

THE DEMON AND THE DAMOZEL:
LACANIAN DYNAMICS OF DESIRE IN THE WORKS OF
CHRISTINA ROSSETTI AND DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

by

Suzanne M. Waldman

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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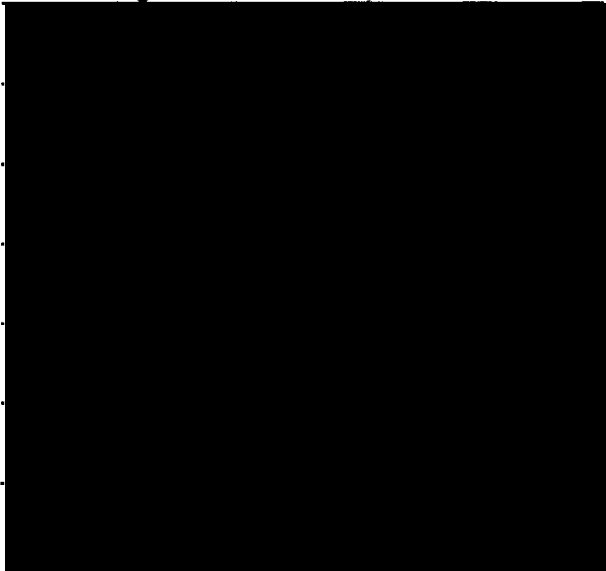
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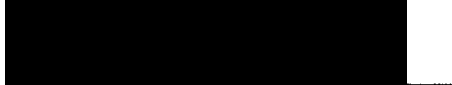
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To Brian, who was beside me through it all.

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All paintings by Dante Gabriel Rossetti are reprinted, with permission, from *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): A Catalogue Raisonné, Volume II: Plates*, by Virginia Surtees.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores convergences between the presentation of the subject in works by Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the subject of psychoanalytic theory, particularly that of Jacques Lacan. Underlying this study of intersections between theory and art is an assumption that these two bodies of writing share a dualist notion of the subject mediated by Christianity and European Romanticism. Both Rossettis, in their own ways, consequently elaborate how a person is split between the function of desire that Lacan identifies as the imaginary order of the subject, and the drive to transcend desire that Lacan characterizes as the symbolic order of the subject.

Two of the chapters in the thesis address CR's representations of the symbolic and imaginary orders, and two address DGR's representations of these orders. In the first chapter, I observe a quest for symbolic transcendence in CR's poetry, describing how she attempts to sublimate her desire into religious dedication through a number of confessional and analytical strategies. In the second chapter, I examine outbreaks of libido in CR's gothic and fantasy writings, which feature characters who become enthralled by ferocious figures of the sort that Lacan and Kristeva identify with the narcissistic super-ego. In the third chapter, I analyze DGR's visual and poetic responses to Dante's writings, finding that DGR swerves away from Dante's example of symbolic sublimation and instead valorizes the narcissistic passion that Dante condemns to the first circle of hell. In the fourth chapter, however, I observe that DGR seeks to attract the symbolic gaze of the Other by offering images of women as "lure[s]" that will "arouse the desire of God" or men (Lacan).

The thesis weaves together perceptions of the human psyche offered by DGR and CR—two exceptionally nuanced and candid analysts of human desire—with readings of latent psychodynamics in their works. In order to elaborate both the manifest and latent subjects of the Rossettis' works, the thesis gives attention to the literary and religious influences they drew on as well as the historical and biographical contexts that formed them. Meanwhile, it proposes ways in which reading the Rossettis' texts as both psychoanalytically speculative and expressive can complement, as well as challenge, prior historicist, biographical, feminist and classic Freudian readings.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

For the sake of convenience, the primary subjects of this thesis are referred to in the main text by their initials:

CR	Christina Rossetti
DGR	Dante Gabriel Rossetti

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Introduction

Using Psychoanalytic Theory to Read the Works of Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti

*The wise do send their hearts before them to
 Dear blessed Heaven, despite the veil between;
The foolish nurse their hearts within the screen
Of this familiar world ...
Oh foolish fond folly of a heart
 Divided, neither here nor there at rest!
 That hankers after Heaven, but clings to earth;
 That neither here nor there knows thorough mirth,
Half-choosing, wholly missing.*

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI, *LATER LIFE*

A sonnet is a coin: its face reveals
 The soul,—its converse, to what Power 'tis due.

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, *THE HOUSE OF LIFE*

I.

The common factor structuring both Christina Rossetti's and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's presentation of human experience, and the psychoanalytic presentation of the subject, is that of an integral duality. In the above excerpts from CR's and DGR's most comprehensive, almost contemporary poetic statements—the sonnet sequences *Later Life* (1881) and *The House of Life* (1880)—the two poets incidentally consider the divisions that structure their oeuvres and plague their biographies. CR's speaker describes the conflict within herself in traditional Christian terms, depicting the conflicting appeals of heaven, where as a “wise” and scrupulous woman, she aims to “send [her] heart[,]” and of earth, to which her heart contrarily clung. DGR's *House of Life* sonneteer presents a

somewhat different split, gives an account in the introductory sonnet of the fissured nature of an ideal poetic expression, which must both attend to the needs of one's individual loving "soul," and also supplicate "Power," paying "tribute to the august appeals / Of life" in order for social goals such as money and fame to be earned (11-12). Thus, in contrast with the Christian framework in which CR's speaker describes duality as a conflict of world against heaven, DGR's speaker represents the fundamental conflict as one of self against world, expressing what Loy Martin has described as the typical Victorian split between a "desire for autonomy" and a "desire for coherence in the system of social ... ties" (25). Not merely isolated expressions, the speakers' testimonies in these sonnets portray the divisions that underlie CR's and DGR's oeuvres as wholes. CR's writings divide starkly between her lyrics in which speakers disavow earthy sensuality and cultivate an austere ideal in pure language, and her Romantically-tinged fantasy and gothic poems that make use of sensually appealing imagery to dramatize scenes of demonic temptation; it is this radical division that makes it difficult to decide whether as an author, she ultimately celebrates austerity and obedience, or pleasure and subversion. DGR's works, in contrast, split between works that glamorize private amorous ecstasies, and works that indulge in dispassionate fantasies that display how symbolic iconographies and hierarchies mediate desire. These two alternating thrusts, towards autonomous intimacy and towards social ratification, also produce duality within DGR's individual works such as "Jenny" (1848-1859/1870), where tones of tenderness interweave with tones of exploitation.

But while CR's and DGR's modes of representing the duality of subjectivity are sharply distinct from each other, both are circumscribed within the psychoanalytic theory of divided subjectivity, and particularly that of Jacques Lacan, who observes that "essential dualism [is] constitutive of the subject" (*Seminar II* 326). Lacan's theories, which he describes as a "return to the origin of the Freudian experience," revise Freud's "economic" split between "death instincts" and "life-instincts" to imagine the subject, as well as his speech,¹ as split between the effects of the symbolic order and the imaginary order (*Seminar I* 13).² The symbolic order of the subject is that of culture, through which the subject becomes linked into a community that offers "recognition and transcendence" while demanding submission to "the order of a law" (*SI* 177). The imaginary order subsumes the vestiges of the subject from before he "learn[ed] to recognise [himself]" as an abstract being "through the symbol," when he created an egocentric identity within a "specular state" of mirrored relations with others (*SI* 177). As Lacan insists,

The line of cleavage [in the subject] doesn't pass between the unconscious and the conscious but between...something which is repressed and tends simply to repeat itself, that is to say speech which insists ... and something which is an obstacle to it, and which is organised in another manner, namely the ego...the imaginary. (*SII* 321)

Thus, in the mature subject, an insistent symbolic order impels the subject towards social belonging and a share of immortal meaning, while his equally imaginary attachments continue to underlie his most pressing, and potentially obstructive libidinal attractions.

Julia Kristeva, a semiotician and student of Lacan, has further described how this split has been equally constitutive of the dynamics of art and literature for "a century" preceding her writing of *Desire in Language* in 1973. The networks of signification in

works of art from this era are, she finds, “split in half,” between the effects of the “symbolic order” and the effects of “[d]esire” (*Desire* 116). Kristeva’s precise characterization here of the symbolic order as the force of “rationality” that constrains the desire of the subject’s “body” is more reductive than Lacan’s opposition of symbolic and imaginary orders.³ Nonetheless, her account of art as a network of opposing symbolic regulations and libidinal impulses helps to map the conflict in CR’s writing, in psychoanalytic terms, as that between a dominant symbolic order of devotion and imaginary desires that persist despite all attempts to repress or sublimate them. Kristeva’s model of the opposition of desire and symbolic law also sets out a way to read the struggle in DGR’s work. According to this model, we may see his work as divided between the cultivation of an ecstatic narcissism, which Lacan associates with the imaginary order, and the compulsion to sacrifice the imaginary connection to an other in order to be inserted into what Juliet Flower MacCannell calls a “function within the symbolic order” in the pursuit of fame, social acceptance, and aesthetic or spiritual redemption (125).

Despite the fact that psychoanalytic theories have emerged only in the twentieth century, therefore, psychoanalytical accounts of the subject and artistic representation that originated in the writings of Freud, and which have been further developed by Lacan and Kristeva, seem aptly to characterize the Victorian formations of the Rossettis. Investigating the basis of this congruence between theory and art discloses that psychoanalytical theory and the Rossettis’ art share important contexts as well as influences. Most obviously, psychoanalytic criticism may be found to account for

dynamics in the Rossettis' works because these works were created amid the nineteenth-century conflicts and frustrations that Freudian theory was originally devised to explain. John Eli Adams has pointed out that Freud's skepticism about the possibility of reconciling "the claims of the sexual instinct" with "the demands of culture" expresses the Victorian sense of an insoluble division within the self (130). In particular, the works of CR and DGR foreground an opposition between individualistic and regulated desires that Wendell Stacy Johnson has described as the Victorian question as to why "the nature of sexuality" frequently isolates the subject from social harmonization (39). Thus, in a number of her gothic poems, CR depicted brides who are torn between taking a place within ordinary society and surrendering to deeper, more occult sexual pressures, and DGR typically portrays—and inhabits—the position of the romantic rogue whose desire leads him beyond the bounds of social acceptability.

This experience of inner duality and disharmony that underlies both the works of the Rossettis and the theories of psychoanalysis can be analyzed in relation to the legacies within each of Christian metaphysics and Romantic literature. For both the Rossettis' writings and psychoanalytic theories display vestiges of the Christian model of the subject, who is occupied by both forces of evil and goodness, as well vestiges of the Romantic model of the subject imagined by writers like Blake and Byron, who inverted Christian values to favor the individual desire that Christianity labeled demonic. Psychoanalytic theory as well as Victorian artists like the Rossettis may indeed be said to have shared the burden of preserving dualist conceptions of the subject from the monistic rationalizations of post-enlightenment humanisms. As Joan Copjec explains,

psychoanalysis arose in resistance both to nineteenth-century utilitarians, who conceived of the subject as a pure ego singularly in pursuit of his desire, and twentieth-century cultural materialists such as Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault, who have envisioned the subject in reverse, as totally susceptible to the symbolic order of ideology (18-30). In contrast with these theories, psychoanalytic theory sees the subject as never perfectly identified with either his own desire, or a higher symbolic will, but inevitably split between these thrusts (23). The psychoanalytic subject does not “purely and simply follow his inclination,” in Lacan’s words (*SII* 326), because he also expresses what Copjec calls the “potential for ethics,” the ability to participate in a symbolic order that has evolved to regulate human relationships (92). Neither, however, do the socializing effects of the symbolic order ever succeed in annihilating the imaginary inclination of the subject. In psychoanalysis, moreover, this dualism produces a suspicion towards theories of the untrammelled domination of the subject by either the imaginary or the symbolic order. Lacan thus preserves the Christian intuition that a subject’s desire is not perfectly authentic or well-motivated, since “desire is not self-originating,” but “is first grasped in the other and in the most confused form,” and consequently retains a “fatal” thrust (*SI* 147, 225). As Copjec generally argues, among contemporary theoretical systems, only psychoanalytic theory can accommodate the suspicion that desires are an inner alienation—which we can see strongly featured in CR’s devotional writing, and which haunts DGR’s writing if it does not motivate it—(96).

But while insisting that the subject must be wary of his desire, Lacan also insists that “the only thing one can be guilty of is [of] giving ground relative to one’s desire,”

testifying to the importance of incorporating one's unique desire into one's mode of living (*Seminar VII* 321). He here displays how psychoanalytic theory preserves the Romantic intuition that a life that excludes one's deepest impulses is barren. Many historians of Freud have accordingly observed that his psychoanalytic theory is a "culmination[] of the Romanticist literature of the nineteenth century" (Trilling 35), concerned with the "dangers of blunting the emotional life" and the value of exposing the "hidden element in human nature" (Trosman 50). The writings of both CR and DGR are each likewise inhabited by a Romantic compulsion to excavate and release hidden psychic elements and thereby give full scope to emotional life. Both, of course, read widely in the Romantic literature that preceded them, and like many Victorian writers, continued to explore issues the Romantic period had raised, such as the claims of one's passion, even when it is at odds with one's morality. DGR identifies himself as an explorer of hidden desire in the sonnet "Dantis Tenebrae" (1861/1870), where he describes how he is drawn to the "magical dark mysteries" of the infernal valley (6). CR experiments with the Romantic gothic genre particularly during the mid-1850s, when she imagines many scenarios in which demon lovers offer, at least initially, to save women from sterile lives.

The Rossettis did not primarily revive gothic conceits to titillate readers with specters of forbidden desire, however, but rather to explore the precise dynamics of desire within the imagination and the challenge it poses to psychic security and religious commitment. As Ekbert Faas points out, Victorian writers who insisted on exploring and exposing their deepest desire anticipated Freud's efforts to liberate his clients from the

burdens of repression (15, 194). Swinburne and his circle, in which we may include the Rossettis,⁴ exposed through poetry a “demonized mirror image of [the] [self]” (Faas 199), which we may see Freud extending into a similarly gothic representation of how desire that is repressed is experienced as a “thing of terror” (“Uncanny” 358). Thus, in CR’s works such as “Goblin Market” and “My Dream,” as well as in DGR’s “Willowwood” sonnets and his drawing “How they Met Themselves,” repressed desire emerges, producing horror and dangerous psychic instability. There are, in particular, many indications that this sensation of division and horror were personally exacerbated in CR and DGR, whose upbringings offered both the mores of Christianity and the free reign of a library full of Gothic writing. Their mother Frances Rossetti was a devout member of a fervently anti-sensual brand of Anglo-Catholicism, a moral influence that must have clashed with their enjoyment of titillating novels written by such authors as their maternal uncle, John Polidori (Marsh *CR* 55). Consequently, throughout CR’s and DGR’s works there are bifurcated impulses, as the Romantic glamorization of desire contends with the Christian condemnation of it. In *Goblin Market*, CR’s narrator appears to relish the landscape of desire that she structurally determines as demonic. And while DGR’s writing is famous for its inveterate “flesh[iness],” in the terms of Robert Buchanan (*Contemporary Review*, October 1871), it is also laden with signs of sexual guilt, as in “Jenny,” where the speaker admits to mocking Jenny because he “ashamed of [his] own shame” (381). Both of the Rossettis’ lives were, meanwhile, significantly wracked by symptoms and breakdowns that can be closely tied to the effects of desire coming into contact with the law, in terms of how Lacan defines the superegoic production of the

symptom (*SHI* 137). To some degree, therefore, this thesis uses psychoanalytical theory psychobiographically, tracing evidence of these artists' divisions in their works, given that the biographical experiences of CR and DGR reflect, in extreme fashions, typical conflicts of the Victorian period.

However, what this thesis finds even more psychologically interesting than the symptoms that are represented in the Rossettis' writings are these artists' methodologies of figuring their conflicts in art. As Faas has pointed out, much Victorian poetry reflects the psyche in an analytical manner that resembles psychiatry, promoting understanding rather than empathy; this mode assumes its highest form in dramatic monologues by Robert Browning that treat the insane or deluded (6). Isobel Armstrong thus appropriately describes the dramatic monologue as the "double poem" because its effects reveal a split between knowing Cartesian authors, and lyric subjects motivated by irrational, unconscious forces (13). Apart from writing some dramatic monologues, such as DGR's "Jenny" and CR's "Day Dreams" (1857/1862), however, the Rossettis wrote much lyrical poetry and narrative, which is less given over to the dramatic monologist's detachment and duplicity. We thus do not find the Rossettis anatomizing the pathologies of dramatic subjects so much as assuming what Faas has describes as the post-Romantic "confessional" strategy of dramatizing one's own "emotional idiosyncrasies" and "favorite fantasies" (189).

Nonetheless, the works of the Rossettis feature precision in their reflection of psychic structures and conditions that reflects the concerns of their Victorian milieu, in which the tools of a scientific psychiatry were being developed. Janet Oppenheim

describes how “[n]ineteenth-century medical literature abounded with efforts to delineate the defining characteristics” of depression as well as nervous exhaustion, hysteria, hypochondria, and insanity (5). These conditions of mental distress and unconscious repression were, moreover, not merely discovered in the Victorian period, but were in some senses created in it, through effects of industrialization such as increased exhaustion, the heightening of the British “work ethic,” and the utilitarian rationalization of social problems (14, 23). Also fueling Victorian interest in the psyche were investigations into dreams and the unconscious by introspective psychologists like Sir William Hamilton, who asserted “the infinitely greater part of our spiritual treasures, lies ... hid in the obscure recesses of the mind” (qtd in Faas 36-7). Responding to this Victorian backdrop of interest in mental processes, DGR and CR thus both describe, with great precision and plausibility, the effects of anxiety, depression and breakdowns, as well as giving depictions of dreams that alternately suggest lost delights and landscapes of horror. Doubtlessly the Rossettis’ efforts to chart the vicissitudes of mental distress were fuelled by the concerns of their psychiatric culture—a culture that touched each of them due to the breakdowns they experienced, CR when she was a teenager and DGR later in life.

However, the “economic” schism between desire and obedience represented by the Rossettis is not well accommodated by Armstrong’s topographically divided double-poem in which, unconscious lyric subjects are analyzed by conscious knowing authors. More fully resonating with the Rossettis’ vision of the subject are Victorian accounts of inner fragmentation such as that offered by the psychologist James Thompson, who

proposed that “we are governed by a succession in mysterious permutation of unlike-minded tyrants”—a notion that approaches the psychoanalytic model of the decentered subject (qtd. in Faas 132). However, this experience of simultaneous self-awareness and fragmentation is not widely discussed by Faas and does not show up in the Victorian psychiatric annals surveyed by Oppenheim, perhaps because it was subtler and less distinctly pathological than the conditions displayed by the asylum patients that Victorian alienists largely studied (Oppenheim 24-5). Indeed, the inner fragmentation that the Rossettis register appears to have been more fully explored in the arts than in the sciences at the time that they deployed it. Freud significantly attributed his particular “discover[y] [of] the unconscious” not primarily to earlier forms of mental science, but to “the poets and philosophers before me,” claiming that what he “discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied” (Trilling 54). While Freud was largely referring to Romantic and earlier works, Victorian literature was, more broadly, a fertile ground for psychiatric exploration. Victorian poetry, in particular, has been observed as a site in which psychic formations too complex and strange to be incorporated into science were explored; as Faas points out, Victorian “poets ... often anticipated the new science” (31). The Rossettis were distinctly part of this psychoanalytical testing-ground in art, as they gave psychological interpretations to traditional and Romantic literary conventions, such as those of gothic possession and doppelgängers. CR thus anticipates expressly psychoanalytic understandings of the decentered subject when she inquires into the basis of desire in “lack” in *Later Life*, and uses apocalyptic imagery to detail the conditions of what Kristeva calls “intimate ... apocalypses,” where the subject is torn between libido

and law (*Powers* 208). As Jerome McGann has found, moreover, DGR's interconnected imagery—fetishes that are beautiful but murderous, love that begins in narcissism but ascends to holiness—graph a comprehensive system of “forms of desire” (6).

That the Victorian mental sciences were an undeveloped and fragmented field seems, moreover, to have inflected representations of the psyche by the Rossettis, producing an art that does not evoke stable perceptions of the psyche but flickering, changing perceptions of it. Faas finds that Victorian writers tended to “expand upon” the psychological strategies of Romantic poetry; one feature of this expansion seems to be the increased evocation of complexity and multiplicity (6). Thus, neither of the Rossettis present a conclusive or transparent “psychology,” as Romantic writers aimed to do, interrogating consciousness from a stable position (Armstrong 13). Rather, Victorian writers sustain the effect of bifurcation, contenting themselves with “rationaliz[ing] the relations among fragments” in their poetry (Martin 25). They consequently offer an indeterminate reading of the psyche that is mediated by, as well as affected by, the subject's means of expression, and are thus “phenomenological” in the sense described by Armstrong in how they “explore expressive psychological forms simultaneously as psychological conditions *and* as constructs” (13). The Victorian refusal of a constant and secure center in the psyche thus approaches the relativity of all psychoanalytic observation, as Lacan defines it. According to the psychoanalytical method, the subject's “speech” is the only location of the “meaning” of “the functions of the individual,” and this meaning is consequently always in a condition of redefinition (“Function” 49). Works like *The House of Life* and *Later Life* similarly produce the effect not of being

airtight representations of psychological conditions, but of being flows of discourse that give momentary revelations of the subjectivities of their speakers in a process of constant transformation. As such, the art of the Rossettis and many other Victorians does not merely portray psychic states, but gives them meaning through language and form. Beyond representing neurotic symptoms in their art, such artists were forced to be innovative theorists of psychodynamics, and to find ever more ways to register the conditions of subjectivity through forms of language and artistic signification.

II.

Given how the Rossettis' art is historically interconnected with the early stages of psychoanalytic thought, it is surprising how little their oeuvres have been analyzed in relation to psychoanalytic theories, and particularly as active exponents of incipient forms of such theories. A few articles have offered subtle Lacanian perspectives upon the Rossettis, such as Christina Wiesenthal's account of the gaze in CR's "Reflection" (1857) and J. Hillis Miller's account of the way narcissistic desire gives way to castration anxiety in DGR's writing and portraiture.⁵ Often, however, psychoanalytical criticisms of the Rossettis' works have been analytically reductive, as users of classical Freudian theory have produced clinical pathographies of their work, describing DGR as a narcissist or a fetishist and/or taking CR's faith "as evidence of sexual repression," as Diane D'Amico sums up (*CR* 16). As a result of such damagingly reductive treatments of CR, in particular, Antony H. Harrison has spoken for other contemporary critics in his

assertion that her poetry is “hardly best served by ... neo-Freudian interpretations” (xvi-xvii).⁶

This thesis hopes to add a new dimension to psychoanalytic criticism of Victorian poetry by demonstrating that such criticism need not reduce works to mere “symptoms,” but can also open up the subtle and mixed nature of their aesthetic effects and philosophical positions. In particular, it tries to steer clear of the reductive style of much psychoanalytical interpretation by paying attention to the way CR and DGR do not merely display psychoanalytical symptoms and dilemmas in their works, but actively explore such dilemmas through verbal and visual analyses of the nature of desire and its effects on the subject. The thesis thus attends to the perennial question laid out by Ellen Handler Spitz, as to whether psychoanalytic critics should treat art as an emanation of unconscious drive or as products of artists’ own psychoanalytical virtuosity (254-5, 7). It complements readings of so-called “symptoms” in CR’s and DGR’s works with their own analyses and discoveries about the psyche, showing how the works of CR and DGR exhibit ingenious analyses that augment, as well as qualify, existing theory. Accordingly, the thesis follows Spitz’s guidelines for treating the work as a “cultural object” (254), interpreting the Rossettis’ artistic preoccupations and habits not only in relation to biographical events and trends, but also in relation to matters of genre, technique, historical context, reception, and requirements of commercialization. Furthermore, the thesis tends to maintain a formal interpretive distance between the work of art and the psyche of the creator, as Spitz recommends, seeing the work of psychoanalysis as exceeding the exploration of authors’ confessions. While the Rossettis’ oeuvres support

coherent, though multiple, psychoanalytical narratives, these narratives are revealed not only through confession, but also through works that exemplify these artists' main concerns from different positions, in keeping with Lacan's proposition "that the subject may occupy various places" within his own fantasies and, implicitly, his fictions (*Four* 209).

The thesis also tries to surmount another limiting aspect of more recent psychoanalytical readings of both CR's and DGR's works, which is the way that such readings tend to polarize the gender politics of these writers' works in predictable ways. Typically, recent psychoanalytic criticism of CR draws on theories of Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler to find that she subverts patriarchy,⁷ while recent psychoanalytical criticism of DGR tends to draw on the writings of film theorist Laura Mulvey to find that DGR traps women in destructive masculinist fantasies.⁸ But both of these views are, in themselves, too single-faceted to encompass these artists' sexualities, of which "no [single] drive presents the totality," according to Lacan (*Four* 184). This thesis has attempted to present a more nuanced treatment of how these artists' works embody and depict gender, dealing especially with struggles inherent in their sexualities as well as contradictions in their gender politics. It recognizes that, apart from those works in which DGR portrays a norm-determined idea of masculine desire, there are also works in which he is willfully "unmanly," and that while CR sometimes exposes the particular perils of women's lives, as in her critical sonnet "A Triad" (1856), she also frequently evades such concerns in the pursuit of a Christian redemption that could lead her beyond gender.

The thesis further aims to exceed “cookie-cutter” psychoanalytical treatments of the Rossettis within a unifying theoretical regime by juxtaposing psychoanalytical treatments of two different writers, thereby displaying how different subjects may emerge in the works of writers subject to different gender and other unique determinations. An example of how different forms and expressions of subjectivity can emerge in different writers can be seen in the poems about coming of age that CR and DGR wrote in 1854, the year in which their father, Gabriele Rossetti, died. CR’s “My Dream” is a fantasy on the theme of inner apocalypse, in which a crocodile resembling the corrupt “beast” of *Revelation* is vanquished in his richly-colored milieu by an austere angel. This narrative is read in this thesis as a fantasy of symbolic castration, in which subjection to the symbolic order is reinforced. It is, meanwhile, particularly explicable as a response to her father’s death, when CR reportedly experienced a “horrifying vision of [her]self becoming earthly sensual and devilish” at the loss of her father’s “purifying restraining influence” (qtd. in Auerbach 118). A need for CR to fantasize a renewed symbolic commitment after the death of her father is particularly plausible, given how, according to Lacan, the oedipal complex that “sustains the structure of desire with the structure of the law” is anchored within the subject by a “name of the father”—a signifier associated with a real parental authority figure (*Four* 34). In contrast, DGR’s “A Landmark” depicts the lyric speaker’s recognition that he has metaphorically missed “the path” of righteousness, distracted by a reverie in which he “sat and flung the pebbles from its brink / In sport to send its imaged skies pell-mell, / And mine own image, had I noted

well!" (3-5). This laggard subject's realization of the need to monitor his own spiritual progress suggests a less terrifying, but no less urgent, paternal vacuum in its speaker.

These two poems thus represent the fear of paternal loss in ways that are distinctly relevant to these authors' oeuvres. For CR's speaker, subjection is an experience she has passively endured, prefiguring the passivity of many of CR's other characters before male-inflicted violence, while for DGR's speaker, subjection remains incomplete, a fact that helps to explain the narcissism as well as the gender anxiety of many of his male characters. Bringing together these two poems also illustrates how shared literary influences are absorbed differently by different writers. The influence of Dante, a factor Mary Arseneau finds was particularly relevant to both writers, may have been especially relevant to poems written around the death of their father, a Dante scholar ("May"). Significantly, "My Dream" is fraught with terrifying allusions to the demonic world of the *Inferno*, while "A Landmark" aligns the male speaker with Dante himself, who similarly finds himself lost in a wood of sin, "the right road ... wholly lost and gone" (*Inferno* 1.2-3). Observations of how these two writers draw upon Dante thus can contribute to gender criticism, as it highlights the advantage of the male writer who is able to drop himself into the optimistic quest narratives of his tradition, in contrast with the female writer who inherits fewer positions from which she may emulate action and courage, and instead speaks from the position of being overwhelmed.

Despite their potential literary value, however, comparative studies of CR and DGR have been undertaken with surprising infrequency in recent Victorianist criticism. Closer to their own era, these two artistic Rossettis were occasionally studied together in

literary biographies entitled, for instance, *The Rossettis: Dante Gabriel and Christina* (1900) by E. L. Cary. But in recent years, their difference in gender has led to their being studied largely in segregation from each other. Isolated critical essays have examined specific overlaps between the oeuvres of both siblings: Harrison has commented upon the unexpectedly intimate correspondence between the two poets, and a number of articles and books have been written on DGR's editing and illustrations of CR's writings.⁹ CR's poetic commentaries on the practices of her brother, such as "In An Artist's Studio" (1854) and "A Prince's Progress" (1864-5), have also attracted interest. However, no recent full-length studies have given parallel and simultaneous attention to the full extent of each of their oeuvres, despite the fact that the two sibling artists were mutually influential and companionate, as Harrison and Gail Lynn Goldberg have pointed out. Instead, CR has tended to be grouped with women writers, and DGR with other members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, preventing the two from being seen as a 'circle' of their own—a shortfall that subtracts from our understandings of both of these artists, as well as from our comprehension of the interwoven influences and contexts of Victorian poetry.¹⁰

To some degree, the differences in the temperaments and styles of DGR and CR, as well as how they were published and received, have worked against their juxtaposition, as we may see in the cases of "My Dream" and "The Landmark." CR's "My Dream" was included in "Goblin Market and Other Poems" (1862), her first volume of poetry, which generally received acclamations for its curious characterizations of a "border-land of the marvelous—half dream, half awakening intellect, half conscience"

(*London Review*, April 12, 1863). In contrast, DGR's "A Landmark" was literally buried for fifteen years, likely deposited in his wife's grave among other poems because DGR felt remorse for having written them when Elizabeth Siddal "was ill and suffering" (Marsh *DGR* 244). After being exhumed, the sonnet was eventually published in the 1870 version of *The House of Life* that led to Robert Buchanan's condemnation of DGR for writing poetry that was too sensual and thus not "manly" (Marsh 432). Thus, both of these poems, each of which appears to respond to Gabriele Rossetti's death by reflecting on the need to come to terms with maturity, would receive highly different responses in keeping with the general trajectories of these two siblings' careers. While CR's "A Dream" would be enjoyed as one of her enigmatic, quasi-spiritual curiosities, DGR's self-admonition towards propriety would go generally unnoticed amid the notorious improprieties of *The House of Life*. Insofar as such circumstances, as well as the subsequent effects of literary segregation, have worked against these two poems being seen in one light, they have prevented valuable psychoanalytic inferences about the conditions of gender development as well as the motives of artistic production from being drawn. It is gaps like these that this thesis seeks to begin closing, through use of a methodology that sustains a clear perspective on the differences of these two artists, while also pointing out how their visions are born out of a shared context, and consequently intersect as well as collide.

III.

The critical methodology of the thesis emphasizes recent psychoanalytical theory that is faithful to the original Freudian concept of the economically divided subject, which is largely found in Lacan's writings, as well as in interpretations of these writings by critics such as Julia Kristeva, Joan Copjec and Slavoj Žižek. Kristeva's writings also open up the literary and artistic implications of Freudian and Lacanian concepts, while contributing additional useful concepts such as 'the object.'¹¹ Meanwhile, culturally and historically situated uses of Lacanian ideas in the study of utilitarianism by Copjec and the readings of courtly love, horror, medieval art and mystical devotion offered by Kristeva have been used to elicit psychoanalytic readings of the Rossettis that are responsive not only to the logic of their works, but also to the cultural traditions in which they lived and the influences on which they drew.

The concerns of the thesis generally reflect the aim of distinguishing discursive and formal divisions in CR's and DGR's texts that anticipate Lacan's opposition between the symbolic and imaginary orders. The thesis thus observes the evocation of something like imaginary desire in regressions to fabulous landscapes of beauty and terror, such as the swirling Euphrates in "My Dream" and the surreal landscapes of DGR's "Willowood" (1869) sonnets. It finds the dominance of this desire expressed in speakers and characters who are susceptible to extravagant influences of love and coercion, such as the lyric speaker of "Willowood" and Laura from CR's "Goblin Market." Because the imaginary order is created through a scopical dynamic, in which the self is discovered in the mirrors constituted by others, hints of such an imaginary order are also perceived in

works that feature intense glances, such as DGR's paintings of Dante meeting Beatrice, and CR's sonnet sequence *Later Life* (1880), where her speaker longs to set "the eyes of [her] desire" upon Jesus (11.9). And because the imaginary order is the compulsion in the subject that disrupts symbolic meaning, "sowing discord in the discourse," as Lacan puts it (*SII* 306), it is found in the indeterminate, jumbled imagery that seems to belong to dreams, such as CR's "My Dream" as well as DGR's 1856 version of *Dante's Dream at the Death of Beatrice*. In contrast, the thesis finds the symbolic order of subjectivity represented in those instances of CR's and DGR's art that are dominated by teleologies and other overriding structures of meaning. Major examples of these are CR's devotional poems, which urge the subject towards austere forms of freedom, and DGR's later portraits of women, which rehearse symbolically determined male sexual fantasies. In each of these types of works, the conspicuous presence of symbols and other shared normative codes indicates the dominance of the symbolic order, as do the prominence of generic structures, in keeping with Lacan's description of the symbolic order as a system of "regulation" (*SII* 254). In CR's expression of symbolic order, its form-giving character is highly conspicuous because she tacitly accepts the Christian ideology that dominates her work as a means to achieve the transcendence that perfect regulation promises. DGR struggles more directly with such regulations, and consequently the actual norms of a symbolic order are focal points of his writings and art, which often question the justice of a divine authority that nonetheless anchors this order for him much of the time.

Beyond identifying these patterns, however, the thesis also explores the precise qualities and values that these imaginary effects and means of symbolic ordering hold for

CR and DGR. These two artists' explorations of interior division are undertaken from different perspectives and seek different ends. Therefore, while the thesis presents integrated studies of the two Rossettis, it nonetheless presents studies of their oeuvres in separate but linked chapters, in order to explore the literary and psychoanalytic dynamics unique to each as fully as possible. The chapters have been structured as examinations of the works in which either of these orders dominate for each artist, sequenced in relation to the priority the artists seem to give these orders in their self-identification as artists. The thesis begins by studying the works of CR, because CR reprises a traditional configuration of the symbolic and imaginary division—a configuration that she nonetheless inflects and develops with tremendous ingenuity and grace. It concludes with an analysis of the vision of the symbolic and imaginary orders set out by DGR, which is arguably revolutionary in its cynicism towards symbolic regimes as well as in its valorization of interpersonal love as the source of a modern ideal.

In the half of the thesis on CR, I accordingly treat her exposition of the symbolic order first because in her writing she tends to emphasize the subject's need to seek perfect symbolic ordering in alignment with the discourses of Christianity, and to pose eruptions of imaginary libido, which I treat in Chapter Two, as mere impulses to work off. In contrast, DGR's explorations of the effects of narcissism within himself produced the works which seem to have most engaged his interests and skills as a poet and an illustrator, and I thus treat the function of the imaginary order in his works in Chapter Three, and leave to Chapter Four an analysis of products he developed in supplication to normative forces he partially disavowed, such as Christian dogma and the capitalist

market. At the same time, no perfect division between texts that express the symbolic or imaginary order can be made, since, as Lacan claims, these “two different dimensions ... never cease getting caught up with one another” and “criss-cross” in multitudinous ways (*SHI* 105). CR’s and DGR’s evocation of these orders are consequently not sealed off from each other, but describe “criss-cross[es]” that produce some of their most striking and idiosyncratic effects, such as the way that CR’s quest for Christian transcendence is interpenetrated by her imaginary desire for companionship, and the way that DGR’s analyses of narcissistic love in *The House of Life* invoke imagery of the sacred. In general, the thesis seeks to understand the character of these confusions as well as effects of integration that come to light in these criss-crosses. I have, meanwhile, made an effort throughout the thesis to draw attention to ways in which CR and DGR may have reacted to, and provoked, each other’s explorations of psychoanalytic issues. Finally, in the Conclusion, I remove all boundaries between these two artists, and show how a psychoanalytic reading that interweaves two complementary sonnets by CR and DGR, “In an Artist’s Studio” (1856) and “A Superscription” (1870), may enhance our understanding of both of these poems, as well as these writers’ works as a whole.

Chapter One explores CR’s quest for symbolic transcendence of interpersonal desire and other claims of the ego in terms of Lacan’s theorization of the “transcendent tendency toward sublimation,” which he finds to be the encompassing project pursued by subjects in the symbolic order (*SHI* 326). The chapter begins by exploring CR’s motive for sublimation by looking at poems such as “A Triad” (1856/1862), “An Echo from Willowwood” (1870), and “Amor Mundi” (1865), which invoke various gothic and

traditional Christian discourses of temptation and the fall to depict human love as a dead-end for the subject. It also looks at how CR's most passionately amorous poems such as "Confluents" (1875) and "A Birthday" (1857) embrace the emotions of love while remaining ambiguous about whether they are describing human or devotional encounters. For the most part, however, it focuses on how CR's most effective devotional poetry relies on the strategies of symbolic ordering, including repetitive and minimal linguistic form, invocations of the death drive, and a self-conscious absorption in traditional and often patriarchal discourses, to pursue the meaning that lies beyond the limits of the self. After moving through CR's most virtuosic devotional poetry that casts the quest for God as a quest through language, it contrasts the *Monna Innominata* (1880) sonnet sequence with the *Later Life* (1880) sequence to show how, for CR, sublimation required not merely a courtly conversion of amorous to divine love, but a rigorous analysis of the nature of desire itself. Finally, this chapter concludes that CR was willing to use patriarchal symbolic discourses instrumentally to seek transcendence because her apocalyptic vision frames both language and gender as "worldly," and, in a sense, anticipates Lacan's view of gender as a contingent rather than essential attribute of the subject.

The intention behind developing Chapter One has been an interest in characterizing CR's religious motives in her poetry in a way that neither pathologizes, denies nor sidelines them. Perhaps in retreat from psychoanalytical readings that have characterized CR's writings as obsessively neurotic, much recent criticism gives emphasis to other aspects of her writing, apart from either its religious or its

psychoanalytic character. Some critics have, for instance, stressed the pursuit of beauty evident even in her devotional poems; Harrison thus has proposed reading “acts of renunciation in Christina Rossetti’s poems” as “aesthetically complex events,” for instance (21, 3), and Blake has tried to find poetic “material” and a “creative basis” in CR’s poetic themes of deferral and renunciation (20; xiii). However, it has seemed valuable to find tools for analyzing CR’s devotional strategies in theoretical and linguistic terms that relate her poems about renunciation and aspiration to their sought-after ends, which Diane D’Amico portrays as a “quest for holiness” (*CR* 62), and CR’s biographer Marsh shows were frequently intended to further the “holy work” of her church (*CR* 298). Focussing attention directly on CR’s transcendental project, this chapter uses the Lacanian account of sublimation to suggest ways that CR’s asceticism can be validated in secular psychoanalytical terms as well as religious ones, read not as obsession but as a wise pursuit of what Copjec calls “the subject’s ultimate freedom” to resist the claims of the ego (96).

Chapter Two looks at the darker side of CR’s writing, drawing on Lacan’s differentiation of the symbolic Other and the superego to observe a distinction between CR’s portrayal of submission to divine authorities and her portrayal of subjection to demons that assume outer as well as inner forms. The subject may aim to eliminate her imaginary ego through an “exalting” identification with the symbolic Other, but intense self-loathing can signal that the subject’s desire is not being sublimated, but is fueling a malignant superego that is “purely oppressive” (*SI* 102). The superego is thus a false version of the law, imaged in fantasy and fantasy literature as a “ferocious figure” or

demon. Chapter Two begins by arguing that the self-immolating poetess in CR's short story "Maude" (1850) is in the grip of such a false authority, based on gothic incidents and imagery in the story. It then studies CR's explicitly gothic writing, where demonic figures lure women into zones that are figured as both narcissistic and "abject," to use Kristeva's term (*Powers*). Finally, it traces a persistent and evolving psychoanalytical fantasy in CR's fantasy writings, in which monsters who represent imaginary libido are boldly glimpsed, then feared and kept at bay, and finally disarmed and brought into the symbolic order through a process Kristeva calls "familiarity with abjection" (*Powers* 123). Overall, the two chapters on CR observe an interplay between symbolic quest and the exploration of resistant imaginary desire, in keeping with the requirements of a subject who is interested in finding what Freud calls a "way out" of desire through sublimation (*Narcissism* 407), but who must also engage in intense self-scrutiny that resembles the therapeutic procedure to comprehend the obstacles to that way out. Whether CR finally achieves permanent sublimation is doubtful, though perhaps secondary to the meaning, self-knowledge, and apparent moments of psychic comfort that this dialectic allowed her to accumulate.

Chapters Three and Four analyze the symbolic and imaginary dynamics in both DGR's verbal and visual arts. Interpretive continuity across his two media has seemed natural for most critics who have addressed both, due to DGR's notoriously painterly style of writing, his heavy use of literary narratives and cultural symbols in painting, and his tendency to address similar themes and incidents in the two media.¹² Thus, to some degree I use similar tools in reading DGR's poems and paintings, looking for similar

indications of the logic of the symbolic and imaginary orders in each.¹³ However, I also try to take advantage of specific psychoanalytic theories of art and writing, including Lacan's theory of painting and the gaze (34). An additionally informing distinction made in the thesis between these two media is based on Kristeva's account of how painting tends to be more symbolically conservative than writing. Kristeva finds that painting imposes the aesthetic goal of "integrat[ing] its transgressions," perhaps because it is taken in in one glance (*Desire* 210). But she finds that the verbal forms of language through which the subject initially submits his desire into the symbolic law, according to Lacan, push towards the "negation" of that very law, moving towards "what cannot be symbolized...toward the real" (215, 111).¹⁴ DGR's uses of these media follow the narratives Kristeva describes, as in his painting career he increasingly eliminates imaginary transgressions, and in his writing career he increasingly explodes symbolic restraints. While DGR's early paintings such as *Paolo and Francesca de Rimini* evoke the intensity of narcissistic desire, his later paintings stifle imaginary relations under fetishistic and symbolic fantasies. In contrast, his melancholy narrative poems of the 1840s and 1850s, like "The Staff and Scrip" and "The Bride's Prelude," regret male subjects' exclusion from symbolic power, while his *House of Life* sonnets of the 1860s and 1870s deliberately challenge symbolic security through explorations of narcissistic desire. The result of these opposing narratives is a chiasmic symmetry across his careers in poetry and art that has not generally been observed. DGR's early imaginary explorations in his paintings about Dante are echoed in the transgressive explorations of the much later *The House of Life*, while the stylized, symbolic scenes of early poems like

“The Bride’s Prelude” mirror the ornate backgrounds and symbolically-overdetermined women portrayed in his later paintings.

Chapter Three focuses in general on portions of DGR’s verbal and visual oeuvre that celebrate the challenges that the imaginary order presents to symbolic pieties. This chapter begins by demonstrating that DGR acknowledged his character as a demonic artist, determined to explore the depths of human passion, rather than to ascend spiritual peaks like his namesake, in the sonnet “Dantis Tenebrae”. It goes on to extract DGR’s rebellious tactics for illustrating Dante’s relationship with Beatrice as rife with narcissistic desire, despite the fact that Dante would later deploy that relationship towards the purest symbolic goals. DGR’s demonism abates, however, in the 1860s, as he revises some of these illustrations to erase or devalue narcissistic suggestions and portrays Dante and Beatrice in more decorous relations. This period also heralds the heightening of the fetish in DGR’s works, which Žižek explains as a “step towards the domain of symbolic universality” (104). By 1868, DGR is beginning to regret the homogenizing effect of the fetish in his visual art, acknowledging in a letter that his painting has become a repetitious production of “recreated forms,” and hoping that a return to the poetry will allow him to more authentically register the “dramatis personae of the soul” (*Letters* 850). DGR arguably succeeds in doing so in *The House of Life* sonnet sequence, which, read chronologically, reveals a dialectic in which the speaker first candidly exposes and then integrates narcissistic desire into an appreciation of specific signs of the other, producing what Lacan calls a symbolic “approximation” of imaginary desire (*SI* 141).

Chapter Four goes on to explore DGR's uses of the gaze as a means of converting desire for the other into a structure for symbolic ascent. Throughout DGR's career, accounts of the pleasures of imaginary desire alternate with accounts of a need to escape male inadequacy and shame through "hysteri[cal]" campaigns "to sustain the desire of the Father" (Lacan *Four* 38). The efforts of DGR's characters, speakers, as well as artistic personae to submit male desire to the Other requires the creation of beautiful "lure[s]" to attract the "gaze of the Other," an essentially hysterical strategy Lacan sees as the symbolic function of art in general (*Four* 103). The chapter begins by reviewing DGR's early narrative poems, such as "The Blessed Damozel" (1847/50), "The Bride's Prelude" (1848/81), and "Jenny," all of which are concerned with male subjects who lack phallic power, and in some cases seek it through indirect means that parallel those of the artist. This chapter then explores the hysterical structure of art in relationship in two stages of DGR's painting, each of which composes the viewer, the depicted object, and the Other into a triangular configuration of desire, in which the presence of the Other is suggested as a gaze upon the work. In his "Art Catholic" painting of the early 1850s, DGR conceptualizes this phallic Other as a God, and the object—frequently a lady—as a blessed entity that may reflect phallic illumination or "grace" onto the viewer. Later, in his notorious female portraiture of the 1860s, DGR appears to conceptualize the Other as an aristocratic master, in the manner Lacan observes in the Venetian Renaissance. In these paintings, the depicted lady is designated as the well-appointed wife of a powerful man, and a lesser man who looks upon her obtains an approximation of social inclusion, a symbolic structure that plausibly also gratified DGR's *nouveau riche* patrons of this

period. Continuity of structure between the two periods thus qualifies suggestions by critics like Jerome McGann that DGR's shift towards a secular mode of conceptualizing the Other is a "betrayal" of his artistic ideals, as in each era, the subject is attracted to an ideal, be it religious or social ("Betrayal"). Finally, however, this section observes that DGR's account of desire always partly resists submission to these structures of symbolic subjection, as even at their most objectifying his poetry and paintings continually evoke the "intersubjective" quality of the imaginary relation to the other.

Overall, the thesis thus aims to elicit as much aesthetic and philosophical subtlety from the works of DGR and CR as can be provided by psychoanalytical theory. Consequently, it should be noted that the title of the thesis is not meant to reduce CR and DGR to singular facets of their obviously complex identities, but rather to point obliquely at personal fascinations each held, the two siblings' perceptions of each other, and how these interacted. It reflects upon how the two artists were not only masters of symbolic discourse, but also had the dynamics of their desire constrained by the positions that were available to their genders within the symbolic order. CR, the chaste sister DGR painted as an angel and as the Virgin Mary, benefited as an artist from the repository of the allure that Victorians attached to the spiritual woman. However, as a woman torn between libidinal and symbolic affiliations, CR likely had few viable choices other than to remain chaste in a tower, lest her "blood freeze" in horror at the release of her desire, like the Lady of Shalott's. In contrast, DGR had far more scope and cultural power to exercise his demonic impulses, as CR testifies in her vampiric portrait of the artist, "In An Artist's Studio." However, eventually even his anxiety about the law overcame him and reduced

him to paranoia, after the debacle surrounding *The House of Life* (Marsh DGR 437).

Taken together, the examples of CR and DGR affirm that Victorian subjects of both genders were wracked by division, whether they inherited the parts of demons or damozels.

Chapter One

Christina Rossetti and the Transcendental Tendency: Undoing the Self through Love and Religion

*I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways
I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.*

SONG OF SOLOMON 3:1

What is this transcendental tendency towards sublimation? ... This is the point where we open out into the symbolic order, which isn't the libidinal order in which the ego is inscribed, along with all the drives. It tends beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the limits of life, and that is why Freud identifies it with the death instinct. ... And the death instinct is only the mask of the symbolic order, in so far – this is what Freud writes – as it is dumb, that is to say insofar as it hasn't been realised.

JACQUES LACAN *Seminar I*

The experiences of sexual love and of religious devotion have not always been sharply distinguished. In twelfth-century Europe, for instance, there was not a great difference between “religious and worldly doctrines of love,” according to Kristeva, who describes how twelfth-century mystics characterized the basis of religious love, like amorous love, as a mutual yearning between two beings “for what one does not have” (*Tales* 154-155). After the twelfth century, she goes on to explain, this theology of desire gave way to a rational distinction of God as above all such desires; however, some devotional writers sustained this mystical tradition, addressing God in prayers that sound like love letters, such as the seventeenth-century Jeanne Guyon.¹ Christina Rossetti is another writer who has dared to straddle this boundary between religion and sexual love. Harrison and Colleen Hobbs have noted that CR’s use of erotic language to convey

religious devotion suggests the influence of medieval mystics such as Thomas à Kempis, Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich (*Context* 89; 415). We can see these mystical overtones at times in CR's poetry when she addresses Jesus in terms that seem sexual and virtually interpersonal. In "A Better Resurrection" (1857/1862), for instance, she repeatedly offers, "O Jesus, drink of me," reversing Jesus's adjuration in John 7:37 to "come unto me and drink" into an equivalent invitation that reintroduces an amorous parity to the human-god relationship. Dolores Rosenblum has accordingly observed that CR expects from God "no more than what she expects from a personal relationship," such as dialogue and acceptance (122). However, it is equally correct to say that CR expects no less from God than a personal relationship, since in "A Better Resurrection" and other poems, CR expresses the quality Kristeva finds in Guyon of being a "strongly amorous person," who solicits a personal relationship with the divine because she sought to "love perfectly" (*Tales* 305).

As common in CR's oeuvre is the more oblique strategy she adopts in "Confluents" (1865/1876), where she makes use of syntactic ambiguity to yoke together amorous and religious discourses, integrating what Harrison calls the impulses of "*eros* and *agapé*," as so much Pre-Raphaelite art sought to do (*Context* 54). At many points in this poem the speaker's desire cannot be determined to be either amorous or divine; for instance when she declares that

As the delicate rose
 To the sun's sweet strength,
 Doth herself unclose,
 Breadth and length;
 So spreads my heart to thee
 Unveiled utterly. (9-14)

Here, her images of unveiling and of the spreading of a rose seem sexual, given the rose's long association with the theme of love and its function as the plant's sexual organ (2.1). However, the image of the rose blossoming is also one of spiritual reception, as, for instance, where the writer of Isaiah describes how "the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose" when it experiences "the glory of the Lord" (35:1). Finally, CR's rose image may also allude to the sacred "eternal rose" at the terminus of Dante's *Paradiso* that "unfold[s], fragrantly" when Dante sees it, extolling the "Splendour of God" that is immanent in it (30:124-5, 97).² Similarly ambiguous is the speaker's exultation:

As dew leaves not a trace
On the green earth's face;
I, no trace
On thy face. (21-5)

Her invocation of a relationship with an other seems like a sentiment of tenderness between human lovers, particularly because of how it refers to the lover's face, thus invoking the vestiges of imaginary desire in the subject. As Lacan explains, while the imaginary attachments the subject develops in the mirror stage become overwritten by the symbolic order, they continue to exert pressure upon the "discourse of the subject" in the forms of "first symbols" stemming from "image[s] of the human body" (*SII* 306). The speaker's description of her gentle touch of the other's face accordingly seems to evoke a sense of identification with the other through this contact with the face. However, this trope of the face is also potentially devotional, as we see where King David recalls how God told him to "[s]eek ye my face" (27:8-9).³ In each case, the poem's imagery and use of allusion are thus teasingly indeterminate about its addressee.

Finally, the tone of "Confluents" seems to become more distinctly religious

towards the end of the poem, “modulat[ing] upward,” to borrow a phrase from Harrison (*Context* 102), when the speaker compares her desire with the “river” that “its goal ... knows” (26). In this phrase, she invokes an image of sublime self-transcendence as well as the “oceanic” sensation Freud associates with religious feeling (*Civilization* 65). Lacan interprets such oceanic desire as the subject’s pursuit of the “point where we open out into the symbolic order,” through her aim of “sublimation” (*SHI* 326), which Freud defined as the process of redirecting libido towards “an aim other than, and remote from, that of sexual gratification,” typically through enlightened curiosity (*Narcissism* 407). Freud uses another hydraulic metaphor to observe how Leonardo da Vinci dammed up his desire through the intensity of his artistic and scholarly practices, until the desire “br[oke] loose and flow[ed] away freely” in the form of spiritual ecstasy, “as a stream of water drawn from a river is allowed to flow away when the work is done” (“Leonardo” 164). Lacan agrees that the oceanic thrust towards spiritual dissolution does not issue from “the libidinal order in which the ego is inscribed, along with all the drives,” but is rather a phenomenon of desire that been subjected to “the transcendent tendency,” where “meaning” is pursued through religious, artistic and philosophical quests (*SHI* 326, 307). Such spiritual connotations of “Confluents” are declared more overtly in the final line, when the speaker’s lower case usage of “thee” is transformed in the final line into a reverent and capitalized form of the pronoun. She asks,

Shall I, lone sorrow past,
Find thee at last?
Sorrow past,
Thee at last? (29-32)

Here, the final modulation of CR’s pronouns is like the ascendant motion of her

metaphors, as it leads the reader beyond the realm of personal desire to entertain a more sublime form of passion.

Ultimately, therefore, the meaning of the title “Confluents” is revealed as metatextual, because the poem not only depicts forms of flow of self into other, but dramatizes how amorous libido in itself can join up with and flow into the cause of religious quest. Because the carefully-wrought ambiguities of CR’s poems like “Confluents” produce a distinctly aesthetic experience of tension, critics have proposed that CR’s motive for writing poems like “Confluents” was to explore art’s potential for oscillation. Jan Marsh describes “Confluents” as “a gossamer lyric heralding the influence of the new Aestheticism” (*CR* 428-9), while Harrison, in relation to the similarly ambiguous and shimmering “A Birthday” (1857), describes CR as a practitioner of a unique Pre-Raphaelite “mystical aestheticism,” which holds that an “irrepressible desire for the ineffable and unattainable” vision of beauty can lead one to a desire for the divine (*CR* 55-57). However, “Confluents” not only inspires the reader towards spiritual transformation through a revelation of beauty, but also elicits that very transformation through its use of language, drawing the reader towards the “goal” it describes. As Lacan finds, “the function of language” is, itself, the vehicle by which one transforms desires by submitting them to a universal principle in the “field of the [O]ther” (*SI* 157, *Four* 188). Kristeva has adapted this Lacanian analysis of language to poetry in particular, which she characterizes as a “minimal signifying structure” with “boundaries admitting of [the] upheaval, dissolution and transformation” of desire, in accordance with which phenomenon she named her first book *Desire in Language* (25). But while Kristeva tends

to focus on the politically radical destabilizing poetics of *avant garde* poets, CR's poetry enacts more conservative dissolutions of fixed desire, dismantling boundaries between the isolated individual and her spiritual source, and so producing sites of sublimation where desire can, in Freud's words, fuel "an ecstatic language praising the splendour of ... creation" ("Leonardo" 164).

In this chapter, I explore CR's literary practices of sublimation over the much larger span of her literary oeuvre in a series of distinct stages. The first section, "Death for Life," begins by investigating how CR's poems about love such as "A Triad" (1856/1862), "Amor Mundi" (1865/1875), and "An Echo from Willowwood" (1870/1888) characterize erotic love as a false path that always leads to disappointment, thus warranting the sublimation of desire into a quest for a higher goal. Next, "Pivots of Desire" looks at ambiguously erotic poems like "Confluents" in which CR's speakers' desires oscillate between human and divine objects—a tactic that holds both potential and also some degree of peril for the subject, in whom imaginary desire continues to persist in a somewhat unmanageable imaginary form. "Devotional Strategies of Sublimation" goes on to explore the more powerful, yet more arid practices of sublimation undertaken in CR's mid-career in poems such as "Who Shall Deliver Me" (1864/1875) and "What Would I Give" (1864/1866), which feature repetition as a mode of sublimation through language in accordance with Lacan's link between processes of sublimation and Freud's conceptions of the repetition compulsion as well as the death drive (*SI* 326). According to Lacan, the symbolic "subjection" of the subject, which is the route of the death drive, occurs as the repetition of language reproduces in the subject a "founding speech" that

encompasses “everything that has constituted him” and “the whole structure of [his] community ... as being” (*SI*, 243, 188; *SII* 7, 20). In this Lacanian sense, the repetition compulsion is not merely a fixation on unpleasurable and unprofitable experiences, as Freud largely emphasized in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (20), but a potentially constructive practice.⁴ Similarly, Lacan understands the related framework of death as a “concept” the subject uses to indicate “the symbolic order in so far... as it hasn’t been realised” (*SII* 326). For this reason, a Lacanian interpretation of repetition and the invocation of death in CR’s writing may profitably supervene previous interpretations based on Freud, which have led many critics to “reduce[] a rich and complex body of work to the neurotic outpourings of a morbid mind,” in the words of Diane D’Amico (*Faith* 16).⁵ Rosenblum, for instance, worries that CR’s collected poems “reveal a poet writing under a compulsion to repeat” (“Poetic” 133), while Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar draw on negative Freudian implications of repetition to regret how CR “[took] up her pen to spend a lifetime writing ‘Amen for us all’” (554). In contrast, Lacan’s definitions of the repetition compulsion and the death drive can be used to emphasize how repetition as well as imagery of death indicate CR’s willed project of spiritual self-loss.

“Experiments in Sublimation: The Sonnet Sequences” goes on to review two different processes of sublimation in her two major sonnet sequences, assessing their degrees of success. It argues that in the *Monna Innominata* sequence (1881), CR displays the courtly practice of loving an individual person as a route to divine love, only to show how it must fall short, at least for the Victorian feminine subject. Meanwhile, in *Later*

Life (1881), CR's speaker charts a more direct route of sublimation, where she first exposes and then purges her imaginary desire, and lastly immerses herself in the "founding speech" of the Bible; she thereby demonstrates a more successful dialectic of imaginary and symbolic orders of the subject (*SHI* 20).

Finally "Putting Faith in Discourse" looks at the consequences of CR's reliance upon patriarchal discourses for transcendence, including her evident submission to its ideology of gender hierarchy in works like *Later Life*, where CR rehearses the story of Adam and Eve to show that women should "fear to teach and bear to learn"—likely, a reference to her belief that woman should not seek ordination (15.1). The question of CR's beliefs about gender has been a critically contentious one; some critics have found CR's statements of disinterest in the political conditions of gender unpersuasive and propose that her religious tone is exaggerated in ways that indicate ironic resistance to the patriarchal ideologies her writings often reinscribe. Colleen Hobbs, for instance, proposes that CR's "voice of pious self-effacement" as a woman could be an ironic mask that covers over "a host of worldly concerns" (423). Harrison similarly proposes that CR "appropriates elements of [patriarchal religious] ideologies in order to expose their inability to fulfill the spiritual, moral, and even intellectual needs of Victorian women" ("Sage" 104). Many critics also propose that CR's poems sustain ironic or lawless subtexts to the discourses they reproduce that resist these discourses through "subversive strategies of extraordinary power and complexity" (Harrison, "Sage" 95), "subversive insights of an estranged feminine experience" (McGann 99), "subversive text[s] ... inscribed within complaisant poem[s]" in a "secret message written 'in white ink' that

seeps and oozes through the page” (Reynolds 15, 17), and “dissent” expressing itself “beneath the overt message” (Foster 75). All of these critics thus argue that CR does not fully subject herself to the Christian patriarchal discourses she employs.

However, CR’s acceptance of the goal of Christian sublimation seems to have entailed a willing obedience to its discourses. In general, the path of sublimation requires submission to a symbolic law through which subjects are promised a different way out of their conflicts than might be achieved by resisting that law; Christianity, for instance, promises an apocalyptic annihilation of human differences such as gender for the faithful. Marsh has accordingly proposed that CR more-or-less submitted to Christianity’s patriarchal doctrines due to her faith that “however it might be in the secular sphere, heaven and religion recognized no distinction of sex” (469). Kristeva more generally notes that mystics are frequently politically “reactionary,” as their unearthly “confidence” in their spiritual aims can make them uninterested in worldly structures (*Tales* 298). This section accordingly proposes that CR’s apocalyptic vision of the end of sublimation allowed her to see gender much as Lacan would see it: an arbitrary construction that binds one only on the level of worldly signs. It concludes that CR’s vision of an end to gender repels critical applications of theories of *écriture féminine* or other theories of a specific thrust of irony rooted in her gender, which hold that her femininity ran deeper than her symbolic commitments. In contrast, it argues that CR viewed her femininity as temporary and her soul as permanent, and consequently made herself a master of the patriarchal discourses that would lead her beyond that worldly bond.⁶

I. Taking Death for Life

CR's literary gestures of renunciation are overdetermined, as they appear to have been encouraged by both biographical experience as well as by underlying philosophical attitudes that precede and subtend all biographical events. On the one hand, Marsh has described how CR resolved upon her path of sublimation after the demise of her hopes of love with Charles Cayley in the mid-1860s confirmed for her that love was bound to be disappointing. As Marsh finds, she "henceforth conveyed the recognition that the happiness she craved could not be attained in real life, but only in *"nell' altro mondo"* (375). CR frames such a retreat from interpersonal love in the poem "Twice" (1864/1866), written around that time of disillusionment, in which the speaker pronounces that if one gives one's heart to a man to "scan" he will misjudge it, but if one gives one's heart to God, he will judge it truly, refine it and hold it forever (11). While Foster has argued that the speaker's conviction is merely an "overt message" veiling her overall "dissent" from such demands for male approval (75), this conviction entirely conforms with what Kristeva has described as the mystical idealization of divine love as a "perfect" and viable substitute for human erotic love, and seems consistent with CR's ideology of transcendence as a whole (*Tales* 205). Rosenblum, for instance, finds a similar preference for divine love expressed in "Vigil of St. Peter" (/1892), where the speaker asks Jesus to "turn now on [her]" the "look which / Pierced St. Peter's heart" (3-4). As Rosenblum argues, to CR "earthly lovers pass by, put off by what they see," but Christ "look[s] persistently" and his "look calls forth" ("Religious" 123). "Twice" thus seems to provide a biographical reference point to CR's critique of how erotic love is

inevitably attended by alienation and loss.

However, the critique of interpersonal love in CR's work also precedes her concrete experiences of disappointment, as her earliest poetry equally testifies to how erotic love is unsatisfying and abrading to individuals, leading them into the forms of "degradation" that Lacan also associates with erotic desire. The juvenile "Death's Chill Between" (1847/1848), for instance, uses gothic conventions to create an allegory of how lovers may be haunted and tormented by their desire, and thereby to reflect a preliminary intuition that, in human erotic love, there is "an element necessarily lacking, unsatisfied, impossible, misconstrued," as Lacan believes there to be (*Four* 154). This lyric is spoken by the widow of the Prince of Wales, who finds that after her husband's death she is spoken to by his ghost: "Listen, listen! – everywhere / A low voice is calling me" (19-20). Everywhere she goes, the woman feels her departed husband's presence as a "love-cord" that ties her to him and continues to be tugged (4). Tranquillity is lost forever to her because there remains "something at [her] heart / Gnawing" after her husband's death, turning the legacy of a happy love into an eternity of suffering (38-9). The widow repeatedly feels that he has returned to her as a ghost and then realizes that he has not—suffering from a version of what Lacan describes as the "specular mirage" of love, which is generated internally but is felt externally (*Four* 268). According to Lacan, such mirages are created because one's most exhilarating forms of sexual attraction are anticipated in "narcissistic" psychic images formed long before one ever encounters that object, and these images are later "invested" with "*Verliebtheit*," or love (*SI* 180). The attachments of imaginary desire are thus experienced as highly authentic, since they

produce a deep sense of identification with another; however, these attachments are also “necessarily alienating,” since they give one a sense of the self that is essentially “other” and based on an “image which remains out of the ego’s control,” as Elizabeth Grosz explains (40, 41). Vital imaginary correspondences outside the self are thus “phantoms that dominate” the subject, just as ghosts dominate CR’s bereft lovers (Lacan “Mirror” 3).

Another of CR’s poems about love that figures this sense of haunting by an other who is also part of the self is “Echo” (1854/1862), a poem whose title evokes Ovid’s myth of the desirous and deceived character he paired with Narcissus, who heard a voice in the world indistinguishable from her own voice. CR’s “Echo” seems equally to be a poem about narcissistic confusion, as the speaker recalls a deeply fulfilling “love of finished years” that has left behind a sense of incompleteness parallel to the void produced by imaginary love (6). Such love “can only ever be partial, wishful, anticipated, put off into the future, delayed,” according to Grosz (40), and CR’s speaker accordingly describes the sensation of her love as “too sweet, too bitter sweet” to ever have been fully manifested in real life, and proposes that its “wakening should have been in Paradise” (7-8). She thus asks her lover to “[c]ome to me in the speaking silence of a dream,” where love’s manifestation could be closer to what the emotion promises (2), thereby embodying Lacan’s observation that the dream is the ultimate site for revisiting libidinal fixations, because “in the field of the dream” the subject is most “at home” as an imaginary ego (*SII* 167, *Four* 44). When CR’s speaker finally asks her lover to “Speak low, lean low, / As long ago, my love, how long ago” (17-18), her echoing lines express

love's rootedness in a remote past or future while replicating the sound of a hollow that is similar to Lacan's fundamental "rupture" in the self, out of which primordial "absence" emerges (*Four* 26). These two poems, "Death's Chill Between" and "Echo," represent erotic desire as an occult effect that binds one to a fate of yearning and disappointment.

CR provides a more detailed critique of imaginary love in "An Echo from Willowwood" (c. 1870/1896), an evident retort to DGR's four "Willowwood" sonnets of 1869. DGR's sonnets portray narcissistic love in a relatively optimistic light, since even though the speaker of his "Willowwood" sonnets is left alone after his brief and partly illusory encounter with the beloved, he nonetheless ends up sanctified within Love's aureole, abstractly ennobled by the experience of love. In contrast, in "An Echo from Willowwood," CR refuses to mystify narcissistic desire as DGR does; to begin with, "Rossetti eschews the personifications of Love that feature so prominently in ... her brother's *House of Life*" (58), as Marjorie Stone points out, reducing the cast of characters at Willowwood to two realistic and pathetic lovers sitting across a pool from each other, "[p]ale and reluctant on the water's brink" (3). CR's lovers thus experience not etherealization, but psychologically realistic deprivation, which she depicts in concrete images related to the materiality of pond-life; they have "hungering heart[s]" like fish that "leap up and sink" and experience "bitterness which both must drink" (6-7). In an image that interprets love in a manner closely to how Lacan interprets it, she describes how the lovers' material selves grow out of roots in the pond "deep below," of which the actual lovers are mere "lilies on the surface" (10-11). These base selves that "crav[e] each for each; / Resolute and reluctant without speech," and which momentarily

surface out of this depth to form a connection, seem similar to Lacan's imaginary foundations of the subject that are exposed in love relations (7). For CR, the joining of the lovers' faces produces no real unity, only an illusion of it when "a sudden ripple" makes "the faces flow / One moment joined" (7, 12-13). Moreover, the lovers' contact is instantly cut off, so that in contrast with DGR's emphasis on the preciousness of love's connection in the "Willowwood" sonnets, CR emphasizes love's ephemerality and thereby affirms that the subject must look to other, divine forms of love beyond to find a more hospitable place for the heart.

CR most decisively critiques love in "A Triad" (1856/1862), which looks at love especially from the female point of view to suggest that women are bound to be degraded by it no matter what form of it they undergo. Of the three women characterized in her sonnet,

One shamed herself in love; one temperately
Grew gross in soulless love, a sluggish wife;
One famished died for love. (9-11)

All of these women erroneously "take death for love" and thus sicken unto death (12). The shameful woman dies of a plague-like fever "with lips / Crimson, with cheeks and bosom in a glow, / Flushed to the yellow hair and finger tips," while the unrequited woman freezes, "blue with famine after love" (1-3, 6).⁷ In a way that is typical of poems like "Goblin Market" (1859/1862), CR thus depicts erotic desire as a vampiric enchantment that lures one into an endless death-like state, fixing one in one's pleasures so that one becomes permanently barred from any transcendental release.

"A Triad" is not only a critique of what Lacan calls "imaginary passion,"

meanwhile, but also of human love that has been put on the “symbolic plane,” organized within a cultural framework such as marriage that is subjected to a “paternal metaphor” of patriarchal law (*SI* 276, *Four* 276). According to Lacan, such a framework produces a “shelter” for love that stabilizes the tempestuous, ephemeral character of imaginary passion into a “viable temperate relation,” by binding lovers in relation to a higher principle than their specular attraction (*Four* 276). However, CR deviates from Lacan’s approval of marriage, insisting that to her, every symbolic “intervention” against imaginary degradation is not equal. She thus criticizes not only the lot of women who are bound to their lovers by imaginary attachment, but also those who are bound by marriage, as she describes the second, married woman’s life as not only “temperat[e]”—doubling Lacan’s use of the word—but also “soulless” (9-10). Married love to CR is thus not a viable form of symbolic transcendence, but a deathful form of repetition without inspiration, like that of a “fattened bee” who “drone[s] in sweetness” (13); it is the same kind of empty repetition, perhaps, that Lacan connotes in his description of a symbolic order uninvested with meaning as a “cybernetics” whose purpose is “simply to repeat” (*SII* 279; 284, 321).

In her insistence that some symbolic “interventions” deaden, rather than enhance, the possibilities of relation, CR therefore provides grounds to qualify accounts of the Lacanian symbolic order that are entirely celebratory, such as that offered by Richard Boothby, who argues that a life lived in the symbolic order is an unconditional improvement upon life lived through the imaginary order because it allows the subject to “find[] new pathways toward expression beyond the imaginary” and to exceed the

temporally limited condition of egoistic selfhood (168). Lacan, however, admits that some forms of the symbolic order can be “alienating” of the subject’s desire, and that in such a case she must seek to “realign [her]self within [a] different symbolic determination[.]” that will permit her to “perfect[] her desire” (*SI* 197, 141). This need for a different sort of repetition seems to be CR’s point of as well, as she rejects some sorts of symbolic submission while accepting other ones she believes hold richer forms of transcendence for the subject.

Attacking interpersonal eroticism on every front, “A Triad” thus seems a highly general critique of love, and not just a description of some failed approaches. Harrison similarly argues that the range of “A Triad” affirms that “not just these lovers, but all possible variations on them, are doomed to be ‘short of life’” (*Context* 106), while Rosenblum agrees that the poem generalizes the outcome of love, as “what appears to be different” in this poem “turns out to be the same” (“Poetic” 136). However, Harrison as well as McGann also attribute a political form of critique to this poem that is questionable from a psychoanalytical perspective, proposing that the critique of love offered in “A Triad” may be directed specifically at the forms of it that CR had access to within her own time. McGann argues that the women in “A Triad” are doomed to be “short of life” because they are bound by specific Victorian ideological formations such as the “Victorian marriage market” and the predicament of the spinster, and that the poem seeks “freedom” from these formations “via critical understanding” (“Christina,” 97,101-2). Harrison similarly suggests that “A Triad” opposes love, in general, as a periphratic way of criticizing the “amatory possibilities—situations, choices, actions—open to Victorian

women” in a “specific historical moment in which the situation of women has become, finally, intolerable” (“Sage” 91). McGann’s and Harrison’s suggestions that CR is critiquing Victorian ideologies of love thus seems to raise the possibility that there could be other ideologies that would permit kinds of human love CR would find more acceptable, a prospect that seems antithetical to “A Triad,” which seems determined to absolutely rule out any viable form of human love.

The absolute character of CR’s critique of love in “A Triad” can be articulated through Joan Copjec’s account of the “psychoanalytical” subject, who does not actually seek any contingent satisfaction of her desire, but opposes any such fulfillment of her libidinal desires so she can “maintain” her desire in an ideal form (68). As Copjec states, such a subject is understood as being always, to some degree, resistant to “surrender[ing] [her] internal conflict, [her] division” between libido and law (68), for it is precisely through her conflict with her desire that she refines her symbolic will towards an “ultimate freedom” (68, 92). As an expression of a general resistance to libidinal gratification, “A Triad” thus seems to exceed any account of the type Copjec calls “historicist,” which is concerned with “what goods ... [she found] pleasurable, [and] which of these were denied [her]” (68). Understood as an expression of the psychoanalytic subject, “A Triad” does not protest against the symbolic law that makes certain forms of gratification impossible, but ratifies the absolute impossibility of gratification because that impossibility justifies submission to the symbolic law.

Increasingly, moreover, CR reveals a Christian context to her absolute critique of love. The poem “Amor Mundi” (1865/1875) is, for instance, an exposure of imaginary

degradation performed in iconic biblical and traditional Christian discourses. This ballad thus revives the allegorical geography of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, tells a story about a young woman with "love-locks flowing" who invites a young man to take "the downhill path" into a valley that breathes "honey," thus exuding sensuality (1-2, 6). These two lovers do not seem initially to be exceedingly sensual but only youthfully carnal, particularly the girl, whose "swift feet seem[] to float on / The air like soft twin pigeons too sportive to alight" (7-8). The earthbound quality of her feet is a warning, however, and after two pleasant stanzas, more ominous signs appear on the bucolic scene: "blackest clouds" that hang, "[a] scaled and hooded worm" whose "scent comes rich and sickly," and, finally, a shadow of the "thin dead body which waits the eternal term" (9-14, 17). The poem thus shows how the descent into sensual love can lead to spiritual death, so that the title "Amor Mundi" expresses a double meaning, signifying both that loving the world is a sin, and that erotic love is irredeemably worldly.

"Amor Mundi" roots CR's critiques of love in her genre of spiritual warning poems, which Arseneau notes are rooted in the Tractarian tradition ("Tractarian" 80-1), and which Harrison finds are devised to "instruct[] ... the reader in worldly vanities" (*Context* 96). CR's poems about the delusions and dangers of erotic desire are here shown to be continuous with the broad category of CR's poetry that display how one "who is not tempted by the empty promise of material things ... can indeed interpret the world in a meaningful and Christian way," as Arseneau observes ("Incarnation" 91). CR's critique of love thus participates in her broader philosophy of asceticism, and while contemporary readers may find themselves to be uncomfortable with this "feminine

ascetic trend” in her work—as “historians of the nineteenth-century women’s movement” have been, according to Katherine Blake (xiv)—the trend may seem less disturbing if accounted for not only in tautological religious terms, which condemn lawless pleasure because it is damnable. In contrast, psychoanalytical theory suggests that such ascetic processes may offer real benefits to the subject who passes “beyond the pleasure principle,” in Lacan’s words, and transforms her desire into a quest for meaning (*SII* 326).

II. Pivots of Desire

Asceticism, for CR, was not mostly a practice of renouncing erotic desire itself, but rather of renouncing human objects. For, even though CR rejected erotic love, discourses of love were not disfavoured within her poetic vocabulary, but revised into the ambiguous genre that shuttles between amatory referents and is exemplified in “Confluents.” Using tropes that are both suggestively erotic and determinedly spiritual, “Confluents” performs semiotic actions that Kristeva has also found in *Song of Solomon*, which she describes as drawing on biblically “coded” figures to associate desire with privileged Judeo-Christian contexts, and thereby to bring together “desire and God” as “the spoken word of law inscribed in desire” (*Tales* 96). Another of CR’s erotic poems that resembles *Song of Solomon* is “A Birthday” (1857/1862), whose lushly aesthetic details, such as the “dais” she wants to have hung with its “vair and purple dyes” and carvings of “doves and pomegranates,” invoke not only sensual pleasures, but also biblical discourses of divine royalty and plenty, giving the sensual context of the speaker

awaiting her lover a sacramental backdrop (9-11). As well, CR's elaborate similes, such as that with which she characterizes the speaker's heart as "like a rainbow shell / That paddles in a halcyon sea" (5-6), partake of the linguistic fluidity Kristeva discovers in highly idealistic and potentially sacramental love poetry. CR's shifting similes thus evoke "uncertainty concerning the reference," dissolving the materiality of the speaker's heart into an ideal and evanescent object which "long[s] for unbeing," in a way that anticipates symbolic transcendence (*Tales* 273). Meanwhile, the future tenses of "A Birthday" heighten not only erotic anticipation but also teleological yearning, as the waiting reader comes to anticipate an ideal object. Amidst this array of symbolic patterning in "A Birthday," there is also a compelling image of "peacocks with a hundred eyes" (9), which are not actual eyes, but rather camouflage eyes of the sort that Lacan finds act in art as a "lure" to attract the gaze of the symbolic Other (*Four* 102). This enigmatic image in "A Birthday," by which the speaker seems to draw a divine gaze thus dramatizes the first stages of the sublimation of libido, helping desire to "modulate upwards" in a similar way as "Confluents" does (Harrison, *Context* 102).

While "A Birthday" is a highly coded poem about desire for the divine, not all of CR's erotically-tinged devotional poems are so cryptic. In "A Better Resurrection" (1857/1862), written the same year, CR's speaker more directly displays how an infusion of divine love can be sought with a passion verging on the sexual. As the speaker claims, passion for the beyond is warranted by the sterility of ordinary life, which is dry and mortal like "the falling leaf" (7). She thus seeks a force to "quicken" her and resurrect her "broken" soul, which can thus become a vessel worthy of transmitting the holy spirit,

“Melt[ing] and remould[ing] it, till it be / A royal cup” (22-3). Even the image of the cup is eroticized at the end of each stanza, when she turns towards Jesus and offers herself, asking “O Jesus, drink of me” (18-24), and thus anticipating a “better” resurrection than any purely abstract symbolic one—a resurrection resembling the mutually inspiring relationship with the divine Kristeva finds in Jeanne Guyon’s writings.

But while CR’s poems that combine amorous feeling with religious aspiration are literarily complex and spiritually inspiring, they are also cautionary, displaying the hazards that accompany trying to turn God into a lover. “Weary in Well-Doing” (1864/1866), for instance, depicts the speaker’s relationship with God as an exhausted plodding which Blake refers to as “the maddening, martyring dullness of patience” in CR’s writing (4), but which also reflects the experience of amorous frustration and disappointment similar to that experienced by the widow in “Death’s Chill Between.”

The speaker thus protests that

I go, Lord, where Thou sendest me;
 Day after day I plod and moil:
 But Christ my God, when will it be
 That I may let alone my toil
 And rest with Thee? (16-19)

Insofar as this poem nakedly characterizes devotion as a plea without an answer, it suggests that unrequited love for God can be as famishing as unrequited love. The devout’s heart “breaks” and her “soul is wrung” with oscillations of “doubts” in God, as much as any lover’s heart and soul are taxed with doubts in the faith of their lover (8-10). Poems like “Weary in Well-Doing” thus reveal that if one seeks escape from the perils of inter-human amorous desire through more desire, one may produce an

anthropomorphic religion that replicates the frustration of imaginary loss.

Kristeva and Lacan have accordingly represented the danger of a devotional project that aims to satisfy the personal, imaginary claims of the subject, given that the “transcendental tendency” is, properly, a quest for the symbolic end of language, rather than one for companionship or erotic fulfillment (*SI* 326). In this vein, Kristeva wonders if Guyon’s quest for contact with a perfectly loving God loses its essentially religious qualities, undergoing “slippage” from a symbolic quest for “emptiness” of the self, towards a quest for a perfect “[u]nity” with another that is essentially narcissistic (310). Lacan also warns that if a subject’s desire for religious sublimation is a quest for a personal response from the Other, one will inevitably suffer disappointment, because “the Other does not respond”; it is “only a metaphor, only the [ultimate] signifier” that one approaches for the sake of total comprehension and meaning (*Four* 188). A subject’s sense that there is a personal God who cares about one may thus be the ultimate “narcissistic mirage” (*Four* 270). In general, therefore, Lacanian theory leads us to believe that if there is progress to be had in CR’s religious vocation, it is likely to arrive through another route than purely amorous yearning, and will necessarily involve the symbolic order through which one may “open out,” exchanging personal desire for the impersonal apprehension of a divine totality Freud characterizes as the end of sublimation.

III. Devotional Strategies of Sublimation

In “The Lowest Place” (1863/1866), CR exemplifies how the means of the

symbolic order can allow one to overcome the disappointments of imaginary yearning with its roots in the egoistic constitution of the subject. "The Lowest Place" is a clever variation on the Christian ethic that "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11), which enacts how the humbling of the speaker's ego can lead to the enhancement of another, less egoistic part of herself. CR's speaker is first nervous over her presumption when she asks a favor from God, to "[g]ive me the lowest place: not that I dare / Ask for that lowest place" (1-2). But while in the next stanza the speaker asks for even further abasement, she at the same time has gained the confidence this time to make a personal request: "Give me the lowest place: or if for me / The lowest place too high, make one more low" (5-6)—a "daring request," as Rosenblum argues, given the Christian doctrine that "the last shall be first" ("Religious" 144). Finally, the speaker's request for lowness is revealed to be a demand for the best seat in the house, "where I might sit and see / My God and love Thee so" (5-8). By enacting how degradation leads to elevation, CR dramatizes how in religious devotion, the "humility" that "glorifies the annihilation of self in the love of God" can spring from "a vitality and a confidence ... [from] a deep wellspring of subjectivity" in Kristeva's words (*Tales* 298). Readers of "The Lowest Place" thus need not be concerned, as D'Amico is, that an ostensibly female speaker is enacting her social role of being "subordinate" and "dependent" ("Eve" 180), because a poem that appears to be about humility is simultaneously saturated with spiritual "confidence," to borrow Kristeva's word for Guyon (*Tales* 209). This speaker's confidence is not, however, that of egoistic self-esteem, but the confidence that comes as the subject leaves behind "the dialectic of the ego and the other" and becomes

“fundamentally linked up with ... the law” that is “always ready” to substitute itself for a subject’s egoistic inclinations, according to Lacan (*SII* 157, 177).

The form of “The Lowest Room” suggests, meanwhile, that this substitution of the law for the self does not occur instantaneously, but through a gradual process of sublimation described by Freud as the “execution” of a discipline (*Narcissism* 407), as it formally dramatizes a discipline of constrained, prayerful repetition. The repetitive, ABAB hymn-like rhythm of the poem rallies the speaker to increased resolution with each variation, while the variations provide reassurance that all of life’s manifestations can be unified in relation to a paternal law. “The Lowest Place” thus evokes through language what it describes, displaying through form how the humbling of the ego through repetition can lead to glory. CR’s poetry has accordingly been tied to the Oxford movement’s poetry, which similarly characterized an intimate process of “seeking the deity,” rather than declaiming upon it, as much Victorian devotional poetry tended to do, according to George B. Tennyson (202). Tennyson particularly notes a link between CR’s repetitive style and that of the Tractarians, whose poetry foregrounds its connection to the style of High Anglican liturgy and prayer (5). Raymond Chapman has further observed that the Oxford Movement sought in general to restore “precision and pattern to those who felt lost” (187), implying that Tractarian poetry’s repetitions were intended to enact something like the “regulat[ive]” function attributed to the symbolic order by Lacan (*SII* 54). In similar terms, W. David Shaw has observed that repetition in CR’s poetry helps to “protect the mind against invasion of powers it is helpless to control” (32); we may see such a technique of protection in “The Lowest Place,” where repetitive form

gives the mind a pattern it can follow to a difficult goal (32).

This Tractarian influence upon CR's writing seems, further, to preempt arguments that describe repetition in CR's poetry as a signpost of irony and transgression.

Armstrong, for instance, argues that repetition acts "as a barrier... that is set up, violated, transgressed, confirmed," so that "seemingly conventional lyric moves into a questioning of convention" (352). But repetition could only support transgression and irony if its symbolic aims were being travestied—a claim that Armstrong assumes, reading CR's poetry in terms of her larger argument about Victorian poetry, which she believes to be generally "deeply sceptical" and "creatively agnostic," intent on eliciting an ironic perspective on the "experience of the lyric speaker" as dramatic monologues do (13-14). While some of CR's most facetious and benighted lyrics seem likely to be ironic in this way—such as "Day-Dreams" (1857), which appears to mock the aims of the male speaker to pin down the thoughts of his uncommunicative beloved—CR's poems that uphold Christian discourses seem less likely to be so, given biographical evidence of her own religious adherence.

Other critics have more helpfully suggested ways that repetition in CR's writing permits innovation and revelation in ways that are more consistent with the regulative symbolic function and do not inherently introduce tones of "transgression" and irony. As Harrison observes, CR's consciously patterned language is repetitive but not homogeneous; he thus observes that CR's repetitions permit "hierarchical and evolutionary" developments, perhaps of the sort seen in "The Lowest Place," where each stanza takes the speaker closer to her goal of specifying a place beside God (*Context* 35).

Shaw similarly observes that CR's repetitions produce the contexts for revelations to occur, where "a familiar refrain takes on unpredictable new meanings" (35). As these critics observe, CR's repetitive forms can be constricting and impersonal while also providing a framework for learning and for the gradual expansion of symbolic consciousness. Lacan's theory of the symbolic function of language further focuses our attention on how CR may have used language, and particularly repetitive language, as a strategy through which to imagine and pursue a condition of symbolic transcendence. As Boothby finds, Lacan locates "the meaning of the death drive"—which is synonymous for Freud with the repetition compulsion—"in a function of language," thus suggesting that practices of language are central to the pursuit of that sublime beyond the limits of one's individual life (13).

Moreover, CR's minimal language—which Harrison has described as her "poetics of conciseness" due to its "absence of background information ... lack of any logical and causal connections or explanations [and] high level of prosodic and lexical control" (*Context* 42)—seems to be central to her project of transcendence. The reason for its suitability may be expressed in Lacan's suggestion that "the subject is separated from the Others, the true ones, by the wall of language" (*SII* 244). A similar intuition seems to be embodied in CR's concise, minimal poetry, which seems designed to allow her to sustain regulative rhythms while bringing down the wall of language as low as possible, thus permitting a sense of near-contact with the oceanic beyond (42). An example of how minimal language produces an anticipation of oceanic dissolution can be found at the end of each stanza in "Confluents," where CR abstracts her personal longings into linguistic

structures so elemental they assume the status of pure sound:

As running rivers moan
 On their course alone,
 So I moan
 Left alone. (7-8)

The repetition of words and sounds in this melancholy fragment suggests that the speaker is at the margins of language. Language is further minimized in the final lines:

Shall I, lone sorrow past,
 Find thee at the last?
 Sorrow past,
 Thee at last? (5-8; 29-32)

In this passage, repetition of a few words underscores the sense that the speaker is coming to the end of language, and thus possibly closer to the Other who is beyond it.

In an earlier poem, "If I Had Words" (1864/1896), CR's speaker more explicitly portrays language as a route beyond the confines of the self. Her speaker begins by seeking words with which to "to vent [her] misery," a linguistic function that remains on the level of the personal (1). However, she quickly moves on to imagine a function for words that is more directly emancipatory. The right words, she claims, could help her reach a land "of love / Where fountains run which run not dry" (19-20), suggesting with this image Lacan's oceanic state of desire freed from the ego's libidinal attachments (*SII* 326). The speaker goes on to claim that if she could find the right "[w]ords," they would be like "wings" that would lift her over herself so she "would not sift the what and why," and thus to explicitly equate words with the transcendental power to exceed the self's narrow, egoistic concerns (24-5).

The form of "If I Had Words," meanwhile, mimics the condition of transcendence

of self. At the end of each stanza, the speaker begins to use fewer words, minimizing her language to mirror the minimization of self that would occur through such transcendence:

I would make haste to love, my rest;
 To love, my truth that doth not lie:
 Then if I lived it might be best,
 Or if I died I could but die. (25-32)

These passages, in which extra words are purged, mirror the purging of self CR's speaker seems to be trying to achieve through her quest of sublimation. Meanwhile, the repetition of identical and similar-sounding words such as "love/lived" and "lie/died/die" seems to overwrite the individual characteristics of her voice with a pattern. As her voice comes to embody a signifying chain, the death she seeks appears not to be a termination—as it is for the women in "A Triad," for instance—but an infinite extension.

We may further see in these final lines that the invocation of death is linked closely with CR's general hopes for self-transcendence through language. This linkage is additionally entailed in Lacan's proposition that it is paradoxically only from "the position of the death drive," where one attains freedom from paralyzing libidinal desires, that one can "engage in the register of life" (*SI* 90). Seen through this Lacanian lens, not all of CR's invocations of death need be taken as perversely morbid, but some may be seen as aspirations to what is beyond what can be encompassed by the ego's categories. For instance, in CR's lyric "Song" (1848/1862), her speaker contrasts love with the fuller gratification anticipated in a transcendental death. The speaker of the sonnet asks her beloved: "When I am dead, my dearest, / Sing no sad songs for me," an expression that is sometimes read as insincere or ironic (1-2). Susan Conley, for instance, understands this request as an expression of passive aggression towards her lover, a dying woman's

“indictment of life and [a] moment of revenge on oppression” she has suffered (265).

But if we read the request as an authentic response to the limits of love and life, the poem is also consistent with CR’s continual representation of death as a concept expressing the transcendence of earthly limitations. An invocation of an apocalyptic context for her death is to be expected in one of CR’s speakers, given the overriding “eschatological” pattern of much of her writing, according to Harrison (*Context* 19). Thus, when the speaker imagines a place where she may “Dream[] through the twilight / That doth not rise nor set,” she anticipates the unbinding of cycles of earthly organic being (13-4).

Because she expects to transcend the limits of imaginary relationship so completely, she is averse to her lover’s sustaining a sentimental image of their love after she is gone; as CR’s speaker warns, “[h]aply I may remember [you] / [a]nd haply may forget (15-16). She likewise discourages her lover from memorializing her with the roses and cypress that are symbols of love and loss, instead requesting that her grave display “green grass,” with its connotations of transcendence from *Revelation* 8:7, which prophesizes that “all green grass [will be] burnt up” after the Apocalypse. “Song,” which thus insists on the supremacy of the symbolic over the imaginary order, may, as such, specifically refute DGR’s blasphemous account of the persistence of human passion after death in his contemporaneous “The Blessed Damozel (1847).⁸ Thus, while Conley may be correct in her perception that the tone of “Song” seems unnatural for an earnest lover, the sentiments expressed by the speaker are a plausible expression of values consistent with CR’s oeuvre as a whole.

In CR’s “Somewhere or Other” (1863/1866), the speaker similarly invokes death

as a symbol of her yearning to move beyond her ego-oriented feelings and cravings that limit the self (*SII* 70). This poem dramatizes a dialectic of transcendence, as the speaker at first depicts a search to exceed the specific constraints of her life in imaginary terms, as a search for an unknown face:

Somewhere or other there must surely be
 The face not seen, the voice not heard
 The heart that not yet—never yet—ah me!
 Made answer to my word. (1-4).

But in the next two stanzas, the speaker ranges beyond these imaginary symbols of the ineffable, looking “clean out of sight” (6). She goes on to wonder if her answer lies beyond “wall” and “hedge,” invoking images of boundaries to be crossed over within the self (10). Finally, CR’s speaker’s quest to exceed boundaries leads her to propose that the meaning she is searching for may be found in “the last leaves of the dying year,” thus evoking the death drive as a means to characterize a limitless beyond (11-12).

The struggle within the split subject of the symbolic order against the ego is characterized most vividly in the poem “Who Shall Deliver Me” (1864/1875), where the speaker portrays her Christian impulse as one side of her being through which she can whittle down another side (55). She thus defines the part turned towards God as “me,” in opposition to “myself” who generates the cravings that distract her from that focus. She thus turns to the “One” who can “deliver” her by helping her to “curb myself” (22-4), pleading,

God harden me against myself
 This coward with pathetic voice
 Who craves for ease, and rest, and joys. (1-3)

There is, in this passage, a sense of inner struggle that a monistic reading of the poem, of

the sort Copjec attributes to cultural materialism, may understate (23). Such a monistic reading might describe the subject's desires as being alienated by the internalized version of the "legislator's voice" whose function is to repress them, in Copjec's terms. Such a monistic perception of CR is, for instance, offered by Gilbert and Gubar, when they contend that women were "bred to selflessness" in the Victorian period, as though an externally oppressive social law robbed women of their authentic desires (547). Instead, according to Copjec, psychoanalytic theory sees the symbolic law as an integral aspect of the speaker's identity: a genuine "will" within the subject to "maximally determine[] itself" (96). This dual sense of the subject split between libido and law is possible because, in psychoanalytic theory, the subject is not totally identified with her egoistic identities and attachments. As Lacan insists, "the core of our being does not coincide with the ego," but the ego is merely an "object ... which fills a certain function" of orienting the subject in her world in a preliminary, but not exclusive way (*SII* 43-4). Repression is thus not an external action of oppression against a whole, centered person who would otherwise live happily with her desire, but an internal action of harmonization and balancing among diverse centers of the subject. We may see such a dynamic similarly expressed in a passage from Augustine's *Confessions*, a text that Harrison finds was influential upon CR's practice of using writing as a means of self-conversion. In this passage, Augustine exclaims to divine Beauty: "thou wert within me, and I out of myself, where I made search for thee," thus indicating that the impulse that searches for the divine emanates from the core of the self (Book X, Chapter 7). Based on this Augustinian example, it appears that division is an essential characteristic of the Christian subject, for

whom the law that can free the self from one's desires is as internally-grounded as one's desires are.

As CR's speaker expresses what is truly central to her, she indeed invokes an opposite interpretation of what constitutes the core of her being from that offered by Gilbert and Gubar. In her own representation, her desires are alien rather than central parts of her because they obstruct the speaker from her highest destiny; she thus insists that "[m]yself" is "My hollowest friend, my deadliest foe" (19-20). The speaker further describes "myself" as "My clog whatever road I go" (21), approximating in this image the Freudian notion of the ego, which is also understood as a limiting aspect of the self that constrains the subject's self-expansion by fixing her desires upon discrete objects (*Ego* 27-19). Finally, when the speaker requests that God should "break off the yoke and set me free" (24), she seems to embody the thrust of the Lacanian symbolic order, which seeks incessantly to push beyond the ego and go "beyond the limits of life" (*SII* 326). This push of the speaker may consequently be understood as "the death drive," through which, as Boothby explains, the symbolic order does not seek the death of the subject as such, but rather the death of the ego it views an obstacle to its perfect realization in the subject (94). Death, in CR's writing as in psychoanalysis, is thus not generally a literally suicidal trope, but rather a symbol of the quest in the self for expansion.⁹

While CR's poems generate a consistent discourse of transcendental desire, there are, however, subtle variations in the way some terms such as "life" and "death" are used. Like her other eschatological poems, "Then They that Feared the Lord Spake Often One to Another" (1859/1893) presents religious sublimation as a release from temporality and

fixed identity into limitless relationship. However, the poem foregrounds some of the ambiguities of the word 'death' in CR's oeuvre, which sometimes, as in "Song," borrows mystical connotations to indicate transcendence, but sometimes, as in "A Triad," uses the word negatively, to describe how subjects fall prey to the sickening effects of spiritual death, a connotation consistent with biblical use of the term, where sin is often linked with death, as for instance, in the expression "sin unto death" in *John* 5:16. Interestingly, Boothby also notes positive as well as negative uses of the term death in Lacanian theory, where death usually stands for the desirable "disintegration of the ego" through the signifier, but also occasionally stands for "imaginary alienation," where the subject's ego becomes locked in an imaginary fixation that prevents the subject from seeking any escape beyond herself—a meaning consistent with CR's "A Triad" (119, 47).

The speaker of "Then They that Feared" uses the term death in this latter, biblical manner when she equates life lived in "the world" to a situation in which "death's heads mock us" and where our animal materiality will ultimately reduce us to "one obscure inevitable grave" (6, 13-4). In another allusive passage, she designates the presence of a "narrow way" of God that is self-mortifying in the moment, but ultimately self-enhancing, culminating in a "love feast" (2-3).¹⁰ Finally, she captures how the ideal way of life is lived through the symbol—or in Christian terms, the "Word"—in a depiction of the lives of the evangelists who "spake often one to another," to become pure vehicles of communication. Lacan conveys a similar potential within the symbolic order in his description of the subject as fundamentally a meaning represented by one signifier "for another signifier" in a chain that both pre-exists and extends beyond our egoistic selves

(*Four* 157). We may similarly see how, given the speaker's orthodox borrowings of biblical discourse in this poem, she too becomes a link in this chain, passing the Word, and the symbol, forward.

Reading CR's devotional poems as strategies of sublimation, it becomes apparent that she uses words not only to characterize a quest, but to undertake it, as language becomes a way of seeking a revelation she senses lies somewhere beyond it, in what Lacan calls "the real" where our unrepresentable "gods" persist (*Four* 45). Similarly, the repetitious groupings of poems Rosenblum finds "compulsive" can be seen as links in this chain of signification ("Poetic" 133). For this reason, even when CR's tone is yearning and desperate, the fact that her structures are formally and aesthetically creative can make her devotional practice seem hopeful. The way that form may counteract bleak devotional content is hinted at in one of Lacan's thoughts about the appropriate use of language to signal the real that lies beyond it, of which we have limited awareness. The real, as Lacan explains it, is the subject's intuition of that which is unrepresentable through symbolism, so that "one can ... think of language as a network ... over the totality of the real" (*SI* 162). Given that intuitions of God, or the Other, are inevitably contained within this net, Lacan proposes our most "ethical" use of language involves refusing to project the presence we seek, but instead "play[ing] on this ambiguity" about the limits of representation (*SH* 244). CR's devotional poetry is frequently ethical in this Lacanian sense, as her speakers at once confess their failures to know the Other and craft their confessions optimistically, as illustrations of how their resources for searching are being strengthened through their symbolic disciplines.

IV. Experiments in Transcendence: The Sonnet Sequences

In CR's two major sonnet sequences composed in the late 1870s and early 1880s, she provides the fullest picture of the ways a subject may use poetry to pursue symbolic transcendence, offering what seem to be a bad and a good example. In *Monna Innominata* (1880), CR pledges to emulate sonnet sequences by Dante and Petrarch, writers who perfected the courtly love poem, a genre that Kristeva characterizes as attaching an "excess of meaning" to the love experience in order to indicate an "Other at the limits of faith" (*Tales* 288, 291). Ultimately, however, CR resists these writers' inspirational accounts of love, and *Monna Innominata* is thus not merely a story of failed spiritual quest, but of failure in love, a matter that is foregrounded in the first half of the sequence. In contrast, CR demonstrates in *Later Life* how the modern, devout subject must not merely hope to transfer her desire from a human to a divine object, but must actually deconstruct her desire, and immerse herself in the field of discourse that lies beyond it. In a sense, therefore, this contrast between *Monna Innominata* and *Later Life* is a critique even of CR's own amatory poetry directed at the divine, as she discovers methods to go beyond the perilous strategy exemplified in poems like "A Better Resurrection."

In *Monna Innominata*, as William Whitla notes, conventions of the sonnet are "continually brought into the foreground ... only to be challenged and decentered" (86). One of the major conventions of the love sonnet CR thwarts is the basis of strong imaginary attraction in the relationship of the sonneteer to his beloved; Dante, for

instance, exults in *La Vita Nuova* over how “My lady carries love within her eyes” (II 8-9). CR’s lovers, however, rarely look in each others’ eyes, so that the lady’s love affair seems marked by an absence of that imaginary component of desire that Lacan sees as inflaming the passions. The first lines of her Sonnet One thus depict glances that are missed, as the lady asks her lover to “come back to me, who wait and watch for you: -- / Or come not yet, for it is over then” (1-2). In Sonnet Two, the lady rejects the imaginary account of love at first sight, proclaiming that their first meeting had so little effect on her that she cannot remember it, “[s]o blind was I to see and to foresee” (6). In the third sonnet, the lady portrays an imaginary element to her love, though in a negative sense; like the speaker of CR’s “Echo,” she expresses that “Happy dreams” are the only place narcissistic connection with the lover is fulfilled, because “in dreams we are one” (3: 5, 9). This passage does not glamorize the imaginary experience, however, but rather demonizes it as a source of frustration, in a way that perhaps predicts, in this early moment, a sad end to the lady’s love story.

The imaginary bliss that the woman and her lover fail to enjoy in the visual order is simulated, briefly, in the verbal order, in one happy moment in the sequence when the two lovers repeat each others’ phrases, producing an effect of linguistic symmetry that seems to stand for the narcissistic experience of the shared look:

“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. (7:1-4)

But passionate words are not likely to match the intense experience of personal exclusivity provided by the imaginary exchange, since as Boothby explains, “the

imaginary tends toward a fixed and unilinear structuring of the drives,” while “the arbitrariness of the linguistic signifier ... effects an uncoupling from the imaginary object” (123-4). In other words, symbolic language abstracts desire from a specific object so that it becomes less all-consuming and more abstract. The weakness of an amorous relationship conducted almost exclusively in symbols becomes clear at another point, when the lovers’ verbal exchange introduces difference and conflict into their relationship. Here, the speaker describes the expression of love as a competition: “I loved you first: but afterwards your love, / Outsoaring mine, sang such a loftier song / As drowned the friendly cooings of my dove” (4:1-3). As Whitla points out, the lovers’ eventual separation seems to be “caused by lovers’ rivalry ... in both poetic art and love” (116). An exchange of looks would, by contrast, be mutually instantaneous as well as absolute, permitting them to persist longer in the total absorption of imaginary love and forestalling such abrasive rivalries.

More specifically, language between the couple diffuses their bond as it shifts the terms of their relation from the “dual” to the “triadic,” as Boothby describes (124). Lacan explains that a “relation ... take[s] its symbolic value” when there is “mediation by a third person” who acts as “the transcendental element thanks to which his relation to the object can be sustained at a certain distance” (Boothby 124). It is desirable for such a mediating representative to be introduced at some point in a love affair, to prevent what Lacan calls “imaginary degradation” (SII 263); such a representative is exemplified, for instance, in the sacred figure of Love in both Dante’s and DGR’s sonnets. However, it seems important to the cause of love for there to have already arisen an unmediated

imaginary attraction for that figure to mediate, and it seems that the love affair of *Monna Innominata* never gives space for this imaginary exchange to become consolidated. Thus, in the fifth sonnet, when the lady utters the sequence's most narcissistic exclamation "O my heart's heart, and you who are to me / More than myself" (102), she instantly quells this narcissistic effect by extending a formal greeting: "God be with you, / Keep you in strong obedience leal and true" (1-2). This injunction, which refers to the Other beyond the love affair, breaks the spirit of imaginary attraction, which is impossible to sustain while the symbolic gaze of God is upon them, the two dispositions being antithetical. It is thus at the expense of her exclusive relation to the lover that the lady increasingly comes to refer to this external Other, describing the two loves as interdependent: "I cannot love you if I love not Him / I cannot love Him if I love not you" (6:13-14). She also, however, insists on the priority of God: "I love, as you would have me, God the most" (6:2). This conditional statement must act as a cooling sentiment in a sequence of love sonnets, where the adoration of the other is supposed to be absolute, and Whitla thus observes that CR challenges the Elizabethan tradition by displaying conflict "between passion and Christian morality," rather than accord (114). The lady's scruple that she must love God more than her lover displays this incongruity between faith and erotic love, which the lady cannot fully harmonize as Kristeva finds the courtly lover does, when he depicts "the possible impossible meeting with the other sex" as "an intrinsic, immanent, sacred invocation of joy" (*Tales* 296, 289).

When the lady's love is ruined, she accordingly proceeds to give herself to the relationship with God that she had earlier invoked, musing as CR's speaker in "Twice"

does that “[I]f I could trust mine own self with your fate, / Shall I not rather trust it in God’s hand?” (13: 1-2). By the end of the sequence, however, the lady’s trust in God does not seem to have born fruit either, since she does not anticipate eternal life, but worries about the diminishment of earthly “youth” and “beauty” (14: 9-11). To some extent, this melancholy ending is in accordance with sonnet conventions: as Whitla describes, “at the end of a sequence, the lover remains alone, resigned to enduring the changes of age and time as he waits for death” (13). However, *Monna Innominata* is gloomier than the standard sequence, as it does not end with the conventional anticipation of a “reunion” with either a human or a divine “beloved in heaven,” in Whitla’s words. Rather, the lady’s attempt at sublimation is thus revealed as having been as unsuccessful as her love affair, not offering her transcendence of desire, but rather focusing her inwards upon thwarted desire and thus reducing her to “the silence of a heart that sang its songs” (3).¹¹

Insofar as the lady does not develop a focussed spiritual vocation, CR may be suggesting the lady’s turn to religion was not sufficiently single-minded, and to reiterate the arguments of works like “Amor Mundi,” that erotic indulgence can fatally hamper the spiritual progress of the subject. Furthermore, critics have plausibly argued that CR’s refusal to reconcile erotic love and religion comments upon the difference between her time and that of Dante and Petrarch. Stone thus sees CR’s refusal to mystify the love experience in *Monna Innominata* as a retort to Victorian sonnet sequences that portray love as a secular religion that can substitute on its own for Christian faith, such as DGR’s *The House of Life* and EBB’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (58). Harrison additionally

proposes that *Monna Innominata* comments on limits of Victorian idealism, proposing that the sequence's "failed reenactment" of Dante's "program of simultaneous aesthetic and spiritual purification" suggests that this program is "no longer functional" (Harrison 163,169). Kristeva has more broadly observed that nineteenth-century writers who have "revived" courtly narratives of love have generally done so in a "melancholy" fashion, generally failing to recapture the Renaissance faith in the spiritual potential of the love experience (*Tales* 296).

A further reason why *Monna Innominata* may be inhibited from success as a sequence is because it is the expression of a woman. As CR establishes the terms of the sequence in the preface, she foregrounds how a woman is barred from the typical scenario that inspires courtly feeling, which is that of adulterous attraction. As Marsh points out, the note exposes CR's refusal to give the female sonneteer a typical adulterous position, since the obstacle to her love affair must not be "incompatible with mutual honor" (474).¹² However, as Kristeva points out, this context of "adultery" is at the heart of the troubadour's desire for the lady, who is thus understood as being of higher status than the singer, making her a worthy, though inaccessible, object, who thus features the qualities of a spiritual goal (*Tales* 280).¹³ This typically adulterous context of courtly desire is, meanwhile, more fully linked to the construction of male desire within the symbolic order, in comparison with female desire. Lacan holds that men seek substitutes for the phalli that as castrated subjects they, by definition, lack, leading them to desire women who will "signify this phallus in various ways"—a formation that is well-suited to the rapture of the courtly lover, who glamorizes his ideal as a perfect and integral

object (“Phallus” 289).¹⁴ The courtly glamour of the woman-as-phallus thus appears to pivot on her magnificent external presence—a sensation registered by DGR’s speaker in *The House of Life*, for instance, when he describes his beloved as a “breathless wonder” (27.3). However, Lacan suggests that, in contrast with male symbolic desire, which is attracted to remote and exaggeratedly impressive objects, female symbolic desire seeks objects that make women feel that they *are* the phallus—that they have internalized the phallus within their very being (“Phallus” 290). Thus, symbolically subjected women seek objects that seem to be not merely a magnificent, but external, object of desire but a powerful, interior cause of it. An apt contrast to DGR’s rapt courtly lover is CR’s lady, who insistently refuses to describe and reify her beloved’s presence as an external entity, failing, for instance, to “recall” her and her lovers’ first “touch hand in hand” (2.14). Such “ambiguity” seems nearer to what Lacan finds appropriate to descriptions of the ineffable Other than to a courtly experience that can be translated into an ornamental art (SII 244). Accordingly, in *Later Life*, CR’s slightly later and more self-aware sonneteer admits that because her desire is for an absolute object, no human can be close enough to love instead of God himself, as the courtly lover seeks to do: “[n]o second fountain can I find but Thee” (5:6). CR’s image helps to affirm Lacan’s suggestion that feminine love seeks not only beauty in an object, but a sense of its being an original cause, or fount, of her symbolic powers. CR’s *Later Life* (1880/1881) sonnet sequence thus fully rejects Dante’s courtly mode of deflecting one’s desire upon an other in a roundabout path to God; instead, the quest of CR’s sonneteer in this sequence is for a perfect unity that makes no distinction between love and spiritual devotion.

In contrast with the futile courtly practices rehearsed in *Monna Innominata*, *Later Life* signals a culmination of CR's most successful practices of sublimation, as in it her sonneteer at once personalizes discourses of Christianity and transplants the passion that fuels personal love to the more fertile ground of spirituality. *Later Life* is consequently a complex study in integration, in which CR's speaker seeks to integrate diverse aspects of her Christian feeling, aspiration and study into a single route of faith. D'Amico has observed that the sequence dramatizes "a journey which successfully weaves together disparate subjects" into a general progress of "Love" ("Later" 27), and Linda E. Marshall analyzes the sequence to show how it is intricately structured to display such an integration on the semiotic level. This process of integration can meanwhile also be understood in Lacanian terms, as a process of integrating imaginary impulses with symbolic aspirations. The sequence thus displays a more sustained account of sublimation than can be seen in any of CR's shorter devotional works, while affirming Freud's argument that a subject who wishes to find "a way out" of desire through sublimation must not only replace the object of her desire, but actually transform the instinct itself, through a process entailing growth in both self-knowledge and curiosity about the world ("Narcissism" 407-8).¹⁵

Before aiming at this integration, however, the sonnet sequence first develops a system of devotional practice through which the speaker may confess the full scope of her yearning. She signals her devotional aims in the opening sonnets, in which she expresses her intent to follow a call to grace: "Let us today while it is called today, / Set out" (9, 10). But she quickly divests herself of this homiletic tone, and begins to explore

in a more candid way the felt experience of the Christian path. The speaker opens up conventional Christian discourses to include possibilities for confession, announcing her faith that “[w]ho thro’ darkness and the shadow of death ... shall find a way,” but also describing how such a seeker feels “[b]lind eyed, deaf-eared, and choked with failing breath” (12-14). Lynda Palazzo observes that CR “struggle[d] painfully” throughout her life “towards the re-imagining and re-imaging of God in terms which spoke from her life and experience” (4); here, CR’s speaker accordingly revises descriptions of Christian rituals to conform more closely with interior experiences of renunciation and purgation. She suggests, for instance, that one should “[r]end hearts and rend not garments for our sins” and “[g]ird sackcloth not on body but on soul” (2:1-2). She likewise confesses to having not only hope, but also moments when she “scarce can rouse myself to watch or pray, / To hope, or aim, or toil” (4:5-6).

The speaker’s candor in these passages may seem desperate, but it actually has a spiritual function within the tradition of Tractarian poetry, which privileged “self-revelation,” according to Chapman (182). To reveal yet more of herself, the speaker probes the nature of her desire in a way that closely resembles the analytics of Lacanian theory:

We lack, yet cannot fix upon the lack
 Not this, nor that; yet somewhat, certainly
 We see the thing 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. (6:1-6)

CR’s account of the elusive content of “lack” is surprisingly similar to Lacan’s explanations that “desire” has no fixed content, but is rather a negative essence: “a

relation of being to lack” (*SI* 223). Likewise, CR’s statement that her “hopes ... were never ours yet seemed to be” is similar to Lacan’s statement that “desire is the desire of the other,” having been formed not out of an actual need of the subject, but as an emulation of another’s desire in the mirror stage (*SI* 146). In Lacan’s interpretation, this “gap” between ourselves and our desire means that “desire is essentially a negativity” that cannot be filled, and CR likewise observes that desire is sustained despite any attempts to fulfil it, being “not this, nor that; yet somewhat” (2). The speaker’s rigorous analyses of the empty nature of her desire may seem to lead towards nihilism. But unlike the lady in *Monna Innominata*, the *Later Life* sonneteer is not destroyed by her disillusionment; rather she finds disillusionment an incitement to “hardi[ness],” perhaps thus exemplifying what Harrison calls the “Augustinian pattern of renunciation and conversion” in CR’s writings (*Context* 133). The speaker consequently observes that

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. (6:9-12)

By understanding that one’s cravings have no genuine personal meaning, but are internalizations of others’ desire, the speaker finds them to be all the more dispensable. She thus does not pity herself for lovelessness, but instead values her “[s]oul dazed by love and sorrow” as “more blest ... than mortal tongue can tell” because of how it may lead to a deep conversion (7.5-6). Terrifying processes such as that exhibited in this sonnet, through which the speaker both probes the depth of her desire and renegotiates its meaning, thus play a necessary role in her process of transcendence, as they permit her to interrupt her fixed attachments and seek a more abstract, and hence symbolic, goal.

The *Later Life* speaker further distinguishes herself from the theology of *Monna Innominata* insofar as she does not merely supplement and later replace her lover with God, but focuses her desire entirely on God from the outset. Like CR's earlier mystical speakers in "A Better Resurrection" and "Twice," the sonneteer insists that Jesus, who "hath the heart of God sufficed," can equally "satisfy all hearts" (13-4). Also like these earlier speakers, the voice of *Later Life* proposes that a love focussed on God can even gratify the imaginary level of the subject—"the eyes of our desire"—which remain ungratified in the *Monna Innominata* sequence (*Four* 182, 11: 9). At this point of the sonnet sequence, the speaker extensively elaborates her imaginary desire for God. She claims that our deepest selves can similarly be nourished "if once we turn to Thee" who is "only Life of hearts and Light of eyes" / "Our life, our light" (5-6). We have the means to achieve this transformative vision, the sonneteer proposes, since "thou hast given us souls and wills and breath / And hearts to Love thee, and to see Thee eyes" (13-14). The sonneteer of *Later Life* thus fully engages her scopic desire at this point of the sequence, as she describes the attraction of "glories half unveiled," which, if meditated upon, may "uplift" her both "to longing and to Love" by the "Light of eyes" (11: 8-10; 8:5).

But such a diversion of imaginary desire is not symbolic sublimation, and thus does not in itself seem likely to provide the serene "way out" of desire that Freud outlines. As Lacan warns against looking for a response from the other, however, he observes pitfalls to this process of seeking out the gaze: "look[ing] at what cannot be seen" and hoping that in return, "that which is light [will] look at me" (*Four* 182-3). He observes that the quest to be looked upon by the symbolic order is likely to produce not a

sense of being embraced by love, but rather a “feeling of shame” impelled by the presence of the gaze (84). The *Later Life* speaker does not explicitly link her desire for the gaze to an onset of shame, but it is notable that a discussion of the experience of severe shame follows her expression of scopic desire for the Other. In similar terms with which Lacan describes the shameful subject as a defiling “screen” that blocks the gaze, casting a shadow upon that which it illuminates (97), CR’s speaker describes shame as “a shadow cast by sin,” which simultaneously produces the effect of a burning light (5).¹⁶ CR’s other descriptions of shame, as “a flame so fierce that we must die / An actual cautery thrust into the heart” further evoke the quality of painfully brilliant light that Lacan associates with the appearance of the Other in a “showing,” as it “surprises” one in a “function of desire,” “disturbing [one], overwhelming [one], and reducing [one]” (84). Both Lacan and CR nonetheless indicate that this reduction is what the desiring subject wants, at some level; for CR, “shame gives back [Man to himself],” and “sets him up on high,” reprising the experience of castration through which the subject may seek ultimate elevation.

Chastened by shame in the face of the gaze, CR’s speaker moves out of the cauldron of desire. She proposes a return to symbolic discourse: to the Bible, where she claims that “[a] groping stroll perhaps may do us good; / [i]f cloyed we are with much we have understood” (16: 10-12). Just as the speaker has earlier suggested that symbolic rituals should be leavened with personal involvement, she here suggests that if one feels “[b]efogged and witless” through excesses of individual thought, one should return for a “groping stroll” in “a wordy maze” of discourse (9-10). An engagement of the mind and

the heart is best, she seems to claim in her discussion of faith as a dialectic as well as a duality:

Our teachers teach that one and one make two:
 Later, Love rules that one and one make one:
 Abstruse the problems! neither need we shun,
 But skilfully to each should yield its due. (16:1-4)

This sentiment of integration suggests that CR's speaker has, by force, come to an eclectic theology that relies upon both the symbolic functions of knowledge and rationality as well as the imaginary immediacy of love. The speaker consequently quenches the fire of her passion in symbolic discourse, increasingly describing her spiritual path in conventional allegorical frameworks of the seasons (Sonnets 18-21) and of pilgrimage (Sonnets 22-23). Her use of these conventional allegories is fully engaging to her, however, and she thus demonstrates in her return to conventional discourses the kind of "discursive renewal" Kristeva sees in lovers, who are able to transfer their passions to conventional discursive signs in such a way that these signs seem to "open up" (*Tales* 275).

Having regained her composure through a return to discourse, CR's speaker is able, at the end of her sequence, to bear gracefully a realistic vision of her mortality as a physical experience of "eyes that glaze ... heart pulse running down," and including the possibility that she "may miss the goal at last" (13). But she is also able to sustain cautious hope that she will be restored to spiritualized friendships, a hope of which the lady had despaired. She thus proposes that,

The unforgotten dearest dead may be
 Watching us with slumbering eyes and heart
 Brimful of words which cannot yet be said,

Brimful of knowledge they may not impart (28.10-13).

The sonneteer's final vision of waking eyes and unimaginable words expresses a subtly integrated and infinitely deferred idea of fulfillment on both symbolic and imaginary levels. Her final vision also reflects how her vision has gone beyond the concerns of her ego through this process, as she anticipates a collective transformation of love for herself and for her readers, rather than remaining fixated on private concerns as the lady of *Monna Innominata* does, as she remains nostalgic for her lost "youth" and "beauty" at the end of her sequence (14).

All in all, *Later Life* seems to describe a rare, successful journey of sublimation of desire into a religious quest, conducted to a large degree through the immersion of self in traditional and Biblical discourses. That this journey ultimately happens through language is, moreover, not surprising. While like Kristeva's mystic, the speaker of *Later Life* pursues "that which is nonrepresentable" (*Tales* 319)—in CR's words "strain[ing] dim eyes to catch the invisible sight" (6:13)—the mystic must nonetheless use writing as a symbolic discipline through which to "hold fast to [her] renunciation," in Kristeva's words (308). Holding fast to the symbolic order is what CR's speaker does as she seeks what lies beyond it, embracing its representational tools as paving stones with which to build a path to the unrepresentable.

V. Putting Faith in Discourse

As we have seen throughout this chapter, there is a way to read CR's use of Christian discourse as assured, rather than wary and ironic. In her quest for

transcendence, CR thus need not be seen as attempting to knock down the symbolic discourses that comprise “the wall of language,” but as employing even patriarchal biblical and Christian discourses as steps of a ladder, with the assurance that she will some day pass over that wall. It seems, therefore, that CR’s apocalyptic mode of faith gave her a foundation from which to dismiss the political claims of her gender and even of herself. For instance, CR does not seem to worry about assuming a typically feminine attitude of subordination in “The Lowest Place,” but rather embraces that attitude as an opportunity to elevate herself as a soul, a demand that seems to have required the renunciation of her worldly political and personal interests. Evidence of her renunciation of worldly claims includes, for instance, her refusal to participate in campaigns to undo patriarchal distinctions, supporting neither suffrage nor the ordination of women (Marsh 464). There was one exception to CR’s rejection of feminist causes, which is that she “voice[d] the female right to speak and be heard in religious discourse” in her theological tract *Seek and Find*, as Marsh points out (464). However, in insisting on women’s rights to participate in the “religious discourse,” CR was hardly resisting that discourse, but rather affirming it.

We can see in *Later Life* what Kristeva refers to as the mystic’s “confidence” (*Tales* 298) that she need not be afflicted by political conditions, where CR frames the biblical tragedy of the first father and mother in an apocalyptic context that anticipates the termination of such relationships; as she concludes consolingly, “[a] morrow cometh which shall sweep away / Thee and thy realm of change” (11-12). CR seems more generally to portray gender hierarchy within this context as a superficial attribute,

describing how Adam was “in guise / Of lover tho’ of lord,” a phrasing that implies that Adam’s lordship, as well as his love for Eve, were a guise or costume preceding the apocalyptic dissolution of identity (5-6). CR also implies that gender is contingent and superficial in her statement that on the Judgement Day, “[l]ove will “hold[] fast / [man’s] frailer self” while “sav[ing] without [woman’s] will,” implying that divine love will balance out masculinity and femininity as it emphasizes male frailty and female will (13-14), in Lacan’s term collapsing the “activity/passivity relation” that differentiates conventional femininity and masculinity (*Four* 192).

CR also insisted on the temporality of discourses regarding gender in her devotional tract *The Face of the Deep* (1892), her last volume of theological writings, whose subject was the book of *Revelation* and which also forges a vision of humanity in the shadow of an inevitable apocalypse. In this text, CR presents conjectures about the role women have in the promotion of human virtue, observing that “We daughters of Eve” should “be kept humble by that common voice which makes temptation feminine” (357).¹⁷ This comment reveals CR’s detached attitude regarding this homily concerning gender, which she characterizes as the “common voice,” rather than an essential truth. But it also affirms CR’s belief in the importance of submission to this moral, which accords with her general conviction of the value of humility. Even though the moral exists purely on the level of human discourse, CR seems to be saying, women should still “heed” it rather than discount it, presumably because it drives women towards humility that is always valuable for the Christian seeker. The spiritual prod given by a patriarchal discourse seems more significant to CR than the sexist discrimination the discourse

promotes, presumably because female identities belong to the world and will be overcome, but souls endure into the afterlife and must save themselves through any means available.

This possibility, that CR saw gender as belonging to “the world,” and thus believed that the conditions that constrict gender were impermanent and unimportant, helps in reading CR’s poems about temptation that invoke gender symbolism, such as “The World” (1854/1862), in ways that are consistent with her more general eschatological attitudes. In this poem, CR’s male speaker describes the dangers to the soul amidst a world that is allegorized as a temptress, who is “exceeding fair” by day and “[a] very monster void of love and prayer” by night (1, 8). Harrison and Palazzo see this poem as ironically undermining the discourses it invokes, and thereby highlighting, in Palazzo’s words, “the hypocrisy of the male attitude towards that most hated figure of Victorian respectability, the prostitute” (14). Harrison similarly suggests that, because the speaker finally discloses that the man’s feet are “cloven too,” he is clearly implicated in the evil he projects onto woman, and that the poem consequently exposes “the degraded constructions of woman’s nature and her accepted roles that these ideologies depend upon and perpetuate” (“Sage” 90).¹⁸ However, another reading of this poem is suggested through the lens of CR’s apparently contingent view of gender, conditioned by her conviction that it will be annihilated in the apocalypse. From this perspective, “The World” is not critiquing the patriarchal discourse that feminizes temptation, but embodying that unsavory discourse because it is useful and because there is no reason not to reinscribe a stereotypical idea of gender, a temporal category that itself belongs to ‘the

world' as much as any other "material thing" or "physical surface," in Arseneau's words ("Incarnation" 91).¹⁹

In a number of other texts as well, CR seems to explicitly reflect on the temporality but also the rigidity of cultural categories, which may be implicitly taken to include gender—a position that draws her near to Lacan's own semiotic reading of gender hierarchy as a non-essential, but non-negotiable fact of culture. One of CR's writings that unexpectedly invokes this philosophical intuition of the superficiality of cultural structures in general is her juvenile "To Lalla, Reading my Verses Topsy Turvy" (1849/1896), in which CR contrasts her own condition of symbolic literacy with that of a small cousin who is able to find meaning in a book held upside down:

Darling little Cousin,
 With your thoughtful look
 Reading topsy-turvy
 From a printed book. (1-4)

CR's fanciful anecdote suggests a deep meaning, as it implies that childhood knowledge is unmediated by convention. Lalla is a "[t]ender happy spirit, / Innocent and pure" who can obtain an "impression" from "marks" she gazes at upside-down (21-2). The anecdote also introduces a contrast between such unmediated knowledge and the mediated knowledge of adults, which is readable only "right side up" (21-2). While the speaker asserts the supremacy of Lalla's knowledge stating "[y]ou are much the wisest / Though I know the most," this comment also affirms her own requirement to participate in an oriented world of culture, which only permits one to read a book right-side-up (31-2). "To Lalla, Reading my Verses Topsy Turvy" thus seems to be a brief parable about the orientations that support a person in her life as a symbolic subject, but which fall away in

states of absolute innocence, whether childhood or the afterlife.

CR also makes intriguing comments about the character of gender orientation in *The Face of the Deep*. In this entry, she analogizes gender division to the division between right-handedness and left-handedness, which she compares to masculinity and femininity. Extending her conceit, she conjectures that left-handedness is a “rule,” but that “rules admit of and are proved by exceptions”; for “[t]here are left-handed people, and there may arise a left-handed society” (409-10). Metaphorically, she thus imagines that gender hierarchy, too, is relatively arbitrary and conventional and may consequently be overturned. With this radical comparison, CR shows that she believes that gender is dictated by “social forces” that are nonessential, as Hobbs notes (422). In psychoanalytic terms, CR seems to share Lacan’s assumption that gender division is purely semiotic and contingent. However, CR’s parallel does not hold out strong hopes for overturning gender hierarchy, because the conventional alignments are so strong that “women have no hope of success in this conflict,” in Hobbs’s words (422). Lacan, too, holds out little hope for a reversal of the “androcentric” structure of the symbolic order, however arbitrary he describes it as being, because of how the symbolic order irrevocably reproduces itself (*SII* 261). CR’s suggestion that the orientation of power could reverse thus seems to be not a political rallying cry, but a philosophical consolation, and one that is likely closely linked to her general notion of the temporality of gender given the imminence of apocalypse. The understanding that gender hierarchy is arbitrary rather than natural may thus have been consoling to CR not because this understanding predicts that this hierarchy is likely to be reversed in the present world, but because it affirms that it will be overcome in the

world beyond.

CR's treatment of gender as a temporal feature of the world should, to some degree, qualify observations that have been made by critics of an ironic "female self" within CR's poetry that speaks against the symbolic discourses of her poetry. Many readings of CR as subversive have been grounded in the theories of post-Lacanian theorists such as Kristeva as well as Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray, all of whom imagine alternatives to the androcentric symbolic order based in the fundamentals of female body and experience. As Jacqueline Rose explains, theories of feminine language posit that women have special access to a "different strata of language," beyond the patriarchal symbolic order (55). Grosz similarly explains that the project of theorists like Irigaray was to describe how female language "exceed[s] or overflow[s] the oppositional structures and hierarchizing procedures" of the symbolic order, in keeping with "the *independent* otherness of feminine pleasure and sexuality" (176-179). We may see such modes of interpretation applied to CR by Foster, who uses Irigaray's conception of how *écriture féminine* is diffuse and Cixous's idea of how it is "freed from law, unencumbered by moderation" and "turbulent, non-unified" (67) to describe a feminine voice within by CR's poems such as "Twice" (67). According to Foster, this voice "subverts [the poem's] ostensible meanings" of obedience to divine judgment, and thus allows CR to "speak beyond patriarchy" (76, 67). Other critics also have applied the logic of *écriture féminine* to CR, such as Reynolds where she observes that CR's writing is "distinctly feminine" and cites Irigaray to characterize CR's writing as "unfettered" (17), and Armstrong where she proposes that one may observe in CR's writing a "female

subjectivity” that favors “obliqu[e] and indirect[.]” means of expression (342).

But the theory of an “independent” and radically anti-hierarchical femininity lying behind these modes of interpretation is highly problematic, both in terms of Lacanian theory and in terms of CR’s own evidently shared view of gender as conventional and contingent in scope. In Lacanian terms, in order to define a place outside of the symbolic order from which women can speak, theories of *écriture féminine* must posit a “woman’s place outside language,” in the words of Rose (49), generally by designating a biological location in woman from whence a different order of signification could issue. However, the idea of a feminine special place “outside language” is antithetical to the theory of the symbolic order, in which gender itself is a semiotic attribute tied to language and based on the absence or presence of the “signifier” of the phallus (“Phallus” 284). All psychoanalytical and cultural gender characteristics are thus not essential or biological but conventional, and the subject learns them as he or she comes to maturity (“Phallus” 284).²⁰ This Lacanian theory of gender as a temporally limited construct that does not fully account for the self, accords, to some degree, with CR’s own eschatological sense that the soul will be liberated from gender in the apocalypse. While CR’s Christian perspective on gender is likely to see femaleness as a material “surface” rather than a semiotic one, (Arseneau 91), these two dualisms share the implication that a subject’s gender is not her ultimate foundation as a subject. In contrast, theories of *écriture féminine* tend to see the subject’s femaleness as deeper than her symbolic commitments, and thus able to subvert those commitments in an inchoate and biologically-driven manner. In general, therefore, the “French feminist” assumption of a distinctly feminine

part of a woman's being that runs deeper than her ostensible symbolic commitments is poorly suited to describing CR, who, instead, seems to have relied on the depth of her symbolic practices to eventually liberate her from her femininity.

Furthermore, the interpretation that CR partook of a special feminine order of meaning encumbers her with the essential criteria that theorists of *écriture féminine* attribute to women's speech, not all of which seem appropriate to her. Descriptions of women's writing as oblique and unfettered, as applied to CR, must fail to account for the highly formal nature of much of CR's writing. They must also fail to account for her virtuosity at employing symbolic language and discourses, where she is always a practitioner "of exact meaning," as Marsh finds, employing language that is crisp and proportionate as well as allusions that are importantly referential (473). Her symbolic skillfulness is, rather, more fully accounted for by Lacan's theory of gender, which, while describing how symbolic functions obstruct women from claiming some phallic privileges, regards the gender of the user of symbolic functions as generally indifferent, as Rose points out (55). Kristeva indeed proposes that women are likely to be excellent users of "symbolic functions," because the challenge they face of symbolizing their excluded experiences leads them to expand the power of the symbolic order "by giving it an object beyond its limits" (*Desire* 146); she thus describes Guyon as a writer who "stretched the body of the nameable," rather than as one who created another system of meaning apart from the symbolic one (*Tales* 312)²¹ As we can see in *Later Life* and throughout her career, CR is also a writer who rises to this challenge, continually exhibiting her will to use symbolic discourses in a savvy and original fashion to

characterize her emotional and libidinal struggles.

Like Lacan and Kristeva, CR poses no alternative to using symbolic functions to symbolize one's meaning, instead seeking to maximize the power of those symbolic functions to characterize the experiences and projects of the self. Terence Holt accordingly observes that CR's poetry rejects "utopian fantasies of a separate woman's culture," and "forces us to acknowledge ... our inscription within oppressively gendered systems of relation" in a fallen world (142, 145). As a determined disciple of those systems of relation, moreover, CR seems largely to have chosen to submit to her symbolic inscription, determining that the suffering her womanhood caused her in this lifetime was less meaningful to her than the transcendental quest that she could pursue through those gendered symbolic discourses.

Chapter Two

Christina Rossetti's Fantasy: Gothic and Apocalyptic Narratives of the Demon

And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.

REVELATION 13.1

The super-ego is at one and the same time the law and its destruction. As such, it is speech itself, the commandment of law, in so far as nothing more than its root remains. The law is entirely reduced to something, which cannot even be expressed, like the You must, which is speech deprived of all its meaning. It is in this sense that the superego ends up by being identified with only what is most devastating, most fascinating, in the primitive experiences in the subject. It ends up being identified with what I call the ferocious figure.

JACQUES LACAN, SEMINAR I

A consistent theme in Christina Rossetti's writing is that of the desire to submit the self to a greater will. In "Confluents," the speaker compares herself to rivers that seek "the sea / Much more deep than they" (2-23), describing a quest in which she will be enlarged if she dissolves her separate identity into her source. Although this quest for submission is most often described in CR's writing as a pursuit of self-realization, other kinds of submission are detailed in CR's writing that are not virtuous but guilty, and result not in redemption but loss. These other, darker poems provide a warning that the subject must carefully discriminate between different opportunities for submission,

trusting only the most meritorious authorities with her fate.

CR's gothic poem "Shut Out" (1856/1862), for instance, characterizes an authority figure who demands submission rather than permitting an opportunity for it; consequently, the poem does not appear to be a parable of a goal the self may seek, but a description of a damaging enthrallment. The poem describes the figure of a "shadowless spirit" who is building a tower around the speaker, cutting off a world of color and life.

The speaker describes her terrifying fate:

The door was shut. I looked between
 Its iron bars; and saw it lie,
 My garden, mine, beneath the sky,
 Pied with all flowers bedewed and green. (1-4)

This cruel obstruction of sight by the shadowless spirit exemplifies "scopophilic themes" Lorraine Janzen Kooistra observes more broadly in CR's writings such as "Goblin Market," where the "feminine desire to look at the world" is subject to "prohibition" (1; 140). The speaker's fate in "Shut Out" reflects, however, not only a prohibition in the social world, but a condition of obstruction within the self, an internal blocking of an allegorical landscape that "had been [hers], and [] was lost" (8). The interior nature of this obstruction is evident in how the captive heroine not only resists her prohibition, asking for "some buds to cheer my outcast state" (12), but also produces her own obstruction as she becomes "blinded with tears" (22; 26), a motif CR also uses to describe a response of self-repression in her accounts of Eve after her fall, in "An Afterthought" (1855/1862) and "Eve" (1865/1876). The speaker also confirms that the "delightful land" that is being barred to her is not a concrete place, but symbolic of some existential condition, when she reveals that its loss cannot be compensated for by the

“violet bed” and “lark” she still has access to, which are “good” but “not the best,” a position held by her allegorical garden (24-8).

Within this conflict, the shadowless spirit who initiates the heroine’s repression holds an ambiguous position. On the one hand, the shadowless spirit in “Shut Out” is comparable to the angels in a number of CR’s poems who exorcise forbidden scenes of color. The “fiery messenger” in “An Afterthought,” for instance, cuts Eve off from her paradise of “roses redder ... / Than they blossom elsewhere” (23). CR’s speaker in the apocalyptic reverie “My Dream” (1855/1862) has an alluring vision of a colorful Euphrates, the origin of false beastly gods, cut off by an “avenging ghost” (27). In cases like these, however, the agencies of repression are understood to be agents of divine justice, who strike out visions that are patently forbidden or legitimately lost. But the more arbitrary character of the shadowless spirit in “Shut Out” and his remorseless captivity of the speaker behind “iron bars,” also recall the demon lovers of the gothic poems CR wrote around the same time as she wrote this poem. During the year of 1856, CR composed a large number of explicitly gothic poems in which women are lured off to isolated castles where all prospects of human delight are absent. Such poems as “The Hour and the Ghost” (1856) and “A Nightmare” (1856) feature malevolent demon lovers who, like the shadowless spirit, bear women off to castles that suggest immurement, where the women are forced to “hide thine eyes” and to be constricted “with book and bell” (“Hour” 27, “Nightmare” 29). These demons reproduce the conventions of “vampirism” that David Morrill observes running through CR’s oeuvre, in which logic agencies of threat “tear away masks of innocence and drain lives” (1). Morrill notes that

CR draws frequently from imagery from *The Vampyre*, written by John Polidori, along with ideas in other popular gothic novels (1).

These two archetypes of the authority figure, the avenging angel and the restrictive vampire, evidently overlap in CR's writing, and suggest a troubling zone in her work in which the two types of repression intersect. This zone seems to center on the figure of the shadowless spirit of "Shut Out," one of CR's poems that is most ambiguous about the reasons for and causes of repression in the subject. We may be tempted, given how these two types of divine and demonic authority overlap in CR's work, to collapse them into a single ominous specter. Freud, for instance, would likely have characterized both of these angelic and demonic commanding images within the subject as forms of the superego, that "identification with the father" that is fueled by displaced libidinal aggression to produce the "general character of harshness and cruelty exhibited by the ideal—its dictatorial 'Thou shalt'" (*Ego* 44-5). However, Freud's solution does not elegantly account for CR's labours to distinguish benign from malignant forms of repression, writing of each in different genres and terms. Just as Christ would tell his disciples that they should "pluck out" their eyes if what they see obstructs their spiritual progress, CR proposes in her devotional poetry that some forms of repression and restriction can be beneficial to the spiritual life of the subject (Matthew 12:1). In "Who Shall Deliver Me" (1864), for instance, the speaker asks for God to "wall / Self from myself" in order to harden her against distracting "ease, and rest, and joys," believing that such repression will lead to a "lightened heart" and freedom from her "yoke" (8-9, 18, 14). In "An Afterthought" and "My Dream," the angel Gabriel and the fiery sword

similarly represent God's clear authority, as they "[w]ill[] with the perfect will" just and deserved restrictions within a Judeo-Christian context ("Afterthought" 33). In contrast, CR's demons and her shadowless spirit in "Shut Out" represent no apparent law, inflict repressions for no perceived reason, promote no good outcome for the speaker, and thus seem stringently distinguished from the former figures, who, however violent, are nonetheless defined as servants of their speakers' transcendental processes (33-5).

While Freud, a confirmed secularist, would not have honored this distinction between benign and malignant internal authorities, Lacan did, devising a crucial distinction between the terms "ideal ego" and "superego" that Freud tended to use interchangeably. The "ideal ego," Lacan holds, is the subject's image of the symbolic master, or "[O]ther," to whom she listens and whom she seeks to emulate; it is thus a genuinely "exalting" presence within the subject who can lead her to improve her character and can orient her quest for meaning (*SI* 142, 102). In contrast, Lacan reserves the term "superego" to describe internalizations of authority within the subject that do not "exalt" her, but "constrain" her, perpetuating a "tyranny" over the subject that does not provide a way out for the subject from her imaginary libido, but rather leads her back into it (102). This form of authority, Lacan suggests, is a corrupt form of the symbolic law in the subject—a set of "mistakes" in interpretation that have induced a "schism ... in [her] relation with ... the law" (*SII* 89, 130). This "senseless" and "destructive" internalization of authority holds extreme and immoral power over the subject that is inseparable from her desires, and that is sensed by the subject as the "ferocious figure" of her nightmares (102). Lacan's distinction between "exalting" and "constraining" forms of authority

within the self is thus perceptive about the way that inner agencies of authority may superintend true ethics that enhance social cohesion and self-realization, or, contrarily, may authorize destructive and self-alienating actions in the guise of morality.

Lacan's observation that the superego is represented in compelling but fearful figures of false authority helps, moreover, to interpret the recurrent religious and literary ideas of the demon in CR's writings, who frequently represents a counter-authority to the true one. In particular, his observation helps to place the significance of the category of fantasy figures in CR's writings, whose intentions are to corrupt the subject rather than to promote an ethical symbolic order in her, and among whom we may include CR's disturbing panoply of beasts, goblins, and demon lovers. Lacan never distinctly links the superego to fantasy, but his account of the superego as an "almost demonic" figure within the psyche that is "linked to primitive traumas the child has suffered, whatever these are," suggests that the superego might be a symptom of a disturbed oedipal complex that the subject has been unable to complete (102). Psychoanalytic theorists Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis accordingly describe how unique personal traumas are recorded in fantasy, which they describe as a structure that "provide[s] a representation of, and a solution to, major enigmas" of development (17-8). Fantasy is thus a personal code in which one may locate vestigial representations of whatever momentous experiences preceded or exceeded the infantile subject's power of signification, and which are frequently imaged in "fantasies of seduction" and "fantasies of castration" (19).¹ While the shadowless spirit in "Shut Out" is not as sexually seductive as some of CR's other demons, his actions seem nonetheless to hint at a "primal scene" of sexual origins in

which desire was first felt as well as prohibited, in Laplanche and Pontalis's terms, and which has been "stabilized" as a pressing myth of the subject's sexuality—a "reverie" that is perpetually "live[d] out" (19, 22). One possibility for such a scene has been proposed by Marsh, who believes that CR's "nightmares [and] morbid fantasies" of demons may hint at a background of incest (*CR* 258). While the theory of Laplanche and Pontalis would suggest that a reading of a fantasy in isolation cannot confirm a distinctly incestuous event, their theory affirms that CR's obsession with such primal scenes may indicate a background of infantile sexual confusion that she had difficulty resolving.

This chapter thus combines the Lacanian model of the superego with the psychoanalytic theory of fantasy to analyze a fantasy of groundless imperatives and usurped authority running through CR's oeuvre. It looks for meanings that may have been personal to CR, but also at literary and religious contributions to the various discourses of demonism that this fantasy elaborates. The fantasy is articulated and evolved through a number of sub-genres in CR's writing, primarily gothic writing, fantasy writing, and narratives about Eve. But the shifts and adjustments in the fantasy sustained in CR's writing do not undermine its general sense of coherence, in keeping with Lacan's observation that an individual's fantasy takes the form of a unique "signifying ensemble" that nevertheless grows "ever more complex" over the subject's life (*Four* 185). All of the versions of CR's fantasy thus center on superegoic figures who are at once agencies of seduction and enactors of sadistic prohibitions upon the very transgressions they have initiated. The versions thus sustain many of the features of "Shut Out," including scopophilic delight in a primal scene that is repressed, an ambiguously

compelling authority figure, and experiences of shame, chastening, or blindness. But the fantasy also transforms over the course of CR's career, increasingly characterized by its differentiation from her religious quest, and by CR's recognition and control over the fantasy as an author. Thus, while the speakers and narrator of early versions of the fantasy like "Shut Out" express incomprehension and helplessness in the face of demonic entities, characters in CR's later fantasy writings reveal strategies to distinguish and disarm demons, including resistance from a position of symbolic security, and narrative containment within the symbolic order.

The chapter begins with "Maude's Superego," a reading of CR's quasi-autobiographical short story *Maude* (1850) as an inchoate, yet particularly fatal form of CR's fantasy. Despite the fact that Maude is an avid writer of religious poetry, the narrative gradually reveals that she is not in the grip a transcendental imperative, but of a tyrannical superego. Maude's domination by an "anti-legal" superegoic authority is shown, for instance, when she restrains herself from taking communion so that she will not "profane Holy things," thus preventing her from seeking Christian redemption (35). Maude's friends also become distressed by other signs of decay in Maude, worrying at how "thin" she is growing (28). There are many additional bold hints in *Maude* that, until the very end of her life, Maude does not experience genuine religious aspiration, but rather a sinister, erotic entrapment by an obscure demon, which induces a similar moral and physical deterioration as that which CR condemns in lovers in poems like "A Triad."

Secondly, "Entrapments in Ghostland" moves on to look at CR's more obvious fantasies of demonic possession from her brief gothic period, when she became

fascinated with demons that tempt women towards obscure forms of gratification and then destroy them. This section draws on Kristeva's notion of "the abject" to help interpret the semantics of CR's fantasies. Margaret Reynolds has already noticed the applicability of this term to CR's writings, which helps to characterize the "obscure sense of invasion" and repelled "unclean[ness]" they frequently evince (10). The term was devised by Kristeva to characterize the experience of narcissistic subjects who are attracted to the imaginary "land of oblivion" they recall from before the onset of the symbolic order (*Powers* 8). Such subjects tend also to be haunted by strong superegos, whose function within the psychic economy of the subject is to keep the subject's identity from "foundering" in that limbo "by making it repugnant" as well as shameful, according to Kristeva (15). She thus describes the superego as itself anchored within this abyss of the imaginary drives, and consequently agrees with Lacan that the superego's "morality" is highly dubious, not properly rooted in the symbolic order, and thus imposing on the subject a "mislead[ing]" and "corrupt" set of rules that are interconnected with the subject's own repressed desires, arousing the very excitement they in turn forbid (5, 15-6).² Kristeva's picture of the superego as both a seducer and a tyrant is in keeping with many of CR's illicit authorities in her gothic poems such as "The Hour and the Ghost," and "A Nightmare," who lure women into abject zones and then punish these women for their transgressions, while often abiding in womb-like spaces that invoke the maternal context of the pre-symbolic era.

The last section of this chapter, "Fantasy of the Beast," reviews the poems within CR's oeuvre that have been described as "fantasy" proper, including "My Dream"

(1855), “Goblin Market” (1859), and the stories in *Speaking Likenesses* (1874). This section finds that CR’s fantasies straddle the spheres of psychology and religion to display intersections between the “senseless, destructive [and] anti-legal” figure of the superego and the Christian image of the Leviathan who reigns over an abject sphere of perversion (Lacan *SI* 102; Revelation 13:2). In psychoanalytic terms, this section proposes that these writings characterize what Kristeva refers to as “apocalyp[tic]” conflicts within the subject between primordial desire and symbolic stability (*Powers* 208). Meanwhile, in religious terms, it observes that these poems anticipate the purgative Day of Judgement described in Revelation, when the Beast’s reign of sensuality and sin will be terminated by the will of God, though they also dwell on “the beautiful sensations of the world” after it has been “renounced,” as Harrison finds CR frequently does, after the example of St. Augustine (*Context* 208). Based on these overlaps in ways of interpreting CR’s poetry, this section exposes how key concepts of psychoanalysis are likely to be rooted in some of the prior religious and literary models of human experience that were available to CR.

In reading CR’s demonic fantasy as a deviation from the symbolic law that CR was intent upon embracing, “Fantasy of the Beast” draws a different conclusion than has been drawn by readers of CR’s fantasy writing who see the demons in her writings as agencies of empowerment. Sylvia Bailey Sherbutt, for instance, understands the goblins in “Goblin Market” as “purveyors ... of creative liberation” (41), while Nina Auerbach proposes that demonism was another way, besides Christian transcendentalism, that CR fueled her “dream of self-apotheosis” (118, 117).³ This section argues that such

assessments that collapse the metaphysical hierarchy of heavenly and demonic influences in CR's work read against the grain of her fantasy, where even those of her demons who offer women a dark self-knowledge always eventually take away women's power and freedom, and even monsters who offer love or liberation are exposed as fraudulent. This section finds the hollowness of demonic delights climactically rendered in "Goblin Market" (1859), an encounter with what Copjec calls the superego's "obscene" temptation of the subject to continual "jouissance" (106) that exemplifies what Mary Arseneau describes as the need for Christian subjects to disdain "the selfish abandonment of disobedience and gluttony" ("Incarnation" 87). "Fantasy of the Beast" also, however, sees "Goblin Market" as a turning point in CR's fantasy, observing, in her descriptions of how Lizzie and Laura learn to resist goblins, a program for how the subject may be ethically empowered to resist her darkest appetites. In CR's view, it seems, the subject's powers of resistance come partly from her ability to tell demonic stories rather than live them. Both Laura in her final position as a storyteller in "Goblin Market," and the aunt who is a spinner of demonic nursery tale in *Speaking Likenesses*, demonstrate how a subject who narrates may gradually become the master of her own demonology, cognizant of the various guises that false authority within the self uses to masquerade itself as true.

I. Maude's Superego

One of CR's most ambiguous narratives about the dangers of false subservience is her early story, *Maude* (1850/1870), the tale of a precocious poetess with an uncannily self-mortifying impulse. Maude is a fifteen-year-old with no ostensibly dismal experiences behind her, who writes poems about how hard it is "to bear hated life":

To strive with hands and knees weary of strife;
 To drag the heavy chain whose every link
 Galls to the bone; to stand upon the brink
 Of the deep grave ...
 To hold with steady hand the knife
 Nor strike home.

(*Kent Prose* 20)

Maude's circle receives these poems in "amazement ... [over] what could make her poetry so broken-hearted" (21), and a reader of *Maude* also seems prompted to find the poems Maude writes bewilderingly ungrounded in either her background or her fundamental temperament. Maude is not initially presented as an especially melancholy character, as she dresses her cousin's hair and greets new friends "with the manner of a practised woman of the world" (23). The narrator's description of how Maude writes this poem additionally seems to rule out a context of intense suffering that would provide an objective correlative to Maude's writing, as she completes the sonnet only to "yawn[], lean[] back in her chair, and wonder[] how she should fill up the time until dinner" (20).⁴

Displaying a strange reversal of the cause and effects of literary expression, however, Maude gradually begins to give signs of a tendency toward self-mortification that doubles the content of her poetry. This tendency is first displayed when she plays "boutes-rimes" with her friends, a game of sonnet-writing that shows off her literary skill.

On the subsequent day she is grave, and expresses herself “sick of display and poetry and acting” (28). In a similar visit the following year, her sense of anxiety in the face of performance is induced when some new friends “attack[] on either hand with questions concerning her verses” and encourage her to publish them; this show of attention gives her “displeasure” and leads her to avoid further contact with these young women (33). After this incident, Maude begins her steady decline. She begins to suffer from “headache” and to become “pale, languid, almost in pain” and to write increasingly punctilious poems that reproach herself for “vanity” and “false heart” (33-4). Most damagingly, she refuses to take communion because she considers herself a “hypocrite” for not “avoiding putting [herself] forward and displaying [her] verses” (34). It is within the year that Maude begins her approach towards the “deep grave,” suffering a carriage accident that results in vague internal injuries that precipitate her death. This accident is not properly in the field of her control, but within the structure of the story it provides fitting and conveniently obscure closure to her morbid narrative.

Overall, this tale thus seems to outline the progress of a “death drive” within Maude that critics have analyzed in many different ways. Most critics of *Maude* see the poetess’s death as the fulfillment of some conventional norm of her society that stifles creative women. Gilbert and Gubar see Maude’s death as “dutiful,” expressing the Victorian law against “the female sin of vanity” whereby “a woman must never become enamored of her own image in nature or art” (552, 547). Other critics, meanwhile, see Maude as embodying a more specific sort of law proper to the Victorian poetess. Dorothy Mermin interprets Maude’s death as a living-out of the destiny that was considered

“suitable” for poetesses for the better part of the nineteenth century (77). Margaret Linley similarly suggests that Maude’s writing and destiny embody a “tradition of women’s writing” in which poetesses were supposed to embody “extravagant soulfulness” as well as “transcendent feminine modesty,” requiring them eventually to stifle their faculties of self-expression (286, 290). Armstrong agrees that Maude embodies a traditional “poetics of expression” that dramatizes Victorian feminine entrapment between alienating “cultural ritual[s]” and conditions of emotional “extremity” (318, 328-9). According to Armstrong’s interpretation, Maude’s poetry and ultimate destiny are still determined by a law that is given to young poetesses to act out. All of these critics, in different ways, thus characterize Maude as the exponent of a norm that is given to her, and the embodiment of what she is supposed to be within the symbolic tradition of her society.

From a psychoanalytical point of view, however, there is a problem with accounting for the conflicts that Maude expresses in her life and works as representing a social law “bred” into subjects, in Gilbert’s and Gubar’s expression (547). This problem lies in whether the subject is understood as monistic, and thus as performing an ideologically-determined role, or as dualistic, and thus as characterized by internally conflicting aspirations, in the way psychoanalytical theory holds the subject to be. As Copjec finds, monistic models of the subject in the latter half of the twentieth century are typically historicist models based on Louis Althusser’s concept of “the imaginary” as an all-embracing ideology, and tend thus to “conceiv[e] [of] desire ... as a realization of the law” and to “say[] simply that the law causes us to *have* a desire” (24). In contrast, Lacanian theory considers the character of the social law as not adequate, in itself, to

explain the peculiar dynamics of a subject's desires. More complexly, Lacanian theory describes an "internal dialectic" between the subject's desire and the law, which makes her "reject [her] desire" as unlawful. Consequently, "the being of the subject" that has grown "dependent on the negation of its desire" becomes a form of desire itself, "turn[ing] desire into a self-hindering process" (24-5). Thus, a subject's behavior is never a pure "realization" of a law, but always an idiosyncratic "effect" of how the subject turns her desires against themselves.

Copjec's characterization of how desire in the subject becomes a "self-hindering process" applies well to Maude, who manifests a zeal for obedience of the sort that psychoanalytic theorists have generally attributed not to symbolical legality, but to a form of legality that is rooted in unconscious desire, as Freud characterizes in his description of "moral masochism" as "conscience" that is "mixed with libido" (*Ego* 43, 45). Freud's description of how the moral masochist experiences a "sense of guilt" from no lawful cause, but nonetheless "refuses to give up the punishment of suffering," is highly applicable to Maude. As well, his account of how the superego splits off in such cases and "turn[s] round on the subject's own ego" in a way that is "as cruel as only the id can be" can be seen in the split in Maude's subjectivity when she offers "strange prayers" to God with "a divided heart" that is simultaneously "frightened" and "reproachful" (*Ego* 44; 35-6). Freud's characterization of moral masochism is also likely applicable to CR, given W. M. Rossetti's observation that CR, like the character Maude she created, was "overburdened with conscientious scruples of an extreme and even a wire-drawn kind" (Marsh 39). The violence of the self-flagellation performed by both Maude and her

creator thus go beyond participation within or performance of a tradition, instead exemplifying real conflicts of a sort that even the members of their communities find incomprehensible and disturbing.

A more complex reading of Maude's habits of expression than critics have heretofore provided is thus required to capture the sense CR creates of the perversity of her poetess. CR's various images of Maude writing peculiar death-driven poems and falling away from the church do not portray a person obeying the cultural norms of her society, but rather someone compelled by a personal and distorted imperative, such as that which Lacan outlines in his idea of the super-ego. Lacan's account of how the superego does not actually encourage the subject along a path of true enhancement, but instead induces in the subject "a failure to understand the law," is especially vivid in the incident in which Maude's superegoic guilt prevents her from attending church (*SI 102*). The baffled and grievous responses of Maude's friends to her behavior—like W. M. Rossetti's to his sister's—indicate that such behavior does not properly represent what Lacan describes as the symbolic law of "[one's] parents, [one's] neighbours, [and] the whole structure of [one's] community," but rather a deviant, personal form of it (*SII 120*). Maude's more obedient friend Agnes reveals the difference between proper, lawful behavior and Maude's perverse self-punishment when she begs Maude not to "deprive [her]self of the appointed means of grace," but rather to take her communion and thus find "safety ... in obedience" (35). Maude, in turn, shows herself in thrall to the punishing part of herself that mercilessly refuses her any scope for salvation when she cries, "I cannot go tomorrow; it is of no use" (36). This inexplicable scruple, which

actually obstructs Maude from a path that would lead to grace, parallels cases observed by Freud in which the moral masochist “produces criminality” for himself in order to permit “relief” from an obscure sense of guilt by “fasten[ing] this unconscious sense of guilt on to something real and immediate” (*Ego* 42).

A tradition that CR may be subliminally invoking, in her presentation of Maude’s alienation from her community and gradual deterioration before their eyes, is the gothic, which she would go on to adapt in poems like “The Hour and the Ghost” that depict women in the grip of mysterious compulsions. Effects in *Maude* seem particularly to resemble a motif Botting observes in Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wielend*, of “spirit[s] possessing the body” who produce “strange voices” that resemble “emanations from God” (116). When such voices occur in a gothic context, we may infer that they are demonic simulacra of divine authority, in keeping with Kristeva’s description of the super-ego as an agency that “corrupts; uses ... [and] takes advantage of” symbolic laws, “the better to deny them” (*Powers* 15). CR’s uncanny presentation of Maude contains subtle signs that she, too, is subject to a fraudulent enchantment. For example, Maude’s automatic manner of writing poems that by all appearances exceed her personal experience suggests a case of possession. Possession is also denoted in Maude’s generally pallid demeanor and intermittent “enervation,” which Morrill finds represented in Laura of “Goblin Market,” and more generally in “vampiric lore” (6). Maude is accordingly “languid” and of fixed “paleness,” except when she reads her poetry, and her “sleepy eyes ... light up with wonderful brilliancy” (21). Even when Maude has become distinctly sickly, reciting still produces “inexhaustible” energy in her, while the writing of

it is an exhausting compulsion, as Agnes notes when she discovers Maude “pale, languid, almost in pain” surrounded by her manuscripts after a busy day of Christmas preparations (25, 34). While these physical oscillations in Maude are naturalistic representations of illness, they also indicate a more profound symbolic form of decay, as even Maude observes when she expresses her faith that “sickness and suffering are sent for our correction” (36).

Maude is not, however, corrected by her suffering, but isolated by it, as her onslaught of superego increasingly renders Maude unfit for any of the normal feminine activities and destinies of her community, in the same way that CR’s gothic heroines become unfit for ordinary lives through their demonic possessions. Mermin finds Maude’s death to be “suitable,” but it is clear that the most suitable behavior in *Maude* is the social circuit of girlish enjoyments, many of which Maude hangs back from, since she refuses to “wear ornament” (23). These activities are, moreover, directed towards securing marriages and family lives for the girls, a destiny for which Maude is portrayed as being ill-suited. Such inaptness is hinted at early in the story, when a baby is given to Maude and it “receive[s] Maude’s advances with a howl of intense dismay” (22). The contrary impulse of Maude’s superego, to obstruct any expressions in her of the normal, social law, becomes even more conspicuous as her physical symptoms arise when she encounters contexts of love and courtship. A distinctly sexual link between Maude’s symptoms and her superego is manifested as Maude’s sickness and suffering intensify at the precise moments when she might encounter evidence of normative sexual desire. Her fatal injury occurs first when she is on her way to Mary’s wedding, preventing her from

witnessing the nuptials (40). Later, when she inquires of her friend Agnes whether Mary's husband is handsome and proposes that she "should love a baby of [Mary's]", Maude's pain breaks out with new violence, so that she writes, "Uh, my side! It gives an awful twinge now and then" (41). This incident confirms that Maude is not only punished with suffering for bad thoughts, but rather, for sexual thoughts. CR's expression of a vague hysterical illness in Maude that is aroused in response to suggestions of normative sexuality anticipates psychoanalytic theories of how superegoic symptoms express both "symbolic" and "sexual" motivations, in Lacan's terms, and "reveal an indirect form of sexual satisfaction" as Freud more bluntly observed (*SI* 197, *SII* 320; in *SI* 118). Kristeva further explains how superegoic symptoms block expressions of desire for another by relating the superegoic complex to the introverted function of narcissism, giving an account of this connection that seems highly relevant to Maude. According to Kristeva, when "a prohibition" such as a superego "block[s] the desire craving an other" with "reproachful jealousy," then "desire and its signifiers turn back toward the 'same,' and "cloud[] the waters of Narcissus" (14-15). In a similar way, Maude's apparently superegoic symptoms seem to cut her off from outgoing, legally and socially acceptable forms of desire, so that she instead experiences the desire unconsciously, as a symptom. Maude's superego's blocking of marriage is thus similar to her "anti-legal" superegoic obstruction of church attendance, as each of these reactions expresses the superego's demonic inclination to prevent forms of symbolic pursuit, through which, as a devotee or a wife, she may "give herself, to a god, to something transcendent," in Lacan's words (*SII* 263).

Maude is not only shut off by her superego from marriage, but also from another normative prospect within her society, and another typical option for the young ladies in her circle, which is the convent. She thus responds to a suggestion by Magdalen, who is entering the convent, that Maude, too, may someday become a “pale sister,” with a typical expression of self-loathing in which she claims that “[Magdalen] is so good she never can conceive what I am” (39). As she elsewhere confirms, she is not “fit or inclined” for the convent, and does not “like the trouble” of ministering, since she did not “fancy [she] ever could have talked to the poor people or done the slightest good” and is generally “too unwell for regularity” (29). While these reasons Maude gives for not becoming a sister may, in part, express a temperamental choice, they also seem contaminated by the effects of her superego, insofar as she justifies her retreat in relation to her symptoms and her general conviction of criminality. More signs of Maude’s superego’s “jealous” inhibition of transcendence emerge, moreover, as she meditates on the reason for her unfitness for convent life. Seemingly to elaborate why she would not make a good nun, Maude explores various proper and improper reasons that she and her friends might enter the convent in the poem attributed to her called “Three Nuns.” The correct sort of nun—who is, as Maude writes to Agnes, “Magdalen, of course”—seeks with a pure heart a “[v]oice to guide me ... till I reach Heaven’s strand” (40). In contrast, one of the wrong sorts of nuns is lovelorn rather than full of faith and seeks the convent as consolation for her grief; she could have been “Mary, had she mistaken her [correct] vocation” of marriage (40). The final wrong sort of nun appears, meanwhile, to be Maude, although she coyly denies the connection, declaring “no one can suspect [her] of

being myself ... [because] my hair is far from yellow” and without “curls” (40). But one senses that this disavowal confirms the association, since it shows that Maude expects to be associated with this nun (40).⁵

The first nun’s reason for being in the convent is thus not primarily to seek spiritual guidance, but rather to seek escape; she wants to “shut out all the troublesome noise of life” in a way that echoes the gothic captivity emblemized in “Shut Out” (6-7). Like the desire to escape suffering that Maude expresses in her earliest poetry, and like the desires that trap heroines in CR’s most morbid poetry, this nun’s form of the death drive thus seems not transcendental but genuinely suicidal. As she beseeches:

Shadow, shadow on the wall
 Spread thy shelter over me
 Wrap me with a heavy pall
 With the dark that none may see
 Fold thyself around me; come. (1-5)

She goes on to seek a “winding sheet,” so she can be “buried before I am dead” (10-11). Moreover, there is also an evidently erotic component to the nun’s request for obliteration by the shadow, which points to the rootedness of this request in narcissistic desire. When she asks the shadow to “fold thyself around me” and to “lay thy cool upon my breast,” she invokes a sexual fantasy of what Kristeva calls the “‘sublime’ object” and “the possibility of naming the pre-nominal”: the power to access again the fullness of libido that had preceded the subject’s powers of signification (5, 14). When the subject seeks to recapture this memory of perfection instantaneously and in a place beyond words, the impulse is narcissistic and the self-loss tends to be short-lived, in contrast with the

transcendence enabled through the more disciplined and studious routes of the symbolic order that we have observed in Chapter One.

A sense that the third nun's vocation is narcissistic is, moreover, confirmed in her description of the kind of privacy and security that the convent represents to her. As she describes, its insulation from the outer world reminds her of a wood to which she had retreated as a child, whose thick sheltering atmosphere protected her from being "found [or sought]":

In the thickest of the wood,
I remember, long ago,
How a stately oak-tree stood
With a sluggish pool below
Almost shadowed out of sight. (50-6)

She recalls how she was able, in this wood, to recover a deliciously narcissistic sense of perfection, of "liv[ing] as in a dream" and feeling "pure" as the "lilies on the stream" (60-3). This wood resembles Kristeva's account of memories of the primal repressed of narcissism, where "light touches, scents, sighs, cadences ... arise, shroud me, carry me away" (58-61). The wood may also, meanwhile, be compared to DGR's "Willowood," another wood saturated with pleasure and loss, where a "woodside well" issues up "dark ripples" filled with narcissistic images (58-61; 11-12). But there is also an ominous quality to the nun's recollection of a private wood. While not a scene of horror, the "sluggish" pool she refers to prefigures some of CR's sterile stagnant landscapes, like the ghostland in "Cobwebs," where "thro' the sluggish air a twilight grey / Broodeth" (6, 10-11). The nun's pool thus exemplifies how the repressed imaginary desire that Kristeva claims is "dissolv[ed] in the raptures of a bottomless memory" tends not to exist in a

pristine state within the self, but to be overlaid with hints of the “abject” that “cloud the water,” ensuring that the drives recovered from a lost imaginary past are not only delightful but susceptible to “confusion” (14, 12).

In this context of confused desire, the nun’s stately oak tree standing over the pond seems like the proto-phallic figure of Kristeva’s superego, “anchored” to the narcissistic structure of the abject who “has settled in place and stead of what will be ‘me’” (10, 15). Because the superego is rooted so deeply in the drives, it is felt as a familiar and thrilling object that causes one to “joy [] ... violently and painfully” and is capable of “swallow[ing] up the self” in its own will (9). As Harrison observes in his reading of “Three Nuns,” there is a sense of “ambiguous sin” hanging over the first nun’s past, which suggests a past “erotic seduction” (*Context* 134). Thus, in the form of narcissism described by the nun, one doesn’t desire an image of the self, but rather a premature, superegoic image of authority that has a highly intimate access to one’s being. The superego seems, moreover, to jealously forbid the nun to have other expressions of desire, in keeping with what S. Isaacs describes as the “defensive” function of fantasy, which protects an initial route of desire to a lost object by blocking other routes (Laplanche and Pontalis 23).

The particular expressions of desire that the nun’s poetry displays her superego to prevent seem, moreover, to be those that fall within what Lacan calls the “masquerade” of normative heterosexual femininity (*Four* 100). As Stephen Heath explains, the masquerade of sexuality is the process whereby a woman shows off superficial attributes that, in a sense, she “does not have,” in order to dramatize her lack of the phallus (52).⁶

The nun describes how in her quest for purity and isolation she has deliberately thwarted sexual opportunities by hampering such alluring aspects of her appearance; in the past her “yellow hair was curled” and “[m]en saw and called [her] fair,” but she sheared those curls to enter the convent, and became “curtained from intruding eyes” by the walls of the convent (41). The nun’s confession that she is impelled to hide away from opportunities for vanity helps to explain the actions of Maude’s own superego, which similarly preempts and punishes vanity within her.⁷ The manner in which the nun’s retreat from vanity seems, thus, to be the cause rather than the effect of her religious vocation suggests that Maude’s own fear of “display” may similarly spring from a narcissistic desire to escape normative female sexuality.

Maude, moreover, portrays how the effects of this desire are not utterly benign or genuinely emancipatory. Christine Weisenthal has observed that CR’s characters frequently evade the normative heterosexual masquerade by focusing their eyes on a relationship with the male “Other,” and so becoming a “black hole” to men who might gaze upon them (394-5). She cites Judith Butler to suggest that CR’s gestures of evasion are emancipatory, allowing the characters to choose to “refus[e] to be a certain gender” in a normative style. But as Copjec points out, the impulse to “conflict with and disrupt ... social relations” is an expression of a prior, narcissistic desire that is excluded by those relations (23). *Maude* shows how this prior desire can be at least as tyrannical as the entry into the symbolic order it obstructs, as subjects in its thrall dread attention in ways that seem compulsive and uncontrollable, raising the possibility of domination by a superego that exaggerates all suggestions of criminality. The wish to become a “black hole for the

gaze” takes on a sinister character where the evasion of a symbolically-ordered sexual life deprives the female subject of all relationship, isolating her within herself.⁸

CR’s quasi-autobiographical characters in *Maude* seem thus possibly to display a side of her own religious campaign that was not transcendental, but rather self-consuming. This dubious aspect of CR’s symbolic project centered on her excessive fear of vanity and display, and the revelations in *Maude* suggest that these concerns may not have been motivated by spirituality but by sexual fear. According to Marsh, CR received religious-toned messages against display from her mother, who while “encourag[ing] [her daughters’] achievements,” chastened them to avoid “the selfish wish to shine over others,” a distinction Marsh links to the moral ideas of Thomas Carlyle (149). CR, however, grew to avoid not only the arrogant “shining” over others, but all kinds of visibility whatsoever—especially those which could become construed in sexual terms—becoming in adolescence “a retired, introverted” young woman “renowned for her lack of fashion consciousness” (Marsh 164, 49, 72). In accordance with Lacan’s description of the super-ego as a destructive “schism ... for the subject ... in [her] relations with what we will call the law,” CR may have made a superegoic symptom out of this Christian norm against vanity, unconsciously attaching it to her own sexual anxieties—in the way Lacan finds superegoic symptoms are produced—and thereby to have suffered from the norm to an excessive degree (*SI* 196).

At the same time, however, the prospect CR holds out in *Maude* that religious vocation may be confused with sexual evasion by no means affirms that CR’s own ultimate spiritual project was, as a whole, an expression of perverted desire, as Gilbert

and Gubar suggest, seeing in Maude's search for a "constraining cross" an acknowledgement that CR's own religious practice was "masochistic" (575; 550). It is true that CR's own poetry at times veers into the style of Maude's—for instance in "Who Shall Deliver Me" (1864), where the speaker on a quest for release from the self becomes caught up in loathing herself as a "coward with pathetic voice" (9, 17). But given Maude's capacity and effort to make distinctions between a suicidal form of religion and that of the nun with a "true" and optimistic vocation, we should infer that CR sensed the difference between religious aspiration and fruitless self-constriction. We may even regard *Maude* as part of CR's effort to distinguish between these diverse impulses within herself.

At the end of the story, moreover, even Maude becomes released from her superegoic compulsion towards immuration, into a clearer mode of symbolic transcendence. When Maude first lies suffering and dying, she continues to indulge her gothic mood, soliciting a luxurious and deadly shadow who will "Shut out the light," as the nun also asks her shadow to do, and to "lull me, languid as a dream" (3-4). Maude thus momentarily partakes of the imaginary desires for the perfection of a dream and the comfort of a mother. However, CR dramatically inserts a story of symbolic conversion in the last moments of Maude's life, which is posthumously uncovered by her friend Agnes amid the "many half-effaced pencil scrawls" of Maude's deathbed writings (50). Agnes is on the verge of throwing all of these writings to the flames, when she finds two poems "evidently composed at a subsequent period" to "Shut Out the Light." The first of these poems begins to signal a departure from neurotic morbidity towards a more

transcendental perspective, as they anticipate how, in dying, “we shall come the sooner back to pleasant spring” (11-12). Maude’s last poem is even more fully transcendental: here Maude reveals herself to be finally filled with faith in Christ and assured that, in his presence, “the powers of darkness ... [she] needst not fear” (9).

The contrasts between dark and light spiritual visions in these final poems suggest that Maude finally finds an escape from narcissistic forms of self-persecution, and discovers Magdalen’s exalting faith in the true law. This transition, while perhaps too hasty to be literally plausible, nonetheless suggests that CR believed that through diligent and patient writing, the gothic compulsions of the superego can be worked through. But while CR may have wished to emulate Maude’s instant transcendence, her body of work suggests that she did not accomplish this shift from demonic habit to genuine illumination as spontaneously as Maude, but had to write a great deal of poetry before the darkness cleared from her own religious vision, even to some degree.

II. Entrapments in Ghostland

During the years 1856 and 1857, CR’s writing suggests that she peered most distinctly at her inner darkness, “convey[ing] the impression of something seeking expression,” according to Marsh, that was “bound in with half-glimpsed fear” (199). It was during these years that CR produced the poems that most directly employ gothic motifs such as demon lovers and wild landscapes as other nineteenth-century works use them: to describe the “irruption of fantasies, suppressed wishes and emotional and sexual conflicts” according to Botting (11). Kristeva likewise notes how the nineteenth-century

developed the language of “horror” to “code” our “most intimate and most serious apocalypses”—schisms between “narcissistic” impulses towards an abject “jouissance” and the “religious, moral and ideological codes” that try to secure the subject on symbolic ground (209, 9). A perfect exemplar of this logic, CR’s version of gothic similarly depicts subjects who are torn between tantalizing, but destructive, zones of libidinal fullness, and symbolic orders where desire never seems adequate, thus guaranteeing these subjects’ attraction to what these orders exclude.

CR’s gothic writing has, however, not been examined very thoroughly, perhaps because it seems highly conventional—a record more of borrowings than of innovations. Morrill and D’Amico, for instance, note the influence of Romantic gothic writers such as Polidori and Maturin in CR’s works (1, 20), while Barbara Garlick observes that CR was “fascinated by the Doppelgänger legend” and other gothic motifs (4). Apart from Morrill, however, none of these critics gives extended treatment to CR’s way of reviving these Romantic motifs, despite how revealing her expressions of libidinal conflict can be. But CR’s version of the gothic is worth studying, especially because of how it sustains a stark division between the libidinal appeal of the abject and other, more licit, forms of desire that many other Victorian writers of gothic efface, perhaps in the attempt to reconcile the subject’s contrary urges. As Anne Williams notes, the demonic lovers characterized by late-Romantic and Victorian writers such as Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte are only superficially “mysterious,” and “otherworldly” (144). In *Jane Eyre* and *Pride and Prejudice*, ostensibly aggressive and arrogant men such as Darcy Bain and Mr. Rochester are “eventually *transformed*, [their] true nature[s] realized,” when they are

found—or made—to be capable of symbolically-legitimate companionate marriages—for instance through Rochester’s castrating blinding. But by offering readers gothic demons who are redeemable and marriageable, these novels commit a sleight-of-hand, permitting gothic thrills while hiding the literary and psychological truths that demons are alluring precisely because they resist and thwart symbolic containment.

CR’s gothic, in contrast, uncompromisingly maintains a schism between illicit, abject gratification and symbolic conformity. She thus depicts scenarios in which women are about to enter sensible, conventional marriages with loving, but unexceptional, men, only to be overwhelmed by alluring but deadly outlaws. These poems are genuine *psychomachia*, in which, like Spenserian heroes, CR’s heroines are forced to make momentous choices among the claims of different parts of themselves—with the gothic complication that her heroines have no choice, since due to their susceptibilities, they are always already condemned by desire for a *jouissance* tinged with sin. “The Hour and the Ghost,” for example, is constructed as two overlapping conversations, one between a bride and a bridegroom, and one between a Ghost who attempts to draw her away from her marriage to his rugged place “beyond the hills and pines” (4-6). This demon has knowledge of the bride’s desires, as he calls her to “come with me...to our home” (12) and reminds her of a prior time when “thou wast not afraid”; he also refers to the bride’s “fair frail sin,” of having previously submitted to the ghost’s “woo[ing],” thus making irresistible appeals to both her desire and her guilt (19, 14, 55 15). Embodying the “corrupt” legality of the superego, moreover, the ghost distorts the words of the marriage

ceremony to imply that she is already bound to him: “[f]or better and worse, / [f]or life and death ... [c]ome, crown our vows” (34-6).

As long as she can, the bride resists the call, asking her groom to “hold me one moment longer” (18). Finally, she speaks to her groom as though she were dying, telling him to

Keep thy faith true and bright
Thro’ the lone cold winter night
Perhaps I may come to thee. (45-7)

The groom fails to comprehend the cause of his bride’s drifting, however, and demands “[w]ho spoke of death or change but aught of ease?” (50). Readers of gothic fiction will recognize, however, that it is not a real death that threatens the bride, but a far worse living death of limbo, which CR once described as “the most horrible of all deaths imaginable,” according to Morrill (9). Legendarily, such a death is a direct cause of the subject’s submission to exorbitant desire, ushering in an enchantment Morrill describes as “a doppelgänger process in which [one] confronts [one’s] desirous other self” (24). CR conveys such a possession through the ghost’s description of the “outcast weather” in which he and the bride will “toss and howl and spin” (62), and, as Arseneau points out, thereby representing narcissistic stasis in the terms of Dante’s Paolo and Francesca de Rimini, who were banished to a blustery hell due to their adulterous desire (“May” 39). DGR had the previous year illustrated this couple’s hell to seem like an eternal suspension in love, in keeping with his own artistic interest in glorifying narcissism; typically, however, CR refutes DGR’s vision by portraying this hell of desire as one of eternal alienation.

The ghost who is at once the bride's seducer and her jailer thus seems the paradigm of Lacan's and Kristeva's superego, a character who is both "fascinating" and "devastating," and invokes moral authority for an immoral end, which is to trap the subject in a permanent narcissistic isolation (Lacan *SI* 102). Just as Maude's superego obstructs normative sexual expression to lure her towards a pole within herself, this demon deceptively lures the bride away from conventional happiness, not only by offering her a desirable alternative, but also through coercion and deception. Having lured her with a promise of support, telling her she may "lean on [him]," he guides her to a solitary cell where no love awaits (29-31). Like a vampire, he finally gloats over how she has become a banished wanderer like he, who will "visit [the bridegroom] again / To watch his heart grow cold; / To see one much more fair / Fill up the vacant chair" (3-8).⁹

If "The Hour and the Ghost" emphasizes the devastating aspect of the demon, a similar poem, "Love from the North," emphasizes its fascinating aspect. "Love from the North" is another ballad of a bride torn between normal love and exorbitant narcissistic passion. The bridal drama plays on an opposition briefly hinted at in "The Hour and the Ghost," between sunny southern civility and rugged Nordic forcefulness, as the ghost is said to come from "beyond the pines" to disrupt that wedding. Here, the woman is about to marry into a temperate form of love to a man who is servile to her needs, having "waited on my lightest breath / And never dared to say me nay," in a church celebration "flushed with sun and flowers" (3-4, 10). Then, the northern man bursts into the marriage ceremony, offering a contrasting picture of strength and boldness as he offers to bear the bride off in "strong white arms...o'er crag, morass, and hairbreadth pass" (14-16). In

constructing an opposition between a bland southern fiancé and a potent northern seducer, CR may well have drawn on the contrast that her acquaintance John Ruskin had described three years earlier in *The Stones of Venice*, between “servile” Latinate architecture, and the “wild[]” and “rough[]” gothic architecture (366).

CR, however, portrays this opposition far more ambivalently than Ruskin, associating with northern power a faculty for cruelty and deception that seems the opposite of Ruskin’s ideal of gothic liberty. The northern man seems, at first, to represent an alternative of freedom for the bride to the symbolic conformity of marriage. She is equivocal before the ceremony, “pacing balanced in her thoughts” and wondering whether it was “too late to think of nay” (8). Thus, when the northern man takes advantage of the legal opportunity to “bar” a marital pledge, issuing a “resounding nay,” he expresses a suppressed will within her (16). And though she initially resists the northern man’s alternative, she also partially succumbs to his persuasion. The ambivalent fantasy in “Love from the North,” in which the only way a subject can claim what she wants is through external coercion, accords with Copjec’s account of how the subject contains libido that is not only “unrealized,” but from which she is “split” and “wants not to desire” because she is bound to the law, though she nonetheless does desire it (25). This fantasy also accords with Kristeva’s representation of the subject as not entirely “desir[ing],” but nonetheless enjoying, the “jouissance” of an “abominable real,” so that “victims of the abject are fascinated victims, if not [] submissive and willing ones” (9). Kristeva’s distinction between desire and enjoyment thus helps to explain why the bride

is overcome by a seduction she does not seek, but nonetheless cannot resist—a “clutch” from which “she cannot withhold” herself, in CR’s terms (20, 23).

Kristeva also helps to explain the origin of the northern man’s irresistible clutch by clarifying that the subjects who are vulnerable to the abject and to demon lovers are those in whom the seal of secondary repression, which blocks off the pre-symbolic condition, is not fully secure. She calls such subjects “strays,” and explains that for them,

the unconscious contents remain [] excluded but in a strange fashion: not radically enough to allow for a secure differentiation between subject and object, and yet clearly enough for a defensive position to be established ... between Inside and Outside. (7)

Such a subject periodically loses her symbolic ability to distinguish herself from among objects, instead falling prey to the pre-symbolic infantile logic through which the mother taught her to maintain her integrity in relation to an encroaching world by “demarcate[ing] [a] universe with fluid confines” (62, 8). Transgressions of the abject are thus terrifying not in themselves, but because they threaten the subject with a return to a state of maternal “meaninglessness” where symbolic categories could fall away and the subject could be faced with “the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body” (2, 54).

The bride’s own sense of being overwhelmed by the abject is in keeping with how Kristeva describes the “narcissistic crisis,” in which the subject is traumatized by the “conflict of drives” that “bring forth everything that, by not becoming integrated within a given set of signs, is abjection” for her (8). The bride accordingly describes how she is overcome by the force of a threatening “outside” coming from all directions, which pummels her like a “blast” she “cannot stem” (3). In response, the bridegroom attempts to

get her to focus on the objects that surround them: “Only ourselves, earth and skies, / Are present here: be wise” (28-9). But the bride is unable to “be wise” in this way, as she cannot distinguish rational facts such as the difference between her dialogue with the groom and her spectral, interior dialogue with the ghost, feeling “swallowed up” by her inner abject, in Kristeva’s words (9). Kristeva’s explanation that such an object-annihilating logic has a basis in “the mother-child dyad” further helps to explain why the demonic ghost ultimately seems to offer not precisely sexual thrills, but security: the prospect that the bride may “lean on [him]” and receive a more satisfying “house and bed” than the groom can offer (62; 29, 32).¹⁰ Such narcissistic promises of a return to maternal security do not, however, yield what they seem to promise. CR’s man from the north turns out not to embody virility and security, but rather sterility and cruelty. He seduces the bride by making himself out to be an alternative lover, proposing a time of happiness for the two of them equivalent to what the bride expects with her bridegroom, “in which I will not say thee nay” (24)—a lie, however, since the man from the north never again asks the bride “yea or nay” (28). Seduction turns into compelled confinement that is both outer and inner, as the demon “made her fast with book and bell” as well as with “links of love” that eliminate any signs of her earlier will, so that the bride finally has “neither heart nor power / Nor will nor wish to say him nay” (29-32). In exchange for a prospectively happy but bland marriage, she obtains only enslavement to a wasted and colonized version of her maternal legacy, not the “maternal love” for the sake of which one regresses to narcissism, but the “emptiness” one finds there, in the words of Kristeva (6).

A maternal context to horror is more explicitly denoted in “A Chilly Night” (1856/1896) and “A Nightmare” (1857/1862), two poems by CR that contain ghost lands that distinctly resemble the landscape of the womb. In “A Chilly Night,” a speaker rises to “look for my Mother’s ghost, / Where the ghostly moonlight shone” (3-4, 24, 28).¹¹ In this realm of the drives to which the speaker returns, there are unearthly ghosts that speak “without [] voice[s],” indicating their externality to symbolic ordering (13). The speaker further shows herself bereft within the ordinary, symbolic world, as she “sobs” and seeks “O my mother dear” and “O my mother kind,” asking her to “make a lonely bed for me / And shelter it from the wind” (15-8). That the speaker’s voyage is narcissistic seems explicit, as she seeks this lonely retreat with her lost mother as an escape, begging her lost mother to “[t]ell the others not to come/ to see me” (19-20). In the end, however, the landscape does not contain the security that the speaker yearns for, and she must conclude that the “dead had failed” her, confirming Kristeva’s proposition that any seeming opportunity of narcissistic return to the maternal era provides “no solace” (*Powers* 63).

In “A Nightmare,” a speaker is lured to a similar wasteland of the drives by a lover who has become a vampiric citizen of “ghostland” (1). The landscape of this world is as deathly as that of “A Chilly Night”: here, her lover hovers “thro the darkness black as ink” and drinks “death’s tideless waters” (32, 28). Meanwhile, a maternal background of this ghostland is implied in womb-like images of “blood-red seaweeds drip[ping] along that coastland” (3). As in “A Chilly Night,” however, this maternal zone is sterile rather than fertile, characterized by an “unripe harvest” and an “unripe vineyard in ...

unprofitable space” (9-12). The landscape is also associated specifically with sexual sin, signified in how the lover returns from ghostland to show her “a blasting sight “ that is “a secret I must keep” and to tell her “the worldless secrets of the death’s deep” (40, 34).

Her guilty knowledge in turn gives him power over her, so that:

If I sleep he like a trump compels me
To stalk forth in my sleep:
If I wake, he rides me like a nightmare. (34; 36-8)

“A Nightmare,” which was written by CR after the other gothic poems, thus imagines more fully the guilty aftermath of a visit to the primal repressed than the other poems, which tend rather to present such regressions as an eternal stasis. In this poem, a subject who has had such a visitation may continue to live in the world, haunted by her menacing secret.

More explicitly than CR’s earlier gothic poems, moreover, “A Nightmare” portrays landscape of the primal repressed as saturated with sin, with its biblical motif of the “unripe harvest” that signals God’s disapproval, and its *Inferno*-like “troops, yea swarms, of dead men’s souls” (19). The poem’s lack of reference to a distinct sin is, moreover, explicable through Kristeva’s account of how sin and guilt are an effect, rather than a cause, of an experience of abjection. As she explains, when the subject’s ego enacts secondary repression of pre-symbolic material that has been glimpsed, it retroactively imposes a framework of “defilement, taboo, or sin,” in order to turn “the sought-after” primal repressed “into the banished” and “fascination into shame,” and thereby ward off further returns to this zone of “meaninglessness” (15, 8).

As well, the speaker's awareness in "A Nightmare" that the "blasted sight" she has seen in a ghostland must remain a "secret" indicates a new concern in CR's fantasy about the suitability of representing primal visions. "A Nightmare" is one of CR's last gothic poems, moreover, affirming that CR may have begun to judge such pre-symbolic visions unsuitable for poetry, and that her own secondary repression, by which the ego makes the primal repressed "repugnant," in Kristeva's words, may have been deepening as well (15). As Kristeva points out, such returns to the primal repressed are forbidden by the symbolic order because they threaten the symbolic order with annihilation, an "unleashing of drive as such ... [that] threaten[s] all identity" (14). CR, who as we have seen in Chapter One, seems to have identified strongly with her symbolic goals, would plausibly have retreated nervously from any such threat to symbolic bearings. Even before the writing of "A Nightmare," moreover, CR's gothic poems begin to feature hints of a punishment for seeing. For instance, in "A Chilly Night" the "subtle ghosts" the daughter had traveled to see in the maternal sublime ultimately fade from sight, so that "from midnight to the cockcrow / I watched till all were gone" (45-6). Such an image strongly suggests the secondary repression that enforces castration, according to Kristeva, and which Grosz aptly defines as the "sever[ing] the child from ... close identification with the image of the (phallic) mother"—a revived idea of a mother who can empower a subject from beyond the symbolic order (156). Meanwhile, the mother's own eyes are "blank and could not see" possibly indicating her own castration, or imposed powerlessness (23-4).

CR's poems about the fall of Eve—one of which, "An Afterthought" (1855), she wrote around the same time as her gothic poetry—are, meanwhile, another context in her writing where transgression to an ostensibly maternal realm is threatened with blinding. In "An Afterthought," Eve's lost garden is characterized as the place where the "first mother," was "lulled to rest," and as a place that was saturated with a "first love of all" that was "[w]armer, deeper, better worth / Than has warmed poor hearts of earth" (15-7; 9-10). In the Book of Genesis, paradise is, of course, the realm in which obedience to God's paternal order was total; by overlaying the biblical version with imagery of a sleeping mother and maternal love, CR recasts that perfect place as the subject's maternal era. Accordingly, as Eve looks back at paradise her vision fades as if through repression, so she cannot ascertain the validity of her intuition of that perfection: whether "the roses [were] redder there, / [t]han they blossom elsewhere?" for instance (24-6; 1-2).¹² This Eve, as well as the heroine of "Eve" (1875), also abraded their own eyes in punishment for sin, streaming "tears that would not cease" and "weep[ing] sore" (1-2; 3). These images of Eve's blinding meanwhile display an unusual intersection between CR's biblical commentary and gothic writing. By representing Eve's vision as lost through the secondary repression that blinds her other heroines, CR suggests that paradise was itself the primal repressed—a revisionist interpretation, given how the bible portrays paradise as the scene of perfect paternal order. In this context, the angels who enforce Eve's secondary repression assume the role held by supegoic demons, and the "fiery messenger," whom Eve feels to have taken from her all but her "heart for love" (28-33), is a similar figure to the shadowless spirit of "Shut Out" who blocks the world out

mercilessly, in a poem with which “An Afterthought shares “thematic unity,” according to Marsh (*Poems* n. 433). Angels thus shade into demons in the overlap between these two poems, which consequently constitute one of the most subversive spots within CR’s career, where she effaces the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate authorities that she elsewhere sustains. It is thus notable that when CR returned to the subject of the Fall in 1865 to write “Eve,” she clarifies the moral context of the fall, having Eve focus not only on her losses but also on her crimes, and bringing in the serpent, who “grin[s] an evil grin” (69). Eve here curses her “wanton eyes” for being tempted by a demonic vision that was not that of paradise itself (31, 5-6), but something surely nearer to the fraudulent vision Milton’s Satan offers, when he promises that by eating the forbidden fruit Eve’s “[e]yes ... / [will be] Op’n’d and clear’d” (*Paradise Lost* 9:706-8).

CR’s continual emphasis upon the degrading and destructive effects of demonic temptations presents a counter-example to critics who see Victorian demonism as a vehicle of female empowerment and creativity. Nina Auerbach, for instance, finds that male demons in Victorian literature who were “the creation and obsession of women” such as the Brontës allowed their authors to imagine radical forms of “essentially female” creative power (64, 101). Williams similarly draws on Kristevan and Lacanian concepts to characterize demon lovers as androgynous men who “express[] disruptions in the law of the father” that produce “spaces in this order for women to enter” (72-3). But while CR’s demonic heroines are encouraged to disrupt the symbolic order, they do not thereby attain leverage to re-enter the symbolic order from an improved position, but permanent and unhappy exile from symbolic normality. Moreover, unlike Charlotte Brönte’s

Rochester, CR's demon lovers are never converted into intriguing husbands, because they mirror the narcissistic core within the self that resists such symbolic restraints. CR's demon lovers thus seem more psychologically realistic than other Victorian demon lovers, insofar as they resist such convenient transformations and remain what they are: deceptive figures who offer gratification on the level of fantasy, but no deeper form of aid. Freud similarly describes how "great criminals" seem glamorous because they mirror the repressed egotistical drives of the subject, thereby promising "substitutive satisfaction" to subjects whose "narcissistic satisfaction encounters real hindrances"; as he notes, however, these "narcissistic objects" always promote "the dissatisfaction of the lover" rather than her happiness (*Narcissism* 101). To CR, demons likewise lead only to the dissatisfaction and alienation of the subjects that harbor them, despite their initial attractions.

In each of her demonic poems, CR describes perilous pre-symbolic conditions that tempt the subject but wield punishments for those who accede to them, reiterating the claims of CR's devotional poetry, that temptations by imaginary libido should be resisted. Arseneau has accordingly proposed that CR's demonic tales should not be segregated from her devotional poetry, according to a common critical "dichotom[y]" that sees CR's poems about demons as describing alternatives for women from symbolic adherence ("Incarnation" 91). Rather, she finds that these poems should be read as consistent with CR's devotional poems, insofar as they perpetuate a fundamental Christian myth in which "the sexualized imaginative world is infinitely attractive but sterile and destructive, and those who commit themselves to longing for it waste away in gloom and frustration,

cut off from natural human life” (107-8). CR’s gothic poems thus reinforce the psychoanalytical thrust of her devotional poems, dramatizing how subjects must learn to recognize, forego, and—if necessary—to overcome the diverse attractions and compulsions of narcissistic regression, in order to claim the benefits of symbolic transcendence.

III. Fantasy of the Beast

CR’s works that most distinctly elaborate a developing fantasy are, appropriately, her so-called fantasy writings, which include the poems “So I Grew Half Delirious and Quite Sick” (1849), “My Dream” (1855), and “Goblin Market” (1859), as well as the short story *Speaking Likenesses* (1874). These works fall into the category of Victorian fantasy writing identified by Steven Prickett, which features loose structures, surreal imagery and themes of primitive desire, and which developed out of eighteenth-century and Romantic forms of “associative” writing that took the “form of a dream or reverie” (21-5). The context of dream-writing is significant to CR’s fantasy literature, which formally express a basis in dreams, and even explicitly expresses such a basis in the cases of “So I Grew Half Delirious and Quite Sick” and “My Dream.” Marsh additionally postulates that real dreams may indeed lie behind some of CR’s fantasy writings, as “all her life Christina was apt to remember dreams, and often made poems from them” (CR 105). As records of dreams, moreover, CR’s fantasy poems frequently seem to contain the “suppressed or repressed” erotic subtexts Freud observed in many dreams (*Interpretation* 194). Prickett has accordingly speculated that CR’s fantasy writings, like

other works in the Victorian fantasy genre, “offer a surrogate language of sexuality” that “hold a mirror to the darker and more mysterious sides” of human life that were otherwise not represented in Victorian literature (103, xv-xvi, 106). Specifically, Morrill reads CR’s most famous fantasy poem, “Goblin Market,” to be concerned with the “sensual possibilities of an evil, seductive brotherhood” of vampire literature, based on how the goblins “dole out strange, exotic fruits to young women,” with pernicious consequences (1). CR’s fantasy writings have thus struck critics as coded accounts of unconscious eroticism that are perhaps more fully camouflaged, but no less libidinally charged, than her gothic writings.

But while CR’s fantasy writings contain traces of literary and psychological eroticism, they also hint at the moralistic discourses of religion insofar as they prominently feature familiar demonic creatures from biblical and other religious texts, such as Dante’s *Commedia*. Her fantasy writings thus claim the status of what Northrop Frye defines as “apocalyptic visions,” which retell the biblical story of how “heathen kingdoms are cast into darkness” (135). CR thus repeatedly embodies versions of the beast from Revelation who has “great authority” but is associated with sin, and is ultimately subdued by a higher power (13:1). Given this biblical intertext to CR’s fantasy writings, many of these works can be seen to function as allegories as well as dreams. Georgina Battiscombe, for instance, believes that “the religious interpretation of “Goblin Market” is much nearer to [CR’s] own way of thought than the sexual one,” while Arseneau agrees that “Goblin Market” is permeated with CR’s “fundamental [Christian] habits of thought” (107-8; 107).

Within a psychoanalytical framework, however, there may be no inconsistency between allegorical and erotic interpretations of CR's fantasy writings, since as Kristeva indicates, "apocalypses" occur on the personal level of the subject as much as they do on the religious level of a community (*Powers* 208). Moreover, given Laplanche and Pontalis's argument that individual fantasies are based on a set of generic "original fantasies," the presence of archetypal stories in CR's fantasy writings does not disqualify them as psychoanalytically plausible dreams (19). For instance, themes of seduction are not only invoked by the subject to explain the origin of her sexuality, as Laplanche and Pontalis have observed, but also by the Judeo-Christian culture as a whole to explain the reason for its collective fall from grace. Kristeva thus seems to associate the abject superegoic authority with the abject biblical "usurper," which "impinge[s] on symbolic oneness" and is similarly a "sham[], substitution[], double[], idol[]" in relation to the Other (104). This association suggests how CR's dreams of Leviathan-like monsters can both draw on biblical imagery of a battleground between lush indulgence and austere but beneficent discipline, and a psychoanalytic fantasy of the same. A practice of cross-referencing biographical information, source-study, and psychoanalytical modes of analysis seems particularly useful for interpreting the dream-writings of a person like CR, who suffered from a traumatic psychological breakdown in 1845 but had only a Christian textual tradition available to interpret it—a conjunction which Marsh finds prompted her most terrifying fantasies (50).

CR wrote the first of her fantasy poems, "So I Grew Half Delirious and Half Sick" (1849), as an exercise in *boutes-rimes*, the sonnet writing game practiced by the

characters in *Maude*. The exercise evoked a poetry that seems both personally idiosyncratic and universally prophetic. In the poem, the speaker describes a dream of an abject landscape of desire, where a monster “put[s] forth a fin” and “lick[s] my hand” (2-6). But the dreamer then passes through a crisis, experiencing a “quick pulsation of my heart ... the fight / Of life and death within me,” and losing track of the monster (8-10). When she wakes up, she weeps for the loss of the “creature” who “had love for me,” his dark and moist world having been replaced by an apparently lonelier and brighter world where the “sun [was] at its height” (14, 12). While the narrative of “So I Grew Half Delirious and Half Sick” is an oddly surreal product of spontaneous writing, CR’s speaker hints at its broader significance in her ambiguous comment towards the end of the sonnet that “this thing is true” (11). There are numerous possible interpretations to be made of her speaker’s insistence upon the truth of her dream. One might focus on the religious truth embedded in the poem’s language, making reference to Kristeva’s description of horror as depicting an “intimate ... apocalypse” (208), and to Frye’s assertion that apocalyptic discourse is not merely prophetic, but portrays “the inner meaning ... of everything that is happening now,” acting as a kind of revelation (146). Marsh accordingly observes that due to the influence of her mother’s religion, CR’s breakdown had a “religious cast” and interprets the poetry she wrote around that time as intended “to exercise the evil lurking within like a horned and abominable beast,” which may have been a hangover from incest, or possibly only her own pubescent libido characterized with apocalyptic terminology (53). As such, CR’s apocalyptic language might display the effects on her of the cultural split within her household, in which she

both consumed gothic and libidinally-exciting romances permitted her by her worldly grandfather and was initiated into a church that damned such desires in apocalyptic terms, describing how “[God] shall pour down ... upon the sinner ... fire and brimstone” (Marsh 44, 56, 60). Given CR’s background, it is not surprising that the speaker’s description of an encounter with dream-like desire in “So I Grew Half Delirious and Half Sick” draws imagery from the book of Revelation, her account of how “thro’ the darkness ... strange faces grin / of monsters at me” (2-3) resembling the biblical speaker’s account of how he “saw a beast rise out of the sea” (13:1).

But while “So I Grew Half Delirious and Half Sick” is theologically resonant, the speaker’s description of how “strange faces” frightened her and a monster “touched [her] clammy” (4-9) also seems psychoanalytically laden, tinted with shades of the “fluid[ity], “clamminess,” “repulsion,” and “fear” that accompany a “narcissistic crisis”—a descent into primal desire, according to Kristeva (6, 14). The speaker’s strange but “true” encounter with the fleshy sea-creature can thus also be read in reference to Laplanche and Pontalis’s account of the language of fantasies, as a coded recollection of “the origin and upsurge of sexuality” (19). The abrupt manner in which the encounter with the beast who offers “love” is cut off similarly suggests the onset of a symbolic prohibition in psychoanalytical, as well as biblical, terms (11-12). The image of the “sun” that the speaker describes as rising over the newly purified scene of her dream has accordingly been classified by Kristeva as a typical poetic symbol of the “limiting structure [of] paternal law” that binds and contains libido (*Desire* 28-9). In the Victorian period, meanwhile, the sun was a prominent symbol of God.¹³

A specific literary context for CR's seductive but morally abhorrent beast may, moreover, be Dante's *Inferno*, which CR had read by this time (Marsh 65). The landscape of CR's poem is very similar to Dante's description of Malbowges, the abyssal eighth circle of hell, in which, as Dante narrates, Virgil throws his girdle into the "thick murky air" (16:131). Out of this air "comes swimming up a shape most marvellously / Strange for even a steadfast heart to bear" (16:131-2), an image that resembles the speaker's account of "strange faces" smiling and extending fins through the darkness.¹⁴ Moreover, while the speaker mourns the loss of her beast, "knowing that one new / Creature had love for me" (12-3), the poem's Dantesque context adds weight to the interpretation that CR saw such lost desires as fundamentally demonic, despite how she mourned them. As Dante conveys, one may be easily fooled by a monster like Geryon into overvaluing his beauties and charms; Virgil thus describes Geryon as an "unclean image of Fraud" who, like many demons, has superficial attractions that hide the fact that he "pollutes the whole wide world" (16:1, 16:7). Arseneau's argument that CR's fantasy writings raise "the problem of the interpretation of things and events" may thus be applied to "So I Grew Half Delirious and Quite Sick," which expresses in both theological and psychoanalytical senses the difficulty of applying a "right moral reading" within a situation where a strange beast "lick[s] [one's] hand" and seems to "[have] love for [one]" (84).

Marsh has also proposed a distinctly psychobiographical reading of the poem, suggesting that "with its invocation of delirium, sickness, fainting" the poem may be an attempt to capture the experience CR's breakdown of 1845 more directly (258). It may thus reflect an incestuous event that lay behind it, evoking in its erotic imagery "sexual

advances or requests she could not refuse” that provoked “unwanted knowledge of arousal” and thus produced a “monstrous ‘bad self’ whose infantile appetite threatens to overwhelm the dreamer” (259-60, 167). In this case, “the thing is true” might testify to the poem’s literal recollection of an event. Based on Kristeva’s reflections about the abject, it is certainly plausible that an incident of incest in CR’s background might be captured in fantasy as an encounter with an improper authority figure. Kristeva finds that superegoic figures are particularly animated among those who have simultaneously suffered “too much strictness on the part of the Other” as well as “the lapse of the Other” (15). The intense libidinal power and allure of the superego within CR’s fantasy may, thus, suggest an improper action on the part of the parental authority who is the model for the symbolic Other.

Nonetheless, we cannot tie CR’s demonic and beastly imagery with absolute assurance to a concrete incident in her background, given how common such imagery is within her Judeo-Christian cultural tradition. As Laplanche and Pontalis maintain, the broad cultural basis of the language of fantasy ensures that fantasy contents cannot necessarily be linked to concrete biographical traumas, as they are more generally pieced together by subjects out of a collective “metapsychological structure” to “major enigma[] ... needing an explanation” (19). “Fantasies of seduction” are part of this metapsychological structure, figuring an abstract myth for an onset of sexuality that has been traumatic and confusing (19). Thus, while there is no way to assuredly interpret concrete sources of the figures in CR’s fantasy, we may more broadly infer from CR’s

need to rehearse her fantasy the backdrop of a traumatic incident—and possibly of incest—that sets her myth-making activity in motion.¹⁵

CR's poem "My Dream," written five years later, also envisions a beast-usurper who resembles the Leviathan from Revelation and Geryon from Dante's *Inferno*. The poem begins in a prophetic key, with the speaker announcing "Hear now a curious dream. I dreamed last night, / Each word where of is weighed and sifted truth" (1-2). She goes on to mimic the passage in Revelation that describes the emergence of the Leviathan with "seven heads and ten crown" (13:1), narrating a birth of crocodiles who put on armor of "massive gold / and polished stones," among whom one wears "kinglier girdle and a kingly crown / Whilst crowns and orbs and sceptres starred his breast" (13-16). In his showy glamour, the crocodile also recollects Dante's Geryon who wore "coloured stuff ... rainbow trammed" (*Inferno* 17.3-16). Like these figures, moreover, the crocodile of "My Dream" is described as powerfully and even perversely sexual, a phallic object "broad as a rafter, potent as a flail" (22). A pre-symbolic context of the crocodile is further indicated through imagery of a "swell[ing] river" that "waxe[s] and colour[s] sensibly to sight," which resembles the source of pre-symbolic identity Kristeva calls the "chora" where "drives hold sway and constitute a strange space" (*Desire* 14). The colorful river offers a contrast to the "white vessel" that arrives on the scene to terminate the reign of the crocodile (38). Kristeva proposes in her analysis of medieval iconic art that "white" stands for the "transcendental dominion of One meaning," and it is evident that the function of this white vessel is to impose paternal order upon this heterogeneity scene (234). The vessel vanquishes the crocodile, along with the entire river from which

he emerged, revealing him as a fraud who hypocritically “shed[s] appropriate tears and wr[ings] his hands” (22, 48).

Nonetheless, CR’s vision is not overtly moralistic, despite its borrowing of morally-freighted Dantesque and Biblical imagery. The Leviathan in his last gasp reveals his vile and sinful nature, as he vomits up “three unclean spirits like frogs” and is consequently “cast alive into a lake of fire” (16:13). In contrast, CR’s crocodile seems, to the end, merely comical, and is permitted to survive his reduction (16:19). CR speaker seems moreover, far more impartial than the speaker of *Revelation*, who champions the “new heaven and a new earth” that is released through the destruction of the usurper (21:1), regarding with awe but not joy the violence of the “avenging ghost,” who “level[s] strong Euphrates in its course ... [t]ill not a murmur swelled or billow beat” (31-2; 40-5). “My Dream” thus continues to present a subject who, like CR’s Eve figures, recalls an oedipal event with ambivalence.

But while CR’s speaker in “My Dream” thus seems partly in thrall to the charms of the demon, by the time CR writes “Goblin Market” (1859), her fantasy has become far less equivocal. In this poem CR shows herself to be more certain of the need for subjects to exercise caution in the face of scenes of the pre-symbolic drives. Her characters, accordingly, now assume a far more prudent reserve towards the primal repressed. “We must not look at Goblin Men,” Lizzie warns Laura (42), revealing a cautious morality that contrasts with those of the speakers of “My Dream” and “So I Grew Half Delirious and Quite Sick,” who look at monstrous creatures without concern. CR’s concern in “Goblin Market” about signs of unfettered desire thus appears to sustain the anxiety

about forbidden visions that is beginning to emerge at the end of her gothic period. At the same time, however, this caution of her heroines—or at least of Lizzie—reveals a maturation within CR's fantasy, insofar as these heroines are coming to develop the means to avoid scenes of primal desire so that they are not invariably destroyed by them.

Nonetheless, "Goblin Market" clearly fits into the general larger pattern of CR's fantasy poetry, with goblins this time assuming the place of the grotesque and fraudulent superegoic beast. Like CR's gothic demons, the goblins are purveyors of fraud, promising delight but "offering only empty promises and death" (85-6). The goblins promise Lizzie hospitality, offering her "to be welcome guest" but are in fact out for themselves, turning on her when she rejects their fruit, and "no longer wagging, purring" as "[t]heir tones wax[] loud, / [t]heir looks [are] evil" (391-7). Moreover, like CR's gothic demons, the goblins combine persuasion with coercion: when Lizzie does not give up her money voluntarily they seek violent ways to compel her, "[s]cratch[ing] her, pinch[ing] her black as ink" (427). As Morrill elaborates,

the goblins in Rossetti's poem are hardly the sprightly, mischievous elves of folklore who skim the cream off milk ... they are darker, more mysterious, more powerful, more terrifying, and more human. Above all, their actions are vampiric: they dole out strange, exotic fruits to young women who become drained, languid, bloodless. (2)

The motif of vampirism particularly emerges in how the goblins destroy Jeanie, who "should have been a bride; / But who for joys brides hope to have / Fell sick and died" (278-9). Laura's incipient decay from the goblin fruit as she "dwindle[s] as the fair moon doth turn to swift decay and burn[s], / Her fire away," similarly seems like the

possessions in “A Nightmare” and *Maude*, which likewise drawn women away from normal life and into fatal obsessions (480-1).

It may seem counter-intuitive to link the pleasure-offering goblins with the superego. But upon examination, the goblins, like CR’s other ferocious tyrants, are also frauds who “mislead, corrupt, use” and “take advantage” of societal laws and rules in order to trap their victims in confusion and double-binds (Kristeva *Powers* 15). The goblins thus apply what Copjec finds to be a primary source of superegoic pressure within utilitarian society, which is its “violen[t] and obscen[e]” “incitement” to indulge in a “boundless and aggressive enjoyment” (92). Terrence Holt notes that the goblins operate within a capitalist market, in which property is a “prop” of legitimate power (140). Having something to sell gives the goblin a means to pressure the subject, because in the market place, exchange is understood to be a form of civility. As a result, when Lizzie returns to the goblins on Laura’s behalf, the goblins can shame her for not buying their fruit, calling her “proud, cross-grained, uncivil” (394-5; 428). Their moral assault makes an impression on Lizzie, as even when she is out of their sight she worries that they will “[d]og[] her with gibe or curse” (456-7).

Interpreting the male goblins as a form of the superego that anticipates, but also displaces, the symbolic master can help to explain the difficulty Lizzie and Laura have in avoiding their dangers, which requires not only that they resist pleasure, but also that they discriminate between conflicting imperatives. Arseneau has read “Goblin Market” as a poem about making proper distinctions in the Christian sense: she finds that Laura is drawn to the superficially tempting fruit because she lacks the “symbolic sense”

described within Tractarian philosophy, which lets humans observe divine values beyond attractive appearances, and thereby make difficult moral distinctions in a physical world (81). This symbolic sense, she argues, is what allows Lizzie to see the demonic character underlying the pleasing appearance of the “unnatural, illusory and deceptive” goblin fruit (85). Arseeau’s explanation of the Christian ethic of resistance the sisters in “Goblin Market” must learn to apply is, meanwhile, similar to Copjec’s account of the psychoanalytic ethic of resistance to the superego that always urges the subject towards demonic excesses. To resist the demonic appeals of the the superego, Copjec asserts, one needs to deepen one’s awareness of the “symbolic relation” that creates distance between “evidence of a thing” and the “real” of the thing (98, 103). Modern subjects, she finds, have lost this suspicion of appearances, due to the “fantasy of the maximization of pleasure” that has been created through the monistic, utilitarian definition of the subject as a “pure positive drive towards realisation” (103). But according to Copjec, Freudian and neo-Freudian psychoanalytic theory revives this suspicion of pleasure, defining the subject as not only alienated by the symbolic law, but also as saved by it, given that the subject is also occupied by a demonic imperative that would force its pleasure upon her in the absence of symbolic guidance.

Copjec and Kristeva signal a number of methods through which the superegoic demon may be resisted through recourse to the symbolic law, all of which are embodied in “Goblin Market.” For Copjec, one resists the superego’s pressures through intellectual separation of oneself from one’s own desires as one erects a barrier “against [one’s] aggression or [one’s] enjoyment,” even at the expense of “prolonging conflict with the

self” (92). We may accordingly see Lizzie crudely resisting the goblin’s calls—and the calls of her own senses—when she “thurst[s] a dimpled finger / [i]n each ear, shut[s] eyes and r[uns]” (68). Lizzie’s separation of herself from her enjoyment is, however, not enough to protect her when she has to more closely approach the goblin market on Laura’s behalf. Kristeva thus additionally proposes that some means to “deal[] with narcissism” as well as “sin and fiendish characters” are embedded in “theologies and literatures”; these, as she discusses elsewhere, are “strateg[ies] of identity” that are more fundamental forms of “separation” and purification designated in the symbolic law (*Tales* 7; *Powers* 94). Lizzie accordingly emulates a distinctively theological attitude of purity when she braves the scene of the goblins the second time, standing “White and Golden,” and thereby embodying the stance of the angels in Revelation who are “clothed in pure and white linens” and “golden girdles” (408; 15:6).

Finally, Kristeva notes another, more radical way of dealing with sin and abjection within Christianity, which Lizzie also uses in her campaign against the goblins. This radical method is a “conversion [of evil] into jouissance and beauty” through “familiarity with abjection” and “subtle transgression” (123, 31). Kristeva accordingly cites Christ’s seeking out of lepers to strengthen his own spiritual purity as the paradigm of how “sin, turned upside down into love, attains ... beauty” (*Powers* 128). Kristeva’s account of the paradox of Christian purity-within-abjection provides an answer to one of the major paradoxes of “Goblin Market,” which is why the goblin’s fruit is at one point poison for Laura, and at another point her cure. Kristeva likewise indicates that while contact with the abject is dangerous, the representation of the abject in art “provide[s]

sinners with the opportunity to live” by setting “the joy of their dissipation ... into signs, painting, music, words” (*Powers* 131). Interestingly, Laura seems to respond to Lizzie’s costume of fruit as to an extreme kind of art, “[leaping] and [singing]” as she licks up the signs of sin (495). Kristeva’s description of how such art produces “jouissance” (123) also may explain why Laura’s response to eating the fruit off Lizzie resembles a “biblical frenzy,” as Mermin finds (113). Such encounters with the abject for the sake of holiness are rare, Kristeva proposes, occurring only “on the fringes of mysticism” (131). But deliberate familiarization with the abject is a stronger tool against sin than resistance or separation, as this familiarization can produce the “ultimate interiorization of sin within discourses,” to include within symbolic discourses what they exclude, so they can recognize and potentially reintegrate those who have fallen away from the symbolic law.

Lizzie’s willingness to expose herself strategically to sin indeed parallels CR’s own writing of “Goblin Market,” in which she conspicuously braves the knowledge of primal desire in a controlled fashion in order to contain and reject that knowledge. Marsh finds that CR believed it was necessary to imagine desire in order to help those whose knowledge of desire has been damning, such as the women in St. Magdalene’s asylum, noting how CR claimed that “‘the poet’s mind’ should be ... able to construct [an illegitimate woman] from her own inner consciousness” (Marsh 226, 229). Kristeva similarly claims that it is not through avoidance, but through “familiarity with abjection,” that “lust, erroneous judgment, fundamental abjection” may be “subsumed into a speech that gathers and restrains” so that even “sin” is “toppled ... into the Other” (131, 130).

“Goblin Market” also demonstrates how confessional writing can help in such a process, foregrounding, in its final image, the value Laura derives from infinitely rehearsing her frightening story before her and her sister’s children, as she relives both her horror at “wicked quaint fruit-merchant men” and her gratitude for “how her sister stood, / In deadly peril to do her good” (554, 557-8). In making Laura a story-teller, CR indicates that a key way to conquer demons may be to make use of lessons learned from them for a public good, thereby expanding the order of ethics so that it may respond to genuine human problems in more knowing ways. Thus, if CR’s gothic and fantasy writing enlarges the symbolic order, we again may find that it is not through subversion and rupture of that order, as Williams proposes, but through the incorporation of the experiences it describes into the symbolic sphere of meaning.

Part of the salutary factor of writing fantasy is that in becoming an active deviser of one’s ethics, one may thereby become less susceptible to the obscure guilty pressures that originate from one’s superego. Kristeva describes how, through confession of the abject, one’s image of the symbolic Other may become purged of harsh, superegoic imagery, as “acts of atonement, of contrition, of paying one’s debt to a pitiless, judging God ... are eclipsed by the sole act of speech” (131). Perhaps CR’s own fantasy writing was in this way instrumental to her releasing herself from the destructive masochism she describes in *Maude* (1881). We may see more control over the effects of the superego in *Later Life*, for instance, where CR’s speaker describes how shame “cast by sin” is “fierce” but is nevertheless able to recover herself and to envision how “[t]oday we fall, but we shall rise again” (14.10). Like Maude at the end of her own life, moreover, CR

seems eventually to come to religion not as an agency of blinding, but of opening the eyes, as her speaker in “Judge not according to the appearance” (1890/1893) views it, when she asks

Lord, purge our eyes to see,
 Within the seed a tree,
 Within the glowing egg a bird
 Within the shroud a butterfly. (1-4)

This late poem of CR’s diametrically opposes “An Afterthought” and “My Dream,” which depict an onset of the symbolic order that stifles visual charm and beauty. Perhaps because she is finally confident in her ability to look discriminately, the later CR seeks to revive, through a symbolic process, the very visual joys her speakers had once felt to be banished by the symbolic authority.

The final image of “Goblin Market,” of Laura producing stories out of sin, is extended in CR’s later *Speaking Likenesses* (1874): three salutary stories about goblins that are told by an aunt to her nieces. *Speaking Likenesses*, though CR’s last fantasy work, is not her best loved, since the stories the aunt tells are more morally determined than CR’s other fantasies. David A. Kent and P. G. Stanwood, editors of the modern edition, label *Speaking Likenesses* as “anti-fantasy,” presumably because the work as a whole contrasts with the confessional spontaneity of her earlier fantasy works (117). However, as we have seen, CR’s fantasy writing as a whole moves in the direction of such moral determinacy, which deducts from the ideological openness and literary brazenness of her early works, but augments her heroines’ abilities to navigate their worlds carefully. The fantasy is first presented through dreams of abject scenes over which the speaker exercised no control. It is next described in horror stories through

which CR could represent the danger that these fantasies held for her. It is finally enclosed into the fable of “Goblin Market,” which both expresses the fantasy’s power in a powerful myth, and purges that power in a salutary and assured fashion. *Speaking Likenesses* is another moment in this development, insofar as it foregrounds the act of narrative as the means by which an author can build stories out of her demons—in the words of the Later Life speaker, “refashioning the sin-disfashioned face” so as to use it as a “grace” (13:3, 2). While an author does not necessarily eliminate her demons by writing about them, she plausibly attains a means of reckoning with them that is similar to that Freud outlines in his account of the goals of psychoanalysis. Analysis does not “make pathological reactions impossible,” as Freud finds, but by making the subject aware of her drives, it “give[s] the patient’s ego *freedom* to decide” whether to obey the pathological imperatives of the super-ego (*Ego* n. 40). Similarly, the author who tells stories about a destructive and greedy demon may possibly never vanquish it, though she may minimize its power over her.

The stories in *Speaking Likenesses* thus suggest an increasing power of CR over her demonic element, though perhaps at a cost to her reader’s pleasure at being genuinely horrified. Moreover, while *Speaking Likenesses* sustains the dangerous imagery of CR’s fantasy literature, it does so in the somewhat incongruous form of nursery tales, which cannot fully support the freight of her fantastic imagery. Readers of these tales have found some degree of continuity between CR’s more menacing fantasy stories and the tales in *Speaking Likenesses*. Readers thus have found these tales “suggestive” like CR’s other fantasy writings; a contemporaneous viewer from *The Academy* (5 December 1874)

expressed “an uncomfortable feeling that a great deal more is meant than appears on the surface, and that every part of it ought to mean something if we only know what it was” (in Kent and Stanwood 117). As in CR’s other fantasy works, the imagery is peculiarly disturbing and calls for psychoanalytic as well as allegorical interpretation. Moreover, the contemporary critic Anna Krugeroy Silver observes similar sexual content as in her other fantasy writings, finding that the tales “portray[] appetite and eating as monstrous signifiers of sexual promiscuity” (177). Nonetheless, it is clear that the modes of narcissism that concern this aunt are less violent than they were in the case of CR’s earlier speakers: this elderly aunt is concerned not with exorbitant sexual sin, but rather with the garden-variety forms of egotism that are more likely to afflict her in her old age, along with her underage nieces.

This reduction of CR’s fantasy to more banal ethics may accordingly reveal that CR’s own demons eventually dwindled into quotidian spiritual problems. Marsh points out that while CR’s previous gothic demons are irresistible, and the demons in “Goblin Market” are exorcised only through great suffering and peril, the demonic forces in *Speaking Likenesses* are “easily defeated,” in each case (423); we may accordingly derive from *Speaking Likenesses* that, by 1872, CR’s truly ferocious figures had been vanquished to a large degree in the remote past. In turn, a very different moral content to *Speaking Likenesses* suggests the rise of new minor demons characteristic of CR’s new difficulties. In particular, CR’s concern in *Later Life* that subjects should seek “grace” from their “sin-disfashioned” faces draws attention to a major source of struggle for CR during the 1870s, which was the disfiguring Graves Disease she had suffered since 1872.

As Marsh points out, this disease would not only have presented challenges to CR's vanity, but also caused "irritability and eccentric ill-temper" (398); the demons that CR's characters encounter in *Speaking Likenesses* are similarly irritability and pride.

An example of a character who must pursue a process of moral distinction occurs in the aunt's first tale, as an irritable birthday girl named Flora discovers a parallel party amid a "multitude of mirrors," with children who double the egotistical qualities of herself and the other partygoers (125). Flora is matched with a bossy queen, girls "exude[] a sticky fluid," and boys are "hung round with hooks" and "pricky quills," conveying in unpleasantly sexualized ways that initial children's egoistic drives are destructively self-indulgent (129). The self-centered qualities of the mirrored children are also reflected in the aggressive games they play, including a game called "Self Help," where the boys attack the girls with their hooks and quills, representing the perverse selfishness one finds amid the egoistic drives.¹⁶ Finally, the children build houses of colored glass bricks that threaten to cage Flora in with the unpleasant Queen, a parodic reenactment, perhaps, of the narcissistic captivity imagined in "Shut Out" (133). By observing these scenes of bad behavior, Flora learns not to listen to her inner "queen," a greedy superegoic authority that would, if unfettered, force her to seek her own satisfaction at the expense of every other value.

The other tales in *Speaking Likenesses* also portray bossy voices within people as demons, and show them how to resist these voices. In the second tale, a young girl named Edith wants to boil water without help from her family, and subsequently finds herself beneath a "cluster of ... purple grapes ... hanging high above her head" and by a "pool,"

revealing through this image that Flora's self-assertion is a fraudulent good, like the fruit in "Goblin Market" (139). In the third tale, a girl named Maggie is sent on a dangerous and important journey through the woods when she is diverted by a piece of chocolate on the ground, only to be accosted by a horrifying boy with "only one feature ... a wide mouth," who represents the insufficiently tempered appetite that threatens to lead Maggie off her pilgrimage (147). Maggie runs away from the boy, forgoes her own appetites, and carries out her social duty. The point of the story is not that Maggie should perversely deprive herself—that would involve another demon—but that she should spread her concern among others as well; then, back at home she is permitted to gratefully enjoy the healthy snack of "battered toast" that her grandmother gives her (150).

Beyond their potential applicability to maiden aunts and children, another common feature of these stories is that the demons in them are no longer private apparitions in nightmares, but social demons that break out at birthday parties and in family contexts. As Julia Briggs has suggested, the demonic stories in *Speaking Likenesses* have a "social" function, and it seems true that the worst danger these demons offer is not that they ruin individual lives, but that they disrupt civil relationship (288). Within CR's trajectory of fantasy, her gradual relocating of demons outside of private nightmares and social scenes seems to be yet another way that she gradually subsumes abjection into the symbolic order of the Other. As Kristeva implies, when an artist becomes a master of the materials of the abject, her art goes beyond confession and becomes a source of social authority. The artist is no longer at the mercy of competing moralities, but is a moral authority for others: "power no longer belongs to the judge-

God” but rather belongs to “the act of judgment expressed in speech and ... in all the signs (poetry, painting, music, sculpture) that are contingent upon it” (132). This social facet of *Speaking Likenesses* thus helps to explain why it is so important that Laura tell her stories to her children at the end of “Goblin Market.” By doing so, Laura moves beyond paralysis by demons, and even beyond confession of demons, to become an artist who recovers her experience of the abject into signs and who can thus likely forge subtler moral distinctions than she had access to as a child. Improving on Lizzie’s tantalizing and inadequate warning not to “look at goblin men,” Laura describes to her children the precise attraction of the “wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men” and “their fruits like honey to the throat / But poison to the blood,” information that could help her children navigate the goblins in their own worlds (552-4). As a set of similar fictions about temptation and resistance, *Speaking Likenesses* represents a final shift in CR’s demonic art, towards stories in which a speaker wields an active and certain moral stance. In a sense, the aunt in *Speaking Likenesses* takes the discourse of the abject to the most advanced phase in CR’s career, as she tells cautionary fairy-tales in which she deploys demons in strategic contexts to induce discursive renewal.

Speaking Likenesses thus stands as an apt conclusion to the trajectory of CR’s writings about demons, which pass from affectionate enthrallment, to guilty terror, to fearful caution, to determined instrumentality. In *Speaking Likenesses*, the superegoic demons that haunted CR’s young heroines have been knocked from their violent perch in the self, their basis in bad conscience re-integrated into discourses of wisdom. Demons no longer loom up in vicious dreams, but provide their lessons and are comfortably

banished with a snack of buttered toast. And if the pathology of superegoic demons still haunt CR's characters, her characters now have, in Freud's words, the "freedom to decide" whether to heed them.

Chapter Three

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Imaginary Passion: Humanizing Narcissism in the Illustrations of Dante and *The House of Life*

Nine times already since my birth had the heaven of light returned to the selfsame point almost, as concerns its own revolution, when first the glorious Lady of my mind was made manifest to mine eyes; even she who was called Beatrice by many who knew not wherefore... At this moment the natural spirit, which dwelleth there where our nourishment is administered, began to weep, and in weeping said these words: "Woe is me! For that often I shall be disturbed from this time forth!"

DANTE, LA VITA NUOVA

The loved object, when invested in love, is, through its captative effect on the subject, strictly equivalent to the ego ideal. It is for this reason that ... we encounter the stage of dependency, such an important economic function, in which there is a genuine perversion of reality through the fascination with the loved object and its overestimation.

JACQUES LACAN, SEMINAR I

William Gaunt has suggested that "the Rossettis carried Dante with them like a totem" (41). Gabriele Rossetti, the father, was a scholar of Dante Alighieri who made himself notorious through his stringently political interpretation of Dante's books, and to some degree, each of his artistic offspring likewise defined their own artistic visions, as well as spiritual and philosophical frameworks, upon Dante's examples. Each poet, meanwhile, deviated from their father's focus on the political subtexts of Dante's works. As Arseneau observes, CR developed "theocratic[s] readings of Dante's writings" that supported her account of the human soul as a site of crucial and irrevocable choices and gave body to her terrifying visions of damnation ("May" 27). Dante Gabriel Rossetti, on the other hand, focussed on "the figure of Beatrice [as] the inspiration for an exploration

of the transcendent possibilities of human love.” For both of these Rossetti siblings, Dante was thus a central influence upon their ideas about the essential goal of human existence, despite their very different convictions concerning what this goal was.

Perhaps because of his name, however, DGR’s relationship to Dante seems not only to have inspired DGR, but also to have intimidated him. When Gabriele Rossetti’s first-born son was born he called him “little Dante” and gave him the poet’s name as his third, and at the time that DGR signed his name to the translation of Dante’s *La Vita Nuova* at age 21, he reversed his initials to put the “D” first, signaling his aim to emulate this master (Marsh *DGR* 41, 3, 49-50). From the beginning of his work in poetry and painting, Marsh accordingly argues that “Rossetti found in Dante not just a namesake but a predecessor and a role model” (49-50). But although DGR’s founding relation to Dante undeniably “shaped [his] art and part of his life,” Dante was an ambiguous icon for DGR, who was not suited for the path of spiritual purification that Dante outlined in the *Commedia*. Consequently, DGR was forced to see Dante not only as a model, but as a basis for productive innovation from whom to “swerve” and produce those “hapless errors of recreation” that would distinguish him from his ideal precursor, in the terms of Harold Bloom (45, 42). David Sonstroem accordingly argues that “Rossetti differed from Dante even as he imitated him,” especially in regards to “important matters” of the heart and spirit, insofar as DGR revised Dante’s famous “conception of woman as a heavenly saviour” to suit his own imaginative, religious, and sexual needs (20). Thus, while DGR was perhaps more consistently focused upon the details of Dante’s vision than CR was, he also swerved more fully away from Dante’s sacramental metaphysics than CR did,

insofar as he was impelled to reformulate for himself where the deepest human satisfactions lie.

The evidently autobiographical sonnet, “Dantis Tenebrae” (1861/1870), provides an overview of the different ways that DGR and Dante treat both spirituality and sexuality. In the title, which can be translated as “Dante of the darkness” or “Dante of the lower world,” DGR seems to summarize what aspects of Dante’s legacy he has, and has not, inherited with the great writer’s name. As he goes on to declare in an implicit address to his late father, he finds himself lost in a “vale” that resembles Dante’s own location at the opening of Canto One of *The Inferno*, symbolizing his state of sin (11-12). DGR adds that he has, like Dante, been taken up by a patronizing Beatrice who “declin[es] her eyes” upon him (4). But for most of the poem, DGR indicates that he has a different trajectory from Dante, who was sent on an epic journey by Beatrice that led him to imaginatively scale the peak of heaven. DGR accordingly describes how his “foot-track” extends “to the hills,” but implicitly not up it, unlike Dante’s path that led up Mount Purgatory (5-7). As well, DGR sees his father in the vale with “bowed” head (14), and thus seems to characterize his own sinful condition as an “inheritance of the father” as Lacan characterizes it (*Four* 34), perhaps implying a link between his own irreligion and his father’s anti-clericism (Marsh 26-7).

DGR’s journey in “Dantis Tenebrae” also opens at “sunset” rather than at sunrise when Dante’s journey begins (9), confirming that DGR knew himself to lack Dante’s scope to achieve spiritual redemption within his lifetime. This image in particular conveys the Victorian sensation of spiritual decline that Walter E. Houghton has linked to

the rise of science (86), and which Matthew Arnold described as the withdrawal of the “sea of faith,” in *Dover Beach*. Accordingly, DGR admits in “Dantis Tenebrae” that he sees Dante’s heights as too remote to be spiritually followed, but only to be admired, in keeping with his identification of himself as merely an “Art Catholic.” That DGR was primarily interested in Dante as an aesthetic ideal rather than a religious one is confirmed in his description of how at the same time as his path aims downward into the “vale,” his face is “lifted” and “gaze[s]” at the “height[s]” (10-11). These highest heights can not possibly be mounted, meanwhile, since they are airy clouds that to “a new height seem piled to climb,” an ethereal image that affirms that DGR was enchanted not by a viable spiritual route, but by an impossible ideal (11-12). Nicolette Gray has accordingly observed that DGR uses Dantesque images to “create an analogy” between his own imagery “and some other sort of knowledge,” but was “not in any way concerned to explore [this knowledge] further” (27-8); the contradiction in this poem between DGR’s appreciative glance of Dante’s vista and the actual route he means to follow affirms his circumscribed use of Dante’s ideas.

The sharpest distinctions DGR claims from Dante are in his ideas of hell and of woman. For DGR, the valley is not actually a source of dread, but a repository of enchantments, where “wisdom’s living fountain to his chaunt / [t]rembles in music” (8-9). His romantic conviction that there is wisdom in darkness means that DGR has less need to seek a genuine Christian heaven, as he affirms in *The House of Life* sonnet sequence (5:8). Correspondingly, his lady does not dwell in Paradise with Dante’s Beatrice does, but in the valley itself, as a sorceress who has “accept[ed] [him] to be of

those that haunt, / The vale of magical dark mysteries” (5-6). McGann has argued that DGR’s trajectory as an artist ultimately “repeat[s] Dante’s journey in the opposite direction, descending from various illusory heavens ... to the nightmares and hells of his greatest work of his greatest work, the unwilled revelations arrived at in *The House of Life*” (“Betrayal” 342-3). DGR captures a similar sense of his own downward fate in “Dantis Tenebrae”; though here, at least, he seems to depict his hell as a desirable goal, rather than the nightmarish disillusionment McGann theorizes.

The reason why DGR’s idea of the hell is not as horrifying as McGann implies is perhaps because it is not purely an intellectual one, but also a libidinal one, as is signaled by the presence of the woman who resides there. DGR’s “magical dark mysteries” seem to be comparable to “narcissistic satisfaction”—that condition of amorous rapture that obstruct spiritual goals, which Lacan deplores as captivity, and which CR depicts as hell itself (*Four* 61). In contrast, the purgative journey Dante takes in the *Commedia*, beyond views of hellish captivity to blessed visas, describes the triumph over such “disordered desires” (Sayers *Purgatory*, n. 68). In psychoanalytic theory, such a reorientation of desire is defined as sublimation, which directs desire “towards an aim other than, and remote from, that of sexual gratification (*Narcissism* 407). “Dantis Tenebrae” can thus be taken as a parable about DGR’s resistance to following Dante’s arid path of desexualization that is charted in the *Commedia*, which is a process that Freud describes as laborious and rare.

Nonetheless, “Dantis Tenebrae” reveals how DGR admired that process even as he resisted it, a combination that does not bode well for the mental life of the subject,

according to Freud. If a person holds a “high ego-ideal” without the capacity to transform his desire, he will merely repress it, concealing it from himself in a “hiding place” and producing “no permanent solution to desire”; gaps between high “ego-ideal[s]” and the subject’s actual capacity to sublimate desire are consequently featured in “neurotics” (407). Marsh confirms that DGR may have been such a neurotic, finding that he eventually succumbed to “a welter of anxieties and depressions” as “inner agitation made his subjective state a pressing, daily matter” (408; 488).¹ Freud goes on to explain idealization as an extension of “narcissism” itself, where the subject seeks to restore his experience of infantile perfection by adoring or admiring an other who seems to him perfect, rather than by laboriously transforming his own nature (407-8). DGR featured numerous forms of such substitutive idealizations, admiring the virtue of Dante while adoring and portraying various Beatrices that expressed ideals of sensibility, nobility, and even holiness.

This kind of narcissism that is implicated in DGR’s form of idealization is not, however, the same as the self-loving narcissism that destroyed Narcissus. As Freud explains, Narcissus’s “primary narcissism” is characterized by “sexual pleasure in gazing at [and] caressing ... [one’s own] body,” but some features of the “narcissistic attitude” are deployed in the “regular sexual development of human beings,” forming a “secondary narcissism,” whereby lost aspects of the are mirrored in others, to whom one consequently feels devotion and dependence (399).² Kristeva clarifies that a lover’s narcissism of the lover is not the kind in which the ego “projects and glorifies itself,” but rather where the ego

shatters into pieces and is engulfed, when it admires itself in the mirror of an idealized [o]ther—sublime, incomparable, as worthy (of me?) as I can be unworthy of him, and yet made for our indissoluble union (6-7).

Lacan similarly describes the state of secondary narcissism as one of “imaginary oscillation,” where the subject alternately “recognises his unity in an object” and more disconcertingly “feels himself to be in disarray in relation to the [object],” the boundaries of his identity shattered because he finds outside himself a formative image of himself (*SI* 166). The neurotic consequences of narcissistic idealization are thus partly rooted in this effect of instability, in which the subject never feels entirely distinct from the other, or entirely whole. When, in *The House of Life*, DGR’s speaker tells his lover that he cannot tell “thee from myself” and requires the other to “[d]raw up [his] prisoned spirit to thy soul” he hints that he is haunted by this destabilizing secondary narcissism (5:8 3:12). Dante, also, expresses narcissistic idealization, for instance in *La Vita Nuova*, when he first describes Beatrice as “the glorious Lady of my mind ... made manifest to my eyes” (*Rossetti* 311). Gradually, however, Dante de-emphasizes the “ideal” of Beatrice and emphasizes the “instinct” of adoration, working over the process of desire itself in keeping with Freud’s definition of sublimation (407).³ Steve Ellis notes that the erudition Dante displays in the *Commedia* proves that Dante spent the years leading up to it developing intellectual and spiritual knowledge (134) suggesting that Dante to some degree fits Freud’s idea of the sublimating artist who “applie[s] himself to investigation with persistence, constancy and penetration which is derived from passion” and thus “convert[s] his passion into a thirst for knowledge” about the universe, and ultimately, of God (“Leonardo” 164). According to Kristeva, by the time Dante writes the *Commedia*

his desire for Beatrice is no longer an imaginary pursuit of union, but a “covert” quest for “meaning” that is symbolized by the crystal rose at the terminus of the *Paradiso*, and consequently that the “narcissistic” love story in which Dante continues to seek Beatrice is “no more than a fiction” (293-4).

But while narcissistic idealization likely made DGR neurotic, his compulsions also lend his art its own grandeur, as some critics have suggested.⁴ Julia Kristeva has proposed that “between the two borders of *narcissism* and *idealization*” abides the ordinary lover (*Tales* 6), and Ellie Ragland Sullivan finds that according to Lacanian theory, “secondary narcissism ... [is] the basic process of humanization as well as the cornerstone of human relations,” individualizing otherwise rigid social mores (35). Accordingly, by deviating from Dante’s clear course of sublimation, DGR maps out a key function role for the ‘modern’ artist, of developing discourses with which to describe the conflicted passions of the lover, perhaps intuiting that the modern artist must “substitute human love for the lost comfort of divine love,” as David Riede has proposed (34). Other critics suggest that DGR’s refusal of Dante’s spiritualizing agenda led him to develop humane strengths as an artist and poet. Stephen Gurney proposes that by forgoing Dante’s “architectonics of a comprehensive spiritual design,” DGR achieves an artistic practice that records “sporadic moments of passion in the autobiography of his spirit,” while John Granger asserts that if DGR does not attain “spiritual liberation along the lines Dante described,” his poems produce valuable “spiritual contact with the reader” (114, 9). As these critics agree, by accepting his nature as “*Dantis Tenebrae*,” DGR replaces Dante’s metaphysics with one that would have been damned according to the

terms of Dante's philosophy, but which is highly resonant in modern terms—more resonant, perhaps, than CR's insistently sacramental structure of values.

This chapter begins with a section entitled "Revisioning Dante's Erotics," which shows how in DGR's illustrations of Dante's works, he emphasizes, glamorizes, and heightens whatever indications of narcissistic passion he finds there, in accordance with his identity as a "Dantis Tenebrae." He thus portrays Dante's damned, narcissistic lovers, Paulo and Francesca as happy rather than contrite in his painting *Paulo and Francesca de Rimini* (1849-55), and inserts into his representations of Dante and Beatrice in *Beatrice Meeting Dante at a Marriage Feast, Denies him her Salutation* (1851) and *Salutation of Beatrice* (1859/1864), signs of what Lacan calls the "imaginary relation of the specular state," when desire is concentrated in the exchange of glances (*SI* 171). By focussing his compositions around these sign of the origin of imaginary passion, DGR to some degree bypasses the hierarchical structure of courtly worship that constrains these incidents in Dante's writings.

Another way that DGR signals an underlying narcissistic basis to Dante and Beatrice's relationship is by representing them in ways that thwart normative hierarchies and gender distinctions. We may thus see that in many DGR's representations of Beatrice and Dante, he has portrayed them as equivalent in gender indications such as height, boldness, and power, thereby defying Victorian aesthetic categories, as several critics have described. Susan P. Casteras points out that DGR and his fellow Pre-Raphaelites represented women in such ways that "turned on its head" Victorian aesthetic norms by transgressing canonical ideals of "minor beauty, (all prettiness and delicacy)" in women,

and “major beauty,” signs of “grandeur, nobility, and power,” in men (27). Howard Sussman further proposes that DGR’s anti-academic style of representing revolutionized Victorian aesthetic norms, leading to the permanent dissolution of “sharp definitions and valuations of art along the binaries of male/female” (172). Within psychoanalytic theory, we may find that such a defiance of normative categories that can be tied specifically to narcissistic impulses of subjectivity, which because of their individual basis in the images of the subject, tend to be heedless, and even destructive, of social norms. As Copjec points out, a subject’s narcissistic impulses are those that “conflict with and disrupt other social relations,” causing him to hang back from a fully subjected symbolic identity as a man or woman (23). Marshall J. Alcorn thus theorizes that the narcissistic subject will “actively seek[s] to create a social and material world that can more fully satisfy narcissistic need,” by developing “new forms of discourse and perception” capable of depicting the subject’s “fundamental response to an image of otherness” (16-7). Steven Bruhm similarly notes that for Romantics as well as their heirs, “Narcissus” was “the definitive trope of cultural production,” because of the way it encapsulates in a sexual image the imperative of “self knowledge” regarding “the deepest spiritual forces within [the self]” (18, 23). While Bruhm focuses on homoerotic versions of this imperative, signs of a potentially revolutionary heterosexual narcissism are also evident in DGR, whose expressions of narcissistic desire in life as in art similarly resisted symbolic norms. We may see the effects of such narcissistic impulses revealed, for instance, insofar as DGR thwarted the symbolic hierarchy of gender by seeking out women to be spiritual companions, such as Elizabeth Siddal, whom he promoted and collaborated with as an

artist, and Jane Morris, with whom he later shared an intellectual relationship.⁵ All the while, he resisted the symbolic constraints of marriage with Siddal as long as he could, and maintained an adulterous relationship with Morris. These women, whose narcissistic appeal to him is expressed throughout *The House of Life*, were simultaneously the main inspirations of his art, helping to ensure ensuring that narcissism was a factor of rebellion in DGR's career as well as life.⁶

The section "Revisioning Dante's Erotics" further suggests ways that DGR's narcissistic impulses led him to challenge mores concerning the decorous representations of masculinity. As Sussman observes, DGR's representation of men in love disrupted the Victorian ideal of masculinity as resistant to "shatter[ing]" due to "sexualized desire" (31). He thus concludes that DGR's portrayal and embodiment of sexual "flood" men helped to "dissolve[]" and reconfigure the Victorian binary of "manly/manliness" (31).⁷ Certainly, DGR's most controversial representations of masculine desire occur in *The House of Life*, whose representations of narcissistic shattering enraged reviewers, insofar as these displayed "emasculated delight in brooding over and toying with matters that healthy manly men put out of their thoughts," according to the accusatory column in the *Saturday Review* of June 1872.⁸ But in DGR's earlier illustrations of Dante he is already focusing on states of amorous "disarray," as he insists on illustrating the passionate Dante's emotional condition in ways that highlight Dante's own account of love as a trauma in which he is "often disturbed" ("New" 311).

After noting how DGR reacted against Victorian restraints upon excesses of male desire, "Revisioning Dante's Erotics" goes on to suggest that DGR, too, came to the

conclusion that excesses of imaginary captivation can be unhealthy, and to indicate how such passion involves a danger to the subject. For instance, in his later draft of *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (1849/1853), DGR represents the grieving Dante as laid low by his fixation upon an artistic representation of his love for Beatrice, and requiring the help of visitors who represent an alternative of sociality and culture. In turn, “The Fetish as Cover” observes a steady move in DGR’s works of the 1860s towards more symbolically decorous expressions of desire, as DGR replaces the libidinally-charged dream imagery of an earlier draft of *Dante’s Dream at the Death of Beatrice* (1856/1871) with Christian symbolism, while heightening the presence of the fetishistic imagery that Žižek characterizes as a “step towards universalization” (104). Through comparison of these drafts, we may see how DGR’s increasing numbers of objectifying symbols and fetishes during the later part of his career—such as the excessive symbolization in *Venus Verticordia* (1864) and the proliferations of hair and flowers—can be understood as measures to protect him from the “disarray” of imaginary desire.

Finally, however, “Verbally Reintegrating the Symbolic,” describes how DGR’s return to poetry allows him to undertake a more patient dialectic between narcissistic impulses and symbolic sophistication. This last section shows that if we read the *House of Life* sonnet sequence chronologically, rather than in the conventional sonneteer’s narrative of love and loss into which DGR retroactively arranged them, we find that DGR again rehearses the joys and problems of imaginary desire, but also gradually learns how to use language to “approximate the imaginary” in ways that both give him stability in the symbolic order and preserve the quality of imaginary intimacy (*SI* 171). Thus, while

many have read *The House of Life* as a solipsistic and gloomy sequence, we can also see how, through this sequence, DGR manages to sensitively navigate the perils of narcissism while rejecting the symbolic excesses of fetishism and idealization. *The House of Life* is thus revealed as successful a poetic dialectic of desire of imaginary desire and symbolic control as CR's *Later Life* is, even though it arrives at an opposite conclusion.

I. Revisioning Dante's Erotics

Apart from *The House of Life* sonnet sequence, the most sustained and unified account DGR gives of desire may be found in his series of illustrations of the major love stories in Dante's writings: that of Dante and Beatrice, and that of Paulo and Francesca de Rimini, the sister-and brother-in law whom Dante depicted as damned to hell for their illegal and sacrilegious affair. Whereas DGR's portraits of the former displays how an unrequited love can be transformed into grace, his portrait of the latter shows the charms of a darker love that foregoes sacramental goals in order to sustain the pleasure of human intimacy. While these two themes within DGR's painting complement each other, their visual depictions require very different strategies. The character of Paulo and Francesca's mutual attachment, which in Dante's telling snared the two in a permanent and fatal passion, is relatively straightforward to convey in visual terms. In contrast, the merits of Dante's asymmetrical, abstract, and increasingly sublime love for Beatrice seems to have been harder for DGR to portray, being an experience whose majesty is traditionally captured in poetry. DGR was forced, therefore to introduce some creative interpolations in order to make this highly inward form of love visually dramatic.



ILLUSTRATION 1
Paulo and Francesca de Rimini (1855)
 DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, Surtees Catalogue no. 75



ILLUSTRATION 2
The Salutation of Beatrice (1864)
 DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, Surtees Catalogue no. 116

DGR was presumably interested in Paulo and Francesca because they are literature's pre-eminent narcissistic lovers. As Charles Williams points out, the "formal sin" of these lovers may be adultery, but their "poetic sin" is "shrinking from the adult love demanded of them, and ... refus[ing] of the opportunity of glory"—in other words, resisting the symbolic order that would remake their desire according to its sacramental norms (*Inferno* 118). Insofar as his depiction of these characters contributes to DGR's sustained vision of love as a form of heaven, however, *Paulo and Francesco de Rimini* challenges the need of such glory. The painting thus notoriously emphasizes the joyful quality of these lovers' strong passion over and above the painful condition of their damnation that Dante details. While Dante describes the couple as having arrived at a "dolorous pass" where Paulo "wail[s] on [Dante] with a sound ... lamentable," DGR's *Paulo and Francesco de Rimini* registers none of the couple's supposed misery (139-1): as Ford Madox Brown comments, "it is impossible to suppose that when DGR painted it he ... thought that the two lovers were really suffering" (123, in Ellis).

Instead, DGR focuses on the elements of narcissistic excitement within Paulo and Francesca's love story. In Dante's epic, Francesca describes how, through exchanged glances, Francesca and Paulo fell prey to an intense, imaginary passion:

As we read on, our eyes met now and then,
And to our cheeks the changing colour started,
But just one moment overcame us – when

We read of the smile, desired of lips long-thwarted
... We read no more that day (*Inferno* 5.130-138)

Lacan describes this sort of instantaneous overcoming by another's glance as the production of a "specular mirage" in which "the subject recognises his unity in an object"

(*Four* 168). A lack of separation between the lovers in Francesca's speech, which uses no separating pronouns, but only versions of a unifying "we" that suggests how the couple is becoming bound not only in their destinies but becoming mirrors of each others' identities (*SI* 276). This is the moment DGR eternalizes in *Paulo and Francesca de Rimini*, as he portrays in the left-hand panel the embrace Francesca describes, and in the right-hand an identically blissful embrace in hell, thereby contradicting Dante's account of the lovers' suffering for their earthly indulgence. Meanwhile, the figure of Virgil in the center panel of DGR's triptych seems to represent the regulating gaze of the symbolic Other that Paulo and Francesca resist, as he looks upon the lovers in a far sterner manner than is indicated in the *Inferno*, where Virgil's narrative of other such lovers "pierces" the susceptible Dante "through with pity" (5.72).

Just as in DGR's painting, Francesca and Paulo resist Virgil's condemnation through their exclusive dedication to each other, so does DGR resist their law as he conspicuously pitches everything in the composition to suggest the desirability of Paulo and Francesca's permanent, criminal embrace. His symmetrical positioning of these two lovers with their hands knotted and their lips kissing renders them as mirror images of narcissistic unity, mirrored again in the opposed panels of the triptych. Love, portrayed as narcissistic mirrors within mirrors, seems a mutually absorbing union where each lover's "soul only sees thy soul its own," as DGR writes in *The House of Life* (4:8). The only indication in the right-hand panel of DGR's painting that the couple has been relocated to the *Inferno* is a background of blustery raindrops signifying the winds of the Circle of Lust, a "blast of hell that never rests from whirling" (*Inferno* 5.31). But in this

context, the storming rain around the lovers only heightens the attraction of their embrace by conveying the stormy thrill of “imaginary disarray”—how “lovers drift[] into self-indulgence and [are] carried away by their passions,” according to Dorothy L. Sayers, Dante’s translator (*Inferno* 102). DGR thus elides in his portrayal the bleaker suggestion of Dante’s anecdote that Sayers points to, of how love without symbolic ordering is a hell of “howling darkness of helpless discomfort”—a quality of experience Lacan affirms when he describes imaginary passion as “always unsatisfying” (*Four* 102). But while DGR would become familiar with this dissatisfaction, affirming in the *House of Life* that such passion produces “soul-struck widowhood” (51.3), *Paulo and Francesca de Rimini* seems a relatively youthful attempt to imagine how such desire can remain perfect. This painting thus dramatically envisions how amatory bliss might be prolonged in defiance of a symbolic order that would compel one to relinquish that bliss through measures of intimidation that include the concept of hell itself.

Investing Dante’s own, less blasphemous love for Beatrice with the same graphic drama was a far more complex task for DGR. Steve Ellis does not believe that DGR accomplished it, finding that DGR’s representation of Paulo and Francesca exhibits “a vital attraction that is missing” from his depiction of Dante’s chaste and one-sided love for Beatrice (123). Some of DGR’s difficulty at conveying the magnificent drama of desire that is *La Vita Nuova* was surely a mismatch with the visual medium into which he was translating Dante’s story. Courtly love inspires the greatest poetry when sonneteers have saturated their language with the desire that is transmitted “metonymically” along the circuit of signifiers, according to Lacan (*Four* 154). Dante, for instance, indicates

how natural and subtle language is as a medium of unconfessed desire when he writes of how “a gentle thought there is will often start, / Within my secret self, to speech of thee” (*Works* 343). However, such delicate passion lacks visual content, and is bound to be pictorially unimpressive if portrayed in a way that emphasizes the external constraints under which it is conducted.

DGR thus had to expand his artistic means to maximize the visual excitement of Dante’s and Beatrice’s uneventful meetings, and of Dante’s solitary recollections and visions of Beatrice. His strategy, of heightening implications of mutual imaginary attraction, is most evident in his painting of a scene from the *Beatrice Meeting Dante at a Marriage Feast, Denies him her Salutation* (1851). In this incident, the infatuated Dante tries to engage Beatrice’s attention, but fails because others had “misfam[ing] [him] of vice” (316-7). Presumably due to his reputation, Beatrice “denie[s][him] her sweet salutation, in which alone was [his] blessedness.” This incident is thus, in Dante’s report, wholly anti-climatic. DGR’s illustration obtains some visual drama by heightening Beatrice’s cruel aloofness towards Dante. Beatrice’s inaccessibility is emphasized through her protection by a bastion of bridesmaids, and her coolness is heightened through the green color of the women’s dresses, which contrast with Dante’s fiery red cloak. *Beatrice Meeting Dante* also strains against Dante’s account of the incident, however, as DGR hints at an imaginary attraction between Dante and Beatrice by depicting them exchanging lances despite her refusal to formally greet him, thereby creating an added thrill, as their attraction thus seems involuntary. Underlining the imaginary frisson between Dante and Beatrice, meanwhile, is a parallel encounter DGR

has juxtaposed on the other side of the canvas. Here, a young peasant woman carries a basket of grapes that a roguish young man reaches to pluck, while the woman glances sweetly up at him, and perhaps thereby implies Beatrice's underlining desire, had she not been distanced by her compulsory hauteur. By adding this other pair of lovers, DGR dares to give us a glimpse beneath the symbolic freight of transcendental courtly love, and allows a hint of Dante and Beatrice as he surely preferred to see them: as genuine, impassioned lovers.

DGR's other depiction of an encounter between Dante and the living Beatrice displays further measures to suggest a mutual imaginary attraction between these two, which Dante never presumed to share in reality. *The Salutation of Beatrice* (1859/1864) is a two-paneled work that juxtaposes Dante's and Beatrice's first meeting in the Florence street with the meeting Dante later envisioned them having in Paradise. Each of these incidents depict an event where a sight of Beatrice coalesces Dante's desire, where, in Dante's words, "the glorious Lady of my mind [is] made manifest to my eyes" (*Works* 312). Dante's account of a lady who resides in the mind being beheld in the eyes closely resembles Lacan's psychoanalytic account of secondary narcissism, whereby a "captivating narcissistic image" within the subject becomes "invested with 'Verliebtheit' or love" at the encounter of an other who seems to match that image (Lacan *SI* 180). DGR seems to have painted in the *Salutation* this very moment of the inception of Dante's



ILLUSTRATION 3
Beatrice Meeting Dante at a Marriage Feast, Denies him her Salutation (1851)
DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, Surtees Catalogue no. 50

love, when Beatrice “turn[s] her eyes thither ... [and] salute[s] me with so virtuous a bearing that I seem[] then and there to behold the very limits of blessedness” (*Works* 312). The second panel that DGR composed presents a revival of that first experience, which Dante experiences when he reaches the junction of Paradise, and describes how he has finally caught a glimpse of Beatrice, and “[m]yriad desire, hotter than fire or scald / Fasten[s] mine eyes upon the shining eyes” (*Purgatorio* 31:109). Despite its ostensibly opposed content, therefore, the *Salutation* is conceived in a highly similar way to *Paulo and Francesca de Rimini*, as a diptych that mirrors earthly and eternal versions of what Lacan calls the “specular moment” of desire (*SI* 177).

However, it took DGR a number of drafts and versions to determine how to maximize the imaginary suggestiveness of the scene. In early sketches of the meeting on the Florence street, DGR initially portrays Dante with fidelity to courtly respect, standing remote from Beatrice as she greets him with her “virtuous bearing” (*Works* 312). In DGR’s early sketches and first complete study of the two panels, Dante and Beatrice thus look at each other with a formal distance befitting strangers. But in DGR’s final version of the panel of 1864, DGR transgresses Dante’s norm of courtly distance to graphically dramatize the imaginary excitement that are privately experienced by Dante in *La Vita Nuova*. Here, Dante and Beatrice pass each other on the same step of an incline in the street while Beatrice’s attendants remain on different stairs. With Beatrice descending and Dante ascending, this conceit figuratively anticipates the sacramental meeting Dante envisioned between the two at the foot of Paradise. However, the conceit also isolates the two figures in a private exchange of glances between Dante and Beatrice, as they meet

each other, while producing the effect of mirroring between the man and woman, who are symmetrically opposed in the composition. DGR emphasizes the suggestion of an exchange of intimate glances by subtitling this panel with a line from a sonnet in the *La Vita Nuova*, “My lady carries love within her eyes” (326). He slyly misuses this line, meanwhile, because in their context it means that Beatrice’s eyes radiate love to the world, not exclusive love to Dante. In DGR’s misreading of Dante’s line, we may see the precise effect Bloom characterizes as the “swerve,” whereby a poet produces a “misinterpretation” of his precursor in order to displace the prior poetic vision with his own—in this case, with a more distinctly erotic vision (30).

Symmetry between Dante and Beatrice is further heightened as DGR depicts Dante stooping, thus making him and Beatrice equal in height and ensuring that their gazes meet on a level plane. In this way, DGR produces the same equalizing effect of narcissistic mirroring that is evident between DGR’s Paulo and Francesca, who are characterized as visual reflections of each other, though in a different manner.⁹ By linking an erotic glance with an equalization of heights, DGR seems to affirm in the *Salutation* that narcissistic passion leads the subject to subvert the symbolic hierarchies and divisions that ordinarily abide in his relations, whether the norms are Dante’s inferiority in class to a lady, or his superiority in gender to a woman. This gender-dissolving force of narcissism in DGR’s works has not been generally noted; instead, narcissism is typically seen as an impulse that enforces male identity. For J. Hillis Miller, for instance, DGR’s representations of male narcissistic responses to women ultimately reassure men of women’s inferiority, as the woman reflects “the perpetual too little or

two much that makes it impossible for the balance to come right” (344). Thus, the male subject who “look[s] in the mirror and see[s] a sister image” discovers that the sister “does not fit him,” and he is forced to wonder, “If she has [no phallus] then I do, or do I?” (344, *SI* 125). By insisting that the male narcissistic lover always finds his female other to fall short of him or exceed him, Miller qualifies the Freudian idea of narcissistic love, according to which the subject desires a person who reminds him of “what he is himself,” “what he once was,” or “what he would like to be,” insisting that gender difference trumps the effect of narcissistic mirroring (*Narcissism* 406).

Miller’s case is slightly different, as he is describing DGR’s representations of women on their own, rather than the groupings of men and women that are being considered here. Nonetheless, Miller’s depiction of narcissism is problematic, insofar as it equates the effect of narcissism in DGR’s art with those of his fetishizing and symbolizing details, which, as we will see, do reinforce gender differences through a threat of castration. Copjec has written against such a conflation of effects, noting how interpretations of male narcissism as vehicles of symbolic normativity deviate from the Freudian definition of narcissism as that impulse in the subject that “conflict[] with and disrupts” such normative structures (23). She thus asserts that such “masculinist” interpretations of narcissism efface one of the “defining tenets of psychoanalysis: the opposition between “the unbinding force of narcissism and the binding force of social relations” (23). In reference to DGR, that opposition can be preserved through a more dynamic reading of his art, as animated by tensions between the individual effects of narcissism and the normalizing effects of symbolization and fetishism.

This opposition between effects of narcissistic resistance and of symbolic ordering is evinced through a comparative reading of the first panel of the *Salutation* with the second panel. While the first panel depicts Dante and Beatrice in a relatively spontaneous meeting on earth, the second panel portrays their envisioned meeting upon Mount Purgatory, bound by the sacramental and formal context of the *Commedia* where all human activity is organized between the ladder-like structure of the cosmos. DGR seems to have illustrated the highly formal moment in which Beatrice pushes back a veil from her eyes and Dante is permitted to glimpse Beatrice's face far above him, in her holy "chariot" (*Purgatorio* 30.15). It is consequently to be expected that DGR would have reimposed a degree of symbolic differentiation in this panel. What is unexpected, however, is the way that DGR has imagined the domination of this event by the symbolic order. He has interpreted Beatrice's unveiling in the manner of a wedding, in which Dante and Beatrice face each other like bride and groom and look at each other. To some degree, a wedding may be a plausible symbolic replacement for the structure of Paradise envisioned by Dante, as the "conjugal bond" is one way of submitting imaginary desire to "something transcendent," according to Lacan (*SII* 263). DGR's expression of symbolic hierarchy inverts Dante's, for whom the submission of his desire to the symbolic order elevates Beatrice so that she becomes "regal of aspect" and "formidable" in Paradise (*Purgatorio* 30:70, 80). In contrast, DGR's submission of the beloved Beatrice for symbolic ordering of love produces a version of her that is slightly shorter than Dante, in keeping with what Lacan calls the "androcentric" structure of marriage (*SII* 261). The way that DGR has rendered the meeting of Dante and Beatrice in Paradise affirms that, in

the Victorian period, the idealization of woman is only a private narcissistic response, and is not supported by any symbolic structure; rather, the symbolic order insists on female subordination. DGR's second panel of the *Salutation* thus affirms Kristeva's observation that nineteenth-century artists who attempted to revive courtly love did not have the "idealizing possibility" necessary to adapt eroticism to a sacramental vision, being too rational to equate the expression of love for a real woman with the "immanent, sacred invocation of joy" that blurs into Christian worshipfulness (*Tales* 289). While DGR has his own, dark, way of making a religion out of narcissistic passion, he is unable to elevate Beatrice within the sight of God, and thus depicts the heavenly Beatrice in a reduced way.

Halfway through *La Vita Nuova* Beatrice dies, and Dante's love for her in that story grows abstract and mournful, not yet envisioning any such meetings as he would depict in the *Commedia*. DGR's challenge in illustrating the story after this point is consequently even greater, and he must find his material in Dante's memories and dreams of Beatrice. Insofar as they filtered through Dante's derangement by grief, however, these portions are rife with indications of narcissistic disarray. DGR's first painting upon the theme of the grieving Dante, *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (1849) interprets a quotation from *La Vita Nuova* in which Dante explains how a year after Beatrice died,

I betook myself to draw the resemblance of an Angel upon certain tablets. And while I did thus, chancing to turn my head, I perceived that some were standing beside me to whom I should have given courteous welcome, and that they were observing what I did: also I learned afterwards that they had been there a while before I perceived them. Perceiving whom, I arose for salutation, and said: "Another was with me." (340)

The “another” Dante imagines to be embodied in the image of the angel may be Beatrice, described consolingly by a fellow woman to Dante as “one of the beautiful angels of Heaven” (334). Alternatively, it may be Dante’s vision of Love in the *Vita Nuova*, which he describes as “not only a spiritual essence, but a bodily substance also” (332). In either case, the angel Dante is drawing appears to be an image upon which Dante’s love has been invested, in the absence of his real other. In a sense, therefore, Dante is comparable to an artist captivated by a visual image that seems alive to him, much like the enthrallment DGR conveys in his poem “The Portrait” (1847/1870) where the speaker stands before a painting of his dead beloved, “gaz[ing] until she seems to stir” (5). *The First Anniversary* is, as such, one of the few paintings in DGR’s oeuvre that deals directly with the allurements, as well as the dangers, of visual art. DGR appears generally to agree with Lacan that desire is triggered “in confrontation with the image,” a comment that holds the possibility that desire can be aroused by a simulacrum of the other as well as the original (*SI* 188). A painting that replicates the effect loved other thus holds the potential to be extraordinary consoling, as both Dante and DGR’s speaker in “The Portrait” find it to be. However, through the course of painting two versions of the *First Anniversary*, DGR indicates a change in his feelings about the artist’s relation to his image, which is reflected in how he characterizes Dante’s solitary artistic practice, as well as the visitors who interrupt that practice. In the first version, Dante stands up in conspicuous irritation at these intruders, anticipating the moment when they will leave and he can “set [him]self again ... to the drawing figures of angels,” as he subsequently does in *La Vita Nuova* (340). These visitors are consequently depicted by DGR as an

unattractive group of snoopers who offer nothing to compete with Dante's narcissistic unity with the image.

In the second version of the *First Anniversary* (1853), however, DGR emphasizes the perilous nature of the imaginary order, along with its bliss. He corrects his previous account of blissful tranquillity by making Dante's drawing surface the cover of a disorderly cabinet of objects, thus indicating how psychic "disarray" accompanies Dante's imaginary fixation on the image. In contrast to the chaotic scene of Dante's room, Dante's guests in the later version of the *First Anniversary* seem comparatively serene, as DGR's cataloguer Virginia Surtees has observed, noting that "the confusion of the objects in the room contrasts sharply with the three visitors who stand quietly watching Dante at his work, the calmness of their concentration being particularly marked" (22).

In the second version of the *First Anniversary*, moreover, DGR further reflects on the disarranging quality of narcissistic desire by having Dante kneel before these noble visitors with a dazed appearance, as though he is weakened by his desire and requires their invention between himself and the image. Dante's guests thus function as a chastening contrast to narcissistic desire, in the same way that Virgil and Dante do in *Paulo and Francesca de Rimini*, representing the sort of "pact" or "commitment" within the symbolic order that a subject needs to avert "imaginary degradation," according to Lacan (*SI* 174). The benefit of a symbolic position within a language and a culture is that through these the subject attains a decentered position of himself as "an other," providing him with a fluid identity by which he can unfix himself from the rigid attachments of the



ILLUSTRATION 4

The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice (1849)
DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, Surtees Catalogue no. 42



ILLUSTRATION 5

The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice (1853)
DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, Surtees Catalogue no. 58

imaginary ego (*SII* 263). In Dante's reverential attitude towards these visitors, he accordingly indicates that he needs to be saved from his obsessive relation to the libidinally invested image through the subordination of desire to a social principle that is obtained through the symbolic order.

Finally, DGR also conveys the danger of Dante's dangerous fixation on his image by ornamenting the paneling across Dante's studio with a repeated female face. Lawrence J. Starzyk has previously noted that recursiveness in DGR's paintings and writings generally indicates a snare of desire that threatens self-possession. As Starzyk observes, certain forms of endless and non-productive "repetition" in DGR's work, such as doppelgangers, indicate "disillusionment" through their meaningless overflow of similitude (60). Starzyk's main example of uncanny recursiveness is the drawing *How They Met Themselves*, which DGR called his "Bogie Painting"; in it, a man and a woman find themselves face their exact doubles in a wood and become desperately alarmed, as though they had seen an evil omen.¹⁰ As Freud further indicates in his essay "The Uncanny," "the constant recurrence of the same thing" indicates the return of repressed narcissism, and is an "uncanny harbinger of death" (356-7). The recursiveness in *How They Met Themselves* thus may be taken to imply that the lover's narcissistic relationship, which mirrors themselves in each other and, progressively, in the world around them, threatens their identities on a deep level. Similarly, in the *First Anniversary*, the repeated images of a woman that line Dante's walls—presumably representing the angel that he repetitiously draws—may indicate that Dante's equilibrium is being fatally disturbed by his nostalgic relation to the image of Beatrice.

The critique of imaginary disarray in the *First Anniversary* suggests that, as early as 1853, DGR began to attain a different perspective on narcissistic absorption he more generally glamorized. DGR's father died in the year 1853, and this year seems to have generally been one in which DGR cast about for how he might himself attain a more mature and 'manly' identity. We can see such a quest being worked out in two of the few poems he wrote around this period: sonnets he would later insert into *The House of Life* entitled "Known in Vain" (1853/1869), and "The Landmark" (1854/1870). Each of these sonnets is implicitly critical of imaginary indulgence, insofar as it presents what Copjec calls an "impediment" to the subject's "founding" in the symbolic order" (21). In the first of these sonnets, "Known in Vain," DGR's speaker worries that "Work and Will" may "awake too late" (4), and describes this shortfall of will through the metaphor of a love affair that distracts lovers from their duty towards God. Such lovers, among whose type we may place Paulo and Francesca, fall prey to a love that seems "first foolish," but whose scope "widen[s] ... to music high and soft / The Holy and holies" (2-3). But this sacramental experience of love is deceptive, for it does not redeem the lovers, but only reminds them of the spiritual paths they have forfeited. DGR's speaker thus portrays imaginary love as a false holiness: an intoxicating but decadent distraction from higher aims, and in this way begins a retreat from the position he struck in *Paulo and Francesca de Rimini*, where the couple's resistance to such higher aims on behalf of their love seems a kind of triumph.

In another poem of this transitional period, "The Landmark/67," a speaker reflects on how he has missed his "path," having been distracted by a well into which he has

flung the pebbles from its brink
 In sport to send its imaged skies pell-mell,
 (And mine own image, had I noted well!). (3-5)

The well that contains his image is clearly the pool of Narcissus, while the speaker's absorption in the "pell-mell" break-up of his reflection appears to be a fascination with something resembling the "imaginary disarray" of subjectivity described by Lacan. The speaker consequently resolves to "go back" and "thirst to drink" from that pool to obtain nourishment to seek his proper "goal" (8-14), thereby drawing on Christian and neo-Platonic symbolism of spiritual education. In DGR's characterization of a young man's laggard disposition, meanwhile, he anticipates CR's "The Prince's Progress" (1863), whose prince "idl[es]" in languid pleasure and puts off symbolic pilgrimage (83) in a manner that Marsh believes reflects DGR's own postponement of marriage, but could also more broadly reflect DGR's spiritual tardiness, given the Christian context of much quest narrative (*CR* 275). But if CR held out little hope for transformation in "The Prince's Progress," where the Prince arrives too late for his spiritual marriage to the princess, these two sonnets and the second version of the *First Anniversary* reveal that DGR is growing increasingly aware of the hazardous quality of his imaginary indulgences and is looking for ways to extract himself from that compulsion.

II. The Fetish as Cover

In the paintings of Dante and Beatrice so far discussed, DGR heightens the appearances of narcissistic desire between them, seemingly in order to hint at an exciting, and possibly mutual, passion lying behind their constrained relationship. However, over

the course of painting *Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice* (1856/1871), an illustration of another Dantesque incident, DGR moves away from his typically celebratory representation of imaginary passion. While in the first version DGR produces another reflection of the sometimes abyssal quality of imaginary desire, in the second version he begins a process of repressing such reflections, masking them under a welter of symbols and fetishes that suggest the dominance of the symbolic order over Dante's—as well as DGR's—desire.

Dante's Dream dramatizes the moment from *La Vita Nuova* after Dante learns of Beatrice's death, when he dreams that he “be[held] his lady in death, whose head certain ladies seemed to be covering with a white veil”; the composition is thus of Beatrice unconscious on a bier, with her attendants lowering a veil over her and Dante gazing upon her. (DGR *Works* 328-9). In the 1856 watercolor, the theme of dreaming seems to have stimulated DGR to include a number of details that elaborate Dante's imaginary libido, such as strange bags and apertures around Beatrice's bed-cabinet that suggest inaccessible unconscious mysteries in the dreamer, and which Freud more specifically interpret as “the commonest sexual symbols” of female genitals (390, 419). In making his portrait of Dante dreaming suggestive of the recesses of a mind, DGR participates in what Harrison describes as the Pre-Raphaelite “emphasis on dreams and dream visions” (“Parody” 3), in such a way that anticipates the work of psychoanalysis, which draws distinctive links between the dreams and desires of the subject. As Lacan explains, “dream thoughts” express “a desire” by permitting the “alleviation of the imaginary relations” to expose “the diversified images of [the subject's] ego” where the relations of

desire are forged (*SI* 45; *SII* 167).¹¹ DGR further anticipates twentieth-century treatments of the dream by surrealists through his distorted depictions of objects, such as the strangely twisting staircases that lead up and down into to the hell and heaven to which Beatrice would guide him, but which also, because of their strangeness, suggest routes into the unconscious. DGR's use of imagery in this illustration is, moreover, more than usually chaotic, suggesting the jumbled quality of dream imagery. A small cabinet in Beatrice's bier, for instance, seems to have no apparent aesthetic or functional purpose other than to contribute a detail to what Freud calls the "composite character" of Dante's dream, as a expression of his imaginary longing for Beatrice (*Interpretation* 136).

In the 1871 version of *Dante's Dream*, however, DGR notably removes many of the most indeterminate images from the first version, or stabilizes them into more distinctly Christian symbols. Twisting staircases are partially straightened, and apertures and windows that suggested unconscious conduits in the first version are removed or clarified. A bag with an ecclesiastical symbol upon it that hangs beside the bier is replaced with a legible scroll that reads "Quomodo sedet solo civitas" (Every City Shall be Forsaken), Jeremiah's lamentation of the Second Coming, thus turning an obscure cipher into a discursively meaningful phrase. DGR also adds a number of other traditionally Christian images, including crimson angels to "bear[] away the soul of Beatrice," according to Surtees (44), a lamp that is a Christian "symbol of wisdom and piety," and a dove that represents the Holy Ghost (Ferguson 16, 176). By smoothing out some pictorial details and making others more explicit, DGR may have intended simply to refine his composition. But while in DGR's other second versions of paintings his

refinements typically heightened the narcissistic implications of the originals, here the refinements eliminate the most fascinating features of the first version.

Instead, DGR's effort at revision in the second version of *Dante's Dream* seems to have been to make his illustration of the dream approximate a religious vision. Lothar Honnighausen, citing Arthur Symons's account of the symbolist movement, has described how Pre-Raphaelitism "spiritualize[d]" art through the insertion of "recognizable signs" that link their images up to shared codes of desire (in Honnighausen 3-4). The major effect of Pre-Raphaelite symbolism, Honnighausen thus suggests, is to give an effect of the ordering, and thus the sublimation, of libido. In a similar sense, Lacan proposes that "the play of symbols" permits the subject to submit his desire to "a human field which universalizes significations" and thus locate his subjective experience within a transcendental "myth" (*SI* 190). Symbolism has this effect because the "power of naming objects" makes such objects "subsist with a certain consistency," and consequently settles down imaginary oscillation, we might infer (*SI* 169). Kristeva more specifically proposes that the codification of symbols in art and literature as well as specifically sacred "rituals and discourse" allows subjects to submit "narcissism" to the "patriarchal law," thereby "elevat[ing], spiritualiz[ing], and sublimat[ing] physical desire" (*Powers* 120, 58-60). DGR's changes from the first version of *Dante's Dream* to the second accordingly seem to be a strategy to represent Dante as no longer the rapt and overwrought lover of *La Vita Nuova*, but as a man who, through love of a woman, becomes fit to be the sublime prophet of the *Commedia*.



ILLUSTRATION 6
Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice (1856)
DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, Surtees Catalogue no. 81



ILLUSTRATION 7
Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice (1871)
DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, Surtees Catalogue no. 81 replica 1

Other measures to subdue narcissism in the second version of *Dante's Dream* are also evident, apart from the distinct introduction of symbols, are evident. One of these is DGR's deliberate differentiation of the heights of the men and women in the frame. While DGR was composing the second version of *Dante's Dream*, he wrote to Ford Madox Brown about his efforts to impose a difference between the heights of the men and the women:

My soul is vexed with the following point:--The women in my picture being 62 inches high, will it do for the man to be 65 inches, or should he be taller? I've got him traced on the canvas, and fancy he looks all right, but am rather nervous about beginning to paint him lest he should possibly need heightening.
(*Letters* 899)

This anecdote seems to evince that, in revising *Dante's Dream*, DGR struggled against a spontaneous impulse to portray female figures as tall as male ones, in order to impose decorous gender distinctions in his painting. DGR's letter to Brown vividly expresses his conflict between what Alcorn calls a subject's "most fundamental response to an image of otherness" based in narcissism, and the symbolic norms that he has internalized that pressure him to repress such individualistic responses (16-7). The letter also suggests that he may have been more interested in reflecting the power of those norms in 1871 than he had been earlier, and thus supports the interpretation of a trend towards symbolic conservatism over the course of DGR's career as a painter.

A final change DGR makes in the second version of *Dante's Dream* is, meanwhile, to increase the density of fetishistic elements. Numerous critics have observed a general tendency to fetishism in DGR's later images and textures of femininity, which feature ornamentation by profuse flowers, flowing silk clothes, and

crinkly hair (315). DGR's fetishes were conspicuous in his own nature, as well: Elizabeth Gaskell, who knew DGR in 1859, commented that he was "hair mad," because "if a particular kind of reddish brown, crepe wavy hair came in, he was away in a moment, struggling for an introduction" (Marsh 208). However, fetishism increased over the course of DGR's career, and is thus less prominent in works of the 1850s, including the first version of *Dante's Dream*, where the hair of Beatrice is straight and her garments are plain and restrained.

In the 1871 version, DGR's fetish for hair and cloth is fully expressed, and seems, moreover, to perform a function in the painting that is not merely aesthetic, but also libidinal. Beatrice's nightgown has now become extravagant silk that drapes as a rippling curtain over the precise place where, in the first version, the small cabinet had opened into the bier and had seemed to suggest Dante's unconscious desire for the dead Beatrice.¹² Given the sexual suggestiveness of that cabinet that the silk now covers, Beatrice's lavish nightgown seems fetishistic in exactly the way that Freud means when he described the fetish as a "substitution for the sexual object" (*Three* 153). According to Freud, a fetish is a substitute either for,

some part of the body (such as the foot or hair) which is in general very inappropriate for sexual purposes, or some inanimate object which bears an assignable relation to the person whom it replaces and preferably to that person's sexuality.

In *Dante's Dream*, the silk cloth "substitutes" for what in the previous version of the painting was a plausible symbol of genital desire, as well as an indication of the transgressive, dream-inflected eroticism of imaginary attraction. The fetish thus seems to indicate a retreat from that imaginary intensity, as Žižek has seen it to be, finding that the

fetish is a “desperate attempt, on the part of the perverse subject ... to achieve separation” from the imaginary object (104).¹³

This way that the fetish functions in the second version of *Dante's Dream* thus provides a test for different interpretation of DGR's fetishism. Previous critics of DGR's art have adopted the Freudian idea of the fetish as a substitute for direct genital desire in the case of DGR. However, we may see in relation to this visible emergence of the fetish how these critics have overstated the pathological character of fetishism, which Freud finds to be quite “habitually present in normal love” (*Three* 154). Lynda Pearce, for instance, suggests that fetishism in DGR's works is an “expression of extreme psychosexual trauma” (55). But the fetishism that is represented in the second version of *Dante's Dream* seems simply an attempt to impose a pictorial decorum. While robbing the work of one of its most psychologically interesting features, it is nonetheless effective for expressing how an intense desire such as that Dante holds for Beatrice may transcend the personal instance, and become a sublime appreciation of a general idea of femininity.¹⁴ Pollock, in turn, sees DGR's fetishism as a feature of isolation, which produces a “barrier between subject and object” that protects the self within a “fortified castle” (55; 47). But the manner in which the fetish masks the sexual suggestion of the first version of *Dante's Dream* in the second version affirms that DGR's fetishism does not so much defend the subject against the object, as defend him against exorbitant desire for the object. DGR's fetish thus seems to be a crude version of symbolization, as Žižek explains, a “fixation on some particular point” in the other that is a first “step” of the

subject beyond imaginary attachment and towards “the dimension of universality” that culminates in the symbolic order (104).

Given this proto-symbolic function of the fetish, moreover, it seems that Pollock overstates the degree to which fetishism empowers the male viewer of DGR’s work by reducing women to “screen[s] across which masculine fantasies of knowledge, power and possession can be enjoyed in a ceaseless play” (123). Pollock bases her understanding of the fetish upon Laura Mulvey’s idea of fetishistic images of women in mass culture, which Mulvey claims “spring from the male unconscious” so that “woman herself becomes its narcissistic projection” (15).¹⁵ But Žižek insists that the fetish is not a narcissistic projection, whereby the subject remakes the other according to his authentic, imaginary desire. Rather, the fetish is an anticipation of what form the relationship to the other will assume in the symbolic order; thus, it is not a projection of a “‘lower stage’ of development ... but a symptom of the inherent contradiction within the higher stage”—in other words, the fetish displays the divisive formations of the symbolic order, which not only splits humanity into two classes of gender, but splits subjects against their own desires (n.16, 124). The “fantas[ies]” produced through fetishism are thus not genuine colonizations of the other, but rather reflections of how the subject himself is inserted into broader webs of social desires and insecurities. As Žižek insists, the subject does not obtain power through the use of a fetish, but offers it up to the symbolic Other as his fetishism permits him to “stag[e] his castration” (104). That Beatrice is a more sublime object in the second version of *Dante’s Dream* does not suggest that either Dante or DGR

have more power over Beatrice, but that a symbolic regime reigns more fully over this scene, at the cost of the imaginary libido of Dante—as well, implicitly, of DGR the artist.

Given this psychoanalytical explanation of the fetish as a protection from more overwhelming forms of libido, it may be possible to trace how DGR's fetishism may have arisen on a personal as well as artistic level. Freud claims that forms of perversion like the fetish normally arise when "circumstances are unfavorable to [the normal sexual aim and object] and favorable to [the fetish] arise" (161). Between the time DGR composed his first *Dante's Dream* in 1856 and Gaskell's noting of DGR's hair fetish in 1859, such a combination of unfavorable and favorable circumstances apparently emerged in DGR's own life. Around this period, DGR's original great love with Siddal became frustrated; Marsh notes how in the winter of 1856 Siddal was in Italy and France for six months, and "a gap" opened between the two lovers that would never close (157). In response, DGR wrote in a letter "come back dear Liz," but he also appears to have widened his desire to encompass other women who aesthetically interested him. He was drawn first of all to Ruth Herbert, whom he made his model, claiming in a letter that "[s]he has the most varied and highest expression ... besides abundant beauty, golden hair, etc" (Marsh 157). Thus, at the same time that DGR suffered an "unfavorable" loss to ordinary, happy sexual passion, he entered into circumstances "favorable" to the fetish, as his sexual life became aestheticized into the admiration and painting of frequently inaccessible women.¹⁶

Surtees accordingly provides a note about the "turning point" in DGR's artistic career around 1859, which warrants quotation in full; she observes that

with the declining health of Elizabeth Siddal the small angular figures with their medieval accessories familiar from earlier water-colors gradually disappear, and in her place appears a new type of woman already observed earlier in the pencil portrait of Ruth Herbert, in which the sweep of the neck, the curved lips, the indolent pose of the head and the emphasis given to the fall of the hair foreshadow his prolific output of studies of women. (68-9)

Apart from itemizing many of DGR's renowned painterly fetishes in his later work, which refract desire into a generic array of effects, Surtees's note also describes how the appearances of DGR's later female subjects tended to project the quality of sexual unavailability. Such women were,

sensual and voluptuous, mystical and inscrutable but always humorless, gazing into the distance with hair outspread and hands resting on a parapet, often with some heavily scented flower completing the design. As the face of the model changed with the years, so the eyes became more wistful, the feeling of distance more remote, until in 1879 the apogee was reached with Mrs. William Morris as the *Donna Della Finestra*.

Here, Surtees points to the particular importance within DGR's fetishistic structure of Jane Morris (then Burden), who was discovered by DGR in 1857, but married his friend William Morris in 1858, and increasingly came to epitomize DGR's remote ideal and the ultimate exponent of his fetishes. DGR would acquire more accessible mistresses such as Fanny Cornforth; but as Marsh points out, Jane Morris was the "unattainable donna Giovanna" whom DGR worshipped as a "courtly lover"—ironically placing him in a similar position to that which he seems to have resisted in his early illustrations of Dante (Marsh 342). Lacking Dante's facility for wholesale symbolic sublimation, however, DGR may have used fetishism to take his desire off of the genital goal, and to focus it upon the "universal[]" aspects her that he could admire and paint, such as her famously flowing clothes and hair. Morris thus became the ideal of the fetishes that he and the

other Pre-Raphaelites created around her; as Henry James stated, it was impossible to know whether Morris was “a grand synthesis of all Pre-Raphaelite pictures ever made” or whether the Pre-Raphaelites’ paintings were “a ‘keen analysis’ of her” (Marsh 339).

Nonetheless, it is obvious from the sentiments expressed in *The House of Life*, which most readers believe to have been written by DGR largely under the influence of love for Morris, that his adoration of her went beyond an attraction to her hair. *The House of Life* is a fiat of narcissistic effusions, rarely mentioning hair, but rather concerned with the deeper issues of “the union of body and soul, the indivisibility of desire and idealization in true love between man and woman,” as Marsh finds (351). Thus, while DGR’s fetishism may, in part, have been a response to blocked narcissistic fulfillment, it nonetheless left the door open for him to more directly explore a narcissistic attachment to Jane Morris when conditions were more favorable. During the late 1860s and early 1870s, when DGR and Jane Morris had most opportunity to express their affection for each other (Marsh 365), DGR’s poetry most bypassed his fetishistic measures of universalization to produce the magnificently subjective analyses of intimacy that are *The House of Life* sonnets. Because fetishism seems to have coexisted with other, more directly loving impulses in DGR, we must challenge critics who base their interpretations of DGR’s fetishism on Mulvey’s interpretation of “male fantasy” as “a closed-loop dialogue with itself” that annihilates the female other which prompts it (16). Instead, the psychoanalytic opposition both Zizek and Copjec insist upon, between the subject’s narcissistic desire and his symbolic measures to repress it, entails that desire for the other is unlikely to be saturated with fetishistic and symbolic responses, for such symbolic

structures do not exist alone, but coexist with the subject's individual imaginary responses. Freud accordingly suggests that "in the majority of instances the pathological character in a perversion is found to lie not in the *content* of the new sexual aim, but ... *alongside* the normal sexual aim and object" ("Three" 161). As Lacan adds, a subject's sexual drive is always a "montage" of disparate components (*F* 169). This multiplicity of libidinal effects seems conspicuously true of DGR, even when he is engaged in representing women most fetishistically and symbolically.

III. Verbally Reintegrating the Symbolic

We can see in this overview of DGR's illustrations of Dante that symbolic forms of relation, including fetishism, eradicate some of the potential for spontaneity and equality that is sustained through narcissism. As Lacan insists, however, the "higher order" of symbolic universality can also produce happier relations with the other. As narcissism is banished and "desire of the other ... enters into the mediation of language [and]... into the order of a law," love grows closer to being a genuinely intersubjective relationship: a "symbolic relation of I and you" in which there can be "relation[s] of mutual recognition and transcendence" (*SI* 177). For these reasons, Lacan describes the ideal trajectory of "genital love" as a dialectic between the two orders, in which love that is first "inscribed" in the narcissistic framework subsequently "transcend[s]" that framework, settling down "in [an] intermediate, ambiguous zone, between the symbolic and the imaginary" (*SI* 217). The subject achieves this happy medium through a process in which he uses speech as a "mill-wheel" to realize his desire in language, allowing the

symbolic order to “determine the greater or lesser degree of perfection, of completeness, of approximation, of the imaginary” (*SI* 141, 179).

However, perhaps because this process Lacan describes depends upon “speech,” this “approximation of the imaginary” does not seem to have occurred within DGR’s painting, which, after declining into fetishism in the 1860s, never recovers its earlier power to spontaneously represent desire. Instead, DGR dissolves the immediacy of the other within the imaginary order in a welter of fetishistic curls, robes and flowers and symbols. DGR also increasingly stifles the imaginary experience through what Diane Sachko McLeod calls his “reduction in narrative content,” as he comes to emulate continental innovators like Manet to place an increased “emphasis on the picture plane” (37-8). DGR thus becomes absorbed within a deathly “repetition compulsion,” repeating similar themes in his portraiture in such a way that seems to overwhelm the life-drive towards disruption and innovation that characterized his early creative activities. The progressive annihilation of the sense of time in art seems to stifle imaginary desire, perhaps because the ultimate way of displaying the permanence of the imaginary attachment is through a narrative, in which a subject “convey[s] what he maintains of an image of the past towards an ever short and limited future,” as Lacan describes the quality of desire (*F* 31). In DGR’s triptych *Paulo and Francesca de Rimini*, we can find such a narrative of how desire carries an ideal that is always lost into an inhospitable future. This painting portrays what Freud calls desire’s “indestructible” nature, in a narrative of how two people may thus link time into a continuum of yearning (in Lacan, *F* 31). Increasingly, however, DGR abandons this bittersweet representation of libido as

desire's infinite attempt to recover a specific loss, and instead represents libido in a more impersonal form that resembles how Lacan describes the drive, as a "rhythmic structure of [] pulsation" that is prompted not by an image but by a sign, so that "the object is ... of no importance" (31, 168). However much DGR's later images seem geared to arousing as well as reflecting desire through their signifiers of sexuality, they do not sustain DGR's earlier account of desire as a deeply subjective form of captivation by a unique other.

Even DGR realized that his acuity as a painter has decreased, as he came to specialize not in potent dramas of subjectivity, but predictable and generic set-pieces. He suggests as much in an 1868 letter to Thomas Gordon Hake, where he admitted that the conditions of commercialization had "led to a good deal of my painting being pot-boiling and no more" (*Letters* 849-50). DGR also hinted in this letter at the effects of fetishism and symbolism on his painting, suggesting that painting had become, for him, the production of "recreated forms." He thus decided, partly for this reason, to redefine himself in the late 1860s as "a poet (within the limits of my powers)," hoping that he could thereby revive his powers of expression, as his poetry, "being unprofitable, has remained unprostituted." DGR went on to intuit that poetry offered the prospect of excavating an interior landscape of desire, and to anticipate that through it he "should wish to deal in poetry chiefly with personified emotions" and thereby "put in action a complete dramatis personae of the soul." DGR's major project of making an impression in the art world thus gave way to the major project of compiling and refining *The House of Life* sequence, a process of accumulation and revision that would engage him for thirteen years.

To enlarge his repertoire, moreover, he notoriously asked his friend Charles A. Howell to dig up poems he had buried in his wife's grave, so he could use them as the beginnings of a new opus and a new career.¹⁷ The grave-digging incident may have contributed fodder for his critics' attacks upon him, as Marsh speculates (454). On the whole, however, this resurrection of the poetry of his youth seems to have been emotionally worthwhile; as Marsh observes, "the resumption of poetry ... signaled the opening of [DGR's] emotional shutter, the reawakening of his heart and need to speak" (357-8). Lacan's account of the experience of clinical psychoanalysis helps to explain DGR's feeling that poetry would hold a special potential for excavating the dynamics of desire that had become alienated from his painting. Of all the forms of symbolization, Lacan argues, verbal language is the medium that can most be "full" in its power to deftly mediate the unconscious (*SI* 109). Language "aims at ... the truth," moving beyond the static and conventional use of symbols to "change[] the nature of the two beings present." DGR seems to have seen poetry around this time in such a way, as an exponent of change as well as truth, as he conveys in the titles he gave the two sections of *The House of Life*: "Youth and Change" and "Change and Fate," and some of the titles of his sonnets: "Love's Testament/3" (1870), "Through Death to Love/41" (1871), and "Transfigured Life/60" (1871). As well, the introductory manifesto of *The House of Life*, which characterizes the sonnet in visual terms as a "monument," nonetheless hopes that his monuments will capture "memorials from the Soul's eternity / To one dead deathless hour" (2-3)—an achievement that would require its writer to develop an especially sensitive form of writing that was capable of truthfully recovering contents of the

unconscious. Thus, while the sonnets of *The House of Life* are certainly interested in aesthetic integration, in keeping with Harrison's observation that DGR's poetry ultimately "exalt[s] purely aesthetic valuation above political or social or religious valuation," another value seems to coexist with aesthetic perfection in these poems, which is the complementary goal of emotional and psychological perspicuity ("Parody" 760).

The House of Life thus weaves into a sequence the passionate, but somewhat puerile, sonnets that DGR wrote while in love with Elizabeth Siddal in the late 1840s and early 1850s with the equally passionate, but far more sophisticated, sonnets he wrote while in love with Jane Morris in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Some critics observe a narrative of self-discovery in the sequence: William Fredeman reads the sequence as structurally reviving the conventional sonnet narrative, in which the hero passes "from innocent joy and hope, through disillusionment brought on by the recognition of the evanescence of beauty and love, to an ultimate acceptance of a transcending hope, a higher faith" ("Rossetti's" 323), while Granger sees the poems graphing a more psychoanalytically complex "critique of the mirror" in which there is a "movement from self to other" (5). Other critics, however, have seen the speaker's trajectory as revealing the kind of downward tendency DGR anticipates in "Dantis Tenebrae," though one in which there will be no genuine lady in the vale. Paul Jarvie and Robert Rosenberg find *The House of Life* "darkens progressively, moving slowly into the painful world of the speaker's mind" (119). Stephen Spector likewise describes the speaker as "unable to escape from the prison of subjectivism," while Miller sees the sequence as characterized

by a “sterile” aesthetic in which “signs” “become fascinating in themselves, in their self-sustaining and self-annihilating interplay” (119; 458; 344-5).

Generally, the critics who note a tendency towards pessimism in the sequence find that any optimistic notes in individual, early sonnets are compromised by the arrangement of the sequence, which confirms a “general downward pattern of despair and helplessness” and eventually circles round in “empty and profitless anxieties” (Jarvie and Rosenberg 117; Gurney 111). A sense of progress comes into focus, however, if one reads *The House of Life* not in DGR’s eventual 1881 order, but in a chronological order that allows for possible psychoanalytic developments in DGR’s own self. Read in this way, some of the darkness of the sequence is counterbalanced, as bleaker poems that formally end the sequence such as “The One Hope/99” (1969) and “Newborn Death/100” (1970) are chronologically succeeded by more hopeful poems such as “Heart’s Hope” (1871) and “Without Her” (1871), both epiphanies of discovery by a lover.¹⁸ *The House of Life* is famous for its elaboration of the narcissistic stage of love where lovers are transfixed by each other’s images, in sonnets like “Nuptial Sleep/6a” (1869) and the “Willowwood” series (1869). But read in order of writing, the sequence also describes the transformation of imaginary desire into what Lacan calls a more “viable” form of love conducted in language (*Four* 276). The narrative of transcendence the poems thereby reveal may not be the heroically Christian one that Fredeman observes, but a more secular and modern one achieved through human love, which in Freud’s words, can “reopens the door to perfection” (in Lacan, *SI* 141).

The journey in *The House of Life* through, and beyond, imaginary desire begins in the earliest poems about love that DGR included in the sequence: “The Birth Bond/15” (1853) and (1854) “Broken Music/47” (1852), and “Known in Vain/65” (1853). These sonnets, presumably triggered by DGR’s meeting of Siddal in 1852, describe the narcissistic themes Riede finds frequently reflected in DGR’s writing, of “the union of lover and beloved in images of perfect reciprocity” and of the “blurring of the boundaries between self and other” (122). As such, DGR’s account of love in this sonnet resembles the condition of imaginary desire outlined by Lacan. “The Birth Bond”/15” accordingly compares the speaker’s connection with his lover to the strong bond between two siblings who share a lost mother, “nursed on the forgotten breast and knee” (4). The speaker claims to feel the sense of exclusive but occult kinship with his lover one might feel to a lost twin: “[o]ne nearer kindred that life hinted of / O born with me somewhere that men forgot” (10-12). His comparison of the experience of love to that of a shared origin resembles Lacan’s explanation of how love is a revival of the imaginary mirror stage, in which the subject experiences a “homeomorphic identification” that is both “formative” as well as “erogenic” (“Mirror” 3). As well, the speaker’s intuition that he shared a mother with his beloved evokes the nostalgia for the mirror stage that Lacan describes as a lifelong yearning for the “unity lost at the origin” (*SII* 136). “The Birthbond/15” thus renders narcissistic desire uncritically, as an ideal state of lovers’ bliss comparable to the pleasure DGR portrayed two years later in *Paulo and Francesco de Rimini*.

However, a number of sonnets from this early period, including “Known in Vain/65,” “The Landmark/67,” and “Broken Music/47” (1852), raise the concern DGR

reflects in the *First Anniversary*, that absorption in imaginary desire distracts one from higher ambitions and spiritual aims. Already, we have seen how “Known in Vain/65” and “The Landmark/67” are concerned with the problem of distraction from one’s proper goals due to narcissistic absorption. In a similar way, the speaker of “Broken Music/47” worries that imaginary absorption will obstruct his goal of writing poetry. As he explains, being in love obstructs his connection to the muse so he catches “no breath of song,” but only the voice of the other (12). Trying to write a poem when he is in this state makes him as frustrated as a baby whose “mother will not turn,” and waits “that it may call her twice” (1-2). Having one’s lover as a muse, he admits, is at a cost to nimble and self-willed art, as the poetry that finally comes is an inarticulate effusion that converts the speaker’s “central moan” or “speech-bound sea-shell’s low importunate strain” to “sweet music” and “sweet tears,” an inarticulate expression that is pure desire (7-8, 11). Finally, the speaker indicates how he resents his lover’s monopoly over his heart by calling her his “bitterly beloved” (13). DGR generally left off poetry after 1854, claiming he had to “giv[e] up poetry as a pursuit of my own” because it conflicted with his artistic ambitions; he “c[ouldn’t] write, for then [he] sha’n’t paint” (*Letters* 214). The record of DGR’s early sonnets suggests, however, that he may have been equally obstructed from poetic achievement as much by love as by duty, because he had not found a way to coordinate passion with poetic control. DGR was, during this time, overwhelmed and somewhat oppressed by his love for Siddal, being utterly broke and thus “not ready to be a worthy husband and father” (134). Under such circumstances, it is understandable that

his poetry of this period would depict love as a burden, and not express the patience to excavate its qualities.

Not until 1868, when he returned belatedly to poetry, did DGR begin to expand the means of that craft, so that it could anatomize the very problems of narcissistic attachment that earlier had paralyzed it. The sonnets of this period also treat love as an exclusive and unifying absorption in the other that DGR had previously portrayed in sonnets as well as paintings; for instance, the lovers in "Nuptial Sleep/6a" (1869) are not, for the most part, specified as distinct persons with genders, but through a collective "we," like that Dante's Francesca employs to convey her inseparableness from Paulo. Moreover, just as DGR portrays Paulo and Francesca's narcissistic passion through the visual strategy of symmetry, he evokes passion in "Nuptial Sleep/69" through symmetrical imagery, describing how, after the speaker and his lover sever off their unifying "long kiss," they remain connected like "married flowers to either side outspread / [f]rom the knit stem," their "burnt red" mouths "fawn[ing] on each other" (6-8). In this way, DGR sustains the idea of love as a form of doubling present in earlier sonnets like "The Birth Bond/15." However, DGR also introduces significant tonal and stylistic differences in these later sonnets, which distinguish them from earlier sonnets in *The House of Life* sequence. While the earlier speakers seem off-balance and sometimes even reluctant in their passion, the speakers of the later sonnets give themselves willingly to "hours of Love," patient to "[speak] of things remembered, and so sit / Speechless while things forgotten call to us" (16:13-4). This image from "A Day of Love/16"

conveys how in the later sonnets, the mute pleasures of love accompany, and do not overwhelm, the lovers' symbolic capabilities of speech.

In other ways, DGR in these later sonnets combines the intimacy of love with the asserts of culture and language, as he begins to use the symbolic order to "approximate" imaginary passion, giving the thrills of the imaginary order symbolic expression through the linguistic "mill-wheel" of language, in Lacan's words (*SI* 141). Most brazenly, DGR begins to describe the effects of imaginary desire in sacramental terms, and thus to "lift[] human love to a heavenly throne," as Riede finds (128). DGR thus declares in "Heart's Hope/5" (1871) that he can no longer tell "our love from God" (8) and in "The Kiss/6" that they have "desire in deity" (12, 14). "Heart's Hope/5" also compares the sonnet to the shore in the "sea which Israel crossed dryshod," thus characterizing the love poem as a divine miracle that allows one to maintain oneself despite immersion (4). Insofar as he juxtaposes sacred discourses and private bliss in these poems, DGR fulfills his identity as "Dantis Tenebrae" that he had defined in 1861. He thus finds heaven in love as he had predicted, in contrast with Dante, who most believe sacrificed imaginary love to seek a sacred goal. Supporting Bloom's notion of the origin of poetic strength, DGR accomplishes some of his most interesting poetic fiats by outrageously inverting the value-structure of his precursor, "find[ing] his good" in the precursor's "bad," as well as "choos[ing] to know damnation" as the precursor defines it in order to "explore the limits of the possible within it" (21).

As DGR arrogated symbolic means to describe imaginary love, his style became virtuosic, thus displaying how rebellion becomes the vehicle of powerfully

transformative art, as Bloom contends. DGR's poetry even becomes metatextually aware of its own procedures, as he deftly demonstrates his awareness his aims to convert passion into language in "The Love-Letter/11" (1869). Here he describes how love is transmitted through the "smooth black stream" of "articulate throbs" through which the beloved expresses her "breast's secrets" (3-4). The love letter links the passion of eyes to that of the words, as it unleashes "sudden confluence" that passes through the two lovers' eyes like "married music" (11, 8). DGR's use of the trope "married music" in this passage aptly describes the nature of what Lacan proposes to be imaginary spontaneity tempered through a relationship to the symbolic order of language. In "A Day of Love/16," DGR similarly describes love at its height as moments that are simultaneously speechless and evocative of speech, or "eloquent of still replies" (7). In these later sonnets of *The House of Life*, the imaginary order only barely exceeds the speaker's powers of speech to express it, and the two orders are nearly harmonized.

Despite the verbal pyrotechnics by which DGR renders passion a spiritual pursuit, however, he nonetheless reveals himself to be faced with the essential problem of imaginary desire: the impossibility of sustaining it in its original state of perfection without "degradation," in Lacan's terms (*SIH* 263). DGR thus complains of the ephemeral nature of unity with the other in "Secret Parting/45" (1869), grieving at "how brief the whole / Of joy, which its own hours annihilate" (5-6). This poem suggests that the problem with imaginary passion is that it that has not been solidified through the symbolic "pact," and is consequently bound to be brief (*SI* 174): his lovers "strove / [t]o build" a shelter for love in a "still-seated secret of the grove" where there was "nor spire

... nor bell," but could not, thereby, make it permanent (12-4). DGR illustrates the brevity of love iconically, in "Death in Love/48" (1869), which features the figure of a "veiled woman" who plucks a feather from Love's wing and holds it to his lips to show that he breathes no longer. Moreover, while "Nuptial Kiss" had described lovers as two flowers on a single stem, "Severed Selves/40" (1871) displays the inevitable undoing of this symmetry, where lovers become "two separate divided silences" whose dream of love is "faint as shed flowers" (1, 14). In these sonnets, DGR joins CR in portraying the narcissistic love that he otherwise admires as tragic, because susceptible to decay and thus bound to death.

However, the condition of narcissistic desire is nonetheless not desperate to DGR for precisely the same reason as it is for CR; that is, because it degrades the subject. The true problem of imaginary desire for DGR seems to have been frequently been misunderstood by DGR's critics, in particular readers of the "Willowwood" sequence, which fully dramatizes the peril of imaginary degradation, but also proposes a provisional solution to it that critics rarely glimpse. The four sonnets of the "Willowwood" sequence are patently based on the Narcissus myth, though the myth is adjusted to reflect the conditions of secondary rather than primary narcissism, as the speaker does not see his own image of the pool and consequently drown, but rather sees the image of his lover, only to lose it to the water's depths. Many critics observe correctly that these sonnets embody the disturbingly deathly spirit of the sequence as a whole, and even of DGR's career in general. But I believe that they fail to see the transformation that DGR has rendered to the myth when they see it as a reprise of the tale of Narcissus himself. For

instance, Jarvie and Rosenberg find that the “Willowwood” sonnets express DGR’s “sterile vision of self-love” (118), while Miller observes that they reveal DGR’s preference for a “solipsistic relation” (339). However, secondary narcissism as Freud and Lacan describe it is not exactly sterile or solipsistic, but rather a way that a subject expands his scope for intimacy by adoring others with the full strength of what would otherwise be egotism. As Bruhm similarly argues, narcissistic attraction “shuttles between the register of sameness ([s]he is what I am ...) and difference ([s]he ... give[s] me a sense of self),” and thus exceeds any definition as solipsism (177). Thus, while these critics conclude that the speaker of the “Willowwood” sonnets cherishes a gratifying image of the self in the mistaken belief that he is loving an other, we may alternatively find that the speaker cherishes the other with an inordinate intensity because of how she is mistaken for the self. As psychoanalytic theory contends, the condition of narcissistic desire is not as that of getting away with solipsism—of keeping the ego safe from the other—but of being too unsettled by the other, as one is “jammed by ... [the] deceiving and realised image of the other, or equally by [one’s] own specular image” reflected by that other (*SII* 54).

DGR displays this helplessness of the subject before the play of images in “Willowwood 1,” when the speaker sees “her own lips rising” there in the pond, to meet the reflection of his own (14). The appearance of the face has generally been taken as a wishful illusion, interpreted, as by Spector, as a “vision of the beloved ... conjured up by the speaker’s memory” (456). Importantly, however, the speaker of the “Willowwood” sonnets does not will this image of the other; rather, she is initiated as a reflection of the

abstract figure of Love sitting across, whose “eyes beneath” become those of the speaker’s beloved (1.8-10). This figure reprises the Dantesque idea of an autonomous spirit of love, and suggests that the speaker does not privately generate his experience, but that the experience is produced and ratified by a separate entity. As well, there is no sign in the sonnet that the image of the other that appears in the pond is an merely an illusion. A plausible reading of the appearance of the other as a reflection can be given, based on the Lacanian account of how consciousness of objects passes them through the distorting, mirror-like ego, which “[re]locates in an imaginary space [an] object which ... is somewhere in reality” (*SI* 46). As Lacan shows in his “Optical Scheme for the Theory of Narcissism,” one may relocate the image of real flowers through a system of mirrors so that they seem to be in a vase that is actually in a different place. Lacan goes on to suggest that the “imaginary vase which contains the bouquet of real flowers” is an analogy for the deceptive function of the ego, which reflects real, separate objects so that they seem to be in conjoined to itself (*SI* 79). We may similarly understand the sonneteer as captive to a distorting ego in the guise of Love, which does not construct an illusion of an other, but rather reflects a “real” person brought into an “imaginary” proximity with the sonneteer’s innermost being. Love thus plays the role of the “deceiving” imaginary ego in Lacanian theory, reflecting a “real” other in such a way as to seem to give the speaker special access to her, and revising the narcissus myth into an astute parable of secondary narcissism.

DGR accordingly describes how Love permits a deceptive intimacy with the other as he “swe[eps] the spring” with his foot, disturbing self-other boundaries and allowing

the two lovers to share a “soul-wrung implacable close kiss” (1. 8, 2.11). This kiss is, however, another incident that has been misinterpreted as a wholly solipsistic indulgence. Miller dismisses the kiss as a “phantom kiss” ... [because] of course he kisses his own imaged lips” (339). But where would the pathos in “Willowwood” come from if DGR’s speaker were simply kissing himself? The emotional effect of the poem lies rather in the effect of a brief intimacy heightened through a precarious sense of proximity. As the sonneteer complains, his problem is not that he is fundamentally alone at “Willowwood,” but that he is with his lover in a way that is so unstable that it permits them to be together “for once, for once, for once alone,” in an access so deceptively intense that they will both be forever haunted by that lost promise (13).

DGR goes on to describe how, in “Willowwood” the wood surrounding the pool teems with “mournful forms” of the couple in their infinite period of loss: “shades of ... days” of “soul-struck widowhood ” (2:6-8). Like CR, he thus uses gothic imagery to depict the aftermath of imaginary captivation. But while CR conveys the gothic fate of imaginary passion as a sinister haunting that implies it never should have been, in poems like “Death’s Chill Between” (1847) where “[e]vermore / [a] dim hand knocks at the door” (23-4), DGR’s ghosts tend to be doppelganger images of lost or impossible happiness that ended too soon. The way these two writers invoke the gothic in their tales of love thus reveal the different ways that love goes wrong to them: for DGR by failing to be secured upon a steadier foundation, and for CR by having absorbed the subject in the first place. Nonetheless, love for both writers is painful insofar as it reminds the subject of his deepest, primordial loss, which each reflects by invoking the landscape of a

devastated maternal order. Just as CR paints her ghostlands as womblike spaces, DGR's Willowood looms before the speaker in "blood-wort burning red," a maternal signifier that inflects the imaginary order in a darker way than the happy maternal backdrop DGR assigns to love in "The Birth-Bond/15," thus displaying an increasing sense of the dangers of imaginary indulgence (3.9-10). Finally, the gothic imagery of "Willowood" culminates in the appearance of the other as a corpse, as her image "drown[s]" away from him, "as gray / As its gray eyes" (4.6-7). Narcissistic love, this incident suggests, culminates with the dreaded loss of a other, in a manner so sudden and grievous that it simulates her death. At this point the sonneteer is wracked by loss, and can only imagine escaping his persecution by desire through the annihilation of "all life" (3.14).

But "Willowood" occasionally signals the possibility of renewal, as the song Love sings of "death's sterility" is one in which "the new birthday tarries long" but is nonetheless expected to come (2: 3-4). In the fourth sonnet there are consequently some indications of how the subject may relieve his hell of unsatisfied imaginary desire, even without yielding his relation to a unique other. Like the "Birthday" that CR anticipates in her own poem, the birthday that DGR's anticipates will permit a spiritualization of the subject's desire in the symbolic order, though not in the way that CR seems to be proposing, where the limited other is given up for the Other, and erotic love becomes a metaphor for divine love. In contrast, the mode of sublimation DGR conceives of seems to be distinctly secular. The speaker counteracts his narcissistic desire for the other reflected in the pond by taking "a long draught of the water where she sank, / Her breath and all her tears and all her soul" (9-10). As in "The Landmark/67," DGR's speaker

counteracts his narcissistic interest in his reflection with the well's nourishing ability to quench his spiritual thirst. But while the water where the beloved sank is sublime, it is nonetheless invested with the other's unique emotions and soul. The water may thus be understood as an instance of what Lacan calls the *objet a*: that "privileged object, which has emerged from some primal separation" that the subject may desire in the stead of the imaginary other (*F* 83). The *objet a* is different from the fetish, Zizek has explained, because while the fetish is a fixed and necessarily generic image of desire, the *objet a* is an arbitrary sign that thus may be associated with the ineffable qualities of a distinct other.¹⁹ As Roland Barthes further explains, the *objet a* channels desire "metonymic[ally]" so that the most insignificant object may appear to be "consecrated" through contact with the beloved (Barthes 173). Thus, if the fate of one who lives in "Willowwood" is the paralysis of the "mute" and "dumb" ghosts who haunt it, such a fate is bypassed when the subject opens up a linguistic field of metonymic associations through which desire may roam, but which is nonetheless a more personal field than what Kristeva refers to as "discourses involved in making up the sacred" (*Powers* 58).

In the final lines of "Willowwood," DGR projects an utterly personal consecration, where the speaker is neither alone, nor narcissistically unified with the beloved, but unified with the abstract symbolic term of Love. When he leans to drink, he feels "Love's face / Pressed on [his] neck with moan of pity and grace,/ Till both our heads were in his aureole" (4.12-14). DGR's image of being collected in Love's halo conveys how love can achieve a "guide beyond the imaginary" that turns love from "an imaginary passion" into "the active gift which it constitutes on the symbolic plane" (*SI*

276). DGR's innovation is that his sonneteer achieves his apotheosis not through a route of austerity and spiritual education conveyed by Dante in the *Commedia*, but by adhering to the means of Dante in *La Vita Nuova*: that of the poet, with his spirit of love and his cherished other. At the end of "Willowwood," the narcissistic pool is not left behind, but transformed into a symbol of Lacan's "discourse"—and perhaps even of poetry, by which the sonneteer seeks meaning not beyond his love, but through it (*SI* 141).

Some of the sonnets in *The House of Life* written after the composition of "Willowwood" in 1869 further indicate how signifying discourses can sustain ephemeral love through the *objet a*. The speaker of "Hearts' Hope/5" (1871) describes sonnet-writing as an exploration through the "difficult deeps of Love" that can only be navigated if he finds a particular word with intelligent power: "the key of paths untrod" (1-2). If he finds the right words, or "evidence," by exploring the particular experience of his "one loving heart," he will be able to generalize this evidence so that it will have universal meaning, and "to all hearts all things shall signify" (1-3). DGR thus describes in this sonnet an inductive process of looking for a set of signifiers in his particular experience of love out of which he can derive universally applicable formulae of love. This process is entirely opposite from his other, fetishizing process seen in those paintings that submit the other to pre-existent sexual formulae. In *Venus Verticordia*, for example, the woman's face modeled upon Alexa Wilding seems merely a prop for the signs of sexuality that she holds, such as Eve's apple and Cupid's arrow, and thus a vehicle of drives for which the object is "of no importance," in Freud's words (Lacan *F* 168). In contrast, the speaker of "Heart's Hope," does not impose meaning on his beloved, but

rather carefully and painstakingly derive meaning from the nature of his unique relation to her. This is a far humbler process, as we may see in how the speaker of this sonnet does not yet envision what meaning he will find and is able only to describe only the qualities this meaning will have. It will be,

Tender as dawn's first hill-fire, and intense
As instantaneous penetrating sense
In Spring's birth-hour, of other Springs gone by. (12-14)

In other words, it will be elusive, unimagable meaning that can be reflected only in the loose associations of language, not in concrete, fetishistic images. "Heart's Compass/27" (1871) similarly makes love for the unique other a source of meaning. The world is described by DGR in this sonnet as an *object a* consecrated by the presence of his beloved: "Sometimes thou seem'st not as thyself alone, / But as the meaning of all things that are" (1-2). The speaker is so confounded by his adoration of the other that he will name no object on earth that matches her. Instead, he insists that one must "set thine eyes above" the images he aptly characterizes as "Night's ambiguous art," in order to understand the ideality she evokes. Sonnets like these, which evoke the difficulty of capturing the beloved in an image and instead rely on the liquidity of signs to convey her elusive essence, are among DGR's most tender, as through them he admits that any way he characterizes his beloved is arbitrary because she exceeds all his means of expression.

DGR even comes to recognize the relative tawdriness of his own fetishistic habits through the discovery of how language, at its best, can communicate an ideal rather than concrete essence of the other. In "Her Gifts/31" (1872), the speaker first aims to capture the other by trying to describe the various parts of her body, such as her "mouth whose

passionate forms imply / all music and all silence,” and her “round reared neck, meet column of Love’s shrine” (6-7, 9). As the sonneteer puts these images into words, however, he becomes more interested in the idea of speaking about her than of seeing her, enjoying “her gifts, as tongue may tell them o’er” and the experience of his soul “breath[ing] low her name” (13-4). Finally, he decides that her essence is equally distributed in every part of her and is in fact best captured in the slightest, most arbitrary attribute of her name, which “means more” than any image of her (14), the fact that “I love in you something more than you,” in Lacan’s words (*F* 268). DGR adopts an even more ironic perspective on fetishism in “Love’s Baubles/23” (1870). In this sonnet, cupids bear “slight wanton flowers and foolish toys of fruit” to numerous ladies who “throng[] in warm pursuit,” willing to clothe themselves in this paraphernalia of male desire. Much to his surprise, the sonneteer discovers that these fetishes do not for him flatter all of the ladies who try them on, but “savour of sleep” or “shame’s salute” (7-8). He only enjoys the fetishes when his lady displays them, and then “at her touch they shone / [W]ith inmost heaven-hue of the heart of flame” (11-2). DGR signals in these sonnets that he has come to see past his fetishism, as his speaker arrives at the point where it is no longer generically feminine attributes—“follies of love”—that induce desire in him, but rather his unique appreciation of his beloved that invests such attributes with their charm, effectively making them *objet a*’s that are animated by her ineffable nature (14).

The sonnets of the 1870s also show the sonneteer open to an equalizing dialogue with the other, and thus overcoming some of the conventionally asymmetries of love,

such as those rendered by idealization and symbolic hierarchy. In “Equal Troth/32” (1871), the beloved playfully corrects the sonneteer’s courtly idea that she is high above him, dispensing “gifts that with thy queenship best behave” (3-4), and chastises him for doubting her “love’s equality” (11). In “Youth’s Antiphony/13” (1871) the sonneteer quotes a similarly playful dialogue between two lovers about the extent of their passion, and then comments that they are “happy,” whom “words as these / In youth have served for speech” (10). These sonnets present a challenge to Spector’s criticism that “the beloved never exists as another consciousness” in *The House of Life*, as they display the sonneteer in his later entries prizing loquacious dialogue with the other above all, and thereby suggesting that he has fully passed into what Lacan calls the phase of genital love, which “acced[es] to the reality of the other as a subject” (458; *SI* 212).

Not all of DGR’s sonnets that invoke the *objet a* are so cheerful, however, since as Barthes points out, “sometimes the metonymic object is an absence (engendering distress)” (173). With so much meaning hinging on his beloved, some of the later sonnets, such as “Without Her/53” (1872), describe a world deprived of value due to her absence: “her paths without her” are like day turned to night (1-2, 5-6). But language tends to provide some consolation for such loss. Even in “Without Her/53,” however, the sonneteer triumphs over his desolation, by associating the beloved with the power of signification itself, without whom “speech be still” (9-10). Thus, insofar as he can write, he will be connected to her, even if she is away from him. DGR’s descriptions of the aims of poetry thus seem similar to Lacan’s account of the *objet a*: both are “object[s] of weaning” through which the subject gracefully lets go of the specific other by

“symboliz[ing]” for himself “the central lack of desire” so that he does not experience his lack as fatal, as the imaginary lover does (*Four* 104-5).

In contrast with critics who see no growth through the course of *The House of Life*, we may, by reading the sonnets chronologically, find signs of the development of a mode of intimacy with the other that is not grasping or paralyzing, as imaginary love tends to be. Instead, this later love is able to bear and even to make use of space between the self and the other. This love does not exclude symbolization, nor does it make use of it to sustain hierarchy, as many forms of symbolization do, but uses speech as love’s greatest vehicle for reinstating equality within the love relation. The sequence also reveals the development of a speaker who finds that love provides a holier form of discourse than “work, contest, fame” (13:12), and thus has learnt how to integrate his imperatives in a way that eludes the earlier speaker of “Known in Vain/65” who is torn between desire and “Work and Will” (10).

Through this process of poetic integration, DGR finds ways to enlarge the scope of his most narcissistic paintings of Dante, discovering how an enamoured subject might cope with, and ultimately perfect, his desire for the image in a way that does not require him to sublimate that desire as fully as most scholars believe Dante did. The ultimate triumph of DGR’s late poems in *The House of Life* is, thus, that they finally prove that DGR’s deviation from the Dantesque model of sublimation can produce its own viable mode of happiness. DGR’s sonneteer finally decides that love is his paramount vehicle of symbolic transcendence, effacing the private self within collective meaning as it “breath[es] in sighs and silences / Through two blent souls one rapturous undersong”

(13:13-14). By persisting in the intimate relation to the other rather than retreating into a solitary spiritual quest, DGR in *The House of Life* affirms his alternative to Dante of a path of love over a path of faith. Adhering to the beloved, DGR's sonneteer eventually discovers the grace of a conversation with her that Dante never knew with Beatrice, as well as the *objet a* that allows him to acknowledge the impossibility of fixing the beloved in any architectonic scheme.

Chapter Four

Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Lure of the Other: Hysterical Desire and the Triangulation of the Gaze

*Beauty past knowledge was displayed to me –
Not only ours: the joy of it complete
Her maker knows, I think, and only He.*

From this point on I must admit defeat.

DANTE, PARADISO

The gaze operates in a certain descent, a descent of desire, no doubt. But how can we express this? Modifying the formula I have of desire as unconscious—man's desire is the desire of the Other—I would say that it is a question of a sort of desire on the part of the Other, at the end of which is the showing.

JACQUES LACAN, FOUR FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

DGR's painting *Beata Beatrix* (1854) renders the moment in Dante's *La Vita Nuova* in which Dante has found out that Beatrice is dead, and describes in a poem how "wonderfully out of the beautiful form / Soared her clear spirit" (DGR *Works* 337). The illustration presents Beatrice with an expression of rapt beatification on her face that Evelyn Waugh has described as exhibiting "consummate delicacy and beauty" (130). And although DGR has portrayed Beatrice with her eyes closed and thus not available to an "imaginary relation of the specular state" with the viewer, in Lacan's terms, the painting is nonetheless a study in imaginary attraction (*SI* 171). The imaginary passion that *Beata Beatrix* seems to inspire emerges from how DGR composed the painting. It was based on the image of his departed wife Elizabeth Siddal, and he

regarded it as “a memorial” to her, whom he adored with a first love that is displayed in the early sonnets of *The House of Life* (Surtees 93). He thus painted Beatrice’s eyes closed, based on an idea that occurred to him only after Siddal had died. While signaling the closing off of her eyes to the viewer’s eyes, this gesture seems to reinforce her exclusive accessibility to his heart, a relation emphasized by how the two other persons in the frame, Dante and the angel Love, can see Beatrice only from the back. A viewer of *Beata Beatrix* is thus permitted to share DGR’s experience of a unique witness of her passion, while the rapture upon her face draws out a similar rapture in the viewer, like the lovers in their mutual abandonment in DGR’s painting of *Paulo and Francesca de Rimini*.¹ What Julia Kristeva calls a “merging apotheosis” of narcissistic love, in which boundaries between subject and object blur, is thus induced between the viewer and the painting (*Tales* 3).

But while DGR found ways to render his portrayal of Beatrice lushly intimate, he also needed to confirm that Beatrice was experiencing a genuine holy transformation, as the title indicates, by suggesting the onset of an external, blessing power. One way of characterizing this transformative power is as a higher desire or appreciation, of the sort that Dante writes of near to the end of the *Paradiso*. When Dante finally relinquishes Beatrice as his personal guide so she may take her place in the heavens, he acknowledges that the God who blesses Beatrice desires her even more than he does: only her “Maker” knows “the complete” joy of her beauty (30:20-21). In similar terms, DGR refers to blessed virgins as “God’s desire” in *The House of Life* (85.11), and in *Beata Beatrix* DGR likewise conveys a higher desire that surmounts the human drama.



ILLUSTRATION 8
Beata Beatrix (1854)
D. G. ROSSETTI, Surtees Catalogue no. 168

These reflections by Dante, as well as DGR, upon a greater desire organizing events, are all in keeping with Lacan's theory that when one views a painting, one unconsciously desires the object "on the part of the Other," whose presence is signaled in the painting by a "a gleam of light" (*Four* 115). DGR accordingly produces his effect of a divine desire in the scene by illuminating Beatrice magnificently from behind in such a way that casts her head in a halo, as though blessed by the rising light (*Four* 97). This dawning luminosity seems to alert the viewer that while he is taking his special viewing of Beatrice's joy, a divine force is approaching from behind, heralded by Dante and the angel. In psychoanalytic terms, moreover, the presence of this superior desire does not negate the viewer's own desire for the object, but augments it. As Kristeva describes, "love" may be experienced in relation to the Other, as a "gleaming reflection of the One, which the soul watches and loves," so that one's desire becomes sublimated into symbolic obeisance (*Tales* 111). Marsh has accordingly observed that in *Beata Beatrix*, DGR comes as close as he ever does to matching Dante's "idealised love for Beatrice with his own for Lizzie" (*DGR* 303).²

As Kristeva's comment indicates, however, this idealized form of love is not purely addressed towards the beloved herself, but also towards the One who is reflected upon her. When Dante arrives in Paradise, he similarly reveals that a benefit of his love for Beatrice is that it allows him to perceive God through her, when she assumes her place in the cosmic ladder. Then he faces the "lumen gloriae [that] / Reveals the Maker to created mind," and witnesses its "pure intellectual light, fulfilled with love," thus having his own spirit refined through the proximity (*Paradise* 30.100-1). Lacan similarly

proposes that a viewer of a painting anticipates a sort of “*showing*” of the Other, and in DGR’s portrayal of Beatrice, the potential for such a showing seems to be what endows the painting with extra excitement. According to this Lacanian logic, as the viewer admires Beatrice’s visage in DGR’s painting, he feels that she is growing holier moment by moment, and thus that he will soon be in a position to become “[i]n veil so luminous ... enwrap” as Dante is when he watches Beatrice’s apotheosis in paradise (*Paradise* 30.19, 40-49).

Like Dante, therefore, the viewer who adores an enchanted object is thus promised his own version of sublimation within the symbolic order, or at least the sensation of it. In Chapter Three I discussed how DGR uses symbolism as a way to distance himself and his viewer from the immediate libidinal relation to the object by “elevat[ing], spiritualiz[ing] and sublimat[ing]” desire, in Kristeva’s words (*Powers* 120). *Beata Beatrix* displays how DGR achieves these spiritualizing aims not only through symbolic and fetishistic imagery, but also in the way his paintings compose the sightlines of viewers, objects, and symbolic Others. Alongside the “imaginary relation of the specular state” discussed in Chapter Three, which captures a sense of personal intimacy with an other, DGR’s paintings thus also exhibit what Lacan describes as a non-“intersubject[ive]” structure of looks, in which persons seek to attract the gaze of the symbolic master to secure themselves individually (*Four* 100, 89). Explaining Lacan’s theory, Copjec reasserts that the determining gaze in art does not belong either to the viewer, or the artist, but to an Other “behind the image” (36).³ The viewer who stands in front of the painting can experience the sensation of being in the sightline of the Other,

who is normally “turned back on itself, absorbed in its own enjoyment” but may be attracted by the painting to look across it, as God is attracted to look across the beautiful Beatrice (36). In broader terms a viewer looks upon a painting to be “inserted in a function” within the symbolic order, over and above any more direct libidinal attraction he experiences towards the object portrayed within the painting (MacCannell 125). As Lacanian critic Juliet Flower MacCannell explains, this decision to be inserted in a symbolic function is the fundamental bargain of the symbolically-subjected individual, who exchanges his “conscious desire” to obtain the “positive evaluation” that “the Symbolic promises.”

We may, in turn, characterize Beatrice’s role in the picture in terms of Lacan’s concept of the painting as a “lure,” which he claims that the painter provides the viewer so that he will be able to “trap ... the gaze” that he may not be able to attract on his own merits (*Four* 101). One example Lacan provides of how the painter designs the painting as a lure is that of the medieval artist who produces icons “play[ing] with those things, in this case images, that may arouse the desire of God” on behalf of a devout viewer (113). *Beata Beatrix* is thus a scenario in which a beautiful lady is offered up as a “lure” to “arouse” a phallic other in that viewer’s presence, in order to attract his blessing. In order to attain this benediction, however, the viewer must agree to be intimidated by this castrating force, and trade his personal desire for the feeling of grandeur he can obtain in the presence of the Other’s greater desire—as Dante does when he “admits defeat” to God’s higher desire for Beatrice. The painter’s ability to compose in such a manner ensures that a painting like *Beata Beatrix* offers more than a simple libidinal thrill to the

viewer; as Lacan insists, the artist's "practice" serves the symbolic order by encouraging the viewer's "renunciation" of individualistic libido in the subject in favor of a cooler symbolic satisfaction that Lacan characterizes as "Apollonian" (111,101).

Critics have previously noted that DGR's portraits of beautiful women serve not just the individual libido of its viewers, but also serve symbolic structures of power. We have previously seen how Pollock depicts DGR's paintings of women as "screen[s] across which masculine fantasies of knowledge, power and possession can be enjoyed" (123). But these scenarios Pollock depicts, in which men are merely aiming to express their domination and thus "coincid[e]" with the gaze, in Copjec's term, seem too brutish to describe all of DGR's frequently sensitive and yearning art (36). Sussman similarly describes DGR's art through Eve Sedgwick's concept of "homosexuality" (141-2), which Sedgwick defines as the exchange of women by men to "maintain[] and transmit[] patriarchal power" (25). This concept does seem to capture one of DGR's motives for painting pinups such as *Bocca Baciata* (1859) during the 1860s, for a circle of friends who also exchanged mistresses. However, Sedgwick's explanation of homosocial desire suggests a patriarchal network in which power flows naturally among men. It thus seems a term of only limited use, given how social relations are characterized not only by exchange, but also by more obscure quests for position and security within a situation in which no person has any genuine source of power, while all are seeking to "mask its lack," in Lacan's term ("Phallus," 289).

Such dynamics as we see in *Beata Beatrix* are more aptly characterized by the concept of "hysterical desire," which Lacan defines broadly as the desire to "sustain the

desire of the father,” a definition that characterizes not only the viewer of art, but the main aspiration of the symbolic subject, as he generally theorizes it (25; 38).⁴ If homosocial desire describes a means for the exchange of power among actual men, hysterical desire more accurately characterizes the symbolic function of a work like *Beata Beatrix*, whose magnificence lies in how it permits the viewer’s proximity to a power so grand it could never be held by any real individual. Hysterical desire also helps to characterize the asymmetrical dynamics of desire in secular contexts where the relevant symbolic Master is a human invested with exorbitant power, or, more commonly in DGR, is an abstract body of humanity that may endow social acceptance or fame. Lacan indeed posits that an artist can “vary the selection” from among different gazes, depending on his intuition into the contemporary nature of his symbolic order (101); DGR certainly shifted between different gazes over the course of his career, sometimes referring to a divine onlooker, as he does in *Beata Beatrix*, but sometimes retreating from this divine context to suggest a human onlooker who is nonetheless abstract and ideal.

An account of hysterical desire adds, moreover, to the critical tools for analyzing the symbolic value of femininity in DGR’s painting and poetry. In particular, it supplements the frequently expressed idea that DGR feared femininity because it represented the prospect of male castration. Such readings take as paradigmatic DGR’s occasional portraits of malignant women, such as *Lady Lilith* (1868) and the accompanying poem “Body’s Beauty” (1867), in which a Victorian version of Adam’s first wife examines herself in the mirror “subtly of herself contemplative,” and “draws men to watch the bright web she can weave” / Till heart and body and life are in its hold”

(6-8). Virginia Allen generalizes *Lady Lilith* into a presumption that DGR was “neurotic[ally] obsess[ed] with the legendary hazards of female sexuality,” and particularly with the threat posed by the “new woman,” who threatened to become “free of male control” (286, 192). Soenstroem supports Allen’s interpretation, believing that DGR demonized female powers of destructiveness after his wife died, when he worried that physical beauty could become “a powerful, evil snare” (115). But while DGR may have occasionally portrayed dangerous women in art and poetry, broad psychoanalytical extrapolation from works like *Lady Lilith* is problematic, given how anomalous such portrayals are in DGR’s oeuvre as a whole.⁵ Overall, DGR did not generally portray women as malignant or menacing, but rather as exquisitely soulful. As Soenstroem himself points out, holy women such as *Beatrice Beatrix* (1864) “define the largest group” of DGR’s women, while the next largest group of DGR’s paintings are noble ladies of sensibility, such as *La Pia de Tolomei* (1868) and *La Donna Della Finestra* (1879). DGR’s generally sympathetic portrayal of women accords, meanwhile, with the record of his relations with women, which Marsh observes to have been “relatively emancipated” and spent in occasional contact with female artists and feminists who included Anna Howitt and Barbara Smith Bodichon (Marsh 116).⁶ It thus appears likely that DGR displayed no general personal fear of the “perilous principle of femininity” of which he corresponded with Thomas Gordon Hake in the course of researching *Lady Lilith* (286). Additionally, there is a basis for reading many of DGR’s femme fatales such as *Venus Verticordia* (1864) in a different manner, viewing the danger that they symbolize to the viewer as that of a paternal castration, given how such women seem to be strongly

illuminated by a figure beyond the scene; such a reading is more consistent with DGR's general portrayal of the male subject as intimidated by an imperious Other, like the pilgrim who gives all to his "jealous God" in "The Staff and Scrip," for instance.

This chapter as a whole analyzes the dynamics of hysterical desire in DGR's career, not only as they are expressed in the various stages of his painting, but also as they are more explicitly presented in some of his major narrative poems. The first section, "Phallic Anxiety in the Narrative Poems," follows how DGR initially articulated a hysterical dynamic of desire between men and women in his narrative poems: "The Blessed Damozel" (1847/50), "The Bride's Prelude" (1848/81), "The Staff and Scrip" (1852/56), and "Jenny" (1848/70). These poems all solicit—or despair of—the gaze of an Other beyond the scene of the poem's action, such as the God that blesses "The Blessed Damozel" but not the man who loves her, or the community of men to whom the speaker of "Jenny" orates his monologue. The poems further suggest that DGR's hysterical portrait of desire grew out of a conviction that his masculine sexuality was shameful, and could be redeemed only if the male subject renounced his desire on behalf of the desire of the Other, as Dante did. In Žižek's terms, these poems depict the subject either "staging [his] castration," through means of symbolic submission, or hanging on to his desire at his peril (104).

The next section, "The Lure and the Light," goes on to show DGR's experiments in graphically reflecting the position of the male in relation to the gaze of the Other. It shows how in one of his first drawings, *Genevieve* (1848), he attempted to represent the structure of the gaze concretely, as a triangulation of sightlines within the frame of the

picture. However, it then demonstrates how after DGR produced this iconic drawing, he developed more abstract techniques to dramatize the effects of the gaze through the use of light, as we may see in “Art Catholic” paintings such as *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1849) and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (1850). As Lacan observes, the effect of the gaze upon one is that of being amid a beam of powerful light, so that “that which is light looks at me” (*Four* 97). Lacan thus argues that paintings are structured to evoke the beam of the Other’s gaze somewhere on its field, and also to evoke the shadow of the viewing subject who blocks the gaze in an obscure zone in the painting that Lacan variously calls “the screen,” “the stain,” “the spot,” and “the hole” (*Four* 96, 108-9).⁷ Extending some of the conclusions of the previous section, “The Lure and the Light” continues to find that DGR’s account of God’s relation to men is fairly anxious, seeing men as excluded from his gaze unless they come across it in a shameful fashion. In contrast, it observes that women tend to be more-or-less unconditionally blessed by God, ensuring that they are available to men to function as mediators of phallic approval, a function that accounts for the degree of radiance and nobility DGR habitually lavished upon his female subjects.

“Hysterical Desire in the Portraiture” explores how DGR came to leave behind his idealistic Art Catholic practice in the late 1850s and to develop a more commercial practice of sensual portraiture in the Renaissance vein. The commercialization of his art does not seem to have been a calculated agenda for DGR—at least not at first, given how DGR’s earliest sensual portraits of women were actually paintings of his own mistresses commissioned by personal friends, suggesting the momentary dominance of homosocial dynamics upon his art. However, by increasingly stylizing and ornamenting these sensual

portraits, DGR went on to develop a highly commercial form of decorative art. While a number of critics have seen this move in DGR's art to have involved a distinct retreat from artistic integrity, the two styles of art have much in common, in terms of the Lacanian theory of the gaze. Kristeva observes in *Tales of Love*, her history of love's artistic and cultural formations, that a single triangulation of "adulterous" desire underpinned Renaissance love for the virgin Mary and courtly adoration for the wife of the aristocratic Master (*Tales* 280). It may be similarly argued that DGR's later, sensual paintings on adulterous themes, such as *Fazio's Mistress* (1863) and *Helen of Troy* (1863), bring into focus adulterous implications buried in his earlier religious art. Moreover, while McGann and Fredeman describe DGR's shift to a desacralized form of art as an apostasy to his artistic values, Lacan argues that in selecting a new gaze, an artist practices his true "morality" as an artist, which changes with the demands of his society. While DGR himself was not fully satisfied by this "morality," his service of a broader social dynamic may be observed in retrospect.

Finally, "The Resistance of *Mary Magdalene*" focuses attention on a paradox observed throughout this chapter, as despite DGR's symbolically-determined representation of femininity, his paintings tend to simultaneously emphasize the individual identities of the women he depicts. One of DGR's strengths as an artist is his animated, sensitive faces, which have led McGann to wonder why even DGR's most iconic paintings of women—including *Lady Lilith*—are "revelations of embodied soul," and "scene[s] of wonderment, inexhaustibly interesting" that exceed the requirements of the symbolic meanings they convey (*Game* 119-20). McGann therefore proposes that

DGR may thus design even subtler “argument[s] with images and purely pictorial materials”; however, it is hard to believe that DGR worked so hard at rendering women’s concrete humanity in order only to heighten the abstract character of his paintings. Instead, this effect in his paintings, as well as his occasional emphases on the individuality of the women in his poetry, seems to insist that the hysterical subject must not merely use women generically, but love them individually. Kristeva has noted that Dante is only able to perceive divine presence through Beatrice because he passionately loves her, and the “meaning” he seeks is ultimately “internal to the luminous refractions of the narcissistic world” (294). In Lacan’s terms, Dante thus affirms that in order to obtain a transformation through the other, one must regard her not merely through one’s sexual “drives,” which may be satisfied by any object, but by love based in the imaginary order, which is “always unique” (*Four* 24). To some degree, DGR indirectly conveys the same message: one must wonder at women’s souls and “thought[s],” as the narrator of “Jenny” does, in order to receive their “grace” (60,18). “Hysterical Desire in the Portraiture” therefore looks at a signature drawing within DGR’s career, *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee* (1858), in which DGR distinctly reflects on how the viewer must retain a perceptive relation to the other of art in order that his own symbolic practices not become utterly bankrupt.

I. Phallic Anxiety in the Narrative Poems

In the first decade of his artistic career, DGR initiated the bulk of his narrative and dramatic poems, which include “The Blessed Damozel” (1848/1870), “Jenny”

(1848/1870), "The Bride's Prelude" (1848/1881), and "The Staff and Scrip" (1852/1856).

One feature these poems have in common is that they tend to explicitly characterize a hysterical model of the male subject, as the central male figures in these poems are virtually all burdened by a sense of inadequacy or shame, and highly concerned with an Other beyond the scene whom their hope of attracting rests in a mediating female. Thus, while many of these poems were thus completed or substantially revised in the 1860s, '70s and '80s, they contrast greatly in their expressions of male anxiety and supplication with the willfully self-indulgent sonnets of *The House of Life*. DGR perhaps recognized this comparative nervousness of his narrative and dramatic art, and left one of these poems unfinished, while initiating few later poems that treat the fate of masculinity in a similarly objective manner. He meanwhile retreated from the bleakness of his own wide perspective by taking refuge in the intense subjectivity expressed in the sonnets that form *The House of Life*. At the same time, however, these narrative poems affirm one message of *The House of Life*, which is that love offers the only consolation to the subject alienated within a world empty of meaning, or mercy.

"The Blessed Damozel," DGR's first published poem, roughly emulates Dante's *Commedia* by figuring a moral hierarchy between a damned man and the woman who strives to save him. The damozel, according to Marsh, is a version of Beatrice (23), and accordingly prays for God to raise up her lover so that she and her beloved can "bathe ... in God's sight," a gaze she describes aptly through the metaphor of "deep wells of light" (76-8). However, the poem offers a skeptical revision of the *Commedia*, as well as other traditional romances in which women permit the salvation of men. While Beatrice is

permitted to guide Dante through a purgative vision that can inspire him to reverse his hellbound trajectory, the lover of the damozel doubts that there is anything she can do so that,

God [shall] lift
 To endless unity
 The soul whose likeness with thy soul
 Was but its love for thee[.] (99-102)

Unlike Dante, who could prospectively attain redemption through laborious effort and the help of Beatrice, this male lover deterministically believes that his soul is inferior, and thus irredeemable. This damozel also seems less spiritually empowered than Beatrice, despite being a “blessed” angel, for she has “prayed in heaven” alongside the lover, but to no avail (63-4), unlike the similarly “blessed” Beatrice, who is able to set in motion the events of the *Commedia* (*Inferno* 2.133).

The reader must therefore conclude that either DGR’s male figure is more fallen than Dante, or he is confined to a more inexorable symbolic order than Dante’s. In the first case, DGR’s male figure would simply be guilty of worse crimes than the sinfulness symbolized by Dante’s “dark wood” (1.2). However, there is much evidence in the poem that the second interpretation is more apt: that the speaker’s metaphysical destiny, is, unlike Dante’s, independent of any efforts he makes at prayer or reform. In general, the speeches of the damozel and her lover, and the descriptions of them in the ballad in which these speeches are nested, fail to reveal any connections between their moral natures or actions and their spiritual fates. For instance, the man believes himself to be hell-bound while believing his damozel is blessed, even though there are no indications in the poem of his relative sinfulness. The man’s recollection of how the damozel’s “hair /

fell all about my face,” may lead us to infer that the man is damned for a sexual transgression, since no other cause for his fate is mentioned (21-2). But it takes two to produce such sins, and the man mentions no other woman than his “warm” and desirous damozel, who has nonetheless attained heaven (46). Neither do the lovers appear to be distinguished by their inner natures. While in heaven, the damozel’s thoughts are plaintive—more like Francesca’s than Beatrice’s—as she moans for her lost love, “I wish that he were come to me” (67). The narrator’s description of how “her bosom must have made / The bar she leaned on warm” further suggests that the damozel remains fleshy and even desirous in heaven (45-6); while she tends to be depicted by the speaker in images of fertility: her hair “yellow like ripe corn,” and surrounded by a group of handmaidens who are endowed like harvest goddesses: “Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen, / Margaret and Rosalys ... with bound locks / And foreheads garlanded” (12, 107-8). These images of the damozel may be the fancies of the narrator, but even so, they suggest that both he and the damozel’s lover believe her to be both sexually desirous and essentially good.

In contrast, the man portrays his own damnable desire through symbols of sterility, claiming that he lives among “the autumn fall of leaves” (23). Moreover, the unholy nature of his desire seems to trump a generally fine character. That in his final thought, when he remarks upon how he “hear[s] [his damozel’s] tears,” he worries about his damozel’s disillusioned hopes rather than about his own eternal suffering, speaks well of his generosity as a lover (97,144). Insofar as it irrevocably damns such a loving person on account of a sexual sin, the Christian cosmos in “The Blessed Damozel” seems intended, perhaps, to seem merciless in its justice—a quality we can also interpret in a number of

ways. In Kristeva's account of the various ways that the Christian tradition understands sin, she provides a number of possible ways to interpret the man's conundrum. One sense of sin within Christianity is an objective one: a calculus of purity and impurity, inherited from Judaism, that "defin[es] a sexual identity" (*Powers* 103). In these terms, the lover's problem may simply be that his fate is defined in relation to an inflexible code of sexual activities. The poem militates against this reading, however, by describing the damozel in vividly sexual terms and referring to no other sexual relationship on the part of the male lover, while seeming to rule out the possibility of grace that was available to Paulo and Francesca de Rimini, given the ineffectiveness of prayer. Another, more incisive reading of the "The Blessed Damozel" is thus suggested by Kristeva's description of Christianity's other, "subjective," logic of "interiorize[d]" purity and impurity, according to which sin is "a matter for the subject himself to decide" (*Powers* 103, 118-9). In this case, even if the male lover in "The Blessed Damozel" has committed no sexual transgressions other than those shared with the earthy damozel, he may still be more sinful than her if he subjectively feels himself to be. Insofar as "The Blessed Damozel" seems to make the lover's damnation a matter of his own conviction rather than any object transgression, it blurs the same boundary between religion and psychology that St. Paul, too, blurred, when he claimed that "to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean" (Romans 14:14, in Kristeva 119).

A reading of the poem thus produces a somewhat different effect than DGR's later painting of *The Blessed Damozel* (1874), which graphically solidifies the hierarchical distinction between the man and his damozel by putting them in different

frames, hers atop his. In contrast, the poem is far more ambiguous about the objective conditions of the characters it is describing, insofar as it juxtaposes multiple voices, all of which seem potentially fanciful; in particular, the narrator's uncertain depiction of how the woman must have made "the bar she leaned on warm" plants a question as to whether this account has any authority (46). As Harrison notes, "the lover's dialogue ... is at various levels fantastical" and is punctuated with "unsettling descriptions and events" ("Parody" 751), making the poem lack persuasiveness as an objective account of a theological condition. While Harrison reads these factors as indications of "self-reflexiv[ity]" and "self-parod[y]" in "The Blessed Damozel," they may also point to the poem's status as a fantasy, where these unstable descriptions and events draw attention to the subjectivity of the conditions that they are mapping. "The Blessed Damozel," while ostensibly a poem about religious condition of sin, may thus really be about the psychological experience of the sense of sin, whose autonomy in the subject from any collective system of regulation Freud captures in his definition of "moral masochism" (*Ego* 43). Lacan similarly describes how the superegoic sense of sin resides in the subject's individual "unconscious," where "the structure of [his] desire" interpenetrates "the structure of the law" that he individually holds (*Four* 34). The psychological autonomy of the sense of sin from shared codes of religious practice suggests that even if DGR were an agnostic—as D. M. Bentley sees him to have been (83)—he could have been afflicted with the syndrome of shame outlined in "The Blessed Damozel," if his desire conflicted with a particularly repressive internal law.

In particular, it seems highly likely that the "The Blessed Damozel" portrays a distinctly Victorian syndrome of masculine anxiety and sexual guilt, whose ubiquity in that period has been observed by social historians, and which was likely exacerbated in DGR's particular case by conditions in the Rossetti household. Houghton accordingly observed that industrialization and scientific discovery in the Victorian period produced an anxiety of impotence, of being "small and inconsequential, caught in the grip of huge social or physical forces" (336). James Eli Adams has similarly noted that the growth of capitalism in the Victorian period entailed a need for men to be dutiful rather than self-willed, which in turn induced "an unease with male sexual aggression" (129).

Within the Rossetti family, DGR's mother echoed this Victorian unease with male sexuality in Christian terms, expressing a general "distaste for lust as a matter of masculine appetite," and thus perhaps helping to impart in DGR the sense of automatic male damnation that is evoked by "The Blessed Damozel" (Marsh 200). Meanwhile, religion in the Rossetti household was "a female affair," as Marsh suggests, sweeping up the daughters while Gabriele Rossetti and his sons tended towards agnosticism (26-7); this distinction perpetuated a division of holiness along gender lines that echoes the schism between female blessedness between and male damnation in "The Blessed Damozel."⁸ There are, moreover, indications that DGR may have been highly sensitive to feelings of spiritual exclusion. As W. M. Rossetti has described, DGR responded to the schism between religious and agnostic attitudes by being both "sceptical" and "prone to the supernatural and the marvellous" (in Bentley 166). He thus forged the internal compromise Bentley calls DGR's "positive agnosticism," rejecting authorized religion,

but taking on a highly idealistic form of art through which he could abstractly “serve some ‘[O]ther,’ be it society, morality, [or] religion” (73). Thus, even if DGR disavowed his mother’s Christian condemnation of male lust, his habits of idealization likely sustained the conditions of a sense of sin, given how, as Kristeva finds, the service of any ideal leads to the formulation of a “sacred” sustained through “projective mechanisms and obsessive rituals” (*Powers* 58). Adams, for instance, reports that non-believing Victorians tended to sustain an ideal of purity they had internalized in their Christian upbringings by idealizing notions such as duty or ‘woman,’ which Victorians constructed as “angelic,” in contrast with men (129). “The Blessed Damozel” evidently draws on this Victorian habit of idealizing femininity, one consequence of which seems to have been the commensurate de-idealization of masculinity.

Despite the archaic tone of this poem, therefore, its presentation of male desire as automatically guilty, and permanently lower in spiritual rank to that of an unexceptional damozel, seems hysterical in a peculiarly Victorian and Rossettian manner. In other ways, too, the poem revises traditional genres such as Romance. In this genre, as Kristeva points out, men who are self-consciousness of sin benefit from that consciousness, becoming quest figures who “hold the keys that open the doors to Morality and Knowledge,” as Kristeva observes (*Powers* 122). Such romantic heroes are, we may add, typically assisted by women who, like DGR’s blessed damozel, are unencumbered by their own spiritual anxieties. But while the Damozel features the useful unconsciousness of Beatrice or Gloriana, the value she holds for her lover is more ambiguous than in these Romance narratives, given that she is actually powerless to help him. Thus, the poem

takes on a particularly hysterical resonance, since the benefit the man receives in this poem from the damozel is not a direct symbolic success that she formally helps him obtain—as it is for Dante or the Redcrosse Knight—but rather the compensatory value of the love she inspires in him, which ennobles him, even if it doesn't save him. In a similar way Freud notes how when the insecure neurotic “possess[es] the beloved object,” that possession seems to “exalt[]” the self” and thus provide a salve for his low opinion of himself (*Narcissism* 405, 410). “The Blessed Damozel” thus seems to overwrite traditional romance, in which the lady is useful to the symbolic elevation of the hero, with a characterization of the emotional needs of the Victorian male deprived of those archaic opportunities of symbolic ascent.⁹

Another of DGR's poems that describes how the Victorian male seeks symbolic approval, but due to the elusiveness of that approval requires the grace of love, is “Jenny.” The dramatic monologue “Jenny” is spoken by a young man who visits a familiar prostitute and, because she is sleeping, gallantly forfeits his initial intention, instead analyzing her condition. Like the male speaker of “The Blessed Damozel,” the speaker of “Jenny” is characterized by “sympathy” and “chivalric generosity,” as Sonstroem has observed, as in a liberal manner he largely absolves Jenny of blame for her occupation (59). In his excoriating critique of the factor of “male lust” in prostitution, however, DGR's speaker goes beyond purely utilitarian analysis, and instead brings to mind the religiously-toned distaste of DGR's mother towards male sexuality.

With its oscillation between tones of liberality and condemnation, “Jenny” is highly ambiguous in its position on sin. Amanda Anderson discusses how, in the

speaker's presentation of the prostitute Jenny, he induces a textual "instability between fallenness and conventional purity" (108-9), by, for instance, referring to the prostitute as "Poor shameful Jenny, full of grace" and thus setting her on the same plane as the virgin Mary, and by describing how she sleeps with a "lamp ... / Like a wise virgin's" (18; 315-6; 156). Not merely ironic, these allusions sustain the paradox about female sexuality DGR establishes in "The Blessed Damozel," where the damozel is simultaneously saturated by desire and blessed. The speaker also reveals what Joan Rees calls an "awareness of the instability of virtue and vice" as he testifies to the unknowability of sin in order to clear Jenny from metaphysical accusations (156). He observes vices in Jenny, but only the a-sexual ones like vanity and materialism that he guesses are the contents of her "grim web" of dreams (342). He further admits that Jenny's dreams are the typical fantasies of ordinary girls, such as his "cousin Nell," who is similarly "fond of dress, and change, and praise" as well as "love" (185-90). Due to Jenny's lack of distinguishing marks of sin, the speaker concludes that the most significant context of her criminality is social rather than metaphysical: she has been cast into "man's pitiless doom" and "lifelong hell," though her ultimate metaphysical fate remains in question (244-5).

At the same time as the speaker minimizes Jenny's sexual sin, however, he stridently condemns the sexual sin of man, repeatedly turning from his chivalrous analysis of the conditions of Jenny's fall to a sterner chastisement of male desire. Murray Roston observes that the image of the fallen women in Victorian art frequently acted as "a personification of [man]'s failure to attain" his moral ideals, and consequently as a sign of "male guilt" (51). In this way, when the speaker looks at Jenny he declares that

“the woman almost fades from view,” revealing a broader “cipher of man’s changeless sum / Of lust” (277-9). For Jenny’s situation he thus blames the “hateful[] actions” of “man,”

Who spares not to end what he began,
Whose acts are ill and his speech ill,
Who having used you at his will,
Thrusts at his side. (84-7)

The emphasis on the problem of male desire in “Jenny” is not an incidental aspect of the poem; W. M. Rossetti indeed recalls that the poem as a whole grew, in part, out of a fragment about male lust that DGR wrote in 1847 that remains in “Jenny” (*Works* n. 649), in which the speaker muses that (male) “lust” is “like a toad within a stone /... there since the earth was curs’d (282-3). The speaker who analyzes Jenny in spiritually ambivalent terms sustains this unambiguous conviction of masculine damnedness throughout the final poem, as he pleads, “how atone, / Great God, for this which man has done?” (241-2). The sudden mention of God comes as a surprise in the monologue of this cosmopolitan young man, but reveals how the vestigial imagery of religion persists in the psyches of even DGR’s most seemingly cavalier characters, as it likely did in himself.

In a particularly theoretical section of “Jenny,” however, the speaker shifts from a metaphysical analysis of the sense of sin to a semiotic one that anticipates the theories of Lacan, as he locates the opposition between masculinity and femininity in the signification of their genitalia. He observes that the “Paphian,” or wanton, “Venus” still “seems / A goddess,” indicating that women may exhibit desiring bodies and remain uncompromised in the symbolic order (362-3). In contrast, men must not expose their genitals, lest they seem to lack power: “Priapus” must be hidden “to the waist” in order

that “whoso look on him shall see / An eligible deity” (366-8). These conditions of masculine power are also explored by Lacan, who notes that the phallus can “play its role” as a sign of power “only when veiled,” for then it appears as a “sign of latency” with the potential to act (“Phallus” 288). In the ancient mysteries of Greece, Lacan points out, the exposure of the penis invoked a “demon of shame” whose role was to “strike the signified”—or penis—in order to maintain the mystique of the phallus as a “signifier,” a cause of desire rather than an effect of it. DGR’s speaker likewise seems to be ashamed of the exposure of his desire, insofar as it threatens to expose his genitals in the condition of being merely a “cause of desire” and thereby to reveal his distance from the condition of phallic power. In a strikingly perceptive gesture, he thus admits that male lust is troublesome not only because of the damage it does to women such as Jenny, and not only because it is supposedly damned by God, but because its exhibition counteracts the appearance of male autonomy and reveals men’s dependencies. Perhaps partly not to expose himself in this way, the speaker ends his visit to the prostitute’s chamber without the usual consummation, but rather with him displacing the signs of that consummation by putting coins in Jenny’s hair, a gesture he admits to carrying out because he is “ashamed of [his] own shame” (381).

The person who wishes to relinquish his desire has a recourse, however, which is to subordinate it to the desire of the Other. We may see the speaker of “Jenny” enacting such a submission, when after he experiences shame, he thereupon describes how he is bound on a transcendental quest for the purity of his soul, through “thoughts” that will seek “a far gleam” and clear “a dark path” (386-7). While the image of the remote

“gleam” seems a symbol of the yearned-for gaze of the other, the image of the “dark path” implies that a Dantesque route through darkness must be undertaken in order for the speaker to find that gleam. This path the speaker intends to pursue through “thought” is, moreover, distinctly intellectual; it thus seems to refer back to the academic context grounded early in the poem, where the speaker describes the room “full of books” that has been keeping him from Jenny’s room (23). The speaker also indicates that the monologue expressed inside Jenny’s parlor is intended for an academic community beyond it when he mocks himself as to “what use” his thoughts are in the presence of a sleeping prostitute, thereby implying that the monologue’s true audience may be elsewhere (297). To a great extent, moreover, the monologue partakes of the quality of an academic prolusion, where the speaker argues with himself about how far he may take his analytical conceits; as, for instance, when he describes Jenny in an extended conceit of ravaged flowers, and then cuts himself off because his analysis has overreached: “[n]ay, nay, mere words” (121). Through what Riede describes as the speaker’s “verbal pyrotechnics, his learning, his wit,” he seems thus to indicate that “Jenny” is intended for an abstract community through whom he could redeem his desire as an intellectual achievement (106). This ideal intellectual entity beyond the frame of “Jenny” is functionally equivalent to the God beyond the frame of *Beatrice Beatrix*, and is likewise symbolized as a “gleam.” In this sense, the speaker offers his reverie upon “Jenny” as a “lure” to these abstract Other[s], who, if they find it engaging, may allow him to trade his problematic desire for a positive evaluation—an intellectual sublimation particularly

necessary for this speaker who has no idea of how to “atone” in the religious sense, as he acknowledges (241).

The speaker’s need to interest an ideal Other that is an intellectual community of men helps, meanwhile, to explain the curiously mixed tone of “Jenny,” which alternates between condemnations of male lust towards Jenny and references to her in lascivious imagery that seems intended to arouse that very desire, such as her “wealth of loosen’ed hair, [her] silk ungirdled and unlac’d / And warm sweets open to the waist” (46-8).

Desire, as we have seen in *Beata Beatrix*, is not extinguished through a process of symbolic redemption, only transferred out of the subject, who must arouse the Other’s interest in the object to effect his bargain. Robin Sheets has analyzed the speaker of “Jenny” as a client of pornography, but it may thus be more precise to describe the speaker as a purveyor of high-toned pornography, that combines salacious reportage with intellectual sublimation in the same way that the painters “Raphael” and “Leonardo,” whom the speaker mentions, pictured beautiful women “to men’s souls” (237-8).

The poem’s basic structure as an exchange between an individual man and a collective, academic Other is proven in the image where the narrator places coins amid Jenny’s hair. Sheets argues that in this moment the speaker shows his will to dominate and possess Jenny, “liken[ing] himself to ... Zeus who descended to Danae’s lap in a shower of gold” (155). But there is no clear expression of power in this payment, which substitutes fetishistically for sexual domination, rather than enacting it. As we have seen, moreover, this gesture elicits feelings of unease in the speaker, rather than of grandeur. Zizek aptly analyzes the fetishistic gesture as asserting not a claim of power over a

desired other, but rather submission to an Other: it is a “fetishist staging of castration” whereby the subject relieves anxiety regarding his desire by actively constraining that desire within a discursive code within the field of the Other (104). At the moment that the fetishist has fully relinquished his desire through his performance of castration, “the domination [of the Other] over the subject is complete.” Such a domination of the subject by the community of readers seems to be symbolized by the speaker’s final “disintegration” of himself into a “shower of gold,” which is superfluous to the speaker’s relationship to Jenny, but seems more plausibly a symbolic payment the speaker is hoping to receive for his poem. It is equivalent to the “money shot” in pornographic films, perhaps, where the male porn star ejaculates onto the body of the woman and thus signifies the submission of his desire to the Other of the viewer’s fantasy.

As a poem about prostitution, moreover, “Jenny” thus seems partly to be about the prostitution of the artist who seeks to excite the interest of Other not only on behalf of himself, but on behalf of his readers or patrons. In Chapter Three, we saw that DGR explained his switch from identification as a painter to a poet because his verse, “being unprofitable, has remained unprostituted” (Gaunt 106-7). In this phrase, DGR acknowledged that commercial popularity for an artist requires a form of prostitution, whereby one leaves off the gratification of one’s own desire, and learns how to create the fantasies that will arouse the desire of the abstract Other on behalf of his readers, just as a literal prostitute must do so for her clients. Lacan describes how the painter’s “creation of desire” may take on “secondary” value in the market, by offering to those who “g[i]ve the artist a living” the “dialogue” with the Other than they seek through the appropriate

selection of the gaze (*Four* 111-2). In Lacanian terms, therefore, the speaker of “Jenny” occupies both the positions of the artist and the viewer, obtaining artistic and commercial status through her reputation while demonstrating how his readers’ minds may be “elevated” through contemplation (111).

Nonetheless, a reading of “Jenny” as pure exchange does not fully encompass its complex dynamics. Despite the calculated agendas that are enacted in the poem, another thread in the monologue asserts the necessity that the speaker regard Jenny with interpersonal human love in order to obtain the “grace” that the mediation of her presence offers (18). He acknowledges a presence in “Jenny” that exceeds her usefulness as a lovely offering to the Other when he wonders “what [she’s] thinking of” (58), and acknowledges that her thoughts, like his, could seek their own “far gleam” (385). Earlier in the poem, moreover, this extra, soulful presence in Jenny stimulates compassion in the speaker, which rouses his hope for his own soul, when he is struck with the concern for Jenny that leads him to “[l]et her sleep” (330). He accordingly describes this ethical intuition as a kind of dim light within himself, whereby “somehow in myself the dawn / Among stirred clouds and veils withdrawn / Strike’s greyly on her” (330-2). Sonstroem describes “Jenny” as an inverted version of “The Blessed Damozel,” in which “the lover rather than the lady [is] cast in the role of saviour” and “the saving force comes from a very human love” (59). But “Jenny” is also a double of the earlier poem, given that Jenny is also a savior to the speaker, eliciting humanizing love in him. Despite what the narrator finally asserts, therefore, his “thoughts” do not seem to be sufficient for him to attract the “far gleam” of redemption that he seeks (26, 836). As he shows in this outbreak of

feeling, he also needs the “grace” that is offered by his relationship to Jenny (18), for if the speaker were not struck by his impulse of personal consideration, he would remain purely in the grip of his impersonal and demanding symbolic order, represented by the books that “thieve” his hours (26). It is also the force of shame at his cheap symbolic gesture that leads the speaker towards a position of greater openness to the other. After he deposits the coins in Jenny’s hair, he regrets having “mock[ed]” Jenny in such an impersonal manner, and turns towards her “poor face” most fully (380-1). He goes on to consider the thoughts that may function inspirationally “in her life” as they do in his, plants a chaste kiss upon her, and utters one of the only genuinely interpersonal lines in the poem: “Good-bye, my dear” (302-8). In these gestures that involve Jenny’s face and hidden thoughts, a spirit of love based in the imaginary order is revived that supports and enhances the speaker’s project of escape from the more brutish form of his desire. The speaker’s oscillations between gestures of callous exploitation and tender concern, and between his categorization of Jenny as a woman with a “grim web” of dreams, and his iconoclastic perceptions of her as a figure of “grace,” become explicable through this duality in the poem. To a hysterical man such as the speaker who prizes the act of loving, a woman like Jenny can be a force of inspiration if she is not only a means of his own hopes for himself, but also the end of his affections. As Lacan explains, the “other sex” holds a “*jouissance*” for the subject that is “beyond the phallus” and is almost mystical, leading one to the “God face” of the Other (“God” 141, 145-7).¹⁰ For DGR, it similarly seems, a person who loves may glimpse a “far gleam” or “God’s face” that is

“supplementary” to his symbolic ascent, as Lacan finds” (141), in his experience of an interior dawn.

A man’s interconnected requirements of woman and the Other are also explored in “The Bride’s Prelude,” a narrative poem that further formulates the ambiguous position of the artist’s desire hinted at in “Jenny.” The atmosphere of “The Bride’s Prelude” is, like that of “The Blessed Damozel,” full of chiaroscuro details of the presence and absence of the gaze; it is “a world of mirrored tints minute,” in the words of the narrator (45). This poem, meanwhile, tells another story of male guilt. In this narrative, a young woman Aloyse, confesses that she has once been seduced, made pregnant, and abandoned by her fiancé, Urscelyn, whom her brothers are forcing her to marry to alleviate the family’s bankruptcy. Like the blessed damozel, Aloyse has known a rogue, though not one whom she has given a chance to reclaim by her love into the light. Instead she feels cursed by her contact with him, so that she must retreat from a “sun shed[ing] judgement-fire” (822-3).

Urscelyn, for his part, seems a peculiarly Rossettian gothic demon lover: a charmer similar to the scholar of “Jenny” who is “meek” but has a “stout heart” and “praised / [f]or letter-lore” (252-8). Like an artist, moreover, Urscelyn plies a trade that gives him access beyond his symbolic circle, acting as a doctor who lures Aloyse with a promised cure for her illness. While this seduction is portrayed as unforgivable in the poem, it is thus also qualified by a depiction of his anxious condition as a man. Urscelyn stands outside the order of power and privilege because he is only marginally related to Aloyse’s family, “[bearing] our shield, but barred athwart” (255), and thus seems to have

no legitimate way to attain access to the aristocratic Aloyse and the company of her brothers. An understanding of Urscllyn as a marginal man is further heightened if we interpret his barred family crest through Lacan's schemata of the barred subject. Lacan's primary notation for the subject is a barred "s," where the bar signifies the subject's castration through which he discovers his secondariness "in relation to the signifier" (*Four*141-2).¹¹ Like Lacan's subject, DGR's Urscllyn lacks real phallic power, and must obtain what he desires through art, whether understood as professional skill or trickery. Confirming Urscllyn's false claim to power is his name, which DGR seems to have etymologically contrived from the Greek and Latin roots for "Criminal Tail" (ur-scelus), thereby implying that the characters' phallic prerogative is unsound. Like DGR's other male characters, and like DGR himself, Urscllyn is an artist-figure, who resides outside the sphere of privilege, intruding upon it surreptitiously and rendering a violence to the privacy of women. He is, however, a darker and more unsuccessful artist than the speaker of "Jenny," for instance, as he has no way to enter the symbolic order and so is sentenced to die for his imposture and sexual crime.

"The Bride's Prelude" ends inconclusively, as Aloyse awaits Urscllyn. It is suggestive that DGR published the poem incomplete, never adding the second part of "The Bride's Prelude," in which he had planned to have Urscllyn killed in a duel. According to W. M. Rossetti, DGR wrote "it is much less tempting to take up than a new thing" (*DGR Works* n. 648). However, perhaps DGR's resistance had also to do with his having left off the story before the figure of Urscllyn appears personally in the action. By not completing this poem, DGR was neither required to kill off this familiar but

destructive male figure, nor to place him, and implicitly himself, within the scene of guilt in which Aloyse abides. Given DGR's comments about exposure in "Jenny," we may imagine that one benefit of this erasure is that it allowed DGR not to represent male desire directly. By never appearing in the action, Urscelyn remains an absence shadowed on the scene of actions, like the artist who forms a "stain" on his paintings, in Lacan's term (*Four* 97). "A Bride's Prelude" is thus an oblique parable of the gaze that evades the man, bestowing value onto the presentation of the woman and, like DGR's later paintings, displaces all of its symbolic meanings onto the face of a woman. Aloyse, who picturesquely "press[es] her hand against her throat" (91-5), in turn is a prefiguration of the women of sensibility that DGR would paint extensively in the 1860s, who radiates the values that could, if appreciated ennoble the man; as Riede observes, "the depths of her suffering ... generate[] the depths of her consciousness" (76).

"The Staff and Scrip" (1856) is the last major narrative poem that DGR initiated, and the one that constructs the most iconic triangular tableau between an artist, a woman, and a judging God. DGR based "The Staff and Scrip" on a tale in the "Gesta Romanorum," a medieval collection of Latin stories characterized by their morals (*Works* n. 649). However, he gave the tale an entirely original meaning through his interpolations and changes. The original story follows the relationship between a pilgrim and the lady he pledges to assist, whose lands are being harried by an evil duke. In return, the pilgrim asks the lady to keep his staff and scrip, which are symbolic of the Christian pilgrimage and the Christian Word, but the lady discards these items, thus making it a fable of spiritual corruption with material gain (Ferguson 181). DGR's version of "The Staff and

Scrip” transforms this moral fable into a different sort of parable, about a man who sacrifices his life in exchange for the artistic inspiration that may be endowed by a woman.

In DGR’s version of the fable, the lady in his version is a queen, and the queen does not discard, but keeps, the staff and scrip, proving her faith to the pilgrim; the change provides another indication of DGR’s relatively high regard of women. Moreover, this queen does not merely take gifts, but gives them, indicating DGR’s sense of the significance of women within the phallic order. While the pilgrim lends the woman a staff, the queen lends him “a sharp sword” (76), symbolizing Christian martyrdom (Ferguson 182), but also conveying phallic power. The pilgrim then suggestively “kisse[s]” the sword “all bare, instead of her,” perhaps to sublimate his desire for the queen into a hysterical intention to please his God (78-80). The other two gifts the lady gives the pilgrim identify the pilgrim even more distinctly as an artist. One is a “green banner wrought / With one white lily stem, / To bind his lance,” upon which the pilgrim writes and kisses “her name” (81-5). The banner thus seems symbolic of writing, and the manner in which the pilgrim “bind[s]” the phallic lance with the banner suggests an association between artistic inspiration and symbolic pursuit. The queen’s last gift is “a white shield” upon which the pilgrim “blen[ds] fair hues that sh[i]ne” and produces an image of “her face,” which he also kisses (86-90). The shield thus seems to symbolize painting, where the artist relies on the female face as a mystical charm, as DGR expresses more directly in “The Portrait” (1847/1870), where the artist “shrines [his beloved’s] face” (19). Overall, the pilgrim embodies the practices of both the hysterical artist and

writer who feels dependent upon woman for inspiration as well as for the very means to articulate that inspiration and thereby vindicate himself within a phallic economy.

Like "The Blessed Damozel," however, "The Staff and Scrip" is also expressive of DGR's concern over the quality of justice overseen by the Other. When the pilgrim dies in battle because his sword breaks "where he had kissed the blade," his fate reveals a weakness in his association with the phallus, perhaps insofar as he had inadequately sublimated his desire (157). The theology of "The Staff and Scrip" is thus as merciless as that in "The Blessed Damozel," not seemingly allowing a man to purify his desire through any kindness or good works. But the most troubling moment in this poem occurs when the queen, who is mourning, seeks consolation by opening the holy scrip that has been given her, wondering whether "letters writ to calm / Her soul lay in the scrip" (177-8). When she opens the scrip she finds nothing but "a torpid balm / And dust of palm" (179-80), suggesting empty words and ashes (Ferguson 36). These revelations convey the instability, or inaccessibility, of phallic power, since not only does the knight's sword break, but the symbolic text he had passed on to the queen is useless, disclosing that the pilgrim never has any real sacred knowledge, and is as much of an imposter as Urscllyn, though perhaps an uncalculating one.

At the same time, the ballad narrator of "The Staff and Scrip" nonetheless maintains the reality of an Other. At its conclusion, a voice charges the dead knight to "stand up ... still armed ... before His brow" and claim the departed queen, who has been transformed by a "jealous God" into an "imperishable peace"—the symbolic end for which the pilgrim had bargained (191, 203). But the pilgrim's consolation of peace

seems meager, since to obtain it he has had to lose everything in life he had ever valued—not only his desire for the queen, but also writing, art, and the glimmer of meaning he seems to have tried to pass on (205). The Other in “The Staff and Scrip” is thus no guarantor of meaning, but rather a pure version of what Copjec calls the superegoic “Other,” who “benefits from the sacrifice of enjoyment—and always at the subject’s expense” (Copjec 92-6). “The Staff and Scrip” thus seems to be structured by a similar intuition of the arbitrariness of paternal authority that DGR’s brother, W. M. Rossetti, arrived at, when he “experienc[ed] a sudden absolute perception of the Judeo-Christian deity as a cruel tyrant, and for ever reject[ed] all revealed religion” (Marsh 26). Functioning as an epilogue to DGR’s other narrative poems, “The Staff and Scrip” discloses the uncompromising nature of the symbolic Other who wreaks his cruel and arbitrary judgments, whether upon guileless female sinners like Aloyse and Jenny, or bewildered male ones, like the men of “The Blessed Damozel” and “The Staff and Scrip.”

In the late 1850s, DGR’s narrative poetry, as well as his narrative art, arrived at a virtual dead end, perhaps because of the consistently disturbing visions these works tended to evince. Moreover, he rarely initiated attempts to represent male subjects detachedly in original poems or paintings from the 1860s onward, instead portraying male desire through either female portraiture or sonnets. DGR’s portraits and the sonnets developed in opposite directions, as the portraits increasingly objectified the female other in static symbolic tableaux, and the sonnets penetrated increasingly into the depths of intersubjectivity. But these two media shared a common tendency to evade the wider

scope of narrative, where the ends of male desire were speculated upon. Instead, they devised contained spaces in which to encode male desire instantaneously, and thus avoided drawing further disturbing conclusions about the effects of desire and the motives of the Other.

II. The Lure and the Light

In paintings like *Beata Beatrix* as well as poems like “Jenny,” “The Blessed Damozel,” and “The Bride’s Prelude,” the subjects are implicitly male. However, the focus of the representations are woman, whose beauty and majesty the artist dwells upon, as though to attract the glance of an Other who might, in turn, condescend to bless its artist, or patron. The idea that the object of representation is a lure is specifically elaborated by DGR in two elegiac sonnets he wrote in 1868, the year that he believed that he was growing blind, and might have to give up painting. One of these sonnets, which would be included in *The House of Life* as “Newborn Death,” is a eulogy for “Life,” “Love,” and “Song” that Marsh sees as growing out of DGR’s general despair in this period (346). Befitting DGR’s nervousness about blindness, meanwhile, the speaker also grieves the loss of “Art,” described as that “whose eyes were worlds by God found fair” (10). DGR’s account of Art in this sonnet, as that which gives pleasure to God, closely resembles Lacan’s account of the practice of the icon-producing medieval artist who “play[s] with those things, in this case images, that may arouse the desire of God” (113). In DGR’s condition of extremity, he thus similarly conceived of art as the depiction of images that may gratify the pleasure of an abstract Master’s gaze, and dreaded his loss of

the means to do so. As he clarifies in “Newborn Death,” his power was, for him, an offspring of “Life” that is the “lady of all bliss” (1), a personification that highlights the important place woman holds for the artist in his production of happiness, not only for himself, but for the Other. The loss of the ability to produce beautifully holy paintings such as *Beata Beatrix* was imagined as tantamount to “Death.”

A second sonnet written in 1868 that describes art as a lure is “The Portrait,” which was forged out of the earlier, longer, poem of the same name. In contrast with “Newborn Death,” however, this sonnet describes a lure that one extended for the gaze of an Other who may be either divine or human. In his account of the practice of art, Lacan describes the artist’s “quest” as that of “sustain[ing] and vary[ing] the selection of a certain kind of gaze” that will find resonance with his society, depending on the character of its symbolic order (111). “The Portrait” reveals the shifting context of an artist like DGR within the Victorian society, where value was coming to be defined not only in Christian, but also in classical humanist terms—a dialectic expressed, for instance, in Matthew Arnold’s account in *Culture and Anarchy* of the need to combine Hebraism and Hellenism. The poem draws upon a classical vocabulary, describing the artist’s practice as a platonic quest to “show / Even of her inner self the perfect whole,” as well as of a pagan idea of the artwork as “a shrine,” whose “shadowed eyes remember and foresee” (4, 10-11). Above all, however, “The Portrait” emphasizes this artist’s wish to lure the attention of men, and places the hysterical structure of the gaze within a secular context, confirming that the desire “to sustain the desire of the Father” may be satisfied through the gratification of an abstractly conceived human Other. In the final line of this sonnet,

DGR's artist thus effuses over his painting of a woman, proudly insisting that "all men" from "all years" should "note" that "they that would look on her must come to me" (14). This line has been read as a sign of the imperiousness of "the male artist [who] appropriates his female subject" by Riede (139). In another sense, however, the line suggests the admission by the artist of his dependence upon the woman's image to attract the attention of those "men" of "all years" that he requires to achieve fame, another classically-rooted form of symbolic immortality. As Harrison has implied, this location of value in art was particularly relevant to DGR's mid-Victorian period, when the elite of the society experienced a widespread "uneasiness about religious faith" that led them to search for secular sources of "values," including an avant-garde emphasis on "art" that was initiated by artists like DGR himself ("1848" 27). Accordingly, DGR's "The Portrait" turns away from the quest for divine approval, searching out forms of value rooted in the classical period that could be transferable to the new secularism, such as beauty and posterity.

DGR's two descriptions of how the artist can devise a painting as a lure, in "Newborn Death" and "The Portrait," meanwhile construct a brief catalogue of the different types of gazes that DGR himself evoked within the two stages of his career. In his early "Art Catholic" phase, which Bentley describes as DGR's phase of "allegorical realism" (1.70), DGR composed devotional paintings resembling medieval icons, through which he and the rest of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood proposed to reclaim a naïve, "Pre-Raphaelite" spiritual quality (Marsh 55). In his later phase, however, DGR came to emphasize more decadent "Venetian" Renaissance influences and projected a morally

“indeterminate,” distinctly agnostic, worldview, which proclaims that “the existence of anything beyond ... material phenomena ... is unknown” (Bentley 2.146). McGann similarly proposes that DGR moves generally over the course of his artistic career, from an artistic practice that supported “illusion[s]” about love and the “soul,” towards a less idealistic engagement within aesthetic and commercial forms of art, in which he rehearsed the “disillusion” of himself from his former ideals (343-346).

This sense that DGR’s art becomes de-idealized is challenged, however, by a Lacanian perspective on the function of the gaze in his oeuvre, which highlights how even though the nature of the ideal evolves in DGR’s art, the hysterical symbolic structure organizing the ways by which the implicit subject of DGR’s art may access the ideal does not radically change. DGR’s two contemporaneous sonnets that describe two ways in which the portrait may be a lure for the Other’s gaze thus encompass both phases of DGR’s art in a single pictorial and psychoanalytical structure. In both periods of DGR’s painting, he finds ways to abstract the Other into kinds of desiring beams of light, which may be divine or hypothetically human. As for the characters in DGR’s poems, moreover, the implied viewer’s relationship to these beams in his art displays his dependence on the approval of Others that may be divine or human, but in either case hold the power to bestow privilege through the mediation of a woman of remarkable beauty and grace.

Before DGR discovered how to use lighting to illuminate the structure of male desire in these ways, however, he sketched a more direct model of how a Victorian subject may access phallic approval through the mediation of woman. The skeleton of

DGR's pictorial model can be seen in his early *Genevieve* (1848), an illustration and revision of Coleridge's poem "Love." Coleridge's poem is a paradigm of conventional courtship; perhaps in an effort to update the poem for the more anxious Victorian period, DGR's illustration instead depicts a hysterical arrangement in which a male artist bypasses the girl entirely, forced by the failure of his male sexual confidence to supplicate the "ideal" Other instead ("Phallus" 281). In Coleridge's original poem, a young singer serenades a girl named Genevieve in front of a "ruined tower" topped by a medieval knight, accomplishing his seduction by singing of how that knight died to save his lady's chastity. Coleridge's "Love" thus proposes that actual, modern masculinity is depleted like a ruined tower, and that men must associate themselves with fictitious, symbolic heroes to achieve their artistic and literal seductions—a process resembling Lacan's idea of "display" as an activity of courtship, where the man seeks to "identify himself with the ideal type of his sex" in order to make a good impression on a woman (*Four* 193). The motif of the ruin was, of course, continuously invoked through the nineteenth century to signify a sense of nostalgia for a lost heroic age, but Coleridge's poem makes explicit that this nostalgia can serve contemporary relations by lending them an air of glamour. His model thus accords with Lacan's account of how the subject bent on seduction must "over-valuat[e]" his attributes by association, given that the phallus is "lacking in the real," and can only be appropriated through "some relation" to a phallic symbol (*Four* 100-102).¹²

Far from being melancholy about this dependence of men upon phallic fakery, however, Coleridge's poem seems ironically to accept the fact that sexual seduction

requires men to exaggerate their phallic attributes through association. Coleridge's singer who inflates his masculinity is, moreover, no more of an imposter than the singer's counterpart Genevieve, who puts on her own "masquerade" by invoking the hollow signifiers of femininity. Coleridge describes how Genevieve produces crocodile tears, out of an instinct he characterizes as "partly love, ... partly fear / and partly ... bashful art" (89-90). Through their impostures, Coleridge's man and woman become ordinary embodiments of the normative sexuality Lacan defines as the "activity/passivity opposition," as the singer ardently "gaze[s] upon Genevieve's] face" and Genevieve maintains "downcast eyes" (*Four* 193; 26, 28). Through these means, the couple obtain their appropriate sexual and symbolic rewards without any problem, as the singer "w[ins] [his] Genevieve / [His] bright and beauteous bride" as handily as a knight might have done (95-6).

But DGR's illustration of *Genevieve* swerves the material away from Coleridge's ironic account of sexual display to produce a very different representation of gender relations. To begin with, DGR undoes many of the conventional oppositions of courtship that Coleridge's poem exemplifies. DGR's singer does not gaze ardently at Genevieve like Coleridge's singer (40), but seems absorbed in playing his lyre, while DGR's Genevieve does not blush coyly, but dotes with majestic sympathy upon the singer, not needing to be courted. Moreover, while most of Coleridge's stanzas focus on the singer and his song, DGR has illustrated one of the only stanzas of Coleridge's poem that focuses on Genevieve. As Surtees's entry on the sketch implies, DGR has named his

illustration of “Love” after Genevieve because he has illustrated the following passage

(7):

She leaned against the armed man
The statue of the armed knight
She stood and listen'ed to my lay
Amid the lingering light. (13-16)

In choosing to illustrate this passage, in which the avidly listening Genevieve is the central, active character, DGR makes Genevieve a paradigm of the women of sensibility he would feature in many of his later paintings of women, such as that of *La Donna Della Finestra* (1879), the character in Dante's *La Vita Nuova* who is distinguished by her rich sympathy for Dante's suffering. DGR has also focused his illustration on the moment in “Love” when Genevieve seems most sincere, rather than artificial as Coleridge tends to capture her; he thereby registers a shift in the tone of art away from Romantic irony, and towards a more distinctly Rossettian quest for quasi-spiritual aesthetic rapture.

The passage DGR illustrates, in which Genevieve listens to the singer's lay while leaning on the armed man, also anticipates the precise value that such lovely women would hold for DGR, which is to provide a link between ordinary, humble men and strong and virile Others. DGR further evokes a circuit between singer, woman, and phallic by depicting the couple as medieval rather than modern lovers, arrayed before a tower that is strong rather than ruined. DGR thus exhibits what McGann calls his preference for “half believ[ing] in [his] illusions” rather than undercutting them ironically, as do other nostalgic poets (“Betrayal” 343). The fact that the tower in DGR's composition is not ruined produces a significant change in the couple's relation to the knight, who is no longer a relic brought to life by the couple's discourse, as Coleridge



ILLUSTRATION 9
Genevieve (1848)
D. G. ROSSETTI, Surtees Catalogue no. 38

portrays him, but a living presence as powerful as the tower. If the knight that Coleridge's singer calls into being is a knight who is "bold and lovely" and so potentially identified with the singer, DGR's image of the knight as stern and old is thus a phallic power who humiliates the bent young singer he towers over, looking away with an expression of disapproval (42).

DGR's "Genevieve" thus triangulates singer, woman, and knight in an ascending order that illustrates the hysterical structure of the gaze. Within this structure, the singer meekly studies his instrument, perhaps trying to produce irreproachable art that will catch the gaze of the knight. He does not seem very conscious of Genevieve, whose role in this framework seems more to represent the value of the singer's art through the rapture on her face than to be an object of his desire. "Genevieve" thus aptly expresses the thrust of hysterical desire in DGR's works, where the male is so caught up in his need to impress the father that his desire for the woman is secondary. At the same time, however, the drawing expresses the woman's necessity to the hysterical arrangement, to soften and mystify what would otherwise be an unbearable submission to the father. The woman's nobility thus makes her a proximate substitute for the phallic ideal, whom the male subject can worship in exchange for the fierce and invisible Other. She is "elevat[ed] into the place where her absence or inaccessibility stands in for male lack," in the words of Jacqueline Rose, signifying the man's insecure position as the woman does for the artist in medieval courtly love (48).¹³ In their symbolic function, DGR's women accordingly seem to be not purely phallic presences, nor absences, but rather glittering, reflective surfaces similar to the objects that, for Lacan, compel the voyeur: "absence[s]...

phantisiz[d] [as] any magic of presence” because “referred to some [O]ther” who is “the true aim of desire” (*Four* 182). Geneveive is, like Beatrice, a fantasy of feminine grandeur animated by some Other source; and the more magnificent she is, the more purely she seems to transmit that presence.

After “Genevieve,” meanwhile, DGR developed a more implicit logic of light and darkness to express these hysterical dynamics of the gaze, a logic that is paradigmatically expressed in his slightly later Art Catholic paintings, *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1849) and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (1850). *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* portrays the young Mary and her mother, modeled on DGR’s sister, CR, and his mother, as they embroider a potted lily held by an angel that is symbolic of the unborn Christ. Through a window we can, meanwhile, see Mary’s father, St. Joachim, tending vines around the roof of the house. The division of labor in this painting matches the Victorian division between a feminine sphere of simple domestic goodness and a masculine sphere of “endeavour, self-improvement, and material achievement,” according to Marsh (12). However, gender seems more than a culture division in this painting, but also a metaphysical one, for a strong differential of light distinguishes the female figures inside from the man outside. The Virgin, the Mother, and the angel are brightly illuminated by a light that appears to enter from the front of the canvas rather than through the window, based on the direction of the shadows. St. Joachim, though nominally a saint, is lit in less radiant daylight hues, and therefore seems to be unperceived by the holy gaze that is blessing the scene. *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* thus provides a snapshot of the character of gender division of the Rossetti family, in which the religious mother and chaste sister



ILLUSTRATION 10
The Girlhood of Mary Virgin (1849)
D. G. ROSSETTI, Surtees Catalogue no. 40

were symbolically within the sphere of holiness, while the irreligious father was excluded from the divine gaze (Marsh 43).

The male exclusion that is dramatized in *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* is given content in *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, a more complex composition which dramatizes an encounter between the Virgin and the angel Gabriel from the perspective of a viewer who is voyeur of their meeting. The signature of this painting is the lighting, which bathes the scene of *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* in glaring white, and thus referred to by DGR as “the ancestor of all the white paintings which have since become so numerous” as well as “an ideal motive for whiteness,” which suggests that its color has symbolic pertinence.¹⁴ Kristeva, moreover, proposes a potential meaning of this whiteness within her discussion of religious Renaissance art, where she notes that white traditionally signifies “the transcendental dominion of One” (*Desire* 224), a significance we have also seen attached to the white vessel in CR’s “My Dream” (1855). But as in “My Dream,” where the whiteness symbolizes a will so pure it is almost violent, the symbolic color white of *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* does not simply ratify the sublimity of the annunciation, but produces an oppressive glare upon the painting, as DGR admitted in his reference to the painting as a “blessed white eye-sore” (*Letters* 124). DGR’s description recalls Lacan’s observation of how when one is confronted with “too bright a light,” one “screws itself up in a well-known grimace,” an analog of the potentially blinding effect of the gaze when it condescends to “show[] itself to a subject” (*Four* 94). The painting’s glare seems tied to its representation of a religious event whose indications of violence DGR has unconventionally heightened. In his version of the annunciation, he depicts Mary



ILLUSTRATION 11
Ecce Ancilla Domini! (1850)
D. G. ROSSETTI, Surtees Catalogue no. 44

retreating into the corner of her bed, shrinking from a force whose phallicism is reinforced by a number of sexual objects that surrounds her, including a probing embroidery stand, and an unusual wall sconce above her head that seems to symbolically combine the staff and cup of grail lore. As Sonstroem observes, Gabriel approaches Mary with a “foreshorten[ed]” appearance that further emphasizes “the masculine physique of the angel” and the Virgin’s “smallness” (37). *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* thus portrays this famously holy event in a way that emphasizes the forcefulness, and possibly even the mercilessness, of the divine will.

Within this scene of light, DGR plants an emblem of what Lacan calls “the hole,” to suggest the viewer’s guilty presence in this physically and morally glaring scene. He interrupts the light in only one zone of the painting, placing a blue curtain in the corner directly behind Mary. This curtain shades the point in the picture where its glare is most fierce, and allows the viewer to see the object upon which the gaze’s eye is riveted “mak[ing] the milky light retreat ... and allow[ing] the object it concealed [i.e., Mary] to emerge” (*Four* 108). But the hole that signifies the visibility of the scene also suggests the presence of the viewer, which helps to explain why DGR claimed that the painting was an “eyesore” as though he were not only looking at the effect of the light, but back at its source. The viewer thus experiences the gaze as a glare that intimidates the viewer with the supremacy of its desire and its potential to castrate the subject.¹⁵

DGR’s most famous “Art Catholic” paintings are thus not only conventional, but also disturbing, revealing the same ruthless nature of the Other that can be seen in his Art Catholic poems such as “The Blessed Damozel” and “The Staff and Scrip.” As in “The

Blessed Damozel,” where the man is damned while his woman remains bathed in the divine light, paintings like *Girlhood of the Mary Virgin* and the forcefully entitled *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* evoke a cruel religion, superintended by a God who jealously claims all feminine beauty for his own pleasure, and either exiles, or intimidates, their menfolk. At the same time, these violent scenes hold obscure gratifications for the viewer of these paintings. As Žižek indicates, the most fetishistic—and thus, presumably, phallus-obsessed—imagery is pleasing to the subject insofar as it permits him to “stage his castration,” and assume a secure place within a symbolic order beyond the irritating demands of his desire (102). DGR’s “Art Catholic” dramas thus provide a peculiarly masochistic form of visual pleasure—a form that would later be reprised in even his most ostensibly sensualist art.

III. Hysterical Desire in the Portraiture

After 1858, DGR shifts away from holy subjects to distinctly secular ones, generally preferring to portray not what Sonstroem calls “Heavenly Women,” but rather “Sinful Wom[e]n” and “Femme Fatales” who are “no more than what we can see—beautiful,” as well as distinctly sexual, like *Fazio’s Mistress* who grooms her hair in patent anticipation of a lover (66). Most critics cannot help but describe this shift to more sensual subject matters in DGR’s works in implicitly judgmental terms: McGann argues that DGR came to paint works that “triumphed in and through [their] commercialism” (“Betrayal” 348), while Fredeman believes that DGR “consciously sacrificed his artistic integrity for pragmatic ends” (“Shadow” xxiii). But while these terms stress differences

between DGR's earlier and later paintings, it bears looking at what, practically, changes in DGR's art between these two eras, because analysis of these paintings through Lacan's theories of art reveals significant continuities. If the divine Other retreats in these later paintings, he seems to be replaced with a secular Other of commensurate cultural power, who similarly guards jealously the beautiful objects that are portrayed. The title *Fazio's Mistress*, for instance, proclaims the background of a husband or lover who pays for the lady's handsome boudoir, and who could arrive upon the scene in a manner as threatening as the God evoked in *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*

As Kristeva points out, moreover, there is significant generic continuity between the holy woman who is sacredly worshipped in medieval Christian art, and the married woman who is adulterously adored in the troubadour's song, since both forms of worship spring from the code of courtly love, "the relationship that aims at completion and remains an adultery" (*Tales* 280). We may observe that this code of adulterous desire is at the root of many of the major influences on DGR: Dante's writings, the cult of the Blessed Virgin in medieval art, and the roguish Romanticism of Shelley and Byron that DGR consumed in his youth (Marsh 11, 32). An idealistic form of adultery seems, in particular, to hold special appeal for hysterical male subjects, insofar as it offers opportunities for them to compensate for their lack of divine approval by entering the field of the Other's desire through a woman who has access to that field. DGR seems to have particularly favored the hysterical thrill of illicit scenarios, given his relationship with Jane Morris (Marsh 214).

The scenario of *Fazio's Mistress*, which foregrounds the context of adultery, seems to have originated in a fantasy of artistic usurpation depicted in its fullest form in the watercolor *Bonifazio's Mistress* (1860), whose subject was "a woman dying suddenly in her chair while sitting to her lover who is painting her portrait" (Surtees 76). The conceit of the woman who dies while being painted by her illicit lover was apparently relished by DGR, who claimed at the time of painting it that he had been turning it over in his mind for eight years; the painting also anticipates the general form of his affair with Jane Morris, who sat frequently for DGR while her husband William Morris quietly glowered (Marsh 364). The morbid version of adultery described by *Bonifazio's Mistress*, in which the artist demoniacally extinguishes his lover's presence, condenses many Rossettian themes, from the viewer who witnesses the lady's apotheosis in *Beata Beatrix*, to the artist of "A Portrait" (1847) who feels that his painting captures his dead lover's living presence. It also reprises CR's image of the vampiric artist in "In An Artist's Studio" (1856), who "feeds upon" his lover's face in the many idealistic forms in which he has depicted it (9). Overall, these conceptions of the artist expand on the themes of "A Bride's Prelude," depicting the artist as a rogue who short-circuits the symbolic system, approximating the symbolic access he desires not through love or prayer, but by using a sinister craft to trap the spirit that eludes him.

But while paintings like *Fazio's Mistress* seem plausibly to reflect DGR's personal desires, they were devised even more distinctly to gratify others audience. Marsh points out that DGR's first portraits in what would become his stylized Venetian manner were prompted by DGR's efforts to "capitalize on the fact that his dealer, Ernest

Gampart, had liked *Bocca Baciata*” by creating more paintings that were overtly decorative and sensual (270). However, *Bocca Baciata* (1859), DGR’s first ‘Venetian’ painting, is quite different from his later ones, providing an indication of how DGR adjusted his style for popular appeal. The model Fanny Cornforth’s expression in this painting is fairly natural, unlike the frequently melodramatic expressions of his later feminine subjects. Furthermore, the clothes and jewelry she is wearing are also modest and modern, instead of lavish and stylized like the clothes depicted in many of his later paintings (1861). The reason for this difference between this painting and the later sensual portraits is likely their respective audiences and functions: *Bocca Bacciata* was painted for a friend of DGR’s named George Boyce, whose relationship with DGR reflected a distinct homosocial undercurrent insofar as the two men sustained “mock rivalr[ies]” for a number of women (Marsh 253-9). After DGR found women such as Cornforth and Annie Miller to model for him, and sometimes become his lovers, Boyce would invariably call on them as well. DGR’s traffic in women with Boyce instigated *Bocca Baciata*, or “kissed mouth,” which Boyce commissioned to be modeled on Cornforth, leading a fellow painter to write that “DGR has lately painted a most beautiful head” that “Boyce has bought” and “will I expect kiss the dear thing’s lips away” (Surtees 80).¹⁶ According to Surtees’s catalogue of the provenance of DGR’s paintings, DGR sold Boyce many of his other sexually-toned paintings, as well, including *Bonifazio’s Mistress* (1860), *The Farmer’s Daughter* (1865), *Belcolore* (1863), and *The Merciless Lady* (1865), introducing a directly homosocial factor into DGR’s career that



ILLUSTRATION 12
Bocca Baciata (1859)
 D. G. ROSSETTI
 Surtees Catalogue no. 114



ILLUSTRATION 13
Fazio's Mistress (1863)
 D. G. ROSSETTI
 Surtees Catalogue no. 164



ILLUSTRATION 14
Venus Verticordia (1864)
 D. G. ROSSETTI
 Surtees Catalogue no. 173



ILLUSTRATION 15
Lady Lilith (1868)
 D. G. ROSSETTI
 Surtees Catalogue no. 293

has been underestimated by many critics, and which qualifies the degree to which DGR's early secular art was prompted by utterly commercial aims.

It nonetheless appears true that, as Riede proposes, DGR became "willing to make whatever compromise might be necessary to bridge the gap between his artistic genius and the vulgar taste," and his later sensual portraiture indeed became more ornate, according to the Venetian manner (20). We might infer that these later paintings were more "vulgar" than would have suited him, given how he had initially rejected the falsity of Renaissance art in order to recover the sincerity of so-called Pre-Raphaelites. But DGR must have found this Renaissance style particularly well-suited to attracting the "textile magnates, shipowners, brewers, bankers and the like" that constituted the new art clientele in England (Marsh 275). A number of critics have studied what it was about DGR's paintings of the 1860s that appealed to this group of *nouveau riche* industrialists and merchants. Dianne Sachko Macleod observes that DGR's idealized sensuality was attractive to industrialists who wished to distinguish themselves from the rest of their pragmatic class by fashioning themselves as "passionate lover[s] of beauty" (340). William Gaunt agrees that DGR's romanticism served industrialists by providing a "refuge from industry, from the machine" (65). For instance, Gaunt quotes the patron Thomas Dixon musing how, in DGR's paintings, "There is ... the life which I long for, and which to me never seems realisable in this life" as well as wondering how "these pictures ... being so realistic, produce on the mind such a vague and dreamy sensation, approaching as it were the Mystic Land of a Bygone Age?" (65). It thus appears that

Victorian industrialists, with their famously materialistic tastes, enjoyed the languid and florid account of “life” given in DGR’s later, more stylized paintings.

But by appending the observations of Gaunt and Sachko MacCleod to Lacan’s theory of art, we may further interpret the attraction of DGR’s paintings to these customers as extending beyond the pleasing forms of his works. In particular, their pictorial emulation of Venetian themes may have been well-suited to gratify these men’s requirement of the gaze. As Lacan finds Freud to have stated, a popular artist not only designs a gaze to please himself, but rather that of the art constituency of his time:

if a creation of desire, which is pure at the level of the painter, takes on commercial value ... it is because its effect has something profitable ... for that part of society that comes under its influence. (*Four* 111)

Lacan interprets Freud’s abstract notion of profitability to mean that the artist has produced a painting that produces an “elevat[ing]” and “Apollonian” effect upon the mind of his constituency, through the gaze it has chosen, which “pacifies” the viewer by “encourag[ing] renunciation.” Before an aptly chosen Other, it seems, the viewer of the artwork relinquishes his social aggression and submits himself to a higher gaze; insofar as he thereby becomes willing to accept his castration, his submission is beneficial to the social orderliness and cohesiveness of his society.

Lacan’s account of the secular gaze in Renaissance Venetian art is particularly helpful for understanding DGR’s secular art, which Sachko MacLeod observes to have been distinctly influenced by the Venetian painter Titian (“Titian” 36). Lacan does not talk about Venetian Renaissance portraiture, but he does propose that the military murals of that period referred to the gazes of “those persons who, when the audience are not

there, deliberate in the hall” (113). His explanation of composition of these murals as suggesting the gaze of the noble class in order to gratify the citizenry raises the possibility that paintings such as Titian's *Young Woman at her Toilet* equally referred to members of the ruling class who viewed those scenes when the crowds are “not there”; for instance, by evoking those men’s wives and daughters (113). As an ordinary man beholding a military mural in a palace may have felt himself to be gazed upon by important men, so an ordinary man beholding the image of a wealthy woman may have felt himself to be in the privileged sight line of her husband or father. In a similar way, DGR’s Venetian-influenced portraiture of the mid-1860s, such as *Fazio’s Mistress* and *The Blue Bower* (1865), which Sachko MacLeod notes were modeled directly on Titian’s paintings of “sensuously attired women,” may be designed to evoke the implicit gaze of powerful husbands, through suggestively adulterous scenarios that permit ordinary men to fantasize a role for themselves amid these men’s private milieus.

McGann has similarly observed that in DGR’s paintings, “clothing, jewelry, and an elaborate rhetoric of decoration characteristically locate the spectacular—which is to say, the social—mechanisms of sexual desire,” and that DGR’s paintings are “self-conscious instances” of such social exposures (*Game 6*). What McGann does not mention, however, is that DGR’s paintings may have not only revealed, but also served, social processes, soothing newly-rich industrialists by placing them within the gaze of more entitled and leisurely class than themselves. In his ornamental paintings of the 1860s, DGR thus seems to have designed hysterical arrangements that disclosed, as well as facilitated, the symbolic desires of this ascendant Victorian class. Sussman, for

instance, confirms that DGR's art was patronized by the *nouveau riche* to reflect a dream of instant class inclusion in his account of how "industrialists ... often married into the landed gentry, bought ancient country houses, and took pride in acquiring Italian Renaissance paintings as well as richly colored Pre-Raphaelite art" ("Industrial" 254). He thus places this male class's motives for acquiring DGR's art alongside their motives for marrying aristocratic wives. Each, we may imagine, permitted such men to imagine themselves within the sphere of aristocratic privilege by giving them access to privileged women, whether real or illusory. This socially ambitious function of DGR's art demystifies the "vague and dreamy sensation" DGR's patrons like Thomas Dixon obtained from his art, revealing that their sensation of a "golden, dim dream" inhabiting those scenes was, in fact, a glimpse of the traditionally aristocratic claim to leisure and beauty.¹⁷ This broader social function also provides a possible reason for the way DGR's models are appaeled, apart from his fetishism, as their vulgar luxuriousness may signify an exaggerated image of aristocratic privilege held by those who did not have it.

DGR also signals the gaze of aristocratic men upon the women in his paintings through specific hysterical triangulations similar to those we can see in his Art Catholic paintings. These triangulations heighten the viewer's sense of momentary amorous exclusiveness, as well as his titillating threat of discovery and potential castration—sometimes in the same painting. Thus, the positions of furtive hysterical lover before the darkly lit *Beata Beatrix*, and of shameful voyeur before the brightly lit *Ecce Ancilli Domini!*, equally characterize the positions available to the viewer who stands before DGR's later portraits. Some of his women, such as *Fazio's Mistress* and *Woman*

Combing her Hair (1864), are ensconced in dark settings like the figure in *Beata Beatrix*, with a bright window behind them similarly indicating the route of the husband's eventual approach. Such women frequently have the Rossettian look of passionate sensibility upon their faces, suggesting unsatisfied longings with which the viewer can narcissistically identify, in a furtive expression of adulterous desire. Other women, like *Helen of Troy* (1863), are illuminated in the expectation of passion; they are brazen versions of Mary in *Ecce Ancilli Domini!*, whose viewer is thrust into the dangerous threat of castration by a looming Other.

While these genres of these latter women are seductresses or femme fatales, their faces do not tend to seem sinister, but rather benign and sometimes pathetic, raising a counterpoint to the critical conjecture that seduction is, itself, the danger in DGR's paintings. For instance, the woman in *Fazio's Mistress* brushes her hair and is thus a plausible double of *Lady Lilith*, who is frequently taken for a dangerous femme fatale based not only on her nominal identity, but on how she narcissistically grooms herself. Riede, for instance, believes that luxurious portraits of seductive women such as *Lady Lilith* convert "the seductiveness of woman ... into the safe and acceptable form of art" and thus keep the terrors of women "distant to keep them harmless" (109). Pollock more generally proposes that images of powerful women in DGR's oeuvre "symbolize the castration which men fear" (16), while Miller agrees that DGR's pictures of seductive and vain women such as *Lady Lilith* produce fear of castration in the male viewer (346). But such readings are undermined by the fact that DGR's so-called femme fatales never look terribly fatal; for instance, *Fazio's Mistress*, while a seductress, is depicted as

vulnerably and sensitively human, and *Lady Lilith* appears merely as a pretty woman. Even Sonstroem admits that DGR tended to treat this motif in a “playful[]” and “caricatured” manner, rather than indicating convincing malevolence in these women’s faces (109). If a fantasy of threat is held out for the viewer of this painting of a seductress like *Fazio’s Mistress*, the threat seems, rather, that the lady’s husband could arrive. The contexts of a number of DGR’s other portraits of the mid-1860s, such as *Fair Rosamund* (1863) and *Helen of Troy* (1864) reflect specific backgrounds of powerful, jealous men. Rosamund was the concealed mistress of Henry V, while Helen of Troy was, of course, fought over by venomous warriors.

An even more direct impression of the castrating gaze in DGR’s portraiture is represented in his brazenly lit paintings from the mid-1860s, including *Venus Verticordia* (1864), *Monna Pomona* (1864), and *Morning Music* (1864), along with *Helen of Troy*. These paintings of women who have evidently accomplished their aims of attraction are surrounded with a fierce array of fetishes, such as feminine flowers and curls as well as symbols of phallic violence, all of which give content to a threat of castration. *Venus Verticordia*, for instance, holds an apple of temptation as well as an arrow, while *Helen of Troy* fingers a pendant of a torch that symbolizes the fires of war she has left in her wake. In Chapter Three I discussed how Zizek describes fetishistic objects in general are signifiers of symbolic castration. Here, the threat of castration seems to be specifically linked to the proximity of Others, symbolized through the full light in which these women are cast. The implicit threat of castration is, meanwhile, always part of the

pleasure of the picture, since it offers the promise of symbolic inclusion to a viewer who likely seeks that as strongly as he does his own direct libidinal gratification.

Given the continuities between the two stages of DGR's pictorial art, we may see his shift between these two stages not as this squandering of his ideal, but as a shift in his depiction of where the ideal lies. While McGann suggests that this definition produces art of a fundamentally different, "disillusion[ed]" quality, a Lacanian perspective reveals that DGR's later painting is in thrall to the same hysterical principle of desire that seeks consolation for masculine insecurity (*Game* 346). Moreover, if McGann suggests that DGR accomplishes a "critical definition of symbolistic imagination when its work has been forced by circumstance to be carried out within a marketing and commercial frame of reference," we may observe that DGR's new, secular definition of the ideal seems not only to have been "forced," but to have been made possible by his own agnostic, and even cynical, attitude towards God ("Betrayal" 341-2). Accusations that DGR betrayed his ideals seem, for these reasons, overblown, as DGR is as much an innovator of values as an exploiter of them. In a similar vein, Sussman has proposed that John Everett Millais, another artist charged with 'selling out,' may be seen as an innovator who took art into a new direction by "incorporat[ing] into art production [] a new, highly valorized construction of masculinity in the nineteenth century, the professional man" (*Masculinity* 153). We may propose a similar innovation in the case of DGR by theorizing that he incorporates into art the construction of a new masculinity of the 'rising man.' However, while Sussman attempts through his reading of Millais to release him from the charge of being a "seller of commodities," Lacan would likely discount his distinction between

artistic innovation and artistic sales, since he seems to find that the changing social relations that art invokes are manifest in its relation to specific commercial patrons, and to affirm that popular art is, by definition, more relevant to the symbolic needs of its times than art that “pure[ly]” expresses the artist’s desires (*Four* 111).

Finally, this evolution in DGR’s art, from gratifying a subject who depends upon a divine Other, to gratifying a subject who depends upon a secular, class-based Other, seems as if it may have been valuable to its patrons precisely because it served the processes of industrialization that they were engendering. In a review of the cultural trends that accompanied industrialization, Sussman makes reference to Raymond Williams’s observation that, in the mid-Victorian period, a mystified and class-based notion of culture was “invent[ed]” by “industrial capitalism” to counteract its own dehumanizing practices and fill the gap of lapsing religious faith (“Industrial” 254). We may infer from the responses of industrialists like Dixon to DGR’s art of the mid-60s that his paintings participated in this invention of an Other of “culture” that would soothe a new era’s need for idealism. By extending a new image of “the life which [one] long[s] for,” DGR conceivably soothed class antagonisms among the men of his generation, and more generally helped them endure the violence of the changes that they were impelling (65).

IV. The Resistance of Mary Magdalene

There were, however, side effects to the assumption of “commercial value” by DGR’s art, as the courting of this value pushed aside DGR’s ability to explore and

expand the scope of his own, personal desire (*Four* 111). As we have seen, DGR found his increasingly popular artistic vocation aversive to his more personal expressions, leading to his concern that he had succumbed to “pot-boiling” (Gaunt 106). As McGann aptly notes, DGR came to “despise[] the commercial face he saw in his work,” and to express contempt for his patrons’ stupidity and gullibility (“Betrayal” 345); for instance, he referred to the Yorkshire merchant John Mitchell as “a cad,” and to Frederick Craven of Manchester as a “stupid enthusiast” (Marsh 277, 311). Such outbursts of aggression towards the patrons whose desires he served suggests that DGR felt frustration at the “prostitution” of his idealistic aesthetic on behalf of less sensitive folks, perhaps because for them he had to deliver up the mere “beauties” that his dealer Gambart encouraged him to paint (Marsh 275). As Marsh reports, Gambart insisted that DGR continue to repeat his most commercial formulae—“innumerable ‘visions of carnal loveliness with floral accessories.’”¹⁸ To DGR, however, the other is rarely circumscribed as a “vision[] of carnal loveliness.” As we have seen, DGR at his best is never so ready to stereotype: earlier in his career, he sustains the possibility that the prostitute Jenny has redemptive thoughts, and places carnal women like the blessed damozel in heaven. Even in his later career, DGR’s women are never reducible to their physical appearance, but also seem “revelations of embodied soul,” in McGann’s words (*Game* 119). A counter-possibility is thus sustained through DGR’s art that the brutalities of the market threaten to crush out, which is that if one does not reduce these women to their symbolic stereotypes, one may obtain more from them than mere visual pleasure. One may then seek an ideal through one’s knowledge and even love of them that is not reducible either to God or to Man—

that is “indeterminate,” in Bentley’s word, though in a good sense, because indeterminacy leaves open the possibility of intersubjective curiosity and dialogue (2.146).

The most eloquent expression of this counter-possibility within DGR’s art can be seen in a drawing he composed in 1858, at the cusp of his emergence as a popular painter. *Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee* is based on the New Testament account of how the prostitute Mary Magdalene had “seven demons” expelled from her by Jesus, and subsequently became one of Jesus’s foremost disciples and witnessed the resurrection (Mark 16:9). Her story tells of the impossibility of determining a person’s spiritual status in a stereotypical manner, because “grace” can be found in unexpected places. In his drawing of Mary Magdalene, DGR equally raises the possibility that a viewer of art may fail to observe the spiritual potential of an ostensible “Sinful Woman,” and thus lose the opportunity to capture the brilliance of the holy gaze that is reflected upon her.

This highly detailed drawing, which appears to be an original conception, presents Mary Magdalene, a Rossettian beauty with flowing hair and longing eyes, being solicited by a clamoring crowd. As DGR described in his 1869 sonnet on the painting, the crowd mobs her for her beauty, demanding ““Why wilt thou cast the roses from thine hair? / Nay, be thou all a rose,--wreath, lips and cheek” (1-2). The crowd is thus thrown into distraction by Mary Magdalene’s most stereotypical Rossettian fetishes of femininity, her flowers and her hair, and they try to fix her with these fetishes when they demand that she “be thou all a rose.” Meanwhile, they throw at her the kinds of sexual offers that DGR

and Boyce themselves may have thrown at their mistresses around the time of the painting of the original *Mary Magdalene*, suggesting that Mary “come thou there” where “this delicate day of love we two will share” (3-5). This mob is so fixated upon Mary Magdalene’s beauty, meanwhile, that they fail to see what is actually illuminating her features with such radiance: the face of Jesus Christ looking at her over the heads of the crowd from Simon the Pharisee’s window and emanating a brilliant halo. *Mary Magdalene* thus graphically displays how a glimpse of the Other may be caught through the grace of any woman, if one is attentive enough to notice what she is catching in her own glance.

Notably, the drawing’s heroine is one of the few women in DGR’s mature period whose eyes are focused on a point within the frame, rather than at either some obscure point beyond or past the viewer. This portrayal of a beautiful, ostensibly “sinful” woman who is, in fact, looking at Jesus must more broadly qualify our assumptions as to where the obscure glances of so many of DGR’s women lead. For instance, *Mary Magdalene* offers an alternative to Miller’s account of at what DGR’s women are looking; he suggests that these women are either narcissistically “contemplating [themselves]” or their lack: a “missing man” who “will not come” (334, 344). But this woman contemplates neither herself, nor a missing man, but a holy man that cannot be seen from her observers’ perspective: the “Bridegroom’s face / That draws [her] to Him” (9-10). In a similar way, viewers of DGR’s women in general may be looking at an Other who is holier than we would have guessed, merely from their clothes or symbolic identities. Allen has asserted that DGR “shared, first and last, his audience’s social prejudices”



ILLUSTRATION 16

Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee (1858)

D. G. ROSSETTI, Surtees Catalogue no. 109

(295), but in his depiction of a crowd that is so attracted by sensual beauty that it misses out on the ideal gaze that is on the scene, DGR distinguishes his own idea about women from the notion of women implicit in the tableaux which he puts up for sale.

Moreover, in the same way that the ulterior orientation of Mary Magdalene is bound to be overlooked by the carnal mob, an Other-oriented perspective assumed by the women in DGR's portraits is bound to be overlooked by a "vulgar" viewership.¹⁹ Although DGR is himself responsible for pimping these women to the crowd, he hints in *Mary Magdalene* that if his viewers carefully apprise the direction of his women's glances beyond the scenes in which they are depicted, they may achieve unexpected graces. Such graces may, moreover, be offered by his prostitutes like Mary Magdalene as readily as by his ostensibly blessed *Beata Beatrix*. *Mary Magdalene* offers a harder symbolic route for the subject than *Beata Beatrix*, not offering up the radiance of the gaze directly, but rather demanding that the glance of a woman be individually studied for the chance that she has found out an unexpected power of redemption behind the frame. Precisely for this reason, however, Mary Magdalene perhaps serves the cause of love even better than DGR's Beatrice, since she incites viewers to look beyond the surface appearances of women to contemplate their individual souls.

Drawn on the cusp between DGR's Art Catholic and Venetian periods, and at once a painting of a holy lady and a sinful lady, *Mary Magdalene* unifies these diverse eras and modes of his art, warning against any severe grouping of DGR's sinful ladies apart from those of his women who are visibly spiritual. Through this drawing, meanwhile, with its insistence that one must look beyond the immediate content of a

scene, DGR the artist may also have sought for himself the same attentiveness as he sought for Mary, insofar as his position as a “prostitute” subject to others’ desires paralleled that of hers. *Mary Magdalene* thus outlines a vindication for the popular artist, who may revel and sell damnable wares, but remain simultaneously capable of seeing and signaling a redeeming force that hasty critics like Buchanan failed to credit. Alert viewers must be attentive to the glance of the artist, the drawing says, lest one fail to glimpse the heights at which he, too, gazes.

Conclusion:

Art and the Demon of Meaning

*Look in my face; my name is might have been;
I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell;*

...

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

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI "A SUPERScription"

*A saint, an angel; --every canvas means
The same one meaning, neither more nor less.
He feeds upon her face by day and night,
And she with true kind eyes looks back on him
Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:*

...

Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI "IN AN ARTIST'S STUDIO"

This thesis has endeavored to show how Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti each realized intricate models of the self, making use of overlapping systems of belief as well as shared literary influences and motifs. Faced with cultural and familial contradictions as well as fundamentally oppositional drives, each artist sought through one part of themselves the gleam of the symbolic Other who would ratify their beings but would also judge them. CR yearned in moments of desperation to regard this gleam directly, as a "light of eyes" (*Later Life* 5), but seems to have settled for the more diffuse illumination the gleam provided through sublimation, permitting her to see that "all the

earth is holy ground" (10.1). DGR preferred indirect lighting: the "far gleam" seen through the "a dark path" that his speaker pledges to follow in "Jenny" (386-7), and the soft light reflected off a beautiful woman like his *Beata Beatrix*. Because of his native sense of guilt, however, DGR seems to have dreaded more direct illumination—an "eyesore" to a person who was figuratively a creature of the dark bower, like most of his male figures and speakers. Both Rossettis were, meanwhile, also drawn towards landscapes of imaginary desire they inflected as demonic. CR's characters thus wander into realms of the primal repressed to "look for ... mother's ghost / Where the ghostly moonlight shone" ("A Chilly Night" 3-4), only to be exiled into torments of "terrible pain," like the speaker of "Introspective" who determines that "not another the sight must see" (16). DGR, however, grew more independent in his demonism over his lifetime. Having been consumed with a fear of damnation early in his career—writing in 1847 that Satan should "get behind thee," and "leave my weak feet to tread in narrow ways" (*House* 90.1, 11)—he had, by the end of his career, determined that hell was nothing but cruel circumstance, and that the idea of a saving God was humbug. As he protests in a later sonnet, the merciless structure of the cosmos merely ensures that virgins who are "God's desire at noon" will be inevitably "suck[ed] down by night," as sins "supersede" all of their "fair deeds" (85.9-10, 2-3).

The resolutions forged by these two artists could not have been more different, and the thesis has consequently treated DGR's and CR's visions distinctly, for the most part, in order to trace the highly different dynamics of desire that their oeuvres mark out. As a coda to the thesis, however, it seems valuable to qualify this opposition by looking

at a zone in which their oeuvres overlap, seeming to forge a common analytic regarding art. This overlap is appropriate, given how it was in their shared commitment to art that CR and DGR transcended their private differences, as each pursued with equal sincerity excellence of aesthetic form and effect as well as fidelity to their truth, producing innovative integrations of candor and brilliance.¹ Art, moreover, made these two siblings friends: as Harrison describes, DGR saw “the best of his sister’s extraordinary poetry in print and recognized its genius,” and CR “loved and admired Gabriel” in return, “despite what she knew with certainty as her brother’s many spiritual and moral failings” (“Epistolary” 96, 98). Such generosity speaks well of each artist, given the distance between their values. It also shows how the practice of art may help persons to keep their affections wide, enacting the “relation[s] of mutual recognition and transcendence” that can only be found through a symbolic practice (Lacan *Seminar I* 177).

At the same time, however, both artists expressed in key moments nervousness about the practice of art. Such nervousness is revealed in DGR’s “A Superscription” (1868) and in CR’s “In an Artist’s Studio” (1856), two sonnets written at greatly different times, and seemingly with different concerns, but which are both about the potentially destructive impact of art upon reality. In writing these sonnets, the writers meet in a surprising way at a thematic juncture that illuminates the concerns of each writer. Meanwhile, the conclusions they come to in these sonnets reveal how the products of artists may transcend biographical and even gender limits in order to display a shared space of meaning—an annex, perhaps, of the broader symbolic order in which they are inducted.

DGR's "A Superscription" is one of DGR's many poems about what the artist hopes to attain through art, though it is more pessimistic than most of his others upon this theme. We have seen how two other of DGR's sonnets written in 1868 that were included in *The House of Life*, "The Portrait" and "Newborn Death," reveal the artist's hopes and lost hopes, respectively, for his practices of representation. In "The Portrait," DGR expresses that through portraiture, the artist feels he is able to immortalize life by capturing its pleasures, "testif[ying] of voice and kiss" (9). The artist is thus able to give living being meaning in the symbolic order, as he transmutes flesh into a spiritual "shrine" that both "remember[s] and "foresee[s]," and thus to link life into the "three extases of time, past, present and future" that are spanned by the symbolic order, according to Boothby (186). Similarly, in "Newborn Death" DGR affirms the sacramental function of art of "produc[ing] worlds by God found fair," thereby indicating how the symbolic effects of art can place the beauty of life within what Lacan calls "the field of the Other" and give it a permanent claim upon meaning (*Four* 188). Both of these sonnets are thus celebratory of the power of art and the transformation it enacts upon life.

In "A Superscription," however, DGR hints at a shadow upon this artist's power, suggesting that the artist's quest to immortalize the beloved or beautiful other may destroy her, producing a demon in her place. In this singular sonnet, the artist does not speak, but is spoken to by an other, who appears to be an image in a painting. Like the woman's face in "The Portrait," which holds mystical power as a "shrine" to "remember and foresee" (12), this face declares that she has "commemorative eyes," though hers are "cold" (14). What she brings to the painter is not, thus, platonic knowledge of the ideal

“perfect whole” of her beautiful “inner self,” as in “The Portrait” (4), but knowledge of their ruined relationship and the destruction that has thereby been wreaked upon his own life. She therefore foresees and remembers what the artist does not wish to know: “what might have been,” and what is “No-more, Too-late, Fare-well” (1-2). In synaesthetic imagery that evokes Echo as well as Narcissus, she claims to hold “unto [his] ear ... the dead-sea shell” (3) and to present to him a “glass” that shows how all that in him had been loving and vital has been depleted to a “shaken shadow.” Finally, the woman in the painting who signifies the artist’s failure reveals herself fully as a demon, in her warning that if the viewer should for “[o]ne moment” forget his failure, and feel “the soft surprise / Of ... Peace,” she will “ambush ... [his] heart” with further remembrance of loss and foreknowledge of doom (10, 12).

This menacing speech leads the reader to wonder what the appearance must be of this terrible woman. Because the figure in the painting claims to “hold a glass” to the artist, it stands to reason that her face must feature signs of these very qualities of lovelessness and death. This likelihood suggests a link between her and the women in DGR’s most fetishistic paintings, such as *Venus Verticordia* (1864), perhaps, who menacingly holds the arrow that is the sign of her viewer’s castration; perhaps the woman in “A Superscription” would make her “ambush” with such a weapon. But the fact of this uncompassionate image in turn leads one back to the artist who painted her. The idea of a “[s]uperscription” hinted at in the title suggests the possibility that this woman’s demonic appearance has superimposed itself upon a previously lovely image intended by the artist, transformed of her own account. But the sonnet as a whole specifically links the artist’s

fate to his own doing, suggesting that he has failed to live up to the requirements of life as well as art, and has inadvertently painted an image redolent with his spiritual failure. Since she is a mirror to the artist, her accusation that he is a “frail screen” of “ultimate things unuttered” implies that she, as well, represents a superficial impression of human potential, reflecting the shadow rather than the substance of life (8).

The pictured woman’s claim of emptiness in herself and in her artist thus leads us back to DGR’s later “pot-boiling” portraiture, where he sidelined the life drive, repetitiously producing painting after painting oriented not towards love but towards the status and power of his viewers and himself. From this perspective, the artist addressed in the sonnet is responsible for the fate rendered him by his painting because of the way he has painted it. The “[s]uperscription” of the title may then not indicate a demonic effect that has superimposed itself upon a loving painting, but a demonic effect the artist has himself created, as he has superimposed a “frail screen,” or symbolic campaign, over the “ultimate things unuttered” of imaginary love, which cannot be represented, according to Lacan (*SII* 321). The doom wreaked by the picture upon him is in this way a perfect “mirror” of his own degradation, and subtextually suggests that he is as much a demon as the woman he has created, having overdrawn upon his loving relations with women to fund his symbolic goals, and having neglected their true “life” and “love” in the process. “A Superscription” thus inverts the platonic philosophy of art that DGR otherwise presents, revealing how its stabilizing and sacralizing powers present a fatal cost to the life it transforms, and suggesting that the deep perception of that life that it promises to grant is actually a mere shadow of that life. In this most radical of DGR’s sonnets,

therefore, he returns to his roots as a narcissistic artist, suggesting that the life-extending power of art is nothing beside the true grace of life that the death-driven artist kills, both in the other, and in his own imagination. Given the comment it makes on the effects of his artistic practice and general mode of life, this sonnet acts as superscription to DGR's life and work as a whole—an importance he acknowledges in his note that the poem was “decidedly (painful as it is) a favorite of my own” (*Letters* 276).

This recognition of the demonic action of the artist is, meanwhile, nearly identical to that reached twelve years before by CR, in “In An Artist's Studio” (1856/1896). CR wrote this poem during her ‘gothic’ period, and this poem is, like “A Superscription,” a poem that explores a demonic factor in the practice of art. CR thus depicts an artist who vampirizes the spirit of his living beloved, who persists “hidden just behind the screens” (3): this latter phrase resonates with the “ultimate things” hidden under the “screen” in “A Superscription,” and similarly hints that art does not show a deeper reality in what it portrays, but rather masks what is “ultimate,” or real. As a vampiric figure, moreover, CR's artist does not extend the spiritual life of a person who is already dead, as so many of DGR's artists do, such as his Dante who repeatedly draws the angel in *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (1849/1853), or the artist in “The Portrait” (1847-70) who “wonder[s] on” the image he has produced of his dead lover “until she seems to stir” (2, 5). Rather, this artist depletes the vitality of the real beloved he depicts, who grows “wan” as she becomes trapped beneath his paintings of her, as though subject to an enchantment (12). There is an implicit connection between the artist's “feed[ing] upon” the woman's “face by day and night” (9) so that she becomes wan and the demons who

deplete CR's gothic heroines with merciless demands. Some examples of CR's vampirized women who resemble this woman are Jeanie in "Goblin Market," who "dwindled and grew gray" under her enchantment by the goblins (156) and the speaker in "A Nightmare" who is compelled to "stalk forth in [her] sleep" after she accompanies her lover to "ghostland" (36).²

However, as in "A Superscription," the demonology of "In An Artist's Studio" reflects not only the dangers of aroused desire but also the destructiveness of improper symbolic strategies. This level of the poem is reflected in the speaker's account of how the artist makes meaning for himself out of the being of the beloved. CR thus points out how the artist's repetition of images is in the service of a determinate symbolic quest, so that a visitor to the studio of CR's artist discovers diverse "canvas[es]" featuring imagery of a "queen," a "nameless girl in freshest summer green," and an "angel" that all reflect the "same one meaning" (5, 7). CR's interpretation of DGR's artistic practice importantly refutes the idea that DGR meant a number of different things through his different depictions of women that is implied, for instance, in Sonstroem's typology of DGR's "Heavenly Women" and "Sinful Women." Instead, her interpretation aligns with the reading of DGR's women through the Lacanian gaze, where the fact of their particular costumes is indifferent, and the ultimate meaning of all of these women is that they feed the man, providing general symbolic nourishment at the expense of loving her personally (6-9). This sense of thwarted love permeates "A Superscription" as well, in its hint of what "Might-have-been," had the artist remained sensitive in his vocation to giving his art "Life's form and Love's," and not begun painting works that were mere symbolic

“screens” of it. In their common evocation of the quest for meaning as a demon that squanders love, CR and DGR thus overlap briefly in their oeuvre. Much further exploration might be done of how the symbolic practices of CR and DGR—or other artists working in parallel—weave together, and thus partake of a system of meaning that transcends individual differences of perspective, entering into a symbolic order that “is already quite ready to encompass the history of each individual,” as Lacan finds (*Seminar I* 177).

In other ways, too, CR’s “In An Artist’s Studio” and DGR’s “A Superscription” exceed the biographical and gender narratives that they reflect upon, permitting a broader, shared philosophical reflection. The portrait in “In An Artist’s Studio,” of an artist who captures his “dream” of his beloved in “freshest summer greens” at the expense of genuine contact (14, 6), tells a similar story of how art’s permanence is antithetical to life as that Keats encapsulates in the notion of the “cold pastoral” in “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” In philosophical terms, CR’s account of the fate of the woman in the artist’s handling is likewise comparable to Lacan’s account of how the subject’s quest for “meaning” is invariably antithetical to “being” (*Four* 211). “In An Artist’s Studio” portrays how the artist who obsessively seeks the “meaning” of his beloved as something symbolically redeemable loses his grasp of her “being,” which falls away, abandoned (3). The poem thus accuses the artist of pursuing, at the expense of his personal relationships, the stabilizing symbolism of the *object a*, through which the subject “separates himself off, ceases to be linked to the vacillation of being,” in Lacan’s words (258). Of course, this danger, of taking too much refuge from life in a signifying system, is present not only

to male subjects but to all subjects, since this practice of “separation” that “is the essence of alienation” is what sustains “all belief”—all idealization as well as all religion (Lacan 258, 264).

The subject’s exchange of being for meaning does not only produce a sense of loss for the subject, moreover, but also a sense of death, for “[i]f we choose meaning ... [it is] eclipsed by the disappearance of being” (211). This fault in the signifying system ensures that any meaning the subject *does* create is overshadowed by the “being” that cannot be signified, producing a specter that Lacan calls the effect of “fatality” or “the Terror”—the looming inevitability of death (211, 213). This eruption of terror out of the fault in meaning may be why CR’s “In An Artist’s Studio” is not only a tragic poem, but a gothic poem, in which the artist seems not only neglectful but given over to extravagant lusts. This uncanny sense of fatality also appears to be embodied in the figure of the woman in DGR’s “A Superscription,” who stands for a reservoir of life that has been excluded and now cannot be accessed, and so has turned to violence. “A Superscription” thereby adds to DGR’s broader picture of demonic decay, through its evocation of how a demon may emerge as a by-product of the symbolic process, as being that has been alienated by meaning does not wither and die, but instead returns to vampirize it.

These problems of art clearly concerned CR as well, given her constant concern to adapt literary conventions to experience, and thus not to betray what she considered life in a quest for beauty. Thus, in *Monna Innominata*, for instance, she does not have her lady merely repeat effusive and insincere sonnet conventions, but instead has her convey

the inability of art to capture life's sovereign moments—as, for instance, when the lady fails to give retrospective “mean[ing]” to the first day she met her lover, which she admits to having “let come and go / As traceless as a thaw of bygone snow” (2.10-12). While the lady regrets that she cannot recall their first touch, her leaving the event unsignified contributes a sense of mystery and exorbitance to her record of their relationship. As Harrison points out, moreover, CR achieved another, sturdier strategy of resolving the duality of art and life, through her use of traditional Christian typology. In poems like “An Old World Thicket” (1879), Harrison finds, the speaker explores nature with a quality of attention that suggests that the world contains immanent meanings the artist can discover rather than superscribe (CR 48). In this way, CR solved the “Romantic and Victorian literary problem of alienation from nature” and surmounted the “characteristically Victorian problem of despair at life's meaninglessness,” thus effecting a perfect harmonization of life and meaning.

However, while the use of typology presents one solution to this fissure, by presuming that some forms of life are already saturated with meaning, CR also explored the problem of how to balance life and art with trepidation. She especially expresses nervousness about the meaning-giving imperative in her numerous poems in which she deems that life, cast as feminine, should be permitted to escape the superficial and subjective meanings that art, cast as masculine, tries to give it. We have seen how, in “Song” (1847), the deathbed speaker asks her lover not to plant roses or any “shady cypress tree” to symbolize their love, but instead to allow her to pass into eternity unheralded (3-4). This request captures not only the desire of an individual seeking

transcendence, but also on the requirements of a vision of life that seeks to be rendered with purity and authenticity, uncorrupted by petty individual significations. Similarly, the speaker of the dramatic monologue "Day-Dreams" tries desperately to "read the spirit / Shrined within [his beloved's] eyes" (16-7), as DGR's artists try relentlessly to do to the women in their portraits. When he insists that he will "carve her in alabaster" after her death, capturing her life in a death-head rather than letting her spirit remain free and mysterious, he plots an act of violence against her (53). CR implies through this parody that there must be an alternative artistic practice to the man's insensitive mode of stabilization.

Arguably, CR seeks such an alternative to an artistic practice that seeks to fix life in those of her poems that register the living flow of it, such as "If I had Words," which modulates in a stream-of-consciousness fashion among different keynotes. She also seems to draft an alternative to the man's art that seeks to penetrate mysterious meanings in her enigmatic poems such as "Winter My Secret" (1857). Here, the speaker repels those who are "too curious" about her secrets, and uses language as "a shawl, / A veil, a cloak" that will protect the truth of life, rather than exposing it (6). Generalizing from such a value, we might imagine that apart from practices of studied artistic sincerity, CR also approved of artistic practices that are conspicuously artificial and discursive, and which thereby create evanescent "wraps" for truth that leave it concealed. Thus, a poem like "A Birthday," with its elaborate armature of aesthetic conceits, prepares for, but ultimately defers, the supreme moment in which the [O]ther arrives, and thus finds another way to preserve a sense of the ineffable.

DGR's problem of alienation, in turn, is the question of how art can honor life given that one must also make a living; he wrestles most honestly with this problem in the opening sonnet of *The House of Life*. Here he admits that the artist, or at least the profitable artist, must accept the symbolic demands upon art—in particular, the various “tributes” he has to pay to power. As he elaborates, the artist's tributes include those he must pay to “august appeals / Of Life,” those to “Love's high retinue,” and finally, that which “In Charon's palm ...[is] the toll to Death” (11-14). DGR's artist must thus make offerings to a symbolic Other to achieve status within life, to placate and secure love, and possibly to attain immortality—all means of securing stability within the vicissitudes of being. However, in a dualistic gesture worthy of Lacan, DGR distinguishes the other, persistent concern of his art from these symbolic claims: the requirements of “the soul,” to which he appropriately gives few words, perhaps because, like any imaginary substance, it cannot be represented. For DGR, the solution to the alienation rendered by art seems to have been for him to register and validate the imaginary connection to the other—the connection of love—as much as possible in his art. When he fails to do so, he produces the demon of deathly art that is depicted in “A Superscription.”

We thus find that CR and DGR came to the opposite conclusions to the same question of art, as they also came to the opposite conclusions upon so many matters. For CR, the solution lies in forms of ambiguity and emptiness that ensure a store of non-meaning which will preserve being; we may see the effects of such strategic emptiness in “A Better Resurrection,” where her speaker testifies to having “no wit, no words” and is thus receptive to an ultimate Word (1). For DGR, the solution is love, through which he

hopes to counteract his and his community's alienating symbolic campaigns. Taken together, both artists' approaches to the problem of alienation—DGR's attempts to honor human soul and CR's attempts to gesture towards divine Soul—reveal the sincerity with which the two artists struggled to preserve in their arts that which was most precious to them, from the destructions they themselves were in constant danger of rendering.

ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹ In referring to the psychoanalytic subject I use the male pronoun generically and when I am referring to subjects in chapters on DGR, and the female pronoun in chapters on CR.

² For Freud's distinction between his "economic" representation of the subject and his other representations, see *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, page 1.

³ To Lacan, the "insistence" of the symbolic order is often exerted in an irrational, unconscious fashion, while any drives within the body are so heavily mediated by the effects of signification that the body falls into the category of the unrepresentable, or "real."

⁴ DGR was, meanwhile, close friends with Swinburne and was paired with him by Buchanan for the "sickly self-consciousness" of the two men's poetry (Marsh *DGR* 401). Although CR was not a libertine like the others, her poems have likewise always been seen as "suggestive" of hidden, and possibly sexual, meanings, as her brother William found "Goblin Market" to be (Marsh *CR* 233).

⁵ I discuss Weisenthal's "Regarding Christina Rossetti's 'Reflection' and Miller's 'The Mirror's Secret: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Double Work of Art'" in Chapters Two and Three.

⁶ Apart from D'Amico's resistance, for instance, Kathleen Blake also asserts that she is "wary of post-Freudian doctrine" (11).

⁷ For psychoanalytic criticism of CR that draws upon Irigaray and Cixous, see Barbara Garlick's "The Frozen Fountain: Christina Rossetti, the Virgin Model, and Youthful Pre-Raphaelitism" and Margaret Reynolds's "Speaking Unlikenesses: The Double Text in CR's 'After Death' and 'Remember Me.'" Weisenthal's "Regarding Christina Rossetti's 'Reflection'" borrows from Lacan but also from Butler.

⁸ See Griselda Pollock in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*.

⁹ For examples of recent criticism that connect CR and DGR, see Harrison's "Epistolary Relations: The Correspondence of Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti," Alison Chapman's "Defining the Feminine Subject: D.G. Rossetti's Manuscript Revisions to Christina Rossetti's Poetry," *VP* 35:1 (1997), 139-56, and Goldberg's "DGR's 'Revising Hand': His illustrations for Christina Rossetti's Poems," *VP* 20.1 (1982) 145-159.

¹⁰ Harrison, for instance, observes how lifelong correspondence between the two writers displays that their relationship was “often as mutually supportive as it was competitive,” as they commented on each others’ works and assisted in their commercialization (“Epistolary” 96); these are ways that artists in a recognized ‘school’ would have interrelated. Gail Lynn Goldberg similarly finds that the interpretive approach DGR took to illustrating CR’s poems engendered an “artistic partnership” between “painter and poet” (158). For a sense of how critical volumes nonetheless segregate these two writers, see Armstrong’s *Victorian Poetry, Poetics and Politics*, Leighton’s *Victorian women poets: writing against the heart* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), and Sussman’s *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art*.

¹¹ Critics are in disagreement as to the extent of continuity between Kristeva and Lacan. Grosz finds Kristeva “dutiful”: “her elaborations may depart from Lacan’s, particularly in her temporalizations, but her allegiances remain clear” (150-5). MacCannell, however, criticizes Kristeva for being more spiritually mystified than Lacan and therefore arriving at “a very different destination from Lacan, different because she thinks in terms of destinations... unlike Lacan ... she subjects herself to the *logos* (28). I personally have found that Kristeva for the most part, generally sustains Lacanian root concepts while elaborating them in rewarding directions, in particular in her essentially Lacanian readings of cultural products in *Tales of Love* and *Powers of Horror*. For more on the question of feminine languages, see the end of Chapter One.

¹² For some accounts of DGR’s overlap of poetic and painterly techniques and subjects, see Richard L. Stein’s “Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painting and the Problem of Poetic Form (*Studies in English Literature* 10 [1970] 775-92), and Wendell Stacy Johnson’s “D. G. Rossetti as Painter and Poet” (*Victorian Poetry* 3, [1965] 9-18).

¹³ Interpretive overlap between “the sister arts” is also well grounded in psychoanalytic theory: Freudian theory groups the statues of Michaelangelo and the plays of Shakespeare in the same category of “art” (“Moses” 254).

¹⁴ Kristeva proposes that critics studying painting must “develop ... a second-stage naming in order to name” the effects of “space and color” (210). Her methodology for finding signs of desire in some ways resembles her “semiotique”; nonetheless, I adopt some of Kristeva’s methodologies for psychoanalyzing art due to the limited scope of Lacan’s own methodologies for concrete application.

CHAPTER ONE

¹ Kristeva points out that Guyon was condemned as a heretic for her transgression of the Enlightenment rationalization of religion, such as Kant’s rejection of the idea that God created humans for the sake of happiness and thus has egoistic desire, and Descartes’

description of the soul as a “small gland in the brain” in his *Treatise on the Passions of the Soul* (1649).

² Dante’s *Commedia* is, of course, another text in which spiritual passion is not distinguishable from the amorous impulses of the subject, as the beloved Beatrice whom Dante knew in the streets of Florence becomes a “figure” of “the whole sacramental principle,” according to Dorothy L. Sayers, a matter discussed in Chapter Three (Purg. n. 311).

³ Kristeva also finds the essentially imaginary trope of “specularity” in the Christianity of twelfth century mystics, who believed that one can find one’s own image in God, given that God created Man in his image (160-1).

⁴ Freud also, however, begins to formulate the notion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that the death drive is an “instinct towards perfection” (51).

⁵ As Lacan hints, Freud also makes an implicit connection between the death drive and sublimation where he describes sublimation as part of the struggle against the “Clamour of life,” though it is left to Lacan to fully theorize this link (“Ego” 36 Norton).

⁶ There is a subversive impulse in CR’s writing, I propose in Chapter Two, but this impulse does not originate in CR’s feminine attributes, but rather in an imaginary fantasy that is founded prior to the designation of gender in the subject.

⁷ More images of eroticism as a vampirism in CR’s work are explored in Chapter Two.

⁸ In her article on CR’s “Advent” (1884/5), Janna Knittel similarly argues that CR has rewritten DGRs “The Blessed Damozel” into a more religiously orthodox poem in which virgins in heaven await Jesus, rather than earthly lovers.

⁹ There are, however, other meanings of death in CR’s writing, some of which are more limbo-like than transcendental; these are discussed further in Chapter Two.

¹⁰ See, for instance, *Matthew* 7:14, where the Lord’s way is described as “narrow.”

¹¹ As I elaborate in a discussion of DGR’s habits of idealization in Chapters Three, Freudian theory distinguishes between the simple adoption of high ideals and rigorous practices of sublimation.

¹² Elizabeth Barrett Browning celebrates a new liberation of female desire within the possibilities of marriage by writing about marital love in *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, but in her preface to *Monna Innominata*, CR implies that such poetry about requited love no longer belonged in the courtly tradition, where the speaker should be “unhappy instead of happy” (*Poems* 229).

¹³ CR, who has ruled out the standard adulterous context to courtly love, does not elaborate what the barrier between the lady and her beau might be, though a plausible guess is that it is a barrier of faith, such as that which thwarted CR's own relationships with James Collinson and Charles Cayley (Marsh 112, 359). Such a difference of faith may, indeed, explain why, for the lady, amorous love itself could not be a mode of faith, as Kristeva finds it to be for the traditional sonneteers; if this is, indeed, the obstacle CR had in mind, it may help to explain why the tone of *Monna Innominata* is not brimming with spiritual jubilation, but is, rather, melancholy and austere.

¹⁴ Lacan also proposes that in periods such as the Renaissance, when men have great cultural power relative to women, they seek the exaltation of the female other to dignify the love relation ("God" 141).

¹⁵ I discuss this difference between the focus on the instinct and on the object in Chapter Three, where I compare Dante's path of sublimation to DGR's route of idealization.

¹⁶ In Chapter Two I show how this sense of shame in relation to the gaze arises in more demonic contexts in CR's gothic-tinged poems, where it initiates a malignant version of the death drive.

¹⁷ I am grateful to Colleen Hobbs for identifying these passages from *Face of the Deep* in which CR directly addresses the subject of gender.

¹⁸ It is further possible that the speaker anticipates his feet being "cloven, too" not because he is demonic to begin with, but because he knows he will be damned by succumbing to the world. As D'Amico observes, CR saw the world as "dangerous not because it in itself is corrupt and evil but because it is the place where evil has access to the human soul" (*Christina* 63).

¹⁹ Another way to explain CR's position in poems like "The World" that reproduce sexist gender stereotypes may be to read these poems not as subversively ironic, but as pragmatically ironic, invoking discourses that CR subscribed to only contingently, because she believed these discourses were useful to accomplishing her end. For the theory of pragmatic irony, see Richard Rorty's *Irony, Contingency and Solidarity*.

²⁰ The reasons Lacan gives as to why the phallus is chosen to be the "signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire" are arbitrary semiotic details of the penis's appearance ("Phallus" 287).

²¹ Even Kristeva, in her conception of the *semiotique*—a form of expression that is a "heritage of the mother" (*Desire* 144)—does not ascribe it to women's use and thereby "mythicize[] ... femininity," according to Leon S. Roudiez, but rather locates it primarily in the poetics of male writers such as Celine and Artaud ("Introduction" 10).

CHAPTER TWO

¹ Laplanche and Pontalis thus chart a middle course between Freud's seduction theory, which argues for the presence of a distinct "event" behind the fantasy such as a "sexual approach from the adult," and his later refutation of it, in which he saw fantasies as signs of a pre-given "sexual constitution" of the subject (17). Rather, they understand fantasies in a Lacanian sense, as a "prefiguration of the 'symbolic order'" that occurs in each subject, but which may be prompted by different kind of incidents (17-8).

² In linking the superego to the subject's own drives, Kristeva builds on Freud's explanation that the "excessively strong" superego draws its force from the Id and thereby produces a "form of morality" that is inappropriately "sexualized" (Ego 162).

³ Susan Conley more restrainedly believes that CR's gothic portrayals of women as living-dead vampires realize in them an ironic "fantasy of power" (280).

⁴ CR was similarly perceived as a spontaneous writer, with quick and natural "habits of composition," as Marsh notes, recalling W. M. Rossetti's account of how CR "scribbled the lines off rapidly enough" (*CR* 20, 69-70). But Maude's style is probably an exaggeration of CR's own, since as Harrison points out, CR seems to have actually "revised in very important ways," rather than spontaneously writing clean verse like Maude (*CR* 3). Such revision indicates a procedure of symbolic repetition and control dominating her imaginary eruptions.

⁵ As well, according to Lacan, "when the subject tells you he had doubts you must take that to indicate he is drawing your attention to the fact that it is a particularly significant dream-element" (*Seminar I*, p. 126).

⁶ Corresponding to feminine masquerade is a specifically male kind of imposture, or "display," where the male exaggerates his attributes through various symbolic proxies; though as Lacan insists, display, "like the masquerade ... betrays ... [that] noone has the phallus," since "if the penis was the phallus, men would have no need of features or ties or medals" (Heath 56).

⁷ Maude's insistence that she does "does not have" the beautiful blonde curls of the nun may also be considered representative of Maude's own refusal of the masquerade (41).

⁸ As Janzen Kooistra asserts in her study of "Goblin Market," "a woman cannot live in the world without looking and being looked at," for "these activities are essential to life, to love" (141), and Lacan similarly makes clear that the "masquerade" does not only gratify men's desires, but women's as well (*Four* 193).

⁹ The picture the ghost paints for the bride may also be designed to incite a demonic envy, of the sort that struck Eve after she had eaten the apple in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, whereupon she tempted Adam lest "Adam wedded to another Eve, / Shall live with her enjoying, I extinct" (9.828-39).

¹⁰ As Kristeva explains, the abject is compelling because it is rooted in "the archaic relation to the mother," where the subject exists in that unstable but fixating dyadic relation Lacan describes in the mirror stage (63). In Kristeva's version of the Oedipal complex, the symbolic order subsequently overwrites this archaic logic of inside and outside with its relation of subject to object, abjecting anything to do with that original order, including signs of the biological nature of motherhood, in order to mask its own "frailty" and arbitrariness as an order (70).

¹¹ In Kristeva's terms, the speaker "shatter[s] the wall of repression" that ordinarily drapes our primordial relation to the mother, as she travels to recapture the version of her mother at the "primordial level" that she had experienced as an all-powerful "phallic mother" (*Powers* 3; Lacan "Phallus" 282).

¹² CR's depictions of Eden as a place, or time, when colors were brighter, also accords with how Lacan describes the recollection of the primal order in dreams through "intensification of ... colours" (*Four* 75-6).

¹³ See *The Sun is God: Painting, Literature and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by J. B. Bullen.

¹⁴ Although Kristeva does not herself conspicuously refer to the *Inferno* in *Powers of Horror*, her accounts of narcissistic regression in this volume seems to draw upon imagery from Dante's eighth circle of Malbowges, a hell rife with sexual corrupters and exploiters that Dante portrays as a lake of ordure (Sayers n. 185).

¹⁵ If CR was, in fact, haunted by memories some other unwanted sexual advance, she may have derived from Dante how difficult but important it would have been for her to produce a "right reading" of a fraudulent figure like Geryon. According to Kristeva, Dante depicts the victim of incest as given to fraudulent feelings, linking incest, fraud, and narcissism in Dante's parable of Myrrha, who abides among the forgers in the tenth circle of hell because she "was devoted to her father beyond the bounds of love," and so "changed herself into another's form" to be his lover (*Tales* 128). The forgers in the *Inferno* are further described by Dante as "lick[ing] the mirror of Narcissus," because they had been "enamored of a sham." According to Kristeva's gloss, the incest of a woman like Myrrha can produce the effects of narcissism: the "defect in thinking, in one's own image, in the identity of the body and its parts" that one must sort out in order to free oneself from the abject (129).

¹⁶ This game is apparently a satire of Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859), a book that came to stand for the Victorian cult of self-sufficiency.

CHAPTER THREE

¹ Herbert Sussman interprets DGR's later neurotic symptoms as having been caused by anxiety surrounding his effeminate, counter-cultural expressions of masculinity, conjecturing that DGR's "partial divergence from hegemonic Victorian manliness" and "self-imposed isolation from the male sphere[s]" of commerce, philosophy and science "created in his later years an unbearable psychic strain" (172). Sussman's interpretation is not entirely consistent with a psychoanalytic diagnosis, however, since for Freud, it is the repression of sexuality that produces neurosis, rather than expression of sexuality, however eccentric. As he sets out in *The Ego and the Id*, we "derive neurosis from ... the antithesis between the coherent ego and the repressed which is split off from it" (7).

² Freud further explains that while primary narcissism is characterized by "self-sufficiency" and a monopolization of psychic energy by "ego libido," secondary narcissism is a syndrome of excessive dependence on the other, where the too-loving subject has so dissipated his psychic energy in "object libido" that he is driven to love someone who will stand for a personal ideal, so that he can indirectly return some "ego-libido" to himself (*Narcissism*, 405, 410).

³ For this reason, Ellis disputes DGR's account of Dante in the poem "Dante at Verona" (1850/1870) as a permanent romantic idealizer, "weeping" during his time of exile in the palace of the Duke Can Grande (134).

⁴ Other critics see DGR demonstrating a significant decline from Dante. Nicolette Gray and Steve Ellis criticize DGR for being philosophically facile, proposing that DGR focuses too much on Dante's early *La Vita Nuova*—the ardent sonnet sequence through which Dante records his love for Beatrice—and gives inadequate attention to the later *Commedia*, where Dante refines that love into a spiritual vocation. According to Ellis, DGR "cl[ung] to what he knew" of Dante, and was consequently responsible for founding an emotional "cult of the *Vita Nuova*" that cheapened Dante's image for fellow Victorians (134).

⁵ In "Beatrix / Creatrix: Elizabeth Siddal as Muse and Creator" Beverly Taylor finds that Rossetti strove "to gain [Siddal] patronage and commissions" with an avidity that indicated that "He pictured her as an artist" (32). Regarding DGR's relationship with Jane Morris, see their *Collected Letters*, edited by John Bryson and Janet Camp Troxall. These letters help to counteract impressions that DGR merely admired Morris for her beauty, displaying the two exchanging books and ideas about art. On June 5th, 1879, for instance, Morris wrote, "Your Vasari is quite safe here, but I have got on to Crowe and

Cavalcaselle (the worst of writers and most valuable of authorities) and to Grimm's *Life of M. Angelo*, which you should read if you do not know it" (95).

⁶ DGR seems thus to have participated in a trend among Victorian elite males to seek out female soulmates, which was expressed, for instance, by John Stuart Mill, another idealizing lover who gave an extremely high estimate to his partner, Harriet Taylor. (See *The Autobiography of John Stuart Mill*).

⁷ Contradictory expectations within the Victorian period are revealed, however, in that while Buchanan attacked DGR's manliness, he accuses DGR of being, in *The House of Life* "never a true lover merging his identity into that of the beloved one; never spiritual, never tender" ("Fleshly" 1336).

⁸ The conservative mid-century critic Nicolette Gray equally reveals how DGR's habits of narcissistic idealization disrupt masculine norms in her criticism that DGR "lack[s] spiritually, the positive, masculine element" because he "admire[s] too much the "union in abandonment to the other" (44).

⁹ Such arrangements between the heights of subjects seem not to have been arbitrary, but studied; DGR claimed to have paid careful attention to the heights of his characters, commenting once in a letter that "[p]roportions always bother me more than anything else" (Henderson 31).

¹⁰ This situation of recursive doubling also occurs in the "Willowwood" sonnets in DGR's *The House of Life*, as we will see.

¹¹ Dante's account of his dream in the *Vita Nuova* exposes such imaginary identifications, as before Dante views the dead Beatrice, he is assailed by "terrible and unknown appearances" who call out: "[t]hou art dead," and so blur the boundaries between his fate and Beatrice's (*Works* 328). He thus "misrecognizes" his relation to the other in a way that expresses the quality of imaginary desire (Lacan *SI* 167).

¹² Interestingly, a foot of Dante's that had protruded conspicuously in the direction of the cabinet in the watercolor, has been sheathed under his coat in the second version. In this more complex case, a fetishistic foot has been substituted even further with a more decorous fetish of cloth.

¹³ Zizek refers to this imaginary object as the "mother," but his comment may be generalized, I think, for all others to whom one has a primal attachment (104).

¹⁴ Mulvey evidently bases her link between fetishism and narcissism on Freud's account of how a man who fetishizes women's feet "represents" for himself the idea of "a

woman's penis, the absence of which [he had] deeply felt" as a child, having previously "imagined [the female genitals] as male ones" (*Three* n. 155).

¹⁵ By 1867, DGR is thought to have suffered yet another circumstances "unfavorable" to the sexual aim, as diverse illnesses impaired his "physical virility" (Marsh 342). Under such circumstances, we might imagine, fetishism would have continued to intensify.

¹⁶ During this period DGR revived his art as well, recovering eyesight he had feared was declining in 1868. His artistic rebirth culminating in the 1871 version of *Dante's Dream* produced "with labor undertaken for love not lucre," according to Marsh, though the work nonetheless sustains DGR's fixations on the fetish and the symbol (413).

¹⁷ I thank Marjorie Stone for the suggestion to read the *House of Life* sonnets chronologically.

¹⁸ Answer to my question, posed from the audience, regarding the difference between the fetish and the *objet a*, at talk given by Zizek at Kings College, Halifax, November 2002.

CHAPTER FOUR

¹ While the maleness of DGR's viewer is typical, it is not essential. For Lacan, both men and women are subject to the threat of castration, and though they experience this differently, both are intimidated by it to seek an "unconscious position" within a normative symbolic order ("Phallus" 281). Thus, many symbolic functions seem to be shared by both genders, and it accordingly appears that some of the wives of DGR's male patrons enjoyed the sublimity of his paintings as much as their husbands did: for instance, George Rae wrote in a letter to DGR that his wife "spen[t] half the day before [DGR's *The Beloved* (1865-6)] as certain devout Catholic ladies had used to do before their favorite shrines in the days of old" (Sachko 339).

² Perhaps through his idealistic presentation of Siddal in *Beata Beatrix*, DGR managed to bear the "extreme pain" of his beloved's absence by imagining her growing "perfectly and spiritually fair," as Dante does Beatrice's absence in *La Vita Nuova*. (*DGR Works* 339-40).

³ Copjec thus clarifies an error she finds in "film theory" usages of Lacan, which contend that the gaze is a projection of "surveillance" which men inflict upon women (16). She argues that this is a misreading of the gaze, which could never "coincide" with and empower any subject, since it "symbolize[s] the central lack" of all subjects" in Lacan's words (*Four* 77); a mark of the subject's powerlessness, it is always "located 'behind' the image" in a way that it is frustratingly elusive rather than penetrating; "absorbed in its own enjoyment" (36). We can see the elusiveness of the gaze in Dante's own Christian model: he must seek to find the light; in the absence he is bound for darkness.

⁴ Freud believed hysteria to be present among men as well as women, despite the etymology of the term, as he discussed in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (474).

⁵ Sonstroem, moreover, points out that DGR got over his briefly morbid fantasy about Fanny Cornforth, and settled into a “long, easy” relationship to her, offering evidence that his interest in the fatality of women was aesthetic rather than psychological, a matter discussed in the Conclusion (117).

⁶ Allen’s case that DGR resisted the liberation of the “New Woman,” and demonized that figure in a serious manner in *Lilith* because he was “unlikely” to have been “an advocate of Woman’s Rights,” is built on weak grounds: such as that he read a magazine that took jocularly anti-feminist perspectives, that he opposed the voice of “falsetto masculinity” in his sister, and that he researched the subject of *Lilith* among his friends (293). An equivocal response to the woman’s movement, as well as an interest in researching the subject of his painting, do not translate into an “obsessive” interest in proffering a demonic idea of womanhood (292).

⁷ The terms “screen,” “spot” and “hole” seem to be relatively interchangeable in Lacan’s art theory.

⁸ In addition to this maternal factor of repression in the Rossetti household, there may equally have been a paternal one. Chris R. Vanden Bossche notes that in the Victorian period parents began to extend authority into a young person’s teenage years (84), a factor that Deleuze and Guattari find led to “unparalleled repression of desire” in the nineteenth century (121). Gabriele Rossetti seems to have been overbearing in this way in his domination of DGR’s career, which may have contributed to DGR’s sense of paternal intimidation.

⁹ As a failed quest narrative, “The Blessed Damozel” anticipates the broader Victorian category that includes CR’s “The Prince’s Progress” (1865-6) and Robert Browning’s “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” (1864). It is, however, subtly more optimistic than these, since it leavens the tragedy with a love story that is triumphant in its own terms.

¹⁰ At risk of simplifying Lacan, I think we may take his discussion of “Woman” in “God and the *Jouissance* of Woman” as a broader discussion of the role the beloved other assumes in the spiritual quest, whether man, woman, or of the “other sex” or the same sex. Lacan’s discussion is a response to famous discourses of love about the effect of woman upon men, but seems constantly on the verge of generalizing that effect more broadly.

¹¹ More precisely, the bar signifies the subject’s split between his sense of “I” and his awareness of himself as a signifier, where he “sees himself duplicated.” This split

between one's being and one's symbolically identity is what Lacan calls the subject's "first split."

¹² The knight on the tower is a form of *objet a*, which signifies the singer's "inadequacy ... in the castration complex" while allowing him to "see[] himself ... constituted by the reflected, momentary, precarious image of mastery" (*Four* 102, 142). But while Lacan suggests that that distance between the Phallus and the actual human penis is a general feature organizing human desire, the nineteenth-century location of the phallic ideal in the past is perhaps distinctive.

¹³ Rose finds that Lacan consequently also "sees [woman's] denigration as the precondition for man's belief in his own soul," although given DGR's typical spiritual insecurity, this treatment does not seem as conspicuous in his works (48-49). It is interesting to speculate that because of the condition of male insecurity in the Victorian period, it offers a truer revival of the courtly structure of male dependency than the Romantic period offered.

¹⁴ Unpublished letter of April 25, 1874, to F. G. Stephens, cited in Surtees, Volume 1, page 14.

¹⁵ Apparently disavowing the consequences of his own composition, DGR denies the violent suggestions of the painting in the sonnet written contemporaneously upon the painting's theme, "Mary's Girlhood" (1848). In the sonnet, he describes Mary as cheerful and confident rather than conspicuously vulnerable: "w[aking] in her white bed" with "no fear" (12).

¹⁶ In what might have been another expression of Boyce's insistence on following in DGR's footsteps, he ultimately acquired DGR's home on Cheyne Way (Gaunt 95).

¹⁷ An implicit possibility of class-ascent is, moreover, doubled in how DGR's gorgeous costumes tend to be layered upon models who featured physiognomies that were perceived as lower class. Susan P. Casteras points out that DGR's models were perceived by contemporary reviewers not only as masculine, as I discussed in Chapter Three, but also as "coarse[]" and "common[]," with "mannerized bod[ies] and face[s] that in size and impact placed a strong emphasis on sheer physicality" (30). By employing models who did not feature the class-markers of aristocracy within implicitly aristocratic contexts, DGR may have heightened the attraction of his paintings for the *nouveau-riche*, signifying both the symbolic apparatus of aristocracy as well as the possibility of class mobility to men who could likewise only hope to wear their aristocratic attainments as costumes.

¹⁸ More evidence, meanwhile, affirms that DGR did not aesthetically embrace the mode of painting for which he had become most popular, but that he became typecast.

According to Marsh, DGR hoped through his more popular productions to “buy[] time for the creation of larger, more elevated subjects,” but Surtees’s record of DGR’s art sales reveals that on occasions when he proposed such subjects, he was generally rejected by his dealers (276). For instance, *The Boat of Love* (1874-) a conception on a Dantesque theme, was rejected by several of DGR’s principle patrons, and *A Fight for a Woman* (1865), which portrayed no woman but only two men fighting was rejected by Gampart because “it was likely to prove unpopular” (Surtees 137, 103).

¹⁹ The distance between Mary Magdalene’s holy desire and the secular desire of the crowd is further expressed in DGR’s sonnet, where he juxtaposes the Mary Magdalene’s offer to “clasp[s] those blood-stained feet of His” with the crowd’s offer to “kiss [Mary’s] feet,” thus showing how the same idea may be posed as either reverential or crudely sensual (12-3).

CONCLUSION

¹ CR maintains her artfulness as a counterpoint to emptiness, in poems like “If I Had Words,” where her speaker describes in perfect cadences and consonances how “My heart is broken in my breast / My breath is but a broken sigh” (13-4). DGR achieves similarly fine expressions of the empty fullness of love as form, as when he exults in how “Love breath[es] in sighs and silences / Through two blent souls one rapturous undersong” (*House* 13:13-4).

² Marsh observes how one of CR’s demonic poems may comment on DGR’s representation of woman, pointing out that “Jeanie,” the name of the seduced girl in “Goblin Market,” is pronounced in the poem as “Jenny” (*Poems* n. 443). But she also proposes that “In An Artist’s Studio” is a reference to Elizabeth Siddal’s treatment by DGR; taking these two points together, we may infer that CR associates Siddal’s fate with the depleting life of sin and social limbo into which gothic figures like the girls in “Goblin Market” fall (*CR* 35-7).

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