A Study of Christina Rossetti:

As a Victorian Poetess

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学位論文内容の要旨

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論文題名　「クリスティナ・ロセッティ研究―ヴィクトリア朝女性詩人として―」

大学生の頃から取り組んできたヴィクトリア朝女性詩人クリスティナ・ロセッティの詩集『歌を歌おう(“Sing Song”)』は、素朴な表現と言葉遊びに満ちていて、児童文学への魅力的な橋渡しもしてくれた。その後ロセッティ研究を続ける中で、フェミニスト批評理論に基づく種々の解釈に出会い、特に彼女の代表作でもある『子鬼の市場("Goblin Market")』、『王子の行進(“The Prince’s Progress”)』「父親の子供に対する不当行為("The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children")」などの長編詩についてのフェミニズム的視点からの解釈に強い印象を受けた。これらの良く知られたロセッティ成熟期の長編詩については多様な側面からすでに色々論じられているが、彼女の初期の作品についてはあまり考察されておらず、この論文では先ず初期作品にロセッティ研究の上で重要な要素がうかがえることを論じた。つまり詩人の初期詩作品を研究することでその詩人の創作過程を明らかにすることができるのであり、これはロセッティの初期作品集『少女時代の作品集(“Juvenilia”)』にも当てはまる。この作品集は彼女の若い頃の読書体験や詩作習慣への貴重な洞察を与えてくれ、同時にこの詩人の思想や感情を簡明に表現する方法を示してくれる。また、この論文では前述した『子鬼の市場』『王子の行進』など詩人の成熟期の代表的物語詩については、フェミニスト批評的な視点から、また古典的な「妖精物語」の女性主人公との比較によって論じている。

イギリスでは１９世紀ヴィクトリア朝から２０世紀初頭にかけて「女権拡大運動(フェミニズム)」が社会的にも大きなうねりとなり、文学の世界でもブロンテ姉妹、エリザベス・ブラウニング、ジョージ・エリオット(女性作家のペンネーム)などが輩出したが、ロセッティもその一人であった。ロセッティは、その抒情詩、宗教詩、子供のための童謡詩、さらには代表的な長編詩を通して、女性詩人の立場から当時の女性の置かれた社会状況についての見解を表現しようとしたのだ。例えば代表作『子鬼の市場』では当時の社会状況に於ける女性の苦闘というテーマが、二人のヒロインの「姉妹関係('sisterhood')」という観点から描かれている。さらにはヴィクトリア朝時代における女性の自立という問題が長編詩では扱われていることを論じている。

以下、本論文における各章の要旨を簡単に述べておきたい。

「序論(Introduction)」

本論の研究目的と、ロセッティとその家族(兄も有名な詩人、姉は修道女に)の伝記的な側面を述べている。

「第１章『少女時代の作品集』―「優しき愛は不滅」(“Juvenilia Poems”―’Sweet Love Shall Never Die’)」

若い頃のロセッティが意識的に模倣しようとした文学上の先達(伝統)とのかかわりを探るとともに、彼女のより深い創作の動機を探る。これら初期の詩を研究することで後の詩人の成熟期に於ける表現方法の萌芽もうかがえると論じている。

「第２章『歌を歌おう』―母の愛と理想家族のイメージ(“Sing Song”―Maternal Love and the Image of an Ideal Family)」

詩集『歌を歌おう』の詩は子供の心に訴える音やリズムを持つが、その内容は子に対する母親の愛をテーマに理想の家族像を描く詩が多いと論じている。

「第３章『子鬼の市場』―「手に手をつないで」(“Goblin Market”―’Joining Hands to Little Hands’)」

ロセッティの傑作『子鬼の市場』では呪文のような繰り返しのリズムと豊かなイメージで、子鬼と姉妹の出会いとその呪術的世界からの「姉妹愛(sisterhood)」による救済を描いていると論じている。

「第４章『王子の行進』―「眠り」の意味("The Prince's Progress"―the Meaning of “Sleep)」

ロセッティのもう一つの傑作『王子の行進』と妖精物語の古典『眠り姫』における二人の王子を比較して、女性作家と男性作家による違いを指摘する。加えてヒロインの「眠り」の意味についてフェミニスト批評の視点から論じている。

「第５章「父親の子供に対する不当行為」―女らしさからフェミニズムへ(“The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children”―from Femininity to Feminism)」

ここではヴィクトリア朝の理想の家族愛と「姉妹関係(sisterhood)」というテーマをフェミニスト批評の視点で解釈し、一人の依存的な若い娘が自立した大人の女性に変容する過程を描いたものと論じている。

「結論(Conclusion)」

この論文ではロセッティをヴィクトリア朝の女性詩人として、またファンタジィの児童文学を描く女性作家として捉え、彼女の初期作品から成熟期の作品に至るまでその時代における女性の置かれた立場と役割を、女性の視線で描いた詩人としてフェミニズム的視点から論じている。

INTRODUCTION

Frederick E. Maser, otherwise mainly known as a collector of Wesleyana and other Methodist works, opens his introduction to Christina Rossetti in the *Maser Collection* (1991) with the memory of a fortunate discovery made by him with his wife Mary Louise on their "first visit to the Pickering and Chatto Bookshop following its move from Bloomsbury to Pall Mall" (5). The shop owner unexpectedly offered them the Bible that had belonged to Christina and her sister, with their names inscribed in it. Frederick confesses to have been "only casually interested since at that time I was not acquainted with either the writings or the art works of the Rossetti" (6). But in contrast, Mary Louise Maser showed a pronounced interest. She told her husband "When I was a little girl I knew many of Christina's poems by heart" (8), including for example:

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

It was this chance incident that induced the Masers to add Christina Rossetti to their list of authors to collect (10). As Frederick explains:

> For years I had been a part of what A. Edward Newton called "this book collecting game". I was known as a steady customer to dealers in England and the United States. I intended to write to all of them for Rossetti material. My wife was at first pessimistic; but soon, in the words of Christina, her "heart was like a singing bird". (10)

Many English speakers are familiar with poems by Christina Rossetti in this way, although not all of them even know the author's name. At any rate, this passage of Maser's confirms me in my resolve to study her poems. It is a fact that they have a magical power to enchant their readers as anybody can judge from the verses just quoted.

Christina Georgina Rossetti was born on December 5th, 1830 at 38 Charlotte Street, Portland Place, London, as the youngest of the four children of Gabriel Rossetti and Frances Mary Lavinia Polidori. As Mackenzie Bell notes, in his biography *Christina Rossetti* (1898), her Italian father was "eminent" as a poet and admirer of Dante but also "obnoxious to the Naples Government owing to his support of Liberal ideas" (5). He settled in London to teach Italian and became a professor of Italian at King's College. Her Italian-English mother was the sister of Lord Byron's physician and companion, John Polidori, known to many as the author of *Vampire*.

Christina's elder sister, Maria Francesca was born in 1827. Mary Louise Maser notes: "Maria was Christina's constant companion. Her cool serenity was a suitable foil for Christina's quick temper and sparkling gaiety. She soothed Christina's occasional fits of anger or depression" (28). Later, Maria was to become a nun and an interpreter of Dante.

The older of Christina's two brothers was Dante Gabriel, born in 1828, who was to found the Pre-Raphaelite circle of young poets and painters. Of this circle, Harold Bloom writes:

> As a literary term, "Pre-Raphaelite" is almost meaningless, yet it survives because we need some name for the cluster of poets who are the overt Romantics among the Victorians. (1)

As noted by Maser, Gabriel "shared with Christina a keen feeling for color and a talent for expressing himself in words" (28) and he acted as her constant adviser in writing matters.

Of her second brother, William Michael, born in 1829, Maser writes that "[William's] life was built on his deep devotion to the family" (28), and late in his life he was to act as a posthumous editor for his predeceased siblings, especially Christina. Effectively, as Bell says, William was "Christina Rossetti's literary executor" (viii).

The Aim of the Research

Being as I am attracted by rhyme of verses, I chose Christina Rossetti's Sing Song to study not only as a subject for my M.A. graduation paper but also for amusing my elder daughter who was at the time only three. That was what started me on studying Rossetti's poems. *Sing Song* is filled with simple expressions and amusing word play which was what led me into the gaily fantastical realm of children's literature. Developing my research in Rossetti's work, I next encountered the assertions of feminist theory, especially in the various possible readings of longer poems such as "Goblin Market", "The Prince's Progress" and "The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children". Many aspects of these better known poems have been discussed from contrasting points of view for many years now. I followed previous researchers in reading these mature pieces, but I also found important elements to consider in Rossetti's earlier poems. Studying earlier works may lead us to probe into an author's learning process. This is certainly true of Rossetti's "Juvenilia", as her brother William called her earliest poems, which give a valuable insight into her early reading and writing habits, and thus into the deceptively simple ways in which she expresses her thoughts and

sensations. In my thesis overall, I focus on feminist viewpoints on Rossetti's poetry and especially on comparisons with female figures in fairy tales.

Previous biographies and criticism have supplied widely varying interpretations of her poems and other works. The prime aim of her first biographer, Mackenzie Bell, was to introduce her to a wide public:

> Perhaps my study may serve to some readers as an introduction to the writing of Christina Rossetti both as a poet and as a prose writer. (1898, Preface)

As this remark suggests, Bell provides a great deal of information about the events of Rossetti's life and an interpretation of her poems for first-time readers. Later critics usually pursue more particular aims. For example, in *Learning not to be First—The Life of Christina Rossetti* (1991), Kathleen Jones attempts to give an account of "Rossetti's life …that is …as close to the truth as Christina herself would have desired it to be" (xv). In *The achievement of Christina Rossetti,* (Ed. David A. Kent [1987]), the focus is on effort and improvement, while in *The Fairy-tale Literature of Charles Dickens, Christina Rossetti, and George MacDonald—Antidotes to the Victor The Fairy-tale Literature of Charles Dickensian Spiritual Crisis* [2008], Cynthia Demarcus Manson analyzes the works of Rossetti and two other authors from the standpoint of the fairytale, as viewed from a feminist perspective. In *Sex, Drugs, and Madness in Poetry from William Blake to Christina Rossetti* [1996], Eijun Senaha focuses on irrational elements. Thus, Rossetti's poems have been studied from many aspects, including fantastical fairy tale imagery, nursery rhyme tricks of language and word play, links to Rossetti's life and friendships, and so forth.

Depending on the aspect highlighted here, the point of the poems will naturally change. In terms of her own life, one could say that Christina Rossetti kept on writing in order to leave a personal testimony in her verses while struggling with painful illnesses.

If the feminist aspect of Rossetti's writing is more attended to, however, the view becomes more social. In the masculine-centered nineteenth century, women's rights were almost ignored and women themselves were only treated as properties held by ma1e parents or marriage partners. Women had fewer rights to be educated than men. In fact, illiterate women were often much preferred in this sort of society. This is not only the case in the West but also in the East. A widespread Chinese proverb says that an illiterate woman makes a preferable housewife (女人無才便是徳) [nizen wuzai ben sidei], and both in China and Japan women have historically been treated as lower beings.

It was not until the eighteenth century that women's rights started to be seriously considered, and often when this happened it was in particular connection with issues such as feminist movements, women's schools, laws, women's welfare, women writers and poets, or so on. The social role of women gradually gained more attention from the late eighteenth century on, and this change of attitude then grew into an issue of general concern in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Many "literary women" in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most notably Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf, were sharply sensitive to the unfair treatment of men and women in the social system as they found it, and protested about the problems that they felt were most vital to contemporary readers.

Christina Rossetti is one of these representative literary women. It was part of her intention to express views on her social surroundings by means of her talent in lyric poetry, religious verses and nursery rhymes for children. In view of this general aspect of her work, I will consider her poems in this thesis not only with a focus on the best known poems such as the "Sing Song" collection, "Goblin Market", "The Prince's Progress" and "The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children" but also paying due attention to the learning process already evident in her "Juvenilia".

One literary area I will concentrate on is fairy tales, which I will regard especially from the viewpoint of feminist criticism. Another clearly related area is nursery rhymes, as represented by the fantastical "Sing-Song" collection. In

her more ambitious poems “Goblin Market”, “The Prince’s Progress” and “The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children”, Rossetti then calls on her readers to consider life in a fuller social context. The social issue of women’s struggle is raised in “Goblin Market”, in which more emphasis is put on the ethic of sisterhood than is ever the case in fairy tales. More generally still, in her major poems, Rossetti considers the transformations in women’s social situations alongside the larger issue of women’s independence in the Victorian period, while treating other more specialized themes, too. As already argued above, however, I also think it is important to look at her earlier poems, the so-called “Juvenilia”, as illustrations of the learning process she passed through from childhood to maturity.

To conclude my Introduction, here is a more detailed preview of the contents of the chapters to come.

Chapter One: “Juvenilia Poems”— “Sweet Love Shall Never Die”

I explore not only the literary heritage that Rossetti consciously imitated, but also something of her deeper and less conscious motivations. Although less importance is usually attached to these early poems, I do not see the matter this way. If anything, I think it is interesting to probe them for the earliest signs of Rossetti’s later mature modes of expression.

Chapter Two: “Sing Song”—Maternal Love and the Image of an Ideal Family

Rossetti applies her imaginative capabilities to a wholeheartedly appeal to the minds of children. The collection also entices younger readers with its vocabulary and verbal play, as for example in: “‘Ding a ding,’/ The sweet bells sing,/ And say,/ ‘Come, all be gay,’/ For a wedding day” (40). Words such as “ding a ding” and “ding a dong” are full of vocal fun and the child comes to enjoy the rhythmical play of repeating them aloud. But apart from these attractions for children, “Sing Song” also reveals an imaginary and poetical world that preoccupies the writer herself.

Chapter Three: “Goblin Market”: “Joining Hands to Little Hands”

Here I come to grips with “Goblin Market”, which is generally acknowledged as the masterpiece of Rossetti’s poetry. The poem excites a strong curiosity. Incantatory and amusing repetitions of words arrest readers’ attention and allure them into trying to discover what the mysterious context is about. Are these word games just attractive as displays of rhythmical candescence, or is something else also implied in them? In all of her works Christina Rossetti devotes her rich imagination to the creation of a fantastic parallel world, but she displays this skill to its fullest in “Goblin Market”.

Chapter Four: “The Prince’s Progress”—The Meaning of “Sleep”

In this chapter I focus on two types of Princesses, as found in “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” and Rossetti’s “The Prince’s Progress”. By comparing the two, we can see a difference in view between a female writer’s perspective and the more traditional male one. Additionally I consider the meaning of “sleep” in fairy tales in general, and attempt to extract a lesson for the new of life which was becoming required in a contemporary woman’s way of living.

Chapter Five: “The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children”:
From Femininity to Feminism

Here, I read one of Rossetti’s longer poems from two comparative viewpoints representing, on the one side, the ideals of physical and ideal family love among Victorians and, on the other, a feminist view of sisterhood. More particularly, in the terms of the poem, I try to explore how a young girl, in the course of her growth process, learns to overcome the conflicts inherent in traditional social convention and to live independently. In other words, she learns how to transform herself from a dependent object into an independent woman.

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Chapter One　Juvenilia Poems: "Sweet Love Shall Never Die."

Emily Bronte secretly writes poems between her busy housekeeping jobs. Elizabeth Browning weaves poems out of her sickroom. Christina Georgina Rossetti writes down her feelings and observations beside her sick father. Each of them has a hardship in creating poems and each has her own special circumstances in the writing process just as you or I do in the learning process. P. L. Travers says "Everybody has to be the hero of one story; his own" (12). Travers, who discusses these writers' creations in terms of "myths," says, too,

> The myths never have single meaning; they have meaning itself. If you hang a crystal sphere in the window it will give off light from all parts of itself. That is how the myths are; they have meaning for me, for you, and for everyone else. A true symbol has always this multisidedness. It has something to say to all who approach it. (13)

Born into the heritage already established by her literary parents and siblings, Christina Rossetti is also remembered as a poetess, whose *Goblin Market* and *Sing Song* were published, like the works of E. B. Browning, or George Eliot etc., in the male-centered English literature of the Victorian age. It is not by some miraculous chance or coincidence that the poetess Christina Rossetti was born at this juncture in history, but she stands above her time.

Rossetti's poems, such as "Goblin Market," "Sing Song," "The Prince's Progress," etc., have a prominent place in English literature and a great attraction for readers.

There are various editions of Rossetti's poems. Rebecca Crump's variorum edition of Christina Rossetti's poems is generally recognized by scholars and critics as offering a complete and convenient access to them.

New Poems by Christina Rossetti: Hitherto Unpublished or Uncollected was edited by William Michael Rossetti, first published in 1895, then reprinted in 1896 and 1900 by Macmillan & Co., Ltd. The poems used in this chapter are based on the 1900 edition which, differing from the expanded 1904 edition, divides the collection into just four parts: "1. General Poems; 2. Devotional Poems; 3. Italian Poems; and 4. Juvenilia Poems."

Mackenzie Bell was a familiar friend of the Rossettis and knew a great deal about the family. In his biography *Christina Rossetti*, Bell notes:

> Christina Rossetti's first verses, addressed to her mother on her birthday, were written on April 27, 1843, and from that date she wrote verse frequently. By 1847 a considerable quantity of poetry had accumulated, and in that year her grandfather, Gaetano Polidori, printed privately a small volume of her compositions under the title of "Verses," all of the poems being dated. (191)

Rossetti's grandfather printed his younger granddaughter's poems with the purpose of recognizing her talent, not only for his own "merely grandfatherly predilection". The executor of her works, her brother William, later states:

> Juvenilia is, of course, of less intrinsic worth than the other sections, but I am in hopes that it will count as not wholly uninteresting. I class among the Juvenilia all that the authoress

> wrote before attaining (on 5 December 1847) the full age of seventeen; all these things, and nothing else. In this last-named section I make no distinction of subject-matter, nor yet of language. (viii-ix)

Though William notes his sister's early poems are "of less intrinsic worth than the other sections", they are more positively valued by other commentators. Bell consistently finds that

> these early poems show in a quite unusual degree, when we recollect the author's age, the qualities which individualized subsequently all her work, but more especially all her work in verse. (193)

Rossetti's grandfather encouraged her in writing and guided her in creation. He knew her gift with words and language and wanted to give her the chance to extend her creative imagery and instincts of word play. In Rossetti's "Juvenilia" poems, readers can find the original poetic qualities of her writing. Bell notes:

> [The early poems] have distinct originality of conception and of presentation, a certain indefinable aloofness from the objects described, while, at the same time, they manifest a remarkable clearness in the delineation of these objects, conjointly with sumptuousness of imagery. (193)

In other words, Rossetti's "Juvenilia" poems allow us to see her resources of word play and process of her learning from the earlier poets and reading. Travers says "If I were a hero the maiden I would set out to rescue would be language".(12) From this point of view, the "Juvenilia" poems are of exceptional interest.

This chapter concentrates on the "Juvenilia" poems (written between 1842 and 1847) to discuss Christina Rossetti's original writing process. Travers says:

> We shall never know what species of man it was that first unfolded from his own subjective understanding this Orphic and objective art. And as to the meaning of the myths, the more one studies them the more one sees that this heritage from archaic man—the rituals and concepts that guided his conscious life—miraculously survives and is ever present in the subterranean layers of ourselves. (12-13)

Thus, from Rossetti's "Juvenilia", it may be possible to find not only the literary heritage she consciously imitated, but also something of her deeper and less conscious motivations. Although relatively slight importance is usually attached to these poems in "Juvenilia" poems, I do not see the matter this way. If anything, I think it is interesting to probe these earliest poems for the earliest signs of Rossetti's later mature modes of expression. In this part I will discuss "Juvenilia" under the heads of (A) Love for Family and Friends, (B) Religious Belief,(C) Influences from Earlier Poets, and (D) The Themes about Death.

(A) Love for Family and Friends

"Juvenilia" consists of 45 poems and begins with "To My Mother," a poem celebrated for its power of expression although it was written in simple words when Rossetti was only twelve years old. Travers says:

> Perhaps the hero is one who puts his foot upon a path not knowing what he may expect from life but in some way feeling in his bones that life expects something from him. (16)

Prompted by her family, Rossetti starts writing poems relating to her family, and natural surroundings. A family birthday, of course, is a thoroughly familiar theme for her.

To My Mother
On the Anniversary of Her Birth

TO-DAY'S your natal day;
Sweet flowers I bring:
Mother, accept I pray
My offering.

And may you happy live,
And long us bless;
Receiving as you give
Great happiness.
27 *April* 1842

Rossetti expressed her sentiments for this occasion in the lines "May you happy live,/ And long us bless;/ Receiving as you give/ Great happiness". (303) She used the verses to express emotions of devotion showing the intensity of her attachment to her mother. Rossetti's brother William comments:

> the lines are regarded by me as in no sense approaching toward excellence; they are simple, spontaneous and in some degree neat. (VP, 392)

Her mother's praising comment was that:

> these verses are truly, and literally by my little daughter, who scrupulously rejected all assistance in her rhyming efforts, under the impression that in that case they would not be really her own. (VP,392)

Rossetti and her mother Frances Rossetti maintained a close and loving relationship to each other. Bell notes:

> Christina Rossetti manifested and evidently felt the deepest love and reverence for both her parents, but the ties of affection which bound her to her mother were peculiar and passionately strong. (6)

Frances Rossetti was a devoted wife and mother to her family, teaching her four children, as Bell notes, "the Church Catechism, besides imparting to them Biblical knowledge; and Christina soon showed deep religious feeling and aspiration". (14) The relationships between Rossetti and her mother remained deep and strong in all areas of Rossetti's life. In a poem of reminiscence, her mother recalls her birth:

> A gift, my dear Christina
> From her who loves you much,
> Who in a cold December,
> First felt your thrilling touch. (ADC)

The closeness of their relationships is insisted on in many biographies. For example, in *Recovering Christina Rossetti—Female Community and Incarnational Poetic*, Mary Arseneau mentions that "there are also many ways in which her mother Frances's interests in poetry affected Christina". (48) This is backed with family journal evidence:

> Frances was both a role model and source of encouragement for her poetic daughter. The mother provided an incentive for the literary efforts of all her children with *The Illustrated Scrapbook* and *Hodge-podge;* or *Weekly Efforts*, two household journals produced by Frances and the four children. (50)

In addition to Rossetti's mother, later readers are also indebted to her maternal Grandfather, G. Polidori, for his timely recognition of her talents and his willingness to collect and print her earlier poems.

Lines to my Grandfather

Dear Grandpapa,
To be obedient,
I'll try and write a letter;
Which (as I hope you'll deem expedient)
Must serve for lack of better.

My muse of late was not prolific,
And sometimes I must feel
To make a verse a task terrific
Rather of woe than weal.

As I have met with no adventure
Of wonder and refulgence,
I must write plain things at a venture
And trust to your indulgence… (85)

Readers today can feel grateful to Polidori for his encouragement to his granddaughter to continue and refine her writing. Bell notes the words Polidori attached to the volume he had printed:

> As her maternal grandfather …though I am ready to acknowledge that the well-known partial affection of a grandparent may perhaps lead me to overrate the merit of her youthful strains, I am still confident that the lovers of poetry will not wholly attribute my judgment to partiality. (193)

His readiness to publish “these early spontaneous efforts” also provides us with some precious materials for researching into Rossetti’s early growth as a poet.

The apple-tree is showing
  Its blossom of bright red
With a soft colour glowing
  Upon its leafy bed.

The pear-tree’s pure white blossom
  Like stainless snow is seen;
And all earth’s genial bosom
  Is clothed with varied green.
… …

I love the gay wild flowers
  Waving in fresh spring air;
Give me uncultured bowers
  Before the bright parterre! (85)
1 May 1845

In this poem, Rossetti tries to express her observation of nature. For example, she notices “The pear-tree’s pure white blossom/ like stainless snow is seen;/ And all earth’s genial bosom/ Is clothed with varied green”. However, the last two lines, “Give me the uncultured bowers/ Before the bright parterre!” show a more subtle knowledge of social snobbery than one might expect in an innocent girl’s heart.

Mother and Child

"WHAT art thou thinking of," said the mother,
"What art thou thinking of, my child?"
"I was thinking of heaven," he answered her,
And looked up in her face and smiled.

"And what didst thou think of heaven?" she said;
"Tell me, my little one."
"Oh I thought that there the flowers never fade,
That there never sets the sun."

"And wouldst thou love to go thither, my child,
Thither wouldst thou love to go,
And leave the pretty flowers that wither,
And the sun that sets below?"

"Oh I would be glad to go there, mother,
To go and live there now;
And I would pray for thy coming, mother;—
My mother, wouldst not thou?" (88)

10 *January* 1846

In this poem, Rossetti expresses the knowledge of distress shared between mother and child. The alternating voices in the poem seem to imitate the opposed viewpoints behind Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. Blake often writes two contrasting poems such as "The Lamb" and "The Tiger." Here, however, the alternation is closer to the parent and child dialogue in Goethe's "Erlenkonig". Battiscombe also describes the distinctive dual character of Rossetti's poems as:

> the two sides of Christina's character both as child and adult, the one essentially serious, loving and deeply involved with the loved person, the other detached, smiling, gently satirical. (27)

Later verses such as "Love and Hope", "Earth and Heaven", "Love Ephemeral", "Mother and Child", "Present and Future", are often replete with these "two sides of Christina's character both as child and adult."

Rossetti's poems written after the 1870s are generally criticized as too full of sentimental impressions and too empty of inspiration. In contrast, Battiscombe characterizes Rossetti in her adolescence as

> a quick-tempered but very affectionate little girl, full of whims and fancies, and just beginning to show a real talent of putting those fancies down on paper. (28)

We cannot fully know what produced the change in Christina's character because of the dearth of information in the biographies. Even *in Family Letters* her brother William Michael Rossetti has little to say on the subject. Only in a few biographies, such as those by Mackenzie Bell (1898), Lona Packer (1963), Fredegond Shove (1931), Georgina Battiscombe (1981) or Frances Thomas (1992), do we find a more determined attempt to uncover Rossetti's personality growth in order to arrive at an assessment of her life and times. In this connection, Rossetti's "Juvenilia" poems provide us with some clues for coming to an understanding of her natural intelligence and poetic ingenuities.

(B) Religious Belief

Following her poem "To My Mother—on the Anniversary of Her Birth", "Hymn" is often recognized as the second most important poem

by Rossetti. In it, she celebrates God's "Eternal Majesty", in words such as:

Hymn
"To the God Who reigns on high,
  To the Eternal Majesty,
To the Blessed Trinity,
  Glory on earth be given,
In the sea and in the sky,
  And in the highest heaven.
2 *July* 1843

To young Rossetti, the mighty God is all in all, both on earth and in heaven. This is a very common set of ideas in Christian hymns of praise: see New Testament, First letter to the Corinthians; 15, 28. Writing Psalms to God in verse was an important theme for Rossetti as a dedicated Christian, and in this poem she expressed her ardent adoration of God in Heaven. Nesca A. Robb comments that "the poem shows her strong family affection and her religious feelings". (82) Similarly, "The Dying Man to his Betrothed", "Will These Hands Ne'er Be Clean?" "A Novice", "A Martyr" and "I Have Fought a Good Fight", all suggest the renunciation of the world for Christ. Later, as a well-known Christian poet, Rossetti wrote a further string of religious poems including "Christ Our All in All", "Gifts and Graces", "New Jerusalem and Its Citizens", all of which were highly acclaimed. Appropriately, Robb notes:

> [t]he Bible is her mind's daily bread. The use of Biblical phrases and allusions has become for her, as it had for those seventeenth century Christians, the use of an instinctive second language. (87)

In the canonical literature tradition of the time, this brings Rossetti close to Milton (e.g., Paradise Lost, 12, 547-551), who was widely read as a model for young children in the 1840s. The unhappy marriage between Dorothea and Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* can be read as a parody of this sort of visionary ideal.

Rossetti's religious belief was influenced by her mother Frances Mary Lavinia Rossetti and her sister Maria Francesca Rossetti. Arseneau says:

> An even more decisive and telling gender division in the Rossetti family was drawn over the issue of faith. The Rossetti women were all deeply religious, and, as we shall see, their daily lives were dominated by the values and devotional practices of their Anglo-Catholicism. (12)

In fact, reading Rossetti's poems we can see that Rossetti's belief in Christianity affords her a release from painful illness, struggle and despair through her life. Robb's interpretation is that "religious ardour colours all her thoughts, and leads her at times into echoing the more platitudinous types of devotional verse". (83) Similarly, her psalms also infuse her readers with courage as they reenact in verse her own struggles to overcome of religious despair and recover her vital energy as a poet.

(C) Influences from Earlier Poets

All of the Rossetti children read from their early childhood. They were taught by their mother Frances at home. Bell says:

> Like many children possessing incipient genius, she [Rossetti] was desultory in her habits of study. But this disposition in her case (as in the case of so many others similarly endowed), was compensated for by much wide general reading. (15)

Rossetti, he notes, reads authors as diverse as William Hone, John Keats, Alexander Pope, William Carleton, William Shakespeare, Sir Walter Scott, Ann Radcliffe, Charles Robert Maturin…etc. She imitates the style habits of these literary predecessors and blends them into works of her own imagination.

In a passage in her "reading diary" *Time Flies* (1888), dated May 8, Rossetti shows particular interest in Blake's Resurrection:

> There is a design by William Blake symbolic of Resurrection. In it I behold the descending soul and the arising body rushing together in an indissoluble embrace: and the design, among all I recollect to have seen, stands alone in expressing the rapture of the reunion. (88)

Bell calls this "an opinion worth quoting when we recollect how great, apparently, was the influence of Blake on her own work". (342)

As I have already pointed out above, Rossetti followed Blake in her use of opposed arguments to bring out contrasting aspects of the same phenomena. A clear example of this is found in her Rose poems. Here is the famous poem "The Sick Rose" by William Blake.

The Sick Rose

O rose, thou art sick!
The invisible worm
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy;
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy. (39)

(William Blake, *Songs of Experience*)

Under the influence of Blake, Rossetti writes several poems about roses, including “The Solitary Rose” and “The Rose”:

The Rose

Gentle, gentle river
Hurrying along
With a sparkle ever,
And a murmured song,
Pause in thine onward motion,
Fast flowing toward the ocean,
And give this rose from me
To haughty Coralie.

Tell her that love’s symbol,
The deep blushing rose,
Doth in all resemble
That it would disclose.
Untended, shortly thriving
There’ll soon be no reviving;
But nursed with kindliness
‘T will cheer life’s wilderness. (II. 95)

In both this poem, as in others, imitations of Blake can be seen. But it is especially in her sonnet “The Rose”, “O Rose, thou flower of flowers, thou fragrant wonder” that signs of Rossetti’s future creative talents are apparent.

The Rose

O ROSE, thou flower of flowers, thou fragrant wonder,
Who shall describe thee in thy ruddy prime,
Thy perfect fulness in the summer time,

When the pale leaves blushingly part asunder
And show the warm red heart lies glowing under?
  Thou shouldst bloom surely in some sunny clime,
  Untouched by blights and chilly Winter's rime,
Where lightnings never flash nor peals the thunder.
And yet in happier spheres they cannot need thee
    So much as we do with our weight of woe;
Perhaps they would not tend, perhaps not heed thee,
  And thou wouldst lonely and neglected grow:
And He Who is All Wise, He hath decreed thee
  To gladden earth and cheer all hearts below.
17 *April* 1847 (351)

Another of her poems "The Solitary Rose" is also influenced by Blake. In contrast to ones above, it seems in the opening lines here—"that bloomest lonely/ where there are none to gather while they love thee"—that Rossetti is becoming conscious of herself as a female poet akin to a lonely rose. Perhaps her family's economic troubles and her own poor physical health at this time were factors that contributed to Rossetti's feelings of loneliness, although this is a matter that seems to be passed over in the biographies.

The Solitary Rose

O HAPPY rose, red rose, that bloomest lonely
  Where there are none to gather while they love thee,
  That art perfumed by thine own fragrance only,
  Resting like incense round thee and above thee;—
Thou hearest nought save some pure stream that flows,
      O happy rose.

What though for thee no nightingales are singing?
They chant one eve, but hush them in the morning.
Near thee no little moths and bees are winging
To steal thy honey when the day is dawning;—
Thou keep'st thy sweetness till the twilight's close,
O happy rose.

Then rest in peace, thou lone and lovely flower;
Yea be thou glad, knowing that none are near thee,
To mar thy beauty in a wanton hour,
And scatter all thy leaves nor deign to wear thee.
Securely in thy solitude repose,
O happy rose.

15 *March* 1847 (335)

The flower blooming in solitude is a familiar Romantic and Pre-Romantic image, e.g. "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen…", Thomas Gray's *Elegy* written in a *Country Churchyard*; "She dwelt among the untrodden ways…" of William Wordsworth's *Lucy*. Rossetti uses the similar patterns and wording but adds her own more intense touches which delight her readers with new deliberation in addition to conventional delicacy.

Like her predecessors, Rossetti writes many love songs in her earlier period, including "Love Ephemeral," "Love and Hope," "Love Attacked," "Love Defended", etc. As a girl of thirteen, she seems ready to admire love and heaven simply, as others do. In "Love and Hope", she affirms:

Love for ever dwells in heaven—
Hope entereth not there,
To despairing man Love's given—
Hope dwells not with despair.
Love reigneth high, and reigneth low, and reigneth
everywhere.

Christina knows that love cheers “despairing man”, and love is stronger than hope. Thus, she emphasizes and wishes for love because she knows that

> [i]n the inmost heart love dwelleth,/ It may not quenched be; E’en when the life blood welleth,/ Its fond effects we see/ In the name that leaves the lips the last—fades last from memory. (3o4)

With graceful verses like these, Rossetti interweaves the beauty of love with the esteemed of heaven to create one noble idea in her poem. At its close, she proclaims:

> Though Hope shall have forsaken,
> Sweet Love shall never die:
> For perfect Love and perfect bliss shall be our lot on high.
> 9 *October* 1843 (304)

Though still very young, Rossetti has already realized that earthly love is ephemeral, and she chooses heavenly love. She is aware that “Love is sweet, and so are flowers" (“Love Ephemeral”, (1845)) but she weeps that "Love endures but for a day" (308). Rossetti has already learned the ephemerality of love from her observation of nature. As Robb remarks:

> Rossetti had already laid hold on her life’s inspiration. Earthly love with its joys and beauties, its partings and estrangements; heavenly love with its reconciling peace, are final realities to the girl as to the woman. (84)

And in “Reparative Strategies”, Katherine Mayberry explains:

> While the inevitability of love’s failure constituted a tremendous loss to Christina Rossetti, from it came a greater gain: the urge to repair, to transform, to create, and, in the best of circumstances, to discover new truths. As these poems repeatedly prove, loss was the wellspring of creativity for Rossetti, and creativity a method of discovery. (57-58)

Loss and creation certainly come together in “Love Ephemeral”. On the one hand, “Love is sweet, and so are flowers/ Blooming in bright summer bowers”; but on the other hand, “Flowers soon must fade away: Love endures but for a day”. (308)

Love Attacked

…
And like an inundation
    It leaves behind
An utter desolation
    Of heart and mind.

Who then would court Love’s presence,
    If here below
It can but be the essence
    Of restless woe?
…

In “Love Attacked,” we find Rossetti continuing the same theme of complaint, but here her contemplations on love become more subtle. She admits: “Love is more sweet than flowers,” “Warmer than sunny hours,” “Softer than music’s whispers” and “More kind than

friendship's greeting," but she also recoils: "Who then would court Love's presence" if "It can but be the essence of restless woe?" In these lines, she sums up the whole bitterness of the human condition, torn between the desire of love unattained and the pain of love lost. As she notes: "Returned or unrequited,/ 'Tis still the same;" the Rossettis were a bilingual family and from an early age Christina must have known the poems of Petrarch in which the sweetness and bitterness of love is a paramount theme. How surprised the realization seems to be that "The flame was never lighted,/ Or sinks the flame". (319)　These are dark thoughts for a girl of only 15; normally, an age for venturing out into glorious joy of the world.　But compensation, too, is to be found in the companion piece "Love Defended":

Love Defended

…
As the man who ne'er hath seen,
　Or as he who cannot hear,
Is the heart that hath no part
　In Love's hope and fear.

…
So, tho' Love may not be free
　Always from a taint of grief,
If its sting is very sharp,
　Great is its relief.
23 *April* 1846

"Love Defended" sets out a converse argument to the one elaborated in "Love Attacked":

Who extols a wilderness?
  Who hath praised indifference?
Foolish one, thy words are sweet,
  But devoid of sense.

As the man who ne'er hath seen,
  Or as he who cannot hear,
Is the heart that hath no part
  In Love's hope and fear
23 April, 1846

These lines will bring an amiable smile to the lips of anyone who has ever fallen in love. In them, Robb recognizes Rossetti's consciousness of the "the fragility of earthly things and of the tragic possibilities of life", (84) in her view, "sorts oddly with her inexperience. This had its origin too, no doubt, in her religious background with its emphasis on human sinfulness, and its consequences, temporal and eternal; but her naturally introspective mind and tender conscience were quick to make that vision of things their own. (84) Rather than from Rossetti's inexperience of life, I think that these verses flow more naturally from her daily life, especially her painful experiences of her family's economic hardships and her own ill-health.

Bell states that "The somewhat minute analysis of emotion in 'Love Attacked' and 'Love Defended,' is very striking when we recollect that the two poems were produced in 1846 when the poet was only fifteen" (196). Like most other readers of Rossetti, I would fully agree with this. Mayberry writes that:

> Unquestionably, Rossetti recognized and made use of the distancing and reshaping properties of art: she was aware that writing poetry about the painful conditions of her life changed those conditions, gave them a quality comfortably distinct from their real essence. (58)

The “painful condition of her life” can be more openly seen in Rossetti’s prose work “Maude”, and in the more mature development of her thoughts in “The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the children”.

(D)The Theme of Death

Death is one of the most pervasive themes in Rossetti’s poems. She sighs for the death of her friends, her pet and her relatives.

On the Death of a Cat
A Friend of Mine Aged Ten Years and a Half

WHO shall tell the lady’s grief
When her Cat was past relief?
Who shall number the hot tears
Shed o’er her, belov’d for years?
Who shall say the dark dismay
Which her dying caused that day?

Though this is the death of a cat, Rossetti expresses the bitterness and grief of the cat’s owner and the memories she had of the cat. The cat is not only a pet but also a member of the family.

Come, ye Muses, one and all,
Come obedient to my call;
Come and mourn with tuneful breath
Each one for a separate death;
And, while you in numbers sigh,
I will sing her elegy. (317)

The more love, the greater the sadness. It is a natural emotion that any human feels. In form, the poem is an imitation of one by the ancient Roman poet Catullus, whose elegy for a lady's pet sparrow goes:

> Mourn, o you Loves and Cupids,
> And such of you as love beauty;
> My girl's sparrow is dead;
> Her sparrow, the girl's delight,
> Whom she loved more than her eye…

This was a standard passage for beginners in Latin, and Rossetti would have met it in her teenage education. Most of her Victorian readers would know it, too.

Another common theme related to death often found in Rossetti is the tragedy of a parting couple.

> The Dying Man to His Betrothed
>
> ONE word—'tis all I ask of thee;
> One word—and that is little now
> That I have learned thy wrong of me;
> And thou too art unfaithful—thou!
> O thou sweet poison, sweetest death,
> O honey between serpent's teeth,
> Breathe on me with thy scorching breath!

The man on the point of death is deeply hurt by the "sweet poison," or the "honey between serpent's teeth" that comes from the mouth of his "Betrothed." The dying man recognizes that "the last poor hope" of reconcilement is lost, "And with it life is ebbing fast." The illusion

that any final solution can be found in this world turns out to have been vain, and that is the situation he has to reconcile himself to.

The last poor hope is fleeting now,
  And with it life is ebbing fast;
I gaze upon thy cold white brow,
  And loathe and love thee to the last.
And still thou keepest silence,—still
Thou look'st on me: for good or ill
Speak out, that I may know thy will.

The real point here is, how can two humans waste time quarreling over something so incongruous when each knows "My life is ending like a tale/ that was but never more shall be" (14 July 1846, 325).

"The Dead Bride" is another poem concerned with death. Rossetti sums up the woman's passive situation with impersonal subjects: "Joy is fleeting,/ Life is frail,/ Death had found her". (328)

The Dead Bride

THERE she lay so still and pale,
  With her bridal robes around her:
Joy is fleeting, life is frail,
  Death had found her.

Gone for ever: gone away
  From the love and light of earth;
Gone for ever: who shall say
  Where her second birth?

Had her life been good and kind?
    Had her heart been meek and pure?
Was she of a lowly mind,
        Ready to endure?

……

Who shall say what hope and fear
    Crowded in her short life's span?
If the love of God was dear,
        Or the love of man?

 Happy bride if single-hearted
      Her first love to God was given;
 If from this world she departed
      But to dwell in heaven;… (328)
                        Folkestone, 10 *September* 1846

Such subjects of death often recur in Rossetti's poems. It is not her purpose to intensify the tragedies so much as to express some important sentiment that is ignored in daily life. Mayberry notes:

> …in most of the poems in this group, she introduces strategies by which the experience, already reformed by being turned into art, can be reshaped and distanced still further. Through the transforming properties inherent in memory, fantasy, anticipation, and fiction, Rossetti creates something new and positive out of love's failure. (58)

In passing, this particular poem may also have been the original for her later and more elaborated work "The Prince's Progress."

"The Dead City" (9 April 1847) is the only long poem in "Juvenilia." It may have been an imitation of "The Rime of The Ancient Mariner" by S. T. Coleridge and appears also to be a pre-sketch for Rossetti's later representative poem "Goblin Market".

The Dead City

ONCE I rambled in a wood
With a careless hardihood,
Heeding not the tangled way;
Labyrinths around me lay,
But for them I never stood.

On, still on, I wandered on,
And the sun above me shone,
And the birds around me winging
With their everlasting singing
Made me feel not quite alone…..(340)

The action of this poem opens with a description of a perplexing Journey, much as "The Rime of The Ancient Mariner" did: "The ship was cheered, the harbor cleared…" is similarly carefree, and of course, the stanza form is the same. But there is no sudden storm in "The Dead City," just sleepy sunshine. And there is nothing like the crime of shooting the albatross. Psychologically, Rossetti was struggling with sickness around the time, feeling anxiety about her own health as well as her family's economic affairs. It may have been her yearnings for peace, rest or death that impelled her strong but simple expressions in this poem.

Kathleen Jones comments, "Her [Rossetti's] poems reveal a natural sensuality, and are influenced by Keats and Tennyson". (15) In contrast to the pull of her inner emotions, Rossetti finds herself alone and suffering in her sickness and fading beauty:

Happy solitude, and blest
With beatitude of rest;
  Where the woods are ever vernal,
  And the life and joy eternal,
Without death's or sorrow's test.

O most blessed solitude!
O most full beatitude!
  Where are quiet without strife
  And imperishable life,
Nothing marred and all things good…..(342)

At the end of "The Dead City", just as later in "Goblin Market," Rossetti awakes from her "strange dream of hope and fear" (stanza 16) and is confronted in particular with the spectacle of a girl who had been so far drawn into the scene that her eyes had become spellbound "no more wandered roundabout."

Full of fear I would have fled;
Full of fear I bent my head,
  Shutting out each stony guest.—
  When I looked again, the feast
And the tent had vanished.

Yes, once more I stood alone
Where the happy sunlight shone,
  And a gentle wind was sighing,
   And the little birds were flying,
And the dreariness was gone.

All these things that I have said
Awed me and made me afraid.
    What was I that I should see
    So much hidden mystery?
And I straightway knelt and prayed.(350)

9 *April* 1847

A more positive and joyful sense of release is found in a poem written half a year later, "The World's Harmonies". It seems that when the poet "straightway knelt and prayed," she came to hear harmonies in heart. With this prayer, harmony can be restored, and in another poem written at this time, this is also expressed more positively:

The World's Harmonies

OH listen, listen, for the Earth
        Hath silent melody:
Green grasses are her lively chords,
    And blossoms: and each tree,
Chestnut and oak and sycamore,
    Makes solemn harmony.

There is an ancient tradition of hymns of praise on the theme "Praise the Lord, all you created things", going back to Psalm 148. Of course, each writer adds personal touches and Rossetti, especially, adds the memorable moral ending of the poor man turning from sin. In this piece, she evokes the vital actions of the earth in its "green grass," "blossoms," trees such as, "Chestnut and oak and sycamore" etc., and extends this to both the inanimate and the human realms:

Oh listen, listen, for the Sea
    Is calling unto us:
Her notes are the broad liquid waves
    Mighty and glorious.
Lo the first man and the last man
    Hath heard, shall hearken thus. (371)

Alongside natural plants and other things of nature, Rossetti is also attracted to the sea in this way in several of her poems. She evokes the "mighty and glorious" movements of the sea interwoven with beautiful and often tragic human stories.

The Sun on which men cannot look,
    Its splendour is so strong,
Which wakeneth life and giveth life,
    Rolling in light along,
From day-dawn to dim eventide
    Sings the eternal song. (372)

The sun that shines continuously "from day-dawn to dim eventide,/ sings the eternal song" day by day, even though most of us are oblivious to its presence. Rossetti calls on us to enjoy the Sun's power and acknowledge its power as coming from God.

And the Moon taketh up the hymn,
    And the Stars answer all:
And all the Clouds and all the Winds
    And all the Dews that fall
And Frost and fertilizing Rain
    Are mutely musical. (372)

After the sun, the moon is the second most important heavenly body as seen from our earth. The sun displays mighty illuminating power like a god, while the moon, like a great mother, tenderly brightens the night sky. The stars and clouds are other natural elements surrounding the earth and sustaining and fertilizing human life. Each component in the natural systems is important and indispensable for us.

Fishes and Beasts and feathered Fowl
  Swell the eternal chaunt,
That riseth through the lower air,
  Over the rainbow slant,
Up through the unseen palace-gates,
  Fearlessly jubilant.

Before the everlasting Throne
  It is acceptable:
It hath no pause or faltering:
  The Angels know it well:
Yea in the highest heaven of heavens
  Its sound is audible.

Yet than the voice of the whole World
  There is a sweeter voice,
That maketh all the Cherubim
  And Seraphim rejoice:
That all the blessed Spirits hail
  With undivided choice: (373)

Rossetti does not forget to listen to the voice of God. An even priest voice of the world she always admires.

Claudia Ottlinger asserts:

> Witnessing other people's death can be regarded as an anticipation of and preparation for the moment when oneself has to die. The confrontation with the ultimate 'otherness' of death might lead to new insights and help to solve the dilemmas and uncertainties concerning the phenomenon of death. (63)

Earthly bitterness can only find a perfect rest in heaven. That is why Ottlinger believes that "Rossetti regards death chiefly as the gateway to perfect rest and oblivion in heaven". (129) As for me, it leaves me bitter that a young girl should have such negative thoughts so early in life.

> That crieth at the golden door
> And gaineth entrance in:
> That the palm-branch and radiant crown
> And glorious throne may win:—
> The lowly prayer of a Poor Man
> Who turneth from his sin. (373)
>
> 20 *November* 1847

Nature sustains humans life with such fertile treasures as the sun, the moon, the sea and the animal world, and Rossetti gives a wonderful conception of this with her sensitive power of observation. But her experience of humans bitterness is much deeper, and leads her more earnestly to look for complete happiness only in heaven. She sees entrance into heaven as the only release. However, this does not mean that she encourages people to put an early end to their own life. On the contrary, she insists on the need to endure earthly bitterness

until the day comes. This is the source of the magic tension in Rossetti's poems. Ottlinger's analysis of it is that

> Rossetti's attraction can be explained by her yearning for ultimate rest in heaven, which is a place of perfect peace and harmony in her mind and suggests the end of all earthly suffering, while her aversion refers to the physical torture that goes along with the process of dying and to the possibility of her being unworthy of God's grace—hence her many poems in the form of prayers. (135)

Such an attraction and aversion can also be felt in "The Last Answer".

The Last Answer
(Written in Bouts-rimes)

SHE turned round to me with her steadfast eyes.
"I tell you I have looked upon the dead;
Have kissed the brow and the cold lips," she said;
"Have called upon the sleeper to arise.
He loved me, yet he stirred not: on this wise,
Not bowing in weak agony my head,
But all too sure of what life is, to dread,
Learned I that love and hope are fallacies."
She gazed quite calmly on me; and I felt
Awed and astonished and almost afraid:
For what was I to have admonished her?
Then, being full of doubt and fear, I knelt,
And tears came to my eyes even as I prayed:
But she, meanwhile, only grew statelier. (373)

2 *December* 1847.

Like Emily Dickinson, Rossetti writes the deathbed scene in a number of poems. Rossetti attempts to combine a desire and fear of death in this poem. In fact, this attempt to generate doubled feelings is apparent in many of her poems, and is reminiscent of a similar affection found in Blake. Like Emily Dickinson, Rossetti writes the deathbed scene in a number of poems.(63) Ottlinger notes that "Christina Rossetti's "The Last Answer" doubles the situation of witnessing somebody else's death in a clever way." (63)

Rossetti excels in displaying the unbridgeable divide between the worlds of death and life. The "incommunicability" between the present world and the one that is gone generates the lonely emotion felt by the living toward the dead. Rossetti approached this state through the experience of her own illness and those of her father and friends. This, in part, was what drove her to find something left for the living in the void left by the dead. In her poems, she looks for a way to realize the myths of death. As Travers reflects:

> Perhaps the myths are telling us these endeavors are not so much voyages of discovery as of rediscovery; that the hero [or Rossetti herself] is seeking not for something new but something old, a treasure that was lost and has to be found, his own self, his identity. (16)

The temptations these myths held for Rossetti are clearly shown in "The Last Answer". As Ottlinger sees it, "the incommunicability of the dead is picked out as a theme" in this poem, and the speaker in "The Last Answer" "gets an answer of a dying one to a question never asked" (65). Ottlinger goes on to explain that:

> …the answer…concerns the other side of the borderline, i.e. death, the dropping out of existence that no one alive knows through their own experience. (65)

In her confrontations with dying persons Ottlinger finds that:

> Rossetti is primarily concerned with the psycho-emotional aspects of somebody else's act of dying and regards them against the Christian background, showing different reactions to the extreme nature of the experience (fear of the truth in "The Last Answer," curiosity in "The Dead Bride"). (74)

It is Ottlinger's view that death, to Rossetti, is a "counterbalance to the burden of life, which she has to carry until she is confronted with earthly extinction, and a power that brings about total oblivion of all suffering and despair. She regards the enjoyment of earthly gifts as incompatible with the attainment of heavenly bliss and cannot escape the feeling of complete disillusionment and dissatisfaction with life". (169)

In current research of Christina Rossetti, feminist scholars tend to stick to the lines originally developed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, which implies some neglect of Rossetti's own character and brilliance. Much attention is accordingly paid to discussing "Goblin Market," "The Prince's Progress" and the religious poems. However, it is not right to neglect her "Juvenilia." Christina Rossetti creates a personal status of her own in her writing, derived from experiences from her own internal and external circumstances, together with others from canonical literature or of her own creative production. Although she may have faced some of the contemporary limitations of *The Madwoman in the Attic,* she is also notable for the breadth of her reading in *One's Own Room* and is earnestly sincere in her writing. That is the fascination of these poems that they allow insights into her spontaneous grace and intelligence.

Above all, the “Juvenilia” give us an insight into Rossetti’s learning process. Some people may think that this is not the main thing to focus on. But is that really so? In my reading of Japanese literature when I first came across “Kusa—makura”(草枕) by Natsume Soseki（夏目漱石）, I recall my excitement in finding that his writing incorporated numerous imitations of features from English and Chinese literature. Another novel of his, *Sansirou* (三四郎), contain hints of Oscar Wilde, Shelly and various Chinese poets. He succeeds in capturing our interest in the way he mixes these English and Chinese literary precedents while also weaving in his own distinctive Japanese contents. Through reading Natsume’s works, I learned the necessity of reading widely so as to have a stock of sources to take as models when it comes to the writing process. As with Natsume, the more you read the more you feel impelled to write. For similar reasons, I feel that it is necessary to study Rossetti’s juvenile writing in which, fortunately, signs of her creative resources and emotions are clearly apparent. I believe that a reading of Rossetti’s “Juvenilia” will encourage readers to broaden out into new research approaches. Another product of her rich harvest of imitation and imagination is the nursery rhyme collection “Sing Song”. I will analyze that in my next chapter.

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Chapter Two "SING SONG": Maternal Love and the Image of an Ideal Family

Juvenile literature changes from one period to another. Recently young readers were finding excitement in the fantasy world of *Harry Potter*, as they did a little earlier in Roald Dahl's grim but colorful *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Matilda*, and *James and the Giant Peach*. Earlier again, in Rossetti's lifetime, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* introduced young readers to a strange world differing from the one they were normally familiar with. Entertaining books like these can make the imagination more fertile and the heart more emotionally alive. Some people, however, ignore this fertilizing power of pleasure reading in favor of competing pulls of commercialism. Visual-only effects keep people from creating a world of their own out of words. In this way, we risk losing spiritual refreshment, and depriving ourselves and our children of a rich store of imagination.

Among other forms of juvenile literature, English has a long history of nursery rhymes. Percy Muir says in *English Children's Books*: "[t]he assessment of verse for children is not an easy task" (119). Poets may have a clear enough view of a child's actions but it is hard to find the words that authentically catch their imagination. In practice, however, many works appear to have succeeded admirably in this. In verse writing, in particular, William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, R.L. Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*, and A.A. Milne's *When We Were Very Young* and *Now We Are Six* have long been recognized as masterpieces of writing for children. What makes these works so attractive is not only the

fact of their vocabularies being so simple and easily understood but also the innocence, or at least the confined childlike naughtiness exquisitely displayed in pieces such as "The Knight Whose Armour Didn't Squeak" in *Now We Are Six*. Effects like these are as captivating for adults as they are for children, and that is one reason why some of these books have managed to maintain their reputation for more than a century.

Sing Song was as popular in its day as these other books were. Published in 1872, it consists of 126 poems by Christina Rossetti. She was more generally known for her lyric poetry, especially her mystic and religious poems, but *Sing Song* offered a completely different side of her talents. In these nursery rhymes, she displays her skill at interweaving bouts of verbal play with the rhythm of traditional English children's rhymes and with the Italian heritage of her parents.

Generally speaking, Rossetti's poems are inclined to be more morbid and melancholy. If *Sing Song* is different, it is because she altered her writing habits for it and allowed her rhymes to be freely inspired by her exuberant imagination. In *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti,* Roderick McGillis comments:

> Rossetti's work for children treats its readers to an experience of the high morality of art, thus offering them the opportunity for free play, for participation in imaginative understanding. (208)

In *Sing Song* the reader is alternately treated to moral exercise, as in: "If all were rain and never sun,/ No bow could span the hill;/ If all were sun and never rain,/ There'd be no rainbow still" (II. 24), and word play for its own sake, such as the M alliteration in: "Minnie and Mattie/ And fat little May,/ Out in the country,/ Spending a day" (II.26). We can find many such rhymes in *Sing Song*. Rossetti uses her imaginative and verbal talent to the full to create a book of delights. The function of *Sing Song*, as McGillis notes:

> is to deconstruct allegoric and didactic meaning; the characteristic psychological tension in Victorian fantasy, the pull of both duty and desire, is evident in Rossetti's work, but its implications go beyond simply dichotomy. It posits a reader capable of comprehending and accepting this uncertain world as a schoolhouse where we prepare for a certain world yet to come. (208)

Most noticeably, like *Songs of Innocence* and *A Child's Garden of Verses*, *Sing Song* captivates its young readers with plays on words. As to this aspect, McGillis says:

> *Sing Song* is a book of nursery rhymes, as the subtitle informs us. But these rhymes are acutely aware of the verbal world children live in, and they encourage children to enjoy the play of language. (218)

In this chapter I will discuss aspects of rhythm, verbal usage, and fantastic imagination in *Sing Song* and show how they relate to maternal love and the Victorian image of the ideal family.

(A) Meter and Rhyme Patterns

In *Sing Song*, with its rhymes of "fresh and cheerful literary conception mingled with visions" for juvenile readers, as Miyao Ohara (1985, 51) puts it, rhythm is changeable and congenial. Elsewhere Rossetti could write poems in strictly formal patterns but here she preferred to keep her writing light and enjoyable. Her distinct rhythm "activates each individual song to amplify various images" (Ohara, 1985, 51).

In *Sing Song*, the rhythms are mostly iambic but the meters change. Rossetti wrote skillfully in patterns unconstrained by conventional rules.

Arthur Symonds in *Studies in Two Literature* commentating on the rhythm of *Sing Song*, says:

…Some of them being, perhaps, among the most perfect we have had since Shelley, whom she resembles also in her free but flawless treatment of rhythm" (Symonds, 1897, 147, quoted by Ohara, 1985, 52).

Though it is hard to assign firm rules to the rhythms in Rossetti's poems, I will try to pick up some recurring features of rhythm and word usage so as to arrive at a few characterizing statements.

First, it will be useful to have some metrical overview of what is typical in Rossetti's verses.

x Boats | sail on | the riv- | ers x	a
And ships | sail on | the seas;	b
But clouds | that sail | across | the sky	c
Are pret- | tier far | than these.	b
There are bridg- | es on | the riv- | ers x	a
As pret- | ty as |you please,	b
x But | the bow | that bridg-| es heav- | en, x	d
And o- | vertops | the trees,	b
And builds | a bridge | from earth | to sky,	c
Is pret- | tier far | than these. (43)	b

This poems has a metrical pattern of four feet ("tetrameter") in lines 3 and 9: "But clouds | that sail | across | the sky", and: "And builds | a bridge | from earth | to sky." On the other hand, I find three feet ("trimester") in lines 4 and 7: "Are prêt- | tier far | than these" and: "But the bow | that bird- | ges heaven." The word "the" is reduced in the first foot of line 7 is most likely reduced (to "th' bow"), while "heaven" contracts into a sort of "hea'm" sound: ("heav'n"). Contractions like these are normal in iambic verse, for example, "Give all | thou canst; | high Heaven ("Heav'n") | rejects | the lore | Of nice- |ly cal- | cula- | ted less | or more" in Wordsworth: "Inside of King's College Chapel, Cambridge".

This poem produces a great fascination. Though the description of the rainbow is similar to Wordsworth's description of the flowers by the lake in "The Daffodils" Rossetti's poem uses different meters.

I wandered lonely as a cloud a
That floats on high o'er vales and hills, b
When all at once I saw a croud, a
A host of golden daffodils; b
Beside the lake, beneath the trees, c
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze. c

(Takenaka, 123)

Most of the time in "The Daffodils", Wordsworth uses iambic tetrameter, but this changes sometimes, for example in the last line of this stanza where the word "Fluttering" can read as either a dactyl or a trochee.

Bell comments that this rainbow poem is "one of the most fascinating of Rossetti's brief lyrics in this volume" (267). The poem has a varied internal scheme, portraying the water below and the sky above, but also a phenomenal progression in the sky from clouds up to the rainbow. Similarly, while boats sail on rivers, only larger ships "sail on the sea," and while men can easily bridge rivers, only clouds are vast and free enough to bridge the whole sky. From another point of view, clouds, which bring rain, are less impressive than the rainbow which ends the rain. In this poem, Rossetti celebrates the magnificence of clouds and, even more, rainbows, and takes them as a symbol of a wish that she could sail free across the sky. The invisible powers of meteorological phenomena are amply expressed in a simple description. With regard to the meter, finally, both Wordsworth and Rossetti mix shorter and longer lines in poems, but Wordsworth more regularly and Rossetti more freely; then, at the close, Rossetti ends on a short line ("Is prettier far then these") and Wordsworth on a long one ("Fluttering and dancing in the breeze").

What | is pink? | a rose | is pink .....a
By | the foun- | tain's brink. .....a

What | is red? | a pop- | py's red .....b
In | its bar- | ley bed. .....b

50

What | is blue? | The sky | is blue.... c
Where | the clouds | float through c （31）

The above poem shows us a different imaginary world. The two-line question and response pattern here provides another kind of language play. What is Rossetti feeling while she describes what is "pink" or "red"? Is she happy, or angry, or what? And does she find the blue of the sky peaceful or oppressive?

Metrically this poem consists of iambic tetrameters and trimeters. Iambic is the staple foot form for many of Rossetti's poems, because this gives the closest cadence to unforced natural speech. Examples are: "What will you give me for my pound?/ Full twenty shillings round./ What will you give me for my shilling/…" (30), or "What does the donkey bray about?/ What does the pig grunt through his snout?..." (33). Such poems, also starting with questions, evoke the impulse of children to constantly wonder why and to question their parents about everything.

A trochee, with the strong beat preceding the weak one, is also used in some poems. This foot is also found in William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. H. L Takenaka, in his *English Prosody and Poetry Appreciation*, comments that in "Spring Song," Blake uses trochaic tetrameter and trochaic trimeter to describe a spring scene full of happiness and hope.

Spring Song

Spring is | coming, | spring is | coming, a
Birdies, | build your | nest; X b
Weave to- | gether | straw and | feather, c
Doing | each your |best. b

(Takenaka, 84)

This piece is from Blake's *Songs of Innocence.* But it would be a mistake to think that the effect of trochaic meters is always to produce a mood that is light and gay. In *Songs of Experience,* the mood produced is often quite different. An illustration for this would be Akira Arai's commentary of the metrical pattern in "O rose, thou art sick!" in *A Guide to English Poetry*:

O rose ,thou art sick!
The invisible worm
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm.

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy;
And his dark secret love,
Does thy life destroy.

(Arai, 41)

This poem consists entirely of trochaic trimeters and trochaic diameters, but the meter of the last line of each stanza is changed. These lines are made up of one anapest　foot (does thy LIFE) and one iambic one (deSTROY) to bind the ends of the stanzas together more tightly. In all other cases, the verse feet here can be in a basically iambic way, like "o ROSE", with the weak beat first and the strong beat following:

o ROSE | thou art* SICK (th'art)
the in*VI- | sible* WORM (th'in; sibl')
that FLIES | in the* NIGHT (inth'),
in the: HOW- |ling STORM… (inth')

In lines 5-8, too, the strong beat always comes last. A special feature, though, is that most of the weak beats (marked *) are made up not of one but of two natural syllables, which makes the rhythm cramped and intense, like the internal sickness that cramps and intensifies the beauty of the rose. Blake uses a sustained trochaic rhythm in "The Tyger" (*Songs of Experience*); but occasionally relaxes into iambics, as in line 4 here:

TYger! | TYger! | BURning | BRIGHT.
IN the | FOrests | OF the | NIGHT,
WHAT im- | MORtal | HAND or | EYE
Could FRAME | thy FEAR- | ful SYM- |meTRY?.

..

Rossetti admired Blake's poetry, as I mentioned in the first chapter, and she certainly follows his preference for mostly irregular meters.

I did | not dig | it from | the ground,
Nor pluck | it from | a tree;
Feeble | insects | made it.
In the | stormy | sea. (42)

This poem changes from iambics in the first two lines to trochaics in lines 3 and 4 to coincide with the change from negation to affirmation. Another irregular pattern can be seen in:

Oh fair to see
Bloom-laden cherry tree,
  Arrayed in sunny white;
  An April day's delight,
Oh fair to see!

Oh fair to see
Fruit-laden cherry tree,
  With balls of shining red
  Decking a leafy head,
Oh fair to see! (47)

This starts on a dactylic meter in the first two lines but then the meter changes to iambic in the third line, and in the fifth line back again to the same dactylic meter as at the start. As in many of Rossetti's other *Sing Song* poems, this not only provides a merry musical rhythm, but also the playful transformations among the internal phonemes function as a resource for expression. Simple as it is, the repetition of "Oh fair to see" is an apt summing up device.

In *Sing Song,* the rhymes are also used in various patterns, for example, in couplets, triplets, quatrains, etc. In the poem:

Brownie, Brownie, let down your milk
White as swan's down and smooth as silk,
Fresh as dew and pure as snow:
For I know where the cowslips blow,
And you shall have a cowslip wreath
No sweeter scented than your breath. (55)

the end-rhymes here, which are all masculine (with one syllable), are arranged in regular couplets. That is to say, each set of two lines ends with

the same stressed vowel (or the same vowel followed by the same one or more consonants). For example, the first two lines have the same end rhyme /ilk/ ("milk" and "silk"); the third line and the fourth /ou/ ("snow" and "blow"), and so on. The constantly altering end rhymes make the poem more amusing.

In *Sing Song*, Rossetti also uses couplets, triplets, and quatrains the same way as in the traditional versifying of this period. The kinds of uses she puts them to can be observed in the following examples:

If I were a Queen,
  What would I do? /uː/
I'd make you King,
  And I'd wait on you. /uː/

If I were a King,
  What would I do? /uː/
I'd make you Queen,
  For I'd marry you. (26) /uː/

Rossetti sets up a complementary role alternation "Queen", and "King" to construct this poem, and uses the vowel /uː/ as a phonological device to strengthen the effect of constancy with change. "If I were a Queen,/ What would I do?/ I'd make you King,/ and I'd wait on you." From both the man's and the woman's position, as conventionally understood at the time, an ideal balance of mutual support and service is illustrated in the little poem. But it is the man who says "I'd marry you" which expresses the difference in position between man and woman. The woman's more passive role appears in the phrase "I'd wait on you," which is the sort of expression often found in Rossetti's poetry, for example in "Monna Innominata," where Rossetti writes "Since woman is the helpmeet made for man" (89). For some women this makes for happiness, for others it is tragic. As will be discussed at length later, the tragedy of the woman's position is clearest in Rossetti's

long poem “The Prince’s Progress” where the Princess goes on waiting for her Prince to come until finally he arrives too late to find her alive. Socially, of course, whether Rossetti is keenly conscious of it or not, the words “I’d marry you” assigned to the man in this rhyme are representative of the male-dominated society of the Victorian era, perhaps by way of an allusion to the *Mother Goose* rhyme: “Lavenders blue, Dilly Dilly,/ Lavenders green,/ When I am King, Dilly Dilly,/ you shall be Queen” (Opie and Opie, 1951, 267).

I planted a hand
  And there came up a palm, /alm/
I planted a heart
  And there came up balm. /alm/

Then I planted a wish.
  But there sprang a thorn, /orn/
While heaven frowned with thunder
  And earth sighed forlorn. (35) /orn/

This poem displays a form similar to that of the one above, except that the two stanzas are bound together by assonance (/alm/, /orn/), not full rhyme. Humor is exhibited skillfully in the word play around “palm” and “balm”, which are names for exotic plants as well as rewards of love. If love is a pledging of “hand” and “heart”, planting a hand will materially produce a “palm” but it takes a heart to obtain “balm”. As for the wish, it can be hoped for, though it may be disappointed and replaced by a thorn.

Pussy has a whiskered face, /ei/ (a)
Kitty has such pretty ways; /ei/ (a)
Doggie scampers when I call, /ol/ (b)
And has a heart to love us all. (34) /ol/ (b)

This time, the rhyme is in couplets again, with a simple scheme of /aabb/. Rossetti loved animals very much. In her brother's London lodgings, she and her brother raised many animals, including wombats and rats. Her observation of animals is emotively reflected in many of her poems, including "Kookoorookoo! Kookoorookoo! "(20), or "Minnie and Mattie" ("Cluck! Cluck! The nursing hen…") (25), "Hear what the mournful linnets say…." (22); and "Hop-o'-my-thumb and little Jack Horner,… Sturdy dog Trot close round the corner"(22). In each of these poems Rossetti succeeds in expressing the animals' characters and in presenting her readers with a comical image.

Another simple example of a quatrain arrangement is the following, with a rhyme scheme of /abcb/:

Currants on a bush,	/ u /	(a)
And figs upon a stem.	/em/	(b)
And cherries on a bending bough,	/au/	(c)
And Ned to gather them. (39)	/em/	(b)

In the next poem, the rhyme scheme cannot be accounted for in terms of simple regular couplets or quatrains, but the same /abcd/ sequence of endings, which does not internally rhyme yet in lines 1-4, enters into delayed rhymes or assonances with a matching sequence of endings in lines 5-8:

I DREAMT I caught a little owl	/au/	(a)
And the bird was blue—	/u:/	(b)
But you may hunt for ever	/er/	(c)
And not find such a one.	/ʌ /	(d)
I dreamt I set a sunflower,	/au/	(a)
And red as blood it grew—	/u:/	(b)
But such a sunflower never	/er/	(c)
Bloomed beneath the sun. (45)	/ʌ /	(d)

This poem is like a series of riddles without a key. Rossetti dreamt of catching a blue owl of a sort that could never be found and of planting a red sunflower of a sort that never bloomed. These are ideas that might prompt imaginations but can hardly be explained. In this respect, this poem is similar to traditional riddle songs such as: "I gave my love a cherry without a stone…".

Another example of a poem in couplets is the one below, which seems to start as a set of rules for learning to tell the time.

> How many seconds in a minute?
> Sixty, and no more in it.
>
> How many minutes in an hour?
> Sixty for sun and shower.
>
> …..
> How many years in an age?
> One hundred says the sage.
>
> How many ages in time?
> No one knows the rhyme. (30)

This poem teaches time units from small to large, but then fails to stop and ends up with the mystery of eternity. The basic beat is dactylic for the question (HOW many | HOURS in a | DAY?) and trochaic for the answers (TWENty-| FOUR for | WORK and | PLAY). The effect of this is to make the answers blunt, or even stark, in the case of the last one: NO one | KNOWS the| RHYME. Here, at the end of the poem, the two words "time" and "rhyme" are united and, as McGillis comments:

> Rhyme is as timeless as language and sound. Time, on the other hand, is rhymeless in the sense that it cannot packaged in the couplet, since

> "no one knows the rhyme"; paradoxically, time and rhyme perform this coupling which the poem says is impossible. (224)

Unlike the "little owl" poem, which works with rhyme or assonance over distance, this one has a rhyme within each couplet, which again helps to highlight the question and answer structure. In fact, this time telling rhyme is immediately followed in *Sing Song* by money counting and colour naming rhymes, both in a similar question-and-answer form. An English acquaintance tells me that English money only changed to decimal in 1971; before then, all kinds of teaching rhymes were used for learning how to convert pence into shillings and pounds

Summing up, we can agree with Bell that Rossetti "has given terse and brief lyrical utterance to the feelings and aspiration of children" (262). The ever-changing forms and vigorous rhymes make these poems in *Sing Song* particularly enjoyable. Sometimes rhyme patterns are directly used to point out similarities of experience, as in: "What are heavy? Sea-sand and sorrow:/ What are brief? to-day and to-morrow:/ What are frail? Spring blossoms and youth: What are deep? the ocean and truth" (26). This is so plainly and truthfully put that no reader can find cause to contradict. In this way, as Bell comments:

> At first sight the lyrics in *Sing Song* seem so simple as to demand neither thought nor artistic workmanship on the part of their author, and yet, spontaneous as they seem, looked at more closely, they reveal considerable thought, and not a little technical workmanship. (262)

Everyone knows that the sea-sand is heavy as Rossetti describes, but whoever can know the sorrow is heavy if one does experience. Though Rossetti uses simple words in *Sing Song*, she succeeds to express her feelings and to beat her readers' hearts strong as these verses: "What are deep?" Rossetti give us a visible answer "The ocean" and an invisible example "truth" (26).

(B.) Choices of Wording

In this section, I will deal with another characteristic of Rossetti's linguistic sensibility that cannot be overlooked when we study her poetry. Throughout *Sing Song* Rossetti concentrated her linguistic talents on the exact choices of sounds and words to express meanings. In comparing Rossetti with other Victorian writers of verses for children, Bell acknowledges first that Jean Ingelow's "Echo and the Ferry" shows "subtle knowledge of the heart of a child and marvelous power of depicting it" (262), and that , though, the best poems in R. L. Stevenson's "A Child's Garden of Verses" express " a dramatic imagination that lifts them to a [high] level of insight and aspiration" (262), Bell praises that Rossetti's "Sing Song" express "higher level of insight aspiration than the best of Stevenson's ones" (262); then goes on to note:

> *Sing Song*—though, of course, it has an affinity to the work for children of Jean Ingelow and Robert Louis Stevenson—has also its points of difference, but this difference is precisely one of those which are more easily felt than exactly defined in words. (262)

Distinguishing the specific characteristics of Rossetti's work in words is not impossible, however. Here, I would like to draw attention particularly to the sound effects and repetitive plays of words in *Sing Song*. These are features that Roderick McGillis also finds striking in his "Simple Surfaces: Christina Rossetti's Work for Children" (1987):

> The poems in *Sing Song* (at least a great many of them) give pleasure in the way all nursery songs give pleasure, through their rhyme, their rhythms, and their metaphors; they teach children to understand, and to have fun with the play of language. In those poems which… Rossetti emphasizes sound, repetition, and the heavily accentual line. (219)

Practically speaking, Rossetti's linguistic talent owes something to her bilingual upbringing. She was used to speaking and listening in two languages from an early age. According to her brother William, he describes:

> As we children were habituated from our earliest years to speaking Italian with our father, we were able to follow all or most of the speech of the 'natives,' and a conspirator or a semi-brigand might present himself, and open out on his topics of predilection, without our being told to leave the room. (xlviii)

Certainly, Christina Rossetti's love of word play is conspicuous in many of the poems in "Sing Song". For example,

> A city plum is not a plum;
> A dumb-bell is no bell, though dumb;
> A party rat is not a rat;
> A sailor's cat is not a cat;
> A soldier's frog is not a frog;
> A captain's log is not a log. (21)

In *Sing Song,* the literal meaning of words is often less important than their metaphorical extensions, and this poem poses a set of little riddles about extended meanings. Rossetti's purpose in this is not just to teach children particular vocabulary usages, however. McGillis sees a more general implied lesson about poetic discourse.

> Rossetti's rhyme points out how in poetic discourse metaphor detaches us from the one-dimensional relationship between word and concept. In other words, poetic language need not refer to a direct reality. (219)

The child's enjoyment can begin from the sounds, through repeated recitations of the words, "plum", "dumb", "cat", "rat", and "log", the plain and metaphorical

senses of which are then naturally remembered.. Such wordplay can be found throughout *Sing Song*.

The next poem derives its fun from the contrary realities that words can refer to.

WEE wee husband,
  Give me some money,
I have no comfits,
  And I have no honey.

Wee wee wifie,
  I have no money,
Milk, nor meat, nor bread to eat,
  Comfits, nor honey. (44)

While the words themselves are repeated, the humor lies in the way that the wife and husband use them to evoke quite different standards of living. "Money" and "honey" make a rather obtrusive rhyme pair, suggesting a naïve and simple scale of values. "Wee wee husband" in the appeal stanza is an exaggerated diminutive for "husband," and "wee wee wifie" in the response stanza an even more exaggerated one for "wife." Ohara surmises: "in this case, the word "little" is intended to express a "mental attitude" rather than represent a physical presence". Judging from the wife's words, it seems that she is only worried about life's luxuries, "money" and "honey", and counts on her "wee " husband's goodwill to supply them, whereas he is worried about how to supply even the basics, "milk" and "bread." The diminutive "wee wee wifie" thus carries irony as well as endearment. In this way, the poem delivers the lesson that the basics are more important than the luxuries, with a possible satiric side thrust at affluent social attitudes of the time. But in addition, the very sounds of the address terms "wee wee husband" and "wee wee wifie" are amusing enough

to attract children. Looking more closely, there are also less obvious but more sustained sound patterns under the surface of the two stanzas, in the / ʌ / vowels of the wife's part (husband, some, comfits, honey) and the /i:/ vowels of the husband's- assuming "wifie" is given its northern or Scottish pronunciation — (wee, wifie, meat, eat). It may be relevant here that *Sing Song* (1872) came out just after Edward Lear's *Nonsense Songs* (1871), containing "The Owl and the Pussy Cat":

> The Owl and the Pussy Cat
> Went to Sea
> In a beautiful pea-green boat;
> They took some HONEY
> And plenty of MONEY
> Wrapped up in a five-pound note…".

"The Owl and the Pussy Cat" is a satire of impossibly unreal romance that is still performed dramatically today. Rossetti's use of the rhyme "honey/ money" could be a deliberate borrowing from Edward Lear.

There are numerous other verbal plays on sound in *Sing Song:*

> Motherless baby and babyless mother,
> Bring them together to love one another. (50)

This poem has only two lines but its contents are made appealing and enlightening through the repetitions and reversals of the word elements. In the first line, "mother" and "baby" are reversed, and in the second line the privative element "-less" gives way to complementing "together" and "one another." The proposal to "bring them together to love one another" thus supplies the answer to a tragedy of absence and tears.

Other poems in the collection seem to use sound and word repetition for pure fun. For example,

MIX a pancake,
Stir a pancake,
  Pop it in the pan;

Fry the pancake,
Toss the pancake,--
    Catch it if you can (38).

This is Rossetti's variation on "Pat-a-cake, Pat-a-cake, Baker's man," a sort of English 「糸巻き巻き」(itomakimaki) rhyme, which, according to Wikipedia, has been in *Mother Goose* since 1765, but was quoted even either in a play by Thomas D'Urfey in 1698. It is an action song, in which you have to make hand actions for "patting" the cake (not originally a pancake), "putting it in the oven," and so on. Rossetti's song works the same way: requiring a mixing action, a stirring action and so on. In this poem, repeating the sequence of operations involving the "pancake" replicates the pleasure of making one.

"Ding a ding,"
The sweet bells sing,
And say:
"Come, all be gay"
For a wedding day.

"Dong a dong,"
The Bells sigh long,
And call:
"Weep one, weep all"
For a funeral. (40)

The bells begin ringing in a basically similar way in each stanza here, but with an /i/ vowel in the first and a more resonant /o/ vowel in the second. Also,

they are said to “sing” in the first stanza, but to “sigh” in the second. The effect is different in the two cases, and associated with different ritual occasions, one for joy and the other for grief. For a child, the question evoked by a poem like this is: When you hear a bell ring how do you feel? Does the bell ring make you feel happy or sad?

Similar sound effects can be found in “Ding, dong bell,/ Pussy’s in the well…” in *Mother Goose* (Opie and Opie, 1951,27), and, in an earlier version, in Ariel’s song near the end of Act I, Scene 2 of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*”:

> Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
> Burthen: Ding-dong.
> Hark! Now I hear them—
> Ding-dong, bell” (Ichikawa, 124-125).

The repetitions draw the child’s attention and direct it to the shared emotion, be it happy or sad, or notable for some other reason.

Another use of the previous money/ honey parallel appears in the next poem. But this time there is nothing dismissive or metaphorical about the honey. Honey and money are literally comparable as socially earned rewards for work:

> What does the bee do?
> Bring home honey.
> And what does Father do?
> Bring home money.
>
> And what does Mother do?
> Lay out the money.
> And what does the baby do?
> Eat up the honey. (46)

Methodically and amusingly, the author sets out the role relationships implied. Bell explains: "the 'bee', 'brings home honey'; 'the father' 'money' which mother expends; while 'baby' 'eats the honey.'"(2005, 297) This is an ingenious way of explaining the relations of Father who works and earns, Mother who uses the incoming money to buy food, and the child who is cared for as a result. It is interesting economically to notice that the father and mother are complementary partners here: the father reliably earns, and the mother wisely spends for both. But the poor bee produces only for other's sakes, and the lucky baby gets to consume what the others have produced.

Playful fancy has a pervasive presence in *Sing Song*. In the following poem, Rossetti takes the imaginative liberty of portraying a pig as human.

> If a pig wore a wig
> What could we say?
> Treat him as a gentleman,
> And say "Good day."
>
> If his tail chanced to fail
> What could we do?
> Send him to the tailoress
> To get one new. (28-29)

As often in this nursery book, the enjoyment of the ritual side of language, the fun of word play and the love of music is greater than the expectation of any literal meaning. We adults easily lose our ability to enjoy nonsense in the straightforward way children are able to. But it is not a bad thing to allow ourselves a refreshing hour of nonsense sometimes in which to benefit from an innocent spell of childlike enjoyment.

(B) Childhood

Innocence is often said to play an important role in children's literature. What is the difference between the world of children and of adults? A child's

world is a place where the grown-up's stock of controls, rules, judgments and knowledge are considered less appropriate and less applicable and where the child can be left to take delight in his or her own imagination and fancies. Children are still innocent enough to express simple emotions and sensations naively because their minds were not yet encroached on by the embellishments of the adult world. So how do authors manage to break free from their grown-up thinking and find access to the purer emotions of childhood when they make their verse? Many of them draw on memories from their own childhood, their personal experience and their love of nature.

It is said that love, childlikeness and memory are three main impulses to stir a poet when he sings of children or of childhood. For example, Robert Louis Stevenson, in *A Child's Garden of Verses,* expresses an outstanding power for connecting with childhood innocence and evoking it in grown-up readers too. His memories are related clearly and fully enough for the reader to save the vividness of them. For example, the poem "Bed in Summer" makes an startling impression on readers from many parts of Asia who are not familiar with the length of winter nights or of summer days as experienced in Northern Europe.

In winter I get up at night
And dress by yellow candle light.
In summer, quite the other way,
I have to go to bed by day.

I have to go to bed and see
The birds still hopping on the tree.
Or hear the grown-up people's feet
Still going past me in the street.

And does it not seem hard to you
When all the sky is clear and blue.
And I should like so much to play
To have to go to bed by day. (17)

Here we find fully displayed the mood of a child who wants to go on playing and is not ready to go to sleep yet, and at the same time grown-up readers are also invited to remember their own childhoods. In this case, this is less easy for someone who lives further south with no experience of the short nights in Scotland. There is one piece in Rossetti's *Sing Song* that makes much the same point as Stevenson's verse:

> The summer days are short
> Where southern nights are long:
> Yet short the night when nightingales
> Trill out their song. (27)

Until my first visit to Britain I could not accurately imagine such a situation and I remember the excitement I felt while staying in England one summer and experiencing the endless summer evening as the poem had described it. British readers will have a more familiar starting position to refer back to, but will also be led either to sigh "Yes, that was how it was in my childhood," or else at least to smile after they have read the poem. In this way, this children's verse not only expresses the feelings of childhood in epitome, but also allows adults to live their childhood days over again.

Rossetti, like other writers of children's poetry, drew on her childhood memories to describe the innocent world of children vividly. *Sing Song* contains numerous memories of her own childhood, which she succeeds in expressing in her own characteristic words. In his "Memoir" of her life, her brother, William Rossetti, makes a general point that:

> The earliest years of a child's life are doubtless of great consequence in forming lines of character which afterwards deepen; but those very earliest years do not remain clear to the consciousness of the adult. (xlvii)

This defines William's position throughout his account of his sister's life, and provides us with a useful perspective from which to relate the character of her

nursery rhyme book to the events of her life. In Tadenma's terms, Rossetti succeeds in uniting her rhymes with her own memories by using specific words and incidents retained from her childhood to interweave the two stores of content frequently. The following is a good example, based on the characteristic word "Kookoorookoo" instead of the usual "Cock-a-doodle-doo":

"Kookoorookoo! Kookoorookoo!"
Crows the cock before the morn;
"Kikirikee! Kikirikee!"
Roses in the east are born.

"Kookoorookoo! Kookoorookoo!"
Early birds begin their singing;
"Kikirikee! Kikirikee!"
The day, the day, the day is springing. (20)

According to her brother, Rossetti often wrote verses spontaneously as a subject came to her, without a great deal of meditation (lxvii~lxix), and in this case the subject seems to have come from a memory of the particular cock calls "kookoorookoo" (French "cocorico") and "kikirikee" (Italian "chicchirichi") which their father used to amuse them with at home when they are young (II. Notes, 493).

Although the poem is constructed in some simple words, its main theme, the celebration of daybreak like a new birth, is so clear that a child can easily catch the meaning and follow it imaginatively. The repetitions of the proclamations "kookoorookoo", and "kikirikee" increase the emotive intensity, while the repetitions of "the day, the day, the day" in the last line summon up a heightened awareness of new beginning. Some critics also look upon the poem as a kind of phonetic game which will help the child to distinguish and practice the sound of vowels.

In another poem, Rossetti uses another family memory to create a delightful and amusing domestic world.

Clever little Willie wee,
  Bright-eyed, blue-eyed little fellow;
Merry little Margery
    With her hair all yellow.

Little Willie in his heart
  Is a sailor on the sea,
And he often cons a chart
    With sister Margery. (47)

Concerning this poem, William Rossetti recalls that "Willie wee" was their mother's pet name for him when he and Christina were both small.

In this way, Rossetti would draw on her own childhood reminiscences to write poems for children. Through simple but cute choices of expression, she managed to appeal to children's unencumbered minds and succeeded in creating a lighthearted nonsense world for children out of a compendious store of simple words. It was no lucky accident that led to this success. She owed her reputation to her masterly writing talents and precise reminiscences of what childhood was like.

(C) Nature

For young children, nature is intensely interesting. Almost all children take a spontaneous sensuous pleasure in daily outdoor play, as fanciful imaginations are released and the pull of curiosity is felt toward animals and the natural world. In the last stanza of "The Wind" in *A Child's Garden of Verses,* Stevenson expresses the child's curiosity aptly and naively in direct questions.

O you that are so strong and cold,
O blower, are you young or old?

Are you a beast of field and tree,
Or just a stronger child than me?
O wind, a-blowing all day long,
O wind, that sings so loud a song! (43)

Rossetti was deeply attracted to nature from earliest childhood. As a small girl, she enjoyed the "stage coach journey of six hour's duration" from London to visit her grandfather's cottage at Homner Green in Buckinghamshire. In this country setting, she could observe the beauties of nature with delight, as Bell says:

> the novelty of this journey to the town-bred and town-immured little girl may be imagined, more especially as surrounding the cottage was a garden, small in actual extent, but large in her idea. To her this garden was a revelation of the beauty of nature" .(9)

In her nursery rhyme book, Rossetti offers a fanciful and amusing world to children through her fantastically expressive and humorous descriptions of nature and animals. In the following, I will take a look at some examples of this susceptibility to nature.

I will start by focusing on her distinctive treatment of the wind.

Who has seen the wind?
Neither I nor you:
But when the leaves hang trembling
The wind is passing thro'.

Who has seen the wind?
Neither you nor I:
But when the trees bow down their heads
The wind is passing by. (42)

In this poem, a phenomenon of nature is described delicately, and even socially. It is one of Rossetti's best-known short poems, not only to native speakers of English but also to Japanese junior high school students from extracts in their English textbooks. The invisible wind is circumstantially made visible and its mysterious powers made understandable to children. This is done in the same way a child is made susceptible to solemn ceremonies, not by understanding the point of the ceremony, but through precise glancing observations of how other people behave—the head bowing and so on. In this way, two aspects of the wind's immense power are brought home to the child, the raging wind that makes the trees tremble, and the majestic wind that causes them to bow. The wind here can be a symbol for the father who leads his family but sometimes strikes fear into them, or for the two similar aspects of God the Father in contemporary religion. And the idea of God invisibly seeming to "pass through" in the grand phenomena of nature may come 1 Kings, 19, 11-12 in the Old Testament.

The next poem also describes the wind but with different images

The wind has such a rainy sound
    Moaning through the town,
The sea has such a windy sound.—
    Will the ships go down?

The apples in the orchard
    Tumble from their tree.—
Oh will the ships go down,
    In the windy sea? (38)

This, too, provides a vivid, non-rational account of the incomprehensible power of wind. Both of the poems are full of vitality but in this second one the description is more precise and localized. Yet another, this time more vibrant and invigorating aspect of the wind is expressed in the verses:.

O wind, where have you been,
  That you blow so sweet?
Among the violets
    Which blossom at your feet.

The honeysuckle waits
    For Summer and for heat;
But violets in the chilly Spring
    Make the turf so sweet. (24)

Thus Rossetti succeeds in treating her reader not just to one idea of the wind, but to various fascinating instances of its powers and motions. What, for example, does she want to express in the following poem?

If hope grew on a bush,
  And joy grew on a tree,
What a nosegay for the plucking
    There would be!

But oh! In windy autumn,
  When frail flowers wither,
What should we do for hope and joy,
    Fading together? (35)

This poem also again depicts the wind's immense power discerned in the alternation of the seasons. Although differing in their techniques and expressions, these poems are all similar in representing an immense force of nature to a child's lively imagination.

Another familiar element of nature is rain. How can play give a child a fuller experience of rain? In Stevenson's poem "Rain,"

RAIN

The rain is raining all around,
In falls on field and tree,

It rains on the umbrellas here,
And on the ships at sea. (22)

the child can enjoy the idea of the varied scenes that get rained upon, while the author, Stevenson, puts across the idea that rain or shine affects everyone and no one has a right to private weather.

Rossetti's imagination leads the child in a more moral direction:

If all were rain and never sun,
No bow could span the hill;
If all were sun and never rain,
There'd be no rainbow still. (24)

The rhymes by Stevenson and Rossetti express quite different moods and different reasons for enjoying the rain. Stevenson presents details of the interest of being out in the rain. This gives a natural description of rain falling in various places. Rossetti, on the other hand, writes about the joy of seeing the rainbow after the rain. Certainly it is not good to have nothing but rainy days, but it would not be any better to have all sunshine. Sun and rain have to alternate to provide the right mix of weather for earth and the human beings who inhabit it. Similarly the mother (female)'s role, like that of the rain, is to tend the family fluidly, as with water, while the male exists, as the sun does, to foster them with warmth. The perfect family must have sun and rain in balance. Perhaps Rossetti is saying that you can't have pleasures in life without having troubles as well.

In *Sing Song*, there are many descriptions of flowers, for example, the aesthetics of the rose in various settings and comparisons, or more occasional

depictions of cherry blossoms or of a lily, Rossetti was highly susceptible to the sensations of nature, which she serenely imitated and celebrated in her verses. But the contemporary critic Watts Dunton (1832-1914) in *Old Familiar Faces* points out that she was city-born and that her insights into nature were not there from birth but came from constant observation driven by love:

> It is, of course, a great disadvantage to any poet not to have been born in the country: learned in Nature the city-born poet can never be, as we seen in the case of Milton, who loved Nature without knowing her. It is here that Miss Ingelow has such an advantage over Christina Rossetti. Her love of flowers, and birds, and trees, and all that makes the earth so beautiful, is not one wit stronger than Christina's own, but it is a love born of an exhaustive detailed knowledge of Nature's life. (4)

The following two poems show examples of how exact Rossetti could be in her observations of a caterpillar in a hurry, or of a briar rose on the point of opening:

> Brown and furry
> Caterpillar in a hurry,
> Take your walk
> To the shady leaf, or stalk,
> Or what not,
> Which may be the chosen spot.
> No toad spy you,
> Hovering bird of prey pass by you;
> Spin and die,
> To live again a butterfly. (28)
>
> ……

In poems like these, compendious in detail but simple in wording, Rossetti creates her mysterious world for children.

The lily has a smooth stalk,
  Will never hurt your hand;
But the rose upon her briar
  Is lady of the land.

There's sweetness in an apple tree,
  And profit in the corn;
But lady of all beauty
  Is a rose upon a thorn.

When with moss and honey
  She tips her bending briar,
And half unfolds her glowing heart,
  She sets the world on fire. (43)

Naturally, the author's love of nature can only account for half of creative process. Now I will proceed to the more decisive matter of how Rossetti appeals to child readers by adapting her observations and imagination of animals to an authentic childhood stance. Bell attributes her success in this to "… a light, playful humour …often present in *Sing Song"* (268). The example he cites is:

If a pig wore a wig,
  What could we say?
Treat him as a gentleman,
 And say "Good-day."

If his tail chanced to fail,
 What could we do?—
Send him to the tailoress
  To get one new. (28)

The imaginative conception in this rhyme offers almost no connections to reality, unless the pig is understood as a stuffed toy like Eeyore the donkey who loses his tail in Winnie the Pooh (Milne, 1926). The word association could have come from the name of the "Piggy-wig" character in Lear's nonsense song "The Owl and the Pussy Cat" (1871).At any rate, the reader finds a kind of naive but delicate enjoyment in the humanized pig and his ludicrous behavior, which also recalls the courtly manners between Mother Hubbard and her dog ("The Dame said 'Your servant', the Dog said 'Bow-wow'") in *Mother Goose*. It is not hard to tell that "Send him to the tailoress to get one new" is an echo of "She went to the tailor's to buy him a coat" in "Old Mother Hubbard" (1805), and there may be an echo of Edward Lear's name "Piggy-wig" in "She went to the barber's to buy him wig".

Dorothy Margaret Stuart in *Christina Rossetti* praised this and a number of similar poems by Rossetti very highly:

> As for the purely nonsensical things, such as "If a Mouse could Fly" and "When Fishes set Umbrellas up", they have inconsequence, the irresponsibility, and the happy abandon lacking which nonsense is heavy stuff indeed. (28)

Here are the other examples of "happy abandon" mentioned by Stuart:

If a mouse could fly,
  Or if a crow could swim,
Or if a sprat could walk and talk,
  I'd like to be like him.

If a mouse could fly,
  He might fly away;
Or if a crow could swim,
  It might turn him grey;
Or if a sprat could walk and talk,
  What would he find to say? (36)

"If a mouse could fly" in the way Rossetti imagines, how startling the world would become. I am not sure whether I could enjoy such a bizarre place or not.

When fishes set umbrellas up
  If the rain-drops run,
Lizards will want their parasols
  To shade them from the sun. (II. 34)

These poems with their bizarre imagination makes the world seem a wonderful place. As Stevenson would put it some years later: "The world is so full of a number of things, I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings" (*A Child's Garden of Verses*, 14).

All through her life Rossetti suffered from illness, but she never lost her capacity for an innocent love of nature. In *Sing Song*, she briefly forgets her more painful experiences amid her concern to make an innocent and love- governed world for children. As I have said, she fills it with her positive values of childhood, love of animals and nature, her fantastic imagination and her humor. But she never shuts out the reality of suffering. As with the joys of life, she transforms the pain, too, through rhyme.

My baby has a father and a mother,
  Rich little baby!
Fatherless, motherless, I know another
  Forlorn as may be:
Poor little baby! (19)

Rossetti did not marry and lived alone all her life although she fell in love twice and even got engaged. Both of these experiences turned out badly and she was greatly hurt by them, but that did not detract from her belief in a happy and loving ideal family.

Here I will try to discuss her family values. First, it is worth mentioning that *Sing Song* as a whole was dedicated to a baby, as can be read on its first page: "Rhymes dedicated without permission to the baby who suggested them" (5). This baby was the child of Christina's best friend's brother. More generally, too, she put her utmost reserves of maternal love into this nursery rhyme collection. Her love seems to flow over in the following little poems if they are read carefully.

> Angels at the foot,
> And Angels at the head,
> And like a curly little lamb
> My pretty babe in bed. (19)

Rossetti's rhyme is spoken from the position of a parent or carer watching a baby safely asleep. If addressed to the child, it might also function as a lullaby. There are several lullabies in *Mother Goose,* of which the best-known must be:

> Hush-a-bye, baby, on the tree top,
> When the wind blows the cradle will rock;
> When the bough breaks the cradle will fall,
> Down will come baby, cradle, and all. (60)

This goes far beyond lulling the baby to sleep. The singer acts out a scene in which the baby is almost dropped on the word "Down," but then caught again in the nick of time. At this dropping point, the rhyme holds a humorous threat, but one that is demonstratively averted. From the singer's point of view, the same threat may also be a self-inflicted thrill, deriving from what Dorothy Mermin, in "Heroic Sisterhood in 'Goblin Market'" has called "a yearning for children that is so intense as to be painful" (214). This playful thrill is expressed in a modulated sequence of vowels, [ʌ], [o], [ai] which produces a soothing sensation for lulling the child to sleep.

Rossetti"s sensibility for words was less conventional and more personal than in most lullabies, and her vocabulary more intimate without the need for words like "hush". In the above song, she chose the religious tradition of guardian angels to express family affection and domestic happiness instead of relying on conventional lullaby sentiments and vocabulary such as "hush".

By way of contrast, the following poem offered an affective emotion of a different kind. It is not a lullaby, but an elegy.

> A baby's cradle with no baby in it,
> A baby's grave where autumn leaves drop sere;
> The sweet soul gathered home to Paradise,
> The body waiting here. (22)

"A baby's cradle" with no "baby in it" expresses grief for the loss of a baby. It is a fact that work of caring for a baby includes not only the enjoyment and happiness described in common lullaby songs, but also sadness. Sure enough, Rossetti's poem expresses an elegiac grief, such as is often found woven into conventional lullabies in certain cultures, and in particular in the Japanese and Chinese cultural spheres. This has to be distinguished from the humour of *Mother Goose* and it is a mark of Rossetti's broad sensibility for both pleasure and grief that is able to move so freely between the joyful and tragic sides of life without obvious strain.

Rossetti's female love was not always confined to human beings but could also extend to animals.

> A white hen sitting
> Oh white eggs three:
> Next, three speckled chickens
> As plump as plump can be.

An owl and a hawk
  And a bat come to see;
But chicks beneath their mother's wing
  Squat safe as safe can be. (22)

While writing of her affections for babies, she never neglected to widen her love to take in other creatures around her, as well. The depth of her affections is apparent in the following poem.

My baby has a father and a mother,
  Rich little baby!
Fatherless, motherless, I know another
  Forlorn as may be:
Poor little baby! (19)

She loved the rich little baby without reserve, but she also had pity for the poor little one. She knew several babyless mothers too, and wished as happy a life for them as parents with babies had. Her hearty compassion was perfectly reflected in her ideals and general conceptions of life. The answer to the conundrum of existence mismatch was:

Motherless baby and babyless mother,
Bring them together to love one another. (50)

In this way, each could enrich the life of the other through a sharing of joys, griefs and fulfillments::

Love me,—I love you,
  Love me, my baby;
Sing it high, sing it low,
  Sing it as may be.

Mother's arms under you,
　Her eyes above you;
Sing it high, sing it low.
　Love me,　—I love you. (19)

This lovely poem expresses a strong inclination to shower motherly love onto a baby. It perfectly exemplifies maternal affection and maternal satisfaction in a baby's birth. The delightful sensation of being a mother comes out infectiously in the moving repetition of twosome-ness: "Love me—I love you." Certainly, one of the initial circumstances that led Rossetti to compile her collection of rhymes was the birth of her friend's baby. This is clear from the dedication:

Rhymes　Dedicated
Without Permission
To　The Baby
Who　Suggested Them. (19)

Rossetti was solitary and unmarried all her life. But the many vivid and captivating poems that fill this rhyme book are refreshingly different in character from the more morbid ones that characterize her poems more generally. This collection is spectacularly animated by its author's warmth of nature, while the finer details in it are inspired by her It is her deep affection for children generally and her experiences of sharing with the ones who attended her mother's day school.

> At first sight the lyrics in *Sing Song* seem so simple as to demand neither thought nor artistic workmanship on the part of their author, and yet, spontaneous as they seem, looked at more closely, they reveal considerable thought, and not a little technical workmanship.　Many of the brief bird-like songs in this volume are perfectly expressed, and it is by no means easy to attain perfect expression within brief limits. (Bell, 262-3)

These are the terms in which Bell commends the *Sing Song collection.* In *Sing Song,* Rossetti offers her readers not only the joy and amusement of nursery rhymes but a reflection on some social issues. One of the problems that arose after the Industrial Revolution was that women were brought out of their homes and "children were no longer in the care of mothers, but farmed out, often badly fed and dosed with laudanum to keep them quiet." (34) Alongside Rossetti's motherly impulses, therefore, her poems could not fail to direct attention to wider social questions. In this respect, too *Sing Song* has a unique place in her works. "Its lessons are not enforced by dull didacticism, and even its teaching is elevated into poetry" (263).

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Chapter Three "Goblin Market": Joining Hands to Little Hands

Christina Rossetti sets out to describe a loving relation of sisterhood in "Goblin Market" that is deliberately different from the envious sort of sisterhood famously found in fairy tales. It is essentially a cooperative relationship between women rather than a contest of rivalry. Also, as many critics have noticed, "Goblin Market" can be interpreted in Christian terms as symbolizing the redeeming act of a Christ figure (Lizzie). In 2008 Cynthia Demarcus Manson argued that "Goblin Market" is a retelling of the Christian redemption story which it complicates and enriches by recasting it within the well-known fairy-tale romance of "Sleeping Beauty" (62). This further supports the view, held by some critics, that "Goblin Market" is a reversal of "Sleeping Beauty."

Many well-known fairy tales such as "Sleeping Beauty," "Cinderella," or "Snow White" portray a rivalry between a mother and daughter or between sisters. Unlike these widely told tales, "Goblin Market" presents a helpmate relationship: "joining hands to little hands" (ll.560). This chapter is based on the content of a previous publication, Lin. 2011. Referring to Manson's argument mentioned above, I will try in this essay to interpret Victorian women's social position as expressed in this poem, by comparing it with the positions of heroines in several traditional fairy tales.

The Fairy Tales

Before entering into my main theme, I will begin by reviewing some of the heroine paradigms that we all remember from our childhood. First, I will look at the case of female relationships in "Snow White". The significant female relationships in this tale involve three women: first the original Queen, Snow White's mother, second the new Queen, her step-mother, and third Snow White herself.

At the beginning of the story, a spontaneous motherly affection makes the first Queen, who has just pricked her finger while looking at the winter scenery outside the window, wish, in the conventional categories of the time, that: "my little daughter may be as white as that snow, as red as the blood, and as black as an ebony window-frame!" (Opie & Opie, 230) Shortly afterward, she conceives, but then dies after giving birth to Snow White. Her husband the King remarries the new Queen, who is beautiful but so obsessively proud that she cannot bear to think that anyone could surpass her. She has a magic looking-glass, to which she habitually goes to gaze upon herself, saying each time, "Tell me, glass, tell me true! Of all the ladies in the land, / Who is the fairest? Tell me who?" The glass never fails to answer, "Thou, queen, art fairest in the land" (230). But meanwhile Snow White has been growing up and becoming more and more beautiful, until one day the magic looking glass tells the new Queen: "Thou, Queen, may'st fair and beauteous be. But Snow While is lovelier far than thee!" This enrages the new Queen with envy and she orders one servant to "take Snow White away into the wild wood, that I may never see her more." The servant takes Snow White away into the wood but takes pity on her and lets her go instead of killing her. Snow White wanders fearfully through the wood but luckily finds her way to the house of seven dwarfs, who accept her into their household provided she will cook, clean and keep house for them. But the Queen soon finds out that Snow White is not dead, and makes several plans to finish her off. On her third attempt, she succeeds in getting Snow White to eat a poisoned apple whereupon Snow White falls down apparently dead (231).

Comparing the three women characters in Snow White, they clearly represent three different types of women. The mother queen sitting with her needlework in a window represents a traditional domestic woman whose activities are confined to the domestic sphere; the new Stepmother, framed in her magic mirror may symbolize a new breed of woman, eager to break out of her limitations and aspiring for freedom outside of domestic conventionality; and lastly, it is Snow White who actually has to enact the role of breaking free by living out in the wild wood, a place outside of woman's normal domestic realm. In fact, as the story progresses it is possible to construe that the new Queen's envy is not only on account of young Snow White's beauty but also because of her free way of life. Cristina Bacchilega writes that: the "basic themes of Snow White are female development and female jealousy" (31). If this is correct, it means that the relationship between the new Queen and Snow White is the jealousy of full grown womanhood, in other words, a rivalry between women which is different in kind from the sort that normally exists between a mother and daughter. This impression is confirmed, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar notice, "not only by the Queen's mirror obsession but by the absence of the King from the story…" (37). It is considered that all the woman's struggle come from "the absence" of men.

More briefly, I also wish to mention the women's relationships in "Sleeping Beauty" and "Cinderella." In its older version, "Sleeping Beauty" features a destructive mother-in-law who tries to destroy her daughter-in- law and her children. It is only since the Grimms' 1812 version that the tale ends more happily with a wedding. In "Cinderella," there is a less violent but similarly hostile contest of jealousy between Cinderella and her stepmother and two stepsisters. More generally too, this is a regularly recurring pattern in folk and fairy tales.

Regarding this sort of women's rivalry in fairy tales, Bacchilega writes:

> For Bruno Bettelheim, "Snow White" represents the daughter's successful resolution of the oedipal conflict, N.J. Girardot focuses on the ritual and sacrificial pattern of initiation Snow White must undergo in order to rejoin her society as an adult. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar emphasize the

> constraints that patriarchal images such as the "angel-woman" (Snow White) and the "monster-woman" (the Queen) place on female characters' and women readers' potential. (31)

Alongside this individual transformation from girlhood to adulthood, Mitoko Hirabayashi, in *Motherhood as Representation,* also gives a historical outline of the women's emancipation movement and points out the evident progress achieved in current ideas of social transformation compared with earlier stages of feminism. Joseph Jacobs, in his treatments of the prince in "Sleeping Beauty" and of the seven dwarfs and the prince in "Snow White" which closely follow the older Perrault (1967) versions, seems to be not only attributing a passive "Angel in the House" role to women, but also advising men to pay more attention to their wife and children instead of being constantly away from their home and family.

According to Hirabayashi, the woman's emancipation movement started in the 1790s, when notice began to be taken of women's pain and pleasure in the domestic realm. Samuel Richardson's novels *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748) graphically represent and condemn male violence against women. The growing number of women authors also introduce more awareness of women's unequal position in literature and in politics, until in the 19th century many works by prominent female writers set out to "illustrate woman's ambivalence about her restrictive life" (Hirayabayashi, 1). These include Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, (1811), Sara Coleridge's "Poppies" (1834), Emily Bronte's "The Caged Bird" (1848), Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856), Jean Ingelow's *Mopsa the Fairy* (1869), Ann Thackeray Ritchie's *Old Kensington* (1873) and Mrs. Dymond (1885), Horatia Gatty Ewing's *The Land of the Lost Toys* (1869), and of course some of Christina Rossetti's poems including "Goblin Market" (1862) and "Speaking Likenesses. I will now turn to consider "Goblin Market" in detail.

"Goblin Market"

Rossetti's "Goblin Market" was written at 1859 and published in 1862. Frances Thomas believes that this poem is

> full of an odd magic, unlike anything else in English poetry, and not quite duplicated in Christina's other work; but this oddness was as much part of Christina's nature as the unflinching religious devotion. (166)

For Eiju Senaha, however, things are more complex: "'Goblin Market' illustrates Rossetti's religious belief as well as her feminist resistance against Victorian society in the 1850s and 1860s" (113). Hirabbayashi, in *Sleeping Beauty Kept Waiting: The Representation of Woman in the Nineteenth Century (1996)*, similarly interprets "Goblin Market" and "The Prince's Progress" in terms of women's and children's happiness. In her poems, Rossetti illustrates women's pain and offers a power of revival to help them to rise again from depression. Senaha notes:

> …like other Victorian poets who write on the subject of woman, Rossetti portrays women's pain and pleasure and punishes them when they leave their "caged" conditions, but the poet's conclusion is more optimistic and didactic than, say, male poets', because the poem is a reflection of the female poet's real experience. (113)

"Goblin Market" offers itself to the reader's imagination in various ways. For example, the poem's moral points are conveyed in chanting litanies reinforced with powerful rhymes and rhythms. As for the adventure of the two sisters with their diverse characters, it can be considered as either a psycho- narrative story or as a story of feminine struggle.

The poem starts with the calls of little goblin men who come from the "glen" and offering a numerous range of fruits:

> Morning and evening
> Maids heard the goblins cry: (1-2)

The maids hear the goblins' calls at the in-between times of dawn and dusk, when it is half-light and half-dark and shapes are hard to distinguish. These are the spooky times for seeing ghosts. This point also suggests a duality of some kind: "morning" may stand for masculine and "evening" for feminine, or else "morning"

may point to heaven and “evening” to earth after the manner of Chinese yang and yin (陽と陰). At any rate, Rossetti seems to be interweaving two competing elements at the start of her poem. Another likely connection is that while the “maids” are of course young women, “the goblins” are the men in this world. By boldly reducing the real world to a few elemental contrasts of morning and evening, men and women, heaven and earth, Rossetti manages to draw her readers into her fantastic poetic world.

> “Come buy, our orchard fruits:
> Come buy, come buy.”
> Apples and quinces,
> Lemons and oranges,
>
> …..
> Apricots, strawberries—
> All ripe together
> In summer weather—
> Morns that pass by,
> Fair eves that fly; (3-18)

The little goblin men proffer all the kinds of delicious fruits to allure the two innocent maids. Germaine Greer explains: “The goblins are like Christina’s favorite animals, the small, grotesque wronged beasts that she loved to play with” (xxxii). Rossetti manages to weave a fantastic world using her favorite animals and the fruits well known to her. The Goblin men go on:

> Taste them and try:
> Currants and gooseberries,
> Bright-fire-like barberries,
> Figs to fill your mouth,
> Citrons from the South,
> Sweet to tongue and sound to eye;
> Come buy, come buy. (24~30)

According to Germaine Greer, some of these cries would have been familiar sounds to Rossetti in her childhood years in Charlotte Street:

> Their cries have been identified partly with the street vendors' cries that the children would have heard in Charlotte Street, and it is only too easy to imagine how excited and envious they felt about the goodies that their struggling father could not hope to buy for them. (xxxii)

The little goblins' offerings fascinate the two maids, Laura and Lizzie. As sisters, they are pure and beautiful female figures of the kind familiar in romantic literature. According to Greer's interpretation,

> they are maids, that is, virgins, which implies puberty and that they are beautiful, Lizzie, in fact, as beautiful as her namesake, with glossy golden hair, a gleaming swanlike neck, and a body as white as snow. (xxxi).

For a heroine in Romantic literature, many readers both male and female have a strong expectation of a figure with golden hair and a swanlike neck suggesting virginal female beauty. The two sisters also love each other:

> Golden head by golden head,
> Like two pigeons in one nest
> Folded in each other's wings,
> They lay down in their curtained bed:
> Like two blossoms on one stem,
> Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow
> Like two wands of ivory
> Tipped with gold for awful kings. (184-91)

Description like this may show the influence of Rossetti's preferred Romantic poets Keats and Tennyson. It seems far removed from the kind of beauty that Asian people are attuned to and it follows different standards from those found in Chinese or

Japanese literature. For example, a beautiful woman in Chinese writing is generally described as having hair which can be compared to something pure black. Similarly, Japanese literature will not usually place female beauty in golden hair. For traditionally-minded people in Asia, it is hard to understand why young women are so keen to change the colour of their hair to gold or yellow.

Just as in "Cinderella," "Snow White" or "The Sleeping Beauty," however, many Chinese tales tend to focus on women's jealousy. With her focus on sisterhood in "Goblin Market," Rossetti differs from this shared tradition in East and West. Manson notes:

> The sisters themselves, who are crowned with golden hair, are portrayed as aesthetically beautiful through similes likening them to splendid works of human craftsmanship. (64)

Laura and Lizzie may both be regarded as "aesthetically beautiful," as Manson asserts. However, there is certainly an imperfection, and maybe a fault, in the two sisters' ignorance of the realities in the outside world. Manson adds:

> Comparisons made between the sisters and aesthetically beautiful creations by humans not only suggest the sisters' beauty, but also hint that the sisters themselves are significant and valuable handiwork by a divine Creator. (64)

Just as the Romantic poets made continual connections to the elements of nature in their poems, Rossetti also draws on images of nature to describe her heroines:

> Moon and stars gazed in at them,
> Wind sang to them lullaby,
> Lumbering owls forbore to fly,
> Not a bat flapped to and fro
> Round their rest:
> Cheek to cheek and breast to breast
> Locked together in one nest. (192-198)

Unlike most Romantic poets, however, Rossetti shows a more positive acknowledgement of social realities. Thus, she takes care to show the two maids in an amicable and cooperative relationship, which is the reverse of the jealousy and envy that is found in such fairy tales as "Snow White" or "Sleeping Beauty." Rossetti knows woman's pain from her real experience of working at the Anglican Sisterhood for fallen women. In Senaha's view, Rossetti may have written this poem to fulfill a social mission of encouragement for these

> so-called Victorian fallen women, or prostitutes, who were mentally and physically abused and rehabilitated with mixed feelings of hope and desperation. (113)

It is no doubt a combination of the general social transformation "from Romantic passivism to Victorian Activism" and of her own personal experience of working for the Anglican Sisterhood that makes Rossetti, like other female poets of the 1850s, more aware of the changing positions of women in the Victorian period.

For Senaha, then, the two sisters Laura and Lizzie in Rossetti's poem comprise a sisterhood case story in miniature. That is to say,

> ["Goblin Market" as] a nineteenth-century feminist representation of women, rouses women to the importance of "sisterhood" and "action" by which sufferings, in the process of achieving the "new world," could be replaced with pleasure after all. (124)

Similar struggles by and for women can also be seen in some of Rossetti's earlier works, such as "Maude." "Maude," written when Rossetti was nineteen, is regarded as semi-autobiographical novella of three girls. In Gilbert's reading of this, the fifteen-year-old heroine Maude Foster stands as "a surrogate Rossetti herself" (549). It comes as no surprise that "Maude/ Rossetti should die," because, as Gilbert comments: "she obviously sees herself as a fragile, vainly costumed lady, no ruler of nature at all but a tormented servant" (553).

Unlike Maude, however, Rossetti did not die and wrote continually. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar account for this as follows:

> Maude lies passively, angelically, dutifully dead—and the living Christina Rossetti takes up her pen to spend a lifetime writing "Amen for us all." (Gilbert & Gubar, 554)

In "Goblin Market," of course, she does far more than write "Amen," and this is the proof of how much more mature and active her sense of sisterhood has become since the hesitating, girlish stage seen in "Maude."

One feature that remains the same, however, is that men do not exist in either "Maude" or "Goblin Market." There are of course the goblin men that symbolize the male world, rather as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of artists and poets may have done, whose gatherings her brother Dante led Rossetti to attend. However that may be, the goblin men in the poem are not real men taken from everyday life. Rossetti fits them out with imaginatively vivid, even bizarre, characteristics:

> One had a cat's face
> One whisked a tail,
> One tramped at a rat's pace,
> One crawled like a snail,
> One like a wombat prowled obtuse and furry,
> One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry. (71-76)

When Laura lingers to meet them at the bottom of the glen, the goblin merchants display all kinds of goods to attract the golden haired maids with.

> One hauls a basket,
> One bears a plate,
> One lugs a golden dish
> Of many pounds weight
> How fair the vine must grow
> Whose grapes are so luscious;
> How warm the wind must blow
> Thro' those fruit bushes. (56~63)

Lizzie quickly runs home at their approach, leaving Laura "wondering at each merchant man" (70) and desiring to taste their fruits. This reaction could be interpreted as reflecting the anxieties and curiosities of young women, including

no doubt Rossetti herself as she stands at the edge of the male world of writing, which she is intent on entering. Greer comments:

> The poem is so compelling because troubling ideas exist within it quite unanalyzed, as they do in dreams. It is driven by the paradoxical motivations of Christina's yearning for ecstasy, her fear of male insensibility and rapacity and her repugnance for carnal intercourse. (xxxi)

Similarly, Ellen Moers comments:

> ["Goblin Market"] "reminds us once for all that there is nothing innocent about childhood and so strikes at the root of a cherished adult fantasy." (Quoted in Greer's "introduction", xxxi)

Given these similar threats in both poems, it would seem that Rossetti has made considerable psychological progress since her immature "Maude" period. Behind the poem, Rossetti herself seems to show a fascination with the world of male artifacts and exchanges, even if she finds it an unfamiliar and uncertain place, to be approached with hesitation. Her hesitation appears most directly in the spellbound description of the Goblin men's various peculiarities. Gilbert and Gubar attribute these hesitations to the mental struggle of a female writer exposed to a universe of male values and interests. They remark with critical irony:

> Young ladies like Laura, Maude, and Christina Rossetti should not loiter in the glen of imagination, which is the haunt of goblin men like Keats and Tennyson—or like Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his compatriots of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. (573)

More personally, Lizzie may represent Rossetti's sister Marian who had worked as a governess like many other educated but needy young women at the time and knew that writing was not a suitable calling for her younger sister Christina. That is the point of the immediately following passage in which Lizzie waits at the gate "Full of wise upbraidings" for Laura to return home:

> Dear, you should not stay so late,
> Twilight is not good for maidens;
> Should not loiter in the glen
> In the haunts of goblin men.
> Do you not remember Jeanie,
> How she met them in the moonlight,
>
> .....
>
> ......
>
> to this day no grass will grow
> Where she lies low:
> I planted daisies there a year ago
> That never blow. (143-162)

A similar passage can be seen in the opening stanza of Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci":

> O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
> Alone and palely loitering?
> The sedge has withered from the lake,
> And no birds sing. (1-4)

Prohibitions like Lizzie's one are often seen in fairy tales, for example, in "Snow White," the seven dwarfs warn Snow White not to open the door or let anyone into their house in case the wicked step-mother Queen might come to hurt her. Rossetti similarly makes similar use of this scheme here. The psychology behind it is simple and familiar: The fruits offered by the goblins do not exist in the ordinary world, so when Laura tries

them her appetite increases and she desires more. As in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Eve (that is, Laura) succumbs to Satan's temptation to eat the forbidden fruit.

Lizzie is more like "The Lady" in Milton's shorter temptation poem "Comus" (1634). Here, the Lady (a virtuous maiden) and her two younger brothers are led astray and tempted by the spirit of wild nature Comus in the forests near Ludlow Castle, on the border of England with Wales. "Comus" was written as a dramatic entertainment to celebrate the promotion of Lord Bridgewater to the office of Lord President of Wales. It was performed at Ludlow, the Bridgewater family home, and the Lady and her brothers were played by the Bridgewaters' children. "Comus" succeeds in entrapping the Lady on a seat from which she cannot get up. But she refuses to listen to his voluptuous praises of wild nature, and in the end the spirit Sabrina of the River Severn (marking the border between Wales and England) intervenes to rescue her. Milton was 26 when he wrote "Comus," and as with Rossetti in "Goblin Market," although he seems to be writing in praise of virtue and resistance to temptation, in fact he gives the best verses to Comus. The parts of "Comus" most similar to "Goblin Market" come in the central temptation scene, especially the passage starting at line 710, "Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth…?" In *Christina Rossetti, The Patience of Style*, however, Hassett, notices that there are further complications to Laura's fall:

> The fruit she desires is not simply missing, it is withheld. Rossetti's goblins are not just tempters, they are desire, or rather the agents of desire's paradox; they deal in what arouses, exhilarates, and injures appetite, and the sisters experience them differently. Each in her own way is a desirer of the goblins' fruit, and each discovers for herself the convulsive, self-divided nature of her yearnings. (20)

After eating the goblins' fruits, Laura falls into a state of apathy, desiring only more of the fruits and forgetting her maidenly role and tasks.

> Lizzie with an open heart
> Laura in an absent dream

One content, one sick in part
One warbling for the mere bright day's delight
One longing for the night. (210-214)

Comparing "Goblin Market" with "Sleeping Beauty" or "Snow White," Laura's fate could be thought of as a non-royal equivalent of the fate of the princesses in these two tales. Manson remarks that both Laura and Sleeping Beauty fall into a spell "as a result of their curiosity" (64), Laura after eating goblins' fruit, Sleeping Beauty after "grasping a spindle and pricking her finger" (86). Of course the same happens to Snow White after eating the poisoned apple. In Laura's more psychological case, as Manson says: "Having eaten the fruit, Laura slips into a sleep-like state of semi-consciousness, in which she disengages from her surroundings" (64).

Finding her sister in this sickened state, Lizzie hesitates no more but puts a coin in her purse and sets off to the goblin men's glen to save Laura. She trades with the goblins so far as to pay the money and buy their fruits, but she refuses to eat with them and remains mindful of her sister waiting for her at home. The goblin men try all kinds of tricks and threats to force Lizzie to eat, but in the end they fail. Greer comments: "Lizzie is energy, whether she is braving the encounter with the goblin men, or greedily sucking their fruit, or writing in medicinal torment" (xxxi). Thus, critics often interpret Lizzie in religious terms, as a female Christ sacrificing herself for her sister.

"Did you miss me?
Come and kiss me.
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
Eat me, drink me, love me;
Laura, make much of me:
For your sake I have braved the glen
And had to do with goblin merchant men" (465-474)

In this way, Lizzie acts as "a female Saviour, negotiates with the goblins (as Christ did with Satan) and offers herself to be eaten and drunk in a womanly holy communion" (566). As a result, she succeeds in bringing the juices of the goblin men's fruits home as a medicine for her ailing sister to suck. Above all, as Gilbert and Gubar stress, she succeeds in saving Laura and transforming her "back from a lost witch to a virginal bride and ultimately leading her into a heaven of innocent domesticity" (The Madwoman in the Attic, 566).

Thus, while only Laura succumbs to the desire for more fruits; Lizzie shares Laura's pains while refusing the goblin men's temptation. Senaha comments here that

> Suffering is required when one takes an action to reach a new world and the pain is transformed to pleasure. In this poem, the pain of Laura and Lizzie is rewarded by their learning of sisterhood. (142)

Similarly Gilbert and Gubar write: "as a representative female poet-speaker,…, Rossetti believes she must learn to sing selflessly, despite pain, rather than selfishly, in celebration of pleasure" (571). Laura at last overcomes her desires, and recovers from sickness and anguish. Senaha concludes:

> Rossetti believes that suffering is a positive process that leads to a higher level of happiness if the effort is made by sororal love. In fact, when Lizzie comes back with goblin fruits, Lizzie's awakening starts. Laura realizes her sister's selfless love and discovers 'the new world' of sisterhood. Laura is a fallen woman, but her suffering is a fortunate fall: she finds pleasure in pain as she is reborn by Lizzie's sororal exorcism. (132)

> Laura would call the little ones
> And tell them of her early prime,
> Those pleasant days long gone
> Of not-returning time:
> Would talk about the haunted glen,

The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men,
Their fruits like honey to the throat
But poison in the blood;
(Men sell not such in any town:)

……

Would tell them how her sister stood
In deadly peril to do her good,
And win the fiery antidote:

"Suffering" has enabled Laura to grow into this helpmate relationship and appreciate that "sisterhood is the strongest tie in the world" (Senaha, 134), a lesson that she goes on acknowledging as she carries out her role of teaching her own children the value of sisterhood.

Then joining hands to little hands
Would bid them cling together,
"For there is no friend like a sister
In calm or stormy weather;
To cheer one on the tedious way,
To fetch one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,
To strengthen whilst one stands." (548-567)

Comparing this with the lessons of other tales of female relationship, "Snow White" emphasizes the rivalry for good looks between women on the parent-child axis, while "Cinderella" does the same on the sister-sister axis. This is no doubt the norm in fairy tales, where women are concerned. Regretfully, fairy tales much less often teach women the importance of loving one another in the more companionable modes of sister and sister or mother and daughter. As Bacchilega puts it:,

> That the heroine's exceptional beauty sets in motion the drama of jealousy may help to explain why critics have focused on the magic mirror so insistently that it has become a metaphor for Snow White itself. (31)

In "Goblin Market, Rossetti emphasizes the importance of sisterhood both from her experience in the Anglican Sisterhood and from what she experienced of her mother's and sister's devotion to herself. For herself, too, as Senaha says, she recognizes "her social role as a poet who could give religious, as well as moral, lessons to the penitents. Rossetti's lesson, 'there is no friend like a sister' doubtless refers to the sisters who were willing to sacrifice themselves to help women" (134). And it is surely significant finally, that she should have dedicated this poem to her mother and her sister Maria.

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Chapter Four "The Prince's Progress"— The Meaning of "Sleep"

In the world of fairy tales, the Victorians inherited a tradition which had mainly been collected and popularized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most famously by Perrault (1697) in France and by the Grimm brothers (1812) in Germany. This tradition was still dominant in the mid nineteenth century but it was being extended as well, by such authors as Robert Southey ("The Three Bears", 1834), Lewis Carroll (*Alice's Adventures in the Wonderland*, 1865; *Through the Looking Glass*, 1871), George MacDonald (*At the Back of the North Wind*, 1871; *The Princess and the Goblin*, 1872), R.L. Stevenson (*A Child's Garden of Verses*, 1885) and Joseph Jacobs (*The English Fairy Tales*, 1890; *The More English Fairy Tales*, 1894), whose stories were becoming more familiar and closer to real life, at least in the character 2portrayals and dialogues, if not so often in the plots.

In other words, the fairy tale in Victorian times was still a world of courts, kings and princes, and on the female side queens and princesses; but it was definitely beginning to loosen up. The little girl intruder did not simply fall asleep in the Three Bears' house as Snow White had done with the Seven Dwarfs; she was more self-willed than that, breaking their furniture and picking and choosing with their breakfast.

In this chapter I discuss two types of Princesses, as found in "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" retold by Iona and Peter Opie (1974)) from Perrault and in Christina Rossetti's "The Prince's Progress" (1866).

The first has a positive outcome, with the heroine surviving an enchanted sleep to get married, bear children, and go on to face the struggles of life. In the other, the heroine passively follows her maidens' suggestions to wait for the prince's coming ("Sleep,/…Better dream than weep" ((CP: I, 95) but finally dies in vain. By comparing the two, we can see a difference in view between a female writer and a male one. Additionally, we can consider the meaning of "sleep" in fairy tales in general. And finally we can extract for the new kind of attitude required of a contemporary woman facing the problems of daily living.

People are fascinated by fairy tales even for their grotesqueness. Children are entertained by the fantasy world in them which enriches their imagination and it is also recognized by many experts in child development that fairy tales help for children to acquire the creative abilities needed to adapt to real life. In *A Study of Fairy Tales*, Laura Fry Kready and Henry Suzzallo write:

> The fairy tale, like every other literary production, must be judged by the fitness of its emotional effects. Fairyland is the stage-world of childhood, a realm of vicarious living, more elemental and more fancy-free than the perfected dramas of sophisticated adults whose ingrained acceptance of binding realities demands sterner stuff. The tales are classics, artful adaptations of life and form which grip the imaginations of little folk. (xv-xvi)

Thus Kready and Suzzallo emphasize the archetypal patterns presented in fairy tales. These patterns have a more powerful influence than stories for adults because they are acting upon less encumbered minds and because they are full of direct and primitive forces.

Academic research into the fairy tales is carried out in a wide diversity of ways, with anthropological, psychological, sociological, and aesthetic approaches, etc. Writers, too, have quite different ways of representing the same characters in

the same tales and it is often difficult even to judge which version of a story is right or in some sense original. But historical authenticity aside, it is also necessary for us, for example as parents or teachers, to examine the different elements of a story in a responsible and representative light reflecting (among other matters) the positions of both male and female writers. In *Forbidden Journeys, Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Victorian Women Writers*, Nina Auerbach and U.C. Knoepflmacher write:

> …the most acclaimed writers of Victorian children's fantasies were three eccentric men—Lewis Carroll, George MacDonald, and James Barrie—whose obsessive nostalgia for their own idealized childhood inspired them to imagine dream countries in which no one had to grow up. The most moving Victorian children's books are steeped in longing for unreachable lives. Carroll, MacDonald and Barrie envied the children they could not be; out of this envious longing came their painful children's classics. (1)

Do female writers attempt to develop the same worlds of imagination that male writers do? Auerbach and Knoepflmacher are disturbed by the fact that

> Most Victorian women … envied adults rather than children. Whether they were wives and mothers or teachers and governesses, respectable women's lives had as their primary object child care. British law made the link between women and children indelible by denying women independent legal representation. In theory, at any rate, women lived [in] the condition Carroll, MacDonald, and Barrie longed for. If they were good, they never grew up. (1)

Auerbach and Knoepflmaher's interpretation appears to be that a man writes fairy tales under the leading of his dreamlike inspiration while a

woman writes them from her own real experience in daily life. It is well known that the role of a woman in the Victorian era was popularly idealized as “the Angel in the House” (Patmore, 1854).

“The Angel in the House”, the title of a long poem on the subject of happy marriage, was written by Coventry Patmore. Patmore was an admirer of Tennyson, who similarly wrote a long poem “In Memoriam”, about friendship, death and grief, three or four years earlier. As well as a poet, Patmore was also a painter, who had been introduced into the Pre-Raphaelite group by Dante Gabriel Rossetti around 1845. At the end of the nineteenth century several prominent writers, including Virginia Woolf, began to make great fun of Patmore, and especially of the phrase Angel in the House, so that it became notorious as an example of outdated thinking. That is why textbooks and internet articles still go on quoting it.

In this poem, a man called “Felix” recalls how he proposed to his wife “Honoria” and married her. But the poem is also based on the songs of Petrarch, who was one of the first mediaeval male poets to treat women with serious respect. Petrarch wrote his poems as a kind of spiritual journal of his life; and similarly Patmore, as “Felix,” is partly writing about his own fiancée, Emily. This is a socially conservative poem, certainly; the woman has to wait until the man proposes first, and so on. In later Victorian times, fewer readers were ready to take this social environment for granted and the poem became ridiculed because Honoria was found too passive.

Under the cultural constraints of the Victorian era, Auerbach and Knoepflmacher argue, women writers “often seem to chafe against childhood rather than to envy or idealize it” (1). That is one important reason why I think it is necessary to identify the differences between fairy tales by male and female writers.

Here, I will try to explain the dual meanings of “sleep” in the two tales “The Sleeping Beauty in the wood” (hereafter: “Sleeping Beauty”) by Charles Perrault (Opie and Opie, eds., 1974, pp. 81-92) and Christina Rossetti’s “The

Prince's Progress" (I: pp.96-110). This will also allow me to examine some of the differences between a male and a female writer's conceptual preferences of what type of tale is best for adults to tell their children or grandchildren.

Comparison of the Meanings of Sleep in Two Different Tales about Princesses

Sleep is often used as a motif in fairy tales, for example, in "Snow White," "The Beauty and the Beast," and "The Sleeping Beauty." Writers such as Charles Perrault, the Grimm Brothers, Lewis Carroll, and Joseph Jacobs have all adopted this sleep motif. Christina Rossetti's interest in the nature of sleep is also evident in many of her poems, for example, "Sleep, sleep, Happy one" (697), "Sleep, let me sleep, for I am sick of care" (708), "Sleep, little Baby, Sleep" (748), "Sleep, unforgotten sorrow, sleep awhile" (783), "Sleeping at last, the trouble and tumult over" (871), and numerous others.

All of these various male writers and Rossetti explored various implications of sleep in their stories or poems. Perrault's' "Sleeping Beauty" and Rossetti's "The Prince's Progress" will be the objects of my analysis here.

A. "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood"

If we look for the origins of the modern tale "Sleeping Beauty", the main source is Charles Perrault's "La belle au bois dormant" (1697) which in turn is based on earlier version in Giambattista Basile's "II pentamerone" (1636). Like those oldest predecessors, the versions told by the Grimm Brothers (1812), Lewis Carroll (1865,) George MacDonald ("The Light Princess," 1864), R.L. Stevenson (1885) and Joseph Jacobs (1916) stressed woman's angelic virtues that were demanded or longed for by men, or by parents in general, in a typical patriarchal society. At the same time, however, these male writers also presented an intellectual and witty heroine to

emphasize her more independent position, as distinct from the position of the feminine characters in the typical versions of the tale. Here, I will focus on the meaning of sleep in the tale as I discuss Sleeping Beauty's progress from girlhood into womanhood from a more distinctively feminine point of view.

The first problem arising in Perrault's version is infertility. The story starts:

> There was once upon a time a King and a Queen, who were so sorry they had no children, so sorry that it was beyond expression. They went to all the waters in the world, vows pilgrimages; everything was tried and nothing came of it. (Opie and Opie, 1974, 85)

Children symbolize a continuation of human life, and represent a ray of hope to their parents. In bearing children, women play an important role in maintaining this continuity. In Perrault's tale: "At last however the Queen was with child, was brought to bed of a daughter" (85). There had to be a child or else the continuity of life would be interrupted. But Marie Louise Von Franz looks on the phase of sterility as a period of intervening human unconsciousness which can be expressed as sleep. In *The Feminine in Fairy Tales,* she explains "these periods of sterility mean that something specific is in preparation in the unconscious" (27). Furthermore, she interprets:

> Before the birth of the hero or heroine, there is often such a long period of sterility; and then the child is born supernaturally. Put into psychological language, we know that before a time of outstanding activity in the unconscious, there is a tendency toward a long period of complete passivity. It is, for instance, a normal condition in the creative personality that before some new piece of work in art or a scientific idea breaks through, people usually pass through a period of listlessness and depression and waiting; life is stale. If one analyzes them, one sees that the energy is meanwhile accumulating in the unconscious. (26-7)

Von Franz tells us here that in real life, when people have various difficulties and troublesome tasks to face, they have to accumulate the energy that they need for overcoming these obstacles in sleep. An interpretation in line with Von Franz's opinions would be that the fairies invited by the King could be thought of as elements of human consciousness and the forgotten fairy as an element of the unconscious. This is a possible viewpoint in terms of psychology, although not one that I would completely agree with. To me, this seems more like a scientific process in which the constitution of new things requires some giving up the older original ones, like the forgotten old fairy.

Second, let us view the problem more in terms of the paternal protection for a small daughter or unmarried girl. After the birth of the princess, the King was overjoyed and held a celebration.

> There was a very fine Christening; and the Princess had for her godmothers all the Fairies they could find in the kingdom (of whom they found seven) that every one of them might give her a gift, as was the custom of Fairies in those days; by this means the Princess had all the perfections imaginable. (85)

However, no invitation was sent to another Fairy, who was very old and never appeared in public. Nevertheless, she appeared at the party. The first six Fairies invited to the celebration gave their presents as follows:

> The youngest gave her for a gift that she should be the most beautiful person in the world; the next that she should have the wit of an angel; the third, that she should have an admirable grace in every thing she did; the fourth, that she should dance perfectly well; the fifth, that she should sing like a nightingale; and the sixth, that she should play upon all kinds of music to the utmost perfection. (85)

The seventh Fairy did not speak up at this stage, because she could see that the uninvited Fairy was preparing trouble. Sure enough, this old Fairy stepped forward and pronounced that the Princess should pierce her hand with a spindle and die, with no one to cry for her. Now at last, the seventh young Fairy came out and spoke:

> The Princess shall indeed pierce her hand with a spindle; but instead of dying, she shall only fall into a profound sleep which shall last a hundred years, at the expiration of which a King's son shall come and awake her. (85)

The virtues promised by the first six Fairies are those demanded generally of women and widely expected by both men and women. Women themselves have naturally come to admire these qualities from their upbringing in the ingrained conceptions of a man-centered society, not only in older times but also in the present. However, this inherited femininity could work as a constraint on women, in the Victorian Era as in the age of Perrault. Some feminists criticize these imposed feminine characteristics as a hindrance that prevents women from aspiring for independence. Von Franz names this "man's femininity". She says:

> If we look for feminine archetypal models of behavior, we at once stumble over the problem that the feminine figures in fairy tales might have been formed by a man, and therefore do not represent a woman's idea of femininity but rather what Jung called the anima — that is, man's femininity. (2)

It is true that the organization of our society has changed for the better and now allows a woman basic social freedoms and a position more nearly equal to that of a man. Some early feminists asserted that an

independent woman has to work outside as men do and to abandon the traditional feminine roles in the family, for example, the role of bearing and educating children, etc., if she wants to continue her working career all through life. But behind this view, there might be a misunderstanding of the original meaning of independence for an individual woman. As in The Sleeping Beauty, these earlier feminists might have done better to respect the actual aspirations most women to have for the independence to acquire more abilities to deal with the various challenges of real life.

The third viewpoint I wish to discuss is that of parental protection before a girl's marriage. Many psychologists and educationalists have pointed out that over-protection by parents can prevent children from developing an independent personality. For an ideal relationship between a father and daughter, Perrault assumed that a girl should be kept at home before she got married. Sure enough, in Perrault's telling of "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" this parental protection of the daughter is regarded as all-important. First, remembering the old Fairy's wicked words, that the Princess should "have her hand pierced with a spindle and die of the wound" (86), the King, her father, immediately issued a proclamation "whereby everybody was forbidden on pain of death to spin with a distaff and spindle, or to have so much as any spindle in their houses" (86). But when, in spite of this precaution, the Princess "fell down in a swoon" while playing with a spindle and piercing her hand, the King came to realize that the princess was fated to go through what was predicted by the Fairies. As her father, he ordered "the Princess to be carried into the finest apartment in the palace, and to be laid up in a bed all embroider'd with gold and silver. (87), and then "commanded that they should not disturb her, but let her sleep quietly till her hour of awaking was come" (87).

This was all done in order to prevent the fate of death foretold by the old Fairy. Steps like these could be considered as the equivalent of the Victorian precautions of keeping young girls at home and not

allowing them to enter into too close a contact with the outer world. In this way, the "Angel in the House" code of conduct was indirectly reinforced.

Another point about the spindle is that in Western culture, a spindle symbolizes a woman. Von Franz explains:

> "The spindle is also the attribute of the wise old woman and of witches. The sowing of the flax and spinning and weaving are the essence of feminine life with its fertility and sexual implications" (44-5).

As a hypothesis of mine, sleep might imply a growth toward womanhood, with the further implication that the princess was entirely protected by King during her period of girlhood. However, in the man-centered society prevailing at that time, this extreme degree of paternal protection completely denies the daughter any chance of becoming an independent individual. That is to say, given a paradigm of strongly patriarchal notions, woman can do nothing but choose the parasitic way and depend on man.

A final problem that cannot be ignored is the question of the woman's independence after marriage. In the story as told by Perrault, a prince from another royal family came to rescue the Princess, married her, and finally brought her and their two children back to his kingdom after his father, the former King, died. This homecoming and inheritance after the death of the Prince's father is a symbolic act of filial obedience as required in a patriarch society.

The Walt Disney version of most fairy tales typically concludes with a happy ending and a magnificent wedding. This is the pattern in *Snow White*, *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*, among others. Some critics point out that endings of this sort offer a misleadingly glamorous picture of marriage to girls or young women. John Townsend in the "Fact and Fancy" chapter of his *Written for Children* is disturbed that "people stuff children's heads with Stories of Ghosts, Fairies, Witches, and such Nonsense when they are young,

and so they continue to be Fools all their Days" (47). In contrast to this, the classical fairy tales offer children a dreamland and, in the case of young girls, also confront them with conflicts that will be waiting for them in real life after they get married.

The later part of Perrault's tale develops in an interesting way. After the marriage of Sleeping Beauty and the Prince, a feud developed between Sleeping Beauty and her royal mother-in-law. Like the wicked step-mothers in "Snow White" and "Cinderella", the Prince's mother could not accept the prospect of her son's new bride usurping some of her own privileges in the kingdom and tried to kill her. In this version of things, a moral can be drawn that after marriage the responsibility of guiding and protecting the wife in her new and unfamiliar family ought to be laid with her husband. But at the same time, the wife must also be strong enough herself in this situation to face up to another woman's jealousy.

Problems of jealousy also exist commonly in real life when two people have conflicting interests and wishes regarding an issue. Von Franz writes:

> The good fairy godmother turns death into sleep for a hundred years, which makes a long period of sleep and repression. This also happens in reality. An individual's problems do sometimes disappear, but often one has the awkward feeling that they are somnolent rather than solved. Generally, the conscious field in our mind is so prevailing that the problems cannot come up for some reason, and therefore fall asleep — although one feels they will recur. (44)

Also, Francine Prose asks:

> Is this, then, one moral of the tale (The Sleeping Beauty): that the long sleep of girlhood is a brief, welcome interval of peace between the battles (with other women!) that deform childhood and adult life? (302)

On this interpretation, the princess fell asleep under the wicked Godmother's curse; but was then awakened by the prince's kiss and subsequently found enough independence to protect her children from the Prince's ogress of a mother. There is enough consistency in this reading to support the idea that "sleeping" could indeed be a metaphor for a girl's growth away from the complete protection of her parents toward the independence of womanhood. As Von Franz interprets it:

> The dream showed that the energy in the unconscious was readjusting itself; energy and instinctive patterns were rearranging. Before the outburst of a psychotic interval, there is also such a time when everything becomes stale. But then comes the explosion. Libido has been accumulating in the unconscious and comes out in a destructive explosion. (27)

If this is right, it means that sleep possesses a great power to comfort human beings. In the tale, "sleeping" supplied the accumulated energy needed to raise the heroine out of her enchanted plight and allow her to start a new life partly with the help of this unknown prince. After finding out about their marriage, the mother-in-law could not accept the threat that this new woman posed to her dominance and was enraged enough to try to eat her grandchildren and finally kill her daughter-in-law. In the narration it is made clear that her rage was as much due to this jealousy as it was to her supposed depraved nature as a wicked Ogress. To foil her murderous intention, Perrault arranges for the Prince to revolt against his mother and rescue Sleeping Beauty from her in the nick of time. Von Franz interprets the Prince's revolt as a sort of growth process taking him out of his mother's dominance:

> To hate the mother is a healthy instinctive reaction in this case. That is a genuine tragedy which occurs over and over where the healthy nature collides with the neurotic family attitude. The instinctively right behavior causes undeserved misery. It is the theme of an infinite number of hero motifs. (35)

Through the story, Perrault exposes conflicts between women as a warning to the young that a marriage may turn out neither romantic nor happy. This is not only

an individual problem either, because a newly married woman is expected to adapt herself to her new circumstances in life not only for her own sake but also for her sake of her children. Many people would say that this notion of marriage is strongly weighted toward a masculine view. But what is an independently-minded female supposed to think of this? And what can the female expect from marriage? Francine Prose says:

> …the story of Sleeping Beauty is not so much a promise of future romantic awakenings as a warning, an etiquette lesson, a prescription for behavior. It's not so much that we are asleep, on ice till the Prince comes to rouse us. It's that — if we want the Prince to come…well, forget the makeup, the curlers, the short skirts, the feminine wiles, to get the flirtation, the conversation. The surest route to a man's (or to some men's) heart is to pretend to be unconscious: I'm asleep, dear…and actually, to tell the truth, I may not even be…real. I'm what you've always dreamed about. Do with me what you will. (300)

In many societies, past and present men have expected women to live by their guidance and rule. In the particular circumstances of the Victorian Era, the risks inherent in colonial policy, and industrialization undermined the hopes of many women to find complete protection in marriage, although this was normally the only way of life for a woman to choose. Increasingly, women came to realize that they needed to earn money for themselves in the same way men did. Fortunately, some women and men had the spirit to fight for the interests and rights of women within the unjust social system under patriarchal dominance. These included Jane Austen, Barbara Bodichon and Elizabeth Barrett Browning among others.

Some critics analyze the fairy tale psychologically; for example, Von Franz says:

> On a primitive level, the image of the real woman and the imageof the anima of man is more or less the same thing and in our civilization underwent certain slow, secular processes of transformation which took about three to four hundred years. (2)

It was this slow movement that finally broke out onto the surface of society as a fight against the man-centered society. Great efforts were needed to express claims that were either meeting with rejection or receiving insufficient responses under a widening array of constraints. For in fact, this new intrusion of women in the Victorian Era was a new current within the man-dominated world of writing. But as a result, women writers began to mold new kinds of feminine figures in their fictions. In studying feminine figures in fairy tales Von Franz advises readers to

> start with a paradox: feminine figures in fairy tales are neither the pattern of anima nor of the real woman, but of both, because sometimes it is one, and sometimes the other. But it is a fairly good guess to say that some fairy tales illustrate more the real woman and others more the man's anima, according to the sex of the last person who wrote down the story, thereby giving it a slightly different nuance. (2)

After having examined a male view of the fairy tale, let us now review one of the tales told in verse by Christina Rossetti, considered as a Victorian female writer. The tale I shall choose is her long poem "The Prince's Progress".

B. "The Prince's Progress"

In her Introduction to R. W. Crump's edition of *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti* (1987), Betty Flowers makes the point that

> …her childhood home was both exotic and conventional; exotic in that it was enlivened by visiting Italian revolutionaries and

> writers, and conventional in that her mother Frances's teaching and example led Rossetti into an intense and lifelong devotion to Christianity. (xxxviii)

Within this social milieu, in common with other literary women of her circle, Rossetti was sensitive to social injustice and sympathetic toward reform. Flowers says:

> Rossetti's life, publications and letters reveal her to be both ambitious and competitive. She was intensely aware of her role as a woman, tending to compare herself with other women writers, especially Elizabeth Barrett Browning … Though in her outer life. Rossetti chose to submit to the discipline of religion, her essential independence of spirit shines through her work. (xliv)

In fact, Rossetti's works, even more than Barrett Browning's, can be said to show signs of the conventional paradigm of life for a middle-class Victorian woman beginning to break down. That is one reason why her works have been so regularly revisited in recent decades. In the 1980s, Edna Charles wrote:

> The Victorian century claimed Christina Rossetti as its own, but her poetry has commanded the attention of critics in the twentieth. And today there is heightened interest in the works of the woman who, new critical perspectives reveal, may well have conducted a fierce inner struggle against assuming the role of a middle-class Victorian woman. (11)

While keeping in mind what was said about the Princess in Perrault's version of "The Sleeping Beauty", I now wish to focus on Rossetti's narrative poem "The Prince's Progress" in order to have a more notably rational female figure for comparison.

It has to be said first that "The Prince's Progress" is not a straightforward example of a fairy tale. The poem as published in 1866, has an evolution history behind it. It began as a "dirge-song" and was originally entitled "The Prince Who Arrived Too Late." It was on her brother Dante's suggestion that Rossetti developed it into a longer narrative poem for publication. The fact that she always had a fairy tale in mind, though, is shown by a letter to the poet Dora Greenwell (1821-1862), in which Rossetti refers to "The Prince Who Arrived Too Late" as "my reverse of the Sleeping Beauty" (913).

In narrative terms, "The Prince's Progress" is the story of a prince who puts off his quest for a faraway bride. While she awaits his coming in bouts of sleeping and weeping, the Prince allows time to slip by on his journey. First he is attracted by a milkmaid, then he stays for some time with a crazed old alchemist brewing up an elixir in a cave. After that, he wanders across a desolate land, then wastes more time in a land of plenty, and is finally nearly drowned in a flood. He is conscious of his delays but too weak-willed to avoid the temptations and distractions, and too hopeful of the restorative powers of the old man's elixir. In the end, he arrives only in time to see the bride being carried away dead. He has failed in his quest and she has died from this deprivation of love. This is a "reverse of the Sleeping Beauty", who first waited in sleep for a husband to arrive for her, and then again in danger for him to return and rescue her.

Like other Victorian treatments of the theme such as that of Joseph Jacobs (1969 [1890]), Rossetti also presents a passive picture of a woman waiting for her man. The first stanza of "The Prince's Progress" begins with the princess' narrating voice:

Till all sweet gums and juices flow,
Till the blossom of blossoms blow,
The long hours go and come and go,
  The bride she sleepeth, waketh, sleepeth,
Waiting for one whose coming is slow:
  Hark! The bride weepeth.

"How long shall I wait, come heat come rime?—
Till the strong Prince come, who must come in time"
(Her women say), "there's a mountain to climb,
A river to ford. Sleep, dream and sleep:
Sleep" (they say): "we've muffled the chime,
Better dream than weep." (ll.7-12)

In contrast to the bride, crying because her Prince never comes, the Prince is at ease. He prepares his gear for the journey, and even waits for a full moon. Then rising up to "stir and to seek, Going forth in the joy of his strength" (ll.45-46), he starts off in a "light step" and with "merry smile". This is notably different from the Prince in Perrault, who, faced with a hedge of thorns, "did not cease from continuing his way: a young and amorous prince is always valiant" (88). It is also true, however, that in Perrault's tale the Prince has not been searching for the Princess. He has simply been hunting in the forest and runs into this adventure by chance. Or if not chance, it may have been fate, or the Fairy's magic. At all events, it is not a tale of active quest.

In contrast, Rossetti develops a quest narrative about a stereotypical female kept at home awaiting her prince's coming irrespective of whether he will actually appears or not. She makes the outcome tragic, in the sense that he does not appear.

There is no convincing reason in our contemporary society why a women should be kept at home in obedience to the will of her father, her husband or even her son. But in the Victorian Period, women's rights were routinely under-valued not only in the family but also outside in society. Like the Prince in "The Prince's Progress", men tended to have the right to do or experience whatever they liked in life, while women were prevented through the norms of convention from doing anything unusual. This has hardly changed from what was assumed in Perrault's

version of "The Sleeping Beauty": No sooner did Sleeping Beauty break free from her parents' protective rules for her than she was plunged into a prolonged sleep.

In her essay "Christina Rossetti's Lyricism as Revealed in "The Prince's Progress.". Eriko Takada says:

> Rossetti has presented the prince as representing a man's lust for conquest. He is easily dissuaded by some kinds of temptation and delays his journey towards the palace, although he is determined to rescue his spell-bound bride. This princess seems quite different from such female figures as the heroine of Jane Eyre (1847) who claims to be "a free human being with an independent will" and equal to a man in the sight of God. What Christina Rossetti is trying to convey to us is that Victorian society has been totally centered on men, while women tend to be vastly marginalized. (Takada, 1999, 33)

Generally, Rossetti's poems confront readers with a passive female attitude to life, and it is partly for this reason that some feminist critics describe Rossetti as an enigmatic woman. For example, Frances Thomas finds that "she remains a shadowy figure, and those who define the mainstream of English poets have still refused to take her into their number" (11). Read on their own terms, however, her poems give readers an oblique but powerful encouragement to face up to the troubles of the world.

> "Time is short, life is short," they took up the tale:
> "Life is sweet, love is sweet, use today while you may;
> Love is sweet, and tomorrow may fail;
> Love is sweet, use today." (ll.39-42)

In this stanza, the Prince is at last incited to cast off self indulgence and set off on his journey. But it might also be interpreted as an active call to go off in quest of women as men are conventionally wont to do. With the emotionally discordant preceding lines "A hundred sad voices lifted a wail. And a hundred glad voices piped on the gale" (ll.37-8), Rossetti evokes the mixed sorrows and joys of real life. Perhaps she is consciously alluding to the actual sad constraints faced in life by women and the opposite invitations to pleasure experienced by men.

"Is there life?—the lamp burns low;
Is there hope?—the coming is slow:
The promise promised so long ago,
    The long promise, has not been kept.
Does she live?—does she die?---she slumbers so
    Who so oft has wept." (ll.379-84)

In male-centered society, women's position was always marginal. Even literature was thought of as a sacred field that was not suited for women, as Anne Finch was already complaining at the beginning of the eighteenth century:

    Alas! A woman that attempts the pen,
    Such an intruder on the rights of men,
    Such a presumptuous Creature, is esteem'd
    The fault can by no virtue be redeem'd. (p.4)

Although women novelists were no longer rare by the early nineteenth century, and one of them—Jane Austen—was portraying pointedly independent-minded heroines, the prejudice against women writers was still slow to change. In a letter to the not yet known Charlotte Bronte in 1837, the Poet Laureate Robert Southey advised: "Literature

cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be." It was in the more assertive mid-century generation of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Barbara Smith Bodichon that radical critiques of the unjust social treatment of women began to become influential. In contrast to these more positive and prominent proto-feminits, Christina Rossetti occupied a more passive position with regard to the social situation of women, which is certainly the case in "The Prince's Progress".

Regarding Rossetti's passivity, Frances Thomas writes:

> Her renunciation might be seen as a legitimate response to the pressures of being a talented woman in an anti-feminist society; or as genetic, the result of her continual struggle against the inherited instability that drove her brother to a drug-hazed premature death. It might be partly attributed to effects upon her at an early age of an inward-turning and restrictive religion; or to the erosion of her vitality by constant illness. It has been seen by some writers a mere perversity, a sour rejection of life. (10-11)

Takada, who was mentioned above, also points out:

> With regard to this narrative verse, the princess is depicted with an image of 'entranced passivity' which is redolent of our poet's attitude towards her own life. (…) However, the sorrowful, tragic life of the princess has been highly sublimated into the blissful and serene reality of Heaven, the New Jerusalem as sung in the form of the final dirge which is turned somehow into a bridal song sung with a tone of elegiac rhapsody. (Takada, 1999. 33)

Takada apparently takes this ending as implying that the attitude of passivity in the poem is characteristic of the man as well as the woman.

We may agree, certainly, that the Prince is not an enterprising character. "Strong of limb but weak of will" when he starts out on his

quest, he barely manages to recall his waiting bride and return to his purpose after being fruitlessly employed by the old alchemist in the cave. Then, no sooner is he on the road again and ready to resume his journey, but he allows himself to have a sleep: "One night's rest", thought the Prince: "This done, / Forth I spend with the rising sun:/ With the morrow I rise and run, /Come what will of wind or of weather" (ll.253-256). While he is frankly happy to have possession of the elixir which will enable him to save his bride from the brink of death, before he actually hastening to deliver it to her he is still "prompt to crave/ Sleep on the ground" (ll.263-4). He awakes again, it thanks to a mysterious voice or "summons": "Thro' his sleep the summons rang,/ Into his ears it sobbed and it sang" (277-278). Whatever the source of this summon is, it is apparently a voice of guilt, which accuses him of holding his bride's life cheaper than his own comfort:

> If she watches, go bid her sleep;
> Bid her sleep, for the road is steep:
> He can sleep who holdeth her cheap,
> Sleep and wake and sleep again.
> Let him sow, one day he shall reap,
> Let him sow the grain." (ll.265-70)

Here Rossetti herself is criticizing the faults in a man that make him capable of keeping a woman forever waiting for his coming until she runs out of vitality and ends up dead. Some critics argue that the inspiration for the Prince and the bride comes from Rossetti's brother Dante and his wife Lizzie (Elizabeth Siddal), who died exhausted after their years of alternately close and distant relations.

In her narrative poem with its fairy tale background, Rossetti tries to force men to look more attentively at women than in the pure

fairy tales of Perrault. To the Prince who finally arrives only in time to meet the bride's funeral procession, the serving women have nothing to say except:

> Too late for love, too late for joy,
> Too late, too late!
> You loitered on the road too long,
> You trifled at the gate:
> The enchanted dove upon her branch
> Died without a mate;
> The enchanted princess in her tower
> Slept, died, behind the grate;
> Her heart was starving all this while
> You made it wait. (481-490)

Passive sleeping or dreaming might serve to alleviate a woman's sorrows temporarily or allow her a short escape from the problems of social reality. But the central message behind Rossetti's poem is that women need to face reality positively instead of waiting in vain like the bride in the story. The passive suggestion "tomorrow would be better than today" is an inadequate reason for postponing an important decision. In "'My Alchemist': Another Archetype Reworked in Christina Rossetti's The Prince's Progress," Paul Hullah says:

> Throughout the poem, Christina Rossetti's Prince is a dumb participant in the death(s) surrounding him on his journey, making implicit symbolically what is made explicit in terms of the plot at the poem's close: his guilty complicity in bringing about the demise of the princess, original and still ultimate object of his mission. The flawed Prince moves idly through a series of what Rossetti, writing as a Victorian woman, sees as being redundant quest conventions,

always blind to the fate he is actively inviting, a fate which must be painfully and passively submitted to by the helpless princess. (49)

There were plenty of real-life men similar to the Prince who threw away their "todays" in enjoyment of temporary temptations while failing to visit a needful princess in time. In this connection, Frances Thomas recalls the time Christina Rossetti had spent working at the Highgate Penitentiary for Fallen Women where she saw many women who had suffered from marriage difficulties; also, she had "campaigned actively against vivisection and child prostitution" (11). Another social concern of hers, the problems faced by an illegitimate child, figures in another of her longer narrative poems "The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children." In this work, Rossetti boldly attempted to give a positive portrait of a female figure striving to stay independent of male dominance and not to be trapped by the dreamy illusion of marriage life. She suggested that men needed to do more to help women; but above all, she encouraged women themselves to be independent. This theme of independence complemented by mutual help can also be found in the poem "Later Life: A Double Sonnet of Sonnets".

When Adam and when Eve left Paradise
  Did they love on and cling together still,
  Forgiving one another all that ill
The twain had wrought on such a different wise?
She propped upon his strength, and he in guise
  Of lover tho' of lord, girt to fulfil
  Their term of life and die when God should will;
Lie down and sleep, and having slept arise.
Boast not against us, O our enemy!
  Today we fall, but we shall rise again;

We grope today, tomorrow we shall see:
What is today that we should fear today?
A morrow cometh which shall sweep away
Thee and thy realm of change and death and pain. (p.352 No.14)

We can see the first eight lines above are very close in mood (tragic but trusting) to the way Milton presents the story of Adam and Eve at the end of Book X in "Paradise Lost" and also to the sad but peaceful close of the poem at the end of Book XII:

"Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;
The World was all before them, where to choose
Their peace of rest, and Providence their guide:
They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.[645]

Gosse who commends "The Prince's Progress", as a moral poem, concludes that "no man can ignore the influence of his tender years. Ultimately they will call to him and draw him home, and it is a sacred call to be heeded. Only sorrow awaits for those who delay too long" (60).

Some critics complain that the characters in fairy tales place inappropriate images in children's minds which they are tempted to imitate in their grown-up lives. A few people have even tried to deny fairy tales any role in education. But Henry Suzzallo is not afraid to disagree. He says:

To cast out the fairy tale is to rob human beings of their childhood, that transition period in which breadth and richness are given to human life so that it may be full and plastic enough to permit the creation of those exacting efficiencies which increasing knowledge

> and responsibility compel. We cannot omit the adventures of fairyland from our educational program. They take the objects which little boys and girls know vividly and personify them so that instinctive hopes and fears may play and be disciplines. (Kready, 2007,[1916]　xvi)

Suzzallo's opinion finds almost unanimous approval. Anyone who has had the experience of having fairy tales read to them in their childhood recognizes the benefits that they bring. In print, as well, Perrault in "The Sleeping Beauty" not only told an imaginative tale, but also commented on the social problem of conflict between women in a family; Christina Rossetti did something of a similar kind in "The Prince Progress". It is a narrative poem combining elements of fantasy, fairy tale and social commentary. It is also a quest poem, which like other contemporary examples such as Tennyson's "Ulysses" and Browning's "Childe Roland", transforms the genre by having its hero set out late. In her *Selected Poems of Christina Rossetti, Angela* Katharine McGowran notes that the poem also hints at the fate of women in society, depicting them as the passive objects of male desire, subject to men's hesitations and vacillations (Rossetti, 1995, xvi). "The Sleeping Beauty" as Perrault tells it, can be read on one level as a metaphor for the sleep that leads to a girl's growth into womanhood. In contrast to this, Christina Rossetti encourages women to awake from the easy option of passive sleep and to learn to be independent if they aspire to a more real state of happiness.

Today, the mass media are full of vivid messages to targeting material desires for fame and money. Generally, the media also prioritize obviously visible results of economic and scientific progress over the less obvious influences of literary creation and research. But

the reading of literature is necessary for the growth and nourishment of a more spiritual mode of thought. Fairy tales supply the pleasure and imagination needed to enrich childhood.

(p.s. This chapter is based on the content of a previous publication, Lin, 2009.)

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Chapter Five
"The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children"—
From Femininity to Feminism

"The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children" is about an illegitimate daughter's view of her mother and father. Its original title in the first edition of "The Prince's Progress and Other Poems" in 1866 was "Under the Rose." It is a long narrative poem in which Christina Rossetti took issue on problems concerning women.

In *Learning Not to Be First—The Life of Christina Rossetti*, Kathleen Jones describes the poem as "one of her rare 'political pieces'" (123). It reveals the hardships women in general faced in society at that time. Jones comments that the poem "deals with a subject of great concern to Christina — the plight of the unmarried mother, and in particular the fate of the child" (123).

In her essay "Christina Rossetti and poetic Sequence" (1987), Dolores Rosenblum argues that the poem "is also a pivotal poem in that it confronts the issue of what is and not canonical in art, specifically in Rossetti's art" (142). In other words, Rossetti showed her interest in women's issues as did other women writers in her time, even if she wasn't active as a champion of women's rights.

In the Victorian period social systems were beginning to improve in various fields, for example, women began working outside the home,

and female voting rights were at least being proposed. In literature, although male and female genres were still partly separate, women such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot started writing stories about women that were critical of current social conditions. The contemporary conservative image of women as expressed in the poem "The Angel in the House" by Coventry Patmore (1854), was increasingly challenged as more and more writers demanded equal recognition and treatment for women and for men. For example, John Stuart Mill wrote "The Subjection of Women" in 1861 and published it in 1869. The ideological division by this time was more between liberal and conservative writers than between male and female ones.

Some Victorian fictions, particularly ones written by women, also began to claim that the social value of femininity prevented women from being independent. To many women, femininity was coming to seem less important than being able to act as an independent woman. My personal outlook is that to be a mother and a wife today, a woman needs to be equipped with both femininity and independence to manage her own life and the running of her family.

While examining Rossetti's poem, this chapter will also aim to explore how a young girl learns to overcome the conflicts inherent in traditional convention and to live more independently in accord with her own growth. In other words, it will examine at how she manages to progress in status from a dependent object to an independent woman.

The poem's original 1866 title, "under the Rose", comes from the Latin phrase "sub rosa", which is a polite and ironic way of saying that something has been settled through a discreet private arrangement.

However, the image of the "Rose" also has other associations in poems and other literary works. There is, for example, a poignant emotion in William Blake's "The Sick Rose" (1794) or in the supreme beauty of the flower grown from the nightingale's heart-blood in Oscar Wilde's "The Nightingale and Rose" (1888). The different qualities of

the roses in works like these have a powerful effect on the readers' emotions. Following the lead of Blake, whom she greatly admire, Rossetti also makes frequent use of "rose" images in poems such as "The Rose", "Queen Rose", etc. The rose displays different qualities in each poem, sometimes symbolizing women's beauty, and sometimes their sadness, bitterness, suffering, or so on.

In "The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children", the heroine opens the first stanza with a gloomy account of her unfortunate birth.

> Oh the rose of keenest thorn!
> One hidden summer morn
> Under the rose I was born. (1-3)

The conventional meaning, which might have been expected first, actually comes last: The speaker declares that she is forced to live in a "hidden" place without a name because she was born "under the rose". As we learn in more detail later, her mother's ignorance of life at the age of sixteen was the direct cause of this misfortunes. But more particular metaphorical meanings are also present: the rose's thorn functions as a metaphor of pain, both for the girl afflicted by this bitter fate and for her mother who has spoiled her roselike perfection by bearing an illegitimate daughter. The "rose of keenest thorn" thus symbolizes waste, injury and shame.

Rossetti further extends the imagery of the "rose" to set up a social statement of protest about the unfair treatment doled out to women, and in particular to unmarried mothers of illegitimate children. Rossetti is sensible of the social realities faced by women and uses the example of one woman's experience of injustice in this poem to give expression to the dual aspects of women's response potential, femininity and feminism. As Rosenblum comments:

> Rossetti is thus ironically qualifying the symbol of womanhood — the Rose — and linking it with the fall or fate of women, for this

> poem tells the story of an illegitimate child, a consequence of male seduction, and of the mother, who, fearing the judgment of a patriarchal society, rejects her daughter. (142)

According to the traditional convention a woman was required to behave as an angel before getting married. And femininity was regarded by male-centered society as the essence of a woman. Women's faults were severely criticized by society but men's are permitted, the main reason being that most women could not live independently either financially or socially without a man to take responsibility for them..

Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* is often known as the first book of feminism. In *A Mid-Victorian Feminist, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon*, Sheila Herstein writes:

> Wollstonecraft asked for equal educational and professional opportunities for women, full citizenship, and the right of married women to own property and to have a share in the custody of their children in case of marital separation. She also wanted men to be legally responsible for their illegitimate children. (43)

In the Victorian Period, it was still true that an illegitimate girl was not accepted in society, although by now there was rather more recognition of the injustice implied in this.

Themes of women's unfair social treatment are popular in the literature of the mid-century. Examples include Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Elizabeth Gaskell's novels *Mary Barton* (1847) and *North and South* (1853), and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856). Rossetti respected Barrett Browning's poetry, and was greatly affected by her social thinking.

Rossetti also showed a more general interest in women's issues and tried her hand on a few of these sensitive themes in her turn. She

did so not simply out of an interest for the current literary vogue but more positively out of a sense of responsibility and as an assertion of her world awareness as an independent writer. Besides the influence from Barrett Browning, she also received impulses from the members of "the Portfolio Society" (96), formed by Barbara Leigh Smith, a well-known Victorian feminist and herself one of the five illegitimate children of Benjamin Leigh Smith. The Society was founded by her sister Annie Leigh Smith, and some of the members had feminist-like ideas. According to Herstein:

> In "the Portfolio Society", Barbara Smith and the members, "her sisters Nanny and Bella, Anna Mary Howitt, Bessie Parkes, and Christina Rossetti, met periodically to exhibit sketches and listen to poetry on prescribed themes" (96).

Because of poor health, Rossetti knew that she could not work actively outside as other feminists did. Instead she chose to voice her protest against the disturbing treatment of women through her poems.

As has already been said, "The Iniquities of the Fathers upon the Children" concerns the relationship between a mother and daughter. And as is often pointed out in biographies, Rossetti lived her own life under a strong influence from her mother. In *The Afterlife of Christina Rossetti*, Alison Chapman says:

> Christina Rossetti's close association with her mother is circulated in the biographies as the distinguishing feature of her identity. Rossetti is depicted as the ideal daughter and is constantly equated with her mother. (110)

Description of this kind may mislead readers of Rossetti into understanding that she was bound to her mother because in a clinging relationship of utter dependence. On the contrary, I think that Rossetti

was fortunate to have her mother's support throughout her writing career, which enabled her to learn much on her way to becoming an independent woman without losing her femininity. At any rate, the relationship between Rossetti and her mother was firm and cannot be ignored. In this poem, too, the mother-daughter relationship is so fully mapped out that the conflicts in it can be quite minutely followed.

Does Femininity Mean Women's Dependence?

I do not guess his name
Who wrought my mother's shame,
And gave me life forlorn,
But my Mother, Mother, Mother,
I know her from all other.
My Mother pale and mild,
Fair as ever was seen,
She was but scarce sixteen,
Little more than a child,
When I was born
To work her scorn.
With secret bitter throes,
In a passion of secret woes,
She bore me under the rose. (4-17)

It was unfair in the otherwise progressive Victorian Period that women should have been shamed in this way and denied the chance to choose their paths in life freely. Here, the speaker laments her mother's misfortune as the poem proceeds, seeks out her own way to live independently. Chapman goes on to say:

> Rossetti's poetry, however, does not endlessly rehearse the painful trauma of loss… she forges a personal space that signifies the paradisal by repressing the memory of separation from the mother. (109)

The closeness of Rossetti's own relationship with her mother was stressed by her first biographer, Mackenzie Bell: "Mrs. Rossetti survived until April 1886, and during [those] fifty-six years Christina was rarely absent from her" (6). In the poem, too, the girl has a deep underlying bond with her mother despite the lack of trust between them (392-394). Regarding her unknown father, however, it is all that she can do not to curse him (519-522). She says that even when she is "at (her) prayer", the idea of cursing him comes to her so strongly that she can hardly resist it. To curse somebody in prayer like this, especially in Protestant Christianity, is blasphemy: the curse would poison her own heart and defile her prayers. Yet she is on the verge of it. She hates him, and is scared of her own hatred.

While she can pity her mother's pain and misery in giving birth to her, she despises her unknown father for not taking responsibility for the mother and child. Above all, she feels a deep grief that her own birth should have damaged her mother's life like "the rose of keenest thorn". She feels deeply for her mother because she has had her only child taken away soon after her birth. For this, the girl readily forgives her Mother, who at the time was "but scarce sixteen/ Little more than a child" (11-12).

The separation from the mother to avoid public scandal must have been traumatic. After all the rigors of birth, when the nurse takes the baby away the young mother feels hopelessly depressed:

> O Nurse, let me look upon
> This babe that costs so dear;

Tomorrow she will be gone:
Other mothers may keep
Their babes awake and asleep,
But I must not keep her here. (20-25)

In the Victorian Period, an unmarried woman with a child was looked upon as a "fallen" woman and the child was illegitimate and not normally accepted in society. According to Rosenblum (1986):

> For a young woman brought up in a time that endorsed only one acceptable adult female role—that of being loved and protected by a man—the realization that this very relationship was for her impossible must have been hugely disruptive" (58).

In her sympathetic concern for women's issues of this kind, Rossetti spontaneously transferred the energies of her reflections on reality into her creative writing, and in the "O Nurse…" passage quoted above, she unmistakably portrays the woman's passive position. There can hardly be a harder blow for a mother than not being allowed to keep her baby as other mothers do but being forced to send her away.

The baby grows up into the poem's heroine who initially enjoys a few years of "childish play" not concerned about the secret of her birth.

So I was sent away
That none might spy the truth:
And my childhood waxed to youth
And I left off childish play. (26-31)

Rossetti might want to assert here that all children should live equally and enjoy their "childish play" in innocence, no matter how they are born. Or she may be saying that this happens naturally, whether it is wished for or not.

My Lady at the Hall
Is grander than they all:
Hers is the oldest name
In all the neighbourhood;
But the race must die with her
Tho' she's a lofty dame,
For she's unmarried still. (59-65)

Ironically, the heroine's mother is socially more powerful for staying unmarried; but her grandeur cannot be passed on, and in addition she has the suffering of being parted from her child. Though Rossetti also remained unmarried throughout her life, her experience working in the Highgate House of Charity, made her sensitive to the social problems of the time and aware of many women's sufferings, usually caused by men. Rossetti revealed her interest in such issues in "The Prince's Progress," although her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti did not approve of her writing a poem of this kind. In this respect, she dismissed her brother's opinions. Jones explains:

> Gabriel objected to the poem on the grounds that the subject matter was unsuitable for a woman, complaining in another letter that the 'modern vicious taint' of Elizabeth Barrett Browning is discernible in Christina's work, referring presumably to her treatment of similar themes— the unmarried Marion Erle in *Aurora Leigh*— and her love of polemics. (123)

As Mayberry describes in *Christina Rossetti: the Poetry of Discovery*, in her reply letter to her brother Christina insisted on her own position as follows:

> [I]t may truly be urged that unless white could be black and Heaven Hell my experience (thank God) precludes me from hers, yet I don't see why the "Poet mind" should be less able to construct her from its own inner consciousness than a hundred other unknown quantities. (82).

Generally speaking, Rossetti respects her brother's judgments and follows most of his advice about her writing. Only rarely does she stick to her own conceptions to this degree in the face of her brother's advice. It may be that Christina herself is affirming her independence from the control of her brother.

Rossetti's own childhood was happy, but similar to the heroine's in the one respect that "men spoke a foreign tongue/ There where we used to be/ Where I was merry and young" (l.85-87). As in the poem, this may have been partly because Rossetti, like the heroine, was "too young to feel afraid" (l.88), but in Rossetti's case there was also the more special reason that the family were political refugees and that other Italian exiles would often come to visit. Bell explains:

> About 1836 the family removed to 50 Charlotte Street. There, partly owning to the father's conspicuous ability, partly to his growing celebrity as a leader of the movement in favour of Italian freedom, his house became a meeting-place of Italians, some of them exiles like himself (William Rossetti). (7)

Some passages in Rossetti's poems, then, appear to be drawn from her own childhood experience. The Rossetti children grew up accustomed to the Italian language and to moving freely back and forth between the English culture of their mother's family and the Italian culture of their father's. This also shows in the interesting way how Rossetti's poems occasionally incorporate Italian turns of phrase in accomplished English verse.

I was a little maid
When here we came to live
From somewhere by the sea.
Men spoke a foreign tongue,
There where we used to be
When I was merry and young,
Too young to feel afraid; (82-88)

As the girl is growing up she gradually begins to "wonder who might my parents be" (l.112). This is a question natural enough for any child brought up entirely by a nurse, with no parents evidently around.

I often sat to wonder
Who might my parents be,
For I knew of something under
My simple-seeming state. (111-114)

All children feel curious about the facts of their own birth while they are growing up and the heroine is no exception. Her nurse tries hard to keep the secret, partly because she is under orders, but it seems also because she feels it is the best way to protect the girl and her mother. In this poem there is no paternal figure directly watching over the nurse, but the nurse acts as a mother-like protector for both the heroine and the heroine's mother. In this role, she similarly reflects the strong relationship between Rossetti herself and her mother.

Nurse never talked to me
Of mother or of father,
But watched me early and late
With kind suspicious cares:

Or not suspicious, rather
Anxious, as if she knew
Some secret I might gather
And smart for unawares.
Thus I grew. (116-123)

The heroine complains here about the nurse's keeping the secret from her. It is a secret beyond the reach of public knowledge. She grows up and nothing eventful happens until the nurse becomes weak with old age and lies dying.

Even on the point of death the nurse still keeps the secret, but leaves the girl with a ring, a token linking her with her unknown mother.

She gave a ring to me
Of gold wrought curiously,
A ring which she had worn
Since the day that I was born,
She once had said to me:
I slipped it on my finger; (133-138)

The girl's nurse dies and she is left alone feeling lonely, miserable and depressed:

The one who loved was gone.
How long I stayed alone
With the corpse, I never knew,
For I fainted dead as stone (143-146)

In *Christina Rossetti and the Poetry of Discovery*, Katherine Mayberry describes how Rossetti's ballads show her feelings and

how she constructs “positive gain out of pain and deprivation” (58). Rossetti’s poems often express a sadness of loss. But in describing this to her readers she also encourages them to rise to new emotions in order to face up to their sadness and live with it.

> When I came to life once more
> I was down upon the floor,
> With neighbours making ado
> To bring me back to life. (147-150)

With her neighbours’ help, the heroine recovers her strength again. Here Rossetti appears to stress the importance of becoming independent and learning to stand alone in the world, but also the equally important fact that humans are not alone in the world. Rossetti herself had to struggle in her youth with financial, health and writing problems, but, with her mother’s support, succeeded in overcoming these challenges and continued writing throughout her life.

> For days day after day
> On my weary bed I lay
> Wishing the time would pass;
> Oh, so wishing that I was
> Likely to pass away:
> For the one friend whom I knew
> Was dead, I knew no other,
> Neither father nor mother;
> And I, what should I do? (164-72)

Humans feel confused when they are alone. Rossetti herself felt no confidence in writing for a living when she was young, as can be seen from the confused emotions in her prose fiction “Maude”. But she had

found a way out of self-destructive despair and had by now gained herself something of a reputation with her publication of "Goblin Market" and "The Prince's Progress". In Mayberry's view, Rossetti's poems express:

> the creativity born of loss which provides, not a refuge from the truth, but a means for discovering a deeper, invaluable truth about the speaker's own power and worth (82).

Thus, a new strength emerges from despair and it is this realization of the power of truth which guides the girl in the poem to rebirth. At the end of these several days of struggle, the Lady of the Hall, who is in reality the girl's mother, hears of the nurse's death from the sexton of the village church and decides that it is time for her to pay a visit. At last, they meet.

> While I stared, My lady took
> My hand in her spare hand
> Jewelled and soft and grand,
> And looked with a long long look
> Of hunger in my face;
> As if she tried to trace
> Features she ought to know,
> And half hoped, half feared, to find. (238-245)

The lady is gentle and anxiously concerned, despite the long years since the girl's birth and their tragic parting. The tie between mother and daughter is as firm and unaltered as the ring, although at this point the girl cannot be sure whether the visitor is her mother or not. The girl begins to build up a dream of her own, of having a complete family, an ordinary happy family. Later in the poem, this is elaborated:

So pleasant in a dream:
A home such as I see
My blessed neighbours live in
With father and with mother
All proud of one another,
Named by one common name
From baby in the bud
To full-blown workman father;
It's little short of Heaven. (458-466)

In a fairy tale, a Prince Charming is always on hand for the beautiful girl. In real life, what should we expect? Conventionally, I think, most people expect, or at least dream of, an ideal family like this with parents and children living under the same roof with "one common name" even if the father happens to be a workman without much in the way of wealth. And in fact, the girl soon finds herself in a position to be able to look forward to marriage and starting her own complete family. In the end, however, she comes to realize that it will not be possible for an illegitimate child to find an ideal husband even if she has money. If she tries to uncover the secret of her birth, she knows that she will only hurt her mother like the "keenest thorn" of a rose that is grasped for too eagerly. In the end, she prefers to live alone, nameless to save her mother.

It seems to me that while Rossetti wrote this narrative poem she must have been conscious of Victorian feminist movements. Especially, she appears to have been influenced by her friend Barbara Smith and by a discussion at the Portfolio Society of a certain "Caroline Norton's marital difficulties". Herstein explains: "The illegitimate child could not inherit except by bequest, having no legal claim to family property or surname (73)". Rossetti may have been so concerned by this that it

led her to write this poem about "fallen women" and their illegitimate children. This raises another interesting question which I will next turn to: Did she support a proto-version of the feminism movement?

Is Feminism the Same as Women's Independence

> My lady, you might trust
> Your daughter with your fame.
> Trust me, I would not shame
> Our honourable name,
> For I have noble blood
> Tho' I was bred in dust
> And brought up in the mud.
> I will not press my claim,
> Just leave me where you will:
> But you might trust your daughter
> For blood is thicker than water
> And you're my mother still. (383-94)

The feelings ultimately expressed by the heroine in this poem arose from the failure of love to supply a new empowerment in her life. In *The Demon and the Damozel*, Suzanne M. Waldman writes that: "A consistent theme in Christina Rossetti's writing is the desire to submit the self to a greater will" (38). Feelings are a significant feature of Rossetti's poems. Some critics regard them as being what Waldman would call "dark" poems, but I prefer the view that behind this "darkness" Rossetti is trying to offer her readers an expression of encouragement. Waldman is also careful to appreciate:

> [Rossetti's] darker poems provide a warning that the subject must carefully discriminate between different opportunities for

> submission, entrusting one's fate to only the most meritorious authorities (38),

and accounts for this positive function of darkness as follows:

> The act of turning her experiences into poetry enabled "Rossetti to achieve desperately needed distance from her difficult discoveries about the role of love in her life" (58).

In the case of "The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children", after first letting her readers share the bitterness of the heroine's situation and experience the renunciation that pours out from despair, Rossetti's verse later releases a hidden but powerful energy that will lead to a presentiment of rebirth. Rosenblum (1986) comments:

> At the end of the poem the heroine (the daughter and the narrator) has experienced a renunciation that refined and defines a self: She stands 'nameless,' a free spirit, undefined except by the limits of mortality. The illegitimate daughter, then, is the 'answer' to the repining princess: the only power of women resides outside the framework of patriarchy. (142)

Like Rossetti, the girl has decided to live independently and start living a life on her own resources:

> I think my mind is fixed
> On one point and made up:
> To accept my lot unmixed;
> Never to drug the cup
> But drink it by myself.
> I'll not blot out my shame
> With any man's good name;

But nameless as I stand,
My hand is my own hand,
And nameless as I came
I go to the dark land. (530-41)

An ideal family might make a woman happy. The heroine of Rossetti's poem knows that the name of her noble mother could assure her a happy and prosperous family that she and her mother could be proud of. The secrets of her birth would be exposed, however, and this would not only injure her mother, but also possibly make herself, as an illegitimate child, ineligible to inherit. Most feminists assert that the protection of a father or mother is ultimately a hindrance that prevents a female from achieving independence. It is important for a girl to gain her happiness not by depending on a male through marriage or inheritance by learning to live as an independent individual. This is an idea clearly expressed in this poem.

General opinion, especially in the Victorian period, was that a woman should be satisfied with either money or with an ideal romantic marriage. But the way an independent individual should live is totally distinct from such circumstances. Rossetti realized this and devoted several of her poems to writing about women's issues. Mayberry analyzed the personal background to this choice of subjects in Rossetti's own life:

> Unquestionably, Rossetti recognized and made use of the distancing and reshaping properties of art; she was aware that writing poetry about the painful conditions of her life changed those conditions, gave them a quality comfortably distinct from their real essence. Pain—disordered, shapeless, intolerable—is not preserved in a poem as much as it is changed, ordered, reduced into a manageable shape. (58)

Like Rossetti herself, the girl in the poem manages to maintain a calm spirit, face her own bitterness, and live courageously on the

energy that she draws from moral rebirth. In other words, the problem of independence here comes down to an attitude of mind and will:

> "All equal in the grave"—
> I bide my time till then:
> "All equal before God"—
> Today I feel His rod,
> Tomorrow He may save:
> Amen. (542-46)

The women's issues in this poem are ultimately related to the ones found in other poems by Rossetti, and in particular the ones that have been examined in the previous two chapters: the duties of sisterly love in "Goblin Market" and the unjust predicament of the Princess waiting for her belated Prince in "The Prince's Progress". Mayberry sums up:

> For Rossetti and speakers of her poems, solitude allowed, indeed required, alternative creations. For Rossetti, the creations were poetry and autonomy; for the speakers of her poems, the creations were dreams, fantasies, hopes, memories, self-love, personal strength. (83)

Today, our society still seems to treat many girls and women unfairly but tomorrow may be better. Mayberry explains:

> Through the transforming properties inherent in memory, fantasy, anticipation, and fiction, Rossetti creates something new and positive out of love's failure. (58)

Rossetti tried to express an independent spirit, to encourage women to resist romantic expectations and face reality. When reading Rossetti's poems, her readers often find an invisible power emerging to cheer them up. This is one important reason why her poems are still read today.

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Conclusion

Christina Rossetti continued writing throughout her life though, as Kathleen Jones notes, she had "Learn[ed] not to be first". She may not have been as popular as Juliana Horatia Ewing and Jean Ingelow, but some of her verses in *Sing Song* are familiar to people far and wide.

Who has seen the wind?
  Neither I nor you:
But when the leaves hang trembling
  The wind is passing thro'.

Who has seen the wind?
  Neither you nor I:
But when the trees bow down their heads
  The wind is passing by.

In the poem above, Christina Rossetti explains the magical power of the wind. Rossetti's poems at times touch her reader's hearts gently like the soft breezes and sometimes beat against their minds in strong blasts. In *Forbidden Journey*, Auerbach and Knoepflmacher observe that children's books written by male writers, like Robert L. Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, or George MacDonald's *The Light Princess*, or shortly afterwards, J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, "are steeped in longing for unreachable lives" (1993: 1). Stevenson, Carroll and MacDonald dominated the field of children's books in the Victorian period, while many woman writers also found themselves writing largely for children instead of

elaborating their ideas in works aimed at adults. Prominent examples of these children's works by women are Ewing's *The Brownies* (1865) and Ingelow's *Mopsa the Fairy (*1869), and, before that, *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb (1807) and Stories such as *The purple Jar* by Maria Edgeworth (1796). These female writers often wrote on patterns laid down by men. As noted by Nina Auerbach and U.C. Knoepflmacher, "women lived the condition Carroll, MacDonald, and Barrie longed for. If they were good, they never grew up" (1).

Breaking free from the influence of these male writers, to quote Knoepflmacher: Rossetti shows her "bizarre imagination: … a creature always presumed innocent, … far more resilient, even monstrous, than sentimentalists, in the nineteen century and now, dare imagine" (Auerbach and Knoepflmacher, 1993: 10). In her poems, Rossetti adopts a more distinctively feminine expression of pathos to attract her readers' attention.

I paid much attention to Rossetti's "Juvenilia Poems" because those poems show her learning process and her observations while writing.

In *Sing Song*, a Nursery Rhyme Book (1872), Rossetti shows her fantastic imagination by combining *Mother Goose* and her Italian-English lingual talent to interweave her verses.

"Goblin Market" brings a strengthening of the concept of sisterhood; "The Prince's Progress" asserts women's preference for action over waiting; and "The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children" focuses on women's independence. In *Sex, Drugs, and Madness in Poetry from William Blake to Christina Rossetti*, Eijun Senaha (1997) notes:

> As a poet, Rossetti dramatizes her mentor's philosophy, with the aid of the realism of the Penitentiary girls, as a philosophy of 'pleasure of pain' and represents the 1850s and 1860s as a period of sisterhood. (144)

In this thesis I have focused generally on feminist criticism and more particularly on a feminist critique of traditional fairy tales. I have used this as a base for examining certain imaginative and emotional elements in Rossetti's works.

Studying Rossetti as a poet also guides us into discovering the works of many works of her predecessors, such as William Blake (1757-1827), John Keats (1795-1821) and Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892), or Jane Austen (1775-1817), Elizabeth Browning (1806-1866), George Eliot (1819-1890), and so on. A comparative study helps us to appreciate the rhythm and verse patterns in both their difference and their similarities, whether in the males powerful verbal constructions or in the female's expression of the heart's cries of happiness and suffering.

Studying Rossetti as a writer of children's literature leads us to discover a playful and fantastic world fascinating to adults and children alike. In the Victorian period, we find both the continuing influence of male-dominated thinking through the popularity of writers such as Charles Perrault (1628-1703), Lewis Carroll (1832-1898), George MacDonald (1824-1905), and R. L. Stevenson (1850-1894) and the early signs of a movement to "break the Magic Spell" of the male-dominated story frame through the new impetus of female writers such as Jean Ingelow (1820-1897), Anne Thackeray Ritchie (1837-1919), Juliana Horatia Gatty Ewing (1841-1885), Beatrix Potter (1866-1943), E. Nesbit (1858-1924) and so on. Through these stories we can come to know some traditional or conventional systems of social order which are different from those of the present time.

Studying Rossetti's works from a critical feminist position allows us to compare the inequalities between the social treatment of men and women in Victorian times and today as well. This in turn helps us to be more conscious of women's unequal position and of the urgent need to push people to improve women's social status to a level that is at last equal to that of men.

The issues implied in Rossetti's poems will continue to attract us and her poems will go on being read in the same way the wind stirs our hearts, whether

we are alertly conscious of it or not. Her devotional religious poems and the comparable presentiments of her verses and tales for children can lead us into knowing something that we have never yet sensed, and that is what has made Rossetti's works so rewarding as perennial objects of research from the most various of angles. Eijun Senaha writes:

> The literary presentation of woman as sufferer between propriety and impropriety came to have less significance. In fact, the woman's "Pain and pleasure" did not continue to be as serious an issue as before, and the poets were perplexed by the image of New Woman because of her mixed reputation as a blatant female or as a perceptive social critic. (150)

In this thesis, I have tried to read Rossetti as a poet and as a woman writer of children's literature and to discuss her works from a point of view of feminist criticism in order to arrive at a view of women's roles in society. I hope to continue my research along these lines discerned by Senaha.

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