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1977

DIVERSE VISIONS IN THE WORK OF DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Among practitioners of the sister arts, painting and poetry, there occasionally appears a hybrid, the "poet-painter." To those who are interested in the relationship between poetry and the visual arts, such a figure provides an enlarged opportunity for study; for, certainly, any links between the two disciplines might well be most clearly defined when the works examined have issued from a single source.¹ One of the most celebrated and most frequently studied of English "poet-painters" is William Blake. When discussing later artists of multiple talents, the comparison with Blake is almost invariably made. Dante Gabriel Rossetti is no exception. The classification of both men as "poet-painters" into one category (often fallaciously defended by citing Rossetti's life-long interest in Blake's work) blinds one, however, to the numerous and significant differences in the approaches which each took to the two media in which he dealt. The abundant examinations which have been made of Blake's work readily reveal a clear-cut

¹ Mario Praz, Mnemosyne: The Parallel Between Literature and the Visual Arts (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), p. 40.

and consistent relationship between poetry and design.² These studies have shown that Blake's designs are intended to contribute commentary and criticism to one's understanding of, and response to, the words which they accompany. In the case of Rossetti's work, however, no adequate study of the relationship between poem and design has ever been undertaken. Our awareness of the nature of that relationship for Rossetti may contribute not only to a greater understanding and appreciation of his works, but to the wider study of the sister arts.

"Poet or Painter?" The question appears and reappears, from chapter headings to footnotes in almost all accounts of the life and work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and therein seems to lie the difficulty in discussing his poetry and painting. Any account of Rossetti's life itself reveals a constant reiteration of the same question, posed by Rossetti, his family, friends, and the public at large, and biographical evidence provides ample warrant for regarding Rossetti as both poet and painter. In spite of contradictory critical assessments of his work, at various points

² Among the most recent and more valuable studies of the interpretive illustrations of William Blake are those by Irene Tayler ("Say First! What Mov'd Blake?: Blake's Comus Designs and Milton," Blake's Sublime Allegory: Essays on the Four Zoas, Milton, and Jerusalem, ed. Stuart Curran and Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. [Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1973]) and Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. ("William Blake: Illustrator-Interpreter of Paradise Regained," Calm of Mind: Tercentenary Essays on Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes, in Honor of John S. Diekhoff [Cleveland: Case Western Reserve Univ. Press, 1971]).

during his life and afterwards, which found the pendulum's swing more pronounced toward one direction or the other, it is impossible to find that Rossetti ever worked in one art for long to the exclusion of the other.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti first began drawing at the age of four, the delight in drawing taking hold at once.³ A single line from his brother William's memoir suggests the supremacy of this art and, at the same time, suggests perhaps the source of the conflict that was to affect Rossetti. William remarks, "I cannot remember any date at which it was not understood in the family that 'Gabriel meant to be a painter.'"⁴ Impulse versus obligation, livelihood versus love, equations whose terms were sometimes reversed, were to characterize the interplay between painting and poetry throughout Dante Gabriel Rossetti's entire life.

Chronicles of Rossetti's early and intermittent efforts in verse and prose clearly show their simultaneous growth. Ample nutriment for the bifurcated interests that were rapidly developing is revealed in accounts of Rossetti's

³ Rossetti was originally given the Christian names Gabriel Charles Dante, but will be referred to by the form he adopted in 1849, Dante Gabriel. The surname Rossetti alone, in this text, refers to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, while other members of the family are distinguished by their Christian names.

⁴ William Michael Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters, with a Memoir (London: Ellis & Elvey, 1895), I (Memoir), 43; hereafter cited in footnotes as Letters and Memoir.

reading and exposure to designs in print and to original art work.⁵ At each significant point in his development, Rossetti exhibited ability in both fields, although professionally he was intended to be a painter. Thus, for example, while William portrays the schoolboy renowned for the dramatic and theatrical characters which adorned the margins of his notebooks, he immediately adds, "though I do not recall precise instances in point— . . . he was known for reciting verses."⁶ While Rossetti did not produce any sonnets of his own during the years of his study at Sass's, a drawing academy of some repute, he commenced translating the works of others. If we regard these translations, as William Rossetti and innumerable critics along with him did, as "re-castings of poems into another language such as could only be accomplished by a poet in his own right," then clearly Rossetti's development as a poet was keeping pace with that in art.⁷

Counterpointing the next step in Rossetti's development as an artist, his entrance to the Antique School of the Royal Academy in 1846, was Rossetti's development as an original poet. Within a year's time from that point, he had

⁵ The most comprehensive account of Rossetti's reading is by Helen S. Culler ("Studies in Rossetti's Reading," Diss. Yale 1943).

⁶ Letters and Memoir, I, 78.

⁷ Ibid., I, 106.

written the first versions of "The Blessed Damozel," "My Sister's Sleep," "The Portrait," and "Ave," and a little later, the opening portions of "Dante at Verona," "A Last Confession," and "The Bride's Prelude."⁸ Rossetti's split commitment at this time is also revealed in his appeals to both poets and painters whom he admired, for criticism and assistance. Rossetti sent manuscripts of his poems to William Bell Scott (himself a poet and painter), appealed to Ford Madox Brown for instruction in painting, inquired of Leigh Hunt as to the feasibility of turning to literature as a career, and then to William Holman Hunt, for relief from the routine of still-life to which his instruction with Brown had bound him.⁹

William Holman Hunt is only one of many during this period of time to substantiate Rossetti's development as both painter and poet. He affirms Rossetti's broad knowledge of poetry, noting that "If he read twice or thrice a long poem,

⁸ Ibid., I, 107. To avoid ambiguity, hereafter the titles of both poems and pairs of poems and paintings will appear within quotation marks, and only when the painting alone is being referred to will the title be underlined.

⁹ The early juxtaposition of the arts by Rossetti is evident in the title of the collection of poems which he sent to William Bell Scott, "Songs of the Art Catholic." Of this title, William Rossetti notes that "by 'art' he [Rossetti] decidedly meant something more than 'poetic art.' He meant to suggest that the poems embodied conceptions and a point of view related to pictorial art—also that this art was, in sentiment though not necessarily in dogma, Catholic-medieval and un-modern." Letters and Memoir, I, 114.

it was literally at his tongue's end."¹⁰ We may imagine that Hunt was audience to Rossetti's recitations of his own work, as well. Hunt describes Rossetti as having been "a student of poetry almost to the exclusion of other pursuits," whose chanting of verses filled the Cleveland Street studio which they shared for part of 1848-1849. Without really distinguishing the object of Rossetti's creative reverie, Hunt gives a portrait of him in which

frequently he would leave his day's appointed task to engage himself with some design or poem that occupied his thoughts. When he had once sat down and was immersed in the effort to express his purpose, and the difficulties had to be wrestled with, his tongue was hushed, he remained fixed and inattentive to all that went on about him; he rocked himself to and fro, and at times he moaned lowly, or hummed for a brief minute, as though telling off some idea. All this while he peered intently before him, looking hungry and eager, and passing by in his regard any who came before him, as if not seen at all. Then he would often get up and walk out of the room without saying a word.¹¹

This, Hunt attributes to the "poetic atmosphere" encircling the poet-painter.

These years witnessed the foundation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group of seven young men who, in spite of differences in personal style or direction, were all dedicated to repudiating contemporary conventions in painting. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood grew from a friendship between Hunt, Rossetti, and John Everett Millais, to a

¹⁰ William Holman Hunt, "The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: A Fight for Art," Contemporary Review, 49 (April 1886), 480.

¹¹ Ibid., Part II (May 1886), p. 742.

fellowship including fellow artist James Collinson, sculptor Thomas Woolner, novice painter turned art-critic Frederic George Stephens, and Rossetti's brother William. For the few years that these men worked with acknowledged unity of purpose, their aims were to instill their work with sincerity and simplicity, taking for truth that which was seen with their own eyes and in the reflex of their imaginations. Although purportedly a league of artists, the Pre-Raphaelites, urged primarily by Rossetti, pursued expression in print as well, and the years of their actual association were marked for Rossetti by efforts in both media. Rossetti is often identified as the "prime mover" in the establishment of the literary organ of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, The Germ, and its origin attributed to his equally keen literary and pictorial interests.¹² Apropos The Germ, William notes that Dante Gabriel "was eager to distinguish himself in literature, no less than in painting, and wanted to have some safe vehicle both for ushering his writings before the public, and for diffusing abroad the Præraphaelite principles in art."¹³ The eventually successful diffusion of Pre-Raphaelite principles owed little to the magazine, which was discontinued after four numbers; The Germ was more fulfilling for Rossetti personally, however, who after the pub-

¹² The Germ was originally subtitled Thoughts Towards Nature in Poetry, Literature, and Art, and was later renamed Art and Poetry: Being Thoughts Towards Nature.

¹³ Letters and Memoir, I, 149.

lication within its pages of five longer poems, a prose tale, and a group of six "Sonnets for Pictures," was publicly recognized as poet as well as painter.

The next decade of Rossetti's life is frequently characterized by great competition between his diverse loves of painting and poetry. Rossetti himself recognized that his devotion to poetry "impeded attention to what constituted another aim and a livelihood in the bargain."¹⁴ He was somewhat more insecure about his literary efforts when he wrote to his friend, William Allingham, in 1854,

My original poems are all (or all the best) in an aboriginal state, being beginnings, and not one, I think, fairly copied. Moreover, I am always hoping to finish those I like; I know they would have no chance if shown to you unfinished, as I am sure they would not please you in that state, and then I should feel disgusted with them. Of short pieces I have seldom or never done anything tolerable, except perhaps sonnets.¹⁵

And to the same friend a month later, he writes,

the fact is, I think well of very little I have written, and am afraid of people agreeing with me, which I should find a bore. I believe my poetry and painting prevented each other from doing much good for a long while—and now I think I could do better in either, but can't write, for then I sha'n't paint.¹⁶

¹⁴ From a letter quoted by T. Hall Caine, in Recollections of Rossetti, 2nd ed. (London: Cassell, 1928), p. 17.

¹⁵ Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl, eds., Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-67), I, 205-06 (23 July 1854); hereafter cited in footnotes as Letters.

¹⁶ Ibid., I, 214 (August 1854).

Nevertheless, his compulsion to work in both disciplines continued. Although his principal literary project was in the field of translation, Rossetti did write original poetry as well. During these years Rossetti's literary and artistic interests mingled, too, in the production of a number of illustrations for the work of other poets.

The event which according to most accounts altered the course of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's career as poet has been described too many times to need repetition at any length once more. In grief or guilt at the death in 1862 of Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal, whom he married in 1860 after a relationship of ten years' duration, Rossetti put the book of his manuscript poems, the only perfect copy of most of them, into her coffin. As his brother notes,

Rossetti thus not only renounced any early or definite hopes of poetic fame, which had always been a ruling passion with him, but he also abandoned a project, already distinctly formulated and notified; for, as we have seen, a forthcoming volume of his original poems was advertised in The Early Italian Poets.¹⁷

Many accounts of these years exaggerate the duration of time that Rossetti turned from writing, and relinquished all thoughts of poetry. In fact, as early as 1865, Rossetti resumed writing with his lines to accompany a recent design for Aspecta Medusa. Frequently too, it is presumed that Rossetti returned to poetry as an alternative to painting, only when he was certain that his eyesight was failing him. While the earliest record of difficulty with sight is toward

¹⁷ Letters and Memoir, I, 225.

the end of 1867, this ailment did not become more serious until 1868, after which he improved sufficiently to resume art work intermittently. According to William, the periods when Rossetti's eyesight most troubled him were in the autumn of 1868, and the spring of 1870. This is corroborated by letters of Rossetti's, in which, for example, he describes himself as being "thrown back a little on old poetic ideas" in February 1869, and notes intervals of painting in December of that same year.¹⁸ Before the exhortations of his friends to return to poetry joined in one common chorus, Rossetti had already made several appearances in print, and had written large amounts of poetry. One of these instances of publication occurred within the review of the pictures of the year 1868, jointly written by William Michael Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne. In Swinburne's section, in which Rossetti's paintings Lady Lilith, Sibylla Palmifera, and Venus Verticordia were discussed, Rossetti's sonnets for these works were introduced, having been written, in the case of the first two, in 1867, and the third, in 1868. The earliest instances of Rossetti's return to verse were thus all connected with his visual works, and to a period before Rossetti was actually disabled from painting, suggesting that the subsequent expression of allied impulses in verse may have been, in some as yet unexplained way, bound to his

¹⁸ Letters, II, 688 (To John Skelton, 7 February 1869), and 769 (To Walter Severn, 8 December 1869).

painting, and was not merely a way of meeting the exigency of impaired sight.

Any tendency to regard Rossetti as primarily a poet is encouraged by remarks made by him during this period of time, such as the following:

My own belief is that I am a poet (within the limit of my power) primarily, and that it is my poetic tendencies that chiefly give value to my pictures: only painting being—what poetry is not—a livelihood—I have put my my poetry chiefly in that form. . . . I should particularly hope it might be thought (if so it be) that my poems are in no way the result of painter's tendencies—and indeed I believe no poetry could be freer than mine from the trick of what is called 'word-painting.'

I had some painting task-work to do, and have set about a little not task-work also; and these have kept me from the other Muse, who I believe, after all is my true mistress.

I wish one could live by writing poetry. I think I'd see painting d——d if one could.¹⁹

We should bear in mind the condition of Rossetti's health, and his prior patterns of composition and creation, in our evaluation of these remarks. His suggestions of a preference for poetry must be taken objectively, recognizing the necessarily more commercial taint with which he regarded his painting in the years of "potboiling," and the support of a positive attitude towards poetry created by the general acclaim with which at this very time his volume was met.

While the preparation for, and the reaction to, the publication of Poems predominates in accounts of the years

¹⁹ Ibid., II, 849-850 (To Thomas Gordon Hake, 21 April 1870); III, 986 (To William Bell Scott, 25 August 1871); III, 996 (To Ford Madox Brown, 31 August 1871).

from 1869 through 1872, Rossetti did continue painting during much of this time. As in the case of his wife's death, the crisis brought on by the "fleshly controversy" and Rossetti's suicide attempt did not incur as great a loss of productive time as one is often led to believe. While painting briefly overbalanced effort in poetry, as usual within a short period of time this balance was tipped. By 1873, Rossetti was thinking of publishing a new collection of original verse; the pendulum could not have swung too far towards the pole of painting solely.

Although his last decade found Rossetti a sometimes morose, drug-driven man, he continued to be productive both as a poet and painter. When he determined to reprint Poems in 1881, which had ceased issue towards 1879, he composed new work for the separate and new volume, Ballads and Sonnets, to which the revised Poems was joined. All portraits of the ailing poet-painter, when he removed to Birchington, the village in which he was to die, are poignant ones, in which the accessories of so much of his life are evident. He continued painting, and there dictated to Hall Caine his last two sonnets, which were to accompany his design called The Sphinx. When, with death, the path of Rossetti's pendulum of interests could be traced no more, William Michael Rossetti marked their path during the course of his brother's life, with these words inscribed on his tombstone in the Birchington churchyard: "Here sleeps Gabriel Charles Dante

Rossetti, honoured under the name of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, among painters as a painter, and among poets as a poet."

II

Rossetti's two art forms were conjoined no less in commentary and criticism about his work than in biographical accounts of their almost simultaneous origin and practice. Rossetti's internalized conflict between painting and poetry appears transposed in reviews of his work, during his lifetime and after his death. The earliest bracketings of painting and poetry, in fact, seem to have occurred more in recognition of Rossetti's habits of creative work, than from any obvious parallels between the two arts. Moreover, at a time when the young members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood aspired to some unity of ideals, this diversity of interests formed a convenient justification of Rossetti's obvious idiosyncrasies. Disregarding those works on Rossetti which reflect a basically biographical impulse, we may observe periods when "interdisciplinary" criticism and commentary on Rossetti proliferated. William Fredeman, in Pre-Raphaelitism: A Bibliocritical Study, posits five dates about which Pre-Raphaelite scholarship clusters; a sometimes overlapping chronology can be recognized by surveying works dealing with Rossetti as poet-painter.²⁰ These dates coincide with the

²⁰ Fredeman gives these as "1851, when Ruskin's letters to the Times (75.1) and his pamphlet, Pre-Raphaelitism (66.1), suddenly catapulted the Pre-Raphaelite cause into prominence; 1857, the annus mirabilis of the movement; 1882, the year of Rossetti's death; and 1928 and 1948, the respective celebrations of the Rossetti and Pre-Raphaelite cen-

period spanning the publication of the short-lived periodical, The Germ and its heir, The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine; the appearance of Rossetti's Poems in 1870; Rossetti's death in 1882 and the decade following; the centenary of Rossetti's birth; and the current critical generation. Even chronological interstices, however, are marked by some critical recognition of Rossetti as poet-painter.

With very few exceptions, the debut of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as a group brought forth little recognition of any relationship between art and literature which might imbue any of their works. At a time when one commonplace of art criticism was the virtue of painting behaving like literature, any unusual literary bias in their works was initially lost upon contemporary audiences, too concerned with issues of style and precedent. It would take John Ruskin, in his championing of the Pre-Raphaelite cause, to teach the mid-Victorian public to "read" their Millaises and Holman Hunts. One exception to the disregard for any literary parallels inherent in Pre-Raphaelite works as a group, was a statement made in a review in the Guardian, at the time of the 1850 exhibition at the Royal Academy:

We gladly recognize and hail an earnestness of meaning and a power of touching the deeper and more solemn chords of the heart, which we fail to find in many of the accredited academical productions of the day; nor can we believe but that in an age which has learnt from

tenaries." Pre-Raphaelitism: A Bibliocritical Study (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965), p. 7; numbers within parentheses refer to entry numbers in Fredeman's catalogue.

Wordsworth the value in poetry of the simple materials which Nature offers to those who look upon her with a true and loving eye. Pictures thus conceived and executed must find extensive and increasing appreciation.²¹

What is here tentatively implied, is given clearer expression in later criticism of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The stronger articulation which this comparison between Pre-Raphaelite painting and a Wordsworthian impulse in poetry subsequently received may be attributed in part to the influence of Ruskin, whose first two volumes of Modern Painters were rich in echoes of the Romantic poet. We may also recognize, however, that in the widening familiarity with the short-lived The Germ, (which after two issues was explicitly titled Art and Poetry), additional warrant was available for linking Pre-Raphaelite painting with literature, and for regarding Pre-Raphaelitism as a movement in both arts.²² In the British Quarterly Review of 1852, in a review of Discourses on the Fine Arts by Sir Joshua Reynolds, The Germ: a Collection of Papers on Art and Poetry, Pre-Raphaelitism, by John Ruskin, and the Catalogue of the Exhibition of the Royal Academy for 1852, Pre-Raphaelitism is seen in this light:

this protest in favour of Naturalism or Realism, which constitutes the essence of the Pre-Raphaelite innovation in Art, is, it will be observed, almost exactly

²¹ Guardian, No. 230 (1 June 1850), p. 396.

²² One reviewer of the magazine calls the contributors to The Germ a "young and rising school in art and literature;" Critic, 9 (1 June 1850), 278.

identical with that which constituted the Wordsworthian innovation in poetical literature.²³

Pre-Raphaelite painting became the artistic counterpart to Romantic poetry, with its elevated moral purpose and commonplace and non-generalized subject; thus was formed one link in the chain of clichés about the interrelationship between Pre-Raphaelite painting and poetry.

In Rossetti's case, as an individual rather than as a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the British public did not wait for Ruskin's sanction to acknowledge the relation of his art to literature. Rossetti's introduction as a painter in 1849, with The Girlhood of Mary Virgin at the Free Exhibition, was not accompanied by any mention of other media in notices of the day, although he had appended to the frame two sonnets to accompany the work. The following year, however, perhaps not coincidentally the year of the advent of The Germ, Rossetti was identified as poet and painter. A retrospective review of The Germ in the Guardian singled out for praise the contributions of Rossetti, noting at the same time that he was also the creator of "a very curious but very striking picture [Ecce Ancilla Domini!]" now exhibiting in the Portland Gallery."²⁴ Rossetti was also recognized as a "poetic" painter by the Times which, in its review of the

²³ "Pre-Raphaelitism in Art and Literature," British Quarterly Review, 16, No. 31 (1852), 201; see also p. 204.

²⁴ Guardian, No. 244 (28 August 1850), p. 623.

same 1850 exhibition by the National Institution (as the Free Exhibition had been re-named) at the Portland Gallery, found the poetic faculty to be the attribute specifically of Rossetti:

Mr. Rossetti [sic], a young artist evidently of talent and originality, carried this predilection for the medieval so far that his "Salutation of the Virgin" might be a leaf torn out of a missal. . . . Mr. Rossetti's picture . . . is the work of a poet.²⁵

It is difficult to ascertain here, however, on what basis poetry and painting were recognized as meeting either in the work of Rossetti, or in that of his Pre-Raphaelite brethren. In the same year, however, the Builder, which in the year of the Pre-Raphaelite debut praised Rossetti's painting solely for its minuteness and "high tone of mind," reveals a new direction in a reaction to a new critical standpoint, in the following year of 1850:

In a performance full of affectation, Mr. Rossetti has shown himself a poet-artist, so much real genius (misdirected though it be) pervades this, that one wonders how the author can subserviently submit his abilities to so confined a sphere.²⁶

This passage marks Rossetti's first introduction as the "poet-painter."

Recognition of the defunct Germ, and of its ideals for both arts, was given in the very first issue of The

²⁵ Times (London), No. 20, 463 (15 April 1850), p. 5.

²⁶ Builder, 7, No. 321 (24 March 1849), 145; 8, No. 376 (20 April 1850), 184.

Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, published six years later.²⁷

In the "Essay on the Newcomes," the anonymous author (in fact, Edward Jones, later Burne-Jones) notes: "Some few years ago a monthly periodical was published upon the subject of art and poetry; it appears to have ceased after a few numbers, not without having spoken something that will live in echoes yet."²⁸ Several months later Rossetti was introduced in a passage in which, after a design of his is praised as "such as only a great artist could conceive," the immediately subsequent sentence inquires, "why is the author of the Blessed Damozel and the story of Chiaro, so seldom on the lips of men?"²⁹ The pattern of hyphenation of Rossetti's dual arts, the welding of artist and author, seems to underlie this passage.

Several numbers later, in August, the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine contained an article entitled "Two Pictures," which carried the intermingling of the arts fur-

²⁷ Rossetti in fact referred to it as "the O[xford] and C[ambridge] Germ;" Letters, I, 302 (To John Lucas Tupper, ? June 1856).

²⁸ [Edward Burne-Jones] "Essay on the Newcomes," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, 1, No. 1 (January 1856), 60.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 61; The design in question was Rossetti's illustration in William Allingham's The Music Master, for "The Maids of Elfen-Mere."

ther.³⁰ The article deals with two paintings which, though worthy, were not to be seen in that year's Royal Academy Exhibition; the first to be treated is Rossetti's Dante's Dream. Rossetti's name is withheld, dramatically, until the identity of the artist whose work has been described and praised at length is revealed in the last words on that work. With no evident reason, therefore, to play on the conjunction of poetry and painting, the writer nevertheless chooses to begin the essay by mentioning that, besides the works in the R.A. Exhibition:

Others there are, which have not met the public eye and shall not yet awhile; very beautiful and precious; not only as studies of lovely form and colour; but as memorials of human life, its passions and holy affections; stories whether of the past or present, with what deep meaning in them, which can quicken our faith in God and man. Such are poems addressed to the eye and heart, sacred poems; which some who walk in the dusty highway of the world may feel it a blessing to see, perhaps still more to have seen.³¹

It is worth noting the influence of Ruskin on this passage, not just for its own sake, but because this point in time parallels the point at which the association between Ruskin and Rossetti, begun in actuality in 1854, was impressed upon Victorian England, and Ruskin's characteristic approach to

³⁰ Coincidentally, this issue contained the first of Rossetti's poetic contributions to The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, "The Burden of Nineveh."

³¹ [Vernon Lushington], "Two Pictures," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, 1, No. 8 (August 1856), 479.

the relationship between art and literature most strongly effected that era's response to the poet-painter in its midst. One gauge to that response is to mark what the young men of The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine would have assimilated about that relationship, through their Ruskin.

As noted before, it was in Modern Painters, begun as a defence of the works of J. M. W. Turner, that Ruskin first developed the link between poetry and painting. Ruskin appears to have been quite familiar with critical works which dealt with that relationship, for he mentions numerous theoreticians throughout his works who treated the subject, including Burke, Hazlitt, Winkelmann, Barry, Fuseli, and Reynolds. Ruskin's initial elucidation of the alliance between the arts in fact developed out of a reaction against Reynolds. In Volume III, Ruskin argues against Reynolds' definition of the "grand style." Reynolds' assertion was that the "grand style" of painting demands that one avoid careful attention to the minute details of nature. Ruskin quotes Reynolds' statement that painting "must be kept as separate from it [nature] as the style of Poetry from that of History," and declares, on the other hand, that "instead of finding, as we expected, the poetry distinguished from the history by the omission of details, we find it consists entirely in the addition of details; and instead of being characterized by regard only of the invariable, we find its whole power to consist in the clear expression of what is

singular and particular!"³² Ruskin then proceeds to define poetry, concluding that it is "the suggestion, by the imagination, of noble grounds for the noble emotions" (V:28). The presence of feeling is not sufficient in order for something to be regarded as poetic; rather, the use of imagination in the handling of images, in order to evoke strong feeling, is the function of poetry. In the conclusion to his statements about the "grand style," one of the most significant points in Ruskin's view of the interrelationship of the arts is articulated:

infinite confusion has been introduced into this subject by the careless and illogical custom of opposing painting to poetry, instead of regarding poetry as consisting in a noble use, whether of colours or words. Painting is properly to be opposed to speaking or writing, but not to poetry. Both painting and speaking are methods of expression. Poetry is the employment of either for the noblest purposes. (V:31)

For Ruskin, the line of definition is obscured between the sister arts; poetry becomes synonymous with the highest form of expression, whether on canvas or on the printed page.

To some extent, nevertheless, Ruskin maintains the distinction between poetry and painting. Usually, however, it is only for the purpose of ameliorating the discrepancies in the minds of the public between their judgments of the two art forms. He emphasizes the distinction, for example, in the following excerpt from "Pre-Raphaelitism:"

³² E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., The Works of John Ruskin (London: George Allen, 1903-1912), V, 21, and V, 26-27; hereafter cited in text.

But is there to be no place left, it will be indignantly asked, for imagination and invention, for poetical power, or love of ideal beauty? Yes, the highest, the noblest place—that which these only can attain when they are all used in the cause, and with the aid of truth. . . . Understand this thoroughly, know once for all, that a poet on canvas is exactly the same species of creature as a poet in song, and nearly every error in our methods of teaching will be done away with. For who among us now thinks of bringing up men to be poets?—of producing poets by any kind of general recipe or method of cultivation? (XII:352)

In this manner of aligning the arts of poetry and painting, Ruskin asserts the merits of both. This was not an uncommon use of the concept of the relation between the arts, as accepted throughout the Renaissance and the neoclassical period. As George Landow, in The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin, notes, it was appropriate that Modern Painters, as a work that was intended to defend the visual art, should refer to that principle which traditionally had been employed to defend painting. He comments, "This hardening of analogies produced the humanistic theory of painting which emphasized that painting had to depend upon poetry, both as model and source, for subject, content, and purpose. As poetry drew painting upward, it impressed its own nature on the sister art."³³

Ruskin is also indistinct in his use of the words "poet" and "painter" in his definition of a great painter as a man who excels in "precision and force in the language of lines," and a great versifier as a man who excels in "pre-

³³ The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), p. 45.

cision and force in the language of words." He concludes, "A great poet would then be a term strictly, and in precisely the same sense, applicable to both, if warranted by the character of the images or thoughts which each in their respective language conveyed" (III:88).

Ruskin further demanded an innovative transformation of the parallel between the sister arts. In Modern Painters III (V), he writes,

whereas the greatest painters or painter of classical and mediæval periods, being wholly devoted to the representation of humanity, . . . the greatest painters or painter of modern times will in all probability be devoted to landscape principally; and farther, because in representing human emotion words surpass painting, but in representing natural scenery painting surpasses words, we may anticipate also that the painter and poet (for convenience' sake I here use the words in opposition) will somewhat change their relations of rank in illustrating the mind of the age; that of the painter will become of more importance, the poet of less. . . . (V:330)

This paragraph is characteristic of Ruskin for, unlike previous proponents of the alliance between the two media, Ruskin often tries to reverse the rank of the sister arts.

Ruskin was also concerned, in Modern Painters, with the ability of art, like poetry, to exert moral influence. Although in the preface to Modern Painters I, Ruskin expressed some doubts as to the function of art, he does go on to try to assert its moral end. He bases his assertion on the belief that both poetry and painting have the ability to record the ideas and ideals of past eras. This view helps explain why Ruskin intermingles the two terms; for both media are forms of language, and the visual arts were

believed by Ruskin to have the capacity of being "read" for the symbolic meanings within their colors, lines, and forms. Yet, though poetry and painting can aid morality, they should not be didactically conceived.

As Wendell Stacy Johnson notes in "'The Bride of Literature': Ruskin, the Eastlakes, and Mid-Victorian Theories of Art," it is difficult to tell "how much the early Ruskin reflected taste and how much he created it."³⁴ Some of his views, for example, such as the "language" of art as a Wordsworthian language of nature, we have already seen expressed elsewhere, in reference to Pre-Raphaelite art. But, like Ruskin, other Victorians justified pictures in literary terms, demanding, as Johnson records, that art fit certain categories—art as truth, art as didactic inspiration, art as sincere self-expression—all of which derive from or are reflected in Ruskin's works.³⁵

There was a minority reaction to the emphasis upon the relation between art and literature among those who affirmed pleasure in the image itself, those who preferred Renaissance art, and those who disagreed with the idea that all arts should above all be moral. These latter dissenters held the idea that the visual arts should be aesthetically pure, in line with the proponents of "art for art's sake." The most powerful attack upon Ruskin's literary bias was

³⁴ Victorian Newsletter, No. 26 (Fall 1964), p. 23.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 24.

made by Lady Eastlake, who denied the need for visual arts to depend upon literature. In her review of Modern Painters I-III in the Quarterly Review of 1856, Lady Eastlake replies to the comparison of "two unanalogous things." She turns her comments at one point to "that land" where

by means of scenes described and images raised, the painter's and the poet's materials are in some measure identical, and the confines of vocal and visible language partially united. But indeed they meet here on such amicable terms as to be equally lenders and borrowers in turn. To say, therefore, that that portion of poetry where natural scenes and objects are attempted to be painted in words is the thought proper for the painter's language to convey, would be a very false and absurd illustration of Mr. Ruskin's definition [of the "grand style"], for it must be remembered that the materials of poetry are here borrowed from the picture—real or imaginary—and that in reversing the process the painter's language only resumes what belongs not to thought, but to itself.³⁶

Lady Eastlake finds the identification between the two art forms a fallacious one, and bids us to recognize their independence.

The young men of The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, however, made very clear in which direction their bias was. In the same article on the "Newcomes," the question is raised, "When shall we learn to read a picture as we would a poem, to find some story from it, some human interest that may feed our hearts?"³⁷ And, in an article in June 1856, entitled "Ruskin and the Quarterly," allegiance goes, as we would expect, to the author of Modern Painters. Vision and

³⁶ Lady Eastlake, "Modern Painters," Quarterly Review, 98 (1856), 390.

³⁷ [Burne-Jones], "Essay on the Newcomes," p. 59.

imagination, the moral impulse and the expression of thought, are asserted, contrary to Lady Eastlake, to be the function of art—a function in which literature is clearly related.³⁸

Even when art no longer needed to be justified by its didactic purpose, its relation to literature, as expressed in the pages of The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, continued to be affirmed. Thus, it was customary to observe the poetic qualities of Rossetti's paintings. This no longer implied an impact of moral story-telling (of which Rossetti's works are almost totally free) but instead seemed to be meant to suggest that his visual art was imaginative and infused with a certain intellectual content lacking in other modes of painting in the Victorian age. Interminglings of the visual and verbal, in discussions of Rossetti, had, therefore, a double impetus: on a theoretical level, conventional attitudes towards the nature and function of art and, more concretely, the evidence of poetry and painting issuing from the same man. As a result, it is often difficult to distinguish which is the more immediate source of the minglings of poetry and painting in the critical vocabulary of the Victorian age, when Rossetti is the subject.

The period of time before the next flourishing of criticism on Rossetti's dual arts was not completely void of

³⁸ [Edward Burne-Jones], "Ruskin and the Quarterly," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, 1, No. 6 (June 1856), 353-61.

such focus. Beginning in the mid-1860's, one critic began to draw public attention to this distinction of Rossetti's work, and continued to pay tribute to the poetic abilities of the painter who, rarely exhibiting, nonetheless was establishing an outstanding reputation. Frederic George Stephens, like William Michael Rossetti, was a member of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood who later made his mark through art criticism. Beginning in 1865, Stephens' "Fine Arts" column in the Athenaeum introduced to the public a Rossetti who was no less a poet than a painter, before all but a handful of his original poems had been published in England. As evidenced in an early column on Rossetti, Stephens frequently picks up the metaphor of "painting as poem," without exploring the meaning of this parallel in any precise way. As prelude to a highly subjective description of The Blue Bower, for example, he says of that painting,

The most original, and, probably, the most important in technical respects, of these pictures is styled 'The Blue Bower.' Of this, as of others, we must promise that it is one of the nature of a lyrical poem, which aims at effect quite as much as by means of inherent beauty and melodious colouring as by the mere subject, which is superficial. . . . 'The Blue Bower' depends in its appeal to the observer on its poetical spirit,—³⁹

Stephens is even less precise about the distinction between the two arts in the years following the publication of

³⁹ [Frederic George Stephens], "Mr. Rossetti's Pictures," Athenaeum, No. 1982 (21 October 1865), p. 545.

Rossetti's Poems, and especially when discussing a painting for which Rossetti had already written, or would write, an accompanying poem. Of Proserpine, he says, "The subject is a new poem in itself, the mode of treatment is finely poetical."⁴⁰ Not coincidentally, two weeks after the appearance of this column, in which among other works by Rossetti La Bella Mano was also discussed, appeared two sonnets, each in Italian and English, entitled "Proserpina" and "La Bella Mano." Stephens indicates in a later column that these sonnets in the Athenaeum, No. 2496, were written by Rossetti, "and explained the motives of his pictures."⁴¹ Why this interrelationship should have developed, or what the reason for explanation was, no guesses were hazarded by Stephens. He simply goes on to describe two canvases, Astarte Syriaca, and also A Sea-Spell, which he calls a "new and hardly less important poem in painting," and quotes two new sonnets, each of which "elucidates most impressively the poetical motive of his picture."⁴² Using a slightly different approach, Stephens introduces the painting of The Blessed Damozel as an "illustration" of the poem printed earlier in The Germ, March 1850, but more specifically of a

⁴⁰ [Frederic George Stephens] "Pictures by Mr. Rossetti," Athenaeum, No. 2494 (14 August 1875), p. 220.

⁴¹ [Frederic George Stephens] "Mr. Rossetti's New Pictures," Athenaeum, No. 2581 (14 April 1877), p. 486.

⁴² Ibid.

portion of the Tauchnitz edition version of the same poem.⁴³
 As before, Stephen's formula is to issue an impressionistic description of the graphic work, and to quote the sonnet, with no statement about any sort of relationship besides the nominal one, that they might bear. Likewise, in his discussion of "The Blessed Damozel," Stephens combines the critical terminology of both arts as abruptly, and with as little explanation, as he does the terms in "poet-painter":

The "effect," as critics call it, of the picture of 'The Blessed Damozel,' subserves the subject as truly and poetically as in the above mentioned instances of Mr. Rossetti's art, poetical and pictorial. The subject of this work brings it within the poetical category; its treatment is eminently pictorial.⁴⁴

If we can see beyond this "sleight of pen" we may realize that we know nothing more, after Stephen's exegesis about the relationship between Rossetti's poetry and painting, than we did before.

In a Ruskinian reversal, Stephens describes several sonnets as "illustrations" of the subject of a painting he writes of in his next Athenaeum column on Rossetti. With a bit more explicitness than previously displayed, Stephens asserts that Rossetti's sonnet, "A Vision of Fiammetta," is "designed to describe his picture, or rather to illustrate

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 487.

the sentiment and purport of that work."⁴⁵ Any expectations of an explanation are immediately thwarted by the now-characteristic quotation of the sonnet in full, and descriptive paragraphs which follow. By the time he ceased to write these Athenaeum articles on Rossetti, Stephens was able at best to make the kind of statement of which what follows is a representative example. Writing of The Day Dream, Stephens remarks that it "illustrates, and is illustrated by, the . . . sonnet."⁴⁶ Interrelationship denotes reciprocity; but of what, we are no clearer than before.

The period when a fusion of focus on poetry and painting next occurs in discussions of Rossetti is that of the years immediately around the publication of his Poems. The divergent banners under which the two disciplines meet in criticism and commentary may be best exemplified by writings on Rossetti by two men: Algernon Charles Swinburne and Robert Buchanan. These two men are recognized as key figures in the "fleshly controversy" that waged around Rossetti's Poems, and in which he is usually, and with good reasons, cast as victim.

That Swinburne had been Buchanan's original adversary is readily recognized, and the choice by Buchanan of

⁴⁵ [Frederic George Stephens], "Mr. Rossetti's New Picture, 'A Vision of Fiammetta,'" Athenaeum, No. 2658 (5 October 1878), p. 439.

⁴⁶ [Frederic George Stephens], "Mr. Rossetti's New Pictures," Athenaeum, No. 2783 (26 February 1881), p. 304.

Rossetti's Poems as target may be attributed to, among several other factors, Swinburne's almost embarrassingly eulogistic review of Rossetti's volume in the Fortnightly Review.⁴⁷ More concerned with its contribution to the controversy, readers seldom pause over Swinburne's essay to note the extraordinary degree to which the focus on poetry and painting cooperate in this critical assessment of Rossetti's work.

Swinburne's concern with the possibility of fusion of art forms was not unique within the pages of his review of Rossetti's Poems. A master at the blending of the arts in his own works, the recognition of such interrelationships was one of his foremost critical conventions, and the parallel between painting and poetry, one of the most frequent to appear.⁴⁸ Swinburne most commonly either interchanges the terms and functions of one art with another, or identifies instances of such interchange in the work regarded; both of these critical methods appear in the essay on Rossetti. Coming to that task with previous experience in the discussion of the work of another poet-painter, William

⁴⁷ Fortnightly Review, 13, NS 7 (May 1870), 551-79; republished in Essays and Studies (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875); for a brief but valuable survey of the chronology of the controversy, see Fredeman, Pre-Raphaelitism: A Bibliocritical Study, pp. 17-19.

⁴⁸ For a valuable discussion of these issues, see his chapter on "Synaesthesia and the Inter-related Arts," in Robert L. Peters' The Crowns of Apollo (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1965).

Blake, Swinburne's ability to recognize specific parallels had likely been sharpened.⁴⁹ Being a proponent of "art for art's sake" in William Blake did not preclude, for Swinburne, a consciousness of parallel impulses or purposes in painting and poetry. At the same time, his work is free of the semantic ambiguity which arises in Victorian art criticism, from the imposition of literary parallels for the purpose of defending the less-respected sister art. While not gifted in the visual arts, Swinburne himself had written companion-pieces to graphic works of others, and so had additional insight into certain aspects of the interrelationship between the visual and verbal media.⁵⁰

To convince his readers of the excellence of Rossetti's Poems, Swinburne begins by positing the existence of an as yet unnamed individual who excels in more than one art:

When fate has allowed to any man more than one great gift, accident or necessity seems usually to contrive that one shall encumber and impede the other. It has been thought, rightly or wrongly, that even the work done by such supreme men as Michel Angelo and Leonardo was impaired on this hand or on that by the various and eager impatience of genius which impelled them alternatively along diverging lines of life and labour. Be that as it may, there is no room to doubt that such

⁴⁹ Algernon Charles Swinburne, William Blake (London: John Camden Hotten, 1868).

⁵⁰ See Peters, pp. 104 and 180; Swinburne regarded his poem, "Before the Mirror," as a kind of supra-criticism of Whistler's The White Girl, and based other poems on pictures. As Peters notes, he intended "Erotion" as a counterpart to one of Simeon Solomon's works, and "Cleopatra" to a drawing by F. Sandys.

a double-natured genius as was theirs lies open to a double kind of attack from the rancorous tribe of weaklings and dullards. The haters of either light or of any may say that there cannot be sunlight and moonlight in the same sky; that a double-gifted nature must be powerless to beget as to bear, sterile by excess of organs as by defect, 'like that sweet marble monster of both sexes' beloved of Shelley as of Gautier: that the time and ardour of spirit and of hand spent on this way of work must be so much lost to that other way; that on neither course can the runner of a double race attain the goal, but must needs in both races alike be caught up and resign his torch to a runner with a single aim. Candid envy and judicious ignorance will mutually concede something; the one, that he might have won the foot-race had he let the horse-race be; the other, that he might have ridden in the first had he never tried his luck afoot. That assurance refreshes with the restorative of a false consolation the runners who fell impotent at starting or dropped lame at the turning-point. Hateful as the winner of a single prize must be to them, how can they bear—if shutting their eyes will save them the sight—to behold the coronation of the conquerer in all five heats? Nevertheless they have now and then to bear it as they may: though some take side with them who should know better, having won each a single crown in his own field, and being loth to admit that in that field at least they can be distanced by the best man in another.⁵¹

Though we recognize that Rossetti is by implication being suggested here, Swinburne defers development of the idea of poet-painter, and turns to a consideration of the characteristics of "greatest living poet."

Rossetti is introduced by name as one whom Swinburne regards as in the running for that title, and Swinburne examines various points of Rossetti's poetic style in judging his right to it. Surprisingly, especially after his impassioned introduction, Swinburne does not use Rossetti's

⁵¹ "The Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti," The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, ed. Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise, (London: William Heinemann, 1926), XV (Prose Works V), 3-4; hereafter cited in text.

laurels in art to bolster his assertions of Rossetti's success as a poet; when, a third of the way through the essay, a direct reference is made to Rossetti's graphic work, it is subtle and underplayed. Speaking of the "dramatic power of detail and composition," in "A Last Confession," Swinburne comments,

This great gift of positive reality, here above all things requisite, was less requisite elsewhere, and could not have been shown to exist by any proof derivable from his other poems; though to any student of his designs and pictures the admirable union of this inventive fidelity to whatever of fact is serviceable to the truth of art with the infinite affluence and gracious abundance of imagination must be familiar enough; the subtle simplicity of perception which keeps sight always of ideal likelihood and poetic reason is as evident in his most lyrical and fanciful paintings as in Giorgione's or Carpaccio's. (pp. 16-17)

Only here for the first time in Swinburne's essay are "painterly" qualities introduced to give further support to Rossetti's status as poet. Swinburne's restraint in his reference to Rossetti's visual arts arouses even more in his audience the anticipation set by his introductory paragraph; though we know the answer, we still ask, "who is the winner of two crowns, and how has he justly won them?"

In a more indirect way, however, Swinburne has been artfully preparing the reader for the coronation, by his hand, of the poet-painter. Synaesthetic critical devices are introduced throughout these early pages, to stimulate us to think in terms of the union of visual and verbal. By encouraging us to share his experience of synaesthetic qualities, Swinburne prepares us for recognition of those interweavings employed by the artist-poet himself. So, in

his first mention of "The House of Life," Swinburne declares, "Spirit and sense together, eyesight and hearing and thought, are absorbed in splendour of sounds and glories of colours distinguishable only by delight" (p. 7). Lines later, he says of the sonnets in this sequence, "Their golden affluence of images and jewel-coloured words never once disguises the firm outline, the justice and chastity of form. No nakedness could be more harmonious, more consummate in its fleshly sculpture, than the imperial array and ornament of this august poetry" (p. 7).⁵² Consistently, in addition, color and form are evoked, in Swinburne's praises of Rossetti's poems. When speaking of the narrative poems, an additional quality, that of "outline" is added, and the word "picture" in reference to these poems is made to have a more than metaphorical bearing.

From the turning-point of Swinburne's first mention of Rossetti's capacity as a painter, his use of inter-art descriptions for critical purposes becomes more pronounced. Continuing his discussion of "A Last Confession," he notes,

Upon each line of drawing there has been laid the strong and loving hand of a great artist—and especially a supreme painter of fair women. In the study of the growing girl, the glories of sculpture and painting are melted into one, and every touch does divine service. (p. 17)

Swinburne's references to Rossetti as painter now become more frequent, though still restrained, as when he praises

⁵² The use of "fleshly" here is bound to create an ironic response, considering the circumstances in which it later was echoed.

Rossetti's translations from Italian as "the kind of test which stamps the supremacy of an artist, answering in poetry to the subtlest successes of the same hand in painting" (p. 19).

As Swinburne shifts from his discussion of the narrative poems to another genre, the class of "sacred art," he now freely cites Rossetti's work as poet and painter. Often here, Swinburne so mingles his terms, that it is difficult to ascertain whether he is discussing Rossetti's paintings or poems. It is through such intentional conflation, by which a poem such as "The Blessed Damozel" is classified as "one of the Venetian School, handled like a Tintoretto or Veronese," that Swinburne further impresses upon us the role of interrelation of the arts both for poet-painter and for the critic.

The point at which parallels seem suddenly to escape Swinburne is when he cites cases in which Rossetti actually created paired works. After mentioning, for example, that "Ave" is a subject handled by the painter as well as the poet, Swinburne seems to falter at comparison. He appears more comfortable, as he turns discussion to Rossetti's ballads, to speak in less specific terms again of "colour" and "perfect drawing" in those poems. Swinburne appears more confident treating the poem-painting relationship indirectly, focusing on familial resemblances, so to speak, rather than on "twin births." He is most free with correspondences when there is no specific counterpart to the poem

he is discussing, and he can descant on broad thematic parallels, as for example, he does in his remarks on an early work, "Pax Vobis," which had appeared in The Germ but was not published in Poems:

This little sacred picture of the Father Hilary should have been here reframed, if only for the fine touches of outer things passing by as a wind upon the fervent spirit in its dream. Besides, it has its place and significance among the author's studies in the Christian style, near some of those earlier works, so full of his special grace and spiritual charm, which belong to the same period, if not beside the highest of his sacred designs, such as the Passover and Magdalene here as it were engraved and put forth in print among the sonnets for pictures (p. 31).⁵³

With the opportunity these last few words create to then turn to a discussion of the "Sonnets for Pictures," Swinburne nevertheless hastens on; he simply notes that "the most utterly delightful to me is that on Giorgione's divine and transcendent pastoral in the Louvre: which actually attains to the transfusion of a spirit that seems incommunicable from one master's hand even to another's" (p. 31). It is this transfused spirit that Swinburne traces in the lines that follow, as it is when he next mentions "Pandora" as the sonnet on Rossetti's own designs "the most perfect and exalted, as the design is among his mightiest in its godlike terror and imperial trouble of beauty" (p. 32). Abruptly, however, Swinburne passes from the sonnets on "Cassandra," which "translate with apt and passionate choice of words the scheme of his greatest tragic design," to poems other than

⁵³ In 1881, the poem was modified and republished in Poems under the title "World's Worth."

those in the "Sonnets for Pictures" sequence, reverting again to stock critical terms like "colour" and "tone," describing works in which "every touch of real detail and minute colour in the study serves to heighten and complete the finished picture" (pp. 35-36).

The core of the problem in dealing with parallels is finally touched by Swinburne, after concluding his examination of specific poems. He begins by declaring, "Had I time and room and skill, to whom all these are wanting, I would here at length try to say some passing word illustrative of the more obvious and the more intimate relations of this artist's work in verse and his work in painting" (pp. 39-40). Yet, we may be surprised to discover no mention of actual paired works; instead, those which Swinburne cites bear at most an indirect, and often more tenuous relationship, such as those

between the poem of 'Jenny' and the design called 'Found,' where at early dawn the driver of a country cart finds crouching in London streets the figure of a girl once his betrothed, and stoops to lift with tender strength of love, and surprise of simple pity startled into freshness of pain, the shuddering abased head with the golden ruin of its rich soiled hair, which cowers against a graveyard wall away from the light that rises beyond the paling lamps on bridge and river; between the song of 'Troy Town' and the picture of Helen, with Parian face and mouth of ardent blossom, a keen red flowerbud of fire, framed in broad gold of widespread locks, the sweet sharp smile of power set fast on her clear curved lips, and far behind her the dull flame of burning towers and light from reddened heaven on dark sails of lurid ships; between the early sacred poems and the early sacred designs of the author's Christian era, as for instance the 'Ave' and the 'Girlhood of the Virgin,' with its young grace and sincere splendour of spirit, 'The Staff and Scrip' and the design of 'Fra Pace,' 'The Blessed Damozel' and the 'Dream of Dante,' all clothed in colours of heaven,

with raiment dyed and spun in the paradise of trust and thought; between the romantic poems and the romantic designs, as for example 'Sister Helen' and the 'Tune of "Seven Towers,"' which have the same tone and type of tragic romance in their medieval touches and notes of passionate fancy; between the poems of richer thought and the designs of riper form, works of larger insight and more strong decision, fruits of the mind at its fullest and the hand at its mightiest, 'The Burden of Nineveh' and 'The Sybil' or 'Pandora'. (p. 40)

As this passage progresses, we move further and further away from the issue of the relationship between "the artist's work in verse and his work in painting." The successively less specific sequence of inter-art correlatives finally gives way to a rhapsodic passage about "growth of mind and hand," in which the dual arts are no longer distinguishable.

Though the essay continues for several more pages, with an outpouring about the timeless recurrence of genius, for our purposes it ends with the last lines of the preceding paragraph quoted:

But to trace the passage from light into light and strength into strength, the march from work on to work and triumph on to triumph, of a genius so full of life and growth and harmonious exuberance of expression, so loyal to rule of instinct and that natural order of art and thought whose service is perfect freedom; to lay out a chart of its progress and mark down the lines of its advance; this, high as the office would be and worth of the ambition, is not a possible task for criticism; though what manner of rank a man may hold, and what manner of work he may have to do in that rank, it is the business of criticism to see and say. (p. 41)

These words refer to the "growth of mind and hand" which Swinburne would attribute to Rossetti but also, we must remember, to the issue with which this paragraph began: the relationship between painting and poem. The diffuseness of Swinburne's description of genius seems a way to sidestep

the issue of interrelationship of the arts. Swinburne can only confirm that there is genius in his age, and that Rossetti's poetry bears its distinguishing qualities, of which "so equal a balance of two great gifts as we find in the genius of this artist is perhaps the greatest gift of all, as it is certainly the most singular" (p. 45).

For one moment, however, before summing up Rossetti's claims to precedence as a poet, Swinburne appears to turn back to his opening paragraph, and to attempt to settle the issue there raised. Swinburne asserts that, whatever their relationship, Rossetti's dual arts do not each parasitically sap the essence of the other. Speaking of Rossetti, Swinburne says,

But here, where both the sister powers serve in the temple of one mind and impel the work of one hand, their manner of service is smooth, harmonious, perfect; the splendid quality of painting and the subtle faculty of verse gain glory from each other without taking, reign side by side with no division of empire, yet with no confusion of claims, with no invasion of rights. No tongueless painter or handless poet could be safer from the perils of mixed art; his poems are not over pictorial or his pictures over poetical; his poetry has not the less depth and reach and force and height of spirit proper to poetry, his painting has not the less might and skill, the less excellence of form and colour or masterdom of design and handiwork proper to painting, for the double glory of his genius: which of the two great men in him, the painter or the poet, be the greater, only another artist equal to him on either hand and taintless of jealousy or misconceit could say with authority worth a hearing; and such a judge he is not likely to find. (pp. 45-46)

This is as close to a definition of the interrelation of Rossetti's poetry and painting, as we are privileged to get from Swinburne.

Part of Swinburne's reticence in discussing the relationship between poetry and painting stems from a recognized lack of critical equipment when it came to evaluations of the visual arts.⁵⁴ Frequent statements of interrelationship may mask the fact that demonstrations of the nature of that relationship would have been outside of Swinburne's domain. We must recognize, however, that Swinburne was clear about one point—while Rossetti's arts appeared to interweave, they were in fact distinct; the impression we get in his essay on Rossetti of a fusion of the visual and verbal mediums should be recognized as a means of dealing with aesthetic experience, but not as an analogy to that experience. As Peters notes, "We may question whether Swinburne's conceits and metaphors are symbolic of 'the perfect scheme' of poetry, or really elucidate the complexities of a work."⁵⁵ At least in the case of his essay on Rossetti, and especially in regard to the interrelationship of painting and poem, the answer seems clear.

Concern with the titular issue of "fleshliness" among those interested in the controversy provoked by Robert Buchanan's "The Fleshly School of Poetry," often blinds them to the fact that Buchanan makes some significant statements about the relationship between Rossetti's dual art forms. Although sometimes for depreciatory purposes,

⁵⁴ Peters, p. 103.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 108.

the link between Rossetti's painting and poetry is made by Buchanan at several points in his review of Rossetti's Poems, and is made with more substance than heretofore observed in Rossetti criticism. The charge of "fleshliness" is directed by Buchanan early in the essay against an entire school, which has made it the "distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art."⁵⁶ Once Buchanan narrows his target to Rossetti, the two art forms are conjoined more concretely, if only to damn the "fleshly" poet, and to protest against the confusion of painting and poetry.

Buchanan introduces Rossetti as "a painter with exceptional powers, who, for reasons best known to himself, has shrunk from publicly exhibiting his pictures, and from allowing anything like a popular estimate to be formed of their qualities," and goes on to add:

he is distinctively a colourist, and of his capabilities in colour we cannot speak, though we should guess that they are great; for if there is any good quality by which his poems are specially marked, it is a great sensitiveness to hues and tints as conveyed in poetic epithet. These qualities, which impress the casual spectator of the photographs from his pictures, are to be found abundantly among his verses. There is the same thinness and transparence of design, the same combination of the simple and the grotesque, the same morbid deviation from healthy forms of life, the same sense of weary, wasting, yet exquisite sensuality;⁵⁷

Overlooking hints of Buchanan's virulence, we may note a paralleling of theme, tone, and images; although for pur-

⁵⁶ Robert Buchanan [Thomas Maitland], "The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti," Contemporary Review, 18 (18 October 1871), 335.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 336-37.

poses of condemnation, Buchanan has attempted to find points of correspondence between Rossetti's painting and poetry.

Buchanan enlarges on what he regards as Rossetti's tendency to treat poetry as painting in a discussion of "The Blessed Damozel," which Buchanan describes as "a careful sketch for a picture, which, worked into actual colour by a master, might have been worth seeing."⁵⁸ His condemnation of the poem contains some nonetheless important points:

The thing would have been almost too much in the shape of a picture, though the workmanship might have made amends. The truth is that literature, and more particularly poetry, is in a very bad way when one art gets hold of another, and imposes upon it its conditions and limitations. In the first few verses of the "Damozel" we have the subject, or part of the subject, of a picture, and the inventor should either have painted it or left it alone altogether; and, had he done the latter, the world would have lost nothing. Poetry is something more than painting; and an idea will not become a poem because it is too smudgy for a picture.⁵⁹

To Buchanan, Rossetti's poem aspires to the condition of painting; ill-motivated, biased, and often totally incorrect as he is, Buchanan has attempted to come to terms with what those familiar with Rossetti recognize, yet have never truly defined, some manner of mingling painting and poetry.

That this is an underlying concern of Buchanan's, and not merely some characteristic of Rossetti's which he has glanced at in passing, may be proven by noting when, and how frequently, the link of poem and painting occurs in "The Fleshly School of Poetry." At some point, while making each

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 340.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 341.

of the several major criticisms of Rossetti in his article, Buchanan indicts the merger of poetry and painting. We have seen evidence of the way in which the link is used by Buchanan in making the accusation of fleshliness. Buchanan's introduction to Rossetti, quoted earlier, contains just one of the many stabs at Rossetti for his reticence towards public exhibition, a criticism of Buchanan's to be enlarged upon in the pamphlet version of The Fleshly School of Poetry and Other Phenomena of the Day.⁶⁰ Buchanan tacitly levels another criticism by observing that Rossetti's reputation owes much to the fact that he has been idolized as a poet-painter by his family and friends—a sore spot, in fact, since evidence shows that those associates, especially Swinburne and Rossetti's brother William, were more responsible than unlucky Dante Gabriel for Buchanan's becoming involved in the "fleshly controversy."⁶¹ In later years, too, the charge would evolve in other sources from that of a "Mutual Admiration School," made by Buchanan, to the imputation that Rossetti "worked the oracle" in regard

⁶⁰ Robert Buchanan, The Fleshly School of Poetry and Other Phenomena of the Day (London: Strahan, 1872).

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 337; For an examination of the controversy from Buchanan's perspective, see John A. Cassidy, "Robert Buchanan and the Fleshly Controversy," PMLA, 67 (March 1952), 65-93.

to the public reception of his poetry and painting.⁶² The fourth major point of criticism of Rossetti by Buchanan dealt with matters of plagiarism. This issue, amplified in the later pamphlet, is raised when Buchanan describes Rossetti as "a poet possessing great powers of assimilation and some faculty for concealing the nutriment on which he feeds," and adds, "He has the painter's imitative power developed in proportion to his lack of the poet's conceiving imagination."⁶³ While the suggestion of mutually parasitic arts is certainly intended as a blow at Rossetti, it also touches Swinburne, through his concluding remarks on Rossetti's Poems and, more broadly, is aimed at the entire coterie which, in Buchanan's eyes, confused the nature and purposes of the sister arts. As predisposed as we are to disregard Buchanan's criticism, we should recognize that he seems in earnest to have attempted to come to some understanding of the practice of a "poet-painter."

The last decade of Rossetti's life was accompanied by intermittent statements by critics about the relationship between his two arts, and reviews of Rossetti's work vied to

⁶² This charge was made most memorably by William Bell Scott, who states that Rossetti got his friends to write laudatory notices for leading journals, before the 1870 volume was issued; see Autobiographical Notes, ed. W. Minto (London: Osgood, 1892), II, 128.

⁶³ Buchanan, "The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti," p. 342.

augment his reputation as the foremost poet-painter of the century. With Rossetti's death in 1882, however, his followers seemed to outdo themselves in eulogies and memorials of the great poet-painter, and to rival each other for recognition of their insight into the nature of his creative output.

The most immediate of these was an article by William Sharp, which is distinguished for its directness in attempting to come to terms with one element of possible comparison between Rossetti's two arts. As far as it goes, his discussion of the pictorial element in Rossetti's works is valid, centering on a key fact which Sharp points out: "That such an artist as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, being also a true poet, should have exhibited marked pictorial qualities in his writings is what would have been expected. Yet there is less of this pictorialism than is probably supposed, and remarkably little of it as regards nature pure and simple."⁶⁴

This observation, especially significant for any assessment of Rossetti's devotion to the aims initially established by the actual Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, is followed by several examples which demonstrate that while there may exist a lack of natural pictorial detail in Rossetti's work, there is no dearth of "word-painting." Sharp clearly identifies one key element of the pairing of poem and painting as successful re-representation, so to

⁶⁴ William Sharp, "D. G. Rossetti and Pictorialism in Verse," Portfolio, 13 (October 1882), 178.

speak. He explains that:

There are two kinds of pictorialism in verse often confused with one another. There is that of the poet who simply describes in detail the main externals of some scene or landscape, and there is that of the poet who creates a picture by some few salient lines, with or without an image, immediately bringing home to the reader the inner or true meaning of the thing represented. The first may be a poet, and yet not be a pictorialist; the second must be a pictorialist in the first instance. . . . Suggestiveness is the soul of verbal pictorialism, as reduplication, modified by individual impression, and vivified by individual insight, is the essential aim of pictorialism on canvas.⁶⁵

The issue of the title of his article is in fact the significant issue for Sharp, in judging the relationship between visual and verbal works.

After noting the more general lack of natural pictorialism in Rossetti's work, Sharp returns to much the same stance as had been, and would be, taken by those writing about the relationship between Rossetti's paintings and poems. He declares:

We cannot, on the other hand, fail to perceive how constantly the twin arts of poetry and painting are interwoven in his work. Some of his finest sonnets are those on pictures, but these I do not here include under "pictorial verse," for they are meant to exemplify the drawing or painting of some other artist, and not to suggest scenes or subjects of their own. Thus the noble sonnet on Giorgione's Pastoral is not intended to call up before the reader any picture, whether directly or indirectly from nature, but Giorgione's beautiful work alone.⁶⁶

Sharp follows mention of this actual pair with several examples of admirable "word-painting" by Rossetti, most of

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 176.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 178.

which, curiously, are not parts of visual-verbal pairs, but only call up in Sharp's mind accompanying pictures. The passages which he quotes from Rossetti's poems would in one instance make, according to Sharp, "a fine subject for a painting by Mr. Rossetti himself, or his friend Mr. Burne-Jones," and in another instance suggests "a very fine picture by Millet."⁶⁷

As indicated before, the nature of the relationship between media for Sharp is one of illustration, of which "exemplification" is simply a synonym. Aside from his articulation of that concept, Sharp remains vague in his statements about the interrelation of Rossetti's two arts, as when he says,

He is as much a poet in his paintings as he is artist in his poems: so much so that in both arts he has frequently been misunderstood; the literary critic sometimes complaining that his poetry is purely artistic, to the disadvantage of the poetic element, while the art-critic has maintained that his compositions suffer from unduly balanced poetic meaning.⁶⁸

"Poetic meaning" in painting, "purely artistic" poems, being "as much a poet in his paintings as he is artist in his poems": ambiguity, paradox, and circular definition as usual are the legacy of the critic of Rossetti as poet-painter.

Sharp also in 1882 published a book-length work on Rossetti, entitled Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and a Study. From his introductory remarks onward, his principal

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 179.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 178.

effort is to portray Rossetti as equally gifted in both arts. Too frequently this results in such ambiguous statements as those apparent in his Portfolio article. Sometimes, with little success, Sharp seems to strive for some clarification of this union, as in the following passage:

To be a poetic painter was the ideal of Rossetti in art, an ideal he has certainly attained; and this, which was undoubtedly his chief charm, was perhaps also the cause of his chief shortcoming, a frequent deficiency in form. Great colourists are seldom strict formalists, and that Rossetti at his best is one of the greatest colourists not only of our own but of any time will not now be generally denied. Colour-sentiment and poetic emotion seem to be kin, for they generally are found united; and though there are periods in his life-work when Rossetti's colour-sentiment predominated, the poetic emotion was in the main the spirit of his achievements.⁶⁹

When Sharp's focus shifts to specific paired works, however, he avoids discussing parallels, speaking of the various sonnets for pictures as "illustrating," "describing," "accompanying," or "embodying" the corresponding painting. One habit in his exegesis of Rossetti's paintings, of which he makes a rather thorough effort by comprehensively discussing them one by one, is to quote the corresponding poem whenever possible. The most concrete statement he makes about interrelationship is to describe the words of a poem in one instance as the "motif" of the painting which is its counterpart.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and a Study (London: Macmillan & Co., 1882), pp. 103-04.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 262; re: La Pia.

Even in his section on the "Sonnets for Pictures," Sharp's approach is simply to itemize, quote, and give background information where appropriate, about when and where the poem was composed. Before concluding, he merely notes that those sonnets quoted or referred to in association with pictures "are so closely connected therewith that they need not be again enlarged upon."⁷¹ Once again, Sharp evades the issue of what precisely constitutes the nature of that connection.

With Rossetti gone, William Holman Hunt was not long in seeking the position of authority as a leader of the Pre-Raphaelites, after having been eclipsed for so many years by his more charismatic colleague. Almost two decades before his compendious Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was published, Hunt issued a three-part article in the pages of the Contemporary Review, entitled "The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: A Fight for Art." Early in the first part, Hunt introduces Rossetti as poet and painter and, after several pages on his own background and training, he resumes his focus on Rossetti with a description of his meeting with the neophyte painter. Hunt recalls his advice to Rossetti, who was then getting restless under the tutelage of Ford Madox Brown, to choose a recent design from the folio of an ongoing sketching club, and to take the work up first with the portions of still-life, that "thus invested with vital interest as a link in an idea to be developed, it would

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 399.

furnish him with the exercise needful to prepare his spirit for the essential core of the poem he had to paint."⁷²

Whether Hunt's remark refers to the fact that the designs for the Cyclographic Society were to be illustrations to a specific literary work, or refers to a more metaphorical parallel, we should mark Hunt's conjoining here of poem and picture.⁷³ The important point to note is the recurrence of the conventionally equivocal use of the word "poem," in reference to Rossetti's painting, striking in its context of a "Fight for Art." In many ways Hunt also follows convention in his discussion of Rossetti's work, by describing characteristics inherent in Rossetti to begin with, such as his "appreciation of beauty" or his intensity, which would seem to Hunt to have filtered indiscriminately into either one art or the other. "Poet and painter" for Hunt sometimes seems to imply that Rossetti had less discipline than would a painter alone, and that Rossetti's works often contained redundant echoes of impulses previously expressed in the sister art.

It is when Hunt's attention is not directed specifically towards Rossetti that we perceive a more precise

⁷² Hunt, "The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: A Fight for Art," p. 480.

⁷³ While Dante Gabriel Rossetti's designs for the Cyclographic Society included those to Coleridge's "Love," Goethe's Faust, and Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," he selected for his first project with Hunt The Girlhood of Mary Virgin which, if paralleled with any literary work of that time, must be paralleled with his own early versions of "Ave" and others of his "Songs of the Art Catholic." More likely than not, Hunt's reference to the "poem" Rossetti was to paint, was a purely metaphorical one.

idea of his concept of the relation between painting and poem than before. Speaking of his own designs for works of Tennyson and Shakespeare, Hunt indicates his doubt at one time that "perhaps the inventions I had been busy upon lacked the spirit which my reading of the author's meaning had made me desire to give them."⁷⁴ This concept of the transposition of the spirit of the work, rather than a simple reduplication of images and themes, may be the core of Hunt's ideal for works with literary counterparts. More importantly, for us, Hunt at a later point says, referring to himself and Rossetti, "We both agreed, when it came to the last, that a man's work would be the reflex of the living image in his own mind of the idea treated, and not the icy double of the facts themselves."⁷⁵ Whether these facts are natural or literary, the point remains that, according to Hunt, Rossetti recognized that any act of recreation involved an essential transposition which was not to be regarded as mere duplication.

Walter Pater, whose essay on Leonardo da Vinci Rossetti deeply admired, includes an essay on Rossetti in Appreciations.⁷⁶ In his essay, Pater identifies several

⁷⁴ Hunt, "The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: A Fight for Art," p. 486.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pt. II (May 1886), p. 740.

⁷⁶ Pater's essay on Rossetti was written in 1883, not long after Rossetti's death, and was first published in The English Poets, ed. Thomas Humphry Ward (London: Macmillan & Co., 1880-1918), IV: "Wordsworth to Rossetti;" it was subsequently reprinted in Appreciations (London: Macmillan & Co.,

qualities common to Rossetti's poetry and painting, like other critics creating the impression of a superfluidity of creative impulse finding expression in design or verse. He also stressed "the painter's eye" and Rossetti's use of detail, citing the by now clichéd "pictorial" power of his works.

Pater's evaluation of Rossetti is unique in its development of parallels between Rossetti's matter and manner. Pater admires Rossetti for making concrete and particular the ideal and abstract, while also instilling mystery and sentiment into even common things. He praises Rossetti for the fact that for him (as for Dante) "the material and the spiritual are fused and blent: if the spiritual attains the definite visibility of a crystal, what is natural loses its earthiness and impurity."⁷⁷ With this view of Rossetti, Pater conjoins that of Rossetti as poet-painter, so that Rossetti's interfusion between the spiritual and the material is paralleled with that between the verbal and visual.

Instead of exercising mere word-painting, or other such conventional mergers of the sister arts, Pater finds that Rossetti represents, by a type of physical or natural

1889). Pater's essay on Leonardo da Vinci appeared in the Fortnightly Review in November 1869, and three years later in The Renaissance; for Rossetti's comments, see Letters, II, 765 (To Algernon Charles Swinburne, 26 November 1869).

⁷⁷ Walter Pater, "Rossetti," Appreciations with an Essay on Style (London: Macmillan & Co., 1910), p. 211.

beauty, the ideal intensity of love. Pater notes that "A sustained impressibility toward the mysterious conditions of man's everyday life, toward the very mystery itself in it, gives a singular gravity to all his work."⁷⁸ Nature (which Rossetti admittedly cared little about) is viewed by Pater in Rossetti's works as having been "translated to a higher service," as it is treated in his poems with the hand of "a painter concentrated upon the picturesque effect of one or two selected objects at a time."⁷⁹ On the other hand, Pater observes that "in matter of pure reflection also, Rossetti maintained the painter's sensuous clearness of conception."⁸⁰ In brief, Pater's observations coalesce into the view that because a poet, Rossetti's painting displays elements of the visionary, and because a painter, his pictorial genius draws the material into his depiction of the ideal: in fine, an analysis of the art of a poet-painter.

Neither Rossetti nor his brother William, who is a source for much that we know of Dante Gabriel, ever directly defined the nature of the link between his poetry and painting. In his numerous volumes on his illustrious brother, however, William Michael often discusses Rossetti's paired works in such a way as to give some indication of his own (if not his brother's) concept of the relationship between

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 211.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 213.

the two media. Sometimes the later work is seen as being a continuation in some way of the idea or impulse of the earlier one. For example, William describes "Body's Beauty" as developing the intention of the painting to which it refers.⁸¹ When it comes to citing specific parallels, William Rossetti is clearest about thematic ones. He mentions that "The Blessed Damozel" was suggested to Rossetti as a theme for a picture by one of his patrons, William Graham, an idea which Rossetti himself had also projected. In his description of the early crayon drawing of 1873 of The Blessed Damozel, William calls it the first instance in which that theme was transferred by Rossetti from language into visual form. He is also fairly specific in reference to Dante Gabriel's sonnets for The Girlhood of Mary Virgin, and describes the first as "setting forth the general purport of the work, the second, its individual symbols."⁸² Most frequently, Rossetti's poems with visual counterparts are described by his brother either as exhibiting the idea or theme of the visual work, as above, or in a somewhat paradoxical manner as an embodiment of the painting to which it corresponds. In one instance William quotes a letter from his brother, in fact, in which Rossetti himself states that he wishes the sonnet in question to "embody the conception"

⁸¹ William Michael Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer (London: Cassell & Co., 1889), p. 63; hereafter cited in footnotes as Designer and Writer.

⁸² Letters and Memoir, I, 143.

of the painting to which it will be appended: a phrase which William Rossetti later repeatedly echoes in reference to the paired works, and which numerous other commentators on Rossetti's dual arts would echo in the future.⁸³

Often more biographical than critical, and more autobiographical than biographical, the majority of studies of the painter-poet by his peers, such as those briefly examined, reiterated similar insights into his dual arts. Long after the use of words like "poetry" and "poetic" subsided in critical assessments of art, convention, and the inescapable fact of concurrent creative output in two arts, encouraged the use of inter-art analogies in discussions of Rossetti's work. Into the twentieth century, writers continued to proclaim the version of "ut pictura poesis" particular to critics of Rossetti: as Rossetti's paintings, so his poetry.

Rossetti was considered the premier poet-painter, and both his arts were equally esteemed. The centenary of Rossetti's birth in 1928, however, brought a new wave of critical writings on his work, along with which were numerous evaluations of the relationship between his dual arts. In these, a schism between critical perspectives could be perceived. Rossetti was now described either as a poet who also painted, or as a painter who also wrote poetry. Because it was difficult to separate the two disciplines in discussions of Rossetti's work, the fallacy was often repeated of imposing

⁸³ Designer and Writer, pp. 55-56.

the critical perspective of one discipline upon the discussion of another.

The difficulty of finding a common ground for discussing both branches of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, out of which Pre-Raphaelite painting usually assumed prominence, is demonstrated in a study by Laurence Housman, in which the poetry of the Romantics is introduced to even the balance of focus, as it were. Although Housman's 1929 address to the Royal Society of Literature, "Pre-Raphaelitism in Art and Poetry" deals with the movement as a whole rather than specifically with Rossetti, it includes some cogent remarks which apply to the issue of interrelationship of the arts. Housman regards Pre-Raphaelitism from an artistic standpoint, and traces parallels not with contemporaneous manifestations in literature, but with literary antecedents, going back to the Romantics. Housman finds it to be "the pictorial expression of influences which had already made their mark in literature."⁸⁴ Somewhat more broadly, however, he finds the precursors of the Pre-Raphaelites to include Shelley, Keats, and Coleridge, rather than only Wordsworth, and correspondingly, their inheritance to consist not only of intensity of vision within the natural world, but of "individualistic treatment of romantic and ideal subjects."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Essays by Diver's Hands ([Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature, NS 12] London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933), 1.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

When Housman does consider the contemporary poetic counterpart to the Pre-Raphaelite movement, he notes a number of shared characteristics:

In both branches alike (the poetic and the pictorial) there was the same sudden discovery and the same close linking together of nature and romance—the same determination to treat romance in terms of natural feeling; to assume, in choosing a romantic subject, that its characters were real people, and that if they were without reality—did not act, move, and appear humanly—they were without significance.⁸⁶

For the most part, however, when Housman refers to the parallel side of Pre-Raphaelitism as expressed in painting, he means nothing other than Romanticism. But in an anachronistic fashion, it is not the characteristics of Romanticism that Housman traces in the later movement in art, but the Pre-Raphaelite tendencies which he discovers in Romanticism. Quoting a series of passages from Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner," for example, Housman notes,

Now all those passages I have read to you are of Pre-Raphaelite quality; original in simile, pictorial in phrasing, they achieve an almost unexampled visibility to the mind's eye; and by a combination of strongly individualized expression with intense feeling they bring the things of nature within the charmed circle of romance in a way that was then wholly new in literature.⁸⁷

Housman discovers the prototypes for Pre-Raphaelitism in the poetry of Coleridge and the letters of Keats—and, from Coleridge and Keats, is enabled to turn to the poetry of Rossetti and Morris. His article is ambitious, in seeking to appraise both Pre-Raphaelite art and poetry. But that the

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

common denominator of Romantic literature is needed to strengthen the parallels which he posits suggests the necessity of further study of the interrelationship of the arts in the Pre-Raphaelite era.

The focus on Rossetti as painter during the period around the centenary of his birth was encouraged by the concurrent reassessment of British Art taking place. The praise of "modern" art necessarily meant the criticism of the Pre-Raphaelites, and often in Rossetti's case, dual art forms meant dual approaches to this target. Evelyn Waugh, for example, although interested primarily in Rossetti as painter, does not pass up the opportunity to cite Rossetti's poetry to support his views. In Rossetti: His Life and Works, Waugh attributes to a power-play among the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood the raising of poetry among them to equal status with painting by Rossetti. He notes, "It seems probable that his desire to balance his literary superiority against his friend's superiority in painting may have been a strong inducement to urge upon them an association in which the two arts should have equal importance."⁸⁸ Waugh expands the implication that Rossetti's poetry was some kind of crutch for his weak art. That he clearly regards the paired paintings and poems created by Rossetti as not more than classic examples of "tagging" is evident from his reference to Rossetti's writing a sonnet for a visual work,

⁸⁸ Rossetti: His Life and Works (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1928), p. 34.

"in accordance with what now became the usual custom, and had it inscribed on the frame."⁸⁹ The kindest thing he can say of one of Rossetti's pairs is said of "Astarte Syriaca," the sonnet inspiring Waugh to call it "one of the happiest examples of harmony between Rossetti's painting and poetry."⁹⁰

Although not a particularly sympathetic biographer, Waugh does attempt in the conclusion of his study to defend Rossetti as a "real" artist against the criticism of Waugh's own age. Searching for reasons behind the modern decline in appreciation for the Pre-Raphaelites in general, and Rossetti in particular, Waugh finds several factors, not the least of which is the literary bias in their words. He notes that Rossetti's paintings conflict with contemporary artistic standards in their allusive or "literary" appearance. While Rossetti (to his credit, according to Waugh) had not the interest in the anecdotal that characterized the work of so many of his compeers, to the extent that allusiveness did show in his work it was, according to modern taste, to his detriment as an artist. Waugh finds that the effort to "codify" artistic merit in the 1920's, and to form some modern criterion for the value of art, was only impeded and confused by the introduction of an element outside of the realm of "pure" art, such as was evident in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, Rossetti among them. As Waugh sees it,

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 136.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 210-11.

the weakness of canons of taste in the centenary year was such that the assessment of Rossetti at that time, when emphasis was placed on him as a painter primarily, had no room within them for the accomodation of another art form.

Concurrent with evaluations of Rossetti as primarily a painter appears a corresponding direction in discussions of his poetry toward focus on its "painterly" qualities. Eva Tietz, in "Das Malerische in Rossettis Dichtung," presents a catalytic study from this point of view, which has stimulated response among critics interested in the dual arts for just short of fifty years.⁹¹ The most striking characteristic of Tietz's study is the strong sense of a bias towards Rossetti as painter; to convey the correspondence of his graphic work to his poetry, Tietz turns Rossetti into a landscape poet, whose delight for the decorative is expressed in nature-imagery. From a statement of parallel between the selection of subject by Rossetti as painter and poet, Tietz draws the conclusion that Rossetti sees the subjects of his poems as paintings, and tries to place them before the eyes of his readers as such. Tietz pursues other parallels as well, between Rossetti's dual arts, discovering a painter's technique in Rossetti's handling of color, light, shadow, composition, and imagery, in his verse. One draws the conclusion from Tietz that all Rossetti's work was that of a painter, and that one is warranted in speaking of the

⁹¹ Anglia, 51 (1927), 278-306.

"picturesque" in his poetry. Implicit, in Tietz's work as in that of other critics of Rossetti in this period of time, is the justification of placing the emphasis on only one of his two arts.

As the years of disfavor towards the Pre-Raphaelites drew on, some writers, Stephen Spender among them, returned to the explanation which identified the reason as a reaction against the literary element in their works. In "The Pre-Raphaelite Literary Painters," Spender discovers that element in the parallel use, in painting, of the subjects, images, and more intangibly, the "inspiration," of poetry. Yet another parallel between the arts is cited which, ironically, is to Spender a cause of the failure of Pre-Raphaelitism: use of detail. Spender makes the pronouncement that "There is a difference of emphasis between the poetic effect and the effect in painting. Poetry must be sharp and particular exactly in the situation where painting must be vague."⁹² The failure of the Pre-Raphaelites is clear to Spender: "Thus, the attempt to paint poetry according to the Pre-Raphaelite formula of truth makes the mistake of copying poetry in painting."⁹³

This wholesale criticism of the Pre-Raphaelite lack of transposition of poetic truth (or truth on a general and

⁹² New Writing and Daylight, 6 (1945), 126; in this respect, Spender appears to echo an even earlier writer on the sister arts who has been mentioned previously, Sir Joshua Reynolds.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 127.

symbolic scale) is qualified by Spender in his statements about Rossetti, whom Spender calls "a poet who invented poetic symbols in painting."⁹⁴ He further clarifies Rossetti's use of symbolism by depicting it as an idiosyncratic one, in which symbols are "crystalizations of aspects of his own personality," with the "symbolic significance of a projected egoism."⁹⁵ Ultimately, Spender regards Rossetti as a poet, who in his graphic works remains a "poetic illustrator;" clearly, the emphasis is still on one art only.

In a reaction to adverse criticism of the Pre-Raphaelites, and of Rossetti in particular, in which a principal point of censure was that their work was too literary, Oswald Doughty re-examines the "poetic" element in Rossetti's works. Ironically, he begins in "Rossetti's Conception of the 'Poetic' in Poetry and Painting," with a critical look at turns in fortune by which the bane of one age is cited as the boon of the next when, in fact, what he was to do in this study was to return to many of the commonplaces in criticism of the 1880's and 1890's, the zenith of Rossetti's reputation.

Doughty attributes that reputation to the fact that Rossetti was essentially a poet, and poetry his fundamental instinct. Adopting for himself the very language of reviews of the earlier era, Doughty notes,

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 129.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 128.

The particular poetic quality which he created, which was indeed the expression of some of the deepest elements in his nature, not only permeated his poetry and painting, but also captured the imagination and associated emotions of many of his contemporaries. For these he was above everything 'Poetic.' He was not only a poet-painter, he was a 'poetic'-painter and a poet as well. This 'poetry' was a quality, they found, common to both the arts he practiced.⁹⁶

Like those writers, Doughty refers to the "poetic source" of Rossetti's works in both media, and states that "Painting, for Rossetti . . . was fundamentally but another medium for the expression of the deepest urge in his nature, the "poetic."⁹⁷ Yet what the meaning of "poetic" painting is, Doughty remains as ambiguous as his nineteenth century predecessors, in fact returning to their statements for purposes of clarification, as when he uses Stephens' explanation: "The expression of the poetry of his nature by means of painting."⁹⁸ As Doughty attempts to remove himself from Rossetti's contemporaries, in his inquiry as to the fundamental aspect of the "poetry of Rossetti's nature," he remains bound in the very language of those writers, characterizing it in Rossetti's early years as his "sensuous response to the beauty of material things, a pictorial element in both his poetry and his painting."⁹⁹ Such a circular definition by

⁹⁶ Essays by Divers Hands ([Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature, NS 26] London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953), 90-91.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

which the poetry of both arts is characterized by the pictorial element in both leads us no further than did the commentary of Rossetti's contemporaries. We have no more success with his statement that "the visual elements in Rossetti's poetic nature were dominant, like the imagery in much of his verse."¹⁰⁰

One way in which Doughty tries to clarify his point of view is to shift gradually from talk of the "poetic" to that which is "poetical," and more precisely, to Rossetti's "poetic nature." Then Doughty's meaning becomes more apparent. Speaking of Rossetti's art-criticism of 1850-1851, Doughty notes, "In these we see Rossetti's identification of the pictorial, poetic, and personal with a romantic mood or dream-state which was obviously a profoundly important element in his own aesthetic development. To induce through poem or picture such a mood was, he then believed, the highest aim and test of art."¹⁰¹ Doughty identifies a "characteristic 'poetic' mood of Rossetti's as that in which he glimpsed the lotus land of his heart's desire; where sensuous beauty, peace, languor, sadness, pleasure, mingle to form for him a ravishing harmony of flesh and spirit."¹⁰² We may gradually recognize that for "poetic,"

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 97.

Doughty simply means an idealizing and imaginative mood or nature, and that in fact he is counterparting the ideal, internalized, and abstract (the poetic) with the concrete, realistic, and naturalistic (the painterly or pictorial).

The reason for this conception may be seen in the issue with which Doughty ultimately winds up: Platonism in Rossetti's work. Turning to the ideas underlying Rossetti's painting and poetry, he bids us consider "the intellectual aspect of Rossetti's 'poetic' quality; of those expressions of his idealistic dream which was the fundamental source of his inspiration in both poetry and painting."¹⁰³ Only thus it has become clear what "poetic" means to Doughty. We are frustrated if we attempt to find any clarification beyond this, of the relationship between Rossetti's dual arts.

Although it is possible to see what Doughty means by the "poetic" in poetry and painting, the fact remains that he often seems to be more concerned with the "painterly" aspects of Rossetti's works, in spite of introductory statements to the contrary.¹⁰⁴ This confusion may lead to recog-

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 99.

¹⁰⁴ This is evident, for example, in the previously cited statement about the dominance of the "visual elements in Rossetti's poetic nature." When Doughty speaks about areas of concrete parallel, such as imagery, painting seems to take precedence. I would attribute this lack of clarity to Doughty's underlying conception of the "poetic," and to his antithesis between the concrete and abstract. Doughty notes that "this visual interest was only aroused when the material it employed was abstracted to serve in pictorial or poetic design"—i.e. it was a "poetic" use of visual interest; Ibid., p. 94.

nition of an important issue, at the bottom of discussions of the interrelationship between Rossetti's dual arts. Even if we account for Doughty's particular concept of the "poetic," the fact remains that he regards it as a source of both Rossetti's poetry and painting. Just so, among even the best materials on Dante Gabriel Rossetti which focus on the interrelationship between his poetry and painting, the tendency survives to regard Rossetti as either a "poetic" painter, as does Doughty, or as a "painterly" poet, as does Tietz. Whether poetry or painting is regarded as the stimulus for outpourings in both arts, as other critics besides Doughty have claimed at one time or another, the conviction that there was a priority of impulse is one that must be questioned, for it is crucial for our assessment of Rossetti's work. One outcome of insisting upon a primal impulse is to take the view, as Doughty does, that by gaining some distinction in two arts, Rossetti sacrificed something in his own development.¹⁰⁵ The contrary opinion, which would regard this point of view as a misconception, would necessarily recognize within Rossetti's work evidence of a concurrent and cooperative growth in both arts.

This point of view is not a new one, as we have seen, but needed articulation in our own time. This it received, in an article by Wendell Stacy Johnson, entitled "D. G. Rossetti as Painter and Poet." While recognizing Rossetti's

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 92; Doughty insists that Rossetti "had to pay the penalty of divided aims and indecision with obvious harm to his own development."

vacillation between the two arts, as Doughty had elsewhere done, Johnson does not insist upon the precedence of one or the other, nor yet, as early commentators on Rossetti had done, does he regard them as indistinguishably fused.¹⁰⁶

In the conclusion to his study, Johnson significantly refuses to choose between the appellations of poet and painter, and he declares, "The accent hovers between the two words in that ambiguous phrase" [i.e. "poet-painter"].¹⁰⁷

This standpoint is but part of a methodology which, culling certain perceptions and directions from earlier criticism and enlarging further, may lead to additional insights into Rossetti's work. Johnson's study is distinguished not only by his point of view towards non-primacy of either art; it is, in spite of its brevity, marked as well by a more concrete and in-depth look at correspondences between the arts than evident in previous works. Johnson examines several paired pictures and poems, and attempts to illuminate their interrelationship.¹⁰⁸ This focus on

¹⁰⁶ Johnson himself notes that this point is touched upon by Oswald Doughty not in his article, but in Doughty's A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1949); it may well be that Doughty is forced to be somewhat contradictory, when he takes the position that the "poetic" element is a central, rather than polar, one, in Rossetti's works.

¹⁰⁷ Victorian Poetry, 3 (Winter 1965), 18.

¹⁰⁸ Specific comments about these works, the pairs for "Mary's Girlhood" (The Girlhood of Mary Virgin and Ecce Ancilla Domini!) and "The Blessed Damozel" (painting and poem) will be reserved until the point in my dissertation where these works are examined. This applies as well to other studies cited below, which deal with examinations of specific pairs of paintings and poems.

actually identifiable pairs enables him to recognize and explain clear parallels, rather than merely noting vague similarities, as studies which pass over the pairs have done. Johnson observes, as significant similarities between poem and design, those between subject, imagery, and tone. This scope of examination may be extended by adding an examination of form and technique as well, something, for example, done by Tietz, but to the exclusion of Johnson's emphases. Calling Dr. Tietz's paper "the only analytical study of Rossetti's poetry in relation to his painting," Johnson identifies another need yet to be filled—the need for a comprehensive analytical study of paired paintings and poems. Another aspect of the direction in which such a study should proceed is the restrained use of biographical data. The tremendously rich source of insights into Rossetti's work available through an examination of his life and, in reverse, the clues available to the darker side of his life through his works, have led to the proliferation of biographies about Rossetti.¹⁰⁹ While a certain degree of biographical data is illuminating, often details about Rossetti's colorful life only obscure his approach to, and attitude towards, his art and poetry. Most important, for a comprehensive study of the relation between Rossetti's painting and poetry, the field of comparison must be widened

¹⁰⁹ An excellent article on the relation between criticism and biography, which deals with Rossetti, is "The Keys are at the Palace: A Note on Criticism and Biography," by Francis Noel Lees; College English, 28, No. 2 (November 1966), 101-08.

more than has heretofore been done. We have noted the designs and poems most frequently examined prior to Johnson's study. In the decade that has followed, several specific paired paintings and poems have been examined for their interrelationship.¹¹⁰ Such studies have widened the field of comparison, but have still left too many visual-verbal pairs unexamined. It is essential, for any study of interrelationships between Rossetti's dual arts, to realize that Rossetti not only created paired pictures and poems, but wrote a number of poems to accompany the paintings of others, and designed illustrations and executed paintings as companion-pieces to poetry not his own. With this awareness and these new directions in mind, "Poet or Painter?" which echoes from Rossetti's childhood to our own time, ceases to be the salient question. Rather, we must ask, "What is the

¹¹⁰ See for example M. K. Bequette, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Synthesis of Picture and Poem," Hartford Studies in Literature, 4, No. 3 (1972), 216-26 (discussion of Rossetti's sonnet, "A Venetian Pastoral" and its counterpart, the Fête Champêtre, attributed to Giorgione, and the Rossetian pair, "Proserpine"); Bernie Leggett, "A Picture and its Poem by Dante Gabriel Rossetti," Victorian Poetry, 11, No. 3 (Autumn 1973), 241-46 (discussion of the sonnet, "Mary Magdalene" and the drawing, Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee); and Richard L. Stein, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painting and the Problem of Poetic Form," Studies in English Literature, 10 (August 1970), 775-92 (discussion primarily of "The Blessed Damozel," painting and poem); Stein's study has been expanded in his recently published The Ritual of Interpretation (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975) to cover several of Rossetti's sonnets for pictures. Although his range is the most comprehensive yet, Stein still limits himself to discussion of only certain features of parallel, notably those of detail and form.

relationship, as expressed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in companion-pieces in both media, between picture and poem?"

CHAPTER TWO

ROSSETTIAN VISUAL-VERBAL PAIRS

Aside from an early sonnet, "For an Annunciation, Early German," the visual counterpart of which cannot be identified, the earliest of Rossetti's "Sonnets for Pictures," and the first to accompany one of his own graphic works, are the pair of poems entitled "Mary's Girlhood." Originally written to accompany, and appended to the frame of, The Girlhood of Mary Virgin (Surtees 40, painted 1848-49), this pair of sonnets actually corresponds to a pair of paintings, the second being Rossetti's Ecce Ancilla Domini! (Surtees 44) of 1850.¹ The first sonnet was composed concurrently with the execution of Girlhood, and the second, somewhat later. Most probably the seed for the second canvas was already in Rossetti's mind when he wrote the latter poem, for in the late 1840's he forecast a series of graphic works dealing with several scenes from the life of Mary. Rossetti intended to append side panels to Girlhood, depicting the

¹ Rossetti later changed the name of Ecce Ancilla Domini! to The Annunciation, to eliminate any suggestions of Romanism. Note: these paintings, and all graphic works by Rossetti mentioned subsequently which are cited in Virginia Surtees' Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): A Catalogue Raisonné, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), are identified by catalogue entry number. Works for which reproductions are available in a source other than Surtees will be so identified.

Virgin planting a lily and rose, and the Virgin in the house of St. John, while to supplement Ecce Ancilla Domini! he contemplated a pendant depicting the death of the Virgin.² This combination of paintings and poems is one of the few to have ever been examined for the purpose of discovering an interrelationship between Rossetti's dual arts. As poems "for a picture," critics seem to expect "Mary's Girlhood" to reproduce certain elements of the paintings to which the sonnets are related. Looking in that direction, they note the curiously artificial quality of even natural details in the painting, The Girlhood of Mary Virgin; they find its counterpart in the formal diction of the poem and in the way Rossetti singles out those details from the painting within the poem which function on a symbolic as well as natural level. Perhaps because these canvases were produced under the attentive eyes of his Pre-Raphaelite brethren, critics tend to attribute this most obvious contrast between the realistic and symbolic to Rossetti's place in that movement, rather than to any purely personal expression or intention on Rossetti's part. Each, depending on his approach to Pre-Raphaelitism, finds Rossetti's paintings representative of a particular characteristic. Some, therefore, single out the truthfulness of representation in these works, pointing in

² William Michael Rossetti, ed., Præraphaelite Diaries and Letters (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1900), pp. 216-17; William Michael Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters, with a Memoir (London: Ellis & Elvey, 1895), I (Memoir), 160; hereafter cited in footnotes as Letters and Memoir.

The Girlhood of Mary Virgin to the precisely delineated vines and flowers, and the use by Rossetti of his mother and his sister Christina as the models for spiritual personages. Such devices suggest to them that this work, like others of the Pre-Raphaelite class, attempts to revitalize and make familiar again the outworn symbolism of the Christian faith; they would read Christina's presence in Ecce Ancilla Domini! the same way, and select for special note the bare simplicity of line, form, and color. Those who find paramount in Pre-Raphaelitism an attempt to return to moral and religious themes and purposes isolate in the first work the symbolism of the cross-like growth of ivy, the vine, palm branch and briar, the vari-colored volumes, lily, and angel, most of which are repeated in the second canvas. Finally, even the detractors of Pre-Raphaelitism move in, singling out for derision such details as the stalk of lilies painted from an artificial model, gilt haloes, and latinate inscriptions.

What these critics seem to overlook is the simultaneous presence of all of these elements in both paintings and poems, and the interaction which develops between them, when one regards the poems and paintings at the same time.³ Even when the dialectical quality of these works has been recognized, it has been attributed to a generally Pre-

³ Rossetti himself indicated that he intended to intermingle impulses in Girlhood, making it suggest "something more probable and at the same time less commonplace" than other works in its class; see Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl, eds., Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-67), I, 48 (To Charles Lyell, 14 November 1848); hereafter cited in footnotes as Letters.

Raphaelite "natural supernaturalism," rather than to something particularly Rossettian.⁴ Yet the existence of the corresponding poems is the most distinctive factor which separates these two paintings of Rossetti's from other works of the Pre-Raphaelite period, and the poems must be approached along with their graphic counterpart to understand Rossetti's special motives and achievement.

The earlier painting, The Girlhood of Mary Virgin, is freighted with conventional religious symbols, conveyed, however, in an extremely concrete manner. Concrete, but not realistic precisely, because the use of formal arrangement contradicts any tendency towards naturalism. Thus, the lily which is propped upright as a model for the Virgin's embroidery echoes the verticals of background trellis-work, embroidery frame, and the stiff, "upright" figure of the Virgin herself. The conspicuously cruciform trellis on which the ivy trails and entwines, contrasts with the more naturalistic lattice-work, which in turn is countered by the overtly symbolic dove which appears roosting upon it. Even color is used to create tension between concrete and symbolic; the rosy wings of the childish angel, which remind us of the other-worldliness of this figure, are de-emphasized by the use of crimson forms elsewhere, from the embroidery background to the mantle behind St. Anne. That Rossetti's purpose is not at least strictly to make the spectator re-

⁴ Richard L. Stein, The Ritual of Interpretation: The Fine Arts as Literature in Ruskin, Rossetti, and Pater (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), p. 171.

evaluate symbolic events and objects to reinstill significance into them, may be implied in the contrast between, rather than simple conversion of, concrete and symbolic. While conventional symbols are portrayed naturalistically, as in the works of many of Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite contemporaries, they are imbued simultaneously with a stylized effect through an artificial and non-representational use of form and color. Rather than trying, as did Pre-Raphaelites like Hunt and Millais, to harmonize material fact and spiritual significance, Rossetti appears to emphasize their conflict.

Ecce Ancilla Domini! again counterplays symbolic detail, realistically handled, with concrete images treated in a highly stylized manner. The lily of The Girlhood of Mary Virgin reappears, now on the completed embroidery, draped at the bedside of the young Virgin, and in the hands of the angel Gabriel. Both the angel-borne flower and the embroidered one are still and angular, whereas the verticality of the embroidery frame links it to the upright figure of Gabriel, and its angle draws our attention to Mary. The flower in Gabriel's hands creates a diagonal which seems both to form a separation between his figure and Mary's, and to emphasize the shrinking-back movement of her form.

Many critics have previously noted the unifying effect of the whiteness of this picture, which Rossetti himself sardonically referred to as the "blessed white eyesore" and "white daub." It is difficult to overlook the

symbolism of that color, but apparently easier to miss the interplay of other colors in this painting. Rossetti creates a color wheel by placing a large mass of pure blue, red, and yellow (the primary colors), at equidistant points on his canvas. While as a color wheel these masses may suggest unity, the overwhelming effect of the triangular and perhaps not inappropriately tripartite design is to break down the sense of unity, and the symbolic effect, of the abundant areas of white. Blue screen, red embroidery, and yellow flames beneath Gabriel's feet (the only hint of the angel's supernatural character other than the gold nimbus about his head) are all given equivalent emphasis and abstracted as elements of design.

Contrast is also created through the relationship between figures. As noted before, the stalk of lilies in Gabriel's hand seems to separate him from the Virgin. While the two figures, and the dove symbolic of the Holy Ghost, are all aureoled, suggesting their affinity, the spatial composition defies that sense of relationship. The Virgin's downcast eyes seem further to halt any impression of inter-relationship. That elements of design work in resistance to the thematic relationship between figures is obvious from divergent interpretations of the scene. While many viewers accept the painting as representing the confrontation between the angelic messenger and the Virgin, in which she is awakened from her sleep to be foretold of the birth of Christ, some respond differently. To them, the painting suggests that she has received a premonitory vision in sleep,

and it is that which prompts her awestruck posture and down-cast eyes. They regard Gabriel as having spoken to the Virgin in her sleep, and as now standing unseen by the simple pallet on which she sits. As Rossetti has handled the painting, it sustains both interpretations.

A curious conflict also exists in Rossetti's handling of images and details suggestive of time and space. Although Gabriel's feet indicate movement forward, the severe verticality of his posture, along with the disposition of his arms and the lily-stem which he holds, transmits a statue-like effect. Mary too, although obviously drawing back after just waking, is rather frozen. Our eyes may be satisfied by this stasis, and by the sense of being out of the flux of time which it creates; yet, in such a visual environment, the hovering dove seems an anomaly, caught moving mid-air in a rather airless, motionless setting. We therefore remain with an uncomfortable sense of unresolved tension.

The sonnets entitled "Mary's Girlhood" are often described as expressing the symbolic dimension of Rossetti's subject in contrast to the material dimension manifest in the paintings which are its counterpart; but just as the paintings have been seen to express a great complexity of impulses, so may these poems. That the poems are intended as a counterpart for a picture is evident in the first line of the first sonnet, "This is that blessed Mary, pre-elect." Thus, the young girl seen in the painting working patiently at her frame, Mary, "God's Virgin," is made more immediate

in the poem with that demonstrative statement. Counter to this, however, Rossetti then consciously draws us back to a narrative perspective with the lines, "Gone is a great while, and she/Dwelt young in Nazareth of Galilee." The subsequent lines, up to the first line of the first sestet, create an effect of stasis—"so held she." Yet, the phrases "through her girlhood" and "near God/Grows" suggest continual if steady change, change which leads to a desired halt in the last four lines of the first sonnet:

Till, one dawn at home
She woke in her white bed, and had no fear
At all,—yet wept till sunshine, and felt awed:
Because the fulness of the time was come.⁵

We recognize these lines as suggesting the second canvas, Ecce Ancilla Domini! and that, like that canvas, they are infused with a sense of the arrested moment.

Like the first sonnet, the second offsets certain impulses with their contraries. The explanation of the symbolic import of tripoint, books, lily, briar, and palm, counteracts with the concreteness of nouns and verbs, and parallels the intermingling on the canvas of Girlhood of abstract and concrete use of visual detail. In terms of a sense of time, the second sonnet conveys inconsistent movement; the abundant consonants give a sharp staccato to the

⁵ Unless otherwise noted, the edition from which quotations are drawn is The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. William Michael Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1911). In instances when the 1870 version of a poem specifically is being considered, and is different from that which appears in Works, the edition from which quotations are drawn is D. G. Rossetti, Poems and Translations, 1850-1870 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1913).

lines in which the symbols are explained, contrasted with the length and more connected rhythm of the line, "Yea God the Lord/ Shall soon vouchsafe His Son to be her Son." Yet, this contrast is paralleled by another, reversing, as it were, the sense of stability versus change. Because of the emphasis on the present tense, and on the symbolic, the statement, "These are the symbols," and the explanation which follows, convey a certain awareness of the immutable; these lines thus contrast with the last three lines (suggestive of Ecce Ancilla Domini!), which focus, rather, on the imminent. The tension underlying apparent harmony is even evident in Rossetti's handling of the sonnet form. While in structure and rhyme scheme the sonnets are characteristically Petrarchan, that form is overridden by the pattern of ideas and impulses expressed in each sonnet, and both have the emphatic ending (but not the rhyme) of the Shakespearean sonnet's closing couplet. In the form and content of both paintings and poems Rossetti seems intentionally to undercut a wide range of elements with their contraries, using each medium as a means of highlighting those contraries as articulated in the other.

Another of Rossetti's designs with a sacred subject is The Passover in the Holy Family (Surtees 78), on which he first began work in 1849, and the painting of which was left unfinished in 1856.⁶ In 1867, Rossetti returned to this

⁶ The circumstances under which the design was abandoned are as follows: around 1854 John Ruskin commissioned the painting, after seeing a design for it; in 1856 he took

incomplete design, and wrote a sonnet for it; of the pairs for which Rossetti contributed both painting and poem, this sequence is in close relationship chronologically to the "Mary's Girlhood" pair and further warrants our consideration here as a work continuing the same thematic vein.⁷

According to Rossetti's own description,

The scene is in the house porch, where Christ (as a boy) holds a bowl of blood from which Zacharias is sprinkling the posts and lintel. Joseph has brought the lamb and Elizabeth lights the pyre. The shoes which John fastens, and the bitter herbs which Mary is gathering, form part of the ritual.⁸

Rossetti treated this incident (an imaginary one) with the same freedom from conventional representation which marked The Girlhood of Mary Virgin and Ecce Ancilla Domini!, while in certain respects the watercolor suggests a stylization similar to the earlier works and in contrast to the naturalistic impulse in the design.

it from Rossetti fearing further revision, after Rossetti had repainted several areas multiple times; although later returned to be completed, Rossetti never did comply. See William Michael Rossetti, ed., Ruskin: Rossetti: Preraphaelitism: Papers 1854 to 1862 (London: George Allen, 1899), hereafter cited in footnotes as Ruskin: Rossetti: Preraphaelitism, and E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., The Works of John Ruskin (London: George Allen, 1903-1912), XXXVI, passim; hereafter cited in text.

⁷ In his ever practical way, Rossetti wrote to William Michael that he wrote the sonnets for this design, and for Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee, for help "in defending the subjects against plagiarists." Letters, II, 740 (14 September 1869).

⁸ Quoted by H. C. Marillier, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Illustrated Memorial of His Art and Life (London: George Bell & Sons, 1899), p. 68.

The contrast between elements of symbolism and realism is exemplified by the response with which this design was met by Ruskin and the poet Coventry Patmore. While Passover is full of allegorical implication which Patmore clearly recognized (although he found it "too remote"), Ruskin, in a letter to Rossetti, reacted by saying in reference to Patmore's remarks, "what the mischief does he mean by Symbolism? I call that Passover plain prosy Fact. No Symbolism at all."⁹ Ruskin's response should not be attributed to the stubborn prejudices to which he was given—he simply was applying a different standard for definition of symbolism. As evident in his numerous remarks on Pre-Raphaelite art, and particularly in those on the work of Millais and Hunt, Ruskin perceived in their efforts (Millais' Christ in the House of His Parents and Hunt's Light of the

⁹ Ruskin: Rossetti: Preraphaelitism, pp. 139-40; compare with Rossetti's letter to Coventry Patmore, in which he says of Passover,

Its chief claim to interest, if successful when complete, would be as a subject which must have actually occurred during every year of the life led by the Holy Family, and which, I think must bear its meaning broadly and instantly—not as you say 'remotely'—on the very face of it,—in the one sacrifice really typical of the other. In this respect—its actuality as an incident no less than as a scriptural type—I think you will acknowledge it differs entirely from Herbert's some years back, Millais' more recently, or any other of the very many both ancient and modern which resemble it in so far as they are illustrations of Christ's life 'subject to His parents', but not one of which that I can remember is anything more than an entire and often trifling fancy of the painter, in which the symbolism is not really inherent in the fact, but merely suggested or suggestible, and having had the fact made to fit it.

Letters, I, 276 (1855); the works referred to are Herbert's Our Saviour subject to His Parents at Nazareth and Millais' Christ in the House of His Parents.

World, for example) an attempt to rekindle spiritual feeling through the naturalization of symbol. Ruskin discerned a similar impulse in Passover; referring to this picture, he notes,

the peculiar value and character of the treatment is in what I called its material veracity, compelling the spectator's belief, if he have the instinct of belief in him at all, in the thing's having verily happened; and not being a mere poetical fancy. If the spectator, on the contrary, have no capacity of belief in him, the use of such representation is in making him detect his own incredulity; and recognize, that in his former dreamy acceptance of the story, he had never really asked himself whether these things were so. (XXXIII:288)

Ruskin perceived in Rossetti's works representation rather than suggestion, a manifestation of objective truth depicted directly, and not an adumbration of truth.

The "plain prosy facts" of this preparation for the Passover, momentarily disregarding the specific events they foreshadow, are added to by certain details which are less easily acceptable as part of a naturalistic and anecdotal scene.¹⁰ In other words, such details are distinctly allegorical rather than typological, for they can only function on a symbolic level, and not on a symbolic and material level simultaneously. Most likely the setting of "house porch" is not gratuitous; as a prelude, it suggests the implications of prefiguration, and causes us to project into the future as we contemplate the scene. It is almost impossible to

¹⁰ The pencil design from which Ruskin probably commissioned the watercolor (Surtees 78 A), the present whereabouts of which is unknown, is reproduced in Marillier (repr. facing p. 68), and should be consulted, for it gives clearer detail of the incomplete portion of the watercolor.

divorce the symbolic undertones from numerous other details: the cross appears as a contrivance by the well to which is attached a vessel for drawing water; the inner doorway is surrounded by vines suggesting Christ and the Christian faith, and within, the table is laden with bread and wine, representative of the sacrament. Rossetti's use of color appears to be a conscious development of the symbolism of the painting, the young Christ's robe having been changed from white to scarlet, and Mary appearing dressed in white, with a rich blue mantle as over-garment.¹¹

The sense of time which the painting conveys is created by our focusing on each of the figures individually and in turn. Each is captured in a moment of action, his gestures such as to project us on to the next instant in time. Working against this, the background appears to defy any process of visual entry and development. Although various depths are implied, the abundance of straight lines not complying with any laws of perspective may cause us to return and rest our eyes simply on the human forms in the composition, and to reject the impression of continuity of time for that of the arrested moment.

✦ In the sonnet "The Passover in the Holy Family," identical contrasts between the arrested, immediate moment, and the continuous movement of time towards the imminent

¹¹ One of Ruskin's complaints centered upon this change, which he described in a letter to Ellen Heaton as one "I did not like;" quoted by Surtees, Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p. 41.

future are transferred. The sense of significant moment is created in the lines, "Here meet together the prefiguring day/And day prefigured;" "here" is the poem's moment, and that of the canvas which confronts the reader-viewer—for not only is the poem about a sacred moment, but an aesthetic one as well. Within the octave, Rossetti contrasts the past ("God did say") and the present instant of the preparation for the Pascal feast. Like the second sonnet of "Mary's Girlhood," the sestet of "Passover" develops the symbolism of the painting, taking concrete details and reexamining them allegorically. Yet, as in the case of that pair, we cannot simply counterpoint the painting, as concrete, with the poem, as abstract. The frequency of vivid nouns and verbs creates resistance to the implications of allegory. Rossetti also appears to use the sonnet to revise the accepted view of painting as strictly a spatial, and poetry, a temporal, medium. Just as depth is distorted on the canvas, here in the sonnet Rossetti intermingles past, present, and future, in his verbal portrayal of the scene.

Rossetti's effort to revise conventional contrasts and simple contraries is again evident even in his handling of the sonnet structure. Given the contrast in the poem between the concrete and abstract, we might expect the octave-sestet division to support that dichotomy. Yet even before the break, which Rossetti emphasizes spatially in the arrangement of his text, we are made to turn from a narrative, naturalistic perspective to the allegorical one underlying the line, "Lo! the slain lamb confronts the Lamb to slay."

We are forced, through this and other means we have noticed, to question the simple polarities between reality and symbol, and painting and poetry, in this Rossettian pair.

From 1853 to 1859 Rossetti worked on a pen and ink design of another sacred scene, Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee (Surtees 109), for which a poem was later composed.¹² Ruskin admired this design greatly, perhaps for the same reasons that attracted him to others of Rossetti's sacred subjects. The design portrays Mary Magdalene as she passes the door of Simon on her way to a banquet and, drawn by the face of Christ which she has just sighted, attempts to leave her companions to go to him. Impulses of movement and stasis clash, as Mary Magdalene is caught tearing the roses from her sweeping hair, while bemused revelers look on, and two of her companions attempt to bar her way. On one level, the design expresses a simple dichotomy between the active outside world, and the inner peace of Christ; yet, this simple contrast is made richer by the development of secondary contrasts in the larger left-hand portion of the design. In most versions of the design, Rossetti pairs the lover with the other female figure on the stairs, and depicts the other revelers two by two as well, leaving Mary Magdalene to be visually paired with Christ. A sense of conversion from the world of flesh to the world of spirit, rather than a deadlock between them, is conveyed by this identification. Against Mary Magdalene's thrusting motion,

¹² Preliminary sketches were made as early as 1853.

we sense the resistance of the solid mass created by the woman and the lover who bar her entrance to the house of Simon. At the same time, the enormously intricate range of detail, from garments to cobblestones, impresses upon the viewer a sense of vigorous movement. While the revelers represent all that is ephemeral and in flux as they surge through the streets, they also suggest the interminability of time (and all that is ordinary and habitual) as they wind from foreground to the very depth of the design. The Magdalene, although "outside" like them, is contrasted against the crowd and the figures on the stair because she represents the perennial moment of intensity. The design also intermingles concrete and symbolic, as have others of Rossetti's sacred designs which have been examined. Precise detail is nonetheless highly stylized, both impressions working against each other. Within this scene, with its individualized and therefore "naturalistic" portraits (a striking one being Simon's disdainful face), we also find allegorical detail ranging from the beggar on the lowest step, and the fawn feeding on the vine, to the lily and sunflower flanking the doorway.¹³

In a recent article in which he discusses the "Mary

¹³ Rossetti noted, in a letter of July 1865 to Mr. Clabburn referring to an oil replica of this design, that the fawn and fowls which gather about the beggar-girl's feet give "a kind of equivalent to Christ's words: 'Yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs;'" see H. T. Clabburn, "Some Relics of Rossetti," Pall Mall Budget, No. 1165 (22 January 1891), p. 14.

Magdalene" pair, Bernie Leggett shows that diagonal and vertical lines are used in one version of the design to create a "suspension between two opposing sets of motion."¹⁴

Leggett observes impulses of progression and detainment working towards articulation of the dialectic within the design. Through his analysis, Leggett concludes that the design reveals not only antithesis, but movement towards resolution of that antithesis; the pattern of stairsteps, and of verticals and horizontals, helps to express this opposition which we have seen manifest in other elements of design, imagery, and composition.¹⁵ Leggett states that "it

¹⁴ Bernie Leggett, "A Picture and its Poem by Dante Gabriel Rossetti," Victorian Poetry, 11, No. 3 (Autumn 1973), 241, 243; Leggett's article is significant in posing the question of how Rossetti construed the links between the sister arts, and in attempting to demonstrate transposition from painting to poem specifically by focusing on line and shape in relation to rhythm and syntax. His analysis demands expansion however, first because of the existence of other parallels and second, because although Leggett is unclear about which version he is dealing with, he in fact focuses only on a little-known 1870 version of Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee (Surtees 109N) in the Birmingham collection (a design for an oil painting commissioned by Leyland and never done), rather than the more familiar, and further completed design dated 1858 (Surtees 109), in the Fitzwilliam Museum. The poem was obviously written with this version in mind, and several inaccurate observations in Leggett's study (i.e., his complaint that Mary's rending the roses from her hair is less clearly suggested in the design than in the poem) result from this error. Leggett obviously uses Esther Wood as a source of information, and accepts her reproduction of Mary Magdalene as the one to which the poem corresponds. See Leggett, p. 243, and Esther Wood, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, 1894), repr. facing p. 116.

¹⁵ Leggett, p. 243.

was mainly in the tone and pacing of syntax that he [Rossetti] found verbal equivalents for the picture."¹⁶ As evidence, he points to the use of the sonnet form to emphasize dialectical opposition in the poem, as it counterparts worldliness in the first eight lines (spoken by the lover) with the spiritual in the sestet (Mary's response). He perceptively points to the creation of verbal "barriers," by which he means commas, caesuras, and full stops. Likewise, he correlates the four "Nays" of the octave with the impeding lines of the design. Leggett then notes, however, that the sestet is also full of pauses, and that lines five and six are an exception to the erratic syntactical pattern of the octave. What Leggett presents only as simple observations are actually contradictions to his analysis of the poem, as far as it goes, for he finds the sonnet an expression of simple dialectical opposition. Clearly, more complex forces are at work. Leggett touches upon this complexity when he observes the break in equilibrium between the nearly balanced countervailing forces of the design, and finds the correlative for this in the "stair-stepping" of the final line, "He needs me, calls me, loves me: Let me go!" which rises in crescendo, and reaches towards resolution in the predominance of the spiritual. Still, Leggett has ignored other ways (even while looking directly at them) by which a simple stasis between opposing forces is denied in both design and poem, and yet perceives resolution where it is

¹⁶ Ibid.

not so clearly evident.

The poem parallels much more completely the complexities of the design than previously observed. Not only are images from the drawing evoked in the poem, but their import is paralleled. The roses which Mary Magdalene casts from her hair, and which suggest metaphorically the sensual life she has led ("be thou all a rose"), are carried over concretely in this version of the design and also given symbolic impact when considered along with the emblematic flowers upon Simon's doorway. Where the poem cannot transfer certain aspects of the picture (such as the contrast between the dark confusion of the outer world and the simple pure light of Christ), another image is employed, in both naturalistic and symbolic contexts, to convey the same idea. In such a manner, Rossetti picks up the detail from the design of the lover's hand caressingly pressed over Mary Magdalene's foot, and uses that image in the octave and sestet for divergent purposes; the lover's last expostulation, "Nay, when I kiss thy feet they'll leave the stair," is counterpointed in the sestet with Mary's words:

For His feet my kiss,
 My hair, my tears He craves to-day:—and oh!
 What words can tell what other day and place
 Shall see me clasp those blood-stained feet of His?
(ll. 10-13)

It also appears that there are distinctions between the octave and sestet stronger than those Leggett observes. While the sestet does carry over some of the halting movement of the octave (which is not only created with stops, but through repetition and parallel construction), it

differs in a significant way. All but one line in the octave is end-stopped, while in the sestet, the lines run fluidly together. The surge which Leggett perceives in the last line is not a sudden resolution, but is characteristic of the general impetus of the whole sestet. Where the exception occurs in the octave, in lines five and six, it appears to be an intentional contrast; just as its affinity in structure is with the sestet, Mary's vision, and the spiritual, so in content it hints of a far different meaning to the lover's words, "This delicate day of love we two will share/Till at our ear love's whispering night shall speak." The repetition in the final line, of love, suggests that this day in fact will be a day of love, but the spiritual love of the Holy Bridegroom rather than the worldly lover's dalliance.

Rather than presenting simple dichotomies brought to resolution, this pair seems to convey a complex pattern characteristic of other Rossettian pairs. We are made to recognize, through design and poem, the presence of diverse impulses, and to trace with Rossetti the tensions of inner contradictions which interweave between those impulses.

Although not based on a sacred subject, Rossetti's Found (Surtees 64) bears a marked affinity with works of that nature. Not only was a corresponding sonnet written to accompany it after all but the last efforts on canvas were made, but like the religious-symbolic designs, Found is readily identified as one of Rossetti's works most Pre-Raphaelite in nature. Not only in treatment but in subject

matter this canvas, with its simple Christian moral message, resembles the works of Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite colleagues; but while a didactic crystallization of many of the impulses of early Pre-Raphaelitism, Found was always regarded by Rossetti as revealing another aspect of his personal capacities as a painter. As he wrote to William Graham in 1879, when he had returned again to the painting, he regarded the work as

furnishing a refutation (I trust) to what is so often alleged against poetic painting such as I follow commonly to the best of my ability,—I mean the charge that a painter adopts the poetic style simply because he cannot deal with what is real and human. I should wish to show,—as such a picture as Found, though small, must do, if I succeed with it—that my preference of the ideal does not depend on incapacity to deal with simple nature.¹⁷

Like other works in this cluster, although detailed and overtly symbolic, Found illustrates Rossetti's idiosyncratic impulses which corresponded almost coincidentally for a time with those of his contemporaries.

No picture of Rossetti's has a more lengthy history than Found, begun in 1854, and worked on at some length in 1861, 1862, 1870, and again in 1880-81. Leaving aside all issues of indebtedness, with which the painting's past is checkered, one reason that Found is fascinating to students of Rossetti is the simple fact that Rossetti was concerned with it over such a span of time. The sonnet which is the counterpart to the graphic work (still unfinished at his death) is contrastingly neat in its summation of the incident

¹⁷ Letters, IV, 1635 (5 May 1879).

portrayed on canvas. Beyond that correspondence, we must question the relationship between this unusual painting and the poem which may be regarded as an attempt by Rossetti to work out in words what he would fail to do in paint.

"Found" was written in 1881, probably during the last period of time in which Rossetti took up the canvas. We may attribute some of its shortcomings to the fact that Rossetti hastily composed several poems in 1881, as he had in 1870, to fill his new volume of poetry. The very first line, a quotation from Keats, suggests the impulsiveness (especially for Rossetti) underlying the composition of this sonnet. In addition to this line's being striking because Rossetti was not in the habit of quoting other poets, it is more so because it probably reflects the fact that it was during the early part of 1881 that Rossetti was involved in a running correspondence with Henry Buxton Forman, editor of Keats's letters and poems.¹⁸ More to the point, however, is the fact that both painting and poem were thus a departure for Rossetti, and must ultimately be passed over in a study of pairs which may illuminate the interrelationship between media. As the painting is an exception to Rossetti's graphic works, the poem is an exception to his usual sonnets for pictures. In spite of the use of "dramatic" diction ("Ah," "Oh God!") and rhetorical devices like the familiar question-

¹⁸ Rossetti regarded the line from "To Homer" as "the greatest line in Keats;" see "On Some Marginalia Made by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in a Copy of Keats' Poems," by George Milner, Englische Studien, 61 (1926-27), 217; rpt. from Manchester Quarterly, 2 (January 1883), 1-10.

ing of the reader-viewer and the use of words to help posit the reader in front of the canvas ("but here"), we perceive none of the complexity of tensions and contrasts which characterize any of Rossetti's truly interrelated works.

Although there are affinities between Rossetti's early poem, "Ave," and several sacred designs, they seem to be those arising from the use of the poem to suggest religious subjects at a time when Rossetti was more frequently about such work for practical rather than artistic purposes.¹⁹

¹⁹ The most closely paralleled is the watercolor, Mary in the House of St. John (Surtees 110), which is related to the following lines:

Mind'st thou not (when the twilight gone
Left darkness in the house of John,
Between the naked window-bars
That spacious vigil of the stars?—
For thou, a watcher even as they,
Wouldst rise from where throughout the day
Thou wroughtest raiment for His poor;
And, finding the fixed terms endure
Of day and night which never brought
Sounds of His coming chariot,
Wouldst lift through cloud-waste unexplor'd

Those eyes which said, "How long, O Lord?" (ll. 64-75)
Marillier (p. 68) identifies The Annunciation (Surtees 69), the present whereabouts of which are unknown, as suggested by "Ave," line 56 ("Or washed thy garments in the stream"), a point noted as well by William Michael Rossetti in his notes to the poem in Works (p. 662), in which he also adds, "When in 1869 my brother got his poems privately printed, as a convenient preliminary before settling for publication, he put a note to "Ave" thus: 'This hymn was written as a prologue to a series of designs. Art still identifies herself with all faiths for her own purposes: and the emotional influence here employed demands above all an inner standing-point.'" In The Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti with Illustrations from his Own Pictures and Designs, ed. William Michael Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1904), p. 151, William Rossetti suggests that the painting Rossetti planned on the death of the Virgin was to parallel the lines from "Ave" beginning "That day when Michael came."

When next Rossetti turned his energies to the creation of paired visual and verbal works, the results, at least superficially, were startlingly different. No longer religious in impulse, these descriptive or emblematic pairs are often considered the characteristic products of Rossetti's two-sided genius; the paintings represent a range of mysterious and fleshly beauties, and the poems, verbal counterparts to them. Yet, many of the same impulses and tensions may be recognized in this sequence of paired paintings and poems.

II

Two of the earliest of such pairs are those for "Lilith" and "Sibylla Palmifera."²⁰ The sonnets by these names were originally written to accompany Rossetti's similarly titled paintings. In the 1881 volume, Ballads and Sonnets, they were moved from the "Sonnets for Pictures"

²⁰ Virginia Surtees recently brought to light a hitherto unrecognized Rossettian pair, which fits into this category, and which actually predates "Lilith" and "Sibylla Palmifera." The drawing of 1858 of Beauty and the Bird clearly corresponds to the poem of the same name in the 1870 volume of Poems (earlier called "The Bullfinch"); I have not introduced it in my discussion of Rossetti's paired works, however, because it seems to me that Surtees is correct in categorizing both works as "a commemoration of the day and the incident [a gathering at Little Holland House, where after the departure of Louisa Ruth Herbert, an actress he much admired, Rossetti made the sketch in question] which he depicted in pen and ink, both in sketch and sonnet form." Rather than displaying a complex relationship, the sonnet and drawing seem more distinctly replicas of the same impressions "commemorated" in different media, a view that may be supported by the last lines of the original poem:

Even so, when she, a little lightly red,
Now turned on me and laughed, I felt made strong
To honour and to praise her golden head.

See Virginia Surtees, "'Beauty and the Bird': A New Rossetti Drawing," Burlington Magazine, 115, No. 839 (February 1973), 84-86.

section, in which they had appeared in the Poems of 1870, to the sonnet sequence entitled The House of Life, and were given the more familiar titles of "Body's Beauty" and "Soul's Beauty." Although the connection with the paintings thus tends to be hidden, the duplication of the poems in some versions of Rossetti's works under the second heading emphasizes their capacity to function as companion pieces to works of art, and suggests a consciousness of a necessary relationship between the two media.²¹

On the most apparent level, the imagery of both paintings is shared by the sonnets. The rose and poppy of "Lilith," and the palm and wreath of "Sibylla Palmifera," serve not only to suggest the symbolic referent of those objects, but more simply to identify and link painting to poem.²² It would appear that Rossetti, by "pinning" the sonnet to the painting, reveals his attitude about the ability of the poem to function freely on its own. Even under the titles of "Body's Beauty" and "Soul's Beauty" the poems rely in part upon the larger context of the sonnet sequence for their elucidation. More deeply, the poems dis-

²¹ Two such editions in which the poems are duplicated are Poetical Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. William M. Rossetti (New York: T. Y. Crowell & Co., 189?) and Poetical Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Chicago: Belford, Clarke & Co., n.d.).

²² The rose and poppy of the "Lilith" pair also serve, when reiterated visually in the painting Sibylla Palmifera and indirectly suggested in that work's companion-poem (l. 1, "love and death"), to link this pair of visual-verbal counterparts.

play an attempt to articulate the themes and tone of the designs.

In Lady Lilith (Surtees 205), the luxuriant hair of the subject dominates the painting. The painting to which the sonnet is conjoined actually no longer exists in the form which provoked many of the parallels between the pair, but reproductions and other paintings give us a good idea of its earlier appearance. Originally, Fanny Cornforth, the voluptuous and frankly sensual housekeeper and mistress of Rossetti, familiar from such works as Bocca Baciata (Surtees 114), Fair Rosamund (Surtees 129), and The Blue Bower (Surtees 178), sat as model.²³ It is she, rather than Alexa Wilding, from whom the work was later repainted, who in all accounts possessed abundant golden hair. Yet even without the color of Fanny's hair, through lines and shadow alone the density and sensuousness of the original hair remains. The tension created in the sweep of locks, caught in her comb and fondled musingly in her fingers, forces the eye to follow and "draws men to watch the bright net she can weave" (l. 7). Rossetti successfully transmutes less concrete visual images to words in his description of Lilith as she sits "subtly of herself contemplative" (l. 6). The mirror which Lilith holds up to her own gaze in the painting serves to form a barrier to the realm in which, and upon which, she eternally dwells; we, as outsiders, cannot participate in

²³ The original is reproduced in black and white in Marillier, repr. facing p. 133.

her vision. In a paradoxical manner, however, the indirect turn of Lilith's eyes captivates rather than repels the viewer.²⁴ Their abstract and dreaming cast is as alluring as Rossetti suggests it is in the accompanying poem: "Lo! as that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went/Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent" (ll. 12-13). We may note a corresponding evocation of this spell on Rossetti's canvas.

The paradox of simultaneous senses of entrapment and rejection is enforced by the appearance of a second mirror image on the canvas. The large mirror in the background serves both to sandwich Lilith away from the reader-viewer and within her self-reflective world, and also to draw in the outsider. By suggesting an outer world (for the reflection reveals a garden, and the leaves and trunks of trees) the mirror makes the outside world (and us) part of the canvas. But by also reflecting roses, the same white roses that fill the background, it further evokes the sense of exclusive containment and spiritual loneliness. Lilith's self-absorption is also symbolized more subtly in the images on the canvas. In her lap rests a woven wreath, which we assume will later bind her hair, but which also seems to exist to suggest binding and encircling. Her left wrist is bound too,

²⁴ Rossetti himself described it as "that self-absorption by whose strange fascination such natures draw others within their own circle;" Letters, II, 850 (To Thomas Gordon Hake, 21 April 1870). In the same letter, Rossetti significantly notes, "As with recreated forms in painting, so I should wish to deal in poetry chiefly with personified emotions."

in this case with a thick coral bracelet, and the hand-mirror is tied with red ribbon, the ends of which fall upon her lap. About her, flowers are encased in vases, oaken boxes, and bands. Even the background, with its congestion of blooms, suggests containment. The very abundance of such imagery may serve to create for the reader-viewer a claustrophobic sense of containment within, rather than exclusion from, the world of the canvas.

Paradox is evident not only in the handling of form, but in the use of color as well, in the painting of Lady Lilith; and again, its use is most effective. The overwhelming whiteness of Lilith's sheer dressing-gown, the fleecy overthrow or robe, her own white flesh, and the profusion of white roses, all suggest a connotation very different from that of purity usually associated with that color. Instead, it conveys the cold and heartless nature of this beauty, symbol of passion without feeling. The whiteness of her skin also creates the impression of otherworldliness, as if this creature, though embodied "in the flesh," has no soul to infuse it. Lest we be deceived however, by the overwhelming whiteness of the canvas, the carmine ribbon, coral bracelet, the poppy, red buds of roses, and Lilith's blood-red lips must remind us of the nature of "Body's Beauty."

The poem presents more than an articulation of themes, images, and technical devices present in the painting. This becomes evident when we turn our attention to that paradoxical entrapping-while-repelling effect of the painting.

Rossetti does describe this effect in the sonnet, "Lilith;" however, he goes still further in his transmutation of painting into poem. The first four lines of the octave establish a narrative perspective. The past tense is used, and the "occasion" of the poem is posited in a chronological point in time through the parenthetical comment about Lilith ("The witch he loved before the gift of Eve"). A turning-point, which pivots on the image of Lilith's hair, brings us up to the present moment. In the rest of the octave and the first half of the sestet, Lilith becomes at once more contemporaneous with us and yet more abstract. It is in precisely these lines that the sense of attraction and entrapment is developed. Only in the twelfth line, by means of the sudden exclamation, "Lo!" is the spell broken, and a return to safe distance allowed. A sense of the present moment, enhanced by the all-encompassing nature of the referent to the pronoun "he" in line ten ("for where/Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent/And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare?") is transformed once again to one of the narrative past, and the pronoun now made referent to one youth, one other than the reader-viewer. We observe the victim of Lilith's spell strangled in her golden hair, while we, at least, have escaped. Both painting and poem thus reveal the attraction not simply of Body's Beauty but of union with another. By simultaneously attracting and repelling, Lilith makes us conscious both of our own solitude and of our desire to alleviate it.

There is no discrepancy in the fact that the Lady Lilith on canvas does not evoke the Lilith of Hebrew legend or Faustian fame. The Lilith whom we view is a Lilith of all time, not as much modern as a timeless embodiment of soulless carnality.²⁵ We needn't look for parallels here to the poem's mention of "Adam's first wife, Lilith," or the Lilith of Faust suggested in the last three lines of both octave and sestet, for the sonnet is about the same form of enchantress as the painting. The narrative elements within the poem are in actuality but counterparts to the spatial composition of the canvas. Rossetti has here taken the traditional polarities between painting and poem, those between space and time, and made them work similarly. The dialectic within both painting and poem between inner and outer realms, self and other, has found, through Rossetti, analogous means of articulation.

In the very structure of this sonnet, with its octave and sestet each divided midway, are suggestions of a deeper consciousness of form than the sonnet conventionally demands, and one which cooperates fully with the painting.

²⁵ William Rossetti, in Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer (London: Cassell & Co., 1889), p. 239, hereafter cited as Designer and Writer, notes however, that in regard to the poem, the Talmudic legend and also Goethe's Faust should be borne in mind. He points to a translation by Shelley of the relevant lines from Faust, in which Lilith appears in the witch scene on Hartzbrocken:

Beware of her fair hair, for she excels
 All women in the magic of her locks;
 And, when she winds them round a young man's neck,
 She will not ever set him free again.

In both media—painting and poetry—Rossetti used structure to reinforce content. The subdivision of the poem is not gratuitous, but serves to emphasize the contrasting tensions, and the polarities of idea and image, which are suggested in both painting and poem. This use of structure by Rossetti is perhaps most apparent in the painting of The Blessed Damozel; a work frequently observed and commented upon, and which we will examine later. This composition consists, in the Leyland and Graham versions, of a large rectangular canvas below which, and as part of the same design, is a predella. In "Rossetti's 'In Memoriam': An Elegaic Reading of The House of Life," William Fredeman suggests that Rossetti divided The Blessed Damozel in a bipartite manner similar to that sonnet sequence and to the Petrarchan sonnet itself, in a structural ratio of four to three.²⁶ From this observation, another critic, Richard Stein, concludes that Rossetti regarded a poem as "an arrangement of masses to be balanced as they are in a work of visual art."²⁷ It is very possible, in fact, to perceive this tendency on a level more subtle than that implied in a two-part composition, or octave-sestet structure. Where one does, as in the painting and poem about Lilith, the results can lead to only one conclusion; for Rossetti, the correspondence between works of

²⁶ Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, 47 (March 1965), 308.

²⁷ Richard L. Stein, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painting and the Problem of Poetic Form," Studies in English Literature, 10 (August 1970), 792.

art in different media could be embedded beyond similarities in theme, tone, and image, in an analogous compositional core.

The counterbalance of opposites within many components of the work of art or poetry is evident in the paired poem and painting each entitled "Sibylla Palmifera."²⁸ In the painting, the palm-bearer sits upon a throne, behind which appear the frescoed walls of a court. On one side, the mural depicts the head of Cupid, blindfolded and adorned with a garland of roses. On the other side appears a skull, above the brow of which is a wreath of red poppies. A lamp (beneath Cupid) and a censor (beneath the skull) which rest on the arms of the throne suggest the goddess-like nature of the rather tangibly conceived beauty who dominates the canvas. Scarlet and white once again make up the principal colors of the painting which binds "love and death."

In Sibylla Palmifera (Surtees 193), to some extent Rossetti seems to suggest two polarities balanced and no longer in conflict, rather than a wavering between contraries. In addition to the images of Cupid and skull in the painting, which are suggested in the poem ("Under the arch of Life, where love and death/Terror and mystery, guard her shrine") we note lamp and butterfly, symbolizing endurance and transience. The images of stone canopy and court-

²⁸ The renaming of "Lilith" and "Sibylla Palmifera" as "Body's Beauty" and "Soul's Beauty" is significant in this regard as well. It should not be overlooked as yet another indication of Rossetti's preoccupation with the embodiment of opposites.

yard, and the assemblage of artifacts of mystery and worship, create for the viewer a sense of stasis which precludes conflict between opposites. Even the gaze of the figure in the painting, direct and austere is, as the sonnet indicates, "awe-striking"; we, as viewers, may be momentarily arrested in our contemplation of the scene. Yet, as we gaze upon the canvas, not a goddess but a woman stands forth, despite these trappings. Temple walls and the high arms and back of the throne do not enclose and imprison the figure, but stand as a flat backdrop against which she seems curiously apart. Further, her gaze, while outward, seems hypnotically self-reflective as well, making us conscious, in turn, of our own isolation.

According to accounts of the development of this painting, the canvas accumulated ideas and implications as Rossetti worked upon it, having been begun simply as a personification of Beauty, whose palm-wreath and title "Palmifera" were, Rossetti indicated, "to mark the leading place which I intend her to hold among my beauties."²⁹ In this process, the sonnet was written to "extend the idea" of the picture and to "embody the conception—that of Beauty the Palm-giver, ie. the Principle of Beauty which draws all high-toned men to itself, whether with the aim of embodying it in art or only of attaining its enjoyment in life."³⁰ Likewise,

²⁹ Designer and Writer, p. 55.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

the contrasts between reality and artifice, so pronounced in the canvas, lent to the poem a parallel dialectic. The woman described in the poem is not simply Beauty personified but, on a more personal and immediate level, she lives as a warm and human form. Just as the painting seems to suggest a dichotomy between supernatural elements and the natural or human, reinforced by the contrast between foreground and background, so does the poem. The division occurs between lines seven and eight, as Rossetti notes,

Hers are the eyes which, over and beneath,
The sky and sea bend on thee,—which can draw,
By sea or sky or woman, to one law,
The allotted bondsman of her palm and wreath. (ll. 5-8)

Sky and sea, familiar background motifs in Rossetti's poetry, here contrast with, and are almost but not quite superseded by, the foreground image of a beautiful woman. That key word, woman, is sufficient to remind us that Rossetti was well aware of the more concrete aspects of his theme. Our consciousness of this point is strengthened by the lines of the poem which follow:

This is that Lady Beauty, in whose praise
Thy voice and hand shake still, long known to thee
By flying hair and fluttering hem,—the beat
Following her daily of thy heart and feet,
How passionately and irretrievably,
In what fond flight, how many ways and days! (ll. 9-14)

Beyond the sonnet break, as if before the backdrop, the sestet could as easily be directed towards a beautiful and real woman, as to the foremost goddess in Rossetti's pantheon.

It is no accident that the division between octave and sestet is not the only pronounced one in the poem. We

have already noted a turning-point in line seven, with the emphasis on the word "woman"; other more complex movements exist as well. Throughout the poem, dichotomy is countered by unity—the first two lines, for example, present contrasts (love-death, terror-mystery) which brace against the impact of "Beauty enthroned," made more striking by the caesura which follows. The remaining lines of the octave express the division which Rossetti desired the poem to embody, between art and life, the two strains in which the single "Principle of Beauty" might be manifest. So, while on one hand the votary of Beauty lives absorbed in her presence made manifest through her gaze ("I drew it in as simply as my breath"), he also responds to her gaze as he would to a visual work, her eyes being likened to the perennial horizon line of the canvas bent upon him. Against these two diverse approaches to Beauty, we feel a regained sense of unity in lines seven and eight, underscored by the sequence of stresses and alliterative echoes, and culminating in "one law" and one bondman to her command. Across the sonnet break, these contrasts seem to work in reverse. We begin with a focus on a unified force, the diction of line nine enforcing her iconic presence: "This is that Lady Beauty." Devotion to her, however, immediately afterwards takes two forms—that of the poet-painter, whose "voice and hand" celebrate her power, and that of the man himself, living in her presence, feeling her "flying hair and fluttering hem." With one single aim to pursue, the "Principle of Beauty," Rossetti has realized in his paired poem and

painting, "how many ways and days" it may be sought. The dialectic underlying this pair is once again not simply the exercise of contrasts or polarities, but a more complex interrelationship in which efforts at balance are undercut.

In both poem and painting entitled "Venus Verticordia," the third Rossettian pair to be presented to the public through Swinburne's review of the pictures of 1868 (along with the "Lilith" and "Sibylla Palmifera" pairs), we once again note a complex of dynamic contrasts. While some of the more obvious details in the painting (Surtees 173), such as the rose and honeysuckle, are absent from the poem, Rossetti does transfer to the sonnet the two most significant details: the apple and the dart held in the hands of that goddess. The cold and massive beauty in the canvas is haloed by fragile butterflies, one of which poises upon the symbolic dart, another on the apple.³¹ While the woman's hand is coyly drawn close to her body, as if she were uncertain in her designs, her bare left breast (one of the few times Rossetti ever painted any portion of the nude female figure) suggests that she is a brazen and seductive temptress. Of all the contrasts, this one especially is implied in the accompanying sonnet:

A little space her glance is still and coy;
 But if she give the fruit that works her spell,
 Those eyes shall flame as for her Phrygian boy.
 Then shall her bird's strained throat the woe foretell,

³¹ Marillier suggests that these butterflies are "symbolic of lovers who adore for one day," and notes that they contrast with the "power of love, which remains eternal;" p. 134.

And her far seas moan as a single shell,
 And through her dark grove strike the light of Troy.
 (ll. 9-14)

This painting of Rossetti's conveys the same conflicting sense of closeness and distance noted in Lilith and Sibylla Palmifera. While Venus' eyes confront and invite, we are visually separated from her by the thickly blossoming hedge which stands before her. Color operates to "layer" the perspective too, so that our involvement as we scan the canvas spatially is periodically impeded by the change in hue described so vividly by William Sharp:

There is an exquisite continuous gradation and inter-lapse of hue between the silver-grays, the reddish-browns, and the dull yellows of the honeysuckles, the ruddy apple, the auburn tresses of Venus, her lips and eyes, the red and pink roses, the yellow butterflies, and the dark green background.³²

We may conjecture that the introverting-extroverting pattern of response to Rossetti's work was further amplified, in the early version of Venus Verticordia, by the treatment of the original model's eyes. As in many instances, Rossetti's efforts in repainting this canvas were not entirely for the better. An early study for Venus Verticordia (Surtees 173B) done from the Portland Place cook who modeled for the original oil version before it was repainted with Alexa Wilding as model, shows this impulse. Like the eyes of Sibylla Palmifera, they seem while gazing outward to be simultaneously reflecting intense self-involvement, inviting the reader-viewer both to enter into the canvas in an effort at

³² William Sharp, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and a Study (London: Macmillan & Co., 1882), p. 207.

union and to perceive his own isolation. The original design also encourages a sense of isolation by means of a trellis behind the figure which, together with the low wall in front, separates her from the "outside" world. We, like the bird which perches there precariously in a space between the trellis-work, participate in both realms.

The link between reader-viewer and the Venus of the sonnet was strengthened significantly by Rossetti, in the process of revising the poem. In the early manuscript version of the sonnet, the eyes of the enchantress are directed towards what we recognize as accessory details of the canvas, rather than going to the core of the reader-viewer who participates imaginatively in the composite work of art.

Compare

She hath it in her hand to give to thee
 Also within her heart to hold it back;
 She muses, with her eyes upon the track
 Of some dazed moth or honey-seeking bee. (ll. 1-4,
 circa 1868)³³

with,

She hath the apple in her hand for thee,
 Yet almost in her heart would hold it back;
 She muses, with her eyes upon the track
 Of that which in thy spirit they can see. (ll. 1-4,
 1870 Poems)

With the removal of the identification of the reader with "one of these" (l. 5, 1868 version) victims of her spell, he is freed to become not merely an interpreter of symbols, at some remove from the work, but a sympathetic actor in the

³³ Thomas J. Wise, ed., The Ashley Library: A Catalogue of Printed Books, Manuscripts, and Autograph Letters Collected by Thomas J. Wise, (London: privately printed by the Dunedin Press, 1922-36), IX, 114.

drama of painting and poem.

The 1870 poem transmits the sense of wavering nearer and farther spatially through the use of language: not only through the images rendered verbally, but through words like "yet," "alas," and "but," which all restrain and create turns, at points at which we had begun to sense an alluring tone of mildness and sweetness:

She hath the apple in her hand for thee,
 Yet . . . (ll. 1-2)

'Behold, he is at peace,' saith she;
 'Alas! . . . (ll. 5-6)

A little space her glance is still and coy;
 But . . . (ll. 9-10)

These currents work simultaneously in three "waves" against the structural form of the sonnet. That bipartite form is emphasized, however, by the changes in temporal stance within the poem. The octave focuses on the present moment and, as it develops, the reader-viewer may imagine himself the intended victim of the enchantress' spell. Across the sonnet division, however, with the development of the hypothesis of line ten, we are ejected from participation in the narrative moment as we have been from the canvas, as Rossetti bars us not with space, color, and form, but with suggestions of myth and prophesy. Once again Rossetti has done more than reiterate image, tone, and idea; by means of the very form and movement of the paired painting and poem of "Venus Verticordia," he has guided his reader-viewer through identical experiences of participation in, and ultimately isolation from, the work of art.

The picture and poem entitled "Pandora" were created at almost the same time and their creation involves one instance in which biographical data is almost inescapably necessary for their complete explication. For that information, Oswald Doughty's account of Rossetti's work on both "Pandoras" in A Victorian Romantic is most useful.³⁴ For our purposes, the significance of these paired works lies in their shift from the evocation of a sense of distance, created by the use of austere language and classical images, to a sense of deep and impassioned involvement. Certainly, mythology is rendered more personal when we take into account the relevant aspects of Rossetti's relationship with Jane Morris. She, in Rossetti's vision, could truly incur the jealousy of goddesses, or anger them by breaking conventions of marriage and prudence.

Doughty recognizes the division in the poem between the distancing and intellectual portion, the dropped guise, and the resumption of distance with the classical pose; he implies, however, that the painting remains constant in terms of distance, and that the last three lines of the poem express an attempt (an unsuccessful one) to reattain the safety of the impersonal, which to Doughty is the predominant theme of the painting.

Beneath the overt theme of the painting (Surtees 224) as a portrait of Pandora, we may note the same hints of

³⁴ A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1949); see chap. V, "Regenerate Rapture," and specifically, pp. 390-91.

association of that figure with Rossetti's own personal predicament, as expressed in the poem. The only-slightly opened casket suggests reluctant release, more characteristic of Rossetti's situation than of the original myth, and the winged spectres of evil which encircle Pandora/Janey suggest the multiplied confusion and despair such freedom necessarily brings. Significantly too, the "fiery pinions" are variants of the complex of symbols, which includes rings, charms, and prisons, with which Rossetti represented his personal fears for Jane, in portraits of her.³⁵

The painting creates a contrast between the immediate moment and the future, through the juxtaposition of frenzied action (the fluttering of the winged ill-spirits from the casket, to encircle Pandora's head) and the distant, brooding look on Pandora's face. In the later version of this work, a colored crayon replica of 1879 (Surtees 224 R1), this contrast is even more pronounced. In this replica Pandora's gaze becomes a deeply reverberative one, while the spirit forms, more distinct and dramatic in their clarity and repetition of form, draw us more towards the horror of this immediate moment portrayed. The sonnet "Pandora" recreates this contrast between present and future. Rossetti begins with what is one of his characteristic devices in the sonnets for pictures, a direct address to the figure in the painting. We are drawn back through myth to regard the deed which occurred,

³⁵ David Sonstroem, Rossetti and the Fair Lady (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1970), p. 135.

and, before that, the very creation of the fatal gift of the gods. Beyond the sonnet division, however, with the repetition of the phrase "What of the end?" Rossetti suddenly brings us back to the present, frenzied moment which fills the background of the canvas and animates all of the figure but her sad and far-seeing eyes:

What of the end? These beat their wings at will,
The ill-born things, the good things turned to ill,—
Powers of the impassioned hours prohibited,
Aye, clench the casket now! (ll. 9-12)

The rhythm of lines nine and ten, the repetition and inversion of line ten, the alliteration of line eleven, and the exclamation in line twelve, all function to strengthen our sense of this intensified moment. Beyond the exclamation, however, diction and syntax change, and once again we are led away from the immediate. Language is more mannered and formal, and movement much slower, as we return to a contemplation of the future and the suggestion once again of the underlying myth: "Nor canst thou know/If Hope still pent there be alive or dead" (ll. 13-14). Down to this last spectre of Hope still entrapped and saved, both poem and picture reveal Rossetti's remarkable ability to articulate his diverse visions.

The painting Proserpine (Surtees 233) reveals a balance similar to that in Pandora between the impersonal, generally representational quality of myth and the expression of personal and passionate feelings. That Rossetti simultaneously intended to invoke his own situation, as well as a more universal one, may be confirmed by an observation made by M. K. Bequette. In his essay, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti:

The Synthesis of Picture and Poem," Bequette notes that Rossetti frequently used the moment before or after the one which conventionally is chosen when depicting a particular myth. By doing so, Rossetti denies the viewer the opportunity for a stock response, and instead, the viewer recognizes the personal and emotional import of the scene for Rossetti.³⁶ And that, in a portrayal of Proserpine under irreversible bondage to her husband, modeled by Jane Morris, is clear.

In the painting, Proserpine stands in a dark corridor in Hades, before a low wall or table upon which a censor stands (meant by Rossetti to symbolize the attribute of a goddess), casting a thin waft of smoke upwards.³⁷ She gazes broodingly off to the distance, while in her hand she holds a bitten pomegranate, symbol of the bond to her unhappy fate. Behind her head, a square beam of light is visible, cast as if from a window or inlet opened out to the upper world. A branch of ivy, symbolizing memory, curls from a source in the right of the canvas, the exact nature of which is obscured. The sonnet, in Italian, to accompany Proserpine, appears painted in the upper right-hand corner of the canvas, within

³⁶ M. K. Bequette, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Synthesis of Picture and Poem," Hartford Studies in Literature, 4, No. 3 (1972), 222.

³⁷ The execution of Proserpine was marked by a series of calamities and, in an effort to achieve a successful version, eight versions of the work were painted. My discussion will focus, unless mention is made otherwise, on the replica in the Tate Gallery (the Leyland version, Surtees 233 R2) with which readers will be most familiar; see Letters, III, repr. facing p. 1252.

the frame. This type of relationship between poem and painting gives added emphasis to their kinship.

Aside from compositional form and the disposition of the figure, color works most strongly to suggest the interplay of contrasts here. Proserpine seems to strain towards the world of her past, as the bluish-white light sets off her head in stark relief, and its beams light her face, hands, and shoulders with the brightness of the upper regions. The repetition of the bright red of the pomegranate in Proserpine's pensively drawn lips strengthens the mythic allusion by their link, and adds to our sense of the isolation of the figure within her environment. Working against this, the steel-blue of her robe (in addition to the massiness of its folds, especially of the sleeve which drapes over the low frontal barrier) makes her appear very much a part of the gloomy underworld. The background is a similar bluish color, against which the ivy tendril blends its green-blue tint. The very wall against which Proserpine rests, and which separates us from her, is a marble blue-veined and cold which almost merges with her figure.

The sonnet reflects the musings of Proserpine, as she reposes in the attitude in which we find her on canvas.³⁸ To a certain extent the poem reiterates images from the painting: the distant light, palace wall, the overwhelmingly dreary greyness, even Proserpine's far off yet deeply indwelling expression. Instead of suggesting through spatial

³⁸ I will only be concerned in this discussion with the English version of the sonnet.

means the contrast between worlds, the poem uses sound, punctuation, and pauses, to create that dichotomy. The running-on of the first line permits a caesura immediately before the phrase, "one instant," which sounds sharply against the droning of the subsequent words, "no more admitted at my distant palace door." Similarly, line two runs into line five where commas bracket and separate the words, "tasted once," from the description of thralldom in Hades. Again, a caesura in line seven gives emphasis to the immediacy of "chills me," against which we feel the unendurable permanence of "how far away,/The nights that shall be from the days that were." The emphasis is laid on the contrast between upper and lower realms, the fateful moment and the future it has brought, this very moment captured on canvas when Proserpine is touched by our world and the rest of time when she is barred from us.

Contrast works in other ways in both painting and poem. While the painting could, in some respects, merely represent the myth of Proserpine, the choice of that myth is apt, and bitterly so. We cannot help thinking of Jane Morris, enthralled (in Rossetti's eyes, at least) to her husband. Unlike most of Rossetti's works, which can function free of biographical implications, here, as in "Pandora," those facts and suggestions must intervene. Not surprisingly then, the painting and poem of "Proserpine" display a similar phase of departure from the framework of classical myth. In this case the myth is "sandwiched" between references to (or passages suggestive of) biographical facts. The poem appears

to be symmetrically split as was "Lilith" and for the same purpose; the two dashes separate and define the contrast between two states, variations upon which we have already noted. Before the first dash (l. 2) is a reference to the light cast upon memory (noted in the painting) and beyond the last (l. 13), the mournful cry of "Woe's me for thee!". The portion of the poem framed between is divided nearly in two. The first part could be a recounting of the familiar myth:

Afar, the flowers of Enna from this drear
Dire fruit, which, tasted once, must thrall me here.
Afar those skies from this Tartarean grey
That chills me: (ll. 4-7)

Yet beyond the caesura, it becomes clear that the poem has shifted in focus to Rossetti's personal concerns, and to the unhappy split between past and future which both he and his beloved feel. In all, half the poem's lines suggest distance, and half, heart-felt closeness. Through this contrast and the technique of "framing," the poem corresponds to the painting in which myth and man mingle, and where the form of Proserpine is constricted against harsh planes.

Myth also interplays with our imaginative involvement (distinguished from Rossetti's), a process which the sonnet structure encourages rather than impedes. In the sestet, Proserpine turns from musing on her history to seek another soul, and her isolation seems broken for a brief time. Not entirely does the poem assert the separation of the two worlds, as Bequette has suggested.³⁹ Just as

³⁹ p. 224; Bequette's observations about the link

Rossetti draws us into a relation with the figure on canvas, here in the poem we imaginatively enter as much as we are able into Proserpine's world, and would, if we could, add our voices sympathetically to that final cry of "Woe's me for thee, unhappy Proserpine!"⁴⁰ The experience embodied in both painting and poem is intended by Rossetti to be not only that of the character portrayed or the artist's expressive evocation of that character, but one in which we, as reader-viewers, become engaged in the complex interplay of opposing impulses.

La Bella Mano (Surtees 240) is an uncomplicated painting for which a similarly styled poem was written by Rossetti. The central figure is a beautiful woman who washes her hands while two youthful angels attend her. As they gaze obediently at her, she casts her eyes off to the distance, as if absorbed in thought. She is dressed in a maroon gown,

created in the painting, between worlds, appears valid however. He notes: "The size of the female figure in the painting suggests that she is very near the surface of the canvas . . . the background is solid and this forces the scene to the front of the canvas. The strong light cast on the background wall presumably originates in the real world of Enna, but it illuminates a sharply outlined area: in terms of visual logic, it must emanate from a source not more than a few feet from the surface of the painting. Thus a tension exists between the assumed verbal distance of the two worlds, and their actual visual closeness."

⁴⁰ While Bequette recognizes the importance of a sympathetic reading of the poem, he is primarily concerned with the sonnet only insofar as it assists in bringing the reader-viewer into relationship with the visual work of art; thus, we may note, Bequette joins those critics of Rossetti who find one art form predominant.

the rose-colored sleeves of which are turned up to bare her arms. The room behind her is filled with unusual objects, many of which can be recognized in others of Rossetti's paintings and which are listed in the catalogue of items for auction after his death.⁴¹ Behind her head is a large circular mirror in which the room, and a bright fire within it, is distinguishable.

While the painting is presented by many critics as a representative example of the decorative inanities of Rossetti's later career, there are in it certain subtleties of contrast, if no "exalted or poetic range of thought."⁴² While the painting was in progress, Rossetti pointed to one aspect of the work in a letter to Thomas Hake:

I am now engaged on a picture to be called La Bella Mano. It is a good-sized Titianesque subject—a girl washing her hands with two attendant Cupids—and will, I hope, for flesh-painting and general painter's qualities, surpass any picture of mine of that sensuous realistic type.⁴³

Certainly the "sensuous realistic" nature of the work is brought out in the rich flesh tones, purples and scarlet, and in the splendid surroundings. We also perceive many more-than-mundane elements within the work, however. The act itself in which the woman is engaged bears overtones of

⁴¹ 16, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea: The Valuable Contents of the Residence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti . . . [Catalogue of the Sale] (London: T. G. Wharton, Marton, & Co., 5-7 July 1882).

⁴² Marillier, p. 185.

⁴³ Letters, III, 1324 (To Thomas Gordon Hake, 20 December 1874).

ritual rather than of the ordinary, and we may note that ewer and basin were often used as a motif in representing the celebration of the Eucharist. Divested of Christian symbolism, these accessories still may connote the mystery of the other-worldly. The setting itself is almost too luxuriant to be a natural one, with many objects seemingly selected specifically for their exotic or unusual characteristics. The predominance of the color gold also gives a rare or jewel-like quality to the scene, as we cast our eyes on the tray of rings and bracelets, the mirror-frame, the basin and ewer, and the toilet castor (which Rossetti stubbornly went so far as to have gilded, being silver originally, for the effect).⁴⁴ All these details help to reinforce the connection between the woman with the beautiful hands and the Goddess of Love, which is implied in both painting and poem. We may compare the first four lines, for example, with the carefully depicted detail in the painting:

O LOVELY hand, that thy sweet self dost lave
 In that thy pure and proper element,
 Whence erst the Lady of Love's high advent
 Was born, and endless fires sprang from the wave:
 (ll. 1-4)

Not insignificantly, the basin in which "La Bella Mano" washes is shaped like a scallop-shell.

The juxtaposition of goddess-like and human-like is carried over in the depiction of the attendants. That they are meant to be supernatural beings is implied by their

⁴⁴ G. C. Williamson, Murray Marks and His Friends: A Tribute of Regard (London: John Lane, 1919), p. 82.

wings, and that their order is that of cupids, rather than angels, implied by the brilliant red color of those appendages, which overpowers any sense of innocence or purity suggested by their white garments.⁴⁵ Although apparently supernatural beings, however, their actions are disconcertingly mundane. One draws a towel from a roller rack upon the wall, while the other patiently holds a tray upon which rest the lady's rings and bracelets. When we look once again at the poem, a similar suggestion of the merely human facet of this scene is suggested, although not through the agency of an attendant, but of a lover:

until thou be,
O hand! heart-handsel'd in a lover's hand. (ll. 13-14)

Against the sumptuousness of rings and rites, this simple image forces a turn in attitude towards both the poem and the picture which it was written to accompany.

Contrast between the heavenly and the earthly is depicted in another of Rossetti's pairs, the painting entitled A Vision of Fiammetta (Surtees 252), and the poem, simply "Fiammetta."⁴⁶ In this instance, however, a Christian rather than classical framework provides the contrasting suggestions of the otherworldly. In A Vision of

⁴⁵ In a later study of the same work (Surtees 240D) the element of the supernatural is even more pronounced in the fact that the attendants hold more evocative objects: one, a closed casket, the other, a smoking censor.

⁴⁶ The poem obviously refers to this painting rather than to another entitled Fiammetta (Surtees 192), which was painted in 1866.

Fiammetta, Rossetti represents the beloved of Boccaccio, to whom many of that poet's sonnets, several of which Rossetti translated, are addressed. One image in the painting, in fact, was suggested by the first two lines of one poem translated by Rossetti, entitled "Of his last sight of Fiammetta":

Round her red garland and her golden hair
I saw a fire about Fiammetta's head; (ll. 1-2)

Around the woman's head appears a fiery aureole, in which the form of an angel is visible, as echoed in Rossetti's own poem, "Fiammetta":

The angel circling round her aureole
Shimmers in flight against the tree's grey bole;
(ll. 10-11)⁴⁷

In the painting Fiammetta stands amidst apple blossoms, lifting one branch above her head with her right hand, and pushing aside another with her left. Rossetti seems to have been especially conscious of color contrast in this work. Fiammetta wears a red robe and has reddish hair, while the blossoms by which she is surrounded range from red to rose to white. Against this predominance of red, we are forced to focus on her blue eyes (which confront the viewer more frontally than usual even in Rossetti's eye-centered works) and the blue butterflies which hover in the background. These colors play up the contrast between body and soul

⁴⁷ Rossetti went to great lengths to get grey bark for his studies of the background apple blossoms, ever frustrated by the fact that samples brought to him had black bark; see [Herbert P. Horne], "Rossetti: Some Extracts From His Letters to Mr. Frederic Shields," The Century Guild Hobby Horse, NS 4 (July 1889), 95-96.

which both painting and poem convey.⁴⁸ Above Fiammetta's head a scarlet bird is also seen, in the moment it appears to be taking off in flight. Even the overall tone of the painting, a muted and sombre one, suggests the contrast, held in balance, between the world of sense and life, and the world of spirit, with the radiance of the aureole about Fiammetta setting off the darker backdrop.

Initially we may respond to the pair, and especially to the painting, as an articulation of the simple contrast between life and death, drawn from Boccaccio. The emblems in the painting seem to work in a conventional manner, soaring bird and butterflies, fallen blossoms, and angel, all reminding us that the canvas portrays more than a beautiful woman in a natural arbor. The poem does more than echo these images or amplify them, however, and in fact Rossetti makes us aware of this through the departures which he makes from Boccaccio's poem. The motive for these departures may be explained by the double meaning implied in the first line of Rossetti's poem: "Behold Fiammetta, shown in Vision here." In his emphatic use of the word "Vision," Rossetti seems to suggest that, in the case of this pair, he is not simply recalling Boccaccio's spiritual and visionary love, but more concretely, something visualized. We recognize that the poem

⁴⁸ The consciousness of color interplay is evident in the careful choice by Rossetti of what objects take which colors; ie., symbols of soul, eyes and butterflies, are blue, while the flowers and the sensuous form of the beautiful woman are in red tones. Further evidence of Rossetti's consciousness of color symbolism comes from his notes in Works, where he expresses thoughts on color.

is in part about a painting, and, as a result, the characteristic tension between contrasts begins to form and grow. Immediately thereafter, other complexes of contrary ideas and images attract our attention. One contrast which we may note is that between distance and proximity. In the painting, the figure is shadowed and blocked by branches and blossoms. Despite this, her gesture suggests an opening up and a coming forward:

she, with reassuring eyes most fair,
A presage and a promise stands; (ll. 12-13)

This contrast works against the more immediately perceived one in this pair; although Fiammetta appears to draw nearer, and the distance between we and she to narrow, in fact of course she is approaching not life (which is our world) but death and "afterlife."

The sonnet captures the same contrast between distance and closeness with its form. In the first eight lines, Rossetti develops an emphasis on stasis ("Behold Fiammetta," "she stands") or on arrested and distinct action. Each action is seen as separate, not as part of a continuity. Even the falling blossoms are "separate petals." This impulse is emphasized by a contrast within the octave when, in line seven, we are made aware of the absolute earthliness and transitoriness of these images, that awareness made more acute with the use of the past tense: "Life shaken and shower'd and flown, and Death drawn near." As if to highlight the transition to a contrary state, across the sonnet break Rossetti declares "All stirs with change." Now the

movements suggest continuity in time, and the verbs which Rossetti chooses are in the present tense ("garments beat," "the angel circling . . ./Shimmers," "she . . ./ . . .stands"). The sestet is also contrastingly positive, ending with an image of life and light, to overcome "Death's dark storms."⁴⁹ This dynamic, which operates concurrently with the Boccaccian elements in poem and painting, is Rossetti's signature.

A Sea-Spell (Surtees 248) was initially inspired by poetry from another source, the lines from Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," "A damsel with a dulcimer/In a vision once I saw."⁵⁰ Like the previously discussed work, however, this painting, and the poem with which it is paired, developed much more towards Rossetti's private and personal vision, until the early source was left behind. In the completed version of the painting, a beautiful siren sits and delicately plucks the strings of a strange instrument, while the wind stirs everything about her.⁵¹ The contrast between human and

⁴⁹ Compare with the concluding lines of Boccaccio's sonnet as translated by Rossetti:

And with these stings
Of sorrow, and with life's most weary load
I dwell, who fain would be where she is gone.

⁵⁰ Designer and Writer, p. 95.

⁵¹ John Hollander, in a paper which deals in part with the emblematic use of musical instruments in the nineteenth century ("Rossetti's Music," typescript of paper [unpublished] presented at the 1975 convention of the MLA), notes that this instrument, while dulcimer-like (having "at least six visible strings"), has some of the characteristics of a more generalized Romantic image; as it hangs in a tree, an emblem of feeling as the wind blows across its strings, it suggests an aeolian harp. Hollander's remarks bring to the fore the fact that not only did Rossetti use musical mis-

supernatural, perhaps de-emphasized by the fleshly quality of the sea-siren, is strengthened by the pose in which she appears, languidly leaning over her instrument. For, as David Sonstroem notes in Rossetti and the Fair Lady, "Since music is accompanied by traces of deep thought in the principals of Rossetti's paintings, we may consider music to be the sound of the soul, and its presence in a work of Rossetti's an indication of the soul."⁵² Above the damsel's flower-encircled head a seagull is caught in flight, almost encircled too. The prevailing feeling transmitted by the painting is not one of imminent disaster or termination, but of hypnotizing enchantment and a pull, in spite of numerous suggestions of movement, towards stasis. The pattern of bird caught in the branches, and the lady encircled by flowers and the swirling folds of her gown, seems to bind the viewer. Likewise, in the poem, the bird is "spell-bound," the woman is entranced, and even the reader is lured closer like the "fated mariner." The poem also employs suggestions of the external and internal, and uses the structural form of the sonnet itself, to transmit the contrasts of the

nomers but (something which Hollander never directly states) critics of Rossetti's have perpetuated these inaccuracies. That the discussion of Rossetti's graphic work is often marked by incorrect details is pointed to by Hollander, who notes that the critic [Stephens] writing in the Athenaeum, 14 April 1877, describes the instrument in A Sea-Spell as "two-stringed." More serious, I would suggest, is the implication behind the repetition of this misinformation, ie., by William Sharp, who in Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and a Study (p. 247) once again calls the instrument a "two-stringed lute."

⁵² Sonstroem, p. 77.

painting. The first four lines record an audible sound, the wild notes of the siren's instrument. With line five, however, Rossetti turns to evocation of the "inner" sounds of the siren's world:

But to what sounds her listening ear stoops she?
 What nether world gulf-whispers doth she hear?
 In answering echoes from what plenisphere,
 Along the wind, along the estuary? (ll. 5-8)

These lines not only suggest another realm of sound, but invite us with their questioning to project ourselves imaginatively into the siren's world and to share her isolation. In an entirely different manner from the sea-bird and her other "victims," we are drawn into her domain. Across the sonnet break, not only she, but we, "sink[s] into her spell." Suddenly, however, with the caesura, Rossetti turns to the outer realm again, and to the evocation of the siren's song. Once again we find ourselves outside the imaginative situation, merely witnesses to the unwary who, drawn by her plaintive tune, must meet their death. Interestingly, the siren on canvas does not sing; instead of sound, it is color, form, and space, that leads us through an equivalent experience of contraries. Both poem and painting are open, inviting, and yet encompassing in their effect, reminding us of many other pairs of Rossetti's paintings and poems.

Yet the relationship between painting and poem is not simply one of verbal reiteration of the images, or even basic impulses, of the painting. A curious point about this pair has been overlooked until now, and made more striking by the fact that statements to the contrary often occur. At

least according to William Rossetti, the poem "A Sea-Spell" was written in 1869, while we know the painting was not begun until 1875; thus, this would appear to be another instance of painting being preceded by poem.⁵³ It is not often that we question William Rossetti, but several factors make the dating of the poem (at least as we are familiar with it), doubtful. In the period before publication of the Poems, when correspondence brings to light almost all of Rossetti's compositions, no mention is made of the poem. Further, major collections of manuscripts and proofs, as well as William Rossetti's diary (in which his brother's compositions, both visual and verbal, are frequently mentioned) are silent on the matter. On the other hand, we have ample evidence that the painting was begun in 1875, completed in 1877, and we know that in 1877 both poem and painting entitled "A Sea-Spell" were discussed in the Athenaeum.⁵⁴ We must assume, therefore, that the usual pattern of composition, as well as the basic impulses of other Rossettian pairs, here prevailed.⁵⁵ It would seem that a

⁵³ Most critics identify "The Blessed Damozel" as the only instance in which poem preceded painting. As I will expand upon later, this category must also include pairs in which designs were later executed for literary works which are distinguished by the fact that they were incomplete at the time the design was composed, or were subsequently revised to their final form.

⁵⁴ [Frederic George Stephens], "Mr. Rossetti's New Pictures," Athenaeum, No. 2581 (14 April 1877), p. 487.

⁵⁵ See the Appendix for further discussion of the problem of chronology in the "Sea-Spell" pair.

creative dynamic was established, in which the painting lent elements to the poem, which in turn effected the painting as it changed from "the dulcimer picture" into A Sea-Spell. In this pair we very clearly witness an interchange of impulses rather than the transposition of painting into poem.

Similar images of branch, bird, and lady appear in another paired poem and painting, both entitled "The Day-Dream." In the painted version (Surtees 259), a pensive woman sits in the fork of a sycamore tree, with a book on her knee and a sprig of honeysuckle cast over it. In both poem and painting, the depiction of the act of daydreaming becomes absorbed in the symbolizing of Reverie. We must constantly be pulled back, in the poem, to a sense of the specific situation, through concrete and anchoring images like the book and blossom. Likewise, in the painting, we cannot discern if the figure is the dreamer, or the day-dream itself. All we do know for certain is the declaration by Rossetti, in another poem about a tree-borne love, that "I knew never but this dream alone" ("The Orchard Pit," l. 17). The new buds and new leaves in this paired poem and picture seem to convey the constancy of that dream.

These images of growth in both painted and written versions of "The Day-Dream" reflect more, however, than a transposition between media. They help to develop a contrast in both, which is integrated with that between natural fact and symbol, reality and dream. While the tension between these opposites tends more strongly towards the latter polarities, the relationship between poem and painting

illuminates the powerful sense of the passage of time, which works against the timelessness of the daydream. The painting was originally intended as a study of Mrs. Morris with snowdrops, symbols of spring, and the work was to be entitled Vanna Primavera (Janey in Springtime).⁵⁶ With the passage of years, the springtime romance mellowed into an autumnal one, and the snowdrops were replaced by the honeysuckle, which "seems to be longer in all the year round than anything else."⁵⁷ Our perception of the development of this work, from the Kelmscott years to the twilight of Rossetti's life, is fully clarified only through the accompanying sonnet. There, the continual interplay between time past, passing, and to come is set against a sense of continuity over and beyond time:

The thronged boughs of the shadowy sycamore
 Still bear young leaflets half the summer through;
 From when the robin 'gainst the unhidden blue
 Perched dark, till now, deep in the leafy core,
 The embowered throstle's urgent wood-notes soar
 Through summer silence. Still the leaves come new;
 Yet never rosy-sheathed as those which drew
 Their spiral tongues from spring-buds heretofore.
 (ll. 1-8)

The reverie of the poem, like the dream-vision of Rossetti's canvas, may be continuous, from spring to autumn, yet both are suggestive of the transitory too, captured in the figure on canvas midst seasonal change and transmuted,

⁵⁶ Helen Rossetti Angeli, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Friends and Enemies (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), p. 216.

⁵⁷ John Bryson, ed., in association with Janet Camp Troxell, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris: Their Correspondence (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 154 (Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Jane Morris, 19 July 1880).

through exclamation and present tense, in the poem:

Lo! tow'rd deep skies, not deeper than her look,
 She dreams; till now on her forgotten book
 Drops the forgotten blossom from her hand. (ll. 12-14)

Clearly, in this pair, poem and painting work with each other to bring out the complex of contrasts only partly illuminated in each alone.

The inability to escape for long from recurrent contrasts and dilemmas is evident in another painting and poem completed late in Rossetti's career, and both entitled "Astarte Syriaca." According to William Rossetti,

Into the Venus Astarte he had put his utmost intensity of thinking, feeling, and method—he had aimed to make it equally strong in abstract sentiment and in physical grandeur—an ideal of the mystery of beauty, offering a sort of combined quintessence of what he had endeavored in earlier years to embody in the two several types of Sibylla Palmifera and Lilith.⁵⁸

The ostensible subject of the pair is the Syrian Venus, Astarte, who is a foreigner in the corpus of myths from which Rossetti usually borrowed. As she appears in the painting, dressed in blue-green with silver chain bound about her bosom and hips, she is a commanding figure. Her form is at once alluring and repelling, for while her hands suggestively finger the wrought chain binding her figure, the lurid colors of the canvas deter us from responding by imaginatively drawing closer. Her large shoulders are shadowed by a mass of dark hair, and her face, turned directly towards us, captivates with its full red lips and deep-set dark eyes. Behind her, two green-winged attendants stand, one on either

⁵⁸ Designer and Writer, p. 99.

side. Each carries a torch, and gazes upwards in awe and questioning. Between them, and in the background, is visible the setting sun contending with the waxing crescent moon which is brighter, but of a colder light. Directly above Venus Astarte's head is a stylized purple star, representing the planet over which she rules. The circularity of the composition, developed through arms, faces, and atmospheric detail, helps us focus more strongly on the contrasts developed on canvas.

The poem reiterates rather obviously many of the images noted on canvas: "twofold girdle," "Love-freighted lips and absolute eyes," "Torch-bearing" ministers; what are most strikingly transmitted in the poem are the images of sun and moon, repeated in the first and last lines:

MYSTERY: lo! betwixt the sun and moon

 Betwixt the sun and moon a mystery

This repetition helps to dramatize contrast within both the painting and the poem.⁵⁹ The first line, with its exclamation, draws our attention to the central figure. As the poem highlights details from the canvas, we are drawn more and more towards Venus Astarte, in whose image opposites are joined together ("whereof the heaven and earth commune"), and by whose lips and eyes, the microcosm and macrocosm touch

⁵⁹ Stein makes an interesting evaluation of the purpose of this repetition: "His [Rossetti's] penchant for repeating phrases in the first and final lines stems from the same assumptions: the interpretation of art is an ongoing process, a ritual in which we must fully and continuously immerse ourselves if we are to experience a painting's transforming power;" The Ritual of Interpretation, p. 141.

("pulse of hearts to the sphere's dominant tune"). Across the sonnet break, focus shifts to the attendants, and we find ourselves now withdrawing. No longer are we compelled to worship her, but witness the worship by "all thrones of light" instead. We begin to draw closer again with emphasis on "that face" which, in any form of worship, is central; and finally the last line, echoing the first, makes us fully captive in her worship once again.

Another possible implication behind the repetition in the poem of first and last lines comes not from an examination of the poem, but in a turn to another, far earlier, painting. In Dantis Amor (Surtees 117), of which several versions were made, Love stands in the center of the canvas, holding a dial and an inverted torch. Behind that figure appears a diagonal line, from lower left to upper right, dividing the canvas, and in the upper corner is the sun, in the lower, the moon. At least on one level, the painting is an expression of conflicting choices in love.⁶⁰ Love assumed many guises in Rossetti's works: at times a beautiful woman (she of earth, invoked in line five of "Astarte Syriaca"), at other times a mysterious and mighty goddess (heaven's creature, also suggested in the dichotomy in that line). Symbolism in Astarte Syriaca has been altered only superficially from the earlier work and, perhaps significantly, only the last six lines of the sonnet, precisely those lines which contain the images of Dantis Amor, actually appear

⁶⁰ Doughty, p. 264.

painted on this canvas:

Torch-bearing, her sweet ministers compel
 All thrones of light beyond the sky and sea
 The witnesses of Beauty's face to be:
 That face, of Love's all-penetrative spell
 Amulet, talisman, and oracle,—
 Betwixt the sun and moon a mystery.

The single focus on these lines, and their suggestion of reconciliation of opposites, is overturned and made more dynamic through the association of Astarte Syriaca with Dante Amor. That association reminds us that however frequently Rossetti brings together and attempts to merge opposites, as always, for him, conflicts and polarities persist.

III

A third class of paired visual and verbal works by Rossetti exists, the discussion of which should be introduced by examining the paired works entitled "The Blessed Damozel." While the painting (Surtees 244) resembles the three-quarter length female studies previously examined, as a pair, "The Blessed Damozel" is distinguished by several important differences. One, mentioned earlier, is that it is commonly accepted as the only instance in which poem antedates painting; another is the poem's form, for it is a longer lyric rather than a sonnet. Finally, we may consider it an example of the narrative mode, having plot, setting, and characterization. One or more of these distinguishing characteristics (different compositional sequence, different poetic form, and narrative impulse) occur in others of Rossetti's paired visual and verbal works, which fit neither the religious-symbolic category of many of the early pairs,

nor the descriptive-emblematic category in which we may place the pairs dealing with single figures. In some instances such pairs diverge from others in Rossetti's corpus for all three reasons.

Because the painting of The Blessed Damozel follows the poem of the same name, critics have frequently referred to it as an "illustration" of that poem.⁶¹ What this point of view commonly leads to is an exploration of the transposition, to the graphic work, of the theme and images of the poem. We must therefore question the presence of polarities, which we have witnessed in all the pairs previously discussed, in the poetic version of "The Blessed Damozel." Since they cannot be attributed to the clarification of compositional tensions in a graphic work, we must assume that by and of themselves they are meant to convey an issue or problem basic to Rossetti's creative impulse. That issue is the complexity of experience, and the manifold modes of perception through which we attempt to come to terms with our world, our life, and love.

⁶¹ Rossetti intended the poem to have a graphic counterpart many years before it was finally realized (see Letters, I, 307 [To Ford Madox Brown, 8 December 1856]). At one point, Morris intended to execute a painted version of "The Blessed Damozel," but never did so for the patron who commissioned the work died (see Letters, I, 325 [To William Bell Scott, June 1857]). Note: I will deal with the Graham version, now in the Fogg Museum, rather than the Leyland version. According to letters of Rossetti's the Leyland replica was clearly done as a "pot-boiler," and many of the details of the earlier work were abandoned for simpler, more stylized forms (ie., the background merely depicts one infant angel, and two other figures, rather than the mass of lovers embracing); see Marillier, repr. facing p. 188.

The most obvious contrast in the poem is between the real world and an ideal one. Critics have long been reconciled to Rossetti's juxtaposition of the spiritual and sensuous, and have attributed it to various motives, from reevaluation of the religious symbol to an assertion of a visionary world view. The poem portrays the damozel in heaven, and her lover on earth, and wavers between suggestions of their union or integration, and an overriding sense of separation. So, in terms of imagery and diction in the poem, there is continual mingling of contraries. The symbolic accessories with which the damozel is donned (seven stars in her hair, three lilies in hand, and a white rose upon her robe) seem inconsistent with her physicality (yellow hair along her back, and warm bosom). The heavenly maiden longs for her earthly lover, and her sentiments range from humble awe and solemn prayer to quite unseemly passion. Yet for every moment when the damozel's musings suggest the "interpenetration of physical and spiritual worlds in the lives of heavenly lovers," there is another when she fails to convince us of their merger.⁶²

The difficulty of merging these opposites is highlighted by the form which the poem takes, with its alternation between the damozel's heavenly musings, and her earthly lover's parenthetically interspersed thoughts. Against her confident anticipation, we note his inability

⁶² The phrase within quotation marks is Stein's; The Ritual of Interpretation, p. 150.

to believe in their eventual union. As the contrasting sections alternate, the division between modes of vision is more and more actively dramatized. The disparity between merger and irreconcilability of opposites is further emphasized by the difference between the damozel's musings and her lover's. While within her meditations little occurs to accentuate the contrast between heavenly and earthly, the use of natural detail clearly contrasted with vision within the lover's reflections emphasizes his skepticism and the possibility of never joining the two realms:

Surely she leaned o'er me—her hair
 Fell all about my face. . .
 Nothing: the autumn-fall of leaves. (ll. 3-6, stanza 4)

Curiously, while in the damozel's musings heavenly union is expressed in increasingly earthly equivalents, the lover's visions seem to suggest more and more the reality of her eternal existence. And while natural effect is used more frequently in the descriptive passages which characterize the damozel, in the passages of the lover's musings the heavenly breaks through the natural and real world:

The sun was gone now; the curled moon
 Was like a little feather
 Fluttering far down the gulf; and now
 She spoke through the still weather.
 Her voice was like the voice the stars
 Had when they sang together.

(Ah sweet! Even now, in that bird's song,
 Strove not her accents there,
 Fain to be hearkened? When those bells
 Possessed the mid-day air,
 Strove not her steps to reach my side
 Down all the echoing stair?) (stanzas 10-11)

This shift culminates in the last stanza:

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

The simple and direct quality of the lover's last parenthetical comments implies a move towards faith in the damozel's ideal presence, while the damozel's despair brings her closer towards the initial perspective of her lover. This gradual shift, and development of contrasts within contrasts, is itself representative of Rossetti's ultimate point of view. Opposites may intermingle, but never may successfully merge. As Stein notes, "In these final lines of "The Blessed Damozel" we are left with two experiences; in the context of the speaker's situation one is real and the other imagined. But rather than choose between them, the poem stresses their interdependence."⁶³

Much critical attention towards "The Blessed Damozel" has focused on the relationship between the damozel and her lover in the poem, a frequent suggestion being that the whole matter may exist only in the lover's imagination. The damozel's passages, within quotation marks, may be purely fictive, and represent the earthly lover's attempt to posit and encourage the continued existence in eternity of his beloved. This would account for the lack of synthesis of earthly and heavenly details since his effort could only be successful to a certain degree. The presence of a narrator's voice, however, indicates a more complex tension within the

⁶³ Ibid., p. 152.

poem for, once recognized, it becomes Rossetti's vehicle for transmitting the powerful sense of opposites. While neither view would disagree with Jerome McGann's statement that "formally the poem is written from this side of paradise," it is important to recognize that imaginatively, tension between opposites does certainly exist.⁶⁴ In some sense the narrator becomes a counterpart to the reader-viewer, as mediator between contrary visions. Whether we perceive the imaginative premise of the poem to include damozel and lover, or lover alone, the powerful evocation of the vision of the blessed damozel helps to dramatize the polarities of which Rossetti was intensely conscious.

Since chronology prevents critics from regarding the poem as a tool in the "reading" of the painting, as it is for Rossetti's sonnets for his own pictures, the painting is instead considered a guide to the way in which we are to read the poem. As previously noted, the picture is accepted as the graphic expression of the dialectic within the poem. The use of the predella, which portrays the lover, certainly has a function which counterparts the use of contrasting voices in the poem. The relationship between larger and smaller canvas is more complex, however, and reflects the interweaving of opposites evident in the poem.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Jerome McGann, "Rossetti's Significant Details," Victorian Poetry, 7 (1969), 49.

⁶⁵ The fact that the predella was suggested by the patron who purchased The Blessed Damozel, William Graham, shouldn't invalidate the significance of the graphic form of this work, for according to William Rossetti, his brother

It is usual for reader-viewers to note the greater physicality of the image of the damozel in the painting than in the poem. They grant the occasionally tangible details in the stanzas describing the damozel, but note the greater predominance of such details on canvas. Absent too, are the cosmic images of the poem, which accompany the descriptive stanzas about the damozel:

It was the rampart of God's house
 That she was standing on;
 By God built over the sheer depth
 The which is Space begun;
 So high, that looking downward thence
 She scarce could see the sun.

It lies in Heaven, across the flood
 Of ether, as a bridge.
 Beneath, the tides of day and night
 With flame and darkness ridge
 The void, as low as where this earth
 Spins like a fretful midge. (stanzas 5-6)

These lines, which evoke a scene not unlike a Martin painting, could not be transposed on canvas without losing the close-up focus on the damozel. Instead, the range and depth of time and space in the heavenly domain of the damozel is suggested by means of the repetition of form, and by the use of color and light. Behind the damozel we observe pairs of lovers embracing.⁶⁶ Their positions are all identical or nearly so, and the faces and clothing of each pair are the same. Their flesh tones are ash-white, giving them an un-

had of his own accord contemplated the same thing; Designer and Writer, p. 104.

⁶⁶ Between 1870 and 1881, Rossetti revised the seventh stanza of the poem, to make more emphatic the contrast between the damozel and the pairs of "lovers, newly met;" compare:

earthly aspect, and the spots of sky between them are a vague, golden color, suggestive of the wide gulf of Space. These forms give graphic embodiment to the eternal realm evoked in the poem, the continuity of infinite moments suggested far more clearly in the replicas which inform the background, than any literal "illustration" of "souls mounting up to God." As our eyes range from pair to pair, these figures truly convey the impression of "lovers, newly met," although their forms must, by nature of the medium, be permanently before us. Also effective in the depiction of the ethereal world are the rows of hedge which separate the paired lovers' forms from those of the other pairs. This sense of "layering" the canvas makes the visual passage through space broken, and more time-consuming to scan, especially in comparison to the single scene portrayed in the predella.

As noted earlier, contradictions to the ethereality of the damozel exist in painting as well as poem; not only are those contrasting images of the poem transposed in paint, however, but other details as well which are suggestive of

Heard hardly, some of her new friends
 Amid their loving games
 Spake evermore among themselves
 Their virginal chaste names;
 And the souls mounting up to God
 Went by her like thin flames. (1870 version)

with:

Around her, lovers, newly met
 'Mid deathless love's acclaims,
 Spoke evermore among themselves
 Their heart-remembered names;
 And the souls mounting up to God
 Went by her like thin flames. (1881 version)

the same conflict in impulse. Most obvious is the damozel's white gauze-like scarf, which flutters about in a supposedly heavenly "void." The damozel's gesture itself is an anxious one, for her hands, while holding the emblematic lilies, seem to fidget restlessly and loosen their grasp. The roses which overflow the bar on which the damozel leans seem to bear a naturalistic, rather than symbolic, appearance. Finally, the three angelic forms in the foreground serve to close the space which other details work so hard to open out. Instead of permitting the bar before the damozel to separate her from our earthly world, the presence of figures, however "heavenly," before her, brings the damozel closer into our field rather than that of the lovers united in heaven.

In the predella, likewise, less transposition of detail from the poem than transmutation of impulse occurs. To be sure, we see the "autumn-fall of leaves," and a representation of the grieving, musing lover. The predella gives us more, however, implied rather than directly stated in the poem. The meandering river in the background reinforces our consciousness of the temporal world in which the lover dwells, as does the transient pink gleam of the sky. On the other hand, the predella, like the larger portion of the canvas, employs contraries as well, which work against the dominant impulse. The lover's position of repose, hands clasped and gaze heavenward, belies his anxiety and doubt. The accessories about him of sword, pouch, and sandals, make him appear a pilgrim of a sort, whose search and questioning, as in the poem, may ultimately bring him closer to faith, and

to belief in the realm he can only know as yet in vision. Just as in the poem the damozel's longer passages balance against the lover's parenthetical remarks because the burden is with the earthly perspective, so here, the predella, though smaller, is balanced by our outside and earthly stance as reader-viewers. The painting reminds us that the poem presents not merely a visionary experience provoked by grief and yearning, not even one made "real" by the medium of imagination. Rather, it emphasizes the complex play of contrasts in the poem and, in its apt structure, makes no commitment as to which perspective ultimately prevails.

Subsequent to the composition of several longer lyrics in balladic or narrative form, as well as one work in prose, Rossetti later designed a parallel graphic work. Often the written work was never completed or, in several instances, although completed underwent dramatic changes over the years. Similarly complex circumstances were involved in the composition of "The Bride's Prelude." According to William Michael, Rossetti began this poem (originally named "Bridchamber Talk") in 1847-1849, returning to it for revision in 1854 and at other intermittent periods. The poem was finally printed in 1881, although still a fragment, to fill the gap created by the separation of the earlier volume of Poems into two parts, and the removal of the sonnets to Ballads and Sonnets.⁶⁷ Although the whereabouts of neither of the two

⁶⁷ Designer and Writer, p. 172; William notes in Works that the poem was also revised towards 1859-60, and that a conclusion was contemplated around 1878.

designs which Rossetti executed for "The Bride's Prelude" are known, reproductions do give us an adequate idea of them.⁶⁸ We can see that as far as the more complete design (Surtees 221) goes, it does convey principal images and ideas from the poem. The bare shoulders of the figure nearest us, in the Marillier reproduction, suggest graphically the oppressive heat evoked at various points in the poem. The two girls sit by the opened window, absorbed as much in themselves as in each other. To convey the sense of enclosure which is effected in the poem through the frequent mention of bowers, recesses, and chambers, Rossetti sweeps the curtain towards the foreground figure; there is no inconsistency in this motion, since clearly the weight of her form between the fabric and the backrest of the chair holds the curtain in place, and thus no suggestion of a breeze is being made. The recurrent motif of oppressive enclosure is also reiter-

⁶⁸ Two drawings not catalogued in Surtees, reproductions of which are in the collection of William E. Fredeman, may be related to those designs for "The Bride's Prelude" mentioned in the Catalogue Raisonné. One bears a marked similarity to the design (Surtees 221A) reproduced in T. Martin Wood's Drawings of D. G. Rossetti (London: Newnes, n.d.), pl. XXV, and the other, which exists only as a drawing on the block, seems to me to bear a rough compositional parallel to the design in Marillier (p. 183) discussed above (Surtees 221). It is possible to conjecture that this design was executed some time during the 1850's, when Rossetti was involved in other designs for wood engravings, and when he and Lizzie Siddal were contemplating collaborating on an illustrated volume of verse. I shall not consider the design How They met Themselves (Surtees 118) as a companion piece to "The Bride's Prelude," although William Rossetti indicates in his notes to the poem in Works that Rossetti had "somewhere mentioned" that the design was suggested by a passage in the poem. The connection seems tenuous at best, between the line from the poem, "Thine own voice speaking unto thee," (stanza 92) and the well-known graphic embodiment of the doppelgänger motif.

ated in the tight sweeping curves of heads, arms, and bodies of the two figures, framed by the chair in front of one figure and the table behind the other. The repeated development of the covert image in the design is significant because, as Ronnalie Roper Howard notes,

The whole poem is unified, structure and image, by the centrality of enclosures—enclosures opening outward and enclosures being penetrated. The sexual act which has led to Aloyse's present plight is not mere physical penetration, but a penetration into the sheltered covert of her innocence. She has moved from covert to covert, always pushed out once again.⁶⁹

More significant, perhaps, is Rossetti's use of gesture in the graphic composition. The two girls hold left hands as they sit opposite each other, forming an S-curve. The mirror-image aspect of their forms brings out what Aloyse herself tells Amelotte at the end of her tale:

"That year the convent yielded thee
 Back to our home; and thou
 Then knew'st not how I shuddered cold
 To kiss thee, seeming to enfold
 To my changed heart myself of old. (stanza 192)

The theme of the double is not infrequent in both Rossetti's poetry and painting, and the design clearly emphasizes the function which the younger sister plays in the poem, offsetting by her innocence the lost innocence of the bride-to-be. Over the course of the narrative, Rossetti is able to develop many contrasts between the two girls which begin immediately from the first few stanzas: contrasts between sound and silence, light and dark, warmth and chill, busy

⁶⁹ Ronnalie Roper Howard, The Dark Glass: Vision and Technique in the Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 38-39.

Amelotte and listless Aloyse. This form continues with the contrasting motives for prayer:

Amelotte wondered with her eyes;
 But her heart said in her:
 "Dear Aloyse would have me pray
 Because the awe she feels to-day
 Must need more prayers than she can say." (stanza 15)

 But Aloyse threw up her neck
 And called the name of God:—
 "Judge, God, 'twixt her and me to-day!
 She knows how hard this is to say,
 Yet will not have one word away." (stanza 85)

Without the tools of the verbal medium, like syntax and diction, Rossetti nevertheless manages to transmute these, and other impulses, into visual form.

"Sister Helen" is another of Rossetti's poems which was first written early in his life and subsequently revised repeatedly. Between its first publication in about 1853 in the Düsseldorf Annual (after being written around 1851) and final version in 1881, Rossetti issued "Sister Helen" in his Poems, and in 1870 worked on a design (Surtees 220) to accompany it. The unfinished design shows a young woman kneeling tormentedly on the floor with her head cast to her left and her arms stiffly extended by her right side. Her hands are clasped, but the rigid fingers and tightened knuckles, as well as the extension of her arms, suggest not peaceful prayer but discomposure and passion. The expression on the woman's face suggests a mixture of feelings: sadness and determination, pain and anger. By her right side is the rough form of a waxen figure, upright and tied to a stake. The brilliant gleam of the fire (not delineated) is implied

prayer-like, but the torment in her hands and face belies what might appear to be a pious purpose. The waxen implement of her curse, bound as it is, almost seems to represent a martyr, especially as the melting wax gives the effigy the appearance of being dressed in a cassock. Even the fireplace, tool in the casting of the evil spell, bears an ambiguous likeness to a roadside shrine.

While the poem reflects several opposites, those of body and soul, hate and love, and the ever-echoing heaven and hell of the refrain, by its balladic structure it posits these contrasts against the unwavering resolution of Sister Helen, and the complex values of an external world against her single-minded grief, pain, and passion. Just so, ultimately, even in its unfinished state, the drawing suggests not only subtle interplays of contrast, but the overriding conclusiveness and ironic merger of opposites in the making of what Sister Helen calls "A soul that's lost" (stanza 34, 1870 version).

Rossetti never went on to complete this design, or to execute any painting based upon it, but he did make several major additions to the poem before republishing it in Sonnets and Ballads in 1881. These additions are consistent with both poem and drawing as they were composed in 1870. Not insignificantly, however, they reflect an element which was perhaps stronger in the graphic work of 1870 than in the poem at that time. Resoluteness was then equally present in both: in the poem, through the repeated refrain and the finality of the last stanza, and in the design,

through the inflexibility of the female form. The sense of interplay of contrasts, however, is more pronounced in the design than in the poem, perhaps because it confronts us as part of the forms and structure of the work, rather than through any superimposed element of style. By adding the character of the bride to the 1881 version of the poem (stanzas 14, 30-35, and 39), Rossetti emphasizes a major contrast between the rejected Sister Helen and the favored lady, with its ironic undertone of counterpart since both are victims in some way of Keith of Ewern's faithlessness.⁷⁰ Thus, through both contrast and counterpart, Rossetti reveals even more strongly than before the plight of the title character of picture and poem.

Another of Rossetti's longer poems which, during its course of revision through the years, was also treated at one point in an unfinished design, is "Dante at Verona." The poem was originally written in 1848-1850, and Rossetti returned to the subject of Dante in exile in 1852, in a series of pencil and pen and ink sketches. One significant difference, however, between poem and design is that the scenes of Dante at the court of Can Grande della Scala which are the fiber of "Dante at Verona" were when graphically projected only part of a triptych on Dante. This design was to have formed one wing, while the other wing was to depict

⁷⁰ The Lady of Ewern's separateness from the other antagonists, and therefore her alignment with Sister Helen, comes across in such lines as these from stanza 39: "Flank to flank are the three steeds gone, Sister Helen,/But the Lady's dark steed goes alone."

Dante when as one of the magistrates of Florence he banished the leaders of the contending factions, and the central panel was to be the work Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante (Surtees 54: the only part ever completely executed).⁷¹ The fact that Rossetti treated Dantesque subjects frequently in paint, and only this once in print, may suggest that the episodes with which the poem deals were especially meaningful to him.

"Dante at Verona" very quickly establishes a series of dichotomies in the second stanza:

Yet if his Lady's home above
 Was Heaven, on earth she filled his soul;
 And if his City held control
 To cast the body forth to rove,
 The soul could soar from earth's vain throng,
 And Heaven and Hell fulfil the song.

These years of exile, the years of the "twofold life" (l. 3, stanza 4) are the focus of Rossetti's poem, as are the contrasts between body and soul, heaven and earth, thought and will. Interspersed with Dante's musings on Florence, and the depiction of his withdrawal into the realm of imagination, are vignettes of his days at the court of Can La Scala which epitomize these dichotomies, and permit expression of the impulse towards their reconciliation. In stanzas thirteen through seventeen and twenty-eight through thirty-one, Rossetti contrasts Dante's way of life within the life of Verona about him: he, solitary and silent, while all others are gay and full of sound. In spite of the occasional point of meeting, the homage and hushed sound with which Dante is

⁷¹ Letters and Memoir, p. 163.

met in these scenes, the split cannot be healed between his world and that of the court at Verona. The contrast is made stronger still, by Rossetti's frequent counterpointing of flux and constancy, the one suggested by the repeated references to the feet ("his feet's appointed way," "the feet might still/Wander for ever at their will") and the mind. The contrast grows more harsh as we witness the bitter side of Dante's stay at court, clearly drawn in the anecdotes (such as the one about the Jester or about the pile of dinner bones) which Rossetti relates. The poem then moves towards an account of the completion of Dante's work, and of his effort towards resolution of dichotomies in the only way possible—his art.⁷² When with Dante's departure from Verona, Rossetti casts one last glance at the court of Can Grande, he returns as well to one of the most significant images in the poem: the palace stairs, "Which of all paths his feet knew well,/Were steeper found than Heaven or Hell." (stanza 84) Referring back to the epigraph with which the poem began ("Yea, thou shalt learn how salt his food who fares/Upon another's bread,—how steep his path/Who treadeth up and down another's stairs": Div. Com. Parad. xvii.), this image is a central one because around it are drawn together all of the contrasts which inform the poem.

⁷² I am indebted to Ronnalie Roper Howard (p. 21) for her suggestion that any transcendence of the dichotomies dramatized in the poem must occur in Dante's "song." It may be significant that, like Dante in this poem, Rossetti himself continually attempted to reconcile opposites through his work, yet could never succeed in spite of art (visual and verbal)—and may reveal part of the reason for Rossetti's lifelong identification with Dante.

The designs for "Dante at Verona" reveal only slightly different aspects of the dominant motif of the poem. In one (Surtees 55), Dante descends a flight of stairs, seemingly musing to himself, while the Court Jester stares at him. Dichotomies of earthly and spiritual realms, internal and external worlds, wisdom and folly, are all thus captured. The stair reappears in another sketch (Surtees 55A), in which Dante is portrayed as he washes his hands in a basin as he descends. This split in action typifies perfectly the impulses of the poem. In yet another design of which two similar versions exist (Surtees 55B and 55C), Dante takes on the form of pilgrim; the exiled poet suitably appears with scallop-shell ornamented hat, and a long staff. The contrast between wandering and stasis is conveyed here through the figure of Dante as, in this garb, he rests against a ledge in what appears to be the Can Grande's palace. Unfortunately, none of these designs ever reached completion. Their major theme fared better, as "Dante at Verona" was published, in slightly revised form, in Rossetti's 1870 Poems.

"Troy Town" was written in 1869, and appeared in print in the 1870 Poems. In 1870, Rossetti worked on a design, never carried over into paint as he intended at one point, nor ever even fully completed. That Rossetti's intention was originally to realize the subject in paint rather than in writing was suggested by Robert Browning, who

believed himself the source of the idea.⁷³ Whether or not Rossetti originally dealt with the idea in the visual medium, it is clear that in this pair (the only extant drawing and the 1869 poem) the visual is an outgrowth of the verbal work. More than any other of Rossetti's designs examined thus far, Troy Town (Surtees 219) has a conventionally illustrative quality. The design manages to parallel the ballad rather comprehensively, however, by portraying narrative elements from the entire poem in a simultaneous representation (ie., using the technique of continuous narration), giving a medieval quality to the design which is complementary to the

⁷³ In a letter to Julia Wedgwood, in 1864, Browning notes that,

In my last good days at Rome, the best in my life, I was meaning to do what I could "next year" with a subject that struck me—Helen dedicating a goblet which reproduced the perfection of what Virgil calls "exsertae mammae", and was deposited in the temple of Venus,—a group of her, bidding farewell to the imperishable beauty, . . . on mentioning this to my friend Rossetti, "I'll paint it" said he—and there it is, archaically treated indeed.

Robert Browning and Julia Wedgwood: A Broken Friendship as Revealed by their Letters, ed. Richard Curle (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1937), p. 60. Surtees (Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p. 123) suggests that the letter which predates the unfinished design (mentioned above) by six years, refers to a finished work of which there is no longer any knowledge. In 1869-1870, Rossetti was still corresponding with Browning about the legend, which implies that his efforts were still directed towards this motif (see Angeli, p. 169). For further insights into the Browning-Rossetti relationship, and additional links in the "Helen" correspondence, see Rosalie Glynn Grylls, "Rossetti and Browning," Essays on the Rossettis, ed. Robert S. Fraser (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), from Princeton Library Chronicle, 33, No. 3 (Spring 1972), 232-50.

ballad form of the poem.⁷⁴ In the design we see Helen, on the left, kneeling before a statue of Venus and offering the cup molded in the shape of her breast, which she is in the act of baring. Behind her several doves, Venus' birds, flurry about. The design is divided vertically by the form of a heavy curtain, behind and to the right of which Venus and Cupid stand, witnessing Helen's words and actions. The paired design and poem thus both suggest an ironic similarity between the gods' aims and man's, and make clear the intervention of the Olympians in the lives of mortals. The seeming separation between her world and Venus', implied in Helen's initial request, "Hear me speak and make me a sign!" (stanza 2), is proven illusory by the ballad's end, and is paralleled in the picture by the use of the curtain as the only separation between woman and goddess, each wishing for her "heart's desire." This connection is important as well because it captures the essential nature of the Trojan conflict—men and gods enmeshed. The suggestion of corre-

⁷⁴ That such representation was an aim of Rossetti's in other instances as well, may be inferred from a comment made by Ruskin in reference to an undetermined design, which William Michael Rossetti suggests may have been some subject from Dante's *Vita Nuova*. Ruskin says, in a letter to Dante Gabriel Rossetti dated 5 June 1854,

as to what you say of your wish to unite several scenes in it on an elevated (?) horizon, I most entirely agree with you. No pictures are so interesting [as those] which tell a story in this consecutive way; and it would [never have] been given up but for the ridiculous "unities" which the bad [critics of the] last two centuries insisted upon. The fact is—taking [the matter in the] most prosaic and severe way—you merely paint three [several pictures, and] unite them by interlude of background, instead [of painting them] separately. What possible objection can there be to [this]? . . . (XXXVI:168)

spondence with which Rossetti endows the two halves of his design also counterparts the way in which he intersperses the simple narrative portion of each stanza (quite "pictorial" in its use of past tense to create distinct stanzaic vignettes in chronological sequence) with the forward-looking refrain which ominously reminds us that "Tall Troy's on fire!" The impending hour and the present, gods and man, are mingled in both visual and verbal versions of this work. Where ultimately the poem goes further, and achieves what the unfinished design could not, is in its anticipatory evocation of the consequences of this episode:

Paris turned upon his bed,
 (O Troy Town!)
 Turned upon his bed and said,
 Dead at heart with the heart's desire—
 "Oh to clasp her golden head!"
 (O Troy's down,
 Tall Troy's on fire!") (stanza 14)

Still, the design goes remarkably far towards this direction, straining in its treatment of space and time against the conventionally circumscribed provinces of poetry and design.

For a span of years, from 1867-1871, Rossetti was haunted by the theme of Michael Scott's wooing, and worked on several versions of a design (preparatory to a painting never undertaken) described by William Rossetti as an invention "Weird in feeling and pictorial in distribution."⁷⁵ This "subject of predilection" also received some treatment in words by Rossetti in 1869, although no poetic work was ever completed. In fact, all we have of the poem is one

⁷⁵ Designer and Writer, p. 57.

stanza, only published after Rossetti's death:

Rose-sheathed beside the rosebud tongue
 Lurks the young adder's tooth;
 Milk-mild from new-born hemlock-bluth
 The earliest drops are wrung:
 And sweet the flower of his first youth
 When Michael Scott was young.⁷⁶

Nonetheless, this set of incomplete works helps to further reveal the interworkings of the visual and verbal.

The most finished design (Surtees 222) shows Michael Scott, in beard and cap, placing a ring on a girl's finger as he kneels beside her.⁷⁷ She sits impassively, head hanging, watching this action half-bedazed. By her side a hooded female figure, somewhat resembling the girl in sweep

⁷⁶ The prose outline in Works, for which a poem was projected, is unrelated to this fragment and to these designs. It is the projected prose-poem to which Walter Theodore Watts-Dunton refers, as being based upon an idea originally suggested to Rossetti by him, and later discovered to have been that of the Ettrick Shepherd's (James Hogg's) "Mary Burnett;" see Athenaeum, No. 3578 (23 May 1896), p. 683. Helen Culler, in an unpublished dissertation entitled "Studies in Rossetti's Reading" (Yale 1943), notes that Rossetti, in changing the name of Watts-Dunton's hero (Donald McGregor) to Michael Scott, was reviving a former interest in the legends concerning the 13th century mathematician and reputed wizard. Culler also notes (p. 104) that Michael Scott is mentioned in The Lay of the Last Minstrel, the Inferno (Canto XX, ll. 115-17), Roberti's Dittamondo, and Villani's History of Florence, all of which Rossetti knew.

⁷⁷ Although dated 1866 by Marillier, Surtees suggests (Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p. 124), and I think rightly so, that in style this version of the design belongs rather to 1870-71. Thus, while the fragment "Michael Scott's Wooing" is subtitled "(for a drawing)," it is likely that Rossetti subsequently further developed this subject in the visual medium. For this reason, and because of both the poem's fragmentary state and the "story-telling" quality of the design, "Michael Scott's Wooing" will be considered as representative of the third type of visual-verbal pair which I have distinguished.

of shoulder, head and arm, stands by, and is in the act of cutting a crucifix from the girl's girdle. Behind Michael Scott, two shrouded figures sit engrossed in a bright flame that appears to be part of some rite of divination. One, whose face is visible, seems masculine, from his heavy brow and coarse features; the other, more graceful and with what may be long hair, appears to be feminine. Directly behind the two major figures is the figure of Love, standing in the low fork of a tree which branches outward above him. His head is turned heavenward, and his wing-tips are crossed before him, as he appears to play on a stringed instrument. To both sides of him, two rectangular and gallery-like apertures are depicted, from which numerous women crowd to gaze down at the scene below. In the far distance, the indoor effect of the galleries (contradicted by the tree in the courtyard) is increased with what seems to be a stained glass window. In configuration, but not in style, this design somewhat resembles an early design in pen and ink, of the same name.⁷⁸

In another design (Surtees 222A), a young man kneels while he kisses a young woman, both figures appearing completely engrossed in each other. Yet all about them a great stir of activity goes on. By the girl's side a seated figure

⁷⁸ 1853 version; see Marillier (p. 145) for a reproduction. In this earlier design, the setting appears more clearly to be that of a courtyard. The young man and woman (who has a book in hand) face the figure of Love, to the left, who plays on an instrument. A female attendant combs the young woman's hair, and a child sits by her side.

feeds a raven, and behind, an older woman holds the girl's sweeping tresses in one hand and, according to a marginal note (though the action is unclear), is burning a lock of her hair. Two figures sit to the far left, engrossed in something flamelike on a table top, and behind, Love stands against a tree playing on an instrument. Finally, in a rough sketch from 1869 (Surtees 222B), a young man kneels at a girl's feet, while a figure behind them plays a stringed instrument. Vague sketchy lines about the pair seem rather eerie, and the girl seems distracted, unlike her counterparts in the other versions.

The designs and the verse fragment reveal Rossetti's personal and imaginative rendering of a scene from the life of necromancer Michael Scott. As the works progress chronologically, the juxtaposition of supernatural elements with realistic ones becomes more pronounced. We have a sense, looking at the two more finished versions of the design, that several orders of existence are being simultaneously disclosed which we, privileged like the sorcerer himself, may perceive. The notebook description related by William Rossetti (which, as Surtees suggests, may either refer to another sketch or to a contemplated alternate treatment of the notebook design [222A] which has survived) is more explicit yet in its emphasis upon the supernatural element, with details of magic wine, Deaths-head moth, and burning hair.⁷⁹ It is the first version mentioned of the design

⁷⁹ Surtees, Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel

which seems to balance both elements most clearly. Its vague shadowy atmosphere is well suited to the questionable circumstances depicted, and to a scene in which the benign figure of Love is placed amidst the sacrilegiousness of cut crucifix and evil spells. The confused sense of inner and outer worlds further increases the tension. And this tension, we may venture to say, is what Rossetti had in mind when he contemplated the poetic version of "Michael Scott's Wooing," of which we have but one meagre stanza. That stanza, however, with its play of contrasts between beauty and death, sweetness and poison, suggests the direction which both works, if continued, might have pursued.

In addition to these paired poems and designs a link exists between an earlier work in prose and a later visual work. In 1848, Rossetti wrote a prose tale, never completed, entitled St. Agnes of Intercession, which he intended to have published in The Germ. He planned to illustrate it but, failing to execute an etching which satisfied him, Millais took over the job. Millais designed an etching representing the modern hero painting the portrait of his betrothed, just

Rossetti, p. 124. Yet another rough sketch of Michael Scott's Wooing exists which is uncatalogued in Surtees, a reproduction of which is in the collection of William E. Fredeman. It is unlikely that this heretofore unmentioned design is the one to which Rossetti's notebook entry refers, although like Surtees 222 and 222A, it shares some details of that description, notably the harem and the old woman removing the girl's crucifix. If we accept William Michael Rossetti's dating of this design newly brought to light (c. 1865, inscribed in his hand on the back of the sketch), then the sequence of this rough sketch, 222A, the missing notebook design, 222B, and 222 would confirm the movement from a focus predominantly on the supernatural to one more balanced and complex.

as his double, four hundred years earlier, had painted the portrait of his beloved during her mortal illness. Neither this graphic work nor the prose piece for that matter ever appeared in the short-lived periodical. In 1860, Rossetti returned to this theme of doppelgängers, and in a water-color entitled Bonifazio's Mistress (Surtees 121) gives the earlier, medieval rendering of the scene in which a woman, while sitting to her lover for her portrait, and attended by her sisters, suddenly dies. We may accept this work as a simple illustration of an incident which happens to be from a written work of Rossetti's. That relationship between poem and painting should be distinguished (as Rossetti seems to have intended it to be by giving different titles to these works) from the visual-verbal relationship of a true paired complex.

The Question (The Sphinx: Surtees 241) is an interesting graphic work of 1875, usually paired with Rossetti's last two sonnets which are commonly regarded as intending to illustrate the idea of the design.⁸⁰ According to William Rossetti,

the Sphinx represents the mystery of existence, or the destiny of man, unfathomable by himself. Three personages—a youth, a man of mature age, and an old man—are shown as coming to the secret haunt of the Sphinx, to consult her as to the arcana of fate. The man is putting the question; the greybeard toils

⁸⁰ In my discussion of The Question I will only be concerned with the version of the design in the Birmingham collection, and not with the version (Surtees 241A) in the Fogg. The sonnets were written 5 April 1882, four days before Rossetti's death; the following sonnets are unpublished, except privately and in Letters, IV, 1952-53:

upwards towards the spot; the youth, exhausted with his journey, sinks and dies, unable so much as to give words to the object of his quest. With upward and inscrutable eyes the Sphinx remains impenetrably silent.⁸¹

William also suggests that the youth represents Oliver Madox Brown, who had died in 1874, at less than twenty years of age.

The Question
(For a design)

I

This sea, deep furrowed as the face of Time,
Mirrors the ghost of the removed moon;
The peaks stand bristling round the waste lagune;
While up the difficult summit steeply climb
Youth, Manhood, Age, one triple labouring mime;
And to the measure of some mystic rune
Hark how the restless waters importune
These echoing steeps with chime and counter-chime.
What seek they? Lo, upreared against the rock
The Sphinx, Time's visible silence, frontleted
With Psyche wings, with eagle plumes arched o'er.
Ah, when those everlasting lips unlock
And the old riddle of the world is read,
What shall man find? or seeks he evermore?

II

Lo, the three seekers! Youth has sprung the first
To question the Unknown: but see! he sinks
Prone to the earth—becomes himself a sphinx,—
A riddle of early death no love may burst.
Sorely anhungered, heavily athirst
For knowledge, Manhood next to reach the Truth
Peers in those eyes; till haggard and uncouth
Weak Eld renews that question long rehearsed.

Oh! and what answer? From the sad sea brim
The eyes o' the Sphinx stare through the midnight
spell,
Unwavering,—man's eternal quest to quell:
While round the rock-steps of her throne doth swim
Through the wind-serried wave the moon's faint rim,
Sole answer from the heaven invisible.

⁸¹ Designer and Writer, p. 93.

On one hand, the relationship between the design and the sonnets is clear—the poems, which were to be included in a book by Rossetti and Watts-Dunton with the design as frontispiece, seemingly follow the by-now standard format of poems "for a design." The poem begins with the graphic fixing of focus upon "This sea," in the design, and transfers from the picture details of crescent moon reflected in the water, the still lagoon, and the steep, difficult cliffs. The three ages of man are also portrayed. The poem suggests a spirit of supplication, however, which is false to the direction of the design, when beyond the first eight lines Rossetti queries, "What seek they?" For the three figures in The Question seem to suggest less request than demand. The last three lines of the first sonnet also create a sense of the eternal which is lacking in the design:

Ah, when those everlasting lips unlock
 And the old riddle of the world is read,
 What shall man find? or seeks he evermore?

There appears to be nothing suggestive of the "everlasting" within the design but the clumsily reiterated symbols of sea, ascent, and Sphinx. The major components of the design, the three figures, evoke rather the sense of an intense moment at hand. The octave of the second sonnet touches upon this aspect of the design as it declares "Lo, the three seekers!" Yet, with its format of first, next, and final questioner, the poem seems to lack the immediacy of the design. The last six lines return to focus on the Sphinx, sea, and moon, image and symbol again bearing all the burden of parallel. The only other transposition which occurs, and

not particularly successfully, is the circular movement in the poem from Sphinx to seekers and back to Sphinx, which corresponds to the sense of unending cycle created in the design through the expressions of the figures and through their disposition in relation to the background.

To some extent we can attribute the failings of interrelationship to the circumstances of composition. Poems dictated on a deathbed could not have, for a careful craftsman like Rossetti, the many layers of correspondence which characterize most of his pairs. Oswald Doughty, however, in his notes to the Letters, raises a criticism, the resolution of which may also apply to this issue of interrelationship. He remarks, in reference to The Question, "This design is really but rather weak illustration, nor does it intimately agree with much that is suggested by the two sonnets."⁸² Perhaps the poem more intrinsically paired with The Question should rather be the one Rossetti suggested when he made the design "sort of a painted 'Cloud Confines.'"⁸³ This relationship is also articulated in a letter of Rossetti's to Mrs. Morris:

⁸² Letters, IV, 1953. In response to an inquiry by Carl Adrian Peterson about the "Sphinx" sonnets, before the publication of Letters, Doughty assured Peterson that the poems did not "illuminate in any worthwhile fashion" the Sphinx drawings; see "Rossetti and the Sphinx," Apollo, 85 (January-April, 1967), 53.

⁸³ Letters, III, 1330 (To Ford Madox Brown, 9 March 1875).

I have been finishing the Sphinx design I spoke of. . . . The idea is that of Man questioning the Unknown and I shall call it either The Question or The Sphinx & her Questioners, but I think on the whole the shorter title is better . . . I have made the design nude, but propose to drape it in some degree when I paint it, which I fancy must be on rather a small scale, for two reasons: one being that to sell a picture without women in it would be a double difficulty, and the other that a moonlight subject on a large scale is always monotonous. The subject is in fact the same as that of my little poem The Cloud Confines:

"And eyes fixed ever in vain
on the pitiless eyes of Fate."⁸⁴

While the later poems carry over the details which are used in the design to develop an allegorical idea, they do not lead us towards further insight into our own relation to the impulses and images of the design, as Rossetti's sonnets for pictures, both allegorical and otherwise, do. In other words, the sonnets only deal with the graphically "given" in the design, and are little more than instances of the word-painting which Rossetti abhorred, or mere verbal "illustrations" of many forms and ideas in the picture. The parallel with "Cloud Confines," on the other hand, is much more deep-dwelling, coming from what Carl Peterson identifies as "the desire . . . to express pictorially that view of the 'mystery' of life that he [Rossetti] articulated in several of his poems about this time."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Bryson, p. 37 (Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Jane Morris, 10 March 1875).

⁸⁵ Peterson, "Rossetti and the Sphinx," p. 48. Note: Peterson suggests that Rossetti intended a visual conception of the confrontation with the Sphinx derived from (and intentionally masking its debt to) Ingres' Oedipe et le Sphinx, and also suggests that Brown's death set Rossetti thinking about a picture on the "mystery of life" theme.

Both this poem and the later design reveal the quest for knowledge and the impossibility of attaining the answers sought. The image of the Sphinx counterparts the refrain of "Cloud Confines"; each provides an ironic twist, representing as both do not so much another position as a variation of the dominant one in each work. We cannot accept the refrain of the poem as straightforward solace (nor should we) but rather as the ironic echo of the belief in ultimate solace or solutions. Likewise, the form of the Sphinx in Rossetti's interpretation of this iconographic commonplace is less suggestive of a separate and silent voice than a stony mirror image of the face of the most prominent seeker. As Ronnalie Roper Howard notes, the voice of the poem may be identified with nineteenth century humanity. She writes, "it both expresses the pain of the 'we' and turns round on itself to mock. The central problem of the poem encompasses both the human predicament and the typical Victorian response."⁸⁶ Similarly, we may discover in The Question a sense of mocking of the quest which forever turns back on itself. The Sphinx gazes as if to the answer towards the unseen sky, the reflection of which falls ironically on the very "sea of life" from which the pilgrims have come. Paradox in the poem (ie., "the day is dark" [l. 1, stanza 1], and lines two, six, one and two, and six, of the following stanzas respectively) is transformed to paradox in the picture, where the youth dies while age unyieldingly persists. The

⁸⁶ Howard, p. 120.

return to the refrain in this poem is also paralleled by the suggestion of the present moment rather than of progression in the design, a suggestion later lost in the sonnets "for" the picture. Finally, the effort to effect involvement by the reader-viewer in the ideas and images of the poem, which was absent from the "Sphinx" sonnets, is evident in "Cloud Confines." The interplay of expression and form and the sense of circularity that draws in the viewer of the design, received an earlier manifestation in the poem to which Rossetti acknowledges The Question a counterpart, when he, by changing the wording of the refrain for the first time, makes our relation to the poem clear:

Our past is clean forgot,
 Our present is and is not,
 Our future's a sealed seedplot,
 And what betwixt them are we?—
 We who say as we go—
 "Strange to think by the way,
 Whatever there is to know,
 That shall we know one day."

Such comparison of "Cloud Confines," The Question, and the "Sphinx" sonnets, which notes points of correspondence on all levels, brings us closer yet to an idea of the means and range of interrelationship between poetry and design possible, if not always attained.

There are several other visual-verbal pairs by Rossetti which, while sharing some characteristics with both the religious-symbolic works and the paired sonnets and descriptive paintings, are exceptional for their departure from any previously examined archetype. Neither "Cassandra" nor "Aspecta Medusa" follows the compositional chronology of

the narrative pairs. In the case of "Cassandra," the pen and ink drawing of 1868 (Surtees 127) never evolved into the painting which Rossetti intended, and in 1869 he instead transformed the incomplete design into two sonnets. "Aspecta Medusa" follows the usual pattern for the descriptive pairs, as the design (Surtees 183) was begun in 1865, and the poem written that same year.⁸⁷ Rossetti intended to extend this design in a painting as well, but was eventually inhibited from doing so by the squeamishness of the patron who had commissioned the work towards the severed head of Medusa. Both pairs are distinguished, however, by the incomplete state of the design, and by the nature of the drawings themselves. Neither presents a female figure within a conventional frame of reference to embody a personal impulse (although the use of names of female mythological figures in their titles might lead us to expect otherwise), as do so many of Rossetti's graphic works for which poetic counterparts exist. Both designs are more narrative in nature, conveying scenes of actions involving multiple figures which are closer to Rossetti's designs of the 1850's (including the religious-symbolic pairs) than to his later paintings which evolved into visual-verbal complexes.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ One early sketch, catalogued as Surtees 183A, is dated c. 1863.

⁸⁸ In addition to these pairs which do not fit any single pattern is a pair composed of the poem "Eden Bower" and an incomplete, and hitherto unreproduced or catalogued, design, at present owned by William E. Fredeman. I have chosen not to include discussion of this pair in the dis-

Cassandra, as Carl Peterson has convincingly shown, is a hybrid which developed from Rossetti's response to Meredith's poem "Cassandra," in combination with certain elements from the Iliad.⁸⁹ This inventive process of illustration will be discussed later, when we turn to Rossetti's illustrative works; but for now we will focus on what Peterson calls "one of the most remarkable instances of the literary inbreeding of his work," Rossetti's two sonnets on Cassandra.⁹⁰ From his highly original merger of antecedents, coupled with his own visions and interpretations of the multitude of scenes conflated in this one busy design, Rossetti then distilled images, tone, and compositional form, in the corresponding poems.⁹¹

Rossetti himself had described the drawing as follows:

I mean her [Cassandra] to be prophesying the death of Hector before his last battle. He will not be deterred from going, and rushes at last down the steps, giving an order across her noise to the Captain in charge of the soldiers who are going round the ramparts on their

sertation, however, because of the general lack of familiarity with its graphic component.

⁸⁹ Carl A. Peterson, "The Iliad, George Meredith's 'Cassandra,' and D. G. Rossetti's 'Cassandra' Drawing," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 7 (1966), 329-37.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 336-37.

⁹¹ One practical reason Rossetti may have transposed detail so directly was in order, as he told William, to help "in defending the subject[s] against plagiarists." Letters, II, 740 (To William Michael Rossetti, 14 September 1869); see above, n.7.

way to battle. Cassandra tears her garments in rage and despair. Helen is arming Paris in a leisurely way, and he is amused at the gradual rage she is getting into at what Cassandra says of her. Other figures are Andromache with Hector's child, the Nurse, Priam and Hecuba, and one of the Brothers who is expostulating with Cassandra. Hector's companions have got down the steps before him, and are beckoning him to follow. . . .⁹²

The design uses space and form in a manner similar to Rossetti's other group scenes. Focus is organized around the central figure of Cassandra, but for every visual element which draws our eyes towards her (ie., the eyes of Hector and Helen, and the two large columns which frame Cassandra's form), other elements distract us. We perceive an intense moment of frozen action, and yet the repeated forms, both abstract and representational (particularly the unending march of soldiers in the background) convey a strong sense of the unstayable movement of time. As some forms (an example once again being the file of soldiers who, as they appear to go beyond picture space, open that space to us) draw us inward, the density and dramatic quality of others keeps us spectators rather than imaginative participants.

In the poems to accompany this design, there is tension not within the structure of each sonnet, but in the relationship between the two. The first is descriptive of the scene in the design. Cassandra is addressed directly, from the standpoint of one who might be a reader-viewer, or imaginative spectator, like ourselves, and her actions and those of the figures around her are delineated. This device

⁹² Ibid., II, 690-91 (To Charles Eliot Norton, 23 April 1869).

of describing to the one addressed the very scene in which she plays a central role has the paradoxical effect of at once drawing us into the design and poem and removing Cassandra from them. She, in effect, were she able to follow the speaker's direction, would herself witness the scene which we see before us: Cassandra's frenzied prophesying, Hector's determination, Andromache's sadness, Hecuba's shuddering fear, and so on. In this first sonnet too, Rossetti captures some of the subtler contrasts of the design, such as that between trepidation and anger, or between passion and humor. In both visual and verbal works, contrast is centered around Helen and Paris—in the design, Helen conspicuously sits on Paris' lap, in the act of arming him while he soothes her indignation at Cassandra's words—and in the poem, in the very description of Helen as "the ravished ravishing prize of Death." The second sonnet, counterbalanced with the first, conveys Cassandra's own words; their urgency and directness contrasts with the speaker's measured voice in the first sonnet. While structurally little about the second sonnet appears to add complexity to the contrast between sonnets, the only distinction marking the division between octave and sestet being the focus first on Hector, then Paris, in fact Rossetti has, through familiar means, built in a degree of paradox. The immediacy of Cassandra's words, which strikes us and encourages us to feel as if we are witnesses to the scene into which we have been drawn in the first sonnet, is counteracted by a change in the treatment of time and space in the second.

Whereas the first sonnet posited present time and space, in which we as reader-viewers were made a part, and conveyed a range and order of focus suitable to that stance, the second sonnet now encompasses visions of the past, present, and future:

long upon our hearth the brand had we,
Lit for the roof-tree's ruin: and to-day
The ground-stone quits the wall,—the wind hath way,—
And higher and higher the wings of fire are free.
(ll. 5-8)

In spite of Cassandra's voice, with which we identify (since we know the verity of her words), through the expanded vision of the second sonnet we are led to regain objective distance once again, for we recognize that we have a "narrative" perspective even wider than hers. By the power of poetry, surpassing that of prophesy, we are ultimately drawn out of the world of design and poem once again, and left to ponder the complex dynamic of Rossetti's art.

Although described by Rossetti as "an inscription," "Aspecta Medusa" was recognized by him to have sufficient significance to be included in his 1870 volume.⁹³ The pair is similar to the majority of Rossetti's others in that both components were conceived of at the same time, but differs in the style of the design, in the fact that a painting based on the design was never executed, and in that the poem is not in sonnet form. Rossetti himself indicated that the lines were to "explain the subject" of his picture, in which Perseus is showing the Gorgon's head, by means of its reflec-

⁹³ Letters, II, 812 (To Algernon Charles Swinburne, 9 March 1870).

tion in water, to Andromeda.⁹⁴

Sparse as both design and poem are, as they work together we may gain some insight into the parallels and contrasts which might have been more fully articulated had either or both been elaborated upon. In the design, Rossetti planned to enclose the actual head of Medusa in shadow; the importance of Medusa compositionally would thus be in the reflected image of her head as it appears in the large basin or pool at the foot of the picture.⁹⁵ Appearing directly beneath the form of Andromeda, it forms a graphic counterpart to her. Perseus appears behind Andromeda and grasps her arm (almost, it would seem, pulling her away from too close a contact with the reflected image), and gazes at reflection as well. This relationship of forms is significant, for Rossetti's purpose in creating the "Aspecta Medusa" pair goes beyond the illustration of a familiar myth. Leaving the ghastly image out of this design, and emphasizing the reflection, Medusa would become more clearly a symbol of the transformation of reality into art. Following that suggestion, Perseus may be the artist himself, and Andromeda, the viewer guided towards the created vision by the artist. Unlike certain Romantic conceptions which focus on Medusa as

⁹⁴ Ibid., II, 624 (To Mrs. Gabriele Rossetti, 20 July 1867).

⁹⁵ I actually base my description on the version of the design reproduced in Marillier, p. 109 (probably Surtees 183A or 183B, present whereabouts unknown), which is more complete than the version reproduced in Surtees.

the symbol, by reflex, of the fusion of diverse aspects of creative power in an act of imagination, Rossetti's rough design seems to place emphasis upon the action of the artist to effect the combining of opposites.⁹⁶ One key difference in Rossetti's conception, therefore, is that it focuses on imagination through the agency of the artist rather than the work of art. It is a view more public, less introverted, more Victorian, and less Romantic. Yet the motivation for this treatment of Medusa was not, as sometimes felt, Rossetti's decorous response to the subject and to Victorian tradition which "regarded the artist's proper object to be not the object itself but the object idealized by the judicious selection of detail coupled with proper aesthetic distance."⁹⁷

That Rossetti's conception was motivated by a concern with the artist above any towards the work of art, is supported by the lines entitled "Aspecta Medusa":

Let not thine eyes know
Any forbidden thing itself, although
It once should save as well as kill: but be
Its shadow upon life enough for thee. (ll. 5-8)

⁹⁶ For a survey of the treatment of the Medusan theme in the nineteenth century, see Jerome McGann's "The Beauty of the Medusa: A Study in Romantic Literary Iconology," Studies in Romanticism, 11 (1972), 3-25. Of interest in reference to the Romantic tradition regarding Medusa, it appears to me that Swinburne uses Shelley's language or concepts ("grace," and strength ["tempestuousness"]) in writing about Aspecta Medusa in Notes on the Royal Academy Exhibition, 1868 (London: John Camden Hotten, 1868), p. 50.

⁹⁷ Kent Patterson, "Medusa in Three Victorian Poets," Tennessee Studies in Literature, 17 (1972), 113.

The poem articulates, in a way that the drawing could not, the ambiguous aspects of Medusa, by which she had been characterized from classical sources through the treatments of her by Rossetti's Romantic forebearers.⁹⁸ Jerome McGann, comparing Rossetti's treatment of Medusa to others', notes,

The new life which she offers to those who dare to approach her is, and must be, fearful, for the knowledge she offers is, as Shelley was among the first to suggest, a self-knowledge most men do not want to face. This fact about her meaning Rossetti will not have us forget, and it is, indeed, a key element in her Romantic revival. Rossetti suggests an even further possibility, however: that in the pursuit of the ideal some sort of betrayal is inevitable. After such knowledge, what forgiveness? This is Rossetti's cautionary theme.⁹⁹

If Rossetti insists that one turn from too direct a grasp of the insight offered by the Medusa, it is because, as he has proven elsewhere countless times, he is supremely conscious of a double edge to the power of the imagination. As someone devoted to the attempt to come to grips with the overwhelming dichotomies which he perceived to underly imaginative life, and whose work in both media reflected a continual and only partly successful effort to reconcile those opposites, Rossetti could well caution us not to pursue the same path. Rather we may, as reader-viewers, content ourselves with the "shadow upon life" of those dichotomies, or, in other words, with their embodiment in

⁹⁸ McGann notes (p. 21), for example, that the suggestion of the equivocal nature of Medusa is expressed in Rossetti's allusion to the two types of her blood which Asclepius preserved, which could foster good or ill.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 21-22.

his paired works. Perseus' feat was to look unfearingly into the mass of paradoxes that Medusa, and truth, was; yet even he could only look indirectly, as we are cautioned by Rossetti to do.

IV

Extended examination reveals that a different sequence of composition was generally used by Rossetti for each of his three types of paired works. In the case of the early sacred or moral designs and poems, the design usually preceded its verbal counterpart. Rossetti's sonnets for his own pictures were written, as William Michael frequently notes, at nearly the same time at which the paintings were executed. Finally, in the third cluster, Rossetti's "narrative" works, the pairs share a chronological pattern in which the graphic work followed the completion of, or abandonment of work on at least one major version of the verbal correlative, a sequence resembling that of conventional illustration. We may, after comprehensive analysis of the paired works for which Rossetti contributed both components, draw certain conclusions about these variations in compositional procedure.

It is clear that while sharing the general background and interests of his fellow Pre-Raphaelites in the late 1840's and early 1850's, Rossetti was from an early point eager to differentiate between his approach and that of his compeers. His sonnets on sacred subjects allowed Rossetti to clarify the dynamic within those paintings and to emphasize the fact that rather than attempting to harmo-

nize public conceptions of religious motifs, he was utilizing such motifs for equivocal purposes. Unlike many of the works of his Pre-Raphaelite contemporaries, these works of Rossetti's were not simply allegorical, for they could, and in fact needed to, function on more than one level. Besides their being preferred as subjects of public and Pre-Raphaelite interest, the stock response likely to the element of paradox inherent in sacred subjects may have made them attractive to Rossetti. By augmenting his treatment of diverse visions with a counterpart in the sister art, Rossetti was clearly placing emphasis not merely on the thematic content of his paired works, but on the dialectic which characterized the imaginative process itself.

Like his use of religious motifs, Rossetti's handling of the narrative mode at once both relates to contemporary trends and is distinguished from them. More than in any of the other clusters of Rossetti's paired works, the narrative designs may be regarded as illustrations, a view encouraged not only from the standpoint of style, but from consideration of their chronological relationship to their literary counterpart. More than in the instance in which painting precedes poem, the subsequent effort in the sister art may be seen as an embellishment upon an autonomous work, at best adding to the earlier work by elucidating ideas and images. The sense of a similarity between a few pairs which do not conform to this chronological pattern of composition and those that do may be attributed to the suggestion of an illustrative manner which they all convey. The more in-

triguing similarity between many of these designs and those of the moral or religious cluster may be traced to the impulse towards story-telling shared by both, and to the fact that both anecdotal and symbolical works impose a "message." The resemblance is less strange than perhaps imagined, for in other Victorian works as well, there often exists a link between telling a story and teaching a lesson. This similarity is more pronounced when we consider not just the designs, but the complete pairs in both categories. In both instances the purpose of pairing appears to be to instruct or explain. Further, correspondences between the media in both religious and narrative pairs seem to be of representative nature; that is, ideas and images occurring in one medium stand for their counterparts in the other. The narrative designs hold a significant place in the tradition of story-telling in both media, and are kin to the later efforts of what continued to be called Pre-Raphaelitism, actually an offshoot nurtured by Rossetti's influence upon a number of young artists and poets in the 1850's. Rossetti's contributions in the genre are distinguished, however, by the relation of these paired works to more underlying issues of form and process. Rossetti's subsequent efforts to create a graphic correlative, after completion or abandonment of a version of these poems, seem in all instances to clarify the balances which are apparent within the written work. If illustrations, these designs are clearly in the interpretive tradition of Blake, not simply echoing images and themes of the literary work, but highlighting deeper,

more personal impulses in the text. It must be regarded as significant that whenever subsequent revision of the poem took place, the poem adapted to contrasts which had been employed more effectively in the graphic counterpart to that work. Again, Rossetti's purpose in creating a pair seems to have been to make more pronounced the dichotomies in the work.

It may be significant that in critical evaluations of Rossetti's works which have counterparts in their sister art, the individual paintings and poems which receive praise most often (the painting of Ecce Ancilla Domini! or the balladic poems, for example) are those which, in spite of the fact that weaknesses may be evident, can function on their own. Significantly, on the other hand, the works which function least well by themselves, and most successfully as a pair, are Rossetti's sonnets for what I have called his descriptive pictures, those directed primarily towards characterizing an idea or emotion. The possible reasons for Rossetti's turn to his version of "imaginary portraits" have been examined too often for repetition here. Certainly, a complex combination of purely practical, and deeply personal motives was responsible. As in the case of Rossetti's efforts in other genres, the descriptive pairs give evidence of his turning a major impulse of Pre-Raphaelitism to his own use. More than in other instances, however, it would appear that Rossetti found his personal *métier* in the expression of fundamental polarities in the descriptive pairs. Working simultaneously on both

components of these pairs or in close sequence upon them, the interrelationship was built in during the creative process in a more reciprocal manner, rather than added on for the retrospective purpose of clarifying contraries. Leaving behind the representative relationship between poetry and painting, Rossetti seems to have been freed from a more public form of the arts, and enabled to employ a more idiosyncratic one. More than the religious and narrative pairs, which utilize motifs with traditional attributes, the descriptive pairs are expressive and personal. While beginning with an almost emblematic format, Rossetti transforms conventional associations surrounding the character or personified abstraction, in an embodiment of intensely individual vision. In this process, Rossetti seems to turn from the pattern of using one medium as a comment on or paraphrase of the other (ie., in their function as illustration), towards a clearer suggestion of the autonomy of both arts and of their equal interrelationship. The creation of pairs in this manner encourages not merely a reevaluation of our relation to one art form but to both, as well as a reevaluation of their relation to each other. It is in this, the most frequently pursued and longest maintained mode of composition of paired works, that we may discover most clearly the nature of the interrelationship of the arts as Rossetti perceived it.

In each of his compound works, Dante Gabriel Rossetti establishes polarities of vision. Poetry and painting, each in itself an alternate mode of expression,

are fittingly linked in order to emphasize the oppositions which were central to Rossetti's thought and work. Among the most recurrent oppositions are those between body and soul, the spiritual or supernatural and the natural, the eternal and the temporal, the literal and the symbolic, and the representative and the personal. Often Rossetti utilizes traditional assumptions about the attributes and limitations of both art forms, alternatively affirming or overriding them, to emphasize the tension between polarities. At times either art may appear to approach the province of the other (ie., visual narrative or verbal icon), not for the purpose of achieving one harmonized or homogeneous art form, but for the purpose of re-enacting the complex dialectic that was, for Rossetti, the exercise of the imagination. To accomplish the depiction of diverse experiences and perceptions, and the relationship between them, Rossetti carefully manipulated the form and structure of both painting and poem, to highlight and make tenable these connections and contrasts. Our perception of the contrasts and counterparts within each pair requires, in effect, that we not simply intellectually, but also imaginatively and emotionally, participate in a shift between perspectives. Rossetti forces the reader-viewer to undergo an experience which parallels his own, as he attempts to come to terms with oppositions. We are made to enter into verse and canvas, to renew and undergo the same conflicts. Rossetti's gift as poet-painter is that he enables us to do so and, unlike himself, break free, to reflect upon his vision; it is, ultimately, a vision of that

moment when balance and equilibrium have been attained.

While Rossetti was never able to satisfactorily integrate oppositions in his own mind, his juxtaposition of painting and poem enables us at least to understand the impulse most central to his work.

CHAPTER THREE

SONNETS ON THE PAINTINGS OF OTHERS

The inclination which led Rossetti, as a youth of nineteen, to write a sonnet on an Annunciation picture seen in an auction room, took another direction in addition to the creation of a verbal gallery of his own graphic works.¹ Besides writing poems to accompany his own designs, Rossetti wrote a number of sonnets upon the works of other, highly notable, artists. Some works thus commemorated were seen during a tour of the continent made by Rossetti and William Holman Hunt in 1849, and another was a work with which Rossetti became acquainted closer to home, at the National Gallery in London, at approximately the same time. The early date of composition, in addition to the sequence by which graphic work antedated poem, might lead us to expect that these pairs reflect a nature and purpose similar to Rossetti's pairs with religious or moral themes. Rossetti was to return on occasion to the same mode of composition over the next three decades, however, and to write several additional sonnets on the paintings of

¹ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. William Michael Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1911), "Notes," p. 661; re: "For an Annunciation, Early German," the corresponding graphic work for which has never been identified.

others, which may suggest that a more complex impulse was at work. Certainly, the poems written upon the paintings of artists whom Rossetti admired do more than pay tribute to them; a closer look at these pairs reveals other aspects of Rossetti's conception of the interrelationship possible between poetry and painting.

One painting with which Rossetti was probably familiar from both the National Gallery and the Louvre, where versions appear, is Madonna of the Rocks by Leonardo Da Vinci. According to William Rossetti, the poem was not written to accompany the Louvre version, but rather that Rossetti wrote it "'in front of the picture in the British Institution many years ago'—i.e., many years before 1869."² While several critics persist in connecting the sonnet with the Louvre version, evidence over-all does seem to point to its correspondence with the work now in the National Gallery.³ There is no contention, however, over the fact

² Works, "Notes," p. 663. The statement within quotation marks is from a letter from Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William; see Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl, eds., Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-67), II, 726 (27 August 1869); hereafter cited in footnotes as Letters.

³ The strongest argument for identifying the Louvre version as the one for which Rossetti wrote the sonnet comes from Robert N. Keane ("The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: 1848-1853," Diss. Columbia 1965, p. 125), who notes William Rossetti's claim that the sonnet was written for the version of Madonna of the Rocks owned by the Earl of Suffolk, at the time of its public exhibition, and indicates that he could find no record of this version being on display until 1851 at the British Institution. Noting William's dating of the poem for 1848, Keane concludes that the poem must have been written while on the continental trip in 1849 as recorded by William Holman Hunt (see Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-

that this early sonnet goes beyond description towards a quite idiosyncratic interpretation and transformation of Leonardo Da Vinci's work.⁴

A comparison between Rossetti's poem, "Our Lady of the Rocks," and the Leonardo painting, should begin by focusing on what Rossetti chooses to emphasize in the graphic work and what he decides to ignore. The painting represents the Virgin Mary seated beside the infant Saint John, whom she presents for the Christ-child to bless as an

Raphaelite Brotherhood [New York: Macmillan, 1905-06], I, 185), or near that time, his implication being that the Louvre version was the corresponding work. Stronger evidence to the contrary, however, seems to me to be the fact that neither Rossetti's correspondence, nor his brother's assiduous recording of communications from the pair during their journey, makes mention of this poem, as either letters or journal or both do in the case of the "Louvre" sonnets and the other sonnets written during the trip. In addition, we may question why, if the poem had been written at that time and under those circumstances, it was not published in The Germ along with the six other "Sonnets for Pictures," composed during the continental journey, but was only first published in 1870, in Poems. Further, while the history of the two versions of the work is not pertinent to this discussion, the recognition of differences between them may be. The earlier, Louvre version is characterized by a triangular visual pattern which emphasizes the Christ-child primarily, and Mary and St. John to a lesser extent. The later version, which appears in the National Gallery, eliminates certain details (i.e., the angel's pointing gesture) and thereby reorganizes focus to center around Mary. Rossetti's similar focus may provide additional evidence that the poem was written in response to that version of the work.

⁴ William Rossetti notes (Works, p. 663), in fact, in reference to an early article by W. M. Hardinge devoted solely to the "Louvre" sonnets (also noting that Hardinge was in error in denoting the corresponding painting to be the Louvre version), "not indeed that Mr. Hardinge aims to undervalue this camera-obscura exercise of Rossetti's transmuting imagination—far from that. He points to it as symptomatic and observable." See William M. Hardinge, "A Note on the Louvre Sonnets of Rossetti," Temple Bar, 91 (March 1891), 433-43.

angel to the left looks on. Juxtaposed with this conventional grouping is a mysterious background which is distinctly Leonardan; luminous rocks tower above, dark and wet, and through the cliffs a vague and unfathomable sea appears, receding towards an indeterminate point of bluish-white. The general atmospheric quality is heavy and infused with tension. In contrast with it, the mildness of the group of figures gives a sense of release and relief. At the same time, however, both color and light create a link between the group of figures and the very farthest points beyond the treacherous rocks and forbidding shadows.

We may imagine that Rossetti was attracted to this painting in part because of its religious motif. For, while a professed agnostic from an early point in his life, through his mother and his sisters (especially Christina) he was deeply influenced by the traditions of High Church Anglicanism. We have as indications of Rossetti's emotional, if not spiritual, commitment to that tradition his other poems of the late 1840's, as well as his canvases The Girlhood of Mary Virgin and Ecce Ancilla Domini!. The evidence of departure from convention in the painting by Leonardo, however, equally suggests a source of attraction which the work would have had for Rossetti. For it is precisely these elements which Rossetti picks up and transforms in his verbal counterpart. Further, we may trace the presence, in Madonna of the Rocks, of strong contrasts which must have appealed to Rossetti at a point when diverse impulses and modes of vision were first beginning to surface in his own

creative work.

Of the conventional elements in the painting, Rossetti has carried over the Virgin Mother herself, to whom the sonnet is addressed, and her Son, in the act of benediction. Conspicuously absent, however, is any mention of the angel or of the young Saint John. Instead, Rossetti has chosen to regard the childish form as a mortal soul receiving the Christ-child's blessing. Yet while deviating from Leonardo's conception, this treatment is not so very farfetched a departure from the bounds of traditional iconology. As in his own paired paintings and poems on sacred themes which reveal a concern with typological symbolism, in this sonnet Rossetti focuses upon implications of the Christ-child's prefigured fate in the Virgin's suggestive mein and gesture:

MOTHER, is this the darkness of the end,
 The Shadow of Death? and is that outer sea
 Infinite imminent Eternity?
 And does the death-pang by man's seed sustained
 In Time's each instant cause thy face to bend
 Its silent prayer upon the Son, while He
 Blesses the dead with His hand silently
 To His long day which hours no more offend? (ll. 1-8)

What such a reading of the painting does is to simultaneously suggest a customary meaning and permit a personal interpretation of the scene. We must feel, by convention if not belief, a certain sense of identification with "man's seed" whom Christ's death would redeem; Rossetti thus draws us more deeply into the drama within the visual work than Leonardo had endeavored to do. At the same time, this focus enables Rossetti to project into the painting certain

allegorical concepts based upon, and treated as, concrete fact. Thus handled, these concepts jar against our more commonly held notion of them, and may make us more aware of our own distance from tradition. Imaginative apprehension, in other words, is made to conflict with spiritual insight, as it does in the Rossettian religious-moral pairs—not for the ultimate purpose of renewing a sense of the veracity of the supernatural idea, but in order to magnify our sense of the diversity of vision possible, and perhaps imperative, to us.

The concretizing of allegorical concepts occurs from the very first lines of Rossetti's sonnet, and in each instance originates from elements of Leonardo's rendition of this grouping which were personal stylistic marks of the painter. To Rossetti, the stark background becomes the valley of "The Shadow of Death," and the vague sea, "Infinite imminent Eternity." Against this rather blunt identification, in the octave, of abstract ideas with contrarily vivid corresponding images, Rossetti reverts in the sestet to a more tempered perspective, that is to say, one in which, in concert with the painting, abstract and concrete are counterpoised:

Mother of grace, the pass is difficult,
Keen as these rocks, and the bewildered souls
Throng it like echoes, blindly shuddering through.
Thy name, O Lord, each spirit's voice extols,
Whose peace abides in the dark avenue
Amid the bitterness of things occult. (ll. 9-14)

This counterpoise is attained through the more metaphorical reading now given of the painting, especially in lines nine

and ten. Yet, as in the case of the Rossettian pairs, balance is here undercut. The conventional Christian beliefs articulated in the sestet of the poem are presented as spiritual allegory not evident in the painting, yet anchored in visual images within ("these rocks," "dark avenue"). In the same lines, Rossetti sometimes departs altogether from Leonardo's imagery, interjecting the idea of the multitude of souls thronging blindly through the valley of the shadow.⁵ Rossetti thereby takes a popularly accepted notion and, by projecting it into the corresponding graphic work where not evident, causes it to evolve into a highly personal, imaginative rather than religious, conception.

By his addition of the sonnet to create a visual-verbal pair, Rossetti emphasizes patterns of counterbalance and contrast not only through idea and image, but through diction and tone as well. As noted by Richard Dellamora, the tone and movement of the sonnet, public and dignified, contrasts with the obscurity of Rossetti's use of language.⁶ Division between octave and sestet is emphasized through the

⁵ In a note to Hardinge's article (p. 435n.), William Rossetti indicates that he thinks Rossetti meant to imply "a distinction between the saved souls and the reprobate," and that he reads line thirteen as referring to each spirit's peace; he does allow that it is possible to read "whose peace" as the Lord's. I think the latter reading likely, in light of Rossetti's use of the phrase "His long day" in line eight.

⁶ Richard Joseph Dellamora, "Renaissance and Modern: Conceptions of Renaissance Painters in Victorian Writers," Diss. Yale 1972, p. 255.

change in rhetorical pattern which is used. Rossetti begins with a direct address to the major figure on the canvas, posing a question which immediately activates our efforts as reader-viewers to identify elements of the scene from the inner perspective of the Virgin Mother. With each successive question we are drawn further into visual participation in the painting. Subtle contrast is created between this process and one aspect of the poem noted earlier; while the identifiable concrete images from the painting help to fix our relation to it, Rossetti's ambiguous phrasing and almost too concrete a conception of the abstractions Death, Eternity, and Time, reinforce a sense of distance from his personal standpoint as exemplary viewer. The last question in the octave most strongly evokes an image parallel to, or in harmony with, the canvas ("thy face to bend/Its silent prayer upon the Son, while he/Blesses"); it thus temporarily strengthens our sense of proximity to the scene and our identification with the emotions and ideas which Rossetti reads into it. Across the sonnet break, however, Rossetti abandons the approach of posing questions to the figure within the painting, signaling a withdrawal from the intensity of identification. While the Virgin Mother is once again evoked, she is now addressed more ceremoniously, as "Mother of grace." The less frequent mention of visual images from the canvas now counterparts the increasing use of conventional devotional language. Rather than drawing the reader-viewer into deeper involvement and identification with Rossetti's interpretation of the work, this pattern

serves to turn us back to reassess our relationship to the painting. Such reevaluation, the tracing of relation between painting and poem, personal vision and public conception, seems to be consciously encouraged by Rossetti through the complex of counterbalances which interweaves throughout the poem.

While the very act of composing a sonnet "for" a picture suggests a relation between visual and verbal work, it is clearly too facile a conclusion to draw that the purpose of such a poem is simply descriptive or illustrative. Rossetti's motive in these instances seems similar to that underlying his creation of other counterparts: to elucidate another work. The sonnet on Madonna of the Rocks certainly does intensify our relationship, as viewers, to the painting. At the same time, however, by departing from the painting at the point when through his efforts we have become most involved in it, and directing us towards a contrast between private imaginative vision and publicly sanctioned belief, Rossetti forces us to recognize the ultimate impenetrability and autonomy of the work of art—not only of the painting upon which the sonnet is based, but of the poet's vision as well.

During the autumn of 1849, after the public debut of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Rossetti and William Holman Hunt made a trip to the continent, concentrating on Paris and the Low Countries. The circumstances surrounding the trip are significant because the association with the P.R.B. encouraged Rossetti to articulate more fully than he was

ever to do again what may be construed as a philosophy of art. To some extent, the influence of his fellow artists determined Rossetti's response to the works which he viewed during the journey. We may perceive the brethren's canons of taste, for example, behind Rossetti's brushing off most of the contents of the Louvre as "slosh."⁷ A greater portion of the response recorded by Rossetti, however, reveals more personal standards for evaluation and a more individual approach at work. Although many critics encourage the view that Rossetti's tastes in art were eclectic, if not inconsistent, we may notice in the letters from Rossetti which reached various members of the P.R.B. an underlying focus which was consistent, and which was to be borne out in Rossetti's own works. These statements by Rossetti were further substantiated by his composition of a series of sonnets on works which were particularly meaningful to him. A closer examination of these paired paintings and poems not only leads to more insight towards a pattern of influences and affinities, but towards the nature of the interrelationship between the visual and verbal arts as well.

One of the first paintings to be specifically mentioned by Rossetti in his correspondence during the trip was Fête Champêtre (Pastoral Concert) by Giorgione, which

⁷ Works, "Notes," p. 665; see also sonnet VI ("To the P.R.B."), VIII ("Last Visit to the Louvre"), and IX ("Last Sonnets at Paris"), and William Rossetti's notes on these sonnets.

Rossetti saw at the Louvre.⁸ He notes that "there are very few good things at the Louvre," and singles out, as one of them, "a pastoral—at least, a kind of pastoral—by Giorgione, which is so intensely fine that I condescended to sit down before it and write a sonnet."⁹ Beneath the self-consciousness of Rossetti's statement one may recognize the impulse which motivated him, when confronted by a work he already knew and deeply admired as an engraving, to memorialize his response in sonnet form.

That one purpose of the sonnet is descriptive is clearly shown in a brief observation of the transposition of imagery from painting to poem. It is a credit to Rossetti's treatment of distinctive details that the correspondence between his sonnet and this painting is easily recognized, despite the misleading title of the poem, "For a Venetian Pastoral by Giorgione," which is still unaccompanied in modern editions of Rossetti's poetry by an explanatory note.¹⁰

⁸ Now attributed to Titian.

⁹ Letters, I, 71 (To William Michael Rossetti, 8 October 1849). Nowhere does Rossetti indicate an awareness of the possible relationship between this painting and pastoral poetry, either classical or contemporary with the graphic work.

¹⁰ Hardinge's description (and complaint) of the confusion incurred through the misnomer is interesting both in itself, and in light of William Rossetti's note upon it in which he attempts an explanation of the designation, "Venetian Pastoral," which had set Hardinge looking for a Giorgione painting replete with gondolas and waves. William suggests that, "he [Rossetti] may mean a pastoral in the Venetian School, or equally well, a pastoral of the terra firma of Venetia—as distinct from the city of Venice"; p. 436n.

The sonnet realizes every element of Rossetti's prose description of the painting:

There is a woman, naked, at one side, who is dipping a glass vessel into a well; and in the centre two men and another naked woman, who seem to have paused for a moment in playing on the musical instruments which they hold.¹¹

Rossetti has not merely written a literal transposition of these and other images of the painting, however, as the scrupulous transferal of detail may suggest. The poem captures a strong sense of the tone of the painting as well, and reveals a more comprehensive effort to convey a shared aesthetic experience. As in the case of Madonna of the Rocks, Rossetti appears to have been attracted by a sense of mystery or allusiveness in the visual work. Along with the particular characteristics of each work by which its conventional genre may be identified are idiosyncratic elements. In each instance Rossetti has pursued these elements while emphasizing the conventional qualities of the graphic work in counterpart.

In this sonnet, in a manner and rhetorical style similar to his poem on the Leonardo painting, Rossetti leads the reader-viewer into the canvas by directing the visual process. He begins by guiding our focus to the gesture of the almost statue-like figure on the left, frozen in motion, which he transmutes to words which are correspondingly weighty and static:

¹¹ Letters, I, 71 (To William Michael Rossetti, 8 October 1849).

WATER, for anguish of the solstice:—nay,
 But dip the vessel slowly,—nay—but lean
 And hark how at its verge the wave sighs in
 Reluctant. Hush! (ll. 1-4)¹²

The gradual identification of images and motifs from the painting encourages our visual exploration of the canvas, while the introduction of purely imagined elements ("at its verge the wave sighs in") is made so subtly that we, as reader-viewers, probably find in it no irregularity. The speaker's directions ("lean," "hark," "hush") seem to apply not only to the figure holding the vessel but to us as we momentarily become imaginative participants in the scene. At the same time in these lines, the abundance of caesuras created by commas, hyphens, and full stops, and the evidence of diction characterized by the repetition of words and sounds, create an effect fully in harmony with the forms and images of the canvas. Moreover, the initial movement is highly appropriate not only to this specific work, but to the unveiling of any visual work by verbal means. The urge

¹² Quotations from this and other poems in the chapter are from Works, rather than from earlier published versions unless noted, since that edition incorporates the revisions made by Rossetti, and reflects a mature articulation of ideas and impulses underlying the creation of sonnets for pictures. One may compare the above lines with the corresponding four lines from the Germ version of the sonnet:

Water, for anguish of the solstice,—yea
 Over the vessel's mouth still widening,
 Listlessly, dipped to let the water in
 With low vague gurgle.

See William Michael Rossetti, ed., The Germ . . . Being a Facsimile Reprint of the Literary Organ of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Published in 1850: With an Introduction (London: Elliot Stock, 1901), p. 181. I think it is evident that while the means may vary slightly (i.e., the absence of the double "nay"), the effect of the lines is similar, and is simply made stronger in the revised version.

in the sonnet towards stasis, traditionally attributed to the visual medium, encourages the verbal "painting" of the scene, while the inevitable movement of the poem emphasizes the corresponding narrative capacity which Rossetti perceives in the canvas. We may recognize in Rossetti's attempts to alternately still natural motion ("the wave sighs in/Reluctant") and animate the static, another instance of his effort to juxtapose opposites and to emphasize tension.¹³ Rossetti also accomplishes this effect by emphasizing the contrast in the painting between the central figures and the background. In the background of the painting another world is depicted where shepherds stride heartily, and the treatment of clouds and trees suggests motion and impermanence. Rossetti intensifies our perception of contrast in the canvas by overlaying the suggestion of stillness further beyond: "beyond all depth away/The heat lies silent at the brink of day."

After mingling the visually apparent and the products of his fancy, Rossetti then leads us back again to a focus on the principal figures and paradoxically, as we narrow our gaze to specific elements of the actual canvas, our relationship with it is lessened. First we envision the lute player and male companion who, in both painting and

¹³ I disagree in this regard with John Dixon Hunt, who feels that Rossetti endeavors in the poem to emulate the condition of painting, and strives towards instantaneity by never allowing the lines in the sonnet to rest; see "A Moment's Monument: Reflections on Pre-Raphaelite Vision in Poetry and Painting," in Pre-Raphaelitism, ed., with introd., James Sambrook (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 244.

poem, appear immobile. Less measurable than the moment between the plucking of the strings is the moment Rossetti next reflects—the piper lets the pipes fall ever so slightly from her lips; just so, we see her, a classical statue whose presence contrasts with the natural setting. Significantly, the sonnet suggests a view impossible by merely regarding the canvas, for we imaginatively face the flutist whose back is actually towards us. Rossetti conveys the conflict which he has perceived, and which we must, through the flow of concrete and sensuous images which he juxtaposes against the first part of that description:

Whither stray
Her eyes now, from whose mouth the slim pipes creep
And leave it pouting; while the shadowed grass
Is cool against her naked side? (ll. 8-11)

Our fluctuating perception of cold marble and warm flesh, the object of art and the living being, contend. The words "cool grass" and "naked side" suddenly transform our response towards the figure, and towards the painting as a whole; that response is further reinforced by the last three lines, which regain the more measured movement of the initial lines as if in pursuit of the iconic stillness of the visual medium:

Let be:—
Say nothing now unto her lest she weep,
Nor name this ever. Be it as it was,—
Life touching lips with Immortality. (ll. 11-14)

In regard to this shift, the concluding injunction may be interpreted as a warning against urging the unhinderable movement of poetry upon this scene, and as a plea to allow the painting as painting (although it may be "poetical") to transcend the passage of time. That, just that, is the point

of the painting, captured by Rossetti in the poem. Rossetti conveys the precipitously delicate equilibrium in his description of the single moment captured before us, when an experience of art creates a transitory balance of opposites: "Life touching lips with Immortality" (l. 14). This contact, but not intermingling, of opposites which for Rossetti characterized the canvas, may also be regarded as the relationship between the reader-viewer's realm and the work of art.¹⁴

The juxtaposition of graphic image and imaginative impulse, and of activity and stasis, is also reinforced through Rossetti's counterbalancing of sound and silence. He leads us to a pitch of imaginative apprehension ("hark," "hush!") until we are filled with a sense of the intense silence of the scene. This impression is of more significance than as a point of correspondence between the poem and the idyllic world pictured on canvas. It has often been noted that while the painting is meant to represent a late afternoon, Rossetti chooses to evoke rather the "brink of

¹⁴ I would disagree with M. K. Bequette who, using "Venetian Pastoral" as an example, finds the interrelationship of painting and poem to be one in which the poem enhances the experience of the painting while remaining subsidiary to it. Bequette declares that "'Solemn poetry' in its own right, the painting nevertheless needs real poetry to augment the actual scene"; see "Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Synthesis of Picture and Poem," Hartford Studies in Literature, 4, No. 3 (1972), 219. Bequette does make the significant observation (the main point of his article) of the direction of the reader-viewer through the visual space by means of the poem, and of the heightening of involvement in the graphic work thus afforded. He does not perceive any disengagement from the canvas, however, or the return of the reader-viewer to his own realm, which I think the sonnet ultimately effects.

day." That conception allows for an increased sense of something impending which counterbalances against the intense mood of momentary fulfillment which the painting conveys. The very silence of the scene seems amplified by the potentiality of music and sound. The counterbalance between sound and silence is further emphasized when in lines six and seven, Rossetti notes the visual fact of pause ("the hand trails," "faces cease to sing") which he had mentioned in his prose description, yet also interjects an evocation of sound ("the string/That sobs."). With a withdrawal once again into complete yet pregnant silence ("Let be:—/Say nothing now unto her lest she weep,/Nor name this ever"), we find the separation supported as well between the scene before us and the other auditory mode besides music, that of poetry. The last line evokes the multiplicity of contrasts created by means of the paired complex, and suggests a meeting but not mingling of the perceived and the intuited, the painting and the poem. Like a more familiar poetic tribute to a work of art which counters the "sensual ear" with the "spirit," Rossetti's sonnet on Fête Champêtre makes us more aware of the diverse modes of apprehension which may underly an experience of art.¹⁵

¹⁵ A comparison between Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and Rossetti's "For a Venetian Pastoral" is made by Stein in terms of the ambiguity as to whether reader, figures within the art work, or the artifact itself is being addressed; see Richard L. Stein, The Ritual of Interpretation: The Fine Arts as Literature in Ruskin, Rossetti, and Pater (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), p. 23. These Keatsian echoes may not be coincidental, since during the period when Rossetti's sonnet was written, he and the other

Following the lead of William Michael Rossetti, many critics have expressed a preference for the original version of the last line of the poem, as it appears in Rossetti's letter to William and later in The Germ: "Silence of heat, and solemn poetry," Still, it seems that the same impulse towards juxtaposition but not merger of opposites is expressed. More clearly, in the revised version, however, Rossetti appears to insist upon the autonomy of both arts for, as Richard Stein has observed, the original line bears deep reverberations of Simonides' dictum regarding the sister arts, that poetry creates speaking pictures and paintings silent poems.¹⁶ Rossetti appears quite insistent upon the reasons for the revision, as explained to his brother William:

I remember you expressed a preference once before for the old line which seems to me quite bad. 'Solemn poetry' belongs to the class of phrases absolutely forbidden I think in poetry. It is intellectually incestuous,—poetry seeking to beget its emotional offspring on its own identity. Whereas I see nothing too 'ideal' in the present line. It gives only the momentary contact with the immortal which results from sensuous culmination and is always a half-conscious element of it.¹⁷

members of the P.R.B. professed deep admiration for Keats. Like the poem's Keatsian analogue too, "For a Venetian Pastoral" may be noted for the unusual number and range of interpretations of its somewhat obscure conclusion possible. In fact, this aspect of ambiguity is often coupled with the one noted by Stein, and variants in readings determined by the reader's perception of who or what is being addressed by the speaker.

¹⁶ Stein, p. 21.

¹⁷ Letters, II, 726-27 (27 August 1869).

The illumination of a momentary meeting of opposites is clearly the underlying impulse in the creation of this paired complex.

In another of the paintings in the Louvre which Rossetti so admired that he composed a sonnet for it, counterbalances like those in the "Venetian Pastoral" pair are at work. The Parnassus of Andrea Mantegna suggested to Rossetti a similar instance of transformation through aesthetic experience, and a similar momentary point of meeting of diverse impulses. The painting portrays the triumph of Venus and Mars, who stand upon a rocky arch surveying the scene below; there the Muses dance gaily in a circle, watched on one side by Mercury (who holds Pegasus) and the other by Apollo. A figure whose forge and hammer, and threatening motions suggest that he is Vulcan, stands in the distant left. It is no wonder that this painting attracted Rossetti, who moved with it sympathetically for, from a modern perspective, the painting has been described with the adjective, "Pre-Raphaelite."¹⁸ Rossetti's praise of "some ineffably poetical Mantegnas" at the time he first saw the work, suggests that when converted to sonnet form, his response would focus on the mingling of the sister arts.¹⁹ And once again, as in the case of others of Rossetti's sonnets for graphic

¹⁸ Giuseppe Fiocco, Paintings by Mantegna (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1963), n.p.

¹⁹ Letters, I, 65 (To William Michael Rossetti, 4 October 1849).

works not his own, the overriding quality of suggestiveness, and the ambiguity or allusiveness of meaning, appears to have been part of the work's attraction for him.

To "An Allegorical Dance of Women," originally titled "A Dance of Nymphs," Rossetti had, in The Germ, appended the following note: "It is necessary to mention, that this picture would appear to have been in the artist's mind an allegory, which the modern spectator may seek vainly to interpret."²⁰ The later removal of this note may be the reason why some readers perceive the sonnet as alluding to the experience and involvement of the artist himself, as imagined by Rossetti. Yet it would be difficult to propose, as the poem does, that the meaning of the work of art may be penetrated by intuition rather than reason, if Rossetti intended only the artist as focus; for Rossetti obviously did recognize the element of allegory in the work while intentionally choosing to ignore it within the context of the poem. This element would have demanded the activity of the intellect of the artist who utilized it, whereas it may be ignored by the reader-viewer who can focus instead on impulse rather than idea. Since Rossetti is always concerned with the balance between the two, we would expect his interpretation of the visual work to accommodate the perspectives of artist, viewer, and that within the work of

²⁰ William Michael Rossetti, ed., The Germ, p. 181.

art alike.²¹ Further, the vision described in the sonnet seems subsequent to the creative act rather than preparatory to or simultaneous with it, even if it is from the artist's perspective; and at that point, the artist may be identified with other viewers, and we with him. It would not be inconceivable for Rossetti to have had this identification in mind, for in his sonnets on his own pictures, as we have seen, he often equates the act of creating with the act of beholding. The most likely reading is one which accounts for Rossetti's usual mode in other sonnets for pictures, in which he leads the reader-viewer into an actively imaginative standpoint towards the work of art by emphasizing both concrete visual elements from the graphic work and what we may identify as his own response to them. The speaker (the "I" of line one) draws readers of the sonnet into the visual work with a combination of description and interpretation, concrete visual fact and imaginative projection. As in other Rossetti sonnets for pictures, the poem is addressed to a figure within the canvas with whose heightened experience or awareness we are encouraged to identify. The ultimate conclusion to which the paired complex perceived in this way brings us would still permit us to perceive the

²¹ In his notes to Works (p. 665), William Rossetti mentions the note which accompanied the poem in The Germ, and adds, "starting from this idea of a quasi-allegory not readily interpretable, he [Rossetti] says in the sonnet that the emotion of the artist, which produced the picture, is manifest, but not the particular thought which governed it." I do not believe that this reading conflicts with my suggestion of Rossetti's interpretation of the visual work.

the process depicted as one enacted as well in the mind of the artist, as he transposes his vision from internal to external form.

Rather than the figure of Mercury beside the dancers, as sometimes suggested, it may be that the distant figure of Vulcan is the one upon whom the poem centers, for he beholds rock, sea, and dancers. Standing aside in his rustic surroundings, he is not just representative of a contrasting perspective. As an outsider, he could as easily symbolize the reader-viewer who, if he attempts to capture the meaning, is surely lost, but who may be conveyed within the scene through an emotional and sensual appreciation rather than an intellectual one.

From the first two lines of the sonnet, a contrast which we have seen recur repeatedly in Rossetti's sonnets for pictures is established between different modes of comprehension: that based upon reason and upon intuition. The conjecture that meaning may have been reached is framed by a rhythm which is complementary, a mixture of hesitant pause created by stops, and a counterthrust through Rossetti's choice of words ("scarcely . . . yet"). The following lines pose a parallel between feeling and visual perception which harkens back to the contrast in "For a Venetian Pastoral" between poetry and graphic art. For here, music, like song, dance, and poetry, each a temporal and intangible mode of expression, counterbalances with the concrete and static nature of the visual representation.

The effect of such contrast may actually be experienced by the reader-viewer, for the music of Rossetti's verse becomes the music of the "allegorical dance," necessarily only suggested on canvas, while through Rossetti's use of language ("these rocks," "that ridged sea"), the viewer of the canvas has become more deeply involved in the scene portrayed. With line five, which counters line one with "I believe" rather than "I think," we pass to a state in which visual fact is used paradoxically to move beyond the evident. The focus on the dance of nymphs ("the girls," "how many feet," "the dancers") is counteracted at each return to it, by a denial of comprehension through the senses, through knowable fact instead of intuition. Like the figure to whom the poem is addressed, we as reader-viewers may have only barely felt (i.e., "just felt"), or heard ("nor gave ear"), or seen ("nor bent . . ./His eyes") that which we nevertheless, in some wise, know. In this intense moment of experience which for Rossetti is at the core of all aesthetic experiences, such contraries and paradoxes do mix; "It is bitter glad/Even unto tears."

By drawing us into the visual medium through the verbal, Rossetti is ultimately able to lead us to recognize their distinctness. The two art forms are not merged or synthesized; rather, Rossetti intermingles suggestions of the distinct nature and purpose of both. The dichotomies upon which the concluding lines finally focus parallel this expression of the diverse impulses of painting and poem:

Its meaning filleth it,
 A secret of the wells of Life: to wit:—
 The heart's each pulse shall keep the sense it had
 With all, though the mind's labour run to nought.
(ll. 11-14)

Heart and mind, intuitive and intellectual apprehension, are counterpointed in the pursuit for meaning that underlies all art. If one were to regard the sonnet simply as an exercise in interpretation, these last lines might be read as suggesting the ultimate failure of analysis (and, thereby, the failure finally of the poem) and the autonomy of the visual work of art. The greater complexity of contrasts developed by means of the paired works, however, should lead us to recognize both the uniqueness of each expressive mode, and their possible interdependence.

In addition to the "Louvre" sonnets, Rossetti was inspired to write a poem for a painting which he and Hunt first saw in the Luxembourg, Ingres' Roger Freeing Angelica. After his first visit to that museum, Rossetti wrote to his brother about an Ingres painting, noting that "One picture of his in the Luxembourg is unsurpassed for exquisite perfection by anything I have ever seen."²² We cannot be certain that Roger Freeing Angelica is the work to which the the comment refers; yet, several days later, Rossetti records his "Last visit to the Luxembourg," with the pair of sonnets, "Roger Rescuing Angelica; by Ingres."²³

²² Letters, I, 66 (4 October 1849).

²³ Ibid., I, 74 (To William Michael Rossetti, 18 October 1849).

In addition to suggestions of temporal, tonal, and technical contrast in Ingres' work, no doubt certain thematic elements attracted Rossetti to Ingres' painting, and inspired him to write two sequential sonnets about that work. The theme of the beautiful lady in distress was always a favorite of Rossetti's and, in his early career, he must have been quite drawn to Ingres' depiction of the scene from Orlando Furioso in which Roger arrives to do combat with Orc and save Angelica. We may also conjecture that Rossetti was attracted by Ingres' imagery, for the painting depicts a scene of desolate rocks, a turbulent sea, and in the distance, a flame-orange moon barely visible behind ominous clouds. Against that backdrop, a stark contrast is created by the colorful and pliant folds of Roger's garments, and the soft flesh of Angelica's naked body as she stands chained to a precipice.

More than those sonnets for pictures by painters other than himself previously regarded, Rossetti's paired sonnets for Roger Freeing Angelica reveal a particularly descriptive impulse. Soon after the return of Rossetti and Hunt from their journey, William Rossetti was to record in the P.R.B. Journal that the poet Coventry Patmore was "much struck with the character they [the sonnets] possess of being descriptive of a painting."²⁴ Rossetti himself

²⁴ William E. Fredeman, ed., with introd. and notes, The P.R.B. Journal: William Michael Rossetti's Diary of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood 1848-1853 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 23.

realized this and while corresponding with William some twenty years later, before the publication of Poems, wrote, "I still bear rather a grudge . . . to the two on Ingres's picture, which are merely picturesque, and which stupid people are sure to like better than better things."²⁵ Yet in spite of this limitation in the sonnets, they do appear to possess a more complex relationship to the work of art.

The first sonnet begins from a highly descriptive approach, transposing all of the essential details of the composition. Not only does Rossetti convey static images, however, but also captures what Robert Rosenblum notes as the startling shift between protagonists in the painting:²⁶

A REMOTE sky, prolonged to the sea's brim:
 One rock-point standing buffeted alone,
 Vexed at its base with a foul beast unknown,
 Hell-birth of geomaunt and teraphim:
 A knight, and a winged creature bearing him,
 Reared at the rock: a woman fettered there,
 Leaning into the hollow with loose hair
 And throat let back and heartsick trail of limb.
(ll. 1-8)

Further, even in these lines which appear to aim for a pictorial effect, we must notice the reverberations of the literary. More than simple description is served by the choice of language which Rossetti uses to describe Orc, the sea-monster, "Hell-birth of geomaunt and teraphim," a line originally made even more archaic-sounding with the phrase

²⁵ Works, "Notes," p. 665, and Letters, II, 744 (15 September 1869).

²⁶ Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1967), p. 138.

"Hell-spurge."²⁷ Highly literary language must remind us of the poetic source underlying this visual work. At the same time, the contrast between literary and pictorial is quickly developed through the handling of suggestions of time. The poem conveys an initial impression of a temporal dimension in the work of art ("remote," "prolonged"). This impression is overturned, and tension which tends more towards the static pictorial mode is created, when we realize that this line actually evokes an image frequently used by Rossetti in his poetry—that of the horizon line of a painting.

The descriptive tendency of the first sonnet is further modified and made more complex when we proceed beyond the octave, to the next six lines. The pictorial effect of the octave is created not only by the details of form and composition which it transposes from the painting, but by the manner in which it does so. The entire eight lines constitute one sentence, fragmented into descriptive phrases which function as static points of focus. The absence of any finite verb highlights the lack of narrative impulse in a mode usually characterized by sequential rather than simultaneous impressions. Further, the frequent use of participle phrases creates a sense of tension due to the cumulative expectation of action. In the sestet, this

²⁷ In the version published in The Germ (p. 182); William Rossetti suggests that perhaps his brother revised the line because he found it "too grotesque with three weird words in it" (Hardinge, p. 442n.). This packing of poetry with unusual diction reflects one of Rossetti's pastimes, that of perusing old manuscripts and volumes in the British Museum, for "stunning" words.

tension is finally relieved with effects which contrast strongly with the lines preceding:

The sky is harsh, and the sea shrewd and salt:
 Under his lord the griffin horse ramps blind
 With rigid wings and tail. The spear's lithe stem
 Thrills in the roaring of those jaws: behind,
 That evil length of body chafes at fault.
 She does not hear nor see—she knows of them.
 (ll. 9-14)

Now the lines evoke imaged activity, as they abound in simple, strong verbs. The chain of monosyllabic nouns and adjectives, often linked through assonance, also contributes to the dynamic impulse of the sestet. We must note, however, that although intensely dramatic, the sestet is no more narrative in nature than the lines which preceded it.

Carrying over the pictorial effect of the octave, Rossetti continues in these lines to shift focus rapidly, spotlighting one action, then another, but with no sense of sequence or continuity, so that each seems to occur concurrently. Only with the last line do we perceive a suggestion of non-pictorial perspective; focus shifts to Angelica, who is portrayed through the projection of imagined and internalized attributes instead of by means of concrete and visual detail. Significantly, the line reverberates with echoes from others of the sonnets in this sequence. We recognize the familiar contrast between sensory perception and intuitive apprehension, and in doing so, must become conscious of the parallel contrast between the visual and verbal media. Even before the turn to the second sonnet, we may anticipate a radical change in perspective; instead of poetry aspiring to the condition of painting, the second sonnet will lead

the reader-viewer to an awareness of the dimension of the characteristically "poetical" possible in painting.

The rather conventional and allegorical perspective of the first sonnet, with its emphasis on external detail easily recognized and inflexible of interpretation, is exchanged in the second sonnet for the more equivocal and subjective perspective suggested in the final line of the first. Concomitant with this change, the octave of the second sonnet draws the reader-viewer yet further from the realm of the visual medium, while maintaining his involvement in the canvas. We now penetrate the consciousness of Angelica through the imaginative effort of the poet as viewer. His commands, which seem to rise in urgency in lines one through four, counterbalanced with the sequence of questions, equally intense, in lines five through eight, serve a dual purpose. The moment on canvas is made more dramatic and less expressive of the character of visual representation, while by responding to the tone of injunction, we feel ourselves to be more actively involved in the experience within the canvas. Lines one through three also suggest the withdrawal from sensory experience which we have previously observed in other sonnets for pictures:

Clench thine eyes now—'tis the last instant, girl:
 Draw in thy senses, set thy knees, and take
 One breath for all:

This withdrawal, paradoxically projected within a work the nature of which is to encourage sensory response, further marks the penetration through the graphic medium to the realm

of intuitive apprehension. When most closed off, experience is most intense ("thy life is keen awake"). From this peak of heightened awareness, the sequence of questions in lines five through eight serve as counterbalance. Clarity is replaced by a multitude of alternate perceptions; these are reflexive not only of the state of consciousness of the protagonist, which we have imaginatively penetrated, but also, more significantly perhaps, of our own multifarious visions. From static and inflexible perception we have reached what may be regarded as the maximal intermingling of the verbal in the visual mode. Yet, at the same time, the sequence of interrogative sentences has brought us to a point which must by that very fact be unstable. Beyond the octave, we are precipitated once again away from an intermingling of media, to a renewed consciousness of the impossibility of integration expressed, characteristically, by the juxtaposition of elements from both. In other words, Rossetti makes us conscious of the impossibility of sustained synthesis by representing independence, beneath interrelationship, of art forms. The sense of diverse vision is amplified by the rapid exposition of contrasts which break the convergent thrust of the preceding lines. Rossetti counterpoints silence with sound, motion with stillness, death with life. The momentum of the verse, built from shifting perspectives, propels us imaginatively beyond the moment of the painting and Ingres' vision. With the final lines, emphasis falls on the immediate, the human, and the real, giving a conclusive counterthrust against the almost

atemporal and supernatural impulse which, to a great degree, the painting conveys.

The language of the second sestet is effectively chosen to foster this dissolution of synthesis. The sestet begins with the exclamation, "Now, silence." By very fact of the continuation of the poem, the distinction between the silence of the visual and the poetic voice is underlined. It is important to recognize, however, that Rossetti clearly intended us to be aware of the intermingling of painting and poetry rather than for us to return to simple contemplation of the visual work.²⁸ We may observe that a shift in the evocation of time is utilized by Rossetti towards this end. In the octave, Rossetti intensifies our consciousness of time through an increasing sense of the imminent moment.

²⁸ In his analysis of this paired poem and painting, which I believe the most thorough and perceptive hitherto offered, Richard Stein notes (pp. 139-40),

Rossetti concludes with a portrayal of the moment after the fight, but as he imagines the scene again unanimated and silent, his language ceases to describe emotions and records only appearances and the general moods created by setting and the colors on the canvas: . . . [Stein quotes lines 9-14] This "nakedness" is only the absence of all the emotive suggestions made by Rossetti elsewhere in the pair of sonnets. Now the demonic beast is only a "dead thing"; the tense, "heart-sick" lady only "a woman in her nakedness." It is as if the figures of the painting have become at last only painted images. This is the final stage in a full perception of art, the point at which we draw back from an intense visual experience and recognize its artificiality. While Stein's comments appear valid, they are not as complete in their scope as I believe the paired painting and poem warrant. The recognition by the sonnets' end of the autonomy of the visual work is only partially the point of view which I perceive Rossetti to project in this pair.

Without ever entirely adopting a narrative mode, Rossetti still suggests the passage of time through the use of the past tense in the sequence of questions in lines four through eight. The sestet, on the other hand, which we have noted to signal a further return to the division between the arts, contains the most "narrative" language in the pair of sonnets, increasing our sensitivity to the distinctions between modes of expression:

Now, silence; for the sea's is such a sound
 As irks not silence; and except the sea
 All now is still. Now the dead thing doth cease
 To writhe, and drifts. He turns to her: and she
 Cast from the jaws of death, remains there, bound,
 Again a woman in her nakedness.

Still, we should note, this suggestion of the continuity of time is made in much the same manner as it was in the sestet of the first sonnet. The various actions, which while here suggest sequence rather than simultaneity, are portrayed through a similarly "spotty" fashion. This juxtaposition of characteristically visual and verbal impulses is augmented by yet another device. While these lines are strongly pictorial in their use of detail, we must of course recognize that they convey a moment which is not within the representational bounds of the painting. Rather, Rossetti has imaginatively "painted" a moment beyond that of the graphic work, that very act being distinctly literary, and suggesting that for Rossetti, the pictured moment was not sufficient. The sonnets on the painting were both his tribute to a work which mingled the poetic and pictorial and a critical statement about the nature and limits of both

arts, and their interrelationship.

From Paris, Rossetti and Hunt proceeded to Brussels, and Rossetti has left abundant records of his experiences during this portion of the 1849 journey. Brussels seems to have been the highlight of the trip for Rossetti, for his correspondence becomes even more animated, and records far more praise than criticism, more personal response than P.R.B. "party line." As Rossetti notes in one of the travel poems,

John Memmeling and John van Eyck
Hold state at Bruges. In sore shame
I scanned the works that keep their name. ("Antwerp
and Bruges," stanza II, ll. 1-3)

Besides letters and travel poems, the visit to Brussels and Rossetti's distillation of significant ideas and images encountered there are commemorated in two more "Sonnets for Pictures."

In addition to "a very wonderful Van Eyck" in the collection of the Royal Academy at Brussels, Rossetti makes note in his correspondence of "some most stupendous works of Memling—among them one of a Virgin and Child, quite astounding."²⁹ So moved by it was Rossetti, that this work was the inspiration for a sonnet. There can be little doubt

²⁹ Letters, I, 85 (To the P.R.B., 25 October 1849 [insert in a letter to James Collinson, 24 October 1849]). Rossetti variously spelled the artist's name Memmeling, Memling, and Memmelinck; however, I will use the form of Memlinc, current in art history and criticism, and used by Max J. Friedlander, whose Early Netherlandish Painting is the definitive work on the subject. Titles of works of art will also follow Friedlander's form. See Hans Memlinc and Gerard David, Vol. VI, pts. I and II of Early Netherlandish Painting (Leyden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1971).

that the corresponding visual work is in fact the right-hand verso panel of Altarpiece of the Baptism of Christ, now attributed to Gerard David. Although some critics writing on this sonnet simply circumvent the issue of the identity of the corresponding visual work by avoiding any mention of a specific painting, others have ventured an opinion on the matter, speculation resting on two works. The more frequently suggested graphic counterpart is the left panel of Memlinc's Diptych of the Virgin and Martin Van Nieuwenhowe, sometimes simply called the Virgin and Child. The major problem in drawing such a parallel is that this work has always been housed in the Hospital of St. John (now the Hans Memlingmuseum), while the parenthetical note to the poem states, "In the Academy of Bruges," The suggestion has been made that Rossetti simply erred, and in fact meant St. John's, but his letter, quoted earlier, makes this suggestion invalid, as does the fact that during an 1863 trip to the continent with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, his brother William records in his diary that he admired Memlinc's "extremely pretty Madonna and Child" in the Academy.³⁰ A second suggestion as to the corresponding graphic work has been made by Robert Keane, who states only that the "Memling" Virgin and Child on which Rossetti wrote the poem is actually the outer wing

³⁰ William Michael Rossetti, ed., Rossetti Papers, 1862-1870 (London: Sands, 1903), p. 37.

of a Gerard David triptych, The Baptism of Christ.³¹ I think that we must concur with the latter suggestion for a number of reasons. We may rely on the fact of the unquestionable provenance of the painting. We must also regard the internal evidence in the sonnet itself, details of which comply much more with this painting than with Memlinc's Virgin and Child. One example is the Virgin's more deeply reverberative expression in the David painting, more likely to inspire the sort of psychological probing which occurs in Rossetti's sonnet. Further, the David painting conveys a tighter visual relationship between the Virgin and Christ-child. Her eyes are focused on Christ while they simultaneously seem to reflect upon that "knowledge" which she bears, and she holds him in a gesture at once protective and yet not inhibiting. In all, much more complexity of impulse is evident in the Baptism panel than in Memlinc's Virgin and Child. Finally, this work was the subject of inquiry concerning its attribution during the nineteenth century, after it was returned to Brussels from Paris (where plunder had taken it) in 1815. In a definitive monograph by James Weale, which established the attribution of the Altarpiece of the Baptism of Christ to David, that critic notes that the work had in several instances been attributed to Memlinc during the mid-nineteenth century.³²

³¹ Keane, p. 146.

³² James Weale, Beffroi, 2, 292; cited by Eberhard Freiherr Von Bodenhausen, Gerard David und Seine Schule

It is a minor, but additional point of interest that another pair of works which Rossetti admired, the attribution of which has never been in question, were David's Justice Panels. Yet Rossetti describes the panels as "two pictures by some unknown author."³³ William Rossetti in fact points to Dante Gabriel's mistake in this regard, noting that these works (which Rossetti had also described inaccurately in his letter) are by David.³⁴ This further proof of Rossetti's lack of consciousness of the scope of David's work, coupled with his intense admiration for Memlinc, seems to provide conclusive evidence substantiating the recognition of the sonnet's relationship to the David work.

It is possible to observe in the sonnet, "For a Virgin and Child" suggestions of the penetration of the pictorial mode in the poetic, as well as many familiar devices from Rossetti's other sonnets on pictures by which the interrelationship between the media is expressed. The very word with which the poem begins signals that this sonnet on a painting will explore multiple perspectives or modes of perception. "MYSTERY" suggests the religious context of this conventional subject, "God, man's life, born into man

(Munich: Verlagsanstalt F. Bruckmann A.-G., 1905), p. 147 nn. 2 and 3.

³³ Letters, I, 85 (To the P.R.B., 25 October 1849 [insert in a letter to James Collinson, 24 October 1849]).

³⁴ William Michael Rossetti, ed., Præraphaelite Diaries and Letters (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1900), p. 12.

of woman"; but equally, the overtones of paradox which it bears apply to the very act, by poem or painting, of attempting to objectify spiritual apprehension. To increase this sense of complex vision, Rossetti selects concrete details from the canvas, and reads into them a series of contrasts:

MYSTERY: God, man's life, born into man
 Of woman. There abideth on her brow
 The ended pang of knowledge, the which now
 Is calm assured. Since first her task began
 She hath known all. What more of anguish than
 Endurance oft hath lived through, the whole space
 Through night till day, passed weak upon her face
 While the heard lapse of darkness slowly ran? (ll. 1-8)

The first four of these lines suggest a sense of stasis complementary to an iconic painting ("there abideth," now . . ./Is calm assured"). Countering this effect, the following four lines evoke a sense of the passage of time, drawing us from the pictorial mode toward the poetic. This counterbalance is reinforced by the contrast between the seemingly definitive statement, "Since first her task began/She hath known all," which implies a comprehensive fullness of vision which certainly could be conveyed graphically with a highly suggestive and symbolic image, and the question which follows. In the lines which posit the query Rossetti draws the reader into imaginative interpretation of the visual work and specifically of the expression on the Virgin Mother's face. As in the case of other sonnets for pictures, we may penetrate the consciousness of a figure within the canvas through the direct agency of the poem as interpretation and as it leads us to recall our own knowledge of

what is implied by the image of the Virgin outside the means of the picture itself to convey.

Across the sonnet break, Rossetti seems for one moment to perfectly capture an intermingling of visual and verbal impulses. Expressing imaginative inference rather than visual fact, lines nine and ten conflate in one instant "all that hath been" and all that "shall be." Religious chronicle, which shares a narrative character with the literary mode, is captured within the pictorial representation. Yet, as always, this perfect intermingling is not sustained; instead, Rossetti returns to a highly descriptive manner:

Where He sits
Even now, a babe, He holds the symbol fruit
Perfect and chosen. (ll. 1-23)³⁵

Against this graphic image, the final lines appear unequivocally "poetic" in impulse. Not only do they allude to what is universally accepted as a literary tradition, whether or not reinforced by faith, but they reflect an interpretive vision outside the means of a painted work by itself to convey.

³⁵ This pictorial detail is an excellent example of one by which we may tend to identify the parallel graphic work even without additional evidence. The "symbol fruit" most often suggests the apple, through which man fell, and might encourage us to identify the poem's counterpart as the Memlinc Virgin and Child. In that work, however, the Christ-child does not "hold," but is grasping for, the fruit in Mary's fingers. On the other hand, in the panel of the Baptism triptych which represents the Virgin and Child, the infant Christ firmly holds a bunch of grapes: not the more familiar but an equally valid symbolic motif suggesting the eventual redemption of man through the blood of Christ.

Rossetti mentions another of his favorites among the masterpieces of Netherlandish art, in a letter to the P.R.B. in which he also reiterates sentiments expressed elsewhere:

But by far the best of all are the miraculous works of Memling and Van Eyck. The former is here in a strength that quite stunned us—and perhaps proves himself to have been a greater man even than the latter. In fact, he was certainly so intellectually, and quite an equal in mechanical power. His greatest production is a large triptych in the Hospital of St. John representing in its three compartments: firstly the Decollation of St. John Baptist; secondly, the Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine to the Infant Saviour; and thirdly, the Vision of St. John Evangelist in Patmos. I shall not attempt any description; I assure you that the perfection of character and even drawing, the astounding finish, the glory of colour, and above all the pure religious sentiment and ecstatic poetry of these works, is not to be conceived of or described. Even in seeing them, the mind is at first bewildered by such Godlike completeness, and only after some time while has elapsed can at all analyze the causes of its awe and admiration; and then finds these feelings so much increased by analysis that the last impression left is mainly one of utter shame at its own inferiority.³⁶

We may regard the sonnet subsequently written, "For a Marriage of St. Catherine," as Rossetti's endeavor at such analysis of a work both pictorial and poetic.

Like "For a Virgin and Child," this sonnet begins with the word, "MYSTERY," and for similar reasons. Not merely a holy mystery (here, not God born into man of woman, but instead, a mystic marriage to Christ) is being evoked; the complexity of perception and the challenge to comprehension are also alluded to. While the poem is perhaps the most descriptive of all the sonnets for pictures, Rossetti does project literary devices upon the scene represented, to

³⁶ Letters, I, 84 (25 October 1849 [insert in a letter to James Collinson, 24 October 1849]).

illuminate its poetic dimension and to involve the reader-viewer more actively in the work. In the octave, Rossetti intermingles visual detail actually perceived with the imaginative penetration of St. Catherine's consciousness, and an emphasis on the immediate moment with a more comprehensive sense of time's scope. Responding to Memlinc's treatment of iconographic elements (i.e., the wheel and sword, symbols of St. Catherine's martyrdom, for example), Rossetti goes beyond the moment portrayed to suggest the history of the saint, "ever unenticed/From God, and in the end thus fitly priced" (ll. 4-5). In this way perhaps, the pair is distinct, for while Rossetti urges the reader-viewer towards a sense of the maximum cross-fertilization of media, he never really departs, as he does in the case of other sonnets for pictures, from the graphically "given." Across the sonnet break, Rossetti does go so far as to project a sense of narrative upon the scene:

There is a pause while Mary Virgin turns
 The leaf and reads. With eyes on the spread book
 That damsel at her knees reads after her. (ll. 9-11)

Line twelve provides a transition, however, which is made stronger by the parallelism of "John whom He loved, and John His harbinger." Their role in the scene, as regarded by Rossetti, seems to characterize the intended response to the paired painting and poem; they "listen and watch," much as we do, as imaginative participants in the scene through its literary dimension. The two impulses are conjoined, but not merged. To give this conclusion more impact, Rossetti turns

finally from the inner perspective from which he and we, as reader-viewers, have regarded the painting by means of the poem, and notes, "Whereon soe'er thou look,/The light is starred in gems and the gold burns" (ll. 13-14). With this final turn, we are ejected from the inner standpoint created through the sonnet "for" the picture. We may be tempted to regard the "thou" of line thirteen as ambiguous, for that would permit us to remain within the realm of the canvas, perceiving along with the figure or figures to whom the pronoun refers the light which pervades this spiritually significant moment. Yet we find the visual senses of all but ourselves engaged: for Catherine, awe and music "hath possessed her eyes in thought"; the Virgin reads while "That damsel at her knees reads after her"; and finally, St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist stand and watch. We realize that no longer identified with the speaker as viewer, nor with the figures in the painting, we are being addressed as outsiders for whom no matter how intense a spiritual vision the painting offers, it must be an extrinsic rather than intrinsic one.

Of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's letter about the painting which provoked this last poem "for" a picture, William Rossetti notes, "These are very strong expressions, testifying to the early 'Praeraphaelite' enthusiasm."³⁷ Certainly, to a degree, we may attribute Rossetti's attraction to the works for which he wrote accompanying

³⁷ Works, "Notes," p. 666.

sonnets to their reflection of qualities which the P.R.B. admired and wished to emulate. In spite of some wide stylistic differences, each painting aspires towards clarity of form and richness of tone. Composition in each is directed towards the articulation of ideas or impulses unique to that particular work itself, beyond those expressive of some externally imposed convention. As varied as the works appear to be thematically, each treats a subject with an underlying allegorical framework. Like works later produced by the Pre-Raphaelites themselves, these paintings invite a "reading" of their implications, and encourage participation by the viewer as he formulates his relationship to the meaning of the work. It is significant, too, that each of the paintings upon which Rossetti based a sonnet was based upon or related to some manner of literary tradition, a characteristic towards which his fellow Pre-Raphaelites would have been sympathetic. Even in cases where Rossetti would not have been aware of the literary counterpart, one would like to think that the relationship was perceived unconsciously, and may have contributed to the factors which led Rossetti to commemorate those particular works in poetry.

Some insight into aspects of visual art particularly admired by Rossetti as an individual as well as a proponent of P.R.B. doctrine may be gained by a brief look at his prose criticism on the paintings of others. Written during 1850-51 while the influence of his Pre-Raphaelite brethren would still have been significant, and yet as an activity,

unlike the continental trip, pursued independently of them, to a significant degree Rossetti's art criticism reflects his personal inclinations.³⁸ To be sure, his praise of clarity of form, color, and finish, or his criticism of insipid or vague subject matter and coarse or "dirty" handling marks the Pre-Raphaelite influence upon these reviews. Even in his choice of language, familiar terms like "truth," "purity," and "brilliance," we hear Pre-Raphaelite echoes, and these of course are most strong in his critiques of the works of personal friends and associates of the P.R.B. like Ford Madox Brown and William Holman Hunt. In other respects, however, these notices seem to reflect Rossetti's personal standards, as well as his unique approach to visual art. Just as the sonnets for pictures do, Rossetti's evaluations and interpretations of works he admires involve an imaginative projection into the graphic work.

Rossetti may identify the "poetic" element in the work, as he does in his description of Anthony's The Rival's Wedding:

After contemplating the picture for some while, it will gradually produce that indefinable sense of rest and wonder which, when childhood is once gone, poetry alone can recall. And assuredly, before he knew that colour

³⁸ In several instances Dante Gabriel Rossetti replaced his brother as art-critic, and his remarks were published in William's columns in the Critic and the Spectator. The occasion of these notices and reviews is more fully explained by William Rossetti in Works (pp. 680-81), which also contains all of Rossetti's critical prose from which quotations are drawn.

was laid on with brushes, or that oil-painting was done upon canvas, this painter was a poet.

Or, when writing of a painting by E. H. Lear, which is tagged with lines from Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Rossetti points to Lear's own "poetical resources" and suggests a harmony between visual and verbal, "like voice and instrument." Rossetti declares that, "This picture should hang in the room of a poet. We will dare to say that Keats himself might have lain dreaming before it, and found it minister to his inspiration": a reversal of cause and effect characteristic of Rossetti's sonnets for pictures.

Sometimes, in addition to noting the "poetical" quality of a work, Rossetti undertakes an impressionist exploration of it. Noting, for example, that Branwhite's Environs of an Ancient Garden calls to mind Hood's "Haunted House" or Mrs. Browning's "Deserted Garden," Rossetti notes,

But here the work of desolation has been more complete. Many years must have passed before it became this; and since then it has scarcely changed for many years. All that could quite go is gone; and now, for a long while, it shall stand on into the years as it is.

So evocative and far from "pictorial" is this description of the painting that we may not even react to the incongruities in Rossetti's remarks as he continues, "The water possesses the scene within its depths, as calm as a picture; the white statue almost appears to listen." We are drawn far from graphic and atemporal representation towards the imaginative and narrative mode of the poetic, to the point where a detail from a painting can be described by using the simile "as a picture" without its seeming redundant. We

recognize such intermingling of diverse modes in Rossetti's sonnets on the paintings of others—this, however, and something more.

It appears that the paintings of others for which Rossetti was moved to write a poem have some further quality in common, with which Rossetti identified and which may account for Rossetti's memorializing of them in verse rather than simply in correspondence or prose criticism. The presence of contrast, developed through form, color, and composition, and pointing to some counterbalance of thematic directions, marks an affinity between these works and Rossetti's own efforts in the visual arts. Unlike the contrast that has been occasionally noted to exist in other works by Pre-Raphaelite painters, in these instances the purpose appears different. While the works of the Pre-Raphaelites often juxtapose diverse elements (most notably naturalistic and symbolic elements), the process may be regarded as one aimed at confusion or synthesis of impulses, in order to ultimately direct the spectator to a particular point of view. In Rossetti's work of this period, on the other hand, we have observed the presence of diverse elements employed for the purpose of articulating a sense of manifold visions or perspectives. We may trace in the works by other artists to which during this period Rossetti contributed a poetic counterpart, a handling of contrast similar to his own. Each work conveys a certain tension between perspectives, intermingled but not reconciled. Whether the raging Vulcan upon the rocky promontory in Parnassus, the ghostly

vista in the background of Madonna of the Rocks, or the fifteenth century world "outside" against which the scene in the Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine takes place, each graphic work for which Rossetti wrote a parallel sonnet counterbalances modes of vision; as such, each is an analogue for the experience which, for Rossetti, lay behind the creation of, and recreation through apprehension of, a work of art.

The allegorical and symbolic impulse behind each of the graphic works to which Rossetti gave a verbal correlative suggests not only an interest attributable to the Pre-Raphaelite influence of the time, but a personal predilection as well. As in the case of Rossetti's composition of a sonnet to accompany one of his own graphic works after its completion, the addition of a poetic counterpart appears to reflect a specific underlying purpose. Through a companion-piece in another medium Rossetti was able to illuminate the manifold perceptions of the work possible and the complexity of imaginative vision. Like his own sonnets for sacred subjects, these sonnets serve to elucidate the equivocal nature of an experience portrayed allegorically. Whether similarly religious and moral in impulse or not, the ambiguity or paradox present in each of the graphic works for which these sonnets were written allowed them to be approached from multiple perspectives. And by simultaneously emphasizing the painting's non-pictorial qualities and the quality of painting as material object of art, Rossetti further dramatized the complexity underlying any effort

towards representation of imaginative or noncognitive experience.

The sonnets on paintings by other artists also provide evidence that the sequence of composition of Rossetti's own sacred or symbolic pairs was not a gratuitous one. While these poems seem to express the same relationship to their graphic companion as the poems written by Rossetti after the completion of, and to accompany, his own designs, it might be possible to regard their similarity in impulse as a consequence of their belonging to the same early period of Rossetti's development as poet-painter. One might therefore attribute the compositional order of components of the pair to coincidence. In addition to the sonnets for pictures by other artists discussed thus far, however, Rossetti also composed several poems on the paintings of others more than two decades later. In these instances of poem being antedated by the visual work to which it corresponds, we may hope to find further evidence of a consistent expression of the nature and purpose of the relationship between poetry and painting.

In the spring of 1870, while in the final stages of amassing work for his forthcoming volume of Poems, Rossetti composed his only sonnet ever written for the graphic work of a contemporary, Burne-Jones's Wine of Circe. The poem was clearly not mere "filler" for the volume; during those weeks Rossetti was quite immersed in revision of a number of other poems, most deriving from rough drafts or prose outlines composed during his summer at Penkill. We must assume,

therefore, that some deeper impulse led Rossetti to write the sonnet, an impulse merely hinted at in his only recorded comments about the process in a postscript to a letter to Barbara Bodichon, in which Rossetti notes,

I copy on the spare leaf a sonnet I have just written on Burne-Jones's Circe, which I know you saw at the Water Colour Gallery. I wanted to have some record of his work in my book. I have tried in the first lines to give some notion of the colour, and in the last some impression of the scope of the work,—taking the transformed beasts as images of ruined passion—the torn seaweed of the sea of pleasure. You will remember that in the picture the window shows a view of the sea and the galleys which bear the new lovers and victims of the enchantress.³⁹

The appeal of the work for Rossetti seems to have stemmed from many sources. To a certain degree, the composition of the sonnet reveals the desire to memorialize the work of a good friend and much-admired artist. It was of Burne-Jones that Rossetti said, ". . . if, as I hold, the noblest picture is a painted poem, then I say that in the whole history of art there has never been a painter more greatly gifted than Burne-Jones with the highest qualities of poetic invention."⁴⁰ Yet the uniqueness of this instance of poetic tribute demands that we look further for an explanation. We may attribute the obvious sense of affinity with the work to the fact that, rather like Rossetti's own paintings of the sixties and seventies, it deals with a familiar femme fatale

³⁹ Letters, II, 816 (15 March 1870).

⁴⁰ Quoted in A. W. Baldwin, "The Burne-Joneses, 1860-1920," The Macdonald Sisters (London: Peter Davies, 1960), pp. 141-42.

figure. But certainly there is much, stylistically, in this work, to disincline Rossetti from identifying with it, in addition to the fact that again, so many other contemporary works also shared this thematic distinction and yet were not commemorated thus.⁴¹ We may also attribute Rossetti's particular interest in this work to the fact that when first exhibited by the Old Water-Colour Society in 1869, it met with harsh criticism both for the imaginative liberties taken with its literary source and its excessive emphasis on color and other technical devices.⁴² The relation between these

⁴¹ The Arts Council of Great Britain, Burne-Jones: The Paintings, Graphic, and Decorative Work of Sir Edward Burne-Jones 1833-98 (London: Lund Humphries, 1975), p. 44. Early sketches show that the work was begun in a highly-detailed, gothic style more in line with Rossetti's work of this period (and reflecting his influence), and only became more classical in style towards its completion.

⁴² Athenaeum (No. 2166 [1 May 1869], p. 611), for example, notes,
 Great discs of sunflowers—for the introduction of which we do not pretend to account, unless our guess is right that the artist aimed a compliment at Phoebus, the father of the witch—gather about the table, and—justification enough, we think, for Mr. Jones—make splendid colour with the gorgeous robe of the dame as well as with the hides of two black panthers, which, clumsily gambolling, fondle about her knees. How, unless by dipping a cat in ink, the painter got the colour of these brutes, we cannot surmise; well do we know that, had he taken the trouble to look at Nature, he would have found a far finer, richer, and more aptly-diverse aggregation of tints for his purpose than has been afforded to us. . . . it is evident that the painter designs in colour rather than, as many men of the finest calibre have done and do, in expression. He thought primarily of that fiery-hearted saffron robe and its surroundings; then of the dramatic accessories—the throne, the panthers and the sea; thirdly of the composition; lastly of the expression. See also the Spectator (8 May 1869), p. 567, and Art Journal (1869), p. 173.

observations and the features which Rossetti remarks upon in his correspondence may provide more insight into the matter. Rossetti regarded the creative act (both poetic and painterly) as a counterbalance of craft and imaginative impulse (what he called "fundamental brainwork").⁴³ Specifically in reference to the composition of poetry, Rossetti once distinguished between two ways in which his sonnets originated. Either they were created "on some basis of special momentary emotion," or they belonged to "the class depending on a line or two clearly given you, you know not whence, and calling up a sequence of ideas."⁴⁴ Recognizing the possible coexistence of these two impulses in a creative work, Rossetti may very well have been attracted to a graphic work which intermingled a very conscious, almost abstract or aesthetic treatment of color and form with an obviously literary and associative theme.⁴⁵ We may observe in Rossetti's sonnet on Wine of Circe an effort to emphasize and make even more pronounced the sense of intermingling of diverse impulses. Further, we shall find that this poem, like other, far earlier, sonnets on the pictures of other painters, fits the category of poems in which a "given," in

⁴³ T. Hall Caine, Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Stock, 1882), p. 249.

⁴⁴ Letters, III, 985 (To William Bell Scott, 25 August 1871).

⁴⁵ In fact, quite recently the color scheme of the painting was described as a "harmony in yellow;" see The Arts Council of Great Britain, Burne-Jones, p. 44.

these cases a graphic work, has called forth a subsequent "sequence of ideas."

The first four lines of the sonnet function to narrow our focus as reader-viewers upon the canvas:

Dusk-haired and golden-robed o'er the golden wine
She stoops, wherein, distilled of death and shame
Sink the black drops; while, lit with fragrant flame
Round her spread board the golden sunflowers shine.
(ll. 1-4)

To some degree this effect is accomplished through the use of highly descriptive language in lines one and four; the disposition of Circe's figure, the "spread board" which bisects the canvas, and the array of bright flowers are all evoked. In addition, Rossetti stresses the dominant golden hue and glassy surface of the graphic work. Within this vivid graphic framework, however, Rossetti introduces details which induce deeper involvement in the painting than possible simply through the recreation of the visually "known." He uses synaesthesia to lead us beyond that which may be actually discerned in the painting ("golden wine," "fragrant flame"), and offers us a perspective which corresponds to Circe's point of view (i.e., "wherein . . ./Sink the black drops"). This counterbalance of perceived and projected, along with the more subtle suggestion of antithesis, through assonance and parallel phrasing ("dusk-haired"/"golden-robed," "shame"/"shine"), functions to make us focus more deeply upon the painting in recognition of its complexity. With our attention now riveted within the realm of the canvas, Rossetti moves, in lines five through eight, beyond the descriptive, drawing us more deeply into the work

by addressing the figure of Circe, while simultaneously departing from the actual canvas in a poetic and imaginative interpretation of the scene:

Doth Helios here with Hecate combine
 (O Circe, thou their votaress!) to proclaim
 For these thy guests all rapture in Love's name,
 Till pitiless Night give Day the countersign? (ll. 5-8)

The second half of the octave repeats the framing effect of the first, paralleling lines five and eight by evoking similar imagery and undertones. Both lines refer to counter-parted personifications or mythological deities, and both references convey a sense of the complementary nature of the pairs. By the end of the octave we seem to have reached a point of synthesis; in spite of our recognition of dichotomy, made absolute in the counterpointing of Helios and Hecate (the bright of the sun and the dark of the moon) and Night and Day, in the mixture of question and exclamation, and in the very statement of the evidence of "countersign," we are lulled (an appropriate effect for the subject of this picture) by means of the poem into acceptance of opposing or diverse impulses. And these include not only the dichotomies evident in the painting itself, but more significantly the underlying one which is the intermingling, in the sonnet "for" a picture, of elements of both pictorial and poetic modes.

In Rossetti's work, however, no sense of synthesis or balance can ever exist for long, before being overturned. Following the sonnet break, we move in the sestet slowly but inevitably towards the separation of modes, and towards the

renewed articulation of opposites. We are made more conscious of this development as Rossetti introduces another parallel:

Lords of their hour, they come. And by her knee
 Those cowering beasts, their equals heretofore,
 Wait; (ll. 9-11)

We suddenly feel quite strongly the distinction between these "equals"—not simply the literal distinction in these lines between the unwary mariners and those transformed to beasts by Circe's power, but between an image drawn directly from the pictorial work ("those cowering beasts") and a vision that is solely imaginary and drawn from the literary associations which exist only outside of the work. Beyond this point, the poem seems to strain unsuccessfully (though intentionally) under the intermingling of imaginative vision and pictorial fact. The reason why the juxtaposition of visual and poetic elements now seems to suggest disharmony, rather than harmony between modes, may be that instead of suggesting his reading into the canvas, Rossetti's use of imagery and diction suggests an appended rather than integrated vision. Although the last lines are framed by two strong visual images (the beasts and the panorama of the sea), these details do not sustain our involvement in the painting. Instead, the poem's concluding lines make us conscious of a realm which is distinct from that offered by the visual work, and of our standpoint as "outsiders" who merely regard the visual work rather than participate in it. This point of view is strengthened through the repetition of

words with slight but significant variation. The possible implications underlying the phrases "equals heretofore" and "new equality" may suggest an analogous distinction between two modes of relationship between poem and painting: one, an equation in which art and literature are intermingled, and a new equation "with a difference," in which the media are counterbalanced instead of combined. The contrast enunciated in the final lines of the poem between "passion's tide-strown shore/where the dishevelled seaweed hates the sea," seems a final metaphorical evocation of the situation in which two modes of perception touch, but may not merge.

When Rossetti was in the process of preparing for the new edition of Poems and Ballads and Sonnets (published in 1881), he wrote a number of new sonnets for the latter volume, in tribute to various poets and painters whom he greatly admired. In addition to the sequence "Five English Poets" (on Chatterton, Blake, Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley), Rossetti wrote a sonnet for Madonna and Child with St. John and Angels by Michelangelo, which he saw in the National Gallery, and one for the Primavera of Botticelli, with which he was familiar only from a photograph.⁴⁶ While to some extent these sonnets (as do the sonnets on the English poets) reflect the occasional nature of their composition, they do provide further insight into the mode of paired paintings and poems.

⁴⁶ Letters, IV, 1812 (To Mrs. Aglaia Coronio, 30 September 1880, re: "Spring"), 1828 (To Mrs. Gabriele Rossetti, 23 December 1880, re: "Holy Family").

Rossetti's interest in the Primavera of Botticelli, which led him to acquire a photograph of it ("all I know of it") and subsequently to write an accompanying poem, was probably related to his one-time ownership of a portrait which was then attributed to Botticelli, of "the same lady . . . here surrounded by the masque of Spring."⁴⁷ While Rossetti himself never traveled to Italy, his brother's enthusiastic reports about Botticellian works seen during his travels undoubtedly also encouraged Rossetti's interest in that painter. To some extent, this interest was a reflection of the times, and Rossetti's creation of a sonnet on a Botticelli painting as much a response to external values as were his P.R.B.-influenced poems of 1848-49. Largely ignored in the mid-1800's, even while acclaimed by pioneers like Rio, Ruskin, and Eastlake, Botticelli was first given more widespread recognition in the 1860's and 70's, only a short while before Rossetti was led to write the sonnet, "For Spring."⁴⁸ The progressive

⁴⁷ Works, "Notes," p. 671; the lady in Primavera is actually not Smeralda Bandinelli, the subject of Rossetti's portrait, but rather is usually acknowledged as Simonetta Vespucci, friend and beloved of Giuliano de' Medici.

⁴⁸ Michael Levey, "Botticelli and Nineteenth Century England," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 23 (July-December 1960), 295. In this excellent study of the revival of interest in Botticelli, and the place of nineteenth century England in that process, Levey makes the significant point that the major obstacle to recognition of Botticelli was his independence from trends typical of his own age, and the continual inappropriateness of his works to the preoccupations of periods which followed. We may conjecture that the very fact that Botticelli was, according to Levey, "too complex a phenomenon" (p. 299) was one of the reasons Rossetti was attracted to his work.

elevation of Botticelli's reputation was accompanied by the recognition of the presence of allegorical elements in his work, and by the recognition of dualities and dichotomies within it as well. As Richard Dellamora notes, the Victorian viewers, among whom Rossetti must be counted, were ill-equipped to decipher the allegorical intent of a work like Primavera; and Rossetti's response is characteristic in that he simultaneously acknowledges the allegorical dimension and avoids attempting to untangle it.⁴⁹ Instead, he turns to a more personal reading which centers upon his perception of the ambiguity and multiple levels of vision within the graphic work.

The celebration of dichotomies in the work of Botticelli did not originate with Rossetti. Although perhaps stirred by Rossetti's interest in Botticelli to do so, it was actually Swinburne who pointed specifically to the intermingling of impulse in Botticelli's work.⁵⁰ He focuses on the dichotomies between the beautiful and the grotesque, and notes throughout Botticelli's work the particular characteristic of "painful grace."⁵¹ The focus on dual impulses in

⁴⁹ See Dellamora, pp. 199-202; Levey (pp. 304-05) gives examples of this misreading, while noting positively that at least the Victorians realized the need for explanation.

⁵⁰ Suggested by Levey, p. 302.

⁵¹ Swinburne was sensitive to this characteristic in works by other artists as well, however, and his remarks on paintings (as in Rossetti's case) may tell us more about the viewer than the work being viewed. See Algernon Charles

Botticelli's work was then picked up by Pater, in an essay first published in the Fortnightly Review and later in The Renaissance. While, as Levey points out, the particular nature of the dualities which for Pater informed Botticelli's works were as much characteristic of Pater as of Botticelli, his added recognition of the contending impulses of Christianity and Paganism gave Botticelli a place in the 1870's which he had hitherto been lacking; in some way he finally was recognized to be part of a "mainstream," even one partly of impressionistic art critics' devising.⁵² What is unique about Rossetti's treatment of Botticelli in his poem on the Primavera is his own personal assessment of the diverse impulses underlying the work. In this respect, his sonnet "for" a picture reflects a departure from public trends in taste similar to, and as significant as, those apparent in the poems on paintings of three decades before.

In the octave of the sonnet Rossetti undertakes the transposition into verse of various visual images from the painting. These lines are relieved from being mere catalogue or description, however, by means of Rossetti's approach; for the poem begins, in characteristic fashion, with a question: "What masque of what old wind-withered New-Year/Honours this Lady?" The query causes the reader-viewer

Swinburne, "Notes on Designs of the Old Masters at Florence," The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, ed. Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise (London: William Heinemann, 1926), XV (Prose Works V), 155-95.

⁵² Levey, p. 302; see also pp. 302-05, passim.

to enter more actively into the scene represented, the repetition of "what" giving double impetus. Further, the contrast of "old wind-withered New-Year" seems to suggest, and by suggesting, encourage, the exercise we are undertaking. The old, the atemporal graphic embodiment of a scene, and the new, our revitalization of it through imaginative involvement in the work, coincide. As we are led by means of Rossetti's poem to explore the realm within the canvas and to encounter the deities who inhabit it, we also enter more deeply into the mode of the pictorial. For Rossetti once again consciously avoids introducing a verb in the lines which guide our focus spasmodically to Flora, Aurora, Zephyrus, the Graces, and Hermes, in turn. As in such instances in Rossetti's sonnets on pictures by other painters which have been previously examined, the effect is to thrust us towards the iconic and atemporal dimension of the visual medium. Rossetti's handling of language works towards graphic suggestiveness in other ways as well. Accessories of scene ("flowrets pranked and pied") and gestures ("clasp and kiss," "arch of white arms") are described in archaic or conventionalized terms. Even the use of sound conveys the suggestion of stiffness and lack of vitality, more proper to a static visual image than a poetic rendition of it.

Across the sonnet break a verb finally appears, and signals the shift to a different perspective:

Birth-bare, not death-bare yet, the young stems stand
 This Lady's temple-columns: o'er her head
 Love wings his shaft. (ll. 9-11)

While these lines may suggest a descriptive tendency similar to that in lines two through eight, and thus denote no change, the verbs signal a greater emphasis on the new and vital or, in other words, that which is instilled into this scene only through the act of imagination that is the poem's. "This Lady" and "Love" above her are not yet reduced to serving as iconic commonplaces as mythological figures, or as players in an allegorical masque, alone. Rossetti sees beyond the representation of Venus in the painting, and significantly, does not identify the figure as a deity, as he does the others. By distinguishing these two personages, Rossetti may be emphasizing their graphic relationship as well. In the painting, just as in Rossetti's poem, the other figures form a procession of a sort, apart from which the lone female figure stands, Cupid above her. Rossetti uses the poem to strengthen our visual identification with her as observers, and thus to strengthen our imaginative participation in the work. The "Birth-bare . . . young stems" form the shelter for these two figures who remind us of an underlying, if elusive, meaning to the scene. When Rossetti asks, "What mystery here is read/Of homage or of hope?" he reaches the moment of the poem when imaginative projection expands to its fullest in relation to the painting before him. While Rossetti did not seem to be aware of the relationship between this painting and Poliziano's "Giostra," an ode in celebration of Giuliano de' Medici and his lady-love, he clearly perceives the painting's literary character. As fellow viewers we are invited to conjecture

what story and what mystery underly this representation of what is clearly more complex than a mythical panorama.

"Homage" and "hope" give direction to our musings, and the Lady and Love become their focus.

At this very point of deepest penetration through poetic reading, Rossetti forces the withdrawal of the reader-viewer from imaginative participation in the work with two questions which outweigh and counter the one preceding:

But how command
Dead Springs to answer? And how question here
These mummings of that wind-withered New-Year? (ll. 12-14)

The emphasis is now on "dead springs" and the "wind-withered New-Year"; the recurrence of the latter phrase from line one returns us to our original stance, but with a difference. Now the present moment of imaginative penetration no longer harmonizes with the timelessness of art, and we as viewers "here" are separated from "that" realm of the painting. "How command" or "question," now, since contact between modes of vision is once again broken? With these two final questions, we draw back to regard the painting simply as static artifact, and the figures represented within it as lifeless simulacra through which the animating spirit of poetry no longer breathes.

Despite earlier mixed feelings towards Michelangelo, Rossetti grew to admire his work greatly, both the visual and the verbal.⁵³ In the early 1870's in fact, Rossetti

⁵³ While Michelangelo was included in the "List of Immortals" compiled by Rossetti and William Holman Hunt

toyed with the intention of translating and editing Michelangelo's poems, a project unfortunately never realized. Not only did Rossetti believe that Michelangelo stands "alone as a good Italian poet after Dante etc., unless we except Poliziano," but clearly also admired his work precisely because it was that of a fellow poet-painter.⁵⁴ It is possible that Rossetti conceived first of the idea of including a sonnet on a work of Michelangelo with his new volume of poetry, and only subsequently settled on a particular work to write upon, for correspondence reveals his interest in another graphic work of Michelangelo's, which significantly reflects a puzzling ambiguity of meaning.⁵⁵ Only days later, he included the sonnet "For the Holy Family" (for the work now entitled Madonna and Child with St. John and Angels) in a letter to his mother, and notes,

In this picture the Virgin is withdrawing from the Child the book which contains the prophesy of his sufferings—I suppose of Isaiah. The idea is a most

shortly before the formation of the P.R.B., Rossetti does express disappointment in the works of Michelangelo which he and Hunt saw during their visit to Paris in 1849; see William E. Fredeman, ed., The P.R.B. Journal, pp. 106-07, and Letters, I, 65-66 (To William Michael Rossetti, 4 October 1849).

⁵⁴ Letters, III, 1121 (To William Michael Rossetti, 12 January 1873); in the same letter, Rossetti notes his desire to also look at some things by Orcagna, "as one might glance at other painter-poets" (p. 1122).

⁵⁵ Ibid., IV, 1826-27 and n.3 (To William Michael Rossetti, 21 December 1880, re: The Saettatori).

beautiful one; and behind this group are angels perusing a scroll.⁵⁶

The contents of this description are transposed in the sonnet; but, in addition, we may note in the poem the articulation of contrasts only hinted at on canvas, and the evolution of the "most beautiful" idea which underlies the graphic work.

The canvas is bisected vertically by the form of the Virgin and Child, on either side of whom stand paired angels, while horizontally it is divided by the disposition of the Virgin's and Christ-child's arms, placing great emphasis on the book which the Virgin pulls from the infant Christ's grasp. This effect of compositional division reinforces the "idea" which Rossetti admired and clearly identified in his sonnet on the work—the diversity of perspectives and the different levels or degrees of knowledge. As outsiders, we regard the scene from a point of view from which we are unable to overcome the horizontal barrier; as we, like the Christ-child, face the outer cover of the text (which is turned towards him and us), we cannot penetrate its mysteries. It is the function of Rossetti's sonnet to momentarily lift that barrier to enable us as reader-viewers to more actively participate in the visual work, and also to make us aware of the distinction that ultimately remains between modes of vision.

In addition to conveying images derived from the

⁵⁶ Ibid., IV, 1828 (23 December 1880).

painting, the octave operates from its outset to involve the reader-viewer:

TURN not to the prophet's page, O Son! He knew
 All that thou hast to suffer, and hath writ.
 Not yet thine hour of knowledge. Infinite
 The sorrows that thy manhood's lot must rue
 And dire acquaintance of thy grief. That clue
 The spirits of thy mournful ministerings
 Seek through yon scroll in silence. For these things
 The angels have desired to look into. (ll. 1-8)

The bestowal of this dramatic voice to the Virgin encourages a more active response to the graphic work, and makes us more sensitive to the antithesis between innocence and knowledge. In a manner which complements the painting, the spacial structure of which keeps us linked to the Christ-child, these lines reinforce our sympathetic identification by their non-specific reference to Christ's sufferings and grief; it is not yet our moment of knowledge either.

Across the sonnet break, however, Rossetti shifts perspectives, and causes the reader-viewer to realign his relationship to the painting. Rossetti now moves away from the pictorial dimension of the graphic work to dwell imaginatively upon that knowledge yet to be revealed:

Still before Eden waves the fiery sword,—
 Her Tree of Life unransomed: whose sad Tree
 Of Knowledge yet to growth of Calvary
 Must yield its Tempter,—Hell the earliest dead
 Of Earth resign,—and yet, O Son and Lord
 The Seed o' the woman bruise the serpent's head.
 (ll. 9-14)

As these lines project a more fanciful reading of the scene depicted, by focusing on details not actually rendered on canvas, they change our relationship to the graphic work. For, as we are exposed to knowledge of the destiny of God

and man, we become identified with all those figures in the painting on the other side of the horizontal division, who may regard the open face of the prophetic book. Yet, paradoxically, as the nature of that prophecy unfolds, we must recognize that we in fact have always been privilege to this perspective—and that outside of the particular pictorial moment, and posited against it, is the literary perspective which embraces all of time. Once again, Rossetti has both intermingled the media and made us conscious of their ultimate distinctness. Yet he clearly wishes us to realize that the autonomy of any one perspective cannot or should not be attained through the sacrifice of another. Rather, we must acknowledge simultaneous and diverse modes of vision. From the initial imperative statement ending "O Son!" the sonnet closes with "O Son and Lord." We are released from the static moment portraying Madonna and Child, to consider its broader significance, and made aware that dual perspectives are not only possible, but indispensable for complete insight.

When dealing in verse with a work of visual art, Rossetti departs from what has often been characterized as the particular Victorian approach to the genre of literature on art. While (as in his own religious-symbolic pairs) the underlying impulse of his sonnets for pictures is a didactic one, we see much more than what one critic has described as

"balance between exposition and evocation."⁵⁷ That perspective implies that in such literary work all ideas and impulses originate from the painting regarded. The assumption is that literature of art always centers on the visual work, and that a poem on a painting simply enables the reader to recreate the process of the writer's experience as ideal viewer of that work. Rossetti's introduction of a corresponding poem, however, creates an equally important experience which often operates against or outside the experience of the visual work. In Rossetti's sonnets for pictures by other painters, as in his own paired visual and verbal works, we witness not only efforts towards inter-relationship, but also the ultimate uniqueness of character and independence of both painting and poem.

From Rossetti's earliest sonnet for another painter's work to the pair of poems written in 1880, the same currents consistently occur. Moreover, these poems exhibit a relation to their visual counterpart which parallels the relation between poem and painting in the Rossettian pairs. Specifically, these sonnets on pictures correspond in

⁵⁷ Stein, p. 6. Stein equates Rossetti's approach to art through literature, along with Ruskin's and Pater's, with the didactic approach of other Victorian prose writers, comparing the stance of these three writers with that of the "sage" as considered by John Holloway in his notable study, The Victorian Sage (London: Macmillan & Co., 1953; rpt. ed., New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1965). The analogy, while stimulating, seems to me incomplete. For more on the Victorian mode of art criticism as literature, see G. Robert Stange's "Art Criticism as a Prose Genre," in George Levine and William Madden, eds., The Art of Victorian Prose (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 39-52.

purpose and procedure to those sonnets of Rossetti's which were written subsequent to the creation of the graphic work. Significantly, however, in a wider sense the sonnets for pictures may be seen to parallel not only this single category of paired visual and verbal works, but all three categories into which we may classify the Rossettian pairs. For although like the religious-moral pairs, which focus on works with a symbolic dimension or which embody ambiguous impulses, these sonnets for pictures also reflect elements of the descriptive and narrative modes. As in the Rossettian pairs then, although one characteristic impulse may be regarded as dominant, clearly these three ways of either assimilating or expressing ideas and impulses interweave. And, in doing so, they make manifest the diverse visions for which the interrelationship of art forms was, for Rossetti, an analogue.

CHAPTER FOUR

ILLUSTRATIONS AND "LITERARY" GRAPHIC WORKS

The close relationship between painting and poem in so much of Rossetti's corpus creates some confusion in discussions of those of his graphic works which correspond to literary efforts not his own. The matter is made more complicated by the fact that whereas limited precedent appeared for the composition of verbal counterparts, the characteristic of being "literary" was so common among paintings and drawings of the Victorian period that it has become a catchword for an overwhelming abundance of graphic works.¹ In spite of the great variety of ways in which the alliance between the "sister arts" was expressed, the notion of a parallel between painting and poetry was commonplace in mid-Victorian times; long after emphasis had shifted from the doctrine of "ut pictura poesis," the classical concept of the relationship between the arts which had been revived and revitalized in the eighteenth century, its mark remained upon the century which followed. While, as we have

¹ The very titles of a number of critical works on the art of this period reflect this fact; see, for example, Sacheverell Sitwell, Narrative Pictures: A Survey of English Genre and Its Painters (London: B. T. Batsford, 1969) and Raymond Lister, Victorian Narrative Paintings (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1966).

seen, the age witnessed the equalization and, in some instances, the inversion of that relationship, to a great many Victorians painting was still viewed as the lesser art to be illuminated or elevated by its ties with literature. Even among the innovative Pre-Raphaelites the pursuit of the imaginative element, which was to be coupled with their particular notions of reality and truth, required that they not only "go to nature" but to the pages of romantic and medieval literature. Rossetti's literary art, however, reveals a more complex combination of each of these many currents. Not only did he put into practice almost every conceivable form of correspondence between literature and art in his graphic work, but his purpose in creating counterparts varied significantly. No examination of Rossetti's concept of the interrelationship between the arts can be complete, therefore, without directing attention to the modes and motives underlying his literary art.

In investigating the relationship between graphic work and work of literature, as expressed not only by one individual but in the Victorian period as a whole, the most immediate problem to arise is the need to clarify the differences between painting which is "literary," and true illustration in paint or on the page. We may find helpful in alleviating some confusion the distinction made by Marcia Pointon, in Milton and English Art, among three genres of pictorial art:

The engraved plate belonging to a set of illustrations commissioned by a publisher is the most frequently encountered genre. Secondly there is the canvas painted

for exhibition, generally at the Royal Academy; and it should be remembered that this type of painting in the nineteenth century was a peculiarly public and ostentatious art upon which, as a rule, an artist's reputation was entirely dependent. Lastly there is what could be called "private" art: that vast number of drawings and sketches, never intended for public viewing or for sale, which often reveal aspects of an artist's talent not apparent in his exhibited work.²

With some modification as to frequency of practice and intended audience, these categories may be usefully applied to Rossetti's graphic work with literary motifs. While it is well known that Rossetti shunned the exhibition hall, the type of painting which often was to be encountered there shares with many of his paintings a common type of literary parallel. In this period, the fashion of appending a line (or lines) of poetry to a painting, whether on the canvas itself, on the frame, or in the exhibition catalogue, was quite frequent. In Rossetti's case it is important for us to determine whether when literary titles or epigraphs are in evidence the verbal work actually served as an inspiration and is indicative of interrelationship, or whether it is simply evidence of the more common practice of "tagging" after the fact. More sensitive than many of his contemporaries to the function of literary parallel, Rossetti nevertheless expresses in his more "public" graphic works links which, if not superficial, are certainly ambiguous at the very least: so too, in the instances in which Rossetti created "private" literary art. Among the enormous number of his drawings, sketches, and designs for paintings never

² (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1970), p. xxix.

completed, the majority bear some tie to a literary counterpart. The impulse behind these parallels, however, appears to range from the tenuous one of tagging with a line or title of a well-loved literary work, to the carefully developed interrelationship which one might expect to find in true illustration. Within that group of Rossetti's works which we may distinguish as illustrations, further distinctions must be recognized. The word "illustration" itself has undergone many transformations in meaning, and may denote anything from a manner of adornment and decoration, devoid of significance, to a process which can enlighten its viewer by elucidating an idea of the author's or proposing an interpretation by the artist himself. The approach to illustration has been in such flux from the Victorian age through our own times that the same works may be highly praised or soundly condemned, depending upon the definition of illustration considered. Both to see Rossetti's place in the spectrum of illustration and to gain further insight into his creation of visual-verbal pairs, any examination of graphic works of his with literary links must not only include "literary" and "illustrative" works, but his true illustrations as well. For far more than in other instances of graphic counterpart, his works intended to actually accompany a written text may further illuminate Rossetti's concept of the interrelationship between the arts.

Among the earliest of Rossetti's designs to be preserved, a significant number reflect his attempt to

articulate some form of correspondence between the visual and verbal arts. In these juvenile works we do not yet observe Rossetti's imaginative capacity for channeling the ideas and images of others into personalized transmutations, while retaining a balance between the visual and verbal work. Rather, they suggest two other processes: inspiration and assimilation. Many of these works, little more than rough sketches, reveal the stimulus towards efforts in both arts that his readings were for the young Rossetti. We may reconstruct his reading habits from these designs, and note a decided preference for the gothic, exotic, and romantic.³ These designs also evidence the reciprocal process which would later manifest itself in Rossetti's own visual-verbal pairs, for frequently the "literary" works to which Rossetti created accompanying designs were of his own pen, or that of his sisters and brother. While all of these written works are more significant as the impetus to his own imagination than as the basis for illustrations, they are important insofar as they help reveal the development of a particular, later pattern of relationship between visual and verbal work. For among the works of Rossetti's maturity are many

³ Among these works, for example, are designs for Matthew Lewis' Castle Spectre, Soulié's Les Memoires du Diable, the Arabian Nights, and works of Sir Walter Scott. See Virginia Surtees, Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): A Catalogue Raisonné (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), I, 1-3, and accompanying plates, and William Michael Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters, with a Memoir (London: Ellis & Elvey, 1895), I (Memoir), 57-68; hereafter cited in footnotes as Letters and Memoir.

in which, while we may recognize a literary antecedent, that work and Rossetti's graphic counterpart to it appear independent, the latter having simply appropriated one aspect of the former. There is no suggestion of interdependence between the media, no suggestion that the graphic work illuminates or elucidates the work upon which it has drawn. We perceive only an intangible sense of Rossetti's sympathetic identification with some element of the literary work, often a rather obscure or minor one. Rather than the design illustrating the work of literature, the written work serves instead as the stimulus for what amounts to a solipsistic illustration of the artist's self and soul.

One cluster of "literary" graphic works which may be so characterized, and which date from an early point in Rossetti's career, are his Dantesque works. The first record we have of a representative work in this class appears in a letter from Dante Gabriel to Charles Lyell, a friend of his father's and a Dante scholar. In that letter, Rossetti informs Lyell that he has been absorbed in translating the Vita Nuova, "intending it to accompany a series of original designs." Rossetti notes,

Of the designs I have completed, as yet, only three, viz.: 1st, Dante overhearing the conversation of the friends of Beatrice after the death of her father; 2nd, Dante interrupted while drawing an angel in memory of Beatrice; 3rd, an emblematical frontispiece. In this last, I have introduced on one side the figure of Dante and on the other that of Beatrice; while in the centre, Love is represented, holding in one hand a sun-dial, and in the other a lamp; the shadow cast by the lamp upon the dial being made to fall upon the figure nine. At the same time Death, standing behind, is drawing from the quiver of Love an arrow wherewith to strike Beatrice.

Ever since I have read the Vita Nuova, I have always borne it in mind as a work offering admirable opportunities for pictorial illustration: a task which I am now resolved to attempt. The other subjects which I propose treating are as follows: 1st, the first meeting of Dante and Beatrice (already commenced); 2nd, The second meeting; 3rd, The salutation denied; 4th, Dante treated with scorn by Beatrice at the Wedding-Feast; 5th, Dante questioned by the ladies; 6th, Dante's dream; 7th, Dante requested to write by the kinsman of Beatrice; 8th, Dante perceives a lady who is observing his grief from a window; 9th, Dante's vision of the childhood of Beatrice; 10th, Dante and the pilgrims.⁴

It may come as a surprise to some that at this early date so many of the motifs for paintings completed up to more than thirty years later were already crystalized in Rossetti's mind.⁵ To a certain degree the works which were actually realized do reflect a conventional concept of illustration; nevertheless, the closer consideration of those proposed subjects which were later completed and those which were never executed, as well as those Dantesque works not outlined here which were later composed, brings to light the

⁴ Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl, eds., Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-67), I, 48-49 (14 November 1848); hereafter cited in footnotes as Letters. See also John Purves, "Dante Rossetti and his Godfather, Charles Lyell of Kinnordy," University of Edinburgh Journal, 4, No. 2 (1931), 110-18.

⁵ These paintings are: The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice (Surtees 42-1849), Beatrice Meeting Dante at a Marriage Feast, denies him her Salutation (Surtees 50-1851), The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice (Surtees 58-1853 [differs in composition from Surtees 42]), Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice (Surtees 81-1856), The Salutation of Beatrice (Surtees 116-1859), Dantis Amor (Surtees 117-1860), Beata Beatrice (Surtees 168-1864), La Donna Della Finestra (Surtees 255-1879, but begun in 1870), and The Salutation of Beatrice (Surtees 260-1880-81 [differs in composition from Surtees 116]).

exercise of a particular tendency underlying Rossetti's "illustration" of Dante.

The very phrase, "pictorial illustration," in his letter to Lyell suggests that at the outset of this project Rossetti's concept of the relation between text and graphic work was much in keeping with the times. Like those "subjects from Milton . . . Shakespear and Spencer," with which he was familiar from adolescent encounters at public exhibitions, the earliest of these designs to actually reach completion reflect little more than borrowed subject and setting.⁶ It is to be noted that each of these projected graphic works focuses upon a pictorially vivid scene from the poem (contrary to the commonly held notion that Rossetti ignored the pictorial dimension of Dante's work), and that the corresponding painting reflects the realization of these details. Works like Beatrice Meeting Dante at a Marriage Feast (Surtees 42, 50), The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice (Surtees 58), and Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice (Surtees 81) each involve a large number of figures and the suggestion of contrast inherent in any intensely dramatic moment; each, in other words, is a characteristic "story-telling" picture, its narrative elements and its ties to a literary work giving foundation to the graphic counterpart. Significantly, Rossetti's

⁶ From Rossetti's description of the exhibition at Westminster Hall of the designs for the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament. Letters, I, 14 (To Mrs. Gabriele Rossetti, 7 July 1843).

endeavors in this mode are early and few. With the creation of Beata Beatrix (Surtees 168) comes a definite turning point. While ostensibly illustrating the Vita Nuova, this portrait of Lizzie Siddal "embodying, symbolically, the death of Beatrice, as treated in that work," also draws together that element of the literary work transmuted by Rossetti into a reflection of his own deepest personal impulses.⁷ For it is not Beatrice as philosophical ideal or arcane symbol but as the apotheosis of a very earthly love that is here represented. The Vita Nuova has become for Rossetti not merely the "autopsychology" of the Italian poet but, by identification, Rossetti's as well.⁸ The painting displays a juxtaposition of realistic images (i.e., the recognizable features of Lizzie Siddal) and symbolic details, of introspective impulse and suggestions of the external world of Florence. We may observe the interplay of contrasts between heaven and earth, life and death, grief and love, which interweave throughout all the Rossettian pairs; further, we may recognize that this creation of a graphic counterpart to a literary work serves above all not to illustrate or embody elements of the work of literature,

⁷ Quoted by H. C. Marillier, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Illustrated Memorial of His Art and Life (London: George Bell & Sons, 1899), p. 128.

⁸ This term is applied by Rossetti to the Vita Nuova in his introduction to part I, "Dante and his Circle," in The Early Italian Poets from Ciullo d'Alcamo to Dante Alighieri (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1861); see The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. William Michael Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1911), p. 296; hereafter cited in footnotes as Works.

but rather to enable Rossetti to articulate, as he does in the pairs for which he contributed both components, those diverse impulses which were ever-present in his own creative consciousness.

The evolution of a work like Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice, for example, reveals the movement from a conception more conventionally "illustrative" to one more expressive of Rossetti's personal ideas and impulses. The work was initially conceived (as far back as 1848, the letter to Lyell reveals) as a depiction of the incident in the Vita Nuova in which, while dreaming, Dante sees Beatrice lying dead. As Rossetti himself notes in a letter to Ellen Heaton, who commissioned the design,

The lines illustrated are:

"These idle fantasies
Then carried me to see my lady dead;
And when I entered,
With a white veil her friends were covering her;
And in her mild look was a quietness
Which seemed as if it said, I have found peace."⁹

Instead of reinforcing the "mild look" of Beatrice (modeled in the early version by Lizzie Siddal), the first replica completed in 1871 reveals an altered impression, although in many more obvious respects the designs are still the same. More significant than the addition of numerous symbolic accessories is the fact that the canvas now appears to reflect a dramatic moment which for Rossetti was personal rather than literary. In spite of the overpainted golden

⁹ Quoted by Surtees, Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p. 42, from an unpublished letter, Heaton Collection (2 March 1856).

hair, Beatrice is here clearly modeled from Jane Morris. As Love now kisses the cheek of the far softer and more sensuous form of Beatrice (barely dead, one may feel), he draws alongside him a Dante who seems, with his bending back and foot thrust behind him, quite reluctant to witness the act. Instead of directing their gaze towards the pall which they hold in the 1856 version, the two female attendants now cast pitying and penetrative glances at Dante. The later version of the painting seems to portray, in other words, not Dante's dream of Beatrice, but Dante's dream, with that figure now taking central place.

When this replica was returned because of its massive size to William Graham, who commissioned it, and another replica ordered, arrangements were made for the difference in price for the smaller version to be compensated for by the addition of twin predellas. The subjects of these two designs are inscribed on the frames of the finished studies (Surtees 81R.2.a. and 81R.2.B.-1879) and on the completed predellas; the first reads, "Dante being sick and crying out in a dream of his lady's death, is mourned over by his near kinswomen whom other ladies lead thence by reason of his grief and awaken him," and the second, "Dante recalling the incidents of this sorrowful dream, recounts them to the ladies who have awakened him; whereto his grieving kinswoman also hearkens apart."¹⁰ These designs do have

¹⁰ Paintings and Drawings of the Pre-Raphaelites and Their Circle [Catalogue of the Exhibition](Cambridge, Mass.:

a narrative quality, and appear to suggest primarily the real or external world in contrast to a more spiritual realm expressed in the first predella through the "thought balloon" containing a vague image of the composition of Dante's Dream and through the symbolic and insubstantial image of the soul of Beatrice borne on a cloudy bier above the figures of the second. Yet, certain elements of both designs mitigate against that impression. Dante, made compositionally central upon a bier-like bed, and surrounded by drapery and circled by women who all gaze piercingly upon him, graphically parallels Beatrice in the major canvas. In doing so, the designs for the predellas to Dante's Dream reinforce the mature vision of that work as a psychomachia in which love and loss, desire and fear, contend in a situation in which self and soul-mate are bound.

Although its title identifies La Donna Della Finestra (The Lady of Pity [Surtees 255]) as a Dantesque subject, this portrait of Mrs. Morris gazing pityingly down from an opened casement, as if upon Dante for his loss of Beatrice, is again characteristic of Rossetti's personal inclinations rather than of any illustrative impulse. As William Rossetti notes of the work,

Humanly she is the Lady at the Window; mentally she is the Lady of Pity. This interpenetration of soul and body—this sense of an equal and indefeasible reality of the thing symbolized, and of the form which conveys the symbol—this externalism and internalism

are constantly to be understood as the key-note of Rossetti's aim and performance in art.¹¹

Not only an example of the characteristic interplay of opposites in his work, La Donna Della Finestra also exemplifies the use to which a purportedly literary motif was put by Rossetti.

A later version of the subject of The Salutation of Beatrice (Surtees 260-1880-81) not only differs in style and configuration, but in its relation to the literary work. The work ostensibly illustrates the following lines from the Vita Nuova:

My lady looks so gentle and so pure
 When yielding salutation by the way,
 That the tongue trembles and has nought to say,
 And the eyes, which fain would see, may not endure.
 And still amid the praise she hears secure,
 She walks with humbleness for her array;¹²

Whereas the early version of the same subject (Surtees 116, right panel; note: the left panel represents Dante's vision of Beatrice in Paradise) depicts a specific incident (the first meeting in adulthood of Dante by Beatrice in the streets of Florence), the later version depicts rather a single, static impression or image. For while similar streets of the city appear in the background, it is not Dante and Beatrice meeting eye to eye as they move in opposite directions upon a stairway, but Beatrice alone who

¹¹ William Michael Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer (London: Cassell & Co., 1889), p. 108.

¹² Works, p. 334.

fills most of the later canvas. Modeled upon Jane Morris, Beatrice gazes upon us, half woman, half apparition, her eyes hinting of that which we can only guess. Completing the sense of the composition as a reflex of Rossetti's consciousness rather than that of the author of the Vita Nuova, in the upper righthand background at the top of the familiar stairs, Rossetti has portrayed the figures of Dante and Love. The wings of Love appear to embrace Dante and hold him back from Beatrice, while he clasps one of Dante's hands in his, seemingly with the same purpose. Further, the expression on Dante's face betrays an emotion more suitable to one who has experienced longing and loss. With her wrapped in white robes and surrounded by roses, and him upon the distant streets of Florence, this Beatrice and Dante, like their personal counterparts in the painter's life, appear to be bound in separate and unbridgeable worlds.

Other Dantesque paintings not "for" the Vita Nuova or listed in Rossetti's early letter to Lyell repeat this particular approach, and confirm its evolution within changing conceptions of the relationship between visual and verbal work. Two early watercolor designs, both commissioned by Ruskin and executed in 1855, simply convey a conventional concept of the relation between literary and graphic work. Dante's Vision of Matilda Gathering Flowers (Surtees 72) and Dante's Vision of Rachel and Leah (Surtees 74) may be regarded as illustrative of Cantos XXVIII and XXVII of the Purgatorio respectively. It is significant, however, that

these subjects were not chosen by Rossetti, but rather by Ruskin, who also suggested five other subjects to Rossetti when he wanted some illustrations from Dante. A third design, that of Paolo and Francesca Da Rimini (Surtees 75), which was executed during the same time, was purchased by Ruskin although actually commissioned by Miss Heaton. While Rossetti in fact executed several very early studies for this subject from Canto V of the Inferno (Surtees 75C-probably 1849, 75D-probably 1849, and 75E-circa 1846-48), the work only truly acquires dramatic intensity and a narrative quality in the version completed for the 1855 commission. Of that version, Ruskin was to remark that it was a "bold—but perfectly true reading of Dante—" and to note that "Rossetti has thoroughly understood the passage throughout."¹³ Yet another design, never completed, displays a similar approach to its literary antecedent. While The Boat of Love (Surtees 239) was begun in 1874 and finally abandoned in 1881, it was conceived of far earlier, perhaps as far back as when Rossetti was in the process of translating several sonnets of Dante's for his Early Italian Poets; for Rossetti indicates in 1871 that he has long contemplated the subject and that it "illustrates" Dante's sonnet to Guido Cavalcanti which appears in that volume.¹⁴ The early dating

¹³ Quoted by Surtees, Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p. 37, from an unpublished and undated letter from Ruskin to Ellen Heaton, Heaton Collection.

¹⁴ See Val C. Princep, "A Collector's Correspondence," Art Journal, 54 (August 1892), 250, and Works, p. 361.

of this conception is corroborated by the style of the existing sketches, which resemble Rossetti's other youthful "illustrations," being dramatic, narrative, and multi-figured compositions. Our clustering of this work with those with which Ruskin is associated is further warranted by Ruskin's reference to "my Dante's Boat," and the existence of several studies for watercolors of this subject made around 1855 which are quite similar to the later work.¹⁵

The painting of Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante (Surtees 54-1852), which "illustrates" a passage in the Purgatorio, also reflects Rossetti's earlier manner of relating painting and poem, while simultaneously indicating a change in approach. The work is narrative in character, depicting several figures captured in a particular dramatic moment. As in Rossetti's own religious-symbolic pairs, while abstractions are "embodied" in the graphic work, Rossetti reveals the need to anchor and identify those abstractions through their concrete manifestation, in this case in incidents described in Dante's verse. Writing of the work, Rossetti notes,

The main incident is that old one of mine, of Giotto painting Dante, but treated quite differently from anything you have seen, and with the figures of Cimabue, Cavalcante, Beatrice, and some other ladies. It illustrates a passage in the Purgatory which perhaps you know, where Dante speaks of Cimabue, Giotto, the two Guidos (Guinicelli and Cavalcante, the latter of whom I have made reading aloud the poems of the former

¹⁵ E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., The Works of John Ruskin (London: George Allen, 1903-1912), XXXVI (Letters), 489; hereafter cited in text.

who was then dead) and, by implication, of himself. For the introduction of Beatrice, who with the other women (their heads only being seen below the scaffolding) are making a procession through the church, I quote a passage from the Vita Nuova. I have thus all the influence of Dante's youth—Art, Friendship, and Love—with a real incident embodying them.¹⁶

We see in this passage the convergence of three currents of interrelationship—first, the conventional Victorian process of "tagging" a graphic work to elevate its status by contact with the elder sister art; second, the Pre-Raphaelite practice of portraying symbolic concepts through "realistic" means; and third, Rossetti's adaptation of a literary source to reflect not only "Dante's youth" but, by identification, his own.

The Dantesque work completed late in Rossetti's career reflects an impulse fully representative of the assimilation of an aspect of Dante's work by Rossetti for self-expressive purposes. While the subject of La Pia De' Tolomei (Surtees 207-1868-80) is taken from a specific passage in the Purgatorio, the painting immediately conveys far more than the image of the unfairly treated wife of Nello

¹⁶ Letters, I, 122-23 (To Thomas Woolner, 1 January 1853). Surtees notes (Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p. 19, re: 54A) that one version of the design is inscribed with the relevant lines of verse in Italian:

'Credete Cimabue nella pittura
Tener lo compo; ed ora ha Giotto il grido,
Sì che la fama di colui s'oscura.
Così ha tolto l'uno all'altro Guido
La gloria della lingua; e forse è nato
Chi l'uno e l'altro caccierà di nido.'

'Vede perfettamente ogni salute
Chi la mia donna—tra le donne—vede.'

della Pietra whose spirit Dante records meeting in the fifth canto of that work. Our perception of the literary element underlying the painting is quickly superseded by a sense of the undeniable personal implications which the particular motif had for Rossetti. For, modeled by Jane Morris, this portrait of the wistful woman who thoughtfully fingers the wedding ring which binds her to her awful destiny in the swamps of the Maremma clearly reflects his innermost sentiments. As W. D. Paden, in his monograph on the painting, notes in conclusion,

In 1880 Rossetti took up again the canvas of La Pia, long ago put aside. When he had first designed the picture in 1868 the image of La Pia, sent by her husband to a quiet death, had been relevant to his own (perhaps then unadmitted) jealousy of Morris. Jane had remained for him the symbol of love and life, the emblem of desire and beauty; having possessed her, having lost her, he saw her now shadowed by his own guilt and agony and remorse. Now, when as La Pia she meditated gravely upon her wedding-ring, she suggested larger meanings. These are of a kind which words seldom convey with as much effect as images:—Beauty is bound to sorrow, love to pain and despair: death, which delivers man from all of these, may come to be desired.¹⁷

If "illustrative" of anything, La Pia is so not of the written work of Dante, but of the deepest and most conflicting impulses of his namesake.

With the seemingly large number of Rossetti's works with Arthurian motifs, it may be surprising to discover how few can be regarded as "illustrative" by any definition of

¹⁷ W. D. Paden, "La Pia de' Tolomei by Dante Gabriel Rossetti," Register of the Museum of Art (Univ. of Kansas) 2, No. 1 (November 1958), 20.

the word at all. Less than a half-dozen paintings actually correspond to incidents in Malory's Morte d'Arthur, and only a few more may be considered to have been "inspired" by that work.¹⁸ Like the more conventional Dantesque designs, these works are the products of the years of Rossetti's affiliation with Ruskin; that fact is quite significant insofar as Ruskin strongly supported the use of literary elements in graphic art, and while Rossetti already had a deep love of all things medieval (as evidenced by his early reading), Ruskin's influence was no doubt important in determining the approach which Rossetti took towards the treatment of Arthurian legend in his graphic work. While only one design (that of Arthur's Tomb) was actually purchased by Ruskin, it was through his instigation that several others were executed. For it was Ruskin who introduced Rossetti to Benjamin Woodward, the architect of the then-new Oxford Union Debating Hall, and Ruskin who suggested that a band of young artists, led by Rossetti, contribute their labors towards decorating the walls of that edifice. Rejecting subjects proposed earlier, Rossetti determined, no doubt with Ruskin's backing, that the fresco subjects should be

¹⁸ Those directly connected are Sir Launcelot's Vision of the Sanc Grael (Surtees 93-1857), Sir Galahad, Sir Bors, and Sir Percival Receiving the Sanc Grael (Surtees 94-1857), Sir Launcelot in the Queen's Chamber (Surtees 95-1857), and Sir Tristram and La Belle Yseult Drinking the Love Potion (Surtees 200-1867; from an 1862 design for a stained glass window executed by the Morris Firm). The less directly connected works are Arthur's Tomb (an imagined incident not actually in Malory [Surtees 73-1855]) and The Chapel Before the Lists (Surtees 99-1857-64).

selected from Malory's literary history of King Arthur. Although William Holman Hunt, in his account of the painting of the Oxford frescoes, goes to elaborate lengths to defend that choice of subject as reflecting appropriate values of chivalry and honor, and singlehearted devotion to an ideal analogous to the Christian faith, most probably Rossetti was more intrigued by the romantic element underlying the Morte d'Arthur.¹⁹ It is likely too, that Rossetti's closest collaborators on the project, the then-Oxford undergraduates Edward Jones (later Burne-Jones) and William Morris (who himself purchased one Arthurian design from Rossetti, and later through the Morris Firm was involved in the origin of another), had similar motives for their particular selection of an episode to "illustrate." The single design completed by Rossetti, Sir Launcelot's Vision of the Sanc Grael, is characteristic of conventional narrative art. The literary work is the source of suggestion for theme, images, and the "story-line" of this graphic work. A second design planned but never carried out, Sir Galahad, Sir Bors, and Sir Percival Receiving the Sanc Grael, also depicts a precise incident from the Morte d'Arthur in the most pedestrian of "illustrative" manners. Of a third design dated "Oxford 1857," Virginia Surtees notes,

¹⁹ See William Holman Hunt, Oxford Union Society: The Story of the Painting of the Pictures on the Walls and the Decorations on the Ceiling of the Old Debating Hall (Now the Library) in the Years 1857-8-9 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1906). This volume includes reproductions of all the murals.

There is no clear evidence that this design was executed for a wall-bay (it is not clear where the window circles would have been introduced), but the possibility should not be dismissed of its having been designed after Ruskin offered to cancel a debt of 70 guineas, providing the artist decorated another panel. . . . Or if you like to do another side of the Union I will consider that as 70 Guineas off my debt: provided there's no absolute nonsense in it, and the trees are like trees and the stones like stones.'²⁰

This design, Sir Launcelot in the Queen's Chamber, is very much like the other designs from Morte d'Arthur. The incident portrayed is an intensely dramatic one, the design incorporating multiple figures variously disposed, whose gestures and expressions may be easily "read" like the most traditional of Victorian narrative graphic works.

If Ruskin was most instrumental in the creation of Rossetti's Malory designs, that role belongs to William Morris for Rossetti's creation of that large number of works more tenuously "Arthurian" in subject, and what Rossetti himself referred to as "These chivalric Froissartian themes" which "are quite a passion of mine."²¹ The year of the Oxford Union Debating Society murals also witnessed the execution by Rossetti of four designs, all similar in impulse, which were purchased by Morris. With the exception

²⁰ Surtees, Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p. 54; see also E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., The Works of John Ruskin, XXVI, 273, from which Surtees here quotes.

²¹ Letters, I, 336 (To Charles Eliot Norton, July 1858). The exception is Before the Battle (Surtees 106-1858), which was executed for Charles Eliot Norton under Ruskin's watchful supervision.

of The Death of Breuze Sans Pitié (Surtees 101-present whereabouts unknown), portraying the fierce combat of two knights over a damsel in distress, these designs display less of a narrative impulse than those with which Ruskin was associated. The drama of The Blue Closet (Surtees 90), The Damsel of the Sanct Grael (Surtees 91) and The Tune of Seven Towers (Surtees 92) is instead developed through intense coloring, intricate detail, and an evocative if mysterious compositional design. Although not illustrative, these designs are quite literary in underlying impulse for they abound with anecdotal potential and suggestions of medieval romance. So rich in "poetical" suggestiveness were two of these designs, in fact, that in a reversal of the process of illustration, Morris later wrote the poems, "The Blue Closet," and "The Tune of Seven Towers" upon them. Yet it is most revealing of Rossetti's concept of the interrelationship between the arts that when in 1872 Mr. George Rae, to whom Morris had sold these paintings, decided to have a catalogue of his collection made up and inserted quotations from Morris' poems as illustrative of Rossetti's paintings, Rossetti's response was that "the quotations from Morris should have been left out, as the poems were the result of the pictures, but don't tally to any purpose with them, though beautiful in themselves."²² Clearly Rossetti had in mind a specific conception of what constituted a meaningful relationship between visual and verbal work; that conception,

²² Letters and Memoir, I, 44.

we may also infer, was distinct from the varieties of relationship between literary and graphic work manifested in his own Arthurian designs.

In addition to the Dantesque and Arthurian works discussed, a great number of other literary paintings, counterparts to works by writers as familiar as Browning and Shakespeare, or as now obscure as Henry Taylor and Theodore Watts-Dunton, were executed by Rossetti during the course of his career. These, like the "literary" visual works which we have previously examined, reveal at most very superficial or tenuous connections with their verbal counterparts.

Some paintings, like The Laboratory (Surtees 41-1849), utilize an intensely dramatic incident (in this case, from Browning's poem by the same title) as the basis for the composition. We may not only recognize numerous details transposed from the poem, but also a sense of condensed story-line. The painting appears to add nothing to our reading of the poem—instead, the debt is completely that of Rossetti's to Browning, for the subject and images of this work. Tagged with the lines from the poem, "In this devil's smithy/Where is the poison to poison her prithree?" the visual verbal relationship is quite conventional for its time. Similarly, an illustrative sketch, Taurello's First Sight of Fortune (Surtees 39-1849), does little but depict in a pedestrian fashion a specific incident from Browning's Sordello. Numerous details, from the dog grasping at an

arrow to Heinrich's manual gestures and Constance's lingering removal of her glove, convey the impression of "story-telling" which underlies this work. The most imaginative treatment by Rossetti of a Browningsque subject appears in his painting "Hist!", Said Kate the Queen (Surtees 49-1851), which is related to Pippa Passes.²³ What makes Rossetti's conception unusual is that instead of selecting a dramatic episode from the narrative portion of the poem, he instead draws the subject of his painting from the words of the lyric which Pippa sings as she passes the window of the artist Jules:

("Hist!"—said Kate the Queen;
But "Oh!" cried the maiden, binding her tresses,
"'Tis only a page that carols unseen
Crumbling your hounds their messes!")²⁴

Through his isolation and emphasis of this particular lyric, which in the poem prompts Jules to "begin Art afresh," with Phene alongside him, Rossetti seems to bring our attention to the suggestion, in Browning's poem, that the most momentous consequences may arise from the unconscious or unintentional. Rossetti's painting, while seemingly representing an insignificant element of the poem, in fact conveys that contrast between public values and private impulses which modern critics of Browning have identified in his poetry.

²³ The original, larger version of the work was never completed, and later was cut up. The surviving oil version was executed while the original was in progress.

²⁴ The Complete Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning, ed., Horace E. Scudder (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1895), p. 137.

Further, Rossetti isolates two sources of conflict in Browning's work which would have personal significance for himself—those of Art and Love. Revealing himself to be a sensitive reader of Browning through this graphic work, Rossetti, in a rare instance among his treatments of others' written works, proffers an alternative to the conventional patterns of Victorian literary painting.

What Marillier and others have identified as Rossetti's attraction for "themes of a romantic and medieval nature" also led Rossetti to draw subjects for his graphic works from Shakespeare.²⁵ With the exception of his design, Hamlet and Ophelia, however, which will be discussed later, these works display only the conventional variations in the relation between design and text. Several early designs, Touchstone and Audrey (Surtees 20-1846: for As You Like It), Hermia and Helena (Surtees 26-1846: for A Midsummer Night's Dream), and Benedick and Beatrice (Surtees 46-1850: for Much Ado About Nothing) display little more than an arrangement of multiple figures who, if not identified by title as representing Shakespearean characters, would no doubt elude the viewer as such. So loose was the connection between another "Shakespearean" design from this period, "To Caper Nimbly in a Lady's Chamber . . ." (Surtees 47-1850: for Richard III), and its literary antecedent, that the composition was later converted with little modification into the watercolor Borgia (Surtees 48-1851-58). Besides the intervening Hamlet illus-

²⁵ Marillier, p. 35.

trations, the next Shakespearean designs to issue from Rossetti's hand manifest a different but equally vague relationship to an actual text. The First Madness of Ophelia (Surtees 169-1864) represents a moment not even actually in the play but simply imaginatively projected, when Ophelia is led away by Horatio while the King and Queen look on in horror. The final three Shakespearean subjects treated by Rossetti are "illustrative" in varying, but all very conventional ways. Mariana (Surtees 213-1870) is little more than a portrait of Jane Morris, graced by the presence of a youthful minstrel whose song ("Take, O take those lips away"), inscribed on the frame, is our only means of connecting the graphic work to Measure For Measure. Both The Death of Lady Macbeth (Surtees 242-c. 1875) and Desdemona's Death Song (Surtees 254-versions from c. 1872-81) survive in several versions, all preparatory to the execution of paintings never accomplished, and both reflect a by-now familiar treatment of literary motif. These designs convey a narrative impulse created through the depiction of diverse actions, seemingly captured in an ongoing moment of time. The Death of Lady Macbeth, in particular, "reads" well as a representation of a scene from the play. That moment captured is not of the actual death of Lady Macbeth, but a visualization of an earlier moment in Act V, when the physician "minister[s] to a mind diseased" as the queen compulsively rubs her hands, attempting to remove the imagined spots of Duncan's blood. A simpler conception, Desdemona's Death

Song represents only two figures, Desdemona and Emilia, but with a similar sense of dramatic interaction between them; they are captured at the moment when Desdemona, whose expression and gesture convey her woefulness, sings the "willow-song" while Emilia combs out her hair. Characters, setting, and mood are all successfully transposed from verbal to visual work—but here, as elsewhere, that link appears to be a simply gratuitous one.

The paintings and studies in preparation for paintings which counterpart lesser-known literary works conform to these same trends in treatment. Composition tends to be more complex than in works of Rossetti's not "literary" in motif, and the emphasis appears to rest upon the depiction of an ongoing dramatic action rather than upon any inner turmoil or moment of heightened experience. These works often appear to cater to the Victorian taste for the superficially expressive in art. Figures gasp, frown, point, sigh, clutch, press fingers to lips or forehead, their gestures inviting us to "read" meaning into them. Frequently too, the figures appear to sing, speak, or shout, as if in an effort, however vain, to assist in the narration of the tale presented on the picture surface. In cases where "literary" paintings do not follow this mode of representing narrative effects by means of a multitude of details, Rossetti's approach appears rather to be to follow his more usual style, and to simply "tag" the work in some fashion. By appending such tags as literary title, line of verse, or

identifying image, Rossetti could obtain for his graphic work whatever added dimension or suggestiveness was to be attained by that gesture.²⁶ But by either approach, these works reveal no hint of that rich and complex mode of inter-relationship which characterizes Rossetti's creation of visual-verbal pairs through the addition of poetic counterpart; instead, they suggest only that view of the "sister arts" which was sustained almost by habit in mid-nineteenth century minds.

Some of what may be considered Rossetti's "private" illustrative or literary works of art follow the same patterns of relationship with a text as those works conceived of for commercial reasons or with a broader audience in mind.²⁷ Among his many incomplete or informal sketches which have survived, a good number are rather conventional and often highly derivative of those continental illustrators like Gavarni and Retzsch, whom Rossetti greatly admired in his youth. Frequently, such designs are tagged, like many

²⁶ Instances of such "tags" are evident, for example, in Golden Water (Surtees 107) where a young woman representing Princess Parisadé from the Arabian Nights carries the key "prop" of the black barrel of golden water, or in My Lady Greensleeves (Surtees 161) which bears the title of the familiar ballad, and has several lines from that ballad inscribed on its back.

²⁷ Examples of works in this category are such "illustrations" as those for E. B. Browning (The Romaunt of Margret [Surtees 25] and 'The Sun May Shine and We be Cold' [Surtees 33]), and several designs for familiar English ballads (Childe Waters [Surtees 27] and Ballad of Fair Annie [Surtees 68]).

of Rossetti's "literary" paintings, with either titles or lines of prose or verse; in other instances, again conforming to previously examined procedures for handling subjects with literary motifs, Rossetti has simply injected enough highly allusive detail from the written work to identify the analogue to the design. At best, a few of these designs capture a wide and perceptive range of images and details from the literary work, or an accurate sense of their prevailing spirit. To this extent, designs like Dr. Johnson at the Mitre (Surtees 119) and some of the designs executed for the Cyclographic Society like Genevieve (Surtees 38-for Coleridge's "Love") or La Belle Dame Sans Merci (Surtees 32), may be regarded as successful illustrations of a literary work; nevertheless, they still reflect a pattern of relationship which has characterized all of the works we have examined thus far.²⁸ For in each case (but those already excepted such as "Hist!"), instead of interrelationship between visual and verbal work we perceive rather a relationship which is nonreciprocal. In these designs Rossetti has borrowed elements of a literary work in varying degrees but, in turn, his designs have lent no new insight into that work.

In a few instances, however, Rossetti did execute "illustrative" designs each of which, while sharing many of

²⁸ This last design is reproduced in Marillier, repr. facing p. 17; the later drawing, also entitled La Belle Dame Sans Merci (Surtees 76) bears very little correspondence to Keats's poem.

these characteristics, go beyond that dependent relationship to a literary work. These designs make some contribution of their own to our understanding or appreciation of the verbal counterpart, or present an imaginative vision which stands as a simultaneously autonomous expression. At the same time, in spite of the overwhelmingly heavy pressure of tradition, these graphic works reveal Rossetti's effort to depart from the conventional processes of literary illustration which affected so many of his other "private" designs.

The first evidence of this effort appears in a series of youthful sketches executed for Goethe's Faust.²⁹ While not strongly articulated until a few years later, as early as 1846 Rossetti was involved in a cluster of illustrative designs which manifest a particularly private and idiosyncratic perspective towards that work. This perspective is made clear in a comparison of the two earliest Faust illustrations to survive. The very earliest, Faust: Mephistopheles Outside Gretchen's Cell (Surtees 17) displays a histrionic impulse not uncommon to Victorian "story-telling" design. Mephistopheles, whose eyes bulge suggestively while he appears to tap his cheekbone in thought, stands furtively behind a prison wall, from which a bare pallet can be seen. His attire (quite literally, his

²⁹ I will exclude from discussion here the pen and ink design of Faust: Faust and Margaret in Prison (Surtees 82-1856, repr. Marillier, p. 73) and the painting, Risen at Dawn (Gretchen Discovering the Jewels [Surtees 253-1878-80]), because of their conventional quality as "literary" designs simply tagged with title or identifying images and themes.

costume) reinforces the "stagy" dramatic effect. In the very next design, entitled Faust (Surtees 18), on the other hand, drama appears to shift to an inner, rather than an external stage. A young woman lies upon a bed, sheltering the form of a man, who appears sleeping upon her lap, from the skeletal figure of Death who hovers above them. While certain of the gestures depicted retain the highly active and expressive effect of others of Rossetti's "literary" designs, the difference here is that all action seems to focus on one point; the upraised and bony arms of Death, the wings of the Mephistophelean figure near him, the pointing finger of the woman behind him, and the hand of the young girl which shields her eyes, all draw attention to her face. By that process, the design suggests an inner conflict for which her physiognomy is but a mirror. Rossetti's "reading" of the episode in this manner reveals a very personal focus on the psychologically significant, and marks an idiosyncratic assimilation of a literary work not unlike that which occurred in many of his Dantesque designs. This focus recurs again in a cluster of Faust designs executed two year later. In the several versions of Faust: Gretchen and Mephistopheles in Church (Surtees 34, 34A, and 34B), certain consistent details carry over this impulse. A sense of torment and conflict is conveyed through the image of the whispering Mephistopheles. The girl's gesture, hands over head, and more significantly, the fact that she is always turned from or does not face him, emphasizes the idea of internalized drama. In spite of (and in contrast to) the

external accessories of church and other worshipers, we recognize that the significance of the design lies in the girl's intense and inner anguish. The same current is evident in Faust: Margaret in the Church (Surtees 35). Tension centers on the hands and face of the tormented young woman who seems unnaturally pressed between the wall against which she leans from the sheer psychological force of the vague yet terrible apparition which hovers above her right shoulder. This sense of great physical force issuing from a non-physical form helps to emphasize the focus of the design upon inner strife. This focus is strengthened by accessory details such as praying statuette and lovers embracing in the background, which establish contrast with the dominant form. In the last of the 1848 Faust designs, inscribed "Faust. part I. Last scene," (Surtees 36), a man and woman shield their eyes from the winged apparitions shown them by a Mephistopheles now undisguised in all his awfulness. Behind, a more firmly sketched but less terrible figure of Mephistopheles also points to a ghostly form. The effect of counterposing figures, both in terms of their disposition in the design and their actual expression and "impression," is to reinforce our identification of inner conflict as the dominant impulse of the design. In every instance, in his designs for Faust, Rossetti exhibits the same process. While utilizing certain accessories, such as the characters from Goethe's work, his designs suggest far more strongly a personal transmutation of that work, to express currents which the work had in his reading of it.

These designs are "private," not only in their mode of distribution or exposure, but in the vision which they convey.

This same deeply personal reading of a literary work in drawings purportedly "illustrative" may be seen in several designs which Rossetti executed for poems by Edgar Allan Poe. In the first set of these, for "The Raven" (Surtees 19, 19A, 19B, and 19C), Rossetti seems to waver between a conventional literary approach and a more personal one. In the alternative designs, the scene portrayed is more outwardly dramatic. While the motif involves the depiction of apparitional forms and a "real" figure, Rossetti has realized an actual confrontation. The young man gazes steadily and penetratingly at the corps of spirits who form an orderly procession before him. As customary for a "literary" design, Rossetti has tagged these sketches with the necessary identifying images of study, lamp and book, and most importantly, the portentous raven. Like many conventional Victorian literary designs, these works display only a one-sided process in which poem determines picture. While many of the same "tags" are evident in the most detailed design (Surtees 19), the temper and style of the work seems to have changed, as has the motivation behind it. For now the spirits, instead of marching by, leap and scurry about in a frenzy which seems to reflect the derangement of mind which appears to afflict the young man, now centered in the composition. As in the first Faustian design, all figures seem to emphasize the one in whose consciousness the psychological drama is taking place. A winged woman and two skeletal forms who flank her,

spective towards the relation between graphic and literary work which differs from that which was in ample evidence around him.

The third instance in which Rossetti utilizes a unique approach in a "private" design is once again merely an exception to his usual treatment of that particular author's work; it thereby affords us an interesting individual treatment of the visual-verbal relationship, but no more solid grounds on which to base any generalizations about his concept of that relationship when adding a graphic counterpart to a well-known literary work. The instance referred to is his execution of a design "illustrating" Shakespeare's Hamlet. In 1858, Rossetti created a very intricate pen and ink design, Hamlet and Ophelia (Surtees 108).³¹ While the design does represent an identifiable episode from the play when in Act III, Scene i, Ophelia returns Hamlet's gifts and letters to him, Rossetti's emphasis, as in the case of some of his Dantesque designs, seems overplayed. For again, of all the significant aspects of a literary work to dwell upon, Rossetti has chosen one involving misfortune in love, and instead of a dramatic confrontation, he has heavily stressed psychological tension. The figure of Ophelia, turning away from Hamlet, appears yet another accessory to the scene. She presses

³¹ This design differs from a later watercolor (Surtees 189-1866), representing the same episode, which is more conventionally "literary" like Rossetti's other Shakespearean designs.

against the back of the oratory pew, as if she would almost "fade into the woodwork" as it were. Her pale face and the steady position of her hands, holding out the cast-off letters and propping her prayer book, convey a statue-like quality. Finally, the intricate over-all pattern of her gown, detailed and flat, gives an impression of lifeless ornament (made stronger by juxtaposition with the pattern beneath her feet) which further draws her from dramatic function in the graphic portrayal of the scene. Hamlet, on the other hand, kneels firmly upon a pew in the center of the design, his arms outstretched in a Christ-like gesture. The inner turmoil which he experiences is reflected in various details from his tearing of the rose-petals to the convoluted stairs and archways above his head, which seem to suggest his confusion of thought. The sense of conflict is reinforced by the multidimensional effect created through the use of symbolic detail in the design. The carvings beside him, for example, depict the Tree of Knowledge encircled by the Serpent, with an angel with upraised sword flanking it, and the death of Uzzah after touching the Ark, symbols, according to Rossetti, of "rash introspection."³² It is clear that Rossetti intended to intermingle the literal transposition of incident and the inner drama of those moments, but less clear, however, that he was aware to

³² Quoted from a letter from Rossetti to Charles Eliot Norton by Helen M. M. Rossetti (Angeli), in "The Life and Work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti," Art Journal (Easter Art Annual, 1902), p. 16.

what extent the psychological dimension dominates. Although, as Rossetti informed George Eliot, "as regards dramatic action," he meant Hamlet to be "ramping about and talking wildly," we get no sense of much physical movement.³³ In the same letter Rossetti also makes mention, however, of wishing to "symbolize the character and situation." This intention, which is more clearly realized, was in Rossetti's mind when he conceived the design as well as in his report of that process to George Eliot over a decade later. For, in a letter to William Allingham in 1854, Rossetti writes of his plan for a contribution to the folio of an ongoing sketching club. He notes,

I am doing one, which I think will be the one, of Hamlet and Ophelia, so treated as I think to embody and symbolize the play without obtrusiveness or interference with the subject as a subject.³⁴

What the design does appear to "embody and symbolize," rather, "without interference with the subject" of the play, is Rossetti's own very personal assimilation of it. Not Shakespeare's concerns, but Rossetti's, are predominant in this technically impressive recreation in graphic form of an episode from a literary source.³⁵

³³ Quoted by Surtees, Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p. 61, from a letter in the Duke University Collection, Durham, N. C. (18 February 1870).

³⁴ Letters, I, 223 (19 September 1854).

³⁵ In spite of the admirable thoroughness with which he examines the details of this "illustration," I would object to David Sonstroem's somewhat myopic perception of the design, which suffers overmuch from the biographical fallacy. He identifies Hamlet and Ophelia with Rossetti and Lizzie

Like the painting of "Hist!", said Kate the Queen', these few private illustrations which reveal a different approach must be considered exceptions to Rossetti's usual procedure for creating "illustrative" designs, and as nothing more.³⁶ Whether they are conventionally literary, or intensely idiosyncratic, Rossetti has repeatedly revealed in these works a relation in which the arts do not intermingle—instead, one definitely takes precedence over the other. We can form no generalizations or definitive

Siddal, and suggests that the design is meant to reflect "a self-conscious, sexually guilty lover unhappily rejecting an innocent beloved whom he was indirectly but unquestionably destroying" (p. 95). See Rossetti and the Fair Lady (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 91-96.

³⁶ Perhaps Rossetti's design entitled Cassandra (Surtees 127), which Carl A. Peterson compares with "Hist" for its strategy in depicting "a scene only indirectly alluded to," should be considered with this group as well; see "The Iliad, Meredith's 'Cassandra,' and Rossetti's 'Cassandra' Drawing," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 7 (1966), 335. Peterson suggests that by selecting a peripheral or imagined aspect of the literary work, "Rossetti freed himself to work up his scene as he pleased." Cassandra may not only be regarded as a component in a Rossettian pair, although considered as such in Chapter Two of this dissertation, but as an "illustration" to both the Iliad and Meredith's poem, "Cassandra." The nature of the design as a loose composite of details from both literary sources is explored by Peterson, who notes,

Close study of the picture itself resolves any doubts . . . about a link between Rossetti's picture and Meredith's poem. But it also reveals an equally binding link between his picture and the Iliad. It shows, in other words, that Rossetti did not simply translate into pictorial terms a specific scene described in detail by Meredith; but that, his imagination activated by a reading of Meredith's poem, he with the aid of the Iliad made an imaginatively constructed "invention" that stands free and independent of both texts and both poets, and is not, strictly speaking, an "illustration" of either poem. (p. 333)

conclusions from the works examined thus far; neither the treatment of a given author's work nor the underlying purpose of an illustration (i.e., public paintings, "private" illustrative designs) appears to determine a particular relationship between media. This, however, is not the case, when another cluster of Rossetti's graphic works with literary counterparts is regarded. For, in addition to these two forms of illustration, Rossetti also executed a number of works which actually accompany a literary work in print.³⁷ In these instances, limited though they are, we may witness a distinct, consistent, and clearly articulated inter-relationship between the arts.

In the mid-eighteen hundreds a great many artists

³⁷ These illustrations are ten in number. Not included among these for consideration is the paired poem and design for his sonnet on the sonnet, which became the first poem in the sequence of The House of Life. This design was inserted by Rossetti in the copy of Main's Treasury of Sonnets given to his mother for her eightieth birthday. Rossetti did not intend it for publication. Also excluded from this examination are those of Rossetti's designs which he intended to accompany his Early Italian Poets (See Letters, II, 398, 400, 409, 412, and 418). The title page design was actually etched, but was unsatisfactory to Rossetti. The plate was subsequently destroyed and the design was never included. Instead, it was utilized shortly thereafter by Rossetti for Love's Greeting (Surtees 126) and later for Roman de la Rose (Surtees 126-R1); see reproduction in Marillier, p. 107. The copy of Rossetti's volume in the Janet Camp Troxell Collection, Princeton University Library, contains six brush and ink vignettes the attribution of which are open to question. For further discussion of these designs see Virginia Surtees, "The Early Italian Poets by D. G. Rossetti with his Illustrations," Princeton University Library Chronicle, 33, No. 3 (Spring 1972), 230-31, and John Christian, "Early German Sources for Pre-Raphaelite Designs," Art Quarterly, 36 (Spring-Summer, 1973), 58-59, 79.

were attracted to the practice of illustration. For some it was simply an experiment, and for others, a means of livelihood out of need, not choice. At the same time, techniques were developed which made illustrated works more available to the public. From the initial proliferation of chapbooks and broadsheets, illustrations soon found their way into newspapers, magazines, and more books than ever before. Of course, one problem with illustration involved the actual technique used in reproduction. The artist who designed the plate (whether wood or metal) was often removed from the production of his illustration. Only his original recorded what he really envisioned and it, unfortunately, was often destroyed in the engraving process. If not drawn directly on the plate, the transfer of design from one medium to another often destroyed the original idea, or caused distortion and over-elaboration. Some artists resolved this problem by etching their own plates (Cruikshank and "Phiz" [Hablot K. Browne] for example). For the most part, however, the methods employed during the Victorian period hindered most artists, and the weaknesses of the method encouraged the development of new modes of reproduction. By the late nineteenth century, photogravure and other methods of reproduction took over, and accuracy, while perhaps replacing a certain charm, was attained. In the period of the fifties and sixties, however, called by one critic the "Dalziel Era" for the famous firm which engraved the illustrations most familiar to us, the method most frequently used was wood-

engraving.³⁸ Despite the deficiencies of the medium, many illustrators followed an approach which was intended to instill a maximum degree of their own point of view and imagination in the design. It was not uncommon for illustration to involve communication and cooperation among an array of individuals including artist, author, publisher, and team of engravers. As an interesting reflection of the aims of those involved, we may note the following statements from The Art of Illustration by Henry Blackburn which are fairly indicative of the prevailing attitude towards illustration in the Victorian age:

The first object of an illustration, the practical part is . . . to illustrate and elucidate the text—a matter often lost sight of. The second is to be artistic, and include works of the imagination, decoration, ornament, style.

To turn to a more practical side of book illustration, the first principle of illustration is to illustrate, yet it is a fact that few illustrations in books or magazines are to be found in their proper place in the text.³⁹

Yet, in the very same era which encouraged this sort of illustration and "literary" graphic art which tended to make art dependent upon, or to be subsumed by, literature, we may note the development of a new mode for the Victorian age: the interpretive illustration. What this mode of illustration attempted was not to deny a relationship between art and literature, but to place the two arts on a

³⁸ Percy Muir, Victorian Illustrated Books (London: B. T. Batsford, 1971), chap. VI.

³⁹ (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1894), pp. 15, 182.

more equal basis on which they could cooperate. The development of this type of illustrative work was encouraged by the expansion of the art of book illustration in the mid-nineteenth century, which then took an equally important place beside the modes of the literary painting and "private" illustrative design as a form of combining characteristics of both arts. We must agree with William Fredeman that "not since Blake had the illustration of books in England laid serious claim to artistic consideration," and find Rossetti one of the forerunners in this field.⁴⁰

Although sparse, Rossetti's contributions to illustrated books were significant, specifically in providing models for the genre of interpretive illustration, a form perhaps not evident since Blake. In these designs Rossetti reveals a capacity to be not only an artist and poet in his own right, but to act as critic of the poetry of another as well. Although too frequently it is made gratuitously, the comparison between Blake and Rossetti is illuminating in regard to Rossetti as illustrator-critic. In an essay on Blake's illustrations, Joseph A. Wittreich, Jr., has noted that Blake's endeavors in this genre were highly respected in the nineteenth century, especially by such men as Alexander Gilchrist, with whom, significantly, Rossetti

⁴⁰ William E. Fredeman, Pre-Raphaelitism: A Bibliocritical Study (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965), p. 275.

collaborated on a Life of Blake.⁴¹ Wittreich formulates certain questions about Blake's illustration which may be valuably applied to another master of interpretive designs. Roughly paraphrasing, these are as follows: How closely related are illustrations and text? Do the designs depart from the text towards the artist's personal store of image and idea and, if so, what is the meaning of this departure? To what extent is the artist working within the traditions of illustration and criticism? What is the meaning of the text as the artist understood it? And finally, are the designs valid either as interpretations or as an index to the artist's other work?⁴² As appropriate as these questions are to Blake, they are equally appropriate to Rossetti as interpretive illustrator; and, they may be most fruitfully applied to Rossetti's genuine illustrations.

The recognition and definition of this distinct illustrative mode is essential to clear up misconceptions and conflicting viewpoints about Rossetti as illustrator. Initially, Rossetti's interpretive designs met with a critical perspective of which John Ruskin is representative. In a letter written to Tennyson about a volume of his poems

⁴¹ Joseph A. Wittreich, Jr., "William Blake: Illustrator-Interpreter of Paradise Regained," Calm of Mind: Tercentenary Essays on Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes, in Honor of John S. Diekhoff (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve Univ. Press, 1971), p. 124; see also Rossetti's essay, "William Blake," in Works, and Alexander Gilchrist's Life of William Blake (London: Macmillan & Co., 1880).

⁴² Wittreich, p. 122.

which contained many illustrations by the Pre-Raphaelites, including Rossetti, Ruskin comments that,

many of the plates are very noble things, though not, it seems to me, illustrations of your poems.

I believe, in fact, that good pictures never can be; they are always another poem, subordinate but wholly different from the poet's conception, and serve chiefly to show the reader how variously the same verses may affect various minds. (XXXVI: 264-65)

The very characteristics which caused Ruskin to consider the designs not to be illustrations, are precisely those which belong to the genre of interpretive illustration. The major point in which he appears to err is in his notion of subordination of design to text. Perhaps Ruskin was so concerned with the defence of art as a form of poetry that he could not perceive its independence and equality as a mode of expression which could function cooperatively with a literary counterpart. It may in fact be that only with the beginning of the rejection, in the eighteen-fifties, of Ruskin's view, could interpretive illustration thrive as a unique art form. The condition for its being able to do so was that the visual not be subordinate to the verbal. Of course for a few men like William Blake, that truth, of the equality of the arts, never needed to be affirmed; but in a sense, the mid-nineteenth century had to return to his perceptions. Ruskin's response, however, marks only the beginning of more than a century of critical shortsightedness as to the nature and purpose of interpretive illustration as a consistent and formal approach to the relationship between design and text. For decades, interpretive illustrations were censured precisely because they implied

that design was as important as related text, while their function as interpretation was overlooked or ignored. Shortly after Rossetti's death, one highly sympathetic critic reluctantly noted that several of Rossetti's designs could "hardly be called" illustrations, "being more justly definable as original creations; for, though illustrative of the spirit of the poems they accompany, they more or less but slightly adhere to their separate subject lines or verses."⁴³ Lacking that intention, the works might be praiseworthy, yet were not accepted as the new approach to illustration which they were, but as something totally different. They were "inefficient as [an] actual illustration, however noteworthy as [an] original design."⁴⁴ Even while receiving adulation and written "appreciations," Rossetti's designs were distinguished from illustrations which were "immediately and directly inspired by the poet" whose work they accompanied and were regarded as intending not to promote the views of the literary work, but rather to "overpower the text."⁴⁵ Amidst voices of convention, some few critics

⁴³ William Sharp, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and a Study (London: Macmillan & Co., 1882), p. 108.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ George Somes Layard, Tennyson and his Pre-Raphaelite Illustrators: A Book About a Book (London: Elliot Stock, 1894), p. 9. In the chapter on Rossetti, Layard further finds that Rossetti's designs reveal "negligence of their prototypes" (p. 54), and says that Rossetti "deliberately ignored the allegiance which, as illustrator, he owed the text." (p. 55) This, from Layard, all the while he praises the brilliance and imagination of Rossetti's works.

did perceive the intention of Rossetti and his Pre-Raphaelite compeers, in regard to their efforts in illustration. As far back as 1896, for example, Laurence Housman recorded that these designs provided "personal and intellectual readings of the poems to which they belonged, were not merely echoes in line of the words of the text. Often they were the successful summing up of the drift of an entire poem within the space of a single picture. . . ." ⁴⁶ And, in his pioneering catalogue of English illustration, Gleeson White observed,

The drawings by Rossetti, even as we see them after translation by the engraver had worked his will, must needs be valued as masterpieces, if only for the imagination and thought compressed into their limited space, and from their exquisite manipulation of details. At first sight, some of these . . . seem discordant, but afterwards reveal themselves as commentaries upon the text—not elucidating it directly, but embroidering it with subtle meanings and involved symbolism. ⁴⁷

Unfortunately, however, not even these sympathetic critics delved further into discussion of this mode, and they continued to compete with more conventional voices clamoring about the ethics of illustration. In the resultant confusion,

⁴⁶ Arthur Boyd Houghton (London: Kegan Paul, 1896), p. 13.

⁴⁷ English Illustration: The Sixties 1855-70 (1897; rpt. Bath: Kingsmead Reprints, 1970), pp. 105-06. Another sympathetic and perceptive early critic of Rossetti's illustrations (although she does focus more on the "illustrative" works than on the true illustrations) is Elisabeth Luther Cary. See her essays, "Rossetti as an Illustrator," The Lamp: A Review and Record of Current Literature, 27, No. 4 (November 1903), 321-28, and "Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Illustrator," Print Collector's Quarterly, 5, No. 3 (October 1915), 316-38.

there have been no real attempts to examine Rossetti's designs in relation to the written texts of others, just as there has been little study of the relation between his own paired paintings and poems. Yet, no understanding of Rossetti's conception of the relationship between art and literature can be complete without such examination.

Rossetti's first venture into actual book illustration was initiated in 1854, when he designed an illustration for his friend William Allingham's volume of verse, The Music Master. Aside from questions or comments about obtaining the woodblocks, we find the first extended reference to this undertaking in a letter from Rossetti to Allingham, in which he comments,

I trust certainly to join Hughes in at any rate one of the illustrations of Day and Night Songs, of which I hope both his and mine will be worthy—else there is nothing so much spoils a good book as an attempt to embody its ideas, only going halfway. Is Saint Margaret's Eve to be in? That would be illustratable. ⁴⁸

Although he originally anticipated contributing at least two or three illustrations, Rossetti ultimately executed only one, for "The Maids of Elfen-Mere." That single design, however, signals Rossetti's embarkation upon a graphic work intended, while manifesting a reciprocally expressive process, to embody a literary work from another's pen.

⁴⁸ Letters, I, 208 (23 July 1854); note: the volume was published in 1855 as The Music Master, A Love Story; and Two Series of Day and Night Songs. Arthur Hughes, mentioned above, contributed seven full-page illustrations and a vignette, and Millais, like Rossetti, contributed only one illustration.

It is clear that faced with the undertaking, Rossetti gave a great deal of thought to the nature and subject of his design. There is evidence of extensive and frequent communication both with Allingham and with Arthur Hughes, who also collaborated on the volume. In Rossetti's design for "The Maids of Elfen-Mere," the following lines of the poem are evoked:

'Twas when the spinning-room was here,
 There came Three Damsels clothed in white,
 With their spindles every night;
 Two and one, and Three fair Maidens,
 Spinning to a pulsing cadence,
 Singing songs of Elfen-Mere;
 Till the eleventh hour was toll'd,
 Then departed through the wold.

.
 Three white Lilies, calm and clear,
 And they were loved by every one;
 Most of all, the Pastor's Son,
 Listening to their gentle singing,
 Felt his heart go from him, clinging
 Round these Maids of Elfen-Mere;⁴⁹

The poem is a simple ballad of enchantment and love, which evokes the magical realm in which truth and trust are essential to sustain that special vision which belongs to those who believe. Motivated by a love which dares to grasp and hold what cannot be held, the Pastor's son ultimately destroys the magical maidens, and himself.

In Rossetti's design, the Pastor's son is seen as he turns, distraught with love-anguish, while the three maids before him spin and sing. The strong sense of illumination,

⁴⁹ William Allingham, The Music Master, A Love Story; and Two Series of Day and Night Songs (London: G. Routledge & Co., 1855), pp. 202-03.

inconsistent in source, gives a peculiarly supernatural aura to the scene. While it may simply reflect Rossetti's poor technical skills, the sense of organization of brilliant whites and areas of dense crosshatching which comes across belies that assumption. For it is the forms of the "Three white Lilies" that strike us, more so when beheld in contrast with the dark form of the brooding boy. Their pale faces and gleaming hair gives them a quality of agelessness which counters the obvious youth of the boy. Through the windows in the background, light is fixed upon the crescent moon, the spirals and steeples of the buildings in the darkened town, and upon the face of the distant clock, perhaps the one put back by the boy to hold the magic maidens before him beyond their appointed hour to depart. The sense of contrast is reinforced through the juxtaposition in the illustration of fluid and static lines. For the maids not only are portrayed while they are in song, but their figures, and the gestures they display, suggest a certain rhythmical quality. Against that impression, the hard lines of the boy's face and form, and of the very bare floor upon which he reclines in a twisted position, convey a feeling of simultaneous attraction and repulsion so characteristic of Rossetti's figures. Through all of these means, Rossetti has captured not only a particular incident or scene, but the impulses underlying the entire poem. For the appeal of the design, like that of the ballad, is in the sense of progression in spite of repetition, till the culmination of the

story occurs. The graceful repetition of forms suggests the musical refrain, the recurrent diction in the poem, and the sense of long-ago and far away, while the darkness and angularity in the design conveys the impression of what is real, hard, without enchantment, the here-and-now. Were we to take away the forms of the three maids in the design, all that was left would suggest that mournful world which exists when magic has been drawn from it; as is, we may "read" that possibility inherent in the very moment of enchantment. Rossetti seems to have gone to the heart of Allingham's poetry, to suggest through the intermingling of impulses the "suspension of disbelief" that characterizes the world of magic. He seems to sympathize with the poem's expression of an inevitable destruction of balance of natural and supernatural, and its concluding hint that if such contrasts were ever to be transcended, it would be through "true love."

Critics often mistake Rossetti's dissatisfaction with the engravers' handling of his design for rejection of the design itself or of the process embodied in it. It is certainly true that Rossetti was greatly upset by what he referred to as "that unlucky job," and "the lesson as to the difficulty of wood-drawing."⁵⁰ Although he wished to have

⁵⁰ Letters, I, 245 (To William Allingham, 17 March 1855). We may gain some insight into the effect Rossetti desired through his criticism of the treatment of the block by the Dalziel firm. He notes,

That woodblock! Dalziel has made such an incredible mull of it in the cutting that it cannot possibly appear. The fault, however, is no doubt in great measure mine—not of deficient care, for I took the very greatest, but of over-elaboration of parts,

the design removed from the book (and in fact, dramatically cut it from his personal copy of Allingham's volume) the plate was included, suggesting Allingham's contentment, at least, with the graphic treatment of his poem by Rossetti. That others agreed is evident from the great praise which the design received shortly afterwards, in an article in The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine. There, Edward Burne-Jones proclaimed,

perplexing them for the engraver. However, some of the fault is his too, as he has not always followed my lines, but rather a stupid preconceived notion of his about intended 'severity' in the design, which has resulted in an engraving as hard as a nail, and yet flabby and vapid to the last degree. In short, it is such a production as could give no idea of anything like care or skill on the part of the designer—of anything but the most conceited attempt of a beginner to be grand and 'severe.' (pp. 243-44 [To William Allingham, 17 March 1855])

The effect which Rossetti did want is obvious from other explanations to Allingham, in which he notes, I hope my own drawing is not so bad as it looks to me now it is finished, but in any case I am sure it will not bear being made worse in the cutting. In this second edition of it, I have tried to draw all the shadow in exact lines, to which, if the engraver will only adhere, I fancy it may have a chance, but hardly otherwise, as there is a good deal of strong shade—dangerous especially to the faces, but I could find no other way. (pp. 237-38 [23 January 1855])

I showed the proof yesterday to Woolner, who saw the original drawing, and he was as shocked as myself. Nevertheless, I am not wholly unimpressed by your unprejudiced view of it, I confess. Moreover, it would be possible to improve it a good deal, I believe—not by adding shadows, which, though very advisable (as in the finger you mention) would not be practicable; but by cutting out lines, by which means the human character might be partially substituted for the oyster and goldfish cast of features, and other desirable changes effected. (pp. 246 [21 March 1855])

It is I think the most beautiful drawing for an illustration I have ever seen; the weirdness of the Maids of Elfen-Mere, the musical timed movements of their arms together as they sing, the face of the man above all, are such as only a great artist could conceive.⁵¹

We may accept the judgment of such a critic in assessing the success or failure of Rossetti's first essay in book illustration. But further indication of his satisfaction with the medium, if not the particular result in this instance, comes from Rossetti himself. For, only days after completing the design for "Maids of Elfen-Mere," Rossetti informed Allingham that he had been called on by the publisher, Edward Moxon, to participate in the illustration of a new edition of Tennyson's Poems.⁵² The design for Allingham's work was to become merely the prelude to the

⁵¹ [Edward Burne-Jones], "Essay on The Newcomes," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, 1, No. 1 (January 1856), 60. In somewhat more purple language, a biographer of Burne-Jones would record of the young man's exposure to the "Maids of Elfen-Mere" design that,

it was revealed to young Burne-Jones that there existed a strange enchanting world beyond the hum-drum of this daily life—a world of radiant, many-coloured lights, of dim mysterious shadows, of harmonies of form and line, wherein to enter, is to walk among the blest—that far-off world of Art into which many a time since he has made his way and brought back visions of delight to show his fellow-men. The first suspicion of that land of faëry came to him when, in a small volume of poems by William Allingham, he found a little wood-cut, 'Elfen-mere,' signed with a curious entwinement of initials D. G. R. The slumbering spirit of fancy awoke to life within him and cast her spells upon him never to be shaken off.

See Malcolm Bell, Sir Edward Burne-Jones: A Record and Review (London: George Bell & Sons, 1895), pp. 15-16.

⁵² Letters, I, 238 (23 January 1855).

truly monumental experiment in illustration which was next undertaken by Rossetti.

The Moxon edition of Tennyson's Poems may be the most celebrated illustrated book of the Victorian period. The work is an uneven one, for the illustrations are divided between two schools: the older, comprised of Stanfield, Maclise, Creswick, Mulready, and Horseley, contributed twenty-four designs, and the younger, the Pre-Raphaelites Millais, William Holman Hunt, and Rossetti, contributed thirty. Rossetti's judgment that the "right names would have been Millais, Hunt, Madox Brown, Hughes, a certain lady, and myself" is valid, if a bit prejudiced, for the illustrations which the Pre-Raphaelites contributed are quite superior not only in design, but in terms of their treatment of the poems involved.⁵³ An interesting description of their work is given in a monograph by George Somes Layard entitled Tennyson and his Pre-Raphaelite Illustrators: A Book About a Book. He notes,

To put it broadly, Millais has realized, Holman Hunt has idealized, and Rossetti has sublimated, or transcendentalized, the subjects which they have respectively illustrated. The two latter have, in greater or lesser degree, introduced subtleties which Tennyson never dreamed of. Rossetti indeed, has done more. He has not hesitated to contradict the text.⁵⁴

Such a succinct statement may dazzle, but is not a little off the mark; a closer look at Rossetti's efforts reveals

⁵³ Ibid.; "a certain lady" is Lizzie Siddal.

⁵⁴ Layard, p. 9.

his developing concept of the nature and purpose of illustration.

It is clear that in addition to the financial considerations involved, Rossetti was persuaded to accept the commission by the understanding that he would be at liberty to pursue his own directions in the choice of poems and their treatment in his illustrations. That such liberty was essential is suggested by a comment made by Rossetti to Allingham, in a letter written at the time of the undertaking, which illuminates Rossetti's concept of the relation between word and picture. He writes,

I have not begun even designing for them yet, but fancy I shall try the Vision of Sin and Palace of Art, etc.,— those where one can allegorize on one's own hook on the subject of the poem, without killing, for oneself and everyone, a distinct idea of the poet's. This, I fancy, is always the upshot of illustrated editions,—⁵⁵

Rossetti further indicates that such failure might be avoided where the poetry is "absolutely narrative" in character, suggesting that he clearly identified the character of conventional Victorian illustration. Since he regarded Tennyson's narrative poems, such as "Lady Clare" and "The Lord of Burleigh," as generally the Laureate's worst, he would move in another direction. Rossetti appears to have found an alternative to the failure he describes by pursuing the mode of interpretive illustration. He began by vacillating towards poems with allegorical undertones, and wound up designing illustrations for "The Lady of Shalott,"

⁵⁵ Letters, I, 239 (23 January 1855).

"Sir Galahad," "Mariana in the South," and two for "The Palace of Art." Rossetti considered, but did not ultimately do, a second illustration for "Sir Galahad" or one for "Two Voices." Each poem which Rossetti did choose shares the further attribute (a bond as well with much of his own work, both visual and verbal) of involving a protagonist caught up in an intense moment of introversion ranging from zeal to madness. Response to the designs reflects the fact that Rossetti realized his intention as expressed to Allingham. Tennyson himself was unable to see their relation to his verse and could not, in certain instances, discover what they meant. A similar response came from a critic in the Saturday Review, who remarked, "to assert that, after any study, we can understand Rossetti, would be an hypocrisy beyond the homage which human intelligence may justifiably pay to pictorial incomprehensibility."⁵⁶ Even William Rossetti somewhat apologetically noted of the designs that "It must be said, also, that himself only, and not Tennyson, was his guide. He drew just what he chose, taking from his author's text nothing more than a hint and an opportunity."⁵⁷ Such reactions center on a conception of illustration which involves simply lifting idea and image from one medium and transposing it to another. Rossetti, however, attempted something else.

⁵⁶ Quoted by Oswald Doughty, A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1949), p. 215.

⁵⁷ Letters and Memoir, I, 189.

The illustration to "The Palace of Art" usually referred to as St. Cecilia is at once the most criticized and most praised of Rossetti's illustrations to Tennyson's work. In the design, which is replete with medieval details, Rossetti captures the exaggerated feeling for beauty which underlies the poem. The lines which appear most closely aligned to this illustration are the following:

Or in a clear-wall'd city on the sea,
Near gilded organ-pipes, her hair
Wound with white roses, slept St. Cecily;
An angel look'd at her.⁵⁸

These lines refer to one of the many scenes in arras-work which ornament the pleasure house of the soul. Certainly the figure which we see in Rossetti's illustration might simply be Saint Cecilia, and the form behind her, the angel. At the same time, however, the details of the design function on another level. It is probable that the clear-walled city of the design is the rampart-enclosed Palace of Art itself, suggested in stanzas two and three, and the rapturous female form is the soul, fed with beauty but nourished by nothing else. In his discussion of "The Palace of Art," George O. Marshall, Jr. describes the "gallery" of the palace and notes, "The joys rise to a higher plane with the ravishing of the soul by intellectual and aesthetic pleasures."⁵⁹ We

⁵⁸ This and all subsequent quotations of Tennyson's poetry are from A Collection of Poems by Alfred Tennyson, ed., with introd., Christopher Ricks (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1972).

⁵⁹ A Tennyson Handbook (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1963), p. 66.

may recognize that Rossetti's design, in which the angel is certainly not merely guarding the sleeping saint, reflects such a reading of the poem. As observers of the design were quick to note when the volume made its appearance, neither the form of the woman nor the angel are Tennyson's, that is, if we regard the design as a strictly literary illustration of the specific passage cited above. As Forrest Reid notes,

This splendid creature, with loose hair and flowered robes, who holds St. Cecily in his arms while he greedily kisses her, is not evil assuredly, like the angel in Beardsley's 'Mysterious Rose Garden', but just as assuredly the form he has assumed has been chosen with the ultimate purpose of becoming St. Cecily's lover in the flesh. In fact, he already is her lover, if that face of swooning ecstasy means anything.⁶⁰

What critics such as Reid overlook is precisely the fact that the design is not intended simply to represent the figures in one particular episode but to conflate the movement and meaning of the entire poem. This perspective is amply reinforced by other aspects of the design. The enclosed space created by the organ-pipes and ramparts conveys the suggestion of the soul's solitude, while the almost bestial guard standing in the left foreground and the background sea and plain, busy with ships and men, all suggest the common world. With her eyes closed, the woman in the design is further isolated from the outside world which thrives, if on a more natural level, below the heights of

⁶⁰ Illustrators of the Sixties (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1928), pp. 39-40. Layard (p. 56) states that the angel besides St. Cecilia is "seemingly munching the fair face of the lovely martyr."

her clear-ledged palace. While we may be struck by the condensed quality of the imagery in Rossetti's design, we should realize that all of the details present there have their origin nowhere else but in the poem itself. Rossetti has simply given them a degree of concreteness which pictorial conception permits. While the poem primarily presents the world of the soul, the sense of contrast which is graphically expressed in Rossetti's design is also actually drawn from Tennyson's vision. While conforming to so many of Rossetti's own poetic and pictorial works, the counterbalance between self in isolation, and the "others" of the external realm, is a key impulse embodied in "The Palace of Art."

Not only in terms of imagery, but by other means as well, Rossetti's design very actively develops contrasts and polarities. Even the tone of the design is two-fold, for we receive a sense both of rich and varied life, and of vacuous and isolated beauty. In terms of structure, the convoluted spaces, walls, and pillars (devices which we recognize as quite familiar from much of Rossetti's other graphic work), serve to confound the viewer who attempts to discover the true reality of this design. Forms and structures merge with a puzzling yet pleasing effect. "The Palace of Art" provided Rossetti with the opportunity simultaneously to make the real world glow mystically and to externalize the realm of the soul. This may have been, in part, why he had chosen from Tennyson's works a poem in which contrasts in levels of perspective, corporeal and spiritual being, beauty and life, are clearly evident. Yet, in whatever manner this coopera-

tive effort was kindled, it is obvious that in all, Rossetti was constant to his "hook" (one familiar enough to those who know his designs), while true to the poem as well. Like other critics of Tennyson's verse, even up to our own time, Rossetti appears to have also recognized the basic weakness or discrepancy underlying "The Palace of Art." For, while Tennyson's intention was, as one modern reader notes, to "assert[s] that the soul which loves Beauty only, and builds its Palace of Art, will fall into despair and self-loathing," we must sense Tennyson's failure to convince.⁶¹ By its own vibrant beauty, Rossetti's design expresses what Tennyson leaves unexpressed in his poem—that while an alternative presses upon the aesthetic realm, it is not a particularly attractive or enviable one, nor is it ultimately persuasive. In doing so, the design reveals its capacity not merely to accompany, but also to function as criticism of, Tennyson's poem.

The fact that of all of Rossetti's designs for his poetry, Tennyson liked best the illustration to "The Palace of Art" known as King Uther's Son, may be indicative of the success of the design from the point of view of anyone seeking Rossetti's expression of an innovative relationship between picture and poem.⁶² In the design, Rossetti por-

⁶¹ Christopher Ricks, Tennyson (New York: Macmillan Co., 1972), p. 93.

⁶² Marillier, p. 75.

trays another of the scenes which, as a painting, ornamented the walls of the Palace of Art. The lines of the poem which it calls to mind are the following:

Or mythic Uther's deeply-wounded son
 In some fair space of sloping greens
 Lay, dozing in the vale of Avelon
 And watch'd by weeping queens.

Certain of the images and details from "The Palace of Art" are transferred in a strictly literal fashion to the design. Rossetti depicts a circle of crowned women, dressed in medieval garb, sitting around the prostrate figure of a bearded and helmeted man. Their facial expressions and the gestures of their hands suggest dismay, pity, and fear. In the background, a ship is visible against a dark, stormy night. It seems that little of Rossetti's imagination or personal perspective is evident in this illustration, with an important exception; the queens look remarkably alike. Though dress and ornaments differ, the faces are like haunting spectres of the same form. In this respect, the design may be much closer to Rossetti's "hook" than we might first imagine.

It is also curious that among the many tapestries and canvases which are described in the poem, "The Palace of Art," Rossetti should choose one which presents a tragic scene. The juxtaposition of death with beauty is not foreign to Rossetti's own work, however. We may be reminded of one of his travel poems of 1849, "From Paris to Brussels," from the sequence entitled "A Trip to Paris and Belgium." In that poem, Rossetti describes the corpse of a

murdered man which had been dredged up from the Seine:

the other day,
In passing by the Morgue we saw a man
(The thing is common, and we never should
Have known of it, only we passed that way)
Who had been stabbed and tumbled in the Seine,
Where he had stayed some days. The face was black,
And like a negro's, swollen; all the flesh
Had furred, and broken into a green mould.

Now, very likely, he who did the job
Was standing among those who stood with us,
To look upon the corpse. You fancy him—
Smoking an early pipe, and watching, as
An artist, the effect of his last work. (ll. 4-16)

Beneath the obvious irony in that choice of image, Rossetti seems to suggest that art may be removed from life, and even the brutal and tragic aspects of life appreciated for their aesthetic quality. Even death may be regarded objectively and "artistically." The choice of the passage about "King Uther's son" for an illustration may be Rossetti's way of further commenting about Tennyson's poem, for in "The Palace of Art" the soul which admires such kinds of beauty is made ultimately, if unaffectionately, to suffer. In addition, Rossetti's treatment of the canvas in "The Palace of Art" suggests that here in his illustration, as frequently in his own poems and non-illustrative designs, the work of art itself can function as a metaphor to suggest artistic (or poetic) endeavors and points of view. The design thus functions as both criticism and self-expression simultaneously.

Rossetti reveals his critical abilities through the vehicle of interpretive illustration most clearly in his

design for "The Lady of Shalott."⁶³ Numerous strictly Rossettian elements may be seen to enter into what at first appears to be simply a conventional recreation of the images of the poem. On first impression, Rossetti appears to concur with Tennyson in terms of the poet's ideas and images, by depicting the Lady of Shalott after she has suffered the fate of mortal men for abandoning reflections for reality. Her beauty in death suggests that which Tennyson would attempt to convince himself and us, what one early critic of Tennyson's verse called "the emptiness of the life of fancy, however rich and brilliant."⁶⁴ In the illustration, Lancelot bends towards the body of the Lady, who lies wrapped in her cloak in the narrow boat. Above her head a triangular roof-type structure, part of the boat, is visible. It is orna-

⁶³ The mode of interpretive illustration is also very successfully exemplified in another design from the Moxon Tennyson to "The Lady of Shalott," from the pen of William Holman Hunt. This illustration has received a highly competent exegesis from Allan Life, in "Art and Poetry: A Study of the Illustrations of Two Pre-Raphaelite Artists, William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais," Diss. Univ. of British Columbia 1975, pp. 190-226. Particularly significant are Life's efforts to show how Hunt's "Lady of Shalott" illustration epitomizes his conception of the artistic imagination, a point which (although my attention was only subsequently brought to Life's dissertation) is paralleled in my discussion of Rossetti's treatment of the poem. Life's dissertation provides excellent in-depth studies of a limited number of illustrations by Millais and Hunt, and shows the functioning of these artists' views of the relation between literature and visual art. It is only to be regretted, considering the nature of his study, that Life does not in conclusion sufficiently form some wider notion of the genre itself, beyond the distinctions in Millais' and Hunt's use of interpretive illustration.

⁶⁴ R. H. Hutton, "Tennyson," Literary Essays (1888), quoted by Ricks, Tennyson, p. 79.

mented by a double crown, and numerous small flaming brands or candles. This form is the same shrine-like one which we have seen in others of Rossetti's designs; the image suggests that the Lady, who both painter and poet see as embodying Art, was elevated by Rossetti, characteristically, to the level of a religious ideal. The foreground figure of Lancelot looks sympathetic yet distant as he gazes upon the Lady of Shalott. Behind him, a second figure appears. Additionally, we can see several hands holding torches in the upper foreground, while in the background crowds of people can be discerned, suggesting the forms that "Out upon the wharfs [they] came, / Knight and burgher, lord and dame." Contrasting with the excited and energetic movement of human forms are several swans, floating with death-like stillness upon the dark waters beneath the wharf. The water is almost glassy, making Lancelot's gazing at the Lady upon the river something of a parallel to the Lady's sight of Lancelot by reflection in her magic mirror. Rossetti captures all of these details and effects of the poem, and more. The Lady is truly a "gleaming shape" for she is, in the drawing, the center of all light. Because of this, and because of her flowing garments, she seems akin to the swans and flames, and foreign to the other details of the design; for all around, Rossetti fills the design with harsh vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines. Wharf-boards, swords, ladders, limbs, chains, and garments, all make a dark meshwork. With the sweep of his cloak, his bent back, and his almost pilgrim-like garb, Lancelot forms a bridge between two types

of movement, two temperaments or modes of vision. Rossetti's treatment of Lancelot reflects Tennyson's, for in the poem, Lancelot's comment when he sees the Lady of Shalott distinguishes him from the fearful townspeople. He alone sees and understands her fate to some degree. Rossetti's interpretation of this portion of the poem may have been identical to that of a modern critic of Tennyson, Christopher Ricks, who notes that "when Lancelot says 'God in his mercy will lend grace,' he speaks as someone to whom God in his mercy will lend grace."⁶⁵ Rossetti's depiction of the Lady of Shalott, casting light upon Lancelot, certainly suggests this. Rossetti also graphically implies that Lancelot should be regarded not so much in other literary contexts (including Tennyson's, in the Idylls) as this line of "The Lady of Shalott" might encourage one to do, but should be considered specifically here in his function as mediating figure. As Lancelot's words by implication counterpoint grace with the mysterious curse of mortality (mentioned in stanza one, part II of the poem) which accompanies direct confrontation with experience, his presence in design and poem suggests another who will attempt to reconcile public and private, responsibility and romance, life and art. It may not be going too far, in fact, to see the presence of the poet himself (and his illustrator-interpreter) in this element of the design.

At the conclusion of the poem, the Lady has made her

⁶⁵ Ricks, Tennyson, p. 81.

choice, suffered the consequences, and entered the realm of reality. Rossetti's treatment of "The Lady of Shalott" conveys this, and yet reveals an additional response; for he seems to have simultaneously recognized the usual interpretation of the poem, and juxtaposed a critical commentary upon it in his illustration. Rossetti implies in his illustration to "The Lady of Shalott" that the Lady, who once saw reality as the reflection of shadows in her mirror, now experiences light in death, while the real world is in darkness. As in the case of the "St. Cecilia" illustration, Rossetti has corroborated Tennyson's expression of antitheses, but made them stronger, more evident, and has more firmly injected a value judgment about them. We not only perceive the divergence between the isolated aesthetic soul and the realm of the everyday, but cannot miss Rossetti's identification with and approval of the first, and his suggestion, thereby, of Tennyson's (if reluctant) sympathy with that polarity as well.

Rossetti's executed paintings based upon two of the designs created for Moxon's edition of Tennyson's poems, those for "Mariana in the South" (Surtees 86R1) and "Sir Galahad" (Surtees 115). This fact suggests that Rossetti was comfortable with the ideas, images, and tone of those illustrations and that they reflected not only the works which they accompanied, but Rossetti's own viewpoint as well, independent of Tennyson's verse.

The illustration for "Sir Galahad" most directly refers to stanza three of that poem:

When down the stormy crescent goes,
 A light before me swims,
 Between dark stems the forest glows
 I hear a noise of hymns:
 Then by some secret shrine I ride;
 I hear a voice but none are there;
 The stalls are void, the doors are wide,
 The tapers burning fair.
 Fair gleams the snowy altar-cloth,
 The silver vessels sparkle clean,
 The shrill bell rings, the censor swings
 And solemn chaunts resound between.

All of the details of the poem are evident, from bells to tapers to altar. The curious point where Rossetti diverges from the poem is in the sixth line ("I hear a voice but none are there"). Rossetti makes quite visible four angels who crowd beneath the altar, hands clasped in prayer.⁶⁶ One pulls upon the bell-cord, causing the "shrill bell" to ring. This departure from the poem transforms Tennyson's theme, while incorporating it, for Rossetti concretizes spiritual forces and, paradoxically, makes the scene appear more mystical because of the presence of the angelic figures. His handling of Tennyson's poem in this fashion reveals Rossetti's characteristic tendency to idealize the purely human by using spiritual images, but is also a commentary

⁶⁶ These figures have often, without reason, been identified as nuns. The careful examination of the design, which reveals the peculiarly compact placement of the four feminine figures beneath the altar, and what appear to be wings directly behind the heads of the two closest to us, makes their supernatural character apparent. Besides direct visual evidence, Rossetti provides proof of his intention in a letter to Ford Madox Brown, in which he declares that, "Linton has sent me a proof of Sir Galahad, fine in many respects, but the angels as black as D___ls—I don't mean Dalziel's brothers. I hope though it can be set right." See Letters, I, 315-16 (To Ford Madox Brown, ? 1856).

upon "Sir Galahad." For where Tennyson somewhat unconvincingly attributes aspiration (and inspiration) to faith, Rossetti, by means of the "sleight of pen" of his design, redirects its origin to that of art. Vision becomes aligned not with faith, but with imagination. Rossetti revitalizes the symbolism of the spiritual in his own manner and, by doing so, both comments upon and corrects Tennyson's perceptions and point of view.

In his illustration to "Mariana in the South," as well, religious symbolism is given a new turn through Rossetti's expression of his own views by means of interpretive design. While most details again conform to those of the poem (the room is "close-latticed," a detail Rossetti would like, Mariana kneels, and old letters lie scattered about), in certain respects they do differ. Not surprisingly, Rossetti's handling of details with religious significance forms the most obvious departure. Rossetti was probably attracted to the odd juxtaposition, in the poem, of Mariana's exclamations of "Ave Mary," "Sweet Mother," and "Madonna," with cries to her absent lover. Rossetti expands this contrast in the illustration, in the slightly inappropriate gesture he depicts Mariana as making; as she kneels, she rather sensuously kisses the feet of the figure of Christ on the crucifix upon the wall. The value of this detail in the illustration is to remind us that the human is closer to her prayers than the divine; ultimately, the shift in the poem from a focus on the divine does lead to a sort of breakdown in the tenuous balance between faith and despair,

dream and reality, loneliness and union, which is manifested in the expression of suicidal impulses in the last stanza. Another curious detail in the design is a long mirror (not the one mentioned in stanza three of the poem) which, as it stands behind Mariana, reflects her kneeling figure and the upper portion of the crucifix. Rossetti uses the mirror image frequently in his other works, both visual and verbal, and always it suggests self-involvement, introspection, and the inability or lack of desire of the individual to come to terms with the outside world. This idea is further reinforced by the tight spaces, stairways, close vertical and horizontal planes which, while not at odds with Tennyson's poem, add dimension through the expression of Rossetti's feelings which have been evoked by it.

Unlike Tennyson's Mariana, Rossetti's is always in the foreground, not lost amidst the natural setting. It is interesting to note that Arthur Hallam commented upon Tennyson's emphasis in this regard, and compared this poem with the earlier "Mariana," noting that "the essential and distinguishing character of the conception requires in the 'Southern Mariana' a greater lingering on the outward circumstances, and a less palpable transition of the poet into Mariana's feelings, than was the case in the former poem."⁶⁷ That Rossetti consciously intended to reject the subordination of Mariana to her environment is confirmed by the alternate name he gave to the painting The Heart of the

⁶⁷ Quoted by Ricks, Tennyson, p. 82.

Night which, although later in creation, was identical in design to the illustration for "Mariana in the South." By also entitling the painting Mariana of the Moated Grange, which is the epigraph (from Measure for Measure) to Tennyson's earlier poem, "Mariana" (to which "Mariana in the South" is a pendant), Rossetti asserts his preference in terms of the point of view with which Mariana herself is to be regarded.

As one modern critic has noted, Tennyson is a poet of dualities.⁶⁸ The examination of Rossetti's illustrations to Tennyson suggests that at least in part, Rossetti was attracted to certain poems because of their expression of those dichotomies which prevail in his own paintings and poems. One can see in Rossetti's illustrations of Tennyson's poems an emphasis on their inherent contrasts, notably those between illusion and truth, shadow and substance, art and life; in addition, other emphases consistently appear. Rossetti selected poems for their allegorical framework, and for themes which were similar to those with which he himself frequently dealt. When Rossetti departed from Tennyson, it was significantly almost always on one point. Tennyson consistently appears to posit the isolation and action of the artist against convention, morality, and religion, as part of his deep sense of contrasts. Rossetti, however, seems through his designs to strongly disagree with the view of art that infuses these four, and many others, of Tennyson's poems. Unlike Tennyson, who struggled towards a belief in

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

art for morality's sake, Rossetti had a vision more in line with art for its own sake: an emphasis which, along with the articulation of contrasts, characterizes Rossetti's interpretive illustration of Tennyson's poems.

Rossetti's next undertaking in true illustration shows him acting in most complete harmony with his author's text—and no wonder, for that author was his sister Christina, and the poem, Goblin Market.⁶⁹ When Christina Rossetti's volume of verse, Goblin Market and Other Poems (Macmillan) was issued in 1862, it was accompanied by two designs by Dante Gabriel: one for the title-page and another for the frontispiece. Both designs give additional evidence of Rossetti's sensitivity and imagination as a reader of literature as well as a poet-painter, and suggest further

⁶⁹ It is interesting to note that the praise meted to Rossetti for his illustrations of his sister's works was based on critics' identification of these designs as genuine illustrations, as distinguished from such designs as those for the Moxon edition of Tennyson's Poems. Speaking of the illustrations which Rossetti executed for Christina's poetry, William Sharp, for example, notes,

These four designs differ materially from those in the quarto Tennyson—differ in the important matter of interpretation. They are really illustrations, that is, they are based upon certain lines in the Goblin Market or The Prince's Progress, and adhere strictly to those lines or relative descriptions elsewhere in the poems, and are thus simply pictorial representations of the text. (p. 107)

I would argue that the success of these designs is based precisely on the fact that they are not "simply pictorial representations," but richly-developed interpretive illustrations of Christina Rossetti's poems. Rossetti also designed an illustration, Three Sang of Love Together (Surtees 184-1865), never published as an accompaniment to the text, for Christina Rossetti's poem "A Triad." Unlike the interpretive illustrations which actually appeared in print, this design is purely decorative and conventional.

possible dimensions to the relationship between literature and graphic art.

The title-page design must be approached both in that function, and as an illustration of a specific line from Goblin Market, "Golden head by golden head." The actual illustrative design is framed by double horizontal and vertical lines; the vertical bands extend to embrace the title above, and the name of the publisher and place of publication below. The upper and lower-most limits of the "frame" are indicated by a single horizontal line. The word "frame" is particularly appropriate in this context, for in fact Rossetti borrowed many elements of his own designs for that applied art, of which he was a sensitive practitioner as well.⁷⁰ The uppermost corners are ornamented with two different motifs of roundels enclosing "S" forms, one suggestive of temporary balance and the other, continual flux or rhythm. The lower corners nicely contrast Rossetti's monogram, curving and sinewy, with the neat block monogram of the engraver of the design, W. J. Linton. The inner, boxed corners of the frame are decorated with a floral motif, upper blocks conveying a leftward or spineward movement, and lower blocks, a movement to the right and to the text within. Between these lower designs Rossetti includes the appropriate

⁷⁰ For an excellent study of Rossetti's frame designs, as well as one on his book-bindings, see Alastair Grieve's "The Applied Art of D. G. Rossetti—I. His Picture Frames," Burlington Magazine, 115 (1973), 16-24, and "Rossetti's Applied Art Designs—2: Book-Bindings," Burlington Magazine, 115 (1973), 79-84.

line from the poem, in a softly curving hand.

The actual illustration portrays Lizzie and Laura peacefully sleeping, while in a moonlit sphere in the upper left, the troop of fantastic goblin-men descend with their tempting wares. Contrast is conveyed between the girls and goblins by the fact that the sphere seems to be more of a superimposed form, within and counterplayed against the rest of the design, than the integrated part of the design which it would be if the sphere were rather a window revealing the goblin-men in moonlight.⁷¹ There also appears a subtle interplay of naturalistic and stylized forms, with the expressive arms and faces of the girls set off by patterns upon the coverlet and curtain, the moon and stars motif within the illuminated sphere in which the goblins' forms appear, and the dark/light division of that sphere. The most intriguing aspect of the illustration, however, centers upon the forms of the girls themselves. Carrying over the technical device of page design in which lines and forms serve multiple functions, in the illustration Rossetti turns that device to interpretive ends. The faces of the two girls, turned towards each other and therefore revealing opposite sides, seem nearly identical, as if two halves of the same physiognomy. As their hair sweeps towards the window, the fluid lines and textures merge, as if one golden meshwork.

⁷¹ William Sharp (p. 106) suggests that the sphere and its contents were, by their "artefice meant to represent the dream that haunts Laura's sleep as she lies clasped in the protecting arms of her sister."

Rossetti utilizes the outlines of these forms in such a manner that a single line often serves the function of delineating the twin-like forms, as, for example, where the heaving bosom of one suggests the curved neck of the other, or hands and shoulders seem to merge. Finally, with much the same effect, light and dark areas are used to define counterparted form. One face is defined in the shadow of the other, a forearm against hand and wrist. Aside from the dramatic quality these devices give to the design, they clearly serve a more expressive purpose as well.

Any inclination to attribute the intensive development of counterpart and contrast in the title-page design for Goblin Market to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's own stylistic tendencies alone must be reconsidered after a careful reading of that poem. As Lona Mosk Packer so ably points out, we will there discover many levels of meaning. She notes,

At the narrative level it offers a charming and delicate fairy tale to delight a child—if a somewhat precocious one. At the symbolic and allegorical level, it conveys certain Christian ethical assumptions. At the psychological level, it suggests emotional experience universally valid.⁷²

And, most to the point, Packer suggests something which Dante Gabriel Rossetti also clearly perceived—that the sisters, Laura and Lizzie, "seem but different aspects of

⁷² "Symbol and Reality in Christina Rossetti's Goblin Market," PMLA, 73 (September 1958), 375. My explanation of the designs for Goblin Market owes a not insubstantial debt to Packer's exegesis of the poem. While one may question the particular biographical interpretation which Packer derives from the poem, it appears to me that her observations about thematic elements are valid ones.

the same maiden."⁷³ This conception, as well as suggestions of the dual nature of love and the perils of temptation, are all intimated within this introductory design. And the same elements, we shall discover, are elaborated upon in the second illustration executed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti for Goblin Market.

While the title-page portrays two sides of a single character, the second illustration (originally the frontispiece) focuses upon dual aspects of a single thematic impulse. To some extent the design appears, quite simply, a graphic evocation of the "thematic core" of the poem—the problem of temptation.⁷⁴ In the foreground Laura kneels, and cuts a lock of her golden hair as payment to the goblin merchants for their irresistible wares. Her expression is intense, and she seems impatient to make the transaction. Crowded about her are the goblins themselves, seductively proffering large platters upon which rest their luscious burden of forbidden fruit. Only one goblin is less than intent upon the temptation of Laura, as he turns and beckons to a young woman we take to be Lizzie; while she turns her head back towards the group, she keeps resolutely walking upward and onward, jug in hand, almost rather laboriously. Like the sphere-bound goblins in the title-page design, this figure

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ See Ibid., pp. 375-76, and Mackenzie Bell, Christina Rossetti: A Biographical and Critical Study (London: Thomas Burleigh, 1898), pp. 206-07.

seems less an integrated part of a single narrative scene than one superimposed upon another. Contrast is heightened by our perception of Rossetti's conflation of (but not departure from) episodes from the poem, to permit us to regard Laura succumbing to, and Lizzie resisting temptation. Developing contrasts further, Rossetti has also conveyed within the design a sense of the dual nature of certain impulses, characterized notably by the forms of the goblins themselves. For the temptors bear the humanized forms of the little creatures so beloved by both Christina and Dante Gabriel, made sinister in the confines of this poem and design. As William Rossetti notes, Christina did not actually represent the goblin-men as all "having the actual configuration of brute animals."⁷⁵ Their actual description is as follows:

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.

It is Dante Gabriel Rossetti who goes further with his sister's imaginative conception, and depicts the goblin-men as rodent and bird-faced creatures leering and frowning—a forceful crystalization in graphic form of the suggestion within the poem that the most benign or beloved thing may have a dark and evil side. Rossetti clearly brings this

⁷⁵ The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, with memoir and notes by William Michael Rossetti (London: Macmillan & Co., 1904), "Notes," pp. 459-60. All quotations from Christina Rossetti's verse are from this text.

suggestion out by conflating in one image a menagerie of animal-men, endearing creatures turned devilish, symbols of the littleness and bestiality which governs so many of our very human appetites and impulses which yet may have a corresponding higher or purer form.

Rossetti's second design incorporates not only the essential problem of the poem, but also its solution. The forms of the two girls are not counterparted, but are contrasted instead. Laura not only bears golden curls which contrast with Lizzie's dark and seemingly bound coif; the softness of Laura's flesh and the fluid, abundant folds of her gown are countered by the simple form of her sister, and the tense and purposive disposition of her form. With one arm bearing great weight, and the other poised outward to help ease the burden by balancing against it, she seems to graphically symbolize the great effort of keeping upon a steady, upwards path. Lizzie's garment is neat and austere, while Laura's is carelessly twisted and rolled about her, more ornate in pattern and design, and appears to almost burst at her bodice which swells as if with hunger and desire. The juxtaposition of the forms of both girls, as opposites, within the same frame as the single composite form of the goblins, appears to be Rossetti's way of articulating the same point in visual terms that Christina makes in poetic terms. That key idea is not the badness or goodness of the temptation or temptor, but the response given to

it or them.⁷⁶ Choosing the forbidden sweets of love offered by a perverse and malevolent hand, or their wholesome anti-theses, involves a drama not between self and others, but between two sides of the same self. The complexities of Goblin Market should make us aware that a deeply introspective character was not the sole property of the eldest male among the four Rossetti children. In this regard, William Rossetti notes that Christina's was a life which was "in all its deeper currents, internal."⁷⁷ Dante Gabriel, through his sensitive interpretive illustration of one of Christina's most beloved yet perhaps least understood poems, seems to illuminate that same point.

Less resistant than in the case of Goblin Market to what a penetrative reading into the poem might reveal, it is Christina herself who points to the multiple levels of meaning in the other of her poems which was illustrated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. In speaking of The Prince's Progress, she informs Dante Gabriel in one letter that she included in the poem "a subtle hint (by symbol)" and certain details suggestive of its meaning, adding that "I don't expect the

⁷⁶ Packer (p. 378) gives other examples of this concept in Christina Rossetti's writing and notes, of the two sisters in Goblin Market,

Both are equally tempted. One resists. The other succumbs. Laura is destroyed by her own weakness, not by goblin fruit. Even the taste of goblin fruit which the little men force upon Lizzie's lips does not corrupt her whose strength is formidable enough to put the goblins themselves to rout.

⁷⁷ The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, "Memoir," p. lviii.

general public to catch these refined clues; but there they are for such minds as mine."⁷⁸ Another mind which clearly shared in their presence in the poem was Dante Gabriel Rossetti's for, in his two designs for Christina's 1866 volume, The Prince's Progress and Other Poems (London: Macmillan & Co.), he again reveals himself a master in the art of interpretive illustration. To some extent, his great degree of perceptiveness towards, or appreciation of, the poem may come from the fact that it was he who suggested to Christina that she expand an originally brief dirge-song entitled "The Prince who arrived too late," into the longer narrative poem; this was "almost the only instance," according to William Rossetti, "in which she wrote anything so as to meet directly the views of another person."⁷⁹ Though Rossetti undertook no more true illustrations after these two designs, they stand as yet another monument to the degree of relationship possible between the visual and verbal works of two different, if highly sympathetic, minds.

As in the case of the Goblin Market volume, one of the two designs which Rossetti executed was for a title-page, and again, the format is similar. The outer margins of the design are marked by a frame of lines, in double bands except for the outermost vertical lines surrounding the

⁷⁸ William Michael Rossetti, ed., Rossetti Papers, 1862-1870 (London: Sands & Co., 1903), p. 81 (3 [March 1865]).

⁷⁹ The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, "Notes," p. 461.

actual illustration. At each of the corners, and near the line separating the framed title (in block letters) from the illustration, Rossetti has added an ornamental motif of three equal circles, almost clover-like. A stylized floral design fills a small square centered in the dividing band between title and illustration. Beneath the illustrative portion of the design, Rossetti has again included a "tagging" line, in a curvilinear hand identical to that used in the caption to the Goblin Market title-page; in this case, it is the third line of the poem, "The long hours go and come and go." The illustration itself represents a young woman, the waiting bride, seated by an open window and bearing a demeanor of infinite patience. Her face suggests resignation rather than longing, and her eyes have that hint of thoughtfulness which in Rossetti's other paintings and drawings often suggests inward reflection as well as outward glance. Covering her arms is a full and softly folding shawl or cloak which accentuates the steady poise of her arms along the window ledge. Her hands are graceful and relaxed, crossed before her. One has only to compare this conception to others of women in waiting (i.e., Rossetti's or Millais' Mariana) to perceive that rather than agitation or grief, the disposition and expression of this figure conveys a strong sense of quiet resignation. One may almost imagine Dante Gabriel to have been thinking of the poetess as well as the poem, for the design might represent Christina herself, looking out upon the world with her "spirit of self-postponement," as well as

the hapless maiden of the title poem.⁸⁰ The suggestion that the design represents more than the waiting bride is reinforced by other details as well. Although we see the distant gate and the trees beyond it, the path our eyes follow seems less directed towards the lingering Prince, perhaps, than symbolic of the life of the waiting figure in the foreground. For there are no external barriers represented, but rather a multitude of concentric circles about a fountain which with their mazelike configuration suggest a perplexity of inner consciousness as well as outward acts. The statue of what appears to be an angel with folded wings, atop a fluted column, also serves to return focus to the patient bride. Within the maiden's chamber the furnishings and accessories are adorned with the motif of triple-pronged crown and patterns of circles, suggesting the contrast between an unending cycle of hours and days, and the ultimate cessation of cycle beyond the patient wait. Correspondingly, in the poem's conclusion, the last circle described is the crown of poppies upon the dead maiden's head.

Whereas the first design emphasizes anticipation and cyclicity, the second design, which corresponds to the concluding lines of the poem and appeared as the frontispiece to the volume, emphasizes finality and death. The design is captioned with the first line of the last verse paragraph, and to a certain degree, transposes the final

⁸⁰ The expression is William Michael Rossetti's; *ibid.*, "Memoir," p. lxvii.

scene evoked in the poem, especially the images of these lines:⁸¹

'You should have wept her yesterday,
 Wasting upon her bed:
 But wherefore should you weep to-day
 That she is dead?
 Lo we who love weep not to-day,
 But crown her royal head.
 Let be these poppies that we strew,
 Your roses are too red:
 Let be these poppies, not for you
 Cut down and spread.'

In the design, the tardy Prince leans against the entrance to the dead maiden's chamber, his hand pressed mournfully to his face. Upon the floor by his feet are his hat and a bouquet of roses for his intended bride. He is being reprimanded by one of the serving women whose pale face and hair, and commanding posture, suggest she is the eldest of the women in the design and speaker of the final lines. She presses her hands firmly to the Prince's chest, as if to eject him from the chamber where his presence is no longer desired. Behind her, six younger women kneel in two rows of three, their hands pressed together in prayer, but with their frowning faces (remarkably alike, as in Rossetti's "King Uther's Son" design) all turned towards the Prince. In the

⁸¹ One of Christina's few criticisms of Dante Gabriel's illustrations to her work was that, in regard to the faithful transposition of detail, she wished him to correct two details to conform with the poem: the Prince's curly black beard should be depicted (Rossetti's original design shows him beardless), and the bride should be veiled. The final woodcut reveals that only the latter request was honored. In the same letter (To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 6 [March ? 1865]) in which these requests were made, Christina also interestingly comments, "Surely the severe female who arrests the Prince somewhat resembles my phiz." See William Michael Rossetti, ed., Rossetti Papers, pp. 83-84.

background, a high canopied bier supports the form of the dead bride, now covered in a shroud instead of a wedding veil. Her hands are also pressed together, as if in prayerful repose even now. Above the canopy are seven brightly burning torches; their intensity, and the brilliance of the light which enters from the open door, sets into stark contrast the darkened form of the bride's body and the shadows upon the faces and figures of the mourners.

Contrast does not come into play only in the use of light and dark, however, or in the disposition and significance of the figures in the design. Instead of the dominant pattern of circles which characterized the title-page design (and the beginning and body of the poem), this design to accompany the poem's conclusion is characterized by an abundance of straight lines, geometric forms, and perhaps most significantly, the repetitive use of the triple-pronged crown motif. As delineated by Rossetti, the crown is flattened and stylized, and so perceived not as yet another continuous and circular form, but as one sharply bounded. Represented in this fashion, the crown seems less to signify royalty and honor than that which is complete, finished, and thus "crowned." A large crown appears above the inner doorway, and stands out in its blackness against a gray background. The same motif is evident in vertical rows upon the bier. Upon the cornerstone of that structure, in the center, the crown again appears, flanked in the upper right by a circle with one rose within, and below-left, by another circle with a triple tear motif. Finally, a crown

of the same configuration is evident, not as part of the decorative scheme of the death chamber, but representing an actual crown upon the pillow of the intended bride, next to which her head, wreathed with poppies, rests. Like the white poppies of the sixth verse paragraph, which hinted of the dire fate to follow, the crown which appears but twice in the first plate (beneath the window "to the world," and upon the ornamental pane) may be regarded as a suggestion realized by the poem's end. The counterpointing of termination with continuity, waiting and sleeping, cycle and culmination, circle and crown, runs through both poem and picture. These antithetical currents are not kept distinct in the poem but are interwoven throughout, as if the presence of one is always harbored in the other. Just so, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's interpretive designs for The Prince's Progress, regarded as a pair, reveal an interworking of opposites so characteristic of the poem.

As in the case of Rossetti's other interpretive designs, meaning may go beyond the confines of particular lines of poetry that are suggested in graphic form. The point of view distilled from the design may be regarded as a larger attitude or approach to life and art. Rossetti's designs to The Prince's Progress are no exception. As in the case of Goblin Market, Rossetti appears to have identified, in the paired protagonists, two sides of the same soul. The Princess who waits in the title-page design is in some way the emotional or psychological, as well as the narrative, counterpart to the tarrying Prince, and both

characters perhaps but aspects of their authoress's consciousness. For while William Rossetti informs us that Christina was motivated by self-sacrifice and fortitude, and that "tenacity was in the very essence of her being," in the next moment she is described as being "naturally of a rather indolent turn."⁸² As in the case of her over-scrupulousness, which William regarded as Christina's one serious flaw, there may often be little distinction between defect and virtue. Prudence and wariness, patience and obstinacy, are but two sides of the same coin, one being its positive, and the other its negative face. Just so, the waiting bride and the tarrying bridegroom in some way represent but two sides of the same personality. It is significant that in the poem neither character is presented in a purely positive or negative light; the Prince tarries, but often for the highest motives ("his royal pledge," or a "bargain made"), and the Princess waits, but not heeding of life all the while it fades. Unlike Goblin Market, where a harmony of opposite impulses and a "happy ending" is achieved, The Prince's Progress presents an instance of unity unfulfilled and opposites unreconciled. We may be certain that Dante Gabriel Rossetti recognized this quality in the poem, as he must have in its writer—for his illustrations to The Prince's Progress illuminate, as do his designs for his own poetry, the interplay of diverse

⁸² The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, "Memoir," p. lxvii.

impulses in the literary work and in the mind which forged it.

After these designs for The Prince's Progress, Rossetti never again executed an illustrative design to accompany a published text, or designed more true illustrations for the literary work of another. We should probably attribute Rossetti's disinclination to venture further as illustrator to several factors, some of which have already been alluded to. With few exceptions, Rossetti was quite dissatisfied with the reproductive processes involved in the art of illustration in his day. The history of his difficulty in dealing with the Dalziel firm requires no reiteration.⁸³ While Rossetti's demands may have been great, and his expectations excessive, he was certainly justified in his desire that his hand, rather than that of the technician, ultimately be most evident, and was rightfully troubled by the discrepancies between his and the engravers' notions of his designs. Then too, we must consider Rossetti's frequent complaints, dating as far back as his work on the Moxon edition of Tennyson's Poems, that

⁸³ For various versions of the relationship between Rossetti and the firm of the Dalziel brothers, see Letters and Memoir, I, 189-90, [Dalziel, George and Edward] The Brothers Dalziel: A Record of Fifty Years' Work in Conjunction with Many of the Most Distinguished Artists of the Period, 1840-1890 (London: Methuen & Co., 1901), pp. 86-90, and Marcia Allentuck, "New Light on Rossetti and the Moxon Tennyson," Apollo, 97 (February 1973), p. 176.

the drawing on wood was extremely trying on his sight.⁸⁴ Rossetti did consider doing other illustrations beyond that time, however, in addition to the four for his sister's works which he actually executed. Several of these projects, admittedly, were contemplated because of the pecuniary advantage which would arise from them. Even for Allingham's designs Rossetti was practical enough to discuss not only meaning and manner of illustration, but the use of the medium to "raise tin."⁸⁵ And, in a peculiarly contradictory manner, Rossetti writes to Allingham in 1860,

I quite agree with you in loathing Once a Week, illustrations and all—by the bye what could be more astonishingly bad than Hunt's two or three? Meredith's novel, however, had very great merit of a wonderfully queer kind, I thought. Did you? But through your poem (how long have such little commodities as 500 line poems been lying by with you?) I should like greatly to open a connection even with Once a Week, though it is only once a century that I feel disposed to 'illustrate'.⁸⁶

The very same letter mentions the notion of participating in the illustration of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh, a project upon which Rossetti never followed through. For whatever reason this and other projects were never pursued, we may conclude that Rossetti had no artistic quarrel with this popular form of linking visual and verbal work. When we consider his significant if scanty efforts in the

⁸⁴ Letters, I, 239 (To William Allingham, 23 January 1855).

⁸⁵ Ibid., I, 189 (To William Allingham, 2 May 1854).

⁸⁶ Ibid., I, 384-85 (29 November 1860).

medium, coupled with that conclusion, we can only wonder how much further he might have gone in the art of illustration had he so chosen.

It is evident, however, that when he did approach the work of another writer through the medium of the true illustration, Rossetti employed a consistent and highly valuable approach. As in his designs for his own poetry, these illustrations transpose theme and image into graphic form—yet, their function is more specialized than that. For we may consider all of Rossetti's "illustrative" or "literary" work similar to those designs which he executed for literary counterparts by himself, in that the one work of art may be regarded as an embellishment upon another, clearly autonomous, work; at its most successful, the visual counterpart may add to the earlier written work by elucidating ideas or images, as it does in the Rossettian narrative pairs, or it may instead parasitically draw upon the literary work for imagery and theme. And, in instances such as the Dantesque designs, priority appears reversed, for the supposed "illustration" in fact expresses the ideas and impulses of the painter more than the poet, and the initial written work contributes at most an imaginative entry-point, or supplementary source of overtones for an essentially personal vision. Only Rossetti's true interpretive illustrations, however, carry over such use of a graphic correlative as occurred in the Rossettian narrative pairs, to clarify counterbalances apparent within the written work. In these instances, Rossetti uses the visual

art not only to transpose images and themes of the literary work, but to reveal an inherent dialectic. Thus he also brings to light personal impulses, for his identification with the text in this manner emphasizes what we have seen to be the underlying current in all works made by Rossetti into a visual-verbal pair. In addition to making the reader-viewer's awareness of dichotomies inherent in the literary work more pronounced, Rossetti used true illustration as a means of creating a cooperative artistic partnership between picture and poem, even painter and poet. This achievement marks yet another similarity between this cluster of illustrations for the work of others, and certain pairs for which Rossetti contributed both visual and verbal work. For like the descriptive Rossettian pairs, the interpretive illustrations convey a relationship in which neither picture nor poem is dominant or takes precedence. Rather than only one work or only one medium appearing to function autonomously, both visual and verbal element contribute, as they are presented to us in a published text, in a cooperative and interdependent relationship. By carefully examining Rossetti's illustrative work, we may ultimately recognize correspondences between the different modes of illustration and the three categories or types of Rossettian pairs. The religious-symbolic pairs for which Rossetti contributed visual and verbal work may be seen most closely to resemble those "literary" paintings and graphic works expressive of an idiosyncratic direction. We find

ourselves using the literary element to assist us in our "reading" of the symbolism of the visual counterpart. Rossetti's narrative pairs are most similar to his "illustrative" designs, the "private" works with literary counterparts; for in these instances it is the visual component which serves as a paraphrase of the verbal. Finally, the descriptive Rossettian pairs may be seen to correspond to Rossetti's true interpretive illustrations. In that mode, as in his particularly personal approach to the pairing of visual and verbal works, Rossetti appears to have kept close contact with both media, and to have been extremely sensitive to the building in of interrelationships as part of the creative process, rather than allowing the retrospective linking of one medium to the other to determine their relationship. Not surprisingly, this third form of literary design is, like Rossetti's descriptive pairs, the most individual and expressive, embodying most clearly not only the ideas and impulses inherent in the literary work, but also his own deeply personal vision. While unlike its counterpart among Rossettian pairs, interpretive illustration was the mode least pursued as a way of linking a visual work to the literary efforts of another, Rossetti's contributions in that mode similarly serve to enhance our understanding of his concept of the interrelationship between the arts.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

By whatever manner Rossetti created paired visual and verbal works, his aim above all appears to have been to emphasize conflicts in impulse. Whether these conflicts centered on the opposition between natural and supernatural, temporal and eternal, literal and symbolic, or some other recurrent dichotomy, their presence is inevitable and points to the same conclusions. For Rossetti almost any dichotomy could form the framework upon which to elaborate the complex currents which characterized his direct assessment of experiences and perceptions and their redirection in the exercise of the imagination. Further, from the sense of contrast which Rossetti establishes in the paired poems and paintings, we may arrive at an understanding of the process out of which his arts were created. Rossetti's contribution of poem, design, or both, enables us actively to reconstruct for ourselves what must have been his concept of the relationship possible between the arts of painting and poetry. No matter which cluster of pairs or which mode of pairing dominates, Rossetti's means and message appear consistent.

The distinction between the two arts became the base upon which, in his composites of visual and verbal work,

Rossetti could build the complex of contrasts with which he was concerned. Beyond the articulation of diverse thematic concerns we may recognize innumerable, often subtle, instances of counterpointing. In both poem and painting, Rossetti counters a wide array of elements with their contraries, and utilizes each medium to accentuate those contraries expressed in the other. Using the more immediately identifiable elements of theme and imagery, Rossetti transposes details from one work to its counterpart, establishing an initial and temporary impression of parallel. The underlying sense of unresolved tension in one work, however, enables Rossetti to suggest the requirement of a counterpart for fuller, more satisfactory, vision. Although the transposition of theme and image from one medium to the other may delude some reader-viewers into regarding Rossetti's pairs as expressions of identical ideas and impulses, Rossetti himself implies that painting does not reiterate poem, in his statement that, "Even if I did not paint, I should never be a redundant poet."¹ The point of view which perceives only repetition in the paired works is invalidated more convincingly through their comprehensive analysis. For against the suggestion of parallel in the paired works, Rossetti handles form, tone, and technical devices appropriate to each medium, to suggest simultaneously points of similarity and difference, just as he over-

¹ Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl, eds., Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-67), IV, 1857 (To William Davies, 16 March 1881).

rides a predominantly narrative, symbolic, or descriptive focus by introducing alternate modes. In the process, he expands the range of possible visual analogues for literary effects and the converse. The success of this effort depends upon our recognizing that while the tools of each medium must necessarily be different, they may be handled to the same effect. Rossetti emphasizes the "traditional" attributes of the sister arts, and revises or contradicts conventional contrasts, to suggest initially to his reader-viewers a sense of synthesis in a poem which is painterly or in a pictorial poem; inevitably, however, he reaffirms the autonomy of both arts. Whether Rossetti contributed either poem, painting, or both, he appears to have aimed towards, if not always achieved, a form in which the interrelationship between works was reciprocal. The integrity of the painting and of the poem corresponds to the ultimate irreconcilability of other opposites in Rossetti's eyes. We may witness the effect of both arts on each other in the pairs which he created, as they intermingle but do not fuse, and recognize that no form takes precedence over the other.

In the visual-verbal pairs Rossetti creates a chain whereby the reader-viewer's experience of the work of art is made to parallel its creator's. Rossetti himself was to note,

Above all ideal personalities with which the poet must learn to identify himself there is one supremely real which is the most imperative of all—namely, that of his reader. And the practical watchfulness needed for such assimilation is as much a gift and instinct as is the creative grasp of alien character. It is a

spiritual contact hardly conscious yet ever renewed,
and which must be a part of the very act of production.²

This, we may apply to painting as well as poem, to viewer as well as reader. It is important to stress, moreover, that pairing affords not only the recreation in a counterpart of a "model" reader's or viewer's experience of the work of art, but a recreation of the poet's or artist's experience as well, directed both towards the creation of the prior work of art and imbued in it. The perspective of artist or poet, and poet-painter is illuminated by the creation of a visual-verbal complex. Further, the counterpart in the sister art often permits not only a perspective which recreates that of the original work, but one contrary or extrinsic to that work; ultimately, in the visual-verbal pairs created by Rossetti, we are removed from shared experience, and prevented from sustained participation in a harmonized vision. Counterpart both enables us to enter into the experience of a poem or work of graphic art, and forcefully emphasizes our own isolation and individual point of view.

Art (both poetic and painterly) involved for Rossetti the effort, which was destined finally to fail, to reconcile opposing ideas and impulses. Rossetti sympathized with this direction in the work of others, and whenever he

² William Michael Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters with a Memoir (London: Ellis & Elvey, 1895), I (Memoir), 417; purportedly in a letter to William Sharp, no date.

constructed a visual-verbal pair which incorporated another's poem or painting it was because he recognized that in addition to sharing a thematic focus similar to his own work, like his own the work underscored dichotomies, diverse visions, and modes of vision. His counterpart illuminates the complexity of another's imaginative vision, and elucidates its equivocal nature. Rossetti was clearly attracted to the qualities of ambiguity and suggestiveness as a source of contrary impulses, and utilized pairing to call attention to the alternate perspectives appropriate to the work. He perceived, identified with, and emphasized the tension between conventional and idiosyncratic directions evident in the works of others as well. Regarding art as the means towards expression of the unsatisfiable urge towards equilibrium, Rossetti's contribution of a visual or verbal counterpart to an already existent work made that purpose more pronounced.

Contrary to current critical perspective, at no point is the merger of media in Rossetti's visual-verbal pairs completely effective. To judge from much existing scholarship, Rossetti regarded the underlying relation between poetry and painting as being founded on a balance between, or merger of, elements from either medium; too easily overlooked are the irreconcilable oppositions enunciated in paired works which relate to, and perhaps stand as symbols of, the unmediated visions of painting and poem. We must remember that the fusion of poetry and painting in a homogeneous and harmonious art form was not

achieved by Rossetti, and although little evidence exists that he ever had that aim in mind, the question of its pursuit presupposes a persistent lack of synthesis. The relationship between Rossetti's dual arts is not one of integration of opposites and blending of both forms, but rather is the juxtaposition of one art with another, the expression of polarities set in contrast, and the dynamic of diverse vision. Frequently cited to support the conventional viewpoint is Rossetti's statement that "Picture and poem bear the same relation to each other as beauty does in man and woman: the point of meeting where the two are most identical is the supreme perfection."³ But we should note that Rossetti says "point of meeting" and not merger of media, and that "most identical" suggests aspiration towards, but not achievement of, fusion.

The erroneous belief that Rossetti's paired works display a merger of media and a synthesis of impulse is encouraged by the view which regards Rossetti primarily as representative of Pre-Raphaelitism. In general, the Pre-Raphaelites achieved a harmonious intermingling of the disparate impulses which underly their work as well as Rossetti's; the poet-painter, however, purposely undercuts all fleeting intimations of integration of opposites, implying that his aims and efforts were different. It is clear that, in all respects, while the pairs evince Pre-

³ The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. William Michael Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1911), p. 606.

Raphaelite influence, Rossetti's personal directions predominate.

Any uncertainty as to whether, after all, Rossetti consciously developed the intricate system of counterbalances in both media which we have observed in the visual-verbal pairs is allayed by the conspicuousness of such complexity. It appears, in fact, that Rossetti made no effort to submerge the maneuvers involved in the articulation of interrelationship—rather, he seems to emphasize craft to remind us that his art is about art. Unlike contrasts in moral, social, or religious perspectives, those pertaining to aesthetic matters are not simply another possible source of tension, but suggest an everpresent division which acts as analogue for Rossetti's awareness before its transformation into visual or verbal work. If a balance between imagination and reality could be achieved, it might afford as comprehensive insight as possible. A creative act seems the surest way towards their union, yet any effort towards imaginative representation involves contrast or tension, because it is a revision of primary experience and perception. As the driving though divided impulse in his life, the creative process informs all of Rossetti's paired works not merely as means but as matter as well. And it is precisely because all of Rossetti's works are, at least in part, about the action and reaction of the imagination, that they cannot and do not attempt to synthesize opposites or to merge the two media. The complexity in life, and in art, is conveyed through the interrelationship established by

Rossetti between components of the visual-verbal pairs. Our appreciation of Rossetti as poet, artist, and critic of both arts, demands that we recognize and re-experience the diverse visions in his work.

APPENDIX

"The Blessed Damozel" has long been regarded as the only instance among Rossetti's paired works of a poem preceding the painting for which it is a counterpart, which suggests that those who hold this view have simply neglected to correlate compositional dates of components in his visual-verbal pairs. To do so would reveal the existence of those pairs discussed in Chapter Two of the dissertation which share this order of composition with "The Blessed Damozel." Judging from William Michael Rossetti's dating of the poem, another instance of this compositional sequence would be the "Sea-Spell" pair.¹ While he is generally recognized as a reliable source of information on his brother, and the various chronological lists of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's paintings and poems assembled by William

¹ The date of composition of the poem, "A Sea-Spell," is given as 1869 by William Michael Rossetti in The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (ed. William Michael Rossetti [London: Ellis, 1911]), p. xxix, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Classified Lists of His Writings with the Dates (ed. William Michael Rossetti [London: privately printed, 1906]), p. 12. William makes no mention of the poem in either his Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer (London: Cassell & Co., 1889) or Bibliography of the Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1905; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1971), the two other sources which are frequently consulted for information on the sequence of composition of Rossetti's works. The painting belongs to the years 1875-77.

are questioned very infrequently, the nature of the pair itself seems to belie this order of composition.² Aside from displaying characteristics more like those of the descriptive than the narrative pairs, closer investigation of the "Sea-Spell" pair reveals other inconsistencies. Sufficient warrant to question William's memory of the situation is not difficult to find. William notes, for example, in the 1911 edition of Works, that "A Sea-Spell" was first published in 1881; yet actually, the poem first appeared in print in the Athenaeum of 14 April 1877. This discrepancy provides further inducement to examine the question of chronology in the "Sea-Spell" pair.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's correspondence, usually a fruitful source of information on all of his projects, both visual and verbal, contains no mention of "A Sea-Spell" around the date cited by William. The diary kept by William Rossetti, in which he assiduously recorded most of his

² One critic who has questioned William Rossetti's dating of certain of his brother's works, however, is Oswald Doughty. In A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1949), p. 685, Doughty notes that William Rossetti's dating of the House of Life sonnets "sometimes differs considerably from the dates he gives on other occasions, as a comparison of his edition of the Collected Works (1887), with his Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer (1889), the Memoir (1895), and the Works (1911) shows. Even in the last of these, the only one in which he claims accurate knowledge, there are occasional demonstrable inaccuracies." After citing several of these instances, Doughty concludes (p. 686), "Nevertheless, as we shall see, all the biographical evidence suggests that the dating of the sonnets in the Works, 1911, is substantially correct." Note: the "Memoir" referred to above is Vol. I of William Michael Rossetti's Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters, with a Memoir (London: Ellis & Elvey, 1895).

brother's undertakings, is also devoid of any reference to the poem. Both are significant omissions in light of the fact that the composition of the poem, according to William, would have preceded preparation for Rossetti's 1870 edition of Poems. All accounts reveal that Rossetti was quite concerned about filling his volume and went to great effort to expand its contents; witness, among other evidence, the exhumation of his wife to recover the buried manuscript, and his trip to Scalands, late in the course of events, where with quiet and concentration he hoped to finish as many incomplete poems as possible. It seems odd then that if "A Sea-Spell" was already written it was not included in Poems, nor was it ever apparently considered for inclusion. For the abundant documentation of the circumstances surrounding the publication of that volume reveals that nearly all of Rossetti's completed poems, whether ultimately published or rejected, appear in the proofs at some point. Yet among an extensive number of proofs for that edition consulted, no mention is made of this poem, or of any poem which could be regarded as an early version of it. Further, when the selection of entries for the volume was made, very few poems were rejected, and those were almost never ones that had been written just prior to that time, as William claims "A Sea-Spell" to have been.

In an article on Rossetti's "Trial Books" (so named by Thomas Wise) which touches upon these matters, Janet Camp Troxell traces the evolution, through various sets of proofs, of the final version of Poems. In summary, she notes,

In the first edition of 1870, everything that was added was written for immediate inclusion; Rossetti was anxious to publish as large a book as possible, and he estimated it hopefully in his letters as running to 400 pages. . . . It is certain that if he had had a further supply of poems or sonnets that he could have used he would have included them.³

Troxell further adds,

The proofs were revised and transposed almost to the day of publication, and even after copies had been sent to the reviewers, Rossetti had one further sheet of sixteen pages struck off with *The Stream's Secret*, and four new sonnets: *The Love Letter*, *Barren Spring*, *The Wine of Circe*, and *The Monochord*.⁴

These facts substantiate the likelihood that "A Sea-Spell" was written only subsequent to the publication of Poems.

Momentarily disregarding all these compelling reasons why it is unlikely that the poem was composed in 1869, the only alternative possibility which might account for those stylistic differences in the "Sea-Spell" pair which distinguish it from Rossetti's narrative pairs would be to find support for the existence of a graphic antecedent to "A Sea-Spell." Visual evidence is equally thin that there exists any earlier work which might have suggested the poem. In fact only one drawing entitled Wood Nymph (Surtees 223) bears some vague suggestions of affinity to "A Sea-Spell" and it, in any event, was executed in 1870. There is absolutely no connection between the poem and other "musical" paintings like The Blue Bower (Surtees 178) and

³ Janet Camp Troxell, "The 'Trial Books' of D. G. Rossetti," Colophon, NS 3, No. 2 (Spring 1938), 253.

⁴ Ibid., p. 255.

La Ghirlandata (Surtees 232).

We do have sound evidence of the date of the painting, A Sea-Spell. A then-unnamed painting, obviously A Sea-Spell, is the subject of a letter by Rossetti to Frederick Leyland, in 1875:

I am beginning a picture as companion to the Veronica,—indeed the head and shoulders, as well as the arms and hands, are nearly finished. It is as brilliant in painting as anything I have done or can do. I may quote to it the lines of Coleridge,

'A Damsel with a dulcimer', &c.

It represents the lady (Miss W) seated by a tree on which her instrument is hung, and playing on it in an attitude of passionate absorption, while her hair spreads wide over the bough above her, and a dove seated in the tree stretches its neck low along the branch with its wings raised, and listens to the magic lay. Thus here the bird listens to the player, as in the other picture the player does to the bird.⁵

We may question why, if "A Sea-Spell" was already written, Coleridge's poem was cited as referent? Also, we should note that many details shared by the pair, such as siren, sea-bird, and water, are not yet present.

Somewhat later that year Rossetti notes in a letter written while at Bognor, Sussex, to Alice Boyd,

I have been for some little time here and hitherto chiefly idle after getting through a new picture in London. I have taken this house for the time and shall probably keep it till the end of the year. It is within one minute's walk of the sea-beach which is a fine one, only without downs, and the air is very

⁵ Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl, eds., Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-67), III, 1345-46 (18 August 1875); hereafter cited in footnotes as Letters. Note: "Veronica" refers to Veronica Veronese (Surtees 228).

pure and bracing—the sands like a carpet at low water.⁶

Again, although not mentioned by name, evidence points to this composition as being the work later entitled A Sea-Spell. We may wonder whether the scenery of Bognor inspired Rossetti to change the details in his canvas to those of the sea?

In 1876, Rossetti was still referring to the work as the "Damozel and Dulcimer picture."⁷ After its appearance, Rossetti mentions the Athenaeum article "on my last picture" to his mother, and near the same time records the change of the dove to "sea bird."⁸ By 21 October, 1877, we find Rossetti referring to the painting by the name, The Sea-Spell.⁹

Other letters noting corrections made to inaccuracies in Frederic Stephens' laudatory reviews of Rossetti's works in the Athenaeum suggest that if the article on A Sea-Spell contained any misinformation, we should know of it. Yet, in that article, Stephens refers to the painting as "a new and hardly less important poem in painting, illustrating "A Sea-Spell," and notes, "In this case too, we have Mr.

⁶ Ibid., III, 1367 (3 November 1875).

⁷ Ibid., III, 1443 (To Henry Treffry Dunn, Saturday [?1876]).

⁸ Ibid., IV, 1485 (26 April 1877), and IV, 1489 (To Frederic James Shields, undated).

⁹ Ibid., IV, 1520 (To Frederic James Shields).

Rossetti's permission to print a new sonnet, which elucidates most impressively the poetic motive of his picture."¹⁰ Evidence seems overwhelming that like Rossetti's other descriptive paired paintings and sonnets, the components of the "Sea-Spell" pair were composed at nearly the same time, and that the approximate date in question was 1877.

What then led William Rossetti, usually an accurate source of information, to give a different, far earlier date of composition for the poem? That an error occurred is supported by the inconsistency which led William to give the date of the sonnet "Vain Virtues," just as he does "A Sea-Spell," as "before 18 March 1869" in the Classified Lists and "1869" in Works, while in Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer, he dates it "?1858." William does note in his diary in this case, in an entry for 18 March 1869, that "Gabriel has done two new sonnets—Pandora (for his picture now in progress) and Vain Virtues."¹¹ More significantly, two fragments written in 1869-70 and later published reveal some similarities to "A Sea-Spell" which may have confused William. One is the incomplete "lyrical tragedy" entitled "The Doom of the Sirens," which Rossetti describes in a letter to Swinburne, noting,

¹⁰ [Frederic George Stephens], "Mr. Rossetti's New Pictures," Athenaeum, No. 2581 (14 April 1877), p. 486.

¹¹ William Michael Rossetti, ed., Rossetti Papers, 1862-1870 (London: Sands & Co., 1903), p. 386.

A new idea for a poem The doom of the Sirens occurred to me the other day and I think the story (which is my own invention) would afford fine opportunities and intense situations, but I fear that I shall not find time to write it at present, nor indeed to be writing at all just now, which is what I should like best.¹²

The second is the fragment, "The Orchard-Pit," mentioned several times in Rossetti's letters.¹³ Of both works, William notes in his diary,

He [Dante Gabriel Rossetti] is bent (and I think very wisely) on getting out his volume of poems in the Spring; and will with this view forgo writing any additional poems for it, beyond one. As to this one, he is in some doubt whether to make it The Orchard-Pit, which he schemed out at Penkill, or an invention that has lately occurred to him of The Doom of the Sirens: he inclines to this latter.¹⁴

Both schemes involved a seductive and fatal siren, an enchanted grove, and the lure of song—and both were begun in 1869. It is not inconceivable that years later, when putting on record his remarkable brother's achievements, William at least in this instance did err. That conclusion may serve not only to place in perspective William's position as an authority on his brother, but to remind those interested in Rossetti of the need to account for other resources, the most significant of which are Rossetti's works themselves. In this instance, as only one example,

¹² Letters, II, 770 (8 December 1869).

¹³ See for example, Letters, II, 740 (To William Michael Rossetti, 14 September 1869); III, 959 (To William Bell Scott, ? July 1871); III, 1012 (To William Bell Scott, 22 September 1871).

¹⁴ William Michael Rossetti, ed., Rossetti Papers, p. 417; entry for 10 December 1869.

the seemingly minor question of chronology bears upon our understanding of the wider issue of the interrelationship of the arts. For rather than affording an unaccountable exception to the usual pattern of composition of other Rossettian visual-verbal complexes in the descriptive mode, the "Sea-Spell" pair would appear to reconfirm the process of nearly simultaneous development out of which the dynamic developed between painting and poem.

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