THE BIFURCATED PERSONALITIES OF CHRISTINA ROSSETTI
AND DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI AS REFLECTED
IN THEIR "SISTER POEMS"

THESIS

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Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti both suffered from ambivalent feelings concerning the role female sexuality plays in the salvation of the soul. These ambivalent feelings ranged from seeing female sexuality as leading men to salvation, to seeing it as a trap for the destruction of women's souls as well as men's. The contradictory feelings of the Rossettis' typifies the Victorian people's experience and was caused by the nature of the times. Using the analysis of the period by Walter E. Houghton in *The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-1870*, this paper describes the affect the Victorians' religious zeal, their "moral earnestness," and their "woman-worship" had on the two Rossetti poets.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Several critics of the Victorian era have focused on the dichotomous nature of its people. The critics have used adjectives such as "neurotic," "hypocritical," and even "schizophrenic" to describe such paradoxical behavior as the way Great Britain rallied around John Stuart Mill, yet at the same time embraced Carlyle's beliefs, or the way the people accepted biblical criticism and social Darwinism, yet packed the churches in an Evangelical Revival.\(^1\) John Fowles writes that "... every Victorian had two minds . . ." (288). He sees Victorians as suffering from a "dichotomy" or "schizophrenia" "... which led them to see the 'soul' as more real than the body, far more real than their own self" (288). No two people better personified this two-mindedness than Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his sister Christina. This duality is revealed in their poetry and in their lives.

Although the duality shows up in many aspects of the siblings' lives, the greatest dichotomy in each was in the area of love, especially in regard to the role female sexuality plays in love. The impossible ideal the Victorians set for women created in both Rossettis mixed
emotions concerning female sexuality. Both artists were torn between, on the one hand, realization and acceptance of a woman's sexual desires and, on the other hand, the Victorian attitudes that frowned on such feelings. Both artists searched for a "Blessed Damozel," a beautiful woman whose goodness and love meant salvation for her lover.  

Christina searched within herself for this blessed ideal. Dante Gabriel tried to find the "blessed damozel" in the women he met, especially in his wife, Lizzie Siddal, and in William Morris' wife, Jane Burden. Even though both artists desired to find this virtuous, perfect ideal, they could not deny what they saw in reality or what they felt emotionally. Christina was well aware of her faults and believed that she could not find salvation for herself let alone a lover. Dante Gabriel wrestled with the opposing beliefs that female sexuality was the salvation of men and at the same time their damnation; and he never was able to decide which statement was correct. Because each poet acted on the belief that the ideal woman existed, both Rossettis ended up denying themselves the happiness of meaningful relationships with members of the opposite sex.

Three major influences created the division of self in Gabriel's and Christina's personalities. The first influence was the bipolar extremes in temperament that existed in the Rossetti family. The father, Gabriele Rossetti, was a hot-blooded Italian whose fiery temperament
Christina and Dante inherited. On the other hand, their mother, Frances Lavinia Polidori, had a calm and restrained disposition much as did the other two Rossetti children, William and Maria. The two extremes of temperament created an atmosphere conducive to paradoxical behavior.

The second influence on Dante Gabriel and Christina that led to dualities in their personalities, particularly with respect to love, stemmed from the Christian beliefs that describe proper behavior for women in relationships and in society. Many of the doctrines concerning women's behavior attested to by Saint Paul in Ephesians and by Saint Peter in his First Letter are hard for some of today's educated women to accept; these tenets promoting submissive and puritanical behavior in women must have been equally difficult to adhere to for such an intelligent, talented and passionate woman as Christina Rossetti, yet she accepted them without question. The opposing factors of her religious beliefs and her passionate nature added to her contradictory feelings. Because she chose to comply with those beliefs, she did not reach her full potential as a woman; it is most probable that Christina, who never married, remained a virgin throughout her life. Christian beliefs concerning the submissiveness of women to men also affected her poetry. For instance, even though Christina was as gifted a poet as her brother Gabriel, if not more, she altered several poems because Gabriel or William had
found them either "shocking" or "too masculine."³

The Christian beliefs governing the role of women also affected the way Dante Gabriel viewed women, and this view clashed with what he saw on the streets of London where, Hippolyte Taine points out, every "hundred steps one jostle[d] twenty harlots" (qtd. in Houghton 366). Dante Gabriel’s first romantic relationship was with a woman whom, as David Sonstroem states, Rossetti identified with Dante’s Beatrice (39). This woman, Lizzie Siddal, was to be his soul-mate, his guide to salvation (Sonstroem 43). Yet Gabriel’s sexual desires could not be met by this Madonna figure since she refused to have a physical relationship until they were married; so he turned to the prostitutes on the streets (48).

The third influence that helped to create the dichotomous natures of the brother and sister is related to the religious influence. This persuasive factor was the Victorian attitude concerning women, an attitude shaped by those same Christian tenets spoken of above. Although these Christian beliefs were quite ancient, Victorian conventions formed a special conception of them. This attitude expected "good" women to repress their sexual feelings. "Good" women had no sexual desires, listened respectfully to the men in their lives, and were much more spiritually oriented and more virtuous than men. In fact, the Victorians believed women were so virtuous that they
were "more like angels than humans" (Houghton 355). These unrealistic expectations made Christina reject two marriage proposals. According to Sonstroem, this Victorian idealization of women also created a disparity between what Dante Gabriel expected from Lizzie and her actual behavior (45).

The frustration Dante Gabriel and Christina felt about love is seen in many of their poems. Both artists used the motif of sisters to characterize the dichotomy between the ideal and the real. These dual images not only signify the mixed feelings the poets had about love, but also the related idea of the division between body and soul. Besides using the sister motif, Dante Gabriel showed the division between body and soul by portraying two types of beauty, the physical and the spiritual, in sister sonnets. Physical beauty led men to damnation, while spiritual beauty led them to salvation.
CHAPTER 2

CHILDHOOD ORIGINS OF THE BIFURCATED PSYCHE

The division of self that each Rossetti felt had its origin in their childhood, and the conflicting emotions each felt concerning the sexuality of woman were developed before their first encounter with romantic relationships. Three major influences were at play on the two Rossettis during their childhood and adolescence.

First there was the polarity of temperament found in the Rossetti household. The father, Gabriele Rossetti, was forty-three when he married the twenty-six-year-old Francesca Lavinia Polidori. (She later changed her name to the English version, Frances.) They had a loving and truly happy marriage even though they had extremely opposite personalities. Gabriele was an exuberant Italian romanticist who was exiled from his homeland for voicing his sentiments about a national and unified Italy. His fiery temperament, eloquent speech and romantic charm won him many friends in England. He moved among the literary circles; he knew Coleridge, Henry Francis Cary (the translator of Dante), the poet Thomas Campbell, and many other literary figures. Other exiled Italians found Gabriele’s house a welcome meeting place where they held
intense discussions about politics, literature, and philosophy. It was in England that Rossetti met Frances Polidori. She was half-Italian and half-English, but the English temperament prevailed in her personality. She was gentle, reserved, and yet forceful. She knew how to get her two fiery children, Dante Gabriel and Christina, to behave, as well as her quiet, sweet-tempered children, William and Maria. The children adored their kind, even-dispositioned mother. In fact, Christina lived with Frances until the mother's death. The sonnet Christina wrote in memory of her mother, which William placed as the dedication in the Poetical Works volume, shows the influence the mother had on the daughter:

To my first Love, my Mother, on whose knee
I learnt love-lore that is not troublesome;
Whose service is my special dignity,
And she my lodestar while I go and come.
And so because you love me, and because
I love you, Mother, I have woven a wreath
Of rhymes wherewith to crown your honored name.

(5-11)

Although not as eloquent or talented as her husband, Frances was also accomplished. She had been trained as a governess and knew French and Italian as well as English. Because the elder Rossetti did not make much from teaching Italian in London, Frances worked as a governess. She kept
a stiff upper lip in the sometimes self-effacing occupation.

The two extremes of temperament created an atmosphere conducive to dichotomous behavior. The dualism appeared in both artists when they were young children. For Christina, the dichotomy first showed up in her temperament. On the one hand, Christina was passionate, rebellious, and highly explosive; on the other hand, she wanted to be a good daughter by trying to emulate the calm and control of her mother. The family saw this duality early. At the age of three, Christina was described by her father as "that angelic little demon of a Christina" (qtd. in Packer 1). One time Christina became so enraged at something, that she cut her arm on purpose with a pair of scissors. She described the incident to her niece Helen Rossetti Angeli: "On one occasion being rebuked by my dear Mother for some fault, I seized upon a pair of scissors, and ripped up my arm to vent my wrath" (qtd. in Packer 10). Gabriel, too, cut himself once upon becoming too passionate. When he was putting on a play about chivalry, he stabbed himself in a mock sword fight (Sonstroem 9). Even among the four siblings, there was a dichotomy between the temperaments. Maria and William both were like their mother—industrious, controlled and reserved. Both Maria and William had to work as children, while Christina and Gabriel found ways out of employment. When it was time for Christina to try
her hand at being a governess, the same occupation her
mother and sister had, she became too ill to work. Dante
Gabriel did not work because he was sent to King's College
to study the art of painting. In fact, it was William's
paycheck that paid for Gabriel's tuition. In adulthood
William continued being responsible for both Dante Gabriel
and Christina.

While Dante Gabriel never attempted to curb his
passionate nature, Christina worked very hard at
controlling hers. According to Packer, winning her
mother's approval was very important to Christina; and in
order to do so, she had to keep her temper under control.
Packer describes the difficult task Frances Rossetti had in
rearing her two most passionate and gifted children:

If, as has been said, Dante Gabriel was the
battleground upon which his mother fought an
inconclusive but lifelong engagement with the
world, Christina was no less a battlefield upon
which her mother's moral discipline contended
with the inherently tumultuous Rossetti strain
for dominance of her spirit. It was Frances
Rossetti's maternal task, as she conceived it, to
tame and subdue in her two most gifted children
some of the more dangerous characteristics
transmitted by the Rossetti genes. (11)

For Dante Gabriel, the first sign of the division of
self was in his indecisiveness as to which of the sister arts, painting or poetry, he should really devote his time. This indecision created all sorts of problems for him. Even though paint that is allowed to dry on an uncompleted canvas means extra work for the painter, Dante Gabriel would stop in the middle of a painting in order to write poetry. Then, when he was attending the Royal Academy, he often skipped classes because he was busy writing poetry (Sonstroem 10). Sonstroem points out other areas in which the two-mindedness showed up in Rossetti. He explains that whenever Dante Gabriel had an obligation, he would lose interest in the matter; for instance, even though Rossetti loved his mother, he often forgot her birthday (10). And when Gabriel was commissioned to do a painting, he soon lost interest in it.

Frances and Gabriele Rossetti were as opposite in their religious beliefs as they were in temperament. An Anglican, Frances was deeply religious, while Gabriele, a Roman-Catholic, is considered by most biographers as having been irreligious. When they married, they had a double wedding ceremony with a Roman Catholic and an Anglican priest. William Michael states that Frances' favorite book in the Bible was Ecclesiastes. According to Conrad Festa, it has a "negative bias [which] leads logically to a puritanical dualism which reduces life here on earth to worthlessness; only the life hereafter is worthwhile, good"
(28). Frances steeped the children in religious education. She taught the children catechism at home and took them at first to St. Katherine's Church in Regent's Park, and then to Christ Church, Albany Street, because of her interest in the Oxford Movement. Reverend Dodsworth, the vicar of Christ Church was a leader in the Movement.

The Oxford Movement was founded by John Keble, Richard Hurrell Froude and John Henry Newman. It was much like the Evangelical Awakening that called for the necessity of conversion, pious living, and reform for the individual as well as society (Latourette 1167). Unlike the Evangelicals, however, the Oxford Movement desired more unity with the historic Catholic Church. The three founders were joined by Edward Pusey in 1833 and began to publish pamphlets known as the Tracts for the Times. Their supporters became known as Tractarians. Ninety tracts were published in all, until the Bishop of Oxford demanded that the publications be stopped.

The Tractarians were determined to revive Catholic practices such as the use of incense, genuflecting, celibacy, fasting, and the reverence for saints. They also wanted to bring back the ideas of the Catholic Church as they were before the Church's corruptness that forced Martin Luther to publish the Thirty-nine Articles.

The Tractarians were almost violently attacked after Newman published the Ninetieth Tract, which stated that the
Thirty-nine Articles were not contrary to Catholic Doctrine. Since the position of the Church of England is based on these articles, Newman was stating that the Church of England was not different from the Church of Rome. Several hundred of the Tractarians, including Newman, left the Church of England and joined the Catholic Church. But the large majority of the Anglo-Catholic party, which grew out of the Movement, remained with the Anglican Church. Although hostility did erupt sometimes against the Anglo-Catholic party, under Pusey’s guidance the church took on some of the Catholic rituals and preached piety and humanitarianism in the form of good works especially to the poor and neglected.

The emphasis on religion in Victorian society led to what Houghton calls "a creed of earnestness" that was developed from the "Christian tenets of self denial and life after death" (231). Houghton explains that the Victorian’s moral earnestness meant that the Victorian had to live his life as if this world were temporal and only a stepping-stone to heaven and life-ever-after. Therefore, one had to live a moral life, be Christ-like. Houghton writes: "One had to hate the world, the flesh, and the devil, to keep all of God’s commandments exactly, and to live as in the sight of the world to come, as if . . . the ties of this life were already broken" (231). Although in theory this goal sounds admirable for society, moral
earnestness really helped to create a double-mindedness in the Victorians. Houghton explains:

When the standard of Christian virtue was placed so high and the range and gravity of sin was so great, the Christian life became in literal fact a life of constant struggle--both to resist temptation and to master the desires of the ego . . . . His [The Christian's] first objective was to beat down the terrible temptations of worldly and fleshly existence. (233)

Houghton concludes that the victory over morality required a "bitter struggle" (233).

Besides creating a neurotic dichotomy in the Victorian mind concerning morality, the Christian religion influenced the era's attitudes about sexuality and gender roles. The Victorians tried to conduct themselves by the ways prescribed in the Bible, especially the New Testament. A woman's role was clearly defined for her in Paul's First Letter to the Ephesians, Peter's First Letter, and First Corinthians. These letters state that men are at the head of a household--an idea with its origins in Genesis--and that women should be submissive to their husbands.

Ephesians 5.22-24 states:

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and
is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.

First Peter 3.1-2 states a similar idea:

Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behavior.

Then in verses five through six of the same chapter, Peter uses Abraham’s wife Sarah as an example for women to follow because Sarah "obeyed Abraham, calling him lord."

One more example of the Biblical view of women’s place in society is in 1 Corinthians 11.7 which states: "For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man."

The Evangelical Movement, compounded with the goal of moral earnestness, created a society in which the women really felt that they were inferior to men mentally and physically, but superior spiritually. Houghton explains that in the Victorian period, there were three conceptions of women, the best known being that "of the submissive wife whose whole excuse for being was to honor, love, obey--and amuse--her lord and master" (348). Although some women did rebel against this model, demanding equal rights with men, the majority felt that while not exactly inferior to men,
they were not equals, but in fact, entirely different from them. This view, called "distinctive womanhood" by Tennyson, held that women were inferior physically and mentally, but superior spiritually, and therefore their role in society was to guide the more base male sex to a loftier, holier life than men would have on their own. Houghton explains that because of the economic view prevalent in the Victorian attitude, competition and greed flourished in the business world. Men had to struggle between the Christian ethic of treating others as they expected to be treated and the reality that if one wanted to stay afloat in the business world, one must follow the rule that when one wins, another loses. In order to accept both of these opposing dogmas, the working man separated his business life from his home life, and it was the woman's role to "preserve and quicken the moral idealism so badly needed . . ." by her husband (Houghton 352).

Society went so far in thinking of women as numinous saviors that "woman worship" prevailed. Houghton explains that every boy was:

- taught to view women as objects of the greatest respect and even awe. He was to think of them as sisters . . . as creatures more like angels than human beings--an image wonderfully calculated not only to dissociate love from sex, but to turn love into worship, and worship of purity. (354-355)
Women were viewed as being almost asexual. Although a woman’s role included bearing her husband’s children—and the Victorian household averaged five to six children (Rees 46)—women were not considered to have sexual appetites. A woman knew nothing about sex until her wedding night, and then the sex act was performed as a shameful, unclean, and nasty duty. Even if a woman did enjoy her sexuality, she could not express her pleasure in fear that her husband should think low of her. Men, too, felt a sort of revulsion toward their own sexuality. Having sex with his wife meant that a man was spoiling her purity, but he admitted that his more base nature required him to yield to his pleasure.

The quiet, religious Frances tried to rear her two passionate, temperamental children and her two quiet, well-behaved children in an exotic household belonging to a fiery Italian. An evangelical revival was awakening a "creed of earnestness" in the Victorians who suffered a moral struggle between the flesh and the spirit. The society "worshipped" women, but at the same time, the male population supported thousands of prostitutes by buying their bodies. All of these factors made up the dichotomous milieu in which Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti were reared and in which they learned about love. It is interesting to note that biographers have noticed a leaning towards self-dividedness in both artists in the area of
love before their first encounters with it. Packer writes about Christina:

Two tendencies, then, had already showed themselves by the time she reached seventeen. On the one hand was her positive and healthy acceptance of the function of womanhood and her full anticipation of the joy potential in the sexual relationship. On the other, was her fear and foreboding of the suffering caused by what Andre Gide once called the wild darkness of passions. (25)

Similarly, Sonstroem writes about Dante Gabriel:

... a problem is presented to Rossetti. The beautiful woman is easily assimilated by his imagination. All he need do is dream on and elaborate. But his sexual nature will not be satisfied with mere fantasies of fair ladies. The dilemma may be put as follows: if he spends his time lethargically in fantasy, how can he satisfy his very real sexual desires; if, on the other hand, they are satisfied in the here and now, how can the actual experiences live up to his ideal ones? His desires demand palpable gratification, but the intended object of his desires, because of his escapist fantasies, exists first and indelibly in his mind with an
entourage of associates that must travel with her if she is to make her appearance in his actual experience. In short, he is faced with a conflict of ideal and real in sexual terms. (16)

These mixed emotions and conflicting needs created great pain and difficulty in Christina’s and Dante Gabriel’s romantic relationships; at the same time, the result of this struggle was poetry that is hauntingly soul-searching and filled with evidence of this divided-mindedness.
CHAPTER 3

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI AND HER "SISTER POEMS"

Sharing her mother's and her sister's religiosity, Christina struggled with what she felt were opposing lifestyles. Her biographies describe a woman who turned away from life and love in order to achieve life hereafter, and yet who was never sure that she was good enough to reach Heaven. By the age of eighteen, Christina began to shape the life of the famous recluse she would become. She stopped attending the theatre because she believed stage folks were prone to self-indulgence. She stayed at home much of the time suffering from what William Michael describes as "angina pectoris (actual or supposed), of which, after some long while, she seemed cured; then cough, with symptoms which were accounted ominous of decline or consumption . . . then exophthalmic bronchocele . . . ." (qtd. in Poetical Works 1). These mysterious maladies could well have been induced by the struggle between flesh and spirit within her. As her sister Maria, Christina contemplated joining the convent, a lifestyle Saint Paul recommended:

And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body
and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband. 
(1 Cor 7.34)

Then in verse 38, Paul concludes, "So that he who marries his betrothed does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better." Both Christina and Maria were drawn to the monastic life, but only Maria became a nun. William Michael believed that Christina never felt that she was holy enough to join an order. 6

With such fervent religious beliefs, the outcome of Christina's engagement to James Collinson is not surprising. At the age of nineteen Christina fell in love with Collinson, a charter member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. He was as deeply religious as she, but Catholic instead of Anglican. She agreed to marry him if he switched to Anglicanism. He complied. Why did she require him to change his religion? William Michael Rossetti and Helen Rossetti Angeli believed that it was because she felt obligated to do so. The Oxford Movement had torn the Church apart. Her mother's attempts to save her Catholic, but irreligious, husband failed. Maybe Christina concluded that a heterodox marriage fails in salvation. Her religion told her that only Anglicanism was correct. Therefore, it was her duty to "save" James Collinson, the man she loved. She wanted to be the "Blessed Damozel," the woman whose goodness and purity
meant salvation for her lover. Society also told her she was to be the spiritual leader in her marriage. Festa points out that even her father stressed this spiritual role of women:

He [Gabriele] took no active part in this spiritual training of the children. He did, however, encourage one concept which captured the minds and imaginations of all the children, and that was the idea of woman as stairway to God—all women were potential Beatrices. So compellingly did this idea impress Christina that she never lost the conviction that a woman ought to play the part of Beatrice to a man's Dante.

(26)

Christina had found someone who shared her religious fervor, who was a part of the exciting artistic world she loved. No wonder she was hurt so badly when Collinson retracted his renunciation of the Catholic faith. She broke the engagement. William Michael points out that Collinson "struck a staggering blow at [Christina's] peace of mind . . . from which she did not recover for years" (qtd. in Poetical Works lii). Christina so seriously believed in the idealized form of woman characterized both in Victorian belief and in the Christian religion, that she could not accept a heterodox marriage. Therefore, she denied herself the happiness of marriage.
Later, Christina fell in love with Charles Bagot Cayley, whom she met in 1847. Although they were deeply in love, here too she could not marry because of his religious convictions; Cayley was agnostic. They remained friends until his death in 1883. Zaturanska calls their relationship "a kind of tenuous trembling marriage of two spirits" (218). Cayley never married; he left what little he had to Christina and made her his literary executor.

Choosing neither complete commitment to Christ nor to a husband, Christina suffered from her indecision. Shefer, taking the stand that Christina chose to dedicate herself completely to Christ, points out a similar discontentment:

... although she gave up a great deal during her lifetime, even her fiance, for her religious beliefs, she never found peace of mind in her decision to dedicate herself body and soul to Christ. Nowhere ... in her poetry is there a sign of the contentment and satisfaction that comes from making a definite decision. Instead there is a sense of restlessness, anxiety and frustration which derive from conflicts within Christina herself. (19)

Festa points out that Christina's decision to break off her engagement to Collinson left her dissatisfied:

Up to this point in her life, she was prepared to be a Beatrice, to be a lovely nun, and to deny
the worth of life; but she must have observed, as the months and years passed, that her experience differed from that of Elizabeth of Hungary and Catherine of Alexandria—saints whom she admired and had written about in her youth. She could not belie her regrets nor shrug off her part in the broken engagement. (30)

Christina Rossetti portrayed this dissatisfaction in her decision to end the engagement to Collinson in the "sister poems" she wrote afterwards. These sister poems discuss the battle within Christina between her religious and Victorian desires to be pure, controlled, and godly, and her passionate and real nature which made her curious about sex. In her poems the battle between the real woman and the ideal usually ends with the ideal winning out, but not always. Most often love is thwarted.

The prototypical poem dealing with sisters is "Goblin Market." Although this poem has been interpreted in several different ways, critics agree that in essence it is a poem about temptation and redemption (Watson 50). The goblin men sell luscious and tempting fruit. Germaine Greer focuses on the sexual nature of the poem and interprets the fruit as a symbol of sexuality (ix). Although the fruit can be interpreted as a symbol for all sorts of temptation, Christina has made a point of using imagery that portrays fertility, fullness:
Plump unpecked cherries,
Melons and raspberries,
Bloom-down-cheeked peaches,
Swart-headed mulberries,
Wild free-born cranberries, (7-11)
and so forth. This is a poem about mixed emotions
concerning sexual awareness. It is probably the most
blatantly honest admission of Christina's feelings about
women's sexuality, even though William Michael Rossetti
remembered "I have more than once heard Christina say that
she did not mean anything profound by this fairy tale--it
is not a moral apologue . . ." (qtd. in Poetical Works
459).

That "Goblin Market" is about the divided self is
evident in the description of the alliteratively named
sisters Laura and Lizzie: "Golden head by golden head, / Like
two pigeons in one nest" (183-184) and also, "Like two
blossoms on one stem, / Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow" (187-188). Laura is representative of the passionate side
of Christina. Laura is curious about the goblin men:
"Like a vessel at the launch / When its last restraint is
gone" (84-85). Christina uses descriptions about Laura
that show she is inquisitive, passionate, and eager for
sexual knowledge; in line 69 she calls Laura "curious" and
has her whisper "like the restless brook" (53), an apt
description for Christina. Lizzie, on the other hand, is
comparable to the restrained and religious side of Christina. Like the typical puritanical Victorian woman, Lizzie does not want to know about sex. "Lizzie covered up her eyes, / covered close lest they should look" (50-51). Lizzie sees the goblin men as having evil motives even before she has had any experience with them. She believes what she must have been told.

'No,' said Lizzie: 'No, no, no:
Their offers should not charm us,
Their evil gifts would harm us.'
She thrust a dimpled finger
In each ear, shut eyes and ran. (64-68)

As stated earlier, the Victorian woman did not know about sex until her wedding night. And then she looked upon it as a shameful, nasty, and unclean duty. Women were not supposed to be curious about sex, and those who were were expected to end up in trouble.

Eager to satisfy her curiosity, Laura exchanges a golden curl and a tear for the fruit, or, as Jeanie Watson puts it, "buy[s] the feast with the price of her body" (51). The description of the feast is highly erotic. Ellen Moers points out that "suck" is the "central verb in 'Goblin Market'; sucking mixed with lust and pain" (102). After her orgy, Laura goes home "and knew not was it night or day" (37). She is disoriented. Laura has to pay the price for her experience. Watson points out that Laura
does not get punished right away (54). The reason she is not is that a woman can hide her sexual activity for a while; but eventually she will be found out, because she will become pregnant or her reputation will be ruined by gossip. Houghton points out that in Victorian society, once a woman had engaged in illicit sex, she was often cast out and forced to prostitution because few other options were open to her for support (366). After her tryst with the goblin men, Laura can no longer hear their cry and so she pines away. The goblin men do not want her. In Victorian rhetoric, she is "spoiled." Her reputation is ruined and, therefore, her chances for love are gone. This theme about a spoiled reputation occurs in several of Christina's sister poems.

Christina has shown the two sides of her personality in Laura and Lizzie. The next step she takes in the poem is to unite the two (Weathers 83). The unification occurs when Lizzie sacrifices herself in order to rescue her sister. With a penny she offers to purchase fruit from the goblin men to take home, but when she refuses to partake in their feast, they try to force her to eat the forbidden fruit in what appears to be a gang rape. The rape scene unifies both the sexual side and the puritanical side of the divided self Christina has portrayed. It is interesting to note that some psychiatrists feel that women
who feel guilty about their sexual desires fantasize about rape because in this fantasy, the women believe that they can have sex and still be innocent of what they feel is wrong (Trusevich).

In the climactic scene Lizzie comes home and tells her sister to suck the juices off her face. Several critics feel that this scene is a lesbian or incestuous display of love. But Christina is not creating a lesbian relationship because the two women are really two parts of a divided self. Lizzie sacrifices herself for Laura and, Christ-like, achieves redemption for her sister. At the same time, Lizzie, although tattered and bruised, remains alive by not eating the forbidden fruit; thus she is the savior of the whole person Laura and Lizzie make up. But it is a dissatisfying salvation because the Victorian prudery has won over the reality of female sexuality. Watson feels that the ending of "Goblin Market" sounds too "pat":

Goblin fruit remains tempting and somehow rightfully so. We remain unconvinced that we should shun it. . . . What we finally wish to do is reject the cultural [sic] which makes these conventions inevitable. . . . (54)

Watson is correct in stating that both sisters have made a sacrifice by "favoring the moral world" (54). Even though the sisters are married in the end, the poem remains a
story about repressed sexuality.

In "Noble Sisters," as in "Goblin Market," the puritanical side of the divided self (portrayed as a sister) saves the whole self from wrong, and again the reader is left feeling unsure whether or not too great a sacrifice has been made. The plot consists of questions from the speaker, who is romantic and loving, to her sister asking about various signs her lover has sent to show his love or to say that he is coming. The practical sister replies always that she has sent the messengers away for her sister's welfare. The speaker becomes more and more angry as the poem progresses. The reader slowly becomes aware that the speaker and the lord are deeply in love as the poem progresses and then culminates with the declaration: "And in his heart my heart is locked / And in his life my life" (42-43). The practical sister turns away the lover with the statement that her sister is happily married.

One question among critics is whether the speaker is or is not married. Packer believes that this poem, as well as "Goblin Market," may have been associated with the possible thwarted love affair between William Bell Scott, a Pre-Raphaelite friend of Dante Gabriel, and Christina for which Packer blames Maria Rossetti (151). She points out that "Noble Sisters" and "Sister Maude" were both omitted from subsequent editions of the Goblin Market volume and
theorizes that possibly Christina feared that these poems might be thought of as being resentful of Maria's interference (152).

Another possible biographical interpretation is that the speaker and the sister are two parts of the divided Christina. One side of her wanted to be religious, even contemplating being a nun (thus married to Christ); the other side of her wanted love and passion from a human male. Both sisters in the poem are believable. The reader believes that the one sister is deeply in love with the Lord and believes her when she passionately cries to her sister:

Fie, sister, fie, a wicked lie,
A lie, a wicked lie!
I have none other love but him,
Nor will have till I die
And you have turned him from our door,
And stabbed him with a lie. (48-53)

But the reader also believes the sister who has the last four lines in the poem, when she tells her sister that she had better not "... shame our father's name / [lest] My curse go forth with you" (58-59). The reader wonders how both sisters can be telling the truth. The speaker state that she is not already loved, and at the same time her sister accuses her of being married. A biographical interpretation is that the two sisters are two parts of the
dichotomous Christina, who at the same time wants to be "married to Christ" and also married to a flesh-and-blood man. The father spoken of in the poem could be God, the Heavenly Father. As already stated, Christina did not feel that she could get to heaven if she were married.

The altruistic woman has saved her sister from what she thinks is wrong, yet she threatens her in the last line. Weathers points out that the curse in the last two lines of the poem reflects a dangerous situation: "The curse that one sister gives another represents the ultimate horror of the divided self; when one part of self cannot tolerate the other, true disintegration is at hand" (152). "In order to have a unified self," the good and controlled part of Christina tells the passionate side, "the man must be left alone."

Another "sister poem" that deals with the possible ruin of a reputation is "Sister Maude." In this poem the speaker has had an illicit affair, which ended with the death of her lover. She blames the death on her sister Maude who told their parents of what the speaker admits is her "shame" (1). Unlike "Noble Sisters" in which both sisters speak, the reader never hears Maude’s point of view; therefore, in this poem the self is severed completely. Watson writes, "The two sisters are now enemies, snarling at one another, interfering with one another, no longer integrated, no longer sitting side by
side in their difference, but now in combat" (86).

Just as in Christina's own personality in which the "controlled and pure side" of her would not allow marriage, so Maude does not allow her sister to find happiness in love. It is true that the affair is one that had to be covert, but, as Watson points out, the speaker is proud of her love and calls him "dear" from the second line on (55). Just as Christina, who could not be "married to Christ" and also be married to an earthly man, ended up choosing neither, in this poem both sisters end up with nothing and are both damned: "You might have spared his soul, sister, / Have spared my soul, your own soul too" (9-10). Watson points out that not only was the speaker betrayed, but Maude was also betrayed by "social restrictions that thwart her own opportunity for self-knowledge . . . "(55). Here again, a woman's passions are frustrated by social and religious mores.

Two poems that have three sisters instead of just the two are "A Triad" and "Maiden-Song," and in both poems the subject is love. In "A Triad" Christina Rossetti shows the dilemma which Victorian women, including herself, faced concerning their futures. The three sisters represent the types of women Christina came in contact with in England. The first sister is earthy, "Crimson with cheeks and bosom in a glow / Flushed to the yellow hair and finger tips" (2-3), reminiscent of the descriptions of Fanny Cornforth, the
prostitute Dante Gabriel had as a mistress. Like the plump Fanny, this sister "droned in sweetness like a fattened bee" (13). But the life of a prostitute is not one in which women expect to find happiness. Another sister marries but has a "soulless love" (10). According to Houghton, many marriages of convenience took place in the Victorian era (381-384). G.R. Drysdale writes in 1854:

A great proportion of the marriages we see around us, did not take place from love at all, but some interested motive, such as wealth, social position, or other advantages; and in fact it is rare to see a marriage in which true love has been the predominating feeling on both sides. (qtd. in Houghton 381)

If the situation was as bad as Drysdale describes, Christina must have come in contact with women in "soulless" marriages. The third sister "... was blue with famine after love" (6) and she dies because of it. The result of all three situations, according to Christina, was "All on the threshold, yet all short on life" (14). None of the three girls found happiness. In addition to portraying the three alternatives for the Victorian woman, the three sisters also represent the parts of Christina's personality. The sister starved for love represents the life of a nun, while the married sister represents a "soulless" marriage to Collinson or Cayley, because, as
stated before, Christina did not think she could marry either of them and still save her soul. The earthy woman represents the passionate side of Christina that wanted to be expressive but could not because of her mother's influence.

The other poem with three sisters is "Maiden-Song" which has a much happier ending than "A Triad." In this poem two sisters feel inferior to their almost unearthly, perfect sister, and they, therefore, go on an outing without her to pick strawberry leaves. The alliteratively named sisters, Meggan, May, and Margaret, are all extremely beautiful and gifted with melodious voices, but Margaret is characterized as the ideal woman for Victorian "woman-worship":

Margaret like a queen
Like a blush-rose, like the moon
In her heavenly sheen,
Fragrant breathed as milky cow
Or field of blossoming bean
Graceful as an ivy bough
Born to cling and lean. (37-43)

Margaret is more a heavenly body than she is an earthly human. All the animals are as if under her spell:

When she raised her lustrous eyes
A beast peeped at the door;
When she downward cast her eyes
A fish gasped on the floor. (45-48)

While her sisters marry men who derive their living from working with the Earth’s resources, a herdsman and a shepherd, Margaret gets a king for her husband. Even he bows to Margaret:

With his crown upon his head
His sceptre in his hand
Down he fell at Margaret’s knees
Lord King of all that land
To her highness bending low. (194-198)

Only after this spiritually superior sister’s marriage is it desirable for the other two sisters to return home. In fact, it is Margaret who "sang her sisters home..." (206).

In "Maiden-Song" an ideal woman exists; but not so in real life. If Christina could have found the ideal within herself, she would have been able to marry; but as it is, Christina’s religiosity could not let her marry when she felt her soul was in danger. She could not sing her passionate self home in "marriage mirth" (207).

The king in "Maiden-Song" could also represent Christ. Thus in this poem, Christina has shown the ideal situation. All parts of her are satisfied: she is "married to Christ" and, therefore, her passionate, but lower, nature can now wed a physical man. As in "Goblin Market" the whole is
There are several other poems that can be called "sister poems." The two women in both "Cousin Kate" and "Maude Clare" are not sisters, but they face situations that are similar to the one in "Noble Sisters." In both poems animosity exists between two women who love the same man. And in "The Ghost's Petition" two sisters live together after the death of the married sister's husband. Even if a sister marries, this poem shows, marriage and happiness will not last, because only together are the two sisters whole (or in the case of "Maiden-Song," if both parts of the self get what they need). An analysis of these other "sister poems" is not necessary. The five poems already analyzed have shown the range of emotions that Christina Rossetti felt about her sexuality and her decision not to wed either the Church or the flesh-and-blood men, Collinson and Cayley.

In "Goblin Market" Christina chooses purity rather than passionate fulfillment as a means of salvation for a divided conscience, but the reader is left feeling that the salvation was not worth the sacrifice. In "Noble Sisters" the puritanical woman comes to the rescue of her sister, just as Lizzie did to Laura in "Goblin Market"; but in this case the reader sees how strong is the struggle is between the two parts of the self. The sister who is "saved" does not appreciate the rescue. The disintegration of self that
is only threatened in "Noble Sisters" does occur in "Sister Maude." The self is damned as the speaker points out: "You might have spared his soul, sister, / Have spared my soul, your own soul too" (9-10). Christina's decision to break the engagement to Collinson and her rejection of Cayley's proposal caused her a great deal of pain. In "A Triad" the reader sees the choices open for Victorian women like Christina, and sees that happiness cannot come from any of the three situations. Only in "Maiden-Song" does true happiness exist, but this fulfillment occurs only after the marriage of the "ideal woman," the unearthly, perfect woman who Christina could not be. Through her religious training and the Victorian practice of "woman worship," Christina was taught to believe that this "Blessed Damozel" existed. But even before her first exposure to romance and love, Christina's dichotomous nature was set. The struggle between the part of her personality shaped by her father and the control and religiousness she learned from her mother were in place by the time she was eighteen, a struggle she would later portray in her "sister poems."
Dante Gabriel Rossetti's life epitomizes the paradoxical behavior seen in Victorian men. His divided-mindedness shows up in many facets of his life. One lifelong struggle he endured was deciding whether he was a poet or a painter. If he chose to work on a painting, he might suddenly be compelled to write poetry. Early in life Dante Gabriel stated his intentions of being a painter (Doughty 41). Yet when given the chance to study art at "Sass's," a distinguished art school run by Cary, he was rude and insolent and refused to follow the instructor's directions (Doughty 51). Then at the Antique School of the Royal Academy, Dante Gabriel spent many class hours translating Italian poetry. Doughty writes, "Reading and writing seemed to absorb more of his attention than the profession he had chosen as a career" (55). Rossetti's biographers attribute his ambivalence to his dislike for technical training (Doughty 51) and his belief that poetry would lead faster to success and fame (57). But this latter hope was extinguished when after sending his poetry to Leigh Hunt, he was informed that:
If you paint as well as you write, you may be a rich man. . . . But I need hardly tell you that poetry, even the very best--nay, the best, in this respect, is apt to be the worst--is not a thing for a man to live upon while he is in the flesh, however immortal it may render his spirit. (qtd. in Doughty 62)

Rossetti compromised by doing both. Many of his paintings have accompanying poems, while others were inspired by literary works.

Another example of Dante Gabriel's sometimes schizophrenic behavior concerned his religious beliefs. He rejected the formal religion of his youth when he was in his teens (Sonstroem 20) and in fact denied any belief in Christianity. When questioned by his friend Smetham about his religious beliefs, Rossetti wrote in answer:

I had better tell you frankly at once that I have no such faith as you have. . . . Its default in me does not arise from want of natural impulse to believe nor of reflection whether what I should alone call belief in a full sense is possible to me. Thus I know that while discussion on such points with a believer is painful to me, it affords me no counterbalancing profit; and I abstain from it absolutely. (qtd. in Doughty 575)

In essence he declared himself an agnostic. Yet many of
his poems and paintings deal with Christian topics. Some of his religious works include the paintings *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (*The Annunciation*), *Dante's Vision of Rachel and Leah*, *The Passover in the Holy Family*, *Beata Beatrix*, and *St. Cecilia*. In his literary works he made even greater use of religious topics. In fact, he called some of his poems "Songs of the Art Catholic." Because his use of Christian subjects contrasted paradoxically with his religious skepticism, when he died both Christian and agnostic writers associated him with their believers (Doughty 575). William Michael described his brother's religious stance:

His opinions on the subject were highly indefinite; his utterances often negative, sometimes positive; his interior and essential feelings, a mixture of the two, highly coloured by passion and the imagination, hazily distinguishable by himself, and by no means to be neatly ticketed by others. *(Family Letters I, 381-382)*

Typical of many of the Victorians, but in contrast to Christina, Rossetti was pulled on the one hand by his Christian upbringing and on the other by the ideas of Darwinism and atheism. He used Christianity for his art but not for the salvation of his soul, a point that, of course, greatly grieved his mother and sisters.
Rossetti's membership in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood also exemplified his contradictory behavior. The Brotherhood began when two young painters realized that they shared a similar displeasure with the artwork of their time. A talented and extremely diligent painter, Holman Hunt, joined with John Everett Millais, the nineteen-year-old genius of the Royal Academy school, in agreeing that contemporary paintings were "dishonest and uninspired" (Weintraub 29).

Hunt had read John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, which called for "a just representation of natural objects in a scientific spirit." The two young artists sketched out basic goals to "paint from Nature" and agreed that "nothing is done until the model and the painted figure are so much alike that one might almost take the one for the other in a momentary glance."12

Hunt and Millais asked Rossetti to join, and he immediately took charge in forming the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. He was the one to first encourage the use of the term "brotherhood" and suggested that his brother William Michael and James Collinson (who he thought was going to be a brother-in-law) be members. This suggestion was startling because William Michael was not a painter and only a dilettante at poetry, and Collinson was only a mediocre artist. Rossetti almost broke up the Brotherhood even before it began by nominating Christina as a member.
(Weintraub 29); but he relented and two other mediocre artists were added in order to have the magical number seven for this secretive group. With Rossetti taking charge, the Brothers wrote down their creed of "simplicity, sincerity and fidelity to nature" (Weintraub 31). They also preached a philosophy for living but one that they contradicted in action. Canady describes their philosophy:

Basic to it were revulsion against the Victorian scheme of things for vices it undeniably had (materialism, hypocrisy, and social injustice) and idealization of the medieval past for virtues attributed to it (probity, idealism, faith and beneficent rule. (73)

The Brothers were guilty of hypocrisy and social injustice in their treatment of women which will be discussed below. As for materialism, Rossetti’s letters to William and other members of his family often refer to his need for money, which he calls "tin." In a letter dated Monday, August 1854, Rossetti asks his Aunt Charlotte for some money, not the first request, by any means and writes, "I know you must indeed be weary of applications like this from me. . . " (Letters and Memoir 133). Then in a letter dated November 19, 1854, Rossetti reminds William to send money: "Please don’t forget--but I know you won’t--about that tin--as soon and as much as you can manage . . . " (136). Millais too was guilty of materialism when he abandoned the
Brotherhood’s goals because "he could no longer afford to spend a day on details of this kind" (Canady 78).

The Pre-Raphaelites published several articles in their short-lived magazine, The Germ, which called for social realism. William Michael Rossetti stated that in their art they were "to have genuine ideas to express," and "to sympathize with what is heartfelt, direct, and serious in previous art and to exclude what is conventional and rote" (qtd. in Bryant 56). Several of the Pre-Raphaelites used illegitimacy and prostitution as the subjects of paintings. Rossetti dealt with prostitution in his never completed painting Found and in his poem "Jenny," as did Holman Hunt in The Awakening Conscience. Ford Madox Brown, a mentor and close friend of Rossetti’s, dealt with illegitimacy in his painting Take Your Son, Sir! John Everett Millais did several drawings dealing with infidelity. In his article "Two Unfinished Pre-Raphaelite Paintings," Hallman B. Bryant points out that these men chose to work on the social issues of prostitution, illegitimacy, and infidelity because they themselves were guilty of these kinds of problems. The Brothers’ treatment of women in real life contrasted with the benevolent way they treated them in their art.

In regard to the Pre-Raphaelite basic tenet of "truth to nature," Holman Hunt took it seriously and lived by it faithfully, while, right from the start, Rossetti rejected
it (Canaday 74). In The Girlhood of Mary Virgin Rossetti deviated from nature by using his own ideas of how she should look. Sonstroem writes:

[Rossetti] was not very considerate of nature itself, as was Hunt, but rather of the Virgin and her story. His true occupation is seen also in a flat contradiction of Pre-Raphaelite practice: he made the Virgin’s hair gold instead of the brown of the model, his sister Christina. This was following his fantasy, and not nature, for in this way he brought the Virgin closer to the ideal medieval beauty. . . . (35)

Once in a while Rossetti made half-hearted efforts to use realism in his paintings. For example, for the picture Found, Rossetti used a real cow, cart and wall as models (Waugh 64), and for another painting he tried to locate a dying boy to paint from life (Weintraub 64). But these attempts were few, and although he used the term now and then, he was not truly dedicated to "Truth in Nature" (Sonstroem 209).

A fourth example of Rossetti’s contradictions is in his beliefs concerning, first, the separation of body and soul and, second, the role of female sexuality. Sonstroem, in chapter two of Rossetti and the Fair Lady, and Bock, in "Found and 'The Blessed Damozel' as Explorations in Victorian Psychosexuality," point out that in his poetry
Rossetti professes a theory contradictory to the schizophrenic separation of the body and soul that Fowles attributes to the Victorians. Beginning with "The Blessed Damozel" and then in "Heart's Hope," "The Portrait," "Secret Parting," "The Kiss," and "The Lover's Walk," Rossetti describes his lovers in terms that do not separate the spiritual from the physical. Because the soul and body are one, Rossetti professes, woman's sexuality goes hand in hand with her soul. Rossetti adopted the Victorian belief that women were more spiritual than men and led them to salvation, and because he did not separate body and soul, he attached sexuality to the requirements leading to salvation. Sonstroem argues, "The earthly passion of lovers does not . . . merely lead to heaven, but rather is a veritable heavenly state" (22).

Sonstroem argues that although Rossetti professed the theory concerning the unity of body and soul in his poetry, in his own love life he could not completely reject the Victorian attitude that denied women's sexuality, and as various, morally different women came into his life, he began to see women's sexuality as being a damnation for men. Rossetti dealt with this incongruity in several of his poems, including his famous "Jenny" and in the sister poems "Body's Beauty" and "Soul's Beauty." Sonstroem believes that Rossetti never came to grips with the contradiction between the belief system he professed and
the one that society forced on him. What he saw on the streets contradicted what he wanted to believe about women. As did his sister Christina, Rossetti denied himself true love because he could not come to grips with the role female sexuality played in men’s salvation.

Bock writes, "[To Rossetti] the physical and the spiritual are one. . . . While his contemporaries seem bent on etherealizing women, Rossetti insists that it is her physical and even sexual nature which gives her the power to be man’s spiritual guide" (83). In "The Blessed Damozel," a woman who has been dead for ten years pines away for her lover still on earth. She leans over the golden bar of heaven to look at the speaker of the poem. He is in a dream-like state and feels her hair fall about his face as she bends over to look at him. He describes their surrealistic conversation. With the innocence of a child she wishes that her lover would come to heaven so that they can "As onto a stream . . . step down, / And bathe there in God’s sight" (77-78). In the 1850 version of the poem which appeared in The Germ, around her, other couples "Playing at holy games, / Spake, gentle-mouthed among themselves, / Their virginal chaste names" (44-46). But she keeps her distance from them and pines for her lover. She says they will approach the Lady Mary and will ask her to intercede for them. The Virgin will bring them hand in hand to Christ who will agree to let them "but to
be / As then we were,--being as then / At Peace" (130-132). In the 1847 and 1850 versions, the couple wants to be together and be at peace; however, no mention is made of a desire for a physical love. But the physical aspects of the lovers are noticeable in the earlier drafts as well as in the later versions. Sonstroem points out that this woman is much more physical than spiritual. He writes:

The Damozel, though in heaven, has lost none of her humanity in translation, and in fact is a more recognizable human being than [Dante's] Beatrice ever was on earth. She addresses herself to the readers' senses more than Beatrice does, for her physical description (if the term may be used of spirits) is more detailed; we know the color . . . and the appearance of her eyes, the way she wears her hair and her hair's color. We even know the warmth of her bosom, and we cannot imagine Beatrice's breast making any bars warm. (21)

For Rossetti's Beatrice the physical and the spiritual are one. In the latter versions the lovers' sexuality emanates more strongly than in the first. In the version that came out in 1881, instead of "playing at holy games" around the woman, lover's newly met

Spoke ever more among themselves

Their heart-remembered names;
And the souls mounting up to God
Went by her like thin flames. (39-42)
The couples are now lovers. When the speaker and his
damozel approach God, they do not ask for peace as they had
on earth, but instead for a physical, sexual union:

Only to love as once on earth
With love--only, to be
As then awhile, for ever now
Together, I and he. (129-132)

The request changes from a desire to be together in peace,
to a physical, sexual love as they once shared on earth.
As a young man Rossetti was influenced by courtly love. He
was convinced of the Victorian belief that chaste women
aided in the salvation of men. Yet even then he did not
differentiate between the physical and the spiritual.

Several other poems promote Rossetti's philosophy. In
"Heart's Hope" Rossetti continues treating the physical and
spiritual sides of humans as one. He writes:

Lady, I fain would tell how evermore
Thy soul I know not from thy body, nor
Thee from myself, neither our love from God.
(6-8)

In "The Portrait" the speaker prays that he may be allowed
to show the inner beauty of his love in his painting of
her.

O Lord of all compassionate control
O Love! let this my lady's picture glow
Under my hand to praise her name, and show
   Even of her inner self the perfect whole. (1-4)

Then in the second stanza he feels that he has succeeded because "... above the enthroning throat / The mouth's mold testifies of voice and kiss, / The shadowed eyes remember and foresee" (9-11). Therefore, a union exists between spiritual and physical or, as Rossetti puts it, "Her face is made her shrine" (12). Her physical beauty is not separated from her inner beauty. In "Secret Parting" Rossetti writes, "And as she kissed, her mouth became her soul" (8).

In two other poems Rossetti treats the soul just as he does the physical aspects he mentions; he does not fail to include the spiritual parts of his humans when discussing the physical. In "The Kiss" a man describes the different things he is when he is with his lover:

   ... a man
When breast to breast we clung, even I and she.--
   A spirit when her spirit looked through me,--
   A god when all our life-breath met to fan
   Our life-blood... (9-13)

He is stating that when she touched him he was a child, a man when they embraced, a spirit when her spirit looked at him and a god when they kissed. In "The Lover's Walk," Rossetti makes a list of the parts of two lovers: hands
that cling in hand (2), "meeting faces" (3), "mirrored eyes in eyes" (5), and "two souls softly spanned/ with one o’erarching heaven of smiles and sights" (7-8).

Rossetti held this theory of life which does not separate the spiritual and the physical. He believed that women’s sexuality played a part in the salvation of men. Yet he also saw women’s sexuality as the damnation of men. This latter belief came after he and his friends began having romantic and sexual relationships with women. Also, as pointed out in the second chapter, real sexual experiences would not be able to meet Rossetti’s "escapist fantasies" in which the woman would be so perfect that she could satisfy him spiritually as well as physically. Typical of his contradictory and ambivalent nature, Rossetti contradicts the theory he professed and thus epitomizes the Victorians who viewed women as spiritual saviors and saw women’s sexuality as leading to destruction.

As a young man Rossetti saw himself as a Dante in search of a Beatrice. Sonstroem writes, "he [Rossetti] seems to have looked for the reappearance of literary figures in real life..." (5). In 1849 he thought he had found her in Elizabeth "Lizzie" Siddal, a Sheffield cutler’s daughter with a meager education, who was working as a millner’s assistant. Walter Deverell, a friend of Rossetti’s, described to the brothers:
You fellows can't tell what a stupendously beautiful creature I have found. By Jove! she's like a queen, magnificently tall, with a lovely figure, a stately neck, and a face of the most delicate and finished modelling; . . . she has grey eyes and her hair is like dazzling copper.

(Hunt, 198)

Rossetti thought her the answer to his dream of salvation. Throughout her life and even after her death, he painted her repeatedly as pure and godly women such as Beatrice and Mary. Within a year they were engaged to be married. However, Rossetti's role for her as savior did not fit her personality. Sonstroem points out that the real person did not fit the mold her fiance put her in as a heavenly creature visiting earth (43). She "did not possess the refined aristocratic manners of a medieval lady-fair" (43), and she was constantly in poor health. Something else bothered Dante Gabriel about his fiancee: she apparently denied him premarital sexual relations. William Rossetti writes, "[T]his continual association of an engaged couple, while it may have gone beyond the conventional fence line, had nothing in it suspicious or ambiguous or conjectured by anyone to be so" (qtd in Sonstroem 47). His unquenched desire for sexual gratification intensified his conflicting feelings for Lizzie. Sonstroem writes:

Rossetti's strong sexual desires and his equation
of earthly and heavenly love made it easy to see why he would seek sexual consummation as the salvation of his spirit. . . . The disparities, which Rossetti was unwilling to recognize as such, between Lizzie and his ideal madonna threw him into greater vagaries of behavior and uncertainty of purpose. (48)

Other women willing to satisfy him soon came into his life; his relationships with them added to his conflicting feelings about the role women played in his salvation. John Henry Middleton, friend and companion of Rossetti from his Oxford Brotherhood, said, "Rossetti was addicted to loves of the most material kind both before and after his marriage, with women, generally models, without other soul than their beauty. It was remorse at their contrast between his ideal and his real loves that preyed on him and destroyed his mind" (qtd. in Weintraub 107).

In 1854 Holman Hunt brought Annie Miller, his fiancée, to Rossetti to model for him. She was fifteen when Hunt met her, an uneducated teenage prostitute from the London slums. Hunt had first hired her to model for him, but the relationship quickly became a romantic one. It is highly ironic that Hunt dealt with prostitution in The Awakening Conscience. Rossetti seduced her when Hunt went on a two-year sabbatical to the Holy Land. Hunt had given her permission to sit only for Rossetti in his absence,
thinking that Rossetti was too in love with his Lizzie to be a rival for Annie's affections. When Hunt returned, he broke off the engagement and felt that Gabriel had "beguiled the girl away from him" (qtd. in Weintraub 89). But Rossetti was not the only guilty party. She was also seen in the company of several other Pre-Raphaelites during Hunt's absence (Weintraub 89).

Another woman in Dante Gabriel's life was Fanny Cornforth. He met her in 1856. She had been married twice. She was quite large, in fact even described as a giant of a woman, was streetwise, vulgar, easygoing, and prone to thievery of Rossetti's belongings. Dante nicknamed her "Elephant." She seems to have been a prostitute before Rossetti knew her (Sonstroem 64). He portrayed her in Found, and some believe she is the subject of his poem "Jenny." They had a warm relationship for twenty-five years, and when he was dying, some of his last words were said in concern for her.

Rossetti's last great love was Jane Burden. She was a real beauty, tall, dark complexioned, and with a mass of black curly hair. She was seventeen when Rossetti first met her. Although Rossetti was in love with her, she became Mrs. William Morris in 1859 because he was still with Lizzie. Critics feel that Rossetti was no longer in love with Lizzie but felt obligated to stay with her (Weintraub 100; Doughty 369). He wrote a story a few years
later that may be autobiographical. The story, "The Cup of Cold Water," is about a king and his best knight who both fall in love with the forestman's daughter who gives them water to drink. She professes her love to the king, but the king, already engaged to someone else, persuades her to marry the knight. She realizes that if she can't have the king she might as well be married to his best knight. It seems plausible to view Janey as the daughter and Morris, Dante's closest friend, the knight.

Rossetti finally married Lizzie in 1860, but she delivered a stillborn child in April of 1861 and died shortly thereafter on February 11, 1862, from an overdose of laudanum, which she had been taking in large quantities. Rossetti had been gone that evening, possibly with Fanny (Sonstroem 83).

Rossetti soon began taking the drug chloral in an attempt to cure a terrible insomnia that cursed him. He began to have hallucinations, and in June 1872 he unsuccessfully attempted suicide with laudanum. During this tumultuous period, Jane Burden loomed large in his life. In July 1872, Rossetti and William Morris jointly leased Kelmscott Manor in Oxfordshire. Although Morris was seldom in residence, Rossetti lived there until the summer of 1874. Many of Rossetti's paintings of Janey were done at this time. There he portrayed her several times as Beatrice. Critics differ in their belief as to whether the
relationship was sexual. However intimate their relationship was, Rossetti was definitely in love with her and tried to portray her as the ideal woman because of her physical beauty and her "soulful" gaze that made her appear to view things more deeply than others (Sonstroem 128).

Just as Lizzie had failed to meet Rossetti’s expectations of perfection, so did Janey. She was guilty of human frailty. For one thing, she was extremely self-centered (Sonstroem 127). Also, like Lizzie, she suffered from mysterious maladies. Her marriage to Morris was terrible. He was loud and boisterous and mean-tempered. He was violent and was known to throw people and things down stairs. Janey’s illness quite possibly could have been caused by the problems at home (Faxon 59). More importantly than her physical or mental defects, Janey’s marriage hurt Dante Gabriel in that she was separated from him during periods of time (Sonstroem 152). It was during one of their long separations that Rossetti had his first mental breakdown and attempted suicide. A perfect love could not grow in their relationship because Janey’s first duty was to her husband and children. A menage a trois did not exist in Rossetti’s sexual-spiritual heaven.

Rossetti’s letters reveal his feelings for Janey. He wrote on July 30, 1869:

All that concerns you is the all absorbing question with me, as dear Top will not mind my
telling you at this anxious time. The more he loves you, the more he knows that you are too lovely and noble not to be loved: and dear Janey, there are too few things that seem worth expressing as life goes on, for one friend to deny another the poor expression of what is most at his heart. But he is before me in granting this, and there is no need for me to say it. I can never tell you how much I am with you at all times. Absence from your sight is what I have long been used to; and no absence can ever make me so far from you again as your presence did for years. (Rossetti and Morris: Their Correspondence 11)

Then in a letter dated February 4, 1870, he writes:

No one else seems alive at all to me now, and places that are empty of you are empty of all life. . . . You are the noblest and dearest thing that the world has had to show me; and if no lesser loss than the loss of you could have brought me so much bitterness, I would still rather have had this to endure than have missed the fulness of wonder and worship which nothing else could have made known to me. (34)

Then in a letter dated February 18 [?], 1870, he writes:

To be with you and wait on you and read to you is
absolutely the only happiness I can find or conceive in this world, dearest Janey; and when this cannot be, I can hardly now exert myself to move hand or foot for anything. (35)

One can see that woman-worship prevailed in Rossetti's feelings toward Janey. He hoped to find spiritual salvation in her ideal beauty, but, as explained, he found damnation in the form of a mental breakdown. It was a breakdown from which he never completely recovered.

In his poem "Jenny," Rossetti writes about the tension the Victorians felt. Rossetti captures the Victorian male's struggle between the acceptance of his own passion and lust and his desire to keep women pure. Jenny is a prostitute whom the speaker, a young male student tired of studying, has hired for the evening. But she has lain down with her head in his lap and is falling slowly into sleep. The student contemplates Jenny as she lies there with her eyes closed, but it is the speaker whose personality is revealed rather than Jenny's. The speaker gives a dramatic monologue in which he thinks to himself rather than speaks out loud to Jenny. The monologue reveals that he struggles with his desire for sexual gratification and his opposing feelings of compassion for her. Jules Paul Siegel writes about the student:

He is unconsciously caught in the moral dilemma of not being able to resolve the compassion he
feels for Jenny as well as the shame he feels for himself with his equally strong physical and emotional attraction toward her. . . . [H]e enjoys Jenny's womanliness, her physical beauty, but nevertheless feels compassion as well as guilt and shame for her fallen nature. (688)

The way the student-speaker wavers between describing Jenny's physical attributes and talking about her in spiritual terms symbolizes the struggle in his feelings. At first he thinks about her in sexual terms. She is a prostitute, and therefore, she is "Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea" (2). He talks about her kisses and her blue eyes and blond hair (2,10,11). He compares her to a fresh flower and says that looking at her one can't see any outward signs of physical and spiritual damage caused by the hardships of her profession (12-13). Then, in the same stanza, the speaker shocks us with an allusion to the Catholic prayer, the "Hail Mary." He twists the first line of the prayer: "Poor shameful Jenny, full of grace" (18). Already the student makes mention of the fact that Jenny is a woman, and therefore, a born spiritual savior to men. (Siegel points out that the speaker's motive for hiring Jenny is twofold: he wants her for his physical needs, but at the same time he seeks redemption from her for emotional suffering he is encountering (690). Immediately after he alludes to her spirituality, the student again reverts to
sarcastically discussing her profession as he muses jokingly about what she must be daydreaming (20). He wonders who occupies her thoughts and then flippantly adds, "or whose purse may be the lodestar of your reverie?" (21).

Next, the student compares his room with Jenny's and reflects on his life. He says that it wasn't long ago that he often frequented prostitutes and wonders why now he doesn't do so. "What breeds the change, --? / The many aims or the few years?" (39-40). The student has left his books this evening because of a restless feeling that borders on a depression caused by his ambivalent nature (Siegel 690-691). His brain has been "clouded" with thoughts while he tried to study: "The cloud that made it turn and swim / While hour by hour the books grew dim" (44-45).

The speaker looks at Jenny whose blouse is open to her waist. He compares her to a book that is "Half read by lightning in a dream!" (52). Unlike a man who is blinded by lust, the speaker realizes that she is more than a sexual object. He wonders again what she is thinking about and concludes that she is probably just thankful that he is not a brute or a drunk (64-65). The speaker sees her as a person now. He reflects on the abuse she receives daily, from the pale girl who mocks her out of jealousy (72), from the little boys that sneeringly point her out (78), and from the cruel men who use her, "Whose acts are ill and his
speech ill, Who, having used you at his will, / Thrusts you aside . . . " (85-86).

The student makes a bold statement in his remark about proper women's virtue:

And from the pale girl's dumb rebuke,  
Whose ill-clad grace and toil-worn look  
Proclaim the strength that keeps her weak.  

(72-74)

He criticizes the virtuous woman and points out that her strong character makes her weak. This criticism is shocking for Victorian society. Why would he consider the woman weak? The answer may lie in Rossetti's own experience with a virtuous woman at the time he worked on the poem. The fact that the girl is pale and holds back from sexual promiscuity reminds the reader of Lizzie Siddal's refusal to have physical relations with Rossetti. Part of Lizzie's constant ill-health may have been due to the tug of her frustrated desire for physical love and her virtuous conscience. It was not long after his engagement to Lizzie that Rossetti began to look for sexual relations elsewhere. In fact, the inspiration for "Jenny" was apparently Fanny Cornforth (Sonstroem 64). Surely it must have been painful for Lizzie to stay virtuous while her fiance found physical satisfaction with other women.

In the next stanza, the speaker tries to think of Jenny as a prostitute. He wants to share wine with her but
decides to let her rest a little while longer so that again she will be merry (88-95). As he has done throughout his meditation on Jenny, he immediately changes to thinking about her in terms of religious symbols: lilies, roses and thorns appear in the next twenty-four lines. Her hand is like a lily (96); her lot in life is compared to the words from the sermon on the mount: "Behold the lilies of the field, / They toil not neither do they spin" (99-100).

The pattern of describing Jenny in physical terms and then spiritually continues throughout the poem. In the stanza containing lines 229 through 248, the pattern leads the student to contemplate why some women end up like Jenny and thus lose their womanly spiritual superiority: it is man's fault that woman has been brought low, that she is abused physically and emotionally. In this stanza the speaker points out that artists have painted women as religious figures in order to instruct man in God's ways:

Fair shines the gilded aureole  
In which our highest painters place  
Some living woman's simple face  
And the stilled features thus descried  
........................................
With Raffael's, Leonardo's hand  
To show them to men's souls, might stand,  
Whole ages long, the whole world through,  
For preachings of what God can do. (229-232; 236-239)
The speaker asks, "What has man done here? How atone, / Great God, for this which man has done?" Because of men, the "body and soul" of Jenny, and those of other women who share her lot in life, "... must now comply / With lifelong hell" (244-245). In this stanza the reader sees Rossetti’s belief in woman-worship and the destructive pull physical beauty has for men (for it was Eve that tempted Adam); but the reader also sees that Rossetti blames prostitution on man’s baser nature.

Another technique Rossetti uses to show the speaker’s ambivalent feelings towards Jenny is the use of the sister-motif so often found in Christina’s poems. Looking at Jenny as she sleeps, "So young and soft and tired" (172), he realizes that she looks just as do virtuous women:

   Enough to throw one’s thoughts in heaps
   Of doubt and horror,--what to say
   Or think,--this awful secret sway,
   The potter’s power over the clay!
   Of the same lump (it has been said)
   For honour and dishonour made,
   Two sister vessels. Here is one. (177-183)

The student compares Jenny to his cousin Nell. The cousin is a "good" girl because she keeps her honor. The speaker is proud of her (190). She is the typical Victorian woman, "fond of fun," "dress," "change and praise" (184-185). Her virtue is well guarded (191), and
she blossoms under the pride another feels for her (196-197). She appears to fill the role of the Victorian lady quite well. Her love will ripen through years of fertilizing peace (199-200). In comparison to Nell who is "So pure," Jenny is "So fall’n" (206). Jenny is the one he does not want to think too deeply about "Lest shame of [hers] suffice for two" (91).

The speaker is amazed at the randomness of fate. Here are two women whose fates took different paths. He says of chance: "It makes a goblin of the sun" (205). With a deterministic point of view, the speaker points out that Nell’s children may one day need the charity of Jenny’s children; a woman’s fate is in the hands of chance (208-212).

The speaker begins to ponder what it would be like if only a woman could look unerringly into the life of a woman like Jenny. He believes such an incident can never occur because it is life-threatening to a virtuous woman to look at such debasement. The good women will decay by looking at Jenny’s shame (254-255). The student realizes that his ambivalence is "a cipher of man’s changeless sum / Of lust, past, present, and to come" (277-278). It is a riddle (279). The speaker realizes he is a victim of these ambivalent feelings. He feels compassion for her, yet the lust is buried in him "Like a toad within a stone" (281).

Lust has been around since Adam and Eve fell from Paradise
and will be around until the end of time (283-296).

Because the speaker realizes that he feels not only lust for Jenny but also woman-worship, he lets compassion win out this evening. The speaker lets her sleep through the night while he works out his dilemma by studying her. In the end, Jenny's light has been kept alight "Like a wise virgin's all one night!" (314-315).

Parallels between Christina's "Goblin Market" and "Jenny" are quite obvious. The friend who died because she pined away for the fruit of the Goblin men, has a name that echoes Jenny's--Jeanie. The name of Christina's poem reflects Dante Gabriel's line that the mystery of how two fair women can take such different paths "Makes a goblin of the sun." Both works use the sister-motif to describe ambivalent feelings about sexuality. The reason for the similarities is that Christina was aware of "Jenny" when she wrote her poem in 1860. Rossetti had worked on his poem on and off since 1848, and Christina had read it. (It should be noted that Rossetti enlarged the poem after meeting Fanny (Sonstroem 64), and therefore, parts of it can be viewed as inspired by her.)

Dante Gabriel makes a distinction between "Soul's Beauty" and "Body's Beauty" in the sister-sonnets with those names. These works were juxtaposed to show the difference between physical and spiritual beauty. Therefore, they prove that Dante Gabriel was uneasy with
his fusion of body and soul. "Soul's Beauty" is about the pursuit of ideal beauty, as Rossetti explains:

I have written a sonnet to embody the conception—that of beauty the palmgiver; i.e., 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. (qtd. in Doughty 347)

The speaker sees Beauty enthroned like a goddess. Her gaze strikes awe in him, yet he draws it in as simply as his breath. Beauty is life-giving to him like air. He pursues beauty and finds her manifested in a physical lover. But beauty is evasive; he long knows her "by flying hair and fluttering hem" (11). Beauty is worth pursuing and draws "high toned men to itself." By capturing ideal beauty, whether in art or life, man is saved. On the other hand, however, there is physical beauty which leads to the damnation of man. In "Body's Beauty" Rossetti fantasizes about ideal physical beauty. The poem is based on the Rabbinical writings about Lilith who is supposed to have been Adam's first wife. Angered by the separation from Adam, Lilith dons the guise of the serpent, her former lover, and tempts Eve (Richardson 53). In the myth she is supposed to be especially dangerous to children. "Body's Beauty" is the extreme opposite of woman-worship: instead of Rossetti's typical union of physical and spiritual
leading to salvation, the poem shows that "Body's Beauty" "Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave, / Till heart and body and life are in its hold" (7-8). Like "Soul's Beauty," "Body's Beauty" is immortal. She still sits, "young while the earth is old" (6) and destroys her lover's heart with one strangling golden hair (14).

The sister-sonnets reflect Dante Gabriel's experiences with women. He pursued ideal love in Lizzie Siddal and Jane Burden; but in each case, the real did not meet the ideal. Lizzie's personality did not match up to the ideal woman of courtly romance; and as for Janey, while she did have a charming personality, she too did not match up to the ideal because she had black hair rather than the courtly lover's blond (Sonstroem 137); also, as previously mentioned, she suffered from frailties of the mind and body, and then, too, there is the obvious fact of her marriage. If she were to be anybody's spiritual guide, she would be her husband's. It is interesting to note that for "Sibylla Palmifera," the painting that accompanies "Soul's Beauty," Rossetti did not choose either his wife or Jane as the model. Instead, he chose another one of his paramours, Alexa Wilding, whom he also painted as "Lilith," the painting associated with "Body's Beauty." At first, Fanny Cornforth had modeled for Lilith. It is ironic that Lilith was considered dangerous to children and that Rossetti's own child died at birth. Although Rossetti is celebrated
as the poet whose heaven included sexual love, the ideal physical beauty stands in direct opposition to the "Blessed Damozel." The separation of the two types of beauty contradicts Rossetti's philosophy concerning the union of body and soul. He pursued ideal beauty in hopes of salvation, but became entrapped by physical beauty. In "Body's Beauty," he foreshadowed his own destruction.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION TO THE STUDY

The search for an ideal woman who could lead men to salvation played a major part in both Christina Rossetti's and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's lives. The age the artists grew up in was ripe for fermenting a conflict between the ideal and the real in terms of womanhood. The Victorians practiced "woman-worship," treating women as if they were on a higher spiritual plane than their male counterparts. Because of the economic changes occurring in the 1800's and the influence of Darwinism and atheism, men felt a greater need than ever for spiritual guidance and thus looked at their wives for inspiration.

The Rossetti household promoted "woman worship." Mrs. Rossetti provided the religious education for her children; she also fit the role of "angel of the house" in that she had the quiet and reserved personality, while her husband had the passionate and more base nature. And as pointed out, Gabriele Rossetti also stressed the spiritual role of women: "all women were potential Beatrices" (Festa 26).

Christina fought the passionate side of her personality that she inherited from her father and tried to mold herself into the ideal of woman-worship in order to
save her own soul and that of a husband's. But aware of her own human frailty, she questioned whether she was good enough to get into heaven, let alone be spiritual guide to a lover. Twice she rejected marriage proposals because she did not feel capable of guiding the men to heaven. Also, she was pulled by the opposing desires of a spiritual marriage with Christ and a physical one with a man. She could have chosen to join a religious order as did her sister Maria. Or she could have chosen a heterodox marriage as did her mother. Instead she chose neither.

Christina uses the sister motif to describe the conflict raging inside her. An analysis of five of these sister poems reveals Christina's divided-mindedness concerning the role of female sexuality. Most often in the poems, the passionate character ends up chaste either by choice or by force from another more spiritually perfect character. Only in "Maiden-Song" does a physical marriage occur happily by the two more physical sisters. But their marriages can only occur after their unearthly, perfect sister marries the king. The situation this poem represents was not possible to Christina: her passionate, physical nature could not be separated from her soul. And to avoid the disintegration of self that occurs in "Sister Maude," Christina chose spinsterhood for herself.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti also searched for the ideal woman, and his search too ended up fruitless because the
real women he met never matched up to his ideal. He is celebrated as the poet whose heaven consists of perfect human love, a theory manifested in his poems "The Blessed Damozel," "Heart's Hope," "The Portrait," "Secret Parting," "The Kiss," and in "The Lover's Walk." But typical of Rossetti's contradictory ways, he separated the flesh from the spirit, as seen in the poems "Soul's Beauty" and "Body's Beauty." The fusion between sexuality and spirituality does not exist for Rossetti in these poems; instead, he too falls victim of woman worship. "Body's Beauty," describing ideal physical beauty, leads man to damnation, while "Soul's Beauty," in which sexuality does not play a role, leads him to salvation.

Scott J. Mitchell writes, "In his exaltation of a higher love, Rossetti is typical of his century" (50). The Victorian was embarrassed by his sexuality, and this shame is described in "Jenny." In the poem, Rossetti reveals the struggle the Victorian male had in trying to balance his lust and his compassion for a woman whose abuse he is contributing to. He feels shame for what he is doing but realizes that lust has been around since the fall of man. Guilty of woman-worship, the speaker in "Jenny" sees women as spiritual guides and so at times speaks of the prostitute in religious terms. But his lust for her brings him back to viewing her physically.

Rossetti uses the sister-motif to show the two
contradictory roles the Victorians had for women: his spiritual guide and the object of his lust. The nineteenth century saw both "woman-worship" and massive prostitution. Because women like Nell guard their honor well, men have to visit the Jennys of the world. As in "Goblin Market," the poem by Christina that "Jenny" influenced, purity wins out in the end.

Both Rossettis failed to find the perfection they sought in their relationships with members of the opposite sex. Both epitomize the dichotomous nature of the Victorians who separated the physical from the spiritual and saw women as "more like angels than humans" (Houghton 355). Because of her religious beliefs, Christina saw the soul as more real than the body. Dante Gabriel envisioned an ideal love that fused sexuality with spirituality, but saw in reality one leading to destruction and the other to salvation.
Endnotes

1Two of the Victorian critics who have focused on this dichotomous behavior are John Fowles in The French Lieutenant’s Woman, and Walter E. Houghton in The Victorian Frame of Mind.

2This interpretation, with which I concur, is attributed to David Sonstroem in Rossetti and the Fair Lady 20. Sonstroem writes: "[Rossetti] began to think of the beautiful woman as a savior who strove to bring him to the heaven that he associated with her."

3In a letter dated December 3, 1875, Dante Gabriel comments on a "falsetto muscularity" in Christina’s poem "The Lowest Room" and warns her to "exclude from your writings everything so tainted" (Letters and Memoir).

4The following biographical information is derived in part from Christina Rossetti by Lona Mosk Packer, Christina Rossetti by Marya Zaturenska, Rossetti and the Fair Lady by David Sonstroem, Christina Rossetti by Mackenzie Bell.

5The discussion about the Victorian attitude concerning women is derived in part from Houghton’s The Victorian Frame of Mind, 341-394.

6William Michael Rossetti writes in "Memoir" in the Poetical Works volume, "... Christina ... always distrusted herself and her relation to that standard of
Christian duty which she constantly acknowledged and professed" (liv).

7For the origin of the term "sister poems" see Winston Weathers, "Christina Rossetti: The Sisterhood of Self" 82.

8For example, Dorothy Mermin interprets "Goblin Market" as a poem about "... the development of female autonomy in a largely female world" ("Heroic Sisterhood" 107), while Jeanie Watson interprets the poem as one of several poems about sisterly self-sacrifice ("'Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me'").

9Miriam Sagan points out that the lesbian critic Bonnie Zimmerman "sees the love between the sisters as the erotic core of the poem" (qtd. in "Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' and Feminist Literary Criticism" 70).

10William Michael Rossetti describes Fanny Cornforth as "a pre-eminently fine woman, with regular and sweet features, and a mass of the most lovely blonde hair—light-golden of 'harvest yellow' [sic]" (qtd. in Sonstroem 63); and, as Sonstroem points out, pictures of her show her to be a fat woman.

11The following biographical information on Dante Gabriel Rossetti is derived in part from Rossetti and the Fair Lady by David Sonstroem, A Victorian Romantic by Oswald Doughty, Four Rossettis by Stanley Weintraub, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Friends and Enemies by Helen Rossetti Angeli, and Rossetti: His Life and Works by Evelyn Waugh.

12The quotation is attributed to John Everett Millais as reported to William Michael Rossetti by Michael
"The Blessed Damozel," which Dante worked on from 1847 to 1881, now exists in four principal versions. The 1850 version appeared in The Germ, and the last version was published in 1881. All quotations of the poem come from Paull Franklins Baum's edition of the unpublished manuscript text and collations in The Blessed Damozel.
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