

**THE EVOLUTION OF THEMES AND IMAGES IN
CHRISTINA ROSSETTI'S POETRY: FROM PASSION
TO MYSTICISM**

**LA EVOLUCIÓN DE LOS TEMAS E IMÁGENES EN
LA POESÍA DE CHRISTINA ROSSETTI: DE LA
PASIÓN AL MISTICISMO**



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1- Abstract

This work analyses the evolution of the themes and images of Christina Rossetti's poetry in relation to her experience regarding personal aspects like love, erotic passion, motherhood and faith. Through the analysis of a selection of poems we intend to demonstrate that her poetry becomes a vehicle of expression of the evolution of her personal aspirations and anxieties. During her youth, the poetess's works were full of sexual connotations but in her mature stage, the themes of her poems are related to her disillusion regarding romantic love. Her disappointing experiences in love led her to the renunciation of "earthly love" and the acceptance of the death of romantic love; as consequence, her last poems deal with spiritual love and religion, which provided Rossetti a shelter far from human corruption.

Este ensayo examina la evolución de los temas e imágenes de la poesía de Christina Rossetti de acuerdo con su experiencia personal en relación a aspectos como el amor, pasión erótica, maternidad y fe. A través del análisis de la selección de poemas, nosotros tenemos la intención de demostrar que su poesía llegó a ser un vehículo para la expresión de la evolución de sus aspiraciones y ansiedades personales. Durante su juventud, los trabajos de la poeta estaban llenos de connotaciones sexuales pero en su etapa de madurez, los temas de sus poemas están relacionados con sus desilusiones en relación al amor. Sus decepcionantes experiencias en el amor la condujeron a la renuncia del "amor terrenal" y la aceptación de la muerte del amor; como consecuencia, sus últimos poemas tratan sobre amor espiritual y religión, los cuales proporcionaron a Rossetti un refugio lejos de la corrupción humana.

2- Introduction

Christina Rossetti is considered to be one of the best women poets in the history of European literature. As Edmund Gosse says in his critical review:

I desire to pay no more than a just tribute of respect to one of the most perfect poets of the age-... to a writer toward whom we may not unreasonably expect that students of the English literature in the twenty fourth century may look back as the critics of Alexandria did toward Sappho and toward Erinne. (1893: 24)

During her life, Christina Rossetti was considered to be one of the best British poets, but after her death she reached a higher status, according to George Lowther: “She has added abundantly to the treasure of English religious poetry which had been stored by line of poets from Caedmon to Patmore” (1913: 104). Her poetry was pure, intense and fine, she followed the line of tradition regarding form and thought. One of the aims of this essay is to show that the poetess expresses through poetry her own experiences and feelings regarding love in its diverse aspects. Lona Mosk Packer points out in her biography about the poetess that there is: “close organic connection between Christina’s life and her poetry” (1963: 114). Angela Leighton also points out that: “Rossetti is a great love poet, not because she idealizes love beyond the lies and cruelties of the passions, but because she enters those lies and cruelties with total imaginative abandon” (1992: 134). The poetess’ personal experiences led her to evolve from earthly love to divine or spiritual love, but she never gave up expressing her passions and sensuality in her poems, as Kathleen Jones comments: “her [Rossetti’s] poems reveal a natural Sensuality” (1991: 15).

At the first stage of her life, Rossetti published most of her poems in the pre-Raphaelite journal *The Germ*, under the pseudonym Ellen Alleyn. At this age, the poetess wrote her masterpiece “Goblin Market and Other Poems” (1862); with this book Christina was able to enter the poetic scene of the Victorian period. It was a collection of poems that contained her most famous poem, “Goblin Market”, where she expressed intense passion and sexual impulses. At this time Rossetti was a vivid teenager who was trying to find love; she had already rejected her first suitor, James Collinson, in 1848, due to

their differences regarding religious faith. In her poetry she expresses physical desire for the beloved and jealousy when another woman interposes between the lovers.

Rossetti's mature period was hard regarding personal life because she suffered a second breakdown with Charles Bagot Cayley and an illness that weakened her physical health. The poetess wrote *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1866) at this time, it was another collection of poems for children that had less impact than the first one. She also published *Sing-Song* (1872), a sad book which seems to be a farewell from earthly love that the poetess considered not to be pure, real and eternal. The disillusion in love added to the illness that affected her were the trigger to see life with a darker and a more pessimistic view. Her poetry frequently deals with death because of the love betrayals and the loss of the instinct of motherhood.

The poetess managed to recover from the hard illness and wrote her last poetry book, *A Pageant and Other Poems* (1881), which focuses on religious aspects and on the figure of God. Rossetti became aware that real love resided on spirituality and her pains and sufferings were replaced by divine love, the one she considered to be eternal and not corrupted. Religion provided the poetess all the love that men had denied her and for that reason she became really aware of her religious duties. In her poetry, she expresses love for the figure of God and a wish to get next to him in heaven although this fact meant her death.

Rossetti has been compared to several women writers, like for example Elizabeth Barrett Browning. After Browning's death in 1861, Rossetti was seen as Browning's successor. On the one hand, Browning's poetry was considered to be more varied, intellectual and political and, on the other hand, Rossetti's poetry was considered better in lyric, displaying perfect diction, tone and form under the premise of inner simplicity. Dante Gabriel Rossetti quoted a commentary by William Sharp in *The Atlantic Monthly* (June 1895) which shows the difference between both writers: "She is the finest woman-poet since Mrs. Browning, by a long way; and in artless art, if not in intellectual impulse, is greatly Mrs. Browning's superior" (PoetryFoundation.org). Another women writer Rossetti was compared with was Emily Dickinson; their personal lives were similar and their interests were about similar subjects. Another feature they have in common the dark environments where their characters are settled. One of the main differences between

them was that Rossetti followed the line of traditionalism while Dickinson followed the line of individualism. Dickinson's poetry was considered to be more intellectual than Rossetti, with a pure and primitive language, while Rossetti's poetry was considered to be more confined and melodious and she had an unquestionable advantage in pure imagination and in intensity of poetic vision. Rossetti was considered to be better than Dickinson by most of the critics and readers as William Benet points out: "there can be little doubt today that Christina Rossetti was a poet superior as an artist to Elizabeth Barrett Browning" (1933: 5). Rossetti also awoke a great admiration among other women writers, for example Virginia Woolf, who wrote a poem about Rossetti entitled "I Am Christina Rossetti" (1930). In this poem, Woolf praises Rossetti's poetry and talks about the intellectual circle that surrounded Rossetti's family and how she acquired the best of those intellectuals. Woolf explains that Christina was: "a quiet and observant child, with her own way of life already fixed in her head" (1935:238).

3- State of the question

At the present time, a great number of researchers have carried out works about Christina Rossetti; they have focused on different aspects related to the poetess' poetic style, family or the less common are related to her personal life. A relevant author would be Shelley O'Reilly, writer of *The Articulate Heart* (1995), analyzing the warring impulse in the poetry of Christina Rossetti between the necessity of concealing love and the desire to confess it.

Other works about the influence of love in Rossetti's poetry have also been relevant in order to develop this project, among others, Suzanne M. Waldman's *The Demon and The Damsel: Lacanian Dynamics of Desire in the Works of Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (2003). Waldman comments on Rossetti's experience of sexual love, erotic desires and fantasy writings. Another relevant writer is Elizabeth Fleming Buck, with *A comparison of the poetry of Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson* (1933), where she analyzes aspects like the influence of love, life, nature or death in Rossetti's poetry. The different authors, writers and Rossetti's family and friends, who Fleming quotes in the work highlight the poetical expression of sexuality and the poetical change due to Rossetti's personal experiences in love issues.

Some researchers have also studied the dark side of Rossetti's poetry focusing on topics like death, for example in *Christina Rossetti: A Biographical and Critical Study* (1898) by Mackenzie Bell. In this work, Bell deals with aspects related to death and he examines the influence of this aspect on Rossetti's poems. The different facts that are said to have affected Rossetti's poetry are the death of her sister Maria, her mother's last illness and death or Rossetti's own illnesses along her youth. Bell concludes that all those facts affected Rossetti's poetry because her own conception of life also changed.

Most of the works that have been published about Rossetti focus on her religious devotion and on her resulting poetic imagination. Firstly, spiritual symbolism derived from Rossetti's poetry has been tackled by Dinah Roe in *Christina Rossetti's Faithful Imagination* (2007). These aspects that Roe analyzes have been basic in the development of this project, because they provide new possibilities of interpretation of Christina Rossetti's approach to religion and to the figure of God. Roe talks about the expression

of love in Rossetti's poetry, which was influenced by Dante and Petrarch, and about the poetess' evolution towards spiritual topics that deal with eternity, religious authority and spiritual humility.

A similar work can be found some years before, *Christina Rossetti: The Patience of Style* by Constance W. Hassett (2005), who also points out several ideas about the poetess poetic evolution. According to Hassett, Rossetti evolved from an erotic poetry through a period of restraint and, finally, a period of wisdom and nonsense. Hassett also highlights Rossetti's "patience" when writing about certain topics that can be considered to be erotic or even sensual using a language and topics apparently addressed to children.

4- Objectives

This project's main aim is to examine the different stages of Cristina Rossetti's poetry in relation to her life experiences with love. The style and themes were clearly conditioned by the different amorous facts that affected the poetess' personal life as well as by several illnesses that changed Rossetti vision of life.

In the first section, the objective is to analyze Rossetti's juvenile stage through the four chosen poems and to show the ways in which her poetry expresses her passion and sensuality. In "Goblin Market" (1862), the poetess depicts sexual and erotic scenes with the aim to explore her sensual impulses. She also explored jealousy in "Maude Clare" (1862) and expressed her feelings of weariness regarding her impossibility to reach earthly love. In "A Birthday" (1862), Rossetti shows excitement due to the arrival of a beloved and the emotion of being loved. The last poem of this section is "Love from the North" (1862) where the poetess develops an ode to men's beauty and shows her fleshy desires.

In the second section, the purpose is to explore Rossetti's poems composed between late 1860's and 1870's. The four selected poems have different connotations from the ones of her early stage. In "The Prince's Progress" (1866), the poetess shows the shift from love and sexuality towards death and sadness caused by betrayal. In "Light Love" (1866) the poetess expressed the feelings of withdrawal, loneliness, and unfulfilled love. Rossetti rejected earthly love because she considered it to be corrupted and she even wrote a farewell poem called "Good-bye in Fear, Good-bye in Sorrow" (1872). Finally, this section ends with a poem that deals with her renunciation to motherhood: "Baby Lies So Fast Asleep" (1872). This section is marked by the anguish that the poetess felt due to her loneliness and her abandonment of earthly love.

Finally in the third section, the aim is to examine Rossetti's mature poetry and last works, where the poetess seemed to find the solution to her earthly problems and sheltered in divine love. In "In the Bleak Midwinter" (1872), she introduced the topic of salvation. The tone of happiness was recovered due to the fact that the poetess was able to feel love again. "Love Came Down At Christmas" (1881) is a happy poem where Rossetti compared love with Christmas and the arrival of Jesus. Religion acquires great

importance in the poetess' life. In "De Profundis" (1881), Rossetti wished to be in Heaven next to God although it would mean the end of the earthly life. Finally, the last poem of the project is the sixth sonnet of "Monna Innominata" (1881), where the poetess considers God to be the perfect beloved.

5- Methodology

The elaboration of this project started with the reading and studying of Christina Rossetti's poems and with the search for topics and links between the different poems. Apart from the poems, biographical aspects were also studied because the connection between those aspects and the topics of the poems are an essential point in the project's development. Therefore, some libraries such as the ones in University of Huelva, Palos de la Frontera and UNIA were consulted in order to get as much information as possible related to Rossetti.

After that, the work called *Christina Rossetti: A Biographical and Critical Study* (1898) by Mackenzie Bell provided relevant information to understand Rossetti's family and friend relationship. Different bibliographies about symbolism and themes have been studied, finding other important authors such as Dinah Roe and Alison Fiona Chapman. Some articles from scholars such as Paul Elmer More in the *Atlantic Monthly* have been consulted and some doctoral dissertations such as those by Elizabeth Fleming Buck and Nour Alarabi have also been studied. Besides that, Rossetti's poems have been analyzed before and after the research, world classics have also been read in order to draw a better relationship between the poetess and the poetic movements of the age she lived in.

6- Juvenilia Poetry: idealization of “Earthly Love” and sensuality.

Christina Rossetti, a devout Anglican with strong religious convictions, was nonetheless deeply inclined to question certain moral assumptions and to be critical with some convictions of the Victorian age. During adolescence she seems to have been making an effort to find her own identity in a period in which English literature was in transition between post-Romanticism and pre-Raphaelitism, then the poetess tried to search her own identity by acquiring features from both literary movements apart from other ones that influenced her. In her early stages as a poet she was influenced by some literary groups that were taking a relevant place in the European literature. For instance, the second generation of Romantic poets influenced Rossetti as can be seen in her poetry; the focus on nature, on the material and on imagination are some features largely developed in her poems. The most important group was the nascent Pre-Raphaelite movement, which influenced Rossetti’s poetry on the truthfulness, on the dream vision and on the detailed nature that characterize her poetry. Finally, the poetess was also influenced by the Tractarian doctrine that led her to highlight the value of virginity and to employ motifs of baptism or marriage. Those movements or doctrines helped Rossetti to build her own poetic voice when she was growing as a poetess but she developed her own poetic technique in the following years of her life.

The poems we are going to analyze in this section belong to her early stages as a poet. Our aim is to show how her experience with love led her to depict sexual and erotic scenes and to explore topics as temptation, jealousy or beauty in her poems. The poems of this period are full of eroticism as a manifestation of her passionate search of love. With this purpose we have selected for our analysis the following poems, which belong to Christina Rossetti’s first book *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1842): “Goblin Market”, “A Birthday”, “Maude Clare” and “Love from the North”.

“Goblin Market” (1862) is without any doubt her masterpiece. Having reached great popularity from the first moment of its publication, it was printed in her first book *Goblin Market and Other Poems*. Despite the fact that the poem was printed as a text for children and was considered to belong to the Victorian fantasy genre, it offers a multiplicity of interpretations that render it a disturbing text. The poem’s high connotative

component allows us to consider it as a Biblical allegory, as well as an ode to sexual desire. In his editorial comments on the poem, his brother W.M. Rossetti observed:

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 consistently carried out in detail. Still the incidents are such as to be at any rate suggestive, and different minds may be likely to read different messages into them. (1862: 30)

While the poem has the appearance of a conventional fairy tale, containing many elements proper to this genre, as the two allegedly innocent sisters and the goblins as main characters, it also shows traces of eroticism. With this comment, W.M. Rossetti seems to be reproducing the role that Lizzie, the innocent girl, plays in the poem when she rescues her sister Laura from the grip of temptation. Laura ate the tempting fruit offered to her by the goblins, after that, her body became impure. Lizzie, her sister, begged and cried for Laura in an act of pure sisterhood love that pulled out the fruit from Laura's body and saved her. Christina Rossetti's great popularity was in part because her work originated a great controversy among authors and critics of the period; for instance, Caroline Norton, in a review published in *Macmillan's Magazin*, described the ambiguity of the poem:

Is it a fable—or a mere fairy story—or an allegory against the pleasures of sinful love—or what is it? Let us not too rigorously inquire, but accept in all its quaint and pleasant mystery, and quick and musical rhythm—a ballad which children will con with delight. And which riper minds may ponder over, as we do with poems written in a foreign language which we only half understand. (1863: 83)

This commentary is likely to attest the reading public opinion about the poem because it poses certain problems of interpretation to them, those possible interpretations are due to the fact that the poem may contain some symbols that may be interpreted as an expression of the poetess' sexual desires. She managed to publish it in spite of the fact that the public expression of sexuality was not accepted in the Victorian Age; therefore, she created a story full of symbolic allusions, concerning two sisters: Laura, the one who ate the goblin men's sinful fruit, and Lizzie, the prudent girl who remained untouched by

temptation, although both of them had been at first tempted by the goblin men who sold the luscious fruit. Behind “Goblin Market” there are some hidden emotions related to temptation, doubts, and surrender to flesh, as we may infer from the following lines of the poem, where the goblin men are offering some fruit to the sisters and Laura decides to try it:

Laura stretch'd her gleaming neck
Like a rush-imbedded swan
Like a lily from the beck
Like a moonlit poplar branch
Like a vessel at the lunch
When its last restrain is gone (ll.81-86)

In these lines Laura succumbs to temptation: she shakes herself and “stretch’d her gleaming neck/like a rush-imbedded swan” (ll.81-82) in order to reach the sight of the goblin men. Her neck is compared to a long swan’s neck as the swan may be understood as a symbol of sexual desire. In “Leda and the Swan” by William Butler Yeats (1924), for instance, the swan is God Zeus in disguise, who forces Leda to have a sexual encounter with him. The goblin men perform Zeus’ role and they incite Laura to sin. In the following lines Laura is compared to some elements of the natural world like a lily on a cliff edge and a tree branch on a moonlit night. Laura feels that she is ready to experiment with the fruit as the lily is strong enough to resist on the cliff edge and the branch lighted up by the moon that may be a place where to beloveds meet, then Laura’s body starts to feel the ecstasy provoked by the pleasures temptation. In the last two lines Laura cannot restrain her desire anymore and surrenders to temptation trying a mouth-watering bit of the delicious fruit. This fact can be the representation of Laura’s virginity and loss of innocence; women who surrendered to the temptations of love before marriage were considered to be “fallen women” in Victorian Age. These women were not considered to be worthy of a husband and they were condemned to be alone the rest of their lives. In the poem “fallen women” are portrayed thus: “While to this day no grass will grow/where she lies low/I planted daisies there a year ago/that never blow” (ll.158-161), grass and daisies that do not grow being symbols of the infertility of “fallen women”.

Furthermore, the act of eating the fruit is not the only reason for the loss of Laura's purity; she also loses her integrity when she pays the goblin men's fruit with a lock from her hair. She is sexually out of control since she wishes to get the fruit but she has an economic problem: "I have no coin" (l.116), she argues, and "I have no silver either" (l.119). So Laura cannot get the fruit because she cannot pay for it, but her desire for the fruit is so strong that Laura negotiates with the goblin men: "buy from us with a golden curl" (l.125), said the goblin men to Laura, proposing her to pay with a lock. Then "she clipp'd a precious golden lock" (l.126) and accepted the deal. Paying the fruit with her hair implies selling a part of her body in return for the fruit. The act of selling the body recalls prostitution, which in the nineteenth century was considered to be an impure act and women who practiced it were considered to be "fallen women".

In the following lines we can appreciate Laura's reaction once she has managed to get a piece of fruit in her hands and to enjoy it:

She suck'd and suck'd and suck'd the more
Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;
She suck'd until her lips were sore. (ll. 134-136)

Laura's reaction after getting the fruit is very passionate; as tasting it seems to provoke ecstasy, she enjoys the fruit and the scene is full of sexual connotations: "she suck'd and suck'd and suck'd the more" (l.134). The action has an erotic rhythm because the fruit may be interpreted as a phallic symbol; therefore these lines may be interpreted as an allusion to an actual sexual encounter. The poem says that the fruit is "unknown" (l.135) due to Laura's lack of experience in sexual affairs; curiosity and innocence lead Laura to explore and to fantasize with the luscious fruit. Intensity and pleasure pervade this extract where she is tasting the fruit and enjoying it: "she suck'd until her lips were sore" (l.136). She is experiencing an intense moment and she only stops when she cannot go on because her lips are painful. After eating the fruit Laura is confused and she did not know if it was "night or day" (l.139); the abruptness of the experience has confused her mind and her innocence has been lost in this action.

The characters of the poem, Laura and Lizzie, seem to represent the two sides of Christina Rossetti's personality. On the one hand, Laura means passion, temper and

desire; on the other hand, Lizzie's attitude is described as "full of wise" (l.34) because she sticks to her religious beliefs and does not surrender to sin. Lizzie's moral convictions are stronger than her worldly desires and when both sisters were tempted by the Goblin men, Lizzie "veil'd her blushes" (l.35). She did not want the Goblin men to see her face and warned Laura about the risk of paying attention to temptation: "we must not look at Goblin men/we must not buy their fruit" (ll.42-43). Nevertheless, Laura cannot control her desires and decides not to hear her sister. Lizzie is sure on her attitude towards goblin men's temptation because she is mentally stronger than her sister and she ignores every word or act that comes from them.

After having experienced the pleasure of the fruit, Laura gets home and falls sick. This fact can be interpreted as a moral punishment for her uncontrolled reaction with the goblin men. The following lines highlight the moral teaching of Laura's experience: "who should have been a bride/ but who for joys brides hope to have/ fell sick and died" (ll. 313-315). Only brides were allowed to experience this joy, which was forbidden for unmarried girls in Victorian times. Lizzie thinks that Laura is about to die because she is terribly ill, her sexual thirst is not satisfied despite the disease and she orders Lizzie to get more fruit: "give me much and many" (l.365). When Lizzie is back with the fruit, the way in which she pours the fruit juice over Laura is described: she "held her hands and squeez'd their fruits/against her mouth to make her eat" (ll.406-407). The poem acquires a sexual innuendo again. Lizzie spreads the juice over Laura's body and even pushes it against her mouth while the goblin men are witnessing the scene in which the two sisters are playing with the fruit. It seems to be a kind of orgy where each one is taking pleasure in their own way. But Laura continues sick with desire despite having drunk the fruit's juice; in the following lines Lizzie begs God for her sister in an outburst of passion and desperation:

Did you miss me?
Come and kiss me
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
Squeez'd from goblin fruit for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
Eat me, drink me, love me;

Laura make much of me. (ll.464-472)

These lines are an expression of sisters' love; Lizzie feels guilty because she thinks that she could have protected her sister from the goblin men. Lizzie asks herself if her sister would have missed her protection during the encounter with the goblin men: "did you miss me?" (l.464). In the second line Lizzie is imploring Laura to "come and kiss" (l.465) her as Laura's health is deteriorating and desperation leads Lizzie to plead for a pardon because of her sister's sin. Laura needs to throw out the juice of the fruit, otherwise she could die; expelling the corrupting juice from her body means that she will be pure again and will save her life. In the following lines there are some expressions that may contain several erotic connotations as "eat me", "drink me" and "suck my juices" (ll.468/469). These expressions are shocking between sisters because they are more common between beloveds, the sister's relationship can be interpreted as a lesbian incest due to Lizzie's excessive expressions. Dorothy Mermin in her essay *Heroic Sisterhood in "Goblin Market"* (1983) draws attention to the physical contact between the sisters when Laura is rescued by Lizzie: Mermin describes this action as "sheer physical pleasure of strength and freedom" (112), a moment full of passion and ecstasy. The following scene describes how Lizzie carries out the salvation: "clung about her sister/ kiss'd and kiss'd and kiss'd her/ tears once again/ refresh'd her shrunken eyes" (ll.485-489). The sisters lay down together, Lizzie's tears falling over her sister's eyes while she kisses her once and again. In *Victorian Women Poets* (1996), Tess Cosslett argued that sisterhood involved women who "act as a substitute to each other, providing physical and emotional sustenance" (12); in this case, Lizzie provides this lack of physical and emotional sustenance to Laura and saved her corrupted soul. The moral lesson of the poem was not only addressed to children, but also to the 'fallen women' Rossetti was working with, as her biographer Jan Marsh claimed:

It therefore seems very probable that *Goblin Market* was conceived as an engaging but moral tale for the Penitentiary, designed to delight and instruct and pitched midway between the nursery and the study, in order to be accessible both to intelligent children and imaginative adults. (1994: 242)

Christina Rossetti worked as a volunteer in a penitentiary at St Mary Magdalene house of charity, in North London, from 1859 to 1870. Women who had been rejected by society could resort to penitentiaries, which were religious places where they could repent from their mistakes and follow God's way. Apart from being a poetess, Rossetti also imparted moral lessons to the penitents and developed a labor helping 'fallen women'. The objective was to reform these women into reliable housemaids and to make them active members of the Anglican Church. So Rossetti believed that fallen women could be saved and reintegrated into society, instead of remaining in ostracism. The message of the poem may be an encouraging lesson for the "Lauras" or 'fallen women' she had met there. After years trading with their bodies, prostitutes contracted different illnesses that seem to be the referent of Laura's physical discomfort in the poem after having eaten the fruit. Laura's story demonstrates that women could fall and rise because at the end of the poem her purity is restored. Rossetti urges society to embrace reformed women.

This poem is a clear example of Christina Rossetti's youth poetry; it is intense and passionate when she refers to love. She highlights the notion of temptation, which is one of the main points of the poem and the resulting impurity. The restoration of Laura's purity is interpreted as a social and moral message to these women who had fallen into temptation as Laura did. Laura's personality evolves during the poem because at the beginning she was innocent but at the end of the poem she has lost her innocence due to her contact with the goblin men.

Rossetti expressed love in her poetry because she wanted to feel it in her personal life; it seems that during Rossetti's youth, her poetry dealt with aspects of love that the poetess had not already experienced. In "A Birthday" (1862) the poetess alludes to a special day in her life in an extremely happy tone. The title of the poem does not correspond with its content, it seems that the poem deals with a very special birthday but this celebration is not the main theme of the poem. There is something more profound than a repetitive birthday celebration: the arrival of the beloved. The poetic voice expresses excitement because her love is about to arrive and this provokes her heart to beat quickly:

My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a water'd shoot;

My heart is like an apple-tree
Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit
My heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea
My heart is gladder than all these
Because my love is come to me (ll.1-8)

From the beginning of the poem, comparisons to different elements of the natural world confer intense symbolism to the heart. Her heart is paralleled to “a singing bird/“whose nest is in a water’d shoot” (l.2), equating the heart with a bird that symbolizes freedom. Her heart is also compared to a beautiful, big and robust “apple-tree” (l.3); the apples represent love and are the blessing that her beloved would obtain taking care of her heart. It is worth mentioning that apples take here a different connotation from the one they had in “Goblin Market”, where they represented temptation and sin. Her heart is also paralleled to “a rainbow shell” (l.5), this comparison seems to refer to the place from where a rainbow raises. Her heart “paddles in a halcyon sea” (l.6), a Greek myth in which a fantastic bird bred on a floating nest over the winter solstice and it was said that the bird calmed down the waves and winds. All those natural elements have been compared with the heart: “my heart is gladder than all these” (l.7). This excitement is due to the fact that her love has come; the poem’s last lines evince how important this day was for the poet and how it would mark her life: “because the birthday of my life/ is come, my love is come to me” (ll.15-16). Therefore, meeting her beloved is for her like being born again; she seems to have been waiting for one who loved her for the rest of her life and now it seems that she has found him. In her youth, Rossetti’s search for love corresponds with a period where her poetry was jovial and full of hope. In 1848, before publishing this work, she had a marriage proposal by James Collinson, a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement and, although he was a Roman Catholic, he reverted to the Anglican Church because Rossetti had accepted to marry him. After a short period of time, Collinson regretted and reverted to Roman Catholicism again; this fact provoked that the engagement between Rossetti and Collinson broke down. Christina Rossetti’s devotion to the Anglican Church was more powerful than her own desires, therefore she renounced not only to flesh but to her own family. The rupture was very hard for her and all her expectations were suddenly left aside. Rossetti was deeply affected by this rupture and her poetic expression started to adopt a tone of disappointment.

After having focused on Rossetti's expression of her sexuality and her anxiety to find true love, we should also comment the presence of jealousy in her poetry, as in, for instance, "Maude Clare" (1862), a poem in which she referred to a man who had loved her in the past. This poem is built upon a series of dialogues along which we become aware of the feelings of the three poetic voices. A singularity in this poem is the presence of a male figure, "Sir Thomas", who gets married at the beginning of the poem. In the previous poems Rossetti had always made references to male figures who were absent and had no voice. Rossetti's thoughts seem to be uttered through the poetic persona of Maude Clare. Nell is the bride who gets married to Sir Thomas; she is a secondary character and is settled in a background. Another singular aspect of this poem is that Maude and the bride are confronted in several occasions, Maude's physical and social superiority being declared. It seems that Maude tries to call Sir Thomas' attention because she feels somewhat jealous; the situation takes place in the church where Sir Thomas and Nell are getting married:

Out of the church she followed them
With a lofty step and mien:
His bride was like a village maid,
Maude Clare was like a queen. (ll.1-4)

The beginning of the poem describes the moment in which Sir Thomas and Nell are leaving the church after getting married; the poet focuses the attention on Maude and smears Nell. Maude Clare leaves the church with a smart and powerful step "like a queen" (l.4), contrasting her majesty with the humbleness of the bride, who is a "village maid" (l.3). After leaving the church, Sir Thomas' mother approaches Nell and her son and wishes them to have a prosperous and long relationship. The mother mentions that when she got married "thirty years ago" (l.9), she and her husband were nervous but not as pale as Thomas and Nell are now. Then Maude takes the cue again:

My lord was pale with inward strife,
And Nell was pale with pride:
My lord gazed long on pale Maude Clare
Or ever he kissed the bride. (ll.13-16)

Sir Thomas is described as being pale because of an internal conflict (“with inward strife”, l.13), probably for not being sure about the wedding. Maude also refers to Nell as “pale with pride” (l.14) because she has managed to get married with that man, but Maude also suggests that Thomas does not really love Nell: “or ever he kissed the wife” (l.16). In the third line, Thomas “gazed long on” (l.15) Maude Clare and then both Thomas and Nell approach the place where Maude Clare waits. When the couple and Maude are face to face, Maude decides that it is the perfect moment to give her wedding presents to the couple. According to Maude, her present is aimed “to bless the heart” (l.19) and “to bless the marriage-bed”. The gift is Maude’s “half of a golden chain” (l.21) that Thomas had worn in a special day when Maude and he were together picking up lilies; it is a memory from a happy day. The idea that Maude and Thomas are in love with each other outcrops in the poem. As in the previous poem there is a barrier that does not allow the beloveds’ union, being, in that case, Nell, who makes Maude and Thomas’ love impossible. In the last lines of the poem the comparison between Maude and Nell continues:

Yea, though you’re taller by the head,
More wise and much more fair:
I’ll love him till he loves me best,
Me best of all Maude Clare. (ll.45-48)

Nell is the last speaker of the poem and she compares herself with Maude. On the one hand, Nell recognizes Maude’s physical superiority (“you’re taller by the head”, l. 45); and, on the other, she recognizes Maude’s intellectual superiority (“more wise and much more fair”, l.46). Nell balances out all those disadvantages with true love (“I’ll love him till he love me best”, l.47), which will be long-lasting, but the “till” suggests that Nell will have to fight for Thomas’ love because he does not love her currently. The different clues along the poem denote that Sir Thomas misses his past relationship with Maude, who is his real love. The last line of the poem is ambiguous: “me best of all Maude Clare” (l.48) can be interpreted as Nell’s victory because she is obviously the bride. But it can also be interpreted as a kind of spell on the couple because the last words of the poem are “Maude Clare”. Maude is the character who catches the attention of the reader because even the poem has her name, the focus of the poem should be on the groom and the bride because the poem is set on their wedding but the focus is on Maude most of the time.

There are different elements that have connotations of jealousy: focusing the attention on Maude, paying no heed to the couple's love and exalting Maude's character over Nell's one. Christina Rossetti focuses on Maude at the end of the poem because the poetess has created Maude's character as her own alter-ego, both Rossetti and Maude have let love go but the character feels that she is a great woman from a physical and intellectual point of view and she possesses the tools to overcome the rupture and even attending to her former beloved wedding. In William Rossetti's preface to "Maude Clare", he admits that this poem is autobiographical:

It appears to me that my sister's main object in delineating Maude was to exhibit what she regarded as defects in her own character, and in the attitude towards her social circle. (1963: 57)

Both Christina Rossetti and Maude Clare share some aspects and have common feelings, for example both Rossetti and Maude have not managed to find their beloveds and both are waiting for them. The poetess went further with the character and her jealousy, because in another poem called "Sister Maude", Maude is betrayed by one of her sisters. The sister could not find love and she decided to tell her father about Maude's romantic story with a boy. This boy was killed presumably by someone related to the father, after that, Maude decides to kill her sister because she considered romantic love more important than fraternal love.

Christina Rossetti's poetry is full of passion; her own vision and description of love, temptation, innocence, youth or jealousy make her poetry unique. Apart from being jealous because she could not manage to find a man, the poetess describes men's physical qualities and fantasizes with them. In some of her poems, these physical descriptions can be interpreted as a kind of cult to the beauty of the male figure. In "Love from the North" Rossetti describes her perfect beloved in detail and she expresses through the voice of a bride her wish to be loved. The poem was published in 1862 but it was written some years before on 1856; the title suggests the influence of *Northern Mythologies*, which were very popular during the 1850s. The poem starts with a bride talking about her beloved and describing their relationship:

I had a love in a soft south land,

Beloved thro' April far in May;
He waited on my lightest breath,
And never dares to say me nay. (ll.1-4)

The beloved is said to be “in a soft south land” (l.1), this location with the south may have a link with the novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* by Charles Robert Maturin (1820). According to Katherine McGowran it is one of Rossetti’s favorite novels. In it, the Englishman John Melmoth researches about his family ancestors and he finds that their ancestors belonged to the Spanish nobility. The nobles are settled in a south land in Melmoth’s work, therefore Christina Rossetti sets the beloved of her poem in a noble southland because she wants him to belong to a high social class. The second line of the poem suggests that the bride is missing her beloved so much that months are longer and longer without him. This idea of separated beloveds appears frequently in Rossetti’s poetry due to the Romantic ideals of the age. Platonic love was considered to be a real expression of love because the lovers did not have a physical relationship, but an emotional one that was considered to be sincere and pure. The third line shows that the man is very attentive to her, she is comforted so quickly by him that on her “lightest breath” (l.3) he tries to improve his beloved uncomfortable problem. In the fourth line it is said that he never says “nay” to his beloved’s requests because he wants to please her petitions. The following line has a threatening tone: “the wedding hour was come” (l.9). It sounds like an ominous foreboding which recalls a kind of Last Judgement. The bride shows her nerves and insecurities: “I pacing balanced in my thoughts” (l.11) and “It’s quite too late to think of nay” (l.12). While the wedding is taking place, she has some doubts, but it is too late to back out. During the ceremony the bride was asked if she wanted to marry and when she is about to answer, a voice from the background says “nay” (l.16). Both the bride and the groom are frightened but she suddenly stands up with courage and pride and says: “and if I answer yea, fair Sir” (l.19). The bride has faced her adversary and her speech goes on with the description of her beloved’s physical qualities:

He was a strong man from the north
Light-locked, with eyes of dangerous gray
(. . .)
He took me in his strong white arms,
He bore me on his horse away. (ll. 21-22, 25-26)

Along the description she also suggests that he is brave and his look is deep; it can be interpreted as a cult to the beauty and an arrogant behavior by the bride but she seems to be proud when she highlights her beloved qualities in front of the wedding guests. The following line describes that he can take and bring her wherever he wants with his powerful arms: “in his strong white arms” (l.25), this notion of the strong man is emphasized several times. It seems that the beloved can protect and bring the bride to the safest places where she will not be hurt: “he bore me on his horse away” (l.26), she is completely sure about her feelings and accepts to be with him as if it was a challenge. Christina Rossetti seems to reflect her anxieties and aspirations in the bride while the groom is described as a brave and attractive man who can protect her from others. The poetess fantasizes imagining and describing a perfect beloved in her poems as he does not appear in her real life.

Some symbols of Christina Rossetti’s poetry show that the poetess expresses desire, feelings related to passion or even erotic ecstasy. Rossetti expresses love in her poetry and sexual connotations are highly present in some of her early poems, the lack of experience in personal life led her to explore and experiment with those elements in her poetry. The poetess expresses a great desire for love to arrive and she expresses jealousy when a suitor does not satisfy her love expectations. A singular feature of Rossetti’s poetry is the introduction of an element that keeps the beloveds separated. These barriers are different elements that interpose between the female characters and their beloveds, as it has been seen in the poems above; in her personal life religion is the element between the poetess and James Collinson.

7- Mature Poetry: abandonment and farewell from love and motherhood feelings.

This second section deals with Christina Rossetti's mature poems and aims at portraying her evolution as regards the expression of love in her poems; the poetess turns from the notion of love into the notion of death because she loses her hopes of finding a beloved due to a new love breakdown. After her breakdown with James Collinson, in 1862 she felt deeply in love with an English linguist called Charles Bagot Cayley with whom she began her romance around 1862 but he was also refused by Rossetti in the autumn of 1866. He was not a man of faith and this lack of religious firmness was not compatible with Rossetti's spiritual aspirations. This new breakdown confirmed that love was bound to be disappointing and happiness was not to be searched in amorous relationships. According to Marya Zaturenska in her *Selected Poems of Christina Rossetti*, "Rossetti's love affair with Cayley was a failure not because of their lack of love but because of other circumstantial reasons" (1970: 54). In that case, the circumstantial reasons allude to a religious barrier that does not allow Rossetti to fully accept her suitor. Rossetti herself said in a letter from September 1866 referring to her rupture with Cayley, "of course I'm not merely the happier for what has occurred, but I gain much in knowing" (1930: 70). The poetess points out that she was wiser after the rupture because she noticed that real love does not reside on Earth and she rejected Earthly love. She had had two marriage proposals but her suitors seemed to have not possessed the qualities to marry her as she seemed to be looking for her twin soul, a man similar to her in personality, but above all, in her way to live faith. She felt that love had turned its back on her and thought that her beloved would never appear. Her disillusion in love affected her poetry and both poetic and personal passion which faded step by step because she did not know where love really lies. Georgina Battiscombe identifies a conflict in Rossetti's life:

The sadness characteristic of her poetry has causes deeper than these external troubles. Outwardly, Christina Rossetti's life was an uneventful one; inwardly, it was a continual conflict. A conflict between the two sides of our nature is the common experience of every human being. For Christina, however, the struggle was an unusually painful one, partly because being peculiarly gifted she was also peculiarly sensitive, partly

because in her two cultural streams met and mingled without becoming a unity (1981: 228)

The poetess had left back her youth innocence because personal experiences had made her wiser and as a consequence the subjects of her poems also evolved into new ones. An idealized conception of love and several betrayals in her relationships may have been the reasons that led the poetess to forget and reject other suitors. During Rossetti's youth she seems to have created high expectations about love which were never achieved and these delusive hopes drove her to more melancholic and tragic themes in her poetry. As Alison F. Chapman in her work *Christina Rossetti and the Aesthetics of the Feminine*, in a quote from William Michael Rossetti in his memoirs: "Christina was extremely reticent in all matters in which her affections were deeply engaged" (1995: 144). In addition to the hard search for love, it has to be added that she was not physically well because, throughout most of her life, she was a sick woman. In this second section we will focus on Christina Rossetti's mature poems, works composed between late 1860s and 1870s. The main aim of this section is to analyze how the poetess expresses: her frustration regarding her expectations about love, the feeling of betrayal, her response to that feeling of betrayal and the shift from the notion of love to the death one.

The poems we have selected in order to provide a view of Rossetti's poetic evolution as a response to her intimate mood belong to two different books: "The Prince's Progress" and "Light Love", included in *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1866); "Good-bye in Fear, Good-bye in Sorrow" and "Baby Lies So Fast Asleep", which appeared in *Sing-Song* (1872). Symbols of death, and a tone of sadness and melancholy govern most of Rossetti's poetry at this stage.

Christina Rossetti's poetry evolved from a vivid tone into a darker and unhappy mood; the poetess had explored sexuality in her early stage and now she became interested in subjects related to death and loss. She printed *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* with the help of her brother William Michael Rossetti, who helped her with a beautiful cover and illustrations in order to create a commercial book which attracted a wider audience. Critics embraced it positively because this work was not as controversial as her first publication had been and the repercussion in the literary circle was lighter than what she and her brother had expected. In a letter from Christina to her brother in March 1865, she said: "my Prince lacks the special felicity (!) of my Goblins" (Rossetti, 1865:

75). She recognized that her work had changed not in style but in the tone of happiness that characterized her first work. “The Prince’s Progress” is considered to be her second best work, and it is similar to “Goblin Market” in length, but its poems deal with love from a different perspective. This change on perspective is one of the most important features to take into account in the evolution of Rossetti’s self and poetry. She began to consider earthly love as hollow and futile, and the subject of death predominated in her poems as a barrier that separates the lovers. Nesca Robb commented on Rossetti’s “Four in Exile” that “death mars all and is yet powerless to destroy the complicated web of human affections” (1948: 107).

Both poems “Goblin Market” and “The Prince’s Progress” are the main showpieces of her first two works and they are also considered to be Rossetti’s critique to a patriarchal society where women were seen as mere objects. Rossetti’s messages of liberation and revelation seem to be aimed at banishing the Romantic idea of women as the angels in the house. This notion had been introduced by Coventry Patmore’s poem “Angels in the House” (1854) and had become so popular that it is possibly the most popular term to describe women in the Victorian era. Women were described in the poem as domestic beings who could not leave the house; they were expected to be naive and their main duty was to satisfy, to respect and to obey their husbands. According to Elaine Showalter, “suffocation of family life, boredom, and patriarchal protectivism gradually destroys women’s capacity to dream, to work, or to act” (64:1985). Christina Rossetti seems to be denouncing patriarchal conceptions and encouraging not only women and society to vindicate equality. Eriko Takada points out that: “what Christina Rossetti is trying to convey to us is that Victorian society has been totally centered on men, while women tend to be vastly marginalized” (1999: 33). The poetess does not only vindicate her own work, but women’s work in the Victorian age. Edna Kotin Charles writes in her work *Christina Rossetti: Critical Perspectives 1862-1982* (1985):

Today there is heightened interest in the works of the woman who, new critical perspectives reveal, may well have conducted a fierce inner struggle against assuming the role of a middle-class Victorian woman. (11:1985)

Back to the poem, “The Prince’s Progress” relates the story of a Prince who travels in search of the princess’ castle. Some obstacles make his way complicate and, when he

finally reaches the castle, it is too late for love. This poem has similarities with “The Sleeping Beauty” by Alfred Lord Tennyson (1830), where a princess bride is waiting for her beloved who does not appear. “The Prince’s Progress” is Christina’s version of “The Sleeping Beauty”, with the difference that her work is much more dramatic than Tennyson’s. This poem shows the transition from her first poetic stage to a more mature period where the expression of the loving feeling and romantic sentimentalism of the previous poems have disappeared. At the beginning of “The Prince’s Progress”, the bride is waiting for her Prince:

The long hours go and come and go

The bride she sleepeth, waketh, sleppeth,

Waiting for one whose coming is slow:--

Hark! The bride weepeth (ll.3-6)

The bride is bored waiting for her beloved to arrive; hours are very long and the waiting is being everlasting: “the long hours go and come and go” (l.3) and “the bride sleepeth, wakeeth, sleepeth” (l.4). She is hopeless because she had been waiting for a long time for her beloved to arrive: “waiting for one whose coming is slow” (l.5), the bride is in despair; the last line of the first sestet ends with a gesture of boredom and lament: “Hark! The bride weepeth” (l.6). She was alone and begged as in an exasperating plea: “how long shall I wait” (l.7). In the following line the reason of the bride’s impatience is unveiled: “Till the strong Prince comes, who must come in time” (l.8). Her beloved is delaying her arrival to the castle because he is having some distractions in his way: “there is a mountain to climb” (l.9) or “a river to ford” (l.10). Then, the prince was supposed to be overcoming obstacles to reach the princess and join her in marriage. This poem seems to be a record of Rossetti’s own experience regarding love: both the poetess and the princess have been waiting for love to come but there has always been something that has gone wrong and, although they have been waiting for a long time, love remained aloof to them. In the following lines of the poem, Rossetti changes her response to unfulfilled love and adopts a different attitude.

The prince is “in his world-end palace” (l.13), he is in a far land where the princess cannot reach him. He hears a “voice of doom” (l.19), a voice from the great beyond that

tells him about her princess who is waiting for him. A feeling of remorse possesses the prince and then “a hundred of sad voices piped on the gale” (l.38) and said:

Time is short, life is short (. . .)

Life is sweet, love is sweet, use to-day while you may;

Love is sweet, and to-morrow may fail;

Love is sweet use to-day (ll.39, 41-43)

The chorus of voices reprehend the prince because he is wasting his time in his castle instead of going to find true love. The voices talk about the brevity of life: “time is short, life is short” (l.39), and about the sweetness and importance of love: “use to-day while you may” (l.41). The prince is persuaded by the sad voices and decides to leave his castle; the way to the princess’ castle is long and full of temptation and the prince has to overcome them as a proof of true love. The first obstacle is “a wave-haired milkmaid” (l.58) that demands a payment for the prince swig of milk. The milkmaid demands him to “give the full moon” (l.80) to her while both are “sit under this apple tree” (l.81). The religious symbolism of the apple tree is temptation and sin, the forbidden fruit is in this case a sexual encounter with a woman who is not her beloved. The prince’s reaction is described in these lines:

So he stretched his length in the apple tree shade,

Lay and laughed and talked to the maid,

Who twisted her hair in a cunning braid

And writhed it shining in serpent coils,

And held him a day and night fast laid

In her subtle toils. (ll.91-96)

The prince accepted the deal: “stretched his length in the apple tree shade” (l.91). He succumbed to temptation and they “lay and laughed” (l.92) together. When the prince is enjoying the situation, he is not thinking on her bride princess who is longing him in

her castle, as Mary Arseneau points out in her essay *Pilgrimage and Postponement* (1988): “clearly the prince is forgetting his primary purpose here” (283). The prince listens to his own desires and forgets his beloved. The milkmaid’s hair is described as coiling like a serpent when she cunningly touches her braids, recalling Medusa, a female monster of the Greek mythology who had venomous snakes instead of hair, who turned into stone those men who dared to look at her. This diabolic depiction is a representation of an evil who is tempting the prince, who finally spends the night with the milkmaid: she “held him a day and night fast laid” (l.95). The poem does not describe anything else until the clarity of the day comes: “the owl left off his sober play” (l.98). There are some evidences in the poem that suggest a sexual encounter between the prince and the milkmaid. The forbidden fruit had been tasted by the prince. As it has been commented on the analysis of the “Goblin Market”, Rossetti feels temptation to be such a compelling emotion that she makes both Laura and the prince surrender to their carnal desires.

Christina Rossetti feels disappointed regarding love and her happiness and inquisitiveness about men and love seem to have disappeared in this stage of her career as a poet, and the subjects of her poems have become darker. According to James Sambrook in *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Collection of Critical Essays*: “earthly love has become a profound somnambulism and where love is defined by the absence of the beloved” (1974: 106). She seems to believe that men represent false ideals and that their main goal is physical pleasure. The prince embodies this conception of men, the poetess portrays him as lazy, arrogant and shallow, in contrast to the paragon of princes in fairy tales, who appear as brave and fearless in the pursuit of their goals.

The setting of the poem changes when the prince resumes his way: “a lifeless land, a loveless land” (l.133). The prince’s sin has not only corrupted his soul but the whole land around him in such a way that: “only scorpions jerked in the sand” (l.135). The way he is due to walk in search of the castle has turned rigorous and hostile as a punishment for his disloyalty; the prince has been condemned to roam through a land where “no man cometh or goeth” (l.142). The prince continues his way, overcoming mountains and valleys until he finally arrives the princess’ castle, where a tragedy has taken place:

Too late for love, too late for joy,

Too late, too late!

You loitered on the road too long,

You trifled at the gate:

The enchanted dove upon her branch

Died without a mate;

The enchanted princess in her tower

Slept, died, behind the gate;

Her heart was starving all this while

You made it wait. (ll.475-484)

The message of these lines is devastating because the princess' heart could not wait any more for her beloved and she dies because of the prince's delay: it is now "too late for love" (l.475). The last sentence in the poem can be interpreted as Rossetti's expression of her personal experience with love: "You made it wait" (l.484). Lona Parker comments in her work *Christina Rossetti* (1963), the thematic import of the poem: "symbolically the death of the princess represents the renunciation of love, a theme to which Christina was committed." (202). The poem therefore deals with love's delay and the resulting death of the heart as a consequence of the long wait. According to Parker, in poems like "The Prince's Progress" the notion of death "has been a reminder of her many vain longings and sights for the man in her youth" (1963: 364). Her personal renunciation of love appears in her poetry through the absence of her previous and recurrent references to sensuality and desire as well as through the substitution of the happy tone for mournful sadness and resignation. As Margaret Sawtell points out in her work *Christina Rossetti: her life and religion* (1995: 24), her poetry "runs through the expectations of early death—dividing them into the thoughts of the parting of earthly lovers".

The last sixty lines of the poem were written in 1861, four years after the poem was composed and there is a change of perspective from the prince towards the princess. Until this point, the poem has focused on the prince, and the poetess has created a dreamlike atmosphere often turned into nightmare. The narrative resource changes and the last sixty lines set the focus on the princess and they emphasize on the beloved's

feeling of having been betrayed. The theme of the poem recalls Tennyson's "Mariana" and "The Lady of Shalott", as both poems relate the story of a woman who is waiting for her beloved in a huge castle where everything is ready for the celebration of the beloved's arrival. The following lines narrate the death of love and describe the princess' acceptance of death:

We never heard her speak in haste;

Her tones were sweet,

And modulated just so much

As it was meet:

Her heart sat silent through the noise

And concourse of the streets (ll. 515-520)

Although she is serene, facing solitude, she experiences pain in her soul; her mood is described as "sweet" (l. 516) or "modulated" (l. 517) and there are no signs of anxiety or exasperation: "her heart sat silent through the noise" (l. 519). She remains completely passive: "no hurry in her hands" (l. 521), "no hurry in her feet" (l. 522). William Morris, in his work *The Defense of Guenevere, and Other Poems* (1858), pointed out that the princess' passivity recalls Tennyson's Mariana, a woman who also waits for her beloved. Both authors aimed to idealize their female characters by providing them with a strong personality and a motionless reaction to their beloved's neglect and the women's subsequent deaths. Men are portrayed as inefficient characters whose lack of interest in love issues cause their beloveds' deaths.

Rossetti seems to have renounced to love's demands because they imply great emotional pain; her personal experiences have destroyed her expectations about love. In *The Demon and the Damozel* (2008), Suzanne M. Waldman writes that "the act of turning her experiences into poetry enabled Rossetti to achieve desperately needed distance from her difficult discoveries about the role of the love in her life" (58). Her youth had passed without bringing some of its treasures to her, an unavoidable situation that would mark her life. The poetess thought that love had played with her. When she had been about to

graze love, it suddenly disappeared and left her heartbroken. These feeling of withdrawal, loneliness, and unfulfilled love pervade in “Light Love”, which was published in 1856 but written in 1866. The title is revealing, as the adjective “light” expresses the way in which Rossetti considered that love had treated her, not having completely satisfied her aspirations. Sawtells mentions that the poetess adopted an attitude of “quiet joy” (1955: 22), he suggests that Rossetti did not completely enjoyed with the amorous pleasures and therefore the poetess felt that love had not fully appeared in her personal life. This poem tells the story of a woman who had been seduced and abandoned by her beloved after having given birth to an illegitimate baby.

The poem consists on a series of dialogues between a woman and her beloved who is about to left her; the man does not seem to be compassionate with the woman and he even advices her to find another love: “but hast thou ne’er another love” (l.23). He offends the woman with this proposal as he is assuming her condition of fallen woman and now, he aspires to find another woman with no past sins to marry her. The affront continues when he suggests that the woman sells her body for money and uses love “to build thy [her] nest of silk and gold” (l.25). The woman is holding her baby on her knees and there is no answer to the man’s words, but she sends a message to the reader: “even let it go, the love that harms” (l.38). Her advice is to let love go and avoid the pain it causes. In the next lines the man compares the woman with his new lover:

Ripe-blooming she, as thou forlorn,

Ripe-blooming she, my rose, my peach;

She woos me day and night:

I watch her tremble in my reach. (ll. 45-48)

His new lover is described from an erotic perspective as “ripe-blooming” (l.45) and refers to his new love with a fruit metaphor to allude to her as sexually appealing: “my rose, my peach” (l.46); and he emphasizes the fact the new lover draws his attention “day and night” (l.47). He even describes the new pleasures they enjoy together: “I watch her tremble in my reach” (l.48) and “she reddens” (l.49). His description of his new lover’s qualities seems to be aimed at causing emotional suffering to his former lover. The woman speaks again, but in this occasion she gives her point of view: “thou leavest

love, true love behind” (l.56). She claims that his new beloved is not a true one: “go, seek in haste: but wilt thou find?” (l.58). Then he seems to forget her feelings and tells her former beloved what he should do:

Pluck up, enjoy—yea, trample too

Alas for her, poor faded rose,

Alas for her her, like me,

Cast down and trampled in the snows (ll.60-63)

The woman insinuates that he is a womanizer who does not pursue real love but her own and personal pleasure: “alas for her her, like me” (l.62). In line 63 she claims that her ex-beloved’s love moves from a woman to another one because his love is not pure. Christina Rossetti’s description of love in this poem is full of pain, the female character is being humiliated and abandoned by her husband. The poetess focuses on love’s betrayal by portraying a sexualized new lover; the man is portrayed as a traitor who is going to enjoy the new love pleasures while the old-love has to take care of a bastard baby. This dark vision of love governs in most of the poems of this stage of life due to her personal experiences in love and some physical problems that were deteriorating her health.

Rossetti had been an ill woman almost all her life but the situation got worse between 1870 and 1872. In April 1871, she was apparently near death with fever, exhaustion, heart palpitations, occasional loss of consciousness and other symptoms that were caused by exophthalmic bronchocele (or Dr. Graves's Disease). Although Rossetti overcame this crisis, the threat of a relapse always remained; moreover, the crisis left her appearance permanently altered and her heart weakened. W. M. Rossetti in his memoirs mentions that “Christina was an almost constant and often a sadly-smitten invalid, seeing at times the countenance of Death very close to her own” (2000:50).

This hard personal experience affected her poetry because a tone of sorrow and sadness appear in most of her poems, as in those contained in *Sing-Song* (1872), a book written after having recovered from her illness. It is a nursery rhyme book as *Goblin Market and Other Poems*. Dorothy Margaret Stuart considers this collection of poems to

be “self-conscious, sophisticated, neither childish nor likely to be understood by child” (1971: 85). Paul Elmer More points out that the real cause of Christina's unfulfilled love life lies in her mind's inclination: “some inner necessity of sorrow and resignation [...] drew her back in both cases, some perception that the real treasure of her heart lay not in this world” (1904: 817). “Good-bye in Fear, Good-bye in Sorrow” seems to be the poetess’ farewell to love because she had denied herself what she had desperately longed for, as Antony Harrison points out, it shows her realization of “earthly love's inadequacy and the impossibility of achieving genuine fulfillment through it” (1988: 56). In the first quartet we read:

Goodbye in fear, goodbye in sorrow,

Goodbye, and all in vain,

Never to meet again, my dear –

Never to part again. (ll. 1-4)

The poetess uses “good-bye” twice in the title, three more times at the beginning of the first quartet and other three times at the beginning of the second quartet: the message is clear and conclusive. Apart from the emphasis on the farewell, some expressions related to the poetess’ feelings are introduced. She feels “fear” and “sorrow” (l.1), and she finds that her efforts to find love have been “all in vain” (l.2). The third and fourth lines are repeated in both quartets so as to show her determination not to fall again in this search: “never to meet again” (l.3) and “never to part again” (l.4). The addressee is described as “my dear” (l.3) as a reference to love in general terms. The second quartet goes on thus:

Goodbye today, goodbye tomorrow,

Goodbye till earth shall wane,

Never to meet again, my dear –

Never to part again. (ll.5-8)

In this quartet the words that accompany the farewell (“today” and “tomorrow”, l.5), do not introduce modality like in the previous one (“in fear”, “in sorrow”, l. 1), but temporality, underlining the poetess’ determination to abandon her search of love. The sixth line insists on that idea through the hyperbolic expression “till earth shall wane” (l.6). Christina Rossetti was weary of expecting earthly love and of suffering its thorns and for that reason she seems to have decided that romantic issues should disappear from both her poetry and her personal life. As Betty S. Flowers comments: "disappointments experienced in those earthy love relationships ostensibly set up as 'opposites' to the heavenly one" (1987: 169).

The poetess definitively abandons earthly love and, with it, other feelings conventionally related to womanhood also died. In “Sing-Song”, for instance, there are several poems where babies who are on the verge of death appear. There is no clue that could attest to Rossetti’s longing for a child, but her alleged failure as a wife seems in occasions to be related to a feeling of failure as a mother. In her poem “My Baby Has a Mottled Fist” (1872), the poetess manifests strong tenderness towards a baby but when the poetess renounces earthly love, she also renounces motherhood. For instance, her poem “Baby Lies So Fast Asleep” (1872), she focuses on the relationship between a mother and her baby. The poem starts alluding to the apparent peaceful view of a seemingly sleeping baby: “Baby lies so fast asleep”; however, the readers have to accept the inevitable truth, as the baby is actually dead. The poetic voice wonders if a baby can go to heaven: “will the angels clad in white/ fly from heaven to take her?” (ll.3-4). The notion of death as a barrier to separate the beloved person, in this case a dying baby from her mother, is recurrent in Rossetti’s poetry. In the second quartet of the poem the speaker manifests that although she loves the baby, she has to let it go as a metaphor of the poetess’ renunciation to motherhood:

Baby lies so fast asleep

That no pain can grieve her:

Put a snowdrop in her hand,

Kiss her once and leave her. (ll. 5-8)

The “snowdrop in her hand” (l.7) represents the baby’s innocence but it could also represent the Rossetti’s melting hopes about motherhood that have turned into impossible due to her Earthly love’s renounce. The final line is the last good-bye, the painful acceptance of the farewell. Christina Rossetti seems to express that her aspirations regarding motherhood have quenched and she does not desperately wish to become a mother. She had a happy childhood with her mother, Frances Rossetti, who educated her, but she had not succeeded in following that model and building a family.

In conclusion, Christina Rossetti’s mature poems show a pessimistic view of love, and death becomes a recurrent theme. As it has been commented, the poetess felt that love had not fulfilled her personal aspirations and she let that disillusion transform her verse. The pain that love had caused in Rossetti’s heart seems to have been intense and the poetess’ poetic response to it was to take up death as a recurrent subject. Her emotional reaction to frustration at this point of her life seems to be more drastic than in her youth, when this disappointment used to be symbolized by barriers between lovers such as physical distance or a third person, but never death. In this stage of her poetic career she insists on her determination to give up her search of earthly love and writes lines of farewell to her former aspirations. Rossetti’s personal experience in life made her see that love is a fool’s paradise and she starts to conceive earthly love as an equivalent to death.

8- Spiritual Poetry: embracement of “Divine Love” and Religion.

This third section deals with Christina Rossetti's mature and last poems and it attempts to show how her verses abandoned the expression of earthly love and adopted divine love as its main subject. Her disillusion in love with men led her to look for true and unconditional love. According to Katherine Mayberry, Rossetti was “a rigorously self-denying woman who gradually learned to replace her need for immediate pleasures with the anticipation of eternal delights of Heaven” (1989: 18). Her personal experiences have taught the poetess that true love cannot be found on earth, but in God. Allusions to the Bible and God had always been present in her poetry but, at this stage of her life, they increase and pervade most of her poems. As Nesca Robb (1948) points out, “the Bible is her mind's daily bread. The use of Biblical phrases and allusions has become for her, as it had for those seventeenth century Christians, the use of an instinctive second language” (87). According to Robb, the language of the Bible is a second language for Rossetti, whose purpose is to send religious and moral messages to those who want to save their soul. Rossetti has found in the figure of God a substitute for what she has not been able to find in romantic love and therefore He becomes the ideal beloved in her mature poems. The images of death and the melancholic tone of her previous poems become less frequent. At this time, her bad health had deteriorated her body and her mind and, as her biographer Jan Mars (2007) observed, “she, like Keats, wrote not about what she experienced day to day but what she remembered or imagined” (43). According to Mars, the poetess at this stage of her life wrote about what she remembered about her youth and, in particular, her childhood, and about what she imagined. The poetess looks for perfection in her imagination, what is called the search for “The Sublime”; according to Dinah Roe, who discusses this idea in her book *Christina Rossetti's Faithful Imagination* (2007), the poetess manifests “The Sublime” notion through nature and God who is described as the perfect male figure. Catherine Musello Cantalupo, in her work *Christina Rossetti: The Devotional Poet and the Rejection of Romantic Nature* (1987) highlights Rossetti's “insistence on seeing the natural world as a declaration of the glory of God” (278). The language can be considered to be a language of longing for those moments, memories or figures that she cannot experience or reach again. Rossetti did not give up loving, she only re-addressed her love towards what she considered to be authentic. The poetess' only purpose now was to be saved by God and reach eternal happiness. The main

aim of this section is to show how Rossetti's poetry found its happiness again and her subjects move from earthly love's betrayal and pain to divine love's purity and salvation. The poems that have been selected to show Rossetti's evolution belong to two different books: "In the Bleak Midwinter" belongs to *Sing-Song* (1872), and "Love Came Down At Christmas", "De Profundis" and the sonnet 6 of "Monna Innominata" belong to *A Pageant and Other Poems* (1881), which is her last collection. These poems exhibit a tone of happiness due to the divine love that the poetess felt, the hope for salvation, and some childhood memories from when the poetess was loved by her parents.

Christina Rossetti evolved from a pessimistic view of life that made death to be one of the central subjects to a happier conception based on her memories and imagination. The poetess left back her disillusionment and found an antidote to forget the pain that her failures had caused to her. According to Flowers (1987), the "disappointments experienced in those earthy love relationships ostensibly set up as 'opposites' to the heavenly one" (169). God and religion play an important role at this point of Rossetti's life and she does not allow earthly love to interpose between her and God anymore. Flowers also points out that as a deeply religious woman she was afraid somebody "could come between a woman and her love of God" (1987: 165). In *The Poet of Mystery: The Art of Christina Rossetti* (1987), David Shaw points out that Rossetti did not remain depleted, but learned to merge with God: "she must trust that her broken heart will be acceptable to him and that she can find in her atonement with him all the heart can wish" (56). She looked for perfection in her imagination and the only male figure that could be considered perfect was the figure of God. According to Dinah Roe, the search for "The Sublime" led Rossetti to follow Keats's theory of imagination:

What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth – whether it existed before or not – for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love, they are all in their sublime, creative of essential beauty. (2007: 64)

Roe states that Rossetti modified this notion herself because, for her, imagination is not the force that creates beauty, but the way to express it; for Rossetti imagination is not creative but expressive. She found shelter in her memories to write her poems because her personal life during 1860's and 1870's was full of pain and sickness. She felt that God

had rescued her from her inner fog and divine love began to appear in her poetry as a recurrent theme. For example the poem “In the Bleak Midwinter” (1872) describes how someone was rescued from a frigid and lonely place; this poem seems to symbolize the poetess’ conviction about God’s salvation. The poem was first published in the edition of January 1872 of *Scribner’s Monthly* under the name “A Christmas Carol”. It is a poem full of religious connotations and Biblical allusions in which the poetic voice speaks from an unpleasant place:

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago. (ll.1-4)

The title, which is repeated in the first line, suggests a cheerless, frigid and dark place. The horrifying environment is described as lifeless and lonely: “earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone” (l.2). The word “snow” that appears several times in the third line seems to represent all the problems that a person has: “snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow” (l.3). Although, according to the last line of this quotation, all those problems took place “long ago” (l.4). It seems that the poetic voice was hopeless in a deserted and dark place that according to Diane D’Amico in *Christina Rossetti’s “From Sunset to Star Rise* (1989), “when Rossetti places her speaker in the twilight darkness without sun or star in her sky, she is depicting a loss of Christian hope” (87). Then, the poetic voice, who was abandoned in that lonely place, is saved because it finds “a stable place” (l.7) which was the home of “The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ” (l.8). The image of God saving the poetic voice from solitude and despair seems to stand for Rossetti’s devotion, as she seems to have found true love in God when she was disappointed by men and ravaged by health. The poetess had been devoted to Christ her whole life but at this point she became strongly attached to God. Josephine DeWilde (1904) pointed out that the poetess never questioned her devotion to God: “Her religion was entirely a matter of feeling. She did not reason about her faith; she felt convinced that what she believed was the truth which had been revealed by God” (43).

The poem follows with the poetic voice trying to find a moral payment to God’s salvation; she wonders how she can return to God the great love received because she is

poor and cannot pay with earthly wealth: “What can I give Him, poor as I am?” (l.17). But God does not require material or expensive objects or things, what He demands is devotion, faith and real love: “yet what I can I give Him: give my heart” (l.20). Christina Rossetti great devotion led her to accept divine love as the real one, as Katherine Tynan (1904) said: “in spite of the human passion which beats through much of her poetry she was of the women who are called to be Brides of Christ” (33). Her firmness about her faith is reflected in “Love Came Down at Christmas” (1881), a poem in which the poetess praises divine love and proclaims it as the only true one. This poem was written on 1875 although it was published some years later in *A Pageant and Other Poems* (1881). It provides Rossetti’s personal view about God and love; it seems that the poetess tries to show to the rest of people where divine love resides and how to reach it:

Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine,
Love was born at Christmas,
Stars and Angels gave the sign. (ll.1-4)

The first line suggests that love appeared at Christmas, a time of love and unity: “love came down at Christmas” (l.1); the poetess compares the coming of love with the birth of Jesus: “love was born at Christmas” (l.3). Then Jesus and love are closely linked. The second line makes emphasis over the word “love” and in particular the love towards God: “Love Divine” (l.2). In the fourth line, a Biblical allusion is found: “stars and Angels gave the sign”; it makes reference to the shooting star that The Three Kings followed on their way to find Jesus. Then, Rossetti invites the reader to conceive Jesus as the incarnation of love on Earth and the expression of God’s love: “Love Incarnate, Love Divine” (l.6). Jesus became for Rossetti the pure expression of love and was considered by the poetess as a shelter from corrupted earthly love. The last quartet of the poem is an allegiance to God; these lines also describe the way to reach the eternal salvation in heaven next to God:

Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign. (ll. 9-12)

The poem says that love both earthly and divine should be the most important aspect in the human nature: “love shall be our token” (l.9), and it should be “yours” and “mine” (l.10). The poetess advocates for divine love as a solution for the decaying earthly love, she proposes God as the model to follow: “love to God and all men” (l.11). Rossetti noticed that real love resides in God and she encourages everybody to accept and to practice their religious duties: “love for plea and gift and sign” (l.12). Georgina Battiscombe (1965) quoted a commentary from Maurice Bowra referring to the relationship between Rossetti and God: “Only in God could she [Rossetti] find a finally satisfying object for the abounding love which was the mainspring of her life and character” (81). Christina Rossetti’s main aim at this point of her life was to be saved and embraced in God’s hands, reaching eternal love in a paradise, which is represented in her poetry by heaven. She wishes to escape from earth and all its denigrating aspects; as a consequence the poetess fantasizes imagining herself next to God and curses her earthly life. For instance, in the poem “De Profundis” (1881), Rossetti expresses both a great longing for heaven and a wish to leave earth. She represents heaven with those standards that Earth lacks; therefore, heaven appears as the opposite to the Earth and earthly material limitations disappear in God’s holy land. Arthur Glutton-Brook in his work *More essays on Religion* (1928) pointed out that: “The most frequent of Christina Rossetti’s themes is the longing for heaven as a place where all her misgivings will be quieted and where all imperfect terrestrial delights. . . will be made perfect” (17). In the first quartet of the poem the poetess expresses that feeling of longing:

Oh why is the Heaven built so far,
Oh why is earth set so remote?
I cannot reach the nearest star
That hangs afloat. (ll.1-4)

The poetic voice of the poem yearns for heaven and for the distance between earth and heaven that is not physical but spiritual: “oh why is the heaven built so far / oh why is earth set so remote?” (ll.1-2). The poetic voice seems to be anxious to reach heaven and to leave earth; the distance between both places is the representation between material and spiritual lives and this distance can only be walked through death. The distance between earth and heaven is compared to the distance with the stars because the poetic

voice “cannot reach the nearest star” (l.3), and therefore heaven is completely beyond reach. Claudia Ottlinger observed in her work *The Death-Motif in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti* (1996) that death was for Rossetti:

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

Then the poetic voice may be wishing its own death in order to reach heaven: “but all my heart is one desire” (l.11). In the last quartet of the poem, the voice focuses on his material hindrance which hinders his purpose:

For I am bound with fleshly bands,
Joy, beauty, lie beyond my scope;
I strain my heart, I stretch my hands,
And catch at hope. (ll.13-16)

The poetic voice makes reference to the materiality of her body, which does not allow her to reach the spiritual stage: “for I am bound with fleshly bands” (l.13). The way in which the voice refers to her skin and body as simply “fleshly hands” seems to be a way to undervalue her material body. She does not only undervalue her material limitation but also her human behaviors, which the voice considers to be full of corruption: “joy, beauty, lie beyond my scope” (l.14). In the following line, the speaker’s feelings when imagining heaven are described: “I strain my heart, I stretch my hands” (l.15). Christina Rossetti seems to be representing her aspirations in this poem, her strong religious beliefs push her to think that leaving earthly life and reaching heaven is the way to find the eternal love. Ottlinguer notes that:

Rossetti’s attraction can be explained by her yearning for ultimate rest in heaven, which is a place of perfect peace and harmony in her mind and suggests the end of all earthly suffering, while her

aversion refers to the physical torture that goes along with the process of dying. (1996: 135)

The poetess wants to feel divine love because she considers heaven to be prior to earth and she has no problem on dealing with death to manage her purpose, Ottlinguer also says: “Rossetti regards death chiefly as the gateway to perfect rest and oblivion in heaven” (1996: 129). Rossetti’s faith became so strong that her earthly life has no longer sense. Kathleen Jones mentions in her biography *Learning not to Be First: The Life of Christina Rossetti* that a friend of her biographer, MacKenzie Bell, says that the poetess suffered: “religious mania bordering on insanity” (1992: 18). For example, in “Monna Innominata” (1881), which is considered to be the sonnet of sonnets, Rossetti shows obsession with the figure of God and an exaggerated expression of her own amatory poetry directed to the divine. Rossetti tried to emulate Dante’s and Petrarch’s sonnet sequences because they had perfected the courtly love poems; she did not manage to do it correctly because the critics compared “Monna Innominata” to Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1845-1846) because of their relationship in love and moral cues. Rossetti’s sonnet sequence seems to be an ode to God and the imagination of a meeting with God in heaven. As William Whittle points out, the sequence is the anticipation of a “reunion” with a divine “beloved in heaven” (1987: 13).

From the sequence of fifteen sonnets that make “Monna Innominata”, only the sixth one is going to be analyzed in this section. The sixth sonnet defines the perfect unity between earthly love and spiritual devotion. In the first quartet, there are some features that manifest a great devotion and love from Rossetti to God:

Trust me, I have not earn'd your dear rebuke,
I love, as you would have me, God the most;
Would lose not Him, but you, must one be lost. (ll.1-3)

This sonnet deals with the love between men and women and love for God; “you” (ll.1/2/3) represents the earthly lover and “Him” stands for God or the divinity. At the beginning of the poem, the poetess seeks the reader’s confidence to foresee that the religious content of the poem is the way to find real and eternal love: “trust me” (l.1). From the beginning it is clear that the narrator of the poem prefers divine over earthly

love: “I love, as you would have me, God the most” (l.2). Not only does the poetess choose God but she creates a new concept of love, as Dinah Roe suggests: “Rossetti expands the boundaries of sonnet convention to incorporate the love between God and woman” (2007: 79). The narrator justifies her choice saying that earthly love requires a great effort and, consequently, she prefers divine love because it does not damage her feelings and the reward is eternal: “this say I, having counted up the cost” (l.6). After enhancing God’s position in the hierarchy of love, the narrator modestly establishes herself in a low position because she wants to reduce her value as a religious devout: “this, though I be the feeblest of God's host /the sorriest sheep Christ shepherds with His crook (ll.7-8). The fact that Rossetti stands in a relegated position is very common in her poetry; this concept is developed in Rossetti’s poem “The Lowest Place” (1866). She thought that by occupying the lowest place on earth, it would mean that she would take the highest place in heaven and closer to God. Rossetti acquired this concept from the Tractarian doctrine that advocated that: “one who occupies ‘the lowest place’ on earth will enjoy the higher position in heaven” (66:2007). This great devotion and faith does not mean that Rossetti did not imply in love with any man; she just wants to make her points of view clear in order to make a possible suitor to understand that God is first: “I love my God the most” (l.9). In the last lines of the poem, the poetic voice expresses her opinion about the relationship between earthly love and divine love:

That I can never love you overmuch;
 I love Him more, so let me love you too;
 Yea, as I apprehend it, love is such
 I cannot love you if I love not Him,
 I cannot love Him if I love not you. (ll.10-14)

The poetic voice suggests that earthly love cannot be excessive (“that I can never love you overmuch” l.10) because she loves “Him more” (l.11). God is considered to be an ideal beloved who possesses all the qualities that men lack. As Harrison (1998) observes, Rossetti expresses her “desire for Christ” in terms of “the ideal lover” and “visions of fulfillment in all-embracing love in Paradise” (78). However, Kristeva points out (1981) that the meeting with God in a fleshly body is impossible: “the possible impossible meeting with the other sex” (296) as “an intrinsic, immanent, sacred invocation of joy” (289). The poetess is conscious of the impossible meeting with God

and in the last two lines she proclaims that “love is such” (l.12) as a mixture of both loves but without neglecting the most important one, divine love and love for God: “I cannot love you if I love not Him” / “I cannot love Him if I love not you.” (ll.13-14). According to Lona Mosk Packer (1963), both lovers are complementary but there is one who stands out: “Love of God does not exclude love of the lover but includes it” (157). Then the poetess can love both at the same time but never interposing earthly over divine because she considers the second one to be more true and real than the first one.

In conclusion, Christina Rossetti last poems show a great devotion and faith. She has left earthly love aside and has devoted herself to God. The poetess realizes that divine love is the only real and eternal love, although she does not completely reject earthly love, but she defends that God is first in her life. As it has been commented, she was in a moment in which a hard illness affected her and caused her too much suffering. Religion rescues her and provides her the love she needed. The description of heaven is also largely developed in Rossetti’s poetry together with a desire to go there despite the fact that it would mean her death. The poetess considers death a minor payment if it means to be next to God. Rossetti’s great desire for the figure of God can also be considered obsessive because she regards Him to be a perfect beloved and the symbol of eternal and pure love. The search for “The Sublime” reaches its highest point in the figure of God and in the description of the natural world in Rossetti’s poetry. She thought that a humble and devotional life was the right way to reach heaven, and for that reason she tried to adopt a Christian humbleness in both her poetry and personal life in order to reach the highest place in heaven next to God for the rest of the times.

9- Conclusion

This work has shown Christina Rossetti's poetic evolution, as well as, the different facts that made her change the subjects and tone of their poems in the different stages of her life. The result of Rossetti's evolution is a great collection of poems; they show different feelings and uses of techniques which allow the reader to read a story directed for children with a disturbing secondary interpretation.

Rossetti expressed sexuality at her first stage, her poetry was very vivid and her sexual curiosity led her to explore this field in her poetry. The poetess also showed a great desire for being loved and her anxieties for a beloved to arrive to her life. Another common feature at this first stage was the expression of jealousy when she could not reach the wished male figure. The poetess also suggested how her perfect beloved would be in some poems and a cult to the men's beauty by means of describing their bodies, physical qualities and fleshly desires.

In a more mature period, Rossetti lost her hopes on personal love after two breakdowns with her suitors as well as a terrible illness was deteriorating her physical health. At this stage, the poetess introduced the idea of love betrayal in her poetry and the male characters were represented with bad qualities that made the beloved's encounter impossible. Rossetti felt alone in life and this sadness affected her women instinct because she even renounces to be a mother.

In the last period of her life, Rossetti found the wished love and expressed how she was rescued from fog by God. The poetess searches for refugee in divine love, which is considered to be the only real and eternal; she embraces God as her Saviour as well as the perfect figure as a beloved. Rossetti wished to be next to God and to reach Heaven, although this trip would mean her death. She describes Heaven in some of her poems where she lets her imagination go. Finally, the poetess gave some clues about real love and how to reach it by means of religion and love towards God.

Remember

*Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.*

*Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:
Only remember me; you understand
It will be late to counsel then or pray.*

*Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.*

(Rossetti, 1862: 58)

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