

**“That mighty maternal love which makes [...] little
women matches for very big adversaries”**

**The Matrilineal Heritage of Louisa May Alcott and
Christina Rossetti**

Azelina Joan Flint

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

University of East Anglia
School of Art, Media and American Studies

May 2019

© This copy of this thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that use of any information derived there from must be in accordance with current UK Copyright Law. In addition, any quotation or extract must include full attribution.

*Dedicated to the memories of my late father, Bertram William Flint,
and Great Uncle, Frederick Keen*

Men who embodied “theologies of renunciation”

An emerald is as green as grass;

A ruby red as blood;

A sapphire shines as blue as heaven;

A flint lies in the mud.

A diamond is a brilliant stone,

To catch the world's desire;

An opal holds a fiery spark;

But a flint holds fire.

Christina Rossetti, *Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book* (1893)

Abstract

The Matrilineal Heritage of Louisa May Alcott and Christina Rossetti is an unprecedented socio-cultural comparison that exposes and redresses critical preoccupation with the authors' male associates in the Transcendentalist and Pre-Raphaelite movements by re-orienting attention to the unpublished life-writing of their female relatives. The thesis unpacks the influence of the Romantic construction of "genius" on critical assessments of both women, which have often evaluated their literary outputs in light of what I call an "ideology of individualism" that privileges the vocation of the artist above all societal obligations. I demonstrate that both women resisted the ideologies of individualism promoted by their male associates, in order to affiliate themselves with "theologies of renunciation" that were developed by their female relatives.

Part I, "Matches for very big adversaries", explores Alcott's and Rossetti's critical discourses surrounding the ideologies of individualism that were championed by the Transcendentalists and Pre-Raphaelites. Section I, "But a flint holds fire", stresses the authors' agency in rejecting the models of artistic identity promoted by both movements by foregrounding their debates with their male relatives in private correspondence and autobiographical writings. Section II, "Behind a Mask", considers how Alcott and Rossetti adopted ingenious strategies for challenging the movements' objectification of the female muse in their pseudonymous and posthumously published works. It compares Alcott's feminist assessment of Hawthorne's critique of the figure of the "marble woman" developed by the Transcendentalists, with Rossetti's interrogation of her brother, Dante Gabriel's, preoccupation with the dead beloved.

The second part of the thesis, "That mighty maternal love which makes [...] little women", recovers the matrilineal heritage of Alcott and Rossetti, tracing its presence in both unpublished and canonical works. Section I, "Left-handed societies", uncovers the literary

networks of the Alcott and Rossetti women in unpublished and posthumously published life-writings to argue that family matriarchs, Abigail Alcott and Frances Rossetti, encouraged their daughters to conceive artistic identity as formulated through identification with others. Section II, “A Loving League of Sisters”, unearths the influence of the Alcott and Rossetti women in the authors’ canonical works, focusing on how the values of their mothers are propagated in fictional sisterhoods that use art as a means of both combating social injustice and achieving divine communion. The thesis concludes by demonstrating that the sisterhoods of the authors’ public writings promote the theologies of renunciation that were championed by their female relatives—stressing the importance of relinquishing the solipsistic pursuit of genius, in favour of achieving communion with the wider female community and a fuller revelation of God.

Acknowledgements

This project is outcome of eleven years' study in higher education. Like so many women, I fell in love with the work of Louisa May Alcott during childhood, sparking a lifelong passion for investigating the interrelations between her life and writings. I discovered the poetry of Christina Rossetti as an undergraduate at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, under the tutelage of veteran Rossetti scholar, Professor Clive Wilmer. Since the first year of my undergraduate degree, I have envisioned a comparative project on these two remarkable women authors, whose agency, intellect and theological rigour is often underestimated. As such, I am indebted to many people who have guided the development of my scholarship along the way, but I must also extend my thanks to the souls of the departed members of the Alcott and Rossetti families, from whom this thesis is derived. Doubtless, there are some erroneous assumptions concerning your life and works, but hopefully we can resolve any unsettled scores in the world to come!

It may seem strange that a thesis devoted to recovering the matrilineal heritage of two female authors is dedicated to the memory of my late father, Bertram William Flint. In his parenting, my Dad was the embodiment of a "theology of renunciation": a generous mentor, exhaustive scholar, insightful writer and self-giving religious leader. I would never have completed a PhD if he had not taken the trouble to bring me a new book during each week of my childhood, as well as to read the works of Christina Rossetti and Louisa May Alcott, so he could discuss them with me. Likewise, my Great Uncle Frederick Keen made many sacrifices to support my family over the years, and I am indebted both to him and to the wider Keen family for the opportunity to pursue postgraduate study. My mother, Debra Flint, has been an unwavering emotional support, particularly since my father's death shortly before the commencement of my PhD, and remains my biggest ally. To my long-lost cousin, Brig. Ted

Flint and my Uncle Michael Flint, thank you for providing me with a link to my father, as well as a connection to my wider Flint heritage during my doctoral studies.

This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance of many generous mentors and colleagues. Thanks are first due to my remarkable supervisors, Drs Thomas Ruys Smith and Hilary Emmett, who have granted me unwarranted license to pursue unconventional ideas, theories and sources, as well as putting up with a tutee who is perhaps a little more stubborn than the average. The financial, professional and scholastic support of the AHRC “CHASE” consortium has been invaluable, and I must extend especial thanks to Dr Steven Colburn, Robert Witts, Clare Hunt and Daphne Rayment for supporting a diverse array of ambitious projects, including the first international conference on May Alcott Nieriker at Université Paris Diderot. Due to “CHASE”, more people are learning about the Alcott women! The same gratitude must be extended towards the Fulbright Commission, especially to Senior Programme Manager for the UK division, Brittany Lehr, without whom my archival research at the Houghton Library, Harvard, could not have happened.

Beyond the University of East Anglia, there are many scholars and academics who have enhanced my ideas with their mentorship and learning. During my first year, Professor Wendy Parkins, Kent University, guided me with my research on Christina Rossetti, while my study at Harvard was informed by the enlightening conversation of Dr John Stauffer: an inspiring example of how sharp academic scholarship can be informed by religious faith. Foundational Alcott scholar, Dr John Matteson, has been kind enough to review my work. Drs Vicky Greenaway and Ruth Livesey, and Professor Emeritus Barrie Bullen, guided my burgeoning research on Alcott and Rossetti during my MA at Royal Holloway, paving the way for me to commence my PhD. The remarkable example of my undergraduate Director of Studies, Dr Nuzhat Bukhari, remains a formidable illustration of the learning and erudition of women in the academy. Numerous colleagues have assisted me with my thinking, including

(soon-to-be) Drs Jack Massie, Marie-Alix Thouaille and Professor Lauren Hehmeyer, Texarkana College, who have assisted in the proof-reading of this work. Likewise, my PhriendS Drs Steven Bembridge, Vera Da Silva-Sinha, Koenraad Claes, Elena Gessi, Helena Niemi, Kenyan Gradert and (soon-to-be) Drs Vasko Yordanov, Nikhita Obeegadoo, Ryosuke Kondo, Adrian Rubio, Akin Oyawale, and Emeka Onyealord of the Houghton Library and Sean McCauley of the Watertown Library, have enriched my PhD experience.

A number of independent scholars outside of the academy have offered fresh insights that have shaped the trajectory of this project. The conversation of Parish Catechist, Michael King, of Sacred Heart and St Margaret Mary R.C. Church, Dereham, has informed my scholarship on the Trinity and my analysis of Abigail Alcott's theology of providence. Equally, the enthusiastic correspondence of Eddie Simpson has enlightened my thinking on covenantal societies and introduced me to the work of Alasdair McIntyre. My students from the Brilliant Club programme, especially the pupils of Litcham School, have challenged me to look for ways to make my research more relevant to everyday life. The assistance of their teacher, David Glenn, has been instrumental in motivating me to promote my research to a wider audience. Outward-facing sisterhood is alive and well in the Louisa May Alcott Society and the outstanding research of Alcott fanatic and blogger, Susan Bailey, has helped this thesis to grow and thrive. I cannot wait for that biography on Elizabeth Alcott!

As a woman of faith, I have been touched by the spiritual care of many religious communities throughout my student career. The support of my Parish Priest, Fr Brendan Moffatt, and my brothers and sisters at the Parish of Sacred Heart, Dereham has been invaluable. My "CHASE" work placement at the Delaware Art Museum was enabled by the kind hospitality of the sisters of the Caterina Benincasa Dominican Monastery, Wilmington. Thank you for opening your home and for watching Louisa May Alcott adaptations with me! The spiritual havens of Blackfriars, Oxford and Ampleforth Abbey have provided sanctuaries

for my work, and I am grateful to Fr Matthew Jarvis OP and Alan Jones for opening their doors. My former parish priest, Fr Nicodemus Lobu Ratu SVD, and the parish of St Mary-on-the-Quay, Bristol remain formative influences in my life. Likewise, I cannot forget the slightly wacky spiritual guidance proffered by the Reverend Dr Alexander Lucie-Smith, a character straight out of an Evelyn Waugh novel! The former Chaplain of the Fisher House Cambridge Catholic Chaplaincy, Fr Alban McCoy OFM, should also not be forgotten.

Last, but not least, I cannot overlook the support of many longstanding friends who infuse my life with joy, providing me with the motivation to continue in my research. Outstanding among these are my elected sisters: Dr Clarissa Chenovick and Rosary Abot-Kato; childhood friends, Becky O'Hara, Felix Pilgrim and Emma Scott; fellow Dante and Rossetti enthusiast, Francesco Amatulli; my "college brother" and director extraordinaire, Josh Seymour; musical prodigy, Aeron Preston; expat traveller-poets and associate Christmas convalescents, Dr David and LeAnna Porter; man of steel, SLT Alex Ronaldson RN; fellow Catholic and feminist academic, Dr Raphael Cadenhead; choir director, autodidact and proof-reader, Helen Jacobs; my sister in Christ and art restorer, Kathleen Malkin; my adopted brother and sister, Drs Andrew and Pippa Simpson, and their son, Peter (my Godson). I would also like to express my gratitude to the reception staff of the Broadview Lodge Guest Accommodation, University of East Anglia, who have supported me with their good humour, flexibility and kind words during the last few months of write-up. The list is too long to name in full, but to all of my friends, thank you for confirming the words of Hilaire Belloc:

From quiet home and first beginning,

Out to the undiscovered ends,

There's nothing worth the wear of winning,

But laughter and the love of friends. (85-88)

Abbreviations

AFAP Alcott Family Additional Papers

LMAAP Louisa May Alcott Additional Papers

When citing multiple works by a single author, I have used an acronym of the title in parenthesis.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	11
List of Illustrations.....	12
Part I – Matches for very big adversaries.....	13
Section I – “But a flint holds fire”: Alcott’s and Rossetti’s Renunciation of Genius.....	14
Introduction.....	14
Chapter 1 – “I am even I”: Rossetti and Alcott Resisting Male Authority.....	54
Section II – “Behind a Mask” – a “secret she must keep”? The pseudonymous and posthumously published work of Alcott and Rossetti: suppressed or forgotten?.....	109
Chapter 2 – “A marble woman! Is the omen good or ill?” Pygmalion and Galatea in the work of Hawthorne and Alcott.....	125
Chapter 3 – “The grave-worm revels now”: Rossetti’s exhumation of the Pre-Raphaelite corpse.....	168
Part II – That mighty maternal love which makes [...] little women.....	198
Section I – “Left-handed societies”: Women’s Life-Writing.....	199
Chapter 4 – “Renunciation is the law, devotion to God’s will the gospel”: The empowerment of the “other” in the life-writing of the Alcott women.....	208
Chapter 5 – “For every human creature may lay claim to strength”: Rossetti’s elevation of the left hand.....	257
Section II – “A Loving League of Sisters”: Alcott’s and Rossetti’s promotion of Christian values through the ties of sisterhood.....	304
Chapter 6 – We are all relative creatures: The transformative power of sisterhood in Rossetti’s <i>Maude</i>	313
Chapter 7 – “Happy Women”: Alcott’s sisterly utopia.....	343
Conclusion – “That mighty maternal love which makes [...] little women matches for very big adversaries”.....	376
List of Works Cited.....	384
Appendix 1 – List of Archival Sources.....	415
Appendix 2 – List of Works Consulted.....	418
Appendix 3 – “Rolf Walden Emmerboy” transcription.....	429
Appendix 4 – “Two Scenes in a Family” transcription.....	430
Appendix 5 – “Wealth” transcription.....	433
Appendix 6 – “Story of an apple” transcription.....	436

List of Illustrations

Figure 1: <i>Lady Lilith</i> (1867).....	53
Figure 2: <i>Christina Georgina Rossetti; Frances Mary Lavinia Rossetti (née Polidori)</i> (1877).....	107
Figure 3: <i>Mariana</i> (1851).....	107
Figure 4: <i>Ophelia</i> (1851-2).....	108
Figure 5: <i>The Lady of Shalott</i> (1886-1905).....	108
Figure 6: <i>Clasped Hands of Robert and Elizabeth Browning</i> (1853).....	166
Figure 7: <i>Puck</i> (1856).....	167
Figure 8: <i>The Blessed Damozel</i> (1875-8).....	197
Figure 9: <i>The Hireling Shepherd</i> (1851).....	383
Figure 10: <i>You should have wept her yesterday</i> (1866).....	383

Part I

Matches for very big adversaries

Section I

“But a flint holds fire”

Alcott’s and Rossetti’s Renunciation of Genius

Introduction

Christina Rossetti defined a new way of looking at female creativity in an 1878 letter to the British poet, Augusta Webster: “...if anything ever does sweep away the barrier of sex, and make the female not a giantess or a heroine but at once a hero and a giant, it is that mighty maternal love which makes little birds and little beasts as well as little women matches for very big adversaries” (*Letters* 2 158). There are two interesting things about this passage. Firstly, when the female reaches epic proportions, she transcends her gender: she is not a giantess or a heroine, but a hero and a giant. Not only that, she is “at once” *both* a hero and a giant, the transcendent female does not simply become the male—she encapsulates all of the dominant qualities that language would assign to the male. Secondly, this epic might and power does not generate more heroes and giants, but rather begets “little” things: “little birds”, “little beasts” and, most importantly, “little women”.

Where the Romantic tradition affiliates divine creation with the supposedly more active role of the male in heterosexual sexual relations, Rossetti claims that it is maternal love that comes closest to emulating the deity. Why? The very fact that the female creates “little” things renders her an emulation of God because creation, for the omnipotent, is an act of humility. Even the universe, in its totality, must pale in the face of an all-encompassing being—nothing can be created as its equal. And yet, as the reflection of this prime mover, the universe, in a curious way, also mirrors the Creator. In this way, the most diminutive things are “matches for very big adversaries”, for no adversary is capable of obliterating the primeval origin of every created being. Yet, Rossetti does not provide an account of the role

of these “little” creatures, and especially the “little women”; to understand their function, we must turn to the woman who made the term famous—Louisa May Alcott.

I have chosen to start with this passage because it provides an uncanny resonance between these contemporaries who never met or corresponded. One cannot imagine that when Rossetti staked her claim ten years after the publication of *Little Women*, she did not have Alcott’s phenomenally successful novel in mind.¹ Yet, “little women” is a phrase that comes down to us fraught with pejorative connotations. Ann B. Murphy has argued that, in Alcott’s work, the term is “an instrument for teaching girls how to become ‘little’” (564). This notion is contested by Frances Armstrong who makes the important point that, such an interpretation “present[s] a binary opposition in which littleness, triviality, and women are set against bigness, greatness and men”, and that “...Alcott’s most popular texts set littleness and greatness on a temporal continuum rather than in binary opposition” (454).

Once again, the archetypal origin of this temporal continuum is located in the figure of the mother. In *Little Women*, Jo confides in Marmee that: “Mothers are the best lovers in the world, but I don’t mind whispering to Marmee that I’d like to try all kinds” (464). Unlike Rossetti, Alcott does not draw a comparison with the creative power of God and the mother; she rather presents the mother as the primeval source of human love. At this moment, Jo describes her love for Marmee as begetting the expansion of her love outwards towards the human family: “It’s very curious, but the more I try to satisfy myself with all sorts of natural affections, the more I seem to want. I’d no idea hearts could take in so many. Mine is so elastic, it never seems full now, and I used to be quite contented with my family” (ibid.).

¹ *Little Women* was well received in Britain. *The British Quarterly Review* claimed that, “We are not so sure that our American cousins do not, in this department of literature, far excel any writer that we can boast”, 53.[1] Jan. 1871: 157 (Clark 84). Likewise, *The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, raved: “We consider Miss Alcott’s stories to be far better in every way than the generality of English tales”, 103.203 1 Jan. 1875: 271 (87). Due to unprecedented demand, *Little Women* precipitated a blockade at the warehouse of Alcott’s publisher, Roberts Brothers, upon its initial printing in 1868 (Matteson 344). Roberts Brothers were also Christina Rossetti’s American publishers (Kooistra 96).

“Little women”, then, are the replication of “that mighty maternal love” as it multiplies itself by means of the natural affections, rendering the heart so elastic, that the human capacity to empathise with others is continually expanded. Where Rossetti conceives maternal love as leading upwards towards unification with God, Alcott finds in maternal love the source of universal human communion.

This elastic capacity for empathy has been a bone of contention with Alcott’s critics because it is perceived to be a threat to her heroine’s artistic identity. The expansion of Jo’s affections, of course, leads to her marriage, something that Elizabeth Lennox Keyser claims “....throws a damper on Jo’s creative powers” (72). It is important to remember that Jo does not stop writing at the moment she decides to expand upon the heritage of her maternal love. She actually starts writing *sentimental fiction* and this, in line with Alcott’s own career, brings widespread recognition and success. But with the adoption of a sentimental style comes, as Judith Fetterley puts it, the elevation of “a more submissive spirit”, which upholds “the wisdom of the doctrines of renunciation and adaptation” (ACW 38). Fetterley contrasts “renunciation and adaptation” with Alcott’s pseudonymous sensation thrillers to the detriment of Alcott’s sentimental work (27).

The subversive and rebellious qualities of Alcott’s thrillers have excited critics since their discovery in 1943. Of course, under the instruction of her future husband, Professor Bhaer, Jo gives up sensation writing. I will argue, though, that the sensation writing is not as opposed to the sentimental fiction as it may initially appear, for it also brings the image of divinely ordained male genius into question. Herein lies the rub. From the very beginning, both Alcott’s and Rossetti’s critics have been uncomfortable with an outlook that undercuts the idea of artistic genius as omnipotent, powerful and infallible by replacing it with a community of “little women” who follow their mothers’ examples by embracing what I term

as a “theology of renunciation”. It must not be forgotten, however, that beneath this theology of renunciation lies a strength that can take on heroes and giants.

This thesis re-evaluates the theologies of renunciation embraced by Alcott and Rossetti to demonstrate that they are central to the authors’ understanding of the role of the female artist. If creation is defined as an act of self-giving humility, then the female artist must bring her work into being through identifying herself with the “little” things she begets. Contrary to Romantic preconceptions concerning the prophetic role of the artist, creation is not an act of self-expression, but is rather a mode of self-giving. To achieve communion with one’s readers and with the wider community of artists, you must identify yourself with the “other”. Consequently, a theology of renunciation is not a framework for merely relinquishing personal fulfilment, but is instead a means of entering into an ecstatic communion with one’s sisters. I characterise Rossetti’s and Alcott’s spiritual outlooks as “theologies of renunciation” in deliberate opposition to the term “doctrine of renunciation” that is used by Fetterley (*ibid.*). In line with Fetterley’s own views on Alcott’s renunciation, “doctrine” bears connotations of an imposed hierarchical framework that is enforced from above within a patriarchal superstructure. By contrast, “theology” suggests a fully conceptualised belief-system that is developed within a mutually supportive community and which reflects that community’s engagement with Christian traditions, societal mores and scriptural discourses.

My elevation of Alcott’s and Rossetti’s theologies of renunciation as fully-formed frameworks of belief defines these women’s spiritual and artistic outlooks as formulated against what I refer to as the “ideologies of individualism” that were embraced by their male relatives in the Transcendentalist and Pre-Raphaelite movements. The critical discourses surrounding these authors has focused on their patrilineal heritages, frequently defining their theologies of renunciation as expressions of deference to the dominant individualism of the

male artists in their families. Yet, if the paradigm of artistic identity offered by the male is one of individualistic genius, then to embrace a theology of renunciation is an act of resistance. Rossetti and Alcott were fully conscious of the ideologies of individualism adopted by their male relatives, and were free to develop an openly critical discourse of these ideologies—rejecting their male relatives’ emphases on divine revelation and genius as predicated upon the suppression of the “other” and the domination of “little” creatures.

My application of the term “ideology” coincides with Poovey’s definition of the word as a system that “....governs not just political and economic relations but social relations and even psychological stresses as well” (PL xiv). The “ideology of individualism” adopted by the Rossetti and Alcott men went far beyond the realm of art, shaping the economic destinies, gender dynamics and psychological pressures experienced by the two families. Nor were these ideologies mere constructs or speculative philosophies: they were established systems of principles that governed the relations between the gendered communities of the two families, for “....simply by living together, men and women establish priorities among their needs and desires” (ibid.). The ideologies of individualism formed by the Rossetti and Alcott men, and the theologies of renunciation developed by the Alcott and Rossetti women, co-existed in a lively debate concerning the social and moral purpose of art between the male and female communities of the families.

Despite the presence of this dynamic interchange, Alcott’s and Rossetti’s matrilineal affiliations remain largely hidden from the public eye. The critical preoccupation with the authors’ patrilineal contexts stems from a preference to “....legitimate women artists whose very real self-referencing to male artists makes it possible for them to be inserted and then resubsumed into the patriarchy” (Schor 61). Thus, as Schor has argued, “....despite the historical, critical, and creative practice of women artists ... current canon formation is still based on male forebears, even when contemporary women artists ... are involved” (58). It is

for this reason that I undercut Alcott's and Rossetti's patrilineal legacies in favour of recovering their matrilineal heritages. By focusing on the output of privileged male artists who achieved incorporation into the canon, as well as celebrity status in the public sphere, we subtly reaffirm the centrality of individualism in our conceptions of the social role of artistry. Through demonstrating that Alcott and Rossetti wrote out of female literary communities within their families, I foreground the diverse array of lesser-known texts and artefacts that contribute to a foundational work's creation.

Poovey has claimed that "minor" texts should not be reintegrated into the canon unless they can tell us something about "...the imaginary wholes our discipline has been devised to illuminate: literary history, the history of gendered writing, the history of cultural ideas" (REP 449). The life-writing of the Alcott and Rossetti women does all of these things, but it is also valuable as a record of the aesthetic formation of these women as writers. The lesser-known Alcott and Rossetti women offer profound critiques of the ideologies of individualism in the Transcendentalist and Pre-Raphaelite movements, developing distinctive theological frameworks that are shared in common throughout the family. As critics and visionaries, these women are the "matches" and equals of the canonised male artists of their families in every way. This thesis recovers their history to demonstrate that the individual theologies of renunciation espoused by Louisa May Alcott and Christina Rossetti were the legacy of their mothers. They were formulated against their fathers' and brothers' circles respectively, and shared in common with their sisters—the "little women" with whom they affiliated themselves.

“The terrible cost of feminine submission”: the critical heritage of the “anxiety of authorship”

Much of the early criticism of Alcott and Rossetti aligned their rejection of the androcentric paradigm of artistic genius, commonly associated with their male relatives in the Transcendentalist and Pre-Raphaelite movements, with the supposedly inferior qualities of their writing. For instance, a 1930 review in the *Times Literary Supplement* by Basil de Sélincourt typifies Rossetti’s poetry as expressing “....an imprisoned genius, a genius doomed to unfulfilment” because artistic originality is fostered by a “latitude and amplitude of circumstance” that is “harder for a woman” to attain (1022). In particular, de Sélincourt associates what he describes as Rossetti’s qualities of “introversion and self-effacement” with her status as a “satellite” in a society where “the centre of gravity was incorrigibly male”, detecting in her work a “repressed Epicureanism” that belies her unfulfilled attraction to the Pre-Raphaelite movement (*ibid.*). De Sélincourt extends the inability to cultivate an individual identity, unhampered by allegiance to the male subject, to all female poets—arguing that the world is only “just conceiv[ing] and even see[ing] signs of a civilisation in which a woman will be able to place herself with open eyes” (*ibid.*). In other words, women like Rossetti have not been granted sufficient autonomy to pursue their artistic visions. Thus, “....even when [Rossetti] renounced the world there was a certain hollowness in her renunciation, for she was renouncing what she had never had” (*ibid.*).

De Sélincourt’s portrayal of authorial renunciation as the by-product of female submissiveness is also embraced, albeit positively, by Alcott’s contemporaries. Alcott’s funeral eulogy describes her as “ripe parental fruit dropped from this family tree” and her death, two days after her father’s, is used as evidence of her identification with him: “....the two were so wont to be together, God saw they could not live well apart. As the young mother in the classic story gave her breast to her famished sire in prison, so this daughter,

such a support to her father on earth, was needed by him even in heaven”.² Early assessments of Alcott’s work underscore the fact that her writing financially supported her father, the Transcendentalist philosopher Bronson Alcott, in his literary and artistic aspirations, thereby presenting her authorial vocation as a response to his needs: “She has denied herself other pleasures for the satisfaction of giving comfort and pleasure....” (ibid.). Perversely, an artistic stance that undercuts the individualistic and libertarian qualities frequently associated with male artistic genius is presented as reflecting the authors’ desires to support the alleged male geniuses in their lives. In these early reviews, the matrilineal communities of the Alcott and Rossetti families are expunged from the record: their existence is not even acknowledged, let alone considered as a possible source of inspiration for both women.

It is hardly surprising that such assessments would be embraced by a coterie of male journalists and scholars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the presence of the Romantic concept of male genius as an ultimate point of authorial aspiration has also left its trace in twentieth-century feminist criticism. Gilbert and Gubar’s 1979 foundational work, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, defines *Little Women* as a depiction of “....the terrible cost of feminine submission” (483), while Rossetti is described as a type of “Judith Shakespeare” (558)—referring to Virginia Woolf’s fictionalised narrative concerning Shakespeare’s sister, whom Woolf re-imagines as a writer whose pretensions to genius are stifled by her brother’s overwhelming fame and success (AROOO 36). The important cultural work attained by Gilbert and Gubar in the realm of early feminist literary theory should not be underestimated. As Janet Gezari has argued, “Gilbert and Gubar’s account of how nineteenth-century women’s writing had been shaped by ‘gender strife’ brought the emergence of gender as a category of analysis to full consciousness” (266). The theorists’

² “Louisa May Alcott”. AFAP 1707-1904. MS 1130.16. Folder 7. Houghton Lib., Harvard.

work unmasked the potentiality for “doubleness” in women’s writing of the nineteenth-century, alerting readers to the fact that writing that might, on first glance, seem to conform to stereotypes of female inferiority might, on another level, undermine these stereotypes.

Nevertheless, as Nina Auerbach has succinctly put it, Gilbert and Gubar’s work also “grants patriarchal structures ... a power they do not seem to have earned” (506). I concur with Gezari’s claim that the theorists’ “....argument about precursors ... more than any other, dates their book” (268). *The Madwoman in the Attic* references Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), which postulates that the male poet conceives his work as a battle with his literary predecessors to establish an independent voice. Functioning from the assumption that that “Western literary history *is* overwhelmingly male” (47), Gilbert and Gubar adapt Bloom’s theory to argue that female writers correspondingly experience an “anxiety of authorship” that is the product of the male author’s refusal to recognise the legitimacy of a feminine voice (49). In the face of the male literary tradition and the proliferation of patriarchal portrayals of women, Gilbert and Gubar’s female writer struggles to attain autonomy because she can only see herself through the “male-inscribed literary text” that has been passed down to her: one where she is “killed into a ‘perfect’ image of herself” (15), existing merely as “inanimate *objet d’art*” (40).

In this historical account of women’s writing, the female author is always “other” and “object”—not only socially and politically, but in her very self-conception. Such an analysis of female authorship displays, in Gezari’s words, an “inferiorised psychology of women under patriarchy” (276). The tendency to focus on masculine depreciations of female authorial achievement, as can be observed in the early commentaries of Rossetti’s and Alcott’s work, has led to a defensiveness regarding the alleged inability of women’s work to satisfy masculine conceptions of authorship. Such readings do not stop to consider that the rejection of masculine models might be deliberate. Germaine Greer (1995), for example, has

disregarded the entire corpus of nineteenth-century women's poetry wholesale, contending that women who wrote poetry in English before 1900 have been critically neglected because they were "disabled and deflected by the great tradition itself" (xxiii). The Victorian poetess, termed in Greer's book as a "slip-shod sibyl", is a repugnant figure who is perceived as a "flying-pig or dancing-dog": recognised only as having any value as a writer because she had the courage to write during a period when female authorship was marginalised (xxi).

Greer's work is an extreme example of the output of Gilbert and Gubar's theory of an "anxiety of authorship" when taken to its limits, but it is not isolated in its assumption that the female capacity for self-expression is repressed by the dominant model of male genius. Angela Leighton (1992) offers a more nuanced account of the nineteenth-century female author's struggle to distinguish herself against the social mores that surrounded her. In contrast to Gilbert and Gubar, Leighton acknowledges that women wrote out of a "self-consciously female literary tradition" (1), but perceives this tradition as growing from "a struggle with and against a highly moralised celebration of women's sensibility" (3). The work of women poets is situated within a conflict between the prescriptive female values of "sincerity and purity" (ibid.) and the individualistic model of artistic identity that is inherited from the Romantics (5). Isobel Armstrong (1993) similarly contends that Victorian women's poetry reveals the lack of an expressive outlet for the spontaneous "overflow of feeling" that Coleridge claimed was integral to poetic expression (340-341). As a consequence of the inability to "bring forth an excess of feeling", repression becomes an integral aspect of the female poet's condition because, for women, "...the overflow of secret and hidden feeling creates the barriers which bind and limit it" (341).

The critical indebtedness to a Bloomian model of authorial patrilineage has allowed female repression to become a central preoccupation of the literary criticism surrounding nineteenth-century women's writing. A notable exception to this trend is Marianne Hirsch's

The Mother/Daughter Plot (1989), which upholds the importance of recovering the figure of the mother as a pivotal precursor to the female author (19). However, Hirsch's study is still beholden to the vision of the author as an isolated and individualistic figure who must divorce herself from all social communities and networks, including that of the family, in order to attain an independent artistic identity. Hirsch argues that "...in conventional nineteenth-century plots of the European and American tradition the fantasy that controls the female family romance is the desire for the heroine's singularity based on a disidentification from the fate of other women, especially the mother" (10). This important work of psychoanalytic recovery is still invested in a vision of autonomy that finds its model in the Romantic conception of a male literary genius who seeks to distinguish himself against the tradition that has preceded him. Hirsch does not stop to consider that a female literary tradition might follow a fantasy of integration, rather than individuation, especially if the female community is perceived as existing on a continuum that stems from the divinely ordained love of the mother.

"I am that I am" or "I am even I"? Alcott and Rossetti's resistance to the individualistic model of authorial genius

Within the Romantic tradition of creativity, the author conflates himself with God by presenting himself as the infallible origin of the imagined world that derives from him. This is summed up in Coleridge's definition of the authorial imagination: "The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (172). One may wonder how this identification with the infinite God differs with that of the mother in Christina Rossetti's theology. The difference is located in the fact that the mother's divine

power is rooted in her self-giving capacity to create “little” things, thereby aligning her procreative divinity with those who are perceived to be weak and diminutive. By contrast, the Romantic author identifies with the power of God as self-transcendent, so that “...the only reality we have is one strung together out of perceptions by means of the imagination” (Battersby 43). In other words, the “other” only exists in relation to the self, whereas the mother gives of the self to allow the “other” to come into being. In the words of Battersby, “For the Romantics, then, art grows out of individuality” (44), and this individuality is rooted in the separation of the self from the “other”.

Battersby cites Anais Nin’s critique of Henry Miller and Lawrence Durrell’s conception of authorship, contained in her cynical aphorism: “I suppose they mean ‘I am God, I am not a woman’” (45). What Nin is getting at is that the Romantic model of authorship allows the male, positioned as the dominant societal subject, to imagine himself as omnipotent, while woman, the societal other, is “necessarily linked to the body; to the ‘real’ world; to feeling, emotion and ‘subjectivity’” (45). Thus, where the author who follows Coleridge’s authorial manifesto affiliates himself with the self-definition of the Old Testament Yahweh, who proclaims of himself: “I am that I am” (King James Exod. 3:14), Christina Rossetti only defines herself, “I am even I” (“The Thread of Life” II 14). As I will explore in the first chapter, titled “I am even I”, Rossetti asserts her subjectivity as a means of separating herself from the divine objectivity of the male artist. She recognises her artistic identity as rooted in her selfhood, but this selfhood, as inherently limited, leads to a recognition of the selfhood of others, especially the marginalised “other”, as can be observed in her identification with Elizabeth Siddal, the late wife of her brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Central to my thesis is Mary Poovey’s claim that “...to say women were legally or economically marginal or even that they were characteristically relegated to the object term

of cultural grammar is not to say they were denied all forms of power” (PL xi). The cultural power that is seized upon by the female author is the ability to foreground human subjectivity as the basis for the formation of artistic identity, which is, in turn, geared towards empowering the subjectivity of the “other”. It is my contention that the nineteenth-century female writer cashes in on her marginalised status as “other” to elevate it above the authorial “I am” because the “other” more closely resembles an incarnate God who “...being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2: 6-8), rather than, in Battersby’s words, “...an individual and arrogant ego, so swollen with pride as to suppose that its own self encompasses the whole universe” (45).

Certainly, Louisa May Alcott, like Christina Rossetti, rejected the prototype of individualistic genius with the utmost repulsion. Lauren Hehmeyer compellingly demonstrates that Louisa May Alcott’s conception of authorial identity was formed in opposition to the model of genius that was laid out by her father:

As a result of Bronson [Alcott]’s chosen life as a philosopher, his family suffered from unrelenting hardship and humiliation ... As one of the older sisters, [Louisa] keenly felt the cost of Bronson’s choices and spent her adult life in the pursuit of the financial security her father had failed to provide ... According to Louisa’s description of herself in her letter of 1855, she was a decided contrast to her father: distant from divine origins, close to Nature, not Heaven. If she saw him as a genius, she would not want to see herself as such. His influence on her concept of genius was a contrary one: *genius might be admired, but it was not to be desired* (para. 15).

The Transcendentalist conception of genius is centred on the notion that “...the individual need not concern himself with the institutions of society because, as representatives of the outside world, they would interfere with the development of the self” (Warren 27). This necessitates a marginalisation of the family, the traditional realm of female kinship and influence. In his 1844 essay, “Experience”, Emerson claimed that “Marriage (in what is called the spiritual world) is impossible, because of the inequality between every subject and every object” (230). Predictably, Emerson assigns the role of subject to the male: “The subject is the receiver of the Godhead, and at every comparison must feel *his* being enhanced by that cryptic might” (ibid., emphasis added). In his conscious refusal to identify with the female “other”, the male subject affirms the Godlike nature of his selfhood. Conversely, the female object can never enter into full communion with the divinity of the male because she is an appendage to the male as Godhead: “...nor can any force of intellect attribute to the object the proper deity which sleeps or wakes forever in every subject” (ibid.). To Emerson, “Other people have no existence, no substance, except as they are absorbed into or made use of by the self” (Warren 29). Consequently, he is also able to write on the death of his five year old son, Waldo: “In the death of my son, now more than two years ago, I seem to have lost a beautiful estate—no more” (“Experience” 218).

Joyce W. Warren’s 1989 monograph, *The American Narcissus*, has argued that the American cultural emphasis on the “positive qualities of freedom and self-determination” has “...encouraged an insular self-assertion that prevented the individual from recognizing the selfhood of others” (4). Fuelled by the narrative of manifest destiny, which positions the triumph of the individual as evidence of the American republic’s overarching favour with God, “there has been little room for the ‘other’ person” in a nation that defines itself through the narrative of an ascent to power (4). Citing the work of Emerson in particular, Warren

argues that this emphasis on individual freedom has created a culture where woman, “the traditional other”, is “regarded as a non-person” (17).

Warren’s assessment of Transcendentalist individualism is by no means isolated. In her 2015 feature article for *The New Yorker*, “Pond Scum: Henry David Thoreau’s Moral Myopia”, Kathryn Schulz writes that: “The real Thoreau was, in the fullest sense of the word, self-obsessed: narcissistic, fanatical about self-control, adamant that he required nothing beyond himself to understand and thrive in the world.”³ In particular, Schulz refers to Thoreau’s response to the 1849 wreck of the brig St John, just outside of Boston: “On the whole, it was not so impressive a scene as I might have expected. If I had at once found one body cast upon the beach in some lonely place, it would have affected me more. I sympathized rather with the wind and waves, as if to toss and mangle these poor human bodies was the order of the day” (9).

The wreck of the brig St. John, an Irish “famine ship”, claimed over twenty fatalities, which were displayed in boxes on the neighbouring hillside and conveniently seized upon by the Transcendentalist philosopher as fodder for his cold and dispassionate authorial observation. Now stripped of their autonomy, the bodies of the dead became mere vehicles to aid and assist Thoreau in his individualistic communion with nature: “If this was the law of Nature, why waste time in awe and pity?”, he asks (ibid.). If the other person did not really exist to begin with, except as a by-product of the individual’s imaginative engagement with the world, why indeed?

The Pre-Raphaelite diminishment of the “other” occurred less as a conscious strategy than as an implication of the rarefied status of the male artist within the Brotherhood’s public discourse. In her recent monograph, *Critics, Coteries and Pre-Raphaelite Celebrity* (2018), Wendy Graham has illuminated the Pre-Raphaelite artist’s celebrity status, which is closely

³ “Pond Scum: Henry David Thoreau’s Moral Myopia” Oct. 19 2015. Paragraph 6. Web. 28 Sept. 2018.

aligned to his cultural relegation to “the margins of society” and recipient of “inadequate public recognition”, as indebted to the construct of “romantic individualism” (57). Graham contends that the Pre-Raphaelites capitalised on the public’s initial “neglect, incomprehension and censure” to cultivate an avant-garde *mystique* as misunderstood geniuses whose only compensation for their inadequate recognition was their very “status as geniuses” (ibid.). In the Pre-Raphaelite movement, then, we see the dominant male subject posing as the “other” through positioning his underappreciated brilliance as the foundation for his future canonisation. Graham contends that the history of the movement reflects a wider cyclical pattern where “....avant-gardes burst upon the scene, dispense with their posture of antagonism and get incorporated” (78). This strategy of posing as the underrated “other” is therefore a perverse way for the male artist to reassert his cultural supremacy.

What are the implications of this masculine appropriation of critical marginalisation and neglect for women? In Graham’s view, the painting of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in particular, reflects his fascination with “....the concept of the feminine alter ego or state of inner contradiction wherein the ego and a second self struggle for dominance” (168). The “second self” can be viewed as a reflection of the female “other”, and the female model in Rossetti’s paintings represents the threat of feminine subjectivity and its potential to obliterate the godlike individualism of the male artist. Rossetti’s 1867 watercolour painting, *Lady Lilith* (Fig.1), portrays the self-aware female subject, who is in control of her sexual power, as a lethal threat to the autonomy and transcendence of the male creator. In Talmudic myth, Lilith was the primeval woman who was created as equal to man from out of the dust (Patai 296). As such, she had no interest in obeying Adam’s authority and eventually left him to copulate with a demon (ibid.). In response to Lilith’s desertion of Adam, God created the helpmeet, Eve, who was shaped from out of Adam’s rib and was therefore unconflicted in her identification with him (297). In an 1870 letter to T.H. Hake, Rossetti described Lilith’s “self-

absorption” as “the perilous principle of the world” (*Correspondence* 4 70.110 449-50).

Immersed in her own individualism, Lilith refuses to adapt to the role of artistic muse for the male artist and thereby undermines his godlike precedence.

The first part of this thesis, “Matches for Very Big Adversaries”, explores Alcott’s and Rossetti’s theologies of renunciation as acts of resistance to the ideologies of individualism that were promulgated by the men within their families and which were informed by the larger artistic manifestos of the Pre-Raphaelite and Transcendentalism milieu in which they moved. Christina Rossetti’s poetic entries in the Pre-Raphaelite journal, *The Germ* (1850), which are explored in Chapter One, “I am even I”, interrogate the Pre-Raphaelite fear of feminine subjectivity through scrutinising the figure of the female corpse in Pre-Raphaelite poetry and art. The female corpse is revealed by Rossetti to be the ideal Pre-Raphaelite model: conveniently subservient to the sexual desire of the male artist and devoid of any agency that would invest the female subject with an identity that is independent to that of her male counterpart.

However, Rossetti breaks into the subconscious world of these corpselike figures to demonstrate that for the female muse, death is a convenient escape from the voyeurism of the male gaze, which allows her to become united with an incarnate God who affirms the independence of her identity and the sacredness of her vision. Rossetti’s critical enquiry into the Pre-Raphaelite fascination with the female corpse is further explored in Chapter Three, “The grave worm revels now”, which analyses her opposition to the Pre-Raphaelite figure of the dead beloved, who is commonly presented as a saintly intercessor for the male artist’s spiritual redemption. Rossetti takes umbrage at her brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s, redirection of divine transcendence towards erotic love, and reasserts the responsibility of all individuals, including the male artist, to account for their moral conduct before God. In deliberate contrast to her brother’s iconic poem, “The Blessed Damozel”, Rossetti’s female

beloved expresses doubt concerning her ability to guarantee a heavenly reunion with her fallen earthly lover in the poet's little-known dramatic monologue, "A Year Afterwards".

Central to my examination of Rossetti's interrogation of the Pre-Raphaelite corpse is the editorial intervention of her brother, William Michael Rossetti, who acted as the gatekeeper of his family's reputation by censoring and suppressing a selection of his sister's poems, which were critical of their brother, in his 1896 edition of posthumously collected verse, *New Poems of Christina Rossetti*. Section II, "Behind A Mask", compares the obfuscation of Christina Rossetti's critical commentaries on the poetry and painting of Dante Gabriel Rossetti with the critical history surrounding Louisa May Alcott's pseudonymous sensation writing and its encoded critiques of the Transcendentalist movement. Alcott, who claimed that she wrote under a pseudonym for fear of the "horror" her sensation work would induce in "dear Mr. Emerson" (Giordano 146), has frequently been judged as repressing her rebellious literary alter-ego behind a "double voice" that obscures her psychological frustrations. Such critical readings emphasise Alcott's lack of autonomy and read her generic choices through a "narrative of exclusion" (Fite 175) where it is assumed that the stylistic decisions of female writers reflect their comparative lack of freedom within the literary marketplace. Instead, I argue that Alcott took pleasure in outwitting her male contemporaries through using genres that they regarded as aesthetically inferior.

In particular, I explore Alcott's assessment of Hawthorne's critiques of the Transcendentalist conception of artistic genius in his 1860 novel, *The Marble Faun*, in her sensation novella, *A Marble Woman* (1865). Alcott endorses Hawthorne's portrayal of the inanimate female muse, or "marble woman", as a cypher of the male artist's desire to assimilate the subjectivity of the female "other" into his Godlike self, but rejects Hawthorne's cynical assessment of the heterosexual union as being predicated upon the subjugation of the female artist. Instead, Alcott looks forward to a future where an egalitarian union between

male and female artists produces a collaborative work of art that celebrates the power of female procreation in its capacity to bring forth “little things”, as is encapsulated in her reference to American sculptress, Harriet Hosmer’s, portrayal of a little infant clutching a little insect in her 1855 sculpture, *Puck*. In Alcott’s unfinished novel, *Diana and Persis* (1879), this sculpture is presented as the product of an artistic collaboration between male and female artists. Both Alcott and Rossetti reject the individualism of the male artist as predicated upon the objectification and subordination of his inanimate muse, but where Rossetti locates feminine fulfilment in the afterlife, Alcott is more optimistic in her vision of a future where the construct of male artistic genius can be rejected in favour of an egalitarian union between the genders.

Alcott’s determination to imagine a future where the male artist can relinquish his individualism in favour of recognising the subjectivity of the female “other” reflects her rejection of her father’s pursuit of his philosophical vocation at the cost of the freedom of his wife and daughters, who were forced to financially support his artistic aspirations. Alongside my examination of Christina Rossetti’s commentary of the Pre-Raphaelite portrayal of the female muse in, “I am even I”, I also consider Alcott’s parodic satires regarding her father’s philosophical experiments, such as her 1873 short story, “Transcendental Wild Oats”: an account of Bronson Alcott’s failed Transcendentalist fruitarian commune, “Fruitlands” (1843). At the close of “Transcendental Wild Oats”, Alcott alters the real-life trajectory of the Alcott family narrative by re-imagining her father’s spiritual redemption as a response to her mother’s emphasis on the centrality of family ties. Bronson Alcott’s fictional counterpart, Abel Lamb, submits to his wife’s spiritual authority and promises that he will prioritise on the needs of others, especially his family, in the future. This spiritual transformation is reiterated in a second autobiographical short story, “Eli’s Education” (1883), which sees a fictionalised version of Bronson Alcott relinquishing his dream of becoming a spiritual leader to support

his family by embracing a career in education. Alcott's autobiographical writing continually reasserts the precedence of her mother's theology of renunciation and its emphasis on prioritising the needs of the "other" above the self as the foundation for a truly utopian society. The elevation of a theology of renunciation as central to the female artist's vocation is also shared by Rossetti who contrastingly emphasises the female artist's renunciation as directed towards the accomplishment of heavenly redemption, instead of the installation of a utopian society on earth.

Recovering the Matrilineal Heritage of Louisa May Alcott and Christina Rossetti

Alasdair MacIntyre's 1981 treatise on moral philosophy, *After Virtue*, stakes the controversial claim that a decline in the study of morality and ethics has led to a deterioration in the practice of virtue among Western cultures (1-5). MacIntyre's work, which traces the evolving definitions of virtue from the ancient world to the present day, contends that the collapse of a tangible code of moral conduct derives from the fact that we no longer conceive of the self as finding its "moral identity" through "...its membership in communities such as those of the family, and neighbourhood" (205). In MacIntyre's conception, a Christian society conceives the individual as part of a "cosmic order", so that "the good man is a citizen of the universe", responsible not only for his treatment of his "kindred", but also for his relationship to the entire phenomenological order of existence (157).

Alcott and Rossetti conceived of themselves as existing within such an order. They were able to do so because they affiliated themselves with the matrilineal Christian communities of their families. I would define the structures of these matrilineal communities as being covenantal in nature. Within Christian theology, as is laid out in Ephesians 2:11-13, the covenant of the incarnate God is a pledge to redeem the world through the sacrifice of his

death, regardless of the worthiness of humanity to receive such an unmerited gift. As such, a human covenant, like the marriage contract, mirrors this pledge by requiring the individual to uphold their side of the bargain, irrespective of whether the reciprocal party chooses to do so. A theology of renunciation can therefore be properly viewed as the virtue system of such a society because it operates under the assumption that the individual must prioritise on the needs of the “other”, no matter what.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has argued that much of the feminist criticism surrounding nineteenth-century women’s writing characterises the authorial preoccupation with renunciation as “inherently repressive” because it functions under the assumption that Judeo-Christian religions “explicitly enjoin the subordination of women to men” without studying them in any theological depth (16-17). In Fox-Genovese’s estimation, such critics have responded to what they deem to be “man’s determination to subordinate women to themselves” by seeking the “erasure” of religion from female authorship, consistently refusing to provide in-depth studies of the religious beliefs of nineteenth-century authoresses in their work (17). Instead of aligning authorial freedom with the Romantic “I am”, it might be more useful to examine women’s authorship through its orientation towards the “other”, for it is in the portrayal of the “other” that we actually see women resisting the male model of authorship that has been passed down through the Romantic tradition.

It is nevertheless important to bear in mind that some feminist thinkers react viscerally to the feminine theology of renunciation because it is uneven in its application. As feminist theologian Sarah Coakley has argued, secular feminist theory has stressed “...the specifically *gendered* nature of much political marginalization and subordination, and of the insidious entanglement of gender with race, class and other factors of discrimination in the hierarchy of oppressions” (xiii). Christina Rossetti scholar, Lynda Palazzo, has argued that the androcentric gendering of God functions as a means of justifying the oppression of

women within the divine order (xi). Palazzo contends that Christina Rossetti reconceives God as female and imagines the ties of Christian community as being perpetuated through the “bonds of sisterhood” (xiv).

While I concur with Palazzo in her assertion that Rossetti sees the Christian community as being propagated outward through sisterly relationships, it is to my mind irrefutable that Rossetti upholds the incarnate Christ as the perfect model for divine renunciation. Yet, Christ’s renunciation need not necessarily be conceived as affirming an oppressive patriarchal hierarchy. In Coakley’s conception, what is termed as Christ’s *Kenōsis* is “....not only compatible with feminism, but vital to a distinctively Christian manifestation of it....” (4). *Kenōsis* refers to the self-emptying of Christ, as is set out in Phil. 2: 6-8, quoted above. Coakley demonstrates that this passage has been exploited by a minority of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century male theologians to justify the existence of a patriarchal framework that subordinates women and ethnic minority groups to the dominant white male subject. For instance, Frank Weston (1907) compared Christ’s act of *Kenōsis* to an enslaved African king dutifully accepting his enslavement as the will of God, while Charles Gore (1891) suggested that *Kenōsis* was a model for how the white male subject might usefully identify with “....the circumstances of an ‘inferior’: the child, the uneducated, or the ‘savage’” (Coakley 19-20).

However, in Coakley’s estimation, *Kenōsis* can be a useful paradigm for women if it is understood as conceiving “true divine ‘empowerment’” in the context of “a *special* form of human ‘vulnerability’” that is equally applicable to men (32). By vulnerability, Coakley does not mean “victimisation”, but instead refers to a type of submission to the divine will that facilitates spiritual transformation (34). One must let go of the limitations of subjectivity to be truly integrated into an omnipotent, all-powerful being, in the same way that this omnipotent being conversely embraces subjectivity to become united with humanity. The

individual does not proclaim with God, “I am that I am”, but rather invites the all-powerful “I am” to encompass them in a spiritual transfiguration that is ultimately empowering.

In Part II, “That mighty maternal love which makes [...] little women”, I demonstrate that the Alcott and Rossetti women conceived of sympathy as a form of self-emptying that allowed them to enter into deeper communion with the other, something that, in turn, brought them closer to the divine. Resisting Glenn Hendler’s (2001) contention that sympathy unwittingly obliterates the autonomy of the other by integrating the other’s victimisation into the subject’s experience, I demonstrate that the Alcott and Rossetti women developed a type of “shared consciousness” through taking part in collaborative literary projects and shared religious practices. The life-writing of the Alcott and Rossetti women was integral to the collaborative development of a theology of renunciation, as well as a shared worldview and distinctive literary style.

Life-writing is an integral area of study in nineteenth-century women’s writing because, as Linda H. Peterson (1999) has argued, it forces critics to consider “....the possible self-representational modes available to, acknowledged, or created by women writers” (3). Within the life-writing tradition, many women “....composed their lives without a sense that they were appropriating a masculine tradition or that their experiences were radically different from men’s” (6). Likewise, Karen Lystra has foregrounded life-writing as challenging perceptions of the “sexually repressed Victorian” in its representations of the “private live[s]” of nineteenth-century writers who often conceived of love as a means of transcending the barriers of subjectivity (5-7). The life-writing genre’s recovery of the private worlds of nineteenth-century women, in particular, is fundamental to my repositioning of the matrilineal heritage of Louisa May Alcott and Christina Rossetti as a key influence on the authors’ public outputs. Due to its largely unpublished status and subsidiary relegation to the “minor” canons of the authors’ works, Alcott’s and Rossetti’s life-writing has received

limited critical attention, with a few notable exceptions, such as Mary Arseneau's *Recovering Christina Rossetti* (2004).

Section I of Part II, "Left-handed societies", makes evident the central influence of matriarchs, Abigail Alcott and Frances Rossetti, in the development of a communal theology of renunciation that prioritises the needs of the other in the life-writing of the Alcott and Rossetti women. Abigail Alcott's journal directed her four daughters towards a practice of "lived religion" through conceiving unification with the divine as facilitated by sympathetic identification with the other. She encouraged her daughters to collaborate with her in the formation of her journal, so that the perspectives of all members of the "left-handed society" were given equal precedence in their record of a shared history. This practice was continued by the four Alcott sisters who developed the juvenile newspapers, *The Portfolio* and *The Pickwick*, dedicated to their mother, in their adolescence, and who continued to dedicate epistolary and commemorative works to Abigail, as well as engage in collaborative journaling, during their adulthood.

The theology of renunciation developed by the Alcott women functioned as a framework for conceiving the trials and temptations encountered by each individual as part of an overarching providential order where each person is required to shape their actions and desires to account for the needs of the other. This providential framework unites the struggles of the individual with those of the wider community, thereby enabling the individual to conceive of their destiny as inextricably tied to the community as a whole. As such, the Alcott women counteracted Bronson Alcott's understanding of the individual's destiny as shaped by a pre-determined fate that affirmed his divine genius. For Bronson Alcott, it was the responsibility of the outside world to conform to his genius by shaping its circumstance to meet his peculiar needs and desires; for the Alcott women, it was the responsibility of the

individual to shape their needs and desires to complement both the circumstances of the outside world and the needs of the “other”.

In Christina Rossetti’s Valentine’s Day verses, dedicated to her mother, the theology of renunciation developed by the Rossetti women is presented as the product of a self-contained community that is united in its shared vision of God. This vision of the divine shapes not only a “shared consciousness”, as is apparent in the life-writing of the Alcott women, but also a shared selfhood that unites the subjectivity of each individual in an overarching integration with God. Frances, Maria and Christina Rossetti, as presented in the Valentine’s Day verses, perfectly enact Coakley’s definition of *Kenōsis*—letting go of the self to make room for the presence of God and, in doing so, simultaneously affirming the subject’s unification with the “other”. Rossetti draws an analogy between the divine communion of the matrilineal community and the “equal sharing of essence (*ousia*) among the Persons of the Trinity” (Cadenhead 113) where each “person” of the triune Godhead retains its distinct personhood, while nevertheless remaining united as a single deity. Frances Rossetti, through her conflation with the person of the Father, is presented as the primeval origin of the matrilineal community’s spiritual unification, for, like the Father, she begets her children out of love—allowing them to take on a distinct personhood that is nevertheless derived from her very being.

The Rossetti men are absent in Christina Rossetti’s portrayal of the familial community’s *Kenōstic* unification with God. In Rossetti’s conception, unification with the divine is predicated on the act of faith, which, within the Rossetti family, finds its origins in the mother. Those who deny the spiritual authority of the mother are therefore excluded from divine communion. It is at this point that Rossetti’s vision of the unification of the matrilineal community with the divine diverges from Alcott’s. Throughout Alcott’s public and private works, the outward-facing orientation of the matrilineal community is portrayed as having the

power to transform the outside world. By contrast, Rossetti maintains the inter-subjective framework of the matrilineal community as self-contained: it does not have the authority to shape another person's free will. The Rossetti women's theology of renunciation is simply the act of stoically bearing with the fallen world, waiting until the resurrection to attain a complete unification with God, all the while living with the knowledge that many others will choose to reject God's grace.

Section II, "A Loving League of Sisters", illuminates the centrality of the matrilineal discourse of the Alcott and Rossetti women in Louisa May Alcott's and Christina Rossetti's canonical works to demonstrate that the worldviews of Abigail Alcott and Frances Rossetti are propagated through a community of sisterly descendants in the authors' critically established writings. Alcott's and Rossetti's shared experience of sisterhood within the family allowed both women to develop an understanding of sororal ties as generating a widespread reform of the female community in the outside world, as well as a moral reformation of the work of the female artist. Both women uphold the vision of an elected sisterhood that receives the devotional values of the mother, in order to propagate them into a wider sisterly community. Christina Rossetti's 1850 autobiographical bildungsroman, *Maude*, tracks the moral, aesthetic and psychological development of its titular heroine from embracing an artistic ideology of individualism, which is closely aligned with that of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, to expressing a mystical unification with the person of Christ through her experience of the *imitatio Christi*. Maude Foster's rejuvenated Christian vision is facilitated by her elected community of sisters, especially the example of her friend, Sr Magdalen Ellis, whose entry into a religious sisterhood inspires Maude to relocate the inspiration of her poetry to her religious faith.

Louisa May Alcott's 1873 bildungsroman, *Work*, contrastingly presents the mystical unification of its heroine, Christie Devon, with her elected sisterhood as rooted in their

mutual engagement with the wider world. Like Maude Foster, Christie Devon discovers that embracing an ideology of individualism disengages the female artist from her surrounding community and encourages her to exploit her sympathetic capacities to exert power over others. Christie rejects the Transcendentalist preoccupation with self-autonomy to embrace a theology of *caritas*, using her artistic gifts to minister to the needs of the marginalised, thereby extending the peculiar relations of sisterhood into the world at large. Christie, who is named for Christ, does not seek to enter into Christ's mystical passion, in order to facilitate her own spiritual redemption—but rather enacts a conscious imitation of Christ's acts of charity, so that she is able to achieve a mystical identification with her chosen sisters. Surrounding herself with an intersectional sisterhood that is representative of a wide range of ethnic and economic demographics in nineteenth-century America, Christie engages in a variety of charitable projects that conceive of social reform as stemming from the individual's identification with the other.

Alcott's portrayal of an intersectional community that is engaged with the outside world diverges from Rossetti's preoccupation with spiritual redemption in the afterlife, but the authors coincide in their shared emphasis on the transformative power of sisterhood. In the canonical work of Alcott and Rossetti, the union between sisters enables the female artist to create an inter-subjective vision of art that rejects the ideology of individualism that is modelled by the male artist. Both women present their sisterhoods as offshoots of a new tradition of artistic matrilineage that empowers "little women" to propagate the theological visions of their mothers to succeeding generations.

"Lift the veil, see the light": Transatlantic styles of thought

As an unprecedented comparison, this study brings together two female authors who bear little relation to one another within the parameters set out by nineteenth-century women's

studies as a field. Alcott and Rossetti never met, there is no evidence that they read one other's work (although it is possible they did, given the similarities apparent in their theologies of renunciation I have drawn out in this thesis), nor is there any tangible indication of a shared print culture accessible to both women, or even a circle of mutual acquaintances within the spheres of either epistolary exchange or transatlantic exploration. *The Matrilineal Heritage of Louisa May Alcott and Christina Rossetti* was never envisioned as a study of either influence or interchange. Instead, it demonstrates that transatlantic connections can be mapped through parallel experiences: in critical receptions, familial relationships and religious communities, all of which go towards creating a distinctive artistic identity. First, it seeks to expose how critical traditions surrounding renunciatory aesthetics have inadvertently "othered" nineteenth-century women writers by promoting Romantic ideologies of genius that continue to dominate scholarly perceptions of "great" writing and canon formation. Second, it examines how two female authors navigated their status as others through affiliating themselves with the religious beliefs of their female relatives, tracking the authors' active resistance to prevailing models of authorial identity promoted by the dominant male figures of their families.⁴ Most pertinently, it challenges the notion that creative originality and innovation are centred on one's position as subject and the privileged alienation this entails; an alienation that allows the artist to disregard all covenantal obligations in favour of pursuing an elusive internal "truth" that is centred on self-revelation and personal fulfilment.

Within the field of postcolonial studies, Edward Said has demonstrated that the subjugation of the other is derived from "ontological and epistemological distinction[s]" between the subject and all that dwells beyond it (2). While *Orientalism* contains this discourse within the geographical spheres of "Occident" and "Orient", it draws attention to

⁴ Jennifer Camden has similarly explored how the "secondary heroine" in nineteenth-century British and American fiction is a type of "other" who embodies "alternative construction[s] of femininity and nationhood" (2). However, Camden's analysis focuses on fictional figures.

the othering of the East as derived from a particular “style of thought” (2). This intellectual tradition references the “corresponding reality” of the East (5), but the allusion to this reality neither determines its existence, nor offers an objective account of the other who dwells within it. The premise that our perception of the other does not determine the construction of their identity is indisputable, but Said’s work came at a moment when “Orientalism” had reached its peak as a supposedly objective and dispassionate discipline within the academy. Scholarly discourses appertaining to the centrality of individualism to the pursuit of genius, as well as the dismissal of renunciation as a disempowering alternative for women, have attained a comparable dogmatic status within the field of nineteenth-century women’s studies.

Like Said, I do not set out to expose this dominant ideology as a hegemonic master-discourse of oppression that is either aesthetically or intellectually inferior. Said acknowledged that: “The fabric of as thick a discourse as Orientalism has survived and functioned ... because of its richness....” (24). The ascendant status of the Pre-Raphaelite and Transcendentalist movements within the artistic countercultures of nineteenth-century Britain and America is irrefutable, and it is for this reason that Rossetti’s and Alcott’s resistance to the ideologies of individualism promoted by these movements is invaluable. Not only do the authors expose how artistic individualism defines itself in opposition to the female other; they also reveal how nineteenth-century women defined themselves against the figure of the individualistic male genius.

In selecting the two authors for my case study, I encountered similar methodological challenges to those set out by Said, namely the importance of balancing “the general group of ideas overriding the mass of material” with “the much more varied work produced by almost uncountable individual writers” (8). Alcott and Rossetti not only stood out for their connections to the two most prominent male artistic movements inspired by the Romantic

tradition in nineteenth-century Britain and America, but also for their continuing association with these movements within the canon of feminist criticism, which has historically disregarded the authors' matrilineal heritages and the theologies of renunciation that were formulated against the male literary traditions of their families. The myriad networks of artistic affiliation within these two families, as well as their connections with diverse intersections of artists in the public sphere reveal how artistic manifestos and discourses of identity emerge out of "political circumstances" and "configurations of power" within the family (Said 10, 5).

Nevertheless, my examination of the dynamic interchange between the male and female communities of these families is not formulated with the purpose of exposing identical relational dynamics and formations of power. Such an object would be impossible to attain. As Said has argued, "...a considerable degree of nuance and elaboration can be seen working ... between the broad superstructural pressures and the details of composition, the facts of textuality" (13). This study likewise necessitates "...an act of delimitation by which something is cut out of a great mass of material, separated from the mass" and made to stand in for the discourse as a whole (16). The primary delimitation I have made is located in the peculiar familial relationships I have selected for study. While the term "matrilineal heritage" refers to the authors' affiliations with their mothers and sisters in both cases, the influence of their male relatives has been restricted to Alcott's father and Rossetti's brothers respectively. The term "ideology of individualism" refers to a style of thought inherited from the Romantic tradition and does not necessarily coincide with a patriarchal superstructure. Consequently, the male influences discussed here reflect Alcott's and Rossetti's interactions with the artistic milieux in which they moved, rather than their positions in patriarchal hierarchies.

Alcott's resistance to the Transcendentalist ideology of individualism expands across the Transcendentalists' circle, while Rossetti's interrogation of the male artist's voyeuristic

relationship with his muse remains grounded in the influence of her brothers. Rossetti's early experimentations in verse coincided with those of Dante Gabriel and William Michael Rossetti with whom she debated the role of the artist and the moral function of art in depth. Her interactions with the wider Pre-Raphaelite circle were limited: she declined the invitation to attend its meetings as an honorary member and her contact with the Brotherhood remained on a largely superficial basis.⁵ Rossetti's father, Gabriele, also has little bearing on her relationship with the Pre-Raphaelites. As an acclaimed Dante scholar and Italian *improvisatore*, Gabriele Rossetti's influence can be identified in Rossetti's scholarship on Dante and her Italian poetry, which comprises a small subsection of her overall canon. Gabriele Rossetti was not directly involved in the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, although he may have influenced the movement's depictions of Dante Alighieri, which are not immediately pertinent to the scope of this topic. Gabriele is therefore not discussed within this study and the scarcity of English translations available of his work raises serious obstacles to producing an in-depth analysis of his influence on Christina Rossetti. Consequently, my examination of Christina Rossetti's interactions with the Pre-Raphaelite movement remains focused on her brothers with ancillary reference to their immediate acolytes, such as the late wife of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Elizabeth Siddal.

Contrastingly, Louisa May Alcott was exposed to Transcendentalism through her father, but Bronson Alcott was not a formative influence on her writing. Bronson Alcott was an orator acclaimed for his public lectures and conversational series (Matteson 206), as well as his skill in the Socratic method of teaching (Reisen 27). His philosophical theories were a point of departure for Alcott's developing theology of renunciation, but the writings of Emerson, Fuller and Hawthorne are referenced most frequently in her literary work. Unlike

⁵ For a complete account of Rossetti's interactions with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, see Chapter 1, subsection "I would that I were dead".

Rossetti, Alcott was acquainted with an extended circle of scholars who shaped the ideology of individualism she was exposed to throughout her childhood. During her residence at the Temple School, she lived in close quarters with Elizabeth and Sophia Peabody, as well as Margaret Fuller (Reisen 29 36); she was later tutored by Thoreau (55) and enjoyed unlimited access to Emerson's library (126), while her admiration of Hawthorne's novels is documented throughout her journals (Myerson et al 63 129).

Hawthorne is a key reference point in Alcott's critical appraisal of the Transcendentalists because he occupied the position of both respected insider and cultural outsider. As I will discuss in Chapter 1, Hawthorne initially affiliated himself with the movement, but publically expressed his disenchantment with Transcendentalist philosophy after he left the Brook Farm community in 1841. Hawthorne's critiques of the Transcendentalists are referenced throughout Alcott's writing, especially his commentary on Emerson's essays. Alcott develops a feminist reassessment of Hawthorne's critical position by championing a collaborative union between male and female artists. Her vision of artistic collaboration between genders alludes to Margaret Fuller's feminist appropriation of the "Over-Soul" and the latter's belief that the Over-Soul facilitated both the subject's experience of gender fluidity and their identification with the other. It is therefore integral that I reference Hawthorne, Emerson and Fuller at length, in addition to Bronson Alcott's philosophical teachings.

As the familial configurations within this study are examined through the lens of two competing ideological discourses, the material examined should also reflect the pervasiveness of these discourses across a wide cross-section of the authors' work. Just as Said emphasised the "material effectiveness" of the Orient in a diverse variety of media (23), so do I also examine the authors' theologies of renunciation across a range of genres, including epistolary writing, juvenilia, pseudonymous and posthumously published work, and unpublished

manuscripts in categories as varied as literary criticism, collaborative journaling and amateur newspapers. The perspective I seek to foster is “broadly historical and ‘anthropological’”, given that I also “...believe all texts to be worldly and circumstantial in (of course) ways that vary from genre to genre, and from historical period to historical period” (ibid.). My intertextual practice of setting unpublished and lesser-known texts alongside canonical works seeks to “....discover plausible ways of negotiating between ‘the life’ and ‘the work’”, for to juxtapose life-writing, fiction, privately-written poetry and theology is merely “...to read one kind of text alongside another” (Bodenheimer 16). Equalising the critical attention given to a variety of texts has enabled me to re-centralise the influence of the matrilineal community of the Alcott and Rossetti families, which has, in part, been obscured as a result of the value judgements surrounding these texts’ lesser worth.

In particular, I resist critical preoccupations with “Goblin Market” and *Little Women*. The tendency to centralise these works in studies of Rossetti’s and Alcott’s writing generates the illusion that they are representative of the authors’ diverse outputs and embody the acme of their literary achievements. This is particularly problematic in regard to Rossetti. Dinah Roe has argued that “....the reluctance to engage with Rossetti as a serious devotional commentator is ... reflected in the continuing investment in her earlier, more secular poems” and “....there remains a critical and popular lack of interest in the poetry that postdates 1865, when she was only 35 years old” (CRFI 4). Rossetti’s poetic output totals at over 1,000 poems, over half of which are devotional, but “Goblin Market” remains “...her most famous and anthologized work”, while “....the vast majority of Rossetti criticism focuses on it” (Weltman 1 6).

Yet, according to Weltman, “...all of [Rossetti’s] volumes of poetry and fiction were highly praised in her own time” (1) and “Goblin Market” did not receive an exclusively favourable response on its publication in 1962. Ruskin famously lampooned the work for its

metrical irregularity, advising Rossetti to “...exercise herself in the severest commonplace of metre until she can write as the public like” (qtd. in Marsh 268). “Goblin Market” has only dominated scholarship on Rossetti since the emergence of second wave feminist criticism in the 1970s and ‘80s, which by and large focused on psychoanalytic theories that drew “...connections between female creativity and female sexuality”, expressing “....signs of uneasiness with the fact of [Rossetti’s] spinsterhood, particularly if that spinsterhood [was] seen in terms of lifelong virginity, and especially with the fact of her Christian faith” (D’Amico 8). Given that this study seeks to rehabilitate Rossetti’s agency through recovering the intellectual rigour of her religious beliefs, “Goblin Market” is consistently placed in conversation with other texts, which reveal its embeddedness within the discourses of the matrilineal community.

Although *Little Women* conversely formed the bedrock of Alcott’s reputation in her lifetime, it is a work that comes fraught with editorial and readerly interventions. Alcott commenced the novel at the request of Bronson Alcott who was negotiating the publication of his philosophical treatise, *Tablets* (1868), with her editor, Thomas Niles, at the time. In exchange for publishing her father’s text, Niles requested that Alcott author a children’s book for girls, believing that there was a gap in the market for such a work (Reisen 264-265). Alcott commenced *Little Women* with considerable distaste, confiding in her journal that “...I plod away, though I don’t enjoy this sort of thing. Never liked girls or knew many, except my sisters, but our queer plays and experiences may prove interesting, though I doubt it” (Myerson et al 165-166). Her fans’ investment in the novel infuriated her, especially their demands that the four sisters marry.⁶ Alcott eventually capitulated to these demands by marrying off her heroine in the second part of the novel, but her decision remained a lifelong

⁶ “Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that the only end aim of a woman’s life. I *won’t* marry Jo to Laurie to please anyone” (Myerson et al 1997 167).

bone of contention.⁷ To read *Little Women* as Alcott's representative work aligns her authorial commentary on the role of the artist with the demands of the marketplace and obscures the extensive observations on women's artistry, male genius and renunciatory aesthetics in her life-writing. Throughout this study, *Little Women* is placed in dialogue with "...the queer plays and experiences" of the matrilineal community who inspired its composition (Myerson et al 1997 166), as these unedited records contain the prototype for the utopian female community that Alcott believed was the foundation of the female artist's devotional vision and literary output.

In addition to foregrounding the theological discourses of the lesser-known women who influenced Alcott and Rossetti, my recovery of the authors' matrilineal heritages also provides a new comparative model within the field of transatlantic studies. Until now, transatlantic studies of Alcott's work have been grounded in models of influence and exchange, while Lorraine Janzen Kooistra's *Christina Rossetti and Illustration: A Publishing History* (2002) is the only monograph to touch on Rossetti's transatlantic connections. Christine Doyle's *Transatlantic Transactions* (2000), a monograph on the interchange between Alcott and Bronte, focuses on Bronte's role as a precursor for Alcott's portrayal of women's work, arguing that "...Alcott, spurred on by her American perspective, identifies with Bronte's premises but resists her conclusions" (13). Although Doyle's examination of the similarities between Bronte's and Alcott's biographies provides a useful precursor for my study of Alcott's and Rossetti's familial dynamics, her methodological focus on Alcott's literary references to Bronte, as well as her emphasis on the progressiveness of Alcott's Transcendentalist milieu, do little to forward my analysis of Alcott's and Rossetti's resistance to the male literary traditions of their families. Likewise, Barton and Huston's *Transatlantic*

⁷ "Jo should have remained a literary spinster but so many enthusiastic young ladies wrote to me clamourously [sic] demanding that she should marry Laurie, or somebody, that I didn't dare to refuse & out of perversity went & made a funny match for her" (Myerson et al 1995 125).

Sensations (2016) considers the transatlantic exchange of ideas in sensation writing, paying careful attention to the influence of British writers like Elizabeth Braddon on Alcott's thrillers, but remains grounded in the material exchange of print culture and pays scant attention to life-writing or unpublished manuscripts.

Alcott and Rossetti's lack of a conscious influence over one another renders their shared affiliation with the theological discourses of their matrilineal communities more compelling. Toni Wall Jaudon has persuasively argued that a religious framework produces "...culturally shared ways of seeing, hearing, and feeling" (726) and that religion possesses the power to redefine "...not only the boundaries of political community ... but also the nature of sense perception" (727). Consequently, the experience of an individual within a religious community "...shapes the material world to which the senses refer" (727). The existential experience of people of faith challenges the notion that "...there is a shared terrain, a stable, common ground across which things, bodies and ideas move" (720). Although Alcott and Rossetti never met or corresponded, their affiliation with the religious discourses of their mothers and sisters creates a shared perception of artistic identity as other-orientated and dedicated to a religious vision of either divine union or earthly communion.⁸

By foregrounding religious experience as a point of ecstatic transatlantic communion between women, I emphasise the transcendent power of female communities and their ability to influence one other beyond the androcentric discourses of the classic canon.⁹ If the resonances I have identified hold weight for future scholars, this research has the scope to generate further analyses of traditions of feminist thought that resist models of artistic

⁸ As a "...transatlantic history of the novel via the secondary heroine", Camden's 2010 monograph endorses my claim that the transatlantic cross-pollination of ideas can transcend networks of exchange (5). Similarly referencing the shared heritage of the Romantic tradition, Camden argues that nineteenth-century British and American novels "...equate the primary heroine with a cultural ideal of femininity", but also "...challenge that cultural ideal through the figure of the secondary heroine" (ibid.).

⁹ Nina Auerbach's *Communities of Women* contains a fascinating comparison of the matriarchal structure of the Bennet and March families in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Little Women* respectively, but Auerbach does not link her observations concerning fictional female communities to the authors' matrilineal heritages.

identity inherited from the Romantics. As well as enabling further examinations of the feminist potential of renunciatory aesthetics that are unhampered by scholarly deference to male literary traditions, my comparative framework also opens up possibilities for further comparative studies of nineteenth-century female authors that are based on parallel life-experiences and Saidian “styles of thought”.

Within the field of Alcott studies, scholars are already beginning to examine conceptual patterns of ideological affiliation across the Alcott family. In the conference I recently organised on Louisa May Alcott’s younger sister, May, Ariel Clark Silver spoke convincingly on the complementarity between the political philosophies of Margaret Fuller and May Alcott Nieriker. Silver demonstrated that although Fuller and Nieriker’s journeys to Europe were two decades apart “...the experience in Europe was an important extension of the tensions that governed their lives in America” because it allowed both women to develop intellectual responses to emerging debates surrounding the values and allegiances of Republicanism, both at home and abroad (4-5). There are other female writers whose mutual engagement with renunciatory aesthetics could be fruitfully placed alongside the work of either Alcott or Rossetti, including Felicia Hemans, the Bronte sisters, Emily Dickinson, Michael Field, Frances Hodgson Burnett and L.M. Montgomery. Likewise, my analysis of the authors’ resistance to the ideologies of individualism promulgated by their male relatives might also be productively brought to bear on the work of LEL, Fanny Fern, Augusta Webster, Elizabeth Drew Stoddard and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps.

Beyond the body of critical writing appertaining to nineteenth-century female authorship, my recuperation of the female communities who inspired the feminist subtexts of Alcott’s and Rossetti’s religious beliefs also foregrounds understudied styles of thought that contribute to a shared scholarly heritage that is the inheritance of academic women of faith. Said’s experiences as an “Arab Palestinian in the West” provided the initial inspiration for his

study of Orientalism (27) and my background as a Catholic woman within the academy is the foundation for my analysis of Alcott's and Rossetti's theologies of renunciation. The contemporary feminist scholar who shares many of the religious beliefs of such women cannot endorse scholarly narratives that emphasise their subjugation to male genius, for this pattern of androcentric domination compromises the validity of our own voices within the study of women's history. Their heritage is our heritage and we are part of the feminist tradition from which they write. Our positions as Christian female scholars are indebted to the struggles they undertook to provide an alternative vision of women's artistry in a period when ideologies of individualism pervaded accepted models of public authorship.

To say that the matrilineal heritage of Alcott and Rossetti contributes to the scholarly tradition from which I write does not undermine my assessments as a critic. Said made the point that the Western commitment to being "...nonpolitical, that is scholarly, academic, impartial, above partisan or small-minded doctrinal belief" obscures "...the highly if obscurely organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced" (10). The fact that I also inhabit a theology of renunciation enables me to provide insights into the inter-workings of the traditions of thought embraced by these women that an outsider could not share. Doubtless, it also compromises my ability to objectively assess the ways in which their religious frameworks may have inhibited their feminist potential. Every scholar is in some measure limited by the political circumstances that motivate their research; yet these motivations simultaneously enrich our scholarship.

My personal experience has shown me that greater space needs to be made for women of faith to articulate their identities in their research. The 2018 media storm surrounding Sarah Braasch, a doctoral candidate and former human rights lawyer who has since been dismissed from Yale University, has highlighted the ways in which the voices of women of faith, as well as those of women of colour, are marginalised within contemporary feminist

discourse. Braasch initially received attention for calling the police to investigate the identity of a black Yale student who was napping in the Graduate Common Room,¹⁰ but came under further scrutiny when her online article, “Lift the veil, see the light”, for *The Humanist* went viral. In this article, Braasch endorsed the ban of face-covering veils on the grounds that all women of faith “...choose to be ‘slaves’ in abusive, misogynistic, or otherwise patriarchal religious traditions”, going so far as to equate these traditions with the experiences of an alleged group of enslaved people who “....wanted to remain with their owners [sic] after emancipation”.¹¹ Braasch’s case is extreme, but it exposes the persistent conflation of religious women with scholarly ignorance, as well as the power that such thinkers have to affect the lives of women who exist beyond the networks of affiliation they have constructed on behalf of all feminists. That a Yale-educated doctoral candidate can publish work endorsing the claim that a subsection of enslaved people embraced their condition as slaves, while promoting the view that all woman of faith are the products of patriarchal oppression, suggests that those on the margins of both white and secular configurations of power need to be given further opportunities to incorporate their styles of thought into their scholarly discourses.

Feminist women of faith who embrace theologies of renunciation make up a diverse range of subcultures within the secular society that produces the political circumstances we write out of. These subcultures contain many resonances with the matrilineal communities of nineteenth-century female authors like Alcott and Rossetti. All interface with discourses of individualism that dominate contemporaneous models of authorship and develop feminist alternatives that envision the self as formed through reciprocal relations with others. Alasdair

¹⁰ Cleve R. Wootson, Jr. “A black Yale student fell asleep in her dorm’s common room. A white student called the police”. *The Washington Post*. May 11 2018. Web. April 5 2019.

¹¹ “From the Editors: A Note on Sarah Braasch”. *The Humanist*. May 10 2018. Web. April 5 2019. Following numerous complaints, Braasch’s article has been removed from *The Humanist*, but this note from the editors contains an outline of the work.

MacIntyre has recognised the continuing presence of such subcultures within our secular society, but argues that these subcultures are “interrupted and misinterpreted” by “the pluralism which threatens to submerge us all” (210). The Alcott and Rossetti women have been interrupted by the voice of the male genius and his pluralistic individualism for long enough and succeeding generations of critics have been hampered by an apologetic deference to ideologies of individualism championed by male literary traditions. *The Matrilineal Heritage of Louisa May Alcott and Christina Rossetti* is a study of the subcultures that produced Alcott’s and Rossetti’s vision of Christian female authorship, recovering a style of thought that continues to be embraced by women of faith both within and without of the academy.



(Fig. 1.) Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Lady Lilith*. 1867. Watercolour and gouache.

Metropolitan Museum, NY.

Chapter 1

“I am even I”

Rossetti and Alcott resisting male authority

In his 1904 memoir of Christina Rossetti, William Michael Rossetti described his sister's transition from childhood to adolescence as a period in which she increasingly forced herself to subdue her passionate emotions: “Her temperament and character, naturally warm and free, became ‘a fountain sealed’” (lxviii). This interpretation of Christina's early life was echoed by her other brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in his double-portrait of Christina, and their mother, Frances: *Christina Georgina Rossetti; Frances Mary Lavinia Rossetti (nee Polidori)* 1877 (Fig. 2). The portrait shows both women in side-profile and emphasises their austerity and inscrutability. Each gaze inclines away from the viewer in a frown, while the lips of both women are set severely and appear to eschew the expression of emotion—something that is also emphasised by the muted blue and grey chalk palette. When discussing this portrait in his memoir, William Michael Rossetti again linked it to his sister's enforced self-repression: “Whenever I set my eyes upon it, the lines from her poem, ‘From House to Home’ come into my mind—‘Therefore in patience I possess my soul; / Yea, therefore as a flint I set my face’” (lxv).

In both assessments of his sister's character, William Michael Rossetti freely utilises his personal interpretation of her poetry. His first reference is to her poem “The heart knoweth its own bitterness” (Crump 2001 797-798) where the protagonist, who is waiting to be united with the Lord, describes her state of being before his arrival: “Bear with me: I must bear to wait, / A fountain sealed through heat and cold” (43-44). Similarly, “From House to Home” (Crump 2001 76-82) describes the protagonist's transition from dwelling within “....a pleasure-place within my soul” (6) to her renunciation of all earthly pleasures: “Yea therefore

as a flint I set my face, / To pluck down, to build up again the whole—” (206-207). William Michael Rossetti’s biographical reading of his sister’s verse continues to influence interpretations of her poetry, while Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s portrait, as a surviving visual representation, is widely circulated as a reliable depiction of her character.¹² Indeed, Barbara Garlick (1993) explicitly interprets Christina’s identification with “The Frozen Fountain” as a reference to her virginity and “...the loss of selfhood involved in repressed sensuality” (105), while Dolores Rosenblum (1979) associates Christina’s impenetrable demeanour with her role as a Pre-Raphaelite model, claiming that her severe facial expression “becomes a ... mode of aggression, as this seemingly stoical declaration reveals: “Yea, therefore, as a flint I set my face” (85). Yet, as with the image of the sealed fountain, Rossetti’s image of the flint also belies a hidden depth, as can be observed in her poem on the stone (Crump 2001 251): “An opal holds a fiery spark; / But a flint holds fire” (7-8).

Louisa May Alcott’s fiction has likewise been frequently assessed in light of her father, Bronson Alcott’s, evaluation of her character. His 1882 *Sonnets and Canzonets* included a tribute to his daughter, which described her as “Duty’s faithful child” (qtd. in Matteson 404 14) who had “vexed a sprightly brain” (10) to “cherish kindred dear” (9). Following the discovery of Alcott’s pseudonymous sensation fiction, there has been a renewed critical emphasis on the fact that Alcott only commenced her iconic novel, *Little Women*, because her father believed it would clear the family debts.¹³ As William Michael

¹² See for example the dust cover and frontispiece of *The Letters of Christina Rossetti, Vol. 2 1874-1881*, ed. Anthony H. Harrison. At the close of his 1904 memoir, William Michael provides a list of portraits of his sister “which can be appealed to to settle the question of her good looks” (lx sic). The vast majority of the portraits William Michael refers to are by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Both his memoir and the earlier edition, *New Poems of Christina Rossetti* (1896), contain frontispieces that reproduce portraits by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Andrew and Catherine Belsey have noted that many modern biographies have followed William Michael Rossetti’s tradition of using Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s portraits for the frontispiece or front-cover (31).

¹³ Fetterley (1984) writes: “Given the financial success which followed the publication of *Little Women* and which has shaped the context within which her life is viewed, it is difficult to recover the sense of economic desperation which haunted Alcott previous to the discovery of her golden egg” (2). Subsequent generations of scholars have attempted to recover this “sense of economic desperation”. Estes and Lant stress the fact that Alcott only wrote children’s stories “...because such tales provided her with a much needed income” (100-101). Showalter (1997) claims that *Little Women* was a book Alcott had “not particularly wanted to write”, but it

Rossetti's assessment of his sister's character has influenced readings of her poetry, so Bronson Alcott's description of his daughter has shaped critical responses to her life and writing. Early reviewers praised Alcott's submission to her father's will, with an 1888 obituary claiming that Alcott would be remembered as "...the devoted daughter, on whose arm leaned for support that white-haired sage from whom her separation in life has been so pathetically brief".¹⁴ This tradition of interpretation continued into the 1970s with Carol Gay claiming that Alcott was unable to mature as a thinker because her relationship with her father infantilised her: "Driven by a blind desire to please him and by her own intellectual and psychological limitations, she succeeded only in giving him what he neither desired nor needed ... "Duty's Faithful Child", as her father called her, never grew up" (189). Similarly, Eugenia Kaledin writes that Alcott's "...profoundest artistic vision, the causes she believed in and worked for, she never gave life to in her fiction" because she embraced a "creed of womanly self-denial" (251). Alcott's theology of renunciation has frequently been viewed in light of her decision to support her father financially.

The influence of such patrilineal discourse on critical assessments of Alcott's and Rossetti's theologies of renunciation needs to be interrogated, in order to re-evaluate the agency that these authors were able to exercise as women of faith. This chapter analyses critical claims that Alcott's and Rossetti's theologies of renunciation derived from their subordination to the artistic authority of Bronson Alcott and Dante Gabriel Rossetti respectively. The biographical foundations of these claims will be scrutinised alongside the authors' correspondence with their male relatives, in order to establish the conversations and debates they entered into with the Alcott and Rossetti men. The authors' intertextual

allowed Bronson Alcott to find "new celebrity as the Father of the Little Women" (xxii-xxiii). Ross's 2005 article divides Alcott's work between her domestic and sensational fiction, implying the latter is unhampered by economic motivations.

¹⁴ "Louisa May Alcott". 1888. MS 800.23. LMAP, 1849-1931. Houghton Lib., Harvard.

references to the life and works of their male relatives in collaborative projects, such as the Pre-Raphaelite magazine, *The Germ*, and in autobiographical fiction like Alcott's "Transcendental Wild Oats" is also assessed, so as to examine Alcott's and Rossetti's active critical engagement with the ideologies of individualism that were promulgated by their male relatives.

Even as critical assessments of Alcott's and Rossetti's work expanded to include further analysis of their agency, they continued to focus on the authors' refusal to embrace ideologies of individualism modelled by their male relatives. Alcott is frequently understood as aspiring towards the values of her father and the Transcendentalists and their ideals of "self-expression, self-reliance and self-exploration" (Estes & Lant 99). Estes & Lant perceive Alcott as frustrated by the cultural limitations of the period, which forced her into meeting "the needs of her young readers and publishers" and actively prevented her from embracing a Transcendentalist way of life and literary style (101). Rossetti, on the other hand, is portrayed as suppressing her sensual nature, as fostered by the Pre-Raphaelites, to meet the requirements of the religious beliefs she shared with her mother and sister. For example, R.A. Bellas claims that Rossetti withdrew into herself because of the religious belief-system that was forced upon her, which he describes as an "...imposition of a code of life—a way of thinking, feeling, and acting—that did not satisfy the needs of Christina's personality or adequately explain her experiences" (43).¹⁵

Alcott's and Rossetti's theologies of renunciation are often seen as coercive outlooks that deny the authors' agency and their ability to engage in a discourse with their male relatives in the Pre-Raphaelite and Transcendentalist movements. More recently, in 2008

¹⁵ See also C.M. Bowra, *The Romantic Imagination* (245-270) and Donald Gray, who claims that Rossetti's poems "...are often personal in the sense that they express her feelings about herself and her connections with others, with the possibilities of life outside her narrow bound, and with God" (543).

Donald Sturge used William Michael Rossetti's description of Christina Rossetti as a "fountain sealed" to support his claim that she "...experienced inner conflict because her spiritual beliefs clashed with her innate desire for worldly things" (198). This conflict reflected the diverging influences "...that coursed through Rossetti's family, and can be roughly divided into two categories, 'religious' and 'intellectual' corresponding to the predominate interests of mother and father respectively"—and which were propagated among the male and female siblings of the family accordingly (193). Clearly sympathising with the Rossetti men, Sturge claims that Rossetti's so-called inner conflict "...caused her to develop a dichotomous world view" (216) because she "...could not easily renounce her natural human desire for worldly pleasures" (226). As recently as 2012, Meg Jensen has similarly argued that Alcott's work implicitly expresses her sense of repression under her father's "intrusive surveillance" (10). While Jensen acknowledges that Louisa "critiqued" Bronson Alcott's beliefs in her writing, she claims that she nonetheless "avoided ... explicit public critiques" of her father (5), which is "in a Bloomian reading" evidence of "weakness" (10).

Such critical assumptions are frequently justified by biographical assessments of the authors' relationships with their male relatives in the Pre-Raphaelite and Transcendentalist movements. The authors' childhood tendencies towards individualism are often read as being thwarted in their adolescence when they were supposedly indoctrinated with the notion that it was their moral responsibility as women to embrace theologies of renunciation. Alcott's and Rossetti's emphases on renunciation are sometimes read as evidence of their subordination to the male artists in their families. For example, Showalter (1997) claims that Alcott's father set out to "tame stubborn Louisa "down to docility"" (xii), something that "determined the shape of [her] life until her teens" (xiii), while Rosenblum contends that Rossetti's transformation from a "beautiful and wrathful little girl" to a "reserved middle-aged woman"

was a symptom of her deference to Dante Gabriel Rossetti who, as the head of the family, was regarded as the superior artist (85).¹⁶

It cannot be denied that both Alcott and Rossetti underwent a transformation from juvenile rebellion to adult respectability. However, the authors' decisions to embrace theologies of renunciation as adults were conscious and informed. Critical mis-readings of Alcott's and Rossetti's rejection of their childhood individualism have contributed to the negative connotations that have been attached to their theologies of renunciation. For example, Christina Rossetti's piety, reserved demeanour and disciplined devotional practice has often been read as a symptom of her adolescent breakdown, while Louisa May Alcott's decision to take on the role of family breadwinner has been used as evidence of her desire to place her father's needs before her own. However, further evidence suggests that the authors' theologies of renunciation were deliberately antagonistic towards the individualistic ideologies of the men in their families.

“I wish I had never been born”: biographical readings of Alcott's and Rossetti's theologies of renunciation

In infancy, Christina Rossetti was allied with her Pre-Raphaelite brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, as one of the “two storms” of the family, as opposed to the “two calms” of the other two siblings: Maria Francesca Rossetti and William Michael Rossetti (Marsh CR 5). Known by her father as an “angelic little demon” (ibid.), Rossetti admitted to having mutilated her arm with a pair of scissors in childhood after being reprimanded by her mother (50). Louisa May Alcott experienced similar fits of anger and frustration in her youth. An 1845 entry in her journal, written when she was thirteen, reads: “I am so cross I wish I had never been

¹⁶ See also Bump (345).

born” (55). Alcott’s early journals also express a sense of guilt over her temperamental outbursts: “I’ve made so many resolutions, and written sad notes, and cried over my sins, and it doesn’t seem to do any good!” (59); “I try to keep down vanity... My quick tongue is always getting me into trouble, and my moodiness makes it hard to be cheerful” (61).

Both Alcott and Rossetti gained increasing self-control in their adult years, but contemporary accounts agree that maintaining this self-control was often a source of frustration to both women. A selection of critics and biographers have assumed that Alcott’s and Rossetti’s change in temperament was enforced by and reflected the demands of their families and the wider socio-cultural expectations of women in the nineteenth-century. In 1845, when Christina Rossetti was fifteen, she suffered an adolescent breakdown. As a consequence of her breakdown, Rossetti became “introverted” and was increasingly exacting in her religious devotion, especially in practices of self-denial (Marsh CR 49; 53). Her doctor diagnosed her as experiencing symptoms of a religious mania, or what in modern terms would be understood as a form of obsessive compulsive disorder (52)—something that has led some contemporary critics and biographers to view her devotional practices throughout her life, as well as in her devotional poetry, to be both excessive and extreme.¹⁷

However, the most tenable medical explanation for Rossetti’s breakdown, offered by Nicholas Shrimpton in Natalia Fernandez’s BBC Radio 4 program, “Christina Rossetti: In

¹⁷ Frances Thomas (2013) writes, “So we are presented with a passionate girl who become a self-effacing woman, a writer of sensuous poetry who seemed to deny the senses in her own life, a woman who chose isolation and self-sacrifice amid Pre-Raphaelite splendours. She often exasperated her friends, she has exasperated me, she will exasperate the reader at times” (10). Greer views Rossetti’s beliefs with outright disgust as expressions of her repressed sexuality: “Her sexuality was unknown to her: the more it loomed vast and polymorphous in her dreams, the less able she was to confront it in any recognisable form . . . Appalled by the uncontrollable violence of her own nature, she resolved to stifle herself, no matter the cost”. After suggesting that Rossetti’s “invalidism” was a conscious choice, Greer hypothesises that it stemmed from her “religious mania” (SSS 364). For a complete summary of psychoanalytic interpretations of Rossetti’s breakdown see Bianchi (18).

Our Time”, is that Rossetti was suffering an early onset of Graves’ Disease, with which she was diagnosed in later life and which is known to trigger depressive episodes. This medical assessment has been consistently overlooked by biographers, in favour of more salacious interpretations of Rossetti’s mental collapse.¹⁸ Jan Marsh has speculated that Rossetti’s behaviour is consistent with that of a sex-abuse victim—hazarding that the abuser in question was her father, Gabriele (CR 48): something that there is no direct evidence for in Rossetti’s private writings; the accounts of her doctors; or in the memoirs of any member of the Rossetti family. Marsh’s theory remains highly contentious and is strongly contested by the Rossetti family¹⁹ on account of the fact that her psychoanalytical approach is based solely upon speculative evidence: “Perhaps too, Papa made excessive demands, confusing Christina’s companionate role with that of his absent wife, whom she resembled in his eyes....” (ibid.). Such interpretations deny Rossetti agency in regard to both the treatment of her mental health condition and the formation of her religious beliefs.

Furthermore, all of the aforementioned biographies of Rossetti fail to acknowledge that many of the hardships she experienced during the period of her breakdown were exacerbated by the behaviour of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. As the eldest son, Dante Gabriel Rossetti had received considerable financial support from his family to pursue his career as a painter. However, he frequently lived on credit—sending himself into debt, much of which he expected his younger brother, William Michael Rossetti, to clear. During this period, he often

¹⁸ Packer (1963) claims that Rossetti’s illness was self-induced and functioned as a means of avoiding the restrictions that were imposed upon her as a Victorian woman: “She early found semi-invalidism, with its freedom from economic and social responsibilities congenial to a life in which the production of poetry was paramount” (123). Frances Thomas links Rossetti’s symptoms to her religious beliefs: “She was now firmly locked into a system that taught her that human beings were miserable tainted creatures doomed to perdition. With her vivid imagination, the Horrors of hell were tangible and present....” (50).

¹⁹ In an interview I conducted on 19/5/2015, Rossetti’s Great-Niece, Mary Rossetti Rutterford, emphasised the affection with which Gabriele’s memory has always been regarded by the succeeding generations of the Rossetti family. Rutterford claims that Christina’s breakdown has been taken out of context by both critics and biographers, stating that within the family circle it has always been regarded as an adolescent depressive episode, which was exacerbated by the negative implications of Gabriele Rossetti’s resignation at King’s College, London and the subsequent financial hardship that ensued.

“threw up” paintings (Marsh DGR 82), leaving many unfinished, and abandoned his formal training with Ford Madox Brown, whom he had approached due to his objections over the teaching-style at the Royal Academy. It would be equally reductive to identify Dante Gabriel Rossetti as the source of his sister’s breakdown, but it is important to note that Christina Rossetti continued to embrace a theology of renunciation throughout her life, despite the inequality of autonomy between the siblings. Christina Rossetti’s consistent elevation of a theology of renunciation suggests that she made an active choice to reject the lifestyle of her brother and there is little written evidence to infer that she envied his individualistic outlook. My methodological emphasis on the intertextual dialogue between Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti will focus on Christina Rossetti’s ability to engage in a discourse with her brother about the respective merits of his ideology of individualism and her theology of renunciation.

Louisa May Alcott’s theology of renunciation has been similarly interpreted as a symptom of her willingness to sacrifice her ambitions to those of her father.²⁰ Such attitudes can be usefully contrasted with the tenor of critical responses to contemporary male American writers, such as Hawthorne and Melville, whose role as family breadwinner is often perceived to be an affirmation of their masculine autonomy.²¹ Like Rossetti, Alcott curbed her temperamental nature in her adult years and habitually practiced self-denial, although this was done with the purpose of enabling herself to provide more efficiently for her relatives. She took on the role of breadwinner at sixteen, selling stories to newspapers, as well as later working as a seamstress, teacher and servant. Following her success as an author, she also funded her younger sister, May’s, art studies in Europe and legally adopted the children of her elder sister, Anna Alcott Pratt, after her husband John died in 1870. She

²⁰ See Strickland (26-29), Elbert (xi-xii).

²¹ For a useful comparison of Alcott’s critical reception as breadwinner compared with prominent male American writers see Ciolkowski.

also took on the role of primary carer to her parents in the years before their deaths, nursing her father for seven years following his stroke in 1882.

Alcott's familial responsibilities often led her to take on literary projects that were distasteful to her. For example, she cancelled her European tour and commenced writing *Little Men* when Anna Alcott Pratt was widowed. Elizabeth Lennox Keyser (1995) has argued that Alcott continued to "...express her angry feelings while supplying herself with the moral commentary that would regulate them" (xvii). Biographer John Matteson (2007) has also linked Louisa's sense of familial obligation with her father's disapproval of her fiery temperament and adolescent hyperactivity, indicating that her adoption of a theology of renunciation was in some measure an attempt to win his approval (191-195).

It cannot be denied that Alcott expressed frustration over the familial responsibilities she was forced to take on. For instance, an 1874 journal entry reads: "When I had the youth I had no money, now I have the money I have no time, and when I get the time, if I ever do, I shall have no health to enjoy life" (191). She also keenly felt the sacrifices that she was forced to make for her family. An underlying resentment is clear in her account of her sister, Anna's, purchase of a new home, with her assistance: "So she has *her* wish, and is happy. When shall I have mine? Ought to be contented with knowing I help both sisters with my brains. But I'm selfish, and want to go away and rest in Europe." (8). However, such passages should not be read in isolation. From an early age, Alcott repeatedly affirmed that her greatest dream was to care for her impoverished mother who had been the most constant source of emotional support in her life: "[She] always encourages me, and I wish some one [sic] would write as helpfully to her ... I think she is a very brave, good woman, and my dream is to have a lovely, quiet home for her, with no debts or troubles to burden her" (63). Alcott never expressed any regret at the fulfilment of this dream, writing on her mother's death: "My only comfort is that I *could* make her last years comfortable" (206).

The notion that Alcott's sense of familial obligation stemmed from an enforced sense of duty ignores the vulnerability of Alcott's mother and sisters, as well as Alcott's genuine affection for them. Furthermore, the hardships experienced by the Alcott family were also compounded by the individualistic behaviour of Alcott's father, Bronson, just as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's economic recklessness impeded the wellbeing of the Rossetti family. As a Transcendentalist philosopher, Bronson had failed to support the family through his teaching or lecturing. The Temple School, which he founded in Boston, was closed in 1841 due to his radical teaching on the scriptures, while his subsequent attempt to found a Transcendentalist commune, Fruitlands, failed in 1844. Following the collapse of Fruitlands, Bronson informed his family that he would partake in no paid employment unless it accorded with his philosophic vocation: "I have [as] yet no clear call to any work beyond myself" (qtd. in Matteson 193). Following a family council in 1848, it was agreed that Abigail Alcott and her three children would move to Boston to work, while Bronson would occasionally accept donations for the lectures he gave for free. The employment options open to women in this period were limited and under-paid. As a consequence, the Alcotts lived hand-to-mouth in Boston for nine years, with Louisa writing that they were "Poor as rats & apparently quite forgotten by the Lord" (197). At one point, the entire family caught small-pox and Alcott's sister, Elizabeth Sewall Alcott, was later to contract scarlet fever, which weakened her constitution and led to her eventual death in 1858 at the age of twenty-two.

While critics have stressed Louisa's sense of loyalty towards her father, she frequently expressed disapproval over his failure to support the family. For example, in an 1856 letter to Bronson, she makes the pointed remark: "Things go smoothly, and I think I shall come out right, and prove that though an *Alcott* I *can* support myself" (27). In passages of her journal, she also condemns her father's philosophical system as excluding all social obligations: "If they are philanthropists I *should* enjoy it, but speculation seems such a waste

of time when there is so much real work crying to be done. Why discuss the Unknowable till our poor are fed & the wicked saved?" (216). It is clear that Alcott valued social and humanitarian projects above speculative thought. She suffered many hardships, but her decision to support the family was nevertheless a conscious choice and perhaps, in some measure, an act of protest against the beliefs and lifestyle of her father.

While biographical readings of Alcott's and Rossetti's works have stressed the authors' subordination to their male relatives, the correspondence and private writings of the two authors remain relatively understudied. Their correspondence reveals that they engaged intellectually with their male relatives and often refuted them—either directly or indirectly. Furthermore, many of the authors' literary works that engaged with the ideologies of individualism that were formulated by the Pre-Raphaelite and Transcendentalist movements have been overlooked. Alcott's autobiographical fiction critiques her father's attitude towards his familial responsibilities, as well as his philosophical beliefs. Similarly, Christina Rossetti's collaborations with the Pre-Raphaelites in her contributions to *The Germ* magazine also provide an implicit commentary on Pre-Raphaelite values and representations of women. It is therefore necessary to expand on the canon of writing that is commonly discussed when assessing Alcott's and Rossetti's relationships with their male relatives and their theologies of renunciation.

"I would that I were dead": Christina Rossetti's critique of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite objectification of women

Christina Rossetti's correspondence with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and her early collaborations with the Pre-Raphaelite movement in the Pre-Raphaelite journal, *The Germ*, reveal her intellectual engagement with the values of Pre-Raphaelitism. Her correspondence with Dante

Gabriel Rossetti challenges his moral values and behaviour through literary debate.

Christina's literary observations often underlie an implicit critique of her brother's writing and individualistic outlook. This can be particularly observed in her critical commentary on the poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's late wife, Elizabeth Siddal, which Christina considered for inclusion in her upcoming volume of verse in 1865 (*Letters* 1 224). On receiving Siddal's poems, Christina informed her brother that she believed the works of Siddal were autobiographical: "...how they bring poor Lizzie herself before one, with her voice, face and manner" (225). It is therefore startling that she openly admits that her favourite poem is "Number III", "Dead Love" (*ibid.* fn. 3), a work that condemns the inconstancy of the narrator's beloved:

Oh never weep for love that's dead

Since love is seldom true

But changes his fashion from blue to red,

From brightest red to blue,

And love was born to an early death

And is so seldom true. (1-6)

If read as an autobiographical work, Siddal's poem is extremely damning of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. It takes on a disturbingly prophetic tone in the context of Siddal's suicidal overdose, and pre-emptes the subsequent guilt Dante Gabriel Rossetti was to experience on account of the fact he introduced Siddal to laudanum and postponed their engagement for six years:²²

"Oh never weep for love that's dead / Since love is seldom true" (5-6). The changing

²² Dante Gabriel Rossetti's guilt on account of his wife's death is documented by Marsh (DGR 115; 167; 214) and Battiscombe (116).

“fashion” of the figure of Love from colour to colour can also be affiliated with Rossetti’s own paintings, which often went through phases of preoccupation with a particular model, many of whom he engaged in romantic relationships. The poem also becomes more damning when it is read as consciously intertextual with Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s verse. Siddal’s personification of love as a male figure doubtlessly references Rossetti’s creation of a figure of “Love”, inspired by Dante, in his *House of Life* sonnets, many of which were dedicated to Siddal. Perhaps the most famous of these is ‘The Portrait’ (14), where Rossetti invokes the personified Love to “....let this my lady’s picture glow / Under my hand to praise her name” (2-3). The poem describes how the inspirational figure of Love allows the poet to idealise his beloved in a similar manner to that of Dante’s Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*. Siddal trivialises Rossetti’s interpretation of Dante, as well as the homage he pays to her as a model, by transforming “Love” into a foppish figure who changes his colour with the fashion of the moment.

Furthermore, through describing love as being born to an “early death”, Siddal also references Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s later sonnet from *The House of Life*, “Stillborn Love” (44-45). This poem was probably a response to Siddal’s laudanum-induced miscarriage—an event that eventually triggered post-partum depression and ultimately led to her suicide.²³ In this poem Rossetti transforms the narrator’s regrets, which are described as “The hour which might have been....” (1), into the personified image of a child that has been lost and “....somewhere sighs and serves....” (6) before “The house of Love....” (7) in eternity. Though the lost moment cannot be reclaimed on earth (2), Rossetti indicates that it survives somewhere within the realm of immortality and will be united with the couple after their deaths:

²³ This view is expressed by Marsh (DGR 227-228) and Hawkesley (183-184).

But lo! what wedded souls now hand in hand

Together tread at last the immortal strand

With eyes where burning memory lights love home?

Lo! how the little outcast hour as turned

And leaped to them and in their faces yearned:—

‘I am your child: O parents ye have come! (9-14)

By contrast, Siddal’s figure of love is “born to an early death” because of his inconstant nature as one who is “seldom true” (6). Siddal’s poem conveys a total lack of faith in the fidelity of the absent beloved, and is sharply juxtaposed with the sentiments of regretful hope conveyed in ‘Stillborn Love’. Indeed, the climax of “Dead Love” is explicitly damning of the view that the mistakes of an inconstant lover can be rectified in the afterlife:

If the merest dream of love were true

Then, sweet, we should be in heaven,

And this is only earth, my dear,

Where true love is not given. (15-18)

This is doubtlessly a reference to Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s iconic poem, “The Blessed Damozel” (*Poems* 1-5), where a dead maiden pines for her beloved in heaven and experiences anxiety because he may be unable to join her there: “‘I wish that he were come to me, / For he will come,’ she said. / ‘Have I not prayed in Heaven?...’” (67-9). When compared with “The Blessed Damozel”, Siddal’s poem seems to scoff at Rossetti’s sentiments. The existence of heaven seems predicated upon the “truth” of love, which the poem has steadfastly denied. The implication is that if love is inconstant on earth, it will not

exist in heaven. This is a radical protest against the claims of “The Blessed Damozel” where the Damozel’s lover hopes that his unworthiness will be redeemed by the dead Damozel’s love for him:

.... But shall God lift

To endless unity

The soul whose likeness with thy soul

Was but its love for thee? (99-102)

In speaking of her particular admiration for “Dead Love”, Christina Rossetti implicitly affiliates herself with Siddal’s critique of her brother’s poetry. Indeed, she daringly informs him that she admires the poem because it is “piquant ... with cool bitter sarcasm”, an audacious admission when considered in context of the fact that she associates Siddal’s poetry with “Lizzie herself” (225). Unsurprisingly, Christina’s next letter to her brother indicates that he did not agree with her positive response to the poem: “...how odd it seems to me that just III my admiration is rejected by you as ineligible” (226). Christina’s throwaway remark masks her conceptual affiliation with Siddal’s criticisms in a discussion of the poem’s objective merits. Nevertheless, she does imply that Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s reaction to the poem belies his desire to control the image of Siddal following her death:

I think with you that, between your volume and mine, their due
post of honour is in yours. But do you not think that (at any rate
in your volume) (that) beautiful as they are they are almost too
hopelessly sad for publication *en masse*? (ibid.)

Emily J. Orlando has argued that Siddal’s poetry has been continually associated with that of Dante Gabriel Rossetti as “products of the great artist’s influence” that are “decidedly

secondary to his canon" (628). Orlando claims that this was because Rossetti "continually put his stamp on how history would remember [Siddal]", suppressing the publication of her poetry, and even destroying her photographs, so that she would be remembered solely through his paintings (628-629). Christina Rossetti's letter therefore simultaneously acknowledges her brother's desire to control Siddal's reputation, while implicitly supporting Siddal's criticisms of his inconstancy and objectification of women.

Christina Rossetti's responses to her brother's criticisms of her own poetry also frequently assert her independence, stressing the uniqueness of her poetic identity. Such acts of self-assertion refute those critical claims, defined by Allen J. Salerno, which brand Rossetti as a "...third Rossetti brother who merely rehashes the methods of the brotherhood at the expense of her identity" or as a "cloistered nun devoid of worldly or physical desires" (76). Anthony H. Harrison has argued that Rossetti refutes her brother's criticisms through an illicit "strategy of depreciation" where she refers to alleged technical weaknesses as a justification for not following his advice (ER 95). However, a careful examination of Rossetti's correspondence reveals that what may appear to be an affirmation of her poetic weakness is actually a statement of her poetic independence. For example, when responding to her brother's request that she allow him to provide a list of recommended revisions for her upcoming volume of verse, Rossetti replies: "Please make your emendations, and I can call them over the coals in proofs:— only don't make vast changes as 'I am I'" (*Letters* 1 232). While at first glance this may appear to be an admission of her artistic limitations, Rossetti, in fact, foreshadows her later triptych of poems, "The Thread of Life" (Crump 2001 330-331). In these poems, the narrator initially expresses a desire to join in the activities of those surrounding her: "Then gaze I at the merrymaking crew, / And smile a moment and a moment sigh / Thinking: Why can I not rejoice with you?" (II 9-11), only to repudiate the desire by asserting the transcendence of her personal identity: "But soon I put the foolish

fancy by: / I am not what I have nor what I do; / But what I was I am, I am even I" (II 12-14).

While it may be masked in deference, Rossetti's statement to her brother is therefore an assertion of her right to a separate voice from his own, as well as a rejection of any collaborative or shared literary style.

When outlining Christina Rossetti's "strategy of depreciation", Harrison cites a letter where Rossetti responds to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's request for new material (ER 96). She refuses this request, claiming that she is unable to produce poetry on demand because she is "a person of one idea" who sings from a "one-stringed lyre" and is therefore unable to "turn to politics or philanthropy with Mrs. Browning" (*Letters* 1 348). Harrison observes a denigrating tone in her statement that "Women are not Men" and that Dante Gabriel Rossetti "must not expect [her] to possess a tithe of [his] capacities" (*ibid.*). However, while the statement is outwardly depreciative, it nevertheless contains an underlying criticism of her brother, of which he would have been aware. In claiming that the only way to increase her output would be to broaden her subject-range to the breadth of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's, Rossetti explicitly references a poet that she knew her brother disliked. Indeed, he later criticised Christina's poem, "The Lowest Room", as "...echoish of the Barrett-Browning style", which he defined as a "modern vicious style" that evinced a tone of "falsetto masculinity" (*Letters* 1 323). In claiming that she can neither be Elizabeth Barrett Browning, nor Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti implicitly draws attention to the double-standard of her brother's demands. On the one hand, he demands a greater volume and variety of material, but on the other hand he excludes women from writing on certain topics. In response, Christina once more asserts her independence and distinctive character as a female poet by claiming that she is only able to write in a certain style and, if he does want her to follow Barrett Browning's example, neither should he expect her to follow his own.

Furthermore, in other letters Christina asserts her especial right to cover particular topics as a woman. For example, when responding to her brother's claim that the subject of her poem, "Under the Rose", was inappropriate for a female poet because it was about an illegitimate child, Christina replied: "...whilst I endorse your opinion of the unavoidable and indeed much-to-be-desired unreality of women's work on many social matters, I yet incline to include within the female range such an (work) attempt as this...." (234). Her justification is that "the Poet [sic] mind" is able to "construct" the heroine from its "inner consciousness" (ibid.). This suggests that, while she has no experience of the topic of the poem, she is able to empathise with another woman's experiences.

Moreover, some of Christina's letters also implicitly challenge her brother's moral approach to certain poetic themes. For instance, when criticising his sonnet on Chatterton, she writes:

You are right as to my thoro' ignorance not being able to say
anything about Chatterton's literary position: but the dreadful
poverty which goaded him to so dreadful a deed I do know
something of; & hard must be the heart which feels not for him,
however far from feeling with him. You bring the poor boy &
his gifts & his career vividly before one: *I*, if I could write thus
upon him, I should say something more & something less....
(238)

In this passage, Christina states that, while she does not share her brother's knowledge of Chatterton's work, she is able to understand the situation that drove him to suicide. Yet, while she is able to sympathise with him, she is not able to empathise with him, and it is implied that the "something more" she would say would be a condemnation of his suicidal act, while

the “something less” would presumably be a limiting of her brother’s unfettered praise. Christina therefore implies that there are moral obligations to the role of the poet, which her brother has failed to fulfil, and which she would be better qualified to achieve. Consequently, there are occasions where she indicates that his limited approach reveals an inherent moral weakness, where her “female range” (234) can render her more suited to the topic in question.

Rossetti’s belief in the moral superiority of women’s writing can also be observed in her entries to the Pre-Raphaelite magazine, *The Germ*. Rossetti’s poems in *The Germ* critique Pre-Raphaelite portrayals of women. Through intertextual references to the works of her brother and the wider Pre-Raphaelite circle, Rossetti interrogates Pre-Raphaelite depictions of the female body and offers an alternative feminist discourse on Pre-Raphaelitism. Critics have disputed how far Rossetti was welcomed as a collaborator to the journal and if she had the freedom to satirise the Brotherhood’s representations of women. *The Germ* was established by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 1849 as an artistic manifesto for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as well as an attempt to contribute to the sphere of literature, as well as art. All members of the Brotherhood were invited to contribute, but the magazine only went through four issues before it went out of print in 1850, due to poor sales.

Scholars and biographers have disagreed over the nature of Christina Rossetti’s involvement with the publication. Garlick has stated that Christina was marginalised because she was denied membership to the Brotherhood, but was nevertheless exploited as an “acolyte and central icon of virginity” within the journal (105). On the other hand, the Belseys have highlighted the fact that Dante Gabriel Rossetti invited Christina to become a regular contributor to the magazine and an honorary member of the Brotherhood, but that she turned him down (32). Indeed, an 1848 letter from Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Holman Hunt states that it was “impossible” to persuade Christina to attend the meetings because she was

“under the impression that it would seem like display ... a sort of thing she abhors” (qtd. in Doughty 45). Christina’s poems were thereafter used as a “filler” when the magazine was short of material and were privately selected by herself and her brothers from her notebooks (Easley 3). Christina’s status within the magazine as a silent outsider was her own choice, perhaps reflecting an implicit rejection of what she perceived to be the vanity of the project.

Critics similarly dispute how far Christina’s contributions were disparaged by her brothers. Easley has claimed that her *Germ* entries were depreciated by the Pre-Raphaelites. In particular, she draws attention to the fact that the printed edition of the *Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood Journal* does not acknowledge many of Christina’s contributions. She also claims that the editor, William Michael Rossetti, implied that his sister’s involvement with the magazine was trivial and unimportant (ibid.). By contrast, Doughty has contended that Dante Gabriel Rossetti relied on his sister to make submissions of quality to the publication, amidst the mediocre contributions that were made by painters with little literary expertise (95). It should also be acknowledged that when *The Germ* was reprinted in 1899, William Michael Rossetti recognized the merit of his sister’s contributions in his “Introduction” to the edition (17).

Christina’s entries to *The Germ* are sometimes interpreted as embodying an enforced sense of propriety imposed upon her by her family. For example, Elaine Shefer has argued that Rossetti’s portrayal of self-controlled, virginal figures in entries like “Repining” reflects the suppression of her temperamental nature by her brothers (16). Shefer contends that Christina’s poetry “expresse[s] the frustrations of a young woman locked in a prison of her own making” (17). However, Dante Gabriel’s attempts to convince Christina to recite her poems suggest that the Rossetti men were not averse to supporting her artistic aspirations. Her *Germ* entries should therefore be taken more seriously as deliberate interrogations of Pre-

Raphaelite representations of femininity and should not be overlooked as attempts to complement her brothers' ideals of Pre-Raphaelite womanhood.

The general critical consensus regarding Christina's submissions to *The Germ* is that they are centred on virginal female figures who are icons of self-containment. However, scholars dispute the self-consciousness of these representations and whether they can be understood as legitimate forms of self-expression. While Garlick has claimed that Christina exploited her virginal status because it was the only possible position she could take within the Pre-Raphaelite movement (109), Salerno has convincingly argued that Christina deploys a "Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic" to enable herself to "critique it from within" (77). Easley contends that Rossetti's *Germ* poems are "meditation[s] on her *choice* to suppress her name and desire for artistic fame" (7 emphasis added). Christina's *Germ* contributions should therefore be examined in light of their intertextual references to the works of the Brotherhood, in order to expose her critical commentaries on the moral and conceptual values of the movement, as well as the publication as a whole.

Christina's poem "Dreamland" (20), included in the first issue of *The Germ*, is centred on the image of a dead female figure. However, the death of this figure is portrayed as a positive occurrence, with the poet referring to her state-of-being as "a charmed sleep" (3), "a perfect rest" (17) and a "perfect peace" (32). It is implied that the evolution of the experience of this figure towards death is an integral aspect of her personal development, for she leaves "...the fields of corn, / For twilight cold and lorn" (10-11) as a completion of her journey towards "...the west / The purple land...." (20) where she can experience a "Sleep that no pain shall wake" (29) until "...joy shall overtake / Her perfect peace" (31-32).

Shefer has noted that many of Rossetti's poems reference Millais's 1851 iconic depiction of Tennyson's poem, "Mariana" (15). Tennyson's poem refers to the character of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, and dramatizes an event that happens off-stage in

Shakespeare's narrative. Mariana, imprisoned in the moated grange, laments the desertion of her lover, repeating in a dirge-like refrain: "I am aweary, aweary; / I would that I were dead!" In Millais's painting (Fig. 3), Mariana is portrayed at the close of the day, stretching her arms in apparent fatigue by her desk where she has been embroidering. Her posture is tense and her head thrown back in exhaustion. Barrie Bullen, in his "Pre-Raphaelite Revolution" module at Royal Holloway, has suggested that her uncomfortable position is indicative of an illicit pregnancy. Her room is also covered with scattered fallen leaves, which represent the loss of her youth during her time of self-enforced imprisonment.

While Shefer has suggested that Rossetti's frequent references to *Mariana* stress "renunciation, frustration and sexual repression", which Rossetti herself supposedly experienced (18), "Dreamland" portrays a far more liberating vision of the female figure's self-containment. The stylised landscape of the poem, of "purple land" (20) and "mossy shore" (26), implies a transfiguration of the heroine's state-of-consciousness that is infinitely pleasurable: "Rest, rest, that shall endure, / Till time shall cease;— / Sleep that no pain shall wake" (27-29). As opposed to the Mariana of Tennyson and Millais, who endures a painful self-imprisonment that is the consequence of her abandonment and possible shame, Rossetti's figure has escaped the restrictions of the outside world to exist in an enclosed state of being that no one can disturb. Furthermore, there is no absent male figure in Rossetti's poem and her heroine exists independently. Rossetti also implies that, due to her self-containment, no outside force is able to interfere with her identity. Indeed, Rossetti commands the reader to "Awake her not..." (4) because "She came from very far, / To seek where shadows are / Her pleasant lot" (6-8). Rossetti indicates that her heroine's choice to isolate herself from the outside world and the sphere of men, in particular, brings about completion, rest and fulfilment. This is because her isolation is *not* a response to male rejection, but is rather borne of an independent desire to achieve self-fulfilment in isolation.

Moreover, in portraying the heroine's death as a summation of her desires, Rossetti offers an implicit critique of Pre-Raphaelite portrayals of women, for if women are portrayed in continual repose, ever lamenting their unfaithful lovers, then their ultimate desire and final fulfilment must be found in death. This can be observed in the contributions of male members of the movement to this issue. For example, in Thomas Woolner's double-set of poems, "Of my Lady in Life" (1-5) and "Of my Lady in Death" (5-10), the unnamed female figure is viewed only through the eyes of her beloved, and his attraction to her apparent stillness, repose and sickliness suggests that the Pre-Raphaelite artist is, in fact, attracted to the female corpse. Indeed, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel" was inspired by Poe's "The Raven" (Upstone 192), a poem doubtlessly motivated by Poe's assertion that "the death ... of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world" (1621).

Woolner's narrator describes "his lady" as "...aloof and high" (1.3), "...like the simple flower / Trembling beneath the shower" (9-10), as possessing a "mild" voice (11) and "slight" touch (28) and as "Silent, with hands clasped and arms straightened" (137). He fails to portray her speaking, or in action, and even neglects to name her: "My lady's name, if I hear strangers use,— / Not meaning her—seems like a lax misuse" (31-32). This is because the narrator does not like to think of "his lady" as an independent person, describing her solely in relation to himself, as a body that "...lies in cold decay, / Which held the vital soul / When she was my life's soul" (144-146). The lady's lack of identity therefore makes her death seem inevitable.

Furthermore, it is also implied that the lady's death is the consequence of the sexual consummation of her relationship with the narrator. Indeed, "Of my Lady in Life" closes with a description of how "Each breast swelled with its pleasures" (141) and "...new sensations dimmed her eyes, / Half closing them in ecstasies" (143-144). The nature of the act is explicitly stated as illicit: "O God! It is not right to tell: / But I remember well" (174-175).

The denouement of the poem describes the narrator and his lady as becoming lost in a “whirling round” (181) where “dark was starred with life” (185), indicative of sensory oblivion and orgasmic ecstasy. However, at the opening of the following poem the narrator’s lady is already dead in what is probably the indirect consequence of her sexual experience.

Woolner writes from a Victorian tradition that fetishizes the erotic promise of female virginity and dictates that if a woman experiences sexual relations outside of marriage she is permanently “fallen”.²⁴ His Lady’s death can therefore be understood as the inevitable consequence of her probable sexual act, functioning as a means of preserving her purity, while simultaneously allowing the narrator to violate the virginity he finds so alluring outside of the confines of marriage. Indeed, “Of my Lady in Death” portrays the narrator as excessively preoccupied with his lady’s corpse, which is affiliated with the virginal impenetrability of death. The narrator describes how his “day-dreams hover ... round her brow / Now o’er its perfect forms / Go real worms” (31-33) and visualises his lady’s corpse directly: “Her eyelids by the earth are pressed; / Damp earth weighs on her eyes” (17-18).

Orlando has written extensively on the Pre-Raphaelite preoccupation with the female corpse, claiming that the erotic beauty of such models as Elizabeth Siddal was affiliated with an unhealthy emaciation, probably linked to consumption and anorexia, and a “deathlike” pale complexion (613). Woolner’s poems can therefore be read as expressing the Pre-Raphaelite fixation with images of dead and dying women, which portray death as the ultimate destiny of the Pre-Raphaelite heroine. When read against Woolner’s poems, Rossetti’s “Dreamland” can therefore be seen to expose the fact that death is the ultimate destiny of the Pre-Raphaelite model. However, Rossetti simultaneously creates a new realm of death where women can escape from the interference of men and their fetishization of the female body.

²⁴ For theoretical work on the “fallen woman” see Houghton 366.

Rossetti also questions the Pre-Raphaelite romanticisation of death in her second poem of the issue: “An End” (48). This poem was selected as the epilogue of the edition and opens with the line: “Love, strong as death, is dead.” This line is a striking reference to the Song of Solomon, the longest love-poem of the Bible: “Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is as strong as death; jealousy is as cruel as the grave” (8:6). This statement commands the female beloved to define herself solely through her relationship with her lover: “Set me as a seal upon thine heart” (ibid.). In declaring that this kind of love is “dead”, Christina destroys the female beloved’s enforced identification with the male lover. The implication seems to be that the love that the Pre-Raphaelites aspire towards is already dead, and so the quest for the erotic consummation of death is futile.

The subsequent lines of the stanza reference Ophelia’s song of grief for her father, Polonius, from Act IV, Scene V of *Hamlet*:

Come, let us make his bed

Among the dying flowers:

A green turf at his head;

And a stone at his feet....

(“An End” 2-5)

He is dead and gone, lady,

He is dead and gone,

At his head a grass-green turf,

At his heels a stone.

[...]

White his shroud as the mountain snow —

[...]

Larded with sweet flowers

(*Hamlet* IV V 29-37)

Rossetti's reference reminds the reader of Ophelia's hysterical grief and breakdown following Polonius's murder by Hamlet. In describing the death of "Love" through references to Ophelia, Rossetti implies that the destruction of "Love" is the direct consequence of the actions of men, who refuse to consider the implications of their behaviour for women, just as Hamlet's actions in refusing to explain his erratic behaviour to Ophelia ultimately causes her breakdown and suicide.

Ophelia's suicide was one of the Shakespearean scenes that most interested the Pre-Raphaelites, and was later depicted in Millais's iconic painting, *Ophelia* (Fig. 4). When considered alongside Millais's painting, Christina Rossetti's negative reference to the fate of Ophelia takes on another dimension, for Elizabeth Siddal served as its model. Indeed, Rossetti's critical commentary on the Pre-Raphaelite preoccupation with Ophelia can be seen as prophetic when examined in the context of Siddal's relationship with the movement and the negative implications it had for her life. Both Siddal's later suicide and her near-fatal contraction of pneumonia while modelling for Millais's painting, mirror the fate of Ophelia. While posing for Millais, Siddal was subjected to lying in a bathtub of cold water fully-clothed, so as to render the painting more realistic: a typical example of the Pre-Raphaelite model's subordination to the painter's artistic vision. Siddal almost died from the experience. Although Millais's *Ophelia* had not been commenced at this time, Rossetti was doubtless aware of the Pre-Raphaelite interest in *Hamlet*, and it is possible that the idea of painting Ophelia had been discussed within the group by this point, as the painting was begun in 1851. It is notable that Siddal had begun to model for the movement in the year that this issue of *The Germ* was printed. Rossetti's reference to Ophelia can therefore be read as a commentary on the negative consequences of the Brotherhood's lack of regard for the women who were

affiliated with the movement, and whose feelings, like those of Ophelia, were overlooked within the movement's quest to achieve an idealised, silent vision of femininity.

Furthermore, Rossetti's striking depiction of the death of "Love" probably also references her brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's, interest in the *Vita Nuova*, which he had begun to translate in 1845. In the *Vita Nuova*, "Love" is frequently personified as a masterful figure who controls both poet and beloved. As with Siddal's "Dead Love", Rossetti overturns Dante Gabriel Rossetti's idealisation of "Love" to suggest that the love he is aspiring towards no longer exists, in much the same way that Siddal claims that: "If the merest dream of love were true / Then, sweet, we should be in heaven, / And this is only earth, my dear...." (15-17).

Rossetti's references to the postponement of love in the earthly world become more damning in the second issue of *The Germ*. "A Pause of Thought" (57) describes how the denial of the female narrator's romantic desires causes an internal breakdown: "I looked for that which is not, nor can be, / And hope deferred made my heart sick, in truth" (1-2). The poem articulates the internal emotions of the silent female "other", who is made to defer the consummation of her love until death. Rossetti describes how the overwhelming desire of the female beloved, which has been denied her, becomes a fatal obsession: "I watched and waited with a steadfast will: / And, tho' the object seemed to flee away / ... / I watched and waited still" (5-8). Andrew and Catherine Belsey have claimed that Rossetti's poetry dramatizes the problem of Romantic subjectivity within the Pre-Raphaelite movement, where the poet seeks a confirmation of their identity in the outside world, only to discover that this leads to a total absorption into the subject, as the object becomes defined by the identity of the other (31). "A Pause of Thought" portrays the narrator's experience as defined by the object, which forever recedes from her grasp. At the climax of the poem the narrator acknowledges that this preoccupation with the object is futile: "Thou knowest the chase useless, and again / Turnest

to follow it” (19-20). The Belseys claim that Rossetti’s poetry expresses the “double displacement” of the female subject within the world because Victorian women were “barely subjects” and so could not prevent themselves from being absorbed into the object (31). “A Pause of Thought” therefore expresses this loss of identity as the consequence of the male subject’s compulsion to treat the female beloved as a silent object whose destiny is only achieved in death.

The displacement of the female beloved and her desire to achieve a consummation of her love are expressed explicitly in “Repining” (111-117), which was printed in the third issue of *The Germ*. The poem opens with a description of how Rossetti’s heroine “...sat always thro’ the long day / Spinning the weary thread away” (1-2) and contains the repeated refrain “Come, that I be no more alone” (4; 18). In its description of the continuous “spinning” of the narrator, “From early dawn to set of sun / Working, her task was still undone” (5-6), the poem references Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott”, another poem that featured as the topic for many Pre-Raphaelite paintings:²⁵ “There she weaves by night and day / A magic web with colours gay” (37-8). As with the sudden appearance of Lancelot in Tennyson’s poem, Rossetti’s heroine is suddenly joined by a mysterious stranger, who greets her: “Damsel, rise up; be not afraid; / For I am come at last” (31-32). However, in contrast to Tennyson’s poem, the stranger is Christ, who in direct reference to Matthew 4:19 commands the narrator to “Rise, and follow me” (49). The narrator is then led out into the world to witness a number of horrific sites: an avalanche, a storm at sea, and a fire: all of which cause mass destruction and death. At the close of the poem the narrator kneels “in her agony” (247)

²⁵ See for example Elizabeth Siddal, *The Lady of Shalott At Her Loom* 1853; Arthur Hughes, *The Lady of Shalott* 1873; John William Waterhouse, *The Lady of Shalott* 1888 and *The Lady of Shalott [looking at Lancelot]* 1894.

before Christ, exclaiming: “O Lord, it is enough.... / My heart’s prayer putteth me to shame / Let me return to whence I came” (258-249).

While the Belseys have argued that the message of “Repining” corroborates the damning vision of Tennyson’s poem, where the female subject is condemned for stepping outside of the confines of her allotted task (17), Rossetti’s poem does not contain the same catastrophic climax as that of Tennyson. Tennyson’s implicit condemnation of the Lady of Shalott for her act of leaving the tower is dramatically conveyed in Holman Hunt’s 1886 painting of the same name (Fig. 5). Hunt portrays the Lady of Shalott at the moment the loom is torn. The scene is apocalyptic: the stray threads of the loom wrap around the Lady of Shalott to entrap her as she attempts to leave the tower, and her long hair flies loosened into the air, a common symbol of sexual promiscuity.²⁶ Hunt’s interpretation of the poem is clear: it represents the protagonist’s rejection of the confines of respectable womanhood, and the erotic appeal of her subsequent abjection.

By contrast, Rossetti’s narrator achieves an understanding and acceptance of her situation at the close of “Repining”. While her situation is frustrating and lonely, the implication is that she should learn to rely on the love of God: “Thou who for love’s sake didst reprove, / Forgive me for the sake of love” (250-251). While the narrator is frustrated by her inability to fulfil her romantic desires, she is reminded of those who are less fortunate than herself, and encouraged to place her trust in the Lord. In contrast to Hunt’s portrayal of “The Lady of Shalott”, Rossetti indicates that the female heroine should reject her role as silent beloved and find fulfilment in her relationship with God. She therefore condemns the fate of the Pre-Raphaelite heroine and presents an alternative path for her female readers.

²⁶ See Ofek for further information on the symbolic role of hair in Victorian culture.

Christina Rossetti's contributions to *The Germ* subvert the Pre-Raphaelite preoccupation with dead women, in order to expose how the movement objectifies the female muse, depicting her solely in relation to the desires of the male artist. Rossetti transforms the image of the dead heroine, so as to render her unobtainable—creating a space where she is self-contained and free of the interference of men, who are unable to destroy her interiority. She also foregrounds the futility of objectifying the female corpse by portraying the male artist's relationship with his muse as exploitative, one-sided and abortive. Although she emphasises the frustration experienced by the female muse, who longs to escape her objectification and achieve a reciprocal relationship, Rossetti also indicates that women are able to find fulfilment through a relationship with God. Women may be forced into roles of subordination, but they can nevertheless transcend this subordination through their religious faith and their identification with those who are less fortunate. Rossetti's theology of renunciation therefore functions as a means of protecting the female identity from indoctrination by the male artist. Her religious faith does not stem from a patriarchal framework that is imposed upon her, but instead acts as an alternative to the vision of the male artists that surrounded her. Furthermore, Rossetti's theology of renunciation opposes the vision of the Pre-Raphaelite movement and is therefore not a symptom of her subordination to her brother's will. Her correspondence with Dante Gabriel Rossetti instead refutes his moral and artistic vision.

“His philosophy I do not understand”: Louisa May Alcott's rejection of her father's

Transcendentalist ideology of individualism

Louisa May Alcott's theology of renunciation was also formulated in opposition to the individualistic ideology of her father, Bronson Alcott. Alcott implicitly challenges her

father's ideology of individualism in many of her letters through subtly satirising his philosophical tenets, in order to expose their flaws. Her autobiographical fiction, based on the life of Bronson Alcott, critiques her father's philosophical practices more openly than Rossetti's subtle commentary on the Pre-Raphaelites. Alcott's ability to parody her father's views in their correspondence reveals her awareness of the negative implications that his ideology of individualism had for women, while her rejection of Transcendentalism in her autobiographical fiction runs parallel with her affiliation with her mother's theology of renunciation, which is presented as an alternative to Bronson Alcott's individualism.

Louisa May Alcott's letters to her father interrogate his negative assessments of her character and appearance, which are grounded in his philosophical beliefs. In particular, she challenges his faith in complexion theory, an unpleasant pseudoscience that held that the moral natures of human beings could be deduced by their physical colouring. Bronson was blue-eyed with a fair complexion, while Louisa and her mother, Abigail, had olive complexions and dark hair and eyes. Bronson frequently allied the volatile temperaments of his wife and daughter with their colouring and claimed that the two women exhibited demonic tendencies in his journals: "Two devils ... I am not quite divine enough to vanquish—the mother fiend and her daughter" (qtd. in Matteson 189).

Bronson was not temperamental by nature and believed that his behaviour was an exemplar for the rest of his family. Biographer, John Matteson, has claimed that Bronson's narrowness "...long prevented him from setting [Louisa's] talents at their proper value. For him, genius was to see the world as a seamless and transcendent unity" (192). His early letters to Louisa frequently express a disapproval of her temperamental nature and encourage her to follow his example. For instance, a letter on their shared birthday of November 29th in 1842, when Louisa was ten, repeatedly asks Louisa to allow him to influence her behaviour, claiming:

I would have you feel my presence and be the happier, and better that I am here. I want, most of all things, to be a kindly influence on you, helping you to guide and govern your heart, keeping it in a state of sweet and loving peacefulness, so that you may feel how good ... we ... always feel, if we will keep the passions all in stillness and give up ourselves entirely to ... soft desires....

Bronson implicitly offers himself as a model for Louisa's character, repeatedly attempting to convince her to assume his quiet disposition. The letter implies that Louisa resisted his attempts. Indeed, at one point, he desperately asks her "Will you not let me do all the good that I would?" To further enforce his condemnation of her temperamental tendencies, he sets forward a philosophical argument, claiming that the human person is controlled by a "good" spirit and a "bad" spirit. The "good" spirit only abides "in the breasts of the meek" and is defined by "kind, gentle ... heedful ... serene" attributes. In his description of the bad spirit, Bronson provides a catalogue of faults, which he doubtlessly wishes to curb. These include "anger, discontent, impatience, evil appetites, greedy wants, complainings, ill-speakings, idleness, heedlessness, rude behaviour" (93). It is little wonder that the letter implies that ten-year-old Louisa was somewhat resistant to her father's influence, especially when one considers that it was conveyed as a birthday gift. Harriet Reisen claims that Bronson "...could not bring himself even to decorate his note with his usual sketch or newspaper woodcut", and that the opening of the letter implies that this was a deliberate punishment for a recent bout of rebellious behaviour on Louisa's part: "I sought ... for some pretty picture to place at the top of this note ... but I did not find anything that seemed at all expressive of my interest in your well being, or well-doing, so this note comes to you without any such emblem" (qtd. in Reisen 79).

Years later, Louisa was to recall such letters ironically in her own birthday correspondence with her father. In a letter of 1855, written on her twenty-third birthday, Louisa interrogates Bronson's complexion theory, claiming that her faults were present from the moment of her birth because she had dark skin, while her father was born pale-skinned and morally irreproachable:

I know *you* were a serene & placid baby when you began your
wide meditations in the quiet little Spindle hill farmhouse (I
believe that's where you descended from on high) looking
philosophically out of your cradle at the big world about you....

[...]

I was a crass crying brown baby, bawling at the disagreeable
old world where on a dismal November day I found myself, &
began my long fight first for a proper quantity of water from
my ablutions which was unlawfully withheld from me....

(*Letters* 13-14)

Louisa parodies her father's belief in complexion theory, as well as his judgements of herself, so as to reveal their ludicrousness. If temperament is determined by complexion, which is inherently good or bad, then people are pre-destined to be good or evil, born fair, "serene and placid" or "crass brown" and temperamental. As a consequence, Bronson's theory can be seen as a convenient pretext to view himself as "descended from on high" and, by nature, without fault. Moreover, Louisa satirises her father's former description of her "evil appetites" and "greedy wants" by describing herself as unreasonable in her demands for water at her birth. It is therefore apparent that Louisa was able to question her father's philosophical views from an early age. As with Christina Rossetti's cynical correspondence

with her brother regarding his treatment of Elizabeth Siddal, Louisa was also able to subtly parody her father's style of discourse, in order to expose its flaws, whilst nevertheless ostensibly seeming to support his theories. Indeed, she ironically signs off one letter, "Ever your loving demon" (32).

Lisa M. Stepanski has claimed that Bronson's method of corresponding with his daughters was formulated during his time as a teacher when he exchanged letters with his students to create a "disciplinary intimacy" with them. In place of corporeal punishment, the teacher's disciplinary correspondence would give the child "a voice with which to talk back" (50), allowing him or her to cultivate "self-control" through using language "as an appropriate tool for gaining insight into the self" (55). It is apparent that Louisa May Alcott was able to utilise the high level of literate proficiency she gained during her correspondence with her father as a tool for subtly challenging his theories. However, the fact that this was invariably done through satire suggests that Bronson Alcott did not encourage an open dialogue between them. Indeed, Bronson frequently policed Louisa's language, often condemning her for expressing herself in a passionate manner. For instance, an 1845 entry in Louisa's journal recounts how her father forced her to look up the word "mean" in her dictionary, following an argument with her sister, Anna. Alcott writes: "...it means 'base', 'contemptible'. I was so ashamed to have called my dear sister that, and I cried over my bad tongue and temper" (54). Furthermore, while Bronson may have claimed to encourage self-reflection in his disciplinary correspondence, Louisa's journal also suggests that he actively resisted her attempts to engage in any private analysis of her behaviour. For example, an 1860 entry, written at the age twenty-eight reads: "In looking over our journals, Father says, 'Anna's is about other people, Louisa's about herself'" (61).

In contrast to the claims of Stepanski, Richard Francis has argued that Bronson used the "disciplinary intimacy" of letter-writing to exert an ideological control over his students.

As evidence, Francis cites the memoirs of Bronson's teaching assistant at the Temple School, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, who claimed that he "led the minds of his pupils", while his use of Socratic dialogue frequently questioned them "out of their opinions" (34). While Bronson ostensibly encouraged self-reflection and engagement with his opinions, this was purely on his own terms, and anyone who wished to question him had to do so from the realm of his own philosophical theories and discourse. It is apparent that, over the years, Louisa developed an ability to do this aptly. For instance one journal entry includes an ironic account of the lessons of her father's associate, Charles Lane. Following the pattern of her father, Lane requested that his young pupils list their faults. Louisa's journal records her doing so religiously; listing the traits that were previously mentioned in her father's birthday correspondence, including such behaviours as, "idleness", "wilfulness" and "impatience". However, she ends the list with "love of cats", probably referring to her father and Lane's objection to any display of passionate feeling (qtd. in Reisen 121).

In her private letters with her mother, Louisa was more explicitly satirical when assessing her father's Transcendentalist views. Writing of her attendance at a meeting of the Transcendental club in 1872, she describes the event as a "funny mixture of rabbis and weedy old ladies, the 'oversoul' and oysters" where Bronson Alcott and his colleague "flew clean out of sight like a pair of Platonic balloons". She concludes the account by describing how a member of the audience ended the meeting by admitting that it all seemed "very fine", but he could not "understand a word of it", signing off her letter with the declamation: "We are a foolish set!" (165). It is apparent that Alcott judged the Transcendental club to be a collection of privileged, social outsiders who used their wealth and leisure to partake in "oysters" and highfalutin discourse, while ostensibly attempting to reform society. However, the discourse is clearly unintelligible, and she assigns her father the Platonic form of a balloon, suggesting that he is destined to abstract himself from both his audience and the realities of day-to-day

life. Alcott figures the image of the balloon as a recurring symbol of her father's philosophical vocation. When asked by a friend, in the presence of her father, to provide a definition of a philosopher, Alcott responded: "A philosopher is a man up in a balloon, with his family and friends holding the ropes, trying to haul him down" (qtd. in Reisen 72). The aspiration towards transcendence is presented as a convenient way of detaching oneself from the outside world, forcing one's family and associates to act as ballast, pulling the individual back to earth. Such abstraction necessitates the continuous support of one's family and friends, but also assigns this wider community with a disciplinary role because they are forced to confront the philosopher continually with the impracticality of his schemes. The philosopher requires perpetual parenting on account of the fact that he refuses to relate his ideals to the outside world in lieu of the profound insights of his vision.

Louisa also showed an awareness of her father's hypocrisy in his refusal to offer the women of his family any financial support, while simultaneously claiming to morally reform them. In another letter to her mother, Louisa describes a dream where she dies and returns as a ghost, to discover her father using her fortune to fund a Transcendentalist college. When she tries to communicate with her father, he does not notice her, and continues to converse with students, while looking "plump and placid and young and happy". Referring to her agreement to fund a Concord School of Philosophy where her father would act as Principal, Alcott observes to her mother: "...I can't help thinking that [the dream] may be the foreshadowing of something real ... I only hope he won't quite forget me when I come back fat and grey and old" (146). Alcott therefore shows an awareness that, while her father was ready to criticise both her temperament and appearance, he had no qualms in using her economic support to fund his philosophical schemes.

Alcott's autobiographical fiction also satirises her father's philosophical beliefs and, like Rossetti's contributions to *The Germ*, stresses the negative implications for women of the

ideology of individualism that was championed by the male artist. Alcott examines her childhood in the Transcendentalist movement, in order to uncover the wider socio-cultural implications of her father's ideology of individualism. Alcott's critique of Transcendentalism is more explicit than Rossetti's commentary on the Pre-Raphaelites because Alcott was born into the movement and was therefore raised to follow her father's philosophical beliefs and practices. Alcott's autobiographical fiction assesses the negative consequences of her Transcendentalist upbringing and exposes the double-standards of the Transcendentalists' attitudes towards women, who were actively prevented from espousing ideologies of individualism. By contrast, Rossetti's collaboration with the Pre-Raphaelites in *The Germ* necessitated that her commentaries remain implicit, while the respect with which she was treated as a fellow artist meant that her criticisms of the Brotherhood were less brutal.

Alcott's most famous autobiographical work is "Transcendental Wild Oats", an 1873 short-story based on her time at the Fruitlands commune, which was established by her father in 1843 when she was eleven years old.²⁷ The Fruitlands community was founded on vegan and fruitarian principles. Bronson Alcott and his associate, Charles Lane, believed that humanity was capable of returning to its original state of innocence and achieving the divinity of Christ if it ceased from exploiting the environment and using animal labour. Alcott and Lane claimed that the human diet reflected the moral inclinations of each individual and should be restricted and monitored to ensure a purification of the spirit. Endeavouring to respect the communion between human beings and the natural world, Bronson excluded all meat, salt, cane sugar, spices, coffee and tea from the daily diet because they were products of the slave trade. He also forbade the use of oxen for ploughing, as well as oil-lamps because they depended on the exploitation of whales. All members of the community were banned

²⁷ The subsequent discussion of "Transcendental Wild Oats" draws extensively from my MA dissertation: "Self-Reliance: Transcendentalism and the Woman-Artist in Louisa May Alcott's Fiction".

from wearing wool because it was considered theft from sheep, as well as cotton because of its association with slavery. Consequently, many members wore linen and went barefoot in the harsh winter months, while living in a house that had open windows—something that also increased the stifling heat in the summer months. Alcott even went so far as to attempt to prevent his wife, Abigail, from feeding milk to their youngest daughter, May, while she was still a baby, in order to prevent the exploitation of cows.

Due to the Fruitlanders' claim that they were encouraging a return to primeval innocence, the community also attracted some questionable characters. These included a resident nudist and compulsive swearer who believed that language "was of little consequence if the spirit was only right" (Francis 27). The increasingly strict demands of the Fruitlanders' lifestyle, coupled with the fact that its leaders expected the women to oversee the vast majority of domestic labour, eventually brought Bronson Alcott into direct conflict with his wife who was concerned for the health and wellbeing of their four daughters—all of whom were under thirteen at the time. The experiment collapsed after six months when Charles Lane announced his intention to reconceive the community as a segregated-gender organisation. Lane envisioned a commune where people would put aside their "selfish devotion" to their families and would form, instead, a single, "consociate family" (Matteson 106), even going so far as to imply that the marital relation should be absolved and all members of the community should practice sexual abstinence. Abigail Alcott suspected that Lane's obsession with marital celibacy stemmed from his homoerotic attraction to her husband,²⁸ and subsequently convinced her brother, Samuel May, to withdraw his financial

²⁸ Reisen writes, "In talks Abby was not permitted to join (but which were held in her presence), [Lane] pounded away at Bronson to impose sexual abstinence on Fruitlands" (98) and that upon announcing her decision to leave Abigail told Bronson he could go "...with the rest of the family or stay with Lane" (101). Francis more explicitly claims: "It seems likely that the intense and in many ways destructive relationship between the two men had some degree of homoerotic underpinning. That would explain Abigail's anguish and resentment at being overlooked. Certainly Lane himself was fully aware that he was involved in a triangle" (266).

support for Fruitlands, thereby ensuring the community's eviction from the freeholding. She then issued her husband an ultimatum: he would have to choose between his family and the reestablishment of the community, insisting that she would never partake in such a venture again.

Studies of "Transcendental Wild Oats" have thus far been limited to edition introductions and a small number of journal articles. In the first reprint of the story, published in 1975, the editor, William Henry Harrison, claimed that Louisa May Alcott's account of the Fruitlands experiment could only be considered reliable "in part". Harrison cites a letter from Alcott to the Transcendentalist publisher, William Torrey Harris, where she claims that she will not attempt a biography of her father's life because she "never understood" his philosophy. Harrison patronisingly assumes that this statement indicates that Louisa literally could not intellectually grasp her father's beliefs (4).

However, the more recent scholarship of Claudia Durst Johnson has indicated that Alcott used "Transcendental Wild Oats" as an opportunity to subvert her father's request to write a complimentary biography about his life by composing a negative commentary on his philosophical views. Durst Johnson cites Alcott's letter to Harris at length, thereby revealing Alcott's annoyance concerning her father's egotistical interference in her literary affairs: "Father entirely forgot your last arrangement and gave me directions as I wrote. It is of no consequence. I am used to these philosophic 'lapses' of memory and manage to pay bills with my unphilosophic wits very often" (qtd. in Durst Johnson 15). The opening of Alcott's letter to Harris makes it clear that she views her father's beliefs to be both impractical and selfish, inadvertently burdening her with the full encumbrance of domestic and familial obligation. She also implies that her success as a writer has been the consequence of her refusal to follow Bronson's example by relying on her "unphilosophic wits".

When taken in this context, Alcott's statement that she did not understand Bronson's philosophy takes on an entirely different meaning: "His philosophy I have never understood and biography is not in my line. Sanborn and yourself are the persons to do that, and I can only help a little about the domestic part" (ibid.). Alcott dismisses her father's life as an inappropriate subject for her literary affairs, informing Harris that she is not a biographer, nor a Transcendentalist, and that it is the responsibility of the members of the movement to complete such a work. Nevertheless, when writing "Transcendental Wild Oats" Alcott included a subtitle, which was, in fact, the projected title of her father's biography: "The Cost of an Idea". "Transcendental Wild Oats" is therefore Alcott's response to her father's request that she write a laudatory biography concerning his career as a philosopher, setting out her own alternative point of view.

Sandra Harbert Petrulionis has argued that Louisa's depiction of a Transcendentalist utopia exposes her father's values of living "simply and spiritually" as a "pretence", which allowed the male Fruitlanders "to escape from all responsibility, both domestic and otherwise" (3). In "Transcendental Wild Oats" Alcott promotes the theology of the family matriarch, Hope Lamb (a character based on her mother), who is placed at the centre of the story as its heroine. Hope's persistent emphasis on the practical fulfilment of duty allows the commune to survive for a short period, and when the project collapses she takes on the role as head of the household, in order to support her husband and family.

Throughout the story Hope Lamb's practical theology is contrasted with the solipsism of her male contemporaries. Alcott portrays the men of the commune as so preoccupied with their conceptual worlds that their engagement with reality has become warped. Indeed, their lack of empathy with the female community causes them to transgress their philosophical principles. When asked by a visitor if there are any "beasts of burden" on the commune, Hope ironically replies: "Only one woman!" (373). Whilst the female members of the

commune are confined to a “domestic drudgery” (ibid.), the men respond to “some call of the Oversoul [sic]” (375) during the harvest season, leaving Hope and her infant daughters to reap the harvest by hand during a thunderstorm, an incident that actually happened to the Alcott women while at Fruitlands.

Alcott’s allusion to the “Oversoul” refers to Emerson’s pantheistic theology, which replaced the omnipotent God with a “soul of the whole”, which “every part and particle” was related to—a spiritual entity or “eternal ONE [sic]” that ran through all of creation (“The Over-Soul” 153). Mott has defined Emerson’s over-soul as “an *immanent divinity*, perception of whom energises the individual” (73). However, Emerson’s over-soul can be read as something more radical than a mere spiritual force that is perceived by the mind. If perception of the over-soul is self-affirming, it can be argued that the presence of the over-soul is generated by self-perception. The over-soul can therefore be understood as self-created, enabling the individual’s desires to become the unifying element of the created world. When Alcott describes the men of the commune as “wafted away” by “some call of the Oversoul” (375), she implies that their faith in their divine vocation underlies a superficial desire for self-gratification. As the men conveniently respond to the call during harvest-time, it is also associated with the evasion of duty. Furthermore, Alcott implies that the call of the over-soul is experienced by the male members of the community only. In following their principles of obeying the “inner light” (370), the men of the commune cultivate their ideologies of individualism through forcing its female members to shoulder all practical responsibilities. Their aspiration to achieve transcendental divinity is therefore dependent on the subordination of the female other.

Alcott’s condemnation of the individualism of the Fruitlands’ men has much in common with Nathaniel Hawthorne’s negative portrayal of the individualistic behaviour of the leader of the fictional commune, Blithedale, in his novel, *The Blithedale Romance*, which

was based on his experiences in the Transcendentalist commune of Brook Farm. Hawthorne describes the commune-leader, Hollingsworth, as the “bond slave” of his “philanthropic theory” (61) who becomes so obsessed with the righteousness of his philosophic ideals that he fails to consider the needs of those who surround him:

Sad, indeed, but by no means unusual: he had taught his benevolence to pour its warm tide exclusively through one channel; so that there was nothing to spare for other great manifestations of love to man, nor scarcely for the nutriment of individual attachments, unless they could minister in some way to the terrible egotism which he mistook for an angel of God.

(61)

Hollingsworth’s philanthropy is portrayed as the consequence of his need to affirm his belief in his own greatness, but his altruistic scheme overlooks the needs of the immediate community. He secretly conspires to overthrow the commune, in order to establish a reform institution for criminals, using the funds of his associate, Zenobia, in order to do so. After obtaining Zenobia’s fortune for the establishment of his community, Hollingsworth marries her half-sister, Priscilla, in the knowledge that Zenobia is in love with him. His behaviour causes Zenobia to commit suicide and subsequently destroys the Blithedale community. Hawthorne portrays the tragic outcome of Hollingsworth’s actions as the consequence of his refusal to respect the independent identity and diverging philosophical beliefs of any other person. When the novel’s narrator, Miles Coverdale, condemns Hollingsworth’s inability to see that “....a man may wish well to the world, and struggle for its good, on some other plan than precisely that which you have laid down,” (157) Hollingsworth responds: “Be with me ... or be against me!” (158).

Hollingsworth's tyrannical attitude has much in common with Louisa May Alcott's portrayal of her father's associate, Charles Lane, who is renamed "Timon Lion" in her story. Referring to him as "Dictator Lion", Alcott condemns Timon as a hypocrite who justifies delegating his manual work to the women of the commune with the claim that "...each member is to perform the work for which experience, strength and taste best fit him" (368). Hollingsworth's dictatorial nature is also detrimental for women, for Miles Coverdale claims that he "...deprived woman of her very soul, her inexpressible and unfathomable all, to make it a mere incident in the great sum of man" (142). Hollingsworth subordinates Zenobia, an outspoken advocate of women's rights, to his will, convincing her to act as the "sympathizer" and "unquestioning believer" in his underhand scheme (141).

Alcott departs from Hawthorne's portrayal of the tragic fate of women in Transcendentalist communes by recasting Hope Lamb as her heroine in "Transcendental Wild Oats". When the Fruitlands community collapses, Hope takes on a spiritually symbolic function in the story. When the other members of the commune abandon the Lambs, Alcott describes how "Hope" became "the watchword" for the family—implying that she is transformed into the personification of the values she represents, which are indicated by her name. Furthermore, Alcott subverts the emphasis on the male individual as the Godlike centre of the familial community. When Abel Lamb suffers a physical and mental breakdown, Hope responds by reassuring her husband: "Leave all to God—and me. He has done his part; now I will do mine" (378). Hope replaces Abel as the centre of the family and successfully identifies her maternal values with an external, omnipotent God, rather than with a self-centred "over-soul". Abel Lamb's individualistic vision is replaced by a mutually supportive familial community.

Alcott's and Hawthorne's negative portrayals of the individualism of their Transcendentalist heroes were doubtlessly informed by the behaviour of Bronson Alcott.

Bronson's personal attitude had much in common with Hawthorne's Hollingsworth and he frequently expressed the conviction that the needs of others should be subordinated to his own high moral principles. For instance, when writing to his brother Junius to thank him for a loan, Bronson treated his brother's money as an entitlement of his superior moral nature: "Be assured, I am not insensible of these favours of friends. I wish sometimes that God had withheld some portion of the gifts with which he has blessed me, that so I might dwell in closer sympathy with the outward interests ... of men." (47). Hawthorne came to despise such egotism after his disastrous experience at the Brook Farm commune, and he dissolved his friendship with Bronson Alcott after the Fruitlands episode. He went on to satirise Alcott in his short-story "The Celestial Railroad", a parodic retelling of John Bunyan's, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), Bronson Alcott's favourite book, to which he often referred in lectures and personal writings. Hawthorne reapplied Bunyan's moral allegory to the tenets of Transcendentalism, portraying the movement as using its ideology of individualism to subvert the self-sacrificing Christian message of Bunyan's moral tale.

In the story Hawthorne describes the creation of a railroad, which avoids all the spiritual obstacles that are faced by Bunyan's pilgrims as a necessary part of their Christian journey. For example, instead of allowing the pilgrims to shoulder their burdens of sin, they are "snugly deposited in the baggage car" to be "delivered to their respective owners at the journey's end" (200). Hawthorne also depicts Bronson Alcott as the ultimate personification of Transcendentalism who has lured the pilgrims into a disastrous course of action. The author replaces Bunyan's "Evil Giants", "Pope" and "Pagan", with a "Giant Transcendentalism" who "sieve[s] upon honest travellers, and fattens them for his table with plentiful meals of smoke, mist, moonshine, raw potatoes and sawdust" (208). The diet of potatoes is a reference to the Fruitlands commune where it was the staple diet. Hawthorne's

writing on Transcendentalism therefore cites and condemns Bronson Alcott as the living personification of the movement's most dangerous evils.

Louisa May Alcott was doubtless aware of Hawthorne's negative portrayals of her father. He was the family's next door neighbour for four years and she admitted in her journal that he was one of her favourite writers (63). Memoirs of the extended Transcendentalist circle reveal that she followed Hawthorne's example in satirising key figures of the movement publically, sometimes in performances in the home which, daringly, proceeded under her father's nose. In his essay, "When Louisa Alcott was a girl", Edward W. Emerson, son of Ralph Waldo Emerson, describes "a memorable evening at the Alcott's house" (325) where Louisa appeared in an "ugly, scant, brown calico dress" with "a manuscript in one hand, and a pen in the other", performing "travesties on her father's writing", as well as satirical pieces on the works of the author's father, one of which appeared under the name "Rolf Walden Emmerboy" (326). Housed at the Houghton Library, Harvard, "Rolf Walden Emmerboy"²⁹ is a paragraph-long stream of conscious sentence that mimics Emerson's discursive style, written during the moment of performance as a spontaneous and unstructured dramatic monologue that finishes mid-ellipsis. The loose structure is heightened by confused diction and bathetic metaphor, conveying the impression of a philosophical position that lacks rigour, but is nevertheless propped up by a dense and obscure vocabulary.

Ironically introduced to the audience as both a "fragment" and a "poem" by "the flower of American literature" (thereby implying that the canonical status of Transcendentalist writing is at odds with its aesthetic quality), Louisa describes the "towering mind" of Emmerboy as sweeping "the blue fundament like the fowl of Job watching the stars". The metaphorical use of the word "firmament" in Romantic poetry, commonly

²⁹ See Appendix 3.

associated with the pinnacle of human thought and experience,³⁰ is replaced with “fundament”—a word with earth-bound connotations of “bottom”, “foundation” or “base”. Louisa is brutal in her critique of Emerson’s writing as failing to reach its aspirational heights, for the secondary meaning of “fundament” is “a person’s buttocks or anus”.³¹ The bathetic diction portrays the poet’s self-image as at odds with how he appears to the outside world, for his uneven craftsmanship undermines his high ambition. This is further underlined by the hyperbolic image of the “fowl of Job”—a subversion of Emerson’s metaphor of the Phoenix, which symbolises the human soul’s struggle for spiritual metamorphosis:

My phoenix long ago secured
His nest in the sky-vault's cope;
In the body's cage immured,
He is weary of life's hope. (1-4)

Appearing at the bottom of the fragment, the word “Phoenix” is struck out, suggesting that Louisa composed the piece with Emerson’s poem in mind. While “The Phoenix” suggests that the mind of the poet secures “the sky-vault’s cope” (2), but is thwarted by the “body’s cage” (3), Louisa implies that such highfalutin discourse lacks substance, and is closer to a person’s backside than the aspirational image of the sky. Moreover, in transforming the image of the Phoenix into the “fowl of Job”, Louisa creates a bird that is associated with the most suffering and put-upon figure of the Bible—hardly the most appropriate model for the kind of transcendent experience that the passage outwardly aspires towards. Indeed, Emmerboy is also described as a “snowy and meditative crow pecking at the hollow nuts of human life”. The condescending attitude of a bird who deigns to peck at humanity’s husks

³⁰ See for example Keats’ “To One Who Has Been Long In City Pent” (4), *Endymion* (297), Shelley *Adonais* (72.19).

³¹ According to the OED, the figurative use of the word “fundament” came into being in the sixteenth-century, and was in common usage until the 1950s. Fundament, n2. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, September 2017. Web. 23 Oct 2018.

implies that the peculiar suffering described in Emerson's poem is derived from a belief in his innate superiority, an attitude that is subverted by the ludicrous description of the bird as a "snowy and meditative crow": an image that suggests that, while Emmerboy may believe himself to be sublime, he is really the most common and base of fowls.

Unfortunately, this does not prevent the pompous bird from lecturing his captive audience (one of whom, we should remember, is Emerson's son), and he continues: "O fellow worms, mind and matter glide swift into the vortex of immensity." Subject to a myriad of interpretations, such a statement deliberately eschews any fixed meaning—literally becoming lost in the linguistic slippage of philosophic diction and inadvertently creating the very vortex it describes. The rambling tone and structure of the piece portray a writer who is so in love with the sound of his own voice that he does not realise he actually has nothing of substance to say. While attempting a democratic identification with his audience, Emmerboy nevertheless defines them as "fellow worms", placing them in an inferior position to his enlightened status as an aspirational bird-in-flight. It would seem that the bird's pompous exterior belies a more menacing attitudes towards his audience, for worms are consumed by birds within the food chain. Indeed, the passage breaks off with the speaker's admission that: "The marvel of fancy I offer you is entitled..." Although the word "Phoenix" is written and struck out below, perhaps suggesting that the statement refers to the title of the piece, it is also possible that Louisa portrays Emmerboy's vision as quite literally "entitled", for it is couched in a pretentious diction that casts the uneducated audience in an intellectually inferior position. Louisa's "ugly, scant brown calico dress" (Edward W. Emerson 326) would have appeared ludicrous against the extravagant and overstated claims made by her speaker—visually displaying a disparity between Emmerboy's aesthetic aspirations and the reality of his artistic achievement. Indeed, the passage as a whole implies that the speaker's apparent superiority is mere posturing—something that is further underlined by Louisa's play on the

name “Emerson”, which becomes “Emmerboy”, thus inferring that the speaker is fundamentally immature. Louisa does not spare any member of the Transcendentalist movement in this satirical piece, for “Waldo” in turn becomes “Walden”—making a direct allusion to the work of Thoreau.

Like Hawthorne, Louisa critiques the disparity between the intellectual pretensions of the Transcendentalists and the inconsistencies in their philosophical positions, as well as their condescending attitudes towards others. However, while she shares Hawthorne’s criticisms, she nonetheless offers an alternative path for the Transcendentalist protagonists of her autobiographical fiction. The characters based on her father are forced to undergo moral conversions, perhaps as a means of presenting Bronson Alcott with an alternative course of behaviour. For example, she transforms Abel Lamb’s breakdown into a religious conversion and thereby radically edits the collapse of the Fruitlands episode. While her father did suffer a nervous breakdown, this was not at the end of the experiment, but rather half-way through in 1843. At this time he exhibited symptoms of persecution mania, claiming that his refusal to eat or participate in communal activities was a response to the lack of support he had received for the community, from both family and friends. By contrast, in “Transcendental Wild Oats” Lamb ultimately rejects his philosophical aspirations, in order to embrace his role as a father and husband: “My faithful wife, my little girls ... What right have I to leave them alone? What right to escape from the burden and the sorrow I have helped to bring? This duty remains to me, and I must do it manfully” (378).

In real life, Bronson Alcott’s aspiration towards a potential transformation of character was not so straightforward. Reisen has speculated that Bronson suffered from a hereditary manic depressive disorder that was shared his brother, Junius, who committed suicide in 1852 (141). Reisen contends that Bronson’s unstable relationship with Louisa was a “version” of his relationship with his brother: “....he recognised in [them] his own mental

instability" (ibid.).³² As well as indicating the moral route that her father should have taken, the climax to "Transcendental Wild Oats", perhaps also imagines a future where Bronson was able to conquer his mental instability. Either way, the ultimate redemption of the father-figure of the story, whether it be moral or psychological, is located in his subsequent dedication to his wife and children.

Alcott was also to rewrite her father's biography in her short-story, "Eli's Education", which was based on Bronson's impoverished youth as a peddler and was perhaps intended as a chapter for his proposed biography (Stern 2001 xxxvii). However, Alcott writes out the Fruitlands episode entirely, having the protagonist, Eli, persevere in his teaching career after his mother and sisters are left without someone to provide for them following his father's death. Eli gives up his dream of becoming a minister, telling his mother: "I should be a poor fellow if I allowed you and the girls to want, after all you've done for me" (350). By demonstrating an alternative course of action through the behaviour of Eli, Alcott implicitly condemns her father's pursuit of his personal aspirations at the cost of the needs of his family. Alcott also portrays Eli as willing to learn from his previous mistakes, including the selfish behaviour of racking up debt during his time at college, so he could buy more fashionable clothes:

....he had to confess his debts and borrow money of his father to pay them. He meekly bore the stern rebuke that came with the hard-earned dollars, but the sight of the tears his mother shed, even while she comforted him, filled him with remorse. He went back to his books, in a homespun suit, a sadder and

³² Louisa herself contemplated suicide in 1858 (183-4) and was later to complete both a novel and a short-story that dealt with a family plagued by hereditary insanity (Reisen 141).

wiser boy, and fell to work as if resolved to wash out past errors and regain the confidence he had lost (349).

Despite the fact that “Eli’s Education” is a biographical tale, the portrayal of Eli completing his studies and paying off his debt is a reversion of Bronson Alcott’s life. Like Louisa’s rustic hero, Bronson did obtain admission to Cheshire Academy, a preparatory school that prepared young men for Yale in 1814, at the age of fifteen. However, Bronson was “...homesick and uncomfortable among the better-dressed boys and left after a few weeks” (Reisen 12-13). “Eli’s Education” is curiously unsympathetic to the teenage Bronson’s plight: belittled by his more well-to-do peers, the self-taught prodigy from a largely illiterate family was pressured to leave. Did Bronson confide in Louisa that his feelings of inferiority had resulted in the purchase of costly clothes and the accumulation of a debt that his father was unable to pay off, unlike his fictional counterpart? Or did Louisa make up the episode, so that it might serve as a turning point for her fictional hero? Certainly, the portrayal of Eli’s economic recklessness and unpaid debt is relevant to Bronson’s married life. His acquisition of debt was so notorious that when Abigail Alcott’s father died, he left her a bequest on the sole proviso that her husband would have no access to the money, an unprecedented action in a period when married women were legally entitled to no property apart from their husbands. Regardless of whether the episode has any biographical foundation, the denouement of the story indicates Louisa’s preferred outcome for her father’s life. She creates a hero who persists in both his formal education and teaching career (Eli later opens a school), while paying off his debts to support his family. When examined in the context of “Eli’s Education”, Louisa’s refusal to complete a biography of Bronson Alcott can be seen as reflecting her dissatisfaction with both his educational choices, and the role he adopted as a husband and father.

Alcott's refusal to write a biography of her father should not be interpreted as evidencing her inability to engage with the philosophical tenets of Transcendentalism, nor should her theology of renunciation be understood as the consequence of her desire to support her father's Transcendentalist principles. In espousing her mother's theology of renunciation, Alcott puts forward an alternative framework, both for her father's ideology of individualism and his personal, educational and professional choices, which she drastically alters in her autobiographical fiction. Her correspondence with her father reveals her ability to interrogate his values. This correspondence satirises Bronson Alcott's demand that his daughter display a serene and equable temperament, which is portrayed as a stratagem for affirming the superiority of his own character traits against those of his daughter. Alcott's private satirical writing also extended to other members of the Transcendentalist movement, including Emerson, and showed an informed awareness of the critiques against Transcendentalism that were made by contemporaneous writers, like Hawthorne. The satirical work portrays the condescending nature of Transcendentalist diction as a pretence that belies a desire to elevate the Transcendentalist philosopher above his plebeian audience. Transcendentalist discourse is presented as a tool for eschewing social responsibility, while maintaining a solipsistic attitude towards the rest of humanity.

Christina Rossetti similarly satirises the attributes of stillness and silence that are upheld as ideal characteristics of the Pre-Raphaelite model, presenting them as embodying the movement's subjugation of the female muse, whose body is fetishized and eroticised as an inanimate corpse. While Rossetti's final message is one of renunciation, it is a different kind of renunciation from that which is advocated by the Pre-Raphaelites, for Rossetti's renunciation is an act of defiance towards the Pre-Raphaelite attempt to control the female object, and a rejection of the male sphere altogether. She expresses disapproval of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's individualistic vision in her letters, implicitly supporting the criticisms of

his late wife, while her poems in *The Germ* articulate her resistance to the objectification of the female muse at the hands of the Pre-Raphaelite artist. Rossetti's theology of renunciation should not be read as supporting the subordinate role of the female "other" in Pre-Raphaelite art, but rather as a tool for creating a separate space where the female subject can exist in contented isolation with God.

Both Alcott and Rossetti resist the image of the silent female "other", instead of conforming to the subordinate role that is championed by the Pre-Raphaelite and Transcendentalist movements. The authors' theologies of renunciation do not support their male relatives' attempts to subjugate women, but rather challenge Bronson Alcott's and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's ideologies of individualism. Alcott's and Rossetti's theologies of renunciation can be read as alternative frameworks to the individualistic ideologies promoted by their male relatives, providing a model of female fulfilment where women are able to find contentment either in service to others, or alone and apart from the men who attempt to control them. Louisa May Alcott certainly made her alternative position clear, for Edward W. Emerson writes that, at the close of her performance of "Rolf Walden Emmerboy", "Mr. Alcott came in ... and however little he could understand such manifestations of the spirit of prophecy, he seemed to feel the pride of a parent in his daughter's wit...." (326).



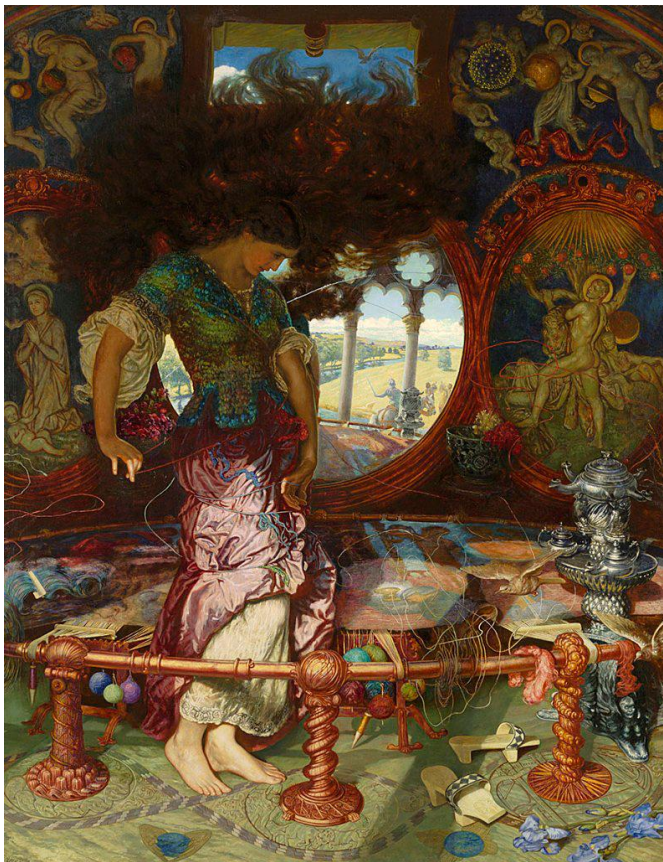
(Fig. 2) Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Christina Georgina Rossetti; Frances Mary Lavinia Rossetti (née Polidori)*. 1877. Chalk. National Portrait Gallery, London.



(Fig. 3) John Everett Millais. *Mariana*. 1851. Oil on mahogany. Tate Collections, London.



(Fig. 4) John Everett Millais. *Ophelia*. 1851-2. Oil on canvas. Tate Collections, London.



(Fig. 5) William Holman Hunt. *The Lady of Shalott*. 1886-1905. Oil on panel. Manchester City Galleries.

Section II

“Behind a Mask”—a “secret she must keep”?

The pseudonymous and posthumously published work of Alcott and Rossetti: suppressed or forgotten?

1943 saw the occurrence of a momentous event that forever changed the face of Alcott scholarship. Alone in the Houghton Library of Harvard University, Leona Rostenberg let out a sound that her scholastic partner, Madeleine B. Stern, described as a “barbaric yawp” (*Louisa May Alcott Unmasked* xiv). In Box II of the Louisa May Alcott manuscripts, Rostenberg had uncovered the pseudonym that Alcott used for her sensation fiction, A.M. Barnard, a name that had been deliberately obscured by Alcott’s first biographer, Ednah Dow Cheney, whose highly selective work, *Louisa May Alcott: The Children’s Friend* (1888), did much to promote an overly sentimental image of the author (Stern *ibid.* xiii-xiv). Rostenberg’s discovery transformed Stern’s now foundational 1950 biography of Alcott, leading to the recovery of a number of pseudonymous stories, originally published in such periodicals as the *Flag of Our Union*, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated News* and *Chimney Corner* (xiv-xvi). Among these dramatic pieces is the iconic “Behind a Mask”: the story of a Machiavellian thirty year-old actress, Jean Muir, who, in a satirical rendering of *Jane Eyre*, poses as a seventeen year-old governess, in order to seduce the male members of Coventry family—eventually settling for the elderly Sir John, in order to usurp the family fortune. The first edition of Alcott’s sensation fiction, *Behind a Mask: The Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott* (1975), was named after this story—sensationalising the now mythical discovery of Alcott’s thrillers by conflating the author with her subversive heroine. Stern saw “Behind a Mask” as a story that had, not only “unlock[ed] the past” of Alcott’s heroine, but also of

Alcott herself—writing that “the future author of *Little Women* sits for a dark but revealing portrait” (*Behind a Mask* xviii).

In 1896 Pre-Raphaelite critic, memorialist and biographer, William Michael Rossetti, brought out a new edition of his sister, Christina Rossetti’s, poetry: *New Poems by Christina Rossetti: Hitherto Unpublished or Uncollected*. William Michael set out his editorial aims in an explanatory preface: he resolved to “....put into print any verses of [his sister’s] which [he] could find, such as would sustain her poetical reputation....” (vii). He also admitted to omitting “a certain—not large—number of compositions ... which appear ... to represent her less than well” (xi). Among the verses selected by William Michael is a strange anomaly: a poetic fragment titled “A Nightmare” (118), which contains only the first and last four lines of the author’s original manuscript. In his accompanying note, William Michael explained that in Christina’s notebook “....this composition begins on p.25 and ends on p.27; the intermediate leaf has been torn out....” (383). This is an accurate statement: in the poet’s 1858 notebook, held at the British Library, the composition appears exactly as it is reproduced in William Michael’s posthumously published collection of his sister’s verse.³³ However, a fair copy of Christina Rossetti’s complete manuscript, titled “A Coast-Nightmare”, can be found in the Christina Georgina Rossetti Collection of Princeton University,³⁴ and was reprinted in Rebecca Crump’s landmark 1979 variorum edition of Rossetti’s complete poems, and again in her 2001 edition, *The Complete Poems*.

While William Michael Rossetti scrupulously detailed his interventions throughout his work as an editor, noting the changes he made to Christina’s verses in the notes to all of his editions, he neglected to inform his readers of the presence of the complete manuscript of

³³ 18 Dec 1856-29 Jun 1858. Ashley MS 1364 (2). British Lib., London.

³⁴ 1850. Box 1 C0222. Christina Georgina Rossetti Collection. Firestone Lib., Princeton.

“A Coast-Nightmare”.³⁵ William Michael Rossetti’s editorial choices have shaped the critical canon of his sister’s poetry for subsequent generations. Anthologies of Victorian verse almost never include poems that did not feature in his early editions,³⁶ instead focusing on verse that has cemented Christina Rossetti’s place in popular culture, such as “Goblin Market”, “In the Bleak Midwinter” and “A Birthday”—something that is mirrored within school and university syllabi.³⁷ Although Rossetti’s posthumously published work is listed under the category of “Unpublished Poems” in Crump’s collected edition (2001 649-833), there at present exists no comprehensive critical study of this posthumously published verse. The critical history of this verse follows the opposite trajectory to Alcott’s recovered pseudonymous work. By and large, Rossetti’s poems are still organised by the categories that her brother created for her, with distinctions commonly being made between her secular and religious poetry.

However, critical categorisations of Alcott’s and Rossetti’s works have one thing in common: the tendency to make a distinction between work that upholds and work that subverts traditional concepts of femininity in the nineteenth-century. It is frequently assumed that the authors’ more subversive works were composed in secret and deliberately expunged from their public record. During her lifetime, Alcott was often associated with qualities that

³⁵ I note here that there is some dispute concerning William Michael Rossetti’s awareness of the complete manuscript. Packer believes that the strike-outs that appear in “A Nightmare” are in William Michael Rossetti’s hand (172), while de Groot maintains that the amendments are made by Christina Rossetti herself and William Michael was not aware of the completed text (49). De Groot does not offer any evidence for this, however, and it seems unlikely—given Christina’s editorial practice of circulating her notebooks among her siblings for comment. The more recent scholarship of Moffett makes the point that the word choices replacing the strike-outs in the bowdlerised “A Nightmare” are consistent with the word-choices in the completed text at Princeton. If these strike-outs were made by William Michael Rossetti, then he was certainly aware of the second text. This is Moffett’s view and her dissertation explores the “resistance [and] sabotage” of Christina Rossetti’s poetic success apparent in her brothers’ correspondence at length (5).

³⁶ See for example *Victorian Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* (2006), *Blackwell Essential Literature: Victorian Poetry* (2008), *Victorian Poetry* (2002), *The Penguin Book of Victorian Verse* (1998), *The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* (2008), *The Everyman Book of Victorian Verse* (1993). None of these editions include “A Coast-Nightmare” and all are limited to verse that was published in Rossetti’s lifetime.

³⁷ The Rossetti poems included in the Edexcel, AQA and OCR syllabi for GCSE and A-Level are limited to poems published in Rossetti’s lifetime.

we would now associate with the “Cult of True Womanhood”: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity (Welter 152).³⁸ Early writing on Alcott stressed these traits and emphasised the connection between her personal life and domestic works. For instance, an 1888 review, “Miss Alcott: The friend of Little Women and of Little Men” by “F.B.S.”, contended that: “She not only tells you pleasant stories but she shows you how good it is to be generous and kind, to love others and not to be always caring and working for yourself.”³⁹ A contemporary obituary similarly claimed that “Every tender affection of family life, every good work for humanity, found response in [Alcott] ... There was never a thought in her heart of any martyrdom to duty....”⁴⁰ This portrayal was expanded on in Cheney’s biography, and Joel Myerson has pointed out that Cheney “....quoted very selectively from [Alcott’s] letters and journals to create the author that the readers of *Little Women* wanted to see.”⁴¹ Some of the manuscripts accessed by Cheney have subsequently been lost (ibid.).

It is therefore unsurprising that the discovery of Alcott’s pseudonymous sensation fiction has inspired the widely-held assumption that the author led a “double literary life” (Stern *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked* xiii-xiv). This notion was put forward by Saxton in her 1977 biography, which made that claim that “*Little Women* was a regression for Louisa as an artist and a woman” (9) and that the experiments with sensation fiction created a space where she “didn’t need to be responsible for a morality, an expected metaphysic, or a righteous ending” (261). This early assessment has been enthusiastically taken up by a number of Alcott scholars. Elbert identifies a “correspondence” between Alcott’s “canny separation of her literary markets and the nineteenth-century concept of ‘separate spheres’” (xiii), while

³⁸ For further exposition on the “Cult of True Womanhood” see II.I “Left-handed societies”.

³⁹ 1888. MS 800.23. LMAP, 1849-1931. Houghton Lib., Harvard.

⁴⁰ “Louisa May Alcott”. 1888. Ibid.

⁴¹ Nancy Porter, dir. “Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women”. By Harriet Reisen. Perf. Norbert Hirschhorn, John Matteson, Joel Myerson, Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern, Leona Rostenberg, Shirley Samuels, Jan Turnquist. *American Masters*. PBS. 2009. Television. Web. Amazon Prime Video. 16 March. 2018.

Davis similarly claims that, in private “....Alcott allowed herself the freedom to write as she wished, and her anonymously and pseudonymously published works reveal a woman whose interests and aspirations far overstepped the bounds of Victorian propriety” (v). Lennox Keyser takes such readings a step further by arguing that the radical concerns of Alcott’s pseudonymous work is subtly encoded in her domestic fiction (xiii).

Although there are few studies of the distinctions between Rossetti’s public and private works, there is nonetheless a tendency to differentiate pious devotional verse from the supposedly more subversive secular pieces. This distinction can be attributed to the editorial legacy of William Michael Rossetti who divided his sister’s poems under what Fredeman has described as the “arbitrary” categories of “devotional” and “general” verse (qtd. in Kent 19). David A. Kent has compellingly argued that William Michael Rossetti’s dismissal of his sister’s categorisation of her verse, as well as the sequencing her poems, has obscured the fact that she saw her secular and religious poetry as deeply intertwined (19-20). The false separation that has been made between Rossetti’s secular and religious verse has enabled critics to interpret her work through a “double life” myth that sees the secular verse as an expression of the repressed desires that are expunged from the religious poetry. For example, Greer divides Rossetti’s secular poems of “rebellion and self-assertion” from her devotional verse of “resignation and self-denial” (SSS 359), while Kathleen Jones claims that Rossetti turned to religious poetry following the break-up of her engagement with James Collinson as a means of encouraging herself to embrace a theology of renunciation (55). Likewise, Barbara Fass contends that Rossetti was heavily influenced by Keats’ “The Eve of St Agnes” because it expressed her “plight” as a “lonely and repressed” Victorian woman “whose entire life was a struggle to negate passion” (33), a view endorsed by Eleanor Walter Thomas (211). Addison notes that critical studies of Rossetti are commonly divided between her religious and secular verse (76).

However, many unpublished poems that embedded Rossetti's subversive voice within her religious beliefs were deliberately expunged from William Michael Rossetti's 1902 edition of her posthumously collected verse. A number of these poems engaged with the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a figure that Greer has claimed "wielded immense influence over [Christina] Rossetti as if by right" (ibid. 369). Ironically, many of Rossetti's intertextual responses to her brother's poetry are made through the medium of her religious discourse. William Michael Rossetti's eagerness to eliminate such work from his edition of posthumously published verse can be attributed to his philosophy as a biographer and memorialist. In his 1906 memoir, *Some Reminiscences*, William Michael defined the "chief object" of the biographer as "sympathy", arguing that "defects and misdoings should not be absolutely ignored, but they should be minimized" (480). William Michael was not only the gatekeeper of Christina Rossetti's legacy, but of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's, as well. Roger Peattie has argued that a "fierce family loyalty ... characterised the Rossettis" (72) and that William Michael made use of the same editorial practices when preparing his brother's work for publication (86). Peattie contends that those who judge William Michael harshly should bear in mind that, as an editor "...he was not much better but certainly no worse than the general run of Victorian ... editors" (ibid.), and that the collation and publication of works by the Rossetti family is, in large measure, indebted to his work as a memorialist (86). It is inevitable that William Michael's attempts to protect both of his siblings has, in some measure, obscured Christina Rossetti's more radical written responses to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's life and writings.

Where some of Christina Rossetti's unpublished poems engaged in a private critical dialogue with her brother, Louisa May Alcott publically stated that she published her sensation fiction pseudonymously to keep it from her father and the wider Transcendentalist movement. In an 1886 interview with Corbell Pickett, Alcott claimed that:

I think my natural ambition is for the lurid style. I indulge in gorgeous fantasies and wish that I dared inscribe them upon my pages and set them before the public ... How should I dare to interfere with the proper grayness of old Concord? And my favourite characters! Suppose they went cavorting at their own sweet will, to the infinite horror of dear Mr. Emerson ... And what would my own good father think of me ... if I set folks to doing the things that I have a longing to see my people do? (qtd. in Giordano 146).

This interview is sometimes cited as evidence that sensation fiction was Alcott's "true" style. Both Stern (*Behind a Mask* xxvi) and Davis (vi) interpret the interview as an indication that Alcott's domestic fiction was written out of economic necessity, whereas the experimentations with sensation fiction were in some sense liberating. Estes and Lant affiliate the subversive nature of Alcott's sensation writing with her Transcendentalist background, suggesting that she embraced the Transcendentalist ideals of "self-expression, self-reliance and self-exploration" in her sensation fiction (99), but that she was aware of the fact that her father and Emerson would disapprove of a woman embracing these ideals (100), a surprising assumption given the number of women affiliated with the movement whom associated with both Emerson and Bronson Alcott (Margaret Fuller, the Peabody sisters and Ednah Dow Cheney herself, to name but a few).

At the back of such hypotheses is Alcott's 1877 admission in her journal that she enjoyed returning to sensation fiction after her success as a domestic novelist because she was "...tired of providing moral pap for the young" (204). Numerous scholars, including Veronika Bassil (191), Christine Doyle (51) and Judith Fetterley (ILW 369), cite this quotation as evidence that Alcott affiliated her literary identity with the sensation fiction, but

was forced to hide it from her reading public because it was deemed unacceptable for a sentimental authoress to write within this genre. However, Alcott's journals are equally scathing of her sensation writing, frequently referring to it as "rubbish" (67, 118, 130, 136, 139). Although the interview would suggest that the author enjoyed writing sensation stories more than young adult fiction, this does not necessarily mean that Alcott viewed the genre as her "true" style. In actual fact, Alcott's journal records her desire to write a "great book" (92), while a letter to her mother admits that she hoped to "...pass in time from fairies and folks to men and realities" (12). Matteson claims that nothing "seized [Alcott's] imagination and energies as much as *Moods*" (261): her first novel (1861), which she worked on for a period of twenty years, releasing a revised edition with an alternative ending in 1882. Similarly, *Work* (1872) was composed over a period of eleven years, serialised in *The Christian Union* magazine when Alcott's publishers, Roberts Brothers, declined to publish it (*Journals* 124 fn. 35). Both novels are experiments in realism, suggesting that Alcott's "true" style was a realist work written without a specific literary "market" in mind.

While the notion of a "double voice" acknowledges the female author's ability to critique the male canon, it nevertheless denies the female writer agency by implying that her artistic choice of style or genre is conditioned by the repressive attitudes of her male peers. Keren Fite has challenged the discourse surrounding the "double voice" in Alcott's work by arguing that the tendency to view Alcott's sensation and domestic fiction as reflecting a double-consciousness where the sensation literature must be plumbed for its subversive undertones constructs a history where the female writer is viewed through a narrative of "exclusion" (175). Such readings subtly contribute to a wider gendered assumption surrounding the apparent "freedom" of male writers and their ability to write for the marketplace, while it is frequently assumed that female writers are overwhelmingly inhibited by gender roles. This bias can be observed in critical assessments of the influence of the

sensation genre on Herman Melville's *Pierre*, which can be neatly contrasted with the critical reception of Louisa May Alcott's sensation fiction. Milder has claimed that the "orthodox" critical interpretation of *Pierre* has historically functioned under the assumption that Melville undertook the project due to financial strain, and that its alleged lack of aesthetic quality can be imputed to the fact that it was composed with a female audience in mind (186). Thus, genre writing is viewed as an imposition on the male writer's ability to achieve the acme of Romantic self-expression, while for the female writer it is frequently presented as a last resort in her attempt to challenge the male canon, while simultaneously preserving her public reputation as a morally reputable figure.

Assigning a "double voice" to Rossetti similarly underestimates her agency as a poet by reducing the complex layering of her verse to a narrative of repressed protestation. Burlinson has noted that Rossetti's poetic personae frequently exhibit a "...reluctance to provide readers with a secure interpretive foothold" (4). In fact, the fraternal revisions of Rossetti's work frequently reduce the reticence of her narrative speakers, so that her poems take on a more didactic, confessional quality. Chapman has claimed that Dante Gabriel Rossetti's strike-outs in his sister's dramatic monologues deliberately eliminate passages that explore the complexity of the speaker's emotions and raise a number of allusive possibilities concerning her relationships with others (DFS 143).

The withheld secret is a major preoccupation of Rossetti's verse, granting the poet a level of power and autonomy over her readers—forcing them to inhabit her state of mind, in order to ascertain the poem's subject, instead of privileging their readerly response. William Michael Rossetti's decision to publish the fragmented version of "A Coast-Nightmare" downplays the role of the secret in his sister's posthumously published poem. Consisting only of the opening and concluding lines of the complete manuscript, the fragment provides the most basic skeleton of its narrative content:

I have a friend in ghostland—

Early found, ah me how early lost!—

Blood-red seaweeds drip along that coastland

By the strong sea wrenched and tost [sic].

If I wake he hunts me like a nightmare:

I feel my hair stand up, my body creep:

Without light I see a blasting sight there,

See a secret I must keep.⁴²

As a short vignette, this fragment simplifies the ambiguities surrounding the speaker's relationship with her "friend in ghostland" (also referred to in the completed manuscript as a "lover" (Crump 2001 801 27)). Titled merely "A Nightmare" in William Michael Rossetti's edition, the poem can be read as exactly that: a nightmare where the speaker meets a ghostly figure whose presences lingers when she awakes, something that could be read merely as an indication of the speaker's momentary disorientation and uncertainty concerning whether her conscious state is "real" or not.

However, the completed poem casts considerable doubt over whether the speaker is describing a literal nightmare, a hallucination, a terrifying fancy, or a symbolic narrative that alludes to an unspoken trauma. The landscape of this "Coast-Nightmare" is well-developed, consisting of "...towers and towns from sea to sea" (20), filled with ghostly inhabitants that make up a small civilisation, "Civilians, soldiers, seaman" (23). This level of descriptive

⁴² 18 Dec 1856-29 Jun 1858. Ashley MS 1364 (2). British Lib., London; *New Poems by Christina Rossetti: Hitherto Unpublished or Uncollected* (118).

detail opens up the possibility that the speaker perceives “ghostland” to be a real place, which she travels to in both her waking and sleeping states, and that the friend or “lover” (27) described is a real and recurring presence in her life. This “lover’s” identity remains uncertain throughout the poem. He communicates “the wordless secrets of death’s deep” (34), suggesting that he could perhaps be Death himself and that the “secret” he reveals to is the speaker’s own death, as she awakes in “ghostland” at the poem’s close. Nevertheless, the speaker’s state-of-mind and exact location in the final lines remains uncertain and unknown, rendering it impossible for the reader to pin down the identity of the “friend” or “lover” and the exact nature of his relationship with the speaker. Is he a literal ghost of someone the speaker has known, a memory from her past, or a fantastic product of her imagination—the “ghost” of her fancy? His presence has disturbingly sexual connotations, for in the fragmented manuscript he “rides” the speaker “like a nightmare” (37)—an adverb that is struck out and replaced with the less sexually-explicit “hunts” (Crump 1979 466 fn. 37). Does this refer to an act of rape, or is the speaker describing her fear surrounding her own feelings of sexual desire? This information and the exact nature of the relationship between speaker and subject is deliberately withheld.

Rossetti’s poetry not only renders authorial experience inaccessible, but also explores emotions and sensations that cannot be articulated. Her speaker cannot communicate her “secret” because it is a visual one, one that is “seen”—not one that is “told” (Crump 2001 40). The medium of verse is therefore deployed for a purpose it can never fulfil. As a verbal medium, it cannot express the “blasting sight” (39) experienced by the speaker, for the descriptor itself suggests that her revelation is one that destroys the very sight that bears witness to it. The poem’s withheld “secret” is therefore presented as a deeply disturbing event, one that traps the speaker within her own experience, which she perpetually relives, but cannot communicate. The speaker is “compell[ed]” (35), “hunt[ed]”, “ridd[en]” (37) by

the unknown subject “like a nightmare”, and yet she “must keep” the “secret” he conveys to her (40), one that is “wordless” (34), incommunicable. The incessant, recurrent nightmarish nature of this “secret”, coupled with its inexpressibility, suggest a type of trauma—one that the reader cannot know, but must bear witness to as the speaker shares her sensations and responses with her audience.

The completed manuscript of this poem shows Rossetti experimenting with the role of poetic personae. Not only does she acknowledge authorial intention and experience as objects that cannot be retrieved; she also forcibly confronts the reader with these realities, rendering the poem itself a type of trauma—one of linguistic slippage—that is shared between them. These innovations challenge the perception of women’s poetry as a confessional medium, implying that the poet possesses a level of knowledge regarding traumatic experience that goes far beyond the stylistic conventions of the love-lament commonly associated with a female speaker.

In publishing the poem fragment, William Michael Rossetti maintained an image of his sister as a conventionally didactic writer, one who recorded the experience of a “nightmare” merely as an unusual event worthy of becoming the subject of a poem. To reduce Christina Rossetti’s poetic persona to a “double-voice”, where the poet secretly expresses her suppressed rebellion, falls into the trap of dividing her work into a false dichotomy between the authentic and conventional. Such assumptions are, in fact, indebted to the fraternal revisions, which frequently expunged complexity from her work. It is worth nothing that William Michael Rossetti’s notes to the posthumous edition acknowledge that, on occasion, Dante Gabriel Rossetti tore pages that he disapproved of from Christina’s notebooks (380)—something that may account for the fragmented state of the second copy of “A Coast-Nightmare”. Assigning Rossetti a “double-voice” therefore falls into the trap of

assuming that her more subversive work was deliberately hidden from a repressive literary culture that obstructed women from expressing their “true” selves.

However, Rossetti *did* submit the completed manuscript of “A Coast-Nightmare” for publication with the Portfolio Society (Crump 2001 1137). Rather than expressing a repressed inner-life, a number Rossetti’s posthumously published poems interrogate literary conventions concerning the portrayal of female experience and heterosexual gender-dynamics. Much of this work engages in an intertextual dialogue with the work of her brother, Dante Gabriel, but instead of functioning as a didactic and purely subversive critique, it explores the complex social, moral and artistic connotations of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s portrayals of women. Alison Chapman has argued that “Dante Gabriel Rossetti positions [his sister’s] poetry as inherently posthumous, always and only existing in its afterlife” because he “impo[s] closure in his various revisions and deletions”, removing “the feminine subject ... and the feminine signature of the poetry” (*Afterlife* 74). Ironically, then, it is the poet’s *actual* posthumously published work that resists the fraternal attempts to “disembody the poetry from its authorial origins” (ibid.) because it is in these poems that the reader witnesses Christina Rossetti’s uncensored assessments of her brother. William Michael Rossetti, who was aware of the notoriety of his brother’s life, as well as his sister’s contrastingly untarnished public image, obscured work that would lead the lives of his siblings to come under scrutiny. Bringing these lesser-known works into the critical “canon” of Rossetti’s *oeuvre* allows readers to examine her critical engagement with the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti without underestimating her agency as a writer.

Likewise, instead of viewing Alcott’s sensation fiction as an incendiary outlet for her suppressed rebellious views, such works can instead be understood as ingenious vehicles for interrogating the work of the Concord milieu “undercover”. Whereas Estes and Lant assume that Alcott aspired towards the ideals of the Transcendentalists, I interpret the author’s

decision to hide her literary experiments from the movement as an indication that she suspected its members would not approve of her writing. Dorri Beam has compellingly argued that, in an American context, the engagement of female authors with such depreciated genres as sensation fiction enabled such women to push against the portrayal of “true womanhood” in contemporary literary culture, for “...the plot’s presentation of the barriers to women’s desire” register with such “desire” on “another level” (5). Alcott’s sensation fiction is what Beam would term as a “highly wrought” (1) interrogation of the vision of femininity promoted by her Concord associates. It is not simply her “true” style, but rather a self-consciously constructed vehicle that is utilised with the purpose of appropriating the gendered tropes of the Transcendentalists, in order to expose and challenge them.

While Rossetti and Alcott undoubtedly ensured that a substantial portion of their work was less available to their male relatives, the implicit assumption that the genres and styles adopted by these women were taken up as a “last resort” is problematic. It is my contention that both authors took pleasure in outwitting their male associates by interrogating the work of these associates within genres and styles that they disapproved of. Moreover, to ignore the complementarity between the authors’ lesser-known works and the wider canonical body of their writing obfuscates their agency as female artists. Catherine Maxwell has observed that nineteenth-century women’s writing that does not exhibit explicitly rebellious qualities is frequently dismissed as “conformist” and “repressive” (77). When applied to the work of Alcott and Rossetti, this assessment suggests that the authors’ thematic concerns should not be dichotomised along the lines of genre or publication status. The following section will therefore place the authors’ pseudonymous and posthumously published work in dialogue with their public discourses on the writing of their male associates.

Both Alcott and Rossetti reference the work of their male associates to expose the male artist’s preoccupation with the inanimate female beloved as a symptom of his desire to

erase feminine subjectivity. The proceeding pair of chapters, “A Marble Woman” and “The grave-worm revels now”, will examine Louisa May Alcott’s interrogation of the Pygmalion myth in her 1865 sensation novella, *A Marble Women*, with reference to her inter-textual allusions to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun* (1860), alongside Christina Rossetti’s satirical examination of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s portrayal of the female corpse in her posthumously published verse. Alcott highlights the abusive connotations of the Pygmalion and Galatea myth that is referenced throughout Hawthorne’s work, foregrounding the male artist’s sinister desire to destroy the independent identity of his muse, so that she exists only as *objet d’art*. Hawthorne’s commentary on the Transcendentalist ideology of individualism is also scrutinized from a feminist perspective. Alcott shares in Hawthorne’s critique concerning the solipsism of the Transcendentalists, but upholds a sympathetic union between the genders as the foundation for a work of artistic genius, thereby undermining Hawthorne’s cynicism concerning the male artist’s inability to recognise the female muse’s capacity to create an original work of art.

Rossetti’s intertextual references to the work of her brother, Dante Gabriel, reveal his preoccupation with the female corpse as derived from the same motivation as that of Hawthorne’s Pygmalion: namely, a desire to incorporate the identity of the female muse into the selfhood of the male artist. As a lifeless corpse, the female muse is reduced to an inanimate object that the poet-painter can fashion into his prescribed image of ideal womanhood. Christina Rossetti foregrounds the erasure of female autonomy in her brother’s verse, which is revealed to be a convenient means of deflecting the moral and spiritual obligations of the male artist onto the muse who is forced into becoming the vessel for his heavenly salvation. Both Louisa May Alcott and Christina Rossetti allow the muse to express her independent identity: Alcott permits her to create an original work of art, while Rossetti

endows the female beloved with a voice that speaks back from beyond the grave, informing the male artist of his probable exclusion from the elect.

Ultimately, Alcott and Rossetti both succeed in overthrowing the image of the female corpse that is disseminated throughout the work of their male associates. The authors' decisions to engage in private writing that was distanced from their public personae should be read as acts of freedom, which allowed both women to "outwit" their male contemporaries through placing their criticisms beyond the reach of all censorious intervention. Despite the fact that William Michael Rossetti revised his sister's unpublished work after her death, the preservation of her manuscripts and surviving record of his editorial amendments merely heightens the subversive content of her posthumously published verse. William Michael's attempts to censure his sister's critique of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's art and writing indicates that the current "canonical" body of Christina Rossetti's poetry should be reassessed in light of the public image that was promoted by her brother after her death. Likewise, Alcott's sensation fiction needs to be read alongside the wider body of her work, in order to shed light on how her pseudonymous writing usurps tropes of male literary traditions, foregrounding critical interventions that are implicit in the body of her domestic fiction. Both Alcott and Rossetti undermine the figure of the dominant male individualist, simultaneously investing his silent muse with a voice that speaks back and challenges his authority.

Chapter 2

“A marble woman! Is the omen good or ill?”

Pygmalion and Galatea in the work of Hawthorne and Alcott

In her references to the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne in her pseudonymous sensation fiction, Louisa May Alcott exposes the figure of the female corpse to be the ultimate embodiment of the male artist's ideology of individualism. Alcott demonstrates that the male artist's infallibility is predicated upon the lack of subjectivity that is displayed by the female muse or model. This absence of subjectivity is, of course, a construct—but it is preserved and maintained by the male artist by means of psychological control and emotional domination. At the hands of the male artist, the model is manipulated into conforming to a prescribed image of female passivity and lifelessness, while she is actively prevented from engaging in acts of artistic creation.

Elizabeth Bronfen has analysed the recurring trope of the beautiful, dead woman, which appears throughout the canon of nineteenth-century male writing. Drawing on the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, among others, Bronfen claims that the attraction of the image of the dead female beloved is rooted in the aesthetic perfection that is achieved by the statuesque female corpse: “The feminine body appears as a perfect, immaculate aesthetic form because it is a dead body, solidified into an object of art” (5). Moreover, the male artist's preoccupation with the deceased female beloved's inanimate nature allows him to overcome the threat to his individualism that is posited by female “otherness”, thereby creating a stable relation between himself and the external world (11). Consequently, the artist ultimately aspires towards a necrophiliac union with this statuesque dead body (70).

Hawthorne acknowledges the existence of the male artist's disturbing preoccupation with the female corpse, but he does not champion this preoccupation as achieving the acme of artistic expression. Instead, he suggests that the transformation of the female subject into a lifeless object is the inevitable by-product of the male artist's alienating individualism. Making extensive references to the Transcendentalists, Hawthorne implies that the exclusivity of the male artist's vision disregards the validity of other perspectives and outlooks, forcing the female muse to become the sympathetic vessel of the male artist's ideal image of femininity. The female muse is coerced by the male artist into becoming the "marble woman": a figure who is the artistic embodiment of the female corpse. In Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun: or, The Romance of Monte Beni* (1860), the "marble woman" functions as a contemporaneous depiction of Pygmalion's Galatea: a figure who is mute, cold, lifeless and unresponsive, and who yet supports the male sculptor in his individualistic vision.

Hawthorne presents the female corpse as the inevitable fatality of the male artist's ideology of individualism, even though he does not condone this ideology, because he is doubtful of the male artist's ability to engage in a truly reciprocal union with the female muse. In Hawthorne's work, the possibility of an egalitarian union between male and female is always presented as an elusive ideal that is impossible to attain, and which often causes the downfall of the female heroine. At the close of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne outlines Hester Prynne's belief that "...at some brighter period ... a new truth [will] be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness" (240). However, Hester's aspiration towards this "new relation" is figured as an almost unreachable object that is unattainable to a "woman stained with sin" (ibid.). The model union between male and female can only be facilitated by an idealised emblem of

womanhood: “....the angel and apostle of the coming revelation must be a woman indeed, but lofty, pure, and beautiful....” (ibid.).

Feminist critics are divided on how to interpret Hawthorne’s portrayal of the female artist as unable to attain either the romantic ideal she aspires towards, or a symbolic equality with her male counterpart. Nina Baym has argued that Hawthorne portrays the “oppression or rejection of women” as the cause of “male downfall” in *The Scarlet Letter*, claiming that Hester’s inability to attain her ideal union stems from her fall from grace, a symptom of male oppression (RHF 109). On the other hand, in her work on *The Marble Faun*, Hilary Emmett notes that female artistic production (which a reader of Hawthorne might reasonably impute to Hester Prynne) is “linked to the foundational act of fratricide” (2), and that female artists are punished for their “....sin, which may have been nothing more than a foray into the artistic marketplace” (38).

What is consistent among these differing interpretations is that Hawthorne defers an egalitarian union between man and woman that is founded on the recognition of female subjectivity indefinitely. Sacvan Bercovitch has acknowledged the ambiguity of the function of the Scarlet Letter itself, which is transformed “into a symbol for ‘able’ [and] ‘admirable’, as well as ‘adulteress’” (629), but nevertheless acknowledges that at the close of the novel Hester advocates “....a morphology of penitence ... and hope in the future, involving some apodictic revelation to come” (630). For Bercovitch, it is at this moment that Hester finally adopts “....the office of the A as the Puritan magistrates intended it” (ibid.), for she “....chooses for no clear reason to abandon her heroic independence, and acquiesce to the A after all” (631). One might reasonably argue that Hawthorne’s portrayal of the aspiration towards the “new relation” between male and female is inevitably doomed because of its tainted contact with the fallen world. The compulsion to achieve this union is therefore

presented as a tragic delusion of the artistic vision, regardless of whether this vision is gendered as male or female.

Louisa May Alcott's allusions to Hawthorne throughout her sensation fiction locate the source of the failed union between man and woman in the individualism of the male artist who destroys the female muse by attempting to mould her in his own image. Hawthorne was an apt author for Alcott to reference in her commentary on the relationship between male and female artists, for his position is in itself ambivalent—both in regard to the elevated position accorded to the male artist by the Transcendentalists, and the aesthetic merit assigned to the popular woman's novel by the reading public. As discussed in Chapter 1, Hawthorne, who up until 1846 had been regarded as a colleague of the Transcendentalists, became disenchanted with the movement following the failure of the "Brook Farm" experiment. Nevertheless, his extended residence in Concord and continuing association with Emerson and Thoreau ensured that the spectre of Transcendentalism was never fully exorcised from his work.

Hawthorne's ambivalence towards female artistry can be observed in his widely quoted dismissal of the popular woman's novel in an 1855 letter to his publisher, William Ticknor: "America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash—and should be ashamed myself if I did succeed" (*Letters* 17:304). Beginning with the influential critic, F.O. Matthieson, who used Hawthorne's statement as a means of justifying his exclusion of popular women's writing from the classic canon of American literature (x-xi), this excerpt has often been interpreted as reflecting the author's need to "...defend masculinity, both sexual and literary, against imagined feminist challenges" (Rowe 75).

However, three months later in his correspondence with Ticknor, Hawthorne was to reflect more critically on his earlier assessment: "Generally, women write like emasculated

men, and are only to be distinguished from male authors by greater feebleness and folly; but when they throw off the restraints of decency, and come before the public stark naked, as it were—then their books are sure to possess character and value” (*Letters* 17:456-7) Baym has compellingly argued that this letter evidences Hawthorne’s critique of “....women trying to write the kind of book that men wrote and, of course, failing, producing ... a book like a man’s, except more foolish and feeble” (“Scribbling Women” 25), while James D. Wallace takes this assessment a step further to suggest that Hawthorne felt that the female writer should reject the precedents of the male literary tradition and “expel [her] rivals by actual pressure” (209).

Louisa May Alcott takes up Hawthorne’s challenge of expelling her rivals by actual pressure through interrogating Hawthorne’s examination of the relationship between male and female artists within the sensation genre. Alcott’s engagement with popular fiction presents a challenge to the standard of “cultural literacy” (Hawkins 12) that was constructed by male literary traditions, as embodied in the work of Hawthorne and the Transcendentalists. While Emerson claims in “The American Scholar” that “I would not be hurried by any love of system ... to underrate a book” (42), his literary judgements are, in fact, informed by preconceived Romantic notions of divine inspiration and artistic individualism, which inevitably opposes the role of both genre literature and popular writing.⁴³ Emerson outlines a program of study, known as “the theory of books” (40), where the “study of letters” (52) creates “the world around” through giving it a “new arrangement through the mind” (40). The literary scholar re-interprets the writer’s experiences in order to transform the writer’s works into “immortal thoughts” (*ibid.*). This enables the scholar’s “soul” to expose the “absolute truth” that is revealed through an inspired literary text (41).

⁴³ This discussion of Emerson’s “The American Scholar” is taken from my “Self-Reliance: Transcendentalism and the Woman-Artist in Louisa May Alcott’s Fiction”.

However, the view of artist and scholar as divinely inspired prophetic figures constructs a hierarchy of intellectual value where the individual must function as a divine oracle in order to produce a work of merit. Indeed, in “Self-Reliance”, Emerson claims that the central tenet of “every man’s education” is that “imitation is suicide” and the only way to attain success is to focus on the power that resides “in him” (132). Such a view denies the value of exchange within an intellectual community, as well the collective creation of a literary genre through the development of a set of conventions—something that was key to the rise of women’s literature through the development of generic fiction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Alcott capitalises on the avant-garde status of sensation fiction, in order to recast Hawthorne’s criticisms of Transcendentalism within a genre that challenged the canon of aesthetic merit that was constructed by both Hawthorne and the Transcendentalists. Hawthorne’s condemnations of the movement’s solipsism are endorsed, while his hypocrisy in dismissing both popular fiction and women’s art is exposed.

Alcott’s sensation novella, *A Marble Woman or, The Mysterious Model* (1865), recasts Hawthorne’s portrayal of the Pygmalion myth in *The Marble Faun* (1860) to highlight the emotional trauma that the female muse experiences when she is forced to shape her identity to the male artist’s desires. In addition to interrogating the male artist’s refusal to acknowledge feminine subjectivity, Alcott also explores the ramifications that this has on women’s art, which is forced into becoming lifeless imitations of the work of men. She scrutinises Hawthorne’s failed aspiration towards an “ideal union” between man and woman to reveal that such a union is dependent upon the male artist’s recognition of the value of both feminine subjectivity and creative genius. In her later realist work, *Diana and Persis* (1879), Alcott upholds an egalitarian union between male and female artists as the source of a collaborative work of art that foregrounds the life and subjectivity of the muse. Alcott’s portrayal of such a union exposes Hawthorne’s cynicism regarding the possibility of an

egalitarian union between male and female as a symptom of his investment in a patrilineal artistic tradition. Hawthorne portrays the female subject's sympathetic investment in the male artist's vision as a product of the patrilineal heritage of artistic production, for the female artist only has male predecessors to draw inspiration from. Alcott challenges Hawthorne's androcentric vision by referring to an emerging tradition of women's art, alluding to such figures as Harriet Hosmer, Margaret Fuller and her own younger sister, May Alcott Nieriker. By challenging Hawthorne's cynical preoccupation with male domination and feminine submissiveness, Alcott fulfils what Wallace would define as Hawthorne's demand that the female artist "expel [her] rivals by actual pressure" (209). In the case of *A Marble Woman*, Alcott's rival is Hawthorne himself. Let us turn, then, to Alcott's reconfiguration of Hawthorne's work in her early sensation writing.

"His beautiful idea at once came to life": Pygmalion's creation of Galatea

Alcott's sensation novella, *A Marble Woman* (1865) makes extensive references, both in plot and theme, to Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (1860).⁴⁴ Both works examine romantic relationships between male and female artists and consider the relative merits of different disciplines within the sister arts. Alcott and Hawthorne also examine two contrasting images of femininity: that of the passionate and vital artist who is associated with dancing and painting, and the morally pure, but colder ideal muse that is affiliated with sculpture and artistic reproduction. The plot of each novel also hinges on an unrevealed secret concerning a mysterious model whose identity is left in doubt throughout the text.

⁴⁴ To my knowledge, this is the first extended study of the influence of Hawthorne's novel on Alcott's novella. Lennox Keyser acknowledges the interconnections between these two texts, but it is not the topic of her chapter. The mythical origins of Pygmalion and Galatea are more central to her analysis of the relationship between the sculptor and his muse.

The Marble Faun is centred on three American artists: Miriam, Hilda and Kenyan, who are working in Rome, and their Italian friend Donatello, a seemingly simple rustic, later revealed to be the Count of Monte Beni, who bears an uncanny likeness to the famous sculpture by Praxiteles to which the novel owes its name. Donatello, who is enamoured of the beautiful Miriam, follows her as a stranger until she permits him to enter her social circle. Miriam, a painter who allows few people to become acquainted with her, is stalked through the city by a mysterious Capuchin monk who claims that they are both implicated in a mutual crime, which the narrator never discloses. Miriam insists on her innocence, but nevertheless maintains that she has an obligation to the monk, whom she permits to be her model. Donatello, who has observed the emotional distress that the model's presence causes Miriam, develops a hatred of the model and abruptly murders him (at Miriam's mute behest, he claims) by hurling him from the top of the "Traitor's Leap". Following the model's murder, Hawthorne develops the theme of *felix culpa*, or the fortunate fall, by implying that the previously faun-like Donatello has developed a conscience as a result of his guilt. The murder also disturbs the innocent copyist, Hilda, who unwittingly witnesses the act and subsequently cuts ties with Miriam, whom she sees as tainted due to her mute encouragement of Donatello. Hilda eventually overcomes her disturbance and engages herself to Kenyon, a sculptor who simultaneously pities Miriam, while disapproving of her relationship with Hilda. The novel closes with Donatello turning himself into the authorities in repentance for his crime, while Miriam undertakes a life of penance as a Catholic convert. Hilda and Kenyan return to America to establish their marital home.

Alcott's *A Marble Woman* also centres on the lives of three artists: the sculptor Bazil Yorke; his ward and apprentice, the orphaned Cecilia, also known as "Cecil", Stein; and Yorke's "mysterious model", who is later revealed to be Germain Stein—a failed opera singer and Cecil's estranged father. Cecil is sent to Yorke following the death of her mother

(for whom she is named), who nominated Yorke as Cecil's guardian due to her husband's abandonment of her following Cecil's birth. Yorke, who was jilted by Cecilia Stein in favour of Germain, determines to "make the daughter pay the mother's debt" (183) by rendering Cecil a "beautiful and passionless" "marble woman" who is incapable of experiencing love or affection (188). Yorke prevents Cecil from associating with anyone outside of the tower in which she lives (and which mirrors Hilda's tower in *The Marble Faun*). Cecil, who has fallen in love with her surrogate father, agrees to a sham marriage with Yorke when it is revealed that scandalous rumours concerning their relationship have circulated through the neighbourhood. Following their marriage, Cecil becomes frustrated at her husband's lack of affection and befriends the mysterious model whom he has banned her from seeing on the grounds of an alleged obsession. Yorke's subsequent jealousy (which erupts when he dangles Germain from Cecil's balcony in a scene that mirrors the model's murder in *The Marble Faun*) convinces Cecil to end their sham marriage and admit her love for him. However, she is prevented from doing so by a failed boating excursion with Germain, who suffers a fatal injury and, while dying, confesses that he is Cecil's father. It is revealed that Yorke has harboured the fugitive Germain, who is wanted for murder, out of a sense of loyalty towards Cecil's mother. Cecil forgives Germain before he dies and when Yorke arrives to rescue father and daughter he admits his love for Cecil and the couple are reconciled.

Alcott's title makes reference to a scene in Hawthorne's text where the sculptor, Kenyon, unwittingly stumbles across a statue of a marble woman while searching for Hilda: the artist and muse with whom he has fallen in love. The fragmented "marble woman" is portrayed as a symbol of the male artist's desires: an ideal image of female beauty over which he exercises complete control as creator. Kenyon, whose "practised eye was soon aware of something artistic in [the] rude object", a "shapeless fragment of stone" (833), briefly abandons his frustrated search for Hilda to reassemble the sculpture from its ruins. This

excavatory exercise is a relief for the thwarted sculptor who has, thus far, proved unable to secure Hilda's affections. In his new role as excavator, Kenyon exercises absolute power over the lifeless image whose resurrection now depends upon his artistic skill and vision. When he finally repositions the head onto the ruin's trunk, he finds that "[His] beautiful Idea at once asserted its immortality, and converted that heap of forlorn fragments into a whole...." (834).

Kenyon's restoration is not made with the view of reinstating the original sculptor's vision, nor of rescuing the female image from desecration, but rather with the purpose of imposing his "beautiful Idea" (834) onto the ruined woman, so that she becomes the immortal symbol of his artistic ideal. In short, he abandons his search for Hilda to create his own Galatea, something that he explicitly acknowledges in an aside to the reader: "I seek for Hilda, and find a marble woman! Is the omen good or ill?" (833). The sculptor's act of imposing his own image onto the work of another artist suggests a long patrilineal heritage of subordinating the female muse to the male artist's desires, while his ability to breathe life into the ruin disturbingly implies that, in Hilda's absence, he creates an actual woman over whom he will have complete control: "The effect was magical. It immediately lighted up and vivified the whole figure, endowing it with personality, soul and intelligence" (834). Kenyon believes that his act of restoring the figure to totality has endowed it with human qualities, not in the least a "soul", exposing his "beautiful Idea" (834) as nothing more than an attempt to create a living woman whose spiritual, intellectual and emotional life is completely subservient to his own. This is underlined by the adverb "vivified", stemming from the Latin root "vivus" or "alive" and "caré" or "to make", literally meaning "to make alive".⁴⁵ Kenyon has brought his "beautiful Idea" (834) to life, but this act of "vivifying" unfortunately shares the same root as "vivisection": "the action of cutting into or dissecting some part of a living

⁴⁵ "Vivify", v1a. A more disturbing secondary physiological meaning, originating in the nineteenth-century is: "To convert to living tissue", v1c. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 1920. Web. 24 Oct 2018.

organism”⁴⁶—a practice that attracted considerable attention among nineteenth-century female animal rights activists in both Britain and the US, one of whom was Christina Rossetti (Frances Thomas 344-5). Kenyon, then, brings his ideal image to life, but at what cost? Is he resurrecting an already living image: that of Woman herself, who must continually be fragmented and reconstructed into the ideal of whichever male artist crosses her path?

If one views the ruined sculpture as a stand-in for Hilda, then the answer must be yes, for Hilda’s inanimate and statuesque appearance is frequently associated with Kenyon’s infatuation, and it is implied that the sculptor is attracted by her feminine subservience and physical diminutiveness. Indeed, he fetishizes Hilda’s virginal innocence by rendering her as one of his sculptures, an act that can be affiliated with Bronfen’s claim that the image of the inanimate dead woman allows the artist to achieve a voyeuristic union with the female muse as lifeless object. Significantly, Kenyon does not create a complete sculpture of Hilda, but instead fashions a secret marble cast of her hand, while admitting that he knows she would disapprove of such an act because he has “stole[n]” the image from her (659). The scene bears disturbing connotations of rape, for Kenyan is aware that Hilda would see the sculpture as a violation of her “maidenly reserve” (ibid.), and yet he persists in his attempts to attain a part of her body without her prior consent. The hand itself is presented as a disconcertingly fetishized image, kept in a jewelled “ivory coffer”, and apparently wrought to give the impression of “virgin warmth”, so that “the jealous sculptor” would not allow anyone else to touch it (ibid.).

Hawthorne’s disturbing portrayal of the male artist’s objectification of the female muse reflects his cynicism regarding the possibility of an egalitarian union between male and female artists. This can be observed in his inspiration for Kenyon’s sculptured hand, which Miriam claims is like “Harriet Hosmer’s clasped hands of Browning and his wife,

⁴⁶ “Vivisection”, n1a. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 1920. Web. 24 Oct 2018.

symbolizing the individuality and heroic union of two high, poetic lives” (659). However, Hosmer’s *Clasped Hands of Robert and Elizabeth Browning* (see Fig. 6) conveys a reciprocity of which Kenyon’s sculpture is devoid. The hands are fused into one, with the male palm and fingers encircling the female. Hosmer’s sculpture is also cast in bronze, a medium that is melted in a furnace and therefore does not share the same associations with coldness and death as that of marble, which is hewn out of rock. The Brownings were renowned as an artistic couple who had managed to forge a happy marriage after their elopement to Italy against the will of Barrett Browning’s father. In recasting an image that was symbolic of the “heroic union of two high, poetic lives” (ibid.) into an isolated and fragmented limb, cast against the subject’s will, Hawthorne undermines the aspiration towards an ideal union between artists—replacing it with the male sculptor’s obsession with the female corpse.

Alcott expands on Hawthorne’s portrayal of a thwarted union between male and female artists to level blame solely at the door of the male sculptor through highlighting the destructive ramifications of his conduct. Hawthorne’s inversion of the Pygmalion myth is made explicit, for instead of having Pygmalion’s sculpture stand in as a synecdoche for Galatea, Alcott portrays the living Galatea as one of her master’s works whose emotional and artistic development is stunted as a result of her objectification. From the opening of the novella, it is clear that the protagonist, Yorke, intends to control his muse and apprentice, Cecil, by denying her both sexually and emotionally, treating her as an unresponsive statue. Yorke consciously casts himself in the role of Pygmalion; expressing a desire to transform Cecil from a human girl *into* the image of his statue of Psyche: “I would have you as beautiful and passionless as my Psyche, a creature to admire with no fear of disturbing its quiet heart, no fear of endangering one’s own” (188). Yorke adds another layer of regression to the Pygmalion myth by reverting the transformation, so that the final result is that of the

marble woman. The creation of a marble Psyche is a subconscious expression of his desire to freeze female emotion, for Psyche, as the lover of Cupid, symbolises the apex of female passion. The author implies that the sculptor who emulates Pygmalion creates a cold and lifeless image of femininity, without emotion.

A Marble Woman's exposure of the female muse's exploitation emphasises the psychological damage that is wrought upon her as a consequence. Cecil is described as "colorless, like a plant deprived of sunshine", "strangely unyouthful in the quiet grace of her emotions", and "as beautiful as the Psyche and almost as cold" (183). Yorke's obsession with preserving Cecil's beauty, as an aesthetic connoisseur, deprives her of her humanity. His artistic associates recognise this and condemn his marriage as a perversion of the purpose of conjugal union—namely, a reciprocal bond between equals: "I don't envy him his handsome wife unless he possesses the art of warming and waking his Galatea. I doubt it, however, for he hasn't the look of a Pygmalion..." (210). By implying that Yorke doesn't possess the power of a true Pygmalion, his associates, Ascot and Dent, unwittingly expose the futility of the sculptor's endeavour, for he obstructs the very union he aspires towards by depriving the beloved of her autonomy. His attempts to breathe life into his ideal are futile because the living woman cannot exist purely as the object of the artist's desires: "As a work of art she is exquisite, but as a woman she is a dead failure. Why in heaven's name didn't Yorke marry one of his marble goddesses and be done with it?" (209). Cecil, as a "dead failure", has been reduced to a corpse, for she has lost her humanity by conforming to the image that has been prescribed to her by Yorke. Her subordination to his wishes is so exact that she has literally become one of his "dead" sculptures in an act of chremamorphism: "If it were not for color and costume, she might be mounted on a pedestal..." (209).

Like the subject of Browning's "My Last Duchess", Cecil is killed off, in order to become *objet d'art*—but her transformation into aesthetic object ultimately proves

unsatisfactory for Yorke. While she is the most beautiful article in the room, she is not the most attractive woman: “....that rosy, sweet-faced little woman sitting near her is far lovelier than this expressionless, heartless-looking beauty. See how young Mrs. Vivian kindles and grows with every passing emotion; look at her smile, hear her laugh, see her meet her husband’s eye with a world of love in her own, and then contrast her with the statuesque Mrs. Yorke” (209-10). Ascot and Dent’s commentary juxtaposes the artist’s ideal with the living reality to show that the acquisition of aesthetic perfection is not equal to reciprocal union. Mrs. Vivian does not share Cecil’s beauty, but her living flesh responds to her husband’s emotions, “kindling” with the evidence of the blood that runs through her veins (ibid.). The vivid impression that she inspires in her audience does not find its origins in her physical appearance, but rather in her sensory response to her husband’s “passing emotion[s]” (ibid.). She is the living embodiment of the reciprocal relationship between husband and wife, with her name also deriving from the Latin root of “vivus”, or “life”.⁴⁷

Yorke’s attempts to fashion a perfect beloved in the image of his art mirror those of Hawthorne’s Kenyon, but he diverges from his Hawthornian prototype in his dissatisfaction with the result of his experiment. Determined to prove Ascot and Dent wrong, he forces Cecil to dance so that she might glow “....with the soft excitement of exercise and pleasure” (210), causing his onlookers to retract their words and own that “....this is nature and not art. The man *can* animate his statue and I envy him” (ibid.). When confronted with the actuality of his artistic ideal, Yorke realises that he cannot have a wife that is both object and partner. His determination to rouse Cecil “....with the soft excitement of exercise and pleasure” (ibid.) implicitly alludes to the unconsummated nature of their sham marriage where at home they remain as “guardian and ward” (203). The “nature” that Dent refers to is therefore perhaps that of natural, sexual response (as is previously alluded to in Mrs. Vivien’s “kindling”

⁴⁷ The definition of “Vivid” is “Full of life”, a1a. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 1920. Web. 24 Oct 2018.

pleasure), for dancing is frequently figured as a metaphor for sexual relations, while the “blush” is often conflated with sexual knowledge. Yorke has achieved possession of his ideal statue, but finds the return of his necrophiliac union deeply unsatisfactory.

Cecil’s emotional and sexual fulfilment is similarly curtailed, but the ramifications of the abortive marital union for the artist’s muse are that of a total fragmentation of self, coupled with an inability to relate sincerely to the outside world. Cecil is forced to compartmentalise her emotions and play a variety of roles to satisfy Yorke’s every whim. The result of such excessive role-play is loss of identity, for the object must crumble under the weight of its maker’s will. Cecil is expected to both function as unresponsive object *and* mirror the identity of her progenitor. Yorke commands that she imitate Mrs. Vivan in public, in order to satisfy Ascot and Dent, thereby necessitating a change of character in the matter of a split-second: “She bowed and held the fan above her eyes a moment, as if to screen them from the light. When it dropped ... they saw a blooming, blushing face, with smiles on the lips....” (212). In a perverse reversal of Mrs. Vivan’s reciprocal response to her husband’s emotions, Cecil’s reactions have become mechanical imitations of genuine feeling. Yorke even goes so far as to simulate sexual stimulation for the performative and voyeuristic purpose of satisfying his colleagues. Following Cecil’s “exercise and pleasure” (210), she emerges from behind her fan wearing the blush that will satisfy her audience. Cecil, as woman, has been reduced to the status of artistic erotica—titillating her male audience, while maintaining the illusion that the female object is devoid of independent agency.

“You were blind and would not see, deaf and would not hear”: Pygmalion’s manipulation of Galatea

Alcott undercuts the male artist’s belief in the superiority of his idealised image of marble womanhood by portraying the psychological abuse that the creation of a marble woman is

predicated upon.⁴⁸ The reader is permitted to access the interior life of the muse, rather than merely admiring her aesthetic appearance, thereby acting as a witness to the damage that the male artist's psychological control inflicts upon the muse's sense of selfhood and autonomy. Yorke's determination to transform Cecil into his ideal "marble woman" is revealed to be a cruel and sadistic punishment for the romantic rejection of her mother. The male artist's preoccupation with the female corpse is explicitly portrayed as a vehicle for attacking the female subject's matrilineal heritage.

Alcott underlines the emotional trauma that such an assault renders on Cecil's identity. The only way she is able to perform her obligations to Yorke is through developing a dependency on opium: "I found it very hard to kill the affection that had grown warmer than you chose to have it ... I chilled and hardened myself rigorously; I forced myself to be meek, cold, and undemonstrative to you ... I took opium, that I might forget my pain, and feign the quietude I could not feel...." (249). Cecil's submission to Yorke's demands requires her to inflict violence upon herself emotionally, for she is forced to figuratively "kill" her affection. The author further emphasises Cecil's transformation into Galatea by extending the marble metaphor, as Cecil is "chilled" and "hardened", forcibly disengaged from herself and her own experiences. Alcott distinguishes her portrayal of the "marble woman" from that of Hawthorne by showing the lengths of self-harm that women must resort to, in order to achieve their transformation into marble.

Cecil's drug-addiction perhaps alludes to contemporary treatments for female hysteria. Andrew Scull claims that opium was commonly used as a means of calming "hysterics" (41), while Showalter records opium usage as a treatment for female patients who were abused by their doctors for showing signs of nymphomania (one of the most disturbing

⁴⁸ The abusive nature of Yorke and Cecil's relationship has been documented by Lennox Keyser and Kate McCullough who discuss the paternal and patriarchal contexts of Yorke's coercive control at length. Neither scholar considers the relationship between Cecil's abuse and her role as muse, or her output as a female artist.

treatments accompanying the usage of opium was compulsory clitorrectomy) (TFM 75-76). Cecil's decline into drug addiction reflects the level of scrutiny and surveillance that female sexuality was subjected to in the nineteenth-century, which, at its most extreme, could result in female castration. The only semblance of female sexuality that is acceptable to Yorke, as male artist, is the androgynous form of his sculptures, and this is underlined by his decision to remove the gender of Cecil's name. Yorke renames the heroine in the first scene of the novella, informing her that he "dislike[s]" her birth-name of Cecilia and thereby provoking her to tears (178). This sadistic act is motivated by Yorke's continuing resentment of Cecil's mother, for whom she is named: "...surely I can mold the child as I will, and make the daughter pay the mother's debt" (sic 183). His decision to rename Cecil therefore functions as a deliberate assault on the maternal line by erasing her matrilineal heritage and exacting complete control over her sexuality, thus rendering her an asexual being for the remainder of the narrative.

The author's portrayal of the exploitation and suffering of the female muse is also deployed with the purpose of exposing the wilful blindness of the male artist, who refuses to acknowledge the abusive nature of the relationship he has created. When Cecil takes Yorke at his word and refuses to show him affection, he reprimands her for not recognising that his feelings have changed: "I understand you now; you intend to hold me to my bond, and see in me nothing but your guardian. You are as ignorant as you are headstrong if you think this is possible. I gave up that foolish delusion long ago, and tried to show you a truer, happier tie. But you were blind and would not see, deaf and would not hear, hard-hearted and would not relent" (247).

Cecil's exacting enactment of her "bond" exposes the double-standard that Yorke has imposed upon her. Although Yorke wishes Cecil to exist purely to satisfy his own desires, he refuses to treat her as a human being, thus denying her ability to love him. His description of

her as blind, deaf and hard-hearted is a reference to Matthew 13:13 where Christ claims that “...they seeing see not; and hearing hear not, neither do they understand”. In conflating his identity with that of Christ, Yorke portrays himself as a prophetic figure, while Cecil is cast as an ignorant disciple who refuses to engage with reality. This reference is an ironic one because it is Yorke’s ignorance to Cecil’s true feelings that has blinded *him* to the destructive repercussions of his abusive behaviour. His refusal to accept culpability enables him to create an alternative narrative where Cecil is, in fact, the abuser. Through following his instructions to the letter and failing to somehow psychically sense his abrupt change of heart, Cecil has become the *femme fatale* who has betrayed her creator by denying him ultimate satisfaction. Ironically, this satisfaction would have been facilitated by allowing her the freedom to express her emotions independently and forge a genuine union with the male artist.

Unfortunately, the attainment of such freedom is impossible, for the female muse is forced to conspire with the male artist’s alternative version of history by accepting her complicity with his demands as evidence of her desire to partake in the injustice that has been perpetrated against her. This is most chillingly represented in a scene when an accidental overdose causes Cecil to slip into a coma, thereby enabling her to embody the very “deathlike immobility” that Yorke has demanded of her throughout the text (213). However, Yorke is “perplex[ed]” by Cecil’s actions and asks his doctor to hypothesise why she has become an addict. The doctor colludes with Yorke by dismissing the reality of female suffering—allying Cecil’s behaviour with hysteria: “A whim, perhaps, ennui, wakefulness; a woman’s reasons for such freaks are many” (214). Cecil’s addiction is divorced from her relationship with Yorke, so that it might be used as evidence for her feminine irrationality and the continuing necessity of the sculptor’s abusive practice, despite the fact that it is Yorke who first introduced Cecil to opium when she had trouble sleeping (198). Doctor and artist conspire

against the muse—forcing her to remain at the mercy of the male artist’s psychological control, as a part of her treatment and recovery.⁴⁹

Indeed, when Cecil wakes she is once more forced to repress the very suffering that has caused her emotional collapse: “Tears fell between her fingers, and for a moment she was shaken by some uncontrollable emotion. Yorke half rose as if to go to her, but checked the impulse and sat down with the air of a man bent on subduing himself at any cost. Cecil was herself again almost immediately, and wiping away her tears, seemed to await his reproof with accustomed meekness” (216). Cecil spontaneously reveals her suppressed emotions to Yorke: an act that he later insists was the true object of his desires, but her tears are checked by his determination to control her through withholding affection. The sculptor is initially attracted by the muse’s display of suffering, but he cannot risk her metamorphosing into a human being that is capable of acting reciprocally and independently, as his equal. Cecil comprehends Yorke’s behaviour implicitly: she is to regress into her former character and accept full blame for the episode. Yorke claims that he longs for Cecil to reciprocate his feelings, all the while forcing her to assume the role of inanimate muse whenever she shows the faintest glimmer of humanity. At the moment she risks exposing this hypocrisy, Cecil is also denied all access to opium. If Pygmalion is to maintain the illusion of reality in his relationship with Galatea, he must systematically eradicate her humanity, while forcing her into voluntary submission by destroying any opportunity for her to act autonomously. The muse is not the model for Galatea; Galatea is the model for the muse.

Alcott’s *A Marble Woman* foregrounds the perversion of the male sculptor’s desire to re-enact the Pygmalion myth; a preoccupation that is only implicit in Hawthorne’s narrative

⁴⁹ My reading of this scene is indebted to Lennox Keyser who claims that “Cecil ... unwittingly discovers, then deliberately seeks immunity, conformity, and oblivion in the narcotic preferred by her father/lover” (40). However, Keyser contends that Cecil’s exposure of Yorke’s hypocrisy is deliberate (*ibid.*). I read Cecil’s opium addiction as a last resort, which enables her to cope with her guardian’s conflicting demands and the contradictions inherent in their relationship.

(Kenyon is, of course, only a minor character in Hawthorne's text, and not the novel's hero).

The Marble Faun acknowledges Kenyon's infatuation with Hilda to be a symptom of his obsession with sculpture as the corpse-like embodiment of his desires, but allows the sculptor to maintain the happy delusion that muse and artwork are unified as a single object. At the close of the novel, the marble woman sculpture is restored and Kenyon and Hilda are reunited without being made aware of the disturbing connotations of Kenyon's attitude towards his muse. Hilda remains blissfully ignorant of Kenyon's illicit sculpture of her hand for the remainder of the novel.

By contrast, Alcott's text hones into the minutiae of Pygmalion's relationship with Galatea (a secondary preoccupation of Hawthorne's novel) to expose the abusive dynamics that would preserve such a relationship in real life. It is significant that *A Marble Woman* examines the relationship between Pygmalion and Galatea within the marital institution because the interactions between artist and muse are placed under a microscope. Where Hawthorne's novel leaves the reader with the mere knowledge that Kenyon has attained his desires in a conventional marital denouement, *A Marble Woman* allows us to scrutinise the process by which the male artist attains his object through a campaign of objectifying and dehumanising the female muse. Kenyon's conflation of Hilda with "the marble woman" sculpture becomes a reality: through an enforced subservience to the male artist, Cecil is transformed into a comatose female corpse who can be "mounted on a pedestal" (209) as one of his sculptures. Where Hilda functions as synecdoche for the marble woman, Cecil Stein is her personification (both literally and figuratively).

Alcott allies the patriarchal dynamic of ownership enshrined within marriage with the male artist's monopoly over the dissemination of the female image. The saturation of this objectified image throughout artistic culture enables the male artist to maintain ideological control over his muse by forcing her to conspire with her own abuse, in order to survive.

Alcott shares Hawthorne's cynicism concerning the ideal union between sculptor and muse/apprentice, but this cynicism is rooted in the abusive emotional dynamics that lie at the heart of this relationship, as perpetrated by the male sculptor. The failed union between sculptor and his marble protégé is therefore not merely a symptom of the fallen world because the necrophiliac union is, by nature, abortive. It is the desire of the male artist that is futile, reducing the consummation of his relationship to literal marble, dead flesh.

“So much sympathy they have”: the female artist as copyist

The Marble Faun does acknowledge the limitations of the relationship between the sculptor and his muse, but only through elevating the status of the female copyist, so that the value of women's art is affiliated with its capacity to emulate the work of great male artists.

Hawthorne champions Hilda's accomplishments as a copyist, especially her sympathetic appreciation for the Italian masters, as evidence of the superiority of her artistic vision.

Unlike Kenyon, Hilda's capacity to identify herself with other people consumes her art, so that she cannot remain trapped in the solipsism of her individual outlook: “....as she grew familiar with the miracles of art that enrich so many galleries in Rome, Hilda had ceased to consider herself as an original artist. No wonder that this change should have befallen her. She was endowed with a deep and sensitive faculty of appreciation; she had the gift of discerning and worshipping excellence in a most unusual manner” (622).

As a symbolic figure, Hilda aligns true artistry with the capacity for humility, which finds its origins in the artist's ability to relinquish her selfhood. Amidst the splendours of Rome, Hilda realises that there is no such thing as originality: all art derives from the great work that has preceded it. Consequently, the truly great artist expands upon their ability to appreciate the work of their forefathers, so that they are able to uphold the vision that has been bequeathed to them. This is quite the opposite to the philosophy of Kenyon, who

remains trapped within the voyeuristic world of his “beautiful Idea” (834). Hilda is described as capturing the “evanescent and ethereal life ... of the original”, something that is equivalent to “a sculptor [getting] the very movement and varying color of a living man into his marble bust” (623). Her ability to integrate her artistic perception with the work of her predecessors is aligned with her facility to invest the object with the life of its subject. Hilda’s capacity to endow her paintings with life is effectively juxtaposed with the cold stasis of marble. The “varying color of a living man” (623) (that is the colour of his flesh and blood) can never be contained within stone.

In his commendation of Hilda, Hawthorne challenges Emerson’s understanding of the visionary role of the artist. Emerson’s 1841 essay, “Art”, devalues the role of the copyist, claiming that every creative act should attempt “the production of a new and fairer whole” and that “...in our fine arts, not imitation, but creation is the aim” (186). Emerson champions the artist’s prophetic power, arguing that he should utilise “...the symbols in use in his day and nation”, in order to represent “the idea on which he and his contemporaries live and toil” (187). The work of the copyist is implicitly discarded as derivative of a bygone era that is disengaged from the artist’s authentic experience.

Hawthorne, by contrast, describes himself as a type of literary copyist whose work is formed in direct opposition to the artistic vision of the Transcendentalists. His introduction to the 1846 short-story, “Rappaccini’s Daughter”, sets up the work as a translation of an earlier story by M. L’Aubepine (the French equivalent to the name of Hawthorne), and establishes the author’s position as lying somewhere between the prophetic outlook of the Transcendentalists and the sensationalism of the popular novel:

As a writer, he seems to occupy an unfortunate position
between the Transcendentalists (who, under one name or
another, have their share in all the current literature of the

world), and the great body of pen-and-ink men who address the intellect and sympathies of the multitude. If not too refined ... to suit the taste of the latter class, and yet too popular to satisfy the spiritual or metaphysical requisitions of the former, he must necessarily find himself without an audience ... His writings, to do them justice, are not altogether destitute of fancy and originality; they might have won him greater reputation but for an inveterate love of allegory.... (386)

This passage perhaps contains the motive for Hawthorne's aforementioned dismissal of the "scribbling women". Worried that if he merely addresses "the intellect and sympathies of the multitude" he will descend into producing writing that lacks aesthetic "refinement", Hawthorne also does not wish to fall into the extreme "spiritual and metaphysical" abstractions of the Transcendentalists (ibid.). He combats his predicament with "an inveterate love of allegory" (386)—a genre that Deborah L. Jones has claimed critiques the "assumptions of both idealism and pragmatism" (153). Allegory is an inherently "mixed" genre because it "...seeks ... an interpretive structure that will make intelligible the ontological nature of the narrative signs, by representing these signs in terms of a Transcendental signified" (154). In other words, allegory renders the transcendental symbol intelligible within a narrative that bears some relation to the outside world, for M. L'Aubepine "...generally contents himself with a very slight embroidery of outward manners,—the faintest possible counterfeit of real life...." (387). Allegory, then, is, in some sense, the work of the copyist, for it builds on references to previous myths, narratives and symbols to produce an original work that is consciously indebted to the literary tradition.

By defining "Rappacini's Daughter" as a translation of the author's own words, Hawthorne also implies that all writing is, to some extent, a work of imitation. Mary Cappello

has claimed that Hawthorne invites the reader to question “‘how do we know?’ or ‘*how* is reality?’” (263). Perhaps to a greater extent, the question is, how can we decipher a language that is, by virtue of its history, buried in allegorical allusion? The author’s decision to translate his name and the titles of his works into French deliberately enacts and draws attention to linguistic slippage, reminding the reader that an element of etymological meaning forever evades both themselves and the writer. This slippage, in part, finds its origins in the allusive symbol that has been deployed by a multitude of prior allegorists. In transforming himself into M. L’Aubepine, Hawthorne implies that the work he has produced is not exclusively his own, but is rather the product of a linguistic discourse that he can never fully access or control.

In acknowledging the prior power of language in shaping and controlling the narrative, Hawthorne challenges the centrality of individualism within Transcendentalist discourse where it is upheld as the foundation of creativity. Sabine Metzger has claimed that *The Marble Faun* represents visual art as the creation of both artist *and* viewer because “...the beholder is the agent of the transfiguration” and shapes the final interpretation of the painting itself (92). Hawthorne’s commendation of Hilda illuminates his vision of art as a reciprocal activity where artist and onlooker continually extend and re-create the moment that is captured within the object. His self-styling as an author of *Twice-Told Tales* (1842) reveals his personal identification with the copyist, a role that is often assigned to the female artist. This is further elaborated upon in *A Wonder Book* (1851) where the protagonist, Eustace Bright, defends his remodelling of the Greek myths on the grounds that “...an old Greek had no more exclusive right to them than a modern Yankee ... They are the common property of the world, and of all time,” and condemns the ancient poets for casting myths “...into shapes of indestructible beauty” (171).

Bright's role as an aural storyteller who, within the text, is surrounded by his audience, transforms the narrative into a collaborative project. Linda Sahmadi, in her 2016 ALA conference paper, has argued that Primrose Bright, a character that is modelled on Sophia Hawthorne, serves as a critic of the storyteller, "contribut[ing] to the literary process of rewriting" (2) by casting a "sharp critical eye" over his tales (4). In Sahmadi's view, women like Sophia Hawthorne and her fictional counterpart "...provide the authors with the necessary metatextual comments to perfect themselves in the literary art of re-creation", thus preventing them "from enjoying a delusive self-satisfaction in their talents" (ibid.).

Works like *A Wonder Book* and *The Marble Faun* champion the female artist's ability to identify with another person's experience by virtue of her sympathetic capacities. In both narratives, the female artist, as critic, illuminates the male artist's vision. For instance, Hilda, "...execute[s] what the great master had conceived in his imagination, but had not so perfectly succeeded in putting upon canvas; a result surely not impossible when such depth of sympathy as she possessed was assisted by the delicate skill and accuracy of her slender hand" (623). The female artist is presented as the collaborator who enables the male artist to realise the ultimate conception of his work. She is his ideal audience who has passively accepted her role as co-creator, for her sympathetic perception complements his vision. Thus, Hilda "...felt—through and through a picture; she bestowed upon it all the warmth and richness of a woman's sympathy" (622). The aspirations of the male artist are integrated into Hilda's emotional response, so that she comes to embody them, and is subsequently able to reproduce them. She is the emblem of the act of procreation as conceived by the male artist, an empty vessel who carries his "beautiful Idea" into fruition (834).

Hawthorne's elevation of female sympathy as supporting the male artist's endeavours is formulated against the philosophy of Emerson who devalued sympathy as inhibiting women's ability to produce great art. Emerson's 1855 lecture, "Woman", makes the claim

that female artists were unable produce great masterpieces because: “So much sympathy they have; makes them inestimable as the mediators between those who have knowledge and those who want it” and that they are therefore most suited to the teaching profession.⁵⁰ To an extent, Hawthorne agrees with Emerson; the female capacity for sympathy renders women incapable of producing original art. However, Hawthorne views the female artist as an inestimable counterpart to her male colleague who assists him in the realisation of an artistic ideal that he is unable to achieve alone. On a basic level, Hawthorne has faith in neither individualism, nor originality, for Hilda decides that: “...the world seemed already rich enough in original designs, and nothing more was so desirable as to diffuse those self-same beauties more widely among mankind” (622).

One might assume that Hilda’s ability to disseminate the works of the Italian masters elevates all traditional roles of female artistry, including that of muse, model and copyist, above the status of the male artist who merely produces corpse-like imitations from real life. And yet, in identifying herself with the Italian masters, Hilda submits to becoming an object that is subordinated to the male artist’s vision: “...the girl was but a finer instrument, a more exquisitely effective piece of mechanism, by the help of which the spirit of some great departed painter now first achieved his ideal, centuries after his own earthly hand, that other tool, had turned to dust” (623). Hilda is not an artist who is equal to the great masters, but rather an “effective piece of mechanism” (*ibid.*), a machine who might be acted upon to propagate the sublime influence of her antecedents for succeeding generations. In fact, in the same manner as Cecil Stein, she is also chremamorphosed into a “tool” that is activated by the dead artist’s hand (*ibid.*). Although she is championed as the rightful inheritor of the great tradition, she is the passive vessel of the male artist’s metempsychosis; her identity must be eradicated to allow his vision to thrive.

⁵⁰ “Woman” 1855. Paragraph 4. *Transcendentalism Web*. Web. 16 March. 2018.

How, then, does Hilda's status differ from that of the marble woman who is reduced to a corpselike vessel of the male artist's desire? Instead of being killed off and subsumed into the male artist, the muse takes life from her patrilineal heritage and is its *living* embodiment. What then, of a tradition of female artistry? The lone muse is required to pay homage to this patrilineal lineage in perpetuity, for her matrilineal legacy is obscured, and her affiliation with the male tradition has trapped her in a cycle of continuing obscurity. Herein lies the difference between Hawthorne as copyist, and the muse as copyist. The legacy of the patriarchal tradition belongs to the male artist; he is its rightful inheritor. Thus, where Eustace Bright refashions the Greek myths, Primrose Bright serves only as critic and listener. Beatrice Rappaccini, as the motherless embodiment of her father's scientific experiments, is poisonous to all human beings beyond the gates of her father's garden. Her kiss is the kiss of death, for her power of procreation is usurped by her father, so that she might conform to his preconceived prototype of femininity. Confronted with the injustice that he has perpetrated against his daughter, Rappaccini can only respond: "'Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil, and capable of none?'" (622). Woman, alone and independent of man, is weak, passive, worthless. It is only when subjected to his "beautiful Idea" that she attains human value (834), for Beatrice "now stands apart ... from ordinary women" (420). However, as a living woman, Beatrice is nothing more than a "poor victim of man's ingenuity and of thwarted nature", perishing "at the feet of her father and Giovanni" (420). Hilda, on the other hand, does not die, but she is destined to become the "marble woman", for it is the "slender hand" that the male artist has "stolen" from her, which invests her with the power to "...execute what the great master had conceived in his imagination...." (623).

Taking up Hawthorne's challenge of expelling her rivals by actual pressure (Wallace 209), Alcott endorses Hawthorne's critique of the Transcendentalist depreciation of

sympathy, while simultaneously questioning Hawthorne's exploitation of that very sympathy to support the male artist's vision. Cecil's independent work as sculptor's apprentice demonstrates her ability to use her sympathetic nature to transform the immobility of sculpture as a medium, but she is prevented from doing so by Yorke's demand that her work emulate his. Cecil creates a companion piece for Yorke's *Psyche*, a Cupid "exquisitely carved in the purest marble", which is portrayed in the act of "drawing an arrow from his quiver with an arch smile" (185). Captured in a moment of motion, the Cupid resists the stasis of sculpture as a medium, in stark juxtaposition to Yorke's *Psyche*, portrayed as: "A marble woman ... with no heart to love ... only grace and beauty to please [the] eye" (188).

Cecil's lifelike Cupid is the embodiment of her emotions: his smile mirrors that of the girl who "watch[es] him with one almost as gay" (ibid.). The figure is the object of her sympathy, subject to her "caressing touch" as a creation she has "learned to love" (ibid.). Its attempts to resist the inflexibility of sculpture captures Michelangelo's understanding of the purpose of the medium, defined by Walter Pater as "...an energy of conception which seems at every moment able to break out of the conditions of comely form" (41). Michelangelo believed that he could see the forms of his sculptures trapped within the marble block and sought to release them through his art. In Pater's conception this accounted for the incomplete nature of his work, which arrested the figure at the moment of metamorphosis—thereby allowing it to access the very motion that the finished statue would obstruct (43). Michelangelo encapsulates Pater's concept of "*Anders-streben*", which the latter defined as the proclivity of each art-form to "...pass into the condition of some other art" through a "partial alienation" of its peculiar "limitations" (124). In other words, the most effective art is that which resists the nature of its own medium. In the case of sculpture, this refers to the statue's capacity to overcome immobility and take on motion. As a reflection of Cecil's emotions, her Cupid achieves the Paterian object of *Anders-streben* by emulating the life and

vitality of the girl's gay smile and perpetuating the moment the arrow leaves its quiver.

Cecil's art, then, achieves the highest ideal of sculpture, while Yorke's retains the semblance of a marble corpse.

The threat that Cecil's work poses to Yorke's precedence drives him to extend his campaign against Cecil to her art. She is rebuked for fashioning the Cupid, commanded to create "No more Cupids of any sort" (188). The secret of the sculpture's offensiveness lies in the fact that it complements the work of the male artist, instead of emulating it. Unlike a typical apprentice, Cecil does not reproduce Yorke's Psyche, but instead creates a companion piece that is inspired by the work of her master. When Yorke indignantly asks Cecil to disclose the inspiration for her sculpture, he is shocked when she identifies him as its source, reprimanding her for taking his work as model without his prior "knowledge" or consent (186). Cecil's ability to utilise the sculptor's work as the foundation for an alternative artistic vision is deeply threatening because she inadvertently exposes the inconsistencies at the heart of Yorke's ideology: "Your making Psyche suggested Cupid", she claims, undermining the sculptor's very desire for the marble woman (188). Cecil does not share Hilda's desire to "...execute what the great master had conceived in his imagination" (623); she rather produces what the great master *did not* conceive—highlighting the very problems of his art. Moreover, it is Cecil's sympathy *with* Yorke's sculptures, her all too real identification with Psyche that enables her to see through their inadequacies. Cupid *is*, of course, the true counterpart of Psyche in Greek myth. Cecil, then, is a dangerous version of Primrose Bright: she does not relay her criticisms back to the male artist for his own improvement, but instead enacts them in her art, usurping the patriarchal tradition in the process (Yorke is, of course, Cecil's surrogate father). In this, she perhaps also stands as proxy for the author herself, for Alcott embeds her critiques of her predecessor, Hawthorne, within the disreputable sensation genre.

Alcott's references to Hawthorne condemn the male artist's refusal to acknowledge women's art as a type of assault on feminine emotion and experience. Cecil's artistic vision is figured as an abnormality and used as a justification for forcibly conforming her to the model of the female muse: "Carving Cupid has filled your head with fancies that will do you no good; banish them and be what I would have you" (188). Cecil's imagination is presented as a dangerous delusion, a "fancy" that must be exorcised. The female artist who has dared to procreate without the assistance of a man must be figured as a deranged aberration; otherwise her art will propagate itself and threaten that of the male artist with extinction. The true female artist is not the empty vessel of the copyist who carries the male artist's "beautiful Idea" into fruition (834); she is a woman who is able to reproduce independently, propagating "...a little winged child with the bandage and the bow" (186). By representing Cupid as a "child", Cecil reminds Yorke of the ultimate threat that she poses to his artistic supremacy: she is able to give birth and can therefore identify herself with the highest act of creation. For this, she must be punished, and punished she is, for the sculptor's deliberate desecration of her work provokes her to an act of destruction that is reminiscent of self-harm:

Cecil listened and answered with her usual submission, stood motionless till the sound of a closing door assured her that he was gone, then a look of sharp anguish banished the composure of her face, and a woman's passionate pride trembled in her voice as she echoed his last words.

"I am done with love!" And lifting the little Cupid let it drop broken to her feet. (188-189)

Cecil reverts Kenyon's loving restoration of the marble woman by shattering the work that is symbolic of her inner-life. Despite the fact that Yorke concedes she may keep the sculpture "as a warning" against future romantic entanglements (188), Cecil cannot divorce her art

from her emotions and is driven to annihilate it. BBC Radio 4's adaptation of *A Marble Woman* foregrounds Yorke's abusive behaviour by having him destroy the statue.⁵¹ However, Alcott's decision to portray the statue's destruction as an act of self-harm reminds the reader that Cecil's art is a reflection of her personal identity and will therefore suffer when this identity is suppressed. Cecil's sculptures are formed out of her capacity for sympathy and cannot survive the obliteration of her innermost feelings. Emerson and Hawthorne's contention that female sympathy drives women to reproduce male art is proven to be a fallacy, for it is the depth and profundity of the female artist's connections to the outside world that motivates her original work. It is only when she is forced to relinquish her sympathy that her art becomes a poor woman's shadow of the male artist's. With no option but to transform herself into the marble woman, Cecil must obstruct her feminine desire for love and figuratively kill herself through her work. This act is simultaneously a suicide and infanticide, for the work that has drawn its life from her has been abominated, thereby providing the basis for the continuation of the male sculptor's career. Unable to breathe life into his progeny, the sculptor's sterile art is dependent on the inanimate female corpse for its survival. This body, with its capacity for life-giving reproduction, must be killed off and subjected to the male artist's restoration, in order to facilitate the continuation of his work. Thus, does Keyon tenderly piece the marble woman back together, while Cecil shatters her child-Cupid at her feet. Safely aborted, the memory of Cecil's art is subsequently erased, enabling the sculptor to reassert the primacy of his artistic vision and claim the muse's sympathy for his own. Indeed, the reader does not witness Cecil attempting to create another work of art for the remainder of the narrative.

⁵¹ Pauline Harris, dir. "Louisa May Alcott – A Marble Women". By Lavinia Murry. Perf. Bill Paterson, Amanda Root, John McArdle, Charles De'Ath, Sarah Parkes, Geoffrey Banks, Becky Simpson and Robert Pollard. BBC Radio 4 Extra. 2000. Radio. Web. 24 Oct 2018.

The most significant revision that Alcott makes to Hawthorne's text is the fact that Cecil does not find an outlet for her capacity for sympathy through working as a copyist. Alcott shares in Hawthorne's condemnation of the male artist's solipsism, rightfully identified with the Transcendentalists, but she does not allow the female artist's excess of sympathy to compensate for this solipsism. Once again, Alcott exposes the emotional damage that is wrought upon the female artist when she is forced to recompense for her "master's" inadequacies. Cecil, as apprentice, is not a pilgrim of the great masters who submits herself to the vocation of promoting their divine vision. Her capacity for sympathetic feeling drives her to create a unique work that complements that of the male artist, while inadvertently exposing its flaws. Although Hawthorne, in divergence with Emerson, recognises the value of the female artist's outlook, he unwittingly deploys it for the purposes of bolstering his patrilineal heritage. Alcott exposes this hypocrisy by creating a female artist who is not contented with mimicking the work of her "master", and who suffers the loss of both her matrilineal heritage and her ability to procreate in the process of doing so.

At the heart of Hawthorne's failure to invest the female artist with the freedom to procreate independently is his cynicism surrounding the union between male and female artists. Hilda possesses the superior artistic vision, but this vision is subordinated to Kenyon's superior will, so that she is forced to become the marble woman by the end of text. Hilda's sympathy may elevate her artistry, but it is also a sign of her human weakness and susceptibility to the patriarchal tradition, which eventually consumes her. Kenyon, a consummate Transcendentalist, is locked into his individualistic vision, a vision that is so inflexible it cannot be relinquished. His union with Hilda is imperative to his artistic development, but this development comes at the cost of Hilda's identity.

By creating a female apprentice who attempts to work in collaboration with her male superior, Alcott provides an alternative to the female copyist. As a companion piece to the

work of the master sculptor, Cecil's Cupid compensates for the work's deficiencies, combining the perspectives of male and female to create a vision of unity in the form of a child. Unfortunately, the sculptor's pride prevents him from accepting his apprentice's offering and she is forced to annihilate her offspring. Alcott's critique is clear: this act of destruction is not the inevitable repercussion of the artists' union; it is rather a masochistic act that is provoked by the male sculptor. Where Hawthorne's ideal artist is the male copyist who can render unconflicted tribute to the patriarchal tradition, Alcott implies that truly great art finds its origins in a collaboration between male and female. The refusal to admit women as equals into the studio perpetuates the production of sterile and corpselike art that defies the female muse's humanity. The Transcendentalist ideology of individualism should not be combated with a deference to the past, but with an acknowledgement of the artistic power of female sympathy within the present. While an egalitarian union between artists is obstructed in this text, the author presents this as a tragedy that should be remedied. In her later realist text, *Diana and Persis* (1879), Alcott combats this tragedy by presenting a reciprocal collaboration between artists that produces great work.

“I will not be pounded out of stone”: Alcott's vision of an egalitarian union between the genders

Alcott's novel fragment, *Diana and Persis*, rejects Hawthornian pessimism by depicting a romantic union between two artists who are united in their creative endeavours. *Diana and Persis* is based on the artistic career and marriage of Alcott's sister, May Alcott Nieriker (Showalter “Introduction” xxxix). Despite the fact that May's unexpected death in 1879 prevented the completion of the work, the fragment portrays the artistic and emotional transformation of its heroine, Diana—a cold and remote protagonist likened to the “plaster, iron and marble figures” she creates (348)—into a rosy-cheeked figure of “innocent gaiety”

(437). This transformation is facilitated by Diana's acquaintanceship with a renowned sculptor, Anthony Stafford, who endorses the "virile force" and "genius" of her work (438). Stafford embodies the Hawthornian approach to female artistry, encouraging Diana to expel her rivals by actual pressure (Wallace 209) by commending her statue for its "power", while simultaneously condemning the work of her female contemporaries for its excessive "sentiment" (438). Alcott looks forward to a future where the muse and apprentice will achieve equality with the master sculptor through embracing the power and authority that is commonly preserved for him alone.

Jessica Daigle Vidrine has argued that Alcott presents "marriage between a man and a woman" as "less desirable than the love ... between women" in *Diana and Persis* (10). However, Vidrine's claim that Alcott's heroines only find fulfilment in a pseudo-lesbian relationship goes against the narrative thread of the fragment, which culminates with the union between Stafford and Diana—a relationship that exudes both divine and creative potential. Integral to Diana's journey towards fulfilment is her maternal bond with Stafford's son, Nino. Named for Margaret Fuller's only child, who died alongside her in the wreck of the *Elizabeth* (Rosenfeld 18), Nino is the divine offspring of the American female artists to whom Alcott pays tribute in this text. He is likened to the "impish" Puck (427): a direct reference to Harriet Hosmer's sculpture of the same name (see Fig. 7). This work embodied Hosmer's spiritualist beliefs and her preoccupation with the continuity between the material and celestial worlds. Hosmer's decision to depict the sprite was inspired by her interest in perpetual motion: a "highly refined but not completely immaterial" life-force that supposedly "sustained" supernatural beings and allowed them to achieve immortality (Colbert 46). Hosmer's attempts to contain Puck within the marble form of sculpture reflect her affiliation with the Michelangeloesque. The Shakespearean character is transformed into an impish child who is caught in a moment of motion—stretching his arm above his head, while

grasping a moving beetle in his hand and unfolding his wings. Like Cecil's cupid, Hosmer's depiction of a divine childlike figure reflects the ability of the female artist to invest life into the unresisting form of marble by virtue of her capacity for procreation. Through affiliating Hosmer's vision with a reciprocal relationship between male and female artists, Alcott implies that the divine potential of the female artist can be absorbed into her work if it is supported by the master sculptor as co-creator and equal. In this manner, she offers an alternative to the cynical vision of *The Marble Faun*, for Hosmer also served as one of the models for Hawthorne's Hilda (Rowe 3) whose artistic vision is distorted by her union with Kenyon—aptly conveyed in the disturbing perversion of Hosmer's sculpture of the Brownings' clasped hands.

Alcott counteracts this perversion of Hosmer's vision by depicting Diana and Stafford collaborating on a bust of Nino together. As parents of the sculpture, each artist invests it with elements of their own identity, for Diana gives "the motherless boy the gentle caress he needed" (440), while Stafford makes "one effective dent in the round chin which gave Nino's dimple to the life" (441). The substance used by the sculptors also lends itself to reciprocal communication between them, for Diana deliberately chooses clay, and not marble for her work, even though Stafford offers her use of his workmen to put her statue of Saul "in marble at once" (438). Diana opts to keep the bust of Nino in clay because the model himself displays contempt for the marble medium as too fixed a form, insisting that: "I will not be pounded out of stone. It makes me ache to see the men do it. I will only be Nino...." (430). Nino resists the sculptors' attempts to freeze his life into their art, thereby exhibiting an affinity with the pre-lapsarian Donatello as a figure who exudes his artistic vision through the very innocence and simplicity of his life. Clay is an infinitely malleable medium that allows the statue to be continually remodelled and changed, enabling the sculptors' depiction of Nino to remain transient and incomplete, so that it reflects the shifting moods and emotions

of the child. In listening to the child's protestations, both sculptors also evidence their underlying respect for the identity of their muse and model, as well as a willingness to allow him a stake in his portrayal. This is a departure from the precedent set out in *A Marble Woman* where the muse and model is forced to mould herself to the male artist's preconceptions.

The final sculpture, to which "Diana added a pair of winged shoulders and called it Puck" (441) is a more perfect representation of Hosmer's statue, capturing the concept of perpetual motion in its inability to attain a fixed form. Hosmer would first create a model in clay and then have it transferred into marble by her studio assistants (Gaze 712). Despite the fact that this was the standard practice of the time for all sculptors, including men, Hosmer faced accusations that her workmen did an undue amount of her labour, which she refuted by claiming that she was being targeted in a sexist campaign (ibid.). Alcott champions the vision of the female sculptor and its emphasis on the michelangelesque, while simultaneously emphasising the sculptress's equality with her male counterpart. Stafford's insistence that his workmen transform Diana's model of Saul into marble underlines the sculptress's practice as both conventional and respectable. Directly refuting the accusations against Hosmer, Alcott has Diana express anxiety over whether she is relying too much on Stafford's help: "I have longed to see it done for years, yet I am slow to receive a favour from so great a hand" (439). Stafford, however, contests Diana's concerns by arguing that her act of saving Nino's life has placed him in her debt: "Let me pay the debt I owe you and save your child from oblivion as you saved mine from harm" (ibid.). In a reversal of roles, Stafford is placed in charge of a human child, while Diana must preserve the divine offspring of her art. Unlike Yorke, who drives Cecil to destroy the statue that reflects her capacity for divine procreation, Stafford instead insists upon saving Diana's child "from oblivion" (ibid.), thereby validating her work to the outside world. His decision to act as an ally for Diana allows her to access the tools and

connections that will enable her to promote her art to the world at large. Alcott acknowledges the female artist's social disadvantage, but implies that this can be remedied if the male artist embraces her as an equal. Consequently, Stafford's "satisfaction in her work" as a sculptress means more to Diana "than the father's gratitude" for saving his child's life (ibid.).

As well as vindicating Harriet Hosmer's artistic practice, the portrayal of the relationship between Diana and Stafford perhaps also endorses the marriage of Margaret Fuller and Giovanni Ossoli, which was condemned by Hawthorne on account of the fact that it followed the illegitimate conception of their son, Nino:

...she was a person anxious to try all things, and fill up her experience in all directions; she had a strong and coarse nature, too, which she had done her utmost to refine ... but which of course could only be superficially changed. The solution of the riddle lies in this direction ... Margaret has not left, in the heart and minds of those who knew her, any deep witness of her integrity or purity. (qtd. in Mehren 346)

Alcott's Nino is the product of a divinely symbiotic relationship and not "a strong and coarse nature" (ibid.). He invests Diana's artistic productions with the life and vitality that evidences her real "integrity and purity" (ibid.). By portraying Nino as the natural child of Stafford and the surrogate son of Diana by proxy, Alcott hints at the illegitimate status of Fuller's child, but suggests that this very illegitimacy binds the artists together in a closer union because Nino is the product of their shared vision. Perhaps this accounts for the child's supernatural and spritelike nature as "Puck"; he is the sublime realisation of the artists' communion, which bears no relation to the outside world. The Ossolis, of course, were also united by a shared vision: that of Italian independence. Their relationship accelerated while Fuller worked as a

political correspondent among Mazzini's exiles where she met Ossoli, who had been forcibly estranged from his family on account of his political affiliations (269). Nino Ossoli was therefore the product of his parents' shared political aspirations and their vision for Italian freedom.

Alcott's myriad references to a group of female artists in *Diana and Persis* challenges Hawthorne's elevation of female sympathy as a bolster for the male tradition. Instead of presenting the reader with a female copyist who submits herself to the superior vision of her male predecessors, Alcott creates an independent female artist who is the embodiment of the most prominent American feminist figures of the day. Through linking Diana's artistry with her capacity for procreation, Alcott implies that the female artist is destined to give birth to a new tradition that will no longer be subservient to that of the male. Diana's facility for sympathy has not been annihilated, but is instead deployed to enable the male artist to develop his emotional life, while he sustains her in her professional aspirations. Indeed, when Stafford complains that "the power has gone out" of his art (440), Diana consoles him with the claim that he has "the boy to live and work for" (439) in a tone of "...gentle frankness that made its undertone of sympathy the sweeter" (440). In a radical subversion of conventional gender roles, Diana utilises her sympathy to encourage the male artist to compensate for his sterile artistic vision through childrearing, thus freeing up the female artist, who is not the natural mother of the child, to focus on producing a work of "genius" (438).

As well as challenging Hawthorne's exploitation of female sympathy, Alcott also offers an alternative to the individualistic vision of the Transcendentalists. In particular, she promotes Fuller's elevation of sympathy as a unifying force between the genders. Beam has argued that Fuller's work contained feminist revisions to Emerson's concept of the "Over-soul" by linking the "Over-soul" to mesmerism—a philosophical theory that claimed that

individuals could use their emotional connections with others to facilitate the healing of ailments (88). Like the “Over-soul”, mesmerism was founded on the theory that an invisible force connected all living beings (ibid.). Where in Transcendentalist philosophy the “Over-soul” facilitates the divine vision of the individual, mesmerism champions utilising this natural energy as a means of identifying more completely with others (ibid.). Beam has contended that “...in Fuller’s feminist view, such energies were impeded by social identities, relations, and institutions that women could not peel off as easily as Emerson could ‘shun father and mother and wife and brother’” (88). As a way of combating this, Fuller upheld an androgynous vision of the relationship between male and female:

In Fuller’s view, pure gender is never resurrected in the flesh; instead, the spheres of Fuller’s great radical dualism are permeable bodies that pass into and out of each other, mingling in various amounts and at varying locations. Fuller defeats the compartmentalisation of gender into separate spheres by releasing gender into the cosmic spheres, where bodies are permeable, shifting, and transmuting versions of their former state. (96)

Fuller’s feminist revision of the “Over-soul” is not unlike Hosmer’s concept of “perpetual motion”. A divine energy sustains all life-forms, enabling them to exist in a state of continuous transformative flux. This flux allows for a reciprocal interchange between genders, a continuous give and take where men and women are able to completely inhabit one another’s experiences. One might see this as an expansion of sympathy, so that it becomes universal, allowing women to overcome their limited social roles by embracing all identities and gendered experiences as inherently interconnected. Sympathy, then, does not

facilitate the male artist's individualism, but instead allows multiple experiences to co-exist through reciprocal self-giving.

Alcott's final portrayal of the relationship between Diana and Stafford is deeply indebted to Fuller's vision, for Diana's artistic achievement and her connection with Stafford is consciously affiliated with her androgyny: "Stafford ... stood there asking himself why this woman ... allured such confidence from him, unless it was that ... he saw curiously blended an image of his own ambitious youth and a faint likeness to the wife he mourned" (440). Diana encapsulates Stafford's former union: she is both a great artist, and a nurturing companion. Crucially, she achieves wholeness independently, without need of a male counterpart to "complete" her. In fact, it is Stafford, immersed in grief for his late wife's death, who is in need of such completion, which is facilitated by Diana's androgyny. Indeed, at the close of the fragment, Stafford comments in an aside to the reader, "One feels as if there was a fine man and woman working there together, and one scarcely knows which to admire most" (440).

Diana's androgyny and the reciprocal nature of her relationship with Stafford, serves as the foundation for the creation of the artists' ideal work. The bust of the similarly androgynous Nino, described as "cherub" (428), "imp", "spirit of good" (434) and "pigmy" (441), embodies the Michaelengoesque in its aspiration towards perpetual motion and flux. Moreover, Nino himself personifies the Paterian vision of art in his embodiment of the intense and vivid experience of life itself. Like Hawthorne, Pater understood the viewer or critic as a type of artistic collaborator, but this collaborator was also championed as an equal who transformed the work of the dead artist into something new through their unique vision. The viewer is not subservient to the tradition that has preceded them, but instead aspires to "...see ... all there is to be seen ... by the finest senses" (119). In Pater's assessment, the greatest artist is the person who seeks to experience life to the fullest intensity: "Not the fruit

of experience, but experience itself, is the end ... How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy” (ibid.). Closely resembling Fuller’s feminist revisions to the “Over-soul”, Pater contends that the ideal artist experiences a variety of “vital forces” at the point at which they intersect, united by an overarching universal “energy” (ibid.).

Such a description might easily be applied to the pre-lapsarian Donatello, or the sprite-like Nino; both are portrayed as ethereal, immortal beings whose experiences change minute to minute. But, where Donatello’s fall from grace must be precipitated by the dangerous female artist, Nino’s “gem-like flame” (Pater 120) is upheld and immortalised by the collaborative work of the female sculptress and her male counterpart. This final union heals the muse’s regression into marble, for Nino’s life and vitality are encapsulated within the warm substance of clay. Diana and Stafford’s depiction of Nino, a thinly-veiled reference to Hosmer’s *Puck*, also restores Cecil Stein’s aborted artistic vision by virtue of its likeness to her shattered cupid. The image of the marble woman is replaced by that of a sprite-like child who is the offspring of a reciprocal union between artists.

Alcott finally dismantles both the Transcendentalist and Hawthornian depreciations of female sympathy by filtering Hawthorne’s critique of the Transcendentalists through the lens of her peculiar feminist vision. The Transcendentalist aspiration towards divine individualism is overturned by referencing Fuller’s and Hosmer’s understanding of divine “energy” as a unifying force that is accessed through feminine sympathy, and which facilitates the artist’s sublime inspiration. Likewise, Hawthorne’s portrayal of the sympathetic copyist who dedicates herself to the male tradition is combated through incorporating an emerging tradition of female artists into the identity of the protagonist. Having previously exposed the abusive dynamic of the relationship between sculptor and muse, Alcott finally expels her rivals by actual pressure (Wallace 209) through creating an alternative egalitarian union that

champions the reciprocal interchange of emotions, experiences and gendered roles. The female artist's capacity for procreation is channelled into her art, while the male artist joins her in creating an androgynous offspring that embodies the best qualities of both of its parents. Galatea is finally superseded by the life-giving Puck.



(Fig. 6) Harriet Hosmer. *Clasped Hands of Robert and Elizabeth Browning*. 1853. Bronze. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



(Fig. 7) Harriet Hosmer. *Puck*. 1856. Marble. Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Chapter 3

“The grave-worm revels now”

Rossetti’s exhumation of the Pre-Raphaelite corpse

In 1869, seven years after Elizabeth Siddal’s death, her body was exhumed so that her late husband, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, could retrieve a manuscript of poetry he had buried with her in a fit of remorseful grief. Rossetti, himself a laudanum addict, felt responsible for the addiction that precipitated Siddal’s miscarriage and eventual overdose.⁵² Unlike Alcott’s Yorke, he did not attempt to hide behind the smokescreen of hysteria when addressing his late wife’s untimely demise. Of the suicide note, pinned to her nightgown that he subsequently destroyed, he is said to have commented that it “...left such a scar on his heart as could never be healed” (qtd. in Kathleen Jones 111). Too late, did Rossetti realise that Siddal’s laudanum addiction reflected her increasing unhappiness and the artistic aspirations that had been thwarted as a consequence of the increasing rift in the relationship with the partner who was also her “master” and teacher.⁵³ The sole manuscript of love poems he had written in her honour, and which he considered to be his greatest work, was buried with her as a mark of grief and respect.

Seven years later, Rossetti’s guilt was unassuaged, but, in the words of Hall Caine: “...he began to hanker after poetic reputation, and to reflect with pain and regret upon the hidden fruits of his best effort” (qtd. in Packer 59). Suffering from extreme paranoia, which would later deteriorate into psychosis, in addition to insomnia, hydrocele, depression and addiction, the mentally-compromised Rossetti was set upon by his artistic associates: Howell, Swinburne and Burne-Jones, to retrieve his manuscript from Siddal’s coffin (Hawksley 210).

⁵² This view is expressed by Marsh (DGR 223-224), Kathleen Jones (111), Hawksley (184-185, 196-197).

⁵³ The following scholars link Siddal’s depression and addiction with her relationship with Rossetti and her thwarted artistic ambitions: Kathryn Hughes (239), Campbell Orr (43-45), Oliver (20-21), Hawksley (102, 154).

Aided and abetted by Howell, Rossetti had also begun an extra-marital relationship with Jane Morris—leading to a reinvigorated return to writing poetry. Under the Dantean premise that all experiences of romantic love stemmed from the poet's initial awakening in the presence of the primordial, first love, Rossetti wished to incorporate the earlier sonnets to Siddal in a sequence that would include his later verse for Fanny Cornforth and Jane Morris (Bullen 108). The event was orchestrated by Howell and witnessed by an accompanying doctor and lawyer, taking place under the cover of darkness without the knowledge of either Rossetti's or Siddal's families. The poet himself was not present, preferring to avoid an event that would become infamous in the gossip rounds of London for years to come (Hawksley 210-211). He was later to console himself with the thought that, of all people, his wife would understand his need to retrieve his best work. "The truth is, no one so much as herself would have approved of my doing this", he wrote to Swinburne (qtd. in Marsh DGR 376). Desperate to assure himself that the spirit of Siddal did, indeed, condone his act, Rossetti organised a séance with the purpose of communicating with his wife's spirit—seemingly unaware of the irony in his choice of medium in Fanny Cornforth: the model who had acted as his mistress during his marriage to Siddal (Kilic 143).

The exhumation subsequently took on a life of its own and has become the event that often first alerts people to Siddal's existence as a historical figure and artist (Hawksley 211). Upon his return from Siddal's grave, Howell informed Rossetti that Siddal's body was perfectly preserved in death and that her famous red hair had continued to grow until it filled the entire coffin. Howell's story became an apocryphal myth that transformed the event into a public scandal (ibid.). Jerome McGann has claimed that "...the vivid hair of the dead woman is a figure of the continuing presence of the dead among the living" (52). Rossetti had previously kept a lock of Siddal's hair as a token of "...a certain victory, as an acquisition that fixed and contained a volatile relationship, promising to secure a shared future" (Ofek

80). Siddal's hair, then, was, as Galia Ofek has argued, a fetish that evidenced the poet's ability to mould the beloved to his predetermined image (80, 82).

Rossetti shared Hawthorne's preoccupation with an ideal union between the male artist and his muse, but surmounted the obstacle of the muse's subjectivity by deferring this union to the afterlife. As I have argued elsewhere, Rossetti's preoccupation with the transfigured romantic union was inspired by the model of Dante who "...partakes in an idealised love for an initially silent, and eventually absent object", but, for Rossetti, "...spiritual communion with the beloved is dependent on their physical union" ("Twofold Silence" 9). Consequently, Rossetti sought to overcome the death of the beloved as "a catastrophic event that destroys the poet's ability to achieve any spiritual communion with her" (9) by imagining a heavenly reunion that "...aspired to both spiritual permanence and physical ecstasy" (11). This fantasy of ecstatic unification is contingent upon the dead beloved's unconflicted identification with the poet-painter. The image of the dead beloved is a variation on her corpse, for she is presented as a vapid vessel of aesthetic perfection that can be easily assimilated into the male artist's vision of feminine complementarity. As can be observed in the myths constructed around Siddal's body following her death, the physical appearance of the beloved remains the same, but her subjectivity is erased because she defines herself solely by her posthumous desire for the male artist.

Rossetti himself made the link between the beloved's corpse and her heavenly reunion with the poet-painter explicit by recognising his indebtedness to Poe. Rossetti acknowledged Poe's "The Raven" as the initial inspiration for his iconic poem, "The Blessed Damozel", claiming that: "I saw that Poe had done the utmost it was possible to do with the grief of the lover on earth, and so I determined to reverse the conditions, and give utterance to the yearning of the loved one in heaven" (Upstone 192). As I have noted in Chapter One, Poe argued that the death of a beautiful woman is "...unquestionably the most poetical topic in

the world, and equally it is beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such a topic are those of a bereaved lover” (1621). Poe’s affiliation of the “beautiful” with an inanimate female corpse alerts the reader to the presence of the male artist’s erotic desire. Bronfen claims that it is unclear whether this desire is for the death of the female beloved, the object of the corpse itself, or the prevention of the death of the male artist (62-63). At the heart of all of these hypotheses, however, is the compulsion of the male artist to reduce the individuation of the female “other” into a “non-reciprocal ‘dead’ figure of imaginary projection” (63). The female beloved is transformed into the aesthetic *objet d’art* of the male artist’s work.

On the surface, Rossetti reverses the submissive dynamic between male artist and female beloved that is established by Poe by foregrounding the resurrection of the beloved in the afterlife, but this image of heavenly reunion is only accessed through the medium of the male artist’s work. For instance, in his sonnet, “The Portrait” (THOL 14), the poet-painter argues that the power of his painting lies in the fact that “They that would look on her must come to me” (14). Rossetti may desire a union with the living female beloved, but this is a union where the beloved is resurrected in his own image. This is explicitly expressed in his longer narrative poem, also titled “The Portrait” (*Poems* 73-76):

This is her picture as she was:
It seems a thing to wonder on,
As though mine image in the glass
Should tarry when myself am gone (1-4).

The deceased beloved’s identity is conflated with that of the poet-painter, so that the preservation of her image in the portrait, a portrait that is executed by his own hand, is compared with the poet-painter’s own reflection. The portrait is therefore not unlike a self-portrait, expressing the desires of the artist himself. Within the categories set out by Bronfen,

Rossetti's desire is not for the inanimate corpse, but rather for "a dead other", one who can make way for a female object that is entirely controlled by the male gaze (63). The image of the dead beloved that appears throughout Rossetti's work is invariably a silent one: a reflection of both the male artist's desires and his fantasy of a perfect union with an objectified female image. It is the deceased beloved's silence that renders the lips of the "bereaved lover" the "best suited" for her commemoration (Poe 1621) because the voice of the female beloved has been transferred to the male artist, thus enabling him to control her subjectivity. While Rossetti's beloved has been resurrected from the dead, her function is identical to that of Poe's inanimate corpse; she is incorporated into the male artist's personhood and her independent identity is thereby erased.

The dead beloved resembles the marble woman in that she, also, is a lifeless object of the male artist's creation who is transformed into the perfect embodiment of his image of ideal womanhood. Consequently, it is insignificant whether Siddal's body deteriorated or not: the mere event of her death allowed Rossetti, once more, to exert control over her body, so that the apocryphal legend became accepted fact. Indeed, when Rossetti eventually published his sonnet sequence, *The House of Life* (1869), he referred to the continuing growth of the dead Siddal's hair as evidence of the endurance of her image as it appeared in his memory:

Even so much life hath the poor tress of hair
Which, stored apart, is all love hath to show
For heart-beats and for fire-heats long ago;
Even so much life endures unknown, even where
'Mid change the changeless night environeth,
Lies all that golden hair undimmed in death.

("Life-in-Love" 32 9-14)

The beloved's hair is presented as a synecdoche for the poet's continuing relationship with her, standing in for "heart-beats and ... fire-heats long ago" (11). It is not merely a token of the poet's prior relationship, it is an enduring vessel of her life that is fetishized and kept apart as the remaining memento of their past union. Bearing a striking resemblance to Kenyon's secret cast of Hilda's hand in *The Marble Faun*, the lock of hair has become an object that defies the beloved's subjectivity and her evasion of the poet's control through death. The presence of her corpse facilitates the "endur[ance]" (12) of her image as it was shaped and moulded by the poet in her lifetime. Consequently, there is no distinction made between the "poor tress of hair" (9) that was obtained with her consent, and the continuously-growing hair of the corpse that has been exhumed without her prior permission. Both are symbols of the beloved's body as an object that must be possessed and controlled by the poet.

Christina Rossetti was to later portray the relationship between painter and model as a type of "feeding" on her physical body. In her poem, "In An Artist's Studio" (Crump 2001 796), which William Michael Rossetti speculated was about their brother (*New Poems of Christina Rossetti* 383), Rossetti writes: "He feeds upon her face by day and night" (9). Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who is "vivified" ("made alive") by the beloved's (now dead) body, resembles Hawthorne's Kenyon, who likewise "vivifies" the inanimate image of the marble woman by restoring her to wholeness. Although these two instances of vivification may appear to follow opposing trajectories, both processes, in fact, present the artist as taking life from his muse. Kenyon may restore the marble woman to completion but, in the absence of Hilda, he merely creates an inanimate beloved that satisfies his desires for a corpselike female counterpart. Rossetti is similarly imbued with life by the presence of his wife's body, whether or not it is alive or dead. If Hawthorne defines the creation of a marble woman as a symptom of the male artist's desire for the female corpse, Rossetti merely turns to the actual corpse as the embodiment of the desires that are previously expressed in his poetry. 'Mid the

“changeless night” (13), the beloved’s body remains the same, unaffected by death, it is the mirror of the poet’s artistic vision.

In the posthumously published poems I will examine in this chapter, Christina Rossetti moves away from her brother’s aspiration towards an ideal union in the afterlife, in order to emphasise the absence of reciprocity in the male artist’s relationship with the female muse. Christina Rossetti presents the death of the beloved as a convenient means of silencing the female “other” and re-creating her in the image of the male artist’s desires. Through interrogating Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s use of Christian typology, Christina Rossetti implies that the redirection of religious symbolism towards romantic love is deployed as a means of allowing the male artist to avoid all spiritual obligations that fail to satisfy his solipsistic desires. Instead, the male artist relies upon the dead beloved to secure his redemption, labouring under the delusion that her existence in the afterlife will revolve around her desire for unification with him. Christina Rossetti allows the dead beloved to speak back, voicing her doubt concerning the male artist’s ability to attain redemption.

Rossetti’s condemnation of the male artist’s desire for an ideal union with his beloved diverges from Alcott’s portrayal of an egalitarian union between male and female artists. In Rossetti’s estimation, such a union is superfluous to the individual’s pursuit of heavenly salvation. Where Hawthorne’s cynicism surrounding the aspiration towards an ideal union between the genders limits the male artist’s ability to recognise the subjectivity of his muse, Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s preoccupation with a heavenly reunion between poet-painter and beloved is deployed as a vehicle for attaining ideological control over the female subject. Christina Rossetti exposes the male artist’s objectification of the beloved by drawing attention to his preoccupation with her corpse, brutally unmasking the corpse’s deterioration to uncover the futility behind the male artist’s erotic voyeurism. Christina Rossetti’s exposure of the male artist’s compulsion towards necrophilia is censored in her brother, William

Michael Rossetti's, posthumous collection of her work, *New Poems by Christina Rossetti: Hitherto Unpublished or Uncollected* (1896). Acting as a gatekeeper to his brother's legacy, William Michael Rossetti obscures many intertextual references to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting and poetry in this edition of his sister's posthumously published verse. Christina Rossetti's intertextual references to her brother's work explore the possible ramifications of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's preoccupation with the female corpse. These ramifications appear chillingly prophetic in the context of Elizabeth Siddal's later disinterment.

“Come; I will show you where she lies”: The prophetic power of Christina Rossetti's intertextual references in “A Year Afterwards”.

Christina Rossetti's dramatic monologue, “A Year Afterwards” (1850) (Crump 2001 713-715), was not published until Rebecca Crump brought out her landmark variorum edition of Rossetti's poems in 1979. The poem provides an in-depth exploration of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's preoccupation with the female corpse with extensive reference to his iconic poem, “The Blessed Damozel”, published in the same year. Voiced by an unnamed male speaker, the poem narrates the speaker's pilgrimage to his beloved's tomb and explores his fantasies surrounding an imagined reunion with her in the afterlife. As a prefigurement of events that were to later occur in the life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the monologue unwittingly complements Dante Gabriel Rossetti's theories concerning the power of poetry to foretell the future. Jerome McGann has argued that, following the model of Dante's *Vita Nuova*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti believed that poetry could prophesy impending events and that he viewed some of the verses composed before meeting his wife as “prophetic poems about [her]” following her death (64). The prophetic power of poetry, as set out by Dante, was divine, for it revealed the relationship between poet and beloved as providentially ordained.

However, the prophetic power of the poem becomes dangerous if it is placed in the hands of a female poet who is capable of exposing the male artist's solipsistic agenda. Christina Rossetti's deliberate engagement with her brother's life and work unwittingly enacts her brother's conception of the prophetic potential of verse to his detriment. In "A Year Afterwards", Christina chillingly prefigures Elizabeth Siddal's death and her brother's subsequent obsession with his wife's corpse—all the while making extensive meta-textual references to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poetry. The poem was later excluded from publication in William Michael Rossetti's posthumous edition of Christina Rossetti's poems (1896).⁵⁴ As with many of Christina Rossetti's verses that engage with the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, "A Year Afterwards" critiques the male artist's obsession with the female corpse as evidencing his erotic desire for the inanimate female body and his determination to shape the female beloved to fit his preconceptions, thereby denying her a reciprocal relationship.

"A Year Afterwards" opens with the male narrator leading the reader to the beloved's tomb, while describing memories of their time together: "Things are so changed since last we met: / Come; I will show you where she lies" (1-2). By leading the reader back to the site of his beloved's remains, the narrator stakes a claim of ownership over her corpse, projecting his personal associations, fantasies and memories onto her body, so that the reader is forced to imaginatively re-enact these associations in the absence of any alternative. Disconcertingly resembling Dante Gabriel Rossetti's later act of fashioning an apocryphal myth surrounding Elizabeth Siddal's corpse, the narrator fantasises about the corpse's continuity with the beloved's appearance in life: "Doubtless the old look fills her eyes, / And the old patient

⁵⁴ Moffett has speculated that the 1848 poem, "Death", which is discussed later in this chapter, was suppressed by the Rossetti brothers on account of the fact that it was "an extreme case of literature writing life" (302). However, Moffett does not consider how Christina Rossetti's unconscious prefigurement of Elizabeth Siddal's death and exhumation intersects with Dante Gabriel Rossetti's conception of the prophetic power of poetry. She also neglects to discuss "A Year Afterwards".

smile is set” (3-4). This idealisation of the corpse as an embodiment of the beloved’s most attractive qualities implies that the intervention of her death functions as a mode of aesthetic transformation that immortalises her beauty. Death, then, transforms the beloved into a flawless statue that perfectly embodies the artist’s vision. The corpse is an ideal alternative to the marble woman, functioning as aesthetic *objet d’art* that is able to masquerade as the real beloved, while encapsulating the speaker’s voyeuristic fantasies.

The narrator’s preoccupation with the beloved’s silence and stillness in the days before her burial also bolsters the delusion that the corpse is the authentic personification of the beloved’s identity. Indeed, the narrator is unaware of any transformation between the beloved’s life and death, thus implying that she was an inanimate object when she was alive, and has remained so following her death. She is described as lying “asleep” (9) until the “dust [is] heaped upon her” (10), indicating a frightening permanency of appearance, as well as a lack of agency. The speaker unwittingly represents the beloved as being buried alive, for her death has been arbitrarily declared while she is asleep: “....at last a day / Came when her patient watch was done, / And someone told me she was dead” (49-51). Within the descriptive world of the poem there is nothing to suggest that the beloved is actually dead besides the act of her burial. This implies that the beloved existed in a state of living death where it was impossible to signify the moment of her expiration, such was the extent of her lifelessness as the object of the speaker’s desires.

Rossetti alludes to her brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s, most iconic poem, “The Blessed Damozel” (1850) throughout “A Year Afterwards”. “The Blessed Damozel” (*Poems* 1-5) describes the predicament of a deceased female beloved, whose hair is “yellow like ripe corn” (12), pining for her lover on earth. The poem is narrated by the male lover, who imagines that he can hear the Damozel yearning for him as he lies dreaming of her in a forest: “Surely she lean’d o’er me—her hair / Fell about my face.... / Nothing: the fall of autumn

leaves" (1 l.21-4). "A Year Afterwards" portrays an almost identical scenario, but, in this case, the scenario is presented as a fantasy created by the narrator, whereas Dante Gabriel's poem defines the Damozel's predicament as objective fact. Indeed, the reader is not made aware that the lover is the poem's narrator until he parenthetically describes the Damozel leaning over him. Moreover, her sensations and responses are presented as immanent realities experienced through visionary episodes. (The poem closes: "[She] wept. (I heard her tears.)" (44).) Conversely, the narrator of "A Year Afterwards" admits that the image of the deceased beloved leaning over him is a product of his imagination:

....The dusk branches meet
 Above, making green fretted work,
 The screen between my saint and me.
 There, where the softest sunbeams lurk,
 Cannot you fancy she may be
 Leaning down to me from her rest;
 And shaking her long golden hair
 Thro the thick branches to my face,
 That I may feel she still is mine? —

(18-26)

The narrator invites the reader to join in his "fancy" (22), so that we may become complicit in his desires. His motivations are unambiguous: he wants to imagine that the beloved is leaning down to him from heaven, so that he can maintain the delusion that "...she still is mine" (26). The visionary, ecstatic experience of "The Blessed Damozel's" narrator is expunged, so that the protagonist's intentions are made clear; he constructs an alternative reality where the beloved eternally belongs to him. The

beloved's inanimate corpse cannot articulate autonomous desire, while her existence in the afterlife is manipulated and controlled by the narrator. These manipulations depend upon our cooperation with him: we must walk beside him, as he interprets the surrounding world to us for his own benefit: "Come; I will show you where she lies", he says (2).

Christina Rossetti exposes the deployment of the dramatic monologue as a vehicle for controlling the female subject's image from the position of the male gaze. Significantly, we are invited to accept the narrator's imagined scenario, as well as given the opportunity to reject it. This possibility is made manifest by the explicit portrayal of the narrator's questionable motivations: he does not seek a remorseful union with the beloved, but instead desires to possess her as a silent and inanimate object for all eternity (significantly, we never hear the beloved speak in "A Year Afterwards" where she does in "The Blessed Damozel"; this speech is, of course, witnessed and recorded by the narrator himself). Rossetti's exposure of the self-interested connotations of the male subject's desire for a silent and unresponsive beloved resembles Alcott's scrutiny of the abusive relationship between artist and model in *A Marble Woman*.

The poet's description of the branches of the trees as a "...screen between my saint and me" (20) also resonates with her brother's later painting, *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-8), inspired by the poem of the same name. This work (Fig.8) is a two-part diptych that presents the Damozel's lover within a predella at the bottom of the canvas, gazing up through the trees to the much larger, iconographic image of the Damozel herself. The predella is contained in a frame within a frame, a literal screen that prevents the Damozel and her lover from being able to reunite. This is probably a reference to the "gold bar of Heaven" (2) that the Damozel "lean[s]" (1) out of in the original poem. The predella resembles the altarpieces of the early Venetian Renaissance, which often depict pilgrims in similar devotional attitudes to that of

the lover in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's work. Alicia Craig Faxon has claimed that the image is partly inspired by the depiction of angels embracing human beings in Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity*. Dante Gabriel's work therefore redirects the sacred content of religious art towards romantic love. The Damsel's head is surrounded by fantasy-images of herself and the lover embracing, which blend in seamlessly with the winged seraph and cherubs at the bottom of the painting.

Although it predates her brother's later painting, Christina Rossetti's metaphorical attribution of the leaves as "screen" and deceased beloved as "saint" (20), heighten the sacrilegious nature of the narrator's attitude towards the dead woman. By consciously defining her as a "saint", rather than a "Blessed Damsel" (they are essentially the same thing, but the latter phrase obfuscates the religious implications of the beloved's role), Christina Rossetti's narrator acknowledges that his relationship with the dead beloved has superseded religious devotion. She is *his* personal saint, the patron whom he defers to as sole intercessor, and the screen perhaps stands in for the iconostasis: the most sacred of devotional objects, which prevents the pilgrim from directly witnessing the physical manifestation of God in the Eucharist. The "saint" is therefore represented as the highest incarnation of the divine. Yet, let us not forget that this portrayal is a "fancy" (22) that has been constructed to replace God, one that bears dangerously voyeuristic implications.

Rossetti reveals the male poet's imagined ideal union with the beloved to be a vehicle that allows him to retain the fetishized image of the dead woman in perpetuity. Like Hawthorne's Kenyon, the narrator depends upon the transformation of the beloved into object to facilitate the ideal union between artist and muse. Rossetti's poem precedes her brother's later visual work, indicating that her insightful analysis of his verse effectively unpacks the motivations that underpin his preoccupation with the female corpse. Thus, Christina Rossetti unwittingly taps into Dante Gabriel Rossetti's understanding of the prophetic power of poetry

as an expression of the inner-life of the poet that can foretell future events and works of art. However, in this case, the poem is an expression of the inner-life of the poet's muse, her brother, which subverts the gendered power-dynamics that commonly underpin the relationship between the male artist and model.

Rossetti's conflation of the "saint's" hair with the narrator's fantasies concerning her corpse also exposes his desire for a heavenly reunion to be motivated by a yearning for the inanimate female body. It was well-known that Dante Gabriel Rossetti had a hair fetish, which often inspired the pursuit of his models. Upon meeting Rossetti, Elizabeth Gaskell wrote that "I had a great deal of talk with him, always excepting times when ladies with beautiful hair came in ... he was in a moment struggling for an introduction with the owner of said head of hair. He is ... hair mad" (qtd. in Ofek 80). Within Christina Rossetti's poem, the beloved's hair functions as fetish because it is the only tangible aspect of her appearance that is described by the narrator, and which enables him to possess her in perpetuity: "Cannot you fancy she may be / ... /...shaking her long golden hair/ ... /That I may feel she still is mine?" (22-26).

The fetishistic function of the beloved's hair uncannily resonates with Dante Gabriel Rossetti's later preoccupation with the continuing growth of Elizabeth Siddal's hair following her death, and his insistence that it evidenced her continuing presence in his life. Ofek has claimed that Dante Gabriel "...animated [the lock of hair] with the sympathetic connection of part to whole—be it the relationship, the buried body, or the rest of Siddal's hair—thus assuming a fetishistic stance" (81-82). As with Kenyon's obsession with the marble hand, so does Rossetti seize upon an aspect of the beloved's anatomy and transform into it possession he can control, so that it may stand as a synecdoche for the beloved herself. In both cases, this synecdoche is closely related to the male subject's art, for Rossetti is famed for his depictions of long hair. Consequently, the artwork immortalises the fetish, while simultaneously

functioning as the living legacy and embodiment of the female muse. “A Year Afterwards” draws a connection between the fetish and inanimate corpse, unconsciously foreshadowing the synecdochal link that Dante Gabriel Rossetti was later to forge between Elizabeth Siddal’s hair and her perfectly preserved body, following her exhumation.

Robert Browning’s 1836 poem, “Porphyria’s Lover” (O’Gorman 171-173), is also implicitly referenced in Christina Rossetti’s connection of the hair fetish to the inanimate corpse. In this dramatic monologue the narrator, Porphyria’s unnamed lover, describes how he strangled Porphyria with her own hair, so that he could freeze the perfect moment that they shared: “And thus we sit together now, / And all night long we have not stirred” (58-59). Like the protagonist of “A Year Afterwards”, Porphyria’s lover is preoccupied with her unresponsiveness, thus revealing his motive for murder as a desire to preserve her as an inanimate object. Ironically, this desire has been thwarted by their reciprocal union. Through murdering Porphyria, the narrator both preserves the beauty of her unresponsive body, while ensuring that she exists only as an object of his possession:

That moment she was mine, mine fair,
 Perfectly pure and good: I found
 A thing to do, and all her hair
 In one long yellow string I wound
 Three times her little throat around,
 And strangled her....

(36-41)

The lover’s use of Porphyria’s hair as a weapon of asphyxiation underscores the connection between the fetish and the lifeless female body, thereby rendering the male lover’s desire to transform his beloved into a corpse as an explicit fact. The narrator’s act of murder functions as a means of fetishizing the entire female body, so that it becomes conflated with the

beloved's hair as an inhuman(e) object of gratification. Christina Rossetti's reference to Browning, who was one of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's favourite poets (Marsh DGR 22), challenges her brother's idealised portrayal of a heavenly reunion between lovers by affiliating this desired union with the psychotic tendencies of Browning's narrator.⁵⁵ It is notable that Christina Rossetti's narrator echoes Browning's, almost verbatim, in his claim that the presence of the beloved's hair enables him to possess her: "...shaking her long golden hair / Thro' the thick branches to my face/ ... I may feel she still is mine" (24-26) ("That moment she was mine, mine fair/ ... / and all her hair / In one long yellow string I wound" (36-39)). Just as Alcott subverts Hawthorne's negative references to Hosmer's depiction of the Brownings' ideal union, so does Rossetti expose the problematic aspects of her brother's preoccupation with a heavenly reunion through referencing one of his favourite poets. Alcott and Rossetti, of course, follow opposing trajectories in that Alcott creates an alternative egalitarian union between artist and muse, where Rossetti subverts the perverted union desired by the male artist. This is because Hawthorne acknowledges the fetishistic desires of the male artist as the cause of the obstruction of his ideal union, where Dante Gabriel Rossetti attempts to deploy the fetish as a vehicle for facilitating his continuing union with an inanimate, female beloved.

Christina Rossetti expands upon her critique of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's vision of a heavenly reunion by questioning whether the unworthy male lover can ever attain redemption. In two unpublished stanzas of "A Year Afterwards", which are struck out of the MS. of the Weston Library, Oxford University,⁵⁶ the narrator recalls how the beloved

⁵⁵ It is an interesting coincidence that Browning met both Elizabeth Siddal and D.G. Rossetti in 1855 to discuss the possibility of hiring Siddal as illustrator for the upcoming illustrated edition of "Pippa Passes". However, he rejected the project because he recognised in Siddal the same signs of laudanum addiction that had afflicted his late wife. Like Christina Rossetti, Browning was sceptical of the dangerously addictive nature of Siddal and D.G. Rossetti's relationship, and kept himself at a distance (Hawksley 120-121).

⁵⁶ Notebooks of Christina Rossetti Poems. 1845-56. Cat. 504. Item 1305. Weston Library, Bodleian Collections, University of Oxford; Crump (1990 181-184 429-430).

commanded him to pluck no more flowers for her until she was able to wear “Such flowers as Dorothea wore / When first her footsteps trod the sky” (Crump 1999 429 fn.37 48-49). This is a reference to stanza seventeen of “The Blessed Damozel” where the Damozel describes how she will introduce her beloved to “the five handmaidens” (105) of the Virgin Mary when they are reunited in heaven. However, Christina Rossetti’s beloved questions the narrator as to whether they will ever be reunited in the afterlife, expressing doubts as to whether she shares in St Dorothea’s power to redeem souls: “Her courage won a soul from earth; / Is love sufficient for such things? / Can simple love profess such worth?” (Crump 1999 430 fn. 37 51-53).

When Christina Rossetti does endow the female beloved with a voice in her first draft, this beloved asserts the separation between her identity and that of her male counterpart—stressing his moral culpability and lack of worthiness for heavenly redemption. Indeed, the sexual metaphor of “plucked flowers” (Crump 1999 429 fn.37 45) perhaps also hints at the possibility that the male lover may betray the beloved’s memory by attempting to de-flower other virgins following her death. Moreover, the beloved’s insistence that the narrator is fully responsible for his questionable moral conduct refutes the faith of the Blessed Damozel, who is certain that her prayers will provide sufficient grace to reunite her with her lover in the afterlife:

“...For he will come,” she said.

“Have I not pray’d in Heaven?—on earth,

Lord, Lord, has he not pray’d?

Are not two prayers a perfect strength?

(68-71)

The Damsel affirms the transfigurative power of the lovers' union and implies that her divine love is able to join with that of her unworthy lover to form a "perfect strength" (71) through the communion of prayer. This is perhaps a reference to Swedenborg's belief that "every one's peculiar love remain[ed] with [them] after death" because human beings maintained a physical body and gender (34). This Swedenborgian dogma is also referenced in *The Blessed Damsel* painting where the Damsel is surrounded by both embracing lovers and angels (Upstone 192). The original draft of "A Year Afterwards" contests Dante Gabriel Rossetti's portrayal of a continuing heavenly union by allowing the beloved to doubt whether her love is sufficient to win "a soul from earth" (Crump 1999 430 fn. 37 l.51), thus implying that the individual is responsible for his own salvation. Even more damning is the fact that the narrator shares in the beloved's doubts and informs the reader that "I understood her questionings / But would not answer" (Crump 1999 430 ll.54-55). This suggests that the narrator is also unsure of his worthiness for redemption, a deliberate contrast with the lover in "The Blessed Damsel" who hopes that his beloved's prayers will secure his own salvation:

" ...shall God lift

To endless unity

The soul whose likeness with thy soul

Was but its love for thee?" (99-102)

It is notable that the two stanzas containing the most critical meta-textual references to "The Blessed Damsel" are struck out of the original MS of "A Year Afterwards". In the footnotes of *New Poems by Christina Rossetti; Hitherto Unpublished Or Uncollected*, William Michael Rossetti acknowledged the fact that his brother sometimes destroyed uncomplimentary descriptions of himself in Christina Rossetti's manuscripts. For example, in

his notes for the poem, “Portraits”, he writes: “This warm-hearted though light effusion is meant for myself ... and for Dante Gabriel ... There used to be an intermediate stanza, characterising *him*; it is torn out (by his arbitrary hand, beyond a doubt)....” (380). Chapman also notes that annotations in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s hand frequently accompany strike-outs in Christina Rossetti’s manuscripts. It is therefore possible that the strike-out was not made by Christina, although this would be impossible to ascertain conclusively (DFS 139).

It is likely that “A Year Afterwards” was simply too close to the bone in its eerie foreshadowing of the apocryphal status that Elizabeth Siddal’s corpse would later assume, both within the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and among the wider critical histories of the movement. If Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s faith in the prophetic power of the poem would lead him to later believe that “The Blessed Damozel” was a premonition of the death of his wife, “A Year Afterwards” (a critical response to “The Blessed Damozel”) can also be read as a premonition of Siddal’s death, but one that is presented from Christina Rossetti’s critical perspective. Christina’s sympathetic interpretations of Siddal’s verse, discussed in Chapter 1, indicate her tendency to approach the relationships portrayed within her brother’s work from a female point of view. It is for this reason that the deceased beloved challenges the complacent male lover in “A Year Afterwards”, and it is also for this reason that the male lover’s preoccupation with the female corpse is exposed as a strategy that enables him to control the image of the beloved, rendering her an inanimate vessel that is subjected to his voyeuristic desires.

Imagining her brother’s response to his beloved’s death, Christina Rossetti creates a scenario where the unnamed narrator visits his beloved’s grave, fantasies about the near-perfect state of her corpse and imagines her hair falling about his face—almost twenty years before Elizabeth Siddal’s subsequent disinterment. Undercutting this imagined scenario is Christina’s critique of a male lover who depends upon his beloved’s prayers for salvation.

This dependency is portrayed as a kind of spiritual apathy, which allows the male lover to deflect responsibility for his redemption onto the female beloved who, as an unresponsive corpse, can be conveniently moulded into the perfect “saint” that ensures his entry into heaven. The narrator’s dehumanisation of his beloved preserves his individualism, allowing him to maintain his solipsistic attitude towards the outside world, while exploiting the beloved as a gateway to spiritual communion. Christina Rossetti endows the dead beloved with a voice, allowing her to articulate her objections to the lover’s imagined union: he will be held accountable for his morally questionable behaviour, and she is unable to make an intervention on his behalf. Rossetti takes the essence of her brother’s spiritual beliefs and highlights their inadequacy, as well as their damning implications for the salvation of his male protagonists.

It is unsurprising that William Michael Rossetti, the gatekeeper of the Rossetti legacy, expunged “A Year Afterwards” from the posthumous edition of his sister’s works. Poems that incorporated meta-textual references to the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti in this edition were largely more complimentary to the poet-painter, or at the very least ambivalent in their assessment of his attitude towards the female muse. Among these poems is “An Echo From Willow-wood” (164), a sonnet that William Michael Rossetti acknowledged “refer[red] to the love and marriage of my brother and Miss Siddal, and to her early death in 1862” (385 unnumbered fn.). Unlike the earlier “A Year Afterwards”, this poem sympathetically portrays a union between lovers that is disrupted by the female beloved’s death: “Two wistful faces craving each for each / ... / ... / One moment joined to vanish out of reach: / So those hearts joined, and ah! were parted so” (10-14). Likewise, the now-iconic “In An Artist’s Studio” (114) also made its debut in this edition, with William Michael Rossetti similarly claiming that: “The reference is apparently to our brother’s studio, and to his constantly-repeated heads of the lady whom he afterwards married, Miss Siddal” (383). This poem is now canonical

within Christina Rossetti's *oeuvre*⁵⁷ and has been noted for its ability to "...call into question the female forms personified by a voracious poetic imagination" (Knoepflmacher 300), portraying the artist's model, "Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright; / Not as she is, but as she fills his dream" (13-14).

Although the current critical trend reads these lines as embodying the male artist's projection of his desires onto the image of his muse,⁵⁸ the tone of poem is dispassionate, and it could easily be read as a purely didactic description of the artist's state of mind. Indeed, the poet's reference to the portrayal of the muse "not as she is, but was" (13) might legitimately refer to a time when she was alive and partook in a happy communion with the artist. When "In An Artist's Studio" was first published, its dispassionate tone would have enabled William Michael Rossetti to market the poem as a neutral appraisal of his brother's artistic practice. While the editor hypothesised that the poem probably referred to the earlier painting of his brother, the sonnet itself bears no explicit references to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's paintings or poems. Moreover, its challenge to the poet-painter's praxis is not comparable with "A Year Afterwards", for it does not scrutinise Dante Gabriel Rossetti's preoccupation with the female corpse, nor does it undermine his spiritual beliefs. By contrast, the references to Dante Gabriel's earlier verse in "A Year Afterwards" are both irrefutable and damningly critical. These references amass further troubling connotations when examined in light of the future events that they seem to foresee. Ironically, William Michael Rossetti excised the one poem that pre-dated Siddal's death, and which he could have legitimately claimed had nothing to do with it. His decision to exclude "A Year Afterwards" reflects the aptness of its

⁵⁷ Wiesenthal describes "In An Artist's Studio" as "...perhaps Rossetti's most famous, and most famously trenchant, reflection on the obstacles posed for the nineteenth-century woman artist...." (389).

⁵⁸ Helsinger summarises the poem thus, "The woman who perhaps aspired to be an agent of exchange, to negotiate money or love or marriage for the use of her face—even, like Lizzie (and Christina), to author her own exchangeable objects of beauty—has been herself reduced to that object, and consumed" (911). Danahay similarly defines the poem's subject as: "...an idealised representation that bespeaks the artist's desire as much as the actual appearance of his subject" (41).

critique and its uncanny embodiment of his brother's belief in the prophetic power of poetry. It is ironic that "In An Artist's Studio" and "An Echo From Willow-wood" are now enshrined in Christina Rossetti's critical canon where there is not a single published article available on "A Year Afterwards". "The Blessed Damozel" is also among Dante Gabriel Rossetti's most famous works.

"Now from the rosy lips / He damp corruption sips": Christina Rossetti's subversion of the Pre-Raphaelite corpse

Another poem that has been obfuscated from Rossetti's critical canon, and which was excluded from William Michael Rossetti's 1902 edition, is the 1848 "Death" (Crump 2001 688-689). This poem describes the deteriorating corpse of a young woman in a manner that subverts the fetishization of the dead female body in Pre-Raphaelite art. Excluding the presence of a male narrator, the poem is articulated by a genderless and omnipotent voice that dispassionately observes the disintegration of the corpse as an objective fact. Any attempt at romanticising the corpse is deliberately undercut by the poet's visceral descriptions of the decomposition process:

"The grave-worm revels now"
 Upon the pure white brow,
 And on the eyes so dead and dim,
 And on each putrifying limb,
 And on the neck 'neath the long hair;
 Now from the rosy lips
 He damp corruption sips,
 Banqueting everywhere. (1-8)

The opening line of this poem is a direct quotation from “The Raising of Lazarus” by Rev. Thomas Dale, which appeared in *The Christian’s Penny Magazine* in 1834: “The grave-worm revels now / Upon his mouldering clay” (15-15). The poem references the description of the raising of Lazarus in John 11:39, a biblical passage that emphasises the smell of Lazarus’s corpse to indicate how far his body had deteriorated at the time of his resurrection: “...Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.” Rossetti’s reference to Dale’s poem reminds the reader of the reality of the decomposition process, underscoring the fact that, within scripture, the dead body is represented as a repulsive entity that can only be transformed by the individual’s redemption. This scriptural reference reminds the reader that the body of the deceased cannot take on a totemic function in place of God, nor is it able to stand in as synecdoche for the living person.

The subsequent lines of the poem function as satirical parody of the sexualised depictions of the female body in Pre-Raphaelite art. The stereotypical image of “the pure white brow” (2) is juxtaposed with the “putrefying limb[s]” (4), while the Pre-Raphaelite emblems of the “long hair” and “rosy lips” (5-6) are invaded by the “banqueting” (8) grave-worm who sows traces of “corruption” everywhere (7).⁵⁹ Rossetti creates disconnect between representations of the female body in the art and poetry of the Brotherhood, and the immanent reality of that body within the world. Cleverly positioning her own poem as a didactic observation, she obscures the bias of her position through relentlessly recording the corpse’s “corruption”, a *double entendre* that also refers to the inherently “corrupt” nature of the physical body in Christian theology. The poet’s metatextual references, both to scripture and religious verse, subtly affiliate her devotional perspective with objective truth, while the image of the female corpse that is disseminated within Pre-Raphaelite art is desecrated by the

⁵⁹ I note here that Moffett also analyses how “Death” undermines the Pre-Raphaelite fetish with the female corpse, but offers no commentary on the Christian connotations of the poem (301-302).

realist treatment of the dead body that is upheld by the poet, and which the work of the Pre-Raphaelites deliberately obfuscates.

Like “A Year Afterwards”, the poem also attacks the hair-fetish of the Pre-Raphaelites, describing the grave-worm as “Creeping up and down through the silken tresses / That once were smoothed by her husband’s caresses” (9-10). The voice of the poem seems to take a sensuous pleasure in these lines, for the descriptive tropes of “caress”, “silken tress” and the “smoothing” hand, bear connotations of softness, commingling and unification that are disrupted by the presence of the worm. This worm stands in for the husband, the absent male subject that is deliberately excluded from the world of the poem. Indeed, it shares the male artist’s preoccupation with dismembering the female body (whether this be achieved through obtaining a lock of hair or a marble hand), and similarly “feeds” upon the beloved’s anatomy, so that each individual limb is dwelt upon with a voyeuristic detail designed to titillate: “In her mouth and on her breast / Where the babe might never rest” (11-12). The stereotypical images that are associated with the female form in classical art: hair, mouth and breasts, are simultaneously tended to and desecrated by the worm, which functions as a phallic symbol of the erotic motivations that underlie the male artist’s obsessive examination of the female corpse.

The poem is an uncanny reversal of the dissemination of Elizabeth’s Siddal’s image by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, following her death. Where Siddal’s hair was known for its apocryphal growth, the hair of the protagonist is fed upon by the “banqueting” grave-worm. Like the poetic subject, Siddal’s distinguishing physical features were her pallor, her long hair and her “rosy lips”—attributes that were heightened in the iconic depiction of her as the dead Ophelia, but which were not subjected to the brutality of the decomposition process in the painting of the same name. The protagonist is also positioned in reference to her widowed husband and miscarried child, although the conflation of the husband’s “caress”

with the banqueting grave-worm bears sinister connotations for the protagonist's relationship with her husband that are not present in Pre-Raphaelite memorialisations of Siddal.

Furthermore, the poem's reference to the protagonist's death as the consequence of her miscarriage resonates uncomfortably with the circumstances of Siddal's suicide: "In giving birth she lost her life; / She gave all and she gave in vain, / Nor saw the purchase of her pain" (13-15). Although the protagonist's death does not follow a suicidal act, these lines unwittingly recall the depression that Siddal suffered as a consequence of her laudanum-induced miscarriage; the catalyst for her eventual overdose (Hawksley 187-193). Siddal's death was, therefore, in some sense, the product of her miscarriage, and it might legitimately be said that "In giving birth she lost her life" (13). Rossetti's examination of the Pre-Raphaelite corpse in "Death" precedes the mythical status that Siddal's corpse was later to acquire, undermining the artistic treatment of her body at the hands of Brotherhood before it had even taken place.

Rossetti challenges the Pre-Raphaelite preoccupation with the female corpse with the view of presenting death as a transitional event that facilitates the individual's union with God. If "A Year Afterwards" portrays the male narrator's obsession with the deceased beloved as a strategy for deflecting responsibility for his salvation onto an inanimate intercessor, "Death" focuses on the deceased woman's independent journey towards redemption, excluding the absent figure of her "husband" and presenting the corpse as terminating the body's prior function as receptacle for her identity. The poem's denouement emphasises the importance of understanding the protagonist's tragic death from a spiritual perspective, subverting the Pre-Raphaelite fixation with the inanimate body through championing the Christian emphasis on the immortality of the soul:

Let none weep that ye could not save
 So much of beauty from the earth:
 It is not death ye see, though they
 Pass into foulness and decay;
 It is the second birth. (35-39)

Rossetti exposes the futility belying any attempt to preserve and commemorate the human body by linking the finite nature of beauty with earthly materiality, thus reminding the reader that earthly beauty is inherently corruptible. In order to come to terms with the brutal reality of death, the reader must look upon it as a process of transition. The transitional nature of death is underlined through the allusive nature of the phrase “the second birth” (39), which refers to the resurrections of both mother and child. Through usurping the pre-eminence of the physical body and replacing it with an aspiration towards spiritual transfiguration, Rossetti indicates that the Pre-Raphaelite treatment of death will fail to provide sufficient consolation for the bereaved. Consequently, Rossetti’s “Death” highlights the problems that are caused by an excessive preoccupation with the physical body, asserting an alternative devotional perspective that focuses on the dead woman’s redemption as an exemplar for the spiritual salvation of those who knew her.

“I visited the tomb and opened the coffin”: Christina Rossetti’s exposure of the male artist’s voyeurism

When “Death” and “A Year Afterwards” were composed, Elizabeth Siddal had not yet died, but it seems reasonable to assume that both poems were written with her in mind. “A Year Afterwards” imagines the circumstances of “The Blessed Damozel” as real events that were experienced by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, rather than the particulars of a medieval fantasy. Setting the poem in the present, Rossetti creates a protagonist who is closely based on her

brother and who ventriloquizes her concerns regarding the attitudes of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood towards the female muse. The Brotherhood's fixation with dead women is exposed as an attempt to reduce the muse to a lifeless object without autonomy, so that she may function as a vessel of the male narrator's erotic fantasies. This lifeless corpse closely resembles the "marble woman" of Hawthorne's and Alcott's fiction, a similarly inanimate and mute female muse who is also subjected to the male artist's voyeuristic gaze.

Both the "marble woman" and the Pre-Raphaelite corpse are dismembered, so that the trace of female identity that is contained within a severed limb or lock of hair is able to stand in for the autonomous presence of the female beloved, a fetish that simultaneously functions as a type of synecdoche. In the case of "A Year Afterwards", the beloved's hair is fetishized, in order that it might become a totemic relic that symbolises the beloved's spiritual role as intercessor and gateway to spiritual salvation. Reduced to a silent "saint", the deceased beloved's sole purpose is to ensure the male narrator's subsequent redemption. Rossetti usurps the muse's intercessional role, however, by allowing her to speak back from beyond the grave. In direct opposition to the language of the Blessed Damozel, the deceased beloved restates the male lover's unworthiness for salvation and her inability to help him, implicitly condemning his spiritual apathy, as well as his refusal to take responsibility for his spiritual wellbeing. This moment of defiant self-assertion is struck out from the original manuscript, bearing the trace of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "revising hand" (Goldberg 145). It would seem that the muse's critique of the male artist's faith in a heavenly reunion is simply too devastating for the male artist to handle.

In "Death" this critique is redirected to the image of the lifeless female body, which is subjected to a microscopic examination, limb by limb, during the rapid process of its decomposition. Rossetti is relentless in her dismemberment of the Pre-Raphaelite portrayal of the ideal female muse: each individual fetish is sadistically offered up to the banqueting

grave-worm, a satirical replacement for the male narrator who feasts upon the female body as the ultimate satisfaction for his phallic urges. This repulsive image is consciously replaced by that of the beloved's heavenly redemption, a redemption that significantly excludes the unnamed "husband", but which is asserted as an aspirational possibility for both husband and reader. Unlike Alcott, Rossetti does not replace the abusive union between male subject and inanimate female object with a reciprocal union between male and female artists because this would be to share in her brother's vision of a heavenly reunion in the afterlife. Instead, she reasserts the individual's relationship with God as the central focus of every person's transitional journey in death. Rossetti does not deny the possibility of an ideal union between artists, but merely implies that such a union is superfluous within the teleology of the individual's salvation.

"A Year Afterwards" and "Death" foreshadow Dante Gabriel Rossetti's later act of exhuming his late wife's body in myriad ways. We observe a male narrator in the act of day-dreaming about his beloved's corpse as a perfectly preserved and pristine work of art, which enables him to imagine that she remains unchanged in the afterlife, awaiting their heavenly reunion. We are prevailed upon to figuratively exhume a Pre-Raphaelite corpse that has died in childbirth, one that is deathly pale with long hair and "rosy lips", so that we may be forced to face the fact that this corpse is decomposing, and that the beloved has undertaken a spiritual transfiguration that is independent from our own. What would have happened if these poems had been published in William Michael Rossetti's *New Poems of Christina Rossetti*? Would readers have noticed their uncanny resemblance with the events of Siddal's death and subsequent exhumation? Would they have felt that Rossetti's critique of her brother's treatment of the female corpse and his spiritual apathy were prophetically apt? Certainly, these poems would have become objects of greater critical interest than they have been to date.

If “Death” reminds us of one thing, it is that the sight of a rotting corpse undermines any belief in a perfectly preserved female body. Oddly enough, one male artist who confronted this irrefutable fact head-on was Emerson. Like Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Emerson was drawn to Swedenborg’s premise that heterosexual couples would be transfigured into a single body in the afterlife (Richardson Jr. 470), and was similarly devastated when his first wife, Ellen, died at the premature age of twenty (110). In the week that followed Ellen’s death, Emerson reconceived her as a saintly intercessor in his journal, writing that “...Ellen went to heaven to see, to know, to worship, to love, to intercede” (qtd. in Richardson Jr. 109). However, in the months and years that succeeded this devastating event, Emerson was to increasingly feel “...most keenly ... a sense of loss and alienation that expressed itself as a consciousness of separation” (110)—culminating with him relinquishing his faith in immortality, his belief in the sacrament of communion, and his vocation as a minister (4). Why? On 29th March, 1892, a little over a year after Ellen had died, Emerson wrote in his journal: “I visited Ellen’s tomb and opened the coffin” (ibid.).



(Fig. 8) Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *The Blessed Damozel*. 1875-8. Oil on canvas. Harvard Art Museums.

Part II

That mighty maternal love which makes [...] little women

Section I

“Left-handed societies”

Women’s Life-Writing

In Christina Rossetti’s 1892 devotional commentary on the apocalypse, *The Face of the Deep*, she wrote:

Society may be personified as a human figure whose right hand is man, whose left hand is woman; in one sense equal, in another sense unequal. The right hand is the labourer, achiever: the left hand helps, but has little independence, and is more apt at carrying than at executing. The right hand runs the risks, fights the battles: the left hand abides in comparative quiet and safety; except (a material exception) that in the *mutual* relations of the twain it is in some ways far more liable to undergo than to inflict hurt, to be cut (for instance) than to cut.

Rules admit of and are proved by exceptions. There are left-handed people, and there may arise a left-handed society!
(410)

Readers of Rossetti’s theological work may wonder where this conception of a “left-handed society” originated. Scholars of nineteenth-century American and British culture would doubtless situate it within the domestic sphere. The expansion of industry in the nineteenth-century allowed the marketplace to replace the nuclear family as the “chief economic unit of production”, assimilating much of women’s former work, such as tailoring, raising food and running a business, into the public sphere (Anderson 31). Across the western world, a woman’s primary concern became housework and child-rearing, and those who could not

afford to make this their sole occupation faced a reduction in social status, pressuring many “lower-middle and working-class women [to] aspire to domesticity” and embrace it as a “modern improvement in their lives” (32). As Ellen Jordan has argued, where “linked distinctions such as mind/body, public/private, reason/desire had long been part of western thinking”, in the nineteenth-century these distinctions became gendered (43). This “doctrine of separate spheres” where the public sphere was understood to be the realm of men, while the private, domestic sphere was increasingly seen to be the sanctuary of women, branded women as “relative creatures” (ibid.) who proved their innate spiritual superiority by “guid[ing] and uplift[ing] their more worldly and intellectual mates” to “preserve and quicken the moral idealism so badly needed in an age of selfish greed and fierce competition” (Houghton 349 352).

Barbara Welter’s concept of “The Cult of True Womanhood”, developed in her 1966 article of the same name, has become canonical in its assertion that it was the responsibility of the “true [American] woman”, confined the home, to uphold the moral values of the Republic, thereby preventing her husband and sons from neglecting “the religious values of [their] forebears” and sinking into an abyss of exploitative, capitalistic selfishness (151). The four qualities of the “True Women”, as defined by Welter, are piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity (152). Likewise, the British figure of the “angel in the house”, who made her first appearance in poet Coventry Patmore’s 1854 novel-length poem of the same name, was defined by Virginia Woolf in the 1931 lecture, “Professions for Women”, for her qualities of charm, unselfishness, self-sacrifice and purity (2). Woolf found this limited vision of femininity to be so stifling that she was to claim that: “Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer” (3).

The critique of the nineteenth-century British novel’s tendency to promote a left-handed society has, as Lowe has argued, focused on the notion that the “Victorian fictional

imagination” assigns women a role of “self-abnegation and confinement within the closed domestic sphere” (124). Within both the American and British contexts, the woman’s ability to assume a role of “self-abnegation” is frequently allied with her capacity for sympathy. I define sympathy as the ability to identify with the marginalised “other”, which is achieved through “imaginary leaps across spaces of difference” (Boudreau x). Hendler has contended that the feminine model identification with the “other” is focused on a voyeuristic dynamic where the subject is expected to “submerge his or her experience in the emotions of the [object] in order to transform partial sameness into identity”, an ideological aim that is mirrored within the project of the novel itself in its insistence that the reader identify themselves with the fictional protagonist (PS 5). This object of alleviating another person’s suffering through sympathetic identification at worst threatens to “negate ... individuality” by “the paradoxically narcissistic and self-negating desire to feel *with* [the] other, to share the other’s experiences as if they were one’s own” (ibid.). The claim that the voyeuristic application of sympathy encourages the obliteration of the victim’s autonomy has been reinforced by Elizabeth Barnes’ assertion that, within the sentimental novel: “...true personhood is attained not by social elevation but by encounters with pain, encounters to which the “strong” have access via their empathy with the “weak”: through their identification with the suffering victim....” (LWB 1). Thus, Christina Rossetti’s belief that the left hand is “far more liable to undergo than to inflict hurt, to be cut ... than to cut” derives from the fact that “the left hand helps, but has little independence” (FD 410).

The female communities of the Alcott and Rossetti families can be understood as left-handed societies in microcosm, independent of the patrilineal companionship of the Alcott and Rossetti men and their wider participation within the public sphere. And yet, these communities are not more prone “to be cut ... than to cut” (ibid.). Abigail Alcott’s advancement of a female literary community, consisting of herself and her four daughters,

was centred on the development of mutual values of sympathy, religious devotion and renunciation. These values deliberately opposed the ideals of individualism and self-reliance that were championed by her husband, Bronson, who was deliberately excluded from the left-handed society of the domestic sphere. Equally, the Rossetti women's participation in the daily devotional practices of the Tractarian Movement contributed to the fostering of a shared set of ethical and artistic principles from which the Rossetti men were side-lined. These devotional practices led to the development of a lesser-known body of theological work that focused on the value of matrilineal relationships, spiritual submission and the renunciation of earthly desires. These concepts were inspired by the theology of family matriarch, Frances, and were deployed in the religious writings of her two daughters, Maria and Christina.

The notion that the domestic sphere was and remains straightforwardly subjected to the civic and political authority of the public realm is an overly-simplistic rendering of the complex relationship between male privilege and female kinship. As Pateman has argued: "The two spheres of civil society are at once separate and inseparable. The public realm cannot be fully understood in the absence of the private sphere" (4). In her germinal work, *The Sexual Contract*, Carole Pateman contends that contract law, which underpins the workings of a capitalist society, is centred on the supposition that "all men are born free" and can thus participate in "free agreement" (6), but that this very "freedom" depends on "sex-right and conjugal right ... A man's power as a father comes after he has exercised the patriarchal right of a man (a husband) over a woman (a wife)" (3). Although the domestic sphere is rendered invisible within political discourse, the very underpinnings of male privilege depend upon its existence. This is because, while women "are not party to the original contract" they are its *subject*, for the very discourse of fraternal freedom depends upon the assumption that "...women are not born free; they have no natural freedom" (6).

Therefore, the very meaning of “civil freedom” only gains significance when counterposed to “...the natural subjection that characterises the private realm” (11).

Within literary criticism, Brigid Lowe has expanded on this theoretical discourse to contend that the portrayal of the family in the Victorian British novel exposes the fact that “men are produced ... by female labour, continue helpless and beholden to others for life for many years” and that “...considering the huge amounts of (predominantly female) labour ‘mixed’ in the thriving individual, it seems possible that his very soul is not his own” (143). Consequently, the fallacy of the autonomous male is exposed as dependent upon the exertions of the female community within the domestic sphere. As the site of the gynocentric labour that produces the “thriving individual” (*ibid.*), the left-handed society provides us with evidence of female resistance to the patriarchal framework of authority that governs the public sphere, and the power that female societies can paradoxically exert through their very submission. Where Audrey Jaffe has attested that the feminine framework of sympathy allows the victim’s experience to be “...apprehended through the mediation of the spectator’s self-image” (10), Lowe advances that sympathy implies “real, personal human engagement—intellectual give and take” (11). Instead of functioning as self-abnegation to the systemic oppression of the “other”, the sympathetic relations of the female community, as Rae Greiner has affirmed, are structured around a “form of thinking geared toward others, including the other that is myself as others see me” (1). In opposition to Jaffe and Hendler, Greiner radically proposes that sympathy affirms both the identity of the other *and* the self because we “...do not sympathise best with those whose feelings we share absolutely” and, within Victorian fiction, the mirror is presented as “...a pathological emblem of the need to see oneself in others; the identity of emotions is presented as a threat to, not an achievement of, sympathetic connection” (4).

The sympathetic relations of the left-handed society have the power to privilege female experience, sensation and selfhood through facilitating recognition of the “other” as a part of the freedom of the self. Sharon Marcus’s pivotal work on the relations “Between Women”, in her 2007 monograph of the same name, has highlighted the fact that “....a narrow focus on women’s status as relative creatures, defined by their difference from and subordination to men, has limited our understanding of gender, kinship and equality” (1). Resisting the tendency of lesbian theory to function as “....a master discourse for understanding all relationships between women” (12), Marcus sets out to demonstrate the multiplicity of kinship networks between Victorian women with a particular emphasis on friendship as “reinforc[ing] femininity” and licensing “forms of agency women were discouraged from exercising with men” (2). Marcus’s methodological focus on life-writing and the content of “memoirs, autobiographies, letters, and diaries” (ibid.) places women at the “centre of histories of the nineteenth-century family”, thereby resisting the critical tendency to focus on how women “....accepted and contested belief systems that defined [them] in terms of male standards, desires and power”—reorienting attention to “how relationships between women defined normative gender” (9).

Where Part I, “Matches for very big adversaries”, focused on how Louisa May Alcott and Christina Rossetti resisted the ideologies of individualism that were disseminated by their male peers in the Transcendentalist and Pre-Raphaelite movements; Part II, “That mighty maternal love which makes [...] little women”, analyses the understudied life-writing of the matrilineal communities of the Alcott and Rossetti families, as well as its wider influence on the canonical works of Louisa May Alcott and Christina Rossetti. A notable exception made by Hendler in his discourse of sympathy is the function of epistolary writing as a “primary site for affective exchange”, facilitating an “emotional transaction” between individuals that holds the power to become an “inter-subjective exchange of self-relation” (PS 23). The

network of life-writing generated between the Alcott women, and the collaborative theological discourse of the female Rossettis, develops an inter-subjective account of female experience that privileges the importance of sympathetic recognition of the “other” as activated through mutual submission to Divine Will. This submission to a higher power overcomes the risk of self-negation at the expense of the “other” because a theology of renunciation enables the development of a community that champions the co-existence of multiple perspectives and identities through a shared emphasis on “real, personal human engagement—intellectual give and take” (Lowe 11).

This inter-subjective model of female kinship embraces what Greiner has defined as a vision of reality that is “...itself sympathetic, a reality whose realism [finds] sanction in the imaginative fellowship we have with others” (4). In Greiner’s conception, this sympathetic vision is the foundation of the realist novel: “Long designated a genre littered with things and stuff that, simply by being there, produce a reality effect, the nineteenth-century realist novel ... grant[s] to fellow-feeling—not objects—the task of maintaining reality” (10). Embracing Greiner’s proposition that sympathy in the novel transforms the “actual particularity” of others “into the concrete particularity of others-as-ourselves” (9), I treat the life-writings and domestic discourses of the Alcott and Rossetti women as a key to the model of sympathy that is provided in Louisa May Alcott’s and Christin Rossetti’s canonical works. Within nineteenth-century American scholarship, Baym has posited that “...in novel after novel, a network of surrogate kin gradually defines itself around the heroine, making hers the story not only that of a self-made woman but that of a self-made family” (WF 38). The domestic family of the sentimental novel becomes, as Cindy Weinstein has argued, an elective institution, for its portrayal of both “paternal failure” and “motherless” infancy necessitate that the “possibilities for who counts as family be expanded”, and this expansion “extend[s] the possibilities of sympathy” (9). The inter-subjective outlook that is developed by the

Alcott and Rossetti women in their life-writings determines the values of the “elective families” that are created in Louisa May Alcott’s and Christina Rossetti’s canonical works, and the sympathetic frameworks that underpin these fictional communities.

My examination of the life-writing and literary discourses of the Alcott and Rossetti women will focus on how the inter-subjective and sympathetic visions of family matriarchs, Abigail Alcott and Frances Rossetti, shaped their daughters’ conceptions of an ideal female community. The Alcott and Rossetti sisters embraced an outward-facing vision of female sympathy, directed towards the other, as a vehicle for accessing divine communion with God. The matrilineal community’s attitude of sympathetic submission towards one another and the divine embodies what Jordan has defined as the “religious heterodoxy” of the women’s movement: a position that enabled women of faith to outwardly accept their subordinate status through a theology of renunciation, while nevertheless exploiting their moral and devotional authority to critique the workings of male privilege that underpinned the “doctrine of separate spheres” (90). Within this discourse of “religious heterodoxy”, women who existed on the “borderlands” of the public sphere, partaking in such employments as authorship and philanthropy, argued that their relationships with God, as the foundations of their spiritual authority, preceded their subservience to the paternal head of the household. This elevation of their spiritual insights invested female authors with the authority to act as spiritual leaders within the domestic sphere and, in some cases, even enabling them to take on roles as public theologians (89-90). In Jordan’s words, such women “....devise[d] strategies for gaining what they want[ed], while avoiding transgressing the rules so obviously as to provoke social retribution” (89). I will now turn to the network of life-writing and domestic discourse generated by the Alcott and Rossetti women, in order to outline the models of sympathetic identification that were developed by Abigail Alcott and Frances Rossetti;

tracing the propagation of these sympathetic frameworks in the literary exchanges of the Alcott and Rossetti sisters.

Chapter 4

“Renunciation is the law, devotion to God’s will the gospel”

The empowerment of the “other” in the life-writing of the Alcott women

In his 2007 double biography of Louisa May Alcott and Bronson Alcott, *Eden’s Outcasts*, Matteson claimed that the grief-stricken Louisa, unable to write a memoir of her mother, burnt the majority of her writings—a decision “that has cost historians priceless insights into the mind of an extraordinary woman (388-9). Matteson’s account is confirmed by Louisa’s journal entry for April of 1882, which claims that she followed her mother’s wishes and burnt the majority of her writings following her death (233). However, in her 2012 double biography of Abigail and Louisa—in some measure a response to Matteson’s prior work—Eve LaPlante contested his claim that the loss of the majority of Abigail’s life-writings has cost scholars the opportunity to assess her significance as a figure within the Alcott family:

The biographer John Matteson concluded that “instead of weaving her mother’s writings into published work, [Louisa] chose to commit the great majority of them to the flames” ... [This] conventional wisdom turned out to be wrong. Louisa did weave her mother’s writings into published works ... [The] archives also contain hundreds of pages of Abigail’s diaries ... Unknown papers of the Alcotts continue to be discovered (5).

La Plante’s selected collection of Abigail’s private writings, *My Heart is Boundless*, published in the same year, revealed that while the volume of Abigail’s surviving life-writing pales in comparison to the thousands of pages bequeathed by Bronson Alcott, they nevertheless constitute a considerable body of work. LaPlante transformed the scholarly narrative by revealing that, while Louisa could not bring herself to burn *all* of her mother’s

writings, the editorial hand of Bronson, who rewrote, edited, excised and burnt much of his late wife's work, has shaped our vision of Abigail since her death (MHIB xi-xii). LaPlante claims that the destroyed material was critical of Bronson's conduct as a husband and father, and that this is something that both Abigail and the wider family wished to obscure.

Antoinette Burton's 2005 collection of essays, *Archive Stories*, argues that archival research is often structured around a "liberal, triumphalist narrative" that emphasises "fact-retrieval" (6-7)—frequently identified in the seeming objectivity of material evidence (5).⁶⁰ However, Burton claims that the archive itself is also an artefact, subject to "specific historical and cultural contexts" and the embodied experience of the researcher at work (9). It is therefore imperative that archival scholars scrutinise the narrative that is contained within the archive—considering such questions as how it has been compiled, selected and edited, and what this can tell us about the material that we access. Within the Alcott family and its descendants, it was implicitly accepted that the writings and scholastic reputation of Bronson, the public philosopher, would be protected at the expense of the private writings of Abigail, and this decision has shaped the archival approach of succeeding generations of scholars, who have, by and large, focused on the prolific writings left by Bronson, at the expense of Abigail's scattered fragments.

LaPlante's anthology marked the beginning of a rehabilitation of Abigail's archival material, but her selected collection of Abigail's work is by no means exhaustive. Focusing on Abigail's talent as an unpublished writer, as well as her forgotten significance as an individual, LaPlante's work does not include the collaborative writings of Abigail's

⁶⁰ An abbreviated version of this overview of the Alcott archive can be found in my article, "'Her lovely presence ever near me lives': A Brief Encounter from the Archives with May Alcott Nieriker". *Brief Encounters* 2.1 (Jan 2018): 53-68. Web 1 May 2019.

daughters, which intersected directly with Abigail's journals. William Merrill Decker has argued that the publication of epistolary writing transforms the original form of the genre, which was conceived as addressing a "multiple interface" or "community of utterance" by re-schematising it into a linear progression of life-writing, authored by a single individual (33). The same can be said for the nineteenth-century diary, and this is certainly the case for the Alcott family, who followed the practice of reading and annotating each other's journals and private writings.

Collaborative journaling was not uncommon in nineteenth-century New England for, as Ronald J. and Mary Saracino Zboray have argued, the "broad distribution of literacy in a ... rural society undergoing rapid urbanisation" (101), coupled with the explosion of a market for "special-purpose blank books" (104) led to "a widespread writing impulse propelled by the dual need to keep track of one's life in a time of social upheaval and to maintain ties to distant loved ones...." (102). The collaborative contents of Abigail's journals are significant in that they offer an insight into what the Zborays have termed "...the structural relationship between writing as a practice and lived experience" (103). These moments of literary interaction are inextricably linked to moments of historical interaction within the Alcott family, exposing the authorial identity of the diarist as not simply an "isolated self standing out in high relief from its social environment but the self embedded within its environment", and utilising the diary as the record of a type of "socioliterary experience" (ibid.).

"Socioliterary experience" comes hand in hand with generic hybridity, for the forms adopted within a collaborative work must reflect the developing events and experiences of its co-authors. Thus, "long, commonplace book-like passages of poetry ... routinely interrupt the flow of a diary usually enhanc[ing] the account of daily experience" (105); "clippings sometimes document ... the events recorded by hand" (107), the diary

can become a friendship album containing messages of sympathy during times of bereavement (109). Within this nexus, the use of poetry is particularly significant because the “authorial identity” adopted by the poet is at once personal and impersonal. Adapting the events experienced over the course of the day into a prescribed literary form, the diarist-as-poet invites readers and collaborators to examine their reflections, not only as types of narrative record, but as works of literature. This enables the journal’s co-authors to develop an analytical discourse surrounding their inter-personal relationships with the view of achieving a greater mutual understanding.

In opposition to her husband, Abigail Alcott views the diary, not as a site for parental discipline, but as a space for developing sympathy between family members. Stepanski has claimed that while Bronson used personal writing to enquire about his “daughters’ faults” (103), Abigail used her journals and those of her children to provide the “safe psychic space that her daughters needed to pursue their individual talents” (108). Stepanski has emphasised Abigail’s use of literature as “communal, dialogic, uplifting” (100), drawing attention to her emphasis on educating her “daughters’ moral sensibilities” and connecting them “to the greater community—in this case the immediate family” (101). Poetry, in this context, provides a space where the Alcott women exchange ideas and feelings concerning their artistic accomplishments, the inter-workings of family relationships and the formation of a shared set of religious beliefs.

The Alcott sisters expanded on the collaborative practice that was instigated by their mother in their juvenile newspapers, which paid tribute to Abigail as the inspiration for their mutual literary endeavours. These collaborative projects form what Hewitt and Bernier et al. have termed as a “networked community” of writers and readers (15). Focusing on epistolary practice, Hewitt contends that literary collaboration is orientated “....not merely toward the writing subject, but also toward the myriad networks and communities” that are forged

through literary exchange (6). Citing the work of Mary Favret, Bernier et al. expand upon this vision of literary exchange to argue that female communities “pulled the letter out of its fiction of individualism” and transformed epistolary practice into “a site for social negotiation and political empowerment” (14). It is my contention that this vision of a “networked community” is not only limited to epistolary practice, but was utilised by the Alcott women as a means of negotiating personal empowerment within the family, as they formulated a set of literary, relational and devotional discourses that consciously opposed the philosophical outlook of family patriarchy, Bronson.

“Let us perpetuate in the remembrances of our children [...] what of love and good-will we have lived for them”: Abigail Alcott’s model of relational sympathy

Abigail Alcott’s influence over her daughters can be identified in her resistance to the framework of sympathy that was modelled by her husband and the diverging mode of sympathetic discourse that she championed for her children in her life-writing, which was taken up by the Alcott sisters in their later literary work. Bronson Alcott embraced a vision of sympathy, but his vision embodied what Gordon Hutner has defined as the Hawthornian model of the infallible author who depends upon the sympathy of his readers, stipulating “....how others must come into his sphere ... through sympathetic penetration ... For others to know him, they must extend their own capacities, and not rely on any guidance from the author” (8). In other words, the sympathy of the reader must be directed towards the author without any expectation of emotional return.

This framework of authorial privilege relies upon what Janet Todd has termed “....the communication of common feeling from sufferer or watcher to reader or audience” (4), developing a “politics of sympathy [that] is fatally flawed by its drive to turn all

differences into equivalences, all analogies into coincidences” (Hendler PS 8). Ironically, Hendler affiliates this particular politics of sympathy with a “protofeminist subject position” that attempts to forge “emotional solidarity between ... predominantly white women” as a means of advocating for the rights of “their racial, class and national others” within the sentimental novel (7). Barnes has imposed this interpretation of a female politics of sympathy onto the fiction of Louisa May Alcott, claiming that: “Sadistic impulses are ultimately converted into masochistic ones in Alcott’s novels, a transformation that affords its own form of pleasure by the children’s understanding that the one who is ‘beaten’ is the one who is loved” (LWB 21). Barnes associates this sadomasochistic impulse with the matriarchal figure of Marmee, the fictional embodiment of Abigail Alcott.

However, the framework of sympathy that is embraced by Marmee contests Barnes’ association of this character with “sadomasochistic impulses” (ibid.). Marmee’s model of sympathy enables her daughters to engage collaboratively in their struggles against the trials of everyday life, thereby facilitating the independent growth of each sister. This process of psychological maturation is far from masochistic because it presents the shortfalls of each of the sisters as childish misdemeanours that are essential to the development of their characters. Marmee does not subject her daughters to psychological brow-beating, but instead encourages the development of self-awareness as a means of learning how to bear the sufferings that are an *inevitable* aspect of daily life.

Marmee is closely modelled on Abigail Alcott, and the life-writings of the Alcott family demonstrate that Abigail did not share in her husband’s emotionally masochistic disciplinary practices, but instead perceived parental discourse to be a dialogue that privileged the experiences of the “other” and fostered mutual understanding and growth. Abigail’s conception of sympathy encourages the development of what I term as “shared

consciousness” where the needs and behaviours of the individual are shaped by the experiences of others, as much as they are the experiences of the self. This shared consciousness is fostered through literary collaboration and is the prototype for what Greiner terms as the “virtual reality” (4) of the realist novel, which grows out of the sympathetic network of identification that is generated between author, reader and fictional community.

Abigail’s journals are the site of her development of shared consciousness, for they form a reciprocal discourse with her children by means of self-analysis and reflexivity. She defines the purpose of the diary as allowing the moral good of the individual to live on and nourish the growth of their children: “....let us perpetuate in the remembrances of our children at least, what of love and good-will we have lived for them....” (LaPlante MHIB 200). It is also through the *exchange* of personal record, something that Abigail encouraged her daughters to actively partake in, that family ties and relationships are cemented. For instance, in a private letter, sent to fourteen-year-old Louisa through the “domestic post office”, established by Abigail to heal “all differences and discontents” within the family,⁶¹ Abigail describes the diaries of herself and her daughter as intertextual works that evidence the intertwined nature of their lives: “My Diary! Your Diary! only to think that we neither of us snatch a moment to notch our days! Can they be profitably spent if not a moment can be spared to record the fact that we lived?” (LaPlante MHIB 155-156).

Abigail used her journal a site for maintaining her relationships with her girls, fostering affectionate communication between them. She would sometimes record notes that

⁶¹ *Diary for the years 1841-1844; at Concord, Fruitlands, Still River, and again at Concord*. Monday 23rd January, 1843. AFAP, 1707-1904. MS Am 1130.14 (1), Houghton Lib., Harvard.

were sent through the domestic post office for posterity. For instance, she transcribed a note sent to Louisa on her eleventh birthday into her journal, which encouraged her daughter to use her diary as a tool for reflection that would aid her personal growth: “Remember, dear girl, that a diary should be an epitome of your life. May it be a record of pure thought and good actions, then you will indeed be the precious child of your loving mother” (128).

Abigail understood the purpose of life-writing to be a tool for self-composition where the act of recording the actions of one’s life would enable the individual to analyse and reconstruct their behaviour, so refining and strengthening their conscience in the process.

Abigail’s journals frequently express frustration at her husband’s inability to relate to her need for empathetic relationships and sympathy from others. After observing Abigail’s happiness at receiving a sympathetic note from her brother Charles, which addressed their difficulties during the Fruitlands experiment, Bronson apparently criticised her for showing signs of weakness, something that provoked the following entry in her journal:

Cousin Sam leaves us this morning a truly kind and fraternal note from our dear friend ... This is what I much need, what my husband seems to regard as puerile and false sympathy. I do not ... It may be weakness- well! I am weak and I do not find that he that is wise is “*always strong*”. I am but human, and with many infirmities lurking about me.⁶²

Noting that Bronson’s aspiration to fashion an independent identity overrode the human desire for mutual understanding, Abigail observed that his denigration of emotional experience ignored a fundamental aspect of the human condition—the desire for sympathy from others. In failing to aspire after the same level of self-sufficiency, Abigail concedes that

⁶² *Diary for the years 1841-1844*. February 6th, 1844. AFAP, 1707-1904, MS Am 1130.14 (1). Houghton Lib., Harvard.

she might appear weak, but that in acknowledging and accepting the reality of her supposed weakness, she is actually wiser than her husband, for her desires are rooted in the inevitable human need for companionship with others.

At the heart of the divergence between husband and wife are opposing visions of fate and providence. Where Bronson sees his Transcendentalist vision as forming part of a manifest destiny, where all becomes unified in the Over-Soul, Abigail emphasises the importance of working with the uncertain and shifting circumstances of the environment of the individual, trusting that, through conscious cooperation with the divine, they will be directed towards the best possible outcome for their lives. A quotation by Bronson, written in Abigail's hand in her journal, suggests that he believed that human will could dictate the course of the individual's future—to the extent of achieving a vision that is at odds with that of the external world: "...that which such souls desire, shall assuredly come to pass. His desire is the promise of its accomplishments, and his Faith prophetic. Time shall unfold his Ideal into its full and fair image in the actual."⁶³ For Bronson, the mere existence of human Faith was evidence of its inevitable fulfilment—it was only a matter of time before such faith came to fruition.

In contrast to her husband, Abigail's vision of transcendent experience, is achieved through total submission to divine will and complete forgetfulness of self. An entry on 1st April, 1843 claims that a soul attached to earthly desires, or "creaturely entanglements", paradoxically has greater difficulty in achieving true freedom.⁶⁴ Stating that "conversion to God is aversion from sin", Abigail argues that "turning away from the latter is going into the former, a continuous sinking into the Deity" (ibid.). While a relinquishment of self-interested desire might, on the surface, appear to necessitate a renunciation of

⁶³ August 22nd, 1842, *ibid.*

⁶⁴ 1st April, 1843, *ibid.*

individual identity, within Abigail's theology such an act of spiritual renunciation, in fact, redirects the individual away from the perversions and distortions that are conditional to the fallen world. Instead, the individual achieves their preordained purpose, which is unification with God, through a letting go of an individualised form of selfhood that is aligned with the desires and conditions of the external world. The strikingly sensory description of "sinking into the Deity" (ibid.) depicts this union as a literal cohesion of two beings, enfolded into one other to become a compound substance, while the lesser human element becomes transfigured by its incorporation into the Creator: "Love is the weight which sinks us as into an infinite sea, wherein they descend with inconceivable rapidity from one profound depth to another" (ibid.). Abigail understands true spiritual communion to be an infusion of all of humanity into the infinite love of the Creator. This "infinite sea" (ibid.) is a force that realigns existential experience into another plane of being, projecting all who incorporate themselves into the deity into an ecstatic and almost erotic experience that escalates until a total union with the infinite is achieved.

The redirection of the self into the Creator also requires a learnt acceptance of suffering, for the submission of the individual into the infinite life-source necessitates a rejection of the outside world. The ability to embrace suffering is achieved through detaching the self from the immanence of conscious experience, so that it is diminished by the immanent presence of the deity: "A sensibility of suffering constitutes a principle part of the sufferings themselves. They often bear the Cross in weakness, at other times Strength. All should be equal to us in the will of God" (ibid.). In another diary entry, dated 2nd July, 1848, Abigail even goes so far as to claim that, as a vehicle to unification with God, human suffering can even be transformed into an uplifting experience: "Renunciation is the law, devotion to God's will the Gospel, the latter makes the former

easy—sometimes delightful.”⁶⁵ A relationship with God therefore generates a radically reconfigured experience of the human condition, whereby duty and renunciation can become beneficial, and even pleasurable.

It is possible to interpret such a theology as, on some level, masochistic. Marianne Nobel has compellingly argued that: “The masochism in sentimentality—neither subversive nor purely reactive—makes available the “bliss” of revelling in fantasized submission to power” (5). Likewise, Claire Jarvis has staked the claim that the repression of female sexuality can function as a means of activating that sexuality: “Withholding sex, in the Victorian novel, is a perverse way of having it” (viii). However, Abigail Alcott’s theology of renunciation is a framework for *transcending* pain, not “revelling” in it: “A sensibility of suffering constitutes a principle part of the sufferings themselves” (ibid.). Through identifying herself with the will of God, Abigail enters into an alternative plane of existence that reconfigures the human emphasis on individual fulfilment. Renunciation is not experienced as pain, but rather as a type of ecstatic bliss where the subject is able to let go of the limitations of self, in order to share in the pleasure that is given over to the “other”. This mystical theology alters sense perception, so that the sensations one experiences in the world, which are conditional to the solipsistic outlook of that world, are turned upside-down. Pain, in this context, would be to turn inwards into the self because such self-interestedness would facilitate the victimisation of the other, with whom the individual identifies.

Kenyon Gradert’s 2016 ALA conference paper, “Puritan Heritage in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Folk Theology” raises the interesting possibility that Abigail Alcott’s theology of renunciation might be viewed as part of a wider female response against the “individualistic

⁶⁵ 2nd July, 1848, ibid.

spiritual antinomianism” of mid nineteenth-century New England (1). Gradert contends that Harriet Beecher Stowe, in particular, sought to counter “....a Puritan legacy of excessive iconoclasm, individualism and antinomianism” through “reclaiming [Puritanism’s] communal facets in ... a folk theology grounded in the lived reality and communal relations of Puritan New England” (2). Gradert’s concept of a “folk theology” is centred on what he refers to as a “....hermeneutic of empathy in which readers imaginatively cast themselves back into the world of sacred history”, in order to come to a realisation that “God spoke not only through individuals, but to communal peoples that developed and matured through the arc of sacred history” (4). These emerging Puritan communities, which were inspired by the Halfway Covenant,⁶⁶ achieved this “hermeneutic of empathy” through embedding the communal events of sacred history “....within a texture of vernacular speech and quotidian folk life” that formulated a vision of Christianity theology as growing out of “communal lived experience” (6-7).

Abigail Alcott might reasonably be seen as falling into this tradition, for she counters her husband’s belief in divine revelation with an understanding of individual destiny as generated through an outward-facing predisposition towards the growing needs of the surrounding community. While the Transcendentalist emphasis on a return to pre-lapsarian innocence opposes the Calvinist doctrine of the “Total Depravity of Man”, the movement’s faith in individual revelation and the divinely ordained vocation of the individual, is nevertheless indebted to the concept of pre-destination. If all is united within the “Over-Soul”, then the over-soul, as a pre-condition of one’s existence, facilitates the individual’s personal fulfilment: “....that unity, that Over-soul, within which every man’s particular being is contained and made one with all others; that common heart ... that overpowering

⁶⁶ The Halfway Covenant, written by Richard Mather in 1662, allowed second-generation Puritans to be baptised without first undergoing a conversion experience. See Campbell, “The Halfway Covenant” in “Puritanism in New England”. *American Authors: Literary Movements*. Web. 9 Oct 2018.

reality ... confutes our tricks and talents, and constrains every one to pass for what he is, and to speak from his character....” (Emerson “The Over-Soul” 153). The difficulty with this self-affirming philosophy is that it interprets the conditions of life as supporting the individual’s chosen identity, and does not allow for the possibility that an individual’s circumstances may circumvent his or her desires.

Of course, what we might term as Abigail Alcott’s “matrilineal theology” differs from Stowe’s “folk theology” in that it is contained within the unit of the nuclear family and does not consciously situate itself within a Puritan discourse, but Abigail’s development of a sympathetic shared consciousness is fascinatingly close to what Gradert terms as Stowe’s “hermeneutic of empathy” (4). Both frameworks are centred on lived experience and communal relationships. Indeed, it is no coincidence that Stowe viewed Louisa May Alcott as her sentimental heir, writing to her in a letter that “....in these days where so much seductive and dangerous literature is put forward, the success of your domestic works has been to me most comforting” (qtd. in Saxton 305-6). In Louisa May Alcott’s public works we see her ground her mother’s matrilineal theology in what Gradert terms as “the vernacular speech and quotidian folklife” of New England (7), developing a sentimental backdrop that is deeply indebted to Stowe’s earlier work. It is my contention that Alcott’s portrayal of female relationships as “a key means of grace” that facilitates the integration of the self-reliant individual into a “social body” (Gradert 7) is indebted to the prototype of the matrilineal community of the Alcott women. In the work of the Alcott sisters, we witness an application of Abigail Alcott’s vision of a shared consciousness where the needs of the community are prioritised above those of the individual, as well as a mutual championing of her theology of renunciation and practice of “lived religion”, which conceives religious belief as “a foundation on which actual life [is] based” (Stowe qtd in Gradert 6).

“Piety of the right kind”: Anna Alcott’s advocacy of her mother’s lived religion in her literary criticism and its influence on *Little Women*

The Alcott sisters conceive religious practice as a practical way of life that eschews the hierarchical and ritualistic frameworks of organised religion, instead focusing on the power of communal bonds to redeem the individual and bring them closer to God. The emphasis on the redemptive power of matrilineal relationships fosters a providential outlook because the individual’s salvation is facilitated through the female-centred relationships of the family. This matrilineal vision of redemption can be observed throughout the life-writing of the Alcott sisters and is the foundation for the portrayal of the March women in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*. Anna Alcott’s journal reveals the sympathetic vision of the Alcott women and its influence on their public writing. Her critique of Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World* is germane to our understanding of *Little Women* because it illuminates Louisa May Alcott’s innovations within the sentimental genre, and indicates how these innovations embody the providential outlook that was championed by Abigail Alcott. These innovations are visible in a double set of early sketches for *Little Women* that was written by Louisa for the Alcott sisters’ juvenile newspaper, *The Portfolio*.

Anna’s journal contains short pithy reviews of works of fiction and religious tracts, a practice that she inherited from her mother. Her observations on *The Wide, Wide World* reflect her wider sentiments concerning lived religion and spiritual submission. The entry for Tuesday 9th February, 1861 argues that Warner’s novel would be a “....real good story if it were not quite so pious”.⁶⁷ Clarifying that she does not “....dislike piety of the right kind, that which shows itself in loving words and unselfish deed”, Anna explains that she finds the formal religious practice of the novel’s heroine, Ellen Montgomery, to be affected:

⁶⁷ *1860-1861 Diary of Anna Alcott Pratt*. Tuesday 9th February, 1861. AFAP, 1707-1904. MS AM 1130.14 (6), Houghton Lib., Harvard.

....when a child of 10 yrs. talks constantly of being “washed in the blood of the Lamb”, “having a new heart” and seeking Grace, it seems rather unnatural. Then to pray on every occasion, read the Bible in preference to all other books, and weep bitterly if anyone asks her if she is a “Christian” or “expects to be saved” seems to me hardly childlike and simple enough (ibid.)

Anna’s objection to Ellen Montgomery’s particularly self-conscious brand of “piety” can be linked to what Jane Tompkins has termed as the “ethic of submission” that pervades the sentimental genre (167). Within this framework, female heroines “could not assume a stance of open rebellion against the conditions of their lives” and instead appropriated the “culture’s value system” of female submission to gain a position of authority (168). Tompkins interprets *The Wide, Wide World* as “paradoxically an assertion of autonomy” because submission, as the highest act of Christian faith, enables “the dutiful woman [to] merge her own authority with God’s” (169). Thus, every single act of submission within the text is consciously linked back to the heroine’s “piety” and is developed within a religious discourse that is, as Anna points out, somewhat affected for a child of ten years old.

One might ask how Warner’s “ethic of submission” differs from Abigail Alcott’s theology of renunciation, and why Anna Alcott finds it to be so objectionable. The answer lies in Warner’s theology of predestination, which views the subordinate status of women as part of God’s pre-ordained salvific plan. Warner’s “ethic of submission” defines the sufferings of women at the hands of patriarchal authority as divinely willed, thereby championing an eschatological vision of female destiny that perceives salvation as facilitated through gynocentric suffering. This can be seen as a devotional version of

Bronson Alcott's androcentric vision of "Fate". Warner's theology embodies what Ira L. Mandelker has defined as "Puritan mysticism" (39). The Puritan mystic strenuously subordinates themselves to "Divine Law" at the cost of great persecution, focusing on the doctrines of "resist no evil" and "turn the other cheek", in order to form a "positive ascetic ideology" (ibid.). Such submission does not lead to the same other-orientated shared consciousness that can be observed in the devotional writings of the Alcott women because it is dependent upon the ultimate sacrifice of the heroine: that is, the relinquishment of her mother, and, with her, the possibility of a redemptive matrilineal community. As Barnes has noted, "the mother often dies early in the domestic novel, and in her place is left a text—a Bible...." (MTMT 162). Within Warner's narrative, Ellen Montgomery's mother must die, so that Ellen can form a closer relationship with God. Consequently, every assault upon the matrilineal community is viewed as a part of God's predestined "plan", unquestionably and inviolately "good".

From the opening of the novel, Ellen's separation from her mother is inadequately accounted for and functions as a pretext for the heroine's necessary submission to her maker's capricious and inexplicable divine will. Mrs. Montgomery, who has experienced a psychic intuition of her impending death, agrees to abandon her ten year-old daughter, in order to convalesce abroad in the hopes of recovering. It is not exactly clear why Ellen cannot accompany her parents on their travels and the reader, like the novel's heroine, must unquestioningly accept this conditional circumstance as a pivotal aspect of the plot without any hope of explanation. Thus, we are forcibly immersed into the novel's narrative teleology through a compulsory identification with its heroine. Despite Ellen's unaccountably "necessary" absence, Mrs. Montgomery still embarks upon her travels in the knowledge that "...the chance[s] of her ever returning to shield the little creature who was nearest her heart ... [are] very, very small" (9). Although she reasons through her

decision on the moral grounds that she had no right “....to neglect any chance of life that was offered her” (ibid.), in reality she has interpreted her separation from her daughter as a divinely ordained event and feels powerless to defy it. Upon gifting her daughter with the ominous bible that Barnes claims functions as a metonymical replacement for the mother, Mrs. Montgomery is “bowed by an unseen force” and spontaneously offers her Creator a “petition” that renders the finality of her separation with her daughter explicitly clear: “....when these miserable lips are silent for ever ... be unto my little one all thou hast been to me!” (60).

Given that there is no logical reason why Mrs. Montgomery must separate from Ellen (other than the weak preferences of a perpetually absent father whose intermittent appearances in the novel seem only to coincide with the circumvention of his daughter’s happiness), the reader is left in doubt as to why the separation is, in fact, necessary. Disturbingly, the answer is contained within the very maternal bond itself, for Ellen’s concupiscence is explicitly associated with her mother-love: “Ellen had plenty of faults, but amidst them all, love to her mother was the strongest feeling her heart knew” (11). Admittedly, the syntactical construction of this statement is ambivalent, but the very conflation of these two attributes, “faultiness” and “mother-love”, establishes a chain of associations that is maintained throughout the text. Mrs. Montgomery soliloquises that it is “for Ellen’s sake” that she effects the separation, subsequently informing her daughter that “God sends no trouble upon his children but in love” (10).

We might justly wonder why this loving maternal bond is so detrimental to Ellen’s spiritual welfare, but are, in fact, provided with an explanation (a rare occurrence in Warner’s inexplicable narrative of predestination). While Ellen mourns the absence of her mother on board a ship en route to her Aunt Fortune’s, she receives a particularly unpalatable form of comfort from a stranger who appears purely with the purpose of

informing her that: “Sometimes [God] sees that if he lets them alone, his children will love some dear thing better than himself” (103) and just as swiftly vanishes. A type of avenging angel, the man offers the forsaken ten year-old the edifying explanation that: “[God] saw that his little child was in danger of forgetting him; and he loved you, Ellen; and so he has taken your dear mother, and sent you away where you will have no one to look to but him” (104). The angelic messenger’s lesson is clear: a left-handed society is a detrimental threat to a God whose patriarchal authority depends upon the perpetual subjugation of women.

Warner’s eschatological vision of pre-destination can be linked to what Anne Douglas has defined as a Calvinistic theology of atonement where God is seen to be “the author of evil”, while humanity is held “totally responsible for sin” (122). In the words of nineteenth-century theologian, Edward Bellamy, “....when it is plain matter of fact that God does such a thing, we may thence conclude that it is most certainly right for him to do so, although we cannot understand how it is” (qtd. in Douglas *ibid.*). Of course, within Warner’s novel God is not presented in such capriciously tyrannical terms, but, as Baym has convincingly argued, if one views “existential doubt as an absurdity” one will “get along better with absolute power if one accepts it as beneficent”, however masochistic its workings may actually be (WF 145).

In keeping with the novel’s project of placing the misfortunes of both heroine and readers within a beneficent context, Ellen is encouraged to interpret the events of her life within a divine framework. Coming under the tutelage of her adoptive brother and erstwhile suitor, John Humphreys, she is instructed to read *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, so that she might learn how to regard her misfortunes as the predestined prerequisites for her eventual salvation: “Her attention was nailed; the listless, careless mood in which she sat down was changed to one of rapt delight ... They came to the place where Christian loses his burden at the cross; and ... three shining ones came to him” (568). *The Pilgrim’s*

Progress is yet another text that comes to stand in for Mrs. Montgomery herself and is, indeed, gifted to Ellen after her death: “....never was a child more comforted and contented with a book than Ellen was with the *Pilgrim’s Progress*” (571). Not only is Ellen informed that her mother’s death is part of God’s divine plan, she is also provided with an interpretive framework with which to read this plan, in much the same way that the novel’s female readership is implicitly encouraged to place their own struggles within the salvific eschatology of the text by consciously conflating themselves with its heroine.

Douglas has astutely observed that sentimental texts like *The Wide, Wide World* invariably disappoint feminist scholars because such “sentimentalism provides a way to protest a power to which one has already capitulated” (12) by becoming complicit within a power structure that “forces its objects to be oppressive in turn, to do the dirty work of their society in several senses” (11). Douglas disregards the value of the sentimental genre in its entirety, arguing that that “America lost its male-dominated theological tradition without gaining a comprehensive feminism or adequately modernized religious sensibility” (13). Yet, Anna Alcott’s critical response to the particular brand of piety presented in *The Wide, Wide World* would suggest otherwise. As we have already seen, it is Ellen’s conscious identification with the formal practices and discourses of organised religion that Anna finds so unpalatable. I would argue that Anna objects to the rigidly formal elements of organised religion because they are a replacement for the mother as mediatrix to the divine. While Baym has asserted that “an expression of existential doubt and absurdity” would be preferable to Warner’s beneficent portrayal of an autocratic deity (WF 145), Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* stands out for its determination to allow the mother to live on as a spiritual guide for the novel’s four heroines.

Abigail Alcott was highly influenced by the emphasis on free will and spiritual aspiration that was promoted by the Arminian revival, but nevertheless remained true to

the Unitarian precept of wresting "...religion from the clergy, congregation, and ritual, and substitut[ing] an intense personal relationship with God" (Mandelker 44). This personal relationship with God is forged in concert with the left-handed matrilineal society of the family and it is this vision of a divine shared consciousness that we observe in *Little Women*.

Consider, for instance, the difference between the function of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in *Little Women* and *The Wide, Wide World*. Where Ellen Montgomery is encouraged to apply Bunyan's text to her own life as a means of accepting the peculiarly misogynistic brand of injustice she is continually forced to confront, Marmee encourages her four daughters to use the text as an aspirational vehicle towards self-fulfilment:

Do you remember how you used to play Pilgrim's Progress when you were little things? Nothing delighted you more than to have me tie my piece bags on your backs for burdens, give you hats and sticks and rolls of paper, and let you travel through the house from the cellar, which was the City of Destruction, up, up, to the housetop, where you had all the lovely things you could collect to make a Celestial City.

[...]

....Now, my little pilgrims, suppose you begin again, not in play, but in earnest, and see how far on you can get.... (17-18)

Bunyan's text allows the March sisters to look upon the trials and tribulations of their lives as obstacles to be overcome, rather than as the inevitable workings of blind destiny. The sisters are encouraged to read the text through the unfolding events of their lives, instead of interpreting their lives through the framework of the text. Their engagement with Bunyan's narrative is active and evolving because it is a guide for conquering "their

bosom enemies” and achieving salvation through supporting all members of the matrilineal community in its mutual quest towards spiritual and moral fulfilment (14). By contrast, Ellen Montgomery applies the text to her life in hindsight when its events cannot be altered.

Marmee’s conflation of her daughters’ struggles with what is presented as a favourite childhood story also associates self-improvement with “play”: “We are never too old for this, my dear, because it is a play we are playing all the time in one way or another” (18). The use of literature and theatricality, as well as the emphasis on heavenly reward, allows the girls’ attempts to conquer their faults to bring joy and laughter, as well as suffering. This association of self-improvement with “play” counteracts Brodhead’s claim that sentimental works like *Little Women* foster a practice of “disciplinary intimacy” (70) where the protagonist is punished through the voyeuristic experience of the victim’s suffering, as can be identified in Bronson Alcott’s practice of punishing his pupils through having them whip him for their misbehaviour (68). The very notion of “play” suggests that one’s moral development is formed through a process of “trial and error” and rejects any suggestion that the parent should encourage the development of excessive guilt for what are essentially childish misdemeanours. “Play” is not a form of emotional manipulation, but is rather an act of creative collaboration and self-discovery.

Louisa May Alcott’s emphasis on self-reflection through “play” also encourages the reader to reject the notion that the experiences of her heroines are predetermined. The narrative structure of the novel, which examines the struggles of each sister in the context of Bunyan’s narrative, opens up the text to myriad interpretive possibilities. The sisters’ understanding of the text is transformed by each circumstance they meet and their failure to overcome their “bosom enemies” is neither lamented as an indicator of their eternal damnation, nor is it celebrated as an inevitable obstacle in the divine trajectory of their

lives. Instead, it is presented as an integral aspect of the individual's self-development, and each sister is encouraged to regard her shortcomings as the foundation for psychological and spiritual growth.

For instance, when Meg justifies her vanity on the grounds that "...it *is* nice to be praised and admired, and I can't help saying I like it" (109), Marmee does not condemn her, but instead encourages her to redirect this predilection towards the cultivation of her virtues: "That is perfectly natural, and quite harmless, if the liking does not ... lead one to do foolish or unmaidenly things. Learn to know and value the praise which is worth having...." (ibid.). Such virtuous sentiments may seem overly didactic to a contemporary reader, especially when the girls' faults appear to be relatively trifling in a present-day context (after all, Meg's "bosom enemy" is simply resenting being looked down upon for being poor), but it is important to note that Alcott's portrayal of lived religion is in some respects radical for the period, and was even scorned by contemporary reviewers. For example, an anonymous reviewer in the *Zion's Herald* condemned Alcott's secular appropriation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* and her refusal to link Bunyan's narrative to the affected display of pious sentiment that can be observed in *The Wide, Wide World*:

We dislike the spiritualizing in it of Bunyan's great Allegory ...

The fight with Apollyon is reduced to a conflict with an evil temper, and the Palace Beautiful and Vanity Fair are made to be only ordinary virtues or temptations. We cannot recommend the book as its quality merits. It is without Christ, and hence perilous in proportion to its assimilation to Christian forms.

Don't put it in the Sunday School library.⁶⁸

When read alongside this particular review, Anna Alcott's critique of *The Wide, Wide*

⁶⁸ *Zion's Herald* 45.43. 22nd October 1868. 509:3 (Clark 63-64).

World takes on another dimension, for she is pushing against the restrictive models of religious formation that were assigned to women in the sentimental literature of the period, and thereby prefiguring her sister's intervention within the canon.

One might wonder what the reviewer finds to be so dangerous in Alcott's text. (S)he is apparently affronted that a novel that affirms Christian values, makes extended reference to the popular theological writing of the period, and features a paterfamilias who is an Army Chaplain, never references Christ directly. His or her outrage perhaps makes more sense, however, when we consider the possibility that the deeper source of offence lies in Alcott's alleged trivialisation of Bunyan's text, for the reviewer regards her association of a theological tract with "ordinary virtues and temptations" as sacrilegious. This is astounding, given that Bunyan's narrative was an allegorical rendering of his own life and conversion experience. However, it becomes comprehensible when we consider the possibility that the reviewer is really offended that Alcott has the audacity to place the spiritual insights of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the left-handed society of the domestic sphere. Susan Cheever has argued that the most rebellious feature of *Little Women* is that it allows the "domestic details" of daily life to become the "subject of art", thereby implying that the "small things in a woman's life—cooking, the trimming of a dress or hat, quiet talk—can be just as important a subject as a great whale or a scarlet letter" (192). The same claim can, and has been made, for *The Wide, Wide World*⁶⁹—but the fact remains that the struggles of Ellen Montgomery are rooted in her continual expulsion from the domestic sphere and her forcible immersion into the "wide, wide world". She is cast

⁶⁹ Catharine O'Connell has argued that *The Wide, Wide World* "privileges female subjectivity" within the domestic sphere because the portrayal of "female suffering" in the seemingly trivial events of daily life subtly undermines the authority figures of the public sphere, to whom Ellen Montgomery submits (22). Tompkins contends that Warner's largely female readership would have identified with "the psychological dynamics of living in a condition of servitude" and that the novel demonstrates how women cope with this servitude "hour by hour and minute by minute" (178). By contrast, Noble's reading of *The Wide Wide World* endorses my own in its emphasis on how the loss of the mother is presented as a facet of God's providence: "If Ellen can learn to interpret suffering as a sign of God's love, then her suffering will not only be meaningful, but rewarding" (94).

out of the pre-lapsarian space of the matrilineal community and forced to make her way in a shockingly misogynistic society without any sign of protest, or rebellion. When Anna Alcott objects to Ellen Montgomery's inability to appear "hardly childlike or simple enough", advocating "piety of the right kind",⁷⁰ she is really championing the practice of lived religion that was modelled by her mother, and which later made it onto the pages of *Little Women*.

Louisa May Alcott's assimilation of her mother's providential model of "lived religion" into the narrative of *Little Women* is rendered even more explicit when it is examined in the context of a double set of early sketches for the novel, "Two Scenes in a Family", which was written for the sisters' juvenile newspaper, *The Portfolio*.⁷¹ Like the opening of *Little Women*, these sketches portray four sisters in front of a fireside complaining about their poverty. However, this earlier version of the scene also features the figure of a father, an "old philosopher" seated by a "well-stocked bookcase", who is clearly modelled on Bronson Alcott.

Rather than opening with the dialogue between the sisters that commences *Little Women*, "Two Scenes in a Family" allows the paterfamilias to commence the discussion on poverty. He is anxious to justify the family's straightened circumstances in light of his philosophy of predestination, which interprets earthly sufferings as preordained tribulations that establish the individual's purity of character: "Wealth brings selfishness and the love and care of the poor and lowly is forgotten. Then are we not happier than they, and can we not wish for riches if they take from us the quiet joy and contentment that now are ours?" The four daughters remain unconvinced by the patriarch's arguments, claiming that they would be more able to help those less fortunate than themselves if they were financially comfortable

⁷⁰ See footnote 67.

⁷¹ See Appendix 4.

and more able to engage in providential acts of goodness: “I should be better, happier and of more use if I had more money, everybody must be. The world need not hurt us if we have strength enough not to let it. Money cannot hurt us. I think not me, at least. The power of doing good always makes people happy”.

This opening debate subtly places the sisters’ theology of free will and good works in opposition to their father’s emphasis on human weakness and the necessity of hardship. The girls defer the question of the abstract value of poverty to their mother who argues that the struggles of the poor are the product of a self-serving capitalist society that does not encourage values of renunciation and generosity. She echoes Abigail Alcott’s sentiments, arguing that the foundation of any successful society lies in its capacity for sympathy and love for others, “The moral and social laws are entirely false. While the rich waste, the poor will want, while there is no sympathy and love, there will be sin and misery. When the rich will give of their abundance wisely and kindly, will the poor live virtuously and happily. It is not only what we give, but how we give....”

Emulating Abigail’s example, the nameless mother disregards the philosopher’s claim that punishment alone can refine a person’s character, instead advocating the universal development of a sympathetic shared consciousness that is fostered within the matrilineal community. The girls’ father, however, dismisses his wife’s dreams of a future society where “wealth may be a source of true happiness to high and low” with the abrupt assertion that such a time “will never come”. His wife’s insights are disregarded without cause, and he restates his prior belief that poverty is in the best interests of the family: “Then let us strengthen ourselves in humility that pride shall not cast us down”.

In light of this earlier blueprint for the opening scene of the novel, it is fascinating that Louisa chose to erase the figure of the father from the first part of *Little Women*. The absence of this self-righteous philosopher, who undercuts the insights of his wife, allows the March

sisters to follow the advice and instruction of their mother without opposition. Indeed, the second sketch of “Two Scenes in a Family”, entitled “Wealth”,⁷² suggests that the father’s mere presence undermines the promotion of sympathetic values, for his philosophy of predestination is upheld, while his wife’s faith in the development of universal sympathy is presented as untenable. Although the family has attained wealth, its good fortune has corrupted each of its members, with the exception of the “old philosopher” and “Lizzie”, an early version of Beth March. “Annie”, the counterpart for Anna Alcott and Meg March, appears lazy, listless and bored, “laying comfortably back” on the ottoman while “reading the last new novel”; the “brown girl”, an early model of Jo March and fictional counterpart to Louisa May Alcott, is pictured “filling a costly album with nonsensical poetry”, while the youngest sister, an unnamed version of Amy March based on her real-life counterpart, May Alcott, sits “idle” in a recess, “teasing a cross little lapdog and talking to a frightened little bird who flutter[ed] in its golden prison long[ing] in vain for the free fresh air it could not reach”.

Most damning of all, however, is the portrayal of the unnamed mother who throws off her “rich furs”, exclaiming in a “discontented voice”: “The beggars are a public nuisance. I cannot stir out, I am surrounded with vagabonds and poor wretches who torment one’s life out for this thing and that. Ah me, what a trouble it is to be rich if they would but let me alone, I should be satisfied”. The mother’s failure to realise the altruistic attitude that she has previously championed confirms the “old philosopher’s” avocation of the necessity of cathartic suffering. The aspiration towards a mutually supportive left-handed society is exposed as a fallacy and this early version of Marmee is portrayed as the worst of hypocrites because she is unable to practice her philosophy of altruism when she becomes the recipient of good fortune. Consequently, a belief in the providential power of good works is rejected in

⁷² See Appendix 5.

favour of upholding a vision of predestination where one submits to the righteous vengeance of a wrathful God, in order to achieve eternal salvation. The family's moral peril is explicitly underlined by the "brown girl" who claims that "we were happier in our old home at C." because "...we enjoyed our little pleasures with gratitude when we had care and sorrow ... of our own. We felt for those who suffered like us and in that pity found comfort for our own griefs". The sketch abruptly ends on this note of discord, implying that the family's unexpected windfall is to have disastrous ramifications for the spiritual welfare of its female members for the foreseeable future.

"Two Scenes in a Family" and "Wealth" present a depressing alternative to *Little Women* because, like *The Wide, Wide World*, they insist that women must be subjected to perpetual suffering if they are to obtain salvation. Within these texts, the matrilineal community is shown to be entirely incapable of self-control and unable to achieve virtue through the cultivation of sympathy, the entire premise of *Little Women*. Louisa May Alcott's iconic work embodies a conscious rejection of Bronson Alcott's theology of predestination in favour of Abigail Alcott's vision of a left-handed society, which is centred on the cultivation of sympathy and good works. Alcott expunges the figure of her father from the text because his mere presence traps the matrilineal community in a sense of guilt and unworthiness, as they perpetually enact what Brodhead terms as the pedagogical practice of "disciplinary intimacy" (70).

Furthermore, LaPlante has argued that the minor character of Mr. March, who does share in Mrs. March's moral authority following his return from the Civil War in Part II of the novel, is actually based on Abigail's father, Colonel Joseph May (MAL 228). Unlike Bronson Alcott, whose poverty followed his failed philosophical, educational and social experiments, Colonel May, like Mr. March, lost his fortune after clearing the debts of a business partner who participated in a fraudulent Ponzi Scheme without his prior knowledge

or consent (ibid.). By replacing the figure of her father with her maternal grandfather, Alcott enables her mother's moral wisdom to be reaffirmed and supported by the patriarchal figurehead of the novel. The moral message of *Little Women* also becomes affiliated with the maternal line of the Mays (tellingly, the surname "March" is also a month of the year), rather than the patriarchal line of the Alcotts (227).

When read in this context, *Little Women* can be seen as a depiction of Abigail Alcott's sympathetic vision of a matrilineal community that facilitates female redemption through championing mutually supportive and reciprocal relationships between women. The providential structure of the novel, which examines the unfolding events of the sisters' lives in the context of their evolving interpretations of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, mirrors the shared code of conduct modelled by Abigail Alcott through her collaborative journaling, the installation of a family post-office and her fostering of juvenile literary projects like the Alcott sisters' newspapers. This exchange of life-writing encouraged the development of a sympathetic shared consciousness within the matrilineal community. The network of the Alcott sisters' life-writing demonstrates how each sister applied Abigail Alcott's vision of a sympathetic shared consciousness and her theology of renunciation to their daily lives.

"We must live for each other": the maternal bond as the origin of the Alcott sisters' life-writing

Abigail Alcott is presented as the inspiration for her daughters' collaborative life-writings throughout their lives, and her presence continues to linger after her death. The Alcott sisters' journals are commonly dedicated to Abigail and assign her the role of intended reader. The sisters place the maternal bond at the centre of their life-writing projects, interpreting the circumstances of their lives through the framework of their relationships with their mother.

Abigail's invisible presence and the overarching influence of the values championed in her journal is an exemplar for the role of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in *Little Women*. Indeed, the very presence of this tract in Louisa May Alcott's text was based on her mother's pedagogical practice, for Abigail allegedly encouraged her daughters to play out *The Pilgrim's Progress* over the entire house known as "The Wayside" in Concord.⁷³ The Alcott women interpret their daily experiences within a providential framework that places the preservation of matrilineal bonds at the centre of the individual's moral choices, for the narratives of the sisters' unfolding lives are placed in the context of the matrilineal relationships of the family. Consequently, the girls' identities as authors are generated through their relationships with their mother. Examining Louisa May Alcott's participation within this literary community helps us to understand how her identity as an author was shaped by her sympathetic relationships with her mother and sisters, so that her published works became a public expression of the sympathetic and devotional values of the matrilineal community.

As with the preeminent role of Marmee in *Little Women*, Abigail Alcott is presented as the central influence on Anna Alcott's life in her journal.⁷⁴ On Anna's first wedding anniversary on 22nd May, 1861, she inserted a note from Abigail into the text, instead of including something from her husband. Anna links the event of her marriage back to her mother, implying that the maternal relationship remains the centrifugal influence in her life and that all other relationships are built out of this preeminent bond. Abigail's note informs Anna that she has been preparing her diary for Anna's perusal, and it is to be passed on through Louisa. It is clear that Abigail still understands her life as intertwined with those of her daughters, even after their marriages, and that she looks upon life-writing as a means of

⁷³ The Wayside Museum in Concord states this information as a part of its tour.

⁷⁴ *1860-1861 Diary of Anna Alcott Pratt*, AFAP, 1707-1904. MS AM 1130.14 (6), Houghton Lib., Harvard.

continuing her relationships with them. She re-establishes herself as a constant presence in her daughter's life, acknowledging the continuation of their bond, despite Anna's marriage: "Oh my darling it is hard to believe that you belong to anyone else than God or me—all happy you are happy—all try to be" (ibid.).

Abigail's description of the relationship between mother and daughter as a continuing state of "belonging" presents the maternal bond as symbiotic in nature, for the identity of each individual is formed through an identification with the other. Indeed, Abigail's journals define the maternal bond as centred on an outward-facing disposition towards the other: "I wish [my daughters] to feel that we must live for each other. My life thus far has been devoted to them and I know they will find happiness hereafter in living for their Mother" (LaPlante MHIB 106). While Abigail acknowledges the importance of Anna's marriage, she nevertheless champions the maternal bond as transcending all other relationships. The role of the mother is associated with that of the Creator, while the bond between mother and child is portrayed as emulating the human relationship with the divine parent. Throughout her life, Abigail interpreted the maternal role as a sacred duty, claiming that the mother was "the most interesting, as well as important member in the community".⁷⁵ Anna's act of pasting her mother's note into her journal suggests that she shares in this consensus and viewed her maternal bond with Abigail as preceding her conjugal union. Moreover, the continuing exchange of journals between the Alcott women indicates that they interpreted the events of their lives through the lens of their inter-personal relationships with one another. Anna's husband, John, is never recorded as either a collaborator or reader of her life-writing.

Like her mother, Anna also defines familial relationships as grounded in a philosophy of sympathetic shared consciousness. She describes her union with her husband as based

⁷⁵ *Extracts from the journals of Abigail Alcott in the hand of Louisa May Alcott, 1828-1829*. June 9th. AFAP, 1707-1904. MS AM 1130.14 (5). Houghton Lib., Harvard.

upon a mutual identification with one another, inadvertently mirroring Abigail Alcott's description of the mother-daughter relationship: "We are most blessed together, our habits, tastes and inclinations being much alike ... Each has grown to be a need to the other...."⁷⁶ The maturation of the conjugal bond is defined as a process whereby each person reconciles themselves to the personal and temperamental dispositions of the other, so that they become, in effect, indispensable to the other person. This description of the marital relationship is accompanied by an excerpt of devotional verse that stresses the importance of the individual's responsibilities to others in daily life. This excerpt is taken from Isaac Watts' poem, "Self-Inquiry": a versified examination of conscience that instructs the individual to reflect upon the impact of their actions upon others at the close of each day. Unlike the Transcendentalist model, Watts's definition of self-knowledge is relational—seeking to understand the self through others, rather than through contemplating an internal "divine calling". The ultimate end of Watts' analysis is to place the actions and behaviours of the self in relation to the individual's relationship with God and their hope for eternal salvation: "These self inquiries are the road / That leads to virtue and to God" (12-13).

Watts perceives the self as part of a wider familial community that directs its shared experiences towards the divine will of its Creator. This theological outlook necessitates a relinquishment of the individual's ego, so that they are able to identify the workings of God in the external world. Anna Alcott shares her mother's belief that human relationships should be tied to a vision of divine providence where the individual consciously relates the events of their daily lives towards the image of the Creator through a self-sacrificing dedication to the "other". Her reference to "Self-Inquiry" also evidences her continuing allegiance to the literary community of the Alcott sisters, for this poem is transcribed in an 1852 journal entry

⁷⁶ *1860-1861 Diary of Anna Alcott Pratt*. Tuesday 1st January, 1861. AFAP, 1707-1904. MS AM 1130.14 (6), Houghton Lib., Harvard.

of Anna's youngest sister, May Alcott Nieriker.⁷⁷ The fact that the sisters cited the same literary excerpt when composing reflections on the importance of family relationships indicates that they collaborated in the creation of a canon of influential aphorisms that informed their private life-writings throughout their lives.

The life-writing of the youngest of the Alcott sisters, May Alcott Nieriker, shares in the providential vision of human relationships that is promoted in the diary of Anna Alcott, while likewise figuring the mother-daughter bond as an instrument that shapes the divine trajectory of the lives of both individuals. May was a painter who, beginning in 1870, undertook a number of European excursions to cities such as Paris, London and Rome, to study art. Her letters home, largely addressed to her mother, portray Abigail Alcott as the inspiration of her artistic career and later marriage. May's art classes are narrated in minute detail and inform her mother of the continuing development of her artistic accomplishments, including the praise received from a drawing master for her "strikingly strong" work, in contrast to his distaste for the poorly executed drawings of a colleague.⁷⁸ May's letters also included small pen and ink drawings of her paintings, so that her mother might be able to better visualise her progress: "Here dear Marmee is the still life group, which I have been busy on the last week, and which everyone praises so much and in which I feel I have improved so greatly...."⁷⁹ The use of illustration in May's correspondence is a vehicle for enabling her mother to enter into her everyday experiences. For instance, she proposed creating an album of places she had visited abroad, so that her mother could feel that she was travelling with her: "I send this letter to you because it is a pictorial one, I know you like to

⁷⁷ 1840-1879. *AM.S. Diary 1 Sep 1852-25 Jul 1863*. Thursday 1st December 1852. LMAAP, 1845-1944, AM 1817 (56). Houghton Lib., Harvard. *Mirador*. Web. 4 Sept. 2018.

⁷⁸ *May Alcott Letters Sent From Abroad*. Undated. AFAP, 1724-1927. AM 2745, Series II, Houghton Lib., Harvard.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Undated, No.69.

see first where your big baby is and enjoy all the fine old things with her as far as possible....”⁸⁰

For her part, Abigail Alcott dedicated her final journal to May, and the vast majority of its entries concern her youngest daughter. Abigail was a remarkable mother for the period, in that she was determined that all of her daughters should pursue careers: “My girls shall have trades, and their Mother with the sweat of her brow shall earn an honest subsistence for herself and them” (LaPlante MHIB 88). Abigail’s use of the term “trade”, commonly associated with the working classes, displays her belief in the importance of engaging with divine providence through industrious activity. Instead of desiring her daughters to cultivate the benign “accomplishments” deemed to be the proper pastimes of young ladies, Abigail instead encourages them to shape the course of their lives through the “sweat of the brow” (ibid.). This work ethic is formulated in opposition to Bronson Alcott’s aristocratic approach to work: “[I] should like to see my husband a little more interested in this matter of support. I love his faith and quiet reliance on Divine Providence, but a little more activity and industry would place us beyond most of these disagreeable dependencies on friends....”⁸¹

While Bronson’s refusal to engage in industrious activity is couched as a “quiet reliance on Divine Providence” (ibid.), Abigail portrays him, as once more, expecting the outcome of his life to conform to his will, rather than working with the circumstances he encounters. His interpretation of providence diverges from her vision of a sympathetic shared consciousness and is more closely affiliated with a framework of fate or pre-destination. Abigail’s belief in collaborating with “divine providence” through supporting oneself by means of a “trade” guaranteed her support of May’s studies abroad. Her final journal

⁸⁰ Ibid., Chester, September 20th 1876, No.39.

⁸¹ *Diary for the years 1841-1844*. 18th January, 1844. AFAP, 1707-1904. MS Am 1130.14 (1), Houghton Lib., Harvard.

expresses a “hope” that May’s studies will “....mature and develop the best traits of her character ... and confirm still further her conviction that her talent for painting needs these farther instructions to establish her claim as an artist of no mean degree”.⁸²

Following Abigail’s death, May continued to situate her mother’s influence at the centre of her life, interpreting her lived experiences in light of her mother’s example and the providential framework of her beliefs. Shortly after her mother’s passing, May informed her family that she had experienced a psychic intuition of the event: “On the 25th I was sitting in the dressing room writing my home letter beginning ‘Dear Marmee’ I think and at night had a good cry in my room”.⁸³ Thereafter, May consciously modelled her life on Abigail’s values and example. When she married the Swiss banker, Ernest Nieriker, in the following year, she justified her happiness during her period of grief on the grounds that Abigail’s “example” would “always be [her] guide”, arguing that her own unconventional double vocation as both artist and wife was inspired by her mother’s decision to embark on an unconventional marriage with a philosopher “for love”: “she struggled with poverty and all possible difficulties and came out gloriously at last”.⁸⁴ May also made it clear that Ernest would never supersede Abigail as the most important person in her life: “No matter how dear the husband he can never be so precious as Marmee.”⁸⁵ Like Anna Alcott, she interpreted the mother-daughter relationship as a bond that superseded all other unions, including the covenant of marriage. She even went so far to create a shrine to her mother in her home in Paris, writing that “It is so beautiful, and Marmee seem[s] to have come ... in spirit so that even amid my happiness I ... weep a little weep” (ibid.).

Louisa May Alcott shared her sisters’ celebration of the maternal relationship as the

⁸² *Diary Sep 1876 - 8 Oct 1877*. April 14th, 1877. AFAP, 1820-1886, AM 1817.2 (15). Houghton Lib., Harvard.

⁸³ *May Alcott Letters Sent From Abroad*. December 11th, 1877. AFAP 1724-1927. AM 2745 Series II (58), Houghton Lib., Harvard.

⁸⁴ *Extracts from May's letters in Paris, 1878-1879*. London, March 15th, 1878. AFAP, 1724-1927. AM 1130.17.

⁸⁵ Meudon, September 1878, ibid.

preeminent bond in a woman's life, combining Anna Alcott's affiliation with their mother's vision of life-writing as the collective expression of a female community with the connections that May Alcott Nieriker draws between the identity of the woman artist and the mother-daughter relationship. An unpublished poem, "My Picture Gallery",⁸⁶ portrays the family as a private work of art that shapes the author's public identity as an artist. Louisa's depiction of the family-picture by the fireside as an inspirational shrine strikingly resonates with her sister, May's, later creation of a shrine to their mother in her artistic home in Paris:

Seeking beauty, painters journey
To the galleries of Rome;
My pilgrimage is sooner ended,
For my pictures are at home. (1-4)

The religious pilgrimage is here conflated with the artistic pilgrimage, but is circumvented back into the domestic sphere, so that the very notion of "pilgrimage" as an outward journey to a sacred place, uniting the individual with the divine, is transformed into a deeper grounding in familial bonds. As with *Little Women*, the devotional dimension is not articulated directly, but the transference of the artistic pilgrimage to the home implicitly presents the domestic sphere as a receptacle for the divine. The aspiration towards divine communion is underlined by Louisa's association of each family member with the iconographic image. The icon, as a representative symbol, is understood to be a physical vessel for the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, because it is a product of the artist's self-effacing subservience to a typological framework that is ordained from above. The iconographer follows a prescriptive practice whereby artistic materials, pre-set compositional layout, an inherited language of symbolism, and prescribed techniques for

⁸⁶ "My Picture Gallery" (erroneously titled, "My Future Gallery"), *Compositions by Louisa May Alcott and Others*, AFAP, 1747-1927. MS AM 2745. Series III B (102). Houghton Lib., Harvard.

pigmentation, gilding and finishing subscribe to a pre-prepared model that has been established by tradition as facilitating an ideal representation of the divine. The devotional nature of Louisa's picture gallery is rendered clear by her conflation of her family members with the holy and celestial: Anna Alcott is described as a "guardian angel" who bears a "halo", while Elizabeth Alcott is figured as a type of virgin-saint: "Cheerful, & sweet, and good / Bright with the pure and simple grace / Of truest maidenhood" (77-78).

Louisa's conscious rejection of the "grand tour", as can be identified in her reference to "the galleries of Rome" (1), and her privileging of an iconographic depiction of the domestic sphere, achieves two things: first, she rejects the aspiration towards idiosyncratic expression and originality of artistic production, thereby prefiguring her later affiliation with genre fiction and the instructional aims of sentimental literature; second, she positions the home at the centre of artistic and public life, thereby reversing the subjugation of the domestic sphere to the public realm. Although one might view this as a simple affirmation of the redemptive power of the "doctrine of separate spheres", the moral uplift that is facilitated through the family is not directed towards its male members, but is instead projected back into the outside world through the matrilineal community.

The connection between the domestic sphere and the outside world is underlined through the portrayal of Abigail Alcott, who is presented as a pilgrim-martyr; promoting the values of the family-unit in public life, in order to pave the way for her daughters' later "pilgrimages" (42). Abigail's participation in public life is indicated by "the shadow of sorrow" (36) upon her "worn and sad" face (35), but this sorrow is redirected towards the redemption of her daughters. The "light of her tender eyes" (38) transforms the "sorrow, pain and strife" in their lives (40), so that she is conflated with the self-sacrificial Christ. By portraying her mother's eyes as a portal to the divine, Louisa also presents Abigail as a mediator between her children and God, subtly affiliating her with the Virgin Mary, a reference that is also made by May

Alcott Nieriker in her later act of creating a shrine for her mother. Christ is not referenced directly within the poem because he is revealed by Abigail, a divine missionary to both her children and the outside world. Although the origins of this divine inspiration are situated within the home, Louisa nonetheless portrays Abigail as inspiring her daughters to undertake “the pilgrimage of life” (42)—prefiguring Marmee’s use of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in *Little Women* as a framework for the March sisters’ daily interactions with the trials and temptations of the outside world.

“My Picture Gallery’s” portrayal of the matrilineal community as an outward-facing network that infiltrates the public sphere, confirms Pateman’s claim that: “The two spheres of civil society are at once separate and inseparable. The public realm cannot be fully understood in the absence of the private sphere” (10). Within this poem, the public realm is positioned as the destination of the values that are fostered within the home, but it does elide the home as the source of the individual’s identity. Instead, Louisa presents her mother as a primal point of origin that she must return to when her earthly mission is completed:

That face so fair and dear to me,
 Though youth and bloom are past,
 Was the first that shone on me in life,
 Oh! may it be the last. (ll.43-46)

Abigail’s role as mediatrix between her children and God is constant, for she assumes her children into heaven following her death and the successful completion of their earthly pilgrimages. The poem therefore portrays the purpose of the domestic sphere as promulgating the values that are instigated by the prophetic mother into the outside world, in order to ensure the resurrection of the matrilineal community in the afterlife. In divergence with the “doctrine of separate spheres”, Abigail actively sends her children after her as types of female apostles who are to be reunited with her in the world to come.

“A Little Kingdom I Posses”: Abigail Alcott’s Theology of Renunciation in the Life-Writing of the Alcott sisters

The Alcott sisters’ juvenile newspapers, *The Portfolio* and *The Pickwick*, are collaborative attempts to form a manifesto that is centred on their mother’s theology of renunciation. The dedicatory poem of the first edition of *The Pickwick*, “To Mother”,⁸⁷ written by Louisa, presents the project as an embodiment of the sisters’ determination to sacrifice their needs for the continuing preservation of their mother and the survival of their family. Within this poem, the constraints of poverty are superseded by an “economy of love”⁸⁸ that situates the fulfilment of the individual in the context of her relationship with others. Poverty of self and feelings of unworthiness are transformed through the elevation of the weakest member of the family-unit: the fragile and aging mother who invests her children with the self-sacrificial purpose that motivates their writing:

To Mother

Accept our little offerings,
 Few and simple though they be.
 For we are poor, dear mother,
 In all save love to thee.

Yet the poverty is all unfelt.
 For the wealth our hearts can hold
 Of fadeless love is better far
 Than costly gifts of gold.

⁸⁷ A reproduction of the first edition of *The Pickwick* containing this poem can be found in the inside pocket of the back cover of *Lilliputian Newspapers* (Henderson, 1936). I am indebted to independent researcher, Susan Bailey, who has provided me with photographic images of this poem, as it appears in Henderson’s work.

⁸⁸ This phrase, coined by Fitzpatrick, refers to Alcott’s desire “...to imagine a public world in which women’s private virtues might be employed to reconstruct social and public exchange” (30). In Fitzpatrick’s words, “Alcott refigured self-sacrifice as work for love—a reward as tangible as money in this fictive order” (31).

Like wayside flowers that humbly bloom

And ask no fairer home

May we be to thee, dear mother,

Through the years that yet may come.

Thus may we cheer and brighten

The path that thou must tread,

And gently bend in sorrow's storm

To shelter thy dear head.

Abigail's understanding of composition as a tool for strengthening matrilineal bonds is presented as the source of the newspaper's creation and circulation. Aesthetic quality is dismissed from the outset: these "little offerings" are "few and simple" (1-2), but their purpose is to function as mutually supportive models for family relationships. An analogy is drawn between the matrilineal community and the order of the natural world: as the girls "bloom" into adulthood (9), so will their mother grow in fragility. The purpose of collaborative composition is to foster a symbiotic model of interchange where the natural development of the mother towards death and decay is counteracted by the growth of her daughters into adult strength. Thus, the Alcott sisters are presented as a single tree with shared roots (16), collectively sheltering Abigail from the impending storm (one might even read Abigail herself as the roots of this tree, protected by the interconnected framework of its branches).

As a literary project, the newspaper is transformative, consciously uniting the sisters in a shared moral purpose, and setting out the providential framework for their future relationships with one another and their mother. By publicly articulating the sisters' continuing dedication to the mother-daughter bond, the paper acts as a guarantee for the

fulfilment of their promise to maintain this bond, and can be seen as a type of contract. *The Pickwick* does not aspire towards originality of execution or virtuosity of craftsmanship; it is rather a collaborative expression of the matrilineal values that are fostered by Abigail, as well as an attempt to promulgate these values within the family at large. As such, it prefigures Louisa May Alcott's later attempt to transmit her mother's sympathetic vision into the public sphere through extending the network of sisterly relationships, as is set out in "My Picture Gallery" and realised in *Little Women*.

The newspapers' preoccupation with the renunciation of individualistic desires for the benefit and preservation of the wider world is especially apparent in the juvenile work of Elizabeth Alcott. Elizabeth's compositions, written under the Dickensian pseudonym of "Tracey Tupman" are allegorical fables that champion Abigail Alcott's code of conduct, usually within the context of a redemptive female figure. One such composition is the undated "Story of an Apple",⁸⁹ an allegorical narrative that emphasises the transformative potential of a theology of renunciation when it is dispersed throughout society at large. In this story, a young girl, happening upon a "fine, rosy apple" in a "beautiful garden" longs to take the "fair and beautiful" fruit home as a gift for her mother. Once she has picked the apple she meets "a little ragged boy" who asks permission to take the apple home to his "poor sick mother" who is dying in a "miserable hut". The little girl unthinkingly gives the apple to the boy and runs "laughing away (to think how generous she had been)". The apple becomes the boy's last gift to his mother, "refresh[ing]" her, before she dies. Following his mother's death, the boy plants the seeds of the apple by the door of the hut and returns with his family years later to see what has become a "beautiful tree full of ripe and rosy fruit". The story closes with the nameless protagonist gathering apples with his children, while telling them

⁸⁹ See Appendix 6.

the story of “the little sunny haired child who had given him the apple for his sick mother years ago”.

Elizabeth’s story can be read as a revision of the Eden myth, for here a blameless female protagonist saves a dependent male victim by deferring to a matrilineal code of conduct. In Elizabeth’s revised version of the fall, a female child, who is protected from temptation by her virtue of very innocence, unthinkingly plucks the apple because it is a sign of the abundance and beauty of the natural world. However, as soon as she realises that her male counterpart has a greater need of the fruit, she immediately relinquishes it in an unthinking act of self-sacrifice. The apple no longer symbolises a selfish desire for knowledge and disobedience towards God, but instead comes to embody the procreative power of nature, which is freely shared by women for the benefit of others. Strikingly, the apple’s symbolic capacity to regenerate the individual is conflated with the figure of the mother who witnesses the little girl’s generous act from an upper window and is subtly conflated with the providential God who influences the actions of humanity for the greater good. Likewise, the apple is also associated with the boy’s mother whose family is regenerated by the fruit that has been consumed by their deceased matriarch, a redeemed version of the condemned Eve. No longer conflated with the fall, the tree of knowledge is re-presented as a symbol of reciprocal self-giving that brings new life to future generations. Crucially, the male protagonist passes the story on to his descendants, so that they also will associate the apple with new life and the preservation of humankind through the self-sacrificial acts of women, rather than female disobedience and the fall.

The Eden myth was significant in the Alcott household. In an attempt to check selfish desires and bodily appetites, Bronson would re-enact the fall of mankind with his infant daughters. When Louisa was three and Anna was four years old, he placed an apple on top of the girls’ wardrobe—informing them that it belonged to him, and they were forbidden to eat

it. Upon his return, he discovered that the girls' actions had mirrored those of Adam and Eve, for Louisa had initially eaten the fruit against Anna's instruction, but had later convinced her sister to share the apple with her. As a form of punishment, Bronson left Louisa alone with a second forbidden apple the following day. To her credit, the sorely-tried toddler tried to resist temptation, picking up the object of her desire several times, and returning it, saying "No. No, father's. Me not take father's apple. Naughty! Naughty!" (Matteson 72). However, Louisa eventually lost her internal struggle, helplessly explaining to her father that, "Me could not help it! Me *must* have it!" (ibid.). Casting himself as the judgemental and patriarchal God, Bronson more closely resembled the serpent in his persistent temptation of his baby daughter. The experiment was designed to fail when directed at an infant who was of an insufficient age to understand the abstract benefit of experiencing deliberate temptation, in order to learn the value of renunciation. By contrast, Abigail encouraged her daughters to practice renunciation in everyday situations, so they might observe how it could positively impact the lives of others. On Louisa's fourth birthday party at the Temple School, the flower-strewn child, who was distributing her cake, discovered that she was a piece too short for all the guests. Letting her daughter make the decision for herself, Abigail nevertheless informed Louisa that, "It is always better to give away rather than to keep nice things. I know my Louy will not let the little friend go without" (Matteson 73). Louisa received a kiss from her mother as a consolation for her generous act.

While both events probably appear extreme to a modern sensibility, Abigail's mode of teaching was nevertheless relational, focusing on how one's actions could affect the lives of others. The young Louisa was able to understand the practical value of bringing pleasure to a friend, where she could not grasp why her father would make her stare at an object that she was forbidden to take. Bronson's mode of instruction focused on female temptation, disobedience and weakness, where Abigail's emphasised loving relationships and generosity.

Elizabeth's story follows the tradition of her mother, for the narrative is centred on a generous feminine desire to help and serve others. Elizabeth affiliates herself with her mother's vision of a redemptive and regenerative matriarchal community, rejecting her father's patriarchal of authority, which cast women as weak beings who needed to be protected from their own selfish desires.

"Story of an Apple" is noteworthy for portraying the practice of renunciation as a key facet of the female identity. However, there is a remarkable absence of any sense of deprivation, loss, or punishment because the child, by virtue of her innocence, understands her personal desires in light of the needs of the wider community. The legacy of Abigail Alcott's theology of renunciation, which can be identified here, is the foundation of the Alcott sisters' identities as writers. The Alcott sisters' literary identities are formed through their collaborative literary practice, which, in turn, shapes Louisa May Alcott's public portrayal of sisterly communities that embody a sympathetic shared consciousness between women. Abigail Alcott's transformative theology of renunciation, founded on a return to a state of pre-lapsarian innocence and the pursuit of eternal salvation, remains a constant presence in Louisa May Alcott's life-writing. Following Abigail's death in 1877, Louisa composed an elegy, "Transfiguration" (LaPlante MHIB 223-225), which portrays her mother's suffering and self-sacrificial acts as the source of her eventual union with the divine:

Bending beneath the weight of eighty years,

Spent with the noble strife

Of a victorious life,

We watched her fading heavenward, through our tears. (5-8)

The evocative image of Abigail as "Bending beneath the weight of eighty years" (5) uncannily resonates with the earlier symbol of the Alcott sisters as a bent tree, shielding their mother's aged roots from the oncoming storm, in the dedicatory poem, "To Mother". Here

again, the weight of age, decay and fragility is the foundation of the aspiration of the matrilineal community towards salvation because Abigail quite literally dissolves into celestial purification through her aged weakness, “fading heavenward” (8). This divine transfiguration is brought about through human suffering, for Abigail enters heaven “through our tears” (ibid.), a phrase that references the Christian concept of the “vale of tears”, taken from Psalm 84:6, which describes earthly life as a continual state of trial and tribulation. Viewing the world as a “vale of tears” allows the Christian to understand earthly life as a temporary state, redirecting their suffering and affliction towards an eternal union with the divine. Thus, Abigail ascends through the overwhelming weight of eighty years’ mortality, thereby facilitating the grief and tears that will also pave the way for her daughters’ eventual salvation.

Abigail’s theology of renunciation is also portrayed as the foundation of her salvific destiny in “Transfiguration”. Her “great deep heart” is metaphorically described as a “home for all” (29), subtly affiliating her charitable achievements as one of the first “poverty workers” in Boston (an early form of social work) with the domestic sphere. As with “My Picture Gallery”, Louisa defines the ethical foundations that Abigail lays within the home as possessing a transformative power to reshape the outside world, for Abigail’s vision of a just society, modelled on the values of the domestic sphere, allows her own heart to become the spiritual “home” that the poor and afflicted seek. This outward-facing position of *caritas* facilitates her return to a pre-lapsarian state of innocence, so that she is able to overcome her fallen nature through a self-sacrificial orientation towards the “other”: “Wide charity, that knew no sin, no fall” (32). This vision of a perfected state of being that is achieved through relinquishing the individual’s solipsistic desires subtly opposes Bronson Alcott’s faith in “fate” as guaranteeing the individual’s fulfilment through assimilating the conditions of the

world into the divine destiny of the self. By contrast, Louisa describes Abigail as “....wresting happiness from Fate’s hard hand” (36).

Unlike the Fruitlands experiment, which aspired towards a return to innocence through rejecting the injustices of the outside world, Abigail achieves purification through engaging with social injustice “in protest against wrong” (31), rendering herself the vessel of divine intervention. Indeed, the term “transfiguration” refers to Jesus’s revelation of his perfected body, as a means of evidencing his divinity to the Apostles on Mount Sinai, shortly before his sacrificial death. This transformed body prefigures Jesus’s appearance following the resurrection and, within Christian theology, is understood as a revelation of the appearance that all redeemed bodies will take following the Judgement Day. By describing Abigail’s acts of charity as facilitating her own transfiguration on earth, Louisa implies that Abigail achieved a communion with God through uniting herself with the self-sacrificing Christ as a vehicle for salvation. As such, Abigail is redeemer of both the family-unit *and* the wider community of the public sphere, “Mating poor daily needs / With high, heroic deeds” (34).

Louisa’s elegy can also be read as a commemoration of the collaborative literary network of the Alcott women that was initiated by her mother, for it refers to previous exchanges between herself and Abigail that occurred within the domestic sphere. Her description of Abigail’s renunciation “Of Sceptre and of crown / To win a greater kingdom, yet unseen” (43-44) is a reference to an earlier juvenile poem, “A Little Kingdom I possess”, also known as “The Kingdom of God is Within You”. This poem was one of the literary works that Abigail prized most highly in Louisa’s canon. Abigail submitted it to the Transcendentalist educator, F.B. Sanborn, for publication in a Sunday School chapbook (LaPlante MFIB 217), and later transcribed it, alongside excerpts of Keble’s *Christian Year*,

as an aid for prayer, writing “I have copied these lines, for ... I find them superior in judgment and beauty—encouraging as well as inspiring”.⁹⁰

Like “Transfiguration”, the final stanza of “A Little Kingdom I possess” describes the individual’s relinquishment of an early crown, in order to obtain salvation:

I do not ask for any crown
But that which all may win;
Nor try to conquer any world
Except the one within. (25-28)

When read in the light of her later elegy to her mother, Louisa’s juvenile poem can be interpreted as an attempt to emulate Abigail’s self-sacrificing orientation towards the heavenly kingdom, which is facilitated through a theology of renunciation. However, the earlier poem focuses on conquering the kingdom of the concupiscent self, where the later work describes the kingdom that is attained when this self is conquered. As such, Abigail’s life can be properly viewed as the exemplar for Louisa’s earthly pilgrimage. Indeed, the devotional framework of self-control that is modelled within “A Little Kingdom I Possess” also prefigures the March sisters’ attempts to conquer their “bosom enemies” at their mother’s behest in *Little Women*.

“Transfiguration” is a microcosm of the values that can be identified throughout the network of life-writing that is authored by the Alcott women. It celebrates Abigail Alcott’s self-effacing dedication to the needs of others, affirming her vision of providence as shaped through the individual’s commitment to serving the wider community. Bronson Alcott’s understanding of fate as compelling the circumstances of the individual’s daily life to conform to their personal desires is rejected in favour of a vision of redemption that is

⁹⁰ *An MS copy of “My Kingdom” with a commentary upon it with “Extracts from Keble”: an MS commentary of a poem*, AFAP, 1820-1886. MS AM 1817.2 (17). Houghton lib., Harvard.

achieved through cultivating a shared consciousness with the weakest members of society. The literary network of the matrilineal community is also alluded to through referencing previous exchanges between Louisa and her mother, thereby figuring Abigail as the exemplary model for her daughters' literary and spiritual identities, while presenting the mother-daughter bond as at the heart of the individual's conception of self. The elegy also shares in Abigail's understanding of the domestic sphere as the site for wider social reform, realising her vision of a left-handed society that grows out of the female-orientated community of the home.

Written after Abigail Alcott's death, "Transfiguration" evidences her continuing influence on Louisa May Alcott's writing, something that was eventually articulated in her iconic public work, *Little Women*. This novel not only pays tribute to Abigail, but also celebrates the shared vision of the matrilineal community that Abigail initiated. The voices of Meg, Beth and Amy March can be identified in the private works of Anna and Elizabeth Alcott, and May Alcott Nieriker respectively. The Alcott sisters shared in Louisa May Alcott's conception of the mother-daughter bond as preceding all other familial relationships, as well as laying the foundation for their interactions with the outside world and the development of their identities as artists. Anna Alcott portrays this bond as prefiguring the model of sympathetic identification she will establish within her own family. The narrative record of her life that is set out in her journals is composed with her mother in mind, and Abigail Alcott is positioned as the point of moral authority upon which Anna's relationship with her husband rests. Abigail is not merely the source of Anna's moral values; she is a constant presence who determines Anna's interactions with the newly-extended family-unit that is an offshoot of the matrilineal community. Abigail can therefore be understood as a guiding force of providence that shapes the trajectory of her daughter's life.

Abigail is portrayed as the matriarchal intercessor who assists her daughters in the development of their vocations as artists in the correspondence of May Alcott Nieriker. May presents her artistic identity as the offspring of her relationship with her mother, deifying Abigail within the household as a divine parent who continues to guide her after her death, shaping both her relationship with her husband and her artistic achievements. Elizabeth Alcott foregrounds the divine contexts of her mother's theology of renunciation, replacing the misogynistic overtones of the Eden myth with her mother's emphasis on the redemptive potential of matrilineal relationships, which possess the power to transform the experiences of both men and women through prioritising the needs of the "other" over those of the self.

Louisa May Alcott takes up this deification of her mother by figuring her as channel of redemption who instigates her daughters' missions within the public sphere. In her early poem, "My Picture Gallery", Louisa portrays Abigail's self-sacrificial dedication to her daughters as infusing their daily lives, enabling them to propagate their mother's values to the outside world. Despite the outward-facing nature of this matrilineal mission, the domestic sphere is also portrayed as the ultimate point-of-return and prototype for the heavenly relationships that the sisters must re-orientate themselves towards at the end of their earthly "pilgrimages". Louisa May Alcott's identity as an author is inextricably linked to the theology of renunciation that was espoused by her mother, and her canonical works should be reassessed in light of the life-writing that was produced by the matrilineal community her mother instigated. The final stanza of "Transfiguration" sums up the spiritual aims of this literary community, which are closely aligned with the vision of the March women in *Little Women*:

Teach us how to seek the highest goal,

To earn the true success,

To live, to love, to bless,

And make death proud to take a royal soul. (45-48)

Chapter Five

“For every human creature may lay claim to strength”:

Rossetti’s elevation of the left hand

Christina Rossetti’s devotional reading diary, *Time Flies* (1885), establishes the left-handed society as mirroring the right. In fact, she presents the left and right hands as two sides of the same coin, acknowledging that the right hand commonly predominates, but the left at times usurps this dominant role. In Rossetti’s lexicon, “left hand” is part of a wider vocabulary for alternative and “other”. She does not refute that to be “other” is, in some sense, to be marginalised, but to be marginalised in the public sphere is to assume a spiritually elevated status in the world to come. For Rossetti, the individual should aspire to be left-handed, “other”, “little” and “weak”. In short, one should strive for the diminutive position commonly assigned to the female:

In common parlance Strong and Weak are merely relative terms: thus the ‘strong’ of one sentence will be the ‘weak’ of another.

We behold the strong appointed to help the weak:

Angels who ‘excel in strength,’ men. And equally the weak the strong: woman ‘the weaker vessel’, man.

This, though it should not inflate any, may fairly buoy us all up. For every human creature may lay claim to strength, or else to weakness: in either case to helpfulness. ‘We that are strong,’ writes St. Paul, proceeding to state a duty of the strong.

We who are weak may study the resources of the weak. (57)

By presenting “Strong and Weak” (equivalent terms for “right-handed” and “left-handed”) as interchangeable, Rossetti implies that society is, strictly speaking, ambidextrous. The opposing terms are inter-dependent, suggesting that it is only through dichotomy and opposition that identity is achieved. As such, the domestic sphere might properly be viewed as the underbelly of the public realm in what is an upside-down hierarchy.

More strictly speaking, Rossetti can be understood as eroding the divisions between public and private, masculine and feminine, right and left, strong and weak. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon has argued that the notion that people form identities in the private sphere and emerge into the public realm as fully-fledged individuals is a fallacy (6). She claims that the individual within the public sphere embodies a desire to construct a performed “subjectivity” that points backwards toward the private sphere, a process that she terms as “sociality” (7). For Maddock Dillon, print culture is a key site of “sociality” because it is a space where the public and private meet and commingle.

As a female theologian who uses her “relative” status as the justification for her position of moral authority, Rossetti herself inhabits this space of “sociality”. Through skilful manipulation of syntax, she reminds the reader that the “strong” depend upon the weak for their existence, and this is even true of syntax itself: “the ‘strong’ of one sentence will be the ‘weak’ of another”. To illustrate her point, Rossetti reverses the subject and object in two sentences of the following paragraph: “We behold the strong appointed to help the weak ... And equally the weak the strong”. By contracting the second sentence, Rossetti creates a diverging literal meaning: “the weak *are* the strong”. One is reminded of St Paul’s proclamation that in Christ there is no male or female (Galatians 3:28) and indeed, in the subsequent passage Rossetti goes on to identify the weak with Christ: “Of our Divine Lord a prophetic psalm ... saith: ‘I am feeble and sore smitten’” (ibid.). Thus, Rossetti is not daunted by St Paul’s claim to masculine strength, for she intends to study the “resources” of her

feminine “weak[ness]”, a weakness that is a corresponding facet of that strength, as well as an integral characteristic of the incarnate (male) God.

The radical connotations of this “ambidextrous” theology have been noted most recently by Palazzo in her 2002 landmark work, *Christina Rossetti’s Feminist Theology*. Palazzo claims that Rossetti rejects the androcentric conception of God as exclusionary and inhibiting to women, prefiguring a “post-Christian” feminist position as promulgated by such contemporary theologians as Mary Daly who advocates rejecting the patriarchal hierarchy of the Christian Church in favour of an inward-facing sisterly community that positions “male sexism” as “original sin” (xi). Palazzo aptly foregrounds Rossetti’s rejection of female spiritual inferiority, but ignores the reality that, as Roe has claimed, “...[Rossetti’s] theories about women, however forward-thinking they may seem, are always subordinate to and answerable to God’s higher authority” (CRFI 107).

Rossetti’s rejection of female suffrage in her correspondence with the feminist poet, Augusta Webster, has been discussed by a number of critics, including Roe (114) and Palazzo (77),⁹¹ but it is worth quoting again here:

....the Bible was based upon an understood unalterable
distinction between men and women ... The fact of the
Priesthood being exclusively man’s leaves me in no doubt that
the highest functions in this world are not open to both sexes:
and if not all, then a selection must be made and a line drawn
somewhere (*Letters* 2 158).

⁹¹ Palazzo acknowledges Rossetti’s anti-suffrage letter, but claims that the poet’s spiritual elevation of women shows that she ultimately “accepted women’s right to determine the fate of a nation” (77). This is certainly true from a spiritual and theological perspective, but it does not change the fact that Rossetti publicly opposed women’s suffrage. Arseneau acknowledges the paradox inherent in Rossetti’s perspective and argues that it stems from the fact that her “religious convictions are the basis of her political position” (36).

The fact that the weak are of equal spiritual value to the strong, and the right-hand depends upon the left for its existence, does not eradicate the existence of the “weak” or “left-handed”; nor does it mean that one is the same as the other, however mutually intertwined they might be. Palazzo’s conflation of Rossetti with such iconoclastic figures as Florence Nightingale and J. Ellice Hopkins, who publicly expressed faith in the advent of a female messiah, as well as a female-centred Christianity (xiv), is at variance with Rossetti’s explicit affirmation of the patriarchal structure of the Tractarian Movement and its faith in an apostolic male priesthood.

Nevertheless, Palazzo’s work is invaluable for rehabilitating the female heritage of Rossetti’s theological work as rooted in “women’s experience” where “spiritual lessons” are formed through “life within a community” (107). Palazzo is correct in her claim that Rossetti exposes the source of masculine “strength” as originating in the left-handed realm of the domestic sphere. It is important to note that while Rossetti claims that “the highest functions of this world are not open to both sexes”, the underlying implication of this statement is that this hierarchy will be reversed in the world to come. Indeed, Rossetti seems to take the words of Christ’s proverb to heart, “So the last shall be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16), for she claims that the very subordinate position of women mirrors the position of Christ: “In many points the feminine lot copies very closely the voluntarily assumed position of our Lord and Pattern. Women must obey: and Christ learned obedience” (*Seek and Find* 1879 30). Rossetti inverts the value that society places on power and authority by gesturing towards the Christian belief that those who serve are invested with a higher calling and will assume an elevated status in heaven.

Arseneau’s germinal monograph, *Recovering Christina Rossetti: Female Community and Incarnational Poetics*, is foundational to my own work in its rehabilitation of the often-overlooked influence of Rossetti’s mother, Frances, and sister, Maria. Arseneau highlights

the critical “....tendency to consign to the margins the very conceptual framework and lived perspective most intimate to Rossetti herself”: that of the “familial, literary, intellectual, and religious community” of the Rossetti women (1). Her work represents a significant watershed in its recuperation of the commonplace album of Frances Rossetti, housed at the University of British Columbia Rare Books and Special Collections, which contains a range of extracts from a long line of female poets, demonstrating Frances’s self-conscious construction of a female literary tradition integral to the development of Rossetti’s poetic voice (50). Arseneau likewise recovers the Rossetti siblings’ juvenile newspaper, *Hodge-Podge*, tantalisingly claiming that, like Abigail Alcott, Frances was the sole inspiration for her children’s literary projects (ibid.).

It is difficult to ascertain the extent of Frances’s influence on Christina Rossetti’s development of a theology of renunciation without access to the Angeli-Dennis Collection of the University of British Columbia,⁹² but Arseneau’s rehabilitation of Frances’s presence in the Rossetti siblings’ early life-writing and juvenilia has assisted me in establishing her centrality as a figure of theological authority in Christina Rossetti’s devotional verse. In particular, I examine the Valentine’s Day verses, written for Frances as recipient and published posthumously,⁹³ as well as the dedicatory sonnet to Rossetti’s 1881 collection, *Pageant and Other Poems*. These verses foreground the relationship between mother and daughter, emphasising their shared aim of obtaining Christian salvation through mutual

⁹² Access to the Angeli-Dennis Collection has not been forthcoming during my doctoral programme, due to extenuating medical and financial circumstances. Arseneau gestures to the significance of Frances’s commonplace album in Christina Rossetti’s devotional verse, but does not discuss the text in depth, indicating that further research at the University of British Columbia is germane to recovering Christina Rossetti’s matrilineal heritage to its full extent. As I continue to progress this project through developing a book proposal, I will pursue further funding opportunities to facilitate access to this collection by applying for a Killam Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at the University of British Columbia, as well as a British Association of Victorianists’ Research Award. My pending application for a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellowship also necessitates a summer’s residency at the University of British Columbia and the provisional costings for this research activity have been fully incorporated into my budget and research proposal.

⁹³ These poems are untitled, but I follow Catherine Maxwell’s precedent in referring to them as the “Valentine’s Day verses”.

submission to God's will. Arseneau's analysis of these poems is brief (51; 182-4) and they have received scant attention in critical studies of Christina Rossetti,⁹⁴ but within these verses I find grounds to extend her claim that: "Rossetti's most assertive, most feminist, most political, and most egalitarian statements are formulated not in resistance to her religion, but rather are firmly grounded in it" (3). I do not dispute this contention, but take it a step further to argue that Rossetti's most feminist and egalitarian statements are not only "grounded" in her religious practice, but also expose the innovative, polemical and feminist potential of this practice as rooted in sacred history, thereby challenging Palazzo's claim that Rossetti's feminism must, by nature, reject the foundations of patristic theology.

I diverge from Arseneau's emphasis on Rossetti's Tractarian poetics as illuminating her faith in the typological symbolism of the incarnation as the proper way for addressing the fallen world, by instead focusing on the poet's portrayal of the feminist potential of the Trinity as an embodiment of gender fluidity. The theologian Sarah Coakley has challenged Mary Daly's claim that the Doctrine of the Trinity is a type of "all-male club" by noting that the concept of three persons united in one Godhead is founded on the feminine principle of reciprocity (111). Coakley resists Cartesian conceptions of the Trinity that are grounded on "modern forms of individualism" (115) by referring to the work of fourth-century church father, St Gregory of Nyssa, and his emphasis on a "communion" between persons as counteracting the multiplicity of origins and networks that are contained within the human race (120). This "communion" of persons stresses a "fluidity in their boundaries" (121) that finds its apotheosis in "gender fluidity" because the Trinity, as a divine communion, seeks assimilation of the entire human race, including both genders, into itself (127). Thus, "...the

⁹⁴ Neither Addison's "Christina Rossetti Studies, 1974-1991: A Checklist and Synthesis" (1995), nor Weltman's *Oxford Bibliographies* entry, "Christina Rossetti" (2011), contain any record of a journal article on the Valentine's Verses. They are also accorded limited critical attention in the most recent critical studies on Rossetti's devotional verse, namely those of D'Amico (1999), Palazzo (2002), Arseneau (2004), Roe (2006) and Ludlow (2014).

‘persons’ of the Trinity are always being reconfigured and reconstructed as the soul advances to more dizzying intimacy with the divine” (129), just as the “right hand” and the “left hand” of the public and private spheres are continually realigned as they encounter one another within liminal spaces of “sociality”.

Rossetti’s private devotional verse stands out because it portrays the communion of the matrilineal community as foreshadowing the divine configuration of the Trinity. Frances Rossetti is conflated with the person of the Father, from whom, in Gregory’s words “...the Son is begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds” (qtd. in Coakley 120). Rossetti therefore shares in Alcott’s conception of the maternal bond as prefiguring all other human relationships, as well as the union between the individual and the divine. Her “Trinitarian poetics” of communion mirrors the shared consciousness fostered throughout the life-writing of the Alcott women. The devotional poems that Rossetti circulates through the matrilineal community mirror the Trinitarian communion between the three Rossetti women. Within these poems, the “persons” of the female Rossetti’s are presented as distinct, but are unified through poetic form itself. The circulation of these poems facilitates the mystical and spiritual communion of the female Rossettis, as they converge in the space of the text, united in their common prayer and devotional practice.

Unlike the Alcott women’s shared consciousness, what I term as Rossetti’s “Trinitarian poetics” is restricted to the matrilineal community and does not embody the same outward-facing disposition as the Alcott women’s life-writing. For Rossetti, salvation can only be attained through recognising the mother’s spiritual authority as mediatrix towards the divine. Those who fail to recognise her spiritual authority, including the Rossetti men, are unable to enter into the same divine communion with the Trinity. Rossetti’s theology of renunciation therefore departs from that of the Alcott women because it is directed to the world to come: she does not view the matrilineal community as having the same power to

affect salvation and social change. Salvation is predicated on an act of faith and the recognition of the mother's spiritual authority. Without this act of faith, salvation is not forthcoming. Thus, renunciation is bearing with a fallen world as a shadow of the kingdom of heaven, it is not seeking to transform that world into a type of that kingdom on earth.

My analysis of the influence of Maria Rossetti, an Anglican nun, focuses on her theological work, *The Rivulets: A Dream not all a Dream* (1846). I am indebted to Arseneau for alerting me to the presence of this text, but where Arseneau tracks its influence on Rossetti's references to Dante and Bunyan, I examine its presence in her theological writing, especially her avocation of a practice of lived religion. As Palazzo has claimed, Rossetti's theology offers the possibility "for spiritual development outside the Church and a revaluation of women's daily activities" (107). I identify these activities with her shared life with Frances and Maria, scrutinising her discourse of "lived religion" through the lens of her intertextual references to the theological writing and wisdom of Maria. Exposing Maria's influence on Christina's work allows us to connect Christina's references to what Roe refers to as "a matrilineal religious history" of scripture (CRFI 127) with the immediate matrilineal community of the Rossetti women. Thus, Christina's theological work bridges the link between what Gradert defines as "folk theology" (2), which embeds the individual within an overarching teleology of sacred history, and the private "matrilineal theology" that was practised within the enclosed community of the Rossetti women.

"Companion, Friend, & Mother mine": Rossetti's Trinitarian poetics as accessed through the figure of her mother

In 1876, Christina started composing yearly Valentine's Day verses for her mother, which lasted until Frances's death ten years later. The project was inspired by the then seventy-five

year old Frances's casual comment that she had never received a Valentine. Boldly taking on the role of her mother's Valentine, Christina composed a set of poems that emphasised the priority of the mother-daughter relationship as exceeding all others in its capacity for love. During the previous year, Christina had written to Caroline Jenner that she believed that the "maternal type"—the woman who plays a maternal role, regardless of whether she is actually a biological mother—was the most sacred of human persons, for the bond between mother and child mirrors the relationship between the individual and God: "...the Maternal Type is to me one of the dear and beautiful things which on earth help towards realising that Archetype which is beyond all conception..." (*Letters* 2 40). Like Abigail Alcott, Christina understood the child as deriving from its mother and spiritually belonging to her in a union that can even supersede marriage in importance. Just as Abigail Alcott exchanged letters with her daughter Anna on their shared wedding anniversary, affirming the enduring nature of their relationship, so Christina Rossetti portrays her relationship with her mother as the highest bond of love to be celebrated on Valentine's Day.

It is important to note that Christina's scepticism regarding female suffrage made an important exception for mothers: "...I take exceptions at the exclusion of married women from the suffrage, for who so apt as mothers ... to protect the interests of themselves and their offspring?" (*Letters* 2 158). If we recall that Rossetti rejects the notion of universal suffrage because the divinely ordained apostolic priesthood is supposedly reserved for men only, the implication would seem to be that the mother fulfils a comparable role. Indeed, in her 1879 theological work, *Seek and Find*, Rossetti presents motherhood as the apex of all human relationships: "And well may [woman] glory, in as much as one of the tenderest of divine promises takes ... the feminine form: 'As one whom the mother comforteth, so will I comfort you'" (31). In Rossetti's conception, despite the fact the incarnate second person of the Holy Trinity appears as male and likewise refers to the Father from whom he is begotten

with the masculine pronoun, the most sacred aspects of the relationship between the Trinity and humankind mirror the role of the mother.

While Daly claims that such assertions are only viable from a “post-Christian” perspective, the discourse of the Trinitarian God as motherlike in its relation to humankind is longstanding. Ludlow claims that Rossetti’s concept of “divine maternity” is indebted to a “patristic conception of personhood” that likened the relationship between God and humankind to that of a “nursing mother” and its offspring (174). Similarly, within the tradition of female theology, the fourteenth-century English anchoress and mystic, Julian of Norwich, claimed that: “Jhesu Crist, that doth good against evil, is oure very moder: we have oure being of him, where the ground of moderhed beginneth, with alle the swete keeping of love that endlessly floweth. As verily as God is oure fader, as verily is God oure moder” (309). Julian’s location of “divine maternity” in the childlike status of the human person bears a striking affinity to Abigail Alcott’s contention that the child primarily “belongs” to God and its Mother. Marsh has also observed the links between Rossetti’s conception of “divine maternity” and the work of Julian of Norwich (CR 468), claiming that Rossetti “...held a firm Protestant belief in the Primacy of the Word ... and its direct relation to the pious individual. In this tradition, each woman could be her own theologian” and, as a female theologian, Rossetti consciously wrote “...within a tradition that stretched back beyond the Reformation to mystical writers such as ... Julian of Norwich” (452). It is unlikely that any Victorian female theologian would be unaware of Julian as predecessor, especially when one considers the fact that she was also the first known woman to author a book in English.

If the right hand and the left hand are in perpetual flux, a notable moment of left-handed dominance occurs when the mother achieves a closer emulation of God than any other person. Womanhood, in its totality, may be subordinate to manhood, but mothers are prophetic leaders that are empowered to assume positions of authority at the apex of

humanity. As such, it is not surprising that Rossetti's rejection of universal suffrage contains a paradoxical advocacy for female MPs: "...if female rights are ... to be overborne for lack of female voting influence ... I feel disposed to shoot ahead of my instructresses, and ... assert that female *M.P.*'s are only right and reasonable" (*Letters* 2 158). The female MP can be looked upon as a type of mother, who protects the rights of her (female) children when they are threatened with abuse. The mother therefore occupies a key space of "sociality" because she can transgress into the public sphere and assume a role of authority: she is not merely confined to the home, and does not blindly reinforce the spiritually redemptive "relative" status of women upheld by the "doctrine of separate spheres". Citing the work of Robert M. Kachur, Ludlow also claims that Rossetti extends the morally instructive role of women within the home into the "household of God itself", namely the Church (174).

Within the Valentine's Day verses, Christina portrays the figure of the mother as sharing the Church's role as a vehicle of access towards the divine. Frances Rossetti is presented as a mediatrix who leads her daughter towards salvation in much the same way as Louisa May Alcott portrays Abigail Alcott's spiritual example as enabling the future redemption of her daughters in "Transfiguration". Christina's verses to her mother emphasise a reciprocal model of self-giving that binds each individual closer to God, mirroring the project of the Alcott family's life-writing as a means of strengthening reciprocal matrilineal bonds through contemplating the complementarity between the matrilineal relationship and the individual's relationship with the deity.

The Valentine's Day verses emphasise Frances and Christina's shared interpretation of reality and existential experience as deriving from their common religious beliefs and practices. As an archetype for heavenly salvation, Frances is figured as an exemplar for her daughter's Christian experience. The mother and daughter's shared interpretation of the world also creates a union that transcends all other relationships, directly linking the maternal

bond with the relationship between the individual and the Creator. For instance, in the poem composed for 1878 (Crump 2001 847), Christina imagines her relationship with her mother as a vehicle to heaven that will be continued into the afterlife: “Companion, Friend, & Mother mine / ... / With whom I hope to stand & sing / Where angels form the outer ring” (2-5).

The image of the ring, or circle, is a common symbol of the Trinity in Christian typology—denoting both the immortality of God, and the united nature of the three distinct persons who are contained within the Trinity. In using such a symbol to describe the relationship between mother and daughter in heaven, which is also witnessed by the angels, Christina emphasises the maternal relationship as uniting both poet and recipient with the Trinity. Significantly, the Trinity is defined primarily by means of the relationships between the three persons, rather than through gender identification. It is therefore not surprising that the relatedness of mother and daughter is the vehicle towards assimilation with the Godhead. In the words of St Augustine, “He is not called Father with reference to himself but only in relation to the Son; seen by himself he is simply God” (qtd in Ratzinger 182). If this is the case, the relationship between mother and daughter is theologically quite literally paradigmatic to that of the first and second persons of the Trinity. Ratzinger has claimed that the Trinitarian “Person”: “...is the pure relation of being related, nothing else. Relationship is not something extra added to the person, as it is with us, it only exists at all as relatedness” (ibid.). Unlike the human identity, which is shaped by, but not subject to, its relationships with others, the three persons of the Trinity are formed by means of their relationships to one another. Thus, in their relatedness, mother and daughter transcend their limited human status to become fully assimilated into both the Trinity and the communion of saints. Although this conception is grounded in a patristic theology, it is surprisingly close to the “matrilineal

theology” that was initiated by Abigail Alcott, for she also viewed female relationships as a vehicles towards divine communion.

Furthermore, in casting her mother in three roles, “Companion, Friend and Mother” (2), Christina implies an affinity between her mother and the Trinity, frequently described in similar terms, with the Father figured as spiritual parent; the incarnate Son as “friend” or “brother” to humanity; and the Holy Spirit as the “companion” or “comforter” of humankind. Once again, the “maternal type” is figured as the highest of human roles that mirrors the divine nature of the deity. If the Father is only male insofar as he relates to the Son, it is not surprising that Frances is able to emulate the Father by means of her relationship to her daughter, and that the rest of the Trinity thereby assumes a female gendered identification. Within this particular Valentine, Christina also portrays her mother, the maternal type, as bringing her closer to salvation, for Frances is described as the figure “Round whom my fears & love entwine” (3). By portraying Frances as the subject of her fears and love in respect of her hopes for achieving eternal life, Christina implies that Frances is the vehicle for her own salvation.

The form of the poem also positions Frances as the centre-point upon which is hinged the poet’s religious faith, and to whom she must return in the afterlife. The poem is structured in groups of three lines that are connected by the poet’s use of continuous enjambment, thereby creating a form that resembles a returning circle made up of many interconnecting parts. Rossetti makes use of the indented line to give a sense of a whole within a whole, subtly portraying the relationship with the mother as a microcosm of the heavenly communion:

Blessed Dear & heart's Delight,

Companion, Friend, & Mother mine

Round whom my fears & love entwine,—

With whom I hope to stand & sing

Where angels form the outer ring

Round singing Saints, who clad in white

Know no more of day or night.... (1-7)

The poem is ostensibly structured around a train of associations that are inspired by the mother, but these are inextricably linked with the mother's role as mediatrix. Thus, while each group of three lines is centred on a particular theme, these themes converge into a continuously-evolving whole. The first three lines address the figure of Frances, while the proceeding three look towards the celestial realm. However, Frances has already been projected into the celestial realm within the poet's imagination, so the two groups must run into one another. The second group is indented because the vision of heaven is initially contained within Frances, but this contraction abruptly expands into a generalised vision of the afterlife. The afterlife is not merely a realm where Christina and Frances "hope to stand & sing": it is also the residence of the heavenly communion. From here the scansion of the poem accelerates, as the number of syllables is contracted and the description of heaven becomes more rapid and insistent. Thus, the seventh line that begins the second half of the poem is a continuation of the heavenly vision that has been instigated by the sixth.

This model of poetic form is of Rossetti's own creation and can be understood as emulating the tripartite nature of the Trinitarian God whose identity is in perpetual transition as each person reconfigures themselves towards the other two, as well as humanity at large.

The three-line divisions mutate into one another in an act of perpetual transfiguration. It cannot be said that one three-line group begets another, for each threefold division is self-contained and holds a separate meaning while yet remaining inextricably intertwined with the preceding triplet. This vision of poetic form is, by nature, incomplete and unfinished, perpetually engaged in the act of creation. If we view Frances as the origin of this formalistic fluidity, it can be argued that the poem itself embodies a female conception of the creative act. The form of the poem is never complete; nor does it attempt to emulate Frances's image as the divine parent. Instead it grows out of Frances, and consistently moderates and adapts itself to the beings and circumstances it encounters.

Gilbert & Gubar have claimed that "...the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator ... whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis" (6). As such, the text must always reach a state of completion because it "belongs" to the male author and is created in his image. However, in the case of a Valentine composed by a female poet for her mother, the poem becomes a medium of divine communication between the two women. Just as the identity of the Trinitarian person is conceived by means of its relation to the other, so the poetic form reshapes itself to the relational links between mother, daughter and heavenly communion. The text is no longer a product of the act of procreation; it is a continually mutating space of feminine conception.

Rossetti's Trinitarian poetics redefine poetic form through the model of the maternal relationship, so that the form of the poem mirrors the mother's role as a continually evolving medium of communion between poet and divine. Frances is an earthly reflection of the Trinitarian Father, enabling her daughter to proceed through her towards heavenly salvation. If Frances reflects the Father, then Rossetti herself is an incarnate Daughter whose being grows out of her maternal creator. The poetic form imitates the third person of the genderless Holy Spirit, who assimilates the preceding two persons into a unification with the

communion of saints. The poem is based upon a model of reciprocity where form comes into being by virtue of the eternal interchange between mother and daughter as they aspire upwards towards unification with God. It is an act of relationship whose existence depends upon the maternal bond. Since the maternal bond is to be continued in heaven, it is eternal and takes on a new significance with each phase of the relationship between mother and daughter. If the current phase of that relationship remains a mystery to us as readers, it is no more so than the concept of the Trinity. We are interlopers in the act of communion that these poems facilitate. As posthumously published verses, they are not intended for our eyes. Our status mirrors that of the Rossetti men, for we have access of readership, but cannot enter into the communion laid before us. These poems were composed for an exclusive matrilineal community as an articulation of that community's shared faith in the redemption of the individual as attained only through the divine communion between mother and daughter.

“Bid me to thy tryst above”: The inaccessible realm of mother and daughter

The reciprocal nature of these verses, focused on the shared goal of eternal salvation modelled by mother for daughter, as well as the private lexicon shared between them, upholds the exclusivity of matrilineal relations within the Rossetti family. The religious beliefs of the Rossetti family were divided along the lines of gender, forming two distinct communities. Frances, who had previously been an Evangelical, converted to Tractarianism in 1843 and was joined by her two daughters. By contrast, William Michael Rossetti followed in his father's footsteps by rejecting Christianity and all forms of organised religion at the age of fourteen. Dante Gabriel Rossetti also abstained from joining his mother and sisters at Christ Church, although his beliefs were more agnostic in nature. As the Rossetti men all rejected the symbolic Christian framework on which the verses are predicated, the poems

create a conceptual linguistic world shared only by Christina and Frances. As occasional poems not intended for publication, but rather for exchange within the Rossetti household, the verses quite deliberately uphold the prioritisation of matrilineal relations, as well as the theological insights of the Rossetti women. The Rossetti men are excluded from the sequence's self-contained world, despite the fact they would have had access of readership. This is further emphasised by the fact that these are Valentine's verses where the poet actively takes over the role of her deceased father. Written for a family event, the poems boldly emphasise the exclusive nature of the mother-daughter relationship as a unique bond that will be continued into eternity, which none of the Rossetti men can relate to. This exclusivity of perspective can be compared to the shared consciousness fostered within the network of life-writing authored by the Alcott women, which focused on their shared Christian and family values, from which Bronson Alcott was frequently excluded, both implicitly and explicitly.

The shared outlook between mother and daughter, each of whom adheres to the same eschatological version of the universe, is heightened by the abrupt transition of tone between the uncertain status of Rossetti's future as one who "hopes" to sing with the angels, to the exact location of the place where her mother will dwell: "Where Angels form the outer ring" (5). The transition that both mother and daughter hope to achieve in heaven is portrayed in absolute terms, for Christina actively disrupts the metre of the poem at the moment of imagined transformation. She describes the saints, with whom she and her mother will join in communion, as those who "Know no more of day or night" (6). The monosyllabism of this line obscures the previously consistent iambic pentameter of the poem with the ghost of a continuous spondee—giving the aural effect of a relentless continuing stress that accumulates towards a dramatic climax. This abrupt transition of metre insists upon the tangible nature of the described transformation as a reality that both poet and recipient witness and aspire

toward. The poem therefore relies upon a shared lexicon between poet and recipient, which encourages a mutual interpretation centred on mother and daughter's shared hope for future redemption, founded on a common set of religious beliefs.

Like Louisa May Alcott's imagined vision of her mother's spiritual transfiguration, Christina also visualises the transfiguration of her mother in heaven as a certainty that she herself must emulate: "Bid me to that tryst above, / Bless your valentine" (11-12). Through inverting the iambic foot, so that it begins with the stressed syllable, Christina transforms her request into a demand, highlighting her determination to join her mother in heaven. Moreover, through entreating her mother, as the poem's recipient, to bless her, Christina invests her with divine authority in the present moment, before her future spiritual transformation. She therefore implies that her relationship with her mother is already directing her towards salvation.

Christina's revelation of the world to come allows her to enter a space where the conditions of human consciousness are radically altered and external stimuli is experienced only as an embodiment of divine immortality. The saints are described as dwelling in a place where they "...know no more...." of "...death or any changeful thing, / Or anything that is not love / Human love & love divine" (7; 10-12). The very conditions of the person's existence are turned upside down, so that the experience of death, upon which the human condition is predicated, is eradicated. Human and divine love are also fused into a single entity, so divine love is no longer reached by means of the imagination or the conscious outpouring of prayer. The maternal bond therefore enables Rossetti to reconfigure her experience of reality, so that her aspiration towards heavenly redemption does not pose an existential challenge. It is through sharing this redemptive theological framework with her mother that Rossetti is able to realise her spiritual vision. Mirroring the Alcott women,

Rossetti understands the maternal bond as altering the way the individual experiences the world, facilitating their eventual salvation.

The maternal bond also enables the poet to pre-empt the spiritual communion she will experience in the afterlife. Frances, as mediatrix, enables a direct line of communication to heaven from the material world through investing her daughter with the vision that motivates her pursuit of eternal salvation. The exclusion of the Rossetti men from this divine vision subtly asserts the primacy of Rossetti's Trinitarian poetics over the self-contained world of individualised poetic inspiration. Within the conception of the Valentine's Day verses, poetic inspiration is outward-facing, shaped and moulded by poet and recipient, and directed towards a reconceived divine communion in heaven. The poet's human experience is determined by a perpetual transformation of identity that reconfigures itself as it encounters the mother who propels the poet upwards towards further communion with both God and the saints. To place oneself outside of this transformative community is to inhibit oneself by restricting the capacity to aspire upward to anything beyond the material world. Poetry is conceived as a reciprocal project built of the maternal bond and utilised with the purpose of achieving divine revelation, not a vehicle for self-expression. The poetic philosophy of the sequence resists the Pre-Raphaelite conception of art as an expression of the individual's unique insights and their potential to achieve divine communion with the other independent of any religious framework. Instead, the reciprocal nature of the mother-daughter relationship is upheld as enabling a transfigured understanding of human identity and divine inspiration. Just as the three persons of the Trinity are defined by virtue of their relationships with one another, so is the relationship between mother and daughter determined by the communion facilitated through their shared religious beliefs.

“To my first Love, My Mother on whose knee / I learnt love-lore”: Replacing male authority with the maternal bond

Rossetti publicly voices her resistance to an individualised philosophy of poetic expression in favour of the communal vision of her mother in the dedicatory sonnet to Frances Rossetti that commences her 1881 collection of verse, *A Pageant and Other Poems*. This untitled poem (Crump 2001 267) discusses the history, thematics and purpose of sonnet writing, with explicit reference to the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, while setting up an alternative trajectory of purpose allied with the matrilineal tradition inherited from Frances. Expanding on the underlying theme of love between mother and daughter as a point of continuity that runs across all human experience, the poem begins: “Sonnet are full of love, and this my tome / Has many sonnets: so here now shall be / One sonnet more, a love sonnet from me” (1-3). The conscious meta-textual opening of the poem, where Christina places her sonnet in the context of the tradition that has preceded her, deliberately puts her in opposition to her brother, who had previously published an iconic analysis of the sonnet form in his “Introductory Sonnet” to *The House of Life* (7): “A Sonnet is a moment’s monument,— / Memorial from the soul’s eternity / To one dead deathless hour” (1-3). The impersonal and analytic tone of Dante Gabriel’s opening, which deliberately separates the textual space of the sonnet as a “moment’s monument” from the intentions of the poet, contrasts starkly with Christina’s generalised definition of the sonnet’s purpose, which is linked to her personal experiences and her relationship with her mother.

Christina rejects the wider literary tradition referenced by her brother, in order to uphold the private maternal bond as preeminent, dedicating the sonnet “To my first Love, My Mother on whose knee / I learnt love-lore that is not troublesome” (5-6). The poet’s pseudo-romantic references to her “first Love” and “love-lore” actively subvert the courtship tradition of the sonnet, commonly dedicated to the beloved, in order to re-orientate the origins

of human love towards the figure of the mother. Her designation of “love-lore” as “not troublesome” also departs from the courtly tradition where the sonnet is frequently used as a vehicle for overcoming a barrier between poet and beloved. Christina portrays maternal love as uncomplicated by the difficulties of romantic attachment because it is described as the initial “first love” from which all others stem. She consciously subverts the use of cliché, reconfiguring the term “first love” (5)—often used to denote an individual’s first romantic relationship—to refer instead to their experience of maternal love in infancy. In describing her mother as the primal source of her love, Rossetti again presents her as an equivalent to the Trinitarian person of the Father, from whom the other figures of the Trinity proceed. Once more, the left-hand gains prominence over the right by means of the sacred figure of the mother who, like the Trinitarian Father, is the creative source and origin of the individual. The matrilineal tradition of loving relationships within the family takes precedence over the male literary tradition referenced in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s poetry.

This privileging of female relationships over male literary traditions is underlined in the poem’s denouement, which links the maternal bond to the wider experience of matrilineal love throughout history: “In you not fourscore years can dim the flame / Of love, whose blessed glow transcends the laws / Of time and change and mortal life and death” (12-14). Frances’s personal expression of love taps into a wider universal experience that transcends human mortality and the mutable laws of life on earth. The mother, as the primal source of all experiences of love, is the figure who enables humanity to overcome its fallen and mortal state because her love contains the power to overcome death. Just as Abigail Alcott’s providential philosophy allowed her daughters to conquer their “bosom enemies” in the outside world, so the flame of Frances Rossetti’s love allows her daughter to triumph over the conditions of her mortality.

Rossetti's association of immortality with the figure of her mother also contests the male poet's attempt to achieve earthly immortality by incorporating himself into the male literary tradition. The poem's conclusion again alludes to the denouement of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Introductory sonnet", which contains the same number of syllabic feet; a large proportion of monosyllables and an identical iambic metre: "In Charon's palm it [the sonnet] pays the toll to Death" (14). However, where Dante Gabriel Rossetti defines the sonnet as a means of bribing eternity from the personified figure of death, Christina Rossetti emphasises the maternal relationship as able to transcend the conditions of human mortality. In the "Introductory Sonnet", the poem itself—previously personified as a "coin" (9)—is an object of barter for the mythological figure of Charon who ships souls across the River Styx. Dante Gabriel Rossetti implies that the literary text functions as an artificial means of achieving immortal life. Conversely, Christina defines her mother's love as the source of a fully realised eternity, rather than an imagined immortality generated through the multi-generational readership that accesses the male literary tradition. Frances's tangible earthly experience, represented by her old age of "fourscore years" (12), is presented as equally palpable to her metaphorical "flame / Of love" (12-13), which transcends the conditions of temporality and change that the sonnet form itself is contained within.

In defining Frances's love as embedded in an overarching experience of eternity, Rossetti implies that the maternal bond is part of a wider human experience that is a viable source of redemption throughout history. Moreover, she places her personal experience of this bond alongside her brother's writing and his references to the male literary tradition, thereby underscoring the superiority of the matrilineal community, which is able to overcome the temporal limitations of human mortality and poetic form. Poetic form is harnessed as a vehicle for expressing the immortal love between mother and daughter. It is subsidiary to the

maternal bond and is therefore not subjected to the same pressure of achieving artistic immortality for the poet.

Rossetti consciously aligns the poetic vocation with the maternal bond by suggesting that all experiences of love, the preeminent theme of the sonnet, derive from the figure of the mother. As such, the tradition of sonnet writing is blown open to all women, who do not need to access the precedent of the male literary tradition, in order to take on the role of daughterly troubadour. This democratic conception of the maternal bond resists Gilbert & Gubar's claim that the woman writer sees herself through the lens of the "male-authored text" (20) and is "killed into a "perfect" image of herself" because she cannot access the phallic pen, which is the rightful property of the male author: "Lacking the pen/penis which would enable them ... to refute one fiction by another, women in patriarchal societies have historically been reduced to ... characters and images imprisoned in male texts" (12). By portraying the mother as the origin of human existence and experience, Rossetti challenges the notion that women need to "refute" the male literary tradition. The maternal bond occurs outside the realm of the male text, and is not subject to its traditions and histories. Like the Alcott sisters, Rossetti portrays her literary vocation as stemming from her relationship with her mother, using her poems as mouthpieces for the religious beliefs that were held in common between mother and daughter.

Indeed, throughout the Valentine's Day verses, Christina emphasises the unique way in which she and Frances interpret the world. Their shared religious beliefs modify their experience of the environment in which they live, separating them from the diverging experiences of those who reject the precedent of mother and daughter's religious faith. For instance, in the Valentine for 1881 (Crump 2001 848), Christina makes a conscious link between the external world, described in derivative terms relatable to secular experience, and her vision of the heavenly sphere. The awareness of the difference between the material and

earthly realms transforms both poet's and recipient's interpretations of reality, so that they no longer experience the material world as something immanent, instead viewing it as a shadow of the world to come.

The poem begins with a straightforward description of the current season and natural world: "Too cold almost for hope of Spring/ Or firstfruits from the realm of flowers" (1-2). However, while this seasonal backdrop may appear to be universally relatable to all, these opening lines already contain Christian references that illuminate the rest of the poem. The compound "firstfruits" is an idiosyncratic Pauline term, taken from Corinthians 15:20: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept". The winter landscape therefore symbolises the soul before death, which is to be redeemed by Christ in the resurrection. Indeed, this is explicated in the second and final stanza of the poem, which makes an explicit connection between the wintry nature of the unredeemed world and the ecstatic experience of the soul in paradise:

If even in this wintry world love is love

(This wintry world which felt the fall),

What must it be in Heaven above

Where love to great and small

Is all in all? (6-10)

This second stanza provides a hermeneutic key for the symbolism of the first, where the wintry experience of the poet and recipient is revealed to be their exile from heaven in a post-lapsarian world: "This wintry word which felt the fall" (7). The juxtaposition between the two stanzas therefore emphasises the fact that the poet's and recipient's experience is shaped by their theological interpretations of reality. While a secular reader might initially feel

included in the scene described in the first stanza, this is actively disrupted in the second, which abruptly exposes the descriptive imagery of the first as a symbolic foreshadowing of the transformation of the Christian soul in paradise. This rhetorical strategy reveals Rossetti's adherence to the Tractarian Doctrine of Analogy, which contends that God reveals his presence analogically through type and symbol because humanity is unable to cope with encountering him directly. The second stanza therefore provides an analogical reading of the first.

While the two realms described within the poem are distinct, Rossetti nevertheless portrays a continuity of experience between them, which is that of human love, continued from the material world into the afterlife. Love is the poem's overarching theme, facilitating a transferral of human experience before and after the spiritual transformation that occurs during the resurrection. In the first stanza, the poet uses her love for her mother as a way of combatting the wintry nature of the fallen world that surrounds them: "Your dauntless Valentine I bring / One sprig of love, and sing / Love has no winter hours" (3-5). When "Love" is capitalised in verse, it either refers to a personified figure who controls the romantic lover, as can be observed in the poetry of the Italian *stilnovisti*, emulated in the verse of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, or the figure of the incarnate Christ, who is portrayed as the realisation of human love on earth. The identity of the transcendent figure of Love in the 1888 Valentine is ambivalent in the first stanza, but is explicated in the second, where Rossetti rejects both poetic precedents to claim that love is the one type of human experience that remains unaffected by the fall of mankind: "If even in this world love is love / (This wintry world that felt the fall)" (6-7).

By defining love as a self-derivative term, "love is love", Rossetti portrays love as self-transcendent, a unique and divine experience that needs neither explanation nor analogy to reveal its presence to others. It is once again implied that the reciprocal and love-giving

relationship between poet and recipient is the vehicle for their redemption because the Valentine of Love described in the first stanza becomes the unchangeable love experienced in heaven in the second. Where love is consciously adopted as a means of combating the winter world at the poem's opening, it becomes the foundation of existential experience in heaven its close: "What must it be in Heaven above / Where love to great and small / Is all in all?" (9-10). Both poet and recipient look beyond the external conditions of the material world, in order to witness a greater metaphysical truth of the transcendence of love, which is to be fully realised in the afterlife.

The idea of a shared reality between mother and daughter is undoubtedly drawn from the Doctrine of Analogy, which is centred on the notion that human beings must train themselves to read the language of God's revelation through receiving the sacraments and studying scripture. However, while the poem references the analogical language of scripture held in common by Rossetti and her mother, Rossetti's portrayal of maternal love as self-evident resists the notion that the human person cannot directly experience divine love in the material world. Rossetti implies that the maternal bond is uncorrupted by the fall, for it is divinely ordained. It does not need to be subjected to an analogical framework because it is a direct reflection of the love the individual will experience in heaven. The exception in Rossetti's Tractarian poetics is that of the mother-daughter bond, which is sacramental in nature. If we consider that Rossetti recognised male authority over women on the grounds of a divinely ordained apostolic priesthood (the precedent of the Tractarian Movement's existence), we once again see her investing the mother with a spiritual authority equal to that of the male priest. The mother is the priestess of the language of revelation that the daughter must access, in order to witness the divine. Significantly, her role as medium of divine revelation is withheld from the sons who reject her spiritual authority, just as the private language of providence fostered by Abigail Alcott deliberately counteracted her husband's

discourse of pre-destination. Rossetti acknowledges that the sacraments can only be accessed through a male priest, but nevertheless claims that the highest form of human love, as a type of sacrament, can only be experienced in its fullness through the figure of the mother. She therefore not only bypasses the male literary tradition, but also creates a female-centred version of the church located in the divine revelation that grows out of the mother-daughter bond.

“A world of change & loss, a world of death”: Rossetti’s theology of renunciation as stoic endurance

The mother-daughter bond facilitates a direct revelation of the divine, but this revelation is a type of prophecy that prefigures the world to come. Frances Rossetti’s role as mediatrix is a limited one: she cannot recreate the kingdom of heaven on earth, even though she enables her daughter to bear witness to it. If poet and recipient are to be transfigured in the afterlife, they must suffer in a fallen world that diverges sharply from their divine vision. Like Abigail Alcott, both women refuse to regard human suffering as all-encompassing, but instead defer human fulfilment to the afterlife, a preoccupation that is not shared by the Alcott women who transcend earthly suffering through building an outward-facing community that is focused on the needs of the other. Nevertheless, the Valentine’s Day verses do promote the mother-daughter bond as partially alleviating earthly suffering, for it enables both women to develop the necessary stoicism needed to attain the kingdom of heaven. Rossetti makes this explicitly clear in the short, stanza-long Valentine for 1883 (Crump 2001 849):

A world of change & loss, a world of death,

Of heart & eyes that fail, of labouring breath,

Of pains to bear & painful deeds to do:—

Nevertheless a world of life to come

And love; where you're at home, while in our home

Your Valentine rejoices having you. (1-6)

In this poem, earthly experience is defined through human mortality and the gradual disintegration of the human body. The image of Christina's mother is constituted solely by her ailments: the failing heart, eyes and shortness of breath. Christina acknowledges human decline as the fulfilment and embodiment of all earthly experience, for human life is a progression towards death. This is particularly heightened by her elision of the mid-line caesura in the third line, which gives a sense of a relentless accumulation of pain: "Of pains to bear & painful deeds to do" (3). By replacing the caesura with an additional syllable and connective, Christina implies that the trajectory of life consists of a continual build-up of suffering until the human body crumbles under the weight of deterioration. The casual, almost flippant tone of solace in the following line, "Nevertheless a world of life to come" (4), dismisses the recipient's experience of pain, while acknowledging that it is more immediate than the projected eternity (more descriptive space is accorded to the recipient's suffering within the poem than the kingdom of heaven).

Rossetti implies that, while the world to come is a certainty that both she and her mother share in, this does not alleviate the immanent reality of earthly suffering. This reality can only be borne through consciously redirecting existential experience towards hope for a future redemption. The conjunctive adverb "Nevertheless" suggests a deliberate psychological overriding of pain, in order to focus on the rewards of heavenly life. Christina concurs with Abigail Alcott's assertion that redemption is only achieved through an acceptance of the conditions of the surrounding world, but this acceptance is contingent upon the privileging of divine revelation. Christina's emphasis on salvific deferral diverges from

Abigail Alcott's theology of renunciation because, in Abigail Alcott's conception, the kingdom of heaven grows out of the sacrifices that are experienced on earth. If we think back to Elizabeth Alcott's "Story of an Apple", we recall that renunciation in this story is not painful because the pre-lapsarian individual does not struggle to sacrifice their needs for the other. Likewise, in Louisa May Alcott's "Transfiguration", her mother's decline and old-age are described as the means by which she attains salvation, "fading heavenward through our tears" (8). Abigail Alcott's physical deterioration is a signifier of the self-sacrificing life she has led on earth and is therefore a necessary vehicle for her redemption. For the Alcotts, the fallen world is in some sense mediated by the reciprocal bonds of the matrilineal community. By contrast, Christina and Frances Rossetti share in the same divine vision, but they must defer this vision to the afterlife. The self-contained world between mother and daughter is one of mystical revelation and insight; it is not an outward-oriented community of charity.

The poet's and recipient's relationship is also defined as a point of continuity between earthly and heavenly experience, for it is the "love" (5) that is shared between them that makes the world bearable. The poet portrays the loving relationship between herself and her mother as an exclusive one, superseding all others within the earthly sphere, especially those of the surrounding family. While Frances dwells "at home ... in our home" (5), it is only "[her] Valentine" that "rejoices" (6). The transition from the plural space of the household ("our home"), which at this time was also shared with William Michael Rossetti, to the singular pronoun of "your Valentine" defines the loving relationship that protects Frances from her experience of pain as existing solely between mother and daughter. The act of sending the Valentine is therefore once more an affirmation of the love between poet and recipient, which enables both to bear the difficulties inherent in earthly life, while functioning as a bridge into the eternal world. There is no suggestion of this relationship being dissolved into the lives of others, for the mother-daughter relationship is an exclusive bond that cannot

be emulated. Where in “My Picture Gallery” Louisa May Alcott suggests that she will attain salvation through following her mother’s altruistic example, Christina Rossetti rarefies the maternal bond, implying that it is unique to each individual and must be upheld as preeminent if one hopes to attain salvation.

Nevertheless, Christina does extend the exclusive bond she shares with her mother to make room for one other figure: that of her deceased sister, Maria. In the Valentine for 1877 (Crump 2001 846-847), Rossetti presents Maria as a figure who recognised the spiritual precedence of the maternal bond and thereby attained the kingdom of heaven. The manuscript for this particular Valentine is signed “C.G. for M.F.R.” and Arseneau has claimed that “Christina ventriloquizes the recently deceased Maria’s voice: now in heaven, the poem’s speaker articulates her longing for a reunion between mother and daughter” (51). Indeed, the poem begins:

Own Mother dear,

We all rejoicing here

Wait for each other,

Daughter for mother.... (1-4)

The poem not only “ventriloquises” Maria’s voice, it also articulates Christina’s desire to share her heavenly vision with her brothers, for the next line states that “Sister for Brother” also waits (5). The divergence in religious beliefs between the male and female members of the Rossetti family was not simply theoretical: Maria Rossetti admitted on her deathbed that she had become an Anglican nun with the hope of facilitating the conversion of her brothers through prayer (Roe *Wonderland* 292-293), while Christina Rossetti expressed fear for Dante

Gabriel Rossetti's soul following his death.⁹⁵ It is unlikely that the "sister" waiting for her "brother" is the redeemed Maria, it is probably Christina Rossetti who wistfully longs for the conversion of one or both of her brothers.

The poem stands out within the sequence for its articulation of the matrilineal community's desire that the Rossetti men will be reconciled to its divine vision. Indeed, the poet looks forward to a day when "...each dear face appear[s] / Transfigured by love's flame" (6-7). Once more, the hope of this heavenly reconciliation is located in Frances Rossetti. It is only through acknowledging Frances as a vehicle of divine revelation that each family member can hope to be redeemed. In the subsequent lines, Christina claims that in heaven Frances's face will be "Made lovelier by Love's flame / But still the same" (15-16). Frances's "transfiguration" (7) resembles that of Abigail Alcott, in that it is a continuation of the exemplary life she has lived on earth. The transfiguration of each of her children depends upon them reflecting her love through the same metaphorical flame: "My face to you, / Your face to me, / Made lovelier by Love's flame" (10-12). It is clear then, that salvation can only be achieved through recognising the maternal bond as the source of all earthly love and the proper medium for heavenly redemption. Without acknowledging the primacy of this bond, the individual cannot access the divine revelation it makes possible. Christina Rossetti does not share the Alcott sisters' hope for transforming the outside world through the model of matrilineal relations instigated by her mother, for it is the individual's responsibility to recognise the truth of the mother's religious tenets. If the individual does not place the maternal bond at the centre of their spiritual life, they cannot hope to be saved, even by the self-effacing dedication of the sister, because redemption itself is predicated upon a spiritual revelation that grows out of the recognition of the mother's innate spiritual authority.

⁹⁵ Marsh writes, "Relieved that his earthly sufferings were over, [Christina] had no hope that Gabriel had joined Maria in heaven. She had prayed hard, but there was no evidence of grace" (CR 494).

If redemption is understood as determined by the proclamation of religious faith, it is not surprising that Christina Rossetti's theology of renunciation is centred on the stoic endurance of a fallen world that neither mother nor daughter have the power to change. The shared beliefs of both women allow them to exist in a self-contained bond of reciprocity, but this bond is not outward-facing: it is exclusive. That is not to say that Christina Rossetti denies her brothers access out of a sense of matrilineal privilege, but that she rather feels powerless to affect their acknowledgement of the primacy of this bond, which is the vehicle of their eventual redemption. Rossetti's theology of renunciation embodies a stance of stoic endurance: the world is unalterable, but the salvation facilitated by the mother is guaranteed if one is willing to embrace it.

Surprisingly, given the theological contexts of both women, Christina Rossetti's theology of renunciation depends upon a rigid understanding of grace as dependent on faith alone, while Louisa May Alcott leaves leeway for good works as a source of redemption for the outside world. Nonetheless, Rossetti does acknowledge the possibility that the exclusive bond she shares with her mother might be extended to another person, but only if this person recognises its precedence. In the figure of her sister, Maria, we find a triangulation of the maternal bond, which now grows outwards into a matrilineal community. Maria features minimally in the Valentine's Day verses because she predeceased their composition, but Rossetti's brief acknowledgement of her sister in the poem for 1877 suggests that she also shared in the theological vision instigated by Frances. Maria's influence pervades Rossetti's work as a theologian, and in this work we see Maria upheld as the exemplar of her mother's love, which is exuded in her interactions with others. Maria is championed as embodying a type of "lived religion" because she takes the precepts set out by Frances Rossetti and applies them to her daily life. Even if another person's redemption cannot be affected by one's good works, these good works nonetheless have the power to transform the bleakness of a fallen

world. If Frances is equivalent to the person of the creative Father, and Christina emulates the incarnate Son, then Maria assumes the form of the Holy Spirit, who infuses the presence of the proceeding two persons throughout the world. Let us turn, then, to the presence of Maria Rossetti in Christina Rossetti's theological writing.

“In harmony with her holy hope and joy”: the influence of Maria Rossetti on Christina Rossetti's discourse of lived religion

Maria Rossetti figures as a spiritual role-model and literary precursor in Christina Rossetti's 1885 theological work, *Time Flies: A Reading Diary*, which defers to her sister's authority as an exemplar for Christina's Christian practice. *Time Flies* makes reference to Maria's early theological work, which was curtailed by her entry into religious life in 1872 and her premature death from ovarian cancer in 1876 at the age of forty-nine. The text is structured as a devotional diary, containing spiritual meditations for each day of the year. Rossetti's personal experiences are related back to her religious beliefs and presented as reflections on how she might refine her devotional practice, thereby deepening her relationship with God. Todd O. Williams has compellingly expanded on Roe's claim that “In *Time Flies*, Christianity is as much about the writing of the self as it is the writing of God” (CRFI 148), by arguing that the text creates an “extended consciousness” through constructing the self “...in relation to the environment, which, for Rossetti, is experienced through her Christian beliefs” (“Autobiographical Self” 322). Rossetti transforms her daily experiences by placing them within a Christian framework, allowing her “sense of self as physical and spiritual being” to be developed “in relation to God” (ibid.). *Time Flies* references passages of scripture and the lives of the saints, in order to place the events of the author's daily life within a redemptive Christian narrative. Williams contends that Rossetti creates an

“autobiographical self” through consciously creating her identity through the act of writing as a form of devotional “self-regulation” (ibid.).

Rossetti’s application of a religious framework to her daily life bears a striking affinity to Louisa May Alcott’s use of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as a narrative template for *Little Women*. Alcott follows her mother’s example of placing her daily struggles in the context of the tribulations experienced by Bunyan’s Christian, while Christina also uses theological writing as a means of reinterpreting her life within a Christian framework. However, where Alcott refers to the spiritual authority of her mother, Rossetti draws on the theological wisdom of her sister, Maria. Rossetti transforms her sister’s use of Christian allegory into an autobiographical narrative, just as Alcott relates Christian’s journey to the “ordinary virtues and temptations”⁹⁶ experienced by the March sisters in an autobiographical novel reminiscent of her own childhood.

Rossetti’s diary is a devotional aid for the practice of lived religion, encouraging the reader to reflect on their own salvific journey through tracking the progress of the author’s spiritual life. Consequently, the text encourages the reader to develop a type of devotional self-awareness. Unlike the March sisters, Rossetti cannot instigate a matrilineal community in the outside world, but she can encourage her readers to emulate the community she shares with her sister through embracing the same practice of lived religion. The opaqueness of the typological symbolism that can be identified in Maria’s theological writing is transformed into an anecdotal and directly relatable autobiographical narrative. Where Maria’s theological writing provides the tenets that are the foundation of Christina’s devotional practice, Christina’s “reading diary” demonstrates how these tenets should be applied to one’s daily life. As such, she opens up the matrilineal community to the wider world, but the reader’s

⁹⁶ See Chapter 4, 229-230.

participation within this community is contingent upon an act of free will. Rossetti cannot build the theological discourse of the matrilineal community into the public sphere in the same manner as the March sisters; she must ask the reader to propagate this discourse alongside her as they meet within the realm of “sociality” located within the theological text.

Maria Rossetti’s 1846 work, *The Rivulets: A Dream not all a dream*, written when she was nineteen and privately published by her maternal grandfather, Gaetano Polidori, provides the analogical framework that Christina Rossetti applies to her daily experiences and salvific journey in *Time Flies*. *The Rivulets* describes a vision experienced by the author, which is then analogically elucidated by means of an imagined dialogue with the reader at the work’s close. At the beginning of the narrative, the author finds herself in “a wide-extended plain” scattered over with “a number of little cottages”, all of which contain a rivulet (5). Each cottage is placed in the care of one of four children, all of whom bear a symbolic German name: Liebe, meaning love; Selbsucht, who is associated with a particularly egotistical brand of selfishness; Eigendunkel, who stands for presumption; and Faule, who represents sloth. The four children are all directed by a mysterious man, who is an Ambassador for “the King”, to purify the rivulet in each of the cottages, which are being polluted by venomous serpents (6-8). For this purpose, he sprinkles each rivulet with pure water, and gives the children a crystal mirror that reflects words of instruction and advice, alongside bunches of myrrh and hyssop and a vase of sweet perfumes.

Liebe persists in cleansing her rivulet, despite the fact she is consistently thwarted by the serpent and often falls into fits of despair. Nevertheless, she eventually succeeds in her task and her crystal mirror instructs her to: “Let us consider one another to ... promote love and good works” (24). She interprets this message as a command to assist Faule, who has fallen asleep by her rivulet in exhaustion. At first, Liebe does most of the work for Faule, but she is eventually assumed into heaven and leaves Faule’s mirror behind with the command to

“put not your trust in any child of man” (34). Faule’s grief for Liebe rouses her from her lethargic state and she subsequently completes her task, although her finished stream does not possess as “clear and unbroken a surface” as Liebe’s (38). Nevertheless, it is sufficient to win her redemption and she also is assumed into heaven by an angel.

By contrast, Selbsucht takes pleasure in further polluting his rivulet, and makes no effort to cleanse it. While his behaviour leads to his eventual degradation, he exhibits only a self-interested sorrow, rather than “...the sorrow that works repentance unto salvation” (31). The roof of his cottage subsequently collapses and he is consumed by a “darkness visible” (ibid.). Selbsucht’s damnation leads the prideful Eigendunkel, who has previously expressed a belief that he is “already perfect” (19), to reject his inclination to “triumph over others” and redress the incipient pollution that has infected his own rivulet (33). Eigendunkel is also assumed into heaven, shortly after which the narrator awakes.

In the concluding dialogue of the text, which is structured around a set of questions and answers between author and reader, the author explicates the symbolism of her analogical narrative. The rivulets are revealed to be the hearts of each individual, while the serpents represent the devil and his attempts to corrupt them (41). The King’s Ambassador is a Christian priest, whose sprinkling of holy water represents the sacrament of baptism and the gift of grace that enables each individual to reject the temptations of the devil (41-42). The priest’s gifts of the mirror, spices and perfumes symbolise the Holy Scripture and “...repentance, and the self-denying duties of religion” (42).

Maria’s narrative provides a generalised blueprint for a variety of human experiences and temptations, each of which is viewed through the lens of Christian dogma. Liebe clearly represents the lives of those who dedicate themselves to God, while Selbsucht models the experiences of individuals who follow the devil. Faule is associated with Christians who are

too lazy to pursue the dictates of their religious beliefs and are only roused from their torpor by their impending death. Eigendunkel personifies the sin of pride and the belief that one's religious devotion erases the innate fallibility of the human condition. Maria's references to the sacraments, the authority of the apostolic priesthood, and the "self-denying duties of religion" (ibid.) portray the apparatus of Christian redemption as stemming from a specifically Tractarian framework of religious practice. Her theological tract is a manifesto for the tenets of the Tractarian Movement as a pathway to redemption for all types of the human disposition.

In Christina Rossetti's "reading diary", *Time Flies*, the author follows her sister's example of linking the choices, behaviours and temptations of the individual to their journey towards redemption. Where Maria provides a generalised analogical narrative designed to relate to a variety of experiences, Christina individualises her devotional narrative by modelling it on the diary format. This allows her to relate her Tractarian religious beliefs to her personal experiences, thereby reducing the impression that she is preaching to or judging the reader. She frequently allies her behaviours and choices with each of the deadly sins that Maria condemns in *The Rivulets* and shares her struggles in combating these faults with her readers. Rossetti does not create an instruction manual for pursuing a Christian way of life, but instead applies the analogical narrative shaped by her sister to her autobiographical experiences. Christina's implicit admission of fallibility as an author allows her readers to identify with her, while encouraging them to follow her example. She does not reject the precedent set out by Maria, who is portrayed as the Christian exemplar for her own life, but instead expands on the pattern set out in *The Rivulets* by applying Maria's analogical key to her own lived experiences, thereby advocating for Maria's authority as a woman of faith and encouraging her readers to join her by following Maria's example.

For instance, Rossetti's entry on the death of her sister demonstrates how Maria's practical theology transformed her own experience of grief. Christina consciously applies her sister's beliefs concerning earthly separation to her own grieving process, thereby allowing the reader to witness the transformative effects of Maria's theology. Christina's observations regarding her grief are also closely aligned with the experiences of Faule in *The Rivulets*, but the autobiographical nature of her narrative enables the reader to identify more intimately with the author's experiences than with Maria's analogical text. In her entry for April 22nd, 1885 Christina describes how Maria, "...one of the most genuine Christians I ever knew", never regarded earthly separation as an obstacle to human relationships because she believed that "such congenial intercourse on earth" was destined to reach full "development" in heaven (77). This anecdote is supplemented by a poetic reflection by Christina, who contemplates how submission to God's will promotes the greater good of the individual:

Lord, I had chosen another lot,

But then I had not chosen well;

Thy choice and only Thine is good:

No different lot, search heaven and hell,

Had blessed me, fully understood;

None other, which Thou orderest not. (ibid.)

Christina's disruption of the AB rhyme scheme, so that the first and last lines of the poem rhyme unexpectedly, jars the reader aurally, providing a sense of vocal disturbance that mirrors the sudden shift of direction at the poem's close. This complements the poem's internal trajectory, where the author's wishes are initially at odds with God's will, but undergo a radical transition once she realises that the pursuit of her own desires cannot bring

her fulfilment because her human identity derives from God. Christina's use of macro imagery, spanning the spiritual cosmos from heaven to hell, underlines the fact that the full spectrum of human desire across a variety of spiritual planes fails to supersede God's will.

As an accompanying piece to Maria's reflections on earthly separation, Christina's poem portrays her sister's theology as a type of Christian submission. Separation is figured as part of God's providential plan, which brings about the individual's redemption. Christina's assertion that she might have "chosen another lot" (1) perhaps alludes to a former desire not to be separated from her sister by death. However, her life-experiences allow her to realise that God's "choice" is "good" when it is "fully understood" against the possible outcomes of the poet's desires (3, 5). Maria's prior reflections on the afterlife prefigure the complete understanding of God's will achieved by Christina at the denouement of this poem. Consequently, Maria's death allows Christina to fully appreciate the truth in her sister's theological meditations. While Maria has predeceased her, their spiritual partnership is nevertheless maintained, for the insights that are facilitated by Maria's death allow Christina to continue on her spiritual pathway towards redemption.

Christina's portrayal of the impact of her sister's death on her own spiritual development is comparable to the insights achieved by the character of Faule following Liebe's death in *The Rivulets*. Like Faule, Christina was characterised as "indolent".⁹⁷ Faule's grief for Liebe arouses her from her spiritual torpor, encouraging her to follow Liebe's example in redirecting all of her efforts towards the purification of her rivulet, or heart. In much the same manner as Christina's reflective poem, Faule learns "...to feel that [God] had done all things well—that He cared for her no less lovingly in taking away than in giving" (38). Christina's reflection that grief strengthens one's faith in God is prefigured by her

⁹⁷ See Marsh (CR), "As William [Michael] wrote, despite a strong sense of duty, she was naturally indolent, 'often better pleased to be doing nothing than anything'" (173).

sister's analogical message in *The Rivulets*. *Time Flies* uses the precedent of Maria's theological writing to argue that the experiences of daily life can be transformed through applying a Christian framework of interpretation that focuses on the individual's preparation for the afterlife. This framework of interpretation is modelled through autobiographical experience and is more relatable for Rossetti's audience. The reader is more likely to sympathise with the author's overt acknowledgement of fallibility than with Maria's proselytising tract. Christina's portrayal of her sister's wisdom as directly applicable to her own life therefore provides greater credence to her sister's theological authority.

To demonstrate how her theological beliefs transformed the lives of those with whom she came into contact, *Time Flies* is also peppered with references to Maria's spiritual wisdom. For example, the entry for November 7th, 1885 contains a reflection on Maria's funeral, which is portrayed as emblematic of her blameless life and assurance of Christian redemption. Maria's faith in her salvation inspires others to re-orient themselves towards the solace provided by their own Christian faith. Maria is described as "one of the dearest and most saintly persons I ever knew", whose positive example leads mourners to act "in harmony with her holy hope and joy", instead of allowing themselves to be overcome by grief (213). Christina fondly describes how her sister particularly requested not to have the stereotypical "hood and hatband" style of Victorian funeral, towards which the author "evinced some old-fashioned leaning" (ibid.). She recalls Maria's claim that funerals should not appear "hopeless" because they are symbolic of the individual's union with God.

Christina's recollections of Maria's funeral are shaped by her belief that her sister's presence transformed the day's events, as well as the experiences of the mourners. She "vividly remember[s]" how, at the moment the sun shone through the November rain during the first hymn, it made "a miniature rainbow in [her] eyelashes" (ibid.). It would appear that Maria is able to intervene in God's divine language of analogy from above, for Christina

interprets the presence of the rainbow as corroborating her sister's belief that funerals should be joyful celebrations of the individual's union with God. In Genesis 9: 13-17 the rainbow is presented as a sign of God's salvific covenant with his people following his protection of Noah from the flood. The rainbow is an emblem of Maria's salvation, but it also symbolises her assimilation into the divine language of analogy. Maria's death is not only perceived *through* an analogical framework; she is incorporated *into* that analogical framework by virtue of her unification with God. The rainbow is an arc of communication with the divine and Maria has become the divine medium, sending her sister a sign that her hope for eternal redemption has been justified by her religious faith.

The rainbow is a private medium of symbolic communication between the sisters, who share in the same eschatological interpretation of the world because it is viewed only through Christina's eyelashes. Christina shares the sisters' typological communication between heaven and earth with her readers so that they will be encouraged to discern the same divine symbolism in the events of their own lives: "May all who love enjoy cheerful little rainbows at the funerals of their beloved ones" (*ibid.*). While the bond between the sisters is exclusive, it is utilised as a means of inspiring others to re-orient their lives towards a perception of the divine. Christina's devotional diary is a bridge between her Christian faith and her readers, enabling them to bear witness to the power of her religious beliefs. The source of Christina's faith is identified time and again with her relationship with her sister.

Time Flies consistently portrays Maria as a partner in Christina's spiritual development. The meditation for July 17th, 1885 refers to the sisters' shared childhood experiences and recalls how "a little girl and ... my yet younger self" had agreed to halve "a certain wild strawberry growing on a hedgerow bank" (136). The elder instructs the author "not to pluck it prematurely", so as to allow it to ripen, but "one fatal day" they find it "half-eaten, and good for nothing" (136-137). In hindsight, Christina interprets the event as

teaching both herself and her sister the importance of prudence and self-restraint, while enabling both of them to learn how to bear with disappointment as an inevitable part of life. Renunciation is again associated with deferring one's happiness to the afterlife, for Christina claims that their "counsel of prudence" left them disappointed in regards to the strawberry, but the "balked watches of the afterlife" will not "prove in vain" (137). The minor trials and tribulations of day-to-day life cannot be overcome in this world, but they nevertheless allow the individual to achieve spiritual fulfilment in the world to come. By referring to such shared life-experiences, Christina demonstrates that both she and her sister have endeavoured to apply the same religious framework to their lives and that they both experience disappointment as a temporary obstacle on the path to redemption.

In the anecdote of the wild strawberry, the reader perhaps discerns an autobiographical precedent for Rossetti's iconic poem, "Goblin Market" (Crump 2001 6-20). William Michael Rossetti claimed that this poem was dedicated to Maria, writing that "...apparently C. considered herself charged with some sort of spiritual backsliding, against which Maria's influence had been exercised beneficially" (qtd. in Thomas 176). The sisters' encounter with a potentially dangerous fruit in their childhood is re-appropriated into an analogical narrative that pays tribute to Maria's spiritual guidance in adulthood. In this poem the responsible sister, Lizzie, follows Maria's example in advising her sister, Laura, not to partake of the fruit of the Goblin men:

We must not look at goblin men,
We must not buy their fruits:
Who knows upon what soil they fed
Their hungry thirsty roots. (42-45)

When Laura refuses to heed her advice and begins to waste away after sampling the fruits, Lizzie saves her sister by usurping the role of the Christian priest. She obtains the fruit in a

violent encounter with the Goblins who attempt to assault her with their wares, unwittingly smearing her with the fruits' juices in the process. These juices enable her to provide the antidote for her sister, who is instructed to: "Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices" (468) and "Eat me, drink me, love me" (470). Critics are divided over whether Laura's sacrificial offering to her sister is indicative of a lesbian encounter⁹⁸ or an experience of the Eucharistic body.⁹⁹

However, the most remarkable aspect of Lizzie's encounter with Laura can be properly identified in the fact that she is the medium of access *to* the Eucharistic body. Lizzie's potential as a female Christ has been well documented,¹⁰⁰ but it should be noted that it is *not* Lizzie's body that cures Laura, but rather the fruit-as-antidote upon her body. Rather than standing in for Christ, Lizzie actually replaces the Christian priest who takes on the *personae Christi* (or person of Christ), in order to effect the transubstantiation of the Eucharist at the moment of consecration. Rossetti places what is defined as the "grace" of the sacrament of the Eucharist in the female community, relocating it from the patriarchal hierarchy of the apostolic Church.

Once more, we see Rossetti creating a female figure whose spiritual authority is equal to that of an apostolic priest. Where Frances Rossetti directs her daughter towards a vision of the afterlife in the Valentine's Day verses, "Goblin Market" portrays the fictional equivalent to Maria Rossetti as a sacramental vehicle that allows her sister to access the divine body that will eventually enable her spiritual redemption. If we recall that Maria Rossetti upholds the

⁹⁸ See for instance, Greer's "Introduction", which claims that Rossetti "...used the aspirations of piety as a metaphor for her own frustrated sexuality" (x), interpreting the poem as "...about the greater virtue of physical love between sisters" (xxxvi). Likewise, Kaplan reads the poem as "...an exploration ... of women's sexual fantasy that includes suggestions of masochism, homoeroticism, rape or incest" (69), while Wilson Carpenter argues that sisterhood is presented as "...a saving female homoerotic bond..." (419).

⁹⁹ In reference to Rossetti's Eucharistic imagery, Mermin writes: "...we find it hard to allow a nineteenth-century religious poet the conflation of spiritual and erotic intensity that we accept without question in Crashaw or Donne" (113). Marylu Hill contends that "...the poem directly invokes the Eucharist as both sacrifice and as regenerative antidote to the poison of misplaced desire" (462).

¹⁰⁰ 瀨名波栄潤 refers to Lizzie as a "female Christ figure" (16). Galligani Casey coincides with this characterisation: "...Rossetti feels that it is suffering for the sake of others (and not sex) that makes one Christ-like" (74). Marshall sees both of the sisters as "...together imitating mother Eve and motherly Christ" (446).

sacraments as the necessary means by which the soul is purified in *The Rivulets*, her portrayal as a Christian priest in “Goblin Market” pays tribute to her role as Christina Rossetti’s spiritual mentor.

Maria’s role in *Time Flies* is also closely aligned with that of “Goblin Market’s” Lizzie because her council of “prudence and self-restraint” (137) allows her sister to redirect her attention towards her future salvation, just as Lizzie’s example of self-denial allows Laura to be transfigured and redeemed. The individual’s primary point of access to the divine is located within the contained world of the matrilineal community and this is made explicitly clear at the close of “Goblin Market” when Laura brings the children of the two sisters together to “....tell them how her sister stood / In deadly peril to do her good” (557-558). Although Rossetti claims that “the highest functions of the world are not open to both sexes” (*Letters* 2 158), she portrays the figures of both mother and sister as equivalent in sacramental status to that of apostolic priest. The divine communion facilitated by these women is championed in Rossetti’s posthumously published verse, her theological prose, and her public works, just as Louisa May Alcott builds the theology of renunciation and philosophy of lived religion practised within the matrilineal community of the Alcott women into her autobiographical novel, *Little Women*.

However, where the March sisters attempt to expand their sympathetic community into the outside world, Christina Rossetti upholds the exclusivity of the matrilineal community in “Goblin Market”. Michie has argued that “the temptation of the fruit is, of course, the temptation of difference ... and the knowledge of difference” between sisters (34). I agree with Michie’s contention, but do not concur with her negative evaluation of Rossetti’s portrayal of sororal identification within this poem, especially her claim that Rossetti’s “discourse of sameness” undermines the individuation of female identity between women (33-34). What Michie defines as the “temptation of difference” is not the threat of possessing

a separate identity, it is the threat of cutting oneself off from the sacramental communion that is facilitated by the matrilineal community. Lizzie and Laura are not the same person: their diverging responses to the Goblins make this clear, but they are united in the sacramental redemption facilitated by Lizzie's act of self-sacrifice. Just as the three persons of the Trinity remain distinct but are yet united as one divine entity, so the two sisters possess separate identities that nevertheless come together as one body when they partake in a sacramental union with the divine. This contention is theologically sound: the apostolic Church is commonly referred to as the "Body of Christ" because the Christian congregation comes into communion with the Second Person of the Trinity when it receives the sacrament of the Eucharist en masse. Time and again, Rossetti deliberately chooses to portray this sacramental body as female in nature, whatever her claims about the higher function of an apostolic male priesthood may be.

It is nevertheless important to note that the matrilineal community can only come into communion with God by virtue of its unification with the Christian "Body of Christ", even if this Christological "body" is primarily female in nature. Rossetti's Trinitarian poetics uphold a model of matrilineal identification that is very close to the Alcott women's model of a shared consciousness, but diverges in one crucial respect: the assimilation with the divine facilitated by this matrilineal identification must be accessed through a priest-like medium. Frances Rossetti, like the Creative Father, embodies a continuum of love that extends from this world to the next, allowing her daughter to access a vision of heavenly salvation, while Maria Rossetti becomes the analogical vehicle that enables her sister to witness the presence of the divine on earth. To access the divine, one must willingly acknowledge the precedence of the matrilineal community and enter into communion with it. Salvation is enabled by recognising the sacredness of the maternal bond as the primary means by which each individual accesses the love of God. The maternal bond can be expanded outwards into a

matrilineal network, but this is an elected network: it cannot be built into the public sphere in the same manner as the Alcott women's shared consciousness.

Where the Alcott women believe that an outward-facing disposition towards the other can transform the structures of human relationships in society at large, the Rossetti women insist upon the individual's direct assimilation into the left-handed community before they can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. At the heart of these diverging conceptions of matrilineal communion is the communities' differing perceptions of divine grace. The Rossetti women follow the Augustinian model of grace as the free and unmerited favour of God evidenced by religious faith alone. Thus, if the mother is the primary medium of grace, she must be acknowledged as such: there is no room for entering into a communion with the divine without first recognising her sacramental authority. By contrast, the Alcott women defer to a providential model of grace that relies upon the implementation of good works; a self-sacrificing disposition towards the other has the power to transform the wider community's experience of the divine. Unlike the Alcott sisters, the Rossetti women cannot promote a maternal theology of lived religion to the world at large; their redemptive community serves as a model that others can choose to accept or reject. If society chooses to reject this model, a theology of renunciation is merely accepting the material world as a shadow of the world to come; it is not a means of restructuring society on the values of the matrilineal community.

However, the theology of the Alcott and Rossetti women overlaps in one critical respect: the relations of the left-handed society are upheld as a vehicle for accessing the divine. Within the left-handed societies of both of these families, the identity of the individual is formulated through unification with the other and it is through becoming one body that the community as a whole is able to access a vision of the kingdom of heaven. In the case of the Alcott women this kingdom is first implemented on earth; for the Rossetti women it is deferred to the afterlife—but in both communities it finds its origins in the figure of the

mother. This divine mother is not restricted to the “private” world of the domestic sphere, for her authority can be identified in the private writing of the Alcott and Rossetti sisters, *and* the public writing of Louisa May Alcott and Christina Rossetti. Both *Little Women* and “Goblin Market” are manifestos of the values of the matrilineal community and its power to redeem each of its daughters, but Alcott and Rossetti’s championing of the sympathetic and Trinitarian theologies of their mothers is not limited to these texts. It can be identified throughout their canonical works, which promote the left-handed society of the domestic sphere as the foundation for female empowerment and social reform in the public realm and the elevation of women in the world to come.

Section II

“A Loving League of Sisters”

Alcott and Rossetti’s promotion of Christian values through the ties of sisterhood

In her 1883 biblical commentary, *Letter and Spirit*, Christina Rossetti claimed that the wife was incapable of experiencing a direct revelation of God and implied that she was the spiritual inferior of the single woman:

She sees not face to face, but as it were in a glass darkly. Every thing, and more than all every person, and most of all the one best beloved person becomes her mirror wherein she beholds Christ and her shrine wherein she serves Him ... Her earthly love and obedience express to her a mystery; she takes heed to reverence her husband, as seeing Him Who is invisible; her children are the children whom God has given her, the children whom she nurses for God. She sits down in the lowest place, and is thankful there. (92-93)

Rossetti’s implicit challenge to the elevation of women as “relative creatures” has been well documented,¹⁰¹ but it is interesting to note the paradox inherent in her demotion of the figure of the wife and her absolute elevation of the mother, especially when we consider the fact that the wife is discussed in relation to “the children whom she nurses for God” (93). As has been noted previously, the mother attains her spiritual status exclusively through her relationship with her children who must first acknowledge the maternal bond as the primary

¹⁰¹ See Yankovski, “Rossetti functions as a case study of a larger trend in Victorian British society to retrieve medieval models and ideals, for a variety of religious, artistic, and political purposes. Rossetti is an interesting case study because she was single by choice....” (78) and Roden, “In all of Rossetti’s writings ... the single woman’s spirituality is contrasted with a married or marrying ‘sister’s’” (Roden goes on to argue that single woman’s spirituality is presented as superior) (64).

source of human love, thereby creating a familial Christian community that mirrors the reciprocal relations of the Trinity. The husband, or father, is removed from Rossetti's portrayal of the mother, unless she refers to the heavenly Father whom the mother emulates in her Trinitarian relations with her children. More importantly, the mother's most sacred maternal relationships are with her daughters.

The significance of Rossetti's elevation of matrilineal bonds, especially when male figures are extrapolated from such female-centred relationships, is that sororal ties are implicitly upheld above conjugal ones. It is important to remember that Rossetti elevates the "maternal type", and does not limit the superior spiritual status of the mother to biological mothers alone. Arguably, she takes on the role of spiritual mother in positioning herself as a biblical scholar and spiritual guide. By contrast, the woman who defines herself as "wife" inhabits the "lowest place" and is reduced to experiencing everything in analogical terms. While the Tractarian faith championed the analogical mode of spiritual revelation, it nevertheless allowed for the individual's personal engagement with the symbolic language of God. However, the wife's spiritual experience instead lies at a second remove, for she accesses the symbolism of God's analogical language exclusively through the "mirror" of her husband "wherein she beholds Christ" (92). One detects the echo of St Paul's claim that marriage was inferior to the single life and should only be resorted to when one is incapable of controlling one's sexual urges (1 Corinthians 8-10). Significantly, if children (and female children in particular) facilitate an emulation of the self-giving bonds of the Trinity, then the husband himself can be viewed as the figurative "dark glass" or "mirror" that stands between the mother's union with her heavenly spouse. In point of fact, the mother's children come directly from God as "the children God has given her" (93); they are not an obstruction to union with this heavenly spouse.

If the husband's removal facilitates the mother's heavenly union with Christ, then it stands to reason that the relations between sisters must transcend those of spouses, for they are the derivation of the life-giving relationship between mother and child that simultaneously mirror the complementarity of spousal relationships, while nonetheless allowing the individual's relationship with God to take precedence. Leila Silvana May's integral scholarship on sibling relations in nineteenth-century British literature has traced "...the relatively uncharted territory of the horizontal rather than the vertical plane of the family axis, and on the sister as the primary pole of the sibling relationship" to argue that the sister is "...key to understanding much about the complicated and contradictory conception of the nineteenth-century middle-class family" (13). May claims that the sister is the link between the public and private worlds of Victorian society because she draws the brother back into the home (19). The sister is also the "sanctum sanctorum of moral virtue" because "...only in heaven can there exist a true Virgin Mother; but such a vestal vessel is nevertheless required to be elevated, touted, and sacrificed, and ... it can exist on earth only in the being of the sister" (18).

If the husband must be removed for the mother to achieve her elevated status, no such obstacle stands in the way of the sister. As such, May contends that the sister is the proper subject of the Victorian family romance, and is at the heart of the nineteenth-century novel (14). Central to May's thesis is the notion that the sister's elevated role is a conflicted one because she enacts a type "cognitive dissonance"—both upholding and undermining the structures of the family-unit (14-16) by implicitly revealing the flaws in the "ideology of sororal perfection" that she embodies (27). I do not contest May's claim, insofar as it appertains to the heterosexual nuclear family, but in my estimation she overlooks the presence of exclusively female sisterly communities that deliberately separate themselves from heterosexual ties.

Such a community can be identified in Christina Rossetti's 1850 autobiographical novella, *Maude*, which portrays the psychological, spiritual and artistic development of its titular heroine as facilitated by a community of elected sisters that are inspired by the emergence of the Tractarian sisterhoods in the mid-nineteenth-century. *Maude* expands the social implications of the growth of religious sisterhoods by demonstrating that secular women are as capable of forming transformative religious communities that revitalise the output of women artists. In this text, the sister is no longer a bridge between the public and private spheres, nor is she the doppelganger of her brother. She is rather the "other" with whom the individual must identify to achieve a revelation of Christ. Maude Foster is only able to reject the ideology of individualism that is associated with the Pre-Raphaelites through adhering to the example of her sisters who enable her to integrate her vocation as poet with her Christian beliefs. As with the relations of the Rossetti women whose shared devotional practices facilitated a mystical communion with one another and an assimilation with the divine, Maude's sharing of the sacraments with her sisters similarly enables her to unite herself with Christ through experiencing the *imitatio Christi*. The *imitatio Christi*, or imitation of Christ, centres on the belief that the individual who is fully oriented towards Christ engages in a mystical union that reconfigures their perception of the outside world and their relation to the "other". Rossetti solves the problem of the sister's enclosure in the domestic sphere by immersing her in a self-contained sisterhood that facilitates integration into the Godhead through mutual identification with one another.

Louisa May Alcott shares Rossetti's vision of attaining communion with the divine through cultivating sisterly ties, but portrays these ties as self-perpetuating in their outward-facing disposition towards the public sphere. Where Rossetti circumvents the sister's role as redemptive medatrix by containing her in an exclusive religious community, Alcott creates a philanthropic sisterhood that is the foundation for a utopian gynocentric society. Her 1873

bildungsroman, *Work*, explores the psychological struggles of its heroine, Christie Devon, who enters the public sphere in search of a meaningful vocation and is torn between the desire to achieve artistic acclaim and the need to create an inter-subjective family. Christie overcomes her internal conflict by endeavouring to instigate a universal sisterhood that is united in the pursuit of social reform, engaging in a variety of charitable causes that reflect its intersectionality. Through participating in the world of work, Christie's sisterhood aspires to a future where the values of the public sphere are reconfigured to convey a theology of *caritas*. This theology of *caritas* is focused on alleviating social inequality through identifying oneself with the impoverished and marginalised.

Christie's redemptive theology is inspired by the person of Christ, as is indicated by her name, but her imitation is of a practical, rather than mystical, kind. Unlike Maude Foster, Christie remains focused on mimicking Christ's evangelical mission and his self-sacrificial theology of renunciation. Her outward-facing altruism allows her to reconceive her art as the collaborative out-pouring of a female community that is focused on utilising artistic expression as a tool for combating social injustice. By contributing to the fields of philanthropy, reform and work, this female community is liberated to re-interpret male literary traditions, re-reading seminal works of the male canon through the framework of its Christian beliefs.

Alcott's vision of a reformed society founded on the bonds of sisterhood is not unique among nineteenth-century American women. In her work on female benevolence in nineteenth-century America, Lori D. Ginzberg has argued that "...during the nineteenth century, the growth of both economic hardship and benevolent associations expanded the list of Protestant women's duties beyond recognition" (17). Significantly, Ginzberg claims that the "rhetoric of Christian benevolence" allowed women to aspire to "...a higher standard of virtue than that ... exhibited by men", portraying women "acting together" as sisters as more

able to care for the “poor and downtrodden” (ibid.). Despite the radical possibilities of Christian altruism, Ginzberg nevertheless notes that the very notion of a spiritually superior sisterhood “....carried within it both the conservative imperative to conform and a more radical call to define and act upon women’s needs” (18). Ginzberg’s most significant criticism of the secular Christian sisterhood is that its Evangelical framework led many of its advocates to claim that their “sense of connection” could “....lead women to transcend their differences and act upon their shared sexual status” (21). This is a criticism that can be levelled at *Work*, which portrays a multi-racial sisterhood that cuts across class boundaries to enable widespread social reform. However, Alcott presents sisterhood not as a smokescreen to obscure difference, but instead champions difference as the foundation for sororal kinship and the pursuit of social justice.

Robin Cadwallader’s book chapter on the concept of Christian *caritas* in the work of Harding Davis, Alcott and Phelps has alerted me to the affinities in Alcott and Rossetti’s vision of Christian sisterhood. Cadwallader deconstructs the root of *caritas* as stemming from the Greek verbs for both “love” and “charity”, defining *caritas* itself as “....the affection of one created being to another so far as it is prompted by the sense of their common relationship to God” (114). In actual fact, *caritas* is the proper outcome of the *imitatio Christi* because spiritual unification with Christ enables the Christian person to properly orient themselves towards the “other”. Cadwallader rightly observes that Alcott’s theology of *caritas* is significant within the context of the period because it attempts to transform the widely held perception of “charity” as an “institutionalised and impersonal” enterprise by redefining it as a response to “....the humanity of all individuals ... with simple acts of kindness” (114-115).

Sisterhood is the foundation of Alcott’s theology of *caritas* because *caritas* requires each individual to orient herself towards the needs of the other. Jean Pfaelzer has argued that

Alcott's experiences on the Fruitlands commune led her to believe that "...when men construct utopian spaces, they monopolise the authority of the father to represent or define power and desire"—forcibly disseminating the values of the autocratic male figurehead onto the rest of the community (98). Pfaelzer contends that, in opposition to her father's vision, Alcott champions the "maternal connection" as the "appropriate basis for a community" that is centred on a model of "inter-subjectivity" (97). In Pfaelzer's definition, an "inter-subjective" community acknowledges "the human need for recognition", while simultaneously fostering values of reciprocity and mutual fulfilment (99).

Pfaelzer correctly associates this "inter-subjective" framework with the mother-figure, but it is important to acknowledge that the "inter-subjective" values of the mother are circulated within the wider community by her female children. The reciprocal relations that are modelled in Alcott's *Work* closely mirror the Trinitarian relationships that are promoted in Rossetti's *Maude*: within each of these fictional communities the individual gains a sense of self through dedicating themselves to the needs of the "other". In *Work*, this orientation towards the other is a reformist enterprise that is focused on propagating the kingdom of heaven on earth, where Rossetti's *Maude* is dedicated to facilitating the salvation of each individual in the world to come. It is for this reason that Rossetti privileges the Holy Trinity as the ultimate model for female relations, while Alcott implies that *every* individual should aspire to emulate the benevolent figure of Christ.

Alcott and Rossetti locate the transformative power of sisterhood in different spiritual aspirations, but they are united in their rejection of the model of male genius. Both Maude Foster and Christie Devon are driven to near breakdowns by the conflict between the solipsistic ideology of individualism that is required of the public artist, and their need to be integrated into an inter-subjective community that aspires towards communion with the "other". The heroines are saved from their internal psychomachias through their initiation

into elected sisterhoods that facilitate access to the divine through rejecting the limitations of self, aspiring either towards a vision of God or the attainment of the greater good.

Maude and *Work* portray the heroines' contact with their elected sisterhoods as the origin of their spiritual rebirths and the crystallisation of their artistic vocations. Inspired by her friend, Magdalen Ellis's, decision to become a nun, Maude Foster rededicates her poetry to her religious faith—overcoming her fear of “vanity” and “display” in the process. At the novella's denouement, the heroine is symbolically reincarnated in the figure of her cousin, Agnes Clifton, who transmits Maude's newly reformed Christian verses to subsequent generations of sisters. Similarly, Christie Devon's decision to harness her theatrical training as a tool for campaigning for women's suffrage is inspired by the struggles of her intersectional sisterhood. Her spiritual rebirth is achieved through the death of her husband, David Stirling, who martyrs himself to the causes of abolition and female suffrage when he is killed by a sniper while assisting a group of fugitive slave women to freedom.

Alcott eradicates men from her final vision of inter-subjective sisterhood, portraying the female community's creation of a collaborative work of art and its formation of a shared school of interpretation as stemming from its engagement with the public sphere. Rossetti takes this depiction of female kinship one step further by creating an exclusive and self-contained sisterly community that consciously separates itself from the ideology of individualism promoted by the male artist, instead aspiring towards a mystical union with Christ. In both cases, the sisterhood achieves transcendence through dedicating itself to the other, promoting a theology of renunciation that is the heritage of the matrilineal line. The figure of Christ is the exemplar of this theology of renunciation; his radical model of self-sacrifice complements the heroines' compulsion to identify themselves with their suffering sisters. In the canonical works of Alcott and Rossetti, we witness the implementation of the religious beliefs of the matrilineal community in the work of art. Both *Maude* and *Work*

present the female artist as the collaborative creation of an outward-facing sisterhood that proceeds from the divine figurehead of the mother.

Chapter 6

We are all relative creatures

The transformative power of sisterhood in Rossetti's *Maude*

When William Michael Rossetti published his sister's autobiographical novella, *Maude*, in 1896, two years after her death, he dismissed the work as a "juvenile performance" on the first page of his Preface, assuring the reader that he was "...not under any misapprehension regarding the degree of merit which it possess[d]" (18). In particular, the editor trivialised the heroine's spiritual conflict as evidence of the author's affiliation with the Tractarian sisterhoods, which he regarded with suspicion as evidence of her religious extremism:

Maude is made the subject of many unfavourable comments, from herself and from her strict-minded authoress. The worst harm she appears to have done is, that when she had written a good poem, she felt it to be good.

[...]

If some readers opine that all this shows Christina Rossetti's mind to have been at that date overburdened with conscientious scruples of the extreme ... I share their opinion. One can trace in this tale that she was already an adherent of the advanced High Church party in the Anglican communion, including conventual sisterhoods (19).

Maude is an exploration of the heroine's internal conflict and her attempts to reconcile her artistic identity with her religious faith. Like Rossetti herself, the teenage protagonist experiences a psychological breakdown that stems from her failure to live up to the high

standard of her religious beliefs. She eventually recovers from this breakdown by developing a new theological style of writing, which is inspired by her friend, Magdalen Ellis's, decision to become a nun. The text has been the subject of increased critical attention over the last fifty years, but has never achieved public acclaim—something that is undoubtedly linked to William Michael Rossetti's discouraging preface, as well as the text's references to the religious sisterhoods and their continuing association with religious extremism.

It is easy for the contemporary scholar to overlook the radical implications of the Anglican sisterhoods in the mid-nineteenth-century. Associated with the long-standing British suspicion of Catholicism, dating back to the Reformation and fuelled, in part, by the furore surrounding the 1829 Roman Catholic Relief Act providing Catholics with the civil rights to vote and hold office, the sisterhoods were often held in contempt, due to the widely perceived “unnaturalness” of sexual abstinence (D'Amico 47). At a time when marriage was perceived to be the only vocation for women because of their status as “relative creatures”, the religious sisterhoods offered a viable solution to the “surplus woman problem” that nevertheless undermined the very fabric of British society, founded on the deceptive distinction between public and private spheres. Due to the impact of the Crimean War, women outnumbered men by a half million in 1850s Britain, a major source of public anxiety that was hotly debated in a variety of periodical publications (Casteras 158). Employment options for single women were limited and, at a time when the law of primogeniture determined the line of inheritance, spinsters were frequently forced to rely on the generosity of their fathers and brothers for survival (*ibid.*). The religious sisterhoods provided an alternative vocation to marriage that maintained the supposedly superior spiritual status of women, but were nonetheless met with suspicion, for in the words of Roe:

Involuntary spinsterhood was one thing, but celibacy as a career and lifestyle choice was another thing entirely. If women started rejecting their traditional roles as mothers, sisters and daughters, and instead became independent agents serving their own community, what would be the long-term implications for family structures? Furthermore, there was an unsettling lack of male influence over these religious female communities, which had a woman at their helm, provokingly called a ‘Mother Superior’ (*Wonderland* 258).

In the religious sisterhoods, we find the model of Christina Rossetti’s ideal family where the celibate mother leads a community of sisters, united in their devotion to Christ. Where May focuses on “....the horizontal rather than the vertical plane of family axis” (13), I continue to develop my analysis of the triangulated relations between women in Rossetti’s work as modelled on the Holy Trinity. In *Maude*, religious sisterhoods are upheld as the exemplar for female relations in society at large, both within and without the domestic sphere.

However, while the titular heroine is inspired in her faith by her friend, Sr Magdalen Ellis, she nonetheless emulates her creator in maintaining her poetic vocation as a single woman outside of the convent walls. The elected sisterhood that Rossetti presents within her novella is notable for its portrayal of a variety of female vocations, consisting of the religious life, as personified in Magdalen; the married life, as represented by the figure of Maude’s cousin, Mary Clifton, and the artistic vocation that is embodied by Maude and her doppelganger, Agnes Clifton, Mary’s sister. *Maude* is a radical text in that it presents not only one, but *two* alternatives to married life for women, while upholding universal sisterhood as the means by which women are able to form independent identities and discern their callings. Maude’s elected sisterhood is championed as the foundational community for the

development of both the heroine and her friends, while their shared religious faith is presented as underpinning sororal bonds.

Christina Rossetti's portrayal of a female artist who relinquishes the worship of her art in favour of integrating herself within a female community that achieves self-expression through unification with the person of Christ was perhaps too close to the bone for William Michael Rossetti. When one considers the fact that both of Rossetti's brothers *and* the wider Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood are expunged from the text, one cannot help but wonder if William Michael Rossetti was, in reality, threatened by his sister's disavowal of her fraternal ties *and* her elevation of an imagined female utopia. Graham has contended that although the Pre-Raphaelites refuted the influence of Tractarianism on their work, the "Brotherhood" was nonetheless inspired by "the principles of a monastic community" that was consecrated to "artistic mission and the notion of fellowship" (91-93). The "Brotherhood" departed from the traditional purpose of monasticism, however, through locating this fellowship in the mutual experience of artistic creation as inherently divine, rather than as an instrument for the communal worship of God.

Where the Pre-Raphaelites were keen to disassociate themselves from their obvious Tractarian influences through creating a secular and, at times, sacrilegious "Brotherhood", Christina Rossetti deliberately reaffirmed her Tractarian identity through creating a religious sisterhood that is dedicated to artistic reform in *Maude*. Written at a time when Christina Rossetti was still modelling for the Pre-Raphaelites, while declining to read her poetry aloud among the group, *Maude* embodies the poet's alternative artistic manifesto, written with the female artist in mind. It is little wonder that William Michael Rossetti felt threatened by the text, or that his sister neglected to share it with him. To read the work through the lens of William Michael's biased autobiographical interpretation raises serious issues, not in the least that such readings subtly reinforce the canonical precedence of the Pre-Raphaelites as a male

fraternity, above the vision of a female sisterhood that was espoused by the sister who refused to ever join the movement.

This chapter will interrogate Maude's spiritual conflict and her decision to reject an ideology of individualism. Maude must learn to redirect her verses towards the glorification of God if she is to reconcile her poetic vocation with her religious faith. The examples provided by her elected sisters, who use their creative gifts to serve the Church, allow Maude to redirect her poetry towards her religious devotion. Maude is finally able to relinquish her solipsistic preoccupation with self-expression through identifying herself with the person of Christ in an ecstatic experience of the *imitatio Christi*. Maude's conformity with the person of Christ is made manifest through the stigmatic wound in her side. What might initially appear as a symbol of suffering actually enhances Maude's transfiguration as a heroine who has become the image of God through prayerful contemplation. Mirroring the medieval female mystics, Maude becomes united with the crucified Christ through a painful rebirth that is product of her reorientation towards God. Although the text ends with her death, it is my contention that she is actually resurrected in the figure of Agnes, a truly "Christic" person who preserves Maude's devotional verses for succeeding generations of sisters.

The Christian concept of the *imitatio Christi* is not centred on a literal emulation of the second person of the Trinity, but rather on the restoration of the human identity as created in God's image, as is set out in Genesis 1:27. The human person attains their fullness of selfhood through affirming their status as image of God, thereby imitating the incarnate Son who "images" the Father as his expressed likeness contained in human form (Delio SB 115-116). Just as the Son retains his independent personhood, while simultaneously revealing the presence of the Father to the world, so does the human person retain their independent identity while uniting themselves with the perfected person of Christ (ibid.). This does not

necessitate actively seeking out the suffering of Christ, but rather emulating Christ's example through positioning the self both towards the Father and the human family.

Maude's spiritual unification with Christ through the act of the *imitatio Christi* allows her to relinquish the self-involved poetic persona she has embraced earlier in the text, thereby achieving a reformed poetic style that strives to be a revelation of God and which rejects the affected and self-indulgent tenor of her early work. Complete unification with Christ is obtained through embracing "spiritual poverty" (119). Contrary to common belief, this does not require that the suppliant engage in acts of masochistic humiliation, but instead necessitates the individual's recognition of humility as "the foundation of one's life in God" (118). The cultivation of humility, another form of renunciation, is central to the *imitatio Christi* because it is through humility that the human person is able to orient themselves to the other, just as the Father in "self-diffusive goodness" gives himself to the Son who, in turn, bequeaths the Father's self-gift to humanity (ibid.).

True poverty of spirit radically requires that *all* humanity, both *men* and women, recognise their status as "relative creatures"—relative to both one another *and* to God who has created humankind *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) (118-119). Consequently, it is only through relinquishing her individualistic conception of the role of poet, a role that Maude initially places above her religious faith, that Rossetti's heroine is able to paradoxically access the divine through her verses. Furthermore, the sisterly community's acceptance of the human person's status as "relative creature" allows it to become elevated above the male community as a model for human relationships *and* artistic production in the outside world. By recognising her creaturely status as subject to the will of God, rather than to that of husband or brother, Maude achieves the artistic precedence she has sought throughout the text. This is chapter is titled, "We are all relative creatures", because it demonstrates how Maude attains empowerment through embracing a theology of renunciation that places all individuals on an

equal footing. Her religious faith enables her to envision a future where artists receive inspiration through dedicating themselves to receiving a vision of God. Contrary to predominant critical readings of this text, religious faith is presented as the means by which the female artist achieves pre-eminence over her male contemporaries, as well as the source of the sisterly community's elevation above the male-dominated public sphere. This elevation is enabled by the community's facilitation of the female artist's salvation.

“The wife, the nun, or the kind and useful spinster”: the critical history of *Maude*

William Michael Rossetti's assessment of his sister's theological outlook has all too often been embraced as objective fact by succeeding generations of critics. Gilbert and Gubar have claimed that: “...the moral of this story is that the Maude in Christina Rossetti—the ambitious, competitive, self-absorbed and self-assertive-poet—must die, and be replaced by either the wife, the nun, or the kind and useful spinster” (552). Gilbert and Gubar's assessment is not incorrect, but the negative connotations that they attach to Rossetti's selection of female vocations are prejudicial—inherited from the negative associations attached to Catholicism and celibacy, as well as the preconception of spinsters as sexually undesirable, which finds its origins in the “surplus woman problem”.

Gilbert and Gubar's dismissal of Maude Foster's religious conflict is by no means isolated within the critical history of the text. Palazzo's reading of the novella even goes so far as to claim that *Maude* subtly undermines Tractarianism because it “...expos[es] the extremism of a religious position that denies the beauty of the natural world or of human efforts to reproduce it” (11). Likewise, Showalter interprets Rossetti's allegiance with the Anglican sisterhoods in *Maude* as a consequence of her exclusion from the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the lack of a defined female literary tradition with which to affiliate herself: “Lacking a sisterhood of poets to match the poetic fraternity of the P.R.B., [Rossetti's]

imagination often turned to the newly established Sisterhoods of the Anglican Church....” (*Maude* xii). However, D’Amico has made the important point that such readings “....present [Rossetti’s] faith more as a device for coping with reality than the reality it was for her” and that focusing exclusively on the negative connotations of renunciation ignores the fact that: “For Rossetti, controlling bodily and worldly appetites was an important stage in the quest for holiness” (62).

In actual fact, the renunciation of bodily and worldly appetites is an important stage of the *imitatio Christi* because the soul that desires to imitate Christ must embrace “spiritual poverty” to achieve mystical transformation (Delio SB 118-119). Self-interestedness must be relinquished if the individual is to attain a Christlike nature: “Christ, as the teacher of perfect humility, shows us that it is in the humbling of self that the height of imitation lies—not as passive recognition or acceptance of oppression—but that self-humbling that leads to truth and the experiential knowledge of one’s own reality” (118). This paradox is rooted in the fact that the Christlike person “....lives in receptivity to the gift of God’s overflowing goodness” in full knowledge of the fact that “grasping after equality with God is the source of sin” (119). The incarnate person of Christ is a radical exemplar in that, even though he is entitled to seek power and authority over humankind, he “enter[s] into suffering humanity ... and has loved [humanity] precisely in and through this suffering” (121). In short, the pain of renunciation is the pain one experiences when re-orienting oneself towards the “other”, so as to obtain a truly “inter-subjective” outlook.

Arseneau has acknowledged that the conflict between “fame, femininity and faith” that is experienced by Maude is resolved through the “feminine, domestic and religious” community she partakes in, but locates her spiritual transformation in the “Tractarian principles of reserve and analogy” (RCR 67-68). Reserve bears a close affinity with the concept of “spiritual poverty” because it is centred on the notion that one can only behold

God through cultivating virtues of “modesty” and “reticence” (71). However, such “modesty” requires the individual to maintain a distance from the divine because the human person is only able to access God by means of type and symbol. By contrast, the “spiritual poverty” of the *imitatio Christi* enables total unification with Christ, so that the individual essentially shares in the identity of the incarnate God: “Bonaventure interprets the Stigmata as the signs of ... perfect transform[ation] in the image of Christ” (Delio SB 123). “Spiritual poverty” is therefore the source of spiritual elevation, and Rossetti’s text charts the heroine’s transformation into a truly “Christic” person through the vehicle of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Receiving the literal “Body of Christ” enables Maude to unite herself with Christ’s suffering and transfiguration.

I am indebted to the work of Linda E. Marshall who has observed the presence of the *imitatio Christi* in “Goblin Market”. Marshall reads Lizzie’s sacrificial offering of her body to Laura as an example of the flesh becoming “the ground of divinity” when it is “fused” with that “ultimate body which is the body of Christ” (438). Marshall acknowledges the Eucharistic connotations of Lizzie and Laurie’s redemptive encounter, and her work provides a useful model for considering how unification with Christ through the *imitatio Christi* is facilitated by the sisterly community in Rossetti’s verse.

Likewise, Roden offers an insightful commentary on Maude’s stigmatic wound, arguing that “To receive God, [Maude] has become like Christ, physically wounded” (73). He explores the resonances between Maude’s wound and the wound in Christ’s side in the writings of the medieval mystics where it is sometimes likened to a vagina or nursing breast (ibid.). I read *Maude* through the lens of the Franciscan interpretation of the *imitatio Christi* because it speaks to Rossetti’s perception of the created world as sacramental in nature, illuminated through the act of grace as “...the self-communication of a transcendent God” (Musello Cantalupo 283). Catherine Musello Cantalupo has noted that Rossetti rejected a

pantheistic vision of nature by claiming that the individual's experience of the sublime was not the "source of individual revelation" (285), but instead stemmed from their relationship with God (281). Williams has argued that this emphasis on "...the individual's relationship with nature as profoundly connected to spiritual fate" led Rossetti to develop an "environmental ethics" that emphasises "conservation and stewardship" ("Environmental Ethics" 1).

Although Cantalupo and Williams align this sacramental environmentalism with Tractarianism, Emma Mason has recently recovered Rossetti's understudied Franciscan influences. In her germinal work, *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology and Faith* (2018), Mason has claimed that: "As an Anglo-Catholic of Italian descent, Rossetti was familiar with the cultural and religious presence of Francis in the nineteenth-century, and had visited several Franciscan churches in her 1865 tour" (116). Maria Rossetti's *A Shadow of Dante* (1871) explored the significance of the figure of St Francis in the *Divine Comedy* at length, while Francis was also revered by both the Pre-Raphaelite and Tractarian movements (ibid.). Crucially, "Rossetti's relational cosmology under grace was analogous to Francis's sense of the divine, and both rejected the idea of human stewardship over the world as a reading of creation as companion" (117).

While Mason does not explore the Franciscan interpretation of the *imitatio Christi* in her scholarship, the Christocentric emphasis on Rossetti's preoccupation with environmental stewardship contains important insights for the portrayal of the *imitatio Christi* in *Maude*. Franciscan spirituality positions Christ as the point of reconciliation between humanity and nature because Christ enables the completion of creation through the incarnation: "Since the entire created world is related to humanity, it finds its fulfilment in perfect glorification of humanity" (Delio SB 87-90). Maude's act of spiritual imitation allows her to reform her poetry into an expression of the Christological grace of God as it runs through creation.

Moreover, her reconciliation with Christ enables her to develop an inter-subjective vision of the sisterly community surrounding her, for she finally abandons her individualistic poetic persona in favour of identifying the figure of Christ in her spiritual sisters. Consequently, Maude's participation in the *imitatio Christi* facilitates the reconciliation between the artistic and religious aspects of her identity because she finally realises that her experience of divine revelation is rooted in Christ. Prior to her contact with the sisterhood, Maude's poetic vocation disconnects her from the outside world and her vision of God. She is dissatisfied with the moral connotations of her verses, despite the fact she indulges her desire for artistic acclaim. The first step on her journey to aesthetic reform is to reject the precedent of artistic originality. It is therefore imperative that we explore the threat of originality in greater depth.

“I am sick of display and poetry and acting”: the temptation of originality

The conflict that Maude experiences between her religious faith and poetic vocation is situated in her anxiety regarding her lack of humility as an artist. Although William Michael Rossetti claims that “...the worst harm Maude appears to have done is that when she had written a good poem, she knew it to be good” (19), her error can be more accurately located in the fact that she allows her belief in the quality of her verse to set herself apart from other people. As such, she is obstructed from entering into a true union with Christ because she lacks spiritual humility. Indeed, while she feigns modesty by refusing to read her verse aloud because she cannot “...think of monopolising everyone's attention” (33), she nevertheless deliberately suggests a *Bouts rimes* competition when requested to propose a party-game, despite the fact that her companions are clearly unenthusiastic about her proposal (24). The *Bouts rimes* competition references a pastime frequently enjoyed by the Rossetti siblings where competitors were given a pre-prepared set of rhymes, which were then used to compose an original sonnet. Maude claims that she

“has nothing else to propose” for the entertainment, but subsequently suggests “game after game” when she has successfully won the competition (24-25).

Maude’s anxieties concerning the public recitation of her verses recalls Christina Rossetti’s reservations regarding her brothers’ suggestion that she read her poetry aloud during the meetings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which she looked upon as “display ... the sort of thing she abhors” (qtd. in Doughty 45). Maude accedes to the temptation to “display” herself under the cover of providing entertainment, but her hypocrisy implies that Christina Rossetti regarded the artistic culture of the Pre-Raphaelites as centred on a competitiveness and self-assertion that was at odds with her own religious beliefs. In reference to her love of adulation, Maude later observes that: “It is horrible to feel such a hypocrite as I do” (35). Her conflict comes to a head when she decides to abstain from receiving communion on Christmas Day because she knows that she is “not trying” to “avoid putting [herself] forward and displaying [her] verses” (35). Using the identical language of “display” that Rossetti herself used to avoid associating with the Pre-Raphaelites,¹⁰² Maude makes it clear that such self-interestedness compromises her spiritual welfare. Her cousin, Agnes, observes that she is torn between the conflicting demands of her religious faith and her desire to indulge in the individualistic aspirations of a celebrated artist: “You cannot mean that for the present you will indulge vanity and display; that you will court admiration and applause, that you will take your fill of pleasure until ... death strips you of temptation and sin altogether” (36).

Maude’s poetry suggests that it is her identity as an artist that obstructs her relationship with God, for it is an expression of her *psychomachia*—a state of being that traps the subject between two modes of conceiving the world and interpreting reality. Surrounded

¹⁰² Bristow has also recognised the poet’s autobiographical allusions here, but conversely interprets Maude’s pretence of humility as evidence that Rossetti’s “attitude of self-denial” was a front for her own acts of “self-display” inherent in her authorship, “Making herself only too noticeable by her reticence, she lent her poetic voice to a host of women.... (272; 262).

by an “old chaos of stationary”, Agnes finds Maude looking “pale, languid, almost in pain” (34). One of the poems that Maude shares with Agnes articulates her sense of dissociation with religious worship (34-35), for while she listens to “the holy antheming” (1) of “white-robed men and boys” (4), she asks herself “....with a sad questioning: / What lov’st thou here?” (5-6). It is notable that Maude finds herself unable to relate to the artistic elements of the church service: she does not describe a sense of frustration in prayer, or an inability to achieve a revelation of God. Rather, she cannot access or participate in the beauty of the liturgy. This is significant because liturgy, as a form of ritual directed towards divine communion, requires the suppliant to relinquish individuality, in order to partake in a preordained expression of worship shared in common with the church community. As a crucible of theatrical performance, visual art and musical expression, liturgy is a type of total art that is experienced as a reflection of God’s image, *not* as a vehicle for individualised self-expression. Maude identifies her inability to share in the liturgy with her artistic individualism: “Vanity enters with thee, and thy love / Soars not to heaven, but grovelleth below” (10-11). Maude’s art cannot participate in the divine outpouring of the Church because she uses it as a means of distinguishing herself over others and, in seeking after originality, she finds herself “grovelling below”—cut off from God and the church community.

The rejection of originality was central to Tractarian poetics, for Keble defined the purpose of poetry as “awakening ... some moral or religious feeling, not by direct instruction ... but by way of association” (qtd. in G.B. Tennyson 25). Eschewing the celebration of individualism, Keble claimed that poetry should forego originality, in order to tap into the wider universality of human experience—redirecting that experience towards the divine (ibid.). Rossetti herself adhered to this sentiment, for in her 1881 theological work, *Called to be Saints*, she claimed that, “No graver slur could attach to my book than would be a

reputation for prevalent originality” (xvii). Maude’s disassociation with church liturgy reflects her resistance to integrating herself into the artistic expression of the church community. Her conflict confirms Jaudon’s claim that a religious framework produces “culturally shared ways of seeing, hearing, and feeling” (726) and that religion possesses the power to redefine “the nature of sense perception” (727).

At this moment, Maude is torn between the model of “seeing, hearing, and feeling” defined by Tractarianism as a communal project of worship, and the model of artistic individualism she has inherited from the Romantic tradition. She is unable to reject the promise of artistic adulation, but her conscience nevertheless insists that the pursuit of idiosyncrasy is futile. Indeed, the first poem that she shares with Agnes makes the radical claim that “there is nothing new under the sun” (11), but Maude cannot overcome the temptation that she might prove the exception to the rule. When she comes across her cousins embroidering a lectern cover for their church, she is immediately able to read the typological symbolism of the piece: “There is the Cross and the Crown of Thorns; and those must be the keys of S. Peter, with, of course, the sword of S. Paul” (27), but is nevertheless unwilling to participate in the sisters’ collaborative artistic practice: “I should not do it well enough, and have no time to learn....” (ibid.).¹⁰³

However, the real reason behind Maude’s reluctance to participate is that she would receive no recognition for her contribution. The lectern cover fits a utilitarian purpose in serving the church community: no one will enquire as to its creator, and no single person will take credit for its invention. Yet, Maude is also simultaneously drawn to the project despite her refusal to help, for she subsequently soliloquises: “How I envy you ... who live in the country, and are exactly what you appear, and never wish for what you do not possess. I am

¹⁰³ Arseneau has written extensively on Maude’s duplicity in this incident, as well as in the *bouts rimes* game, but does not link it to the threat of originality (79).

sick of display and poetry and acting” (ibid.). Maude’s inauthenticity and covetousness is aligned with her identity as a poetess, for Agnes, whose relationship with Maude is founded on their shared religious faith claims, “You do not act ... I never knew a more sincere person” (ibid.). Agnes does not realise that Maude is referring to her artistic vanity: the real reason behind her refusal to participate in her cousins’ devotional practice.

Ironically, Maude’s pursuit of individualism and originality does not actually produce verse of aesthetic worth, for her early work is both affected and self-interested. In the opening scene of the novella, the nineteen year-old Rossetti presents Maude as something of a teenage *poseuse* who makes a deliberate show of “slipping out of sight some scrawled paper” when her mother, whom she intentionally ignores, enters the room (20). Mrs. Foster, “accustomed to inattention”, asks her daughter a series of “vain questions” regarding her health and state of mind, only to receive a series of evasive answers from “one who without telling lies was determined not to tell the truth” (ibid.). Regarding her mother as an “interruption” to her weighty poetic occupation, Maude proceeds to compose a poem that begins “Yes, I too could face death and never shrink: / But it is harder to bear hated life”, only to “yawn”, “lean back in her chair”, and “wonder how she should fill up the time until dinner” (ibid.).¹⁰⁴ The attention that Maude draws to herself by ensuring that the secrecy surrounding her compositions is universally known (she makes a performance of hiding them from her mother and refuses to give her friends copies of the *Bouts rimes* verses she had previously forced upon them) suggests that she enjoys the *mystique* surrounding her poetic identity in a decidedly immature manner.

Maude can only attain maturity as a poet through realising that her vocation, as a Christian writer, is to reflect the image of God. Therefore, any attempt at self-aggrandizement

¹⁰⁴ Arseneau draws attention to the contrived style of this sonnet, yet links it to “...a female tradition of sentimental poetry characterized by displays of ‘heart-sickness’” (82).

must appear ludicrous when it is placed up against the collective expression of the Church as Body of Christ. Maude is not required to let go of her identity, but rather to recognise it as rooted in her creaturely nature as image of God. It is for this reason that the process of the *imitatio Christi* is integral to her poetic transformation. Christ, as incarnate Son of God, is defined as the “Word of God”. Franciscan theology identifies the “Word of God” as “the sum total of the infinite divine ideas” (Delio SB 84), referring back to the theory of a proto Indo-European language that preceded the division of *matris lingua* along the lines of national boundary. Within this Christian theorisation of linguistics, the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9 represents the degeneration of verbal communication following the fall of humankind. Significantly, this occurs after humanity strives for equality with God through attempting to build a city and tower tall enough to reach heaven.

The hubris of humanity in attempting to create an architectural work of art that equals the creative outpouring of God is rectified by Christ as the incarnate “Word” who receives “....the self-gift of God into [his] inner depth” as the “exemplary image” of God (64). Thus, the human person who is truly united with Christ is the ultimate realisation of the expression of the Word in the world, fulfilling their divine creative potential as image of God and thereby enabling “....all of material and spiritual reality (which are summed up in the human person) to attain a personal relationship with God” (ibid.). Significantly, unification with the incarnate Christ permanently alters one’s existential experience, for reality is realigned when one becomes a creative instrument of God. If Maude is to overcome her sense of artistic superiority, she must first become united with Christ as the Word of God who encapsulates “....the congruity between the Word and the world”, revealing all created phenomena as “a little word of God” (ibid.). Consequently, Maude is excluded from liturgical participation until she realigns her verse to become an expression of both the presence of the Word as it

lives within her and a link to the inter-subjective Christian community that surrounds her. She is only able to achieve this transformation through her participation in Christian sisterhood.

“Let us wait the end in peace”: the spiritual transformation of Maude’s poetry

It is the self-denying decision of one of Maude’s friends, Magdalen Ellis, to enter the Sisterhood of Mercy that inspires the transformation in Maude’s poetry. Magdalen’s decision to renounce the expression of her selfhood as an individuated mode of being, in order to aspire towards a revelation of God, inspires Maude to write *out of* the religious community in which she finds herself. Following the news of Magdalen’s consecration, Maude chastises her cousin Mary for referring to Magdalen under the disparaging epithet of “poor Magdalen”, sparking a re-enactment of the debate surrounding the religious sisterhoods that was raging at the time. Mary retorts: “Surely you would not want such a life ... They have not proper clothes on their beds, and never go without a thick veil, which must half blind them. All day long they are at prayers, or teaching children, or attending the sick, or making poor things, or something. Is that to your taste?” (29).

Mary’s contempt for the religious sisterhoods is rooted in their uniformity and lack of individuation. In her eyes, the outward-facing nature of the community, which requires each individual to re-orient their attention toward prayer, teaching, or charitable works, belittles their human dignity by depriving them of an identity. One detects the echo of William Michael’s disparagement of the “extremity” of Anglican religious practice and the underlying assumption that conceiving identity in concert with a female community leads to a loss of selfhood by subsuming one’s personal fulfilment into the needs of others. Maude rejects this secular outlook for its rigid partiality and lack of objectivity, claiming that: “You cannot imagine me either fit or inclined for such a life; still, I can perceive that those are very happy who are” (ibid.).

Maude's critique of Mary is founded on the latter's tendency to regard the world exclusively through her subjective experience, thereby disregarding the validity of alternate modes of self-creation—especially those that are generated through participation in a shared religious framework. By contrast, Maude's particular psychological struggle is rooted in her need to reconcile two seemingly dichotomous aspects of her character: the religious and community-oriented, and the artistic and self-expressive. She notifies her cousins of her feelings of guilt concerning her rejection of her pastor's suggestion that she engage in charitable work on account of her health. Her appreciation of the value of this ministry leads her to doubt the moral rightness of turning down such work, even though she is not suited to it: "I have regretted it since though: yet I don't fancy I ever could have talked to the poor people or done the slightest good" (ibid.).

Maude's ministry, however, lies in her verse, which acts as a point of intersection between religious and secular ways of life, uniting the women around her in a common aspiration towards a revelation of God.¹⁰⁵ Magdalen's decision to enter the convent inspires Maude to not only lift her ban on copying her verses into her friends' commonplace albums, but to attempt a new poetic style through seeking to compose something that is "admissible even within Convent walls" (ibid.). Like Maude's first composition, the poem for Magdalen's album (30-31) is centred on a desire for death: a preoccupation that runs throughout the text. Yet, on this occasion Maude does not portray the desire for death as the product of a melodramatic and affected world-weariness, but instead presents death as the culmination of the natural processes of creation, which gradually evolve towards unification with the risen Christ. She reorients the poet's affiliation with nature towards a vision of paradise through

¹⁰⁵ I coincide with Arseneau's claim that the resolution to Maude's spiritual and artistic conflict "...is found, not in a choice between the two aspirations, but in a reconceptualization of the intimate connections between them" (69), but diverge from her view that "Magdalen sees her religious vocation ... as incompatible with poetry, and she cannot see any solution to the conflict that Maude has experienced as well" (85).

consciously resisting the generic conventions of her forebears and reconfiguring her textual references towards scripture.

Maude deliberately disrupts the pastoral genre's positioning of serenity and tranquillity in the natural world by affiliating its tropes with stagnation and cliché, thereby creating a sense of cognitive dissonance in the mind of the reader whose generic expectations are undercut. The poem opens: "Sweet sweet sound of distant waters falling / On a parched and thirsty plain" (1-2), a picturesque description whose literal allusions of satiation and abundance are destabilised by the disruptive verbal sibilance and opening spondaic foot, which pushes against the regular iambic pentameter of the proceeding line. As the poem unfolds, the poet deliberately distances herself from the associations of such imagery with the supreme fulfilment of humanity in nature by forming an alternative set of images that resist the pastoral scene she has so painstakingly created. Each stanza is divided into two parts: the first sestet conforms to the pastoral tradition in its use of natural imagery, which is jarringly presented within a disruptive call and response structure, alternating between lines of iambic pentameter and tetrameter. However, the subsequent sestet contrastingly deploys a consistent iambic tetrameter, while reiterating an opposing interpretation of the surrounding world: "Of a much more priceless worth / Is the old, brown, common earth" (11-12). Maude deliberately contrasts the worldly outlook of her previous writing with the Christian framework of interpretation that has been embraced by Sr Magdalen.

Maude's emphasis on the afterlife is made explicit in the second half of the poem when she turns from didactic description to instructive diction, encouraging the reader to share in her typological interpretation of nature. The reader is directed to "See the ancient pine that stands the firmer / For the storm-shock that it bore" and "...the moon her silver chalice filling / With light from the great sun's store" (27-30). Maude's readership is encouraged to look *through* the image towards its symbolic foreshadowing. Of particular

significance is the rendering of the moon as a “chalice” for the sun. The chalice is the crucible for the Eucharistic blood of Christ and points the readers towards a figurative reading of the image of the sun as homophonic word-play (Christ as “Son of God”). Just as the moon sources her light from the sun, so is the created world dependent on the incarnate Son for its life. The stereotypical images of the pastoral genre are gradually replaced with Christian symbolism, guiding the reader towards a transition between pastoral and Christian modes of perception, a transition that the heroine herself is also currently undergoing.

This journey towards Christological centrality reaches its acme in the final stanza when the poet departs from natural imagery to command the reader to “Let us wait the end in peace” and “....see our lamps our lighted” because “....the judge is at the door” (37-39; 43). Maude replaces natural imagery with scriptural references, alluding to the “Parable of Ten Virgins” from Matthew 24, which describes the journey of ten virgins to meet their bridegroom in the middle of night. The five wise virgins bring all the necessary supplies for their lamps, while five foolish virgins forget their oil. The bridegroom arrives at midnight, but the five foolish virgins are unable to go out to meet him and are later barred from the wedding feast. Christ specifically relates the parable to the kingdom of heaven, emphasising the need of his followers to prioritise on putting their relationship with God before the material concerns of day-to-day life. By drawing an analogy between the individual’s redemption and the relationship between the bridegroom and his brides, Christ implies that the individual’s relationship with God takes place of the romantic union as the preeminent relationship in the life of a Christian. Maude’s decision to relate the poem’s denouement to this parable heightens her earlier rejection of the pleasures and beauty of the natural world, in favour of a unification with Christ.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, through addressing the specifically

¹⁰⁶ The allusions to this parable have been discussed by D’Amico, who focuses on Maude’s fear of damnation (53).

female audience of a commonplace album, Maude implies that communion with Christ should remain at the heart of her elected sisterhood.

The “Parable of Ten Virgins” bears a particular significance for Rossetti’s understanding of sisterhood because it is referenced in a poem, “Evening Hymn”, by John Samuel Bewley Monsell, which appears in the commonplace album of Rossetti’s cousin, Isabella Pietrocola-Rossetti.¹⁰⁷ This album was circulated throughout the women of the extended Rossetti family and Monsell’s poem is referenced in Rossetti’s devotional poem, “Behold the Bridegroom Cometh” (Crump 2001 419). It is significant that Maude’s first poetic entry into one of her friend’s commonplace albums, an act that has previously been renounced, makes reference to the literary community of the Rossetti women, and its emphasis on devotional writing. If Maude’s change of poetic style is affected by her affiliation with the “conventual sisterhoods” through the figure of Sr. Magdalen, it is also reinforced by Rossetti’s reference to her allegiance with the literary community of the extended Rossetti sisterhood, as well as her sister, Maria’s, religious vocation as a nun. The original parable’s allegorical machinery is significant in its implication that the “wise virgins” who receive the bridegroom are, in fact, “brides of Christ”—a term that is colloquially used to refer to female religious. By identifying Maude with Sr Magdalen, and herself with the Rossetti sisterhood, Rossetti implies that the elected sisterhoods of both the text and its autobiographical exemplar, share a common quest for redemption that is affiliated with the religious sisterhoods of the period.

The gradual transition of Maude’s poetic style that begins with Magdalen’s commonplace album outlines her reorientation towards a Christocentric manner of viewing the world. Maude must recognise that creation only achieves its union with the divine

¹⁰⁷ *Commonplace book, 1851-1901*, Dora Browning Dick, inscribed: “Dora Browning Dick, in affect. memory of Aunt Isabella, nee Steele” on inside cover, Rare Books and Special Collections, Manuscript Collection C0199 no.290, Firestone Lib., Princeton University.

through the figure of Christ. The Bonaventurian approach to the *imitatio Christi* contends that the incarnation “completes creation” because “Christ and the world are not accidentally connected but intrinsically connected” and that the “order of creation” reaches its “highpoint” in the perfection of Christ (Delio SB 90-91). As the “....fulfilment of the potential that lies at the heart of creation”, Christ must be the “goal to which creation is directed” (91). Maude’s emphasis on the futility of a pantheistic approach to nature therefore belies her Christological outlook. This being so, the reader might reasonably ask why Maude’s depiction of nature is bereft of transcendence. Ilio Delio, a leading specialist on the Franciscan spirituality of the *imitatio*, argues that despite his rarefied view of the incarnation, Bonaventure understood that: “the fulfilment of the created world remains incomplete” because “the problem of an incomplete universe lies not in Christ but in the human person” (94).

If the universe is to be redeemed by the incarnation, it is necessary that the human person becomes united with Christ: “Christ is not only the point of perfection but he is the model and image to which the human person, who is called to spiritual perfection, is to be formed” (ibid.). Paradoxically, it is only through embracing the sacrifice of Christ’s death that humanity can effect a transfiguration of the world around them. Delio argues that “To be the body of Christ is ... a flesh and blood reality” (FP 154), for it is in Christ’s willingness to sacrifice himself for the world that the world is redeemed. The Christian who embraces the *imitatio* must therefore also be willing to sacrifice themselves in imitation of Christ. This does not mean literally dying for the other, but instead requires the individual to place their needs below those of the surrounding world. St Francis was not a martyr, but he received the stigmata as a sign of his spiritual martyrdom, both for others and for the natural world. Maude’s portrayal of a fallen world that is transfigured by death is a precursor for the transfiguration that she herself will later experience through her mystical participation in the *imitatio Christi*.

“She had been overturned”: Maude’s experience of the *imitatio Christi*

Maude’s mystical participation in Christ’s passion is the final resolution to her struggle both to reform her verse and her attempts to find a suitable Christian vocation in the elected sisterhood that surrounds her. Significantly, the fatal cab accident that precipitates her stigmatic wound is the consequence of the news of her cousin, Mary’s, wedding. Mary’s wedding and Sr Magdalen’s consecration occasions a crisis in Maude’s identity that is only resolved through her mystical unification with Christ. Maude is a curio who is unable to fit into the prescribed roles that society assigns to women in the period: she is devoutly religious, but she is also a stridently independent artist. It is only through total integration into the figure of Christ that Maude is able to reconcile the differing aspects of her identity.

Maude departs from home to attend Mary’s wedding immediately after receiving Agnes’s invitation and is instantaneously precipitated into her mystical passion in what feels like a moment of divine intervention:

At length ... the tardy preparations were completed, and Maude
... stepped into a cab....

Half an hour had not elapsed when another cab drove up
to the door; and out of it Maude was lifted perfectly insensible.

She had been overturned; and, though no limb was broken, had
neither stirred nor spoken since the accident. (40)

Maude’s injuries mirror those of the crucified Christ, for although “no limb [is] broken” she subsequently confides in Agnes that “My side is dreadfully hurt; I looked at it this morning for the first time, but hope never again to see so shocking a sight” (ibid.). The crucified Christ is similarly wounded in the side—a fact that is interpreted in John 19:36 as a fulfilment of the

words of Psalm 34:20, “He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken”.¹⁰⁸ Maude’s passion forces her to reorient her identity towards a Christic understanding of the self, for she had previously refused to receive the Eucharist: the sacrament that would enable her to achieve a physical union with Christ on earth: “I shall not receive tomorrow ... No: at least I will not profane Holy Things....” (35). At the opening of the text, Maude is unable to relinquish the individualistic poetic identity she has crafted for herself and refuses to enter into the mystery of the incarnation “....on the eve of the feast celebrating the incarnation of God in human form” (Roden 70), but her mystical passion allows her to receive communion on Easter Sunday (48). Maude’s final reconciliation with the Eucharistic sacrament implies that her mystical participation in Christ’s death has allowed her to become a recipient of the redemption that is effected by his resurrection.

Nevertheless, the problem remains that, following Maude’s spiritual transformation, she requests that Agnes destroy her verses, inspiring Gilbert and Gubar’s claim that “....the ambitious, competitive, self-absorbed and self-assertive-poet must die” (552). Yet, is important to note that Maude’s poetry remains accessible to the reader within the *bildungsroman* itself. Agnes also copies a small number of poems for Maude’s mother, once again affiliating the artistic identity of the female poet with her matrilineal heritage. The poems selected by Agnes embody a transformation of style that is inspired by Maude’s experience of the *imitatio Christi*. Indeed, the poem that closes the novella (51), opens with the lines: “What is it Jesus saith unto the soul?— / “Take up the Cross and come, and follow Me” (1-2). It is true that the “self-absorbed and self-assertive poet” *does* die, but the reformed Christian poet remains, and it is notable that the selection of poems included in *Maude* were also published under Rossetti’s name prior to the completion of the text (“Preface” 18).

¹⁰⁸ The Christ-like nature of Maude’s wounds is also observed by Bristow; yet he conversely characterises Maude’s mystical passion as a “....sacrifice for her indulgent love of poetry” (272).

Arseneau has claimed that *Maude* is Rossetti's "poetic manifesto" (90), and the novella recounts Rossetti's own change in style and her later emphasis on devotional writing.

Rossetti locates this transformation of style in the figure of Agnes Clifton who, following Maude's death, becomes the executor of her verse. Agnes is Maude's doppelganger: the figure who facilitates her return to the Eucharistic table, and who embodies the fulfilled Christian spinsterhood that is Maude's vocation. Roden has claimed that, "As a saving sister, Agnes willingly volunteers to serve as Maude's double in her relationship with Christ. On praying, Agnes tells Maude, 'if there is anything you miss and tell me of, I will say it in your stead'" (71). Yet, when questioned by Maude as to whether she would change places with Magdalen, Mary or herself, Agnes responds that Maude must "...even put up with me as I am" because she could not "bear [Maude's] pain" (47). Agnes's rejection of Maude's identity is founded on the fact that it is Maude's particular type of pain in her *imitatio Christi* that instead allows *her* to become transformed into Agnes. Maude makes Agnes the executor of her surviving verses, while also requesting that she "...destroy what I never intended to be seen" (49). This request refers to Maude's desire to erase any trace of work that embodies the "self-absorbed and self-assertive" poetic identity that has since been rejected. A new, self-giving poet, dedicated to communion with God, is reborn in Agnes: the figure who is presented to the reader at the close of text, praying "...for the hastening of that eternal morning, which shall reunite in God those who in Him, or for His Sake, have parted here" (51).

Agnes embodies the resolution of the conflict Maude has experienced between the spiritual and artistic elements of her identity. She most closely resembles the mature Rossetti, dedicated to a vision of heavenly salvation and the promotion of devotional writing.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Arseneau also affiliates Maude's poetic evolution with the stylistic transformations of Rossetti's verse. However, she does not comment on the union between Maude and Agnes, or the influence of Maria Rossetti (91).

Having provided an autobiographical account of her teenage nervous breakdown, Rossetti kills off her younger self, only to have her reborn in a new vision of a single poetess who has dedicated her life to God. In what William Michael Rossetti describes as a “curious [and] unconscious prefigurement of a well-known and much-discussed incident in the life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti” (Preface 19), Agnes buries the surviving “locked book” of compositions “with all its records of folly, sin [and] vanity” in Maude’s coffin—retaining only a lock of her hair (49). Unlike Dante Gabriel Rossetti, however, Agnes never attempts to retrieve Maude’s manuscript because the “self-absorbed and self-assertive poet” has been consigned to the dust. William Michael Rossetti’s observation that this event is a “curious...prefigurement” of the disinterment of Elizabeth Siddal is apt because this event represents Christina Rossetti’s final rejection of the Pre-Raphaelite style of writing that she associates with vanity and “display”, and which finds its apotheosis in the voyeuristic appropriation of the female corpse. By burying Maude’s individualistic and affected verse out of sight alongside her corpse, Rossetti obliterates Maude’s previously self-involved poetic persona in an act that is the exact the reverse of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s appropriation of his verses from his wife’s coffin. It is perhaps in this uncanny “prefigurement” that we can locate the origins of William Michael Rossetti’s distaste for the supposed religious extremism of *Maude*. If “A Year Afterwards” and “Death” were suppressed on account of their damning prophetic resonances with Siddal’s disinterment, *Maude* is also less than complimentary in its dismissal of the values of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. In this case, though, the editor is able to dismiss the text as a work of adolescent juvenilia.

Yet, if Agnes is Christina Rossetti, she also embodies elements of Maria Rossetti, especially in her role as the spiritual sister and guide who brings Maude back to the Eucharistic table. It would seem that the identities of all the sisters, both within the text and in the real world that inspired it, are conflated. This is made explicitly clear in Agnes’s final act

of cutting “one long tress from Maude’s head; and on her return home [laying] it in the same paper with the lock of Magdalen’s hair” (51).¹¹⁰ Maude’s union with Christ in death unites her with Magdalen who, as a religious sister, has dedicated her life to the devotional act of the *imitatio Christi*. It would also appear that both sisters are incorporated into the figure of Agnes: the custodian of their memories, writing, and personal effects who awaits the heavenly reunion of the sisterhood, and who integrates the qualities of Maude’s determined independence with Magdalen’s religious devotion. This interchangeability of the sisters’ relationships and spiritual experiences mirrors the inter-subjective relations of the Trinity who are at once three distinct persons, and one single God. If Magdalen is conflated with the Father, and Maude is identified with the Son, then Agnes is the Holy Spirit who propagates the self-gift of both the Father and Son throughout the world. Total unification with the person of Christ can only be attained through an imitative participation in his passion. Therefore, the Holy Spirit allows those who are not called to participate in this mystical experience to access a communion with God in a different way. Maude’s reformed poetry can be regarded as the Word of the Son, while Agnes is the Holy Spirit who transmits the Word to the next generation.

The sisterhood that supports Maude throughout the text is finally integrated into the image of a transformed heroine who promotes a reformed type of devotional verse. It would seem that when spiritual sisters unite through the *imitatio Christi*, they literally become incorporated into one body that mirrors the maternal archetype of womankind commonly associated with the figure of the mother in Rossetti’s poetry. In their unification as one body, the sisters also mirror the sacramental body of the Eucharist, which unites all members of the Christian church. It is notable that before her death Maude asks Agnes to “....come tomorrow

¹¹⁰ I am indebted to Bristow, who reads the intertwinement of Maude and Magdalen’s hair as “...a symbolic pact or communion” between sisters (272). Our readings diverge, however, at the point of Bristow’s claim that Agnes’s decision to preserve Maude’s verse proves her to be “disobedient to her friend’s will” and that Agnes “with her individualistic nature” is set against the sisterhood of Maude and Magdalen (272).

and administer the Blessed Sacrament to me” (49) because Maude’s death predeceases this act, presumably leaving Agnes to receive the Blessed Sacrament in her stead. Agnes, then, is a type of female priest. The relationship between Agnes and Maude prefigures that of Lizzie and Laura in “Goblin Market” because these spiritual sisters also reconfigure the gendered dynamics of the Eucharistic sacrament, relocating the physical medium for sacramental redemption into the female body of the sister, rather than the male body of the priest. Thus, Agnes’s final desire to bring forward “that eternal morning, which shall reunite in God those who in Him ... have parted here” (51) seeks the divine unification of sisterhood within the body of Christ, something that has been prefigured on earth by the sisters’ mutual participation in the Eucharistic sacrament.

It is telling that Mary, the sister who allows her desire for human love to override her desire for divine love, is expurgated from the transfigured sisterhood that is championed by Agnes.¹¹¹ In Rossetti’s text, the exemplar of the religious sisterhoods inspires a reformation of the relationships between all women, as well as the transformation of the artistic identity of its heroine. The religious sisterhoods are models for a reconceived vision of womankind, founded on an inter-subjective framework where each individual achieves identification with Christ through unification with the female other. Rossetti does not advocate the religious life as the final object for all women because the trajectory of her own life as a secular poetess runs contrary to such an evangelical mission. Rather, Rossetti promotes the relations between sisters as a medium for divine communion with Christ because they mirror the inter-subjective relations of the Trinity. She creates an elected sisterhood that is inspired by the

¹¹¹ I note here that Roden has also observed the Trinitarian symbolism in *Maude*, but argues that it is Agnes, and not Mary, who is excluded from Rossetti’s Trinitarian model of female sisterhood. This is odd, given that Mary vanishes from the text during Maude’s experience of the *imitatio Christi*, and Agnes is the only sister who remains by Maude’s side during her mystical passion. Roden also fails to identify Maude’s experience of the *imitatio* with the person of the incarnate Son, instead conflating her with the Holy Spirit: “Of the three options open to young women in this story, if Mary embodies God in humanity, Christ the Son, and Sister Magdalen relates to God the Father through her faithful profession to him, Maude’s process of conversion involves the Holy Spirit” (74).

religious sisterhoods, but which has the scope to support the divine revelation of all women, including those beyond the convent walls.

Still, the spiritual journey that is facilitated by the elected sisterhood remains finite because the relationships between its members are a temporary substitute for total unification with Christ the afterlife. It is for this reason that Maude's poetry must pass away with its heroine, for its consignment to flame represents the spiritual rebirth the heroine has undertaken through her mystical passion and death. Maude's final act of purgation bears surprising resonances with the end of St Thomas Aquinas's life, as recorded in Butler's *Lives of the Saints*. On the feast of St Nicholas, Aquinas received a vision so powerful that he determined never to write again, leaving his greatest work, the *Summa Theologica* (1485), unfinished, as it seemed to pale in comparison to the vision he had received. When questioned over this abrupt decision, he responded, "All I have written appears to me like straw compared with what I have seen and what has been revealed to me" (196). Maude's instructions to burn her writings after her death mirrors Aquinas's dismissal of his work as "like straw" (ibid.) because the transformation of her artistic vision is similarly facilitated by the divine revelation of her mystical passion.

It is important to understand that Aquinas's final act was not a rejection of his identity as a writer, but rather an expression of faith in the revelation he had received as the final embodiment of his authorial vision. Aquinas's vision was, in some respects, the outcome of the *Summa Theologica*. His revelation, then, can be viewed as the final fruit of his labour, while Maude's experience of the *imitatio Christi* can similarly be interpreted as the ultimate output of her literary career. Following the reformation of her verse, which is inspired by her sister in Christ, Magdalen, Maude is transformed into a truly Christic individual. For both Aquinas and Maude, their writing has, quite literally, taken flesh and become imbued into their selfhood; rendering the literary text obsolete. Sr Magdalen's practice of Christian

submission may have ensured her final redemption in the world to come, but the transformation of Maude's poetic vocation has brought about her heavenly transfiguration on earth. The consignment of her verse to flame represents her spiritual rebirth.

Just as the *Summa Theologica* remains the bedrock of Christian theology, so is Maude's surviving verse, preserved by Agnes and printed in the text, the foundation of the model of universal sisterhood that is to be taken up by the next generation. As Maude's doppelganger, Agnes passes on the heroine's spiritual revelation to the sisterhood to come. Winston Weathers has argued that in Rossetti's work, sisters often symbolise a crisis of self where two conflicting identities must "struggle with one another" to achieve a final, harmonious resolution (82). This resolution is embodied in Agnes, but it is important to note that the resolution is not only symbolic, as Weathers claims, for the sisters, like the three persons of the Trinity, possess distinct identities that are nevertheless united in the same Christic body. Just as Christ sends his Holy Spirit after him following the ascension, so does Agnes exude Maude's transfigured identity, while simultaneously retaining her own unique selfhood. Agnes will transmit Maude's Word to the succeeding generation of sisters, so that that the inter-subjective relations that have been inspired by the religious sisterhoods will be promulgated into society at large. Rossetti's text is therefore a manifesto of the divinely transformative power of sisterly relationships and their ability to affect a total unification with Christ. Indeed, *Maude* closes with the voice of the author who, in an usual moment of self-expression, affirms her support of Agnes's hope that the sisters will be reunited in heaven. "Amen for us all", Rossetti writes (51). She may as well have written, "Amen for us all, sisters."

Chapter Seven

“Happy Women”

Alcott’s sisterly utopia

For Louisa May Alcott, the husband is an obstacle on the female artist’s quest to achieve self-determination. He is not only a mirror that reflects the image of God on the wife’s behalf; he is the source of her fulfilment and self-approval, her financial stability and sense of identity. In short, the husband determines the woman’s public role as helpmeet and appendage and, as such, he must be replaced by a sisterly community that is focused on the growth and development of the “other”. In an 1868 essay, “Happy Women”, Alcott directly confronts the “surplus woman” problem, experienced in the United States as a consequence of the Civil War, by sarcastically describing the “fear of being an old maid” as “one of the trials of woman-kind” (203). She counsels against rushing into matrimony without first considering “the loss of liberty, happiness, and self-respect” that is “poorly repaid by the barren honor of being called “Mrs.” instead of “Miss”” (ibid.). The author uncannily echoes Rossetti in her portrayal of the wife as the most inferior member of the female community, similarly championing “a certain class belonging to the sisterhood” who “....from various causes, remain single, and devote themselves to some earnest work; espousing philanthropy, art, literature, music” (ibid.).

Alcott departs from Rossetti’s approach, however, by directly drawing from the nonfictional sisterhood with which she surrounds herself, a community that is put forward within the essay as an exemplar for her single female readers. Alcott provides sketches of a number of women of her acquaintance for “....those of my young countrywomen who, from choice or necessity, stand alone, seeking to find the happiness which is the right of all” (ibid.). Amongst these examples is an autobiographical sketch of “A.”, the author herself,

described as a woman of “....strongly individual type, who in the course of an unusually varied experience has seen so much of ... ‘the tragedy of modern married life’ that she is afraid to try it” (205). In place of a husband, Alcott’s thinly veiled counterpart pursues an artistic vocation: “Literature is a fond and faithful spouse, and the little family that has sprung up around her ... is a proper source of satisfaction to her maternal heart” (205). Alcott’s description of the artistic vocation as a type of spouse bears an interesting resemblance to Rossetti’s implicit elevation of the heavenly spouse above the human husband. Although Alcott does not, at this moment, link the female writer’s “marriage” to literature with her relationship with God, her later realist novel, *Work* (1872), the subject of this chapter, champions the “professional” woman who pursues her vocational calling as spiritually ordained because she conceives her identity as subject to the will of God, rather than the will of a husband.

Like Rossetti’s *Maude*, *Work* charts the heroine’s search for a meaningful vocation, and her rejection of the values of self-reliance and individualism, in this case associated with Transcendentalism, in favour of her participation in an outward-facing sisterly community. However, where *Maude* is preoccupied with the spiritual potential of sisterly relationships, *Work* is concerned with social reform, for the relationships between sisters are portrayed as not only possessing the potential to transform the spiritual and social contributions of women, but the capitalist marketplace as well. Alcott implies that if professional work is made available to women, the values of individualism, competition and self-interestedness will be expunged from society. Crucially, it is the female capacity to achieve sympathetic identification with the other that is presented as possessing the transcendent power to alleviate both personal afflictions and social ills. Alcott advocates a philosophy of reform that champions becoming “personally involved with others, and ... embed[ding] the alleviation of all poverty, not just physical deprivation, in a Christian doctrine....” This “Christian

doctrine” upholds personal contact with the marginalised individual as the proper means of identifying their spiritual and physical needs (Cadwallader 115).

In her personification of a theology of *caritas*, Alcott’s heroine, Christie Devon, gradually learns to imitate Christ, but her imitation is not of the mystical kind. Christie does not become physically united with Christ; she instead consciously and practically mimics his inter-subjective outlook in her relationships with her elected sisterhood. This sisterly community is portrayed as having the potential to inspire the installation of a kingdom of heaven on earth because its sympathetic power transforms the experiences of the ostracised and downtrodden across society. Like Maude, Christie is an artist, having worked as a professional actress, but she cannot achieve personal fulfilment through her artistic vocation alone, since the pursuit of individual greatness isolates her from the surrounding world and disconnects her from her elected sisterhood. Instead, Christie’s artistic gifts are gateways to social reform, just as Alcott’s *Little Women* is the mouthpiece for championing her mother’s theology of renunciation as the vehicle for transforming the materialistic values of the public sphere.

Cadwallader has claimed that, for Alcott “....writing became benevolence in action, a way for [her] to minister to those in need by opening the hearts and minds of readers to poverty of all kinds—physical, psychological, and spiritual....” (114). Thus, Christie’s formerly voyeuristic gifts as an actress are likewise transformed into a type of mesmeric sympathy that allows her to physically enter into the sufferings of others, thereby facilitating a mystical integration into their peculiar trials and tribulations. Christie’s ultimate aim is not to enter into the passion of Christ, but instead to enter into the passion of the world—thereby fulfilling the original purpose of Christ’s passion and death as ensuring the redemption of humanity. Where Rossetti looks upon the material world as a shadow of the world to come, Alcott emphasises the divine potential that lies dormant in the event of the incarnation.

Crucially, Alcott portrays the sisterly community as possessing the power to integrate the person of Christ into the self because its peculiar proclivity for sympathy shapes the inter-subjective values that underpin a truly Christian society. She therefore relocates the morally elevated role of women from the domestic sphere into the field of professional work, ensuring the recognition of the contributions of women within the realms of economics, philanthropy and artistry, as well as within the field of morality and ethics.

While *Work* upholds female philanthropy above female artistry, its final portrayal of a female community that is liberated to reinterpret the canonical work of a male artist looks forward to a future where the social achievements of sisters can create an inspired school of collaborative art. This vision is realised in Alcott's 1869 text, *An Old Fashioned Girl*, which portrays a utopian community of female artists engaging in philanthropic work, while collaborating in the creation of a unique sculpture, "Woman": an archetypal female figure freed from her associations with domesticity and motherhood to become a prophetic herald for a future where women contribute to all areas of the sister arts without referring to the established canon of male artistry. Alcott portrays her community of female artists as reforming the social and moral purpose of art through championing artistic collaboration above the development of individualism, and prioritising co-operative altruism above the celebration of genius. If Rossetti's vision of paradise is centred on the types of Trinitarian relationships that are embodied by sisters, Alcott's vision of a perfected world is founded on the collective achievements of a sisterly community that champions a theology of *caritas*, which is accessed through collective artistic production.

“The doctrine of hatred must be preached as the counteraction of the doctrine of love”:

The destructive ramifications of Transcendentalist self-culture

Work tracks Christie’s transition from pursuing the Transcendentalist values of self-reliance and individualism upheld within the capitalist marketplace to her acceptance of the intersubjective outlook of the sisterly community she creates for herself. Christie discovers that the Transcendentalist emphasis on self-culture, which is contingent upon one’s alienation from others, is detrimental for women. Her initial pursuit of genius and self-reliance precipitates a mental breakdown that reaffirms her dependence on the female community she has left behind. Christie must learn that she is only able to transcend the social, artistic and moral obligations placed upon her in the domestic sphere by uniting with other women in the mutual creation of a new social framework modelled on collaboration and service to others, rather than individualistic fulfilment. At the opening of the novel, Christie announces her intention to leave the house of her guardian, Uncle Enos, and enter into the world of work because she hates “to be dependent; and now there’s no need of it, [she] can’t bear it any longer” (5). Driven by the romanticised and unrealistic vision of “get[ting] rich, found[ing] a home for girls like [herself]; or, better still, be[ing] a Mrs. Fry [or] a Florence Nightingale” (8), Christie’s dreams of self-aggrandizement are associated by her uncle with “redic’lus notions about independence and self-cultur”, which “won’t come to nothin’ in the long run” (10 sic).¹¹²

“Self-Reliance”, as defined by Emerson in his essay of the same name, is the practice of prioritising one’s outlook of the world, over and above the values and responsibilities that society would ascribe to you: “To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius” (131). Christie’s rejection of the

¹¹² This discussion of Uncle Enos’ critique of “Self-Reliance” and the subsequent analysis of Christie’s theatrical exploitation of her sympathy is taken from my MA dissertation, “Self-Reliance: Transcendentalism and the Woman-Artist in Louisa May Alcott’s Fiction”.

dependent role that society assigns to women complements Emerson's vision of intellectual single-mindedness because she affirms her determination not to "...sit and wait for any man to give me independence if I can earn it myself" (9). However, Emerson's vision of self-reliance not only prioritises the individual's vocation, but also discards the value of collaboration or constructive guidance: "There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till" (132). In essence, the subject must single-mindedly block out all social obligations in favour of pursuing their chosen vocation—not simply being content to ignore the criticisms of those who, like Uncle Enos, would deny their capabilities.

While Christie is drawn to the idea of achieving public renown, she nevertheless expresses her dislike of "dependence where there isn't any love to make it bearable" and voices her desire to find work that she can "put her heart into, and feel that it does [her] good, no matter how hard it is" (11). Christie particularly condemns her uncle's pursuit of a monotonous "everlasting work" where he "starves" the soul for "the sake of [the] body" with "no object but money" (10). Christie, then, is searching for a new type of collaborative and philanthropic work that is located in the female community, and which rejects both the Emersonian model of individualism and the capitalistic object of materialism. Indeed, she associates her pursuit of work with the figure of her mother: "Even if I only do what my dear mother did, earn my living honestly and happily, and leave a beautiful example behind me, to help one other woman as hers helps me, I shall be satisfied" (11).

Hendler (1991) has claimed that *Work* "...complicates the conventional opposition between the masculine public sphere of work and money and the emotional realm of family ties ... by having Christie leave the domestic sphere in search of precisely those values it is

supposed to uphold....” (687). Uncle Enos embodies the porousness between the public and private realms, corrupting the sanctum of the domestic sphere with his greed and materialism. Yet, while Christie rejects the soulless pursuit of wealth that her uncle represents, she is torn between the Transcendentalist concepts of “self-reliance and self-culture” that her uncle associates with her pursuit of genius, and her mother’s example of providing moral guidance for succeeding generations of women. The novel traces Christie’s transformation from her pursuit of artistic acclaim to her eventual integration in an elected sisterhood that introduces her to philanthropic reform, thereby providing her with a sense of fulfilment and self-worth. Following her departure from the family home, the narrative explores her experience in the majority of professions open to women in nineteenth-century America in themed chapters entitled: “Servant”, “Actress”, “Governess”, “Companion”, and “Seamstress”. Alcott herself had experimented with all of these professions in her early adult-life in Boston (Strickland 86). All of the professions explored in the text prove to be emotionally unfulfilling for Christie, however, and she resigns from each position disenchanted and unsure of her professional calling.

Alcott makes it clear that the professions that are open to women exploit their sympathetic capacities for voyeuristic and selfish purposes. For instance, when Christie becomes an actress, she discovers that the profession encourages her to simulate her sympathetic gifts to inflate her sense of artistic superiority and titillate her audience, rather than creating a meaningful connection with them: “Her love of admiration grew by what it fed on, till the sound of applause became the sweetest music to her ear. She rose with ... a growing appetite for unsatisfactory delights, an ever-increasing forgetfulness of any higher aspiration than dramatic fame” (41). Christie’s experience as an actress exposes the exploitation of female sympathy within the professions as a means of affirming the self-aggrandizing values of the marketplace: “....she yielded [to the lesser temptations], growing

selfish, frivolous, and vain,—intent on her own advancement, and careless by what means she reached it” (ibid.). Ultimately, Christie finds the pursuit of genius to be emotionally unrewarding because the solipsism it inspires corrupts her sympathetic tendencies and leaves a contaminated legacy for succeeding generations of female artists: “Am I what I hoped I should be? No, and it is my fault. If three years of this life have made me this, what shall I be ten? A fine actress perhaps, but how good a woman?” (43).

The conflict that Christie experiences between her vocation as an artist and her identity as a woman is rooted in her atomised pursuit of personal success, which follows the Emersonian model of “shun[ing] father and mother and wife and brother, when my genius calls me” (“Self-Reliance” 134). While she leaves the domestic sphere in pursuit of the values that it lacks, she makes the mistake of neglecting to seek out a wider female community that would support her in her search for a meaningful vocation. Christie must learn to create her own self-made family within the public sphere if she is to find the values of inter-subjectivity and mutual support that were bequeathed to her by her mother. The creation of such a community is incompatible with her pursuit of individual genius, for Emerson claims that “The doctrine of hatred must be preached as the counteraction of the doctrine of love when that pules and whines” (134). In other words, a consideration for the needs of other suppresses one’s capacity for greatness.

Alcott exposes the psychologically detrimental effects of such a philosophy on women through her portrayal of Christie’s breakdown, which manifests itself in an attempted suicide that is the offshoot of her psychomachia. Just as the conflict between artistic genius and Christian obedience drives Maude Foster to a near mental breakdown, so do Christie’s conflicting desires for artistic genius and sympathetic companionship lead to a destructive split within the self. Having tried and tested the full range of professions open to women, and found them to be emotionally unrewarding, Christie walks to the Boston lumber wharf to

drown herself. Her desire to end her life is identified with her need to reconcile the two conflicting aspects of her identity, which have become disassociated from one another. Upon gazing into the water Christie experiences a hallucination of an alter-ego, which she longs to reunite with her conscious self through entering the waters below: “Something white swept by below—only a broken oar—but she began to wonder how a human body would look floating through the night. It was an awesome fancy, but it took possession of her, and, as it grew, her eyes dilated, her breath came fast, and her lips fell apart, for she seemed to see the phantom, and it wore the likeness of herself” (124).

Christie’s hallucination is an out-of-body experience that symbolises her sense of disconnection with the public identity she has created. Melville’s *Moby Dick* associates the colour white with nihilism and a loss of selfhood: “Is it by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and this stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation....?” (186). As an inanimate white oar, Christie has become a lifeless object that is devoid of human personality and the capacity for self-expression. Ironically, her pursuit of individualism has eradicated her identity, for she has divorced herself from the surrounding world and become dislocated from her own existence, a “phantom” who wears “the likeness of herself”. If Melville’s Ahab personifies a deranged male individualism that attempts to exterminate any threat to its absolute authority, Alcott’s Christie represents the fragmentation of the female subject who attempts to emulate such individualism at the expense of her sympathetic capacities: “So plainly did she see it, so peaceful was the white face, so full of rest the folded hands, so strangely like and unlike, herself, that she seemed to lose her identity, and wondered which was the real and which the imaginary Christie” (124).

Hendler (1991) has argued that Christie’s breakdown represents “....the complete submergence of the female self in an identification with the other—sympathy in its most extreme form” because it demonstrates the heroine’s unhealthy reaction to human loneliness:

Christie is unable to form a coherent sense of self independently (691). I would contend that Christie's decision to stay at the lumber wharf because "She know it was no place for her, yet no one waited for her, no one would care if she staid forever" (124) indicates that her crisis of identity is a product of her isolation from the female community. As Hendler claims, "...the coherent boundaries of her ego, are clearly in crisis in this scene" (692), but there is no indication that her ego has become conflated with that of another subject. Christie has, instead, submerged herself with the image of the lifeless corpse, or marble woman, for she has fixated on the image of a figure with a "peaceful white face" and "folded hands" who is both "strangely like, and unlike, herself" (124). In fact, Christie has transformed herself into the image of Pygmalion's Galatea: a pale body that physically resembles the female subject, but is a lifeless imitation, devoid of autonomy or independence. In seeking to emulate the male artist, Christie has transformed herself into the object of his desires, for the work of the male artist would seek to reduce her into the white and statuesque marble woman.

It is especially significant that Christie is pulled out of her psychotic episode by her old friend and erstwhile adopted sister, Rachel. A fallen woman who is fired from the mantua-making factory where she works alongside Christie after her sexual history is discovered, Rachel has left Boston to help other fallen women in a neighbouring city—inspired by Christie's example of loving her "like a sister" (126). Having redeemed herself, Rachel returns to Boston to continue her philanthropic work and happens across Christie at the lumber wharf (127). When Christie claims that she was: "...so worn out, and weak, and wicked [... that she] meant to take [her] life", Rachel responds "No, dear; *it was not you that meant to do it*, but the weakness and the trouble that bewildered you" (125 emphasis added). Rachel helps Christie to understand that her breakdown is the product of the atomised society she exists within, for Christie herself admits that: "I have been ill, I worked too hard; *I'm not myself* to-night ... People disappoint and worry me..." (ibid. emphasis added).

It is Rachel's role to restore Christie to her elected sisterhood, so that she is able to regain her sense of selfhood: "I'm past thinking of myself ... and only want to be taken care of till I find strength and courage to stand alone" (127). The remainder of the novel traces Christie's rehabilitation and her final discovery of her vocation as a female philanthropist whose practice of a type of "lived religion" allows her to extend her intersubjective female sisterhood into the wider world. At the close of the narrative, Christie gathers together the adopted sisters she has made throughout her working life to create an elected sisterhood that reconfigures the portrayal of women within male literary traditions and champions female suffrage.

"You will do my part better than I could": Christie's rehabilitation and the emergence of her sisterhood

Christie's rehabilitation takes place within the domestic sphere, but the outward-facing community she encounters becomes the foundation for her wider reformist efforts at the close of the novel. Following Christie's attempted suicide, Rachel provides her with "...a home, very humble, but honest and happy" (127). The home in question belongs to Cynthia Wilkins, a washer-woman who takes in impoverished and fallen women at Rachel's behest. Defying the distinctions between the public and private spheres, Cynthia extends the domestic sphere into the outside world, refusing to limit her motherly obligations to her immediate kindred. She informs Christie that her peace of mind is the product of "jest doin' whatever comes along, and doin' it hearty, sure that things is all right, though very often I don't see that at furst" (144). In other words, Cynthia embraces a providential theology that advocates "stand[ing] by the Lord though thick and thin", trusting that he will "fetch [you] through somehow" (136) through working with the circumstances of day-to-day life to bring about the greater good.

Cynthy's belief that the values of the home hold the potential to redeem the outside world mirrors Abigail Alcott's faith in the power of matrilineal bonds to revolutionise the relations of the public sphere. Like Abigail, Cynthy attempts to break down the barriers between the nuclear family and the wider world. Upon Christie's arrival, she informs her that: "You're one of them that can't live alone without starvin' somehow, so I'm jest goin' to turn you in among the children to paster, so to speak" (135). Cynthy recognises that Christie has been deprived of an outlet for her sympathetic capacities and farms her children out "to pasture", as a means of providing the lonely and isolated young woman with the companionship she so desperately needs. Once more, the maternal connection is upheld as the primal bond from which all human relationships stem. When Christie tells the story of her hardship, she is comforted by "...the sympathetic face opposite, and the motherly pats so gently given by the big, rough hand" (135), while her initial "treatment" is being allowed to hold Cynthy's youngest child: "Let me hold her! I love babies dearly, and it seems as if it would do me more good that quarts of tea to cuddle her, if she'll let me" (130). The self-giving love of the mother is portrayed as healing the divided self, for it is only through experiencing the all-embracing love for another that the individual attains an identity and sense of purpose.

Cynthy's approach to the family is revolutionary in its embrace of a type of universal motherhood where the disenfranchised are liberated to benefit from the fruits of the domestic sphere. In some respects, this mirrors Bronson Alcott's utopian vision of a "consociate family" where the peculiar affections for one's family members are blown open to the wider world, but Cynthy's understanding of human *caritas* diverges from Bronson Alcott's because the *nuclear* family is presented as the foundation for the wider human family of the public sphere. Cynthy does not do away with her primary affiliation with her children; she merely shares her family with anyone who happens to need it, and at any given time. In this way, the

public life of the professional sphere takes its sustenance from the private world of the family and the two are in continual interchange.

Fitzpatrick has claimed that Alcott's "sentimental narrative and her political goals were at odds" because *Work* reinforces the "sentimental economy" of the marketplace by requiring women to sacrifice their needs in support of the public sphere (31). In actual fact, the public sphere must conform itself to the model of the domestic sphere through prioritising human relationships above economic gain. Cynthy enables Christie to leave her lodgings where she has been accumulating financial debt and enter into a home where her "rent" is expending the sympathy that she lavishes on the Wilkins children—something that is equally beneficial to her. The individualism of the marketplace is not transformed by self-sacrifice; it is rather transformed by a universal recognition of the importance of human connection. No one person sacrifices themselves wholeheartedly for someone else; all are interconnected in an inter-subjective and outward-facing familial community that is an extension of the domestic sphere.

Once more, Alcott's elevation of the nuclear family is complicated by the figure of the husband. As with Rossetti, who portrays the mother's relationship with her children as disconnected from her conjugal bond, Alcott similarly presents the husband as an obstacle on the female protagonist's quest to instigate a universal utopian sisterhood. Cynthy's husband, 'Lisha, is a peripheral figure: an intellectually deficient alcoholic who causes mayhem in the domestic household, and is only redeemed through being packed off to fight in the Civil War. Likewise, Christie's eventual marriage is presented as a threat to her affiliation with the sisterhood, as well as an obstruction to her benevolent mission. Aided by Cynthy, Christie finds work at a local nursery, assisting the owner, David Stirling, whom she eventually marries. Alcott depicts this romance as a passing interlude in the novel, and hints at the limiting potential of Christie's love for David early into their courtship:

Everything *did* “go beautifully” for a time; so much so, that Christie began to think she really *had* “got religion”.

[...]

....it is unnecessary to explain what was the matter with Christie. She honestly thought she had got religion; but it was piety’s twin sister, who produced this wonderful revival in her soul.... (221-222)

Given that the narrative traces Christie’s Christian conversion and her gradual adoption of a practice of lived religion, the fact she mistakes her love for David for “getting religion” indicates that her romantic feelings have blinded her judgement and impeded the progress of her conversion. When one considers that *Work* was composed at the time of the Second Great Awakening with its emphasis on total submission to the will of God, the “wonderful revival” that is facilitated by Christie’s love for David stands in the way of her relationship with the divine, just as the figure of the husband in Rossetti’s work functions as a mirror that is a barrier between the individual and Christ. As Alcott claims, something is “the matter” with Christie: she is diverging from her path of self-discovery to, as Hendler would contend, submerge herself in “an identification with the other” (691).

Alcott’s response is to transform Christie and David’s marriage into a charitable mission, for it conveniently takes place at the outbreak of the Civil War. The abolitionist cause finally inspires Christie to redirect her attentions from the insular world of her romantic affections to social justice, and she insists upon being married in her uniform as a nurse, just as David is married in his uniform as a soldier. However, it is David who is martyred to the cause; shot while assisting a group of contraband women and their children to freedom. The act is symbolic, for David must sacrifice himself to make way for the interracial community of sisters that Alcott ushers in at the close of the novel. The author implies that if an

intersubjective female community is to replace the solipsistic model of the capitalistic marketplace, it must rise out of the ashes of the patriarchal hierarchy that has been destroyed by the Civil War. Thus, upon his deathbed, David's final words to Christie are "You will do my part, and do it better than I could" (315).

Thereafter, Alcott implies that David is incorporated into Christie as a part of herself; enabling her to become a type of female Christ in her outward-facing dedication to others. Christie finds solace in the sound of the wind "whispering in David's flute that hung beside the window" because "it brought back the memory of the living, loving man so vividly, so tenderly, that Christie felt the barrier was down, and welcomed a new sense of David's nearness..." (320). David's spiritual reincarnation in Christie allows her to achieve an androgynous state of being that the truly Christlike person must attain as one who is "neither male, nor female" (Galatians 3:28). His presence within her is described as a "...better answer than any supernatural voice could have given her; a more helpful sign than any phantom face or hand; a surer confirmation of her hope than subtle argument or sacred promise" (*ibid.*).

Christie finds the ultimate salve for her grief in locating David's spiritual presence within her reborn self. This incorporation of the male subject into the female "other" transforms Christie into a figure who "...looks back into the past without bitter regret or unsubmitive grief, and forward into the future with courageous patience..." (329). In other words, she achieves the integration of self that eluded her in her search for genius and acclaim, and the sense of identity that was almost subsumed into the image of her husband following their marriage. Yet, if David Stirling represents the sacrificial cost of the Civil War in liberating women to pursue their professional callings and form their own communities, he nevertheless foreshadows a future where male and female become truly united in the

Christian mission of benevolence. Himself a Christlike figure, he is incorporated into Christie as “one flesh” following his death.

In the short term, David’s death liberates Christie to rededicate herself to the female community. It is the birth of her daughter, Pansy, that allows Christie to finally redirect her attentions away from her grief and envision a life without her husband. David’s death initially transforms Christie into the epitome of the marble woman, “tranquil, colorless, and mute ... leaving the shadow of her former self behind” (316), but she is resurrected by discovering the image of herself in her daughter: “Don’t let me die: I must live for baby now” (321). Christie finds “unspeakable delight” in the knowledge that she has “....a double duty to perform towards the fatherless little creature given to her care” (321). As both father and mother, Christie locates the image of the psychically whole self in the daughter that has sprung from her as an almost immaculate conception, for the reader is barely given any insight into the conjugal relationship of Christie and David following their mutual enlistment (it is implied that Christie conceives Pansy during a brief leave of absence when she visits her husband on the front lines—hardly the picture of marital bliss).

Alongside Pansy, Christie forms a mutually-supportive female family with David’s mother, Ruth, and her estranged daughter, Letty. When Uncle Enos questions Christie concerning the division of finances in this “feminine household” (321), Christie explains that: “....we work for one another and share everything together” (325). As with the Trinitarian relationships portrayed in *Maude* and the Valentine’s Day verses, the women of the family become interchangeable in their outward-facing orientation to each other another. Alcott defines the community they establish as the embodiment of the Christian virtues, founded on the “three good angels” of “faith, hope and charity” (329), which are defined in Corinthians 13:13 as the foundation of the Christian life on earth. Charity, or *caritas*, is the self-giving love for the other that is defined as the greatest of these three principles, and the Stirling

women mirror the female Rossettis in becoming a united body that nevertheless enables each person to achieve a greater sense of “personhood” through its identification with the other.

Where Hendler would claim that the formation of such sympathetic bonds equates to a loss of individualized selfhood, Christie is actually able to reconceive herself as a child of God through her participation in these intersubjective female relationships: “Searching for religion, she had found love: now seeking to follow love she found religion” (319). It is the institution of marriage that threatens to submerge the female capacity for sympathy in the identity of the other, for the husband is positioned as the primary social subject from which the female other takes her being. By extricating her heroine from her marital bond, Alcott liberates her to create a female society that counteracts both the individualistic vision of male genius and the materialistic values of the marketplace. Uncle Enos responds to Christie’s description of her intersubjective female community with contempt: “So like women!” he grumbles, soliloquizing that the equal division of household labor is not “a fair bargain” when Christie is the sole breadwinner (325).

Christie is able to extend her inversion of the individualistic values of the marketplace into the public sphere by using David’s death as an opportunity to propagate the values of the sisterhood into the outside world. David’s martyrdom and his eventual assimilation into Christie’s reborn self allows her to give herself wholeheartedly to her mission of instigating a universal Christian sisterhood through campaigning for women’s suffrage. At the close of the novel, Christie is portrayed attending a women’s rights meeting, likely based on the Seneca Falls Convention—an act that is inspired by David’s self-sacrificial martyrdom for the abolitionist cause. Confronted with the site of a diverse group of women who are unable to relate to one another, Christie uses her “steadily increasing sympathy for all” to bring the delegates into “truer relations with each other” (331). It is at this moment that Christie utilises her artistic gifts to bring about widespread social reform, for she gives her “first public

speech since she left the stage” (332). In contrast to the qualities of “selfishness, frivolity and vanity” (41) that were inspired by her acting career, Christie now projects a “subtle magnetism of character” that is conveyed by a “sympathetic undertone ... so magical in its effect” (332-333). Her power of sympathy is finally translated into a tangible, public mode of communication that is capable of transcending boundaries and uniting women in universal sisterhood.

Hendler’s reading of Christie’s speech takes on far more negative connotations than my own, for he claims that Alcott’s failure to literally transcribe Christie’s words belies a “loss of self” that is the byproduct of sympathetic identification (17). In particular, he interprets Christie’s claim that: “I don’t deserve any credit for the speech, because it spoke itself and I couldn’t help it” (342) as evidence that “....feminine subjectivity is predicated in self-negation” (17). It is my contention that Alcott does not transcribe Christie’s speech because it is a type of divine revelation that is presented as the inspired outpourings of a heroine who has become a vessel, or medium, for sisterly communion: “What she said she hardly knew: words came faster than she could utter them, thoughts pressed upon her, and all the lessons of her life rose vividly before her....” (332). As a type of oracle, Christie has literally broken down the barriers of selfhood in her capacity to identify with the other. This portrayal of a protagonist who leaves her body to achieve a spiritual communion with her sisterly community complements Fuller’s vision of a mesmeric interchange between individuals that dissipates the distinctions between class, race and gender. Indeed, Christie’s “subtle magnetism of character” (333) can be read as directly allied with mesmerism, which is often colloquially referred to as “animal magnetism”.

It is important to note, though, that Christie’s magnetism is not the simple product of her femininity, but is rather born out of the diversity of her experience as a woman who had “....known so many of the same, trials, troubles and temptations” as her interlocutors and

who is therefore able to conjure “a spirit of companionship” among the disparate group (333). Fitzpatrick has claimed that this “spirit of companionship” is delusory because the “sentimental ideal of work for love could not really assuage the sufferings of people who neither loved their work nor worked for love” (39). Fitzpatrick is undoubtedly right in her claim that transcendent sympathy could not literally alleviate physical suffering, but her insistence that “in the real economy, sacrifice ... was inequitably distributed according to class, gender and race” (ibid.) ignores Alcott’s radical claim that sympathetic identification erodes such uneven distributions because in the sisterly community everyone “works for one another and share[s] everything together” (325).

Alcott’s model of an intersectional intersubjective community is directly taken from her mother’s work as a home missionary: an early form of social work that required women to act as intermediaries between the benevolent societies of the rich and the households of the working classes. In one of her 1849 “Reports While Visitor to the Poor of Boston”, Abigail wrote that “...I could serve the poor most effectively [by] becom[ing] an intelligent and acceptable medium of communication to the rich...” (La Plante MHIB 160). Abigail’s description of herself as a “medium” alludes the spiritualist movement, casting her as sympathetic vessel of communication between social stratas. The image of the female missionary as a receptacle of sympathetic communication between the classes also bears strong resonances with the subtle “magnetism” of Christie’s oratory as a bridge between the socially diverse groups of the suffrage movement. Abigail describes her relief office as “....a place where poor and rich could be put in communication without much loss of time, mind, or money; a kind of neutral ground, a receptacle....” (175).

As a fictional counterpart of Abigail Alcott, Christie seeks to create a community where social divisions are transcended by the sympathetic relations between individuals. Abigail herself wrote: “I feel most near the divine when in the fullest accomplishment of my

human relations” (182). Christie achieves her resemblance to Christ by facilitating the communion between the members of the sisterly community surrounding her. By spiritually giving herself to others through her power of sympathy, she enables the community to become united as a single body and thereby imitates the person of Christ who ensures the communion between the human race and the divine through the event of the incarnation. The final scene of the novel looks forward to the foundation of a feminist society that takes its life from the self-giving principles of sisterhood that are instigated by Christie. With the Civil War behind her, Christie observes that she cannot give anything further to the cause of emancipation, other than her husband who went before her to “behold the glorious end” (334).

Once more, David’s sacrificial death is portrayed as liberating Christie to dedicate herself to the intersectional female community that proceeds from her sympathetic identification with the other:

This new task seems to offer me the chance of being among the pioneers, to do the hard work, share the persecution, and help lay the foundation of a new emancipation whose happy success I may never see. Yet I had rather be remembered as those brave beginners are, though many of them missed the triumph, than as late comers will be, who only beat the drums and wave the banners when victory is won (ibid.).

As a pioneer whose sacrifice is equal to that of a fallen soldier, Christie is a prophetic figure who must lead her descendants to the promised land without witnessing its final crystallisation. Her final task, then, is to bring women together across a wide range of class and racial divisions and, contrary to Fitzpatrick’s claims, Christie is well aware that this is not an object that she will realise in her lifetime. Nevertheless, she has surrounded herself with

what she describes as “...a loving league of sisters, old and young, black and white, rich and poor” (343) who are the prototype of the intersectional society of the future.

At the close of novel, the sisters that Christie has adopted through her involvement in a diverse range of professions miraculously reappear, as if drawn by the powerful magnetism of her previous speech: all have heard about it in one way or another, and all encourage her to “hold forth again” (342). Where Christie was estranged from her sisterhood and divided from herself during her episode of suicidal despondency, her sisters are providentially brought back to her when she is able to use her sympathetic capacities to “lay the foundation of a new emancipation” (334). One by one, each sister reappears to join her around the family table where “with one accord they [lay] their hands on hers” (343). Spanning a diverse cross-section of classes and races of nineteenth-century America, Christie’s sisterhood demonstrates that a truly intersubjective and intersectional community defies social structures of inequality because, in aspiring to emulate Christ, each sister gives herself entirely to the other person’s wellbeing. Let it turn, then, to Christie’s Christ-like sisters and examine their truly inter-subjective relations with one another.

“Sympathy works miracles”: self-identification with the “other” in Christie’s intersectional sisterhood

Christie’s dedication to assisting her sisters in overcoming their social stigmatisation allows her to confront her own shortcomings, so that she is able to scrutinise the inequalities implicit in the patriarchal hierarchy that surrounds her. Her contact with a multi-racial sisterhood, spanning the full range of class boundaries, inspires her to create an alternative intersectional community, as well as to interrogate how the complicity of her white privilege has blinded her to the social inequalities upon which her elite status is predicated. The plight of Christie’s

ostracised sisters galvanises her to transcend the boundaries of her selfhood and enter into the suffering of others.

Christie's friend Rachel, who in a dramatic twist of fate is revealed to be David Stirling's estranged sister, Letty, is presented as interchangeable with the heroine, and the sisters' sympathetic relations with each another ensure their unification as "one body". Rachel/Letty takes David's place following his death and it is implied that David was only ever a proxy for his sister. When Christie first meets "Rachel" in the mantua-making factory, she acts like a suitor and "...woo[s] this shy, cold girl as patiently as a lover might" (104), while "Rachel" in turn "...watch[es] [Christie] with covert interest, stealing quick, shy glances at her as she sat musing over her work" (103). The relationship between Christie and "Rachel" contains surprising resonances with that of Lizzie and Laura in Rossetti's "Goblin Market", for Christie's willingness to sacrifice herself for her fallen sister ultimately ensures the redemption of both women.

When "Rachel" is fired from her position in the mantua-making factory on account of her disreputable past, she condemns her female colleagues on account of their inability to practice a type of lived religion and imitate Christ: "Your piety isn't worth much, for though you read in your Bible how the Lord treated a poor soul like me, yet when I stretch out my hand to you for help, not one of all you virtuous, Christian women dare take it and keep me from a life that's worse than hell" (109). Women who had experienced sexual relations outside of marriage, colloquially known as "fallen women", were often scapegoated for the widespread infidelity of married men during a period when prostitution, known as "the great social evil", provided working class women with a better salary than the limited range of professions open to them (a prostitute could earn as much in an hour as a seamstress could in

a day).¹¹³ Dr William Sanger's 1859 study in Blackwell Island Prison, New York revealed that roughly three quarters of women in the sex trade had formerly been servants and seamstresses, turning to the profession as a last resort when facing destitution and homelessness.¹¹⁴

Yet, despite the exploitation of women in the sex trade, Victorian sexologists like William Lecky maintained that "pure" women did not experience sexual desire, while the role of the "fallen woman", as "eternal priestess of humanity", was to expunge "the degradation and sinfulness of man" from the domestic sphere where "the happiness and goodness of society" was located (qtd in Bullen 56-57). Both Alcott's Christie and Rossetti's Lizzie resist such a polarised understanding of female sexuality by enabling their sisters' redemption through sympathetically identifying themselves with them. At the moment "Rachel" claims that not one of her working sisters will dare to take her hand, flinging out this very hand "with a half-defiant gesture", Christie symbolically takes it into her own (109-110). This act represents Christie's determination to redeem her sister by identifying herself with her. She informs the factory-owner, Miss King that: "Some one must trust her, help her, love her, and so save her, as nothing else will. Perhaps I can do this better than you,—at least, I'll try ... even if I risk the loss of my good name...." (110). Just as Christ redeems humanity by taking on human flesh, so does Christie "save" her sister through conflating her identity with hers.

One wonders if Christie's act was informed by the actions of Rossetti's Lizzie who similarly brings about her sister's redemption through inviting her to unite with her as "one body", and thus be purified:

¹¹³ Jabour, "Women's Work and Sex Work in Nineteenth-Century America". *Mercy Street Revealed Blog*. PBS. Web. 22 Feb. 2016. Accessed 28 Sept. 2018.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Eat me, drink me, love me;
 Laura, make much of me:
 For your sake I have braved the glen,
 And had to do with goblin merchant men. (471-474)

If Lizzie's act mirrors that of the Christian priest through ensuring her sister's communion with the transfigured Eucharistic body of a feminized redeemer, Christie likewise becomes one body with "Rachel", co-raising her daughter, Pansy, with "Rachel", now Letty, following David's death. Christie and Letty are presented as parents in the "feminine household" (321) that the child is reared in: "The purring and clucking that went on; the panics over a pin-prick; the consultations over a pellet of chamomilla; the raptures at the dawn of a first smile; the solemn prophecies of future beauty, wit and wisdom in the bud of a woman..." (ibid.). As the "bud of woman", Pansy is the apotheosis of a gynocentric community, born in an overwhelmingly yonic household that is devoid of any traces of masculinity. The consultation over chamomilla, which is historically associated with female fertility, positions Pansy as the offspring of Christie and Letty.

Pansy's containment in an exclusively "feminine household" is retribution for David's earlier rejection of his sister, since he disowned Letty and left her homeless when he discovered her "shame" (266). Christie claims that David "...atoned to that harshness to one woman by years of devotion to many", transforming himself into "... 'a brother of girls' ... a man that has a clean heart to love all women as his sisters, and strength and courage to fight for their protection!" (267). As a form of restitution for the abandonment of his biological sister, David must dedicate his life to the preservation of the sisterhood, and must ultimately sacrifice himself for its continuation into the next generation. Letty takes David's place as Pansy's second parent, uncannily mirroring the close of "Goblin Market" when Laura passes

on the story of her redemption to her and her sister's children in a shared household that is strangely devoid of fathers and husbands.

The resonances between the relationship of Alcott's Christie and Letty, and Rossetti's Lizzie and Laura, are not merely limited to the redemptive power of the sisterhood. Like Rossetti, Alcott also explodes the dichotomisation between the "pure" and "fallen" woman by emphasising the fact that it is not sexual purity alone that defines a woman's moral worth. Although Christie "saves" "Rachel" in the first instance, it is "Rachel" that later redeems Christie during her suicidal episode. This encounter is significant because Christie is presented as the morally weaker of the two characters, even though she has preserved her chastity. When Rachel claims that she went away to help other fallen women, so that she "...might grow good enough to be [Christie's] friend", Christie responds, "See what I am, Rachel, and never say that the more!" (126). Likewise, when David confesses to Christie that he feared she would not accept his proposal when she "knew all" about his sister, she responds by asking him: "Did Letty tell you what she had done for me?"—placing her moral fault on an equal footing with Letty's (272-273).

Likewise, the redemption between the two sisters in "Goblin Market" is not one-sided.¹¹⁵ Lizzie does not experience the same symbolic fall as her sister, but she is also not a paragon of domestic virtue. Lizzie maintains her purity by shutting herself off from the world and denying the existence of temptation: "cover[ing] up her eyes" (50), thrusting "...a dimpled finger / In each ear..." and running away (67-68)—thereby abandoning her sister to the temptations of the Goblin merchant men and the sight of their fruits. Lizzie merely avoids sin by following the prescriptions of a social doxa that she does attempt to question, or

¹¹⁵ This reading has a strong precedent. Galligani Casey writes, "This poem undercuts the traditional patriarchal binary concept that the redeemer is somehow "better" than the redeemed..." (66), while 瀬名波栄潤 observes, "...a passive maiden learns to take action in order to save other women and establish her potential outside of the domestic sphere" (16). I am grateful to Barrie Bullen for explicating the term "doxa" in reference to "Goblin Market" in his "Pre-Raphaelite Revolution" class at Royal Holloway.

ascertain the origins of: “We must not look at goblin men, / We must not buy their fruits” (42-43).

It is Lizzie’s physical and spiritual combat with the goblins that enables her to take on the role of heroine. In her quest to defeat the goblins, Lizzie is described as beginning to “listen and look” (328): observing the world around her and its trials and temptations, for the first time. Laura’s fall therefore enables Lizzie to exercise her agency and form an independent identity; ceasing to define herself through the social mores that surround her. Equally, Lettie’s experience of despondency and her redemption at the hands of Christie, enables her to later facilitate Christie’s redemption when she succumbs to the temptation of her own “bosom sin”, indulging in a self-involved solipsism that culminates in her attempted suicide.

The portrayal of sisterly relationships as mutually transformative is consistent across the full range of class and ethnic groups that are contained within in Christie’s intersectional sisterhood. Christie’s encounter with a fugitive African-American cook, Hepsey, during her time as a servant, forces her to confront her white privilege, something that her solipsistic preoccupation with her struggles had formerly obscured from her attention. When Christie expresses disgust at her employer, Mr. Stuart’s, request that she clean his boots because “....there ought to be a boy to do this sort of thing”, Hepsey responds: “Dere’s more ‘gradin works dan dat, chile ... You’s paid for it ... and if you does it willin, it won’t hurt you more dan washin’ de marster’s dishes” (21).

Hepsey unwittingly forces Christie to confront her unknowing investment in the patriarchal hierarchy of the marketplace where poor children and African-Americans are forced to do the most degrading work, while educated white women like herself are led to believe that such tasks are beneath them. The pride that Hepsey takes in being remunerated for her work reminds Christie that if she wants to become a truly self-reliant woman she

cannot expect to be placed above others on account of her age, race or gender. Hepsey is unashamed of taking on any labour, providing that her humanity and autonomy are recognised, and she therefore offers to clean the master's boots on Christie's behalf: "You jes eave de boots to me; blackin' can't do dese ole hands no hurt, and dis ain't no deggygation to me now; I's a free woman" (ibid.).

Christie's encounter with Hepsey enables her to contemplate the nature of freedom and the symbolic importance of allowing women to become self-sufficient. Hepsey locates freedom in being paid for her work, rather than having both her body and labour seized as another person's "property". Christie is forced to let go of the introspective fixation on her own needs and place her trials and tribulations in the wider context of those of her disadvantaged sisters and colleagues. Upon learning that Hepsey was enslaved, Christie forgets "...her own small injury at this suggestion of the greatest of all wrongs" and admits that she is "ashamed" of her refusal to black the master's boots because she should not "...feel degraded by it, though I should by letting you do it for me" (22-23).

Christie finally recognises that true "degradation" comes of supporting the patriarchal hierarchy where children, African-Americans and poor workers must give up their rights, so that the white elite can maintain their privileges. Her relationship with Hepsey exposes her to the fact that she has been viewing her "whiteness as property". "Whiteness as property" is a term coined by racial theorist Cheryl L. Harris to refer to the theory that many individuals with white privilege experience "...being white and having white privileges [as] their private property: legally protected inalienable rights" (referenced in Kinukawa 95). Christie must accept that if she is to undertake paid labour as a servant, she has no protected inalienable rights not to black her master's boots, where it would be acceptable for a "boy" or an African-American woman.

Thereafter, Christie attempts to eradicate her conception of “whiteness as property” by doing away with the social distinctions between herself and Hepsey. Christie eradicates the gulf that separates the sisters by sympathetically identifying herself with Hepsey. Upon learning that Hepsey has been cheated out of the money she saved to secure her mother’s emancipation, Christie both sets aside a portion of her own wages and teaches Hepsey how to read because she now conceives “Hepsey’s cause as hers” (27). This mode of transformative identification is enabled by her ability to sympathetically immerse herself in Hepsey’s experiences, for “Hepsey could give her a comedy and a tragedy surpassing any thing she found in them, because truth stamped her tales with a power and pathos that the most gifted fancy could but poorly imitate” (27). Alcott underscores the importance of giving authentic testimony throughout the novel, since it is only through recognising the validity of another person’s experience that true reform can be achieved: Christie is moved to “....tears of sympathy” by Hepsey’s account of her struggles (ibid.).

Hepsey’s experiences as an enslaved woman, transmitted through her stories, and Christie’s biography, communicated through her speech, are contained within the narrative as a testament of the wider needs and experiences of the intersectional sisterhood that is fragmented across the public sphere. It is only through engaging sympathetically with the experiences of one’s sisters that the individual is able to achieve communion with them, and Alcott implies that the novel itself should be reformed to include a more diverse range of stories and characters. Up against Hepsey’s stories “novels [lose] their charm” because the authentic struggles of Christie’s African-American sister are more urgent, authentic and compelling. Subtitled “A Story of Experience”, *Work* attempts to expose the reader to the reality of the struggles of women across a variety of classes, employments and ethnicities. Based on Alcott’s own experiences in the workplace, it endeavours to open the eyes of its

female readers to the plight of their sisters, in order to galvanise them to join forces in pursuit of women's suffrage at the close of the narrative.

“Bigger, lovelier and more imposing than any woman I ever saw”: the sisterhood's vision of the female artist of the future

At the close of *Work*, Alcott demonstrates that by cultivating an independent identity in the workplace and engaging compassionately with the outside world, Christie's female sisterhood is able to create an alternative artistic community that is focused on the reform of the androcentric traditions of art they have inherited, redirecting the elevation of the individual to the mutual support of a diverse group of others. In the final scene of the novel, Christie and her “loving league of sisters” come together to interpret a painting that has been gifted to Christie by Mr. Fletcher: a rejected suitor who has come to accept the platonic sentiments she feels for him.¹¹⁶ The painting depicts a scene from *The Pilgrim's Progress: Part II* (1688) where Mr. Greatheart leads Mercy and Christiana out of the City of Destruction. As each woman gazes upon the picture, she sees her own life reflected within its image. Christie's mother-in-law, Ruth Sterling, detects “just a hint of Davy” in the figure of Mr. Greatheart, while Hepsey observes that the female figures in the painting: “oughter bin black”. Christie and Letty, meanwhile, observe that the child looks like Pansy (342).

The fact that each woman is liberated to read her own story into the picture suggests that they have been freed to interpret the literary tradition that has preceded them in the context of their female experience and sisterly relationships. Moreover, the fact that the painting is a gift from Fletcher suggests that the male artist will eventually accept the

¹¹⁶ The interpretation of Fletcher's painting is taken from my MA dissertation, “Self-Reliance: Transcendentalism and the Woman-Artist in Louisa May Alcott's fiction”.

outward-facing values of the sisterly community. Fletcher agrees to Christie's offer of friendship and gifts her with a scene from a seminal work of the male canon that is re-interpreted by both her and her sisters. If Fletcher must be rejected and David Stirling must die to allow the female community to form an independent identity and alternative set of values, this gesture of reconciliation indicates that after a period of gestation both male and female artists will be able to come together collaboratively, as in foreshadowed at the end of *Diana and Persis*.

Yet, the sisterly community must first be allowed a period of growth because the apotheosis of a new school of interpretation is contingent upon the sisterhood's engagement with the outside world. It is only through participating in philanthropic projects that aid and assist the most downtrodden members of society that the female community is finally able to instigate a new tradition of female artistry at the end of the narrative. Just as Maude Foster must become united with Christ before her poetry is able to be transformed into a vessel of his incarnate Word, so must each of Christie's sisters learn to imitate Christ through focusing their attentions on the needs of the "other" before they are able to reform the emphasis on solipsism and individualism that is contained within the androcentric traditions of art they have inherited. Emerson's vision of a self-reliance that rejects the individual's social responsibilities in favour of the pursuit of artistic genius is finally replaced by Abigail's Alcott's emphasis on collaborative work and co-operative community that is embodied in a theology of *caritas*.

If Alcott's *Work* only charts the inception of a newly-formed school of female art, her earlier text, *An Old Fashioned Girl* (1868), goes one step further to imagine a female circle that not only addresses the most pressing social issues of the day, but also spearheads an idealized utopian community of female artists who create a public commentary on feminist issues in their work. This group consists of sculptress, Rebecca Jeffrey, engraver Lizzie

Small, author Kate King, and the heroine, Polly Milton, who is a musician. This sisterly community is referred to as “a different race of creatures” who are set apart from the superficial women who dominate fashionable society and whose lives are spent in “dress, gossip, pleasure, or ennui” (227). Alcott’s creation of a “different race” of women stands out in her *oeuvre* for its total exclusion of men. Whereas *Work* presents the initial stage in the development of female artistry when women are freed to reinterpret male traditions of art, *An Old Fashioned Girl* portrays a self-contained school of female art that does not refer to the seminal works of the male canon. The figure of the self-sacrificing male patron who gives up his romantic claim to make way for the ascension of the sisterhood is also notably absent.

Alcott’s distaste for the figure of the husband as an obstacle on the female artist’s journey towards professionalization is made explicitly clear in her portrayal of the relationship between artists, Lizzie and Rebecca, who “live together, and take care of one another in true Damon and Pythias style” (223). Lizzie and Rebecca are almost certainly a lesbian couple, for “....they work, eat, sleep and live [together], going halves in everything” (ibid.). The Greek myth surrounding the idealized friendship between Damon and Pythias is often read as an early portrayal of a homosexual relationship, and this interpretation was openly referred to in contemporary novels of the period, such as Theodore Winthrop’s *Cecil Dreeme* (1861): a story of the narrator, Robert Byng’s, love for the novel’s titular hero. Alcott was almost certainly acquainted with *Cecil Dreeme*, for an illustration of the novel’s protagonist can be found in her sister, May’s, private papers.¹¹⁷ Seelinger Trites has also claimed that the relationship between Rebecca and Lizzie was based on the historical relationship between sculptress, Emma Stebbins (a close friend of Alcott’s), and actress, Charlotte Cushman: a romantic union that was an open secret in Boston, referred to as one of

¹¹⁷ “Cecil Dreeme”. *May Alcott Drawings, Loose Images From Green Album*. AFAP, 1724-1927. MS Am 2745 IB (29a). Houghton Lib., Harvard.

the many “Boston marriages” between women (144). Within the realm of her domestic fiction, Alcott obscures her portrayal of Stebbins and Cushman’s relationship with a veneer of respectability, for Lizzie “is to be married in the spring” (229). However, in the most unconventional manner, Rebecca is continue living with Lizzie after her wedding because “nothing will part” these two “friends” (439).

In one of her seemingly most conventional novels for children, Alcott manages to portray an exclusive female community of artists that propagates its values into the wider world without the assistance of a male mentor or patron. The final output of this artistic community is the creation of a sculpture, “Woman”, which is fashioned by Rebecca and reflects the entire community’s conception of what they perceive to be the “true woman” (225). This sculpture deliberately undercuts the “Cult of True Womanhood” by referencing many of the images and roles traditionally associated with the “true women”, in order to overthrow them. The statue is described as neither a “saint or a muse, a goddess or a fate, but ... a beautiful woman, bigger, lovelier and more imposing than any woman I ever saw” (224). Significantly, Rebecca’s “true woman” is also surrounded by emblems of women’s “various talents”, including a “needle, pen, [and] palette”, as well as “the ballot-box”, which symbolizes the fact that she has “earned the right” to vote (225-226).

In this, her most striking portrayal of a sisterly community, Alcott presents a female utopia that is able to produce a new emblematic image of the “true woman”: a self-sufficient artist who is able to make a contribution to society, independent of any contact with men. Alcott does not reject the family in this final image, since the sisterly family remains at the heart of this new vision, but in this most unusual sisterhood, the author finally presents a self-sufficient community that promotes its values to the outside world through artistic production, as well as philanthropic work. Like the sisterhood of Christina Rossetti’s *Maude*,

this community is self-contained, supporting the female artist in the realization of her ecstatic vision through its outward-facing ethos of care for the other.

By letting go of her individualistic pursuit of genius, Alcott's female artist creates a new model of artistic identity that focuses on identification with the disenfranchised. Alcott's vision of inter-subjective female community lays the foundation for wider social reform; the female artist instigates a kingdom of heaven on earth through using her art as a type of ministry. Alcott's portrayal of artistic vocation as a ministry that is borne out of the sisterly community mirrors Rossetti's depiction of the female artist as a mouthpiece for the religious faith of all of her sisters. However, the collective outpouring of Rossetti's sisters facilitates mystical unification with Christ and an eventual reunion in the afterlife; it does not generate wider social reform. Alcott's and Rossetti's portrayals of transformative sisterly communities emulate the theological visions of their mothers: Alcott's sisters facilitate the redemption of others through good works; Rossetti's emulate Christ through collectively expressing the divine grace they have received through faith. Both women are nevertheless united in their understanding of the sister as a proxy for the husband, for the sisterhood provides the female artist with the foundation of her artistic vision and the values embodied in her theology of renunciation. The canonical works of Louisa May Alcott and Christina Rossetti reproduce the models of sisterhood witnessed within their families, which were formulated under the guidance of their mothers. As public expressions of the authors' matrilineal heritages, their canonical works are the products of feminist "styles of thought" that have been obscured by subsequent generations of critical scholarship.

Conclusion

“That mighty maternal love which makes [...] little women matches for very big adversaries”

Both Louisa May Alcott and Christina Rossetti portray the female artist's affiliation with her inter-subjective sisterhood as contingent upon her rejection of the individualistic ideologies promoted by male literary traditions. If the authors' public works articulate their adherence to their mothers' theologies of renunciation, they also express Alcott's and Rossetti's definitive repudiation of the models of artistic identity inherited from the Pre-Raphaelites and Transcendentalists. Alcott's allusion to *The Pilgrim's Progress* in *Work* (1873) enacts a subtle commentary on her father's ideology of individualism, for *The Pilgrim's Progress* was seminal in Bronson Alcott's philosophical writings and was later adapted by Alcott to represent the providential theology of her mother in *Little Women*. When Alcott's intersectional sisterhood interprets *The Pilgrim's Progress* in light of their personal experiences, they reconfigure the values of the male canon and its emphasis on the hero's solipsistic quest towards fulfilment.

Alcott departs from the thematic preoccupations of her father's interest in Bunyan's spiritual allegory by focusing on the lesser-known second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1688), which concerns the spiritual journey of the protagonist's wife, Christiana. In the more well-known first part of the narrative (1678), Christiana is presented as an obstacle on Christian's journey to eternal life: “So I saw in my Dream, that the Man began to run; Now he had not run far from his own door, but his Wife and Children perceiving it, began to cry after him to return: but the Man put his fingers in his Ears, and ran on crying, Life, Life, Eternal Life; so he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the Plain” (13). Christian's determination to ignore the pleas of his wife and children in his pursuit of pre-lapsarian innocence bear striking similarities with Bronson Alcott's stubborn pursuit of his

philosophical ideals at the expense of the health and wellbeing of his wife and daughters in the Fruitlands experiment.¹¹⁸

By focusing on Christiana's bildungsroman, Louisa May Alcott allows the redemption of the female protagonist to take precedence over the male hero's isolated journey of self-discovery. Christiana's initial disregard of her husband's distress, and her investment in the pleasures of the City of Destruction, are conveniently expunged from the painting. Instead, the image presents two female figures holding a baby and protected by a "faithful" male guide (342). Rather than supporting a female bildungsroman that reflects the prejudices of a male writer, Fletcher's painting instead allows the sisterly community to re-tell Christiana's story from the unique perspective of its own feminine experience. The ability of each sister to interpret the painting analogically in reference to her own biographical experience suggests that, like Abigail Alcott, the community favours a providential outlook regarding the trials and tribulations of day-to-day life where each person is liberated to redirect their suffering towards the greater good of others through working in concert with the divine.

The individualistic Romantic currents that permeated Alcott's and Rossetti's artistic milieux both found outlets in the authors' commentaries on Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Christina Rossetti's 1866 poem, "The Prince's Progress" (Crump 2001 89-104), is an ironic retelling of Bunyan's narrative that signals her scepticism about the archetypal Romantic "questing" hero. A "Sleeping Beauty" fairy-tale, this poem narrates the story of a prince who fails to overcome each of the obstacles he encounters on his journey to meet his predestined bride, eventually arriving late at the nuptial celebrations to discover that she has died before he can give her the kiss of life.

¹¹⁸ The resonances between this passage and the Fruitlands experiment have already been noted by Matteson (157), but he does not make any link to Alcott's *Work*.

Rossetti portrays the Prince's spiritual blindness as the source of his eventual downfall. His journey is centred on his own emotional and erotic fulfilment, and he is unable to recognise the typological signs that warn him of the impending spiritual danger.¹¹⁹ For instance, he first delays his journey upon meeting an overly-sexualised "wave-haired milkmaid" (58) who offers him a draught of milk if he will pay "her fee" (72). This "fee" is a promise to "...sit under this apple-tree / Here for one idle day at my side" (81-82). Despite the obvious association of the apple-tree with the fall of humanity, the prince is oblivious to these intertextual allusions, believing that "...for courtesy's sake he could not lack / To redeem his royal pledge" (87-88). By portraying the hero's deference to his chivalric courtesy as a pretext, Rossetti relocates the culpability of the fallen woman's sexual indiscretions to the male protagonist. The milkmaid's sexual power is discernible to both the reader and prince, for she writhes her hair around the latter like "shining serpent-coils" (94). This reference to the serpent also presents the milkmaid as another type of the demonic first woman, Lilith, who precedes the ideal helpmate Eve. Indeed, Dante Gabriel Rossetti correspondingly described Lilith as leaving one "strangling golden hair" (14) about the heart of the pre-lapsarian male subject ("Body's Beauty" THOL 60).

Christina Rossetti's intertextual references to the work of her brother stress the responsibility of the male hero for his own spiritual and sexual downfall. In refusing to accept the divine framework of the Tractarian Doctrine of Analogy, the prince ensures that he will never attain his object of spiritual unification with the beloved. Significantly, Rossetti extends her condemnation of this spiritual blindness to the wider Pre-Raphaelite movement, for her description of the prince's encounter with the milkmaid bears startling resonances with Holman Hunt's 1851 painting, *The Hireling Shepherd* (Fig 1), which depicts a shepherd

¹¹⁹ The Prince's inability to recognise the symbols of Christian typology have likewise been discussed by Arseneau (1994) and Henwood.

neglecting his duties to engage in a dangerous liaison with a country girl.¹²⁰ Where the sexuality of Hunt's shepherd is clearly an off-shoot of his connection with the natural world, situated amidst the thriving flora, fauna and animal life he tends, the susceptibility of Rossetti's prince is aligned with his spiritual ignorance. Rossetti reverses the trajectory of Bunyan's narrative: instead of providing the reader with a triumphant male hero who abandons wife and children to achieve salvation, she instead creates an inept, dilettantish prince who unwittingly kills his bride through remaining preoccupied with his self-affirming desires.

Battiscombe has hypothesised that Rossetti's creation of a prince whose procrastination inadvertently kills his bride was a veiled rebuke to Dante Gabriel Rossetti for his protracted five-year engagement to Elizabeth Siddal, which preceded her depression, drug-addiction and eventual overdose (116). Dante Gabriel Rossetti seems to have been aware of the strain of his sister's critique, for his final illustration for the poem (Fig.2) depicts a figure, suspiciously like himself, being thrown out of the Princess's palace by a "severe female" whom Christina Rossetti admitted in a letter "somewhat resembles my Phiz" (qtd. in Battiscombe 124). Significantly, within the poem itself, this lone female figure is surrounded by a group of sisters who condemn the prince for arriving on the scene after the princess has died:

You should have wept her yesterday,

Wasting upon her bed:

But wherefore should you weep today

That she is dead? (531-534)

¹²⁰ I am indebted to Peterson (1994) for alerting me to Rossetti's allusion to Holman Hunt's painting here (221), although she does not consider the different ways that the Prince and shepherd relate to the natural world.

Once again, Rossetti foregrounds the futility of the Pre-Raphaelite depiction of the dead beloved as the ideal counterpart for the self-involved male artist. Here, the sisterhood suggests that the prince has, in actual fact, desired the beloved's death because he showed no urgency when she was in danger of losing her life. The attendants' punishment for the adjournment of the prince's journey is extreme: he is arrested at the door and forcibly ejected from the palace by a group of severe looking waiting women whose flint-like faces belie their sensuous, free-flowing Pre-Raphaelite hair and medieval attire. In the accompanying illustration, the prince covers his eyes in shame, forcibly made aware of the destructive ramifications of his spiritual blindness. The tenor of this illustration is significant because it demonstrates that, far from expecting his sister to blindly affirm his ideology of individualism as a satellite of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Dante Gabriel Rossetti understood her allusions to his spiritual blindness and acknowledged her religious faith as an important facet of her artistic identity.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's illustration does not merely acknowledge the centrality of his sister's religious faith, but also conveys the presence of a self-contained female community that is determined to drive male individualism out of the enclosed space within which it exists. Where Louisa May Alcott's reinterpretation of a seminal text of her father's library allows some room to imagine a future where the male protagonist might be brought to a realisation of the value of a female model of interpretation, Christina Rossetti condemns her protagonist's rejection of a religious framework from the outset as insurmountable.¹²¹ Just as the Rossetti men's dismissal of the spiritual

¹²¹ It is worth noting here that *The Pilgrim's Progress* was a highly influential text in the Rossetti household. Packer claims that it was one of the first texts Frances Rossetti read to her children before they had learned to read themselves (13). Through reinterpreting a seminal text within the family tradition from a feminist perspective, Rossetti draws on the canon to openly challenge her brother's rejection of the Tractarian religious faith. Christina Rossetti's revisions to Bunyan's narrative would have been doubly significant to Dante Gabriel Rossetti when he came to illustrate her poem, for the text would have contained significant childhood and familial resonances relating to the matrilineal tradition of spiritual instruction. Since *The Pilgrim's Progress* was

authority of Frances Rossetti ensures their exclusion from both the matrilineal community and the elect, so does the prince's inability to recognise his unconscious desire for the death of his beloved ensure his banishment from the female space of the palace. There is no evangelical strain to Rossetti's analogical narrative: the prince's fate has been predetermined by his own obtuseness. Unlike Alcott, Rossetti has no faith in the female community's power to transform the outside world through a universal application of its sisterly relationships, for the sisterhood does not even try to redeem the self-involved male hero. One senses that to do so would be to waste their time.

Alcott and Rossetti's vision of a self-contained community of female artists diverges at the point of the authors' conception of the social purpose of women's art and its engagement with the wider world. Social reform remains at the heart of the idealized female utopia that is presented in both *Work* and *An Old Fashioned Girl*. It is notable, though, that Alcott excludes the male artist from her sisterly utopia in the latter text. While the male artist may be capable of achieving an egalitarian collaboration with his female counterpart, he must not be allowed to disrupt the sacred sanctuary of the sisterhood, upon which the eventual reformation of society is founded. This community's transformative theology of *caritas* is derived from a specifically feminine mode of perception that privileges the experiences of the marginalised other through conscious impersonation of the figure of Christ. Integration into Rossetti's Christian sisterhood likewise depends upon a mystical union with the person of Christ, but this union is directed towards the achievement of a perfect communion between sisters in afterlife.

The authors' differing conceptions of the christic union between sisters stems from their mothers' diverging theologies of renunciation. Louisa May Alcott embraces Abigail Alcott's

a text that the Rossetti siblings came into contact with through the matrilineal line, it is also apt that Rossetti creates a self-enclosed community of women who condemn the male protagonist at the poem's denouement.

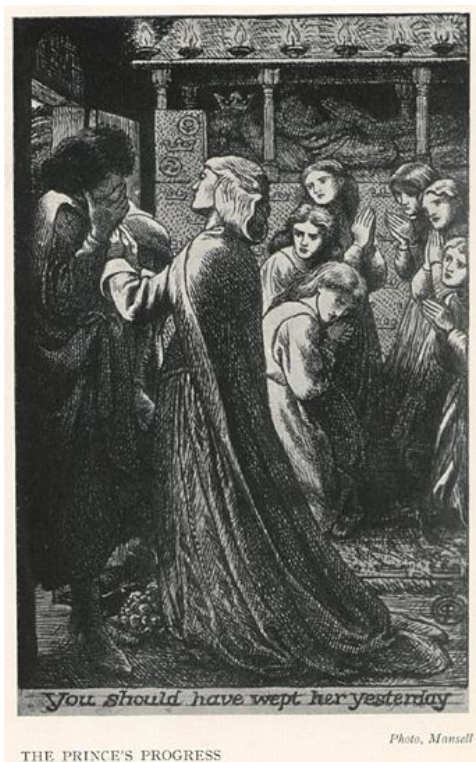
providential understanding of suffering through presenting the sacrifice of one's needs to those of the other as integral to the reformation of society. By contrast, Rossetti remains focused on the relations of the sisterly community as reflections of the divine relations between the persons of the Holy Trinity. The sympathetic communion between Rossetti's sisters is a product of their union with the divine, which is achieved through accessing the sacraments of the Church and shunning the toxic influences of a post-lapsarian world. For Alcott, the divine union between sisters is attained through engaging with the material world to create an inter-subjective society that embraces an outward-facing orientation towards the other.

Nonetheless, Alcott and Rossetti are in concert in their vision of a sisterly community that achieves spiritual unification through sympathetic identification with the other, allowing each of its members to transcend the barriers of their selfhood. Both authors reject the pursuit of genius and exceptionality, in favour of creating a communal vision of female artistry that is founded on the pursuit of the divine, and the promotion of Christian values. These sisterly communities are embodiments of the theologies of renunciation that were espoused by their mothers, and focus on the importance of relinquishing the solipsistic pursuit of individual genius to achieve an ecstatic communion with one's sisters. The authors' canonical works promote the values of their mothers to the wider world, encouraging the female community to take up the sympathetic relations between women that were modelled by the Alcott and Rossetti families, and form their own elected Christian sisterhoods. Alcott's and Rossetti's understanding of the social purpose of these sisterhoods may differ, but their conception of the female predecessor from which they take their being are remarkably similar. While Alcott envisions a "true woman" who is "...bigger, lovelier and more imposing than any woman I ever saw" (AOFG 224), Rossetti imagines a mother who is at once "a hero and a giant" (*Letters* 2 158). In the cases of both of these imaginary sisterhoods, it is that "mighty

maternal love” that makes these “little women” truly matches for “very big adversaries” (ibid.).



(Fig 1.) William Holman Hunt. *The Hireling Shepherd*, 1851. Oil on canvas. Manchester Art Gallery.



(Fig. 2). Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *You should have wept her yesterday*, 1866. Woodcut for the frontispiece of Christina Rossetti's *The Prince's Progress* (1866). Princeton University Lib.

List of Works Cited

- Addison, Jane. "Christina Rossetti Studies, 1974-1991: A Checklist and Synthesis". *Bulletin of Bibliography*. 52nd ed., 1995. 73-93. Print.
- Alcott, Amos Bronson. *The Letters of A. Bronson Alcott*. Ed. Richard L. Hernstadt. Iowa City: Iowa State UP, 1969. Print.
- Alcott, Louisa May. "Behind A Mask". *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Ed. Madeleine B. Stern. New Hampshire: Northeastern UP, 1995. 361-430. Print.
- . "Eli's Education." *Louisa May Alcott: Selected Fiction*. Eds. Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern, and Joel Myerson. Athens, Georgia: U of Georgia P, 1990. 338-351. Print.
- . "Happy Women." *Alternative Alcott*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1997. 203-207. Print.
- . *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*. Eds. Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy. Athens, Georgia: The U of Georgia P, 1997. Print.
- . *Little Women; Little Men; Jo's Boys*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New York: Literary Classics of the US, 2005. Print.
- . *A Marble Woman: Or, the Mysterious Model*. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Ed. Madeleine B. Stern. New Hampshire: Northeastern UP, 1995. 175-251. Print.
- . *An Old Fashioned Girl*. Ed. David Reed and David Widger. *Project Gutenberg*. Ebook.

---. *The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott*. Eds. Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy. Athens, Georgia: U of Georgia P, 1995. Print.

---. "Transcendental Wild Oats". *Alternative Alcott*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1997. 364-381. Print.

---. *Work*. Ed. Joy S. Kasson. London: Penguin, 1994. Print.

Anderson, Bonnie S. *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement 1830-1860*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. Print.

Armstrong, Frances. "'Here Little and Hereafter Bliss': Little Women and the Deferral of Greatness". *American Literature* 64.3 (1992): 453-474. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct 2018.

Armstrong, Isobel. *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Arseneau, Mary. "Pilgrimage and Postponement: Christina Rossetti's 'The Prince's Progress'". *Victorian Poetry* 32:3/4 (Winter 1994): 279-298. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.

---. *Recovering Christina Rossetti: Female Community and Incarnational Poetics*. London: Macmillan, 2004. Print.

Auerbach, Nina. *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978. Print.

---. "The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination." *Victorian Studies* 23.4 (1980): 505-507. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.

Bailey, Susan. "Origin of the P.C. and the P.O. from *Little Women*—it started earlier than you think". *Louisa May Alcott is My Passion*. 26 Oct. 2016. Web. 1 June 2018.

Barnes, Elizabeth. *Love's Whipping Boy: Violence & Sentimentality in the American Imagination*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of NC P, 2011. Print.

---. "Mirroring the Mother Text: Histories of Seduction in the American Domestic Novel". *Anxious Power: Reading, Writing and Ambivalence in Narrative by Women*. Eds. Carol J. Singley and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney. New York: State U of New York P, 1993. 157-197. Print.

Barton, John Cyril, and Kristin N. Huston. *Transatlantic Sensations*. Oxford: Routledge, 2016. Print.

Bassil, Veronica. "The Artist at Home: The Domestication of Louisa May Alcott". *Studies in American Fiction* 15.2 (1987): 187-197. *Project Muse*. Web. 29 Oct 2018.

Battersby, Christine. *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*. London: Women's Press, 1989. Print.

Battiscombe, Georgina. *Christina Rossetti: A Divided Life*. Holt: Rinehart and Winston, 1981. Print.

Baym, Nina. "Again and again, the Scribbling Women". *Hawthorne and Women: Engendering and Expanding the Hawthorne Tradition*. Boston: U of Massachusetts P, 1999. 20-36. Print.

---. "Revisiting Hawthorne's Feminism". *Hawthorne and the Real: Bicentennial Essays*. Ed. Millicent Bell. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2005. 107-125. Print.

---. *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-70*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1993. Print.

Beam, Dorri. *Style, Gender and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. Print.

Bellas, R. A. *Christina Rossetti*. Boston: Twayne, 1977. Print.

Belloc, Hilaire. "Dedicatory Ode". *Sonnets and Verse*. London: Duckworth, 1923. 70-78. Print.

Belsey, Andrew, and Catherine Belsey. "Christina Rossetti: Sister to the Brotherhood". *Textual Practice* 2.1 (1988): 30-50. *Taylor & Francis*. Web. 14 March 2016.

Bercovitch, Sacvan. "The A-Politics of Ambiguity in the Scarlet Letter". *New Literary History* 19.3 (1988): 629-654. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct 2018.

Bernier, Celeste-Marie; Judie Newman; Matthew Pethers. Introduction: Epistolary Studies and Nineteenth-Century American Letters and Letter-Writing. *Edinburgh Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Letters and Letter-Writing*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2016. 11-31. Print.

Bianchi, Petra. "From Improvisatrice to Beatrice: Gabriele Rossetti's Influence on His Daughter, Christina". *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 8 (1999): 17-33. Print.

Bodenheimer, Rosemarie. *Knowing Dickens*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2007. Print.

Boudreau, Kristen. *Sympathy in American Literature: American Sentiments from Jefferson to the Jameses*. Tallahassee: UP of Florida, 2002. Print.

- Bowra, C. M. *The Romantic Imagination*. Boston: Harvard UP, 1949. Print.
- Bristow, Joseph. "'No Friend Like a Sister?': Christina Rossetti's Female Kin". *Victorian Poetry* 33.2 (1995): 257-281. *JSTOR*. Web. 28 Oct 2018.
- Brodhead, Richard H. "Sparing the Rod: Discipline and Fiction in Antebellum America". *Representations* 21 (1988). *University of Carolina Press Journals*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Bronfen, Elizabeth. *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1992. Print.
- Browning, Robert. "My Last Duchess". *Victorian Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*. Ed. Francis O'Gorman. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 173-175. Print.
- . "Porphyria's Lover". *Victorian Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*. Ed. Francis O'Gorman. 2nd ed. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 171-173. Print.
- Bullen, J.B. *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. Print.
- Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Ed. W.R. Owens. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003. Print.
- Burlinson, Kathryn. *Christina Rossetti*. Plymouth, UL: Northcote House, 1998. Print.
- Burton, Antoinette. "Archive Fever, Archive Stories". *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions and the Writing of History*. Ed. Antoinette Burton. London: Duke University Press, 2005. 1-25. Print.
- Butler, Alban. *Lives of the Saints*. Ed. Paul Burns. New York: A & C Black, 1995. Print.

Cadenhead, Raphael. *The Body and Desire: Gregory of Nyssa's Ascetical Theology*. Oakland, CA: U of California P, 2019 (forthcoming). Proof. Received from author. 16 Sept. 2018. Email.

Cadwallader, Robin, and Alison Giffen. Introduction. *Saving the World: Girlhood and Evangelicalism in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. London: Routledge, 2017. 1-15. Print.

Cadwallader, Robin. "Rebecca Harding Davis, Louisa May Alcott, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps: Saving the World by Reclaiming Caritas". *Saving the World: Girlhood and Evangelicalism in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Eds. Robin Cadwallader and Allison Giffen. London: Routledge, 2017. 113-124. Print.

Camden, Jennifer. *Secondary Heroines in Nineteenth-Century British and American Novels*. Farnham: Ahgate, 2010. Print.

Campbell, Donna M. "Puritanism in New England". *American Authors: Literary Movements*. Web. 9 Oct 2018.

Campbell Orr, Elizabeth. *Women in the Victorian Art World*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995. Print.

Cantalupo, Catherine Musello. "Christina Rossetti: The Devotional Poet and the Rejection of Romantic Nature". *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*. Eds. David A. Kent, Jerome J. McGann, and G. B. Tennyson. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987. 274-300. Print.

Cappello, Mary. "'Rappaccini's Daughter' as Translation". *Philological Quarterly* 65.2 (1986): 263-277. *ProQuest*. 29 Oct. 2018.

- Carpenter, Mary Wilson. "'Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me': The Consumable Female Body in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*". *Victorian Poetry* 29.4 (1991): 415-34. *JSTOR*. Web. 30 Aug. 2016.
- Casey, Janet Galligani. "The Potential of Sisterhood: Christina Rossetti's '*Goblin Market*'". *Victorian Poetry* 29.1 (1991): 63-78. *JSTOR*. Web. 25 Jul. 2016.
- Casteras, Susan P. "Virgin Vows: The Early Victorian Artists' Portrayal of Nuns and Novices". *Victorian Studies* 24.2 (Winter) (1981): 157-184. *JSTOR*. Web. 30 May 2017.
- Chantell, Claire. "The Limits of the Mother at Home in *The Wide, Wide World* and the *Lamplighter*". *Studies in American Fiction* 30: 2. (Autumn 2002): 131-153. *Project Muse*. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.
- Chapman, Alison. *The Afterlife of Christina Rossetti*. London: Macmillan, 2000. Print.
- . "Defining the Feminine Subject: D. G. Rossetti's Manuscript Revisions to Christina Rossetti's Poetry". *Victorian Poetry* 35.2 (1997): 139-56. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 April 2018.
- Cheever, Susan. *American Bloomsbury: Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry David Thoreau: Their Lives, Their Loves, Their Work*. New York, Simon & Schuster, 2007. Print.
- Cheney, Ednah Dow. *Louisa May Alcott: The Children's Friend*. Massachusetts, 1888. Print.
- The Christian's Penny Magazine Conducted Upon the Principles of Protestant Reformation and Suited to Every Denomination of Christians Vol. II for the Year 1834*. *GoogleBooks*. Web. 29 Oct 2018.
- Ciolkowski, Laura. Introduction. *Little Women*. London: Knickerbocker Classics, 2013. Print.

Clark Silver, Ariel. "The Art and Politics of Margaret Fuller and May Alcott in Nineteenth-Century Europe". *Recovering May Alcott Nieriker's Life and Works*. 28 June 2018.

Université Paris Diderot. Received from author. 8 Sept. 2018. Email.

Clark, Beverly Lyon. *Louisa May Alcott: The Contemporary Reviews*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. Print.

Coakley, Sarah. *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*. London: Blackwell Publishers, 2002. Print.

Colbert, Charles. "Harriet Hosmer and Spiritualism". *American Art* 10.3 (1996): 29-49. *The University of Chicago Press Journals*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria; Or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*. New York, 1834. Print.

Cunningham, Valentine and Duncan Wu. *Victorian Poetry*. London: Blackwell, 2008. Print.

D'Amico, Diane. *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender, and Time*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1999. Print.

Davis, Octavia. Introduction. *Louisa May Alcott A Modern Mephistopheles*. Ed. Octavia Davis. New York: Bantam Books, 1995. v-xx. Print.

De Groot, H.B. "Christina Rossetti's 'A Nightmare': A Fragment Completed". *The Review of English Studies* 42.93 (1973): 48-52. *JSTOR*. 23 Oct. 2018.

De Sélincourt, Basil. "Christina Rossetti December 5, 1850-December 29, 1894". *The Times Literary Supplement*, December 4 1930, p. 1020-1021. Print.

Delio OSF, Ilia. *Franciscan Prayer*. Cincinnati: St Anthony Messenger P, 1991. Print.

---. *Simply Bonaventure: An Introduction to His Life, Thought, and Writings*. New York: New City P, 2001. Print.

Dillon, Elizabeth Maddock. *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004. Print.

Doughty, Oswald. *A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. London, England: Oxford UP, 1960. Print.

Douglas, Anne. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Knopf, 1977. Print.

Doyle, Christine. *Louisa May Alcott and Charlotte Bronte: Transatlantic Translations*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2000. Print.

Easley, Alexis. "Gender and the Politics of Literary Fame: Christina Rossetti and *The Germ*". *Critical Survey* 13.2 (2001): 61-77. *Project Muse*. Web. March 2 2015.

Elbert, Sarah. Introduction. *Moods*. By Louisa May Alcott. New Jersey: Rutgers UP. xi-xli. Print.

Emerson, Edward W. "When Louisa Alcott was a Girl". *L.M. Alcott: An Intimate Anthology*. New York: Doubleday, 1987. 319-328. Print.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Art". *Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Richard Poirier. Oxford: Oxford UP 1999. 186-194. Print.

---. "Self-Reliance". *Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Richard Poirier. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. 131-152. Print.

- . "The American Scholar". *Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Richard Poirier. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. 37-52. Print.
- . "The Phoenix". *Poetry Nook: Poetry For Every Occasion*. Web. 1 Oct. 2018.
- . "Woman". *Transcendentalism Web*. Web. 17 March 2018.
- . "Experience". *Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Richard Poirier. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. 216-235. Print.
- . "The Over-Soul". *Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Richard Poirier. Oxford: Oxford UP 1990. 152-166. Print.
- . "The Transcendentalist". *Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Richard Poirier. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. 97-111. Print.
- Emmett, Hilary. "'Passion More than Fraternal': Towards a Poetics and Politics of Sisterhood in the American Novel, 1798-1987". Diss. Cornell University, 2007. Print.
- Estes, Angela M., and Kathleen Margaret Lant. "Dismembering the Text: The Horror of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*". *Children's Literature* 17 (1989): 98-123. *Project Muse*. Web. 29 Jan. 2015.
- Fass, Barbara. "Christina Rossetti and St. Agnes' Eve". *Victorian Poetry* (1976): 33-46. *JSTOR*. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Faxon, Alicia Craig. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Second ed. London: Phaidon, 1994. Print.
- Fernandez, Natalia. *Christina Rossetti: In Our Time*. Perf. Melvyn Bragg, Dinah Birch, Rhian Williams, Nicholas Shrimpton. Rec. 1 Dec 2011. BBC Radio 4. Web. 22 Oct 2018.

- Fetterley, Judith. "Impersonating 'Little Women': The Radicalism of Alcott's 'Behind a Mask'". *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 10.1 (1983): 1-14. *Taylor & Francis*. Web. 5 May 2015.
- . "Little Women: Alcott's Civil War." *Little Women and the Feminist Imagination*. Eds. Janice M. Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark. London: Routledge, 1999. 27-43. Print.
- Fite, Keren. "The Veiled, the Masked, and the Civil War Woman: Louisa May Alcott and the Madwoman Allegory". *Gilbert & Gubar's the Madwoman in the Attic After Thirty Years*. Eds. Annette R. Federico and Sandra M. Gilbert. Columbia and London: U of Missouri P, 2009. 170-183. Print.
- Fitzpatrick, Tara. "Love's Labor's Reward: The Sentimental Economy of Louisa May Alcott's *Work*". *NWSA Journal* 5.1 (1993): 28-44. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 July 2018.
- Flint, Azelina. "'Her lovely presence ever near me lives': A Brief Encounter from the Archives with May Alcott Nieriker". *Brief Encounters* 2.1 (Jan 2018). Web. 1 May 2019.
- . "'Twofold Silence as the Song of Love': The Application of Pater's Concept of *Anders-Streben*, within His Discourse of Aestheticism, to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The House of Life*". *Pre-Raphaelite Review* 24. Autumn (2015): 2-13. Print.
- . "Self-Reliance: Transcendentalism and the Woman-Artist in Louisa May Alcott's Fiction". Diss. Royal Holloway, 2013. Print.
- Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. "Religion, Meaning, and Identity in Women's Writing". *Common Knowledge* 14.1 (2008): 16-28. *Duke University Press*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.

Francis, Richard. *Fruitlands: The Alcott Family and Their Search for Utopia*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2010. Print.

"From the Editors: A Note on Sarah Braasch". *The Humanist*. May 10 2018. Web. April 5 2019.

Garlick, Barbara. "The Frozen Fountain: Christina Rossetti, the Virgin Model, and Youthful Pre-Raphaelitism". *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*. Ed. Lloyd Davis. Albany: State U of New York P, 1993. 105-127. Print.

Gay, Carol. "The Philosopher and His Daughter: Amos Bronson Alcott and Louisa". *Essays in Literature* 2 (1975): 181-91. Print.

Gaze, Delia. *Dictionary of Women Artists: Artists, J-Z*. London and Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997. Print.

Gezari, Janet. "Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's the Madwoman in the Attic". *Essays in Criticism* 56.3 (2006): 264-279. *Oxford Academic*. 29 Oct. 2018.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2000. Print.

Ginzberg, Lori D. *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the 19th-Century United States*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990. Print.

Giordano, Paola. "Man's Self-Reliance, Woman's Self-Denial: Alcott and Emerson's Contradictions". *Emerson at 200: Proceedings of the International Bicentennial Conference*. Ed. Giorgio Mariani. Rome: Aracne, 2004. 145-152. Print.

- Goldberg, Gail Lynn. "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Revising Hand': His Illustrations for Christina Rossetti's Poems". *Victorian Poetry* 20.3-4 (1982): 145-59. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 July 2017.
- Gradert, Kenyon. "Puritan Heritage in Harriet Beecher Stowe's Folk Theology". *27th Annual American Literature Association Conference*. May 26-29 2016, Hyatt Regency, San Francisco. Received from author. 16 June 2018. Email.
- Graham, Wendy. *Critics, Coteries and Pre-Raphaelite Celebrity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018. Print.
- Gray, Donald J. *Victorian Literature: Poetry*. Ed. George B. Tennyson. London: MacMillan, 1976. Print.
- Greer, Germaine. Introduction. *Goblin Market*. By Christina Rossetti. New York: Stonehill, 1975. vii-xxxvi. Print.
- . *Slip-Shod Sibyls: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet*. London: Viking, 1995. Print.
- Greiner, Rae. *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2012. Print.
- Harrison, William Henry. Introduction. *Transcendental Wild Oats and Excerpts From The Fruitlands Diary*. Carlisle: Applewood, 1981. 1-21. Print.
- Harrison, Antony H. "Epistolary Relations: The Correspondence of Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti". *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 4 (1995): 91-101. Print.

Hawkins, Harriet. *Classics and Trash: Traditions and Taboos in High Literature and Popular Modern Genres*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990. Print.

Hawksley, Lucinda. *Lizzie Siddal: The Tragedy of a Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel*. London: Andre Deutsch, 2004. Print.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Blithedale Romance*. New York: United Holdings, 2016. Print.

---. *The Celestial Railroad and Other Stories*. Ed. Ross C. Murfin. New York: Penguin, 2006. Print.

---. *The Marble Faun. The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Ed. Norman Holmes Pearson. New York: Random House, 1937. 589-861. Print.

---. "Rappaccini's Daughter". *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Selected Tales and Sketches*. Ed. Michael J. Colacurcio. London: Penguin, 1987. 386-421. Print.

---. *The Scarlet Letter. The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Ed. Norman Holmes Pearson. New York: Random House, 1937. 85-243. Print.

---. *Selected Letters of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Ed. Joel Myerson. Ohio: Ohio State UP, 2002. Print.

---. *Twice-Told Tales*. Ed. Roy Harvey Pearce. New York: Everyman, 1967. Print.

---. *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys*. Boston, 1855. Print.

Hehmeyer, Lauren. "'Let the World Know You are Alive': May Alcott Nieriker and Louisa May Alcott Confront Nineteenth-Century Ideas about Women's Genius". *American Studies Journal* 66 (2019). Web 1 May 2019.

Henderson, James D. *Lilliputian Newspapers*. Norwood: Plimpton Press, 1936. *Archive.org*.

Web. 1 May 2019.

Hendler, Glenn. "Louisa May Alcott and the Sentimental Novel". *American Literary*

History 3.4 (1991): 685-706. *Academia.Edu*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.

---. *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Chapel Hill: U

of North Carolina P, 2001. Print.

Henwood, Dawn. "Christian Allegory and Subversive Poetics: Christina Rossetti's 'Prince's

Progress' Re-examined". *Victorian Poetry* 35.1 (Spring, 1997): 83-94. *JSTOR*. Web. 29

Oct. 2018.

Hewitt, Elizabeth. Prologue: Networks of Nineteenth-Century Letter-Writing. *Edinburgh*

Companion to Nineteenth-Century Letters and Letter-Writing. Ed. Celeste-Marie

Bernier, Judie Newman, and Matthew Pethers. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2016. 1-11.

Print.

Hill, Marylu. "Eucharist and the Erotic Body in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin*

Market". *Augustine and Literature*. Eds. Robert P. Kennedy, Kim Paffenroth, and John

Doody. Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 2006. 215-233. Print.

Hirsch, Marianne. *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*.

Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989. Print.

Houghton, Walter E. *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1957.

Print.

- Hutner, Gordon. *Secrets and Sympathy: Forms of Disclosure in Hawthorne's Novels*. Athens: The U of Georgia P, 1988. Print.
- Jabour, Anya. "Women's Work and Sex Work in Nineteenth-Century America". *Mercy Street Blog*. PBS. 22 Feb. 2016. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Jaffe, Audrey. *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP. Print.
- Jarvis, Claire. *Exquisite Masochism: Marriage, Sex and the Novel Form*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2016. Print.
- Jaudon, Toni Wall. "Obeah's Sensations: Rethinking Religion at the Transnational Turn". *American Literature* 84.4 (2012): 715-41. Print.
- Jensen, Meg. "The Anxiety of Daughterhood, Or using Bloom to Read Women Writers: The Cases of Louisa May Alcott and Virginia Woolf". *Literature Compass* 4.10 (2007) Received from author. 7 Feb 2014. Email.
- Johnson, Claudia Durst. "'Transcendental Wild Oats' Or the Cost of an Idea". *American Transcendental Quarterly* 12.1 (1998): 45-65. *ProQuest*. Web 29 Oct 2018.
- Jones, Deborah L. "Hawthorne's Post-Platonic Paradise: The Inversion of Allegory in Rappaccini's Daughter". *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 18.2 (1988): 153-169. *JSTOR*. Web. 3 May 2017.
- Jones, Kathleen. *Learning Not to be First: The Life of Christina Rossetti*. Oxford: Windrush, 1991. Print.

- Jordan, Ellen. *The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain*. London: Routledge, 1999. Print.
- Julian of Norwich. *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman AND A Revelation of Love*. Eds. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 2006. Print.
- Kaledin, Eugenia. "Louisa May Alcott: Success and the Sorrow of Self-Denial". *Women's Studies* 5.3 (1978): 251-263. *Taylor & Francis*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Kaplan, Cora. "The Indefinite Disclosed: Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson". *Women's Writing and Writing About Women* Ed. Mary Jacobas. London: Croom Helm, 1979. 61-79. Print.
- Karlin, David. *The Penguin Book of Victorian Verse*. London: Penguin, 1998. Print.
- Kent, David A. "W.M. Rossetti and the Editing of Christina Rossetti's Religious Poetry". *Pre-Raphaelite Review* 1.2 (1978): 18-26. Print.
- Keyser, Elizabeth Lennox. *Whispers in the Dark: The Fiction of Louisa May Alcott*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1995. Print.
- Kilic, Yildiz. "My World My Work My Woman all My Own": Reading Dante Gabriel Rossetti in His Visual and Textual Narratives. Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2014. Print.
- Kinukawa, Tonomi. "Science and Whiteness as Property in the Dutch Atlantic World: Maria Sibylla Merian's *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium*". *Journal of Women's History* 24.3 (2012): 91-116. *Project Muse*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.

Knoepfelmacher, UC. "Avenging Alice: Christina Rossetti and Lewis Carroll". *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 41.3 (1986): 299-328. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.

Kooistra, Elaine Janzen. *Christina Rossetti and Illustration: A Publishing History*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 2002. Print.

LaPlante, Eve. *My Heart is Boundless: Writings of Abigail May Alcott, Louisa's Mother*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012. Print.

---. *Marmee & Louisa: The Untold Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Mother*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012. Print.

Leighton, Angela. *Victorian Women Poets*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1992. Print.

Lowe, Brigid. *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy: An Alternative to the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*. London: Anthem, 2007. Print.

Ludlow, Elizabeth. *Christina Rossetti and the Bible: Waiting with the Saints*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. Print.

Lystra, Karen. *Searching the Heart: Women, Men and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989. Print.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. London: Duckworth, 1981. Print.

Mandelker, Ira L. *Religion, Society, and Utopia in Nineteenth-Century America*. Boston: U of Massachusetts P, 1984. Print.

- Marcus, Sharon. *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2007. Print.
- Marsh, Jan. *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1994. Print.
- . *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter and Poet*. London: Orion, 1999. Print.
- Marshall, Linda E. "'Transfigured to His Likeness' Sensible Transcendentalism in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'". *University of Toronto Quarterly* 63.3 (1994): 429-450. *University of Toronto Press*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Mason, Emma. *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology and Faith*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018. Print.
- Matteson, John. *Eden's Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father*. New York: Norton, 2007. Print.
- Maxwell, Catherine. "Tasting the 'Fruit Forbidden': Gender, Intertextuality, and Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*". *The Culture of Christina Rossetti: Female Poetics and Victorian Contexts*. Eds. Mary Arseneau, Antony H. Harrison, and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1999. 75-102. Print.
- May, Leila Silvana. *Disorderly Sisters: Sibling Relations and Sororal Resistance in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*. New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 2001. Print.
- McCullough, Kate. "Louisa May Alcott's Incestuous Fathers and Fiendish Mothers, Or, the Daughter as Wife". *Pacific Coast Philology* 26.1 (1991): 59-67. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 Nov. 2017.

McGann, Jerome. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game that must be Lost*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2000. Print.

Mehren, Joan Von. *Minerva and the Muse: A Life of Margaret Fuller*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1994. Print.

Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick*. London, 1892. Print.

Merill Decker, William. *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America before Telecommunications*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1998. Print.

Mermin, Dorothy. "Heroic Sisterhood in 'Goblin Market'". *Victorian Poetry* 21.2 (1983): 107-118. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct. 2019.

Metzger, Sabine. "'That Indefinable Nothing, that Inestimable Something': Empathy and the Miraculum of Art in *The Marble Faun*". *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review* 37.1 (2011): 88-108. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 Aug. 2017.

Michie, Helena. *Sororophobia: Differences Among Women in Literature and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992. Print.

Milder, Robert. "Melville's 'Intentions' in *Pierre*". *Studies in the Novel* 6.2 (1974): 186-199. *JSTOR*. 5 May 2016.

Moffett, Helen. "Rewriting Christina Rossetti: Cross-Gendered Sibling Rivalry, Fraternal Intervention and the Counter-Poetics of Dissidence". Diss. U of Cape Town, 1993. *Open UCT*. Web. 23 Oct 2018.

Mott, Wesley T. "Emerson and Individualism". *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Joel Myerson. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. Print.

- Murphy, Ann B. "The Borders of Ethical, Erotic and Artistic Possibilities in *Little Women*". *Signs* 15.3 (Spring) (1990): 562-585. *The University of Chicago Press*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Nobel, Marianne. *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature*. New Haven: Princeton UP, 2000.
- O'Connell, Catharine. "'We must Sorrow': Silence, Suffering, and Sentimentality in Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*". *Studies in American Fiction* 25:1 (Spring ,1997): 21-39. *Project Muse*. Web. 5 March 2018.
- O'Gorman, Francis. *Victorian Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*. London: Blackwell, 2004. Print.
- Ofek, Galia. *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009. Print.
- Oliver, Lois. "Models as Artists". *Dictionary of Artists' Models*. Ed. Jill Berk Jiminez. 20-26. London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001. Print.
- Orlando, Emily J. "'That I may Not Faint, Or Die, Or Swoon': Reviving Pre-Raphaelite Women". *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 38.6 (2009): 611-46. *Taylor & Francis*. Web. 7 July 2018.
- Packer, Lona Mosk. *Christina Rossetti*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1963. Print.
- Palazzo, Lynda. *Christina Rossetti's Feminist Theology*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. Print.

Patai, Raphael. "Lilith". *The Journal of American Folklore* 77.306 (1964): 295-314. *JSTOR*.

Web. 6 Feb. 2017.

Pateman, Carole. *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988. Print.

Pater, Walter. *Studies in the History of The Renaissance*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. Print.

Peattie, Roger. "William Michael Rossetti and the Making of Christina Rossetti's

Reputation". *Haunted Texts: Studies in Pre-Raphaelitism in Honor of William E.*

Fredeman. Ed. David Latham. Toronto, Ontario: U of Toronto P, 2003. 71-90. Print.

Peterson, Linda H. "Restoring the Book: The Typological Hermeneutics of Christina Rossetti and the PRB". *Victorian Poetry* 32.3/4 (1994): 209-232. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct 2018.

---. *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing*.

Charlottesville, VA: UP of Virginia, 1999. Print.

Petrulionis, Sandra Harbert. "By the Light of Her Mother's Lamp: Woman's Work Versus Man's Philosophy in Louisa May Alcott's 'Transcendental Wild Oats'". *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1995): 69-81. *JSTOR*. 2 Jan. 2015.

Pfaelzer, Jean. "Subjectivity as Feminist Utopia". *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women:*

Worlds of Difference. Ed. Susan Gubar. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1994. 94-107. Print.

Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Philosophy of Composition". *The Norton Anthology of American Literature Vol. B*. Ed. Nina Baym. London: Norton, 2012.

Poovey, Mary. "Recovering Ellen Pickering". *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 13.2 (2000): 437-452. Print.

---. *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary*

Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984. Print.

Porter, Nancy (Dir.). *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women*. Prod. Harriet

Reisen and Jennifer Pearce. Perf. Norbert Hirschhorn, John Matteson, Joel Myerson,

Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern, Leona Rostenberg, Shirley Samuels, Jan Turnquist.

American Masters. PBS. 2009. Television. Web. Amazon Prime Video. 16 March. 2018.

Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. *The Germ: The Literary Magazine of the Pre-Raphaelites*.

Reprint. Ed. Andrea Rose. Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1979. Print.

Pykett, Lyn. *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel*. Northcote House: Tavestock, 2011.

Print.

Ratzinger, Joseph. *Introduction to Christianity*. San Francisco: Ignatius P, 2004. Print.

Reisen, Harriet. *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women*. New York: Picador,

2009. Print.

Richardson Jr., Robert D. *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1995.

Print.

Ricks, Christopher. *The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990.

Print.

Roden, Frederick S. "Sisterhood is Powerful: Christina Rossetti's *Maude*". *Women of Faith in*

Victorian Culture: Reassessing the Angel in the House. Eds. Andrew Broadstock and

Anne Hogan. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012. 63-78. Print.

Roe, Dinah. *Christina Rossetti's Faithful Imagination*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Print.

---. *The Rossettis in Wonderland: A Victorian Family History*. London: Haus Publishing,

2011. Print.

Rosenblum, Dolores. "Christina Rossetti: The Inward Pose". *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist*

Essays on Women Poets. Eds. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Bloomington:

Indiana UP, 1979. 82-99. Print.

Rosenfeld, Natania. "Artists and Daughters in Louisa May Alcott's *Diana and Persis*". *New*

England Quarterly: A Historical Review of New England Life and Letters 64.1 (1991):

3-21. JSTOR. Web. 4 Aug. 2015.

Ross, Cheri Louise. "Louisa May Alcott's (Con)Temporary Periodical Fiction: The Thrillers

Live On". *Journal of Popular Culture* 38.5 (2005): 911-23. *Wiley Online Library*. Web.

29 Oct. 2018.

Rossetti, Christina. *Called to be Saints: The Minor Festivals Devotionally Studied*. London,

1885. Print.

---. *The Complete Poems*. Ed. R. W. Crump. London: Penguin, 2001. Print.

---. *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti: A Variorum Edition*. Ed. Rebecca Crump.

Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1990. Print.

---. *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse*. London, 1892.

Print.

---. *Letter and Spirit: Notes on the Commandments*. London, 1883. Print.

---. *The Letters of Christina Rossetti, 1843-1873*. Ed. Antony H. Harrison. Vol. 1.

Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1997. Print.

---. *The Letters of Christina Rossetti, 1874-1881*. Ed. Anthony H. Harrison. Vol.2.

Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1999. Print.

---. *Maude. Selected Prose of Christina Rossetti*. Eds. David A. Kent and P. G. Stanwood.

London: Macmillan, 1998. 17-52. Print.

---. *Seek and Find*. London, 1879. Print.

---. *Time Flies: A Reading Diary*. London, 1897. Print.

Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Chelsea Years,*

1863-1872. Ed. William E. Fredeman. Vol.4 Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur, 2002.

Print.

---. *The House of Life*. Champaign, Illinois: Book Jungle Rare Reprints, 1999. Print.

---. *Poems and Translations*. Seventh ed. London: Oxford UP, 1968. Print.

Rossetti, Maria. *The Rivulets; A Dream Not All A Dream*. London: Sold By The Author. 50,

Charlotte St, Portland Place. 1846.

Rossetti, William Michael. *New Poems of Christina Rossetti Hitherto Unpublished or*

Uncollected. London, 1895. Print.

---. *The Poetical Works of Christina Rossetti: With Memoir and Notes &c*. London,

1904. Print.

---. *Some Reminiscences*. New York, 1906. Print.

Rossetti Rutterford, Mary. Personal interview. 19 May 2015.

Rowe, John Carlos. "Hawthorne's Ghost in Henry James's Italy: Sculptural Form, Romantic Narrative, and the Function of Sexuality". *The Henry James Review* 20.2 (1999). *Project Muse*. Web. 5 June 2017.

Sahmadi, Linda. "Writing for Kids: Hawthorne's Grandfather Impersonated". *27th Annual American Literature Association Conference*. May 26-29 2016, Hyatt Regency, San Francisco. Received from author. 21 July 2017. Email.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, 1978. Print.

Salerno, Allen J. "Reappraisals of the Flesh: Christina Rossetti and the Revision of Pre-Raphaelite Aesthetics". *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 10 (2001): 71-89. *History of Art Bibliography*. Web. 6 April 2015.

Saxton, Martha. *Louisa May: A Biography of Louisa May Alcott*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1977. Print.

Schor, Mira. "Patrilineage". *Art Journal* 50.2 (2014): 58-63. *Taylor & Francis*. Web. 1 Sept. 2018.

Schulz, Kathryn. "Pond Scum: Henry David Thoreau's Moral Myopia". *The New Yorker Online*. 19 Oct 2015. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.

Scull, Andrew. *Hysteria: The Disturbing History*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.

Seelinger Trites, Roberta. "'Queer Performances': Lesbian Politics in *Little Women*". *Little Women and the Feminist Imagination: Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays*. Eds.

Janice M. Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark. New York: Routledge, 1999. 139-161.
Print.

Shefer, Elaine. "The Woman at the Window in Victorian Art and Christina Rossetti as the Subject of Millais's *Mariana*". *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 4.1 (1983): 14-25. *History of Art Bibliography*. Web. 5 Sept. 2018.

Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*. London: Penguin, 1987. Print.

---. Introduction. *Alternative Alcott*. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1997. ix-xliv. Print.

---. Introduction. *Christina Rossetti, Maude; Dinah Mulock Craik, on Sisterhoods: A Woman's Thoughts about Women*. Ed. London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993. vii-xxvii. Print.

Siddal, Elizabeth. "Dead Love". *Lizziesiddal.com* 26 July 2008. Web. 15 March 2018.

Stepanski, Lisa M. *The Home Schooling of Louisa May Alcott*. New York: Edwin Mellen, 2011. Print.

Stern, Madeleine B. Introduction. *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995. ix-xxix. Print.

---. Introduction. *Behind a Mask: The Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott*. New York: Quill, 1975. vii-xxxiii. Print.

---. Introduction. *Louisa May Alcott Selected Fiction*. Eds. Daniel Shealy, Joel Myerson, and Madeleine B. Stern. Athens, Georgia: U of Georgia P, 2001. xi-xlvi. Print.

---. *Louisa May Alcott: A Biography*. New Hampshire: UP of New England, 1999. Print.

Strickland, Charles. *Victorian Domesticity: Families in the Life and Art of Louisa May Alcott*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1985. Print.

Sturge, Donald. "A Difficult Renunciation: Conflict in the Life and Art of Christina Rossetti". *言語文化研究* 16 (2008): 193-230. CiNii. Web. 10 Dec. 2017.

Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Conjugal Love and its Chaste Delights: Also, Adulterous Love and its Insane Pleasures*. London, 1855. Print.

Tennyson, Lord Alfred. "The Lady of Shalott". *Victorian Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*. London: Blackwell, 2006. 71-76. Print.

Tennyson, G. B. *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode*. Boston: Harvard UP, 1981. Print.

Thomas, Donald. *The Everyman Book of Victorian Verse: The Pre-Raphaelites to the Nineties*. London: Everyman, 1993. Print.

Thomas, Eleanor Walter. *Christina Rossetti*. New York: Columbia UP, 1931. Print.

Thomas, Frances. *Christina Rossetti: A Biography*. London: Hachette Digital, 2013. Print.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Cape Cod*. Boston, 1877. Print.

Todd, Janet. *Sensibility: An Introduction*. London: Methuen, 1988. Print.

Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985. Print.

- Turner, Arlin. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980. Print.
- Upstone, Robert. *The Age of Rossetti, Burne Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain, 1860-1910*. London: Tate Gallery, 1998. Print.
- Vicinus, Martha. *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988. Print.
- Vidrine, Jessica Daigle. "Notions on Marriage: Bisexual Desires and Spinsterhood as Intellectual and Artistic Genius in Louisa May Alcott's 'Happy Women' and *Diana and Persis*". *Women's Studies* 39.2 (2010): 136-54. *Taylor & Francis*. Web. 5 Nov. 2014.
- Wallace, James D. "Hawthorne and the Scribbling Women Reconsidered". *American Literature* 62.2 (1990): 201-222. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 May 2016.
- Warner, Susan (printed under the pseudonym Elizabeth Wetherell). *The Wide, Wide World*. Leipzig, 1854. *iBooks*. Ebook.
- Warren, Joyce W. *The American Narcissus: Individualism and Women in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1984. Print.
- Watts, Isaac. "Self-Enquiry". *Bartleby*. Web. 1 June 2018.
- Weathers, Winston. "Christina Rossetti: The Sisterhood of Self". *Victorian Poetry* 3.2 (1965): 81-89. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Aug. 2017.
- Weinstein, Cindy. *Family, Kinship and Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006. Print.

- Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860". *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966): 151-174. *JSTOR*. 4 Oct. 2018.
- Weltman, Sharon Aronofsky. "Christina Rossetti". *Oxford Bibliographies*, Oxford UP. 25 May 2017. Web. 2 March 2011.
- Williams, Todd O. "The Autobiographical Self and Embodied Knowledge of God in Christina Rossetti's *Time Flies*". *Literature & Theology* 28.3 (2014): 321-333. *Oxford Academic*. Web. 29 Oct 2018.
- . "Environmental Ethics in Christina Rossetti's *Time Flies*". *Prose Studies* 33.3 (2011): 217-229. *Taylor & Francis*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Winthrop, Theodore. *Cecil Dreeme*. Ed. Peter Coviello. New York: New York UP, 2016. Print.
- Woolf, Virginia. "Professions for Women". *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*. San Mateo: Harcourt, 1942. 235-42. Print.
- . "A Room of One's Own." *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*. Ed. Anna Snaith. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015. 1-87. Print.
- Wootson Jr., Cleve R. "A black Yale student fell asleep in her dorm's common room. A white student called the police". *The Washington Post*. May 11 2018. Web. April. 5 2019.
- Wu, Duncan and Valentine Cunningham. *Victorian Poetry, Based on the Victorians: An Anthology of Poetry and Poetics*. London: Blackwell, 2002. Print. .

Yankoski, Danae. "A New Way to be Woman: Christina Rossetti's Retrieval of Pre-Reformation Catholic Models of Virgin Mothers and Female Saints". *Canadian Society of Church History Historical Papers* (2013). *Google Scholar*. 29 Oct. 2018.

Zboray, Ronald K. & Mary Saracino. "Is it a Diary, Commonplace Book, Scrapbook, Or Whatchamacallit? Six Years of Exploration in New England's Manuscript Archives". *Libraries & the Cultural Record*.1 (2009): 102-123. *U of Texas P*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.

瀬名波栄潤. "A Punishment Required: Pleasure of Pain in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'". *The annual reports on cultural science* 48.2 (1999): 15-58. *Google Scholar*. Web. 20 Oct. 2018.

Works of Reference

Holy Bible (Illustrated). Authorised King James Version, Oxford UP, 1997.

The Poems of John Keats. Ed. Miriam Allott. London: Longman, 1970.

Oxford English Dictionary Online. Oxford UP. Web. 24 Oct. 2018.

Shakespeare Complete Works: Revised Edition. Eds. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. *The Arden Shakespeare*.

Shelley Poetical Works. Ed. Thomas Hutchinson. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988.

Appendix 1

List of Archival Sources

Alcott, Abigail. *Diary for the Years 1841-1844; at Concord, Fruitlands, Still River, and again at Concord*. Alcott Family Additional Papers, 1707-1904. MS Am 1130.14 (1). Houghton Lib., Harvard.

---. *Extracts from the Journals of Abigail Alcott in the Hand of Louisa May Alcott, 1828-1829*. Alcott Family Additional Papers, 1707-1904. MS AM 1130.14 (5). Houghton Lib., Harvard.

---. *Last Diary*, Sep 1876 - 8 Oct 1877. Alcott Family Additional Papers, 1820-1886. AM 1817.2 (15). Houghton Lib., Harvard.

---. *An MS Copy of "My Kingdom" with a Commentary upon it with "Extracts from Keble": An MS Commentary of a Poem*. Alcott Family Additional Papers, 1820-1886. MS AM 1817.2 (17). Houghton Lib., Harvard.

Alcott, Anna. *Diary, 1860-1861*. Alcott Family Additional Papers 1707-1904. MS AM 1130.14 (6). Houghton Lib., Harvard.

Alcott, Elizabeth. "Story of an Apple". *The Portfolio*. December 9th, No.9. *The Pickwick and The Portfolio: Autograph Manuscript: Various Issues of the Alcott Children's Newspapers*. Alcott Family Additional Papers, 1724-1927. MS 2745 B (104), Houghton Lib., Harvard.

Alcott, Louisa May. "Rolf Walden Emmerboy". Undated fragment. Alcott Family Additional Papers, 1724-1927. MS AM 2745. Series III B (106). Houghton Lib., Harvard.

- . "Two Scenes in a Family". *The Portfolio. The Pickwick and The Portfolio: autograph manuscript: Various Issues of the Alcott Children's Newspapers*. November 18th, No.7. Alcott Family Additional Papers, 1724-1927. MS 2745 B (104), Houghton Lib., Harvard.
- . "My Picture Gallery" (Erroneously Titled, "My Future Gallery"). *Compositions by Louisa May Alcott and Others*. Alcott Family Additional Papers, 1747-1927. MS AM 2745, Series III B (102). Houghton Lib., Harvard.
- . "Wealth". *The Portfolio. The Pickwick and The Portfolio: Various Issues of the Alcott Children's Newspapers*. November 26th, Number 5. Alcott Family Additional Papers, 1724-1927. MS 2745 B (104). Houghton Lib., Harvard.
- Alcott Nieriker, May. *1840-1879. AM.S. Diary 1 Sep 1852-25 Jul 1863*. Louisa May Alcott Additional Papers, 1845-1944, AM 1817 (56). Houghton Lib., Harvard. *Mirador*. Web. 4 Sept. 2018.
- . *Cecil Dreeme. May Alcott Drawings, Loose Images From Green Album*. Alcott Family Additional Papers, 1724-1927. MS Am 2745 IB (29a). Houghton Lib., Harvard.
- . *Extracts from May's Letters in Paris, 1878-1879. MS. in the Hand of Anna Alcott Pratt*. Alcott Family Additional Papers, 1724-1927. AM 1130.17. Houghton Lib., Harvard.
- . *May Alcott Letters Sent from Abroad*. Alcott Family Additional Papers 1724-1927. AM 2745, Series II. Houghton Lib., Harvard.
- Dick, Dora Browning. *Commonplace book, 1851-1901*. C01999 (290). Rare Books and Special Collections. Firestone Lib., Princeton University.

F.B.S. "Miss Alcott: The friend of Little Women and of Little Men". 1888. MS 800.23.

Louisa May Alcott Papers, 1849-1931. Houghton Lib., Harvard.

"Louisa May Alcott". 1888. Louisa May Alcott Papers, 1707-1904. MS 1130.16. Folder 7.

Houghton Lib., Harvard. *There are three different anonymous sources that share this title and reference information, cited in Introduction, "I am even I" and "Behind a Mask".*

Rossetti, Christina. "A Coast-Nightmare". 1850. Box 1 C0222. Christina Georgina Rossetti Collection. Firestone Lib., Princeton.

---. "A Nightmare". 18 Dec 1856-29 Jun 1858. Ashley MS 1364 (2). British Lib., London.

---. "A Year Afterwards". Notebooks of Christina Rossetti Poems. 1845-56. Cat. 504. Item 1305. Weston Library, Bodleian Collections, University of Oxford.

Appendix 2

List of Works Consulted

- Addison, Jane. "Christina Rossetti Studies, 1974-1991: A Checklist and Synthesis". *Bulletin of Bibliography*. 52nd ed., 1995. 73-93. Print.
- Aiello, Lucia. "Mimesis and Poiesis: Reflections on Gilbert and Gubar's Reading of Emily Dickinson". *Gilbert and Gubar's the Madwoman in the Attic After Thirty Years*. Eds. Annette R. Federico and Sandra M. Gilbert. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2009. 237-257. Print.
- Armstrong, Isobel. "D. G. Rossetti and Christina Rossetti as Sonnet Writers." *Victorian Poetry* 48.4 (2010): 461-73. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 May 2015.
- Auerbach, Nina. "Austen and Alcott on Matriarchy: New Women Or New Wives." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 10.1 (1976): 6-26. *JSTOR*. Web 29 Oct. 2010.
- Avallone, Charlene. "What American Renaissance? The Gendered Genealogy of a Critical Discourse." *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*. Ed. Venetria K. Patton. Boston: St. Martin's, 2006. 76-97. Print.
- Bakratcheva, Albena. *Visibility Beyond the Visible: The Poetic Discourse of American Transcendentalism*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013. Print.
- Bell, Millicent. "The Marble Faun and the Waste of History." *The Southern Review* 35.2 (1999): 354. *ProQuest*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.

- Blackford, Holly. "Chasing Amy: Mephistopheles, the Laurence Boy, and Louisa May Alcott's Punishment of Female Ambition." *Frontiers* 32.3 (2011): 1-40. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. Print.
- Blow, Suzanne. "Pre-Raphaelite Allegory in *The Marble Faun*." *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 44.1 (1972): 122-7. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct 2018.
- Brenzo, Richard. "Beatrice Rappaccini: A Victim of Male Love and Horror". *American Literature* 48.2 (1976): 152-164. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Budge, Gavin. "The Hallucination of the Real: Pre-Raphaelite Vision as a Crisis of Romantic Masculinity." *Pre-Raphaelite Masculinities: Constructions of Masculinity in Art and Literature*. Eds. Amelia Yeates, Serena Trowbridge, and Colin Cruise. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014. 55-79. Print.
- Bump, Jerome. "Christina Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood". *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*. Eds. David A. Kent, Jerome J. McGann, and G. B. Tennyson. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987. 322-345. Print.
- Campbell, Elizabeth. "Of Mothers and Merchants: Female Economics in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'." *Victorian Studies: A Journal of the Humanities, Arts and Sciences* 33.3 (1990): 393-410. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Jan 2015.
- Conley, Susan. "Rossetti's Cold Women: Irony and Liminal Fantasy in the Death Lyrics". *The Culture of Christina Rossetti*. Eds. Mary Arseneau, Antony H. Harrison, and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Athens: Ohio UP, 1999. 260-284. Print.

- DaGue, Elizabeth. "Images of Work, Glimpses of Professionalism in Selected Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Novels." *Frontiers* 5.1 (Spring) (1980): 50-55. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- D'amico, Diane, and David A. Kent. "Rossetti and the Tractarians". *Victorian Poetry* 33.1 (Spring) (2006): 93-103. *Project Muse*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- De Puy, Harry. "Amos Bronson Alcott: Natural Resource, Or 'Consecrated Crank?'" *American Transcendental Quarterly* 1.1 (1987): 49-68. Print.
- Doke Kerns, Jessica. "Shaping an 'Idea without Hands': Bronson Alcott's Educational Theory Brought to Life in *Little Women*". Diss. Iowa State University, 2009. Print.
- Doyle, Christine. *Louisa May Alcott and Charlotte Bronte: Transatlantic Translations*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000. Print.
- Eberle, Roxanne. "Rewriting the 'vile' Text: Christina Rossetti and the Poetics of Social Reform". *Chastity and Transgression in Women's Writing, 1792-1897*. Ed. R. Eberle. New York: Springer, 2001. Print.
- Escobar, Kirsten E. "Female Saint, Female Prodigal: Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'". *Religion and the Arts* 5.1 (2001): 129-154. *Springer Link*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Ezell, Margaret M. *Writing Women's Literary History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996. Print.
- Fay, Elizabeth A. "Romantic Men, Victorian Women, the Nightingale Talks Back". *Studies in Romanticism* 32.2 (1993): 211-224. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.

- Franklin, Rosemary F. "Louisa May Alcott's Father(s) and *The Marble Woman*". *ATQ* 13.4 (1999): 253-267. *ProQuest*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Frederick, John T. "Hawthorne's 'Scribbling Women'". *The New England Quarterly* 48.2 (1975): 231-240. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 July 2016.
- Gallagher, Catherine. *Nobody's Story: Gender, Property, and the Rise of the Novel*. Ed. Marshall Brown. Durham: Duke UP, 1999. 27-42. Print.
- Goldberg, Gail Lynn. "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Revising Hand': His Illustrations for Christina Rossetti's Poems." *Victorian Poetry* 20.3-4 (1982): 145-59. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 July 2017.
- Goldman, Suzy. "Louisa May Alcott: The Separation between Art and Family." *Lion and the Unicorn: A Critical Journal of Children's Literature* 1.2 (1977): 91-7. *Project Muse*. Web. 25 Feb. 2016.
- Goodman, Russell B. *American Philosophy and the Romantic Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990. Print.
- Greene, Jessica. "A Woman's Legacy: An Analysis of Feminist Themes in the Work of Louisa May Alcott". Senior Honors Thesis. University of Tennessee, 2000. Print.
- Habich, Robert D, and Robert C. Nowatski. *Romanticism and Transcendentalism, 1820-1865*. New York: Facts on File, 2010. Print.
- Halttunen, Karen. "The Domestic Drama of Louisa May Alcott." *Feminist Studies* 10.2 (1984): 233-254. *JSTOR*. 29 Oct. 2018.

- Hamblen, Abigail Ann. "The Divided World of Louisa May Alcott". *Webs and Wardrobes: Humanist and Religious World Views in Children's Literature*. Eds. Joseph O'Beirne Milner and Lucy Floyd Morcock Milner. Lanham: UP of America, 1987. 57-64. Print.
- Haviland, Beverly. "The Sin of Synecdoche: Hawthorne's Allegory Against Symbolism in 'Rappaccini's Daughter'". *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 29.3 (1987): 278-301. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 June 2016.
- Helsing, Elizabeth K. "Power and the Utopia of Desire: Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'". *ELH* 58.4 (1991): 903-933. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Hodgson, Louisa Jayne. "Transatlantic *Little Women*: Louisa May Alcott, the Woman Writer and Literary Community". *49th Parallel* 23. (Summer, 2009). 1-14. *Google Scholar*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Huff, Cynthia Ann. *Women's Life Writing and Imagined Communities*. Oxford: Routledge, 2005. Print.
- Hughes, Kathryn. *Victorians Undone: Tales of the Flesh in the Age of Decorum*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2018. Print.
- Jenson, Meg. "The Writer's Diary as Borderland: The Public and Private Selves of Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and Louisa May Alcott". *Life Writing* 9.3 (2012): 315-325. Print. Received from author. 7 Feb. 2014. Email.
- Kaplan, Amy. "Manifest Domesticity". *American Literature* 70.3 (1998): 581-606. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 Oct. 2017.

- Keane, Patrick J. *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason: The Transatlantic 'Light of All Our Day'*. Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 2005. Print.
- Kent, Kathryn R. *Making Girls into Women: American Women's Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity*. London: Duke UP, 2003. Print.
- Kiliz, Yildiz. *"My World My Work My Woman all My Own": Reading Dante Gabriel Rossetti in His Visual and Textual Narratives*. Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2014. Print.
- Klaiber, Isabell. "'A Woman could (Not) do it'-Role-Play as a Strategy of 'Feminine' Self-Empowerment in L. M. Alcott's 'Behind a Mask,' 'La Jeune,' and 'A Marble Woman'". *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik: A Quarterly of Language, Literature and Culture* 52.3 (2004): 213-30. *Degruyter*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Knittel, Janna. "Knocking at Paradise: Christina Rossetti Rewrites 'The Blessed Damozel'". *Victorian Review* 24.1 (1998): 12-28. *Project Muse*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Lahey, Sarah T. "Honeybees and Discontented Workers: A Critique of Labor in Louisa May Alcott". *American Literary Realism* 44.2 (2012): 133-156. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Laird, Susan. "Learning from Marmee's Teaching: Alcott's Response to Girls' Miseducation". *Little Women and the Feminist Imagination: Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays*. Eds. Janice M. Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark. New York: Routledge, 2014. 285-323. Print.
- Leder, Sharon, and Andrea Abbott. *The Language of Exclusion: The Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1987. Print.

- Linley, Margaret. "Dying to be a Poetess: The Conundrum of Christina Rossetti." *The Culture of Christina Rossetti*. Eds. Mary Arseneau, Antony H. Harrison, and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Athens: Ohio UP, 1999. 285-314. Print.
- Millis, J. Hillis. "Literature and History: The Example of Hawthorne's 'The Minister's Black Veil'". *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 41.5 (1988): 15-31. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 July 2016.
- Mullen, Alexandra. "Father/Daughter Match: Bronson and Louisa May Alcott." *The Hudson Review* 62.1 (2009): 159-167. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 Jan. 2015.
- Nelson, Dana D. *National Manhood*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1998. Print.
- Pearson, Leland S., Jr. "Inscribing Paternity: Nathaniel Hawthorne as a Nineteenth-Century Father." *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1991): 225-44. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Philips, Anne K. "The Prophets and the Martyrs—Pilgrims and Missionaries in *Little Women* and *Jack and Jill*." *Little Women and the Feminist Imagination: Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays*. Eds. Janice M. Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark. New York: Routledge, 1999. 213-237. Print.
- Raabe, Wesley. "The Text of 'Eli's Education': From Manuscript to St. Nicholas Magazine." *Children's Literature* 34 (2006): 161-85. *Project Muse*. Web. 1 Aug. 2016.
- Roberts, Mary Louisa. "True Womanhood Revisited". *Journal of Women's History* 14.1 (2002): 150-155. *Project Muse*. Web. 5 Oct. 2017.

- Rogers, Scott. "Re-Reading Sisterhood in Christina Rossetti's 'Noble Sisters' and 'Sister Maude'." *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 43.4 (2003): 859-75. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Jan. 2015.
- Ryan, Kelly A. "A March of Complexities: Louisa May Alcott's Conflicted Response to Transcendentalism in *Little Women*". Diss. Sonoma State University, 2006. Print.
- Schlueter, Renee J. "'No Friend Like a Sister': Christina Rossetti's Awakened Conscience and the Fallen Woman." *Victorians and the Case for Charity: Essays on Responses to English Poverty, the State, the Church and the Literati*. Eds. Marilyn D. Button and Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen. North Carolina: McFarland, 2014. 142-159. Print.
- Schofield, Linda M. "Being and Understanding: Devotional Poetry of Christina Rossetti and the Tractarians." Eds. David A. Kent, Jerome J. McGann, and G. B. Tennyson. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987. 301-322. Print.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia UP, 1993. Print.
- Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of their Own: From Charlotte Bronte to Doris Lessing*. London: Virago Press, 1991. Print.
- Smulders, Sharon. "Woman's Enfranchisement in Christina Rossetti's Poetry". *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 34.4 (1992): 568-88. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 July 2015.
- Sofer, Naomi Z. *Making the "America of Art": Cultural Nationalism and Nineteenth-Century Women Writers*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2005. Print.

- Spaise, Terry L. "Not 'as She Fulfils His Dreams' but 'as She is': The Feminist Voice of Christina Rossetti." *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 51.1 (1997): 53-68. *Project Muse*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Stadler, Gustavus. "Louisa May Alcott's Queer Geniuses." *American Literature* 71.4 (1999): 657-77. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Stein, Jordan Alexander; Justine S. Murison. Introduction: Religion and Method. *Early American Literature* 45.1 (2010): 1-29. Print.
- Stoneley, Peter. "'The Fashionable World Displayed': Alcott and Social Power." *Studies in American Fiction* 27.1 (1999): 21-36. *Project Muse*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Susina, Jan. "Men and *Little Women*: Notes of a Resisting (Male) Reader." *Little Women and the Feminist Imagination: Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays*. Eds. Janice M. Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark. New York: Routledge, 2014. 161-173. Print.
- Tromp, Marlene. "Modelling the *Madwoman*: Feminist Movements and the Academy." *Gilbert & Gubar's the Madwoman in the Attic After Thirty Years*. Eds. Annette R. Federico and Sandra M. Gilbert. Columbia and London: U of Missouri P, 2009. 34-60. Print.
- Tuck, Donna-Marie. "Blurring the Boundaries: The Sexuality of *Little Women*." *Working with English: Medieval and Modern Language, Literature and Drama* 2.1 (2006) *Nottingham.ac.uk*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Wadsworth, Sarah A. "Social Reading, Social Work, and the Social Function of Literacy in Louisa May Alcott's 'May Flowers'". *Reading Women: Literary Figures and Cultural*

- Icons from the Victorian Age to Present*. Eds. Janet Badia and Jennifer Phefley. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2005. 149-163. Print.
- Waldman, Suzanne. *The Demon and the Damozel: Dynamics of Desire in the Works of Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2008. Print.
- Wayne, Tiffany K. *Women Thinking: Women Thinking: Feminism and Transcendentalism in Nineteenth-Century America*. Lexington: Lexington Books, 2015. Print.
- Wester, Bethany S. "'At Home we Work Together': Domestic Feminism and Patriarchy in Little Women." Diss. Master of the Arts The Florida State University, 2005. Print.
- Widdicombe, Toby. "A 'Declaration of Independence': Alcott's Work as Transcendental Manifesto." *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 38.3 (1992): 207-29. Print.
- Wiehe, Roger. "Sacred and Profane Gardens: Self-Reflection and Desire in Pre-Raphaelite Painting and the Poetry of the Rossettis". *Pre-Raphaelitism and Medievalism in the Arts*. Ed. L. Cheney. New York: Edwin Mellen, 1992. 109-123. Print.
- Wiesenthal, Chris. "Regarding Christina Rossetti's 'Reflection'". *Victorian Poetry* 39.3 (2001): 389-406. *JSTOR*. Web. 29 Oct. 2018.
- Wion, Caitlin B. "'Nothing is Impossible to a Determined Women': Louisa May Alcott and Nineteenth-Century Gender Roles." Diss. San Diego State University, 2015. Print.
- Yellin, Jean Fagan. "From Success to Experience: Louisa May Alcott's *Work*." *The Massachusetts Review* 21.3 (1980): 527-539. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Feb. 2016.
- Yoshida, Akemi. "Temptation of Fruit: The Symbolism of Fruit in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' and in the Works of D.G. Rossetti and J.E. Millais". *Plants and*

Literature: Essays in Critical Plant Studies. Ed. Randy Laist. Amsterdam: Rudopi, 1994.
75-85. Print.

Appendix 3

“Rolf Walden Emmerboy” transcription

The next fragment I offer you is a poem by the flower of American literature whose towering mind sweeps the blue fundament like the fowl of Job watching the stars and other mundane bodies with his gossamer wings, or perched on the dry and withered boughs of modern philosophy like the snowy and meditative crow pecking at the hollow nuts of human life and warbling larky melodies with a gushing sweetness rare to hear, crying to the world, “O fellow worms, Mind and matter glide swift into the vortex of immensity, Howls the sublime and calmly sleeps the soft Ideal in the whispering chambers of Imagination.” Oh- sweet it is to hear it, but then out laughs the stern Repulsive and saith— lo— the grotesque, “What ho arrest that agency and bring it hither” and so the vision fadeth. The marvel of fancy I offer you is entitled...

Phoenix (struck out).

Louisa May Alcott. “Rolf Walden Emmerboy”. Undated. Series III B (106) MS 2745. Alcott Family Additional Papers, 1724-1927. Houghton Lib., Harvard.

All material of the Houghton Library that is not protected by copyright or owned by a third party is in the public domain.

Appendix 4

“Two Scenes in a Family” transcription

The night was dark and windy. The wind whistled mournfully over the barren hills and leafless trees. In a small house round a bright fire sat a group of happy faces. The room was simply furnished, though here and there some small object showed that they had seen better days; a well stocked bookcase, a few rare pictures and, more than all the countenances on which the fire fell brightly round the table, sat five persons. The pale anxious face and busy fingers that plied the needle so swiftly could be mistaken for none but the mother. Sitting at her feet was a child who was fondly watching over the pussy that lay purring in her lap. Beside her sat another, some years older, a book lay on her knee, but she was looking up at the others, the quiet little form with an air of such perfect repose and contentment about it that few would not envy it. The firelight seemed to linger lovingly on the rosy cheek and bright locks.

Beside the mother sat two more daughters, one in whose gentle face and quiet eyes shone a good and happy spirit, the perfect neatness of the dress and the taste with which the sunny brown hair was parted back and lay in a shining crown above contrasted strangely with the face beside her so thin, dark and restless, yet not without a certain beauty in the small dark eyes and finely formed head, betokening will and strength of mind. One hand was hidden in the disordered hair that fell over it, the other tossing over some papers that lay before her and listening carelessly to the clear musical voice near her. The speaker was a face seldom seen in our land, the thin grey hair fell over a high full forehead. There was a soft holy light in the eyes and about the whole person, something fine and sacred that brought to the mind of the faces of the old philosophers so strangely beautiful in their grace and simplicity. In low earnest tones, he said, “Why should we be troubled, rich and poor have each these cares and sorrow, but the hearts of the pure, warmed and purified by their own

griefs feel for others and their few joys are shared freely with those less fortunate. Wealth brings selfishness and the love and care of the poor and lowly is forgotten. Then are we not happier than they, and can we not wish for riches if they take from us the quiet joy and contentment that now are ours.”

“But father, it is so pleasant to be rich and not to be troubled with debts, to live in ease and comfort and enjoy all the lovely things money can give us. People must be so happy. I think I should be as kind to the poor, or perhaps kinder. If I could help them more, is it wrong to wish to be rich?” asked the child with the book.

“No Lizzie, I think nothing could harden your gentle little heart, but time alone will show, the darkness of the world can dim even the brightest spirit, can take from it all it loved or cared for,” said the father with a sigh.

“I know I should be better, happier and of more use if I had more money, everybody must be. The world need not hurt us if we have strength enough not to let it. Money cannot hurt us. I think not me, at least. The power of doing good always makes people happy. Wouldn’t you like to be rich Annie” broke out the brown girl, “think how good it would seem to have all we want and not be doomed to pass our lives doing what we hate.”

“I don’t know,” said the sister, looking into her wild face, “I should like it for the many pleasant things I could do with it, yet I am not sure but the little we can do while poor brings a truer joy than the careless alms of the rich. What do you think, mother?”

“I cannot decide” answered the mother “the moral and social laws are entirely false. While the rich waste, the poor will want, while there is no sympathy and love, there will be sin and misery. When the rich will give of their abundance wisely and kindly, will the poor live virtuously and happily. It is not only what we give, but how we give it. A gentle word enriches a generous action, the wounds made by cruelty cannot be healed by money, but truthful kindness can restore joy and peace to the loneliest hearts. Wealth may be made a

source of true happiness to high and low, but I feel that time will never come.”

“It never will,” said the Father, “till a greater event has taken place, till charity is a principle, not a task. Not till men feel deeply and truly that it is better to give than to receive will poverty cease, and equality appear. Let us wait till we are tried, for we may be found wanting. Wealth is a greater trial than poverty, for the golden walls it builds around our hearts, we love not to break. We are dazzled by the bright bars that shut out love and Charity and we do not feel that the more we seek and honor it, higher grows the wall till the sweet virtues are cast away, leaving the soul they would purify to wear its golden fetters, but the cold dark stores that in poverty lie before us, keeping from us what we need, we eagerly seek to pass over them to the rest beyond, and as we suffer and hope, feel for those like ourselves. Then let us strengthen ourselves in humility that pride shall not cast us down.”

Louisa May Alcott. *The Portfolio. The Pickwick and The Portfolio: autograph manuscript: Various Issues of the Alcott Children's Newspapers*. November 18th, No.7. Alcott Family Additional Papers, 1724-1927. MS 2745 B (104), Houghton Lib., Harvard.

All material of the Houghton Library that is not protected by copyright or owned by a third party is in the public domain.

Appendix 5

“Wealth” transcription

A large room splendidly furnished. The brilliant light of the chandeliers fell on the loveliest pictures and statues, velvet couches and counters, ornaments while the glowing fire cast a rosy glow over the marble chimney piece and soft dark carpet. Four young ladies occupied the room. The eldest lying on an ottoman was reading the last new novel. There was not happiness in her handsome face and she laid comfortably back as if they could expect nothing more of her. At a table sat another who was engaged in filling a costly album with nonsensical poetry. Her miserable face and restless movements told she was not as much at ease as her indolent sister. The third, a rosy child no longer, but a tall beautiful girl for whom fashion and art had done much, but nature more. She was looking over a book of engravings, and now and then, as her eye rested on a lovely little cottage with a group of happy children beside the door, a sad smile passed over her face and, with a sigh, she would turn to look on lighted ballrooms and romantic scenes. The younger daughter sat in a recess idle, teasing a cross little lapdog and talking to a frightened little bird who fluttering in its golden prison longed in vain for the free fresh air it could not reach. In a cold lonely corner of the room was crouched a poor little pussy whose quiet purr told that there was one contented heart in that pleasant room, filled with everything heart could desire, but happiness.

“Oh dear,” sighed the eldest, dropping her book, “What a dismal evening. If this tiresome rain had not come, we might have been enjoying Jenny Lind’s music. How full of trouble this world is.”

“Well, I wish I was dead,” said the second. “What is the use of living if one is rich. People have us only for that. However bad we may be, no one cares whether we are dead or alive, and yet I think I used to be very happy with my old clothes and freedom. What a dreadful world we live in,” and with a sigh she went on writing.

“It’s a very tiresome one,” yawned the little girl in the window, pushing away the dog. “Nothing worth looking at. I shall ask father to get me something new. What did I used to like and never get tired of?”

“Your pussy,” answered Lizzie, looking up from her book and pointing to the neglected favorite who came from her stray corner, and whose soft purr and gentle eyes seemed to reproach her young mistress.

“I don’t care for her now,” said she carelessly, “though she is a dear little thing. I used to love her, but I am never satisfied with anything now— but here are father and mother.”

The same quiet man entered, but the hopeful expression had passed away from his face. He was pale and thin and a sad, lonely feeling might be read in the sorrowful eyes and bowed form. A plump old lady resting upon his arm seemed the personification of peace and plenty, but as she sank into a luxurious chair before the bright fire, and threw off her rich furs, she exclaimed in a discontented voice, “The beggars are a public nuisance. I cannot stir out. I am surrounded with vagabonds and poor wretches who torment one’s life out for this thing and that. Ah me, what a trouble it is to be rich if they would but let me alone, I should be satisfied.”

“Why always long for that which is beyond your power to obtain,” said the father, beaming over Lizzie, who looked up tenderly into his pale face.

“Now husband, that is a very strange speech, for you know I am very charitable to the poor? Did I not give \$60 dollars towards the house for the aged? Did not I give \$50 towards the last festival, besides numberless unknown charities? Well in this world, one gets no credit for one’s virtues! My girls, how stupid you all are. What is the matter?”

“I have been thinking,” said the brown girl, “How much happier we were in our cold home at C. than we have ever been here. There we enjoyed our little pleasures with gratitude when we had care and sorrow and poverty of our own. We felt for those who suffered like us

and in that pity found comfort for our own griefs. How useless are we now, wishing for everything and satisfied with nothing. How unlucky for us to be rich, we have abused it sadly,” and pushing her book and pen from her, she laid her face on the table and cried with a vengeance.

“Now, of all the ungrateful girls that ever touched a dollar, you are the most,” so said the mother with uplifted hands, “you who wished, longed, prayed for wealth, to be so scornful now you have it. What has happened to you all? Do you feel so girls?”

“I am happy enough,” said the eldest, turning over a new leaf and sinking back on the soft cushions.

“If father was well and happy, I should be too,” sighed Lizzie with her tearful eyes.

“As for me, I should be perfectly satisfied if I could only have what I want always. If I could never get tired of my playthings,” said the younger.

A long silence ensued, which was broken by the mother...

Louisa May Alcott. *The Portfolio. The Pickwick and The Portfolio: autograph manuscript: Various Issues of the Alcott Children's Newspapers*. November 26th, Number 5. AFAP, 1724-1927. MS 2745 B (104). Houghton Lib., Harvard.

All material of the Houghton Library that is not protected by copyright or owned by a third party is in the public domain.

Appendix 6

“Story of an apple” transcription

In a beautiful garden there stood a tree under which lay a fine, rosy apple. A little child flying about picked it up, looked at it, and seeing it so fair and beautiful, ran away to show it to her mother. At the garden gate a poor little ragged boy who looked longingly at it, saying, “Ah, if my poor sick mother could only have that, how happy I should be!” The child, after thinking a moment, gave it to him and then ran laughing away (to think how generous she had been) to her mother who had seen her from the window. The poor boy went away looking at the rosy apple and feeling very happy. In a miserable hut lay his sick mother. He came softly to the bed and gave it to her. She had had no fruit during her sickness and even the sight seemed to refresh her. When it was eaten, he took one of the seeds and planted it beside the door. His mother died soon after, and the boy was soon old enough to get his own living. Many years passed and he was a man and had a family, he took his children to the old home, and there beside it stood a beautiful tree full of ripe and rosy fruit. They gathered and ate them and the father thought of the little sunny haired child who had given him the apple for his sick mother years ago. The tree grew old, the winter winds broke, the boughs bore no fruit. A woodman came and cut it down, carried home the branches, and in the evening made a bright fire of them on the hearth by which his children sat and told stories. Tupman.

Elizabeth Alcott. The Portfolio, December 9th, No.9. *The Portfolio. The Pickwick and The Portfolio: autograph manuscript: Various Issues of the Alcott Children's Newspapers*. Alcott Family Additional Papers, 1724-1927. MS 2745 B (104), Houghton Lib., Harvard.

All material of the Houghton Library that is not protected by copyright or owned by a third party is in the public domain.