Accents of a New Voice: Personal Histories and Literary Mythologies in the Art of Christina Rossetti and Charlotte Brontë

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In spite of striking similarities in Christina Rossetti's and Charlotte Brontë's public personae and reputations, critics have ignored the provocative parallels between Rossetti's and Brontë's unusual life histories and literary mythologies. Even more importantly, no critical study has identified or tried to account for the uncanny convergence of imaginative preoccupations and narrative strategies that shape both the individual works and the oeuvre of each woman. I will begin to address these concerns by examining the fascinating relation between the cultural and literary-historical conditions under which each woman writes and the authorial position each develops in the early stages of her career. In examining Rossetti's and Brontë's struggles as women of an educated middle class and as aspiring writers, I do not mean to imply that there is a simple or direct causal relationship between the life and the works. I hope, instead, to suggest the interactive dynamic by which the living self and the writing self inform one another.

When Rossetti was born in London, on 5 December 1830, Brontë, at fourteen, was already engrossed in the imaginary world of Angria at Haworth. From the earliest days of childhood, the world of books and imagination was of primary importance to both women. As children in highly literary and talented households, they were encouraged to develop and flex their creative capacities. The same intellectual and imaginative precocity that led Brontë in collaboration with Branwell, Emily, and Anne to create and people a fictitious world, flourished in Rossetti. Rossetti composed her first poem before she could write, excelled at bouts-rimes

contests, a sonnet-writing game played by the Rossetti children, and, like the Brontës, also wrote fantastical stories. The earliest works of both women, Rossetti's poetry and semi-autobiographical work, Maude, and Brontë's extensive and complex juvenilia, reveal their commitment to a literary vocation. Much of this work, however, also casts light on the disjunction between the creative spirit that burned in them and the limitations imposed by their sex. As they matured, each woman was forced to come to terms with the fact that she was writing in a culture that defined literary authority as masculine (Gilbert and Gubar, The Madwoman 45-46).

It was at home that Rossetti and Brontë, like many other talented Victorian women, first and most vividly experienced the disparity between the prospects, both literary and otherwise, of women and men. Each woman's recognition of these differences was made particularly acute by the fact that she had an exceptionally talented brother close to her in age. Indeed, because of their rather singular social circumstances, Rossetti and Brontë were more strongly influenced than usual by the constellation of tight-knit family relationships in their respective households. As a result, the artistic vision of each woman was shaped by her role in the household, by certain family ways of organizing experience, and by a division in the family that occurred along the lines of gender (Rosenblum, The Poetry of Endurance 25).

The strength of this primary affiliation with the immediate family seems to have limited the new attachments or relationships each woman formed. Rossetti's and Brontë's experiences were almost entirely confined to the family circle, with the exception of some mostly epistolary friendships maintained by both women, of Rossetti's relatively short engagements to James Collinson and Charles Cayley, of Brontë's experiences at Roe Head and Brussels (most notably with Constantin Georges Romain Héger) and her brief marriage to Arthur Bell Nicholls. It is not surprising, then, that the influence of family relationships dominates their work in fairly immediate ways for most of their lives.

Family life was, for each, both a repressive and an expansive influence.

Like other writers of the period, Rossetti and Brontë were exposed to important cultural currents of their age, to literary, political, religious, and intellectual ideas and movements, but in an anomalous way. Each woman grew up in an highly unconventional and self-sufficient household. The Rossetti family's difference from conventional society stemmed from its mixed heritage. Although the literary Italian refugee Gabriele may have married the half English half Italian governess Frances with an eye toward achieving assimilation into British society, the insularity and rigidity of class society kept the Rossetti family outsiders (Rosenblum, The Poetry of Endurance 27). The Brontës's seclusion, on the other hand, resulted from the early death of Mrs. Brontë, the geographic isolation of Haworth, and the increasingly anti-social tendencies of Patrick Brontë. The roughness of those in the village and surrounding district of Yorkshire, in conjunction with Patrick Brontë's disregard for social convention, created an informal, intellectual and self-sufficient atmosphere in the Brontë household (Fraser 25).

Rossetti and Brontë engaged the world from a position that was strangely cloistered, even for women of their time, and the externally imposed isolation of their childhoods established the habits of adulthood. Once they achieved recognition, both women still chose not to establish many new ties outside of those sanctioned by the family. They were even reluctant to meet other writers of the age. They were, however, very attentive to the reception of their works. In this regard, the isolating circumstances of both women's lives seem to have whetted their appetites for intellectual and creative dialogue. Each woman carefully prepared her work with a great consciousness of her responsibility and role as a writer, and each manifested a particular concern, in her works and correspondences, with the contract between writer and reader. One can even conjecture that the obscurity imposed by a primary and lasting allegiance to their respective families, a bond made stronger both by their gender and by their sense of difference from others, intensified each woman's engagement with literature, art, and the world of ideas, at the same time that it limited

the number of outside influences to which each was exposed. The strongest elements in Rossetti and Brontë's personalities thus made seemingly strange bedfellows. It is hard to reconcile each woman's reserve and self-restraint with her strong sense of literary vocation and her relish in imaginative freeplay.

Because of the closed nature of each family's social circle, as children, both Rossetti and Brontë were accustomed to socializing with adults. The intellectual and aesthetic maturity not merely encouraged but demanded by both households led Rossetti and Brontë to regard their literary calling, their earliest writing, and their developing authorial identities with the utmost seriousness. The adults of the respective households treated the young Rossetti and Brontë as miniature adults and intellectual equals, rather than as children. In the Rossetti family, it was Frances Rossetti who had particularly high standards for the children, in the Brontë family, Patrick Brontë. As might be expected, such an environment fed each woman's intellectual and aesthetic aspirations but also took a certain psychological toll. Family and friends noted the unusual precocity exhibited by both women.

Paintings of Rossetti by Dante Gabriel and other Pre-Raphaelite artists reveal a young girl whose solemn demeanor suggests both unusual powers of concentration and exceptional inner strength. These qualities are likewise very much in evidence in William Bell Scott's description of his first meeting with Rossetti. After a visit to the house in London when only Gabriele and Rossetti were at home, Scott describes his vivid impression of the seventeen year old Rossetti:

> By the window was a high, narrow reading desk, at which stood writing a slight girl with a serious, regular profile, dark against the pallid wintry light without. This, most interesting to me of the two inmates turned on my entrance, made the most formal and graceful curtsey, and resumed her writing. . . . 1

This uncommon maturity and single-minded intensity are also manifested in Rossetti's

early commitment to her poetry. By the age of twelve, Rossetti was already in "serious training" to be a poet, modeling her poetry after "Dante, Tasso, Metastasio, as well as Herbert, Crabbe, Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and Tennyson" (Rosenblum, The Poetry of Endurance 36). By fourteen, she was studying religious poetry as models for her own religious verse (Packer 23).

It was likewise apparent that Brontë had been raised in an atmosphere where ideas were the common currency of the household. Her habitual thoughtfulness and fierce determination greatly impressed her classmates and teachers at Roe Head. Though Brontë's knowledge of grammar was somewhat lacking owing to the unsystematic nature of her education under her father's guidance, Miss Wooler, the director of the school, decided to place Brontë in the first class and let her catch up by long hours of private study. Miss Wooler's judgment proved astute, and Brontë soon amazed her teachers both with her serious application to her studies and with her considerable knowledge of literature, politics, and history. In their earliest descriptions of her, both Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor note the contrast between Brontë's weighty reserve and the other girls's unthinking vivacity. Mary Taylor writes:

> . . . She would confound us, by knowing things that were out of our range altogether. She was acquainted with most of the short pieces of poetry that we had to learn by heart: would tell us the authors, the poems they were taken from, and sometimes repeat a page or two and tell us the plot. . . . She made poetry and drawing. . . exceedingly interesting to me; and then I got into the habit, which I have yet, of referring mentally to her opinion on all matters of the kind. . . . (Shorter, The Brontës: Life and Letters 80-83)

Both women immediately perceived the original bent of Brontë's mind.

While the unusual nature of the Rossetti and Brontë households created an environment that nourished both women's intellectual and creative capacities, there

were also some disadvantages to these familial arrangements. When they were still quite young, Rossetti and Brontë were forced to assume adult responsibilities. In Rossetti's case, the family's mixed heritage and the financial and emotional pressures caused by Gabriele's early invalidism were the primary cause for this, while in the Brontë household, the premature deaths of Brontë's mother and elder sisters, the limited financial resources of the family, Brontë's position as eldest of the remaining children, the family's geographic isolation from congenial society, and Patrick Brontë's increasing unconventionality made great demands on Brontë. Such conditions ensured that Rossetti and Brontë rapidly learned how to arm themselves both for and against adulthood.

Because of this early assumption of adult status, Rossetti's and Brontë's development was perhaps more strongly marked than usual by the idiosyncrasies and personal styles of their parents and by the adult interactions in their respective households. In such a closed environment, the strong and even somewhat eccentric personalities of Frances Rossetti and Gabriele Rossetti, in the Rossetti household, and of Reverend Patrick Brontë and, to a lesser degree, Elizabeth Branwell, in the Brontë household, could not fail to determine the nature of familial interactions and the course of family loyalties. Both Rossetti and Brontë were greatly affected by a parental figure who not only became the conduit for an outwardly imposed restraint, but who also established the habit of self-suppression in each woman. In order fully to describe the effects not only of these parental figures on Rossetti and Brontë, but also of the developments and conflicts in Rossetti's and Brontë's art that result from certain allegiances and rivalries in each household, I now turn from a consideration of both women together to an analysis of each in turn.

In the case of Rossetti, this susceptibility to the suasion of a forceful personality seems to have combined with a number of circumstances to effect a dramatic change in adolescence that was to last the rest of her life. William Michael Rossetti describes Rossetti's transformation from a spontaneous and warm child into

an increasingly shy, exacting, restrained, and self-conscious adult. Although Rossetti inherited the literary aspirations of her father and grandfather, her life and writing (the repressive career persona of her poetry) reveal her lasting allegiance to the religious and moral values of her mother.

In a household strongly polarized by gender, it was perhaps natural that Rossetti, as a daughter, would be more strongly influenced by Frances Rossetti. It was Frances who was primarily responsible for the education of the young Rossetti and Maria. In this, Rossetti was like many other young women of the day who were taught by their mother at home. Frances, a staunch supporter of the Oxford movement, schooled her daughters in the doctrines, rituals, and morals of the Anglican church, and was, in many ways, the emotional and moral ballast of the household. With her practicality, quickness, and firmness, Frances must have presented a strong contrast to the idealistic Gabriele; the differences between the two must have been further accentuated when Gabriele's health began to decline precipitously in 1842. Gabriele's invalidism gave Frances even more authority in the family's eyes because it forced her to take on the financial as well as the domestic responsibilities of the household. By 1845, then, Frances and her strict notions of religion and propriety had become a major influence in Rossetti's life.

Rossetti and her sister Maria's identification with their highly religious mother divided the family along the lines of gender. Although nominally Catholic, their father Gabriele was vocal in his criticisms of the scriptures and was adamantly antipapist. As adolescents, then, Dante Gabriel and William Michael came to identify with their father's masculine skepticism, while Rossetti, Maria, and their mother "set themselves apart in a kind of lay sisterhood" (Rosenblum, The Poetry of Endurance 39). Indeed, it is quite likely that the Anglican church was attractive to the Rossetti women because it provided them with a sense of exclusivity, belonging, and respectability that compensated for their exclusion from other spheres (Rosenblum, The Poetry of Endurance 39). Under the influence of her mother, then, Rossetti's

outlook became increasingly High Anglican — with its emphasis on self-denial and on self-examination of motive and conduct.

This religious faith could not fail to conflict with Rossetti's desire for a literary career because it condemned personal ambition and achievement. In Maude, the fictional but semiautobiographical work that Rossetti wrote at the age of nineteen, the heroine, Maude, experiences a crisis of faith that leads her to condemn her poetic calling; as she tells her friend Agnes, it is precisely her literary ambition that becomes an issue of faith:

> Whatever your faults may be, (not that I perceive any,) you [Agnes] are trying to correct them; your own conscience tells you that. But I am not trying. No one will say that I cannot avoid putting myself forward and displaying my verses. (Maude 53)

The work ends with the premature death of Maude and the interment of her poetry and writings with her, a punishment for the hubris of the female poet (Gilbert and Gubar, The Madwoman 550-552). Rossetti's own attempt, in real life, to exercise stern self-denial and to forgo any object that brought her into conflict with her religious principles wrought a visible change in her. A prolonged illness coincided with this troubled period of early adolescence. Whether her physical symptoms, which remained largely undiagnosed, were a manifestation of emotional or nervous distress or had an organic component, it seems likely that Rossetti's painful internal struggle exacted a physical, as well as a psychological cost. Her poor health at this period in her life paved the way for later acute illness.

Throughout her career, much of Rossetti's poetry would register the psychic toll of continual self-conflict. The vast body of her poetry enacts the drama of the self engaged with self, struggling toward self-knowledge and mastery. Whether dramatic, lyric, or narrative, Rossetti's poetry explores a range of often competing female voices:

"The Lyric speaker yearns, suffers, and endures; dramatic monologuist posits and rejects alternatives, protests and renounces, strikes an inward pose; the narrator creates a company of women — mothers, daughters, sisters, brides, nuns, corpses, ghosts — who spurn or are spurned, who linger on the threshold or stand rooted to the spot" (Rosenblum, The Poetry of Endurance 145). Rosenblum suggests that these different voices, descending from the prototypical Laura and Lizzie of Goblin Market, enact the basic conflict between the woman who goes forth full of curiosity and desire and the woman who passively waits and silently endures. Indeed, in much of Rossetti's poetry, as in Goblin Market, the act of self-making involves a profound chastening of the self: it is precisely from the repression or disciplining of the self that the poetic speaker paradoxically derives the energy necessary to possess or free the self. Rossetti thus uses a series of female projections to enact a myth of "the fragmented self moving. . . toward harmony and balance" (Weathers 81-84).

The division in Rossetti's poetry between emblematic figures like the two sisters in Goblin Market or between opposing aspects of the self frequently has a narrative or formal corollary. Rossetti establishes a dialectic between the language of romantic feeling and individualism and the language of religious asceticism and self-denial. In coming to terms with her identity as a female poet, she strives to accommodate not only the spirit of Anglicanism that was of primary importance both to her mother, Frances, and to her Anglican nun sister, Maria, but also her proximity to the Romantic tradition and to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The poem Goblin Market itself provides an excellent illustration of the semantic instability that results from this tension in Rossetti's work. The religious allegory of a tempted Eve (Laura) and of a female figure (Lizzie) who becomes a saving Christ does not consistently operate on a register of Christian values. Instead, the erotic and economic nature of the sisters's transactions with the goblin men, figures who "in themselves cross-breed religious meaning with irreligious energy," contradictorily links appetite both with imaginative (transformative) energy and with moral depravity (Leighton 139).

Rossetti's reaction to Swinburne's poetry likewise reveals this fundamental split in her imagination. After Dante Gabriel gave her a copy of Swinburne's poetry, she wrote, "What a wonderful treasure of beauty the Atalanta is, amazing for delightfulness of sheer beauty" (Troxell 145). The work which she admires for its "sheer beauty," however, is one that contained lines so offensive to her, because of her religious views, that she covered certain portions of it with strips of white paper. Because of these dual allegiances in individual poems as well as in the volumes of her poetry, which each contain a section of secular and of devotional poetry, she uses both the rhetorical structures, language, and ideologies associated with certain types of religious discourse and the forms, language, and ideologies associated with nineteenth-century Romanticism.[2]

Even as Rossetti writes within established poetic forms, then, she is, at some level of the text, constantly challenging and revising the very literary-historical conventions on which she seems to rely. In Monna Innominata, for example, she establishes a dialogue between her own sonnet sequence and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese, Dante's Vita nuova and Divina Commedia, Petrarch's Rime Sparse, and the works of the troubadour poets. In doing so, she appropriates and revises the tradition of the love lyric, revivifying a set of literary-historical conventions that the introduction to Monna Innominata suggests are falsifying or constraining for women. Rossetti reveals the disparity between the originally religious Dantean tradition and the nineteenth-century secularized version of this tradition. Moreover, she suggests that the poetic paradigms that are the basis both for the medieval and for the nineteenth century lyric are incompatible with the quest of her female poetic speaker.

Yet though much of Rossetti's poetry derives it energy from this tension between religious literary traditions and nineteenth-century aestheticism, even her secular poetry, because of its commitment to certain poetic and religious idealities, is in an important sense religious. Most of Rossetti's poems have a context or orientation

that emphasizes the exemplary, prophetic or monitory nature of her art. In the devotional poems and often in the secular poems as well, the aesthetic project of the poetic speaker thus not only involves the serious act of self-creation, but is also deeply concerned with the selfhood of the implied female reader. Both individual poems and whole volumes demand an emotional and imaginative engagement that fosters the reader's own moral and spiritual awareness, leading to self-analysis, if not spiritual change. The body of Rossetti's poetry, as well as the numerous devotional prose works she writes in later life, thus reveals the important role the High Anglicanism of her mother played in shaping the major currents of her psychic and creative life.

I turn now to a discussion of the similar influence Patrick Brontë and the intense relationships in the Brontë household exerted over Brontë's development and art. Just as Frances Rossetti exercised a lasting influence over Rossetti, so the strong personalities of the adults in the Brontë household, Patrick Brontë and, to a lesser extent, Elizabeth Branwell, were a significant influence during Brontë's formative years. The highly disciplined Patrick Brontë, with his missionary zeal, his dedication to his parish, and his evangelical writing, set the tone for the Brontë household. Elizabeth Branwell, the unmarried aunt who came to Haworth to help nurse her sister and remained with the family to manage affairs after Maria Branwell Brontë's death in 1821, also contributed to the serious atmosphere of the household. Though she efficiently managed the household, her strictness and piety caused her to remain at an emotional distance from the children.

Although the question of Patrick Brontë's and Elizabeth Branwell's effect on the religious attitudes of the children is a vexed one, it is apparent that, like Rossetti, Brontë, Branwell, and Anne all experienced serious religious crises as a result of the religious doctrines they were exposed to during early childhood. Reverend Brontë was not a Calvinist and actively repudiated what he termed the "appalling doctrine of personal election and reprobation" (Gérin 35); he adopted Wesleyan Methodism, and believed in reforming the Church of England from within and in the

"glorious" idea of personal salvation for all, through Jesus Christ. Yet at home and in church, he emphasized that hell and damnation awaited sinners. His sermons and didactic poems reflect this preoccupation with the dangers of eternal damnation. Elizabeth Branwell, with her morbid and narrow religious views, certainly sought to instill a fear of sin and judgment in the Brontë children, as well as seeking to prepare the girls for their work as governesses by reconciling them to a life of self-denial.

It is likely that the traumas and difficulties of early childhood also helped lay the groundwork for Brontë's, Anne's, and Branwell's religious crises. The premature deaths of Mrs. Brontë and of the two eldest girls, Maria and Elizabeth, probably predisposed the highly imaginative children to morbid thoughts. An early acquaintance with death, the isolated and insular nature of the household, and the constant sight of the graveyard next to the church may have caused the Brontë children to dwell on the terrors of fire and brimstone awaiting the impure of heart and body. In conjunction with these influences at home, Brontë's experiences at the charity school at Cowan Bridge, with its physical privations, harsh discipline, and unsanitary conditions, must also have contributed to the great hold that religion took upon her mind (Gérin 33).

Regardless of the particular role he played in shaping Brontë's religious attitudes, Patrick Brontë's influence on Brontë was, in some important regards, a repressive one, and Brontë's position as eldest girl, after the loss of her mother and two sisters, caused her imagination to be more bound up with her father than that of her sisters.[3] As Elizabeth Gaskell, Brontë's friend and first biographer notes, Brontë felt a sense of duty towards her father that kept her in a relationship of debilitating dependence for most of her adult life. This family dynamic accounts, at least to some degree, both for Patrick Brontë's extreme resistance to Brontë's marrying and for Brontë's own discomfort on this subject. Brontë's feelings of duty to her father were so strong that, even despite his support for the proposal of James Taylor, they effectively prevented her from even considering any of the offers of marriage she

received in her younger days, and, in fact, almost prevented her from accepting Arthur Bell Nicholls. Indeed, this habit of discipline to paternal authority also sheds some light on Brontë's susceptibility to the paternalistic and authoritarian M. Heger, in Brussels. As she expresses it in a letter to Ellen Nussey, "It is natural in me to submit" (Wise and Symington 1: 260).

It was not until Patrick Brontë's growing blindness in the 1840s that the balance of power between Brontë and her father changed. With her father's (and her brother's) increasing infirmity, Brontë was, to some degree, released from a situation which emphasized her powerlessness and dependency as a woman. As Patrick Brontë's sight became increasingly bad, he relied more heavily on Brontë, allowing her to read to and write for him. In this highly literary household, such a gesture must have been invested with enormous symbolic as well as actual significance: "My father is well but his sight is almost gone. He can neither read nor write. . . . My father allows me to read to him. I write for him; he shows me, too, more confidence that he has ever shown before, and that is a great consolation" (November 18, 1845. Wise and Symington 2: 70). Perhaps not coincidentally, this change in Brontë's relationship with her father heralded the beginning of her career as a novelist (Möglen 78). Indeed, it was while she was staying with her father in Manchester, during his cataract surgery, that Brontë began writing Jane Eyre, her first novel with a female narrator/protagonist, in contrast to the juvenilia and The Professor, which have male authorial personae. It is interesting, in this regard, that in several of her novels, the ascendancy or apotheosis of her female protagonists coincides with the blinding, maiming, or removal of men, who though sometimes lovers or friends, are also competitors or critics. Since male supremacy and female victimage were the impulses that shaped the plots of the Angrian tales, it is likely that Brontë's discovery of her own strength, during this period of her life, may have offered her a new position from which to write.

As in the case of Rossetti, then, Brontë's unusual upbringing fostered an

acute sense of self-division in her. Although Brontë was able to criticize the early religious training that she received, the recurrent crises of childhood and adolescence took a firm hold upon her, and she was to struggle with them throughout her life (Gérin 36). At twenty she admitted ". . . I have always taken a clouded and repulsive view of religious matters."[4] At times, she expressed her fears about personal salvation to her closest friend, Ellen Nussey: ". . . I feel in a strange state of mind still; gloomy but not despairing. I keep trying to do right . . . I abhor myself, I despise myself — if the Doctrine of Calvin be true I am already an outcast. . . ."[5] Indeed, perhaps because of this internal strife, the hostile reviews that stung Brontë the most and that inevitably provoked a response from her were those that called into question her religious or moral convictions. In her correspondences, it becomes apparent that the struggle Jane experiences, in Jane Eyre, between her passion and her principles was one to which Brontë herself was no stranger:

> I have stings of conscience — visitings of remorse — glimpses of Holy, inexpressible things, which formerly I used to be a stranger to. It may all die away, I may be in utter midnight, but I implore a Merciful Redeemer that if this be the real dawn of the Gospel, it may still brighten to a perfect day. Do not mistake me, Ellen, do not think I am good, I only wish to be so, I only hate my former flippancy and forwardness. O! I am no better than I ever was.[6]

Like Rossetti, Brontë, the impassioned creative artist, continually did battle with her own pangs of conscience and guilt.

Just as the demands placed upon Rossetti by her mother had a formative effect on Rossetti's aesthetic, so Patrick Brontë had an important effect upon Brontë's imaginary universe. Brontë's novels take the drama of the self engaged against the self as their primary preoccupation: as in Rossetti's poetry, the female protagonists in Brontë's novels are engaged in an act of self-making that has radical implications for

the reader, and suffering is, once again, the source and substance for this female self-fashioning. Like the female figures who coexist, in Rossetti's poetry, as ideological antagonists or shadowy doubles, the protagonists in Brontë's novels confront and frequently repudiate different possibilities for the self.[7] The struggles of these protagonists are given tangible form as self-conflict and psychological processes are externalized in powerful images. The problem of self-definition thus stands at the heart of her novels.

Brontë's mode of work is dialogic, with the generic complexity of the novels mirroring the self-division of their female narrator-protagonists. Like Rossetti's writing, Brontë's writing derives its energy from the tension between religious and Romantic discourse. Brontë appropriates the rhetorical structures, language and ideologies associated with certain types of religious literary traditions and the verbal structures, language, and ideologies associated with nineteenth-century Romanticism. The protagonists of her novels, like the speakers of Rossetti's poetry, use both the language of romantic self-assertion and the language of Christian asceticism. Indeed, the prophetic, lyric, and romantic utterances in Brontë's novels serve various and often competing ends, yet as in Rossetti's poetry, it is precisely the tension between these different modes that proves artistically and imaginatively generative.

In contrast to the repressive or divisive effects of family life, certain influences within the Rossetti and Brontë households also became a powerful force for all that was generous and expansive in each woman's art. Both Gabriele Rossetti and Patrick Brontë provided their daughters with an important connection to a larger sphere of action. In the Rossetti household, it was Gabriele, the poet, patriot, and man of letters, who fostered Rossetti's romantic, inquisitive, and literary side, while the forceful Patrick Brontë captured the young Brontës's imaginations with his reverence for men of military and political genius and with the account of his own ambitious rise to a position in the Anglican ministry. Both the specific nature of these paternal histories and the very act of personal myth-making itself proved important to

Rossetti's and Brontë's own acts of literary self-creation.

The tale of Gabriele Rossetti's dramatic and daring escape to England must have captured the imagination of Rossetti and her siblings. As the story goes, Gabriele was a popular political versifier in Naples until King Ferdinand put him on a list of dangerous enemies to the regime, and he was forced to disguise himself as an English sailor and flee. With the assistance of a friend of Coleridge, the Rt. Hon John Hookham Frere, he eventually made his way from Malta to England. Despite his somewhat quixotic nature, Gabriele's earnest idealism must have been very attractive to those around him. Even in his exile, he maintained his Neapolitan nationality till his death, and fervently believed that "politics and patriotism were 'the permanent platform of life'" (Jones 2). Indeed, it was thanks to his strong ties to Italy that the Rossetti household was often jostling with activity. William Michael Rossetti describes how the family's small sitting room was usually crowded with Italian exiles who were, variously, artists, nationalists, politicians, musicians, and literary men.

For Rossetti, then, Italy the country was a natural inheritance she had lost, through the passing of two generations on her mother's side and through her father's political exile. Yet because of her father's strong nationalism, she still had a connection to this community of Italian exiles and to the ideal of Italy as a motherland. It seems appropriate, then, that exile becomes a defining trope in her work. The sense of dispossession that pervades so much of her poetry surely stems, in part, from this aspect of her childhood experience.

In the four poems that describe her experience of Italy, one becomes aware of the way this sense of (cultural) loss provides the underpinnings for her larger artistic and imaginative vision. In "Italia, Io Ti Saluto", she expresses her regret at leaving Italy after her only trip to her father's native country, and describes the sense of self-division that accompanies her return to England:

To come back from the sweet South, to the North

Where I was born, bred, look to die;
Come back to do my day's work in its day,
Play out my play —
Amen, amen, say I.

To see no more the country half my own,
Nor hear the half familiar speech,
Amen, I say: I turn to that bleak North
Whence I came forth —
The South lies out of reach.[8]

In "Enrica, 1865" Rossetti contrasts the warmth, vitality, and expressiveness of her visiting Italian cousin with the austerity of English women:

She came among us from the South
And made the North her home awhile;
Our dimness brightened in her smile,
Our tongue grew sweeter in her mouth.

We chilled beside her liberal glow,
She dwarfed us by her ampler scale
Her full-blown blossom made us pale,
She summer-like and we like snow. (1: 193 - 94)

The sense of exile expressed in "Italia, Io Ti Saluto" here explicitly gets connected to the somehow disabling condition of women in Victorian culture.[9] As these poems suggest, just as Italy gets connected, in her father's own personal mythology, with a larger (political or historical) sphere of action and with the Dantean tradition central to

his own writing, so Rossetti takes her loss of Italy and her Italian heritage as the basis for her own personal and particularly female brand of mythmaking.

Italy becomes both a symbol of her own quest for a kind of poetic authenticity and an originary point for her own myth-making as an artist. She experiences her loss of some emotionally sustaining motherland or mother tongue as the originary condition of art, for the female artist. In Rossetti's work, then, Italy is the source of a certain kind of imaginative authenticity and inspiration, and Italian, a private language in which she could free herself from the pressures of publication and from a consciousness of audience.

Thus, even though Rossetti's experience of Italy and her Italian heritage is inevitably connected with a deep sense of loss, it takes on a liberating significance in her poetry. The romanticized Italy that appears in her poems is frequently a source of inventive freedom, passionate love, and rich sensualness. In the sonnet sequence, Later Life, Rossetti describes the way her experiences in Italy enriched her art and life:

A host of things I take on trust: I take
  The nightingales on trust, for few and far
  Between those actual summer moments are
When I have heard what melody they make.
So chanced it once at Como on the Lake:
  But all things, then waxed musical; each star
  Sang on its course, each breeze sang on its car,
All harmonies sang to senses wide awake.
All things in tune, myself not out of tune,
  Those nightingales were nightingales indeed:
  Yet truly an owl had satisfied my need,
And wrought a rapture underneath that moon,
  Or simple sparrow chirping from a reed;

For June that night glowed like a doubled June. (2: 147)

This sonnet describes the powerful and lasting effects of Rossetti's one trip to Italy; the speaker vividly evokes her memory of the ascent from Switzerland to Italy and of the moment when all Italy lies before her. In contrast to England, the "bleak North", Italy is a realm of sensory and aesthetic authenticity — of spiritual awakeness. It represents a moment in space and time of complete spiritual, aesthetic, and physical harmony, while England is, instead, the land of "tak[ing] on trust" — of memories and words. Later Life, by exploring this relation between art and inspiration, reveals the significant place Italy occupies in Rossetti's imaginative and poetic mythology, and poignantly expresses Rossetti's fear that one "[m]ay miss the goal at last, may miss a crown" (2: 150).

There is, in fact, an important sense in which both Italy and the Italian language provide Rossetti with a primary medium for her poetry. Although it is not clear to what extent the Rossetti family conversed in Italian, Rossetti's biographer, Mackenzie Bell, suggests that, in its musicality and enunciation, her speech was not like that of someone whose first language was English (Rosenblum, The Poetry of Endurance 51). From 1849, when her grandfather first published her Verses, to 1876, Rossetti wrote a number of poems in Italian. Although these poems in Italian remained unpublished during her lifetime, they were an important influence upon the English poetry she wrote during that period of time. In fact, the most substantial of these poems, a sequence of love lyrics called Il Rosseggiar Dell' Oriente, became the basis for Rossetti's major sonnet sequence, Monna Innominata.

The 21 short lyrics (six of them sonnets) of Il Rosseggiar Dell' Oriente exemplify Rossetti's method of linking and contrasting secular and religious themes, and they provide fascinating evidence for the way in which Rossetti doubled her poetic material in two languages. Although critics have used the fact that Rossetti kept this sequence locked up in a drawer as evidence of the fact that she had a secret love, it seems more likely that this act reflects the intimate and possibly more unmediated

nature of her Italian poetry — poetry written in a more primary language, without the constraints imposed by editors, readers, publishers, or critics. It is in this regard that the poems she wrote in Italian during her most formative and productive years may have served as a kind of ur-text for her poetry.

Just as Gabriele Rossetti indirectly provided Rossetti with an imaginative source for her art, a vision of Italy as a "motherland," so Patrick Brontë was an impetus for what would become the wellspring of Brontë's art, the imaginary country of Angria. Despite some of the repressive aspects of his influence, Patrick Brontë succeeded in opening Brontë's mind to a wider world of action and heroism, as well as endowing her with a passion for learning, a spirit of inquiry, and a conviction in her own opinions and beliefs. Under his tutelage, Brontë and her siblings reached a maturity of mind that was exceptional for their age.

In many ways, Patrick Brontë treated his children as his intellectual equals. He obtained a very wide range of reading material for them, and encouraged them to discuss the important political events, literary publications, and artistic accomplishments of the times. The young Brontës had access to their father's library which had among other works The Arabian Nights, Pilgrim's Progress, Blackwood's Magazine, The Times, the writings of Byron, Wordsworth, Scott, and Southey; they also had within their reach an extensive supply of other books, magazines, and newspapers and the variety of works that could be borrowed from the Keighley Mechanics Institute. In addition to this wealth of resources, Patrick Brontë's own writing and his modest literary success provided Brontë and her siblings with a model for their own literary efforts; he wrote and published religious poetry, short stories, and two didactic novels.

Like Gabriele Rossetti's embellished personal history, Patrick Brontë's particular brand of myth-making was also to play a significant and lasting role in his daughter's literary development. Brontë and her siblings could not but be aware of the degree to which Patrick Brontë was driven by his desire for an active and influential

life. Within the Brontë household, Patrick Brontë's life was regarded as a pattern of the intellectual and creative career. As family history had it, in his youth, Patrick Brontë had found the call of a military life almost irresistible. Indeed, despite the fact that he did not fulfill this particular ambition, he chose a vocation that allowed him to satisfy his need both for moral and for physical discipline. Though one of many children in a large and poor Irish family, his ambition, self-discipline, and unwavering principles brought him to Cambridge, then into the Anglican ministry, and then to the difficult posting in Yorkshire which he accepted because of his dedication to his ministerial duties. Even from the remoteness of Haworth, he was actively involved in the local and political affairs the area. (The stories of his experiences with the Luddites found their way into Brontë's Shirley.) He revered 'genius' and avidly followed the careers of the great men of his age, imparting this love of politics and high adventure to his children.

This paternal myth formed the basis for the complex imaginative world that so strongly marked Brontë's development as an artist. It was, fittingly, Patrick Brontë's gift to Branwell of a set of wooden soldiers from Leeds, in June 1826, that led the Brontë children to create the Glass-Town literature and, later, the separate realms of Angria and Gondal. As a part of this group play, each child had a special soldier that functioned as her or his persona in this "infernal" or "nether" world, with Brontë significantly naming her soldier after her father's favorite, the Duke of Wellington. Though Brontë's attention soon shifted to the Duke's sons, Arthur, his father's namesake, retained his father's iron will and heroism, while the younger Charles, whose name mirrors Charlotte's own, was a more ambiguous character.

In conjunction with the powerful paternal presence in her life, the loss of her mother, Maria Branwell, and of the older sister, named Maria after her mother, who was also a maternal figure deeply influenced Brontë's imaginative development. This familial pattern of the vulnerable or absent mother and the powerful father probably helped shape the sharp division in Brontë's art between femininity and masculinity. In

her juvenilia, Brontë associates femininity and masculinity with opposing kinds of experience. The vulnerable and victimized women that recur with obsessive regularity throughout her early poetry and fiction frequently possess some variant of the maternal name: Maria, Mary, Mina, Marian, and Marina. Conversely, the strong, harsh, charismatic, and vigorous men in the juvenilia are connected, either by lineage, by name, or by both, to the progenitor of the stories and her father's special hero, Arthur Wellesley, the first duke of Wellington.[10]

In Brontë's imaginative mythology, then, the act of literary assertion naturally gets associated with masculinity. Throughout her juvenilia, Brontë chooses male authorial personae for her stories. At the same time, however, that she writes through these male voices, she also manifests a profound ambivalence toward her own literary and imaginative ("masculine") powers. She writes from the perspective of male personae, but becomes so involved in the perspective of these suffering women that she cannot maintain a consistent narrative detachment from the stories. Despite her creation of the passionate and regal intellectual Zenobia, the one woman in the cycle who is learned in Greek and Latin literature, Brontë, throughout the stories, identifies herself primarily with the love-sick, vulnerable, and self-annihilating Minas, Marians, or Marys; indeed, even the fiery Zenobia is rendered weak by her unrequited love for Zamorna (Taylor 114 -23). As she later moves from the juvenilia to novel writing, Brontë will devise increasingly sophisticated narrative and imaginative strategies for dealing with this fear that her creative impulses may render her unwomanly or heretical. Long before publication necessitated the invention of the pseudonyms Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, however, Brontë shows an acute sensitivity to the relations, in the nineteenth-century, of gender to literary and other kinds of authority.

As the Angrian tales proliferated, this imaginative mythology became connected to certain strains of Romanticism. The storytelling of the servant Tabitha Aykroyd, the engravings of John Martin that hung in the parsonage, and, most of all,

the cult of personality surrounding Lord Byron all helped foster the influence of Romanticism over the world of Brontë's childhood. Tabby, the local woman of fifty-four who came to work for the Brontës in the winter of 1824, was a gifted raconteur who brought the colorful local and natural history of the moors to life for the children. Her stories of mysterious, romantic, and awe-inspiring events must have paved the way for the hold the dashing figure of Lord Byron would exert on the young Brontë's imaginations. The Martin engravings, portraying dramatic and apocalyptic scenes from the bible as well as vast perspectives of ancient lost cities, also contributed to the influence of the Romantic poets on Brontë's and her siblings's writing. Their strange grandeur inspired the glittering "nether world" of the juvenilia, leading the young Brontës to create an imaginary landscape that was a powerful romantic presence, in itself.[11]

By the age of thirteen, Brontë was not only well acquainted with all of Byron's work, but was also fascinated with the figure of Byron himself. After reading "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," she developed the character of Zamorna, also known as Arthur, the elder son of the Duke of Wellington, on her conception of Byron's character. Soon afterwards, her attention and that of her siblings shifted away from the contemporary historical situation — the actual conquests of Arthur Wellesley, that generated the first stories and came to rest, increasingly, on the romantic exploits of Zamorna. As Zamorna came to play a larger role in the stories, the tales became characterized by extravagant fantasies, exuberant exoticism, and inordinately complex and erratic plots.[12] While this "world below" clearly had a liberating effect on her imagination, Brontë, by 1834, had also grown anxious about potentially disabling effects of her involvement in this imaginary world.

Although Brontë's involvement in the Angrian tales was more intense than Rossetti's involvement in her poems in Italian, these two enterprises seem to have fulfilled a similar function in each woman's artistic development. Like the poems Rossetti wrote in Italian, the Angrian tales became a locus of imaginative and

expressive freedom. Brontë herself identifies Angria as the source of a pure creative impulse:

> It is the small voice always that comes to me at eventide, that — like a breeze with a voice in it over the deeply blue hills and out of the now leafless forest and from the cities on distant river banks — of a far and bright continent ; it is that which takes up my spirits and engrosses all my living feelings, all my energies which are not merely mechanical" (The Shakespeare Head Brontë 21: 123)[13]

She wrote the tales unhindered by any considerations regarding audience or publication; in fact, she was so completely engrossed in her imaginary world that she would sometimes write with her eyes closed (Kucich, Repression 54).

It is fitting, then, that just as Rossetti views Italy as her homeland, so Brontë, in her moving "Farewell to Angria," describes her imaginary world as a kind of motherland:

> Yet do not urge me too fast, reader: it is not easy to dismiss from my imagination the images which have filled it so long; they were my friends and my intimate acquaintances. . . .When I depart from these I feel almost as if I stood on *the threshold of a home and were bidding farewell to its inmates. When I try to conjure up new inmates I feel as if I had got into a distant country where every face was unknown and the character of all the population an enigma* which it would take much study to comprehend and much talent to expound. (Legends of Angria 316, my emphasis)

The metaphor of Angria as a homeland is an apt one, not only because it emphasizes the primary role Angria played in her literary apprenticeship, but also because it suggests the way that the romantic world of Angria will inform Brontë's later writing.

Although Brontë begins her career as a novelist by renouncing the formal and thematic preoccupations of the juvenilia, the most compelling tensions of the juvenilia get reworked in her novels. She contrasts the realism of novel writing with the "passionate preference for the wild wonderful and thrilling," in the preface to The Professor, but is unable to sustain this distinction in her writing.[14] The concept of romantic love that was central to the Angria tales provides the underpinnings for the romantic relationships Brontë depicts in her novels. In fact, the Byronic Zamorna seems to be the model for many of her male protagonists — particularly, of course, for Rochester and M. Paul.

Yet, despite these points of continuity between the juvenilia and the novels, Brontë's "maturation as a writer. . . [also] hinge[s] on her ability to leave behind the unbounded passional subjects of her juvenilia, and to discipline the thematic content of her novels" (Kucich, Repression 34). In this regard, it is interesting to consider how this break with the imaginary realm of childhood gets manifested in her mature work. She seems to begin her career as a novelist both with some regret and with a sense that she is hazarding her own sense of identity or self. This emotional experience is, to some degree, reproduced in the novels. Most of the protagonists in the novels are themselves exiles.

The major characters in Brontë's novels are almost always orphaned, estranged from family, from society, and from self. Their own sense of identity is thus, frequently, up for grabs; indeed, even when Brontë's characters are not literally orphans, they must come to terms with the fact that they are, in some sense, profoundly alone in a hostile and dangerous world.[15] The theme of adulthood as exile, hardly unique to Brontë, may have offered her a particularly fitting expression for deep sense of loss that resulted from or at least coincided with her assumption of the duties of womanhood. The important shift in Brontë's artistic development, signaled by her "Farewell to Angria," occurred at the time when she was to begin earning her living as a governess.

Bowing to her family's expectation that she would earn her living as a governess or teacher, Brontë retreated from the realm of fantasy that she and her siblings had created. Indeed, Southey's well-known remark to Brontë, "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not be" stands as the judgment not merely of an individual but of a whole culture.[16] At this period in her life, then, Brontë had to find a release from the seductive excesses of this fantasy world, while also confronting the obstacles that lie in the way of the woman writer in the "real" world. Her farewell to Angria is thus bound up with her acute experience of a particularly female kind of deprivation.[17] Indeed, the painfulness of this loss becomes particularly apparent when Brontë returns to Roe Head as a teacher. In her journal, Brontë suggests that the world of "reality" is killing, and that she is sustained only by the world of her imagination. Desperately unhappy and suffering form what she calls "hypochondria," by 1838 she takes a doctor's welcome advice and returns home to Haworth. It is evident, then, both from her writing and from her outward behavior, that Brontë's coming of age, like that of Rossetti and many other women writers of the period, brought with it a painful awareness of her status as a woman in a patriarchal society.

This awareness was made more painful by the fact that Rossetti and Brontë established a secret or private life apart from the adults in their respective households, aligning themselves with a brother who was a favored companion or second self, only to find that gender led to an increasing differentiation between themselves and this sibling. It was thus with this brother that each shared interests, pleasures, and loyalties, and against this brother that each measured and defined herself.

Rossetti became both the model for and the ideal of Dante Gabriel's early art. In fact, as a result of Dante Gabriel's influence over the rise of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Rossetti became the muse of early Pre-Raphaelitism; in the painting that brought the PRB to public attention, The Girlhood of Mary Virgin, he depicted her as the 'symbol of female excellence.' At the same time that she was important to him as

a subject for his art, Dante Gabriel was also interested in furthering her literary career; he encouraged her to submit her poetry to the Athenaeum, one of the leading periodicals of the time, and tried to have her present at some of the meetings of the newly formed Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. (Her attendance, however, was not permitted by the other members, and when Dante Gabriel formally proposed her as an honorary member, none of the other members would agree to admit a woman.) Dante Gabriel later convinced her to become involved in the production of The Germ, and, despite the fact that the magazine lapsed after several editions, it was through this venue that Rossetti enjoyed one of her earliest critical successes. It was also through Dante Gabriel that Rossetti met James Collinson, one of the two men to whom she was engaged over the course of her lifetime, though her religious scruples over Collinson's reversion to the Church of Rome and later over Charles Cayley's agnosticism ultimately led her to break off both relationships.

Although he was competitive towards her while Elizabeth Siddal was alive and could sometimes be controlling, Dante Gabriel did facilitate the publication of several volumes of Rossetti's poetry. Revealingly, he once told Rossetti, "You must take care. . . not to rival the Sid [Elizabeth] but keep within respectful limits" (Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti 108). He sent a selection of her poetry to Alexander Macmillan, and then illustrated the resulting volume, Goblin Market and other poems. He even persuaded John Ruskin to read some of her work, only, however, to be highly displeased with Ruskin's response.

Dante Gabriel's suggestions regarding the selection of poetry for Rossetti's second volume were generally helpful, but he was sometimes prone to offering unwanted or misguided advice. He convinced Rossetti to enlarge the elegiac "Too late for love" into the longer, uneven narrative poem which eventually became "The Prince's Progress," the titlepiece for her second volume. Despite his pride in Rossetti's poetry, he disapproved of poems like "The Iniquity of the Fathers Upon the Children," "The Lowest Room," "A Royal Princess," and "Under the Rose," viewing

these poems as instances of what he called the "falsetto muscularity" of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry, and he repeatedly cautioned Rossetti against assuming Elizabeth Barrett Browning's unfeminine tone and inappropriate interest in politics and social issues. He was critical of poems like "The Iniquity of the Fathers Upon the Children," which deals with illegitimacy, not because of his ideas about poetry but because of his assumptions about woman's proper sphere; in the same vein, he disliked Rossetti's "A Royal Princess" not on the basis of its artistry, but because Rossetti contributed it to Emily Faithfull's anthology, Poems: An Offering to Lancashire, which was published, as the title explicitly states, for the relief of Distress in the Cotton Districts. Dante Gabriel also objected to the admission of two narrative poems in The Prince's Progress and Other Poems because he thought that the woman characters in both were too angry and assertive in their protests against a woman's lot. (Rossetti, while seeming to agree with his ideas about woman's proper sphere, decided to include the poems in the volume.) It has been suggested that, in this, he was reacting not only to what he perceived as the poem's "unwomanly" tone, but also to the subtle expression of his sister's anger and competitiveness with him (Rosenblum, The Poetry of Endurance 47).

Because she was a model for his paintings, Dante Gabriel's vision as a painter also had an important effect on Rossetti's art. Rossetti's experience as a model gave her special insight both into Dante Gabriel's pictorial methods and into the principles of Pre-Raphaelite art, over which Dante Gabriel had considerable influence. One of Dante Gabriel's most important representations of Rossetti, Ecce Ancilla Domini, illustrates the nature of his approach. Though Rossetti was the model for Ecce Ancilla Domini, the hair for the virgin was painted from another model, and the head of the Rossetti figure was painted over many times. G. P. Boyce indirectly comments on this process of revision when he notes that Dante Gabriel was still working on the painting after it was exhibited at the National Institution: "He [Dante Gabriel] has been painting on it since, and sent it off (to Dublin) whilst I was there.

The Virgin one of, if not the most exquisite conception I have yet seen, her head, golden hair and blue eyes (although painted from his sister who is darkish) full of intense thought and awakened and growing religious awe, almost my ideal of a woman's head. . . ." (Surtees 1:14). In the same vein, William Rossetti remarks of Ecce Ancilla Domini that "When first exhibited in 1850 the likeness [to Rossetti] was more decided than it is now" (William Michael Rossetti lxii).[18]

Dante Gabriel's artistic technique thus itself exemplifies the general tendency of Pre-Raphaelite art to negate female individuality and agency. In his paintings, Dante Gabriel obsessively represents "woman as visibly different. . . as fantasy [or as] sign of masculine desire (Pollock 121). Griselda Pollock has analyzed how Dante Gabriel's repeated use of an identifiable set of facial types and proportions gives his representations of female figures an abstracted or schematized quality. She notes the striking similarities in portraits labeled 'Elizabeth Siddall,' 'Fanny Cornforth', 'Emma Brown', and 'Jane Morris', and suggests that Dante Gabriel's representations of women "register his active looking at and possession of the feminine object, the looked-at, the surveyed which is reconstructed in his image" (Pollock 113).[19] In such an aesthetic, the female figure becomes merely a vehicle for the male artist's own assertion of his subjectivity. Rossetti responds to this objectification of women in Pre-Raphaelite art; she seeks to reclaim this model of passive and self-effacing femininity in order to make it imaginatively productive both for the female poet and for the female reader.

Like Rossetti and Dante Gabriel, Brontë and Branwell developed a special identificatory relationship with one another. Despite Branwell's differences from her, Brontë recognized an affinity between them, and they became firm partners in all their childhood pursuits. All four Brontë children participated in the creation of common imaginary worlds, generally at the instigation of Brontë and Branwell. But gradually the more reserved and quiet Emily and Anne abdicated from the extravagant and Byronic world created by Brontë and Branwell. Glass-Town, the children's original

collaborative effort eventually transmuted into Brontë and Branwell's Angria, while Emily and Anne created the separate kingdom of Gondal.

The collaboration between the siblings, especially that between Brontë and Branwell, "determined the configuration of division and companionship" which lasted into adulthood (Möglen 25). In adolescence, the partnership between Brontë and Branwell took an interesting turn. Although both were fascinated by power, each focused their attention on a different aspect of the imaginary empire they created. Brontë delineated the complex social and psychological interactions in a world defined by the power struggles of courtship, seduction, and adultery, while Branwell focused on the historical events of empire, on martial accomplishments, heroic actions, and political intrigues. Despite their different interests, however, the wealth of Brontë's and Branwell's literary output during their childhood and early adolescence attests to the intensity of their involvement in this common imaginary world.

Although Brontë recognized some of Branwell's flaws, for many years he remained the person with whom she shared the most intimate details of her imaginary life. It was, in fact, Branwell who initiated Brontë, Emily, and Anne's assault on the literary establishment. His dreams of glory inspired Brontë and her sisters to try to publish their writing and win a literary reputation; yet unlike Branwell, Brontë systematically pursued and learned from her efforts. Throughout her career, Branwell's faults and vices remained central to Brontë's romantic concept of masculinity.

Gradually, however, as Branwell began to act upon his self-destructive impulses, Brontë came to achieve some distance from Branwell and to assert herself against the bonds of their once symbiotic relationship. Branwell failed to achieve not only any kind of literary or artistic success but also any kind of satisfactory employment, and retreated more completely into the realms of the imaginary world he and Brontë had created. As his failures worsened and he felt himself more inadequate to the masculine role to which he aspired, he, like his alterego Northangerland, became

increasingly dissipated and self-destructive. He developed an obsessive desire for a married woman whose children he tutored, and, although most likely unrequited, the affair turned into a scandal. He also became heavily dependent upon opium and alcohol.

Though Brontë remained for many years unable to exert herself against the consolidated strength of Patrick Brontë's position as father, patriarch, and sole parent, her competition with and rebellion against the flawed Branwell proved productive during the time when she made the transition from the uncensored romanticism of the juvenilia to the more controlled imaginative activity of novel writing.[20] Indeed, the very activity of novel writing reveals an important shift in Brontë's intense relationship with her siblings. From the start, Brontë's decision to write novels was identified with her sisters rather than her brother; Branwell was not included in the original decision to each write a novel.

This change in creative allegiance reflects Brontë's reaction, whether conscious or unconscious, against against the troubling dependency and rivalry that characterized her relationship with Branwell. Branwell's torturous decline provided Brontë with a dark mirror image of her own desires for M. Héger and her own unvoiced needs. In fact, her stern repudiation of Branwell during his illness probably stemmed both from the fact that he acted out her own repressed emotional needs and from the fact that she needed to break free of her childhood dependence on him in order to gain her independence as an artist.

It was in the crucial years of adolescence, then, that Rossetti and Brontë were each made aware of their own limited scope by the differences in their brother's freedom, opportunities, and expectations. In the case of Rossetti, the fact that Frances Rossetti was to keep both girls at home and educate them, while the boys were to be educated in a formal system, effected this change. Dante Gabriel and William went on to formal schooling. They received a traditional classical education and were free to develop their own intellectual agendas; both nourished their imaginations on Byron,

Shelley, Goethe, Schiller, Whitman, Dante, and the Pre-Petrarchan Italian poets, and Dante Gabriel also attended the Antique School of the Royal Academy, where he copied statuary and spent much of his time at the British museum, translating the Italian poets and reading Shelley, Browning, and Blake. In contrast to Dante Gabriel's and William's liberty to follow whatever paths interested them in shaping their own aesthetic or scholarly careers, Christina and Maria had to make do with whatever texts and materials were at home.

When Rossetti was seventeen, both brothers, together with some other young men who were painters and poets, formed the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Dante Gabriel's charismatic personality and dramatically original talent quickly made him the center of the movement, and William became the chronicler of the circle's common artistic life. This shared artistic life nourished Dante Gabriel's talent, while Rossetti, despite her intimate relation to the primary members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, worked in a solitary fashion, perhaps feeling her isolation more acutely because of this proximity.

In Brontë's case, the particulars that distinguished her education from that of her brother were different from those that distinguished Rossetti's from Dante Gabriel's, but the results were the same. Brontë was taught that it was her duty to sacrifice for her brother's success, while Branwell, in his pursuit of aesthetic enterprises, had behind him the weight both of cultural and of paternal authority. Brontë and her sisters were sent to school, first at Cowan Bridge and then at Roe Head, in order to receive an education that would enable them to become governesses. In contrast to this, Patrick Brontë would not trust the task of Branwell's education to anyone but himself, and Branwell was deemed the one entitled to the lion's share of the family's resources. (It is likely, however, that Patrick Brontë probably stifled Branwell, while Brontë and her sisters, because of their outside schooling and employment, eventually saw something of a wider world.) Brontë and her sisters were expected to teach so that Branwell could have the opportunity to study at the Royal

Academy in London, and it was in order to further Branwell's prospects for a career that Brontë faithfully pursued the hated task of governessing. Indeed, it was not until three months after the publication of Jane Eyre that Brontë told her father about her writing, and it was only when Patrick Brontë was well advanced in age and deprived of his only son that he took pride in his daughter's literary reputation.

In both the Rossetti and Brontë family, then, a consensus emerged: Dante Gabriel and Branwell were the ones who could aspire to a career as an artist. Rossetti and Brontë both internalized the message that to sacrifice for a brother's success was part of the responsibility of women. It was this important distinction made between each woman and her brother that led to the polarization of the two members of each family who initially seemed to have the most in common in terms of temperament and talent.

Rossetti's and Brontë's relationships with their brothers thus painfully focused the alienation that each woman experienced as a woman and writer in her culture. The turning point in each woman's relationship with her brother not only called into question her own legitimacy as an artist, but also emphasized the narrowness of Victorian notions of womanhood. Not surprisingly, then, female vulnerability and powerlessness emerge as central preoccupations in the early work of both women.

As this counterpointing of Rossetti's and Brontë's life histories suggests, each woman's art was shaped by the intense literary, imaginative, and intellectual interests that divided their respective households, frequently along the lines of gender. In addition to the important roles their siblings played in their artistic development, Rossetti and Brontë inherited some form of the literary aspirations and personal mythologies of their fathers, as well as the religious fervor or convictions, in Rossetti's case of Frances Rossetti, and in Brontë's of Reverend Patrick Brontë, that frequently came into conflict, because of Rossetti's and Brontë's gender, with these artistic aspirations.

From childhood on, then, both Rossetti and Brontë were intensely interested in exploring the problem of how gender relates to fate, to power, and to form. In Rossetti's early poetry and prose and in Brontë's extensive juvenilia, femininity is associated with vulnerability, powerlessness, and passivity: female subjects suffer and endure, ultimately submitting will, judgment, and desire to male authority that is either human or divine. Because masculinity, in such a scheme, is necessarily associated with imaginative as well as social power, both Rossetti and Brontë find it difficult, in these early works, to construct a consistent narrative or authorial stance. For both women, developing a successful authorial position hinges on two related but different questions: how can the power relations traditionally associated with gender be reversed or re-envisioned, and how can women writers translate their own culturally imposed sense of self-division into narrative or formal terms that will make it imaginatively productive?

[1] William Bell Scott, Autobiographical Notes, 1: 247. Scott goes on to mention that at seventeen, Rossetti had already written, "like her brother, some admirable lyrics, nearly all overshaded with melancholy" (248).

[2] In Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance, Dolores Rosenblum notes that there is a schism in Rossetti's poetry between the language of self-denial and the language of romantic self-assertion. Angela Leighton, in Victorian Women Poets, offers an interesting and somewhat different perspective on this dichotomy in Rossetti's poetry, arguing that the great 'split' in Rossetti's writing occurs between the freedom of her imagination and the conventionality of her opinions.

[3] Though Patrick Brontë was in some ways a repressive influence in Brontë's life, he seems to have had the most damaging effect on Branwell, who, because both of temperament and upbringing, was the most vulnerable of the Brontë children. Because Patrick Brontë took complete responsibility for Branwell's education, Branwell must have been acutely conscious of his father's expectations and hopes for him. While these expectations initially may have spurred Branwell to great exertion, they must have crushed him when he began to fail. Indeed, not just Patrick Brontë, but the whole family had high hopes for the realization of Branwell's genuis.

[4] Wise and Symington, 1: 140. Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 1836.

[5] Wise and Symington, 1: 148. Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 1836.

[6] Wise and Symington, 1: 140. Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 1836.

[7] For a persuasive argument about the centrality of this struggle of the divided self in Brontë's writing, see Chase's two chapters on Jane Eyre in Eros and Psyche: The Representation of Personality in Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, George Eliot. Chase suggests that Jane Eyre evolves as a series of negotiations to a succession of alternatives which Jane herself has demanded or elicited.

[8] Complete Poems, 2: 74-75. All subsequent citations refer to Rebecca Crump's variorum edition of Rossetti's complete poems, The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti, vols. 1-3.

[9] For a discussion of how this sense of physical exile deepened Rossetti's awareness of the situation of women in Victorian culture, see Rosenblum, Christina Rossetti and the Poetry of Endurance, 49-52.

[10] Taylor, 110 - 112. For an interesting analysis of the relations of this structural/thematic paradigm in the juvenilia to Brontë's biographical circumstances, see the introduction and third chapter of Irene Taylor's Holy Ghosts: The Male Muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë.

[11] Gérin, 40-45. See Gérin's Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius, 40 - 55, for a fuller discussion of these early influences on Brontë.

[12] For an insightful discussion on the way "history defers to romance" in the juvenilia, see Chase, "Brontë's Romance" in Eros and Psyche: The Representation of Personality in Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, George Eliot.

[13] The so called Roe Head Journal consists of Brontë's fragmentary record of her stay at Roe Head during the three years she was teaching there. Most of the loose sheets that comprise the Roe Head Journal are housed in The Bonnell Collection, at the Brontë Parsonage Musuem in Haworth, England.

[14] The Professor 2.

[15] Undoubtedly, the premature deaths of her sisters and brother augmented the sense of loss that is such a strong force in Brontë's novels. Not surprisingly, Brontë's last novel, Villette, written after the deaths of Emily and of Anne, particularly gives voice to an anguished sense of privation.

[16] Southey's letters are printed in Wise and Symington, 1: 156 - 58.

[17] In his letter of March 1837, Southey described the dangers of 'unfeminine' ambition in a way that must have touched Brontë at her most vulnerable point: "the daydreams in which you habitually indulge are likely to induce a distempered state of mind; and in proportion as all the ordinary uses of the world seem to you flat and unprofitable, you will be unfitted for them without becoming fitted for anything else."

[18] See Garlick, "The Frozen Fountain: Christina Rossetti, the Virgin Model,

and Youthful Pre-Raphaelitism," in Virginal Sexuality.

[19] For an important discussion of these tendencies in Pre-Raphaelite art, see chapters 5 & 6 in Griselda Pollock's Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and the Histories of Art.

[20] See Taylor, Holy Ghosts: The Male Muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë, 121- 23.

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