

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI'S THE HOUSE OF LIFE

AND THE BIOGRAPHICAL IMPERATIVE

by

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B.A. (Honors), University of Alberta, 1958

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

English

We accept this thesis as conforming to the  
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

June, 1963

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the importance of biographical inreading to a study of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's The House of Life. Although most of Rossetti's critics have predicated a biographical imperative in examining this work, the validity of their approach can be seriously questioned. The tendency to employ biographical criticism perhaps stems from an excessive concern on the part of both biographers and critics with the sensational details of Rossetti's life. Because of this concern, The House of Life has been treated more as an autobiographical record than as an integral work of art. It is necessary to re-examine the poem through some approach other than the biographical.

Chapter One outlines three standard approaches to the study of literature. The first, the historical or extrinsic, includes the study of the poet's biography as

well as the various external influences on him. The second, the organic or intrinsic, concentrates on internal aspects of the literature, such as imagery and form. The third, the synthetic, is a more fluid approach than the other two in that it attempts to employ all available tools of literary criticism, including biography.

Chapter Two reviews certain pertinent facts about Rossetti's life and considers a number of biographies and biographical studies which have appeared since his death, and which, to a considerable extent, have created an inaccurate legend about him.

Chapter Three considers the specific problem of biographical inreading in The House of Life, and discusses some of the criticism based on that inreading. It also traces the general development of The House of Life from the two essentially biographical preliminary versions (the Fortnightly Review sonnets, and the Kelmscott sonnets) to the complete version of 1881.

Chapter Four examines The House of Life as a work of art rather than as a biographical document. A reading of the poem is suggested in which The House of Life is seen as a series of cycles depicting the "transfigured" life of the poet.

An exegetical analysis of The House of Life necessarily

involves the critic in an examination of biographical data. However, once the development of the sequence has been traced, the critic must employ intrinsic criteria in order to determine the essential structure of the poem. In other words, the best approach to The House of Life synthesizes both the extrinsic and intrinsic methods of criticism.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter One: The Relation of Biography and Literary Criticism.....	1
Chapter Two: The "Scandal-Mongering Devils.".....	17
Chapter Three: The Biographical Imperative.....	49
Chapter Four: The Cycles of <u>The House of</u> <u>Life</u> : A Tentative Reading.....	83
Conclusion.....	100
Appendix.....	104
Bibliography.....	117

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am greatly indebted to Dr. W. E. Fredeman for the generous and invaluable assistance he has given me in the preparation of this thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. William Robbins and Dr. J. F. Hulcoop for their advice and helpful criticism.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE RELATIONSHIP OF BIOGRAPHY AND LITERARY CRITICISM

On a summer afternoon, three literary critics taking a stroll encounter an especially admirable chestnut tree and pause to examine it in detail. The first critic exclaims, "tel arbre, tel fruit," and proceeds to point out to his companions the obvious similarities between the blossom and its parent. The second critic remarks that the blossom is more than a mere extension of its mother and must be examined for its own merits. The third critic, moved to poetry by the "great rooted blossomer," cries, "Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?" and steps back to get a better look at the entire tree. Ultimately, the three part, each convinced that the other two know very little about the nature of trees.

Of course, the three critics in the anecdote are discussing, not chestnut trees, but literature, specifically the relationship between biography and literary criticism. The first, Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, unreservedly advocates a biographical approach

to literature:

La littérature, la production littéraire, n'est point pour moi distincte ou du moins séparable du reste de l'homme et de l'organisation; je puis goûter une oeuvre, mais il m'est difficile de la juger indépendamment de la connaissance de l'homme même; et je dirais volontiers: tel arbre, tel fruit. L'étude littéraire me mène ainsi tout naturellement à l'étude morale.<sup>1</sup>

The second critic, T.S. Eliot, does not favour a biographical approach. Acknowledging the obvious connection between a work of art and its creator, he denies that the personality of the creator is necessarily imbedded in that work. In fact, says Eliot, "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." The process of creation being "not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion... not the expression of personality, but the escape from personality,"<sup>2</sup> biographical criticism will lead the critic not toward but away from an illumination of literature.

The third critic, quoting from W.B. Yeats' "Among School Children," is Cleanth Brooks.

Our staple study of literature consists in investigations of the root system (the study of literary sources) or in sniffing the blossoms (impressionism) or--not to neglect Yeats' alternative symbol--in questioning the quondam dancer, no longer a dancer, about her life history (the study of the poet's biography).

There are many valid approaches to the study of literature, says Brooks, but they are valid only if used judiciously.

I want to use the metaphor fairly: it is entirely legitimate to inquire into the dancer's history, and such an inquiry is certainly interesting for its own sake, and may be of value for our understanding of the dance. But we cannot question her as a dancer without stopping the dance or waiting until the dance has been completed. And in as far as our interest is in poetry, the dance must be primary for us. We cannot afford to neglect it; no amount of notes on the personal history of the dancer will prove to be a substitute for it; and even our knowledge of the dancer qua dancer will depend in some measure upon it. How else can we know her? "How can we know the dancer from the dance?"<sup>3</sup>

Each of these three approaches to literature, the biographical, the organic or intrinsic, and the synthetic, is used by twentieth century critics. Of the three, the biographical can claim, if not the longest, certainly the most complex history. Its most obvious ancestors seem to be the biography, which by the eighteenth century had become an established literary form,<sup>4</sup> and the historical method of literary criticism, itself a multi-branched discipline whose roots can be traced to classical times.<sup>5</sup> The two pursuits ultimately merged, for example, in the critical biographies of Samuel Johnson whose Lives of the Poets constitutes a serious attempt to relate biography

to literature, to see in the life of the poet a "cause" of the work of art. The principles of Romanticism, the growing concern for individual genius and personality, provided not only impetus but justification for the biographical method since the Romantic poet was inclined and encouraged to use personal experience and emotion as his creative inspiration. By the nineteenth century, in which the biographical method enjoyed its greatest popularity, it became necessary to distinguish, as Robert Browning does in his Essay on Shelley, the objective poet, "one whose endeavour has been to reproduce things external," from the subjective poet, the "seer", who concerns himself with "not what man sees, but what God sees," and who consults his own soul as "the nearest reflex of that absolute mind.... Readers of his poetry must be readers of his biography also."<sup>6</sup> A distinction was also made between those literary figures for whom there existed little biographical data, and those more self-conscious (or posterity-conscious) artists who left behind diaries, or frankly autobiographical poems or records.<sup>7</sup>

With the publication of Sigmund Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams in 1900, and the subsequent incorporation into literary criticism of psychological and psychoanalytic principles, the biographical approach gained new impetus

and advocates in the twentieth century. The Freudian concept of literature as wish-fulfillment (echoing Goethe's idea of literature as a means of confession) and Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of literature as unconscious autobiography have led to an interest in not only the external life of the artist but his mental and emotional makeup.<sup>8</sup> The trend has been from the social biography to the "inner" biography,<sup>9</sup> a pursuit which, in opening new vistas for the critic, has at the same time begun to plague him with new problems and pitfalls. The question of frankness--when to divulge or withhold information about an author's personal life; how to know "when personal information stops being relevant and becomes simply prying into the private life of the author,"--Stanley Edgar Hyman, at least, sees as one of the major problems now confronting the biographical critic. (p. 120) What seem to be extremely private details of a writer's life--sexual abnormalities, for example--may have had an important influence on his work; a knowledge of these details will then be of considerable interest to the critic.

Hyman's conclusion that the real value of psychoanalytic criticism lies in its application to the literature rather than to the artist might well be applied to biographical criticism in general. (p. 157) The dual

parentage of biographical criticism, on the one hand literary biography, on the other historical criticism, has led in turn to a dichotomy of interests. For the biographer, the path leads from the literature to an analysis of the man; for the critic, a study of the man is, or should be, only a means of gaining insight into the literature. René Wellek and Austin Warren see biography leading in three possible directions: to a study of literature, of a man, or, through psychology, to a "study of the psychology of the poet and of the poetic process."

For our conception of "literary scholarship" only the first thesis, that biography explains and illuminates the actual product of poetry, is directly relevant. The second point of view, which advocates the intrinsic interest of biography, shifts the center of attention to human personality. The third considers biography as material for a science or future science, the psychology of artistic creation. (p. 67)

The confusion of these avenues of biographical study has led to some curious distortions of both the writer and his work, among which are several biographies of the Brontës pieced together from incidents in their novels; Georg Brandes' study of Shakespeare, in which his work is judged typical or atypical of a personality which Brandes has created from the plays; and Joseph Wood Krutch's psychoanalytic biography of Edgar Allan Poe which concludes

confidently, "we have, then, traced Poe's art to an abnormal condition of the nerves."<sup>10</sup>

The attractiveness of the biographical approach, both as a comparatively simple means of studying literature and as an excuse for dissecting another human being, tends to obscure its basic weaknesses. One weakness is the assumption (what Wellek and Warren call the "biographical fallacy") that an artist either self-consciously or unconsciously pours his personality into his art; but this assumption may be valid with regard to only a portion of his canon--or, indeed, it may not be valid at all. One of the major problems facing the biographical critic concerns the deceptively simple decision as to whether or not an artist can or should be studied biographically. Perhaps, as Wellek and Warren suggest, the artist presents an anti-self to the reader. (p. 72) Probably, if he does draw upon his experience and unless he is consciously writing a "confession" or an autobiographical record, he will remold as well as recollect in tranquillity.

Even when a work of art contains elements which can be surely identified as biographical, these elements will be so rearranged and transformed in a work that they lose all their specifically personal meaning and become simply concrete human material, integral elements of a work. (Wellek and Warren, pp. 71-72)

Some critics have expressed an increasing dissatisfaction with the biographical approach and with extrinsic criticism<sup>11</sup> in general. Wellek and Warren's statement that "the whole view that art is self-expression pure and simple, the transcript of personal feelings and experiences, is demonstrably false," provides a typical illustration of this trend. (p. 72)<sup>12</sup> The "impersonal" conception of art, emphasized by T.S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," developed into the theory that a work of art, far from being a mere extension of the writer's personality, had a life of its own.

We can only say that a poem, in some sense, has its own life; that its parts form something quite different from a body of neatly ordered biographical data; that the feeling, or emotion, or vision, resulting from the poem is something different from the feeling or emotion or vision in the mind of the poet.<sup>13</sup>

R.P. Blackmur, expanding on Eliot's idea, concludes that "criticism must deal centrally with literature as literature,"<sup>14</sup> a process which Wellek and Warren call "intrinsic" criticism in that it turns its attention inward to an analysis of euphony, rhythm, meter, style, genre, and the comparison of the work with its literary predecessors. A concentrated effort has been made to re-evaluate intrinsically literary works previously treated biographically;

the results have been both amusing and significant.<sup>15</sup> Frank H. Ellis, for example, has used the tools of the biographical critic to show that Gray's "Elegy written in a Country Churchyard" should not be interpreted biographically.<sup>16</sup> In illustrating how the poem developed from personal to impersonal expression, he in fact has dealt with the "causes" of the poem and the biography of the poet. Similarly, Carlos Baker has used biographical evidence to refute Newman I. White's interpretation of Shelley's "Julian and Maddalo".<sup>17</sup> It would seem that the biographical approach, however satisfactory it may appear, is difficult to avoid even by critics attempting to replace it.

Particularly in the twentieth century, whose chief characteristic in literary criticism seems to be variety, the question might well be raised as to whether or not any one critical approach should replace another except, perhaps, in a particular instance. Even a cursory examination of modern critical trends will illustrate the many new directions critics have taken. Whether these are opposed as two general groups, extrinsic and intrinsic, or dealt with under such headings as tradition, biography, psychology, Marxism, and evaluation,<sup>18</sup> is less important than the immediate problem of which approach is valid in a given

instance. Walter Jackson Bate suggests that "the most challenging task now awaiting critical theory is perhaps one of synthesis rather than further particularized investigation."<sup>19</sup> Hyman places the responsibility of choice directly upon the shoulders of the individual critic:

No method, however ingenious, is foolproof, and almost every technique of modern criticism is used brilliantly by brilliant critics and poorly by stupid, ignorant, incompetent, or dull ones. On the other hand, a good man possessed of the critic's virtues may operate well or brilliantly, today as at any time, with no method but the application of his own intelligence and sensibility. (p. 8)

To return to Cleanth Brooks' metaphorical representation of the critical process, as long as the critic bears in mind that his purpose is to interpret the dance, he is free to gather any material, including the biography of the dancer, which will achieve that purpose.

If, in pursuing this critical purpose, the critic manages to use biography while avoiding the "biographical fallacy," he may encounter yet another weakness in the biographical method--although, in this case, the weakness may be more attributable to the critic. All too frequently, what begins as biographical criticism degenerates into an uncritical preoccupation with the life of the artist. The critic, caught in a web of fact and

speculation, may ultimately forego both his objectivity and his purpose. Pre-Raphaelite criticism provides an excellent example of this phenomenon. Howard Mumford Jones, surveying this field of study, observes that some of the blame for poor scholarship--or, indeed, the lack of scholarship--lies with the extremely self-conscious subjects themselves.

The dramatic instinct that led Frances Winwar to write Poor Splendid Wings (1933) may be sounder than the scholar's analysis inasmuch as the clash of personalities in the circle (or circles) is at least as crucial as aesthetic theory. However you group them, these artists were immensely conscious of themselves, immensely aware of human individualities. Not since Byron had the individual gesture seemed so important, not since the Keats circle had there been such an immense savoring of personalities.... On the base of this Olympian self-consciousness, affection and piety have been raised one of the most remarkable biographical and autobiographical collections of the 19th century.<sup>20</sup>

The devastating result of this extreme self-consciousness has been that the Pre-Raphaelites "exist in the minds of general readers as personalities rather than artists.... One of the present embarrassments of scholarship is that we know too much about the poets and not enough about the poetry." (Jones, pp. 179, 183) Faced with this cult of personality, fostered by the Pre-Raphaelites and sustained

by the public, the critic, obliged to employ biography if only to deny its usefulness, runs the risk of succumbing to the cult or of becoming hopelessly involved in the mass of biographical fact and fiction, a morass from which he may never emerge. To avoid biographical criticism becomes not only inadvisable but virtually impossible. As Jones observes, "we know too much about [the Pre-Raphaelites] to forget the human being and to concentrate on the art; and the distaste and adulation they aroused equally invite explanation and correction." (p. 179)

This cult of personality surrounding the Pre-Raphaelites has centred its attention primarily upon the acknowledged leader of the group, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who, since his death in 1882, has inspired a seemingly endless stream of biographical studies ranging in kind from the strictly anecdotal to psychological and critical examinations such as Oswald Doughty's A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti.<sup>21</sup> During the course of these biographical investigations, almost every conceivable facet of Rossetti's private and public life has been probed and discussed in the name of science or art. His work, if examined at all, has been considered little more than a personal diary. Individual poems, and especially The House of Life, have served as sources of information about his love affairs and his emotional and physical condition, but they

have been largely ignored as literature. Such critical studies as exist seem primarily concerned with indicating to what extent Rossetti drew upon his personal experience in writing poetry. Jones assesses the situation with ironic accuracy:

Researches into the number and nature of Rossetti's models and mistresses undoubtedly throw some light on the meaning of The House of Life, but if we knew as little about the personal life of its author as we know about the personal life of Shakespeare, The House of Life would still remain a great, a beautiful, and an enigmatic work of art....What the further study of Rossetti needs is a closer analysis of his poetry in terms that the work of I.A. Richards and others has made familiar. (pp. 183, 188)

Rossetti, then is a poet for whom the biographical approach has proved inadequate, and who must be examined by some other method. In the following chapters, an attempt will be made to establish this method, by an assessment of the biographical and critical studies made on Rossetti, and by an examination of The House of Life.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Nouveaux Lundis (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1865), III, p. 15.
2. "Tradition and the Individual Talent," The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism (London: Methuen, 1950), pp. 53, 58. Stanley Edgar Hyman in The Armed Vision (New York: Knopf, 1952), comments on the contradictions in Eliot's criticism as "a trick he learned from Pound of proposing theories he doesn't believe, just to hear the roar." (p. 77) However, his views on the impersonality of art seem to be basic to his criticism. For the purpose of this thesis, the positions expressed by these critics are being emphasized; whether or not the statements are typical of or basic to their individual critical doctrines, is irrelevant.
3. The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry (New York: Harcourt, Brace, A Harvest Book, 1947), p. 191.
4. Izaak Walton's Lives, written between 1640 and 1678 is perhaps a worthy ancestor, among others, although the major popularizers were Samuel Johnson and James Boswell.
5. For a survey of the historical method see: William K. Wimsatt Jr., and Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History (New York: Knopf, 1959), especially Chapt. 24, pp. 522-554.
6. Peacock's Four Ages of Poetry, Shelley's Defence of Poetry, Browning's Essay on Shelley, ed. H.F.B. Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), pp. 63, 65, 66. Browning's essay was first published by Edward Moxon in 1852 as an "Introductory Essay" to a volume of Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley which were subsequently found to be forgeries.
7. René Wellek and Austin Warren, in Theory of Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949) consider this general distinction (p. 71) and also suggest that the restriction has not daunted the biographers. Georg Brandes, William Shakespeare, English translation (New York: Macmillan, 1935); Frank Harris, The Man Shakespeare and his Tragic Life-Story (New York: Kennerley, 1909) are

cited among others as examples. It is difficult, however, to decide what are "frankly autobiographical poems." For example, Wordsworth's Prelude, generally considered to be autobiographical, has been shown to differ from Wordsworth's actual life; see George W. Meyer, Wordsworth's Formative Years (Ann Arbor Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1943).

8. See Hyman, Chapt. 6, "Maud Bodkin and Psychological Criticism," pp. 142-167; Wellek and Warren, Chapt. 7, "Literature and Psychology," pp. 75-78; and Leslie A. Fiedler, "Archetype and Signature: A Study of the Relationship between Biography and Poetry," Sewanee Review, LX (1952), 253-273, which sees literary criticism as the study of the "signature," or personal imprint of the artist on the "archetypes" or universal patterns which form his raw material.
9. A trend popularized, as well, by the biographies of Lytton Strachey.
10. Virginia Moore, The Life and Eager Death of Emily Bronte (London: Rich and Cowan, 1936); Edith E. Kinsley, Patterns for Genius (New York: Dutton, 1949); Romer Wilson [Florence Roma Muir Wilson O'Brien], All Alone: The Life and Private History of Emily Jane Bronte (London: Chatto and Windus, 1928); Georg Brandes, William Shakespeare; Joseph Wood Krutch, Edgar Allan Poe: A Study in Genius (New York: Knopf, 1926), p. 234.
11. The terms "extrinsic" and "intrinsic" are used by Wellek and Warren to distinguish two basic methods of literary criticism. Extrinsic criticism includes the study of biography, psychology, society, ideas, and literature compared to other arts.
12. As an example of how this controversy occasionally degenerates into a quibble, see the prolix but relevant discussion of the word, "personal," and of the biographical problem in general, in C.S. Lewis, "The Personal Heresy in Criticism," Essays and Studies, XIX (1933), 7-28; E.M.W. Tillyard, "The Personal Heresy in Criticism: A Rejoinder," Essays and Studies, XX (1934), 7-20; C.S. Lewis, "Open Letter to Dr. Tillyard," Essays and Studies, XXI (1935), 153-168.
13. The Sacred Wood (1928), Intro., x.

14. Quoted from Hyman, p. 246; see R.P. Blackmur, "T.S. Eliot," Hound and Horn, I (March 1928), 187-213.
15. The concern over the problem of biographical misreading is evidenced by "The Critical Significance of Biographical Evidence," English Institute Essays (1946), a symposium in which Douglas Bush discusses the significance of biography to a study of Milton, Louis A. Landa discusses Swift, Carlos Baker discusses Shelley, and Marion Witt discusses Yeats. "Their principal point of agreement," concludes G.E. Bentley, "seems to be that critics of Milton, Swift, Shelley and Yeats have mis-used biographical evidence; that writers have turned 'biographical conjecture into biographical fact'; that relevant biographical evidence has been ignored; that autobiographical interpretations have been overdone." (Intro., 4).
16. "Gray's Elegy: The Biographical Problem in Literary Criticism," PMLA, LXVI (1951), 971-1008. Ellis' purpose, however, is basically sound: "what is needed is a view of poetry which sees in Gray's Elegy neither an autobiographical document nor a literary exercise, but a calculated rhetorical structure--calculated, that is, to produce certain intellectual and emotional effects on the reader." (1008).
17. Carlos Baker, "Shelley's Ferrarese Maniac," English Institute Essays (1946), pp. 41-73. Newman I. White, "The Development, Use and Abuse of Interpretation in Biography," English Institute Essays (1942), pp. 29-58.
18. Hyman's categories.
19. Criticism: The Major Texts, ed. Walter Jackson Bate (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952), p. 273.
20. "The Pre-Raphaelites," in The Victorian Poets: A Guide to Research, ed. Frederick E. Faverty (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 176. The reference is to Frances Winwar [Frances (Vinciguerra) Grebanier], Poor Splendid Wings: The Rossettis and Their Circle (Boston: Little, Brown, 1933), a semi-fictional and sentimentalized account of the Pre-Raphaelites.
21. (London: Muller, 1960).

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE "SCANDAL-MONGERING DEVILS."

Rossetti's position as the leader of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and of its successor, the Oxford Brotherhood, and later, as the central figure in biographical bacchanalia, is perhaps less attributable to his poetic superiority than to the hypnotic spell of his personality. The P.R.B., organized in 1848 by Rossetti and six other youthful colleagues,<sup>1</sup> constituted for some of the brethren (inspired by the crusading zeal of William Holman Hunt) a solemn pact, a pledge to assume moral responsibility for the future of art in England. For Rossetti, the Brotherhood seems to have been little more than a "lark." Yet it was Rossetti who, convinced that anyone could be a poet, inspired the more prosaic members of the circle to write poetry for the first--and in some cases, the last--time; who encouraged the group to publish its own manifesto, the ill-fated Germ; and who, in adopting

the word "stunner," created the only critical term in the Pre-Raphaelite vocabulary. One such "stunner," Elizabeth Siddal, Rossetti's model-mistress, who, transformed into a ghostly medieval lady with long neck and flowing gold hair, "looks out from all his canvasses,"<sup>2</sup> was to become almost the symbol of Pre-Raphaelite art. Almost in spite of himself, and to the chagrin of Holman Hunt,<sup>3</sup> Rossetti became the center of and the source of inspiration for this youthful coterie.

This strange power of attraction Rossetti possessed is even more clearly illustrated in his association with Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris. As undergraduates at Oxford, both Jones and Morris had developed an interest in medievalism, poetry, and art. Upon meeting Rossetti in 1856, Jones abandoned university to become Rossetti's adoring pupil-disciple, and Morris, having already embarked on a career as an architect, plunged enthusiastically into the production of both artifacts and poetry.

Valentine Prinsep, one of the reluctant participants in the "Jovial Campaign," a scheme instigated by Rossetti to paint murals on the walls of the Oxford Union Building in 1857, later recalled that Rossetti "was unlike anyone I ever met. He was an Italian of the fourteenth century who happened to reside in London."<sup>4</sup> For Prinsep and the

other impressionable young artists, Rossetti became "the sun round whom we revolved, and from whom we...borrowed what light we had." (p. 284) Gradually, as Prinsep matured, Rossetti's influence on him diminished.

The forced atmosphere of the Rossetti world grew too restrained for my healthy lungs. Directly I began to think for myself, I found Rossetti and his ideas were not natural to my views....He was a jealous friend. It was all in all or nothing with him....(p. 285)

Much of Rossetti's charm derived from his physical appearance and his musical voice. Prinsep's description of him, though not altogether flattering, does suggest that Rossetti possessed unusual and fascinating physical attributes.

There was a strong likeness to [Shakespeare] save that the eyes were the eyes of an Italian, grave and dark with the bistre tinge around them which some great lady--I think Carlyle's Lady Ashburton--said "looked as if they had been put in with dirty fingers." His mouth was large, and his lips had what the novelist would call a sensuous appearance. His voice was singularly sweet and caressing, and he talked in a kind of melodious chant. (p. 167)

Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson's description of Rossetti as he remembered him in 1870 is more impressive:

His face was pale, the colour of old ivory

as it were, but it glowed under excitement. His forehead was highdomed and broad, the brown eyes deep-sunk, lambent and sad, with the skin about them of a much darker tone than the rest of the face....The face was very handsome, deeply striking, with its calm nobility and impressiveness--one of those rare faces, in short, that once seen are never forgotten. His voice was rich and deep, soft to ear as velvet to the touch...his whole appearance expressed his powerful personality.<sup>5</sup>

The romantic and tragic events of his life, as well as his fascinating appearance and hypnotic personality, soon drew Rossetti into the public spotlight. "There really was an extraordinary buzz about his personality during the 'seventies and 'eighties--a romantic clamor," recalled Ford Madox Heuffer in 1911.<sup>6</sup> Oswald Doughty attributes the rise of this "romantic clamor" partly to Rossetti's increasing melancholy and reclusiveness during the 1860's:

The mental and emotional strife he vainly tried to hide from all was already working towards his ultimate undoing. Of this inner waste the world knew little or nothing yet, but already, intuitively, it began to sense something strange, uncanny, about this remote, inaccessible painter shut up in his dark and silent house, and with an intriguing reputation for wonderful "poetic" pictures and poems which few were allowed to see, for a strange, unhappy, romantic past, a solitary, darkly Bohemian present, and a misanthropy, a contempt for public opinion so great that he would condescend to show neither pictures nor poems to the world. Already, in his first

hour of triumph, the sinister but useful legend of Tudor House was taking shape.  
(Doughty, p. 337)

This legend, nurtured by sensational events such as the untimely and mysterious death of Rossetti's wife in 1862, and the exhumation of her body in 1869 to recover Rossetti's poems, has created special and almost insurmountable problems for biographers and critics of Rossetti. The bare facts of his life are readily available, having been carefully recorded by his brother, William Michael, preserved in correspondence, and recounted in the memoirs and autobiographies of his acquaintances.<sup>8</sup> But prompted by the suspicion that details of Rossetti's life have been suppressed by a scrupulous brother and considerate friends, biographers have turned instead for material to the less reliable but more fascinating legend. Since his death in 1882, a number of biographies have appeared which claim to tell the "truth" about Rossetti; presumably, they will continue to appear as facts are sifted or unearthed, or as more or less imaginative biographers join in the investigation. No attempt will be made in this thesis to add to the growing collection of biographies, although it will be necessary to emphasize certain events in Rossetti's life, since they form the core of many of the biographical and critical studies concerning him.

The relationship between Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal, and its importance to Rossetti's life and art, has prompted considerable biographical interest. It is known that, soon after they met in 1850, Miss Siddal became the exclusive model and pupil of Rossetti; that their courtship lasted ten years; that she was plagued with illness throughout their acquaintance; that they were married in 1860; that she died from an overdose of laudanum in 1862; and that some of Rossetti's poems were buried with her only to be exhumed in 1869. From these facts, certain assumptions logically follow: that, during the period of their acquaintance, Rossetti painted and sketched several pictures of his model-mistress-wife; that some of his poems were inspired by her; that there was some reason for their drawn-out engagement, and for their ultimate marriage; that her sudden and unusual death had some effect on her husband; and that Rossetti had some reason for burying, and later for exhuming, his poems.

At the point where facts and logical assumptions end, the stories begin to conflict, and speculation becomes enthusiastic. It is conjectured that Miss Siddal was well-born, or that she was not; that the courtship dragged on because Rossetti was involved in another love affair, or because Miss Siddal's ill health made marriage unfeasible

for a time; that Rossetti married her because he loved her, or because he loved someone else; that Miss Siddal suffered from nervous distress, dyspepsia, pthisis, neuralgia, curvature of the spine, or tuberculosis; that, on the night of her death, Rossetti was visiting Fanny Cornforth, or that he was lecturing at the Workingmen's College; and that his wife's death was accidental, or that it was not.

Rossetti's other love affairs have also interested biographers and critics. Fanny Cornforth, the crudely-mannered model for many of Rossetti's paintings, offers great scope for the speculator since little is known about her or her association with Rossetti. A complete contrast to Elizabeth Siddal, Miss Cornforth, "vulgar, vital, primitive, the antithesis of the over-strained ideal of 'The Blessed Damozel';" (Doughty p. 253) has been described by biographers as the "serpent of Rossetti's Eden." But Paull Franklin Baum asserts that

she was neither so maleficent nor so cunning nor so cold....She brought him the first enchantment of "soft-shed kisses and soft sleep;" but it was Lizzy who gave him, per-versely and too well, the sense of sin, because it was she who made Fanny "wrong." Without her Fanny would have been a conventional model-mistress.<sup>9</sup>

Of greater interest to biographers in recent years has been the discovery of Rossetti's love affair with Jane

Morris. As recounted by Oswald Doughty, the affair began at Oxford during the "Jovial Campaign," when Mrs. Morris, then Jane Burden, was "discovered" by the Pre-Raphaelites and persuaded to model for them. Her marriage to William Morris, and Rossetti's marriage to Elizabeth Siddal, forestalled the romance until 1868 when it was renewed. The face of Jane Morris soon replaced that of Elizabeth Siddal in Rossetti's paintings, and she provided the inspiration for a great outpouring of poetry by Rossetti between 1868 and 1873. As Doughty's evidence indicates, she was also the cause of much of Rossetti's despondency, guilt and ill-health during the last fifteen years of his life.

Rossetti's ill-health has provided a separate area of biographical interest and conjecture. In 1867, Rossetti's eyesight began to fail; plagued by headaches, insomnia and fear of blindness, he sought relief and sleep in alcohol. By 1869, he had resorted to chloral to allay his mental and physical distress. Weakened by his addiction to this drug, and tormented by doubts concerning both his poetic future<sup>10</sup> and his love affair, Rossetti attempted suicide in 1872 by taking an overdose of laudanum. The remainder of his life was marked by recurring mental and physical disorders, among them a kidney disease which was the immediate cause of his death in 1882. The symptoms Rossetti displayed

during these last fifteen years of his life have been examined and interpreted by writers such as R.L. Mégroz, who appended to his biography of Rossetti a detailed analysis of his ailments,<sup>11</sup> and Dr. Louis J. Bragman, who not only discusses to what extent Rossetti's mental and physical disorders were a result of his chloral addiction, but who also suggests that Rossetti's life and art indicate a frustrated sexuality. Bragman concludes that Rossetti was quite mad.<sup>12</sup>

This diversity of studies on Rossetti indicates the wide interest he has inspired in the fields of both medicine and art. Since his death, at least a dozen full-scale biographies and many shorter biographical studies have appeared, a brief survey of which will illustrate how the "facts" of Rossetti's life have been interpreted, augmented, and distorted.

Ironically, the man Rossetti selected to write his official biography, and thereby stave off the scandal-mongers, never did so. Theodore Watts-Dunton, awaiting the propitious moment to tell the story of a man whose intimate friends were still alive, remained silent,<sup>13</sup> while other, less sensitive biographers undertook the task immediately upon Rossetti's death. The first biographical account to appear was Thomas Hall Caine's Recollections of Dante

Gabriel Rossetti.<sup>14</sup> Published in 1882, it consists mainly of an account of Caine's friendship with Rossetti during the last three years of the poet's life, together with excerpts and paraphrases from correspondence between the two, mainly about literature. Silenced by a stricture similar to that which prevented Watts-Dunton from speaking out, Caine refrains from presenting more than a superficial summary of Rossetti's personal life, of which he undoubtedly had some knowledge. He notes in his Preface,

I am sensible of the difficulty and delicacy of the task I have undertaken, involving, as it does, many interests and issues; and in every reference to surviving relatives as well as to other persons now living, with whom Rossetti was in any way allied, I have exercised in all friendliness the best judgment at my command. (ix)

Faithful to his vow of propriety, Caine dispatches the Rossetti-Siddal affair in two pages, and his account of Mrs. Rossetti's death is a masterpiece of brevity:

it was found that Mrs. Rossetti had taken an overdose of her accustomed sleeping potion and was lying dead in her bed. (p. 44)

Extra-marital relationships are not even hinted at, and Rossetti's struggle with the demon chloral is briefly, but dramatically described.

"They say there is a skeleton in every cupboard," [Rossetti] said in a low voice, "and that's mine; it is chloral!" (p. 228)

The chapter on Rossetti's death at Birchington is interesting as Caine was an eyewitness to the event. But in general, Caine, who undoubtedly sought to bask in the reflected glory afforded by his association with a great artist, seems less concerned with recounting Rossetti's life than with recording the conversations between poet and disciple. Inasmuch as the Recollections deals more with Rossetti as an artist than a personality, it is typical of the biographical and critical works published in the first few years after Rossetti's death. William Sharp's Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and a Study, and Joseph Knight's Life and Writings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti,<sup>15</sup> both more eulogistic than critical, are other examples of this general type.

In 1895, William Michael Rossetti published his two-volume Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters with a Memoir. In the Memoir, which Oswald Doughty dismisses as "dull, discreet, and colourless," (Doughty, p. 6) William Michael records his brother's life accurately but with such frustrating vagueness and obvious reticence that subsequent biographers have suspected him of knowing far more than he will say. For example, he refers to a letter from Holman

Hunt to William Bell Scott, written shortly after Rossetti's death, in which Hunt says, "I had long ago forgiven him [Rossetti], and forgotten the offence, which in fact, taken altogether, worked me good rather than harm."<sup>16</sup> William Michael cautiously remarks,

I understand perfectly well what it is that Mr. Hunt terms "the offence," but will not dwell upon any details; only remarking that, if my reader chooses to ask the old question "Who was the Woman?" he will not be far wrong, though his query may chance to remain forever unanswered.<sup>17</sup>

It could be said without exaggeration that the era of the biographical sleuths, whose abilities William Michael so naïvely underestimates, was launched on the impetus provided by such veiled allusions.<sup>18</sup>

Yet as late as 1911, Ford Madox Heuffer could complain:

For thirty years or so Rossetti's figure was perpetually before the public, getting more and more pompous, more and more priestly, more and more like a German professor of the beautiful, growing duller and duller, and at last he was dead. Last year he was as dead as a doornail. And that was a thousand pities, a triumph of obscuring pompousness over a man who was very great, and a poet who was very rare. <sup>19</sup>

The person primarily responsible for turning Rossetti to stone was William Michael, and George Saintsbury, writing also in 1911, applauded his efforts in spreading "the

fraternal shield (long may he be preserved to repeat the pious office!) over his dead brother."<sup>20</sup> With prophetic accuracy, Professor Saintsbury added, "indeed, when a man has the singular ill-fortune to attract industrious parasites of the gende-lettre kind early, his legend is never destroyed."

1928, the year of the Rossetti centenary, saw the publication of several biographical studies which clearly indicated that the Rossetti legend had not been destroyed. A comparison of Hall Caine's Recollections of 1882 with the drastically revised 1928 edition will illustrate not only to what extent Rossetti's personal life had undergone careful biographical scrutiny in fifty years, but also how the facts of his life had become mixed with fiction and speculation. Whereas in the first Recollections, Caine seemed primarily concerned with recounting Rossetti's comments on literature and art, in the second, he concentrates on incidents in Rossetti's personal life. The disciple has become the confidante, harboring confessions and secrets particularly about Rossetti's love affairs. He suggests that Rossetti loved someone other than Elizabeth Siddal, and describes Rossetti's life accordingly as "a struggle between love and duty." (p. 37) Who this third member of the triangle is, the reader is not told. But

since the revelation follows close upon a description of Jane Morris, "the strongest, purest, and most lasting influence upon his life," the conclusion seems obvious--at least, it has seemed so to many subsequent biographers. The topic is resumed later in Caine's book when he recalls a conversation between Rossetti and himself which presumably took place as they were returning to London from the English Lakes in 1881, and for which there exists "no witness except my own memory." (p. 197) Caine then offers a full explanation of the tragedy which molded and eventually ruined Rossetti's life, a tragedy of a man,

who, after engaging himself to one woman in all honour and good faith, had fallen in love with another, and then gone on to marry the first out of a mistaken sense of loyalty and fear of giving pain, instead of stopping, as he must have done, if his will had been stronger and his heart sterner, at the door of the church itself. (pp. 200-201)

Certain that a knowledge of the tragedy in Rossetti's life will raise rather than lower his stature, Caine feels justified in making public this information which he had hitherto suppressed. His conclusion that "the whole truth that hurts is better than the half truth that kills," (p. 205) may well justify the revelations made in this edition. But, unfortunately, in telling the "whole truth" about this and other disputed events in Rossetti's life,

he neglects to mention a few salient facts, and consequently, instead of quelling the controversy, he succeeds only in exciting it further. In general, Caine's reconsidered Recollections is of interest primarily because Rossetti emerges from it a slightly mad, chloral-sodden wretch with a tragic past. As such, he reappears in a number of twentieth century biographies.

Not all the centenary biographies were of a sensational nature. Evelyn Waugh's Rossetti: His Life and Works<sup>21</sup> is a reasoned, if not totally sympathetic, biographical and critical study of Rossetti, primarily as a painter. Of a similar type is R.L. Mégroz' Dante Gabriel Rossetti which is divided into two parts described as "Mainly Biographical" and "Mainly Critical." Avoiding hearsay and gossip, Mégroz presents a well-balanced summary of Rossetti's life. His account of the circumstances surrounding Mrs. Rossetti's death, for example, is confined to the known facts, and he dismisses the controversy with comments such as,

Whatever the atmosphere in that doomed home was when the harassed husband left the suffering wife to herself, there is no reason for any attempt to allot blame by biographers who must know far less of the facts than the mutual friends of Rossettis knew. (p. 75)

However, he does offer some reasoned speculation as to the

cause of her death:

In such an inharmonious marriage, so beset by the trivial difficulties of life which may assume momentous importance with highly strung people, there must have been incidents enough to make so affectionate and imaginative a man remorseful after that tragic end. For we have to face the probability that Lizzie Rossetti took that overdose of laudanum in an hysterical moment with the knowledge that it was fatal. The suspicion of such a thing would have been cause enough for Rossetti's distress, apart from the bare loss of the "lovely Guggums". (p. 76)

Because Mégroz is mainly concerned with Rossetti, the artist, he invades the murky realm of Rossetti's life only to the extent that it offers insight into his art.

In 1932, a work appeared which, though not strictly a biography of Rossetti, was nonetheless firmly grounded on the Rossetti legend unwittingly fostered by William Michael and supported by Hall Caine. Violet Hunt's The Wife of Rossetti is an anecdotal potpourri about the Rossettis based on information "chiefly oral, from the circumstances of my childhood and early girlhood, spent much in the company of the actors in the scenes I am attempting to describe," and on secondary material of varying degrees of reliability.<sup>22</sup> Although Miss Hunt focusses on Elizabeth Siddal, claiming that "the truth about Rossetti has been told," (vii) her unsympathetic portrayal of Rossetti as a

cold-blooded, promiscuous rake who drove his wife to suicide, adds a new dimension to the Rossetti legend. The author claims that she "cannot forgive Rossetti"; (xxiii) her conception of the poet is, indeed, unforgivable.

It is in Miss Hunt's book, for example, that the list of Rossetti's lovers extends to include Fanny Cornforth, Annie Miller, Barbara Leigh-Smith,<sup>23</sup> and Jane Morris. Moreover, Miss Hunt displays a considerable aptitude for augmenting, distorting, and sensationalizing the more dramatic events of the poet's life. She carefully recreates a conversation between Rossetti and his wife on the night of her death, although there were no witnesses to such a conversation. (pp. 302-304) She quotes the contents of a note supposedly pinned to Mrs. Rossetti's nightdress when she died--"My life is so miserable I wish for nor more of it"--a note which Ford Madox Brown apparently destroyed, and over which there has been much subsequent discussion.<sup>24</sup> (p. 305) She asserts that, on the night of his wife's death, Rossetti was visiting Fanny Cornforth,<sup>25</sup> (p. 304) and she closes her account of the death with the touching tale about one of Mrs. Rossetti's doves being buried with her. (p. 318) Gossipy and unreliable as it is, The Wife of Rossetti cannot be ignored by either biographers or critics since, as Helen Rossetti Angeli points out, "it is

the origin of so much that has subsequently been written about [Rossetti], from biographical excursions to drama, broadcast fantasies, and periodical comment and criticism. It may be said to have created a school, and Miss Winwar, author of The Rossettis and their Circle,<sup>26</sup> was taken to task in the columns of our leading literary weekly for daring to write about Rossetti without consulting this authority." (Angeli, p. 7)

David Larg's Trial by Virgins, Fragment of a Biography,<sup>27</sup> is similar in kind, though fortunately not in influence, to Miss Hunt's biography. It is interesting primarily as a typical example of semi-fictional biography in which fact is generously embellished, not only with speculation and gossip, but with outright fabrication. The author, assuming omniscience, wanders freely through the minds and drawing rooms of his characters, recording both their thoughts and intimate conversations. The result is neither a valid biography nor a successful work of fiction.<sup>28</sup> A brief excerpt from the book will illustrate both Larg's unflattering portrayal of the Rossettis and the liberties he has taken in portraying them. The occasion is a private quarrel between Rossetti and Miss Siddal.

She knew the selfish fools. This man  
with his large eyes was like all the others.  
After she had been still long enough he

would put his hand out and touch her, expecting her to melt. She had had enough of that too. Just let him.

He did. Exactly to time-table. At first explanatory and tender. Then blustering. Then sorry, watching her. At last his hand stretched out and she sprang to her feet. "Take your hands off me. Not sure, are you, whether we are engaged or not? Don't know, do you, what my mother will say? Well, listen to what I say. Get out. And keep out. Want to know if we're engaged? Lovely. Well, now you know. We are not. I say we are not. Go and marry your whore at Wapping and tell your mother she can keep her great genius of a son." (p. 241)

Once more, a member of the Rossetti family felt obliged to rise in defence of the maligned artist. Helen Madox Rossetti Angeli is overly partisan in her praise of Rossetti and in her criticism of his biographers. But, in Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Friends and Enemies, she does not attempt, as her father, William Michael, did, to "spread the fraternal shield" over Rossetti. In fact, Rossetti's private life, and especially his love affairs, are given a detailed examination. But Mrs. Angeli's work is significant, not only because in it she attacks the sensational biographies--which she does with vigour--but because she attempts to recreate an attractive image of Rossetti and to restore him to posterity as a human being. She is to be forgiven for occasionally descending into the realm of

gossip to prove it ill-founded, and for too enthusiastically whitewashing Rossetti and his life. That she manages to salvage his reputation at all is a credit to her ability in attacking the legend almost single-handed.

Oswald Doughty's A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti is undoubtedly the most thorough and comprehensive of the biographies published since Rossetti's death. The purpose of the biography is twofold:

It seemed worthwhile...in the hope of obtaining a more accurate portrait of Rossetti, and, what is perhaps more important, a clearer understanding of those obscure poems which compose The House of Life, to attempt a new biography based on a detailed, impartial examination of all available published and unpublished material, a close adherence to authenticated fact, and the avoidance of mere sensationalism....My method was to arrange all my material...in chronological order, including Rossetti's literary and pictorial works which could thus be seen in their correct biographical contexts and perspective. (p. 8)

Doughty's method of drawing close parallels between Rossetti's work and his life in order to illuminate both, makes the biography an invaluable aid to the biographical critic. However, A Victorian Romantic is less a critical biography than a psychological study and a vehicle for developing Doughty's thesis concerning the relationship

between Rossetti and Jane Morris. He cannot resist coming to two "inescapable conclusions,"

one suggesting that uncertainty as to whether Mrs. Rossetti's death was accidental or suicidal aggravated Rossetti's hereditary tendency to anxiety, the other, a passion for Mrs. Morris, which through its frustrations and complexities, together with the burden of debt, intensified his morbid tendency until it assumed at least some of the aspects of paranoia. (pp. 8-9)

In order to support such conclusions, Doughty frequently misinterprets Rossetti's poems by forcing close biographical parallels and by ignoring any interpretations which will not support his thesis. The controversy prompted by Doughty's biography, and the subsequent renewed interest in the Jane Morris affair, intensified by the knowledge that letters from Rossetti to Mrs. Morris will be opened by the British Museum in 1964, bear witness to the fact that the Rossetti legend is still growing.<sup>29</sup> Doughty's book, instead of settling disputes, seems rather to have intensified them.

What absurd heights the legend has attained can be illustrated by two fictional biographies of Rossetti published within the past eight years, A Victorian Love Story: A Study of the Victorian Romantics Based on the Life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti by Narina Shute, and Angel

with bright Hair by Paula Batchelor.<sup>30</sup> A brief quotation from the second and less distorted treatment will serve as a concluding commentary on the present trend in Rossetti studies. The scene once more concerns a lovers' quarrel between Mr. and Mrs. Rossetti.

She gasped as though crying, but there were no tears in her eyes. "There's enough cash for what you want to do--for theatres, circuses and parties and the 'dear boys,' and for the sluts you bring in off the streets! Oh yes, I hear about them, and I'm not the only one to think you all the more low and vile and despicable for it!... If only I could die...if only I had died the last time...." Then she turned suddenly and stared at him with such loathing that he moved uneasily. "How you'd love me if I were dead! The faster I rotted the better off you'd be!"

"Lizzie, for God's sake-----" (p. 168)

Truth, Candour, and Honesty, "the three Gods who keep watch and ward by the inkpot of biography,"<sup>31</sup> might well rise in defence of Violet Hunt, Hall Caine and Doughty, and against William Michael and other disciples of the trio, Purity, Modesty, and Chastity. It is more likely, however, that they would retire in baffled confusion. For the truth about Rossetti is difficult to tell, as the foregoing summary has indicated. And without the truth, without some concrete body of reliable fact, biographical criticism of Rossetti's poetry can be a

futile pursuit, fraught with dangers and pitfalls which the critic will find difficult to avoid. If he is fortunate, he may escape exposure to the works of Larg, Batchelor, and Shute--but he must be certain that such works have not had an influence on an otherwise reliable source of information. If he is wise, he may conduct a Doughty-like "impartial examination" of available material, without becoming involved in "inescapable conclusions." That the biographical approach, cautiously employed, can provide valuable insight into some of Rossetti's poetry is illustrated in the work done by Paull Franklin Baum on "The Portrait"<sup>32</sup> and "The Stream's Secret."<sup>33</sup>

Baum justifies his biographical approach to these poems with the observation that through these and other poems written between 1869 and 1871 "run five related but distinguishable themes: passionate love, the malignant woman, severance, the conflict of two loves, and thoughts of suicide and death," (P.B.S., xxviii) and that these themes correspond closely to events in Rossetti's life during this period. William Michael had denied any biographical significance in "The Portrait":

In printed notices of my brother's poems I have often seen the supposition advanced that this poem was written after the death of his wife, in relation to some portrait he had

painted of her during her lifetime. The supposition is very natural--yet not correct. The poem was in fact an extremely early one, and purely imaginary,--perhaps in the first draft of it, as early as 1847; it was afterwards considerably revised.<sup>34</sup>

But Baum points out that the portion "considerably revised"--nearly half the poem--constitutes "the basis of our impression of the autobiographic character of the poem."

The same acute sense of loss, the same half-mystical vision, so familiar elsewhere in Rossetti's poetry written in the decade after his wife's death, are unmistakable here. In the earlier poem the feeling of separation by death is simply conventional romanticism. What was an imaginary portrait has become an autobiographical fact.... (List, p. 28)

A similar fusion of imaginary and actual experience can be seen in "The Stream's Secret," in which the poet,

deeply and desperately in love with a woman who, he realizes, can never be his, communes with the Stream, fancifully believing that it knows the answer to his question and confessing all his aberrations, and implores it to tell him if he shall ever be united with his beloved; and the reply is, Only after death. (P.B.S. xxxii)

Baum feels that the loved one referred to in this poem is identical to the "Innominata" of The House of Life sonnets, although R.L. Mégroz had presented convincing

evidence to show that the woman in question was Rossetti's wife. (Mégroz, p. 192 et seq.) This contradiction of interpretations can exist, says Baum, because

"The Stream's Secret" is a work of the imagination, not a biographical document.... It is a record of conflicting loves, the two figures now blended into one, now set over against each other. There is perhaps no confusion in the poet's mind--it is a fusion (not quite complete, to be sure) for the purposes of art. (P.B.S. xxxv)

In interpreting Rossetti's poetry, then, the critic is faced with a "peculiar problem...Rossetti has fused an impersonally dramatic situation with an intensely personal emotion. In Rossetti's case we can apply the biographic test with some security; for other poets we are often left to surmise merely." (List, pp. 28-29) The failure to recognize this problem, to acknowledge that the poems are poetic creations, has led critics to excess in drawing biographical parallels between Rossetti's poetry and his life. Nowhere is this practice more clearly evident than in the body of criticism dealing with The House of Life.

Considering the keen interest expressed in Rossetti's life and personality by both his contemporaries and his biographers, it is not surprising that this sonnet sequence, dealing as it does with life, love, and death, should have been traditionally accepted as an autobiographical record.

Rossetti, himself, had asserted that "I hardly ever... produce a sonnet except on some basis of special momentary emotion,"<sup>35</sup> and William Michael gave tacit acceptance to a biographical interpretation of The House of Life by saying that it "embodies salient incidents and emotions in [Rossetti's] life...there are very few of the sonnets which are not strictly personal, and not one through which his individual feelings and views do not transpire."<sup>36</sup>

Elsewhere, however, Rossetti claimed that in The House of Life, "the 'Life' recorded is neither my life nor your life, but life purely and simply,"<sup>37</sup> affirming, as Baum later affirms, the truth that the poet may fuse personal experience with imaginative material to create an impersonal work of art.

To speak in the first person is often to speak most vividly....Whether the recorded moment exists in the region of fact or of thought is a question indifferent to the Muse, so long only as her touch can quicken it.<sup>38</sup>

Unfortunately, these claims of impersonality in The House of Life have been ignored or dismissed by Rossetti's critics.

## FOOTNOTES

1. William Holman, John Everett Millais, William Michael Rossetti, Thomas Woolner, James Collinson, and Frederick George Stephens.
2. Christina Rossetti, "In an Artist's Studio," line 1.
3. Hunt's envy of Rossetti's leadership, which he felt should have been his, manifested itself in his petulant criticism of Rossetti in Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1905-1906).
4. "Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Chapter from a Painter's Reminiscences," Magazine of Art, XXVII, n.s. II (1904), p. 281.
5. Quoted in Oswald Doughty, A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Muller, 1960), p. 423. See Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, A Player under Three Reigns (London: Unwin, 1925).
6. "D.G.R.," Bookman (London), XL (June 1911), 113.
7. Tudor House, 16 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, to which Rossetti moved in 1862, was itself a source of public interest and speculation especially after it acquired the wombats and other curious animals comprising Rossetti's private zoo.
8. Of particular interest are: Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters, with a Memoir, 2 vols. (London: Ellis, 1895); Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism. Papers 1854 to 1862. ed. W.M. Rossetti (London: Allen, 1899); Rossetti Papers (1862-1870), ed. W.M. Rossetti (London: Sands, 1903); Three Rossettis: Unpublished Letters to and from Dante Gabriel, Christina, William, ed. Janet Camp Troxell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1937); Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Letters to Fanny Cornforth, ed. Paull Franklin Baum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1940). The autobiographies and Memoirs include: William Allingham, A Diary, ed. Helen Allingham and D. Radford (London: Macmillan, 1907); G[eorgiana] B[urne]-J[ones], Memorials of Edward Burne-

-Jones, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1904); Thomas Gordon Hake, Memoirs of Eighty Years (London: Bentley, 1892); William Bell Scott, Autobiographical Notes... and Notices of His Artistic and Poetical Circle of Friends, 1830-1882, ed. W. Minto, 2 vols. (London: Osgood, 1892).

9. Letters to Fanny Cornforth, Intro. p. 23; Conclusion, p. 139. This volume contains the most thorough examination of this curious relationship.
10. See especially the attack made on his poetry by Robert Buchanan: Thomas Maitland [Robert Buchanan], "The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D.G. Rossetti," Contemporary Review, XVIII (October 1871), 334-350; expanded and re-published as The Fleshly School of Poetry and other Phenomena of the Day (London: Strahan, 1872); for discussion of controversy prompted by Buchanan's attack, see John A. Cassidy, "Robert Buchanan and the Fleshly Controversy," PMLA, LXVII (March 1952), 65-93.
11. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Painter Poet of Heaven in Earth (London: Faber, 1928), Appendix C.
12. "The Case of Dante Gabriel Rossetti," American Journal of Psychiatry, XCII (March 1936), 1111-1172; see also Richard D. Altick, [Dante Gabriel Rossetti] in "Post-Mortems," The Scholar Adventurer (New York: Macmillan, 1950); David I. Macht and Nellie L. Gissford, "The Unfortunate Drug Experience of Dante Gabriel Rossetti," Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine, VI (1938), 34-61; W.D. Paden, "La Pia de' Tolomei: of Dante Gabriel Rossetti," Register of the Museum of Art (University of Kansas), II, no. 1 (November 1958), 11-18, and notes 30, 31, 33, 37, 46.
13. He did, however, publish a few articles about Rossetti: with F.G. Stephens, "Mr. Dante Gabriel Rossetti," Athenaeum, No. 2842 (15 April 1882), 480-482; "The Truth about Rossetti," Nineteenth Century, XIII (March 1883), 404-423; "The Life of D.G. Rossetti," Spectator, LXXVI, no. 3539 (25 April 1896), 596-597, in which he says he has not abandoned his intention to write Rossetti's biography.
14. (London: Stock, 1882). Incorporated into My Story

- (New York: Appleton, 1908). Republished as Recollections of Rossetti (London: Cassell, 1928).
15. (London: Macmillan, 1882); (London: Scott, 1887). Of a similar type is Arthur C. Benson's Rossetti (English Men of Letters) (London: Macmillan, 1904).
  16. See Scott, II, 312.
  17. Family Letters, I, 201.
  18. Helen Rossetti Angeli, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Friends and Enemies (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), p. 72, identifies the woman as Annie Miller, a model whom Hunt at one time planned to marry. The conclusion finds support in comments made about Rossetti and Annie Miller by G.P. Boyce in his diary: Arthur E. Street, "George Price Boyce with Extracts from G.P. Boyce's Diaries, 1851-1875," The Old Water-Colour Society's Club. Nineteenth Annual Volume, ed. Randall Davies (London: O.W.C.S., 1941).
  19. Heuffer, p. 115. Val Prinsep, who never saw Rossetti after 1872, says in his "Painter's Reminiscences," "it is impossible that the humorous, witty, and captivating Rossetti I knew could ever become the sententious prig [his later friends] have depicted." p. 286.
  20. "The Poetry of D.G.R.," Bookman (London) XL (June 1911), 120.
  21. (London: Duckworth, 1928). In "Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Centenary Criticism," Fortnightly Review, n.s. CXXIII (May 1928), 595-604, Waugh observes, "At the present time, a hundred years after Rossetti's birth, his fame seems in real danger of extinction." (595). He adds, "it is easy to see what it was in Rossetti's life and personality which captivated the imaginations of his contemporaries. His value to us is a different matter. All his art, poetry as well as painting, is essentially human and personal, two qualities which modern criticism does not regard with sympathy." (604).
  22. (New York: Dutton, 1932), Intro., xxiii. For comments on the unreliability of these sources, see Angeli, p. 7.

23. Later, Madame Bodichon, whose country place, Scalands, Rossetti and Miss Siddal visited in 1856.
24. See letters of Mrs. Angeli, R. Sunne, and Violet Hunt in *Time and Tide*, XIII, no. 2 (July-December 1932), 1 October 1932, 2 October 1932, 22 October 1932, 5 November 1932; and letter from Clara Watts-Dunton, Angeli, p. 272. Legend also has it that Mrs. Rossetti was clutching a note asking that someone take care of her brother, Harry.
25. Miss Hunt later retracted the statement in a letter in *Time and Tide*, XIII, no. 2 (July-December 1932), 8 October 1932.
26. Poor Splendid Wings: The Rossettis and Their Circle (Boston: Little Brown, 1933). This volume together with William Gaunt's The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy (London: Cape, 1942), reissued as The Pre-Raphaelite Dream (London: Reprint Society, 1943); and Francis L. Bickley's The Pre-Raphaelite Comedy (London: Constable, 1932), all tend toward sensationalism and gossip in their treatment of the Pre-Raphaelites. Evelyn Waugh, in a eulogistic review of Miss Hunt's book, says, "There is not a page of Miss Hunt's book that does not contain some piece of information enormously significant to the student who has wandered bewildered among the official sources." "Rossetti's Wife," Spectator, CXLIX, no. 5441 (8 October 1932), 449.
27. (London: Davies, 1933).
28. For a more successful imaginative re-creation of an incident in Rossetti's life, see Sacheverell Sitwell's "Dumb Tones and Shuddering Semitones of Death," Dance of the Quick and the Dead (London: Faber, 1936), in which Sitwell describes the evening of Mrs. Rossetti's death.
29. For example, see the correspondence between Doughty and Sir Sidney Cocherell in Times Literary Supplement, no. 2575 (8 June 1951), 357; no. 2579 (6 July 1951), 421; no. 2585 (17 August 1951), 517; no. 2586 (24 August 1951), 533; no. 2588 (7 September 1951), 565. See also Paden; and the claim made by H.R. Williamson that Rossetti's secret love was really Alice Boyd: "The Lost Letter," Time and Tide, XL (14 March 1959), 305-307.

30. (London: Jarrolds, 1954); (London: Methuen, 1957).
31. Virginia Woolf, Orlando: A Biography (London: Hogarth Press, 1933), 123.
32. Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Analytical List of Manuscripts in the Duke University Library, with Hitherto Unpublished Verse and Prose, ed. Paull Franklin Baum (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 1931), pp. 28-30. Hereafter referred to as List.
33. Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Poems, Ballads and Sonnets, ed. Paull Franklin Baum (Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday Doran, 1937), Intro. xxxi-xxxvi. Hereafter referred to as P.B.S. K.L. Knickerbocker, in "Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel'," Studies in Philology, XXIX (July 1932), 485-504, also employs the biographical method to show that this poem, originally written when Rossetti was eighteen, gradually became coloured with biographical touches as Rossetti identified the Damozel with his dead wife. Knickerbocker traces this transformation through four basic versions of the poem, but his evidence is challenged and dismissed by Baum, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: "The Blessed Damozel," The Unpublished Manuscript, Texts and Collation (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), Intro. xviii-xxi, although Baum concedes that the argument is reasonable: "it is as certain as such a thing can be without documentary evidence, that in 1869 or 1870 Rossetti recognized the likeness between his imaginary lover of 1847 looking up towards the Blessed Damozel and himself thinking of Lizzie Siddal's 'soul-sequestered face far off'." (xx).
34. The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. William M. Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1886), I, 519.
35. Letter from Rossetti to Scott from Kelmscott, 25 August 1871; see Scott, II, 150.
36. The Siddal Edition [of the Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti] (London: Ellis, 1899-1901), Preface, p. 9.
37. From unpublished notebook IV of Rossetti's in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; quoted in The House of Life: A Sonnet-Sequence by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. Paull Franklin Baum (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), Intro., p. 47, n. 2.

38. From the Fitzwilliam "House of Life" (1881);  
quoted in Baum, House of Life, Intro., p. 47, n. 2.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE BIOGRAPHICAL IMPERATIVE

Much of the criticism of The House of Life is concerned with the dating of individual sonnets because, as F.M. Tisdell determined, "such a study ought both to throw light on the mystery of the poet's life and also to help clear up some of the obscurities of the sonnets."<sup>1</sup> Although William Michael, on several occasions, attempted to assign dates to the sonnets,<sup>2</sup> his efforts have not proved entirely acceptable to subsequent critics who doubt the accuracy of his memory or who suspect that he is once more spreading the fraternal shield. The problem of dating is further complicated by statements made by Rossetti himself, particularly those which appear in editions of his poems. In Poems (1870) he informed the reader:

Many poems in this volume were written between 1847 and 1853. Others are of a recent date, and a few belong to the intervening period. It has been thought

unnecessary to specify the earlier work, as nothing is included which the author believes to be immature.

Prefacing the 1881 version of The House of Life was the comment:

It will be evident that among those now first added are still the work of earlier years.

Oswald Doughty calls this latter comment misleading since most of the sonnets added in 1881 were written between 1870 and 1873, that is, during the time of his "regenerate rapture" when he was involved with Jane Morris. If Rossetti was, in fact, obfuscating dates in order to hide his private life from public view, his action has had just the opposite effect. In an effort to establish dates of composition, critics have been led from a study of the sonnets to a study of Rossetti's life and back to a more or less biographical interpretation of the entire sequence. The trend toward biographical inreading of The House of Life is thus based on both biographical assumptions and conclusions. F.M. Tisdell, for example, assumes that those sonnets of a sensual nature must have been inspired by Elizabeth Siddal, and he dates these between 1851 and 1862. Ruth Wallerstein groups the sonnets around events in

Rossetti's life, his marriage, his tenancy at Kelmscott, and dates the sonnets accordingly.<sup>3</sup> The critics seem to agree that most of the sonnets in The House of Life were written during two general periods: 1848 to 1855, and 1868 to 1873. The biographical significance of these two periods cannot be overlooked, since the first parallels the time of Rossetti's affair with Elizabeth Siddal, and the second his affair with Jane Morris.

In fact, it is useless to deny that the life of Rossetti hovers in the background or foreground of many sonnets in The House of Life. They are intended to be moments' monuments, and occasionally the moment immortalized too precisely coincides with a biographical fact. Yet such precise coincidences are not frequent. Of the thirteen or fourteen sonnets written between 1848 and 1855,<sup>4</sup> for example, a few seem to depict Rossetti wrestling with the problems of his artistic career which he feels has been thwarted by fate or his own indecision. Some of the ideas expressed in the group, "Old and New Art" (LXXIV-LXXVI) echo those propounded by the P.R.B. in The Germ. "Lost on Both Sides" (XCI), as William Michael suggests,<sup>5</sup> may be a discussion as to whether poetry or painting will provide Rossetti's career. But this poem, like "The Choice" (LXXI-LXXIII), may be less a personal debate than a literary

exercise. Only three of the sonnets written in this period could even remotely be applied to Miss Siddal.

"The Birth-Bond" (XV) expresses a Platonic, or even Buddhist, conception of love; the other two, "Broken Music" (XLVII) and "A Dark Day" (LXVIII), may be taken as general statements, unless one agrees with Doughty that the first concerns Rossetti's despair that Miss Siddal will not succumb to his advances without marriage, (Doughty, pp. 130-131) or that the second is a debate as to whether or not he should marry her. (p. 154)

A few of the sonnets written between 1868 and 1873 pose interpretive problems which can be solved only with the aid of biographical facts. In "Life in Love" (XXXVI) and "The Love-Moon" (XXXVII), it is specifically stated that a new love has entered The House of Life, a revelation for which the reader has not been previously prepared, but which becomes clarified by a knowledge that Rossetti's life was marked by two important love affairs. Thus, the "dead face, bowered in the furthest years," [XXXVII, l. 1] and the "poor tress of hair" [XXXVI, l. 9] seem unmistakable allusions to Rossetti's dead wife, and the lady addressed in the sonnets can be identified as Jane Morris. "Pride of Youth" (XXIV) and "The Moonstar" (XXIX) suggest less concretely the existence of two loves, but can be

interpreted more generally. "Sleepless Dreams" (XXXIX) concerns the insomnia which plagued Rossetti during this time; "Through Death to Love" (XLI) may contain references to his contemplated suicide, and "The Sun's Shame" [1] (XCII) contains a number of general parallels to Rossetti's life.

Only a handful of sonnets, then, from The House of Life invite or demand biographical interpretation to clarify their meaning. Yet the majority of critics choose to discuss the entire sequence as an autobiographical record. The desire to impose the poet's private life upon the poems is, of course, tempting, and it is not difficult to see why a critic, striving to reach daylight through what are frequently dark and obscure sonnets, will rely on a method which seems both reasonable and facile. The fact that many of the sonnets are love poems of an intimate nature would seem to support an essentially biographical approach to their analysis. Even Rossetti's denials of personality in the sequence give support to a biographical approach since, as Doughty says, Rossetti "unintentionally arouses suspicions that [the sonnets] do in fact contain the biographic significance he half denies and obviously wishes to hide." (p. 379) Typical of this trend to biographical criticism is Oswald Doughty's analysis of The House of Life in his critical

biography, A Victorian Romantic.

Doughty's aim is not an interpretation of the sonnet sequence but a portrayal of Rossetti's life, and much of the evidence to support this portrayal, especially as concerns Rossetti's affair with Jane Morris, comes from a biographical inreading of The House of Life which Doughty considers to be a reliable source of biographical data.

Indeed the life which energizes these sonnets is not life "representative," but life essentially individual, individualistic and of a particular period, despite the largely generalized form of expression created by the omission of definite personal and local elements. Like so much of Rossetti's art, both poetic and pictorial, this sonnet-sequence is essentially... "autopsychology." From this arise both the biographical significance and general obscurity of The House of Life which for the most part expresses thoughts and feelings aroused and conditioned in Rossetti by personal experiences of which the reader is left wholly or partly ignorant. Hence it follows that The House of Life and Rossetti's biography are interdependent, each in some degree illuminating the other. (pp. 383-384)

Frequently, Doughty provides a fresh, illuminating analysis of sonnets which have perplexed other critics. For example, a considerable number of the sonnets are characterized by underlying emotions of remorse, guilt, fear, and general depression. Most critics have concluded that these feelings have been prompted by the tragic death of Rossetti's wife

and by disillusionment with himself following Robert Buchanan's fierce attack on him and his poetry in 1871. Dismissing these explanations, Doughty suggests that the despondency and remorse arose from the vicissitudes in Rossetti's secret and illicit relationship with Jane Morris. Of "Love's Fatality" (LIV), for example, Doughty asks, "'Love's Fatality' !--was not that, rather than a belated repetition of a contemptible literary criticism, the basic cause of Rossetti's breakdown, and the explanation of his first spontaneous cry upon recovery?" (p. 541) Doughty's explanation is especially illuminating since, in many instances, these poetic moods seem ill-founded or exaggerated if considered only within the confines of the sequence. In general, Doughty's re-creation of the Rossetti-Jane Morris affair throws considerable light on those sonnets written between 1868 and 1873, particularly those composed while Rossetti was staying at Kelmscott in the summer of 1871. The allusions to a new love, the immediacy of the love poems, the suggestions that the separation mourned is temporary rather than permanent--all such problems which have faced critics who wish to see Elizabeth Siddal as the inspiration for these sonnets, are resolved satisfactorily by Doughty's interpretation.

Unfortunately, in using the sonnets to establish

biographical fact, Doughty ignores the obvious fact that individual trees collectively make a wood. His attempt to link each sonnet of the sequence with a moment in Rossetti's life may, as he asserts, clarify both, but the dismembering of the sequence which such a method demands will contribute little to an understanding of The House of Life as a unified work of art. Moreover, Doughty's preoccupation with biography often results in narrow, superficial, and insupportable interpretations of individual poems. His curious readings of "Broken Music" (XLVII) and "A Dark Day" have already been noted. In discovering in "The Dark Glass" (XXXIV) an ominous note of impending calamity, a foreshadowing of separation from "Janey," (p. 537) he overlooks the broader significance of the poem's message. Similarly, in "Heart's Haven" (XXII), which celebrates Love's power to turn away "all shafts of shelterless tumultuous day," [1.11] Doughty sees only a depiction of "bitter-sweet emotions of secret love-trysts with a tearful and apparently conscience-stricken woman." (p. 533) The narrowness of Doughty's approach can be most clearly seen in his interpretation of the early poem, "The Landmark" (LXVII), which, in its reference to taking a wrong turn, Baum terms almost too general to be autobiographical.<sup>6</sup> Doughty claims it has to do with

Rossetti's failure to see in Elizabeth Siddal the ideal love he had envisioned. "Gabriel recognizes a tardy but sincere love for some humble person whose affection he has abused and betrayed in his expectation of a sincere passion for some more exalted lover who will appear in due time." (p. 153) Doughty's contribution to the criticism of The House of Life is thus both positive and negative; for other critics he provides a valuable example of the biographical approach cleverly but sometimes recklessly employed.

In The Romantic Imagination, C.M. Bowra makes an observation which points toward a successful interpretation of The House of Life:

Although [the sonnets] are based on actual experience, and it may in some cases be possible to trace them to their source, there is no need to do this, and it is almost an irrelevant task, since Rossetti transmutes particular occasions into moments of universal interest and is concerned only with their lasting and essential appeal.<sup>7</sup>

p. 203.

Ruth Wallerstein recommends, but places restrictions on, a biographical approach to The House of Life, observing that,

although a sonnet takes its inceptions from some specific and personal experience, the

poet generalizes and allegorizes it in such a way as to imply the personal and still give us no clew to it. The experience is vividly present to his own imagination so that the sonnet is a commentary upon it; yet the actual object is either not present or only vaguely adumbrated. ("Personal Experience," p. 492)

Paull Franklin Baum also cautions against a misuse of the biographical method, and in his edition of The House of Life he attempts to strike a bio-critical balance in his analysis of individual poems.

In criticism there is, to be sure, no biographical imperative. But with Rossetti's "House of Life" there are some grounds for pursuing biography....If we knew Rossetti's life in sufficient detail, we might hope to find and cite chapter and verse for each of these moments; though it is doubtful if this would be desirable. But in the paucity of our knowledge this search is vain, and perhaps under even ideal conditions would be fruitless. The artist is never the mere autobiographer; many of his finest moments are the product of his "projecting" imagination, and leave the quotidian events of life irrevocably behind. (H.L., p. 6)

In his analysis, Baum singles out those poems which he feels demand biographical illumination, but cautiously avoids courting "the inevitable blunder of a thoroughgoing biographical annotation of the sonnets," (H.L., p. 49) or embroiling himself in Rossetti's life even to the extent of naming the new love whom he refers to only as the

"Innominata." Baum, writing in 1928, was one of the first critics to consider the problem of this other love in The House of Life and to trace her presence through the sequence.<sup>8</sup> Of "Heart's Compass" (XXVII), for example, he says,

"Night's ambiguous art" with its "gathering clouds" looks like a reference to the sinister effects of Rossetti's insomnia and consequent illness; but it may be only an elaborate phrase for the harshness of life. Certainly, the gathering clouds of Rossetti's life postdate 1862 [the year of his wife's death], and this love that rends them--idealized as it is--must be more than a memory of his first love. (H.L., p. 104)

He recognizes, in "Life in Love" (XXXVI) and "The Love-Moon" (XXXVII), the unmistakable presence of the "Innominata", and sees the situation in "Severed Selves" (XL) as "that of Rossetti in the early years of his desperate, tragically denied love for the Innominata. Thus the poem, simple and moving as it stands, may receive an added poignancy of personal history." (H.L., p. 122)

In The House of Life, as in "The Stream's Secret," Baum recognizes a possible fusion of two loves "not with the view of concealment but for the sake of artistic blending." (H.L., p. 144) This fusion is most clearly seen in "Without Her" (LIII) and "Hope Overtaken" (XLII) which allow ambiguous biographical readings because they "stand

for two different meanings, one literal or original, the other deriving from [their] position in the sequence."

(H.L., p. 126) Baum's conclusion that The House of Life consists of personal experience modified and reshaped leads him to an essentially balanced criticism of the work and a reasonable explication of individual sonnets.

It is with the knowledge that Rossetti's sonnets are not merely personal but universal moments that The House of Life must be examined. As Rossetti cautioned, the sequence records "life purely and simply." No matter how personal a poet Rossetti appears to be, how introspective, narcissistic and egotistical his approach to life, he was first of all an artist concerned with the creation of good poetry. His poetry may have been inspired by events in his life, but little of it was dashed off in the heat of passion. Even a cursory examination of his work, his notebooks, and his letters will indicate that most of his poems owe more to "fundamental brainwork" than inspirational frenzy, and that many were reworked and altered over a period of years. It seems reasonable to assume that Rossetti attempted to make his life a record of a poetic "philosophy." In fact there is considerable evidence to suggest that this was precisely his approach to both life and the composition of poetry. Rossetti's attitude toward love and his depiction

of it in The House of Life will illustrate this point. It is incorrect to assert, as A.C. Benson<sup>9</sup> and others have, that The House of Life is really a House of Love, yet love is undoubtedly the dominating theme of much of the sequence and the foundation for a major portion of the "House." Any complete discussion of The House of Life must include an examination of Rossetti's love ideals; it is not sufficient to merely chronicle his love life. As Baum cautions,

the love is, from the strictly biographical point of view, not that of the poet for one single woman, while from the artistic point of view it is love simply, without distinction of one or more persons, except in those few sonnets which concern the conflict between his love for his wife and that for another. (H.L., pp. 45-46)

A number of critics have dealt with the platonic quality of Rossetti's ideas on love, and particularly with his debt to Dante and the early Italian poets for his concept of ideal or spiritual love. F.W. Myers, in his essay "Rossetti and the Religion of Beauty," suggests that Rossetti's platonism was basically a reaction against the scientific age in which he lived.

The instincts which make other men Catholics, Ritualists, and Hegelians, have compelled him, too, to seek "the meaning of all things that are" elsewhere than in the behavior of ether and atoms, though we can track his revelation to no source more explicit than the look in a woman's eyes.<sup>10</sup>

Thus love, and the contemplation and worship of beauty, "wakes [Rossetti's] soul to enchanting visions and stirring enterprises." (Bowra, p. 211) Rossetti, like Dante, makes love a principle of life and goodness, a means by which to take the mystical step from adoration of the physical to adoration of the spiritual. But, as Myers warns, "the parallel between Rossetti and Dante must not be pushed too far. Rossetti is but as Dante still in the selva oscura; he has not sounded hell so profoundly, nor mounted into heaven so high." (p. 351) As C.M. Bowra observes, "while Dante sees in love a divine power which brings man nearer to God, Rossetti is content that it should bring him nearer to beauty." (pp. 210-211) In aspiring toward the state of ideal love, Rossetti never quite releases his grasp on physical love. Instead--and herein lies the basis of his confusion and disillusionment--he attempts to fuse the physical and the spiritual. His poetry celebrates, as Baum says, "at first an ecstatic mingling of body and soul, then a confusion of them." (H.L., p. 27)

This attempt at fusion, only partly successful both in his poetry and his life, distinguishes him as a platonist and as a poet. Such modified platonism can be seen even in the earliest versions of "The Blessed Damozel," in which the maiden, although conceived as a spiritual being, is

described in human terms even to her bosom which makes "the bar she leaned on warm."

"The Blessed Damozel" also provides proof that Rossetti had developed a love ideal before he had loved in fact, a perplexing paradox to those critics who would nonetheless suggest that the damozel was Elizabeth Siddal. Again, it seems more accurate to say that the damozel inspired Elizabeth Siddal, that the ideal coloured the real, rather than the reverse. That Rossetti attempted to make his love affairs accord with a preconceived quasi-platonic idea can be clearly seen in his attempts to create a medieval, fleshless madonna of Elizabeth Siddal, who became instead a mental and emotional wreck, or of Jane Morris who, as Graham Robertson says, seemed less than comfortable in her role.

She was a Ladye in a Bower, an ensorcelled Princess, a Blessed Damozel, while I feel sure she would have preferred to be a "bright, chatty little woman" in request for small theatre parties and afternoons up the river.<sup>11</sup>

The disillusionment and despair which colour so much of Rossetti's poetry and which plagued him in his life can be only partly explained as the effects of one particular love affair. Any attempt to create reality from an ideal is destined, if not to fail, at least to produce only

partly satisfactory results. When the process concerns love and women, and when the man in question sees love as a major force in his life, the results can be disastrous. To see a woman as a madonna, chaste and unapproachable, and yet to desire her; to plead that spiritual and physical love are irrevocably united, and yet to feel desire wane as the love is embalmed in a loveless marriage; to re-create the dream in another love, and to see it also fall short of perfection, confined and degraded by both a moralistic society and a personal guilt which never hindered the medieval lover--such are the paradoxes which characterized Rossetti's life. His attempts to resolve these paradoxes created by his idealism--on the one hand, tenaciously to maintain a fusion between ideal and real; on the other, to separate the disparate parts, the body's beauty from the soul's beauty--proved unsuccessful in his life. In his poetry, the paradoxes though equally strong seemed less ominous; here Rossetti could to some extent create his own world, rejecting reality where it seemed to contradict his ideals. Even in this special world of poetry, however, life was imperfect, though more satisfactory than reality.

The House of Life, then, might well have been built, not haphazardly from frozen moments in a life, but carefully from a preconceived if imperfect plan. The life itself,

the moments of love and despair, were fitted in to form, if not an architectural whole, at least a structure with some semblance of unity. Or to put it more plainly, The House of Life is not a biographical but an imaginative record. One cannot approach each sonnet or the whole as autobiography because Rossetti used events in his life only to illustrate a set of poetic ideas. He did not hesitate to prune and distort the life to make it fit the ideas. A comparison of the Kelmscott sonnets with their altered versions in the 1881 House of Life provides an example of just such pruning and distorting. John Robert Wahl considers especially significant the change made in the title and text of some of the sonnets to include the word "youth," and the lines altered to include the word "gold" in descriptions of the loved one's hair.<sup>12</sup> These changes, concludes Wahl, indicate a desire to make the reader think that the subject is Elizabeth Siddal and that the sonnets were written much earlier than 1871. The conclusion is reasonable but not necessarily final. It seems equally reasonable to assert that Rossetti made these changes to add unity to the love sonnets in general. In the octave of "Love Enthroned" (I), itself a Kelmscott sonnet and the one finally chosen to introduce the sequence, the poet lists those things prized in life, although prized less

than love itself. Among these, he records,

...Youth, with still some single golden hair  
Unto his shoulder clinging, since the last  
Embrace wherein two sweet arms held him fast....

[11. 5-7]

Youth and the immediate experience of love are but a phase in the larger structure of life, a phase which will be recorded in the subsequent sequence. The loved one, though she changes in real life, and though as Miss Siddal she is blond, as Mrs. Morris brunette, maintains in the sequence golden hair, for here she is merely the representative love or the symbol of the experience of love. It matters little that the poems concerning her were written to Mrs. Morris at Kelmscott or to Miss Siddal in London: in the sequence, they are inspired by only one--the loved one--and any disturbing contradictions in description will be resolved.

To presume that an underlying set of ideals or ideas both unifies and depersonalizes The House of Life is to presume that the sonnet sequence follows some pattern in depicting a view of life and love. On this particular point there exists considerable disagreement among the critics. A few state that The House of Life has no underlying pattern, but their statements are frequently self-

-contradictory and confusing. W. Basil Worsfold, for example, concludes that The House of Life is a "mere sonnet-sequence--a series of individually perfect but entirely independent pieces."<sup>13</sup> A.C. Benson observes that the work "is in effect a sort of commentary on life as Rossetti conceived it, and there is a certain evolution of experience thought-out." But he adds that it "is not constructed on a definite plan: the mss., which I have carefully studied, bear witness to the perpetual alterations and rearrangements which took place before the eventual publication, and reveal how hard a task it was for Rossetti to satisfy himself." (Rossetti, p. 130) Most frequently, the critics conclude that, although Rossetti seemed to have a general plan in mind, the end product is imperfect and fragmentary. Oliver Elton says, for example, that

a kind of plan may be traced in [the sequence], or rather a procession of the three figures Love, Death, and Hope. Love at first triumphs, so that Hope is at first needless. Later, Hope is clouded with fear and foretaste of Death, who at last seizes the beloved. This series, though, is interrupted by many digressions.<sup>14</sup>

Mary Suddard contends that the 1870 version displays some semblance of a framework; "its outlines are already drawn albeit with an unsteady hand....The poem is vaguely divided two parts, the one devoted to the story which properly speaking forms its subject, the second to the speculations to which

it gives rise in the poet's soul." By 1881, "the fragments have fallen into line in a series; the poem, as to construction, forms a complete whole," but, adds Miss Suddard, this version shows a greater unevenness in style and thematic unity.<sup>15</sup>

R.L. Mégroz, who sees The House of Life as a kind of projection of the poet's inner life, observes,

for complete fulfillment he needed to combine in one work sensuous feeling, spiritual passion, and intellectual contemplation. He does it fitfully in The House of Life, but he needed a different framework, more like the Shakespearean drama, perhaps, than Dante's in the Divine Comedy....In The House of Life he made his greatest effort to reconcile conflicting elements in himself, and he nearly succeeded in doing the impossible, and making a single poem out of 102 sonnets."<sup>16</sup>

C.M. Bowra feels that The House of Life is not, "strictly speaking" a sonnet sequence; it differs from Elizabethan series "in which a kind of story, whether real or fictitious, is presented," and from Victorian sequences which recorded crises in the poet's life. (p. 202)

Rossetti's sonnets reflect not a crisis but a lifetime, and through them he tells what his most enthralling discoveries have been....The House of Life is a unity because it reflects a consistent and closely knit personality and shows its progress along a clearly marked path. It needs no story to hold it together, and, because it has no story, it is all the more impressive as a personal record. (p. 203)

This critical disagreement is understandable in view of the complexity and obscurity of individual sonnets, as well as the absence of any concrete statements from Rossetti concerning the structure of the whole. As Swinburne observed in Essays and Studies, The House of Life "has so many mansions, so many halls of state and bowers of music, chapels for worship and chambers for festival that no guest can declare on a first entrance the secret of its scheme."<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the problem of discovering a plan to The House of Life has been hindered rather than helped by the biographical approach. Preoccupation with dates of composition of sonnets, with the subjects of the love sonnets, or with biographical allusions in general will necessarily impede any attempt to see The House of Life as an organized whole, since the sequence of sonnets in no way follows either the sequence of composition or of events in Rossetti's life. If any conscious plan for The House of Life is to be discovered, it will be done not by approaching the sequence as a biographical document, but by tracing the growth of The House of Life from its earliest embryonic stages to its final form in 1881.

The sixteen sonnets published in the Fortnightly Review in 1869<sup>18</sup> indicate that even at this time Rossetti had some notion of grouping the sonnets he had written

over a fifteen year period. That they are gathered together under a general title, "Of Life, Love and Death," and that the Willowwood sonnets which head the series seem to have been composed specifically for this occasion suggest that this is more than a random selection. An examination of the individual sonnets will show that a certain thematic structure is intended. Douglas J. Robillard suggests not only that the Fortnightly Review selection is a germinal version of The House of Life but that the Willowwood sonnets which dominate the group also form the thematic core of the final sequence, acting "as a pivot on which the whole structure turns." These sixteen sonnets, says Robillard, comprise "a sequence expressing grief and, more especially, remorse and guilt at the poet's waste of the opportunities offered him by Life and Love." But this version is "too truncated, too concerned with one emotion" to be considered a complete sequence. "Instead of developing slowly, with proper forebodings, to the death of the beloved, this version thrusts us dramatically into the situation."<sup>19</sup>

It is surprising that these sonnets "Of Life, Love and Death" have not been examined biographically since they comprise what is probably an accurate record of Rossetti's mental and emotional state in 1869. Curiously enough,

it is partly through a biographical inreading that the development of this series into the 1870 version will be most clearly seen. The key sonnet of the Willowwood group, which Robillard correctly considers the thematic center of the series, is the third, Love's song: "All ye who suffer from unsatisfied Love, how long is the night ere ye shall again behold the day? Alas that your souls may not die, rather than wander in Willowwood." (H.L., p. 141) Although biographical critics may attempt to discover the object of this unsatisfied love, it seems reasonable to conclude that Love in general is referred to. Biography will bear out this conclusion. By 1869, Rossetti's love life had reached both its nadir and turning point. His love for Elizabeth Siddal had become little more than a memory. Intermittent affairs with other women and the comfortable liaison with Fanny Cornforth did little to sustain his platonic ideals of perfect and everlasting love. The impending affair with Jane Morris was in its embryonic stages or still to come, providing Rossetti could rid himself of indecision and fear about the consequences of such an association. At this moment, the past seemed a long record of pointless enterprises and futile dreams; the future loomed unpredictable and, perhaps, without hope. Without a vision of love to sustain him, or an object for this love,

Rossetti's confidence and sense of purpose deserted him. Robillard suggests that the Fortnightly Review sonnets record a turning point, and sees an analogy with Section 95 of In Memoriam. "And if the analogy holds, Rossetti's poem, like Tennyson's should take a turning after this scene and begin to suggest ways out of the poet's dilemma." (Rob., p. 6) However, to see these sixteen sonnets as an artistically ordered biographical or emotional record is not to suggest that the expanded 1870 and 1881 versions offer similar analogies. Significantly, of these sixteen sonnets, only the Willowwood group and three others dealing specifically with love were placed in Part One of the 1881 House of Life; those relegated to Part Two are, like the others in this section, more general and retrospective in their themes. Even by 1870, the order of the Fortnightly Review sonnets had been quite radically altered. A comparison of these sonnets with either later version will indicate that Rossetti gradually expanded his personal life into the general life which the final House of Life depicts.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from a comparison of the Kelmscott sonnets with the 1881 House of Life. Again, an artistically arranged personal record was rearranged and distorted, to be incorporated into the general life depicted

in 1881. Several factors suggest that the Kelmscott sonnets have been arranged in a sequence. The album containing the sonnets is obviously a fair copy, not a notebook containing a random collection.<sup>20</sup> It seems more than mere coincidence that the first sonnet of the group, "Heart's Hope" (V) was apparently considered for the first position in The House of Life, (H.L., p. 72) and that the second, "Love Enthroned" actually headed the final version. A comparison of these two sonnets indicates not only the theme and plan of the Kelmscott group but the enlarged scope of the 1881 House of Life, that is, the subordination of a specific love to life and love in general. "Heart's Hope" has as its subject a particular love whom the poet praises, a love whom he would make the sum and substance of all loves. This particular love is the subject of the Kelmscott sonnets. "Love Enthroned" deals rather with love in general, love removed from a specific object whose throne is far above life's other goals and prizes. This love is one of the subjects and unifying factors of the final House of Life.

The knowledge that the Kelmscott sonnets were written during the time when Rossetti was involved with Jane Morris helps to substantiate the claim that they are a personal record of a specific love. In fact, they follow quite

logically upon the earlier personal record, the Fortnightly Review sonnets. The last poem of that group, "Newborn Death" (XCIX and C) consider death as the possible solution to the poet's dilemma. The third Kelmscott sonnet, after the announcement of the theme in the first two, again deals with death; here the poet claims that love has rescued him from death. It is followed by "Love's Fatality" (LIV) in which Love, free and happy in itself, is compared with Loving Desire which yields only misery and bondage. This is followed by "Hope Overtaken" (XLII) celebrating the regeneration of hope; then three praising the loved one's beauty (XXXI, XVIII, XVII); "Between Kisses" ("Mid Rapture," XXVI) which, as Baum says, not only records a moment of love, but marks the midpoint of the affair; (H.L., p. 102) then "The Dark Glass" (XXXIV) which, in claiming that love aids the poet in penetrating the unknowable, shows Rossetti moving in a platonic fashion from the contemplation of specific love and beauty to the ideal forms. The next three sonnets (XXVII, XXVIII, XXXII) are similarly platonic in theme. The next, "Heart's Haven" (XXII), which tells how the lovers protect each other from the sorrows of life, is followed by "Without Her" (LII), a cry of loss for the beloved. The next eight sonnets record moments of love, some with a carpe diem motif, some coloured with doubts and

fears for the future; they constitute a kind of narrative of the love affair. The series ends with sonnet (XL), in mid-air if much is made of the original title, "Between Meetings," or quite appropriately if, as the later title, "Severed Selves" more clearly suggests, the affair is ended. All the Kelmscott sonnets subsequently appeared in Part One of the 1881 House of Life, that is, in the section devoted to love, but Rossetti obliterated the narrative pattern of this series by considerable rearrangement.

The Fortnightly Review sonnets and the Kelmscott sonnets are useful, then, in indicating that Rossetti used his own life, as recorded in these two series, to create The House of Life, and more important, that he transformed the life as evidenced by the incorporation of the two series into the final version, not as units, but piecemeal and only after considerable rearrangement. However, if these two groups and their incorporation into The House of Life suggest that Rossetti had a scheme in mind, the scheme itself is still not clearly discernible. The key to the arrangement of sonnets must be sought in an examination of the 1870 version and particularly of the final 1881 House of Life itself.

Robillard, who considers the Fortnightly Review sonnets a germinal version of The House of Life, feels that by 1870 the poem "has now evolved into a cycle, much more

varied and complicated than the 1869 sequence." (Rob., p. 6) He uses the term "cycle" since he sees the work as consisting of a number of thematic units grouped around the Willowwood sonnets which now hold a central position.<sup>21</sup>

(24-27) The structure of the whole is tightened by the use of imagery dealing with life, love, death, and birth, and by the balancing of sonnets on either side of the Willowwood group. Thus "A Day of Love" (12) is balanced by "A Dark Day" (32), "The Birth-Bond" (11) by "Newborn Death" (48), (49), and "Broken Music" (22) by "Death's Songsters" (41). Further, "love, life and death conjoin in Willowwood as if the center of the poem is also its central point of gravity." The 1881 House of Life, according to Robillard, is an expansion of the 1870 version with certain gaps being filled to expand the theme or to provide mechanical balance. Part One is lengthened to include the new love sonnets inspired by the second love affair, Part Two seems a kind of "grabbag stuffed with whatever Rossetti had in the way of leftovers." (Rob., pp. 7, 8)

A number of critics share Robillard's view that, although the 1881 House of Life is essentially an expansion of the 1870 structure, it is less unified as a sequence. Baum sees the 1881 version as a compromise. Rossetti's note to the 1870 poem stated that "the first twenty-eight

sonnets and the seven first songs treat of love. These and others would belong to separate sections of the projected work." "Apparently," says Baum, "there was to be a section devoted to love, and others to other topics." (H.L., p. 36) The final version of The House of Life, he concludes, is a series rather than a closely-knit sequence; it is the result of no "distinct or emphatic principle of grouping." (H.L., p. 37) However, Baum's summary of The House of Life does suggest a pattern, albeit general. Part One "is chiefly devoted to Love...but contains one other motif, the poet's insomnia and remorse, in 'Sleepless Dreams' (XXXIX), to be echoed again in LXII; yet this sonnet is closely linked in tone with the preceding (love-) sonnet, and the two together form a kind of introduction to the Despair-Hope-Love motif of the succeeding stanzas." Part Two is more varied, "a loose group illustrating the Many-sidedness of Life." (H.L., p. 39) Continuity from Part One is provided by the themes of Change and Fate. "The Change had already urged itself into the story of Part I; now it expands ominously into Fate." (H.L., p. 41) Baum sees in the poem "a kind of unity of time of composition, and certainly a unity of tone," but adds that "it has little unity of a formal kind; on the contrary, its unity is the unity of Rossetti's life." (H.L., p. 44) The poem is fused together

by the repetition of certain leit motifs, "the passion of love, both human and mystical; indulgence and adoration; premonition of separation and of death; love won but frustrate; sleepless despair over a life mislived, hopes unfulfilled; effort unrewarded or unexerted; selfdoubt and achievement; longing for death; questionings of the future life; the one faint hope." (H.L., p. 46) The House of Life, Baum concludes, is "the record of a series of 'crises' "; it is "incomplete as any other single representation of life is incomplete." (H.L., p. 35)

According to Rossetti, the 1870 version of the sequence is an unfinished work, a group of sonnets and songs "Towards a Work to be called The House of Life." It is, then, merely a germinal version of the final 1881 sequence. Curiously enough, if the 1870 sequence is divided into two equal parts, it begins to resemble the two groups of sonnets just discussed. If the sequence is broken at the first Willowwood sonnet (24), what emerges are two sets of sonnets, the first resembling the Kelmscott group in thematic design, although, of course, it includes no Kelmscott sonnets; the second, still beginning with the Willowwood sonnets, resembles the Fortnightly Review group in theme but is expanded to include other sonnets of a similar nature. The first set creates a fairly unified narrative: "Bridal

Birth" (1) deals with the birth of love, "Love's Redemption" (2) with the power of Love to redeem the soul from Hell, "Lovesight" (3) with the worship of love through the loved one, and premonitions of the future. The next four sonnets, celebrating physical love, are followed by several, frequently platonic in tone, sometimes coloured with fear, in which the progress of love is commemorated. The sonnets after "Life-in-Love" (16) become more grief-stricken in tone; separation is indicated in "Parted Love" (21) and "Broken Music" (22), and the desire for death mentioned in "Death-in-Love" (23). This poem provides the link with the next group, the theme of which, like that of the Fortnightly Review group, concerns despair over a wasted life leading ultimately to a desire for death. Unlike the Fortnightly sonnets, this group ends on a more or less hopeful note with "The One Hope" (50). The parallels between the 1870 version and the two groups of sonnets are general, but their themes are too analogous to be dismissed as merely coincidental. That the first twenty-three sonnets of the 1870 sequence closely resemble the Kelmscott group seems strange, but again biography serves to indicate how Rossetti has adapted his life to fit an artistic scheme. Most of the twenty-three sonnets were written between 1868 and 1870; many of the Fortnightly Review

sonnets were written between 1868 and 1869; and, of course, the Kelmscott group were composed in the summer of 1871. This four-year period, however poetically productive, was perhaps the most emotionally chaotic in Rossetti's life. The depression, illness, and desire for death which marked his life in 1868 and which were recorded in the Fortnightly Review sonnets, were only fitfully allayed by the "regenerate rapture" of his new love, itself a frustrating and erratic affair. The ensuing years brought moments of love and ecstasy such as were recorded in individual sonnets of the 1870 sequence and in the Kelmscott group, but they were punctuated by period of separation in which Rossetti could revert to despair and depression now intensified by the vicissitudes of a clandestine affair. Yet, in the 1870 poem, to some extent in the Kelmscott group, and most obviously in the 1881 House of Life, Rossetti attempted to order the chaos of reality by grouping into thematic patterns sonnets written at various times. The erratic heights and depths of his life became transposed into a more gradual, though no less irrevocable journey from love to despair, or from love, through change, to fate. The first twenty-three sonnets of the 1870 poem resemble the Kelmscott sonnets primarily since both have been arranged to accord with a preconceived artistic idea,

although, as suggested earlier, the Kelmscott sonnets possess a greater immediacy and are biographically more specific. Significantly, in the 1870 poem and all later versions, the love poems precede the despair poems, an arrangement which is almost the reverse of biographical fact.

Thus, the ultimate pattern of *The House of Life* is clearly visible in the 1870 version, but it is not the pattern of events in Rossetti's life. Moreover, as Robillard points out, the pattern in 1870 is skeletal, the transition from phase to phase in the sequence frequently abrupt. The poet begins with love in general and its function in his life; then he considers one specific love and its value in elevating his soul and making his life worthwhile. The old love abruptly becomes the new love who just as abruptly departs leaving him sorrowing in Willowwood, sustained only by the hope that his love will be consummated in eternity. Plagued by doubt, he begins to review his life, specifically his career, almost decides that his have been truly wasted days and that death is the only solution to his problem, when at last he decides that there is hope, and on this note, the sequence ends.

## FOOTNOTES

1. "Rossetti's House of Life," Modern Philology, vol. 15 (September 1917), 258.
2. See The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. W.M. Rossetti, I (London: Ellis, 1886); W.M. Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer (London: Cassell and Co., 1889); Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters, with a Memoir, ed. W.M. Rossetti, 2 vols. (London: Ellis, 1895); The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. W.M. Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1911).
3. "Personal Experience in Rossetti's 'House of Life'," Publications of the Modern Language Association, vol. 42 (June 1927), 492-504.
4. Sonnets XV, XLVII (although 1869 is a more likely date of composition. See Appendix), LXV, LXVII, LXVIII, LXIX, LXX, LXXI, LXXII, LXXIII, LXXIV, LXXV, LXXVI, XCI.
5. D.G.R. as Designer and Writer, p. 252.
6. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, The House of Life, ed. P.F. Baum (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), p. 168. Hereafter referred to as H.L.
7. "The House of Life," in The Romantic Imagination (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 203.
8. F.M. Tisdell noted her presence in 1917, but his criticism and dating do not reflect a knowledge of her identity or her function in the sequence.
9. Rossetti (English Men of Letters) (London: Macmillan, 1904), p. 129.
10. The Bibelot, VIII, no. 10 (October 1902), 364.
11. "The Spell of Rossetti," Time Was: Reminiscences (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1931), p. 94.
12. The Kelmscott Love Sonnets of Dante Gabriel Rossetti,

ed. John Robert Wahl (Capetown: A.A. Balkema, 1954), Intro., ix-x. "Yough's Antiphony" (XIII) had originally been entitled "Love's Antiphony," and lines nine to ten had been altered to include the word "youth." "Youth's Spring Tribute" (XIV) had originally been entitled "Spring Tribute." In XIV, "rippling tresses" became "golden tresses"; in XXXI, "deep locks" became "deep golden locks"; and in XXXIII, "deep-shadowed" became "gold-shadowed."

13. "The Poetry of D.G. Rossetti," The Nineteenth Century XXIV (August 1893), 286.
14. A Survey of English Literature, 1830-1880, II (London: Arnold, 1920), 10.
15. "The House of Life," Keats, Shelley, and Shakespeare: Studies and Essays in English Literature (Cambridge: University Press, 1912), pp. 275, 277-278.
16. Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter Poet of Heaven in Earth (London: Faber, 1928), p. 306.
17. Essays and Studies (London: Chatto and Windus, 1901), p. 64.
18. "Of Life, Love, and Death: Sixteen Sonnets," Fortnightly Review, vol. 11, n.s. 5 (March 1869), 266-273. See Appendix for the order of these sonnets.
19. "Rossetti's 'Willowwood' Sonnets and the Structure of the House of Life," The Victorian Newsletter, no. 22 (Fall 1962), pp. 6-7. Hereafter referred to as Rob.
20. See Wahl's description, Intro. ix. See Appendix for order of these Sonnets.
21. Robillard provides a very sketchy outline of the structure as he sees it, p. 7. Arabic numbers refer to 1870 version. See Appendix for the order of sonnets. The development of the Fortnightly Review sonnets into the 1870 version is difficult to trace. See Janet Camp Troxell, "The 'Trial Books' of D.G. Rossetti," Colophon, n.s. III (Spring 1938), 243-258. See also Tisdell.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE CYCLES OF THE HOUSE OF LIFE: A TENTATIVE READING

The 1881 House of Life maintains the general pattern of the 1870 poem, with the two divisions depicting love and fate now emphatically separated into two parts, "Youth and Change," and "Change and Fate." The fifty-one sonnets added to the sequence provide not merely "mechanical balance," as Robillard concludes, but strength and dimension to the existing pattern. Further, by 1881, The House of Life has shed most of its biographical trappings to become a poem of considerably more integral unity than most critics have allowed it. Robillard's thesis that The House of Life is not a sequence but a cycle provides an important key to the pattern of the poem. If it is presumed that a sequence must progress narratively or thematically along a horizontal plane to a resolution, The House of Life is certainly not a sequence, and critics are correct in saying that it lacks unity. Far from moving forward to a resolu-

tion, The House of Life seems rather to meander back and forth, covering the same ground over and over in its depiction of life, love, and death. Robillard's analysis of the poem as a cycle of sonnets moving around a pivot provided by the Willowwood group accounts for neither this erratic progression nor for the two-part division of the poem. However, if The House of Life is seen as a series of cycles, or a spiral development, moving from love to fate, both characteristics of the poem can be accounted for.

In "The Heart of the Night" (LXVI), the poet reviews his life:

From child to youth; from youth to arduous man;  
 From lethargy to fever of the heart;  
 From faithful life to dream-dowered days apart;  
 From trust to doubt; from doubt to brink of ban;--  
 Thus much of change in one swift cycle ran  
 Till now.

[11. 1-6]

The "one swift cycle" notwithstanding, this description suggests that Rossetti saw his life as a series of stages moving within the larger cycle from birth to death. The cyclical stages of life are even more clearly suggested in "Barren Spring" (LXXXIII) which, like many of the House of Life sonnets, uses seasonal change to symbolize the passing of life. In saying that "the changed year's turning wheel returns" [l. 1] bringing Spring, Rossetti is not merely

being poetic; each return of Spring to The House of Life, whether it marks the return of love, or as in this sonnet, merely the renewal of despair, signals the beginning of a new cycle in the gradual spiral toward death. This cyclical pattern is further emphasized by imagery of light and dark, day and night, and by recurrent symbolic use of birth and rebirth. Each cycle in The House of Life to some extent resembles its predecessor in theme and ground covered, but each adds a new dimension to the material, a new, more mature perspective. The cyclical groups in Part One emphasize love, each cycle depicting a phase of love, each phase bringing change, until finally love disappears altogether. Part Two continues the pattern with life and fate as the principal themes; each changing cycle carries the poet closer to death which finally is reached in the last cycle of the poem. "The One Hope" (CI) may be an epilogue to the whole, or the first step of a new cycle moving toward infinity. The poet being mortal, this last cycle, or first stage of an immortal spiral, will necessarily remain unfinished.<sup>1</sup>

No precise demarcation can be made between the individual cycles comprising The House of Life as each cycle flows from the last and merges with the next in an unbroken spiral. However, the stages can be approximately distinguished by

imagery, themes, and by the punctuation provided by certain sonnets which mark a pause in the movement and which frequently announce the theme of an ensuing cycle. What emerges is a series of ten cycles, each containing from eight to eleven sonnets. Part One contains six cycles, Part Two contains four, and both parts are introduced by a sonnet or sonnets.

A thorough analysis of The House of Life as a cyclical poem would involve a precise explication of each sonnet; such an analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis. The ensuing discussion will be confined to outlining the cyclical structure of The House of Life, and to indicating that this structure is supported by repetitive imagery and themes.

"Love Enthroned" (I) announces the theme of Part One, the transcendence and dominance of love over all other Powers. "Bridal Birth" (II) depicts the birth of love itself, and emphasizes with youthful optimism love's transcendence even over "Death's nuptial change" [l. 13]. It thus constitutes a commentary on Part One as a whole, but it also marks the beginning of the first cycle since it celebrates the birth of love. The startling religious imagery of "Love's Testament" (III) suggests a sacramental ceremony such as marriage, or perhaps even a baptism which

would link it with the previous birth sonnet. The 1870 version, entitled "Love's Redemption," suggested even more clearly a religious ritual in its description of a kiss as a presentation of "the body and blood of Love" [l. 3]. This sonnet also provides a general commentary to Part One by claiming that love redeems "my prisoned spirit" [l. 14] from Hell. Cycle A. really begins with "Lovesight" (IV) and runs to "Youth's Antiphony" (XIII). This first cycle constitutes an ideal pattern of perfect love, a pattern which will be retraced, modified, and gradually destroyed by the bitter experience of subsequent cycles. The octave of "Lovesight", with its mingling of passion and worship, is given added poignancy by the premonition of separation in the sestet. "Life's darkening slope" [l. 12], "the perished leaves of Hope" [l. 13], and "Death's imperishable wing" [l. 14], foreshadow events in ensuing cycles, but they are the only shadows evident in this otherwise bright set of sonnets. It is typical of Rossetti, however, to have the lover feel, even in the first kiss, a foreboding of the last. The imagery of "Heart's Hope" (V) reinforces the impression of a newly-born love,

Tender as dawn's first hill-fire, and intense  
As instantaneous penetrating sense,  
In Spring's birth-hour, of other Springs gone by.

[ll. 12-14]

This last line even suggests a continuity with the past and perhaps even with a past love and a previous cycle. The unequivocal platonic statement,

Thy soul I know not from thy body, nor  
Thee from myself, neither our love from God...

[ll. 7-8]

is illustrated by the next five sonnets (including "Nuptial Sleep" VIa), the first three depicting physical love, the others providing the counterbalance of spiritual love. The cycle ends with three examples of a "moment's monument": "The Portrait" (X), "The Love-Letter" (XI), and "The Lover's Walk" (XII). The summer scene of this last sonnet provides a link with the prattle of lovers in the octave of "Youth's Antiphony" (XIII), which marks the pause before the beginning of Cycle B. This pause is suggested primarily by the retrospective point of view of the sestet where the poet stops to look back and comment upon youthful love.

Ah! happy they to whom such words as these  
In youth have served for speech the whole day long,  
Hour after hour, remote from the world's throng,  
Work, contest, fame, all life's confederate pleas....

[ll. 10-13]

Spring returns in "Youth's Spring-Tribute" (XIV) and

with it comes a new "hour of Love's sworn suit-service" [l. 13]. Renewal is further suggested by the reminiscent birth imagery of "The Birth-Bond" (XV). The next six sonnets, framed by a description of physical love in "A Day of Love" (XVI), and of spiritual love in "Love-Sweetness" (XXI), are moments of joy or monuments to the lover such as were found in Cycle A. But this group, unlike that of the first cycle, contains increasing reference to approaching calamity and the irrevocable passing of youth and love. The lovers in "A Day of Love," "speaking of things remembered...speechless while things forgotten call to us," [ll. 13-14] separate for a time, leaving the poet sighing sadly in "Beauty's Pageant" (XVII). "Genius in Beauty" (XVIII) shows the poet's increasing awareness of "the envenomed years, whose tooth/ Rends shallower grace with ruin void of ruth" [ll. 12-13]. This grim imagery is replaced by the verdant beauty of "Silent Noon" (XIX), which nonetheless suggests that the "day" of love is passing. The "night's gloom" and "spirit's grief" [l. 14] of "Gracious Moonlight" (XX) are momentarily dispelled by the rapture of "Love-Sweetness," only to be renewed with greater intensity in "Heart's Haven" (XXII) where the love is for the first time "inexplicably filled with faint alarms" [l. 4], and where love is seen as a protection from "all shafts of

shelterless tumultuous day" [l. 11]. This changing attitude toward life and love is further emphasized in "Love's Baubles" (XXIII) where the poet admits that love can be a snare and a sin, even though the lady gives it the necessary sanctity.

"Pride of Youth" (XXIV), another "pause" poem, again indicates a distinct shift in point of view, as the poet interrupts the poem to comment on "the loves that from his hand proud Youth lets fall,/ Even as the beads of a told rosary !" [ll. 13-14] The entrance of the New Love replacing the Old Love whom "night-rack shrouds" [l. 8], suggests the beginning of Cycle C, characterized by "change in every hour's recall" [l. 9]. In the terrible imagery of "Winged Hours" (XXV), the poet displays an increasing maturity in his grim foreknowledge that this new hour of love will ultimately give way to "wingless skies" [l. 14] leaving only "bloodied feathers scattered in the brake" [l. 12]. Nonetheless, he plunges into the new affair, glorying in the "new sunrise" [l. 3] in "Mid-Rapture" (XXVI), although "worn tired brows" [l. 8] have replaced the smooth face of youth. With a certain desperate bravado, he "stakes with a smile the world against thy heart" [l. 14] in "Heart's Compass" (XXVII) which also notes the ominous "gathering clouds of Night's ambiguous art" [l. 11]. He marvels, in

"Soul-Light" (XXVIII), that love can bring "wonder new-born" and "fresh transport" [l. 11] even at "startide" [l. 10]; the observation moves him to a comparison between this love and another in "The Moonstar" (XXIX). The significant title of "Last Fire" (XXX), the setting of a "summer eve" [l. 1], and the glimpse of approaching winter's sunless days, reinforce the impression that this love and love in general are destined to end soon. Cycle C. ends with three commemorative sonnets, the last of which, "Venus Victrix" (XXXIII), contains an intentionally vague and general reference to "the sweetest of thy names." [l. 12]

The depiction of love's cyclical renewal really ends at this point, for Cycle D. celebrates, not love, but the gradual removal of love from The House of Life. In the "pause" sonnet, "The Dark Glass" (XXXIV), the poet stops, not to look back and comment upon the loves of youth, but to gaze around him in fear and bewilderment at a situation he does not fully understand. He sees only that love, not he, is the master of his fate; having revelled in love's grace, he must submit to final separation and the death of love. Even though love is not yet dead, what was a living religion already seems a "Lamp's Shrine" (XXXV) from which he will "nowise shrink" [l. 9]. "Life-In-Love" (XXXVI) and "The Love-Moon" (XXXVII) attempt to answer the philosophical

question, "What am I to Love, the lord of all?" [l. 9] posed in "The Dark Glass"; the poet seeks to justify his loves, saying that his lady "vivifies/ What else were sorrow's servant and death's thrall" [XXXVI, ll. 3-4], and that in loving more than one, he has been fulfilling love's purpose. [XXXVII, ll. 9-14] In "The Morrow's Message" (XXXVIII), the poet finds that, for a little while longer, his "life is still the sun's" [l. 13], but this renewed hope is soon replaced, in "Sleepless Dreams" (XXXIX), by the fear that love's grove may be only "a thicket hung with masks of mockery" [l. 13]. The image-burdened "Through Death to Love" (XLI) yields a resolution of the problem pondered in many sonnets in this cycle; as Baum puts it, the poet "has passed through thoughts and fears of death to the acceptance of love." (H.L., p. 124) But this renewed faith does not result in a renewal or rebirth of love. The reunion with the loved one celebrated in "Hope Overtaken" (XLII) and the seeming return of Spring in "Love and Hope" (XLII) merely allow the poet a last farewell, one last hour, in the light of the "sinking sun" [XLII, l. 11].

"Cloud and Wind" (XLIV) announces the real themes of Cycle E: death and separation. The last meeting, which began in "Hope Overtaken", ends in "Secret Parting" (XLV),

and the remainder of this cycle (XLVI to LIII), strongly elegaic in tone, mourns the poet's loss. The pause sonnet, "Love's Fatality" (LIV), in which the poet philosophically concludes that love chained by desire yields only misery, is followed by "Stillborn Love" (LV) whose birth imagery would ordinarily herald a new cycle. But the love being stillborn, the poet can only hope for a renewal of love in eternity. In this last cycle, F., he erects a monument to his dead love in "True Woman" (LVI-LVIII), in the last of which he reiterates his one hope:

...Yet shall Heaven's promise clothe  
Even yet those lovers who have cherished still  
This test for love:--in every kiss sealed fast  
To feel the first kiss and forbode the last.

[ll. 11-14]

"Love's Last Gift" (LIX) provides a transition to Part Two. The "sweet blooms of love" [l. 9] given to the poet "while Spring and Summer sang" [l. 10], are replaced by the laurel to tide him through the Autumn and Winter of his life which will be recorded in the second part of the poem.

In "Transfigured Life" (IX), one of four sonnets introducing Part Two, the poet begins to explain the general nature of the ensuing sonnets. The life recorded will be "transfigured," lived in the memory. Since love has departed, he must rely on his "song" to "bid passion's fullgrown

birth remain" [l. 11], and in "The Song-Throe" (LXI), he says that his "song" will be a sincere outpouring of genuine grief which will "pierce thy brother's heart." [l. 14] "The Soul's Sphere" (LXII) indicates that the poet intends to look ahead as well as behind. His mind continues to bombard him with perhaps vain "visions of golden futures" [l. 12] as well as a "wild pageant of the accumulated past." [l. 13] This manysidedness of life, past, present, and future is discussed in "Inclusiveness" (LXIII). Part Two, then, will be characterized partly by a conscious retracing of past cycles, but also by an irrevocable spiralling forward to the future, fate and death.

Cycle G. begins with the return of Spring in "Ardour and Memory" (LXIV), but instead of a new love, the poet is greeted only by "the rose-tree's verdure" [l. 12], the memory of past loves. This bitter realization that life has changed causes him to reflect, in "Known in Vain" (LXV), on a squandered life which has "sailed by." [l. 11] In "The Heart of the Night" (LXVI), he asks for regeneration, for a chance to make the rest of his life meaningful, and in "The Landmark" (LXVII), he decides that he must retrace his steps to some landmark he has missed in his journey through life. Accordingly, he sets out, wondering in "A Dark Day" (LXVIII) if the gloom he feels is a portent of new griefs

to be met or simply the memory of old griefs which he must relive. Uncertain at first, he aimlessly leads his "shadow O'er the grass" [LXIX, l. 13], until finally he reaches "The Hill Summit" (LXX) and pauses before a set of "bewildered tracks." [l. 11] These tracks are more clearly distinguished in "The Choice" (LXXI-LXXIII): Eat and Drink; Watch and Fear; Think and Act. Which path did he take before? Which should he pursue now?

Cycle H. records the actual journey through the poet's past life. "Old and New Art" (LXXIV-LXXVI) represent his artistic life; "Soul's Beauty" (LXXVII) and "Body's Beauty" (LXXVIII) symbolize the love which has been both his source of life and his greatest pitfall. In "The Monochord" (LXXIX) he asks in wonder, "What is this that knows the road I came" [l. 9], and that allows him to relive the past in "regenerate rapture"? [l. 13]. "Gazing steadily back,--as through a dream" [LXXX, l. 7], he inquires whether "those unknown things or these things overknown" [LXXX, l. 14] were most influential in his life. In "Memorial Thresholds" (LXXXI), he pauses before a house which had once been of great importance to him, and observes that its

...single simple door,  
By some new Power reduplicate, must be  
Even yet my life-porch in eternity,  
Even with one presence filled, as once of yore:

Or mocking winds whirl round a chaff-strown floor  
Thee and thy years and these my words and me.

[11. 9-14]

The poet still holds out little hope for a better future, but in "Hoarded Joy" (LXXXII) he resolves to pluck from the tree of life the "last clusters" of fruit which in the past he had spurned. This weak resolve is the only lesson he draws from his journey through the past. He has found no landmark, no renewed life.

Thus, Spring returns in the next sonnet (LXXXIII), but again it is "barren". "Spring no more concerns" him [l. 8]; instead, he begins to look forward to death. Cycle I. begins with the poet's farewell to life and hope, symbolized by "Farewell to the Glen" (LXXXIV). From this point on, life becomes merely a purposeless plodding to death. In "Vain Virtues", he contemplates the one sin, "still blithe on earth" [l. 14], that sends an otherwise virtuous soul to Hell. In "Lost Days" (LXXXVI), he fears that his wasted life will haunt him in death; but still "Death's Songsters" (LXXXVII) beckon him. Bitterly he mocks his pursuit of perfect love (LXXXVIII), and even derides life itself as a "wisp that laughs upon the wall." [LXXXIX, l. 4] But, chiding himself at this heresy, he exhorts "Satan" to "leave these weak feet to tread in

narrow ways" [XC, l. 11], even though the journey seems aimless (XCI).

The journey ends with the two sonnets titled "The Sun's Shame" (XCII-XCIII). In the first, the poet, at the point of death, reviews once more his shamefully wasted days. The second introduces a device which frequently occurs in this last cycle, J.: "the World's grey Soul" contemplates the "green World" [l. 9]; age contemplates youth, death looks at life. The Spring imagery of this sonnet provides a bitterly ironic contrast to past Springs, and introduces the last cycle in which the poet, his journey over, simply waits to die. At this point, he gathers together some final comments on life. Life gives but small reward (XCIV); life is a vase "which now/ Stands empty till his ashes fall in it" [XCV, ll. 13-14]; life to the dying always seems attractive (XCVI) even though its bitter memory haunts him (XCVII). "He and I" (XCVIII) records the last meeting between life and death-in-life before death itself is finally born in "Newborn Death" (XCIX-C). The birth of death recorded in this latter sonnet returns the cyclical poem to its point of departure. As love was born of his lady, so love, song, and art yield by their deaths the birth of death itself. "The One Hope" (CI) remains that a new life and a renewed love in the

"green plain" [l. 6] of eternity may continue the cycle interrupted by death.

## FOOTNOTE

1. For a discussion of The House of Life as an infinite cycle see John Lindberg, "Rossetti's Cumaeae Oracle," Victorian Newsletter, no. 22 (Fall 1962), pp. 20-21.

## CONCLUSION

Clearly, The House of Life is not a model of Tudor House or Kelmscott Manor; it is not inhabited by Elizabeth Siddal, Jane Morris, or even by a chloral-sodden Rossetti who could consume a dozen eggs for breakfast, and who kept wombats in his backyard. Obvious as this conclusion may seem, it has been largely ignored or overlooked by critics of the poem who, like Doughty, choose to "cite chapter and verse" for each moment in Rossetti's life. Attempts to find living people and faithfully recorded events in The House of Life can only result in a distortion of the work and a misunderstanding of Rossetti's purpose. This purpose is metaphorically expressed in "Transfigured Life" (LX):

As growth of form or momentary glance  
 In a child's features will recall to mind  
 The father's with the mother's face combin'd,--  
 Sweet interchange that memories still enhance:  
 And yet, as childhood's years and youth's advance,

The gradual mouldings leave one stamp behind,  
 Till in the blended likeness now we find  
 A separate man's or woman's countenance:--

So in the Song, the singer's Joy and Pain,  
 Its very parents, evermore expand  
 To bid the passion's fullgrown birth remain,  
 By Art's transfiguring essence subtly spann'd....

Perhaps, as Doughty points out, this poem suggests that biography, "the singer's Joy and Pain," has been a source of The House of Life. On the other hand, one might suggest that "Joy and Pain" are general terms and that Rossetti is admitting emotional sincerity rather than biographical accuracy in his "Songs." But the metaphor in the octave of the poem more clearly illustrates what Rossetti means by "transfigured life" and perhaps what he intended by saying that The House of Life records "neither my life nor your life, but life purely and simply." The product of the singer's "Joy and Pain," like the offspring of the mother and father, is a "separate...countenance," bearing characteristics of its parents, but transformed by Art's (or nature's) "transfiguring essence" into a separate entity. The transfiguration of the life into the separate entity, The House of Life, is made evident by a comparison of Rossetti's biography to the early versions of the poem, and, in turn, by a comparison of these versions to the final 1881 version. The Fortnightly

Review sonnets and the Kelmscott sonnets represent early attempts to commit Rossetti's life to paper in some ordered fashion. In them, the chaos of the life is transformed into patterns which are narratively and thematically comprehensible. The 1870 version of the poem, a further step in the evolution from life to art, is less biographically accurate and more artistically unified than the two smaller series. The final product, the 1881 House of Life, bears little resemblance to the life from which it was created. It is a "separate countenance" and must, like the blossom on the chestnut tree be examined as an entity in its own right. At this final stage of the poem's development, it is inaccurate and inadequate to examine it only as an autobiographical record. To evaluate The House of Life as a work of art, to discover in it an essential unity, and to comprehend its thematic structure and meaning necessitate a critical approach which is primarily intrinsic or organic. Such an approach has been used in the reading given in this thesis of The House of Life as a cyclical poem.

The decision to employ this particular approach, however, has been based on a critical examination which is essentially extrinsic and biographical. To approach The House of Life only as factual autobiography is to ignore or misconstrue much of its content; it is similar to calling

the blossom the tree. On the other hand, to dismiss biography in a study of the poem is to undertake a perilous journey without guideposts or direction. Studying the blossom without knowing the tree from which it fell, is possible but unnecessarily difficult. A complete understanding of this complex work can result only from a critical examination which synthesizes extrinsic and intrinsic methods.

## APPENDIX

The following chart is intended to indicate the versions of The House of Life as well as several attempts at dating individual sonnets. The columns contain the following data:

1. the divisions of cycles in The House of Life as they are discussed in Chapter Three.
2. the final numbering of the sonnets.
3. the title of each sonnet as it appeared in the 1881 House of Life and all subsequent versions. "Nuptial Sleep" (6a) was omitted from the sequence after the sixth edition of Poems (1870), and was not officially restored to The House of Life until 1904 in The Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, edited by William Michael Rossetti (London: Ellis); for a discussion of the omission from and subsequent restoration of the sonnet to the sequence, see W.M. Rossetti, Bibliography of the Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1905), p. 25.
4. the initial publication date of each sonnet. "Pride of Youth" (24) first appeared in the Athanaeum no. 2810 (3 September 1881), p. 305; "Soul's Beauty" (77) and "Body's Beauty" (78) in Notes on the Royal Academy Exhibition, 1868, Part II, under

other titles [see chart]; and "Lost Days" (86) in A Welcome: Original Contributions in Poetry and Prose (London: Faithfull, 1863), p. 118. All other sonnets first appeared either in Poems (1870), or in the 1881 House of Life.

5. the order of the sixteen sonnets entitled "Of Life, Love, and Death" which appeared in the Fortnightly Review, vol. 52, n.s. 5 (March 1869), 266-273.
6. the order of sonnets in the 1870 sequence entitled "Sonnets and Songs towards a work to be called The House of Life." The asterisk indicates those sonnets which appeared elsewhere in Poems (1870).
7. the order of those sonnets which appeared in the quarto album prepared by Rossetti and published by John Robert Wahl in The Kelmscott Love Sonnets of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Capetown: Balkema, 1954). The original collections contained a few miscellaneous poems along with The House of Life sonnets [numbered by Wahl 10, 21, 26, 27, 28, 29]; hence the gaps in numbering in this column.
8. two sets of dates compiled by W.M. Rossetti: in Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer (London: Cassell, 1889), and in The Works of Dante

Gabriel Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1911). William Michael made other attempts at dating [see Chapt. Three, no. 2; and Column Eleven] but those given here are considered the most important.

9. the dates compiled by F.M. Tisdell in "Rossetti's House of Life," Modern Philology, vol. 15 (September 1917), 257-276.
10. the two sets of dates compiled by P.F. Baum. In his edition of The House of Life (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), Baum based his dates mainly on those given in D.G.R. as Designer and Writer, on Tisdell, and on the unpublished data of Frederick Page. In his edition of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Poems, Ballads, and Sonnets (Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday Doran, 1937), he adopted the dates assigned by William Michael in 1911.
11. notes indicating the sources of individual dates, dates assigned by others, and other relevant data. Oswald Doughty accepted most of William Michael's 1911 dates and disagreed with only a few; these are given in this column. For a discussion of William Michael's dates and their substantiation see Tisdell.

Abbreviations used in the chart.

C.--Hall Caine, Recollections, 1882

- D.--Oswald Doughty, A Victorian Romantic, 1960.
- FLM.---Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Family Letters with a Memoir.
- Kn.--Joseph Knight. The Life and Writings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.
- K-S.--Letter written by Rossetti to William Bell Scott from Kelmscott, 1871.
- L.A.--Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham, 1854-1870.
- L.D.--Letter to William Davies.
- NRAE--Notes on the Royal Academy Exhibition.
- P.--Frederick Page.
- PFB.--P.F. Baum.
- RDW.--Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer.
- RP.--Rossetti Papers (1862-1870).
- S.--William Sharp. Dante Gabriel Rossetti.
- T.--F.M. Tisdell.
- Tr. Bk.--Rossetti's Trial Books

C	1881 No.	1881 TITLE	FIRST PUBL.	F.R.	POEMS 1870	K. 1871	W.M.R.		TISDEL 1917	P.F. BAUM		OTHER AND NOTES
							1889	1911		1928	1937	
I N T R O .  A		THE SONNET	1881					1880		1880		
	1	LOVE ENTHRONED	1881			2		1871		1871?	1871	
	2	BRIDAL BIRTH	1870		1			1869	?1851-62	T	1869	
	3	LOVE'S TESTAMENT	1870		2 Love's Redemp- tion			1869	?1853-62	T	1869	"Flammifera" in Tr.Bk. (PFB)
	4	LOVESIGHT	1870		3			1869	?1853-62	T	1869	
	5	HEART'S HOPE	1881			1		1871		1871?	1871	
	6	THE KISS	1870		4			1869	?1853-62	T	1869	
	6a	NUPTIAL SLEEP	1870		5		1868 <i>Placata Venere</i>	1869	?1853-62	T R.D.W.	1869	See n.
	7	SUPREME SURRENDER	1870		6			1870	?1853-62	?1869 -1870	1870	
	8	LOVE'S LOVERS	1870		7			1869	?1853-62	T T	1869	
	9	PASSION AND WORSHIP	1870		8			1870	?1868-70	T	1870	Orig. "Love & Worship" D

C.	1881	1881	FIRST PUBL.	F.R.	POEMS 1870	K. 1871	W.M.R.		TISDEL 1917	P.F. BAUM		OTHER AND NOTES
	No.	TITLE					1889	1911		1928	1937	
B	10	THE PORTRAIT	1870		9		1869	1868	?1860-61	?1863 -1866 T,P	1868	
	11	THE LOVE- LETTER	1870		10			1870	?1853-62	T T	1870	
	12	THE LOVERS' WALK	1881			18		1871		1871	1871	K-S, II, p.142
	13	YOUTH'S ANTIPHONY	1881			17 Love's Antiphony		1871		1871?	1871	
	14	YOUTH'S SPRING TRIBUTE	1881			23 Spring Tribute		1870		1870 P	1870	"Love's Spr. Tribute"? D
	15	THE BIRTH-BOND	1870		11			1854		1854	1854	L.A., p.46
	16	A DAY OF LOVE	1870		12			1870	?1853-62	?1864 -1868 T	1870	
	17	BEAUTY'S PAGEANT	1881			8 Love's Pageant		1871		1871?	1871	
	18	GENIUS IN BEAUTY	1881			7		1871		1871?	1871	
	19	SILENT NOON	1881					1871		1871?	1871	
	20	GRACIOUS MOONLIGHT	1881					1871		1871?	1871	

C.	1881	1881	FIRST PUBL.	F.R.	POEMS 1870	K. 1871	W.E.R.		TISDEL 1917	P.F. BAUM		OTHER AND NOTES
	No.	TITLE					1889	1911		1928	1937	
	21	LOVE- SWEETNESS	1870		13			1870	?1853-62	T	1870	
	22	HEART'S HAVEN	1881			15		1871		1871 Kn.	1871	K-S, II, p.142
	23	LOVE'S BAUBLES	1870		14			1870	?1868-70	T		
	24	PRIDE OF YOUTH	1881 <u>Athenæum</u>				1880	1871		1880	1880	C, p.254, 1880 "Love's Changes" PFE
C	25	WINGED HOURS	1869	9	15			1869	?1868-69	T	1869	
	26	MID-RAPTURE	1881			9 Between Kisses		1871		1871?	1871	
	27	HEART'S COMPASS	1881			12 Love's Compass		1871		1871?	1871	
	28	SOUL-LIGHT	1881			13 Love- Light		1871		1871?	1871	
	29	THE MOONSTAR	1881			19		1871		1871?	1871	1st Tr.Bk.: 1869 D
	30	LAST FIRE	1881					1871		1871?	1871	
	31	HER GIFTS	1881			6 My Lady's Gifts		1871		1871?	1871	

C.	1881	1881	FIRST PUBL.	F.R.	POEMS 1870	K. 1871	W.M.R.		TISDEL 1917	P.F. BAUM		OTHER AND NOTES
	No.	TITLE					1869	1911		1928	1937	
	32	EQUAL TROTH	1881			14 Love- measure		1871		1871?	1871	
	33	VENUS VICTRIX	1881			24		1871		1871?	1871	
	34	THE DARK GLASS	1881			11		1871		1871	1871	K-S, II, p.143 p.145
D	35	THE LAMP'S SHRINE	1881			24. The Love Lamp		1871		1871?	1871	
	36	LIFE-IN-LOVE	1870		16			1870	?1868-70	T	1870	
	37	THE LOVE- MOON	1870		17		?1868	1869	?1868-70	?1868	1869	
	38	THE MORROW'S MESSAGE	1870		18			1869	?1868-69	T	1869	
	39	SLEEPLESS DREAMS	1869	5	19			1869	?1868-69	T	1869	"Sleepless Love" D
	40	SEVERED SELVES	1881			30 Between Meetings		1871		1871 P.	1871	
	41	THROUGH DEATH TO LOVE	1881			3		1871		1871	1871	K-S, II, p.143
	42	HOPE OVERTAKEN	1881			5		1871		1871?	1871	

C.	1881 No.	1881 TITLE	FIRST PUBL.	F.R.	POEMS 1870	K. 1871	W.M.R.		TISDEL 1917	P.F..BAUM		OTHER. AND NOTES
							1889	1911		1928	1937	
	43	LOVE AND HOPE	1881			20	?1871	1871		?1871	1871	
	44	CLOUD AND WIND	1881			22	?1871	1871		?1871	1871	
E	45	SECRET PARTING	1870		20			1869	?1868-69	T	1869	
	46	PARTED LOVE	1870		21			1869		1869	1869	
	47	BROKEN MUSIC	1869	11	22		?1869	1852		?1869	1869	FLM 1869
	48	DEATH-IN-LOVE	1870		23			1869		1869		Ms: "Dies atr: 1st May, 1869" PFB
	49	WILLOWWOOD 1.	1869	1	24		?1869	1869		1868	1868	1868 D FLM, RP 1868
	50	WILLOWWOOD 2.	1869	2	25		?1869	1869		1868	1868	1868 D FLM 1868
	51	WILLOWWOOD 3.	1869	3	26		?1869	1869		1868	1868	1868 D FLM 1868
	52	WILLOWWOOD 4.	1869	4	27		?1869	1869		1868	1868	1868 D FLM 1868
	53	WITHOUT HER	1881			16		1871		?1871	1871	

C.	1881 No.	1881 TITLE	FIRST PUBL.	F.R.	POEMS 1870	K. 1871	W.M.R.		TISDEL 1917	P.F. BAUM		OTHER AND NOTES
							1889	1911		1928	1937	
F  TRUE WOMAN	54	LOVE'S FATALITY	1881			4	1869	1871		?1871	1871	
	55	STILLBORN LOVE	1870		28		?1869	1870	?1868-70	?1869 T	1870	1st Tr.Bk.: 1869
	56	1. HERSELF	1881				1881	1881		1881	1881	
	57	2. HER LOVE	1881				1881	1881		1881	1881	
	58	3. HER HEAVEN	1881				1881	1881		1881	1881	
	59	LOVE'S LAST GIFT	1881					1871		?1871	1871	
I N T R O .  G	60	TRANSFIGURED LIFE	1881					1873		?1871	1873	
	61	THE SONG- THROE	1881					1880		1880	1880	
	62	THE SOUL'S SPHERE	1881					1873		?1871	1873	
	63	INCLUSIVENESS	1869	14	29		1860	1869		1860 ?1862- 69	1869	
	64	ARDOUR AND MEMORY	1881					1873		1879	1879	1879 D H.D.:S, p.426

C.	1881	1881	FIRST PUBL.	F.R.	POEMS 1870	K. 1871	W.M.R.		TISDEL 1917	P.F. BAUM		OTHER AND NOTES
	No.	TITLE					1889	1911		1928	1937	
	65	KNOWN IN VAIN	1869	13	30		?1857	1853		1853-7	1853	FLM 1853
	66	THE HEART OF THE NIGHT	1881				?1874	1873		1874	1873	
	67	THE LANDMARK	1869	10	31			1854		1854	1854	
	68	A DARK DAY	1870	\	32			1855		1855	1855	1855 L.A. p.102
	69	AUTUMN IDLENESS	1870		*			1850		1850	1850	RP 1869 1850 S, p.27
	70	THE HILL SUMMIT	1870		33			1853		1853	1853	L.A. pp.45- Tr.Bk.: 45 1869
	71	THE CHOICE 1.	1870		35		1847	1848		1847-8	1848	
	72	THE CHOICE 2.	1870		36		1847	1848		1847-8	1848	
	73	THE CHOICE 3.	1870		37		1847	1848		1847-8	1848	
H	74	1. ST. LUKE THE PAINTER	1870		*			1849		1849	1848 1849	
O	75	2. NOT AS THESE	1881					1849		1849	1848 1849	
L												
D												
&												

C.	1881	1881	FIRST PUBL.	F.R.	POEMS 1870	K. 1871	W.M.R.		TISDEL 1917	P.F. BAUM		OTHER AND NOTES
	No.	TITLE					1889	1911		1928	1937	
NEW ART	76	3. THE HUSBANDMAN	1881					1849		1849	1848 1849	
	77	SOUL'S BEAUTY	1868 NRAE Sibylla Palmifera		*		1866	1867		c1868 1864-8	1867	FILM 1868 1866 D
	78	BODY'S BEAUTY	1868 NRAE Lady Lilith		*		?1865	1867		1864-8	1867	FILM 1868
	79	THE MONOCHORD	1870		*			1870	?1868-70	T	1870	
	80	FROM DAWN TO NOON	1881					1873		?1871	1873	
	81	MEMORIAL THRESHOLDS	1881				?1874	1873		?1874	1873	
	82	HOARDED JOY	1870		38			1870	?1868-70	T	1870	
	83	BARREN SPRING	1870		34			1870	?1868-70	?1869 T	1870	
I	84	FAREWELL TO THE GLEN	1870		*			1869		1869	1869	
	85	VAIN VIRTUES	1870		39		?1858	1869		1869		
	86	LOST DAYS	1863 A <u>Welcome</u>	12	40		?1858	1862		?1858	1862	

C.	1881	1881	FIRST PUBL.	F.R.	POEMS 1870	K. 1871	W.M.R.		TISDEL 1917	P.F. BAUM		OTHER AND NOTES
	No.	TITLE					1889	1911		1928	1937	
J	87	DEATH'S SONGSTERS	1870		41			1870	?1868-70	1868-9 T	1870	
	88	HERO'S LAMP	1881					1875		c1875 P	1875	
	89	THE TREES OF THE GARDEN	1881					1875		c1875 P	1875	
	90	"RETRO ME SATHANA !"	1870		42			1847			1847	
	91	LOST ON BOTH SIDES	1869	6	43			1854		1854	1854	L.A. p.38
	92	THE SUN'S SHAME (I)	1870		44			1869	?1868-70	T	1869	
	93	THE SUN'S SHAME (II)	1881					1873		?1871	1873	
	94	MICHELANGELO'S KISS	1881					1881		1881	1881	
	95	THE VASE OF LIFE	1869	7Run and Won	45			1869	?1868-69	T		
	96	LIFE THE BELOVED	1881					1873		?1871	1873	
	97	A SUPER- SCRIPTION	1869	8	46			1868		1869	1868	RP 1869 1869 D

C.	1881	1881	FIRST PUBL.	F.R.	POEMS 1870	K. 1871	W.M.R.		TISDEL 1917	P.F. BAUM		OTHER AND NOTES
	No.	TITLE					1889	1911		1928	1937	
	98	HE AND I	1870		47			1870	?1868-70	T	1870	
	99	NEWBORN DEATH 1.	1869	15	48		?1869	1868		1868-9	1868- 1869	
	100	NEWBORN DEATH 2.	1869	16	49		?1869	1868		1868-9	1869- 1869	
	101	THE ONE HOPE	1870		50		?1869	1870		?1869 1870 P	1870	

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