

DISPLACED AND ABSENT TEXTS AS  
CONTEXTS FOR  
CHRISTINA ROSSETTI'S *MONNA INNOMINATA*

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Christina Rossetti rarely tells us how to read her poetry, but with her "Sonnet of Sonnets," *Monna Innominata*, she is openly directive. Her preface invites us to see the sequence against the background of the amatory poetry of Dante, Petrarch, and the troubadours, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetic response to the medieval tradition, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Epigraphs from Dante's *Commedia* and Petrarch's *Rime* head each sonnet of *Monna Innominata* as if to explain the text below, and scriptural echoes and references in individual sonnets resonate with the epigraphs and their specific theological contexts to further suggest how to approach the poem.

William Whitla's and Antony Harrison's studies of the poem's intertextuality demonstrate how Rossetti's interpretation of the love-sonnet tradition reveals her own poetic enterprise. Whitla concludes that she establishes the literary conventions only to challenge or subvert them (82-131), and Harrison contends that her transvaluation of the tradition looks to "recover and espouse" a Dantean ideology that is incompatible with Victorian values (185). These evaluations of Rossetti's contextualization of *Monna Innominata* reveal the many ways the poet has shaped a unique persona, one who is linked to but distinct from the voices created by- past and contemporary sonneteers, and who ponders in a different key questions similar to those of her antecedents about human mortality, the mutability of earthly love, its expression through poetry in life, and its possible redemption in heaven. Yet clues to a reading of *Monna Innominata*, and to the perspective of its female speaker, can be found not just in the poem's relation to its broad literary context but also to its local context: the volume *A Pageant and Other Poems*, in which it was published, and a quartet of love sonnets, entitled "By Way of Remembrance." Though Rossetti never published "By Way of Remembrance" in its entirety during her lifetime, she reworked its four sonnets for both *Monna Innominata* and another sequence published in *A Pageant and Other Poems*, "'Behold a Shaking,'" a double sonnet depicting the resurrection of the dead and the salvation of the blessed. As an absent text, one that does not appear in the

*Pageant* volume and that Rossetti chose never to publish, "By Way of Remembrance" provides the clearest picture of the direction she chose to take by showing us the direction she chose not to. The displaced texts (removed, rewritten, and reshuffled stanzas from the posthumously published composition) shed important light on Rossetti's art and the complex rhetoric of *Monna Innominata*.<sup>2</sup>

In R.W. Crump's Variorum edition, the date of composition for *Monna Innominata* is listed as "unknown" (2: 373-4), but an early version of at least part of the sequence can be found in the 1870 holograph manuscript of "By Way of Remembrance." The clearest link between the two poems is a sestet shared by the last sonnet of the early sequence and the tenth sonnet of *Monna Innominata*. Another, subtler, though quite detectable link, is the thematic congruence of sonnets 13 and 12 of *Monna Innominata* with the first and second sonnets of "By Way of Remembrance." It is likely that Rossetti returned to the early composition thinking of it as an appropriate source of inspiration and material. Rossetti's practice here is consistent with that of much of her career, since there are many other examples in the canon of her cannibalization, revision, and retitling of poems in manuscript to alter theme, argument, or voice, or to fine tune the language.

The most obvious difference between *Monna Innominata* and "By Way of Remembrance" appears to be one of sophistication. Where *Monna Innominata* is tonally varied and rhetorically nuanced, "By Way of Remembrance" is repetitive. In the octave of each of the four sonnet-stanzas the speaker contemplates potential obstacles to union with her beloved in this world, then in each sestet imagines an eternal reconciliation in heaven. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Rossetti rejected "By Way of Remembrance" as unfit for publication. The execution of all of the sonnets in the quartet is strong, and the persona's determined optimism is both convincing and affecting as it builds to a moving conclusion. Perhaps thinking of Petrarch's "*vario stile*" (*Rime* 1), and therefore of the depth of meaning and emotion possible in an extended sequence, Rossetti decided to complicate the speaker's mood and attitude in *Monna Innominata*. Most significantly, when she revised "By Way of Remembrance" she obscured the picture of a redemptive reunion of lovers in heaven, and rewrote the voice of the poem, transforming unflagging confidence into tentative self-contradiction and apparent resignation. In fact, by observing her changes to the 1870 manuscript we are able to appreciate the full subtlety of Rossetti's characterization of the later poem's unnamed lady, who seems at first glance to be counting on satisfaction in the next world.

The poet's reuse of "By Way of Remembrance" also highlights her penchant for creating new potential meanings in her verse through recontextualization. In an 1875 letter to her publisher, Alexander Macmillan, discussing an edition that would later become *Goblin Market, The Prince's Progress and Other Poems*, she reveals the creative purpose behind the pragmatic concern for including new and previously published material in a new volume:

I will look up what waifs & strays I can from Magazines, & forward them to you; of *never-printed* pieces, I fear I shall scarcely find one or two for use. I shall like to make

the arrangement of pieces carefully for myself, & suppose the fresh matter had better be introduced amongst the old, as suits subjects or what not. (*Rossetti-Macmillan* 107)

Many "never-printed pieces" that she fragmented and rewrote over the years have one emphasis in manuscript stemming from the logical sequencing of ideas and the directive function of the title, and another in the revised, published versions. For example, when Rossetti gave several different contexts to separate extracts of two versions of the poem, "A Burthen," she created a slightly different focus with each placement.<sup>3</sup> Until the publication of Crump's definitive edition, this practice was not known to readers, but her associative imagination can be detected quite easily in her echoing of key words in linked poetry and prose of such works as the *Face of the Deep* and *Time Flies*, and in the suggestive arrangement of poems in the various volumes. As Dolores Rosenblum explains, "Rossetti's sequencing foregrounds certain themes and patterns so that poems echo each other not simply as parallels but as structural oppositions" (133). David Kent has shown how the parallels and contrasts created by sequencing progressively take a definable shape--the poet-speaker's spiritual pilgrimage--in the organization of previously published poems in *Verses* (1893) (261-62).

That Rossetti intended meaning to be dependent on sequencing in *Monna Innominata* is evident in her letters to publishers requesting that none of the individual sonnets be reprinted outside of the original grouping.<sup>4</sup> Therefore it is important to explore the implications of her decision to exclude the third sonnet of "By Way of Remembrance" from any part of that sequence, and to include it in a separate poem, "Behold a Shaking," in the larger sequence of poems in the *Pageant* volume. And, though we might not be entirely certain of the "what not" in Rossetti's mind when she organized the poems in that volume, we can identify patterns that clarify the rhetoric of *Monna Innominata*.

Before examining the poet's selection, revision, and recontextualizing of "By Way of Remembrance" and the sonnet that opens "Behold a Shaking," however, we must consider general signs in *Monna Innominata* of her avoidance of what Katherine Mayberry aptly calls "reparative strategies," imaginative transformations of love's failure, which resolve a number of love poems in the canon (57-58). For example, though Rossetti invokes Petrarch and Dante in her epigraphs, her sequence does not conclude with a conversion of *eras* to *agape* as the *Commedia* and the *Rime* do. Moreover, when she equalizes the subject-object correlation between the male poet and his lady, Rossetti also eliminates the beloved's function as ideal, beatific guide. The speaker's beloved does not draw her to God; nor does the speaker take the role of a second Beatrice or Laura. Though she does commend her beloved to God's care, he is never able to answer, leaving his fate undetermined.<sup>5</sup> The promptings of *agape* and *eras* are neither individually satisfied for long, nor fully reconciled.

In her preface to *Monna Innominata* Rossetti indicates that she has deliberately set out to write a love poem that dramatizes frustrated desire: "had the Great

Poetess of our own day and nation only been unhappy instead of happy, her circumstances would have invited her to bequeath to us, in lieu of the 'Portuguese Sonnets,' an inimitable 'donna innominata'" (2: 86).<sup>6</sup> Because Rossetti has re-interpreted the courtly love conventions, as Whitla and Harrison have shown, we cannot make the customary assumptions about the nature of the speaker's love, nor about the "barrier" that prevents its consummation. What we hear as we progress through the sequence itself are hints of salvation, fragments of frustrated desire, and an incomplete integration of *agape* and *eros*.

The organization of *Monna Innominata* reflects this ambivalence. In the first three sonnets the speaker laments her inability to "meet" the beloved physically or emotionally in time. By sonnet 4 her yearnings seem to be spontaneously realized. Sonnet 5 establishes the union of the speaker, the beloved and God, but sonnet 6 qualifies this by recalling the inevitable rivalry between her two loves. In sonnet 7 the speaker returns to her quest for an ideal union, and ends by suggesting this may not be possible on earth. Sonnet 8's ambiguous sensual-mystical portrait of Esther and vague petition to "Love" hardly solve this problem, though the biblical figure provides the speaker with a model of one who gains what she desires by presenting herself as a sacrificial offering. Likewise in sonnet 9 the speaker seems to relinquish the beloved only to claim him again-- recalling scriptural truth in both cases. Sonnet 10 illustrates a reunion of the lovers only in the abstract, while sonnets 11 and 12 envision, respectively, compromised religious and secular solutions for estrangement. In the final two sonnets, the speaker ostensibly relinquishes the beloved, though she retains her love, and suggests through the epigraphs that she has joined him in her love of God--or joined God without him.

Various manifestations of the speaker's conflicting impulses can be observed in individual sonnets. Sacrifices are mentioned, but never truly carried out; desires are expressed, but never come to fruition. Hints about a redemptive reunion in heaven never develop into unqualified assertions. One instructive place in the sequence to observe this ambivalence is in sonnet 6 where *eras* and *agape* are weighed against one another with great frankness and clarity. The devotional impulse predominates, for the speaker loves God "the most." Yet she finds it difficult to separate the two loves in her mind. As first-person pronoun, the "I" either acts upon or stands between the "Him" and the "you" throughout the sonnet, and intermittent qualifications and interpolations suggest that the speaker is indeed "unready" to forsake her beloved, in spite of her best intentions (italics mine):

Trust me, I have not earned your dear rebuke ,  
     I love, *as you would have me*, God the most;  
     Would lose not Him, but you, *must one be lost*,  
 Nor with Lot's wife cast back a faithless look  
 Unready to forego what I forsook;  
     This say I, *having counted up the cost*,  
     This, *tho' I be the feeblest of God's host*,

The sorriest sheep Christ shepherds with His crook.  
 Yet while I love my God the most, I deem  
 That I can never love you overmuch;  
 I love Him more, so let me love you too;  
 Yea, as I apprehend it, love is such  
 I cannot love you if I love not Him,  
 I cannot love Him if I love not you.

Of course God *appears* to win the contest on a number of counts. His words, after all, provide much of the speaker's argument. And certainly her ungenerous identification of the beloved with Sodom and Gomorrah reveals the depth of her feelings of guilt for upholding the association. Alluding to Luke's gospel she counts up the cost of not forsaking "all that [she] hath" in faithfulness to Christ (Luke 14:29). Nevertheless, the rhetoric of biblical references progresses from near polarity to synthesis from octave to sestet. Significantly, the concluding lines of sonnet 6 refer us to 1 John 4:20 ("he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"). Chiasmus, in the mirrored lines "I cannot love you if I love not Him,/ I cannot love Him if I love not you," emphasizes the spirit of reconciliation that directs the sestet. The speaker thus answers the implied question of the octave: "How shall I choose?" By the conclusion of sonnet 6 the two loves' mutual detraction is converted into a satisfying balance and synthesis.

Still, a friction between the tone of the epigraphs and that of sonnet 6 itself suggests an underlying tension in the text that is not revealed plainly. Rossetti's speaker weighs her words carefully. Her love of God seems obligatory, a matter of principle, and her love of a man, tepid and subdued. It is difficult to determine whether in the "cannot love" of the concluding line the speaker expresses a natural inclination or a sense of duty. In the epigraphs, on the other hand, love glows and is a knot never to be unbound. Indeed, in its new context the line from Dante transfigures *eros* with the fire of *agape* ("Or puoi la quantitate comprender de l'amor che ate mi scalda": Now canst thou comprehend the quantity of the love that glows in me towards thee<sup>7</sup>). It is as if Rossetti's speaker allows a second voice to express the passion she dare not show. Beneath the controlled measuring of loyalties lie emotions that are not so neatly categorized according to a hierarchy of value. She is, to borrow the canceled title of *Later Life's* sonnet 24, "double-minded"; her dual longings suspended, she is "neither here nor there at rest" (10). A comparison of the linked sonnets of *Monna Innominata* and "By Way of Remembrance" reveals how Rossetti carefully shaped the doubleminded psychology of her speaker. This reshaping is perhaps most obvious in sonnet 10 of *Monna Innominata*, where the substitution of a new octave significantly alters the rhetoric of the original:

Time flies, hope flags, life plies a wearied wing;  
 Death following hard on life gains ground apace;

Faith runs with each and rears an eager face  
 Outruns the rest, makes light of everything,  
 Spurns earth, and still finds breath to pray and sing;  
     While love ahead of all uplifts his praise ,  
     Still asks for grace and still gives thanks for grace,  
 Content with all day brings and night will bring.  
 Life wanes; and when love folds his wings above  
     Tired hope, and less we feel his conscious pulse,  
     Let us go fall asleep, dear friend, in peace:  
     A little while, and age and sorrow cease;  
 A little while, and life reborn annuls  
 Loss and decay and death, and all is love.

(*Monna Innominata* 10)

I love you and you know it--this at least,  
     This comfort is mine own in all my pain:  
     You know it and can never doubt again,  
 And love's mere self is a continual feast.  
 Not oath of mine nor blessing-word of priest  
     Could make my love more certain or more plain:--  
     Life as a rolling moon doth wax and wane  
 O weary moon, still rounding, still decreased!  
 Life wanes: and when love folds his wings above  
     Tired joy, and less we feel his conscious pulse,  
     Let us go fall asleep, dear Friend, in peace;--  
     A little while, and age and sorrow cease;  
 A little while, and love reborn annuls  
 Loss and decay and death--and all is love.

("By Way of Remembrance" 4)

"By Way of Remembrance" begins with a forthright and passionate declaration of love: "I love you and you know it." The speaker's assertion that their love need not be sanctioned by the church through matrimony ("Not oath of mine nor blessing-word of priest/ Could make my love more certain or more plain") is far bolder than anything Rossetti's *donna innominata* dares to state outright. The substituted octave in *Monna Innominata*, however, makes the specific and private general and universal. A race among reified concepts, a kind of abstract drama that recalls the hierarchy of virtues in 1 Corinthians 13 ("hope flags.. ./ Faith runs.. ./ While love ahead of all"), replaces the assertive declaration of love. As a result, the lovers lose their particularity--they seem to stand for all believers who await fulfilment in the heavenly kingdom. Rossetti's common practice of generalizing the personal manuscript versions of a poem is unusual here because the sonnet's new context--an extended love poem--could be expected to accommodate the intimacy of the original.<sup>8</sup> Instead, Rossetti constructs a gnomic utterance that ignores the contribution of a specific union of hearts to the love ideal, and obscures the blissful

repossession of this love in the afterlife. Her few changes to the diction in the sestet further indicate this perspective shift: now "hope," not "joy," is tired, and it is "life," not "love," that is reborn.

Both speakers are pressed by the exigencies of time, but the voice of *Monna Innominata* ends in silence after an apparent battle lost. Her valediction to the love song in the last sonnet--"silence that cannot sing again"--is anticipated in the *ubi sunt* of the first: "Ah me, but where are now the songs I sang." Throughout *Monna Innominata* the present tense seems haunted by an unrecoverable past and an uncertain future. Hope, a virtue that grounds the "later" in the "now," is like quicksilver: once grasped it disperses, once abandoned it reappears. By contrast, in "By Way of Remembrance" hope is almost certitude. The speaker in the posthumously published sequence insists from one sonnet to the next on a proleptic fulfilment of her desire: a bond renewed after the severance of death.<sup>9</sup> The title itself insists on the redemption of the temporal by echoing St. Peter's words to keep in mind the past and present in anticipation of the *parousia*,<sup>10</sup> and the structure of each sonnet affirms her argument that the temporal inevitably, and happily, flows seamlessly into the eternal. In the first sonnet of "By Way of Remembrance," for example, the focus of the octave is the speaker's request for patience from her beloved for asking too much in this life, and the focus of the sestet is her assurance that the imbalance will be corrected in heaven. The iteration "Still unrepaid.. ./ Still unrepaid.. ./ But overpaid" of lines 8 through 10 bridges octave and sestet, suggesting the link of the two worlds and an easy reparation of the deficiencies of human love after death:

Pay. me my due; though I to pay your due  
 Am all too poor and past what will can mend:  
 Thus of your bounty you must give and lend  
 Still unrepaid by aught I look to do.  
 Still unrepaid by aught of mine on earth:  
 But overpaid, please God, when recompense  
 Beyond the mystic Jordan and new birth  
 Is dealt to virtue as to innocence. (1: 5-12)

In "By Way of Remembrance" each sonnet repeats from a new angle progressively the confident hope of the first, that the love between the speaker and her implied listener will continue, in fact be completed, in the afterlife. An initial letting go of the beloved slowly evolves into an indissoluble embrace made absolute by God. In the first sonnet, angels, her loving surrogates, repay her earthly dues; in the second, her heart finds "its own fulfilment" in heaven even if the beloved is bound to another; in the third, they meet "in resurrection" at the Last Judgement "no more... to part in twain"; and in the last, as we have seen, they join after death together in the Primal Love of God.

Rossetti disengages this rhetorical sequencing when she rearranges and revises these sonnets for their new context. What is an ecstatic conclusion in "By Way of

Remembrance" is only the tenth sonnet of fourteen in *Monna Innaminata*, neither a turning point (using Whitla's schematizing of the poem as an 8 and 6 structure)

(93) nor a coda. Moreover, an assertion that initiates the repetitively hopeful prolepsis of the early poem is transformed in the published version into apologetic surrender:

Remember, if I claim too much of you,  
I claim it of my brother and my friend:  
Have patience with me till the hidden end.  
(*"By Way of Remembrance" 1: 1-3*)

If I could trust mine own self with your fate  
Shall I not rather trust it in God's hand?  
(*Monna Innominata 13: 1-2*)

It should be noted as well that in sonnet 13 God's love is to fill "love's capacity" in the present, whereas in the earlier version the payment of all earthly dues takes place beyond death, outside of time, in heaven.

Rossetti's revisions of the second sonnet of "By Way of Remembrance" for sonnet 12 of *Monna Innominata* are subtler, but no less radical. In both texts the speaker imagines herself emotionally fulfilled even if the beloved is bound to another. However in "By Way of Remembrance" the three-way reunion takes place in the afterlife; in *Monna Innominata* the anticipated resolution, to borrow a word common to both versions, is more *grudging*. The litotes of "you companioned I am not alone" (*Monna 12: 14*) pales next to the frank "My whole heart shall sing praises for your sake/ And find its own fulfillment in your bliss" ("*By Way" 2: 13-14*). Moreover, the imagined action in sonnet 12 is earthbound, finite. Rossetti's inversion of the early speaker's gestures of surrender--first to God, then to a rival bride--suggests that rather than moving towards God *with* him, she places him in God's hands before abandoning love altogether. If we read her injunction to the beloved in sonnet 11 to make her love plain "at the Judgment" as a provocative echo of the Anglican marriage rite to deny at the last Judgement any impediment to legal union (including bigamy), then her willingness to pledge her beloved to another looks all the more like complete renunciation, for she acts not as bride but as officiant, and asks the beloved to make his confession alone.<sup>11</sup> The *ubi sunt*, valedictory cast of *Monna Innaminata* as a whole at least superficially confirms that Rossetti had decided to throw into question the possibility that this love could be sustained on earth or renewed in the afterlife. Seen from this angle, the speaker's final "silence of love that cannot sing again" is profound indeed.

By refusing to grant her speaker the sure hope of reconciliation beyond time Rossetti eschews one of her cherished remedies for the mortality of earthly love, expressed in the 1866 lyric, "One Day," for example. Also, in her Italian canzoniere, "Il Rossegiar dell'Oriente" [The Reddening Dawn], written between 1862 and 1868, she returns to this theme again and again, concluding with a prayer to



Jesus: "*Nell'altro mondo donami quel cor/ Che tanto amai*" [In the other world, give me that heart which I loved so much] (7-8). Yet Rossetti does not indicate with the publication of *Monna Innominata* that she has changed her mind. As if to make this point Rossetti juxtaposes sonnet 14 of *Monna Innominata* with "Luscious and Sorrowful," which gently reiterates the rhetoric of "By Way of Remembrance." The choice of "Luscious and Sorrowful" is important because Rossetti may well have intended quietly to reassure at least one reader, her beloved Charles Cayley, from whose poem, "Noli me Tangere," the title was borrowed.<sup>12</sup> As late as 1883, in a letter responding to Cayley's request that she be his literary executrix, Rossetti wrote that she did "not despair of the good goal" for either of them (*Letters* 124). William Michael's account of her last days reveals that she kept some of this hope until the end. Though her brother reports that her mind was "very gloomy as to her prospects in eternity" (538), he also discloses that his sister's worries about personal salvation were interrupted by thoughts of a reunion with her mother, and quite probably with Cayley (538), about whom she spoke on her deathbed "in terms of almost passionate intensity" (314).

Rossetti's published prose writings further confirm the longevity of her heart-felt desire that a remedy for the infirmity of earthly love would be found after death. Significantly, in the letter to Cayley quoted above, she referred to her article, "Dante, the Poet Illustrated out of the Poem," part of which is devoted to the problem of a heavenly reconciliation of Dante and his wife Gemma Donati whose love was unfulfilled in life (571-72). This belief is in keeping with her entry for May 8 in *Time Flies*, published in 1885, where she takes issue with Dante's stress on the perfection of the self through Solomon's exegesis on the yearning of the blessed for the Resurrection. She emphatically links the resurrection of the body with the renewal of "beloved ties," and treats as inspiration Blake's illustration, most likely for Robert Blair's *The Grave*, of the reunion of the soul and body, an unmistakably "fleshly" depiction of that moment (*Time Flies* 88-89). In the following entries of May 9 and 10 (which form the second and third parts of a tripartite structure) Rossetti further asserts the promise that love on earth continues after death. Under May 9 she writes, "Once loving, we cannot love too long. Death and the grave need make no difference" (89), and under May 10, "If love on earth is man's exclusive (because all-inclusive) preparation for heaven, surely the result must be led up to and not led away from by the preparation" (90). Moreover, in her 1894 commentary on the Book of Revelation, *The Face of the Deep*, she uses Christ's raising of Lazarus as a background for her prayer "I beseech Thee, our beloved whom Thou hast taken to Thyself: reunite us not in mortal life but immortal, not for a little while but for ever" (545).

Yet Rossetti was apparently of two minds about the issue, for elsewhere in *The Face of the Deep* she expresses her fear that rather than leading us to love of God, "the hope of reunion... might block out even our hope of the Beatific Vision" (30). It is not unlikely that reservations of this kind are at the heart of the speaker's

hesitations and multifaceted sense of obligation in *Monna Innominata*. Whatever her private hopes, Rossetti chose to create a specific personality for her sonnet of sonnets, an unnamed lady who would articulate the poet's own more complex understanding of the desire for heavenly redemption of earthly love than that found in her optimistic poems on the subject. The juxtaposition of sonnet 14 of *Monna Innominata* with the more hopeful "Luscious and Sorrowful" throws this decision into relief.

The epigraphs to the concluding sonnet of *Monna Innominata* reveal the full extent of the poet's careful evasion of a reassuring close to the sequence. For example, the reference to *Paradiso* 3:85 in the epigraph implicitly allies the despairing speaker with the Inconstant who contemplate the love of God from the lowest sphere of Paradise. Although the genuine peace of the souls affirmed by Piccarda Donati ("*La Sua Volontade e nostra pace*": His Will is our peace) may be guaranteeing the *donna innominata* a peace she will also enjoy, the diminished status of the souls who donna utter this innominata sentiment may also imply the afterlife will be only a compromised sanctuary from mortal loss. Nor does sonnet 14 and its epigraphs make unambiguous promises of the mystical renewal of the earthly body: lines in the *Commedia* following those chosen for the epigraph describe the loss of form in Piccarda's disappearance into song and the epigraph from the *Rime* highlights the bodily decay lamented in the sonnet proper. One of many possible readings of the epigraphs is that the speaker of *Monna Innominata* finds herself in such a predicament having insufficiently committed herself either to God or the beloved. The sonnet itself does not provide sure direction, its answers "pent up" like the longings of the forlorn heart. Since the poet has not disclosed whether we are to read the epigraphs as ironic or interpretive glosses, or whether the text of her sonnets rewrites by recontextualizing, or qualifies her persona's assertions by juxtaposition with these external texts, we are left to read between the lines, or in this case the gaps between the epigraphs and the text.

It could be argued that an answer is implied in the structure of *A Pageant and Other Poems* itself, because if the fourteen-sonnet sequence does not end with a certain resolution, the greater sequence of poems in the volume does. The two concluding poems "Why?" and "Love is Strong as Death" are passionate religious love lyrics, the title of the last overtaking the qualified secular application of the *Song of Songs* in Sonnet 7 of *Monna Innominata*. In fact the rhetoric of "Why" and "Love is Strong as Death" seems to follow the logic of Rossetti's precis of the *Commedia* in her first essay on Dante--that human love perfected in heaven leads to the love of God alone ("Classic" 201)--for *agape* subsumes *eras* decisively and without compromise. Rossetti's *Later Life* could be seen as the necessary prelude to this apotheosis. As a *double* sonnet of sonnets which follows *Monna Innominata*, it stands as a kind of rebuttal to the concerns of that sequence. The title suggests maturation, progress, and the life to come. The particularized love song is absent, replaced for the most part by generalized chastened meditations on the temporal

and the eternal, on love and moral duty. The subject of a reunion with loved ones after death is important in this sequence, but the emphasis is no longer on the amatory. The speaker debates the wisdom of striving for the preservation of earthly bonds in the last six sonnets of the poem, and after sometimes harsh dismissals of such hopes, concludes that the dead wait patiently for the final uninterrupted meeting in the other world, "brimful of words which cannot yet be said" (12). This final statement is general, though it implicitly includes the "I" of the poem, who in sonnet 27 feared she herself might "miss a crown" if on her deathbed she were "no saint rejoicing." Unlike *Monna Innominata*, the double sonnet of sonnets ends with self-forgiveness and quiet optimism.

Rossetti's changes to and placement of "Behold a Shaking," the double-sonnet constructed from the third sonnet of "By Way of Remembrance," further reveal Rossetti's editorial decisions for *Monna Innominata*. "Behold a Shaking" (whose title quotes from Ezekiel 37) is included in the series of devotional poems that follow *Later Life* and close the volume. The existence of a separate manuscript of the third sonnet of "By Way of Remembrance," dated 23 October 1870, and showing few substantive differences, suggests that Rossetti had early plans to create a new poem from the fragment.<sup>13</sup> Rossetti's changes to this sonnet are similar to those made for sonnet 10 of *Monna Innominata*, in that she has substantially rewritten one section--in this case the sestet--and only partly revised the octave. Moreover, as in sonnet 10, she has converted the particular to the general:

In resurrection is it awfuller  
 That rising of the All or of the Each:  
 Of all kins of all nations of all speech,  
 Or one by one of him and him and her?  
 When dust reanimate begins to stir  
 Here, there, beyond, beyond, reach beyond reach ;  
 While every wave disgorges on its beach  
 Alive or dead-in-life some seafarer.  
 In resurrection, on the day of days ,  
 That day of mourning throughout all the earth,  
 In resurrection may we meet again:  
 No more with stricken hearts to part in twain;  
 As once in sorrow one, now one in mirth,  
 One in our resurrection songs of praise.  
 (" By Way of Remembrance " 3)

Man rising to the doom that shall not err,--  
 Which hath most dread: the arouse of all or each;  
 All kindreds of all nations of all speech ,  
 Or one by one of *him* and *him* and *her*?  
 While dust reanimate begins to stir  
 Here, there, beyond, beyond, reach beyond reach;

While every wave refashions on the beach  
 Alive or dead -in-life some seafarer.  
 Now meeting doth not join or parting part;  
 True meeting and true parting wait till then,  
 When whoso meet are joined for evermore,  
 Face answering face and heart at rest in heart:--  
 God bring us all rejoicing to the shore  
 Of happy Heaven, His sheep home to the pen.  
 ("Behold a Shaking")

In the third sonnet of "By Way of Remembrance" the general resurrection is the occasion of a reunion of two individuals at the Last Judgement. The "Each" have become one with the "rising of the All," but not to the extent that the particularized "we" are indistinguishable from the multitude. In this first context, the sonnet plots out the necessary stage before the ultimate reunion of body and soul and the renewal of earthly ties dramatized in the final sonnet of the sequence. In "Behold a Shaking" the sestet and following sonnet reconceive this as a *blending* of the each and all ("Now meeting doth not join or parting part;/ True meeting and true parting wait till then"). Rossetti's revisions alter the rhetoric to console those who might fear the "dread" and "doom" of judgement by assuming her readers are the "sheep" and not the goats, and by resolving the concrete horrors of a reanimation of corpses with comforting abstractions: "life is the beginning of our death/ And death the startin g-point whence life ensues" (9-10). Of course the connection of "Behold a Shaking" to *Monna Innominata* is hidden, and perhaps the transformation of the personal to the general and the distance of the poem from the longer sequence in the volume attest to Rossetti's belief that the concerns of the two are quite distinct.

How we interpret the relationship of these poems within the volume and without depends to some extent on how we understand the poet's wish to preserve the integrity of her sonnet sequence by having individual sonnets printed on separate pages, but together, as a whole. Certainly in the *Pageant* volume Rossetti implies the mutual commentary of voices in separate poems through juxtaposition and thematic modulation.<sup>14</sup> One particularly overt gesture of this kind is the repetition of the phrase "endless days" in the juxtaposed final stanza of "All Thy Works Praise Thee" (the song of All-Creation) and the first sonnet of *Later Life* (which describes the Last Judgement). Similarly, the dedicatory love sonnet to the poet's mother and "The Key-Note" well might insist that we look for thematic and rhetorical echoes in the poems that follow. Indeed variant notes from the opening poems reverberate in *Monna Innominata*, drawing attention to the flexibility of closure and negotiability of absolutes in individual poems, for the "Sonnet of Sonnets" does not demonstrate the transcendence of love in death, nor does it; it dramatize the survival of the "songs I used to know," but rather comes full circle to the *ubisunt* introduced and apparently answered in "The Key-note."

Given the evidence of Rossetti's deliberate ordering of the poetry in the volume it is likely that she carefully thought out the recontextualization of the third sonnet of "By Way of Remembrance," and the decision suggests that she consciously denied the speaker of *Monna Innominata* the consolation that corruptible earthly love can be made incorruptible, preferring to universalize this promise in a relatively depersonalized religious poem. This is not to say that the consolatory impulse is absent from the sequence, only that it is complicated by the speaker's conflicting desires. She shows the division in her belief that a timeless ideal can be subsumed in the present or realized in the future through her inability to express hope in the confident prolepsis of "By Way of Remembrance."

The revisions and interruptions of the 1870 manuscript continue, albeit in another form, within the published sequence itself. Rather than answering the question of whether love for the creature and the Creator can be reconciled, the speaker falls into qualification, self-contradiction and conditional phrasing--or she throws the burden of explanation on others: the voices of the *Rime*, the *Commedia*, the bible, and the poems linked with the sequence in the same volume. Though Rossetti gives her "donna innominata" a voice, it is perhaps what she does not say that is at least as important as what she does. Ultimately what we hear through the silence and the chorus of voices is the poet's own self-questioning double-mindedness: her wish to eternalize the joys of earthly life, and her doubt that she should wish for anything else but the all-encompassing love of God.

Her editorial decisions also show that in denying herself the reassuring closure of "By Way of Remembrance" she is able to lay the groundwork for a far more complex and fascinating poetic voice. She challenges the fixed sonnet form, taking full advantage of the flexibility afforded by the open-ended stanzaic values of sonnets in a sequence (and by adjacent poems in a volume), and blurs the edges of each sonnet-stanza with epigraphs that point outside the apparently closed structure. Moreover, by centring her psychological drama in the world, and avoiding her customary evocations of a redemptive after life, Rossetti is able to play with the dimension between hope and resignation. She thus creates a finely tuned music from the anxious yearning of one who lives at a threshold between two loves.

#### Notes

1. The manuscript for "By Way of Remembrance" is in the British Library, Ashley Collection, and the fair copy notebook for *A Pageant and Other Poems* is in the University of Texas Humanities Research Center.
2. To date the relationship of these poems has been noted but not emphasized. Lona Mosk Packer (255-58) and Eleanor Walter Thomas (75) briefly discuss the link between *Monna Innominata* and "By Way of Remembrance" and Gwynneth Hatton documents the link with "'Behold a Shaking'" in her unpublished thesis (259-60).
3. Two fair copy manuscripts of this poem are known to exist. The one in the British Library notebook is entitled "A Burthen," and the other, submitted to the Portfolio Society, and now in the Open Collection at Princeton University Library, is entitled "My Old Friends." Rossetti

published two extracts in *Time Flies* as entries for May 28 and April 15. When she republished the April 15 poem in *Verses* (1893) she gave it the title (or epigraph) "Then whose shall those things be?" and placed it under the heading "Divers Worlds: Time and Eternity." She republished the May 28 poem in *Verses* (1893) as well, but under the heading "Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims" and without a title.

4. In her letter to her publishers Rossetti insisted that *Monna Innominata* be printed with one sonnet to a page, and that the original sequence not be compromised by the publication of selected sonnets. To Alexander Macmillan she wrote, "I may count (may I not?) on no 2 poems sharing pages or part-pages, and on all sets of sonnets being treated as so many separate sonnets" (*1. Rossetti-Macmillan Letters* 137). She wrote to an American anthologist: "I do not mind what piece you select, subject only to your taking any piece in question *in its entirety*; and my wish includes your *not* choosing an independent poem which forms a series or group.... Such compound work has a connection (very often) which is of interest to the author and which <the reader> an editor gains nothing by discarding" (154-55n). It should be noted that, despite her preferences, she could be flexible if circumstances demanded it. Jan Marsh notes the fragmenting of the sonnet sequences that she allowed (496-97), and in a letter dated June 18, 1890 to William Michael she accepts the fact that she can arrange only part of a volume because one half had already been stereotyped (*Complete Poems* I: 3n2). In addition, according to William Michael she supported his decision to ignore the arrangement of poems in Dante Gabriel's *Poems* (1881) and *Ballads and Sonnets* in favour of a chronological ordering, raising the possibility that regardless of her initial intentions, she might not have completely disapproved of his scheme for the *Collected Works* published after her death (Peattie 481n1; *Collected Works* xxxii).
5. It is worth pondering whether the poem immediately leading up to *Monna Innominata*, "He and She," ushers in this indeterminacy. In "He and She" *both* the man and woman speak, but neither is sure about the endurance of their attachment, or its outcome.
6. Rossetti is referring, of course, to the fact that Barrett Browning's sequence documents the courtship that led to marriage with Robert Browning. In *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, love rescues the poet-speaker from death and the sickroom. Barrett Browning's innovative, personalized interpretation of Petrarchan emotional paradox traces her own painful vacillations between self-doubt and confidence about her artistic powers and worthiness of love. William Michael suggests that *Monna Innominata* was also autobiographical, in that it describes Christina's feelings about Charles Cayley, whose marriage proposal she had refused in 1866, but with whom she had a lifelong friendship. See Whitla (90-93) and Marsh (473-75) for an interrogation of that assumption. William Michael also believed that "By Way of Remembrance" and "Il Rosseggiar dell'Oriente" were autobiographical (*Some Reminiscences* 312-15), but, as in the case of *Monna Innominata*, the precise identification of the implied listener remains unproven.
7. I have used William Michael's translations of the epigraphs (*Poetical* 462-63).
8. See, e.g.; such changes to manuscript versions of a number of poems printed in *Verses* (1893).
9. Michael Wheeler's study provides useful background on contemporary views of this concept. His analysis of Rossetti's proleptic constructions in other poems in the canon is also relevant (155-63).
10. 2 Peter 3:1: "I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets... Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." The juxtaposition of the title of the poem with the first word of the sequence, "Remember," draws our attention to the interrelation of divine and earthly time. Both uses of the word convey a "keeping in mind" of the past, present, and future. The passage from scripture refers to a remembrance of the words of the prophets and the last days, and the opening of the sonnet sequence asserts the claim of earthly love for the present as well as for the life to come.
11. The language of "The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony" in *The Book of Common Prayer* is very close to that of the final lines of Sonnet 11: "I require and charge you both (as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgement when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed), that if either of you know any impediment, why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it."

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12. Rossetti's first response to Cayley's poem can be found in "11 Rossegiar dell'Oriente." Marsh (370) and Kamilla Denman and Sarah Smith provide further evidence that she answered Cayley in a kind of private poetic code in another poem from the Italian canzoniere entitled "Biumine" risponde" (332-33), in which she looks forward to a reunion in heaven. The text of "Noli me Tangere" engages the scriptural context (John 20:17) of the title obscurely, if at all. Marsh provides insight into a possible biographical reading of the poem (360-366).
13. The holograph manuscript is in the Janet Camp Troxell Collection at the Princeton University Library.
14. Rosenblum argues convincingly that in *A Pageant and Other Poems* "Rossetti can be seen moving toward a more overtly didactic mode, asserting more firmly her stoical acceptance of loss and lack of fulfillment within the context of the paradoxes of Christian orthodoxy, in which loss is translated into its exact opposite" (146). The themes of "renunciation and endurance" (148) do not, however, seem to develop consistently or unambiguously.

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