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Abstract: This paper analyzes the verbal-visual aesthetics in the poetry of Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti and how they achieved through different techniques a connection between words and images, in a way, creating a double-work of art that combines the visuality of paintings with the lyrical features of poetry. In order to explain that matter, first the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the innovations they presented in art in the nineteenth century will be introduced. Then, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Sonnets For Pictures* are going to be interpreted to see how his use of pictorial and poetical symbolism is able to convey relevant meaning through the usage of symbols. To conclude this part, Dante shows how a poem could mirror an image through some of his 'portrait poems' and finally it is explained his particular 'Theory of Mimesis' which questions whether art is a realistic imitation of nature. In the part dedicated to Christina Rossetti, her religious background is considered, the way in which her devotional poetry includes many images in the form of biblical typology. Then, the analysis focuses on her most famous poem, "Goblin Market," where the symbolic elements are ambivalent and could be interpreted in two different ways; either in religious or erotic terms. Finally, the paper concludes with a reflection upon the technique of 'word-painting' in the Rossettis' poetry and how it was quite innovative for poetic profile as a whole.

Keywords: Poetry, Painting, Pre-Raphaelite, Aesthetic, Rossetti, Verbal-Visual.

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Word-Painting: Verbal-Visual Aesthetics in The Rossettis' Poetry

0. Introduction

In 1848 a group of English artists including painters, poets and art critics created the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in order to establish a new artistic movement that exalted the Classical forms in painting before the arrival of Raphael, one of the most famous painters and architects of the High Renaissance that stood out for the quality of his compositions and his idealized representation of nature. The Pre-Raphaelites claimed that Raphael was a corrupting influence on the academic teaching of art because his depiction of nature was perfectionist and, in a sense, moralized: its purpose was not to be represented as truthfully as possible. In order to introduce an artistic renewal, they evoked the Late Medieval period and the Italian Quattrocento and adopted their themes and aesthetics for their being "a spirited reassertion of those principles of colour, beauty, love, and cleanness that the drab, agitated, discouraging world of the mid-nineteenth century needed so much" (Welland 22).

Another influence for the Pre-Raphaelites was Romanticism. They drew inspiration from poets like Keats and Tennyson, whose thoughts of freedom and lyrical spirit shaped many of the Pre-Raphaelites' artistic values. Dante Gabriel Rossetti was one of the founders of the Brotherhood and besides being an acclaimed painter, he was also a poet. As well as his sister Christina Rossetti, he combined his talent in painting with poetry in order to enhance his literary art with visuality. Moreover, George Landow points out that even "throughout the Renaissance and eighteenth century, poetry and painting had been juxtaposed as a means of defending the prestige of the visual art" (44). So herewith, Rossetti creates a 'double work of art' that relies on the conventions of ekphrastic poetry. An ekphrastic poem is usually based on a work of art and includes vivid descriptions of its scenes, which are presented in the poem. It pays attention to the scene's details and identifies the symbols that are used to convey deeper meanings. This technique of precise description could be deemed word-painting for the way words are used almost as paint to design an image. Additionally, Rhoda L. Flaxman recognizes that "Word-painters typically employ framing devices, recurrent iconographic motifs, careful compositional structures, and pay close attention to contrasts of light and dark, of color, volume, and mass" (9).

John Ruskin was a remarkable art critic at that time and he supported to a certain extent the Pre-Raphaelites because they share similar ideas related to art, such as the concept of "truth to nature," which he believed to be the final purpose of art. Consequently, he encouraged artists to portray the natural world as truthfully as possible. In his book *Modern Painters* he agrees that "Painting is properly to be opposed to speaking or writing, but not to poetry. Both painting and speaking are methods of expression. Poetry is the employment of either for the noblest purposes" (Ruskin 24). Ruskin's religious upbringing conditioned his ideas of beauty and nature, and he came to the conclusion that those concepts had to be linked to the divine. Some Pre-Raphaelites acknowledged this concept and tried to incorporate religious features into their work. That is the case of Christina

Rossetti, whose devotional poetry focuses on religious aspects where she attempts to paint images with words that have the capacity to make visible the immaterial world in which she searches for eternal and divine truths.

However, Dante Gabriel Rossetti was more interested in the aesthetic part of his paintings and poetry, whose purpose was the elevation of beauty to its maximum expression. In fact, he was one of the precursors of the Aesthetic Movement that took place during the late nineteenth century. The movement was ruled by the maxim "art for art's sake," which means that art has no other purpose than to be beautiful and aesthetically pleasing to the eye. Therefore, art refuses to be moral or didactic, in other words, it doesn't have a meaning. Rossetti's picturesque poems, especially his 'portrait poems,' serve that aesthetic purpose by focusing on the alluring physicality of the poetic object and the exaltation of its bodily beauty. Although both Rossetti siblings play with visual imagery in their poetry, each of them uses it to communicate different things which are going to be discussed more in detail in the next sections.

1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): *Sonnets for Pictures*, Symbolism and Mimesis

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's engagement with both verbal and visual arts began as an idea of innovation and exploration in a double work of art that brings into dialogue aspects that belong to the author's poetic skills as well as his competences as a visual artist. Thus, "Each part of the double work is a unique view of an ideal whose existence is posited through the different incarnate forms" (McGann 8).

One of the first paintings that was exhibited with the PRB (Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood) initials on it is *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* in which the Virgin Mary is depicted in a domestic environment while she is being taught how to embroider a lily. The painting was accompanied by two ekphrastic sonnets. As Armstrong contends, "For the Victorian poet the 'photographic' nature of the sonnet meant that instantaneity and evolution, the single moment and the experience of process, combined in the scrutiny of a small fragment of thought and feeling" (463).

In the first sonnet, the poetic voice describes the virtues of the Virgin Mary. For instance, "Her gifts were simplicity of intellect" and "faithful and hopeful; wise in charity"; (Rossetti 7) but it is also a verbal translation of the iconographical details: "An angel-watered lily, that near God" (Rossetti 10), which is what the spectator can easily appreciate when looking at the painting. In the second sonnet he draws attention to the different symbols and motifs of the painting such as "On that cloth of red" (Rossetti 1) that refers to the Passion of Christ, or "the lily standeth, which/ Is Innocence, being interpreted" (Rossetti, 7-8) being the lily the flower that represents purity and virginity, in other words, Mary's qualities. In fact, "the paintings and the sonnets together provide an opportunity to develop a reading of the intertextual relationships at work in Rossetti's visual and verbal constructions" (Donnelly

475). The spectator not only becomes a viewer but also a reader that will inevitably make a connection between the work of art and the work of literature that invites them to contemplate a duality in their vision and to consider the "word-image opposition that consistently threatens the temporal-spatial divide through which images and texts are normally separated" (Donnelly 476). The second sonnet provides an explanation of the symbolic elements of the picture and as Brian Donnelly argues, "the highly symbolic nature of the sonnets and the critical preoccupation with decoding them naturally emphasizes the spatial stillness of the pictorial image" (478).

Symbolism in Rossetti's poetry is quite significant and plays an important role in the imaginary he uses to deliver a more complete meaning. One of the poems that illustrates how he introduces symbolic elements is "La Bella Mano" which is, in fact, a triple work of art, considering that not only was it produced after a painting of the same name, but also because Rossetti first wrote the verses in Italian and then he translated them into English. It is known that Rossetti used to translate the classical Italian poets such as Dante Alighieri, and thanks to this work of translation, he was able to develop "the mature and finished character of his poetry, achieved through the discipline he acquired translating Dante and the poets of the early stil novisti circle" (McGann 1).

The poem starts with a description of the hands of the lady, who is washing her hands: "O lovely hand, that thy sweet self dost lave" (Rossetti 1). Later on, the poem seems to acquire a sensuous tone since in several times the Roman Goddess of Love is recalled "Whence erst the Lady of Love's high advent" (Rossetti 3). The painting is also full of references of Venus that are made in the form of symbols. For instance, the shell-shaped basin, being the shell an allusion to the Venus' birth which is more clearly portrayed in the famous painting of Botticelli *The Birth of Venus* and Rossetti's poem, supports it with the following line "Was born, and endless fires sprang from the wave" (Rossetti 4). The red colour, which is predominant in the painting, can be appreciated in the lady's attire and the angels' wings. Red traditionally signifies passion and desire, which are very well-known qualities of Venus. The jewels gain also an importance since Rossetti paid close attention to make them detailed in the painting and to mention them explicitly in the poem "For thee the jewelled gifts they bear" (Rossetti 6). They seem to contribute to the sophisticated look that the lady is wearing and they also stand for the materialistic and physical beauty that Dante's visual aesthetics express. Attention is drawn to the lady's lips, reinforcing the erotic sensuality "Looks to those lips, of music-measured speech" (Rossetti 7) and the hands, being at this point in the poem a symbol for sensuality, are responsible for the melancholy of many lovers that she could have had "O hand! heart-handsel'd in a lover's hand" (Rossetti, 4). Somehow, it gives an empowered image of the lady that "[has] in her hands" the decision and the control over love and even happiness when the poem tells that "The fount, and of more bliss than man may crave" (Rossetti 8).

Along with the symbolic imagery of Venus, there is another figure that is evoked which is the Virgin Mary. The iris flower that can be found in the painting symbolizes virginity. Moreover, in the poem, it is presented as "A flower of Venus' own virginity" (Rossetti 10); thus, it combines the virginal aspect of Mary but referring to the virginity of Venus. The lemon tree, the white cloth, the act of cleaning herself and even the angels'

apparition confer an innocent and pure aspect to the lady, who is being reinforced in the poem when it says "In maiden-minded converse delicately/ Evermore white and soft; until thou be" (Rossetti 12–13).

The inclusion of symbols that represent opposite meanings, in particular erotic love and purity, introduces an interpretative duality in both the painting and the poem. At first glance, the act of washing her hands may be considered the result of a lustful act or a previous affair, for instance, what Rossetti's paintings *Lucrezia Borgia* and *Washing Hands* depict; but in *La Bella Mano* apparently it denotes chastity and innocence. Nevertheless, the perspective can change easily and convey the opposite meaning when taking into account all the erotic symbols the painting and the poem provide.

Although some of his paintings have religious insights or portray a biblical image, Rossetti was not quite a religious person. According to McGann, "religion here is only the medium for Rossetti's ideas about art. The agnostic Rossetti turns traditional symbols into aesthetic artifacts, which we are to appreciate for their own sake, outside of a devotional context" (30), and his paintings "tried to imagine a new basis for justifying its existence apart from an educational, moral, or religious significance" (Dickey 28). Consequently, he did not support the belief of the body and soul division that the Christian religion defended, as well as the conception of a transcendental or spiritual world that infers and supports the material one. However, his "Skepticism about interiority presented both a challenge for portrait painting and also, as Rossetti discovered, an opportunity to explore new approaches" (Dickey 26). In 1860, Rossetti focused on painting female portraits as a way to explore new techniques and bring into conversation the link between art and people, the interior and the exterior, the surface and the soul. Along with his paintings, he elaborated ekphrastic poems on them known as *Sonnets for pictures* that defy the conventions of the Victorian portrait poem whose basis Dickey explains very accurately:

The Victorian portrait poem was the vehicle for a traditional Cartesian view of the self as comprising an interior, the soul, and an exterior, the body. The female portrait poem—more common than the male—typically interpreted the subject's character on the basis of her appearance, applying a clichéd set of symbolic equivalences. [...] These equivalences were not unique to poetry, but pervaded the sentimental literature and art of the time. (Dickey 4)

By those means, Rossetti's paintings and poems concentrate on the physical body and particularly its surface, in order to make it 'eye-catching' or pleasing to the eye. Therefore, aesthetics plays an important role: it has a final purpose no other than beauty itself. This might be interpreted as a materialistic and shallow point of view of art, whose only aim is to decorate the halls of the ones that would buy his paintings. Nevertheless, Rossetti's vision of the body-soul dualism takes place in the visual and material world; for instance, in his book *Hand and Soul*, he tells the story of a painter who struggles with the representation of the soul until he visualizes it in the form of a woman. His doubts of what it could lay under appearances, and whether there was life after the physical body is degenerated, drove him to focus on the exterior and glorify the idea of the artwork-for-itself. The experience of the

painter in using a female sitter, with a sole interest in the physical attributes of the model, is portrayed in his paintings. The beauty of those females is undeniable, but their facial expressions are neutral and by no means insightful into psychological aspects, almost as though nothing was going on inside their heads. As Dickey discussed: "Yet even as Rossetti affirms the transparency of the beloved's face and her image, he also pursues the seemingly incompatible goal of making the portrait independent from the sitter" (32).

For Rossetti, the main objective was to show the physicality of his models, the beauty of the body, without conveying any psychological meaning or the soul of the sitter. One example of this is his poem "Body's Beauty," which corresponds with the painting *Lady Lilith*. Some of Rossetti's verses address this specific matter:

And still she sits, young while the earth is old, And, subtly of herself contemplative,
Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,
Till heart and beauty and life are in its hold (Rossetti 5-8)

In the painting, *Lilith* has a mirror which she uses to look at herself and to admire her own beauty. However, her expression is one of boredom, indifference, and it doesn't shed any light on her real emotions. The mirror seems a perfect metaphor to illustrate the similarity in the reflection she sees and what the viewer could experience when they look to the painting and see her. Furthermore, Dickey mentions that:

The mirror, the double, and the portrait represent a separable aspect of the person that, like the soul, is both self and not self. Yet, unlike the soul, a reflection or even a ghostly double seems limited to the earthly world of humans and does not refer upwards to transcendental realms. (Dickey 34)

It is worth mentioning that Rossetti's mimetic vision was opposed to the Platonic canon which he specifically questions. Mathew Potolsky clarifies that:

According to Plato's canonical claim, works of art mime the appearance of something else and do not have a specific nature of their own. They are reducible to the function of illustration or expression, of depicting reality or conveying images of behavior worthy (or more often unworthy) of emulation. (Potolsky 168)

However, for Dante, works of art are not a reflection of more perfect ideas. The Real world is not an imitation of some more perfect world; there is no transcendence or intention to mimic what it is beyond the natural world and, as Potolsky points out: "Rossetti treated mimesis as one theory of representation among others, not the final word on the nature of art" (169). Mirrors, shadows and doubles were quite fascinating for Rossetti, and he included this imagery in his art.

For instance, his poem "The Portrait," which is a dramatic monologue, opens with the conventional gesture of ekphrastic portraiture: "This is her picture as she was" (Rossetti 1). Dickey discusses that:

In using the term "portrait" in the title of a poem, the poet signals that he is engaging with visual art at some level. The engagement may be negative, such as claiming that words represent people better than images, or it may be superficial, simply signaling that, like a visual portrait, the following poem represents a single figure. (Dickey 9)

Therefore, by naming a poem "portrait," it claims its belonging to the pictorial world and at the same time validates a portrait in being a poetic genre.

The content of "The Portrait" is that the poetic voice identifies himself with the reflection of the picture of his lover who, unfortunately, passed away. Looking through a mirror he imagines that she might speak to him. The poetic voice contrasts her portrait with her corpse on the ground "And yet the earth is over her" (Rossetti 9). Here Rossetti wonders about the immaterial and vanishing soul and seems to come to the conclusion that the painting is not sufficient in itself to portray anything related to the beyond, to the supernatural. Nevertheless, the poetic voice searches in the shadows and in the water "Less than her shadow on the grass/ Or than her image in the stream" (Rossetti, 35–36) the reflection of his object of desire that is no longer there. But looking at her portrait and its scenery, the poetic voice remembers the moment when he actually painted it, and it brings back echoes from all the good moments they had together:

Next day the memories of these things,
Like leaves through which a bird has flown,
Still vibrated with Love's warm wings;
Till I must make them all my own
And paint this picture. So, 'twixt ease
Of talk and sweet long silences,
She stood among the plants in bloom
At windows of a summer room,
To feign the shadow of the trees. (Rossetti 55–63)

The double images and the reflections serve their purpose as a reminder of the visual memories and the physicality of the material world, but it doesn't provide knowledge or hope for the mystical or spiritual one. It almost declares "That is it, this is the only thing you are going to get" as remarking the fugacity of life since he doubts that there is something greater beyond reality. He only has left the portrait of his beloved one which is something material and also the source of his memories with her; therefore, "the mirror is at once a reflection and an artistic tool; the self-portrait a mimetic artwork and pedagogical exercise" (Potolsky 176).

Another great representation of the theory of mimesis of Dante Gabriel Rossetti is found in his poem "Aspecta Medusa":

Andromeda, by Perseus saved and wed,
Hankered each day to see the Gorgon's head:
Till o'er a fount he held it, bade her lean,
And mirrored in the wave was safely seen
That death she lived by.
Let not thine eyes know
Any forbidden thing itself, although
It once should save as well as kill: but be
Its shadow upon life enough for thee. (Rossetti 1-9)

This was a sonnet written for an uncompleted painting and it describes Andromeda's wish to see Medusa's head in order to visualize the one thing that helped Perseus to save her from the sea monster Cetus which in the end he turned it into stone thanks to the power of Medusa's head. Perseus leads her to a fountain and tells her to look at the reflection of Medusa in the water for Andromeda to be safe from the deadly eyes of the Gorgon. Although the poem ends with a reminder to the reader to take into account the danger of forbidden knowledge, Potolsky argues that "Aspecta Medusa" is in fact "a poem about the necessity of representation. Andromeda does not renounce her desire to see Medusa's head but accepts limitations on how she can see it. Understood in this way, the poem offers a lesson about the responsibilities of the artistic spectator" (Potolsky 178).

The theory of mimesis is represented by the water mirror. In this poem, this not only testifies against the Platonic philosophy by giving more importance to the image than the reality but it also elaborates on the idea of what is 'real' since the image Andromeda sees is real although it is only a reflection. Rossetti makes an observation about the connection of word and image and how the reader can construe the plot of the poem through images that are revealed gradually when reading the poem; in other words, "just as the Medusa can only be seen by means of representation, so the specific scene the poem is available to us only by means of the poem's words" (Potolsky 180). In addition,

Both the painting and the poem imitate mimesis, borrowing the traditional language and imagery of Platonic theory to question that theory and its influence. In so doing, Rossetti reminds his audience that art is irreducibly material and real, not the insubstantial shadow of the truth that Platonic tradition imagines. (Potolsky 182)

Finally, the poem's ending could be seen as a didactic lesson that reminds the reader the power of words, especially the ones that represent a forbidden but tempting knowledge. Nonetheless, for Rossetti, words are not an instrument to convey a bigger truth, a perfect idea as Plato claims. Words' purpose is to depict reality as it is; a reflection is not less than reality, as well as a copy is just as great as the original. For the last part of the poem Rossetti wanted the reader to think about the difference between original and copy and to

reflect about the autonomy of the last one, which he considers to have a full presence of itself and not be a mere shadow of a more complex or perfect work of art.

2. Christina Rossetti: Devotional Poetry and Symbolic Ambiguity

Christina Rossetti's first approach to visual arts started from early years in her life when she developed an interest for drawing and water-colouring. Although her brother Dante believed in her innate talent and encouraged her to keep striving for success, Christina's inability to become professional in her artistry was a matter of self-reflection upon her aptitude for art-work. It is a fact that she was not truly supported by her mother. She argued that the world of art belonged to men as Deborah Cherry points out: "Women artists were located in asymmetrical and unequal relations to art education, art administration and professional status" (53). Despite her gender exclusion from the meetings of the PRB, Christina Rossetti worked in collaboration with some other members from the Brotherhood; for instance, she became a sitter for her brother in *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* and for William Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World*.

This realization directed the British artist to pursue another way to achieve the vision she had in mind, an art that "brings into communion the visual and the verbal, the past and the present, the spiritual and the material, the reader/viewer and the maker" (Kooistra, "Christina Rossetti" 1). Poetry seemed to be the instrument through which she could elaborate on her visual imagination, as she concluded that there must be a dynamic exchange between word and image, painting and page. Being the only female that published in the PRB's magazine *The Germ*, she was determined in focusing on her writing career along with her visual-verbal aesthetics because her "Pre-Raphaelite legacy is not to be found in inchoate graphic lines, but rather in the physical forms of her verses and books" (Kooistra, "Christina Rossetti" 2). Christina Rossetti accompanied her works with illustrations, recognizing, on one hand, the necessity to complement visual images with the verblity of narration and, on the other hand, the transition of metaphoric and symbolic elements from mental images to paper. Her illustration artistry is transformed into relevant material for her visual imagination, and it provides "a glimpse into the poet's mind at work, the crude drawings demonstrate Rossetti's critical response to the work of others and her dialogic engagement with her own poetry in another medium" (Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration* 28).

It is a fact that most of her illustrations were attached to devotional texts due to her religious beliefs and background. Christina was hugely influenced by Tractarian poetry such as John Keble's *The Christian Year*, which was a type of poetry that "required its readers to meditate on the literal and symbolic meanings contained in the words, their scriptural allusions, anagogic or spiritual import and hidden truths" (Kooistra, "Christina Rossetti" 3). Making the correspondent illustration for Keble's poem, she represented the understanding of the main idea through her ability in combining text and image.

In Rossetti's writings, her idea was to create a connection with two different worlds: the visible and the invisible; therefore, it is needed to typify into words those things that are

not visible but still carry significance to human nature. Lorraine Kooistra agrees that Christina's poetry does not have only

An aesthetic and interpretive function, but also a deeply spiritual significance, for it was by this material means that the invisible could be made visible, just as the ineffable could be hinted at in the resonance of poetic language. (Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration*, 29)

Images being the body and words being the spirit: these two-part divisions were intended to be a way to join the physical facts to the spiritual truths through the use of symbolism, types and analogies. In her poem "Song," which is the final lament of a loved one near to death, the poetic voice requests not to "Plant thou no roses at my head,/ Nor shady cypress tree," (C. Rossetti 30), which carries a symbolic meaning of love and loss respectively, but to "Be the green grass above me," (C. Rossetti 30), which could be a direct reference to the book of Revelation that says that "all green grass [will be] burnt up" (Rev.8.7) after the Apocalypse. In fact, it announces that there is no need for materialistic decorations, since the body is just another part of the earthly experience, but what is significant is the eternal soul that will transcend into communion with God. Her poems conceive and glorify death as an instrument to liberate the soul. Furthermore, Suzanne Waldman insists that this poem "has the effect of insisting on the supremacy of the permanent symbolic order of heaven over the imaginary order of human love" (Waldman 24).

For Christina Rossetti, the purpose of art is not only to represent the natural world as truthful as possible: "the forms of nature, the visual art of the eye and the poetic art of the ear are not valuable or sufficient in themselves but as types shadowing forth the deferred 'Best' to come" (Kooistra "Christina Rossetti" 4); it is also to portray what is beyond materiality, what couldn't be observed through the eye and what remains everlasting. In her poem "Who has seen the wind?" she successfully managed to materialize the wind by the effect it produces where it passes: "But when the trees bow down their heads/ The wind is passing by" (C. Rossetti 76). It serves as a testimony of the existence of those things that are there but couldn't be easily perceived unless carefully beheld. Painting through words almost a whole autumn landscape in which the protagonist is the wind, Rossetti reflects upon the apparent immateriality of elements that have a repercussion in the phenomenal world, which she wisely transforms them into a brilliant analogy and she uses language as "a trenchant device through which to imagine and pursue a condition of symbolic transcendence" (Waldman 21).

As a matter of fact, Christina Rossetti's choice in selecting a meter to deliver her devotional poetry was the sonnet. As Joshua Taft has discussed:

Christina Rossetti's interest in the sonnet cannot simply be explained by its contemporary popularity. Its formal properties and history made it a particularly suitable form for a poet who wished to emphasize the active practice of Christian self-discipline. (Taft 317)

Sonnets have a long history and they look back at the Italian sonnet which was mainly used by Petrarch in praise of his beloved Laura. Christina Rossetti seems to prefer using the Italian sonnets over the English ones. The reason behind is that

The requirements of the sonnet form—concision, comfort within a small, confined space, ingenuity in meeting stern requirements, and adaption to a series of conventional and arbitrary limitations—match the disciplined religious activity Rossetti advocates in her devotional prose and poetry alike. (Taft 319)

Her turn in the use of these sonnets, which was originally based on the representation of courtly love, was to create a duality in meaning that can be observed, on one hand, from the perspective of mundane love and, on the other, from a devotional and religious love to God. In her poem 'Forget Me Not' she presents a short scene where a young lady implores her lover to not forget her even though he is already gone to a battle. The image portrayed reminds us of many of the paintings whose central figure is a beautiful woman with an expression tinted with melancholy or longing, such as *Jane Morris* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti or the image of lovers shortly before one of them departs as in *Love Among The Ruins* by Edward Burne-Jones:

Forget me not! Forget me not!" The maiden once did say,
When to some far-off battle-field Her lover sped away.

Forget me not! Forget me not!" Says now the chamber-maid
When the traveller on his journey
No more will be delayed. (C. Rossetti, lines 1–8)

The reading of the poem is different from a more spiritual point of view in which the interpretation for the maiden and the servant is the awaited return of Christ in which they desperately ask for him to not forget them and take them to heavens. In the first verse there is a maiden and in the second one there is a servant; this could explain the equal justice of God who won't make any distinction between earthly matters such as social classes. Following this particular reading of the poem, through the overlaying of two different kinds of love, the poem acquires a symbolic ambivalence in which "Rossetti engenders the kinds of ambiguity that permits the direction of desire to symbolic ends" (Waldman 22).

As mentioned before, part of Rossetti's strategy to breathe the visual aesthetic into her poems is the use of symbolism. *Goblin Market* is one of her most famous poems. Kooistra debates that it is considered "one of her most characteristically Pre-Raphaelite works because of the pictorial richness of its sensuous details" ("Christina Rossetti" 8). It is a long poem that narrates the story of two younger sisters, Lizzie and Laura, who are confronted by temptation from the appealing Goblin's fruits offered to them. Laura trades one of her 'golden curl' for a fruit and becomes dependent. Unfortunately, she never saw the Goblin's Market again, so she slowly starts degenerating into an old woman until Lizzie sacrifices herself and searches for the Goblins in order to buy them some fruit. The Goblins became

angry when she wanted to purchase and, consequently, threw the fruits violently at her, the juice soaking her clothes. Nevertheless, when Lizzie came home, Laura licked the juices and this action turned to be her salvation.

Marylou Hill argues that "Goblin Market is first and foremost a poem about hunger and our desire to eat our fill of that which will satisfy us" (458). Moreover, temptation is a notorious subject that is presented through the use of explicit imagery that draws in our minds what Laura could have seen in that Market, and that made her succumb to temptation. Christina Rossetti achieves this by describing exuberantly the fruits at the beginning, for instance, "Plump unpecked cherries" or "Bloom-down-cheeked peaches." Furthermore, she illustrated the poem along with some pieces created by Dante which depicted in a more visual way the full image of the Goblins urging the girls to buy something from their Market. This back-and-forth movement between the image and the poem itself encourages the readers to "discern in material signs –words, pictures, physical forms–figural representation of invisible truths" (Kooistra, "Christina Rossetti" 9). Although the description of the fruits "appear[s] to be perfect in their beauty and sweetness, there is something unnatural and sinister about them" (Hill 460). In fact, the amount of fruits (some of them out of their proper season reunited in one place) seemed sketchy; but of the two sisters, only one of them, Lizzie, seemed to realize that relevant fact and consider that maybe there is something dangerous about them "Their offers should not charm us/Their evil gifts would harm us" (C. Rossetti 129). It could signify that she had the capacity of reading far beyond the materiality of those fruits that will only satisfy the body but will not feed the soul, which gives a religious insight into the poem.

Following this interpretation, the poem is an allegory that inevitably recalls the Biblical narrative of the Original Sin; the Fall into temptation, more explicitly, when Eve bites the fruit from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge after the snake convinced her. The golden curl that Laura offers symbolizes her innocence and purity, since "golden hair was always a potent signifier of feminine beauty in Pre-Raphaelite art, and is a symbol in *Goblin Market* of a 'natural,' and apparently renewable, innocence and purity likened to blossoms and snow" (Kooistra, "Christina Rossetti" 10). Flowers also symbolize beauty and innocence in the description of Laura's neck "like a lily from the beck" (C. Rossetti 129) and then, after she fell into the Goblin's trap, "I planted daisies there a year ago / That never blow." This means that there is no more innocence for her. We should bear in mind that "in her poetry Rossetti represents chastity as the basis for agency, interpretive power, and creativity" (Vejvoda 571). This lack of innocence as a result of her choice of consuming those fruits turns Laura into the archetype of "the Fallen woman," to which the story gives a redemptive ending after:

Lizzie's decision to act takes on Christ-like dimensions and she sacrifices herself for her sister first by undergoing the attack at the hands of the affronted goblins (in itself a graphic scene with overtones of sexual violence) and by offering herself as the regenerative meal for Laura to "hug," "kiss," and "eat." (Hill 462)

Many critics have elaborated on this idea taking into account the almost erotic images the poem presents; for example, "She sucked until her lips were sore" (C. Rossetti 132), "Eat me, drink me, love me" (C. Rossetti 148), or "Cheek to cheek and breast to breast / Locked together in one nest" (C. Rossetti 135). This last line is literally illustrated in her poem. Linda Marshall argues that "reading the poem as juicy sexual fantasy relishes the text's sensuous immediacy, discrediting 'moral apologue' or Christian schematics in order to savour a mysterious carnal presence, an evocative literalizing of fleshly travail" (Marshall 433).

To sum up, it seems that "Rossetti herself seems to have emphasized a reading of the fairy tale on her own terms; insisting that "the poem was not an allegory," and that the poem was only a story, utterly without "any profound or ulterior meaning" (Mendoza 916). Indeed, "her poems use vivid imagery that overlays the literal with the symbolic and a pattern of allusion (chiefly biblical) that invites an understanding of physical forms and historical events as spiritual types" (Kooistra, "Christina Rossetti 3). Nevertheless, Christina's poem full of rich imagery and visual descriptions convey more than one meaning depending on the reading.

3. Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have discussed some of the techniques of word-painting Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Christina Rossetti used in their poetry in order to provide more visuality in their lyrical compositions. It is a fact that ekphrastic poems existed before the apparition of the Pre-Raphaelite movement; however, the way both Rossettis dealt with the representation of images within their poems was quite exceptional. Both of them seemed to have a preference for symbolism and indeed, it was one of the most effective methods to create a bond between image and word. Although they share this particular feature, each of them used it to convey different ideas. On one hand, for Dante, it was a tool to give his art a more complex meaning, while the symbolic details enriched his refined aesthetics. On the other hand, for Christina, it was a vehicle for conveying a more spiritual insight and moral values. Another aspect that creates a communion between the verbal and the visual art is the close attachment of pictorial art to the poems. In this case, Dante created sonnets from some of his paintings and bound them together and Christina accompanied with illustrations of some of her most famous poems. It is inevitable to draw a connection between the images that are physically painted in a canvas or drawn in a piece of paper and what is told with words, which in the end provides the spectator and the reader a double artistic experience that is complemented with the visual information they receive from the two sources. Even if the poetic goals of the Rossetti siblings was diverse, the technique of word-painting was innovative and the Pre-Raphaelite movement as a whole served as an inspiration for latter artistic movements such as the Aesthetic Movement and the so called Symbolist Movement, which remind us of the revolutionary change Pre-Raphaelites made in the world of art in the mid-nineteenth century.

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