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**MADONNAS AND MONSTERS:
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INTRODUCTION

The idea of Victorian women as images, created by the visions of men (be it in everyday life or in art) is what initially drew me to this project. What women of the nineteenth century truly were as individuals was of no consequence: from birth they were given a role to play by the patriarchal society surrounding them. The idea of a female "sphere," a realm of domesticity and obedience became the prison of the home, the husband, and of course, the children.

Along with Coventry Patmore's "Angel in the House" idea, however, came other connotations of femaleness-- that of a creative force as well as the source of inspiration, derived in part from the Muses of Greek mythology. Accordingly, though, the image of the female as a creative strength had some measure of power associated with it, a power which could be in some way threatening, almost emasculating to men.

I knew, though, that this was by no means the totality of the images ascribed to Victorian women. The justification behind the patriarchal structure of Victorian society had its roots in Christian mythology, and Eve's punishment for "causing" the Fall of Man. Eve's folly is representative of yet a third, more complicated facet of the Victorian image of women-- the simultaneous serpent, seductress, wife and mother. Reaching even further back in Christian teaching reveals Adam's first wife, Lilith, whose great evil was refusing to "lie beneath" her husband. Against the order imposed upon her, the "feminist" stance she held was enough to have her banished from Eden and branded a Demon, accused of stealing men's sexuality in the night.

Women of Victorian society, with its strict adherence to religious and moral values, were

the direct inheritors of these images. It was the manifestation of these conceptions of womanhood in the poetry and art of the period which particularly drew my interest, for it was through artistic mediums that men expressed both their ideals and anxieties over female "space," and its definition. Was it a totally domestic sphere? If so, how much control does the male retain? If not, what does constitute "femaleness?" Sexuality? Seduction? Death? All three?

The only consensus I have discovered was that any effort on the part of women to control their own space was viewed as innately deviant, and therefore threatening to men.

As for the artists, I chose Victorians and members of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, both poets and painters. In the literary sense, the term "Pre-Raphaelitism" is rather vague. It certainly includes the followers of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who were, as Harold Bloom points out, "the overt Romantics among the Victorians."¹ It has also been termed "the visualized poetry of fantasy," a definition which, according to Cecil Lang, "obviously admits Coleridge's *Christabel*, Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, and Tennyson's *Lady of Shallott*..."² What these definitions neglect, however, is one of the most important aspects of Pre-Raphaelite poetry and art, which is its particular treatment of women.

I have broken my argument down into four main parts. The first is an exploration of the influences and ideas of the first generation of Romantics concerning the nature of poetry, which

¹Harold Bloom, introduction, Pre-Raphaelite Poets, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea, 1986) 1.

²Cecil B. Lang, introduction, The Pre-Raphaelites and Their Circle, ed. Cecil B. Lang (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975) xxxvi-xxvii.

had a bearing in shaping Keats' ideas of art and beauty. I chose to include this simply as a background for understanding how the poetry of the 18th century evolved to influence Keats, who in turn influenced the Victorians.

The following three sections deal with the Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite treatment of women, breaking their images down into the three I found most prominent: The Madonna/Mary Magdalene figure, the partially empowered domestic female, and the femme fatale. I begin each group with a comparable poem from Keats, one of the three "Hymns to Eros" for each section.

In the second section I concentrate on the female as a religious icon, an image from the very core of Victorian society. "As all clean-minded Victorians knew," Nina Auerbach writes, "a normal, and thus a good woman was an angel, submerging herself in family, existing only as daughter, wife, and mother."³ Any deviance from the "ideal" was punishable by society, an attitude I attempt to sort through in my analysis of the poem and paintings of *The Lady of Shallott*.

The third section deals with a partial empowerment of the female, which tended in its Victorian interpretations to be confined to the domestic environment. However, female space in this section is dominated and delineated by the woman herself, and male accessibility is prohibited. Any attempt at an exchange between the two spheres, as in *Goblin Market*, is

³Nina Auerbach, Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) 4.

ultimately unsuccessful.

Finally, the third section confronts a female sensuality and power which totally overshadows any male interloper. The women are presented as sexual goddesses, females whose touch is at once undeniable and deadly. They represent the polar opposite of the "angel in the house," and are demons who threaten both male sexuality and control. It was these last women who intrigued me the most, in part because of the obsession the Pre-Raphaelites in particular displayed over them, and in part because of my own interest in the simultaneous fascination and repulsion they represented for the Victorians. They were the scapegoats of the society, "fallen" women who represented deviance from the norm.

I

Although it is generally impossible to trace anything in literature back to a single source, it is important nonetheless to search for the roots of artistry, for what is to be called art is not created in a vacuum. The poet is a conglomeration, a melding of all that has come before him, and all the experience of his individual lifetime. Together with his own psyche, these elements compose the body of knowledge and emotion which make his craft possible. Those who come before define the direction of poetic thought, but not, in truly great poets, the end product. Such is the case with John Keats, struggling with his own influences during life, only to become the source of such an influence in the years after his death. What Keats created out of the revolution of thought begun by the first generation of Romantic poets was the deification of earthly love, and consequently, the female form. His fascination, however, which paralleled his love of art, led him to find the serpent within Eden, the figure of the woman herself. It was an idea adopted by the Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite poets with a vengeance, a new religion with a terrible goddess who both punished and rewarded with pleasure.

The tracing of this thread of thought goes beyond Keats to his predecessor, and largest influence, William Wordsworth. During the late eighteenth century, Wordsworth and his counterparts created for themselves new paths for poetic thought, a new avenue of literature which placed the temple to art not at the feet of the Christian god's heavenly throne, but in the center of nature. Simple and complex, powerful and profound, nature became a religion.

Man, as well, had a new place in this scheme. Instead of a fallen, sinful being, man was

seen as worthy of contemplation and inquiry, a newly baptized creature in the Eden of the mind. Discovery and exploration into the workings of the human soul were extended beyond questions of Christian salvation and damnation dependent upon God. Instead, theological and poetic inquiry was moved into a new sphere concerned with man's judgement of himself, including his own commandments. This is not to say, of course, that Wordsworth was a pagan. What he and his contemporaries did, however, was to recognize a psychic state of being not tainted with original sin, with nature as its visual reflection.

In addition, and perhaps as a consequence of this new poetic theology, the first generation of Romantic poets, especially Wordsworth, began a line of inquiry into the concept of pleasure, which was to become extremely important to the philosophy and poetry of Keats, and later, the Victorians. In his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth mentions the word frequently, referring to it as constituting the "naked and native dignity of man." It is important to note, however, that at the time, the word did not carry the heavy connotations of sensuality and physical gratification in poetry. Lionel Trilling, in his essay "The Fate of Pleasure," comments,

The pleasure which used commonly to be associated with poetry was morally unexceptionable and not very intense-- it was generally understood that poetry might indeed sometimes excite the mind but only as a step towards composing it.⁴

According to Trilling, it is the sheer **primitiveness** of the ideas associated with the word pleasure

⁴Lionel Trilling, "The Fate of Pleasure: Wordsworth to Dostoevsky," *Romanticism Reconsidered*, ed. Northrop Frye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963) 75.

which may be related to its unfavorable connotations. He associates primitive with the erotic, but Wordsworth's poetry contains a pleasure which is primitive in a different way. It tended, as Trilling observes, "toward joy, a purer and more nearly transcendent state." To find pleasure in its sumptuous, highly erotic context, we must examine Keats.

In his own poetry, Keats adopted the poetic religion of Wordsworth, and transformed it into a creed which not only directed his art, but his life as well. His poetic imagery is characterized by its sumptuous erotic texture, its overwhelming sensory explosions. Trilling comments,

No poet ever gave so much credence to the idea of pleasure in the sense of "indulgence of the appetites, sensual gratification," as Keats did, and the... complex of pleasure-sensuality-luxury, makes the very fabric of his thought.⁵

The pleasure obtained from an erotic encounter was to Keats more than a simple sexual experience-- it was a direct route of access to the spiritual plane. "I could be martyr'd for my Religion," he wrote to Fanny Brawne in October, 1819, "Love is my religion." In his imaginative landscape, love is a delicate, magical state. The very part of mortal man's soul which is damning in traditional Christian doctrine is not only celebrated in Keats, but deified. This veneration of erotic love is easily recognizable in works such as *The Eve of St. Agnes*.

Unlike Wordsworth, Keats was openly agnostic, contemptuous of the Christian Church which he saw as full of hypocrites practicing corruption. It would be incorrect to assume,

⁵Ibid, p. 77.

however, that he wasn't religious. He admired Wordsworth, his poetic nature worship, and his innovative examination of the mind and soul of man. For Keats, however, it was only a stepping stone, one aspect of his obsession, his artistic worship of Beauty, Truth, and Love. In a letter to his friend Benjamin Baily in 1817 he wrote, "I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination- What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth..." Keats' religion was fully humanized, placing man as an autonomous entity at the center of a vast creative universe waiting to be explored. "Do you not see," he wrote in 1819, "how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?" Suffering was not, as Christian doctrine taught, a necessity brought on by the Fall of Man, or a prerequisite for the Glory of Heaven. Instead, each pain was a learning experience, a marker of maturity which contributed to engineering individual identity. "In this way," M.H. Abrams notes, "Keats explicitly translated the theological system of salvation into a secular system of progressive education."⁶ By calling the world "the Vale of Soul-making," Keats transformed the human experience into a theology of sensation.

Progressively, however, the idea of pleasure inextricably entwined with pain became a major theme for Keats. This is especially visible in later works such as *Lamia* and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. Abrams notes,

⁶M.H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1971) 125,

...one of Keats' boldest expressions [is] his sense that there is something perverse and self-negating in the erotic life, that it is quite in the course of nature that we should feel "Pleasure... turning to Poison as the bee-mouth sips."⁷

In Keats' three "Hymns to Eros," this pleasure/pain paradox is progressively associated with the idea of the female, and the space she occupies. Operating simultaneously on the level of Muse and erotic fantasy, the women in Keats' poetry became representatives of the Romantic anxiety of identity. As a consequence, the space Keats appropriated his female characters, and the vision they represented became increasingly one of power, seduction, and finally, death. Both *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and *Lamia* embody this idea through the omnisensuality and simultaneous fatality which pervades both poems. This merry-go-round of intertwined passions, obsessions, and anxieties associated with the female form fascinated Keats, and the Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite poets and painters who admired and followed him.

⁷Ibid, p. 83.

II

The Eve of St. Agnes was Keats' first step in the direction of an exploration of the female presence. Here, the woman is an icon, held up for better or worse to the interpretive eye of the male. The poem defines many layers of space, both of erotic love and its female originator. The protagonists' experience of carnal love is a religious encounter, and it becomes a major vehicle for defining Porphyro's vision of Madeline. Indeed, the passages most full of religious imagery and wonder are those of the fulfillment of sexual love between the pair.

The environment the lovers create is more than reality, what Harold Bloom calls a "sensuous concreteness."⁸ In the moments anticipating the consummation of their desire, Keats paints the scene with exquisite attention to the senses. Moonlight falling through the windows in Madeline's chamber bathes her in an array of sumptuous color.

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon;
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst (217-21)

Keats wants us to not only read, but to *feel* that this is the one, true world.

All of the wealth and luxury of Madeline's chamber becomes itself an expression of women's space, as she is transformed into an icon of religious devotion for her lover. The gorgeousness of her surroundings is representative of his ideal, and of her image as luxuriousness made flesh. The main action of the poem takes place in this room, a womb-like space of

⁸ Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1961) 370.

nourishment and warmth, a haven for the lovers against the terrors and harsh brutality of "reality" which exists outside her chamber doors. There is a sense, though, in which the lovers are confined to Madeline's chamber. They are surrounded by both the hostility of the elements and a group of people who would kill Porphyro on sight. The space they occupy may be a haven, but its walls enclose and isolate them.

Madeline's room is a creative space, nurturing the sexual environment the lovers establish. The physical environment takes its meaning from various fantasies surrounding its occupant.

Even so, Madeline's belief in the legend of St. Agnes' Eve partially creates this image of religious devotion around her. Ultimately, however, she is the reason this sumptuousness exists, while Porphyro's fantasy completes the vision. She is the centerpiece to the altar he has come to kneel before, and his act of *seeing* is definitively dynamic. In a moment of passion he tells her,

Ah, silver shrine, here will I take my rest
After so many hours of toil and quest,
A famish'd pilgrim,-- saved by miracle. (337-39)

Clearly, Madeline is not simply a mortal woman, but an image which the male can worship both actually and artistically. She is an object of devotion and fascination, and the type of image she inspires has clear descendants in the work of the Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite artists.

Two painted versions of *The Eve of St. Agnes* were created. William Holman Hunt's representation (1848) [figure 1], does not attempt to address the nature of female space at all. Instead, it is painted at the moment when Madeline and Porphyro escape into the night. By his choosing to focus on the moment of their *escape*, however, he acknowledges their earlier confinement, and the fact that however beautiful the previous scenes may have been, her

bedchamber is not without a darker shadow.

The only clue we have to Madeline's temperament in this painting is her resemblance to a Virgin Mary figure. The second, however, Arthur Hughes' triptych (1856) [figure 2], depicts as its central scene Madeline's bedchamber, with her lover kneeling at her side. The artist's interpretation misses both the magnificent spectacle of colors Keats painted into the poem, and the sumptuous banquet Porphyro lays out for her pleasure, instead choosing to focus solely on the vision of her as a holy icon. Again, Madeline resembles if nothing else a pure young girl, which in itself is yet another interpretation of the religious iconographic motif. Her lover kneels before her, in an almost prayer-like stance. In the poem she is worshipped on a much more carnal level, as when Keats describes their consummation:

Beyond a mortal man impassion'd far
At these voluptuous accents, he arose,
Ethereal, flush'd, and like a throbbing star
Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose;
Into her dream he melted...(316-320)

Again and again, the language Keats wields to describe the scene is simultaneously highly erotic and religious.

Hughes, like Holman Hunt, decided that the escape was a focal point in the poem, which by induction leads the viewer to focus on their previous confinement. This theme surfaces again in Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott*.

As with Porphyro himself, each painter has given Madeline life through his own vision, and gives her a unique iconographic status. Through Keats' work, and through the painters who later attempted to portray her on canvas, Madeline enchants because of the act of vision. She is raised to the level of Madonna because of how these men *see* her. In the poem Keats makes

much of visions, tricks of light, and the sight of dreams, because Porphyro uses them to construct an idol from the woman he loves.

Years later, public opinion brought on by the cultural changes during the reign of Victoria would have considered Keats highly censorable. Her advice to the women of her realm to close their eyes and "think of England" during the sex act reflected the attitude of the times. The erotic was extremely taboo, and ideas of sexuality were focused mainly on the female. Women became more of an icon than ever, equal in one aspect to the Virgin Mary, but at the same time tainted with the shadow of Mary Magdalene. This confusion wanted an artistic expression, which was eventually found in the Pre-Raphaelite poetry and paintings. The Victorian artists were searching for an iconographic ideal, and they found her both in Keats, and in their own dreams of the women around them.

Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* is the first of the Victorian descendants of *St. Agnes'* Madeline. While not a Pre-Raphaelite, he was, like them, a great admirer of Keats. Once again, the female figure of the poem appears in a "room," a space which is unquestionably hers. The Lady's position as icon here is different, however, for this poem has no happy ending. Confined to the space she inhabits, she makes the room her world, creating with her weaving visions of a real world that is now inaccessible to her.

As in *St. Agnes*, the room is a creative space, but in Tennyson it is a space of work. In the poem it serves as a sort of dual image, symbolizing both "women's" work and the artistic process. On one level, her weaving is useless labor, like the embroidery the women of the Victorian period used it to fill their idle time. The leisure to weave suggests wealth, but the woven products did not represent art. Instead, they were an image of superficial listlessness, as

nothing of the creator was embodied in the work.

Certainly, however, the Lady and her loom embody the artistic process. Her weaving does not arise from the imagination, but is a reflection of a reflection of the true world. It is a twice-removed mirror of reality, made as the result of a forced vocation. She is the quintessential artist, creating a version of reality not necessarily accurate (but no less meaningful) because it can only mirror experience. Wedded for better or worse to its author, the Lady's work denotes the most crucial kind of psychological involvement.

Here the poem raises questions of freedom, artistic and otherwise, since the Lady's subject matter is limited upon penalty of death. Left with no alternative but her work, cut off from active participation with her subject, the Lady is left to long for what she can only reproduce in two dimensions. She is weaving a tapestry of the world she cannot enter, except through shadows; actual contact would mean destruction. Confinement has become literal, a theme that Keats began with *The Eve of St. Agnes*.

What, then, is the nature of the female iconography Tennyson attempts here? The Lady's role as artist is only part of her story, and Tennyson leaves the details of her life and the curse which holds her deliberately hazy. She is his representative of the essence of the female itself, an enigma. In Woman/Image/Text, Lynne Pearce comments, "the Lady of Shalott herself [is] the heroine who is at once a bewitching 'fairy' (Parts I and II) and a pure Virgin, clothed in 'snowy white' (Part IV)."⁹ At once ensnaringly provocative and sadly innocent, the image of the Lady leaves the reader with an endless round of speculations. We are never told why she is

⁹Lynne Pearce Woman/Image/Text: Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) 78.

confined to her tower and her work.

The Lady of Shallott was painted repeatedly by the Pre-Raphaelites, who found her a fascinating example of all they worshipped in the female character. Each painter who attempted her found a different angle on her image, from something resembling a harlot in William Holman Hunt's 1886 [figure 3] and John William Waterhouse's 1915 versions to Waterhouse's virginal portrayal (after the curse has come upon her) of 1888. [figure 4] Their act of imagining the Lady very seldom looked to Tennyson's intentions, but instead recreated her from their own individual visions. The way they saw her is reflected in both the moment each chose to portray, and in particular interpretations of the reason for the curse. Most of the paintings and drawings chose to portray her at or near the moment of her disobedience. Her image as a voluptuous, free-minded woman who is punished for her crime seems of particular interest. Sidney Harold Meteyard's portrait (1913) [figure 5] shows the Lady at her loom, before the fulfilling of the curse. His title is a quote from the text, *"I am half-sick of shadows," said the Lady of Shalott*. She is reclining, watching the two lovers in her mirror, weaving an image of Lancelot in anticipation of her later actions. Her hair is styled in an anachronistic way, the "Gibson Girl" look of the early 20th century. It seems Meteyard saw her as a representative of his idea of contemporary womanhood instead of an individual.

William Holman Hunt's portrait is painted at the moment when the mirror cracks. Here she is an icon of bold sexuality, initiating an encounter with Lancelot by her glance into his world. Hunt's portrayal is less sympathetic, playing on Tennyson's use of weaving imagery to illustrate her entrapment in her own snares. "Despite Tennyson's own claim that the poem articulated the dilemma of art, caught between reflection and reality" states Jan Marsh, "Holman

Hunt analyzed the text as a moral fable illustrating 'the failure of a human soul towards its accepted responsibility'.¹⁰ The tangled threads of the loom are wrapped around her, as her body undulates and her hair flies in an unnatural wave. She is angry, large and powerful, not remotely the image of the proper Victorian lady. This Lady is wild and rebellious, and brings down justice through her own wrongdoing.

John William Waterhouse painted several versions of the Lady, imagined at different points in the poem. The earliest depicts her after the curse has been meted out. She is a sad, wan figure, sitting forlornly in her boat, with a crucifix in the prow, the weaving of Lancelot trailing in the water over the sides. She is dressed in virginal white, although her abdomen bulges a bit, perhaps suggesting unwed pregnancy as the nature of her crime. Later, in his final painting, he accuses her further, as she sits at her loom dressed in harlot red. Again, the bulging abdomen, girded underneath with a golden belt. Like Meteyard's portrait, she watches the lovers, and reclines with a look of obvious longing on her face.

Is she the scarlet harlot who was justly punished for her crime of hubris? Or simply a victim of the Victorian cultural system? Although she was resurrected by Tennyson for an admittedly different purpose, what she became for the painters of the time was a symbol of all womanhood. Freedom, propriety, sexuality and the creative process are all interwoven into her countenance and her purpose.

The interpretation of her moral character was of particular importance for these painters, especially in conjunction with her work. Whether in her room or in the boat floating toward Camelot, her defining characteristic is the tapestry, bound to her as no other object is. In the

¹⁰Jan Marsh, Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity in Pre-Raphaelite Art (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987) 150.

Hunt, Waterhouse, and Meteyard portraits, a certain judgement on her labor is imposed upon the poem. For Hunt especially, but for the others as well, it was a symbol of her "place," her bound duty as a woman. The painters imposed a definition of her space through their own imaginative "seeing," so that in a sense she is a powerless figure of femininity.

The painters also explored Tennyson's theme of the Lady's imprisonment, and the ways in which her chamber reflected it. Holman Hunt, for example, trapped her not only in the room, but in the spinning threads that enshroud her body. In his painting she is confined on a much more literal level than simply by the power of a curse. Also, it is important to notice that each painter specifically included her tapestry next to her, whether she was in or out of the room. Her work is held to her at all times. Even when she was painted by Waterhouse floating towards Camelot, the tapestry is close beside her in the boat.

Each artist who attempted the myth of the Lady of Shallot defined her space as he saw fit, and although Tennyson allowed for more than one interpretation, in all cases men delineate her world. Our last glimpse of her in the poem is when she is named and defined for the last time by another male, Lancelot. His final blessing, that "God in his mercy lend her grace," leaves her broken and helpless, totally the product of the male vision.

III

The second of Keats' examinations of female space is *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. A marker of his growing poetic maturity, the poem in addition reflects Keats' anxieties about inspiration and imagination. The femme fatale image of the fairy woman, who taunts, seduces, and abandons the knight on the cold hillside of reality, has at once many identities. She is the fickle muse, teasing the poet with fleeting glimpses of an imaginative paradise; the wanton seductress, drawing the man into a world of appetites that can never be fully satiated; and the draining succubus, leaving her victims "death-pale" and "starving." Keats does not suggest that *La Belle Dame* is necessarily an evil figure, but simply other-worldly, one who creates Coleridge's poet of "flashing eyes" and "floating hair" who can no longer keep the company of men.

She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna dew,
And sure in language strange she said
"I love thee true." (25-28)

The knight is enraptured, covering her eyes "with kisses four," and sleeping in her enchanted fairy land. "All is to the purpose," Harold Bloom observes, "not of gratification, but to lulling the knight asleep, with the fated food within him, to dream of the truth and awaken to find himself in a withered natural world, forever cut off from it."¹¹ In this poem, the woman has become the focus of a formidable power.

¹¹Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry. (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1961) 378.

La Belle Dame again brings into light the question of female space. Here, in apparent progression from *The Eve of St. Agnes*, it has become much more dangerous, even potentially fatal to the man who becomes so captivated with its delights that he can no longer have any use in the real world. The woman's place has become an "elfin grot" where the man is no longer dominant under her spell of femininity. Again, Keats has made femininity an inroad to creativity, identifying with sexuality and the artistic endeavor. While *La Belle Dame* is the inspiration for the male artistic creative force, she herself is confined to sexuality, and the feminine wiles which accompany it. Her art is the art of entrapment, the art of sensual pleasure. Nevertheless, in *La Belle Dame* the female has created a space of her own, powerful in its own right. As opposed to *St Agnes*, or *The Lady of Shallot*, the area of interaction between masculine and feminine is no longer totally controlled by the male, and the female image is no longer what the male would have it be. In this poem, the female gains a sense of power, and the encounter is structured as a type of exchange between the separate male and female spheres. It is an attempt which is ultimately unsuccessful, and it is a problem *because* it is a gendered exchange. The transaction has value, however, because the woman's power is not a social contrivance, but a natural part of her female identity.

This contest is envisioned and narrated by the male. He is a knight, and therefore comes to the "elfin grot" expecting to proceed according to the rules of chivalry and romance, which are, of course, his own rules. He sees everything through the filter of knighthood, and anticipates taking possession of the lady. Unfortunately for him, however, *La Belle Dame* does not play by

those rules, and he is ultimately victimized.

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend and sing
A faery's song.(21-24)

The exchange he expects is not what he receives, and he is thwarted by a new set of rules which includes a woman who can exercise control over the sexual situation, a transaction which is ultimately one of power.

Both John William Waterhouse and Frank Cowper (a late Pre-Raphaelite) painted versions of *La Belle Dame*. Waterhouse's portrait, entitled *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (1898), [figure 6] focuses on the moment of entrapment, when the lady has wrapped her long hair around the neck of the knight and is pulling him down into her enchanting embrace. The forest surrounding them is dark and close, suggesting that her "elfin grot" is not only a location of sensuality, but a site of something more sinister-- specifically, the seduction of the knight. Here the lady's dress is not threatening, though it gives a misrepresentation of innocence, which is yet another ploy. Her appearance is one which on the whole suggests purity, and this ultimately serves to enhance the feeling of deceit emanating from her form.

Cowper's rendering, again titled *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (1926), [figure 7] visualizes the moment of the lady's triumph. No deceit remains in Cowper's painting, as her work is done and she is merely contemplating her victory. Any vision of innocence is also gone, as her scarlet dress flows around her body like a cloud. The knight, asleep at her feet, is covered by a spider's web, and lies contentedly among the poppies of forgetfulness.

Together, the two artists' choice of scenes is indicative of the way La Belle Dame is viewed as a woman. In both cases, as in the poem, she is shown overcoming the knight. Waterhouse chooses to illustrate her as the deceiving temptress, while the Cowper highlights the triumphant, yet indifferent, empowered female. In both paintings there is no doubt as to who is in control. Though La Belle Dame is not a femme fatale in the sense that her victim is literally dead, the portraits choose to see her as a woman with destruction of men as her aim. The step into the female sphere by the male protagonist proves to be disaster, for a woman existing outside the male sphere is inevitably dangerous.

This theme continues in Victorian poetry as well, and the idea of male/female relations culminating in an exchange in which the *female* is somehow empowered occurs in Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess*, Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The Blessed Damsel*. Each of these poems considers the idea of exchange between male and female spheres which are completely separate, and the attempted transaction is ultimately fruitless. The women in these poems are not helpless captives, held up to the light by the male gaze. Instead, each of them is in control to some extent, even, as in the case of *My Last Duchess*, after her own death.

Browning's poem is another example of the image of a female becoming more important than the woman herself. Here, the act of seeing becomes so crucial to the Duke that his wife's death (whatever the circumstances) takes second place to her portrait on the wall. Unlike *The Lady of Shalott*, however, the Duchess is empowered in some fashion, even beyond the attempt

her husband has made to trap her on canvas.

Ferrara is a collector, a connoisseur. He is giving the agent of the Duke of Tyrol a tour of his home, and the treasures he has had the pleasure to acquire. His most precious, of course, is the portrait he unveils for the man, revealing his last Duchess. He owns her now as surely as the sea horse cast in bronze, but covets the painting as much more than as a canvas executed by a master. In his eyes it has replaced the woman herself.

When she was alive, the Duke says, she gave herself to the world. "Her looks went everywhere," he remarks. "All and each\Would draw from her alike the approving speech,\Or blush at least."(29-31) Value was to her a smile, or a sunset, "as if she ranked\My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name\With anybody's gift."(32-34) He arranges for her portrait, and then her death, because for him, his gaze is all that is required to give her life. She lives from that moment on only with the permission of his eyes, and the vanity that might call him to pull away the material covering her.

Here, women are commodities, and their images are representative of their status as things to be traded. Even the context for the poem is an arrangement between two men for the possession of a woman. It is a financial transaction. Unfortunately for the Duke, however, the simple act of acquiring a human being does not constitute ownership. He thinks that her portrait can be controlled by his whim, interpreted and manipulated according to his fancy. He doesn't realize that his own obsession is the mark of her continued power. She haunts him still, and even though he has control of this painting, there is something of her nature that escapes him.

Why else would he go to such theatrical lengths to display it? That very quality which led him originally to attempt her imprisonment on canvas continues to elude his grasp.

Her power lies in the fact that she did not participate in his world of exchange. Value meant something different to the Duchess than it did to her husband. "The bough of cherries some officious fool\Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule\She rode with round the terrace" (27-29) These were the things she held as valuable. It is a system the Duke cannot comprehend, a system beyond lire, in which exchange does not include money or property. It is the realm of the woman, and his failure to comprehend or acknowledge it only lends his dead wife more power. He loses as surely as the knight of *La Belle Dame*.

Bearing strong resemblance to Keats' *La Belle Dame*, Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* nonetheless reverses the roles of seducer and seduced. In this case, it is the men, not the women, who offer the deadly, succulent fruit, and here it is a woman, not a man, who is infected with its sweet juices and is abandoned. Like Keats, Rossetti seems to have wanted to explore the nature and power of feminine versus masculine strength, and his examination works on two levels. Besides the dichotomy between the mercantile area of the Goblin men and the domestic domain of the sisters, Laura and Lizzie in themselves represent conflicting interpretations of the realm of the woman.

Value and exchange are significant in *Goblin Market*, as the title itself suggests. The Goblin men are first and foremost merchants, associated with the masculine world of trade and commerce. Bizarre chimeras of animal and human characteristics, they are completely alien to

women, who are the sacred bearers of normal human reproduction. The fruits they use to taunt the women are the fruits of the male sphere, the fruits of sexual initiation and exploration, which is a power the sisters are unfamiliar with, according to their sex. The world of men is vastly different from the domestic range of Laura and Lizzie, who cling together and manage their own sphere of hearth and home. The Goblin men offer them a chance to taste of the marketplace, a chance to experience the world as a man. Access to that world, however, is expressly forbidden of them, and as Lizzie knows, to enter would mean death.

Laura, on the other hand, rejects custom and partakes of the feast, with the ensuing consequence of degeneration. The payment demanded of her is a lock of her golden hair, with its connotation of currency. Gold is the only valuation the Goblin men know, and to them the value she carries is contained within her body.

It is only after her sister makes the sacrifice to save her that Laura has any hope.

Elizabeth Campbell concludes that

together Laura and Lizzie represent an actively female mind torn between the two most obvious alternatives for a woman presented by Victorian society. A woman can either comply with the male Victorian's market economy and capitalist values, his historical ascendancy and currency-- the choice that relegates the woman to an inferior position but allows for her survival; or she can assert her own sense of female integrity, wholeness, and self-sufficiency¹²

¹²Elizabeth Campbell, "Of Mothers and Merchants: Female Economics in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*," Victorian Studies 33:3 (1990): 400.

Laura chooses to enter the male world, and suffers for it unto death. She withers away, fruitless, both figuratively and literally. It is her sister, the stalwart upholder of the Victorian ideal of the "Angel in the House," who must come to her rescue and redeem her.

This is not to say, however, that Rossetti necessarily meant for women to bow to some kind of inferior position. In fact, there exists a system of female power which struggles in this poem to assert itself in its own right. The power of sisterhood, of a self-contained female space, is embodied in Lizzie's battle with the goblins. The episode is important because it is a turning point for the question of power in the poem. Until now, the power lay in the realm of the unknown, in the fruits that the goblin men carried. Their world was an Eden the women were forbidden to taste from, and the serpent was man himself. When Lizzie stands firm against the goblins' insults and thrashings, however, she represents the redeeming virgin, the pillar of the strength of womanhood. She enters with a penny, the men's standard of exchange, under the pretense of using their system of value, but returns to her sister having done just the opposite.

White and golden Lizzie stood,
Like a lily in a flood,--
Like a rock of blue-veined stone
Lashed by tides obstreperously,--

Like a royal virgin town
Topped with gilded dome and spire
Close beleaguered by a fleet
Mad to tug her standard down.

Even the metaphors describing her stalwart resistance against the goblins' blows cast the contest in terms of space. She is a "royal virgin town" who is approached in battle, or a beautiful lily

withstanding the rushing waters. The conflict with the goblins has become a contest over gendered territory, and the female has won.

She returns to Laura, and in the famous lines heavy with sexual overtones, redeems her sister with the gift of her body, a *female* body:

She cried, "Laura," up the garden,
"Did you miss me?
Come and kiss me.
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
Eat me, drink me, love me;
Laura, make much of me; (464-72)

Once again, value exists for women in a way which is totally inaccessible to the men. Now power rests in the hands of the women, who sustain and nurture one another. They are strong without venturing into the site of exchange created by the men, who have as a consequence been banished. The remainder of their lives is spent in quiet domestic happiness, passing to their children the wisdom of their trials. Granted, the seat of power for women in this poem is the domestic sphere, but where else would Rossetti have placed it and retained the essence of the feminine which was, at the time, certainly associated with the domestic? Their location gives the reader connotations of womanhood some other site could not have afforded. *Goblin Market* concerns power struggles in which women gain strength within their separate gender sphere, not despite it.

Finally, D.G. Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel* is yet another example of the artistic definition of separate male and female spheres. Here, the subject is a couple parted by death, and the frame is the longing they both feel for one another. As in his sister's work, Rossetti

gives the female a voice, thereby empowering her with the ability to speak and consequently define her plight. Patmore's "Angel in the House" has become manifested in its truest form, and Rossetti makes it most obvious that her metaphorical existence on earth has been finally verified.

The Blessed Damozel is primarily a poem about separation. Male and female space are most clearly divided here in a literal sense, male being of the earth and female being of the heavens. Boundaries exist everywhere: between life and death, male and female, salvation and damnation. Even time is radically differentiated between the two spheres.

The line between life and death has been crossed by one of the pair, and she is now in Paradise, for better or worse. There is no going back, nor does she desire to, for she has come into her own place. Instead, it is her wish that her lover come to her. Heaven has become yet another "elfin grot," a decidedly female space which is also, nevertheless, incarcerating. Nina Auerbach writes,

Women are granted unprecedented power in its prisonlike space...hers is a Heaven purged of male control, a community of women with the sole power to sanctify their lovers.¹³

As what Auerbach calls the "presiding genius," the Virgin Mary is the most visible of the Heavenly hierarchy, surrounded by five more women. Where men are present (excepting God and Christ), there are also women, all joined in pairs as lovers, as if men cannot exist here without the company and guidance of a female. The only single man is the Damozel's lover,

¹³Nina Auerbach, Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982) 72.

alone on the earth with other men.

The Damsel, while occupying a decidedly female space, is not happy. She is not a luring seductress, but a lonely woman longing for her lover who was left behind. Rossetti's Heaven is different from the realm of *La Belle Dame* in that it is a prison for the single woman as well as for the man who enters. This is, of course, embodied as the golden bar.

This boundary defines the worlds better than mere space or distance. As we know, earthly bounds (such as time) are useless in Heaven, hence the need for a different type of perimeter. The bar, however, more than simple demarcation. George Y. Trail writes,

The bar of Heaven in the second line of the poem is revealed to us in the 25th line, as part of the "rampart of God's house," part of a fortification. In line 44 the bar has become "circling charm"; its impenetrability has become somehow magical. Yet by the last four lines this "charm" has become the "golden barriers" upon which the Damsel weeps.¹⁴

Finally, in addition to being the bar of a prison, part of a fortification, and a "circling charm," the golden bar is also a symbol of sexuality. In line 43 the Damsel leans across it, "until her bosom must have made\The bar she leaned on warm." She is still very much of the flesh, at least in one respect. Even though Heaven is different from the "elfin grot" in the attitude of its inhabitant, it is again a very sexual place, where lovers embrace around the Damsel and become "like thin flames."

¹⁴George Y. Trail, "Time in *The Blessed Damsel*," Pre-Raphaelite Poets, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986).

As in the previous poems, an exchange is attempted, but this time it is the exchange of affection. Here again, for the protagonists it is unsuccessful. We leave the Damozel weeping upon that same bar, smiling only in anticipation of a reunion with the man left below. Only when fatality touches his own limbs will they be joined.

In the painting of the same name, [figure 8] Rossetti again chooses to highlight the golden bar as the primary barrier between the two worlds. The painting is framed such that *another* gold bar, namely the part of the frame splits it into two sections, which serves to catch the eye as a clear dividing line between the two worlds. Through the very arrangement of the parts of the canvas, Rossetti wanted to make the distinction between woman's and man's sphere very clear.

He also gave evidence of his interpretation of the story through composition. Unlike the poem, which alternates between scenes of the Damozel in Heaven and her lover on Earth, the painting chooses only one scene of each to illustrate, which creates in itself a new perspective with which to view it in relation to the poem. The choices he made as to what to include in the scene, for example, accentuate the theme of a divided landscape. Although never explicitly stated in the poem, for instance, the angels are obviously women in the picture. Men are not allowed in this particularly female Paradise except in the company of a woman, as in the case of the lovers gathered around her. One also notices that the section in which the lover of the Damozel lies on the earth is much smaller than the Heaven above where she sadly longs for him. Rossetti makes it clear here in ways not available in the poem that this is a story of a kind of exchange between two entirely different realms, an exchange which, as in the poem, is unsuccessful.

In Keats' *Lamia*, it is the joining itself which is fatal to the male, although as in *The Blessed Damozel* we know that love is the attempted exchange. The difference is that the touch of the woman, and the "fairy fruit" the male ingests are fatal. In culmination of the progressive images of woman and the space she inhabits, we see now the "femme fatale." She is empowered to the fullest extent, able to take the life of a man who is enchanted by her charms.

IV

Like *St. Agnes* and *La Belle Dame*, *Lamia* takes the configuration of space as an important issue from the beginning. The "southern moors" and "elfin grot" have become the world of the immortals, where Hermes searches for the nymph he loves. Passion is all encompassing, unrestrained. Lamia has made the nymph invisible, in fact, to hide her from the multitude of lovers who want her. Unfortunately, however, Lamia herself has fallen in love with Lycius, a man who she can only reach by hiding her snake form in that of a woman. She must cross the barrier, and she does so, without hesitation.

This opening scene exists as a sort of marker for male-female relations. The women we see--the nymph and Lamia-- are both in disguised forms, inaccessible to the males. A transformation must take place in both instances to allow for the barrier to be crossed. In each case, a distinct line must be traversed, and Keats makes it obvious that men's and women's spaces are configured differently.

Even after careful study, Lamia is a baffling character. From the very beginning everything about her is in question; we are constantly asking ourselves what is real and what is illusion. "I was a woman," she tells Hermes, and the snake form she holds is one of incredible beauty. Harold Bloom comments,

Lamia is simultaneously a deceptive sorceress
and a beautiful innocent, a destroyer and a
sensual ideal...Keats has so built his poem
that we cannot know which is the true Lamia,
serpent or woman.¹⁵

Her transformation is particularly interesting, for its language is one of terrible pain and
erotic fulfillment. It is full of the imagery of rape and of intense sexual encounter. Lamia is
violated by the passion of her change.

The colours all inflam'd throughout her train,
She writh'd about, convuls'd with scarlet pain:
A deep volcanian yellow took the place
Of all her milder-mooned body's grace;
And, as the lava ravishes the mead,
Spoilt all her silver mail, and golden brede;
Made gloom of all her frecklings, streaks and bars,
Eclips'd her crescents, and lick'd up her stars:
So that, in moments few, she was undrest
Of all her sapphires, greens, and amethyst. (153-62)

She emerges from her experience, in the male sphere, "A virgin purest lipp'd, yet in the lore/Of
love deep learned to the red heart's core." Her ordeal is indeed a transformation, for in assuming
the human female form, she has acknowledged the sexuality which is associated with the love
of a man. Keats does not seem, however, to view her introduction to sexuality as a equal union,
and Lamia is violated unto "scarlet pain."

In contrast to this scene, however, is the pleasure palace she constructs for Lycius in the
middle of Corinth, full of magic and erotic pleasures. This place effectively recreates the world
she has emerged from to find him, the world in which she wielded the potency. As in *St. Agnes*,

¹⁵Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry. (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1961) 378.

female space is once again associated with wealth, luxury, and enchantment. The creation of her dwelling is arguably the pivotal point in the poem, for this is where the issues of gender space and power configuration are set up for the final battle. Lamia has drawn the line around her creation--the palace that is the seat of dominance for her womanhood-- and into it she welcomes her lover. Her effort is ill-fated, however, for Lycius is still not satisfied. His ties to the male world outside their palace are still very strong. He wants to take Lamia as his possession, to show her off in his own world, where possession of a woman is once again structured almost as a financial acquisition.

Let my foes choke, and my friends shout afar,
While through the thronged streets your bridal car
Wheels round its dazzling spokes. (62-64)

He wants to have the best of both worlds, so to speak--to live with his passion in the confines of their palace, and at the same time live within the mortal world, here representative of the male sphere. It is not so much malice as immaturity which guides him so. Unfortunately, his immaturity is a fatal mistake.

The final intrusion of the male sphere, represented by Appolonius, identifies the lovers for what they are when not transformed by Passion--an illusion. Dismissing the Eden they have created with the accusation, "A serpent!" he exposes again the painful line between male and female space. Lamia disappears, presumably back to the land from which she originally emerged, but the encounter is too much for Lycius. In his final moments he is transformed by his experience of melding with Lamia, and his body is wound, snake-like, in its marriage robes.

For the nineteenth century, the rise of the early feminist movement and the increasing call for women's rights turned the female into a figure with a potential for power outside the domestic sphere, a move which gave rise to the resurrection of the femme fatale emblem. In order to express the woman at the height of her power, the Victorians frequently referred to her in terms of myth. These mythological figures, following in the tradition of Keats' lamia, are always associated with sexuality, followed by the death of the male protagonist concerned. Bram Dijkstra comments,

The link between Lamia and the late nineteenth-century feminists, the viragoes-- the wild women-- would have been clear to any intellectual reasonably well versed in classical mythology, since the Lamia of myth was thought to have been a bisexual, masculinized, cradle-robbing creature, and therefore to the men of the turn of the century perfectly representative of the New Woman who, in their eyes, was seeking to arrogate herself male privileges... The same was certainly true of Lilith...¹⁶

Unlike the power of the male, which could be used to kill a member of "the weaker sex" on whim, the idea of a female with mortal power could only be conceived if she was stronger than all humanity, so strong that no man could possibly hope to prevail. It is no accident, for example, that the underworld figure A.C. Swinburne features in his poems about death is not Hades, a male, but Proserpine. Nina Auerbach comments, "Algernon Charles Swinburne's divine-demonic pantheon of goddesses and personifications is not a perverse departure but a

¹⁶Bram Dijkstra, Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 309.

crystallization of a myth central to the Victorian imagination."¹⁷ In *Laus Veneris*, he returns to the image of the femme fatale, but this time she has become much more dangerous. No longer a calm and unbiased gatherer of the dead, the goddess of love and desire becomes the embodiment of evil. Along the same line, D.G. Rossetti was fascinated by the figure of the biblical Lilith, whom he immortalized in his House of Life sonnet, *Body's Beauty*, and in his painting titled *Lady Lilith*. [figure 9] Both authors viewed these powerful female figures as Reaper-like, gathering in men from the world in a sinister and cruelly deceiving way, while personally remaining cold and distant. The encounter is always structured as a surrender, leaving the male as cold and lifeless as the immortal being he was originally drawn to.

In *Laus Veneris* Swinburne created a character who is at once tempting, provocative, and fatal, a combination which makes her all the more alluring to the male protagonist. The very first stanza begins with a reference to vampirism, and curiously enough, Venus is the victim. Her neck, he says, "wears yet a purple speck\Wherein the pained blood falters and goes out" (2-3). In this way Swinburne doubly insures her immortal, yet deadly, aura. She is a goddess, but one who has been initiated into the darker side of immortality, a woman who carries the mark of sexuality and death.

Her victim is again a knight, the paragon of manly virtues. He is lured into her "Horsel" to suffer the fate of an eager surrender to her charms. "She holds my heart in her sweet open

¹⁷Nina Auerbach, Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) 104.

hands," he says. (33) He is both a captive and a willing participant, excused from his actions because of the overwhelming power of the enchantress.

As Swinburne makes clear, however, Venus' dwelling is a bower of blood and flame, certainly a far distance from the ideal "Queen's Garden" of the properly domesticated woman. The world of the totally empowered female is a region of degeneration and destruction instead of life and nurturing warmth. The poem is laden with images of blood and fire, a hellish den of debauchery. The house he describes is "hot" place where night falls "like fire." "Her gateways," he says, "smoke with fume of flowers and fires,\With loves burnt out and unassuaged desires." Blood flows everywhere, "round the roots of time like rain," as "Her little chambers drip with flower-like red." (117-121) It is clear that the domain of this woman is Hell. Like Proserpine and Lilith, the powerful, sexually bold woman is bound and identified with the underworld. In this final culmination of the idea of a feminine space, the woman is given strength which simultaneously allows her the power normally allotted to the male, and dooms her to no hope of salvation. It is clear that to stand on equal or superior footing with the male within her own sphere is damning.

As the man thinks of his former days as "God's knight," he excuses the murders he himself committed, and goes to lengths to identify the world he came from, the male world, with goodness and light. The sphere of men is repeatedly exonerated and exalted, while the realm of a female with the same power over life and death is pointedly portrayed as evil, particularly because of her crimes. "The fair pure sword smites out in subtle ways,\Sounds and long lights

are shed between the rows\Of beautiful mailed men," he says. (215-17) In the end, however, the knight returns to the arms of his beautiful and horrible temptress as a willing captive, immersed in a living death of desire.

Reflecting the attitude of the poem, Edward Burne-Jones' painting *Laus Veneris* (1873-8) [figure 10] is the portrait of a dominant, powerful woman, large in stature and bold in her sexuality. Handmaidens occupy the places at her feet, and four of them fill one half of the painting while Venus is large enough to command half of the painting on her own. Her gown of red, reminiscent of flame, clings to her body, outlining the curves of her thighs. She holds her hair away from her neck, hinting at the theme of vampirism. It is a portrait which clearly means to identify her with a sexuality which is simultaneously irresistible and terrifying. This is not a dainty angel, but a woman who both threatens and commands, surrounded by the aura of the demonic.

Outside, the shining knights who shimmer in the sunlight look in upon the women. The window is surrounded by the murals on the walls of Venus and her son Cupid, who are being adored by the mortals on the ground. The murals frame the view of the window containing the knights, including them in the world which is portrayed on the walls. By their very gaze these "beautiful mailed men" are doomed, drawn into the images which enclose the sphere of the women.

Rossetti's Lilith, from the House of Life sonnet *Body's Beauty* and the painting *Lady Lilith* is another prime example of the Pre-Raphaelite image of the powerful woman. The poem and

the painting exist to complement one another, and frequently the literary vision of the poem is extended into the painting. Like Swinburne's *Venus*, Lilith's power is measured in her ability to ensnare men, and her indifference to the fate of her lovers is seen as cruelty.

Lilith is a woman who, like *La Belle Dame*, exists in a domain of nature which has well-defined boundaries. Here it is "rose and poppy" which symbolize her powers of enchantment and sleep. In the painting she is literally surrounded by them, and a large open window on the right provides view of a garden, presumably Eden. As with Swinburne's *Venus*, Lilith's hair is the material manifestation and primary instrument in the implementation of her goal of entrapment. Like the hair of *Venus* it is serpentine, entwining about her victims. Describing her effects upon the male Rossetti describes, "round his heart one strangling golden hair." Again, as in *Goblin Market*, golden hair is described, with its connotations of currency and exchange. Here, however, it is the female who controls the currency and the nature of the transaction. Arriving full circle, it is the male, not the female, who is drained of vitality and power in this market.

In the painting, Rossetti creates an atmosphere of deliberate cruelty on the part of this powerful femme fatale in that the tool of her trade is also one of the main items of which she is "subtly contemplative." He combines her vanity and self-absorption with the "bright web she can weave," and consequently, the image later on of her ensnaring hair:

And her enchanted hair was the first gold.
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 body and life are in its hold. (4-8)

As a mythological figure who epitomizes the evils of femininity, Lilith combines all those vices attributed to women, especially in the Victorian era. The power she holds, and the consequences of its interaction with the male world in Eden, brand her a "witch," while the proper Eve is presented as a "gift." She is relegated to the sonnet *Body's Beauty* instead of *Soul's Beauty*, for her crime as the image of a powerful woman leaves her without the privilege of spiritual rewards.

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