

THE EROTICS OF LOVE AND DEATH IN VICTORIAN POETRY

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Thesis Abstract

Bircan Sıkık, “The Erotics of Love and Death in Victorian Poetry”

The Victorian period is well-known for its constructed understanding of “sexuality” which is one of the products of the patriarchal, imperialist and religious discourse of the age. The Victorian concept of sexuality exerts pressure on women and also on men, fixes gender roles according to a certain code of behaviour which prescribes what is ideal and what is not, and delimits Victorian women’s living space accordingly. This study will explore how Victorian poetry by male authors reflects and reacts against the constructed concept of sexuality under the themes of appropriation, confinement, and evil femininity. In the light of modern and contemporary theory, this thesis focuses on how the dichotomy of love and death finds expression under the roof of eroticism in selected poems.

Tez Özeti

Bircan Sıkık, “Viktorya Dönemi Şiirinde Aşk ve Ölümün Erotizmi”

Viktorya dönemi, çağın ataerkil, emperyalist, ve dini söylemlerinin inşa ettiği cinsellik anlayışı ile bilinir. Viktoryen cinsellik kavramı, kadınlar ve erkekler üzerinde baskı kurar, neyin ideal olduğunu belirten bir davranış kuralına göre cinsiyet rollerini belirler, ve kadınların ve aynı zamanda erkeklerin, yaşam alanını kısıtlar. Bu çalışma, on dokuzuncu yüzyılın erkek yazarları tarafından kaleme alınan şiirlerinin dönemin cinsellik anlayışını nasıl yansıttığını ve bu anlayışa nasıl tepki gösterdiğini ‘sahiplenme’, ‘hapsedilme’, ve ‘kötü kadınlık’ temaları altında inceleyecektir. Modern ve çağdaş kuramlar ışığında, aşk ve ölüm ikilisinin erotizm çatısı altında bu şiirlerde ne şekilde ifade edildiği çalışmanın temel odak noktası olacaktır.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Victorian era has been characterized by its conflicts, such as the ones between science and religion, Utilitarianism and Tractarianism (The Oxford Movement), stability and instability, progress and degeneration, rationalism and romanticism (or its romantic sensibility). Within the scope of this study, the dichotomy between love and death will be explored by focusing on Victorian sexuality, another contentious subject.

Taking its name from the reign of Queen Victoria, who ruled between 1837 and 1901, this age is well-known for its domestic ideology which stems from the two role-models of society, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Social, and especially sexual, restrictions were both the cause and effect of this new domesticity which generally appealed to the middle class. This idea of domesticity also created the image of an ideal woman with reference to the traits of the Queen, who represented the ideal of a perfect wife and mother (of the entire nation). Ironically, the ideal female, epitomized by Queen Victoria, was the one who does not belong to the public domain, but to the private one. In her *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism*, Kathy Alexis Psomiades draws our attention to the differentiation between the public and the private in the Victorian era, and explains how women were consigned to the category of the private domain:

In England, bourgeois culture is characterized by the separation and gendering of public and private spheres and the concomitant assignment to bourgeois women of moral authority over private life. Femininity thus connotes what is not public and not political, what has to do with personal

and private matters, and what draws its authority from expertise in personal matters. (5)

Relying upon the binary opposition between what is ideal and what is not, all other woman figures who did not fit into this description were viewed either as evil (witches, prostitutes, or femmes fatales) or the inevitable victims of evil. So, a woman could choose either to be suppressed by patriarchal society and live safely under the roof of a male, or she might be marginalized and turned into the “other” by pursuing a different path.

The sources of this new domestic ideology were not limited to these two role models. Victorian Britain was a huge imperial country and the discourse of imperialism asserted its influence over different aspects of life in England. Imperialist Britain was characterized by its policy of expansion, which “provided a spurious appeal to [middle] class unity, a means to confirm Britain’s position as a great power within the world, and an orientation of public attention away from internal problems towards international concerns as well as providing escapism” (Stott 7). While the first part of the period is characterized by an optimistic attitude towards this expansionist policy, the signs of what Stott calls “the siege mentality” (11) appear in its latter part. For this reason, she uses the words “‘defensive’, ‘fearful’ and ‘preservationist’ to describe the spirit of the age” (4). It was believed that the cultural virility of the period was based on the moral purity of the public (Stott 22), and people started to look for scapegoats who were responsible for what was perceived as degeneration.

In this way, British imperialism produced its own code of morality and women had a crucial place in this new code. Victorian literature successfully

mirrored the newly constructed moral norms of the period, and as John R. Reed notes, “presenting the good woman as a domestic saint was a favourite stylization in Victorian literature (37)”. However, the image of the angelic and pure woman eventually leads to the creation of its binary opposition. As Psomiades asserts, “increasingly, and through much contestation, the sexless ideal woman comes to contain her opposite, the dangerously sexualized and desiring woman, in her capacious psychological interior” (5). The image of this ‘other’ woman, characterized by her sexual appetite, was obviously viewed as a threat, and various controlling mechanisms were developed to fight against the so-called ‘desiring and thus dangerous’ woman. As Reed points out in his *Victorian Conventions*, even love was taken as a means of regulating women and their behaviour:

Such eager resistance may now appear strange, but to the Victorian mind, an independent woman challenged moral and social assumptions which Victorians considered essential to a stable society. Furthermore, such a woman promised to be dangerously uncontrollable. Coventry Patmore expressed the sentiments of his time when he asserted that women were meant to be controlled by their men. When a woman is in love, he wrote, she becomes childlike and dependent. (36)

It can be asserted that the Victorian notion of love served nineteenth century patriarchal discourse which aimed to keep female desire under control. There were other policies to create ‘sexless’ women, one of which was the notion of public reputation, again appealing to the middle class. As Anna Clark states in her *Desire: A History of European Sexuality*, “middle-class moralists presented themselves as more sexually pure than the working class” and “it was more a matter of keeping up a public reputation and not talking about sex” (139). In order to earn the epithets of ‘virtuous’ and ‘reasonable’, Victorian women had to learn to suppress their sexual desire and to be completely silent about the issue of sexuality itself. As Foucault

notes in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, “on the subject of sex, silence became the rule” (3). “Nothing that was not ordered in terms of generation or transfigured by it could expect sanction or protection. Nor did it merit a hearing. It would be driven out, denied, and reduced to silence” (Foucault, *Sexuality*, 5). Victorian women were even “supposed to pretend they did not see the prostitutes who were so apparent on city streets” in Europe of the 1860s (Clark 140).

On the other side of the coin, the late Victorian period was characterized by some radical developments in the field of biology such as Darwin’s writings. While Victorian discourse relied upon religion and morality in the first half of the century, science became a new means of categorizing people as various “others” in the second half, and therefore, as Stott asserts, “Christian morality gives way to the ‘incontrovertible authority’ of biological law” in this period (Stott 19). Unlike the conservatives defending ‘sexual purity’, Darwin asserted that sexual desire is a natural part of being human:

By pointing out that humans are animals, Darwin undermined the idea that reason controls human destiny, and since sexual desire was seen as biologicistic and animalistic, it became a particularly important issue in these debates. [...]

Darwin influenced social purity advocates to see that the sexual impulses as natural, as emanating from the body. But they also thought that the higher self- the will- should control the lower self- the body- to enhance evolution. Social purity advocates regarded the sexual drive as characteristic of an earlier stage in evolution. (Clark 149-150)

Highly influenced by Darwin’s works and his idea of evolution, the Victorians believed that they were undergoing degenerative evolution step by step (Stott 18). Thus, the “fear of ‘cultural drift’, a drift *backwards* down to the evolutionary scale” (Stott 18) appeared among the public. The imperialist nation and its culture were viewed as living entities, born of the empire’s moral perfection and flourishing for

some time, but now dying due to those that were outside the realm of this perfection, hence the paradigm of life and death was a part of Victorian Britain's culture. To control this anxiety, which was originally the product of the fearful patriarchal and imperialist mind, new terms were invented relying upon scientific discourse. Sander L. Gilman explains how these fantasies led to the creation of certain sexual norms in *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*:

The sexual dimension of the human experience is one of those most commonly divided into the 'normal' and the 'deviant', the 'good' and the 'bad'... For a secure definition of the self, sexuality and the loss of control associated with it must be projected onto the Other. Fantasies of impotency are projected onto the Other as frigidity, fantasies of potency as hypersexuality... Sexual norms become modes of control. (qtd. in Stott 34-35)

It may be asserted that the social purity advocates in the nineteenth century turned biological developments into a means of controlling sexual desire. Even the term sexuality first came into use in the nineteenth century with reference to what Stott calls "problematic female sexuality" in medical discourse, in *Clinical Lectures on the Diseases of Woman* by the physician James Matthews Duncan in 1889. (Stott 25), and this shows how scientific discourse and biological determinism started to shape the Victorian public's life. As Stott notes, "biological determinism itself is a way of fixing "Others", believed to be themselves safely fixed by inherited and biological features" (39). Sexuality was used not only to fix gender roles, but also to create and regulate the so-called "appropriate" codes of behaviour for each gender, creating an atmosphere of oppression and suppression for women.

On the one hand, sexual desire was reflected as deadly and primitive. On the other hand, there were "the sex radicals-avant garde intellectuals, writers, physicians,

and social activists- [who] believed that sexual desire was a potent force for human health and creativity” (Clark 151). As a result, sex paradoxically signified both fecundity and infertility in the Victorian period and this is seen in a babble of voices in society. All these discussions and developments led to the invention of Victorian sexual discourse which was essentially restrictive for women. As Psomiades asserts (quoting Michel Foucault), “sexuality and gender turned into ‘dense transfer points’ for relations of power, places through which the hegemonic exercise of power and the exercise of resistance may take place” (4).

In this atmosphere, Victorian poets started to engage in the controversial issues of sexuality and morality in different ways. The bond between writers and their reading public was strengthened by developments in printing techniques and mass media which made it easier for the Victorian poets and writers to reach their reader quickly. Linda K. Hughes emphasizes how “widely read” the best Victorian poetry was by stating that Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* “sold 60,000 copies in three to four years” (Hughes 1). Besides, the close link between the Victorian poet and reader was also supported in a bill. “In 1850 parliament passed a bill founding free libraries and artisans in the northern industrial cities of Liverpool and Manchester soon benefited” (Hughes 5)

As Hughes states, “the best Victorian poetry is complex, challenging, and experimental” (Hughes 1). This experimental attitude is seen both in form and in theme. There was a special interest in how the mind works, perhaps in line with developments in the field of psychology, later continued in the writings of Freud, Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter (and it was not a coincidence that these figures appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). The form of dramatic monologue, which enables the poet to explore the depths of his protagonist’s psyche,

became popular among poets. They experimented with this form, which according to Hughes, was in line with the 'multiple voices' here created by improvements in the fields of printing press and mass media (7) as "it subjects the lyric utterance of an individual to a social context, positioning that speaker in relation to a specific time, place and situation, and tacit or explicit the auditor" (Hughes 7). It is also in harmony with the variety of different voices within Victorian society. Actually, whether in the form of dramatic monologue or not, Victorian poetry is generally characterized by "many-voicedness" according to Hughes (7):

Victorian poetry is characteristically dialogic, presupposing and even harbouring the existence of multiple voices. Print materialized the many-voicedness of Victorian poetry, since one poem or volume was sure to be challenged by another and all participated in the roiling, unceasing, sometimes chaotic flow of print through millions of hands in the form of books, newspapers, magazines, or paperbound serial parts. Isobel Armstrong demonstrates that the multivocality of Victorian poetry was not just an effect of material culture, however. She terms the defining form of Victorian poetry the "double poem": one that expresses an emotion or point of view yet, through formal means, simultaneously calls into question the poem's grounds for representing its subject and who or what should figure in poetry. This philosophical scepticism is manifested as poetic technique, so that the double poem is intrinsically aesthetic yet opens a space for cultural politics. (Hughes 7)

Along with the dramatic monologue, there were also common themes employed by Victorian poets and which appealed to the readership of the age. One of these themes is physical love. Why sexuality found itself a place in verse more than it did in any other genre is explained by Meg Tasker:

'For men as well as women, sexual matters were much easier to write about in verse' compared to Victorian novels, which were often read aloud in drawing rooms. 'Not only may sexual desire or activity be described indirectly, through metaphor and allusion (this, after all, is possible in prose), but they could be more freely employed as metaphor in poetry'. (qtd. in Hughes 185)

The themes of death and lamenting were also popular in the period, exemplified by Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and "Tithonus" as well as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Sister Helen". Triggered by Queen Victoria's mourning over her beloved husband, Prince Albert, the Victorians developed their own conventions of mourning. As Edgar Johnson asserts, "mourning the dead is an instinct as old as man, but in no era had it become such an ironbound convention as in the Victorian age" (Reed 156).

The notion of death was also an essential part of the escapist tendency observed in the period. Death was viewed as the source of stability in the instable Victorian age characterized by its conflicts and was regarded as a door to liberty, peace, and bliss for those who were notable for their moral perfection. Thus, the Victorian concept of death had moral overtones. Moreover, the Victorians emphasized the idea that death is a common destiny, and thus, the temporary nature of sublunary pleasures. On the other hand, "death and mourning were sometimes appropriated to social protests by poets" (Hughes 179), who subverted the relationship between death and Victorian morality, and used the notion of death against the period's delimitative moral code focusing on gender categories as seen in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Sister Helen". Rossetti blends love and witchcraft in this work, and portrays a female who avenges herself upon her lover by destroying his waxen image. Although the young woman seems to be empowered through witchcraft, she is also doomed through her own black magic. Thus, Rossetti shows the destructive, deadly, wild, and uncanny aspect of love by combining it with the violent demise of the male lover. Through the image of the powerful, murderous and revengeful young woman, Rossetti reacts against patriarchal authority and the well-known deathbed scenes of the period's literature, showing the Victorian woman as a 'saint worthy of good death'. As Hughes notes, "even Christianity subserves the

uncanny [in “Sister Helen”]. Christ’s torture on the cross and the three days between death and resurrection are warped into a bridegroom who suffers so painfully on his deathbed that he cannot be shriven and is doomed forever” (67).

The two common themes of the period, (sexual) love and death are sometimes combined to explore the line between two opposing realms, Eros and Thanatos, and also the possibility of their union. Thus, what might sound like quite a sentimental and romantic story in the combination of these two themes, love and death, in poetry would often turn into a representation of the deviant mind of a patriarchal figure, social illness, and the hypocrisy of the new morality. Hence, these poems raise sympathy for the victims, who are generally female, and give voice to their alienation and suppression. At the same time they resist patriarchal, victimizing and essentialist Victorian discourse through the portrayal of erotic scenes.

Of the six Victorian poems discussed in this thesis, “Porphyria’s Lover”, “The Leper”, “The Lady of Shalott” and “The Blessed Damsel” all question the nineteenth century imperialistic patriarchal discourse and its victimization of women, the suppression of female sexuality in different ways such as the appropriation of the dead beloved and the confinement of women. The nature of love, as it appears in these poems, will be discussed by referring to possession, captivity, and the thin line between pleasure and pain, love and death, Eros and Thanatos. In the other two poems, “Eden Bower” and “Faustine”, on the other hand, conventionally victimized females will become victimizers, *femmes fatales* who were an essential part of Victorian culture and discourse. According to Stott, the *femme fatale* “is one of the recurring motifs of the fiction of the late nineteenth century and takes her place amongst degeneration anxieties, the rise of invasion scares, anxieties about ‘sexuality’ [...] and concerns about cultural ‘virility’ and fitness” (22). In these

poems, women are not sufferers of love or passion, but cause pain, destruction, and death, and are portrayed as emblems of nineteenth century anxieties about female sexuality. How sexuality may empower women and how they can exercise control over men will be discussed with reference to Lilith and Faustine. This thesis is an attempt to explore how love and death meet under the roof of eroticism in Victorian poetry.

CHAPTER II

APPROPRIATING THE DEAD BELOVED

“Porphyria’s Lover” by Robert Browning:

“Porphyria’s Lover”, first published in 1836, is a famous poem by Browning, and it presents the tension between the sexual instinct and the deviant love from the perspective of a lover obsessed with possession. I will explore how the narration of the poem demonstrates the speaker’s abnormal psychology through the technique of dramatic monologue and how love and death, pleasure and pain, fondness and cruelty are combined through sadomasochism in deviant love.

The speaker of the poem is a lover who yearns to appropriate Porphyria, but is aware of the fact that Porphyria is not willing to be possessed completely. His love for Porphyria seems to be the ultimate source of his happiness as the scene where Porphyria enters his house indicates:

When glided in Porphyria; straight
She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneel'd and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm (6-9)

Juxtaposing her entrance into the cottage with the previous rainy and cold atmosphere given at the beginning of the poem, the speaker makes use of fire imagery to describe the internal setting. Thus, the poem moves from water imagery to fire imagery, and makes use of two elements which both signify on the one hand

purifying and life giving powers and on the other, destruction. In the opening lines, Browning creates a dark atmosphere:

The rain set early in to-night,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake:
I listened with heart fit to break. (1-5)

These lines show how the gentle face of nature may become disordered, violent, and destructive. They may foreshadow the forthcoming destruction of Porphyria.

Returning to Porphyria's entrance, instead of rain and cold, it is characterized by the image of fire signifying light and warmth. In line with this image and its significations, the poem continues with the personification of grate as cheerless, but blazed up by Porphyria, which may refer to the conventional representation of the grate as a symbol for femininity, domesticity, and family, and going all the way back to Hestia, the virgin goddess of the hearth in Greek mythology. So the images of "warm" cottage and blazing fire may refer to a "home and hearth", but maybe also to the symbolic fire stemming from passionate love. The first nine lines make the reader think that the speaker in his lonely and previously cold house has been waiting for a long time for warmth and a cheerful blaze, and this could be effected only with Porphyria's coming. This imagery may also imply that the grate would be cheerless and the cottage would be cold if Porphyria did not arrive or left the house, and this impression will be stronger when the fear of abandonment is revealed in the later part of the poem. The speaker's fondness for Porphyria is revealed upon her entrance. After she enters the house, the speaker observes what she is doing by paying

attention to every detail, and he remains silent as if he were in a hypnotic state. He describes how she takes off some of her wet clothes, her cloak, gloves and hat:

Which done, she rose, and from her form
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
And laid her soil'd gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And, last, she sat down by my side
And call'd me. When no voice replied
She put my arm about her waist (10-16)

He seems frozen and already seduced by her being there for him, and he does not reply when she calls him. This “uncovering” of Porphyria may also signify her presenting herself to him, which is apparently what he desires. His paying attention to her hair may signify a fetishism, perhaps deriving from her previous unattainability. Freud explains this kind of fetishism in his “Sexual Deviations”:

A certain reduction in striving for the normal sexual goal seems to be the precondition for all such cases (executive weakness of the sexual apparatus). The link to normality is conveyed by the psychologically necessary over-valuation of the sexual object, which inevitably encroaches upon everything connected with it by association. Hence a certain degree of such fetishism is a regular part of normal loving, particularly during those stages when one is in love, in which the normal sexual goal appears unattainable or its fulfilment cancelled. (34)

This focus on Porphyria’s hair may be interpreted in a different way by referring to hair symbolism in Victorian literature. Porphyria’s damp and straggly hair may stand for her undomesticated nature which does not seem to be in line with the lover’s expectations, unlike the fire imagery standing for feminine domesticity. As she is now in an attainable state, he cannot take his eyes off of her. While she is uncovering herself, Porphyria is entering into the domain of the household and leaving the

external world. The speaker who is already obsessed with the idea of possession seems to enjoy every moment of her coming in from the rain and storm into the house, making it a warm place and removing her outer garments, the traditional covering of woman's sexuality outside the house. In a private setting with a specific person, Porphyria starts to uncover herself to flirt with him or actually to seduce him, and this might enhance his desire for possession and fulfilment which can be attained only through the appropriation and consummation of Porphyria. Later, he explains how she tries to seduce him again:

She put my arm about her waist,
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved me - she (16-21)

He continues in his frozen state, silent and unmoving. It is she who puts his arm about her waist and continues to uncover herself by baring her shoulders. He pays special attention to the moment when she murmurs how she loves him. She is now attainable, but he does not touch her. What prevents him from approaching her seems to be the continuing possibility of her unattainability, as the introspection part coming after a hyphen indicates:

Murmuring how she loved me - she
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
To set its struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
And give herself to me for ever. (21-25)

He thinks that the only way for her to give herself to him forever, the idea which certainly stems from his obsession with possessing her absolutely and permanently, is for her to set passion free from her pride, and to sever her ties to others. Her pride may be due to a class difference between them or another reason. But in any case, in the speaker's mind, it is why she will not give herself completely to him. This thought shows that he is aware of the fact that the moment of surrender is a temporary one, and it will not lead to absolute fulfilment on his side. So, he seems to be interested not only in mutual affection, but also in complete possession. In his famous essay, "Metaphysics of Sexual Love", Schopenhauer asserts that the will-to-live is the primary instinct of man which is followed by other subjective needs such as the need to possess the beloved:

That which makes itself known to the individual consciousness as sexual impulse in general, and without direction to a definite individual of the other sex, is in itself, and apart from the phenomenon, simply the will-to-live. But what appears in consciousness as sexual impulse, directed to a definite individual, is in itself the will to live as a precisely determined individual. Now in this case the sexual impulse, though in itself a subjective need, knows how to assume very skilfully the mask of an objective admiration, and thus to deceive consciousness, for nature requires this stratagem in order to attain her ends. But in every case of being in love, however objective and touched with the sublime admiration may appear to be, what alone is aimed at is the generation of an individual of a definite disposition. This is confirmed first by the fact that the essential thing is not perhaps mutual affection, but possession, in other words, physical environment. The certainty of the former, therefore, cannot in any way console us for the want of the latter; on the contrary, in such a situation many a man has shot himself. On the other hand, when those who are deeply in love cannot obtain mutual affection, they are easily satisfied with possession; i.e. with the physical environment. (535)

In line with what Schopenhauer claims, it seems that it is not enough for the speaker in Browning's poem to enjoy mutual affection, as he is in pursuit of complete possession. The hidden motive behind his sexual impulse may not be affection, but

possession. Therefore the speaker's, that is, the subject's desire towards Porphyria (his object), in other words, his sexual impulse, according to what Schopenhauer claims, is due to two main reasons: his will-to-live and his yearning for possession. He is aware of the fact that this moment of yielding on Porphyria's part is a temporary one, and he cannot possess her permanently. Schopenhauer asserts that "many a man has shot himself" when they lack possession. However, this conflicts with another of the speaker's subjective need, which is the will-to-live. Instead of committing suicide, he has to find a different way to satisfy his need of possession.

On the other hand, the reader learns about Porphyria's ambivalent attitude towards him with the line "But passion sometimes would prevail" (26). The word "sometimes" (26) suggests her irregular comings to his house and the temporal nature of her impulses. The speaker acknowledges this in the following lines: "A sudden thought of one so pale/ For love of her, and all in vain"(28-29). He becomes "pale" because he loves or simply desires her, but he thinks that she will not belong to him in the unconditional way he wants, which makes him think that he loves in vain. The word he chooses to describe his obsessive desire and love for her is "passion". Suffering from such an abnormal condition, he may be defined as a madman "of desperate passion" (Foucault, *Madness*, 30) by referring to Foucault's classification of different types of madness in his *Madness and Civilization*: "Then the last type of madness: that of desperate passion. Love disappointed in its excess, especially love deceived by the fatality of death, has no other recourse but madness". (30)

In the case of Browning's persona, his love is frustrated by the fact that Porphyria's pride prevents him from possessing her permanently. This desire for permanent possession makes the reader enquire into the nature of the speaker's

passion. According to Blackburn, Browning “has written with exceptional insight about fixation; I mean a relationship between men and women where love is not a means of fulfilment but a form of slavery” (57). So, Porphyria’s being an individual who can decide for herself is enough for the speaker to feel insecure in this relationship. Blackburn names what the speaker wants to do as “psychological vampirism” (58):

Otherness and individuality are a threat which such people do not meet by deepening their capacity to feel and know until the threat is absorbed by a communion which is greater than the anxiety of separation. On the contrary, they attempt to reduce their partner to servitude. It is a kind of psychological vampirism. It seeks for slavery and destroys relationship since it denies that separate personality which is an essential condition of dialogue and meeting. The logical conclusion of this desire for total possession is a species of necrophilia, intercourse of one kind or another with a human who has been reduced to a thing. It is this intention through with no particular insight that peers ghoulishly through the romance trappings of *Porphyria’s Lover*. (58)

At the moment when Porphyria abandons her pride, admits her love through her gestures and proceeds to seduce him, he sees himself as an authority figure who occupies a God-like position as his choice of words, his use of the word “worship” indicates:

Be sure I look'd up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipp'd me; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do. (30-35)

When to his “surprise” (33) he “knows” that she “worshipp'd” (33) him, he is “happy and proud” (32) He debates “what to do” (35) in order to freeze this moment. This comes as a surprise to the reader since the typical reaction would not be to “debate what to do” (35) but to return her passion. Ann Wordsworth comments on

the speaker's obsession which leads him to the desire for freezing the moment by putting emphasis on the suspension of the erotic moment and bliss:

But barbarous action is only one part of the poem, the surface logic of a jealous panic, casting its power over the defiant resistances of sexuality and of the master poem. Under this is the mimicking- a blackly comic play of the creative mind, shuffling and redealing the cards of our mortality time, change, age, infidelity, death. [...] Time and change are abolished; the erotic moment sustains itself against all the mortal erosions, suspends laws, defies death, creates its own space and time. But in *Porphyria's Lover*, in the redealing of the substitutions, the erotic and the creative triumph is got through murder not vision. Death is the trump card. Inconstancy and belatedness are overcome by dealing death to the mistress [...]. (122)

This notion of freezing the beauty of the youthful beloved at a certain moment can also be traced back to the sonnet tradition of the Renaissance period, as it is typical for a lover to struggle to immortalize his beloved through his art. However, there is also a difference which is the fact that the speaker is not interested in preserving her beauty, but in making his authority and power last longer than it would if he permitted *Porphyria* to seduce him, and make love and leave the house afterwards. This by the way shows that he still had doubts when he claimed that he knew she worshipped him, and thought this was momentary. The solution he finds will satisfy both of his subjective needs, the need of possession and the will-to-live. Also, such a solution would provide the speaker with the chance of preserving *Porphyria's* beauty. Therefore, it may be asserted that the speaker empowers himself in three different ways: Firstly, he eliminates the possibility of *Porphyria's* leaving him and turns her into his object, secondly, he presents himself as a God-like figure and by assuming the posture of an artist/poet freezing her beauty before it is ravaged by the time. All these involve the exercise of power. Thus, he actually debates how to shape her destiny.

So, his obsession with the idea of possessing Porphyria not only includes the issues of deviant love and madness, but also the notions of authority and power. For this reason, it is possible for the reader to view the speaker's obsession by referring to Baudrillard's theory of seduction since he explores the notion of seduction by framing it within the concept of power relationships. According to Baudrillard, femininity and seduction are intermingled with each other, and he asserts that seduction which belongs to the domain of femininity predominates over the political power which belongs to the domain of manhood (39). He states at the beginning of his essay, *Seduction*, that seduction is conventionally associated with the devil and takes as its strategy from religion, and this idea leads to the emergence of concepts where femininity has connotations of evil, trickery, and satanic power (7). From his point of view, femininity associated with seduction may stand for the devilish threat against man's virility. In line with this idea, the speaker may take Porphyria's effort to seduce him as a threat against his virility, authority and power. He is aware of the fact that her actions are not under his control, and she can leave whenever she wants. So, it would have been impossible for him to make her stay and obey him unless he found a different way to make her subject to his rule.

In the ecstasy born of having found a solution, he immediately takes action, and describes what he did:

That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;

I am quite sure she felt no pain. (36-42)

At the moment when he feels Porphyria is his, he also finds her “fair, perfectly pure and good” (36-37), no longer proud and inclined to break vainer ties. Thus it is her worship of him and her yielding herself to him which make her pure and good in his eyes. In the reader’s eyes, she appears to be a sacrificial victim purified before the ritual killing. He strangles her by using his fetishist object, her hair. She has been using her hair, a symbol of woman’s power over a man, during her overtures to seduce him and this may be viewed as her power and threat against his manhood, virility and authority, so he may choose to use the same tool while he is asserting his authority over her body by killing her and turning her into his subject, or commodity. Furthermore, the lines above also indicate the fact that his guilty-conscience is at work as he tries to console himself by repeating that she does not feel any pain. After strangling her, which turns her into an object, the issue of necrophilia, a sexual perversion, is raised in the poem.

As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids: again
Laugh'd the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untighten'd next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blush'd bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propp'd her head up as before,
Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still:
The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will, (43-53)

After she is dead, he opens her eyes with his fingers, kisses her and props her head up on his shoulders. He imagines that her eyes laugh again, her cheeks blush and she smiles with happiness. The words suggest a resurrection, as if she were brought back to life. It should be noted that he begins to touch her only after her death.

Porphyria's maneuvering his passive arm about her waist (16) is the only moment when he has actually touched her in the poem. It appears that he would not have been satisfied with any physical intimacy between them unless he completely possessed her. Porphyria's dead body guarantees her attainability. Freud asserts in an essay entitled "Sexual Deviations" that in some perversions the sexual goal is diverted into pathological channels like necrophilia, overcoming feelings like disgust, fear and pain (41).

Her inconsistency may have been the reason for his jealousy and obsession with possession, and it may have led to perversions. Another factor may be the fear of abandonment. According to Freud, an individual may believe that his friends are going to desert him (physical abandonment), or they do not give importance to his feelings (emotional abandonment), and these beliefs are called the fear of abandonment in general (Tyson 16). Such fears may have increased the speaker's desire for possession of Porphyria, and lead to necrophilia. He may have suffered from the fear of physical abandonment as well as emotional abandonment.

The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorn'd at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gain'd instead!
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
Her darling one wish would be heard. (52-57)

What Porphyria has scorned may refer to her scorning sex out of wedlock. The speaker who is obsessed with the idea of possession and domestication may have favoured married love or a regular relationship, and her ambivalent attitude towards their relationship may have disturbed him for this reason. He uses the phrase “its love” (155) rather than “her love” referring to “the smiling rosy little head” (52), and this may imply she is a pure object for him now that she is dead and he owns her, or more appropriately he owns her physical body as a woman. As Ann Wordsworth states, “by murder the lover transforms his wayward mistress into his puppet-doll” (122).

When he tries to suppress his guilty-conscience by repeating that she has not felt any pain, he also implies that she has actually been willing to suffer from the pain of suffocation and she is happy about her own death by saying that “The smiling rosy little head,/ So glad it has its utmost will” (52-53). This attitude is typical for a sadomasochistic individual according to Freud’s theory that “every pain contains within itself the possibility of a feeling of pleasure” in sadomasochism (Freud 39). Looking at the head of the corpse, the speaker claims that she is smiling, and also, he is quiet sure about that she felt no pain. This inclination to bring together pain and pleasure can only be explained by sadism felt by the lover and masochism attributed to Porphyria and perhaps also to the lover which are the active and passive formations of what Freud calls “*algolagnia*” which emphasizes “the notion of the pleasure in pain” (37). On the other hand, by referring once again to the issue of the fear of abandonment, it may be claimed that the death of the beloved will also cause pain in the speaker although it simultaneously satisfies his need of possession. Therefore, the pleasure in pain becomes possible for him as he is both the sufferer and torturer; and for this reason, one of the main motives behind his action seems to

be sadomasochism which is the “most frequent and significant of all perversions” according to Sigmund Freud (37). What makes it possible for the speaker to kill his beloved is mainly the tension between his creative and destructive instincts. His love for Porphyria may have turned into hatred due to the pairs of oppositions inherent in the nature of sadomasochism. Freud explains the nature of this duality:

The partial drives play quite a prominent role in forming the symptoms of psychoneuroses. Mostly apparent in pairs of oppositions, we have encountered them introducing new sexual goals, the drive to cruelty in both active and passive formations. The contribution of the latter is indispensable for an understanding of the presence of suffering in the symptoms, and in almost every case it controls part of the patient’s social behaviour. Through this link between cruelty and the libido, love is also transformed into hatred, and tender impulses into hostile ones. (47-48)

In the poem, the speaker’s love for Porphyria is transformed into cruelty and hatred disguised. He ends up strangling her and continuing to love her dead body. The coexistence of the creative and the destructive, love and hatred, life and death can only refer to “the omnipotence of love” in Freud’s theory (42). He notes in his “Sexual Deviations” that “it may be that the omnipotence of love is nowhere more strongly apparent than in these deviations. Everywhere in sexuality, the highest and lowest are most profoundly attached to one another (‘from heaven through the world to hell’ [Faust])” (42).

Georges Bataille notes that “only the victim can describe the torture; the torturer necessarily uses the hypocritical language of the established order and power” (Deleuze 17). However, due to her death, the beloved is confined to silence. The speaker, on the other hand, uses the language of power (and also the power of language); and hence, turns himself into an authority figure who completely possesses Porphyria. In this dramatic monologue spoken by a man, the male gaze is

the sole voice and the voice of authority. Throughout the poem, the title may be viewed as the only place where the speaker does not have authority. While the dramatic monologue presents the speaker's obsession with the idea of possession, the title suggests that the speaker is possessed by the beloved, Porphyria, and implies that his sole identity depends on his status as Porphyria's lover. Therefore, the title may be taken as an ironic touch of Browning.

Although he is against Freud's idea that "a sadist is always at the same time a masochist (40)" and the Freudian duality inherent in the nature of deviant love which leads to the transformation of tenderness to hatred, Deleuze also talks about pairs of oppositions in his *Masochism*. According to him, the speaker in "Porphyria's Lover" cannot be at the same time a masochist. He is a sadist because "possession is the sadist's particular form of madness just as the pact is the masochist's" (21). While the masochist's relationship with his/her victim depends on a contractual relation, the sadist enjoys "abominating and destroying" contracts according to Deleuze (20). He explains that the sadist is not interested in an alliance with the victim, but yearns for possession. What Deleuze observes in Sade's works and sadism is the fact that "destruction is merely the reverse of creation and change, disorder is another form of order, and the decomposition of death is equally composition of life" (27). Thus, the speaker, as an authority figure who craves for power, and as a sadist who lusts for total possession of the victim, imposes his order through the use of violence, leading to the beloved's death; in other words, this disorder is apparently a form of order, and it manages to be "another form of order" as Deleuze notes. Although Freud's and Deleuze's theories conflict with each other at certain points, still the speaker's attitude in the poem corresponds to what they see as the pairs of oppositions working together.

The lover's asserting his own order over his environment and over the entire relationship between Porphyria and himself reaches the point where he claims at the end of the poem that even God has not interfered in what he is doing by stating that "And thus we sit together now,/ And all night long have not stirr'd,/ And yet God has not said a word!" (58- 60). Rather than seeing himself as a God-like figure, he now assumes that he is an earthly authority figure, and God has not disturbed them all night. So, the lover does not see his murder as a sin, but Porphyria as a sinner due to her scorning love out of wedlock. Thus her death at his hands becomes a purifying punishment for sin. An interpretation of these lines according to Baudrillard would stress the evil in the feminine. As seduction is viewed as a feminine power associated with evil forces threatening virility, the speaker may conclude that God has not interfere in what he is doing as he actually approves the murder or the elimination of the evil stemming from seduction. This idea may even be traced back to the Biblical stories of Adam, Eve and the serpent since Eve is conventionally shown as the seducing and deceiving female figure who leads to the fall. Thus, Porphyria may be a symbolic representation of trickery and the seductive female, and the speaker may feel that he had the consent of God for this reason. On the other hand, according to Norton B. Crowell's interpretation, "the sin of Porphyria's lover is not murder only, but a mad attempt to stop time, to preserve one moment in time" (237). This attempt can exemplify what Crowell calls "the extreme individualism which leads to hubris" (82). Crowell explains what he means with the word "individualism" and its place in Browning's poetry in the following way:

Man's individualism may be vast, but not absolute. The critical error that has become so entrenched as to amount almost to a dogma is that Browning encourages man to regard truth as absolutely relative and individual, no truth being inherently superior to another so long as an individual seizes upon it as a truth for him. In fact Browning held that there are two views of truth: God's

view and man's. The one is eternal, fixed, imperishable; the other is shifting, relative, impermanent. (84)

The relativeness and impermanence of the man's truth seems to be emphasized by depicting a mad speaker who murders his beloved. However, by acting like God and imposing his own order over Porphyria, the mad speaker commits hubris according to this interpretation. As Crowell notes, "the mad murderer in "Porphyria's Lover" makes his own code of conduct, too, but he is detested of God and man for it. Nowhere does Browning suggest that a man has a right to scorn traditional paths and to make unto himself a light for his feet" (89). Indeed, the speaker is consoling himself when he claims that "God has not said a word" (60). In what form did he expect God to register his approval or disapproval, lightning or sunshine? It seems that he is projecting his self-approval of his deed onto God.

"Porphyria's Lover" had been published with "Johannes Agricola" under the title of *Madhouse Cells* before it was published as an individual and separate poem. The poem explores the psychology of a mad lover, and allows the reader to interpret his obsessions, his yearning for authority, and his need of possession and his perversions. In the poem, we are presented with a female figure drawn as the victim of her mad lover's desire for possession to exhibit the tension between love and death by touching upon the traditional association among the concepts of femininity, seduction, and trickery.

“The Leper” by Algernon Charles Swinburne:

In Swinburne’s poem, “The Leper”, the tension is born of the clash of two opposing forces, love (creative) and death (destructive), which meet in a man of lower rank who hopes to attain a lady of higher rank thanks to the illness the lady suffers from. The poem explores the notions of exclusion, unrequited and later deviant love, in the form of necrophilia, and how they lead to perversion in the case of the speaker by portraying his psychology through the technique of dramatic monologue. I will explore how passionate love leads the speaker to be obsessed with appropriating the beloved, and how the lady’s illness, causing her ‘willing’ detention in his house, influences this relationship. As the poem makes use of the conventions of the Courtly Love tradition while narrating the course of this love relationship in what appears to be a medieval setting, these conventions will be kept in sight throughout.

The poem begins with a negation to emphasize the idealization of love, which is an important aspect of the Courtly Love tradition.

NOTHING is better, I well think,
Than love; the hidden well-water
Is not so delicate to drink:
This was well seen of me and her. (1-4)

The comparing of love with the hidden well-water which is “so delicate to drink” (3) and the claim that love is more pleasurable than drinking clean, sweet well-water may refer to the idea that love, as a force, is greater than the combination of mystery, as the word “hidden” indicates, and regeneration, as well as purity, which is symbolized by “water”. In the medieval setting of the poem, the “hidden” may also

refer to the code of love as laid out by Andreas Capellanus in his *De Amore* (185).

The second stanza continues to exhibit the traditional features of the Courtly Love tradition in a somewhat archaic diction. The speaker's humble station is indicated in the following lines:

I served her in a royal house;
I served her wine and curious meat.
For will to kiss between her brows,
I had no heart to sleep or eat. (5-8)

His "love service" is a service in a very literal sense. He serves her wine and "meat" which in the medieval sense means food. He displays the symptoms of Courtly Love, which are having "no heart to sleep or eat" (10); thus, he behaves as the conventions of courtly love require. Although the Courtly Love tradition presupposes an idealized love in which the lovers do not touch each other or one in which the male lover never reaches the fulfilment of his desires, he wants "to kiss between her brows" (7), which may remind the reader of the traditional spot which is the target of Eros' arrows in Greek mythology. Therefore, he builds an analogy between his kiss and Eros' arrows.

One of the most important aspects of the Courtly Love tradition is the lady's capricious attitude and the lover's willingness to suffer the pain resulting from the Lady's indifference towards him. In line with this tradition, the speaker of the poem has been suffering from unrequited love, and he talks about the lady's attitude towards him in the past:

Mere scorn God knows she had of me,
A poor scribe, nowise great or fair,

Who plucked his clerk's hood back to see
Her curled-up lips and amorous hair. (9-12)

He describes himself as “a poor scribe, nowise great or fair”, which is in harmony with the Courtly Love tradition. Harrison refers to Jerome McGann's ideas about Swinburne and his use of the Courtly Love tradition, and notes that “as Jerome J. McGann has suggested, Swinburne's mythology of passion is derived primarily from courtly love literature” (Harrison). McGann explains Swinburne's interest in this tradition in the following way:

Swinburne's work is dominated from the start by a fascination with . . . the theme of a lost love and the sorrows of a memorial poet-lover.... Swinburne was not only absorbed by the figures of powerful and/or unattainable women at a very early age; he also seems always to have been fascinated by the idea of ill-starred love.... [His] obsession ... is essentially a slightly modernized, that is, romanticized version of the topos of the Provençal poet-lover. (McGann, 216).

Moreover, the speaker's self-description signifies his servile station in the royal house and also his low self-esteem. According to Freudian psychoanalysis, an individual with low self-esteem feels less worthy than other people. So, s/he thinks that s/he does not deserve attention, care, or love, and expects to be punished by life in some way (Tyson, 16). In a similar way, the speaker thinks that he is not able to attract the lady's attention as he is only a poor scribe, a poor servant who can see her gorgeous hair and lips only when he is serving her. It is possible that we have a hint of fetishism here. What occurs in the mind of a fetishist is explained by Freud with the use of the term “over-valuation”:

From the point of view of categorization we should perhaps have mentioned this extremely interesting group of deviations related to the sexual drive among the deviations related to the sexual object, but we have put off doing so until we have encountered the element of *sexual over-valuation* on which these

phenomena depend, and which is connected with an abandonment of the sexual goal.

The substitute for the sexual object is a body part (foot, hair) which is generally unsuited to sexual purposes, or an inanimate object demonstrably connected to the sexual person, or best of all with that person's sexuality (items of clothing, white linen). (33)

In the speaker's case, this over-valuation leads him to admire her hair and describe it by projecting the quality of amorousness on it (12). It should be also noted that the reason why he substitutes "hair" for the actual sex object, the woman, is the fact that he cannot approach her. His fetishist tendency also finds expression in the ninth stanza focusing on her little feet. He concentrates on her little feet, and gives voice to his desire to touch them by referring to his ability to grasp both of them only with one of his hands. This brings us back to what Freud calls surrogating or the transgression of the sexual object. The person suffering from the unavailability of the real object abandons the original object, and creates a surrogate object (Freud 34).

The Lady's unattainability and her scorn which triggers the lover's low self-esteem become the first signs of the pain resulting from this love, and according to the conventions of the Courtly Love tradition, he should willingly suffer this pain. His low self-esteem which originally stemmed from her superior position and pride later complicates his relationship with God when she stays as a leper in his hut:

I vex my head with thinking this.
Yea, though God always hated me,
And hates me now that I can kiss
Her eyes, plait up her hair to see (13-16)

He seems to think that he is acting against the law of God by enjoying intimacy with the lady whose illness is the sign of God's anger towards her. Moreover, the idea that

God has always hated him is in line with Freud's description of low self-esteem as it includes the expectation of being punished in some way. Also, his hair fetishism appears again as it does in the third stanza. This time, he plaits up her hair, and in traditional Victorian hair symbolism, hair plaited up refers to chastity and domesticity while messy and unkempt hair signifies vulgar and vicious femininity. Hence, by plaiting up her hair, he may be metaphorically trying to tame her body and turn it into a domestic object, which shows his striving to possess her, as well as an attempt to escape the wrath of God.

This notion of female domesticity and his desire to have complete possession of her reappear in the next stanza: "Yet am I glad to have her dead/ Here in this wretched wattled house/ Where I can kiss her eyes and head" (18-20). The only way for him to completely possess her is in death which is a form of necrophilia. They are staying together in a "wretched wattled house", which is nevertheless a domestic setting. House is conventionally associated with women while the wattles may be taken as a phallic symbol. The house is described as a wretched one since once a servant, the speaker is a poor man.

The dwellers of this house, a leper and a madman, are traditionally regarded as outsiders excluded from society. The speaker appears to be mad according to Foucault's classification of different types of madness which was explained with a quote from *Madness and Civilization* in the previous section. To recall it briefly, Foucault asserts that "the last type of madness" is the one which stems from "desperate passion" which denotes both unrequited love and mortal love "deceived by the fatality of death" (30). So, in a way, they are cursed both by God and by society. In the first line of the twenty-third stanza, the lover touches upon the common point between lepers and madmen as in Foucault's theory, as the ones who

lack God's grace and mercy by saying that God hates them both, but he is still optimistic about their love as he believes that "he [God] knows/ That hardly in a little thing/ Love faileth of the work it does/ Till it grow ripe for gathering" (89-92), which means that love may not prosper at first, but it is eventually "ripe for gathering" (92)-like fruit and God is aware of this. As his actions are full of love, he is in expectation of gathering, which may refer to endless love and happiness stemming from it. This may be the reason why he is so happy with hosting the leper lady which provides him with the chance of possessing her completely. Before, as he stated in the third stanza, he could only come close to her in order to serve her, but due to her illness and succeeding death, he is able to satisfy his need for possession. He seems to be aware of the fact that it was impossible for him to have her affection while she was healthy. Moreover, it will be not enough for him to have her affection temporarily, as he is actually in pursuit of absolute possession. Schopenhauer explains this situation in his "Metaphysics of Sexual Love", as touched upon in the first section. According to Schopenhauer, what a lover needs is not only mutual affection, but also possession (535). It has been noted that the speaker in "Porphyria's Lover" yearns for possession, and in a quite similar way, the speaker here is also obsessed with possession, and he satisfies his need of possession by kissing and fondling the corpse as the speaker in "Porphyria's Lover" does, clearly exhibiting necrophilia. Her previous state of unattainability which has helped to trigger his low self-esteem may contribute to turning his need of possession into an obsession which will lead him to care for and physically to love the dead body, and may even intensify his passionate love for her. This depiction of the passionate and obsessed lover who tries to possess the beloved and become owner and master that this love relationship carries the overtones of power relations, which is one of the features of Swinburne's poems in

his *Poems and Ballads*. This is explained by Isobel Armstrong in her *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics*. She states that “as in *Atalanta*, the real political centre of *Poems and Ballads* is in the poetry of *desire*, the consuming, exhausting desire, which needs to be ever stimulated and ever expended. It is kind of sexual hegemony, ever seeking new objects, ever striving to maintain and energise itself” (419).

The speaker’s obsession with appropriating the beloved is depicted through the imagery of amber and berry in the sixth stanza. In this stanza, the speaker compares love to “amber in cold sea” (22) and “berries under snow” (23) and asserts that love is better than these. Amber is fossilized resin which has organic materials captured in it and kept fresh in the cold sea, similar to the way in which the lady is trapped in the scribe’s house, which may be associated with the precious nature of eternal love. “Berries under snow” (23), on the other hand, may refer to passion kept under control. Their being hidden may be compared to the “hidden well water” (2); and thus may signify the element of secrecy of love again. Furthermore, their sweet taste may refer to love, and their dark red hue may signify passion. However, while Foucault blames “the fatality of death” for separation and takes it as being responsible for this type of madness, in this poem death paves the way for the fulfilment of the speaker’s ultimate obsession, possession.

How the speaker has been led to this extreme passion and perversion is explained to the reader by making the speaker take a stroll down memory lane, and he needs courage to do so as the twenty-sixth stanza indicates: “First I take heart and think of this:” (26). He remembers “That knight’s golden hair she chose to love,/ His mouth she had such will to kiss” (27-28), which he was only a poor servant for her. She has chosen to fall in love with a person of status, a knight. This aspect of the

narrative shows that the questions about love, sex, and erotics turn into political questions including power relationships such as who can love whom. Then, the reader learns to his/her surprise that the speaker was actually serving as a go-between in this love relationship:

Then I remember that sundawn
I brought him by a privy way
Out at her lattice, and thereon
What gracious words she found to say. (29-32)

We learn from these lines that the only time she showed courtesy to the poor scribe was when he acted as a go-between. However, the whole situation has changed now due to her illness, and the scribe may be content that the lady again finds “gracious words” (32) to say to him, as the speaker has not abandoned her in her illness while the knight has done so. This is the reason why she thanks him. Also, it is implied that there is a shift of positions as the lady who had authority over this poor scribe is now subject to her previous servant and go-between. The scribe is free to do what he wants, first taking care of her and then possessing the lady’s dead body for six months, and thus turning it into an object of appropriation. This relationship between freedom, possession and a sadistic tendency are also underlined by Armstrong in his analysis of the characteristics of Swinburne’s poems. She asserts that “it is an enactment of the Sadean fantasy of the completely free agent. Total freedom depends on total possession of the other [...], but total possession logically leads to the power to kill. Such freedom depends on the making of the other into an object (411)”. Although the speaker does not kill the lady, he still turns her into an object while enjoying intimacy with her dead body for six months.

When the lady was alive, the scribe continued to serve her although she was under his authority now. So even when he had mastery of the lady, he enjoyed serving to her. It was enough for the poor scribe to make her feel thankful. He quotes what she says directly; and in this way, the reader can hear her voice for the first time in the poem:

Sweet friend, God give you thank and grace;
Now am I clean and whole of shame,
Nor shall men burn me in the face
For my sweet fault that scandals them. (37-40)

Because she has found shelter in his house, people do not have a chance to stare at her anymore. Nor will this gaze burn her “in the face”(39) and open “wounds of shame” (38) which stem from the possibility that she got the disease from sex with the knight who left her afterwards. With this stanza, the reader learns why the lady stays in the scribe’s house. But no matter what the lady’s motives are, the speaker enjoys this situation, and he explains the three thoughts from which he derives “pleasure ” (25). The first is the lady’s love for the knight, the second one is the memory of the knight and the meeting in which he serves as a go-between, and the third one is that she has developed leprosy. He finds these thoughts pleasurable because if these things had not happened, she would never be his. It is thanks to these that she is no longer unattainable. However, he is aware of the fact that the death of the lady will put an end to his pleasure. His anger is directed towards God, and he both praises and condemns him as he is responsible both for her disease, which makes her accessible for him, and her coming death. This tension between his praise and condemnation is expressed in the twelfth stanza:

God, that makes time and ruins it
And alters not, abiding God,
Changed with disease her body sweet,
The body of love wherein she abode. (45-48)

He chooses the epithet of “the body of love” for her corporeal existence, and this may be a sign of the Courtly Love tradition again. According to this tradition, the lady’s beauty is often seen as a representation of divine beauty stemming from God, and she is celebrated for her virtues, which again derive from God. So, loving the lady is a kind of worship, and the male lover, who worships the lady and becomes her servant, is regarded as loyal to the Church of Love. God is the ultimate source of love and compassion in Christian doctrine, and by referring to the lady as “the body of love” as if she embodies the church of love, the poem alludes to the Courtly Love tradition.

What is problematic for the speaker is the fact that God can abide eternally unchanged while his beloved is dying due to the illness God has bestowed upon her. So, there is a tension between the notions of God as both creator and destroyer, and these lines express the coexistence of illness, death, passion, love, happiness and melancholy before the approaching disaster in the speaker’s life, the beloved’s death. Thus, although love does not have a spiritual aspect in Swinburne’s poetry, this poem, according to Harrison’s interpretation, integrates erotic and spiritual preoccupations “which are central to Swinburne’s radical ideology early in his career” (Harrison). At this point, he speaks for the third time about the nature of love, and says “Love is more sweet and comelier/ Than a dove’s throat strained out to sing” (49-50). The dove is a traditional symbol for love and elegance (as well as part of the Trinity representing the Holy Ghost) while singing is conventionally

associated with poets of the oral tradition, in other words with the bards of rhapsodic tradition. Therefore, the dove which strives to sing may signify the speaker who has previously defined himself as a 'scribe', and again, he is stating that love is greater than what he is or what his art can do which is in line with the Courtly Love tradition. The scribe, who was perhaps a court poet, acknowledges Eros' power in this stanza by comparing it with a metaphorical representation of his art and himself.

The Lady's leprosy, the reason of her approaching death, points to another issue, namely, society's condemnation of the beloved. She is "spat out and cursed" (51) due to leprosy, which means that they believe that she bears God's curse and also that they are afraid of being infected with the same disease. However, for him, this is "a base thing" (52) and it also shows his attitude towards death. He doesn't seem to take into consideration the power of Thanatos at this point, but instead relies on Eros' power. With the fourteenth stanza, the reader understands more fully that the reason of the lady's exclusion from society is not simply the people's fear of infection:

They cursed her, seeing how God had wrought
This curse to plague her, a curse of his.
Fools were they surely, seeing not
How sweeter than all sweet she is. (53-56)

The people turn her into an outcast as they believe that God has cursed her, and she must be a sinner to deserve such a serious punishment. On the other hand, although there is no indication that the townsfolk regard him as an outcast, the scribe appears to have made himself an outcast and he may be viewed as an outsider due to his "desperate passion". This interpretation stems from Foucault's theory of madness in which he draws a parallelism between leprosy and madness. Besides, what is seen as

the speaker's obsession and perversion may be signs of his unhealthy mental state, and they are considered abnormal conditions. Foucault touches upon the issue of society's prejudices against lepers and madmen, later transformed into vagabonds and criminals, in his *Madness and Civilization*:

Leprosy disappeared, the leper vanished, or almost, from memory; these structures remained. Often, in these same places, the formulas of exclusion would be repeated, strangely similar two or three centuries later. Poor vagabonds, criminals, and 'deranged minds' would take the part played by the leper, and we shall see what salvation was expected from this exclusion, for them and for those who excluded them as well. With an altogether new meaning and in a very different culture, the forms would remain- essentially that major form of a rigorous division which is social exclusion but spiritual reintegration. (7)

As Foucault claims, the stereotypical mental image associated with lepers has been transferred to the mental scheme culturally determined for madmen and "others". Furthermore, the second reason why people cursing the leper lady also has a place in Foucault's thought. By putting the blame on someone whose illness becomes proof of her sins and by excluding her, people are in hopes of what Foucault calls "spiritual reintegration" and salvation (7). He emphasizes how Christian teachings and the priests of that time amplified this idea by noting that "the sinner who abandons the leper at his door opens his way to heaven" (7). They found relief in the fact that they had not been punished in the same way with leprosy which was taken as a proof of God's wrath. As Foucault asserts, "if the leper was removed from the world, and from the community of the Church visible, his existence was yet a constant manifestation of God, since it was a sign both of His anger and His grace" (Foucault, *Madness*, 6). However, the scribe seems to be indifferent to God's anger or the possible dangers of living with a leper as long as he has what he wants, the lady.

While it makes the scribe and the lady grow closer, leprosy is the reason why her previous lover, the knight, abandons her. To underline the knight's unfaithfulness (as opposed to the poor scribe's fidelity), the speaker touches upon the explicit details of the knight's relationship with the lady before he has learned that she is ill. In these descriptions, the madmen's fetishist obsessions extend to descriptions of the lady's hair, lips, eyes, and mouth. He describes their sexual intercourse and juxtaposes this image with the knight's abandoning her due to leprosy:

Yea, he inside whose grasp all night
Her fervent body leapt or lay,
Stained with sharp kisses red and white,
Found her a plague to spurn away. (65-68)

The speaker blames the knight by saying that he had made use of the lady for his sexual gratification, and when he learns that she is ill, he abandons her. Thus, the speaker who is actually making use of her in her present state perhaps suppresses his own guilty conscience with the thought that he whom she used to love also exploited her, and unlike himself, this knight has "spurned" her "away" (68). The image of the knight's hungry grasping of her healthy body in the previous stanza is juxtaposed to the speaker's tenderness, in the repeated line of "joy to kiss between her brows" (71), which is a metaphor referring to Eros' arrow. He gives her bread and water, and after a while "bread failed" (73), so they survived only on water and wild seeds, but he says he did not mind. Happy with kissing her, he did not need food or sleep although he was exhausted: "I had small care to sleep or feed" (76). Thus, the speaker continues to present his love in accordance with the Courtly Love tradition, and he speaks of his "service" (77) which brings him such happiness that he cries tears of joy:

Sometimes when service made me glad
The sharp tears leapt between my lids,
Falling on her, such joy I had
To do the service God forbids. (77-80)

What calls for attention in this stanza is the last line, indicating that he is fully aware of the fact that what gives him joy is against the will and order of God. Since he thinks that God has never loved him, his joy may also signify his revenge. The motive behind his appropriation of the lady, then, is not only his obsession to possess her completely or his love stemming from her previous unattainability, but perhaps also the fact that he is revolting against God by being close to the leprous woman who is the sign of his anger on earth, and by not abandoning her whom God abandons and grudges his mercy. Simon Wilson states in his "Decadent Art" that "erotic art can [...] be seen to have a positive subversive potential" (176). Swinburne seems to make use of this subversive potential by putting the questions of sexuality and spirituality side by side. As in the Courtly Love tradition, love and spirituality merge into each other in a quite different way in which an obsessed lover rebels against the word and authority of God, and thus, Swinburne subverts the convention. Besides love and spirituality, he includes the issues of otherness by portraying two marginalized characters and "perverse" sexuality in his poem. By choosing marginalized figures as his characters who do not enjoy God's mercy and portraying them engaged in perverse sexuality, Swinburne appears to expose the hypocrisy of his age. As Peter Webb notes in his "Erotic Themes in Victorian Art and Photography", the Victorian period is an "age of sexual repression, in which hypocrisy seems to have characterized the sexual attitudes of the majority, and nowhere is this more clearly reflected than in the art of the day" (186). Therefore, it

may be claimed that Swinburne reacts against what Barry Curtis calls “the new domestic mythology” of the Victorian Age (203) thanks to the subversive power of eroticism in his poetry.

The speaker does not give the leper lady any peace. He keeps talking to her, reminding her of the past, kissing and fondling her. His fondness of her makes the lady, who is close to death, so uncomfortable that she says “let me be at peace” (81). Resignation and peace as death approaches is what she wants and F.L. Lucas notes in *Ten Victorian Poets*, this seems to be Swinburne’s own inclination.

In *Poems and Ballads I*, the poet turns his rebellious anger less against the laws of God than against the laws of men, as the outraged Victorians were quick to realize; towards death and destiny his mood is more resigned. Yet it is still the resignation not of middle-age which learns to ignore death, but of youth which falls in love with it, as at moments Keats had done. So, Swinburne too grows dreamily fascinated by the dreamless slumber of the dead. (Lucas 175)

In this poem, death seems to afford the lady relief as she will no longer suffer both from society’s condemnation and from her illness which causes this disapprobation. The lady dies at the end of the sixth month. Now, the speaker is faced with the inevitable death of the beloved. She was previously unattainable, and when he thought he had complete possession of her, he is disappointed with her death. She was sweet to him when she was ill, and she continues to be “sweet” when she is dead. As he is still obsessed with the idea of possession, he cannot leave the dead body as the twenty-fifth stanza demonstrates.

The signs of necrophilia, the perversion from which the speaker begins to suffer, appear with the coming of the twenty-sixth stanza. He is holding her “cold feet” (102), and still gets excited when he looks at her hair although it is now “half grey half ruined gold” (103). However, her beauty starts to decline day by day, which

saddens him as he states in the twenty-seventh stanza. He resents love as her dead body makes him realize that because of the ravages of death, he cannot physically possess her eternally. His love is shot with pain as her beauty fades and her body begins to decompose:

Love bites and stings me through, to see
Her keen face made of sunken bones.
Her worn-off eyelids madden me,
That were shot through with purple once. (105-108)

The speaker cannot bear the fact that the body of the lady, which is his object, something he finally possessed, does not belong to him completely as its decomposition demonstrates. It is impossible for him to preserve it eternally. His use of the word “madden” in this stanza stands as an indication of his “desperate passion”, the term coined by Foucault. Out of this pain, the speaker’s madness is triggered, his obsession with the lady’s body and with the idea of possession lead him to necrophilia. Then, his mind returns to the days they spent together in the hut:

She said, ‘Be good with me, I grow
So tired for shame’s sake, I shall die
If you say nothing:’ even so.
And she is dead now, and shame put by. (109-112)

In this stanza, he remembers her words, but it is important to note how his memory works in a very selective way. He remembers her words about her shame resulting from society’s condemnation of her as a sinner with the stamp of God’s anger on her. As he is already an outsider, and is now practising in necrophilia, a perversion which also turns him into a sinner and a target for God’s wrath, he seems to be suffering

from the same shame. However, he states that in death she no longer suffers from shame as she is no longer a scapegoat for society, and she cannot be exposed to their condemnation: "And she is dead now, and shame put by" (112). Then, he remembers his previous pain stemming from her erstwhile scorn when she was healthy. He states that she must have regretted it when he was taking care of her by noting that "Yea, and the scorn she had of me/ In the old time, doubtless vexed her then" (113-114). What is more, he also regrets his perversion, kissing her dead body, and he blames God for this by saying that "What fools God's anger makes of men!" (116). As a "mad" man, he finds God responsible for all his sufferings, and tries to find relief for his guilty-conscience. He even regrets that he was not an even humbler servant to her: "She might have loved me a little too,/ Had I been humbler for her sake" (117-118). He adds "that new shame could make love new" (119). He believes that she did not recognize that her shame, leprosy, had the potential to "make love new". He seems to be aware of the fact that she is still interested in the knight, or at least thinks about him from time to time, as the following line, "the old love held fast his part" (126), indicates, so his obsession does not lead to any self-delusion. Although the lady is in a way captive in the scribe's house due to the fact that she is ill and she has nowhere to go, she is still thinking of the knight. So, there is a distinction between the enslavement of body (which the speaker tries to turn into an object) and the freedom of the mind, and this distinction will be touched upon more elaborately in the next chapter.

Towards the end of the poem, the speaker compares his love again with his art, his poetry, which gives us hints about his current situation. He states that his love has gone "awry" like his scribal effort (130). In order to define his work, he uses the phrase "Spoilt music with no perfect word" (132), which is a sign of discord.

Actually, this discord is also present in the inconsistency between what he expects from love and what he gets at the end of it, as he cannot reach what he yearned for, endless mutual love. Not her illness, but her death and the fact that she still cares for another man frustrate him. Still, he believes that he would have liked to do his best, but that he has failed and was not able to make her forget the knight: "She kept at heart that other man's" (136). He feels that he should have realized it before. Now that the lady is dead, she is no longer carries the stamp of God's anger. He guesses that she might have "some better knowledge" (139) about all these things which may refer to some kind of knowledge attained through death. However, he is not sure whether this was a just end. So, he asks "will not God do right?" at the end of the poem, and poses a question: What would be the right thing for God to do? The scribe does not find any definite answer to this question. This open-endedness may be deliberate to make the reader meditate this question, which is suggestive of the notions of spirituality, religion, fate, divine justice, and the idea of a benevolent God versus a cruel one.

Chapter III

CAPTIVE MAIDENS IN THEIR TOWERS

“The Lady of Shalott” by Alfred Lord Tennyson

Although the major motifs of “the Lady of Shalott” have been borrowed from the medieval romance tradition, Tennyson adds motifs of his own into it such as the magical web and mirror, which enable the poem to generate “its own complex tradition” as Karen Hoddder notes (60). Hodder adds that “it is, in fact, typical of the tendency of nineteenth-century writers and painters to use the Middle Ages in order to create their own myths, rather than merely absorbing and reissuing medieval myths” (60). Furthermore, she claims that the poem is important in terms of “its power as a feminine image” (60). It employs a feminine myth to compose a feminine image, who suddenly falls in love, and is willing to be destroyed for its sake. The poem lends itself to many different interpretations. I will interpret the poem by mainly referring to Helene Cixous’ “Laugh of the Medusa”, which talks about feminine myths and their source, patriarchal ideology, and I will explore how a maiden, who has fallen in love with a knight, may willingly cause her own death.

The tension between the oppressor and the suppressed, patriarchal ideology and its victim, the captive maiden, finds expression in the first stanza. While Camelot is defined by referring to its towers, phallic symbols functional as a means of

confinement and suppression, Shalott is depicted as an island one passes by on the way to Camelot:

On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the world and meet the sky;
And through the field the road run by
To many-tower'd Camelot;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below,
The island of Shalott. (1-9)

The poem begins with a juxtaposition of two different domains, the domain of Camelot and the domain of Shalott. Describing the road which leads through fertile fields to Camelot, the speaker employs phallic images, “bearded barley” (20) and rye, which make it clear that this is the road to the domain of patriarchy. What’s more, Camelot’s association with the idea of knighthood and masculinity is obvious. Shalott, on the other hand, is described after Camelot, which may indicate its secondary position. It is the land “where the lilies blow” (7) (lilies which traditionally symbolize unlawful passion), this imagery may foreshadow that the Lady of Shalott’s passions will lead her to follow her own choice. Harold Bloom also points to this contrast between inside and outside, and explains how this contrast paves the way for other tensions in the poem:

Part I of the poem places the reader on the island of Shalott, where there are a series of sharp contrasts between the interior of the tower and the busy world outside. “On either side the river live/ Long fields of barley and rye,/ That clothe the world and meet the sky.” The Outside world is ripe with vegetation, fields of barley and rye. However, juxtaposed to these strong images of nature

and vitality, are the images of artistic and sexual purity symbolized by the lilies, the only flowers of which we are told. "And up and down the people go,/ Gazing where the lilies blow." Thus, an immediate tension is created between activity and seclusion, art versus life, passion versus a paralysis of emotion. (15-16)

The speaker reflects this tension between patriarchal discourse and femininity in a different way in the second stanza. In the later part of the second stanza, there is again the image of a tower. However, now it describes the tower in Shalott, not in Camelot, and it is stated that these grey walls and tower "overlook a space of flowers" on the silent island. It seems that the realm of the feminine is situated on an island on which we find masculine grey walls and towers. So, it may signify that the realm of masculinity encapsulates the realm of femininity. The following lines introduce the Lady of Shalott, hence, the last part of this stanza may build a relationship between flowers and the Lady of Shalott. The use of the verb, "to imbower", supports this relationship as it also denotes lying among flowers. Moreover, in the last four lines of this stanza, the tension between the grey walls and towers and a space of flowers may be analogous to the tension between the isle and the Lady of Shalott. The walls, towers, and the isle, which are the instruments enabling her captivity, seem to belong to the patriarchal discourse and its domain whereas the flowers and the Lady of Shalott seem to be outside this domain. The traditional tension between nature (associated with femininity) and civilization (stands for masculinity and patriarchy), thus, can be seen in the closing lines of the second stanza.

How patriarchy suppresses the Lady of Shalott is shown in her detention in a tower which prevents her from making contact with life and humanity as well as with carnal knowledge. The poem makes use of Arthurian elements and characters from

medieval fiction such as Lancelot and the damsel in distress. Although Arthurian stories and the story of Astolat in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* are viewed as the main sources of the poem, Bloom asserts that Tennyson's source is an Italian romance (15):

Tennyson stated that the source for "The Lady of Shalott" was derived from an Italian romance about the Donna di Scalotta, and it was not, as was generally believed at the time of publication, based upon the story of the maid of Astolat in Malory's *Morte de Arthur*. Nevertheless, because the poem contains so many trappings which are an inherent part of the Arthurian Legend- the magical kingdom of Camelot, Lancelot's bejeweled armor, and the barge that ferries the dying Lady, as well as the very name Shalott, which appears to be an anagram of the maid of Astolat (a rearrangement of the letters of a word to produce another word or meaning)- readers immediately identified this poem's setting as Arthurian. (15)

However that may be, as Lionel Stevenson claims, it seems that "Tennyson adapted the Arthurian material for his own ulterior purpose, omitting the girl's name, using an obscure form of the name of her residence, and introducing an element of supernatural"(129). Hence the partly conventional and partly Tennysonian elements such as a magic web and a curse support this image of confinement.

The poem's second part introduces one of these Tennysonian elements, the curse which limits the Lady of Shalott's perception and living space.

There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
To look down to Camelot. (28-32)

Bloom explains the dangerous but obscure nature of this curse in the following way (16):

Part II begins by telling us that the Lady is living under an evil yet vague threat on her life and thus offers an immediate and compelling explanation as to why the Lady has been forced to accept a permanent alienation from the real world. If she dares to look upon that world, a curse will fall upon her. (16)

Although she does not know the source of the curse, she obeys it and passes the time by weaving. The imagery of weaving calls attention to the idea of fate with a reference to the Greek goddesses, the Moirai or the Fates, standing for destiny and order. Thus, the curse imposed upon the Lady could have a relation with these notions, and it may stand for the order the Lady is unwillingly subject to. Also, the image of weaving may remind the reader of “chaste Penelope” due to her loyalty to her husband, who weaves a tapestry to keep her suitors at bay when her husband is away for ten years fighting in Troy. Thus, the Lady of Shalott’s weaving a web may signify her chastity. The image of the tower, an inaccessible and high place, may also be related with the notion of chastity, in the sense that chastity needs to be protected in this high tower on an isolated island.

The nature of this mysterious curse may also be explained by referring to Bataille’s theory. It is evident that the curse stands for a taboo and according to his view, all taboos derive from the idea of universal taboo which is “constant” while “its shape and its object do change” (51). So this curse may refer to a universal taboo, and the imagery of confinement in a tower, a phallic symbol, may suggest that the domain of patriarchy is responsible for this universal taboo, which indicates that the Lady’s destiny is predetermined by the patriarchy. This claim will be in line with what Foucault asserts in his “Subject and Power” by noting that society assigns a role to each individual to participate in its dominant discourse (Foucault, Subject, 781).

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word “subject”: subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. (781)

What is expected from the Lady if she is to be part of this structure, shaped by power and discourse, is her ultimate obedience, acceptance and silence (except for her song and her talking to herself).

Cixous claims that woman should react against this role and should “break the symbolic and effective silence to which they have been reduced” (Segarra 20). This imposed destiny attracts Cixous’ attention. Referring to fairy tales, she talks about “how girls were traditionally doomed to a ‘destiny of restriction and oblivion’ due to having been misled to limit their activities mainly to the care of their appearance (they were ‘mummified ... into prettiness’) excluding anything that had to do with imagination or brave opposition” (Segarra 22). Although the Lady of Shalott is not interested in her own appearance, her world consists of appearances reflected in the mirror. In this early part of the poem, there is an image of an obedient lady who acts according to the role assigned to her, is content with what she has, appearance and shadows. By obeying the rules of this domain, the Lady of Shalott becomes the first and own censor of herself as Cixous implies in her writings when she talks about women accepting the rule of the patriarchal domain (Cixous 32). Bloom observes how the Lady turns into a figure who cannot exist in the public domain, and states the importance of involvement in the public domain for Victorian poets and artists who found themselves in the midst of social turmoil:

As distant as she is, the Lady cannot be involved in social causes, an involvement which became increasingly important to the poets and artists of the Victorian period. She only knows of love and knightly adventures, spirituality, the natural world, and the politics of the life at court, but she is not vitally connected to any of it. (Bloom 17)

The Lady's preoccupation with this magic web also supports the traditional link between magic and femininity in the poem as the Lady of Shalott's weaving the magic web shows. The speaker also depicts her as "fairy" (26) likening her to the supernatural. The Lady's creative endeavors may exemplify what Cixous sees as a resistance against imposed silence and death deriving from this silence. The Lady's song is an indication of her creative tendency, which may supply her with an alternative resistance to the domain of patriarchy as it includes bringing out something new. Cixous believes that a song may be functional in woman's liberation from defenses against her drives, and she explains its importance by noting that:

In woman's speech, as in their writing, that element which never stops resonating, which once we've been permeated by it, profoundly and imperceptibly touched by it, retains the power of moving us- that element is the song: first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman. Why is this privileged relationship with the voice? Because no woman stockpiles as many defenses for countering the drives as does a man. (Cixous 33)

Besides, the songs may also be functional in terms of the poem's organic unity which builds a relationship between its structure and the feeling it evokes. When he talks about the importance of "sight and sound" in this poem, Bloom points to this relationship and asserts that the poem's structure "is both compact and highly artistic, blending sight and sound to evoke strong feelings of loneliness and seclusion in a remote and magical past" (15).

In the first part of the poem, the Lady of Shalott is quite content weaving a magic web, producing the images that are reflected in the mirror which reinforces the idea of mimicry, art as mimesis, and the Lady as a woman artist. As Bloom asserts, “what is even more poignant about her existence is that up until now she has believed her art to be a satisfying compensation for the active life” (17). The turning point for The Lady of Shalott comes when she sees two young lovers through her mirror.

Or when the Moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed.
"I am half sick of shadows," said
The Lady of Shalott. (51-54)

She says she is “half sick of shadows” (53), and it is the first sign of her approaching rebellion against the curse. However, she does not take action until she sees Lancelot, which shows the powerful influence of love at first sight that makes her completely sick of shadows. Bloom also comments on this first sign of rebellion:

That satisfaction, however, is soon to be undermined when she sees reflected in the mirror a funeral and a wedding, two important markers of the human life cycle from which she has been precluded. The funeral foreshows the fate she will later suffer when she violates the proscription placed upon her and gazes directly upon the world outside her window (17)

One may add that the wedding is what she yearns for after seeing Lancelot. The Lady’s action and the narration of the poem go parallel to each other in the sixth stanza which moves from death to love. It is parallel to what the Lady of Shalott does in this part of the poem. From her death-in-life state, she moves into a new mood which leads her to take action, and love is responsible for her new mood. What she wants is “a red-cross knight for ever kneel'd/ To a lady in his shield” (60-61), Lancelot, who is riding a horse and singing a song, is depicted in the seventh stanza.

The reader who is familiar with medieval romance will immediately recognize the fact that the lady to whom Lancelot “for ever kneel’d” (60) is Guinevere, the wife of King Arthur. This unlawful love and his disloyalty to his king destroy Lancelot’s knightly perfection and brings about the destruction of the Round Table in medieval romances. However, his portrayal in this poem is quite different. Lancelot acts as the trigger which causes the Lady to go against the curse. On the other hand, the figure of Lancelot seems to have further connotations and Bloom points to them in his analysis. He observes that “the strong images used to describe Lancelot, “the gemmy bridle glitter’d free,” suggest a life full of passion, love, and adventure, in sharp contrast to the emotionally paralyzed life to which the Lady of Shalott is condemned” (18).

After seeing Lancelot’s reflection in the mirror, the Lady of Shalott cannot bear to look at the world through the mirror anymore and “she look’d down to Camelot” (76) which makes the curse to operate. Although the signals of this decision may be found in the sixth stanza where she says she is “half sick of shadows” (53) after seeing two young lovers, it seems it is an instinctive decision resulting from love at first sight. Smitten by Lancelot’s heroic appearance, the lady reacts against the curse for the first time:

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces through the room,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She look'd down to Camelot. (73-76)

With her staring at Camelot directly, the mirror cracks. The Lady recognizes the reality of the curse by saying that “the curse is come upon me” (80). Therefore, it may be asserted that she is aware of the possible misfortune which may result from

her decision, and ventures her life for the sake of love. Her love instinct, Eros, is so strong that it can even harbor Thanatos, the death instinct, within itself, and may lead to self-destruction. Even signs of masochism, in which joy and pain are combined, can be observed in the Lady's behavior as she is willing to die if it enables her to be seen and acknowledged by Lancelot.

Nature, as the macrocosm, reflects the forthcoming disaster. The Lady's moment of decision is followed by a storm as the east-wind and rain "over tower'd Camelot" (85) indicate at the beginning of the tenth stanza. The Lady finds a boat, which refers to the image of the river signifying the flow of life, starting with birth and flowing towards death. What's more, she writes her name "around above the prow" (89) to make the others recognize her, but instead of her given name (if she has one), she writes "The Lady of Shalott" (90). This is the moment when the reader sees her desire to leave her mark as an individual and a woman in this world as she travels to the realm of death. Her consciousness of her approaching end comes in the eleventh stanza which employs a simile which resembles the Lady to a seer in a trance:

And down the river's dim expanse
Like some bold seer in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance -
With a glassy countenance
Did she look to Camelot. (91-95)

Her hypnotic state may be viewed as the influence of love which is leading her to self-destruction. So, the Lady's transition from one state to another under the influence of love is emphasized. At the beginning of the poem, as in the fourth

stanza, she was obeying the requirements of the curse. In the middle of the poem, she sees the young lovers and says that she is “half sick of shadows” (53), and towards the end of the poem, after falling in love with Lancelot at first sight, the reader sees that she is defying the curse and following Lancelot to be visible to him no matter what the consequences are. The Lady of Shalott dies at the end of the twelfth stanza. In his interpretation, Bloom comments on the Lady’s transformation and her tragic end.

We, the readers, are here left with this ironic turn of events: the Lady’s act of responding to Lancelot, reaching out to the sensual attractions of life in the external world, at the very same time is the end of any possible fulfillment of these newly awakened desires. The impulse to live contains its own death sentence. (Bloom 18)

While she is dying, she hears a carol, the source of which is not clear. The carol is described as “mournful” and “holy” (100), which is in harmony with the death scene of the Lady. Music has played an important role throughout the poem, as the Lady’s and Lancelot’s songs indicate, and it continues to function by providing a background for this death scene. We expect the music to be “mournful” as she is dying, but it is at the same time “holy”-indicating that the divine powers are on her side, not on the side of the patriarchal curse. On the other hand the word “holy” may refer to her innocence as she dies without having any real contact with the external world.

As the thirteenth stanza show, with her death she is again confined to silence, but now she has exposed her dead body to the external world and her name written on the prow enables others to recognize her. Only in death does she reach Camelot, the place she longed for. This moment is described by referring to the individual characters from different classes of society:

Out upon the wharfs they came,
Knight and Burgher, Lord and Dame,
And around the prow they read her name,
The Lady of Shalott. (114-117)

Quite paradoxically, she makes her body visible by dying although death leads to the dissolution of the body. The Lady's asserting her own female body, name and existence through death shows that it's the only way for her to be seen by Lancelot and the rest of Camelot. She "break(s) the symbolic and effective silence", as Cixous suggests, (Segarra 20) but she still becomes what Cixous views as "the false woman" as she reduces herself to silence again through death, the result of her love for Lancelot and her yearning to live in Camelot. Also, the irony of the Lady's breaking "the symbolic silence", as Cixous calls it (Segarra 20), and her confinement into silent through death can be found in Bloom's analysis of the poem:

Thus, she is forever denied the experience of an active and passionate involvement with the world. The moment of her being reawakened is also the moment of her death, and she must leave Camelot, wrapped in a white funeral shroud that simultaneously symbolized death and her innocence of the world, the same shadowy, insubstantial state that has marked her entire existence. Her first attempt to grasp hold of life is at the very same time her letting go. (Bloom 19)

Thus, the poem blurs the line between life and death, activity and passivity, reality and appearance (reflection, or shadow), and Camelot and Shalott. Tennyson seems to employ what Elton Edward Smith calls "the play of ambivalence" in his *Two Voices*: *A Tennyson Study* (37):

Which, for Tennyson, represented real life: Shalott or Camelot? The question is made even more complex because he had reversed the well-known Platonic and Baconian figures of the cave so that the source of reflection is not the ideal but the phenomenal world. Perhaps the phrase Tennyson used in his brief elegy on his friend Brookfield, in 1869, is the closest we can get to

his complete meaning-“dream of a shadow.” It is not so much the case of this or that, but of categories having some of the characteristics of reality and at the same time some of the characteristics of unreality. Tension has dissolved into ambiguity. (Smith 29)

The last stanza demonstrates the reactions of those male inhabitants who see her dead body: “they crossed themselves for fear, All the Knights at Camelot” (121-121). This fear may be interpreted as the fear associated with feminine sex and death, which Cixous calls the myth of the Medusa, and she asserts that men need to define femininity with reference to death as it will allow them to associate themselves with life and presence. Only Lancelot finds her face “lovely” (124), and seems to sympathize with her, which may imply that he might have reciprocated her love had she been alive. Furthermore, the link between Lancelot and the Lady of Shalott, which is the fact that they both sing in the poem, may support this argument as Cixous associates singing with the releasing of defenses and passions. Lancelot may have set free his passions and might have loved the Lady of Shalott if they had been able to meet before she died.

The Lady of Shalott’s death becomes the instrument of her access to this famous knight, as Lancelot can only see her when she is dead. When he is attracted by her “lovely face” (124), it may be said that the Lady reaches a sorry kind of fulfillment because in death she can no longer be aware of his attention. The poem ends with Lancelot’s words, “God in his mercy lend her grace” (125), which implies that she is now with God, which signifies her confinement in a fixed place again.

Although he is a Victorian male poet, who is considered as the optimistic voice of his era, Tennyson has arranged the poem so that readers can sympathize with a female figure, the Lady of Shalott, who is captive and wants to be released

from the bonds imposed by patriarchy. Unfortunately, she is consigned to death.

Tennyson may be criticizing the patriarchal system and its delimiting power over the female under the veil of the Arthurian story and a romance setting. This might be the reason why he has placed the poem safely in the past, not in the nineteenth century.

There is another interpretation of the poem which I want to touch on briefly because it dovetails with the reading presented in this chapter. On the other hand, many critics have suggested a relationship between Tennyson and his protagonist, the Lady of Shalott, in terms of artistic spirit, and this may be the reason why Tennyson sympathizes with his female protagonist. Jerome Hamilton Buckley is one of these critics, and he elaborates on this shared spirit in his *Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet*:

More explicitly and with a greater measure of self-identification, "The Lady of Shalott" explores the maladjustment of the aesthetic spirit to the conditions of ordinary living. Though the lady, in this first of Tennyson's Arthurian poems, will reappear as Elaine of the *Idylls of the King*, she is here a grander and more elusive figure than the pathetic, love-smitten ingénue, "the lily maid of Astolat." She is the dedicated artist, the complement or antitype of the poet, perhaps properly to be understood in Jungian terms as the anima¹, the unconscious self. (49)

So Buckley traces the source of Tennyson's sympathy with his protagonist, and asserts that it stems from "the artistic temper which is both blessed and cursed by its difference" (50).

Another critic, Elton Edward Smith acknowledges this sympathy and the idea that the Lady of Shalott might be "*animae* or female counterpart of the soul of the poet" (156). Lionel Stevenson was the one who "found what he called 'the high-born maiden symbol' in 'The Lady of Shalott'" and "he argued that the symbol

¹ "Jung used the term "anima" to refer to the repressed, unconscious female aspects of a man's personality" (Anderson).

represented the poet's own soul by way of a woman figure" (Smith 155). Smith asserts that "then the soul is represented as mourning, isolated from a life which would mean the death of the soul, luxuriating in a selfish aestheticism, and disdainful of love" (156). However, Smith adds another dimension to the issue by referring to the fact that "If there is a maiden there is also a male who either rejects (as in "The Lady of Shalott," "Mariana," "Mariana in South," "Lancelot and Eliane"), or is rejected ("Lady Clare Vere de Vere," "Locksley Hall," *Maud*, *Enoch Arden*, "Edwin Morris," *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*) (156):

According to this broader concept, the poet not only portrays female figures who are projections of his inner states, but he also makes a moral judgment upon them as worthy or unworthy of acceptance. Thus the ego becomes the censor of the *anima* as the poet rejects the soul of the Palace of Art, Letty Hill ("Edwin Morris"), and Lady Clare; weeps with Mariana, Oenone, and Elaine; and accepts Amy and the Princess after a period of adjustment. By this reading, the "high-born maiden theme" becomes a part of the total Tennysonian indecisiveness and tension between withdrawal and return, reception and acceptance. It stresses both the feminine *persona* of the poet and his masculine role of judgment and identification or refusal to identify. (Smith 156)

Therefore, Tennyson not only sympathizes with the protagonist, but also charges her with the moral codes of his time according to Smith.

"The Blessed Damozel" by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

"The Blessed Damozel" is a Pre-Raphaelite poem, that is nineteenth century poetry characterized by its reaction against the dominant mode of the art of its age. It should be noted that "the Lady of Shalott" was among the favourite poems of the Pre-

Raphaelite brotherhood (Marshall 60), which seems to be characterized by the ideas of resistance and rebellion to authority and the dominant culture

It was the rampart of God's house
That she was standing on;
By God built over the sheer depth
The which is Space begun;
So high, that looking downward thence
She scarce could see the sun. (25-30)

Confinement is a strategy generally achieved by putting women out of sight, often through captivity or death. In “the Blessed Damozel”², there is a young woman who is both captive and dead. She is in God’s castle in heaven as the word “rampart” in the quotation above indicates. The poem demonstrates how a reward may turn into a punishment and in what ways eroticism can find its way to heaven by portraying a young woman yearning for a fusion of divine and earthly love.

The title of the poem introduces the protagonist, who is a young woman and is referred as “the blessed damozel”. “Damozel” is a Middle English word for “damsel”, which means “a young woman or girl; a maiden, originally one of gentle or noble birth”, and it comes from Old French “damoisele”.³ Thus, the title demonstrates one of the characteristics of Rossetti’s early poetry, which is his use of archaic words.

The poem starts with an image which presents a young woman leaning down from the parapet, the “bar” (2) – though it is a “golden” bar, the word reminiscent of limits and being put away in prison:

² There are three published versions of this poem: 1850, 1856, and 1870. In this analysis, the 1850 one is used.

³ Dictionary.reference.com

The blessed damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven;
Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even; (1-4)

This description portrays a young woman who seems sad, as her deep eyes suggests, and restricted, and it makes the reader visualize the protagonist full of melancholy at the very beginning of the poem.

The portrayal of the Damozel continues by referring to the “three lilies in her hand (5) and the seven “stars in her hair” (6). Lilies are known as the conventional symbols of virtue, purity, and chastity, and this is in harmony with the title which refers to this young woman as “the Blessed Damozel”. However, it should be also noted that these lilies may represent the holy trinity, as their number suggests, and the seven stars may remind the reader of the seven stars that Jesus holds in his hand. (Revelation 1.20, King James Bible). In the Bible, it is said that “the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches” (Revelation. 1.20). What’s more, these seven stars may also refer to an actual constellation in the sky, the Pleiades. Thus, this image of the seven stars brings together the divine and the earthly at the very beginning of the poem. Moreover, it is understood that the Damozel is leaning out “from the gold bar of heaven” (2) to see her beloved down below on earth. So, her depiction through the use of Christian symbols and her yearning for the earthly beloved creates an irony which does not escape the reader. Apart from these two meanings, the seven stars may also refer to the daughters of Atlas in Greek mythology, who attended the virgin goddess Artemis. After they die, they become

stars, the Pleiades. This connotation reinforces the idea of virginity in the depiction of the Blessed Damozel.

The main conflict in the poem stems from the fact that the lady is dead and in heaven while her beloved is alive and on earth. The lady's place in heaven becomes the sign of divine grace quality, as the poem's title "the Blessed Damozel" indicates. This of course refers to her virginity and chastity, therefore her virtue; hence she is given a place in heaven and made holy. This idea finds support in many parts of the poem in which a relationship between the Damozel and the Virgin Mary is implied. For instance, the Damozel carries "a white rose of Mary's gift; For service meetly worn" (9-10). Another stanza depicts the Virgin Mary with her handmaidens by referring to their "bound locks" (109), (as opposed to dishevelled hair), symbols of chastity and propriety, and this symbol may even remind the reader of Alexander Pope's "Rape of the Lock" immediately in which the lock is also symbol of Belinda's chastity. All these maidens sit "circlewise" (109), which signifies a closed, harmonious, and equal relationship among them. What they do may also be symbolic. They are "weaving the golden thread, / To fashion the birth-robcs for them/ Who are just born, being dead" (112-114). It is evident that they are weaving robes for men and women who have died and are to be reborn to a new life in heaven. However, this image of weaving may also remind the reader of Penelope (and of course her chastity), who wove a tapestry while her husband was away from home for ten years.

The Blessed Damozel yearns for the arrival of her beloved's soul (which can only happen after he is dead) and God's lifting them "to endless unity" (100), which would combine divine love and earthly love. For the Damozel, the two of them will

create a harmonious union, and the use of music in the following lines, in which she imagines their singing together in heaven, may symbolize this harmony:

“And I myself will teach to him,
I myself, lying so,
The songs I sing here; which his voice
Shall pause in, hushed and slow,
And find some knowledge at each pause,
Or some new thing to know.” (91-96)

Although the poem mentions the tree of life, not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “some knowledge” may include carnal knowledge as the erotic scenes imagined by the Blessed Damozel in the forthcoming stanzas suggest. In one of these scenes, she describes how they will bathe together in God’s heavenly light. The most surprising part comes when she says that God will also watch this scene, making him a voyeur:

‘When round his head the aureole clings,
And he is clothed in white,
I’ll take his hand and go with him
To the deep wells of light;
As unto a stream we will step down,
And bathe there in God’s sight. (73-78)

This image of the lovers’ bathing is reflected as process of purification as the divine light and white robes suggest. It seems as a new kind of baptism. Instead of a river, they will bathe in God’s light as if it were a stream, and they will both be dressed in white robes. This guardedly erotic scene is juxtaposed to a holy scene in which the two lovers pray together.

'We two will stand beside that shrine,
Occult, withheld, untrod,
Whose lamps are stirred continually
With prayer sent up to God;
And see our old prayers, granted, melt
Each like a little cloud. (79-84)

Their prayers mingle with each other as clouds mingle and melt. This idea of fusion is also implied by putting divine and erotic elements side by side, and this aspect of the poem may stand for the Damsel's desire for bridging the sacred and the earthly. The sixth stanza shows how distant God's heaven is from the earth and how small the earth is seen from heaven. It is just like an insect as the simile in line thirty-six demonstrates:

It lies in Heaven, across the flood
Of ether, as a bridge.
Beneath, the tides of day and night
With flame and darkness ridge
The void, as low as where this earth
Spins like a fretful midge. (31-36)

On the other hand, line thirty-two refers back to "the rampart" in the twenty-fifth stanza and by likening it to a bridge, the speaker employs a metaphor which includes the idea of unification. Adrienne Johnson draws the reader's attention to how Dante Gabriel Rossetti "illustrates the gap between heaven and earth", and notes that "even Rossetti's description of the space between the two lovers is an attempt to unite heaven and earth. He calls the ether a 'flood' and the rampart above the ether a 'bridge', both images of inherently earthly qualities- water and the manmade construction that crosses it". So, by describing heaven with reference to earthly

qualities, the speaker is attempting to reconcile the divine and the earthly. This attempt to reconcile opposites may be parallel to the conflict inherent within the Pre-Raphaelite's aesthetic. In his "the Pre-Raphaelites", William E. Fredeman cites the sources of this conflict:

More important is the recognition of the several paradoxes operative within the Pre-Raphaelite's working aesthetic: the conflict inherent in the choice of realistic techniques to portray essentially romantic subjects; the unreconciled contradiction between their mimetic ("follow nature") and expressive ("fidelity to inner experience") theories of art; and the attempt to fuse the literary and visual media by utilizing reciprocal techniques. (255-256)

So, it may be asserted that there is a similarity between the poet Rossetti and his female protagonist in terms of their endeavour to bring together opposites.

The ideas of fusion and reconciliation find place in another erotic image which appears right after the imagined prayer scene, and it implies that the Blessed Damozel yearns for the intermingling of two different types of loves, the divine and the earthly. This time, the Blessed Damozel imagines that they "two will lie i' the shadow of/ That living mystic tree" (85-86). The living mystic tree stands for "the tree of life" in the Bible⁴; thus, signifies immortality. The Blessed Damozel seems to have a desire for an immortal earthly love in this image, a contradiction in terms which is actually impossible. Even the words "earthly" and "immortal" sound like an oxymoron when they are put side by side. However, she explicitly states this yearning in the twenty-second stanza:

"There will I ask of Christ the Lord
Thus much for him and me: —
Only to live as once on earth

⁴ Abrahams M.H, and Stephen Greenblatt, eds. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 8th ed. New York; London: Norton, 2006, 1445, footnote 5.

With Love, — only to be,
As then awhile, for ever now
Together, I and he.” (127-132)

We see the combination of divine and earthly love in the Renaissance sonnet tradition in which the beloved’s beauty becomes the reflection of God, and by praising her virtues and physical beauty, the lover actually elevates God. So, earthly love becomes a means of promoting divine love. However, the lady in this poem does not take her beloved as the reflection of the divine, but has a craving for earthly love for its own sake.

The tension arises from the fact that she cannot do anything to reach her lover as she is dead. Only if he dies can they meet. So, she waits for the time ‘when round his head the aureole clings,/ And he is clothed in white’ (73-74). On the other hand, she does not turn her back on divine love. Bataille talks about the Christian notion of divine love in his *Eroticism*, and claims that it includes a wish “to open the door to a completely unquestioning love.” (118). He asserts that “according to Christian belief, lost continuity found again in God demanded from the faithful boundless and uncalculated love, transcending the regulated violence of ritual frenzy” (118). However, it is not enough for the young woman to be satisfied with this “unquestioning love”. What the Damozel wants is not divine love which transcends the earthly one, but the reconciliation of these two types of loves. This is why she envies “newly met” lovers around her (37).

Around her, lovers, newly met
‘Mid deathless love’s acclaims,
Spoke evermore among themselves
Their heart-remembered names;

And the souls mounting up to God
Went by her like thin flames. (37-42)

After seeing these lovers, she tries to see her beloved on earth which made “the bar she leaned on warm” (46). Thus, the scene of her looking at the lover on earth is eroticized by stating that “her bosom must have made” (45) the bar warm. She reflects her bodily passion on the barriers which limit her space. The fact that she is in heaven, which is generally a gift for a person, is the reason why she is delimited in this way. Although she is in God’s castle which has “gold bars”, reinforcing the idea that she is the bird in a golden cage, she is not to be satisfied until her beloved joins her. Thus, the gift turns into a punishment as it separates her from her lover. She does not feel rewarded, but captivated, and the images of the golden barriers reinforce this idea of confinement.

The young woman tries to console herself by thinking about what they will do when he comes, but the end of the poem demonstrates that she is actually aware of her self-delusion and of the fact that she does not have the necessary power to make him come or even to know when he will come. This is the reason why she bows to fate and weeps at the end of the poem.

And then she cast her arms along
The golden barriers,
And laid her face between her hands,
And wept. (I heard her tears.) (141-144)

A heaven without her lover fails to be the place of ultimate bliss for her, but makes her sorrowful due to her separation from the beloved on earth. The title, therefore, appears to be ironic as the word, “blessed”, may also refer to happiness and good

fortune besides its other connotation, holy. The Blessed Damozel cannot celebrate her unification with God as she also needs to be united with her lover.

On the other hand, as pointed out earlier, she does not want to exchange God's love for her beloved's. She wants them both, and it might be the reason why the poem makes use of the images of fusion. Even the narration of the poem suggests this idea of fusion as it gives voice to both the young lady and male lover, and make their voices merge into each other. In the poem, parentheses are used to convey the male lover's feelings and it should be noted that although he is not in heaven, he can hear "her tears" (144). This line suggests a very strong bond between two lovers which can transcend the distance between heaven and earth. They have such a passionate love for each other that they can build empathy even when they are in different realms, heaven and earth.

A strong association and a close bond between the lovers are actually among the characteristic of Victorian prose and poetry according to Stephen Kern (99-100). For instance, Kern observes in *Jane Eyre* that the lovers' conversation "is not a struggle between independent selves to communicate but more like a single 'audible thinking'" (100). The narration of "the Blessed Damozel" may also create the same effect in the mind of the reader as it combines the voices of two lovers in a harmonious way.

Furthermore, Kern asserts that "by the mid-nineteenth century the Romantic ideal of a love that unified everything- mind and body, man and woman, rich and poor, sexual desire and love of God- could make lovers hyperventilate" (99). In this poem, Rossetti seems to rely on this notion of Romantic love that combines opposing forces, and it seems that Rossetti does not believe in the duality of the body and the

soul. They are not contrary but complementary for him. Many critics admit William Blake's influence on Rossetti and the fact that the Pre-Raphaelite poets admired Blake due to his ability to fuse visual art and poetry. According to a certain type of sixteenth century thinking, the body's beauty stems from the virtue of the soul, and it becomes a mere reflection of divine force. So, the soul belongs to the realm of God while the body is only a material thing and resides in the sublunary world. However, in the 18th century, Blake subverts this idea in his "Sick Rose" in which a beautiful rose is being destroyed by an invisible worm. Thus, he reacts against the conventional association between what is seen (the body) and what it is (the soul). This is a reaction against the traditional separation of the soul from the body, which is actually the heritage of the Enlightenment discourse. According to the traditional view of heaven, an individual's soul will be in peace in it as it unites with its source and creator, God. However, it is seen that the Blessed Damozel is still suffering from her bodily passions in heaven, so it cannot be only the realm for the soul's peace. Thus, Rossetti seems to problematize the conventional definition of what is heaven and blurs the line between the soul and the body by subverting the constructed binary opposition between them.

His portrayal of heaven may also make the reader aware of Blake's influence over his art as both poets depict heaven in unconventional ways. While Blake blurs the line between heaven and hell in his *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Rossetti subverts the conventional view of heaven. It is not only a paradise, but also a kind of prison for the Blessed Damozel. It is both a reward (as she has God's love now) and a punishment (as she is separated from her lover). This may be the reason why heaven is not portrayed in a traditional way in this poem as all these erotic details and the images of captivity imply. Actually, Rossetti explained the reason why he

chose heaven as a setting in the following way: “I saw that Poe had done the utmost it was possible to do with the grief of the lover on earth, and so I determined to reverse the conditions, and give utterance to the yearning of the loved one in heaven” (1443)⁵. It seems that what Rossetti has reversed is not only the conditions in Poe’s poem, but also the conventional idea of heaven and the duality between the body and the soul. These reversals enable him to create what Curtis calls “a confused spirituality which maintains an uneasy balance between ideal and earthly love” (204).

This representation of heaven also paves the way for the discussion of the notion of God as an authority figure. Throughout the poem, he is not visible, but an absent/present figure whose influence over the young woman is felt. By thinking about the Blessed Damozel’s excessive grief, the reader may assume that he is not a compassionate figure as he does not afford the person rewarded in heaven with relief. It seems that the young woman is not under the protection of a kind and a benevolent God, but under the rule of one who is indifferent to her suffering.

The Blessed Damozel seems quite powerless under these circumstances. By giving voice to a powerless female figure who is dead and representing her suffering, Rossetti seems to react against what Kathy Alexis Psomiades calls “the Lancelot moment”, with an allusion to Tennyson’s “Lady of Shalott”. She explains that it is “the moment at which a masculine observer stands mystified before a beautiful, insentient feminine body” and “a moment in which ‘She has a lovely face’ might finally be the only adequate response to the feminine figure” (40). However, the Damozel in the poem is not a pure image or object of beauty since she has her own

⁵ Abrahams M.H, and Stephen Greenblatt, eds. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 8th ed. New York; London: Norton, 2006, 1445, footnote 1.

story, unravelling her individual experience; and this experience makes her an individual, not an object. When Psomiades analyses the image of the dead woman in nineteenth century literature, she shows how Rossetti's poems criticize this moment and how he gives priority to the female experience:

These poems criticize but also readapt the poetic tradition that makes masculine experience of the death of a woman into suitable subject matter for art. By privileging the experience of the dead woman over that of her masculine onlooker, Rossetti's poems explicitly criticize the Lancelot stance [...]. (62)

Although she is quite helpless, the Damsel still has the gift of imagination which becomes a source of consolation. So, she keeps thinking about future possibilities which will make her happy. These possibilities include erotic scenes, and they may be taken as the reflection of her desires which may be both conscious and unconscious. Her ultimate desire or what she really waits for is the death of her beloved as it will bring them together. Therefore, death becomes the means to consummate love in the poem, thus, two opposing forces, love (creative) and death (destructive), meet in it.

CHAPTER IV

FEMMES FATALES

“Eden Bower” by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

It was Lilith the wife of Adam:

(Eden bower's in flower.)

Not a drop of her blood was human,

But she was made like a soft sweet woman. (Rossetti 1-4)

Lilith was always an interesting icon and protagonist for Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who wrote two poems, namely “Eden Bower” (a ballad) and “Body’s Beauty” (a sonnet) portraying this figure, and painted two different versions of *Lady Lilith* which became a counterpart to his sonnet. In this analysis, I will present a brief account of what “Lilith” has signified through the ages, trace the sources of Rossetti’s inspiration, and explore how Rossetti depicts this femme fatale. Up until this chapter, female characters were portrayed as the victims of patriarchy, suppression, religion, and deviant love. In this chapter, however, we will witness a turn as the female characters here are not sufferers but torturers, not the victim ones but the killers. Besides Rossetti’s portrayal of a femme fatale who seems “like a soft sweet woman” (4), the questions of how Rossetti’s Lilith differs from the traditional representation of this figure, and how these differences pave the way for the reader to understand Pre-Raphaelite art will be examined. Lilith’s metamorphosis and the change in her

feelings will help us to understand the nature of her love which becomes the source of all the disastrous events in the poem.

In “The Lineage of Lilith”, Harry M. Geduld explains the Hebrew origin of Lilith. She was a handmaid of the Assyrian Lil, the spirit of darkness who was known for her ability to seduce men sleeping alone (58). However, in the earliest post-biblical representations, Lilith appears as “the semi-human progeny of Adam (under a spell) or of Eve (by male spirits)” (59). Geduld explains how Lilith was first represented as the first wife of Adam in the following way:

The conception of Lilith as the first wife of Adam originated in later Talmudic traditions and was probably established through the allusions to the Lilith story in Buxtorf’s *Lexicon Talmudicum* (n.d.). According to these later traditions, Lilith was not at first a demon, but was transformed into one because of her evil conduct. In these versions of the Lilith story, the female demon preys upon infants and not upon unprotected men.

Lilith assumed an even more definite form during the Middle Ages. Eisenmenger’s *Entdecktes Judenthum* (ii. 417 et. seq.) quotes superstitions associated with Lilith in the Jewish literature of the Medieval period when the evil nature of this spirit at last became definitely established. She was supposed to take the form of a night-owl in order to steal children from their beds. (59)

Rossetti’s Lilith is characterized by her metamorphosis, but she is transformed from a snake into a wife by God. Still, she is a threatening and dangerous woman in Rossetti’s representation. So, Rossetti, whose art works hark back to the Middle Age, seems to make use of an age-old tradition, which becomes more precise in the Medieval period, to create his own protagonist although his Lilith is still quite different from the conventional representation of this figure in the Christian tradition. According to Russell, this is how the portrayal of Lilith in this tradition first appeared (“The Legends of Lilith and of the Wandering Jew in Nineteenth-Century Literature”):

Lilith is a growth of the Rabbinic tradition, of that minute, searching and intensive examination of the Scriptures which sought to draw every atom of meaning out of them and to leave no hints neglected. It has been suggested that the legend sprang out of the two different, though not actually contradictory, descriptions of the creation of Eve in the *Book of Genesis*. 'Male and female created he them' which suggested that Adam and Eve were created at the same time and were both made out of dust of the earth, and the later, more detailed account, in which Adam was cast into a sleep, and a rib was taken out of him and fashioned into a woman, who was therefore 'bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.' The creative imagination of early students of the Bible provided them with the story of how Lilith, the first wife, feeling herself the equal of Adam, claimed equal right with him; they quarrelled and she pronounced the hidden name of God, fled from Eden and became a demon. (132)

Rossetti's poem, "Eden Bower" starts at that moment when Lilith was dismissed from heaven, turned into an evil and passionate female who is seeking for revenge in a blood-thirsty manner. Lilith can be regarded as a femme fatale as she sexually manipulates the snake, her old beloved, to take revenge from Adam, Eve and God. This is in line with Robin Barrow's definition of femme fatale, that is as "a familiar stereotype from myth, literature, and film: the sexy woman who manipulates men, usually by lying and occasionally by committing crimes, to further her own self-interests". Both in the religious sources and in the poem, Lilith is portrayed as an evil woman since she rebels against patriarchal authority. According to Virginia M. Allen, "Rossetti's choice of Lilith as subject for his icon implies that her personality traits were essential to the meaning of his work" (286). Thus, the tension between patriarchy and femininity, which was an essential Victorian conflict making women subject to male authority and power, and limiting their living space must have attracted Rossetti's attention. Allen also adds that although "this creature lurked in the dark corners of the European imagination throughout the Middle Ages", she was not made into a "subject matter of commissioned art" (286). Lilith first appears in Goethe's "Faust", and Rossetti's brother, William M. Rossetti, states that Rossetti

“knew Goethe’s play from childhood [...] and produced a number of illustrations for it in his youth (Allen 289). Therefore, this work might have inspired D.G. Rossetti to write about this seductive and threatening figure, Lilith. Moreover, her appearance in the religious sources may also have importance for Rossetti, and there will be a possible explanation of this issue towards the end of my analysis.

In the poem, the use of flashbacks enables the reader to learn how Lilith became the first wife of Adam, and how she was expelled from paradise:

Lilith stood on the skirts of Eden;
 (And O the bower of the hour!)
 She was the first that thence was driven;
 With her was hell and with Eve was heaven. (5-8)

Besides mentioning the dismissal of Lilith from paradise, this stanza offers a comparison between Lilith and Eve which may seem a strict distinction at first sight. However, it should be remembered that Eve is conventionally a model of the temptress, especially when she is compared to the Virgin Mary. By turning Eve into a figure associated with heaven, when she is compared to Lilith standing for hell, Rossetti destroys the traditional representation. As a member of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, characterized by its reaction against any kind of convention, stock-expression and familiar modes of representation stemming from these conventions, Rossetti seems to subvert what was conventional. As he does not see the world as black and white, he supplies his reader with an alternative representation in which Eve's role is shifted. Eve has always been regarded as one of the first femmes fatales since she has caused the downfall of Adam, and hence, of all humankind.

Nevertheless, Rossetti supplies us with a fresh perspective by turning Eve into the

victim of another woman, Lilith, thus breaking the reader's habitual perception. In this respect, what the Pre-Raphaelites were trying to do is similar to the goals of the Russian Formalists, as they both aim at providing the reader with a new perspective and at destroying perception which have become automatized. This new way of representation also includes other shifts in the story of Lilith in Rossetti's "Eden Bower". The reader learns that Lilith had been a snake before she was turned into the first wife of Adam :

'I was the fairest snake in Eden;
(And O the bower and the hour!)
By the earth's will, new form and feature
Made me a wife for the earth's new creature. (13-16)

In the traditional account of the story (the Biblical one), Lilith does not undergo metamorphosis. However, in Rossetti's poem, Lilith was "made" a wife for "the earth's new creature" (16), Adam through her metamorphosis. Rossetti starts to introduce new elements into the traditional story in this part of the poem. The word "made" reinforces the idea that God turned her into a wife for Adam, and thus, her identity was constructed with a special emphasis on her domestic role, being a wife. It may be the reason why it is said that she became a wife instead of a human being or woman. It is evident that her identity depends on her relationship with Adam and her status, being his wife. This portrayal implies upward mobility. Through the ages, animals have been viewed as "inferior" when they are compared to human beings. Still, there has also been a hierarchy between the two sexes of human beings in the dominant patriarchal discourse, and man has been regarded as "superior". Turning from a snake into a woman, Lilith has ascended the ladder, but she is the so-called "weaker sex".

Also, the relationship between nature and culture (or civilization) and the one between femininity and masculinity must be taken into the consideration to examine this seductive woman who was originally a snake. In *Evil Sisters*, Bram Dijkstra explores this relationship by referring to Sumner's ideas:

Sumner never tired of pointing out that civilization was a product of man's struggle *against* nature: "The whole retrospect of human history runs downwards beast-like misery and slavery to the destructive forces of nature."⁶ (WOE 179) A sexual woman, being a primitive woman, was not "above", but part of, nature. One could go even further and insist that she was nature itself. In consequence, man's struggle against nature expressed itself first and foremost in his struggle against the sexual woman. (43).

Thus, Lilith, as a femme fatale, may first have been a snake due to this conventional bond between nature and femininity which depends on the idea of primitivism.

On the other hand, Rossetti depicts this snake as "the fairest" one, and thus employs what seems like an oxymoron by combining the words "fairest" and "snake" (13), since snakes have traditionally been portrayed as threatening and evil, not as fair. As it is said before, Rossetti, as a Pre-Raphaelite artist, does not see the world by relying upon constructed binary oppositions. On the contrary, he seems to enjoy blurring the line between them. This might be the reason why this snake is represented as a fair one. Furthermore, if we take into account the fact that Dante Gabriel Rossetti was a great admirer of Blake, who was both a painter (also engraver) and poet like himself, Eve's representing heaven and Lilith representing hell may signify more than just a comparison between a benign woman and a femme fatale, between good and evil. In his *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake defines heaven and hell in a quite untraditional way:

⁶ (qtd. in Dijkstra 43)

"Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion,
Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.
From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil.
Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing
from Energy. Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell." (Blake 181)

Hence, Eve becomes "the passive that obeys Reason" (Blake 181) while Lilith is "the active springing from Energy" (Blake 181), thus, she seems to be an emblem for the idea of revolution. By regarding herself equal to Adam, she reacts against limiting her identity to the role of being wife to Adam, a role given her by God. In the poem, she acts as an individual and seeks for revenge, and it is implied that she was also angry with God who turned her into a wife and then dismissed her. In this respect, it may be claimed that Lilith may be linked to Keats' Lamia since both undergo metamorphoses from snakes into women.

Lilith's "quest" is characterized by the feelings of passion and revenge. She tries to make a deal with the snake, her lover before she was made wife to Adam, and for this reason, Lilith begs the snake for their reunion:

"Take me thou as I come from Adam:
(Eden bower's in flower.)
Once again shall my love subdue thee;
The past is past and I am come to thee. (16-20)

In this stanza, the word "subdue" calls for attention since it says much about what love means for Lilith. For her, love involves power relations. This is the reason why the snake's love for her will subdue the snake. In a similar way, she depicts her relationship with Adam in terms of power relations, and in this relationship, "Adam

was thrall to Lilith" (21) and "Lilith was queen to Adam" (25). Interestingly, she juxtaposes the description of her forthcoming union with the snake with the depictions of her husband, Adam, and the "great joys" (29) they had. Philip McM. Pittman explains how Lilith seduces the snake by talking about the sexual joys she had with Adam in his "The Strumpet and The Snake: Rossetti's Treatment of Sex as Original Sin":

The Lilith of this poem must surely rank among the most sordid characters in literature. Driven from Eden for her primordial disobedience, she now bargains with her first consort, the serpent, for the use of his body, first that she may gratify herself with it, then that she may in it assail Adam and Eve and so secure her revenge. Her function does not change; whether she is dealing with Adam or with a snake she is a seductress, and though she is insanely jealous of Eve she fondles and cajoles the snake, using her sexuality to arouse him into acquiescence- talking the while about the pleasures of Adam's bed. [...] In fact or in memory, Lilith comes to the snake virtually dripping from Adam's bed, and this memory (appropriate because of her still human form) as much as her present sex play excites and prepares her for union with the snake. (52)

Lilith stimulates both the snake and herself by reviving and narrating this memory. Besides the sexual joys she will derive from it, the shape of the snake will enable Lilith to take revenge from Adam and Eve, as Pittman notes (52). The phallic shape of the snake does not escape the reader's attention at this point. Lilith's metamorphosis into a snake, a phallic image, may symbolize empowering herself to beat a strong enemy, God:

"Strong is God, the fell foe of Lilith-

(And O the bower and the hour!)

Nought in heaven or earth may affright him;

But join thou with me and we will smite him. (53-56)

Pittman also notes Lilith's admiration for this phallic image and claims that she "worships" the snake's form (52):

The phallic implications of the scene can hardly be ignored. As she fondles and fawns upon her old (and new) lover, Lilith's monologue develops in filthy tension toward the release of sexual consummation, and as it does the serpent likewise grows, from snake, to King-snake, to Love-snake, and to God-snake. Like Milton's Eve, Lilith worships a serpent- here more overtly the form of a phallus. (52)

Since she has turned from a snake into a wife, Lilith may be viewed not only to have risen in the chain of being but as a figure symbolically "castrated", and thus weakened by God. This may be the reason why she is fascinated with the snake's shape and "worships" it. Besides its being a means of disguise, the snake's shape may symbolically masculinize (and thus empower) Lilith, and this might help her to defeat her two male rivals, Adam and God. It should be noted that Reed describes destructive women in Victorian art and culture by stating that they have "astounding beauty", but "it really abrupt masculinity that characterizes these conventional types" (45). Reminding the reader of the painting, *Lady Lilith*, and the fact that Lilith was a snake before she was turned into a wife and how she yearns for having this shape again, it can be asserted that she is presented as a masculinized figure in terms of both the type of beauty she has and her metamorphosis.

Lilith cannot fight against her enemy, God, in her woman's form. However, she is not a weak figure since she is capable of convincing the snake thanks to her femininity. She makes the snake slide his head along her breast and lip her while she is making plans for her revenge (75-76). Pittman notes how she makes use of her female sexuality as a weapon in his analysis, and he asserts that "her sexuality is her means to revenge- the bribe that will buy the serpent" (50) Thus, Lilith, as a femme

fatale, turns her body into a commodity in her deal with the snake, and her “golden” hair, which is described as “a net” holding Adam’s heart (25), may signify money (or capital more generally) in this respect. Instead of weaving a tapestry, a sign of domesticity, Lilith uses her golden hair as a trap for men. This image of hair as a kind of trap may be traced back to Goethe’s *Faust*, in which Lilith appears only once, and this scene puts emphasis on her hair by depicting it as “imprisoning” (Allen 286). Allen translates this part of the play and notes its importance:

Beware of her beautiful hair, her chief glory; if she catches a young man in it, she will not soon let him go.⁷ This short passage constitutes Lilith’s only appearance in the play, as well as an early manifestation in “high” art. Goethe utilized only one aspect of legendary Lilith in his drama, and the device of imprisoning hair appears to be his own invention. He made no reference to her power over infants. (286)

Besides its “imprisoning” power, golden hair has signified many other things for Victorian writers and poets. Elisabeth G. Gitter mentions its different significations in her “The Power of Women’s Hair in the Victorian Imagination” in the following way:

While women’s hair, particularly when it is golden, has always been a Western preoccupation, for the Victorians it became an obsession. [...] Golden hair, through which wealth and female sexuality are inevitably linked, was the obvious and ideal vehicle for expressing their notorious –and ambivalent– fascination both with money and with female sexual power. At the same time, golden hair became the crowning glory of the mythologized Victorian grand woman [...] When the powerful woman of the Victorian imagination was an angel, her shining hair was her aureole or bower; when she was demonic, it became a glittering snare, web, or noose. Silent, the larger-than-life woman who dominated the literature and art of the period used her hair to weave her discourse; immobile, she used her hair at times to shelter her lovers, at times to strangle them. But always, as Rossetti’s *Lady Lilith* painting suggests, the grand woman achieved her transcendent vitality partly through her magic hair, which was invested with independent energy: enchanting- and enchanted- her gleaming tresses both expressed her mythic power and were its source. (936)

⁷ (qtd. in Allen 286)

Thus, her hair becomes Lilith's "enchanting" weapon in this poem, which is in line with her traditional representation in nineteenth century art. Similar to way in which she turns her hair into a means of temptation, Lilith uses her mouth as a means of seduction:

"Lend thy shape for the love of Lilith!

(And O the bower and the hour!)

Look, my mouth and cheek are ruddy,

And thou art cold, and fire is my body. (61-64)

Through the description of the cold male body (moist) and the hot female body (dry), we understand that Lilith offers to warm the snake's cold body with her fire. This depiction may remind the reader of the image of the hysterical woman who suffers from the wandering womb in search of moisture. For centuries, it was believed that engaging in too much sexual activity with women is harmful for men due to this notion of the wandering womb. (This belief also led to the creation of the term "female hysteria", which was thought of as a type of illness resulting from excessive and uncontrolled sexual desire and the term was very common in Victorian times). This belief has changed shape through the years, but the portrayal of the sexual woman as a cannibalistic creature endures in certain ways. Thus, love has been viewed as a process of incorporation, in which one partner is incorporated (passive), and the other is incorporating (active) (Dijkstra 80). How this leads to the loss of selfhood and how this view creates a link between love and death is described in "Evil Sisters" by Bram Dijkstra:

The dominant ideology of the turn of the century expressed itself in series of strict dualist choices. "Being" meant being in control; nothingness was to be controlled by another. Selfhood was dominance; submission signified loss of self-death. If love was an expression of self-hood and the nonself was death,

then to love another meant to expand one's love of self. On the level of social metaphor, to love was therefore, an act of incorporation. You preyed, or you were preyed upon. Love and depredation went hand in hand. That is why Freud, to almost universal acclaim, had come to the conclusion that love and death were pretty much one and the same thing, especially if you happened to be the one being incorporated rather than the one doing the incorporating. (80)

This is the reason why "love and sex" are "seen as forms of deadly vampirism" (Dijkstra 80). Rossetti's notion of love in "Eden Bower" is also in line with this narcissist incorporation where self and the other do not merge into each other, but the self devours the other, the nothing. Hence, love of the beloved turns into love of the self, narcissism, and the other symbolically dies in such a relationship. Stephen J. Spector notes that love "is usually a means of escaping from the prison of self. Traditionally love provides a way for the self to escape its own limitations; love is the most significant mode of human relationships which are interpersonal and therefore in direct contrast to" subjectivism (433). However, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's portrayal of love is quite different from this traditional approach:

What is distinctive and disturbing about much of Rossetti's most accomplished poetry is that the traditional function of love is reversed: love, instead of liberating the self, actually increases the subjective isolation of the lover. [...] Instead of embracing wholeheartedly an optimistic religion of love, Rossetti is consistently engaged in its demystification; he reveals not only the illusory nature of love, but also the ways that love itself actually generates illusion.

Rossetti shows that love, or indeed any intense emotion, often tends to increase the isolation of the self, because the self in such moments, cannot escape from being aware of its own intense feeling. [...] As passion increases, the lover becomes more and more aware, not of the beloved, but of his own increasingly agitated mind and heart, a heart that beats louder and louder until it is the only reality he can perceive. Love, instead of being a mode of intersubjectivity, becomes another mode of subjectivism. (Spector 433-434)

This must be the reason why Rossetti portrays Lilith in his painting as a femme fatale who is looking into her mirror, lost in her own self and passions. In a similar way,

“Eden Bower” depicts a seductive woman who is only led by her passions and in whose heart “love grows hate” and becomes destructive (72). For this reason, Pittman calls Lilith’s love a kind of “perversion” (49) when he comments on Rossetti’s sonnet, “Body’s Beauty” in which the portrayal of Lilith is similar to the way in which she is presented in “Eden Bower”:

In Lilith love is perversion, because it is narcissistic and spiritually destructive. Her preparation for it, self-contemplation, is natural to her, indeed all that she is capable of; the end of sexuality is, and always be, self-love in the form of self-gratification. Rossetti conceived that love, at exactly that moment when it loses its altruistic character and becomes self-involved, is the fundamental sin of man and the basic form of evil in the world. (49)

By portraying a passionate femme fatale, Rossetti subverts the Victorian idealization of woman. Robert Bell, in his *The Ladder of Gold*, explains the role ascribed to the ideal woman in Victorian society, states that “stern and obdurate strength is not the finest characteristic of women; they are most strong and most lovable in their weakness” (qtd. in Reed 52). However, Rossetti chooses not a weak but a strong female character who attempts to rebel even against God and his order. Reed says that “women were viewed both as tempting sirens and holy virgins” in Victorian culture (53), and Lilith, with her passionate nature, apparently belongs to the first category of this classification, and Rossetti finds such a nature inspiring in his later years:

What more inspiring for poetic effort than the terrible Love turned to Hate,- perhaps the deadliest of all passion-woven complexities,- which is the theme of ‘Sister Helen,’ and in a more fantastic form, of ‘Eden Bower’- the surroundings of both poems being the mere machinery of a central universal meaning? (qtd. in Spector 436)

According to Spector, “Rossetti explores the self-absorbed intensity of love which has been raised to such a high degree of intensity that it has turned into hate” (436). As a passionate, hateful and evil figure, Lilith seeks for a revenge which will cause complete disaster. Therefore, it is not enough for her to cause the fall of Adam and Eve, which will turn them into mortal beings.

“Lo, Eve bends to the words of Lilith!—

(And O the bower and the hour!)

"Nay, this Tree's fruit,-why should ye hate it,

Or Death be born the day that ye ate it? (101-104)

Lilith, wanting more than the death of Adam and Eve, can foresee that this fall will turn into the original sin of mankind and will influence all coming generations. It is the reason why Lilith says that “To Eve’s womb, from our sweet tomorrow,/ God shall greatly multiply sorrow” (183-184). So, this femme fatale creates a revenge plan which not only hurts Adam, but all humankind. The last stanza unravels another aspect of her plan which seems to increase Adam’s and Eve’s pain:

“The first is Cain and the second Abel;

(Eden bower's in flower.)

The soul of one shall be made thy brother,

And thy tongue shall lap the blood of the other.”

(And O the bower and the hour!) (193-196)

In the Middle Ages, Lilith also had a reputation for harming children (Geduld 59). Lilith does too, but in a different way in Rossetti’s poem. As a femme fatale responsible for the disaster which befell human kind, Lilith also causes the first murder in the history of humankind. Besides turning Adam and Eve into mortal

creatures with her plan, Lilith makes them suffer from Abel's death and Cain's fratricide. As Abel and Cain are "two men-children born for their pleasure" (192), which means the outcome of their intercourse, Lilith, jealous of this sexual intimacy, includes these two figures in her revenge plan. In the Bible, Cain murders Abel after God accepted the offering of Abel, but not Cain's offering (Genesis 4.8, King James Bible). In Rossetti's story, this event, which has again been foreseen by Lilith, seems to be one of the results of her revenge plan.

In this refrain ballad, "a style fashionable among the Pre-Raphaelites" (Russell 133), Rossetti explores biblical and sexual themes side by side. Although the events seem to take place in the dim past, Rossetti includes controversial issues of his period in the poem. Even by looking at his painting, *Lady Lilith*, one can see that Lilith's clothes are quite in line with Victorian fashion and that she appears to be a Victorian lady who rebels against mainstream values. Thus, Rossetti makes use of mythologizing and historicising tendency of the Victorian poets to reflect his own age under the veil of the distant, and therefore safe, past.

Also, by using rather simple language with a song-like quality and including highly erotic scenes, Rossetti seems to trivialize a metanarrative, the Bible, and parodies the story with some important changes. In this respect, the poem may be viewed as quite a modern attitude for the Victorian readers who were subject to the conflict between science and religion. Rossetti's "open interest in sexuality is one of the clearest signs of the incipient modernism of his verse" (Stein 127), and he also became a leading figure for the Decadent artists by supplying them with the figure of the femme fatale. Wilson states that Decadent art is "characterized by a special emphasis on sexuality and death" (Wilson 175) and in this art "subject matter is

typically projected through an image of woman seen as fascinating and mysterious Goddess” (Wilson 177).

To summarize, besides exploring the nature of love which has turned into hate and thus leads to the symbolic death of the other, Rossetti shows how deadly a passionate and bereft woman may become by showing Lilith’s “achievements”, which are turning Adam and Eve into mortal beings and thus making them subject to time and death, multiplying their sorrow in every new generation due to their original sin (184) as well as leading Cain to murder his brother, Abel.

“Faustine” by Algernon Charles Swinburne

Swinburne, who may be counted among the Decadent poets and thus might possibly be under the influence of Rossetti’s femme fatale, also portrayed such deadly women whose love leads to destruction. As it is stated in the introduction, a femme fatale is the one who is not a victim, but a victimizer. Swinburne’s poem, “Faustine”, presents a destructive woman who is dead, but still able to exert her influence upon a male speaker. He refers to a historical figure, Roman empress Faustine, who is “the wife of Marcus Aurelius and known for her profligacy” (Maxwell 736). The speaker does not lament the death of Faustine, but mortality which makes fulfilment impossible. Faustine becomes an object which the speaker projects his fantasies upon and through which the male speaker’s unconscious is revealed. In this analysis, I will explore how Faustine is viewed as an emblem of evil femininity (even after her death), and how the speaker’s thoughts about Faustine, which are presented in the

stream of consciousness mode, reveal the fantasies of the male mind in the fin de siècle.

The epigraph at the beginning of the poem exposes the deadly aspect of this femme fatale, Faustine. It says “Ave Faustina Imperatrix morituri te salutant”, which means “Hail, Faustina, Empress, those about to die salute thee” (Buckley 665). The doomed gladiators’ show of respect to their empress indicates her power over them. Buckley notes that “this is adapted from the traditional words of the Roman gladiators about to engage in mortal combat: ‘Hail Cæsar, Emperor! Those about to die salute thee!’” (665)⁸. As a female figure, Faustine has imperial power stemming from her status. Thus, she combines female sexual and seductive power with imperial power which is generally regarded as a kind of power belonging to the domain of masculinity and patriarchy. According to the speaker, the source of her power stems from her seductiveness which is reflected as her “good gifts” (9):

Let me go over your good gifts
That crown you queen,
A queen whose kingdom ebbs and shifts
Each week, Faustine: (9-12)

It is the reason why she is “twice” crowned, first with her gold crown, and then by her beautiful black hair, which may be a symbol of her seductive power. It may imply that by seducing the emperor, Faustine has gained imperial power over these gladiators. Thanks to her beauty and charm, Faustine has become a powerful figure in the sublunary world, a world which is characterized by instability as the words “ebbing” and “shifting” (11) indicate.

⁸ Buckley, Jerome Hamilton, and George Benjamin Woods, eds. *Poetry of the Victorian Period*. Chicago : Scott, Foresman, 1965, 665, footnote 1.

In order to talk about this lady of high rank, the speaker employs Petrarchan language and the blazon which are generally used by the male lover (of lower rank) to praise a beautiful and virtuous beloved of high status. The speaker uses the same stock expressions which are used in this tradition but reverses them. Instead of depicting the lady's lips as a cup to be drunk by a male lover, the speaker likens his lips to a cup for the lady to drink from:

Bright heavy brows well gathered up-
White gloss and sheen;
Carved lips that make my lips a cup
To drink, Faustine, (13-16)

Besides parodying the Petrarchan tradition and its stock expressions, this image also reinforces the idea of incorporation in love and sexuality in which women are viewed as vampires or "cannibalistic creates", as Bram Dijkstra calls it in his *Evil Sisters*, (80) while men are reflected as the ones who are "incorporated" (Dijkstra 80) Again, in line with the Petrarchan tradition, the speaker equates passion with suffering. Actually, this is quite similar to Swinburne's view of love. He is well-known for his successful employing the pleasure and pain paradox in his poems:

Swinburne never forgot the etymological origins of the word "passion" from the Greek *pathos* and the Latin *passio*, meaning suffering. In his works, suffering is represented as an essential, indeed inevitable and inescapable, consequence of love. This notion is a crucial aspect of Swinburne's mythology of the human condition. (Harrison 697)

This is parallel to the representation of the lover in the Petrarchan sonnet tradition for whom the beloved is the source of passion, as both joy and suffering; and in this poem, Faustine is represented as a dangerous, but beautiful woman whose love may

lead a man to drink the poison she will offer (164). Accordingly, Faustine is represented both as a nurturing and destructive figure:

Wine and rank poison, milk and blood,
Being mixed therein
Since first the devil threw dice with God
For you, Faustine. (17-21)

While wine may remind the reader of Jesus due to transubstantiation idea and therefore as something positive, poison clearly signifies the destructive aspect of Faustine. Like Jesus, Faustine may be taken as the representative of God on earth due to the traditional link between monarchy and divine power. The emperor and the empress are expected to represent God and his justice, mercy, and other virtues. However, as the devil has won Faustine long ago after they, God and the devil, “threw dice” (19) to win her, Faustine ceases to be a virtuous empress representing God, but becomes a poisonous evil figure. On the other hand, this relationship between monarchy and God might be viewed from a different perspective. What God signifies for Swinburne is important at this point, and Robin Fox explains this in the following way:

Swinburne was not really an atheist. He believed in God, but he thought God was a terrorist: a genocidal torturer and killer of innocent civilians, and therefore morally inferior to his creation. God for Swinburne was a sadist. His gift of consciousness was a clever torment, for it meant the consciousness of death. Or at least that was the way Swinburne posed his atheism. He was the natural and very conscious heir of Shelley. (218)

As implied by the gambling image in which God and the devil threw dice, God does not seem to care for humankind at all. Swinburne does not view God as a merciful figure, but rather as a death bringer. Faustine as an empress and a femme fatale may

also stand for this representation of God since she is also an evil female figure for whom the death of many gladiators does not mean anything:

She loved the games men played with death,
Where death must win;
As though the slain man's blood and breath
Revived Faustine. (65-68)

In the same manner, “milk” and “blood” (17) create a tension; as milk may connote the idea of motherhood, and thus the nineteenth century view of ideal femininity, whereas blood may imply the bloodthirsty side of this vampire-like femme fatale. As an empress, Faustine may be expected to be an emblem of motherhood (a mother for the whole nation), but in fact she is a killer. When the speaker traces the source of evil in her nature, he claims that Faustine is the child of the devil, who is again portrayed as a mother, and therefore a female figure, although the speaker refers to the devil as “he”:

A suckling of his breed you were,
One hard to wean;
But God, who lost you, left you fair,
We see, Faustine. (36-40)

Due to her evil nature which she inherited from the devil who breastfed Faustine, the speaker tells Faustine that “You could do all things but be good/ Or chaste of mien;” (45-46). According to the speaker, not even Jesus, who is the saviour of mankind, can save Faustine even though he can offer the salvation of a prostitute:

Even he who cast seven devils out
Of Magdalene

Could hardly do as much, I doubt,
For you, Faustine. (49-52)

What Faustine inherited from her breastfeeding he-mother, the devil, is not only her evil nature which even Jesus cannot fight against, but also her androgynous disposition. The issue of androgyny first finds a place in the tenth stanza. Faustine, in the same manner, is portrayed as “epicene” (130)

What sterile growths of sexless root
Or epicene?
What flower of kisses without fruit
Of love, Faustine? (130-133)

The word “epicene” (130) means “sexless (of neither sex)”⁹. Quite paradoxically, the word “epicene” also denotes “having the characteristics of both sexes; hermaphroditic”¹⁰. Although it might imply a union of both sexes due to its second meaning, androgyny signified perversion and lust at the end of the nineteenth century. For this reason, it is among the images which are products of the siege mentality of the Victorian age, the result of the fear of degeneration. Bram Dijkstra explains how the androgyne was viewed as a threat by referring to its links in the “primitive and undeveloped” state of humankind. He states in his *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-De-Siècle Culture* that “for a woman to take on such masculine qualities was actually a sign of reversion, a sinking back into the hermaphroditism of that indeterminate primal state- just as it was a clear sign of analogous degeneracy in the male to show himself to be effeminate” (212-213). Furthermore, A. J. L. Busst enumerates the connotations of what Leonard M.

⁹ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/epicene>

¹⁰ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/epicene>

Findlay calls “the androgynous diabolism of the ‘fin de siècle’” (227), and says that it is “a symbol of vice, particularly of cerebral lechery, demoniality, onanism, homosexuality, sadism and masochism” (qtd. in Findlay 227). Therefore, this portrayal may partly fit Faustine, and to the common belief that the female is weaker and more primitive compared to the male.

What the androgyne meant for Swinburne adds another dimension to the interpretation of these lines. As Leonard M. Findlay asserts, “For Swinburne, the androgyne is a pessimistic symbol, associated with barrenness and frustration” (227). So, the expected fertility of the empress Faustine, who is supposed to be the mother of the whole nation, is undermined through this description. On the other hand, such a portrayal reinforces the idea of masculinized femininity, which is in harmony with the general description of Faustine, who combines masculine imperial power with female seductive and sexual power, which allows her to exert her influence over the lives of many people. When she writes about woman and power, Laure Adler touches upon the combination of these two types of power, and notes that:

History and mythology are full of female figures who made a crucial impact on cultural or political life, either because they themselves held the reins of government or because they played a decisive role as the wife or mistress of a king or a ruler. Unlike some women who, as they enter politics, appear to put their femininity to one side so to speak, others exert an influence employing different means. Their preferred tool is love, real or feigned. (117)

By choosing a femme fatale of high status who has played “a decisive role as the wife” of the Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, the speaker increases the tension between life and death, sublunary power and the tragic end which all people share whether they are of high rank or not. The imperial and lustful glory days are over for Faustine. The speaker, by looking at the face of Faustine on the coin, which signifies

the materialization and commodification of a female body, questions whether “life is worth sin”:

Was life worth living then? and now
Is life worth sin?
Where are the imperial years? and how
Are you Faustine? (85-88)

Swinburne and his poetry were viewed as “sensational” by the Victorian readers and critics especially because of his female characters such as Faustine. As Heather Seagroatt explains,

Victorian critics identified sensationalism by two principal features: its unconventional subject matter (particularly its preoccupation with and sensuous representation of sex crimes, domestic intrigue, secrets, and murder) and its deliberate attempt “to preach the nerves” (Rae 203). According to Baynes’ formulation, *Poems and Ballads* was sensational because of its sensuous, “fleshly” representation of women and because it had the peculiar ability to engender physical, “sensational” responses in the reader. (43)

However, Swinburne’s aim cannot be reduced to the impulse to shock the audience by sensational subject matter. As “Faustine” presents a grotesque image of a dead femme fatale under the veil of the blazon tradition and the theme of mortality, critics also counted it among the fleshly poems of the time. Swinburne explains his inspiration for this poem, “Faustine”, in his *Notes on Poems and Reviews* by touching upon the critics’ negative comments upon his poems:

I have heard that even the little poem of Faustine has been to some readers a thing to make the scalp creep and the blood freeze. It was issued with no such intent. Nor do I remember that any man's voice or heel was lifted against it when it first appeared, a new-born and virgin poem, in the *Spectator* newspaper for 1862. Virtue, it would seem, has shot up surprisingly in the space of four years or less — a rank and rapid growth, barren of blossom and rotten at root. Faustine is the reverie of a' man gazing on the bitter and vicious loveliness of a face as common and as cheap as the morality of reviewers, and

dreaming of past lives in which this fair face may have held a nobler or fitter station ; the imperial profile may have been Faustina's, the thirsty lips a Mænad's, when first she learnt to drink blood or wine, to waste the loves and ruin the lives of men ; through Greece and again through Rome she may have passed with the same face which now comes before us dis- honoured and discrowned. Whatever of merit or demerit there may be in the verses, the idea that gives them such life as they have is simple enough: the transmigration of a single soul, doomed as though by accident from the first to all evil and no good, through many ages and forms, but clad always in the same type of fleshly beauty. (25)

Swinburne thus blames what he calls “virtue” (25), most probably signifying the domestic ideology of the Victorian period, for being delimitative and leading to barrenness and degeneration, which may be counted among the fears of the siege mentality of the age. The main discourse accuses the so-called immoral, sinful and evil people, who are marginalized figures of the period, of being the source of degeneration, Swinburne holds that what has been called “virtuous and moral” is responsible for the creative infertility of his age. He undermines spirituality, which was so important for the Victorians, by bringing “the morality of the reviewers” (25) to the level of “the bitter and vicious loveliness of” (25) Faustine’s face, who becomes the emblem of dangerous female sexuality leading men to their wilful self-destruction, and more importantly, signifies materialism as she turns into a commodity, an image on the coin, in the poem

Moreover, Swinburne calls what has been inspired by his “sudden sight” of coin imprinted with Faustine’s face a man’s “reverie” (25) in his comment on the poem, “Faustine”. Dreams are believed to be the source of the unconscious, and the first claim about this was presented a few years after the time of Swinburne by Freud. Still, the Victorians were known for their interest in the mind and how it works, and this can be seen in many dramatic monologues of the period as in “Faustine”. Swinburne’s description, in line with the Petrarchan tradition which is

employed half parodically in “Faustine”, reveals the depths of the male speaker’s mind while the poem seemingly portrays the power of the beloved’s beauty. Thus, the Petrarchan blazon tradition turns out to be quite narcissistic. On the other hand, viewing the monologue as the product of a “man’s reverie” (25), is in accord with Swinburne’s aesthetic theory as William Wilson explains in his “Behind the Veil, Forbidden: Truth, Beauty, and Swinburne’s Aesthetic Strain”:

Swinburne’s aestheticism is based on an awareness that the meaning of objective experience (be it the narrative behind Whistler’s canvas in particular or the origin of beauty in general) lies finally behind a veil, forbidden to man, absent from his consciousness. Since it is not possible in Swinburne’s world to see “the object as in itself it really is”, as Matthew Arnold wished, the better aesthetic aim is to represent the impressions objective reality leaves upon consciousness, “to render the effect of a thing [rather] than a thing itself” (*Works*, XV, 380)¹¹. In fact, this particular limitation of aesthetic perception can be seen in other significant poems from major phases of his career. Elsewhere in *Poems and Ballads* (First Series), for example, Swinburne again portrays beauty as a mask that conceals the essence of the object [...]. (Wilson 432)

He portrays Faustine as “an awe- inspiring femme fatale” (Wilson 432). In the poem, “Faustine” turns into an object for the male gaze, which leaves an impression on the male subject’s mind and through which the fears associated with female sexuality in the unconscious of the speaker are revealed. As Wilson states, Faustine’s beauty is a mask, but it is the only visible thing about her. Her nature, on the other hand, is unknowable. In Freudian terms, she is the representation of the Dark Continent. As a historical figure who has been described as a seductive, threatening and dangerous woman and who lived a sinful life (a complete femme fatale, in other terms), Faustine turns into a mirror reflecting fantasies of evil feminine sexuality of the fin de siècle in this poem. Swinburne criticizes his own age, the delimitive perspective imposed upon the artist, poet and writer of the period, and to reveal the fears of the

¹¹ (qtd. in Wilson 432)

siege mentality. Eroticism in the poem, thus, is not an end, but a means. Through the portrayal of a femme fatale, Swinburne seems to be trying to break the preconceptions of the Victorian reader and to create an art work which goes against the prescriptive ideology of the age.

In Swinburne's poems, sexuality and eroticism also generate a spiritual meaning. In "Faustine" we have the representation of a historical femme fatale. The questions which the speaker's poses as to whether life is worth sin (86) reveals Swinburne's tragic view of life, which may turn the poem into a lament on loss.

Anthony H. Harrison explains it by stating that:

From his very earliest works at Oxford to his last major poems, the dominant subject of Swinburne's poetry is human passion, whether his focus be upon his characters' explicitly erotic and often perverse impulses or upon their corollary spiritual desires, which are often represented by means of sexual metaphors. However, Swinburne as the most "fleshly" of the Pre-Raphaelite poets, was primarily interested not in flaunting salaciousness for its own sake, but rather in exploring sexual proclivities that result in "conditions of the soul." These include alienation, guilt, rage, intellectual perplexity, spiritual frustration, and finally a sense of unfathomable loss. In his early sensational poetry as well as in his more subdued later works, Swinburne desired to shock his countrymen ("*épater la bourgeoisie*") not merely for the sake of notoriety, but in order to express as powerfully as possible his sense of life's inevitably tragic development for all spirited men and women: tragic because satisfying our passionate impulses is ultimately impossible. (689-690)

Swinburne employs a sexual metaphor which shows that even this powerful femme fatale is subject to death and decay. It is not possible for her to satisfy all her passions and sexual appetites, and this shows the impossibility of fulfilment in the sublunary world. This lack of fulfilment becomes the source of human suffering, and it is the proof of "the dolorous experiences man is heir to in the world" (Harrison 691). It should be remembered that passion and suffering are the same thing for

Swinburne (Harrison 690), and the loss which the speaker laments is the possibility or the opportunity to satisfy the passions.

In order to demonstrate the decay and savage death Faustine is subject to, the speaker employs grotesque images in the second half of the poem. Although the lady is immortalized in the Petrarchan tradition, Faustine's death and decomposing body are emphasized in this part to show the impossibility of fulfilment with a reference to her infertility as phrases such as "sterile growths of sexless root" (129) and "flower of kisses without fruit" (131) indicate. While describing Faustine's dead body, the speaker projects his fantasies, stemming from the unconscious, onto the corpse, and eroticism finds a place in this grotesque description:

What adders came to shed their coats?
What coiled obscene
Small serpents with soft stretching throats
Caressed Faustine? (133-136)

In this passage the speaker is probably dreaming the scene. According to Freud, there are two layers in a dream: The first is the manifest content, which is what we remember about our dream. The latent content, on the other hand, is the second layer which is the underlying meaning of the dream. The goal of Freud when he analyses dreams is to recall the manifest content and try to uncover the latent content (Freud 46) which is hard to discover as it has changed through processes such as displacement and condensation. Dream displacement is the replacement of a safe person or an object with a threatening one whereas condensation is using a single dream image to represent more than one unconscious conflict (Tyson 18). While Freud identifies some objects with male imagery such as snakes, towers, rockets or

guns, he asserts that caves, rooms or cups can be classified as examples of the female imagery in dreams. In poetry too, we have a second layer of meaning, and metaphor, metonymy and symbol are used instead of displacement and condensation. In the male speaker's dream, we have a snake image caressing Faustine's dead body, and it may be a phallic symbol. Even in her death, Faustine's body is subject to male fantasies, and hence, portrayed in an erotic and grotesque way. Robin Fox emphasizes "the hissing "s" sounds of the little serpents" (224), and calls the reader's attention to this alliteration, which strengthens this symbolic representation. As a reverie, the poem unravels nineteenth century patriarchal mind and Faustine, thus, turns into an object that triggers unconscious male fantasies to appear covertly.

As Norman Vance asserts in his "Heroic Myth and Women in Victorian Literature", "ancient history and myth could provide heroines in abundance to embody Victorian aspirations without indecorously intruding upon the privacy of women of the present day" (170), and Swinburne chooses Faustine, a historical femme fatale who was also a public figure as an empress, to rebel against what Vance calls the ideal women of the age, who should be "private" and "anonymous" (170). By using the Victorian interest in mind and how it works, and parodying the Petrarchan tradition, Swinburne presents us with a dangerous woman who continues to destroy and lure the male speaker through her image in his mind although she is already dead. Hence, the poem demonstrates the fantasy of evil feminine in the patriarchal mind and shows how this fantasy exerts its influence over the speaker and victimizes him.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The interface between love and death, the creative and destructive nature of eroticism, is what I have explored in my thesis. All six Victorian poems under discussion suggest that eroticism signifies more for their respective poets than sexuality and seduction. It is linked to many other issues such as the structure of Victorian society which is characterized by a variety of opinions and beliefs, power relations (in terms of sexual hegemony and the structure of the patriarchal and imperialist society of the nineteenth century), spirituality, moral considerations and gender politics in general. By locating their poems in the distant past and historicizing and mythologizing their poems, the poets create a 'safe' atmosphere in which they can explore these issues. Love and death are the two forces inherent in eroticism, the lover as either the victimized or the victimizer, one of the pair being incorporated while the other incorporates as Bram Dijkstra explains in his *Evil Sisters* (80).

The power relations depicted in these poems allow for a critical discussion of mainstream discourses which purport to impose order over individuals' lives. In the appropriation of the dead beloved, we see how the mad male figure tries to regulate the beloved's life by completely possessing her, which is effected through the beloved's death, turning her into an object. Both Porphyria's lover and the speaker in "The Leper" try to satisfy their love and passion with their dead beloveds, who were turned into commodities through death. We note two different kinds of discourse

which victimize women in “The Lady of Shalott” and “The Blessed Damozel”. The patriarchal and imperialist discourse which privileges man over woman and which makes women captive in the private domain, preventing them from entering into the public one, appears in the form of a mysterious curse in “The Lady of Shalott”. In “The Blessed Damozel”, we see how the Christian tradition, which is also patriarchal, may restrict a woman even after she is dead and in heaven. Although she is in heaven, a sign of her being rewarded, we feel that the Blessed Damozel is actually being punished through her separation from her lover on earth. Thus, the poem problematizes two different kinds of love, divine and earthly, and shows the hypocrisy of religious discourse according to which Victorian women were to be chaste, pure, and virginal, and suppress their earthly passions. By showing how these two women engage in freethinking and find happiness in their dreams, these poems present the dichotomy between enslavement of the body and freedom of the mind. Unlike these two poems, the following two poems are about femmes fatales. As we have seen, although the Lady of Shalott rebels against the curse, she cannot escape from her fate. Lilith and Faustine, on the other hand, are two female figures who rebel against the passive role assigned to women and show how deadly a woman can be. Two “rebellious” poets, namely Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne, who reacted against the mainstream Victorian discourse and view of art, present two insubordinate women in their respective poems. They choose to engage in the portrayal of powerful and destructive femmes fatales. Yet, these women are presented as possessing masculine powers. Whereas Lilith is masculinized with the phallic image of the snake, Faustine is portrayed as an androgynous being who combines masculine political power with female sexuality. Both women are characterized by their infertility: Lilith does not have any children, and causes the

death of a child of Adam and Eve. Rossetti's portrayal of his female protagonist focuses mainly upon her desire for revenge, and thus appears to justify her behaviour on the grounds of the unjust behaviour of two patriarchal figures, God and Adam. Swinburne, on the other hand, makes no attempt to justify his Faustine. He emphasizes Faustine's infertility by calling her "epicene" (130), and chooses to demonstrate his bloodthirsty protagonist's influence on the male speaker's mind who seems enchanted with this image of dangerous femme fatale.

In these poems, the issue of power relations sometimes include discussions about spirituality. For instance, the male protagonists in "Porphyria's Lover" and "The Leper" engage in thoughts about God and the nature of his power. At the end of "Porphyria's Lover", the speaker is sure about his own authority and power, and challenges God by saying "And yet God has not said a word" (60). At the end of the second poem, "the Leper", the death of the lady comes from God. Thus, the speaker is led to question what would be a just end. While Porphyria's lover enjoys the death of his beloved as he believes that this makes him an authority figure who can even challenge God, the speaker in "The Leper" seems frustrated and sad due to the beloved's death which puts an end to the time he enjoyed with her in their "wretched wattled house" (19), and blames God for cursing his lady with leprosy and this unjust end, kissing and fondling his dead beloved. The Lady of Shalott reacts against her fate but cannot survive in the public domain while "the Blessed Damozel" portrays a young woman who cannot rebel against what God has granted her, a place in heaven but far away from her earthly lover. Thus, the first poem shows the tragic end of a female in the domain of patriarchy whereas the second poem demonstrates a Victorian woman who has to submit to religious (and patriarchal) discourse. In "Eden Bower", Rossetti provides the reader with the story of a voluptuous woman

seeking revenge within what could be termed a spiritual realm (the Garden of Eden). In “Faustine”, Swinburne points to the impossibility of fulfilment in the sublunary world and he brings the spiritual down to the level of the material. This is similar to what he implies in his *Notes on Poems and Reviews* when he undermines spirituality by equating “the morality of the reviewers” (25) with “the bitter and vicious loveliness of” (25) Faustine’s face.

Moral considerations are also included in some of the poems to expose how Victorian masculinity oppresses women by imposing on them the ‘appropriate’ codes of behaviour and limits their living space with the help of the mainstream discourse shaped by religion, science and imperialism. For instance, “Eden Bower” challenges the notion of evil femininity in religious discourse by associating Eve, who is viewed as the first femme fatale in the Christian tradition, with heaven and supplying bloodthirsty Lilith with a reasonable motive for revenge. Porphyria’s lover engages in what Blackburn calls “psychological vampirism” as he cannot tolerate the separate female personality of Porphyria (Blackburn 58) and tries to domesticate her through death. In “the Leper”, the female protagonist represents a woman suffering society’s condemnation, and thus, the poem presents how this code of behaviour functions in life.

Besides portraying Victorian moral considerations and how they function in society, the poems resist their delimitative power of Victorian morality through what Hughes calls “many-voicedness” (5). For instance, despite the general mood of primness and propriety in society, the reader may find in these poems a variety of beliefs and thinking current in the nineteenth century. This atmosphere of multiple voices is reflected in the narrative techniques employed in “The Blessed Damozel”, “Leper”, “the Lady of Shalott”, and “Eden Bower”. In most of these poems, the

reader can hear more than the voice of the speaker. "The Blessed Damozel" fuses the voices of two lovers (and thus of the two sexes, though we hear hers more than his) in different realms, hence, reacts against the tendency to privilege patriarchal discourse in society. "The Leper", too, includes mostly the speaker's but to a lesser extent the voice of his beloved. The dramatic monologue enables the femme fatale in "Eden Bower", namely Lilith, to turn into "a self" to be explored although women like her were viewed as the traditional others. This form also allows the poets to look through either the male or the female gaze. In "Porphyria's Lover", Robert Browning explores the depths of the deviant male mind through the male gaze. Swinburne does the same in his "Leper" when he gives voice to a male speaker characterized by his low self-esteem. In "The Blessed Damozel" and "The Lady of Shalott", Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Tennyson build empathy with the captive women and enable the reader to see through the victimized protagonist's eyes. In "Eden Bower", the reader witnesses Rossetti's empathy with a powerful victimizer, which presents him/her with a different perspective on the female. Swinburne presents another dimension of the male gaze by portraying his overwhelming unconscious fears, fantasies, anxieties as well as his attraction towards a dangerous and evil woman in his "Faustine".

Owing to the challenges they pose against Victorian moral considerations, Rossetti and Swinburne have been accused of assaulting what is called "Victorian sensibility" which is actually an extension of the new domestic ideology. Swinburne's grotesque images and his dangerous women, represented in my analysis by Faustine, was found disturbing for this reason while Rossetti's so-called "fleshly" poetry as exemplified by "Eden Bower" was viewed as downright immoral. Nearly in all of these poems, a new kind of morality is implied- a morality which does not depend on the mainstream discourse privileging masculinity over femininity and thus

oppressing/ victimizing the so-called “weaker sex”. The anonymous ladies in “The Lady of Shalott” and “The Blessed Damozel” present the secondary position of women, but both protagonists actually challenge patriarchy in different ways. Rossetti’s “The Blessed Damozel” (1850) and “Eden Bower” are both critical of Victorian sentimentality, but the severity of the criticism is greater in the latter (1869). Moreover, it includes more disturbing images due to its Biblical story. Like Swinburne’s poems, Browning’s “Porphyria’s Lover” includes grotesque elements which did not appeal to the common Victorian taste. Tennyson’s story and protagonist, on the other hand, were not regarded as disturbing and did not draw criticism. Still, all of these poems present a criticism of the Victorian sensibility which depends on binary oppositions such as masculinity and femininity, culture (civilization) and nature, self and other. To show how this sensibility victimizes women, the poets make use of the images of restriction such as walls, bars and the walled house all standing for civilization and its discontents.

Through the portrayal of the conflict between restriction and freedom, “The Blessed Damozel” and “The Lady of Shalott” explore the nature of love by focusing on the interface between love and death and the notion of fulfilment. They show how love and death may be interconnected: the Lady of Shalott, seeking self-fulfilment triggered by love at first sight and ending in death, and the Blessed Damozel, who would be fully content only if she could combine divine and earthly love, which is actually impossible as you can enjoy earthly love only if you are alive. The sadomasochism found in “Porphyria’s Lover” and in the speaker of “The Leper” indicates that there is a complex relation between love and death. In both poems, fulfilment is possible for the male speaker only if he possesses the beloved completely, but both poems imply that fulfilment in love is impossible as you cannot

possess the beloved completely. Whereas Porphyria's lover uses death as a means of immortalizing love and the poem ends in an open-ended way which leads to the discussion of whether the speaker can really achieve immortal love through murder, death prevents the speaker in "the Leper" from possessing his beloved eternally. "Eden Bower" points to the fact that love may turn into hatred, and through revenge, pave the way to death. So, love seems to comprise oppositions within itself and can be viewed as "discordia concords". The speaker in "Faustine" and his subconscious help us to understand the pleasure/ pain paradox inherent in love and the nature of the speakers' satisfaction, who seek for different kinds of fulfilment. Whereas taking revenge from God and Adam is the only fulfilment for Lilith, Faustine turns into an emblem of the impossibility of sublunary fulfilment in the male speaker's mind.

As seen in all of these poems, the Victorian notion of love has many faces and it can be connected to death through its wild, violent, possessive nature, and its power to victimize. The poems portray the protean nature of love with a reference to its tender as well as cruel aspects, and they include death as a force which can be a means to or the end of love. It may be asserted that love can unite and divide at the same time. In order to demonstrate how it resists moral considerations, the poets employ erotic images as eroticism itself is viewed as defiance in the Victorian era. Hence, the theme of eroticism in Victorian poetry functions as a weapon against the delimitative discourses of the nineteenth century and allows the poets to engage with gender politics as well as the human condition at large.

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