

The Naming of Beatrice and Laura: What Dante and Petrarch Left to Christina Rossetti

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'Had such a lady spoken for herself, the portrait left us might have appeared more tender, if less dignified ... drawn not from fancy but from feeling, and worthy to occupy a niche beside Beatrice and Laura.'

(Christina Rossetti, 'Preface' to *Monna Innominata*)

'... let me beg your prayer's (*sic*) for the poor sinful Woman who has dared to speak to Others ...'

(Christina Rossetti, Letter to Frederic Shields, 5 September 1894)

I

Thematic and strategic similarities between the love lyrics of Dante and Petrarch, and the lesser-read poetry of their contemporaries are far from difficult to demonstrate.¹ Both writers embraced the broader conventions of the form. But they also revolutionised the tradition and, consequently, there are certain crucial ways in which the sonnets of these two major Italian writers diverge from the male-ordained, male-ordered poetic tradition that they directly inherited and within which they otherwise composed. Given Christina Rossetti's pronounced and avid interest in radically rewriting tradition and exposing/subverting received phallogocentric poetic conventions (an interest she openly declared, and which I have discussed elsewhere), there can be no doubt that it is their *differences* from, rather than their similarities to the typical poeticizing strategies and modes of their forerunners and contemporaries which caused her

directly to identify (in her 'Preface' to the sonnet sequence *Monna Innominata*) Dante and Petrarch as seminal authors within a poetic canon she was about to subvert and re-address.²

In order to discover what is genuinely new (as opposed to reiteration of established poetic practice) in Dante's lyric writings, we must deconstruct his self-christened 'Dolce Stil Nuovo'. A prominent revolutionary device pioneered by Dante (most clearly of interest to Christina Rossetti when she came to write *Monna Innominata*) is his repeated insistence upon a historical referent for the 'lady' object of his poetic praise, denoting an innovative desire to anchor his ideal female form to an empirical, external 'reality' rather than construct her as a stylised spiritual ideal. Beatrice is not the only female addressee of the Dantean lyric given a proper name – others include Violetta, Matelda, Pietra, and Lisetta – but she is the ultimate symbol of his spiritual life, occupying the same position with regard to the speaker of the poetry as does Laura, also verifiable as a figure from history, in Petrarch's work. Dante's Beatrice was born a Portinari and married a Bardi (both were more distinguished families than Dante's own). She died, aged twenty-four, in 1290. Apart from these recorded facts, she exists primarily as a poetic configuration in the *Vita Nuova*, possibly the most highly-attuned visualisation of a poet's spiritual self in the history of the lyric. This work was well known and highly admired by the Rossettis. Dante Gabriel made a translation of the text, which he sent to Tennyson in 1850, eventually to be published in *The Early Italian Poets* in 1861.³ Christina's eldest brother praised the *Vita Nuova* greatly as being 'so full of intricate and fantastic analogies ... much more than appears on any but the closest scrutiny'.⁴

We must assume that Christina Rossetti – who referred to Dante as 'a fascinating centre of thought' and was herself severally described as 'a student of Dante' and 'deeply influenced by Dante' by her first biographer Mackenzie Bell – gave the Dantean text 'the closest scrutiny', particularly in the period of conception of *Monna Innominata*, which coincided with the publication of her brother's translation.⁵ After all, the

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Rossetti family was steeped in knowledge of Alighieri's life and works. Christina's father, Gabriele, (who also wrote on Petrarch, which leads to the conclusion that Christina's 'knowledge of Dante, and even of Petrarch was great') had, after all, been possibly the foremost Dante scholar of his age, studying the Italian poet with an intensity which 'reached the far side of devotion'.⁶ In an obituary, published in *The Spectator* after his father's death in 1854, William Michael Rossetti paid tribute to Gabriele Rossetti's studies, calling him 'the most daringly original of the commentators on Dante':

[H]e engaged deeply in studies of the letter and spirit of Dante's imperishable works. Rossetti's leading idea (indicated in his work, and enforced in subsequent productions with the fervour of a discoverer, vast literary diligence, and indefatigable minuteness of criticism) is that Dante, in common with numberless other great authors, wrote in a language of secret allegory, which embodies, in the form now of love, now of mythology, now of alchemy, now of freemasonry, the most daring doctrines in metaphysics and politics.⁷

In particular support of William Michael's eulogistic claims, Gabriele Rossetti's publication *La Beatrice di Dante* (1842) shows an overtly philosophical interest in the implications of Alighieri's heroine. His daughter, Christina's older sister Maria Francesca's *A Shadow of Dante* (1871) evinces an equally intense, though less intellectual fascination with the Italian poet.⁸ Margaret Sawtell states that, specifically during the period 1866-1870, '[Christina Rossetti's] main mental preoccupation seems to have been the study of Dante':

Maria [Rossetti] was engaged on her book *A Shadow of Dante*, published about 1870; D. G. produced in the course of time *Dante and his Circle* which Christina describes as 'a monument of loving

labour'; William Michael made a translation of *The Divine Comedy* which she calls 'the best we have' ... and in 1867 an article by Christina herself, called 'Dante: an English Classic,' was published in the *Churchman's Shilling Magazine*.⁹

In *Dante and his Circle*, Dante Gabriel calls the *Vita Nuova* an 'Autopsychology'.¹⁰ He is correct to do so since, like Christina's poetry, the *Vita Nuova* consciously offers a sustained conception of the inner mental (as opposed to physical, outward) growth of its speaker. In 1293, by taking thirty-one of his early poems and embedding them in a prose narrative which maps the history of his relationship with a lady named Beatrice, in such a fashion that the poems are offered as if intimately inspired by stages in that love story, Dante (from the platform of a defined sonnetting tradition) undertakes a bold literary experiment. Like Christina Rossetti with her loaded contextualising of *Monna Innominata*, at both surface narrative and poetic levels, Dante becomes the direct critic and interpreter of his own work, its conception and meaning. This concern with literariness and context, a concern echoed by Christina Rossetti in her own work, is clearly announced in the opening paragraph of the *Vita Nuova*: 'In that part of the book of my memory before the which is little that can be read, there is a rubric, saying, Incipit Vita Nova. Under such rubric I find written many things; and among them the words I purpose to copy into this little book; if not all of them, at least their substance'.¹¹

There is an immediate and pronounced interest here in processes of reading and writing: 'book', 'read', 'rubric', 'written'. The text openly tackles the problem of 'words' and their 'substance', thus raising the issue of signification, which intensifies into a central theme of the work. When Beatrice appears in the narrative, we are provided with precise details of her dress, age, and history – she is forcefully presented as a historical entity, an actual person. But, coupled with this empirical presentation, a simultaneous idealism is established in the text. Dante speaks of Beatrice as seeming 'not to be the daughter of a mortal man, but of God', and

stresses that 'her image ... was with me always'.¹² The moment when the speaker of *Vita Nuova* first sees Beatrice at the age of nine is described as that time 'when first the glorious Lady of my mind was made manifest to my eyes'.¹³ So, in the terms set out here, it is clear that the figure of 'the glorious Lady' stands primarily as a mental essence, an essence allowed signification by the poet-speaker through the medium of an actual person, Beatrice Portinari on earth, consciously grounding an abstract ideal in an identifiable version of reality. Indeed, later in the narrative, the speaker admits of the object of his desire: 'no sooner do I image to myself her marvellous beauty than I am possessed with the desire to behold her, the which is of so great a strength it kills and destroys in my memory all those things which might oppose it'.¹⁴ Plainly expressed, this stresses beyond question the speaker's unquenchable need for a concrete, visual manifestation to image to him the elemental essence which is his soul-mate or anima, traditional object of the lyric poem. For Dante, Beatrice Portinari becomes that which actualises and signifies the spiritual yearning of the poet. The text fixes upon the actual person of Beatrice and transforms the empirical actuality into the heavenly metaphor.

Once it is established as a consistent metaphor, the *Vita Nuova* seeks to affirm the inevitability, the 'proper' nature of this innovative procedure: the naming of the ideal and seeking to verify the internal, unknowable by the external, knowable. The text repeatedly strives for stability. The pursuit of certainty becomes a governing theme of the work: the relevance and employment of Beatrice as a divine metaphor is lightly questioned upon occasion but the issue is always resolved in favour of the inevitable correctness of the configuration of heroine and ideal, a reflection of the divinely ordered scheme of things which the *Vita Nuova* (notably in its dealing with the notion of signification) continually strives to echo. The letter and spirit are reconciled and the bridge between them is one founded upon religious certitude. Early on in the work, the speaker openly ruminates upon this desire to close the gap between the 'word' and the 'thing': 'The name of Love is so sweet in the hearing that it would not

seem possible for its effects to be other than sweet; seeing that the name must needs be like unto the thing named: as it is written: '*Nomina sunt consequentia rerum*'.¹⁵ Names are the consequents of things: this thought gives the speaker 'no rest'. A concern with names and what they signify looms large in the text of *Vita Nuova*, colouring the symbolism and semantics of the narrative, and is reflected in the use of language itself. As with *Monna Innominata*, Dante's work is one (though not to such an extent as Christina Rossetti's cycle) in which action takes second place to meditation. The speaker returns to contemplation of names and their consequents: 'And by ... these thoughts I was so sorely assailed that I was like unto him who doubteth which path to take, and wishing to go, goeth not. And if I bethought myself to seek out some point at the which all these paths might be found to meet, I discerned but one way'.¹⁶ The 'one way' that the speaker strives to attain is the path of truth, the position of stability, finally resolved as total certitude in the text, proceeding from an orthodox and dogmatically held faith in a deicentric cosmos, with God, the ultimate ordering principle, accepted without challenge.

In the very first sonnet of the *Vita Nuova*, this desired state of order is optimistically invoked: 'To every heart which the sweet pain doth move,/ And unto which these words may now be brought/ For true interpretation and kind thought,/ Be greeting in our Lord's name, which is Love.'¹⁷ The 'true interpretation' called for here is held to be a reading process directly consequent of an absolute faith in an omniscient, omnipotent deity, an idea which dominates the *Vita Nuova* and becomes a central motif in the text. Visions have 'true' discernible meanings (as do the sonnets which the poet himself decodes one by one in the work) as opposed to 'false' counterfeit readings, and mistaken interpretations of signs (of which the speaker claims to possess the 'true meaning')¹⁸ are gently mocked in the narrative. For a poet so critical of absolutism as Christina Rossetti, this theme of the Dantean text is not one that *Monna Innominata* can possibly overlook. Dante's poetry assumes the principle that, interpreted correctly, the material signs of this world reflect with total

certainly the truth which will be perceived directly in the kingdom of God.

Subsequently, signification and interpretation do not become (as Christina Rossetti would have it) arbitrary processes, unfixed and shifting and capable of subversion by the intrusion of ideologies masquerading as truth, but rather equations with fixed, finite solutions available to the reader who knows the password. For Christina Rossetti, there is no password, no cipher, because there are no certainties, no absolutes (as we witness in all but, I would argue, her later devotional writings);¹⁹ for Dante, the password is God and the absolute certitude which faith in God generates. Thus, for Dante, the move towards naming his Lady becomes an inevitable step – ‘Names are the consequents of things’ – since earthly referents must be unfailingly perceived as certain signs of heavenly essences. Making Beatrice Portinari, ‘wherein alone I found that beatitude which is the goal of desire’, signify a spiritual ideal is, in the Dantean scheme, a sure consolidation of that ideal, never a reduction of the universality of the divine essence thereby signified.²⁰ The sacred symbol of Beatrice is at once Beatitude and Beauty, on earth as in heaven. The naming might well be read by later poets as the first step towards subversion of the ideal – tethering the divine in some way to the ‘real’ – but, for Dante’s speaker it is not a subversion at all.

Thus, notably within a church (symbolically beneath, inside, and as part of a holy structure), the *Vita Nuova* offers the reader a microcosmic image of its dogmatically adopted strategy towards representation. Beatrice is discovered at worship:

Now it fell on a day, that this most gracious creature was sitting where words were to be heard of the Queen of Glory; and I was in a place where mine eyes could behold their beatitude; and betwixt her and me, in a direct line, there sat another lady of pleasant favour; who looked round at me many times, marvelling at my continued gaze which seemed to have her for its object. And

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many perceived that she thus looked; so that departing thence, I heard it whispered after me, 'Look you to what a pass such a lady hath brought him;' and in saying this they named her who had been midway between the most gentle Beatrice and mine eyes. Therefore I was reassured, and knew that for that day my secret had not become manifest. Then immediately it came to my mind that I might make use of this lady as a screen to the truth ... By her means I kept my secret concealed till some years were gone over ...²¹

Dante's speaker, who knows exactly to whom his gaze refers, is incredulous at, and gently mocks the error of the observers who misread the image before them. This accurately reflects the attitude of the whole work towards certainty of reference where the correlation of signifier and signified is concerned. Of the same self-congratulatory nature is the playful toying with the implied speaker of the lyric in some later sonnets of the series, where words are 'disguised ... so as to seem to be speaking of another ... in such sort that [the sonnet] might seem to be spoken by this friend of mine'.²²

Similarly, the speaker toys with notions of the self as divisible, only in the knowledge that, within the terms of this text at least, these elements are ultimately reconcilable as components of a repeatedly proffered unitary subjectivity. The clue lies in the language: the speaker's boast that he can 'make myself into two' as a literary conceit forms a simultaneous recognition that he is wholly in control of a divisible unit, his stable self: 'In this sonnet, I make myself into two, according as my thoughts were divided one from the other. The one part I call Heart, that is appetite; the other, Soul, that is, reason; and I tell what one saith to the other'.²⁴ This whole operation of division stands governed by the repeated 'I' figure, forcefully guarding the claim of the unified self, which dominates the intellectually playful juxtaposition of 'Heart' and 'Soul' undertaken by the complacent poet here. These experiments with notions of representation

are alluded to locally and fleetingly (knowingly, smugly even) in a work whose overall perspective negates the possibility of 'truth' ever being misread. At one point in the *Vita Nuova*, the speaker decides to use the 'screen to the truth' woman of the church as a decoy, in order that his 'true' love for Beatrice might not be discovered. But this plot backfires, and it becomes obvious that Beatrice herself is unaware of Dante's real affections: the potential for misreading is all around the speaker, yet never within him. Distressed (at the errant interpretative powers of others) the speaker falls weeping to sleep in his chamber. Love personified shortly appears to him in a dream, also weeping, and the words addressed to the poet by this vision are crucial to the methodology of the poetry itself. 'My son, it is time for us to lay aside our counterfeiting,' advises the vision: 'I am as the centre of a circle, to the which all parts of the circumference bear an equal relation; but with thee it is not thus'.²³ The vision (of Love, which reflects the governing divine principle in the Dantean scheme) warns the speaker of the perils of 'counterfeiting'—of the danger of taking images to be truths—advising him of the importance of stability and the need for a 'centre' by which all other elements in a system may be held in governable relation. In the *Vita Nuova* as a whole, God functions as this ordering principle, rendered as such a potent device that all meaning generated by this dogmatically proffered certitude is held to be irrevocable 'truth' by the terms of the stable system that generates it.

Jacques Derrida links the principle of 'coherence' to the concept of a 'centred system' such as that generated in the Dantean text (with the radical difference that he does not call this centre God). Derrida describes the kind of interpretative centre required for such a system in functional terms which are appropriate (and it is to this important point that I would ultimately connect the text of *Monna Innominata*) for describing what happens in the *absence* of such a centre:

[I]t has always been thought that the centre, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which

while governing the structure, escapes structurality ... The centre is at the centre of the totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its centre elsewhere.²⁵

Dante's God fulfils these conditions. Transcending the temporal, the divine ordering principle becomes, in the Dantean text, an absolute guarantee of meaning and certitude. The pervasive spiritual presence saturates Dante's lyric poetry with a guarantee of meaning, just as the all-encompassing absences in Christina Rossetti's writings function to abnegate any condition of certainty or stability of meaning in the text. The naming of Beatrice within the terms of the *Vita Nuova* and the system of signification promoted on those terms becomes just one more certitude amidst a pattern of similar guarantees of intelligibility. The text becomes tautological: the naming therein cannot be questioned and in its comfortable conveyance of closure represents a confirmation of the unshakable stability of the linguistic and semantic system from which it proceeds. It is this self-satisfying tendency in the language of Dantean poetry that Christina Rossetti rejects in *Monna Innominata* at a poetic level, simultaneously denying the authority of the unsubverted male poetic tradition at literal level.

In the poetry of Petrarch, a dramatic shift in sensibility from that outlined above and characterised as Dantean may be detected. This is why Christina Rossetti indicates these two poets as a starting point in her own deconstruction of poetic tradition, *Monna Innominata*. Alexander Dunlop has summarised the difference of approach:

[W]hereas Dante had been able to sublimate his passion for his lady Beatrice in his love for God, Petrarch admits no such transcendent revolution. The love of Laura and the Love of God remain in tension and the *Rime* record the effects of that tension on the lover over time. The fundamental Petrarchan tension is

ultimately that between a God-centred and a self-centred universe. The only resolution is renunciation of one of these centres ...²⁶

If a fundamental (if not *the* fundamental) intention of the lyric writings of Dante might be said to be the promotion of certitude and stability – be it symbolic, narrative, or linguistic – then one finds no such strategy running through the Petrarchan lyric text. Instead, one detects a distinct air of unease with language, with signifiers and their endurance – the principle of intelligibility is shaken and uncertain in Petrarch's writings. Petrarch's autobiographical *Letter to Posterity* opens timidly with a revealing reference to naming: 'You may, perhaps, have heard tell of me, though even this is doubtful, since a poor and insignificant name like mine will hardly have travelled far in space or time'.²⁷ This can be read as implying a lack of trust in the reliability of referents, an anxiety that pervades Petrarch's work. It is a prominent mistrust, a lack of confidence reflected in the poet's unusually fragmented employment of pronomination. This tendency may be witnessed in lines from the opening lyric of the *Canzoniere*, the sequence of verses for which Petrarch is best remembered, written, ordered, and revised between 1335 and his death in 1374:

O you who hear within these scattered verses the sound of sighs
with which I fed my heart in my first errant youthful days when
I in part was not the man I am today ...²⁸

The language of the poetry, with its displacement of the 'I' pronominal reference – 'I ... was not ... I' – conveys a strong interest in the possible non-fixity of identity. In similar fashion, there are many instances elsewhere in the *Rime* where both lover and addressee are referred to (in the Italian) as first person singular subjunctive, again blurring certainty as to identity as constructed by language. All this would seem to indicate a conception of the signifying possibilities of language far removed from

that promoted in the Dantean lyric. Petrarch's awkward inscription of the name Laura (or 'Laureta') into the fifth sonnet of the *Canzoniere* in semi-anagrammatical form, setting up a sort of intellectual word game within the poetry, further marks a conscious disruption of set patterns of signification which, one feels, would have no place in the strategy of Dantean verse as I have interpreted it here.²⁹ Of course, this is not to say that, in Petrarch's lyrics, centres of intelligibility are deconstructed in the same manner in which (as I believe) they repeatedly are in *Monna Innominata*, but rather to illustrate the shifting conception of language which distinguishes Petrarch's writings from those of Dante.

Petrarch's poetry appears in part to play out one theory of language and interpretation, that enacted and elaborated in the Dantean text whose other conventions Petrarch evokes. The linguistic principles evinced by the *Canzoniere* function in a manner markedly dissimilar to those characterising Dantean poetics, where signs and that which they signify can be accurately related to each other with reference to the common centre, or principle of intelligibility, that is the divine meta-presence. Petrarch's poetry, I would argue, has lost the absolute confidence that the Dantean text placed in this divine presence; instead, the *Canzoniere* gently acknowledge the possibility of the absence of a principle of intelligibility capable of maintaining the integrity of the signifiers which construct the poetry. (It is, ultimately, this shift in sensibility – the first in a series of subversions later to be echoed in the sonnets of receptive writers like Spenser, Drayton and Shakespeare – that Christina Rossetti exploits in *Monna Innominata*.) In his paper 'Petrarch's Conception of the Dark Ages', Theodore Mommsen concludes that, whereas Dante's world conception might be epitomised by the question 'What else is history, if not the praise of God?' (the notion of a stable theocentric system), Petrarch's view could be rhetorically set out as 'What else is history, but the praise of Rome?'³⁰ The substitution of Roman glory for Christian redemption as the central event in history appears to govern Petrarch's inversion. It also becomes a subversion from within of the mediaeval mode of thought that it

counters.

Dante's God fulfilled the Derridean conditions requisite for an all-encompassing central principle of intelligibility; Ancient Rome, on the other hand, most definitely does not meet those conditions. As evinced in the *Rime*, the Petrarchan conception of Rome sees it as only one part of the totality of history, of temporal origin and end. Because it is located entirely within the system (of temporal history) there is no transcendent reason for privileging the idea of Rome above any other element of that system: such elevation is necessarily arbitrary.³¹ A distinction pertains between historical Rome (the Rome of Empire) and Rome the eternal city (Papal Rome, to which men and women made pilgrimages in the Middle Ages). As the Holy City and the seat of Imperial Power, Rome is an inherently ambiguous presence: the place of ruins and the work of time, and yet the place of Christ's Church, the place of eternity. Two oppositional ideas of Rome pertain. Used as a principle of intelligibility, an element such as Rome generates meaning, but the authority or certainty of such meaning is lost in ambivalence. This *a priori* collapsing of stability (unlike the *a posteriori* collapsing consciously enacted by Christina Rossetti's poems) is detrimental to Petrarch's attempt to construct a coherent system of imagery and signification. In the sixteenth lyric of the *Canzoniere*, this flaw is highlighted in the brief narrative telling of an 'old ... dear father' who leaves his family to search for spiritual confirmation:

The old man takes his leave, white-haired and pale,
of the sweet place where he filled out his age
and leaves his little family, bewildered,
beholding its dear father disappear;

and then, dragging along his ancient limbs
throughout the very last days of his life,
helping himself with goodwill all he can,
broken by years, and wearied by the road,

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he comes to Rome, pursuing his desire,
to look upon the likeness of the One
he hopes to see again up there in Heaven ...³²

The old man's pilgrimage is to the actuality of Rome, proffered by the Petrarchan lyric as a centre about which meaning may be generated. Yet the pilgrim's unfulfilled desire is to attain an order of stability through Heavenly redemption. Two conflicting principles of intelligibility – Roman glory and Christian faith – are operating here and each functions to disturb, even negate, the authority and coherence of the other system. The old man's quest is doomed to failure and non-attainment of 'truth' (or meaning) because he is caught between two opposing views of the world, each only capable of offering certainty on its own terms, neither able to cope with the terms of the other. Thus certainty of reference evaporates as individual components signify different ends in the opposing semantic spheres. The lyric ends on a note of despair: 'Just so, alas, sometimes I go, my lady, / searching as much as possible in others / for you true, your desirable form'.

In the Dantean lyric, the search for truth was guaranteed success at every turn; for Petrarch, absolutes are impossible as one generation of meaning intrudes upon the next, offering ambiguities where certainty is desired. Petrarch's use of Ancient Rome as the centre of his historical structure functions, in fact – despite its being the goal of the quest – to decentre and destabilise the signifying system thereby established (since the nominal centre cannot possess absolute authority), resulting in a breakdown of the process of signification itself. It is the devout promotion of certainty in Dante and its collapse into the lack of absolutes in Petrarch, and their difference of implication, which makes these two writers unquestionably relevant to the poetic positioning of Christina Rossetti, certainly as manifest in *Monna Innominata* and the consciously provocative and polysemic attitude to matters of identity and signification pervading that remarkable work.

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Notes

- 1 I did so in: Hullah, Paul, 'What Christina Did Next: Rossetti's Adaptive Adoption of Some Courtly Love Constructs and Conceits' in *Journal of Meiji Gakuin University Faculty of English* (127) (Tokyo, February 2012).
- 2 see Hullah, Paul, 'Under the Influence: Christina Rossetti and Romanticism' in Hullah, Paul ed., *Romanticism and Wild Places* (Quadrige: Edinburgh, 1998) and Hullah, Paul, "'Give me my fee...': Christina Rossetti's Milkmaids' in *Journal of Okayama University Faculty of Letters* (30) (Okayama, December 1998). The full text of *Monna Innominata* can be found in Crump, Rebecca W. ed., *Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State U. P., 1979-90) (3 volumes), volume II, 86-93.
- 3 see Doughty, Oswald, *A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1949) 108, and Rossetti, D. G., *The Early Italian Poets together with Dante's Vita Nuova* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1861).
- 4 Rossetti, D. G., *Poems and Translations 1850-1870* (London: Oxford University Press, 1913) 300 n.
- 5 Rossetti, William Michael, ed., *The Family Letters of Christina Georgina Rossetti* (Brown, Langham and Co.: London, 1908) 184, and Mackenzie Bell, Henry T., *Christina Rossetti: A Biographical and Critical Study* (London: Thomas Burleigh, 1898) 58, 319.
- 6 Mackenzie Bell, *Christina Rossetti* 319. Weintraub, Stanley, *Four Rossettis: A Victorian Biography* (London: W. H. Allen, 1978) 2.
- 7 Rossetti, W. M., 'Obituary' in *The Spectator* 6 May 1854. Text available online at: <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/6th-may-1854/11/obituary-gabriele-rossetti>
- 8 Rossetti, Gabriele, *La Beatrice di Dante* (London: Privatera, 1842) and Rossetti, Maria F., *A Shadow of Dante* (London: Rivingtons, 1871).
- 9 Sawtell, Margaret, *Christina Rossetti: Her Life and Religion* (Oxford: Mowbray & Co., 1955) 87. Maria Francesca Rossetti's *A Shadow of Dante* was actually published by Rivingtons of London in November 1871. Sawtell gives no source for the quotations attributed to Christina Rossetti in this extract. They come from Mackenzie Bell, *Christina Rossetti* 58.
- 10 Rossetti, D. G., *Poems and Translations 1850-1870* 297.
- 11 *Ibid.* 325.
- 12 *Ibid.* 326.
- 13 *Ibid.* 325.
- 14 *Ibid.* 343.
- 15 *Ibid.* 339.
- 16 *Ibid.* 339.
- 17 *Ibid.* 328.
- 18 *Ibid.* 329.

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- 19 Indeed I have often done so: see Hullah, Paul, “‘The Fire Has Died Out’?: Christina Rossetti’s Devotional Poetry (I)’ in *Journal of Okayama University Faculty of Letters*: (25) (Okayama, May 1996) and Hullah, Paul, “‘Wearied of self I turn, my God, to Thee ...’”: Christina Rossetti’s Devotional Poetry (II)’ in *Journal of Okayama University Faculty of Letters*: (26) (Okayama, December 1996).
- 20 Ibid. 346.
- 21 Ibid. 329.
- 22 Ibid. 372.
- 23 Ibid. 379.
- 24 Ibid. 336 n. 1 and n. 2.
- 25 Derrida, Jacques, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1978) 279. I cite this particular passage simply because it neatly and succinctly expresses what I propose to be a notion central to the *Monna Innominata* cycle and an idea crucial to an understanding of the processes of intertextuality and recontextualisation which advance Rossetti’s sequence. The citation of Derrida is not offered as any form of commendation of the broader theoretical position advocated in Derrida’s philosophical works.
- 26 Dunlop, Alexander, Introduction to ‘Amoretti and Epithalamion’ in *The Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser: Yale Edition* (London: Yale University Press, 1989) 586.
- 27 Petrarca, Francesco, *Selections from the Canzoniere and Other Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) 1.
- 28 Ibid. 21.
- 29 Ibid. 24.
- 30 Mommsen, Theodor E., ‘Petrarch’s Conception of the Dark Ages’ in *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* ed. E. F. Rice Jnr. (Ithaca, 1959) 106–29.
- 31 This elevation of Rome was nevertheless supported by a kind of sub-Platonism based upon Roman Unities of Architecture, Theatrical Form, etc. Rome became the type of the Secular Holy City – later Blake’s ‘Jerusalem’, Yeats’ visionary ‘Byzantium’ – always potentially presented in ‘real’ terms, cf. Dickens’ London in *Bleak House*, Thompson’s *City of Dreadful Night*, the opposition of Wordsworth’s two sonnets of 1802 on views of London.
- 32 Petrarca, *Selections* 24.