

Christina Rossetti



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Christina Rossetti was considered the ideal female poet of her time. Her poetry was devo-tional, moral, and spoke of frustrated affection. Dolores Rosenblum presents a fresh reading of Rossetti's works and places them in the con-text of her life. Rosenblum shows that what was ostensibly devotional, moral, and loveless, was actually what Luce Irigaray calls "mimetism," a subtle parody and subversion of the male tra-dition of literature. Only with the coming of feminist criticism can Rossetti be meaningfully re-evaluated. Rosenblum calls Rossetti's works the "poetry of endurance," stating that it is similar, and at times identical, to the female "sentimental" tradition in literature. Rossetti endured the con-straints of the Victorian female artistic spirit by becoming a "watcher." Within this self-accepted role, Rossetti was able to carefully and deliber-ately choose artistic self-protection. In her reli-gious poetry, Rossetti transcended, by aesthetic renunciation, the alienation and immobilization forced upon her. Rossetti's poetry is full of paradox; it sings about silence, exposes the poet's oblivion. From the repining Victorian poet, there emerged a "stone woman." Rosenblum discusses this pas-sively enduring female figure's alienation from knowledge and power, and how the myth of self strengthened the lyric voice within her. Because she was a woman, she was denied the male use of the lyric "I." Rossetti's work is unified, Rosenblum argues, because she was a deliberate poet, and by

accepting the "burden of womanhood," she played out what men only symbolized as female in their art. By her mimicry and revision of the male tradition of literature, Christina Rossetti engaged the patriarchal tradition in ways that make it usable for the female experience, and that provide a critique of male objectification of women in art.

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