

introduction

## A Materialist Aesthetic and a Materialist Hermeneutics

**C**HRISTINA ROSSETTI'S life and work were bound up with illustration. This intimate relationship continued after her death, as her texts were reproduced in illustrated formats for a variety of audiences throughout the twentieth century. Combining pictures and words in printed form may therefore be seen as an important element in the production of the commodity known as Christina Rossetti in the international marketplace for well over a century. Audiences and meanings have been produced along with the illustrated gift books, picture books for children, and devotional books and tracts signed with her name from the time she entered the world of Victorian publishing to the present.

Rossetti's career as a writer coincided with the development of the book trade into one of Britain's largest and most powerful industries. Linking her personal story and the institutional one is the common feature of illustration. In 1850 Rossetti made an early appearance in a commercial publication, an occasional periodical produced by her Pre-Raphaelite associates. Despite its limited circulation, short duration, and anomalous use of etching rather than wood engraving, *The Germ* was a significant initial venue for the aspiring poet. The Pre-Raphaelite focus on the interrelations between art and literature in general, and on the creative and critical possibilities generated by pairing pictures with poetry in particular, had a profound impact

on the young Christina. Throughout her long professional life Rossetti frequently sought out illustrated contexts for her published work.

1850 is also a landmark year in the history of the British book industry and its relations with a growing market of consumers (Altick, 294). For many of these newly literate or newly leisured book buyers the visual had a particular appeal that enterprising publishers were quick to capitalize on. With the rise of wood engraving, the improvement of paper quality coupled with a decrease in cost, the advent of the steam press, and increasingly sophisticated distribution networks made possible by the railway, illustrated periodicals, newspapers, and books of all kinds proliferated. At the same time middle-class consumers, eager for objects that would confirm for themselves and display to their visitors their own sophisticated status, created a new market for gift books of illustrated poetry. As a specialized form of literature, poetry represented “culture” in a way that the upstart, best-selling novel, could not. Recognizing “that culture was a marketable commodity and that technology could be used specifically for its widespread and profitable sale” (Anderson, 10–11), publishers paid particular attention to producing poetry in salable packages. From the illustrated anthologies and reprints of the 1860s to the limited first editions of the fin de siècle, pictures helped sell poems.

Students of Victorian publishing history, however, have focused almost exclusively on the fields of fiction, series publication, and periodicals. With the exception of an interest in the production of anthologies in the period, scant attention has been paid to the genre of poetry, and even less to the production of Victorian illustrated poetry.<sup>1</sup> While this is less true of studies in twentieth-century publishing, the important connections between Victorian publishing practices and twentieth-century developments in the production of illustrated poetry have yet to be made.<sup>2</sup> Taking Christina Rossetti as a case study, this book seeks to establish those links and explore their complexities by mapping the genealogy of her publications from their genesis in her lifetime through their ongoing reproductive life after her death.

### Image, Text, Book

“One thing which occupied C[hristina] to an extent one would hardly credit,” William Michael Rossetti told his sister’s first biographer,

“was the making-up of scrapbooks for Hospital patients or children—This may possibly have begun before she removed to Torrington Sq[uaire] [i.e., 1876]: was certainly in very active exercise for several years ensuing—say up to 1885. When I called to see her

and my mother it was 9 chances out of 10 that I found her thus occupied—I daresay she may have made up at least 50 biggish scrapbooks of this kind—taking some pains in adapting borderings to the pages etc. etc.” (qtd. in Bell, *CR*, 54–55)

Just as William Michael dismisses one of Christina Rossetti's main occupations for ten years of her life, so too have scholars failed to credit this non-writerly charitable activity. But the making of some fifty “biggish scrapbooks” for children and hospital patients is neither incidental nor irrelevant to Rossetti's career. In creating these albums—selecting and arranging images and texts cut from newspapers and periodicals and presenting them attractively within borders adapted to the content, size, and physical appearance of each page—Rossetti acts as editor, illustrator, and publisher all in one. Despite their limited distribution, her scrapbooks remain “books” produced for specific audiences, in a visual-verbal format calculated to give pleasure to the eye and nourishment to the soul.

Christina Rossetti's habits of production throughout her long career as a writer demonstrate a consistent interest in combining image and text. William Michael's dating of her scrapbook making—roughly the mid-1870s to mid-1880s—provides a publication context which enables us to see this private, charitable activity as an extension of, rather than a drain on, her creative work. Indeed, the principal audiences for Rossetti's commercial publications at this time correlate to the projected recipients of her scrapbooks—children and members of the lower-middle or working classes. In the early seventies she published *Sing-Song* (1872) and *Speaking Likenesses* (1874) for the juvenile market and throughout the decade she sought publication in illustrated children's periodicals like *St. Nicholas Magazine* and *Wide-Awake*. Both these magazines, incidentally, urged their privileged middle-class subscribers to remember those less fortunate and donate their discarded issues to children's hospitals. Rossetti's scrapbooks for children might well have included illustrated poems from these very magazines—perhaps even her own “An Alphabet from England” (*St. Nicholas Magazine*, 1875) or “Brother Bruin” (*Wide-Awake*, 1885).

The second audience William Michael identifies for Christina's scrapbooks—hospital patients—is differentiated not by age but by class. Victorian middle-class and well-to-do patients were attended in their homes; hospitals were for the indigent. Rossetti's second projected readership for her scrapbooks is, therefore, in keeping with the audience targeted by her principal publisher during these years, The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK). The SPCK produced a great mass of devotional material which, in the case of tracts, was distributed freely to the lower classes. Their books, on the other hand, were

either purchased by well-to-do patrons and given as gifts to the poor or, because of the society's policy of low prices, made accessible to lower-middle- and working-class consumers at its subsidized depots (W. K. Clarke, 192). The wide circulation of SPCK illustrated tracts ensured that even the poorest homes would have access to visual imagery and printed texts.<sup>3</sup> While not all SPCK books were, like their tracts, illustrated,<sup>4</sup> the publisher remained well aware of the importance of the visual in enticing readers. The SPCK always produced its books in attractive formats: bibliographic features such as tooled bindings, black-letter typefaces, ruled pages in red and black ink, and decorative initials contributed to their visual appeal.

Rossetti's production of these fifty or so large scrapbooks for children and hospital patients was likely inspired by sympathy for what Patricia Anderson has called "the visual deprivation of the inmates of charitable institutions" (198) and Linda Dowling has described as an "unrelenting visual squalor" in the lives of ordinary Victorians (68). From this point of view Rossetti's forgotten scrapbooks, with their carefully adapted "borderings . . . etc.," share something of William Morris's more public desire to counteract contemporary ugliness with the "Book Beautiful" and "the promise of aesthetic democracy" in his Kelmscott Press productions (Dowling, 68). In painstakingly constructing these albums from the detritus of a print culture readily accessible to the middle classes in the masses of illustrated newspapers and periodicals that flooded the market from mid-century on, Rossetti was attempting, in her own small way, to democratize image and text. Perhaps she was aware of the degree to which the working poor were "book-starved," or had heard stories about children who scavenged their wealthier neighbors' dustbins for discarded issues of illustrated magazines (Galbraith, 32).

Rossetti herself grew up in a visually enriched environment. Although the family had limited financial resources, their modest home had a few works of original art, and their small library was stocked with illustrated books such as the *Iconologia* of their friend Filippo Pistrucci (who painted the children's portraits in 1838), the emblems of Francis Quarles, the fables of John Gay, and a variety of fairy-tale, science, and religious books embellished with woodcuts. Sometimes her brothers, Dante Gabriel and William Michael, would bring home prints picked up at stationers' shops for the siblings to color (*DGR: His Family Letters*, 1:43). Her sister Maria was encouraged to develop the art of flower painting at age twelve with the gift of an instructional book from Count Pepoli (*LDGR*, 1:3), but she does not seem to have shared her younger siblings' interest in artistic matters. In contrast, Christina worked hard at developing any artistic gift she might have. In her twenties she studied drawing with Ford Madox Brown and tried her hand at portraiture and wallpaper design; she con-

tinued to sketch occasionally for personal pleasure throughout most of her long life. But it was Dante Gabriel who was singled out from an early age as the family artist, and his career as a painter and illustrator had a profound effect on his sister's life. When the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood formed in 1848 with Dante Gabriel and William Michael among its seven founding members, the group sometimes met at the family home. As a woman Christina could not become one of the "brothers" and did not attend the PRB meetings. Nevertheless, she was involved in their artistic activities, serving as a model for many of their early paintings and sometimes going to their studios, or to various exhibits, to view their work. Furthermore, like the members of the PRB, Christina was inspired by the "sacramental aesthetic" John Ruskin developed in his second volume of *Modern Painters*, in which material fact becomes resplendent with symbolic truth and spiritual meaning (Harrison, *CR*, 29). Coming of age in such an environment, Rossetti became fascinated by interrelationships between the visual and verbal arts. Her interest in interart relationships was enhanced by her brother's fortuitous discovery of William Blake, for Christina soon shared Dante Gabriel's admiration for the painter-poet.

Reinforced by such aesthetic influences, Rossetti's religious background provided the fundamental base for her highly visual sensibility and her sacramental view of life. George Landow has suggested that Victorian "Evangelicals sought the pleasures of the ear and the High Anglicans those of the eye" (19), and there can be no doubt that Rossetti was greatly affected by the visual pleasures of her worship experiences. In 1843 she began attending Christ Church, Albany Street, then the leading London church of the Oxford Movement, and so came into immediate contact with the Tractarianism that had as much effect on her life and art as Pre-Raphaelitism.<sup>5</sup> Tractarian sacramentalism brought with it an increased emphasis on symbol and ritual in both the ceremony of worship and church decoration, and thus encouraged worshippers to "read" material signs for their spiritual significance. Rossetti attests to this in her youthful novella, *Maude*, when she describes the lectern cover Mary and Agnes have designed. Maude is able to read such traditional religious devices as "the Cross and the Crown of Thorns," "the keys of S. Peter," and "the Sword of S. Paul," but needs help with the meaning of the floral emblems embroidered on the borders (*SP*, 27). Maude's creator would not have had this difficulty, for Rossetti was not only schooled in the figural tradition of religious iconography extending back to the Middle Ages and Renaissance; she was also, as Gisela Hönnighausen has shown, familiar with the emblematic Victorian "language of flowers." Furthermore, the Tractarian movement's revival of typological and analogical modes of thought, especially as expressed in the poetry of John Keble and Isaac Williams, nurtured Rossetti's own tendency to view objects and events as material signs of a

profound spiritual reality. In Tractarian poetry, in the sacramental symbolism of the early Pre-Raphaelites, and in the writings of John Ruskin, religious and aesthetic influences combined to impart an idea fundamental to “a symbolic view of life” (L. Hönnighausen, 12): Rossetti’s notion that “All the world over, visible things typify things invisible” (*SF*, 244).

From the various strands in her cultural experience Christina Rossetti developed a visual imagination that informed both her poetic practices and her modes of production.<sup>6</sup> By visual imagination I mean not only the habit of conceptualizing ideas in concrete images, but also the obverse activity, the tendency to see phenomenal objects as figurations of abstract concepts. Both these imaginative tendencies determined the visual-verbal aesthetic she developed and practiced throughout her nearly fifty years of creative production. While critics have long recognized the significance of Rossetti’s sensuous imagery and “word painting,”<sup>7</sup> they have not considered the *material* side of her visual imagination. This study seeks to demonstrate that Rossetti’s “‘pictorial’ modes of representation” (Harrison, *CR*, 24) should not be considered only as poetic analogues for painting. Rather, our understanding of her pictorial modes of representation should include the *literally* pictorial. In the illustrated texts she produced in collaboration with a variety of artistic partners, Rossetti sought to combine picture and word not only to enhance the beauty (and hence desirability) of her work but also to extend its meanings by introducing a nonlinguistic form and a hermeneutic framework.

Rossetti’s entrance into the Victorian publishing market was coeval with England’s “Golden Age” of illustration, and her association with the Pre-Raphaelite artists who “changed illustration completely” in the sixties (Goldman, *Victorian Illustration*, 2) obviously furthered her interest in visual-verbal collaborations. Four of her first five commercially produced volumes for the general market (*Goblin Market and Other Poems*, *The Prince’s Progress and Other Poems*, *Sing-Song*, and *Speaking Likenesses*)<sup>8</sup> and one of her devotional works (*Called to Be Saints*) were illustrated in their first editions. Although this was a radical departure from the contemporary Victorian publishing practice of issuing only proven good sellers with pictorial embellishment, Rossetti scholars have overlooked the significance of her books’ unique physical forms. The image, however, is as much a part of a book’s semiotic system as the letterpress. Perhaps more than any other bibliographic feature, a picture determines audiences and shapes reception. A historically specific and culturally aware analysis of Rossetti’s works must take into account their production and reception as illustrated books, both within her own lifetime and subsequently, in twentieth-century reprints.

Illustrated books are not simply physical objects or “products.” They are also

social *processes*, involving a complex network of relationships in historically specific situations that change over time. By the same token, texts are not composed of unmediated words. The material features of production—including such physical details as typeface, paper, cover design, and decorative or illustrative material, as well as such institutional issues as copyright, price, advertising, and distribution systems—contribute to their signifying structures. Whether or not we are conscious of these details during the reading process, meaning is in fact “a function of all these matters.” As Jerome J. McGann has taught us, the meaning of a work emerges through the combined force of its bibliographic and its linguistic codes (*Textual Condition*, 12, 15).<sup>9</sup> For this reason the interpretive act must include an analysis of all the social processes that go into the making of a book. Books are always collaborative acts, involving not simply an author but also an editor, publisher, printer, and binder—and, in the case of an illustrated book produced in the Victorian period, an artist and engraver. These social networks of production extend to include the readers and audiences who are produced along with the book (Macherey, 70), for visual imagery contributes to the way reading markets are differentiated by age, gender, and class. With the passage of time, “the signifying processes of the work become increasingly collaborative and socialized” (McGann, *Textual Condition*, 58), as editors, publishers, and artists reproduce the text in new formats for audiences in different social, historical, and geographic circumstances. As a commodity emerging from a capitalist mode of production for highly specialized markets, a book comes to our table saturated with histories and expressive of ideologies both personal and institutional that we must learn to read.<sup>10</sup>

This is a sociohistorical study of the publishing history of Christina Rossetti’s illustrated books. Using a materialist hermeneutics<sup>11</sup> I map the production and reception of her works under changing conditions, from the poet’s Pre-Raphaelite days through the late twentieth century. Examining not simply the relationship between image and text but also all aspects relating to their production in specific books under particular circumstances, I focus as much on bibliographic issues as I do on linguistic or iconographic matters. Indeed, the premise of this study is that the three aspects under scrutiny—image, text, and book—must be studied relationally. Their complex social and institutional relationships contribute to the interpretive structures Rossetti’s works make available to her readers with each new production. Since signifying systems are embedded in the material form of Rossetti’s books, their meanings cannot be traced solely to an originary, authorizing, writer, but must be seen as social and institutional outcomes as well. Even in her lifetime, factors beyond the author’s control resulted in certain textual effects that influenced reception and interpretation. Once her works had become part of the public domain with the expiration of copyright in

the early twentieth century, illustrated Rossetti's proliferated and meanings multiplied with their audiences.

The continuities and the divergencies in the production and reception history of illustrated works published under Rossetti's name are reflected in this book's two-part, mirroring structure. Part 1, "Victorian Productions," begins by situating Rossetti's interest in illustration within a visual imagination shaped by her own sociohistorical context, and then goes on to examine the production of her illustrated poetry, children's writing, and devotional works. Part 2, "Twentieth-Century Reproductions," examines each of these sites of publication in reverse order—the religious market, the juvenile market, and the connoisseur's market—and concludes by looking at other ways in which Rossetti's work has contributed to visual culture on both sides of the Atlantic. Likewise, the remainder of this introduction is divided into two parts. I begin by providing a general overview of the materialist aesthetic that prompted Rossetti to publish her work in illustrated form. I then offer a case study of *Goblin Market's* production in the twentieth century to demonstrate the critical necessity of using a materialist hermeneutics to understand illustrated books.

### A Materialist Aesthetic

Rossetti's methods of production were informed by visual-verbal principles and practices at all stages of her creative work. She had a habit of drawing small sketches in pencil or watercolor, both in the formative stages of a poetic project—for example, in incidental sketches in letters or in the illustrated manuscript she produced for *Sing-Song*—and, after a book was completed, in the marginal illustrations she added to published volumes. Because Rossetti illuminated not only her own work in this way—notably her first commercially published volume, *Goblin Market and Other Poems*—but also books she admired by other writers, such as John Keble's *Christian Year*, her illustrative practices seem to be integrally connected to a critical and imaginative vision moving beyond the borders of linguistic codes. Thus it is not surprising that when she entered the marketplace as a publishing writer she sought venues that would enable her to combine words with pictures.

Like her fellow Pre-Raphaelite poet William Morris, Rossetti had what Jerome McGann has called a "materialist aesthetic," one which acknowledged the importance of "the compositional environment" in the making of poetry and which resisted current publishing practices in an effort to exploit "the resources of the physical media that were the vehicular forms" of her writing ("A Thing to Mind," 56). Rossetti's interest in publishing matters was, however, more modest than Morris's. She did not, for instance, share his need to control

all aspects of her books' bibliographic codes from typography to paper, or attempt to circumvent the contemporary book trade by becoming her own publisher. She did, however, take a strong interest in the material form of her publications, from illustration and binding to the number of leaves to the kind of publisher and printer. Indeed, like Morris, whose interest in the physical appearance of his books was apparent in his selection of the superior Chiswick Press for his early works (57), Rossetti indicated her determination to provide a suitable compositional environment for her poetry by selecting Macmillan and Company as the publisher of her first commercial books, *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862) and *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1866). Alexander Macmillan was one of the few publishers at the time who "always cared greatly for the details of book production—for the outward appearance" of a work (C. Morgan, 64). For this reason, the bibliographic format of Rossetti's early publications, like Morris's, demonstrates her "artistic aims in a material, apparent way" (McGann, "A Thing to Mind," 57). As Samuel D. Albert suggests, "[t]he process and problems of printing, as well as the struggle to synchronize form and content" that plagued Morris throughout his career, even after he established the Kelmscott Press at the fin de siècle, were anticipated, and indeed partially overcome, by Christina Rossetti in the sixties. She met the challenge of the typically "poor coordination of text and image" in contemporary book production by having her brother Dante Gabriel design her first two volumes of poetry (93–94).<sup>12</sup>

While it is in the area of illustration that Rossetti's materialist aesthetic is most evident, it is also important to recognize that her first two publications are virtually unique in the period because of the wholeness of their book design. As Paul Goldman observes in *Victorian Illustration*, "Both are true first editions, containing new designs made specifically for them, and, in addition, [Dante Gabriel] Rossetti designed the bindings in a chaste medieval manner reflecting the contents. Such a guiding hand linking text, illustration and binding was most unusual in an era often criticized for creating illustrated books artificially." Working in collaboration with her brother, Christina Rossetti produced trade books that "possess a clarity of purpose and execution today only found in the precious realms of the private press" (3).

In the history of Victorian book production the importance of these trade books published by Macmillan and Company in the sixties cannot be overemphasized. In the first place, the fact that they are, indeed, "true first editions" in an age when illustrated works were almost exclusively reprints of proven good sellers distinguishes them from virtually all other Victorian publications during the "Golden Age" of illustration (Goldman, *Victorian Illustrated Books*, 21). Secondly, they are distinguished examples of book design and of the integration of

image and text in a period when even the most celebrated volumes—such as the Moxon *Tennyson* illustrated by Pre-Raphaelite artists and others in 1857—have been accused of “disgraceful ‘book cobbling’” for the lack of coordination between their visual and verbal elements (Goldman, *Victorian Illustration*, 3). Finally, the two pictures Dante Gabriel Rossetti provided for each of his sister’s volumes are remarkable productions in the innovative Pre-Raphaelite style of interpretive, decorative, and intellectual illustration which had such a profound effect on the book artists of the nineties, when illustrated first editions truly came into their own. When one considers that Dante Gabriel Rossetti published only ten book illustrations, and that four of these appeared in his sister’s volumes, his subsequent influence on late-Victorian book design clearly has a specific application to Christina’s poetry.

The siblings’ creative partnership gave them an unusual degree of control over the final product, rivaling even that of the powerful Victorian publisher. Despite Alexander Macmillan’s habit of giving “precise instructions to the designers who worked for him” (C. Morgan, 64), the final illustrations for Rossetti’s two volumes were determined by the author and her artist rather than by their publisher. To his chagrin, Macmillan had to put up with this subversive encroaching on his usual province when Dante Gabriel followed his own lead in selecting pictorial subjects. Even more galling, perhaps, he had to accept that the books would be published, not when he advertised them, but when the two Rossettis were ready to go to print. Macmillan’s marketing plans to produce *Goblin Market* and *The Prince’s Progress* as Christmas books were undermined by delays related to the very illustrations that were to make them salable commodities in this lucrative gift market.

It is usual to point the finger of blame at Dante Gabriel and his notorious procrastinating, but Christina’s complicity in the publishing delays should be recognized. Her role in the postponement of the publication date is especially evident in the production of *The Prince’s Progress*. In December 1865 she wrote Macmillan to say “the woodcuts cannot be ready for Xmas” and to ask him “to keep back *P.P.*,” despite his recent “‘few days’ advertisement.” With a mixture of deference and assertiveness, Rossetti continues: “yet if you agree with me in thinking Gabriel’s designs too desirable to forego, I will try to follow your example of patience under disappointment” (*Letters*, 1:265). Nine months earlier, Christina had written to her brother with regard to the delayed designs: “if that enterprising publisher [Macmillan] has been prodding you it is *di proprio moto*, not instigated in word by me. Your woodcuts are so essential to my contentment that I will wait a year for them if need is—though (in a whisper) 6 months would better please me” (1:239). Ultimately, Rossetti had to wait a year and more for her “laggard book” (275), but her “contentment” was contingent not on the

early publication of her poetry, but rather on the production of a book which would combine image and text in a well-designed format. As she confided to Gabriel in April 1865, "My *Prince*, having dawdled so long on his own account cannot grumble at awaiting your pleasure; and mine, too, for your protecting woodcuts help me to face my small public" (246).

As first-edition illustrated books, Rossetti's inaugural volumes not only exemplified a Pre-Raphaelite verbal-visual aesthetic but also were astute marketing maneuvers, helping her "face" her public in tandem with an artistic partner. Such a production strategy was doubly empowering: in addition to enabling her to exercise more control over the business of publication than was usually the case in the Victorian book trade, it allowed her to carve out a small but special niche for herself in a demanding market. By the 1860s, Dante Gabriel Rossetti was a highly regarded painter whose celebrity would attach more value to her books in the marketplace and potentially increase their salability. Thus her production strategy worked both aesthetically and commercially, allowing her to embody her materialist aesthetic in the physical form of her books and to pursue her commitment to fame and poetic vocation.<sup>13</sup> If Christina Rossetti was indeed, as Swinburne enthusiastically hailed her after the successful publication of *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, "the Jael who led their host to victory" (Gosse, *Life*, 127), this may be ascribed in no small measure to the fact that of all the Pre-Raphaelite poets, only she produced her poetry in a physical form which conformed to the movement's commitment to visual/verbal and author/artist partnerships. As W. E. Fredeman recognized in his germinal *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Bibliocritical Study*, "A concern with illustration may in fact be considered an integral part of the Pre-Raphaelite innovation" (185). Nevertheless, despite frequent proposals for illustrative projects, *The Germ* remains the single illustrated publication "to emerge from the combined efforts of the Brotherhood" (Fredeman, "Woodman," 10). Although published a decade and more after the demise of the PRB, Christina Rossetti's first two volumes of poetry realize in concrete ways the aspirations behind the Brethren's "fantasy editions of illustrated books that never were" (9). Moreover, despite the interest in the visual arts of such Pre-Raphaelite poets as her brother, Dante Gabriel, and William Morris, only Christina Rossetti produced her work in illustrated form before Morris established his Kelmscott Press in 1891.

Rossetti's most collaborative partnership, however, was arguably not with her brother but rather with his Pre-Raphaelite associate, Arthur Hughes, who illustrated her two works for children, *Sing-Song* and *Speaking Likenesses*. *Sing-Song* was brought out by the Dalziel Brothers under the Routledge imprint for the Christmas market of 1871. Although struggling with her nearly fatal Graves disease, Rossetti was particularly aggressive in her negotiations for an appropriate

illustrator for this book. During contract negotiations in April 1871 Rossetti wrote the Dalziels that her acceptance of their offer was conditional on her independent approval of the artist: “I gladly agree to the terms you propose and will send you a formal note to that effect, *if* you will first inform me whom you intend employing to design the illustrations and *if* of course the name pleases me” (*Letters*, 1:369; my emphasis). The artists suggested by the Dalziels, however, were *not* pleasing to Christina or her brother William, who was helping her transact business during her illness. Resisting the contemporary practice of producing books illustrated by many hands, the Rossettis suggested “that, if Hughes will undertake to do *all* the illustrations, that will be better still,” and went on to give directions about the desired “character of designs” in keeping with the nature of the verse, the size of the type, and so on (qtd. in *Letters*, 1:371, n. 4).

The degree of collaboration between artist and author in the production of *Sing-Song* is unique because Hughes worked from Rossetti’s own illustrated manuscript, in which she had included a small pencil sketch above each poem. Unlike any other of her published works, then, *Sing-Song*, from its initial manuscript stage, was conceived as a Pre-Raphaelite pairing of verbal and visual elements. Rossetti was so delighted with the artist’s work, and so keenly aware of the commercial viability of illustrated texts, that, on seeing the proofs for the book in August 1871, she wrote the Dalziels to say “the cuts deserve to sell the volume” and to suggest that the collaborative nature of the book be acknowledged by printing “‘Arthur Hughes’ in larger type on the title page” (*Letters*, 1:375).<sup>14</sup> When Macmillan agreed to publish her next book, a collection of stories for children, she told him that “nothing would please me more than that Mr. Arthur Hughes” be given the commission for *Speaking Likenesses*, although she deferentially acknowledged that the selection of illustrator usually fell to the publisher, not the author (*Letters*, 2:9–10). No doubt aware of the high praise both image and text had received in the reviews of *Sing-Song*, Macmillan deferred to Rossetti’s judgment, and gave *Speaking Likenesses* to Hughes.

*Speaking Likenesses* was the last of Rossetti’s illustrated first editions over which she exercised such a degree of authorial control, but she did bring out one other illustrated book in her lifetime. *Called to Be Saints: The Minor Festivals Devotionally Studied* (SPCK, 1881) contains numerous botanical line drawings of flowers illustrating Rossetti’s textual descriptions. There is no evidence that the author had any part in assigning or overseeing the designs. Nevertheless, it is an important publication because it realizes so fully Rossetti’s emblematic purposes for this book in particular and for her art in general. Moreover, its production history offers a glimpse into the workings of a large Victorian religious publishing house, The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. The SPCK’s significant departures from the publication practices of a general trade publisher like

Alexander Macmillan provide an instructive case study in how the material aspects of a book affect its meanings. As Pierre Macherey remarks in his *Theory of Literary Production*, “the question of how the text communicates with its readers” is profoundly connected to “the study of the conditions of literary production” (69). For this reason a publishing history cannot speak of production without taking into account reception, or discuss the present artifact without unearthing its previous material forms. Thus my study of Christina Rossetti’s illustrated books in part 1 includes an exploration of the modes of production in the Victorian book trade in order to provide a base from which the complex changes that took place in the twentieth century may be understood. This groundwork facilitates my account, in part 2, of the very material effects these reproductions have had on reception and interpretation.

### A Materialist Hermeneutics

Since the beginning of the twentieth century Rossetti’s visual imagination has been reified in both predictable and, in some cases, unexpected, ways. It is not surprising, for example, that the SPCK should recycle her religious poetry in their illustrated pamphlets and books. In works such as *Reflected Lights from “The Face of the Deep”* (SPCK, 1899) and *Redeeming the Time: Daily Musings for Lent from the Works of Christina G. Rossetti* (SPCK, 1903) Rossetti’s verses are converted to Sunday School lessons with the addition of stock religious images taken from the publisher’s files. In the secular realm it is also not surprising that many artists interested in fantasy should turn to Rossetti’s poetry, for the twentieth-century tradition of fantasy illustration derives from the Pre-Raphaelites (Whitlark, 59). This heritage is especially evident in a lavish gift book illustrated by Florence Harrison in 1910 for Blackie and Sons, *Poems by Christina Rossetti*. The tradition continued throughout the century, with even the American children’s book illustrator Ellen Raskin attempting to capture “the sharp-focus, hard-outline PRB technique” (Raskin, “Afterword”) in her own color illustrations for an abridged *Goblin Market* for juveniles in 1970. The fantasy tradition is also apparent in some of the less predictable forms Rossetti’s poem has taken, such as its infamous reproduction in the pages of *Playboy Magazine* in 1973. Religious tract, lavish gift book, children’s picture book, pornographic fantasy—the proliferation of illustrated Rossettis in the twentieth century has multiplied the poet’s audiences. Each publication is produced for a specific segment of the reading market, a segment whose age, class, and gender determinants are produced by all the bibliographic features of the book, but especially by its printed imagery.

Illustrated reprints issued after an author’s death thus provide a fascinating

subject of investigation in the “history of the book” as it has recently been conceived: a material study of a work’s production and reception in a variety of markets for different audiences. Inevitably, works that are reillustrated establish new dialogues between image and text and generate new meanings along with their physical reformations. Unlike first-edition illustrated books, the reprint is not a collaboration between an artist and a contemporary author and her publisher, but rather a complex network of relationships and associations extending over time and space. Publishers who decide to reprint a text and commission illustrations for it have a particular marketing strategy in mind, a designated audience to target, and a host of economic concerns, not least of which is the obvious profit motive. At the same time, the artist who illustrates a “classic” engages not only with the verbal text but also, often, with previous pictorial (and, sometimes, critical) interpretations of that text. Moreover, the reprint is, in all senses of the word, a *reproduction*. The relationship between the verbal and visual elements in an illustrated reprint establishes a dialogue between a work from the past and its new temporal and spatial environment. For these reasons, examining a work that has been illustrated, and reillustrated, for more than a century in both Britain and North America tells us much about the history of Rossetti’s critical reception. It also reveals the formative roles that such material aspects of book production as publishing practices, economic and institutional relationships, and bibliographic and pictorial codes have in the production of both audiences and meanings. These are all profoundly consequential *material* issues, attendant on the book as a physical, human-made object. As Pierre Macherey says, “Readers”—and, I would emphasize, their interpretations—“are made by what makes the book” (70).

Approaching both first editions and illustrated reprints from the perspective of a materialist hermeneutics means being equally attentive to linguistic and bibliographical codings. It also requires a charting of literary and social histories always in the making. Only by focusing on the particular material aspects of a single work or set of works can we understand a writer’s books in their full context. As McGann explains in *The Textual Condition*, “‘the meaning of the texts’ will appear as a set of concrete and always changing conditions: because the meaning is in the use, and textuality is a social condition of various times, places, and persons” (16). Rossetti’s *Goblin Market*, for example, is never the same work when it assumes a different physical manifestation, and our understanding of either her individual poem or her oeuvre as a whole lacks necessary context when we ignore its material form(s). Indeed, failure to attend to the historical particularity of her texts and their transmission in the marketplace has resulted in certain scholarly fallacies. One particularly egregious example of this is the uninvestigated truism long reiterated in Rossetti studies: that *Goblin Market* was

“a nursery favourite in the Victorian period.”<sup>15</sup> This critical commonplace is supported by neither the poem’s publication nor its reception history.

*Goblin Market* is a model case study for a materialist hermeneutics because it was the combination of its linguistic codes—such as the poem’s fairy-tale genre and nursery-rhyme meters—and its bibliographic codes—notably, the presence of pictures—that produced the fantasy Victorian nursery poem that never was. Studying the production and reception of the poem in the Victorian period with attention to its economic, institutional, and cultural environments demonstrates that *Goblin Market*’s primary contemporary market was the adult reader, specifically one appreciative of books as beautiful objects. This is as true for the poem’s first publication in *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862), accompanied by Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s two designs, as it is for its first appearance as an illustrated reprint in 1893, with Laurence Housman’s numerous full-page illustrations and textual decorations. Although Housman’s illustrated version of the poem clearly belongs to the period’s illustrated gift books for collectors, critics have missed the book’s cultural context by ignoring its publication history. Thus Joyce Irene Whalley and Tessa Rose Chester include Housman’s *Goblin Market* in their historical survey of children’s book illustration, while Jonathan Cott, in his anthology of Victorian children’s fantasy, and R. Loring Taylor, in his edition of Rossetti’s works for children, both reprint a facsimile of Housman’s version of the poem. Although Taylor acknowledges that *Goblin Market* “was not originally written for children,” he claims that “it was apparently Victorian culture rather than the author’s intention which identified the work as children’s verse,” citing as evidence the poem’s republication “in illustrated editions” (vi, vii).<sup>16</sup>

The poem was not, however, republished in illustrated editions in the Victorian period. Housman’s *Goblin Market*, published by Macmillan in 1893 for the adult market, was the only illustrated reprint before the twentieth century. Thus it was clearly not “Victorian culture” but rather twentieth-century culture that “identified the work as children’s verse.” To understand how this misclassification of the text and its transmission in the marketplace occurred, it is necessary not only to return to the site of the poem’s initial production and reception, but also to investigate the practices of publication and interpretation in our own day. Certainly our modern equation of picture books with juvenile literature, together with our virtually exclusive identification of the fairy tale with a child audience—biases not shared by the poem’s Victorian readers—are two important influences in our retrospective reconstruction of the poem’s life in its own period. Other cultural and social conditions have also played their part in our myth about the poem. For example, changing attitudes toward what constitutes children’s literature, and also toward human sexuality—particularly as it relates to Victorian women and children—have significantly affected the poem’s modern

reception. This has a particular application to *Goblin Market*, since its notoriously multivalent metaphors have often been read as sexually suggestive, and since sexuality has always been more or less prohibited in representations for children. Although the taboo against sexuality in books for the young has remained relatively constant over the years, however, conceptions of what makes a poem or a picture “sexy” have not. Twentieth-century representations of Victorian culture as mute and repressed in regard to sexual matters, of their children as sexless and their spinsters as sexually ignorant, also played a part in a classification of *Goblin Market* based on a model of Victorian “innocence” and modern “knowingness.” It is “We ‘Other Victorians,’” as Michel Foucault has named us (3–4), who have retroactively produced Rossetti’s poem for our Victorian forechildren.

This projection of our own sensibility onto another time period has resulted in an imaginative reconstruction of contemporary reception—in effect, in the invention of “the Victorian child as audience” for the poem (Watson, 66)—in those analyses of Rossetti and her work lacking a grounding in publishing history. In *The Child Figure in English Literature*, for example, Robert Pattison states that “‘Goblin Market’ does not seem today like a children’s poem, yet in its own day it was often included in books for the young” (142). Bibliographic evidence makes it patently clear that *Goblin Market* was never included in books for young Victorians,<sup>17</sup> but Pattison (inaccurately) cites Harvey Darton as the authority for his claim. What Darton in fact says in his germinal *Children’s Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life* is that *Goblin Market* was not produced as a children’s book at all in the Victorian period, although “it had its direct appeal to the young imagination: and the fact was recognized without delay, which is here the significant historical point” (282). Despite his sociohistorical approach to children’s literature, Darton provides no contemporary evidence for his “historical point,” leaving it as yet another inference masquerading as fact in the critical interpretation of Rossetti’s work.

Darton may well have been thinking of Mrs. Norton’s initial review of the poem in *Macmillan’s Magazine* (1863), in which she acknowledged the child as a potential reader of the poem. However, there is no evidence to suggest that *Goblin Market* was particularly popular with young Victorians. The poem is significantly absent from the lists of poems that Victorian youth “liked best” in the survey of schoolchildren’s favorite literature included in Edward Salmon’s *Juvenile Literature As It Is* in 1888 (14–24). Since *Goblin Market* had made its inaugural appearance in a school textbook only in the year previous to Salmon’s study (in M. A. Woods’s *A Second School Poetry Book* [1887]), its absence from the pupils’ lists may not be surprising. Its omission does suggest, however, that in the quarter of a century since the poem’s first publication, *Goblin Market* had

not yet become a favorite on *family*reading lists either, for the Victorian habit of reading aloud in domestic settings provided the usual transition phase for the movement of literature from the drawing room to the nursery.

This brief history of *Goblin Market's* misprision as a Victorian children's poem illuminates how a materialist hermeneutics can enrich our understanding of a work. Clearly, the meaning(s) generated by Rossetti's texts cannot be adequately discussed without due attention to their historical uniqueness as works produced by particular persons (editors, publishers, artists) for designated audiences at specific times and places. This study's focus on Rossetti's visual imagination both allows her own modes of production to be localized in the context of the contemporary Victorian book trade and maps the ongoing effects of that powerfully visual imagination on twentieth-century publishing and institutional practices, including those of the academy. While this exploration of Rossetti's materialist aesthetic provides the first full-scale attempt to take into account the poet's strategies of production, the employment of a materialist hermeneutics permits a corollary analysis of the reproduction and reception of her work, from the Pre-Raphaelite period to the postmodern. This is the history, not of a book, but of many books published under the name "Christina G. Rossetti."