Through love to death: the structure of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's The house of life

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THROUGH LOVE TO DEATH; THE STRUCTURE OF DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI'S THE HOUSE OF LIFE

BY

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THROUGH LOVE TO DEATH: THE STRUCTURE OF DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI'S THE HOUSE OF LIFE

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Michael D. Hughes
August 1975
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INTRODUCTION

This study offers an explanation of the structure of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The House of Life*. It does not attempt to elevate Rossetti to a new position of pre-eminence among the Victorians or to make extravagant claims for his genius. What it tries to provide is a descriptive analysis of the poems taken together as a unit of meaning. No effort has been made to deal adequately with Rossetti's biography nor his output in the realm of painting. While these matters certainly have an important place in Rossetti studies, there is also a place for an intensive study of the poems as a body of work with a uniquely shaped content. Too often Rossetti has been relegated to the role of historical curiosity, either as an exemplar of Pre-Raphaelitism or as a precursor of the aesthetic movement associated with Pater and Wilde. These concerns are valid insofar as they make a point about literary history; the problem is that such views often obscure the peculiar nature of Rossetti's method and his imaginative construction of the world.

For the essentials of Rossetti's vision we must turn to a consideration of the poems themselves and especially *The House of Life*. The one hundred-two sonnets in *The House of Life* occupied Rossetti for virtually his entire career as a poet. The first of these, "Retro
Me Sathana," was written in 1847 when Rossetti was nineteen; the last, "True Woman," in 1881, a year before his death. These poems, then, represent Rossetti's most sustained effort in verse and contain almost all of the major themes which occur in his work. In short, we might say that The House of Life is the most essential work to be considered for an understanding of Rossetti's poetic achievement; it is the imaginative center to which all of the remaining poems point.

Now the initial critical response to The House of Life usually fell into one of two categories—biographical or impressionistic. The biographical form has, in fact, enjoyed a considerable longevity. Many readers have been interested in the sonnets as an embodiment of one of the most intriguing personalities of the age. Further, this approach is buttressed by the alleged obscurity of the sonnets, that supposedly vanishes in light of the details of Rossetti's life. The biographical view culminates in the work of Oswald Doughty, whose critical biography, A Victorian Romantic, is recognized as the standard work on the subject. In relation to the problem of clarity in the sonnets Doughty says:

The House of Life is what Rossetti called "autopsychology." From this arises both the biographical significance and the general obscurity of The House of Life, which for the most part expresses thoughts and feelings
aroused and conditioned in Rossetti by personal experiences of which the reader is left wholly or partly ignorant. Hence, it follows that The House of Life and Rossetti's biography are interdependent, each in some degree, illuminating the other.\(^1\)

The line of argument here is quite powerful. However, if Doughty were going to take Rossetti at his own word, he might have given more consideration to the poet's remark, "The Life recorded is neither my life nor your life, but life purely and simply as tripled with Love and Death";\(^2\) that is, life as transformed and depersonalized through art. As critics, we are more likely to apprehend that life as literary creation by looking at it as the imaginative structure of words which constitutes The House of Life.

Rossetti did not prize obscurity and he once wrote: "Above all ideal personalities with which the poet must identify himself, there is one supremely real which is the most imperative of all; namely that of his reader."\(^3\) However, Rossetti was equally anxious to be appreciated, as his efforts in his own behalf testify. Before the publication of his various collections, he went to great

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\(^2\)Doughty, p. 378.

lengths to secure friendly reviews. Perhaps these gave rise to the impressionistic remarks which followed in their wake. Criticism of the late nineteenth and very early twentieth century tended to heap unqualified praise on The House of Life, which was characterized as "the greatest gift poetry has received since the days of Shakespeare,"4 and "the noblest contribution in this form of verse yet made to our literature."5 Rossetti received the appreciation he wanted, but not a great deal of understanding; for such remarks really say nothing about the content of the poems, though they do tell us about the personal taste of the critics.

In the last fifty years criticism has tended to deal with Rossetti's House of Life on a more objective basis, exploring matters of theme, structure and imagery. In this process of examination a special view of the sonnets has emerged, which has become widely accepted. Generally, it is believed that The House of Life is a rather formless collection of sonnets, extolling human love as a means of unifying disparate elements in the poet's experience, principally flesh and spirit. This study will take issue with this view and set forth an


5Hamilton Wright Mabie, Essays in Literary Interpretation (London, 1892), p. 140.
analysis of the structure which includes the accepted view in a larger configuration that hopefully does more justice to the sonnets. As a prelude to the argument of this study and for purposes of providing a critical context to the contentions to be put forth, a brief summary of the modern critical position on The House of Life and its main lines of development will be presented.
THE CRITICAL TRADITION

It is customary in a discussion of criticism and its relationship to the work of Rossetti to make some reference to Robert Buchanan's famous attack on "The Fleshly School of Poetry." Nowadays we are inclined to dismiss Buchanan's remarks as pompous and self-righteous moralizing, representative of what we deem worst in the Victorian temper. Complaining of Rossetti's treatment of sensuality and sex in an early version of The House of Life, Buchanan concluded:

> It is neither poetic, nor manly, nor even human to obtrude such things as the themes of whole poems. It is simply nasty. [6]

Rossetti, extremely sensitive to criticism, felt a need to defend himself and his art and issued "The Stealthy School of Poetry" in which he spoke of the spiritual aspect of the poems that was ignored. Criticism has more or less abandoned the argument concerning the morality of the sonnets because of different assumptions about the nature and function of art. Yet, the concepts of body and soul or flesh and spirit have continued to dominate the criticism of Rossetti and The House of Life

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in an almost unbroken line in terms of both theme and structure. Largely the discussion is absorbed in the problem of whether or not Rossetti successfully harmonizes the worlds of flesh and spirit. There are, of course, different formulations of the problem and different emphases, but the majority of critical writing concentrates on the dialectic between body and soul as the central matter in The House of Life. The following synopsis of opinions is by no means exhaustive; it is merely a representative selection.

Some comparison between Dante Alighieri and Rossetti seems inevitable. Rossetti's father was a lifetime student of the medieval Italian poet, and Rossetti himself translated Dante as well as his Florentine contemporaries. That some affinity between the poets exists is probably true. Graham Hough, for example, in The Last Romantics bases his remarks on the notion that Rossetti attempted to write the sonnets in The House of Life using the imagery and ideas of Dante. However, the resemblances are superficial, Hough tells us, because whereas Dante distinguishes imaginative mythology from theology, Rossetti has no such distinction in mind; consequently we do not know what status to give his images. Rossetti tries to identify idealized love with the senses, turning his own conception of love
into the highest value, and calling it God. This conception has no unity, no reconciliation because it can never be satisfied by bodily objects nor absorbed by Rossetti as by Dante into a total scheme of life. Moreover, Hough contends that Rossetti's work inaugurates the period of emotional unrest when satisfaction is sought in traditional religious symbolism but not found since the symbols have been emptied of religious content. In conclusion, he asserts that Rossetti turned away from science, sociology and progress into an analysis of his own soul which led to an impasse of half-religious, half-earthly hope.7

A similar dissatisfaction with the sonnets is voiced by Masao Miyoshi in *The Divided Self*. Miyoshi's thesis explores the notion that Victorian writers were plagued with an internal conflict, a concept of selfhood which was essentially fragmented and that this concept colors the literature these writers produced. With respect to Rossetti and *The House of Life*, Miyoshi discerns a strong desire for unity in the sonnets, a unity of soul and body, God and love, which is pursued by the poet through his love for woman. Yet, this unity is never

achieved by Rossetti because his poetic method is inadequate. Unlike Dante whose metaphors were well chosen and drawn from a coherent imaginative conception of the world, Rossetti's figures are arbitrary and finally meaningless. Attempting to join realms of spirit and flesh, the temporal and the eternal, Rossetti turned to metaphors drawn apparently at random that failed to connect. The precise nature of the union is never conveyed since Rossetti could not conceive of it in any meaningful structure of imagery. Though the act of love is, for Rossetti, an instant sacrament, the compound of man-woman is unstable since the poet cannot be sure spiritual love and carnal desire are the same. 8

David Soenstrom's Rossetti and the Fair Lady explores the poet's conception of woman. Woman takes on a variety of characteristics such as the abilities to protect or destroy, but basically she has one principal role—she acts as the key to spiritual salvation. In this respect woman is a kind of micro-heaven, the answer to all mysteries, and a bridge to a world of immortality beyond this one. In the view of Soenstrom,

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Rossetti perceived a divine comedy existing behind the everyday events of ordinary experience. His failure to embody it in a cohesive fashion resulted from three psychological factors: Rossetti's "desire for woman, a wish for heaven, and a guilty conscience." These three critics draw attention to analogies in the work of Dante and Rossetti, usually explaining the failure of the latter in terms of the former's success. Generally the same conclusions are reached by other critics without reference to Dante. Robert Cooper in *Lost on Both Sides* tries to make a case for Rossetti as a critic as well as a poet and finds Rossetti wanting in both roles. Cooper points out the frequent linking of "love" and "soul" in the sonnets. Then he advances the proposition that as a critic Rossetti admired subtlety as an artistic virtue. These two ideas are subsequently tied together in the following manner. Cooper says:

Realizing that intellectual subtlety was beyond his power, he [Rossetti] should have relied on his imagination, aiming frankly at emotional impact and beauty. He should have acknowledged his basically sensuous nature, admitted that body was not soul, celebrated the delights of the physical without a false mask of spirituality.

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10 Soenstrom, p. 197.
and put body and soul's beauty in perspective without trying to make them identical.  

However, Rossetti's extremes of temperament made it impossible to find a successful compromise between the demands of the body and the soul. His intended effect was to embody the spiritual; his actual effect was all too often sensual, with soul only a vague idea lost amid erotic images. More generally, according to Cooper, Rossetti tried to embrace both sides of every conflict and fell short because emotionalism usually triumphed.  

Casting body and soul in slightly different terms, Stephen Spector's essay "Love, Unity and Desire in the Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti" sees the poet's attempt in The House of Life as fundamentally an effort to bridge the gap between subjective and objective worlds through love. Spector finds Rossetti's lack of success in this imaginative venture attributable to his exclusive consciousness of self or his inability to make the journey back from the external world. He claims that Rossetti begins with the idea of a fragmented world and an absent God and posits two modes of existence—earthly and transcendent. The transcendent mode is

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11 Cooper, p. 248.

12 Cooper, p. 250.
achieved by bringing subjective and objective worlds into alignment, and Rossetti believed this could be accomplished by establishing an intimate relationship with woman. However, love did not validate, as Rossetti hoped, the external world because the beloved never really enters into the poet's consciousness, but exists as a beautiful object. Thus the desire for unity eventually becomes a desire for death as the poet finds himself a prisoner of his own consciousness.13

This same problem is seen as a result of the decadent consciousness by Barbara Charlesworth in *Dark Passages: The Decadent Consciousness in Victorian Literature*, who says this mode of consciousness, in principle, does not allow an escape from self. She siezes upon the term "infinite moment" from Browning criticism, identifying it as an essential concept in relation to *The House of Life*. By this phrase Charlesworth means a single instant of time, a sort of all-embracing "now" that is grasped by the consciousness. These moments are apprehended chiefly in pursuit of love, but in the end prove elusive or unfulfilling. Rossetti, it seems, could not link his consciousness to this timeless instant because he came to recognize it as

only a fleeting segment of experience, and because even when apprehended such moments only provided a deeper awareness of self. 14  

Almost identical in theory but different in conclusion is J. L. Kendall's "The Concept of the Infinite Moment in The House of Life," which explains the sonnets in terms of Rossetti's preoccupation with time. Concentrating on the sonnets of the first section, Kendall sees a conflict between love and time which are at odds to preserve the infinite moment. 15

Where Kendall parts company with all of the previously mentioned critics is in the way he views the conflict of love and time, agents of the eternal and temporal. This conflict, according to Kendall, creates a tension in the sonnets which acts as a unifying force. Most of the criticism on The House of Life supports the theory of fragmentation, the idea that the opposing claims of body and soul, or flesh and spirit are never fully integrated. There is, however, advocacy for the theory of unification as Kendall's essay shows. Another example of this view is presented by Jerome Buckley in The Victorian Temper. He asserts that Rossetti pursued an ideal love that would pierce through the physical to


the infinite. Accordingly, Buckley puts Rossetti's *House of Life* in the metaphysical tradition of poetry and compares Rossetti to Donne. In *The House of Life*, Buckley says, we find the physical world penetrated by the spiritual, and the sensuous lifted to a new plain of existence. Rossetti related particular experiences to a larger unity in his quest for universal values.\(^{16}\)

Another proponent of unity, C. M. Bowra, emphasizes Rossetti's pursuit of beauty through love, as the central impulse of the poems. Rossetti is misread, in Bowra's view, if we fail to recognize that *The House of Life* constitutes an imaginary world, the product of a myth-making power with affinities to the Romantic tradition. Further, Bowra notes that Rossetti undertook a formidable task when he tried to define the nature of spirituality; yet Bowra gives Rossetti good marks for his effort.\(^{17}\)

At this juncture two important points need to be made. Though there is diversity in terms of approach and emphasis in the criticism we have been reviewing, there is a shared assumption concerning what *The House of Life* is about. Stated briefly it goes something like

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this: the poet of The House of Life attempts to unify the worlds of flesh and spirit or the temporal and the eternal through his love for a beautiful woman. There are a number of formulations of this theme, and all kinds of parallels can be drawn between Rossetti's work and the work of a wide variety of poets, from Dante to the Romantics, but the essential nature of this proposition remains fairly consistent. The only real disagreement comes in deciding whether or not the fusion Rossetti attempted is successful. However, The House of Life consists of two major divisions: Part I, "Youth and Change," and Part II, "Change and Fate." Part I concerns itself chiefly with love, while Part II is made up of sonnets on a wider variety of subjects.

Now it is readily apparent that the analyses of The House of Life surveyed, (which represent the vast majority of writings on Rossetti) treat the pursuit of love as the single pervasive theme operating in the poems, though they may include a discussion of time or beauty. To borrow a term from logic, this constitutes the fallacy of composition, which is based on the idea that what is true of one part is true of the whole. This simply does not turn out to be the case, though it is difficult to imagine why Part II of the poems has been largely ignored. Perhaps this preoccupation with
the poet-woman theme is an outgrowth of the interest in the biographical implications for Rossetti's work or the popular belief in Rossetti's obsession with woman. Whatever the reasons, the point remains that The House of Life involves considerably more than the pursuit of an ideal love which unifies experience. What is needed is a more comprehensive view of the sonnets, one which would take into account the matter of Part II as well as Part I by giving careful consideration to both sections.

The other point to be made also involves a neglect on the part of most Rossetti scholars: the absence of comment in regard to the structure of The House of Life. There is an implied theory of form that may be constructed from the frequent referrals to ideas of pursuit or search and, in general, the idealized conception of woman. These ideas usually bring to mind the romance form and more specifically the quest, which in this case would be conceived of in purely psychological terms; that is, a quest which takes place essentially in the mind of the poet. However, since this theory is only implied and not stated, its particulars remain to be worked out in some detail. The point remains that there is very little criticism concerning structure. The argument about unity in The House of Life is really
an argument about conception versus execution, or idea and image, or conflicting ideas and whether or not any cohesive fusion of elements is achieved.

Some criticism does exist which touches both of the points mentioned above. The monumental work of Paul F. Baum in this regard stands out as a conspicuous example. In 1928 Baum published an edition of the sonnets prefaced by a lengthy introduction and with interpretive remarks following each poem. This introduction has become one of the most significant single pieces of criticism yet produced concerning The House of Life. Besides extended remarks on Rossetti's method of composition, a discussion of "fleshliness" and "mysticism," and a note on autobiography, Baum devotes a good deal of space to a consideration of the unity and diversity of structure and meaning in The House of Life. He begins with the proposition that "Rossetti often disguised his meaning under a cloud of gorgeous phrasing. Yet the meaning is there, if one choose to disengage it."

Moreover, Baum asserts that Rossetti believed the essence of life to be in some sense the essence of love.

He then sets forth an explanation of the form and

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18Baum, p. 3.
content of the sonnets, segregating those "sonnets which do not clearly fall in with the two subtitles"\(^{19}\) of The House of Life, "Youth and Change" and "Change and Fate." This amounts to about one-tenth of the sonnets. The remaining sonnets are treated pretty much separately as they occur in the individual sections of the sonnets. Part I is dominated by the theme of love, but contains one other motif, the poet's insomnia and remorse. Baum later refers to the Despair-Hope-Love motif of the initial section of poems, and further on he talks about the motifs of love, despair and death. Part II of The House of Life supposedly embodies "the Manysidedness of Life,"\(^{20}\) and traces how Change expands ominously in Fate. This, he explains, involves the dark moods in which the poet remembers the love he lost and speculates on various aspects of life—its beauty and sorrow. In conclusion Baum states "There can be no doubt...that with proper allowance for rhythmic alterations of feeling and idea, the tone of Part II is as genuinely unified as one could expect in a sonnet sequence."\(^{21}\)

\(^{19}\)Baum, p. 38.

\(^{20}\)Baum, p. 39.

\(^{21}\)Baum, p. 41.
Yet, however unified the tone of Part II or the motif structured Part I, Baum says the sonnet collection as a whole has little formal unity. Elsewhere in this introduction he had asserted that "we have only a series of sonnets divided into two parts, without a distinct or emphatic principle of grouping."22 Thus, Baum's treatment of the sonnets' structure is in the end unsatisfactory. Claiming The House of Life is not a sequence but "no more than series; perhaps even less,"23 this critic then sets out to show the unity of the poems only after omitting ten poems in the process. It is a rather confusing argument at best and refutes itself in several places. To add to these difficulties, Baum wants to deal with the poems in a formal sense while at the same time complaining of the biographical obscurity of many poems, especially in Part I.

Two other significant articles on the structure of The House of Life are by Douglas J. Robillard and Houston A. Baker, Jr. Robillard's essay "Rossetti's 'Willowwood Sonnets' and the Structure of The House of Life" explores the idea that the structure of the entire sequence is exemplified in the structure of the

22 Baum, p. 37.
23 Baum, p. 36.
"Willowwood Sonnets," a group of four poems in Part I. Citing the movement of loss to despair and a vision of the departed woman, the article posits a similar form for The House of Life. The basic difficulty with this reading is that it is based on 1869 and 1870 editions of the sonnets which contain only about half of the completed number of poems in the 1881 version. "The Poet's Progress" gives an account of structure which is indeed unique in Rossetti criticism. Baker hypothesizes a unified form for the sequence, based on a progression from a personal to an impersonal vision of life, from narrow sensuous ideals to broad ones. This argument is perhaps the most persuasive one in terms of making a case for the idea of unity in The House of Life. However, its conclusions do not seem to really fit the evidence of the poems. Baker's theory about the structure of The House of Life bears an analogy to the bildungsroman in which the hero is usually followed through a series of adventures from youth to maturity, or in other words from innocence to experience. Of course, this is a rather crude analogy; however,


both the view of structure advanced by Baker and the apprenticeship novel observe a sense of continuity. "The Poet's Progress" argues for an interpretation of **The House of Life** as a poem which presents the journey of the poet in a more or less continuous line of development from a naive, personal view of the world to a mature, objective one. This theory does not seem to accurately describe the form of the sonnets, though it does attempt to include Part I and Part II in its account.

The explanation of structure to be offered in detail in the following chapters utilizes many of the insights provided by the critical tradition of Rossetti's **The House of Life**. The previous readings of many individual poems seem to be essentially correct and are so acknowledged in the proper context. Thus, particular elements of the total design which have been identified by preceding examinations play a significant part in this study. The contribution made, then, is one of further elucidating the organizing principles of Part I and Part II. These patterns have gone unnoticed by commentators on **The House of Life** who have, with few exceptions, regarded the collection as rather formless. It is the contention of this study that Rossetti's revisions and careful arrangement of the poems for publication result in a unified structure which is made
up of two distinct though related visions of human experience. Part I is governed by the "Eros vision," to borrow a term from Northrop Frye. The Eros vision, as Frye explains it, involves "everything that inspires and ennobles man" 26 and "helps him ascend from the world of his fallen nature to something nearer his original home, traditionally the Earthly Paradise." 27 Frye also explains the meaning of the term "Eros vision" as based on the fact that "some form of human love almost invariably prompts it." 28 This vision is present in the work of the Provencal love poets, as well as later in the writings of Petrarch and Dante. Yet, whereas the central convention in these works and many sonnet sequences in English literature has to do with unrequited love, The House of Life begins with a vision of love attained. If we conceive of human experience as a cycle with fulfillment of desire at the top and despair or frustration at the bottom, then Rossetti's sonnet sequence opens with the lovers at the summit of experience, already restored to the Earthly Paradise. The themes that make up this picture include the definition of

27 Frye, p. 258.
28 Frye, p. 257.
love, the aspects and power of love, and praise of woman. This world then collapses with the loss of the beloved and the poet falls into the realm of despair in which he laments his fate and contemplates death. In the end we have a sense of resolution as the poet accepts his position and finds consolation. Thus, the progress of the poet in Part I of The House of Life takes a downward direction, or to use our previous metaphor, describes an arc which starts at the top of the cycle and curves toward the bottom.

Part II, by contrast, is governed by what shall be called the "Existential vision," that is, a vision embodying the poet's attempt to validate his existence through choosing the proper course of action. This may be thought of psychologically as a process of sublimation or in poetic terms as an effort to recover some form of Paradise. In this section the structure observes a kind of movement, though not in an unbroken linear direction that we find in Part I. Instead we find a series of poems that deal with alternatives to the Eros vision, the principal one being artistic creation itself. In addition, a number of poems are meditations on the nature of the world of experience the poet inhabits after his loss of the Eros vision. The movement eventually becomes a further sinking into despair until the poet
once again envisions death. However the poems of despondency are punctuated by moments of hope or some positive expression of being, even at the very end in the period of deepest despair. Part II then traces the poet's existence through the ordinary world of time and frustrated desire and eventually brings him close to destruction.

It is interesting to note how the structure of both Part I and Part II consists of clusters of poems, each on a related theme; these clusters then fit together to form a configuration or structure. The common thrust of the two major divisions of The House of Life is the poet's attempt to unify his experience by realizing a fulfilling vision of the world where the opposites of experience are reconciled. The specifics of this attempt as it is recorded in the two visions of The House of Life is the subject of the following chapters.
THE KEY TO THE GARDEN

Part I, "Youth and Change," treats a number of themes, many of which are adumbrated in the introductory sonnet of the sequence; in this respect, the poem serves as a gloss on the sonnets which follow. Consisting of paired opposites, the poem introduces us to the realms of being with which the series deals. The opposites are embodied in the images "lustral rite or dire portent" (1. 4), "in ivory or in ebony" (1. 6), and "dower in Love's high retinue" (1. 12) and "the dark wharf's cavernous breath" (1. 13). These images convey an awareness of two extremes of human experience; on the one hand is the realm of Love's dower which is associated with light and celebration, and on the other hand, in diametric opposition, is the realm of Death associated with darkness and suffering. Spatially, Love's kingdom is projected upwards, while Death's is downwards. With the creation of these extremities, the poem sets the imaginative limits inside of which the action of Rossetti's The House of Life takes place.

Such an arrangement is largely in keeping with traditional imaginative concepts of the structure of human experience which is generally conceived of as a cycle. The top half of the cycle is usually identified

29 Frye, p. 257.
as the world of innocence with God just above the very summit, a realm of human fulfillment and completion. The bottom half makes up the world of experience, where desire is frustrated, with death or Satan below the lower limit of human experience. Rather than introducing the reader to some occult system of thought, the first sonnet prepares us for a traditional framework, with some modifications, one which opens to us with a little patience and effort. Rossetti's chief modification in the conventional structure of human existence lies in his treatment of the top half of the cycle. The world of innocence, symbolized by the Earthly Paradise or the Garden of Eden, is not presided over by God in Part I of *The House of Life.*

Instead, Rossetti makes Love the ruler over the world of innocence as the first nine sonnets of Part I establish. "Love Enthroned," the first in this cluster of poems, reveals Rossetti's poetic ontology. All of the objects of human desire are considered, including Truth, Fame, Youth and Life, along with corresponding objects, Past and Oblivion. The poet concludes that "Love's throne was not with these; but far above/All passionate word of welcome and farewell" (ll. 9-10), the others being lower in a hierarchical sense. With the position of Love established, its origin becomes
the subject of "Bridal Birth." Graham Hough acknowledges that "Rossetti develops a mythology and a whole mystique of love."\(^{30}\) This second sonnet begins the development of Rossetti's mythology. The octave contains the birth of Love from the womb of the beloved; the sestet, paradoxically, shows the lovers as later to "Be born his children" (l. 13). This doctrine, as Hough points out, of *figlia del suo figlio* associates the woman with the Blessed Virgin.\(^{31}\) Following this analogy through, we should expect Love (identified as masculine) to be associated with the Christ archetype, as indeed he is by the accompanying images of "dawn," "spring" and "light." Love also prepares a couch for the bodiless souls of the lovers, which implies that Love himself exists in some region outside the time and space of the human world.\(^{32}\) Interwoven with this basically Christian symbolism there is a hint of Classical mythology in the reference to Love's "wings" in the beginning of the sestet. This image is clearly related to the figure of Eros, thereby equating the figure of Eros with Christ. Conceptually then, Love or Eros occupies the role of

\(^{30}\)Hough, P. 79.

\(^{31}\)Hough, p. 79.

\(^{32}\)Soenstrom also points out that the personification of Love expresses the poet's belief in a love that extends beyond the senses. See p. 144.
Christ in Part I.

"Love's Testament" confirms the function of Love as it is ministered through woman. The beloved presents to the poet her heart, metaphorically described as Love's testament "clothed with his fire" (l. 3), and other Christian overtones may be seen in the image of Love's "sanctuary" (l. 5). The role of woman as emissary of Love is presented in the sestet in which woman descends "the deep stair...to the dim shoal/And weary water of the place sighs/And there does work deliverance" (ll. 11-13).33 Love has the power of redemption, or the power to lift the poet from a place of suffering and darkness into the light through its agent woman. Basically the same idea informs "Lovesight" with a slight shift in emphasis. Here woman's function in the redemption of the poet is made more explicit. Without woman, there can be no ascension, at least not in terms of the Eros vision. Imagining himself without the beloved, the poet has a vision of "Life's darkening slope," "the perished leaves of Hope," and "the wind of Death's imperishable wing" (ll. 12-14). Love is made known through the beloved, who in this poem is linked to water, specifically a spring, which traditionally

33 Hough reads this passage as an analogue of Christ's harrowing of hell; however Eros seems closer than the woman to the Christ archetype. See p. 79.
symbolizes revitalization.

"Heart's Hope" finds the poet trying to fathom the "difficult deeps of Love" (l. 2) and the experience of participating in Love. Under its influence the poet says to his mistress, "Thou soul I know not from thy body, nor/Thee from myself, neither our Love from God" (ll. 7-8). Love, then, has a unifying power, fusing flesh and spirit, man and woman and takes on an identification with the deity. As a poet, the speaker hopes to embody this experience in art or "Song." He demonstrates the quality which no real poet can be without: the desire to communicate his experience through the "word's power" in a song "tender as dawn's first hill-fire, and intense/As instantaneous penetrating sense" (ll. 13-14). Again we encounter the images of dawn and spring as they are associated with Love. In addition, this poem brings us almost into alignment with the point of apocalypse, that is, the point at the top of the world of innocence where it touches the timeless world of eternity, traditionally heaven, the place of the presence of God. In the cosmos of "Youth and Change," heaven is inhabited by Eros. Miyoshi has complained about the vagueness of imagery in this sonnet, a view not supported by a careful reading.34

34Miyoshi, p. 254.
Transforming as well as redeeming, Love works a metamorphosis on the poet and his beloved in "The Kiss." The octave contains a portrait of the beloved who seems to elude the forces of change and death. The sestet details a similar process at work on the poet, who becomes successively child, man, spirit and god. Fire, conventionally a purifying agent, becomes the blood of the lovers as they are absorbed into the upper world of innocence or fulfilled desire, beneath the deity. Still conscious of himself as poet, the speaker likens himself to Orpheus, which is in perfect keeping with the Song imagery of the preceding poem. This reference compares the "interlude" of the beloved's kiss to one which "Orpheus longed for when he woed/The half-drawn hungering face with that last lay" (ll. 7-8). The kiss, then, has the power to overcome the forces of darkness. Actually the roles are reversed in this analogy. The beloved, like Orpheus, has a special gift to confer, while the poet, as Euridice, is the recipient. In this regard, the poet seems to play a passive part to the woman's active role in the experience of love.

Sonnet VI, "Supreme Surrender" is essentially a celebration of Love and woman as something attained. This is the first of the sleep or dream sonnets in The House of Life, most of which have to do with the poet's
unconscious fears and hopes. In this case, the beloved lies in the "harvest field of sleep" (l. 7), while the poet muses on past, present and future. The past is looked on as a time of frustrated longing and pain; the present is just the opposite, a time of bliss and warmth. Yet there is a disconcerting note struck in the final three lines of the octave which deal with the future. The poet sees the possibility of a time "when Fate’s control doth from Love’s harvest reap/The sacred hour for which the years did sigh" (ll. 7-8). Thus Love is pitted against Fate, though the nature of Fate is not fully explored until much later in Part II. Its obtrusion here makes the point that the power of Eros is not absolute or permanent, that Love can be lost as well as won. The other significant inference in this passage concerns the "sacred hour" image in the octave (l. 7). Time is not abolished in the realm of Earthly Paradise; it exists but in an elongated form, as further reference will make clear.

Love is identified with the classical figure of Eros as we mentioned. "Love’s Lovers" substantiates this identification with images of Love’s "gold-tipped darts" (l. 2) and "blindfold sight" (l. 6). The poet wants to claim that whereas other women are infatuated with the trappings of Love or its superficial qualities,
his beloved is connected with the innermost "heart of Love" (l. 9) and in return she receives Eros' kiss of immortality. In this context, the poet probably suggests the idea of the assumption, though this is only an implication. It is interesting to note the picture of Paradise created by the phrase "bower of unimagined flower and tree" (l. 11). We should expect the rose and the tree of life to be hinted at in this phrase, but these are conceivable instead of "unimagined" (l. 11). Perhaps Rossetti was searching for an image outside of conventional symbolism and failed. In any event he recovers himself in "Passion and Worship," which returns us to more familiar ground.

Here we find Eros in his major aspects of passion and worship or constancy. Two winged creatures appear to the lovers, each described as distinctly different from the other. The first is "flame-winged" (l. 1), plays a hautboy, and is associated with the sunlit sea. 35 The other, by contrast, is "white-winged" (l. 1), plays a harp, and is associated with a place "where wan water trembles in the grove/And the wan moon is all the light thereof" (ll. 12-13). Eros, then, is composed of paired opposites, but manages to contain both as befits

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35 The "flame-winged" image recalls a similar figure in Dante's Vita Nuova, according to Hough. See p. 79.
a being above human limitation, the lovers under his influence are able to experience both the tumults of passion and the quiet of constancy or devotion.

Graham Hough complains that Rossetti's mythology of Love was created with no clear purpose in mind. His chief objection to Rossetti's method is the poet's use of religious imagery.36 If we stand back from the first ten sonnets of Part I, we can see a definite purpose emerging. These poems define a schemata of human experience which is the Eros vision of the poet. The configuration created has much in common with the Biblical model of the cosmos, but more generally with a tradition that includes Biblical and classical structures. Instead of God, Rossetti posits Eros or Love as the sovereign ruler over the human world. Through the agency of his beloved the poet is able to ascend from a lower human world to a higher one, and this is an accomplished feat in the opening poems of "Youth and Change"; that is, the act of redemption or transformation has for the most part already taken place. In the conventional sonnet sequence, union is never at hand, but is something to be sought or projected as wish fulfillment in the future. However, Rossetti does not introduce us to a

36 Hough, p. 79.
poet pining away with unrequited love. He plunges us into the world of attainment and shows us its consequences.

The next group of poems (about twenty-four in all) further explores the theme of love attained with the emphasis shifted from the figure of Eros to that of the Garden itself and the lovers. Actually several themes are interwoven into this section but basically all of them are about the relationship of poet to woman as they exist in the Earthly Paradise. The imagery of these poems tends to become more sensuous, or oriented more towards the physical aspects of love and woman. This should not surprise us since the poet is dealing more with creatures from the human order, rather than from the divine as in the previous poems. The first two poems of this group demonstrate the changes and prepare the way for the new emphasis on the lovers and especially the poet's perception of woman.

In "The Portrait," the artist-speaker is a painter, as opposed to the singer in preceding sonnets. Following the conventional idea that art preserves the beloved for posterity, the poet enumerates the physical virtues of the beloved. The portrait that emerges is one familiar to admirers of Pre-Raphaelite painting. Among the features alluded to are "the enthroning throat"
and "the shadowed eyes" (1. 11) which are standard fare in the pictures done by Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and others. The speaker wants to claim that his portrait is intended to capture "The very sky and sea-line of her soul" (1. 8). Apparently, the "inner self" (1. 4) of the beloved is mirrored in her features, and the imagery is here largely concerned with sensuous details of the woman.37

Reinforcing these images, "The Love Letter" presents more description of the flesh and blood nature of woman. In this poem, the poet examines a love letter from his mistress and proceeds to imagine her as she wrote it. Again we find an avowal of interest in her soul as it is embodied in the letter: "let thy silent song disclose to me/That soul" (ll. 7-8). However, just as important as mentionings of soul are images of hair, eyes, and lips. Shadows are a recurring figure in Rossetti's depiction of woman as both the last poem, "The Portrait," and "The Love Letter" contain shadow images, suggesting an aura of mystery about the woman and maintaining a distance between the poet and his mistress. The most repeated image in "The Love Letter" is the image of breast, occurring three times within

37Miyoshi says this poem is one of the few to achieve a unity of man and woman. See pp. 256-7.
the space of two lines. Thus, woman becomes a warm-blooded, earthly creature in this and the preceding poem. Rossetti is ever mindful of maintaining a consciousness of her spirit or soul (which are interchangeable terms), but the thrust of the poems is directed at establishing woman as human, thereby distinguishing her from Eros, who is divine.

As we said earlier this section of poems, X-XXXIV, is composed of a number of interlocking themes. We will proceed to examine them as they occur, one at a time. In order to do so, it is necessary to jump about in the numerical ordering of the sonnets since it is rare to find a particular theme dealt with in a string of consecutive poems. Rather, we find one to three poems treating basically the same idea, then later the idea recurs. Altogether they form commentaries on the more general theme of love attained between poet and mistress or Paradise gained.

The largest group of poems deals specifically with the union of man and woman through love. Sonnets XII, XIII and XIV are poems which constitute a trilogy on union. "Youth's Antiphony" (XIII) is a dialogue of poet and mistress in which the lovers argue about whose love is strongest, "till kisses claim their turn" (l. 8). Love is conceived of as a transport, carrying the lovers
to a place "remote from the world's throng" (1. 11) of "work, contest, fame" (1. 12). These phenomena are seen as activities of the mundane side of experience. From a world dominated by meaningless conflict, the poet and his lady escape to an erotic domain of "sighs and silences" (1. 13) where "two blend souls" (1. 14) make one song. The other two poems of the trilogy are based on seasonal imagery. "Youth's Spring Tribute" revolves around spring and "The Lovers' Walk" around summer. The former is set in the moment of love's onset or the moment when the poet hears the call of love. References to "newborn woodflowers" (1. 3), "blackthorn blossom" (1. 7) and "April's sun" (1. 9) are linked with the moment when the poet's kiss is implanted on the "warm throat" and "warm lips" (1. 12) of his mistress. In terms of the Eros vision, this is the moment of ascent. "The Lovers' Walk" shows the lovers after the sacrament of physical union is taken. Stillness, light and cloud are the chief metaphors of the poem which is set in June. Symbolizing the union of lovers to each other and in turn to Love, the final two lines of the sonnet make an interesting analogy: "As the cloud-foaming firmamental blue/Rests on the blue line of a foamless

38 Bowra, p. 257.
sea" (ll. 13-14). The equation of Love with sea echoes the imagery of Eros' "difficult deeps" in "Heart's Hope" (V), and suggests life-giving ability as well as enormity and power.

As a parallel of spring and summer, Sonnets XIX and XXVI use the solar metaphors of dawn and noon. "Mid-Rapture" puts forth the idea that the eyes of woman continue to "shed very dawn" (l. 4), and the poet eventually is "light-circled in a heaven of deep-drawn rays" (l. 12).39 "Silent Noon," like its counterpart, "The Lovers' Walk," contains images of cloud and sky.40 In addition, corresponding to stillness we find "visible silence" (l. 8). We noticed that time is not absent in Earthly Paradise but is elongated. The idea occurs in this context in which the silence is "still as the hour-glass" (l. 8). The stillness of an hour-glass is more apparent than real, for it is continuously, if slowly, moving. The union of the lovers is encompassed by an "inarticulate hour" (l. 13); that is, it is limited by time, but time seems to move at a curiously slow pace. Paradixically, in this inarticulate hour the poet hears the song of Love, which repeats the sense

39 Soenstrom also calls attention to how the poet sees himself in the beloved. Consult p. 128.

40 Bowra calls this poem a moment of flawless peace. See p. 257.
in "Youth's Antiphony". (XIII) of silence creating music.

The two remaining poems of this set recapitulate the matter of the previous poems in image and idea. "Soul-Light" (XXVIII) contains a variety of light images, ranging from the fire of Love's "inmost ark" (1. 8) through dawn and noon and even "startide," (1. 10). All of these are symbols of "the changeful light of infinite love" (1. 14). Eros is eternal but his blessings are administered by woman, who brings them into the temporal realm. Baum says this poem illustrates that the spiritual is known through the physical.\(^1\) The admission that human love is subject to change seems a throw-away line at this point; a little later the implications become more sinister. "A Day of Love" (XVI) considers the union of lovers in retrospect. The places where the beloved usually is found are scornful of the spot the lovers now inhabit. Fire occurs again as it lights the "love-lines of her mouth" (1. 10), and Eros' connection with woman is further suggested in the phrase "the words take wing" (1. 11). Eros himself is present as we learn:

\[\text{...Love's spell}\\ \text{From his predominant presence doth compel}\\ \text{All alien hours, an outworn populace,}\]

\(^{41}\text{Baum, p. 24.}\)
The hours of Love fill full the echoing space
With sweet confederate music favorable. (ll. 4-8)

The theme of union then is possessed of a definite
structure of imagery in The House of Life. This essentially turns out to be a vision of Earthly Paradise, which is created in its particulars actually for the first time and generally symbolized by "bower" or "grove." Basically the Earthly Paradise is a realm of warmth and light, a world associated with spring or summer in which the poet hears the strains of silent song. In shifting from the eternal place of Eros, the poet must place both his mistress and himself in time, though the nature of time has been altered. Far from confused, this picture of the upper human world is on the whole cohesive and intelligible.

Closely related to the theme of union is the theme of woman's indispensible role in the poet's happiness. Sonnet XX, "Gracious Moonlight" compares the poet's mistress to the moon, an analogy we will meet later in another connection. In the previous group of poems the Earthly Paradise was drawn; in this poem we learn more about the importance of woman. "Even as the moon grows queenlier in mid-space/When the sky darkens" (ll. 1-2), so the woman is more precious "When the drear soul desires thee" (l. 5). Moreover the face of his beloved "Gathers and garners from all things that are/
Their silent penetrative loveliness" (ll. 7-8). In short, she sums up the spiritual beauty of nature. To return to the therapeutic nature of woman, we notice in the final line of the sonnet how she has the power to chase "the spirit's grief" (l. 14) in the same way the moon chases night's gloom.

The sanctifying power of woman is the subject of Sonnet XXIII, "Love's Baubles," and she is differentiated from other women. Eros appears in this sonnet bearing armfuls of flowers and fruit, images which do not suggest a clear interpretation, although they probably symbolize sexual matters. Ladies gather round the figure of Eros, take his gifts and give them to the poet. Now the poet's response to the gifts of sex are the key to this poem. He tells us "from one hand the petal and core/Savored of sleep" (ll. 5-6) and "from another like shame's salute" (l. 7). In the sestet the poet's lady offers the same thing, but the gifts are suddenly transformed under the lady's hand so that "at her touch they shone/With in-most heaven-hue of the heart of flame" (ll. 11-12). Love then offers a gloss on this scene by saying that "Follies of love are love's true ministers" (l. 14) when the hand is hers. Whereas the poet feels only guilt or lethargy in the former case, he is practically given a sacrament in the latter. The
difference is accounted for by his mistress who is somehow in touch with the true spirit of Eros.

Sonnets XXVII and XXXII extend the power and meaning of the lady. "Heart's Compass" is addressed to her and begins on an auspicious note: "Sometimes thou seem'st not as thyself alone,/But as the meaning of all things that are" (11. 1-2). She becomes almost totally identified with Eros in the beginning line of the sestet: "is not thy name Love?" (1. 9). Eros acts through woman, as she must embody his will, but the two do remain separate and distinct. By his hand she is empowered to rend apart "all gathering clouds" (1. 11). Since the poet receives Eros' blessing through his mistress, it is natural to suppose that Love and woman become very closely allied. Thus she seems "oracular" (1. 7) of the furthest fires of the soul, and by contacting woman, who is the intermediary of Eros, the poet can contact the infinite. "Equal Troth" has basically the same content. The sonnet portrays the lady as a figure in whom "All beauties and all mysteries" (1. 8) are interwoven. Before she appears the poet is "graceless, joyless, lacking absolutely/All gifts" (11. 3-4). However, the mistress does not have this power at her exclusive prerogative. She administers these gifts "by Love's decree" (1. 7), the point being that
though the poet's mistress is essential in transforming his existence, she depends on the sanction of the divine world of Eros. As Soenstrom has put it, the lady is the source of vision and the poet's love for her the means to vision. 42 There is then a kind of chain through which the poet is redeemed from the world of grief and struggle. It starts with Eros and extends through woman to the poet, and each link is essential to the process. The first section of "Youth and Change" (I-IX) makes the importance of Eros clear and these poems, Sonnets XX, XXIII, XXVIII, and XXXII, stress the role of the poet's beloved.

We have come upon the idea of beauty in a few sonnets previously, and there are four poems which deal with the theme extensively. Sonnet XX, it will be remembered, employed the comparison of mistress and moon. This figure is used later in "The Moonstar" (XXIX) in a slightly different manner. As a moonstar can eclipse the moon's beauty, so the lady glorifies the moon by her loveliness. The beloved all through the poems has been associated with light imagery. In this case the luminous beauty of woman drowns the rays of the moon. Thus she is superior to the traditional symbol of beauty--Diana. Further, the poet's mistress exceeds the beauty

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42 Soenstrom, p. 142.
of the ordinary physical world as "Beauty's Pageant" shows. In the words of the octave:

What dawn-pulse at the heart of heaven, or last
Incarnate flower of culminating day,
What marshalled marvels on the skirts of May,
Or song full-quired, sweet June's encomiast;
What glory of change by nature's hand amass'd
Can vie with all those moods of varying grace?

(11. 1-6)

She is the emissary of Eros, wearing his "very vesture
and elect disguise" (1. 9) and partaking of his majesty.
The poet ends his panegyric with the familiar pity for
those "that read these words and saw her not" (1. 14).

The closest analogy to the woman's beauty can be
found in Venus in "Venus Victrix." Summoning up the
classical figures of Juno and Pallas, the poet finds
these immortals inferior to the claims of Venus who
claims the prize for beauty. Again we encounter the
metaphor of sea for Eros over which hovers Venus' smile.
It is interesting to notice that Love's power is ren­
dered as a "tumultous trance" (1. 6), restating his
ability to unite opposites, but of more importance is
the image of Venus' voice, which is likened to "the
last wave murmering there" (1. 9). This image connects
Venus to Eros; following other analogies Venus becomes
a figure that reminds us of the beloved, also noted for
her beauty and association with Eros. Venus Victrix is
not only judged most beautiful, but as her name suggests
she captures the poet's heart and mind as well as his imagination, just as the lady has done.

The final poem in this group concerning beauty is "Genius in Beauty," and in it the poet compares his lady with the creations of Homer and Dante and with the personifications of Spring and Summer. She is the equal of all these; even her shadow breathes a "love spell" from "its shadowed contour on the wall" (l. 9). Also there is an air of mystery surrounding her "sovereign face," which is portrayed as "musical" (l. 4), repeating a form of imagery we have met elsewhere. This occurs again in the lines:

As many men are poets in their youth,
   But for one sweet-strung soul the wires prolong
   Even through all change the indomitable song; ...
   (11. 10-12)

That is, men who are touched by the beauty of someone like the poet's beloved (if there is anyone like her) are transformed into creators and capture a vision of woman which is preserved against the destruction of change. So too this poet is creating a portrait of woman that she may be protected from the "envenomed years,/Whose tooth...Upon this beauty's power shall wreak no wrong" (11. 12-14). "Beauty like hers is genius" (l. 1), but it requires the imaginative gift of the poet to preserve it for us. The lady for all her loveliness is like the poet, mortal. Baum does not feel that this poem fits
into Part I; yet it seems obvious obvious to see it as part of the theme of beauty in "Youth and Change." 43

The idea of beauty as Rossetti presents it has some overtones of Platonism. Implied in the relationship between lady and Eros is her special knowledge of Eros which enables her to offer gifts of a unique quality. She seems to participate somehow in the essence of Love, or, to cast it in Platonic terms, the beloved appears to know the ideal Form of Love. This would account for the extraordinary way in which "The follies of Love" become "Love's true ministers" at her touch. There is also other evidence suggesting Platonic or perhaps Neo-Platonic elements in "Youth and Change" in The House of Life. In Sonnet XV, "The Birth-Bond," the poet posits a transcendent mode of existence. 44 The central theme rests on the Platonic idea of love, to the effect that lovers are the severed halves of a single soul; this single soul is an antecedent to the lovers in eternity and is reunited by the fusion of the lovers. In the poem the poet uses the metaphor of two children nursed "on the forgotten breast and knee" (l. 14). These children will be "In act and thought of one goodwill" (l. 6) and will have "in silent

43Baum, p. 38.
44Spector, p. 442.
speech./And in a word complete community" (ll. 7-8).
The sestet applies the analogy to the lovers in the poet's apostrophe to woman:

O born with me somewhere that men forget,
And though in years of sight and sound unmet
Known for my soul's birth-partner well enough!
(ll. 12-14)

Clearly the poet has the idea of birth and forgetting in mind, as well as the notion of union. Though not stated directly, the implication of the imagery is that the union is accomplished through love. Notice the phrase "silent speech" (l. 7)) which echoes the love imagery of preceding poems we have considered, like the figures of "silent song" and so on. We now have an ontological explanation of why this particular woman is regarded by the poet as so special: she is recognized as the complementary part of his soul with which he reunites through the act of love.

Another way of making the same point is to see the matter in Jungian terms. Following this line of thinking, the beloved becomes the poet's anima or feminine aspect, or rather he projects this meaning onto her. Jung tells us that the anima is a collective image of woman in man's unconscious by which he understands the nature of woman. Further, the projected anima has several characteristics that are in perfect keeping with Rossetti's portrayal of woman as we have discussed it. One Jungian scholar
describes the anima figure, saying, "She is wise but not formidably so; it is rather that 'something strangely meaningful clings to her, a secret knowledge or hidden wisdom.'"\(^{45}\) This description is reminiscent of the picture of woman in whom "all mysteries" are interwoven.\(^{46}\) All of these ideas are probably connected in one way or another with woman. In short, she is the high-priestess of Eros, initiate in his mysteries and ready to bestow her knowledge and powers on the poet.\(^ {47}\)

Our discussion has explained the ability of woman and Eros to lift the poet; thus love is conceived of in positive creative terms. However, there is another aspect of love with different connotations as presented in several sonnets. "Heart's Haven" (XXII) shows love to be protective, insofar as it shelters the poet from harm. Here the poet complains of his "own spirit's hurtling harms" (l. 5); that is, he is threatened by internal rather than external forces like work, contest, and fame from Sonnet XIII. In his words he discovers:

\(^{45}\text{Frieda Fordham, An Introduction to Jung's Psychology (Baltimore, 1966), p. 52.}\)

\(^{46}\text{For a more detailed discussion of the anima figure in The House of Life see Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi's essay "The Image of the Anima in the Work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti," Victorian Newsletter, XLV (Spring, 1974), pp. 1-8.}\)

\(^{47}\text{Miyoshi points out that in the Vita Nuova the lady is also identified with divine wisdom. See p. 253.}\)
I crave the refuge of her deep embrace,—
Against all ills the fortified strong place
And sweet reserve of sovereign counter- charms.
(ll. 6-8)

Images of haven are repeated three times in these lines
—"refuge," "fortified strong place," and "reserve."
Spatially the protection is to be sought "within,"
instead of above, which adds another dimension to the
structure of things in "Youth and Change." Eros is still
above, but now he is a "light at night and shade at noon"
(l. 9). This reverses the more common associations of
Love with sun's light. Yet, it does fit the context of
the sonnet in which happiness is attained not so much
by escaping to something as escaping from it. Nonetheless,
the effect is similar to what is achieved in typical
poems on the subject as images of "song" and "roundelay"
assure us in the sestet.

"Her Gifts" (XXXI) picks up the image of a haven
in the line that speaks of the woman as a place where
"the heart takes sanctuary" (l. 10). Listed as the
last of the beloved's gifts, protection sums up the
others, at least in this particular sonnet. It seems
reasonable to assume the lady is then superior in degree
to the poet. Since her powers and knowledge are con-
ceived of as "within," she exists on a horizontal axis
with the poet, while Eros is related to both on a
vertical axis. Eros, a creature of mythological proportions, is superior in kind, not degree, to the poet and his mistress. Though "Heart's Haven" and "Her Gifts" demonstrate a slightly changed view on the nature of the relationship of poet and woman, the cosmological topography remains essentially the same.

We have been speaking of the Earthly Paradise as something attained through woman, and we have mentioned how time slows down under the influence of Eros. All of this is not to say that the Paradise once achieved is permanent. Because, poet, mistress and Paradise are still in a world of time, they are subject to change. To put it another way, although Eros is eternal, its expression in the human world is not. Three sonnets in the section of poems we have examined as embodying love attained or the Earthly Paradise deal with the theme of mutability. "Pride of Youth" details the death of an old love and the birth of a new in the octave and treats the governing principle of change in the sestet. Using flower imagery to bear the meaning, the poet says:

There is a change in every hour's recall
And the last cowslip in the fields we see
On the same day with the first corn-poppy. (ll. 9-11)

Many critics have taken the phrase "The loves that from his hand proud Youth lets fall" (l. 13) to mean the poet himself in a present tense. Casting aside one true
love, he easily finds another, the argument goes. Those who want to imagine Rossetti as an unstable and fickle man will probably accept this interpretation, but there is another. For one thing, there is a note of censure in the descriptive use of the word *proud* and in the title "Pride of Youth"; thus, the act of discarding one love for another is not condoned or applauded by the poet. Further, this poem uses an objectified persona instead of the customary "I." The poet is therefore more likely to be talking about an unhappy tendency of youth in general or himself at an earlier time. In any event the theme of change is established midway through this section (X-XXXV).

It appears again in "Last Fire" (XXX) which celebrates woman and looks toward an ominous future. The first eight lines concern themselves with a picture of the lovers enjoying the "summer eve" (1. 1) and the sun that "filled the west" (1. 3). Sunset, usually symbolizing the end or dying phase, makes the poet think of "the many days that Winter keeps in store" (1. 9), days that are "sunless throughout, or whose brief sun-glimpses/Scarce shed the heaped snow through the naked trees" (11. 9-10). Yet despite the premonition of the victory of the powers of cold and darkness, the poet is consoled with the fact "This day at least was Summer's paramour" (1. 12).
Love is attained, and its blessing conferred even if the fulfillment is only transitory.

The third poem of the three, "Winged Hours," as the title implies, speaks of unredeemed time. In this instance the poet laments his separation from woman, likening the time to "a bird/That wings from far his gradual way along/The rustling covert of my soul" (ll. 2-3). At the hour of meeting "He sings, in Love's own tongue" (l. 6); that is, time is transformed under the influence of Eros in the manner we have suggested. By contrast, the sestet treats the poet's vision of time as it would exist without woman:

What of that hour at last, when for her sake
No wing may fly to me nor song may flow;
When wandering round my life unleaved, I know
The bloodied feathers scattered in the brake,
And think how she, far from me, with like eyes
Sees through the untuneful bough the wingless skies?
(ll. 9-14)

To recapitulate at this point, we see that the union of the poet and his lady results in the capturing of a revitalized kind of existence. However, attaining the Earthly Paradise does not mean keeping it indefinitely. The attempt at ascension to a higher human world is one that must be repeated over and over again since union is threatened by separation. To possess Paradise the poet knows he must be willing to constantly strive for

48 Robillard rightly calls this sonnet a poem of foreboding. See p. 8.
it; when his hold loosens it can slip away and his realization of this at least enables the poet to deal with it.

The final poem in this set, "The Dark Glass" is a meditation on the nature of Eros and rounds out the poems on Paradise. It is surely one of the most impressive sonnets in The House of Life and deserves to be quoted in full:

Not I myself know all my love for thee:
How should I reach so far, who cannot weigh
To-morrow's dower by gage of yesterday?
Shall birth and death, and all dark names that be
As doors and windows bared to some loud sea,
Lash deaf mine ears and blind my face with spray;
And shall my sense pierce love,—the last relay
And ultimate outpost of eternity?

Lo! what am I to Love, the lord of all?
One murmuring shell he gathers from the sand,—
One little heart-flame sheltered in his hand.
Yet through thine eyes he grants me clearest call
And veriest touch of powers primordial
That any hour-girt life may understand.

The poet confesses that Eros holds the answers to problematic human existence, that it is essentially mysterious, and that he himself is infinitesimal in the total scheme of things. Rather than despair, he realizes that despite the limitations of an "hour-girt life" he is able to touch "powers primordial" through Love. It is a fitting conclusion to vision of love attained, containing the major terms of the Eros vision—Love,

woman and poet.

The controlling theme, then, of the first thirty-five sonnets of Part I of *The House of Life* is love attained. This group of poems, in turn, may be broken down into two sub-groups. The first of these, consisting of Sonnets I-IX, constitute a kind of preamble, establishing the scheme of the Eros vision in a kind of configuration which is basically archetypal, that is, a configuration which is repeated as a literary convention from Classical and Biblical material to the present. The other sub-group, poems X-XXXV, deals with a part of this cosmos, the Earthly Paradise, as it is inhabited by the lovers. As we have shown, there are a number of themes which go together to form this latter picture and liberties have been taken to demonstrate what they are by skipping about to collect them by subject. This has not been an attempt to re-order the sonnets; the order given to them by this study—Paradise itself, the role of woman, her beauty and so on—is one constructed purely for convenience. Rossetti did not arrange these sonnets in small groups by subject; if he had the result would be a mechanical structure. Mixed as they are and yet controlled by the larger theme of the lovers in Earthly Paradise, they have an organic relationship to one another.
The critic Northrop Frye is fond of saying that a poem is a structure of images with conceptual implications. Following this premise we have talked a good deal about the framework of imagery in these thirty-five poems in "Youth and Change," discovering how it creates the themes of Eros' cosmology and the lovers in Paradise which together make for the inclusive theme of love attained.\textsuperscript{50} The poet has ascended to a higher realm in these poems, having found the key to the Garden in his imaginative apprehension of Eros through woman. We now leave a world of warmth and light and music for a lower world which is the second large part of \textit{The House of Life}'s structure and the other half of the Eros vision.

\textsuperscript{50}Curiously enough Cooper reports Rossetti as having said, "I cannot at all perceive that I have a habit of using images a second time." See p. 128.
DESCENDING TO WILLOWWOOD

The first thirty-five sonnets of "Youth and Change," Part I of The House of Life, deal with the attainment of Paradise; the remaining twenty-four (Sonnets XXXVI-LIX) treat its loss as a process which occurs slowly at first, then more rapidly. The effect on the poet is fairly predictable since the Garden is the ultimate realm in human experience as far as he is concerned. His entire happiness seems to depend on the presence of woman, who makes it possible; thus, separation is the occasion for lamentation and grief, which become the dominant emotional tones in the sonnets after "The Dark Glass" (XXXV). 51 This is not to say the poet abandons the Eros vision altogether, but rather that he finds himself descending to a lower world in which human desire is unfulfilled and suffering is commonplace. Though the poet continues to hope all during his losing of Paradise, in the end he must eventually reconcile himself to his predicament.

The first sonnet in this group, "Life-in-Love," begins on a familiar note, being a panegyric to the lady. A life-giving force, "she yields...life that verifies/What else were sorrow's servant and death's

51 Gelpi agrees that there is a shift in tone and theme after Sonnet XXXV. For her discussion see pp. 4-5.
thrall" (ll. 3-4), and the poet recalls

The waste remembrance and forlorn surmise
That lived but in a dead drawn breath of sighs
O'er vanished hours and hours eventual. (ll. 6-8)

This is a vision of the unredeemed life, the life of despair and unhappiness, which is the world without woman. The poet's consolation in this moment is a "poor tress of hair" (l. 9), presumably taken from a lover now dead. The idea seems to be that the poet, realizing his dependence on his mistress for salvation, wants to believe there is some vestige of power left even in the memory of her. It will be remembered that the theme of separation exists in some sonnets previous to Sonnet XXXVI. For instance, it was encountered in "Lovesight" (IV) and "Winged Hours" (XXV), as well as "Pride of Youth" (XXIV), which were all part of the love attained section of Part I. The chief difference between these and "Life-in-Love" is the darker recognition of death as an eventuality. Now the poet wishes to think that death is overcome by memory as the phrase "Even so much life endures alone" (l. 12) indicates, but death receives a strong emphasis, his hope notwithstanding.

The next poem, "The Love-Moon" (XXXVII), suggests this same matter. Again the poet is haunted by the memory of a dead lover and looks into the face of his
lady, wondering what her fate might be:

When that dead face, borrowed in the furthest years,  
Which once was all the life years hold for thee,  
Can now scarce bid the tides of memory  
Cast on thy soul a little spray of tears,—  
How canst thou gaze into these eyes of hers  
Whom now thy heart delights in, and not see  
Within each orb Love's philtered euphrasy  
Make of them buried troth remembrancers? (ll. 1-8)

The poet's difficulty appears to be internal: he questions himself, asking whether his feelings for his lady can be so evanescent. The fact that memories of the past hardly "Cast... a little spray of tears" (l. 4) on his soul makes the poet doubt himself and reminds him of "the culminant changes" (l. 13) which are a part of experience, the most important being Death. The shift in emphasis in these two sonnets is apparent. Rather than enjoy the attainment of love, the poet concentrates on his fears of losing the world to which he and his mistress have risen as he recalls a similar experience in the past.

Robillard asserts that these two poems treat the death of the beloved of the previous sonnets and the taking of a new one. The evidence of the sonnets suggest that it is just as likely to have occurred in the past before he met the lady of the previous sonnets.52

"The Morrow's Message" is basically a premonition

52 Robillard, p. 8.
of loss in a vision of present and future, and as such it is a projection of the poet's fear. The octave contains the appearance of the ghost who is "Today," "Yesterday's son." Speaking to the poet he reveals: "Henceforth our issue is all grieved and gray" (l. 5), to which the lover responds in dejection, "Mother of many malissons/O Earth, receive me to thy dusty bed" (l. 9-10). Faced with the prospect of a loveless future, the poet would choose death instead. However, just as he begins to despair the poet hears, "Love yet bids thy lady greet thee...whereby the shadow of death is dead" (l. 12-14). In light of this sonnet, we get the distinct impression that the power of Eros, though still available, is beginning to recede from the poet. The preoccupation of his waking hours is becoming an anxiety about the future of his union with woman.

"Sleepless Dreams" (XXXIX) takes us into the world of night, a world that shares this anxiety. Essentially a portrait of mixed emotions, this sonnet exhibits the sense of self-division that is overtaking the poet. The first line is built around two contrary images, "dark growths" and "glimmering star," corresponding to the opposing feelings of the poet. What these feelings are is withheld until the seventh line of the octave; then they are revealed as "Ruth and Joy." Sleep is
"waved back" by these emotions, causing the poet to hope for a dream vision in the sestet—a vision that harkens back to previous poems: a "shadowy grove that bears/Rest for man's eyes and music for his ears" (ll. 10-11). In short, this is a recapitulation of the Earthly Paradise as identified in previous sonnets. Apparently, the poet looks on the "grove" or Garden as a solution to his troubled sleepless dreams, or rather a resolution of the internal tension of his life. However, the vision is not coming, nor is sleep. Night, to whom the entire poem is addressed, holds only "A thicket hung with masks of mockery/And watered with the wasteful warmth of tears" (ll. 13-14). The "one star" of line one has now disappeared from the scene leaving the poet nearly in darkness. This is the deepest penetration of despair reached up to this point, and it is almost unrelieved in contrast to the other sonnets which precede it. In terms of the scheme of the Eros vision the poet has not yet fully fallen into the lower world, though he is fast approaching it. In the dialectic of self, one force is still Joy.

53 Robillard refers to the mocking quality of night as the key to the poem. See p. 8.

54 Baum calls attention to the poet's guilt and remorse. Guilt, however, can only be projected onto the poem by a biographical reading. For this view see p. 28.
"Severed Selves" (XL) is another lamentation of separation. The lovers are in turn rendered as "two separate divided silences" (1. 1), "lost stars beyond dark trees" (1. 4), and "the shores wave-mocked of sundering seas" (1. 8). It is interesting to compare these figures to the already established framework of imagery. Silence has been associated with Love and Paradise in other sonnets of this series and usually linked with music or song. In this instance silence, symbolizing separation, contrasts with "loving voice" (1. 2), a sign of reunion. "Stars" (1. 4) looks back to the previous sonnet's "one star"; the metaphor for Joy now becomes more clearly identified as a metaphor for the poet's mistress, so we may reinterpret the poet's Joy as his lady. The sea has been used as a metaphor for Eros, but it was also employed in the poem "The Dark Glass" as a symbol of limitation or opposition. Thus, images of "silence" and "sea" reveal how Rossetti inverts his framework of imagery to suit his purpose.

The sestet of "Severed Selves" treats the theme of hope, which is looming larger in the sonnets as this section of Part I develops. Again it is a hope for reunion and the return of Eros:

55 Perhaps this is why Robillard has referred to Sonnet XL as a difficult poem. See p. 8.
Ah! May our hope forecast
Indeed one hour again, when on this stream
Of darkened love once more the light shall gleam
An hour how slow to come, how quickly past
(ll. 9-12)

The poet implies that love, even if attained, is transitory, that it cannot last, but "blooms and fades, and only leaves at last/Faint as shed flowers, the attenuated dream" (ll. 13-14). Eros' rule seems no more than a dream to the poet, who once celebrated its reality.

The first extended vision of death occurs in the next poem of the sequence, "Through Death to Love" (XLI). Death occupies virtually the entire octave, appearing in a series of similes: "winds that sweep the winter-bitten world" (1. 2), "night's flood-tide" (1. 4), and "hoarse-tongued fire and inarticulate sea" (1. 5). Several images--fire and sea--repeat the process of inversion of imagistic meaning just mentioned. All of these figures, however, are "wild images of Death/Shadows and shoals that edge eternity" (ll. 7-8) as perceived by both poet and mistress.

The sestet attempts to offer comfort, explaining that Death is over-ruled by "One Power," (1. 10) which is Love, or Eros. In the face of darkening visions, the poet wants to cling to the assurance of Eros' superior power in the scheme of things. Robillard believes the poem is about the blessing of hope and love.56

56 Robillard, p. 8.
The argument somehow lacks cogency because the tone of the poem seems to indicate that the poet is desperately trying to cling to the Eros vision; that is, he wants to believe in the ability of Love to redeem his life. The difficulty is revealed in his almost frantic tone which suggests that his faith is receding. Obviously we have come a long way from the spirit of confidence and exuberance of the first poems of "Youth and Change."

Hope has risen as one of the dominant themes in the last few poems, indicating a shift in interest from present to future situations. It is the subject of the next two poems "Hope Overtaken" (XLII) and "Love and Hope" (XLIII). The first expresses the poet's uncertainty about the future, though at the moment he has recaptured the Garden. He remembers the past when Hope's garments were "gray" (l. 1), but

Now the space between
Is passed at length; and garmented in green
Even as in days of yore thou standest to day.
(11. 2-4)

Hope is identified with the grove or garden of Paradise by its green garments, which is a way of saying that the desire matches attainment. This is made explicit in the phrase, "O Love and Hope the same" (l. 10). The future is another matter, for "now the sinking sun/That warmed our feet scarce gilds their hair" (11. 11-12), and the poet implores Hope to "cling round me, for the day is
"Hope Overtaken" restates the essentials of its companion poem, "Love and Hope." The past is construed as a "chill doomsday...where the blown leaves lay" (ll. 2-3). Set over against this is the present moment, when "one hour at last, the Spring's compeer,/Flutes softly to us from some green byway" (ll. 5-6). The poet is willing to accept this moment for its value, believing that the future cannot be known. Yet he can try to discern "at length the illusive eyes of Hope" (l. 14). In this context Hope is as fleeting as the time of union.

To review at this point, the first six sonnets (XXXVI-XLI) of this division relate a growing sense of crisis and questioning; the poet is temporarily in danger of being estranged from Eros and the Earthly Paradise. In the next two sonnets he apparently renews his hold on love, at least for short intervals. A special feature of all these eight poems is a change in the poet from a present to a future-oriented consciousness, a part of which is the vision of death. The poet stands on the edge of the Garden with one foot in each world, possessing neither. Though he is never completely fallen the poet has come perilously close.

Moving on to "Cloud and Wind" (XLIV), we find the poet returning to a consideration of death, asking, "Love,
should I fear death most for you or me?" (l. 1). "Love" actually means "beloved" and should not be confused with the figure of Eros. The poem is based on two questions that grow out of the initial one: what happens if the lady dies first, and what happens if the poet does? In doubt is whether the lovers will be reunited in eternity, and the poet turns out to be very skeptical. More likely than reunion is the prospect of "unsunned gyres of waste eternity" (l. 8). Further, the poet pessimistically forecasts to his lady "The hour when you too learn that all is vain/And that Hope sows what Love shall never reap" (l. 13-14). The title "Cloud and Wind" suggests change, though these images never enter the poem itself, and death is the victor in its struggle against Love, insofar as the poet's prophecy is concerned.

Separation, a theme of past poems, receives a good deal more attention in the pair of sonnets "Secret Parting" and "Parted Love" (XLV-XLVI). The first poem ends just short of the moment of separation, but shows a full consciousness that the moment is at hand. Opening with the lovers talking of "the cloud-control/And moon-track of the journey face of Fate" (ll. 1-2), the

poem moves forward to portray the poet and his lady as they remember "how brief the whole/Of joy, which its own hours annihilate" (ll. 5-6). In the face of what is seemingly an inevitable parting the lovers strive "To build with fire-tried vows the piteous home/Which memory haunts and whither sleep may roam" (ll. 10-11). This activity amounts to an effort to create an experience not for its intrinsic worth but rather as fodder for memory and dreams. Such an idea is an admission of failure or perhaps a realization that the end of love is in sight. The conclusion of the sonnet recalls what is going to be lost: "the still-seated secret of the grove..." where neither "spire may rise nor bell be heard therefrom" (ll. 13-14). There is definitely a poignancy and desperation in this scene, which is heightened by a sense of what has gone before and indicated in the woman's kiss, which is "thirstier of late" (l. 7).

"Parted Love" picks up the action after the actual parting has taken place and finds the poet, not surprisingly, in despair.58 Bereft of his mistress he wonders:

What shall be said of this embattled day
And armed occupation of this night
By all thy foes beleagured; now when sight
Nor sound denotes the loved one far away? (ll. 1-4)

58Robson declares that the poem is marred by overripe voluptuousness. See p. 365.
When the poet looks on himself, he sees a figure who "Now labors lonely o'er the stark noon-height/To reach the sunset's disolute disarray" (ll. 7-8). This image of the sun's progress across the sky is an apt metaphor for the structure of this section of "Youth and Change," suggesting a process of decline. The clarity of the image, in fact, contradicts Howard's notion that Rossetti here tried to express the inexpressible.59 Addressing himself as "fond fettered wretch" (l. 9), the poet bids himself "stand still while Memory's art/Parades the Past before thy face" (ll. 9-10). The recollections, far from tranquil, are rendered as "tempestuous tide-gates" (l. 12), which will "Flood with wild will the hollows" (ll. 12-13) of the poet's heart. This has a destructive ring to it, but the poet in the final line is able to say to himself, "thy heart rends thee, and thy body endures" (l. 14). The poet's spirit may be tortured, yet he will endure although his future remains largely in doubt.

"Broken Music" follows in the wake of separation and further details its effects on the poet. The octave is based on the extended metaphor of mother and child, explaining how the mother "will not turn, who thinks

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59 Howard, p. 167.
she hears/Her nursling's speech grow articulate" (ll. 1-2) but will sit "That it may call her twice" (l. 5). Analogous to mother and child are the poet's soul and his vision of the Garden. When the lovers were united the song "at length found tongue/And the sweet music swelled and the sweet tears" (ll. 7-8). Thus, the poet remembers the time he and the woman were able to summon Paradise. Now the music is what the sestet tells us. Instead of the music of the Garden, the poet hears "The speech-bound sea-shell's low importunate strain" (l. 11), because "No breath of song, thy voice alone is there/O bitterly beloved!" (ll. 12-13). Without the lady, who is painfully recalled by the poet, no vision of Paradise is possible. All that is left to him is "the pang of unremitted prayer" (l. 14), a prayer for reunion, no doubt. The idea of the anima is reiterated here by the poet's identification of his soul as feminine.

"Death in Love" (XLVIII) is an ambiguous poem with several possible readings. Whether the sonnet is about the death of Eros, the death of the lady, or the death of the union of lovers is debatable. What does seem certain is that the poet has permanently lost his hold on the Earthly Paradise. Like several of the foregoing poems "Death in Love" is a vision in which the poet sees the ruling powers of existence, but gives special attention
to one "image in Life's retinue" (l. 1). At first the poet believes the image to be Eros since it had "Love's wings and bore his gonfalon" (l. 2) and made "Bewildering sounds, such as Spring wakens to" (l. 5). However more important than its "Form and hue" (l. 4) is the power wielded by the figure, power which speeds "trackless as the immemorable hour/When birth's dark portal groaned and all was new" (ll. 7–8), that is, the hour when the poet was born, or perhaps reborn, through sexual union. In the sestet he reveals that this is a different kind of vision from the usual one, for the poet notices that "a veiled woman followed" (l. 9) and caught "the banner round its staff, to furl and cling/Then plucked a feather from the bearer's wing" (l. 10–11). Curiously the veiled form holds the feather to Love's lips, then apocryphally says, "Behold, there is no breath:/I and this Love are one and I am Death" (ll. 13–14). It is unclear what death is envisioned here—probably the death of the union, which may or may not have been occasioned by the woman's actual physical death. It has been pointed out that a chain of beings is established by "Youth and Change." Eros operates through woman to influence the poet, and a break anywhere along the chain results in a loss of the Earthly Paradise. The absence of woman by separation for whatever reason amounts to a death of
the relationship in Rossetti's terms; therefore, "Death of Love" may be a more effective reading of this sonnet as far as the poet is concerned. From the poet's point of view, Eros, woman and union are all fatalities.

Over the course of Sonnets XXXVI-XLVIII there appears a continuity of movement from "Life in Love," the first, to "Death in Love," the last poem in this series, from a troubled look at the poet trying to cling to the higher realm to the ultimate death of his chance to maintain it. Overall this group shows a steady decline in the poet's fortunes, analogous as we have mentioned to the sun's progress across the sky.

The final eleven poems of this part of "Youth and Change" create portraits of the poet in the lower realm of suffering and total despair and finish with a slight upturn near the end when the poet tries to find consolation. These are the last stages of the Eros vision and mark its conclusion in The House of Life as the controlling vision of the poems.

Beginning this final phase of "Youth and Change" is a cluster of four poems commonly referred to as the "Willowwood Sonnets" (XLIX-LII). The subject of these sonnets is the conjuring of the lost woman's image by Eros and the attendant bitter memories of the poet. Doughty says that Rossetti called the poems a dream or
trance of divided love momentarily reunited by longing fancy, which is an accurate description. The scene is set by Sonnet XLIX in which the speaker describes the situation at Willowwood: "I sat with Love upon a woodside well/Leaning across the water, I and he" (ll. 1-2). Without speaking, Eros begins to play his lute, a kind of magician's wand, that works a charm whereby the "sound came to be/The passionate voice" (ll. 7-8) from the poet's past. As the poet's tears fall Love's "eyes beneath grew hers" and "Then the dark ripples spread to waving hair" (ll. 9 and 12). The poet stoops over the well and tells how "her own lips rising there/Bubbled with brimming kisses at my mouth" (ll. 13-14). Obviously references to the departed mistress, these lines are dominated by the central image of the well. Traditionally, looking down into the depths of water symbolizes a look into the unconscious; here it suggests that meaning or perhaps the art of memory fired by longing or desire, by which the poet effects a transitory reunion with the apparition of his lady.

Sonnet L consists of the song of Eros, a song

So meshed with half-remembrance hard to free
As souls disused in death's sterility
May sing when the new birthday tarries long.
(ll. 2-4)

60 Doughty, p. 384.
 Appropriately the strains of the death-song have the power of resurrection also, because there is the appearance of "A dumb throng/That stood aloof, one form by every tree" (ll. 5-6). These "mournful forms" (l. 7) turn out to be ghosts of the lovers, "The shades of those our days that had no tongue" (l. 8), who stand and watch while the lovers cling in a "soul-wrung implacable close kiss" (l. 11). Self-pity overtakes the poet, and he laments "For once, for once, for once alone" (l. 13). The repetition attests to the poet's highly emotional state, for he is united with a ghost and not the flesh and blood woman of earlier celebrations. The poet cannot obtain salvation without a living woman; the poet's lament is really for himself.

The song of Eros continues in Sonnet LI, the only poem occupied completely by the speech of Love. It is addressed to all those who suffer the fate of the poet, all those who walk in Willowwood with "hollow faces burning white" (l. 2). Eros paints a dismal picture of the present and future:

What long, what longer hours, one lifelong night,
Ere ye again, who so in vain have wooed
Your last hope lost, who so in vain invite
Your lips to their unforgotten food
Ere ye, ere ye again shall see the light. (ll. 4-8)

Mourning lovers are thus condemned to a realm of darkness, an everlasting night of the soul beyond the reach
of hope. The banks of Willowwood offer other painful reminders, being "With tear-spurge wan, with blood-wort burning red" (l. 10). These images of flowers and fire, as well as red and white have been associated with Eros and woman; hence their presence in this dismal location is a subtle form of torture. Love goes on to say the soul would do better to sleep until death than "That Willowwood should hold her wandering" (l. 14). There is no relief in living; only in sleep or in death can the poet find repose according to the song of Eros.

Sonnet LII is the last of these poems and the end of the poet's vision of his beloved: "When the song died did the kiss unclose/And her face fell back drowned" (ll. 5-6). In addition, the poet knows this may be the last time he sees her face as he remarks, "if it ever may/Meet mine again I know not if Love knows" (ll. 7-8). Almost an act of communion, the poet's drinking of the well water in the sestet of the sonnet is described:

I leaned low and drank
A long draught from the water she sank
Her breath, and all her tears and all her soul: . . .
(11. 9-11)

Love shares the moment of pity and grace with him, their heads meeting "in his aureole" (l. 14).

Robillard makes the Willowwood Sonnets the center of The House of Life, saying that it gathers together
the themes of birth, death and love. However, this plainly does not seem to be the case since Willowwood represents only one segment of the Eros vision. On the whole Willowwood emerges as the apotheosis of the lower world, the human world of pain and despair into which the poet has been cast. In the final poem of the "Willowwood Sonnets" we have a hint that the poet's lady is dead in the physical sense, since it reminds us of the question in "Love and Hope" (XLVI) of seeing the loved one after death. This confirms what before was in doubt. The poet's loss is final because of the lady's fatality; because of her mortality the poet is now doomed to the unredeemed life. Parodying images of flower and color and water, Willowwood becomes the counterpart of the Garden and the home of the poet. Eros still exists, but his is not a living presence.

"Without Her" (LIII) recalls "Lovesight" (IV). The earlier poem hypothesized about life without the lady, thereby making her presence more highly valued. This sonnet attempts to deal further with the reality of her absence, finding the world dark, barren and chill. As Cooper suggests, the poem is about spiritual and physical loss. Again the poet makes a point of his will to

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61 Robillard, p. 7.
62 Cooper, p. 143.
endure in the face of despair. Despite "the heart without her" (1. 9) the poet continues on the "steep ways and weary...Where the long cloud, the long wood's counterpart/Sheds doubled darkness up the laboring hill" (11. 12-14). We do not find the impulse toward death present in the poet. Left with little else he still embodies perseverance, even courage in his loneliest moments.

"Love's Fatality" (LIV) looks back to "Death in Love" in its insistence on the irretrievable loss of love. At first the poem appears redundant in light of the previous sonnet. However, a closer inspection reveals an important difference. In "Death in Love" Eros and death are linked in the poet's vision, but in this sonnet there is a connection between two other beings. The poet says, "Linked in gyres I saw them stand/Love shackled with Vain-longing hand to hand" (11. 2-3). Each figure has a distinct aspect much like the figures in "Passion and Worship" (IX). Love "was eyed as the blue vault above" (1. 4), while the gaze of Vain-longing was "tempestuous like a fire-cloud" (1. 5). The sestet examines in greater detail the second and more unfamiliar being whose lips are "two written flakes of flame" (1. 9) and "in chains grown tame" (1. 12). The fire imagery recounts how Rossetti reverses the meaning of an image so that
the sense of it in one particular context is inverted in another. In this case fire imagery, which has usually been associated with Eros or woman as a symbol of purification, is now coupled with a figure in bondage and thus suggests something of hell or, in the poem's terms, "Life's iron heart, even Love's Fatality" (l. 14). What has been forfeited in this sonnet is more than Love; it is the hope for Love. The return of the Eros's ministry is impossible: that much we already know. The poet makes clear with "Love's Fatality" that it is even beyond the power of wishing.

This premise applies to earthly existence but not necessarily to the afterlife. Elsewhere the poet has questioned whether or not he and his mistress will cease to be after death, generally concluding that he cannot know. Having abandoned hope for reunion on earth, he turns his desire toward the realm of immortality in "Stillborn Love" (LV). The octave expresses the sorrow for "the hour which might have been yet might not be " (l. 1), the hour of desired reunion "which man's and woman's heart, conceived and bore/Yet whereof life was barren" (ll. 2-3). Time has shown the poet the futility of misconception or hope. The hour, personified

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63 Robillard, p. 7.
as a "bondchild," is consigned to limbo where it "sighs and serves...mute before/The house of Love" (ll. 6-7).

Yet, in the sestet the poet questions the possibility of regaining what has eluded him in the temporal world:

What wedded souls now hand in hand
Together tread at last the immortal strand
With eyes where burning memory lights love home?
(ll. 9-11)

The lovers in this wishful vision remember and are joined again, recapturing the fulfillment which death had interrupted. The Eros vision has such a grip on the poet's imagination that he wants to project it onto an afterlife. At least it is a hope, a possibility which the poet himself has earlier discounted as improbable. Insofar as his life in the time-space realm of being is concerned, the Garden has vanished never to return.

The last cluster of poems in "Youth and Change" is called "True Woman" (LVI-LVIII) where the poet draws the virtues of his lady under the subtitles "Herself," "Her Love," and "Her Heaven." All are panegyrics to woman and form a kind of elegy for the poet's departed love. The first gathers together the major symbols of Eros and woman which have developed during the course of the

64 Robillard says that "True Woman" was inserted merely to add more poems on love. See p. 8.

65 Baum, p. 45.
sonnets of Part I. Mentionings of Spring, music and flower as well as an indirect reference to the sea are used in the octave in reference to the lady's beauty. These were the outward manifestations of her soul, "the sacred secret" hidden by "Heaven's own screen" (1. 10) like "The wave-bowered pearl, the heart shaped seal" (1. 13). The second sonnet, "Her Love," is a testament to her constancy. Her passion is "a glass facing his fire where the bright bliss/Is mirrored and the heart returned" (11. 2-3), but turned to a stranger the glass "shall turn by instant contraries/Ice to the moon" (11. 6-7). She is wife and sister to the poet, thus combining the sexual and Platonic elements in her love for him in that "hour" of union which constitutes the Earthly Paradise. The third and final poem of the "True Woman Sonnets" places her in heaven or rather identifies her as the heaven to which the poet hopes to rise; in death she becomes "Paradise all uttermost worlds among" (1. 8). However the sestet brings the poet back to the fallen world where

The sunrise blooms and withers on the hill
Like any hillflower; and the noblest troth
Dies here to dust. (11. 9-11)

He concludes on the note established in "Stillborn Love" by asking "Yet shall Heaven's promise clothe/Even yet those lovers" (11. 11-12) who have stood the test of
love? Essentially he questions whether reunion may occur in the next world if not in this one.

The concluding poem in Part I, "Love's Last Gift" deals with the poet's consolation in the world of experience this side of immortality. Eros speaks to the poet, explaining that the rose and apple trees are special forms of Love's blessing as well as are "Strange secret grasses" which "lurk inviolably/Between the filtering channels of such reef" (ll. 7-8). Respectively these are symbols of spirituality, sex and secret knowledge, the primary gifts of Eros which were given "while Spring and Summer sang" (l. 10). This time has passed and "Autumn stops to listen with some pang/From those worse things the wind is moaning of" (ll. 11-12), an obvious reference to the poet's loss of the Garden. However, Love offers the poet a parting prize, a reward for his creative effort: "Only this laurel dreads no winter days/Take my last gift; thy heart hath sung my praise" (ll. 13-14). It is a fitting gift and a healing gift in that it affords the poet some form of relief. Though he has failed in his pursuit of the Eros vision, the poet can take comfort in the imaginative enterprise he has undertaken and in particular his celebration of Eros in the immortal shape which is poetry.

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66Baum, p. 45.
The movement of the last twenty-four sonnets of "Youth and Change" as we have said, is analogous to the solar cycle; it also resembles the cycle of seasons passing from summer to autumn or from fulfillment to frustration and despair. Essentially these poems represent a dying phase or perhaps a falling action. It begins when the poet realizes the eminence of death and recalls the death of a past love. The attainment of love or the attainment of Earthly Paradise by the poet becomes briefer and more tenuous as the sonnets progress until separation occurs, and then comes the fatality of the mistress. With her passing all hope of recovering Paradise is gone and the poet retires to Willowwood, the counterpart of the Garden in the lower world. Yet he endures and is eventually rewarded with the laurel by Eros.

Viewed as a whole "Youth and Change" follows the course of the Eros vision from the summit of experience to its depths. At stake is the imaginative construction of a world in which opposites are reconciled—flesh and spirit, passion and worship, desire and fulfillment. The poet has achieved this fusion in the first thirty-five sonnets which correspond to the "Youth" half of Part I. However, human experience seems to be subject to mutability, and the last group of sonnets records the unhappy effects of Change. The structure of Part I is
based on a movement through the upper limit of human experience and then a steady decline to its lower extremity. It is a more restricted journey than that which Dante undertook, never reaching the apocalyptic or demonic worlds which are beyond the time-space order of earth, although both are approached. In the end the poet finds consolation in the recognition of his creative achievement. This is the first suggestion of an alternative to the Eros vision; as such it prepares the way for Part II of *The House of Life*, in which substitutes are sought. As we leave the confines of the Eros vision there is a sense of a painful resignation to the course of events; some semblance of order may yet be achieved as the poet's will to endure pushes him forward to imagine other choices, other ways to give a shape and meaning to his experience.
THE CHOICE

At the end of the Eros vision in Part I of The House of Life, the poet settled for the consolation of art, signaling an end to his imaginative attempt to redeem himself through love. Part I describes a fall from a higher order of human experience to a lower one. Further, the action generally proceeds in a continuous fashion, passing through the Earthly Paradise then descending in an uninterrupted decline until the poet comes to rest in the ordinary world.

Part II, "Change and Fate" begins in the world of ordinary experience, the unredeemed world to which the poet is fallen. Eventually the structure shows a further falling action at the end of which the poet touches the bottom of human experience. There the world appears as a sordid and dismal place in which nothing is coherent, not even the poet's concept of selfhood. However, the initial phases of Part II do not follow a smooth continuous movement in a constant direction. Perhaps this aspect of the structure has proven more bewildering to critics than any other and has in turn engendered the idea that The House of Life (and particularly Part II) exhibits no formal unity. Baum describes "Change and Fate" as a collection of miscellaneous sonnets on the many-sidedness of life.67

67 Baum, p. 39.
C.M. Bowra simply states that Part II consists of poems on a wide variety of subjects in reaction to the loss of love in Part I.68 Douglas J. Robillard practically ignores this section of The House of Life saying only that it repeats the idea of cyclical movement from birth to death.69

Only Houston Baker has seen fit to assert the notion of structural coherence in Part II, claiming the principle of structure in "Change and Fate" is progress. Baker argues that the poet begins with narrow sensuous ideals and exchanges them for broad spiritual ones.70 However the poems of Part II do not sustain the idea of progress, at least not in any ordinary sense of the word. There may be cyclical movement as Robillard suggests but not from birth to death since birth appears only at the end of "Change and Fate."

Perhaps it is more accurate to say that the structure of Part II of The House of Life consists of rhythmic alternations in mood and theme in the first three-quarters of the poems. The design is created by the poet's oscillation among possible alternatives to the Eros vision.

68 Bowra, p. 253.
69 Robillard, p. 8.
70 Baker, pp. 1-4.
and meditations on existence and occasionally despondency. The structure embodies his attempt to impose some order and meaning on his experience in the ordinary world. Since the Earthly Paradise is unattainable, the poet's goal becomes accommodation; that is, the poet tries to make a home for himself in the fallen world. In the beginning of Part II the search for positive solutions to his existential situation dominates the poems. However, as "Change and Fate" moves forward the moments of speculation and despair make themselves more strongly felt. In the final poems dejection takes control of the poet. Now it is here that the structure discards the oscillating movement and resumes a continuous movement so that the poet sinks toward death in an uninterrupted manner.

Thus the final phase of Part II is basically the same as that of Part I, a steadily declining movement. The chief difference between "Youth and Change" and "Change and Fate" with regard to structure comes in the beginning stages of each. Part I starts at the summit of human experience and moves through it in a single smooth direction. Part II repeats a series of small rising and falling actions or perhaps short advances and retreats which show the poet's successes and failures to create some coherent order out of the flux of his experience. What binds together the consideration of alternatives
or possible choices is this rage for order. The suffer-
ing and instability of the ordinary world are reflected
in the poet; therefore, his effort is actually directed
toward self-preservation. When the imaginative options
fail him, the poet resumes the fall begun in Part I
approaching the lower limit of the human world where it
becomes the threshold of Death. What follows is an
examination of the particulars of the structure which
gives coherence to Part II of The House of Life.

Part II takes up the theme of art in the first poems
of "Change and Fate." There are eight sonnets in the
group, the initial five comprising a kind of ars poetica.
"Transfigured Life" (LX) deals with the idea that poetry
reconciles the opposites in the poet's experience. Just
as "a child's features will call to mind/The father's
and mother's face combined" (ll. 2-3), so the Song fuses
"the Singer's Joy and Pain" (l. 9). The title and the
sestet suggest how this accomplished: "By Art's trans-
figuring essence" (l. 12). The song or poem objectifies
experience and thereby, to recall Rossetti's words, "the
Life recorded is neither my life nor your life." Pleasure
and suffering come into proper perspective through this
process which ultimately results in the creation of a
"song-cloud shaped as a man's hand" (l. 13) and from
which "There comes the sound as of abundant rain" (l. 14).
Rain is here a symbol of regeneration; the poet himself is transfigured. Rossetti opts for the view of art as purgative, but in terms of the poet's catharsis and not that of his audience.

"The Song Throe" brings into focus the relationship of poet and reader and further explains the theme of *ars poetica*. Art is communication, the poet tells us, for "By thy own tears thy song must tears beget/O Singer" (ll. 1-2). Without benefit of a "magic mirror" the poet must rely on his "manifest heart" (l. 3) and the singer must be sincere in the feelings he commits to song, else

...verse is the feathcry jct
Of soulless air-flung fountains, May more dry
Than the Dead Sea for throats that thirst and sigh,...

(ll. 5-7)

In the sestet, the poet refers to Apollo in his aspect as "Song-god" (l. 9), who prepares his shaft for the singer's soul. What is required of the poet is spontaneous response to the god-inflicted wound, the "lips' loud cry" (l. 13); then "The inspired recoil shall pierce thy brother's heart" (l. 14), the poet tells us. Communication thus depends on the honesty of feeling which the poet brings to his craft. If in the act of creation his tears flow, so will the tears of his brother. The poem then becomes the intermediary between writer and reader, bridging the gap and making for the transfer of emotion from the creator to his audience.
The next two sonnets concern themselves with the imagination in a broad sense. Rossetti makes no nice distinction between the kinds of imaginative activities of the mind as had Coleridge. He talks instead about the general power of the mind to conceive of possibilities or to hypothesize in concrete terms about existence. "The Soul's Sphere" (LXII) is about the power to invest meaning in the images met in experience. Two such images in the octave are "Some prisoned moon in steep cloud-fastnesses" (l. 1) and "some dying sun whose pyre/Blazed with momentous memorable fire" (ll. 2-3) The cloud-eclipsed moon and dying sun recall matters in Part I, where they symbolize a decline in the poet's fortune. Sometimes the imagination is used "to appease Tragical shadow's realm of sound and sight" (ll. 5-6), which brings it into close alignment with the activity of wishing. The poet also gives imagination the power of prophesy, saying it may "forecast/The rose-winged hours" (l. 10) or "that last/Wild pageant of the accumulated past" (l. 13); that is, the imagination may envision both paradise and death.\(^7\) This is possible because of "the soul's sphere of infinite images" (l. 8), which is a way of saying the imagination is limitless, that it

\(^7\)Howard, p. 167.
can include all that is conceivable.

"Inclusiveness" (LXIII) shows a specific application of the imagination to a particular setting. The scene is a roadside table peopled with "changing guests, each in a different mood" (l. 1). Wondering what occupies the thoughts of each guest, the poet hypothesizes in the sestet that the setting of the poem may "dwell/In separate living souls for joy and pain" (ll. 9-10) or have the association of "some life spent well/And may be stamped, a memory all in vain" (ll. 12-13). In sum, the poet seems to be imagining what others imagine, realizing that the imagination is inclusive insofar as it can cover the extremes of human experience.

Sonnet LXIV demonstrates the function of "Ardor and Memory" in the creative process. The mind takes joy in the natural images of rose, cloud and stream in the act of immediate perception, and when these have flown so do the feelings they aroused. Yet the emotions can be recreated with the aid of ardor and memory through art just as the rose tree "Will flush all ruddy though the rose be gone" (l. 13). The imagination then feeds on direct sensory experience and fashions "ditties" and "dirges" (l. 14) to continue the metaphor of "Song."

72 Robillard, p. 8.
works to shape an object (in this case the poem) which is made up of concrete images stored by memory and invested with meaning by desire. Passing from poet to reader through the medium of words, the feelings associated with the particularized experience are felt by the reader. From the poet's point of view this effects a catharsis of joy and pain and makes his existence objective to himself. These are the poetics of Rossetti as he establishes them in the first five sonnets of "Change and Fate."

However, the benefits of creation to the poet cannot be made manifest unless he does, in fact, practice his craft. The recognition of this is the subject of the three following poems beginning with "Known in Vain" (LXV). The poem speaks in terms of a failure of will, making an analogy to lovers who waste time and "gaze/After their life sailed by" (ll. 10-11). "So it happenth/When Work and Will awake too late" (ll. 9-10), the poet says. There is no second chance once the poet has entered the "sad maze" (l. 12) to "Follow the desultory feet of Death" (l. 14). The next poem, "The Heart of Night" (LXVI) treats the poet's awareness of fleeting time:

73 Robson criticizes the poem for its lack of forceful imagery. See p. 358.
From child to youth, from youth to arduous man;  
From lethargy to fever of the heart;  
From faithful life to dream-dowered days apart;  
From trust to doubt; from doubt to brink of ban;  
Thus much of change in one swift cycle ran  
Till now. Alas; the soul—how soon must she  
Accept her primal immortality—  
The flesh resume its dust whence it began? (11. 1-8)

With the consciousness that his life is finite the poet  
addresses the Lords of work, life and will, pledging  
himself to a renewed effort. The regeneration of will  
which will enable the poet to go on creating also will  
enable him to face his death without fear or guilt.

If "The Heart of Night" expresses the desire to feel  
the creative urge, "The Landmark" (LXVII) shows the poet  
turning his desire into action. The octave again expresses  
the realization of lost opportunity asking, "Was that  
the landmark...the foolish well/whose wave, low down, I  
did not stoop to drink?" (11. 1-2).  
The "well" in  
this context suggests the unconscious of the poet, the  
repository of creative energy the poet failed to exploit.  
Instead of using it, he sat and "flung pebbles from its  
brink/In sport to send its imaged skies pell-mell" (11.  
3-4), unaware that his own image was scattered in the  
process. The implication is that the poet has brought  
about a dissolution of self by frivolously exploiting  
his unconscious. In the octave the poet is resolved to

74 Hobillard, p. 8.
go back "And thirst to drink when next I reach the spring" (l. 10), even though "no light be left nor bird now sing" (l. 12). Far from despairing, the poet is thankful "That the same goal is still on the same track" (l. 14). The importance of work or creation becomes even clearer in this sonnet. We noticed before that art reconciles the poet to his mixed emotions—joy and pain. Now it is apparent that through the creation of poetry the self, down to its deepest recesses, is unified. Art is an alternative to the Eros vision, offering the poet a way to make sense of himself and his experience and to communicate that sense to others. From the despair and suffering of the fallen world the poet envisions an escape, a process of reclamation which is creation.

This resolution is short-lived as "A Dark Day" (LXVIII) proves. Once again the poet experiences the familiar feeling of dejection, although the source of the emotion is a mystery even to the poet himself. He asks, "bodes this hour some harvest of new tares" (l. 5) or is it memory? It is likely that the memory "whose plough/Sowed hunger once" (ll. 6-7) refers to lost love. In any event the poet sees the hope of time's healing power by recalling "How prickly were the growths which yet how smooth/Along the hedgerows of this journey shed" (ll. 9-10). Time has worked its resolution before;
whether the poet's grief is old or newly acquired, it is subject to the same transforming power of passing time.

In fact, a later perspective on experience may even turn the present gloom to some useful purpose, much like

...the thistledown from pathsides dead
Gleaned by a girl in autumns of her youth
Which one new year makes soft her marriage bed.
(ll. 12-14)

"Autumn Idleness" (LXIX) represents a moment of pause while the poet considers what to do. Dominated by contrasting images of dark and light, shade and sun, the sonnet suggests a division of will on the part of the poet. This point is reinforced by the shadow image of the sestet, where the poet speaks of leading his "shadow o'er the grass/Nor know, for longing, that which I should do" (ll. 13-14). Failure of the will was noted as a theme in the sonnets on art; its occurrence here fixes its importance as an obstacle to be overcome if the poet is to achieve some measure of happiness. Another attempt to fortify the will is made in "The Hill Summit" (LXX). In the presence of the setting sun the poet recognizes that he "loitered in the vale too long/And gazes now a belated worshipper" (ll. 3-4). Echoing the gaze of the lovers in "Known in Vain" the poem is fully aware of the passage of time symbolized by the journeying sun

75 Howard sees the poem as an illustration of the idea of a "moment's monument." For her discussion see p. 166.
as it undergoes a series of transfigurations.

In the sestet the poet finds that he has "climbed and won the heights" (l. 9), indicating his arrival at mid-life. From this vantage point he looks toward the future with the knowledge he "must tread downward through the sloping shade/And travel the bewildered tracks till night" (ll. 10-11). Life is finite and the poet can see the inevitability of death, yet he must pause and contemplate his experience. We notice a pattern and a paradox emerging from the sonnets examined in "Change and Fate."

The pattern consists of small groups of poems which embody an alternating rhythm. It begins with poems that posit a resolution of the poet's pain and dissatisfaction; this is followed by poems of dejection or meditation, and the cycle begins again. The paradox has to do with the problem of time. On one hand the poet laments lost time and lost opportunities to be productive. On the other hand time itself is seen as a resolver in that it puts the poet's experience into a proper perspective. The paradox is not really solved in the poems considered up to this point. However, it is explored further in the next poems as a problem to be reckoned with.

Three poems gathered under the title "The Choice"

76 Bowra, p. 256.
comprise a kind of thematic center of Part II as it sets forth what we have called the Existential vision. Implicit in the title of these sonnets is the idea that the poet is a free agent capable of choosing his path. The problem to be overcome has several aspects; for one thing the poet is bothered by time, for another he suffers from the paralysis of will and alienation of self. This last aspect will become much more apparent a bit farther on. Resolving these matters holds no promise of restoring the poet to the Garden. However, it does suggest the promise of reconciling the poet to himself and to the ordinary world of experience to which he is now fallen. This is the closest analogy to Paradise the poet can construct in terms of the Existential vision.

The first poem of "The Choice" series, Sonnet LXXI, is expressly addressed to a woman in contrast to the others. Attacking the problem of time and self the poet employs the carpe diem theme as one possible alternative. "Eat thou and drink; tomorrow thou shalt die" (l. 1), the poet says, stating the conventional plea. "Then lose me," and "We'll drown all hours," he continues (ll. 3 and 7). The purpose of obliterating time is predictably to "veil the changing sky" (l. 8); that is, by losing

77 Howard's idea that "The Choice" is out of tune with the rest of The House of Life seems illogical to me. See p. 164.
himself in sensual enjoyment the poet may escape the flux of experience. Those who strive to increase "Vain gold, vain lore" (1. 11) cannot die, the poet declares, "for their life was death" (1. 13). The ideas and feelings expressed in the sonnet should not be confused with those of the Eros vision. The tone is here much less serious or fervent, and the purpose of union is loss of self instead of self-awareness. Then too there is no mention of the spiritual aspect of love which is an integral part of the Eros vision. Sonnet LXXI offers an alternative to the Eros vision and not an extension of it; it is best summed up by the theme of carpe diem, the tradition carried on from classical writings down through the Cavalier poets.

Sonnet LXXII is one of the few ironic poems in The House of Life, offering a double perspective on the poet. Addressed to an unseen figure the poem suggests "Watch thou and fear; tomorrow thou shalt die" (1. 1), and then sardonically "Or art thou sure thou shalt have time for death" (1. 2). Most of the sonnet is devoted to the fears of the poem's listener, fears of destruction and death which cannot be allayed by the knowledge of "his gladness that comes after thee" (1. 12). The sentiments attributed to the person addressed bear a curious similarity to the poet's own moments of despair. Thus it
seems reasonable to assume that the poet is addressing himself and parodying his own impulses toward dejection. In this instance the poet is able to stand outside himself and make wry jest of his lamentations, concluding with the command, "Go to;/Cover thy countenance and watch and fear" (l. 14). The choice of a course of action ironically turns out to be the course of inaction, of waiting in fear and trembling.

Third in the series of "The Choice" poems, Sonnet LXXIII looks back to previous poems of commitment to will and productivity. "Think thou and act " (l. 1), the poet says. Again he seems to be engaged in soliloquy rather than dialogue, although both "thou" and "me" are mentioned in the poem. Dramatizing self, the poet is pictured as "outstretched in the sun's warmth upon the shore" (l. 2), a scene that recalls "The Hill-Summit" and "Autumn Idleness." The passive self claims:

Man's measured path is all gone o'er
Up all his years steeply with strain and sigh
Man clomb until he reached the truth; and I
Even I am he who it was destined for. . . .
(ll. 3-6)

The active self replies to this spirit of indolence:
"Art thou then so much more/Than they who sowed, that thou shouldst reap thereby" (ll. 7-8). Truth can never be captured and exhausted but must be continuously pursued—in the words of the sestet's sea imagery:
Niles and miles distant though the last line be
And though thy soul sail leagues and leagues beyond
Still leagues beyond those leagues, there is more sea.

(11. 12-14)

Through will and intellection man may arrive at some satisfactory answers to his problematic existence. He cannot find the solution in what others have done or found. The healthy optimism of this view contrasts with the feeling of the two preceding poems and completes "The Choice." It is not possible to say which of these alternatives the poet is opting for since each represents a choice. In fact the whole point is that the poet sees a number of courses open to him ranging from the anti-intellectual emersion into physical pleasure, through stasis and fear to action and thinking. The poet will come back to each of these options in the unfolding of "Change and Fate" in search of the appropriate path which will lead him to an acceptance of self and world.

"Old and New Art" returns to a consideration of aesthetics with a slightly different emphasis. Although Baum sees no reason for its inclusion, "Old and New Art" has a definite function. The group of sonnets which opened Part II concentrated largely on art in terms of the artist who produced it. The three sonnets of "Old

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78 Bowra, p. 264.

79 Baum, p. 38.
and New Art" (LXXIV-LXXVI) offer a less personal view of art, putting it into the context of tradition. The first poem is subtitled "St. Luke the Painter" and gives credit to the Evangelist who, according to legend, "first taught Art to fold her hands and pray" (l. 3). The importance of religion's influence on art is connected with the idea of symbolism, for she (Art) learned "How sky-breath and field-silence...Are symbols in some deeper way" and "looked through these to God and was God's priest" (ll. 6-8). Since that time, which roughly corresponds to the Middle Ages, art has suffered a decline or "turned in vain/to soulless self-reflections of man's skill" (ll. 10-11). This sounds a great deal like a criticism of the idea of original genius. In the Middle Ages the artist was a selfless workman through whom God worked to embody his wisdom; for example, the idea of a signed painting was only begun during the Renaissance. The decline of art is then attributable to a secularization of art in which process the artist takes greater credit for the object created. This in turn produces "soulless reflections of man's skill" as opposed to an inspired reflection of God's message. In response to this

80 Baker finds a parallel between the aesthetic ideas in "Old and New Art" and those of T. S. Eliot. See pp. 1-4.
development the poet urges a return to the old ways
"Ere the night cometh" (l. 14).

"The Husbandmen" (LXXVI), the last of the "Old and
New Art" poems, is essentially a restatement of the
argument for tradition. Harkening back to the time
"Before the husk of darkness was well burst" (l. 3),
which as we have seen denotes the Middle Ages, the poet
praises those artists whose burdens were heat and the
dry thirst. "God hath since found none such as these
were " (l. 8), the poet exclaims. Therefore, he charges
his fellows who stand "idle in the market-place" (l. 10)
to become first by faith and will, to work and "give
a Future to their Past" (l. 14). There seems to be an
implied comment on the commercialism of current art.
The creators in the distant past, "Who questioned of
their wages, answered, 'Sir/Unto each man a penny'"
(ll. 5-6), stand in striking contrast to modern artists
who are found in the market-place. The husbandmen called
to labor in God's vineyard worked not for personal recog-
nition or gain but for the satisfaction of serving a
higher good than themselves. This is perfectly under-
standable, even to a poet such as Rossetti whose theology
is non-Christian because he can agree, in principle,
with the practice.

For a poet interested in creating a depersonalized
kind of poetry, Rossetti believes it is possible to write in the tradition of the Middle Ages even though his conception of the highest good is different. What this good is becomes the subject of the next two sonnets. Paired as companion poems "Soul's Beauty" and "Body's Beauty" show the proper and improper content for the kind of poetry Rossetti has opted for in "Old and New Art." Rather than in God's service, the poet works in the name of Beauty, spiritual Beauty, that is. It is she who

...can draw
By sea or sky or woman, to one law
The allotted bondsman of her palm and wreath.
(11. 6-8)

Although terror and mystery guard her shrine, the poet pledges himself to work in praise of her, and thus aligns himself with a greater power than himself. Spiritual Beauty, much like Eros', exists as a timeless ideal form, "enthroned" (1. 3) above ordinary experience. Baum rightly sees this sonnet as an example of Rossetti's Platonism. 81

In contrast, as Sonnet LXXVIII shows, is "Body's Beauty." Lilith becomes the archetype for physical beauty in this poem, and she continues to be a living presence, drawing "men to watch the bright web she can

81 Baum, p. 25.
weave/Till heart and body and life are in its hold" (ll. 7-8). The sestet tells us "The rose and poppy are her flowers" (l. 9) and are symbols of her power to attract and subdue. The youth, who speaks of innocence, is entrapped by her gaze. The spell of her "left his straight neck bent/And round his heart one strangling golden hair" (ll. 13-14). "Body's Beauty" is very seductive to the unwary and equally destructive. In the present context of art, the poet apparently warns against following mere physical beauty, distinguishing it from the exalted form of spiritual loveliness. The difference is vital to his poetic theory. The adoption of Spiritual Beauty as the content embodied in poetry leads to art of the first order, whereas the choice of Body's Beauty as the object of artistic pursuit leads to the destruction of the poet.

When C.M. Bowra declared that the pursuit of beauty was an important theme in *The House of Life* he was at least partly right.82 However he failed to note that the theme has a restricted role in Part II, and in the sequence as a whole. Beauty is but a part of the poet's aesthetic theory, as he outlines it. The point seems to be that poetry must unite the poet's experience of the

82 Bowra, p. 257.
ordinary world with the order of some ideal world, chiefly through the use of symbols. In the Middle Ages the ideal order was the order of God, but God does not exist in the cosmos of The House of Life. Therefore, to regain touch with this great tradition the poet posits Spiritual Beauty as the being (if we may call it that) in whose praises poetry must sing. However, an alliance with Spiritual Beauty does not allow the poet to ascend to a higher plane of existence in the way in which the Eros vision does. It does allow the poet to tame the chaos of his experience and to make sense of himself and his world, as the earlier sonnets in "Change and Fate" have helped make clear.

We noticed an alternating rhythm of resolution, meditation, and dejection in the initial sonnets of Part II. From this point on the sonnets of Part II alternate between meditations on the nature of experience and poems of despair, punctuated only occasionally by moments of hope when the poet seeks resolution. This amounts to a general sinking in the psychological and imaginative fortunes of the poet and is not a form of "progress" in the usual sense of the word, as Houstan Baker would have us believe. The meditative form or the poem of resolution withheld makes itself more strongly felt as a part of the design of "Change and Fate" with Sonnets LXXIX-LXXXI.
"The Monochord" (LXXIX) questions which power holds sway over the poet's existence and shapes his destiny. 83 It is often the case that man chooses life or death; here the poet wonders which has chosen him:

...is it Life or Death, thus thunder-crown'd
That mid the tide of all emergency
Now notes my separate wave and to what sea
Its difficult eddies labor in the ground?
(11. 5-8)

The mood is one of discouragement, but the poet seems more interested in the identity of the power that rules his life than in lamenting his own misery. His experience has been made of changes in fortune, "The flame turned to cloud the cloud returned to flame" (1. 10). Even now he experiences a state of mixed emotions, both "regenerate rapture" and "Coverts of dismay" (11. 13-14), and the poet asks why his life is being drawn from him. 84 The poet's belief in free will is shaken because he implies that he is no longer in control of his destiny. No answer to this riddle is forthcoming since the poem is entirely interrogative. The questions however are no less important in spite of the fact that they are unanswerable. The Monochord or presiding power remains mysterious, but it is a source of speculation.

83 Baum conjectures that the sonnet is about the oneness of soul and music but does not explain what he means. See p. 38.

84 Doughty believes the poem expresses the ideal erotic illusion; however he does not make the point very clearly. See p. 377.
Likewise "From Dawn to Noon" (LXXX) is a contemplation of existence without conclusions. In this sonnet the subject of speculation is the past as opposed to the present. Using the analogy of the child who cannot make out the features of its mother until "tow'rd noon of his half-weary race" (1. 5), the poet tries to sort out those things which have led him up to the present moment. He ponders whether it was "Those unknown things or these things overknown" (1. 14), that is, those matters which have escaped his notice altogether or those things about which he continuously broods. Perhaps we may read this as indicating the unconscious and conscious aspects of his mind. In any event, the known things include "the sun-smit paths all grey/And marvellous once" (11. 10-11), a possible reference to lost love. The title indicates that the poet is still at the mid-point in his life as in "The Hill Summit" (LXX), still at the critical stage when he must choose a way to be. Though he has entertained a number of alternatives, principally art, his decision is withheld for now while he examines his past.

"Memorial Thresholds" (LXXXI) is occasioned by a visit to a familiar place, which brings back a flood of memories "Like frost-bound fire-girt scenes" (1. 4). The realization that informs the poem is the idea that the meaning of the "single simple door" (1. 9) is

85Baum, p. 39.
completely private, a perception which is unique to the consciousness of the poet. Whether he takes this perception as his "life-porch in eternity" (l. 11) or whether both are committed to "mocking winds" that "whirl round a chaff-strown floor" (l. 13) is largely in doubt. The fact remains that he alone confers meaning on the place by the act of perception which is individual and inviolate. It is as if the poet considers himself cut off from other minds by the solipsism of subjectivity. It may be that such is the meaning of experience, something apprehended but incommunicable. If this be true then the foundation of art as communication is called into question. It would be unfair to assert the poet's rejection of the resolution of art based on this sonnet; nonetheless he appears to drift in just such a direction, and it is worth noting that art does not occur again as an alternative to the Eros vision.

After the interlude of a single sonnet, "Hoarded Joy," which is based on the carpe diem theme, the poet plunges into despair in a series of three poems beginning with Sonnet LXXXIII. By way of contrast, the summer and ripe fruit imagery of "Hoarded Joy" is supplanted by the particulars of "Barren Spring." The poet notices that "Once more the changed year's turning wheel returns" (l. 1) and "Spring comes merry towards me here" (l. 5). Usually Spring has been associated with the onset of
fulfillment and happiness, especially in connection with the Eros vision. However, Spring "earns/No answering smile" (ll. 5-6) from the poet whose

...life is twined
With the dead boughs that winter still must bind
And whom to-day the Spring no more concerns.
(ll. 6-8)

Far from rejuvenating the poet, the signs of Spring are symbols of pain and suffering. The crocus is a withering flame" (l. 9); the snowdrop, snow and the appleblossom prefigure "the fruit that breeds the serpent's art" (l. 11). This is a vision of the fallen world, the world as unredeemed by the poet's imagination which he wishes to flee before "The white cup shrivels round the golden heart" (l. 14). The last image recalls the one used in association with Lilith in "Body's Beauty," which leads one to believe the poet's remorse comes from a betrayal by physical beauty, or an untrue woman, or both. Spring, which should give rise to feelings of growth and hope, thus is invested with the opposite emotions.

"Farewell to the Glen" (LXXXIV) is another lament, this time associated with place instead of time. The familiar symbol of attainment, the stream, is present and contrasts with the state of the poet. Whereas the

86 Robson, p. 362.
stream runs on smoothly and untroubled, the poet must "fare forth in bitter fantasy" (l. 5) to find other shade by other streams. The poet's melancholy seems to color the stream, which shall fare better "When children bathe sweet faces...And happy lovers blend sweet shadows there" (ll. 10-11)—better than one hour ago when its "echoes had but one man's sighs to bear/And...trees whispered what he feared to know" (ll. 13-14). Although analogous to the sonnets of Willowwood, the poem does not speak of love directly, but love is clearly suggested by the context. Possibly the poet recalls his previous happiness, yet there is no hint of hope in the poem, nor even a wish to recapture what has been lost in Part I. The memories of past experience cannot be obliterated by the poet; he does not, however, wish to go back but accepts what cannot be changed. This willingness to accept change is the important distinction between the poems which recall love in Part II and the last sonnets in Part I.

"Vain Virtues" and "Lost Days" (LXXXV - LXXXVI) are poems about futulity, the former impersonal and the latter personal. The first looks at those victims of fate whose single sin can condemn them to hell. Decrying the arbitrary nature of punishment and reward in the Christian sense, he sees irony in the lot of virgins "whom death's
timely knell/Might once have sainted" (l. 4), but who now abide "the snake-bound shuddering sheaves/Of anguish" (ll. 6-7). The fair deeds are superseded by a soul's sin, earning them "the tribute of the pit" (l. 9) and the "torturer, who "yearning waits his destined wife" (l. 13). The poet can find no rationale for this concept of divine retribution, seeing only frustration and contempt in such a doctrine. In much the same way the poet laments his own fate "when, after death, he shall see the faces,/Each one a murdered self, with low last breath" (l. 11). Unlike the virgins of "Vain Virtues" the poet himself is responsible for this end, having indulged in wasted days—the "ears of wheat/Sown once for food but trodden into clay" (ll. 3-4), the "golden coins squandered and still to pay" (l. 5), and the "spilt water as in dreams must cheat/The undying throats of Hell" (ll. 7-8). Each of the "Lost Days" is irretrievable and represents a small death of the self. The virgins seem to be arbitrary victims of fate, but the poet is a victim of his own paralysis of will. Each is the subject of the poet's pity, yet in his own case the poet must accept responsibility as an agent of free choice. For that reason his frustration is the worse. We saw in Sonnets LXXIX-LXXXI

87Bowra, p. 264.
how the poet seemed to swing towards the idea of fate or destiny. Here he seems to reassert his role in the shaping of his destiny and his assumption of guilt, which makes the burden of existence heavier to bear.

Following these poems of dejection are three speculative sonnets which signal a growing absorption with the idea of death. "Death's Songsters" (LXXXVII) draws on allusions to the classical figures of Helen and Ulysses. The first is a singer of death's songs in relation to the incident of the fall of Troy. Ulysses evaded the song of the sirens and thus avoided destruction. In view of these traditional stories the question for the poet's soul becomes twofold: "are songs of Death no heaven to thee/Nor shames her lip the cheek of Victory?" (ll. 13-14); that is, must the poet avoid the call of death as did Ulysses though its song is sweet, and does not death represent a hollow victory, a regrettable means of escape, as in the case of Helen? Given to the interrogative voice like most poems of meditation in Part II, the sonnet raises questions which are unanswered. However, by the very nature of the poet's final question it appears that at least for now death is an alternative he had rather not choose.

"Hero's Lamp" (LXXXVIII) is the most conspicuous intrusion of the Eros vision up to this point in Part II.
Without speaking of himself, the poet asks about the possibility of love's rebirth. The sonnet addresses Hero, who filled that lamp in Eros' name and who is never to see the journey completed, for "dawn's first light/On ebbing storm and life twice ebb'd must break" (ll. 5-6), referring to the deaths of lover and beloved. The gods decree the lamp will remain unlit "Till some one man the happy issue see:/Of a Life's love, and bid its flame to shine" (ll. 11-12). The poet speculates that the flame "may rest unfir'd" (l. 14). In other words, he conjectures that love may no longer obtain in the world for himself or others. The Eros vision is a dubious affair for mankind at large, as demonstrated by the fates of Hero and Leander, the archetypal lost lovers of classical writings.

"The Trees of the Garden" (LXXXIX) inquires whether there is any meaning at all to our existence or "all a show--/A wisp that laughs upon the wall" (ll. 3-4). The inevitability of death suggests the question of whether there is a

...decree
Of some inexorable supremacy
Which ever, as man strains his blind surmise

88 Howard, p. 168.
89 Howard, p. 168.
From depth to ominous depth, looks past his eyes
Sphinx-faced with unabashed augury? (ll. 5-8)

Reminiscent of "The Monochord," the sonnet seeks to identify the power who governs man's existence and finds the possibility that the force is a blind, indifferent one, oblivious to man's imaginative attempt to fathom it. Even those "who have passed Death's haggard hills" (l. 1) cannot answer the riddle. Thus the poet turns to the Earth to "Invoke/The storm felled forest trees" (ll. 9-10) or the silver sapling beneath its yoke of stars. Yet these too are mortal like man, and shall "shrink with age" (l. 14). The realm of heavenly bodies is represented here by "clustering gems" or stars; a realm both timeless and inscrutable, it is the domain of the supreme power who rules men's lives. "The Trees of the Garden" contains a concentrated vision of the poet's existential dilemma. Faced with the prospect of death in a universe in which he is an alien, man finds meaning to be questionable, because it is not given. Perhaps a parody of the Earthly Paradise, this garden encompasses only speculation, not resolution.

"Retro Me, Sathana" (XC) is at best a stop-gap in the poet's slide toward total despair. Attempting to counter the nihilism of the previous sonnets, the poem temporarily casts aside evil. The poet begins by
accepting the notion of finite human existence and even
the finite existence of the world:

...Even as heavy-curled
Stooping against the wind, a charioteer
Is snatched from out his chariot by the hair,
So shall Time be, and as the void car, hurled
Abroad by reiiless steeds, even so the world.
Yea, even as chariot-dust upon the air
It shall be sought and not found anywhere. (ll. 1-7)

Yet the poet will not turn to cynicism, saying to Satan,
"Leave these weak feet to tread in narrow ways" (l. 11).
In resisting the temptation to despair, the poet cannot
expect to reclaim Paradise. At best he can hope to locate
an alternative to the Eros vision, to imagine some other
form of redemption, and this is only possible in moments
of courage like this one when he refuses to admit defeat.90

This exercise of will in the context of adversity
is short-lived, as the following five sonnets show (XCI-
XCV). The initial poem in the group, "Lost on Both Sides,"
is a study in the dissolution of self, which many critics
take to be the chief characteristic of the poet.91 The
octave utilizes the situation of two men who have "loved
a woman well/Each hating each" (ll. 1-2). Neither can
claim the prize, "Yet o'er her grave the night and day

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90 Robillard correctly points out that the poet is
also resisting the temptation to commit suicide. See p. 7.

91 This is especially true of Miyoshi. See pp. 249-256.
dispel/At last their feud forlorn, with cold and heat"
(ll. 5-6). This experience becomes the metaphor for
the poet's consciousness. The separate hopes "which
in a soul had wooed/The one same Peace" (ll. 9-10) even-
tuate in the loss of Peace. The poet tells us "They
roam together now, and among/Its by-streets, knocking
at the dusty inns" (ll. 13-14). Unable to settle on a
commitment to act, the poet suffers the fragmentation
of self which comes of failure to translate hope into
action.92 The winding path and dusty inns are apt meta-
phors for the undirected journey through a realm of
waste and futility, which is the experience of the poet.

Next are two sonnets with the title "The Sun's
Shame," which deal with the ordinary world of pain and
unfulfillment as created through metaphors of nature
unredeemed by the imagination.93 Youth and hope are
mocked by

...penury's sedulous self-torturing thought
On gold, whose master therewith buys his bane;
And longed-for woman longing all in vain
For lonely man with love's desire distraught;
And wealth and strength and power and pleasantness,
Given unto bodies of whose souls men say
None poor and weak, slavish and foul as they....
(ll. 5-11)
The corruption of man's striving for material gain and the pain of frustrated desire are the earmarks of the ordinary world of experience, according to the poet. Nature manifests the pathetic fallacy: "The blushing morn and blushing eve confess/The shame that loads the intolerable day" (ll. 13-14). In the other sonnet, "The Sun's Shame" (XCIII), the world is unregenerate, though Spring gives the appearance of rebirth. The octave introduces the personification of age, who speaks to youth saying "Might I thy fruitless treasure but possess/Such blessing of mine all coming years should bless" (ll. 4-5). The old man's anxiety is prompted by the "breath against his soul/The hour swift-winged of nearer nothingness" (ll. 7-8). Customarily Rossetti will set down an analogy in the octave to make his point in the sestet; this sonnet follows the principle. The old man is replaced by "the World's grey Soul" and the youth is replaced by "the green World" (l. 9). Earth is "All soulless now, yet merry with the Spring" (l. 12). What we have is a dichotomy and a paradox. The dichotomy is one of body and soul, one which in this case applies to the world. The paradox exists in the fact that Earth's green beauty is soulless, while the spirit of the world is verging on death or nothingness. In order for the Earth to be reborn it must unite itself with the spiritus
mundi, to borrow Yeats' term. That this is an improbability in the context of the sonnet at hand makes the Earth's regenerate appearance a mockery, the occasion of the sun's shame for a fallen world.

"Michelangelo's Kiss" (XCIV), ostensibly about art, is really about the soul's reward. Michelangelo's one regret, we are told, was that he failed to give Colonna, "His Muse and dominant Lady, spirit-wed" (l. 7), a proper parting kiss: "Her hand he kissed, but not her brow or cheek" (l. 8). What then can the soul expect when she is "Touching at length some sorely-chastened goal" (l. 11), and "What holds for her Death's garner" (l. 14)? In thought and feeling this sonnet looks back to "Vain Virtues." It might be argued that Sonnet XCIV should be classed as a poem of speculation as have many others with a similar tone. However, the question raised by the poet actually contains its own answer. The soul can expect only nothingness as its reward, just as the old man of the previous sonnet and Colonna demonstrate in different ways. Inasmuch as this be true, "Michelangelo's Kiss" represents the poet's growing sense of the morose and futile nature of existence.

It was stated that the act of artistic creation as a means of uniting self and world was substantially discounted after Sonnet LXXXI, which undercut the idea
of communication. If the self cannot be validated by establishing touch with the external world, art becomes an activity of psychological masturbation instead of a creative act. "The Vase of Life," Sonnet XCV, seals the case against art. The poem puts forth the notion that man's experience does not match art in its order and stability, in its ability to escape from the changes of time. The possessor of the vase has "turned it with his hands" (l. 2) but he cannot enter its domain. Preserved on the vase is the image of a youth who "stands somewhere crowned, with silent face" (l. 8). In the words of the Introductory Sonnet the urn is a "moment's monument." Contrasting with this image of immutable life, mankind's experience is rendered in the sestet. He has

...filled this vase with wine for blood
With blood for tears, with spice for burning vow
With watered flowers for buried love most fit.

(ll. 9-11)

Images of flood and tears speak of suffering or passion, and buried love of unfulfilled desire. In "Fate's name he has kept it whole; which now/Stands empty till his ashes fall in it" (ll. 13-14), suggests that art survives man and shows up his futile existence. Beauty, even when it is spiritual in nature, only reveals the ugliness and chaos of ordinary human existence.

Again in "Life the Beloved" (XCVI) the poet tries to
work his way out of dejection, proclaiming a rebirth is at hand. Spring, the time of regeneration, "blows with fresh hours for hope to glorify/Though pale she lay when in the winter grove" (ll. 11-12). The poet still clings to living, to the idea that the powers of darkness and cold will be overcome and that the cycle of experience will turn, lifting him from the despair of the previous poems. However, this turns out to be the final expression of this sentiment; henceforward the further descent of the poet continues until he is brought close to death.

Much like "Lost on Both Sides," Sonnets XCVII-XCVIII treat the themes of self-division and wasted time. "A Superscription" (XCVII) envisions a meeting of the poet and the spectre of lost opportunity, which calls itself "Might-have-been," "No-more," "Too-late," and "Farewell."94 The spectre holds up "the glass where that is seen/Which had Life's form and Love's" (ll. 5-6), that is, the poet himself. By the ghost's spell the mirror's image "Is now a shaken shadow intolerable/Of unuttered the frail screen" (ll. 7-8). Faced with his own failures and missed opportunities, the poet is cut off from ultimate knowledge. Whereas once he was the

94Fobson unfairly calls this sonnet a summary of Rossetti's poetic career. See p. 364.
conductor of sacred wisdom, passing it from the eternal to the temporal world through creation, he is now but a screen, cut off from the sense of mystery in the universe. Similarly, "He and I" (XCVIII) talks about a disparity, not of possibility and achievement but of self. The poet has become alienated from himself so that he sees himself as a stranger who "now wanders round my field/ With plaints for every flower" (ll. 9-10). This self finds the "images of sky, cloud and Light" to be lifeless, the world unredeemed by joy and imagination in the same fashion as nature appears in "The Sun's Shame."

The "sweet waters of life," symbols of rebirth, "yield/ Unto his lips no draught but tears unseal'd" (ll. 12-13), and thus the hope for renewal just entertained in "Life the Beloved" vanishes with the dissociation of self.

Nothing is left to the poet at this point but a vision of death. Curiously, death has lost its fearful aspect, and the poet says, "To-day Death seems to me an infant child" (l. 1). The desire for acceptance is the chief impulse of the poem. The poet could accept death

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95 This sonnet probably best supports Miyoshi's idea of the poet's obsession with the notion of divided selfhood. See p. 253-8.

If haply so my heart might be beguil'd
To find no terrors in a face so mild
If haply so my weary heart might be
Unto the newborn milky eyes of thee.
O Death, before resentment reconcil'd. (ll. 4-8)

In the sestet the poet asks how long he must wait before reaching "the strand/Of the pale wave" (ll. 12-13). This recalls the sea imagery of "The Monochord" as associated with death, the idea being that death is a sinking into oblivion and nothingness. "New Born Death" continues with Sonnet C, in which the poet looks back to recapitulate the past. Addressed to Life, "the lady of all bliss" (l. 1), the poem treats the Eros vision in the octave. Speaking of the attainment of love, he remembers the fair places where "only woods and waves might her our kiss/While to the winds all thought of Death we cast" (ll. 5-6). Yet now Love "And Art whose eyes were worlds by God found fair" (l. 11) have departed. The poet asks, "And did these die that thou mightst bear me Death?" (l. 14). The faded vision of Eros and the fading Existential vision leave only death as an option for the poet.

Having sought alternatives through his imagination in Part II, the poet is unable to sustain them. The structure of this section observes, as we have noted, an alternating rhythm of hope and despair. In the beginning Art and sensuous enjoyment were conceived as
means of uniting self and world, the world of ordinary experience. The poet's movement through this realm in which pain is always in the offing traces an upward and downward direction corresponding to his moods and the power of his imagination to fashion a coherent picture of experience. Gradually the poet sinks lower, the moments of positive self-assertion are less frequent, and the alternatives slip away as his failure to act grows more serious. The structure of "Change and Fate," then, follows the development of the poet through the lower human world, rising and falling and eventually reaching toward the nadir of experience where it touches the demonic world or, in terms of the Existential vision, nothingness. It is not a straight linear direction, as we pointed out previously. Rather, the structure of Part II oscillates back and forth or up and down, to continue our metaphor, and finally becomes an arc curving downward toward death. The title "Change and Fate" is appropriate in view of this structural arrangement. "Change" describes the poet's mood and tone as he turns from one option to another, seeking the way to be. Yet despite his effort he emerges from the sonnets of Part II a frustrated image of his former self; his destiny is never to firmly grasp a form of resolution which can satisfy his needs. One by one the alternatives are
discarded. Perhaps his inability to carry his conceptions over into the realm of action is his undoing, or perhaps the conception proves inadequate. Actually it is a combination of these two factors. Yet whatever the reason, the outcome remains the same. The use of "Fate" in the title does not really denote some power in the cosmos, not as Rossetti has employed it. Fate means simply the eventual end or plight of the poet; he himself accepts responsibility for his demise, which thus increases his sense of guilt and remorse.

This leads us to the final sonnet in The House of Life, "The One Hope" (CI). Recognizing his failure to make a choice, to sustain a vision of the lower world which would accommodate him to it, the poet looks beyond death and asks,

Shall Peace be still a sunk stream long unmet
Or may the soul at once in a green plain
Stoop through the spray of some sweet life fountain
And cull the dew-drenched flowering amulet?

(ll. 5-8)

This is a vision of the Garden, identified by its images of flower, green and fountain, projected into an after-life. The poet's one hope is that, reaching the immortal land where "the wan soul in that golden air...Peers breathless for the gift of grace" (ll. 9-11), he will find his mistress there—"even that word alone" (l. 14). 97

97Hough, p. 81.
Standing back to view The House of Life in its totality, the structure becomes an intelligible whole. Part I begins at the summit of human experience and moves down into the lower world; Part II begins in this fallen domain (what we have called ordinary experience) and then eventually moves to the bottom of the cycle where it touches death. The sequence has been called a spiritual autobiography by many, and this is an acceptable notion if we keep in mind the distinction between the life Rossetti lived and the one he created. It is the story of a poet's existence as a generic man. Seeking a vision which would unite the contraries of human experience—flesh and spirit, time and eternity, body and soul—the poet pursues two particular imaginative constructions of the world, one based on the figure of Eros and one on the poet's own energies as he exists in an unredeemed world. This second vision never approaches the exalted realm of Eros or the promise of Earthly Paradise restored. It does offer its own peculiar rewards; yet both visions represent the efforts of the poet to revalue experience and make it worthwhile. The record of this effort as the ordered experience of the poet's imagination constitutes the structure of The House of Life.
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