Chapter 4
THE PORTRAIT: ROSSETTI'S 'NEW LIFE'

O Love! let this my lady's picture glow
Under my hand to praise her name, and show
. . . . .
Her face is made her shrine. Let all men note
That in all years (O Love, thy gift is this!)
They that would look on her must come to me.[1]
Sonnet 10, December 1868.

JANE MORRIS A.D. 1868 painted by D.G. ROSSETTI.
Famed by her poet husband and surpassingly famous for
her beauty, now let her gain lasting fame by my painting.

So wrote Rossetti on his newly-completed portrait of Jane. From this point in time – which coincides with the writing of the *Willow-wood* sonnets – it seems to have been Rossetti's aim to do for Jane Morris, in both words and images, what Dante determined to do for Beatrice at the end of the *Vita Nuova:* '. . .it is my hope that I shall yet write concerning her what hath not before been written of any woman.'[2] In Rossetti's sonnet Jane is the icon of Ideal Beauty of which Rossetti is the high-priest. This is of particular importance within *The House of Life,* as Rossetti employs his own personal experience of love as the metaphorical vehicle for his religion of transcendent Love, which is the main theme of the fifty-nine sonnets that constitute Part 1: *Youth and Change.* In this, he is following in the footsteps of Dante.

In order to identify Rossetti's methods and intentions more clearly, we must first consider the apparently earlier poem of the same title, *The Portrait.* The painting of Rossetti's portrait of Jane coincided precisely with the events detailed in the *Willow-wood* sonnets. While the *Willow-wood* quartet marks a point of personal, psychological, and emotional transition for Rossetti the sonnet *The Portrait,* commemorates Rossetti's

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emergence from this state of transition, and stands as an affirmation of his newly acknowledged feelings for Jane. It stands for the 'New Life' he found in her. The process of this, however, may be better observed in the longer poem of the same title. William Rossetti wrote:

> In printed notices of my brother's poems I have often seen the supposition advanced that this poem was written after the death of his wife, in relation to some portrait he had painted of her during her lifetime. The supposition is very natural – yet not correct. The poem was in fact an extremely early one, and purely imaginary, – perhaps, in the first draft of it, as early as 1847; it was afterwards considerably revised.[3]

William's explanation is, however, rather misleading. While he correctly states that the portrait is not that of Elizabeth Siddal, the words 'it was afterwards considerably revised' conceal the truth of the matter: elsewhere, William provides the dates for this poem as being 1847-69,[4] which allows us to see that in its 'considerably altered and improved'[5] form, it stands as a counterpart to the sonnet. My belief is that the poem is not at all 'purely imaginative' but is a record of the same period of transition as *Willow-wood,* although expressed in entirely different terms. The 'improvement' consists of the same devious devices that Rossetti employs in the *Willow-wood* sequence to disguise the true subject of the sonnets. *The Portrait* indeed starts with the same motif of the dead beloved: 'And yet the earth is over her.'

The first stanza reacquaints us with the same imagery encountered in *Willow-wood*: the poet-lover stands before 'her picture as she was', while internally his self-reflection transposes his own image upon hers. This is a double-edged motif. On one level it dwells on the ephemerality of human life which we find repeated in Sonnet 97, *A Superscription:* 'Unto thine eyes the glass, where that is seen / Which had Life's form and Love's', which muses upon the frailty of human life and the inevitability of death. On another level, it repeats the imagery in *Willow-wood,* in which the poet-lover (who is also the Orphic poet Love on a higher spiritual plane), conjures the image of the dead beloved within the magic-mirror of the water's surface. In this familiar Rossettian motif, the images of the lover and the beloved – which we often find Platonically reflected in each other as well as in mirror-surfaces – represent the recognition and reunion of their separate individual souls. William Sharp, writing on the sonnet *The Portrait,* makes the comment, which we find fully illustrated in the first stanza of the longer poem, that in the image of the portrait, both subject and object, painter and model, will exist in union long after both are dead.[6] Here, Rossetti skilfully combines both motifs. We may imagine 'the glass' to be not a mirror, but rather the protective

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glass of the painted portrait, in which the artist finds himself reflected as he gazes at the image of his beloved. The fusion of images of artist and model so produced would echo Sharp's suggestion, as well as the Platonic motif.

The first stanza ends with the information that the subject of the portrait is now dead, while the second opens with a Poe-like description of the interior of her coffin. This is no doubt part of the original version of the poem. There is nothing beyond death but this, the stanza concludes, save only the remains of the beloved within the grave, the remains of the beloved within the poet's memory, and that which remains a mystery beyond human ken.

The first line of the third stanza, 'In painting her I shrined her face', echoes the sonnet's 'Her face is made her shrine.' There is also a close link with the *Willow-wood* sequence. The stanza continues:

> Mid mystic trees, where light falls in
> Hardly at all; a covert place
> Where you might think to find a din
> Of doubtful talk, and a live flame
> Wandering, and many a shape whose name
> Not itself knoweth. . . .
> . . . . .
> A deep dim wood; and there she stands (St.4)

The fourth stanza concludes with the knowledge that the beloved is now less than 'her image in the stream', expressing a familiar Rossettian motif. The 'deep dim wood' here, besides recalling that of Dante, corresponds with the willow-wood. Yet, at the same time, it supplies us with an image of everyday life which is spiritually dead – the 'live flame [of love] wandering' amidst this undefined underworld – which we may perhaps understand as the inner life of love brought about by the presence of the beloved which relegates everything beyond this presence to a state of void. Rossetti, increasingly entranced by his model as he paints her, takes a proportionate disinterest in anything beyond herself alone. The model is undoubtedly Jane, and not as most commentaors conclude, Elizabeth.

The fifth stanza tells how the lovers met alone in the wood and were happy. Here again is a return to *Willow-wood* imagery;

> yet memory
> Saddens those hours, as when the moon
> Looks upon daylight. And with her
> I stooped to drink the spring-water,
> Athirst where other waters sprang

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The image of the moon looking on daylight reminds us of the symbolism of *Proserpine,* the presiding deity of *Willow-wood.* The 'spring-water' is that of the Hermetic Stream, whose source is Venus Urania, Proserpine's heavenly alter-ego. The 'other waters' are those of the deep wells of emotional love, which echo back and forth between the two lovers, who are but a metaphor for the poet and his inspirational divine love. But his earthly love has so far remained undisclosed. As the poet's 'soul won strength / For words whose silence wastes and kills' – that is the declaration of his love – a storm breaks overhead and drives the lovers inside. Here, Rossetti amplifies the internal 'other waters' of personal emotion into the waters of the storm; the tension between the two lovers is conveyed by the enormity of natural forces which burst upon them, eclipsing, overwhelming and engulfing them. The storm is also a metaphor for those forces which the lovers will unleash upon themselves by a declaration of their illicit love. These themes provide the symbolism of the sonnet for the painting *Pandora,* 1869, for which Jane posed:

What of the end, Pandora? Was it thine,
The deed that set these fiery pinions free?
Ah! wherefore did the Olympian consistory
In its own likeness make thee half divine?
Was it that Juno's brow might stand a sign
For ever? and the mien of Pallas be
A deadly thing? and that all men might see
In Venus' eyes the gaze of Proserpine?

What of the end? These beat their wings at will,
The ill-born things, the good things turned to ill, -
Powers of the impassioned hours prohibited.
Aye, clench the casket now! Whither they go
Thou mayst not dare to think: nor canst thou know
If Hope still pent there be alive or dead.

The same sentiment is also expressed in Sonnet 47, *Broken Music*:

and all her gain
Is but the pang of unpermitted prayer.

And again in Sonnet 46, *Parted Love:*

Till the tempestuous tide-gates flung apart
Flood with wild will the hollows of the heart,
And thy heart rends thee, and thy body endures.

The tension of the storm, both within and without the lovers, I believe to be that which was developing between Rossetti and Jane as he painted her portrait during 1867-8. It is this tension, and the various forms of guilt it fuelled, which lies behind the *Willow-wood* sonnets; the ghosts

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of which appear to be directly connected with the 'words whose silence wastes and kills'.

In stanza 6 the poet declares his love as the storm rages outside 'the pelted window-pane'. The torrential downpour connected with unleashed sexual passion recalls the later suppressed *Nuptial Sleep*:

> At length their long kiss severed, with sweet smart:
> And as the last slow sudden drops are shed
> From sparkling eves when all the storm has fled,
> So singly flagged the pulses of each heart.

In order to capture the memory of this moment, 'Like leaves through which a bird has flown', the poet endeavours to paint the portrait of his beloved. What follows next is a passage replete with symbolic content. In order 'To feign the shadow of the trees', he positions her before a window through which the sunshine pours 'among the plants in bloom'. The 'plants in bloom' are a metaphor for the lovers themselves, as can be seen in *Nuptial Sleep*:

> Their bosoms sundered, with the opening start
> Of married flowers to either side outspread
> From the knit stem. . . .

In stanza 8, the metaphor is carried further: 'It seemed each sun-thrilled blossom there / Beat like a heart among the leaves.' Here, the Sun, in a typical Rossettian metaphor, is conflated with Love, to which the blooms of the flowers respond as the human heart responds to the Godhead; their sensitivity allows them to recognise the light and warmth of the celestial fire, to which they must always turn their heads. The heart and the blossom both palpitate to the thrill of the divine good, the Sun of Love. The blooms represent the Rose of Love, which opens within the hearts of the lovers. In this archetypal imagery, it is the heart of Lunar Aphrodite, the Rose of Love, which opens in adoration for radiant Solar Apollo. Again, we are presented with the image of the sun / flower 'among the leaves' noted earlier. Here, once more, nature is used as a metaphor for the internal condition of man, in whom the radiant divine pulse is glimpsed through the shell of his material fabric. This symbolism is Rosicrucian in nature.

But at this very moment, the poet is drawn to contrast this opening of hearts with the one that continues to haunt him, the

> heart that never beats nor heaves,
> In that one darkness lying still,
> What now to thee my love's great will
> Or the fine web the sunshine weaves?

This heart is the heart of his dead wife, not that of his new love. They are not one and the same: 'For now doth daylight [i.e., the Sun of new

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love] disavow / Those days – nought left to see or hear.' Nonetheless this, the ninth stanza, demonstrates that during darkness – when the Sun of Love (in the form of the beloved) is not present – the presence of the dead continues to haunt him. While daylight belongs to the Sun and to Love, the night remains the province of shades ruled by dark Proserpine. Thus, unconsciously, we are returned to the essential dualism which underlies all Rossetti's symbolic structures and artistic output. Nature, that in daylight is radiantly joyous, is by night transformed by the lunar Death-Queen Proserpine, into a place of illusion and torment:

At night-time these things reach mine ear;
When the leaf-shadows at a breath
Shrink in the road, and all the heath,
Forest and water, far and wide,
In limpid starlight glorified,
Lie like the mystery of death. (St.9)

For it is during the night that the poet is haunted by the past and the shade of his dead wife. She appears to claim a hold over his darker moments, even now. But there is a double edge to this, for, nearly seven years after her death, it is Rossetti who reaches towards her grave to repossess the poems he had buried with her. The death-symbolism of both this poem and *Willow-wood* seems to be rooted in this macabre episode. Proserpine exacts a toll for this violation, and the Orphic myth is not only present, but horrifyingly real. Here, the influence of Poe cannot be ignored.

If we turn to Sonnet 97, *A Superscription,* it may be reinterpreted in this light. Although the speaker of the sonnet is usually identified as Rossetti himself, the bitterness and recrimination assumes a more satisfactory reading if we understand the speaker to be Lizzie Siddal. The sonnet was composed on 24 January 1869, thus making it contemporary with both *Willow-wood* and *The Portrait.* In the imagery of first stanza of *The Portrait*, in which the artist gazes upon the image of his dead wife, we may imagine the words of *A Superscription* running through his mind – but spoken by *her*:

Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been;
I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell;
Unto thine ear I hold the dead-sea shell
Cast up thy Life's foam-fretted feet between;
Unto thine eyes the glass where that is seen
Which had Life's form and Love's, but by my spell
Is now a shaken shadow intolerable,
Of ultimate things unuttered the frail screen.

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Mark me, how still I am! But should there dart
One moment through thy soul the soft surprise
Of that winged Peace which lulls the breath of sighs, -
Then shalt thou see me smile, and turn apart
Thy visage to mine ambush at thy heart
Sleepless with cold commemorative eyes.

This connection is easily missed, simply because of the late position Sonnet 97 holds in *The House of Life* – indeed it is quite likely that this is what Rossetti intended us to believe, in order to conceal the true motive of the piece. Placed in its proper context beside the poems we are considering, it reassumes its true value, and all the funerary implications and associations fall into place. So also does the overwhelming sense of guilt experienced by the poet.

But at this crucial point in the poem, penetrating 'the mystery of death', comes redemption in the form of the new and revivifying love, which bursts in upon the darkness like a new dawn. Dante's vision in the culminating cantos of *Paradiso* appears to be compressed into this one stanza. Despite bearing the style of an earlier period – it appears to be a fragment of the original version of the poem through its similarities to *The Blessed Damozel* – its imagery now points to a redefined climax. This stanza stands for the triumph of the saving grace of love over death.

Even so, where Heaven holds breath and hears
The beating heart of Love's own breast, -
Where round the secret of all spheres
All angels lay their wings to rest, –
How shall my soul stand rapt and awed,
When, by the new birth borne abroad
Throughout the music of the suns,
It enters in her soul at once
And knows the silence there for God! (St. 11)

There can be no doubt from this that the Rossettian deity is female, and that the gateway to the infinite is through the finite, that the eternal is gained through the temporal. In 'The beating heart of Love's own breast' we are returned to the earlier image of 'each sun-thrilled blossom there / Beat like a heart'. In other words, the earlier worldly love, has transcended the material realm into a solar heaven where now Love exists as 'the secret of all spheres'. This, the 'new birth' of the soul 'borne abroad / Throughout the music of the suns', expressed in typically Rosicrucian solar symbolism, relates not only to the transfiguration within this poem but also to *The Blessed Damozel,* where the handmaidens of the Virgin 'fashion the birth-robes for them / Who are just born, being dead.' Here, the poet's soul unites

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with that of his beloved, through which the Godhead is achieved.

This is quite straightforward in poetical and mystical terms, but I do not believe this was Rossetti's sole intention in this context. Beneath this 'transfigured' image lies a more mundane foundation, the underlying truth of which seems directly related to the sense of death noted earlier, in both this poem and *Willow-wood.* This death seems to be Rossetti's spiritual bereavement following the death of Lizzie. A sense of morbidity pervades these works; it is the death of love that is addressed in poetic terms. The rebirth of stanza 11 stands for the spiritual rebirth of Rossetti's love on a level that transcends its material rebirth in stanzas 7 and 8. Female love was Rossetti's only true religion. It pervaded his character, physically, emotionally and spiritually, so entirely, that to be without it, was to endure a living death. It is this sense of death that he poetically symbolises, and from which, here, he describes being rescued by a new love. The new love was Jane, who re-awakens him into 'new life'.

This is exemplified in Sonnet 37, *The Love Moon,* which testifies to the transference of love from the dead Lizzie to Jane. In Sonnet 36, *Life-in-love,* we may trace the process I have described above, of a 'new life' bestowed through new love:

> Not in thy body is thy life at all,
> But in this lady's lips and hands and eyes;
> Through these she yields thee life that vivifies
> What else were sorrow's servant and death's thrall.
> Look on thyself without her, and recall
> The waste remembrance and forlorn surmise
> That lived but in a dead-drawn breath of sighs
> O'er vanished hours and hours eventual.
>
> Even so much life hath the poor tress of hair
> Which, stored apart, is all love hath to show
> For heart-beats and for fire-heats long ago;
> Even so much life endures unknown, even where,
> 'Mid change the changeless night environeth,
> Lies all that golden hair undimmed in death.

In this sonnet we are able to observe the major motifs behind *The Portrait.* It is also worth noting, in the sestet, the use of the symbolic 'heart-beats' and 'fire-heats' discussed earlier.

In the last stanza of *The Portrait,* the poet looks at the portrait – which is that of the dead wife – and awaits the time

> Till other eyes shall look from it,
> Eyes of the spirit's Palestine
> Even than the old gaze tenderer.

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The importance of this poem lies in establishing an autobiographical moment for the events in the poetic and emotional landscape it describes. This landscape provides the background to the *Portrait of Mrs William Morris,* 1868. This portrait is inextricably linked to both the sonnet and the poem.

Here, it may be as well to look at the known events surrounding 'The Portrait' itself. The painting had its conception as early as 1866, when, on the 16 June, Rossetti wrote to Ford Madox Brown that he was about to start work on the portrait.[7] It was during the previous summer of 1865 that Jane posed for the familiar photographs of herself in the garden at Cheyne Walk, which shows Rossetti's intention of using her as model well before this date. From this time onwards, Jane was to become the essential prototype in Rossetti's quest for the Grail of Ideal Beauty. Whatever his private relations were with her, in his artistic output she is always his ultimate symbol of transcendent beauty, the icon *par excellence* of his own personal religion. William Sharp emphasises the significance of Rossetti's new form of icon as a spiritual Ideal of Beauty.[8] It is no exaggeration to state that, through his paintings he elevated her to a cult figure within the aesthetic community, and that 'They that would look on her must come to me' as the high-priest of that cult. Even today her image is immediately recognisable as the enduring icon of the Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic styles, despite the fact that as a model she post-dated the original Brotherhood. There can be little doubt that Rossetti's Ideal of Beauty was regarded by others also as little less than a religion. William was no less prone to express it so:

> [Jane's] seemed a face created to fire his imagination and to quicken his powers – a face of arcane and inexhaustible meaning. To realise its features was difficult; to transcend its suggestion, impossible. There was one fortunate circumstance – if you could but represent its *appearance,* you stood thereby already high in the region of the typical or symbolic. For idealising there was but one process – to realise. I will not conceal my opinion that my brother succeeded where few painters would have done other than fail; he did some justice to this astonishing countenance.[9]

This testifies to the particular intensity that existed between Rossetti and his handful of chosen models. Nowhere was this more evident than in his relationship with Jane.

The process of painting Jane's portrait – or at least the time spent with her during this period – marks the time when love was reborn in Rossetti, and he leaves the spectral willow-wood for the land of the living again. The transition must have been far from easy, as onto the guilt he still suffered over Lizzie was added the guilt of the betrayal of one of his

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closest friends. Although we may only conjecture at the true circumstances, my own belief is that Rossetti may have been somewhat reticent to enter on this course, and that Jane was less than passive in encouraging him. This view is also held by Jan Marsh.[10]

Closely related to the portrait of Jane, and started while he was painting the portrait, is the picture entitled *Mariana.* This painting depicts Mrs Morris in the same sumptuous blue silk dress that she is wearing in the portrait, and can only be regarded as a variant of the portrait. It appears from Rossetti's correspondence with Jane that both paintings were originally conceived as portraits of Jane in differing attitudes.[11]

The second of the two portraits was named *Mariana,* and sold to Rossetti's patron William Graham. To it was added the figure of the minstrel boy singing Shakespeare's *frustra,* for whom Graham's son William posed. The theme was taken from *Measure for Measure,* act IV, scene 1, and Rossetti's painting had the full verse inscribed on the frame:

> Take, O, take those lips away,
> That so sweetly were forsworn;
> And those eyes, the break of day,
> Lights that do mislead the morn:
> But my kisses bring again, bring again;
> Seals of love, but sealed in vain, sealed in vain.

Tennyson's poem *Mariana* was also based on *Measure for Measure,* and tells the story of the heroine who lives shut away in a crumbling moated grange longing for the return of her lost lover. Millais' painting *Mariana* (1850-1), was based on the accompanying lines from Tennyson, which were quoted in the exhibition catalogue:

> She only said, 'My life is dreary,
> He cometh not,' she said;
> She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
> I would that I were dead!'

The title and the theme behind it would thus have been immediately understood within Rossetti's circle. It is difficult to see how Rossetti's feelings, so obviously displayed for all to see, could have been in any way misinterpreted. And yet, beyond these meanings, there exists yet another, deeper, layer of symbolism within these two paintings. What is of particular importance is the manner in which Rossetti has chosen to portray Jane to the world. The aspect of her as a religious icon and him as her priest is not at all fanciful; neither is the fact that others saw in her image a new spiritual type, the 'face of arcane and inexhaustible meaning'.

In the *Portrait of Mrs Morris*, Rossetti has used the specific language

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of traditional religious iconography to portray Jane in the role of goddess. Here, his portrayal parallels that of the Virgin Mary in a type of secular Annunciation. More importantly, he has infused Christian symbolism with a pagan content to produce a syncretic mythological archetype that is typical of his aim and method. Here, she is both Mary and the Goddess of Love. The blue dress in which she is depicted is traditionally that in which Mary is shown, but it is more accurate to say that it represents the spatial infinity of the heavens inhabited by the Lunar Goddess, of which Mary was but the latest of a long line. The sheen on the silk of her dress appears like the light of the moon on rippling water: 'where wan water trembles in the grove / And the wan moon is the light thereof'.[12] Indeed, the alternative title, *Mariana,* indicates the symbolic association with both Mary and the sea. These elements all occur in the sonnet version of *The Portrait*:

> Beyond the light that the sweet glances throw
> And refluent wave of the sweet smile, may know
> The very sky and sea-line of her soul.

In the portrait, white roses stand before her in a glass jar. Both are traditional signs of purity – the jar representing the 'clear vessel' of the Virgin – although, here, the roses displace the more traditional lilies. This image parallels the traditional iconography of the Annunciation – which of course it was, though not in any Christian sense.

Mingling with the lunar roses are vine-leaves, a symbol of the Sun God.[13] The image is thus charged with an overt sexuality; the 'clear vessel' of the Virgin which is penetrated by the rays of the Sun God. This image is that already noted in the poem of *The Portrait,* 'each sun-thrilled blossom there / Beat like a heart among the leaves'. It is an image found over and again in traditional Annunciations, although in these, the Sun God is the Father of the Christian Scriptures.

Hanging behind both these and Jane in Rossetti's painting, is a flame-coloured cloth, which both reminds us of, and serves the same purpose as, that which covers Beatrice in Dante's vision in the *Vita Nuova*, when she was borne in the arms of Love. At the top it is gathered up where it hangs in such a way that the folds of cloth form the shapes of red-roses, which it is intended that they represent. The brightness of this colour is again picked out in Jane's lips and in the red carnations tucked into her waist-band. All these symbolise love's passion.

In *Mariana,* this is taken one step further. In her hair, Jane wears a spiral-shaped jewel, which is present in several of Rossetti's paintings. Although this is invariably dismissed by commentators as being merely one of Rossetti's stock of theatrical props, it in fact forms a vital part of his symbolic language. There are two of these used in Rossetti's paintings,

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one of which is of a right-hand, the other of a left-hand, spiral. One indicates increase – that proceeding from – the other, decrease, – or that returning to – the Goddess. They represent the trinity of Life, Love, and Death, which is the central motif of *The House of Life.* These are the vital functions of the Lunar Goddess of Nature, who presides over the fertility of vegetable growth throughout the annual cycle. Behind her head in this painting is a green cloth (as in *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*), which represents vegetable nature. That this is the case may be confirmed by the cloth slipping from her lap, on which she is embroidering bright flowers. Here, she represents Spring, or 'new life'. Behind her, the minstrel boy sings the poignant, bitter-sweet lay of the Love which is the motivating force of this 'new life'.

Another painting started in 1868, although not completed until 1881, concerns the same theme as *Mariana*. *La Pia de' Tolomei* takes its subject from Dante, and depicts a beautiful young woman who was confined to a castle in the Maremma marshes by her cruel husband, where she was left to die. Naturally the model for this painting was Jane, who is shown fingering her wedding ring as she gazes abstractedly past the viewer into the distance, a theme taken from Canto V of *Purgatory*:

> Remember me who am La Pia, me
> From Sienna sprung and by Maremma dead.
> This in his inmost heart well knoweth he
> With whose fair jewel I was ringed and wed.

There is a sad irony to these paintings, including *Proserpine*, which depict Jane as the neglected and unhappy wife of an uncaring husband. Here we must turn to one of the earliest portraits of Jane, and certainly the first oil-painting for which she was the model, William Morris's *Queen Guenevere,* 1858. It was almost prophetic that Morris, who genuinely loved Jane, should have, from the start, characterised her as Guenevere. She was the subject of the poem *Praise of My Lady,* in his first published volume, *The Defence of Guenevere*. In a further irony, this painting passed to Madox Brown's son Oliver, from whom Rossetti bought it in 1874. He kept it for the rest of his life.

Although Rossetti did all he could to disguise the autobiographical nature of the sonnets, which included omitting the dates of composition and muddling the proper order of their significance, he was not entirely successful. Indeed, when Rossetti was in the process of publishing the completed version of *The House of Life* in *Ballads and Sonnets,* 1881, he met with a certain amount of opposition from Jane, who was no-doubt concerned about both a repeat of the Buchanan episode, as well as any personal scandal which might attach to herself.[14]

Thus, in proceeding through the sonnets in *The House of Life,* the

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biographical foundations have now been laid upon which to ground them. Of the fifty-nine sonnets of the first section, *Youth and Change,* only two were not composed during the period 1868-71.[15] Most, if not all, of these sonnets are deeply concerned with various aspects of love, and chart the progress of its course in the emotions of the poet. It may now be seen conclusively that they were inspired by, and stand as a testament of, Rossetti's love for Jane Morris.

In *The House of Life,* the *Willow-wood* quartet performs a vital function. Taken in conjunction with Sonnet 36, *Life-in-love,* Sonnet 37, *The Love Moon,* and Sonnet 38, *The Morrow's Message,* they clearly mark the period of the reawakening of Rossetti's love and its transference to Jane. The poignancy of this is detailed in what remains of his correspondence to her.[16] Although the surviving examples all date from 1870, they graphically illustrate the process I have outlined above, reiterating many of the themes found in the sonnets. *Willow-wood* falls at the exact mid-point of *The House of Life,* and details the wasteland of their separation, while *The Portrait* records his being brought back into emotional, spiritual, and creative 'new life', as exemplified by the sudden outpouring of sonnet-writing during this period. This being so, the *Willow-wood* sonnets, along with those that accompany them in detailing the process of transition, mark the true entry-point of *The House of Life.* Ideally, these sonnets should have been placed at the start of *The House of Life,* although it is obvious to see the reasons why they could not have been. Rossetti's deliberate suppression of the dating of the sonnets, coupled with his devious method of composition and ordering that implied that they referred to Lizzie rather than to Jane, were an attempt at confusing the matter further. While *Willow-wood* appears to mark the end of love in the death of the beloved, it is rather the beginning of the new love which forms the central focus of part one of *The House of Life.* All the sonnets of this, bar two, were written as a record of this love.

The composition of both the sonnet and the poem entitled *The Portrait* correspond with the actual painting of the portrait of Jane Morris, thus linking the metaphors and imagery of the poems with traceable events in the poet's life. This link allows us to understand and penetrate the symbolic significance of the sequencing and imagery of *The House of Life.* Perhaps nowhere else in *The House of Life* is this interface between Rossetti's symbolic world and the real world so graphic or so important, for had not the events behind the imagery had a real significance, the whole sonnet-sequence would not, in all probability, have existed at all.

It is for these reasons that we are also able to see the closest of links that exist between Rossetti's poetry and his painting, and the events upon which they are founded. Fact and art interweave to create a complex fabric which consists of both; they are inextricable. Thus, as we look at the

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Portrait of Mrs William Morris, with its symbolic glass of white lunar roses, and a red carnation on the book before her, we hear at the same time within the mind's-ear the lines, 'It seemed each sun-thrilled blossom there / Beat like a heart among the leaves', or picture her within the studio, as 'She stood among the plants in bloom / At windows of a summer room'. At the same time we can almost hear Rossetti's voice intoning as he paints, 'O Love! Let this my lady's picture glow / Under my hand to praise her name':

> Her face is made her shrine. Let all men note
> That in all years (O love, thy gift is this!)
> They that would look on her must come to me.

SAMPLE

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