

The Demon and the Damozel: Dynamics of Desire in the Works of Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti by Suzanne M. Waldman. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2008. 202 pp. + 15 b/w illus. ISBN 978-0-8214-1816-1. \$39.95.

Suzanne Waldman's *The Demon and the Damozel* will challenge some readers with its psychoanalytic readings of the works of the two Rossetti siblings, Christina and Dante Gabriel. The text is dense with specialist terminology (sublimation, primary narcissism, libidinal fixations, and hysterical desire are among the most frequent) as well as copious references to theorists (principally Freud, Kristeva, and especially Lacan). Much to her credit, Waldman has worked assiduously to help the attentive non-specialist reader grasp her arguments and to make her application of theory understandable. Her study is closely argued, she effectively draws on the secondary literature on the Rossettis, and – with psychoanalytic concepts alternating with close reading – she provides original and perceptive readings of many poems and paintings. She submits that the works she will be examining “augment, as well as qualify, existing theory.” Certainly, both Rossettis emerge from this study as more mature, self-conscious, and perceptive artists than they are sometimes portrayed as being. The book includes an introductory chapter, two chapters on Christina Rossetti, three on Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and a conclusion.

Waldman's fundamental premise is that both Rossettis experienced a division in the self. Christina's duality involved “a conflict of world against heaven,” while Dante Gabriel's featured a conflict of “self against the world.” For Waldman, psychoanalytic criticism's theories of “divided subjectivity” can help explain the “dynamics in the Rossettis' works” because their art emerged from “the same nineteenth-century conflicts and frustrations that Freudian theory was originally devised to explain.”

While the application of psychoanalytic theory can occasionally marginalize the importance of literary precedents (the Psalms and Herbert seem neglected in the treatment of love poetry addressed to God, and Petrarch and Dante might be more explicitly invoked in the discussion of *Monna Innominata*), there are numerous solid gains that more than compensate. Too often, Waldman contends, psychoanalytic readings of the Rossettis have been “analytically reductive and prone to pathologizing generalizations.” For instance, she is not sympathetic to feminists who have recruited Christina Rossetti but who conveniently ignore “her willingness to submit to the conventional dictates of patriarchal Christianity.” In this respect, she stresses Rossetti's acceptance of the given social order but situates that acceptance within an ultimately apocalyptic context.

On the subject of gender, Waldman also posits an overlap between