

"THE FULNESS OF THE TIME":  
THE EARLY MARIAN POEMS OF D. G. ROSSETTI

George P. Landow has persuasively argued that Rossetti uses typological symbolism and similar structures because he wants to find a moment when the temporal and the eternal meet, one of those perfect moments which can "offer a pattern and order to our lives" and redeem human time.

Unfortunately for the poet, the only such moment of which he knows that could last is that one at which Christ was supposed to have appeared on earth, there-after providing a center to all history for those who believed in Him. Since Rossetti, like so many Victorians, cannot accept such a divine irruption into the human, these centers of time . . . can appear only in his most personal poetry in a truncated form.<sup>1</sup>

Though Landow briefly examines those sonnets of The House of Life in which Rossetti substitutes the beloved woman for Christ, he does not look at the early poems in which Rossetti also reworks the doctrine of the Incarnation. These early poems present the beloved (who is again the center of meaning) as a type not of Christ, but of His mother.

Rossetti from the beginning of his career had been interested in events in which divine power penetrates the natural world. That interest shows in one of his earliest poems, a ballad called "William and Marie" (written c. 1843).<sup>2</sup> In the ballad, Sir Richard, who wants to wed Marie, kills her lover William. Marie calls for the judgment of heaven to fall upon the murderer's head, whereupon Sir Richard throws her out of the castle window into the moat and rides away. But as he rides across the heath, a bolt of lightning stretches him "writhing on the earth, / A burnt and blackened corse." The very elements are God's instruments of vengeance. If he so wills, God can bridge the gap between heaven and earth with the direct intervention of "heaven's artillery." Unfortunately, there is an after-the-factness about God's intervention. When, in the castle, human need is uttermost, God is nowhere to be found. His concern seems to be with justice; mercy is not in His line. To Rossetti, God the Father seldom became more than a bad joke. When Ford Madox Brown suffered an attack of what he called "gout in the kidneys," an amused Rossetti saw it as a Nobodaddian revenge: "Has Urizen added it to the ills of man for your special behoof?"<sup>3</sup> As he entered his first significant poetic period, Rossetti found a different power to bridge the gap between human and divine and to