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Christina Rossetti and *The English Woman's Journal*

In the recently published third volume of *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti*, Rebecca Crump provides valuable information on the place of publication for numerous "separately published poems" — poems that Rossetti never included in her collected volumes. However Crump indicates that she was unable "to locate the journal text" of "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (III: 361). The journal text for "Gone Before" is also unidentified (III: 386). Recent research shows that Christina Rossetti published both these poems in *The English Woman's Journal*. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" appeared in the December issue for 1861 and "Gone Before" in the October issue for 1863.¹ Identifying the original place of publication for these two poems contributes to the textual study of Rossetti's work and clarifies her publication history.² More importantly, knowledge of Rossetti's appearance in *The English Woman's Journal* provides valuable insight into her opinion of the mid-Victorian woman's movement.

Identifying the periodicals in which Rossetti published is central to an understanding of her private views, since it is clear that she gave serious consideration to the "literary company" she kept. When in 1878 her poem "Yet a little while" appeared in *The University Magazine* with articles that Rossetti considered religiously questionable, she declined the editor's invitation to submit another contribution: "I never could be at my ease or happy in literary company with persons who look down upon what I look up to. I have not played at Xtianity, and therefore cannot play at unbelief. . . . I have studied the 'table of contents,' and that leaves me in doubt" (Troxell, 160). Later in her life, Rossetti, a firm anti-vivisectionist, even stopped subscribing to the Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge, an institution that had published several of her own prose works, when she discovered that "they had published a book countenancing Vivisection" (W. M. Rossetti, *Family Letters*, 218). Clearly, the fact that Rossetti contributed to *The English Woman's Journal* indicates that she

was sympathetic to the *Journal's* overall purpose and tone.

Founded in 1858 by feminists Bessie Rayner Parkes and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, *The English Woman's Journal* holds a significant place in Victorian woman's history. Although it lasted only until 1864, when it failed for financial reasons, it marked "a new voice in British journalism" (Levine, 296).³ In Parkes's own words, it was founded upon a "desire to investigate the great mass of female misery and indigence existing in England" (Rendall, 120). Much of this "misery" was seen to arise from a lack of female employment. Although the journal served to inform its "lady readers" of relevant legal and political issues, such as the campaign to pass a Married Woman's Property Act, its primary purpose was to open the work place to women, especially middle-class women: "It is work we ask, room to work, encouragement to work, and an open field with a fair day's wages for a fair day's work" ("Association for Promoting the Employment of Women," 55). This focus on extending employment opportunities naturally led to a call for changes in female education and training: "The leading contributors of the *Journal* all pointed, often from personal experience, to the poverty of middle-class women's education" (Rendall, 124). If women were to work, they must be allowed more serious and rigorous forms of education. One contributor even argued that "the errors of prevalent systems of education" contributed to "insanity among women" (Tuke, 149).

Just because Rossetti contributed two poems does not mean that she was in agreement with every view expressed in the *Journal*. Indeed, as Rendall's study of the *Journal* makes clear, the major contributors themselves did not always agree (124). Nevertheless, since Rossetti was personally acquainted with both Barbara Bodichon and Bessie Rayner Parkes, she must have been well aware of the purpose of *The English Woman's Journal*.⁴ Certainly if she had found the "table of contents" at all questionable, she would