

THE EFFECTS OF CONTEXT: CHRISTINA ROSSETTI,
“MAUDE CLARE,” AND *ONCE A WEEK* IN 1859

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In 1859, after a gap of eight years, Christina Rossetti succeeded in having two poems published by a popular magazine: *Once a Week*. “In the Round Tower at Jhansi” appeared in the 13 August 1859 issue and “Maude Clare” appeared in the 5 November 1859 issue. The significance of these events has long been acknowledged. Jan Marsh notes that “the publication of the two items in *Once a Week* confirmed and encouraged the ambition that led to the *Goblin Market* volume in 1862 and the beginning of her established fame” (“Indian Mutiny,” 19). Yet the publication of Rossetti’s poetry in this format had additional importance. It gave her (as a woman writer) direct access to public expression of opinion.. It has been calculated that the total circulation of *Once a Week* from July to December 1859 was as much as 570,000 (Savory, 290). It also introduced Rossetti to a new group of readers. Those readers, of course, read *Once a Week*, for its other familiar features, and so would have read their way towards or away from Rossetti’s poem. That is, most of those readers read the poem in context.

This paper studies the relationship between “Maude Clare” and its original published context. In doing so, it aims to build on suggestions made by Jerome McGann and others that we continue to try to better understand the “social and historical formations” which Rossetti’s poetry can be seen to dramatize and participate in (McGann, 97).¹ It also follows Isabel Armstrong’s calls for approaching the poems in terms of their “intertextual dialogue” and to do so in a way which would enable us to read more clearly Rossetti’s relation to Victorian ideologies of gender and culture (136). Although the social character of much of Rossetti’s verse is now less in doubt, and while Dolores Rosenblum has demonstrated the viability of intertextual readings as they are suggested by Rossetti’s careful arrangement of individual poems within volumes of verse (“Christina,” 132-56), the examination of Rossetti’s poems in the context of their initial individual appearance before the Victorian reading public still represents a neglected area of investigation. Yet, as Marsh has shown in a recent examination of the first of Rossetti’s *Once a Week* poems, “In the Round Tower at Jhansi,” it can be a productive one (“Indian Mutiny,” 19). What can happen is that the