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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English

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READING BOREDOM IN TENNYSON, DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, WILLIAM
MORRIS, AND CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Rebekah Ann Lamb

Graduate Program in English

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the poetry of Alfred Lord Tennyson, the poetry and paintings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the early poetry of William Morris, and the poetry and prose of Christina Rossetti, this thesis examines how boredom emerges in Victorian aesthetic culture. Drawing from writings in visual culture, gender studies, social history, and recent returns to new formalism in Victorian studies, this thesis attends to how renderings of boredom open up our understanding of the relationship between poetry, art, temporality, embodiment and explorations of everyday life and living in Victorian England.

Chapter One of my thesis is an introductory explanation of boredom and the term an *aesthetic of boredom*—a concept that I use to explore the connections between poetry, art, the psycho-somatic phenomenon of being bored, and poetic developments in Victorian socio-political and artistic contexts. It also outlines the connections between boredom and various affects of discontent (such as acedia, melancholy, and idleness). Chapter Two considers how Tennyson’s understanding of boredom is shaped by complicated attitudes towards gender, sexuality, and work—as seen in his poems “Mariana,” “Mariana in the South,” “The Lady of Shalott,” “The Lotos Eaters,” and “Ulysses.” Chapter Three concentrates on how repetition and thwarted desire influence the multiple versions of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “The Blessed Damozel,” his paintings of women from the later 1850s, onwards, and aspects of *The House of Life*. Chapter Four considers how William Morris’s *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* fleshes out an aesthetic of thwarted desire that links to his developing views on art, gender, and everyday life. Chapter Five discusses the ways in which Christina Rossetti understands boredom in an expressly moral, albeit paradoxically ambivalent, light: it is either a form

of affective purgation or else a symptom of spiritual lukewarmness, as shown in *Maude*, “The Prince’s Progress,” and *Commonplace*. My thesis concludes with a Postscript that comments on how both Victorian art and poetry—and its ways of encoding time, playing with rhythm and rhyme, and exploring the dynamics of desire—provide us with a profound sense of the embodied nature of boredom, in its various forms, in Victorian England.

Keywords: Alfred Lord Tennyson, Christina Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, Aesthetics, Boredom, Chronotopes, Desire, Embodiment, Faith, Gender, Labour, Pre-Raphaelites, Temporality, Visual Culture, Victorian Poetry

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“She only said, ‘My life is dreary,
He cometh not,’ she said;
She said, ‘I am weary, weary,
I would that I were dead!’”
-Tennyson, “Mariana” (1830)

“Waiting is, in a sense, the lined interior of boredom.”
-Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Oxford English Dictionary tells us that the first literary reference to boredom is found in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853), where Lady Dedlock experiences the "chronic malady of boredom" (414). Boredom registers psycho-somatically throughout the novel, manifesting in Lady Dedlock's "exhausted composure" and "worn-out placidity" on the one hand and in her tortured conscience on the other (19). In terming boredom a "chronic malady," Dickens perceives it as being a discontented and persistent mood that plays out in the body's nerves and drops in energy levels, and that stems from confinement and repetitious daily routines. As I will discuss at more length, shortly, boredom in the Victorian period tends to manifest itself differently, along gendered lines, and is also related to problematic and unsettling relationships to time.¹ For example, Dickens presents boredom as a painful temporal consciousness that Lady Dedlock bears in her body as a burden, like a kind of sickness. Referring to her desire to break the repetitive patterns of her bourgeoisie daily routines, Dickens writes: "[h]er soul is turbulent within her; she is sick at heart, and restless" (690). Exhibiting his love for word-play, Dickens sums up boredom's varied meanings in one word: a heavy spondee,

¹ Increasingly throughout *Bleak House*, Lady Dedlock feels cramped and confined in her home; her desire to resolve the unfinished chapters and problems of her past life makes her feel as though the "large rooms" of her home "are too cramped and close" (690). Unable to "endure their restraint," she finally resolves to act and, in leaving the decadent but isolated and deadening halls of her husband's home, she is able to dispel her boredom (690). In the passage of the novel where Lady Dedlock realizes her home is "too cramped" for her desires, Dickens implicitly offers us an example of the ways that restricting spaces (especially domestic ones) in the Victorian period often represent female affects of discontent—boredom being chief among them.

‘Dedlock’ suggests weariness, stress, and stagnation and becomes synonymous, in *Bleak House*, with the phrase “bored to death” (18).

The English term ‘boredom’ stems from ‘bore’ which, according to the OED, dates back to nearly a thousand years ago, and means a hole, perforation or crevice created by the act of boring into wood or stone. From the outset, lack and hollowness characterize the word’s genealogy and, by the nineteenth century, had come to describe a spiritual and psycho-somatic sense of “being left empty,” to borrow Martin Heidegger’s descriptions of boredom as a particularly modern mood (*The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* 120). Recently, Peter Toohey has observed that “[p]redictability, monotony, and confinement” are “key” causes of boredom (*Boredom: A Lively History* 8). Toohey divides boredom into two types. The first, “simple boredom,” arises from carrying out repetitive or dull tasks; this kind can be easily dispelled by a change in activity (5). The second type, however, is not so easy to cast off as it is “existential” or “complex,” a form of “philosophical sickness” in which the bored subject feels a sustained, restless dissatisfaction with circumstances or with life itself; this “sickness” is closely related, Toohey suggests, to other forms of affective discontent such as the classical *taedium vitae* or the Christian sin of acedia (5-6). Quoting from Ian Miller’s *The Anatomy of Disgust*, Toohey observes that boredom is also a passive form of resistance to unpleasant conditions: “boredom” is “the name we give to a less intense form of disgust [. . .] Boredom stands in relation to disgust as annoyance does to anger” (15). Along similar lines, Allison Pease reads boredom as either “situational,” which includes such symptoms as weariness, idleness and laziness or as an “existential crisis,” triggered by the alienating forces of modernity, in which the bored subject falls into a

state similar to depression or world-weariness (*Modernism, Feminism and the Culture of Boredom* 95, 41). Both Toohey and Pease are indebted to Heidegger's writing on boredom which, to date, remains the most sustained analysis of the philosophical implications of this mood.

As Elizabeth Goodstein explains, Heidegger understands boredom as being the *Grundstimmung* (the fundamental mood) of modern life and living, a "lived symptom of modern nihilism" (*Experience without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* 282). In other words, he views boredom as a mood that announces the growing poverty of subjectivity caused by industrial capitalism, among other things.² This point particularly comes across in his most nuanced and extended engagement with the nature of boredom, found in a series of lectures he gave, between 1929-1930, for the University of Freiburg (later published under the title, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*). In these lectures, Heidegger explores boredom as being an indication of a subject's growing impoverishment in the context of modernity's inability to satisfy the breadth and depth of human desire. He invokes the image of "limbo" to explain this mood of boredom: "[B]ecoming bored," he maintains, "is this *essential being held in limbo in coming to be left empty*" (105). The German word for boredom, *langweile*

² In his earliest writings on boredom, found in *The Concept of Time* (1924), Heidegger perceives boredom, in this early phase of his consideration of its nature, as a condition arising from *Alltäglichkeit* (everydayness); it stems from subjects becoming completely absorbed by their daily duties, to the point where they focus only on the "thoroughly uniform, homogenous" tick-tock of the clock and its rule over their lives (4E). Goodstein comments that Heidegger perceives boredom as being the affective equivalent of the effects of the "temporality of the clock" which "distracts" the subject from the true nature of time (*Experience without Qualities* 290). Specifically, for Heidegger, time first and foremost announces the inevitability of death which should spur the human person to excellence: the "authentic 'how' of my Dasein [being-there] is at every moment my unique potential for ceasing to exist" (12E). However, with boredom, the human subject (Dasein) becomes distracted from the gravitas of temporality and, instead, views it as a series of interminable nows that, as Goodstein describes it, "must be filled up," consumed (291).

(meaning “long while” or “duration), emphasizes its status as an emotional and intellectual response to time’s passing.³

Heidegger divides boredom into three different kinds and all three take into account the different ways in which being bored affects subjectivity to greater or lesser degrees. This thesis is most concerned with the first form of boredom, situational boredom, which Heidegger identifies and discusses. Out of the three forms, Heidegger is the least interested in this form since the other two kinds of boredom that he outlines are more expressly bound up with his focus on the mystery of being qua being, of broader questions pertaining more directly to ontological and metaphysical concerns, throughout *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. While it is useful for this project to briefly review the three different forms of boredom, as Heidegger explores them, I want to emphasize that one of the aims of this project is to attend to, and even reclaim, the importance of situational boredom, which stems from the conditions of everyday lived experience. As a result, this thesis proposes to explore the interpretive and theoretical

³ As is characteristic of his philosophical approach, Heidegger gives attention to the linguistic roots of *langweile*, observing that *whiling* [*Weilen*] means “enduring, dragging,” as well as “*passing the time, hav[ing] to do with time*” (100). Heidegger’s account of boredom implicitly combines being-in-a-body with consciousness and thus demonstrate how his phenomenological epistemology (which stems in part from Edmund Husserl) eschews the subject-object division that has been part of Western philosophy since Aristotle and which was brought to a new pitch in René Descartes’s Cartesian model. Moods, such as boredom, for Heidegger, are what alert us to our profound difference and other-ness from the things around us and, yet, confirm that we are always already shaped by the world around us and that, as such, no clear subject-object differentiation can actually occur (for Heidegger’s discussion of mood in relation to boredom and the consequent lack of a subject / object division in his work see pages 60 to 78 in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*). It is important to note, however, that Heidegger does not fully collapse the distinction between subject / object, in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, until he discusses the third and most profound form of boredom in which personality and subjective interests completely disappear and one is left, stripped of any sense of individuality, facing the fact of time’s passing in and of itself (see pages 132-159).

possibilities emerging from Heidegger's first form of boredom—even though he, himself, tends to largely dismiss situational boredom in favour of exploring fundamental aspects of human nature (as temporally constituted and constituting) instead of addressing how personal individuality and one's embodied situation shapes attitudes towards everyday life and living.

The fact of boredom as a somatic issue, emerging in the context of everydayness, consistently gets sidelined in Heidegger's consideration of boredom—as Kevin A. Aho has noted recently in *Heidegger's Neglect of the Body* (29-63).⁴ Aho points out that, for Heidegger, everyday living practices, beginning in the age of industrial capitalism and continuing with the burgeoning of various forms of modern technologies, often distracts the human person, rendering him / her situationally bored, and thus unable to experience profound boredom which only arises when distractions have been dispelled (and a more profound contemplation on the fact of temporal constitutedness can, as a result, finally begin). Superficial or situational “boredom is particularly dangerous [for Heidegger],” Aho writes, “because our very busy-ness conceals the oppressiveness of our own indifference” (134). It is precisely this busy-ness and restlessness which my thesis aims to explore in Victorian art and poetry so as to discern how both emerging modern modes of being-in-the-world and the dynamics of desire's frustration are profoundly affected by

⁴ Although Heidegger dismisses the concept of subject / object division, Aho has recently commented that Heidegger's substitution of subject / object difference with the conception of “being-in-the-world” may be insightful but, nevertheless, shows a problematic “reluctance to offer an account of the body” (*Heidegger's Neglect of the Body* 29). Aho explains that, in returning to the Pre-Socratics, Heidegger parts ways with the “assumption of substance ontology” and from exploring “the properties of objects” as such in order to “turn our attention to the ordinary activity of human existence itself that underlies and makes possible any and all theorizing” (30). In short, Heidegger does not expressly acknowledge such factors as gender, sexuality, or physical ability or disability (to name only a few of the many formative material categories shaping personal lived experience) as being fundamentally constitutive for philosophical acts of attention.

one's having a body. While the second and third forms of boredom that Heidegger discusses reveal that our very consciousness of our predicament as temporally constituted subjects is manifested in more profound forms of being bored, the first form of boredom offers the most room for considering the inextricable relationship between embodiment, gender, desire, and being situationally or environmentally bored. At most, Heidegger only implies these considerations and so my thesis aims to show how they can, and should, be explored far more expressly. My thesis is concerned with considering how situational boredom, a kind of limbo-like experience (as described by Heidegger), especially draws out the issues that gender, frustrated desire, embodiment and complicated and frustrated relationships to time's slow passing present, at various points, in the paintings and poems that will be studied in the ensuing pages.⁵

As a result, my thesis draws substantially from Heidegger's discussion of the first form of boredom because it provides us with an implicit, but nevertheless fundamental, theoretical framework for rethinking the significance of the ordinary, commonplace, everyday, and often mundane aspects of everyday life and living. My thesis, then, both supplements, and departs from, Heidegger's account of boredom by expressly considering how material and physical conditions affect, and shape, a growing aesthetic and rhetoric of boredom in the Victorian period. However, it remains the case that

⁵ While Heidegger's own metaphysical program often sidelines "substance ontology," it nevertheless can work in concert with aspects of it. For example, Jeff Nunokawa's study of boredom in Oscar Wilde (which is indebted to both Adam Phillips's thinking and, more implicitly, to Heidegger's) focuses on the body as a means of announcing the limitations that the body places on our theorizations of space and time (which Heidegger implies in his tendency to focus on boredom without considering the fact and problem of embodiment). Nunakowa also explores how these very limitations become a productive way of helping us understand the dynamics of human desire. Nunokawa argues that out of all the moods closely connected with the body, boredom is the one that is most implicated with the psycho-somatic aspects of the human person (see pages 71-89 of *Tame Passions of Wilde: The Styles of Manageable Desire*).

Heidegger's three fundamental classifications of boredom are useful and necessary for my study since his work is the most thorough and perceptive account of the relationship between frustrated desire and theorizations of temporality that pervades understandings of boredom as a mood. In the chapters that follow, then, I will both appeal to, and (when necessary) qualify, Heideggerian approaches to boredom. In the remaining pages of this section of the Introduction, I will outline the main points Heidegger presents in his delineation of the three forms of boredom so as to make clear what aspects of his work on boredom will appear throughout the thesis as a whole.

Stemming from superficial irritations or from more existentially fraught sources, boredom, according to Heidegger, can be either simple or profound (*The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* 78). The first form of boredom falls under the category of "simple": in "simple" or situational boredom, one is "bored by something" (78) and this "something," such as a delayed train (or even a play, book, ritual or party that fails to entertain or command one's attention), causes frustration and annoyance. In this predicament of frustration, the "dragging of time" is pronounced and found "*oppressing*" and, as opposed to marking change or progression, it seems to measure out the intervals of seemingly interminable disappointment (99). This first form of boredom, Heidegger stresses, is situational or environmental: we become "bound in a peculiar form to . . . specific surroundings" (108); as a result, the bored subject must endure time's slow passing so as to either outlive the boring event or, alternatively, so as to finally discern a

way to fulfill the longing and lack causing this boredom in the first place (78, 82-5).⁶ Being “bored by something” translates into “being held in limbo,” according to Heidegger (105). Meaning, the bored subject’s frustration with time seeming to pass too slowly makes him or her feel stuck, caught in a period of stasis and indeterminacy that is aptly represented in the spatial-temporal image of limbo.⁷ In his discussion of the first form of boredom, then, Heidegger appeals to specifically modern analogies, such as waiting at train stations or “looking at our watch” (96), in order to explain the subjective nature of situational boredom.⁸ He finds, in the “tasteless station of some lonely minor

⁶ Heidegger views such situations as being “well-known, banal” aspects of everyday life and living, especially in modernity (93). Nevertheless, the boredom that the bored subject feels in these circumstances is not dependent on the circumstances alone: train stations or parties are not boring per se. In fact they can be anything but boring in certain situations (94, 102). Instead, the boredom arises from a subject’s being “left empty” (101) in a situation: a party, for example, “offer[ing] nothing” to the subject transforms the subject’s experience of time into something that is “dragging” and “oppressive” (104). It is this form of oppression (arising in the bored subject) that interests Heidegger. He suggests that it reveals the ways in which desire is bound up with responding to, adapting to, or resisting a series of frustrating circumstances.

⁷ Given this, it is little wonder that other writers thinking through boredom in the context of modernity often attribute the colour grey to boredom—it signifies the various shades and degrees of ambivalence, weariness, and, ultimately, of frustration, that surface when a subject finds herself in an uncomfortable relation to time and personal / social circumstances. Walter Benjamin thinks of greyness and fog in relation to boredom, for example, in “Convolute D: Boredom, Eternal Return” from *The Arcades Project*. He likens London’s and Paris’s fog, dust, and rain (caused by both natural and industrial forces) to the “narcotizing” and wearying emotional side effects of boredom (D1,3, D1,7, D1a,3, D1a,7).

⁸ As Lars Svendsen points out, Heidegger understands boredom as a phenomenon that is not wholly bound up with the subject—it also belongs to the object(s) or other subject(s) involved in a situation in which the feeling of time passing too slowly announces to the subject that boredom is now part of experience (*A Philosophy of Boredom* 108). Collapsing the distinctive categorical differences between subject and object, Heidegger sees boredom as both an emotion and a mood—an emotion when one is bored by something (such as a late train) and a mood when it involves a less concrete, and more psychologically-inflected condition of being frustrated with the conditions of existence, of being-in-the-world as such (Svendsen 110-111). The condition of being held in limbo, however, is one of the few images which Heidegger employs for more situational / emotional states of boredom. While Matthew Boss suggests, in “Metaphysics and the Mood of Deep Boredom: Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Mood,” that psychology and the emotive are not present in Heidegger’s focus in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, I disagree as Heidegger frequently appeals to anger, listlessness, anxiety, and frustration to discuss the effects of time (which *seems* to be moving too slowly) on the subject who becomes bored (*The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* 93-102). Boss is right to note, however, that the main focus for Heidegger is that boredom is “a mood in which time becomes suddenly conspicuous” and that he “distinguishes three different forms of boredom which make time manifest in different ways. The mood’s relevance to the questions of metaphysics is in the kind of time revealed by “deep” boredom in distinction from the “clock-time” of everyday life. It is Heidegger’s basic philosophical position,” Boss continues,

railway,” a resonant spatial-temporal metaphor for the structure of boredom as an experience of being held in limbo: waiting for the seemingly never-to-arrive train, the bored subject feels resistant to, but bound by, the passing of time (93).⁹

By contrast, in the second form of boredom, the bored subject is no longer bored by something but, rather, *with* something. “In the *second instance* of boredom,” Heidegger writes, “we find *nothing* [specific] *that is boring* . . . More accurately, we are *not* able to say *what* is boring us. Accordingly, in the second instance it is *not* that there is nothing boring *at all*, rather what is boring us has this character of ‘I *know not what*’” (114). Specifically, in this condition, the bored subject realizes, only retrospectively, that one’s experiences during a particular portion of time were unsatisfying (109). Heidegger explains this predicament through an example:

We have been invited out somewhere for the evening [. . .] So we go along [. . .] There is nothing at all to be found that might have been boring about this evening, neither the conversation, nor the people, nor the rooms. Thus we come quite satisfied [. . .] and then it comes: I was bored after all this evening, on the occasion of this event. (109)

“that our understanding of being always has an inner connection to time through its relation to human temporality” (85).

⁹ Of course, the train is not all that bores the bored subject, per se. Instead, the delayed train is a stand-in for how the somatics of modernity (railway stations, clock-run factory schedules, interminably humming machines, and sprawling urban expansion) are architectural or material representations of the isolation and alienation that Heidegger locates in the emergence of modernity (an alienation fueled by industrialism’s advances in continental Europe, during the 1800s, and ever accelerating in the nineteenth-and-twentieth-centuries).

As Pease observes, this “form of boredom is not simply a judgment; it is driven by fear” (32). Pease elaborates on this observation, saying “[i]n this [bored] relationship objects take precedence over subjects” (32) and one finds that all activities have failed to make the passing of time less burdensome. “In this boring situation,” Heidegger writes, “*boredom and passing the time become intertwined*” and we realize that time itself is what is boring for us (situations and predicaments become “of no consequence” per se; instead, they only signify as failed checks to boredom’s arrival) (113). Here, we can see that Heidegger’s interests are shifting away from exploring “situational” boredom and, instead, are moving towards a metaphysical consideration of the general and universal categories: being and time.

In the third and final form of boredom, Heidegger focuses specifically on the fact that existence is “boring for one” (132). He suggests that we “*press forward to the essence of time through our interpretation of the essence of boredom*” (133). While this observation may, at a first reading, appear circuitous, it sums up Heidegger’s in-depth exploration of the collapse between subject and object that occurs in the third form of boredom. The third form of boredom is the apprehension, the attunement, that existence is predicated on a certain degree of lack and incompleteness. Boredom ceases to be predicated on any one thing: it is an attitude towards being-in-the-world and knowing that the world cannot satisfy us: “[t]his boredom *takes us precisely back to the point* where we do not in the first place seek out this or that being for ourselves in this particular situation; it takes us back to the point where all and everything appears indifferent to us” (137). This final form of boredom does not really surface in the pages that follow. However, it is useful to sketch out the three forms of boredom that Heidegger explores to

give a sense of some of the central, underlying concepts that structure his general understanding of boredom as a mood: it is a response to the passing of time which, for various reasons, appears too slow for our liking and it is a mood arising from a variety of conditions, among them disappointment and desire's frustration. It is particularly this intensive time-consciousness that forms the underlying framework for Heidegger's exploration of boredom and, moreover, is that which finds resonance with my study's consideration of boredom in Tennyson, Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti and William Morris.

As Krista Lysack, among others, has pointed out, the Victorian period was intensely time-conscious. During this period, "time and history had become a problem," and a series of chronotopes—liturgical time, industrial time, clock-time, commodity time, evolutionary time, leisure time—"lurch[ed] back and forth" in the poetry, art, and literature of the period ("The Productions of Time: Keble, Rossetti and Victorian Devotional Reading" 453). This time consciousness and careful time-keeping, in nineteenth-century England, led to the rise of an intensive literary and aesthetic interest in self-perception and in renderings of time, mood, feeling and the body. It is no accident, I argue, that this growing interest in representations of time and desire led to a growing consciousness and experience of boredom in everyday life and living in Victorian England. For example, throughout *Bleak House*, Lady Dedlock's boredom is a paradoxical resignation to her circumstances (until near the novel's close) and a simultaneous resistance to them—these resignations and resistances are explored through representations of being bored with the slow passage of time on the one hand and with

the fact of frustrated / unfulfilled desires on the other. Describing the bourgeois surroundings and daily routines of Lady Dedlock's life as being "extremely dreary" (18), Dickens echoes Tennyson's poem, "Mariana" (1830), in which the abandoned, solitary and bored Mariana repeats the same refrain over and over again, expressing the female problem of being stuck in a period of bored time.¹⁰

In the figure of Mariana, Tennyson provides an early Victorian instance of what I term, throughout this project, an *aesthetic of boredom* in Victorian England—an aesthetic which dramatically developed in the context of emerging modernity and along specifically gendered, socio-political lines. I interpret an *aesthetic of boredom* as meaning a form of perceiving, and then commenting upon (embracing or even resisting), the emergence of boredom as a mood that bears multiple meanings, shaping various forms of socio-political, aesthetic, and personal experience in Victorian England.

Parting ways with the Kantian aesthetic paradigm, Terry Eagleton argues, in *The*

¹⁰ In his introduction of Lady Dedlock into the narrative of *Bleak House*, Dickens comments that she finds her place "dreary" and dissatisfying (18). She seems something of a reinterpretation of Mariana from Tennyson's "Mariana" (1830) and "Mariana in the South" (1832). Mariana complains that her life is both "dreary" (9) and "awearied" (11) as does Lady Dedlock. Recently, Matthew Bevis has reminded us that Mariana's dejected and wearied refrain was very popular during the Victorian period, and was often satirized or used as the basis for spin offs and adaptations of the Poet Laureate's work ("Tennyson's Humour" 240). Dickens, of course, was aware of this and there are many parallels that can be drawn between Mariana and Lady Dedlock: both are strong-feeling women who are bored and restless and confined to the domestic sphere. And both women also long for reunion with lovers who are seemingly impossible to return to, for various reasons. Through Lady Dedlock and her boredom, Dickens seems to be thinking through the psychology of the Mariana 'type' who proliferated in Victorian literature, embodied in the experiences of women whose lives were largely regulated to the private spheres of life and to domestic spaces. Dickens's Lady Dedlock, Tennyson's Mariana, and, more recently, many of Samuel Beckett's characters and Quinn from Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy* (1985) are some of the most dramatic examples, and explorations, of boredom in English literature. They reveal boredom to be a psycho-somatic condition that affects energy levels, radically determines desire's highs and lows, and darkens even the most basic and essential tasks of everyday life and living—like work, eating, socialization, and mobility itself (neither Beckett's nor Auster's bored characters like to walk or move at all and some of them literally cannot).

Ideology of the Aesthetic, that “Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body” and is concerned with “nothing less than the whole of our sensate life together—the business of affections and aversions, of how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces, of that which takes root in the gaze and the guts . . .” (13). It is interested in human embodiment, the “palpable dimension of the human,” the “first stirrings of a primitive materialism—of the body’s long inarticulate rebellion against the theoretical” (13). Eagleton’s emphasis on the ways in which philosophies and theories of art are always already implicated with human bodies and human “affections and aversions” can assist us in delineating what is meant by an *aesthetic of boredom*. Specifically, in the visual and poetic texts I focus on in this Study, a philosophy of what boredom is surfaces and this philosophy, at turns explicit or implicit, underscores the fact of embodiment and how boredom is a psycho-somatic phenomenon which is largely expressed materially and physically as opposed to theoretically. As an inward condition of both the mind and the body (a mental and emotional response to one’s environment, for example) boredom in the work of Tennyson, the Rossettis and William Morris compels us to understand aesthetics as equally concerned with matter as it is with the mind.

As Jason Rudy has recently observed, the “history of Victorian poetry is in no small part a history of the human body. Whether we look to Alfred Tennyson’s ‘poetics of sensation,’ the midcentury ‘Spasmodic’ phenomenon, or the so-called fleshly school of the 1870s, Victorian poetry demands to be read as physiologically inspired” (*Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics* 2). Victorian visual and poetic aesthetics is grounded in a profound fascination with, and curiosity regarding, the paradoxical mystery that is the human body: its simultaneous knowability and unintelligibility, its rhythms,

responses, deteriorations, pains and pleasures, impulses and urges, drops and surges in energy provide the rhetorical frameworks for the writings of the poets I discuss throughout this thesis. Tennyson, for instance, is indebted to a medieval idealism and Keatsian romanticism grounded in, and shaped by, an intensive physiological consciousness connected to, among other things, medieval sacramental vision, sense experience, and an attunement to the performative nature of the human body. In turn, of course, the Pre-Raphaelite turn to the Art Catholic tradition and the fascinations Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris shared for human passions (dramatized in their poetry in ways that often mirror the pulses and movements of the body) contribute to what Rudy calls the emerging “physiological poetics” of the Victorian period (2). Likewise, Christina Rossetti’s Tractarian sense of a sacramental vision of life, in which God “interacts and inheres,” as Bernadette Waterman-Ward puts it, in the world he made, makes her poetry and her prose almost always body-conscious (*World as Word: Philosophical Theology in Gerard Manley Hopkins* 145). The body provides an ideal and unique means, then, through which the expression of desire and loss can be communicated with a sense of intimate familiarity (*skintimacy*, as it were) on the one hand and a profound sense of the inability to receive full knowledge of the body’s dynamics and functions on the other. Like Victorian poetry, boredom itself is inextricably bound to the fact of human embodiment. As a result, it is useful to consider how the visual and poetic texts studied in this thesis shape an *aesthetic of boredom* in which understandings of art are never far from understandings of the relationship between art, the dynamics of frustrated desire, imagination, and the human body.¹¹

¹¹ Specifically represented by careful attentions to various kinds of bodies—constrained, confined, lost,

Currently, Spacks's *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (1995), Jeff Nunokawa's *Tame Passions of Wilde: The Styles of Manageable Desire* (2003) and Lee Anna Maynard's more recent *Beautiful Boredom: Idleness and Feminine Self-Realization in the Victorian Novel* (2009), are the only book-length studies focusing, in detail, on how boredom is figured in Victorian England.¹² In their respective works, however, they centre almost exclusively on novels, and so leave poetry and painting largely untouched in their otherwise nuanced and extensive readings of a variety of Victorian writers, which, together, include Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Oscar Wilde, and Henry James.¹³ In fact, most scholarly conversations about boredom in the Victorian period tend to centre on Wilde's writing and how he views boredom as a trivial form of play and non-committal in, for example, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) and as an artistic and

longing, toiling, loitering and so on—boredom and being bored in the visual and poetic texts I explore in this thesis contribute to readings of the growing Victorian preoccupation with the body as an essential aspect of aesthetics. Meredith Martin explains that Victorian associations between the body and the elements of poetry—rhyme, rhythm, metrical intricacies, and grammar—has always been part of the English poetic tradition but gained traction during the eighteenth-and-nineteenth-centuries when self-identity and self-expression (couched in conceptions about the meaning of the human body and how it should and should not participate in public and private life) was expressed through explorations of, and experiments with, the elements of prosody. In particular, she notes, words were increasingly perceived “visually as bodies” (*The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930* 54).

¹² Thus far, Patricia Meyer Spacks's *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (1995) is the lengthiest consideration of boredom in relation to literature. To see her take on the origins and social evolutions of the meanings of 'boredom,' as a word and affect “record[ing] a sequence of cultural change[s]” in England, from the Restoration period, onwards, see her Chapter, “Reading, Writing, and Boredom” (pages 1-30).

¹³ By the fin de siècle period, boredom had become a signature affect in the Aesthetic movement where, as Nunokawa notes, it manifested itself psycho-somatically as the “dull hangover” that “follow[ed] the nocturnal thrills of desire” in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, among other texts (*Tame Passions of Wilde: Styles of Manageable Desire* 74).

ethical struggle, in *Dorian Gray*, that is bound up with the desire to seek pleasure in the face of the inevitability (and fear) of death. Yet even before Wilde transformed boredom, or being bored, into the stuff that sends plot development into a dizzying, dysphoric trajectory towards destruction or, alternatively, into the catalyst that contributes to a comic ending (as in *The Importance of Being Earnest*), we see it cropping up in Victorian narrative discourses (in poems and novels alike) that are especially concerned with melancholia, work, the role of the poet as labourer, gender, and considerations of the connections between art, faith, and desire. However, as noted, thus far any attention afforded to the psycho-somatic problem of boredom in Victorian culture has remained focused on Victorian novels. Attending to this gap in work that has been done on boredom's presence in Victorian literary culture(s), my thesis explores the close relationships between mind, environment, and the body that are pronounced in artistic and poetic renderings of the problem of being bored—of feeling a loss of interest in life, of enduring unfulfilled desire. Boredom is not just a mood conducive to the representational possibilities available to the novel as a genre. Instead, boredom is a phenomenon rendered, and wrestled with, in poems and paintings of the Victorian period as well.

Bridging the distance between the early period of Victoria's reign and the fin de siècle period, Alfred Lord Tennyson's poetry, for instance, provides an entry-point for emerging aesthetic concerns involving boredom that become further fully fleshed out in the Pre-Raphaelites and Christina Rossetti (all of whom take many of their aesthetic cues from Tennyson, especially when it comes to rendering women, desire, and domesticity). Victorian "physiological poetics" contracts and expands experiences of time in ways that

the generally linearly structured nature of the Victorian novel does not. Specifically, poetry's ways of encoding and measuring-out time according to uses of metrical variation, rhyme, and rhythmic associations between words, never allows the reader to depart from the fact of embodiment for long (if ever). Likewise, boredom is always already implicated in the body—particularly in situational forms of boredom in which the symbiotic relationship between mind, body, and environment work together to generate a mood of restless discontent. Tennyson believed all his poetry was best understood when read out loud (the rise and falls of his meter and poetic cadences often bring to mind various forms of spoken / performative expression—nursery rhymes, chanting, calling, singing etc.) and the Rossetti's and Morris's poems are always couched in an intensive awareness of the boundaries, longings, and contours constituting human bodies. As poetic precursor to *Lady Dedlock* and others reminiscent of her type and as an important figure for Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics, Tennyson's iconic Mariana embodies many of the interests, both explicit and implicit, concerning boredom in the Victorian period.

1.1 “I am weary, weary”: Boredom in Tennyson, Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti and William Morris

A Romantic inheritor as well as the eventual Poet Laureate of England, replacing William Wordsworth upon his death in 1850, Tennyson straddles a series of converging and competing narratives about personal identity in the context of emerging modernity in nineteenth-century England. Despite the many voices Tennyson ventriloquizes, his most persistent interest, as Christopher Ricks notes, is one of thwarted desire, an “art of the penultimate” in which desire and identity are fragmented and vacillating but always

longing after something beyond immediate grasp (*Tennyson* 45). Ricks describes “Mariana” (1830) as one of Tennyson’s earliest and most striking poetic renderings of his preoccupation with frustrated desire and complicated relationships to time (45-60). As a Shakespearian figure translated into a Victorian context (who captured Tennyson’s imagination and, by way of Tennyson, influenced the Pre-Raphaelites), Mariana can be read as representative of Victorian poetic and artistic interests in examining the “disenchanted” condition, to borrow Max Weber’s description, of emerging modernity, a disenchantment that encouraged the development of boredom as a psycho-somatic condition in Victorian England (“Science as Vocation” 155).¹⁴ Tennyson’s poems, especially those depicting solitary women such as *Ænone*, *Mariana* or the *Lady of Shalott*, or those addressing the crises of national (often male) identity and modernity as laid out in “*The Lotos Eaters*” (1832) and “*Ulysses*” (1842), either implicitly or explicitly involve various kinds of boredom caused by confinement, seemingly interminable conditions of waiting, exhaustion, and other dysphoric feelings.

As an early instance of the problem of boredom, of the “art of the penultimate,” “*Mariana*” provides a particularly useful entry-point for reading how an aesthetic of boredom is present not only in Tennyson but also in poems and paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites, especially Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris, and in selections of Christina Rossetti’s poetry and prose which focus on the themes of duty, exhaustion, and

¹⁴ In section 2.1 of my Chapter on Tennyson, I discuss his renderings of Mariana in his poems “*Mariana*” and “*Mariana in the South*.” For the purposes of showing Tennyson’s influence on the Pre-Raphaelites and on Victorian visual and poetic culture(s), in general, I will explore, in this section of my Introduction, John Everett Millais’s 1851 painting of Tennyson’s Mariana to underscore the ways in which both art and poetry, during this period, attended to the figure of Mariana as a bored subject.

thwarted desire in the context of domesticity and faith. John Everett Millais's *Mariana* (1850-1), which drew from Tennyson's poems "Mariana" and "Mariana in the South" (1832), is one of the first in a series of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, poems, and engraving designs that feature bored subjects (who are usually female ones). A scan over other Pre-Raphaelite canvases, taking into account works such as Millais's *Waiting* (1854), Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *La Pia De' Tolomei* (1868-1880), *The M's at Ems* (1869), and *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-8), and William Morris's *La Belle Iseult* (1858), reveals a series of uncannily similar women who are all rendered in states of being "held in limbo" and confinement.

The problem of "being held in limbo," of waiting, also characterizes Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* (1858), the first published volume of Pre-Raphaelite poetry. Morris presents a series of confined or spell-bound individuals who, collectively, form a kind of slow-moving, aching, bored community—shaping what Walter Pater called a "tension of nerve" ("Aesthetic Poetry" 62). Likewise, in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's career as a poet-painter, boredom figures as an aesthetic theme and process (both of which emerge, and are caused by, the disjunction between desire and its fulfillment); this is especially seen in his re-workings of "The Blessed Damozel" and *The House of Life*. In Christina Rossetti's "The Prince's Progress" (1862), her almost completely overlooked (and rather boring) novella, *Commonplace* (1870), and her posthumously published *Maude* (1897), varying states of boredom also affect her narrative patterns and ways of discussing religious, sexual, personal, and communal

forms of desire.¹⁵ Whereas bored subjects in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's and William Morris's work tend to be implicated with aesthetic ideals on the one hand and with the practices of the growing industrialization of market demands for art on the other, Christina Rossetti's interests in boredom involve questions of Christian virtue ethics and poetic aesthetics (they also, I suggest, involve her exploration of the problematic links between boredom and domesticity). While similarities and differences abound in the ways that Tennyson, the Rossettis, and Morris approach the problem of boredom, I suggest that they all understand it as a "rhetoric of reflection," to borrow Elizabeth Goodstein's definition of boredom as a critical standpoint that accounts for the various relationships, and conflicts, between desire, emerging views of time in modernity, and Victorian understandings of personal identity (*Experience without Qualities* 4). To place in view some of my study's concerns regarding the implications of an aesthetic of boredom in Tennyson, Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti, and Morris, I will now turn to a discussion of Tennyson's influence on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and how John Everett Millais's painting, *Mariana*, stages many of the aesthetic concerns boredom underscores, both in the Victorian period more generally, and in this study in particular.

Included in the ranks of the newly-formed Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's "List of Immortals" (which they drew up during the summer of 1848), Tennyson was an

¹⁵ While already explored by other scholars such as Jan Marsh, in particular, in *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (1985) and by Alison Milbank in *Dante and the Victorians* (2009), it bears repeating that Christina's female figures can often be read as foils to Pre-Raphaelite women. In my Chapter on Christina Rossetti, I explore how her female subjects are often implicit criticisms of the Pre-Raphaelite 'ladies-in-waiting' who dominate the canvases of her brother, Dante Gabriel, from the later 1850s, onwards.

important poetic inspiration for the newly formed group. Although the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (P.R.B.) had largely disbanded by 1853, Tennyson's influence on the members' work is most evident in Edward Moxon's illustrated *Tennyson* (1857) for which Millais, Hunt, and Rossetti all individually contributed wood-engraved designs that depicted various episodes from selections of Tennyson's poetry—"Mariana" and "The Lady of Shalott" being among them. Apart from the "jovial campaign" of the largely unsuccessful Oxford Union Murals Project (1857-1859), which saw a collaboration of Rossetti with Morris and Edward Burne-Jones (the up and coming 'second generation' Pre-Raphaelites), Moxon's *Tennyson* was the most significant collaboration of original Pre-Raphaelite artists on a single project. However, a few years before Moxon's edition, both Millais and Hunt were already busy painting scenes from Tennyson's early poetry, especially favouring depictions of some of the poet's most iconic confined, restless, and bored women.

In his journal on the P.R.B.'s early years, William Michael Rossetti recorded that, in 1850, Hunt was working on a design for "The Lady of Shalott," specifically focusing on the poem's climactic yet problematic moment, "the breaking of the spell" (*The P.R.B. Journal* 73), in which the Lady flees from the confinement of her boring environment comprised of "shadows" ("The Lady of Shalott" 70). Around the same time, Millais drafted a pen and ink sketch of "Mariana," which emphasized the claustrophobic environment of her chamber. By the following year, however, he had completed a painting on the same topic, this time expanding the scope of his initial rendering by adding realistic, detailed depictions of her environment, including elements of Marian devotional imagery, inspired by "Mariana in the South." In this second representation,

Millais underscores the sexual potency latent in Mariana's character (whereas, in the earlier sketch, she seems more resigned to her fate and, as a result, is a more faithful copy of Tennyson's poem).

The first Pre-Raphaelite painting depicting a Tennysonian theme to be exhibited at the Royal Academy (in 1851), Millais's *Mariana* met with a range of conflicting responses, many of them critical, if not out-rightly hostile, as typified by reviews in *The Times* and *The Athenaeum*. However, William Michael Rossetti observed that women were particularly drawn to Millais's painting and he overheard one of them saying it was "the best thing in the exhibition" (*The P.R.B. Journal* 91). Most likely, the women were sympathetic with, and could relate to, Mariana's contorted pose which suggests pent up desire, fatigue from the repetitious movements and focused concentration that her needle work required, and the boredom her confinement and disappointed desires caused. In *Mariana*, Millais dramatizes the dilemma of waiting, of "being held in limbo," especially by implying a dissonance between liturgical time and clock-time.¹⁶ By juxtaposing the figure of the Virgin Mary, at the moment of the Annunciation, with Mariana, I suggest that Millais creates an aesthetic of boredom in which female bodies, through the common poetic theme of fertility versus barrenness, embody how different relationships to time and one's environment can cause either a greater sense of self-realization or, instead, an impoverished sense of subjectivity.

¹⁶ In the painting, linear (or clock) time appears to function as what W. Warren Wager, by way of Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), defines as being the "succession of inexorable measured 'nows'" that constitutes, and governs, industrialism's and modernism's increasing compartmentalization of experiences into quantitative (as opposed to qualitative) categories (*Good Tidings: The Belief in Progress from Darwin to Marcuse* 218).

Dressed in a deep blue, the traditional colour for the Virgin Mary, Mariana's tired yet sexually suggestive pose attempts to resist the monotony induced by her embroidery and her situation of interminable waiting for Angelo. With her hands on her lower back (a posture connoting fatigue but which also often suggests pregnancy), Mariana slightly arches her neck, gazing at the Annunciation image positioned on the stained-glass window directly in her line of vision (the Angel Gabriel, here, may be a play on the name of Mariana's faithless fiancé, Angelo). Mariana's pose is a stark contrast to that of the Virgin Mary's. Reminiscent of Charles Collinson's *Convent Thoughts* (1850-1), the Virgin attends to the words of the Angel Gabriel, raising her left hand and placing three of her fingers together (a gesture in Christian devotional paintings, in both the Eastern and Western medieval traditions, representing the profession of faith in the Trinitarian Godhead) as a way of physically expressing her *fiat* ("let it be done").¹⁷

In the Christian narrative of salvation history, the Annunciation marks the "fullness of time" ("Mary's Girlhood (For a Picture)" 14), to quote Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sonnet accompanying his first Pre-Raphaelite painting, *The Girlhood of Mary*

¹⁷ In the summer of 1850, Millais was working in Oxford, at Thomas Combe's home, and was accompanied by Charles Collins who was working on *Convent Thoughts* (1850-1). During this period, Millais was especially interested in the High Church movement in Anglicanism (of which the Combe family were a part) and both Collins's and Millais's respective paintings are rich in Marian imagery and other Anglo-Catholic images characteristic of the resurging interest in medieval devotional images and practices—promoted by Augustus Pugin's revival of the medieval 'Gothick' style in architecture and by the Oxford Movement's inclination towards incorporating a "sensuous and rich," Catholic-influenced sensibility into their liturgical worship, as Tim Barringer puts it (*Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* 25, 109-110). Millais's inclusion of an Annunciation scene in his painting is not Tennysonian and, instead, stems from his own consideration of High Church symbolism as well as the foundational P.R.B. interest in, for example, Carlo Lasinio's engravings of the fifteenth-century frescoes at the Campo Santo at Pisa which Millais first introduced to the P.R.B. in the late 1840s (Barringer 34). "Mariana in the South" does mention the Virgin Mary but not the Annunciation and it is this event, compared to Mariana's state of waiting, that highlights the difference between sacred or liturgical senses of time (in which an event is singular and unrepeatable) versus clock-time or bored time in which moments are viewed as measurements of repetition or lack (of various kinds).

Virgin (1848-49), which Millais knew well. The Annunciation fulfills the centuries-long desire for a divine messiah by ushering in the event of Christ's Incarnation and, as such, it commemorates an unrepeatable moment of consummation in the Christian historical narrative. The Annunciation, as Rowan Williams puts it, marks the moment when the numinous God takes on flesh: "[f]rom the sanctuary of heaven, from the terrifying emptiness between the cherubim on the ark, God enters another sanctuary, the holy place of a human body" (*Ponder These Things: Praying with Icons of the Virgin* 63).¹⁸ The Annunciation, then, celebrates the Incarnation and the elevation of the dignity of the human body. While Mariana carries her lack and longing in her body, the stained-glass hints that, by contrast, the Virgin is about to carry a sense of profound meaning and purpose in hers. John Keble's description of the Annunciation in his highly popular *The Christian Year* (1827) which, by the time Millais painted *Mariana*, had already gone through almost thirty editions, understands the Annunciation as an event celebrating the Virgin's body as a unique tabernacle for God's divine presence. He writes that the Virgin makes her heart a "shelter meet, / For Jesus's Holy Dove" (41-2). The Annunciation marks a threshold moment that transforms history and the body of the Virgin; however, Mariana's encounter with time and her environments is "barren," to borrow Christina Rossetti's choice of adjective to describe boredom as a spiritual and psycho-somatic burden (*Letters* 1: 277). A significant part of Mariana's restlessness in Millais's depiction

¹⁸ Carol Herringer notes that the feast of the Annunciation was an important celebration in the liturgical calendars and observances of Roman Catholics and Anglicans, alike, in the Victorian period: both celebrated the feast on 25 March and recited the *Magnificat*, where Mary recalls the event of the Incarnation, in the daily recitation of the divine office, the liturgy of the hours (*Victorians and the Virgin Mary* 37).

stems from her sexual frustration but I suggest that her inability to find consolation in contemplating the image of the Annunciation or in praying by her devotional altar both contribute to Mariana's boredom, as well.

Unlike Millais's pen and ink sketch (1854) of Tennyson's "St. Agnes's Eve" (1837) in which a nun, also in a state of confinement, finds consolation by dreaming of her eventual consummation with Christ in the "sabbaths of Eternity" (33), Mariana is fixed on

the problem of her discontent. In her state, both the Annunciation image and devotional altar seem more like aesthetic trappings only, part of the backdrop of a Victorian rendering of a (re)imagined medievalism which, for Mariana, bears no personal relevance. Lars Svendsen writes that "[i]n boredom events and objects are given to us as before, but with the important difference that they appear to have been stripped of meaning" and thus bored experience is the consequence of a painful often "involuntary loss of meaning" like the kind Heidegger describes in his exploration of the third form of boredom (*A Philosophy of Boredom* 108). Boredom, here, registers not only loss of love, desire, and aesthetic impulses but, also, signifies as an implicit crisis in faith, as well. Ultimately, however, the painting, like Tennyson's poems, explores the ways in which time becomes oppressive, measuring out refusal and disappointment, when desire is deferred, delayed or frustrated.

Boredom calls attention, then, to the inevitability of mortality and loss. Mariana's embroidery work (which she has momentarily abandoned), the scurrying of the mouse across the floor (who, as we know from Tennyson, is far more energetic than Mariana is),

the falling leaves blowing into her chamber, and the lit oratory lamp all signal the passage of time, of the movement of the hours which, in Mariana's state of dejection, do not offer the possibility of change and boredom's dispelling. Events plod along, measuring out differences in seasons and the tick-tock of the clock, but do not affect Mariana's personal history: the falling leaves, like the falling rhythms in "Mariana" and "Mariana in the South" (so characteristic of Tennyson's poetic aesthetics), represent nature slowly moving towards decay.

Mariana's bored state calls to mind other affective dysphoric conditions, such as melancholia or (given her quasi-cloistered existence) the struggle of the "noon-day-devil." Reinhard Kuhn describes the "noon-day-devil" as the temptation for monks to avoid their daily religious devotions—especially when the heat of the noon-day sun beats on the ascetic's flesh, stirring up a host of distractions and temptations ranging from fatigue and laziness to sexual impulses (*The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature* 41-8). Although boredom is a distinctly *modern* form of discontent, it bears close association to a series of other discontented states which predate it: acedia, ennui, melancholia, and idleness. For the purposes of this study, it is important to consider some of boredom's earlier affective cousins so as to see the ways in which they are included, or transvaluated, in aspects of Victorian representations of, and responses to, boredom. As one example, in my fifth Chapter, I will focus on how Christina Rossetti thinks about boredom as a broad term, encompassing a variety of definitions which include the

Christian views on sloth and idleness.¹⁹ In general, older forms of malaise resurface throughout my consideration of boredom, showing the ways in which boredom includes what Adam Phillips calls a “variety of moods” (*On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life* 78). So as to have a broader sense of how varying Victorian understandings of boredom is distinct from, but at times includes, past affects of discontent I will now turn to a brief consideration of the history of acedia, idleness, and melancholy in relation to European history. In so doing, I will then extend the discourse to note the abrupt changes in self-perception, caused in great part by the “Cartesian moment,” to borrow Michel Foucault’s phrase (*The Hermeneutics of the Subject* 14), which, as Goodstein argues, inaugurated the advent of modernity and, with it, the proliferation of boredom as a problem and mood (323).

1.2 Discontented Feelings and the Pre-History of Victorian Boredom

In his extensive study of ennui in Western literary culture, Kuhn attributes one of the earliest discussions of weariness and disgust with monotony to Seneca’s writing on the classical concept of *taedium vitae*; however, he suggests that it is with the development of the Christian monastic tradition that ennui’s most clear historical precedents are fleshed out in the form of the “demon at noon-tide,” also known as acedia, one of the

¹⁹ Boredom, in Christina Rossetti’s work, becomes part of an aesthetic exploration of moral duty and, consequently, her take on it departs from the more strictly aesthetic interests boredom offers in Tennyson’s, Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s, and William Morris’s poetry. Nevertheless, Tennyson, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and William Morris, especially in their use of medieval devotional images to communicate their highly personal aesthetic ideas, show how wide-ranging boredom, as discontented affect, is: it speaks to specifically modern problems while also calling to mind previous historical ways of wrestling with frustrating relationships to thwarted desire and time (as an unyielding measurement of such frustrations).

seven deadly sins (*The Demon of Noontide* 31). Given that the monastic rule is built upon a faithful adherence to a spiritual program of life, which easily becomes a monotonous routine if a supernatural outlook is abandoned, acedia was deemed to be one of the most frequent temptations, or vices, for monks. For instance, John Cassian, a monk and theologian from the fourth century who introduced Egyptian monastic practices to the Abbey of St. Victor in Southern France, understands the ‘demon at noon-tide’ to be a psychological plague as well as a physiological burden: when it descends upon the solitary monk it “induces such lassitude of body and craving for food” that one becomes “slothful and vacant in every spiritual activity” and can only escape it through the “solace of sleep” or by “salut[ing] the brethren” or “visit[ing] the sick” (qtd. in Healy 16). This early Christian view of acedia became more fleshed out with Thomas Aquinas’s writing on the subject.

In her recent work on sloth and the seven deadly sins in Western medieval theology, Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung points out that Aquinas’s view of acedia greatly extended early Christian understandings regarding its nature and relevance for the development of virtue ethics. DeYoung observes that Aquinas identifies acedia as being, first and foremost, weariness with, or disinterest in, the spiritual aspects of life—particularly those influencing the duties of a Christian in his or her daily and liturgical life. Even more specifically, DeYoung argues, Aquinas understands acedia as a refusal to love God and others, according to the Christian understanding of *caritas* and virtue ethics; instead of choosing the will of God, the slothful person chooses his or her whims and interests. Acedia, then, bears important implications for questions regarding the Christian moral life. “If Aquinas is right that acedia is aversion not to physical effort as

such, but rather to what it sees as the burdens of a relationship of love,” De Young writes, “then this feature of the vice, born of its link to charity, confirms its important role in the moral life” (“Acedia’s Resistance to the Demands of Love: Aquinas on the Vice of Sloth” 2). In sum, while Cassian views acedia as an outgrowth of physical weariness which *then* leads to spiritual temptations and sins, Aquinas perceives acedia as an intellectual sin, as a selfish mindset. For Aquinas, acedia often manifests itself as an incessant busy-ness, an inability to rest, and, at other times, as a shirking of the duties and labours expected of a Christian (worship, personal prayer, almsgiving, and liturgical participation being chief among them).²⁰ Reading Aquinas, De Young concludes that acedia is a “resistance” to the duties that inevitably accompany a Christian’s call to love God (26). This point becomes evident when we consider Aquinas’s treatment of acedia in *Summa Theologica*:

Sloth, according to Damascene (*De Fide Orth.* ii, 14) is an oppressive sorrow, which, to wit, so weighs upon man's mind, that he wants to do nothing; thus acid things are also cold. Hence sloth implies a certain weariness of work, as appears

²⁰ In *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, Joseph Pieper comments that the link between acedia and busy-ness comes from Aquinas’s mining of Aristotle’s conception of leisure and the “contemplative life” (the *vita contemplativa*) from Book VII of *Politics*. Those who are slothful in spiritual things have neglected contemplation for the sake of “servile” works and interests, involving practical matters such as economics (5). For both Aristotle and Aquinas, the contemplative way of life allows the human subject to rest from servile work so as to engage with fundamental questions about the nature of life and existence. When translated into a specifically Christian context: an inability to contemplate is an inability to keep the Sabbath—which is the day of the week reserved, in particular, for rest from servile labour so as to free the mind and heart for contemplation (of which liturgy and worship are the highest forms, in the Catholic spirituality Aquinas knew and lived). As I discuss in Chapter Five of my dissertation, Christina Rossetti’s conception of boredom is closely aligned to Aquinas’s view of acedia as a kind of intellectual and spiritual distaste for spiritual things and goods. Especially as a result of her Pauline references, throughout her work, and as a consequence of her Tractarian spiritual formation, Christina would be familiar with the kind of ethical framework espoused by Aquinas. Specifically, as Owen Chadwick makes clear, Aquinas was in the air of the Oxford Movement: he was read alongside the Church Fathers and Pascale, among others (*The Spirit of the Oxford Movement: Tractarian Essays* 303). Edward Pusey, as one example, who greatly influenced the Anglican Church that Christina was a part of, in London, had translated *A Commentary on the Four Gospels* which came from Aquinas’s *Catena Aurea*; John Keble and John Henry Newman assisted Pusey in this project.

from a gloss [from Augustine] on Psalm 106:18, "Their soul abhorred all manner of meat," and from the definition of some who say that sloth is a "sluggishness of the mind which neglects to begin good." (II, Q. 35, Art. 1)

Here, Aquinas presents *acedia* as a mental "sorrow," and as a repugnance towards one's work and daily duties. Joseph Pieper's extensive consideration of Aquinas's writing on *acedia* points out that, elsewhere in the *Summa*, Aquinas views *acedia* as a specifically moral negligence, on the Christian's part, to internalize the *habitus* of Sabbath-keeping which calls for a contemplative attention to God and his creation (as opposed to focusing upon everyday worries and concerns, especially those involving work, money, one's own pleasurable pursuits, and the gamut of daily, practical affairs) (*Leisure: The Basis of Culture* 23-38).

Throughout the Middle Ages, especially thanks to Aquinas, *acedia* was expressed in strictly theological terms (whereas, in the classical period, its equivalent, *taedium vitae*, could be a social and psycho-somatic problem and not necessarily a theological one). During the later Middle Ages, however, and especially from the Renaissance, onwards, melancholy rose in prominence as a cousin of *acedia* but it did not always bear the same ethical and theological implications. Noting the wide range of meanings attributed to melancholy in the Renaissance, Angus Gowland says it bore distinctively psychological and physiological dimensions, alongside spiritual and aesthetic ones ("The Ethics of Renaissance Melancholy" 103-8). Melancholy was viewed as either "genial," a kind of contemplative wisdom that channelled physical impulses towards living a life of moral virtue or as a "pathological and vicious state" which "vexes the brain with assiduous trouble and deliriousness, and perturbs the judgement of the soul," as one

Renaissance philosopher, Marsilio Ficino, commented (qtd. in Gowland 107). As we know, works of the period on melancholy, such as Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (c. 1603), characterize the melancholic as intellectually gifted on the one hand and as suffering from imbalances in the body (excesses of black bile) on the other. The symptoms of melancholy—ranging from restlessness, bouts of tears and exhaustion to depression—are physiological manifestations of the demands of thinking, among other things.²¹ Renaissance representations of melancholia are aptly expressed, and summed up, in Albrecht Dürer's *Melancholia I* (1514). The etching depicts melancholia as an angel whose pose suggests frustration, even anxiety bordering on disgust, at the demands accompanying intensive intellectual work. The etching's background is cluttered with various tools, used for measurement, and, at the angel's feet, lie various instruments used to fashion the material world (*British Museum*). However, the angel pays them no heed and is lost in introspection, focusing on her own interior world.

²¹ Freud's view of melancholia is strikingly different, at points, from the Renaissance one. As I discuss at more length in my Chapter on Tennyson, melancholia was a key feature of Victorian poetic aesthetics (and was a significant aspect of Queen Victoria's mood, following the loss of her husband) and, in many instances, possesses some of the same symptoms as boredom. I will sketch out the difference between boredom and melancholia in the Victorian period, in my next Chapter, but, here, it is useful to briefly outline how Freud views melancholia. He sees it as an "extraordinary reduction in self-esteem, a great impoverishment of the ego" occurring following the loss of a loved person or desired object ("Mourning and Melancholia" 205). The melancholic subject so closely identifies with the lost object / subject of desire that s/he is unable to consciously admit of the absence that has occurred. It is when the absence is acknowledged that a movement towards mourning can occur (and, indeed, has already become). Melancholia is also closely linked to nostalgia and, as Joel Faflak points out in *Romantic Psychoanalysis: The Burden of the Mystery* (2008), the Romantics were already keenly aware, in advance of Freud, of the pathological nature of Melancholy which continually crops up in Romantic writers as both a psychological burden and power of perception as well a poetic rhetorical mode that thrives off of "iteration[s]" and repetitious fixations upon loss, lack, and longing (220). Intuiting the talking cure before Freud, the Romantics, and Victorians following them, are keenly attuned to the ways in which speaking, introspection, and representations (and repetitions of representations) can begin the work of not only facing loss but *making* something out of it: narrative.

Increasingly, throughout the Renaissance, melancholy was viewed as a character trait of both the artist and philosopher and, towards the end of the period, Michel de Montaigne, for example, viewed contemplative melancholia as a rigorous exercise of the mind that safeguarded against idle, potentially sinful, wanderings of the imagination (“On Idleness” 20). By contrast, Blaise Pascal, although greatly influenced by Montaigne’s writings in general, focused on the ways that melancholia, restlessness, and *ennui* stemmed from original sin and, through God’s mercy, became a paradoxically fruitful sign indicating that one’s true home was not on earth but, rather, in heaven (*Pensées* 14, 46, 122).²²

With the onset of the Enlightenment, these various states of discontent—*taedium vitae*, *acedia*, melancholia, and *ennui*—were increasingly regarded not only in theological and psychological terms but also in economic, technological, and scientific ones. Moreover, questions about *acedia* and discontented moods, in general, became tied to discourses on work and work’s respective connections to social advancement and religious practices. This is particularly evident when we consider the development of the Protestant Work Ethic in Continental Europe and the United States.²³ The

²² Seán Desmond Healy points out that the French *ennui*, which stems from the Middle English “annoy” (which, in terms comes from the Latin *inodiare*—‘to hold in hatred’) stands as a bridge, of sorts, between *acedia* and melancholia: it suggests a type of disgust with life that goes beyond frustration with monotony, as in the monk’s encounter with the noon-day devil; it represents a certain existential anxiety, an inability to be satisfied with one’s current conditions. In various Victorian and modern contexts, English writers tended to retain the use of ‘ennui’ as a synonym for the later English term, boredom (*Boredom, Self, and Culture* 18).

²³ It is important to note that aspects of Enlightenment thinking, as they developed in Continental Europe, varied. However, it is outside of the scope or focus of this thesis to explore them. Rather, it is useful to, instead, keep in mind that one of the general trends of Enlightenment epistemology is its grounding in empiricism and pragmatism—two things which greatly influenced the growing sense of what Goodstein calls a “new, secular vision of [the] body” constituted by scientific, “materialist and idealist interpretations of experience” (22). Tillotama Rajan notes that in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, branches of

Enlightenment's emphasis on privileging the classification and organization of knowledge and the regularization of time, as Goodstein (by way of Georg Simmel and Max Weber) has pointed out, fed Puritan tendencies to micromanage all aspects of daily life and living, from work routines to the ways leisure time was structured and spent (1-20). In turn, the Puritan emphasis on success in work as a sign of election shaped, what Weber described as being, "a certain methodical, rational way of life . . . [that] paved the way for the 'spirit' of modern capitalism" (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* 146). The Puritan emphasis on the merits of labour had not only eschatological and soteriological significances but also temporal and material ones. Weber argues that hard work, financial success, and diligence became signals of the election of individuals within various Protestant sects, especially in Puritanism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism (140-150). Since it was difficult to discern whether or not one was a member of the elect, material and worldly success was often interpreted as a way to discern God's favour in one's personal life. This desire to be a member of the elect, Weber concludes, helped fuel important economic developments in Continental

knowledge were integrated and "held in check by the trope of the book as mirror of creation" but the encyclopedic and materialist thinking of the long eighteenth century radically shifted the way knowledge was organized and understood; it became valorized on the basis of being "up-to-date, with a bias towards politics and a Baconian bias towards the pragmatic" ("The Encyclopedia and the University of Theory: Idealism and the Organization of Knowledge" 335). The theological conception of the human body, then, was greatly sidelined as a growing view of the body as a kind of machine, as an outgrowth of Cartesian thinking, took prominence. Goodstein aligns this developing materialistic view of the body with the rapid growth in understandings of, and references to, malaise, indifference, weariness and fatigue in the eighteenth century. In the term 'boredom,' from the nineteenth century, onwards, we find, Goodstein argues, a "rhetoric of self-reflection" grounded in discontent with the reduced parameters of human experience caused by materialist thinking, among other things (4). For a developed discussion of this shift from theological views of the body and discontented emotions to more secular ones, see pages 1-53 in Goodstein's *Experience without Qualities*.

Europe and North America and the concepts of progress and success that are inextricably connected to capitalism (since these concepts fuel it in the first place).

As Stephen Kalber delineates, Weber's discussion of the Protestant Ethic emphasizes how the Puritan belief that success helped pave the way for establishing capitalism as the economic infrastructure of England, Holland, Germany, and the United States, from the seventeenth century, onwards ("Introduction to the Protestant Ethic" lvi). As I will discuss at more length in the next section of this Chapter, Victorians in particular took up the conception of the Protestant Ethic, aligning it with the religious idea of Muscular Christianity which was rooted in biblical passages (particularly in St. Paul's comparisons of the conscientious Christian to the persevering, hard-working and skilful athlete).²⁴ However, productivity and the values of labour were not only promoted by the Puritans but, as Christoph Asendorf explains, dominated the Enlightenment's increasingly rationalistic and mechanistic views of the human person as a machine of power (power that could be expended and re-fueled).

Extending the consequences of René Descartes's careful distinction of *res cogitans* (the mind) from *res extensa* (the body), the French Enlightenment Encyclopédistes and, among others, Julien Offray de La Mettrie in his work, *L'homme machine* (1748), viewed the body as a machine, outlining a theory which Christoph

²⁴ As examples, see 2 Timothy 2:5; 2 Timothy 4:7; 1 Corinthians 9:25; Philippians 2:16; and Galatians 2:2. See also 2 Thessalonians 3:8; John 9:4; and, for an Old Testament source, Proverbs 22:29. In *Past and Present* (1843) and *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34), Thomas Carlyle applies Scriptural images of work and argues that labour is not only that which gives each human person a sense of nobility of purpose but also connects humanity to the divine: "Blessed is he who has found his work," Carlyle writes in *Past and Present*, "let him ask no other blessedness. He has a work, a life-purpose" (189). To be bored, for Carlyle, then, would be tantamount to rejecting one's very identity and purpose in life. We shall see, in the ensuing Chapters, that not all Victorians shared such a view.

Asendorf calls the “mechanics of the human body” (*Batteries of Life: On the History of Things and Their Perception in Modernity* 7-8).²⁵ As Elizabeth Grosz notes, post-Descartes, the body was increasingly viewed as being a “self-moving machine, a mechanical device” which “places the mind in a hierarchical superiority over and above nature, including the nature of the body” (*Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* 6). Views of the productive possibilities of the human person, as a type of machine, grew into more abstract conceptions of production and labour, as typified in (and, for the most part, inaugurated by) Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776). However, more importantly for my discussion is the fact that the Protestant Work Ethic defined individual and civic moral integrity according to the Christian call to “work the works of Him who sent him, while it is day” (John 9:4) (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* 105). William Hogarth’s plates, *Industry versus Idleness* (1747), illustrate, and provide, some of the most striking and didactic examples of the Puritan view of labour as a religious duty that easily conflated with, and fed, the principles of

²⁵ In addition to the growing Enlightenment proclivities to think of the human body in mechanistic terms, it was also characteristic that the body was seen as a centralized structure, akin to a musical instrument as evidenced in George Cheyne’s *The English Malady* (1773). Peter Melville Logan describes how, throughout the Enlightenment, the human body was seen as a unified machine, structured by the nervous system which consistently operated as a process of “simple pathways for sensations entering the brain and for motor impulses flowing to the muscles” (*Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century British Prose* 166). Physicians, during the Scottish Enlightenment, viewed the body in this simplified, mechanistic way but by the early 1800s and well into the Victorian period, the nervous system became viewed as a sensitive, complex, and reactive series of forces in the body that complicated ideas about clear correspondences between bodily action and human volition (Logan 167-170). That is to say, when the nervous system was viewed as a centralized, predictable force—much like the workings of a machine or instrument—it was easier to understand the body as a “simple” and “sincere” manifestation of inner feelings and, even to some extent, of will and intentionality (Logan 168). However, by the Victorian period, literary descriptions of bodies, of appearances and reality, were often confused or layered—the body, a complex manifestation of human desire, was increasingly viewed as being a less certain phenomenon as an object of direct knowledge, as typified in George Elliot, the Brontë sisters, and Oscar Wilde, among others (Logan 169-171).

capitalism. Popular for his *Marriage A-La-Mode* (1743-1745) and other social mores paintings, Hogarth was celebrated as a social critic well into the Victorian period; his compositional and narrative styles in his paintings and layouts for engravings influenced Victorian rhetorical styles in a variety of forms, from the ways sermons were preached to how paintings concerning social and religious questions were organized through the juxtaposition of vices and virtues.²⁶

In *Industry versus Idleness*, Hogarth depicts idleness as a negligence of duty, specifically of work responsibilities, that results in spiritual corruption. Through a series of twelve engravings, Hogarth presents the starkly contrasting lives of an industrious worker and an idle slacker. The stock character, Tom Idle, is used by Hogarth to provide a moral exemplum of what happens to sluggards: Idle begins his life of vice by shirking his duties, during work hours, as an apprentice at a silk loom. After taking a series of detours that range from skipping Church services to mingling with prostitutes, his aimless life is ended by hanging at Tyburn. By contrast, the industrious apprentice, Francis

²⁶ Hogarth was a formative influence on the early Pre-Raphaelites as well—especially in Hunt’s and Millais’s paintings concerning contemporary socio-political problems, typified in paintings such as *The Awakening Conscience* (1853), *The Gambler* (1853) and *Virtue and Vice* (1854). Hogarth’s work sought to be morally instructive by juxtaposing opposites (often by pitting a vice against a virtue) so as to demonstrate what was needful for society’s social, economic and moral well-being. Hogarth’s influence also especially extended to the clergy of both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Finding Hogarth’s lesson educative, Reverend John Trusler, in 1833, compiled prints of some of Hogarth’s most famous plates, turning them into a collection accompanied by a short series of moral reflections. By way of introduction to the *Industry v Idleness* plates, he suggests that, for the purposes of moral instruction, it is more powerful to illustrate, rather than preach, the consequences of living an unproductive life: “[a]n example is far more convincing and persuasive than precept, [and thus] these prints are, undoubtedly, an excellent lesson to young men as are brought up to business, by laying before them the inevitable destruction that awaits the slothful [. . .]” (85). Hogarth’s drawings clearly establish a non-negotiable binary between idleness and industry that is reinforced by Tusler in his commentaries on the plates. Such a commentary chimes with the emerging Gospel of Work narrative that framed Victorian ideas about moral duty in relation to virtue ethics and conceptions of the relationship between gender and identity.

Goodchild, who originally began working alongside Tom Idle, grows in favour and wealth as a result of his diligence and faith; as an earthly reward for his upright character, he ends up becoming an alderman. Through a series of events (which Hogarth hints are Providential), Goodchild ends up being the alderman charged with sentencing Idle to death for his life of crimes. Through his story, Hogarth reinforces the typical eighteenth-century conception of idleness as a negligence of one's moral duty (which is fulfilled and measured by one's industriousness). The Puritan view of idleness, however, did not have complete purchase on the condition. Throughout the eighteenth-century, idleness carried a variety of meanings.

Idleness was also understood to be an important physical state of inactivity which provided the rest required for creative work and contemplation. During the period from 1750 to 1830, a series of conflicting views regarding human nature in relation to labour shaped English and continental political and aesthetic discourses. As Richard Adelman discusses, Smith's idea that the human person is primarily a labouring subject influenced a wide range of philosophical, political, and aesthetic ideas about activity and inactivity; competing notions of a culture of industry and a culture of leisure were integrated, or at odds, with one another throughout the Enlightenment period and well into modernity (*Idleness, Contemplation and the Aesthetic, 1750-1830* 3-9). In addition, the growth of Romanticism, especially the English variety, highlighted the tension existing between competing views of the poet as a labourer, dedicated to a difficult and educative craft on the one hand, and as a quasi-hermit, a "priest" to "wingéd Psyche," as John Keats puts it, who lived a life of idle, melancholic leisure and contemplation, on the other ("Ode to Psyche," 50, 6).

William Wordsworth, for example, laboured over his poetry, re-working *The Prelude* over the span of five decades and he viewed his projects in terms of what J.D. Kneale calls “architectonic metaphors” (*Monumental Writing* 63). Wordsworth planned that *The Prelude* (an ambitious, complex and dense text in and of itself) was supposed to serve as the “ante-chapel” to “The Recluse,” which he planned would be his *magnum opus*: the main body of a “[G]othic” church (qtd. in Kneale 63). However, just as much as he could be seen as an intensive poet-worker, Wordsworth often depicted the poet as an idler; in “I wandered lonely as a cloud” (1807), for instance, we find an iconic, Romantic image of the poet stretched out on a couch (in a rather proto-Freudian manner), recollecting images of daffodils in his mind (19-21). Viewing poetry as “emotion recollected in tranquility,” Wordsworth perceived idleness as enabling pauses from activity for the purposes of contemplation (*Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* 21). Samuel Taylor Coleridge, however, provided a more complicated series of representations of idleness in his poetry and prose. More especially, his personal habits, especially his opium intake, figures into his views of the relationship between poetic work, pain, stupor, fatigue, restlessness, *ennui* and idleness.

From his negligence regarding attributing the sources for his ideas to his dependency on opium, Coleridge was a paradoxical figure of illness and productivity, genius and unpredictability, insight and moral contradiction—this was especially placed in view, to the public, after Thomas De Quincey, protesting Coleridge’s plagiarism practices, wrote an exposé on Coleridge in 1834, in *Tait’s Magazine*. Tilar J. Mazzeo, examining Coleridge’s plagiarism as well as his kleptomania, opium intake, and definition of the unconscious in relation to the psychology of desire, notes that his

plagiarism was a “[r]omantic habit;” in other words, it demonstrated his desire, she argues, to be a ventriloquist, a passive or idle voice that serves as a conduit for other texts, other voices (“Coleridge, Plagiarism, and the Psychology of the Romantic Habit” 335, 339-341). Although morally problematic, Coleridge’s vacillating states of illness and physical inactivity did feed his creative work and comprised a major theme, or subtext, in his poetry, especially in “Dejection: An Ode” (1802), “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison” (1800), and “Kubla Kahn” (1816): in all three poems, idleness or dream-like states of passivity feature as essential conduits for poetic, even prophetic, insight.

With these points in mind, we can see, then, how experiences of, and responses to, acedia, melancholia and idleness are often ambivalent, if not out-rightly paradoxical, depending on their relation to specific social, literary, and theological contexts and discourses. For Aquinas, acedia is a largely intellectual sin that makes the heart indifferent to God; during the Renaissance, and onwards, the classical conception of melancholia as a psychological and creative power was reemphasized; for Hogarth, idleness is a moral failure as measured by largely economic terms; for Romantics like Keats, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, idleness is an ambivalent state, enabling creative powers even as it requires physical stasis and often stems from forms of physical and psychological illness. These ambivalences notwithstanding, the general discourses on idleness and acedia remain inextricably implicated with questions involving aesthetics, poetry, theology, socio-political aspects of everyday life and living, and ethics. Such implications are present, also, in the earliest forms of boredom as a unique state of discontent in the eighteenth century.

Spacks notes that boredom in eighteenth-century England was more of a psychological “response to the immediate” than an attitude towards existence itself; the latter form of boredom, an existential form, emerged more specifically during Victorian England, in light of the burgeoning of industrialization and the consequences it had on individual and broader cultural levels (*Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* 12). With boredom’s development as a response to situations of discontent in the eighteenth-century, we see it rendered as a feeling constituted by a marked sense of dejection, an inability to escape one’s present conditions of disappointment, and a weariness of the body signalling both a mental and a visceral resistance to whatever is displeasing in a situation. Although ‘boredom,’ as a term, does not appear in dictionaries of the eighteenth century and is not expressly referred to in literature of the period, Spacks makes the case that the psychological and emotional problems of being bored proliferated throughout the period, especially as a result of the idleness experienced by the upper-classes on the one hand and the growing loss of a sense of spiritual and communal purpose on the other (all of which would reach a greater pitch of intensity in the nineteenth century) (151). Aware that her consideration of boredom in the eighteenth century is shaped by attentions to nuances, subtle implications, and a reading that is sensitive to the symptoms of dejection as displayed in the body, Spacks specifically illuminates the contested origins of when exactly boredom surfaces as a unique, psychosomatic response, signalled by prolonged conditions of “irritation and unease” (13). She does so by focusing on the ways that boredom in England carried across all class structures.

Until the advent of industrialism, boredom tends to mainly crop up in the growing world-weariness of the often-idle members of the leisure class (who, essentially, could *afford* to be bored and squander time at the horse races or at elaborate dinner parties).²⁷ Similar to how idleness is treated in the Puritan narrative of using time well, typified in *Industry versus Idleness*, boredom in its earliest treatment in the eighteenth-century was an outgrowth of discussions on the ethical obligations centred around using time well (Spacks 17-59). Taking Johnathan Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) and James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) as examples of how boredom afflicted men and women (especially of the economically stable sectors of society), albeit in different, gendered ways, Spacks explains that boredom was typically viewed as a symptom of selfishness, a "focus on the self, its needs and demands" which were then pitted, by both Swift and Fordyce, against the nobler interests of "communal and historical stability" (32). Boredom, Spacks argues, was often viewed in a manner akin to acedia; it was a moral disregard for "the Christian ethical imperatives of faith and good works, which together fruitfully occupy mind and body and improve the hope of salvation" (65-70).

In the Victorian period, however, the aspect of moral censure that was so closely attached to representations of boredom and bored subjects in the eighteenth-century discourses of Swift, Fordyce and others, remains but is no longer the governing narrative. To be sure, questions of ethics were not the only ones shaping eighteenth-century discourses on boredom but in the nineteenth century, boredom's meanings multiplied,

²⁷ Here, Spacks takes her cue from Benjamin in particular who describes boredom as one of the most democratic feelings of nineteenth-century cultures: "[f]actory labour [can be seen] as [the] economic infrastructure of the ideological boredom of the upper classes," Benjamin writes (*The Arcades Project* D2a,4).

signifying, among other things, gender issues; a personal, ethical resistance to the modernizing and alienating forces of modernity; and a reaction to Victorian tendencies to slice up time into a series of different chronotopes (clock time, liturgical time, geological time, evolutionary time, secular time, commodity time)—all of which increasingly fragmented senses of personal and collective identity even as they sought to describe them.

1.3 Reading Boredom in Victorian England

Lasting as long as the monotonous, mind-numbing work hours of cotton mills in Northern England, experienced as a “chronic” attitude towards the confined quarters of the domestic sphere, or understood as being symptomatic of resistances to conventional practices regarding gendered behaviour in socio-political contexts, boredom is a psychosomatic response, in Victorian England, to the ways in which emerging modernity’s varied and powerful forces shaped senses of personal identity and desire. Exhausted and bored by the “repeated shocks” of progress in its varied forms that “numb” the “elastic powers” (146) and “nerves” (147) as described by Matthew Arnold in his anti-modern polemic, “The Scholar Gypsy” (1853), Victorians were no strangers to how burgeoning modern industrial and technological processes caused a surge in experiences of boredom in everyday life and living. In fact, it is precisely in the Victorian period when boredom began to become what Michael Gardiner has recently termed a “mass phenomenon”: a “diffuse affective experience that . . . correlated strongly with the consolidation of modernity itself, and hence [was] the result of specific socio-historical and cultural factors” (“Henri Lefebvre and the ‘Sociology of Boredom’” 38). By the 1840s, Benjamin

observes that boredom was a democratic mood, reaching “epidemic” proportions in England and France: the unvarying, monotonous toil of industrial workers, the limited space of the domestic sphere characterizing the domain of middle-class women, and the leisure of upper-class men and women (with too much time on their hands) all tended to generate, in different ways, the growing sense of time as empty and unfulfilling, a burden to be born physically and psychologically (*The Arcades Project* D2a,4, D3a,4, D4,5). Carlo Salzani observes that, in *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin interprets boredom as an ambivalent mood: it is both the pain of waiting and, also, a threshold or liminal state-of-being in which the bored subject hopes for desire’s fulfillment or a change of condition that dispels boredom and brings new interests to the fore (“The Atrophy of Experience: Walter Benjamin and Boredom” 140-2).

Reading Henri Lefebvre and Walter Benjamin, Gardiner explains that certain specific and “broader conditions of modernity” have “given rise to the contemporary experience of boredom” (40). Among them, the growing “atrophy of experience,” as described by Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*, is a root cause. By this, Gardiner, by way of Benjamin, means that the forces of Enlightenment’s emphasis on the material as opposed to the spiritual and the rise of industrialism both, among other things, inaugurated a “devalue[ing] of the past stressing instead perpetual change, innovation and transformation vis-a-vis both self and world” (41). Gardiner also observes that in “pre-modern societies,” daily lives, both with regards to leisure and labour, were based off of the rhythmic and cyclical patterns of nature, marked by “innumerable festivals, rituals, and celebrations” which rendered time as, Lefebvre says, “non-accumulative,” composed of that which is “sensual, qualitative in nature, integrated into the body, and imbued with

poetic or artistic qualities” (44). However, the more organic, heterogeneous view of time, specifically reflected in liturgical and cyclical patterns of life and living, is either marginalized or else largely replaced in industrialized, capitalist systems. “The time of modernity,” Gardiner concludes, “is determined by the logic of the commodity and its endless flows and homeostatic circuits, of exchange rather than use-value” and such a series of interminable “endless flows” of seconds which signify in relation to production marks out “commodity time” (44).

This homogenization of time, which was a major factor in the increase in boredom in the Victorian period was adapted, critiqued, and appropriated in a variety of ways. Moreover, Gardiner observes that the accelerated paces of emerging modernity, in the contexts of both labour time and leisure time (temporal periods that varied in length and duration and quality depending on one’s social and economic status in society), collapsed the distinctions between work and rest, industry and idleness. Boredom, Gardiner writes, also then stems from an “increasingly standardized form of social existence” (which we find increasing in the nineteenth century) that, in turn, transformed categorizations, theorizations, and applications of time (41). As Gardiner notes, with industrialism, a certain dulling and burdensome homogeneity spread across a series of social activities in unprecedented ways in England and France, in particular, during the nineteenth century:

. . . [S]ocial existence [was increasingly] under continuous assault from the acceleration and redeployment of temporality that is the crux of modernization. Formerly heterogeneous activities are subjected to the tyranny of a universal clock-time, and individual moments, especially under the sway of industrial

labour, become repetitive, interchangeable and bereft of meaning [. . .] The instantiation of this ‘empty, homogeneous time’ must also be understood in relation to the continual shocks of modern urban life. (41-2)

This “empty, homogenous time,” was not only figured in Victorian representations of time. Victorian chronotopes, vast and varied, continued to demarcate different social activities (for example, it distinguished work time from devotional time). But as Lysack has argued recently, the differences between them diminished throughout the period. Commodity consumption, for example, not only dominated the spheres of labour and production but grew to influence the book-making, writing, and publishing ventures of religious devotional projects, such as John Keble’s wildly popular and influential *The Christian Year* (1827) (which went through over 95 editions by the time of Keble’s death in 1866) and Christina Rossetti’s *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* (1885) (“The Productions of Time” 451-460). Instead of encouraging readers to slow down in their daily lives so as to engage in protracted periods of contemplative prayer, both Keble’s and Rossetti’s texts adapted to the growing hustle and bustle of modern life, encouraging readers to grab snippets of time away from their work to pause over a few lines of devotional commentary. “In an era when standardized clocks and train schedules were beginning to frame the duration of one’s reading moments [and attention],” Lysack observes, “grazing over Keble came to resemble browsing the timetables of a *Bradshaw’s Railway Guide*” (459). Secular work-time and devotional time (often claimed from one’s spare time) were conflating and becoming one and the same.

Given the growing transformation of all time into a continual and homogenous experience, to return to Gardiner, and the hyper-accelerated demand for progress, change,

development, and novelty that characterized economic, industrial, and economic enterprises, it is no surprise that Victorian literature is populated by a diverse cast of bored subjects: Tennyson's "Mariana" who is "awearry" with life; Jane Eyre whose exotic and "peculiar" paintings (*Jane Eyre* 197) express the wide expanse of her desires on the one hand, and how poorly they are being met in her confining state as a "paid subordinate" on the other (206); Eugene Wrayburn's struggles with indifference towards his profession which he complains about, saying he is "dreadfully susceptible" to "boredom" (*Our Mutual Friend* 286)); and the world-weary and spiritually troubled (the "fagg'd," "fashed," "cogg'd," and "cumbered") modern human community in Gerard Manley Hopkins's exploration of boredom in "The leaden echo and the golden echo" (42-3). Boredom and bored subjects appear, across the economic, temporal, social, and gender divides and interactions of nineteenth-century England.

As my Chapters on Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, and Christina Rossetti will outline at more length, various Victorian art interests dealt with the problems of boredom and modernity, indirectly, through other forms—especially through romantic returns to medieval sensibilities (as a means of returning to think through past time periods and cultural values that were eschewed by Victorian interests in progress). For instance, Victorian paintings and poetry were often aesthetic and / or devotional re-workings of the significance of time as a measurement of productivity and of desire's fulfillment or disappointment. More particularly, while boredom was a consequence of new classifications of, and relations to, time's passing it was also a "gendered" condition, as Pease argues in her Introduction to *Modernism, Feminism, and the Culture of Boredom* (25). As will be seen in my Chapter on Christina Rossetti and my discussion of

“Mariana” and “The Lady of Shalott” in my Chapter on Tennyson, female boredom often stems from two sources in the Victorian period: the prescriptions and limitations of the domestic sphere and the restrictions and obstacles facing women who sought to become part of broader public intellectual and socio-political spheres.²⁸ Male boredom, however, tends to be more directly associated with resistances to the pressures of the Protestant Ethic and the Gospel of Work which, as Tim Barringer argues, was a dominant and profound ideal influencing a variety of masculine-dominated spheres in the Victorian period: political life, artistic movements (such as the short-lived Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood), religious discourses of the time, and cultural and literary commentaries, as represented by Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin in particular (*Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain* 22-66). To place in view the close connections between the private and public spheres and their contribution to the rise of boredom as a psychosomatic response to problems of frustrated desire, contested spaces (such as the domestic sphere) and the pressures of temporal categories, such as clock-time, it is important to consider how boredom translated differently, along gendered lines in the Victorian period. In order to do so, it is useful to first look at the ways in which boredom and neurasthenia, as masculine and feminine problems that were dealt with quite differently (along gendered lines), relate and contrast.

²⁸ Of course, it is important to note that many women, throughout the Victorian period, found ways to rise to prominence in the social sphere but this status was often achieved indirectly: through publishing their writings or getting involved in various religious and charitable enterprises, such as the St. Mary Magdalen charity home in Highgate London—a place for recovering prostitutes and ‘fallen women’—where Christina Rossetti volunteered from 1859-1870. Most women, in general, were defined by their relation to the home. In *Night and Day* (1919), commenting on the condition of women in England, Virginia Woolf writes that female work and identity was equated with being “at home” and, rather ironically, she observes that domestic work is “. . . a very great profession which has, as yet, no title and very little recognition, although the labor of the mill and factory is, perhaps, no more severe” (44).

Often aligning or overlapping throughout the Victorian period and into the twentieth century, boredom and neurasthenia were viewed as two sides of the same coin. As a psycho-somatic reaction to the stresses of modernity, the restless frustration characterizing boredom was often a consequence of problematic scientific and psychological diagnoses of women struggling with neurasthenia. Loosely defined by the nineteenth-century neurologist, George Beard, as the consequence of stress on the brain caused by anxiety, worrying, urbanization, and industrialization, neurasthenia was increasingly understood as being a consequence of female domesticity (*Modernism, Feminism, and the Culture of Boredom* 25). As Pease explains, the “growth of medicine as science and profession in the nineteenth century created an entire industry around woman’s pathologized boredom” (24); neurasthenia, under a certain light, can be seen as a problem of nerves and an aspect of boredom itself. The listlessness, apathy, exhaustion, and restlessness accompanying boredom became “medical[ized]” (129), according to Goodstein, and, at points, also became indistinguishable from the growing medical interest in the relationship between the human body’s nervous system and energy levels. The disconcerting signs and symptoms of neurasthenia (including high levels of stress and anxiety, irritability, and hysteria) can be interpreted as resistances, at the level of the body, to conditions of seemingly interminable monotony.

Throughout the period, Logan observes, authors recognized the power and mystery of neurasthenia as a complex part-somatic, part-psychological problem which revealed various problems about Victorian classifications of gender inequality and difference: “[l]ike a canary in a mindshaft, this [nervous] body, with its mysterious

symptoms,” he observes, “was singing its warning song. An author could credibly use the health or sickness of the body to ground a commentary on the British way of life” (*Nerves and Narratives* 2). As a result, the poses and movements of the body became powerful ways to supplement and add to the prevailing discourses on questions regarding health, wellness, desire, and gender identity in the nineteenth century. When it comes to neurasthenia and boredom, both conditions often enabled women to express their dissatisfaction with the current conditions of restriction they often experienced in their daily lives. By extension, given that medical responses to female and male neurasthenia were different, representations of raw nerves and boredom in literature became powerful ways to express dissatisfaction with the unequal treatment of men and women when it came to nervous issues and anxieties.

Pease points out that while neurasthenia, that “half mystery and half medical fact” of damaged nerves and “stress on the brain” in the nineteenth century, was identified as a disease for both men and women, the prescriptions for treatment were gender specific: men were prescribed a change of clime and a robust set of activities to help soothe their raw nerves whereas women were ordered to take bed rests (24-5). For example, the year before marrying Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett wrote that one of her doctors prescribed that her ill health would be restored if he “carried the inkstand out of [her] room,” thus depriving her of the instruments she needed for work; in the letter where she recounts this episode, as well as in others during the year before she married Browning, Barrett compares herself to Tennyson’s Mariana, seeing her as a poetic equivalent to the frustration and boredom of women who felt sickened, not restored, by confinement and limitations (*The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning: 1845-46*

156-57).²⁹ Barrett's identification with "Mariana," who became the quintessential bored female 'type' in Victorian literature, shows how interchangeable boredom and the more serious states of depression and neurasthenia could be: initial illnesses could be prolonged by forced prescriptions of strict bed rest for women and habits of inactivity could, in turn, produce boredom, restlessness and bouts of depression verging on madness. This latter symptom is, of course, the subject of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). Barrett had to deal with years of fatigue and exhaustion, as well as a growing dependency on morphine that was initially caused by an injury she sustained in her adolescence, affecting her spine. This injury later developed alongside respiratory problems and coughing-induced blood spitting, which George Pickering suggests was symptomatic of pulmonary tuberculosis; throughout her illness, Barrett knew how essential intellectual work, reading, studying, and writing was for mental health while suffering illness and chronic discomfort and fatigue (*Creative Malady* 247-9).

Mariana is a fitting poetic equivalent to Barrett: enclosed in her "moated grange," she typified a variety of nineteenth-century, gendered discourses on health and illness, neurasthenia and forms of depression, often framed in the context of the domestic sphere. Had Barrett followed her doctor's orders, she would have succumbed to the very problem that prescriptions against neurasthenia attempted to circumvent: she would have gone mad. Barrett makes this point in her letter, noting that it was absurd of her doctor to

²⁹ For a more developed discussion of Barrett in relation to Tennyson's "Mariana" and the problem of female boredom see Chapter Two, section 2.1: "Boredom and the Insufficiencies of the Present Moment in Tennyson's 'Mariana' and 'Mariana in the South.'"

attempt to prescribe, to manage, her illness by ordering away one of the few outlets, her pen, that afforded her the ability to convey her mind's racing thoughts and provide her with a pleasurable and fruitful means of passing the time (157-59). Rather than remain passive, however, Barrett wittingly and critically appraised her doctor's orders, in her letter to Browning, happily qualifying her condition by saying that not all of her medical carers were so short-sided. Her work, praised and encouraged by Browning, helped her to shape her poetic voice in the face of suffering and frustrations.

The problem of how to manage time and labour was a key topic, as Athena Vrettos writes, in the various conversations neurasthenia generated throughout the Victorian period, conversations ranging from scientific to social and religious topics (*Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* 23-5, 83). In Victorian literature, and in the personal histories of various women writers, boredom is not only an oppressive burden but is embraced as a way of generating critical and aesthetic responses to both personal desires and larger social issues and concerns regarding various problems in Victorian society and culture. That is to say, as frustrating as being bored could be, there were as many women embracing and exploring their boredom, channelling it to creative ends (as with Barrett and, as I shall discuss in Chapter Five, as with Christina Rossetti), as there were those who seems to succumb to it, like Tennyson's "Mariana" (who, of course, is an impoverished female subject created by a male poet). For instance, Lee Anna Maynard argues that Jane Eyre's boredom with a "society shaped by conduct-book ideology" and stereotypical assumptions about her identity as a governess forms the basis for a perceptive "critique of the limited options Victorian women [were] offered;" Jane's boredom eventually translates into her defiance of the conventional ideas about

female intelligence and beauty (*Beautiful Boredom* 12). While boredom is similar to neurasthenia, and especially so when female boredom is the topic being explored, it remained distinct from neurasthenia, in many ways. It was not only a condition of issues with illness, confinement, and nerves throughout the nineteenth century. It also presented itself as an ethical issue and one relating to questions of poetic identity in the context of work; this is especially evident when we consider connections between boredom, masculinity, and theories of labour in the Victorian period.

Boredom is also a male problem which, throughout the Victorian period, often stemmed from problems of industrialism and labour and their respective relationships to questions of, and views concerning, Victorian masculinities.³⁰ In Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), for instance, Eugene Wrayburn continually attempts to put off his obligations as a lawyer, preferring to seek out forms of amusement so as to stave off the boredom to which he is "dreadfully susceptible" (286). Similarly, in *Hard Times* (1854), James Harthouse describes his state of boredom as being an inability to care, or dare, to commit himself to any specific project or aim in life: "[t]he result of the varieties of boredom I have undergone, is a conviction . . . that any set of ideas will do just as much good as any other set, and just as much harm as any other set" (162).³¹ Harthouse's and

³⁰ As Herbert Sussman has demonstrated in *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (1995) and Barringer, more recently, in *Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain* (2005), ideas about masculine identity were vast and varied during the Victorian period—multiple competing notions of the ideal man (ranging from navy to monk, from aesthete to hard-working artist) showed that, as Sussman observes, the "terms 'masculinity' and 'manliness'" were "multifarious social constructions of the male current within [Victorian] society" and that understandings of male identity were largely "diverse rather than . . . monolithic" (13).

³¹ In these cases, the ways in which both temporality and a kind of malaise bordering on illness—a condition of weakness towards taking life on fully and committedly—instance the ways that Dickens's

Wrayburne's boredom both stem from their mutual resistances to identifying with work as the constituent of personal, masculine identity. On one level, then, their boredom indicates their skepticism that any social modes or conceptions of male identity will provide them with meaning in life. Their boredom signals the growing epistemological crisis of the Victorian period: prevailing ideals about the meaning and purpose of everyday life and living were thrown into doubt by the rapid, almost daily, accelerations of technological innovations, the breakdown of communal living, the burgeoning of cities into alienating labyrinths, the railroading of nature, and a growing uncertainty about the relationship between daily life, personal history, and divine Providence.³²

understanding of boredom shares affinities with the problem of neurasthenia in the Victorian period. Despite the gendered distinctions present in Dickens's treatment of boredom, boredom remains a problematic relationship to time (a "*chronic* malady") for both women and men. And when it came to considering the ways that boredom could be alleviated, Dickens was particularly vocal: he viewed it as a moral duty, on the part of society, to find ways to dispel the problem of boredom, in so far as it was possible.

In fact, before he turned more expressly to the problem of boredom in his novels, Dickens examined the possible ethical problems that being idle and bored in society may cause. In his anonymously published article addressing Parliament, entitled *Sunday under Three Heads* (1836), Dickens attacks a legislative proposal, put forth by Sir Andrew Agnew in the spring of 1836, to restrict the social activities available on Sundays for members of the lower and working classes (who used local parks, for example, on their day off since their homes did not provide a variety of leisure activities (as they would in the cases of the domestic arrangements of the middle and upper classes)). In his criticism of this proposed legislation, Dickens argues that restricting the possibilities of activity on the Sabbath will lead to massive outbreaks of boredom which, in turn, will lead to hordes of men turning to "gin-shops" as their only resource (18). He imagines how the proposed restrictions, if passed, will render the average working class man "weary and dejected," "saunter[ing] moodily about" since he will be deprived of the "means of exercising his body" (18). This concern that boredom wears down of the body, and, by extension, the soul, is also present in Dickens's description of the working class inhabitants of Coketown in *Hard Times*; he describes labourers as going about their daily toil "with the same sound upon the same pavements to do the same work" (44). Weariness, dejection, sauntering, and repetitions of the same activities are descriptions of boredom that overlap with other affective states of dejection (such as neurasthenia) in other Dickens novels, too.

³² While the symptoms, and managements, of masculine and feminine experiences of boredom often appear quite different, throughout the Victorian period, the root causes were often similar. For example, in my discussion of Millais's reading of Tennyson's "Mariana," it is clear that Mariana's rejection of a devotional life and of her work life throws her into a similar identity crisis which is both caused by, and further

The language used in both texts forms a rhetoric shaped by weariness and lassitude, articulating masculine crises in identity. In the cases where boredom is a masculine predicament in Dickens's narratives, it tends to be connected to questions of work and professional life (or a lack of being able to work).³³ The question of labour, in relation to boredom, is a central one in the nineteenth century, especially as it concerned the masculine consideration of discontent and the ideal, gaining traction throughout the British Empire, that industriousness was next to Godliness. Barringer, in his study on representations of labour in the visual culture(s) of Victorian Britain, sums up the relationship between work and the Protestant Ethic, as coined by Weber, by saying that "[h]ard work had become the only means of displaying the moral worth and gendered identity of the individual in a fast-secularising world still addicted to the language of Evangelical Protestantism" (*Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain* 29). Much of the growing obsession with work as a defining shaper of masculine identity, as an antidote for malaise and boredom, and as a vital means for growing in beatitude was encapsulated, and even furthered, in the writings of Carlyle and Ruskin.

For Carlyle, there were few things more abhorrent to him than idleness or boredom. As I will discuss at more length in the next Chapter, on Tennyson, Carlyle

agitates, her situational boredom. For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between epistemological crisis and a growing, Victorian sense of the withdrawal or hiddenness of Providence see J.Hillis Miller's *The Disappearance of God*, pages 18-80.

³³ Perhaps this in part a consequence of Dickens's personal biography; as a young boy, he knew what poverty and hard labour meant. The threat of having nothing to eat, of having the slow passing of unyielding time gnawing on an empty stomach, was a pretty frightful prospect. Work, for Dickens, was a very important and pressing topic.

greatly disliked Tennyson's melancholic poetics, especially as espoused in the figure of Mariana. Carlyle understood boredom, idleness, and melancholia as time-wasters and as moods which tempted men and women from their respective daily duties.³⁴ Work, for Carlyle, was the cure for idleness and lassitude and, also, the unifying principle that integrated and ordered the passions, desires, appetite, and intellect of the human person: "[e]ven in the meanest sorts of Labour," he argues, "the whole soul of a man is composed into a kind of real harmony" and, as a result, "[t]he man is now a man" (*Past and Present* 189). In a similar vein, John Ruskin writes in the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* that "from the inmost heart of the worker rises his God-given Force, the sacred celestial Life-essence, breathed into him by Almighty God" (10:190). The close relationship between religious devotion and work was expressed by various painters of the Victorian period, particularly by the Pre-Raphaelites John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt and by their friend, Ford Madox Brown (who was, for a certain period, a particularly close mentor to, and friend of, Dante Gabriel Rossetti).

In *Jesus Washes Peter's Feet* (1851-52), for instance, Brown emphasizes Christ's muscular arms, rough hands, and his humble and active act of washing Peter's feet (a role reserved for servants). Interestingly, Christ's face is strikingly similar to that of the navy from Brown's *magnum opus*, *Work* (which was begun the next year in 1852), whose muscular and straining body serves as the focal point for the painting. Both Christ and the navy, in their chiselled forms, recall Greek statues of heroes and yet both also depart

³⁴ For my discussion of Carlyle's conception of work in relation to Tennyson's aesthetic poetics of melancholy and boredom, see the first two sections of Chapter Two.

from such a parallel since they are placed, by Brown, in the commonplace and humble settings of the ordinary, even mundane, routines and activities of everyday life and living. *Jesus Washes Peter's Feet*, and others on the topic of Christ as labourer, received some of the highest praise that Carlyle ever gave for art in his writing.³⁵ The dignity of labour as espoused by Ruskin and Carlyle helped also shape the close development between art and work during the Victorian period: the idle and revolutionary representations of the romantic poet were often sidelined by the hard-working painter and poet of the Victorian period.

Typified by the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations which opened in the spring of 1851, the Gospel of Work idealized and even aestheticized forms of labour—especially artisanal or manual labour such as carpentry, harvesting, forestry, and blacksmithery.³⁶ The Great Exhibition grasped the imaginations of England, especially embodying the Gospel of Work (which became a formative principle throughout Victoria's reign). The Gospel of Work was invoked by politicians, theologians, critics, and artists alike; it also influenced, and was influenced by, art of the period, most especially instanced in paintings such as George Elgar Hicks's *The Sinews of Old England* (1857) and Ford Madox Brown's iconic *Work* (1852-1865). Barringer

³⁵ Barringer points out that Carlyle praised *Jesus Washes Peter's Feet* when he went to see Brown's exhibition of the painting and that his praise for a similar painting, Hunt's *The Shadow of Death* (1873), encapsulates what he valued in both works (*Men at Work* 61). For Carlyle, there were great moral, spiritual, and social lessons to be gained from seeing Christ as a humble labourer. For Carlyle, Christ reveals his fleshly and divine nature in his ennoblement of work. "Christ in full manhood endur[ed] the burden of common toil . . . gaining His bread by the sweat of His face" (qtd. in *Men at Work* 61).

³⁶ Barringer suggests that these forms of labour were presented as nation-building occupations and that various visual and literary works of the period tended to occlude, or hide, the more unsightly victims of industrialism itself, championing, instead, the healthy, muscular forms of labouring young men in particular (*Men at Work* 21-30).

rightly, then, calls Brown's *Work* a "great secular altarpiece" (21) to the Gospel of Work that was promoted in the Victorian period by a wide spectrum of social figures, many of them disagreeing on religion and politics but uniting under the common theme of "Work" as a cure-all for social ills. "Work!," says Brown in the poem accompanying his painting, "beads the brow, and tans the flesh / Of lusty manhood, casting out its devils!" (qtd. in *Men at Work* 21). Here, Brown presents work as a transformative, even sanctifying, power as he uses the image of exorcism to describe work's ability to drive out human weaknesses. Brown's praise of labour shares affinity with the eighteenth-century view of idleness, tedium and boredom. Adopting a moralizing tone that echoes that of Hogarth's, Brown praises the virtues of work and thereby also implicitly criticizes idleness, boredom, and other inactive states.

Besides viewing work as a virtue and nation-building power, Victorians often also saw it as a way to work through, or redress, the struggle with melancholia and boredom. In "At Work with Victorian Poetry," Matthew Bevis remarks that those who adopted the Gospel of Work "reified work as release from melancholy or as a therapy for despair (a guarantor of personal as well as of economic progress)" (6). William Morris, especially influenced by Carlyle's *Past and Present* and Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, also perceived work as a kind of therapy against the restlessness and boredom which concerned him in his first volume of poetry, *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* (1858). As I will outline shortly, and at more length throughout the ensuing Chapters of this Dissertation, Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites, especially Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris, troubled the Victorian tendency to separate the Romantic dreamer from the figure of the labourer and they often did so through complicated handlings of boredom. For Tennyson,

Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti and William Morris, boredom is a psycho-somatic response to emerging modern problems and, also, a paradoxical mood which provided, through the restless disappointment causing it, a catalyst for lyric expressions in art.

Beginning with Tennyson and running through the Rossetti family and in Morris's early poetic aesthetics, a "tension of nerve" pulsates and throbs throughout their work ("Aesthetic Poetry" 83). A great deal of the early Pre-Raphaelite movement's aims and interests can be viewed, I suggest, as an attempt to subtly rework modern conceptions of temporality, such as clock-time and commodity time, and the somatics of modernity—from railway stations to modes of reproduction and consumption that influenced both labour and artistic (re)productions throughout the nineteenth century. That is to say, largely disenchanted with the consequences of modernity, Tennyson and those greatly influenced by him, particularly the Rossettis and Morris, explore the force of difficult and burdensome feelings (particularly loss, longing, death, melancholy, love, passion and nostalgia) as ways to explore, transcend, critique, face, and theorize the conditions, the dividends and deficits, of restlessness and boredom in the wake of emerging modernity in England. Blending modern, almost microscopic renderings of nature with scenes of romance, passion, and beauty (often stemming from past literary traditions sourced in Dante, Sir Thomas Malory, Shakespeare, Scripture and the Romantics), the Pre-Raphaelites, especially Dante Gabriel Rossetti, generated an aesthetic sensibility based on what Kristen Mahoney refers to as "the act of longing for the past" which "serves as a template for an aesthetic practice that revels in lack and the perfection of desire" ("Work, Lack, and Longing: Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel" and the Working Man's College" 221). That is to say, the absence of desire's fulfillment, of a restless and bored

dissatisfaction with the insufficiencies of daily life—ranging from burgeoning modernity (which members of the P.R.B. disliked to different degrees) to dissatisfaction with the state of the Royal Academy and art conversations of the period—played a strong and varying role in shaping the aesthetic sensibilities of the Pre-Raphaelites, especially of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Throughout the following Chapters, I present close readings, in conversation with broader socio-political, aesthetic, and theoretical perspectives, so as to outline boredom's multiple meanings in Tennyson's, Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti's, and William Morris's work. In Chapter Two, I consider how Tennyson's early poems "Mariana," "Mariana in the South," and "The Lady of Shalott" as well as "Ulysses" and "The Lotos Eaters" shape an aesthetic of boredom that is explicitly gender specific. I also gesture, in more detail, to the ways in which Tennyson's renderings of dysphoric feelings, melancholy, and boredom have implications for the work of the Rossettis and Morris. When boredom is experienced by women in Tennyson's poems, it tends to be caused by a lack of agency on the one hand and by collapses in the distinction between personal identity and one's surrounding environments on the other. Female boredom, as rendered by Tennyson, then, tends to be an intensification of the predicament of melancholia, as interpreted in the context of Freud's and Julia Kristeva's writing on the topic. Preoccupied with loss and longing, both Mariana and the Lady of Shalott become defined by lack. While some of these observations are not new to scholarly discussions of Tennyson's early poetry, boredom has not been explicitly brought up in discussions centring on the connections between confinement and crises in female agency in Tennyson's poetry. Exploring this problem in light of boredom and being bored, helps us

consider how Tennyson both perpetuates, but also resists, the problem of limited female agency in the general socio-political, gendered expectations for women throughout the nineteenth century. It also complicates Tennyson's ideas about agency in relation to states of idleness, trauma, and contemplation. With regards to male experiences of boredom, I explore how Tennyson ambivalently handles work, showing it as both a means of masculine self-realization (which chimes with the Gospel of Work) and as a form of self-negation in which boredom is a symptom regarding the emergence of modern chronotopes that tend to fragment and reduce human, especially male, senses of the self as an agent of independence.

In Chapter Three, I examine the ways in which Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel" and the structural and thematic aspects of his sonnet sequence, *The House of Life*, are shaped by suspended or deferred desire; boredom becomes a major organizing principle for Rossetti's poetic process. A secular correlative to diurnal and cyclical time, bored time in Rossetti's work is, I argue, a kind of repetitive, cyclical measurement of disappointment in everyday life and living. When reading "The Blessed Damozel" and sections from *The House of Life*, I will consider how Rossetti's growing compulsions to repetition in his art demonstrates the connections between boredom as a form of productive, frustrated desire and, as Elizabeth Helsinger puts it, the "making and selling for modern, urban markets in an expanding culture of consumption" and demand which both Rossetti and Morris "inhabited and criticized" (*Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts* 1). I will also, then, be exploring how, from the late 1850s, onwards, Rossetti's paintings were increasingly repetitious in form and topic. In particular, *La Pia De' Tolomei*, his sketch *The M's at Ems*, and *The Blessed Damozel*, are examples of

Rossetti's growing fascination with frustrated desire, with boredom, as a means for approaching complex questions related to poetic identity, female subjectivity, erotic longing, and Dantean afterlives in his work.

My fourth Chapter focuses on Morris's first volume of poetry, *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, and the ways it dramatizes the effects of "disenchantment" with modernity through explorations of explicitly non-modern settings. Specifically, Morris examines the anxious, raw-nerved, bored, abandoned, and restless figures so characteristic of psychological attitudes in the face of emerging modernity by placing them in distant, pseudo-medievalized settings. The stark dissonance between subjects and their settings underscore the ways that bored subjects feel detached from, and unable to connect with, their environments. This dissonance, I suggest, shapes an aesthetic of boredom which Morris later seeks to redress through his emphasis on fruitful action, and useful labour, which aspires to connect the self with larger communities and with the practicalities of daily living with beauty. Consequently, I argue that Morris is seeking to redress the mechanistic view of the body so prevalent in Enlightenment thinking and typified in both the Industrial Revolution and the growing commodification of modern culture—which Morris, in his Socialism, critiqued but, in his business, frequently benefitted from.

In my fifth Chapter, I consider Christina Rossetti's discussions of *Maude*, "The Prince's Progress" and *Commonplace*—a novella which, so far, as received almost no scholarly attention despite the fact that, as I will argue, it is one of her most sustained yet subtle considerations of the dividends and deficits of domestic life and living. I suggest that in *Commonplace*, Catherine Charlmont, who continually defers her own desires for

the sake of others, is a thinly veiled self-portrait of Christina who came to see her life, her devotional duties and her writing, as an embracing of everyday life and living, of dailiness and all of its routine and mundane circumstances. As a result, *Commonplace* can be read as a more mature reworking, on Rossetti's part, of the problems regarding domesticity, faith, duty, conscience, and writing which she explored in her early novella, *Maude*. My Chapter also considers how Rossetti explores boredom in a series of ambivalent ways—in a rather Kierkegaardian vein, at times, she understands it as a kind of spiritual evil but at other times she sees it as a kind of spiritual trial that affords a growth in hope and faith. In “The Prince's Progress,” for example, it is clear that being able to embrace the burdens and boredom of spiritual duties is a sign of virtue. Those who shirk their duties and seek to evade boredom at all costs end up being described in terms which closely parallel Rossetti's descriptions of the slothful Christian in *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* (1885).

Overall, my Chapters seek to illustrate how boredom, as a psycho-somatic symptom of modernity, fleshes out a series of interests in, and concerns regarding, the ways that time, gender, desire, sexuality, faith, and art were organized and represented in Victorian England. Also, taking into account the earlier forms of discontent (acedia, melancholy, ennui, and idleness) that precede boredom and, at times, seem to overlap with it in the nineteenth century, onwards, my study aims to examine how boredom highlights Victorian, socio-political dynamics related to gender, lyric voice, time, and forms of desire as they surface in poetry and painting. This study also aims to consider how various Victorian chronotopes (such as clock-time, liturgical time, factory time, and leisure-time) either contribute to, or attempt to redress, the burgeoning experience of

boredom, of “being in limbo,” as Heidegger puts it. The problem of boredom and being bored, throughout the Victorian period, is a wide-ranging one, bearing a host of meanings and signalling a series of questions and concerns: questions regarding health, illness, gender dynamics, theories of labour, and the relationships between identity, sexuality, and religious duty, are some of the central ones that shape this study’s consideration of boredom as it emerges as a psycho-somatic phenomenon in Victorian England.

**CHAPTER TWO:
Lyric Longing and an Aesthetic of Boredom in Tennyson's Early Poetry**

Replacing William Wordsworth (following his death in 1850) as the poet laureate of England, Alfred Tennyson and his melancholic and elegiac poetic sensibilities resonated with Queen Victoria in a personal way; she especially valued *In Memoriam* (1850), taking it as the most profound lyrical expression of the suffering she experienced following her loss of Albert, who died in 1862.¹ Victoria's coffin, as John D. Rosenberg describes it, was "as cluttered as the mantelpieces of her subjects;" her burial was an extravagant and iconic instance of the "compulsion to collect" which was symptomatic of the melancholic, Victorian obsession with seeking out "stability in a world in radical transformation" (*Elegy for an Age* 1). As we know, Victoria's melancholia over the loss of Albert influenced many of her daily routines. Helen Rappaport has recently catalogued Victoria's obsessive memorialization practices—which included keeping the room he died in, at Windsor Castle, unaltered, and ordering that his clothes be laid out every night and hot towels prepared daily for his room. (*Queen Victoria: A Biographical Companion*, 408-9, 11).² As Rosenberg has explored, at length, in his recent work on melancholy and

¹ In her diary, she praised Tennyson's elegy to Arthur Hallam, saying that "[n]ext to the Bible, *In Memoriam* is my comfort" (qtd. in Rosenberg 51). Following her death, Victoria was buried with her beloved Albert, surrounded by an eclectic and vast assortment of memorabilia (including one of Albert's dressing gowns and plaster casts of the hands of some of her closest friends).

² Of course, the most public manifestation of Victoria's melancholia was her extravagant monument to Albert, built in Hyde Park, which took twelve years to complete and which, in the end, had to be partially funded by a public commission as the project exceeded original budgetary plans. Sir George Gilbert Scott, the architect of the project, placed the seated statue of Albert in a kind of shrine, reminiscent of a Gothic medieval side-altar, interlaying it with semi-precious stones (Rappaport 11). Albert's contributions to art, science, and "The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations" of 1851 are represented, and memorialized, in the marble frieze that serves as a base for the statue itself (Rappaport 13). Victoria's melancholia, her efforts to memorialize Albert and his vision of The Great Exhibition embody two complex and fundamental narratives that helped shape national, artistic, communal, and individual senses of identity in Victorian England, narratives exploring melancholia and promoting the Gospel of Work. Among other

elegy in the Victorian period, the growing demands of industrialism and burgeoning technological advances created a dysphoric sense of exhaustion and fatigue as central organizational and affective influences in nineteenth century literature and art (*Elegy for an Age* 5-30).³ Tennyson's role in shaping a poetic aesthetic out of this dysphoric condition has also received a great deal of consideration in scholarship, especially in Rosenberg's recent work. However, little attention has been given to the ways in which

things, melancholia tended to stem from the growing sense of the inability to keep up with the rapid, unpredictable emergence of modernity which John Stuart Mills called an "age of transition" (a transition that was radically transforming England's cityscapes and rural landscapes) and, as a result, its development was closely linked to narratives of the Gospel of Work ("The Spirit of the Age" 57).

Jeffrey Auerbach discusses that The Great Exhibition of 1851 was a definitive historical and nation-building moment for Victorian England. The Gospel of Work was particularly an ideal promoted by the Exhibition, encapsulating Albert's desire to advance the dignity of labour as a source of communal and national prosperity and, at the same time, to promote the reformation of labour conditions for the working class poor (*The Great Exhibition: A Nation on Display* 129-131). Auerbach points out, however, that the main motives for celebrating labour that governed The Exhibition were often problematically elitist and idealistic: medals honouring labourers (usually entrepreneurs who funded the Exhibition as opposed to the working class members of society who helped physically build and assemble the various engines of progress) were inscribed in Latin (a language only the well-educated would know), and *The Punch* was critical of the Exhibition's general disregard for the common workers who formed the backbone of the Exhibition's construction (*The Great Exhibition* 130-5).

³ For example, appealing to a passage from Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), which describes Coketown, Rosenberg explores how the brutal forces of industrial labour and an increasing nostalgia for, and idealization of, the past are both linked in a variety of ways (269). In the passage Rosenberg cites, Dickens specifically likens the "piston of the steam-engine [which] worked monotonously up and down" to the "head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness" (223). Here, Dickens's use of "melancholy" is similar to Freud's later description of melancholia as a condition in which loss and suffering, bearing disappointment and burdens, affects the stability of one's self-perception, causing a "great impoverishment of the ego" (*Mourning and Melancholia* 205). While the elephant cannot suffer an "impoverishment of the ego," per se, it is a personification of the consequences of industrialism on human subjects (these consequences comprise the main focus of *Hard Times* in general and in Dickens's description of Coketown in particular). The monotonous and repetitive nature of labour breeds not only melancholia but also "monotony" and boredom and in the same way that it reduces daily relations between communities, work, money, and time, it also often reduces the worker's sense of self-worth and identity. Weariness, loss, exhaustion, and self-doubt constitute the affective and psychological dramas of much of Victorian writing, in general, and these dysphoric conditions have been examined, at length, by various scholars—most recently, by Rosenberg and David G. Riede in *Allegories of One's Own Mind: Melancholy in Victorian Literature* (2005).

Tennyson's poetry, which Christopher Ricks terms an "art of the penultimate" (*Tennyson* 49), is not only concerned with melancholy but also with the problem of boredom.

In his early poems, "Mariana," "Mariana in the South," and "The Lady of Shalott," Tennyson implicitly draws attention to the relationships and tensions existing between boredom and nineteenth-century views of poetry, gender, sexuality, desire, temporality, human feeling, and suffering. Taking moments of loss, of anticipation before consummation, of the melancholic lamentation occurring *after* events, Tennyson excels in "Mariana" (as he does elsewhere) in conveying the pain of longing and restlessness that are both at the heart of the lyric voices and lyric consciousnesses shaping his poetic aesthetic in general. Such a facility with exploring boredom as a "dull hangover" (to borrow Jeff Nunokawa's phrase), as the throbbing pain felt after the powers and joys of pleasure, hope and desire have been exhausted, shapes Tennyson's earliest published poetry and affects his growing concern regarding Victorian formulations of male identity in relation to the Gospel of Work (*Tame Passions of Wilde* 74). This latter point is evident in his poetry of the early 1840s, as typified in "The Lotos Eaters" and "Ulysses." "Mariana," however, is one of the earliest instances of the melancholy that would become typical of both Queen Victoria and Victorians throughout the nineteenth century. As I discussed in section 1.1 of my Introduction to this dissertation, Tennyson's Mariana served as a key figure for the early Pre-Raphaelites and she uncannily resurfaces again and again, throughout Victorian literature and art and poetry, whenever bored and restless women are left interminably waiting (often sequestered in the confines of the domestic sphere). And, as I will discuss in the following section, reading Mariana as 'being bored' allows us to further consider the ways in which Tennyson might be questioning the

limited opportunities available to women in his own time period. As an impoverished subject who is often interpreted as nothing more than a ventriloquist for Tennyson's exploration of melancholia, the words Mariana speaks (and the environment enclosing her) fleshes out the affective consequences, the dysphoric feelings, associated with the problem of boredom—more than this, her impoverished experience invites us to note some of the various causes of boredom (confinement, restricted opportunities, female solitude and so on).

Recently, Sianne Ngai has defined dysphoric or “ugly” feelings as those which generate from whatever is “stultifying, tedious, irritating, fatiguing or dulling” (*Ugly Feelings* 270). Tennyson's melancholic poetic aesthetic, as well as his interest in other “ugly feelings,” to borrow Ngai's words, such as anger, lost love, and boredom (not to mention his ambivalent attitude towards work, the sacred subject of Victorian nation-building), shows how he was both ‘of’ his nation's moment and set apart from it. Ngai says that “non-cathartic” feelings such as fear, disgust, envy or boredom represent the ways in which art (and aestheticism more broadly) is concerned with ambiguous states of feeling; these unresolved and often quasi-ambivalent states speak to the unsettled, restless or exhausted aspects of human life and living (*Ugly Feelings* 1-30). Specifically tracing a way of discussing the emerging modern state of boredom by way of examining Kant's evolving understanding of the “status of affective lack,” Ngai (following observations made by Paul de Man) finds Kant's thoughts on the “status of affective lack” to be “discrepant,” noting that while he dismissed the significance of affective absence or lack [*Affektlosigkeit*] in *Observations on the Sentiment of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), he later found, in *The Critique of Judgment* (1790), that the absence of affect signals a self-

reflexive state of a mind in touch with the sublime (*Ugly Feelings* 269). From this, Ngai then extends Kant's exploration of *apatheia* by contrasting it with boredom. She notes that, unlike *apatheia*, boredom causes specific signs and symptoms of restless discontent.

While *apatheia* is a mental or intellectual experience (an attitude of the mind towards the world), boredom is both psychological and somatic, announcing that the whole human person is out-of-joint with the way things are:

We could say that Kant's sublime *apatheia* involves a lack of affect that is itself reflexively felt by the subject as neither pleasurable nor unpleasurable (that is, an absence of affect that is approached apathetically in turn, a lack about which the subject feels *nothing*), whereas boredom involves a deficiency of affect that is reflexively felt to be dysphoric—stultifying, tedious, irritating, fatiguing or dulling [. . .] In contrast to freeing the subject from the realm of affect in its entirety, boredom immobilizes and stupefies—and indicates the *inability* of other mental activities, including reason, to overcome an affective state. (*Ugly Feelings* 269-70)

Ngai's emphasis that boredom's symptoms are dysphoric helps us to read Tennyson's exploration of negative, restless and ugly feelings—his poetry is full of dysphoric, yet intriguing, emotional wrestlings. This is especially evident when we consider how much he capitalizes on the word, “weary,” especially in his early poetry and how his poetry in general often remains lingering on the precarious line between life and oblivion—a line drawn and re-drawn in his earliest poems, most especially in “Mariana,” and in his ground-breaking *In Memoriam*—as seen in section XXXVIII when he recollects how,

following the death of Arthur Hallam, he can only “loiter on” with “weary steps” (as opposed to definitely advance towards a goal) (1).

Weariness, however, is most memorably explored in “Mariana,” as I will discuss in the following section, and Mariana’s repeated complaint that she is “awearry, “awearry” (11) is an almost perfect verbal expression of the boredom and dejection she feels. “Aweary,” however, does not just crop up in “Mariana” (1830). A few years earlier, in 1827, Tennyson was using the word “weary” to communicate how emotional pain takes a toll on the body. In “Friendship,” for instance, he describes friendship as a rare “all-heavenly voice” (3) that, when lost, pronounces how the “weary waste of life” appears “unblest” (5). Also published in 1827, “And ask ye why these sad tears stream?,” explores how waking from dreams is a sorrow that makes life “doubly weary” (22). The poem’s closing lines find the speaker in a state of boredom, as opposed to melancholia, since he complains of the insufficiencies of his present life to alleviate his world-weariness: “O weary life! O weary death! / O spirit and heard made desolate! / O damnéd vacillating state!” (188-190). This world-weariness, which appears as a distance cousin of acedia and the noon-day-devil that I discussed in the Introduction to this study, is also expressed in “The Lady of Shalott” and in Tennyson’s exploration of masculinity in “The Lotos Eaters” and *Ulysses*.” However, in terms of the latter two poems, boredom is dealt with in very different ways. As I will discuss in section 2.3 of this Chapter, in “The Lotos Eaters,” weariness is experienced by *Ulysses*’s companions who wish that they could have a period of rest from unceasing, and wearying, toil. Boredom in “The Lotos Eaters” can be read as representative of, among other things, a passive resistance to the growing workaholicism of Victorian England. In “*Ulysses*,” however, rest makes *Ulysses* almost

‘bored to death’ with his hearth and home in Ithaca and, more than almost any other poem in Tennyson’s oeuvre, we see endorsements of the general principles of the Gospel of Work.⁴ Throughout the remaining pages of this Chapter, I will examine how “Mariana,” “The Lady of Shalott,” “The Lotos Eaters,” and “Ulysses” provide us with ways of reading the relationship between boredom and a constellation of Victorian ideas regarding male and female identity, sexuality, desire, time, and the Gospel of Work.

More specifically, this Chapter explores how Tennyson views boredom ambivalently, as a psycho-somatic response to, and symptom of, states of negative or “ugly feelings.” This ambivalence, on Tennyson’s part, enables him to explore, critique, and even endorse (to some extent) a series of complicated, pressing, and important questions about the conversations many Victorians, such as his good friend Thomas Carlyle (among others), were having regarding the significance of personal identity in relation to everyday life, art, civic responsibility, and work. I argue that Tennyson treats boredom in a paradoxical manner. At times, the solitude, restlessness, and unfulfilled desire that causes boredom stimulates creativity in the bored subject; this is the case in both “The Lady of Shalott” and “Ulysses.” At other moments in Tennyson’s poetry, however, he presents boredom as a psycho-somatic burden which signals either resignation to one’s fate or a passive resistance to it. We can discern this latter

⁴ Tennyson, following Dante’s *Inferno*, imagines Ulysses’ life beyond the end of *The Odyssey* and makes him a restless hero whose desire to “strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield” (70); as a result, “Ulysses” can be read as a poetic exploration of the idealized Victorian muscular Christian who took on the Gospel of Work as espoused by Carlyle, among others. Despite the various ways Tennyson uses and explores the condition of weariness in his poetry, his repetitive references to this state unfold in largely elegiac strains: either a melancholic subject mourns the loss of a loved one or else a bored subject mourns either the frustration of desire or, as Adam Phillips has put it, mourns the unappealing events of repetitive, everyday life (*On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life* 71).

understanding of boredom at work in “Mariana” and “The Lotos Eaters,” in particular. Tennyson’s ambiguous attitude towards boredom helps us to see how his poetry is protean, almost always reflective of what William Pritchard has recently called a mysterious “[a]rt of [s]uspension” (“Epistolary Tennyson: The Art of Suspension” 331). Paradoxically, Tennyson often effects a sense of lyric movement in his poetry through repeated renderings of a series of lingerings and longings, both of which hint at the possibility of hope just around the corner (thus keeping many of his contemporary readers and reviewers uncomfortably hooked to his art, always waiting for a glimpse of change (like Mariana herself)).

2.1: Boredom and the Insufficiencies of the Present Moment in Tennyson’s “Mariana” and “Mariana in the South”

Although the rhyme and metrical scheme for “Mariana” varies, its opening lines are controlled by an *abba* pattern of mainly iambic pentameter which expresses what John Batchelor has recently called a “music” of “stagnation, helplessness, and entrapment” that would later resurface, as a melancholic and haunting cadence, in certain parts of *In Memoriam* (1850) (*Tennyson: To Strive, To Seek, To Find* 120). The first two stanzas of “Mariana” are locodescriptive and paint images of a wasted landscape. The “moated grange” is only a little less desolate than Browning’s later nightmare-scape in “Childe Roland” (1855) or Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) since it is a neglected garden as opposed to a scarred battlefield or the “[u]nreal [c]ity” (60) of “brown fog” (61) caused by industrialism, among other things. Nevertheless, the grange is described as inexorably moving towards decay and, as a result, distantly anticipates the bleakness of a Beckett

play in which surrounding environs aggravate, as opposed to sooth, unsettled and bored characters:

With blackest moss the flower-pots
 Were thickly crusted, one and all:
 The rusted nails fell from the knots
 That held the pear to the gable-wall.

The broken sheds looked sad and strange
 Unlifted was the clinking latch;
 Weeded and worn the ancient thatch
 Upon the lonely moated grange.

She only said, 'My life is dreary,
 He cometh not,' she said.
 She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
 I would that I were dead!' (1-12)

Departing from the Wordsworthian creed that "Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her," Tennyson prepares us for Mariana's boredom and emotional distress by presenting the grange as a representation of the weariness and isolation she feels at having been abandoned by her faithless fiancé, Angelo ("Lines: Composed A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" 122-23).

Appraising "Mariana" in 1831, a year after it was first published, W. J. Fox observed that the poem was an exploration of psychological terrain. Tennyson, he says,

“seems to obtain entrance into a mind as he would make his way into a landscape; he climbs the pineal gland as if it were a hill in the centre of the scene” (qtd. in *Tennyson* 46). What is more, Fox explains that “Mariana” is not only an exploration of a burdened mindscape but also of the profound and “paralyzing” effect that time’s slow passing has on Tennyson’s poetic sensibilities:

The poem takes us through the circuit of four-and-twenty hours of this dreary life. Through all the changes of the night and day [Mariana] has but one feeling, the variation of which is only by different degrees of acuteness and intensity in the misery it produces; and again and again we feel, before its repetition, the coming of the melancholy burthen. (qtd. in *Tennyson* 46)

“[C]rusted,” “rusted,” “broken,” “[u]nlifted,” “weeded and worn,” Mariana’s “moated grange” is, as Matthew Bevis observes, a poetic precursor for the even more disturbing “dreadful hollow” (1) that is “dabbled with blood-red heath” (2), personifying the raw nerves and hysteria of the troubled speaker in *Maud: A Monodrama* (1855) (“Tennyson’s Humour” 239).

Confining and decaying, the grange is also a spatial representation of Mariana’s state of boredom, much like Martin Heidegger’s use of “limbo” to explain a bored subject’s frustrated relationship to time in which its “progress . . . is slowing down and is *too* slow for us, and which . . . *holds us in limbo* [. . .] This vacillating and dragging of time contains whatever it is that is burdensom and paralysing” (*The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* 97). As Ricks puts it in his reading of the poem, Mariana’s unfulfilled desire both mirrors and supplants the linear and industrial conception of clock

time, making temporality a subjective construct that measures out boredom: “though the clock may tick slow, it is Mariana’s spirit which turns such a movement into [the] ‘slow clock,’” described in the poem’s last stanza (*Tennyson* 47). That is to say, Mariana’s boredom is the result of the consistent and repetitive measurement of time as a series of refusals and disappointments. Like clock time, which offers no narrative outside of measurement, Mariana’s bored time in the grange is limiting and her boredom makes the tick-tock of the clock even more painful to endure than its repetitious mode already causes, in and of itself. Moreover, both Tennyson’s “grange” and Heidegger’s “limbo” embody the psycho-somatic condition of Mariana’s boredom: it is caused by her frustrated desire, in the present moment, and is reinforced and aggravated by her limited environment.

Whereas melancholia, as Freud observes, is caused by a subject’s fixation on a loss that occurred in the past, the bored subject is obsessed with the limitations and disappointments of the present moment (*Mourning and Melancholia* 202-208).⁵ Like the

⁵ Mariana’s continual insistence that she is dreary, and longs to be dead, signals her state of unfulfilled desire. In her state of disappointed desire, Mariana has only the passing of time to mark difference and movement. By the end of the poem, her quasi-death wish is turned into a kind of anti-prayer of supplication encapsulated in the words, “O God, that I were dead” (84). That Mariana is not only a figure for melancholia but, even more so, for boredom is discernible in her limited speech. In his discussion of melancholia, Freud brings up the figure of Hamlet, calling him the melancholic par excellence whose loss translates into an impoverishment of his ego, of his sense of worth; talkiness (“words, words, words!”) becomes a way for the melancholic to work through, or compensate for, his or her loss (*Mourning and Melancholia* 203-7). Freud observes that, in melancholia, there is an “extraordinary reduction, a great impoverishment of the ego” (205) which signifies that it is not the world that has become “poor and empty” but, rather, the “ego that has become so” (206). Such an internalization of the loss of worth, of meaning, in the ego, is manifested in the “trait of an insistent talkativeness, taking satisfaction from self-exposure” (206). In “Mariana,” however, speech is reduced to repetitious refrains. Mariana’s refrain serves to perpetuate a hyper-sensitive attunement to the passing of time and in so doing constitutes the never-to-arrive Angelo, the figure always already absent from the poem’s outset, as the measure by which time is defined. While melancholia is often chatty (and insistent), as Freud emphasizes, boredom bears the features of pause, frustration, and lethargy—all of which are represented by Mariana’s limited word bank.

In Tennyson’s poetry, melancholic subjects often

unchecked weeds slowly overtaking the grange, Mariana's boredom is a persistent problem. The continual deferral of resolution in the poem was an emotional and aesthetic 'problem' for many readers and critics of the poem, Carlyle being chief among them. In a vein similar to John Ruskin's response to John Everett Millais's *Mariana* (1851) in which he said he wished Millais had depicted Mariana with some form of purposeful task, "at work in an unmoated grange instead of idle in a moated one" ("Notes on Millais" 496), Carlyle criticized Tennyson's "Mariana," taking issue with her marked passivity, her boredom (or, in his words, her "ennui").

In his *Commonplace-book* (1855-56), Monckton Milnes quotes Carlyle as saying he wished Tennyson had either given Mariana some kind of resolve to act or else had not bothered writing about her at all: "[i]f Alfred Tennyson could only make that long wail, like the winter wind, about Mariana in the Moated Grange, and could not get her to throw herself into the ditch, or could not bring her another man to help her ennui, he had much better have left her alone altogether" (qtd. in *Tennyson* 49). In short, Carlyle thought it

possess an energy (or at least a desire for talking) that bored subjects do not. For instance, Tennyson's melancholia over the loss of Arthur Hallam in *In Memoriam* is continually recapitulated, "repeated, qualified, and reinterpreted," as Rowlinson puts it ("Introduction" 25). Considering melancholia "from a Freudian point of view" (*Black Sun* 10), Julia Kristeva examines the relationship between speech and the melancholic subject in a slightly different manner from Freud. Having identified melancholia and depression as "composite" (or two sides of the same coin), Kristeva offers a reading of the melancholic's / depressive's relationship towards both language and ways of speaking which speaks to the problem of boredom more than Freud's view of melancholia does: "Let us keep in mind the speech of the depressed—repetitive and monotonous [. . .] they utter sentences that are interrupted, exhausted, [and which] come to a standstill [. . .] A repetitive rhythm, a monotonous melody emerge and dominate the broken, logical sequences, changing them into recurring, obsessive litanies" (*Black Sun* 33). Kristeva's description parallels some of the ways in which Mariana speaks and it particularly underscores the ways in which aspects of melancholia and boredom converge while remaining distinct and divergent attitudes towards being-in-time. The melancholic is focused on the past; the bored subject cannot escape the burdens of the present moment. Mariana mourns her present condition in life: the fact that she is separated from Angelo, indefinitely.

better that Mariana suffer the tragic fate of Ophelia—that of self-harm, if not suicide (“throw[ing] herself into the ditch”)—as opposed to that of “ennui” or boredom. As I discussed at length in my Introduction to this Chapter, Carlyle viewed labour and an active life as essentials for living the good life and, as a result, he struggled to empathize with much of Tennyson’s melancholic poetry. Tennyson laboured over his poetry but Carlyle did not often take his friend’s brainwork into account—especially because Tennyson’s writing often explored the nature of idleness, melancholy, boredom, and other dysphoric (and practically useless) states of being-in-the-world. It is no wonder, then, that Carlyle strongly disliked “Mariana” since he viewed boredom, idleness, and melancholia as attitudes which caused men and women to shirk their moral duty to realize personal potential—a moral duty that Carlyle outlines, in great detail, in *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34).⁶

“Mariana” has no interest in questions regarding moral duty. Instead, among other things, the poem stages the dramatic consequences of boredom, melancholia, and loss

⁶ Ruskin and Carlyle were not the only ones who found Tennyson’s “Mariana” a problematic exploration of unresolved dejection. While, as my Introduction to this thesis explored, the Pre-Raphaelites and, also, various female readers and authors, found “Mariana” a striking lyric drama with various problems and themes to explore that were relevant to personal experience and broader Victorian contexts, John Stuart Mill strongly criticized the poem. Interestingly, Mill’s criticism of the poem describes what exactly struck, and was liked by, so many authors, such as John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Elizabeth Barrett. Mill viewed “Mariana” as an unsettling tease in which the hope for fulfillment and narrative closure is never fulfilled; this tease, as it were, was exactly what interested Millais, Rossetti, and Barrett. It encapsulated many of the experiences involved in making art and, as I discuss in my Chapter on Dante Gabriel Rossetti, it dramatized the ways in which unfulfilled desire often fuels and perpetuates the longing to create art out of lack, limitations, and boredom. “Mariana” ends, as we know, with an unsettling death-wish which, as optative, is uncomfortably closer to opening up more ambiguities than hinting at possible resolutions for the poem as a whole. Performing deferral before Derrida named it, Tennyson’s “Mariana” resists the resolution which, for Mill, was a vital component of a good poem. “Oh God, that I were dead!” (84), a heavily stressed, monosyllabic line, signifies, according to Mill, as a “physical and spiritual dreariness: and no dreariness alone—for that might be felt under many other circumstances of solitude—but the dreariness which speaks not merely of being far from human converse and sympathy, but of being *deserted* by it” (“Tennyson’s Poems” 407). The dysphoric ‘drive’ of the poem itself is that which tended to either attract or repel readers of the poem the most.

and how such burdens affect the formal and thematic elements of the poem and, also, how such dejection tends to throw the question of self-identity into doubt. In closing the ending of every stanza of “Mariana” with a drawn out sigh, Tennyson explores the tension between frustrated desire, female confinement in the domestic sphere, and a burdensome relationship to time that seems to be passing too slowly: “. . . ‘My life is dreary, / He cometh not,’ she said; / She said, ‘I am aweary, aweary, / I would that I were dead!’” (9-12). The anaphoric and repetitive structure Tennyson employs throughout the poem, most strikingly instanced, of course, in Mariana’s refrain, suggests that monotony breeds boredom. Tennyson cultivates an aesthetic of boredom by employing rhythmic and linguistic patterns of repetition, throughout the poem as a whole. Mariana’s repetitive refrains are governed by the ‘long e’ sound, effected by the vowel combination ‘ea,’ and resonates to the ear as the vocalization of exhaustion and weariness, as the verbal equivalent to what she feels.

Tennyson’s careful attention to the ways in which the sounds of language flesh out the problem of boredom in “Mariana” shows us how it is a psycho-somatic condition, signifying at the level of feeling and in the body itself—especially in the vocal registers that are exercised when speaking Mariana’s lines out loud (which Tennyson always preferred). Matthew Campbell points out that there are around sixty-three uses of the letter ‘w’ in the eighty-four lines of the poem. The ‘w’ sound, he suggests, manages to paradoxically effect movement through repetitions of stasis: “[t]he repetitions and mocking modulations of this [‘w’] sound create their own pattern of stasis yet movement in and around the stasis, where the seeming passivity at the centre of the scene is conceived in a highly organized activity” (*Rhythm and Will in Victorian Poetry* 84). This

is because, Campbell continues, Tennyson depicts nature as moving, as “wooing” (the poplar dances to the “wooing wind”) but leaves Mariana weary and unwooed (84).⁷

Equally important, Mariana’s persistent observation, “he cometh not,” shows her obsession with the insufficiencies of the present moment, and of her environment, to redirect her attention, desires, and interests. Mariana’s repetitious and “awearied” (11) sighs shape an aesthetic of boredom at the linguistic and affective levels of the poem.⁸ One set of bleak and dreary images gives way to further images and descriptions of dysphoria and decay. Boredom, here, perpetuates itself as only it knows how, living off the “excrements” of disappointment, as Walter Benjamin puts it, quoting Nietzsche (*The Arcades Project* D8,4).⁹ Mariana’s repetitive sighs and refrains are not the only

⁷ Describing Tennyson’s poetry as, at turns, beautiful but also “static” and “dull” (“In Memoriam” 192), T.S. Eliot hints that the burgeoning modernizations of Victorian England—ranging from the building of railways to the series of vast and varied scientific and technological discoveries being made—left Tennyson, the vacillating poet with split affiliations (to the Romantics, to Victoria’s England, to his haunting and melancholic family history), a “Virgil as Dante saw him, a Virgil among the Shades, the saddest of all English poets, among the Great in Limbo” (“In Memoriam” 202-3). As opposed to the often visceral and energetic power of Dante’s poetics (as evident in his *terza rima* to his vivid accounts of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven), Tennyson’s poetry, according to Eliot, is often stuck, or fixated, on repetition as opposed to progression or resolution (especially in his early poems and in various key moments throughout *In Memoriam*).

⁸ Gerard Manley Hopkins, in exploring the power of repetition in poetry, says that the return to similar-meaning and similar-sounding words is an “*oftening, over-and-overing, aftering*” of “speech” that imitates various kinds of movement (flight and descent, in particular) (*The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins* 289). The “activity” and “movement” in “Mariana” is paradoxical: it “creep[s]” towards continual confirmations of disappointment and, in so doing, reaffirms that death is the approaching fate of nature and of Mariana, herself.

⁹ In *Convolute ‘D,’ “Boredom, Eternal Return,”* Benjamin explores Nietzsche’s discussion, in the fourth book of *The Will to Power* (1901), of the impossibility of perpetual novelty in the world. Nietzsche points out that the “world, as a force, may not be thought of as unlimited” and as a result “the world also lacks the capacity for eternal novelty” (qtd. in Benjamin D8, 3). From this, Nietzsche concludes that the world lives on its exhaustions, its deaths and disintegrations, its “excrements” which Benjamin, in turn, implicitly connects to his consideration of boredom (D8,4). Such an association between the world sustaining itself via excrement is a poetic as well as a quasi-scientific intuition. Shakespeare, for instance, has Hamlet consider why “may / not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander / till he find it stopping a bung-hole?” (5.1 178-180). As Crosbie Smith points out in *The Science of Energy: A Cultural History of Energy Physics in Victorian Britain*, ideas about positive “progression” as espoused by the anonymous work *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) (which Tennyson read and espouses in portions of *In*

manifestations of boredom in the poem; the grange is a spatial representation of it as well. In reading the poem as an aesthetic exploration of the presence and implications of boredom, it is important to consider how Tennyson's epigraph, "Mariana in the moated grange," alerts us to boredom's presence in the text. Both the "grange" and Mariana's "dreamy house" (61) show how boredom is a dysphoric mood that highlights various aspects of expressly Victorian and gender-specific attitudes towards women, space, time, and desire.

As a spatial metaphor, the grange is a way of, to borrow Stephen Levinson's words, "spatial[ly] thinking" through, and "understanding . . . other domains" of lived experience, such as the "everyday" (*Space in Language and Cognition* xiii). Not only Tennyson's use of the decaying "grange" but also his placement of Mariana "in" it is key

Memoriam) were being replaced by a growing understanding of the dissipation of mechanical energy in the world, overall. This view was particularly advanced when William Thompson outlined his view that energy dissipates in the world when "heat is allowed to pass from one body to another at a lower temperature . . ." (124). "Mariana" stages a kind of affective dissipation or entropic turn in a period when questions about the progression, loss, dissolution, or reconversion of mechanical energy was being hotly debated and considered in the Victorian period. Whether this is intentional on Tennyson's part or not is not the point, here, but Smith notes that Tennyson was aware of some of the various conversations occurring on the subject, through connections from his Cambridge days in the late 1820s (although discussions of the theory of entropy would be later in the century for England). See pages 115-119 of Smith's *The Science of Energy* for a fuller discussion of Tennyson's knowledge of current scientific discourses on energy and heat.

"Mariana" implicitly engages with the processes of loss, despair, and the threat of utter dissolution which interestingly mirrors scientific interests of the period. As Bevis points out, the poem's setting stages a kind of quasi-tragic, entropic downward spiral which is spared from utter dissolution through Tennyson's inclusion of a very "bleak kind of hope" (Tennyson's *Humour* 240). Mariana's bored sighs and confining environment show the ways in which her small exertions of energy—sighing, moaning, weeping, and recalling past memories to keep the boredom of the present moment under some form of control—do not positively rejuvenate her world. Instead, her sighs seem to confirm nature's plodding but resolute turn towards decay, thus making the poem a kind of melodramatic staging of what Bevis sees as the dark comedy of "self-undoing" that becomes the only form of "self-sustaining" throughout the poem (Mariana's dissatisfaction and boredom is, after all, the motivation for her speech) (240).

for understanding the poem as a whole. In his epigraph, Tennyson either deliberately misquotes or else misremembers the line from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* which says, "at the moated grange resides the dejected Mariana" (3.1. 1506-07). He places Mariana "in" as opposed to "at" the "moated grange." This prepositional slip may seem slight but Bharat Tandon argues that it shows Tennyson's aesthetic departure from Shakespeare's representation of Mariana and, even more importantly, indicates that the Victorian Mariana is a far more impoverished and fragmented subject than the Renaissance one. Tandon reiterates the more obvious, yet nevertheless important, reading that Tennyson's use of "in" creates an "atmosphere of stagnation, both in terms of the grange's physical setting, and the seeming inescapability of the protagonist's plight" ("Victorian Shakespeares" 210). By contrast, Shakespeare's use of "at" offers Mariana a somewhat greater agency: she has arrived "at" the grange and may choose to leave it when she wishes (as we know, Mariana does just that and ends up, by the play's close, marrying her fickle lover, Angelo—for better or worse). Regardless of whether or not Tennyson's change is intentional, it works to the poem's aesthetic advantage: it emphasizes that a burden from the past (the pain of being abandoned) colours Mariana's present experience, making her relationship to the present moment a tense and problematic one.¹⁰

¹⁰ Discussing the influence of Shakespeare on Victorian representations of temporality, Stuart Sillars comments that theatrical, poetic, and visual representations of Shakespeare's plays in nineteenth-century England often made subtle adaptations that involved privileging the past as "preordained narrative" and as "the raw material of philosophy" in which "new ways of showing and measuring" time were expressly aligned to aesthetic conceptions of place and feeling (*Shakespeare, Time, and the Victorians: A Pictorial Exploration* 4). In other words, history and affect merged and blurred in Victorian handlings of Shakespeare as historical figure and lyric poet and playwright. The intensive Victorian attention to temporality speaks, according to Rowlinson, to the ways in which poems like "Mariana" are instances of what Paul de Man calls "pure anteriority," which is the predication of allegory on previous temporal moments (anterior textual events and histories) (qtd. in Rowlinson 99). In *Tennyson's Fixations*,

The grange is not the only structure embodying the problem of being bored in “Mariana.” Even more obvious is Tennyson’s rendering of Mariana’s “dreamy house” (61) as a space which is anything but a home:

All day within the dreamy house,
 The doors upon their hinges creak'd;
 The blue fly sung in the pane; the mouse
 Behind the mouldering wainscot shriek'd,
 Or from the crevice peer'd about.
 Old faces glimmer'd thro' the doors
 Old footsteps trod the upper floors,
 Old voices called her from without.
 She only said, “My life is dreary,
 He cometh not," she said;
 She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
 I would that I were dead!” (61-72)

Rowlinson, reading de Man, argues that Tennyson’s substitution of “in” for “at” signals the “*allegorical* nature of the relation between place and voice,” throughout the poem (98). In other words, it signals the poem’s status as construction: it is indebted to Tennyson’s knowledge of Shakespeare and yet, at the same time, it is Tennyson’s personal revisiting and reworking of that previous indebtedness. That is to say, the poem rehearses a profound absence of meaning in the present moment: the way Mariana got to the moated grange—a way that is located in a series of textual pre-histories (namely, *Measure for Measure* but also, as Rowlinson notes, aspects of Milton’s work and the legend of Troy)—shows that much of the poem’s “music and breath is elsewhere [than in the grange], in texts constituted, as de Man would have it, in ‘pure anteriority’” (99). What is especially significant about Sillars’s and Rowlinson’s considerations of Victorian attentions to Shakespeare is their highlighting that temporal consciousness (anxieties, interests, and obsessions) are apparent at the levels of organization and structure and of word choice and adaptation / misremembering / linguistic slippage. Both readings also help us to implicitly consider how it makes sense of the fact that boredom (dissatisfaction with the present moment) is so present in various Victorian texts that seek to address the past in light of present uncertainties and desires.

Here, Tennyson employs assonance, internal rhythm, and a simple rhyming scheme, based on an *abab, cddc, abab* structure, which corsets the poem's language and rhythm, keeping both predictable and monotonous (just like Mariana's life, day in and day out). Here, we see the ways Mariana's house, haunted by fears, "old" memories, hopes turned to disappointment, and restless anxieties (as personified in the eerie shriek of the mouse, "[b]ehind the mouldering wainscot" (63-4)), provide her with no respite: she neither indulges in idle reveries about the past nor attends to the signs of life (represented in the busy fly and the shrieking mouse) around her. And although the house is full of memories of past histories and experiences, Mariana seems unable to entertain them. She is fixated on the problem of Angelo's perpetual delay or nonarrival and her experience of life as a series of nonevents seems to explain the house's growing decay, its "mouldering" state.¹¹

While the house is "dreamy" and differs from Mariana who is only "weary" (and suffers from the impoverishment of her imagination as a result of being bored), it does also bear

¹¹ In this stanza, the "blue fly," singing as it hovers about the window pane, and the mouse, shrieking, are both behaving according to their instincts. Both creatures provide a sharp contrast to Mariana: they go about their business while she does not, and will not, occupy herself so as to pass the time. As Heidegger points out, animals do not have temporal consciousness and as a result dwell in a state of instincts and drives as opposed to humans who make their way in the world through choices, through intentional actions (*The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* 236). As a result, he concludes, animals cannot be bored for they are always already fully captivated by the drive at hand, in the moment (246). Both Tennyson and John Everett Millais seem to underscore this point. Millais's inclusion of the mouse in the bottom right-hand corner of his painting of Mariana not only stems from Tennyson but also from a long-standing portraiture tradition in which animals are incorporated into paintings. From the Renaissance, onwards, it was often the practice to include an animal in portraits; this animal would either represent, or contrast with, a feature of the subject being painted. In the case of Tennyson's and Millais's inclusions of the mouse, it functions as a foil to Mariana—unlike her, it is captivated by its little affairs (which are determined by its instincts).

**I am grateful to Dr. Michael Sloane for pointing out that Heidegger perceives animals as incapable of being bored and to Dr. M.J. Kidnie for noting how the inclusion, and role, of animals in paintings from the Renaissance period, onwards, could inform my reading of boredom in both Tennyson's and Millais's representations of Shakespeare's Mariana.

“traces” of the “distress” Mariana feels, to invoke Gaston Bachelard’s description of houses as structural metaphors for psychological burdens (*The Poetics of Space* 72).

Bachelard explains that, especially in art and poetry, there are often renderings of what he, quoting Françoise Minkowska, calls “motionless houses” (72); this description does not mean that such houses are still and abandoned. Rather, they are “motionless” in their ability to encourage emotional or psychological healing and transformation.¹² Mariana’s house can be read as a “motionless” one; it is a space in which her boredom and anxieties are writ large. As various female responses to “Mariana” show, many women in the Victorian period felt her predicament was not unlike theirs. For instance, in her letters to Robert Browning, the year before they were married, Elizabeth Barrett frequently refers to the poem, seeing its dramatic problems as representative of her own ill health, confinement, and frustrated desires (specifically, her fraught desires for Browning and for a life outside of her family’s home which was ruled over by her controlling father).

As I discussed briefly in section 2.3 of my Introduction to this study, in the summer of 1845, Barrett wrote to Browning saying that she is “like Mariana in the

¹² Importantly, Bachelard’s historical context for this reading of houses is grounded in his consideration of accounts of Polish and Jewish children who had drawn pictures of homes either during, or shortly after, the horrors of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. Recalling viewing an exhibition of such drawings, Bachelard points out that children who had suffered prolonged fear, panic, and feelings of abandonment during the War “continued to draw narrow, cold, closed houses long after those evil times were over” (72). It is from these drawings that Minkowska came up with the term, “motionless houses,” noting that “[t]his rigidity and motionlessness” is “present” in moving things, like the chimney smoke or wind-blown trees a traumatized child might sketch (72-3). At its most fraught and existential registers, the motionlessness of houses in art is a psychological and existential shutting down as a defense against recalling the too brutal horrors and disappointments of the not-too-distant past.

moated grange and sit[s] listening too often to the mouse in the wainscot” (*The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning: 1845-46* 91).¹³ In many senses, the “moated grange” and “dreamy house” are kinds of precursors for the series of feminist critiques of domesticity that proliferated throughout the Victorian period and into the twentieth century (in Britain as well as in North America).¹⁴ In saying this, though, it is important to underscore that Tennyson’s rendering of Mariana’s distress is not as straightforwardly sympathetic to the problem of the house as a metaphor for female depression and repression. For instance, David G. Reide discerns elements of a troubling

¹³ Returning to Barrett’s identification with Mariana, it is important to note that she describes her identity as an artist through the figure of bored confinement; she views her solitude and boredom as a deficit and dividend at one and the same time. On the one hand, she views her own grange (her bedroom and study) as a place of quiet which she needed for working. On the other, she perceives her loneliness and repressed desires for larger social and communal contact and, even for intimacy, as being further reinforced by the fact that her life, until marrying Browning and moving to Florence, was largely restricted to a set of small rooms in her family home. In another letter from 1845, Barrett again refers to “Mariana,” this time after criticizing one of her doctor’s solutions for her poor health; this reference in her letter is key, and so is worth quoting at some length, since it shows the ways in which, as Barrett implies, female boredom was often closely linked to neurasthenia diagnoses (as I discussed in section 1.3 of my Introduction to this study) and was also a consequence of male doctors reinforcing problematic conceptions about the identity of women and their purpose in the world (through their prescription practices):

The modesty and simplicity with which one’s physicians tell one not to think or feel, just as they would tell one not to walk out in the dew, would be quite amusing, if it were not too tryingly stupid sometimes. I had a doctor once who thought he had done everything because he had carried the inkstand out of the room ‘Now,’ he said, ‘you will have such a pulse tomorrow.’ He grave thought poetry a sort of disease—a sort of fungus of the brain—and held as a serious opinion, that nobody could be properly well who exercised it as an art—which was true (he maintained) even of men—he had studied the physiology of poets . . . but that for women, it was a mortal malady and incompatible with any common show of health . . . (156-57)

Barrett’s doctor was unsympathetic to her work as a poet and represents many of the medical trends in Victorian prescription practices to, as Athena Vrettos explains, see rest and inactivity as the best solutions for female health issues, be these issues as different as cancer is to a slight disturbance of the nerves (*Somatic Fictions* 98-120). Barrett insists, at the end of this letter to Browning, that it is “wise to leave off listening” to her doctor, arguing that attributing her illness to her ink-stand is both absurd and an insult to her intelligence and her vocation as an artist (157-58). By keeping in mind Barrett’s personal identification with the figure of Mariana and how the poem provides a parallel to her condition as a female poet we see a striking example of the ways in which the poem provides a reading of the relationship between boredom and Victorian everyday experiences for women who were often confined to the limited spheres and possibilities of their respective “granges” and “dreamy houses.”

¹⁴ See Alison Pease’s *Modernism, Feminism, and the Culture of Boredom*, pages 1-70, for a more developed discussion of this point.

ambivalence (on Tennyson's part) towards questions of female identity in "Mariana." Reide provides a reading of the poem that is sensitive to feminist reactions to the female figures reminiscent of Mariana populating Victorian literature; these types represented the ideal woman as a passive domestic angel, as was the case in Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* (1854), which, while being a rather philosophical (particularly Platonic-inspired) and profound poetic exploration of ideal marriage, relegated woman to the role of pleaser of her husband's every "pleasure" (9.2).

Reide argues Mariana is a less than fully-formed subject and more of an "objectified image of the poet's imaginary" since she is problematically "segregated from the faculty of will and is not trapped in the [literal] grange but [rather] in her own brooding passivity" (*Allegories of One's Own Mind* 50). Reide's interpretation gets at the heart of a major problem in the poem, a problem that is highlighted but by no means resolved: the predicament of limitations to the possibilities of action and independence for female women in Victorian England.¹⁵ Nevertheless, it is worth qualifying Reide's observation to some extent since, at moments in the text, Mariana's observation, "he cometh not," implies not only that she experiences boredom but that she also may possess

¹⁵ The marriage that Mariana found with Angelo in *Measure for Measure* is not a guarantor of happiness and fulfillment; most likely recalling his parents' own troubled marriage, in particular, Tennyson once commented, "[i]f marriage can be heaven, it can be hell also" (qtd. in "Tennyson's Humour" 239). I suggest that "Mariana" can be read, at one level, as Tennyson's acknowledgement that the condition of existential restlessness and boredom afflicting Mariana may have no easy solution, if any one solution at all. The intensity of her desire for Angelo, even if it were fulfilled, most likely could not bear the burden of expectation that Mariana has placed upon it. Without any other identified significance to her life, Mariana does seem to be, in a sense, bound for boredom. Such a reading shows how, given the current scheme of Victorian possibilities for women (which were usually either marriage and / or some form of limited work—unless you were of the working class and had to earn your daily bread), Mariana may be, to a certain extent, a victim of a system that narrowly prescribes the factors defining fulfillment and purpose for women in general. However, many women, Barrett and Christina Rossetti among them, found various ways to negotiate and move beyond social restrictions on female autonomy.

a kind of quiet or dark hope that is predicated on the possibility of the future being better than the present: always already, perhaps tomorrow will bring the return of Angelo and the dispelling of boredom.¹⁶

Also, Mariana's unfulfilled desire provides a series of aesthetic dividends: it gives force and shape to the lyric moments in the poem. "Mariana," as a text which explores ways of rendering an impoverished female subject, only thrives so long as Mariana the subject is neither "dead" nor wed. That is to say, the poem receives its lyric power from Mariana's lack of fulfillment: the poem is about what does not happen. Placed in a condition of waiting, Mariana gives flesh, then, to the problem of being-in-indeterminacy which is not unlike the nullity that, according to Heidegger, announces the "*indefiniteness* of one's own potentiality-of-being" which "always reveals itself *completely* only in being-toward-death" (*Being and Time* 285).¹⁷ This is noteworthy because it shows how Mariana's wrestle with boredom can be read, at one level, as a profound consideration of

¹⁶ Bevis points out that the fact Tennyson so carefully plots the shifting patterns of day and night, and gestures also to the cycles of the seasons, offers Mariana the possibility—if she takes it—of recognizing that her time will not always mark lack and disappointment; instead, just as the hours change, perhaps Mariana's situation will, as well ("Tennyson's Humour" 240). "Mariana," Bevis continues, "is not fully alone, or is part of a seasonal cycle that is not entirely 'without hope of change'" even though Mariana, herself, may find this too exhausting to believe (240).

¹⁷ As Judith Wolf notes, for Heidegger, ". . . it is being-unto-death that defines the historicity of human existence" and this movement towards death, compounded by a sense of guilt, is that which Heidegger understands as nullity (*Heidegger's Eschatology: Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger's Early Work* 147). In other words, as Heidegger puts it in *Being and Time*, being guilty constitutes our indebtedness to others and signals an interior lack, on our part (272). We are also thrown into existence (as in, we did not ask for it) and part of our freedom is exercised *via negativa*: that is, we can refuse to accept certain things as possibilities and thus choose nullity, voiding or cancelling or rejecting, as a way of asserting our being-in-the-world as a free subject (272-78). The lack constituting being guilty and having to face moral responsibilities is closely connected to boredom in certain ways in Heidegger's thinking: both pronounce the temporal nature of Dasein ("being there") and remind us of the way that time's passing marks the insufficiencies and transience, the death-tending, nature of existence.

what it means to exist as a temporal subject who, like many in industrial England, is unable to find ways to handle or mediate the pressures of time's passing.¹⁸

By the poem's close, indeterminacy and boredom both give way to an implied death wish. In the final version of her refrain, which closes the poem as a whole, Mariana switches from her previous observation, "he cometh not" (10, 22, 34, 46, 58, 70), to saying "he will not come" (84); with this observation, she makes her death wish, "Oh God, that I were dead!" (86), and the poem ends on a disturbing note of uncertainty. This uncertainty is brought to a higher pitch in "Mariana in the South" (1832), which is often viewed, as Arthur Hallam described it, as "a kind of pendant to [Tennyson's] poem of "Mariana," the idea of both being the expression of desolate loneliness . . ." (qtd. in *Tennyson* 82). Although the burden of boredom is more obviously pronounced in "Mariana," given its perpetual rehearsal of disappointed desire and Angelo's "com[ing] not," "Mariana in the South" dramatizes, in even greater detail, Mariana's refusal to allow anything to console her or distract her from her frustrations as she dwells in a state of being abandoned and bored. The latter poem emphasizes her agency and her intentional refusal to allow other things, be it her environment or religious devotion, to console her. Mariana's refusal is staged through the implicit existential crisis Tennyson creates in the poem by exploring the consequences of Mariana's inability to pray. In

¹⁸ *** I am grateful to Dr. Ross Daniel Bullen, in our conversation on Tennyson's "Mariana," for pointing out the significance of Mariana's death wish at the end of the poem and how it appears to be signaling the ways in which the mood of boredom can lead to an awareness of nullity as part of the givenness of being-in-the-world, of one's unasked-for thrownness into existence (an existence which is always already intuited, and usually experienced as being insufficient to meet the desires and longings of being-in-the-world).

“Mariana in the South,” neither prayer, contemplation nor nature can anchor Mariana to a sense of identity or purpose:

With one black shadow at its feet,
 The house thro’ all the level shines,
 Close-latticed to the brooding heat,
 And silent in its dusty vines:
 A faint-blue ridge upon the right,
 An empty river-bed before,
 And shallows on a distant shore,
 In glaring sand and inlets bright.

But “Aye Mary,” made she moan,
 And “Aye Mary,” night and morn,
 And “Ah,” she sang, “to be all alone,
 To live forgotten, and love forlorn.” (1-12)

The *Aves Mariana* attempts to pray subside into moans; the recurring “v” sounds in the Roman Catholic prayer of petition to the Virgin Mary for assistance throughout life (and especially at the “hour of death,” *nunc et in hora mortis nostrae*) is switched to a “y,” suggesting the movement from confidence in prayer to an anxiety (expressed by sighs) that verges on desperation and culminates in a restless rejection of praying altogether. This dilemma is particularly seen in the latter half of the poem where the Virgin Mary is removed from Mariana’s refrain and the emphasis is placed on Mariana’s growing conviction that she will “live forgotten and love forelorn” (12, 24, 60, 72, 84, 96). Goodstein points out that a marked feature of the bored subject in emerging modernity,

following the Enlightenment, is an inability to connect with a religious mode of existence in which rituals, prayer, and adhering to a special *way* of being in the world appears difficult to accept, let alone follow (195).¹⁹ Interestingly, the suffocating and enclosing predicament Mariana is placed in, throughout the poem—as represented in Tennyson’s locodescription which, Hallam observes, “paint[ed]” an even more “forlorn feeling” than “Mariana” (500)—was something Dante Gabriel Rossetti seems to have attempted to resolve in his reinterpretation of the poem for Moxon’s *Illustrated Tennyson*.

This is especially the case given that Rossetti substituted Tennyson’s references to the Virgin Mary with expressly Christological ones, perhaps suggesting that Mariana could be better consoled by giving her affections to Christ as opposed to reserving them, interminably, for faithless Angelo.²⁰ Both the drawing Rossetti made in November of 1856 for Edward Moxon’s illustrated edition of Tennyson’s *Poems* (1857) and the later

¹⁹ Goodstein explores this point through a reading of Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1856). She argues that, especially following the Enlightenment’s privileging of reason and materialism over faith and metaphysics, religion is often emptied of its authentic meaning and is transvaluated into a way of representing “corporeal desires” (195). Catholicism, in particular, serves as a “temporary guise” through which Emma continues to hold, in her heart, a series of “sensuous desires” which keep her restlessly desiring novelty, adventure, and escapes from her home life (which, because of both her self-centeredness and the limitations that her existence presented to her, has become a kind of boring Hell for her).

²⁰ Given Rossetti’s debt to Dante’s *La Vita Nuova and Comedia*, it is not unlikely that his adaptation of “Mariana” was an exploration of the ways in which Dante Alighieri understood spiritual relationships between the soul and Christ as being both erotic and agapic—that is to say, the spiritual life is a kind of fire of desire as well as a mode of being requiring self-sacrifice (a surrender of the ego which Mariana clearly cannot achieve in both of Tennyson’s poems on her crises of boredom and abandonment). In suggesting such a reading, I am not proposing that Rossetti was attempting to fix Mariana’s spiritual crisis (though, given his background and his relationship with his sisters who certainly viewed Christ as their chief love, he would be aware that a devotional life was often a means for working through personal sufferings). Rather, I suggest he is interested in the ways in which his rendering of Mariana’s plight shows the possibility of finding comfort in the passionate figure of Christ who, depicted on a crucifix, would sympathize with various forms of psychological, spiritual, affective, and physical pain. Throughout both of Tennyson’s poems, it is difficult to tell, as Bevis points out, “whether Mariana’s environment is ganging up or sympathizing with her plight” (240) but the hope of mercy and empathy are inextricable from any use of the Christ-crucified image and Rossetti’s inclusion of the crucifix lessens the sense that Mariana’s environment is hostile to her.

watercolour that he completed in 1864 depict Mariana's psychological distress over her predicament. Instead of rendering her as Millais does in his painting (as a restless and bored figure who clearly rejects the outlets of work and prayer to resolve her situation), Rossetti explores the possibilities of religious imagery and narrative as a means of consolation. Herbert Sussman has made a similar argument when he says that Rossetti's explorations of the adult Christ, as instanced in *Mary Magdalen at the Door of Simon the Pharisee* (1858) or in his sketch and later painting of Tennyson's "Mariana in the South," Christ either possesses, or functions as, an "erotic energy" which both Millais and Hunt "are at pains to suppress" (*Victorian Masculinities Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* 126).²¹

Just as the boundary between sexual desire, passion, and spiritual homesickness is blended and blurred at the close of Dante Alighieri's *La Vita Nuovo*, especially in Chapter XLII, and throughout his *Comedia*, Rossetti's exploration of spiritual encounters as erotic and ecstatic ones is in keeping with Scriptural discussions of Christ as the bridegroom (John 3:29), a theme picked up throughout the Victorian period—especially in, among other texts, Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1894). Kneeling before a crucifix and kissing Christ's nailed and wounded feet, Mariana keeps her eyes closed and her back to the mirror behind her—this pose suggests she has abandoned self-absorption (she neglects to look at herself in the mirror) and has chosen to focus on devotion instead. To the left of the crucifix is a statue of the Virgin Mary but it is subdued in shadow and the

²¹ Reading Rossetti's depiction of "Mariana in the South," Sussman points out that "the kneeling Mariana passionately kisses the foot of Jesus on the crucifix in her room with the same intensity with which Emma Bovary presses her lips to the crucifix in the last moments of her life" (126).

main focal point of the painting is Mariana's collapsed body that is straining to kiss Christ's feet. In the background, we see a spinning wheel which, as in Millais's use of embroidery in his painting, represents her neglect of work. This time, however, Mariana has neglected work in order to pray or, at the very least, to appeal to the image of Christ crucified.

It is useful to consider Rossetti's adaptation of Mariana, here, because it shows just how compelling Tennyson's renderings and recastings of the Shakespearian character were during the Victorian period. Mariana, the Lady of Shalott and Ophelia, were some of the

most popular and striking embodiments of the potencies and problems of female desire and boredom in nineteenth-century English literature. In his interest in providing an alternative narrative 'turn,' as it were, for Mariana in his 1856 sketch and his 1864 painting of Tennyson's "Mariana in the South," Rossetti implicitly explores the problem of frustrated desire but, as opposed to leaving it interminably unresolved, suggests a way for Mariana to negotiate her boredom. As will be seen in my Chapter on Christina Rossetti, boredom is often curtailed, endured, resolved or sublimated, in her writings and personal letters, through turns to a devotional life.²² With Tennyson's representations of

²² One of the ways in which boredom is handled, for Christina, is through a resolute turn to devotional practices, a turn especially made by those belonging to the High Church branch of the Anglican Church (as inspired by the Oxford movement) or by those who participated in the steadily growing revival of Catholicism, and of its rich traditions of prayer and sacramental life, during the Victorian period. For a discussion of the ways in which Anglicanism and / or Catholicism played an increasing role in the imaginative erotic and poetic aesthetics of Victorian poets and in the fin de siècle period, in particular, see F. Elizabeth Gray's *Christian and Lyric Tradition in Victorian Women's Poetry* (2010), pages 38-150; *Daily Life of Victorian Women* (2013) by Lydia Murdoch, pages 39-7; Ian Kerr's *The Catholic Revival in English Literature: 1845-1961* (2003), and G.B. Tennyson's seminal *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* (1981).

Mariana, then, we see one of the first, early Victorian poetic explorations of how the dysphoric feeling of boredom registers at the formal and emotional levels of poetry. By devoting much of his early poetic career to explorations of difficult, even “ugly” feelings, Tennyson not only influenced a growing aesthetic of melancholia, restlessness, boredom, and longing in Victorian poetry but also alerts us to the complexities of representing female boredom in the context of aesthetics and the lived experiences of women throughout the nineteenth-century.²³ As we can see, from Carlyle’s, Barrett’s, and Rossetti’s differing responses, Mariana’s complaints of weariness, loss and boredom really spoke to a variety of writers, from diverse backgrounds, throughout the period. Although “Mariana” provides one of the most striking and early Victorian readings of boredom that opens up a series of concerns related to identity, sexuality, gender, temporality, religious devotional practices, and aesthetics, Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott” (1832, 1842) dramatizes the complex relationship between boredom, art, and everyday life far more explicitly.²⁴

2.2. “[H]alf sick of shadows”: Boredom and Problems of Female Agency in “The Lady of Shalott”

While the Lady of Shalott’s boredom is a less persistent problem, throughout the poem, it surfaces when she notes the marked contrast between her solitude and the unity of lovers

²³ This aesthetic of boredom is interested in, among other things, the ways in which time’s passing, frustrated desire and female confinement affect ways of thinking through what it means to move through the burdens of monotony, frustration, repression, loss, solitude, and disappointment so often surfacing in ordinary life and living.

²⁴ For the purposes of this section, I will focus on the 1842 version of the poem since Tennyson’s rewriting of the poem’s ending, in particular, emphasizes the relationship between the Lady’s confinement / boredom to art and questions regarding female boredom, most especially.

“lately wed” (71). The opening of the poem, in both the 1832 and 1842 versions, describes a landscape strikingly different from the decaying terrain of Mariana’s moated grange. Here, a vivid and vibrant world, reminiscent of the colours and scenes from illuminated manuscripts, comes alive. Descriptions of “willows whiten[ing]” and “aspens quiver[ing]” evoke a sense of harmony and order in Nature (10-11). However, Tennyson’s descriptions shift to a dysphoric tone when he begins to describe the towers that imprison the Lady. He creates a sense of enclosure at the verbal and visual levels of the poem, especially by using simple diction and repetition: “[f]our gray walls, and four gray towers, / Overlook a space of flowers, / And the silent isle embowers, / The Lady of Shalott” (15-18). As Seamus Perry observes, Tennyson’s recycling of words throughout his poetry, “evoke[s],” among other things, the “claustrophobic inability to move on” (*Alfred Tennyson* 19). Like Mariana’s moated grange, the Lady’s bower is a restrictive and isolating space: while it at least provides her with room for creativity, it is a place of reflections and shadows only.

However, the environment surrounding the Lady of Shalott’s tower is part of a rich and diverse community made up of a mix of members from different social classes and different walks of life; “reapers, reaping early” (28), “troop[s] of damsels” (55), “[a]n abbot on am ambling pad” (56) and a “shepherd-lad” (57) pass by her tower and are reflected in her mirror—and, by extension, we can assume that they appear in her art. In spinning her “magic web with colours gay” (64), the Lady is participating in the world of art and, unlike Mariana, has an occupation that fills her time. So long as the Lady is kept immersed in her craft, weaving “night and day” (37), she appears satisfied. The first two sections of the poem emphasize her environment (the inspiration for her work) and her

weaving (her craft). In fact, until the Lady experiences a restless dissatisfaction for her state, when she sees the reflection of “two lovers lately wed” (71) in her mirror, there is almost no sense of her having a body at all. Her web, a material representation of her imagination and her vision (which is mediated through a mirror since she is forbidden to look directly out of her window), is the closest indirect acknowledgement that we have of her body, until the third section of the poem.²⁵

However, once the Lady sees the two young lovers, she is acutely aware of the limitations of her state: specifically, she realizes she is in isolation and forbidden to enter into the world as a body and a soul, as an integrated human being with spiritual and intellectual desires but also, importantly, with fleshly ones. Phillips explains that in moments of intensive concentration, the body is forgotten; however, when desire, need or illness is present, it “insist[s] on its importance” and demands attention (*On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored* 40). Similarly, as Nunokawa explains, the bored subject cannot escape from the demands and needs of her body; boredom announces itself when the needs of the body are not only left unmet but restricted for various reasons (*Tame Passions of Wilde* 72-84). Through the Lady of Shalott’s growing disgust with dwelling in, and with, “shadows,” Tennyson makes it clear that her weaving is a meager substitute

²⁵ As is rather apparent, Tennyson’s use of mirrors in “The Lady of the Shalott” seems to allude to Book VII of Plato’s *The Republic* where, in The Allegory of the Cave, the realm of appearances, shadows, and reflections is eschewed for the light of the Sun (representative of the *Agathon*, goodness in and of itself) (514b, 747). It is arguable that in the 1842 version of the poem, the sun’s “dazzling” (75) beams reflect off of Lancelot’s “greaves” (76) and suggest that, on one level, he is representative of the desire and life the Lady wishes she could have: roaming free and showing dedication to “his lady” (78) on his shield, Lancelot is representative of the passion and desire the Lady of Shalott feels but cannot satisfy in her state of solitude. Lancelot seems a kind of stand-in for the Sun as described in *The Republic*: he is a light which makes the Lady, like the escaping prisoner in Plato’s narrative, seek for a world free from restriction.

for a lack of personal fulfillment that also keeps her weary and bored, lingering in the realm of dreams deferred. In the stanza quoted below, Tennyson shifts the Lady's attention from her work to the lovers who represent the possibilities of living-in-the-body. Their close union emphasizes the Lady's solitude, making her restless and bored for the first time in the poem:

But in her web she still delights
 To weave the mirror's magic sights,
 For often thro' the silent nights
 A funeral, with plumes and lights
 And music, went to Camelot:
 Or when the moon was overhead,
 Came two young lovers lately wed;
 "I am half-sick of shadows," said
 The Lady of Shalott. (64-72)

The poem enacts being "half sick of shadows" (72), of the world of art that is kept separate from the world of action and consummation.

Michael O'Neill interprets the Lady as a stand-in for the reclusive artist (not unlike Tennyson at various points in his life) who is exhausted by the "sense of endless poetic figurations and artful structures" that "prove difficult to dispel" and that render her "an artistic Penelope condemned never to achieve any spousal consummation with the

Ulysses of reality” (“The Wheels of Being: Tennyson and Shelley” 187).²⁶ The Lady’s glimpse of the lovers is not the only moment in the text where her boredom surfaces. The sharp contrast between her home and the rest of Camelot underscores the disparity between a life of community and the life of solitude, between desires that can be expressed and desires that are sacrificed or deferred for the sake of art. Moreover, the poem’s inventive rhyme scheme, *aaaabcccb*, achieves a kind of hypnotic cadence which is further reinforced by the repetition of “Camelot” (in the fifth line) and “Shalott” (in the ninth line) in almost every single stanza of the poem.

Tennyson’s repeated pairing of “Camelot” with “Shalott” reinforces the contrast between the medieval ‘green world’ of desire, passion, and courtly love and the isolated and frustrated tower of the embowered Lady. Until the third section of the poem, Camelot remains a distant prospect, viewable only through the Lady’s mirror. However, with the arrival of Sir Lancelot, in the ninth stanza of the poem, the distant possibility of Camelot is given flesh, (through Lancelot’s form) and, interestingly, his name replaces “Camelot”:

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,
 He rode between the barley-sheaves,
 The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,

²⁶ Housed in “four gray towers” (15), the Lady can be read as a representation of the artist who is also figured in “The Palace of Art” (1832). Both the Lady’s castle towers and the Palace of Art are spatial structures representing psychological inhibitions and the gap between dreams and reality. As Tennyson suggests, “The Palace of Art” explores how the artistic desire for solitude, for living in one’s head, can breed madness. In speaking about the poem, Tennyson said it was partly an artistic response to a conversation he had with his friend, R.C. Trench, while at Cambridge; Trench told him “we cannot live in Art” and this comment formed the basis for Tennyson’s argument which he sought to establish in “The Palace of Art.” Tennyson would later comment that “the Godlike life is with man and for man” (qtd. in *The Poetry of Tennyson* Vol. I, 436).

And flamed upon the brazen greaves

Of bold Sir Lancelot.

A redcross knight for ever kneel'd

To a lady in his shield,

That sparkled on the yellow field,

Beside remote Shalott. (73-81)

The Lady's short spell of boredom, which began with her distraction from her work when she beheld the lovers, is dispelled. Once the Lady catches sight of Lancelot, through her mirror, the descriptions in the poem become charged with an active and erotic energy: Lancelot is described as "flam[ing]," "bold," and "sparkl[ing]," words which sharply contrast with the way the Lady has been represented thus far, throughout the poem. The stanza's cadence clips along to keep time with Lancelot's fast and flashy riding pace. Tennyson's previous use of 'w's' and long vowels, which effectively capture the Lady's increasingly bored relationship to time (she weaves "night and day," day in and day out), are replaced by quick-paced words connoting energy and action. The previous sections of the poem were descriptive, passive, and reflective; this one is full of action and Lancelot's energy pervades the subsequent two stanzas, serving as a catalyst for the bold choice the Lady makes in an attempt to fulfill her growing desires (and, consequently, to dispel her boredom). Lancelot functions as a tease for the Lady; a glimpse of what she desires but cannot achieve completely without paying a price that costs too much (her life).

Among other things, Lancelot can be read as a manifestation of how flirtatious teasing, according to Freud, serves to awaken one to new interests in life while also

warning us that being in the world is a hazard: “Life is impoverished,” Freud notes, “it loses in interest, when the highest stake in the game of living, life itself, may not be risked” (qtd. *Freud, Psychoanalysis, and Death* 120-21). Here, Freud notes the dividends of the awakening and expressing of desires, even if they cannot be entirely fulfilled. While Lancelot is a tease for the Lady, he does encourage her to consider actually moving into the realm of action. To dare to not be bored, the Lady has to take great risks; in violating the mysterious laws of her enchanted existence, she ends up losing her life—a consequence that has been read in a number of ways (as punishment for female ‘libertarianism’ or, among other things, as a commentary on the insufficiencies of art to replace the ordinary yet potent experiences of love, desire, community, and purpose that is part and parcel of ordinary life).

Richard Kaye writes that the “‘liberating effects’ of flirtation” in Victorian literature would “operate just a hairbreadth away from disenchantment, danger, and tragedy” and such an observation neatly fits with the dramatic tensions that ensue in the remaining stanzas of “The Lady of Shalott” (*The Flirt’s Tragedy: Desire without End in Victorian and Edwardian Fiction* 31). Responding to Lancelot, who “flashed into the crystal mirror” like a streak of lightning (106), the Lady leaps into action:

She left the web, she left the loom,
 She made three paces thro’ the room,
 She saw the water-lily bloom,
 She saw the helmet and the plume:
 She look’d down to Camelot.
 Out flew the web and floated wide;

The mirror crack'd from side to side;

“The curse is come upon me,” cried

The Lady of Shalott. (109-117)

Paradoxically, the Lady's boredom is not only a dysphoric symptom of her unfulfilled desire but also, in this instance, it serves as a catalyst for change. Unable to resist the alluring figure and voice of Lancelot, the Lady finally seeks out a way to resolve her unfulfilled desire and restlessness. Tennyson's simple and energy-driven phrases, in the above stanza, report a series of resolute actions: “[s]he left,” “[s]he made,” “[s]he saw,” “she look'd.” Here, The Lady of Shalott's daring to desire is “framed by her body” as is the case, Nunokawa observes, with the bored subjects from Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* who seek ways to dispel their boredom by finding various forms of meaning and / or pleasure (1891) (*Tame Passions of Wilde* 74).²⁷

²⁷ The Lady's decision to escape the confines of her environment has, understandably, become a key text for feminist readings of the Victorian period and the relationship between confining spaces, sexual and social repression, and the lived experiences of women who could, as it were, ‘afford’ to be bored (the boredom the Lady of Shalott feels seems a middle-and-upper-class female problem involving having too much time and not enough to do). Exploring expressly social Victorian contexts for the Lady's predicament, Jennifer Gribble comments that the Lady's being “sealed off from the outside world” bears “all the authority of a fairy tale but her imprisonment is no more inexplicable or irrevocable than that of many another Victorian lady” (*The Lady of Shalott in the Victorian Novel* 1). Gribble discusses, at length, how Tennyson was not alone in rendering women in states of confinement and restless dissatisfaction with cramped, usually domestic, quarters. Such figures are to be “found as well in European painting and literature in the same period . . .” (3). But Gribble does emphasize that Tennyson's painterly poetic aesthetic, in the Lady of Shalott and elsewhere, functions as a representation of “lifeless idealizations of love, in which the lady is framed by time and memory, perpetuating her emblematic significance in the stasis of romantic portraiture” (3). The Lady is not only the embodiment of a “symbolic fable” which “sums up an infinite number of more or less analogous situations,” as Gribble qualifies (3). Instead, she also exemplifies the “self-enclosed protagonist, seeing the world mirrored by the consciousness, conscious above all of individual needs and wants” (5).

William Holman Hunt's sketch of this climactic moment in "The Lady of Shalott," which he made for Moxon's *Illustrated Tennyson*, mingles the broken and tangled threads of the Lady's web with her hair and creates the illusion that the web's tendrils touch Lancelot as he rides past the tower's window: art, sexual power (which is repeatedly represented, in Pre-Raphaelite art, through renderings of loose, long, and luscious hair) and the subject of the Lady's awakened desire are intermingled. Describing Hunt's sketch, Isobel Armstrong observes that the coiled and tangled threads of the disturbed web also represents the interminable cycles of exchange between "image and representation": his "turbulent image," she notes, "has the Lady standing in the centre of her mirrored chamber, caught in the toils of her own web, the circular rhythms of the engraving suggesting how she is physically caught in the circle of repetitious exchange between image and representation" ("The Pre-Raphaelites and Literature" 22). Hunt's later painting of the poem (which took him well over a decade to complete) vividly renders the force and energy that is released when the Lady forsakes her art and indirectly brings about her own demise. However, Hunt does not focus on the Lady's impending death: instead, he details the moment when the Lady discovers (or recovers) her autonomy, even though it is short-lived. The collapse of the web opens up the world of impulse and desire, represented in the Lady's curvaceous body that is awkwardly and disproportionately larger than her environment: she has outgrown her cramped and cramping environment.

As we know, despite the power and energy of the Lady's escape from her confined space, her new-found liberation is punished with a mysterious death: in setting out for Camelot in a boat, she falls into a trance (a consequence of disobeying the spell

that kept her trapped). While the 1832 version of the poem's ending emphasizes the Lady's status as an unknown artist who proclaims, on a piece of parchment (which she uses to write her own epitaph), that she was able to break the charm that kept her a prisoner in her tower (173-180), the 1842 ending is far more problematic. In a moment of dark irony, the Lady, herself, becomes an aestheticized art object, at best. Lancelot comments that this unknown, dead woman, who approaches him and his company in a drifting boat, "has a lovely face" (168).²⁸ In revising the poem so that Lancelot has the final say, as opposed to the epitaph the Lady wrote for herself, Tennyson underscores that, among other things, the poem remains a drama built out of a host of "ugly feelings" (to recall Ngai): disappointed desire, frustration, loss, and failure characterize the overall affective mood of the 1842 version.

Batchelor is right to describe this revised ending as "alter[ing] the whole weight of the story," transforming it into "the drama of a doomed erotic awakening, a one-sided sexual infatuation going nowhere" (118). In the 1842 version, the Lady's fate seems to more closely align with the wearied, nearly depleted energy of Mariana. Boredom, as an ambivalent psycho-somatic condition, is quite pronounced in "The Lady of Shalott." It is

²⁸ How to read Lancelot's reaction to the Lady, at the end of the 1842 edition of the poem, is a complex task: he has been interpreted as sympathetic, curious, an uncanny representation of the later Pre-Raphaelite artist or as a voyeur who turns the Lady's plight into an aesthetic moment (thus depriving her of an identity in her own right). Exploring the possible historical and biographical contexts for the 1842 ending of the poem, Robert Douglas Fairhurst suggests "The Lady of Shalott" came to enact both Tennyson's and a general Victorian anxiety that diminishment and decay, the fact of death, will eventually silence one's poetic voice and have the last word ("Address" 69). He also comments that the Lady's death, failure, and inability to find a sympathetic audience (Lancelot does not seem deeply moved by her death) parallels Tennyson's struggle, throughout the 1830s, to find a receptive audience and readership for his work (68-71). Perhaps, then, the poem is a reflexive exploration, on Tennyson's part, of the risks involved in daring to explore (perhaps even to flirt with) the possibilities and limits of art and how both affect understandings of personal identity.

a symptom of the Lady's resistance to her disagreeable situation, an affective catalyst that helps her resolve to change her circumstances, and an unsettling and unsatisfying relationship to time and one's personal environment that appears to have no set resolution (at least, in the context of this poem).

In his recent, extensive consideration of melancholia in Victorian poetics, Riede suggests that Mariana's and the Lady of Shalott's main problem is their lack of being able to exercise an "organizing power," or "shaping[s] [of a] will or a fully coherent self" (51). Both women, he suggests are representations of a mind not in unity with its will and heart—which is also the central dramatic problem, the traumatic issue, for the male speaker in Tennyson's *Maude: A Monodrama* (1855). Riede's reading can be further extended by considering the ways in which failure, disappointment, and boredom, are also part of the Lady's predicament throughout the poem and how boredom announces, like melancholia, the interdependency between the mind (the creative faculty) and the body (the source of practical productivity as well as the site of desire). Tennyson's early renderings of disappointed desire and boredom, in women, developed throughout the 1830s and into the 1840s and, increasingly, the topic of boredom took on a certain socially conscious slant. His explorations of boredom in the figures of Mariana and the Lady of Shalott alert us to problematic conditions of lived experience for women in the Victorian period but his later poems, "The Lotos Eaters" and "Ulysses," are even more expressly linked to social problems of the times. In these two poems, boredom becomes an implicit and ambivalent response to the Gospel of Work.

2.3. Boredom's Ambivalent Contradictions: Tennysonian Criticisms and Approvals of Victorian Masculine Ideals

One of the undergraduate poems Tennyson worked on while at Cambridge, “The Lotos Eaters” is an ambivalent poem that, among other things, explores how boredom signifies as a psycho-somatic resistance to the burdens of labour; it also subtly and seriously criticizes the pressures of the Gospel of Work, especially as espoused by Carlyle and Ruskin.²⁹ In the first published version of the poem from 1832, its closing playfully and sensually celebrates laziness and escapism from the demands of everyday life and duty. The final lines emphasize Ulysses's companions' choice to become one with their new-found exotic and intoxicating paradise:

Oh! islanders of Ithaca we will not wander more!

Surely, surely slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore

Than labour in the ocean, and rowing with the oar.

Oh! islanders of Ithaca, we will return no more. (168-70)

Batchelor observes that in this version of the poem, the ending closes with the “men's minds dissolving into a musical and rhythmical sensual paradise” (121). In the final lines of the 1842 version of the poem, however, the poem emphasizes the value of rest as an antidote to ceaseless toil: “O, rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more” (173). In both versions of the poem, the Lotos Eaters are worn out by adventuring with Ulysses, the man of “many ways, who was driven / far journeys” (*The Odyssey* 1-2). “[W]eary of sea,” “weary of oar,” “[w]eary” of “wandering fields of barren foam” (41-2), nearly

²⁹ See section 1.3 of my Introduction for a more developed discussion of the growing relationship between boredom and the Gospel of Work in Victorian England.

bored to death from repetitive and strenuous labour, Ulysses's companions have chosen to abandon their work. Boredom in this poem can be read as a symptom of resistance to the burdensome demands of strenuous labour in Victorian England. Reading "The Lotos Eaters" in this context, Bevis observes that Tennyson crafts "eloquent voices [who] draw attention to the victims and the costs of the [G]ospel of [W]ork" ("At Work with Victorian Poetry" 5). In "The Lotos Eaters," Tennyson presents male boredom as a way to "put classical virility [in] question," to invoke Thais E. Morgan's recent reading of the poem ("The Poetry of Victorian Masculinities" 216); instead of "classical virility," the powers of imaginative longing and desire, and the pursuit of desire's fulfillment in particular, are privileged.³⁰

In "The Lotos-Eaters," one of the main questions that reverberates throughout the choric song focuses on challenging the (particularly modern) conception that work measures the worth of a person:

Why are we all weigh'd upon with heaviness,
 And utterly consumed with sharp distress,
 While all things else have rest from weariness?
 All things have rest: why should we toil alone,

³⁰ Morgan explains that a "recurrent topos in Victorian criticism [was] the need for the reinvigoration of poetry" and Tennyson's early aesthetic sensibilities instinctively countered such interpretative bents (216). Frequently, appeals to classical scenes and masculine heroes were used in Victorian poetry because, as Morgan puts it, they "acted in a securely patriarchal world where women were regulated to the sidelines," as is especially seen in Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* (216). Although this is generally the case, Morgan overlooks the powers of force and persuasion that women such as Athena and Hera possess in Homer's work. However, it tends to be the case that female goddesses are on par with the powers and whiles of mortal men and that mortal women are often viewed as lesser than both in terms of capacities. Penelope, a classic stand-in for the woman as a domestic, bears much in common with the Lady of Shalott (until she escapes from her tower), as I briefly mentioned in the previous section of this Chapter.

We only toil, who are the first of things, and make perpetual moan,
 Still from one sorrow to another thrown:
 Nor ever fold our wings,
 And cease from wanderings,
 Nor steep our brows in slumber's holy balm;
 Nor harken what the inner spirit sings,
 'There is no joy but calm!'

Why should we toil, the roof and crown of things? (57-69)

"Perpetual" is the longest polysyllabic and most drawn-out word in this stanza. If read out loud, it requires the speaker to perform the act of lingering that it signifies (this lingering and weary cadence of the stanza's lines is also further achieved by the fact that the entire stanza is comprised of only three sentences). The burdened monosyllabic "toil" and the heavier, drawn-out compound of "oa" in moan" both speak to how Tennyson's ear is sharply attuned to the ways in which the burdens of labour can be expressed poetically. The repetition of the word gives the impression that labour is a seemingly interminable burden and Tennyson's use of "moan" (although it is monosyllabic), effects a drawn-out enunciation that echoes, with only slight difference, the mournful "alone" from the preceding line. Tennyson uses the word "weary" five times in the 1842 version of the poem and employs it to achieve the same rhetorical effect he accomplishes when repeating it throughout "Mariana": weariness evokes a sense of frustrated desire and boredom, of a tired resistance to various pressures and problems. Weariness and boredom in "The Lotos Eaters" are psycho-somatic ways of questioning and critiquing the somatics of modernity (mechanistic and repetitive work as well as measurements of time;

the expanse, and encroachment, of machinery in formerly rural landscapes; and increasing senses of solitude).

The pastoral setting of the island the Lotos Eaters settle on, with its “cool mosses deep” (53) and its calmness which makes “all things” seem “the same” (24), is a striking alternative to the unceasing straining, energy, and movement of life at sea with Ulysses. In this stanza, the Lotos Eaters wish to cease from “wanderings” (a longing that is diametrically opposed to the desires explored and expressed in “Ulysses”) and to replace their former strenuous activities with rest and indolence. In resisting the burdens of persistent labour, the Lotos Eaters implicitly critique the emerging Gospel of Work that frequently blurred, if not completely dissolved, the division between work time and leisure time. The poem can be read, then, as an exaggerated resistance to the growing Victorian conception that, as expressed in the art and literature of the period in particular, daily labour was the main measure of personal value, especially for men.³¹

The desire to escape repetitive routines of labour is clearly the motivation behind the Lotos Eaters’ plan to flee a work-oriented society. Pleasure-seeking, solitude, laziness, and lotos-eating (drug taking) are, at turns, the comic, grave, desperate, and romantic alternatives Tennyson presents as ways to escape the intensive regimes and

³¹ Tim Barringer explains that, increasingly, the art and literature of the Victorian period sought to depict active labour in the public sphere as the source of masculine identities and attendance to domestic tasks as constitutive of feminine ones (*Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain* 31-4). Especially typified in George Elgar Hicks’s highly romanticized and idealistic watercolor, *The Sinews of Old England* (1857), the male seems to become “masculine through working and being seen to work, the female, feminine through abstaining from work in the public sphere” (*Men at Work* 32). As Barringer explains, increasing patterns in Victorian art, poetry, and literature tended to explore women only in relation to the private sphere—an aesthetic trend which “stretche[d] the realist idiom to its limit [for] [o]nly the most credulous middle-class viewer [or reader] would believe that on the whole . . . [women of lower the middle and lower classes] stayed within the domestic sphere [alone] and did not have to work for a living . . .” (*Men at Work* 32).

pressures of modern industrialism and the growing workaholic culture of Victorian England: “ah, why / Should life all labor be? / Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast, / And in a little while our lips are dumb. / Let us alone” (86-90). In his poem, “The Voice of Toil” (1884), which is a versification of the main points he would further explore in his address, “Useful Work Versus Useless Toil” (1885), William Morris describes the burdens of labour (as a result of the industrialization of work) in a vein that echoes “The Lotos Eaters.”³²

Morris represents work in industrial England as wearying because unchanging, boring, and interminable. Morris became especially known, in the 1870s, onwards, for his “hatred” of modernity and the toil associated with it (“How I Became a Socialist” 243-44): “I heard men saying, / Leave hope and praying, / All days shall be as all have been; / Today and tomorrow bring fear and sorrow, / The never ending toil between” (“The Voice of Toil” 1-4). Here, Morris equates mindless labour to perpetual cycles of interminable sameness (“[a]ll days shall be as all have been”) that occlude any time for leisure, contemplation, communal association or, most importantly, for art.³³ While similarities abound between Tennyson and Morris, their attitudes to labour do also have some differences. “The Lotos Eaters” eschews all labour, as a kind of extreme resistance

³² Morris’s Utopian *News from Nowhere* (1890) is poetically and philosophically indebted to Tennyson’s “Lotos Eaters.” James Buzard explores the influence of Tennyson in Morris’s novel, observing that Morris relies on the language of “Lotos Eaters” to explore the unchanging, child-like realm of the Utopian community Morris envisions in which “it [is] always afternoon” (a phrase directly from “The Lotos Eaters”) (“Ethnography as Interruption: “News from Nowhere,” Narrative, and the Modern Romance of Authority” 452).

³³ See section 4.1, footnote 18, for a more detailed discussion of Morris’s “Useful Work versus Useless Toil.”

to the unethical demands of toil, but Morris only condemns the kind of labour that dehumanizes the labourer, making him or her a mere means for economic prosperity (which, according to Morris, is pursued at all costs by capitalists and industrialists). Morris, as I discuss in Chapter Four, had a profound respect for the Gospel of Work and believed there was an inherent dignity to craftsmanship and intensive work, provided the work respected the dignity of the labourer.

“The Lotos Eaters” not only rejects labour but also emphasizes the benefits of rest and desire over strenuous striving and straining, thus going against the ideas of many of Tennyson’s intellectual circle, especially Carlyle. Bevis points out that the OED “credits” the word ‘worksome’ to Carlyle who apparently brought it into English the year that Victoria became Queen (“At Work with Victorian Poetry” 4), and Tennyson’s *Lotos Eaters*, as a community, rather directly criticize the idea of intensive work. Especially given their close relationship, it is plausible to read Tennyson’s resistance to toil, as espoused in “The Lotos Eaters,” as being directly at odds with Carlyle’s developing vision of labour as a kind of secular religion.³⁴ The different perceptions of work that

³⁴ As evident in my discussion of Carlyle’s reaction to Mariana in section 2.1 of this Chapter, Tennyson and Carlyle were frequently at odds when it came to their views on life and its meaning. While often in disagreement, they appreciated each other and Carlyle’s criticisms of Tennyson appear to have stemmed from his genuine concern for his friend’s often brooding and melancholic state. In discussing Carlyle’s and Tennyson’s friendship, Ricks explains that Carlyle was conscious of how often Tennyson’s tortured family history, the fear of madness (that hovers throughout, and generates, the anxious, frenzied energy of *Maud* (1850)), and his own struggles with melancholia, ill health, and wavering financial circumstances, often led Tennyson to prolonged bouts of inactivity and restless boredom. Concerned for his friend’s well-being, Carlyle would sometimes write, especially later in life, how concerned (and even exasperated) he was by Tennyson’s situation and by Tennyson himself. In the later 1840s, Carlyle wrote about how he wished Tennyson would be moved to action, for his good. In his *Memoir* he writes, “Alfred looks haggard, dire, and languid [. . .] Surely no man has a right to be so lazy in this world;--and none that is so lazy will ever make much way in it, I think!” (qtd. in Ricks *Tennyson* 186). Carlyle’s concerns over Tennyson, while shared by many of his friends, are rooted in his belief in the saving power of labour. Perhaps unable to assess the full scope of the psychological terrain Tennyson knew so intimately, Carlyle views work as a cure-all for states of dejection.

Carlyle and Tennyson possessed are underscored when we consider Carlyle's description of Tennyson to Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1847:

[Tennyson is a] truly interesting Son of Earth and Son of Heaven [. . .] I like him well, but can do next to nothing for him. Milnes, with general cooperation, got him a Pension; and he has bread and tobacco: but that is a poor outfit for such a soul. He wants a *task*; and, alas, that of spinning rhymes and naming it "Art" and "high Art" in a Time like ours, will never furnish him. (qtd. in Ricks *Tennyson* 187)

Carlyle's affectionate, but nevertheless serious, criticisms of Tennyson encapsulate, in a nutshell, his habit of interpreting morality and purpose in life according to a framework grounded in labour—which he outlines, at great length, in *Sartor Resartus*.

First published in serial installations with *Fraser's Magazine* (1833-34) and then also in book form in Boston in 1836, *Sartor Resartus* was, according to Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor, essential for inaugurating some of the defining ideals of the Victorian era; they point out that by espousing the ethical merits of "work, duty, and reverence" *Sartor Resartus* "marked the transition from the Romantic to the Victorian periods as sharply as the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* marks that between the eighteenth century and the Romantic period" ("Introduction" vii). In *Sartor Resartus* an enthusiastic and ethos-driven rhetoric characterizes Carlyle's insistence that work is the ultimate

means through which humanity realizes its moral purpose and progress throughout history. Closing his central chapter, “The Everlasting Yea,” with a call to labour, Carlyle adopts a tone that is at once comic in its dramatic intensity and quasi-apocalyptic. It expressly invokes Christ’s address to his apostles, from the Gospel of John, in which He says there is an urgent need for performing works of mercy and healing because death and the end of the world are looming inevitabilities: “I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work” (*John* 9:4). Imitating the tone and rhetoric of this passage, Carlyle’s discussion of labour’s merits is shaped by a rhetoric of time-consciousness, a consciousness verging on panic. In one of the most famous passages of the text, we find Carlyle saying:

Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it in God’s name! ’Tis the utmost thou hast in thee; out with it then. Up, up! Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy whole might. Work while it is called To-day, for the Night cometh wherein no man can work. (149)

Using energetic verbs such as “up” and “work,” Carlyle’s language seems a secular equivalent to prayer: he seeks to effect the very transformation he longs for by communicating the merits of labour in an imperative tone marked by urgency and conviction.³⁵ Juxtaposing the energy of *Sartor Resartus* with the Lotos Eaters’ weariness and boredom, we can see just how differently Tennyson and Carlyle viewed labour

³⁵ Commenting on the energetic language and the literary allusions used throughout *Sartor Resartus*, Donald Hair points out that Carlyle’s bizarre narrator, Teufelsdröck, continually attempts to use energetic language to awaken and mobilize England, just as “Apollo’s music builds Troy and the walls of Thebes grow out of the sounds of his Lyre” (*Tennyson’s Language* 84-5).

during the 1830s and 1840s when both were giving the subject a great deal of thought. But despite the Lotos Eaters' hatred for toil and repetitive work, Tennyson is not wholly committed to criticizing the Gospel of Work.

Although Tennyson uses the voices of the Lotos Eaters to explore the psychological and spiritual exhaustion of workers, his "Ulysses" can be read as a poem that promotes an extreme workaholism, joined to British notions of Imperialism. However, the justifications for labour, as found in "Ulysses," remain markedly different from Carlyle's. Whereas Carlyle sees labour as a moral duty, Tennyson presents it as, first and foremost, a means for pursuing personal pleasure and desire, a means for dispelling restless boredom and the deadening feeling of personal uselessness. According to Matthew Arnold, three lines in Tennyson's "Ulysses" in particular encapsulate the plodding sense of drawn-out time and weariness that shapes the poem as a whole: "Yet all experience is an arch wherethro' / Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades / For ever and for ever when I move" (19-21). Commenting on the vowel sounds and repetitive words marking these lines, Arnold says "[i]t is no blame to their rhythm, which belongs to another order of movement than Homer's but it is true that these three lines by themselves take up nearly as much time as a whole book of the *Iliad*" (*On the Classical Tradition* 147). These lines that Arnold selects summarize the dramatic tension of the poem: Ulysses' longings are always already beyond reach, beyond satisfaction. Tennyson's use of delayed verbs and a passive voice, and his repetition of "[f]or ever" makes these lines an arduous set to read or speak. They also create a sense of time as slow yet taunting: throughout the poem, every movement and dream of Ulysses's only confirms the fact of the unattainability of his desires. These three lines reinforce the

sense of restlessness, impatience, longing, and boredom that drive the poem's opening lines, made felt by the adjectives "still" (1), "idle" (1), "barren" (2), and "aged" (2). The rhetorical development of Ulysses' dramatic monologue also mirrors the boredom that he feels; the logic of his argument is based upon a self-centered desire for novelty, at any price.

In the first stanza, he complains that it is "dull . . . to pause, to make an end, / To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!" (21-22). In the second stanza, he wishes to give the duties of Ithaca to his son Telemachus, claiming his son's "slow prudence" (36) will better handle the uninteresting and predictable rhythms of social and civic life. The third and final stanza finds Ulysses ready and willing to defy his aging body, which has been made "weak by time and fate" (69), so as to resolve to "strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" (70). Ulysses's self-obsession, throughout the poem, is not only a rhetorical strategy, on Tennyson's part, that works to communicate the intensity and borderline desperation of desire and restlessness. It also signifies Tennyson's debt to Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* where Ulysses is represented, in Canto XXVI, as completely preoccupied with his strength and power. Tony Robbins, commenting on Dante's Ulysses, notes that his "utterance [in *Inferno*] is a single, uninterrupted speech, neither part of a conversation nor seemingly addressed to the questioner; he makes no reference to his punishment or to his suffering" ("Tennyson's 'Ulysses:' The Significance of the Homeric and Dantesque Backgrounds" 186). The same is true of Tennyson's Ulysses; providing the basic thematic framework Tennyson will employ for his rendering of Ulysses, Dante identifies Ulysses as a counselor of fraud who uses words to manipulate others into following his desires. Ulysses admits to Dante that he neglected all of his

duties because nothing could “conquer” in him the “restless itch to rove / And rummage through the world exploring it . . .” (97-8). These lines from *Inferno* are echoed in the closing of “Ulysses” and demonstrate the extent to which Tennyson recognized, especially during his twenties and early thirties, how all-consuming the power of desire could be. Able to enter the mindset of an old and fading hero, who is discontented with living a simple and peaceful life, Tennyson explores the provocative power, and also the more troubling side, of the Victorian Gospel of Work: as a force of energy and success, Ulysses gives voice to the self-made man (an attractive and popular masculine identity in Victorian literature and culture, more broadly).

Interestingly, while Tennyson’s poetry usually made Carlyle impatient, if not annoyed, “Ulysses” struck a chord with him and he admitted that the poem stirred his emotions and sympathies. After finishing “Ulysses,” Carlyle rather melodramatically observed that “there [was] in me what could fill whole Lachrymatories as I read [the poem]” (qtd. in *Tennyson* 128). The poem presents an affective and sentimental exploration of the burden of aging, sorrow, boredom with daily life, and the gap between desire and its possible fulfillment. The poem is a kind of elegiac exploration of the idealism of the Gospel of Work: its promotion of the masculine labourer as a manly man, as what David Rosen has recently described as being the embodiment of Carlyle’s idea in *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and The Heroic In History* (1841) that “action turns into the . . . demonstration of manliness” (“The Volcano and the Cathedral: Muscular Christianity and the Origins of Primal Manliness” 21). In his exploration of masculine heroism, throughout history, Carlyle argues that it is evident that power resides expressly and solely in men and that, to be *manly*, a man must “be valiant” and “march forward” so as

to affirm his manliness (*On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History* 32). Ulysses's desire, as presented by Tennyson, is to move "forward," as expressed in the final stanza of the poem where the longing to complete "[s]ome work of noble note" (52) drives narrative forward. "Ulysses" dramatizes the way that boredom can be a symptom not only of resistance to labour (as in "The Lotos Eaters") but, also, of a longing for some kind of purposeful action that fulfills personal longings and desires. Boredom in "Ulysses" is symptomatic of the desire to become more 'manly' in the Victorian (and rather Carlylelian) sense of the word.

The performativity of manliness that Carlyle emphasizes is at the heart of "Ulysses." As Herbert Sussman notes, Tennyson's growing exploration of manliness in his poetry, especially following his appointment to the office of Poet Laureate for England in 1850, is signaled in his poetry from the 1840s, onwards: "his fashioning of himself as [male] sage stands in sharp contrast to the aura of the feminine that marked his early poetic career [as typified in his Mariana poems, for example]" (*Victorian Masculinities* 42). Arguably, "Ulysses" is one of the earlier instances marking Tennyson's shift from female subjects (as representatives of the artist) to male ones. As Carlyle makes clear in *Past and Present* (1843) manly literature is characterized by what Sussman summarizes as being the "quest for manhood" (45). "Male desire [for Carlyle]," Sussman continues, "may be essential" for Victorian promoters of the Gospel of Work "but manhood is an ongoing process, a plot, a narrative over time that charts achieving and maintaining the tense regulations of male desire" (46-7). Among other things, then, "Ulysses" can be read as Tennyson's dramatization, and exploration, of the ways that restlessness and boredom not only resist Victorian economic and cultural ideas of gender,

desire, work, economics, and personal identity but, at times, can become symptoms of the very desire to conform to such ideals in the first place.

It is important to understand, in our discussion of boredom, that Tennyson's approach to this fraught psycho-somatic condition is not consistent. He recognizes that boredom, as a psycho-somatic resistance to a variety of conditions—many of which have to do with sexual desire, the passing of time, and various socio-political conditions of everyday life and living in Victorian England—has both dividends and deficits. Boredom can either be a catalyst for change or prevent it (depending on the energies, opportunities, and interests of the bored subjects themselves). Tennyson's ambivalent attitude towards boredom affords us yet one more opportunity to consider how his treatments of individual psychological predicaments are nuanced and complex. Bevis identifies Tennyson as one of the more conflicted commentators on the culture of labour and merit in the Victorian period, observing that his poetic voice often vacillates on the subject of work, seeing it as a blessing on the one hand and a curse on the other. Summing up the paradox of Tennyson's relationship to work, a paradox that underscores the multiplicity of opinions and ideas about what work is and how it relates to art in nineteenth-century England, Bevis emphasizes that Tennyson presents the poet as one who knows how to work and not to work. Tennyson's "poems provide some of the age's most oblique yet enduring surrogates for the figure of the modern poet-worker, a figure who somehow does and doesn't work" ("At Work with Victorian Poetry" 5).

Tennyson vacillated in his view of what work signified for himself, as a poet of, and as a citizen to, an imperial nation built upon a vision of progress. As much as he disliked persistent labour, he acknowledged that work and finding meaningful tasks

provided a solution to his emotional instability which was mainly rooted in the tragic and haunting history of mental and emotional sufferings in his family. For instance, in reflecting on the speaker in his early poem, “Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind Not in Unity with Itself” (1830), Tennyson comments that the simple gift of a good friend, offering some kind of kindness, could have healed much of the distress the young man expresses throughout the poem (this young man is an obvious stand-in for Tennyson himself): “[i]f some kind friend had taken him by the hand and said, ‘Come, work’-‘Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others’ (*Philippians* ii 4)-he might have been a happy man, though sensitive” (qtd. in *Tennyson’s Collected Poems*, 1: 216). In so saying, Tennyson appeals to work as a reparative solution to mental and spiritual disquiet but even though he views labour, here, as a positive thing, he is not consistent in this view (as “The Lotos Eaters” attests). Tennyson’s views on work are nuanced, as are his renderings of boredom. In “The Lotos Eaters” boredom is a means of passively resisting the demands of labour and in “Ulysses” it is an affective consequence of, among other things, the desire to fulfill the Victorian ideal of manliness which was, as Barringer points out, almost completely unattainable because so incredibly demanding (*Men at Work* 40-80).

Despite the strikingly different ways in which Tennyson explores and defines boredom in the early 1830s and then again in the early 1840s, male boredom always remains more than the affective problem that it tends to be in his Mariana poems and “The Lady of Shalott.” Whereas Mariana seems unable to escape from her boredom and the Lady of Shalott dies when she attempts to dispel hers, masculine forms of boredom are dealt with very differently: they tend to be subtle but significant criticisms and / or

explorations of Victorian conceptions of labour and male identity. Female boredom remains, in Tennyson's poetry, primarily representative of the struggles of the isolated artist and also exposes the problem of women's frequent exclusion from the public spheres of social and political life. By contrast, "The Lotos Eaters" and "Ulysses" treat boredom as an ambivalent but resonant symptom of a series of problems, ranging from romantic desires for escapism to subtle but nevertheless important resistances to contemporary labour practices, and from crises in male senses of identity to problematic confirmations of Victorian constructions of masculine identity. The next Chapter will consider how Dante Gabriel Rossetti picks up the problem of boredom as a mood shaping his aesthetic concerns and processes and how, through figures reminiscent of Mariana, he often, and problematically, locates personal feelings of boredom, longing, and lack in female bodies.

CHAPTER THREE
“[O]ne selfsame figure”: Boredom as Theme and Aesthetic Process in Dante Gabriel’s Work as Poet-Painter

Most interpretations of Christina Rossetti’s “In an Artist’s Studio” (composed on Christmas Eve, 1856 but only published posthumously in 1896), focus on the gender dynamics of the poem and how Christina worried about Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s tendency to perceive women as embodiments of his poetic and artistic ideals (12).¹ Fascinated with an aesthetic “dream” (14), Rossetti’s sketches and paintings were, according to his sister, in pursuit of “[o]ne face” (1), “[o]ne selfsame figure” (2). Descriptions of Siddal’s form, in the poem, are also implicitly representative of the ethical and aesthetic effects of Rossetti’s fascination with boredom which, throughout his work, is represented through explorations of repetition and unfulfilled desire. “In an Artist’s Studio” also implies that aesthetic meaning, for Rossetti, is based on continual representations of his person longings (which Siddal’s face and figure comes to embody):

One face looks out from all his canvases

One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans:

¹ There are various levels of meaning in this poem and other of its aspects have received, and deserve, attention. For instance, “In the Artist’s Studio” is understood to be one of the first, and most detailed, explorations of the very space of the studio in Victorian England and the poem is also engaging with, as Alison Chapman notes, “models of performativity” and gender-conscious evaluations of the ways in which Dante Gabriel Rossetti was interested in the Italian *Dolce Stil Nuovo* tradition, especially as shaped by Dante Alighieri and Petrarch (“Poem of the Month: Christina Rossetti’s ‘In an Artist’s Studio’”). Chapman also argues that both “In an Artist’s Studio” and, Christina’s Sonnet Sequence, *Monna Innominata* (1881), address how the “ideology of romantic love,” as espoused in the Early Italian poets and, in turn, in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s work, often “silences and de-animates the woman as the object of address” (“Poem of the Month”). In *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood*, Jan Marsh notes that this tendency of Rossetti’s self-imposition on his models is reflective of a “trend to depersonalization” in the art of the Pre-Raphaelites and their circle, a trend which often rendered female models “stylized cut-outs” (191) who were “isolated, decontextualized” (191) and, as a result, more akin to “objects” than subjects (not unlike Tennyson’s Mariana) (192). Although Marsh’s reading, and others similar to it, is right to put critical pressure on certain Pre-Raphaelite tendencies to represent women more like ciphers for expressions of personal (male) desire(s), it is important that we explore some of the other interpretive registers available in the poem.

We found her hidden just behind those screens,
 That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
 A queen in opal or in ruby dress,
 A nameless girl in freshest summer-greens,
 A saint, an angel—every canvas means
 The same one meaning, neither more nor less. (1-8)

Christina wrote her sonnet after visiting Dante Gabriel's studio and noticing a series of sketches, all of Elizabeth Siddal, scattered about the room.² While Christina Rossetti's poem is specifically commenting on her brother's drawings of Elizabeth Siddall, and how these renderings tend to reinscribe her as an embodiment of Rossetti's own artistic and personal desires, it also emphasizes his growing interest in re-drafting the "same one meaning" (8) throughout his career as poet-painter.³

² It is important to note, here, that Dante Gabriel's view of boredom is markedly different from Christina's. As my fourth Chapter explores, Christina Rossetti's theorizations of boredom in "The Prince's Progress" and her novella, *Commonplace* (1870), understand boredom and being bored as always linked to either ethics or to a kind of comic, self-reflexive mode that satirizes aspects of everyday life and living, in a spiritual light. Whereas, for Dante Gabriel Rossetti, boredom seems a side-effect of his perpetual fascination with expressing the "unutterable desire" Walter Pater discerns at the heart of *The House of Life* (1870, 1881) and Dante Gabriel's poetry in general ("Appreciations with an Essay on Style" 238). That is to say, boredom is a consequence of Dante Gabriel's poetic efforts to plot out the machinations of desire, as they unfold. Boredom, for Rossetti, is both a feeling and a kind of approach to art, a theme and a process. For Christina, boredom is an ambivalent structure—as it can be both a punishment for sloth or else a cross to be borne by women, in patience—which, nevertheless, always carries an ethical, as opposed to strictly aesthetic, significance. An ongoing importance in both Dante Gabriel's and Christina's poetics is, as Norman Kelvine notes, "the ways in which the works [of both] . . . inform, shape, quote, and reconfigure each other" ("Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Christina Rossetti: A Pairing of Identities" 239).

³ As Matthew Potolsky, reading Jerome McGann, comments, Rossetti "never composed extended theoretical treatises" (other than *Hand and Soul* which is a kind of manifesto on art (1849)) ("Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Mimesis" 167); instead, his "incessant" return to the same, or similar, topics, themes, and problems generate what Potolsky describes as a reflexive, "rigorous form[s] of theoretical practice" which emphasize "art over reality, the copy over the original, the artificial over the natural" (168). In the fourth and fifth sections of this Chapter, I will look at how reoccurring poses, expressions, and environments, in Rossetti's art, can be read as reflections on the value he placed on boredom and unfulfilled desire as a psycho-somatic state that helped him refine and develop his own aesthetic vision.

This Chapter explores how boredom functions as aesthetic theme on the one hand, and, on the other, as an inevitable consequence of Rossetti's fixation on repetition, doubling, and mirroring in his art. The limited, constricting, sometimes even boring and claustrophobic, ways Rossetti renders Siddal are mirrored by the poem's obvious patterns of repetition (and its strategic use of anaphora in the opening lines); its reliance on the imagery of the reflexivity of mirrors and mirroring; and its use of dwindling, repetitive word choice to achieve a kind of finalizing and restricting closure towards the poem's end—"every canvas *means* / The same one *meaning*, neither more nor less" (8; my emphasis).⁴ Situational boredom emerges not only at the rhetorical level of the poem (anaphora and assonance creates a sense of repetition, *ad infinitum*) but also in the poem's highlighting a certain homogeneity, or quality of sameness, that exists in Dante Gabriel's work. For instance, while Siddal may appear, in each sketch, as a different character, as a "queen in opal" (5) or as a "saint" or "angel" (7), Christina observes that she always appears the same. The "eternal return" of the same, to paraphrase Nietzsche, as it were, generates an aesthetic constituted by limitations, frustrations, and boredom (*The Gay Science* 230).⁵

⁴ Just like the home Rossetti would rent for a time, in Chelsea (following Siddal's death), which he cluttered with dimmed lights, bric-a-brac, and a series of mirrors (positioned in such a way that visitors often felt like they were encountering numerous, spliced, encroaching, and spectral versions of themselves), Christina's description of her brother's aesthetic emphasizes the claustrophobic and haunting nature of his work. Henry Treffry Dunn's 1882 watercolour portrait of Rossetti with Theodore Watts showcases the various mirrors Rossetti hung about his room—although the painting received mixed reviews and William Michael Rossetti was known to dislike it, the painting nevertheless provides us with a sense of how mirrors were positioned, and to what effect, in the room Rossetti frequented most when meeting and talking with friends (Marsh "Dante Gabriel Rossetti; Theodore Watts-Dunton").

⁵ With reference to Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence, first mentioned in *The Gay Science* (1882), Benjamin writes that "[l]ife within the magic circle of eternal return makes for an existence that never emerges from the auratic" (*The Arcades Project* D10a,1). Benjamin's observation is made near the close of his section on boredom, entitled "Boredom, Eternal Return," and he links the repetitive experience of

“In an Artist’s Studio” can be read as a rich and complex response, on Christina’s part, to Dante Gabriel’s growing aesthetic interests in what Kristen Mahoney has recently described as his belief in “the value” of rendering “perpetually unfulfilled desire” (“Work, Lack, and Longing: Rossetti’s ‘The Blessed Damozel’ and the Working Men’s College” 221).⁶ Rossetti’s sketches and paintings which present, and re-work, “[o]ne

disappointment and lack, constituting being bored, to the auratic experience arising from repetition ad infinitum (the Nietzschean return of the same). Aura, in Benjamin’s writings, is usually associated with exploring the declining status of art in burgeoning industrialism where, as he puts it, “mechanical reproduction” does not generate “authentic” art because it is incapable of capturing the original aura or “presence” of art works in general (“The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” 220-1). However, glossing the various (and vacillating) meanings aura takes on for Benjamin, throughout his writings, Miriam Bratu Hansen points out that, among other things, aura is often associated with the attractions of the repetitive and habitual: aura is the glow, as it were, created by consistent encounters with repetition that are “not necessarily . . . matter[s] of continuity or tradition; more often than not, [they are implicated with] a past whose ghostly apparition projects into the present and (to invoke Roland Barthes) “wounds” the beholder” (“Benjamin’s Aura” 341).

This two-fold aspect of the aura, as an aesthetic experienced inextricably linked to repetition and as a kind of wounding, can, I suggest, show one of the positive outcomes of boredom: its generation out of repletion causes, in turn, a kind of (secular) mystical response to the ordinary and the commonplace, making the artist open (by being wounded) to the rich levels of meaning present in the same, the similar, the recurrent. In many ways, Rossetti’s poetry and painting seeks to work through, and express, the “ghostly apparitions” of love lost and longed for.

⁶ Rossetti’s interest in pursuing “[o]ne face” (1) is, of course, not only linked to problematic treatments of gender and sexuality in his paintings. During various points in the 1850s, Rossetti and Siddal shared a relationship characterized by both passion and artistic collaboration. Siddal became the “[o]ne face” for Rossetti’s art, until Jane Burden Morris was added to the rank of Rossetian Muse. Attending to this two-fold aspect of their relationship, Christina says that her brother, the artist, “feeds” (9) on the “one face” that haunts and inspires his work—the connotations of consumption and sexual desire are obvious in her somewhat violent word choice. “Feeds,” of course, seems to invite, or tempt, us to think ahead to the sociological, erotic, and sacramental (specifically Eucharistic) qualities that food, and feeding, possess in “Goblin Market,” which was composed only three years following “In an Artist’s Studio.”

In later life, but not, I suggest, in the 1850s, Rossetti’s seeking out of “[o]ne face” in his art will also become tied to his selling of his particular artistic brand, as it were. I will discuss this further in section Three of this chapter when I examine the intimate connection between reproductions of art and boredom as signifying the growing homogenization of aestheticism in the Victorian art market—a homogenization that further emphasizes the inevitability of boredom being part of the process of art-making in the mid-Victorian period, onwards, when various forms of reproduction became increasingly involved in the processes of buying and selling art. For a discussion of the relationship between homogenization, consumption, aestheticism, and mid-to-late Victorian economic structures pertaining to art, see Jonathan Freedman’s Introduction in *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture* (1990); Linda Dowling’s *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic*

face” and “[o]ne self-same figure,” suggest the pursuit of a longed-for, but usually unattainable, desire. For the purposes of this Chapter, it is important to focus on how Christina’s poem underscores for us how Dante Gabriel’s art, and also his developing poetic aesthetic, increasingly relied on a fascination with repetition, thwarted desire, and problematic relationships to time—all of which, according to Alison Pease, are the causes of both “situational” and “existential” forms of boredom (*Modernism, Feminism and the Culture of Boredom* 95-6).⁷

Moreover, as many of the sketches Rossetti made of Siddal during the 1850s attest, various symptoms of situational boredom (lethargy, listlessness, sitting or leaning and daydreaming) are often part of the simple narratives they present to the viewer. In these sketches from the 1850s (which end shortly before she tragically passed away in 1862), Siddal frequently appears in limiting environments where the weight of time’s slow passing seems to be borne by her body. In creating sketch upon sketch of Siddal reclining, with her head resting on her hand as she listlessly reads, daydreams or absent-mindedly twists her hair into loose plaits, Rossetti draws attention to the limitations, and inevitable boredom, often accompanying specific moments of everyday life and living. Paused and static, the “one selfsame figure” who “sits or walks or leans” (2) in most of

Democracy (1996), particularly pages 75-102; Regenia Gagnier’s Introduction to *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in the Market Place* (2000); and Elizabeth Helsinger’s more recent *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts* (2008), pages 119-143.

⁷ As the opening pages of my Introduction to this study discusses at more length, Pease understands boredom as a “structure of feeling” (2) that stems from either situational events (such as uninteresting conversations or repetitive work) or else from more “existential” (112, 118), even “nihilistic” (96), crises in which the bored subject feels threatened either by the possible absence of meaning in his or her life or by the inability to exercise his or her full potential.

Rossetti's drawings in the 1850s (Figure One), and in his series of paintings of bored women from the later 1850s (until his death in 1882), Siddal (and, later on, Jane Morris) embodies the problem of boredom as theme and process in Rossetti's work.



Fig. One: "Sketch of Lizzie Siddal," (1861?), Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Photo: Wikimedia Commons [2014]

Siddall's pose in this sketch, made by Rossetti, signifies at various levels: it records the literal condition of Siddal's modeling for Rossetti (though Rossetti would also often sketched her informally) and, also, manifests the existentially freighted condition of waiting interminably.⁸ Either sleeping or lost in a reverie, Siddal cuts a passive figure who allows the passing of time to wash over her, bringing to mind the condition of waiting.⁹ Waiting and enduring unfulfilled desire (or, even, experiencing the absence of having a specific desire, at all) are often by, and through, Rossetti's obsessive sketching, imagining and re-imagining, drafting and re-drafting of most of his poems and paintings.¹⁰

⁸ In one of the few moments in *The Arcades Project* where he is not quoting someone else, Benjamin writes "[w]aiting is, in a sense, the lined interior of boredom" (D9a,4). This observation suggests that boredom is caused by being held in suspense: desire is present but its possible fulfillment remains beyond the possibility of the present moment. Jeff Nunokawa, influenced by Benjamin's discussion of boredom in *The Arcades Project* and elsewhere, understands boredom along similar lines: "boredom," he suggests, "[is] a period of waiting for desire, or, more exactly, a period during which the psyche fends off, and thus also manifests, the unbearable (because double) burden of desiring desire" (*Tame Passions of Wilde* 74).

⁹ Peter Toohey notes that boredom, in art, is often suggested by "hunched shoulders," a "head [being] cupped in [one's] hand," and "elbows resting" placidly (*Boredom: A Lively History* 22). Such postures suggest, Toohey argues, what Virginia Woolf called, in *Walter Sickert: A Conversation* (1934), the "accumulated weariness of innumerable days" which "discharge[s] its burden" on the body (*Boredom: A Lively History* 22-3). Keeping this in mind, it is important to also note, though, that Rossetti's main interests in rendering Siddal in this way are, I suggest, artistic ones. There are others sketches in which she is rendered sitting hunched and poised at an easel, preparing to do her own work as an artist. Rossetti also paid close attention to Siddal's progress and found her own work an inspiration for his own—as Virginia Surtees notes, Siddal "made a design," depicting St. Cecelia, for Tennyson's "The Palace of Art," which Rossetti then extensively drew from for his drawing on the same topic for Moxon's illustrated edition of Tennyson (1857) (*A Catalogue Raisonné* I. 48).

¹⁰ In a letter from the summer of 1869 to Jane Morris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti describes the burdens and merits attached to his "vain longings" for "perfectibility" in his art (Bryson 27). "I have been working on what may be called the flea-bite principle, however, at my poetry going through the press, and I find that correction, when one suffers from the vain longings of perfectibility, is an endless task . . ." (Bryson 12, 27). Following the encouragement of friends and family members, especially his friend William Bell Scott, Rossetti turned once again to his poetry, which he had, for the most part, put aside following the death of Elizabeth in 1862 (Robert Keane 95-97). Rossetti published his first volume of collected poems in 1870, following a long period of re-writing; this volume also included the unpublished manuscript, *Dante at Verona and Other Poems*, which Rossetti had exhumed from Siddal's grave in October of 1869. Rossetti's return to poetry reveals what his painting habits also often manifested: he was both spurred on by, and dissatisfied with, the inevitable limitations involved in making art. Re-writing, and returning to, similar

Rossetti frequently sketches Siddal (Figure Two) by using only the most rudimentary principles of drawing, particularly those of shape, shade and perspective. These principles were expressly outlined by John Ruskin in *The Elements of Drawing*, which he wrote in 1856, while he and Rossetti were both teaching art lessons at The Working Men's College in London. During this time period, both Ruskin and Rossetti perceived art as the perpetual attempt to capture, or render, an always-elusive ideal. Such a focus, on Rossetti's part, may be influenced, as Mahoney suggests, by Ruskin's idea of what she calls "the shortcomings of human perception" ("Work, Lack, and Longing" 229). Ruskin defined, and expounded upon, limitation in artistic expression at great length in *The Elements of Drawing*. In a similar vein to Mahoney's points, my Chapter explores how unfulfilled desire functions as a catalyst for creativity in Rossetti's art. However, whereas Mahoney focuses on how Rossetti's expressions of unfulfilled desire function as Ruskinian-influenced reminders of the "limits of mimesis" (223), I propose we shift our attention elsewhere. Specifically, I suggest we explore the ways that boredom surfaces in Rossetti's handling of desire's disappointments and how these disappointments are represented through Victorian, and especially modern, representations of time.

As early as the first draft of "The Blessed Damozel" (which Rossetti began in 1847 and reworked until 1870), and increasingly from the 1850s, onwards, Rossetti's Keatsian

themes was a kind of heavy burden for Rossetti. However, it was also a radical commitment, on his part, to render his inner imaginings with a vivid "literality" which gives flesh, colour and structure to personal dreams, to his highest ideals, to that which "was not a thing to be seen of men" (*Hand and Soul* 317).

interest in what Louise Cowan describes as the theme of non-consummation, “of not seizing that which one [once] has the opportunity to seize” manifests itself in a variety of ways (““For Ever Wilt Thou Love, and She Be Fair”: Faulkner’s Image of Virginitv” 65). One of Rossetti’s most consistent themes, and processes for making art, involves exploring how the very desire of the end (for consummation or fulfillment or even the cessation of desire) is almost always sidetracked by the play of the differences, the disappointments, and the disjunctions between longing and its subject and / or object.¹¹ This sidetracking is expressed through renderings of distance between desiring subjects in space and time, in particular.

¹¹ Jerome McGann has recently noted that Rossetti’s paintings and poems, and especially his double-works of art, are products of the interdependency between theme and process. That is to say, the themes in his art are also affective experiences or interests of Rossetti’s own that come to shape the very methods he employs to make his art. Thus, his art maps out “an ideal whose existence is posited through the different incarnate forms [of painting and poetry]” on the one hand and by the very “process [of art making] by which the visionary imagination sustains and develops itself” on the other (“The Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti” 98). Such an observation helps us to appreciate how Rossetti’s art is reflective and self-reflexive: turned inwards and outwards, simultaneously, like his proposed sketch (which never came to fruition) of a “Venus surrounded by mirrors, reflecting her in different views” (qtd. in “The Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti,” 98).



Fig. Two: “Elizabeth Siddal Plaiting Her Hair” (c. 1860), Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Photo: Wikimedia Commons [2014]

Even in the earliest drafts of “The Blessed Damozel” (1847-1870), Rossetti is already exploring the ways desire’s suspension, its perpetual deferral, provides a rich psycho-sexual exploration of the interconnections between desire, loss, and making art. This initial interest in the gap between desire and its fulfillment persists in Rossetti’s developing aesthetic so that his life’s work as a poet-painter is often, among other things, a sustained and cumulative analysis of boredom (the experience of frustrated or thwarted desire) in relation to art. In order to trace the “multiple boredom,” to borrow Pease’s phrase, that consistently re-surface in Rossetti’s work, this Chapter will specifically consider “The Blessed Damozel,” first drafted in 1847 (and frequently reworked until 1870) and how it is the poetic precedent for what became a long, on-going series of renderings, of painting and sketches, from the 1850s, onwards, in which women are presented as disappointed and bored, often left interminably or mysteriously waiting. Rossetti’s various sketches of Siddal from the 1850s and Jane Morris’s bored poses in *The M’s at Ems* (1869) and *La Pia De’ Tolomei* (1868-1880) (which re-casts the banal and tragi-comic situation of *The M’s at Ems* in a Dantean, purgatorial setting), and *The Blessed Damozel* (1871-1881) are especially representative of Rossetti’s reflections on the dividends of disappointment and boredom for art. Often placed in cramped, close quarters (too big for the frames they find themselves squeezed into), Rossetti’s bored women embody the problem of being held in “limbo,” to recall Heidegger’s description of boredom as a response to the “vacillating and dragging of time” that “contains whatever it is that is burdensome and paralysing” to the bored subject (*The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* 97). As a result, these paintings signify as studies of fraught and complex relationships to time. In many senses, these images dramatize the impact of time

as a burden—an impact which, as I will discuss in sections three and four of this Chapter, suggest Rossetti’s aesthetic interests in the frustrating, tiring, repetitive, and unfulfilled aspects of life and living and how, in many senses, they are passive forms of resistance to emerging, Victorian ideas of progress and technological advancement.

Rossetti’s interests in unfulfilled desire persisted until his death. Not only “The Blessed Damozel” but also the sonnet sequence, *The House of Life* (1847-1870) (which Rossetti re-worked until a year before his death) addresses the dividends and deficits of being bored. Many scholars have already identified various connections between these two texts (which bookend Rossetti’s life). As we know, Walter Pater was one of the first to underscore the thematic and aesthetic links between Rossetti’s earliest and last poems. Of course, Rossetti’s work in general is rightly characterized as being an intense and vivid rendering of the drama of personal longing, of what Elizabeth Helsinger calls “the felt presence of things” that are absent, “on the other side of death and time” from the desiring subject (*Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts* 27). However, in *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style* (1889), Pater perceives a unique “anticipative note” constituting the main tone throughout “The Blessed Damozel” (in all versions of the poem), and implies that this same “anticipative note” is present in *The House of Life* (239). Meaning, in *The House of Life*, the burden of what Pater terms “unutterable desire,” of desire briefly fulfilled or left interrupted, deferred or disappointed, shapes the overall architecture of the text as a whole (239). The remaining pages of this Chapter, then, also explore how Rossetti’s persistent (though of course shifting and often implicit as opposed to explicit) fascination with boredom and its symptoms (fatigue, restlessness, longing and

disappointment) helps us to read his relationship to unfulfilled desire as an aesthetic theme and process throughout his life.

3.1 The “gold bar of Heaven”: The Transvaluation of Heaven into Limbo in “The Blessed Damozel”

Two static, embowered bodies, separated by the “gold bar of Heaven” (“The Blessed Damozel” 2), confront us when viewing Rossetti’s diptych, *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-78). Descriptions of distance and the body—the damozel’s leanings, crying, sighing, and straining—permeate the first, and all subsequent, drafts of “The Blessed Damozel,” which Rossetti first wrote between 1846 and 1847.¹² As in the poem, the setting of the painting is comprised of the distance between two distinct realms: the main picture, found in the diptych’s upper, vertical panel, depicts the “blessed damozel” (1) gazing down, from heaven, towards her earth-bound lover who is enclosed in a predella (the frame running along the horizontal, bottom panel of the painting). The earth-bound lover, in turn, is gazing upwards, towards the damozel, from a reclined position: a standard, romantic pose for the idle, dreaming poet, typified, in William Wordsworth’s “I wandered lonely as a cloud” (1807). Although William Michael Rossetti later commented that he “hardly kn[e]w if the idea for [the] predella . . . came from Rossetti himself, or

¹² The production history of *The Blessed Damozel*, like that of the poem itself, involves a series of sketches and drafts, which are now termed the *Sancta Liliis* group of paintings. Some of these sketches occurred before, during, and then after the completion of the painting in 1878. As Rossetti recounted to Ford Madox Brown, his vision of how to position and structure *The Blessed Damozel* came from his extensive work on some of these paintings of Alexa Wilding’s face (*Letters*, 1170). In these various paintings, which serve as a kind of constellation around *The Blessed Damozel* diptych, we see another extension of Christina’s observation that Rossetti’s aesthetic interests were constituted by a fascination with exploring, and representing, the various contours and significations of “[o]ne face” and “[o]ne self-same figure.”

from Mr. Graham” (who commissioned the painting in 1871), it signifies as a material equivalent of heaven’s “gold bar,” which divides the two lovers (*Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer* 104).¹³ The predella also functions as a framing device not unlike the brackets Rossetti employs to mark the earth-bound lover’s speech as distanced from the damozel’s experiences in heaven (*Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer* 104).¹⁴ The painting further dramatizes what Rossetti’s various versions of the poem refine and re-work: the predicament of separation between the two lovers which is a paradigmatic example of Rossetti’s growing interest with frustrated desire, with boredom, as both a theme and part of the aesthetic process of the work of painting and poetry writing.

¹³ Referencing Rossetti’s drafts of “The Blessed Damozel” as well as the painting on the same topic, Maia McAleavey has suggested that we read the drama of separation between the two lovers as being symptomatic of a larger trend, from the 1850s onwards, in which Victorians imagined (and believed) the possibility that marriage continued, in some form, in Heaven. In Rossetti’s double work of art on the topic of the blessed damozel, as well as in Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, McAleavey argues we can see the idea that “Victorians felt that heaven was unimaginable without their worldly identity and relationships” and that they were fixated on “the promise and problem of a conjugal heaven” (“Soul-Mates: *David Copperfield’s* Angelic Bigamy” 191). McAleavey’s reading provides historical context for why the blessed damozel, who is already present in Heaven, is so concerned with being reunited with her lover and, also, for why reception of Rossetti’s poem was so wide-spread, among various circles. The growing preoccupation with a need for heaven to provide “replication[s] of earthly ties,” as it seems to do for select members in the damozel’s heaven, can be traced back to, among other sources, the belief, perpetuated by Queen Victoria (who remained in deep mourning for Albert until her own death when she was buried in her wedding veil), that married lovers are reunited in heaven (McAleavey 193).

¹⁴ In general, the Pre-Raphaelites eschewed the use of mass produced frames that were used by many artists during the Victorian period; instead, they understood framing as an extension of the narrative or atmosphere communicated in their paintings. Such an understanding of the frame’s significance is, as Tim Barringer has noted, part of the Pre-Raphaelite turn to medieval, devotional art as an inspiration for their work and aesthetic practices (*Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* 24-49). Also, as William Holman Hunt notes, William Hogarth—who certainly influenced certain members of the short-lived P.R.B.—was known for his “exquisitely carved frames” which he both “designed and executed . . . himself” (*Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* 15). *The Blessed Damozel’s* frame is no exception; it not only embodies the central problem of separation present in the poem and painting, it also serves as a précis, as it were, of the poem as a whole since the first four stanzas of the poem (as taken from Rossetti’s 1873 version) are etched onto its base.

The painting and poem stage the problem of boredom: the longed-for anticipation of reunion in Heaven never occurs. If anything, Rossetti seems to be presenting his readers with, among other things, a tease or a glimmer of possibilities as opposed to a consummative moment. In so doing, Rossetti aligns himself with the later Keatsian, romantic tradition of thwarted love, a tradition Tennyson also explored in his own use of medievalism as a distant, idealized, only quasi-historical English past that appropriately provides the nostalgic distance needed to explore personal, contemporary, social, and aesthetic concerns. James Najarian, discussing Antony Harrison's consideration of the "Pre-Raphaelite debt to Keatsian amatory ideals," observes that Rossetti "rejected the sensory optimism of the early Keats, in whom the experience of sensory pleasure is pleasurable in itself and can lead to union with the loved object" and, instead, was drawn to the Keatsian fascination with "disappointed lovers," as typified in *Lamia* or "La Belle Dame Sans Merci;" both of these later poems, Najarian reminds us, centre on how "failed . . . love that once had a definite object that is finally put in the past" shapes a vivid, yet claustrophobic and restless, poetic and painterly aesthetic in both Rossetti's poetry and painting (*Victorian Keats: Manliness, Sexuality and Desire* 3). In each of his re-workings of "The Blessed Damozel," Rossetti repeatedly emphasizes that the damozel and earth-bound lover are stuck in a problematic relationship to time. In particular, the region the damozel inhabits is nothing like either the Heaven the Victorians viewed as being the sphere of marital consummation nor is it similar to descriptions the early Italian poetic tradition, typified by Dante Alighieri, provided. While the damozel may be in heaven and the earth-bound lover on earth, they seem to reside in a spatial-temporal dimension more akin to limbo than Heaven.

As we know, limbo is the spatial-temporal structure Heidegger perceives as representative (and generative) of the problem of situational forms of boredom in which the bored subject, as he notes, “want[s] to see time passed” because s/he is “fed up waiting” (*The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* 93). Heidegger does not perceive waiting or impatience as being the root of boredom, per se. Instead, both waiting and impatience announce the ultimately futile attempt to try and “control” our boredom when, in reality, waiting is not the issue in boredom. Rather, the inability to find “anything that could grip us, satisfy us or let us be patient” causes boredom or restless activity, even dreaming, becomes a kind of defense against, or a method of distraction from, the growing realization that time is passing and is not disclosing to us that which we desire (*The Fundamental Concept of Metaphysics* 94).¹⁵ Being in limbo also signifies, for Heidegger, as a mood in which what is at hand (be it other people, work, social obligations or something else) fails to relieve us of the burden of being distracted from the fact of time’s passing, slowly ticking its way towards our death (announcing to us the inevitability of our morality) (103-105). It is important to note that, fundamentally, limbo signifies as a spatial-temporal structure which embodies and “sustains” the predicament of “*coming to be left empty by things*” (106). The problem of “*coming to be left empty by things*” is central to “The Blessed Damozel” and it makes both heaven and earth limbo-

¹⁵ In this condition of finding no form of satisfaction, the bored subject relates to space and time as though both were a kind of limbo in which there is only limited freedom of movement: relations to others, and to time itself (which possesses a “dragging” rhythm, seeming to measure out refusal) only underscore the aggravation of desire’s disappointment (*The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* 99).

like states of existence.¹⁶ Rossetti's framing of *The Blessed Damozel*, and especially his construction of the predella, generate material equivalents to limbo: the framing devices enclose the subjects of the painting and further emphasize the stasis that Rossetti creates through careful juxtapositions of opposites.

In the painting, the earth-bound lover and his heaven-dwelling beloved are both in fixed positions whereas the rest of their environment is dynamic and in motion. While the damozel remains stuck in her longing and frustration (represented by her solitary and staid appearance in both the poem and painting), her environment in the painting is full of lovers, embracing each other, who are rendered in vivid greens (an earthy colour, also representative of hope throughout Dante's *Commedia*) mixed with red and flecks of gold.¹⁷ Alexa Wilding, the model used for the damozel's face, reappears and comeslingles in the faces of the women who are embracing their lovers in the painting's background. This similarity in appearance between the fulfilled women and the bored damozel further reinforces the fact of the central difference between them: the damozel is unfulfilled and it is painful for her to see the lovers together, as the poem's conclusion and the evolution, over time, of the poem's eighth stanza details.

As D.M.R. Bentley has outlined, the "evolution" of the poem towards an even stronger emphasis on the frustration of desire is encapsulated in changes Rossetti made to

¹⁶ True to its nature, boredom dulls differences, numbs the discernment of distinctions and makes both heaven and earth places of almost equal disappointment in the different versions of the poem of the damozel and her predicament.

¹⁷ Despite the rushing river coursing past the embankment where the earth-bound lover lies, out-stretched and passive, the predella evinces a sense of stillness and fixity. Likewise, the damozel has a fixed and "hieratic" quality about her, to borrow Jerome McGann's description, appearing more like a secularized (and one could say sexualized) icon (Rossetti Archive Online). It is also noteworthy that as opposed to gazing at the Triune God, enjoying the Beatific Vision, the damozel's eyes are directed earthward.

the poem's eighth stanza in the Trial Books of 1869, in *Poems* (1870) and, again, in 1881 ("The Blessed Damozel: A Young Man's Fantasy" 33). Originally, the damozel sees "friends" "playing at holy games," in Heaven (a fact which reinforces her solitary existence as she seems to be the only one separated from her lover). By 1881, however, the poem has been, as Bentley notes (paraphrasing McGann), "recast" (33) completely to account for the growing replacement of agape with eros: "Around her, lovers newly met / 'Mid deathless love's acclaims, / Spoke evermore among themselves / Their heart remembered names" (37-40). In addition to the contrast Rossetti makes between the damozel's predicament and the communal, spiritual-sexual image of "lovers newly met" who now enjoy "deathless" reunion, any hint of potential consummation or reunion between the lovers is also thrown into a state of further deferral (or even of doubt) by the poem's ending. The damozel's hopes are abruptly sidelined by the narrator's seeing her cry as she "cast[s] her arms along / The golden barriers" of her place in heaven, seeming to despair of her reunion with her earth-bound beloved (141-2).

Given that the damozel is a fusion of the narrator's observations, the earth-bound lover's imaginative longings and a speaker in her own right, the poem stages and repeatedly reinforces (at multiple levels and from a variety of perspectives), the fact of interminable waiting and restless boredom as one of its central affective problems. The damozel's "pressing" against the "golden bar of heaven" brings a level of intensive, physical theatricality to the poem, showing how the very barriers of the division between heaven and earth, idealism and the body's inevitable limitations, affect the argumentative and rhetorical aspects of the poem. In Heaven, the damozel is stuck in a moment where nothing is happening for her. Meanwhile, on earth, time passes slowly (and is measured

by the falling of Autumn leaves). The earth-bound lover is also suffering from longing and boredom:

The blessed damozel leaned out
 From the gold bar of Heavem [. . .]
 Herseemed she scarce had been a day
 One of God's choristers;
 The wonder was not yet quite gone
 From that still look of hers;
 Albeit, to them she left, her day
 Had counted as ten years.

(To one, it is ten years of years
 . . . Yet now, and in this place,
 Surely she leaned o'er me—her hair
 Fell all about my face . . .
 Nothing: the autumn-fall of leaves.

The whole year sets apace.) (1-2, 13-24)

Here, in the poem's opening, the damozel still appears to be adjusting to the patterns and environment of heaven and, as later lines explain, is perpetually fixated on what is, to her, a major problem that takes over all of her attention and makes her reminiscent of Tennyson's Mariana: "I wish that he were come to me," is the first line the damozel utters in every version of the poem (68). Heaven is boring for the damozel as it fails to fulfill Rossetti's, and a rather standard (and developing) Victorian, obsession with the

idea of married lovers reuniting, and carrying on a life of earthly intimacy, following death. The earth-bound lover also experiences time as a barren and tedious problem since it functions as a melancholic measurement of the trauma of his original loss of his beloved: to him, it has been “ten years of years” (19) since he was united with his beloved. “[T]he autumn-fall of leaves” (23), signifying decay and transience, can be read as a more natural correlative to repetitive forms of time measurement that increasingly held sway not only in Victorian spheres of labour but also, increasingly, in Victorian domestic spheres as well.¹⁸

As Sue Zemka observes, the increase in time-consciousness in nineteenth-century England is neither an unprecedented event nor “the emergence of new temporal forms without a pre-industrial history” but, nevertheless, the ways in which personal routines, labour, and even religious attitudes adapted to the growing synchronization of the habits and routines of life and living was accelerated during the industrial revolution (*Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* 7). While Rossetti’s painting is decidedly medievalized in its settings and distanced from any explicit references to the burgeoning Industrialism occurring during the time when “The Blessed Damozel” was first drafted, the earth-bound lover’s time consciousness is frustrated, tired, and fixated on the fact that

¹⁸ Scholars have noted that the damozel’s and earth-bound lover’s perspectives are so in sync because they are, in many senses, representations of different modes of feeling in one subject: the earth-bound lover. For a review of the various ways in which the three speakers in the poem, the percipient / narrator, the damozel, and the earth-bound lover, present various interpretive problems when it comes to exploring Rossetti’s methods of narration, see: David Sonstroem’s *Rossetti and the Fair Lady* (1970), pages 17-21; Thomas H. Brown’s “The Quest of Dante Gabriel Rossetti in ‘The Blessed Damozel’” (1972), pages 274-275; Bentley’s “‘The Blessed Damozel: A Young Man’s Fantasy’” (1982), pages 31-43; and Christopher S. Nassar’s provocative “‘In Heaven or Hell?’ A New Reading of D.G. Rossetti’s ‘The Blessed Damozel’” (1993), pages 1-4. Nassar argues that Rossetti is actually casting the damozel in a kind of equivalent to the circle of Hell in which Paolo and Francesca are doomed for their capitulation to lust: “The erotic relationship of the blessed damozel and her lover stands in contrast to the spiritual one of Dante and Beatrice which finally led Dante to heaven and God” (3).

time seems the measurement of interminable burdens and loss. Such a time-consciousness is precisely the kind of bored temporal attunement Heidegger perceives as a symptom of the increasing expansion of industrialism in nineteenth-and-twentieth-century Europe.¹⁹ In both Zemka's and Heidegger's views of time, here, the intensification of time consciousness serves, among other things, to aggravate a restless resistance to repetition and monotony and, by way of that very restlessness, to becoming further entangled in the twentieth-century adherences to clock-time.²⁰

While their mutual separation seems to make both the damozel and earth-bound lover bored, and acutely sensitive to the passing of time, the radical separation between them is also an ambivalent one which shows the interplay, and interdependence, between desire's frustration and the sustenance of desiring. Both the various versions of the poem,

¹⁹ Invoking the banal scenario of awaiting a late train, Heidegger provides a description of the bored subject's relationship to time that parallels the dilemma Rossetti depicts in both the damozel's and earth-bound lover's predicaments: "Fed up with walking back and forth [and with waiting], we sit down on a stone, draw all kinds of figures in the sand, and in so doing catch ourselves looking at our watch yet again—half an hour—and so on. An everyday situation with well-known, banal, yet quite spontaneous forms of passing the time [. . .] Passing the time is a *driving away of boredom that drives time on*" (93).

²⁰ As Michael Alexander observes, the Medieval Revival in England, largely begun in the 1830s and 1840s, occurred just as steam railways began to cut through, and re-divide and re-create, England's cityscapes and landscapes (*Medievalism: The Middle Ages in Modern England* 127). Among other things, this intensive backward-looking "historical awareness," which largely explored the terrain of medieval idealist mythology and quasi-historical accounts of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, in particular, enabled a wider "range of possible models" for handling contemporary phenomena in de-familiarized settings (Alexander 130-131). While Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel" should by no means be read as an implicit allegory for critiquing and exploring modern industrialism per se, and while any parallels between modern time-consciousness and the damozel and earth-bound lover remain implicit (and certainly not the main aim of Rossetti's aesthetic poetics in so far as we can venture to know his intentions), I think it is important to note some distinctive parallels between the two. Just as the rhythms of clock-life tended to pronounce how time either revealed or obstructed the fulfillment of desires, so, too, does Rossetti's painting and poetry present time as a burden to be borne out by the body, in landscapes, and in the diminishment of images to pastiches as opposed to symbols of narratives outside of themselves. The self-referentiality of Rossetti's art, its repetitive themes, and his frequent return to "The Blessed Damozel," in particular, is oddly in sync with the rhythms, repetitions, and recurrences of clock-time which is, at once, based upon observed patterns in nature and the imposition of a kind of controlled artifice onto patterns of everyday life and living.

and the painting, depend upon the fact that “heaven is a place where nothing happens,” to invoke a recent, rather post-modern, rendering of paradise in a non-apocalyptic hermeneutic.²¹ As Luce Irigaray puts it, separation has its dividends since desire itself “occupies” the “place of the interval” and, as such, it “demands a sense of attraction: a change in the interval, the displacement of the subject or of the object in their relations of nearness or distance” (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference* 4). The boredom in “The blessed Damozel,” then, is not only an affective problem or a frustration with time not revealing that which one hopes for. Instead, it also helps us understand boredom as an aesthetic dividend. Mahoney has recently and convincingly argued that during the time in which he was carefully redrafting “The Blessed Damozel” in the 1850s and early 1860s, Rossetti’s work with John Ruskin at the Christian Socialist Working Men’s College made him even more consciously aware of how limitations in art, perception, and the body’s ability to express and achieve imagined desires was a paradoxical catalyst for creativity (“Work, Lack, Longing” 221-225).

²¹ The “displacement” of the damozel from her former dwelling with the lover on earth emphasizes that desire’s longing for fulfillment is the main energy driving the damozel’s words and poses. Like a prototype for a Beckett play, *nothing is happening* to, or for, the damozel and her earth-bound lover and this fact continues to be the dramatic and lyric problem in both the poem and painting. This *nothing happening* is precisely what shapes a dysphoric, repetitive and claustrophobic atmosphere in both texts and, at the same time, compels the damozel to continue speaking, thus perpetuating the dream she embodies and furthers.

Talking Heads’ song, “Heaven,” which is framed by the refrain, “Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens, / Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens,” is predicated on a conception of eternity which Rossetti certainly shares: unlike Dante’s dynamic and ecstatic rendering of the perpetual bliss enjoyed in the beatific vision, in *Paradiso*, eternity figures as some kind of perpetual mode of stasis for the damozel. The post-modern imagination, typified by Talking Heads’s song, and bolstered by decades of a kind of Beckettian attitude to existence as perpetually a worsening of the same (“[w]orsening words . . . [a]s worst fail ever worse to say”) is anticipated in the transvaluation of Dante’s rendering of heaven into a kind of Limbo—a transvaluation Rossetti implicitly provides in “The Blessed Damozel” (*Worstward Ho* 478).

***I am grateful to Dr. Donna Pennee for discussing with me how Talking Heads’ “Heaven” provides an example of how various interpretive registers in “The Blessed Damozel,” when viewed in the context of boredom, underscores how similar Rossetti’s handling of heaven is to certain post-modern resistances towards imagining eternity outside of earthly temporal constructions and lived experiences.

While Rossetti never came to commit to Socialism in the way William Morris would, he recognized, and resisted, the ways in which utility, accomplishment, fulfillment, the instant gratifications of desire (promoted by growing discourses on profit, reward, capitalism and, even, by the Victorian conception of the Muscular Christian) were often viewed as the themes of art in Victorian visual culture.²² In fact, Rossetti's brief fascination with medievalism and medievalized settings, as espoused in "The Blessed Damozel," "The Staff and Scrip" (1849; 1851-52) and his painting of scenes from the life of Arthur for the Oxford Union (1857), reveal an aesthetic commitment to what Mahoney calls a "creative" longing "for the past" which "serves as a template for an aesthetic practice that revels in lack and the perfection of desire" (221), a perfection, we should add, that perpetually escapes Rossetti's grasp. The boredom of "The Blessed Damozel," born out of psychological and sexual frustration, appears to be a kind of aesthetic dividend for Rossetti—it assists him in his writing and re-writing, thinking and re-thinking of images and subjects that are so important to him. Adam Phillips's discussion of the dividends of boredom and missing out, for creative work, extends Mahoney's observations about the relationship between lack and creativity in Rossetti's aesthetic poetics (*In Praise of the Unlived Life* xix-xx).

Appealing to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Phillips discerns the imagination as a faculty best driven by lack: the absence of desire's fulfillment forces creativity, as it were. Boredom, then, helps the imagination shape new or alternative ideas

²² In section 3.3 of my Chapter, I will discuss how Rossetti's success as a painter (a role he saw as both a vocation and a profession, and, always, a secondary role to that of the work of poetry writing) inevitably complicates his aesthetic resistance to the socio-political processes and implications Capitalism inevitably holds for art in economic culture(s).

about identity and opens up understandings about how time works in everyday circumstances, as a way to negotiate the fissure between desire and daily life: “[i]t is only in states of frustration,” Phillips writes, “that we can begin to imagine—to elaborate, to envision—our desire [. . .] When we are frustrated, the unlived life of gratified desire returns as a possibility. Waiting too long poisons desire, but waiting too little pre-empts it; *the imagining is in the waiting*” (xx; my emphasis). Phillips’s observation that “the imagining is in the waiting” is, I suggest, a helpful entry-point for thinking about how boredom, as an affect caused by discordant relationships between time, space, and desire, plays a crucial role in the themes and aesthetic history of writing and re-writing, drafting and re-drafting belonging to “The Blessed Damozel.” More than this, such predicaments of disappointment or boredom become fruitful resources for the production of art: time becomes a mode of living-in-expectation, a kind of “advent” period, as Phillips notes, in which boredom signals to us our own lack of fulfillment and, as a result, “returns us to the scene of inquiry . . . [asking us] What does one want to do with one’s time?” (*Being Bored* 75). We answer this question, Phillips continues, through a turn to fantasy, to creative work, thus transforming lack and absence into the topics of art itself.

The bored subject uses “representation,” in its various forms (including those of art), as the “medium in which [she or] he desires and waits” (Phillips 75); as a consequence, Phillips concludes, we can think of boredom as a paradoxical stage of positive action stemming from lack or negation. The bored subject is “lured” into creativity or “distract[ion]” by the possibility of recovering an “object of desire” (76). Interestingly, like Phillips’s view of boredom as a positive form of emotional limitation, Ruskin’s perceives human limitations in drawing and sketching in a positive light. As

mentioned in my Introduction to this chapter, Mahoney points out that Ruskin published *The Elements of Drawing* while both he and Rossetti, among other members of the former Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (which had largely dissolved in 1853), were teaching at the Working Men's College in London during the 1850s and 1860s ("Work, Lack, and Longing" 221). Throughout this period, Mahoney observes, Ruskin's vision of education, shared by Edward Burne-Jones (and, later, by William Morris as well), was in sympathy with a Christian Socialism which focused on the moral and artistic edification of people, of all classes.²³ A kind of implicit Socialism is present in *Elements of Drawing*, where Ruskin points out that, over and above the attainment of complete mastery of skills, there are three aspects to the law of "mystery" which governs the processes, and abilities, of human perception that are needed for making art: "Subordination," "Individuality," and "Incomprehensibility" (171). Mahoney quotes part of Ruskin's outlining of what "Incomprehensibility" means, in relation to art, saying that he "celebrates" the limits of human understanding because he discerns "in the imprecision of sight a happy lesson in infinite mystery" (229). It is useful to include, here, what Ruskin says, in full, about "Incomprehensibility" since it also opens up our reading of boredom's significance as theme and process in Rossetti's art—especially in "The Blessed Damozel" and *The House of Life*.

Ruskin's language in his passage on "Incomprehensibility" in *The Elements of Drawing* is especially visceral; he maps out the process of perception, and its limits, by

²³ Paraphrasing an article from the first edition of *The Working Men's College Magazine*, Mahoney notes it was believed, and promoted, that learning and not mastery "would be the 'sufficient reward of study'" ("Work, Lack, and Longing" 225). The College had a liberal aim in mind as it sought to teach students how to perceive, and express, the beauty of the world around them, by learning how to develop an artist's eye.

noting the boundaries between observation and the full movements, patterns, and shape of not only the “vein[s]” of “forest leaves” but also of the “rents and veins of the human heart” (124). He contrasts the inevitable incompleteness and vagaries of perception with the concrete vividness of detail found in the elements of nature. The human eye’s inability to capture all the aspects of a thing helps the artist to embrace the mystery of existence, Ruskin argues:

Incomprehensibility . . . [is] a perpetual lesson in every serrated point and shining vein which escape or deceive our sight among the forest leaves, how little we may hope to discern clearly, or judge justly, the rents and veins of the human heart; much of all that is round us, in men’s actions or spirits, which we at first think we understand, a closer and more loving watchfulness would allow to be full of mystery, never to be either fathomed or withdrawn. (*The Elements of Drawing* 171)

Ruskin’s understanding of art, and of any reading of nature, as being an ultimately unfinished work-in-progress, is not unlike Rossetti’s desire to seek after an always already elusive sense of consummation and fulfillment of desire. Not only “The Blessed Damozel,” and its various drafts, but also *The House of Life* (which I will discuss in the fifth section of this Chapter), for instance, is structured around the sorts of problems and tantalizing longings that Ruskin outlines as being inextricable from the process of artistic perception—which involves seeking after the mysteries of nature and the human heart which can “never,” as he puts it, be “either fathomed or withdrawn” (171). Rossetti’s interests in the aesthetic dividends boredom produces are not only shaped by influences he received from Ruskin, the Working Men’s College, and his own brief, yet vivid,

fascination with the distant yet colourful and passionately charged scenes of medieval legends (as they came by way of Thomas Malory but also via Tennyson, among others). I suggest we consider how Rossetti's interests in the Italian poets and, increasingly, in Dante's *Vita Nuovo*, at the time of his first drafting, and initial re-workings, of "The Blessed Damozel" can help us to read the poem as a kind of sustained exploration of the ways in which heaven and earth, as theo-poetic realms, can be read as having being been transvaluated into states of limbo, by Rossetti.²⁴

3.2 Boredom and Dantean Afterlives in "The Blessed Damozel"

Although he did not publish his translation of Dante's *Vita Nuovo* until 1861, as part of the volume entitled *The Early Italian Poets*, Rossetti began working on this project in the mid-1840s. In 1847, Rossetti wrote a letter of personal introduction to Leigh Hunt, hoping to receive advice from the poet, presenting him with some of his own poems along with a selection of his translations of the early Italian poets from *Poeti del primo secolo della lingua italiana in due volumi raccolti* (1816). The 1816 Italian source text he translated from gave him access to a series of Italian poems which, he says, were "as yet scarcely at all known in England" (Rossetti Archive). Among the selection of personal poems he sent was an early draft of "The Blessed Damozel." Rossetti's interest in the love tradition, typified in the *stilnovisti* poetry he was translating, serves as an important background to the poetic origins of, and developments for, "The Blessed Damozel": his

²⁴ This is particularly important for our reading of "The Blessed Damozel" as it shows the ways in which, while a self-appointed disciple of Dante (who even re-arranged his Christened name, Gabriel Charles Dante Rossetti), Dante Gabriel was always interested in an aesthetic dream of his own that had more to do with explorations of restlessness, the paradoxes of time, melancholia, eros, and boredom than it did with a Dantean, theo-poetic dramatization of the soul's choices (which begins towards the end of Dante's *La Vita Nuovo* and comprises the structure and over-arching narrative of his *Commedia*).

earliest major poem dealing with the dramatic tensions involving the boredom that arises from thwarted desire.²⁵

Providing us with a useful, historical context for one of the many connections between “The Blessed Damozel” and the early Italian, specifically Dantean, elements in both “The Blessed Damozel” and Rossetti’s early poetic experiments in general, Joan Rees reminds us that Rossetti was occupied, in the late 1840s and early 1850s, with drafting sketches of various scenes from *La Vita Nuovo*, many of which had to do with Dante working through loss, frustrated desire, and Beatrice’s death (*The Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Modes of Self-Expression* 18). Moreover, during the time when he was drafting “The Blessed Damozel,” Rossetti was drawing scenes from *La Vita Nuovo*. As a letter to his Godfather, Charles Lyell from November 1848 shows, Rossetti notes that the first three, of the proposed ten, drawings that he completed depicted scenes from *La Vita Nuovo* that focus on how the fact of death affects art:

Of the designs I have completed, as yet, only three: viz: 1st Dante overhearing the conversation of the friends of Beatrice after the death of her father: 2nd Dante interrupted while drawing an angel in memory of Beatrice: & 3rd an emblematical

²⁵ Although Rossetti did not start translating *La Vita Nuovo* until 1849 and so had already drafted “The Blessed Damozel,” the themes of distance between lovers, separation, longing, and time as a divisive element pervade the poems he was translating from *Poeti del primo*. Also, while Rossetti had not yet translated *Vita Nuovo* in 1847, when he first drafted “The Blessed Damozel,” he was intimately associated with the work of Dante by way of his own reading and his father’s obsession with the Florentine. As William Michael Rossetti records, in December of 1849 Rossetti was hard at work on *Hand and Soul* and in January of 1850 he added another stanza to “The Blessed Damozel” to prepare for its publication in *The Germ* (*The P.R.B. Journal: William Michael Rossetti’s Diary of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* 35, 48). As both *Hand and Soul* and his drafts of “The Blessed Damozel” show, Rossetti was interested in exploring the emotional dilemmas leading up to moments of revelation or consummation that often occur only at the poem’s very end (as is typical with the Italian poets), and, increasingly, he was also interested in leaving the end hanging open and incomplete.

frontispiece. In this last, I have introduced on one side the figure of Dante and on the other that of Beatrice: while in the centre, Love is represented, holding in one hand a sun-dial, and in the other a lamp; the shadow cast by the lamp upon the dial being made to fall upon the figure nine. At the same time, Death, standing behind, is drawing from the quiver of Love an arrow wherewith to strike Beatrice. (*Correspondence* 48.12)²⁶

Rossetti's pen and ink sketch, "The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice" (1849), the second of the three designs he describes to Lyell, is a pictorial representation of a fundamental problem, and theme, also present in "The Blessed Damozel." Dante, in the

²⁶ Rossetti's translation of *La Vita Nuovo* (1861) recounts Dante's description of painting an angel for Beatrice, on the anniversary of her death, in the following way:

[A]s I sat alone, I betook myself to draw the resemblance of an angel upon certain tablets. And while I did thus, chancing to turn my head, I perceived that some were standing beside me to whom I should have given courteous welcome, and that they were observing what I did: also I learned afterwards that they had been there a while before I perceived them. Perceiving whom, I arose for salutation, and said: 'Another was with me.' Afterwards, when they had left me, I set myself again to mine occupation, to wit, to the drawing figures of angels: in doing which, I conceived to write of this matter in rhyme, as for her anniversary, and to address my rhymes unto those who had just left me. (294).

Here, as with the predicament of the earth-bound lover and the narrator in "The Blessed Damozel," the concentrated efforts required, on the part of both Dantes, to render that which is beyond human perception and direct sense experience is explored by emphases on the strains and efforts of artistic labour to render what Rossetti called, in a letter to his friend, Lowes Dickinson, a devotion to things that were not "so familiar to the eye;" he says that what is immediately before us can "be rendered thoroughly with much less labor" and so the real skill (and therefore, the implied recognition of merit) lies in rendering ideal abstractions—dreams, memories, and longings—in fleshly terms (*Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* 335).

In both his sketch of Dante's drawing an angel to commemorate Beatrice and in his early work on "The Blessed Damozel" we see some of the initial workings-out of Rossetti's later poetic aesthetics typified in the Sonnets that would eventually make up *The House of Life*. In "Heart's Hope," for instance, Rossetti describes the inextricable relation between the body and the soul that is announced through "word's power" (1) and "Song" (3). In writing, "[t]hy soul I know not from thy body, nor / Thee from myself, neither our love from God" (7-8), at the close of the sonnet's octet, Rossetti understands how, through an intensity of imagery, his sonnet, "some poor rhythmic period" (5), reveals the simultaneous powers and limits of mimesis to compensate for the absence of the beloved, herself. In addition, the words seem to carry a kind of secular-sacred resonance in that they seek to enact, through language, the observation they make. My reading, here, is along similar lines to Alison Milbank's discussion of how "Heart's Hope" functions as a kind of "secular transubstantiation" in which language seeks to 'perform' or 'do' what it means—that is, it attempts to achieve, at least in language, the unity Rossetti yearns for in life (*Dante and the Victorians* 130).

sketch, and the earth-bound lover, in the poem, both turn to imaginative work, in verbal / visual forms, so as to conjure up re-presentations or imaginative memorials of their beloveds who are separated from them by death. In both texts, art becomes an outlet for boredom, for the frustrations of desire, and for melancholia.

Dante's sketch of an angel is meant to be an act which commemorates and memorializes Beatrice but the interruption from work that the sketch portrays draws attention to art as a pursuit after unity and wish fulfillment that is often frustrated or interrupted by contingencies within, but also beyond, personal control. In this sketch, the limits of mimesis are also represented by the fact of the significant gap between heaven and earth, between time and eternity. On the wrong side of the grave, Dante seeks a connection with Beatrice through art.²⁷ The dramatic distance between the poet-lover and his typically absent or unattainable beloved is a central argumentative and stylistic feature of the Italian poems Rossetti began translating, even before he was twenty. According to McGann, Rossetti's poetic reflexivity (in which his art is often a commentary on the process of creativity itself) is in keeping with the *stilnovista* tradition in which the poem's "argument—its ideas—are incarnations of the work's stylistic procedures" ("Herbert Horne's 'Diversi Colores' (1891): Incarnating the Religion of Beauty" 535).²⁸ For

²⁷ This fact becomes, for Dante, a concrete manifestation of remembering on the one hand and ultimately a *via affirmativa*, enacted by a poetics of prayer, that explores the soul's path to God through experiences of earthly and divine love. As with Dante's drawing of an angel, the earth-bound lover's / narrator's imagining of the damozel reinforces the fact that one desires, one longs, one waits and hopes (against all odds) for unity with that which is loved but absent.

²⁸ Rossetti's interest in medievalism is always an intensely self-reflexive one, largely rooted in a philosophic interest with the *stilnovista* tradition, in which methods and forms of artistic creation are as important as the arguments of the poems themselves. Rossetti's intensive reflexivity—which I suggest is figured through the perspective of the narrator / percipient (which may also be the lover's self-reflexive commentary on his dream) in "The Blessed Damozel"—is characteristic of an emerging modern poetic

instance, repetitive phrasing and images of flowers and references to the beloved female's gaze (or her withholding of it) are characteristic in these romantic, Italian poems; they appear and re-appear as the means through which the problem of thwarted love is explored, as especially instanced in Ciullo's D'Alcamo's "Dialogue: Lover and Lady" which served as the opening poem for both Rossetti's 1861 *The Early Italian Poets* and his 1874 *Dante and His Circle*.

D'Alcamo's poem dramatizes a dialogue between a male lover in pursuit of his distant, female beloved, a pursuit he undertakes through insistent and repeated avowals of his love. The male lover finally achieves his aim: the resistant and remote lady "gives [him] entrance" to her room (the lady's opening up of her chamber to the male pursuant is, of course, an indirect, albeit explicit, way of saying his persistence earns him the opportunity to pluck the "crimson rose" (71), which is the opportunity he has been seeking throughout the entire flirtation the poem stages) (256). Although both the yearning for consummation expressed by the pursuant lover in D'Alcamo's poem and the iambic, alternating trimeter and tetrameter metrical pattern are used by Rossetti in his poem, "The Blessed Damozel" is continually sidetracked by frustration and boredom (and does not end in a moment of sexual encounter). At the poem's close, for example, the damozel's insistence that one day in the future her lover will be reunited with her in heaven is put into question by her tears:

sensibility in which form, as in Ezra Pound (who owes several poetic debts to Rossetti), often supersedes, but also creates, poetic signification.

She gazed and listened and then said,

Less sad of speech than mild,--

“All this is when he comes.” She ceased.

The light thrilled towards her, fill’d

With angels in strong level flight.

Her eyes prayed, and she smil’d.

(I saw her smile). But soon their path

Was vague in distant spheres:

And then she cast her arms along

The golden barriers,

And laid her face between her hands,

And wept. (I heard her tears). (133-144)

In this closing scene of the poem (which remains the same throughout Rossetti’s re-workings of it), the damozel’s tears contradict her speech, thus begging the question as to whether or not her comment, “[a]ll this is when he comes,” is a kind of insistence or wish as opposed to the observation of a known fact confirmed by faith (a conviction in things unseen).²⁹

²⁹ Rossetti’s bracketing of the narrator’s involvement (or intrusion) into this scene is important at the formal register of the poem, in particular: the brackets seem to reinforce the damozel’s dilemma as an experience that is reported by another (and thus, in a manner similar to Tennyson’s “Mariana,” female emotion is heavily mediated through the male gaze). However, this bracketing also suggests that the narrator is attempting to bracket himself out of the narrative, to draw as little attention to his status as witness of the damozel’s smile, speech, and tears, so as to allow the powerful emotion of the poem, the agony of

In every version of the poem, despite the various revisions Rossetti made to it over a series of decades, the central image is that of a sexually charged woman's longing for the arrival of her lover. Her yearning is described visually and verbally—it is presented in her wishes (67) and prayers (69) as well as in her tears (143) and, even more expressly, in the ways her body's warmth and pose structure the poem's opening. Her "robe, ungirt from clasp to hem" (7), her "hair . . . yellow like ripe corn" (11-12), and her "bosom" warming the bar of heaven as she presses against it (in frustration and longing) (44-45), suggest the poem's psycho-sexual tensions.³⁰ They also embody, as Michael Wheeler observes, the "tragic gap between past and future" that is caused by "[d]esire unfulfilled" (*Heaven, Hell and the Victorians* 154). The spatial-temporal region Rossetti imagines in order to give flesh to this gap suggests an existential limbo which, in fact, was becoming something of a growing poetic (as opposed to a theological) conception in Victorian England.³¹

unfulfilled desire and the restlessness of boredom, to signify as the main source of meaning and significance.

³⁰ Also, as many have pointed out, especially Elisabeth S. Gitter, lustrous and abundant hair on display in the Victorian period represented female fertility and a sexual potency bordering on wantonness ("The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination" 938). The damozel is, at once, a chaste, nun-like figure who holds "three lilies in her hand" (5), the flowers of purity that also index the Annunciation and Mary's docility of will to that of God's, and yet she is also clearly sexually pent-up: she passionately presses against the bar of heaven and weeps for her absent earth-bound lover.

³¹ Alison Milbank notes that the development of the concept of limbo in art and poetry, in the nineteenth century, stemmed from a growing Protestant tendency to "elide hell and purgatory," thus problematizing the idea of eternal damnation (an uncomfortable belief) on the one hand and reconceiving solitude and isolation along increasingly secular, as opposed to theological, lines on the other (*Dante and the Victorians* 211). Increasingly, limbo was available as a kind of free-floating signifier that could be taken up by those uncomfortable with specific theological commitments in order to explore the liminal space between death and heaven or death and hell (that is, between death, judgment, and reward / punishment). Rossetti

In “The Blessed Damozel,” we can see that Rossetti’s rendering of Heaven is very unlike the one presented in Dante’s *Commedia* and, moreover, it also departs from the pattern of growth towards spiritual love which begins at the end of *La Vita Nuovo*. David Sanstroem comments that “[t]he Damozel, though in heaven, has lost none of her humanity in translation, and in fact is a more recognizable human being than Beatrice ever was on earth. She addresses herself to the reader’s senses more than Beatrice does” (*Rossetti and the Fair Lady* 21). While, throughout *La Vita Nuovo*, the loss of Beatrice remains a problem, Dante comes to transform (perhaps one could say transubstantiate) the haunting fact of her death, in his *Commedia*: Beatrice becomes a means of spiritual sanctification to the point where, when Dante finally enters Paradise, his gaze no longer focuses on Beatrice but, instead, on Divine Love itself and he claims that words (art, poetry, imagination and memory) cannot even attempt to express the “fathomless / Clear substance” (XXXIII: 115-116), the Trinity, that he beholds: “[h]ow weak are words, and how unfit to frame / My concept—which lags what was shown / So far, ’twould flatter to

collapses the theological distinctions between Heaven and Earth in “The Blessed Damozel” (or, we could also say, their distinctions are not part of his interest or motivation for writing, whereas they are absolutely central to Alighieri’s aesthetic poetics). For instance, the ghost of Jacob Marley in *A Christmas Carol* (1843) suggests a kind of limbo-roaming ghost who comes as close to the plight of King Hamlet Senior, a purgatory-plagued ghost, as a rather anti-Papist Dickens would allow.

This tendency to explore limbo as a quasi-spiritual, quasi-secular phenomenon particularly picked up as commonplace in the early twentieth century. T.S. Eliot, for example, following Charles Baudelaire in *Les Fleurs des mal* (who had originally intended to name his text, ‘Les Limbes’), explores the psycho-spiritual consequences of interminable waiting, isolation, and the loss of communal relationships throughout *The Waste Land*, creating not only a modernist rendering of various circles of Hell, as found in Dante’s *Inferno*, but also specifically collapsing the distinctions between hell, purgatory, and even glimpses of heaven. In so doing, Eliot generates a kind of limbo-like state of shades, ambiguities, and longings for the transcendent. In invoking the aestheticism of limbo, Eliot is able to explore, among other things, the banality of everyday life when it is bereft of a sacramental / supernatural vision, while, arguably, also leaving his poem (represented by the wasted land itself) open to the possibility of new life, to the kind of hell-harrowing that occurs in Canto IV (lines 52-63) of Dante’s *Inferno*.

call it lame!” (XXXIII: 121-123). However, such a transformation does not occur in Rossetti’s work.

His Dantean-inflected art remains decidedly within the rhetorical framework of *La Vita Nuovo*, prior to Chapter XLI where a discernible shift from melancholia over loss is transformed into a sense of death’s transformative power (from this point in the text, Beatrice becomes not only Dante’s love interest but a kind of guardian or Marian figure, too). Interestingly, in this Chapter of *La Vita Nuova*, Dante, like Rossetti’s earth-bound lover, has a vision of his dead beloved. However, as Milbank points out, this vision serves as a spur to help Dante imagine the possibility of spiritual transformation. Until this vision, *La Vita Nuovo* is largely “characterized by anxiety and alienation which is figured in its poetic sequence by the distance of the speaker from the figure of Amore at the heart of a circle in Chapter XII;” this anxiety is not dealt with until a poetics of transcendence, of praise, breaks through self-preoccupation and Beatrice becomes, as Milbank puts it, “no longer an object but a subjectivity,” an “epistemology rather than a resting-place or a mirror” (*Dante and the Victorians* 130-31). However, such a change eludes all versions of “The Blessed Damozel.” In contrast to the teleological trajectory shaping Dante’s pilgrimage, which is intimated at the close of *La Vita Nuovo* and which constitutes the poetic pilgrimage undertaken throughout Dante’s traveling of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, Rossetti’s earth-bound lover and the damozel remain focused on loss and interminable waiting. The strains of a Dantean afterlife in Rossetti’s poetry are strong but they remain the strains of Dante’s younger, poetic self which has not yet embarked on a pilgrimage of purgation and self-renunciation.

This fact is reinforced, and rehearsed, in that the distance between heaven and earth remains, throughout all drafts of “The Blessed Damozel,” one of the central thematic problems causing affective discontent and boredom in particular. For Rossetti, heaven allegorizes the predicament of waiting, of boredom—it is, literally, a place in which nothing happens for the damozel (except the confirmation of the continual absence of her beloved).³² This point is made especially clear if we compare Rossetti’s 1850 version of “The Blessed Damozel,” published in *The Germ*, with what most scholars agree is most likely a transcription of the (now lost) earliest draft of the poem from 1847. While no clear extant copy of the first draft of the poem remains, McGann says that the Pierpont Morgan manuscript from 1855 is, most probably, a “memorial reconstruction” of the first version of the poem which Rossetti gave to Robert Browning as a present in 1855 (Rossetti Archive). Among others, one important difference between the 1850

³² Dante Gabriel’s rendering of heaven was critiqued by Christina Rossetti. For Christina, neither of her brothers understood what heaven meant and, as a result, neither of them understood her faith and hope in the after-life. Her lyric “De Profundis” (1876) can be read as, among other things, a response to the ways both her brothers were not interested in anything other than the aesthetic possibilities of rendering heaven (that is to say, neither were interested in its possible theological implications). The opening lines to Christina’s poem seem a direct recasting of the predicament of separation that also opens “The Blessed Damozel”: “Oh why is heaven built so far, / Oh why is earth set so remote? / I cannot reach the nearest star / That hangs afloat” (1-4). Here, Christina imagines an earth-bound pilgrim, “bound with fleshly bands” (13) who longs to reach the heavens. Interestingly, if we read the poem as a response to “The Blessed Damozel,” Christina not only assumes the male role of the earth-bound lover but also makes the erotic dilemma a spiritual one. Most importantly, though, Christina is expressing how her desire to escape the earth is a spiritually motivated one. Here, boredom is entirely regulated to the earth and to the spheres below heaven: “I would not care to reach the moon, / One round monotonous of change; / Yet even she repeats her tune / Beyond my range” (5-8). The only thing that will satisfy Christina is a life in heaven, free from all earthly things.

Christina implies, through her fixed longing for heaven, that the earthly realm and the entire cosmos (and even human beings, then) are boring and dissatisfying in comparison to heaven. Robert Plutchik describes boredom as a state of surfeit, bordering on disgust, with current circumstances and Christina’s spiritual *taedium vitae* suggests such a kind of disgust with anything that is of the flesh and not of the spirit (qtd. in Toohey, 16). Extending Plutchik’s reading, Toohey suggests that boredom, as disgust, is often involved with the individual conscience: “[i]f disgust protects humans from infection,” he writes, “boredom may protect them from ‘infectious’ social situations: those that are confined, predictable, too samey for one’s sanity” (*Boredom: A Lively History* 17). Christina’s boredom with the everyday life is, in “De Profundis” a holy boredom, a desire to enter the realm of fulfillment—which, for her, is Heaven.

version published in *The Germ* and the reconstructed version of the Pierpont Morgan Manuscript is that the fifth, sixth and seventh stanzas of the ballad of the 1850 version stress the insurmountable distance between the damozel, in heaven, and the earth-bound lover. For example, the “terrace” (25) the damozel is standing on, in the 1850 version, is “[b]eyond all depth and height” (42) (a fact Rossetti takes care to describe in detail).³³ By contrast, in the Pierpont Morgan Manuscript version, Rossetti devotes only the fifth stanza to exploring the distance between the damozel’s new home and earth. As he continued to re-work the poem, Rossetti increasingly intensified the sense of distance and separation between the two lovers, thus casting the problem of boredom into greater and greater relief.

In transforming heaven into a private realm constituted by his own poetic logic, Rossetti shapes a liminal space (and, in terms of his later painting’s frame, *etches* and *inscribes* a space) that explores the waiting and frustration caused by boredom, by the

³³ Given that he made this change while also working on translating *La Vita Nuovo*, it is plausible that Rossetti was re-working the predicament of the lovers in a specifically Dantean way. However, Rossetti is appealing to the moments of absence between lovers in Dante’s work and not to the growing union between Dante and Beatrice that is hinted at, towards the end of *La Vita Nuovo* and which, more specifically, enables Dante’s spiritual pilgrimage in *Comedia*.

Interestingly, the fascination with the process of explaining the development of emotional and psychological states, which included deferral, was what Ezra Pound would come to value most in the Romance poetry of the early Italian poets. Often appealing directly to Rossetti’s translations, Pound describes the Early Italian poets as offering one of the richest psychological renderings of the range of human emotion in poetry. More specifically, he sees the Italian poets, especially Guido Cavalcanti, as those who are attuned to the exhaustion or depletion of desire as well (a crucial understanding, for Pound, of the complex relationship between longing and frustration in lyric poetics): “[t]han Guido Cavalcanti no psychologist of the emotions is more keen in his understanding, more precise in his expression; we have in him no rhetoric, but always a true description, whether it be of pain itself, or of the apathy that comes when the emotions and possibilities of emotion are exhausted . . .” (“Cavalcanti Poems” 16). Here, Pound points to the importance of Cavalcanti’s, and by extension the Italian Poets,’ discernment of emotional exhaustion and frustration as dysphoric conditions which bear out important implications for lyric poetry and the process of writing it. In the late 1840s and early-to-mid-850s, Rossetti’s re-draftings of “The Blessed Damozel” seem to slowly take on a keener interest in finding ways to tease-out the problem of thwarted passion and the dividends that loss present for art.

loss, or deferral, of one's desired fulfillment. Such a transvaluation, on Rossetti's part, is not, I suggest, his attempt to rework theological considerations about the after-life (as was often the case in Victorian handlings of Heaven and marriage). Instead, it seeks to further explore the complex, and fascinating, inter-connections between a series of influences that attracted and inspired Rossetti from his adolescence, onwards: the Italian poets, a growing interest in the relationship between desire and its disappointment, and a developing appreciation for the ways in which effort and boredom, as well as repetition and limitations, are inextricable parts of the process of poetry writing, itself. The highly wrought artificiality of "The Blessed Damozel" seems to announce its own remoteness from any specific time or place but, nevertheless, this does not prevent us from considering how the dramatic tensions between unfulfilled desire and time that moves too slowly are fundamental themes in the poem. Moreover, "The Blessed Damozel" glosses a series of mid-Victorian, and emerging modern themes: boredom, epistemological crises, sexual frustration, and obsessions with repetition. Rossetti's handling of boredom in "The Blessed Damozel" is a varied one; as theme and process, boredom draws connections between a series of topics, especially those concerning desire, time, the role of individual talent in the context of poetic tradition, and, implicitly, the ways in which Rossetti's expressly aesthetic interests converge with certain strands of emerging, modern and social interests. In the next section of this Chapter, I will explore the ways in which boredom, as aesthetic theme and process, is particularly apparent in Rossetti's paintings from the late 1850s, onwards.

3.3 Women in Limbo: Boredom as Personal History and Aesthetic Process in Rossetti's *La Pia De' Tolomei* and *The M's at Ems*

With only a few exceptions, Rossetti never publicly exhibited his paintings. *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848-49), his first painting and the first Pre-Raphaelite work to be put on exhibition, was displayed in March 1849. Originally, he had also intended to showcase *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (1849-50), a companion piece to *The Girlhood*, at the annual Royal Academy exhibition of 1849; however, he changed his mind and showed it at the exhibition of the National Institution. In general, however, he tended to showcase his paintings privately, to friends, family, patrons and, only rarely, at small-scale organized events (Elizabeth Prettejohn, "The Paintings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti" 108). Rossetti's turn towards more private, independent projects, from the 1850s onwards, suggests his growing interests in aesthetic styles and subjects that were not always in keeping with the parameters of the initial P.R.B. program and also demonstrate his turn to other kinds of collaborative projects, such as Moxon's *Illustrated Tennyson* and the Oxford Union Murals Project (1857-59) which was also something of a failure (a story I discuss, at more length, in my next Chapter, on William Morris). These two collaborative projects, along with paintings such as *The Tune of Seven Towers* (1857) demonstrate Rossetti's growing fascination with the fundamental elements of drawing (line, colour, pattern, shape, and setting) and, also, show his growing preoccupation with boredom and complex renderings of time in relation to space, desire, and atmosphere.³⁴

³⁴ For example, *The Tune of the Seven Towers* presents an ambiguously restless, melancholic scene (perhaps the lady of the painting is awaiting her lover who has gone off to the Crusades? Regardless of express context, she appears to be stuck in a period of waiting like Mariana and the damozel). The painting is also a gorgeous exploration of vibrant colour and repeat patterns—modeled, Helsing suggests, by the "heraldic device embroidered on the pennant" that works as an "initiating impulse" for the complex inter-

Rossetti's explorations of powerful feeling and complex relationships to time are, of course, as essential to many of his paintings and sketches, throughout the 1850s, as they are to his re-workings of "The Blessed Damozel" and his later project, *The House of Life*. As my Introduction to this Chapter notes, Rossetti's interests in sketching Elizabeth Siddal in various repetitious and boring settings (in which she is waiting, longing, or even absent-minded) shows his interest in how boredom is a psycho-somatic, as well as temporal, problem, affecting spatial organization and renderings of the body (and its energy levels). However, his increasing interest in painting women, specifically Jane Morris, in various states of bored poses and confining settings, underscores how the problem of being-held-in-limbo, that "The Blessed Damozel" stages, reaches a new pitch from the late 1850s, onwards, when he "launched," as Helsinger puts it, "what would become his series of paintings of women" (163). These paintings tend to depict women in confined and restless positions which are suggestive of boredom, sexual repression, and melancholia, among other things. The poses of these various women can be read as indexes to questions about desire and time that are, as I have discussed earlier, connected to the problem of boredom as theme and aesthetic process in Rossetti's art.

In Rossetti's work, the looming presence of discontented and confined women insist on the fundamentally, irreducible, fact of the body's relation to boredom in his paintings. The body, itself, is the locus of meaning and signification, functioning as a kind of somatic clock (measuring out loss), a representation of potential or unexplored

weavings of colour with shape that comprise the depths of field and the arrangement of figures (*Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts* 9).

sexual potential, and as a material object bearing witness to the intensification of the commodification of art (and, by extension, of the very commodification of the appearances and physical identities of the women Rossetti used as models for his work) in Victorian culture. That is to say, these paintings demonstrate the ways in which such presentations and re-presentations of women in states of confinement and boredom became a kind of distilled aesthetic brand for Rossetti: his paintings, either bought or commissioned by patrons were often re-workings of almost identical settings, themes, and explorations of female beauty, power, and dissatisfaction. As a result, we can read boredom, in Rossetti's paintings, as not only temporal and aesthetic themes but also as an index to forms of economic exchange.³⁵ Indeed, Helsing argues that Rossetti's associations with the growing link between production and reproduction that characterized the growing commodity culture of nineteenth-century England became a dividend for him. He could benefit from economic support, through this growing demand for his work, and also explore, and test, the aesthetic and affective possibilities of reproduction and re-presentation, themselves, as aesthetic processes (*Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts* 10, 119-150).

Rossetti, himself, was aware of the necessary and yet problematic relationship between his art, his patrons (who were typically members of the emerging mercantile and prosperous middle-class) and himself. Speaking about some of his patrons who supported

³⁵ Zemka perceives Rossetti's paintings and poems (especially those in *The House of Life*) as being representative of a kind of "melancholic hermeneutics" in which capitalistic culture and aesthetic achievements are subsumed into an inescapable relation of exchange: art becomes a "cultural object in its own right," and then, she concludes, a form of currency (68). As the 1881 sonnet opening *The House of Life* attests, art is both a "moment's monument" ("A Sonnet is a moment's monument"1) and, as Zemka insightfully argues, a powerful form of currency and exchange (69); after all, as Rossetti himself notes, the sonnet is also a "coin" (9).

his work in the last two decades of his life, Rossetti notes that they often requested very specific settings and poses: “[t]hey are special men who buy special things and almost never effect a divergence from their limited loves” (qtd. in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* 169).³⁶ Although the specific interests and tastes of Rossetti’s patrons did certainly play a role in his painting processes, practices and interests, the repetitious and uncanny features of his work also stem from his personal history. Boredom palpably surfaces in the constrained postures and pallid complexions of red-lipped, passive women (whose combination of languid calm and sexual potency index the problem of deferred desire). Such types of women fill the canvases of Rossetti’s work throughout the 1860s and 1870s and often represent important aspects of his personal life. This is especially the case when we look at the history connecting some of the renderings of Jane Morris that Rossetti made throughout the 1860s and 1870s.

Specifically, in considering his painting, *La Pia De’ Tolomei* (which Rossetti began

in 1868 when he was on close and intimate terms with Jane), and his comic sketch, *The M’s at Ems* (1869), which recasts *La Pia* in even more personal terms, we can see the ways in which repetition, feelings of claustrophobia and boredom are not just aesthetic consequences of his patrons’ requests for similar kinds of work. They also suggest that

³⁶ Frederick Leyland, who was an important patron of Rossetti’s, favoured paintings of women accompanied by musical instruments and collected, among others, *Monna Rosa* (1867), *Veronica Veronese* (1872), and *Roman Widow* (1874) and William Graham, who purchased *Mariana* (1870) and commissioned *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-78), favoured renderings of women in still poses, saturated in rich colours. Alicia Faxon notes that Graham often hung Rossetti’s paintings besides a growing collection of Renaissance works which were complemented by the deep hues and complex renderings of light and shade that Rossetti used (*Dante Gabriel Rossetti* 169).

Rossetti's continual considerations of his thwarted, though sometimes fulfilled, passion for Jane encouraged a certain repetition compulsion in his art. This thwarted desire, in turn, generates an aesthetic of boredom in which desire's deferral is a theme as well as a catalyst for creative work. In particular, *La Pia De' Tolomei* shows, I suggest, the intimate connection between Rossetti's personal life and his exploration of similar, or overlapping, themes in his art.

The painting is an intertextual study, an exploration of Dante's *Purgatorio* and a representation of Rossetti's personal interpretation of Jane's life as boring. *La Pia De' Tolomei*, then, is also an implicit commentary, made by Rossetti, on Jane's marriage to William Morris. This will become particularly clear, of course, when we explore the ways in which Rossetti imagines the marriage between the Morrises as a bored one in his sketch, *The M's at Ems* (which directly refers to *La Pia De' Tolomei* (Figure Three) for its structural organization). Located on the way up the Second Terrace of Mount Purgatory in Dante's *Purgatorio*, La Pia was imprisoned by her husband in a fortress; she eventually died from neglect or by her husband's own hand. Completed in 1880, the painting's symbols represent imprisonment, the passing of time, and La Pia's inability to escape her present situation and her refusal to accept it (much like Tennyson's representation of Mariana in "Mariana" and "Mariana in the South"). As in *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, the space of the picture barely affords enough room for the size of the figure. La Pia almost bursts out of the side of the painting, a fact which further underscores that her condition is both limiting and boring. Twisting her wedding ring, she passes the time by daydreaming; *what exactly* she thinks about is not revealed to the viewer. However, the

painting provides interpretive clues: many of its images have to do with the passing of time.

La Pia's reclined and entrapped body is the most significant representation of the slow passing of bored time. Her unfulfilled life and desire is emphasized by the birds flying past her window; in their energetic and graceful flight, they contrast La Pia's impoverished and claustrophobic existence. David Rodgers notes that the ivy sprawling over the fortress' wall represents "clinging memory" (Rossetti 98). The sundial measures the wasting away of time and of La Pia's hopes, and the nearby, though neglected, breviary, rosary beads, and letters (possibly love letters from La Pia's former lover, now turned tyrannical husband) are more ambivalent in their significance: they appear neglected although, at certain times in her life, they were most likely sources of consolation for her. The predicament of La Pia in the painting, especially when interpreted alongside its relationship to the personal and satirical standpoint of Rossetti's 1869 sketch, *The M's at Ems* (Figure Four), indicates, among other things, how Rossetti's aesthetic concerns rest upon the condition of frustrated desire.³⁷

³⁷ These images, indicating the slow passage of time without reprieve, suggest that La Pia is in the Heideggerian temporal-spatial structure of limbo, a manifestation of what Phillips calls the "permanent suspended animation of desire" (*On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored* 78). However, it is important to qualify, here, that Heidegger's conceptualization of limbo as a spatial-temporal problem—which has helped us read the dynamics of boredom, as mood and temporal relation, in "The Blessed Damozel"—does not provide a wide enough framework for reading Rossetti's paintings of bored women. This is because Heidegger's account of limbo is largely abstract; it is largely employed as a representation of the metaphysical problem of boredom throughout *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. While Heidegger noted, in his 1928 Marburg lectures discussing Leibniz, that his use of the word Dasein is neutral, standing in for both men and women (136), he does not account enough for what Iris Marion Young has called the "particular *situation*," in history and socio-political contexts, of being a woman or man, in the world and in time (*On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* 153).

Kevin Aho also references Young's critique of Heideggerian phenomenology and gender neutrality, noting that Heidegger's use of Dasein does not account for how "public patterns of gendered domination are an



Fig. Three: La Pia De'Tolomei, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1868-1880,
Photo: © Spencer Museum of Art (U. of Kansas) [2014]

essential part of *das Man* [of the lives of men and women]" (*Heidegger's Neglect of the Body* 58). As a result, even though Heidegger's largely metaphysical approach to boredom is incredibly useful, and illuminating, for exploring the ways in which Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel" and, also, *The House of Life*, explore aesthetic attitudes towards dissatisfying relationships to time, Rossetti's paintings are always entrenched in a powerful encounter with the face of gendered and sexual difference—especially given that almost every painting announces the curious as well as problematic fact of the (male) artist's representation(s), and rendering(s), of the female body as inhibited and bored on the one hand and as a powerful, fleshly representative of personal history and of aesthetic theorizations and practices on the other.

While taking the baths during the summer of 1869 in the spa town of Ems, Germany with her husband, in an effort to restore her health, Jane Burden Morris received a series of letters, including some comical sketches, from Rossetti. In his letter to “Dear Janey,” from 21 July 1869, Rossetti enclosed *The M’s at Ems* sketch and included a little interpretation of its meaning. Rossetti imagines the scene that most likely awaited Jane Morris: she would drink of the restorative waters at Ems but become inflicted, according to the predictions of Rossetti’s sketch, by a different kind of malady: boredom. Rossetti imagined Jane’s time at Ems as being taken over by having to listen to Morris read aloud to her from his magnum opus, *The Earthly Paradise*, which was first serially published over the period of 1868 to 1870. Rossetti’s satirical sketch of the unromantic scene depicts Jane trapped in a bath tub; she appears a victim who cannot escape from Morris’ enthusiastic, almost pontificating, performance of his poem as he looms over her.

It was a point of humour among members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle in the 1850s that Morris, while courting Jane, used to read long excerpts to her from Dickens’s *Barnaby Rudge* (1841); they, of course, deemed that an unriveting way to elicit passion. It is certainly possible Rossetti had Morris’ previous courtship habits in mind when designing the pen and ink sketch. Rossetti belabours the cartoon’s already obvious meaning, saying that “[t]he accompanying cartoon will prepare you for the worse—whichever that may be, the 7 tumblers or the 7 volumes” (Fredeman 208). Although Rossetti’s joke is a valid observation of certain points of contention and frustration present in the Morris marriage (particularly in its underscoring of Morris’s almost wholly-absorbing interest in artistic and business projects that could be mundane for others, particularly Jane, to deal with), it is also hyperbolic. Morris’ *Earthly Paradise*

was published serially in three volumes, not seven, and Jane's entrapment in the bathtub as well as her reclined and frustrated, bent head is a condition that suggests Rossetti is willfully connecting her personal experience with the females suffering from frustration, boredom, and confinement who populate his paintings, particularly during the 1860s. Specifically, Jane's posture and her vacant facial



Fig. Four: *The M's at Ems*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1869, Photo: © The British Museum [2014]

expression—which seems a form of resistance to Morris and a ‘tuning out’ defense mechanism against being further bored—is deliberately reminiscent of Rossetti’s oil painting, *La Pia de’ Tolomei*, which Jane modeled for. In considering that Rossetti so obviously associates Jane with the figure of La Pia in his sketch, it becomes clear that *The M’s at Ems* is just as much, perhaps even more so, about Rossetti’s standpoint even though Jane’s condition and perspective is the one depicted. Rossetti’s passion for Jane, begun even while he was courting and then married to Elizabeth Siddal, greatly influenced his artistic projects, and, in the instance of this sketch, it becomes clear that Rossetti imagines Jane as a bored type because it is to his benefit that she be one: if Jane is tired of Morris, it is a possible indication that she would prefer the company of Rossetti. Considering the sketch in the context of *La Pia* further supports this reading; the sketch typifies, once again, how Rossetti’s unfulfilled desire was a catalyst for his artistic expression. In the next, and final, section of this Chapter, I will explore the ways in which Rossetti’s personal boredom, his unfulfilled desire, his longing for that which is absent, concretely effects his organizations and representations of time in his magnum opus, *The House of Life*.

3.4: Interruptions of “[L]ead [B]ound” Stasis: Boredom and Punctualism in Rossetti’s 1881 Version of *The House of Life*

As with “The Blessed Damozel” and his series of paintings that render women in states of boredom and confinement (from 1859 through to the 1870s), Rossetti’s *The House of Life* (1870, 1881) has a complex textual history. Among other things, it is a palimpsest of

various temporal registers, in which Rossetti's past, present, and future desires and concerns coalesce and are re-presented and re-worked, leaving traces of former poetic conceptualizations and organizations made along the way. Ronnalie Roper Howard notes that the text continually reworks "typical Rossetti themes," those "involving death as separation, the longing for union, the exalted joy of successful union" and, then, a return to the problem of frustration, yet again (*The Dark Glass: Vision and Technique in the Poetry of D.G.R.* 164). Re-workings of the sonnet sequence only ended in 1881, shortly before Rossetti's death in 1882, and one senses that the project is, by nature, interminable—aesthetically against the idea of a concrete ending. McGann offers such a reading, saying there can be no "no 'definitive' version of the sequence . . . because, in fact, DGR left the work as he originally conceived and originally described it: as a project 'Towards a Work to be Called 'The House of Life'' ('The House of Life: A Sonnet Sequence')."

The interminable nature of this amorphous, spacious, and complex house (similar to the open-ended musings Augustine offers when he speaks of both the palace of memory and the mysterious nature of time in *The Confessions*) is, however, increasingly focused on expressing frustrated desire and the wearying effects of time.³⁸ For example, the sonnet, "Lost Days," which played a central role in Rossetti's *Life, Love, and Death*

³⁸ Rossetti's aesthetic process is bound up with recurring, repetitious explorations of encounters with the "one face" of an ideal and desired beloved (Elizabeth Siddal and, from the later 1850s, onwards, Jane Morris), Rossetti's *House of Life* is at once intensely personal as well as distanced. He renders a wide-ranging series of experiences, registered in a language fraught with "the overdetermination of feeling," a kind of "open nerve," to borrow Isobel Armstrong's description of Victorian lyric poetry as typified in Tennyson and his poetic inheritors, Rossetti among them (*Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* 12).

(first published in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1867), and which became part of the later versions of *The House of Life*, encapsulates the main drama of time's passing that is exposed and explored throughout the Sonnet Sequence. The poem's octet catalogues a series of temporal, earthly losses and the sestet meditates on the possible after-lives of missed chances and unfulfilled hopes and dreams:

The lost days of my life until to-day,
 What were they, could I see them on the street
 Lie as they feel? Would they be ears of wheat
 Sown once for food but trodden into clay?
 Of golden coins squandered and still to pay?
 Or drops of blood dabbling the guilty feet?
 Or such spilt water as in dreams must cheat
 The undying throats of Hell, athirst alway?

I do not see them here; but after death
 God knows I know the faces I shall see,
 Each one murdered self, with low last breath.
 "I am thyself,--what has thou done to me?"
 "And I—and I—thyself," (lo! each one saith,)
 "And thou thyself to all eternity!" (1-14)

In the final lines of the sestet, loss and disappointments are so strong for Rossetti that they accumulate until they figure as spectral bodies. The way Rossetti presents loss as

palpable entities, possessing “faces,” is an important example of his tendency to make dysphoric feelings, lack, longing, melancholia, and boredom, present and tangible, in various ways. Using liquid vowels that require, when the poem is read out loud, a partial closing of the mouth and a dropping in tonal register, Rossetti’s “last low” (11) and “lo” (13) help render the problem of loss concrete, a paradoxically painful absence that makes itself announced, in the heart and on the tongue.³⁹

Just as “The Blessed Damozel” flirts with loss and boredom (and, indeed, originates from them both while also seeking to transcend them), *The House of Life* explores a series of powerful, emotive experiences which interrupt an otherwise persistent rendering of time as a tiring, exhausting, and boring rhythm that announces (like Tennyson’s “Mariana”) the entropic reality of nature and, existence, as heading grave-wards. Heidegger’s discussion of the first form of boredom in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* is similar to Rossetti’s handling of it in *The House of Life*. In the first form of boredom, Heidegger emphasizes the importance of *subjective* relations to the passing of time (78-93). Alison Pease glosses Heidegger’s first form of boredom as a profound exploration of the subject’s dissatisfaction with objects or other subjects—one “becomes bored by something” (*Modernism, Feminism, and the Culture of Boredom* 32). In *The Concept of Time* (1924), a shorter exploration of temporality and boredom which pre-dates *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger builds off of Aristotle’s

³⁹ As I will discuss shortly, the thematic and aesthetic effects of such an attempt to render states of feeling shows how the text is a punctualist one, in which loss, melancholia, brief close encounters between lovers, and a persistent sense of the impossibility of reunion are aroused, explored, dissolved, and inter-mingled while the text, as a whole, resists and reveals the entropic nature of existence. Moreover, these dramatic stops and starts, represented by love found and lost, show how the text explores time as a subjective as opposed to chronological phenomenon.

proposition that time is only significant, and substantial, in so far as it marks out “that within which events takes place” (3E2). Becoming bored, then, is a subjective response to time when it seems to withhold or postpone events (even though, typically, it is supposed to measure progression towards death); as a result, “boring” experiences are predicated on the sense that time is teasing the bored subject since its passing wearies and exhausts as opposed to fulfills him or her. The “measuring” out of time, Heidegger observes, makes one “worn out” (14E). By 1870, Rossetti’s organization of *The House of Life* was structured around a sense of time wearing the subject out.

Organizing the text into two categories, “Youth and Change” and “Change and Fate,” Rossetti explores being-in-time as a series of varied experiences, many of which delight only momentarily and, when gone, leave an aftertaste of disappointment. Various moments of ecstasy, brief recollections of “lips” “play[ing]” with “lips” in “consonant interlude” (“The Kiss” 5-6); of the “[s]weet dimness of . . . loosened hair’s downfall” (“Love-Sweetness” 1); and of the “[c]ling[ing] heart to heart” (“Love and Hope” 9) are counterpointed with a growing sense of the “[s]teep ways and weary” of lost love and the fact that death and suffering are inevitable (“Without Her” 12). The record of personal events, of distinct and unrepeatable moments, involving the continual interplay between desires lost, interrupted, found, and hoped for, seeks to challenge the otherwise relentless, monotonous ticking of the clock. For example, in the 1881 edition of *The House of Life*, Rossetti yet again reorganized the sequencing of his sonnets and opened the text with a meditation on the “Sonnet,” itself, as being a “moment’s monument,— / Memorial from the Soul’s eternity / To one dead deathless hour” (1-3). The monumental writing that is each sonnet in *The House of Life* gives life, through memory and ink, to various

interruptions, epiphanies, and profound experiences of loss. Time, in *The House of Life*, is moving towards the grave, hurried on by the fact of lost dreams which “cheat” the poet as “spilt water” taunts the souls in Hell (“Lost Days” 7-8). However, Time’s linear trajectory is continually side-stepped or derailed by flashes of ecstasy and pain, hope and uncertainty that, cumulatively, create an ambiguous and punctualist rendering of time as it continually moves grave-wards but is perpetually sidetracked by various experiences.⁴⁰ In general, the trajectory of *The House of Life* is one of growing exhaustion, a sense of the possibilities and inevitable limitations of mimesis itself. However, this is not the whole story as the text also marks, and re-marks, a series of moments in which powerful desires are fulfilled or painful disappointments faced. These moments possess a special kind of challenging power to routine modes of measuring time.

While boredom in “The Blessed Damozel,” *The M’s at Ems*, *La Pia d’Tolomei* and the other paintings I discussed in the previous section of this Chapter is bound up with limbo as a spatial-temporal construction signifying frustrated desire, *The House of Life* can be seen as exploring the temporal unit of ‘the minute’ which Zemka describes as the “primary” measurement of time and a “central artistic conceit” in Victorian, Industrial England (*Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* 1). According to Zemka, the minute, as a temporal unit, is an ambivalent, even paradoxical, one: it signals the growing homogenization and streamlining of social rhythms (such as workday

⁴⁰ These varied, often fluctuating and ambiguous states of feeling led William Michael Rossetti, among others, to feel the need to “supply prose paraphrases” for each sonnet in *The house of Life* (Rossetti Archive). Rossetti was quite aware of this aesthetic ambiguity, noting, in 1870, that he wished to explore “personified emotions” so as to “put in action a complete ‘dramatis personae’ of the soul” (Fredeman 70.110), thus giving concrete definition to things absent, lost, difficult, and longed for.

routines and train schedules) on the one hand and the interruption of such routines, on the other. Zemka describes punctualist time as an increasingly favoured temporal category in poetry written during the industrialization of Victorian England. Punctualism is an aestheticization of the “moment,” which, as such, seeks to counter the tendency of clock-time to have main purchase on its function and signification. In Industrialist Victorian culture, Zemka note that the moment, as a temporal unit, signified in two ways: as a “primary temporal unit [of the clock] and [as] a central artistic conceit” which often seeks to subvert its appropriation by clock-time (1). Zemka asserts that moments, spots in time (as it were), can interrupt routine and monotony and, as such, become quasi-sacred:

Moments that emerge from an undifferentiated flow of time, moments that break routines and habits: almost universally, such events are hallowed for their power. They bring insight, concentration of meaning, ecstasy. They are linked to the event, which in contemporary thought bears the responsibility for change. That sudden, remarkable changes are qualified temporally, as moments or instants, alerts us to something so obvious as to be ignored. The moment is a punctualist form; it is over in a flash, though its effects may linger. What we are approaching is a family of experiences predicated on brevity. This much seems clear: moments become more precise, more punctualist, in societies that measure time with analog and digital clocks. Moments become smaller, insofar as in colloquial usage certainly by the late nineteenth century—they are interchangeable with the instant. (1)

Zemka’s discussion of the increasing emphasis, in mid-to-late Victorian poetry, on the moment as a central aesthetic topic underscores how, increasingly, the sonnet and other

poetic forms, such as the ballad, were used as a means of setting up alternate ways to measure out time. These alternative methods of time management and measurement were rooted in a heterogeneous time consciousness. Specifically, a growing interest in appropriating the temporal unit of the moment for aesthetic purposes, as opposed to mechanized or industrial ones, opened up new possibilities for viewing rhythms of routine and repetition in Victorian England. Uninterested in measuring out the progress of capitalism's aims, writers, in their handlings of the moment, sought to track experiences of love, loss, frustration, and passion. In other words, the moment came to signify as a romantic, temporal category which expressed, in a rather Wordsworthian vein, an understanding of poetry as the expression of the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (*Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* 611). Indirectly, then, this aesthetic recuperation of the moment implicitly critiqued and countered industrial time.

Punctualist experiences of time are inevitably less predictable and manageable than the tick-tock of the clock and, as a result, serve to interrupt the growing conception of time as a homogenous, "undifferentiated" measurement of repetition, of "routines and habits" (Zemka 1). In other words, poetry that centres on the temporal unit of the moment seeks to privilege experience over the patterns of clock-time measurement and seeks to evade the boring trajectory of industrial practices and linear time which both threaten the poet, at every turn, throughout *The House of Life*.⁴¹ In *The House of Life*, however, such a

⁴¹ Such aestheticized and particularized focuses on the "moment," Zemka argues, can be viewed as one, among many, of the origins of emerging Modernist experimentations with style and temporal flow in narrative: "Pater's moments, Joyce's epiphanies: echoes of these aesthetic statements on the importance of figures of brevity survive in contemporary critical discourse, whenever moments of rupture or moments of textual, psychological, or historical exceptionality are invoked" (*Time and the Moment* 10). *The House of Life* is an implicit resistance to the development of standardized, mechanized time in England in the 1850s,

threat is continually countered: each moment is made distinct, like a staccato, interruption or puncture, as opposed to one more tick-tock.⁴²

onwards. As a result, interestingly, Rossetti's aesthetic fascination with rendering the processes of desiring and exploring various ends, as opposed to fulfilling or achieving any of them per se, is not unlike Jacques Derrida's "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy." Specifically, among other things, Derrida argues that the apocalypse signifies most uniquely and productively when the process of desiring, as opposed to concentrating on the end itself, is the focus of interpretation. The teleologically-oriented desire for the end of the world, for the consummation of history—which is at the heart of Christian mysticism and revelation, in particular (and, as Derrida notes, is echoed or "adopted" in philosophical discourses of the 'end' of particular phases of history, as instanced in Hegel's and Marx's interests in achieving a kind of secular eschaton)—is, Derrida suggests, most fruitfully understood as an invitation to read expectation as a form of "contemplation" as opposed to "catastrophe" (64). That is to say, the desire for the 'end' becomes sidetracked by an interest in examining the processes involved *in* desiring the end. The dynamics of desire, the readings of tone (which are involved in longing for an end) become, Derrida suggests, the very work of eschatological thinking, the work of commenting on desiring the end—as opposed to strictly focusing on the end itself (65-90). Throughout "Of an Apocalyptic Tone," Derrida examines the ways in which we can "mul[tiply] the distinctions between closure and end" so as to speak "of discourses *on* the end rather than announcing the end" (90). *The House of Life* also seeks to contemplate various moments, be they about loss or fulfillment, and, as a result, does not focus on the final results of these experiences but, rather, on what it was like to be *in the process* of these encounters.

As Kevin Mills notes, Derrida's deconstruction of Kant's distinction between "reason" and "prophecy," a deconstruction which troubles the ability to ascertain both distinctive, singular tones and trajectories in narrative is particularly useful for approaching aesthetic renderings of desire in Victorian poetics and novel-writing: two broad categories of writing which at least *appear* to rely on narrative structures even though they often tend to resist both the meaning the structures imply and, in fact, centre on the desire for things which are absent or not-yet-here (*Approaching Apocalypse: Unveiling Revelation in Victorian Writing* 191-92). Rossetti's narratives exemplify the derailing, diffusing proclivities Mills discerns in Victorian general patterns of narration throughout the nineteenth century: Victorian "metaphors, rhetoric, and images [are] associated with . . . limits," he writes, and are "endemic [in most] Victorian writings—whether these limits are spatial, temporal, physical, psychological or textual" (192).

⁴² While there are not many explicit discussions, in Rossetti's letters, about time-keeping or watches, there is an interesting passage in William Holman Hunt's *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* which recounts an anecdote Rossetti told about his dislike for forms of repetitive work that were strictly mechanistic in nature. Although repetition, his continual seeking out of "[o]ne face" ("In Artist's Studio") and his launching of a series of similar looking women throughout the late 1850s, onwards, is integral to Rossetti's aesthetic themes and processes, these forms of repetition are punctualist and organic, modeled on the variations and vacillations of human desire.

Before co-founding the P.R.B., Rossetti was offered a job at a telegraphic office, when "telegraphy was in its first development" (Hunt 291) so this was most likely in the mid-1840s. Rossetti was sent to meet the principal at the telegraph office, in the Nine Elms district of London, to be shown what kind of work would be involved if he accepted the position. Hunt recalls Rossetti saying that when he was shown that his job would consist in pulling a handle that made two dials "clock, click, click" and move about "in fits," Rossetti could not suppress his laughter or his disgust (292). Upon seeing that his work would be a continual, monotonous pulling of a lever, to transmit messages, day in and day out, Rossetti promptly thanked the principal but refused the job, saying "it would be absolutely useless for me to undertake the work. I could not do it" (292). Hunt concludes this comic anecdote by thinking it better not

My point is not, by any means, to suggest that Rossetti deliberately set out, in *The House of Life*, to resist the industrial clock-time regulating railway timetables, labour time-keeping, and traveling schedules. However, his creation of temporal models that become side-tracked from linear progression and which privilege recurrence, repetition, and passion as a kind of subjective chronometer, instead, bear an implicit challenge to the encroaching patterns of uniformity in the routines of the public and private spheres of Victorian everyday life and living.⁴³ For Rossetti, life was to imitate art, as he outlined as

only for Rossetti but also for England that he was not left in charge of telegraph operations as he might have become sorely tempted to appease the boredom of the job by interfering with the communications, and, especially, by interfering with political affairs (292).

From the 1840s, onwards, Victorian literature, news and scientific pamphlets were often cluttered with praises of, and musings on, the possibilities of the telegraphic system, seeing it as the harnessing of electricity (of lightning) for the goals of imperial and technological progress. As Iwan Rhys Marus explains, “[c]ommentators waxed lyrical over the way in which the new invention made the mysterious fluid, electricity, subservient to mankind. It was as if a way had been found of harnessing the lightning” (“The Nervous System of Britain’: Space, Time and the Electric Telegraph in the Victorian Age” 256). Despite the excitement of what telegraphic systems could offer, the actual work of managing was mind-numbingly boring and the thought of Rossetti manning the telegraph dials is as humorous as it is implausible. Routine and mechanized forms of repetition were abhorrent to him—he lived by his own internal rhythms, as it were, which were far more interested in the movements of desire and inspiration than they were about keeping regular schedules, time-keeping, and being subsumed into the strictures of increasingly mechanized forms of labour (no matter how interesting, and even quasi-poetic, the consequences of some of these technological forms were).

Of course, the imposition of standard, public time was not only a problem for artists and a signal of a growing technocracy of the kind Heidegger would radically reproach in *Insight Into What Is* (1949) and “The Question of Technology” (1954). It also afforded the further opening up of trans-continent borders and, as Jason R. Rudy has recently noted in *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics* (2009) electricity became a potent metaphor, even a metaphysical conceit, for Victorian poets explorations of the human body (58-62).

*** I am grateful to Dr. D.M.R. Bentley for alerting me to this passage on Rossetti and how it would be a useful narrative to include in an exploration of how Rossetti’s relationship to repetition and boredom (of various kinds) is a deeply ambivalent and nuanced one.

⁴³ Stephen Kern notes, in *The Culture of Space and Time*, that while a significant portion of Victorians embraced the advancement of technology, others did not care for the growing intensification of “temporal precision” which was brought to a new pitch in “the age of electricity” (15). This was because, among other things, many understood “[p]unctuality and the recording of work time,” through such precise methods, as an inauthentic mode of human management which was, for Proust, “superficial,” for Kafka, “terrifying,”

early as *Hand and Soul* (1849) and in art, various unique moments (unique because measured according to subjective experience) are what make meaning.⁴⁴

Like Pater's moments at the close of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), *The House of Life* explores time as a phenomenological and aesthetic exploration of "any moment of intense feeling encountered in a world that scientific enquiry, rational thought, 'analysis' itself have [often] reduced to a state of enervation [and mechanism] and entropy," as Jonathan Fredeman puts it (*Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture* 64-5). In fact, it is telling how much Pater took to

and for Jocye, "arbitrary and ill-suited to order the diverse temporal experiences of life" (15, 17). As Kern puts it, emerging modern authors sought to challenge the "forward movement of the clocks" and the growing obsession with the myth of progress; increasingly, texts offered confusing and challenging views of complex temporal modes in which past, present, and future were fluid and measured by the "irregular rhythms" of personal desire (29). The "heterogeneity of private time" was growing increasingly at odds with "public time" and this theme became a pressing one in various later Victorian and early twentieth-century texts which explored the relationship between personal meaning and the encroaching influences of "routine public time" on the individual (Kern 16). Interestingly enough, however, despite the monotony of the telegraph post, Rossetti's *The House of Life* does not simply plot out resistances and succumbings to a bored, linear mode of time measuring out our way to the grave.

Its turns and challenges, its punctualisms, oddly align with Victorian descriptions of the telegraph itself as a technological mode that required its operator to "'read' patterns of pulsing sound" and, as a result, shows the ways in which acts of reading and attention, to all aspects of life, are profoundly "experienced first as a language of stress," as Jason R. Rudy argues (*Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics* 63). "Like the relay points of an intricate telegraph network," as Rudy would describe the interplay between electricity, mechanisms, and sound, *The House of Life* is a text that grew out of profoundly psychological as well as physiological experiences—the unearthing of Rossetti's only extant manuscript of poems, which came to form a bulk of *The House of Life*, from Elizabeth Siddal's grave being the example par excellence of the physicality, of the grim visceral quality, behind the sonnet sequences development as a whole (an example which rapidly grew into a myth of greatly exaggerated proportions) (Rudy 63).

⁴⁴ As Paola Spinozzie and Elisa Bizotto observe, both "The Blessed Damozel" and *The House of Life* provided "new direction[s]" for aestheticism in the Victorian period, becoming important "origin[s]" for emerging fin de siècle experimentations (*The Germ: Origins and Progenies of Pre-Raphaelite Interart Aesthetics* 157). Specifically, the aesthetic shift Rossetti's work emphasized time as a phenomenon measured by the movements of the soul. As the emanation of Chiaro's own soul in *Hand and Soul* says, meaning in art comes from within, not without, it stems from the hand expressing the soul's movements: the "[s]etting of" the artist's "hand" and "soul" to "serve man with God" (213).

Rossetti's *The House of Life*, seeing it as a kind of punctualist and interruptive text, not unlike his conceptualization of time as “gem-like” and unique crystallizations (or, even, memorials) of experience that are brief, intoxicating and invasive in their own right (an experience of a kind of secular ecstasy). Pater says *The House of Life* is built upon repetition, surprises, and ecstatic encounters with the past comingling with the present. He calls the text a “haunted” one in which memories, desires, and longings are given concrete substance through poetic form and fleshly descriptions that momentarily monumentalize (or freeze) the fleeting (“Dante Gabriel Rossetti” 238).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Pater's fascination with Rossetti's “The Blessed Damozel” and *The House of Life* stems from the fact that he understood both texts as being representative of the fraught relationship between desire and time's passing. Such a relationship is, of course, at the heart of Pater's own aesthetic, as typified at the close of *The Renaissance* in which he describes experiences as generating a moment of its own, crystallized into a “hard gem-like flame” (120). Walter Pater's view of art as the relishing of an experience in the present moment, captured by the well-known kinetic image of the “burn[ing],” “hard gem-like flame” (120), is intensely modern: he offers a visceral and sense-driven view of time's passing that functions as an aesthetic correlative to modern time, the inexorable repetition of the tick-tock of the clock. “A counted number of pulses” measure the passing of time, he writes (119). Pater locates descriptions of time in the rhythms of the heart, the movement of limbs, and the senses' strainings after the knowledge that sight, smell, hearing, tasting, and touching can offer (118-120). Such knowledge, based on sense impressions, is an Empiricism oddly bordering on mysticism, alert to the ways that impressions are always already “in perpetual flight,” a flight announced by time's swift passing towards the grave (119). Here, Pater sounds like both Heraclitus and Heidegger (which, of course, makes complete sense since the latter is indebted to the former for some of his most provocative ideas about poetics and modernity).

Only with the advent of clock-time, the measurement of daily existence that parcels out experience into such precise and discreet intervals, could Pater's rendering of temporality emerge in the way that it does and invoke the image of a gem-like flame. His Heraclitean-inflected description of time as the “tremulous wisp constantly reforming itself on the stream,” as registering the “strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves” (119), bears the elegiac and melancholic strains of modern historical-consciousness that Tennyson captures throughout *In Memoriam*; it betrays a modern sense of alienation and uncertainty brought to the strained pitch straddling the small distance between breakdown and an act of faith (in one's self, in humanity, in God). Calling him a “modernist before his time,” Angela Leighton has recently discussed how Pater's sense of the experiences of everyday life and living is fundamentally elegiac (and, as such, is quintessentially Victorian), shaped by the “passing” “conditions of life” that suggest meaning inheres from “the relativity of the passing moment” (*On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of the Word* 86).

Pater discerned that “so-called material loveliness formed the great undeniable reality in things, the solid resisting substance” (238) in Rossetti's art. This, however, is a paradox, Pater implies, since the material world is always already in a state of flux, of coming and going. Restless desire, or the anticipation of the dispelling of languor, lack, and loss, colour Pater's diction in describing the vacillating moods Rossetti uses to build his rather spectral, or Gothic, take on the house as an architectural metaphor:

The fortunes of these affections—of the great love so determined; its casuistries, its languor sometimes; above all, its sorrows; its fortunate or unfortunate

Each memory, passion and disappointment described in *The House of Life* interrupts “lead bound” stasis and the world of “sleep” which, Pater argues, makes Rossetti’s poetry a sort of “mesmerism” in which forgotten or hidden things are brought to the surface, through the work of poetry (238). Despite the fact that *The House of Life* is haunted by death, by the inevitable fact of entropy, it also seeks to delay or sidestep this inevitability. This is especially seen in the first section of the 1881 edition of *The House of Life*, where Rossetti’s exploration of love cheats time from its consistent, plodding tyranny over memory and desire. “A Day of Love” (Sonnet XVI), for instance, sidesteps the problem of “Love’s Fatality” (Sonnet LIV), and loss as expressed in Sonnet LIII (“Without Her”) and “Autumn Idleness” (Sonnet LXIX). “A Day of Love” especially brings together a series of remembered moments of ecstasy, manifested in and through kisses, which resist the inevitable, entropic sway of time (at least momentarily):

Those envied places which do know her well,
 And so are scornful of this lonely place,
 Even now for once are emptied of her grace:

collisions with those other great matters; how it looks, as the long day of life goes round, in the light and shadow of them: all this, conceived with an abundant imagination, and a deep, a philosophic reflectiveness, is the matter of [Rossetti’s verse], and especially of what he designed as his chief poetic work, “a work to be called *The House of Life*,” towards which the majority of his sonnets and songs were contributions. (“Dante Gabriel Rossetti” 238)

Pater’s interest in Rossetti, as well as in William Morris (which I will discuss in the third Chapter of this Study), centres on the ways that Rossetti, following after Dante, believes that “the first condition of the poetic way of seeing and presenting things is particularization” (“Dante Gabriel Rossetti” 231). This “particularization” is at once visceral and spectral, desirable and haunting (or, at turns, even taunting) for Rossetti. That is to say, it gives flesh to the fraught relationships between time past, present, and future that mix and mingle, separate and tease, Rossetti’s embowered women, his representations of desire and his fraught relationship to time’s passing and its refusal to yield that which he desire (this fraught relationship constitutes boredom as theme and process in his work).

Nowhere but here she is: and while Love's spell
 From his predominant presence doth compel
 All alien hour, an outworn populace,
 The hours of Love fill full the echoing space
 With sweet confederate music favourable.

Now many memories make solicitous
 The delicate love-lines of her mouth, till, lit
 With quivering fire, the words take wing from it;
 As here between our kisses we sit thus
 Speaking of things remembered, and so sit
 Speechless while things forgotten call to us. (1-14)

Here, Rossetti recalls the power of kisses (12) and the “hours of Love” (7) to inspire language, poetry, to “take wing” (11). What is implied, of course, is that the absence of such close intimacies would render the poet paralyzed, fixated, on the problem of loss and expectation, of boredom. In *The House of Life*, moments of consummation and ecstasy are intermingled with repetitious and exhausting rehearsals of disappointment. The overall temporal pacing of the text is one towards exhaustion, especially as displayed in the 1881 text which ends in a kind of cataloguing of all that has been desired but lost or never realized. The earlier versions of the published sonnet sequence (1870 and 1874) focus more on the renovating power of love and end with a grouping of songs in the lyrical mode, culminating with “Song XI. The Sea-Limits” in which all the weariness and “mournfulness” (10) of life is reconciled in the song of a sea-shell (22). The song is an

intricate and playful echoing (and thus haunting) representation of art itself as that which gathers together “all mankind” (26) and “Earth, Sea, [and] Man” and, in so doing, preserves humanity from the ravages of time and disappointment (28). However, in the 1881 version, the songs are omitted and the text ends with sonnets such as “A Superscription” and “The One Hope” in which a wrestle is staged between the disappointments and longings of life.

“A Superscription” recounts all the foregone and lost possibilities of life, the “[m]ight-have-been[s]” (1) and those things which are “[n]o-more” and “[t]oo-late”(2). Likewise, “The One Hope” suggests that “vain desire” and “vain regret” (1) only end with death, implying that art and life are always already implicated with frustration and refusal, even though these problems are interrupted or relieved in moments of ecstasy which feed the desire to still believe in “Hope” (13), “[n]ot less nor more” (14). *The House of Life* characterizes time as a series of punctures, interruptions, chance meetings, and delays and, as a result, signifies the vacillating and influential powers of desire, loss, and boredom. At the same time, it also implicitly counters the encroaching heavy, plodding and consistent rhythms of clock-time, the signature of industrial technology’s advancing influences in both the divisions of labour in England and in the rhythms and practices of everyday life and living. In Rossetti’s work, a kind of languid energy, caused by the disappointment that comes from the disjunction between longing and fulfillment, characterizes the tensions and dramatic unfolding(s) of “The Blessed Damozel,” just as much as it shapes the organizational structure(s) of *The House of Life*. In fact, as with most of his paintings from the mid-1850s, onwards, “The Blessed Damozel” and *The House of Life* (as two poetic texts that frame, as it were, Rossetti’s life-long interest with

disappointed desire and boredom) show that his aesthetic narratives are constituted just as much by what does not happen as by the little that does or does not.

James Richardson sees Rossetti as continually presenting and re-presenting desire's "intensity on the edge of dissolution," from a variety of angles and lyric perspectives or situations (*Vanishing Lives: Style and Self in Tennyson, D.G. Rossetti, Swinburne, and Yeats* 99). In a similar vein, Jerome McGann understands the sonnet sequences from *The House of Life* as hinging on various "local moments of extreme ambiguity" that "define in the most precise way a poetic set of "dissolutions" (*Dante Gabriel Rossetti: And the Game That Must Be Lost* 12). Such "dissolutions" mark a very intimate world, a personalist "geography," McGann tells us, which various sonnets, such as "Introductory Sonnet," "Bridal Birth," and "Stillborn Love," shape by virtue of the fact that they can be "read" like "textual codes," offering us a way of "remapping" and navigating Rossetti's lived experience and his art (*Dante Gabriel Rossetti* 12). Out of the tragedy of Elizabeth giving birth to a stillborn child on 1 May 1861 to the loss of Elizabeth, herself, shortly afterwards, from his encroaching fears of illness (and loss of eyesight) to his ever-growing obsession with painting Jane Morris, Rossetti shaped a profound aesthetic of boredom in his poetry and painting. The dysphoric moods, shaped by lack and longing, that he explored in his painting and poetry not only characterize the predicaments of his characters, in his art; they also function as architectural, organizing principles for his *House of Life*. His art addresses, then, the complex, shifting, and often disappointing interplay between desire, loss, and the passage of time. His restless search after "one face" came to characterize his work as a broken, and often aesthetically vibrant and exquisite, exploration of temporality and human desire. In the following Chapter, I

explore the ways in which William Morris's own aesthetic of boredom explores the close connections between emerging modernity, art, and labour. In so doing, my reading of boredom in Morris's early and short collaboration with the P.R.B. takes on more socially concerned contours than in my discussion of Rossetti (since Rossetti's *House of Life* is a private edifice of personal sorrows and longings whereas Morris's art, even from its outset, is much more closely attached to his growing interests in the application of aesthetic and personal desire to various social contexts and conditions).

**CHAPTER FOUR:
BOREDOM AND IDLENESS IN WILLIAM MORRIS'S *THE DEFENCE OF
GUENEVERE, AND OTHER POEMS***

During his early childhood, Morris roamed through the thickets and brambles of Epping Forest, which bordered his family's Georgian home, Woodford Hall, riding his Shetland pony and wearing a suit of armor designed especially for him. Jan Marsh reminds us that this image of Morris, as a child, all a glint in armour and playing 'medieval times' is "[o]ne of the earliest" that we have of him ("William Morris and Victorian Manliness" 185). As we know, Morris's childhood love for the medieval translated, in later years, into a Socialism that blended a Ruskinian (and historically problematic) idealization of the medieval worker as craftsman with his personal appreciation for the intricacies of medieval design and colour, found in illuminated manuscripts and Gothic architecture, in particular, and in what he termed Chaucer's "fresh and glittering verses" (qtd. In J.W. Mackail 11).¹

¹ In "The Decorative Arts" (1877) (which was retitled "The Lesser Arts" in 1882), Morris identifies the chapter, "On the Nature of the Gothic, and the Office of the Workman Therein" from the second volume of Ruskin's *The Nature of the Gothic* (1853), as providing the "truest and most eloquent words" spoken with regards to the unification of pleasure, beauty, and labour (34). Morris found this chapter so important that he published it, on its own, with Kelmscott Press, in 1892.

In this Chapter, Ruskin argues that the features of the Gothic (particularly those of savageness, changefulness, naturalism, and grotesqueness, among others) stem from the medieval celebration of the ways that art is reflective of the humanness of the labourer: his mistakes and skill both shine through in his daring to turn stone into a manifestation of faith and desire. It is worthwhile to quote Ruskin's discussion, at length, since it was essential to Morris's aesthetic program:

You can teach a man to draw a straight line, and to cut one; to strike a curved line, and to carve it; and to copy and carve any number of lines or forms with admirable speed and perfect precision [. . .] but if you ask him to thin about any of these forms [. . .] he stops; his execution becomes hesitating; he thinks, and ten to one he makes a mistake in the first touch he gives to his work as a thinking being. But you have made a man of him for all that. He was only a machine before, an animated tool [. . .] You must either make a tool of the creature or a man of him. You cannot make both. Men were not intended to work with the accuracy of tools, to be precise and perfect in all their actions. If you will have that precision out of them, and make their fingers measure degrees like cog-wheels, and their arms strike curves like compasses, you must unhumanise

Jennifer Harris points out that Morris's "socialism is characterized by the demand for an existence made meaningful through work and art—through work which is not separated from either physical or creative satisfaction" ("William Morris and the Middle Ages" 13). As his short essay, "How I Became a Socialist" (which was first published in the Socialist periodical based in London, entitled *Justice*, in 1894) outlines, Morris understood his later turn to Socialism as being a natural consequence of his view that medievalism, especially as interpreted by Ruskin, provided him with a framework for ensuring that beauty and passion were essential aspects for making art and for creating art that applied to modes of everyday life and living. Morris also viewed medievalism as a means through which people could be provided with a worldview that departed from the modern preoccupation with utility, profit and labour:²

them. (17)

Gothic art, Ruskin argues, is a manifestation of the human attempt to capture beauty while praising God. He maintains that unlike modern Industrialism and its attempts to put man at the service of the machine, the Gothic 'aesthetic philosophy,' as it were, viewed tools as being at the service of the labourer. Morris, for his part, saw Ruskin's view of the tool at the service of man as showing a way out of viewing labour as a curse—this point is elaborated upon, and extended, throughout his "The Lesser Arts" lecture.

In so far as Ruskin appeals to the Gothic as a kind of aesthetic ideal, as opposed to an historical time period, his possesses a great deal of value. However, as Laurence Davis, among others, has pointed out, Ruskin and Morris both possessed a somewhat reductive and questionable view of the medieval period as a time when labour and pleasure were unified, for the most part, and that emerging modernity, with the advent of the machine and methods of production and reproduction, severed this previous unity: "it is only in consequence of his peculiarly selective reading of social and cultural history," Davis points out, "that Morris is able to portray the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern era as one of total decline" ("Morris, Wilde, and Marx on the Social Preconditions of Individual Development" 722).

² Morris outlines the inextricable relationship between pleasure and ethical political action, between art and moral teaching, in his short essay "How I Became a Socialist":

Surely anyone who professes to think that the question of art and cultivation must go before that of the knife and fork does not understand what art means, or how that its roots must have a soil of a thriving and unanxious life. Yet it must be remembered that civilization has reduced the workman to such a skinny and pitiful existence, that he scarcely knows how to frame a desire for any life much better than that which he now endures perforce. It is the province of art to set the true ideal of a full and reasonable life before him, a life to which the perception and creation of beauty, the

[T]his view of Socialism which I hold to-day, and hope to die holding, is what I began with [. . .] before my days of practical Socialism, [Ruskin] was my master towards the ideal . . . and, looking backward, I cannot help saying . . . how deadly dull the world would have been twenty years ago but for Ruskin! It was through him that I learned to give form to my discontent, which I must say was not by any means vague. Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization. (241, 243-44)

Ruskin's reading of Gothic architecture, as a product of loving hands, made by craftsmen who were not "tools" (17) of labour but, rather, desiring and dreaming subjects, held sway over Morris's imagination when he first read *The Nature of the Gothic* (1853). Of

enjoyment of real pleasure that is, shall be felt to be as necessary to man as his daily bread, and that no man, and no set of men, can be deprived of this except by mere opposition, which should be resisted to the utmost. (ix)

Here, Morris views modernism, as it stands, as out-rightly hostile to an integrated life. While various scholars have aligned Morris with Marx (whom Morris read but never met), it has become rather generally accepted that the two viewed modernism very differently. Morris saw it as inherently problematic (perhaps one could harness machine power for only mundane labour in a distant-Utopia) but Marx saw the disruptive nature of modernity as a potential dividend in the move towards resistance against, and resolution of, alienation and class disparity. Marx notes that:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation, distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier times. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air . . . (*The Communist Manifesto* 224).

For Morris, modernity was, for the most part, entirely a problem: his "hatred of modernism" was wholesale. For Marx, however, the "constant revolutionizing" processes of modernity could, while not ideal, be used to help move the proletariat towards creating necessary shifts in power relations. For a more developed reading of the distinctions between Morris and Marx see Laurence Davis's "Morris, Wilde, and Marx on the Social Preconditions of Individual Development," pages 719-732. While not as recent, Florence and William Boos's "The Utopian Communism of William Morris," pages 489-510 is also a very helpful discussion of the affinities and departures between the two thinkers on modernity, especially with regards to problems of labour and commodification. See, also, Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1982), especially Chapter Two, for a detailed discussion of Marx's ambivalent and nuanced views regarding modernity and modernization.

course, as we know, Ruskin's idealist readings of Gothic architecture were not the only influences for Morris.

As Margaret Lourie observes, for the Pre-Raphaelites and for Morris (once he and Edward Burne-Jones joined the ranks of second-wave Pre-Raphaelitism in the 1850s), the literary and aesthetic culture of the Middle Ages provided a series of distant and alluring forms, and frameworks, through which they could find "authority" for their "own ideas" ("Introduction" 5).³ Morris also saw medievalism as an aesthetic mode through which he could come to understand his own identity.⁴ Even more importantly, medievalism

³ Especially as evidenced by Thomas Carlyle's handling of medievalism in his discussion of Dante in "The Hero as Poet" (1840), it is clear that there were certain trends in the Victorian period that tended to conflate the distances between the Victorian present and the medieval past. In particular, it is significant to note the ways Victorian poets would "retailor" Dante Alighieri to suit "modern needs," as Alison Milbank puts it (*Dante and the Victorians* 50). For example, Carlyle's discussion of Dante focuses specifically on the *Commedia*, only gesturing to historical details as they relate specifically to explorations of the "three kingdoms [of] *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, [and] *Paradiso*" (86). Carlyle argues that we should read Dante in, and through, his "[s]ong" since his biography is lodged in the distant past, "irrevocably lost [to] us" (82). Carlyle's point is not just about the limits of historical knowledge and how these limits affect interpretation; it is also a comment on how the mysterious personal history of Dante may remain a mystery because poetic study, and a reading of the medieval literary spirit, is an epistemological enterprise distinct from the "progress of mere scientific knowledge" (77). The limits of historical knowledge are a dividend for Carlyle as they force us to attend, instead, to the aesthetic sensibilities and philosophies of the *Commedia* as Canticles instead of as historical artifacts (which, at best, are always ruins) (76, 84-93). Carlyle's reading of Dante, here, highlights how Morris understood medievalism: it was more of a philosophical and poetic framework, which later translated into an express theory of practical politics. Morris privileged the 'spirit' of medievalism as opposed to its historical facts: medievalism was a play narrative in his childhood, an emotional (and one could say sexual) awakening and outlet in his adolescence, a model for his poetic aesthetics, and the ethical ground for his developing political theories.

⁴ Recalling memories from his childhood and his time as a student at Exeter College, Oxford, Morris declared that the two most precious moments in his life were his "first" encounters with Canterbury Cathedral, when he was eight, and seeing an illuminated manuscript for the first time (many scholars suggest Morris is referring to a thirteenth-century manuscript of the Apocalypse which he poured over at the Bodleian library while a student in Oxford):

I have [a love of beauty] naturally, for neither my father nor my mother nor any of my relatives had the least idea of it. I remember as a boy going into Canterbury Cathedral and thinking that the gates of Heaven had been opened to me—also when I first saw an illuminated manuscript. These first pleasures, which I discovered for myself, were stronger than anything else I have had in life. (qtd. in Boos 198)

These two moments for Morris operate somewhat like Wordsworthian "spots of time" (*The Prelude* 12.209) in which a profound and unexpected encounter, often "taking their date / [f]rom our first childhood" persists as a potent memory, offering thought for future years (12.223-224). However, whereas

provided a distancing and defamiliarizing mode through which he could explore the strength and power of personal desire, particularly of desire left unfulfilled. Shortly, I will discuss the ways in which Morris's early and persistent fascination with medievalism and his later devotion to the cause of Socialism shapes an aesthetic of boredom in his work. However, before doing so, it is important to detail, at more length, the relationship between his early love for things medieval and his growing, and later, concern for political involvement.

Discussing the connection between Morris's early medieval aesthetic sensibilities and his later work as a socialist, J.M. Macdonald observes that Morris was bent on "infus[ing] everyday life with pleasure, creativity, and [the] revitalization of desire that is intimated by all good art;" meaning, the "aestheticization of aspects of everyday life entails a flourishing of desire and pleasure" (Macdonald 153).⁵ Macdonald's reading,

the "spots of time" originate in experiences of trauma (either imagined or real) in *The Prelude*, Morris's are more ordinary. His recollection shows the importance he placed on understanding art as a form of pleasure constituted by its ability to evince strong emotional responses in people, reminding them that life is about more than profit and labour.

⁵ By the time Morris was an adolescent, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had formed and other writers and poets (Tennyson, Ruskin, and Carlyle chief among them) promoted the dignity and simplicity of various medieval forms, be they architectural, poetic, artistic, or spiritual. Such a looking backwards, to the medieval, was not only a kind of process of historical wish-fulfillment, couched in the colourful, dynamic, and romantic narratives of courtly love, and Christian symbolism. It was also, as Lourie suggests, a conversation with the Romantics, with Keats and Scott, who mourned and explored the increasing sense of a loss of "the possibility of decisive action, objective perception, and human communication" which seemed to have all but "passed from the modern world" ("Introduction" 1). Of course, two of the very modern aspects of these Victorian returns to medieval sensibilities are the facts that these returns were so self-consciously done, on the one hand (and thus, they bore the quality of dramatic artificiality and performance) and that, on the other, they increasingly became commodified in their own right. William Morris's inauguration of the Arts and Crafts movement, for instance, was a strategic combination of the modern machine, personalized craftwork, increasing market demands for his work, and an integration of individual labour within a series of wider economic communities: his own business, Morris & Co., the

according to Regina Gagnier, underscores how and why Morris's early medievalism grew into a substantial economic and socio-political theory of resistance to the growing modern conception that work and pleasure were distinct—a resistance confirmed, Gagnier suggests, in Morris “legendarily” saying “his aesthetic capacity” was an “instinctual warmth in his tummy when he saw a beautiful object” (Review 351). Morris's description of art as an “instinctual [bodily] warmth” shows that he understood art as integrating intellectual, emotional and somatic responses. A good work of art, for Morris, appeals not only to the heart but also, to invoke T.S. Eliot, acknowledges and explores “the cerebral cortex, the nervous system, and the digestive tracts” (“The Metaphysical Poets” 250). Moreover, it also speaks to, with, and for the lived experiences of humans, as desiring subjects, in their everyday life.

In *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* (1858), which was Morris's first volume of published poetry (and also the first volume of Pre-Raphaelite poetry to be published), his poems are tied to a series of explorations of pleasure, desire, and various problems related to emerging modernity and to his own time and place in Victorian history. The poems in this volume give flesh and form to the aspects of human experience that are decidedly not linked to production, labour and commerce. This Chapter explores

growing interior design movement (partially inaugurated by Morris's work), and wider market demands.

Morris's art spawned a lucrative business and medievalism soon became something one could purchase, brand, and reproduce, according to demand. Helsinger points out that Morris understood his growing business as problematically implicated in the contemporary market of demand and, yet, primarily viewed his work as “a response to the challenges of modernity” by being a “partly therapeutic” enterprise in which beauty and usefulness went hand in hand (*Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts* 199).

the ways in which *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* can be said to depart from what Megan Ward calls “mainstream Victorian progressive narratives” (“William Morris’s Conditional Moment” para.1) and, in so doing, provides an alternative view of experience-in-time that is shaped by the rhythms of desire and the body (its straining, throbbing, weariness, periods of rest, and boredom) as opposed to what Queen Guenevere calls the burdensome and inescapable “clock tick, tick” of linear time (“The Defence of Guenevere” 76). While it has already been extensively acknowledged in scholarship on Morris that *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* presents a medievalism that is “not sheer escapism” but, rather, a “legitimate framework for the projection of his poetic vision,” as Ralph Barry puts it, there is much left to be said regarding its relevance, and resonance, as an expressly Victorian text that, implicitly, addresses specifically emerging modern interests and problems (“A Defence of Guenevere” 277). Just as medievalism offered Morris a framework for working out his socialist principles, it also served as a means through which he explored his own time and place in Victorian England.

As D.M.R. Bentley notes in his discussion of “The Wind,” the poems in Morris’s first volume of poetry, while medieval in their setting, “should not . . . blind us to the contemporaneity or, for that matter, the universality, of its central themes: sexual denial and neurotic fixation” (“William Morris’s ‘The Wind’” 32). Bentley goes on to conclude that, as a whole, the volume is “an imaginative tract for Morris’s own time and place” (32). This Chapter also focuses, then, on the ways in which *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* is an early example of Morris’s persistent poetic explorations of how idleness, thwarted passion, disappointment, and boredom are not only affective problems intensified in Victorian England but also affective dividends, critiquing reductive,

modern and industrial views of the human person as a kind of “tool” as Ruskin put it (“On the Nature of the Gothic, and the Office of the Workman Therein”17). In the following pages of this Chapter, I focus on how “The Defence of Guenevere,” “Golden Wings,” “The Wind,” and “Spell-Bound” deal with problems of confinement, immobility, the frustration of desire (sexual and otherwise) and the connections, and differences between, idleness and boredom.

In Morris’s definition of idleness, in “The Aims of Art” (1886), which I discuss in the next section of this Chapter, he says the body must be at rest so the mind can contemplate and wander through various subjective evaluations of temporality: the past, present, imagined moments, and very particular spots of time. Such an understanding is couched in Morris’s Keatsian and Wordsworthian interests (which began during his undergraduate days in Oxford).⁶ Although idleness provides a kind of therapeutic or recuperative form of imaginative (or intellectual) escapism from predicaments of physical confinement, there are critical moments in the volume where such escapes are not possible—this is especially seen in “The Wind” and “Spell-Bound,” and, to a lesser extent, in “Golden Wings.” The inability to escape the weight of frustrated desire initiates the problem of boredom, showing how the bored subject is also unable to escape the body’s limitations. As Jeff Nunokawa has suggested, boredom is a state that occurs when one cannot escape the confines of the body and the oppressive weight of the linear,

⁶ Wordsworth, for instance, in *The Prelude*, creates an alternative theorization of temporality to the regular ticks of clock-time, to *chronos*, in his discussion of “spots of time” in Book XII. Keats also often pits an imagined, medieval or classical past, against the frustrations of clock-time—the time which reminds him that his days are numbered as he faces the slow annunciation of death marked in, and by, his consumptive body in “When I have fears that I may cease to be” (1818).

repetitious patterns of clock time which, among other things, is Industrialism's signature chronotope (*Tame Passions of Wilde: Styles of Manageable Desire* 73-87). While idleness can at least afford an escape, by way of reverie, being bored often means an inability to rest or escape at all. The situational boredom outlined by Pease (which I discussed in my Introduction), that mirrors Heidegger's exploration of the frustration one feels when situations prevent personal fulfillment, is certainly one affective problem that registers repeatedly throughout the volume. It is dramatized in Morris's somatic sensibility which not only played a crucial role in his developing Socialism but also served as a framework for his exploration of the significance of dysphoric conditions (exhaustion, frustrated desire, idleness, weariness and boredom).

Morris's resistances to the increasingly mechanistic modes of ordinary life and living, as promoted by Industrialism, are only ever indirectly dealt with in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*. In later works, especially *News from Nowhere* (serialized in 1890), we receive a more explicit critique of emerging modernism and of the relentless commercial enterprises which Morris disliked most about Victorian England. However, his consideration of the paradoxical dividends of dreaming and idleness, and his representations of the symptoms of boredom (fatigue, repetitious speech, and restlessness) are most vividly rendered in his first volume of poetry. That is to say, while he more specifically seeks out solutions to the problems of modernity in later writings, *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* strikingly provides his first examination of resistances to, and symptoms of, emerging modernity in various Victorian contexts. In a period where, as Christoph Asendorf notes, clock-time and mechanistic views of the body increasingly dominated Victorian discourses, Morris's volume is an intensive exploration

of the body in terms that resist ideas of linear narrative progression and the predictable rhythms of clock time (*Batteries of Life: In the History of Things and Their Perception in Modernity* 3-7).

For Morris, art, the individual body, and the larger body politic were supposed to exist in a communal harmony, not in the atomized and distinct spheres of labour versus private life which were measured out by the clock and intensive regimes of toil. His passion for medieval bodies (for textual bodies, poetic form, architecture, word play, knights-in-arms, ladies of Malorian and Chaucerian tales, and the vibrant hues and intricate patterns of medieval dress and tapestries) is almost always expressed in a way that suggests, at the very least, an implicit response (or resistance) to various forms of emerging, modern and industrial fragmentation (or alienations) of the human subject.⁷ Idle contemplation, being at leisure, for Morris, was a way to escape the alienation of modernity and find refuge in contemplation—an act which, for Morris, should yield some form of contribution to larger social communities. In “Art and Socialism” (1884), for example, Morris says that human beings must have leisure time in which to dream, to imagine, to even while away or squander time:

⁷ In “The Lesser Arts,” Morris envisioned a world in which machines, should they function in society at all, would be entirely responsible for anything repetitive and dull in terms of labour. Meaning, Morris was not a Luddite or anti-machinist per se but, rather, believed that machines could be useful as a means of ridding humans of the monotony of certain dull and demeaning tasks. A medieval sense of *communitas*, and a return to the integration of the body’s abilities, the mind’s capacities, and the emotion’s range of responses (which Morris understood his interpretation of medievalism as typifying) would be a way to dispel the “dull” and boring conditions of various forms of modern labour. While Morris resists the monotony and boredom of Industrialism, he sees artistic contemplation, creativity, and the frustration of desires (be they sexual, communal or otherwise) as positive signals that the human person often draws creative inspiration from lack. This point, which will be explored in the subsequent section of this Chapter, shows certain aesthetic parallels between Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Morris on this score.

. . . [A]ll men must work for some portion of the day, and secondly . . . they have a positive right to claim a respite from that work: the leisure they have a right to claim, must be ample enough to allow them full rest of mind and body: a man must have time for serious individual thought, for imaginative—for dreams evening—or the race of men will inevitably worsen. (128)

Here, Morris sees leisure as a use of time that is directly in opposition to commerce and to the encroaching chronotope, industrial or clock-time, which generates mind-numbing boredom in industrial and emerging modern societies. *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* relies upon strange and subjective relationships to time, which Megan Ward calls “conditional moment[s]” (“William Morris’s Conditional Moment” para. 1). In suggesting that whiling away the hours is a humanizing activity (even a moral one), Morris is also implying that there is something creative and positive about idleness. For instance, in “The Defence of Guenevere” and “Golden Wings,” we see the ways that idleness, to a point, serves as a catalyst for agency, autonomy, and independence for female subjects who have been placed in limited and limiting situations. However, boredom, as I will later argue, is the inability for a restless subject to channel his or her dissatisfaction in a poetic and creative way. As a result, boredom is also a striking affective symptom of a specifically emerging modern problem: an inability to enter into a satisfactory relationship with time as it passes. This problem is especially explored through Morris’s use of distant times and places and of references to ambiguous medieval contexts—as seen in “The Wind” and “Spell-Bound.” In the following pages, I examine the various ways an aesthetic of boredom is present in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* and how such an aesthetic alerts us to Morris’s nuanced and complex

handlings of representations of time, desire, and affective discontents in emerging modernity. I will also consider how such representations cast light on Morris's understandings of medievalism and the poet as an idler who troubles emerging, Victorian views of time and the body in relation to the machine, linear conceptions of time, conceptions of gender difference, and obsessions with progress and productivity.

4.1 The Mood of Idleness in "The Defence of Guenevere": The Dividends of Passivity

"O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!"
—John Keats (letter to Benjamin Bailer, 1817)

Organizing Guenevere's speech in Dante's terza rima (a pattern in which the interwoven rhyme scheme of *aba, bcb, cdc*, etc., mirrors a sense of desire's power to perpetuate speech and reverie interminably), Morris explores the force of desire as one that dominates, and even derails, social norms. Conflicted, constrained, hemmed-in by Sir Gawain's accusations, Morris's Guenevere is usually, and understandably, read as a passive character, buying time until Sir Launcelot arrives to champion her cause ("The Defence of Guenevere" 295). This interpretation often comes from scholars focusing more specifically on the poem's opening, noting the ways Guenevere's body language suggests that she is a bundle of wrought nerves, verging on hysteria, unable to use her speech to cause any form of political or social change. The poem opens with a description of what appears to be a kind of fit of the nerves. Like Mariana's windy moanings (to paraphrase Thomas Carlyle's description), Guenevere's voice grows increasingly shrill, appearing neurasthenic (qtd. in Ricks 49): "[h]er voice was low at first, being full of tears, / But as it cleared, it grew full loud and shrill, / Growing a windy shriek in all men's

ears, / A ringing in their startled brains, until / She said that Gawaine lied, then her voice sunk, / And her great eyes began again to fill” (48-53).⁸ Guenevere’s body also expresses her emotional and psychological distress. Opening *in media res*, the poem starts with a vivid description of Guenevere’s somatic reaction to Gawain’s accusation that she has committed adultery:

But, knowing now that they would have her speak,

She threw her wet hair backward from her brow,

Her hand close to her cheek,

As though she had there a shameful blow,

And feeling it shameful to feel ought but shame

All through her heart, yet felt her cheek burned so,

She must a little touch it; like one lame

She walked away from Gawaine, with her head

⁸ Helsinger states that the “psychology of perception[s]” of time and of the relationship between the body, desire, and art are recurrent throughout *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems (Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts 57)*. Morris’s first volume of poetry is inspired by physiology; it explores affective tensions played out according to the rhythms of the body. Complex psychological responses to desire, loss, and aspects of modernity (such as clock-time) are manifested in the ebbs and flows of the body’s energy levels and in its nervous system, throughout the volume. For instance, Guenevere’s self-defense begins with a neurasthenic shriek and grows into a poetic resistance to regulations of desire, a resistance expressed through her dramatic body language and her process of story-telling which is shaped by her sighs, tears and impulses (as opposed to by a linear narrative). Especially in the opening of the poem, Guenevere is described in neurasthenic terms. Her narrative is guided by her “nerves,” as was so often the case in Victorian depictions of women. Throughout the poem, Guenevere’s blushes, her “cheek of flame” (9), her “passionate twisting[s]” (60) of her body and her cries, sobs, heaving chest, and lapses into reverie certainly bear the markings of a vague nervous malady. The poem follows the fluctuating dynamics of Guenevere’s voice and body.

Still lifted up; and on her cheek of flame

The tears dried quick . . . (1-10)

These first ten lines emphasize the power of Guenevere's body to express her passions. Morris establishes Guenevere's body as the main rhetorical force of the poem, thus privileging sensation over reason in a rather Keatsian vein.

The opening of "The Defence of Guenevere" is, among other things, a fleshing out of Morris's first poetic impulses—he had, as he himself noted, only very recently come to realize his ability to write poetry a few years prior to publishing his first volume ("A Rather Long-Winded Sketch" 30). As we know, Morris's early poetic aesthetics were coloured by his association with the Pre-Raphaelites, specifically with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and the poems in his first volume provide vivid descriptions of the human form, typified in his honing in on Guenevere's "cheek," "heart," "head," and "tears," thus forming a direct and provocative poetics of sensation and "touch," both of which become connected to Morris's conception of idle reverie.

The poetics of touch and response were also shaped by Morris's early understanding of what medievalism provided for him, in his days at Oxford. In his own description of *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, Morris writes that the volume was "exceedingly young and very medieval," and full of his early Pre-Raphaelite enthusiasm for medievalism as a sensual mode which emphasized the powers of sensation, feeling, and creativity; he sums up his fascination with the medieval as an enthusiasm for the "Gothic," vivid colours (as present in the manuscripts he poured over

for hours at a time in the Bodleian while studying at Exeter College), and as a passion for the medieval cult of love, especially as presented in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. ("A Rather Long-Winded Sketch" 30-1). The emphasis Guenevere places on touch, throughout her defense (which is more of a languid, idle, sensual, and wandering recollection of her passion with, and for, Launcelot, as opposed to a self-defence based on ethics), makes her speech an unstable narrative performance: passion and feeling precede and supersede verbal sense. Eve Sedgwick, reading Henry James's *Ambassadors*, writes that narratives shaped by touch and sensate experience create a "consistency" in meaning that is not predicated on rational understanding (or on "any homogenous purity of the speech act at a given level") but which, instead, relies on "the irreducible, attaching heterogeneity and indeed impurity with which" a series of feelings, emotions, and sensual experiences "meets the 'touch' of the other" (*Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* 47). Interestingly, as in James's novels, epistemological clarity is not the aim of Morris's poetry: rather, his early poetry focuses on the powers of feeling as they register at a variety of levels: psychological, neurological, sexual, and aesthetic.

Moreover, emphasis on Guenevere's body-language as the primary form of speech indicates the growing Victorian interest in the stories the body has to tell, as typified in her "cheek burn[ing] so" (6). Guenevere's blushing in the poem's opening is a powerful, psycho-somatic response to her predicament, a response which is inherently passive as opposed to active, demonstrating that her responses to her predicament cover a "heterogeneous" series of sensations and memories—including embarrassment, anger,

passion, and guilt.⁹ However, her blushing also indicates that she is undergoing, as well as enabling, self-exposure. Throughout the poem, she places herself on display, performing what Heather Marcovitch has recently called the “art” of the “pose” (*The Art of the Pose: Oscar Wilde’s Performance Theory* 26). For instance, midway through the poem, Guenevere suggests that Gawaine and the knights should admire her beauty and that she, herself, “dare[s] not think” (119) upon her “beauty” (120) too much, without fearing she will go “mad” (118). These lines come from a moment in Guenevere’s defense where she recalls, “from” her “memory” (106), the first time she and Launcelot kissed in a passionate way, when she was wandering through an enclosed garden, “without [her] ladies all alone” (110). In noting her own beauty, Guenevere’s defense appeals to the impulses and desires of the body as a legitimization for her actions. For example, she recounts her body’s trembling delight when she “kissed” Launcelot one “spring day” (134). She claims this recollection is so precious that she can “scarce talk” (135) of it despite the fact that she then obsesses over this encounter—her speech lingers on suggesting the erotic nature of their encounter. “[B]oth our mouths went wandering in one way, / aching sorely,” she recalls (136-7). Guenevere’s recollections are largely a

⁹ W. Ray Crozier and Matthew Rowlinson have both recently explored Victorian interpretations of blushing, especially as discussed in Charles Darwin’s *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and in Animals* (1872). Crozier explains that blushing is often a somatic reaction to the psychological fear that one’s personal desires or secrets have been exposed (“Blushing and the Exposed Self: Darwin Revisited” 67) and, along more nuanced lines, Rowlinson perceives the blush in Darwin’s understanding as being a physiological response to, as Darwin puts it, “the thoughts that others are thinking about us” (qtd. in Rowlinson “Foreign Bodies: Or, How Did Darwin Invent the Symptom?” 545). Rowlinson complicates Darwin’s reading of the blush, pointing out that it is also a symptom of the victim’s passive (and frequently ineffective) resistance to another’s dominant gaze. Blushing is often a resistance to a specific relation of gender inequality or even, Rowlinson notes, a “mute expression of racial and sexual subjugation” at times (“Foreign Bodies” 548). Guenevere is certainly in a role of “subjugation,” in that she is a lone woman, placed before a male audience who follow a homosocial chivalric code of ethics which tends to punish female transgressions more than male ones. However, she also directs the narrative, throughout the poem, and offers her own interpretation of her body (as beautiful) in order to defend herself but, also, I argue, to transform discourse into poetry.

series of lyrical and languid pauses over moments of pleasure which are interrupted by her return to remembering the social problem of her situation: the fact that Gawaine is accusing her of adultery.

Guenevere's perpetual insistence, throughout the poem, that Gawaine has "lie[d]" (142) in accusing her, however, is not only a consequence of her refusal to see her passion for Launcelot as something ethically problematic. It is also her attempt to provide an alternative reading of her passions. This is particularly evident given that Guenevere's narrative moves from freely recounting her passionate kiss with Launcelot to then specifically insisting that Gawaine's accusation of her adultery remains a lie. Guenevere even seeks to offer Gawaine a new reading of his own responses to her, arguing that his own body is "tremble[ing]" (152) as he listens to her story and that this demonstrates that he, too, is sensitive to her plight, if he really searches his conscience (Gawaine is never given a chance to speak for himself in the poem so we can only take into account Guenevere's reading of his physical responses to her narrative) (142-162).

In recounting her kiss and trying to persuade Gawaine to take pity on her, Guenevere privileges her own passions over various social structures, such as law and duty, and in so doing emphasizes sensations and desire (over ethics and reason) as a mode of self-expression and self-understanding. However, before recalling her kiss with Launcelot, Guenevere discusses how her own beauty almost bewitches even her: she comments that had she held up her "long hand up against the blue [of the sky]," to admire its shape, she may have been overcome by her beauty (121). Here, Guenevere's narrative becomes a kind of idle reverie or trance; her language is wholly preoccupied with her memories, sensations, and longings. Her narrative, here, seems to be more about the

process of her recollections (her interest in her own body's feelings and throbbings) as opposed to directing her narrative towards a specific conclusion. Such a narrative of passive, idle musings directs attention to Guenevere and also to the very *process* of her narrative, of her story-telling—she speaks at such length so as to waste time, to afford Launcelot the chance to arrive to champion her cause. However, we also get the sense that Guenevere's squandering of time is also a consequence of her fascination with her own body and with her personal longings and desires. When she recollects her kiss with Launcelot, she seems to completely forget her accusing audience and, instead, focuses on the potency of that scene of intimacy.

Such an idle and sensual relationship to time is reinforced in Morris's 1858 painting *La Belle Iseult*. Jane Burden, who married Morris in 1859, modelled for the painting, appearing as a languid, sensual, and idle woman, captivated by her reflection in the mirror by her bed as she dresses for the day. Tim Barringer offers the following reading and contextualization of the painting, emphasizing the way the painting evokes an aesthetics of sensuality and idleness:

[T]his image . . . clearly alludes to adulterous sexual activity. The bed clothes are crumpled and a dog curls up on sheets recently warmed . . . There is no iconographic evidence to confirm whether the female figure is Iseult—who betrayed King Mark for Tristram—or Guinevere, who betrayed King Arthur for Lancelot. The image is not of a penitent adulteress; rather, Iseult / Guinevere, buckling her belt as she rises from the bed, unrepentantly contemplates her own beauty in a mirror. For all its richness, the

medievalising interior has a debilitating claustrophobic atmosphere. (*Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* 21)¹⁰

Given the Malorian title and context of the painting and its emphasis on red, the colour of passion, and its inclusion of wine and oranges (representative of fleshly pleasures and desire) we know the painting details the morning after a sexual affair. While Barringer points out that Morris's painting does not directly allude to "The Defence of Guenevere" poem per se, there are certain details that suggest we may justifiably infer such a connection. The fleshly detail of the painting serves as a companion piece, as it were, to "The Defence of Guenevere," given that both texts, in their own ways, explore the interplay between idle reverie, the body and desire.

"The Defence of Guenevere" emphasizes the desires of the body as explored through Guenevere's creation of poetic reveries through her recollection of touch. Morris's emphasis on Guenevere's bodily sensations as the guide for Guenevere's self-defense also shows the ways in which we can read her narrative as an early model for Morris's later understanding of the poet as an iconic "idle singer of an empty day" (7) as found in *The Earthly Paradise* (1868-1870) and in his 1886 address, "The Aims of Art." Like the "idle singer" (7) opening *The Earthly Paradise* (1868-1870), Guenevere uses her powers of imagination and description to explore the force of subjective experience, paying little attention to the nuanced ethical questions that inevitably surface in the

¹⁰ While Barringer's point, here, about the ways in which the painting can be interpreted as representing either Iseult or Guenevere, is valid, it is important to keep in mind, as David Latham has, that Tristram gave Iseult a dog and so it is clear that the painting is more obviously rendering Iseult's adultery as opposed to Guenevere's. Nevertheless, thematically, the painting deals with both narratives, easily enough.

medieval and Victorian views of adultery. Morris defers these questions in favour of exploring subjectivity and how it shapes a lyric voice of longing, intensity and frustration. As Jonathan Post has observed, Guenevere's entire narrative is a series of "verbal slips" ("Guenevere's Critical Performance" 317) as she tries to insist on her innocence of the crime Gawaine brings against her while also legitimizing the power of her desire for Launcelot. In other words, Guenevere can be read as more than a confined woman: she is representative of Morris's association of creative poetic powers with passivity and contemplation. In *The Earthly Paradise*, Morris implicitly separates poetic thinking (which tends to be "idle" and passive) from active, political work. And in his 1886 address, "The Aims of Art," Morris carefully distinguishes the personal from the political, the individual from society, thus implicitly emphasizing poetry's ability, at times, to disengage from questions of critical assessment so as to emphasize personal and private sensations and desires, instead. Moreover, he carefully distinguishes the concept of idleness (representative of poetic life) from that of energy (representative of the political life). However, throughout the essay, he also makes it clear that both idleness and activity are required for a truly socially conscious and ethically oriented relation to society in general.

In "The Aims of Art," Morris identifies idleness and energy as the two dominant moods in his life as poet and craftsman. He also perceives idleness as a means of escaping the demands of labour and time-keeping which, he posits, are increasingly embodied in modern machines. Morris writes that the "mood of idleness" allows him to imaginatively (and passively) contemplate memories, feelings, and desires, without the interruptions that the practical affairs of work and business bring: "[w]hen the mood of

idleness is on me, I find it hard indeed if I cannot rest and let my mind wander over the various pictures, pleasant or terrible, which my own experience or my communing with the thoughts of other men, dead or alive, have fashioned in it” (4).¹¹ Here, Morris understands idleness as a creative state dependent on rest and various kinds of physical immobility. Idleness provides him the leisure his mind needs to explore personal memories, desires, longings and sensations. Moreover, idleness is a state, Morris implies, that attends to the impulses of the body’s urges and desires, showing poetry-making as an attunement to sensation. Likewise, in *The Early Paradise*, Morris makes it clear that the burdens of the body may be put to rest for a time through idle contemplation. For instance, in the opening Prologue (or Apologia) to *The Earthly Paradise*, he describes the poet as “[t]he idle singer of an empty day” (7) who cannot solve all political wrongs (15-17) or resolve theological complexities (1) but, nevertheless, is able to soothe the memory by showing “wondrous things” (30) as a “wizard” can (29).

Although Morris’s view of idleness, and of the poet as an idler, grew to take on more politically specific contours in his later life, especially in *News from Nowhere* (1890), he presents art as a means of providing alternative attitudes towards desire, time, and the body which are expressly distinct from work of all kinds—be it from

¹¹ Although Morris only later expressly outlines these two “moods,” we can see them intuited (and perhaps more than intuited) in the 1850s: his first volume receives much of its dramatic tension from the disjunction between imagination or idealism and action or everyday life’s demands. For instance, the first four poems of the volume, which make up the Malorian set in the volume, dramatize the division between energy and idleness (even though Morris does not use such express divisional categories until 1886). The four Malorian poems deal with separated lovers and frustrated sexual desires and tensions which are either sublimated, deferred or dealt with through discourse (as opposed to action), as seen in “The Defence of Guenevere,” or are transformed into spiritual longing, as illustrated in “Sir Galahad, A Christmas Story” in which Galahad chooses a “chaste body” (55) as opposed to the “vain . . . struggl[ing] for the vision fair” of physical female beauty (200).

craftsmanship (which he deems dignified labour) or from the repetitive and mechanistic toil of industrialism in Victorian England (which, as we know, he perceives as being the evil of “profit-mongering” that comes at the expense of human dignity) (“A Rather Long-Winded Sketch” 32).¹² Guenevere’s emphasis on time as a subjective phenomenon is the most explicit counter to the growing presence of modernism, represented by clock-time (the chronotopes of industrialism), in the entire poem. Guenevere’s narrative is one of side-tracking: she follows the rhythms of her body and the pathways her recollection open up to her, thus serving as an early instance of Morris’s thoughts regarding the role and purpose of the poet. Guenevere speaks according to the pulses and impulses of her heart and thus implicitly eschews the growing Victorian preoccupation with “time-thrift” as E.P. Thompson explains it (*Customs in Common* 395).

¹² Morris’s view of idleness departs from the Victorian conception of Muscular Christianity, supported by William Hogarth’s moral emblem paintings—especially as found in his *Industry versus Idleness* series of plates. Morris prefers states of rest, of leisure and contemplation, over those of occupation. In *News from Nowhere*, modelled in many ways upon Thomas More’s *Utopia*, the inhabitants of Morris’s ideal commune devote much of their day to activities other than labour—such as communal activities, contemplation, reading and so on. In “How We Live and How We Might Live” (1887), Morris advocates a proper balance between work and leisure so that useless “idleness and aimlessness” (which are different from the idleness he outlines in “The Aims of Art”) have their guaranteed place in one’s everyday life. Importantly, he also privileges leisure, or his ideal conception of idleness, as being the purpose for existence—as opposed to the growing Victorian notion that ethics and the meaning of everyday life and living could be aligned with the concepts of profit and gain (a conception owing some debt to the Hogarthian model in which industry and idleness receive their value from a largely economic framework).

“Underlying” the developing economic and ideological structures of Victorian England is the conception that, as Tim Barringer puts it, “the moral imperative or duty of work and the judgment of the merits of each individual in terms of his duty” determines personal meaning and worth (*Men at Work* 46). Morris’s view of idleness as an essential aspect of creative work, as an assertion of the significance of the individual over the demands of action and labour (which interestingly, in the medieval understanding of leisure as espoused by Aquinas, are always secondary to the contemplative and affective aspects of the human person), provides us with a way of re-approaching the complex problem of female passivity in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*. However, it is also important to keep in mind that Morris does view idleness on a moral spectrum, with creativity on one end and laziness on the other. He perceives the latter as a moral problem since work, as he puts it in “Useful Work versus Useless Toil” (1885), is supposed to be evenly distributed, with each person in society contributing something to the common good. Idleness, in the context of a proper work ethic, is, for Morris, the “wast[ing] of labour-power” which then contributes to the evils of uneven distributions of labour (“Useful Work versus Useless Toil” 125).

If we follow the narrative pattern in “The Defence of Guenevere,” we find that the poem is more concerned with rhythms and images of desire (with its fulfilment and frustration) as opposed to providing readers with a fully fleshed-out narrative (as is provided in, say, Malory’s account of the Launcelot-Guenevere affair in *Le Morte D’Arthur*). As Constance Hasset points out, the intensity of desire, throughout the volume, is brought to a pitch in the way Morris hones in on “bodily detail,” “stalling verbal momentum” in favour of the body’s often unpredictable or fluctuating responses which create a non-linear sense of time, a kind of “uneasy stillness” and an “impeded narrative”: passion trumps reason, over and over again, and this is especially the case in “The Defence of Guenevere” (“The Style of Evasion: William Morris’s *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*” 101). In the poem’s opening lines, Guenevere both doubts the possibility of an objective moral code and privileges memory and desire over rational discourse. In a rather Keatsian vein, then, she privileges “sensations” over “thought” and, in so doing, opens up an idle narrative which, according to Isis Leslie (quoting Hannah Arendt) is any discourse that is not yoked to industrialism’s valuing of language and communication in relation to “their usefulness to supposedly higher ends,” such as profit and progress (“From Idleness to Boredom: On the Historical Development of Modern Boredom” 50). Guenevere is an early version of Morris’s later discussion of the idle speaker, the poet, who is able to express the powers and passions of the human person without necessarily being able to effect political change, per se, through such expressions. As defiance, playfulness, evasion, wandering, wondering or reflection, language and the giving of speeches in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* both

announce the power of desire and, also, as Hasset writes, “serves notice of the absence [of fulfilment] it cannot cure” (“The Style of Evasion” 103).

As we can see, then, Guenevere’s defense is not based on a sense of linear progression or rational argument. Instead, her body’s responses to suffering and her recollections of touch and intimacy with Launcelot, combined with her longing for him, drive and direct her language. Passive and wandering, Guenevere’s narrative cannot effect political change (she remains under duress throughout the poem) but it does provide her with the power to explore her own thoughts and desires. That is to say, in her careful attention to her psychological as well as physical urges, Guenevere provides us with a fleshly poetic aesthetic that promotes the value of contemplation as a force which subtly eschews exterior forces of regulation (of various kinds) in favour of returning to a focus on the human body as meaningful in other ways. Specifically, in ways that do not deal with productivity per se. Guenevere’s self-defense, then, is an idle reverie in which the power of nature and beauty, two central Keatsian themes which greatly inspired Morris, especially while he was at Oxford, shape a poetic and idle (chiefly lyric) sensibility and a subjective perception of time.

Given the domination of such increasingly routine-driven modes of daily living practices, Guenevere’s irregular time-consciousness is striking. Morris anachronistically includes the sound of the interminable tickings of the clock in the poem. Guenevere’s response to the clock and the chimes of the bell (the older, medieval form of marking the periods of prayer, the *hours*) is a subjective one; she transvaluates time into a measurement of desire as opposed to a measurement of productivity, prayer or labour. Just as Morris privileges memory, desire, and the idle rest of the body over the rhythms

of workaday life in “The Aims of Art,” Guenevere’s passion for Launcelot and her idle reveries dominate any time consciousness, throughout the poem. For example, she recalls how, from the moment Launcelot enters the ranks of Arthur’s brotherhood as a knight of the Round Table in Camelot, the very bells that ran at “Christmas-time” seemed to sing and “chime” to his name, tolling out the presence of ““Son of King Ban of Benwick”” for all to hear (64). For Guenevere, the liturgical time-keeping which marks the sacred hours of the day are transformed by her passion for Launcelot: the bells’ chiming becomes an exclusive signifier of his presence. As she grows “sick” (71) with love for him, she becomes “[c]areless of most things,” not noticing the “clock” as it “tick, tick[s]” as being distinct from the persistent beating of her “unhappy pulse” (47). Her pulse and the clock tick as one, measuring out her frustrated desire and longing. Guenevere’s non-linear story-telling, then, is shaped by her view of her body as an expression of passive and lyric longing.¹³

Plainly evident in “The Defence of Guenevere” are Morris’s early poetic interests in the ways the powers of the imagination transcend the limits of political and social problems and contexts. Even though, as Jeffrey Skoblow has recently put it, Guenevere’s testimony is morally ambiguous (since she both “confess[es]” and “refute[s]” Gauwaine’s

¹³ Guenevere’s lyrical and uneven relationship to time—which she treats as though it were a malleable phenomenon since she describes it as pausing, hovering, skipping, and speeding up or slowing down according to her imaginative and somatic impulses—implicitly counters the careful and punctual regulation of time so characteristic of Victorian daily life and living. Listing the various chronotopes dominating Victorian scientific and social consciousness, Krista Lysack, reading Thompson, identifies “small time” as an increasingly prominent feature of Victorian daily routines which stemmed from the “divided and incremental temporality associated with industrial labour practices” in which time-keeping becomes a mechanized and dulling, homogenous repetition of the same: “[s]egmented and coordinated [Victorian “small time”], is measured by the seconds, minutes, and hours of the clock, as well as by the factory day—units of time that were standardized through the railway and its attendant timetables” (“The Productions of Time: Keble, Rossetti, and Devotional Reading” 453-54).

accusation), her insistence that Gauwaine's claim against her is false shows that she privileges beauty and feeling, the watchwords of emerging aestheticism (and Rossetian painterly poetics), over the forces of social norms and political practices ("The Writings of William Morris" 201). *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* is not just "very mediaeval," as Morris, himself, classified it in later years ("A Rather Long-Winded Sketch" 30). It is also the beginning of his working-out of a life-long interest in the power of beauty to express the potencies of personal feeling, and subjective experience, and to renovate the experiences of everyday life and living.

Even in Morris's earliest volume, we can discern his acute consciousness of the frequent separation of beauty and passion from the laws and norms regulating everyday life and living in mid-nineteenth-century English culture. Increasingly, Morris understood his work as a continual effort to merge beauty with the social norms of daily life—as seen in his vision for Morris & Co., Kelmscott Press, and his outlining of an ideal society in *News from Nowhere*. But in his first volume the fissure between beauty and desire on the one hand and political and industrial practices on the other is far more pronounced. Guenevere's personalized view of temporality, for example, which displaces secular (clock) time and liturgical time (the tolling of the bells) literally makes her own body (its pulses and heaving sighs) the standard by which time is measured and valued. Such a subjective approach to time emphasizes Morris's early interest in disrupting generally accepted modern conceptions about time and an individual's relationship to it. Anything but efficient and productive, Guenevere stalls and squanders time, re-directing it with

reflections on the beauty of her own body and on the intoxicating pain of thwarted passion and pleasure.¹⁴

Guenevere represents the poet as romantic idler who trace the processes of memory and desire, wherever they go, and her narrative framework gains both its ambiguity and its lyric power from her self-exposure. Her blush (which I mentioned previously), then, become metonymic for the psychosomatic process of poetic (and idle) witnessing to the power of imaginative and expressive thinking over rational and discursive power (which remains, as Florence Boos would view it, problematically located in men alone, throughout the volume).¹⁵ So long as Guenevere speaks, she uses

¹⁴ An idle reverie, in which lingerings, pauses, and desires comprise narrative meaning (as opposed to an over-arching assertion, along with points-of-proof, as found in typical defenses), Guenevere's story is like Richard Schechner's view of performativity as an understanding of one's environment and audience as a theatre in which the "the fundamental logic . . . is not the logic of the story but the logic of story-telling" (*Environmental Theatre* 83). Marcovitch, reading Schechner, suggests that the human body becomes the central point of meaning in environmental theatrics, an "additional text" that must be "read into the performance" to understand what the dramatic tensions and meanings are (*The Art of the Pose* 17). Through her emphases on her own body, Guenevere presents her very body as a text to be read and in so doing, performs an expressive narrative in which self-exposure allows for an emphasis on desire as opposed to a linear narrative pattern.

¹⁵ Boos puts critical pressure on Guenevere's nervous reactions at the poem's opening, arguing that Morris's women in the volume, while more active than Tennyson's Mariana, "fall into" the "Victorian female stereotype—women as helpless victims, preoccupied wholly with love" ("Sexual Polarities in 'The Defence of Guenevere'" 182). She extends this observation, arguing that Guenevere's inability to provide a rational account of her morally-freighted choices (and their consequences) makes her more of a passive subject; women, throughout the volume, are consigned to the passive and sensate parts of the "poetic division of labor" and such a consignment is embodied in their being placed in various spaces indicative of repression ("Sexual Polarities 182). Women, throughout the volume, are often left in isolation, either embowered (as in the opening part of "Golden Wings") or confined to a tower ("Rapunzel," "Tune of Seven Towers") or confining spaces ("Blue Closet"), while men are expected to heroically defend their love, homeland, and fellow knights or else die trying ("Sexual Polarities" 182).

Despite the fact that various scholars read Guenevere along a similar vein to Boos, I suggest that Guenevere's nervous crisis and her status as a passive subject signifies as more than a problematic and reductive representation of female agency, sexuality, and ability. After all, as I will discuss at more length in later portions of this Chapter, while men may possess more active roles throughout the volume (in keeping with the medieval contexts Morris appeals to), many of them are also hampered and paralyzed by loss, longing, traumas of their own, and by limiting and boring situations which frequently open up explorations of the dissonance between time's passing and the fulfillment of personal desire. Although

up time in a uniquely subjective way and resists the powers of the homosocial, chivalric code of the round table which, in this poem, seems to punish female transgressions more than male ones. In privileging Guenevere's desires over more regimented forms of time-keeping, Morris implicitly points out the irreducible and conflicting differences between poetry and industrialism.¹⁶

Moreover, the poem's focus on longing and sensation, above all else, parallels, of course, Morris's debt to the ways that Wordsworth, Keats, and Coleridge, in various ways, privilege voice and subjective perception, over reason, in assessing the powers, and significance, of emotion. Poetic voice and expression, as with the Romantics, both become central points of Guenevere's defense (which is more of a reverie). This is in keeping with what Adela Pinch calls the romantic, especially Keatsian and

Morris's rendering of Guenevere as *only* emotional and sensual is, of course, a problematic reduction, he has a tendency in his later writings to continue this trend of demarcation and classification so as to distinguish carefully between the functions of production, creative thinking, and sensual response. Interestingly, Guenevere's passivity aligns, at various instances, with Morris's later exploration of the poet as a romantic idler, as one who privileges the powers of sensation, memory, and desire over labour and action. While boredom is a decided symptom of various forms of crises in the volume, idleness is a more positive dysphoric condition.

¹⁶ Noting the gaps, or irreconcilable distinctions, between things such as beauty and industrialism, Morris presents a form of what Slavoj Žižek calls a "parallax view" throughout "The Defence of Guenevere" and in other poems in his first volume (*The Parallax View* 20). Specifically, he displaces modernity by exploring some of its essential problems via a medievalized setting, thus exploring how ideas of order, efficiency, and linear time-keeping are derailed by using what Žižek terms the "change in observational position that provides a new line of sight" (17). Medievalism, which fascinated Morris in its own right, signifies at multiple registers: it is meaningful in and of itself as an historical, symbolic and aesthetic category and it also provides a sharp contrast—in its vibrancy of colour, intensity, and passion—to the fog, exhaustion, and mechanization of England's shifting industrial city-scapes and landscapes. Morris can be said, then, to implicitly observe modernity's attributes of efficiency, obsessive time-keeping, the regulation of passions, and abrupt, jerking, and brutal economic and industrial forces through the dilemmas faced by Guenevere and, in so doing, "face[s] the reality that is exposed through difference," through contrast, as Žižek, quoting Kojin Karatani, puts it (20).

Wordsworthian, preoccupation with lyric desire as an epistemological mode in its own right that centres on a subject's loss, a subject's voice, a subject's physiological reactions to his or her own private history. "[R]omantic lyric poetry," Pinch explains, privileges "loss," "temporality," "repetition instead of plot," "voice" and "noise" so as to emphasize the subject as being at the centre of art (*Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion* 145). "The Defence of Guenevere," then, can be read as an early example of Morris working towards his later conception of the poet as a romantic idler whose powers do not lie in energetic activity but, rather, in careful and introspective attentions to desires, memory, feelings, and the rhythms and pulse of the body. Guenevere's often irrational speech suggests her obsession with her emotions creates an intriguing, "fissured" sense of the self—a cause, Athena Vrettos argues, of many nervous disorders in women in the Victorian period—which actually is a kind of poetic dividend in so far as this fragmentation allows for an exploration of the links between passion, passivity, and poetry, for Morris (*Somatic Fictions* 61).

Throughout *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, Morris's pitting of day-dreaming, dawdling, immobility, uselessness, and refusal-as-power, against structures of management and control can be read as a way of offering what Skoblow calls an implicit "critique of modernity" through "form[s] of surrender" to passion and contemplation ("The Writings of William Morris" 205). Such a critique is uncannily similar to the conclusions of escapism (as a response to modernity) that Charles Baudelaire was coming to in the 1860s and 1870s ("The Writings of William Morris" 205). However, such escapism does not avoid the emerging and pressing problems of industrialism that Morris more expressly addressed in later writings. Instead, it provides a

poetic, de-familiarizing way of re-approaching modern concerns. Morris's view of the world of poetry as an idle and useless one is expressly antithetical to the hectic patterns of production and routine characterizing the machine-oriented labour practices of Victorian, industrial England. Languid, idle, twisting, and restless, Guenevere's energy is spent on desire and poetic reflection and, as a consequence, provides an implicit alternative to the profit-driven capitalists who (as Wordsworth lamented as England joined other countries, such as France and Germany, in the first wave of Industrial practices beginning in the 1760s) "lay waste" their "powers" in "[g]etting and spending" ("The world is too much with us" 2).

While I have read "The Defence of Guenevere" as an early, perhaps mostly unconscious, sign of Morris's growth towards his understanding of the nature and office of the poet as an idler, "Golden Wings" is a more explicit exploration, on his part, of the tension between female idleness, boredom, and an active life. Jehane's words and wishes have no audience and this arguably makes her predicament an existential crisis, arising from solitude and a situational boredom which, to be dispelled, requires a dramatic narrative resolution and change in Jehane's circumstances. Whereas Guenevere's idle reverie is spoken before Gauwaine and other knights of the Round Table (thus functioning as a kind of poetic challenge to social and political mores), Jehane du Castel beau's speeches are uttered in solitude. We get the sense that, without her sudden and disturbing action at the end of the poem, Jehane would become a bored woman-left-waiting, like Tennyson's Mariana. Jehane's idle and poetic reveries do not buy her time, as they do for Guenevere. Instead, they provide an anaphoric and disheartening "[n]o answer," "[n]o answer," [n]o answer" to her less than ideal circumstances (155-157).

Longing for the fulfillment of her desire, Jehane resolves to dispel her encroaching boredom through action and Morris's ambiguous handling of Jehanne's action, in "Golden Wings," opens up important questions regarding the complex relationship between idleness, boredom, and female agency in Victorian contexts.

4.2 From Idleness to Boredom: Problems of Female Agency in "Golden Wings"

Both Paul Thompson in *The Work of William Morris* and E.P. Thompson in *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* have compared the stylistic similarities shared in Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" and Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*. More recently, Benjamin Saltzman has discussed the closer links between Tennyson's "Mariana" and "Golden Wings," pointing out that the latter's rhythmic structure, *abba*, is unique in *The Defence* and "mirrors" the "middle four lines in every 'Mariana' stanza;" this is fitting since both poems explore weariness, loss, and sexual repression through "eerily similar phrases and images" and repetitive rhyme schemes that verge on a magical chant or nursery rhyme ("William Morris's 'Golden Wings' as a Poetic Response to the 'Delicate Sentiment' of Tennyson's 'Mariana'" 288, 290). The dramatic tension in both poems hinges on the longing for an always already absent lover—" [g]olden wings" (75) for Jehanne and an unnamed "he," for Mariana, who, as we know, is generally taken to be Angelo from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (10). Both women are sheltered in enclosed spaces that share similar naturalistic features, such as poplars, moats, and moss. However, as Saltzman points out, "Golden Wings" is a poem that opens with an explosion of colour and vitality—the castle is made of "scarlet bricks" (5), the moat's water is a lush, "deep green" (13), and a boat (uncannily

reminiscent (to a point) of the skiff that bears the Lady of Shalott to her watery grave) carries “lovers” to a place of reunion as opposed to of separation. Shaded and concealed by the boat’s “hangings green” (17) the lovers “sit there” and “kiss / [i]n the hot summer noons, not seen” (19-20). The poem’s opening lines are like the verbal equivalent to a page from an illuminated manuscript and William Butler Yeats, ignoring the stark brutality of the poem’s final stanzas, said the poem’s opening lines were “the best description of happiness in the world” (*Essays and Introductions* 60). The opening descriptions in “Golden Wings,” like the title of the poem itself, glisten and sparkle, providing a striking contrast to the scenes of decay and barrenness (representative of Jehanne’s growing boredom and eventual death) confronting the reader by the poem’s close.

By contrast, from the outset of Tennyson’s “Mariana,” the landscape, which serves as a kind of psycho-geography for Mariana’s interior state, is markedly different. Her moated grange is a decaying pastoral scene: “[b]lackest moss” (1) encrusts “flower pots” (1) and the “ancient thatch” is “weeded and worn” (7).¹⁷ Both the parallels and

¹⁷ Helsinger suggests that Morris’s striking use of the rich reds, golds and greens of medieval illuminated manuscripts and the multi-coloured stained-glass window panes of Gothic cathedrals puts him at ideological, theological and political odds with mainstream Victorian Protestantism which, as manifested in the “straight dark trousers, vests, and coats with white shirts . . . adopted by middle-class men after centuries of gay display among the upper classes” had embraced a “long Protestant and national suspicion of color as a sign of vanity and frivolousness” (*Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts* 88-9). Helsinger also points out that the tendency towards darker colours in the Victorian period was also a direct consequence of the “enveloping darkness of the famous coal-saturated fogs and smoke of industrial and urbanizing Britain” which “affected both “city and even country landscapes, in winter months creating gloom at midday in interiors still spottily lit by candle, oil, and smoky gas, and heavily curtained in vain efforts to prevent the penetration of sifting grime . . .” (89). Helsinger’s discussion of “[c]hromatic [s]tates” (87) in Victorian England is a nuanced and lengthy one. She explores how the boring, dreary and drab pallet of Victorian dress and interior decorating was challenged and transformed by the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, Ruskin, the Oxford Movement and Gothic revivalism. More practically, Morris & Co. had a profound influence on the enlivening of private, domestic spaces and Pre-Raphaelite portraiture themselves often seemed to

striking contrasts between the two poems do not end with their opening, and diverging, locodescriptions and Saltzman's recent exploration of them is careful, perceptive and thorough. However, one point that is essential to make for my reading of Morris's exploration of modernity and boredom in "Golden Wings" comes from a detail that Saltzman does not address: the striking similarity between how Morris and Tennyson handle colour and how their respective handlings speak to Ruskin's analysis of the effects of boredom and discontent in emerging Victorian modernity.

In *Stones of Venice* (1853) and in *Modern Painters* (1843, 1856), especially in the first and third volumes, Ruskin argued that the Victorian, modern sensibility lacked the medieval appreciation for vibrancy of colour that signified merry old England's passion for living. Under the section, "Modern Landscape," in volume III of *Modern Painters* (1856), Ruskin writes that modernity possesses a too strong "tendency to deny the sacred element of colour, and make our boast in blackness" (257) which is symptomatic, he suggests, for the way modernity has "dim" and "wearied," suffering from "ennui, and jaded intellect, and uncomfortableness of soul and body" (258). Helsinger reminds us that, for Morris at Oxford, volume III of *Modern Painters* was his aesthetic Scripture and there is a striking passage in it which explores the kind of vivid colour-conscious language that shapes Morris's first volume of poetry and which especially resonates with the way colour signifies in "Golden Wings." In this passage, Ruskin notes that "[t]he Middle Ages had their wars and agonies, but also intense delights. Their gold was dashed

explode with barely-withheld sexual vibrancy which was often emphasized and expressed through the use of vivid colour as a vehicle for "aesthetic possibilities" (90).

with blood; but ours is sprinkled with dust. Their life was inwoven with white and purple; ours is one seamless stuff of brown” (258). Ruskin further describes the medieval period as the “ages of gold” and modernity’s as the “ages of umber,” presenting us with an important key to our understanding of the ways that Morris may be suggesting how boredom and loss and inabilities to cope with them, through poetic reverie, are specifically modern crises.

While John Everett Millais’s *Mariana* is a vibrant rendering, Tennyson’s “Mariana” remains shadowy and dark, and, if painted faithfully, would look more like a work favoring chiaroscuro and heavy lines over the presence of colour (in other words, it would look like the Renaissance styles favoured by the Royal Academy in its early days, as described by Helsinger) (*Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts* 89). Tennyson uses adjectives such as “blackest” (1), “blacken’d” (38), “silver-green” (42), and “gusty shadow[s]” (52) to emphasize the dysphoric, dejected, and bored state Mariana finds herself in. Her grange calls to mind Ruskin’s “ages of umber” (which characterize the bored and restless state of modernity). Importantly, Morris’s uses of vibrant colours do not extend to Jehanne in her dejected state when her idle reveries and her poetic pleas to her lover, who lies “across the sea” (113), do not restore him to her. Noting, in diction expressly reminiscent of Mariana’s weary moanings, Jehanne says that her days are “weary” as they “pass” and continually do not bring her beloved to her (145). As she observes this, she is described as exhausted and worn out: “[h]er tired feet look’d cold and thing, / Her lips were twitch’d, and wretched tears, / Some, as she lay, roll’d past her ears . . .” (160-63). However, sharply diverging from Mariana’s permanent state of bored immobility, Jehanne grows weary and bored waiting for her golden wings to return and

so she resolves to act, thus rejecting the fate of interminable waiting as she seeks out her lover (a process that ends up causing her death as well as that of her lover's). Jehane's resolution to act occurs when her idle, poetic reveries, her callings after her lover, fail to achieve any result. In other words, when romantic fantasies fail her, Jehanne chooses to act as opposed to sink into the boredom which Walter Benjamin notes romantic desires often become:¹⁸

Gold wings across the sea!
 Grey light from tree to tree,
 Gold hair beside my knee,
 I pray thee come to me,
 Gold wings!

The water slips

The red-bill'd moorhen dips.
 Sweet kisses on red lips;
 Alas! The red rust grips,
 And the blood-red dagger rips,

¹⁸ In "Boredom: Convolute D," from *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin quotes a comment from Roger Callois who argues that escapist forms of Romanticism signal the resistance of the romantic subject to the repressions of emerging modernity's pressures. However, he argues that such resistances typically end up in an "abdication of the struggle," given that poetry and politics are forces in the world that often remain mutually exclusive: the disenchanted romantic ends up experiencing boredom in epidemic proportions since poetry alone cannot transform political wrongs (D4a2). "Romanticism ends up in a theory of boredom," Callois concludes (D4a2). Lars Svendsen in *A Philosophy of Boredom* and Elizabeth Goodstein, in the section "Defining Boredom: Etymology and the Modernization of Reflection on Subjective Malaise," from *Experience without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity*, make similar observations. In "Golden Wings," Jehane's fall into boredom and weariness comes about as a result of her inability to repair her social and emotional sufferings through romantic, idle reverie.

Yet, O knight, come to me!

Are not my blue eyes sweet?

The west wind from the wheat

Blows cold across my feet;

Is it not time to meet

Gold wings across the sea? (113-127)

Appealing to the vividness of sensible imagery, Jehanne's plea is a poetic one which dissolves, a few stanzas later, when she cannot keep her boredom in check. Her temporal consciousness is increasingly centered on absence, disappointment, and the prolongation of time as a measurement of refusal (as is the case in the situational boredom Peter Toohey describes in *Boredom: A Lively History* (3-10)).

While initially lingering on cataloguing various colours, such as red (the colour of passion, blood, and eroticism), and referencing the "west wind," which functions as a sexual force in both Greek mythology and in Morris's poem, "The Wind," Jehane is unable to sustain her lyrical invitation to her beloved to return for long because she is persistently met with silence and refusal. With her inability to continue her poetic reverie, descriptions of vivid colour also dwindle (I will discuss the significance of this point, shortly). Whereas Guenevere's conception of time's passing is completely overcome by her obsession with Launcelot (and she poetically replaces clock-time and liturgical time with her own subjective view of time as a measurement of desire), Jehanne is unable to escape from time's slow passing. It marks absence as opposed to the remembrance of fond recollections and desires. Jehane's idle reveries blur into situational boredom which

threatens to stifle her. As a result, she resolves that she “cannot stay here all alone” (175) as the only lady who dwells in the exquisite, Edenic castle (crowded with amorous couples) who is without her lover.

Nunokawa explains that, as a psycho-somatic condition, boredom marks a bored subject’s awareness that neither language nor even art can dispel the dissatisfaction a particular situation or person awakens in us: boredom marks a temporal and affective period, lasting minutes or months, in which the “psyche fends off, and thus also manifests, the unbearable (because double) burden of desiring desire” (“The Importance of Being Bored” 74). Saltzman writes that, Jehanne’s conception of temporality is “disconsolate” and merges with Mariana’s view of time as a cyclical and interminable measurement of Angelo’s absence (10). However, whereas Mariana’s boredom paralyzes her, Jehanne resolves to take action: she breaks from the role of passive, reflective poet who makes reveries out of her lack and longing. In resolving to act, Jehanne troubles the thus far passive statuses of women throughout *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*. While Guenevere uses the poetic resources of speech to waste time until Launcelot arrives, in “good need,” to champion her cause (295) and whereas other women, such as Jehanne from “The Haystack in the Floods,” are able to at least assert the passive power of refusal so as to attempt to maintain some form of control over their bodies (88-126), Jehane in “Golden Wings” is the only woman to venture to resist the confining constraints of her environment.

However, such a choice comes at a high price: in her resolve to leave the castle, and search out her beloved, Jehanne is described as fading. Her feet have turned a pale “white” (200), even though the sun’s rising glow casts a rosy hue on them and her

“smock” is a muted “dun,” which the sun also washes in “gold,” only momentarily (201-02). Unlike Guenevere’s reddened cheeks and throbbing pulse (which signal how her body flushes with passion, anger, desire, and perhaps a hint of shame), Jehane is no longer able to produce powerful feelings on her own. Her escape causes her death and provides a tragic end to her desire. Just as the Lady of Shalott, Jehane meets death when she escapes her enclosed garden and ends up an aestheticized object: coloured by nature and, when discovered dead, only recognizable by her face alone (210).

Morris’s play with colour, throughout the poem, explores the psychological implications of desire’s fulfillment and its thwarting, of the exhaustion of the bored and unfulfilled subject. Moving from vibrant reds and greens to references to whiteness, pallor, and dun, Morris thus traces the affective burdens Jehane bears. For only a short period, Jehane’s attempt to break free from her environments is refreshing. Her escape suggests Morris’s unconventional interest in, and quasi-acceptance of, female agency outside of the context of the domestic sphere (which towers, castles, closets, and places of confinement represent throughout *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*). But her end shows how threatening conventional conceptions of femininity come at a heavy price. Also, given Carlyle’s exasperation with the tears and moanings of Tennyson’s poetry, a frustration Morris shared, Jehane (to a point) represents a refreshing and new possibility for female representation in lyric poetry.¹⁹

¹⁹ In a letter, from the summer of 1869, to Edward Williams Byron Nicholson (who was seeking Morris’s advice on editing a student magazine for Trinity College, Oxford), Morris discusses his views on Tennyson’s poetry, saying the Laureate is a skilled lyric poet who, nonetheless, has “little or no dramatic capacity” (*The Collected Letters of William Morris* 86). Morris’s praise for “Mariana,” as a poem of “delicate sentiment,” is somewhat lackluster and the evident parallels and striking differences between “Golden Wings” and “Mariana” suggest that Morris sought to explore the problem of frustrated desire and

However, Jehane's end, in either death or suicide, troubles a straightforward or easy reading of the text: on the one hand, she has successfully exerted agency and dispelled boredom (a kind of living death) but, on the other, she has been unable to successfully escape her weary confines unharmed.²⁰ Either Jehane is being punished for seeking to escape the constraints of interminable boredom or else her death is a sign that the social environments outside of her domestic sphere are not prepared to welcome and assist her. Regardless of the various ways we can read the poem's ambiguous, perhaps even teasing (and, nevertheless, traumatic) ending, it is safe to say that Morris at least indirectly acknowledges the fact that a female's attempts to circumvent her surroundings and the conventional expectations of her situation in life is both a challenge and threat to Victorian social order. Increasingly, Victorian literature characterized women who left their prescribed, domestic roles as being causes for social and political upheaval and violence. And, often, it seems that one of the only ways to preserve active women from culpability for their deviance from conventional expectations was to claim that they were mad (as is the case in, for example, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* where Lucy Audley, described as strikingly Pre-Raphaelite in appearance, is admitted to

female agency in a more complex and less sentimental way. Jehane's powerful decisions and her dramatic death cut through the lingering and somewhat timid pathos of Mariana's predicament of perpetual moaning and passivity.

²⁰ Jehane's attempt to retrieve her long-absent lover, and "make him speak, who has been dumb" (198) is thwarted by exterior and ambiguous, particularly masculine, threats and forces—among them, war and violence (215-238). However, even before she meets (or most likely causes) such a violent end for herself and, possibly, for her lover (some suggest we read the "slain man's stiffen'd feet" that are "rotting" in a "leaky boat" as being those of golden wings, himself) (238, 237), Jehane is already suffering. And, in a sense, is being punished for not fitting into the social expectations of the happy lovers who surround her (and remind her of her solitude).

a madhouse at the novel's close). Sometimes, however, instead of being rendered mad, women were afforded the opportunity to return to the very places they resisted as a way to resolve the shock of radical female independence (as is evident in Jane Eyre's return to Rochester at the novel's end).

Jehane's determination to break from the unbearable circumstances of her condition of boredom and repression is problematized in that the poem's narrator no longer describes her actions once she has made her escape from the castle's confines. It is as if Jehane only has an identity to speak of when she is in a domestic and confined space. The rest of the events are narrated *after* the events leading to her death have taken place (whether she has been killed or committed suicide is a point various critics, Saltzman in particular, have considered). We are left, then, with a series of clues and fragments, at the end of the poem, which demand our attention but which resist conclusive interpretation:

Where is Jehane du Castel beau?

O big Gervaise ride apace!

Down to the hard yellow sand.

Where the water meets the land.

This is Jehane by her face;

Why has she a broken sword?

Mary! she is slain outright;

Verily a piteous sight!

Take her up without a word! (206-214)

Jehane's fate is obscured with an unanswerable question and a series of exclamations; all that can be said, for certain, is that she was right in her recognition that idle reverie could not fully redress her problem of boredom and that active resistance was the only way to break a condition of interminable waiting.

Given Morris's own acute awareness that idle reveries and poetic longings cannot redress all social wrongs (as he repeatedly pointed out in his later writings), perhaps it is safe to say that Jehane in "Golden Wings" is an exploration, on his part, of the ways in which one could begin to imagine a woman not only protesting, but working against, the situational boredom stemming from various social constructions and expectations of the Victorian period which frequently prevented women from more directly participating in public and political spheres of daily life. In many ways, Jehane prefigures later female characters of Morris's, such as Birdalone in his later fantasy, *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* (1895), in that both women seek out alterations to their unpleasant and restricting circumstances (however, it should be noted that Birdalone is far more successful than Jehane is).

Although both Guenevere and Jehane can be read as romantic and female idle poets who represent the creative powers present in passivity and reverie, Morris particularly complicates the relationship between passivity, desire, and idleness through the figure of Jehane. Unable to manage passivity or action fully, Jehane is a conflicted figure whose death opens up a series of important questions regarding the relationship between reflection, idleness, boredom, creativity, domesticity and wider public spheres

for women in nineteenth-century England. Sultzman suggests we read “Golden Wings,” and Jehane as Morris’s reworking of Tennyson’s “Mariana” who appeared “too delicate and too passive” (297). Although Jehane dies by the end of the poem, she manages to effect a social shift in her surroundings. Admittedly, this shift is a tragic turn but it nevertheless alerts readers of the poem to the fact that the golden pastoral grounds of Jehane’s castle actually imprisoned her and neglected her desires. The decaying landscape at the poem’s close becomes, among other things, a more honest and transparent manifestation of the interior and psychological struggles Jehane endured, while living in the seemingly perfect castle: the apples turn “green and sour” (231), following Jehane’s death, and hang on the “mouldering castle-wall” (232), signaling the affective suffering Jehane felt at being held interminably waiting and neglected by her absent (and neglectful) lover. In “Golden Wings,” boredom and idleness are two closely related, though ultimately distinct, dysphoric states that shape narrative and plot development (and diminishment). Jehane’s boredom is a situational kind, signifying as a response to, and symptom of, conditions caused by subjective and dissatisfied relations to time and enclosed spaces (which represent sexual repression and trauma). In the following section of this Chapter, I will explore how, through his poem “The Wind,” Morris even more expressly explores the problem of boredom—of being trapped in an unpleasant and dissatisfied relationship to time—and how it signifies in express ways as a manifestation of Victorian male crises in relation to sexuality and war.

4.3 “The Wind” and “A Tension of Nerve”: Male Boredom and Paranoia

Pater’s description of *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* as a work surging with throbbing and thwarted bodies, whose passionate “outlets are sealed, beget[ting] a tension of nerve” is perhaps most strikingly typified in “The Wind” (“Aesthetic Poetry” 83). As with many other poems throughout the volume, “The Wind” is a fantasy lyric which blends medieval historical contexts with an intensive exploration of subjective experiences, emotions, and psycho-somatic problems, specifically boredom. While critics tend to categorize the poems in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* under a series of topics—‘historical,’ ‘Malorian’ or ‘Arthurian’ and ‘fantastical’—more specific sub-categorizations have been applied as well. “Following Pater’s lead,” Laurie, for example, has suggested that we also add a category entitled “The Blue Closet group” which includes “The Sailing of the Sword,” “Spell-bound,” “The Wind,” “The Tune of Seven Towers,” “Golden Wings,” and “Near Avalon,” and, of course, “The Blue Closet,” since all seven poems deal with problems of loss and confinement. All seven poems, she continues, represent thwarted sexual desire and the power (and limits) of the imagination to escape from the particularities of historical place, time, and event (“The Embodiment of Dreams: William Morris' "Blue Closet" Group” 195). The moment the speaker in “The Wind” is introduced it is obvious that he is trapped in a tortuous relationship with time that vacillates between boredom and paranoia. Suffering from various forms of attribution bias, he is a man who, as Bentley observes, “is obsessed by the past, fearful of the present, and, above all, petrifyingly afraid of action” (“William Morris’s ‘The Wind’” 32).

The poem's opening lines set the stage for a scene that is medieval and romantic in its trappings but intensely modern in its significations. Like those who suffer from paranoia, the speaker attributes sinister intentions to the inanimate objects surrounding him, perceiving them as threats to his world. In other words, the poem's opening stages an epistemological crisis, so characteristic of growing modern anxieties about the world's seemingly increasing unintelligibility (and, often, of its hostility). In determining his environment as hostile, the speaker does not draw poetic inspiration from his surroundings as do Guenevere and the "idle singer of an empty day" from *Earthly Paradise* (and as Jehane in "Golden Wings" attempts). John C. Farrell, extending Freud's reading of the paranoid subject, argues that paranoia, more generally, is an unsuccessful attempt to make both one's environment and other people conform to personal, and untenable, assumptions about reality and everyday life. The paranoid subject, he notes, will often use "exalted . . . verbal expression" to support a "framework of utter delusion" (*Freud's Paranoid Quest: Psychoanalysis and Modern Suspicion* 214-15).

The speaker in "The Wind" is paranoid in that he sees his environment as threatening and instead of being able to transform this threat (into poetry, for example, as Guenevere manages in her defense), he allows it to overcome him, making time, memory, and desire burdens to be borne. He is held in a limbo-like state. His situational boredom stems from his failed attempt to turn deficits (like fear, guilt, and anxiety) into some kind of narrative. Unable to escape the oppressive burdens of his present state of shock and paranoia, the speaker claims that any attempt to act or to find a resolution to his suffering will cause a violent disturbance to his surroundings:

So I will sit, and think and think of the days gone by.

Never moving my chair for fear the dogs should cry.

Making no noise at all while the flambeau burns awry.

For my chair is heavy and carved, and with sweeping green behind

It is hung, and the dragons thereon girt out in the gusts of the wind;

On its folds an orange lies, with a deep gash cut in the rind [. . .]

If I move my chair it will scream, and the orange will roll out far,

And the faint yellow juice ooze out like blood from a wizard's jar;

And the dogs will howl for those who went last month to the war. (7-12, 16-18)

These opening tercets, with their tightly woven rhyming scheme (*aaa, bbb, ccc* and so on), mirror the fixed monomania and paranoia of the speaker; he justifies his inaction by arguing that movement may disrupt, even wound, the inanimate objects around him (viewing them as though they had consciousnesses and feelings of their own). Moreover, the lines' plodding, mainly iambic, meter contributes to a sense of interminable and boring sameness. The poem's rhythmical structure and metrical patterns not only generate a sense of boredom, control, and fixity but its images do as well. Frederick Kirchoff points out that the speaker's reading of the things around him is symptomatic of his paranoia and nervous hysteria since he conflates their metaphoric possibilities with reality or fact (*William Morris: the Construction of a Male Self* 63-6). Of course, the objects clearly signify outside of themselves: the colour scheme of the chair draped in "green" and the "yellow juice" that is likened to "blood" is, as Bentley notes, "precisely the same" as those of the speaker's former lover's 'green gown,' the 'daffodils' the

speaker scatters over her body, and her ‘blood’ which shocks him towards the poem’s close (35). But, needless to say, they remain inanimate objects (and thus innately, non-threateningly, passive in and of themselves). However, the speaker behaves as though they are potentially hostile objects. Why this paranoia? Could it be a manifestation of a guilty conscience? Both Helsinger and Kirchhoff make efforts to point out the possibility that the speaker is guilty of some kind of violation of Margaret, his former love, whose grotesque (and mysterious) death is clearly represented in the gashed orange.

The intensity of the speaker’s reactions towards his environment and his later remembrance of his actions towards Margaret (actions which quickly shift from being playfully amorous to problematically forceful), accompanied by his inability (or refusal) to be specific in his narrative, paints an incoherent picture of intentionality. Like the problems of dreams and dreaming in Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), the draped chair and gashed orange can be interpreted in various ways and yet also resist clear signification.²¹ As a reviewer for the *Literary Gazette* put it in March of 1858, the narratives in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* leaves the readers in a state of epistemological confusion, if not in outright frustration or boredom: in each poem, “something exciting happens,” he observes, “but, as the courier in *Little Dorrit* has it,

²¹ Morris’s blurring of distinctions between waking and sleeping in this poem, between historical fact and wish-fulfillment or fear, uncannily fit into Freud’s complex examination of dreaming and wish-fulfilment. In his section on “Distortion in Dreams,” from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud suggests that images that cause fear or anxiety in our dreams are linked to “neurotic anxiety,” which is “derived from sexual life and corresponds to libido which has been diverted from its purpose and has found no employment” (185). It is plausible that the speaker’s reactions to the gashed orange and green draped chair not only stem from recollections of Margaret but also derive their ability to terrorize him because they signify the frustration, and ruination, of his secret wish for sexual and even violent dominance over Margaret’s body. Alternatively, the orange and chair may call the mind the speaker’s inabilities to deal with Margaret’s death.

there is no why” (qtd. in Boos 197). The speaker’s indeterminate narrative, throughout “The Wind,” can be read as a consequence of his boredom.²² Dissatisfied with his surroundings, yet unable to disassociate himself from them or from an acute consciousness of time’s passing (he is fixed in the present as he “sit[s],” and “think[s],” “think[s]” (7)), the speaker is unable to rest in idle contemplation. The gashed orange (which hearkens back to the fleshy fruit, symbolic of sexual passion, in Morris’s *La Belle Iseult*) and the howl of dogs are metonyms for things that the speaker cannot face with ease: the sexuality of Margaret and her bleeding body (which I will discuss shortly) and the fact of death represented by those killed in war (87-89).²³

²² The volume’s mainly critical reception, from reviewers, shows the ways in which Morris’s presentation of dream-like states as a way of exploring passion and predicaments of moral ambiguity went against the grain of conventional Victorian poetic aesthetics. Lourie comments that Morris’s use of dreams and ambiguous psychological states—in which memory and desire mix and mingle—radically departed from the poetic philosophies of critics, such as Matthew Arnold, who understood poetry as didactic by nature, offering “forthright, realistic, logical, [and] active” resolutions to the problems of emerging modernity (such as crises in faith, a loss of a sense of familial and personal identity, and a radical questioning of social and political ethics) (“The Embodiment of Dreams” 194). Expressing his moral reservations with Morris’s volume, one writer for the *Athenaeum* in April 1858, for example, declared that Morris’s entire “point of departure” for his volume was the poetic sensibility found in Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott,” in which “strange dream[s]” hover on the “furthest verge of Dream-land to which sane fancy can penetrate” (qtd. in Lourie 193). Implying Morris’s volume flirted with, and tested, the limits of reason, the reviewer both grasps and avoids the point of Morris’s work. On the one hand, the volume is about dreams and dreaming as Morris himself pointed out when he said his poetry was the “embodiment of dreams in one form or another” (*The Letters of William Morris to His Family and Friends* 17). However, on the other hand, its play with the malleable limits between reason and madness, between narrative and dream-like states, put critical and aesthetic pressure on the mainstream Victorian conception that poetry should always be didactic.

²³ The hope of idleness as a form of poetic and therapeutic redress—which the speaker seems to believe is the case at the poem’s outset—is ruined by the poem’s close (in the final lines of the poem, the speaker’s idle reverie ends up conjuring up the “ghosts of those that had gone to war” (86), and sends him into a neurasthenic shock, represented by his shriek (84)). Bentley points out that the poem’s references to the banner of Olaf II, “king and saint” (82), at the end of the poem suggests a Norwegian, twelfth-century origin and makes the case that the speaker may be recollecting the brutal battle of Stiklestad as recounted in the second volume of *Northern Mythology* with which Morris was very familiar (31-2). Expressly exploring the possible contemporary implications of Morris’s exploration of violence and combat, and of various odd and dysphoric moments of imprisonment and physical inaction throughout his first volume of poetry, Ingrid Hanson has recently argued that Morris’s early stories, which he wrote during his Oxford days, and *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, bear traces of his extended considerations of, and reservations concerning, the Crimean War and the ethics surrounding it.

The Crimean War ended two years before *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* was

Given this, “The Wind” is arguably the text in *The Defence of Guenevere* volume that most explicitly inverts or challenges the theme of idleness as a state of refuge and hope since the speaker’s attempts at idle reverie return him to sites of horror and trauma that he cannot transform. Unlike Wordsworth’s reclining on the couch as he recollects, in a “vacant” or “pensive mood,” the speaker’s body does not rest but, rather, like the fragmented narratives and actions of the poem itself, remains tense and suggestive of potential breakdown—a potentiality fulfilled in his shriek (84) at the poem’s close (“I wandered lonely as a cloud” 19-20). At the poem’s outset, the speaker proposes to think back on his past love: “So I will sit and think of love that is over and past, / O, so long ago! Yes, I will be quiet at last; / Whether I like it or not, a grim half-slumber is cast / Over my old brains, that touches the roots of my heart . . .” (22-5). His recollection, however, does not allow him rest and “quiet” for long because it reminds him of rather forcefully coaxing Margaret into erotic play (which only briefly precedes her mysterious and shocking death). The sexual encounter he recollects, and the pastoral setting it is

published and its traumatic and psychological effects on British soldiers and the British Empire could be a plausible source for the speaker’s paranoia and anxiety regarding the brutal price combat and violence bears on *male* identity, in particular; one gets the sense the speaker has no cohesive or integrated sense of self (much like Tennyson’s haunted speaker in *Maude: A Monodrama* which also bears express criticisms of the psychological and paralyzing consequences of war throughout much of the narrative) (*William Morris and the Uses of Violence: 1856-1890* 1-40). Hanson also argues that Morris problematizes the idea that the War effort was noble (which many of Morris’s friends at Oxford, such as Richard Watson Dixon who published defenses for the War, claimed) (1). In “The Wind,” the speaker’s inability to find solace in imaginative thinking—given that the materials for idle, poetic reverie (his imagination, his relationship to time, and his connection with his environment) are all troubled—suggests that his restless dissatisfaction, his disgust for his surroundings, shows how boredom can register at a moral level: it can be a symptom of an uneasy conscience (a conscience that is unsettled for a variety of reasons—perhaps because the speaker is guilty of the brutal and abrupt death of Margaret or because he cannot deal with the brutality of war and what it has done for conceptions of male, Victorian identity).

located in, swiftly turns into a grotesque and abject scene. This is particularly announced when the speaker begins to recount, in a fragmented manner, the ways he spent time with Margaret in years past: “I held to her long bare arms, but she shudder’d away from me [. . .] I kiss’d her hard by the ear, and she kiss’d me on the brow, / And then lay down on the grass, where the mark is now, / And spread her arms out wide while I went down below” (40, 49-51). What appears a scene of sexual passion, also bears within it ambiguous yet disturbing hints of violence, and so makes the dramatic event difficult to read with certainty. The scene remains a fragmented cataloguing of body parts and descriptions of acts of passion that are not fitted together cohesively. Is Margaret glad that the knight “prevail[ed]” and that his kisses are “hard”? Is Margaret complicit or being acted upon? Female agency is particularly difficult to discern in the text. Disturbingly, Margaret seems most participative, or rather, *most significant*, when she is bleeding and dead a few lines following the speaker’s recollection of his ‘play’ with her. Yet, when she bleeds, her body becomes a signifier of something other than herself (since, as a corpse, she cannot signify as a person anymore; woman-as-living-corpse is a fate that often surfaces in explorations of femininity in Victorian literature, as in *Jane Eyre* or *Dracula*). While it is difficult to determine Margaret’s specific significance in the poem, we can see that the speaker does not find recollections of her to be soothing.²⁴

²⁴ Interestingly, Margaret’s appearance and condition is not catalogued with the minute and vivid specificity characteristic of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, as instanced in Rossetti’s rendering of Guenevere for the Oxford Union Mural project and his series of sensual, red-lipped, long-haired women of the very late 1850s and 1860s. However, Korchoff suggests that this poem’s ambiguous and problematic rendering of the possibly violent, and obviously erotic, relationship between the knight and Margaret “foreshadows” John Everett Millais’s 1870 *The Knight-Errant* in which female vulnerability is encountered by male “invulnerability,” as depicted by the knight’s fully-armoured body leaning over a naked and solitary woman who is placed in a position of troubling submission (66). If we are to accept this reading (which helpfully underscores how, from the outset of his poetic career, Morris explored the power dynamics between sexuality and gender), it is important to qualify that the speaker in “The Wind” has also suffered

Margaret's bloody corpse is covered with daffodils which, in the Victorian language of flowers, signify as the "Lent[en]" or "Easter lily," representing hope and rebirth (*A Victorian Flower Dictionary: The Language of Flowers Companion* 37). In the romantic tradition, as typified in "I wandered lonely as a cloud," daffodils are also representative of languid and idle poetic reverie, acting as triggers for poetic reflection. While the speaker recalls flirtatiously "cast[ing]" the daffodils "languidly lower" (66) over Margaret's body, they end up being funereal as they cover her dead body (and so call to mind a scene somewhat reminiscent of Millais's *Ophelia* (1851-52)). Both Margaret's corpse and the daffodils function as the appearance of the abject in the poem. Daffodils do not signify hope in this text; instead, they function as the means by which the speaker covers up, as it were, the full details and circumstances of his relationship to Margaret. Moreover the vivid yellow of the daffodils is conflated with the juices of the gashed orange and is transvaluated into a symbol of boredom and disappointed hopes as opposed to a promise of resurrection. It is not only the speaker's dubious relationship to Margaret, however, that causes fragmentation at the level of description and narration. The very presence of Margaret's corpse signals the emergence of abjection as a troubling aspect of the poem.

and is a strikingly vulnerable and broken subject, himself. Enduring the impoverishment of subjectivity that comes from the disgusted and bored inability to face the present moment with any kind of positivity, the paranoid speaker is ultimately a passive subject, as well (interestingly, far more passive than the eloquent and self-admiring Guenevere or the determined, though ultimately tragic, Jehane of "Golden Wings"). As a result, we can say that Morris's exploration of boredom, suffering, and trauma is not always expressly tied to set Victorian conceptions of masculine and feminine difference.

Julia Kristeva reads the corpse, and other less radical signifiers of the inevitable facts of loss, decay, and death (such as blood), as objects that threaten the coherency of human conceptions of identity:

[T]he corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expect, “I” is expelled. The border has become an object . . . In that compelling, raw, insolent thing in the morgue’s full sunlight, in that thing that no longer matches, that no longer signifies anything [specific], I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons us and ends up engulfing us. (*Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* 3-4)

In “The Wind,” past scenes of trauma, Margaret’s bleeding body (her corpse) and the haunting reminder of those who lost their lives in war, interrupt the speaker’s attempted idle reveries, embodying both the abject (“death infecting life”) and the poverty of the present moment to fulfill the speaker’s desire for healing and hope. The speaker’s nervous restlessness and situational boredom (which is on the verge of becoming an existential boredom announcing a breakdown in identity and knowledge) both make the poem a tense narrative: from start to finish, “The Wind” averts direct narration just as soon as the speaker seems to focus on something specific.

Marianna Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, interpreting Roland Barthes, maintain that traumatic experiences from the past do not remain contained in the past once overcome; rather, they spill over into the present, not only infecting it but also giving shape to past

pains in present space and time (via culture, representations, trauma, memory, and other forms). In other words, to be in-tune to mortality is to be fragmented and restless, even disgusted and bored:

Points of memory [are] points of intersection between past and present, memory and postmemory, personal remembrance and cultural recall. The term *point* is both spatial such as the point on a map—and temporal—a moment in time; and it thus highlights the intersection of spatiality and temporality in the workings of personal and cultural memory. (“Testimonial Objects: Memory, Gender, and Transmission” 358)

Whether the speaker’s memories in “The Wind” are literally accurate or supplemented by desire and the imagination, they nevertheless typify Hirsch’s and Spitzer’s conceptualization of past history, of memory, as a force that continually shapes and punctures present experience, demonstrating the relationship between time (the speaker’s memory) and space (the speaker’s controlled, impoverished, and disturbing landscape comprised of a chair and gashed orange—the bare bones of a Beckett dramascap). Boredom, as opposed to reflective idleness, dominates the scene (keeping the speaker disgusted with, but nonetheless fixated upon, blood, guts and war) because the speaker cannot get over his fear of, and disgust with, the abject (as embodied in Margaret’s bloody corpse). The abject is, as Kristeva’s reflection reminds us, inextricably implicated with the mundane and grotesque facts of everyday life and living that we often wish to push aside. The disgust the speaker feels when he recalls the horrid scene of Margaret’s death may be a psychological defense to repress the horror of the scene (and, possibly, to deny any role he had in its being brought about).

Robert Plutchik explains that disgust and boredom are closely linked since both are complex psychological defenses which attempt to skirt recollections of trauma; both boredom and disgust seek to protect or defend the restless subject from “disease or harm” (qtd. in Toohey 15). William Ian Miller, along a similar vein to Plutchik, maintains that boredom is a psychological and affective reaction to that which is so oppressive or traumatizing that everything outside of it becomes conflated with it: the subject or object who “bores” the bored subject “is vividly differentiated” from everything else, becoming a “highly individuated source of aversion” (*The Anatomy of Disgust* 31). Regardless of why he is traumatized, dwelling in a state wavering between paranoia, disgust, and boredom, the speaker in “The Wind” is unable to find pleasure from retrospectively exploring past scenes since they are comprised of memories of violence and suffering. The various crises the speaker undergoes in “The Wind” speak to the problems of maintain a cohesive masculine identity. Morris not only explores this predicament in this poem but also in his painting for the Oxford Union Mural project, *Sir Palomydes’ Jealousy of Sir Tristram*, and in his poem, “Spell-Bound.” All three texts examine the boredom, dejection, neurosis, and overall melancholia that male subjects, alienated from the chivalric conception of masculinity as defined by various forms of power (martial, sexual, political, spiritual, and so on), experience when trapped in predicaments of failure, isolation, loss and trauma. Kirchoff points out that when they are unable to act heroically, Morris’s men in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* experience profound forms of “[p]sychological regression”—which suggest attempts to “evade the grim details of the present moment” (106). Morris explores the complex and layered dilemma of masculine identity crises of various kinds and, in so doing, he re-evaluates

contemporary attitudes regarding psychological states, sexual politics, conceptions of gender and identity, and the growing Victorian obsession with time-consciousness that mingled in both private and public spheres of life.

Governed by traumatic recollections, the speaker in “The Wind” is a fragmented and impoverished character who is caught in a fraught and dissatisfied relationship with the present moment—held in a suspension (by fear and anxiety)—that so aptly fits the Heideggerian conception of boredom as a being held in limbo. As James Phillips points out, bored time immobilizes the bored subject, rendering him petrified (‘bored stiff’) and aware that “nothing *can* now happen *to* us,” except the reinforcement of disappointment and disgust (“Beckett’s Boredom” 115). Among other things, the vulnerability of the speaker reveals the problem of understanding male identity outside of the contexts of power and self-assertion. Alison Pease notes that neurasthenic or anxious men in the Victorian period were regarded as those who had allowed the pressures of urbanization, modernization, intensive work schedules, and “too much worry” to overcome them and that their cure could be found in “seek[ing] new climes and be[ing] physically active out of doors,” whereas women prescribed with neurasthenia were ordered to seek out a “rest cure,” staying home and remaining as immobile as possible (*Modernism, Feminism, and the Culture of Boredom* 25). Interestingly, Morris presents us with a man unable to take the measures deemed necessary in Victorian medical and social culture to alleviate himself of his worries; if anything, he appears strikingly like a stereotypical, Victorian woman with a nervous condition.

There are a series of ways in which we can interpret Morris’s unconventional handling(s) of masculinity: it can signify as his understanding of the pressures men faced

to appear active, productive, and useful (thus fulfilling the conception of muscular Christianity); the effects of a guilty conscience; or, possibly, it can be seen as an exploration of male and female equality (both men and women suffer from affective discontents). This latter suggestion seems particularly plausible since the speaker shrieks, at the end of the poem, in a manner reminiscent of Guenevere in the opening of “The Defence of Guenevere.”

As I discuss in the next section of this Chapter, in his painting, *Sir Palomydes*, and his poem, “Spell-Bound,” we see Morris exploring an awareness of the burdens of frustrated desire (and how they play out at the levels of the body’s drops in energy and in its poses and activities). We also see him considering how such burdens of frustrated desire apply to a cluster of personal, social, and aesthetic interests which he picked up during his formative years in Oxford. In the remaining pages of this Chapter, I explore how Morris’s collaboration with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and others, in the Oxford Union Murals project and his poem, “Spell-Bound,” show the intimate connection between desire, failure, and boredom and how such a connection shapes Morris’s attentions to the human body as well as to the forms of poetry and painting.

4.4: *Sir Palomydes’ Jealousy of Sir Tristram* and “Spell-Bound”: Crises in Male Identity and Boredom

That Morris focused on thwarted sexual desire and various dysphoric affective problems throughout *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* demonstrates, among other things, how his aesthetic impulses and interests were, as Christina Poulson puts it, under the “spell” of Dante Gabriel Rossetti from the mid-1850s into the 1860s (“Sacred and

Profane Love:’ The Oxford Union Murals and the Holy Grail Tapestries” 125). Morris alerts us to this connection given his dedication of the volume to his “[f]riend, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Painter.” Poulson points out that, prior to collaboration with Rossetti on the Oxford Union Murals Project (1857-1859), both Morris and Edward Burne-Jones were more interested in the religious aspects of medievalism (as typified in the celibate figure of Sir Galahad) than in the erotic dimensions present in the stories of Tristram and Iseulte and Lancelot and Guenevere in *Le Morte D’Arthur*.²⁵ Rossetti had an important part to play in deciding what the themes from Malory would be for the Oxford Union painting project and the murals all dealt “directly or indirectly with adultery, fornication, sexual obsession and sexual betrayal,” as Poulson points out (“Sacred and Profane Love” 126). As we know, from the later 1850s onwards, Rossetti was increasingly interested in painting figures of bored, melancholic, and sexually powerful women, all of whom expressed the striking fleshliness which would later be censured by Robert Buchanan when this same fleshliness appeared in *The House of Life*.²⁶

²⁵ Morris’s choice of theme for his mural contribution focused on Sir Palomides’s jealousy in seeing Tristan and Iseult together and such a selection, Poulson explains, reveals quite a discernable shift in Morris’s medieval aestheticism; prior to the mid-1850s, his medieval interests focused, instead, on the figure of Sir Galahad, his celibacy, and the “religious elements” of Anglo-Catholicism which he and Burne-Jones “shared” when they first came to Oxford (126).

²⁶ Buchanan first anonymously published an attack of Rossetti’s work in *The Contemporary Review* (1871) and then reworked, expanded and re-published his polemic in 1872 as *The Fleshly School of Poetry and Other Phenomena of the Day*. Although he later changed his disposition towards Rossetti’s poetry, Buchanan’s original assessment of it as “fleshly” was a moral criticism. However, “[f]leshly” was, at turns, either a complimentary or a derogatory term. For instance, Buchanan took the idea of “fleshly” from Swinburne’s praise of Rossetti’s ability to create sonnets that were “consummate fleshly sculpture[s],” a point Buchanan disliked for ethical reasons (“The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D.G. Rossetti” 338). Buchanan recasted Swinburne’s compliment, describing Rossetti’s poetics of the flesh as a moral sickness. Rossetti, Buchanan writes, placed fleshliness “generally in the foreground [of most of the sonnets in *The House of Life*], flushing . . . poem[s] with unhealthy rose-colour, stifling the senses with overpowering sickliness . . .” (340).

Rossetti's sketches of Elizabeth Siddal and his growing passion for Jane Burden-Morris (starting in the later 1850s) are chief examples of his developing focus on the female body as the dominant form in his art. As I discussed in my previous Chapter, from 1859, onwards, Rossetti often rendered women as bored and stuck in cramped, claustrophobic settings or else as being in states of isolated contemplation as in *Soul's Beauty* (1866) and *Body's Beauty / Lady Lilith* (1866, 1868)—both of which present to the viewer very different kinds of introspection.²⁷ In general, as J.B. Bullen observes, the Pre-Raphaelites, and especially Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris, were increasingly interested in, if not obsessed with, depicting the “sexualized woman” in their work, often focusing on the female body so as to explore “times distant,” the intricacies of desire’s frustration and coded representations of sexual or unfulfilled desire (*The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry and Criticism* 50).²⁸ Rossetti’s and

²⁷ For a detailed discussion of how Rossetti’s paintings (in the 1850s and early-to-mid 1860s) display his Venetian-styled and “lyrical” paintings focusing on female bodies, see Bentley’s “Making An Unfrequented Path of Art His Own: Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Paintings in the Aesthetic Mode” (21). Bentley stresses that women’s “fingers,” “hair,” “lips,” “breath,” “eyes,” “throat[s],” “bosom[s],” and “shoulders” are the ‘things’ Rossetti’s paintings of this period emphasize and they “convey a sense of languid and inviting sexuality” (23). And, in particular, *Bocca baciata* (1859), *Lucrezia Borgia* (1860-61, 1868) or *Fazio’s Mistress* (1863) typify Rossetti’s incorporation of the sensual style of the Venetians, chiefly Titian, Giorgione or Veronese, in his depictions of women in the 1860s and 1870s. Rossetti told his brother William Michael that Veronese’s *The Marriage Feast at Cana* was the “greatest” painting “in the world beyond a doubt” as it brought to life “flesh” and “blood” (Doughty 367)).

²⁸ The intensity with which both depict the female body as the nexus point for sexual desire and its frustration draws our attention to some important questions. Specifically, are these renderings a kind of objectification of women or, rather, are they more complicated consideration of, and commentaries upon, the dynamics of desire and gender in nineteenth-century England? With regards to both Rossetti and Morris, I suggest that their renderings are more interested in exploring the registers of affect and desire through idealized renderings of women. While Christina Rossetti is, of course, right to criticize the reductive tendencies of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to pursue “[o]ne face” (“In an Artist’s Studio” 1), throughout many of his sketches and paintings, both her poem and Rossetti’s and Morris’s poetry and art, in general, are far more complex in their handling of gender, time, desire, and sexuality. Florence Boos has asked very similar questions in her discussion of *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*:

William Morris's early poetry is striking for its erotic intensity and powerful evocations of passionate and unhappy women. Indeed, his portrayals of confined, alienated, and dependent

Morris's first collaboration, on the Oxford Union Murals project, particularly typifies Morris's developing aesthetic

interests in the female body, in his art, and also provides one of the first instances in which he begins to implicitly render the relationship between thwarted desire, the body's exhaustion and boredom.²⁹ Moreover, it provides an early pictorial precedent for the overall tensions and themes of *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, and especially expresses some of the themes present in "Spell-Bound." As with his first volume of poetry as a whole, Morris's painting for the Oxford Union Murals project details the tensions of frustrated desire and how such tensions play out in the poses and rhythms of the body. Boredom also subtly makes an appearance in Morris's contribution to the Mural project and encapsulates a central, affective tension between loss and desire that is found in "The Wind" and "Spell-Bound" in particular.

women are so sharp that they pose some obvious questions. Do they, in the end, simply stylize and project some of the most destructive conventions of Victorian patriarchy? Or do they actually provide some "defense" of female passion and sexuality, against the social hierarchies and emotional suffocation they depict? ("Sexual Polarities in *The Defence of Guenevere* 181)

Boos's questions do intersect with mine. However, her study focuses on how Morris's poems are a defense of female sexuality—a defense relying on the powers of medievalism for a de-familiarizing power so as to, perhaps, make it more palatable to Victorian audiences.

²⁹ The Oxford Union Murals project augmented the relationship between Rossetti, Morris, Burne-Jones, and the others who took part in the endeavor. However, as we know, it was something of a failure given that the paintings faded, almost beyond recognition, shortly after the project was finished. Neither Rossetti, who led the group, nor Morris, Burne-Jones or the others involved in the project had experience with the techniques required for painting frescoes and their work rapidly deteriorated. What remains of the murals in the Oxford Union are difficult to discern without walking up close to the paintings (which are accessible by ascending to the upper-gallery of the debating Hall) but, nevertheless, they remain striking renderings of scenes from *Le Morte D'Arthur* that focus on loss, restless desire, and, as Poulson classifies them, themes centering on "sexual obsession and emotional pain" (127).

Morris's mural, covering one of the upper, bay side-panels in the debating Hall, depicts a classic medieval love triangle: dejected and in isolation, Palomydes is positioned on the lower, bottom-left corner of the painting, hunched over in a state of jealousy and isolation (as the title for the painting explains), while the embracing figures of Tristram and Iseult occupy the top-most, right hand corner (their bodies are difficult to discern as being separate from each other, thus providing a stark contrast, in their unity, to Palomides's isolation). *Sir Palomydes' Jealousy of Sir Tristram* or, as it is fully titled, *How Sir Palomydes loved La Belle Iseult with exceeding great love out of measure and how she loved not him again but rather Sir Tristram* (1857), dramatizes the problem of thwarted desire on the one hand and passionate, illicit love on the other. Seán Desmond Healy, reading Heidegger and Franz Kafka, points out that boredom often announces itself in disappointment, making itself felt in the face of the absence of all one desires, an absence announced in alienation and isolation: it “burrow[s] deeper, a psychic black hole drawing [one's] energies . . . hopes [and one's] very sense of [self] into an annihilating vortex, acting as an entropic force” (*Boredom, Self, and Culture* 35). While Tristram and Iseult are engaged in an ecstatic moment, a spot of time celebrating the fulfillment of their desire, Palomydes's posture suggests a condition not unlike Healy's description of boredom. His body language tells the disappointing narrative of desire left unfulfilled and hopes dashed. His being-in-time is constituted by lack and longing. This problem of isolation and loss is brought to a greater pitch in “Spell-Bound” when the mysteriously bewitched knight is unable to escape his imprisonment. This poem, in particular, recasts the predicament of Mariana and the Lady of Shalott in masculine terms.

“Spell-Bound” opens with a dysphoric account of the passage of time in a way that echoes the opening lines of the final poem in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, “In Prison.” In the latter, the subject’s body is completely absent from the narrative. Instead, a spectral voice, the linguistic and vocal expression of disenchanting weariness and boredom, describes the day as passing “[w]earily” and “drearily” (1) in a tone that is, once again, similar to Tennyson’s Mariana. In “Spell-Bound,” the speaker, an imprisoned and immobile knight (whose voice and imagination, and not his body, are the agents in the poem) dreams of his beloved, hoping that she will survive to see him return to her. From start to finish, the poem rehearses, in a plodding and predictable iambic tetrameter, the affective sense of weariness and boredom caused by the pressures that slow moving time has on the mind and body of the knight.³⁰ As the “experience without qualities” (Elizabeth Goodstein 1), boredom surfaces in the poem at the level of language, narrative, affect, and handlings of time. The dramatic problem in the poem, as with so many Beckettian non-situations, is that there is “nothing to be done” (*Waiting for Godot* 5). Both the imprisoned knight and his beloved (who is largely a figment of his imagination throughout the poem) are left in solitude, “wait[ing]” for “what perchance may never come” (57-8). As with “The Wind,” the knight’s attempts at poetic reverie, despite his less than ideal circumstances of being mysteriously “bound” “round with silken chains” by a mysterious “wizard” (75-6), are consistently derailed by the fact of his immobility and suffering. His descriptions of the golden fields outside of his tower

³⁰ I am grateful to Dr. M.J. Kidnie for pointing out how the poem’s rhythmic cadences reinforce, at the formal level, the sense of boredom the poem creates.

and of his beloved's longing for him are governed by exhaustion, weariness, and inability:

How weary is it none can tell,
 How dismally the days go by!
 I hear the tinklings of the bell,
 I see the cross against the sky.

The year wears round to autumn-tide,
 Yet comes no reaper to the corn;
 The golden land is like a bride
 When first she knows herself forlorn—

She sits and weeps with all her hair
 Laid downward over tender hands;
 For stained silk she hath no care,
 No care for broken ivory wands; [. . .]

He is not dead, but gone away.
 How many hours did she wait
 For me, I wonder? Till the day
 Had faded wholly . . .? (1-12, 16-20)

The words “weary” and “wears” govern the poem’s opening eight lines, and are connected to the knight’s description of time. World weariness, *taedium vitae*, aptly describe the knight’s state.

His experience of time is like a barren autumn in which nothing is reaped, harvested or sown. “Invulnerable” (as Phillip James describes the bored subject) to the possibility of the productive powers inherent in time’s passing (such as the powers of planting, growth, cultivation, and harvesting), the knight is bored stiff (“Beckett’s Boredom” 115). The landscape, time, and the knight’s mood are all “barren,” which, according to Christina Rossetti, is one of the most significant descriptors for boredom (Harrison 225). “[N]o reaper” (6) comes to the field of plentiful corn and in the same way, the “golden land” that the knight likens to his bride, is left “forlorn” (8). “[W]ear[ing]” passages of time, “weep[ing]” and a general exhaustion, as well as images of teeming potential (that remain untouched), govern these stanzas. Similar to the “still unravished bride of quietness” and “foster-child of silence and slow time” (1-2) in “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” the knight’s beloved is exquisite but left untouched. In “Spell-Bound,” the knight’s narrative is a mix of the living and dreaming world, of the reality of confinement and the potency of imagined desire; both states are continually blurred throughout the text but, nevertheless, each are symptoms of the burden of boredom.

We get a specifically striking sense of the frustration and boredom that governs the poem in the ways that, try as he might, the knight’s attempts to imagine his beloved actually effect no change to his circumstances (at least, in “Defence of Guenevere,” the Queen’s idle narrative not only demonstrates her implicit and passive rejection of the political power and control of the Round Table, as embodied in Gauwaine, but it also

buys her the time she needs for Launcelot to come to champion her cause). On one level, this poem is also about the theme I have discussed at length throughout this Chapter: the abilities and limits of idle reverie, of poetry, to overcome, or at least temporarily escape, difficult circumstances. On another, the poem also dramatizes a crisis of masculine identity: unable to stand, bound by chains, the knight is not able to use his “good sword” (77) which, in “happy days of old,” he used to “w[i]n” his beloved “well from knight and lord” (78-9). Now, action is perpetually denied to the knight and, as in Tennyson’s and Millais’s depictions of Mariana, the disappointment felt in “Spell-Bound,” whether sexual or otherwise, heightens the knight’s power to contemplate the existence of time and to notice the force of desire when it is left deferred, cancelled or unsatisfied.³¹

At times, however, the poem is something of a tease: the knight’s only slight moments of reprieve from boredom occur when he is able to vividly imagine his absent beloved. In these instances, the narrative takes on a brief vitality and borrows the structure of a dream sequence in which the knight’s bound body is relaxed and he is able to focus on his beloved as opposed to the weariness of slow-moving time: “[s]ometimes I have a little rest / In fairest dreams, when on thy face / My lips lie, or thy hands are prest / About my forehead, and thy lips / Draw near and near to mine own” (42-6). The days which oppressively “pass on, pass on” (41), are soon transfigured by the knight’s dreams of the lady’s lips which “draw near and nearer” (46). The dull repetitions of linear time are replaced by delightful, ecstatic imaginings of lovers drawing closer to each other. The

³¹ It is fitting, then, that the repetitive and even, at times, forced-sounding rhymes of the poem’s tetrameters serve to further mark the knight’s suffering: the rhythmic predictability suggests that there may be no physical escape for the knight. Or, at the very least, the poem is not expressly concerned with such a possibility.

burdens of chronological time, then, are replaced by imaginings of physical pleasure. The knight's dream is a romantic, idle reverie, a poetic act, which offers an alternative representation of temporality that recognizes the legitimacy of desire over and above mechanistic understandings of time as a continuum of measured, predictable, and thus boring, paces.

The imagined (or remembered) kiss, in particular, becomes a central trope in the stanza, representing the hope of desire's fulfillment and boredom's dispelling. It represents, also, the possibility of a recuperated masculine identity in which, as Thomas Carlyle would wish it, the mind's imagination and the body's capacities to respond work in harmony and energy. However, it is in this contemplative, dream-like state that the invasion of bored time occurs:

But when the vision from me slips
 In colourless dawn I lie and moan,
 And wander forth with fever'd blood,

That makes me start at little things,
 The blackbird screaming from the wood,
 The sudden whir of pheasant's wings.

O! dearest scarcely seen by me . . . (47-53)

While in an idle reverie, where his body was actually at rest, the knight saw a world of vivid colour (that imaginative medieval world that Ruskin contrasts with the drabness of

modernity in the third volume of *Modern Painters*) and experiences the consolation of remembered or imagined physical contact with his beloved. When the knight can no longer sustain his imaginative state of idleness (the contemplative gaze which allows him to ignore his physical condition of imprisonment), his world becomes colourless and even the simple movements of nature and animal life disturb him and take on a threatening presence as in Robert Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (1855).³² In a state of raw nerves and bored restlessness, the knight is depicted as becoming physically sick from his disappointed desire. And the poem's end does not resolve the restless desire caused by the knight's immobility.

As is so often the case throughout Morris's first volume, the poem's ending does not attend to narrative closure and resolution. Does the speaker's beloved really offer him a sword or does he only imagine that she does so? Will he actually escape his chains? Are his chains real or merely representations of the limitations of poetry and mimesis, of language? Reviewing Browning's *Men and Women*, Morris wrote that "it does not often help poems much to solve them, because there are in poems so many exquisitely small and delicate turns of thought running through and through their music and along with it, that cannot be done into prose . . ." (qtd. in Kirchhoff 84). Morris's sense of the poem as a mystery that is best left unsolved particularly makes itself felt at the end of "Spell-bound." The poem ends without offering a final outcome for the knight: perpetually left

³² Throughout "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," the landscape signifies as personifications of various forms of trauma: the grass seems to bear leprosy (73-5) and a rodent (perhaps a "water-rat") shrieks like a baby (125-6).

on the brink between desire's wants and desire's fulfillments, the speaker's narrative and condition in "Spell-Bound" dramatizes the vacillation between potency and action.

In many ways, the poem functions as a verbal equivalent to painting as a genre: through its vibrant details and titillating suggestions of potentiality, the poem remains bound by its very language. "Spell-Bound," then, is an exploration of the dynamics of stasis, of the powers of boredom and frustration. Prettejohn comments that, in Pre-Raphaelite paintings and poems (such as Millais's *Mariana*), "visual specificity . . . seems to promise that we can fathom [their] secrets, if only we look long enough and carefully enough. Yet," she perceives, "there is no easy answer" to Pre-Raphaelite paintings as they "refuse to allow us easy mastery over [their] figures or the implications of [their stories]—we can [often] neither predict . . . eventual happiness, nor pity . . . [nor] tragic loneliness [and so] are allowed no comfortable respite" (*The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* 13). The enthralled body of the knight is the central trope of the poem and it signifies at conceptual and physical registers. It embodies the possibilities of subjective attitudes to time and explores the psycho-somatic burden of boredom that those, bound by various unrelenting structures (chronological time being one of them), endure. Both the knight in "Spell-Bound" and the alienated figure of Sir Palomydes in Morris's painting for the Oxford Union Murals project present masculine forms of dysphoric feelings. One of the most pressing problems in both texts is the way in which time's passing has failed to bring recuperation or rejuvenation to either figure. The possibilities of poetic reverie as redressing powers are also problematized for both figures and instead of being perceived as healing, time is rendered an aggravating burden to be endured. Among other things, by exploring the ways in which boredom and dysphoric feeling

shape senses of masculine desire, identity, and failure, Morris offers us an interesting and much needed exploration of the ways that distress, troubled nerves and vain longings are not only pressing feminine problems in the Victorian period but masculine ones as well.

The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems is Morris's first and most sustained exploration of idleness, boredom, subjective (as opposed to linear) handlings of time, and the powers of human desire in a variety of forms. The dysphoric nature of *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* as a whole, and its tendency to resist linear time, is typified in the ways narrative development is often sidetracked by loss, reverie or an interest in desire over reason. As Berry has observed, twenty out of the thirty poems in the volume are resolved in an anti-climactic admission of defeat, frustrated desire or loss ("A Defence of Guenevere" 277). Boos likewise appraises the volume as an exploration of the consequences of disappointment and erotic frustration in art and poetry: "the work's principal motifs," she comments, "are its protagonists' direct erotic emotions and pervasive fears of frustration and defeat" ("Sexual Polarities in *The Defence of Guenevere*" 181).

Such readings stem from an interpretive tradition in keeping with Walter Pater's classification of *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* as a manifestation of medieval "mystic passion" that originates not only in the "great romantic loves of rebellious flesh [typified in Lancelot and Abelard]" but also in the tensions and disappointments of such rebellions that are expressed at the anatomical level of the human body, in the organs and nervous system ("Aesthetic Poetry" 80). Thwarted and

frustrated passion, as represented in the heaving and protesting body of Guenevere, sets the stage for Morris's poetic tones and aesthetic interests throughout the volume.³³ Equally important, Morris tends to achieve his close readings and explorations of the relationships between art and the body by centering on how the body responds to unfulfilled desire. This is especially the case in "The Defence of Guenevere," which opens the volume.

The problem of being held in "limbo," the Heideggerian spatial-temporal structure for boredom (which I discussed in my Introduction and in my Chapter on Dante Gabriel Rossetti), also surfaces in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*. "The Defence of Guenevere," as well as some of the historical and fantasy poems, such as "Golden Wings," "The Wind," and "Spell-Bound" shape an aesthetic sensibility grounded in the burdened responses of the body to an often overlooked aspect of human experience in capitalist-driven societies: the value and function of painful and frustrating feelings as signs of an active intelligence, a sympathetic imagination, an emotional sensitivity, and, even, of an active and attuned conscience. Collectively, the bodies described throughout *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* comprise a heaving, slow-moving, throbbing, confined, frustrated, and often idle or bored community. The characters, as Pater describes it, experience "passion of which the outlets are sealed

³³ Thompson suggests that Morris's fascination with medievalism, in the 1850s, was bound up with how it offered a "reconstructed world . . . not in which he could retreat, but in which he could stand and look upon his own age with the eyes of a stranger or visitor, judging his own time by standards other than its own" (28). The problem dramatized between Launcelot and Guenevere, in particular, is one that captured the imaginations and fascinations of Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti alike. The Launcelot-Guenevere predicament is at the heart of Morris's 1858 volume: "poised on the brink of sexual satisfaction," but always already deprived of it, the lovers dramatize the problem and potency of deferred desire (Thompson 67).

[which] begets a tension of nerve, in which the sensible world comes to one with a reinforced brilliance and relief—all redness is turned into blood, all water into tears” (“Aesthetic Poetry” 83). Every feeling, interaction, and word bears implications for the body: it is as if the women, dressed in exquisite hues and posing in pent-up or passionate positions, painted by Dante Gabriel Rossetti throughout the 1850s, are turned, by Morris, into speaking and moving bored subjects who are tuned-in to their fleshly desires.

Although Morris’s later work more expressly takes on the problem of industrialism by expressly imagining alternatives to it, as in *News from Nowhere*, it is important to stress that his fascination with strong feelings, the power of idleness as a creative mood, boredom, and “tension[s] of nerve,” as Pater puts it, registers at a series of levels, ranging from the aesthetic to the affective and the political, in *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*. The various dividends of idleness are also seen in the ways that Morris explores the problem, and potential, of female agency in “Golden Wings” which, alongside “The Defence of Guenevere,” is one of the most sustained explorations of a female protagonist in his first volume of poetry. His exploration of agency is expressly outlined in a passive format and relies on a tense negotiation between idleness and energy (poetic reverie and action) which he identified as being the two moods characterizing his own personality and the interests of his writing and craftsmanship (“The Aims of Art” 4). Morris’s childhood fascinations with the medieval, which persisted and evolved throughout his life, reveals the ways in which, during the 1850s, it became a potent and striking framework through which he considered not only primal and instinctive forms of passion but also the developing structures and socio-political conditions of his own age.

CHAPTER FIVE:
Commonplace Aesthetics: Boredom, “Self-Postponement,” and Duty in Christina Rossetti’s *Maude*, “The Prince’s Progress,” and *Commonplace*

In one of her letters to her brother, William Michael, during the summer of 1849, Christina Rossetti offers an understated and playful analysis of her time visiting the family of James Collinson, to whom she was engaged from 1848 to 1850. In the letter, she complains about the boredom of her visit while, nevertheless, maintaining a sense of humour. In this letter, as in many instances throughout her poetry and prose, Rossetti also hints at the presence of boredom in her everyday life. From describing daily domestic routines to the conversations of visitors, Rossetti provides an involved sketch of the monotonous routines comprising her time with the Collinson family:

. . . Though my visit here is extremely tolerable, still the postman is quite an event in my existence; [. . .] Local converse wearies me somewhat; yet this advantage it possesses-I cannot join in it; so may, during its continuance, abandon myself to my own meditations [. . .] The talk of *beaus* is as perpetual here as at Mrs. Heimmann’s: however, fewer jokes have been passed on me than might have been anticipated [. . .] Do you ever see the Kings? News of them or of the Brotherhood, or of anything else, thankfully received [. . .] In my desperation I knit lace with a perseverance completely foreign to my nature. Yesterday I made a dirt-pudding in the garden, wherein to plant some slips of currant. The unbusinesslike manner in which the process was gone through affords every prospect of complete failure. Ah Will! If you were here we could write *bout-rimés* sonnets, and be subdued together. (*Letters* 1: 18-9)

Rossetti's writing, here, suggests a quiet frustration combined with a wry and subtle sense of humour. While she spent her days "knit[ting] lace," out of "desperation" (James was away for most of her visit), her brothers were busy with the newly-founded P.R.B, brainstorming for the title and format of their magazine and preparing for exhibitions of some of their earliest paintings.¹ At the end of her letter, Rossetti's longing for her brother's company so that they could write *bout-rimés* sonnets together shows how much she valued collaborative creative work with her family.²

Writing *bout-rimés* also features in *Maude* (1850), Rossetti's posthumously published novella about a young girl whose poetic desires are in tension with her growing religious devotion to "the advanced High Church party of the Anglican communion," as described by William Michael in his "Prefatory Note" to the text upon its first being published in 1896 (5). As with the above-quoted letter to William Michael, Rossetti's *Maude* stages a tension between the boring routines of life in the domestic sphere, the desire for creative outlets, questions of social duty, and a longing for outside news from,

¹ In December of 1849, the Brotherhood would chose the title, *The Germ*, out of sixty-five other suggestions and the short-lived magazine was, as Jan Marsh puts it, one of the "highest and happiest" parts of Christina's involvement with the P.R.B. (*Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* 105). Since she could not appropriately visit Dante Gabriel's studio, in a company that was mainly comprised of men and a few female models who made up the 'stunners set,' Christina was able to participate vicariously through *The Germ*. Her poems "Dream Land" and "An End" were both featured in the first instalment of the magazine, in January 1850, and her poem "Song" was paired with a poem and etching completed by her then-fiancé, Collinson. Christina Rossetti's first set of poems were anonymously published in *The Germ* but by the second instalment of the short-lived journal, she wrote under the pseudonym, Ellen Alleyn (which Dante Gabriel thought up for her) so that the title page would not seem over-run with Rossettis. One of Christina's poems, which Dante Gabriel retitled "A Pause of Thought," which featured in the February 1850 installment of the magazine, subtly implies how she was already well acquainted with disappointed desire, frustration, boredom, and the "hope deferred" which makes her "heart sick" (2).

² Holding *bout-rimés* sonnet writing competitions was a favourite competitive pastime between Christina and her other three siblings (usually either Christina or William Michael won first place as the best and fastest rhymesters).

and engagement with, broader public and social circles. This Chapter will explore Christina's earliest attitudes towards boredom as a young woman of nineteen who wrote the manuscript of *Maude* in an exercise school book as a way of commenting on, and sometimes satirizing, members of her social circle. It will also explore how boredom, as a psycho-somatic problem, persisted in Christina's life and writing and took on new meanings as she grew in her social and religious concerns with conscience, duty, and female identity as shaped by the home, family, illness, and creative work. As I will discuss at more length in section 5.3 of this Chapter, the domestic sphere was a conflicted space for Rossetti: it was, simultaneously, a place of rest, respite, care and affection and also one of confinement, stagnation, limitation, familial burdens (which often fell on her shoulders), and boredom. As Jan Marsh's detailed and extensive biography of Rossetti hints, the boredom we find in her work was also present in the Rossetti household—especially since illness and suffering, of various kinds (psychological, spiritual, and physical), were familiar and frequent guests. The almost constant, wearying burden of illness in the Rossetti home dulled Rossetti's vivacious spirit—which, at times, could be incredibly strong and which, when she was a young girl, earned her the pet name, “*vivacio* [lively] Christina,” from her father (23).³

³ Although it is certainly the case that every person will, and does, experience frustrated desire, restlessness, suffering and boredom, Christina's writing is particularly shaped by, and sensitive to, the restless and melancholic strains in life. For most of her life, Christina spend much of her time at home—either helping with the failing health of her father, her mother and relatives, and, increasingly as time went on, with her own. Christina was diagnosed with Graves disease in the late 1860s and, not too long after, with breast cancer. Much of her time at home was spent in helping others feel better; in employing her time with her writing; or in completing small charitable projects for people who were sick. For example, William Michael told Mackenzie Bell that, during the 1870s and until around 1885, Christina used to make scrapbooks for hospital patients and sick children. As Lorrain Janzen Kooistra points out, William Michael numbered his sister's charitable output to at least fifty scrapbooks, noting that she took a great deal of care to make them beautiful as well as instructive and entertaining for her recipients (*Christina Rossetti and*

A playful sketch of Christina, made by Dante Gabriel in 1865, confirms that the domestic sphere was a contested place for his sister. The sketch shows her in a tantrum, rushing about the living room while smashing furniture to bits with a small mallet. The context for the sketch was Dante Gabriel's ironic representation of Rossetti's response to a rather favourable, if not enthusiastic, review of her first volume of poetry, *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862), in *The Times*, on 11 January 1865.⁴ In the review, entitled "Modern Poets," Christina's first volume of poetry was compared to Jean Ingelow's recently published collection of poems. The review declared Rossetti the more mature poet of the two women; it described Rossetti's work as "simpler, firmer and deeper" than Ingelow's, presenting a rhythmic tone and cadence that "would be difficult to mend" (qtd. in *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* 319-20). While Christina was pleased with the review (in fact, she told her brother she was "crowing"), Dante Gabriel played with the observation that his sister's poetry would be "difficult to mend" (qtd. in *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* 320). Interestingly, Dante Gabriel takes the description of his sister's verse (as that which is difficult to mend) and aligns it with the domestic sphere. Christina's hacking of the furniture registers at a series of levels: it represents the way her art and the domestic sphere are inextricable (for better, for worse) and it teases Christina since she worked hard to control her temper and act in a reserved

Illustration 2-3). This thoughtful charitable project was just one, out of many, that Christina undertook in order to contribute to the comfort and care of sick people in their everyday struggles.

⁴ There are disagreements about the precise dating of this sketch. The National Trust Exhibition at Wightwick Manor, in Wolverhampton, dates the sketch at 1862 but this dating would mean the sketch pre-dates the scene it depicts by three years. The Introduction to the sketch on the Rossetti Archive Online explains that it must be from 1865, or perhaps even from a bit later, given that Dante Gabriel includes a quotation, from the 11 January 1865 review in the sketch.

manner (as befitted a devout Anglican). Dante Gabriel's sketch, although a joke, does hint at the ways his sister could, and often did, feel hemmed-in by the small and cramped quarters of the family home.

As Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar, Marsh and, more recently, Dinah Roe, have observed, once the Rossetti siblings entered adolescence, Christina remained in the domestic sphere while her brothers were able to enter social circles that extended far beyond the small borders of the family home. Although Christina's experience was shared by thousands of other middle-and-upper class girls during this period, she had enjoyed some more unique privileges, for a period. As Anglo-Italian, her family culture had been less restrictive than many and, until adolescence, Christina had enjoyed equality with her brothers: they all pursued their games and poetic and social interests together. Christina's letters make it clear she missed her brothers, as they began to explore social possibilities beyond the family home, and she was always curious about their activities and pursuits (both because she loved them and also because they were experiencing opportunities she could only ever have, second-hand, through them). Rossetti was caught in the typical situation of women writers of her period: desiring to express her imaginative impulses but constrained by the fact that the suitable spaces for middle-and-upper-class women were generally private, limited, and domestic, as opposed to in the public square. Granted, Christina did come to have greater access to public spheres through her writing and her volunteer work for St. Mary Magdalen Penitentiary, in Highgate—a rehabilitation or reclamation home for women who left prostitution (she began her volunteer work there in 1859). However, her relationship to the home remained a complex one and, given this, it should be no surprise that boredom was something of a

paradox for Christina—an inevitable part of life but, at times, an overwhelming burden. Whereas it was a symptom of romantic and aesthetic idealism for Dante Gabriel, boredom becomes increasingly aligned with questions regarding feminine identity, conscience, duty, and the spiritual burdens and dividends of deferred personal desire in Christina's poetry and prose. Moreover, whereas Dante Gabriel almost always casts boredom in a feminine form (even when he, himself, is the one clearly experiencing it and exploring it through his art), Christina is very careful about the gender distinctions and differences present in her representations of boredom.

For the most part, Christina examines boredom in relation to the personal, historical, and imagined experiences of women. At times, however, she does consider how boredom translates into male experiences of, and relations to, identity and restless desire—especially in “The Prince's Progress” (1866). The next section of this Chapter will explore the early significance of boredom as a personal burden that Christina, or young female poets reminiscent of her own character, bore. In her first novella, *Maude: Prose and Verse* (1850), Rossetti explores the early growth and anxieties of a young female poet's mind, loosely imitating the kind of prosimetric style so famously employed by a young Dante Alighieri in *La Vita Nuova*. Section 5.2 will explore how, in “The Prince's Progress” (1866), Christina perceives the willingness to endure boredom (the frustration of one's personal desires) as a manifestation of feminine, Christian virtues in particular. In so doing, she interestingly seems to equate specific virtues, which are most strikingly typified in the figure of Christ, as being particularly feminine: long suffering, patience, and endurance. The faithful Princess, who wastes away from patience and boredom, can be read as a figure embodying the Christian fidelity and endurance

Christina later discusses at greater length in her devotional writing, *Called to Be Saints* (1881). By contrast, the male responses to boredom, in “The Prince’s Progress,” are represented in the Prince’s desperation to escape from it, at all costs. The Prince’s fear of boredom can be read as being, among other things, Christina’s criticism of the growing obsession with desire for its own sake—which she believed overtook her brother, Dante Gabriel (and other members of the P.R.B. at various points in their artistic careers). I will also discuss how the Prince’s desire to escape boredom can be read as an exploration, on Christina’s part, of the moral and social consequences of sloth which she would later term the “deadliest of the seven sins” (303) in her devotional work, *Time Flies* (1885). Even though boredom certainly features as a dysphoric condition in both *Maude* and “The Prince’s Progress” (and, in so doing, opens up important insights into Rossetti’s thoughts on the devotional life, personal identity, and female lived experience in Victorian culture), the most developed reading of boredom in Rossetti’s work can be found in her novella, “Commonplace,” from her volume, *Commonplace and Other Short Stories* (1870).

Since recent scholarship on Rossetti has devoted considerable attention to how her poetry, and later devotional writings, express what Linda Palazzo calls the “re-evaluation of [the Victorian] woman’s everyday experiences,” it is surprising that “Commonplace” remains almost entirely overlooked (*Christina Rossetti’s Feminist Theology* 34). In section 5.3 of this Chapter, I will examine how Rossetti classifies everyday, domestic life and living as a condition in which duty paradoxically gives the ordinary meaning and, yet, is often inextricably bound up with, and shaped by, the psycho-somatic experience of what Peter Toohey calls “simple boredom”: the monotony

arising from routine or dailiness that makes simple tasks burdensome (*Boredom: A Lively History* 5-6). Since it underscores the ordinariness of life, the fact of time's passing, the reality of failure and disappointed desire, and the frustration stemming from one's inevitably always limited and commonplace circumstances, boredom is a psycho-somatic condition which subtly but profoundly appears and reappears throughout Rossetti's work. The following pages of this Chapter, then, seek to map out, consider, and interpret the diverse and significant ways in which Christina Rossetti presents the relationship between boredom and everyday life. Throughout this Chapter, boredom is read as a psycho-somatic symptom of Victorian, domestic experience for women on the one hand and as an inevitable part of living in the world on the other. More specifically, I suggest we can interpret boredom as an ambivalent mood in Rossetti's work: depending on the moral fiber of the characters experiencing boredom, it can be transformed into a profound meditation on the vanities of earthly life (in light of the promise of heaven) or it can encourage the kind of frivolous and vain self-absorption that Rossetti so carefully and persistently criticizes in her poetry and devotional prose. Seeking out "the lowest place" ("The lowest place" 1), Rossetti's representations of boredom in her poetry and prose are, I argue, a profound meditation on the relationship between ordinary life and faith and between poetic identity and the conscience. As I shall discuss shortly, in section 5.2 of this Chapter, her exploration of boredom is also often an indirect reconsideration (and critique) of aspects of the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic, especially as present in Dante Gabriel who, as Mary Arseneau points out, was increasingly "incapable" of reading poetry and symbols in an "incarnational" way (*Recovering Christina Rossetti: Female Community and Incarnational Poetics* 162). By reading boredom in this way, I suggest that light is

shed on a series of important aspects and questions that are integral to Rossetti's vision as a female artist committed to the rigorous and mystical aspects of her Christian faith and who was also deeply invested in carefully examining the interplay between art, morality, suffering, personal identity, desire, female lived experience, and ordinary life.

5.1 Poetry, Faith, and Boredom in *Maude: Prose and Verse*

Until scholarship on Rossetti, such as G.B. Tennyson's *Victorian Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* (1981), Diane D'Amico's *Faith, Gender, and Time* (1999) and Arseneau's *Recovering Christina Rossetti* (2004), the religious elements of *Maude*, and Rossetti's work, have often been largely sidelined or else viewed as a form of repression restricting an otherwise vivacious and intelligent woman.⁵ To begin with, this view that religion is an aesthetic obstacle for Christina was an opinion often aired by select members of Christina's own family. Both Dante Gabriel and William Michael could be rather dismissive of the religious elements in Rossetti's work, William Michael in particular. For instance, in his "Prefatory Note" to *Maude: Prose and Verse* (1897), William Michael observes that Maude's sins seem to be mere trifles of over affectation. When

⁵ Since its publication in 1896, *Maude* has occupied a rather specific place in Christina Rossetti scholarship—especially in the last few decades, Rossetti's work has come to deservedly enjoy a great deal of attention due to the work of Feminist Studies in particular. *Maude* is usually viewed as one of the most obviously autobiographical texts that Rossetti wrote. However, in section 5.3 of my Chapter, I will propose that her novella, *Commonplace*, is also a kind of autobiographical work and, moreover, it works through and eventually resolves many of the religious and artistic struggles found in *Maude*. Ever since William Michael Rossetti and Christina's first biographer, Mackenzie Bell, offered this reading, it has been commonplace to view the main character, Maude, as what Gilbert and Gubar term a "surrogate-self" for Rossetti (*The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* 549). In his "Prefatory Note" to *Maude*, William Michael suggests that his sister's "main object in delineating Maude was to exhibit what she regarded as defects in her own character, and in her attitudes towards her social circle and religious obligations" (3).

Maude admits to liking her own poems, she abstains from partaking of Holy Communion as she feels too unworthy to receive it because she is guilty of the sin of pride (the root from which all other sins flow). William Michael suggests that such a hesitance on Maude's part is symptomatic of scrupulosity and, if anything, is a self-renunciation bordering on the absurd: "[i]f some readers opine that . . . this [scrupulosity] shows Christina Rossetti's mind to have been at that date overburdened with conscientious scruples of an extreme and even a wire-drawn kind, I share their opinion" ("Prefatory Note" 4). Along similar lines, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their ground-breaking study of Victorian women writers and poets, view Christina's religious sensibilities as repressive: "the Maude in Christina Rossetti—the ambitious, competitive, self-absorbed and self-assertive poet—must die, and be replaced by either the wife or nun, or, most likely, the kindly useful spinster" (3).⁶

The interpretive conclusions of this kind of criticism offered by William Michael Rossetti, Gilbert and Gubar, among others, suggest that religious devotion plays a largely repressive role in *Maude*, and, by implication, throughout Christina's own fraught

⁶ Sarah Fiona Winters has argued, recently, that Gilbert and Gubar's reading does not take into account how Christina viewed her writing as not only a personal passion but a divine gift, one of the talents she was called to use ("Christina Rossetti's Poetic Vocation" 292). In *Seek and Find* (1879), Christina describes her writing as a form of public apostolate: her words witness to Christian teaching. For all the humility and self-effacement that seems present in her quiet acknowledgement of the significance of her writing, there is a certain self-assertion that is present, nevertheless. In many ways, Christina's devotion, her surety in the spiritual fruitfulness of her endeavors, worked to encourage and bolster her efforts to be published, and influential, in the male-dominated world of publication more generally and of the publication of spiritual materials, of tracts, reflections, poetry, and sermons, more particularly. Of *Seek and Find*, Christina said it was "a simple work adapted to people who know less (!) than I do: but I took a keen interest in writing it, and I hope some may feel an interest in reading it" (*Letters* 11). It is hard not to see a certain playfulness in Christina's self-deprecation: regardless of how she viewed her intellectual and poetic abilities, it is clear that she felt they were good enough to merit a wide audience by offering food for thought and contemplation.

adolescence. More specifically, the frustration and boredom Maude often experiences, throughout the story, is seen as a consequence of her nervous anxieties that she is not worthy to partake in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Although these readings rightfully possess a great deal of traction, and have been insightfully advanced in Marsh's biography on Christina, the novella can also be read as a profound and insightful meditation, by a young Christina, on the nature of her growing devotional life, and, more specifically, on her aspirations to be both a poet and faithful Christian. Especially in the interplay, and often radical disjunction, between the prose and verse throughout *Maude*, I argue that we can discern a kind of adolescent *psychomachia* occurring within Maude. Often, the prose narrative simply recounts the conversations and circumstances that shape the rather straightforward and simple narrative of the novella. However, whenever Maude comments, in verse, about how she spiritually processes her life and experiences, we receive a rather different perspective. Maude's verse so starkly contrasts from the prose pieces of the narrative that we appear to be receiving almost two entirely different narratives about ordinary life, throughout the novella. I suggest that the prose narrative often represents Christina's own ability to more critically and carefully restrain and order the powers of artistic and spiritual passions than Maude, herself, can. That is to say, Christina seems to not only be working through the tension between art, feminism, and faith but also through the process of expressing a subtle critique of excessive pietism.

There are, of course, many parallels between Maude and Christina: they range from more general similarities (both girls keep journals and are starting to experience the ways marriages break up and change the dynamics between young women) to very particular ones. Both play *bout-rimés* to pass the time and to show off their poetic talents

and both are Anglo-Catholic devotees.⁷ However, there are moments when we should question this assumption that Christina is writing an autobiography of sorts, per se. While we can read the novella autobiographically, I argue that there is merit to not only noting the similarities between the young author and Maude but also to considering the important differences.

There are critical moments in the text when the author of the narrative and Maude are at very different intellectual and spiritual places—especially when we consider the location and context of the first Sonnet of Maude’s that we are introduced to in the novella. There are, of course, moments when Maude is an obvious double of, and for, Rossetti (especially, for example, in the *bout-rimés* episode) but an exploration of the differences between the two will help us see how boredom is a kind of ‘pose’ Maude adopts in an attempt to rise above the ordinary circumstances of her everyday life—a pose that is censured through the narrator’s frequent critical and ironic distance, from Maude, and through the figure of Agnes. Maud’s dissatisfaction with her social set, throughout the novella, and her pose of boredom, is also, at times, a dysphoric mood subtly and strategically mocked by the narrator. This is especially evident in the first sonnet that we come across in the novella:

⁷ Arseneau notes that by 1843, when Christina was thirteen years old, she was already regularly attending the High Church liturgies at Christ Church, on Albany Street, which was considered, according to Canon Burrows, to be the “leading Church” of the Oxford Movement in the 1840s (“Incarnation and Interpretation: Christina Rossetti, the Oxford Movement, and ‘Goblin Market’” 80). The influence of the Oxford Movement on Christina’s young poetic sensibilities and, most importantly, on her faith, has been discussed by Antony Harrison, Arseneau, D’Amico and Lynda Palazzo. While there remain some significant differences in the ways these critics read Rossetti, they all stress how important it is that Christina’s poetics be read not just from a variety of theoretical terms but also from the “religious terms,” to borrow Harrison’s phrase, which most specifically and consistently affected and influenced her (*Victorian Devotional Poetry* 203).

Yes, I too could face death and never shrink
 But it is harder to bear hated life;
 To strive with hands and knees weary of strife;
 To drag the heavy chain whose every link
 Galls to the bone; to stand upon the brink
 Of the deep grave, nor drowse, though it be rife
 With sleep; to hold with steady hand the knife
 Nor strike home: this is courage as I think.
 Surely to suffer is more than to do.
 To do is quickly done; to suffer is
 Longer and fuller of heart-sicknesses;
 Each day's experience testifies of this
 Good deeds are many, but good lives are few.

Thousands taste the full cup; who drinks the lees? (1-14)

We have seen, over and over again, this kind of dysphoric and bored language used by Tennyson and Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris, in the other Chapters of this study. Here, however, Maude's uses of "weary," "strife," "heavy," "heart-sickness," and so on, describe an expressly spiritual problem.⁸

⁸ Much like the Pre-Raphaelites' early aesthetic program(s), as Arseneau points out, *Maude* is an attempt to "de[fine] the proper relation of art to self, society, and God" (*Recovering Christina Rossetti* 67) but Christina Rossetti comes to very different conclusions than many of the P.R.B. do. Throughout the novella,

Boredom with ordinary life functions in the novella in two ways: it allows Maude the space to provide a moral criticism of the limited and constricted opportunities available for women in her surrounding environment and it also helps her to justify, to herself, her disdain for earthly things. This second point is important because one can argue that it is Maude's young fascination with Anglo-Catholicism that causes her to become dissatisfied with everyday life. I suggest that Rossetti may be exploring an adolescent obsession with the devotional trappings (the aesthetic qualities and cadences of the liturgical language; the vibrant Anglo-Catholic vestments; the sacramental life which only the initiated may receive) of Anglo-Catholicism over and above the actual elements of the spiritual life that it espouses. This is because there is such a comic dissonance between Maud's religious musings, in her poetry, and in her conduct and observations as she goes about her daily life in the prose sections of the novella. Maude's boredom can be read as something of an affective pose, a desire to be among one of the brave "few" who "drinks" "the lees" of suffering and tribulation. The formal organization of the text helps us to perceive this possible interpretation: both before and after we read Maude's first sonnet, she is portrayed as being slightly ridiculous and frivolous, herself. For instance, just before the narrator shows us Maude's sonnet, we are told that Maude's journal—a hodgepodge of "commonplace-book, album, scrap-book" and "diary" (9)—will be greatly "enrich[ed]," according to Maude's estimation, by her recording her latest profound examination of the meaninglessness of life. But after we are presented with this

Rossetti seeks to work through the apparent disjunction between poetry and faith and, as a result, her language, which is saturated by Ecclesiastes, seeks to try and explain the spiritual merit of renunciation.

grave sonnet that meditates on the vanity (Ecclesiastes 1:1-2) of existence, the narrator notes that Maude “yawned, leaned back in her chair, and wondered how she could fill the time till dinner” (11).

The comic contrast that Rossetti creates by following Maude’s sonnet with thoughts of dinner is obvious: were Maude actually in a state of profound existential crisis, she would have no stomach for anything other than her sober meditations on the difficulties of living a truly good and devoted Christian life.⁹ Of course, Maude’s verse-description of her personal existential crisis does actually become authentic midway through the novella but, near its beginning, Rossetti seems to be having fun with the stereotypical religious devotee whose spiritual reflections seems more like aesthetic affect than a sincere lamentation or lyric longing for God that comes from the heart (and which translates into expressions of charity towards others).¹⁰ Both Maude’s boredom with everyday life, throughout the novella, and her death at the close of the narrative can be interpreted as Rossetti’s rather nuanced (though, at times, melodramatic) critique of religious scrupulosity.

⁹ Christopher Ricks writes that this passage alerts us to the distance between Christina, the writer, and Maude, her character. He describes the swift transition from Maude’s penning a sonnet, rife with affective melancholia, to her thoughts of dinner-time as a playful move, on Rossetti’s part (“Christina Rossetti and *Commonplace Books*” 197-98). Specifically, Ricks views the transitions from the existential to the mundane, as being a “high comedy of the trapeze,” effected by Rossetti’s play with prose and verse, with the juxtaposition of different modes of speaking and thinking (197).

¹⁰ In *Called to be Saints*, Rossetti provides various entries, and reflections, on charity as lived through the Saints whose lives are celebrated throughout the Anglican Church liturgical calendar. In her Preface, she says that, like St. Timothy, “our meditations . . . [must be] on charity, faith, purity, which array the Saints of Christ in a robe more excellent than the glory of Solomon or the loveliness of a lily” (xiv). In discussing the attributes of St. John for his feast day, she writes how every Christina must grow in “most excellent charity, having for companions faith and hope, [although charity is] greater than either” (75).

While, as with William Michael Rossetti and Gilbert and Gubar, we can read Maude's death as a problematic punishment, doled out by Rossetti, for her 'vain' longings to be an artist, I suggest we can also read Maude's problem as an inability to integrate, to read, the relationship between the material world, everyday life, other people (as all being made *imago Dei*) and herself and her art. As John Keble's *The Christian Year* (1827) shows, Tractarians believed that both the ordinary rhythms of life and participation in the sacramental life can, when woven together, create a profound aesthetic sensibility. While it is generally accepted that Keble influenced Rossetti in her later writings, Arseneau explains that there is textual evidence that Christina poured over Keble during the 1840s and that her marginalia during the 1850s and 1860s is a continuation of her young fascination with his work ("Incarnation and Interpretation: Christina Rossetti, the Oxford Movement, and 'Goblin Market'" 92). And both Diane D'Amico and Arseneau point out that the sketches and little illustrations Christina covered her edition of *The Christian Year* with date to the early and mid-1840s, showing that she was certainly engaged with Keble's poetry before she wrote *Maude* ("Christina Rossetti's *Christian Year*: Comfort for the Weary Heart" 36). It is not implausible, then, I think, to suggest that Rossetti, taking cues from Keble and other Tractarians, is seeking to work through her own, young understanding of the integration between faith and reason, between devotional life and her powerful artistic capabilities.

Often, it is through the circumstances and conversations occurring throughout the novella, and through the tensions between prose narrative and verse, that we see the tentative unfolding of a Rossettian conception of the relationship between art and the devotional life which is still young but, nevertheless, far more balanced and less

condescending (or tortured) than Maude's is. Instead of identifying solely with Maude, Rossetti seems to express her own, Tractarian-influenced, view of devotional living through the figure of Agnes. In *Maude*, Agnes's view of devotional living seems based on the idea (which is promoted by Keble in *The Christian Year*) that even the humble and ordinary events of life and living, in keeping with Christ's hidden life of thirty years, are rich sources of spiritual and artistic contemplation. The nature of the Eucharist, as divine presence under the humble auspices of bread and wine, figured as an important symbol for this Tractarian (and, also, Roman Catholic) conception of the dignity of the humble and ordinary and Agnes is the character in *Maude* who best understands this belief.¹¹ I suggest, then, that we should look to Agnes's and Maude's exchange regarding reception of Communion in order to think through Rossetti's ideas about art, poetic identity, faith, and the experience of boredom.¹²

At various points throughout the novella, Maude vacillates between an anguish caused by spiritual scrupulosity and a kind of existential boredom stemming from her frustration with her self-perceived insufficiencies and the insufficiencies of life in general. Her struggle with the latter is apparent when she appeals to the first Chapter of Ecclesiastes to describe her view of life, following her resolution that she "shall not receive" holy Communion on Christmas Day because she feels unworthy of doing so and

¹¹ For discussions of the profound effect that the Tractarian Movement, and its promotion of frequent reception of the sacrament of Holy Communion, had upon Victorian poetry and poets (Christina Rossetti among them), see Kristie Blair's recent *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion* (2012), pages 85-121 and 197-232.

¹² In Patristic theology, and in the writings of Keble and Newman, scrupulosity is seen as a form of pride: an obsessive desire to understand and do everything perfectly is always already going to be frustrated so long as fallen creatures strive after the way of perfection. In his sermon, preached at St. Mary's the Virgin (Oxford), for example, Keble warns against obsessing over "scruples" which make one "alienated from God and Christ" (*Project Canterbury*).

is afraid of “profan[ing] holy things” (70). This poem, “Vanity of vanities,” is read by Agnes and it generates the conversation she has with Maude about Eucharistic reception. The poem resists any hope of change, new life or transformation: all is tending grave-wards and there is no mention of grace (even though Ecclesiastes, itself, emphasizes the fact that hope comes from recognizing that the earth and material goods cannot, and do not, satisfy the human person who is made for eternal things) (Ecclesiastes 2:26):

Vanity of vanities, the Preacher saith,
 All things are vanity. The eye and ear
 Cannot be filled with what they see and hear:
 Like early dew, or like the sudden breath
 Of wind, or like the grass that withereth,
 Is man, tossed to and for by hope and fear:
 So little joy hath he, so little cheer:
 Till all things end in the long dust of death
 To-day is still the same as yesterday,
 To-morrow also even as one of them
 Until the ancient race of time be run,
 The old thorns shall grow out of the old stem
 And morning shall be cold and twilight grey. (1-14)

Recasting the complaints found in Ecclesiastes so they express her own personal struggles and frustrations, Maude is able to both explore the depths of her psychological and spiritual anxieties and to place her psychomachia within a larger poetic and spiritual

tradition: that of the Judeo-Christian tradition of lyric longing and lamentation.¹³ Maude's boredom with the monotonous routines of everyday life and living take on more expressly spiritual contours. Her exploration of Ecclesiastes helps her to express and "reveal [that] a spiritual consciousness" is one of the central "organizing features" of her poetry, to invoke Arseneau's description of the role that the Oxford Movement's focus on Incarnationalism plays in "Goblin Market" and Christina's early poetic development ("Incarnation and Interpretation: Christina Rossetti, the Oxford Movement, and "Goblin Market" 79).

After Agnes reads Maude's poem, "Vanity of vanities," she and Maude have a discussion about receiving the Eucharist; Agnes is dismayed when Maude says she resolves to abstain from reception of the Eucharist until she feels she is worthy. Agnes responds, saying: "[w]e must all die: what if you keep to your resolution, and do as you have said, and receive the Blessed Sacrament no more?" (73). Rossetti writes that Agnes's "eyes filled with tears" after asking Maude her question (73). Agnes's responses and questions to Maude reformulate the spiritual sentiments Keble presents in his poem, "Holy Communion," from *The Christian Year*. The poem begins by acknowledging the profound mystery and gift that is the Eucharist and how it is understandable that fallen

¹³ Even though, as we have seen, Maude has already appealed to Ecclesiastes in her previous Sonnet, she does so very explicitly in her Sonnet, "Vanity of Vanities." Through the figure of Agnes, Christina offers a balanced and integrated view of the relationship between human insufficiency and divine grace, between unworthiness and the reception of Holy Communion. In so doing, this helps us to see how, from an early period in her life, Christina not only allows herself to be an indirect (but nevertheless authoritative) mouthpiece for the (predominantly masculine) poetic and theological Tractarian movement. But, also, it shows how she is already well aware of the pitfalls (such as scrupulosity and boredom with ordinary life) that many a new communicant could fall prey to if s/he did not work to integrate the tenants of faith into the routines of everyday life and living.

human beings would hesitate to partake in this mystery. However, Keble is quick to remind his readers that the Eucharist is the only thing which will satisfy the restless heart (clearly echoing Augustine's sentiments from the opening of Book One of *The Confessions*):

O agony of wavering thought
 When sinners first so near are brought!
 "It is my Maker—dare I stay?"
 "My Saviour—dare I turn away?"

Thus while the storm is high within
 'Twixt love of Christ and fear of sin,
 Who can express the soothing charm,
 To feel thy kind upholding arm,

My Mother Church? and hear thee tell
 Of a world lost, yet loved so well
 That He, by whom the angels live,
 His only Son for her would give? (13-24)

The three lines of the final stanza, in Keble's poem, refer to the words that are professed during the Anglican Communion Service, just after the Confession of the faithful. Keble writes that the sinner is, understandably, torn between fleeing from the Sacrament or receiving it, but that, ultimately, the best choice is to lean on the "upholding arm" of the Church which, as the Tractarians understood it (in keeping with early Patristic theology),

is the sole dispenser of the Sacraments. Commenting on the poem, Keble notes that reception of the Eucharist brings “tearful joy and calm” to the “sinners” who “taste” it, since it provides a “heavenly balm” (*The Christian Year* 59-60). Through the voices of Maude and Agnes, Rossetti stages the dramatic tensions Keble outlines in his poem; Agnes’s voice does end up the dominant one by the novella’s close since we find out that Maude has returned to communicating (before she dies).

However, it is interesting to note that Maude’s initial responses to Agnes’s plea that she reconsider her resolution to refrain from reception of the Eucharist parallels Edward Pusey’s rather more pessimistic and restless consideration of Eucharistic reception. She tells Agnes that she will not receive Communion until her pain and suffering seems to have corrected her of her unworthiness:

I do not mean to never communicate again. Mr. Paulson [who has been interpreted as a stand-in for Rev. Dodsworth, the pastor at Christina’s Church] told us last Sunday that sickness and suffering are sent for our correction. I suffer very much. Perhaps a time will come when these will have done their work on me also when I shall be purified indeed and weaned from the world. Who knows?

The lost have been found, the dead quickened. (73-4)

Here, Maude’s reservation, regarding the Eucharist, appears to be a scrupulous one as opposed to a legitimate concern over being barred from the Sacrament through participation in some form of grievous sin. Maude’s self-disgust, bordering on a kind of dismissive boredom with life and people in general, drastically parts ways with Keble’s, and Christina’s own, celebration of the material world as sacramental. Moreover, as

opposed to seeking out peace in, for example, the act of confessing (which Christina occasionally did, herself, and which the Tractarians encourage), Maude chooses to remain confined to her room, hiding in a private world of art. That Maude's psychological state is an evidently tortured one suggests that Rossetti is casting a critical scan over scrupulous reservations about Eucharistic reception.

Recently, Lynda Palazzo has noted that *Maude* dramatizes Rossetti's questioning of Pusey's influence over Tractarians, especially those who worshipped at Christ Church in London (*Christina Rossetti's Feminist Theology* 3). Reverend Dodsworth, the Perceptual Curate at Christ Church, was a disciple of Edward Pusey's and, in fact, had Pusey preach to his congregation on select Sundays each year. According to Lona Mosk Packer (who provides one of the more balanced and detailed discussions of Christina's time at Christ Church), Dodsworth loved the beauty of Romish ritual and music; he also held daily liturgies and promoted reception of Communion on Sundays and Saint's feast days (*Christina Rossetti* 7). However, as directly under the guidance and influence of Pusey, Dodsworth's homilies were often "incendiary" (*Christina Rossetti* 6) and tended to emphasize faith as a form of fear over and above the transformational efficacy of sacramental life.

While Marsh argues that Christina's hysteria during her late teen years can be linked to the intense theological teachings stemming from "Puseyite thought" (*Christina Rossetti* 64), *Maude* provides us with evidence of a subtle and perceptive push-back, on Christina's part, against such scrupulosity. As Palazzo observes, out of all the characters in the novella, Maude is the only figure who seems to accept, or attempt to abide by, Puseyite thinking (3-10). Pusey was adamant that reception of Holy Communion was an

important part of living Christian life. However, it is in his qualification of when to receive, and when to abstain, from communicating that causes something of a tension in his writing on the subject. In his 1843 sermon, “The Holy Eucharist, A Comfort to the Penitent,” I suggest we see some of Maude’s more particular scruples writ large. The question of spiritual worthiness and unworthiness, which Pusey poses when focusing on Holy Communion, is precisely the one that Maude is wrestling with and which Rossetti, through the figure of Agnes, seeks to resolve. The ways in which Pusey vacillates, in this sermon, on the subject of communicating, encapsulates much of the dramatic problem at the heart of Maude’s bored and restless dissatisfaction with herself. It is worth quoting Pusey’s consideration of communicating, at length, given that it exposes many of the hesitations and reservations Maude feels and which, as Packer points out, were brought up at Christ Church:

[Communicating] is not a matter of obeying rubrics, but of life or death, of health or decay, of coming together for the better or for the worse, to salvation or to condemnation [. . .] There is, in our fallen state, a reverent abstaining from more frequent Communion, founded on real though undue fears; there is and ought to be a real consciousness that more frequent Communion should involve a change of life, more collectedness in God, more retirement, at times, from society, deeper consciousness of His Presence, more sacredness in our ordinary actions whom He so vouchsafeth to hallow, greater love for His Passion which we celebrate; and carrying it about, in strictness of self-rule and self-discipline, and self-denying love. And these graces, we know too well, come slowly. *Better, then, for a time forego what any would long for, or obtain it, where by God's bounty and*

Providence that Gift may be had, than by premature urgency, "walk not charitably," or risk injury to a brother's soul [. . .] Rather should those who long for it, fear that if It were given them, they might not be fitted for it, or, if we have it, that we come short of the fullness of its blessing, than use inconsiderate eagerness in its restoration. (Nine Sermons 30; my emphasis)

In this passage, it is clear to see the emotional struggle Pusey is engaged with; the question of reception of the Eucharist becomes couched in a discourse of holy “fear” and uncertainty. His discernment about when and how to communicate is markedly different to the ways in which Keble treats of the topic in *The Christian Year*. It is clear to see that the same kind of concern is present in Maude’s intense resolve to abstain from reception of Communion until she feels as though she is a more worthy subject.¹⁴

Towards the novella’s end, Maude does end up receiving Communion, on Easter Sunday, following receiving spiritual direction from Rev. Paulson (110-11) and Rossetti makes Maude’s reception an event that finally brings some form of peace to her restlessness (110-120). While the novella problematically ends with Maude’s death (a fact which has understandably concerned William Michael Rossetti, Gilbert and Gubar and others), an important aspect of the text remains Rossetti’s ability to negotiate the relationship between faith and desire by using the genres of verse and prose to effect a critical exploration of spiritual scrupulosity and of the boredom and anxiety resulting

¹⁴ The irony is, however, that, according to Christian doctrine and tradition, communicating is supposed to heal human weaknesses and so the sacraments are for those who are contrite yet still suffering and struggling with various vices. In both Pusey’s and Maude’s belief that they should refrain from communicating until they can be proven worthy there is, perhaps, too much emphasis on the concept of self-sufficiency and an obsession with perfectionism.

from it. Overall, Rossetti seems to be suggesting that a poetic disdain for the things of ordinary life is symptomatic of a spiritual problem: Maude's boredom is only resolved through her accident, her illness, and her return to a sacramental life. Among other things, it could be interpreted that Maude reconciles the spiritual and material through reception of Communion which, as sanctified bread, functions as a symbol of the integrated Christian life in general (which is grounded in a vision of the holiness of the ordinary). While boredom in *Maude* appears to be a kind of pose and a symptom of religious scrupulosity on the one hand and the consequence of ideal (quasi-melodramatic) poetic aspirations on the other, boredom in Rossetti's later writings, especially in "The Prince's Progress" and *Commonplace*, takes on more ambivalent contours—it can be positive or negative, a fruitless burden or a means of moral strengthening depending on the moral responses of the subjects who encounter forms of situational boredom in the midst of their everyday circumstances.

5.2: "Barren Boredom": Moral Regress in "The Prince's Progress"

"The Prince's Progress," the title poem in Rossetti's second volume of poetry, published in 1866, has a simple narrative, replete with medieval, literary and biblical allusions that demonstrate that the "physical journey symbolizes a spiritual pilgrimage," as Arseneau puts it ("Pilgrimage and Postponement: Christina Rossetti's 'The Prince's Progress'" 281). The poem's basic plot opens with a Princess left bored and waiting, in her tower, for her Prince who continually stalls in fulfilling his quest. At the poem's opening, he puts off the quest, and once he actually embarks upon his journey to the Princess's Tower, the Prince finds a series of excuses to defer fulfilling his mission. Presumably, the

Prince is meant to journey to the Tower to prove his love for the Princess and, presumably, to marry her (the specific details of the relationship between the Princess and Prince are left hazy and, as the poem unfolds, are clearly beside the point). Boredom is an important psycho-somatic problem in the text. The Prince's continual delay in his quest—dallying with a milkmaid, an alchemist, and then with a group of women—demonstrates that he seems to equate his duty with monotony and boredom. His fault, however, does not seem to stem from a direct decision to escape his quest; rather, his problem, as Arseneau explains it, is a lack of intentionality. He “does not . . . pursue his journey with the required urgency or singleness of purpose” (“Pilgrimage and Postponement” 280). The Prince's superficiality, his lack of purpose and attention to the continual warnings that various figures present to him, as he dallies on his pilgrimage, ends up causing the Princess to endure a prolonged predicament of situational boredom, like the kind Allison Pease discusses at length in her exploration of boredom and women in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century contexts (*Modernism, Feminism and the Culture of Boredom* 78-100).

The Princess's boredom is an aspect of her everyday living situation as she bears out the frustration of lack and longing in her body (she slowly wastes away, waiting in vain for the Prince to prove his love). However, later on in this section, I will note that the Princess's boredom is quite different from Mariana's given how Rossetti implies the Princess is a figure, as Arseneau has insightfully argued, for Christ and the Christian faith. As a result, the Princess's boredom is a kind of spiritual suffering as opposed to a quasi-existential crisis in self-identity (as is the case for Mariana). By contrast, the Prince avoids boredom at all costs, pursuing his own self-centered desires, instead. As we shall

see, Rossetti's view of boredom is far more ambivalent than her conception of morality: she views boredom as positive or negative depending on the ways in which bored subjects face, and respond to, their boring circumstances. Boredom in "The Prince's Progress" is a complex mood: it pervades the text and, unlike an emotion which can come and go more quickly, continually hovers over the plot's rather anti-climactic unfolding.

Rossetti, herself, emphasizes her intentional structuring of the poem around disappointments, passivity, temptations, distraction, and non-events. Responding to Dante Gabriel's suggestion that she include the spectacle of a medieval tournament in "The Prince's Progress," Christina wrote that it would spoil the sense of "barren boredom" that shapes the narrative and overall mood of the poem (*Letters* 1:277):

[M]y actual Prince [. . .] seems to me invested with a certain artistic congruity of construction [. . .]: 1st a prelude and outset; 2nd an alluring milkmaid; 3rd a trial of barren boredom; 4th the social elements again; 5th barren boredom in a <severer> more uncompromising form; 6th a wind up and conclusion. See how the subtle elements balance each other and fuse into a noble conglom! (*Letters* 1: 277)

Rossetti, here, suggests that boredom is that which both frustrates and, also, paradoxically, creates meaning throughout the poem. With regards to the Prince, boredom is a spiritual burden which he continually seeks to cast off. Fulfilling one's duty can be far less interesting than dallying with an "alluring" milkmaid or a strange alchemist who promises the elixir of eternal life. The first "trial of barren boredom" that Rossetti refers to occurs when the Prince leaves the alluring milkmaid and enters a "lifeless" and "loveless" land ("The Prince's Progress" 133) of "rugged blackness" (128),

a “land of neither life nor death” (139) which is “[t]edious” for the “social Prince” (152). The fifth, more severe, experience of boredom occurs when the Prince has almost reached his destination: the Tower and the Princess (who has died, who has been *bored to death*, in her wait for the Prince’s arrival). The “more uncompromising” tedium and boredom the Prince faces in the last stretch of his journey is personified in the wasted and “barren” (415) terrain he must cross to reach the Princess who, by this point in the poem, lies “[w]asting upon her bed” (532). Before exploring the ways in which these specific passages open up our reading of boredom in relation to Rossetti’s locodescriptive poetics in “The Prince’s Progress” (and how her rendering of boredom both affirms and troubles Victorian gender conventions), it is important to explore the ways in which she explores the spiritual laxity of the Prince as being representative of sloth, a close cousin of boredom (as I discussed in my Introduction to this study as a whole).¹⁵

The poem opens by introducing its two main characters: the long-suffering and patient Princess who waits out the “long hours” which “go and come and go” (3) as she looks for the long-delayed arrival of the Prince. By contrast, “[i]n his world-end palace,” the “strong Prince” (13) sits, “[t]aking his ease on cushion and mat” (14), preferring to idle away his time in comfort rather than take up his “staff” and “hat,” the traditional emblems of the pilgrim (13). The Prince only half-heartedly takes up his quest to meet the Princess following the injunction of a mysterious voice to “start” his pilgrimage (16). The origin and nature of this voice remains obscure and unknown throughout the entire poem—the Prince simply calls it the “true voice” of his “doom” (19)—but it can be read

¹⁵ See section 1.2 of my Introduction: “Discontented Feelings and the Pre-History of Victorian Boredom.”

as functioning in a manner similar to the guardians of classical and medieval literature.¹⁶ Arseneau reads the voice along similar lines, pointing out that it functions, at the poem's opening, to give the Prince an important lesson in discerning the spiritual significance of ordinary events. She maintains that the voice serves as a warning to the Prince, seeking to awaken him from his complacency and to strengthen his resolve to act ("Pilgrimage and Postponement" 280-2). Discussing how the voice offers the Prince a nuanced meditation on, and interpretation of, his patient Princess, Arseneau explains how the voice reads events for the Prince who does not care to examine his life seriously enough, on his own accord:

Not only does the voice offer an emblematic depiction of the race between love and death, as represented by the red and white flowers respectively . . . but it even partially interprets the symbols for the Prince by indicating that the white poppies are "death-cups" ready to burst. But the Prince finally proves to be out of step with even this simple interpretation; in the end, when his loitering has caused the Princess' death, and "White poppies she must wear" (l. 506), he arrives with red roses to claim his bride, only to be reproved by the more astute ladies attending to the dead bride: "Let be these poppies that we strew, / Your roses are too red."
(281)

Here, Arseneau is referring to a central moment of foreshadowing and warning which the voice presents to the hesitant Prince, near the poem's opening:

¹⁶ For example, Athena, Virgil, and Beatrice, in Homer and Dante respectively, instruct travelers on their way so as to help them fulfil their political, and /or religious, duties.

“When wilt thou start? the bride waits, O youth [. . .]

By her head lilies and rosebuds grow;

The lilies droop, will the rosebuds blow?

The silver slim lilies hang the head low;

 Their stream is scanty, their sunshine rare;

Let the sun blaze out, and let the stream flow,

 They will blossom and wax fair.

Red and white poppies grow at her feet,

The blood-red wait for sweet summer heat,

Wrapped in bud-coats hairy and neat;

 But the white buds swell, one day they will burst,

Will open their death-cups drowsy and sweet—

 Which will open the first?”

Then a hundred sad voices lifted a wail,

And a hundred glad voices piped on the gale;

“Time is short, life is short,’ they took up the tale:

 “Life is sweet, love is sweet, use today while you may;

Love is sweet, and tomorrow may fail;

Love is sweet, use today.” (16, 25-42)

A series of important developments occur in these stanzas: the voice seeks to educate the Prince on the significance of his relationship to the Princess by hinting at the Princess’s fate through a description of various flowers. Lilies, of course, represent the Princess’s virginal and Marian qualities, while the roses represent love and passion and the red and white poppies signal the tension between life and death, as both Packer (198) and Arseneau (“Pilgrimage and Postponement” 281) have explained.

The Princess is a “drooping lily,” the voice laments: her interminable waiting for the Prince is taking its toll on her. She bears the burdens of her situational boredom in her body, as manifest in her drops in energy. The voice also hints that, depending on the speed and care of the Prince, either the Princess will re-bloom, upon his arrival, or he will arrive too late and she will die: the “white buds” will “burst.” Following this warning, a “sad” chorus interrupts the “voice of doom” and stresses the *carpe diem* theme of Renaissance love poetry: “seize the day” is the central message of the clipped words and quick-paced and tightly-woven internal and ending rhythms of every line in the final stanza quoted above. Ultimately, however, the Prince’s spiritual insensitivities and laziness will prevent him from arriving on time: the anxious forebodings of the final stanza will be grimly fulfilled towards the end of the poem, when the Princess’s ladies-in-waiting chastise the Prince for having “loitered” so long on his journey (483).

Before we explore the significance of the choric chastisement at the end of the poem, it is important to explore the ways in which the Prince responds to the voice’s warning. Initially, it spurs him to action (43-8). “Up rose the Prince with a flush on his

cheek, / Up he rose to stir and to seek, / Going forth in the joy of his strength; / Strong of limb if of purpose weak” (44-7). As we know, though, the Prince has barely started on his journey before he gets distracted from his mission and succumbs to the invitations of a “wave-haired milk-maid, rosy and white” (58) who, with her luscious and “shining” (94) curls, curvaceous body, and coquettish behaviour seems a kind of caricature of a Pre-Raphaelite stunner. Rossetti is both humorous and cutting in her assessment of the Prince who says that he cannot resist the advances of the milk-maid, given both her beauty and the fact that he had already “journeyed *at least a mile*” of his pilgrimage (59). Obviously, the Prince refuses to closely attend, with purpose, to the scene before him. Interested in pleasure and desire, over duty, the Prince fails to observe that the milkmaid bears the tell-tale signs of a seductress: she is associated with the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and her ambiguity—“[w]as she a maid, or an evil dream?” (68)—suggests her association with Satan, temptation, or even John Keats’s alluring but deadly “belle dame” from “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” (1819).

The Prince’s primary sin, here, however, does not seem to be that of lust—which is the moral undoing of Launcelot and Tristram, among others, of the Malorian and courtly love medieval tradition. Instead, I argue, that his moral error is his lack of intentionality and, more significantly, his constant desire to flee from the boring demands of his arduous journey. His main sin, then, is sloth: a dislike for both holy things and one’s duty. “Loth to stay” with the milk-maid, though “to leave her slack” (85), the Prince chooses to defer his main obligations and, instead, busies himself with more pleasurable pursuits: “So he stretched his length in the apple-tree shade, / Lay and laughed and talked to the maid, / Who twisted her hair in a cunning braid / And writhed it

in shining serpent-coils, / And held him a day and night fast laid / In her subtle toils” (91-6). In her devotional work, *Time Flies* (1885), Rossetti discusses the nature of sloth and her reflection reveals how she, like Thomas Aquinas, views it as a sin against charity. The Prince’s dallying with the milkmaid is an act of sloth, a turning away from his duty towards the Princess he is supposed to be journeying, in haste, to meet.

As I discussed in section 2.1 of the Introduction to this thesis, Aquinas views sloth or acedia as being busy with the wrong things; he describes it, then, as being a sin against Sabbath-keeping, against giving God his due. As a result, the slothful subject is someone who fails to prioritize his or her duties according to spiritual / moral obligations. Likewise, Rossetti perceives sloth as a paralysis of the will which not only prevents people from fulfilling their moral duties but also hinders their ability to discern what these duties are. As I will discuss at more length in the following section of my thesis (where I examine the relationship between boredom and the fulfilment of duty in *Commonplace*), Rossetti understands the obligation to fulfill personal duty as one of the central aspects of living out a devout Christian life. In *Time Flies*, she calls sloth the “deadliest of the seven sins” (303) and warns of the danger it causes to the spiritual “race” each Christian must “run.” Invoking Paul’s image of the saved Christian as one who exerts his spiritual muscles, as it were, and who “runs the race” (2 Timothy 2:7; Corinthians 9:23-25; Acts 20:23-24; and Hebrews 12: 1-3), Rossetti sees sloth as a threat to the energy and commitment needed to live a life of duty and devotion to God and others:

Sloth precludes energy. Sloth may accompany a great many amiable tempers and skin deep charms: but sloth runs no race. And a race is the one thing set before us.

We are not summoned to pose picturesquely in *tableaux vivants* or die away gracefully like dissolving views. We are called to run a race, and woe is us if we run it not lawfully, and with patience and with pressing toward the mark. Sloth tends to paralyze the will. Blessed are those merciful who labour to help the self helpless slothful, and betimes to arouse him. It is never too early to fight against sloth in one committed to my charge—or in myself. It is never too early, but ere long it may be too late. (304)

First and foremost, Rossetti's comment that Christians must not "pose picturesquely" is a vivid way of expressing the moral and spiritual duty to reject any elements of laziness and malaise in the spiritual life. She calls upon Christians to cast off any kind of spiritual stagnancy in order to actively and purposefully assume the responsibilities of the devotional life. Her reference to *tableaux vivants* is also, I argue, a subtle but nonetheless pointed, criticism of the sexual and languid mood of most of Dante Gabriel's paintings from the late 1850s, onwards, and, in addition, can also be read as an interpretive key for our understanding of the Prince.

At the poem's close, we find that the Prince has arrived "too late" (481) to the castle. When he reaches the Tower, a group of women in mourning, who had previously served as the Princess's ladies-in-waiting, announce that the Princess has died while waiting for him to arrive and fulfill the duties of love. The Prince, who was supposed to be the faithful bridegroom, has been replaced by "Bridegroom Death" (474). The women imply, in their dirge, that the Prince literally bored the Princess to death:

She has watched, she has waited long,

Watching athwart the golden grate

With a patient song [. . .]

Too late for love, too late for joy,

Too late, too late!

You loitered on the road too long,

You trifled at the gate:

The enchanted dove upon her branch

Died without a mate;

The enchanted princess in her tower

Slept, died, behind the grate;

Her heart was starving all this while

You made it wait. (460-62, 481-490)

The Prince has consigned the Princess to the problem of boredom in which she literally wastes or dissolves away, waiting patiently for him. Because he is presented as the inflictor of the Princess's predicament of boredom, as we see in the chastisement of the Princess's ladies-in-waiting that closes the poem, Rossetti places moral blame on the Prince.

The choric chastisement of the Prince reappears in the final lines of Rossetti's excerpt on sloth: "[i]t is never too early to fight against sloth in one committed to my charge—or in myself. It is never too early, but ere long it may be too late" (304). The

Prince's attempts to avoid the burdens and boredom of his journey have led to the death of the Princess. In his desperation to avoid anything burdensome, the Prince does not read his surroundings for their symbolic significance. In Tennyson's and Millais's respective depictions of Mariana, boredom surfaces due to her inability to interpret her surroundings in a devotional / symbolic light—there are, of course, other reasons for its emergence but her inability to pray is a significant part of her dilemma. Likewise, in "The Prince's Progress," the Prince's desperate attempts to flee duty and to read the world symbolically (and responsibly) leads to a trial of boredom for the Princess—who is left bearing out the consequences of the Prince's carelessness. As John P. McGowan observes, Rossetti had a sacramental poetic vision, grounded in a "logocentric symbolism," which saw that "physical thing always carrie[d] a symbolic meaning;" McGowan also reminds us that Dante Gabriel Rossetti possessed this sensibility, too, but it "torture[d] rather than sustain[ed] him" (*Representation and Revelation: Victorian Realism from Carlyle to Yeats* 27). "The Prince's Progress," and the figure of the Prince in particular, can be read as a stand-in for the ways in which Christina was worried that Dante Gabriel was growing increasingly uninterested in interpreting life and events in a symbolic and Christian context.

Arseneau makes the convincing case that, by the time Rossetti wrote "The Prince's Progress," she was quite aware that Dante Gabriel did not share in her Christian faith; this fact pained her and "The Prince's Progress" can be read as an allegory that fleshes out the tragic consequences of living without a sacramental worldview (*Recovering Christina Rossetti* 156-162). Moreover, the poem emphasizes that the neglect of moral duty can cause pain for others, too—a fact that may, also, be reflective

of Rossetti's hints to her brother that his attitude towards Christianity caused her suffering. Both Arseneau and D.M.R. Bentley, in his article "From Allegory to Indeterminacy: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Positive Agnosticism," explore how Dante Gabriel's art, from the early 1850s, onwards, "underwent," what Bentley calls, "shifts in spiritual orientation and spiritual practice that would eventually bring him personally and artistically to the darker regions of the universe of positive agnosticism" (86). The Prince's laziness, his interests in personal desire at the expense of anything or anyone outside of himself, seems, in many ways, then, to be a sketch of Rossetti. As I discussed in the Third Chapter of my dissertation, Christina's "In an Artist's Studio" really drives home her frustration with Rossetti's growing obsession with pursuing his ideals in his art—his obsession with "one face" shows the ways in which his art was increasingly inward-turning and, as a result, often blind to the conditions of those closest to him (his family and Lizzie Siddall).

Of course, as I have already noted, The Prince is also representative of the person who is slothful towards, and neglectful of, one's personal and spiritual duties. Unlike other pilgrims, such as Christian from John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) who, as Joan Rees explains, does receive salvation after being purified by raging waters before he can safely and arrive at the Celestial City, Rossetti's Prince continues to lag on his journey—even after he also almost drowns by water and is rescued by a group of beautiful women (who distract him from his quest) ("Christina Rossetti: Poet" 59-71). Arseneau, considering this observation of Rees's as well, comments that the Prince does not discern how the events of his life, of his interactions with nature and others, may bear a moral or symbolic significance and, as a result, he is lazy in the things that have to do

with fulfilling one's conscience (*Recovering Christina Rossetti* 151-54). Unlike the Prince, however, the Princess attends to her moral duty and the descriptions of the Princess, throughout the text, are expressly Scriptural and bridal.¹⁷

Arsenau points out that the Princess is an “emblem of marriage” who embodies the “symbolism of the heavenly union with Christ” (*Recovering Christina Rossetti* 141). While many have taken issue with the passivity of the Princess, I suggest we read her figure along the lines suggested by Arsenau: the Prince is representative of the struggling, fallen soul and the Princess serves as a stand-in for Christ, who is “patient, long-suffering, [and] faithful” (144)—even if slothful Christians are not. As a result, the Princess starkly contrasts with the mourning and restless figure of Mariana who is unable to work through her restricted and boring circumstances (because she longs for the fulfillment of desire, in this world, and also because she does not believe that the devotional life has anything to offer her discontented heart).¹⁸

The boredom the Princess feels, throughout the poem, then, is transformed into a kind of redemptive pain: she accepts it so as to provide, through her broken heart and her corpse, itself, a lesson for the Prince (this is strikingly Christological). While we may still feel unsatisfied about the passivity of the Princess (and consider its consequences for gender politics of the period), I suggest that if we follow Arsenau's argument that the

¹⁷ Specifically, the Princess is described in terms, throughout the poem, that are reminiscent of the Song of Solomon. For a detailed discussion of the uses Rossetti makes of Scripture, to explore the simultaneously bridal and Christological aspects of the Princess, see Arsenau's Chapter, “Interpreting ‘The Prince's Progress’” from *Recovering Christina Rossetti*, pages 140-143 and pages 155-162.

¹⁸ See section 1.1 of my Introduction to this thesis to review my reading of Tennyson's *Mariana* in the context of the themes of boredom, time, sexual desire, Marian imagery, and devotional life / aesthetics.

Princess is a Christ-like figure then we can understand Christina's own spirituality, and her conception of ethics, even better. Moreover, we can gain a better understanding of the ethics of "self-postponement" which is a central concept in *Commonplace*—her novella which provides an implicit but sustained exploration of the various ways one may ethically or unethically respond to the inevitability of monotony and boredom in everyday life and living. Likening the Princess to Christ, Rossetti plays with conventional Victorian gender roles, casting the Princess as the ground and source of ethical action, as being far more strong and self-possessed than the fickle, vacillating and "slackening" (546) Prince. In her preface to *Called to be Saints*, Rossetti likens fidelity and steadfastness to the lily (a flower used to describe the Princess in "The Prince's Progress"). The Princess's acceptance of this trial of boredom is Christ-like—she submits to the mundane like Christ did via his Incarnation and by living in humble obscurity for thirty out of the thirty-three years of his life.

Through the figure of the lazy and fickle Prince, Rossetti may also be critiquing masculine artists or aesthetes who tended to avoid the work and determination of the muscular Christian (we know that the Prince would have annoyed Carlyle as much as the moaning Mariana did).¹⁹ It may even be that, throughout the poem, Rossetti is recasting

¹⁹ If we view the Prince as a stand-in for the aesthete, there are some interesting connections we can make between the aesthete, the Prince, and boredom—along Kierkegaardian lines. In *Either / Or* (1843), Søren Kierkegaard asserts that boredom is the root of modern evil because it signifies the moral emptiness and apathy of the individual who has no interest in moral duty. "Boredom [*kedsomhed*]," Kierkegaard claims "is the root of all evil. Strange that boredom, in itself so staid and stolid, should have such power to set in motion. The influence it exerts is altogether magical, except that it is not the influence of attraction, but of repulsion" from a series of things, especially from one's duty (*Either / Or* 281). As Charles K. Bellinger, in his commentary on Volume One of *Either / Or*, points out, the bored aesthete, for Kierkegaard "lives in the dream world of his poetic ideas and his emotions. He is naturally drawn to the world of the theatre, in which the flickering personalities of the stage are more interesting than the banal reality of the Judge" ("Kierkegaard's *Either / Or*, and the Parable of the Prodigal Son: Or, Three Versions of Three Rival

the parable of the foolish Virgins (Matthew: 25) in masculine terms. Shut out from the wedding feast for arriving too late (because they failed to prepare themselves for their journey), the foolish Virgins were guilty of sloth, of not attending to the duties of ordinary life with a prudent and watchful attention. If read in this light, we see Rossetti emphasizing that *both* men and women, alike, can struggle in the “race” to be run; she is also emphasizing the failure of the soul to attend to the spiritual life through expressly masculine terms. As discussed, this could be because she is providing Dante Gabriel (who concerned her a great deal throughout her life) with a thinly-veiled warning regarding the neglect of spiritual things. It could, however, also signify a general warning to men since they were allowed to manoeuvre the Victorian public spheres of life with far greater freedom than women and, as a result, bore an especially strong responsibility to fulfill their social and moral obligations towards others.

While boredom, in *Maude*, was seen as being something of an affective, poetic pose and a symptom of spiritual scrupulosity, in “The Prince’s Progress” it is generally presented as a spiritual burden to be born, not escaped from, so that progress in the spiritual life can be achieved. If the Prince truly reflected upon the “barren[ness]” of boredom, as opposed to trying to escape from it, Rossetti implies that he would have perhaps learned to run his race and, as a result, would have arrived at the Castle before

Versions” 62). For Rossetti, the slothful Prince is caught up in the “flickering” allurements of sexual and scientific temptations which prevent him from fulfilling his pilgrimage. So, as much as he is attempting to escape, or delay, his monotonous and arduous journey (full of “barren” boredom), he, himself, is a kind of bored subject, as well. But, more than anything, this poem seems to be an exploration of the conditions of the human soul, of its failures to run “toward the mark” (*Time Flies* 304).

the Princess's time had run out. In the final section of this Chapter, I explore the ways in which Rossetti provides us with her most detailed consideration of the deficits and dividends of boredom as a mood which stems from restless desires but also, at times, from the Christian, expressly Tractarian, sense of reserve and self-denial that so characterized Rossetti's own personal life at home in the small social circles she kept up with throughout her life.²⁰

5.3. "Self-Postponement": Boredom and Duty in *Commonplace*

Simple, understated, and one of the least successful of her published volumes, *Commonplace, A Tale of To-Day; and Other Short Stories* (1870) was, to Rossetti's mind, a work dedicated to exploring the nature of "the every-day story," as she put it in a letter to her publisher F.S. Ellis (*Letters* 1:347).²¹ In particular, *Commonplace*, the

²⁰ As we know, over the past three decades, in particular, the Tractarian doctrine of reserve has been explored as a formative influence on Rossetti's work and its role is not usually viewed, anymore, as a repressive restraint on her writings (an interpretation that was especially espoused by Isobel Armstrong (among others) in *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* 341). The doctrine of reserve stemmed from Isaac Williams' article, "On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge" (1838-40), which were published as Tract 80 and Tract 87 for the publication series, *Tracts for the Times*. As Emma Mason notes:

[t]he doctrine of reserve indicated that God's scriptural laws should remain hidden to all but the faithful, urging commentators on theology to encode or restrict their presentation of religious knowledge. Devotional poetry and biblical exegesis alike were thus meant to render religious truth through metaphor, figure and allegory in a manner only the initiated believer could understand. ("Christina Rossetti and the Doctrine of Reserve" 198).

²¹ The rich illustrations of *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862), the detailed woodcut designs made by Dante Gabriel for *The Prince's Progress* (1866), Arthur Hughes's illustrations for *Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book* (1872), and what Krista Lysack describes as the "tactile experience" provided by the "heavy, handmade paper" and "uneven deckle edges" of the pages in *Time Flies* ("The Productions of Time" 459) all attest to Rossetti's attention to how bookmaking and the inclusion of images alongside verse (or prose) work together to create, what Kooistra terms, an overall "materialist aesthetic" (*Christina Rossetti and Illustration* 67). This aesthetic stemmed from the medieval emblematic tradition found in the illuminated manuscripts inspiring the Pre-Raphaelites and, in turn, Christina herself. Images and words, presented in exquisite combinations with each other, manifested the Christian, incarnational sensibility that was at the

novella which inspired Rossetti's title for the volume as a whole, is concerned with the practices of everyday life and living and how these very practices, as Michel de Certeau describes them, can "structure" the "conditions of social life" (*The Practice of Everyday Life* 96). The commonplace book has its roots in Renaissance England and it persisted as a pastime into the nineteenth century. The OED tells us it emerged in late sixteenth-century England and was a scrapbook-journal hybrid: people would record various poetry passages, quotations, and ideas or 'commonplaces' (moral sayings or general pieces of useful advice), and then organize them under various headings. Sarah Cowper's commonplace book from the 1670s is the earliest extant example of this developing trend and its contents detail a series of domestic and everyday concerns (ranging from parenting advice to devotional exercises and comments on the weather). In naming her 1870 volume after the commonplace book genre, Rossetti demonstrates how she views the varied experiences of everyday life as contributing to an overall 'book' or narrative of an individual's life. Christina kept up a commonplace book, herself, and her interest in recording the little details of her daily life largely stems, as Arseneau explains, from her mother's influence (*Recovering Christina Rossetti* 48-50). Keeping a commonplace book

heart of medieval art and aestheticism. As Kooistra notes, this medieval sacramental imagination was celebrated by the High Church movement and was also outlined by Ruskin in his Oxford lecture, entitled "The Art of England" (1884), where he notes that art should "feel and illustrate the relation of spiritual creatures to the substance and conditions of the visible world" (qtd. in *Christina Rossetti and Illustration* 66). Given all this, the plain and undecorated appearance of *Commonplace and Other Short Stories* can be interpreted as intentional on Christina's part. The emblematic elements which tended to shape Christina's bookmaking and publishing decisions and processes are absent in her 1870 volume and we should see the formal, material, and narrative simplicities of the volume as part of its overall aesthetic of everydayness and, as I will argue shortly, of the aesthetic of boredom that organizes and shapes narrative development and structure in *Commonplace*, the novella, which is the first work found in the collection.

was a tradition practiced by Frances Rossetti for over five decades of her life and her book provides a material trace of the ways she, like her husband, influenced her children's literary tastes and interests.²²

As I pointed out in the Introduction to this Chapter, it is surprising how little has been written on *Commonplace*, especially given that it bears some striking similarities to Christina's first attempt to explore the relationship between ordinary life and religious identity in *Maude*. To date, Christopher Ricks' essay, "Christina Rossetti and Commonplace Books" (1990), remains the main commentary on the novella that is available so far. Ricks argues that the title, *Commonplace*, captures the formal, aesthetic, and philosophical aspects of the novella and of the 1870 volume as a whole:

. . . Rossetti uses [the title, *Commonplace*] to effect some shrewd sober sense on how uncommonplace [the] things [of ordinary life] must always feel from within their contingencies, as against in novels or in our daily novelizing of other people's lives. More, she is alive to the compact contrarities of the word 'commonplace': that, although it means a common or ordinary topic, an opinion or statement generally accepted or taken for granted, and so a platitude or truism,

²² In *Recovering Christina Rossetti*, Arseneau spends some time discussing how Frances Rossetti was a formative literary influence on the imagination of her children, particularly on Christina. Not only was she a practical and religiously devout mother and wife but she also possessed a deep poetic sense and greatly informed Christina's thinking about art and poetry in relation to living a Christian life in the midst of one's ordinary circumstances. Dante Gabriel once commented that if his mother had spare time (her time was entirely consumed by her roles as mother, wife, and breadwinner—she helped support the family by working as a teacher), she "must have become an important figure in literature" (qtd. in *Recovering Christina Rossetti* 48). In addition to writing a series of unpublished poems, Frances kept up a commonplace book; its contents ranged from practical advice she collected for her roles as governess and mother; quotations from devotional and secular poems (including the work of Maria Edgeworth and Elizabeth Barrett Browning); creative writings of her own; transcriptions of her pupils' and children's own writing; and excerpts taken from sermons (49-50).

it means too a passage of general application such as may serve as the basis of argument, the text of a sermon or discourse, and—this sense potentially at odds with the diminishment into platitude—a striking or notable passage, noted, for reference or use, in a book of common place, or commonplace book. (192)

At the heart of “Commonplace” is Christina’s interest in exploring, as Ricks observes, the “uncommonplace” nature of ordinary life and living. More especially, I argue that she is interested in exploring, through the figure of Catherine Charlmont, the ways that “self-postponement” (18) and an acceptance of the ordinary, often boring, duties of daily life, end up bearing a hidden but important spiritual value; ordinary life, for Christina Rossetti, bears extraordinary spiritual significance. If Rossetti would like to impart a moral message, a commonplace, for the reader, I propose that it is her idea that an acceptance of one’s duties, in the midst of ordinary and often unchanging or boring situations, is essential for growth in the Christian life.

Like *Maude*, “The Prince’s Progress,” and her other longer prose pieces and poems, *Commonplace* has a rather straightforward and basic plot which provides a series of both subtle and more explicit commentaries on the spiritual dimensions of ordinary life and living. It addresses the struggles of a tight-knit and complicated female community (made up of the three orphaned Charlmont sisters) to find fulfillment and stability in their lives. The oldest sister, Catherine, is described by Rossetti as a woman who, out of love for her sisters and a desire for their happiness, continually effaces and limits her own desires so as to serve her family and ensure her younger sisters’ interests. The two younger sisters, Lucy and Jane, are preoccupied with desires for marriage. Lucy spends most of the novella working through the disappointment of being rejected by, Alan

Hartley, the man she loves; by the story's close, she is, however, happily married to a more considerate man, Arthur Tresham. Jane, who is superficial and "came near to being very beautiful" (5), ends up marrying an elderly widower, George Durham, for his fortune. Both Lucy and Jane desire marriage not only to fulfill their romantic expectations about love but also to ensure the possibility of a change from their otherwise provincial and monotonous existences in their small, uneventful, hometown—the coastal village, "Brompton-on-Sea" (53).²³

Rossetti opens the novella with a description of "Brompton-on-Sea," suggesting it is a boring and static place. The houses are all similar in appearance and unexciting, save for one residence bearing some small insignificant differences distinguishing it from the rest of the nondescript neighbouring homes. Most of the homes are cottages used by families during particular seasons of the year but the Charlmons reside there permanently:

A row of houses all alike stands facing the sea—all alike so far as stucco fronts and symmetrical doors and windows could make them so: but one house in the monotonous row was worth looking at, for the sake of more numerous hyacinths and early roses in its slip of front garden, and on several of its window-sills. Judging by appearances, and for once judging rightly, this must be a private residence on an esplanade full of lodging houses. (53)

²³ "[I]n the Austen vein," as Dante Gabriel described it, *Commonplace* mainly explores the hopes of change through the standard marriage plot (*Correspondence*: 2:818). Marriage was usually one of the few means available to women for the possibility of social mobility in eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century English society and literature. See Clara Tuite's discussion of the importance of the marriage plot in Jane Austen, in "Decadent Austen Entails," for a further discussion of this point.

Words (some of them synonyms for each other) stressing similarity and homogeneity, such as “row,” “alike,” “symmetrical,” “monotonous,” “appearances” and so on, shape Rossetti’s description of everyday domestic life and culture in “Brompton-on-Sea,” thus establishing an ambiance of routine, repetition and isolation. Describing the Charlmont residence as boring, Rossetti equates boredom with the domestic sphere. As the permanent inhabitants in the “monotonous row” of homes, the Charlmont sisters, and especially Catherine, live a quiet and predictable existence. Rossetti portrays boredom as a mood arising from everyday conditions, like those of living, location and routine. Rossetti’s observations, and her development of plot and character throughout *Commonplace*, are embedded in the material and psycho-physical conditions of everyday life. Like *Maude*, but perhaps even more explicitly, *Commonplace* is a work concerned with what it means to be a woman in nineteenth-century England who lived a life like Christina’s—a life of moderate financial means and moderate social opportunities, often interrupted by inconveniences and illnesses, among other burdens and trials. Presenting a picture that is uncannily similar to the feminist concerns of Virginia Woolf, Rossetti depicts the ordinary “work of suffering human beings [which is] attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in” (*A Room of One’s Own* 50). Rossetti, in this simple story, addresses the normal, often unexamined conditions of middle-class female women (living on a restrictive budget) that are stripped of any romanticism (Jane, who represents excessive romantic idealism, in the story, is presented as selfish and unsympathetic).

Throughout *Commonplace*, Rossetti outlines the sisters’ daily routines, in detail. The Charlmont women share in a morning breakfast (19), peruse the *Times Supplement*

and go about a series of housekeeping duties which often include a period of visiting with their former governess, Miss Drum (whose name suggests ‘humdrum’), who took care of the sisters once they were orphaned (19-21). Throughout the story, Catherine Charlmont, who goes by “Miss Charlmont” on all occasions (and who has donned a spinster’s cap even though she is only thirty-three) (5), spends her time serving as a chaperone for her two younger sisters so that they can participate in various social opportunities. Her care for her young sisters ends up assisting them both in making strong marriages—Lucy marries for love and Jane, for money. However, Catherine remains unmarried by the novella’s close and, throughout the narrative, it is clear that her place is at the family home. The reasons for commitment to remaining at the Charlmont family home are, interestingly, the most romantic, unconventional, and mysterious aspects of the entire novella. Also self-sacrificing and considerate, and always ready with a charitable word or assessment of others, Catherine seems bored and boring: she never changes throughout the story and her sisters are the only ones who fluctuate in their responses to events and experiences.

The fundamental condition of Catherine’s boredom throughout *Commonplace* is constituted by her choice to promise to fulfill her dying mother’s wish that she will always remain living in Brompton-on-Sea, in the unlikely event that the corpse of her father (who was mysteriously lost at sea) might wash up on shore and find at least one member of the Charlmont family there to receive and mourn over it. The details of this wish could easily come from a Gothic narrative and Rossetti gestures towards the strange and romantic quality of this aspect of the otherwise rather dull plot by sequestering it entirely in its own Chapter, which she calls “parenthetical” (18). Other than deliberately

containing and managing the romantic elements of the narrative in its own section, Rossetti leaves the dramatic aspects of this strange episode alone and, instead, seems to highlight Catherine's promise to remain always-at-home. The narrative style employed by Rossetti when it comes to describing the Charlmont family background, the nature of Mrs. Charlmont's strange, last wish, and Catherine's reception of this wish is by turns dramatic and controlled. The formal and rhetorical levels of the narrative typically mirror Catherine's submissive and dutiful character.

Mrs. Charlmont's request (which contemporary reviewers found incredibly odd and out of place in the otherwise rather sensible and subdued storyline) functions like a moral law binding Catherine to the boredom-inducing domestic sphere.²⁴ The dramatic way Mrs. Charlmont is reported making her request greatly contrasts with the short, economic way Rossetti describes Catherine's response:

Life was almost gone, and with the approach of death a sort of consciousness had returned. Mrs. Charlmont looked hard at Catherine, who was crying bitterly, and taking her hand said distinctly: 'Catherine, promise to stay here ready for your father when he comes on shore—promise some of you to stay here: don't let him come on shore and find me gone and no one—don't let the body come on shore and find us all gone and no one promise, Catherine!' And Catherine promised.

(57)

²⁴ While reviews of *Commonplace and Other Short Stories* in the *Academy* and *Athenaeum* in the summer of 1870 were generally favourable, or at least ambivalent, sharp criticism came from the *Spectator*. It was levied against the strange promise Mrs. Charlmont extracts from Catherine. The *Spectator* said that "even the most conscientious" of old maids would have found the request absolutely absurd" (qtd. in *Christina Rossetti* 388).

The use of dashes to note the pauses in Mrs. Charlmont's speech represent the dramatic intensity of her feelings and the efforts she has to exert, with her last breaths, to make her wish known. This dramatic exchange between Mrs. Charlmont and her oldest daughter hints at a playful and contained Gothic sensibility that hovers throughout Chapter Two of the novella and which, in brief moments, resurfaces in the hysteria and frustration of Lucy Charlmont as she works through her disappointed hopes and finds new love. Serena Trowbridge argues that, throughout the nineteenth century, Gothic forms shifted in their shape and style. Specifically, the trappings of medieval castles, dungeons, and locked rooms—which spatially represented the psychological problems of melancholia, hysteria, sexual repression, insanity or boredom—diminished but their “traces” remained, especially in the “repeated trope of the enclosed space” (*Christina Rossetti's Gothic* 48). Rossetti's appropriation of Gothic “traces” in the simple, unassuming narrative pace and trajectory of *Commonplace* underscores, at the most fundamental level, Catherine's predicament as a bored heroine left interminably waiting.

The romantic and haunting foundation for the plot (the disappearance of Mr. Charlmont and the absence of his dead body); Mrs. Charlmont's hysteria and melancholia (which eventually causes her death) after her husband's disappearance; and the association of Catherine with an unnecessary and excessive law of confinement are plot conventions that could be straight out of an Anne Radcliffe (as a young girl, Rossetti read Radcliffe with great enthusiasm).²⁵ Ironically, the most exotic aspect of the tale is

²⁵ Outside of this exchange between Mrs. Charlmont and Catherine, there are only a few other hints of the affects of the Gothic. For example, as Lucy is attempting to shake off her sadness over losing Alan Hartley, she encounters a difficult bout of depression and boredom with her everyday life. Rossetti employs the conventional images of a Gothic heroine, confined to her bed and restless in her imagination, to describe

inextricably connected to the steady and practical Catherine. The exchange between Mrs. Charlmont, as she lies dying, and Catherine, also hints at the odd yoking between the romantic and the ordinary. Their conversation is not told fully—Mrs. Charlmont’s gasps and desperate pleas receive all the attention. Catherine’s response is not provided. It is only summarized: “[a]nd Catherine promised.” Confined to the “monotonous” family home, Catherine’s life is constituted by waiting for the unlikely event that her father’s corpse will return. Catherine’s character is defined by waiting and it is this temporal mode of expectation, without a sure guarantee of hope or fulfillment, that Walter Benjamin says determines boredom: the bored subject is s/he “who waits” and “takes in the time and renders it up in altered form—that of expectation” (*The Arcades Project* D3,4). Catherine is left suspended in time, expecting a future that, as will be seen when I discuss the end of the novella, is translated into a hope for heaven.

Rossetti never affords Catherine an opportunity, until the novella’s end, to break free from a rather restrictive and diminished identity. This is particularly evident in the way Catherine is described in the novella’s opening:

Miss Charlmont, having entered her thirty-third year, had taken on all occasions to appearing in some sort of cap. She began the custom at thirty, when she gave up dancing and adopted lace over neck and arms in evening dress. Her manner

Lucy: “By day, [Lucy] could forbid her thoughts to shape themselves, even mentally, into words, although no effort could banish the vague, dull sorrow which was all that might remain of her remembrance [of Alan Hartley]. But by night, when sleep paralyzed self-restraint, then her dreams were haunted by distorted specters of the past; never alluring or endearing” (68).

was firm and kindly, savouring of the provinces rather than the capital [. . .] She presided over the tea and coffee [. . . and was] sure to have friends, however [she] might lack for lovers. (53-4)

Older than even Anne Eliot (the similarly self-postponing heroine of *Persuasion* (1818) who finds love at the belated age of twenty-seven), Catherine has adopted a style and way of behaving that deliberately removes her from opportunities to change her domestic, social, and personal conditions (through marriage).²⁶ Catherine's fidelity to the law of her mother (which is really constituted by the haunting memory of the always-absent, but possibly returning, father) suggests, perhaps, that Catherine, like Christ, is living a life of humble service out of filial obedience and affection. Duty is the defining factor of Catherine's life and it completely shapes the novella's aesthetic—its precise word choice; its implicit scoffing and managing (its parenthesizing) of Gothic / romantic episodes; and its way of narrating Catherine's words indirectly. Repeatedly, throughout the novella, Catherine speaks indirectly—her words are usually reported afterwards, in passing, and this way of narrating Catherine's life contributes to the creation of an image of her as humble, submissive, and continually self-abnegating. Moreover, whenever Catherine's words are repeated, she is always an impoverished subject (not unlike Mariana) whose speech is governed by the wishes of her dead mother and absent father.²⁷

²⁶ Interestingly, Catherine's story is told when she has reached the age of thirty-three, the age Christ was at his crucifixion.

²⁷ Catherine functions as a surrogate-mother and Rossetti emphasizes this fact by placing her, during an evening pageant, in the garb of Juno, the classical goddess and patroness of maternity and the family (79). Passing from the role of daughter to that of mother without experiencing the state of bridehood, Catherine skips the phase of life which typically afforded Victorian women the opportunity to explore sexual desire and identity.

Out of death, loss, expectation, and monotony, Catherine finds an identity for herself which, while relegated to the domestic sphere, brings her more peace than her sisters who, for a majority of the narrative, are trying to find husbands so as to secure a sense of purpose and identity in life. Paradoxically, Catherine's promise relegates her to boredom but it also provides her with the opportunity to shape an identity for herself that does not conform to the typical option for female independence during the Victorian period: that of marriage. Perhaps, with her own increasing obligations to ill family members and her growing dedication to her writing as a form of Christian apostolate, Rossetti understood herself (both humorously and seriously) as a form of Catherine Charlmont. This is especially possible, I suggest, when we examine the way the novella ends.

At the story's close, Lucy says she wishes that Catherine "too, had a future" and a husband (100). It is here, finally, that Catherine speaks directly in the story:

Catherine leaned over her happy sister and gave her one kiss, a rare sign with her of affectionate emotion. Then she turned to face the open sky and sea—'My dear,' she answered, whilst her eyes gazed beyond the clouds and waves, and rested on the narrow streak of sunlight which glowed at the horizon—'My dear, my future seems further off than yours; but I certainly have a future, and I can wait.' (100)

Here, Catherine is finally speaks of potential possibilities that are outside of her current, limited conditions. The extended horizon that she faces as she speaks suggests life beyond her promise and, for once, in this passage, the sea does not appear to signify as

the watery crypt for her father. Moreover, the delicate “streak of sunlight” that Rossetti describes seems representative of the light in Scripture which signals the presence of God the Father. Here, Catherine’s spiritual hopes for eternal life (which certainly anchored Rossetti throughout the monotonous and painful aspects of her everyday life) are the main focus—although, in keeping with Catherine’s nature, they remain subtle and understated (like Rossetti’s devotional poetry and writing, in general). And, once again, a touch of the melodramatic occurs in this passage: normally, a beam of light falling on a dying soul (especially that of a dying child) is a feature of melodramatic fiction, as typified in the death of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841).²⁸ Catherine’s longing for new life is expressed in a rather romantic and picturesque way—the narrator’s discussion of sky, sea, and light sounds Turner-esque and in a rather simple way, we receive the novella’s only vivid and exquisite rendering of nature. While Catherine may also be reminding her sister that she is bound to her dutiful obedience to her mother’s dying wish, she certainly seems to be also implying that her heart hopes for eternal life (represented, in Christian devotional paintings, by depictions of the sky, unlimited horizons, and hints of light).²⁹

²⁸ I am grateful to Dr. Bentley for pointing this out to me.

²⁹ In Newman’s poem, “Lead kindly light” (1833), he likens God’s hidden but life-saving presence as his moral guide, giving meaning to his daily life. “Lead kindly Light, amid th’encircling gloom; / Lead thou me on! / The night is dark and I am far from home; / Lead thou me on! / Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see / The distant scene—one step enough for me” (1-6). An ardent fan of Newman’s writings and poetry, Rossetti’s use of the light, here, seems close to Newman’s: both perceive it, I suggest, as representative of the quiet but sustaining presence of God in their lives and, with characteristic Tractarian reserve (which is a feature of both Newman’s and Rossetti’s writing), both prefer to treat of their personal relationships with God through the use of understated and simple analogies.

In staying bound to her promise, despite its monotonous consequences, Catherine represents the obligations of conscience and moral duty. Her spiritual perspective is signified in her hope for heaven and her glance sky-wards is reminiscent of Rossetti's poem, "Later Life: A Double Sonnet of Sonnets," where she says that "[t]he wise do send their hearts before them to / Dear blessed Heaven" (*A Pageant and Other Poems* 1-2). That Rossetti has finally allowed Catherine an active voice at the end of the novella should not go overlooked. In this moment of the story, Catherine is speaking not only for those she is bound to but, also, finally, for herself. Rowan Williams notes, in *The Wound of Knowledge* (1990), that the active voice is reserved in Scripture for moments when Christ either calls someone to himself or a person seeks Christ out, longing for conversion and a change of heart; the active voice is the mode in which the lyric desires of each personal heart are expressed (103-6).

Catherine's life is far from ideal but the ways Rossetti explores her devotion to duty provides a striking contrast to the Prince's "slackening" paces (throughout his quest) and his lack of intentionality. Unlike Maude, Catherine is also better able to integrate her sense of duty within a habit and routine of everyday life. Quiet and understated about her affection for her sisters, Catherine does, however, obviously possess a poetic sensibility as revealed at the novella's very end: finally speaking directly for herself, she conveys a deep capacity for feeling and a sensitivity in reading the natural world around her. I suggest that through the figure of Catherine we see Rossetti offer a rendering of the price involved in following one's moral and ordinary duties in ordinary life. In staying bound by her promise, even though it is demanding and monotonous, Catherine is like a more commonplace, Victorian translation of the quasi-medieval (and hence more exotic) figure

of the Princess in the Tower, from “The Prince’s Progress,” and, as a result, she serves as a moral alternative to the spiritually barren Prince, on the one hand, and to the often wearied, scrupulous and self-absorbed Maude, on the other.

The problem of boredom, the “hope deferred” that made Rossetti’s “heart sick,” (“A Pause of Thought” 2), pervades Rossetti’s simple and unwavering considerations of the monotonies, and rare excitements, that make up ordinary life. Rossetti confessed she was quite at home in her idea of “hope deferred” (*Christina Rossetti* 12) and her own disappointed desires and bouts of boredom (as outlined in her writings and in her letters) are powerful dysphoric conditions that she used to create a wide-ranging series of explorations of human experience, faith, and nature. In Rossetti’s writings, we do often discern an interior longing to receive the “lowest place,” which, paradoxically, will become the highest place in eternal life. Inspired by Luke 14:10, Rossetti wrote a short lyric, in 1863, that came to be a resonant theme throughout her writing and which, I suggest, is at the heart of the aesthetic and moral interests in *Commonplace*: “Give me the lowest place,” she prays, “not that I dare / Ask for the lowest place, but Thou hast died / That I might live and share / Thy glory by Thy side. / Give me the lowest place: or if for me / That lowest place too high, make one more low / Where I may sit and see / My God and love Thee so” (1-8).³⁰ Boredom is a complex psycho-somatic problem in Rossetti’s poetry and prose. It functions as a trial that the spiritually slothful find burdensome and as a sanctifying burden to be borne by patient female subjects who understand that

³⁰ Rossetti ended up making this poem the concluding piece of both *The Prince’s Progress and Other Poems* volume and her combined volume of *The Prince’s Progress with Goblin Market and Other Poems*. R.W. Crump and Betty. S. Flowers note that the second stanza of the poem marks Rossetti’s gravestone (*The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti* 930).

limitations and monotony are the everyday materials through which one can access grace and hope. Through an exploration of boredom, and of its dividends and deficits, Rossetti works out a humble and ordinary ethics and aesthetics of duty, grounded, no doubt, in her sincere embrace of the Tractarian doctrine of reserve, that is summed up well in her Preface to *Called to Be Saints*. In this Preface, she stresses that the ordinary is the fundamental place from which Christ forms the heart and she “think[s] the Gospel records more lessons drawn by our Master from a seed or plant than from a pearl” (249).

**POST-SCRIPT:
BOREDOM AND EMBODIMENT IN VICTORIAN ART AND POETRY**

Towards the opening of her ground-breaking consideration of the philosophical, social, and historical confluences that have worked together (and against each other) to bring about our current sense of boredom's multiplicities, Elizabeth Goodstein gives us a striking description of the bored subject: "[s]tranded . . . on the banks of desire, resigned to the loss of meaning and fearing worse, the modern subject brandishes boredom like an article of faith" (*Experience without Qualities* 5). As I explored at length in my Introduction to this study, the existential and situational predicaments that have led to the boredom that Goodstein describes, here, has a long history—comprised of various social, religious, philosophical, linguistic, and political currents and pressures. This study has been an attempt to carry out a sustained consideration of the ways in which the emerging, modern problem of boredom, as it rapidly developed as a literary and psycho-somatic phenomenon in Victorian England, enables us to explore many important elements present in these currents and pressures: the lyric poetic power of disappointed desire; the over-time the imagination needs to work (often, to fruitful ends) in order to re-discover the significance of ordinary experience; the ways in which creative work resists the modes of labour promoted during the period of emerging Industrial capitalism; and the various interplays between personal identity and forms of knowledge and self-understanding—faith, sexual expression, and temporal consciousness, being chief among them. I have also taken into account the ways in which boredom is an aesthetic and sociological symptom of the subtle and implicit tensions existing between poetic identity and modernized measurements of time and practices of everyday living. This study, then, has been written with the view that boredom is a profoundly personal, an individualist,

mood, a psycho-somatic response to a wide-ranging series of social conditions. It is also an ambivalent mood that can be either a catalyst for creative work or a deadening spiritual and psychological burden that impoverishes representations, and conceptions, of personal identity, gender, sexual desire, time, ordinary life and living, and art.

From dramatic predicaments of thwarted desire to the monotony of waiting interminably, boredom, as an inward condition of both the mind and body, draws attention to the fact of human embodiment and also encourages us to rethink the concept of aesthetics in the Victorian period. As I mentioned in my Introduction, by way of Terry Eagleton and Jason Rudy, that aesthetics is bound up with the limits, longings, and pulses of the body is a conception felt strongly during the Victorian period. Paradoxically, the body's "tension of nerve" (to recall Walter Pater once again), which often manifests the psycho-somatic condition of boredom, announces the insufficiencies of everyday life to fulfill human wants and, by the same token, often reconciles us to these very insufficiencies ("Aesthetic Poetry" 62). That is to say, lack and longing, frustration and unfulfilled desire, become the dysphoric affective (re)sources from which creativity, lyric longing, and experimentation with meter, rhythm, renderings of temporality, and dramatic configurations and modellings of the human body, emerge. The situational boredom that arises from ordinary life events (which concerned Tennyson, the Rossettis, and Morris) underscores the ways in which boredom is not only about larger metaphysical questions regarding temporality and human nature in general (as suggested by Martin Heidegger). It is also about the fact of particular, individual histories, impulses, regrets, and hopes. The figure of Tennyson's Mariana embodies the way boredom features as both aesthetic theme and process throughout the Victorian period. At turns

resistant and complacent, acutely aware of how her environment and her own body signal the disagreement between desire and time's tick-tocking, Mariana represents lyric desire and the sufferings and frustrations of ordinary life (no wonder, then, that Millais's exhibition of *Mariana* garnered so much female sympathy and approval). This is why I contextualized and began my study of boredom, in section 1.1 of my Introduction, by reading the aesthetic and psycho-somatic implications present in John Everett Millais's painting of Tennyson's poems on Mariana.

Mariana articulates the tension existing between boredom and the hope for sexual fulfilment, especially in Millais's depiction of her as an abandoned woman arching her back and straining her face as though in labour pain. She appears full of sexual potential and vitality but her solitary circumstance confines her to a state of deferral, leaving her "barren" literally and at other contextual and allegorical levels within the painting. Mariana, who, as we know, was also painted by Rossetti, is an early Pre-Raphaelite image of a bored, female subject as she bears uncanny resemblances to many other later figures in Pre-Raphaelite poems and paintings, particularly in: William Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858); Christina Rossetti's second volume of poetry, *The Prince's Progress* (1868), and her devotional prose; and in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's drafts of "The Blessed Damozel" and in selections of his volume, *The House of Life* (1881), and paintings such as *La Pia De' Tolomei* (1868-1880), among others. In these texts, I explored how experiences of time's slow passing, caused and pronounced by boredom, affect representations of feeling, gender, sexuality, and identity in Pre-Raphaelite allegorical realism. For example, I focused on how Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris, in their poetry, explicitly construct moments of erotic or communal unity to

function as measurements of time's passing. As a result they expressly celebrate subjective conceptions of time and, consequently, sideline or even supplant dominant Victorian chronotopes such as the clock-time governing industrial city life, the operations of transportation systems, and the regulation of civic and national identity (as especially embodied, for example, in the iconic "Big Ben" towering over Trafalgar Square, built in the 1850s). Boredom, for Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris, becomes a spur to resist modern alienation and mechanistic time-keeping practices.

While there are other writers and texts I could have focused on for this project, such as Charles Dickens or the Brontë sisters, Tennyson and the central figures who either founded, or were affiliated with, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood struck me as a diverse yet fruitful group to focus on for a variety of reasons. Firstly, all of them carefully distanced themselves (to varying degrees) from the growing purchase that modern industrialism was having on not only the rhythms of everyday life but also on art and literature. Secondly, as I discussed in my Introduction, to date, there are no sustained readings of the relationship between Victorian boredom and poetry. The few studies that have been written on boredom have either focused on the Victorian novel or else on Modern British women's writing. Thirdly, the connections, influences, and associations between Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites afforded me the opportunity to plot out a few of the many rich and wide-ranging social, aesthetic, political, philosophical, and religious contexts that supplement and expand ways to read boredom's presence and significance as a psycho-somatic condition in Victorian England. Finally, and importantly, as I mentioned in the beginning pages of my Introduction to this thesis, poetic and visual texts are particularly apt material bodies, in their own right, for exploring and expressing the

condition of boredom and specific instances of being bored in the context of everyday and life and living, in the Victorian period (and, indeed, up to the present). In particular, the poets I have discussed throughout this thesis were all very sensitive to, and concerned with, the ways that life and art are never at far removes from each other. In various ways, all four poets work through the idea that, as Oscar Wilde puts it, “Life imitates art far more than Art imitates life” (“The Decay of Lying” 835). Meaning, the rhetorical, formal, and aesthetic qualities that Tennyson, the Rossettis, and Morris favoured—pictorial language, explorations of symbolism (or the turn from symbolism to pastiche), obsessions with repetition / haunting, and fascinations with desires left lingering—seem to be further encouraged by their dedication to their respective crafts. For instance, Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s commercial success as a painter of particular types of women (usually solitary, seductive, and restless), undoubtedly fueled his contemplation of the interplay between desire, aesthetic reproduction, repetition, frustration, and boredom. Especially with their poetry and Rossetti’s and Morris’s art, the sense of “physiological sensation” (to borrow Rudy’s phrase) is emphasized—thus affording us a way of contemplating the ways in which human, psycho-somatic experiences, like boredom, affect the rhetorical, formal, and thematic aspects of poetry and painting (*Electric Meters* 127).

Also, both poetry and art announce the presence of the human body as the nexus point of dramatic narrative and experience and serve as paradigmatic examples of Sue Zemka’s conception of punctualism: of the moment, the epiphany, that can seem either interminable or over in a flash (depending on the nature of the experience of the moment) (*Time and The Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* 7-20). Whereas a novel benefits from having time on its side (and only starts to radically reject the trajectory of

linear and teleological forms of understanding temporality towards the close of the Victorian period), poetry and art are about an experience in a moment. “A Sonnet,” Dante Gabriel Rossetti writes at the opening of the 1881 edition of *A House of Life*, “is a moment’s monument” (1). Often rendering experiences of being stuck in a moment, in a pause mid-sentence, in a rapturous or disappointing moment-in-time, poetry and art tend to have a more disruptive, ecstatic, and unfinished relationship to temporality. Such a relationship to temporality is, as my thesis has shown, part and parcel of the condition of situational boredom. And while the novel can certainly explore strange relationships to time, visual and poetic texts can force us readers to gaze at the beginning, middle or end of being bored in a mode of immediacy, as it were.

Moreover, the tangential or indirect ways in which all four poets struggled with restless desires, bouts of melancholia and with all the signs and symptoms of boredom, signaled, to me, how the atmosphere or haze of modernity shaped their work in various subtle ways. And this haze of modernity that often implicitly surfaces in their work, characterizes the nature of boredom, itself. Walter Benjamin, for instance, perceives boredom as a kind of fog or haze, an environment, as it were, that sets in with the growing crises of faith; the modern tendency to feel disgust with everyday life; the emergence of burgeoning industrialism; the growing desire for novelty; and the increasing self-awareness and self-preoccupation of the artist (*The Arcades Project* D1a,8, D2a,8, D3a,4). In various ways, the dysphoric emotional problems of loss, lack, disappointment, restlessness, and boredom consistently characterize the poetry of Tennyson, the Rossettis, and Morris. All four artists handle these problems in similar but also contrasting manners. They channel boredom, and other dysphoric moods of

discontent, into art, into material for religious devotional contemplation, or into explorations of how to develop the social and communal circumstances of modern England, itself. Collectively, Tennyson's, Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti's and William Morris's respective aesthetics of boredom draw our attention to the ways in which the routines and structures governing ordinary life affect art.

For Tennyson, boredom is a close cousin of melancholia, a consequence of frustrated desire, and an exhaustion with the demanding Victorian Gospel of Work on the one hand and the fear of crises of masculinity on the other. For Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris (in his early poetry), boredom is a kind of negative dividend: a restless and dysphoric mood which enables the artist to channel the powers of creativity, in new and sensitive ways, so as to explore how a "tension of nerve" can stimulate a profound exploration of human desire. In Christina Rossetti's work, by contrast, she uses her female experience of situational boredom, her personal faith, and her devotional aesthetic sensibilities to respond to the tendencies of artistic escapism (as instanced in her brother, Dante Gabriel, in particular). Moreover, she sets out an implicit, religious, and reserved philosophy of the ordinary which celebrates the value and dignity of fulfilling one's moral duty—even if this involves embracing the inevitably boring aspects of life and living. Overall, then, my thesis has sought to explore how boredom serves as a nexus point from which a wide-ranging series of concerns and topics pertaining to emerging modernity, in Victorian England, can be discerned and discussed. From its connections to earlier forms of discontent to its explicit emergence alongside, and out of, modern subjectivity and burgeoning industrial culture, boredom is something of a chameleon condition: it paradoxically reflects the tensions of discontent which seem to dominate the

developing modern psyche and also signals the human person's resilient desire to create art in the midst of the (often) less than ideal circumstances of daily life.

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