"Occupations and Interruptions": Christina Rossetti's Caring Poetics

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WHEN Christina Rossetti was preparing proofs for her first volume of poetry, *Goblin Market* (1862), she was in residence as a volunteer at St. Mary Magdalene Penitentiary in Highgate, a rehabilitation home "for fallen women of any grade."[1] She made time for editorial work a condition of this residency, which, according to Jan Marsh, revealed "her sense of priorities: the author took precedence over the social worker, and her true vocation was confirmed."[2] I want to demonstrate how the poet's creative practice in fact resisted this hierarchy; far from being competing occupations, writing and caring were interdependent.

To show the effects of shuttling between writing and caring on Rossetti's working method, I will examine two crisis points in her writing life during which she struggled with demanding caring responsibilities. These periods are connected by two poems, "Looking forward" (1847) and "Looking back along life's trodden way" (1885). Although separated by almost forty years, these works are in conversation about a creative method in which the duty to care and the authority to write are intertwined. I will also discuss how Rossetti's experimental writing in *Time Flies* (1885) develops a caring poetics that has its roots in her formative experience as an adolescent patient and caregiver. Ultimately, Rossetti comes to regard writing itself as a form of care.

Writing and caring were connected throughout Rossetti's life, but the relationship has largely gone unnoticed in Rossetti studies, perhaps because we assume that care must have been antithetical to her vocation as a poet. Resituating her work in the caring context in which it was created not only restores an important part of her everyday existence but also provides a new framework for considering the development of her literary imagination. In tracing the effects of caregiving on Rossetti's

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creative practice, I have been guided by the work of foundational care theorists such as Carol Gilligan (*In a Different Voice*, 1982), Nel Noddings (*Caring*, 1984) and Eva Feder Kittay (*Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*, 1999), whose scholarship has given rise to what Virginia Held calls an "ethics of care." Instead of regarding individuals as "independent," care ethicists conceptualize "persons as deeply affected by, and involved in, relations with others."[3] The individual can only be understood as embedded in wider contexts, which can be familial, social, and historical or as Yuriko Saito argues, aesthetic. Saito's *Aesthetics of Care: Practice in Everyday Life* (2022), for example, examines "what is involved in having an aesthetic experience and engaging in a care relationship," and explores the significance of "the cross-pollination between art and everyday life"[4]

Literary scholars have begun to draw on these theories. I am particularly indebted to innovative recent studies by Talia Schaffer and Chris Gabbard, who are also co-editors of *Care and Disability: Relational Representations* (2025), an important work that explores literary representations of care across periods and genres. Schaffer, whose *Communities of Care: The Social Ethics of Victorian Fiction* (2021) is particularly relevant to nineteenth-century scholarship, provides a useful and concise working definition of the key term "care": "meeting another's need." For Schaffer, this "meeting" is practical ("care refers to deeds") and "inherently interrelational."[5]

For Rossetti, caregiving meant looking after close family members, both organizing and participating in "deeds" such as giving personal care (bathing, dressing, mobility help), housekeeping, preparing meals, and providing companionship and emotional support. The continual process of meeting another's needs forced Rossetti into new relationships, partly with family members, but largely, I would argue, with herself and her writing. By examining specific instances of Rossetti's experiences as a both a carer and as what Noddings calls "the one cared-for,"[6] I want to show how she came to a fresh understanding about the interaction between writing and caring.[7] Attention to this interrelational dynamic has wider implications for literary and care studies, challenging Cyril Connolly's dismissal of the "pram in the hall" as inevitably the "enemy of good art."[8]

Many of Rossetti's best-known poems celebrate what we would now recognize as caring responsibilities, for example: when Lizzie helps her sister Laura conquer her addiction to enchanted fruit in "Goblin Market" (1862); when the beloved Nurse raises her Lady's illegitimate child in

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"The Iniquity of the Fathers" (1865), who grows up to look after her Nurse in turn; when his mother Mary's "Breastful of milk" and "kiss" are more essential to the newborn Jesus than the worship of angels and kings in "A Christmas Carol" ["In the bleak midwinter"] (1872); and in the nursery rhymes of *Sing-Song* (1872), which advocate for the poor, the neglected, the grieving, the sick, and the elderly.

Rossetti herself was an experienced carer from an early age. Within the Rossetti family, she looked after her father when she was still an adolescent; her mother and aunts in middle age; her brother, the painter-poet Dante Gabriel, a chloral addict who suffered from severe physical and mental health problems; and her sister, Maria, when she was dying of ovarian cancer.[9] She was active in her community, undertaking district visiting in her local parish, volunteering as an associate sister at the St. Mary Magdalene Penitentiary for over a decade, and becoming an "outer Sister" at the All Saints Sisters of the Poor. In her twenties, Rossetti even considered caring as a profession and applied to be a Nightingale nurse during the Crimean War. Her brother William remembers that she "acted as godmother to various children—mostly, I think, children of poor people in the neighbourhood of Christ Church, Albany Street, Regent's Park."[10] She wrote the children a poem, "A Christmas Carol: For My Godchildren" (1856), now better known as the carol "The Shepherds Had an Angel." From the mid-1870s to the mid-1880s she prepared over fifty handmade "biggish scrapbooks" comprising words and pictures for "Hospital patients or children" (Bell, 55).

Rossetti's earliest experience of caring came during the early 1840s, when her father, the Italian teacher and scholar Gabriele Rossetti, began suffering from physical and psychological symptoms severe enough to prevent him from supporting his family financially. While Rossetti's mother, Frances; sister, Maria; and brother William went to work outside the home, and her brother Gabriel attended art school, Rossetti remained at home to look after her father and act as his amanuensis, becoming what we would now consider a "young carer" at age thirteen. In common with many of today's young carers, who are at "an increased risk of mental health difficulties, especially where the ill family member was a parent and had mental illness," Christina herself suffered from serious physical and mental health problems during this period.[11] As Simon Humphries's recent research has shown, her symptoms included self-harm, suicidal ideation, and hallucinations alongside severe headaches, nose-bleeds, anemia, and fatigue.[12]

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Another telling symptom was that she stopped writing poetry. The notebook MS of her poems reveals a seven-month gap between "Lines to My Grandfather" (May 1, 1845) and her next poem, "Charade" (December 3, 1845). The resumption of her writing coincided with the arrival of her bright young physician, Dr. Charles Hare. He records that Rossetti "was more or less constantly under my care" from November 1845 "until 1850 inclusive and occasionally afterwards."[13] Having graduated from Cambridge in 1841, the twenty-seven-year-old Dr. Hare was trained in the new ""history and physical' format for diagnosing illness," which combined the "physician's objective findings in physical examination" with "the patient's subjective narration." As Arseneau and Terrell point out, Dr. Hare was known for his "prize-winning case reports—long, detailed documents with the history mainly recorded in the patient's own words." From these innovative methods, "Rossetti would have learned that patient narrative or 'story' is worthy of careful attention."[14] Perhaps Dr. Hare's faith in narrative as a diagnostic tool allowed him to buck conventional wisdom in permitting, and possibly encouraging, his young female patient to write. In his medical memoranda from the period, he connects Rossetti's profound melancholy with her inability to do creative work, observing that the patient has "spoken of suicide; her spirits have been low & she does no drawing or work of any kind." His treatment did not rely on the usual bed rest or tonics, as might have been expected:

> Under a course of medc directed mainly to the imprvt of the general health & without tonics she felt herself at the end of a couple of months "much better; she has amused herself more & not had the eccentric manners which she had formerly"—and her spirits improved.[15]

Dr. Hare's interest in his patient's "general health" was holistic, and his treatment consequently focused on the relationship between her body and her mind. He was attentive to the patient's selfhood both in his practice and in his recording of it; improved "spirits" and capacity for amusing "herself more" signified that Rossetti once again "felt herself." Less than a month after Dr. Hare began to treat her, Rossetti started writing again. "Charade," which is simultaneously an amusement and a poem about writing, signifies the beginning of the young poet's return to herself:

> My first may be the firstborn,
> The second child may be;
> My second is a texture light

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And elegant to see:
My whole do those too often write
Who are from talent free.[16]

As Mazel explains, in this literally playful poem, Rossetti is working within the conventions of a "charade," which is a type of "riddling word game" wherein

> each syllable of Rossetti's solution-word is described by clues that are announced by the genre-constituting keywords, "*first*" (announcing the clue for the first syllable of the solution-word) and "*second*" (the clue for the second syllable of the solution word). Then, the clue for the "*whole*" solution word is given, closing the poem.[17]

In this case, the solution to the "first" is "son"; the "second" is "net," and the "whole" is the two solutions combined, or "sonnet."[18] Rossetti's wry assessment of self-regarding sonneteers who are "from talent free" demonstrates the return of the poet's sense of humor and bespeaks the confidence of a writer who surely did not count herself among their number. The title gestures toward the interplay of concealment and revelation that would come to characterize Rossetti's mature work; "Charade" shows the poet not just returning to form but upping her game.

To what extent Dr. Hare actively encouraged his patient to write poetry is unknown, but crucially, he did not discourage Rossetti; his responsibility for her care coincides with a remarkably fertile creative period (1845–50), during which she produced the material for her first, privately printed volume, *Verses* (1847), and her signature poems, "Song" ["When I am dead, my dearest"] (1848) and "Remember" (1849). The poems she wrote before this period were generally derivative; pastoral pastiches like "Rosalind" (1843) and "The Faithless Shepherdess" (1844), and conventional hymns like "Hymn" (1842) and "A Hymn for Christmas Day" (1844) were typical productions. While other factors, including developmental ones, cannot be discounted, the emergence of Rossetti's confident lyric voice while she was simultaneously caring and being cared for is telling.

Her introduction to caregiving had an explicitly literary dimension; Rossetti acted as amanuensis for her father, Gabriele, when he began to suffer from vision problems. Her duties included providing him with a penwiper to prevent ink staining the rug, an experience she records in "Lines given with a penwiper" (1847):

I have compassion on the carpeting,
And on your back I have compassion too.

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> The splendid Brussels web is suffering
> In the dimmed lustre of each glowing hue;
> And you the everlasting altering
> Of your position with strange aches must rue.
> Behold, I come the carpet to preserve,
> And save your spine from a continual curve. (680)

This short poem is full of surprises, starting with "compassion," which we assume will be for a person but turns out to be for the "carpeting." But this "compassion" is also extended to the poet's father, who is tormented by "strange aches" both physical and psychological, which his seventeen-year-old daughter's care can help relieve. This poet is only half-joking about the heroism of caring for others and the house. "Behold, I come!" to "preserve/And save," she writes, self-parodically echoing the language of Revelation.[19] What is notable here is Rossetti's development of Dr. Hare's holistic approach in attending to her father. On one hand, the delivery of the penwiper is an act of physical care, saving Gabriele's aching back. On the other, Rossetti's inclusion of a poem with the penwiper shows how her conception of care takes into account emotional needs alongside physical ones. The lines express a daughter's "compassion" for her ailing father, while the penwiper enables him to keep writing through illness, just as Rossetti had learned to do over a year earlier.

The fact of the poem's existence demonstrates that Rossetti continued to use writing as a form of self-care, as recommended by Dr. Hare. By foregrounding compassionate caregiving as its subject matter, "Lines given with a penwiper" both acknowledges the practical obstacles to producing poetry and identifies a literary benefit of being responsible for someone else. The speaker's lighthearted allusions to Revelation and compassion for carpets give vent to the frustrations of care, safely containing and aestheticizing conflicted feelings about carrying out onerous duties. What seems at first a simple domestic interruption in fact supports both parties, facilitating the elderly writer's work and inspiring the young poet. The poem expresses what Noddings calls a "duality in the one-caring: the 'feeling with' [the one cared-for] that leads the one-caring to act as though for herself, but in the projects of the other and the accompanying realization that this other is independent, a subject."[20] "Lines given with a penwiper" also illustrates Saito's thoughts about "how objects can serve as a vehicle for expressing care." She writes, "When our environment and objects within exude care given for our experience, we are apt to spread the caring attitude toward others, either directly or through the creation or maintenance of the environment. Care begets

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care." By creating an environment that is conducive to writing, a pursuit that she recognizes is fundamental to her father's well-being and her own, Rossetti puts into practice what she has learned from Hare about the interdependence of self-care and caring for others. Here, as Saito might frame it, "self-care is a pre-condition for other-directed care."[21]

Even during serious setbacks in her recovery, Dr. Hare never discouraged Rossetti from writing. In 1849, when she was affected by nightmares, painful headaches, and hallucinations of shifting walls and "undulating" floors, she presented her physician with the manuscript of her poem "Looking forward," which Hare proudly records has been "written for me,"[22] and which Bell confirms remained one of the doctor's "most cherished possessions" (21). Its opening line, "Sleep, let me sleep, for I am sick of care," does not, at first glance, seem a tribute to Hare's skills as a healer (l. 1). When she composed it in June 1849, Rossetti was so ill that she was "confined to the sofa," too weak to write in her own hand.[23] The title is deeply and bitterly ironic; the dying speaker who is in great "pain" is not looking forward to much, except "sleepy death" (ll. 2, 10). Despite its title, this poem spends a significant amount of time looking backward. Its speaker is listening for "A simple song I loved in days of yore," mourning "old thought," "happy days that shall return no more," and wondering how the addressee will "muse upon the past" (ll. 14, 19, 18, 28). The poem's end finally looks forward, but only to the speaker's death. She imagines the world in her absence:

> Sweet thought that I may yet lie and grow green,
> That leaves may yet spring from the withered root,
> And buds and flowers and berries half unseen;
> Then if you haply muse upon the past,
> Say this: Poor child, she hath her wish at last;
> Barren through life, but in death bearing fruit. (ll. 25–30).

Despite its Romantic melancholy, this poem, like "Lines given with a penwiper," offers an example of Rossetti's creative resilience. Read as a product of her illness, this vision of early death might be dismissed as unremittingly bleak and its title ironic. Considered as a gift to Dr. Hare, the poem is evidence that Rossetti is actively pursuing self-care. That Rossetti wrote "Looking forward" for Dr. Hare suggests she trusted him to understand her as a patient and a writer. His acceptance of this poem shows that instead of urging his patient to suppress her darker impulses and emotions, he allowed her to think them through in poetry. This poem shows that its writer has not yet given up on her own potential, and

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that she hopes another careful reader might detect "flowers and berries half unseen" and "leaves" that "may yet spring from the withered root." Formally presented to Dr. Hare, the manuscript poem itself is a material example of the blossoming it describes. In this context, Rossetti really is looking forward, to a future that acknowledges the reality of death but also accommodates the possibility of hope. Marsh writes that this particular poem "suggests that Hare encouraged Rossetti to write, unlike common prescriptions of the era banning mentally stressed women from reading." She observes that the opening line of "Looking forward" ("Sleep, let me sleep, for I am sick with care"), "inadvertently anticipates" a "later sense of onerous care-giving."[24]

Published only after her death, "Looking forward" was nevertheless an important poem to Rossetti. It features prominently in her short story "Maude," where it is spared from the fire that consumes most of the titular protagonist's poetry after she dies in a tragic accident. This act of preservation, of literary care, is performed by Maude's levelheaded cousin Agnes, who is "astonished at the variety of Maude's compositions" and feels a "pang" at carrying out their author's instructions to burn the majority.[25]

William Michael Rossetti tells us that "Looking forward" was "written in expectation of seemingly imminent death."[26] As it turned out, the adolescent poet lived to revisit her poem in her mid-fifties. At fifty-five, Rossetti was looking back on "Looking forward" because her experience writing *Time Flies* replicated the circumstances in which she became a writer in the first place. In the 1880s Rossetti once again found herself becoming a primary carer for her family and struggling to balance her career as a writer with poor health and increasing domestic responsibilities. During this period, she was living in a house on Torrington Place in Bloomsbury with her mother, Frances, and her elderly maternal aunts, Charlotte and Eliza Polidori. Although her home "always" had "a cook and a housemaid" and a temporary nurse could be employed when one of its elderly inhabitants became exceptionally ill (Bell, 164), from the 1870s, Rossetti undertook what feminists now call the "mental labor" of running the household. This included managing the budget; the hiring, firing, and supervision of a rotating cast of cooks, housemaids, and nurses; and performing ordinary domestic tasks.

Nor did time away from London excuse her from duties as household manager. For example, in 1884 she accompanied her eighty-four-year-old mother to Birchington. The pair were anxiously supervising the long-delayed installation of stained-glass chapel windows

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commemorating her brother Dante Gabriel, who had died at Birchington two years earlier. She was sharing a bedroom with her grieving, frail, and elderly mother; both were sleeping badly but relieved to be staying next door to a pharmacy and down the road from a doctor. Her young niece Mary contracted scarlet fever while she was away, and Rossetti's brother William wrote to ask if he and his other three children could temporarily relocate to Torrington Square to avoid contagion. She reluctantly agreed, worried about the risks to her two octogenarian maternal aunts, Charlotte and Eliza Polidori.

Days after William and his children returned to their own home in mid-October, Rossetti's aunt Eliza suffered the first in a debilitating series of strokes. Her aunt Charlotte was also in decline; she retired in November 1884 and became, like Frances and Eliza, a round-the-clock resident of Torrington Place and Rossetti's responsibility. A month later, her uncle Henry Polydore suffered a stroke and died ten days afterward. Rossetti's caring duties prevented her from saying goodbye. On January 26, 1885, she writes to William Bell Scott that "I wish I could have seen him again, but it was impossible for me to quit my precious Mother."[27] In the new year, Rossetti confesses to her sister-in-law, Lucy Madox Brown, "I am a good deal pulled down just now and feel little strength or spirit to draw upon."[28] By June 1885, she acknowledges that "My mother *absorbs* me: you may easily believe it, at her advanced age."[29]

Caring for her mother and aunts increasingly took up her energy and time, and, in common with 60 percent of today's unpaid carers, her own physical health was precarious.[30] In the early 1870s she had been diagnosed with Graves' disease, a disease involving the thyroid that we now classify as a serious immune disorder. Symptoms included goiter, exophthalmos (bulging eyes), "palpitations, difficulty swallowing, a choking sensation, severe headaches, extreme weakness and exhaustion, fainting, hair loss, frequent vomiting, weight loss, change in voice, continual shaking of her hands, skin discoloration, changed mental function," and heart problems.[31] There was no true effective treatment or cure, and a serious flare-up of Graves' disease in her forties saw Rossetti close to death. It is strongly hereditary, and it may be that her own father was an undiagnosed sufferer, as he shared many symptoms of this disorder. She survived but remained vulnerable to viruses, infections, and exhaustion, and her appearance was dramatically altered. On March 20, 1885, she reports: "[W]e have become a petty hospital, so persistently have illness and even an accident or two beset us. Every one of us has been or is more or less ill . . . ."[32]

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Where she wrote necessarily became a moveable feast, depending on the health of her mother and aunts. D'Amico notes that the poet preferred to write "when alone and in a private space."[33] Bell identifies this "space" as her "small upper back bedroom" (161), but D'Amico has shown how "when other rooms became available to her, she altered her habits both in terms of where she slept and where she wrote."[34] Friction between domestic and creative work had been apparent for some time; in June 1881 she wrote to her friend Caroline Gemmer that "I have had a tiring day, & now I hear an arrival of clean clothes from the wash clamouring for me to look through them. So my poet steps must trudge upstairs to the humble work, and soon I may look forward to bed an ambiguous vista."[35]

As in the 1840s, increasing caring responsibilities and ill health coincided with a struggle to write poetry. The dearth of new material was not lost on Algernon Charles Swinburne, who begs Rossetti for new verses in both "A Ballad of Appeal, to Christina Rossetti" and in a private letter of November 17, 1884.[36] She replies on November 19: "Pray believe that dumbness is not my *choice*; nor will I attempt to justify it with the parrot who screamed 'But I think the more.' And perhaps I may safely add that no one is more pleased than I am when by fits and starts I become vocal."[37] Marsh notices that Rossetti is in fact "less than candid" here because she is engaged in producing her "fully original work" *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* (1885). But what Rossetti does disclose to Swinburne is something perhaps more important: the pains and pleasures of a new creative practice. Both the content and form of her work were being renewed and reimagined, partially in response to her increasing domestic duties and caring responsibilities. Although the rest, routine, privacy, and time that writers need were increasingly hard to rely on, Rossetti did more than just bemoan this problem. She worked around it, and even folded it into a creative process that *Time Flies* advocates and enacts. It is during this period that Rossetti began to conceive of divided attention as a creative opportunity.

Rossetti describes *Time Flies* to her friend Caroline Gemmer as "a miscellaneous set of short readings in prose and verse."[38] Many entries are half a page long, and few exceed one page. Mackenzie Bell observes that in *Time Flies*, "having to write something about each day in the year, something that must necessarily be short, and that ought also to be concise and pithy, she fell back, unconsciously, on her own wide experience, wide, not in the outer but in the inner sense" (304). Rossetti wrote these "concise" passages in brief, stolen moments, and this sense of

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fragmentation and broken concentration, of thoughts abandoned and then revisited, captures both the frustrations and surprises generated by her approach. Despite its chronological structure, *Time Flies* is loose, fluid, and nonlinear. Freely ranging across past, present, and future, its daily entries are a mix of poems, parables, and personal anecdotes. In terms of form and content, it is about reflecting, pausing, distracting, digressing, and being interrupted. As a reading experience, *Time Flies* is mindful of weary readers, of those whose time may be limited by domestic responsibilities, personal difficulties, or circumstances the book couldn't possibly envision yet somehow accommodates.

The domestic focus and diary format of *Time Flies*, which follows the Christian year, demonstrate how the routine nature of everyday life teems with meaning. Daily entries respond to biblical stories and saints' histories from the perspective of an ordinary person and in simple language that is seldom didactic. Its meditations are instead, as Lysack notes, "radically oriented towards the every day." *Time Flies*, the most autobiographical of Rossetti's works, encourages readers to attend seriously to personal, subjective experience, however commonplace it may seem; the poet reframes incidents from her own life as parables whose important lessons are best understood in retrospect. As Lysack observes, *Time Flies* "proposes a distinctly modern way of reading" by encouraging readers to engage with it "regularly, but in pieces, with a view to the part rather than the whole."[39]

Recycling is an important part of Rossetti's piecework approach to writing. In addition to composing new poems for *Time Flies*, Rossetti reuses a lifetime's worth of previously published and unpublished verses. Readers noticed. For instance, Congregational minister William Garrett Horder praises *Time Flies* but also expresses a wish for more fresh poetry. Rossetti justifies her practice in terms that recall the letter to Swinburne: "Be sure that not one of my readers would be more genuinely pleased than myself if I could always write poems! But just because poetry *IS* a gift [. . .] I am not surprised to find myself unable to summon it at will and use it according to my own choice."[40]

The frustration of human will and choice had long been a driving theme of Rossetti's work, as Horder might have appreciated, having recently included her poem "Weary in Well-Doing" (1866) in his *Congregational Hymns* (1884). Composed in 1864, this poem acknowledges that "well-doing" is physically and emotionally exhausting, not just because it is labor-intensive, but because it forces the well-doer to suppress her own needs and desires. Rossetti's speaker is frank about the

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frustrations of serving a God who "broke" her "will from day to day," commanding her to "stay" when she "would have gone," only to order her to "go" when she "would stay," then making her "rest" when she "would have worked" and asking her to "work" when she "would rest" (ll. 3, 1, 6, 2, 7). Rather than continuing to "plod and moil," the speaker longs to "let alone my toil" to "rest" with Christ (ll. 12, 14, 15). At first it seems this poem has reached the same conclusion that "Looking forward" had fifteen years before, where death is proposed as the only escape from life's painful demands. But new possibilities are suggested by its title, "Weary in Well-Doing." The Christian audience of Horder's *Congregational Hymns* would have recognized the allusion to Galatians 6:9: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." Galatians 6:10 clarifies that well-doing specifically means helping others: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men . . . ." Here, well-doing is not simply transactional—the means to achieve divine rest in the future—but an "opportunity" to "do good" in the present.

Rossetti develops this idea in *Time Flies,* which proposes better, more immediate ways to reap the benefits of well-doing than waiting for the afterlife. Can well-doing against our will be, not just an act of submission, but an opportunity for growth? She expands on this possibility over the entries for August 20 and 21 in *Time Flies*, which consider the "startling" relationship between "occupations and interruptions." She defines an interruption as that "which breaks in upon our occupation of the moment" and comes "from without." Examples are "a frivolous remark when we are absorbed, a selfish call when we are busy, an idle noise out of time, an intrusive sight out of place." Occupations, by contrast, are when we "enjoy a pleasure, or complete a task, or execute a work, or serve someone we love," and are a matter of choice because they "come from within" and "are the outcome of our own will." Yet Rossetti argues that it can be more "profitable" when we are "called" against our will "to forego a pleasure, or break off a task, or leave a cherished work incomplete, or serve someone we find it difficult to love." Rather than dismissing such unwanted interruptions as merely "vexatious," we should reframe them as "Providential" opportunities to develop ourselves because they are "sent us" and come "from without." In fact, in resenting an interruption, we "quite misconceive the genuine appointed occupation of a given moment".[41] Ironically, our true occupation may very well be the interruption itself. Once we recognize interruptions as providential interventions, we are in a position to understand their lessons. Rossetti recommends an act of interpretative faith, wherein we trust to a design we

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cannot immediately see, but which time and reflection can help us perceive. The trouble with interruptions, however, is that their providential purpose becomes apparent only in hindsight.

"Looking back along life's trodden way" (hereafter, "Looking back"), the final poem of the calendar year in *Time Flies*, suggests that, paradoxically, hindsight can reveal a way forward. I consider this poem a companion piece to "Looking forward," the poem Rossetti wrote for Charles Hare when she was just seventeen years old. The physician, now sixty-seven, was on Rossetti's mind while she was writing *Time Flies*; she sent him a presentation copy, inscribed "Dr Hare, from his old friend and patient Christina G. Rossetti."[42] Her tender inscription is an in-joke, a punning echo of line 22 from the unpublished "Looking forward," given to him in his presentation copy of *Verses* (1847): "Have patience with me, friends, a little while" (l. 22). That this former "patient" considers her physician an "old friend" speaks to the continuing effectiveness of his treatment during her adolescence, which took into account the patient's emotional, psychological, and creative well-being. The friends also shared an interest in time; Hare's obituary reveals his "engaging habit of drawing a small clock-face at the top of his letters, the hands of which indicated the exact time at which they had been written."[43]

"Looking back" acknowledges time's forward momentum and its circularity. The poem's placement in *Time Flies* is significant. Appearing as the entry for December 31 (New Year's Eve), "Looking back" concludes the Christian year, even as it reminds readers of its renewal. The following day is January 1, New Year's Day, when both the yearly cycle and the book *Time Flies* begin again. It is surely no accident that the bulk of the new poems Rossetti composed for *Time Flies* are roundels, ostentatious experiments in a circular form invented by Swinburne in *A Century of Roundels* (1883), a volume he dedicated to Rossetti. Despite her sharp reply in the negative to Swinburne's 1884 appeal for fresh poems, Rossetti's use of his new form shows that she took his request seriously. Although this final poem is not strictly a roundel, nevertheless, as Dieleman notes, as in a roundel, its first and final lines as well as its refrain "reinforce" its "opening gestures."[44] Rossetti would further emphasize the poem's circularity by choosing "Looking back" to close her final volume of poetry, *Verses* (1894):

> Looking back along life's trodden way,
> Gleams and greenness linger on the track:
> Distance melts and mellows all to-day,

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Looking back.
Rose and purple and a silvery grey,
Is that cloud the cloud we called so black?
Evening harmonises all to-day,
Looking back.
Foolish feet so prone to halt or stray,
Foolish heart so restive on the rack!
Yesterday we sighed, but not to-day,
Looking back. (543)

This 1885 poem looks back on 1849's "Looking forward," whose hopeful "thought that I may yet live and grow green" (l. 25) can be glimpsed in this new poem's "Gleams and greenness" that still "linger on the track." While the "music" in "Looking forward" signified only "longing that must end in nought" (l. 21), "Looking back" "harmonises all." "Distance," both from life experience and from literary work written in the heat of a particular moment, "melts and mellows all." As Dieleman observes, here "the looking back is an act of retrospection, not of longing."[45] In keeping with the poem's spirit, the acts of looking forward and looking back act in concert, in harmony, rather than functioning in opposition. Comparison is essential; hindsight is what allows the speaker to detect subtler shades of "Rose, purple, and silvery grey" in what seemed only "black" before, when the speaker was looking forward. Though revelatory, this fresh perception produces neither regret nor self-reproach but empathy and understanding for the "foolish" and "restive" inexperienced self of "yesterday." This perspective on "yesterday" also helps us live in the present, "to-day." This older, more experienced self is also, importantly, a communal self, an inclusive "we" rather than the more self-focused "I" of "Looking forward." As Mason notices, for Rossetti, "everyday belonging arises from the experience of familiarity and remembrance, not a constant looking towards tomorrow."[46]

The value of looking back is confirmed throughout *Time Flies*, not only in its structure, but by its autobiographical parables that study the contrast between past and present selves. Rossetti recalls feeling "shy" as a child beholding a "gorgeous assembly" of waxwork figures. "Now looking back I laugh at my own absurdity," she confesses. Instead of dismissing her younger self's reaction, she wonders what can be learned from it. "Why then recount it?" she asks herself and her readers, before concluding that only through hindsight can she appreciate the incident's value as "a parable." Revisited in the pages of *Time Flies*, the waxwork figures represent the "hollow momentary world" by which we are falsely "influenced and constrained," while the "real people" that make up both

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our community and the more substantial "eternal world" remain "unseen" and "disregarded" (36).

Looking back cannot arrest time's forward momentum, but retro spection can give us time to change our perspective. Rossetti recalls a childhood fright upon seeing "a black insect" emerging from a mouse's corpse, a vision so shocking she resolved "never to mention this ghastly adventure to anyone." Hindsight, however, allows her to understand the episode as a parable. In writing *Time Flies*, and "contemplating death from a wider and wiser point of view," she can look beyond the "physical disgust" and concentrate "more on the rest and safety; on the perfect peace of death." Even so, she does not condemn her younger self for her initial reaction: "Now looking back at the incident I see that neither impulse was unreasonable, although the sympathy and the horror were alike childish." Revisiting the story as an adult, the writer "would fain reverse the order of those feelings" about death, allowing "horror" to come first, and giving way to "sympathy" in the end. Incorporating "those feelings" into this longer life story enables Rossetti to "reverse" their "order" or, to put it another way, to edit them (45). As the daily entries in *Time Flies* demonstrate, human development can be thought of as a literary endeavor; we can learn about ourselves from being attentive not just to the content of our own stories and feelings but to when and how we tell and retell them, and to what purpose.

Rossetti is explicit that the value of autobiographical storytelling in *Time Flies* is not correlated with factual "accuracy": the writer cheerfully admits she "may have misunderstood," "never understood," "may have forgotten," or been unable to "recall every detail" of "an illustrative story or a personal reminiscence." What is important is that her "story," even if it is "embellished," is "written down in the humble wish to help others by such means as I myself have found helpful." Here, Rossetti makes the connection between creativity and self-care explicit; having found creative writing to be "helpful" herself, the author is keen to "help others" by promoting this practice. She makes it clear that being creative bestows poetic license. Furthermore, there is an artistic pitfall in privileging accuracy when telling a story. Those who are "paralysed" or "fidgeted by conscientiousness" while trying to relate an "anecdote" underestimate the importance of style at their peril. "Eloquence stammers" under the pressure "to be accurate" as each "reminiscence" becomes "an exercise in possible contingencies," a poor "handling" of the material that "blunts the pointed and flattens the lofty" (3–4). In sharing not only her stories but also her composition process, she is envisioning not just a reading community but a writing one.

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Rossetti develops this theme of writing in the entry for January 27:

> Suppose our duty of the moment is to write: why do we not write? Because we cannot summon up anything original, or striking, or picturesque, or eloquent, or brilliant.
> But is a subject set before us? It is.
> Is it true? It is.
> Do we understand it? Up to a certain point we do.
> Is it worthy of meditation? Yes, and prayerfully.
> Is it worthy of exposition? Yes, indeed.
> Why then not begin?
> "From pride and vain glory, Good Lord, deliver us." (22)

The passage practices what it preaches. Writing must be treated like any other daily "duty" or task; the most important thing is to begin. No subject is too ordinary to be worthy of consideration, so long as the writer meditates upon it regularly and from diverse perspectives. This literary approach, which organizes the autobiographical material in *Time Flies*, has a biblical precedent in Psalm 143:5: "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands." Although it is prose, this extract's lineation suggests a poem, while its dialogic structure recalls the question-and-answer format of *The Book of Common Prayer*. The final quotation, taken from the Great Litany, explicitly situates the act of writing in a communal context.[47]

Rossetti envisions her readers as potential writers who may, like her, be struggling to balance the demands of creativity with domestic responsibilities. The very next passage in *Time Flies* (January 28) offers further advice. When "grappling with that distasteful duty" of writing, Rossetti recommends prayer and meditation. Prayer and meditation are not forms of procrastination but are, like diary reading and writing, part of a regular literary practice that develops self-knowledge and understanding. When we avoid writing, we also tend to avoid prayer because it "would end in our having to set about the evaded task." Procrastinating writers likewise avoid "meditation" because it "would harp on the silenced string" (22–23). The metaphor here is a musical and poetic one; "harp" in this case means playing a harp. In the context of writing to which Rossetti's passage alludes, "harp" also evokes the more obscure definition, "To render in verse, to sing."[48] Rossetti is drawing on Psalm 49:3–4, which represents meditation as a practice that makes us receptive to both storytelling and creativity: "My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding. I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp."

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A meditative state invites creativity, allowing us to use our senses in a different way, enabling us to value our feelings, to detect parables in stories, and to "open" our own "dark sayings" in our writing.

Even so, Rossetti felt drained by writing *Time Flies*: "my last little book pretty well exhausted my last scrap," she writes to Frances Granfel Kingsley (Charles Kingsley's wife) on November 24, 1885, confessing, "Now I am feeling as if I may have written my final book,—notwithstanding a hope that it may not turn out so after all!"[49] Five months later, in April 1886, Rossetti suffered another literary crisis when her beloved mother died, and she found herself solely responsible for looking after her aunts in the midst of her own intense grief. In a June 1886 letter to a "Miss May," whose mother is terminally ill, she describes her time caring for Frances as a "privileged watch" and extends her empathy: "I can feel for you watching beside that sick bed."[50] William observes that while "she tended her two aged aunts" with as much care as she had shown her mother, "it was impossible that her outflow of love towards either of them should have had any similar force and glow."[51] William Sharp notes that "[a]fter the death of Mrs. Rossetti her daughter devoted herself to almost hourly ministration to her two old aunts."[52] Domestic obligations continued to compete with time and space for literary work. In July 1886 Rossetti tells her sister-in-law, Lucy Madox Brown, "I am still at intervals fingering my books, with alternations of dirt and soap, and house cleaning breaks out at times in one room or other."[53] Once again, a significant gap in her regular writing practice boded ill. Rossetti experienced a physical and mental health crisis, suffering from choking fits, headaches, and suicidal thoughts.[54]

As in the 1840s, when Charles Hare treated her for similar symptoms, a medical intervention helped restore her spirits and her creativity. Under doctor's orders, Rossetti reluctantly went on holiday with her ten-year-old niece Olivia to Brighton, a destination chosen because her physician "stringently forbade" her to return to Birchington, or "any place endeared to me by my beloved Mother's companionship."[55] It is unclear who cared for the Polidori aunts while Rossetti was away—perhaps a temporary nurse was hired, as happened during periods when the aunts were exceptionally ill. Rossetti's four-week release, which we would now recognize as respite care, proved restorative. Her physical symptoms vanished, and her spirits improved. She and her chatty young niece borrowed books from the local library, visited the aquarium, strolled the esplanade, and enjoyed a museum of British birds; Rossetti even excitedly claimed to have "discovered a comet!! all by myself."[56]

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Upon her return to Torrington Place, Rossetti was able to shoulder her domestic responsibilities more cheerfully and proactively, joking about her "*charwomaning*" duties, sending herself up as a "Joan of all trades to save the odd pence!", and consulting a lawyer to help her arrange her financial affairs and plan for the future.[57] The improvement in her sense of humor had a literary cause, or perhaps an effect: Rossetti was writing regularly again.

On November 22, 1886, she told Theodore Watts about her new "literary occupation," which would become *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary of the Apocalypse* (1892). This devotional prose work is structured by Revelation, just as *Time Flies* is organized by the Christian calendar; Rossetti writes short poems and passages of prose in response to each of Revelation's verses. Having developed confidence in writing "in fits and starts" for *Time Flies*, she tells Watts, "I work at prose and help myself forward with little bits of verse." Once again, she organized her writing around domestic obligations, driven by what was practicable and taking inspiration from the circumstances in which she found herself. Rossetti describes her working method as "reading and thinking over part of the New Testament, writing down what I can as I go along." She wryly explains to Watts, "At present, as you may divine, I am not likely to draw much upon the simply imaginative." Perhaps remembering Dr. Hare's treatment, she also identifies literary self-care as a primary motive: "What I am doing is (I hope) for my own profit, nor do I in the least know that it will ever become an available 'book.'"[58]

Nevertheless, *The Face of the Deep* was published, and its opening pages present reading and writing as acts of care that benefit both self and community. Glossing Rev. 1:1–2,[59] Rossetti envisions herself and her readers "starting in fellowship of patience with that blessed John,"[60] the author of Revelation, who, as Rev. 1:2 tells us, "bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and all things that he saw." By drawing attention to Revelation as a literary artifact, Rossetti reminds readers that the book is collaborative and co-authored, comprising Christ's "testimony," God's "word," and John's vision ("things that he saw"). Divine words from "the fountain-head" (God/Christ) are communicated to humankind via "the channel" of "Angel and Apostle (John)." This emphasis is Rossetti's way of depicting shared words and testimonies as a form of literary service work, a way of caring for others. She praises "the dignity" of Christ, "Who ministers to His Own servants" by sharing God's "Revelation for man" (9). Deriving from the Latin *ministrare*, to minister is "To serve, perform the function of a servant; to

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attend to the comfort or needs of another; to assist, be of use."[61] Rossetti draws on this sense of the word to remind readers that ministering is a form of care and, in this specific case, a form of literary care.

In this way, she argues, Revelation itself can be understood as a narrative act of generosity because it reflects the hierarchical inversion of Christ serving his servants with this very text (9). Humankind can emulate this humility by manifesting this form of literary care; making sure we do not "desire to have servants, or dependents, or inferiors except so far as we may do them good." Instead, we should "spend ourselves for any who need us," so that we are "requiting to them" what Christ "has done to us" (10). By echoing St. Paul's words to the Corinthians when he refuses their financial support for his ministry, Rossetti endorses the unpaid nature of caregiving: "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you" (2 Corinthians 12:15). The play on "spent" compounds St. Paul's rejection of payment with an acceptance of exhaustion as the reward for his efforts. She did not benefit financially from *The Face of the Deep*, instead donating the profits to her publisher, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, as she had for *Time Flies*.

Care had always been an important focus of Rossetti's poetry, but it wasn't until the more experimental devotional writing of the 1880s that she could articulate the connection between a duty of care and the authority to write. The creative breakthrough came at a cost. She explains her thinking in a letter to a close friend, Caroline Gemmer, on February 27, 1883, confessing that "each volume heaps up my responsibility." She reports her struggles under the weight of this "paramount burden," worrying that "when one is strong one can by God's grace bear it, but when one is weak the pressure at times, or the *hauntingness*, may become fearful. And the books I write make me more and more glaringly inexcusable for my faults of all sorts, and shortcomings, and cowardice especially."[62] When her friend Janet Henderson praises *Seek and Find* (1879), Rossetti again mentions "how grave a responsibility rests on those whose writings far outrun their attainments," and worries about the extent to which "personal vanity" might be informing her project.[63]

This dilemma recalls the question Rossetti asked in *Time Flies*: "[W]hy do we not write?" The entry's concluding quotation from the *Book of Common Prayer*, "From pride and vain glory, Good Lord, deliver us," articulates Rossetti's anxieties about both writing and not writing. On one hand, the devotional books could expose her "faults" and "shortcomings." By foregrounding her personal life, character, and creative practice like never before, they run the risk of indulging the author's "personal vanity."

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On the other hand, refusing to write because of "an anxiety to do better" could equally be the result of pride and vainglory. How she handled this dilemma depended on Rossetti's health, circumstances, and state of mind. At times she feels confident that her devotional writing is endorsed by "God's grace," but in weak moments, she is haunted by worries that her determination to keep writing is motivated by more self-centered impulses (*Time Flies*, 22).

Ultimately, Rossetti's growing sense of a responsibility to her readers and to literature itself authorized her devotional voice; as Dieleman observes, "because God had given her a gift, she had to use it responsibly to teach others."[64] One of the ways Rossetti came to terms with this responsibility was by drawing on her experience of care, both as a patient herself and as a caregiver. Shaping personal anecdotes into parables is part of a creative practice that bears the imprint of Dr. Hare, who seems to me to be the first person to encourage the adolescent Rossetti to value her own narrative. In writing about herself to help others, Rossetti was sharing Dr. Hare's curative techniques. In *Time Flies*, she explicitly portrays writing as a form of pastoral care. In the opening passages, she compares writing about faith to an act of "translation," which must primarily avoid "turning a good poem into a bad one." Good form is not simply cosmetic but is a reflection of creativity, spiritual health, and self-knowledge. Writers, especially Christian ones, must undergo "a searching self-sifting on this point," taking extra care that form corresponds with and reflects content; as Rossetti notes, "he (or she) cannot exhibit the religion of love as unlovely" (2). To be "good," literature should also be democratic and accessible, demanding only as much time, attention, and engagement as each reader can spare, as *The Face of the Deep*'s invitation to readers in its prefatory note makes clear: "If thou canst dive, bring up pearls. If thou canst not dive, collect amber" (7).

This is just one of the ways that Rossetti's work gently refutes William Michael Rossetti's charge that her writing was "too seldom concerned with breathing and diurnal actualities" and not sufficiently engaged with "rising currents of thought."[65] Doubtless, domestic chores like household labor and caring responsibilities were not the kind of "diurnal actualities" that William Michael had in mind, anymore than Swinburne did when he complained that Rossetti did not produce more poems. Rossetti's response to those periodic writer's blocks, often brought on by the physical and mental demands of looking after close family members, was to write in fits and starts, to blur the lines between writerly occupation and domestic interruption. If this meant the vexatious prospect of "leaving a

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cherished work incomplete," so be it. The passage of time can reveal this "interruption" to have been "the genuine appointed occupation" all along. Having to cope with "what is sent us" rather than "that which we select" is a way of negotiating our way through a lack of choice and provides a means of looking forward (*Time Flies*, 160–61).

As Rossetti suggests to Swinburne and Horder, *Time Flies* was not something she would necessarily have chosen to write. It was the product of a God-given poetic "gift" that her circumstances rendered her unable to "summon at will" as a matter of "choice."[66] It is this lack of choice that informs and justifies her new method of composition, to "become vocal" in "fits and starts,"[67] as she learns to "work at prose and help myself forward with little bits of verse."[68] This approach mitigated Rossetti's worries about the potential vanity of her desire to keep writing despite what were arguably more pressing spiritual and domestic duties. If writing were a matter of providence rather than will and choice, then Rossetti's literary project was endorsed by faith rather than motivated by personal ambition. In explicitly framing *Time Flies* as a work whose purpose is "to help others by such means as I myself have found helpful," Rossetti is "Looking back" to Dr. Hare, who taught her to value care and self-care in all its forms, whether physical, emotional, or literary.

Recognizing Rossetti's hard-won acceptance of the twin vocations of poet *and* carer as interrelated, reflective, and at times mutually beneficial parts of her diurnal actuality provides new insights into her life and work, and has broader implications for literary studies. That a literary methodology for exploring the interaction of caring, reading, and writing has yet to be developed is in some ways hardly surprising; the private, unpaid domestic nature of caregiving has made it as invisible to scholars as it is to society at large. There are indications that the tide may be turning, however. Talia Schaffer's *Communities of Care: The Social Ethics of Victorian Fiction*, for example, examines case studies of caring communities in nineteenth-century novels in order "to develop a literary criticism that is predicated on care."[69] Care theorists across disciplines can help with this developing field; there is much to be learned from the approaches of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy, among others. We might revisit Nel Nodding's term, "aesthetical caring," which refers to "caring about things and ideas."[70] Or we could consider Saito's recognition of the "structural similarities" between "having an aesthetic experience and engaging in a care relationship."[71] Studying the interaction of writing and caring creates timely opportunities for community-based cross-disciplinary applied research. The development

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of a literary theory of care should therefore be practice-based as well as conceptual, and must be co-created with present-day caregivers.[72]

Finally, foregrounding caring as a context offers fresh opportunities for literary criticism across period boundaries. Writers who care and carers who write are everywhere, from John Keats, who was a caregiver for his mother and younger brother while they were dying of tuberculosis; to Thom Gunn, who developed a caring community of friends and lovers during the AIDS crisis; to Claudia Rankine, whose poem "The Health of Us" envisions a nation "ready to check-up/to look after in this one way we were ready/to care for each other we were ready to see/our range of possibilities as a precious commodity."[73]

Notes

1. *The Colonial Church Chronicle*, 392.
2. Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, 276.
3. Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 46.
4. Saito, *Aesthetics of Care*, 5, 9.
5. Schaffer, "Care, " 363. Diemut Bubeck's useful definition of care also stresses its relational aspects: "Caring for is the meeting of the needs of one person by another person, where face-to-face interaction between carer and cared-for is a crucial element of the overall activity and where the need is of such a nature that it cannot possibly be met by the person in need herself." *Care, Gender, and Justice*, 129.
6. I am using the definition of "carer" provided by NHS England: "A carer is anyone, including children and adults who looks after a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of their illness, frailty, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction and cannot cope without their support. The care they give is unpaid." ("Who Is Considered a Carer?", accessed March 09, 2025).
7. Noddings notes that "caring is a relationship that contains another, the cared-for, and we have already suggested that the one-caring and the cared-for are reciprocally dependent." *Caring*, 58.
8. Connolly's aphorism reads, "[T]here is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hall." *Enemies of Promise*, 116.
9. Her first biographer, Mackenzie Bell, records that "She soothed her father in his last illness; she ministered unceasingly to her brother Gabriel, to her sister Maria, and to her aunts, the Misses Polidori, the last of whom only pre-deceased her by eighteen months." *Christina*

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Rossetti, 56. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
10. William Michael Rossetti, *New Poems*, 290.
11. Dharampal and Ani, "Emotional and Mental Health Needs," 112.
12. See Simon Humphries, "Christina Rossetti's Religious Mania," 116–24.
13. Humphries, "Christina Rossetti's Religious Mania," 119.
14. Arseneau and Terrell, "'Our self-undoing,'" 13.
15. Quoted in Humphries, "Christina Rossetti's Religious Mania," 119.
16. Christina Rossetti, "Charade," *Complete Poems*, 664. All subsequent references to Rossetti's poems are from this edition and are noted parenthetically in the text.
17. Mazel, '"You, Guess,'" 511, 513.
18. Flowers notes that this poem's "MS is in MR's [Maria Rossetti's] hand, and includes a note: "Answer: Sonnet" (*Complete Poems*, 1102).
19. "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown"; "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame"; "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book"; "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 3:11; 16:5; 22:7; 22:12).
20. Noddings, *Caring*, 166.
21. Saito, *Aesthetics of Care*, 7, 5.
22. Humphries, "Christina Rossetti's Religious Mania," 120.
23. William Michael Rossetti tells us that this poem was "in my mother's handwriting (quite contrary to wont)" (*New Poems*, 379).
24. Marsh, letter to the editor, 6. This letter was written in response to my article about Christina Rossetti, creativity, and caring responsibilities: "Tale of Tender Lizzie," *TLS*, June 10, 2022, 13.
25. Christina Rossetti, "Maude," 42.
26. William Michael Rossetti, *New Poems*, 379.
27. Christina Rossetti, *Letters*, 3:242.
28. Christina Rossetti, *Letters*, 3:238.
29. Christina Rossetti to Anne Burrows Gilchrist, *Letters*, 3:265.
30. Carers UK, "Policy Briefing."
31. Arseneau and Terrell, "'Our self-undoing,'" 7.
32. Christina Rossetti, *Letters*, 3:249–50.
33. D'Amico, "The House of Christina Rossetti," 36.
34. D'Amico, "The House of Christina Rossetti," 36.

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35. Christina Rossetti, *Letters*, 2:280.
36. Swinburne's poem is the dedicatory sonnet for his *Midsummer Holiday and Other Poems* (1884). For Swinburne's letter to Rossetti, see Christina Rossetti, *Letters*, 3:232, note 1.
37. Christina Rossetti, *Letters*, 3:231 (emphasis original).
38. Christina Rossetti, *Letters*, 3:267.
39. Lysack, *Chronometres*, 71.
40. Christina Rossetti, *Letters*, 3:264 (emphasis original).
41. Christina Rossetti, *Time Flies*, 160–61. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text. Anna Harris Smith includes the first stanza of "Weary in Well-Doing" alongside this *Time Flies* prose passage in her anthology of daily readings, *Golden Words for Daily Counsel* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1888), 196.
42. From the author's personal copy of *Time Flies*.
43. "Obituary: Charles John Hare," 1913.
44. Dieleman, *Religious Imaginaries*, 154.
45. Dieleman, *Religious Imaginaries*, 154.
46. Mason, *Christina Rossetti*, 93.
47. This is a partial quotation from the Great Litany in *The Book of Common Prayer*. In full, it reads: "From all blindness of heart; from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice; and from all want of charity, Good Lord, deliver us." Sarah Choi argues that "[i]nstead of quoting directly from either" *The Book of Common Prayer* or the Bible, "Rossetti chooses to echo (but not replicate) them, and the tantalizingly familiar passage resonates in the communal 'us' of readers who must participate, like the answering voice in the dialogue, in the act of understanding." "Christina's Rossetti's Dialogical Devotion," 487.
48. *OED Online*, s.v. "harp," www.oed.com/dictionary/harp_v (accessed July 9, 2024).
49. Christina Rossetti, *Letters*, 3:284.
50. Christina Rossetti, *Letters*, 3:325.
51. William Michael Rossetti, *The Poetical Works*, lv.
52. Sharp, "Some Reminiscences," 747.
53. Christina Rossetti, *Letters*, 3:328.
54. In June 1886 Rossetti writes to Miss May that "Life and this world are changed to me, and I ought indeed to be loosened from them." On July 26, 1886, Rossetti thanks a concerned close friend, Amelia Barnard Heimann, "for wishing me with you," but asks her to "pardon my lacking spirits to share the wish," expressing instead her longing

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to "go to" her mother "in due time." Christina Rossetti, *Letters*, 3:325, 333.

55. Christina Rossetti to Goldie Heimann Mueller, ?October 1886, *Letters*, 3:342.
56. Christina Rossetti to Lucy Madox Brown Rossetti, September 1886, *Letters*, 3:340.
57. Christina Rossetti to William Bryant, November 12, 1886, *Letters*, 3:346 (emphasis original).
58. Christina Rossetti, *Letters*, 3:346.
59. "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John:/Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw."
60. Christina Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 9. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
61. *OED Online*, s.v. "minister," www.oed.com/dictionary/minister_v (accessed July 9, 2024).
62. Christina Rossetti, *Letters*, 3:100 (emphasis original).
63. Christina Rossetti, April 16, 1883, *Letters*, 3:112.
64. Dieleman, *Religious Imaginaries*, 134.
65. William Michael Rossetti, *Poetical Works*, lxviii.
66. Christina Rossetti to W. Garrett Horder, May 20, 1885, *Letters*, 3:264.
67. Christina Rossetti to Algernon Charles Swinburne, November 19, 1884, *Letters*, 3.231.
68. Christina Rossetti, *Letters*, 3:346.
69. Schaffer, *Communities of Care*, 1.
70. Noddings, *Caring*, 20.
71. Saito, *Aesthetics of Care*, 5.
72. An example of this practice is my ongoing series of online poetry workshops (2021–) for people with caring responsibilities, co-led by the poet Sarah Hesketh. Participants' poems are published online as audio files and downloadable PDF anthologies at carerspoetry.org. Feedback from workshop participants and charity partners, Carers UK, and the Arvon Foundation has revealed an unanticipated benefit that Rossetti herself might have foreseen: the improvement of caregivers' well-being through the co-creation of a literary community. As one workshop participant puts it, in a representative remark: "By listening to Christina Rossetti's words I have been able to reframe my thinking of the interruptions to my occupations, this has taken

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some of the sting out of them! Having tried to write about caring in the past and been disappointed when some readers don't get it, to be part of a group that just knows, straight away, has been empowering and transforming. I now have confidence to include caring in my poems and to accept that there will be people who miss it, but more importantly some will not only understand but identify!" (Anonymous, workshop feedback submitted to the author, May 17, 2023).

73. Rankine, "The Health of Us."

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