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### 'I Shall Stand Henceforward in thy Shadow': Pairing Women with Shadows in Victorian Poetry

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### "سأقف من الآن فصاعداً في ظلك": إقران المرأة بالظل في شعر العصر الفيكتوري

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#### KEYWORDS

الكلمات المفتاحية

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#### ABSTRACT

This study traces the symbol of the shadow and its association with women's inferior position in selected Victorian poems. It shows how, in their use of the symbol, both male and female poets represent women as abandoned in the shadow of their male contemporaries. Before addressing the poems selected, the study commences by reviewing recent scholarship which refers to the term *shadow* in connotation with negative attributes during the Victorian period. It also provides an overview of Victorian novels which similarly represent female characters as being held captive in the shadows. Although the poems included in this study belong to the same historical period, they have not been linked before, to the best of our knowledge, by contemporary scholars. Furthermore, the symbol of the shadow, with its association with gloominess, darkness, grief, and isolation, has not been thoroughly explored to date. Thus, the argument presented herein is a comprehensive addition to the existing literature. It offers new insights into a symbol which a number of major Victorian poets drew upon to demonstrate women's seclusion, including Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Emily Brontë, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

#### المخلص

تتبع هذه الدراسة رمز الظل وارتباطه بالمكانة الدنيا للمرأة في قصائد مختارة من العصر الفيكتوري. توضح الدراسة كيف يتشابه الشعراء الذكور والإناث على حد سواء في استخدامهم للرمز وإقرانه المرأة ككائن مهجور في ظل معاصرين الذكور. قبل إلقاء الضوء على القصائد المختارة، ستبدأ الدراسة بمراجعة الأبحاث المعاصرة التي أشارت إلى مصطلح الظل كمرادف للخصائص السلبية بالعصر الفيكتوري. كما تتناول الدراسة باختصار روايات فيكتورية صورت المرأة كسجينة في الظل. على الرغم من أن القصائد المدرجة في هذه الدراسة تنتمي إلى نفس الفترة التاريخية، إلا أنه لم يتم ربطها من قبل من قبل العلماء المعاصرين. لذلك، يمثل النقاش المقدم هنا إضافة نوعية للمعرفة الموجودة حالياً. تقدم الدراسة رؤية جديدة لرمز دل على انعزال المرأة وتشارك في استخدامه شعراء فيكتوريين، مثل لورد ألفريد تينيسون، إيلزابيث بارت براونينج، إيميلي برونتي، ودانتي جابرييل روزي.

## 1. Introduction

This study traces the symbol of the shadow and its association with women's inferior position in selected Victorian poems. It shows how, in their use of the symbol, both male and female poets represent women as abandoned in the shadow of their male contemporaries. Although the poems included in this study belong to the same historical period, they have not been linked before by contemporary scholars. Furthermore, the symbol of the shadow, with its association with gloominess, darkness, grief, and isolation, has not been thoroughly explored to date. Thus, the argument presented herein is a comprehensive addition to the existing literature. It offers new insights into a symbol which a number of major Victorian poets drew upon to demonstrate women's seclusion, including Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Emily Brontë, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

The study begins by reviewing recent literature which refers to the term *shadow* in connotation with negative attributes during the Victorian period. It also provides an overview of Victorian novels which similarly represent the female character trapped in shadows. Building on the first section, the argument then moves to outline the use of the symbol by Tennyson, a major Victorian male poet, in two of his poems: 'The Lady of Shalott' (1832) and 'Mariana' (1830). The third section explores the use of the symbol in Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850) and *Aurora Leigh* (1857) and how she might have been influenced by the prevailing norms and expectations of women during her lifetime. The section that follows deals with Emily Brontë's depiction of the same symbol, yet from a more revolutionary perception in 'The Prisoner. A Fragment' (1845) and 'Often rebuked, yet always back returning' (1850). Toward the end of the argument, I consider the portrayal of the shadow in Rossetti's 'Penumbra' (1853, 1870) and 'Three Shadows' (1876) as

representatives of another school of poetry.

## 2. In the Victorian's Shadow

Victorian women were marginalised and neglected as household vassals. Unlike their male counterparts, women were denied rights to education and employment. Society was mainly patriarchal and governed by gendered principles. In 'Power and Control over Women in Victorian England', Rene Kollar (2005) declares: 'Victorian England clearly embraced a patriarchy, and women, consequently, occupied certain clearly defined subordinate roles. Psychologically, this society argued, females were naive, fragile and emotionally weak creatures who could not exist independently of a husband or a father's wise guidance' (Kollar, 2005: 11). Like Kollar, P. Steward and H. Shimreingam (2018) argue: 'It was during the Victorian period that men were seen as strong and powerful whereas women were seen as weak and frail. [...] The home was considered the centre of virtue and the proper life for women' (Steward and Shimreingam, 2018: 241). As will be demonstrated shortly, the prevailing belief that women were unable to compete in the market, and thus rendered fit for the private sphere only, is mirrored in many literary works published throughout the period.

Before turning to the body of the poems selected for this discussion, it is worth referring to the different uses of the term *shadow* in the Victorian context. Drew Gray (2010) claims that 'there was a dark side to Victorian London. In the shadows lurked all manner of vice and crime, degradation and despair' (Gray, 2010: 231). Shadows became connoted with immoral and negative traits. In this association, Gray might have taken Jung's definition of 'shadow as our own dark side', which is referred to by Jenny Plastow (2009): 'Jung defines the shadow as our own dark side, which is characterised by inferior, uncivilised or animal qualities which the ego wishes to hide; not wholly bad, but primitive and unadapted' (Plastow, 2009: 169). I take

such an association between shadow and inferiority as grounds for this study, which explores the shadow as a symbol paired with women in Victorian poetry. The analysis is based on the work of contemporary scholars who have examined negative perceptions towards Victorian women. In this regard, the argument by Simona Avarvarei (2014) is worth quoting in full:

The study of the Victorian construction of the female self may be interpreted as a detailed story of the very concept of marginality and emancipation. [...] In gendered terms, this corresponds to the feminine counterpart that is usually associated with the private sphere, meant to be left in the background, as a guarantee of the official male power. A power that, deeming women unprincipled and emotional, advocated confining them to the domestic sphere where their true self could be easily neutralized, melt in the exclusive part of their destiny, namely the submissive wife and nurturant mother, who was expected to feel, and not to think, to bend her head and not to walk head held high, to give up but never to fight. (Avarvarei, 2014: 536)

'Marginal[ised]', 'feminine', 'neutralized', 'submissive', and 'emotional' are all adjectives commonly used to describe Victorian women and their inability to escape the private sphere. Such characteristics were the focus of many classic works of literature published throughout the century.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) introduces Jane isolated in her room and associated with shadow:

A singular notion dawned upon me. I doubted not—never doubted—that if Mr. Reed had been alive he would have treated me kindly; and now, as I sat looking at the white bed and overshadowed walls—occasionally also turning a fascinated eye towards the dimly gleaming mirror—I began to recall what I had heard of dead men. (*Jane Eyre*, Ch. 2: 23)

The 'overshadowed walls' may be read as a symbol of dimness and seclusion. Even after moving to Mr. Rochester's house, Jane seems to be in favour of being hidden in shadows: 'I let Mrs. Fairfax precede me into the dining-room, and kept in her shade as we crossed that apartment' (*Jane Eyre*, Ch. 13: 216). This is also evident in the following chapter, where she declares: 'I did as I was bid, though I would much rather have remained somewhat in the shade; but Mr. Rochester had such a direct way of giving orders' (*Jane Eyre*, Ch. 14: 238). In a further scene, Jane says: 'At last coffee is brought in, and the gentlemen are summoned. I sit in the shade—if any shade there be in this brilliantly-lit apartment; the window-curtain half hides me' (*Jane Eyre*, Ch. 17: 316). The concept of vagueness and being sheltered also appears when Jane comments on her own thoughts: 'I formed an idea of my own: shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive' (*Jane Eyre*, Ch. 1: 8). As Chin-Ping Chen (2002) suggests:

For Jane, the possible power lies in the ability to see without being seen. Her private gallery becomes a sheltered space in which she asserts her visual power, assuming the role of a host who displays the re-imagined vignettes for her own viewing, forming her interpretation without being seen and judged. (Chen, 2002: 374)

Jane's comment on her idea as 'shadowy' reflects her limited education as a woman—a main theme in the novel. Thus, throughout the novel, shadow is paired with the double disadvantage of being uneducated and unmarried.

As is the case with *Jane Eyre*, Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861) raises intriguing questions about Dickens's attitudes toward women and their perceived role. In his characterisation of Miss Havisham, for example, Dickens engages with and simultaneously challenges the institution of marriage. Removed from the outside world, Miss Havisham lives in a grotesque house: 'In a word, I saw in this, Miss Havisham as I had her then and there before my eyes, and always had had her before my eyes; and I saw in this, the distinct

shadow of the darkened and unhealthy house in which her life was hidden from the sun' (*Great Expectations*, Ch. 38: 513–514). Miss Havisham stands as an archetype for Victorian spinsters whose only fate was to be shunned in gloominess and darkness. In her reading of Miss Havisham wearing her bridal dress, Linda Raphael (1989) suggests: 'The dismal scene mirrors Miss Havisham's failure to make her private dream a public reality and to create an identity outside the private sphere' (Raphael, 1989: 402). Despite their different backgrounds, both Jane and Miss Havisham are representative examples of women imprisoned in the shadows of the private sphere.

### 3. Imprisoning Women in Shadows in Tennyson's Poems

Like Victorian novelists, poets of the time adopted the symbol of the shadow to reflect the prevailing perceptions of women during that period. Alfred, Lord Tennyson 'was the leading poet of the Victorian Age in England and was considered as the representative poet of the Age. He became the Poet Laureate after the death of William Wordsworth in the year 1850' (Steward and Shimreingam, 2018: 240). As Queen Victoria's Poet Laureate, Tennyson's influence would have spread to reach different classes of Victorian society. In 1832, Tennyson published 'The Lady of Shalott', one of the most memorable ballads in English literature. From the very beginning of the poem, the lady is positioned in an isolated tower, cut off from all social activities of the outside world:

Four gray walls, and four gray towers  
Overlook a space of flowers,  
And the silent isle imbowers  
The Lady of Shalott. ('The Lady of Shalott', l. 15–18)

The 'walls' symbolise the lady's separation from Camelot, the busy crowded town. With their grey colour, they reflect the shadow that the lady lives in and complains about in the following lines:

Or when the moon was overhead  
Came two young lovers lately wed;  
'I am half sick of shadows,' said  
The Lady of Shalott. ('The Lady of Shalott', ll. 69–72)

The lady's complaint may be read as an attempt to confront Victorian norms which are imposed on her and on many women at that time, leaving them no choice but to remain in 'shadows'. As Ellen Stockstill (2012) puts it: 'This lady stands as an archetype for all women—a woman with a woman's lot in the world. Specifically, she lives in a tower, and she is imprisoned or oppressed by her position as object' (Stockstill, 2012: 13). Unlike the 'young lovers' who can, apparently, enjoy the clear weather of the outside world, the lady lives in 'shadows' which confine her freedom, leading her to this feeling of 'sick[ness]' and isolation. Shuli Barzilai (2000) argues: 'Grown "half-sick" of a solitary and mirror-mediated existence, of a living burial inside gray-towered walls, the Lady precipitously turns from her loom toward life and the flashing armored figure of Sir Lancelot. But what awaits her on the outside is yet another death' (Barzilai, 2000: 232). When the lady decides to leave the 'shadows' in which she is imprisoned to move towards something that initially looks appealing, death becomes her fate. Thus, it may be argued that the moral of the poem is to warn young maidens from pursuing their passion, urging them to conform to their domestic commitments.

Detaching women from social activities is a common theme in Tennyson's poems, including 'Mariana' (1830). Throughout the poem, the woman is represented as lonely in a grange, mourning her hopeless life and describing it as 'dreary' and 'awearry':

And ever when the moon was low,

And the shrill winds were up and away,  
In the white curtain, to and fro,  
She saw the gusty shadow sway.  
But when the moon was very low,  
And wild winds bound within their cell,  
The shadow of the poplar fell  
Upon her bed, across her brow.  
She only said, 'The night is dreary,  
He cometh not,' she said;  
She said, 'I am weary, weary,  
I would that I were dead!' ('Mariana', 49–60)

In addition to a lack of social connectivity, Mariana's life depends on the arrival of her lover who never comes: "The night is dreary, / He cometh not," she said'. Thus, she stands as a conventional stereotype of Victorian women. In his analysis of the poem, Rajni Singh (2018) comments: 'Mariana's transgressing the prescribed norm and her failure in coping with the realities of the outer sphere leads to her hopelessness. The cry "he cometh not" shows her inability to function without her lover. Mariana's cry for her man suggests her dependence on him and again conformity to the patriarchy' (Singh, 2018: 48). Without her lover, Mariana ends up desperate in the gloominess of her isolation: 'The shadow of the poplar fell/ Upon her bed'. As in 'The Lady of Shalott', the shadow is paired with the hearth where the woman lives. However, unlike the Lady of Shalott, whose dead body leaves the tower, Mariana remains imprisoned and does not show any attempts of rebellion, thereby conforming to Victorian norms.

#### 4. Women Favouring Shadows in Barrett Browning's Poems

Victorian women poets were part of a society that imprisoned women and placed them in shadows, a fact which is reflected in many poems of the time. In *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850), for instance, Barrett Browning commences the sequence with a woman speaker recalling the grief and sorrow she went through before meeting her lover:

I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,  
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,  
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung  
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,  
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move  
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair;  
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove,—  
'Guess now who holds thee!'—'Death,' I said, But, there,  
The silver answer rang, 'Not Death, but Love.' (Sonnet I. 6–14)

The speaker's life is recalled with 'tears' and 'sad[ness]', alluding to the constraints imposed upon her. A biographical reading of the sonnet reveals how Barrett Browning, like many Victorian women, experienced isolation due to familial and social restrictions. In her reading of *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, Andrea Gazzaniga (2016) sums up Barrett Browning's maiden years in the following lines:

Disabled by illness at 15, she had spent much of her adult life indoors and often separated from her family. In 1838, at the age of thirty-two, she relocated to her father's house on Wimpole Street in London, where she confined herself to a single room on the top floor. Most of the poems in her 1844 collection were written in that room, and they reflect the spatial sensibility of one who has spent much of her life indoors. [...] While she lived within the space of one room in her father's house on Wimpole Street, Barrett also lived inside the literary text. The language she uses to talk about herself reflects her particular sense of interiority, built upon a vocabulary learned through literature. (Gazzaniga, 2016: 70)

The sense of 'separat[ion]' and 'confine[ment]' addressed by Gazzaniga is revealed in Barrett Browning's use of the symbol of the

shadow in her sonnets. For Barrett Browning, 'the melancholy years' had thrown '[a] shadow across' her, akin to the Lady of Shalott who ended up 'half sick of shadows'.

Although the previous sonnet shows the speaker's dissatisfaction with her life and the 'shadow' surrounding her, subsequent sonnets reveal that she gradually accepts her placement in this shadow:

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand  
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore  
Alone upon the threshold of my door  
Of individual life, I shall command  
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand  
Serenely in the sunshine as before (Sonnet VI. 1–6)

To escape her loneliness, the speaker 'feel[s]' obliged to 'stand/Henceforward in' her lover's 'shadow'. By accepting this situation, the speaker conforms to the status quo, mirroring the reality lived by many Victorian women. In her remarkable study of the sonnet, Marianne Remoortel (2011) argues:

When *Sonnets from the Portuguese* is considered from the perspective of a Victorian wife-to-be, rather than the perspective of a self-possessed poet, none of its strategies of subjectivity carries any metaphorical or subversive power. The metaphoricality of submission, sickness and inclusion crumbles at the hand of the female poet, because these images were taken from women's daily life in the first place. (Remoortel, 2011: 94)

Barrett Browning's choice of a speaker who favours shadow — in other words, to be sheltered and protected over being recognised in sunlight — is in line with what Remoortel refers to as conventional 'images [which] were taken from women's daily life'. Despite challenging the traditional use of patriarchal sonnets, which represent a silent or absent female beloved from a male lover's perspective, the speaker in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* adopts 'submiss[ive]' feminine traits.

Engagement with the woman question continues to occupy Barrett Browning's poems. In *Aurora Leigh* (1857), the symbol of the shadow is also paired with women:

In Paris. There's a silk, for instance, there,  
As worth an artist's study for the folds,  
As that bronze opposite! nay, the bronze has faults;  
Art's here too artful,—conscious as a maid,  
Who leans to mark her shadow on the wall  
Until she lose a 'vantage in her step. (*Aurora Leigh*, Sixth Book: 343)

The speaker compares art, a traditionally feminine domain, to a young woman '[w]ho leans to mark her shadow on the wall'. The 'wall' stands as a symbol of separation and isolation; thus, both art and shadow become associated with women and their segregation in the private sphere. However, the maiden's obsession with her shadow has a negative influence on her vision, leading her to 'lose a 'vantage in her step'. In doing so, Barrett Browning complicates feminine and feminist motives of her poems. Clinton Machann (2010) argues: 'The revival of both the poet and the poem has not been without controversy, with some critics seeing her role as a traditionalist who defended "patriarchal" values, but most celebrating Barrett Browning as a feminist who carved out a new cultural and aesthetic space for women' (Machann, 2010: 57). It could be argued that the conflict that Barrett Browning experienced as a wife and a poet may have influenced her portrayal of such controversial female heroines, torn between fulfilling social expectations and pursuing their passion.

Like Machann, Lynda Chouiten (2012) comments on the ending of *Aurora Leigh*, pointing out that 'without ceasing to reject the patriarchal prejudices against her sex, Aurora is now more willing to accept the patriarchal assumption that love and family life are what

matters most for a woman' (Chouiten, 2012: 14). Chouiten continues: 'As an ambiguous category, irony in *Aurora Leigh* echoes the poem's undecidable stance towards patriarchy, whose definition of women's role and behaviour it endorses while also attempting to dismantle its association of femininity with weakness and inferiority' (Chouiten, 2012: 16). Avoiding criticism by misogynist reviewers may be another reason for Barrett Browning's ambiguous attempt toward patriarchy. Therefore, contemporary scholars approach her heroines with caution, shunning a fixed reading of her poems.

## 5. Escaping 'the shadowy region' in Emily Brontë's poems

Unlike Barrett Browning, there are some women poets, including Emily Brontë, whose poetry does not fully conform to Victorian ideologies of women's inferiority. Simona Avarvarei (2014) argues:

Women start throwing their society-imposed masks away, and go in search of the real light. But not all women refuse being Penelopes, not all of them can stand the blinding light of the day, for there are others who close their eyes, and, blinded by it, return to the cave/gynaecium they almost never leave. (Avarvarei, 2014: 539)

This section identifies Emily Brontë as one of those women whose poetry throws 'society-imposed masks away, and [goes] in search of the real light'. The space she finds to escape social restrictions may also be due to the fact that her poetry was not widely read – a fact recognised by Laura Inman (2014) in her comment that 'Despite the merit of Emily's poems, the volume went unnoticed, selling only three copies' (Inman, 2014: 6). Brontë's 'The Prisoner. A Fragment' (1845) is one of her poems which question the limited choices women had at that time:

The captive raised her face; it was as soft and mild  
As sculptured marble saint or slumbering, unweaned child;  
It was so soft and mild, it was so sweet and fair,  
Pain could not trace a line nor grief a shadow there!  
  
The captive raised her hand and pressed it to her brow:  
'I have been struck,' she said, 'and I am suffering now;  
Yet these are little worth, your bolts and irons strong;  
And were they forged in steel they could not hold me long.' ('The Prisoner. A Fragment', 14–21)

The theme of imprisonment is evident from the very beginning of the poem, for the woman is described as 'captive' and unable to move. Using the simile technique, the woman's face is compared to a statue, a 'sculptured marble'. She is a dependent frozen figure, as the society wishes her to be. On the one hand, the imprisoned woman in the poem may be seen as a reflection of Emily Brontë herself, who 'for most of her life slept in a very small room that had been formed out of another room, and her bed was situated under a window with an unobstructed view of the sky' (Inman, 2014: 16). The prisoner, like Brontë and other Victorian women, had a limited space that she was not allowed to surpass. Even 'pain', an emotion usually associated with women, 'could not trace a line nor grief a shadow there'. Thus, shadow and darkness become distanced from the place the woman is imprisoned in. On the other hand, the woman in the poem refuses to be submissive; despite being 'struck', she 'raised her face' and 'hand', challenging the restrictions imposed on her.

Escaping shadows and prisons is a theme which also appears in the poem 'Often rebuked, yet always back returning' (1850). Before turning to the body of the poem, it is worth noting that it remains uncertain whether it was written by Emily or her sister Charlotte. As Inman (2014) points out: "'Often rebuked, yet always back returning" might be Emily's poem or it might have been written by Charlotte describing Emily, in her efforts to create an understanding of her deceased sister' (Inman, 2014: 29). In either case, the poem is related to Emily's life:

Often rebuked, yet always back returning  
To those first feelings that were born with me,  
And leaving busy chase of wealth and learning  
For idle dreams of things which cannot be:

To-day, I will seek not the shadowy region;  
Its unsustaining vastness waxes drear;  
And visions rising, legion after legion,  
Bring the unreal world too strangely near. ('Often rebuked, yet always back returning', 1–8)

The poem addresses the speaker's hesitance to approach the 'feelings that were born with [her]'. For her, feelings of freedom and liberty are naturalised – a fact which does not conform to the prevailing expectation of women as submissive and passionless. However, the shadow is not a fate to accept, for she 'will seek not the shadowy region', implying her rebellion against Victorian norms which detach women from the light of the outside world. In his study of Emily Brontë, Andrew Abraham (2004) suggests that she 'engages in simultaneous rebellion and submission, challenge and adherence, defiance and deference, towards her treatment of law and patriarchy' (Abraham, 2004: 93). Abraham's comment may be read in relation to the speaker's description of the 'world' she strives to reach as 'unreal'. Despite her insistence to leave 'the shadowy region', the 'world' of her dreams is alienated as 'unreal', thereby questioning alternatives for women outside the private sphere.

## 6. Women Surrounded with Shadows in Rossetti's Poems

Even towards the end of the nineteenth century, when women started to have more, albeit limited, access to the public sphere, they were still paired with shadows. In his poem 'Penumbra' (1853, 1870), Rossetti expresses his inability to reach the beloved or hear her voice because of the shaded region surrounding her: 'I did not cross her shadow once, / (Though from the hollow west the sun's/ Last shadow runs along so far)' ('Penumbra', 16–18). According to Elizabeth Helsing (2009), 'The hour when [the lyric speaker] didn't listen or speak and [the woman] was sad will return to haunt him, resounding in the wind and water: a penumbra forever surrounding the sounds he would like to hear without the torturing projections of fallacious feeling' (Helsing, 2009: 416). As in previous poems, shadow symbolises darkness, gloominess, and is associated with the woman in the poem disbaring herself from the lover.

'Three Shadows' (1876) is another love poem by Rossetti in which the speaker describes his beloved's eyes, heart, and love through shadows:

I looked and saw your eyes  
In the shadow of your hair,  
As a traveller sees the stream  
In the shadow of the wood;  
[...]  
I looked and saw your heart  
In the shadow of your eyes,  
As a seeker sees the gold  
In the shadow of the stream;  
And I said, 'Ah me! what art  
Should win the immortal prize,  
Whose want must make life cold  
And Heaven a hollow dream?'  
I looked and saw your love  
In the shadow of your heart,  
As a diver sees the pearl  
In the shadow of the sea;  
And I murmured, not above  
My breath, but all apart,—  
'Ah! you can love, true girl,  
And is your love for me?' ('Three Shadows')

As is the case with many of Rossetti's poems, including 'Lady Lilith'

(1868), the speaker views the female beloved as a piece of art. While the male lover is paired with mobility – he is a ‘traveller’, ‘seeker’, and ‘diver’ – the female beloved is passive, submissive, and an object of the male gaze. Also, she is not referred to as a complete human being, but as parts of the anatomy: ‘eyes’, ‘hair’, and ‘heart’. More importantly, these parts of the beloved’s body can only be seen through the shadow of other parts: ‘I looked and saw your eyes/ In the shadow of your hair’. This suggests that the woman is positioned in a dark place and is not entirely visible to the speaker, thereby resembling Victorian women and their isolation in the private sphere. The woman is, furthermore, appreciated merely for her beauty by being put into a parallel with a piece of art: ‘what art/ Should win the immortal prize’. Rossetti’s formation of and engagement in the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood should have influenced his imagination as a poet. Dinah Roe (2014) argues:

In 1848, Rossetti and Holman Hunt drew up a list of ‘Immortals’, or artistic heroes, which included not only canonical writers such as Homer, Dante Alighieri and Boccaccio, but also recent predecessors and contemporaries such as Byron, Keats, Shelley, Longfellow, Emerson, Poe, Tennyson, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, Robert Browning and Thackeray. (Roe, 2014: *British Library Online*)

The fact that members of the Pre-Raphaelites were influenced by a group of writers, including Tennyson and Barrett Browning, who are included in this study, makes it possible to argue that, in his representation of women surrounded by shadows, Rossetti embraced his ancestors in their representation of shadow as a connotation of women’s inferior position.

## 7. Conclusion

This study has explored the symbol of the shadow in selected Victorian poems by both male and female poets. It has shown how images of shadow were utilised to connote women and their isolation in the private sphere, a practice that finds its parallel in Victorian novels. The heroines in some of the poems referred to, like those by Tennyson and Barrett Browning, fail to revolt against existing norms, whereas others, such as the ones portrayed by Emily Brontë, seek better opportunities by escaping the shadows and refusing to be sheltered. Despite the social and political reforms that were taking place in the second half of the nineteenth century, the convention of pairing women with shadows continued to appear in poems published later in the century. As my analysis of Rossetti’s poems has shown, the female beloved is placed in shadowy regions and is simultaneously depicted as an object of the male gaze. By tracing the symbol of the shadow in selected Victorian poems, this study adds a further dimension to the body of knowledge, offering a new insight into the substance of the shadow and its relevance to contemporary theories which associate the shadow in the Victorian period with negative manners.

## Bio

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