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Natural Symbols for Sexual Desire: Analysing Christina Rossetti's Use of Natural Imagery for the Expression of Sexual Desire in Her Selected Poems

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Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830-94) is one of the most prolific Victorian female poets. She was born in London on December 5, 1830 to the house of Italian professor Gabriele Rossetti and the half-Italian and half-English Mrs. Frances Polidori Rossetti. Christina was the youngest daughter of the couple. Along with her, they had two sons –Dante Gabriel, William Michael, and a daughter –Maria Francesca. Dante Gabriel and William Michael are well-known personalities in English literature. Christina also earned a name through her poetical and prose works. Maria is a forgotten name due to her meager participation in literary activities.

Christina was educated at home and, along with her brothers, shared the intellectual inclinations of her family. Gabriele Rossetti, who arrived in England in 1824, was an Italian patriot and activist and started teaching Italian in King's College London. So they always discussed the social, cultural, intellectual, literary, and political matters in their household, "The house she was born into was quite lively, playing host to visiting Italian revolutionaries and writers, but she was also subject to the teaching and religious devotion of her mother Frances" (Bloom 12). All the Rossetti children got an early command on English and Italian languages which influenced their later careers greatly.

Christina's personal life was inflicted by severe illness which compelled her to leave all attempts to be a governess and had a quiet life without any profession obligations. Her mysterious illness affected her psychological temperament. Her coming into contact with James Collinson through the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which was organized by her brothers in 1848, is supposed to be the future prospect of a normal married life which Christina may lead. But due

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Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

to James' reversion to Roman Catholic religion their engagement got broken. Afterwards she lived a solitary and isolated life by declining two marriage offers till her death in 1894.

Christina Rossetti's literary career started when she was quite young. At the age of seventeen she published her first volume of poetry through the help of her grandfather. Her major poetic collections are *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862), *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1866*), A Pageant and Other Poems* (1881) and prose works are *Speaking Likeness* (1874), *Called to Be Saints* (1881), *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* (1885), *The Face of the Deep* (1892) and others.

Christina Rossetti is famous due to her being one of the few accomplished female poets of the century as well as for her strong theological and feminine stand. She is well known for her alliances with Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood which is formed by the joint efforts of her brothers – Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Michael Rossetti. As is the supposed manifesto of Pre-Raphaelites, Rossetti also emphasizes nature and morality in her poetry and prose. Nature is presented with all its beauties, shades, colours, and graces. The clam, peaceful, soothing, and nurturing nature provides abundant scope for manifesting and expressing strong theological and moral values and ideas, "Common aspirations of the group included fidelity to nature (manifested in clarity, brightness, detailed first-hand observation of flora etc.), and moral seriousness, in some expressed in religious themes or symbolic mystical iconography" (Birch 801).

All the characteristics of Pre-Raphaelites can be found in Rossetti's poetry such as the revolt against conventional poetry of Victorians, adherence to 'art for art's sake', glorification of natural beauty, sensuousness, use of rich and elaborative imagery, accurate delineation of the subjects, fascination for medieval romance, chivalry, superstitions, and mysticism, pictorial quality of verse, musical or melodic language, emphasis upon spiritual or religious moral values, simplicity of tone, the use of supernatural material, melancholic note, fantastic or imaginative flights, the use of realism, idealism, and symbolism, and emphasis upon feelings, emotions, ideas, and thoughts. Carter and McRae said, "A medieval simplicity, a closeness to nature in representational clarity, and a deep moral seriousness of intent distinguished the Brotherhood . . ." (306). Christina Rossetti's use of natural imagery and symbols, with precise observation can be seen in the following lines from her poem "Dream Love":

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ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

Young Love lies sleeping
In May-time of the year
Among the lilies,
Lapped in the tender light:
White lambs come grazing,
White doves come building there;
And round about him
The May-bushes are white. (1-8)

Christian Theology is one of the main subjects of her poetic expression as well as personal life. What she tries to find out or explore in theology is not a masculine notion of Divine power, but feminine one. Sisterhood, either in terms of Christianity or otherwise, can be seen throughout her personal as well as literary career, "Furthermore, Rossetti's transcendent view actually involved her in very specific nineteenth-century concerns relevant to Victorian women, such as the revival of Anglican religious sisterhood" (D'Amico 42). The power which sisterhood contains is accurately depicted in her famous poem "Goblin Market" where a female version of Christ is presented that redeemed the fallen Laura:

'For there is no friend like a sister
In calm or stormy weather;
To cheer one on the tedious way,
To fetch one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,
To strengthen whilst one stands.' (562-567)

The sufferings and temptations, Lizzie goes through, equalize her to Christ. Laura-Lizzie relationship elaborates the strength of sisterhood and points out the patriarchal bias of Christianity. Feminine virtues of the supreme God are expressed throughout Rossetti's oeuvre. As a disciple she worships this feminine aspect of the Divine.

Her imaginative and creative powers get the strength, vigour, and vitality from her deep devotional faith in the supreme Divine power. Divine power nourishes the creative one, and both get blended, mixed, and interconnected in such a way that it becomes quite difficult to detach one from the other. Spirituality, in terms of the exaltation of soul from worldly matters and

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ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

turning it towards the Divine power, is similar to that of exalting the poetic imagination to achieve something superior and transcendental. In order to revitalize the spiritual life of people she uses the poetic medium which provides extra charm and fascination to her work, "Rossetti's poetic imagination was shaped by her faith, and her faith by her poetic imagination, in a symbiotic relationship that intensified over her half-century of writing" (Roe 1).

Desire and renunciation are other concerns with which Rossetti deals, especially in feminine context. She has always been aware of the conventional gender bias of social, cultural, and religious systems which cause women to repress their feelings and desires, hence these repressed desires cause hysterical temperaments. Repression, suppression, and oppression of women, throughout the history, influence Rossetti to sing for the causes of women, for their rights, position, their strength, and endurance. These lines from the poem "Eve" can elaborate it more beautifully:

Thus she sat weeping,
Thus Eve our mother,
Where one lay sleeping
Slain by his brother.
Greatest and least
Each piteous beast
To hear her voice
Forgot his joy
And set aside his feast. (36-44)

The renunciation of worldly desires results in acute religious devotion which provides solace and gratification in other terms where worldly and divinely become one and the same. This blurring of the distinction between the two realms, in Rossetti's works, provides additional charm and attraction.

In order to achieve this solace, satisfaction, and gratification human beings have to go through sufferings, pain, humiliation, and hardships. These troublesome experiences result in salvation at the end, just like Christ. The sorrowful, grief-ridden, and melancholic tone of her verse is caused by that very suffering. But the suffering is more spiritual than mundane, "She also begins to revise and adapt what she learns to suit her purposes, which more often emphasize

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ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

the religious than the romantic and begin to shift the poetic subject from a woman's heart to her soul" (D'Amico 19). The irrecoverable loss and the unattainable hope become the source of tension and conflict in her poems like "The Heart Knoweth Its Own Bitterness" where she sings the loss and hope as:

I used to labour, used to strive
For pleasure with a restless will:
Now if I save my soul alive
All else what matters, good or ill?
I used to dream alone, to plan
Unspoken hopes and days to come: —
Of all my past this is the sum:
I will not lean on child of man. (17-24)

But her poetic persona, just like herself, endures these sufferings with remarkable courage. The acceptance of pain and torments, the tolerance powers of females, the experiences they go through give feminist touch to her works. Rossetti is one of the few female voices which reach the wide audiences during Victorian era. And she utilizes that opportunity fairly well. In order to liberate her as well as the other women, from conventional gender norms, she makes clear how both the genders / sexes are equal in front of the Divine. Similarly she talks about the question of fallen women (such as prostitutes), the cause behind their fall, and how to save them as, "Considering Rossetti's fallen woman poems in both their literary and social contexts indicates that Rossetti, unlike many of her contemporaries, saw the fallen woman's story as a complex and layered narrative, one in which the fallen woman was not the only sinner" (D'Amico 95).

In this way, Rossetti is definitely one of the most accomplished female poets to be known. She does not only participate in the literary, social, cultural, religious, economic, and political matters of her times but illuminates the gender bias of all social structures. Her devotional verse gives another dimension to Christianity where feminine virtues of Godly powers are worshipped. She was the advocator of a feminist theology where female version of Divine power becomes the strength of religion and morality. She also proposes feminine version of market economy, educational circle, social reformation, and other worldly matters.

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ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

Similarly Rossetti also deploys the same strategy in presenting queer lesbian desire in a free natural space. Her use of natural imagery is one of the remarkable traits of her poetry and prose. The flower imagery or the flower-lore of her poetical works is influenced by the general Victorian appreciation of decoration and embellishment, "Close study reveals that the contemporary floral alphabets provide the key to many of her poems. The peculiar combination of emblematic and decorative aims which explain the astonishing popularity of the flower books in the Victorian era also recognizable in a number of Christina Rossetti's flower poems" (Honnighausen 1).

Whereas most of the time these images are used to enhance the Christian faith and theological belief, at other times it also presents the inner turmoil of Rossetti and the women she presents in her poems. The female concerns, apart from Christian belief, are the most intense concern of her poetic and prosaic works.

Queer lesbian desire and the natural world of flora and fauna are presented very beautifully in most of her poems. "Goblin Market" is the best known poem in this regard. The setting of the poem is that of a "glen" (a narrow valley) where Laura and Lizzie, two sisters, reside in harmonious conditions until the invasion of the "goblin men". The natural surrounding provides freedom to the two girls to enjoy the female bonding which depicts certain aspects of their sexuality, "Place has played an important role in the creation of lesbian identity and community" (Unger 174). As:

> Golden head by golden head,
> Like two pigeons in one nest
> Folded in each other's wings,
> They lay down in their curtained bed:
> Like two blossoms on one stem,
> Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow,
> Like two wands of ivory
> Tipped with gold for awful kings. (184-191)

The goblins allure Laura with the charm of their delicious fruits and she gets succumbed to the calling of the goblins. Having no money to buy the fruits she has to pay exact substitute for the fruits. She pays with a lock of her hair and enjoys the sweet fruits which later prove to be

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Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

harmful for her. The symbolic meaning of this sacrifice can be seen in the loss of her health (virginity) after having eaten the fruits.

The invasion of the goblins can be seen as a threat to two entities –lesbian sisterhood and a natural habitat. Both these spheres do not conform to the hetero-patriarchal social norms, "The sisters live in peaceful, domestic, almost pastoral harmony –yet in continuous threat of being lured by the male sirens" (Roden 42). While Lizzie warns Laura about the dangers involved in meeting the goblins, Laura looks forward for the delicious fruits and their bearers. She waits for the pernicious goblins to appear on the stage as is presented in these lines:

> Laura stretched her gleaming neck
> Like a rush-imbedded swan,
> Like a lily from the beck,
> Like a moonlit poplar branch,
> Like a vessel at the launch
> When its last restraint is gone. (81-86)

Here Laura is presented by using beautiful and accurate natural imagery. But the thing to note is that whether Laura looks upon the goblins alone in that curiosity or the whole natural world? If the answer to this question is yes, then this stanza is remarkable one to put forth both –lesbian feminist and ecocentric views.

Laura's thrust and hunger for the goblin fruits are not mitigated once she tastes them. Rather she falls prey to the poisonous fruits and goes through the same experiences which Jeanie once goes through. Laura waits and longs for the goblins to appear again so that she may get the fruits once more. But the mischievous goblins come only once for a new girl as can be seen in the case of Jeanie and Laura. The strange ways of the goblin men to violate the purity of virgins is a notable point of the poem.

Lizzie, unable to bear the deteriorating condition of Laura, goes to visit the goblins by putting a penny in her pocket to buy the fruits, not by any other than a reasonable means, "Just as she takes money with her to purchase the goblin fruits, so she also succeeds in extending female value and power and can therefore return unharmed" (Campbell 407). Goblins are infuriated when they see Lizzie holding a penny and being economically independent. When they invite her to join them for the dinner, instead of paying money for their fruits, Lizzie refused. The goblins

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Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

turn violent and attach her. But Lizzie remains resolute to her decision of never tasting the poisonous fruits. She, with a smeared body by the fruit juice which goblins try to thrust in any of her pore, returns back and calls Laura to come out and lick her body to get the fruit juice. Offered by the devoted sister, the same fruit juice becomes antidote and treats the diseased Laura. Their mutual sisterhood is further strengthens by Lizzie's action. Later on, at the very end of the poem, the poet gives voice to the strength, purity and supportive power of sisterhood and female bonding, "The poem is therefore an exploration of the limits defined by the Victorians for sexual roles, an investigation of gender identity, rather than, more simply, an exploration of the temptations of sex" (Campbell 402).

Next poem to note is "What Sappho Would Have Said Had Her Leap Cured Instead of Killing Her". The poem is the direct evocation of Sappho –the first notable poet to express lesbian homoerotic desire in her poetry. The persona of the poem is looking for her lost love. Love is personified in this poem. The dejected persona walks miles in the search of her love but is unsuccessful to find it out, "O blessèd Love, return, return, / Brighten the flame that needs must burn." (5-6). Getting tired and wrecked by the long excursions, she arrives in a natural space loaded with flowers, plants, fresh greenery, and birds around. She praises the beauty, vigour, and freshness of the natural flora which soothes her tense nerves and provides solace and delight to her disturbed psyche. Her acute observation of natural scene can also be seen in these lines:

I walk down by the river side
Where the low willows touch the stream;
Beneath the ripple and sun-gleam
The slippery cold fishes glide,
Where flags and reeds and rushes lave
Their roots in the unsullied wave. (19-24)

The titular reference to Sappho also suggests something about the sexual desire of the persona. May be the persona is looking for her female lover, a female-to-female affection which Sappho stands for. This non-normative desire is also the source of fear and doubt for the persona. Fear for its being unacceptable which can cause great opposition by the rest of society and doubt upon her identity, desire, and sexuality, "I will lie down; and quite forget / The doubts and fears

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ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

that haunt me yet." (47-48). In order to escape these fears and doubts the persona looks towards the natural surrounding for solace and strength. The persona, distresses by the lost love, by the long search expeditions, by the doubts and fears, and the opposition to her deviant desire, finds some relief in the natural world which is far away from the chaotic social systems:

My pillow underneath my head
Shall be green grass; thick fragrant leaves
My canopy; the spider weaves
Meet curtains for my narrow bed;
And the dew can but cool my brow
That is so dry and burning now. (49-54)

But the persona is yearning for one glimpse of her lover. She cannot sleep for long there. She must go on for the search of her lover. She does not want to rest until she finds out the lost love. The abundance of nature provides some solace to her, but all of her efforts are directed to one thing that is the search for her partner. She sings the sorrow of her heart in these lines, "Must bear my pain, till Love shall turn / To me in pity and come back. (61-62).

"Have You Forgotten?" is Rossetti's sonnet having a lot of similarities to Derozio's poem "A Walk by Moonlight". Just like Derozio's poem, Rossetti also presents the persona and her companion on a walk in the moonlight. Rossetti's sonnet presents two companions whereas Derozio presents four friends having a jolly time together. Rossetti's poem is addressed to a silent person whose gender is not specified. Similarly the gender of the persona is also obscure. On the other hand Derozio's poem presents four male friends with specificity of their gender as well as male-to-male affection.

In "Have You Forgotten?" the persona is asking her partner (whose gender is not specified) whether he / she has forgotten the long summer-night walk they have had once. She is reminding her partner how they both have taken long walk by the moonlight and how the partner "praised" certain aspects of the natural world but was indifferent towards the persona:

Have you forgotten how you praised both light
And darkness; not embarrassed yet not quite
At ease? and how you said the glare of noon
Less pleased you than the stars? but very soon

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ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

You blushed, and seemed to doubt if you were right.
We wandered far and took no note of time; (4-9)

The natural imagery is used abundantly. The free environment is helpful in obscuring the gender and sexual roles altogether. In a way the poem can be interpreted as presenting queer gender or sexual subjects, that's why they are presented in obscure ways.

The ringing of the church bell calls them back to their social and cultural systems. The freedom which they enjoy in a night time walk in the moonlight is not available in a strict hetero-patriarchal order of religious, social, and cultural norms. But Rossetti has always been known for her devotion to Christianity which she presents in a very different way. Rossetti deploys the Christian sisterhood tradition to put forth the female-to-female bonding, affection, and love, "Her support of Anglican sisterhoods, her questioning of marriage as woman's highest goal, and even her compassionate response to prostitutes all indicate that she repeatedly questioned those domestic and sexual ideologies that helped to keep Victorian women in a second-class position" (D'Amico 118).

In her poem "By the Water" the persona wants to go for boating with her friend in the pleasant river where the banks must be laden with lilies and bees. In this delightful surrounding both the friends will have good time by ignoring and casting away the worldly anxieties. In such a surrounding they will forget all hopes and fears of the past and future, everything which sheds distress upon their free spirits and will enjoy their closeness to one another and to the natural world. The intimacy between themselves will be stimulated by their closeness to nature.

And if there were a fairy boat
And if the river bore us
We should not care for all the past
Nor all that lies before us,
Not for the hopes that buoyed us once
Nor for the fears that tore us. (7-12)

But the situation becomes clear in the last stanza where the persona is just fantasying these things to happen and which actually have not happened in reality. The hope for such a pleasant experience is the wish of the persona. This wish alludes to her desire to have physical intimacy with her friend far away from the socially regulated world. In a way the poem is also presenting

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Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

a substitute gratification derived through imaginary or dreamy experiences because in reality they are impossible to happen. In third stanza the poet expresses the wishes of the persona in the lines which depict the inner urge for erotic pleasure in a natural environment. The eroticism of the poem is reflected in these lines:

We would rock upon the river,
Scarcely floating by,
Rocking rocking like the lilies
You, my friend, and I:
Rocking like the stately lilies
Beneath the statelier sky. (13-18)

The illusory rivers and friend both vanish once the dream ends. Although it is not mentioned whether the poem is a dream song or not, but the tone of the last stanza clarifies it to be a dream poem. The overall intention of the poem seems to be an expression of erotic desire (may be same-sex because the gender of both the persons is not clarified) in a natural surrounding which does not object for deviant or different erotic pleasure, "In a healthier environment, one organized according to homosocial and homoerotic norms, women could create a more profound connection to each other and to nature" (Sandilands 24).

"Maiden Song" is Rossetti's long poem just like "Goblin Market". Not only the length and narrative technique but the very theme and subject matter of both the poems are similar. In "Maiden Song" three sisters who are the maidens of the title –Margaret, Meggan, and May, reside in a hilly area with complete harmony among themselves as well as with the natural world. The innocence of the three maidens as well as that of the natural world is enhanced and stimulated by one another. Their close connection and relation to the surrounding space is presented in such a way that it suggests the common attributes shared by both the nature and the women. The nurturing nature of the natural world and women is the strength of an ecofeminist ground where the opposition is caused by such factors as male superiority over nature and female.

When Meggan plucked the thorny rose,
And when May pulled the briar,
Half the birds would swoop to see,

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ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

Half the beasts draw nigher;
Half the fishes of the streams
Would dart up to admire:
But when Margaret plucked a flag-flower,
Or poppy hot aflame,
All the beasts and all the birds
And all the fishes came
To her hand more soft than snow. (10-20)

But the harmony, unity, and closeness between the three sisters and the natural world are shattered when male subjects appear on the scene. Soon Meggan and May go out to collect the "strawberry leaves" and are wooed by a "herdsman" who proposes Meggan and a "shepherd" who wins May. The "fair Margaret" spends her time by singing, sewing, and waiting for her sisters. Here Margaret's closeness to animals, birds, and vegetation is presented very beautifully. At each of her movement the natural world responds with much charming effects. As can be seen in these lines:

When she raised her lustrous eyes
A beast peeped at the door;
When she downward cast her eyes
A fish gasped on the floor;
When she turned away her eyes
A bird perched on the sill,
Warbling out its heart of love,
Warbling warbling still,
With pathetic pleadings low. (45-53)

On the other hand both Meggan and May, while searching for the leaves, are tired and rest in the shade of a tree. There they enjoy one another's company and start singing songs. The free and liberal environment prompts their desire for one another as well as for their sister who is staying at home. Both the girls start resting and playing with one another. This free expression of singing, laying down for rest, and playing all refer to the manifestation of some inner desire.

Clothed with thyme-alternate grass:

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Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

Then, while day waxed hot,
Sat at ease to play and rest,
A gracious rest and play;
The loveliest maidens near or far, (56-60)

But the closeness (physical or otherwise) of the girls is threatened by the appearance of a herdsman and a shepherd who attract their attention towards themselves by distracting them from one another. The distraction of the men works and both the girls fall prey to the sexual politics of the male members. Although there are hints, within the poem, about the jealousy between the sisters but the jealousy finds a place to flourish only when the male characters come on the scene.

Margaret waits for long for her sisters but they do not return back. Her worries for them provoke her anxiety more and she goes out for their search. By listening to the nightingale's song Margaret herself starts singing the song which attracts great audience with its passion, sweetness, and grief.

Waiting thus in weariness
She marked the nightingale
Telling, if any one would heed,
Its old complaining tale.
Then lifted she her voice and sang,
Answering the bird:
Then lifted she her voice and sang,
Such notes were never heard
From any bird when Spring's in blow. (179-187)

The king, his princes, squires, knights, peers, and people of the area, everyone gather around the charming Margaret. Meggan and May both return back with their men. When Margaret stops singing the King, mesmerized by her, proposes and marries her.

In this way the poem ends with the marriage of the three girls with three men. But the poem is not about the jealousy of the sisters and their marriage. The poem talks about the sexual politics of genders and sexes. The three sisters, having complete homosocial bonding, are living a happy and harmonious life until the male characters arrive just like "goblin men" in "Goblin

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ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

Market". The idea of the sexual politics, especially the imposition of heterosexuality, can be seen throughout the poem, "it becomes an inescapable question whether the issue we have to address as feminists is, not simply "gender inequality", nor the domination of culture by male, nor mere "taboos against homosexuality", but the enforcement of heterosexuality for women as a means of assuring male right of physical, economical, and emotional access" (Rich 647).

Christina Rossetti similarly deploys the interconnection between nature and sexuality as a form of protest for the protection of female sexuality and environmental conditions. Her most famous poem "Goblin Market" is a good example in this regard. What she portrays in the poem is a solid and firm relation between females and natural world. The "glen" where Laura and Lizzie reside is a secluded and secure space far away from the chaotic industrialist and over-populated urban areas. But the threat of the intervention of male subjects in the form of "goblins" makes things quite clear where a natural space and female-bonding are the victims of anthropocentric and heteronormative ideologies.

Morning and evening
Maids heard the goblin cry:
'Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy: (1-4)

The fruits of the goblins prove to be a poison to eradicate the deviant forms of desires and existence presented by Laura and Lizzie. At the same time their invasion is the direct intervention in a natural space which they might require for growing more fruits, orchards, and farms. Lizzie expresses her fears about these things which Laura ignores completely, "'No', said Lizzie: 'No, no, no; / Their offers should not charm us / Their evil gifts would harm us.'" (64-66). The consequences of Laura's daring nature to follow the goblins is her diseased health which is the outcome of her consuming the poisonous fruits. The fruits lose their nutritious powers in the hands of goblin men. Here a direct connection is presented between the threats to environment / nature and to female-bonding.

But the same fruit juices turn out to be antidote when offered through the body of her sister Lizzie. The nurturing nature of females and natural world become the effective form of bonding which link both of these entities:

She cried 'Laura,' up the garden,

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Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

‘Did you miss me?
Come and kiss me.
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
Eat me, drink me, love me;
Laura, make much of me:
For your sake I have braved the glen
And had to do with goblin merchant men. (464-474)

The nurturing and nourishing attributes of females and nature provide sources of connections between the both. One’s ability to restore the damaged, destructed, and degenerated entities is stimulated and enhanced by the other, “At this point, two obvious female cycles have been completed: Laura's quest and return cause Lizzie's quest and return, bringing this moment of healing identity, with its suggestions of sexual fertility” (Campbell 408).

In her sonnet “The World” Rossetti presents socio-cultural tendencies of homophobia and ecophobia through a female friend of the persona. Here deviant sexuality is presented from the perspective of the other people, rather than through those who themselves possess it. The female persona’s female friend behaves very sensibly during the day but at night she turns out to be different. Two aspects of the personality of the friend are depicted –during the day she “wooes” the persona as a “soft” and sweet friend. But all these appearances are illusions; at night the female friend turns out to be a “hideous”, “foul”, and “loathsome” creature having “serpents” as “hair”, “leprosy” afflicted body, a “beast” and “monster” with claw and “horns”:

By day she wooes me, soft, exceeding fair:
But all night as the moon so changeth she;
Loathsome and foul with hideous leprosy
And subtle serpents gliding in her hair. (1-4)

The night-time appearance of the friend is at odds with the day time illusion. Now what can be the reasons for this sudden change in personality? How can it be related to the sexual desire of the friend as well as the persona? And how homophobia and ecophobia are working in

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Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

this poem? These questions draw attention to the correlation between bestial desire and the homoerotic or queer desire. The same-sex relations are considered uncivilized, pervert, and deviant. That is why they are discarded and prohibited. By linking animal behaviour to lesbian desire Rossetti presents the fear of society for both these different and dangerous things. The images used to describe these aspects connect two things –an unconscious and hidden homoeroticism which is bestial and "beast" and "monsters" which are the sources of ecophobia.

By day she stands a lie: by night she stands
In all the naked horror of the truth
With pushing horns and clawed and clutching hands.
Is this a friend indeed; that I should sell
My soul to her, give her my life and youth,
Till my feet, cloven too, take hold on hell? (9-14)

After narrating the monstrous nature of her friend the persona asks a question –whether she should sacrifice herself in order to save her friend? And in turn she gets degenerated? It is difficult to give answers to these questions in a straightforward way. The persona might be referring to the general way of the world in dealing with homoeroticism and dangerous natural world. But the focus of the persona, upon her friend's different nature, draws attention to her concern for her friend. May be the persona really wants to save her friend from the socio-cultural hostility toward nature and homoeroticism. In that case the poem is trying to connect two forms of resistance, one for natural and biodiversity and the other for sexual diversity.

Another similar poem is "Guesses" where the persona of Rossetti's poem is guessing the reasons which separate her from her female lover. The poet starts the poem by asking questions – why her female friend leaves her? Before leaving her permanently the friend visits the persona but does not cross her threshold because she knows the stigma of their deviant desire which can lead them to the "grave" (death) if it becomes known to the world.

She felt the grave was at our feet,
And felt that we should no more meet
Upon its hither side no more? (6-8)

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While turning away to leave, she looks inside the windows where the persona is standing. She recognizes the hardships involved in cherishing a queer lesbian desire and hence moves away to avoid any scandal. She moves toward a free space.

There was a hill she had to pass;
And while I watched her up the hill
She stooped one moment hurrying still,
But left a rose upon the grass: (16-20)

The token of love, which the lover leaves for the female persona, is a "rose" which is the traditional symbol of love, erotic desire, life, and growth. Or it might be the reason that the lover is deriving pleasure from the natural beauty beacuse now she is separated from her friend. Throughout the poem the female persona is giving voice to her doubts about what her lover is trying to do –Does her friend leave the normal life carelessly? Or is it an idle thought to lead a different life? Or is it a "grace unbought", "a pledge to all eternity"? The persona says that she will come to know the answers when she will meet her female lover in the paradise because in this world homoerotic desire is dangerous and life-threatening.

I know not yet how this may be;
But I shall know when face to face
In Paradise we find a place
And love with love that endeth not. (29-32)

A strict demarcation of the space can be seen in this poem. The home, where the persona is living, presents the heterosexual nature of social order, "How long and rough the pathway is / That leads us home from vanities" (14-15). The hilly area, where the friend of the persona goes once their relation becomes objectionable, stands for a free space. The home represents heterosexual-patriarchal system which the friend does not to follow. The natural world of hilly areas provides freedom on the one hand to live life in one's own ways and it also opposes the adherence to dominant ideologies of anthropocentrism and heteronormativity.

In the poem "Shut Out" the female person has lost her garden to the male subject. She is imploring him to give her access to the garden so that she may be able to gather a few seeds and twigs by which she will grow another garden at her home. But the stern and cruel keeper of the

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garden does not allow it and builds a wall around the garden so that the female persona may not be able to see it. The persona sings her loss in these lines:

From bough to bough the song-birds crossed,
From flower to flower the moths and bees;
With all its nests and stately trees
It had been mine, and it was lost. (5-8)

This invasion and seizure of the garden from the female persona is a direct threat and attack upon a female sphere where she is residing in a complete harmony with the natural world. Here one's nurturing and nourishing abilities provide security and safety from the harshness of the male greed and industrial advancement. But the anthropocentric and hetero-patriarchal discourses never allow women to live alone and be independent because it can threaten the supremacy of male power, reason, and logic. The females are considered to be irrational, illogical, and emotional and these traits link them to the natural world more closely, "In their analyses of oppression, socialists, animal liberationists, ecologists, and feminists each distinguish between privileged and oppressed groups, where the privileged are upper- or middle-class, human, technologically and industrially "developed", male, and the oppressed are poor or working-class, nonhuman animal, "undeveloped" nature, and female, respectively" (Gaard 1-2). So in this way a coalition is built upon these marginalized and oppressed subjects. As in this poem the coalition is between feminist and natural grounds where both the entities are oppressed by male greed for supremacy.

"Autumn" is another of Rossetti's poem where the female persona resides in a solitary natural space full of flourishing flora and fauna. She is conscious and worried about her being alone. She hears the maidens who sail through the boats in the river:

Hush! they will lie becalmed in sight of strand —
Sight of my strand, where I do dwell alone;
Their songs wake singing echoes in my land —
They cannot hear me moan. (14-17)

Their songs aroused the persona's heart and land to new charm and freshness. This presents reciprocal relation where maidens get inspiration and stimulus from the surrounding natural scenario and the natural world which grows more pleasant and fascinating to the persona

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in the presence of maidens. Here a coalition on natural and sexual grounds can be seen. The persona elaborately expresses her closeness to her residing place:

> Mine avenue is all a growth of oaks,
> Some rent by thunder strokes,
> Some rustling leaves and acorns in the breeze;
> Fair fall my fertile trees,
> That rear their goodly heads, and live at ease. (28-32)

As compared to the previous poem "Shut Out" where the persona is shut out from her own garden, in this poem the persona is enjoying a close intimacy to the natural surrounding by securing it herself and getting secured by it from the rest of the world. But she wants to enjoy the same intimacy with the maidens. Soon they leave the river in their boats and the persona again remains alone, "They float and wane, / Long miles away from me." (50-51). But the loss is compensated by her closeness to nature. And through this deviant way of life (living among the trees) the persona tries to challenge the dominant social-cultural norms.

Rossetti's poetry expresses a subtle range of emotions and sensations. In this paper the primary focus has been to explore how her poetry expresses homoerotic desire through the use of natural symbols and images. Her focus on the natural world of flora and fauna as well as the homoeroticism are two major aspects which reveal her concerns for the natural world and alternative sexual desires. In this way, her poetry expresses the issue of natural world and sexual diversity.

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