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SELF-ABNEGATION AND SELF-ASSERTION IN THE POETRY OF CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

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ABSTRACT

In the century since her death, Christina Rossetti has most often been described as a "poet of loss", an orthodox devotional poet who wrote of lost love and self-abnegation. This thesis examines Christina's general and religious poetry to discuss the techniques by which statements of self-abnegation are transformed into sometimes radical statements of self-assertion. Particular attention has been paid to those poems which express an individualistic vision of the self as plural and fragmented. An intertextual model has been adopted to examine the poetry's polyphonic nature; the several co-existing 'voices' and themes within Christina's work (yielding and assertive, orthodox and unconventional, Christian and Gothic), have been traced to reveal a poetry of conflict and complexity.

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"But let patience have her perfect work, that
ye may be perfect and entire, wanting
nothing."

James 1.4

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then... I contradict myself;
I am large... I contain multitudes.

Walt Whitman