The studies made in the preceding chapters have established, without question that ambivalence is indeed Emily Dickinson's forte, with Christina Rossetti not far behind. The poems have not only withstood the test of time but literary criticism as well, including that of feminist literary criticism. Anachronistic readings by which twentieth century pre-occupations are retrojected on the poems produce interpretations such as the homosexual leanings of Emily Dickinson. Poems directly addressed to Sue Dickinson and those that are conjectured to be addressed to a woman whose identity is unknown constitute what feminist critics label the "sisterhood" poems. Some of these poems are "One Sister have I in our House", "Dying! Dying in the Night" and "Ourselves were wed one Summer dear".

By the same token, feminist critics read Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" as either an expression of lesbian relationship or Christian allegory with a female Christ figure. The other so-called 'anti-marriage' poems by Leder and Abbott, namely "Cousin Kate", "Maude Clare" and "An Apple Gathering" do have, in each of them seminal ideas of
feminism. Ambivalence, ellipses and the very nature of the rhetoric used by the poets encourage and sustains feministic reading and interpretation of the poems. At the end of it all, "who was Dickinson's lover?" ceases to be the burning question. The poems convince scholars that Dickinson did not write about only one aspect of love. Love and marriage, with the accompanying pain and betrayal, are part of the poet's repertoire. With regard to religious faith and the after-life, Dickinson's ambivalence is truly reflected in her poems. Her persona believes and not believes at the same time. Doubting even His existence in one poem, "I know that He exists", she listens to God, "a noted preacher" every day in the poem "Some keep the Sabbath". It becomes less imperative therefore to try to solve the mystery that is Emily Dickinson than to accept Dickinson the poet, whose ambivalence is the truth about herself. If her question to "Infinitude", "Hadst thou no face/That I might look on Thee" were asked of her, the answer, unhesitatingly would be that ambivalence is the real face of Emily Dickinson. Her poetry, like a multi-faceted gem dazzles with the same ambivalence.

T.W. Higginson described Emily Dickinson as a "wholly new and original poetic genius". Dickinson's poetry is a living example of the truth behind Paul de Mann's statement: Rhetoric radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration. In such poems as
"I heard a fly buzz—when I died", "Because I could not stop for Death" and "I started early—Took my Dog", the poet's rhetoric defies simple logic to plunge into new avenues of experience and activity. The same may be said of the love experiences of Dickinson's persona. The clever use of indeterminate terms like "You", "Thee", "Sweet" effectively camouflages whether the lover is a man, Christ or even a woman. A secret ambiguity is established through the strength of vagueness. In such poems as "If I may have it when its dead", "I started early—Took my Dog" or "In Winter in my Room", the experience goes beyond the norm of human experience in a way which is not quite supernatural either. Moreover, the ambivalence makes it impossible to gauge to what extent the poet uses facts from her life, unless of course, the ambivalence is accepted as the basis of her life, therefore, the basis of poetic creation.

Having never been married and often referring to herself as a nun, Dickinson's speaker in such poems as "There came a day at Summer's full" and "Ourselves were wed one summer dear" may be assumed to be the "supposed person". The picture of a faithful woman betrayed or left by a lover is a suitable mask for a spinster poet. It adds the realistic feeling to the texture of the poems. It is also less threatening to her reputation to write about a distant lover separated from her, when obviously there is no one around who
might be identified as the lover. But most of all, it has created a mystery so provocative and tantalising, that reader’s interest in Dickinson and her poetry will never wane.

Dickinson’s poems on personal faith have all the ambivalence of the poems on love and more. Her personal rejection of conversion colour the poems with shades of irreverence and lack of conviction. Her persona rejects God and Heaven, but partially accepts Jesus. But Dickinson’s God and Jesus, are in fact, customized deities, made to fit in the mould of her poetry as these lines, “God is a distant, stately lover” and “The Savior must have been a docile gentleman” illustrate. Her explosive rhetoric “Burglar! Banker – Father”, “mastif”, ‘adamant’, ‘a God of flint’ reduces the Almighty to a mean and arbitrary God who takes delight in tormenting human beings. Yet to this God, Dickinson prays, if only to parody the Lord’s Prayer in “Papa above” (#61). Contradictorily, her persona also claims daily communion with God (#324) and boasts of an unshakeable faith in Jesus (#497), the same that she denies knowledge of, elsewhere. The contradictory position is given expression through her rhetoric of ambivalence. Belief and unbelief are proportionately represented in Dickinson’s poetry.

Dickinson’s hermeneutic of post-mortal existence conveys her ambivalence on the subject. Her rhetoric is not
only an exploration, but the opening of new avenues of
consciousness of being. The voices in "Because I could not
stop for Death" and "I heard a fly buzz - when I died" are
supposedly those of deceased persons, the former being dead
for "Centuries". No place is assigned to them by the poet who
lets them recollect and narrate the moment when death claimed
them:

Because I could not Stop for Death -
He kindly stopped for me
The carriage held just Ourselves
And Immortality.

And

And then the Windows failed - and then
I could not see to see -

Almost at the same time, Dickinson regards going to Heaven
after death almost obligatory. Her persona far from looks
forward to going to Heaven, which is an entirely different
place to the one Rossetti looks forward to going. At other
times, the grave is depicted as the final destination, the
permanent home of the spirit. Of her own mother, the poet
writes: "My own is in the Grave". There is bewilderment in
the voice which exclaims: "Lives he in any other world/My
faith cannot reply" (#1557) at the death of Rev. Charles
Wadsworth. Dickinson's eschatology is neither fully Christian
nor wholly pagan. It is ambivalent in a way that is uniquely
Dickinsonian. Whereas she pleads ignorance in the above
lines, at other times, she is almost blase about going to

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Heaven. Her persona is more eager to be announced in the "mystic green" than she is to be in the eternal presence of God.

In contrast to Dickinson's bold, sometimes blistering rhetoric, Rossetti's rhetoric is subdued and calm in the main, but can also be sharp and witty when she chooses. When she chides the persistent suitor in "No Thank You John", her rhetoric is pert and sarcastic:

I'd rather answer 'No' to fifty Johns
than answer 'Yes' to you.

Like her persona in "Isidora" who says, "I must choose 'twixt God and man", Rossetti chose God over her earthly love. Her rhetoric expresses the pain of this renunciation. Rossetti's romantic life may be declared to be in a state of twilight zone. The "Monna Innominata" which William Michael Rossetti declares to be "personal utterances" is a monument of love and renunciation. The poet's ambivalence towards her love is set from the very first line of the first sonnet: "Come back to me, who wait and watch for you - Or come not yet, for it is over then". The day the lovers met for the first time is a day that "seemed to mean so little, meant so much"; Renouncing him for the love of God, the speaker says: "Yet while I love my God the most, I deem/That I can never love you overmuch". This love that she feels for the beloved, even though she has renounced him, still has the power of
transforming her. In sonnet #nine, acknowledging her "faithless and hopeless" state, she claims she is "yet not hopeless quite nor faithless quite" because she is "not loveless". But the speaker feels the need to commend her beloved to God, since in her own heart there is only "love’s goodwill, which is "Helpless to help and impotent to do/Of understanding dull, of sight most dim." The Monna Innaminata’s purpose is to give voice to the hitherto silent nameless lady of courtly love. But the poet swerves from this purpose by addressing herself to the matter between earthly and heavenly love; between desire and deferral. The rhetoric abounds in repetition and ambiguities throughout the sequence. Starting from sonnet #one, lines 1-2, "Come back to me ... or come not yet", Sonnet #three lines 1-2, "I dream of you, to wake ... would that I might/Dream of you and not wake"; sonnet #five, lines 1-2: "O my heart’s heart and you who are to me/more than myself" and so on. Here in this sonnet sequence and in others, ambivalence finds expression in the form of love and renunciation and love and betrayal.

Similarly, in her poems on devotional themes, Rossetti, who was intensely devout portrays her ‘Lord’ as being full of grace and as a willful scourge at the same time. Rossetti’s poetical ambivalence is often expressed through juxtaposition of words that convey opposite meanings:
"I would have gone; God bade me stay
I would have worked: God bade
me rest."

"For though He slay us, we will trust
in Him ... 
Yea, though He slay us we will vaunt
His praise ...."

Rossetti’s poems, in the words of Arthur Symons are
"surcharged with personal emotion, a cry of the heart, an
ecstasy of the soul’s grief or joy, ...." Most of the
devotional poems are in the form of prayer. Unlike Emily
Dickinson who addresses Jesus as an independent deity,
Christina Rossetti uses "Lord" in the New Testament sense of
the term to mean Christ. In the poem "Perfect Love Casteth
out Fear", she opens the poem with "Lord, give me blessed
fear", again juxtaposing words of contradictory meaning. She
asks for both fear and love, giving them a common factor
"blessed". Her prayer in that with the 'fear' of the Lord,
she might love Him more.

Rossetti’s poems are often structured as dialogues
between the soul and the Godhead to which we, as readers, are
also listeners. We cannot help but notice the paradox in the
lines "... without a hiding place

To hide me from the terrors of Thy
Face -
‘Thy hiding place is here
In mine own heart, wherefore
The Roman Spear
For thy sake I accounted dear’ −
My Jesus! King of Grace.
In these lines, Jesus is both the 'terror' from which the soul needs to hid as well as the hiding place. On its part, the soul prays for "blessed fear" of the Lord, who, is, at the same time, the only one who can 'cast out' that 'fear' and replace it with love. Intense faith and love co-exist with an acute sense of unworthiness in the devotional poetry of Christina Rossetti. In lines reminiscent of the Holy Sonnet of John Donne, Rossetti in "Cried out with Tears" supplicates: "Lord, must I perish, I who look to Thee? Look Thou upon me, bid me live, not die".

The attraction of the 'world' that 'woos' her by day inevitably leads to retrogressive glances which in turn are responsible for the feelings of guilt. These nostalgic backward glances towards the world also 'translates' in the words of Stephen Gurney, into 'ghosts' who roam the realms of her poetry.

Christina Rossetti's formulation of post-mortal existence is characterised by the same ambivalence that has marked the poems on love and faith. She has contradictory visions about the state of the soul after the body ceases to live. The poem "At Home" begins with "When I was dead, my spirits turned". The speaker being clearly a deceased person echoes the poet's ambivalence in her attitude: "Sad/To stay and yet to part how loth."
The ambivalence is conveyed by the use of the word "yet". Similarly, the other ghosts too show a reluctance to completely leave the world. The ghost in "The Ghost’s Petition" enters the house at midnight after he "shook the door like a puff of air". He tells his wife he has "come from the meadow/where many lie" because he has been disturbed from his rest by her weeping. The 'poor ghost' too come back from "the other world" as the tears and sobs of her friend have awakened her from her sleep. She promises to "go home" to her 'bed/Dug deep at the foot and deep at the head’ to ‘sleep’ till Judgement Day. The appearance of the ghosts expresses, at one level, the attraction that the world still has for those who have gone out from it. At a deeper level, it may be interpreted as signifying the backsliding of a soul towards the world it has renounced for the higher service of God. But from the merely aesthetic point of view, the poems describing ghosts may be regarded as artistic creations signifying art for art's sake.

The devotional poems reflect the vision of a future ecstasy of the soul in the presence of God and angels. After the death of the "mortal crust", the part of her that 'dies not' but only 'sleeps' a while will waken eternally, "with hymns and halleluiah on its lips. The poem "Of Him that was Ready to Perish" ends with the prayer: "Bid me also to Paradise, also me,/For the glory of Thy Name."
Much as Rossetti’s persona longs for Paradise even claiming Christ as her ‘Heavenly Lover’, she also hopes for a reunion with her earthly love. In the “Monna Innominata” and “By way of Remembrance” the persona voices her hope of claiming her loved one on earth in Heaven, never to be parted from each other again:

In Resurrection may we meet again:  
No more with stricken hearts to part in twain;  
As once in sorrow one, now one in mirth  
One in our resurrection songs of praise.

In Christina Rossetti’s poetry, the earthly lover does not merge into or become the Heavenly Lover. The latter is Christ, whose Godhead the poet never for a moment ever forgets. But the woman in her has equal desire to meet her beloved in Heaven. Rossetti’s rhetoric on love and faith, therefore, is a study in ambivalence. Renunciatory love that claims the beloved even in Heaven is juxtaposed with hopes of Heaven through Grace. Unsightly ghosts exist side by side with blessed souls on the pages of her tome. Innocent young girls live with vile sadistic goblin merchants in the same glen. The ambivalence in “Goblin Market” alone draws attention to the poet’s rhetorical ability. It has caused the narrative to be interpreted as a feminist version of temptation and redemption with a female Christ figure. It is also read as a lesbian manifesto. The poet herself maintains that ‘Goblin Market’ is a fairy tale and nothing more. But
the rhetoric itself lends a hand in the way modern critics choose to read the poem.

In the poetry of Christina Rossetti, the function of the rhetoric of ambivalence as a literacy strategy is to infuse a note of realism. It acts as a restraint that prevents the poems from being mere flights of fancy and imagination. Ambivalence does more than simply contradict. It anchors the poet's expressions to a level of verisimilitude that is wholly acceptable. Even the poet's hermeneutics of eschatology seem probable when expressed through the rhetoric of ambivalence. Through this strategy, both Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti have expressed divergent emotions such as love and renunciation, faith and doubt, certainty of Heaven and its non-existence in their poetry. The use of the rhetoric of ambivalence marks the superiority of the poets as artists for whom the only tools of creation are words and more words.
END NOTES

1. This is suggested by K.K. Ruthven as one way of reading by the feminist literary critic.
