ABSTRACT

CHLOE STEPHENS. “Not as She is But as She Fills His Dreams”: Vampirism in the Life and Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Under the direction of Professor Sharon Setzer.)

The paintings and poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti have been a source of scholarly fascination and contention for well over a century. Similarly, scholars have also found interest in Rossetti’s personal life, particularly regarding his relationships with his models. The nineteenth-century world in which Rossetti interacted with models and created art operated under strict, gendered boundaries. Due to the patriarchal nature of nineteenth-century society, Rossetti’s questionable treatment of his models and the appropriation of their images were ultimately tolerated for the sake of Rossetti’s continued artistic output. Essentially, these societal rules and expectations of the time dictated female submission to male power and this reality was readily reflected in both Rossetti’s life and his artistic works. However, as Rossetti’s celebrated works were infiltrating the nineteenth-century art world, significant literary innovation was occurring as well. In particular, vampire fiction was gaining popularity over the course of the century, and as many scholars have pointed out, this particular genre of fiction is inextricably linked to notions of power and gender. Interestingly, several of Rossetti’s artistic works, both poems and paintings, have come to be seen as vampiric in nature. Throughout Rossetti’s works, women are depicted as either beatific and sickly or evil and seductive. Such disparate representations of the female body echo those of female vampires’ bodies in the popular fictions of the day. Likewise, Rossetti’s bizarre treatment of his most prolific models could be something straight from the pages of vampire fictions as well. On account of these vampiric incidences and similarities, this paper argues that Rossetti’s life and art stand to be examined through the lens of nineteenth-century vampirism.