Desire Deferred: Ana Rossetti’s  
*Punto umbrío*

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It is not hard to grasp the reasons for the keen interest sparked by the poetry of Ana Rossetti since the publication of *Los devaneos de Erato* in 1980. The attraction of her work has been both strong and immediate. While feminist critics have been especially interested in her play with gender categories, many readers have been drawn in by the powerful and explicit eroticism of her work. One significant source of appeal is Rossetti’s appropriation of images from advertising and popular culture, as seen in her two best-known poems, “Chico Wrangler” and “Calvin Klein, underdrawers.” Not least of all are the seductions of her lush, sensuous language.

While the appeal of Rossetti’s work requires no explanation, this apparent immediacy has led to some notoriously superficial appreciations. She is too often presented to the reading public in rather unsubtle ways, as evidenced by statements by two anthologists. For Mari Pepa Palomero, the poet’s language is transparent and mimetic: “De tal manera que su mundo poético es abierto, libre, en ningún momento hay oscuridad, o contención, o hermetismo. Cada imagen creada tiene un referente erótico de inmediata interpretación” (Thus her poetic world is open, free; at no time is there obscurity, concealment, hermeticism. Each image created has an erotic referent that can be interpreted immediately) (411). This appeal to Rossetti’s erotic directness can lead to even cruder stances: “Ana es un auténtico regalo para los pobres heteros, que tan escasos andamos de gratificación en los últimos decenios” (Ana is a true gift for us poor heterosexual men, who have received so little gratification in the last decades) (Buenaventura 64).

While other critical readings of Rossetti’s work are more nuanced, many if not most still focus on the frisson produced by surface effect or by the reversal of readerly expectation. In this view, supported by a reading of her erotic novels and short stories, Rossetti gives poetic voice to the destape, the explosion of sexual expression in the years following Franco’s death and the lifting of
censorship. Among the hierarchies that Rossetti calls into question is the privileging of depth over surface; thus it should come as no surprise that even the best criticism on her poetry has continued to emphasize the immediacy of its effects. What this sort of reading tends to overlook, however, is an awareness of language as mediation. Rossetti’s poetic language, while seductive on its surface, still posits a certain distance between sign and referent; in the complexity of its signifying practice, it belies any ideal of transparent referentiality.

Punto umbrio, published in 1995, might lead the critic toward re-evaluation of Rossetti’s poetic production, in part because it is markedly different from Rossetti’s previous books. In this book the focus of the poet’s attention has shifted away from the seemingly unmediated eroticism of her earlier work toward a more profound exploration of desire as an inner experience. This inward turn links Rossetti’s most recent book to what is arguably the central problem of the European lyric tradition: the relation between the desiring subject and the object of his or her desire. This book thus calls for a more traditional approach, one that once again privileges depth over surface. While this approach lacks the “immediate” appeal of approaches that emphasize Rossetti’s subversiveness, my contention is that her originality is best understood in the context of the longstanding and enormously influential traditions of lyric poetry with which it engages.

Desire, in Western lyric poetry, is predicated on frustration, absence, and loss. In the model of object relations inherited from the Troubadours and from Petrarchism, the beloved is inaccessible almost by definition. While a late twentieth-century poet like Rossetti might appear quite distant from the conventions of medieval and renaissance love poetry, Punto umbrio demonstrates that the traditional model of the relation between desiring subject and the object of desire maintains a powerful hold over the poetic imagination. Some feminist critics have wanted to call Rossetti a subversive poet, arguing that she makes woman, rather than man, the object of erotic desire. This inversion of gender roles is a factor to be considered in Rossetti’s earlier poetry, yet in Punto umbrio this explicitly feminist dimension becomes much less pronounced. Rossetti is concerned here with the psychological dynamics of desire, in a manner that intersects in revealing ways with treatments of this theme in prominent male poets such as Salinas, Cernuda, and Brines. This is not to rule out the possibility of feminist readings of this important work; the argument that Rossetti’s approach to desire corresponds to a specifically female experience would be relatively easy to articulate. From my perspective as a male reader, however, her exploration of desire in this book does not bear the explicit mark of gender.

The role of language in mediating between subject and object plays a crucial role in Rossetti’s poetics of desire. Language, when viewed as a mimetic simulacrum of reality, will inevitably seem insufficient. Yet this insufficiency...
actually makes language the ideal medium for the mediation of desire, since desire itself arises from absence or lack. Language thus plays a double role in the Western poetic tradition: it creates a verbal simulacrum of the desired object and at the same time evinces its absence. Augustine’s well-known account of the way he learned to speak places desire at the origin of language:

It was not that my elders taught me words (as, soon after, other learning) by any set method; but I, longing by cries and broken accents and various motions of my limbs to express my thoughts, that so I might have my will, and yet unable to express all that I willed, or to whom I willed, did myself, by the understanding which Thou, my God, gavest me, practise the sounds in my memory. (16)5

The temporality of language creates another duality much exploited in Western poetics. Language is an inherently temporal medium, yet poetic language strives to monumentalize or eternalize time. The effort to defeat temporality is evident in the lyric convention of the “eternal present,” the moment of intense contemplation in which time appears to stand still, as well as in the topos that the well-made lyric poem works as a hedge against the ravages of time. Yet the awareness that such efforts must ultimately come up short creates an intense self-consciousness about the inherent duality of language.6 Once again, language both promises and defers the fulfillment of desire. It should be noted here that the “deconstructive” approach to poetry, in its insistence on the linguistic deferral of presence, echoes these traditional themes. From this perspective, deconstruction, still considered iconoclastic in some quarters, is strikingly attuned to the problematic of language and desire that stands at the heart of the Western poetic tradition.

Punto umbrío consists of a series of lyric moments that can also be read as a narrative sequence. This narrative, however, is not a linear one, since each of these moments is, in a sense, another approach to the same lyric moment. The first three poems in the book, marked by Roman numerals, provide a sort of prehistory of the “punto umbrío,” which is identified in the first poem with a child’s magical refuge: “Era un tiempo de infancia y la soledad prendía su bengala tras el escudo impenetrable del silencio. / Y el punto umbrío donde se cobijaba sólo era un mágico amparo para su terco y glorioso resplandor” (It was a time of childhood and solitude lit its torch behind the impenetrable shield of silence. / And the shadowy point where it took shelter was but a magic refuge for its stubborn and glorious radiance) (9). The second poem corresponds to adolescence, when this refuge becomes more explicitly sexual: “Era un tiempo adolescente e impreciso, el tiempo del amor sin nombre, hasta casi sin rostro, que merodeaba, como un beso prometido, por el punto más umbrío de la escalera” (It was an adolescent, imprecise time, the time of a nameless love, almost faceless, that lurked, like a promised kiss, in the darkest part of the stairwell) (11). In the third poem, this time undergoes another transformation, attaining the eternal present
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that is so often the goal in European lyric poetry: “Nada se postergaba. Nada se anteponía: era un tiempo predestinado por un singular decreto, una hélice girando, confundiéndose en una rueda brillante e invisible / No era una edad ni una condición, sino el tiempo sin tiempo de la felicidad perfecta. Del acuerdo. De la inmóvil y sin medida duración del arrebato” (Nothing was postponed. Nothing was precipitious: it was a time predestined by a singular degree, a spinning helix, becoming confused in a brilliant and invisible wheel. / It was neither an age nor a condition, but the timeless time of perfect happiness. Of the agreement. Of the immobile and measureless duration of the rapture) (13).

The lyric moment, as defined in poem III, posits a perfect coincidence of time and event, desire and consummation. The subsequent poems in Punto umbrio problematize this eternal present. The fulfillment of desire comes either too soon or too late; or else the attainment of an eternal present leads only to sterility. Many of these poems begin by positing a problematic relation to time, or some attempt to manipulate its flow: “Pero, ahora, la lámpara vigila toda la noche, toda la noche, sin saber hasta cuándo debe durar su desazón” (But now the lamp keeps vigil all night, all night, without knowing how long its uneasiness will last) (15). “Y así, cada minuto, se alarga en lentos túneles / flotando en el vacío” (And thus, every minute extends itself into slow tunnels / floating in the void) (17). “No quieras de hoy más que, dócil, el día cumpla su plazo” (Desire of today nothing more than that, tame, the day reach its end) (19). “Algún día hoy no habrá ocurrido” (Someday, today will not have occurred) (53).

Waiting for time to pass, attempting to make it pass more quickly or more slowly, stretching it out or contracting it, anticipating or deferring events, recapturing the past, imagining a “future perfect” in which the problem of desire will have been resolved—all of these attempted manipulations of time are responses to the impossibility of recovering the “punto umbrio” itself, which, in my reading of this book, is closely linked to the eternal present of traditional lyric poetry. The explicitly metapoetic texts in Punto umbrio confirm this hypothesis. In the following text the process of writing becomes antithetical to the goal being sought, since this process takes the writer further away from the very thing being sought:

AUN LA ESCRITURA DEJA ATRÁS sus renglones desatando su incontenible estela: impronta que reseca su lacada herida; sentimientos que se alejan hasta desvanecerse, hasta abismarse, veloces, en las ráfagas nubladas del principio. Conforme crece se empequeñecen sus vagones de carga perecedera: imágenes que se convierten en reflejo; consignas que acumulan sus escombros, que domestican sus significados hasta que dejan de ser. Irreversiblemente, las palabras, mientras avanzan,
mientras se abren camino en el vacío, mientras su máquina demoledora persigue los instantes, van empapando, absorbiendo el agua de la clepsidra.
Van acortando el lápiz, acelerando su consunción, al intentar organizar su pervivencia.
Van desposeyéndose, transformándose, escapando, en tanto apresan y precisan y detienen.
Pues seguir no es sino dejar atrás, pasar la llana al compás de los péndulos, ahondar la saeta en el último tramo, fingiendo desdenar, o desmentir, el pacto que liga la fragilidad a la existencia. (27)

(Still, writing leaves behind its lines unleashing its uncontainable wake: an imprint that redries its lacquered wound; sentiments that move away until they disappear, until they sink into an abyss, rapid, in the clouded gusts of the beginning.
As it grows its cars of perishable cargo become smaller: images that become reflection; party lines that accumulate their dregs, that domesticate their meanings until they no longer exist.
Irreversibly, the words, as they advance, as they open a path in the void, while their destructive machine chases the instants, gradually sop up, absorb the water from the clepsydra. They slowly cut back the pencil, accelerating their consumption, trying to organize their survival.
They slowly dispossess themselves, transforming themselves, escaping, while they capture and define and arrest.
For continuing is nothing more than leaving behind, ironing out the beat of the pendulums, sinking the arrow in the last passage, pretending to disdain, or disprove, the pact that links fragility to existence.)

Writing is conceived metaphorically as a boat leaving a wake behind in the water (like Machado’s “estelas en la mar”), as a train vanishing into the horizon, and as destructive machine for “killing time.” Instead of retarding time, then, the poet’s words accelerate it, even in the process of trying to “organizar su pervivencia,” that is, to create a poetic form that defeats time. The traditional eternalizing function of poetic form appears in this poem, but only to be negated. Words capture something, it is true: “apresan y precisan y detienen.” Yet this capacity to define and fix reality acquires no positive connotation in this context. Instead of being a hedge against time, writing is an ally of its destructiveness.

Another metapoetic text, “Por qué mi carne no te quiere verbo,” links desire with its linguistic mediation, but in a rather puzzling way:
Por qué mi carne no te quiere verbo,
por qué no te conjuga, por qué no te reparte,
por qué desde las tapias no saltan buganvillas
con tus significados
y en miradas de azogue no reverbera el sol
dando de ti noticia,
ni se destapan cajas con tu música
y su claro propósito,
y ningún diccionario ajeno te interpreta.
Por qué, por qué, Amor mío,
eres mapa ilegible,
flecha desorientada,
regalo ensimismado en su intacto envoltorio,
palabra indivisible que nace y muere en mí. (33)

(Why does my flesh not want you to be Word,
why won’t it conjugate you, why won’t it distribute you,
why from the garden wall are bougainvillaea
not jumping with your meanings
and in gazes of mercury does the sun not reverberate
with news of you,
nor are boxes opened
with your music
and its clear purpose.
Why, why, My love,
are you an illegible map,
an arrow without a target,
a gift absorbed in its intact wrappings,
indivisible word that is born and dies in me.)

Why, this poem seems to be asking, is language unable to convert the desired object into an interpretable sign? In the final rhetorical question posed here the object of desire frustrates all attempts at “legibility,” while the subject’s attempted linguistic manipulation of reality is identified with a state of narcissistic self-absorption: “palabra indivisible que nace y muere en mí.” On a closer reading, however, a more subtle question emerges: why does my flesh not even desire to recreate a linguistic simulacrum of the beloved object? Why, in other words, is the usual sort of linguistic mediation rejected in favor of a deliberately opaque, almost private language? One possible answer—if it is permissible to respond to such rhetorical questions—is that this sort of linguistic transformation of the object of desire, often figured as the (male) poet writing directly onto a woman’s body, would no longer be “desirable,” even if it were possible. In other words, the idea of gaining access to the beloved through a poetic simulacrum—long a staple of lyric poetry—no longer seems viable. Yet the rhetoric of this poem suggests that the simple rejection of this attempt is
utterly unsatisfactory: the speaker is reduced to asking herself, in plaintive
tones, why this lyric convention no longer functions as it should. The failure of
the topos of “the word made flesh” leaves her even more self-absorbed than a
more conventional lyric speaker might be.

Other poems in Punto umbrío also offer implicit critiques of poetic conven-
tions. Often these poems sound like self-reproaches; that is, they appear to be
directed against the characteristic habits of thought of the speaker herself. “Hay
sueños que no mueren,” one of the most striking poems in the book, pillories
the lyrical pretension toward recreating an eternal present:

Hay sueños que no mueren, se empeñan
en ser sueños.
Ajenos a la comba de la esfera
y a las operaciones de los astros
trazan su propia órbita inmutable,
y en blindadas crisálidas, se protegen
del orden temporal.
Por eso es que perduran,
porque eligen no ser.
Negándose se afirman,
rehusando se mantienen, como flores de cuarzo
indestructibles, puros, sin dejarse arrancar
de su durmiente ínsula.
Intactos en el tiempo,
son inmunes a la devastación
que a cada vuelta acecha, inhumana,
a la pasión que exige y que devora,
a la desobediencia y extravío
que en los vagabundeos centellean.
Monedas que el avaro recuenta sigiloso
nunca salen del fondo del bolsillo.
No ambicionan. No arriesgan. No conquistan.
No pagarán el precio del fracaso,
la experiencia, la determinación,
la ebriedad o el placer.
Sólo son impecables subterfugios. (62)

(There are dreams that do not die, they insist
on being dreams.
Alien to the dome of the sphere
and to the operations of the stars
they trace their own immutable orbit,
and in armored chrysalises, protect themselves
from the temporal order.
That is why they last,
because they choose not to be.)
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Denying themselves they affirm themselves,
renouncing they maintain themselves, like flowers of quartz
indestructible, pure, without letting themselves be torn
from their sleeping island.
Intact in time,
they are are immune from the devastation
that lies in wait around every corner, inhuman,
to the passion that demands and devours,
to the disobedience and extravagance
that glitter in wanderings.
Coins that the miser secretly counts
never emerge from the bottom of the pocket.
They do not aspire. They do not risk. They do not conquer.
They will not pay the price of failure,
experience, determination,
drunkenness or pleasure.
They are but impeccable subterfuges.)

This poem could be a warning against a particular variety of literary “autonomy”
or “purity”: the achievement of an indestructible poetic “ínsula” has only
negative implications. Standing apart from temporality, dreams create their own
sterile reality. The striking images of the poem evoke a set of negative attitudes
ranging from sterile solipsistic autonomy to self-abnegation, cowardice, isolation,
and avarice. The sort of desires nurtured in such lyric conventions remain
alive, paradoxically, because they are fixed in a state of suspended animation.
Rossetti’s rejection of the sterility of unacted dreams comes quite close
to William Blake’s insights in his “Proverbs of Hell”: “Expect poison from the
standing water” (9). “Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted
desires” (10). Lorca’s perspective of the infinite deferral of desire in works like
Así que pasen cinco años is also relevant in this context.

The immediate Spanish tradition offers several other instructive parallels
to Rossetti’s rejection of narcissistic desire. Claudio Rodríguez’s “Nieve en la
noche” also condemns an inert desire that refuses to take risks:

Tan sin dolor, su entrega
es crueldad. Cae, cae
hostil al canto, lenta,
bién domada, bien dócil,
como sujeta a riendas
que nunca se aventuran
a conquistar. (159)

(So without pain, its surrender
is cruelty. It falls, it falls
hostile to song, slow,
well broken, well tame,
as though subject to reins
that never adventure
to conquest.)

The following poem from Pedro Salinas’s *Largo lamento* appears to express an opposing perspective:

No rechaces los sueños por ser sueños.
Todos los sueños pueden
ser realidad, si el sueño no se acaba.
La realidad es un sueño. Si soñamos
que la piedra es piedra, eso es la piedra.
Lo que corre en los ríos no es un agua,
es un soñar, el agua, cristalino.
La realidad disfraza
su propio sueño, y dice:
“Yo soy el sol, los cielos, el amor.”
Pero nunca se va, nunca se pasa,
si fingimos creer que es más que un sueño.
Y vivimos soñándola. Soñar
es el modo que el alma
tiene para que nunca se le escape
lo que se escaparía si dejamos
de soñar que es verdad lo que no existe.
Solo muere
un amor que ha dejado de soñarse
hecho materia y que se busca en tierra. (603)

(Do not reject dreams just because they are dreams. All dreams can become reality, if the dream never ends. Reality is a dream. If we dream that stone is stone, that is stone. What runs in the rivers is not water, it is a crystalline dream of the water. Reality disguises its own dream, and says “I am the sun, the heavens, love.” But it never leaves, it never passes by, if we pretend to believe that it is more than a dream. And we live dreaming it. Dreaming is the way that the soul finds to not let escape what would escape if we stopped dreaming that what exists is not true. Only a love that is no longer dreamt will die transformed into material and searched for on the earth.)
In Salinas’s poem, the world of dreams assumes the form of a “virtual reality” in which no possibility is foreclosed upon. Yet it is in seeking their fulfillment on the earth that these dreams of love meet their death. The solution, then, is to preserve desire in a state of suspended animation. This is precisely the solution rejected in Rossetti’s poem. Where Salinas’s dreams are creative, Rossetti’s are sterile and avaricious. In the context of Salinas’s love poetry, “No rechaces los sueños por ser sueños” can be read as an elegy for a desire that is already irrecoverably lost. Its affirmation of the validity of an autonomous dream world, then, becomes a transparently defensive strategy, an effort to avoid accepting a loss that has already occurred.

In the final poem of Punto umbrío the speaker surrenders to desire, putting an end to perpetual deferral. This is the logical conclusion to the sequence, since the end of linguistic deferral also brings to an end the metapoetic play with the conventions of lyric poetry:

Como si una linterna me arrancara
de en medio de la noche,
así me descubriste, así me señalaste.
Así horadaste mis silencios escarpados y troquelaste
las fronteras de mi isla.
Nombrándome me expones, me sitúas en el ojo de la diana.
No hay lugar para el ardid, no hay escondite.
Soy blanco paralizado, centro de tu voluntad, destino
de tu atención y tu advertencia.
¿A qué esperas?
No rehúyo la luz.
Hágase en mí lo que tu dardo indica. (65)

(As though a lantern were rooting me out from the middle of the night,
so you uncovered me, so you pointed me out.
So you drilled through my steep silences and stamped out the edges of my island.
Naming me you expose me, you situate me in the bull’s-eye.
There is no place for a ruse, there is no place to hide.
I am paralyzed target, center of your will, destiny of your attention and your warning.
What are you waiting for?
I won’t shrink from the light.
Let what your dart ordains be done in me.)

By renouncing deferral, the speaker of this final poem also appears to surrender her own subjective autonomy. Desire thus attains a paradoxical status, since it is simultaneously what the subject wants and does not want: while desire springs from the subject’s own urges, the surrender to desire is perceived as a
weakening of will. To submit to desire is at once a form of slavery and of freedom, the expression of one’s own will and the enslavement to a force outside of one’s control. As Luis Cernuda writes in Los placeres prohibidos: “Libertad no quiero sino la libertad de ser preso en alguien” (I want no freedom but the freedom to be the prisoner in someone).

This paradox, in which freedom and compulsion, autonomy and dependence, appear to exchange places, holds the key to the speaker’s ambivalence throughout Punto umbrío. This ambivalence (like the equally ambivalent treatment of the conventions of lyric poetry) lends itself to a deconstructive mode of analysis, in which opposing terms are shown to be radically interdependent. Although these “deconstructive” turns might appear to distance Rossetti from the lyric tradition, the opposite is closer to the truth. To view poetic language as a continual deferral of desire, a deferral that the subject simultaneously elaborates and destroys through language, is simply to insert Rossetti’s sequence within the time-worn topoi of the Western lyric tradition.

The question of what Rossetti brings to this tradition, then, seems inescapable. Like Petrarch, Rossetti could be said to be an original poet working primarily with inherited material. In Rossetti’s case, however, this material is itself derived from the Petrarchan tradition. One tempting answer would be to claim that Rossetti subverts the occidental tradition through her deconstructive play with language. The obvious objection, however, is that this tradition is itself already deconstructive in a linguistically self-conscious way. Metapoetry in the 1990s, after a full century of linguistic self-consciousness, is surely no novelty; what is more, Rossetti’s “subversion” of lyric conventions in this book, while intriguing, is relatively tame, a subtle rather than violent reversal of generic expectations.

Another, possibly more promising approach would be to emphasize the stylistic flair with which she rewrites these conventions. What is most striking about Rossetti’s Punto umbrío is its exuberant and intense expressionism. Reading Rossetti, we suddenly realize (if we have not realized it before) that many late modernist and neo-avant-projects in contemporary Spanish poetry are marked by a certain refusal of pleasure. Valente’s minimalism, Brines’s sober pudor, and Panero’s schizophrenic Mallarméan ascesis come to mind. On the other hand, attempts to break from this puritanism have not been wholly successful; Antonio Colinas’s self-consciously “beautiful” aesthetic effects are often in doubtful taste. The contemporary suspicion of “beauty,” a logical development of Kantian disinterestedness, finds expression in Adorno’s rejection of hedone:

The precondition for the autonomy of artistic experience is the abandonment of the attitude of tasting and savouring. The trajectory leading to aesthetic autonomy passes through the stage of disinterestedness; and well it should, for it was during this stage that art emancipated itself from cuisine and pornography,
Desire Deferred: Ana Rossetti’s Punto umbrío an emancipation that has become irrevocable. However, art does not come to rest in disinterestedness. It moves on. And in so doing it reproduces, in different form, the interest inherent in disinterestedness. In a false world all *hedone* is false. This goes for artistic pleasure, too. Art renounces happiness for the sake of happiness, thus enabling desire to survive in art. (Adorno 18)

It would be hard to find a theoretical statement more sharply at odds with Rossetti’s sensibility. Instead of divorcing art from pornography, or sublimating desire through ascesis, she makes full use of her poetic powers in order to re-establish the connection between art and pleasure. As in her earlier work, one key source of Rossetti’s appeal in *Punto umbrío* is the lushness and sensuality of her poetic language, with its alliterations, branching polysyndetons, and expansive metaphors. What is added in these later poems, nevertheless, is a more subtle interplay of surface and depth, as the beauty of the poet’s language arouses, defers, and fulfills readerly desires.

Notes
1. This narrow response stems, in part, from the disproportionate amount of attention devoted to “Chico Wrangler” and “Calvin Klein, underdrawers.” Until very recently, most of the articles published on Rossetti limited themselves to these two texts (Makris, Rosas and Cramsie, Servodidio, Ferrradans, Ugalde, Wilcox 289–90). Debicki summarizes some potential responses to Rossetti’s poetry as follows: “We might note that this text [“Chico Wrangler”], and others like it, leave much to the reader, whose response to the speaker can take several forms—the amused smile of the feminist, the surprised discovery of some traditional readers, even the irritation of the sexist male” (213). Debicki’s valid point about the text’s openness is undercut by his possibly overconfident predictions of how particular groups of readers will respond: some feminists might respond with irritation to the text and some sexist males (e.g. Buenaventura) will be titillated.
2. Martha LaFolette Miller’s two articles on this book offer a useful perspective that does not overtly contradict my own reading of *Punto umbrío*.
3. Some readers will conclude that Rossetti’s latest work is more “mature” or “profound” than her earlier work. I believe, however, that an emphasis on language as mediation would also enrich the reading of books such as *Devocionario*.
4. Wilcox expresses a view shared by many critics: “In ‘Calvin Klein,’ Rossetti makes the female power of seduction paramount, as she undermines traditional views of gender and foregrounds a woman’s desire” (290). This reversal of expectations perhaps recedes in importance after the initial shock value has worn off. Thus it seems less significant to me now than when I first encountered this argument about Rossetti’s poetry several years ago. In the age of Madonna, it is difficult to be shocked by anything Rossetti has written.
5. *Punto umbrío* bears an epigraph from book 10 of Augustine’s *Confessions*: “He hecho de mí un enigma a vuestros ojos. Ésta es mi trágica dolencia” (7). See Bermúdez for an Augustinian reading of *Punto umbrío* that complements my approach.
6. See Frecce for a now-classic discussion of temporality in Petrarch’s *Rime sparse*.
7. This elegiac tone is more explicit *Razón de amor* and *Largo lamento*, but it is already latent in many poem from *La voz a ti debida*.
8. Compare Eve Sedgwick’s analysis of contemporary discourses surrounding addiction:
“so long as ‘free will’ has been hypostasized and charged with ethical value, for just so long has an equally hypostasized ‘compulsion’ had to be available as a counterstructure always internal to it, always requiring to be ejected from it” (133–34). This view of desire, analogous to that found in Rossetti’s work though quoted here out of context, is characteristically “deconstructive” both in its curious logic and its tortured syntax.