Recasting women's stories : in the poetry of Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon, and Christina Rossetti

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CHAPTER 6

Rewriting the Story of Redemption in "Goblin Market"

Rossetti's Fallen Women

Victorian representations of fallen women may be seen to reflect a conventional Christian view of women as inherently sinful: all women are daughters of Eve, who ate the forbidden fruit in defiance of God's command.[1] Because of their sinful nature, women need to be strictly supervised. With the protection of the family home and the support of a strong man (such as a father or a husband), women can be kept innocent and pure.[2] Without such control, they can easily degenerate into fallen women. Once classified as "fallen", they are destined to ruin: they are abandoned by their lovers or husbands, become outcasts of society, and end up dying destitute.[3] This is a typical scenario for

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[1] For the image of Eve as fallible femininity and its adaptation as visual representations of an adulteress in the Victorian period, see Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 73-74. Cullen Murphy introduces a reinterpretation of the Genesis story of Adam and Eve that challenges the traditional understanding of Eve. See Cullen Murphy, *The Word According to Eve: Women and the Bible in Ancient Times and Our Own* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 52-53.

[2] Kathleen Hickok points out the importance of the family for women's propriety in the Victorian period. She explains that women were defined by society as "relative" creatures, and seen as "existing – legally, economically, and socially – chiefly in relationship to others, especially their families". See Kathleen Hickok, *Representations of Women: Nineteenth-century Women's Poetry* (London: Greenwood P, 1984), 4.

[3] This destiny for fallen women is not unlike that of women poets in the poetry of Hemans and Landon discussed in the previous chapters of this study. Christina Rossetti's interest in fallen women suggests that she sees similarities between women poets like herself and fallen women. For representations of fallen women going down the road to ruin in Victorian paintings, see Takahashi Yuko and Takahashi Tatsushi, *Victorian Kaleidoscope* (Tokyo: Shincyousya, 1993), 93-102. Good examples of

the lives of fallen women in literature and art.

Fallen women are repeatedly represented using a horrifying imagery of contagion. Lynda Nead points out that, while women can be portrayed as passive victims of a cruel society, an equally dominant image is that of "contagion, disease and death; a sign of social disorder and ruin to be feared and controlled" (Nead, 97). When these two images are conflated in one and the same text, they project contradictory feelings of both compassion and fear toward fallen women (Nead, 106).[4]

In the previous chapter we saw Rossetti's Eve affectionately called "our Mother", and accorded respect and compassion. Rather than representing fallen women as irredeemably polluted, Rossetti often suggests their purity. In doing so, she blurs the distinction between pure and impure, often used to divide women into two extreme types. This section looks at some more aspects of Rossetti's fallen women, who show a wide range of emotions including pleasure, sorrow, and anger. They are not passive objects of pity and fear, but have a will of their own. This portrayal is in sharp contrast to the fallen woman seen from a man's point of view in Rossetti's brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti's dramatic monologue "Jenny" (1848).[5] As Noriyuki Nozue suggests, "Jenny" is a typical example of a text that locates a fallen woman as the object of the male gaze. In the poem the sleeping prostitute named Jenny reflects the male speaker's sexual desires and gendered ideologies that presuppose women's sexual subordination to men:[6]

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paintings of fallen women include *The Outcast* by Richard Redgrave (1804-1889), *The Infidelity Discovered, The Abandoned Daughters*, and *The Wife Abandoned By Her Lover With Her Bastard Child* by Augustus Egg (1816-1863).

[4] Amanda Anderson explains that the term "fallen woman" can be applied to a wide range of female figures – prostitutes, unmarried women who engage in sexual relations with men, victims of seduction, married women who engage in adultery – and indicates tabooed behaviors or a debased condition. Depictions of fallenness tend to show "the attenuated autonomy and fractured identity of the fallen figure". See Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (New York, Cornell UP, 1993), 2.

[5] D. G. Rossetti, *The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. William M. Rossetti, 2 vols. (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1897), vol. 1, 83-94.

[6] Noriyuki Nozue, "Has the 'Mystery' Been Solved?: Representations of a Whore in 'Jenny'" (text in Japanese), in *Hirogari to Fukami – Eigo Sekai wo Yomu*, ed. Zenichiro Oshitani (Osaka: Osaka Kyoiku Tosyo, 1998), 332-44, 333-36.

Yet, Jenny, looking long at you,
The woman almost fades from view.
A cipher of man's changeless sum
Of lust, past, present, and to come,
Is left …

(lines 276-80)

While Jenny is reduced to being merely a "cipher" of man's lust, Christina Rossetti's fallen women have their own stories to tell. The speaker in "Cousin Kate" (1862) was "cast [away]" by a "great lord", who in the end marries her cousin Kate (lines 24, 7).[7] She is upset that Kate is called "good and pure" by the neighbors, while she is scorned as an "outcast thing" (27, 28). Feeling the unfairness of the scorn, the speaker criticizes her former lover for treating her like a commodity: "he wore me like a silken knot, / He changed me like a glove" (13-14). She also reproaches Kate for accepting the man's marriage offer, disregarding the plight of the abandoned woman (the speaker herself):

If you stood where I stand,
He'd not have won me with his love
Nor bought me with his land;
I would have spit into his face
And not have taken his hand.

(36-40)

The speaker in "An Apple-Gathering" (1861), another woman cast away, has "no apples … in due season" (lines 3-4).[8] As if to make fun of the speaker, her former lover walks with another girl, who carries a basket full of apples. He does not show any sign of regret about being unfaithful to the speaker, whose empty basket symbolizes her desolate state. The speaker's lament is mingled with reproach of the man for abandoning her after playing with her affections: "Ah Willie, Willie, was my love less worth / Than apples with their green leaves piled above? … To think that by this way we used to walk / We shall not walk again!" (17-18, 23-24).

In "Light Love" (1863) the female protagonist talks with her

[7] "Cousin Kate", in *CPCR*, vol. I, 31-32.
[8] "An Apple-Gathering", in *CPCR*, vol. I, 43-44.

former lover, who has seduced and betrayed her.[9] She holds her illegitimate baby at her breast and tells him that she still has warm feelings for him. However, he jeers at her and cruelly advises her to find "another love … to build [a] nest of silk and gold" (lines 23, 25). He insinuates that she has become a woman who sells her body for money. The man's insult reflects his use of a double standard: once fallen, the woman becomes "impure" and is not valued as a bride, whereas the man who wronged her has no problem finding another woman to marry. Resenting this unfairness, the female protagonist is determined to argue back. Holding her baby tight, she proclaims her enduring love as a mother, dismissing the man's frivolous and harmful love – the "Light Love" of the title – for women:

> "Even let it go, the love that harms:
> We twain will never part;
> Mine own, his own, how dear thou art."
>
> (38-40)

The man continues insulting her, boasting of his new bride, whom he describes in sexual terms as "ripe-blooming" and "trembl[ing] in [his] reach" (46, 48). The female protagonist retorts sharply, predicting that his new love will soon be "cast down and trampled in the snows" (63). This way, she effectively brings to light how men's wrongs cause women's fall.

In "The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children" (1866) the mother sheds tears of joy at being reunited after a long absence with her illegitimate daughter (the speaker of the poem).[10] She is, however, criticized by her daughter because she continues to keep their mother-daughter relation secret, not only from society but even from her own child: she fears acquiring a bad reputation. Significantly, this "fallen woman" is criticized not for her sin and contagion, but for her secrecy. The poem subtly subverts the customary view of a fallen woman as someone to be feared, and as someone who must be silenced and eliminated from society: it instead promotes the idea that

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[9] "Light Love", in *CPCR*, vol. I, 136-38.

[10] "The Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children", in *CPCR*, vol. I, 164-78. I discussed the poem more in detail in "Christina Rossetti in Secrecy: Revising the Poetics of Sensibility", in Garlick, 177-92.

she should speak up to clarify how she was wronged.

Unlike those in conventional Victorian stories, fallen women in Rossetti's poetry are not sinful and impure. Instead they are victims, abandoned by unfaithful men and unfairly scorned by their community. Furthermore, instead of silently enduring their plight, they raise their voice against those in their community who wrong them. "Goblin Market", the poem I discuss in the next section, also tells the story of a fallen woman that differs from conventional ones. In this poem an Eve-like fallen woman is rescued by a Christ-like figure, who takes action spurred by compassion for her suffering.

"Goblin Market"

"Goblin Market" (1862) is written in an allegorical fairy-tale style.[11] The poem's suggestive details have invited numerous interpretations from different perspectives such as Christianity, sexuality, and economics.[12] Possible influences of certain works of literature on the poem have been explored as well.[13] A number of studies suggest that

[11] "Goblin Market", in *CPCR*, vol. I, 11-26.

[12] The poem has attracted attention not only from critics, but also from publishers with an eye to marketing. In the 1960s and 1970s, there appeared newly illustrated versions of "Goblin Market" for both the juvenile and the pornographic markets: in the modern age, Rossetti's fairy-tale depiction of goblin men and look-alike sisters arouses the erotic imagination. For a reception history of "Goblin Market" from the perspectives of academic interest and illustrated publications, see Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, "Modern Markets for *Goblin Market*", in *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 32, nos. 3-4 (1994), 249-77.

[13] "The Sources of Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'", in *Modern Language Review*, 28 (1933), 156-65, by B. Ifor Evans is an early article that attempts to locate the sources of the poem. Evans suggests the influences of Rossetti's contemporaries such as Thomas Keightley (1789-1872) and William Allingham (1824-1889), who produced books of fairy mythology. Ronald D. Morrison sees the influence upon "Goblin Market" of *The Vampyre* (1819) written by John Polidori (1795-1821), and Kathleen Vejvoda hypothesizes that Milton's *Comus* (1634) had an influence on the poem. See Ronald D. Morrison, "'Their fruits like honey in the throat / But poison in the blood': Christina Rossetti and *The Vampyre*", in *Weber Studies: An Interdisciplinary Humanities Journal*, vol. 14, 2 (Spring/Summer 1997), 86-96, and Kathleen Vejvoda, "The Fruit of Charity: *Comus* and Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*", in *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 38, no. 4 (Winter 2000), 555-78.

the story refers to the biblical story of temptation, fall, and redemption. One of the two sisters, Laura, represents Eve in Genesis: she is tempted to taste the forbidden fruits and experiences a "fall" (mental and physical decline). The other sister, Lizzie, plays the role of Christ: she saves her fallen sister's life by an act of self-sacrifice.[14] Several studies discuss the relation of the poem to Rossetti's reclamation work for fallen women at Highgate Penitentiary. They suggest that Rossetti in this poem celebrates sisterly love, showing the way women can play an active role in society helping women in distress. [15] Studies from new perspectives continue to appear, testifying to the many-faceted nature of this intriguing poem.[16]

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[14] One early article that discusses this parallel to the Christian story of redemption is John Heath-Stubbs, "Pre-Raphaelitism and the Aesthetic Withdrawal", in *The Darkling Plain* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1950), 148-78, rpt. in *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. James Sambrook (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974), 166-85.

[15] Jan Marsh suggests that Rossetti may have written the poem with the hopeful prospect of rescuing fallen women through the idea of sisterhood. See Jan Marsh, "Christina Rossetti's Vocation: The Importance of *Goblin Market*", in *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 32, nos. 3-4 (1994), 233-48. D. M. R. Bentley suggests that "*Goblin Market* ... was originally written as an 'exemplary tale made imaginative' to be read aloud by Rossetti to an audience of fallen women … at the St. Mary Magdalen Home for Fallen Women at Highgate Hill". See Bentley, "The Meretricious and the Meritorious in *Goblin Market*: A Conjecture and an Analysis", in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. David A. Kent (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987), 57-81, 58. For Rossetti's work at Highgate from 1859 to 1870 and her lifelong interest in the reclamation of prostitutes, see also Dian D'Amico, "'Equal before God': Christina Rossetti and the Fallen Women of Highgate Penitentiary", in *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art*, eds. Antony H. Harrison and Beverly Taylor (Dekalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1992), 67-83.

[16] To name a few examples, Kirsten E. Escober considers the poem as a revision of the biblical story of the prodigal son; Rebecca F. Stern situates the poem in the historical context of food adulteration, a widespread problem in Victorian England, especially in the 1850s (the poem was composed in 1859). Herbert Tucker, praising recent interpretations of the poem (in the 1990s) from the perspective of economics or systems of commodity exchange that transformed Victorian society, adds to them a new element of "advertising". This element is clearly seen in the goblin men's advertising cry. See Kristen E. Escober, "Female Saint, Female Prodigal: Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'", in *Religion and the Arts* vol. 5, nos. 1-2 (1 March 2001), 129-54; Rebecca F. Stern, "Adulterations Detected": Food and Fraud in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'", in *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 57, no. 4 (Mar 2003), 477-511; and Herbert Tucker, "Rossetti's Goblin Marketing: Sweet to Tongue and Sound to Eye", in *Representations* 82 (Spring 2003), 117-33.

In this section, referring to some of these studies, I do a close reading of "Goblin Market". Firstly, I suggest that the story of Laura's tasting forbidden fruits and wasting away from thirst is a reenactment of the lot of Hemans' and Landon's heroines. Secondly, I offer a theological interpretation of the story. More specifically, I compare Laura's story to the conventional understanding of the biblical story of Eve, and Lizzie's salvation of her sister to the prevailing interpretation of Christ's redemption of human sins. This way, we explore the way Rossetti retells the story of suffering women as depicted by Hemans and Landon, and recasts the Christian stories of Eve's sin and Christ's redemption of humanity.

The poem starts with the goblins' enticing cry, "Come buy our orchard fruits, / Come buy, come buy" (lines 3-4). Laura and Lizzie hear their cry morning and evening, and both sisters recognize that it is dangerous to get involved with the goblins. However, while Lizzie controls herself and runs back home, Laura cannot resist the lure of their fruits. A number of critics see a correspondence between Laura and Eve in Genesis, who ate fruit in defiance of God's command. Some of them judge Laura negatively, viewing her as pursuing sensory and material gratification. For instance, Mary Arseneau regards Laura's act as a failure to understand the deep meanings with which God invests nature.[17] Is Laura, then, a sinful woman? Is she a woman who should be despised?

In the previous chapter we saw that conventional negative views of Eve as sinful and contaminated do not apply to Rossetti's Eve and Eve-like women. "Goblin Market" is no exception. After Laura comes back from a feast with the goblin men, the sisters sleep together in peace. Note how images of purity dominate the scene:

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[17] Mary Arseneau, "Incarnation and Interpretation: Christina Rossetti, the Oxford Movement, and *Goblin Market*", in *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 31, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 79-93, 85. Richard Menke also seems to interpret Laura's desire negatively. Regarding "Goblin Market" as a poem about consumers and markets, he contends that Laura's desire is represented as "commodity fetishism" in the Victorian period. He argues that Rossetti, engaging in "renunciatory ethics or aesthetics", suggests the danger of such fetishism. See Richard Menke, "The Political Economy of Fruit: Goblin Market", in *The Culture of Christina Rossetti: Female Poetics and Victorian Contexts*, eds. Mary Arseneau, Antony H. Harrison, and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra (Athens: Ohio UP, 1999), 105-36, 130.

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-fallen snow,
Like two wands of ivory
Tipped with gold for awful kings.
Moon and stars beamed in at them,
Wind sang to them lullaby,
Lumbering owls forbore to fly,
Not a bat flapped to and fro
Round their rest:
Cheek to cheek and breast to breast
Locked together in one nest.

(184-98)

The images of "gold", "pigeons", "blossoms" and "flakes" of snow, conventionally associated with freshness and holiness, indicate the sisters' innocence. Their goodness is further emphasized by the absence of bats, which symbolize evil and uncleanliness.[18] Laura's tasting the goblin fruits may be a deviation from social wisdom, but the scene suggests that it does not automatically mean she has lost her purity.

The goblin men who sell the fruits, in contrast, are portrayed as malicious seducers. When Laura approaches them, they secretly signal to each other as if to say that they have an easy prey. In setting a trap for a woman, the goblins can be associated with the serpent that seduced Eve in Genesis. Upon meeting the goblins, Laura initiates the conversation, playing an active part in the scene:

"Good folk, I have no coin;
To take were to purloin:
I have no copper in my purse,
I have no silver either,
And all my gold is on the furze
That shakes in windy weather
Above the rusty heather."

[18] See the entry for "bat" in de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*.

(116-22)

Laura knows clearly what she wants, and negotiates with the sellers. She politely addresses the goblin men, and discusses the terms of a transaction. This is an attempt to legitimately participate in men's economic activities, and Laura can be seen as aiming to be on an equal footing with men. Since she does not have the money necessary for the purchase, she proposes instead to offer labor – collecting golden blossoms on the furze in the field. However, the goblins reject her proposal. The only thing left for Laura to offer the goblin men is her "golden lock", which they demand from her in exchange for the fruits.

This negotiation with the goblin men reflects difficulties of women's situation in society. Firstly, Laura has no money: this symbolizes the situation of many Victorian women without financial security. Secondly, her proposal to offer labor is rejected: this seems to refer to Victorian women's limited possibilities in the labor market. To obtain what she wants, Laura has no choice but to offer her golden lock: part of her physical self. For a woman to offer a lock of her hair can be considered a metaphor for losing her virginity.[19] Laura thus becomes men's merchandise, as one of the fallen women of the Victorian period. The scene suggests that her fall is due to social conditions affording women only limited possibilities to pursue their desires.[20]

What, then, do the goblin fruits stand for? They may simply represent attractive merchandise that women may wish to buy. But in a wider perspective, the fruits can be seen to symbolize a variety of rewards gained from social activities in a capitalist society. The exuberance of the fruits and the elaborateness of the fruit plates

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[19] Rossetti's poem "Maggie a Lady" uses this metaphor exactly in this sense. See *CPCR*, vol. I, 140-41. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Jenny" associates the whore's "golden hair" with "golden coins", indicating that a woman's sexuality is interchangeable with money. See Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, vol. I, 92-93.

[20] Compare Florence Nightingale's lament over the impossibility for women to pursue their dreams or desires, in "The Age, the World, Humanity", that do not "give them the means to exercise … moral activity … intellectual cultivation, spheres of action". Florence Nightingale, *Cassandra and Other Selections from Suggestions for Thought*, ed. Mary Poovey (New York: New York UP, 1993), 227.

suggest that they are a symbol of artistic excellence and success, which women may desire but which are conventionally reserved almost exclusively for men. Under this reading, Laura is closely linked with some of Hemans' and Landon's heroines: they pursue careers in the arts, in defiance of men's objection to women's entering such professions.[21]

Laura's experience with the goblins ends up leaving her hungry and thirsty, as she can no longer obtain the goblin fruits. The day after the feast Laura realizes, to her horror, that she cannot hear the goblins' cry, while Lizzie still can. She suffers burning thirst, to the point of dying. This may be considered punishment for her attempt to enter the male market. Desperately hoping to eat the goblin fruits again, Laura plants her kernel-stone, a remnant of the fruits that she obtained from the goblins. She tends the seed with hope and tears, but it never sprouts. Although ending in failure, this episode of planting a kernel-stone subtly indicates Laura's inherently fertile nature:[22] her life-nurturing qualities as Eve, "our Mother".[23]

The way Laura desires and pines away reminds us of Hemans' and

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[21] Catherine Maxwell sees the poem as "a commentary on women's dangerous yet necessary relation to the male literary tradition", and reads the goblin fruits as a symbol of "male [literary] text":

> Rossetti's poem reveals that women cannot enter [the male literary] tradition on the same footing as men, any more than they can compete with men on equal terms in the mid-Victorian marketplace. Yet it also suggests that female interaction with the male tradition, however complicated and risky, is inevitable …. [T]he goblins and the need to conquer them are necessary, as the poem charts a typical path from innocence to experience.

See Catherine Maxwell, "Tasting the 'Fruit Forbidden': Gender, Intertextuality, and Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*", in Arseneau, Harrison and Kooistra, 75-101, 84.

Yumi Sato also sees the goblin market as a metaphor for the literary market. She suggests that Rossetti probably associated herself, a female poet earning money by selling poetry, with sexually "fallen" women in the Victorian period. She argues that the poem in which Laura buys the goblin fruits with her "golden lock" (virginity) is an expression of Rossetti's entering the "literary marketplace". See Yumi Sato, "'No Friend Like a Sister': Womanhood and Poetic Vocation in Christina Rossetti", in *Phoenix* (Hiroshima University), vol. 63 (2005): 1-20, 8-9.

[22] I suggest that the infertility of the kernel-stone is not Laura's fault: it is due to the goblins' malice that still resides in the stone of their fruit.

[23] For Eve's life-nurturing qualities, see my discussion of Rossetti's Eve characters in the previous chapter.

Landon's lovelorn heroines, discussed in Chapter 2. Landon's improvisatrice goes in search of the man she loves in order to "own" him. Like Hemans' Properzia Rossi, she is an artist who pursues public fame. These heroines end up dying after trying to obtain what they want out of life, and their death is presented as consumptive decline. Laura in "Goblin Market" initially appears to be headed for this same fate.

When the three poets' heroines love and decline, similar images repeatedly appear. The decline of Hemans' and Landon's heroines is often described via the image of a withering plant longing for water and nutrition. In "The Improvisatrice", for instance, Landon uses the image of a flower choked by overgrowing weeds and tormented by the heat of the sun (Landon 1825, pages 54, 61). This suggests that outside pressures cause the heroine's decline. However, Landon also uses the image of "fire" within her. This image suggests a symptom of a disease: internal inflammation or fever. In this case, the problem is caused by the heroine herself, rather than by outside pressures:

> … I had been glad
> To mark the paleness of my cheek;
> To feel how, day by day, my step
> Grew fainter, and my hand more weak;
> To know the *fever* of my soul
> Was also preying on my frame:
> But now I would have given worlds
> To change the *crimson hectic's flame*
> For the pure rose of health; to live
> For the dear life that Love could give.
>
> (emphases added; 68-69)

The "crimson hectic's flame", that is, the heroine's passion for love, is destroying her life. What is, then, the cause of her decline? Is it outside pressures, or is it her own fault for being too passionate for love? It remains ambiguous, and this ambiguity reflects the vacillation throughout the poem between the heroine's criticism of society and her criticism of herself.

Like Landon's improvisatrice, the heroine of "Properzia Rossi" as portrayed by Hemans compares herself to helpless plants such as a "reed" (line 76) which needs shelter in a storm, a "drooping vine"

(78) which needs something to entwine itself around, and a "parch'd flower" (80) which longs for a raindrop.[24] She describes how her heart, like these plants, gradually deteriorates without the "meed of love's kind words" (80-81). The cruelty of the environment is emphasized here, and this makes Rossi look like an innocent being. However, the heroine also describes herself using the negative image of a disease:

> Never, oh! never more! Where'er I move,
> The shadow of this broken-hearted love
> Is on me and around! Too well *they* know,
> Whose life is all within, too soon and well,
> When there the blight hath settled; – but I go
> Under the silent wings of peace to dwell;
> From the slow wasting, from the lonely pain,
> The inward burning of those words – "*in vain*,"
> Sear'd on the heart – I go. …
>
> (emphases original; 93-101)

The "blight" (97) that has settled in Rossi's heart is a metaphor for her longing for love. It is an all-consuming fire that destroys her health. The use of the term blight, a plant disease, suggests the heroine's negative evaluation of her own desire. This shift of emphasis from a harsh environment to a disease indicates that the heroine's focus moves from social criticism to self-criticism.

Laura's desire and decline are also presented via the imagery of withering plants and inner heat. Realizing that she would never be able to eat the goblin fruits again, her "tree of life drooped from the root" (260). Suffering from thirst, Laura hallucinates and sees "false waves" of water with the "shade of leaf-crowned trees" (289-90). This suggests that it is the harsh environment that causes Laura's decline. But what torments her most is her desire: a "leaping flame" within her (218). Laura "gnashed her teeth for balked desire" (267), and in a "passionate yearning" starts to decline:

> Day after day, night after night,
> Laura kept watch in vain,

[24] Quotations of "Properzia Rossi" are from Hemans (2000), pages 351-56, and indicated by line numbers.

In sullen silence of exceeding pain.
She never caught again the goblin cry:
"Come buy, come buy,"
… …
… when the moon waxed bright
Her hair grew thin and gray;
She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn
To swift decay, and burn
Her fire away.

(269-80)

Does Laura, then, eventually perish, like Hemans' and Landon's heroines? No, she does not. Laura's affinity with the improvisatrice and Properzia Rossi ends here. Hereafter, the story heads toward the heroine's salvation. Laura's sister Lizzie appears as her rescuer, saving her from the brink of death. Featuring a female rescuer, Rossetti goes beyond her precursors' story of women's decline and death, and she achieves this by incorporating into the story her theological views.

Watching Laura's suffering, Lizzie finally decides to take the risk of buying some goblin fruits for her sister's sake. When Lizzie meets with the goblins, they are infuriated because she talks back to them. The goblins start to bully her, attempting to force her to eat their fruits: they kick and bruise her, and press their fruits against her mouth. Lizzie withstands the assaults, tightly closing her lips and refusing to eat. Finally the goblins give up, toss her "silver penny" back (Lizzie had given them the penny at the start of the negotiations), and disappear. Lizzie runs back home to meet Laura, her face covered with the juice of the fruits that the goblins squeezed against her. Calling to her sister, she is filled with the joy of saving her sister's life:

She cried "Laura," up the garden,
"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."
>
> (464-74)

The line "Eat me, drink me, love me", as is often pointed out, is reminiscent of the Eucharist in which Christ's flesh and blood are offered in the form of bread and wine. When Laura devours the goblin juice that Lizzie brings back, it functions as a strong antidote to the illness caused by her earlier consumption of the same fruits. This transforming effect of the goblin juice is evidence of the power that Lizzie has, similar to Jesus' power to perform miracles, including the healing of the sick and the raising of the dead. Laura is restored to life from a state of "fallenness", thanks to the loving act of her sister Lizzie.

Lizzie's action alludes to Christ's redemption of fallen humans, and in this sense she is a female Christ.[25] Yet there are differences between the poem's story of redemption and traditional Christian ideas of redemption. A feminist theologian, Colleen Carpenter Cullinan, explains traditional ideas of redemption that spread widely after Calvin: God created a perfect world, but because Adam and Eve committed sin (tempted by Eve, Adam committed the original sin), death and suffering were brought into the world. Their sin was passed on to humankind, and all humans are born sinful and deserve God's punishment. However, Christ came to earth to atone for our sins. He offered his life as a sacrifice, to appease God's anger at our sins. Through this atoning sacrifice we are forgiven by God and granted everlasting life (Cullinan, 10-12).

This understanding of redemption, with its views on sin, punishment, and atoning sacrifice, does not fit the story of "Goblin Market". For one thing, while Laura's tasting of the goblin fruits may be a deviation from social convention, it is not necessarily the sin of disobeying God. The poem does not mention God ordering people not to eat the fruits. For another thing, although Lizzie saves her sister's

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[25] The idea of a female Christ was not unusual in the period. Florence Nightingale writes in *Cassandra*, "The next Christ will perhaps be a female Christ" (Nightingale, 230). Nightingale's *Suggestions for Thought*, which contains *Cassandra*, was first published in 1860.

life, she does not offer herself as a sacrifice: Lizzie gets bruised, but she does not die from the experience. The sisters' story differs from the conventional story of redemption, indicating that the poem is telling a different story of redemption.

Why, then, does Rossetti rewrite the conventional story? It is useful to refer again to Cullinan. She points out that there is a danger inherent in the traditional story of redemption: the danger of glorifying suffering. For if Christ's suffering on the cross is the key to our salvation, then suffering is a good thing. This can lead to the idea that any suffering in life should be accepted as a chance to follow Jesus, who endured the agonies of crucifixion. Such glorification of suffering has an especially damaging effect on the suffering poor in society. It can be used by people in power as an excuse to urge the poor to accept their lot as a gift from God (Cullinan, 15-16).[26] I suggest that Rossetti sensed the risk of unintentionally glorifying suffering. She therefore felt it necessary to rewrite the traditional story of redemption and create a new story for the suffering poor – especially women.

Going back to Cullinan, we find her offering alternative stories of redemption to replace the traditional one: those told by Peter Abelard (1079-1142?), a twelfth-century French theologian, and by Julian of Norwich (c.1342-c.1413), a fourteenth-century English female mystic. The main characteristic of their stories is to consider God not as a God of anger, but as a God of love. Abelard objects to the idea of redemption as Christ's sacrificial atonement. He thinks that offering one's son as a sacrifice is too cruel an idea. Did God truly send his son to earth as a sacrifice for human sins, feel gratified to see him killed, and in return reconcile himself with humanity? Abelard does not believe that God would do this. God would never have let Jesus bleed to death, even for the sake of humanity. God's love is so deep that he would surely forgive human sins without requiring someone's life to be sacrificed. Abelard suggests that God guides humans to live not in fear of God, but in the belief that they are loved by him. Redemption is exactly this process by which humans learn to live with God's love, and to live in response to his love. Christ came to earth to show people how to live in this way, as God's children, giving love and compassion to others.

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[26] For Cullinan's discussion, see also the Introduction to the present study.

For Abelard, then, redemption does not mean the one particular event of Christ's death on the cross, nor is redemption something given by God to humans who passively wait for it. Redemption requires humans' active involvement, and for each person it is a life-long process. Cullinan points out that Abelard's interpretation of redemption is significant when seen from the perspective of the salvation of human suffering. For if humans are supposed to respond to other people's suffering with loving compassion, the response will not be to advise a sufferer to patiently endure, but instead to try to relieve that person's suffering.[27]

Rossetti's tale of sisterly salvation in "Goblin Market" can be readily understood in terms of Abelard's ideas of redemption. In saying this I do not mean to suggest that Rossetti was directly influenced by Abelard in this respect. I do not have any clear evidence that she was familiar with his religious thinking.[28] I only want to suggest that Abelard and Rossetti, across time and place, shared similar concerns about the traditional story of redemption, and tried to create an alternative story for people who suffer.

Viewed in the light of Abelard's theory of redemption, Lizzie's act is a loving response to someone else's suffering: Lizzie takes pity on Laura's suffering, and tries to relieve it. In addition, the way Lizzie overcomes her fear corresponds to Abelard's process of redemption in which humans are released from the fear of God. Seeing Laura's suffering, Lizzie initially feels fear: she "Longed to buy fruit to comfort her [Laura], / But feared to pay too dear" (310-11).[29] However, watching her sister weakening day by day, Lizzie finally overcomes her fear. If people think that Laura is being punished by God, then they are people who cannot escape the fear of God. They will abhor Laura, upon whom they think God's anger has fallen. They will regard Laura's case as a frightening lesson, and try to avoid the goblins all the more. Lizzie, however, does not think this way,

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[27] I am heavily indebted to Cullinan's explanation of Abelard's ideas in Cullinan, 25-26. For Abelard's ideas of redemption, see Peter Abelard, "Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans", in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, ed. Eugene R. Fairweather (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), 282-85.

[28] It is possible to speculate, though, that Rossetti's "The Convent Threshold" was inspired by the story of Abelard and his lover Heloise. See my discussion of the poem in Chapter 5.

[29] To be more exact, Lizzie does not fear God, but fears entering men's marketplace.

and eventually ventures into the goblin market to save her sister's life:

> … Laura dwindling
> Seemed knocking at Death's door:
> Then Lizzie weighed no more
> Better and worse,
> But put a silver penny in her purse,
> Kissed Laura, crossed the heath with clumps of furze
> At twilight, halted by the brook,
> And for the first time in her life
> Began to listen and look.
>
> (320-28)

At this moment, she is becoming a woman who lives not with fear but with love, and in this sense is becoming a woman who lives like Christ.

The ideas of sin (fallenness) and redemption as understood by Julian of Norwich shed yet more light on the tale of two sisters.[30] According to Julian, human sin or fallenness is not something to despise, but rather something to take pity on. Julian explains sin using the image of a servant who, in his attempt to serve his master (God), accidentally falls into a pit and gets bruised. He is exceedingly saddened by his failure, and suffers without any hope of rescue. He thinks that he is worthless and sinful, and feels ashamed. However, Julian muses, God will not accuse his servant, who is lamenting in a pit. Instead, God will feel pity for his loneliness, worries and pain, and try to rescue him from his suffering. Christ is a person who was sent to humans to guide people to feel this love of God. Cullinan suggests that Julian's notion of the relationship between a servant and his master is a view of redemption that truly saves humans – especially women – who get into predicaments leading them to think that they are worthless and sinful (Cullinan, 28-29).[31]

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[30] Jan Marsh briefly points out some similarities between Rossetti and Julian. According to Marsh, Rossetti's book on the saints' days (entitled *Annus Domini*) lies within a tradition that dates back to "mystical writers such as the fourteenth-century Englishwoman Julian of Norwich", and Rossetti's idea of God as loving Mother is similar to Julian's meditation on the "mothering role of Christ" (Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, 452, 468).

[31] For the notion of the relationship between a servant and his master (a sinful human and God) proposed by Julian of Norwich, see Julian of Norwich, *The*

The image of sin as an inadvertent fall applies to the plight of Laura in "Goblin Market". Laura, like Julian's sinner who falls into a pit, suffers in solitude. She assumes that nobody can hear her, and does not even try to call for help. She only weeps in the darkness of night:

> She said not one word in her heart's sore ache;
> But peering thro' the dimness, naught discerning,
> Trudged home, her pitcher dripping all the way;
> So crept to bed, and lay
> Silent 'til Lizzie slept;
> Then sat up in a passionate yearning,
> And gnashed her teeth for balked desire, and wept
> As if her heart would break.
>
> (261-68)

In reality, however, her sister Lizzie watches over her all along. Lizzie feels pity for Laura, hoping to help her, and finally takes action. Laura then realizes that she is not alone, but is loved. This realization parallels the situation of Julian's sinner in a pit who is led to know God's love through Christ.[32] When Lizzie comes back from her meeting with the goblin men:

> Laura started from her chair,
> Flung her arms up in the air,
> Clutched her hair:
> "Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted
> For my sake the fruit forbidden?
> Must your light like mine be hidden,
> Your young life like mine be wasted,
> Undone in mine undoing,
> And ruined in my ruin;

Revelation of Divine Love: In Sixteen Showings Made to Dame Julian of Norwich, trans. M. L. Del Mastro (Liguori, Missouri: Triumph Books, 1994), 139-50. Also see Jane McAvoy, *The Satisfied Life: Medieval Women Mystics on Atonement* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000), 11-28, and Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 146-56.

[32] To emphasize God's love is not uncommon in Victorian popular literature. For instance, as Ian Bradley notes, Victorian hymns sing of God's love more often than God's wrath. See Ian Bradley, *Abide with Me: The World of Victorian Hymns* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 1997), 124.

Thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden?"
She clung about her sister,
Kissed and kissed and kissed her:
Tears once again
Refreshed her shrunken eyes,
Dropping like rain
After long sultry drouth;
Shaking with aguish fear, and pain,
She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth.

(475-92)

Laura in her delight kisses Lizzie and sheds tears. The tears, "like rain" falling on weakened plants, quench her thirst, and the fruit pulp on Lizzie's face feeds her hunger. Here we see the power of life-nurturing, and life-giving, love. Lizzie as a female Christ – a maternal Christ – relieves Laura's suffering, restoring her to life. She performs the redemptive work of Christ, in a way that resembles the interpretations of redemption by Abelard and Julian of Norwich.

Lizzie's redemption of Laura has further significance besides rescuing her sister: Lizzie's maturing into an independent woman. Let us return to Lizzie's negotiations with the goblins. Lizzie tosses a silver penny to them; this means that she is starting all over again Laura's failed attempt to trade with the goblins.[33] Although Lizzie has money to buy, the goblins refuse to sell the merchandise to her. They insist, instead, that she be their guest. Lizzie politely but flatly refuses to accept their suspicious offer:

"Thank you," said Lizzie; "but one waits
At home alone for me:
So, without further parleying,
If you will not sell me any
Of your fruits though much and many,
Give me back my silver penny
I tossed you for a fee."

(383-89)

Lizzie's legitimate request to have back her silver penny brings to

[33] Lizzie's "silver" penny stands in contrast to Laura's "golden" lock with which she bought goblin fruits. This indicates Lizzie's determination not to get caught in the goblins' trap that caused her sister's predicament.

light the hypocrisy of the goblins: although they cry, "come buy, come buy", they do not mean to sell their goods to women. It is their secret intention to exploit and punish women who try to participate in their marketplace.

Their hypocrisy exposed, the goblins are infuriated. Calling Lizzie "proud", "cross-grained, uncivil" (394-95), they resort to violence. They cannot bear to see a woman get the better of them. They consider it presumptuous for a woman to think that she can enter men's marketplace not by selling her body but by asking for a rightful transaction. In the end, Lizzie wins her battle with the goblins, and succeeds in bringing home some goblin juice. Her redemption is depicted as her gaining strength to negotiate on an equal footing with men, and to claim women's participation in a male-dominated world. It encompasses relieving another's suffering as well as developing as a person to be able to assert herself in the face of adversity.[34] Further, it is not something offered in heaven to people who wait for a reward after death, but the process in which to take a more positive attitude to life on earth.

After recasting the story of redemption for women, the poem reaches its epilogue. Unlike many other fallen women portrayed in literature, Laura is rescued from impending ruin.[35] Years later, she and her sister Lizzie become mothers and create loving relationship with their children. Laura tells her children how she tasted goblin fruits, suffered thirst to the brink of death, and was rescued by her sister's loving act. She is now a poet who tells a story for an audience (her children):

> Laura would call the little ones

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[34] Kathleen Vejvoda, comparing "Goblin Market" with John Milton's ideas of Chastity and Charity presented in *Comus*, regards Lizzie as a personification of Miltonic Chastity, which can be interpreted as self-love. She seems to suggest by this that Lizzie comes to value her life on earth and take a more positive attitude to it. For Vejvoda's article, see note 13 above. Here we see a model of redemption not as a reward received in heaven but as the process of finding fulfillment on earth. For the ideas of earthly redemption and heavenly redemption, see also Chapters 7 and 8 of the present study.

[35] Deborah Anna Logan notes that none of the fallen women discussed in her study "marries or otherwise achieves social integration". See Deborah Anna Logan, *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, or Do Worse* (Columbia and London: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1998), 11.

> And tell them of her early prime,
> Those pleasant days long gone
> Of not-returning time:
> Would talk about the haunted glen,
> The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men,
> Their fruits like honey to the throat
> But poison in the blood;
> (Men sell not such in any town):
> Would tell them how her sister stood
> In deadly peril to do her good,
> And win the fiery antidote:
>
> (448-59)

An affinity between a (former) fallen woman and a woman poet is again suggested in this scene.

In Chapter 2 of this study, I examined the self-referential structure of Landon's and Hemans' poems, in which women poets sing of women and women writing poetry. While telling the Sappho legend, they implicitly warn us against passing it on to other people. Rossetti also writes a self-referential poem entitled "Reflection", in which a woman poet, after stopping to tell the Sappho legend, struggles to find out what kind of woman to portray in her poetry. "Goblin Market" is another poem where the poet (Rossetti or the speaker of the poem) writes about a poet (Laura) performing a poem (the story of her sister's rescue of her), and in this sense it is written in the tradition of Landon's and Hemans' Sappho poems. "Goblin Market" offers a story for women that could take the place of the Sappho legend. The story is not a story of a dying woman poet like the Sappho legend. Instead, it is a story of a woman rescued from the brink of death by a female Christ: a woman who responds with love to other's suffering. The mother (Laura)'s storytelling for her children suggests that the story will become a legend passed down from generation to generation. In "Goblin Market", Rossetti rewrites the story of redemption for women, and at the same time expresses hopes for creating a new legend of a woman poet that could replace the conventional story of a dying woman poet.