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CHRISTINA ROSSETTI: PRE-RAPHAELITE POET

by

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*Christina Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelite Poet*

Linda Baird

Chapter 1

Christina Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood

Considered by her contemporaries to be one of Victorian England's greatest poets, the writings of Christina Rossetti clearly exemplify the work of a Pre-Raphaelite artist ("CR and the Visual Arts"). The publication in 1862 of Goblin Market and Other Poems represented the first literary success of the Pre-Raphaelites, although Christina herself was not a bona fide member ("CR's Literary Career"). Much speculation exists as to the reason that Christina was never actually a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.<sup>1</sup> Several biographers/critics postulate that some of the members refused to allow her admittance because she was female; however, an actual letter from Gabriel suggests that she was asked, but declined, in his words, because she felt it would some type of "display, I believe--a sort of thing she abhors" (Marsh 83).

While she may not have been an actual member, Christina was still involved in the Brotherhood's discussions. A student at the Royal Academy since 1846, Gabriel Rossetti had begun to move in his own direction, and his dynamic personality soon allowed him to collect a group of others who shared his vision, an assemblage later to become the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. As a result, the

Rossetti household was often filled with a group of colorful and flamboyant individuals. Gabriel's peers were Englishmen, infused with the idealism of youth, interested primarily in literature and art, but also in politics and religion (Smulders 5). The Brotherhood included not only painters, but poets and art theorists as well. The original group included Gabriel's friend and fellow artist Holman Hunt; William Rossetti, by virtue of his attendance at a life<sup>2</sup> class, where, in Hunt's words, he regularly executed rigid transcripts<sup>3</sup> of the nude; painter James Collinson;<sup>4</sup> sculptor Thomas Woolner; Hunt's friend John Millais, a prize-winning student at the Academy, and considered by Gabriel "a very good fellow"; Hunt's protege, Fred Stephens, whose progress in art was relative to that of William's (Marsh 86). In the words of William Rossetti, "We were really like brothers, continually together, and confiding to one another all experiences bearing upon questions of art and literature . . . each man in the company, even if he did not project great things of his own, revelled in poetry or sunned himself in art" (Rosenblum xii).

The Rossetti's involvement in art was not surprising. As part of a close-knit family, both Gabriel and Christina seemed to have inherited their passion for art and literature from their father, a lifelong Dante scholar.<sup>5</sup> It would only be natural, then, for Christina to also be caught up in her brother's and his friends' enthusiasm. Despite their influence, however, Christina's work had

always displayed an overt quality of individualism, not at all like that of the other women writing in her time, such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose works Christina greatly admired. She felt, however, that her own lyrical inspiration could not "be urged into uncongenial themes or unnatural activity," on the topics of politics and philanthropy that Barrett Browning dealt with so well (Leighton 118). Her first collection of poems, published at the age of sixteen on a private press owned by her grandfather, were themselves on subjects unusual for a girl of her tender age and experience; most were concerned with anguish or heartbreak. This publication of her poetry, Verses, and its subsequent praise from family and even those outside the family who received copies, drew Gabriel's attention to the fact that she was no longer just the "baby Christina," as she was frequently called by her father, but an adult. Most importantly, Gabriel had realized at this time that Christina appeared to have the same passion and creativity that he and the Brotherhood shared (Marsh 81).

As the sister of two of the members and the fiancée (for a short while) of another, it is little wonder that Christina's poetry would consistently display characteristics that have since come to be associated with the Pre-Raphaelites. According to John Dixon Hunt, author of The Pre-Raphaelite Imagination, several consistent qualities could be found in Pre-Raphaelite art:

First, the enthusiasm for what was seen as the picturesque and inspiratory Middle Ages, to which most Pre-Raphaelites looked for subject matter and even technical knowledge.

Second, growing out of these medieval interests, their introspection and the fashion in which they chose to communicate their meditations and the shadowy depths of the psyche. Third, their celebration of the noumenous; the search for a dialect of symbolism subtle enough to convey their apprehension of a meaningful world beyond exterior description and rational habits of mind. Fourth, an account of one specific symbol invoked by almost all of the Pre-Raphaelites--the famous image of a woman with large, staring eyes and masses of heavy hair [based on the model Elizabeth Siddal] . . . Fifth, their attempt, often uneasy and hesitant, to accommodate themselves to a modern world of photography and scientific definition by means of realistic description, frequently of subject matter ignored by most other Victorians . . . [These] seem to represent distinct and important elements in the complex fabric of Pre-Raphaelitism. (26)

Christina, along with the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, shared a great appreciation for the beauty of nature, and they collectively felt that natural scenes should be rendered in absolute, minute detail. This esteem was evident in the Brotherhood's paintings, which were filled with rich, vibrant, brilliant colors and a glow that seemed to emanate from the canvas (actually caused by a undercoating of white paint), casting a melancholy, often dream-like or fantastical, other-worldly quality that seemed to flow from the picture itself (Kent 327). These attributes were in direct contrast to the current style in painting recommended by the Royal Academy during the time, with the portrayal of scenes from Homer or the subdued browns and golds of Reynolds' pastorals (Bass 1).

Considering the Pre-Raphaelites' interest in poetry, their creation of a magazine seemed necessary. To Gabriel Rossetti, the

Brotherhood needed its own agent by which to make its tenets known to the public, and so established a monthly magazine which he named The Germ (1850). Appropriately, the sister arts were one of the major topics of interest, as illustrated in the first issue, in which a poem by John Tupper appeared entitled "A Sketch from Nature," representing the kind of description that later came to be known by the Pre-Raphaelites as "word-painting" (Bass 3, 36). Christina, too, contributed to this first outing with the poems "Dreamland" and "An End," both about youthful death (Marsh 106).

The emergence of the magazine also reflected the Pre-Raphaelite's interest in archaic literary forms like the ballad (Harrison 39), and Christina, like everyone in the Brotherhood, wrote sonnets. William Michael Rossetti advocated strict criteria for what Pre-Raphaelite poetry should be like: the informing idea of the poem was to apply to verse-writing the same principles of strict actuality and probability of detail which the Pre-Raphaelites upheld in their pictures (Bass 42). Christina's Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics might have been encouraged by the fact that the Pre-Raphaelites in general showed an emotional and theoretical commitment to a free exchange between poetry and painting; in fact, most of those who were painters tried their hand at writing poems (3). Instead of placing one over the other, the Pre-Raphaelites felt there existed a true common ground in literature and painting. To them, the painting might be used to illustrate a scene from



some written work; a sonnet might be written about the picture upon its completion; or the artist could expound in prose upon the ideas represented in the picture (45).

Commonly, the Pre-Raphaelite painters insisted that every painting had a story to tell, causing a sometimes criticized overuse of detail. Even the posing of the figure, the stance of head, hands, arms, or the position of the body, along with sacred symbolic objects (typically from the medieval period), were used to create a continuous, real narrative, which the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood felt would extend the story beyond the picture frame into the reality of the viewer (25). The Pre-Raphaelites used the term "poetic" to describe these paintings. Dante Gabriel Rossetti often applied the term to either the visual or verbal arts. To him, "poetic" described "that act of imagination which is poetic insight: the discovery of concept, the perception of some sort of ideal, in the concrete" (161).

His own poetic painting is a kind of suppressed or implied narrative, implied by being the most intense moment chosen from the narrative sequence, and the poetry, which is both visual and abstract, focuses on a single, momentous experience composed and arranged in its details by a painter's eye. Dante Gabriel liked to attach the text of sonnets or brief poems, usually his own, to the frames of his pictures, which reversed the traditional "English" approach of upholding the preeminence of literature. In his view

of "poetic painting," Gabriel himself said: "If a man has any poetry in him he should paint, for it has all been said and written, and they have hardly begun to paint it" (223).

Another Pre-Raphaelite belief that Christina shared was "[t]hat art should be pervaded with the Christian spirit--that it should convey and illustrate the highest truths to man's beings . . . ." (Riede 29). According to early critic David Masson, the Pre-Raphaelites aimed to rescue art from the degrading position of being a minister to sensuous gratification and elevate it as an agent of high spiritual education (29).

Christina's use of medieval themes and color schemes like those in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's paintings originated in dissatisfaction with the subjects of other artists and poets of their day, which led them to turn to the Arthurian legends and tales of tournaments and "damsels in distress" for inspiration. Gabriel, in particular, spent many hours researching for topics, not only to paint, but also for composition. Gerard Manley Hopkins traced " Rossetti's 'modern medieval school' to 'the Romantic school . . . of Keats, which chose 'medieval keepings' [styles], as opposed to the Wordsworthians with their 'colourless classical keepings'" (137). "The Lady of Shalott" was the figure represented by many Pre-Raphaelite artists, the most famous example being by Holman Hunt, which was included in the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poems (1857).

Christina Rossetti's poetry reflected the Pre-Raphaelite ideals so much that she was referred to as the "High Priestess of Pre-Raphaelitism." " . . . [T]he use of emblems, the gold thread of embroidered detail like a medieval tapestry, and her themes of renunciation, loss and longing are all in keeping with the preoccupations of her brother and his friends" (Jones 59).

Christina's poetry and the work of the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood also were strongly influenced by the views of art theorist John Ruskin, whose aim of reviving sacred art and restoring the high moral position of the artist thrust the Brotherhood into modernist strategies and an avant-garde artistic role (Harrison 38). For Ruskin, the perception of the beautiful was contingent upon the perception of the divine (55). Ruskin was disgusted with the classical subject matter of the modern artists, which, he felt, neglected God and sacred themes, delegating to God a "second place," a place certainly unbecoming to Him. Regardless of their religious dispositions, all the Brothers were dedicated Ruskinians (29).

Christina Rossetti's own ideas of beauty were similar to Ruskin's. Like the brethren, Christina read Ruskin with interest, and a great number of her devotional poems and "secular" love poems appear to be grounded in Ruskin's theories. Ruskin had a firm definition of "beauty" as theocentrically either the record of conscience, written in things external, or the symbolizing of

Divine attributes in matter of the felicity of living things, or the perfect fulfillment of their duties and functions. "In all cases it is something Divine; either the approving voice of God, the glorious symbol of Him, the evidence of His kind presence, or the obedience to His will by him induced and supported" (Harrison 30).

Both Ruskin and Christina Rossetti also share a concern "with hierarchical accessions and with emblematic correspondences between the material and spiritual worlds [which] reveals the underlying preoccupation of both writers with the necessary orderliness of all art in which true beauty inheres" (33). In order, then, to truly appreciate the beautiful, Christina and Ruskin felt that there must be also a complete regard for its sacredness. In addition to their shared ideas of beauty as holy or divinely inspired, Ruskin and Christina Rossetti both saw the poet as a prophet. During the years 1846 and 1856, Ruskin most forcefully expressed his opinions on this matter, which was also when Christina was most interested in his work, his relations with the Brotherhood, and his patronage of her brother. In volume 2 of Modern Painters,<sup>6</sup> Ruskin explains that "the penetrating, prophetic imagination of the artist works for the salvation of his or her audience. Only the noblest men and women, of course, have such powers. . . the gifts of such an artist cannot be acquired, however, they are 'determined for him at birth'" (Harrison 32). Christina echoes his sentiments exactly:

Natural gifts are laid as stepping-stones to the supernatural:

the nobler any man is by birthright, if keen of insight, lofty of instinctive aim, wide of grasp, deep of penetration, the more is he able and is he bound to discern in the visible universe tokens of the love and presence and foreshadowings of the will of God. (32)

It was in the early Pre-Raphaelite period that the artists displayed these Ruskinian views on the sacredness of art, and it was Christina Rossetti's face and devout demeanor that embodied the ideals of purity and truth that the Pre-Raphaelite arts were trying to express on canvas. "It was . . . much the appearance of Christina Rossetti that determined the emaciated and angular style of the Brothers" (Jones 32). Several of the group used her as a model as they could rarely afford to pay for professional sitters.

## Chapter 2

## The Pre-Raphaelite Women

In their desire to restore art from its debased public position, in the beginning of the Pre-Raphaelite period, Gabriel and many of the other Brothers chose religious scenes as their subjects, going against the current trend of portrayals of women in classic, "pagan" tales; instead, their women were to be symbols of virtue and morality (Bass 33).

In Gabriel's first painting signed "PRB," he chose to portray the Annunciation in "The Girlhood of Mary Virgin," which depicted Christina as the young Virgin Mary under the tutelage of Saint Anne, embroidering a lily, the symbol of her purity. Rossetti's act of placing embroidery in the hands of the Virgin is particularly notable, as she is typically seen studying a book of scripture when the angel appears to her. In a letter to Charles Lyell<sup>7</sup>, Gabriel discussed this substitution himself, and apparently, he felt that he had improved on his artistic predecessors by substituting "an occupation more compatible with these times" (Peterson 212).

In a recent article, however, Linda Peterson asserts that this revision, which goes against the religious tradition of Mary being a faithful reader of the scriptures and, thus, an example to both men and women, limits Mary, in an all too predictable mid-Victorian fashion, to the private, domestic sphere (213). Margaret Homans'

Bearing the Word offers Sandra Ludig's argument that Mary is making a symbol of herself, which charts a shift from "Mary as symbol maker to Mary as the object of others' symbol making, her powers as an artist usurped by [the angel] Gabriel." Ludig stresses that as these are portraits by another Gabriel of Christina, herself an aspiring artist and poet, "these paintings are indeed significant for nineteenth-century women artists' and writers' identification with Mary and the particular form of silencing that her history emblemizes for them" (Homans 310).

Critic David Ludley points out that painters usually set the Annunciation in a temple or a church, as are many paintings of Madonna and child, but Rossetti shows his Mary at home "firmly ensconced within a domestic setting," which, even though it was intended probably to stress the ordinary experiences of human life and their spiritual values, suggests a reduction in the Virgin's stature and significance (Peterson 213). Despite their commitment, then, to raising art from its fallen status by exhibiting Christian ideals, the Pre-Raphaelites were not above modifications to suit themselves, and their ideas of women's place rather than to follow tradition.

Ruskin may have been partially responsible for this substitution and the reduction in women's status. In Sesame and Lilies,<sup>8</sup> he lamented a common Victorian attitude that women spent too much time meditating over the meaning of the "Great Book," when

they should be engaging in useful feminine occupations, such as sewing or cooking, tending to their domestic duties. "For him, 'theology' is the 'one dangerous science for women--one which they must indeed beware how they profanely touch'" (212). He shared the common nineteenth century view that women "might read the biblical text for their own private or domestic use, but they were not to interpret actively, originally, or publicly." Women, then, were to leave the study of scriptures to men, and "accept the role and materials that patriarchal figures deem suitable" (213).

To what degree Christina Rossetti fit into this conception of the ideal Victorian lady is questionable. Certainly, on the surface she appears to have lived the life of the "old-maid" version of the "Victorian Angel"--a quiet, well-mannered, paradigm of saintliness, content with the roles of devoted sister and daughter, characterized as "initially impenetrable, a mute and homebound icon surrounded by reverent men conspiring to transform her into an angel" (Auerbach 115).

Contributing to these views, undoubtedly, are the pious depictions of Christina as the Virgin Mary in Gabriel's paintings as well as her brother William Michael's revising of her poems after her death to make her appear even more devout (117). Although her brothers would certainly argue that their actions displayed their faithful reverence for her, also evident is a certain degree of dominance. Their "flatteries" persisted in



dictating the way Christina should look and how she should speak, thus not only controlling her to a certain degree, but also the public's perception and understanding of Christina.

But what made Christina Rossetti truly different from the Victorian icon that her brothers wished her to be was her zest for more than what her age had to offer, especially for its women. Not always content to be quiet and unassuming, Christina was actively involved in aiding "fallen women" and crusading against vivisection (Marsh 219, 435). Like other Victorian women writers, she struggled against conventions that dictated women should not address subjects such as money, sex, power, and other "insensible" things (Leighton 3, 145).

Christina was not afraid to voice her opinions on the way that women were treated, particularly by her brother and the other members of the Brotherhood, as many of them seemed to share controlling ideas of women as objects to shape. Images of women dominated Pre-Raphaelite art, and the painters had very definite ideas about how women ought to look and behave. They in fact literalized their aesthetic attitude to women in their relationships with real women. They were in the habit of taking up young girls and shaping them to suit their own specifications. Holman Hunt, for example, educated the illiterate Annie Miller; Ford Madox Brown fell in love with his young model Emma Hill, and although she was only fifteen, she lived with him as his mistress

and gave birth to their daughter, Cathy. After their marriage three years later, he sent her to a finishing school, and afterwards she pretended her father was dead and claimed he had been a farmer, although both of her parents were living in London's East End (Jones 58-59).

Undoubtedly the most prominent and tragic example of this type of subjugation was the relationship between Gabriel and his model, mistress, and, later, his wife, Elizabeth "Lizzie" Siddal. When the two met, she was working in a hat shop and had been "discovered" by painter Walter Deverell, who later used her for the model of his famous "Ophelia." Soon, it was her image that replaced that of Christina in the works of the Pre-Raphaelites', as they moved from ascetism to eroticism. She was tall, long-necked, and had the particular shade of red-gold hair that the Pre-Raphaelites found so fascinating. With her dreamy eyed, melancholy gaze, she seemed to embody their ideal of feminine beauty (59).

Lizzie herself wrote a few poems and, in the beginning of her relationship with Gabriel, took lessons from him to improve her drawing skills. Upon learning from his mother that Christina had taken up drawing, he wrote a letter to Christina asking to see some of her latest sketches, but also playfully asking her not to "rival the Sid" (his nickname for Lizzie). It is highly probable that Christina did not necessarily take this as a jest, but a real admonition not to try to compete with Lizzie, perhaps in any way,

either for his attention or from that directed towards the new Pre-Raphaelite "star" (58).

Soon it seemed every model that Gabriel painted took on the same idealized form--the long fingers and neck, crimped red-gold hair, large dreaming eyes and angular countenance of Lizzie. Gabriel had created a new Pre-Raphaelite Woman, and whomever he painted was transfigured into that image on canvas. Instead of seeing the models as individuals, they seemed to all become one woman--one form that he alone had produced. This may have been Gabriel's way of objectifying the women in his life--by being mere "things" painted on a canvas, they were contained in their proper, Victorian place.

Perhaps because Christina, too, had undergone Gabriel's rather stifling influence as his model, she began to feel uneasy about Gabriel's constant representation of the same woman, which had obviously become an obsession. Even Holman Hunt commented on Gabriel's tendency to "convert the features of his sitter to his favourite ideal type" (58).

Christina's dismay increased when, upon a visit to Gabriel's apartment, she was amazed to find drawings of Lizzie everywhere. She returned home and wrote "In an Artist's Studio," which is almost a warning to Gabriel, that in his desire to possess Lizzie, he has actually lost her--she is now nothing but the face and body he lives to paint while the real woman is gone (Marsh 115):

One face looks out from all his canvasses,  
 One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans;  
 We found her hidden just behind those screens,  
 That mirror gave back all her loveliness.  
     A queen in opal or in ruby dress,  
     A nameless girl in freshest summer greens,  
     A saint, an angel; every canvass means  
 The same one meaning, neither more nor less.  
 He feeds upon her face by day and night,  
 And she with true kind eyes looks back on him  
     Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:  
     Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;  
 Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;  
     Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.<sup>9</sup>

Although evidently directed to her brother and Lizzie, Christina leaves the characters nameless. As a poet who felt poetry should be used to teach, she wanted any artist reading the sonnet who could see himself to take her words to heart. She argues, too, with the Pre-Raphaelite painters' portrayal of women in general, and by using "every canvass," she suggests to them that their ideas need to change as well.

Christina also does not spend time physically describing the model, as one would assume she would, believing this facet of the woman has become all-important to the artist. By freeing the model from her physical being, then, Christina suggests that one should look at the true person, her inner self, in a way the male artist does not.

The first two lines descry the redundancy and repetitiveness the speaker sees in the artist's paintings; the same face and figure are always there, sitting or walking or leaning, appearing

virtually purposeless and aimless, almost as if she has nothing to do but sit for him. She "looks out from all his canvasses," watching life passing her by, expressionless, trapped by the artist in his studio, and unable to participate in the actual events of reality because she herself is not real. She just "looks out," with a vacant gaze that has nothing in it.

In line three, the speaker and company have found the model "just hidden behind those screens." The word "screens" could refer to one of two types, the kind that shelter from the elements, meaning that the model allows herself to be placed there to protect her true self or some part of herself she keeps from everyone, or the screen that the painter creates to hide the model's true self from everyone else to maintain the facade he has made. Screens also tend to alter what is seen through them somehow; in this case, the model's actual visage is much different from that perceived from the other side, suggesting that the model has become little more than what the artist has portrayed her as.

The next line: "That mirror gave back all her loveliness" complements this last idea, as a mirror only reflects the surface image, only an appearance with no depth, no soul or force that makes a human being truly alive. This mirror only gives back her beauty, or the distorted "beauty" the artist has given her.

Christina Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite interests in nature, color, and religion are evident in the next four lines. The first

describes a "queen in opal or in ruby dress," a woman, who in the Pre-Raphaelite ideal, is someone set apart from all others, almost untouchable, as royalty are. She is dressed in opal and ruby, gem colors, representing things of material value, not for what they are so much as for what they can do for man--make him money, bring him pleasure, again by their appearance and beauty, nothing more. Concentrating on the clothing of the model again stresses the idea that the outside is merely a covering for the true beauty of the model, which Christina's speaker fears the artists may be overlooking. The colors of the gems themselves are traditional ones in which to dress women found in many Pre-Raphaelite paintings, the white suggesting the innocence of the ideal woman while the richness of the ruby suggests her sensual appeal.

The "nameless girl in the freshest greens" in the following line suggests yet again how the painter separates the model from the person in his portrayal. The model is just a "nameless girl"; she could be anyone. She has no name to define her and make her real. The fact that she is nameless illustrates the insult towards the model, as if her identity is unimportant.

The model is also depicted frequently as a saint or an angel, religious or divine subjects being common to early Pre-Raphaelite work. For the painters, these models of perfection for Victorian women exemplify and display the epitome of their feminine ideal, also serving to emphasize that otherworldliness, that ethereal,

distant feeling transmitted by the Pre-Raphaelite models.

The next lines of the sonnet present a scene between an addict and the object of his addiction: "He feeds upon her face by day and night,/And she with true kind eyes looks back on him." His need to "feed upon her face day and night" recounts the overpowering desire he has for the sight of her, not for the model herself, but merely to be able to admire her beauty, while she, with her "true kind eyes," allows him this pleasure.

While his "feeding on her face," to the artist, is perhaps done in reverence to her great beauty, there is no evidence that he gives her anything in return. His inability to admire her for anything more than her physical beauty projects a barrier between them, as she is relegated to the position of possession, something beautiful to transform onto a canvas and hang on one's wall and admire, rather than to allow her to live and be the real person that she is.

The following likeness "fair as the moon" promotes the idea that like the moon, the model has no light of her own, but only reflects back that of the sun; in this case, the giver of the light/life to the model is the artist. The moon also frequently is associated with lunacy; perhaps the speaker here sees the artist as obsessed with the beauty of the model almost to the point of madness. Christina's speaker's allusion to the moon contrasts the light that would shine if she were fair as the sun, which might

enable the artist to truly see the model. Instead, the reflected light of the moon, like that of a mirror, permits only the image the artist allows to be shown to be reflected. The ending of the line, "joyful as the light," stresses the model's seeming happiness to allow herself to appear the way the artist's joyful light shows her to be.

The last lines emphasize what the speaker sees as the falseness in the artist's depiction: "Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;/Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;/Not as she is, but as she fills his dream." All three begin with the word "not"; clearly, Christina's artist is not allowing something--in this case, the speaker feels that the model is made to conceal herself. Her emotions, her feelings, all those things that make her real, must be kept hidden; she must be seen "[n]ot as she is, but as she fills his dream."

In the final portion, Christina Rossetti shows the consequences of this false portrayal on both the artist and the model. As the artist continues to paint her the way he wants to see her, he not only hurts her, but also himself--he must be blinded or manipulated into believing she is something she is not, which molds her into an image that allows neither one of them any freedom. Held by him in his gaze, she must be what he has made her, and, as a result of her imprisonment, a true depth of feeling or emotion is not allowed to develop, leaving instead only a fear



of rejection or loss.

Christina Rossetti's speaker ends the sonnet suggesting that the artist and the model both need to wake from their stupor and become a part of real life. Her off rhyme, dim/dream, at the end could almost read as her description of the model, and perhaps even of the artist, a dim (dim-witted) dreamer.

Unfortunately, Gabriel could not see the folly of his ways and continued to see women (particularly Lizzie) from the same domineering viewpoint, despite the opinions of his sister. The affects of his treatment of Lizzie after their marriage, (Lizzie's addiction to laudanum, her miscarriage, and subsequent mental trauma) which was filled with infidelity and neglect should have shown him that the ideas of love and adoration he believed he was expressing on canvas needed some refinement. His sonnet "The Portrait" from The House of Life collection best seems to illustrate how he perceived the purpose of his art and the place of his woman in it:

O Lord of all compassionate control,  
 O Love! let this my lady's picture glow  
 Under my hand to praise her name, and show  
 Even of her inner self the perfect whole:  
 That he who seeks her beauty's furthest goal,  
 Beyond the light that the sweet glances throw  
 And refluent wave of the sweet smile, may know  
 The very sky and sea-line of her soul.  
 Lo! it is done. Above the enthroning throat  
 The mouth's mold testifies of voice and kiss,  
 The shadowed eyes remember and foresee.  
 Her face is made her shrine. Let all men note  
 That in all years (O Love, thy gift is this!)  
 They that would look on her must come to me.<sup>10</sup>

Gabriel may have written the sonnet as a tribute to the beauty of his lady, but upon close reading, it becomes yet another statement of his inability to see her as anything other than an object to be admired. His veneration for her beauty is obvious, but evident also is his somewhat overzealous desire to limit his lady to the reproduction on his canvas. His opening prayer to Love--the "Lord of all compassionate control"--leads the reader to wonder who actually needs the control--Gabriel or his model? Surely, Gabriel would feel that his control of the perception of his model is compassionate--full of love and admiration for her beauty, but would she necessarily agree or think perhaps that he needs to exercise some restraint himself and allow her the freedom to choose how others perceive her?

Gabriel's speaker goes on further to state his belief that he is the only one to display her true beauty: . . . "let this my lady's picture glow/Under my hand to praise her name, and show/Even of her inner self the perfect whole." " My lady's picture," "under my hand": both of these phrases make it obvious that he is the one who makes her picture glow. Her beauty is not truly her own, but given to her from him. Also, he does not praise her by his hand or with his hand, but she is "under his hand," in a subservient, inferior position. The artist may be shielding her in a way he tells himself is protective, as there are many Biblical

references to the earth and its inhabitants being cared for under the hand of God, but again he is restricting his model to a certain place. Gabriel's speaker goes on to say that he will "show/ Even of her inner self the perfect whole." He may intend this statement as a compliment, that she is not only beautiful and perfect outwardly, but inside as well, but how inhibiting this would have to be for his model! Always having a beautiful physical appearance would be difficult enough, without the added pressure to be faultless inwardly, which would certainly limit her actions, emotions, and even her thoughts.

The speaker explains that he wishes to portray her perfection so "[t]hat he who seeks her beauty's furthest goal,/Beyond the light that the sweet glances throw/And refluent wave of the sweet smile, may know/The very sky and sea-line of her soul." The use of all of these natural images--the light, the waves, the sky and sea-line--all contrast with the supernatural image of human perfection.

The speaker then exclaims "Lo! it is done," as the sonnet continues with the evidence that the artist believes that at this point he has completed his portrayal of the model as perfect: "Above the enthroning throat/The mouth's mold testifies of voice and kiss,/The shadowed eyes remember and foresee./ Her face is made her shrine." The model's head appears to be separated from her body and set up as a shrine for all to worship, almost like a bust of a goddess or queen, an ideal reinforced by her "enthroning

throat." The mouth is molded by the artist to appear alive, testifying of "voice and kiss," but in the shadowed eyes, which "remember and foresee," the model's confinement as this lifeless icon is evident, as they reveal a pain in their shadows that the artist cannot see.

The speaker's final bid for total control is plainly stated in the last sentence: . . . . "Let all men note/That in all years (O Love, thy gift is this!)/ They that would look on her must come to me." His ownership of the woman is complete, "all men note . . .in all years"--all of her is his; she is his possession totally forever. He stands between her and the rest of the world, even to the point that others must come to him and ask his permission to see her.

Gabriel's sonnet told of his need for control over his models, but, unfortunately, this passion for dominance over his women went beyond the canvas, as Christina later discovered. She certainly always looked to her older brother for support, and he was the first she turned to for criticism and help. She did not, however, allow him to try to create her poetry for her, choose the topics about which she wrote, or the popular issues she supported. She met with Gabriel's disapproval in 1863 when she contributed a poem, "A Royal Princess," to Emily Faithfull's collection Poems: An Offering to Lancashire, published to aid those suffering in the Cotton Districts. During the preparation of Christina's second

volume of poems for publication in 1865, he also expressed resistance to her choice of subjects. She agreed with him that some of "women's work on many social matters" contained an "unavoidable reality," but insisted nevertheless on keeping some of the poems on these "social matters" (Leighton 128).

Despite her upbringing in this patriarchal society which stressed women's subservience, her poetry was hers and hers alone, and she always reserved the right to reject any suggestions he made (Marsh 203). Gabriel was normally Christina's first choice for illustrator, and his representation of the goblins in "Goblin Market" formed the public's view of them. Gabriel's goblins were all very similar, little animals dressed as men; whereas, Christina's own watercolors of the goblins in the margins of the original text make the goblins look more humanesque, part man and part beast. Their horror lies in their simultaneous likeness and unlikeness, holding many possibilities for deception (Jones 93).

## Chapter 3

## "Goblin Market"--

## Christina Rossetti's Most Famous Pre-Raphaelite Poem

"Goblin Market," considered to be a true Pre-Raphaelite work of art (Kent 92), is Christina Rossetti's best example of her disagreement with the place accorded to the Victorian woman. Instead of having a traditional male as the hero, one lone woman, without the physical aid of any male, is shown victorious, relying on her own intelligence and personal strength to resist male dominance. She sees the goblins as males, who, through the use of the temptations of nature, may be able to lead those not firm in their resolutions and faith away from God and virtue, an occurrence which befalls the sister of the heroine when she wavers and falls into their snare.

Christina opens the poem with a description of the goblins' market, a traditional place for males to be selling their wares and women buying. Displaying classic Pre-Raphaelite fantasmal allusions, Christina Rossetti describes the sale taking place in the morning when it is still dark or in the evening, likening the goblins to creatures that come alive only at night to prey on their victims.

The cry of the goblins: "Come buy, come buy" is followed by a virtual extravaganza of fruits they are displaying for sale; in their very number the Pre-Raphaelite sense of overabundance is

evident--Rossetti has nearly twenty lines full of various fruits, which, when visualized, present a bright profusion of rich, vibrant colors--yellows, reds, purples--those deep hues which fill Pre-Raphaelite paintings. All of the fruits are different varieties and flavors, and the list begins with the most obvious and time-honored symbol of temptation--the apple--being the downfall of Adam and Eve, ultimately of mankind. The assortment continues with quinces, a very rare apple, thus increasing their appeal; and lemons and oranges, both juicy with an enticing smell, but, in the case of the lemons, a sour taste, perhaps a foretelling of the power of the goblins' fruit.

An immeasurable amount of pleasure is offered in "plump, unpecked cherries," associated with "cherry-cheeked" with delight or happiness. Blackberries are next on the goblins' list. The commonest wild fruit in England, spoken of proverbially as being "the type of what is plentiful and little prized," their inclusion should be a warning that what the goblins have is really of little true value. "Wild, free-born cranberries" are tantalizing not for their taste but for their depiction of being "wild and free," an expression certain to tease well-behaved young ladies. Fruits known for their sweetness and flavor, as well as their eye-catching appearance, are also offered--melons and raspberries, apricots and strawberries, dates and rare pears.

Christina Rossetti also employs the Pre-Raphaelite use of

symbolism, as several treats are offered that carry subtle warnings or hint at a darkness or wickedness not discernible to the eye, such as crab-apples, known for being harsh and bitter, offered perhaps for the word "crab," and dewberries, a dark, or wicked blackberry. Pineapples are also available, which may be very sweet to taste, but are covered with spikes on the outside, falsely implying to the girls that maybe the goblins themselves are like this--not too pretty on the outside, yet sweet on the inside. "Sharp bullaces," or wild plums, are included, combining the tantalizing "wildness" with the "sharpness" or pain the fruit will cause; as are greengages, which are known for good taste. The color green, however, while traditionally associated with life and vitality, is being used in this instance to intimate green as in innocence, or an expression used in the 1800's meaning "to hoax." Damson, dark purple or black plums, may have the colors of a corrupt royalty, and bilberries may be a threat of the "bill" or payment involved for their indulgence.

Other fruits proffered by the goblins that hint at an unpleasant return on their purchase were "bright-fire-like barberies," which entice the customers by their brightness, catching the eye, but burning them in the end. Rossetti alludes to the classic tale of Persephone in the goblins' presentation of pomegranates, as it appears later that whoever eats of this fruit is out of her own control, and at the mercy of the giver, who, in



this case, is merciless. All of these fruits, extolled by the goblins as being "Sweet to tongue and sound to eye," are used to lure in the girls by trying to please them with pretty things, which the goblins believe all women are tempted by and wish to have.

The offer of currants and the break in the middle of the list with the goblins' cry : "Morns that pass by,/ Fair eves that fly;/ Come buy, come buy/" presses for a fast decision, stressing that now is the time to buy, thus encouraging the girls that hear the plea to make hasty, impulsive decisions to indulge themselves while they can. These are obviously creatures who feel that women can be worn down by constant imploring.

The goblins' offer of gooseberries in their catalog of treats may be alluding to the expression "to make a goose or fool of," in use in the 1800's, and probably when the current phrase "silly goose" originated. The foolishness of succumbing to the goblins' wares may also be a result of the grapes "fresh from the vine," which would surely intoxicate and drug these poor souls, who, too, are "fresh from the vine," so to speak, in their innocence.

Also a part of this array, figs are available to fill the maidens' mouths, no doubt so that they can not protest against the goblins' ghoulishness or be able to cry for help. The goblins end their list with "citrons from the South," which are acidic, bitter tasting fruits, usually made into preserves or citron-water, a

liquor made from brandy flavored with citron peel. The citrons "from the South" may not necessarily be from Southern England or Europe, but that place in the deepest south--hell.

The second stanza opens with the two golden haired sisters, out in the evening. Both sisters hear the goblins' call, but Laura becomes just a little too tempted to hear what they are offering. She turns her head from its lowered, obedient position, to rear it back in the way a horse does when he has been startled and begins to whisper to her sister "like the restless brook"--becoming a part of the nature she will soon succumb to, as she begins to be lured by her base, natural urges. Laura's first look at the goblins sees them as little men, (instead of the beasts Gabriel draws for Christina), but on close inspection she can see their animal-like characteristics: a cat's face (traditionally associated with mystery and treated with suspicion), a tail (the devil is often shown as having one), a rat's speed (a fast moving, disease-spreading rodent, much hated and feared by the majority of the public), a snail's crawl (hinting at a slimy, creep, nasty feeling), a prow like a wombat (an animal described as being like a small bear, usually thought of as being fierce) and the rolling gait of a ratel (a carnivorous animal resembling a badger, perhaps chosen for his name, which includes "rat" or as a play on the word "rattle" as a sound of warning that danger is approaching. Despite their appearance, or perhaps because of it, Laura finds them

intriguing, if a bit frightening, but, instead of listening to her own fear and leaving, stays and puts herself in the way of temptation.

The appearance of the goblins is tempered by their voices, blending together like doves, peaceful and gentle sounding, which enables them to draw Laura into their grasp, as males will generally use some type of "sweet talking" to entice their ladies.

Her loss of restraint is described in vibrant, natural Pre-Raphaelite details: She is like a "rush-imbedded swan," struggling to get out of its protective weeds in a rush or hurry and compared to a "lily from the beck" (lilies representing purity or innocence, associated with Christ, "The Lily of the Valley"). With the swiftness of the beck, a light brook or stream with a stony bed, she impulsively decided to abandon her more difficult, though pure, way of life. Likened to "a moonlit poplar branch," rather than sunlit, Laura must perform her act of disobedience in the dark, the rapid growth of the poplar predicting the pace with which her greed for this fruit will grow. She breaks free at the end "like a vessel at the launch/When its last restraint is gone"/as though all that has held her back has now let go--she has given in completely to temptation.

The third stanza begins with the goblin men approaching Laura backwards, perhaps a perverse warning that she too should turn back. Their repetitious cry to "Come buy, come buy" over and over

confuses her, making it difficult for her to refuse. One goblin even begins to weave her a crown of leaves and "rough nuts brown," as if she is taking part in a type of ceremony; in this case, that of the death of her innocence due to indulgence in these carnal desires, or a mock wedding in which she will be married to the evil of the goblin men. Their entreaties to taste the fruit are accompanied by animal noises, a cat purring and birds whistling, to accentuate their difference from humans, but also perhaps to calm their victims.

As a price for their wares, the goblins ask for a golden curl from her head, signifying the loss of a piece of herself. Although she is unaware of it, this particular lock seemed to be what protected her health and even her life, which is what the goblins intended her to forfeit: "She clipped a precious golden lock,/She dropped a tear more rare than pearl," in a gesture Christina Rossetti uses to symbolize that, in exchange for the sensual pleasure of the goblin fruit, she is giving up her heavenly inheritance (Arseneau 90). "Then [she] sucked their fruit globes fair or red . . ."; Laura gorges herself on their fruit, especially tasty because of its being forbidden, to the point of sucking them to get every bit. She is consumed with desire for the fruit, no matter what its appearance, fair or red, in this case, perhaps red with the blood of its fair victims.

The fruits are "sweeter than honey from the rock," an allusion

to the Biblical honey (salvation, peace, a place of rest) that is available in the Rock (Jesus Christ), meant to make the gratification seem even more intense and pleasurable while actually, instead of giving her life, this honey would steal it. The juices of the fruit of the goblins are stronger than any "man-rejoicing wine," alluding to the high spirits of the wine's imbibers. The juice is like none she had ever had before, suggesting the loss of her innocence.

After she "sucked until her lips were sore," implying that she had eaten far in excess of what she should have, Laura leaves, taking only one stone or seed with her.

Upon her return, Lizzie berates Laura for being so late, and told the story of Jeanie, a warning full of Pre-Raphaelite symbols to illustrate what happens to those who indulge in the goblins' temptations. Using fantasmal/supernatural images, she describes Jeanie feeding on goblin fruit "plucked from bowers/ Where summer ripens at all hours" (an image of hellish heat), and pining away in the noonlight (opposite of moonlight, emphasizing the strangeness, as most things thrive in sunlight). Jeanie then went on to "dwindle," a verb associated normally with flowers, and finally "fell with the first snow," as do most remaining flowers and leaves after autumn is over. Even now, Lizzie tells Laura, no grass will grow on the girl's grave, a sign of her rejection of all that is good, as she embraced such wickedness that its presence lingers

after her death. No signs of life or beauty are allowed to appear there; even the daisies that Lizzie planted, pure and chaste as she is, cannot bloom there.

Laura chooses not to understand the warning, however, and in a "gobliness" way described the fruit to Lizzie: "worth getting . . . piled on a dish of gold," that is too heavy for her to hold. The peaches she describes have a "velvet nap," a foretelling of the long one the consumers of this peach should plan to take. She tells her of transparent grapes without even one seed, a sign of their sterility and ultimate worthlessness, as the fruit cannot grow and reproduce. She portrays a scene that is truly picturesque, but very heady and intoxicating: "Odorous indeed must be the mead/ Whereon they grow, and pure the wave they drink/ With lilies at the brink,/ And sugar-sweet their sap." All of these ideas together hint at an overabundance of tastes and smells similar to that offered by the fruit. One small slip--lilies "at the brink"--intimates that the purity of the lily stays outside, not entering the place where all of this exorbitance is found.

In the next stanza, Rossetti spends several lines emphasizing the closeness of the two sisters, using favorite Pre-Raphaelite themes of nature and images of medieval royalty: "Like two pigeons in one nest"/ laying in their curtained bed, which shuts out the rest of the world, "Like two blossoms on one stem,/ Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow,/ Like two wands of

ivory/Tipped with gold for awful kings," as if the two women themselves can inspire awe in the kings by their value. The sisters spent the next day in activities that sweet young girls would, making "cakes of whitest wheat," "cakes for dainty mouths to eat," foods that are pure and wholesome, made by the women, not like the fruits that Laura has now been exposed to after having sampled the goblins' fruit.

By evening, Laura was consumed by a lust for that fruit "like a leaping flame," perhaps caused by those "bright-fire-like barberries" and "citrons from the South," or to the fires of iniquity that have been lit inside her. Lizzie tried to hurry Laura home, now that the sunset "flushes/Those furthest loftiest crags/" as if she knows things happen after sunset that would cause proper young ladies' cheeks to flush.

Laura can no longer hear the goblins' cry, nor see even one, let alone the "herds" she used to, a word which reminds the reader of their predatory and dangerous potential. "The stars rise, the moon bends her arc,/Each glowworm winks her spark"/--all these are nature's ways of lighting the way home for the girls. When she realizes she could no longer hear the goblins' cry, Laura's flame lost its warmth, emphasizing its falseness, as a true flame would always be warm. She asks herself, "Must she no more such succous pasture find?" and gnashes her teeth in frustration like a beast.

Displaying more of the Pre-Raphaelite's fascination with

magical, fantastic images, Christina Rossetti's next stanza contains several more opposite or reversed unnatural scenes: the noon waxing bright, when waxing is usually a term applied to the stages of the moon; and the degeneration of Laura as the "fair full moon" turns to decay and burns her fire away, a direct contradiction, as the moon has no fire to destroy or burn anything with, unlike the sun. At this point, Laura's fire from the fruit is apparently deteriorating, leaving her lifeless and empty as the moon. The sucking of the goblins' fruit apparently causes this reversal--instead of the maiden receiving something from the juice, the life is actually "sucked" from her by the action; the breath is taken from her lips, leaving only soreness and pain.

Rossetti follows this with Pre-Raphaelite symbolism, offering an admonition of the uselessness in trying to make something good from something evil--that it just cannot be done. When Laura plants the seed, or stone, she had brought back from her encounter with the goblins, although it has plenty of sunshine and water from her tears, unlike a fruit's stone, it fails to grow--nothing good can come from evil.

Like the seed, Laura, too, is unable to thrive and would die if it were not for Lizzie's sacrifice. She puts a silver penny in her purse (an evil currency, associated with the betrayal of Christ) and goes to find the goblins to buy some of their evil fruit. Upon seeing her, they scramble to get to her in every



imaginable animals' gait--flying, crowing, leaping, clucking--and making faces, "mopping and mowing," or grimacing and mocking, trying to be discreet, but unable to truly hide their animallike appearances. They implore her to try their offerings, beginning with "russet and dun" apples, to bob at their cherries, bite at their peaches, citrons, and dates, to pluck and suck "the plums on their twigs," using all the graphic, sensual imagery they can to tempt her.

Laura throws the money to them, much in the way food is tossed to animals when humans fear to get too close. Their fruit, however, is not for sale, only for trade, as most temptations are.

The goblin men want her to sit and eat with them, under the guise of acceptance of friendship, a false one certainly on their part, while they emphasize that time is wasting; the fruit needs to be enjoyed now: "[h]alf their bloom would fly,/Half their dew would dry,/Half their flavour would pass by"/if she delays.

When Laura refuses to join them, they try, at first, human ways of goading her, such as elbowing and jostling her, but then resort to trying to scare her by barking, mewing, hissing, and mocking, tearing her clothes, and getting her dirty, in the way that animals do. When these tactics fail, they squeeze their fruits against her mouth in a violent, rape-like attack to force her to eat them, an idea reinforced by the description of Lizzie resisting this invasion of her person '[l]ike a royal virgin town.'

She will not open 'lip from lip', to allow the goblins to force their fruit into her mouth.

More images associated with rape continue with the goblins' persistent struggle with Lizzie, as they torture and torment her, "pinching her black as ink," and mashing juice against her mouth, which "syrupped all her face." A sticky, unpleasant substance, it clung to her as the ambience of sin often can, lodged in the "dimples of her chin," and tried to hide in her prettiness and find a way under her skin, streaking her neck "which quaked like curd."

Christina uses the example Lizzie sets to praise women who are able to resist the temptation of sensual gratification presented by men, as she is described in angelic, almost saintlike images: She is "like a lily in a flood," purity in a flood of wickedness; like a living stone ("blue-veined," an allusion to the expression "true blue," perhaps), lashed at by noisy, unruly tides; like a beacon left alone in the midst of a stormy, "hoary" sea (corrupt, or a play on the word "whory," emphasizing Lizzie's chastity). Likened to a "fruit-crowned orange tree/ White with blossoms honey-sweet/Sore beset by wasp and bee"/, her trees are productive and sweet smelling. As orange blossoms also are associated with weddings and brides, this passage could suggest a "bride of Christ" portrait. All of these are images of assaults on her chastity.

Later, Christina reveals the truth about the goblins' fruit. After the goblins realize that their attempt at seduction has been

denied, they abandoned it along the road. The fruits' true nature became apparent: "Some writhed on the ground,/Some dived into the brook/With ring and ripple,/ Some scudded [hurried] without a sound,/Some vanished in the distance"; all are hints that demons have inhabited these parts of nature--snakes, fish, even the air.

In a "smart, ache, tingle," Lizzie left, "smart" for having been intelligent enough to know not to give in to the goblins' beseechings. She is forced to tear through the landscape, in yet another battle against nature, which seemed to join with the goblins against her. Instead of the pleasantness and serenity usually found in nature, conversely, Rossetti's terrain takes on Pre-Raphaelite supernatural characteristics, as Lizzie must fight through the furze (a play on "fur"), the "threaded copse," bushes woven together to trip her, and through the "dingle," a deep hollow, all the time on her guard, fearing the goblin men would "dog" her, with their barking and biting.

When Lizzie arrives home, she begs Laura to suck the juice of the "goblin pulp" and "goblin dew" from her face, in an almost orgiastic fashion similar to the way Lizzie gorged herself on the fruit in the beginning: "Eat me, drink me, love me;/ Laura, make much of me." As the evil of the goblin men and their fruit obtained through wickedness consumed her, now she must "consume" the fruit acquired in sacrifice and love to reverse its effects. In this way, Lizzie's love is seen as pure and holy, her juice

life-giving, while the goblins' becomes the death associated with sin and eroticism. These lines are very reminiscent of those of Christ at the Lord's Supper which He speaks to the disciples; the eating of the bread and the drinking of the wine represent becoming a part of Him, and in this case, are the way for Laura to become virtuous again by supplanting the evil within her for the good from Lizzie.

Laura's reaction to the juice seems to be drawn almost directly from Biblical accounts of the reaction from one who is demon possessed when confronted with one who is holy. As the juice acts as a holy water, scorching her lips, tasting bitter as wormwood on her tongue, she writhes on the ground, ripping her clothes in a tormented rage. "Swift fire spread through her veins, knocked at her heart,/ Met the fire smouldering there/And overbore the lesser flame": this passage exemplifies the triumph of good over evil, the superior strength of the good fire which must purge the bad from the heart of the wicked.

The speaker praises Lizzie in the following lines, comparing her to images of immovability and strength: a watch tower and a tree, and a waterspout that gives the water of life to her sister.

The following stanza is Rossetti's way of showing what happens when sin is replaced with holiness. Nature bursts with life; birds are chirping about their homes; reapers go the place "of golden sheaves" (to bring in their sheaves, a Christian image), all

presenting pictures of things that are natural and right. A new day dawns, with "cup-like" lilies opening on the stream, to be filled again with innocence and purity as Laura is when she awakes, transformed back to her old self.

The poem ends with the girls later married and mothers, with Laura using the story of the goblins and their fruit as a warning to her children not to indulge themselves in the temptations of life. She tells them "there is no friend like a sister/ In calm or stormy weather;/To cheer one on the tedious way,/To fetch one if one goes astray,/ To lift one if one totters down,/To strengthen whilst one stands"--could these also be admonitions to the daughters not to rely on others (particularly men) to help in times of trouble?

Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" is typically thought of as being an allegory warning of the impending doom that awaits women who succumb to the temptations of the flesh. Closer scrutiny reveals, however, that "Goblin Market" may be an open objection on Christina's part to the way that men, particularly the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, treated women, and her warning for their models/women (wives and lovers) not to allow themselves to be taken over and controlled.

Many similarities exist within the poem between the goblins and the artists and also between the two sisters and the Pre-Raphaelite women. First of all, the goblins are males and

brothers, just like the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood members considered themselves to be, as William Rossetti stated. The "fruits" the artists offer are easily as sensuous and enticing as those of the goblins: sexual love, admiration from the Brothers as well as the public, social prestige, and even a type of supernatural immortality, as they will live forever in the artists' portrayals.

Like the goblins' fruit, however, their "treats" may not be as wonderful as they are described to be, particularly in the case of Lizzie Siddal and Christina's brother, Gabriel. Parallels abound in the story of Lizzie and Gabriel's marriage and in that of Laura and the goblin men and their fruit. Like Lizzie, Laura succumbed to the temptations of the flesh. After being seduced by offers of physical and emotional gratification, in return for their innocence, Lizzie and Laura were both given instead nothing but misery. Only the sacrifice of one who was pure and holy saved Laura; while for Lizzie, there was no saviour, and she perished.

As Christina had already written at least one poem ("In An Artist's Studio") about Gabriel and Lizzie's relationship, "Goblin Market" could easily be a continuance of the story. Certainly, as a poet, she seemed to prefer to stay with certain topics. When asked by Gabriel to write on others, such as nature or politics, she responded to him that she had a "one-stringed lyre." Possibly, in this case, her "lyre" again decided to return to those subjects

she knew best. Rossetti, could, then, be warning against the futility of falling in with the men of the Brotherhood, many of whom were living a bohemian, almost animalistic way of life, painting erotic pictures that objectified women and stripped them of their purity and innocence.

Directed toward all women, Rossetti's message represents her version of Victorian women's inner struggles, and by substituting, in the case of "Goblin Market," fantasy for anger, she was able to participate in public discourse, a rare occurrence for women in Victorian England. Critics Gilbert and Gubar, authors of The Madwoman in the Attic, see "Goblin Market's" Lizzie as almost a Victorian Amazon. There is a suggestion in the poem that "men hurt while women redeem," which may explain why the women's husbands are never mentioned and that the sisters eventually have daughters, not sons. There is also a sense of "independence from the erroneous belief that women need a man's love, otherwise they are incomplete" (Charles 146-148).

Those who have read the works of Christina Rossetti can definitely agree with the last statement. Although she wrote many beautiful love poems, especially her sonnet collection Monna Innomata, Christina Rossetti's mind was not that of the typical Victorian woman, who thought that men should be allowed to rule her life. Because of her faith, she felt that she must allow God that place. Despite living in restrictive Victorian England, she

composed poetry filled with passion and strength fueled by a fervent love of an art she expressed with vivid Pre-Raphaelite richness and color in her own decidedly feminine voice.



## NOTES TO THE TEXT

<sup>1</sup>Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB)-a name chosen by the seven members for their belief that only before Raphael had there been sincerity and truth in painting. According to them, all painters afterwards tried to "little Raphaels," copying him instead of relying on nature and invention (Winwar 6).

<sup>2</sup>life class-a class in which representations are made of living models.

<sup>3</sup>rigid transcripts-exact, precise reproductions or sketches.

<sup>4</sup>James Collinson-Christina's fiancé for a brief time. She broke off the engagement upon his return to the Catholic church. Nearly fifty years later, her brother William wrote that the break-up "struck a staggering blow at Christina Rossetti's piece of mind . . . from which she did not fully recover for years" (Marsh 113).

<sup>5</sup>lifelong Dante scholar-Gabriele Rossetti embarked on a study of Dante, partly in honor of his father-in-law's Tuscan heritage and partly because Dante was special interest of his chief patron. He began with a commentary on The Inferno and, by 1828, was so immersed in the subject that he gave his first-born son the name of Dante as he third baptismal name. Later, he embarked on a vast study of Dante and his contemporaries, as forerunners of the Reformation and freemasonry. "By aligning Dante with a supposed spirit that heralded the Reformation, Professor Rossetti was moreover protecting himself from current anti-papist feeling in Britain . . ." (Marsh 36).

<sup>6</sup>Modern Painters-a four volume work begun as a defense of landscape artists, especially Turner, considered to be the first painter in history to have given an entire transcript to the whole system of nature, according to Ruskin. In Volume II, the logical framework of ideas was rapidly constructed. Beauty is perceived as theoretic, i.e. the contemplative faculty as opposed to the aesthetic, which is sensual and base.

<sup>7</sup>Charles Lyell-the chief patron of Gabriele Rossetti (Marsh 21).

<sup>8</sup>Sesame and Lilies-published in 1865, includes essays on the respective duties of men and women.

<sup>9</sup>Exerpts from "In an Artist's Studio" and "Goblin Market" are

taken from The Complete Poems of Christina Georgina Rossetti, A Variorum Edition. "In an Artist's Studio" is located in Volume 3, p. 264; "Goblin Market," in Volume 1, pp. 11-26.

<sup>10</sup>"The Portrait" is part of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's House of Life collection, found in Poetry of the Victorian Period, edited by George Benjamin Woods and Jerome Hamilton Buckley, page 519.

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