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THE TENSION BETWEEN MYSTICISM AND EROTIC SENSIBILITY
IN CHRISTINA ROSSETTI'S "GOBLIN MARKET"

BY

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A thesis submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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INTRODUCTION

"Goblin Market," Christina Rossetti's best-known narrative poem, appeared in 1862 as the leading poem in Goblin Market and Other Poems, a volume designed to attract the Christmas trade.¹ Since then, the few scholars who have ventured to regard Miss Rossetti as something more than Dante Gabriel's sister have concerned themselves with varied and in-depth critical interpretations of "Goblin Market." William Rossetti, brother and biographer of the poet, reports that he had often heard Christina say that she meant nothing profound by the fairy tale and that "Goblin Market" should not be taken as an apologue.² Disregarding Christina Rossetti's own comment, the critics seem to divide themselves into three distinct groups with each presenting a different critical approach to "Goblin Market."

A review of the story of "Goblin Market" is necessary before either the critics' interpretations or my own can be profitably discussed. Laura and Lizzie, two sisters, are tempted by goblin merchants who haunt the woods and lure

¹Lona Mosk Packer, ed., Rossetti-Macmillan Letters: Some 133 Unpublished Letters Written to Alexander Macmillan, F. S. Ellis, and Others by Dante Gabriel, Christina, and William Michael Rossetti 1861-1889 (California: University of California Press, 1963), p. 6.

²Cited in Lona Mosk Packer, "Symbol and Reality in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market,'" PMLA, LXXIII (March 1958), 375.

unsuspecting maidens to taste their rich and delicious fruits. Laura succumbs to the temptation; Lizzie resists. Legend records that once a person has tasted the fruit, she is tormented by a wild craving for a second taste which the goblins never grant. The victim pines away and dies. Lizzie, fearing for Laura's life, sets out to secure the antidote, which is the fruit itself. Lizzie confronts the goblins who taunt, tease, torment and tempt her to taste their fruit. Lizzie resists and finally triumphs. With the rich juices of the goblins' fruits smeared over her face, Lizzie returns to her sister so that Laura may suck the juices off her cheeks and chin, and Laura is saved.

Critical response to "Goblin Market" falls into three categories. One of the groups is the formalists. By borrowing one fact from the historical-biographical critics--that Christina Rossetti was involved to some degree in the Pre-Raphaelite Movement--the formalists argue that because the poem can be read and enjoyed as a series of word pictures and unusual images, it is an "ingenious and brilliant creation" of Pre-Raphaelite poetry.³ Christina Rossetti's role in the Pre-Raphaelite Movement is not very clear; however, it is known that she moved in Pre-Raphaelite circles, modeled for her

³C. M. Bowra, The Romantic Imagination (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 247.

brother Dante Gabriel, was engaged to one of the original members, James Collinson, and produced the first volume of poems (Goblin Market and Other Poems) published by the Pre-Raphaelites or their associates to receive general recognition.⁴ "Goblin Market," a completely Pre-Raphaelite poem according to Ivor Evans,⁵ does display key Pre-Raphaelite characteristics-- pictorial elements, unusual images, sensuous candor, and decorative details used as vague symbols.

Exact detail, a Pre-Raphaelite dictum, not only exists in the poem but is also fashioned into one of its main ornaments.⁶

Note the description of the fruits:

Bloom-down-cheeked peaches,
Swart-headed mulberries
Wild free-born cranberries (ll. 9-11)
.
.
.
Bright fire-like barberries (l. 27)⁷

The goblins are also minutely described.

One had a cat's face,
One whisked a tail.
One tramped at a rat's pace,
One crawled like a snail,
One like a wombat prowled obtuse and furry,
One like a ratel tumbled hurry-skurry. (ll. 71-76)

⁴William E. Fredeman, Pre-Raphaelitism: A Bibliocritical Study (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 176.

⁵Ivor Evans, English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century (London: W & J Mackay Co., 1966), p. 92.

⁶Evans, p. 92.

⁷Christina Rossetti, "Goblin Market," The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, ed. William Michael Rossetti (London: Macmillan and Co., 1928). All subsequent references are to this edition.

Decorative details employed for symbolic effect are, according to William Fredeman, "perfectly consistent with the uses to which ornamentation is frequently put in both the painting and poetry of the Pre-Raphaelites."⁸ A description of Laura that appears early in the poem reveals these decorative details along with the vivid imagery and striking pictorial quality.

Laura stretched her gleaming neck
 Like a rush-imbedded swan,
 Like a lily from the beck,
 Like a moonlit poplar branch
 Like a vessel at the launch
 When its last restraint is gone. (ll. 81-86)

A later description of Lizzie is Pre-Raphaelite in its unusual images, sensuous candor and strong pictorial quality. This passage is reminiscent of Dante Rossetti's "Blessed Damozel."

White and golden Lizzie stood,
 Like a lily in the flood,---
 Like a rock of blue-veined stone
 Lashed by tides obstreperously,--
 Like a beacon left alone
 In a hoary, roaring sea
 Sending up a golden fire,--
 Like a fruit-crowned orange tree
 White with blossoms honey-sweet
 Sore beset by wasp and bee--
 Like a royal virgin town,
 Topped with gilded dome and spire
 Close beleaguered by a fleet
 Mad to tug her standard down. (ll. 408-421)

One last point that the formalists use to support their theory

⁸Fredeman, p. 176.

that "Goblin Market" is the most Pre-Raphaelite poem written by Christina Rossetti is that the poem itself echoes the ballad forms revived by the Pre-Raphaelites.⁹

The suggestion that "Goblin Market" is a Pre-Raphaelite narrative seems a plausible one and might be the interpretation most satisfactory to Miss Rossetti since she warned her readers away from seeking a moral in the poem.¹⁰ Another group of critics, however, believes there is significant evidence to indicate that the poem is more than a fairy tale for a precocious child: they feel it is indeed autobiographical and turn to a study of Miss Rossetti's life to prove it. These historical-biographical critics point to the dedication of the poem, the sister theme used frequently by the poet, and the famous tribute to a sister's self-sacrificing love at the conclusion of the poem as evidence in support of their autobiographical interpretation.

William Rossetti reports that Christina titled the poem "A Peep at the Goblins--To M. F. R."; the dedication is to Maria Francesca Rossetti, Christina's sister. Heeding suggestions

⁹Fredeman, p. 176.

¹⁰Christina Rossetti cited in Eleanor Walter Thomas, Christina Georgina Rossetti (New York: AMS Press, 1966), p. 156.

from Dante and others, Christina changed the title to "Goblin Market" but insisted that the dedication remain.¹¹ The fact that Christina Rossetti would choose to dedicate one of her poems to her older sister for whom she had only the most sincere affection and admiration¹² proves little. However the fact that the poem itself deals with two sisters and is one of three of Christina Rossetti's poems dealing with contrasted pairs of sisters is significant. The other two poems are "Noble Sisters" and "The Lowest Room."

Thomas Swann believes that "Goblin Market" can be read as an allegorical account of a weak woman (Christina) being saved from sin by her sister. Professor Swann even provides a rather lengthy but interesting discussion of the sin in question.¹³ James Collinson, the first of two suitors Christina rejected, came back into her life after he had

¹¹William Michael Rossetti, "Notes," The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti (London: Macmillan and Co., 1928), p. 459.

¹²Thomas, p. 83.

¹³Thomas Swann, Wonder and Whimsy: The Fantastic World of Christina Rossetti (New Hampshire: Marshall Jones Press, 1960), p. 96.

married another woman and had begged Christina to run away with him. Maria Rossetti held her back.¹⁴ In "Goblin Market" Christina is paying tribute to her sister for saving her and is attempting to atone for her momentary weakness by an excess of self-reproach. Lona Mosk Packer, a recent biographer of Christina Rossetti, supports this interpretation of self-reproach by pointing out that the two poems, "L. E. L." and "Ash Wednesday," written immediately before "Goblin Market" show more than a normal amount of melancholy and self-reproach. However, Professor Packer discounts the role which Collinson, the rejected suitor, plays.

Professor Packer suggests that Lizzie and Laura could be regarded as Christina Rossetti's version of sacred and profane love and that this concern for the two kinds of love could be directly related to Miss Rossetti's feelings for William Bell Scott.¹⁵ Scott, a poet and friend of the Rossetti brothers, met Christina in 1847. They were fond of each other, corresponded frequently, and spent much time together when Scott was in London. Even after Christina learned that Scott was married,

¹⁴Swann, p. 96.

¹⁵Packer, "Symbol and Reality," p. 375.

she continued to accept invitations to visit him at the home of his mistress, Alice Boyd. For a more detailed analysis of the role William Bell Scott played in the life of Christiana Rossetti, consult Lona Mosk Packer's Christina Rossetti (California: The University of California Press, 1963). Fearing in her own mind that she was guilty of the profane love that Laura represents, Christina Rossetti has Lizzie represent her sister Maria whom she seems too ready to regard as a perfect model of sanctity and sacred love.¹⁶

Disregarding Miss Rossetti's comment that she did not mean anything profound by this fairy tale,¹⁷ a third group of critics insists that "Goblin Market" can be taken beyond the autobiographical level of interpretation mentioned earlier to a universal level; they declare the poem to be symbolic of the Fall and Redemption of Man.¹⁸ The symbolists argue that the Christian doctrines of guilt, self-sacrifice, and temptation

¹⁶John Heath-Stubbs, The Darkling Plain: A Study of the Later Fortunes of Romanticism in English Poetry from George Barley to W. B. Yeats (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1950), p. 160.

¹⁷Christina Rossetti cited in Packer, Rossetti-Macmillan Letters, p. 8.

¹⁸Heath-Stubbs, p. 161.

seem to pervade the entire poem and add significance to what seems at first sight to be no more than a dream fantasy. Lizzie saves Laura by her self-sacrifice since she braves the dangers of the goblins' glen. By giving herself for one whom she loves, Lizzie may be taken as the ideal Christian or even as the Christ-figure.¹⁹ This particular interpretation may be taken even farther. Lizzie's words to Laura when Lizzie returns with the juices of the fruits on her face could suggest the application of the Eucharistic principle.²⁰

"Eat me, drink me, love me;
 Laura make much of me:
 For your sake I braved the glen
 And had to do with goblin
 merchant men." (ll. 471-474)

Temptation seems to be the thematic core of the poem, and temptation in "Goblin Market" is symbolized by fruit which is the traditional symbol of sin and temptation in the Bible. The fruit in this poem belongs "to the order of fruit which tempted Eve."²¹ In fact, Laura even asks Lizzie if she has tasted, "For my sake the fruit forbidden?" (l. 484).

¹⁹Heath-Stubbs, p. 162.

²⁰Packer, Christina Rossetti, p. 149.

²¹Packer, "Symbol and Reality," p. 376.

The symbolists then see "Goblin Market" conveying definite Christian ethical assumptions, the formalists feel that a textual study reveals the poem to be truly Pre-Raphaelite, and the historical-biographers feel that Christina Rossetti lives as Laura tempted by the world, the flesh, and the devil and saved by a sister's love.

All these interpretations are interesting and have varying degrees of merit: "Goblin Market," however, reveals to the careful reader a struggle that dominates much of Christina Rossetti's poetry. By studying the poem, its symbols, allusions and diction, one becomes aware of a tension between mysticism and erotic sensibility. Mysticism, as Miss Rossetti presents it in this poem, is the ability to know right and wrong intuitively. Yet it is a qualified mysticism, either arriving at or guided by the conventional Christian morality. Lizzie intuitively knows that the goblin men are evil, and her memory of Jeanie's fatal encounter with them confirms her horror of them. Jeanie in particular objectifies the consequences of denying the conventional Christian sexual morality. Mysticism, for Christina Rossetti, is conventional Christianity, that is, one moves Godward by conformity to the authority and revelation of Christ. The eroticism in the poem involves the varieties of both sensuous, simple appeal to the senses, and sensual,

appeal to the carnal. "Goblin Market" becomes not merely Christina Rossetti's best-known narrative poem but also a profound statement of the tension between the mystical and the erotic.

For the sake of a more detailed analysis, "Goblin Market" can be divided into seven sections with each section structuring around one, some or all of the six major symbol clusters. The first part of the narrative, consisting of lines 1-70, introduces goblin men and the two sisters, and these opening lines establish quickly the tone and direction of the story. Section two (ll. 71-140) relates Laura's encounter with the goblin men. The third section of the poem (ll. 141-198) deals with Lizzie's upbraiding of her sister, and with this third section, the first day of the narrative ends.

A description of the second day and evening and of the normal activities of the two sisters begins part four (ll. 199-328). This section also records Laura's continual decay and Lizzie's concern for her sister. Section five (ll. 329-463) involves Lizzie's confrontation with the goblin men. Section six (ll. 464-542) records Lizzie's triumphant return and rescue of her sister. Section seven (ll. 543-567) of the poem does little to enhance the narrative or move it forward. It is an important section of the poem in which Laura, now a mother herself, tells of the love and sacrifice of one sister for another.

All seven sections of the poem are rich in the imagery and symbols that give "Goblin Market" its pictorial quality and much of its charm. Six basic motifs can be identified in the poem: animals and birds, fruits and flowers, anatomy, time, color, and miscellaneous natural objects. [Using these symbol clusters in her story of the two sisters, Christina Rossetti conveys successfully to the reader the limitations and evil of carnality and the beauty of and necessity for a constant striving for the mystical, as defined on page ten.] A more thorough investigation of each of these sections of "Goblin Market" and the symbols, allusions and diction used in each will reveal that the tension between the mystical and erotic is deliberate on the part of the poet and that Miss Rossetti consciously uses the erotic to show more clearly and vividly its limitations and to show the need for a mysticism that remains committed to the Christian values.

The action of the poem begins almost immediately as the goblin men, still unseen, cry out twenty-nine luscious fruits that they hope to sell to the maidens. The first fruit mentioned significantly enough is the apple (l. 5). With its Biblical connotation of sin and the fall of man, the apple sets the tone and mood by which the other fruits listed are to be evaluated. With apples in line 5 are quinces. Both these fruits are

characteristically round, firm and fleshy. Mentioned together (l. 6) are lemons with their juicy sour pulp and oranges with their juicy sweet pulp. The small fleshy cherries, large juicy melons and small juicy raspberries are listed next. The peach, symbol of salvation when in the hands of the Virgin Mary, becomes another sensual fruit with its fuzzy skin and delicious juice when in the hands of goblin men. Mulberries, cranberries, crab apples, and dewberries, the next four fruits mentioned, are all small sour fruits that grow wild and uncontrolled. The fleshy pineapples, apricots, strawberries and the small dark blackberries conclude the first half of the list of wares being hawked by the goblin men.

The list of fruits begins again (l. 20) with the mention of grapes with their bacchanalian connotation of pleasure, youth, and good cheer. The juicy pulpy pomegranates, fleshy dates and bullaces, which are wild plums, follow. Rare pears, greengages, a fleshy plum-like fruit introduced in England from France in 1725, damsons or small plums and bilberries which are dark blueberries are listed next. The final five fruits are mentioned (ll. 26-29). Currants, gooseberries and barberries, small sour berries, the citrons, a thick-skinned fruit and the figs conclude the list.

Temptation in the form of these sumptuous fruits is followed in section one of the poem by the introduction of the two sisters. Through their dialogue and through Christina Rossetti's use of the symbol clusters, the human qualities of Lizzie and Laura and the danger they will face are revealed. The goblin men hawk their fruits morning and evening (l. 1), but it is not until a summer evening that Laura deliberately looks at the goblin merchants. Evening, night, dark, the archetypal symbol for evil and death is further enhanced by the fact revealed in line 37 that the evening has turned cool for summer. Even though the symbol cluster of the fruit dominates the first seventy lines of the poem, one must not overlook the frequent references to the human body, more especially to the parts involved in sensory response. In selling their fruits, the goblin merchants appeal to the sense of taste, touch and sight.

Figs to fill your mouth
 Citrons from the South
 Sweet to the tongue and sound to eye. (ll. 28-30)

The mouth and tongue are part of one of the major erogenous zones of the body as are the "cautioning lips" (l. 38). The sense of touch is evident as the sisters are described "with tingling cheeks and finger tips" (l. 39). Laura "pricks" up her golden head (l. 41), and later rears her "glossy head" (l. 52).

Certainly the anatomy is important here, but so are the adjectives that are indicative of a tactile sensation. In line 34 Laura bows her head as in prayer, but her purpose in doing so is to hear more closely the call of the goblin men. Lizzie not only begs her sister to ignore the goblin men and their cries but also blots out for herself all sense impressions of them, thus all temptation. In line 50 "Lizzie covered up her eyes." Later she "thrust a dimpled finger/In each ear, shut eyes and ran" (ll. 67-68). As the first section of the poem ends, Lizzie, knowing intuitively the evil of the goblin men, resists the temptation and flees while "curious Laura chose to linger/Wondering at each merchant man" (ll. 69-70).

Section two of "Goblin Market" begins with a physical description of the merchants only previously heard and discussed. Lizzie's fear of them and the evil that they could do is justified and further enhanced by the description of their bodies in animal terms.

One had a cat's face,
 One whisked a tail,
 One tramped at a rat's pace,
 One crawled like a snail,
 One like a wombat prowled obtuse and furry,
 One like a ratel tumbled hurry-skurry. (ll. 71-76)

The animals chosen and the diction used to describe the goblin

men further convey the idea of evil, temptation and sin. The first animal mentioned is the cat, which is significant. Based on a medieval superstition, the black cat was Satan's favorite form. Since then cats have been associated with witches.²² Other than the cat, all animals mentioned--the rat, snail, wombat and ratel--are lower order creatures. The verbs used in association with these animal-like creatures support the idea that they are lower forms of beings: they tramp, crawl and prowl. The goblin merchants are a personification of carnality and evil-mindedness, and Laura is a victim of their evil and trickery even before she confronts the men. That Laura is deceived is indicated in Miss Rossetti's careful choice of words in the following passage from the poem.

She heard a voice like voice of doves
 Cooing all together:
 They sounded kind and full of loves
 In the pleasant weather. (*italics mine*) (ll. 77-80)

Significantly, Laura is deceived not by the goblin men, but by her own sense of hearing. The voices she hears are not those of doves, the symbol for peace and love, but only sound like doves. The voices sound "kind and full of loves," but in reality they are not. Relying too heavily on the senses, Laura is deceived and will fall victim to the goblin men.

²²William Rose Benet, ed., The Reader's Encyclopedia (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1955), p. 187.

This is one of many illustrations that Christina Rossetti will use in "Goblin Market" to show the limitations of the senses for gaining truth and to suggest the need for a combination of the sensory and the mystical if one is to understand the nature of things.

In the very beautiful exploding simile that follows, Laura is compared to a swan, lily, poplar branch and ship, each representing an object about to be released from any restraints. The poet uses the simile to show the danger that exists for any individual, particularly Laura in the poem, when he has no restrictions.

Laura stretched her gleaming neck
 Like a rush-imbedded swan,
 Like a lily from the beck,
 Like a moonlit poplar branch,
 Like a vessel at the launch
 When its last restraint is gone. (ll. 81-86)

The swan, a creature of grace and movement, is "rush-imbedded," but the rushes are its natural environment where it thrives and is secure. Laura, stretching her neck, seeks a release from her innocent condition and the moral restraints imposed by it. She wants to be free of the innocence and virginity which at a merely physical or sensuous level are meaningless. The lily, a white flower symbolizing purity, is newly released

from its natural environment of the rocky-bottomed stream. Even though it is momentarily free from all restraints, it will soon wither and die, for it has left its natural milieu. The poplar branch, a symbol of aspiration according to some,²³ is seen not in the bright clear light of day but rather in the moonlight. Laura is full of aspiration, but with no moral restraints will be unable to evaluate her direction clearly. The final comparison in the simile is the most powerful. Laura, like a vessel with its last restraint gone, is at this point in the narrative freed from the moral restraints that govern and guide her life. Given this freedom, Laura chooses to deal with the goblin men to fulfill a sensual need and becomes an illustration of the danger in which an individual finds himself when he abandons everything for the sensual.

By the poet's deliberate diction, the evil of the goblin men is further emphasized when they meet Laura. The merchants' cries are described as "shrill" (l. 89) while they leer at each "queer" (l. 94) and "sly" (l. 96) brother. One of the merchants begins almost immediately to weave a crown for

²³Eva C. Hangen, ed., Symbols: Our Universal Language (Kansas: McCormick-Armstrong, 1962), p. 56.

Laura, but the material he uses is strange and foreboding. Tendrils, the threadlike part of a climbing plant which gets its support by clinging to or coiling around an object, are the first materials for the crown mentioned. Also used are leaves as opposed to flowers, and nuts are used that are rough rather than smooth and lovely and nuts that are brown, an unappealing color denoting barrenness and grief.

Laura is enchanted by the men but has yet to buy their fruits. Having tempted her by appealing to her sense of taste, the merchants resort to deception. The queer creature that earlier whisked his tail now "bade her taste/In tones as smooth as honey" (ll. 107-108). The cat-faced creature purred and the rat-like merchant spoke "a word of welcome" (ll. 110-111). Explaining that she has no money with which to purchase the fruits for which she longs, Laura pays the goblins' price by giving of herself, her "precious golden lock" (l. 126). After paying the price but before tasting the fruits she has purchased, Laura "dropped a tear more rare than pearl" (l. 127). This shedding of a tear symbolizes Laura's pain of initiation, that is, the tear is more rare than pearl because even though she has freed herself from the restraints of her innocence, Laura realizes intuitively

that she has paid too high a price for the transitory pleasures of the carnal. Laura devours the juices and discards the empty rinds but chooses to keep "one kernel-stone" (l. 138) that will appear later in the poem. After sucking the fruits, Laura turns toward home unaware of the passage of time. Laura's senses being dulled by the fruits represents a basic idea in Victorian thinking and a key idea in Miss Rossetti's poem; seeking pleasure through the senses destroys the senses. Laura does not know if it is day or night even though her encounter with goblin men took place in the darkness of the night.

The third section of "Goblin Market" (ll. 141-198) relates Lizzie's upbraiding of Laura and introduces the second exploding simile of the poem. Laura returns home in the evening, and Lizzie cautions her that "twilight is not good for maidens" (l. 144). The time of day is stressed again with the twilight indicating a prelude to night, darkness and evil. Lizzie scolds kindly and gently by recalling for Laura the fate of Jeanie, another maiden. Jeanie met the goblin men and took the fruits and flowers that they offered. Being unable to find them a second time, she pines away and dies with the first snow. No grass will grow on Jeanie's grave and the daisies

that Lizzie planted there one year ago have yet to bloom. It is important to note that Jeanie's story is incomplete at this point and that an important fact will be added when the story is mentioned again later in the poem.

The eighteen lines that tell Jeanie's story are rich in imagery and incorporate the symbol clusters of time, fruits and flowers, and color or more particularly the lack of color. Jeanie, as did Laura, meets and deals with goblin merchants in darkness. In the moonlight she succumbs to their temptations and enjoys the fleeting physical pleasures of the fruits and flowers. It is, however, in the noonlight, the clear illuminating light of day, that Jeanie pines away. Jeanie succumbs to temptation in the summer, a hot sultry season of the year which archetypically is the zenith of one's life, and she is dead by the first snowfall.

The daisies that refuse to bloom and the grass that refuses to grow on Jeanie's grave are two important symbols. Lizzie recalls that even now no grass will grow on Jeanie's grave. Jeanie's sin has poisoned the ground under which she lies, and the soil is barren and will not support life. Daisies, a flower symbolic of youth and innocence, were planted by Lizzie at the grave one year ago, but they refuse to bloom.

The flowers are static. Not really dried up and dead and certainly not living, the daisies represent a pathetic death-in-life situation that is also the result of sin. There is a noticeable absence of color. The rich vibrant colors often associated with youth and beauty are missing. Grey is the one color used to describe her, and grey denotes aging, dullness, sadness and darkness.

The story of Jeanie's fate and Lizzie's added warnings have virtually no effect on Laura.

"Nay, hush," said Laura:
 "Nay, hush, my sister:
 I ate and ate my fill,
 Yet my mouth waters still:
 Tomorrow night I will
 Buy more;" and kissed her. (ll. 163-168)

Laura has not found complete satisfaction in the physical but expresses confidence that she will be able to quench her thirst by securing more fruit that next evening. What Laura fails to realize at this point and what Christina Rossetti stresses in this poem is that the senses, in the nature of things, are insatiable. When one chooses only the sensuous to the exclusion of everything else, he can never be satisfied.

The fruit imagery that dominated the earlier portions of the poem appears again as Laura lists the fruits that she has seen and devoured. Her list is reminiscent of the

hawking of the merchants as they lured Laura to their glen.

"I'll bring you plums tomorrow
 Fresh on their mother twigs,
 Cherries worth getting;
 You cannot think what figs
 My teeth have met in,
 What melons icy-cold
 Piled on a dish of gold
 Too huge for me to hold,
 What peaches with a velvet nap,
 Pellucid grapes without one seed:
 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." (ll. 170-183)

The senses are again brought into full play as Laura paints this sumptuous and appealing picture. In strong sensuous images Laura tells about sinking her teeth into the figs (ll. 173-174), touching the icy-cold melons (l. 175) and the velvet peaches (l. 178), and seeing the grapes with their translucent skin (l. 179). Laura imagines the meadow where these fruits grow as having a fragrant odor and as having a stream or brook that is pure and lovely as it nourishes the fruits. Significantly, Laura sees this water supply having lilies growing around the edges. The lily, used throughout the poem, is a white flower symbolizing purity and associated with the Easter holiday. It seems strange therefore that Laura would see the water that nourishes these fruits being surrounded by lilies with their strong religious connotation of spirituality and resurrection.

Perhaps Miss Rossetti, through the use of the lily at the breeding ground for the goblin fruits, is suggesting by this juxtaposition exactly what Laura is losing by choosing the sensual. Perhaps, too, Laura is attempting at this point in the narrative to fuse the sensual and spiritual. If this is the case, her attempt is in vain, and the ideal situation of the best of both worlds—the spiritual and the physical—escapes her. With the tasting of the fruits, Laura has given up all else for the sensuous. Laura's creation of this sensuous and lovely place where the fruits are grown marks the beginning of her withdrawal from her world. This withdrawal becomes greater as the narrative progresses. Laura's natural setting can no longer offer her any satisfaction or gratification of her desire for the sensual; therefore, she is forced out of her natural milieu to search for a new and more intensified sensation that will offer her gratification.

The third section of "Goblin Market" closes with the second exploding simile in the poem. The first one, found in section two of the poem, describes only Laura. This eight-line simile describes both sisters:

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-fall'n snow,
 Like two wands of ivory
 Tipped with gold for awful kings. (ll. 184-191)

The first image used in this simile suggests unity. Laura and Lizzie are together "like two pigeons in one nest" (l. 185). The second and third images, the two blossoms on one stem and the two flakes of new-fallen snow, are similar in that they both have their brief time of beauty. They lack permanence and suggest the transient quality of innocence especially in the case of Laura. The final image of this exploding simile compares the two sisters to "two wands of ivory/Tipped with gold for awful kings" (ll. 190-191). Ivory suggests purity and the gold tips refer to the color of the girls' hair. The image of sceptres of the awful kings suggests law or rule and restates an idea hinted at earlier in the poem that people need some restraints or authority to guide them. In the earlier simile in which Laura was compared to objects that have been released from all restraints, the poet suggests the danger to the individual when he chooses to be free from all forms of restraint. The unity, represented by the pigeons, the innocence, represented by the blossoms and snowflakes, and the conduct according to moral authority, represented by the

wands for kings are the three very important things that Laura will lose now that she has abandoned all for the sensuous.

As the third section of "Goblin Market" ends, the two sisters are sleeping peacefully. The night, earlier so full of evil and temptation, is quiet as the sisters are together. The moon and stars gaze on them, the wind blows just gently enough to sing them a lullaby and neither the bat nor the owls want to disturb the sleep of Lizzie and Laura "cheek to cheek and breast to breast/Locked together in one nest" (ll. 216-217). The innocence of the two sisters is preserved as part three of "Goblin Market" ends.

With section four (ll. 199-328) the second day of the narrative begins. Much more time than is needed to advance the story-line is given to a detailed description of the sisters' activities on the first day after Laura's adventures with goblin men.

Early in the morning
 When the first cock crowed his
 warning,
 Neat like bees, as sweet and busy,
 Laura rose with Lizzie:
 Fetched in honey, milked the cows,
 Aired and set to rights the house,
 Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,
 Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,

Next churned butter, whipped up
 cream,
 Fed their poultry, sat and sewed;
 Talked as modest maidens should:

(ll. 199-209)

Aside from presenting a charming list of domestic duties and a refreshing glimpse at pastoral life, this description of the day's activities serves to reinforce the idea of the unity of the sisters expressed in the second simile where the sisters are like two pigeons. With the closing of section three of the poem, the sisters spent the night "locked together in one nest." It is, therefore, not surprising that at the dawn of a new day, the two sisters "neat like bees, as sweet and busy" (l. 201) set about their daily chores together. However, Laura has succumbed to the temptation that Lizzie knew intuitively was wrong, thus destroying the unity that did exist between the sisters. As this day progresses and the chores are completed, the contrast between the two sisters becomes more obvious.

Lizzie with an open heart,
 Laura in an absent dream
 One content, one sick in part;
 One warbling for the mere bright
 day's delight,
 One longing for the night.

(ll. 210-214)

Lizzie finds joy and contentment in the simple things of

God's world and in the brightness of the day. Laura longs for the night and the fruits of the goblin men. As evening approaches, the differences between the sisters becomes more acute. "Lizzie most placid in her look" (l. 217) finds beauty in her natural setting and picks flowers to take home. Lizzie has the best of both worlds. She finds joy in the sensuous because she has not abandoned all for the sensuous. Her life is still guided by the intuitive knowledge of the conventional moral experience which enables her to find pleasure and satisfaction in the blending of the mystical and sensuous. Laura "most like a leaping flame" (l. 218) can find peace and contentment in nothing. Her daily activities in familiar places offer her no satisfaction, for the sensual drives people from their natural milieu in search of something that will satisfy their appetites. As the sun begins to set, Lizzie twice urges Laura to come home. The first time Lizzie tries to convince Laura to come home, she does so as one would persuade a child to come in for the night. Lizzie refers to their natural surroundings and to the other people and creatures who are already preparing for the night.

"The
 sunset flushes
 Those furtherest loftiest crags;
 Come, Laura, not another maiden
 lags.

No wilful squirrel wags,
 The beasts and birds are fast asleep."
 (ll. 221-225)

The creatures preparing for sleep cited by Lizzie are in direct contrast to the animal-like men who use the darkness of the night to lure maidens with their "iterated jingle" and "sugar-baited words." In an equally child-like manner Laura refuses to come home, making excuses that the bank is too steep, the hour is early, the dew has not fallen and the wind is not chill. The second time that Lizzie urges Laura to come home, she does so out of fear, for she has heard the goblin men for whom Laura has been watching and listening. Lizzie can hear the men and knows intuitively not to look, but Laura wants desperately to hear and see and cannot: this further emphasizes the differences between the two sisters that have been building since Laura succumbed to the temptation of goblin men. Laura is unable to hear and see the goblin men for two thematic reasons. Initiation can occur only once, and Laura has already abandoned all for the pleasure of the sensuous. As happened earlier in the poem when Laura was unaware of the passage of time after having eaten the fruit, Laura's senses continue to be dulled. Again Miss Rossetti stresses a thematic idea of "Goblin Market."

for the carnal, "gnashed her teeth. . .and wept/As if her heart would break" (ll.267-268).

Time passes and Laura's decay is reflected in the basic symbol clusters of time and color. Day and night, light and dark no longer have any distinction to Laura. She waits in vain during both day and night and deteriorates in both periods.

When the noon waxed bright
Her hair grew thin and grey;
She dwindled as the fair full moon
doth turn
To swift decay and burn
Her fire away. (ll. 276-280)

Laura's golden hair turns grey in the light of day, and once like the round moon so full of life, Laura deteriorates as the moon is reduced slice by slice by time.

Remembering the kernel-stone that she saved from her initial encounter with the goblin men, Laura, in a last desperate effort, attempts to nourish the stone so that it will produce fruit. Trying so frantically to find sensual satisfaction, Laura has been driven to the grotesque activity of attempting to rejuvenate a dead object not realizing that the sensual is never satisfied. She places the stone in the sun, waters it with her tears and hopes vainly that it will take root. The sun and tears have no effect on the stone: it is dead and the initial instance of pleasure

that is provided can never be repeated. With all hope gone, Laura slips again into her own world of illusion, since her world can offer her no gratification. The search for the sensual causes Laura to seek an intensified or new sensation as expressed in the following passage:

She dreamed of melons, as a
traveller sees
False waves in desert drouth
With shade of leaf-crowned trees,
And burns the thirstier in the
sandful breeze. (ll. 289-292)

Her desire for the fruits is now more intense because the fruits are unobtainable to her. Laura withdraws from her daily activities, for they no longer provide any pleasure; instead she sits listlessly and does not eat. Her condition is similar to the death-in-life situation symbolized by the daisies planted on Jeanie's grave. Laura is there but does not bloom. She is as static as the flowers.

Lizzie wants desperately to help her sister, but as she recalls the story of Jeanie, she realizes that the price of helping may be too high. This is the second time in the poem that the story of Jeanie is mentioned. Lizzie mentions the story the first time when Laura has returned from the goblins' glen. Lizzie hopes that the story will serve as a warning to her sister of the dangers associated with the

goblin merchants. When Lizzie recalls the story a second time, she adds one fact that was omitted from the original story. Jeanie was a prospective bride who wanted the "joys" of a bride before the moral commitment symbolized by marriage. The joys of the sensuous are for those who can combine them in their life with a moral commitment to the spiritual. Jeanie failed to realize as does Laura that the best of both worlds is available for those who combine the physical and mystical and do not abandon one solely for the other. As Laura drifts closer to the death that claimed Jeanie, Lizzie realizes that no sacrifice is too great to help one whom she loves. Lizzie's unselfishness and devotion to one who has sinned and is suffering is the spiritual doctrine that Lizzie comes to represent in "Goblin Market." Before leaving to meet with the goblin men, Lizzie kisses Laura and puts a silver penny in her purse. She takes along the penny, for she plans to deal fairly with the men. She will exchange money for the fruits when she meets the goblin men that night.

The climax of the narrative comes in section five of the poem (ll. 329-463) and centers around the all-important dialogue between Lizzie and the goblin merchants. The first nineteen lines of this section serve as a reminder of the

character of the goblin men and set the mood for the encounter. The evil that the goblin men represent and their wild and inane actions are revealed in the key phrases and the re-introduction of the animal images.

Flying, running, leaping,
Puffing and blowing,
Chuckling, clapping, crowing,
Clucking and gobbling,
Mopping and mowing,
Full of airs and graces,
Pulling wry faces,
Demure grimaces,
Cat-like and rat-like,
Ratel- and wombat-like,
Snail-paced in a hurry,
Parrot-voiced and whistler,
Helter skelter, hurry skurry,
Chatting like magpies,
Fluttering like pigeons,
Gliding like fishes,--
(ll. 332-347)

Their actions lack organization and seem meaningless.

The greeting that Lizzie receives from the men is as physical and as deceptive as the men themselves. Lizzie is hugged, kissed, squeezed and caressed, but there is no genuine affection felt by the merchants; they are attempting only to ensnare another maiden in their evil glen. The merchants begin the dialogue by encouraging Lizzie to look at their fruits.

"Look at our apples
Russet and dun,
Bob at our cherries,
Bite at our peaches,

Citrons and dates,
 Grapes for the asking,
 Pears red with basking
 Out in the sun,
 Plums on their twigs;
 Pluck them and suck them,--
 Pomegranates, figs."

(ll. 352-362)

The first fruit mentioned this time, as happened at the beginning of the poem, is the apple to reinforce the fruits as symbols of temptation and sin. The fruits are all sumptuous and at the peak of ripeness. The merchants appeal to the sensuous as they encourage Lizzie to sample their wares-- bite the peaches, pluck the plums, suck the plums, bob at the cherries. All this can be done for the asking. The fruits are ripe as they have been in the hot summer sun.

Lizzie's first reply to the goblin men is important.

"Good folk," said Lizzie,
 Mindful of Jeanie:
 "Give me much and many:"
 Held out her apron,
 Tossed them her penny.

(ll. 363-367)

Lizzie's manner is business-like and polite. She has presented herself for temptation but refuses the initiation, for she remembers what the death of Jeanie represents. Lizzie comes only to exchange money for the fruits. The goblin men are not interested in a business transaction and in an equally polite manner, they encourage Lizzie to stay

with them by inviting her to their feast. Symbolically, the feast of the goblin men is held at night. They also try to convince Lizzie to stay by explaining that the fruits will lose their bloom, their dew, and their flavor if taken from the glen. Ironically it is the people, such as Laura, who lose their bloom, their joy of living when they leave the glen after eating the fruits. Remembering that Laura is suffering and is at home alone, Lizzie asks to have her money returned if the goblin merchants are not interested in selling her the fruits for which she asked.

The goblin men, realizing that their deception has failed, reveal their true Satanic character and attack Lizzie.

Lashing their tails
 They trod and hustled her,
 Elbowed and jostled her,
 Clawed with their nails,
 Barking and mewing, hissing, mocking,
 Tore her gown and soiled her
 stocking,
 Twitched her hair out by the roots,
 Stamped upon her tender feet,
 Held her hands and squeezed their
 fruits
 Against her mouth to make her eat.
(ll. 398-407)

Lizzie's resistance to the brutal attack is recorded in the third exploding simile of the poem. The first simile discussed Laura alone (ll. 81-86), the second simile discussed the sisters together (ll. 184-198), and this third simile

discusses Lizzie alone.

White and golden Lizzie stood,
 Like a lily in a flood,--
 Like a rock of blue-veined stone
 Lashed by tides obstreperously,--
 Like a beacon left alone
 In a hoary, roaring sea,
 Sending up a golden fire,--
 Like a fruit-crowned orange tree
 White with blossoms honey-sweet
 Sore beset by wasp and bee,--
 Like a royal virgin town
 Topped with gilded dome and spire
 Close beleagured by a fleet
 Mad to tug her standard down.

(ll. 408-421)

Lizzie is compared to five objects; each object is in danger and each is withstanding the danger. The colors white and gold are used to describe Lizzie as the simile begins.

White symbolizes purity and innocence, and gold symbolizes a splendor and celestial light. The white and gold color imagery also refers to an earlier allusion in the poem to Lizzie and Laura as "two wands of ivory/Tipped with gold for awful kings" (ll. 190-191). Gold denotes the idea of a royal authority. Lizzie has retained her purity and innocence as indicated by the color white because her life has been guided by a moral code or law as indicated by the color gold. Laura has lost her purity and innocence because her life has been guided and consumed by the sensual. To emphasize further the association of purity with Lizzie, she is first

compared to a lily which symbolizes purity, chastity and innocence. The poet also compared Laura to a lily in the earlier simile. The difference is, however, that Laura was like a lily recently released from the restraints of the rocky-bottomed stream (l. 83). The restless and curious Laura loses her purity because she has chosen to be free of all moral restraints that would guide her life. This joy and freedom is short-lived, for, like the lily, Laura cannot survive if she is not rooted in a spiritual and moral commitment. Lizzie, on the other hand, is "like a lily in a flood" (l. 409). Her innocence and purity can withstand the deluge because she is still anchored in her natural milieu, and man's nature is rooted in the mystical.

As this simile continues Lizzie is compared to two more natural elements. Lizzie is like a rock being lashed by unruly tides. Her life, like the rock, has a firm foundation because her life is based on the intuitive knowledge of the conventional moral experience which enables her to withstand the erosion caused by the tides. Lizzie is also like a fruit-crowned orange tree, a person in full bloom and full of the joy of life. The mention of crown is reminiscent of an earlier and far different crown that the goblin men prepared for Laura. Hers was a crown of "tendrils,

leaves and rough nuts brown" (ll. 99-100). Lizzie is compared to an orange tree that is crowned with white blossoms. These blooming flowers associated with Lizzie offer a contrast to the daisies that refuse to bloom on Jeanie's grave. Because of their association with weddings, orange blossoms could represent the combining of the physical and spiritual symbolized by the marriage ceremony. The daisies on Jeanie's grave failed to bloom because Jeanie chose the physical without the necessary moral commitment that marriage provides. To emphasize further the necessity of a moral commitment in the enjoyment of the physical, this orange tree bears the same fruit that the goblin men hawked and that represented temptation and sin to Laura. However, these oranges which still represent the sensuous are on the tree with the blossoms that symbolize the spiritual through their association with marriage. Lizzie is like this orange tree being attacked by wasp and bee. The insects symbolize the siege which carnality raises against purity, and the tree represents, as do the other images, innocence beset by the carnal.

Along with the three natural images of lily, rock and tree, Lizzie is also compared to a beacon and a royal virgin town. Lizzie is compared to a beacon, a ray of light that signals and guides; she is a ray of light and hope in a

destructive and frightening sea. The royal virgin town is another of the poet's images used to present the idea of royal authority. This idea of law and rule has appeared twice before in the poem. Earlier in the poem the two sisters are like two wands of ivory tipped with gold for awful kings (l. 191), and earlier in this very simile, Lizzie is described in terms of the colors white and gold. The image of the royal virgin town incorporates these colors and reinforces the idea of the necessity of law or a conventional moral code by which to live. The royal virgin town has a gilded dome and spire which refers to the earlier image, the two sisters like ivory wands that were gold tipped for awful kings, which symbolized the need for authority. Lizzie, like the town, is beleaguered by a fleet of goblin men who want only to destroy her innocence and purity. Lizzie, like the royal virgin town, can withstand the attack because she has a code or law by which she lives.

The attack on Lizzie continues as the goblin merchants smear her face and neck with the fruits in an attempt to force her to eat. As the fruit juices drip on her body, Lizzie knows that she will be able to carry them home to Laura. Realizing that they were defeated, the goblin men "flung back her penny, kicked their fruit. . . vanished in

the distance" (l. 439, l. 446). Lizzie is free; she has presented herself for the temptation but has resisted the inappropriate initiation. Now she can return triumphantly to Laura. As happened when Laura left the goblins' glen, Lizzie "knew not was it night or day" (l. 449). The significant difference is that Lizzie can hear "her penny jingle/Bouncing in her purse" (ll. 452-453). This jingle is music to Lizzie for it symbolizes that she, unlike Laura, has left the goblin men without having to pay the price of initiation, that is, she has not surrendered anything of herself.

Section six of the poem (ll. 464-542) brings the narrative to a close. As this section begins, Lizzie, in a mood of joyous exaltation, returns to Laura.

"Never mind my bruises,
 Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
 Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
 . . . (ll. 467-469)
 For your sake I have braved the glen
 And had to do with goblin merchant men."
 (ll. 473-474)

Lizzie's willingness to sacrifice herself for another is the result of her having chosen the mystical. Since she is intuitively aware of and guided by the conventional Christian experience, Lizzie ignores personal consequences to save Laura, and in doing so she is mystical in the traditional

Christian way. Laura's first reaction to her sister is extremely important. When she sees Lizzie, Laura is distraught and expresses genuine concern for her sister's welfare.

"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,
 Thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden?"
 (ll. 478-484)

This is the first time since Laura ate the goblin men's fruit that she has shown any concern for anyone other than herself. Laura's love is re-awakened by seeing the sacrifice that was made for her.

She clung about her sister,
 Kissed and kissed and kissed her:
 Tears once again
 Refreshed her shrunken eyes,
 (ll. 495-498)

Laura's salvation, like Lizzie's, is mystical. She recovers the essential Christian mystical quality of agape, the intelligent good will for others with little concern for the personal consequences. Laura's eyes which last shed tears selfishly in a bizarre attempt to water a dead kernel-stone now shed tears out of love and gratitude for a sister who would sacrifice all for her. Laura kisses Lizzie with

a "hungry mouth" (l. 492). She is hungry not for the juices but for the love she has been unable to feel until now. Lizzie has saved her sister but not by bringing her the juices of the fruits. Laura is saved when she sees the sacrifice (agape) that Lizzie has made for her and which stimulates the same quality in Laura herself.

When Laura actually does taste the fruit for the second time, she loathes it. The juice is "wormwood to her tongue" (l. 494). The fruits that initially appealed to her senses now give her only bitterness, anguish and pain. She reacts to their taste like a madwoman, wringing her hands and beating her breast. One of the most powerful descriptions in the entire poem appears in this section and describes Laura's hair after she sees what Lizzie has done for her and after she has tasted the fruit. Laura's hair is important thematically to the poem's progression, for Laura originally used a lock of her lovely golden hair as payment for the goblin merchants' fruit. The golden hair grew grey and lifeless after the initiation to reflect Laura's sin and deterioration. Now her hair is described in the following terms.

however the effect of moral conventions leads not to a cage but to the domestic bliss shown in the last section of the poem.

Laura's sin and guilt is purged, but this is, as it must be, a painful and agonizing experience. Laura collapses from complete exhaustion, but not before Christina Rossetti makes it perfectly clear how she feels about abandoning all else for the sensuous.

Ah! fool, to choose such part
Of soul-consuming care!
Sense failed in the mortal strife!
(ll. 511-513)

Now that the pleasure of being re-awakened emotionally and spiritually and the pain of the purging of the sin have passed, Laura falls from exhaustion and sleeps peacefully for the first time since she succumbed to the fruits. Laura sleeps so peacefully that the poet asks, "Is it death or is it life?" (l. 523). It is life, for Laura has been released from her death-in-life state by Lizzie's actions.

Lizzie watches over her sister through the darkness of night and cools her face with her own tears. Earlier Laura had shed tears over a dead kernel-stone hoping to restore it to life. She was unsuccessful for she was motivated by selfish and sensual desires. Lizzie's tears do revive

Laura because Lizzie is motivated and guided by unselfish and spiritual desires. The night passes, and the images used to describe the morning that Laura awakens suggest rebirth. It is the dawning of a new day, the sheaves of grain are flourishing, the grass has the freshness of the morning dew, and the new buds of the lilies, the flower to which both sisters have been compared earlier, are opening. With no trace of grey in her hair, with breath sweet as May and with light in her eyes, Laura awakens and the narrative ends.

"Goblin Market" ends with a twenty-five line epilogue. Much time has passed, and in this seventh and final section (ll. 543-567) both sisters are wives and mothers. Laura often tells the children about her past, the wicked goblin men, and the fruits "like honey to the throat/But poison in the blood" (ll. 554-555) to reinforce their moral rearing. After relating the story Laura bids the children to join hands and "cling together" (l. 561) as she pays tribute to a sister's love.

"For 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."
 (ll. 562-567)

William Rossetti, in his notes to The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, states that these last six lines are clearly connected to the original inscription of the poem.²⁴ This poem was to have the title "A Peep at the Goblins--To M. F. R.," the initials standing for Maria Francesca Rossetti, Christina's older sister. Upon Dante's suggestion, Christina agreed to change the title to "Goblin Market" but insisted that the dedication remain. For this reason, the conclusion of "Goblin Market" (ll. 562-567) seems to be Christina Rossetti's personal tribute to her older sister Maria. This tribute then brings the poem full cycle; it begins and ends with one sister's statement of admiration for and devotion to another sister. The last twenty-five lines that include this tribute seem to function as a moral tag, for they do little to enhance the narrative. This final section, although quite anticlimactic as far as the action of the story is concerned, does mention two important ideas in the poem. One is that Laura has learned her lesson well and hopes that the children will learn from her experience.

²⁴William Michael Rossetti, "Notes," The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, p. 460.

Secondly, it is important to note that both sisters are happily married. They have the best of both worlds, for they enjoy the sensuous because it comes with the moral and spiritual commitment that their marriage symbolized. In this final section, the poet is speaking as Christina Rossetti. She concludes "Goblin Market" with one final reiteration of the theme of the poem and with a lovely personal tribute to her sister.

CONCLUSION

Through a section by section analysis, the careful reader realizes that a tension between mysticism and erotic sensibility does exist in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market." This careful analysis also reveals that this tension is a deliberate device on the part of the poet. Miss Rossetti consciously introduces the erotic to show more vividly its limitations and to reveal more strongly the need for the spiritual.

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