The Uncertainty of *Goblin Market*

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Some of the most persuasive recent readings of *Goblin Market* have been those which renew that critical tradition in which this poem—in which Christina Rossetti's work as a whole—is to be understood ultimately in religious terms. Such readings have often incorporated insights from critics who have focused on gender or on sexuality; but, at their strongest, they have been sure enough of their ground to know where they are irreconcilable with readings which have a primarily secular focus. It seems that there does come a point at which not every explanation of what happens in *Goblin Market* can be defensible.[1]

This essay subscribes to the position that readings of Rossetti's work must make sure of their religious ground; yet it does so while maintaining that this religious ground is itself much less sure than is generally supposed. To maintain this is, of course, to risk overstatement—for the criticism which insists on the centrality of religious ideas to Rossetti's work does not form a monolithic corpus. Nevertheless, much of it shares a disinclination to consider the possibility that these religious ideas could themselves be conflicting. It is as if a consistent theological system is tacitly posited and then invoked in order to produce the effect of consistency in Rossetti's work. The contention of this essay is that this could not be more mistaken: that Rossetti's writing repeatedly pivots upon contradiction and obscurity, and that its intellectual rigor is nowhere more evident than in this determination to probe the uncertainties of Christian theology.

This is a large contention, one which will not be substantiated in a single essay. But a start may be made by inviting a rereading of Rossetti's most read poem—for is not *Goblin Market* itself, to go no further, structured upon theological contradiction?

I

It's worth telling the story once more. A young woman called Laura gets fruit from goblin men, eats it, and longs to eat more of it, but will never find the goblin men again. That's the problem with goblin fruit: those who have tasted it want what they will never get, and dwindle and die dreaming of melons. Yet that's not the only thing goblin fruit does. Laura's sister Lizzie

goes to get more of it for her, but the goblin men want Lizzie to eat the fruit too and they try to force it into her mouth. Lizzie resists, and runs home dripping with juice and pulp; then Laura kisses her, and in kissing her tastes the juices once more. The fruits which once had poisoned Laura now cure her. So Laura survives to become a storyteller, telling children the tale of how she had tasted the poisonous fruit and of how her sister had won for her "the fiery antidote"—which was more of that fruit. It was the antidote to itself. What she does not tell the children is why goblin fruit once had the power to poison her and then had the power to restore her. Not only does she not explain this, but there is no suggestion that she ought to explain it. It is as if Laura and these unquestioning children can only know what the fruit did on two occasions, and know that they ought to be thankful that Lizzie got Laura more of the poison that cures.

When we read *Goblin Market* (written 1859, published 1862) we will surely be more demanding than the children: we will want an explanation of the double power of the fruit. We know that the fairy-tale mode of the poem can contain the perfectly inexplicable plot detail; and yet, whatever Rossetti's reported denials of a deep purpose to this poem, our wider reading of her work may lead us to expect that this detail is doing more than tell us that there are things in Fairyland that would be inconceivable in nineteenth-century England. It is therefore important to know that the consumption of substances which could become either poisons or cures was by no means inconceivable in nineteenth-century England; important, too, to know that Christina Rossetti herself consumed such substances—was, indeed, dependent upon them. Does not the Book of Common Prayer, which provides the liturgy for the Church of England, tell of the bread and wine that can have the power sometimes to bring life, sometimes to bring death? The Exhortations in the liturgy for Holy Communion warn that those who wish to receive the sacrament should be correctly prepared, for it is "so divine and comfortable a thing to them who receive it worthily, and so dangerous to them that will presume to receive it unworthily." In receiving the sacrament unworthily, "we eat and drink our own damnation," "we kindle God's wrath against us; we provoke him to plague us with divers diseases, and sundry kinds of death." To become worthy of the sacrament requires repentance of sins "lest, after the taking of that holy Sacrament, the devil enter into you, as he entered into Judas, and fill you full of all iniquities, and bring you to destruction both of body and soul." That is the danger: you may think you are eating Christ ("spiritually," this protestant liturgy insists), but you may end up with the Devil inside you.[2] This, then—the bread and wine of the Communion service—brings Life, brings Death. And brings the problem of knowing whether it is Death or Life that is coming your way.

Christina Rossetti obtained these substances from one of the most

prominent London churches influenced by the principles of the Tractarian movement—that movement for Catholic revival in the Church of England which insisted that Communion must be central to the life of the worshipper. (Even from its consecration in 1837, Christ Church, Albany Street, had offered Communion every Sunday and on festivals.[3]) The priority of Tractarian clergy was to introduce frequent reception into parishes, celebrated with proper reverence, and to teach the importance of this worship to their congregations. They conceded the danger of these substances; but they insisted on their beneficial property when consumed correctly, which therefore meant engaging with those threatening passages of the liturgy which had, in the past, often dissuaded people from receiving the sacrament. Congregations were to be taught that worthiness to receive does not mean that the communicant must be perfect (who could ever count themselves worthy of the body and blood of Christ?), and taught that the sacrament is itself a help in the pursuit of holiness.[4] Yet the very frequency of reception which the Tractarians demanded, and which required this judicious interpretation of those monitory passages, brought with it the danger of irreverence. That was a danger which must, in turn, be countered by correct preparation under the guidance of a priest, of which the controversial introduction of auricular confession could be a part.[5]

This, by itself, would tell us that Christina Rossetti knew that some substances could both destroy and save. Furthermore, we have explicit evidence of her concern with this troubling doubleness—for the double power of the sacrament had provided the crisis of her early story *Maude* (c. 1850). The crisis of this often misunderstood story is that Maude is so convinced of her unworthiness that she decides not to receive Communion on Christmas Day. Her cousin Agnes is on hand to offer the corrective (Tractarian) guidance that the sacrament is there to help the recipient, but Maude is too preoccupied by her faults to listen. This does not mean that she intends nevermore to receive the sacrament: "Some day I may be fit again to approach the Holy Altar, but till then I will at least refrain from dishonouring it."[6] Nor does it mean that she will no longer attend church. When Maude asks Agnes if she will "stay" to Communion, and says she will not herself receive Communion, this does not mean that Maude is not intending to go to church on Christmas Day; only that she will not communicate. She surely intends to go to Mattins, but not then to stay on. After this incident she settles on attending another church where her absence from Communion will not cause comment (for clergy and congregation will assume that she is not yet confirmed); and it is when her own parish priest asks her about her absence that her problem is disclosed. Some clerical guidance soon corrects her, so that she receives the sacrament at Easter. However, even though the narrator makes it clear that Maude's concern with her unworthiness has turned into a form of vanity, this does not mean that the worthiness of a communicant is not a grave matter. Her

cousin tells her that she herself was once close to refusing the sacrament. It is there in the Prayer Book: those who receive it unworthily provoke God to plague them with disease and death.[7]

We can put these Prayer Book warnings of the doubleness of the sacrament beside the story of the doubleness of the goblin fruit. And our attention has often been drawn to the presence of Eucharistic language in this poem's more general narrative of temptation/fall/redemption. Hear what comfortable words Lizzie says to Laura, after she has been mocked and beaten by the goblin men:

> "Never mind my bruises,
> Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
> Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
> Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
> Eat me, drink me, love me;
> Laura, make much of me:
> For your sake I have braved the glen
> And had to do with goblin merchant men." (ll. 467-474)[8]

"Take, eat, this is my Body which is given for you. . . . Drink ye all of this; for this is my blood of the new Testament, which is shed for you" are Christ's words in the Prayer of Consecration in the Communion liturgy; and we note that, in a pointed convergence, although the juices on Lizzie's face were squeezed from goblin fruits she is now calling them "my juices," almost as if they have come from her body. Those "bruises" echo the wounds inflicted on Christ (the suffering servant "was bruised for our iniquities" in Isaiah 53.5, a text taken as prophetic of Christ's suffering and used in the Good Friday liturgy). Perhaps even the precision of "Goblin pulp and goblin dew" is a crafty parallel to Communion in both kinds, bread and wine.

Even if the poem's general narrative of temptation/fall/redemption were not, in itself, a strong invitation to a religious reading of the poem, this explicit Eucharistic language surely makes that invitation too strong to be declined. Rossetti would not write this if she did not intend that Lizzie's bravery should be read with a solemn sense of its Christlike self-sacrifice. She would not invoke the Eucharist lightly—that "awful Eucharist," as she would describe it in one of her contributions to the anthology *Lyra Eucharistica* (1864), using what in that context is both a conventional and a weighty epithet.[9] Moreover, this invites the construction of topical religious contexts for the poem, for we can see that the poem's fairy-tale quirk—that its goblin fruit is both a poison and a cure—is informed, even prompted, by one of the pressing concerns of Christina Rossetti's immediate ecclesiastical environment. There, far from being puzzling, the double power of substances is an everyday problem. The poem therefore reflects the centrality of Eucharistic theology and piety in that

environment. (The 1850s had been notable for major Tractarian works on the Eucharist, partly provoked by measures to censure Tractarian clerics.[10])

To contextualize *Goblin Market* in this way—relating it to debates current at the time of the poem's production—is to implement the kind of historicizing reading strategy that has dominated literary criticism over the past two or more decades; and this historicist program has surely propelled the renewed interest in the religious contextualization of Rossetti's work. With good reason: while the story of *Goblin Market* is certainly structured on the grand Christian narrative of redemption, it may be that what exactly happens in the mossy glen would not have happened were it not for the urgent concerns of mid-century clerics. Yet we must be cautious in categorizing Christina Rossetti as an Anglo-Catholic writer, as if that term can adequately contain her. Anglican identities in this period are often fluid, often formed by both Evangelical and Tractarian influences; and what appears to be almost a consensus in current criticism—that we may position Rossetti as "Anglo-Catholic," and then read her work under that description—may have the effect of occluding much in her work that has no particular debt to the Catholic revival within nineteenth-century Anglicanism.[11] Nevertheless, with this caution in mind, when we put *Goblin Market* in the context of mid-century discussions of Eucharistic piety, and in the company of *Maude*, the poem does appear more definitely a product of the Oxford Movement than we might ever have thought it.

If the doubleness of the goblin fruit is an analogue of the doubleness of the elements of the sacrament, it is not only that. Rossetti can think of the whole world as having this double power of being destructive and beneficial—a general doubleness which is brought into focus by particular things (by fruit, by bread and wine). This explains why these fruits, and their merchants, are generated partly by a biblical text to which Rossetti turns repeatedly: the prophecy in Revelation 18 of the destruction of Babylon, and its warning of the transience of the fruits of the world—"the fruits that thy soul lusted after" (18.14).[12] And fruit stands for the delights of the world in other poems of the 1850s, most explicitly in the 1854 sonnet "The World." All of which implies the synecdochic status of these goblin fruits: they represent the double power of the things of the world generally. A passage in the late prose work *The Face of the Deep* (1892) has been cited by Mary Arseneau to illuminate this:

> What is the world? Wherein resides its harmfulness, snare, pollution? Left to itself it is neither harmful, ensnaring, nor polluting. It becomes all this as the passive agent, passive vehicle if I may so call it, of the devil, man's outside tempter, and of the flesh, man's inside tempter. . . . Through envy of the devil death came into the world, and man hath sought out many inventions; but the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them when made and finished were beheld to be "very good." (p. 333)[13]

The inversion in that last sentence—corruption being put before creation—wards off the narrative of decline in which the world, though once good, is no longer so. It is still the good world that God made. On which view, while this world is passing, and while worldly things must be subordinated to heavenly things, the world need not be wholly rejected: "This world is not my orchard for fruit or my garden for flowers. It is however my only field whence to raise a harvest" (p. 333). The things of the world must be used to that end, not misused.

In the light of such a statement we understand that the fruits which are brought by the goblins are not inherently evil but are used by the goblins for their dark purposes—dark, because it is never explained why the goblins are so insistent that young women should eat their fruit. They are described as merchants, but these are merchants for whom it is not enough that young women merely buy their goods. Indeed, this is the major difficulty encountered by those critics who (in Herbert Tucker's phrase) want to "put the market back in 'Goblin Market.'"[14] It almost seems as if the goblin men want nothing to be exchanged for their fruit. When Laura encounters them, they "bade her taste" (l. 107) before there is any kind of payment. That might be a dégustation preliminary to what they want (payment) but it might itself be what they want. They do get a lock of Laura's golden hair from her; but they may take this for the formality of a transaction, enabling Laura to begin eating—for Laura restrains herself from eating because she knows that to eat without paying would be theft (ll. 105-106, 116-117). It is she who wants to make payment; and the goblins' expressed interest in her golden curls (that linking of gold coin with gold hair which is a commonplace of Victorian literature) provides a solution to her problem. But when Lizzie makes payment with her penny, the goblins reject it: "Nay, take a seat with us, / Honour and eat with us" (ll. 368-369). That they fling her penny back when they are unable to make her eat suggests that its only value to them is that it might have led to her eating. (Is it likely that, after these "evil people" (l. 437) have viciously assaulted Lizzie, we are to understand that they fling back her penny out of a strict moral conviction that they must not take money for goods that have not been received? Surely we must understand that they fling it back because they are not in the market for money.) One implication of this is that when Lizzie warns her sister that "Their evil gifts would harm us" (l. 66), her words may be a mark of her discernment: while "gifts" ought to be the wrong word for what merchants bring, it may indicate Lizzie's awareness of their purposes.[15] And these goblins do have a way of pressing their gifts on people – as Lizzie finds out when they squeeze their fruit in her face (ll. 406-407). Killing their customers will diminish the market for their produce, and therefore their profits; but that is no puzzle if their business is killing, not profit. Which means that the very first words we hear from them—words of which criticism of the poem has been so

very trusting—are duplicitous: "Come buy." What they mean is: "Come eat." But such generous invitation would provoke suspicion: Beware of goblins bearing gifts. So, instead, they come bearing goods for sale.

Which means, too, that the title of the poem—Dante Gabriel's gift—is ironized: it is not only the produce in the goblin market that is suspect, but the very procedures of the market. It is a pretence: there is no market in *Goblin Market*. The goblins' malign generosity therefore ought to disrupt that tradition of criticism of the poem which takes it to be concerned with buying and selling—criticism which takes the goblins' cry on trust, and which invests in the poem's title unbewares. The foundational assumption of this critical approach is, I would argue, open to question. And yet it is true that young women may (on the evidence of poor Jeanie) pay a great price for eating goblin fruit: nothing less than their lives.

It is here that the expository capacity of religious readings of the poem becomes evident, for such readings will not be confounded by the goblins' determination that the fruit should be eaten and by their rejection of a tossed penny. The fruits of the world become dangerous when they are (as *The Face of the Deep* puts it) the passive vehicle of the Devil. And one consequence of Lizzie being depicted in Christlike terms—being, like Christ, "mocked" (l. 429) and beaten (cf. Luke 22.63)—is that the purpose of these goblin men, "the evil people" bearing those "evil gifts" (ll. 437, 66), is by implication, in this religious interpretation of the poem, demonic. To the reader, the fairy-tale mode of the poem, in which the goblin men can prowl like wombats and crawl like snails, prevents these little devils from being very demonic; but in the world of the fiction, not only are they vicious, but they bring destruction. That, surely, is what they want: to kill, not to make a killing on the fruit market.

Religious readings therefore place the poem in a theological framework in which such seemingly profitless malevolence can make sense: the goblins represent the demonic forces which, to Rossetti, have such destructive influence in the world. (James Ashcroft Noble found in the poem a symbolic narrative in which a Christlike redeemer, Lizzie, "goes into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."[16]) Yet, while the goblins use the fruits for their evil purposes, the poem insists on the unknowable provenance of the fruit itself:

> "We must not look at goblin men,
> We must not buy their fruits:
> Who knows upon what soil they fed
> Their hungry thirsty roots?" (ll. 42-45)

A better reason for not buying goblin fruits would be that they kill those who consume them (poor Jeanie, for one), not their uncertain origin; but this uncertainty must be underlined. The fruits are from an "unknown orchard" (l. 135). They must grow on odorous meads, and by pure waters, Laura later

says, so knowledgeably—which is only what she would like to think; though that is not to say that we know she is wrong (ll.180-182). The poem withholds from us the origin of the fruit.[17]

What it gives us are uses of the fruit. When the fruit is offered not by the malign goblin men, but by the self-sacrificing Lizzie, it becomes curative. Yet, in the terms of *The Face of the Deep*, the things of the world become evil both through forces outside of man (the Devil) and through internal forces (the Flesh). The fruit which had once poisoned Laura therefore turns out to cure her not only because it is offered differently, but because it is consumed differently. Once Laura had sucked the fruit for pleasure; now she tastes it because she wants to kiss Lizzie who, for all Laura knows, has brought ruin on herself for her sake. "She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth" (l. 492), which is no longer selfish desire for fruit but pure love for her sister who may be in danger. It is in the context of such love that the poison becomes the cure (Noble, p. 59). Eating the fruit becomes an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace—that is, a sacrament (as defined in the Catechism of the Prayer Book) which strengthens and refreshes those who receive it correctly. It has become "the fiery antidote" (l. 559). And the fiery antidote may take its fieriness from a biblical antidote. In Numbers 21, the complaining of the Israelites in the wilderness provokes God to punish them: "And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died" (21.6). The Israelites then repent, but God's response is not to take away the fiery serpents, but to prescribe a cure for their poison: "Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live" (21.8). That brass image of—of all things—a poisonous serpent becomes the cure. "Nothing could *in itself* be less suited to give relief than this expedient," writes Thomas Scott in his commentary on this passage.[18] But yet the serpent is not "in itself": "it was the Lord's appointment; and by this token the sufferers must express their entire dependence on him, and submissively expect a cure from him alone." Used in this way, what would not seem beneficial can become that which cures.

This, then, is a view of the world which explains the doubleness of the goblin fruit. It is not evil in itself: the things of the world can be offered, and can be consumed, for good or for harm.[19]

II

Yet this is not the only view of the world which we find in Rossetti's writing. Her writing repeatedly finds imaginative provocation in uncertainties deep within Christian theology. (Think of the poetry which probes one great theological obscurity: what happens in the time between death and resurrection?) To exploit such uncertainties is not incompatible with a trust in the

firm ground of scripture; rather, it is licensed by that trust, for scripture can be inexplicit, even contradictory, on such great matters. And the status of the world following the Fall is one such uncertainty within Christian thought. The world which God made was pronounced "very good" (Genesis 1.31); and, for some currents of theology, man only—not nature—is corrupted by the transgression in Paradise. Yet some biblical texts would support the position that the world itself is corrupted (Genesis 3.14-19) and waits to be delivered from that corruption (Romans 8.18-22); even though what it means for nature to be corrupted is, in the theological tradition, unclear. This is why the world in Rossetti's writing can be both "very good"—as we have seen—and yet can also be very different from the pristine world that God made.

This uncertainty over the status of the postlapsarian world can take the form of explicit debate. "You tell me that the world is fair, in spite / Of the old fall," opens the 1851 sonnet "'A fair World tho' a fallen'"—the sonnet's title citing an argument presented to the speaker against rejecting the world and turning toward death (*CP*, 3:198-199). To which the speaker asserts that, if it was indeed wrong to turn from the world, that cannot be worse than coming to love the world too much. That seems to concede her error. "Comfort the sad, tear-blinded as they go," she pleads, and in that self-description we see the blindness that leads to error. Those who are tear-blinded may need more than comfort as they go on their way: they may need direction. "And who can give me comfort?" she asks—and the poet surely expects the reader to respond: Christ can. Yet, if the speaker concedes her error, she does so while suggesting that there may be safety in such error. There is an implied wager: she must ultimately lose less by the error of rejecting the world than by the error of loving the world too much. That this presumes a choice of errors testifies to the difficulty of conceiving what the correct mode of living in the world could be.

This uncertainty is not usually debated explicitly in Rossetti's poetry. (We may even guess that Rossetti did not publish "'A fair World tho' a fallen'" because of its very explicitness.) More often we find that individual poems imply a position on "the world" while keeping in some relation to the opposing position—not in open debate, but in implicit dialogue. I take "Spring Quiet" as an example of how poetically productive these contraries can be (*CP*, 1:120). (And as an example of a poetry which is both unassuming and very exacting.) On the one hand, the poem contemplates the possibility that the world could be safe—or that one small hidden part of it, the "covert," might be. The breeze in the boughs may be obliged to whisper "We spread no snare"—a quiet assurance which attests to the suspicion that the world outside this covert is doing exactly that—but it surely tells the truth. If the arching boughs of the covert were themselves trying to ensnare, they would be unlikely to whisper this:

Here is heard an echo
Of the far sea,
Tho' far off it be. (ll. 23-25)

In whispering of that echo of a far-off sea (with the sea's sound perhaps being heard in the very rustle of leaves) they tell of what lies beyond their seclusion, of the world beyond their world. This implies that they can be trusted, for in Rossetti's poetry the world becomes a trap when it passes itself off as sufficient, entire. (In "The World," it lies by offering satiety—"full satiety," nothing less.) Here, the small world of the covert offers itself for sacramental reading, as a sign which points toward what is far off. It promises no deceptive plenitude. On the other hand, the longing for this place is voiced from within an unsafe world. It can only be conditional: "Gone were but the Winter, / Come were but the Spring, / I would go to a covert"—which is not to say that the speaker ever will go there, or that there could ever be such a place to go to (ll. 1-2). The poem does not say that the desired spring quiet will come to the wintry world: it leaves its title vulnerable to ironizing reading. This slight poem is, in this way, exemplary of the richness in Rossetti's work that derives from theological incertitude. Which is to say, this poem can become exemplary for the reader of Rossetti who is open to the possibility of such incertitude.

It does violence to such writing to present contrary theological positions too schematically; yet it is better to be overschematic than to ignore such contrariety. To be explicit, then: Rossetti's writing can occupy the position that the world becomes good or evil depending on use, and it can occupy a position contrary to that—one which resolves the doubleness of the world: the world is inherently evil, its goodness only a deception. So in the sonnet "The World" (1854) those seductive ripe fruits and sweet flowers are a lie, and the seemingly fair world is unmasked as truly foul by night (*CP*, 1:76-77). The world is not, therefore, double-powered, but duplicitous. It is not to be used rightly; it is to be rejected. When we read "The World" in the context of *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862), where the sonnet follows "'Consider the Lilies of the Field'" (1853), we are therefore confronted by a transition from a poem in which lessons are to be found in the flowers of the world to the sonnet's sweet deceiving flowers. This is no simple difference of flowers passively being used for good and for ill. The flowers of one poem speak to those who are prepared to hear; but it would be unwise to listen to what those of the other poem have to say. It is hard to see how we could harmonize these poems.[20] It is better to understand that they are the product of a radical uncertainty which is generated by uncertainty in the theological tradition—by what D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, writing of New Testament and patristic views of nature, calls "a disturbing oscillation between world acceptance and world renunciation." (As he further puts it, "'Consider the lilies of the field'" is followed soon by the

stern reminder that "here we have no continuing city."')[21] This is not, therefore, eccentricity on Rossetti's part. It is not chance that (as Terry Eagleton has argued) we find uncertainty over the state of postlapsarian nature in Gerard Manley Hopkins' writing too. If the oscillation in Rossetti's writing is more disturbing, I take that to be the effect of the greater weight of eschatological expectation there. We have only to consider the continuing involvement of Rossetti's writing with Revelation to understand that the more emphatic the expectation of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21.1), the more emphatic the renunciatory extreme of this oscillation may become.[22]

Not only is there no single position on the status of the world in the earlier poetry, no single position is ever found. The world is never consistently duplicitous, or consistently double-powered. In *The Face of the Deep*, we know, the world is not inherently evil, but is the passive vehicle of the Devil and the Flesh. Yet, in its commentary on the catalogue of the things of the world in Revelation 18.12-13, where (again) the world is to be used and not abused, it is not so clear that the created things ("creatures") in the world are only passively evil: "on the same principle that we are bidden redeem the time because the days are evil, Christians find ways to redeem these other creatures despite their evil tendency"—that way being to dedicate them to God (p. 420). This does not say: to redeem these other creatures because they are evil. The draw of the parallelism is resisted, for God made them, and they are very good. But if the things of the world have that evil "tendency," it is not so clear that they can only be passively evil. And in the later prose the world can indeed be unmistakably (which is to say, all too mistakably) evil. In *Time Flies* (1885), a cobweb in the form of a funnel or tunnel can be "an apt figure of the world":

> It exhibits beauty, ingenuity, intricacy. Imagine it in the early morning jewelled with dewdrops, and each of these at sunny moments a spark of light or a section of rainbow. Woven, too, as no man could weave it, fine and flexible, frail and tenacious.
>
> Yet are its beauties of brilliancy and colour no real part of it. The dew evaporates, the tints and sparkle vanish, the tenacity remains, and at the bottom of all lurks a spider.
>
> Meanwhile a fly has been tempted in through the wide mouth of easy access: a fly who returns no more. What becomes of the fly takes place (happily) out of sight: the less seen of that fly the better.
>
> Or suppose that a pitiful passer by stops and stoops to rescue the fly in mid funnel before the spider clutches it. Out it comes alive indeed, but to what a life! (pp. 81-82)[23]

The cobweb is woven "as no man could weave it," but this cannot be

(as, in another context, it would be) a periphrastic assertion that God wove it. If this is indeed an apt figure of the world, not only has the Devil made the world his own, but the Devil made the world. Therefore, left to itself, the world is indeed harmful and ensnaring. And most actively "tenacious": "Fine and flexible, frail and tenacious, the web clings to the fly, although the fly clings not willingly to the web" (p. 82). The web could be nothing other than evil, from the dipteran perspective; it is not "very good," but then turned to destructive purposes by the fly and the spider, for it exists only to destroy the fly. It has its beauty, but that cannot be "part of it," and therefore whatever beauty it has must be put down as false. The fly can then be described as "tempted" into the web in order to make the figure work: man tempted to destruction by the delights of the world. If there is a passer-by who stoops, with Christlike condescension, to rescue the fly from the web, it may indeed be that it is possible to pass the world by and not be drawn in; but that does not make the world the less destructive.[24] (Note, too, that in this passage there seems no possibility that a Lizzie who stoops to rescue a Laura will be able to bring her back to the life she has lost.) This passage is ample warning against trying to plot a clear development in Rossetti's work from a view of the world as duplicitous to a later view of the world as double-powered. These perspectives can coexist: the world can seem good, can seem evil; can seem the work of God, of the Devil.[25] This does not mean that Rossetti subscribed to the dualist position that the Devil made the world—a position which must have no place in Christian theology. (We need not suppose her to have been a Victorian neo-Gnostic.) It does mean that her writing draws out the renunciatory tendencies within Christian views of the world which push toward that prohibited position, so completely can the world seem the dominion of the Devil.

In reading Rossetti, there is nothing to stop us from privileging those texts which view the world as double-powered, while marginalizing or ignoring those which view it as duplicitous, in order to cite the former as stating Rossetti's view of "the world." Or perhaps, rather than ignoring the latter group of texts, we could bring them into view as dramatizations of error (even though, in order to distinguish those speakers who are in error from those who are not, we would presumably have to invoke a theological tradition which is, we have seen, itself inconsistent). The question is why we would want to employ reading strategies which would occlude the richness of contrariety in Rossetti's work.

It is the contention of this essay that we must be open to these contraries when we read *Goblin Market*, in which the coexistence of a sacramental view of the world and the view that it is duplicitous and must be rejected provides the contradictory theological structure over which the poem is written. For this instability would explain something in *Goblin Market* which is so odd that

perhaps we pass over it in our reading, almost as if it would be perverse to observe it—although it is perhaps the most extraordinary detail in this extraordinary poem. When the Christlike Lizzie comes back from being tormented by the goblin men, and offers Laura the juices that drip from her face, we understand that this is being likened to the sacrament of Communion—to what the Exhortations in the Holy Communion liturgy call the "heavenly Feast." ("That was indeed a Feast," says Maude of her Easter Communion [*Maude*, p. 70].) Yet Laura "loathed the feast" (l. 495). It is one thing to give a goblin tale Eucharistic significance; it is quite another to make that Eucharist bitter, loathsome—though it is a truly Christlike offering, and it does bring "Life out of death" (l. 524). No sweet sacrament divine, this. It cannot be, because the goblin fruits are produced by the conflicting views of the world which coexist in this sacramental moment: the things of the world are good when used rightly, the things of the world will entrap and must therefore be rejected. So the goblin juices are good because they are offered by the self-sacrificing Lizzie, and consumed by the now selfless Laura; yet, while "sweet" is exactly what they ought to be as an analogue of the sacrament, it is exactly what they must not be at this point.

This is to differ from, for example, D.M.R. Bentley's reading of this sacramental moment in a notable essay on the poem. Where Bentley finds a "combination of sensual gratification and eucharistic reference in Laura's redemptive eating, drinking, and loving of her sister," I find no such sensual gratification here: this must be a loathsome moment for Laura. As Bentley says, a sacramental vision of the world ought to allow this combination—"not a rejection but an elevation of sensuality"; but here the sacramental vision is disrupted by its intersection with a renunciatory position. There can be no sanctified sensual gratification here. Thus this extraordinary, bitter Eucharist. In order that the goblin fruits may be safe, they must become loathsome (like the world of "The World"), because it was their sweetness that had made them dangerous by making them desirable. They become safe only when nobody would want them. Such is the theological trouble Rossetti has with the things of the world.[26]

That the goblin fruits are not only viewed sacramentally in this poem—that they may stand for a world which must ensnare and which must therefore be rejected—is suggested by the catalogue of fruits which opens the poem and which ends with that description of them as "Sweet to tongue and sound to eye" (l. 30). Our suspicions should be excited by that description, especially if we recognize the immediate model for this seductive catalogue. In the very first canto of *The Faerie Queene* we come upon another catalogue, that of the trees of the Wandering Wood (that is, the wood in which those lured by its delights may err, where the monster Error herself lurks)—a catalogue which ends with a duplicitous tree, "the Maple seeldom inward sound" (I. i. 9).[27] The

possibility of a tree which is only outwardly sound—sound to eye—should be worrying enough to warn the reader not to be misled (as the questing knight and his lady are misled) by the delights of the wood. This wood may not be what it seems. It is a passage which generates the catalogue of trees that opens Rossetti's "An Old-World Thicket," including the ominous "elm that dies in secret from the core"—suggesting that however delightful the wood may seem, there is deadness inside it (*CP*, 2:123-124). But what Spenser offers Rossetti is more than the literary device of the catalogue. I shall risk an assertion that I do not have, here, the space to substantiate: it is this allegorist, more than any other poet, who aids Rossetti in her writing of the seemings of "the world." For Rossetti, the world can indeed be the Wandering Wood into which the Red Cross Knight and Una enter: "Faire harbour that them seemes" (I.i.7)—but only seems. When, in the 1854 sonnet, "The World" is personified, it is not only biblical texts that are drawn on: "Loathsome and foul" (l. 3), with serpents in her hair , she resembles the monster Error who lies within the Wood:

> Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,
> But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine,
> Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine. (I.i.14);

The world's doubleness—she is "fair" by day, but is seen as "foul with hideous leprosy" by night when "she stands / In all the naked horror of the truth" (ll. 1, 3, 9-10)—is that of the double being Duessa, whose true form is glimpsed when she is naked:

> Her neather partes misshapen, monstruous,
> Were hidd in water, that I could not see,
> But they did seeme more foule and hideous,
> Then womans shape man would beleeue to bee (I. ii. 41).

Both the catalogue of trees in the first canto of *The Faerie Queene*, and the catalogue of fruits at the beginning of the first poem of *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, are initial tests of readerly alertness. *Goblin Market* is written for the reader who will suspect that the precision of the description of the goblin fruit means: sweet only to tongue, sound only to eye. (For the reader, too, who knows that when the goblins "sounded kind," it is a strong indication that "kind" is one thing they will not truly be, l. 79.) Such a reader will be watchful for the bitterness and deception of these fruits; and that these fruits, which may stand for the things of the world as a whole, are associated with the Wandering Wood, attests to their duplicitous status. Thus the parallel: as the questing knight and his lady must leave the Wood behind them (I.i.28), so the young maidens of the mossy glen must once more learn what they knew—that they must have nothing to do with goblin fruit. For while this

tale of goblin fruit is produced by the intersection of contrary views of the world—the renunciatory and the sacramental—the plot privileges the rejection of such seductions.

We see that even though the renunciatory and the sacramental views of the world coexist in Rossetti's writing, it does not therefore follow that they must coexist in parity. (We may recall the implied wager of "'A fair World tho' a fallen'": that less must be lost by the error of rejecting the world than by the error of loving it too much.) Which is why the nearest analogue to the bitter sacrament of *Goblin Market* occurs in a poem of the explicit rejection of the duplicitous world, "From House to Home" (1858; *CP*, 1:82-88). There, in the eschatological vision, a woman is seen drinking "the loathsome cup" (l. 194) which yet becomes sweet as she drinks, for it is through suffering that the sweetness of eternal life will be tasted (ll. 145-152). "Therefore" (the speaker learns the lesson) "I would not if I might / Rebuild my house of lies" which was her "earthly paradise" (ll. 201-202, 7). The delights of the world must be renounced in order to attain the future life; as, in *Goblin Market*, the renunciation of the goblin fruit allows Laura to attain a future life—even if the life described in the last twenty-five lines of the poem is the only future life available to her.

III

And it surely is the only future life available to her. On a religious reading of the poem, the goblin fruits can become a synecdoche for the things of the world which (one position) must be sanctified or which (the contrary position) must be rejected in order that they do not distract from the path toward that world which lies beyond "the world"; but Lizzie and Laura cannot know that. They can learn nothing about the goblin fruit other than that it is poisonous—except when it is not. For Lizzie, and Laura, and the children live in a world which knows nothing of Christ. There is no world beyond their world.

It is necessary to insist upon this, given that there is a distinct tendency in recent criticism to hold that Lizzie and Laura can themselves possess a Christian understanding of the events in this symbolic narrative.[28] This is not so; nor does a commitment to securing a religious understanding of the poem require it to be so. Moreover, to take Lizzie and Laura to be capable of such interpretation will tend to have the effect of recruiting them to the project of subduing theological contrariety in Rossetti's writing. It could hardly be otherwise when the poem ends not in uncertainty, not with questioning, but with a little lecture. Whereas, I would contend, religious interpretation of this poem ought to end in recognition of its uncertainty.

We will see why this tendency in criticism is so mistaken if we invoke a comparable text. The first title of the poem was "A Peep at the Goblins,"

on the model of Anna Eliza Bray's book of stories *A Peep at the Pixies*, before Dante Gabriel offered his own title. Jan Marsh finds in Bray's book "one tale bearing a striking resemblance" to—indeed, "the germ" of—Rossetti's own poem: "The Lady of the Silver Bell," in which a young woman called Serena is enchanted by pixie music, with fatal consequences. Even if we are not struck by resemblances, we ought to be struck by one obvious difference. Serena and the pixies inhabit a Christian world: she receives a thorough Christian education ("Father Hilary had well disciplined her in her religious duties"), and it is important for the tale that she knows she should turn up at church for prayers.[29] But there is no evidence that Laura and Lizzie know their religious duties. We are not told that there is a church in the mossy glen for them to go to, even if they were to show some knowledge of God, which they do not. (Jeanie lies in her grave [ll. 158-161], but do we know that her grave lies in a churchyard? We do not.)[30] When Laura is suffering, neither she nor Lizzie prays to God for her recovery—at home, or in church; and when Laura recovers, neither she nor Lizzie thanks God for that. If the fairy-tale world is, indeed, a Christian world, this would be evidence enough of their damnable godlessness; but it is not that kind of world. (Those critics who hold that Lizzie and Laura can have a Christian understanding of what happens to them would, to be convincing, have to address such objections.) The moral lesson Laura will teach the little ones points this up for one last time:

> "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)

Children given a proper Christian education would be told that there is indeed a friend like this Christlike sister to do these things: Christ himself. (If they had learnt their Catechism, they would know that "strengthening" is the benefit of his presence in the sacrament of Communion.[31]) But that is out of the question in this tale. Lizzie cannot liken, knowingly, her scuffle with goblins to Christ's passion ("suck my juices / Squeezed from goblin fruits for you"); and Laura cannot know that she is being invited to participate in a fruity parody of the Eucharist. That is the condition on which this symbolic narrative operates, and the condition is observed with only the slightest waver. When Laura talks of "the fruit forbidden" (l. 479), her words could be taken for a Christian description of the fruit; yet the fruit must be forbidden not by divine command but by society's protective code—a code which, knowing Jeanie's fate, Lizzie keeps. (For the sisters do surely belong to a society, and a society which includes men: we see those reapers going to the fields [l. 531],

and—if the division of labor and of strength in Fairyland is the same as that in England—reaping is work for men, not women. So there may very well be men in this poem who are not goblin men.[32])

We see, therefore, what readers have always seen: that *Goblin Market* contains a Christian narrative of temptation by the delights of the world offered by demonically motivated forces; transgression of divine command; redemption through imitation of divine self-sacrifice. But there is no divine prohibition, and no divine example of self-sacrificial love of the things of the world, for those who inhabit the mossy glen.

We can understand why this should be so. *Goblin Market* is a poem in which Rossetti presents what she holds to be religious truths, but does so in veiled form—thereby chiming with Tractarian ideas of the reserve with which those truths must be presented: they must be both revealed, and concealed from those unfit to receive them. That Rossetti's poetic practice is informed by—or, at the very least, coincides with—this Tractarian principle has taken its place in criticism, and with good reason.[33] Yet this context of Tractarian poetics ought not to narrow our view of her literary debts. I have suggested that we have hitherto given insufficient regard to what she takes from Spenser (as perhaps we have to what Victorian culture generally takes from him?). Indeed, one effect of the tendency in much current Rossetti criticism to categorize her as a Tractarian writer—at times with an imperfect awareness of the fluidity of ecclesiastical identities in this period—is that we may overlook what she takes from a distinctly protestant literary tradition. It would be very surprising if a poet of Rossetti's sophistication did not learn more from *The Faerie Queene* than from *The Christian Year*. And not only is *The Faerie Queene* a local presence in *Goblin Market* in its opening catalogue of fruits—a presence which in itself ought to guide our reading of the poem—but its allegorical method informs the conception of this fairy-tale poem. Moreover, that is an allegorical method which, in turn, chimes with Tractarian poetics. There may, in fact, be no better account of the conception which produces the symbolic fairy-tale narratives *Goblin Market* and *The Prince's Progress*—narratives which are open to Christian interpretation, even though we may hesitate to apply the constraining term "allegory" to them—than Keble's account of Spenser's allegorical method in an 1825 essay. For Keble, the great sacred poet's disposition was "better fitted to the veiled than the direct mode of instruction":

> His was a mind which would have shrunk more from the chance of debasing a sacred subject by unhandsome treatment, than of incurring ridicule by what would be called unseasonable attempts to hallow things merely secular. It was natural therefore for him to choose not a scriptural story, but a tale of chivalry and romance.[34]

Christina Rossetti chose the fairy-tale mode for the title-poems of her 1862

and 1866 volumes; both poems—goblin tale and quest romance—which put the secular mode to sacred use.

Yet this symbolic method produces a problem. The source of the world's dangerous power to divert man from the true quest for heaven is its seeming completeness. It may be that the speaker of "An Old-World Thicket" knows that the beautiful wood is not sufficient, that there is a deadness within it ("For all that was but showed what all was not," l. 51; *CP*, 2:125); but the earthly paradise of "From House to Home" seems, for some time, so dangerously, enough—it "lured me from the goal," the speaker retrospects (l. 8; *CP*, 1:82). It is easy to forget that the world's pleasures will kill, and that true life is found through their renunciation, when the punishment for succumbing to worldly delights, and the reward for self-denial, can seem so distant, deferred. Yet this is less so with the sweet goblin fruit. The sweet fruit must bring death in order to function symbolically; yet if it evidently kills those who suck it, the reward for self-denial is so obtrusive that it raises the problem of why some young maiden should ever choose to suck it. We see that this problem is the consequence of a symbolic method which operates by secularizing the renunciatory Christian scheme in which pleasure kills, suffering saves—the scheme which generates the sweet and bitter goblin fruit. (*Goblin Market* is no "From House to Home," whatever the local schematic resemblances to that very disturbing poem.) In this poem, renunciation is not for the sake of some distant, perhaps unreachable, heavenly banquet. And this secularization of the renunciatory Christian scheme is no neutral figuration. It produces the difficulty of explaining the knowing consumption of those deadly delights offered by the goblins.

This is a problem for Rossetti not because plausible motivation is a condition of the fairy-tale mode (far from it), but because this is a problem of theodicy—that is, it becomes such a problem in a Christianizing interpretation of the events of the goblin tale. It is important, on a theodical view, that Laura is responsible for what happens to her: she "chose to linger" (l. 69) where the goblins tramp, we must be told; she does not, by some chance, she knows not how, happen to become involved with goblins. (This may be a fairy-tale world; but it must not seem some nastily chancy world.) Now if Laura knows nothing of the deadly properties of the fruit, that would indeed lead her to eat; but, on a Christianizing level, this would imply that man confronts the temptations of the world without any warning. And man has been warned, through scripture (for example: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," 1 John 2.15). The young women of the mossy glen must therefore be given a knowledge of the danger of what tempts them which is analogous to that accorded man. They must not eat death unawares. This is why Jeanie is introduced: Jeanie's death is their warning. And yet, if goblin fruit killed Jeanie, why would Laura eat it too? Which is why it is only after

Laura has eaten the fruit that Lizzie reminds her that such eating had led to Jeanie's death (ll. 141-162). If she had said all that at line 67, before Laura had sunk her teeth into a single sweet fig, either Laura's decision to eat would seem evidence of a death-wish that would damage the theodicy, or Laura would not have eaten. The possibility that Laura has nearly forgotten this is therefore introduced (l. 147), even though the knowledge (in general terms) that young maidens must not eat goblin fruit—which the sisters had both demonstrated at that evening's encounter with the goblins—is presumably derived from what it did to Jeanie. Yet Lizzie's recollection of Jeanie's error will keep her out of danger (ll. 312, 364): if both sisters were to have trouble remembering Jeanie, that would imply either that the warning given them was itself inadequate, or that the young women of the mossy glen are incapable of attending to any warning. Both implications would be damaging to the theodicy.

It should be clear that Rossetti is very careful in setting up Laura's mistake. For the point I am making by this labored discussion of these details is this: we must read *Goblin Market* with the kind of expectation of theodical exactitude that we read *Paradise Lost*. Only that. Indeed, the theodical strategies of these poems can be strikingly similar. One example. Because Lizzie does indeed have Jeanie on her mind, the sisters must be separated in order that Laura may eat the fruit—for if Lizzie had been with Laura, she could have reminded her of Jeanie. Yet Lizzie must not be seen to desert Laura intentionally:

> She thrust a dimpled finger
> In each ear, shut eyes and ran (ll. 67-68)

This means that, while she will not hear or see the goblin men (for she knows she must not look at them), she cannot know that Laura is not following her lead by running home too. If Lizzie had not done this, she would have been in a position to stop her sister eating; but yet her error seems so understandable, so slight—for it is an error that is produced by her determination to do what is right.[35] As, in *Paradise Lost*, Eve would not have eaten of the fruit if she had not been alone. That can occur because Adam gives her permission to go gardening by herself (9.370-375): that is his error, although it appears a very understandable error. We see that for Rossetti, scarcely less than for Milton, theodicy demands total control of detail. Laura (no less than Eve) must transgress; but she must not seem one who must inevitably transgress (for who made her like that?), and she must not seem one whose transgression is the work of cruel chance (for who made her world like that?). Clumsiness here will weaken the theodicy. Think of those poised lines which give us our first sight of the sisters, both reacting to the goblin cry:

> Laura bowed her head to hear,
> Lizzie veiled her blushes. (ll. 34-35)

Here Laura's gesture of primly bowing her head on hearing the goblins (that sense implied by the parallelism of Lizzie's response) does not quite exclude the possibility that she is bowing her head in the posture of one trying intently to hear the goblins. The reader cannot know which, perhaps because Laura herself does not know which. It may be that she then pricks up her head only in order to warn Lizzie of the danger she can hear (l. 41); but then this raising of her head quickly becomes rearing it in order, clearly, to look at the goblins (l. 52). Such is the precision we should expect to find throughout this poet's work; such is the interpretative closeness this work demands. (Connecting Rossetti with *Paradise Lost*, and thereby once more with *The Faerie Queene*—for to read Milton's epic is to be in the strong presence of Spenser—may show us how much we ordinarily underinterpret her work.) Not that Rossetti's command of detail will solve the problem of what fair warning Jeanie herself was given, for some young maiden must, once, have been the first to die of fruit poisoning unawares, and that first deadly error will take some explaining. But then the obscuration of destructive regressions is the stuff of theodicy.

If to insist that much of Rossetti's work pivots upon theological uncertainty might, initially, have been taken to imply writerly uncertainty, it should now be evident that nothing could be further from the truth. On the contrary, the intellectual clarity of Rossetti's writing is seen precisely in its giving form to theological uncertainty. That is why we should refuse those reading strategies which would erase such uncertainty in her work.

That is why, furthermore, we should not be misled by the ending of *Goblin Market*. Laura, we know, survives to become a storyteller; but we should not be tempted to liken this storyteller to the poet herself. Laura reaches the security of a position—"Days, weeks, months, years" (l. 543) after the temptations of the goblin men—from which there can be no doubt that what was sweet was poisonous, and that what was bitter was the cure (ll. 554-555). The secularizing figuration of the poem, therefore, lets it reach a position which Rossetti's poems can usually only look towards. For, in her poems, trust in the possibility of salvation—of being out of the world—stands out from the very present danger of a world of ultimately uncertain status, a world which may be mistaken for what it is not.

Notes

1 Recent Rossetti criticism distinguished by its engagement with religious ideas includes: Linda H. Peterson, "Restoring the Book: The Typological Hermeneutics of Christina Rossetti and the PRB," *VP* 32 (1994): 209-232; Linda E. Marshall, "'Transfigured to His Likeness': Sensible Transcendentalism in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market,'" *UTQ* 63 (1994): 429-450; Diane D'Amico, *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender and Time* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1999); Mary Arseneau, *Recovering Christina Rossetti: Female Community and Incarnational Poetics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). On *Goblin Market*, D'Amico's sureness is exemplary: for example, incorporating

the sexual suggestiveness of Laura's first eating of the fruit into her religious reading of the poem, yet resisting the suggestion that Lizzie's Eucharistic union with Laura is to be understood in terms of sexual desire, pp. 71, 78.

2 *The Book of Common Prayer* (London, 1848), pp. 212, 215, 2125, 213, 215. The biblical basis for this doubleness of the sacrament is 1 Corinthians 11.27-29. See also the *Book of Common Prayer*, Article XXV, "Of the Sacraments.'"

3 See Henry W. Burrows, *The Half-Century of Christ Church, St. Pancras, Albany Street* (London, 1887), p. 12.

4 William J. E. Bennett tries to counter these widespread fears in *The Eucharist, its History, Doctrine, and Practice* (London, 1837), pp. 216-225; cited by George William Herring, "Tractarianism to Ritualism: A Study of Some Aspects of Tractarianism outside Oxford, from the Time of Newman's Conversion in 1845, until the First Ritual Commission in 1867," unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1984, p. 121.

5 On Eucharistic piety, see Alf Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1965), pp. 316-333.

6 Christina Georgina Rossetti, *Maude: Prose and Verse*, ed. R. W. Crump (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon, 1976), p. 53.

7 That the story turns on such technical matters has proved a source of confusion in criticism of *Maude*, which has recently been misread as a story of rejection of the sacrament, of the church, even of Christ. It is none of those things. David A. Kent and P. G. Stanwood point readers, helpfully, toward Charlotte Yonge's *The Castle-Builders; or, The Deferred Confirmation* (1854), another tale about anxiety over the worthiness to communicate: *Selected Prose of Christina Rossetti* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 374n5.

8 *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti*, ed. R. W. Crump, 3 vols (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1979-1990), 1:23. Subsequently cited in the text in the form: *CP*, volume number:page number.

9 "Come unto Me," *CP*, 3:34-35; published in *Lyra Eucharistica: Hymns and Verses on the Holy Communion, Ancient and Modern; with Other Poems*, ed. Orby Shipley, 2nd ed. (London, 1864), p. 5.

10 On Tractarian Eucharistic theology, W. H. Mackean's *The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Oxford Movement* (London: Putnam, 1933) has not been superseded; but see also Peter Benedict Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 235-248.

11 Raymond Chapman's *Faith and Revolt: Studies in the Literary Influence of the Oxford Movement* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970) remains especially valuable for its acknowledgement of the Evangelical elements in Rossetti's thinking.

12 On the importance of Revelation 18, see Jerome J. McGann, *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 221-222.

13 Christina Georgina Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (London, 1892), p. 333; "inventions," Ecclesiastes 7.29; "very good," Genesis 1.31. Discussed by Arseneau, *Recovering Christina Rossetti*, p. 125; D'Amico, *Christina Rossetti*, pp. 63-64.

14 Herbert F. Tucker, "Rossetti's Goblin Marketing: Sweet to Tongue and Sound to Eye," *Representations* 82 (Spring 2003): 117-133—the most recent, most engaging, contribution

to this critical tradition. See also: Terrence Holt, "'Men Sell Not Such in Any Town': Exchange in *Goblin Market*," *VP* 28 (1990): 51-67; Elizabeth K. Helsinger, "Consumer Power and the Utopia of Desire: Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market,'" *ELH* 58 (1991): 903-933. Tucker attributes the goblins' demand that the young women eat, not only buy, to the goblins' need to believe in their product, p. 127.

15 *Pace* Tucker, for whom Lizzie's talk of goblin gifts "confounds purchase with donation," Lizzie may be far from "clueless": "Rossetti's Goblin Marketing," p. 120.

16 J. Ashcroft Noble, "The Burden of Christina Rossetti," in *Impressions and Memories* (London, 1895), p. 59.

17 Noted by Holt, "'Men Sell Not Such in Any Town,'" p. 53.

18 *The Holy Bible, Commentary by Thomas Scott*, 6 vols. (London, 1848), at Numbers 21.8. Rossetti would seem to have owned a copy of Scott's influential commentary, if it is that to which she refers in a letter of December 1877 to Frederick Shields (*The Letters of Christina Rossetti*, ed. Antony H. Harrison [Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1997-], 2:151).

19 See D. M. R. Bentley, "The Meretricious and the Meritorious in *Goblin Market*: A Conjecture and an Analysis," in David A. Kent, ed., *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1987), p. 80; Arseneau, *Recovering Christina Rossetti*, pp. 124-126.

20 It is not clear how Arseneau—an explicit harmonizer—would deal with such transitions: for a reading of "'Consider the Lilies of the Field,'" see *Recovering*, pp. 117-120. In recent Rossetti criticism, views of her as rejecting the world have lost ground to views of her as more engaged with the world. In criticism weighted toward the Rossetti of the sonnet on "The World," nothing better brings out her "radical alienness" than Jerome J. McGann's introduction to Kent, pp. 1-19.

21 D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Greek Patristic View of Nature* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1968), p. 130; Matthew 6.28; Hebrews 13.14. Wallace-Hadrill's study, "a designedly one-sided book" (p. vii), is a valuable counterweight to the notion that the patristic view of the world is monolithically renunciatory. See also Eric Osborn, *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 129-133.

22 See Terry Eagleton, "Nature and the Fall in Hopkins: A Reading of 'God's Grandeur,'" *EIC* 23 (1973): 68-75. In Rossetti criticism, Catherine Musello Cantalupo's essay "Christina Rossetti: The Devotional Poet and the Rejection of Romantic Nature" is distinguished by its awareness of antithetical views of nature in Rossetti's work (Kent, pp. 285, 300).

23 Christina Georgina Rossetti, *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* (London, 1885).

24 For divine stooping, see (for instance) the poem for Thursday in Holy Week, *Time Flies*, pp. 262-263 ("Maundy Thursday," *CP*, 2:226-227).

25 It is not clear how critics who would resolve the contradictoriness of Rossetti's views of the world could incorporate such texts into their readings: see D'Amico, pp. 63-64; Arseneau, pp. 142-143.

26 D.M.R. Bentley, "The Meretricious and the Meritorious," p. 80.

27 I have used A. C. Hamilton's invaluable annotated edition of *The Faerie Queene* (London: Longman, 1977), which is based on J. C. Smith's 1909 Oxford text.

28 For this position, see Marian Shalkhauser, "The Feminine Christ," *VN* 10 (Autumn

1956): 19-20; Peterson, "Restoring the Book," p. 223, Arseneau, *Recovering Christina Rossetti*, pp. 121-129.

29 Anna Eliza Bray, *A Peep at the Pixies* (London, 1854), p. 132; Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* (London: Cape, 1994), p. 230.

30 Peterson, I think misleadingly, puts the fairy-tale narrative *Goblin Market* in the company of "A Royal Princess" ("Restoring the Book," p. 223). In that poem, not only does the princess quote scripture, but the city has a cathedral (l. 92). That distinguishes its land from the Fairyland of the title-poems of Rossetti's 1862 and 1866 volumes.

31 See "After This the Judgment," l. 39: "ofttimes strengthened by Thy Flesh and Blood," *CP*, 1:185.

32 *Pace* McGann, *Beauty*, pp. 222-223.

33 On reserve, see G. B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 44-50. Reserve receives particular emphasis in Arseneau, *Recovering Christina Rossetti*, chap. 3.

34 [John Keble], [on Josiah Conder, *The Star in the East; with other Poems*], *Quarterly Review* 32 (1825): 228; repr. "Sacred Poetry," *Occasional Papers and Reviews* (Oxford, 1877), p. 102.

35 D.M.R. Bentley has a fine discussion of this passage in "The Meretricious and the Meritorious," p. 68.