"Thro' Sleep as Thro' a Veil": Losing the Self to Find the Self in the Poetry of Christina Rossetti

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"THRO' SLEEP AS THRO' A VEIL":
LOSING THE SELF TO FIND THE SELF
IN THE POETRY OF CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Faye R. Buckalew
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Approved, December 1993

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to trace the theme of the realization of self in self-abnegation in the poetry of Christina Rossetti. This theme can be seen in many of Rossetti's poems about death in which the personae attain their desire for perfect peace and solitude in a sleep-state after death, or perfect themselves, in this sleep-state, for entrance into heaven. This theme can also be seen in Rossetti's longer work "Goblin Market." In "Goblin Market," however, the characters realize themselves in a form of self-abnegation which is less obliterating than death. The sisters in "Goblin Market" realize their full potentials in selfless love which takes the form of self-sacrifice on another's behalf and of nurturing motherhood.

This study also suggests that the reason for the predominance of the theme of the realization of self through self-abnegation in Rossetti's poetry reflects Rossetti's choice to live a life devoted to ensuring the care and well-being of her family and others.
"THRO' SLEEP, AS THRO' A VEIL":
LOSING THE SELF TO FIND THE SELF
IN THE POETRY OF CHRISTINA ROSSETTI
INTRODUCTION

Christina Rossetti's life and work are marked by a paradox: the realization of the self is prompted by the loss of self. Often the personae of her poems must, in some way, lose themselves in order to find themselves. The death of a persona is one of the most prominent manifestations in Rossetti's poetry concerning the loss of self leading to the fulfillment of self. At times, as exemplified by the character Lizzie in "Goblin Market," the character dies symbolically, the death being only psychological or spiritual, but in many of Rossetti's other works, "Sleeping at Last" and "Resurrection Eve" for example, the death is physical. In these poems, Rossetti focuses on a sleep-state after death in which the dead character is renewed by a deep, obliterating sleep, a sleep which grants a fuller rest than any allowed on earth, or in which the dead person, free from earthly distractions, is at last able to perfect his soul so that he may gain entrance into a heavenly existence before God.

In Rossetti's poems, selflessness, death, and the realization of self become inextricably intertwined. However, one must look beyond Rossetti's poetry to the poet herself to fully understand her utilization of this triad in her work. In his biography on Christina Rossetti, Ralph A. Bellas speculates that Rossetti's preoccupation with death is rooted
in "Christina's dedication to a life of self-abnegation, bringing with it emotional and psychological strain" (54). Rossetti spent her life giving of herself so that others might live more comfortably and more safely, acting as the family nurse and engaging in various forms of social work. Rossetti's preoccupation with death can be seen to stem from her selfless devotion to others. Her denial of self during her life is transformed in her poetry into the absolute denial of self, death. Furthermore, Rossetti extends her own sense of self realization found in her acts of selflessness by speculating that one may be able to find absolute fulfillment in the complete loss of self that accompanies death.

The denial of self noted by Bellas can be seen in Rossetti's ceaseless caring for those around her. Throughout her life, Rossetti nursed family members through illnesses. Mackenzie Bell notes that

she soothed her father in his last illness; she ministered unceasingly to her brother Gabriel, to her sister Maria, and to her aunts, the Misses Polidori, the last of whom only pre-deceased her by eighteen months; but the chief ministration of her life was her ministration to her mother. (56)

Although such behavior was often expected of Victorian women, Rossetti very likely would not have been expected to have devoted herself as untiringly to the care of others as she did because she herself was ill during most of her life.

Such devotion to others might seem to be the actions of a woman who has been brought up to believe in a subservient
feminine ideal and has not considered that there may be alternative existences for women, but to believe this of Rossetti would be to undervalue her power of thought. Rossetti's repression of her self was not an unwitting submission to the Victorian social ideals; it was a carefully considered choice. Rossetti may have grown into a quiet woman, but underneath her reserve was an assertive nature which had been more prominent during her childhood, before she learned to control her emotions. She was a passionate and assertive youngster with a violent temper, considered by her brother William to have been "the most fractious of the quartette" (Sandars 34). Although she grew to be a reserved adult, Rossetti nonetheless could assert herself and was adamant about her assumption of a deferential role. An interaction between Christina and William, her younger brother, concerning Gabriel, her elder brother, which Kathleen Jones relates, illustrates this point. In 1877, Gabriel suffered a breakdown. Christina took scrupulous care of him and wrote frequent reports on Gabriel's condition to William. William, who seems to have often served as the family mediator,

wrote tentatively suggesting that many of [Gabriel's] symptoms were imaginary, Christina remonstrated sharply that they were none the less real or painful because of that, and she commented perceptively, 'It is trying to have to do with him at times, but what it must be to be himself.' (179-181)

The easiest road for Christina to take, and, most likely, the healthiest for her, would have been for her to listen to
William's cautioning against taking all of Gabriel's symptoms seriously. However, Christina chose to serve Gabriel in his illness and, in her determination, she refused to shrink from the responsibility she had assumed. That her care of Gabriel might be too difficult or taxing for her to undertake was not a factor Christina felt should be considered. She believed he needed her, and she was determined to aid him.

Rossetti's concern for others was not bounded by her family circle, but included other interests. Beyond taking care of her own family, Rossetti applied to join the force of nurses Florence Nightingale took to Crimea, although she was not accepted because she was considered to be too young (Jones 66). She also engaged in social work at St. Mary Magdelene's, an Anglican shelter for fallen women, "open to all classes of women and women in all stages of the fall from purity" (D'Amico 68). The shelter undertook both the spiritual reclamation and the vocational training of the women, thus allowing the women either to return to their family, to marry, or to support themselves honorably (D'Amico 68-69). Serving but never subservient, Rossetti displayed, in her outside work, some of the spirit that had shown through her exterior reserve in her letter to William; she actively campaigned for the Minor's Protection Bill and petitioned against animal vivisection (Bell 94-95).

The selflessness central to Rossetti's personality was certain to manifest itself in her poetry. As Rossetti found a fulfilling role in her devotion to the welfare of others, so
do the personae of her poems attain a fulfillment of self in
self-abnegation. In Rossetti's poetry about death, the
personae often realize themselves either in or by means of a
sleep-state which they enter following their deaths. In
Rossetti's fairy tale "Goblin Market," the sisters Laura and
Lizzie realize their potentials in selfless acts for others.
The common thread running through these works is that of the
protagonists all finding themselves in a loss of self. The
protagonists of "Sleeping at Last," "Song" ("When I am dead
my dearest"), and "Dream-Land" achieve the deep, true sleep
and isolation which they had desired during their lives but
had been unable to achieve because of the distractions of
earthly hardship, pain, and relationships. In both "Song"
and "Dream-Land," the protagonists assert their independence
in this sleep-state by actively taking a part in their
realizing that sleep. The sleep-state envisioned by
Rossetti, although often seen as an end itself, a state in
which the protagonist finds fulfillment, sometimes acts
instead as a means to an end, a state in which the
protagonist, freed from earthly distractions, perfects
himself so that he may realize a perfect existence in heaven.
Both "Resurrection Eve" and "'There remaineth therefore a
rest'" explore Rossetti's conception of the sleep-state as an
intermediate state between earthly and heavenly existence.
The heavenly existence contemplated in these two poems
follows the sleep-state and is marked by the equality of all
people before God, thus promising the protagonists a chance
to realize their full potentials unhindered by oppression or prejudice. However, Rossetti does not always leave the realization of one's potential until after death. Fulfilling forms of selflessness can also be found during life. The sisters in "Goblin Market" discover that selfless love, risking one's self to save another or devoting one's self to the care of others, can bring one to an earthly fulfillment of self.
Rossetti's poetry about death often echoes Rossetti's own paradoxical attitude toward the realization of self. As Rossetti found fulfillment in her life through her self-sacrificing ministration to her family and to others, so do the personae of many of her poems about death find fulfillment only after they have lost their earthly selves. These dead attain a state of perfect peace after they have left the earth, but before they have attained their ultimate place in heaven. In such poems concerning the afterlife, Rossetti creates an image of the soul existing in a state of isolated limbo after the person dies. Rossetti often describes her vision of this intermediary afterlife as being a soul-refreshing, fulfilling sleep. In this sleep, the dead person finds a refuge from the earthly hardship and strife which frustrated his ability to achieve fulfillment during life. Separated from his earthly struggles upon death, he gains the ability to attain a fulfillment of the soul during the peace-filled sleep he enters. Only after he has died can the person find true rest and, in this perfect rest, perfect renewal.

In different ways, the personae of Rossetti's poems realize, or hope to realize, themselves in the sanctuary of the sleep after death. Some of Rossetti's personae look forward to a rest that passes earthly rest, as does the
abandoned woman in "Light Love," and others look forward to equality in death and before God that cannot be found on earth, as does the foundling girl in "'The Iniquity of the Fathers Upon the Children.'" Some personae that are already dead find fulfillment simply in the long awaited and much needed rest that they enter after death. The persona of "Sleeping at Last" desired nothing more than the sleep she finally is granted upon her death. For others of Rossetti's personae, the sleep after death is a goal which they actively strive to realize; instead of the sleep-state being the realization of self, it becomes the central aspect on which the persona builds his quest for self. The persona of "Song," not satisfied with traditional attitudes toward death, creates her own system of beliefs based upon the idea of solitary sleep after death. The protagonist of "Dream-Land" comes to "Dream-Land" after journeying in search of a pleasant realm of sleep. Finally, for the protagonists of "Resurrection Eve" and "'There remaineth therefore a rest,'" the sleep-state after death is a stop on the way to perfect existence before God in heaven. Distracted by the trials of earthly life in their quest to attain the perfection of self necessary for them to enter heaven, these protagonists find that the state of rest following death allows them to focus on their perfection of themselves so that they may be worthy of a place in heaven.

Two of Rossetti's poems which address the fate of fallen women, "Light Love" and "'The Iniquity of the Fathers Upon
"The Children," also address Rossetti's speculations about one's ability to attain peace in the afterlife. Although Rossetti does not fully explore the topic of the persona's realization of self after death in either of these poems, both provide insight into Rossetti's death poems in which she directly addresses the question of one's existence in the afterlife. Both the unwed mother of "Light Love" and the illegitimate daughter of "'The Iniquity of the Fathers Upon the Children,'" find themselves unacknowledged by those on earth who are meant to love and care for them. The woman in "Light Love" has been rejected by her lover after having borne him a child because he chooses to marry another woman, one who has played by the social rules and remained chaste in her courtship with him. The girl in "Iniquity" has been given up by her mother to be raised by her mother's nurse as a foundling. Upon the nurse's death, the mother takes the girl on as her servant/companion "Almost her child" (303), but never claims the girl as kin. Both the rejected lover and the unrecognized daughter look toward death as the only force which could possibly bring them their greatest desires. The woman in "Light Love" believes that, perhaps, she will be afforded the safe, restorative rest in heaven that she will never be able to secure on earth. The girl in "Iniquities" believes that after her death and her mother's death, she may be truly acknowledged by her mother for who she is, and that she will be viewed as equal to other people, rather than
being judged on the basis of her socially unacceptable origin.

Rejected by her lover, the woman of "Light Love" faces the hardship of trying to raise a child on her own because the man has made no provision for her. She also suffers from the abrupt coldness with which the man whom she loves treats her as he throws her away. In her despair, she looks for comfort beyond this world in the quiet peace of the grave:

Is death so sadder much than this--
Sure death that builds a nest
For those who elsewhere cannot rest? (18-20)

The trials of his world are almost too much for the deserted woman, and she hopes that in the namelessness of the grave she will be able to find true peace.

As the woman of "Light Love" looks toward the true rest afforded by a state beyond earthly existence, "the daughter in 'Iniquity,'" as noted by Diane D'Amico in Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art, "bearing the burden of her parents' sin, chooses not to marry and looks to the time after death when God may 'save,' when all will be 'equal before God'" (76). The daughter wants little more than to be recognized by her kin and to be able to claim ownership of her name, and although she does not believe that even death can grant her her rightful name, she believes that, in death, she will at least be fully recognized by God:

How should death half atone
For all my past; or make
The name I bear my own?
"All equal in the grave"--
I bide my time till then:
"All equal before God"--
Today I feel his rod,
Tomorrow He may save:
Amen. (512-514, 542-547)

Society and the girl's earthly parents may ignore her or refuse to treat her as equal to people of proper birth, but she believes that death is a leveler of mankind and that her heavenly father recognizes all of his children, regardless of their earthly status, as equals before his sight.

Although neither of these poems directly addresses Rossetti's conception of a sleep-state after death in which a person can attain a peace of the mind and soul impossible to attain while on earth, both present the germ from which Rossetti's view is most likely developed. Taken together, "Light Love" and "'The Iniquities of the Fathers Upon the Children'" present the conceptions that after death comes sleep, and that in death people are free of the stigmas of society, and all are equal. Rossetti develops these ideas further in poems such as "Sleeping at Last," "Song" ("When I am dead my dearest"), "Dreamland," "Resurrection Eve," and "'There remaineth therefore a rest.'" The sleep that Rossetti describes in "Light Love" is regenerative, restorative, and soul-perfecting. The equality of the grave that she touches upon in "Iniquities" comes about through the necessary loss of material goods and ideals which occurs upon death. After dying, one has only oneself and is divorced of
all one's belongings, appearance, and state of health by which others may have judged one during one's life.

Rossetti presents a more concrete example of her vision of self-obliteration after death in her poem "Sleeping at Last." The persona of "Sleeping at Last" foresees, or is experiencing in death (Rossetti does not clarify), a sleep that is so deep that all consciousness seems to be lost. She longs for peace and quietude, freedom from pain and strife; however, people and problems constantly intrude on her earthly peace. Since the normal occurrences of earthly life, interactions with others, and hardship and pain, for example, present obstacles to the perfect peace the persona longs for, the only chance she has to attain this peace is in her own death. By surrendering herself to the oblivion of death, she is able to attain the peace she had longed for while alive, but which had constantly eluded her.

In this instance, the persona's realization of self after death is passive. She finds her ultimate peace in an event beyond her control, a state that has been given to her after her death rather than one which she has to search for or to will into existence, as the personae of "Dreamland" and "Song" have done. The deep sleep that the persona enters after death finally and truly gives her a relief from the pain and grief of earthly existence:

Sleeping at last, the trouble & tumult over,
Sleeping at last, the struggle & the horror past,
Cold & white out of sight of friend & lover
Sleeping at last.
No more a tired heart downcast or overcast,
No more pangs that wring or shifting fears that hover
Sleeping at last in a dreamless sleep locked fast.

Because, upon her death, she finally attains her goal of true rest, there is a sense that, in the persona's state of obliteration, she has attained a realization of self. When dead, the persona enjoys a freedom in her quiescence that she could not have on earth because of the distractions caused by the pain and anguish of earthly existence or by the demands her acquaintances put upon her. For the first time ever, the persona is free to rest deeply and to rest undisturbed.

To be able to obtain a true, deep rest was very likely one of Rossetti's greatest desires during the time in which she composed "Sleeping at Last." "Sleeping at Last" is thought to be one of Rossetti's last poems and to have been composed sometime during the year before she died (Crump vol. III 507). The weary feel of the poem, created by Rossetti's choice of words of only one or two syllables throughout, very likely reflects Rossetti's state of mind during her last year. Her life had been very wearing between her own and her family's illnesses. During the years that she cared for her mother, sister, and brother Gabriel, she had herself been suffering from Grave's disease, an ailment which involves the enlargement of the thyroid gland, and as a result often caused her difficulty eating and drinking. Furthermore, she was susceptible to bronchitis during the winter months. She also suffered from cancer and from nerve damage caused to one arm as a result of an attempt to remove the cancer. That one
might be able to find true peace and deep rest on earth must have seemed impossible to one who was so gravely, painfully, and continuously ill. The idea that death is the sleep from which one does not wake, or at least does not wake to an earthly existence, would be seductive to one who had lived as painful a life as Rossetti. Rossetti had spent her life trying to give her loved ones a perfect rest while they were alive but ill or dying, nursing and comforting them until their last moments. All that Rossetti asks through the persona of "Sleeping at Last" is to be given the perfect rest after death that she had tried to bestow upon her loved ones during their lives.

Although the persona of "Sleeping at Last" eventually attains her goal of perfect sleep, she has little to do with the realization of her dream. Not all of the personae of Rossetti's death poems, however, are as passive in their struggle to realize their desires after death as is the woman of "Sleeping at Last." The personae of "Song" ("When I am dead, my dearest") and of "Dream-Land" are notable exceptions. Both the goals and the manner in which the women perceive their own attaining of these goals in "Song" and "Dream-Land" show them to be more assertive in their quests than the woman of "Sleeping at Last." While the woman of "Sleeping at Last" wanted nothing more than to be left alone and to be left in peace, the persona of "Song" wants to have control over her destiny, as does the protagonist of "Dreamland." The persona of "Song" wants her beloved to
realize that she exists independent of him, that she, herself, is a whole person. She also wants him to recognize that she is a real human being with thoughts and feelings of her own and not a romantic character from the pages of a classic eulogy.

By visualizing herself to be alone after death in a nameless, obliterating dream world, the persona of "Song" expresses her desire for autonomy and individuality. The persona believes that, after death, her relationship with her lover will be of less consequence than society expects. She tells her lover not to try to hold onto her after her death by erecting monuments to her; she wants only "the green grass above [her]/With showers and dewdrops wet" (5-6). She moves from speaking about that which she wishes her lover to do upon her death to speaking of her vision of herself in the afterlife. As she does so her assertion of her self becomes stronger in her use of more personal language. In the first stanza, while she is telling her beloved what she wishes to be done upon her death, her references to herself and to her lover are approximately equal in number. However, in the second stanza, when the persona turns her focus to a description of her dream state, her references are all to herself. The personal references in the first three lines are especially strong as Rossetti uses the same sentence structure for those lines and as each line begins with the pronoun I:

I shall not see the shadows,
The realm of the afterlife that the woman of Rossetti's "Song" describes is itself another manifestation of her assertion of her independence and individuality. Rather than visualizing a traditional heavenly existence, the persona in "Song" conceives of an afterlife that is significantly of her own making. Her beliefs do not belong to a prescribed system, but to her alone. She believes that when she is dead, she will exist in a world that is neither heaven, nor hell, nor purgatory, nor Hades, but a twilight land of eternal dreaming sleep. Rossetti's depiction of sleep-states has occasionally been attributed to her connections with the premillenarianist movement. However, Linda E. Marshall explains in "What the Dead Are Doing Underground: Hades and Heaven in the Writings of Christina Rossetti" that the connection drawn by earlier critics between premillenarianism and soul sleep is unfounded because "mid-Victorian premillenarianism . . . was not associated with the doctrine of psychopannychy,""the idea that the soul is suspended in profound unconsciousness from death until doomsday" (55). Therefore, the sleep-state described by the persona of "Song" is not founded in premillenarianist ideas which rejected psychopannychy, nor is it founded in Anglican theology which also rejected soul sleep. The Anglican church, Marshall explains, believed soul sleep to be "a materialist heresy, because it implies the soul is incapable of conscious existence apart from the body" (56). Indeed, the woman of
"Song" speaks of her senses and consciousness after death as though she expects to retain both body and soul in the sleep-state. She speaks of the grass that will be above her and of the things she will not be able to sense because they will be on earth while she will be under it. She also states that she will lie "dreaming through the twilight/That doth not rise nor set" (13-14), a description which indicates that she is at least partially conscious of her surroundings and in possession of her bodily sensations, for she perceives herself to be in twilight. The twilight referred to is another unusual aspect of the persona's personal vision of the afterlife because the twilight is not only a literal twilight, but also a twilight of existence. The dead persona is neither fully a part of earthly life, nor of heavenly existence. She is no longer sensible of the actions of those still on earth, and she does not interact with any beings on either side of the grave.

Unable truly to live autonomously in a world in which one's being is defined by one's relationship to others, the woman chooses to exert her individuality through the creation of her own personal conception of the afterlife. She furthers her assertion of autonomy not only by creating her own beliefs about the afterlife but also by envisioning that she will be alone in her sleep-state following death. She believes that, once she has died, she will no longer have the need for support from any other beings, either dead or alive. She further believes that the actions of those on earth will
have no effect on her because she will not be able to perceive earthly things. In addition, her relationships, which would have helped define her sense of self during her life, will be only a memory when she is dead, if they are remembered at all; "Haply I may remember,/And haply, may forget" (15-16).

The solitary figure finding fulfillment in a sleep-state after death takes on a stronger image in Rossetti's "Dream-Land." Like the woman of "Song," the protagonist of "Dream-Land" takes control of her own destiny rather than simply waiting and hoping, as the persona of "Sleeping at Last" has done. However, the personae of "Song" and of "Dream-Land" use different methods to realize their desires. As much as the persona of "Song" is more active in her quest than the persona of "Sleeping at Last," the protagonist of "Dream-Land" is more active in her quest than the persona of "Song." The persona of "Song" works entirely in a verbal medium; she tells of her desires and of her expectations. On the other hand, the persona of "Dream-Land" undertakes her quest physically; she journeys to "Dream-Land." In addition to the contrast created by the differing actions of her protagonists, Rossetti's tone in "Dream-Land" enhances the contrast between the two protagonists. In "Song," Rossetti creates a persona who describes a future state, who speculates about the afterlife. In "Dream-Land," however, Rossetti creates a woman who is presently in "Dream-Land," who is existing in the afterlife only projected by the woman
of "Song." As a result, the experience and actions of the protagonist of "Dream-Land" are more definite and concrete than those of the protagonist of "Song."

The state of peaceful inaction which the woman attains in "Dream-Land" has been realized only through the woman's determined quest for true rest. She left behind all things with which she was familiar and which comprised her world ("the rosy morn" and "the fields of corn" (9 & 10)) in order to find refuge in "Dream-Land." Unlike the protagonist of "Sleeping at Last" who is given her rest, or the protagonist of "Song" who envisions a state of perfect rest but has not yet attained it, the protagonist of "Dream-Land" has deliberately caused her dream to be realized. She made the journey to her Utopian "Dream-Land" by her own free-will, through her own power, and for a purpose of benefit to herself alone: "She came from very far/To seek where shadows are/Her peasant lot" (5-8). Once the woman reaches "Dream-Land", she drowses in "perfect peace" and rests quietly (32).

The active role that Rossetti allows the woman of "Dream-Land" to play in attaining her desired rest is mirrored in the greater perceptive abilities that Rossetti assigns her in comparison to the protagonists of both "Sleeping at Last" and "Dream-Land." The more assertive the woman is in her struggle to be free of earthly burdens, the greater her consciousness after death. The woman of "Sleeping at Last" perceives nothing of her surroundings in the afterlife. She does not even dream in her sleep-state.
The woman of "Song," takes a middle ground. She states that upon death, she no longer will perceive earthly things such as "shadows," "rain," or "the nightingale" (9-11); however, she believes that she will be able to dream in her sleep-state and perhaps even remember her earthly life and love (13-16). The woman of "Dream-Land" is the most perceptive of the characters in the state following death. Although she is asleep in "Dream-Land," she is dimly aware of her surroundings:

Thro' sleep, as thro' a veil,
She sees the sky look pale,
And hears the nightingale
That sadly sings. (13-16)

In addition to being partially aware of her surroundings, the woman, although asleep, waits expectantly for the "joy [that] shall overtake/Her perfect peace" (31-32). As she sleeps, "Her face is toward the west" (19), as though she is trying to see beyond her existence in "Dream-Land" to the ultimate perfection she will be able to attain upon awakening into paradise, the west being a direction often associated with passing out of this world and into the next. Her ability to perceive some of her surroundings, however, does not interfere with her achievement of absolute peace; nothing in "Dream-Land" can disturb her sleep.

As in the previous poems, Rossetti creates a sense of self in the persona through the persona's realization of a state of negation. In "Dream-Land," the negation manifests itself in the woman's deliberate choice of inaction. In
order to fulfill her dream of true peace, the woman chooses
to enter a state of absolute quietude of both mind and body.
In any other place, she would have been unable to attain her
goal because of distractions such as the "pain" that she
indicates had disturbed her attempts to rest on earth (29).
Even though the destiny the woman attains is one of negation,
by choosing her own destiny and actively working to achieve
it, the woman has finally taken control of her own being and
attained a realization of self.

Both "Song" and "Dream-Land" differ from "Sleeping at
Last" in their tone. Their shorter lines afford a greater
sense of movement to the poems; neither has the tired,
resignedness of "Sleeping at Last." In this, they reflect a
different period of the author's life. Rossetti wrote "Song"
and "Dream-Land" during her teens. Although she was somewhat
ill during these years, she was not as seriously ill as in
her later years. Her view of a more conscious sleep after
death reflects her livelier nature at this time.

Rossetti's poetry about realizing the self in death
which was written during her youth reflect the social changes
she was undergoing more than the physiological changes
brought on by her illness. She had been wild and passionate
as a youngster, but when she was about thirteen, she began to
become quiet and withdrawn. As her characters seek a
solitary peace after death, she began to look for an inner
peace formed around her own conceptions of restraint and
morality, giving up chess, for example, because she felt that
she was too competitive when she played and therefore too
prideful, and giving up attending the theater because she
wanted to have no part, no matter how distant, in sustaining
the immoral ways of many actors and actresses (Jones 26).

The change in Rossetti was a dramatic one, yet one she
chose to impose upon herself in much the same way that the
woman of "Song" chose her own mythology or the woman of
"Dream-Land" chose to journey there. Her family did not
impose a new character upon her; that is, they did not try to
make her into a staid, Victorian lady simply because she was
growing older as might be suspected if she had come from a
traditional household. Instead, they watched the transition
with bafflement, and even William, her closest brother, had
difficulty understanding the transformation of Christina
(Jones 8).

Another influence upon Rossetti in her conception of the
afterlife in these early works appears to have been her
reading of classical literature and mythology. Rossetti's
descriptions of the afterlife echo descriptions of the
Elysium of Homer and Virgil. Joël Schmidt explains that in
Homer's Elysium "the climate was always mild, with no rain or
snow or storms" (91). Similarly, the woman of Rossetti's
"Song" states that after death she will "not feel the rain"
(10). Perhaps she means that she will not feel earthly rain
because she is beyond earthly existence. However, she could
also be referring to existing in a place in which there is no
rain. Furthermore, both the woman of "Song" and the woman of
"Dream-Land" state that the sleep of the afterlife occurs in twilight, making the atmosphere of Rossetti's afterlife much like that of Virgil's Elysium in which "the light bore shades of purple and azure" (Schmidt 92). Finally, Homer's Elysium was placed "at the very western end of the World" in much the same manner Rossetti places "Dream-Land" (91). Mixing both Classical and Christian ideas, Rossetti creates "Dream-Land," a place that is the furthest west that one can go without awakening into a new existence. Rossetti writes that, in her sleep, the woman in "Dream-Land" faces a land toward the West; however, the land that she faces does not appear to be a part of her present world, but of the one into which she will awaken at the Last Judgment, and her vision of it is a foresight of heaven.

Although Rossetti often focuses in her death poetry upon the realization of the dead's desires of attaining a state of perfect peace and uncompromised rest, some of Rossetti's poetry about death indicates that a full perfection of self, more complete than the personae's realization of longed for true rest, will be attained upon the Last Judgment or upon meeting with God. The woman in "Dream-Land" sleeps "Till joy shall overtake/Her perfect peace" (31-32). The daughter in "Iniquities" speaks of a time when all people will be considered "equal before God" (544). Although none of Rossetti's available poems deals with heavenly existence only or gives as concrete a description of Rossetti's expectations about a heavenly existence as of her expectations of an
intermediate sleep-state, she does allude to a heavenly existence. In "Resurrection Eve" and in "'There remaineth therefore a rest,'" the sleep-state of Rossetti's figures is not their final resting place. Both of these poems describe in greater detail than either "Iniquities" or "Dream-Land" Rossetti's vision of awakening before God into a new existence. Although Rossetti only touches upon the realization of a heavenly existence in "Iniquities" and "Dream-Land," in "Resurrection Eve" and "'There remaineth therefore a rest,'" the loss of the earthly self after death that Rossetti envisions leads not only to the true peace of complete rest in oblivion but also to the true fulfillment of self in a heavenly afterlife. In such works, death becomes the absolute release from the restrictions and constrictions of earthly life. After death, the personae obtain peace in their sleep after earthly life which is then followed by the full freedom of perfect immortal life. The sleep-state into which they enter upon death, Rossetti speculates, is a resting place between the flawed, present world and the perfect world of God. As the sleep-state lies between the earth, on which perfection is impossible, and heaven, in which imperfection is impossible, it is a realm which embraces both perfection and imperfection, without being ruled by one or the other. Although a person may achieve the perfect peace and the absolute rest which he longed for during his life once he enters the sleep after death, the
person must wait until he or she enters heaven to achieve absolute perfection, or perfection of the self and soul.

Rossetti links her envisioned sleep-state to the Resurrection in "Resurrection Eve," in which the persona, in this instance specified to be male, currently experiences the perfect peace of sleep after death. In this poem, as in "Dream-Land," the perfect peace attained in the deep sleep of death is not the final state in which the persona will exist. Unlike "Dream-Land," however, "Resurrection Eve" focuses on the final outcome of the process of life, sleep, and Resurrection. In "Resurrection Eve," Rossetti envisions a more explicit view of heaven than she does in either "Iniquities" or "Dream-Land." She presents a heaven that is more than a hoped for place of joy and universal equality. Heaven is now definitely a place in which the perfection of the whole self will be attained, in which the earthly being will be replaced by a heavenly being, and in which man's imperfections are forgiven. Rossetti presents these beliefs about heaven through the visions the persona explains the protagonist experiences in his sleep. While asleep, the protagonist glimpses or foresees both heaven and his ultimate fulfillment of himself in heaven. Although the protagonist does not appear to dream while asleep, Rossetti explains that the protagonist's sleep shall be "brightened" (24):

By the foreseeing
Of Resurrection,
Of glorious being,
Of full perfection,
Of sins forgiven
Before the face
Of men and spirits;
Of God in Heaven,
The Resting Place
That he inherits. (25-30)

Compared to Rossetti's visions in "Sleeping at Last," "Song," and "Dream-Land," the picture she draws of the fulfillment of self in "Resurrection Eve" and in "'There remaineth therefore a rest'" has changed slightly, the focus now being on the fulfillment of self in heaven rather than in the sleep after life. Even though Rossetti shifts her focus from the sleep-state to heaven in both these poems, the obliterating sleep which a person enters upon his death remains an important part of his journey to heavenly perfection. Rather than the dead character finding the attainment of his true desire for self-fulfillment in the quiescence of death itself, the sleep following death becomes a stepping-stone to a final, heavenly self recognition. The sleep-state as a stopping place on the way to heaven reveals another dimension of Rossetti's speculation on finding oneself in the loss of self, one which becomes important in her poem "'There remaineth therefore a rest.'" Rather than being a state in which the persona can realize his desires for ultimate rest and peace in the loss of self that occurs in the sleep after death, this sleep becomes a vehicle through which he attains his heavenly fulfillment. In "Resurrection Eve" and "'There remaineth therefore a rest,'" the obliterating sleep of death is no longer an end in and of itself. Instead, the total
obliteration of self in a deep sleep is a preparation for the realization of the perfect self in heaven.

The separate existence which the persona of "'There remaineth therefore a rest'" believes will be experienced after death becomes necessary for the preparation of the self for heaven. Only after earthly cares can be separated from one's existence, can one perfect one's soul for entrance into God's land. In order to enable her personae completely to divorce themselves from their earthly burdens, Rossetti creates an existence between the earthly and the heavenly in which they can escape the trials of earthly life but in which they need not yet be perfect. Coming after earthly existence but before heavenly existence, the sleep after death becomes the ideal opportunity for the perfection of one's soul. Without this chance for isolated rest and renewal, attaining a heavenly existence would be almost impossible. Only a saint could have enough willpower never to be distracted from his earthly struggle for the perfection of the self and soul by the pain, hardship, and inequalities inherent in an earthly existence. By removing those trials which distract one from the perfection of one's soul, the sleep following death becomes the great equalizer of mankind. After death, all have the same chance to perfect themselves for heaven because there are no material obstacles as there are on earth to interfere with their attempts to reach spiritual perfection.
In giving all an equal chance to perfect themselves after death for entrance into heaven, Rossetti appears to ignore the plight of people who have transgressed moral codes. Do the good and the bad have equal opportunities after they die to perfect their souls? Rossetti gives no clear answer. Her ambiguity on this question is probably rooted in her religious, familial, and social experiences and beliefs. Kathleen Jones notes that "the text 'Judge not, that ye be not judged'" was "constantly in [Rossetti's] mind" (65) Coupled with Rossetti's fear of allowing herself to be too prideful, this belief would have made it difficult for Rossetti to write in judgment of the actions of others, or to state that she believed that those who appear to others to be doomed by their earthly actions would be denied the second chance of the sleep-state to attain perfection that she was allowing others. Furthermore, she had before her the example her family's differing religious beliefs which would have made her judgment of ultimate truths regarding other people even more difficult because the family was close despite their differing ideas, ranging from atheism, through High Anglicanism, to Catholicism, and for Rossetti to judge harshly in favor of one belief would be admitting that others of her family were doomed. In addition, she had been able to witness the process of a person's falling before temptation in Gabriel's relationship with Elizabeth Siddel and the relationships of others of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and their mistresses, and, therefore, would have been able to see
both sides of a fallen character, the fallen as perpetrator and as victim. Rossetti's reluctance to judge others becomes extremely important in her attitude toward the protagonists of her work "Goblin Market," a work in which she allows both the "good" and the "bad" protagonist to be saved.

Rossetti removes the complications and temptations of earthly life in her conceptualization of the sleep-state of "There remaineth therefore a rest," thus opening up the possibility of an equal chance for all to be saved. As Rossetti explains in "There remaineth therefore a rest," after a person leaves this world, he has only himself and nothing else; nothing material remains with a person after he dies:

In the grave will be no space
   For the purple of the proud,
      They must mingle with the crowd;
         In the wrappings of a shroud
    Jewels would be out of place.

Youth and health will be but vain,
   Courage reckoned of no worth;
      There a very little girth
         Shall hold round what once the earth
    Seemed too narrow too contain.

High and low and rich and poor,
   All will fare alike at last:
      The old promise standeth fast:
         None shall care then if the past
    Held more joys for him or fewer.

There no laughter shall be heard,
   Nor the sound of heavy sighs;
      Sleep shall seal the aching eyes;
         All the ancient and the wise
    There shall utter not a word. (16-35)

Death provides the optimum environment for the perfection of one's soul because it is the great leveler of humankind.
Upon death, each person enters a sleep-state until he is called before God at the Last Judgment. In the death state of unconsciousness, or semi-consciousness, the dead person is not aware of any others who have died and are also in the sleep-state. Unaware of anyone else's existence, the dead person has no one against whom to compare himself; therefore, the trappings of an earthly existence lose all meaning. Such things as wealth, youth, and strength no longer bear any importance in the determination of a person's worth because they have meaning only if there exist others against whom one is able to compare one's own wealth, youth, and strength, or against whom others can evaluate one's material attributes. Once the rule of materialism is taken away, a person's material being can no longer be measured, and material things lose all of their meaning. Material goods further lose their meaning in the sleep-state because it is the gateway to heaven, and therefore is not marred by earthly flaws. Money, beauty, and health are important on earth and are measured on earth only because life on earth is essentially faulty. Humanity is flawed by pride and vanity, and, therefore, values characteristics that give one pleasure or power during one's life but that have no eternal worth. After death, however, one's ephemeral values no longer have any significance, because, when one does awake from one's sleep, one comes before God, who seeks the eternal, spiritual worth of a person, rather than before humanity, which seeks the material worth of a person.
Rossetti's death poetry, shaped as it was by Rossetti literary environment, her religious upbringing, and her own morality, and affected as it was by her choice to withdraw into a restrained, contemplative persona and by her continuing illness, gives some insight into her complex character. This insight allows for a better understanding of Rossetti's doctrine of finding the self in the renunciation of self, which in her death poetry takes the form of the realization of self in a sleep-state after death. Rossetti's personal strength is most obvious in her renunciation of self to aid others, as her personae's strengths are most evident after they have lost their earthly selves.
"GOBLIN MARKET": THE FULFILLMENT OF SELF IN LIFE

Although much of Rossetti's poetry describes the fulfillment of self being reached only after death, not all of her poetry relies upon such a literal form of the obliteration of self or renunciation of self as the way to spiritual wholeness. The characters of Rossetti's "Goblin Market" attain their full potential while still alive. Instead of losing their earthly selves in death, they undergo a psychological transition in which they lose their original, flawed selves and gain more perfect, new identities.

Although the evolution of character explored by Rossetti in "Goblin Market" does not have the physical death of the personae as its catalyst, the psychological growth exhibited by Laura and Lizzie centers on their respective losses of integral parts of their being. Lizzie must lose her innocence to attain a state of experienced innocence. Laura, in an echo of Rossetti's death poetry, must undergo a symbolic death after succumbing to the temptations of the Goblin men and learning of the poison of forbidden fruit before she can rise redeemed and whole.

Both Laura and Lizzie must endure crises of the self in order to become more rounded individuals. At the beginning of "Goblin Market," neither girl is whole unto herself. Janet Galligani Casey notes in "The Potential of Sisterhood:
Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* that Laura and Lizzie can be viewed as:

> two distinct individuals who are equally incomplete. Each lacks the trait that is dominant in the other: Laura is wanting in Lizzie's prudence, while Lizzie has none of Laura's daring.

Laura and Lizzie have equal and opposite characters. Laura is impulsive, daring, and driven by her desires. Lizzie is cautious, timid, and motivated by her naive sense of goodness. Each sister's personality is one-sided, each on opposite ends of the spectrum. With such limited personalities, both lack the balance which would enable them to come to a true understanding of themselves and of their lives. Each possesses faults which hinder her from growing. Laura is blinded by her inability to foresee the long-term results of her own actions, and Lizzie is blinded by her innocence in which she refuses to see and confront the evil in her world. Although the sisters' personalities balance each other well, they must learn to create a similar balance inside each of themselves if each is to be able to realize her own potential. In order for each sister to become an independent, rounded individual, each must integrate into her own personality those traits exhibited by the other.

Since the two sisters have personalities which are mirror images of each other, and which are each equally deficient, critics have not always considered them to represent two distinct individuals. Instead, the sisters "have seemed to a number of critics to be two halves of one
whole or to represent two parts of a divided self" (Watson 51). However tempting this point of view may seem, it diminishes the importance of the sisters' interactions in each other's redemption. As Dorothy Mermin states, "By turning the two sisters into parts of one person, [the critics] minimize or distort the central action in which one sister saves the other" (107). That Lizzie's selfless love for her sister gives her the strength to sacrifice herself to save Laura is clear in almost any interpretation of the poem. But the salvation of a sister in "Goblin Market" is not one sided. Laura's fall serves not only as the stimulus of her own salvation through Lizzie, but also as the catalyst of Lizzie's own salvation, a point whose significance is overlooked or minimized if both sisters are considered to be halves of one personality. If the sisters are thought to symbolize one self divided into two halves, the two halves of which must simply be balanced and integrated in order for that self to become whole, then the significance of Laura's misdeeds bringing about Lizzie's salvation is lost because Laura is no longer a separate, fallen woman who sparks the salvation of an innocent woman, but only the darker side of a personality.

When viewed as different people, the sisters show that all people, both those considered to be bad and those thought of as good, must lose themselves to find themselves. As Laura must learn to resist temptation so that she can be saved, so must Lizzie learn to face temptation so that she
also can be redeemed. Viewing the sisters as two people further shows that the people whom society considers to be bad may, nonetheless, be instruments of good. In the world of the poem, "neither sister is morally superior to the other. Although Laura alone succumbs to the goblin fruit, neither Lizzie nor the narrator offers a negative judgment of her" (Casey 68). Neither sister is perfect; both must overcome flaws in order to become whole. Not only must the "bad" sister work through a loss of self to find a new, better self, but so also must the "good" sister.

In much the same way that the personae of Rossetti's death poetry are hindered in their struggles to attain peace by their circumstances, both Laura and Lizzie are also impeded in their struggles to reach their full potentials by aspects of their daily lives. In "'There remaineth therefore a rest,'" Rossetti discusses the pressures of materialism, aging, and poor health, and comments on their roles as obstacles on the way to self-fulfillment on earth. The persona must die and enter a state of limbo in order to be able to overcome the distraction of such earthly cares. Although neither Laura nor Lizzie dies during the course of "Goblin Market," both face obstacles that they must overcome if they are to reach their fullest earthly potential. Laura must learn that acting impulsively to satisfy base, earthly desires leads only to spiritual death and bitter rewards. She must understand that there is a greater cause to be striven for than satisfying one's greed for pleasure, and
that, finally, the greatest satisfaction on earth comes from a love which has at its root mutual support and succor for those involved. Lizzie must discover that true goodness comes not from ignoring evil and temptation, but through working selflessly to overcome that evil and temptation, and that the root of goodness is love, courage, and valor, not the empty, mechanical actions of blindly following what one has been told one should do to be good.

The most obvious evolution of character occurs in the character of Laura. In the beginning, Laura strays from the proper path, ignoring both her sister's and her own admonitions not to "look at goblin men" (42). Tempted by the exotic and beautiful fruit of the goblin men, Laura succumbs to their bargain of fruit for a lock of hair. Eventually, she must be saved by Lizzie from a wasting disease, which seems to be leading to certain death, that her consumption of the fruit has caused. As the poem ends, Laura, having recovered, has gained a new life and had a family. She gathers her children about her and tells them about Lizzie's saving her after her encounter with the goblin men, and, in doing so, becomes an emblem of the redemptive power which brought her redemption. She discusses the power of the sisterly love which was her salvation:

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. (562-567)
While Laura obviously speaks in reference to Lizzie's salvation of her in these lines, by using the ambiguous term "a sister," Laura indicates that she too has become a steadying, strengthening influence in Lizzie's life, and that both sisters strengthen and support each other in a mutual relationship.

In order that Laura and Lizzie may each develop into a whole person, not only one who must be supported and saved but also one who supports and saves, each must gain knowledge and experience beyond her original innocent existence. They must lose their innocent selves, which are one dimensional, so that they may gain insight and more rounded characters. Since both sisters are the opposite of each other, their journeys to self-fulfillment also must be opposite. By virtue of the sisters' differing characters, Lizzie's way to salvation is not and can not be Laura's way to salvation. At the end of their separate journeys, both reach the same destination, but each must follow her own path to that end. Because of her own susceptible and daring nature, Laura must fall into her knowledge. Lizzie, because of her meek and cautious nature, must rise into hers. The turning point for each sister comes about in an amplification of her innate nature. Laura falls to temptation, and Lizzie sacrifices herself to save her sister.

Laura and Lizzie come into their true selves through a process, which has its basis in Biblical accounts of the fall and redemption of humanity, of innocence into knowledge into
experienced innocence. The first step of Laura's salvation comes in what seems to be a step toward damnation, her succumbing to the temptation of the goblin men. However, as Jeanie Watson explains, Laura's fall is not one into damnation; instead, "the fall, as in the Genesis account, is a fall into knowledge" (51). In much the same manner that the fall of Adam and Eve led eventually to the salvation of humanity by God and eternal life through Jesus, Laura's fall leads to her own salvation and fullness of self. Laura's loss of innocence requires that she gain a new innocence, one tempered with experience, or remain forever lost in the wasting state brought about by her knowledge of and desire for the goblin men's fruit. The movement from the complete loss of self to the attainment of a fulfilled self "necessitates the intervention of the still-innocent sister; it is she, after all, who best understands the nature of the temptation, being herself in the same danger" (Watson 51). Lizzie knows that in order to save her sister, she must bring back the goblin fruit for which Laura pines. At the same time, she knows that she must do this without falling into the goblin men's snare herself because to do so would render her as helpless to recover herself as it has done to Laura. If Lizzie fell and were unable to help herself, she would have no chance of rescuing her sister. Because Laura fell prey to the goblin men, Lizzie has lost her sister, and, if she is to recover Laura, she must sacrifice her own innocence, her naivete, and her guardedness, the very traits
which constitute her character at the beginning of the poem. Watson notes that:

> just as Christ assumed human form and endured the temptation of the devil in the wilderness and the passion of the Garden of Gethsemane and the cross, so the redeeming sister must subject herself to temptation. She must be tempted, but she must not fall. She must move from innocence to experience and yet not be lost. (52)

Lizzie must overcome her fear of the goblin men and confront them if she is to be able to save Laura. In order to obtain the antidote of goblin food, Lizzie must no longer refuse to see or hear the goblin men, nor may she any longer run away from them as she had in the past ("Goblin Market" 50-68). To save Laura, Lizzie must change. She must gain the resolve and courage necessary to stand up to the goblin men. She also must retrieve goblin food without actually tasting it herself, and in doing so, she must learn of the true nature of goblin men first hand and experience their evil herself. Although she does not lose her innocence in her confrontation with the goblin men in the same manner that her sister does, Lizzie gains knowledge from her personal dealings with the goblin men. This knowledge allows her to enter a state of experienced innocence; even though she retains her innocence, she no longer retains the naivete central to her earlier self. She learns that evil faced can be overcome and that love is a greater power than the force of the goblin men.

Because of the necessity that Lizzie's character undergo a transformation so that she may save her sister, Lizzie's role as redeemer is two-sided. By confronting the goblin men
without falling prey to them, Lizzie not only saves her sister, but also is saved herself. As Janet Galligani Casey explains:

In a very subtle manner, however, Rossetti allows Lizzie to play the role of the redeemed as well as that of the redeemer. As we have already seen, Lizzie lacks the courage of action that is Laura's. Laura's fall sets in motion the chain of events which forces Lizzie to gain that courage (68).

If Lizzie is to break free of her one-dimensional, timorous nature and become a whole person, she must learn to become more daring and to face the evil that exists in her world. At first, she is so timid that she refuses even to look upon the temptations of the goblin men or to listen to their cries. Rather than confronting the evils of the world, Lizzie shuts herself out of the world. In doing so, Lizzie acts in a manner that is good; that is, she does not succumb to the goblin men, but her goodness is blindly mechanical. She is good only because she has no knowledge of evil. Lizzie chooses the path considered to be correct because she has been told that it is the right way, not because she knows enough about the workings of good and evil to be able to determine her path by her own choice. Before Lizzie can be redeemed, she must learn to see and to know evil. Otherwise, her good actions will have no meaning either for her or for those around her. She does not open her eyes to evil, however, until after she loses her sister to it and decides that she must find a way to reclaim Laura "when she first decides to confront the goblins for Laura's sake, Lizzie 'for
the first time in her life/Began to listen and look'" (Casey 68-69). Lizzie's character also grows in another way when she decides to save Laura.

More than finally beginning to acknowledge both sides of the world, the good and the bad, Laura moves from being on the defensive, hiding her eyes and plugging her ears, to being on the offensive, fighting to save her sister. In this decision to act, Laura turns the weakness of her character, her overwhelming meekness, into her strength. Before Lizzie decided to act on behalf of her sister, her meekness kept her from acknowledging the presence of the goblin men, but upon Lizzie's choosing to save her sister, her meekness is transformed by courage and determination into a quiet, unyielding strength which becomes the tool of her victory over the goblin men. Lizzie's passivity at the hands of the goblin men is the manifestation of this new found strength; this passivity is not an act of submission to the goblin men but an act of assertion against them. Lizzie does not fight back physically because to do so would be to lose her chance to bring back the juices of the fruits to Laura; physically, she is no match for the throng of goblin men. However, by standing quietly and defiantly before the goblin men, Laura is able to get "their treasure without paying their price" (Mermin 112). In her act of passive resistance, she obtains the antidote for Laura and overcomes the seductive power of the goblin men without herself falling before their temptations.
Although Laura falls into the snare of the goblin men's tempting goblin fruits and must be saved by her unfallen sister, the outcome of Laura's fall is not bad, but good. Laura's fall is a fortunate one which facilitates not only her own redemption but also that of her sister. The self-sacrifice Lizzie makes for Laura is no mean or cowardly act of submission, but one of defiance and action; it is a decisive act of will, and in the face of her strength the goblin men slink and slime their way back into the dark recesses of the earth, back into the primal depths of their origin. (Shurbutt 42).

Had Laura not fallen, Lizzie would never have confronted the goblin men, and, therefore, would never have learned the true meaning of goodness, to stand up to evil and, if necessary, to sacrifice oneself to save another from the harm that evil can cause. Although Lizzie remains immobile while under attack by the goblin men, she is more powerful now than at any previous part of the poem. She has found inside herself a quiet strength, the strength that Laura later praises as the great gift of one sister to another, the sustenance and support of unselfish love. Addressing the apparent paradox of Lizzie's finding her strength and wholeness of self in an act of self-sacrifice, Sylvia Bailey Shurbutt states that one must free oneself from the traditional patriarchal interpretation of self-sacrifice as ultimate expression of feminine submission, in order to understand the implications of the sisters' uniquely empowering act of renunciation. (41)

To look at self-sacrifice, such as that which Lizzie makes for Laura, as merely a gesture of submission is to overlook
the strength of character necessary for a person to be able to give up part of himself, or herself, in order to help a fellow human being. The greatest gift one can give is the gift of oneself, and few people are willing and able to take the risk of making themselves vulnerable so that another may be helped. Lizzie's love for Laura changes her from a weak woman to a strong one whose strength is so great that she is able to place herself in jeopardy to save her sister.

Lizzie's sacrifice for Laura is the center around which the sisters' fates turn: "without the risk [that Lizzie takes for Laura], there can be no redemption. There must be a journey outside the safety of innocence into the glen of the goblin men" (Watson 51). Laura makes this journey first, but she wanders so far into the realm of the goblin men that she can not find her own way back. Lizzie follows, but with the determination to go only as far as is necessary to save Laura, and in doing so, learns of the evil in the world by confronting the goblin men without falling victim to their wiles, and, because of her triumph over the goblin men, also learns of her own power and potential which had remained hidden while she turned in fear from the goblin men. Dorothy Mermin notes that when Lizzie returns to Laura with the antidote,

she runs home in the sheer physical pleasure of strength and freedom, impelled not by fear (1.460) but by joy and filled again with "inward laughter" (1.463). As her laughter indicates, her story has to do not with temptation resisted . . . but with danger braved and overcome, an heroic deed accomplished. (112)
As Lizzie realizes herself in her sacrifice of herself for her sister, so does Laura find her true self as a result of Lizzie’s actions. After having tasted of the goblin fruit and having been unable to secure any more to satisfy her cravings, Laura begins to waste away

Her hair grew thin and gray;
She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn
To swift decay and burn
Her fire away. (276-280)

She remains in this state of pining until Lizzie secures the antidote of goblin fruit juice for her. As she pines in the wasting state, Laura exists in a limbo between the two states of innocence. She has lost her original innocence, but she has yet to gain the experienced innocence which will allow her to become whole. Instead she is in a state of experience which is as detrimental to her growth, if not more so, than her original state of innocence was. Again, the necessity of balance becomes a key issue in the realization of self for one of the sisters. As Laura must learn to become more cautious than she is at first if she is to become a well balanced individual, she must balance innocence and experience to gain the experienced innocence which will allow her to realize her own potential. Lizzie becomes the instrument of the balancing of Laura’s self by helping Laura to realize that the goblin men’s forbidden fruit, though tempting in appearance and first taste, in reality, is horrible and soul-draining. This realization causes Laura to have a breakdown which in appearance and form is deathlike:
She fell at last;
Pleasure past and anguish past,
Is it death or is it life?

Life out of death. (521-524)

Like Lizzie, Laura undergoes a loss of self before she attains her state of experienced innocence and realizes her true potential. However, while Lizzie's loss of self was psychological and symbolic, her own sacrifice of herself for her sister, Laura's is physiological and concrete, her state of apparent death. But out of this death-state, Lizzie gains the strength to awaken to a new life. When she awakens, she "awoke as from a dream,/Laughed in the innocent old way,... And light danced in her eyes" (537-538, 542). Upon awakening, Laura recaptures some of her prior innocence, but she does not revert into her old, ignorant ways. Lizzie, having accomplished the feat of redeeming Laura and having reached her greatest potential in her loving deed for her sister, disappears from the poem. Laura, however, remains and, indeed, speaks the last lines of the poem. Now living in a state of experienced innocence, a balanced person, Laura becomes an instrument for saving others, just as Lizzie was the instrument through which Laura attained her salvation. Married and with children, Laura relates her experiences to her offspring. By doing so she introduces the next generation to both of the lessons learned by the sisters from their experience with the goblin men. She tells them about Lizzie's and her own early innocence, "Of not-returning time" (551). She relates the deceptive nature of evil, that it may
appear beautiful, but in truth is "poison in the blood" (555). Finally, Laura tells of the power of love, which she saw embodied in Lizzie, to overcome evil, to restore and redeem, and to support, guide, "cheer," and "strengthen" (557-567).

As each sister reaches her full potential, the narration of her story comes to a close. Lizzie attains her full potential in her act of sacrificing herself for her sister. After this point, she is no longer seen in the poem. Laura having gained a new self out of her experience with the goblin men reaches her full potential later than Lizzie, not coming fully into herself until she has children and is able to gather them round her and to teach them the lessons she learned from her encounter with the goblin men. Lizzie gains a new self upon awakening, but she only realizes this self when she, like Laura can give something of herself to someone else; she gives her children the benefit of her knowledge and experience and brings them together in love. Accordingly, as Laura has also reached her full potential, the narration of her story, and the poem, ceases.

By the end of "Goblin Market," both Laura and Lizzie realize themselves in roles of selflessness, Laura as a mother and Lizzie as the savior of her sister. The sisters' attaining their full potentials in roles of self-abnegation is one manifestation of the theme of finding oneself in the loss of self which runs through much of Christina Rossetti's poetry. This theme also can be seen in Rossetti's poetry
about death. In these poems, however, the personae or protagonists do not realize themselves until after they die. As Laura and Lizzie find themselves in self-sacrifice, the personae of Rossetti's death poems find themselves in a different form of self-abnegation, that of a self-obliterating sleep after death. Their sleep after death allows them to realize themselves either by finding the ultimate peace in their rest or by perfecting themselves for entrance into heaven. Whether Rossetti's characters attain their full potentials in life, as in "Goblin Market," or in death, as in many of her shorter poems, her characters realize themselves through self-abnegation.
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