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Emily Dickinson's and Christina Rossetti's Portrayals of Goblins and their Threat to Feminine Integrity

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EMILY DICKINSON’S AND CHRISTINA ROSSETTI’S PORTRAYALS OF GOBLINS AND THEIR THREAT TO FEMININE INTEGRITY

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
Miki J. Hazard
2002
APPROVAL SHEET

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

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Mary Ann Melfi
DEDICATION

This work is for my grandmother, the late Beatrice O. Cosentino, and my friend, the late Steve A. Kester. Thank you both for teaching me how to live.
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ABSTRACT

Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti, both prominent nineteenth-century female poets, struggled with how best to preserve feminine integrity when forming relationships to the masculine and devoting their lives to poetic composition. Both poets confronted societal and internal pressures when faced with the choice between the traditional roles of women and powerful callings to a life of art and the imagination. They feared losing their feminine identities and sense of self in their relationships to the masculine and their pursuit of a traditionally masculine occupation. In response to these fears and anxieties, both women wrote poetry surrounding the figure of the “goblin,” an undeniably masculine representation of internal and external threats to feminine integrity. An examination of the biographical similarities between Dickinson and Rossetti provides an illuminating background for a comparison and contrast of their poetic treatment of the goblin.

Dickinson’s letter 93 and Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” depict the consequences of focusing too much energy on desire and the deterioration of self that results from this action. Letter 93 discusses the implications of marriage, as Dickinson contrasts the perfect “golden” identity of the independent bride with the “flower” wife’s dependence on the masculine “man of noon.” Dickinson’s letter concludes that a woman’s willing “yielding up” of self to her husband poses a threat to her unique feminine identity, representing a significant source of anxiety in the young poet. Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” addresses similar themes, including the “golden” identity or personal wealth of maidens, the comparison of Lizzie and Laura with flowers, and the detrimental effects of obsessive desire. Concerned for her sister Lizzie’s well being after Lizzie braves the goblins’ glen, Laura awakens from her self-imposed stupor and ceases to want the goblin fruit, thus regaining her personal “gold” and re-establishing the bonds of sisterhood. In contrast to letter 93, Rossetti portrays Laura’s pre-marital interactions with the goblins as a threat to her feminine integrity, figuring marriage as the safe forum for Laura’s creative expression at the conclusion of “Goblin Market.”

In Dickinson’s “goblin” poems, she explores the inner experience of anxiety, figured as a masculine “goblin,” and how it fragments identity. Poem #512 studies the Soul whose life consists of “bandaged moments,” “moments of escape,” and “retaken moments.” The Soul exists in a cycle of utter despair and utter joy, as anxiety-ridden periods in her life surround transitory “moments” of expressive release. Continuing the themes of poem #512, poems #414, #430, #511, and #590 treat various states of anxiety and their negative effect on identity. Poem #646 provides resolution to the other “goblin” poems, envisioning a safe realm of the imagination. This “Vision” dismisses the “Goblin” of anxiety and allows for a harmonious internal marriage of the feminine and masculine aspects of self in the speaker’s “Mind.” This fictional marriage also alludes to the poet’s relationship with her masculine muse, mentioned in Dickinson’s “Master” letters. With poem #646, she makes peace with herself, her solitude, and her creative powers, achieving an emotionally rich state of transcendence free from anxiety and doubt.
EMILY DICKINSON’S AND CHRISTINA ROSSETTI’S PORTRAYALS OF GOBLINS AND THEIR THREAT TO FEMININE INTEGRITY
Though separated by an ocean and the cultural differences of America and Great Britain, Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson, arguably the two most well-known and thought-provoking female poets of the nineteenth century, faced similar challenges and anxieties that threatened both their integrity as women and their chosen occupation of poetic composition. Evidence of their parallel struggles may be pieced together from their life histories, personal letters, and, most notably, the fabric of their poetry. Exact contemporaries, Dickinson and Rossetti both strove to preserve their identities as women against ominous aspects of masculinity in societies that practically ignored the intellectual talents of women and avidly scrutinized female sexuality, irrationally linking it to genius and ambition. In Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” and Dickinson’s six “goblin” poems, both women personify fearsome characteristics of the masculine in the monstrous and multi-faceted figure of the goblin, conjuring the problematic nature of women preserving their own unique identities when forming relationships with the masculine elements of society and self. Coincidentally, Goblin Market and Other Poems appeared in published form in 1862, while the Johnson text ascribes Dickinson’s “goblin” poems to the year 1862. Beyond this possible concurrence of dates and other circumstantial theories based on Rossetti’s popularity in America, no documented evidence exists suggesting that Dickinson ever read Rossetti’s poetry or could have been influenced by it. Their mutual choice of the goblin seems natural given that the goblin permeated Victorian literature written by women, including the major works of the Bronte sisters, Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre, in which “both refer to . . . Heathcliff . . . [and] Rochester . . . as goblins at different points in their novels” (Wardrop 43).
As a figure with a long and complex history of meanings, the goblin came equipped with multiple, symbolic allusions. Traditionally, “goblins are sinister beings who can lure humans into a realm of entrapment from which they are unable to escape” (Bentley 65). Embodying “beastly and exploitative male sexuality” (Gilbert and Gubar 567), goblins incarnate more sinister qualities, charming their way into the minds and souls of their victims in addition to violating the sanctity of their bodies. In this capacity, the goblins represent for Rossetti and Dickinson the passionate and rapacious aspects of masculine society and consciousness that threaten women intent on maintaining their individuality and uniquely feminine voices. The simultaneous allure and corruption of the goblins make them dangerous, especially to a woman unsure of her identity and her place in society who desires more out of life than a husband, a home, and a family. Linked to Satan with his ability to manipulate language for the purpose of tempting the innocent into sin, “goblins are not fairies at all, but full-size devils, and as such are named among Satan’s crew in Paradise Lost” (Marsh Rossetti 231). Indeed, the temptation scene in “Goblin Market” clearly parallels Satan’s temptation of Eve in John Milton’s Paradise Lost.

Rossetti’s poem first introduces the innocent sisters, Laura and Lizzie, and then chronicles their separate encounters with the goblin merchant men and the consequences to feminine independence, self-worth, and morality of these pre-marital interactions. Like Eve, Laura becomes enchanted with the goblins’ fruit and the auditory stimulation of their glib charms, trading a vital piece of herself for their wares and falling victim to her own obsessive desire. By conjuring the temptation scene from Paradise Lost, Rossetti demonstrates the gravity of Laura’s act and foreshadows her subsequent
downfall. While Eve's pursuit of desire for knowledge and godliness brings about separation from God, Laura's craving for the goblins' fruit brings about separation from herself and her sister, who manages to avoid duplicating Laura's uninhibited indulgence of desire. Rossetti resolves the themes and conflicts in "Goblin Market" by pointing out the value inherent in staying true to oneself and extolling sisterhood, the bond between women that leads to the preservation of feminine integrity and a unique perspective on storytelling.

In "Goblin Market," Rossetti explores two major themes—the importance and value of feminine integrity and the consequences of obsessive desire to a woman, namely Laura. Feminine integrity may be described as the basic and essential components of a woman's selfhood free from the negative influences of the masculine, the very essence of the feminine that defines a woman and makes her unique and separate from man, instead of his appendage. When a woman maintains her feminine integrity, she possesses a strong sense of identity and self-worth, fertile creative energy born of the feminine consciousness, individuality and independence, the ability to make decisions that benefit herself, personal morality, and strength of character when confronted with danger and temptation. She also finds peace and self-confidence by fostering a safe personal space either of the imagination or in reality where she can remain true to herself and the sisterhood of women while simultaneously forming meaningful relationships to the masculine. Dickinson and Rossetti both identify feminine integrity with "gold" or "golden" imagery. When women lack feminine integrity or lose emotional wealth figured as "gold," they fall victim to desire, as evidenced by Laura's experience in "Goblin Market." In Rossetti's poem, desire encompasses physical appetite, sensual and
sexual pleasure, and a transcendental aspiration for an unnamed something more, something beyond oneself, a perceived power that results in constant yearning without satisfaction. Without feminine integrity and a thorough knowledge of oneself, desire may be fatal to a woman, disintegrating her feminine being and dispersing her creative energy across a spectrum of masculine influences that do not embody her true nature, essentially tearing her apart. In this sense, desire produces anxiety in Laura and discomfort in her own skin because she attempts to move beyond herself, desiring the fruits of the masculine, without knowing herself first, without nurturing, appreciating, and valuing her basic feminine integrity. While Dickinson similarly explores the relationship between feminine integrity and desire in her “man of noon” letter, her “goblin” poems focus more intently on the sensation of anxiety and how it adversely impacts feminine integrity.

Whereas Rossetti’s poem envisions the goblins’ masculine threat to feminine integrity as an external entity pandering to a woman’s most basic desires, Dickinson contends with an internal goblin, an anxiety-producing, masculine force that invades the feminine consciousness, provoking self-doubt and despair. In poem #512, “The Soul has Bandaged moments--,” the feminine Soul undergoes an intense inner struggle between power, her “moments of escape,” and powerlessness, her “bandaged” and “retaken” moments. She fights to control the goblin “fright” that rises within her and terrorizes her consciousness. Poem #414, “’Twas like a Maelstrom, with a notch,” explores utter and complete powerlessness in the face of imminent death and the debilitating anxiety that accompanies this moment. The “Goblin” of this poem, described in the terms of an omnipotent deity, ticks off the seconds of the victim’s life in a nerve-racking countdown that ends in absolute fragmentation of the sufferer’s identity. Though initially blessed,
 unlike the main characters in poems #512 and #414, the speaker of poem #430, “It would never be Common—more—I said—,” loses her creativity and personal riches when an imaginary goblin drinks “her dew” and leaves her bereft of her former sense of self-worth. Dickinson again briefly referenced the links between anxiety and the figure of the goblin in poems #511, “If you were coming in the Fall,” and #590, “Did you ever stand in a Cavern’s Mouth—,” where she equates uncertainty and darkness with the goblin. Finally resolving the images and themes of the “goblin” poems in poem #646, “I think to Live—may be a Bliss,” Dickinson puts forth a self-assured, hopeful speaker who envisions a realm of the imagination free from the masculine inner threats and the attendant sensation of anxiety present in the previous “goblin” poems.

In addition to their shared image of the goblin, other similarities in the lives of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti contributed to their poetic treatment of feminine integrity and the struggle to overcome the influence of the masculine. Genteel women of their age did not often take up purposeful occupation beyond the duties of wife, mother, friend, daughter, and sister, but Dickinson and Rossetti felt compelled to define themselves beyond the traditional roles assigned to women. As a young woman struggling to achieve self-definition, Dickinson hopelessly watched “her friends taking paths very different from anything she was inclined to follow—matrimony, or careers, or the kind of piety she saw in Abiah Root,” her childhood friend (Sewall 688). While Dickinson’s grandfather founded Amherst College, her family expected her to do little more than bake bread for her father, witness her brother win the family honors, and watch life go by from “her corner bedroom on the second floor at 280 Main Street, Amherst” (Rich 99). Indeed, “given the clash between the cruelly limited expectations for women
in Dickinson’s culture and the grand scope of her innate abilities, it is no great wonder that the impulse to realize those abilities generated an almost debilitating anxiety” (Dobson 95).

Unlike Dickinson, Rossetti felt pressured by her family to adopt a socially useful vocation. Following the example of her Aunt Eliza Polidori, Rossetti, thinking she might pursue a career as a nurse, petitioned to join Florence Nightingale in the Crimea. Turned down because she was too young, Rossetti explored other options. She shied away from the constraints and duties of marriage and found governessing exhausting and stressful. Although she remained a devoutly religious woman throughout her life, “the promise of entering a convent was one that induced great anxiety in the poet” (Bristow 261), even when “in 1873 her older sister Maria became an Anglican nun, as she had long wanted to do” (Mermin 115). Instead of immuring herself in the world of the convent, Rossetti, at Maria’s urging, volunteered as an Associate Sister at the St. Mary Magdalene Home in Highgate, “the London diocesan penitentiary for fallen women” (Marsh Vocation 238), early in 1859. Many critics and historians believe that Rossetti wrote “Goblin Market” as a tale of hope for the fallen women she tended to at Highgate and that she read the poem to them in the course of her volunteer duties. Because of a persistent cough, Rossetti surrendered her duties at Highgate in 1864, and “she did not find an alternative career in religious social work” (245).

Both women eventually heeded their calling as poets, but struggled with the implications of taking it up as a full-time occupation. Called to a life of literature, beauty, and a world of the imagination, Dickinson and Rossetti made the choice to reject the traditional roles of women—mother, wife, homemaker—in order to preserve their
time and energy for poetic composition. Despite their resolve, both poets experienced conflict over the impact of this choice on their feminine integrity. Dickinson expressed concern over the loss of her identity when taken over by the power of her poetic inspiration, dreading that her “creative and powerful self” might actually be “unacceptable, perhaps even monstrous” (Rich 114). At times, she even “relates her writing of poetry to Eve’s disobedience in the garden, Eve’s wicked hunger for knowledge and power and glory” (Mossberg 51). Desperately “trying to reconcile the desire for achievement with the feminine ideal as promoted by Church and society” (Marsh Rossetti 180), Rossetti struggled to avoid practicing what she regarded as “the worst, the most unforgivable sin, the ultimate sin of vanity” (Gilbert and Gubar 552) when composing verse. Though less haunted by the mandates of religion, Dickinson still found herself alone with her “growing sense of poetic vocation” which “she seemed unable to talk about . . . except in veiled metaphors and with a sense of guilt—the ‘evil voices’ lisping in her ears—as if to be a poet were somehow improper or even blasphemous” (Sewall 597).

In addition to these internal conflicts, both poets met with significant social resistance. Dissuaded from publication by societies that believed “to actively seek recognition and occupy pages of print in the prestigious journals was to trespass on essentially masculine territory” (Marsh Rossetti 284), Rossetti and Dickinson “felt in danger of losing their status as women” (Rich 105). The double standard of society irrationally dictated that “female genius triggers uncontrollable sexual desires, and perhaps, conversely, uncontrollable sexual desires even cause the disease of female genius” (Gilbert and Gubar 569) and, as a result, placed “significant pressures on women
writers to protect their personal lives from public scrutiny” (Pollak 222) in an effort to frighten them away from the exposure involved in publication. Rossetti personally encountered this unreasoning prejudice when Swinburne, a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, wrote a letter to Dante Gabriel Rossetti joking “that to have a ‘sister’ as a poet is in some respect to be associated with a ‘Lesbian’” (Bristow 267). As if to prove him wrong, under the stresses related to the publication of Goblin Market and Other Poems, “Christina fell ill, following in this a well-attested tendency among female authors to sicken after publication . . . For publishing transgressed the gender rules of the time, in an implicit challenge to male authority in the field of letters . . . Illness in response to the anxiety thus generated was an affirmation of feminine frailty and dependence, in symbolic denial of the assertive autonomy of entering the literary marketplace” (Marsh Rossetti 284). Dickinson, whose attempts at publication met with misunderstanding and misinterpretation of her poetry, adopted the notion that “Publication—is the Auction / Of the Mind of Man—“ (Dickinson 709.1-2) to maintain the integrity of her artistic expression and meditated instead on “the posthumous fame she seems confidently to have expected” (Wolff 534).

Dickinson’s and Rossetti’s brothers contributed to this social resistance and to the perception of a sense of impropriety in their verse, compounding their unease about losing their status as women as a result of pursuing careers as poets. After receiving some of Emily’s more creative letters, Austin Dickinson “reprieved her for being ‘too loud’ in her use of her literary voice,” and he “became annoyed when Dickinson exulted in her ability to make metaphors, flaunting . . . her mastery of language” (Mossberg 50). Addressing his underlying implication that her literary skills represented an
inappropriately aggressive form of communication for a woman, Dickinson wrote back
"that she knew the terms by which he was to be obliged: 'I'll be a little ninny, a little
pussy catty, a little Red Riding Hood.' But offering to be 'little' infers that such behavior
is not natural to her" (Mossberg 50). Dickinson knew how she should act, but could not
bring herself to be modest and womanly in her poetry. At a later stage in their
relationship, Emily, resentful that "Austin was being groomed for a career and future
consonant with the glorification of the Dickinson name while his sisters were being
enlisted in little more than the daily round of household routine" (Wolff 252-3),
channeled her anger into her poetry, secretly hoping her art would earn her a different
kind of ascendancy in the family. To her chagrin, "Austin took a short turn at writing
verses himself" (131), encroaching on Emily’s artistic territory in the family. To make
matters worse, while Edward Dickinson recognized and praised literary talent in his son,
"Father had never taken the least notice of his daughter’s precocity or literary genius"
(170). Emily’s identity as “daughter” overshadowed her identity as poet during these
early years, leading to her sense of self-doubt and frustration.

Rossetti faced an even more daunting rival in her own brother. A painter
responsible for “the period’s most famous incarnations of woman as mysterious ‘other’”
(Rosenblum Pose 83), a fellow poet, and a co-founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood,
Dante Gabriel Rossetti rendered Christina “a poet who felt doubly ‘precursed’; first by
the patriarchal tradition in English poetry and secondly by her brother’s ‘first’ place in
the family canon” (Rosenblum Endurance 50). A frequent reader and editor of
Christina’s original drafts, Dante Gabriel initially prevented the publication of “The
Lowest Room,” “reacting to the poem’s unwomanly tone of protest against women’s lot”
and perhaps “responding to its oblique suggestions of his sister’s anger and competitiveness with him” (47). Despite his successful censorship of the work early in her career, Christina defiantly published “The Lowest Room” twenty years after her first attempt to see it in print, in spite of her brother’s continued protestations, favoring her identity as poet over that of sister.

Resisting the false perceptions of intellectual women as monstrous and improper and the disappointing feedback they received from their brothers about their art, Dickinson and Rossetti forged a secure sense of identity and created poetry supportive of women, nourishing their own souls in the process. In order to dedicate their lives to their art, neither woman ever married or bore children, giving up the roles of mother and wife to nurture their poetry. They embraced isolation and solitude to pursue self-definition. Dickinson, in order to accommodate her cherished vocation and ensure that “there is nothing in her world but her own soul, with its attendant abstractions” (Wilbur 134), gradually withdrew from the world outside her father’s Homestead between the years 1858 and 1862, plagued continuously by time-consuming household chores that intruded on the time she set aside for writing. After 1871, Rossetti’s desire for “autonomy and self-sufficiency . . . resulted in her virtually complete withdrawal from active life, as well as her reliance upon ‘the Poet mind’—the creative imagination that generates experience—to sustain her, enrich her, and to serve as both a buffer and a mechanism for mediation between her and the external world that threatened always to encroach upon her independence” (Harrison 16). Despite the obstacles they faced, Dickinson and Rossetti sought always in their verse and in their lives to forge a place for themselves as serious nineteenth-century writers, while attempting to remain true to their identities, to
preserve the qualities that made them uniquely feminine, and to enrich and strengthen a literary tradition for women. The fabric of their “goblin” poems explores their unwavering commitment to feminine integrity and how to confront and foil the masculine forces that threaten it.

Despite the similarities between Dickinson and Rossetti, their treatments of the themes surrounding the goblin image differ significantly. In Dickinson’s “goblin” poems, she focuses on an internal struggle, masculinizing a psychological opponent in the figure of the goblin, while Rossetti describes an external conflict with the masculine in “Goblin Market.” Conversely, Dickinson’s letter 93, commonly known as the “man of noon” letter, contains striking similarities to Rossetti’s “Goblin Market.” A comparison of Dickinson’s letter to Rossetti’s poem reveals the similarities in thought processes of the two women and assists in highlighting the contrasts between their “goblin” poems.

In letter 93, Dickinson discusses the consequences of all-consuming desire and the anxiety produced by the potential loss of a woman’s individuality in the union of marriage. Dickinson wrote this letter in 1852, ten years earlier than her poems treating the figure of the goblin, to Susan Gilbert prior to her engagement to Emily’s brother, Austin. At this point in her life, Dickinson still assumes that she will marry, as she gushes, “those unions, my dear Susie, by which two lives are one, this sweet and strange adoption wherein we can but look, and are not yet admitted, how it can fill the heart, and make it gang wildly beating, how it will take us one day, and make us all its own, and we shall not run away from it, but lie still and be happy!” (Dickinson 1.93). Still innocent and untouched by these strong emotions, Dickinson imagines the excitement and intimacy that permeates the union of a married couple desperately in love. Despite her
seeming enthusiasm, these perceived feelings scare her, as she contemplates running “away from it.” Dickinson seems unsure and fearful about the all-encompassing desire she perceives as essential to the marriage union and asks for Susan’s opinion on these speculations, urging “when you come home, Susie, we must speak of these things” (Dickinson 1.93).

Dickinson then forges on into her own stream of thoughts on the subject, beginning with the critical difference between the engaged woman and the married woman. She realizes that the promise and hope of a woman in love and awaiting her wedding day differ markedly from the daily realities of the wife, as she postulates “how dull our lives must seem to the bride, and the plighted maiden, whose days are fed with gold, and who gather pearls every evening; but to the wife, Susie, sometimes the wife forgotten, our lives perhaps seem dearer than all others in the world” (Dickinson 1.93).

The nourishment of “gold” represents this woman’s new social identity, accepted and praised for planning to take a husband and assume the role of wife, but also still a unique individual with her own emotional wealth, not yet defined by her marriage and her spouse. She gathers “pearls every evening” in the form of compliments on her engagement, wedding gifts at parties and social occasions, and romantic visits from her husband-to-be. When compared to being in love and the excitement of the betrothal ceremonies, the single woman’s life must seem less exciting, but, as Dickinson points out, the dream of the bride soon enough becomes the reality of the wife who envies the single woman her freedom and unique identity.

Dickinson next figures women as “flowers,” initially separate, unique, and beautiful, but dramatically changed by the demands of marriage, as she argues “you have
seen flowers at morning, *satisfied* with the dew, and those same sweet flowers at noon
with their heads bowed in anguish before the mighty sun; think you these thirsty
blossoms will *now* need naught but—*dew*? No, they will cry for sunlight, and pine for
the burning noon, tho' it scorches them, scathes them; they have got through with
peace—they know that the man of noon, is *mightier* than the morning and their life is
henceforth to him” (Dickinson 1.93). Focusing on the desire awakened in these
women/flowers/wives, Dickinson uses verbs like “pine” and “cry” to emphasize the
emotional upheaval and loss of identity involved in being consumed by desire. Once
complete as a flower, needing only “dew” to survive, the sunlight of the “man of noon”
now creates a new need in the flower, the dependence upon his presence and heat to
sustain her and nourish her desires.

Eloquently expressing her doubts and fears about the consequences of marriage
for women, Dickinson here focuses on how “two lives are one” in this union,
necessitating a yielding up of the feminine to the more powerful masculine identity.
Despite the terrifying, burning imagery she uses to describe the male “sun” scorching the
female “flower,” she does not condemn men for this reality, but instead suggests that the
choice to succumb lies with women who trade their feminine integrity for the pursuit of
their desires. According to Dickinson, wives forsake their self-sufficiency and self-
fulfillment for what their husbands provide: emotional, financial, and physical care. This
dependency and potential loss of an individual life and identity frighten Dickinson, as she
exclaims, “oh, Susie, it is dangerous, and it is all too dear, these simple trusting spirits,
and the spirits mightier, which we cannot resist! It does so rend me, Susie, the thought of
it when it comes, that I tremble lest at sometime I, too, am yielded up” (Dickinson 1.93).
Dickinson vocalizes the implications of surrendering herself to marriage and its attendant desires and weighs the consequences to her feminine integrity inherent in such an act.

While at its most obvious level this letter deals with the anxiety produced by the prospect of marriage and the yielding up of her identity required by the woman in this union, other evidence suggests that Dickinson may have also been referring to another power greater than herself, the power of her poetry, a masculine muse of sorts who consumes her life. Three draft letters, numbered 187, 233, and 248 in the Johnson edition, addressed to an unknown, unnamed “Master” were found among Dickinson’s personal papers after her death. Biographers cannot determine whether or not she sent these letters, as the intended recipient is unknown. Indeed, these letters appear to be written to a masculine muse she credits with providing her artistic gift, the poet side of her identity. The wording and imagery of letter 248, similar to that of letter 93, suggest a marriage of the imagination in which she yields herself up to the “Master” of her art, as she pleads, “oh, did I offend it—Daisy—Daisy—offend it—who bends her smaller life to his . . . who only asks—a task—something to do for love of it—some little way she cannot guess to make that master glad—A love so big it scares her, rushing among her small heart” (Dickinson 1.248). Again figuring the woman as a flower, specifically a “Daisy” this time, Dickinson focuses on her surrender to something greater than herself, despite the fear induced by that sacrificial action. While Dickinson did not enter into a traditional marriage with a mortal man, she did succumb to this “Master” of her art, electing to become a poet despite the anxiety over identity this choice produced in her.

As illustrated by letter 93, Dickinson struggled with both the elation and fear associated with desire in the marriage union and the conflicts inherent in yielding up her
feminine integrity to a masculine muse of poetry. She faced difficult choices as a woman, attempting to preserve the wholeness and purity of her own soul, and as a poet, consumed by an imagined entity greater than herself. Envisioning a woman as a flower, initially content with the nourishment of dew and the unique “gold” of her intact selfhood, who comes to desire and depend upon the heat and power of the scorching “man of noon,” Dickinson creates a memorable palette of imagery and an intense autobiographical account of her stream of consciousness on the subject of marriage. Because of notable similarities in theme, imagery, content, and treatment of issues, Dickinson’s letter 93 forms an instructive comparison and contrast with Rossetti’s “Goblin Market.”

Rossetti’s approach to the topics of marriage, identity, desire, and anxiety differs somewhat from Dickinson’s. Laura and Lizzie, the sisters in “Goblin Market,” resemble Emily and Susan in letter 93 in that both pairs of women stand on the border between girlish innocence and encroaching womanhood. Their identities, at first uniquely feminine and complete, will be changed forever by the upcoming choices they will make regarding their desires and their relationships with the masculine elements of society. While Dickinson figures the desires inherent in marriage as potential threats to a woman’s individuality, given her tendency to surrender to the man’s powerful will in this union, Rossetti demonstrates in “Goblin Market” that a woman’s pre-matrimony interactions with men, brought about by a premature awakening to desire, can be far more dangerous to her feminine integrity and her future. Indeed, Rossetti’s portrait of marriage at the end of the poem provides women with creativity, freedom, and a strong sense of
self in sharp contrast to Dickinson’s idea of the husband as the scorching sun who enslaves his wife’s passions and consumes her uniqueness.

Until Lizzie’s and Laura’s actions distinguish them from each other in “Goblin Market,” the completeness and near perfection of their initial state of innocence denote their mirrored identities. Rossetti intensifies this sense of the two sisters’ similarities when she describes them asleep together:

> Golden head by golden head,  
> Like two pigeons in one nest  
> Folded in each other’s wings,  
> They lay down in their curtained bed:  
> Like two blossoms on one stem,  
> Like two flakes of new-fall’n snow,  
> Like two wands of ivory  
> Tipped with gold for awful kings . . .  
> Cheek to cheek and breast to breast  
> Locked together in one nest. (Rossetti 184-91, 197-8)

In addition to the likeness of the two sisters, this passage emphasizes their innocence and purity by evoking images of flower “blossoms,” “new-fall’n snow,” and “ivory” wands. The perfect wholeness and harmony of their current identities emerge in the picture of “two pigeons in one nest” and “two blossoms on one stem.” Rossetti describes women as flowers, a symbol of their feminine integrity and sisterhood, and makes several references to “gold” in her description of the sisters, depicting their strength of character and emotional wealth.

Despite their inherent similarities, the sisters’ identities diverge when they meet the goblins in the glen while gathering water. Initially, the goblins appear more seductive than threatening, as they open the poem tempting potential buyers, maiden women, with a detailed description of their luscious fruit:
Morning and evening
Maids heard the goblins cry:
‘Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy:
Apples and quinces,
Lemons and oranges,
Plump unpecked cherries,
Melons and raspberries . . . ’ (Rossetti 1-8)

This introductory passage continues as the goblins deliver their list of fruits made more
delectable with the use of lush, sensuous adjectives, such as “Bloom-down-checked
peaches” (9) and “Wild free-born cranberries” (11). Allusions to sexuality pervade the
goblins’ description of their wares and foreshadow the corruption of “maids” who elect to
consume their fruit.

At this point in the poem, despite the goblins’ sensual hawking of their wares,
they pose no immediate threat to the protagonists of the poem. In fact, when Rossetti
first introduces Lizzie and Laura, the sisters blush and strain to hear the goblin cries,
seemingly excited by their proximity, as “Laura bowed her head to hear, / Lizzie veiled
her blushes . . . With clasping arms and cautioning lips, / With tingling cheeks and finger
tips” (34-5, 38-9). Ironically, Laura first speaks out against the goblins, Laura who
awakens to a desire for their fruit and falls under their spell within the next few lines,
when she tells Lizzie, “We must not look at goblin men, / We must not buy their fruits: / Who
knows upon what soil they fed / Their hungry thirsty roots?” (42-5). As Laura
clarifies in these lines, unless a maid looks at the goblins, they cannot approach her, so
she cannot be corrupted against her will. Rossetti here makes a clear point that women
choose their own destiny, electing whether or not to invite the goblins with a look. In
these lines, Laura also shrewdly questions the origin of the goblins’ too-perfect fruit,
suspecting its unnatural, illusionary source. Confirming Laura’s initial suspicions,
Rossetti consistently draws attention to the mysterious and unnatural source of the goblins’ fruit throughout the poem in lines such as “(Men sell not such in any town)” (101), “Who knows upon what soil they fed / Their hungry thirsty roots?” (44-5), and “Fruits which that unknown orchard bore” (135).

Despite Laura’s words of warning, she seemingly succumbs to the temptations the goblins offer almost immediately. After her speech, the goblins call out, just once, “'Come buy'” (46), and Lizzie echoes Laura’s words “'You should not peep at goblin men'” (49). Laura then, in one fateful motion, “reared her glossy head, / And whispered like the restless brook: / 'Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie, / Down the glen tramp little men'” (52-5), not only losing herself in the moment, but attempting to sway Lizzie as well, the sister whom she sought to protect only a few lines earlier. Rossetti does not offer a reason why Laura gives herself over to the temptation of looking at the goblins beyond an inexplicable awakening of desire in her. One could speculate that she sought to separate herself from her shared identity with Lizzie, but, ultimately, the reason seems to matter less to Rossetti than that Laura chooses to look of her own free will, spontaneously experiencing desire and acting upon it, and that this choice distinguishes Laura from Lizzie for the remainder of the poem. With Laura, as with Dickinson’s flower women, this yielding up, this giving over of one’s individuality to a more powerful masculine force, happens because it happens, born of emotions and desire, without logic and without a logical explanation. This consumption by desire and lack of rationality explains the anxiety produced in women over how to maintain their unique feminine wholeness while forming meaningful, fulfilling relationships with the masculine.
Lizzie, with eyes shut tight, finds herself listening to her sister’s description of the goblin men and their wares. In contrast to Laura’s initial speech in which she relates her well-founded anxiety about the “soil” used in the cultivation of the goblins’ fruit, she now admiringly states, “how fair the vine must grow / Whose grapes are so luscious; / How warm the wind must blow / Thro’ those fruit bushes” (60-3). Lizzie attempts to remind Laura of her previous view that the goblins’ fruit comes from an unnatural source by vehemently retorting “no, no, no; / Their offers should not charm us, / Their evil gifts would harm us” (Rossetti 64-6). Panicking at the recent turn of events, Lizzie “thrust a dimpled finger / In each ear, shut eyes and ran” (67-8), resisting Laura’s invitation to look at the goblins. While Lizzie’s actions seem cowardly, as she sacrifices her sister in order to save herself, Laura does try to tempt Lizzie into experiencing desire for the goblins’ fruit and sharing her fate. Though not entirely blameless, Lizzie makes the wise choice to separate from her sister and run away at what might potentially be her moment of greatest weakness in the poem to gather strength against the goblins for a later date when she has her wits about her.

While Lizzie flees the scene, “Curious Laura chose to linger / Wondering at each merchant man” (69-70). Carefully selecting her words in these two lines, Rossetti clearly indicates Laura’s choice in what befalls her. As the goblins approach, Rossetti describes them as both tempting and repulsive, both beasts and men:

One had a cat’s face,
One whisked a tail,
One tramped at a rat’s pace,
One crawled like a snail,

1 Similarly, in Paradise Lost, Satan brings Eve to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and, though she knows the fruit of this tree is forbidden, she allows herself to fall into his trap and describes it as “Fruit Divine, / Fair to the Eye, inviting to the Taste, / Of virtue to make wise” (Milton IX.773-9).
One like a wombat prowled obtuse and furry,
One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry. (71-6)

Depicting negative animalistic features, Rossetti paints beasts low to the ground, often rodents, who lurk and prowl in search of a victim. Despite their loathsome appearance, the goblins’ call captures Laura’s interest, as “She heard a voice like voice of doves / Cooing all together: / They sounded kind and full of loves / In the pleasant weather” (77-80). With this emphasis on the goblins’ speech rhythms, Rossetti paints them as orators who use duplicitous language and warped logic to further ensnare their victims once caught. In this sense, the goblins’ kinship with Satan, who adopts the form of the serpent, as tempter reverberates in the following passage from Paradise Lost:

[Satan’s] words replete with guile
Into [Eve’s] heart too easy entrance won:
Fixt on the Fruit she gaz’d, which to behold
Might tempt alone, and in her ears the sound
yet rung of his persuasive words, impregn’d
With Reason, to her seeming, and with Truth. (Milton IX.733-8)

Rossetti’s obvious allusion to Satan in her description of the goblins indicates the extent of the peril they pose to unprotected maidens. Further emphasizing their abnormality and strangeness, Rossetti stresses that the goblins walk unnaturally “backwards up the mossy glen” (Rossetti 87) to meet Laura, continuing their litany of “‘Come buy’” (90) until they reach her.

Mocking their customer, the goblins stand still before Laura “leering at each other, / Brother with queer brother; / Signalling each other, / Brother with sly brother” (93-6). Their solidarity and brotherhood stand in stark contrast to Laura who, at this critical moment, faces them without a sister, utterly alone, just as Satan “wish’d his hap might find / Eve separate” (Milton IX.421-2) from Adam laboring in the garden,
“Herself, though fairest unsupported Flow’r, / From her best prop so far, and storm so nigh” (IX.432-3). Milton here compares Eve to a flower, standing alone in the Garden of Eden susceptible to danger. In the following passage, Rossetti also emphasizes the risk of Laura’s solitude in her meeting with the goblins:

Laura stretched her gleaming neck  
Like a rush-imbedded swan,  
Like a lily from the beck,  
Like a moonlit poplar branch,  
Like a vessel at the launch  
When its last restraint is gone. (Rossetti 81-6)

On the surface, Rossetti’s imagery in these lines revolves around the color white as symbolic of innocence and purity—a “swan,” a “lily,” and a “moonlit poplar branch.” Less noticeably, Rossetti selects only one of each of these images. There is one swan, one lily, one branch, one vessel, and, more importantly, one Laura. Additionally, these images embody the action of reaching, symbolizing Laura reaching out to the goblins. She wants what they have to offer. Without Lizzie, her “last restraint” (86), Laura, a “vessel” floating away from shore, gives herself over to desire in her encounter with the goblins.

Confronting the goblins and the “golden weight / Of dish and fruit” (102-3) they offer her, Laura becomes immobilized, unable to decide what to do next, as she “stared but did not stir, / Longed but had no money” (105-6). She knows it would be wrong to partake of the goblins’ fruit without paying them, yet she desires the fruit anyway and waits for a solution to her dilemma. Sensing her hesitation, the glib goblins use their gift of gab to persuade her, as “the whisk-tailed merchant bade her taste / In tones as smooth as honey” (107-8). Since her wavering sense of morality prevents her from accepting his too-welcome invitation, Laura hurriedly replies:
‘Good folk, I have no coin;
To take were to purloin:
I have no copper in my purse,
I have no silver either,
And all my gold is on the furze
That shakes in windy weather
Above the rusty heather.’ (116-22)

Erroneously believing these goblins are “‘good folk,’” Laura yet remains aware of the fact that without currency partaking of their wares would constitute stealing on her part. She relates her perceived poverty to the goblins by claiming only the “gold . . . on the furze,” a golden-tipped plant, as belonging to her. The goblins quickly contradict her with an obviously rehearsed answer: “‘You have much gold upon your head,’ / They answered all together: / ‘Buy from us with a golden curl’” (123-4). Laura fails to count her personal “gold,” the valuation of her emotional wealth, identity, and personal strength. The goblins realize Laura’s worth, where she does not, and they take advantage of her naivete for their benefit. Well-versed in trafficking with unsuspecting maidens, they know exactly what they are requesting—the source of Laura’s very being, but she fails to realize the implications involved in such a surrender.

New to this kind of interaction and a stranger in their marketplace, Laura, relieved at this proposal of an alternate form of payment, without hesitation “clipped a precious golden lock, / Dropped a tear more rare than pearl, / Then sucked their fruit globes fair or red” (126-8), using herself as currency. The adjectives “precious” and “rare” call attention to the value of Laura’s payment and its cost to her. At this critical juncture in the poem, Laura devalues herself for the sake of her desire, overvaluing the fruit and acting without regard to the consequences of her actions. Laura unwisely perceives the fruit as more valuable than the “gold upon her head.” When the goblins offer her the
opportunity to barter away a precious part of herself, she jumps at it, seeing it as a bargain compared with the greater value of the fruit.

By choosing to look at the goblins, inviting them to approach her with their wares, Laura’s desire for the fruit instantly separates her from her sister Lizzie and symbolically from her own feminine integrity even before she tastes it. Having crossed the threshold of desire, the fruit becomes the object of her ambitions and a vehicle for permanently separating her from her former life of simple domesticity. It represents Laura’s hunger for knowledge and power and her desire to transcend the boundaries of the feminine, just as Eve’s consumption of the fruit proffered by Satan represents her desire for the knowledge and power possessed by God and her wish to know more than Adam. Laura believes the fruit holds the promise of a new identity and a better life, disregarding the danger of giving herself over to the grasp of an insatiable desire. By consistently linking the goblin’s fruit with gold, symbolic of personal wealth, when Laura “clipped a precious golden lock” (126) to pay the goblins for the fruit, Rossetti makes a connection between the fruit and the concept of identity, placing it on “a golden dish” (58) and “a dish of gold” (176) and referring to “the golden weight / Of dish and fruit” (102-3). Contrary to the seeming richness of the goblin fruit, the gold proffered by the goblins is fool’s gold, a false identity, not the genuine gold of self that Laura clips and delivers to them.

Despite her negative portrayal of the goblins as tempters, Rossetti never directly blames them for Laura’s fall in the poem, figuring them as more of a catalyst for the realization of her desire. In and of itself, Laura’s awakening to desire cannot jeopardize her feminine integrity. She must succumb to desire and act upon it in order to risk losing herself in its clutches. Weakened by Lizzie’s departure, Laura, without a sister to caution
or direct her, subsequently acts upon her growing desire, overvaluing the goblins’ fruit and perceiving it as a means to satisfy her craving for something more, something beyond her feminine identity, the natural world, and the limitations of her current life. Like a greedy, spoiled child who finally gets her own way, Laura experiences the uninhibited joy of indulging her desire, evidenced by her utter loss of self-control when passionately consuming the fruit: “She sucked and sucked and sucked the more / Fruits which that unknown orchard bore; / She sucked until her lips were sore” (Rossetti 134-6), just as Eve,

Intent now wholly on her taste, naught else
Regarded, such delight till then, as seem’d,
In Fruit she never tasted, whether true
Or fancied so through expectation high
Of knowledge, nor was God-head from her thought.
Greedily she ingorg’d without restraint,
And knew not eating Death. (Milton IX. 780-92)

A far cry from the proper, demure Laura at the beginning of the poem seeking to protect her sister from the corruption of the goblins, Laura, sucking greedily at the fruit globes, is now unrecognizable in terms of her former self and the mirrored Lizzie-and-Laura identity.

Upon leaving the scene of her encounter with the goblins, Laura casually “flung the empty rinds away / But gathered up one kernel-stone” (Rossetti 137-138) as a souvenir of her adventure. Laura mistakees her initiation into the world of desire as a passport into the goblins’ market, a visa allowing her to revisit it again and again to obtain more fruit. Taking the “kernel-stone” indicates her intent to remain connected to this realm, her inability to let go, her enslavement to the desire awakened within her. Rossetti indicates how lost and divided from herself Laura truly is when she “knew not
was it night or day / As she turned home alone” (139-40). Morally distracted, self-absorbed, and bereft of a sister to guide her, Laura again stands alone, now incapable of distinguishing night from day, wrong from right, reality from fantasy. Directed solely by her desire, she runs home to Lizzie in a trance, her feminine integrity disintegrating.

Lizzie meets Laura upon her return home with “wise upbraidings” (142), relating the sorrowful tale of Jeanie, a young maiden whose encounter with the goblins proved fatal. Like Laura, Jeanie “Ate their fruits . . . Plucked from bowers / Where summer ripens at all hours” (150-2). Rossetti here again draws attention to the unnatural origin of the goblins’ wares, for, in the natural world, perpetual summer does not exist. Lizzie continues to predict Laura’s doomed fate by reminding her of Jeanie’s:

‘ever in the noonlight
She pined and pined away;
Sought them by night and day,
Found them no more but dwindled and grew grey;
Then fell with the first snow,
While to this day no grass will grow
Where she lies low;
I planted daisies there a year ago
That never blow.’ (153-60)

Obsessed by the passion awakened within her, Jeanie “sought them by night and day” (156) in vain, continually thwarted in her attempts to satisfy her desire. Eventually, Jeanie’s single-minded obsession obliterates her feminine integrity and results in her death. In contrast to Dickinson’s letter, which emphasizes the loss of a woman’s individuality in marriage, Rossetti’s poem, at its most obvious level, stresses the consequences to a woman’s sense of self when she submits to desire and becomes inappropriately involved with men prior to matrimony, whether sexually, intellectually, or otherwise. Later in the poem, Lizzie again refers to “Jeanie in her grave, / Who should
have been a bride; / But who for joys brides hope to have / Fell sick and died” (312-5).
Rossetti’s repetitive use of the word “fell” (157, 315) to describe Jeanie’s fate underscores her fallen state. By eating of the goblin’s forbidden fruit, Jeanie transgresses the morality of the time, seeking the pleasure “brides hope to have” before reaching the sanctity of her marriage bed. As a fallen woman, she “grew grey,” losing the gold of her integrity, and becomes corrupted by her experience with desire and her encounter with the goblin men. Jeanie trades her creative life force and her chance to be a mother when bargaining with the goblins, evidenced by the sterility of the ground over Jeanie’s grave where Lizzie attempts to plant daisies. Flowers, symbolic of women and feminine wholeness for both Dickinson and Rossetti, will not grow in the soil covering Jeanie’s grave, indicating her separation from self and the natural world.

Lizzie predicts that Laura will be unable to renew her encounter with the goblins, since Jeanie “found them no more” after her first meeting with them, and that Laura, frustrated by “baulked desire” (267), will wither away like Jeanie before her. Laura refuses to believe Lizzie’s rationale and cannot conceive that the consequences of her actions will mirror Jeanie’s. Intent on returning to the glen and buying more fruit from the goblins to gratify her desire, Laura attempts to silence her sister, stating:

‘Nay, hush, my sister:
I ate and ate my fill,
Yet my mouth waters still;
Tomorrow night I will
Buy more.’ (164-8)

Paradoxically, though Laura should be sated after eating her “fill,” her “mouth waters still,” signaling that her appetite for the fruit can never be fully satisfied. Laura’s all-consuming desire for the fruit launches her on a never-ending quest to obtain it, a losing
pursuit from the start. Laura’s behavior again mirrors that of Eve after she gives in to temptation and eats the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, when Eve gushes to the tree:

‘henceforth my early care,  
Not without Song, each Morning, and due praise  
Shall tend thee, and the fertile burden ease  
Of thy full branches offer’d free to all;  
Till dieted by thee I grow mature  
In knowledge, as the Gods who all things know.’ (Milton IX.799-804)

Like Eve and Jeanie before her, Laura loses herself in her desire for more fruit, becoming a slave to her obsession with it. Separate from her sister, whose identity mirrors her own at the beginning of the poem, Laura’s condition may be likened to Adam’s assessment of Eve after her fall: “How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost, / Defac’t, deflow’r’d, and now to Death devote? / . . .  to lose thee were to lose myself’ (IX.900-1, 959). Just as Eve, fearful of being alone in the world without Adam by her side, offers Adam the fruit so that he may fall with her, so Laura intends to tempt Lizzie, enjoining her “‘have done with sorrow; I’ll bring you plums tomorrow’” (Rossetti 169-70).

Enmeshed in denial, Laura enjoys a peaceful night’s rest with her sister. At this point in the poem, Rossetti does not yet outwardly distinguish Laura from Lizzie, focusing instead on their similarities as they sleep. As the new day dawns, Laura and Lizzie go about the daily domestic chores that define their lives:

Fetched in honey, milked the cows,  
Aired and set to rights the house,  
Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,  
Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,  
Next churned butter, whipped up cream,  
Fed their poultry, sat and sewed;  
Talked as modest maidens should. (203-9)
During the course of their daily chores, Laura grows increasingly dissatisfied with the life of simple toil, companionship, and innocence that she shares with Lizzie. While Lizzie warbles “for the mere bright day’s delight” (213), Laura spends their time together “in an absent dream . . . sick in part . . . longing for the night” (211-2, 214). In this passage, Rossetti demonstrates the extent of Laura’s entanglement in desire, as doubt, fear, and anxiety begin to invade her psyche and foreshadow her impending descent into despair. Similarly, the effects of Adam and Eve’s fall do not become apparent until the morning after their transgression, when:

High Passions, Anger, Hate,  
Mistrust, Suspicion, Discord, and shook sore  
Thir inward State of Mind, calm Region once  
And full of Peace, now toss’t and turbulent . . .  
Both in subjection now  
To sensual Appetite, who from beneath  
Usurping over Sovran Reason claim’d  
Superior sway. (Milton IX.1123-31)

Unlike Eve, who shares her fate with Adam, Laura cannot share the knowledge and disillusionment she now possesses with Lizzie, since Lizzie remains unfallen. Laura must face the consequences of her act alone.

When evening finally falls, Laura “most like a leaping flame” (Rossetti 218) accompanies her sister to the glen to fetch water, obsessed with finding the goblin men and tasting their fruit again, completely lost in her single-minded quest. While Lizzie “plucked purple and rich golden flags” (220), indicating her commitment to herself and her valuation of her “golden” identity, Laura, by contrast, “loitered still among the rushes” (226), searching for the goblin men, looking outside of herself for nourishment and fulfillment. Even when Lizzie advises her of the lateness of the hour, Laura insists
on staying, waiting to hear “The customary cry, / ‘Come buy, come buy’” (231-2), yet
“Not for all her watching / Once discerning even one goblin” (235-6). Already distraught
over the goblins’ absence and seeming lateness, Laura becomes frantic when Lizzie
beckons “‘O Laura, come; / I hear the fruit-call but I dare not look’” (242-3). Unlike
Laura, who trades the gold of her feminine integrity to gratify her appetite, Lizzie does
not desire the goblins’ fruit, favoring the golden ring of self and holding out for the
reward of matrimony instead. As night falls, Lizzie warns Laura about the coming
darkness, fearing “‘if we lost our way what should we do?’” (252), unaware that Laura is
already lost.

Confronted with her false perception of the goblins’ disappearance, “Laura turned
cold as stone / To find her sister heard that cry alone, / That goblin cry, / ‘Come buy our
fruits, come buy’” (253-6). Lizzie’s innocence and ignorance of desire separate her from
her sister and allow her to hear the goblins’ cries while Laura has seemingly “gone deaf
and blind” (259) to them. At this point in the poem, Laura cannot see past herself and her
own desires, so she cannot see or hear the goblins. Intent on obtaining more fruit to
satisfy her appetite, Laura cannot find the goblins, since her overvaluation of their fruit
renders their existence real and continually necessary to her, but they only exist on the
margins of society, patrolling the shady glen, and cannot be depended upon. At their
most basic level, the goblins represent lustful, aggressive male suitors with dishonorable
intentions, and their fruit represents the fleeting and dangerous fulfillment of desire.
Unlike husbands, the goblins symbolize the baser instincts of man, providing sexual
pleasure, figured as fruit, without having to fulfill the obligations of matrimony. Laura
wants more than the goblins can offer, more than just fruit. Her desire extends to the
freedom, knowledge, power, and creativity she associates with eating the fruit and relating to the masculine, just as Eve in *Paradise Lost* perceives the fruit as a means for attaining godliness. Disappointment awaits Laura, since she misconstrues the value and power of the fruit. Ultimately, it is just fruit, affording sensual pleasure. Laura’s obsession with it and her belief that it can transport her beyond herself renders her blind and deaf to the reality of the goblins. Interestingly, despite the title of the poem, “Goblin Market,” the goblins merely tramp up and down a glen hawking their fruit. No real market exists in the poem. The goblins’ makeshift marketplace may only be seen and heard by uncorrupted maidens with realistic expectations. Unable to meet the demands of Laura’s obsession with attaining the fruit, the goblins no longer exist for her.

At this crucial moment in the poem, Laura becomes immobilized with fear and anxiety and stands on the threshold between her former life and her barren future life. She cannot be content to knit her identity to Lizzie’s again and share their simple country life, nor can she forge ahead with her ambitious alter ego. On the surface level, having experienced desire and enjoyed the company of men before marriage, Laura loses her feminine integrity in her pre-matrimony relationship to the masculine. She now identifies with Jeanie and looks horror-stricken into her future. Rossetti draws attention to Laura’s fallen state and her related blindness, as “her tree of life drooped from the root: / She said not one word in her heart’s sore ache; / But peering thro’ the dimness, nought discerning, / Trudged home, her pitcher dripping all the way” (Rossetti 260-3). All of Laura’s senses become dull as a result of her separation from the source of her misguided obsession, as she turns inward in silence to nurse her broken heart, unable to see past the “dimness” surrounding her. Burdened with the knowledge that prevents her from returning to the
happiness of her previous life, Laura spends this night sleepless “in a passionate
yearming, / And gnashed her teeth for baulked desire, and wept / As if her heart would
break” (266-8).

Divided from herself, Laura falls into a state of paralyzed inactivity, doomed to a rapid deterioration of body and spirit. Devoid of her feminine integrity and her unique voice, “Laura kept watch in vain / In sullen silence of exceeding pain. / She never caught again the goblin cry: / ‘Come buy, come buy;’” (270-3). Focusing all her energy on the one thing she cannot obtain, Laura ignores the other needs of her body, mind, and spirit. Undergoing a living death, she sits unproductive and silent, unable to awaken from this self-imposed stupor. Like Jeanie before her, Laura begins to wither and die, since “when the noon waxed bright / Her hair grew thin and gray; She dwindled” (276-8).

Laura’s final effort to save herself from the despair of thwarted desire comes when she remembers the “kernel-stone” (281) she took from the scene of her undoing. Attempting to grow the fruit she can no longer buy, she plants the seed, “dewed it with tears, hoped for a root, / Watched for a waxing shoot, / But there came none” (283-5), a failure indicative of her sterility and her separation from the natural world. Forever removed from the object of her obsession while continuing to desire it, Laura finds herself in a paradoxical moral dilemma. Incapable of teaching herself “that to lose or forego what we desire is somehow to gain” (Wilbur 130), a major theme in Dickinson’s works, Laura, instead, “dreamed of melons, as a traveller sees / False waves in desert drouth / With shade of leaf-crowned trees, / And burns the thirstier in the sandful breeze” (Rossetti 289-92). Haunted by these visions, Laura, consumed by “baulked desire,” withdraws into herself, severing all connections with the outside world and refusing to
perform her daily chores alongside Lizzie. She "sat down listless in the chimney-nook / And would not eat" (297-8), rejecting all nourishment except the fruit denied her. In order to heal, Laura must acknowledge her overvaluation of the fruit, renounce her obsession with it, and reconstruct her feminine intégrity, incorporating her current experience, but she cannot do it alone.

Understandably alarmed by her sister’s condition, Lizzie finds herself torn between saving her sister and saving herself from sharing Laura’s fate. Untouched by the corrupting influence of obsession, Lizzie falsely assumes that she, too, might fall by merely looking at the goblins. Still able to hear the goblin’s litany of “Come buy” (305) from the glen, Lizzie, formulating a plan to release her sister from the goblins’ grasp, “longed to buy fruit to comfort her, / But feared to pay too dear” (310-1). Lizzie desires only to save her sister, but anxiety over a potential loss of her own feminine integrity plagues her, since she fears paying the price of her personal wealth in exchange for restoring her sister. Waffling in her resolve, Lizzie again remembers Jeanie “who should have been a bride” (312) and fears that merely approaching the goblins will damage her and disqualify her from the respectability of marriage.2 Waiting until the last possible moment, when Laura “seemed knocking at Death’s door” (321), Lizzie decides to risk herself for her sister, as she “weighed no more / Better and worse . . . And for the first time in her life / Began to listen and look” (322-3, 327-8). Carefully selecting the

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2 Interestingly, like the single woman in Dickinson’ letter 93, Lizzie aspires to be a “bride,” the prize denied Jeanie when she acts on her desire by interacting with the goblins and engorging herself on their fruit, but not necessarily a wife.
words “better and worse,” part of a key avowal in the marriage ceremony, Rossetti signifies the alteration in Lizzie’s priorities from matrimony to sisterhood.

In her brave endeavor to save Laura, Lizzie cleverly illustrates that a woman’s dealings with the seductive goblin fruit sellers need not result in loss of self and moral ruin. Unlike Laura, when Lizzie chooses to look at the goblin men, she does not risk losing her moral compass. Laura and Jeanie fall because they act upon desire, willingly succumbing to the goblins’ seduction, partake of the fruit at great personal cost to themselves, and become obsessed with their false perceptions of the goblin fruit. Rossetti contrasts Lizzie’s experience with the goblins with Laura’s and Jeanie’s to show that the goblins are not inherently corruptive to maidens, unless the maidens first awaken to desire. The goblins cannot seduce women into eating the fruit unless they want it, as Rossetti points out during Lizzie’s ordeal: “One may lead a horse to water, / Twenty cannot make him drink” (422-3). Viewing the goblins as merely an obstacle to the goal of healing Laura and lacking any desire to taste their fruit, Lizzie’s commitment to herself, her logical assessment of the situation, and her mission to save her sister empower her to outsmart the goblins without compromising herself.

When Lizzie looks at the goblins, thus tacitly inviting them to accost her, they revel in the erroneous notion that this initial act signals the awakening of her desire for their fruit, since presumptuously “laughed every goblin / When they spied her peeping” (329-30). Assuming they are now entitled to take certain liberties with her, they rush at her like untamed animals, “crowing / Clucking and gobbling” (334-5), and then “hugged her and kissed her, / Squeezed and caressed her” (348-9). Enduring their unwelcome physical attentions, Lizzie tries to take advantage of their overanxious desire to please her
with their elaborate presentation of fruit by agreeing to purchase their wares, but on her own terms:

‘Good folk,’ said Lizzie,
Mindful of Jeanie:
‘Give me much and many:’ —
Held out her apron,
Tossed them her penny. (363-7)

Unlike Jeanie and Laura before her, Lizzie, unmoved by the goblins’ eloquent speech patterns, knows they are not “‘good folk’” and approaches them prepared with valid and impersonal currency to purchase their fruit and with an unselfish purpose to guide her. Lizzie arms herself with the “silver penny”3 (324) with which she intends to buy fruit legitimately from the goblins and thus avoid surrendering any of her personal gold to them.

When Lizzie pays the goblins with a tangible silver coin and demands that they supply her with take-out fruit, they attempt to persuade her to eat with them, insisting:

‘Nay, take a seat with us,
Honour and eat with us . . .
Such fruits as these
No man can carry;
Half their bloom would fly,
Half their dew would dry,
Half their flavour would pass by.’ (368-9, 375-9)

The goblins here strive to take control of the meeting from Lizzie, emphasizing the transitory allure of their fruit, since its power will dissipate if Lizzie carries it out of the glen. Debating this point in vain, the goblins cannot convince Lizzie since, unlike Laura

3 Barrett Browning speaks of the “‘silver song’ of female poetry that [she] was herself continuing” (Marsh Vocation 235). Dickinson and Rossetti, not content to take second best, strive to associate gold, the more valuable metal, with their female poetics and sense of feminine integrity. While Lizzie represents the savior in “Goblin Market,” backed by the silver currency of a female tradition, Laura’s surrendering of her gold for the fruit, her experience with desire, and her ensuing descent into despair contribute to her storytelling ability at the end of the poem, rendered more powerful by her personal experiences.
and Jeanie, she neither desires the fruit nor believes in its ability to transport her beyond the boundaries of the feminine. She attaches no value to it beyond the necessity of feeding her sister. Referring to Laura, she refuses them politely, but determinedly: "Thank you,' said Lizzie: ‘But one waits / At home alone for me’'' (383-4). Lizzie always knows who she is and what she wants, never straying from her goal of helping Laura. Unwilling to pay the goblins’ price and relinquish her personal gold, she places the goblins in an awkward situation, as they cannot accept her “silver penny,” useless in their marginal, illusory world.

Unmoved by their glib arguments, Lizzie refuses to bargain on their terms, protecting herself from the consequences that befall Laura and Jeanie. Lizzie demands “without further parleying, / If you will not sell me any / Of your fruits tho’ much and many, / Give me back my silver penny / I tossed you for a fee’” (385-9). Bewildered by her unprecedented behavior, the goblins first “scratch their pates” (390) and then lose composure, allowing their mask of feigned “airs and graces” (337) to drop with stunning rapidity, revealing the demons below, as “their looks were evil. / Lashing their tails / They trod and . . . jostled her, / Clawed with their nails” (397-401). After unleashing their frustrated wrath upon her, the goblins, unable to convince Lizzie to part willingly with her personal gold, instead attempt to corrupt her with a desire for the fruit by force, when they “squeezed their fruits / Against her mouth to make her eat” (406-7). Figured in sexual terms, the goblins force themselves on her, attacking her body and attempting rape, but unable to sway her resolve or corrupt her feminine integrity.

Describing Lizzie’s brave moment of resistance, Rossetti employs the golden imagery of strength of character combined with the symbolism that hearkens back to the
moment when Laura succumbs and her “last restraint is gone” (86). Whereas Rossetti uses white and solitary images to mark the moment when Laura loses her innocence, purity, and sense of self, left piteously alone to succumb to her own desire and the goblins’ charm, Lizzie, while also alone, remains “white and golden” (408), as she retains that part of herself which Laura has given away as currency, that part of herself which gives her the strength and courage to withstand the goblins’ attack upon her: feminine integrity. Unlike Laura, Lizzie does not desire what the goblins have to offer, and, try as they might, they cannot make her want it.

White and golden Lizzie stood,  
Like a lily in a flood,--  
Like a rock of blue-veined stone  
Lashed by tides obstreperously,--  
Like a beacon left alone  
In a hoary roaring sea,  
Sending up a golden fire,--  
Like a fruit-crowned orange-tree  
White with blossoms honey-sweet  
Sore beset by wasp and bee,--  
Like a royal virgin town  
Topped with gilded dome and spire  
Close beleaguered by a fleet  
Mad to tug her standard down. (408-21, italics mine)

While attacked on all sides by the goblins, Lizzie continues to produce her own “golden fire” (414), signifying her wholly intact identity. In addition to describing Lizzie as “golden,” Rossetti also endows her with her own fruit in one of the similes, comparing Lizzie to a “fruit-crowned orange-tree” (415). Cleverly turning the tables, the goblins, likened to a “wasp and bee” (417), now attempt to seize Lizzie’s fruit. Unable to coerce Lizzie into surrendering her personal gold to them, the goblins madly attempt to take it by force.
Despite the goblins’ relentless onslaught, Lizzie remains steadfast in her lack of desire for their fruit, refusing to ingest their corruption. Battered and bruised by the goblins, still “Lizzie uttered not a word; / Would not open lip from lip / Lest they should cram a mouthful in” (430-2), thwarting their attempted rape and remaining pure and whole despite the siege. Unlike Laura’s “silence of exceeding pain” (271), Lizzie’s silence comes from a belief in herself and her purpose. In this sense Lizzie becomes the model of feminine integrity, since she outsmarts the goblins at their own game without relinquishing her personal gold and simultaneously gains the antidote to Laura’s sickness born of obsession. Indeed, Lizzie “laughed in heart to feel the drip / Of juice that syrumped all her face” (433-4). Vanquishing the combative goblins through her close-lipped defense, Lizzie rejoices at her victory. Flustered by Lizzie’s unexpected triumph, “the evil people / Worn out by her resistance / Flung back her penny, kicked their fruit . . . Some writhed into the ground” (Rossetti 437-9, 442). Like devils re-entering hell, the frustrated goblins give up, kicking their fruit, rendered valueless by Lizzie’s lack of desire, and returning her legitimate currency, which they cannot accept as payment. Like all forces of evil, they are “pitifully impotent when faced with the power of innocence . . . They can only slink back into their graves and hope for future victims who are unable to block the threshold of desire” (Morrill 11).

Describing Lizzie’s journey back to Laura, Rossetti compares and contrasts Lizzie’s post-goblin homecoming with Laura’s. Whereas Laura becomes so morally distracted by her interlude with the goblins that she cannot distinguish light from darkness or good from evil when she “knew not was it night or day” (Rossetti 139), Lizzie’s senses become clouded by positive emotions, the joy and relief she feels
knowing that she has escaped Jeanie’s fate and possesses the medicine to liberate Laura from doom as well, for “in a smart, ache, tingle, / Lizzie went her way; / Knew not was it night or day” (447-9). The music of “her penny jingl[ing] / Bouncing in her purse” (452-3) signals Lizzie’s intact feminine integrity. Lizzie runs home “as if she feared some goblin man” (456), but Rossetti quickly rejects this possibility, instead citing Lizzie’s anxiety to deliver the precious medicine coating her body to her sister as the reason for her haste. Indeed, “the kind heart made her windy-paced / That urged her home quite out of breath with haste / And inward laughter” (461-3).

Whereas Laura, after her encounter with the goblins, returns to Lizzie promising “I’ll bring you plums tomorrow” (170), inviting Lizzie to fall into corruption with her, Lizzie brings the untasted fruit juice covering her body to Laura as medicine for her sister’s current consumption by desire, not as a means for perpetuating it. Arriving home, Lizzie greets her waning sister by inviting Laura to:

‘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.’ (468-9)

Rossetti significantly calls the fruit juice “dew,” reminiscent of Dickinson’s letter 93 and the initial source of nourishment for the flower. If Laura can again be satisfied with dew and reject her obsessive yearning for the fruit, then she can transcend her lost identity and become whole again. Offering Laura juices from the fruit she desires and asking her to feast on Lizzie quite literally, Lizzie invites Laura to look outside of herself, accept the bonds of sisterhood, and reaffirm the feminine integrity they once shared. Similarly, in Paradise Lost, Jesus offers to mitigate the doom intended for Adam and Eve after their
fall by knitting his identity to that of humanity, and thus bringing humanity back to God, as “to better life shall yield him, where with mee / All my redeem’d may dwell in joy and bliss, / Made one with me as I with thee am one” (Milton XI.40-4). Intent on separating herself from the impulses of desire, Lizzie clarifies her purpose in obtaining the fruit for Laura when she states, “‘for your sake I have braved the glen / And had to do with goblin merchant men’” (Rossetti 473-4).

Reacting to what she perceives as Lizzie’s sacrifice on her behalf, Laura instantly snaps out of her stupor, forgetting about her thwarted desire in her concern for her sister, as she “started from her chair, / Flung her arms up in the air, / Clutched her hair” (475-7). With this momentary spark of life, Laura pulls herself out of her self-centered despondency, and the strength of her love for Lizzie allows her to begin the healing process. Previously blinded by obsession, Laura now becomes anxious for her sister’s well being and somewhat belatedly opens her eyes to her own perilous state, finally demonstrating anxiety over her lost essence, when she exclaims:

‘Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted
For my sake the fruit forbidden?
Must your light like mine be hidden,
Your young life like mine be wasted,
Undone in mine undoing
And ruined in my ruin,
Thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden?’ (478-84)

Realizing that her unfulfilled desire has rendered her “thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden” and extinguished the “light” of her feminine integrity, Laura, through her selfless caring for Lizzie, comes to know herself and appropriately assess her condition. Laura’s detrimental obsession with the fruit ends when she fears for her sister’s health and realizes how her fixation has affected her and potentially endangered Lizzie. Just as the
goblins represent the catalyst through which Laura acts upon her desire, so Lizzie’s actions on Laura’s behalf represent the catalyst that allows her to awaken from her obsession and so save herself. Ultimately, “Laura is cured . . . by discovering that what she pined for is not really desirable” (Mermin 110-1).

Subsequently, Laura tastes the goblin fruit juice not because she still wants it, but because she has missed her sister and wants to recover her feminine integrity. After expressing her concern for Lizzie, Laura reaches the turning point of her ordeal when she demonstrates the natural human qualities of empathy, concern, and affection:

She clung about her sister,
Kissed and kissed and kissed her:
Tears once again
Refreshed her shrunken eyes,
Dropping like rain
After long sultry drouth;
Shaking with aguish fear, and pain,
She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth.
(Rossetti 485-92)

After a long separation from her sister and herself, Laura returns to creativity and wholeness, marked by the life-giving tears that she sheds. Afflicted with “fear” for her sister’s well being and the “pain” of her recent descent into despair, Laura’s hunger now centers on reconnecting with Lizzie and, symbolically, herself. Clinging to Lizzie and covering her with kisses, Laura attempts to reenter the feminine sisterhood and leave the corruptive desires of the goblin world behind. As compassion and sisterly love return to Laura’s heart, they block out her obsession with the goblins’ fruit.

As Laura kisses Lizzie, the goblin juice covering Lizzie’s body produces a painful affect on Laura, a complete catharsis of her obsessive desire for the fruit and a rebirth of her soul. During her encounter with the goblins, Laura’s longing for the fruit transfigures
it into the most delicious sustenance she has ever tasted. Alternately, after undergoing
the self-destructive consequences of indulging her appetite for the fruit the first time,
Laura learns from her mistake and ceases to want the fruit, understanding its detrimental
affects on her. Upon tasting the fruit juice as she kisses Lizzie, Laura’s “lips began to
scorch, / That juice was wormwood to her tongue, / She loathed the feast” (493-5).
Through Laura’s example, Rossetti reveals that obsessive desire and its object threaten
destruction of the individual who indulges in them. Indeed, when Laura tastes the goblin
juice coating her sister, it scorches her internally, as “swift fire spread thro’ her veins,
knocked at her heart, / Met the fire smouldering there / And overbore its lesser flame”
(507-9). Her loathing of the fruit on Lizzie’s and her behalf extinguishes the desire
burning her heart. Realizing that she has surrendered her physical and emotional health,
her link to the natural world and her sister, and her creative productivity in her single-
minded pursuit of the fruit, “she gorged on bitterness without a name” (510), chastising
herself: “Ah! Fool, to choose such part / Of soul-consuming care!” (511-2).

Laura’s healing and the restoration of her feminine integrity begin with her
attainment of self-awareness, but she must undergo a fiery exorcism and repentance
before becoming whole again. Evoking the penitent, Rossetti first describes Laura:
“writhing as one possessed, she leaped and sung, / Rent all her robe, and wrung / Her
hands in lamentable haste, / And beat her breast” (496-9). Next, Rossetti employs a
series of similes imaging Laura as moving swiftly and madly “like a caged thing freed”
(505). The “fire” of the fruit juice meets the “fire” of the intense yearning “smouldering”
in her heart and exorcises it. Following the violent outward display of the turmoil searing
within her, “sense failed in the moral strife” (513), as Laura “fell at last; / Pleasure past
and anguish past, / Is it death or is it life? / Life out of death” (521-4). Having overcome her fixation, figured as both “pleasure” and “anguish,” Laura will return to life after the despair of her recent living death.

Appropriately, natural images of rebirth mark Laura’s emergence from her swoon. All night Lizzie holds a loving, apprehensive vigil at her sister’s bedside, attending her as one suffering from a grave illness. In the morning, nature surrounds them with images of awakening, rebirth, and emerging identity:

... the first birds chirped about their eaves,
And early reapers plodded to the place
Of golden sheaves,
And dew-wet grass,
Bowed in the morning winds so brisk to pass,
And new buds with new day
Opened of cup-like lilies on the stream. (530-6)

Rossetti uses the “golden” imagery of the sheaves to reflect Laura’s harvesting of selfhood and “dew” to signal her return to feminine integrity and satisfaction with the natural world. Additionally, Rossetti suggests Laura’s affinity with a flower, as the “new buds” open, symbolizing the renewal of her uniquely feminine identity. Mirroring the natural events around her, “Laura awoke as from a dream, / Laughed in the innocent old way, / Hugged Lizzie but not twice or thrice; / Her gleaming locks showed not one thread of grey” (537-40). Returning to sanity and health, Laura shows moderate affection towards Lizzie, free from the frantic expression of desire of the past evening. Endowed with the gold of her self-worth, her hair again gleams, free from the “grey” of her obsession with the fruit. Once again content with the domestic life she shares with Lizzie and connected to the world of nature, Laura recaptures her innocence, apparently unblemished by her previous deterioration.
Indeed, Laura’s indulgence of her desire and its temporary damage to her feminine integrity does not disqualify her from marriage and the “joys brides hope to have” (314), as Lizzie originally fears. Speeding up time, Rossetti fast-forwards the poem through “days, weeks, months, years / Afterwards, when both were wives / With children of their own” (543-5). While Dickinson in letter 93 expresses anxiety over the loss of a woman’s uniqueness and wholeness in the union of marriage, Rossetti, after illustrating the consequences of Laura’s separation from self and sisterhood as a result of her obsession with the goblins’ fruit and her pre-marital experience with desire, figures marriage as a safe forum for a creative, sensitive woman’s thoughts and ideas, emphasizing the innate influence a mother has on her children. Lizzie and Laura, “their mother-hearts beset with fears, / Their lives bound up in tender lives” (546-7), shift their focus from protecting a sister to protecting their children, since their “fears,” or anxiety, about the threat of uninhibited desire to their children’s character permeate the educational lessons they deliver to their offspring. While Rossetti somewhat disappointingly turns her once heroic, independent, and self-sufficient protagonists into housewives, she nevertheless empowers them in marriage, preserving and extolling their individuality and creative energy. Additionally, Lizzie’s and Laura’s husbands remain conspicuously absent from the poem. Instead, the relationships of sisterhood and motherhood relate more directly to the main theme of feminine integrity in the poem.

At the conclusion of “Goblin Market,” Rossetti endows Laura with the honorable role of storyteller, or poet, whose experiential awareness of desire and obsession legitimizes her tale about the benefits of sisterhood. Laura’s recitation of the all-important concluding lines of the poem demonstrates the worldly knowledge she
incorporates into her intact sense of self. In order to pay homage to the sister who braved the goblins’ glen for her and initiated her return to self-awareness, Laura, demonstrating her capability as both mother and poet, takes her place as the creative storyteller, passing on a feminine legacy and the gift of self-knowledge to her children and her nieces (and possibly nephews).  

Comfortable in her new role, “Laura would call the little ones / And tell them of her early prime, / Those pleasant days long gone / Of not-returning time” (Rossetti 548-51). Laura’s message conveys the lessons she has learned from her encounter with the goblins. She remembers her unspoiled innocence prior to her brief, though traumatic, surrender and consequent loss of self and “would talk about the haunted glen, / The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men, / Their fruits like honey to the throat / But poison in the blood” (552-5). Understanding the simultaneous allure and repulsiveness of the goblins and their fruit in conjunction with the specific harm to one’s character associated with indulging in obsessive desire, Laura successfully balances both sides of the issue in her address to the children, since she refers to the “fruit-merchant men” as being both “wicked” and “quaint” and “their fruits” as tasting “like honey to the throat,” but actually becoming “poison in the blood.” As a poem addressed to fallen women, this “poison in the blood” may signify venereal disease spread by lecherous male seducers. More appropriate to the poem’s larger themes, this “poison” refers to the obsession awakened in Laura after her consumption of the fruit, her desire for the unattainable that threatens her feminine worth and identity. When Laura warns the

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4 Critics vehemently disagree over the sex of the children. Wishing to maintain a feminist slant in Laura’s message of sisterhood and to preserve the notion of an “all-female” (May 146) world, May, Marshall, Mermin and Gilbert and Gubar believe that the children are “evidently all daughters” (Marshall 436). Casey recognizes Rossetti’s avoidance of the issue, since “she refrains from identifying Laura’s and Lizzie’s children by their sex” (Casey 71). Both Michie, who refers to Laura’s “audience of her children and her nephews and nieces” (Michie 414), and Bentley, who extols Laura’s joining of “the hands of a
children about these dangers, she speaks from torturous experience and can relate the exact consequences of such a grave transgression.

Continuing her story, Laura gives credit to her sister for helping her realize the consequences of her unreasoning fixation on the fruit to her feminine integrity. Grateful for Lizzie’s courageous act, Laura practically canonizes her sister when she “would tell them how her sister stood / In deadly peril to do her good, / And win the fiery antidote” (557-9), portraying Lizzie in almost medieval terms as a knight who slays the dragon to rescue the imprisoned maiden. Laura then, as a tribute to Lizzie, by “joining hands to little hands / Would bid them cling together” (560-1), instilling a sense of sibling love and responsibility in them. Continuing in her acclamatory vein, Laura extols the benefits of a sisterly bond, asserting that:

`... 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.' (562-7)5

Laura here reiterates her bond to Lizzie and the life-saving benefits of sisterhood.

Whether confronted with danger, “stormy weather,” or riding out “calm” seas, Laura can count on Lizzie for laughter, comfort, guidance, support, and strength. Lizzie now serves as a constant reminder to Laura of how close she came to losing her life and her soul.

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5 Many Rossetti critics censure the poet for tagging an ostensibly simplistic moral onto the end of her brilliantly complex poem. As Marjorie Stone insists, “like The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Goblin Market cannot be contained by its moralizing epilogue” (Stone 340). The poem “does not lead logically to the moralistic conclusion which Rossetti felt obliged to give it (namely, one should resist temptation and save oneself for marriage and motherhood, and in this endeavor ‘there is no friend like a sister’). In fact, it is not altogether obvious that the narrative and its moral are even logically compatible. What is described is not at all advocacy... of the traditional role assigned to sisterhood... it must rather be seen as a challenge to it” (May 140).
While the moral of “Goblin Market” may not encompass the original complexity of the poem, it nonetheless constitutes an important conclusion to the central message of feminine integrity and the need for self-control in relation to desire woven throughout the poem. Without Lizzie’s assistance, bravery, and belief in her ability to thwart the goblins, resist desire, and awaken Laura from her self-imposed stupor, Laura would have faced certain death, foretold by Jeanie’s fate, at the end of the poem. Laura’s love for her sister represents the force that saves her from the life-threatening moral dilemma in which she finds herself. Loyalty to one’s sisters also alludes to the role of female poets in forming a support system for each other. While Dickinson refers to a masculine muse, a “Master” of her poetry, Rossetti stresses the bonds of sisterhood in the maintenance of feminine creative pursuits. Though Rossetti never married, her figuring of marriage in “Goblin Market” provides a safe haven for the creative abilities of women that stresses motherhood and storytelling, reinforcing a need to develop mutually protective poetic sisterhoods. Rossetti resolves the issues raised in “Goblin Market” by pleading that women unite in a sisterhood aimed at unselfishly promoting each other’s interests and abilities and protecting one another from the threat posed by unhealthy, obsessive desires to their individuality and uniquely feminine voices. By fixating on the fruit of the masculine goblins, Laura seeks nourishment from the wrong source and must be shown the way by a sister who knows better than to want what the goblins have to offer.

Depicted as the most threatening aspects of the world of men, including seduction and rape, Rossetti’s goblins present an obvious and external source of anxiety for women. As in Dickinson’s letter 93, Rossetti figures women as flowers, initially satisfied with dew, but, once awakened to desire, intent on bending their lives to the object of their
obsession. Dickinson’s “goblin” poems differ markedly from both her own letter 93 and Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” in relation to Dickinson’s vision of the threatening aspects of the masculine. Imaging anxiety as a masculine entity invading the feminine psyche, Dickinson’s goblin represents the epitome of anxiety itself, disassociated from any one source, including triggers as varied as the fear of death, darkness, uncertainty, guilt, and, basically, anything else that threatens one’s sense of self. For both Dickinson and Rossetti, the goblins signify masculine forces that threaten feminine integrity; however, Rossetti’s goblins embody the negative qualities of actual men, while Dickinson’s goblins evoke anxiety within the feminine consciousness imaged in masculine terms. Dickinson’s female characters usually contend with alternating feelings of power and powerlessness when confronting their internal goblins. In her “goblin” poems, Dickinson illustrates the trials involved in preserving one’s feminine identity and wholeness against the threats of both masculine society and existence itself, figured as masculine. Both Rossetti and Dickinson figure their female characters as poets or storytellers, but they primarily treat the struggles their speakers face as women and individual souls, secondarily illustrating the conflicts specific to female poets.

In poem #512, “The Soul has Bandaged moments—,” Dickinson uses imagery to refer to the Soul’s poetic abilities, but specifically describes the Soul’s agonizing internal experience of existence and separation from self. Similar to Laura’s engagement in desire followed by her descent into a living death, Dickinson treats the anxiety⁶ and fear related to the consequences of uninhibited self-expression in poem #512. This poem

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⁶ For a comprehensive psychoanalytic discussion of anxiety or “dread” as a human emotion resulting from widespread literacy see Harley C. Shands’ study “The Goblin Bee: Anxiety in Relation to Poetry, Physics, and Semiotics” in The American Journal of Semiotics volume 4 pages 1 through 27.
naturally divides into three sections, describing the "moments" which make up the Soul's life. The Soul experiences "Bandaged moments" (Dickinson 512.1), then "moments of Escape" (512.11), and finally "retaken moments" (512.19) that resemble the bandaged moments of the first section. Figured as feminine throughout the poem with pronouns such as "she" and "her," the Soul must endure the moments of her life alone, trapped in an unending cycle of brief episodes of joy followed by paralyzing fears and anxieties.

At the start of the poem, Dickinson describes the terrifying internal experience of the Soul's bandaged moments:

The Soul has Bandaged moments—
When too appalled to stir—
She feels some ghastly Fright come up
And stop to look at her—

Salute her—with long fingers—
Caress her freezing hair—
Sip, Goblin, from the very lips
The Lover—hovered—o’er—
Unworthy, that a thought so mean
Accost a Theme—so—fair— (512.1-10)

Wrapped tightly in her fear, similar to a mummy enveloped in bandages, the Soul becomes immobilized by her anxiety, as she is "too appalled to stir" (512.2). More literally, bandages usually cover a wound, though in this case Dickinson figures the hurt as metaphorical, afflicting the Soul's consciousness. Dickinson next relates an intensely vivid internal horror story in which the Soul, left alone with her thoughts, "feels some ghastly Fright come up / And stop to look at her—" (512.3-4, italics mine), emphasizing that this "Fright" resides within the Soul and bubbles to the surface to terrorize her. The "Fright" enacts a psychological rape on the Soul, familiarly caressing "her freezing hair" (512.6) and daring to "Sip, Goblin, from the very lips / The Lover—hovered—o’er—"
(512.7-8). Likened to a “Goblin,” the “Fright” sips from the Soul’s lips, not necessarily kissing her, but more invasively drinking her feminine life source, or the dew valued in Dickinson’s letter 93 and Rossetti’s “Goblin Market.” Utterly powerless at this moment, the Soul chastises herself for being “unworthy,” since she allows “a thought so mean,” (512.9) the paralyzing grip of anxiety, to overtake or “Accost” her feminine integrity, the “Theme—so—fair—“ (512.10). The Soul’s vulnerability to the “ghastly Fright,” an all-consuming anxiety imagined in terms of threatening masculinity that attacks the “fair”ness of the Soul’s femininity, fragments her sense of self and freezes her in bandaged moments of fear.

Despite the paralyzing influence of this “Goblin . . . Fright,” the Soul experiences release from her fears in “moments of Escape” (512.11). Overtaken by sheer energy and joy, she engages in unfettered creative expression:

The soul has moments of Escape—
When bursting all the doors—
She dances like a Bomb, abroad,
And swings upon the Hours,

As do the Bee—delirious borne—
Long Dungeoned from his Rose—
Touch Liberty—then know no more,
But Noon, and Paradise--  (512.11-18)

Freed from the bandages of her pent-up fear and indecision, the Soul takes a bold step beyond herself, “bursting all the doors” (512.12) that shut her in and silence her. Her powerful alter ego explodes outward “like a Bomb, abroad” (512.13), breaking free from the psychological ties binding her.

During these moments of escape, Dickinson portrays the Soul as momentarily adopting a masculine identity, severing herself from her femininity. Reversing her usual
imagery of woman as flower and man as bee, Dickinson likens the Soul to the “Bee—
delirious borne— / Long Dungeoned from his Rose—“ (512.15-6), 7 expressing the pure
joy and confidence the Soul feels upon escaping her prison of bandaged moments when
she erupts into action. Divided from her feminine sense of self by her fear, just as the bee
has suffered separation from the rose, the Soul ecstatically enjoys “Liberty” (512.17), a
welcome release from the anxiety that frequently plagues her. The Soul, after touching
“Liberty,” “know[s] no more, / But Noon, and Paradise” (Dickinson 512.17-8), blind to
everything except her current state of bliss. Nourished by the masculine element of
“Noon,” just as the flower in Dickinson’s letter 93 comes to rely on the “man of noon,”
the Soul, finding “Paradise” during her moments of escape, achieves masculine freedom
and fulfillment, a perfect realm of the imagination, a forum for uncensored creative
expression, “an arrested present which is timelessness, or eternity, or heaven, when all
accident, or ‘grossness’ is discarded and there is nothing but essence” (Sewall 681).
Dickinson’s relation of “Noon” with this “Paradise” of the mind also arises out of her
craving for the “golden warmth” (Gilbert and Gubar 595) of Apollo—not only of the sun
god, but also the god of poetry. During these empowering moments of escape, the
feminine Soul becomes momentarily masculine in her aggressive and confident display
of creative energy, thwarting the “Goblin . . . Fright” of anxiety during these brief
interludes.

The Soul’s reprieve from fear and anxiety cannot be permanent, since a moment,
by definition, represents a temporary state. Unable to sustain her empowering adoption

7 Significantly, Rossetti also compares the goblins in “Goblin Market” to a “bee” when they attack Lizzie
and attempt to force their fruit on her. Dickinson frequently employs the bee as a symbol of masculinity in
her poems. For Dickinson and Rossetti, who addressed the problematic nature of a woman forming a
of masculine qualities, the Soul returns to her fair feminine identity, fearful that the anxiety goblin will again threaten her existence. The seemingly perfect realm Dickinson describes as the Soul’s “moments of escape” can never truly exist beyond her imagination. The Soul’s brief, willful pleasure comes at great personal cost in the form of “retaken moments.” Concluding the poem, Dickinson describes the Soul’s recapture and her involuntary walk back to her prison:

The Soul’s retaken moments—
When, Felon led along,
With shackles on the plumed feet,
And staples in the Song,

The Horror welcomes her, again,
These, are not brayed of Tongue— (Dickinson 512.19-24)

Revisiting the self-incarceration of the first section of the poem, Dickinson now discards the bandages in favor of language that more tangibly identifies the Soul as a prisoner — “retaken,” “Felon,” “shackles,” “staples.” While these images suggest that an external force “led [her] along” (512.20), Dickinson emphasizes that the Soul views herself as a “Felon,” trapped in a prison of anxiety and fear. When “The Horror,” clearly an internal emotion, “welcomes her, again” (512.23), the Soul falls silent, as her feminine creativity withers following her masculine “moments of escape.”

In this final section, Dickinson also reveals that the Soul is a poet by referring to her “plumed feet” (512.21) and her “Song” (512.22), implying that her “moments of Escape” make possible flights into poetry, but poetry inspired by a masculine muse, “the virile self-assertion of ‘Noon, and Paradise’” (Gilbert and Gubar 606), that overtakes her individual identity. Dickinson often portrayed her own poetic composition in these terms fulfilling, self-affirming relationship to the masculine, the “bee” represents a moderately violent aspect of the masculine sensibility.
as the "Master" to whom she surrendered. In the final lines of the poem, the Soul’s "Horror," an internal experience on a par with the "ghastly Fright," once again succeeds in silencing her, as "These, are not brayed of Tongue—" (512.24). The Soul cannot even speak of her second imprisonment, as the knowledge that the "Fright" can return again and again confirms her original anxiety. The Soul thus remains trapped in an interminable cycle of imprisonment and fear interrupted by brief periods of freedom and creative expression.

Dickinson paints an even darker picture of existence in poem #414, "'Twas like a Maelstrom, with a notch." While the Soul in poem #512 at least experiences moments of escape from her anxiety, the central character in poem #414 remains mired in horrified expectation of impending death, unable to find even temporary solace from fear. Addressing various states of helplessness and uncertainty, the speaker of this poem uses three similes to describe a fearful trauma and applies them hypothetically to "you," presumably the reader of the poem, but, more universally, anyone who could relate to these events:

'Twas like a Maelstrom, with a notch,
That nearer, every Day,
Kept narrowing it's boiling Wheel
Until the Agony

Toyed coolly with the final inch
Of your delirious Hem—
And you dropt, lost,
When something broke—
And let you from a Dream--  (Dickinson 414.1-9)

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8 Wardrop suggests that the unnamed traumatic occurrence encompasses an anticipated rape of the speaker by "the goblin-ravisher," quoting the lines "the agony toys with the 'final inch' of 'delirious Hem—'" (Wardrop 45), referring to the hem of a dress, as evidence of this point of view.
Again figuring the subject of the poem as feminine by referring to the “Hem” of a dress, Dickinson, refusing to permit the reader to remain in her usual position of distanced comfort outside of the work, puts her directly within the harrowing scenarios of the poem, watching the threatening “maelstrom” spin closer and closer and anticipating the agonizing moment of death when it reaches you. As the speaker conveys, your feminine identity shatters at the moment of impact, your will broken by fear and anxiety, since “you dropt, lost, / When something broke” (414.7-8). With the reality of the “maelstrom” upon you, you awaken from the “Dream” that it may not reach you, and you face your fate with fearful uncertainty. Unable to control your destiny, “you” fall into a state of debilitating anxiety and await pronouncement of your sentence. Dickinson here removes free will and desire from the equation, exploring anxiety and its impact on identity from the perspective of an utter lack of control and an inability to choose differently. Forcing her readers to share this harrowing experience with the speaker, Dickinson makes them aware of their own vulnerability when confronted with the trial contained in the poem. When assailed in such a manner, “no reader can be happy with this positioning . . . The goblins’ aggression is enacted upon us . . . Try as we might to read #414 without entanglement, the poem simply does not work without our conscription into its major role” (Wardrop 45-6).

Compounding “your” sense of helplessness and anxiety, Dickinson places her “Goblin” in control of time as well: “As if a Goblin with a Gauge— / Kept measuring the Hours— / Until you felt your Second / Weigh, helpless, in his Paws—“ (Dickinson 414.10-13). Since this “Goblin” measures the “Hours” which make up eternity and which lead inexorably toward every individual’s death, he easily makes “you” feel small
and insignificant by treating “your” whole life as a mere “Second ... in his Paws” in comparison. Hinted at by His control over the eternal clock, Dickinson endows her “Goblin” with the power God wields over humanity, and “in fact ... Dickinson’s 1828 Webster lists one of the definitions of ‘goblin’ to be ‘God’” (Wardrop 43). At this point in the poem, Dickinson forges a strong connection between God as the imposer of time upon humanity and the “Goblin with a Gauge” (Dickinson 414.10) who ticks off the seconds of “your” life.

After prompting this kinship between the “Goblin” tormentor and God, Dickinson then wastes no time shifting the identity of the “Goblin” who literally holds “your” life in his hands. In the next stanza, she calls him “the Fiend” and evokes the eternal image of Satan struggling with God over a human soul.

And not a Sinew—stirred—could help,  
And sense was setting numb—  
When God—remembered—and the Fiend  
Let go, then, Overcome—  (414.14-7)

Vainly attempting to break free from the iron grasp of the “Goblin . . . Fiend,” “you” find that “not a Sinew—stirred—could help, / And sense was setting numb” (414.14-5). Utterly helpless and unable to escape, “you” must wait for an outside force to rescue “you” from impending damnation. Ironically, “your” defender turns out to be an indifferent, though almighty, “God” who must first remember “your” existence before He can save “you.” “You” only elude the goblin’s grasp “When God—remembered—and the Fiend / Let go, then, Overcome—“ (414.16-7). Consistent with this instance, as a general rule “the entity named ‘God’ has a very rough career in [Dickinson’s] poetry” (Bloom 295), and, in this particular case, “God Himself was implicated in the outrage—if only by His failure to intervene more quickly and halt the torture” (Wolff 358). In its
most terrifying aspect, this poem features Dickinson’s fusion of the satanic fiend and the apathetic deity into one almighty, evil character with the goblin as the central image.

Completely at the mercy of this unnamed, unseen, omnipotent entity controlling all aspects of “your” fate, conventional morality no longer applies to “you,” given your inability to choose or to direct “your” own destiny. A prisoner to outside forces, you face your captor:

As if your Sentence stood—pronounced—
And you were frozen led
From Dungeon’s luxury of Doubt
To Gibbets, and the Dead—

And when the Film had stitched your eyes
A Creature gasped ‘Reprieve’!
What Anguish was the utterest—then—
To perish, or to live? (Dickinson 414.18-25)

Reminiscent of the Soul’s “retaken moments” in poem #512, “you were frozen led” (414.19) from the anxiety of uncertainty about your future, the “luxury of Doubt” (414.20), to the gallows and certain death, “Gibbets, and the Dead” (414.21). Preparing to die at the hands of a distant, arbitrary power and making peace with your end, “you” are unexpectedly pardoned, when “a Creature gasped ‘Reprieve’!” (414.23). The injustice and terror of “your” victimization, having obliterated your normal identity by eradicating the daily routine of your existence, renders your life meaningless and worthless to you. Living in this constant state of terror, “you” cannot decide whether death or life represents the greater punishment; thus the speaker asks the rhetorical question “which Anguish was the utterest—then— / To perish, or to live?” (414.24-5).

While Laura, at the end of “Goblin Market,” experiences a welcome re-birth after facing the gloomy prospect of her approaching death, Dickinson’s subject of poem #414
cannot decide whether death or life represents the worse fate after undergoing a traumatic experience in the form of anxious anticipation of one’s own arbitrary death at the hands of another. Rossetti almost superficially addresses Laura’s inner journey from innocence through desire and obsession to self-discovery in “Goblin Market” when compared to Dickinson’s expertise at expressing the internal experience of the human condition and the agony of separation from self in her “goblin” poems. Dickinson’s poetry exhibits a painstaking attention to detail in portraying the inner workings of human consciousness that Rossetti cannot accomplish with her lilting rhythms and fairy-tale story line. Despite the resemblance between Laura’s deterioration of self and the Soul’s “bandaged moments” of poem #512, Dickinson creates an internal masculine goblin of anxiety far more horrifying than the beastly little men Rossetti conjures to taunt her heroine. While the “Soul” ultimately accepts responsibility for her own “bandaged” and “retaken moments,” Dickinson, varying from her previous emphasis in letter 93 on the flower’s choice to devote her life to the “man of noon” and working against Rossetti’s portrayal of Laura as responsible for her own downfall, removes free will and desire from the equation in poem #414, exploring anxiety and its impact on identity from the perspective of an utter lack of control and an inability to choose differently. Straying from the utter bleakness and despair inherent in poems #512 and #414, Dickinson begins poem #430 by placing the speaker in an early position of power and creativity from which she falls.

Dickinson initially endows the speaker of poem #430, “It would never be
Common—more—I said—,” with confident empowerment, limitless creative ability, and a strong sense of self, but soon subjects the poem’s protagonist to the desperate anxiety
and loss of identity common to the Soul of poem #512 and the “you” of poem #414. In the first lines of the poem, the speaker seems to awaken to a new life:

It would never be Common—more—I said—
Difference—had begun—
Many a bitterness—had been—
But that old sort—was done—

Or—if it sometime—showed—as ‘twill—
Upon the Downiest—Morn—
Such bliss—had I—for all the years—
‘Twould give an Easier—pain— (430.1-8)

This unnamed “Difference” transforms the speaker’s existence, leading her optimistically to believe that she has permanently moved beyond the “bitterness” of past experiences. Rejoicing in the “bliss” of her current state, she perceives the “Difference” as a welcome agent of change that separates her from all things “Common.” She dismisses future bouts of “bitterness,” as her “bliss” will make them bearable, “an Easier—pain—“ (430.8).

Continuing in this exclamatory vein, the speaker celebrates her “Difference,” elaborating on her overwhelming sense of happiness:

I’d so much joy—I told it—Red—
Upon my simple Cheek—
I felt it publish—in my Eye—
‘Twas needless—any speak—

I walked—as wings—my body bore—
The feet—I former used—
Unnecessary—now to me—
As boots—would be—to Birds— (430.9-16)

The speaker’s description of her feelings of “joy” echoes the Soul’s “moments of escape” in poem #512, and, like the Soul whose “Song” distinguishes her as a poet, so the imagery in these lines points to this speaker’s occupation. No longer earthbound, the speaker floats rather than walks, her “wings” of “joy” keeping her aloft and rendering her
“feet” as useless “As boots—would be—to Birds—“ (430.16), similar to the Soul’s “plumed feet” in poem #512. Key words like “Red,” the homophone of “read,” and “publish” also signal her creative writing abilities.

Intent on sharing her newfound happiness and contentment brought about by the creative “Difference” in her life, the speaker “put my pleasure all abroad-- / I dealt a word of Gold / To every Creature—that I met-- / And Dowered—all the World—“ (430.17-20). She derives “pleasure,” or sensual enjoyment, from unfettered creative expression, similar to the realm of “Noon, and Paradise” (512.18) that the Soul of poem #512 achieves during her “moments of escape.” For Dickinson, the word “dealt” indicates the process of writing exercised by the poet, as in poem #479 where “She dealt her pretty words like Blades—“ (479.1). Like the bride from letter 93 “whose days are fed with gold” and Laura from “Goblin Market” who “clipped a precious golden lock” (Rossetti 126), the speaker’s “Gold” signifies her emotional wealth and her feminine integrity. More specifically, in this poem, “Gold” modifies the speaker’s words, referring to the gift of poetry that comes to define her. Indeed, Dickinson uses the term “abroad” (Dickinson 512.13, 430.17) in both poems to indicate the Soul’s and the speaker’s desire to extend their internal wealth and creative impulses beyond themselves to “all the World” (430.20). “Dowered,” while normally associated with the wealth a woman brings

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9 Dickinson’s poem #454, “It was given to me by the Gods,” supports this argument, as she equates “Difference” and “Gold” with the riches and personal wealth of one’s identity, specifically her identity as a poet, in this first-person account: “Rich! ‘Twas Myself—was rich-- / To take the name of Gold-- / And Gold to own—in solid Bars-- / The Difference—made me bold—“ (454.13-6). Additionally, in a letter dated April 3, 1850 to Jane Humphrey, Dickinson begins to recognize, and convey, her calling as a poet, couching it in terms of gold: “I have heeded beautiful tempters, yet do not think I am wrong . . . it’s all wrong unless it has one gold thread in it, a long, big shining fibre which hides the others” (Dickinson 1.35, italics mine). Richard B. Sewall, in the second volume of his work The Life of Emily Dickinson, asserts “in the letter to Jane the ‘one gold thread . . . the long, big shining fibre’ may well be the dedication to the life of poetry that (as she told Jane) gave her life ‘an aim’” (Sewall 398), since “she seems to be revealing the secret of her new vocation” (375).
to her husband at the time of marriage, here denotes the personal riches or natural gift of
the speaker.

Sadly, the speaker loses everything at the end of the poem: "When—suddenly—my Riches shrank-- / A Goblin—drank my Dew-- / My Palaces—dropped tenantless-- / Myself—was beggared—too—“ (Dickinson 430.21-4). Significantly, the "Goblin" appears as the entity who robs the speaker of her "Gold" and leaves her "beggared," devoid of personal "Riches," when the "Goblin" drinks her "Dew," symbolic of her feminine integrity and creative energy. The goblin’s action empties the "Palaces" of the now bereft speaker’s imagination, leaving them "tenantless." Desperate to recapture her creative abilities, the speaker “clutched at sounds-- / I groped at shapes—“ (430.25-6), but her efforts come to naught as she "felt the Wilderness roll back / Along my Golden lines—“ (430.28-9). "Golden lines" conjures both lines of poetry and the line between the speaker’s "Golden" identity, marked by creativity and generosity, and her current barren state. The speaker’s imagination becomes a "Wilderness" of irrational thought after the "Goblin" steals her "Dew," eradicating her sense of self and her creative powers.10

During the final stanza of the poem, the speaker mourns her losses and remains adrift on an island between the past satisfaction of her joyfully productive identity and her current state of sterility. The speaker of poem #430 stands on the border of the life she wants, but can never return to, and the desolate life she now must lead. Prior to

10 Perpetually anxious and fearful that her poetic powers might someday desert her, Dickinson dreaded most “those periods of psychic death, when even the possibility of work is negated” (Rich 117), leaving her barren and desolate.
awakening to her “Difference,” she has worn the “Sackcloth” (430.31), a garment of mourning. Now, in her “retaken moments,” she laments the loss of her creative energy, her “moment of Brocade— / My drop of India” (430.32-3), similar to the Soul’s “moments of escape” in poem #512. Longing to return to this “moment of Brocade,” this “Golden . . . Difference,” the speaker realizes the extent of her shattering losses and grieves for her momentary glimpse of happiness and productivity, though succumbing to the anxiety and hopelessness that will impede her from recapturing her feminine integrity and poetic identity.

The initial glimpse of hope in poem #430 foreshadows Dickinson’s resolution of the issues contained in her “goblin” poems. Similar to poems #414 and #512, the speaker confronts a debilitating anxiety, figured as a masculine goblin that drinks her “dew” of creative energy and steals the “Gold” of her emotional wealth. Dickinson’s thought-provoking and terrifying descent into the realms of extreme self-doubt and division in poem #512, a helpless fear of death and then of life in poem #414, and then anxiety over barrenness and solitude in poem #430 differ markedly from her passionate yet worrisome portrayal of marriage in letter 93, noteworthy due to the extensive imagery evoking a woman as a once dew-nourished flower, unique and golden, suddenly withered and dependent upon her husband, the scorching “man of noon.” Dickinson’s poems also explore in greater detail a psychological state of despair, similar to Laura’s in “Goblin Market” after she realizes she can never again obtain the object of her unquenchable desire—the goblin fruit. Like Rossetti, Dickinson ultimately concludes and closes her chapter on the goblins, as her resolution appears in poem #646, “I think to Live—may be a Bliss.” While Rossetti emphasizes the strength inherent in the bonds of sisterhood and
the virtues of this natural defense against the goblins and their wares, Dickinson advocates a defense mechanism against the inner masculine forces that fragment the feminine psyche to resolve the issues raised in her “goblin” poems.

Dickinson works out the issues of anxiety, feminine integrity, and creativity contained in her “goblin” poems and letter 93 by attempting to erase her internal visions of darkness, death, and uncertainty and to replace them with a peaceful and spiritually-fulfilling realm of the imagination. In poem #646, “I think to Live—may be a Bliss,” Dickinson envisions her ideal realm as a fictitious marriage in which she blends the feminine and masculine aspects of her identity, strengthening her power as a human being and as a poet. The speaker begins the poem by expressing her desire to live a joyful, active life accompanied by her anxiety over attempting such a feat:

I think to Live—may be a Bliss  
To those who dare to try—  
Beyond my limit to conceive—  
My lip—to testify—  

Through the word “Bliss,” Dickinson alludes to the “bliss” of the speaker of poem #430 and the “moments of escape” which the Soul, “delirious borne” (512.15), experiences in poem #512. She demurs that such a happy state of existence lies “Beyond my limit to conceive-- / My lip—to testify—“ (646.3-4) and then proceeds to describe successfully her wish list for a perfect life:

I think the Heart I former wore  
Could widen—till to me  
The Other, like the little Bank  
Appear—unto the Sea—  

I think the Days—could every one  
In Ordination stand—
And Majesty—be easier—
Than an inferior kind—

No numb alarm—lest Difference come—
No Goblin—on the Bloom—
No start in Apprehension’s Ear,
No Bankruptcy—no Doom—

But Certainties of Sun—
Midsummer—in the Mind—
A steadfast South—upon the Soul—
Her Polar time—behind— (646.5-20)

Bringing the set of images appearing in the “goblin” poems and letter 93 to resolution, Dickinson here constructs an imaginary safe haven free from anxiety and fear. The speaker first realizes the need to open or “widen” her “Heart” to new experiences, trusting herself to move forward instead of living in fear, eventually looking back on her past feelings as a “little Bank” when compared to the vast “Sea” of existence opening up before her. With this emotional investment in her new life on the horizon, the speaker grows bolder with her imagery, believing that all of her “Days” could be invested with “Ordination,” a sacred blessing. Aspiring to new heights of existence, she now accepts “Majesty” as an “easier” state of being than an “inferior kind.”

Next, the speaker envisions what her ideal state would not be like, renouncing the obstacles to her happiness. Her first prerequisite, “No dumb alarm—lest Difference come—“ (646.13), hearkens back to poems #430 and #454 in which “Difference” signifies a welcome agent of change conferring creative gifts and strength of character. In poem #646, the contemplative speaker hopes to be awake and alive enough to recognize, appreciate, and reap the benefits of “Difference” should it come to her, rather than feeling “numb” and apathetic towards life and potentially missing these momentary
sparks of creativity. Expectantly awaiting a visit from “Difference,” the speaker formulates a non-threatening environment in which she might sharpen her dulled sense of awareness. Envisioning a world with “No Goblin—on the Bloom—“ (646.14), Dickinson offers “the Bloom” as representative of a woman’s essence and worth, akin to Rossetti’s comparison of a revitalized Laura with “new buds” (Rossetti 535) and an unspoiled Lizzie with “a fruit-crowned orange-tree / White with blossoms” (415-6). By shooing away the “Goblin,” the speaker hopes to maintain the “dew” of creativity nourishing her feminine flower identity, similar to the flower in letter 93 prior to its exposure to the “man of noon,” and avoid the fate of the Soul in poem #512 and the speaker in poem #430 who both lose their “dew” to the thirsty “Goblin” of anxiety and fear. With the absence of any “Goblin” stalkers, the speaker, constantly looking over her shoulder before, now enters a fearless and peaceful existence where there is “No start in Apprehension’s Ear” (Dickinson 646.15). Able to maintain her personal wealth, her “Riches” and “Gold,” she need experience neither the emotional “Bankruptcy” or, in the alternate reading, “Wilderness” (646.16) of the Goblin’s victim in poem #430 nor the “Doom” of the despairing “Soul” of poem #512 and the condemned prisoner of poem #414. Dickinson’s speaker in poem #646 achieves freedom from negativity and fear by developing her own list of “No’s,” renouncing the anxiety that formerly plagued her by dismissing her fears one by one. After ridding her fictional landscape of personal demons, the speaker then focuses on the positive aspects of such a place and its beneficial effects on her. Listing the boons of her fanciful haven, she ranks “Certainties of Sun” (646.17) first, turning the scorching “man of noon” into a positive image of certainty and serenity, where past uncertainties about one’s fate and one’s identity, like those
experienced by the Soul in poem #512 and “you” in poem #414, have generated a debilitating anxiety.

Dickinson’s remaining two “goblin” poems also treat these themes. In poem #511, “If you were coming in the Fall,” she concludes with a simile which likens the speaker’s frustration with the uncertainty of life to “the Goblin Bee— / That will not state—it’s sting” (511.19-20), “one of the most evocative allusions to the state of anxiety that is often so much more painful than the certainty of even the worst outcome” (Shands 24). When applied to poem #646, the link between the absence of the Goblin and the presence of certainty for the speaker becomes manifest. Beginning poem #590 with the question “Did you ever stand in a Cavern’s Mouth-- / Widths out of the Sun—[?]” (Dickinson 590.1-2), the speaker uses her imagination to answer her own question, describing this scenario with the phrase “How Goblin it would be—“ (590.6). By linking the adjective “Goblin” with darkness, particularly total absence of sunlight, Dickinson sets up the inverse situation for poem #646 where “No Goblin” ensures “Certainties of Sun.” Because the speaker no longer lives in the shadow of anxiety, if only in the illusory realm of by her mind, she comes to realize the “Bliss” of truly living, terming it “Midsummer—in the Mind-- / A steadfast South—upon the Soul / Her Polar time—behind—“ (646.18-20). Dickinson thus moderates the power of the burning “man of noon” from letter 93, incorporating the positive aspects of his masculine strength into the speaker’s identity, creating a harmonious union of feminine and positive masculine qualities in the speaker’s “Mind.” In contrast with the Soul’s transitory “moments of escape” of poem #512, poem #646 constructs a “steadfast South” in the “Mind,” suggesting the permanence and composure involved in this newly formed identity, free
from the frantic energy and fear of the characters populating Dickinson’s other “goblin” poems.

Enchanted and calmed by the product of her own imagination and the promise it holds, the speaker confuses her illusory realm with reality, as she admits:

The Vision—pondered long—
So plausible becomes
That I esteem the fiction—real—
The Real—fictitious seems—

How bountiful the Dream—
What Plenty—it would be—
Had all my Life but been Mistake
Just rectified—in Thee (646.21-8)11

Sadly, in the final stanza, the speaker realizes her error in judgment, just as in “Goblin Market” Laura learns that the goblins’ fruit “represent[s] desire for a paradise of the imagination that does not exist and therefore can be only desired, never obtained” (Mermin 108). Notwithstanding, Dickinson continues to derive pleasure from the idealism of her creation, almost congratulating herself on the success of its mesmerizing effect when, surprised by her own aesthetic ability, she remarks “How bountiful (beautiful) the Dream” (646.25, alternate reading in parentheses). Musing on the endless possibilities and opportunities afforded by her chimerical province, the speaker expresses her longing for the solace and independence she finds there when she considers “What Plenty—it would be— / Had all my Life but been Mistake / Just rectified—in Thee” (646.26-8). Personifying the “Dream” as “Thee,” the speaker displays the extent to which this mental escape route has become a comfort to her in times of distress and

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11 Mossberg argues that “were Emily Dickinson not to feel dissatisfaction with her ‘lot’ as a female, she would not be motivated to turn to language to console or free herself, to become what she ‘would be’ if she had the opportunity” (Mossberg 62).
frustration with reality, reflecting "her joy in the prospect of a poetic vision—a vision of a world that she as poet could create—that has made all things new for her" (Sewall 396). She renounces reality in favor of this rewarding "Vision" and sees the possibility of knitting her life to "Thee" in a symbolic marriage. Just as Rossetti in "Goblin Market" depicts marriage as a protected forum fostering Laura’s creativity and expression in "Goblin Market," so Dickinson creates a fictitious marriage in the speaker’s "Mind," merging the best aspects of her feminine and masculine identities. In poem #646, Dickinson makes peace with her fear of being "yielded up" (Dickinson 1.93) and having her identity consumed by the masculine muse of her poetry, the "Master" of letters 187, 233, and 248. Instead, she consumes him, incorporating the "Difference" poetic inspiration brings her into her uniquely feminine identity, and thus closes her poetic chapter on the "goblin."

The conflicting emotions of desire and anxiety marked the paths of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti on their respective journeys toward poetry. Although an ocean divided them, their biographical and artistic similarities united these two women poets in a common struggle against the anxiety they felt when taking up the occupation of poet and the attainment of identity and "Difference" that made their lives extraordinary. While neither woman ever married, the fictitious marriages created in their poetry symbolized their commitment and giving over of themselves to this form of artistic expression. Renouncing the fear and anxiety once generated in them by their chosen occupation, Dickinson and Rossetti focused on the inner human experience, withdrawing into landscapes of the imagination far superior to the drudgery of their daily lives.

12 Please see poems 303, 528, 1072, and 1620 for evidence of Dickinson’s use of a fictitious marriage to signify her commitment to poetry and the masculine muse she associated with it.
Dickinson enjoyed “the poetic impulses which visited her,” and “by their means she converted all her losses into gains, and all the pains of her life to that clarity and repose which were to her the qualities of Heaven. So superior did she feel, as a poet, to earthly circumstance, and so strong was her faith in words, that she more than once presumed to view this life from the vantage point of the grave... And yet her poetry... is not an avoidance of life but an eccentric mastery of it” (Wilbur 136). Despite their differences, Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti achieved the same victory: they wrote. As evidenced by the psychological and emotional struggles contained in their “goblin” poems and Dickinson’s letter 93, their election of feminine integrity and the poetic craft represented a difficult choice, fraught with personal hardships and constant anxiety about identity, and yet, despite these obstacles, they wrote. Haunted by internal demons, they wrote. In writing, they learned how to exorcise the goblin.
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