

A NOTE ON "GOBLIN MARKET":  
A LITERARY SOURCE IN  
CAROLINE BOWLES SOUTHEY'S "YOUNG GREY HEAD"

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In her biography of Christina Rossetti, Jan Marsh outlines two important influences for "Goblin Market" (229-32). One is the poet's work at Highgate Penitentiary with so-called "fallen women" and prostitutes. The second involves fairy lore, taken from books like Anna Eliza Bray's *A Peep at the Pixies* of 1854. A third, and perhaps equally important, source can be found in the tradition of women's poetry that had developed in the early nineteenth century, and in particular "The Young Grey Head," a sentimental narrative by Caroline Bowles Southey.

Caroline Bowles, who lived from 1786 or 1787 (scholars dispute her birth year) to 1854, often used a poetics of pathos to address issues of social conscience. In 1820 her first published poem, *Ellen Fitzauthor*, was one of the semi-realistic "fallen woman" narratives by women poets antecedent to "Goblin Market." When she read about "factory atrocities" in 1833, Bowles responded with *Tales of the Factories*, using naturalistic dialect and description to dramatize cruel working conditions. Yet as Virginia Blain points out, it is difficult to place her in any neat ideological category: a "dash of iconoclasm, which often feeds the satiric impulse in her writing, appears to sit oddly with an extreme reverence for the authority of Church and State" (Blain, 7). Much of her poetry focuses rhetorically on provoking anger and pity from readers rather than on supporting any ideology economic or religious.

Bowles maintained a twenty-year correspondence with poet laureate Robert Southey, during which he found the pathos of some of her poetry too painful to read. After the publication of her volume *The Widow's Tale and Other Poems* in 1822, Southey advised her to turn from poetry that "exacts a heartache for imaginary distress" toward "a picture of summer and sunshine" for the sake of her popularity with readers as well as her own mental health (*Correspondence*, 24-25). Then in 1829 he half-seriously chided her for being a "cruel woman" to provoke