

VAMPIRES AND GOBLINS:
COLERIDGE'S INFLUENCE ON CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

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In the pastoral English countryside of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market," resplendent with mossy glens and babbling brooks, two sisters – Laura and Lizzie – live in innocence until goblin men intrude and enact a horrible transformation. Laura becomes a creature who, having "sucked and sucked and sucked" the goblin men's fruit (134), "long[s] for the night" (214), gnashes "her teeth for baulked desire" (267), and descends on her sister "with a hungry mouth" (492). Laura is unable to tell if she is dead or alive, and when her deliverance does come it is considered "life out of death" (524). That "Goblin Market" can be read as a vampire story has been well established. However, the fact that Rossetti's poem is a vampire tale is less important than why it is a vampire tale. What was Rossetti trying to accomplish by making the female-dominated world of "Goblin Market" a place where vampires dwell? Laura's fall is often seen as that of an innocent girl into a life of sin or prostitution (see Cho; McGann; Rogers). I contend that Rossetti intentionally employs vampire imagery to equate Laura's transformation with prostitution because she was aware that the parallels between the figures of the female vampire and prostitute depicted in Victorian literature are more than coincidental: in fact, the two share the same origins. Like the fallen women Rossetti dedicated so much of her life to helping, the nineteenth-century literary female vampire was seen as an unredeemable "femme fatale" or, at best, a doomed victim of man's cruelty and woman's weakness. By aligning prostitutes with the female vampire, Rossetti shows that even in the most hopeless case of corruption and perversion a fallen woman can be purified and restored to society. For Rossetti, this is a redemption that can only come about by the sacrifice and acceptance of a sister – an idea that has its roots, I believe, in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's early nineteenth-century vampire poem, "Christabel."

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