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Victorian Feminism: Oppressive Notions Mediated in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's "Aurora Leigh"

Viktoriánský feminismus: Opresivní náměty zpracované v básni Christtiny Rossettiové „Skřetí trh" a Elizabeth Barrett-Browningové „Aurora Leigh"

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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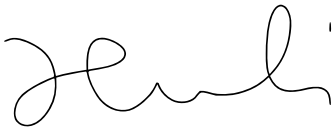

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Ester Hochmanová

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Abstract

Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, two prominent poets of the Victorian Era, notably discuss various notions oppressive to women in their poetry, namely “Goblin Market” and “Aurora Leigh.” Employing the Victorian theme of glamorizing death, Barrett-Browning speaks on the deadly protentional of normalizing such restrictive entrapping and an idea that love and sexual relations are often embedded in power disproportion. Rossetti on the other hand, focuses on chastity which is strongly implemented by the Catholic Church and deems unchaste women “fallen,” while men are not being held up to the same standard. This overall critical examination of traditional gender roles, motherhood, and marriage, emphasizes the intersection of societal expectations, trauma, and autonomy in the lives of Victorian women.

The goblin’s tempting fruit becomes an allegory unveiling the predatory dynamics prevalent in Victorian society, while the narrative simultaneously unfolds a nuanced exploration of sisterhood and homoerotic, the constraints of societal expectations, and the dichotomy of fallen and redeemed women. The periodical concept of the “Angel in the House” is applied onto the contrasting fates of Lizzie and Laura as virtuous and fallen woman, highlighting the pervasive notion of women’s moral pre-eminence and revealing the unjust standards imposed on them. Laura’s temptation and Lizzie’s sacrifice are each explored through the lens of Christian imagery. Rossetti’s departure from the traditional tragic outcomes for fallen women is emphasized, and the chapter concludes by positioning “Goblin Market” as a feminist narrative, which challenges societal norms and advocates for female solidarity.

The Elizabeth Barrett-Browning chapter portrays maternity in her nine-book poem “Aurora Leigh” on four characters: Aurora Leigh’s mother, Marian Erle, Lady Waldemar, and Aurora’s mother. Hence, illustrates the diverse outcomes of marriage and motherhood often resulting in death in one shape or form. For example, the death of Aurora’s mother creates an unachievable maternal ideal for women and Marian’s tragic life story causes her figurative death. Furthermore, Lady Waldemar’s overt sexuality does not give her children but brings upon manipulation and more exploitation, while Aurora’s fear of maternity results in her considering writing her true descendant. Overall, this chapter explores societal views on “fallen women” and the consequences of maternal sacrifice, highlighting Browning's critique of restrictive Victorian ideals.

Key words: Aurora Leigh, Chastity, Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, Goblin Market, Maternity, Victorian feminism

Abstrakt

Christina Rossettiová a Elizabeth Barrett-Browningová, dvě přední básnířky viktoriánské doby, se ve svých básních "Goblin Market" a "Aurora Leigh" zabývají tématy, které reprezentují různé formy útlaku soudobých žen. Poezie Barrett-Browningove se vyznačuje častým zobrazením toho, jakým způsobem instituce manželství manželky samotné omezuje, a podtrhává tak skutečnost, že láska a sexuální vztahy jsou často zakotveny v nerovnovážném rozložení moci ve společnosti. S využitím viktoriánského motivu romantizace smrti mladé dívky upozorňuje na katastrofický potenciál takovéto idealizace. Naproti tomu Rossettiová tematizuje pojem počestnosti, tak jak jej prosazuje katolická církev, která zároveň považuje necudné ženy za „padlé," zatímco muže podobnému soudu nevystavuje. Tato analýza tradičních genderových rolí, mateřství a manželství zdůrazňuje provázanost společenských očekávání, traumatu a samostatnosti viktoriánských žen.

Alegorické pokušení skřetů odhaluje predátorskou dynamiku, která byla v tehdejší společnosti běžná, vyprávění zároveň zkoumá motivy sesterství, homo-erotických vztahů a dichotomii „padlých" a ctnostných žen. Soudobý koncept „anděla v domácnosti" je aplikován na protichůdné osudy Lizzie a Laury s důrazem na nespravedlivé a nekonzistentní normy tehdejší doby. Pokušení Laury a Lizziina oběť jsou zkoumány skrze křesťanskou symboliku. Rozuzlení příběhu hrdinky v básni Rossetiové se výrazně liší od ostatních soudobých literárních děl s podobným námětem, „Goblin Market" je často považován za feministickou báseň neboť končí výzvou k přehodnocení společenských norem a vyzívá k ženské solidaritě.

Kapitola věnovaná Elizabeth Barrett-Browningové, která se ve své obsáhlé básni „Aurora Leigh" zabývá mateřstvím v kontextu čtyř postav: matky Aurory Leigh, Marian Erleové, lady Waldemarové a samotné Aurory, ilustruje různé dopady manželství a mateřství, které často končí smrtí. Například smrt Aurořiny matky symbolizuje nedosažitelný mateřský ideál pro viktoriánské ženy a Marianin tragický životní příběh Marian ústí do její obrazné smrti. Otevřená sexualita lady Waldemarové neplodí děti nýbrž manipulaci a další vykořisťování, zatímco Aurořin strach z mateřství vede protagonistku k závěru, že jejím skutečným mateřským posláním je literatura. Tato kapitola zkoumá společenské pohledy na „padlé ženy" a důsledky mateřské oběti s důrazem na kritiku nevhodných viktoriánských ideálů.

Klíčová slova: Aurora Leigh, Elizabeth Barrett-Browningová, Goblin Market, Christina Rossettiová, křesťanství, mateřství, viktoriánský feminismus

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Introduction

The central objective of this thesis is to thoroughly examine the Victorian poem "Goblin Market" written by Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's "Aurora Leigh." This essay will demonstrate the poets' expression of feminist ideas on the recurring themes in their work and study the contemporary historical context following the Catholic Emancipation Act. Both poets being fairly interested and engaged in the discussions surrounding women's rights and their position in the Victorian society have expressed their experience with navigating the religious imposed norms through their poetry. Critical analysis of sisterhood, female companionship, or internalized misogyny in Christina Rossetti's work will be amplified by the controversy of marriage and its connection to death in Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's art. Both poets dedicated a significant part of their work to death of women and motherhood. Moreover, each of the discussed poems is of exceptional length and therefore a great match for comparison.

On the background of the initial chapter, illustrating the historical-cultural context of the Victorian period, the two poems are critically analysed from a feminist perspective. The Victorian era marked a pivotal moment in history, amidst the prevailing moral standards, enforced by nonconformist churches, Victorian society earned a reputation of prudishness and a conservative outlook. Christianity, extending its influence beyond religious domains, contributed significantly to the patriarchal structuring of society and enforced morality, particularly in relation to women's sexuality, which lead to a transformative period where feminists sought to challenge and redefine the prevailing narratives.

Furthermore, the first chapter describes how the institution of marriage brought about legal disparities, namely stripping women of many rights and

consigning them to domestic responsibilities. As the feminist movement gained momentum, critiques of marriage as an institution surged, unveiling a sea of cultural changes in relationships. The Victorian era witnessed profound political controversies surrounding religion, with nonconformists advocating for the abolishment of the Church of England as the *Catholic Emancipation Act* of 1829 granted religious freedom. The first Chapter outlines the intertwining of piety, gender roles, and societal expectations, examining how religious beliefs contributed to the subjugation of women within the domestic sphere.

A peculiar fascination with the romanticization of young dead women permeated Victorian literature and art. Drawing on works by Edgar Allan Poe, Lord Alfred Tennyson, and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood the poetic subject of a deceased women, which is a pervasive motif stemming from the Renaissance, becomes an area of concern for the thesis. Christina Rossetti's utilization of poetry as a tool for reclamation and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's exploration of death as an inherent element of women's societal roles are scrutinized, shedding light on the broader societal attitudes towards femininity and mortality. The following two chapters are each dedicated to one of the poems and their authoresses and the feminist issues they focus on in their poetry. Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" explores themes of the "Angle in the House," fallen women, gender and sexuality, Christianity, and Sisterhood and Homoerotics, while Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's "Aurora Leigh" examines four characters and their relation of maternity to death and the disproportionate power dynamic in marriage.

Christina Georgina Rossetti's narrative poem "Goblin Market" analyses the moral quandaries faced by women in the Victorian Era, the story itself draws inspiration from many genres including the Bible. Exemplified by the forbidden

fruit motif, the poem explores themes of original sin. While the chapter explores the Victorian ideals embodied in the "Angel in the House" archetype and their application on the sisters, Rossetti introduces homoerotic undertones too, hereby attacking the traditional gender roles. The unequal and inconsistent standards placed on women, which are rooted in the belief of their moral pre-eminence subjects them to sever societal scrutiny. The analysis of the "Goblin Market" in this Chapter explores gender and sexuality and discusses the societal expectations that compelled the sisters to resist goblin advances.

The final Chapter evaluates four female characters of the narrative: Aurora Leigh, her mother, Marian Erle, and Lady Waldemar. In an Era dominated by patriarchal norms, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning offers a unique exploration of motherhood via multifaceted perspectives. Thorough this diverse representation of maternal figures, the narrative questions the institution of marriage and motherhood and connects them to a woman's death, which is a recurring theme in Victorian poetry. The initial section focuses on Aurora's late mother, highlighting the portrayal of maternity's unattainable ideal. Her death creates a paradox where the ultimate sacrifice, dying for one's child, is the most highly appreciated act. This contrast underscores the prevalent dangers within maternity and the double standards surrounding the concept, which is explored the next section, which further delves into societal perceptions of "fallen women" and the grim aftermath of maternal sacrifice. The penultimate subchapter examines Lady Waldemar's childlessness and its relation to how societal perceptions of femininity and motherhood are faulty. Lastly, the third sub-chapter is dedicated to the protagonist herself, who for the majority of the story consciously opts for a career over conventional marriage and motherhood.

1. Historical-Cultural Context

The contemporary writers were for the first-time acknowledging and reflecting on their age of transition. Generally, there was an appreciable insistence on a tremendous moral standard, enforced by the nonconformist churches, therefore the Victorians are often perceived as prudish or old-fashioned.[1] The influence of Christianity now extended beyond religious realms and shaped England's internal politics, thereby contributing into its patriarchal structuring.[2,3,4] Namely, morality was a highly regarded virtue among the Victorians, with a strict emphasis on women's sexuality. In response, contemporary feminists sought to reshape this narrative by reclaiming their sexuality and holding accountable those who tried to label them as immoral.[5]

One of the fundamental formative effects of the Victorian era was the significant rise of middle class and its consequential impact on the society. Their newly gained political and financial eminence enabled a major influence over the contemporary philosophy, which was a power previously exercised exclusively by the aristocrats. Suddenly, each individual and family had the intention to present themselves as respectable and worthy of their position.[6] Hence, the women's

[1] Ben Xiao, "Morality in Victorian Period," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 5, no. 9 (September 2015): 1815–1816.
[2] Sally Mitchell, "The Forgotten Woman of the Period: Penny Weekly Family Magazines of the 1840's and 1850's," in *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, ed. Martha Vicinus, (London: Methuen, 1980), 47.
[3] F. Barry Smith, "Sexuality in Britain, 1800-1900: Some Suggested Revisions," in *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, ed. Martha Vicinus, (London: Methuen, 1980), 182.
[4] Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900*, (Gainesville: University Press Florida, 1994), 32, 127–8.
[5] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 133.
[6] Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 5.

movement was making it its ambition to "improve the conditions of bourgeois ideologies in British society, a process completed in the Victorian period."[7]

1.1 Marriage

The institution of marriage was becoming to surpass the mere idea of mutual economic benefit. Emphasis was being put on privacy and family life, with women being disallowed many legal rights and therefore expected to fully tend to the household.[8] This contributed to the emergence of the feminist movement.[9,10] The majority of Victorian England women experienced marriage with all its disparities, which was the earliest area of concern for the contemporary feminists and "resulted in an unprecedented critique of marriage as an institution and a sea of change in cultural attitudes toward gender relations."[11] Unfortunately, domestic violence was rather common and believed to be emanating from alcoholism; to an extent women were advised to avoid engagement with men who were not teetotal. Economic hardship and dependency along with matrimonial legislation impeded women to escape their abusive partners or report them to the authorities. Nevertheless, Victorian women were often subjected to both physical and economic threats.[12]

For women marriage often remained a transactional commerce as they were relinquishing any political influence for social one.[13] Upon marriage all previously

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[7] Sudesh Vaid, "Ideologies on Women in Nineteenth Century Britain, 1850s-70s," *Economic and Political Weekly* 20, no. 43 (1985): WS-66–67.
[8] K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846–1886*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 316.
[9] Susan Rubinow Gorsky, *Femininity to Feminism: Women and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 3.
[10] F. Elizabeth Gray, "Angel of the House," in *Encyclopaedia of the Victorian Era 1*, ed. James Eli Adams et al. (Danbury: Grolier, 2003), 40.
[11] Lise Shapiro Sanders, "Marriage and Divorce," in *Encyclopaedia of the Victorian Era 3*, ed. James Eli Adams et al. (Danbury: Grolier, 2003), 2.
[12] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 132–33.
[13] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 134.

earned possessions and assets as well as all possible future capital obtained by paid labour of the wife is to belong and be controlled by the husband. Likewise, any debt or other financial impositions were assigned to the man upon the wedding as well.[14] Despite the woman being obliged to maintain the household and the supervise the children's upbringing, their guardianship was not an exception to the restrictions. In her collection of essays, Philippa Levine notes that

> [T]he husband's right to property extended further into the human field too; the children of the marriage were his children and where a marriage was dissolved, custody was automatically ceded to the man.[15]

Prior to passing of the *Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act* in 1857, termination of marriage was determined only by the Church, and it was nearly impossible for a woman to successfully apply for a divorce.[16]

Additionally, it is unlikely for a wife to even be able to file for divorce as she must do so at her own expense, which, as mentioned above, were under her husband's control. Not all were lucky enough to have a trustee, who could support their case without the spouse's approval. Next to being denied any responsibility, women were further discriminated against by being held to a higher moral double standard than the opposite sex. The wife had a chance at a successful dissolution of marriage only were the husbands proven guilty of incest, bestiality, sodomy, rape, or of adultery with bigamy, cruelty, or desertion. Comparable requirements did not adhere to men's bids for divorce, and they could separate from their companions sufficiently on the grounds of adultery alone. Curiously, divorce was considered of

[14] Shapiro Sanders, "Marriage and Divorce," 4.
[15] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 134.
[16] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 135.

less importance by the early Victorian feminists in comparison to women's right to property ownership, education, and vote.[17]

The ideal of womanhood was transformed into a cultural phenomenon of an "Angel of the House," a phrase coined in the mid-century by Coventry Patmore in his poem from 1854 but popularized almost a hundred years later. The name emphasized a woman's domestic importance in the household, angelic purity and utmost devotion to her husband and family. According to Carol Christ the poem defines the contemporary sexual ideal and the male-gaze oriented reasoning of its fascination.[18] In his poem Patmore lionizes the institution of marriage, feminine purity, selflessness, and acquiescence, which eventually escalates into forming a "natural destiny of a woman [was] identified with marriage and raising a family."[19] In her famous deconstruction of this phenomenon, Virginia Woolf notes it pertains to a woman who conveys innocence, chastity, and unwavering dedication to securing domestic harmony.[20]

1.2 Victorian Feminism

In juxtaposition to the prominent religious forces controlling the periodical mentality, philosophies like Utilitarianism started emerging simultaneously. Established by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, it was often referred to as Benthamism or Philosophical Radicalism. Essentially seeking to maximize pleasure and minimize pain of the majority, this philosophy perceives religion as an outmoded superstition.[21] Moreover, Charles Darwin wrote his famous *On the*

[17] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 137.
[18] Carol Christ, "Victorian Masculinity and the Angel in the House," in *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, ed. Martha Vicinus, (London: Methuen, 1980), 147.
[19] Gray, "Angel of the House," 40.
[20] Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women" in *Killing the Angel in the House: Seven Essays* (London: Penguin, 1995), 3.
[21] Gail Turley Houston, "Utilitarianism," in *Encyclopaedia of the Victorian Era 4*, ed. James Eli Adams et al. (Danbury: Grolier, 2003), 147–8.

Origin of Species in 1859, which conflicted not only with the concept of creation, but the Holy Bible in general. It was his *Descent of Man* (1871) that explicitly expressed its views on gender, however. Darwin argued that the biological differences in the nature of men, who operate with reason and invention as opposed to women, who are motivated by intuition and tenderness, irredeemably deem males the superior sex.[22] By virtue, he does not stray from the previous claims espoused by religion and to a degree neither does John Ruskin.

Other relevant contemporary scholars too, like Ruskin himself, attest misogynistic approaches and glorify the medieval past, which is inevitably being rejected by the feminist objectives. The literary critic does not take a definite outspoken position as he denies both inferiority and equality. He does however contend that great poets mediate disasters brought about by men, which are later amended by women,[23] which is exactly what Rossetti does in the "Goblin Market." Ruskin's conclusions are influenced by culture as opposed to Darwin's science.[24] Feminist agitators on the other hand recognized cultural and scientific differences between men and women, yet "the political equality they sought was not based on desire to emulate men but to balance existing male opinion with women's views"[25] and as such it may have not been perceived.

The feminist condemnation of the institution of marriage and the concomitant intimate relations rose from a disappointment of the normalized disproportionate status quo within partners. Sadly, "[C]riticism of the feminist perspective, in the nineteenth century as much as today, all too frequently sank to a level of mud-slinging which characterized feminism as the voice of a bitter

[22] Sudesh Vaid, "Ideologies on Women in Nineteenth Century Britain," WS-66.
[23] Sudesh Vaid, "Ideologies on Women in Nineteenth Century Britain," WS-66–67.
[24] Sudesh Vaid, "Ideologies on Women in Nineteenth Century Britain," WS-66.
[25] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 150.

spinster."[26] When in reality, the movement aimed to establish harmony and fairness as opposed to sabotage the practice of the union or its prevalence in Victorian society. Next to both single and married women, men were a nonnegligible part of the feminist movement. Namely, Russell Gurney first enacted the Married Women's Property Act in 1870, which allowed women to inherit property as well as have control over their income.[27] English political activist and suffragette, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, assigned four major areas of focus of feminism: education; demolishing the moral double standard; professional industrial autonomy; and politics. Rossetti and Barret-Browning's contemporary Josephine Butler, who was a feminist social reformer was ultimately fighting for these values several decades earlier.[28]

The contemporary feminist indicated the correlation between sexual and political power, therefore sexual inequality reflected the injustice in social influence. Men's forces were proclaimed violent and assertive, as we later see reflected in Christina Rossetti's poem "Goblin Market;" while women were restricted by demands of different moral principles to which they were expected to conform without exception, remaining chaste as to maintain their purity. Female prostitution was predominantly coerced by economic disposition, poor "fallen" women were providing services for men with affluent backgrounds, who advocated and enforced sexual purity, while alone engaged in practices which went against their alleged conviction. This was often the only resort for a woman to make income and support herself when single, men on the other hand could acquire jobs more easily and did not face such problem on this big of a scale.[29]

[26] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 141.
[27] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 141.
[28] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 148.
[29] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 133.

In terms of education, women's values to academia were often refused in order to avoid limiting other female duties and competence. According to Martha Vicinus, as quoted in *Victorian Feminism*, these sexist perceptions of that period were a product of the newly emerging industrial capitalism.[30] The feminists of the Victorian Era have efficiently underlined the inconsistencies intrinsic to the circumambient environment. Understandably, nowadays we would acknowledge their axioms as conservative or outdated, but for its time they were regarded as highly revolutionary, powerful, and freeing by those who agreed with them.[31] Instinctively, works written by authoress concerning their experiences were considered feminist texts in this period and their female characters were typically more complex and three-dimensional.

1.3 Religious notions

In the Victorian Era, societal reform in the countryside has caused religion to be profoundly politically controversial. Nonconformists were lobbing for the abolishment of the Church of England, which was noticeably fragmented already. Gradually discrimination of other religions was receding as they have been gaining popularity and founding their own schooling institutions around the Kingdom.[32] Furthermore, levels of secularism increased with more easily accessible education and Darwin's theory of evolution, challenging the established biblical Creation of the Universe and anthropocentrism.[33] Although atheism remained illegal to preach,

[30] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 128.
[31] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 151.
[32] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 32.
[33] Patricia Branca, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home*, (London: Croom Helm, 1975), 147.

religious sentiments were subject to readjusting in pursuance of accommodating the newly emerged scientific criticism and discoveries.[34]

Following the *Catholic Emancipation Act*, carried in the House of Lords in April 1829, Roman Catholics in the United Kingdom were granted religious freedom after the Reformation, being able to enter authoritative spaces such as the political, judicial, and state offices. This emancipation was to efface all civil disabilities of the sovereign's subjects concerning their religious background. Despite the fact most Great Britain's citizens hold hostile attitudes towards the Relief, the government has considered it a politically necessary measure for maintaining peace in catholic-majority Ireland. The breakout of a civil war was anticipated in Ireland were the entreaty refused to concede to, but the public was unhappy and ridiculed the decision with cartoons showing "the Tory ministers responsible for the bill, the Duke of Wellington and Mr. Peel, carrying rosaries and kissing the pope's toe."[35]

Piety was especially important as a women's quality as bachelors were encouraged to only marry a devotee, who was believed to possess all other good virtues because of her faith. Churchgoing was considered not a distraction but contrariwise an endorsement of housekeeping. This was distinct from pursuits such as education, employment, or even politic activism which would remove wives from their assigned 'sphere.'[36] Unforeseen capitalist reliance on industrialization gave way to the theory of separate spheres, which rhapsodized its nation. Separation of domestic and public lives, having occurred "because industry gradually replaced

[34] Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, (London: A & C Black, 1966), 286.
[35] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 7–8.
[36] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 152, 153.

agriculture as the dominant employer of labour,"[37] has become more apparent than ever before. Because of this combination of values shared by religion, the country's economic state, anthropology and tradition, women were bound by the religious teachings to submit to men, which only strengthened their moral obligations as they were to remain delicate.[38]

Based on the Christian conceptions, women were marked with moral superiority while men were associated with aggressiveness and rigidness which conclusively contradicted the Christian doctrine. Regrettably, this imposed further sexual and moral restrictions over the fairer sex, which had to be enclosed within the family's privacy, where brides were to fulfil duties to their husbands. Their surmised freedom of sexual desire and selflessness denounced them to helplessness without the men's protection.[39] Court could sentence fornication on the basis of religious grounds to public penance, however "[T]hese penances were infrequent, unpopular, and absurd."[40] Unlike many formerly religious fellows, Christina Rossetti's imagination maintained its reflection of the unconditional trust in the divine.

The conventional belief of Creation was proved erroneous by the recent geological uncovering, Rossetti argued the explanation offered by the Church should be understood symbolically instead of being dismissed altogether.[41] The magnitude of the impact faith has had on her life is apparent from her art as well, aside from many subtle references in most of her works, she has published devotional proses of considerable length.[42] The Anglican movement founded

[37] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 12.
[38] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 11–12, 129.
[39] Mitchell, "The Forgotten Woman of the Period," 50.
[40] Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 489.
[41] Cf. Kathryn Burlinson, *Christina Rossetti*, (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998), 1.
[42] Burlinson, *Christina Rossetti*, 60.

reformative hospitals for women, where through teaching Christian tenet and moral instruction the volunteers, such as Rossetti herself, were to restore the patients' graciousness and discipline them as domestic servants.[43] "Goblin Market" exhibits parallels with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in themes of temptation and adversity atoned for sin. Yet romanticism, which Coleridge was known for, is more apparent in Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's works, which later influenced ballads of the Pre-Raphaelites.[44]

Elizabeth Barrett-Browning espoused the view that Christianity is poetry glorified.[45] She was raised in Congregational family household which preached "free movement of the Spirit" and therefore encouraged Barrett-Browning's open-mindedness.[46] The seminal "Aurora Leigh" alludes to the apocalypse but also the story of Miriam from the Old Testament. Elizabeth Barrett-Browning merges Victorian with Romantic poetry and creates argumentative intertextuality.[47] Remarkably, both authors adhered to Christian doctrine despite its obvious misogynistic overtones.

1.4 Death Romanticized

The Victorian obsession with young dead women as the most poetic subject of all poetry is pervasive among much literary art. It further reinforces the idea of a perfect women being pliable, visionless, passive, and easily dominated.[48] In his

[43] Burlinson, *Christina Rossetti*, 46.
[44] Simon Avery, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, (London: Longman, 2003), 18–19.
[45] Linda M. Lewis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God* , (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 9.
[46] Alexandra M. B. Wörn, "Poetry is Where God is: The Importance of Christian Faith and Theology in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Life and Work," in *Victorian Religious Discourse: New Directions in Criticism*, ed. Jude V. Nixon (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 236, 250.
[47] Avery, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 19.
[48] Brenna Mulhall, "The Romanticization of the Dead Female Body in Victorian and Contemporary Culture," *Aisthesis 8, no.2 (November 2, 2017): 1–2, https://pubs.lib.umn.edu/index.php/aisthesis/article/view/46/43.*

essay "The Philosophy of Composition" from 1846, Edgar Allan Poe notoriously writes "the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetic topic in the world,"[49] which reflects the ideal woman as dead; a sentiment prevalent still in the present day.[50] This perverted image of the male gaze describes deceased women as attractively peaceful and obedient often resulting in a disturbing necrophiliac illumination as in the case of Poe's "Annabel Lee" or the French poet Charles Baudelaire's "I Worship You." These young women tend to be the love interest of the speaker or protagonists themselves. Brenna Mulhall notes that their inability to respond or express their own convictions is precisely what makes them so appealing and agreeable to the male author and narrator, which is apparent in William B. Yeats' "He Wishes His Beloved Were Dead," where death is the "ultimate form of passivity."[51]

Likewise, the poem "The Lady of Shalott" by Lord Alfred Tennyson describes the romanticization of female death during this Era, the protagonist is fated to die as a result of her love for Lancelot. Her curse and immediate demise parallel the oppression of women of this time – imprisonment with a lone purpose to fulfil domestic duties. Paradoxically, her gained freedom causes her to become a fallen woman, whose death is depicted as romantic and eroticized. The glamorizing of a girl's death as something desirable is later applied in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* through Sybil Vane's suicide after which a male character expresses his hopes for a beautiful woman killing herself out of love for him. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood depicted dying young women in their artwork as well,

[49] Edgar Allan Poe, *The Raven; and The Philosophy of Composition*, (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Co., 1906), 28.
[50] Mulhall, "The Romanticization of the Dead Female Body in Victorian and Contemporary Culture," *6–7.*
[51] Mulhall, "The Romanticization of the Dead Female Body in Victorian and Contemporary Culture," *1–2.*

both paintings and poetry, famously Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel" or John Everett Millais' painting of the Shakespearean heroine "Ophelia."[52]

Christina Rossetti uses poetry as a tool of reclaiming the exploitation of women and introduces speakers from the netherworld like in "In an Artist's Studio." In this poem she offers a counterpoint to the idealised muse, saying the love the male artist feels for the muse is superficial and monetizing and does not capture her essence nor complexity of her persona. Christina Rossetti assumed a definite attitude against a woman "too pure and good for this world but too weak and passive to resist evil forces."[53] She denied being more infirm and a mortal innocent victim than a man is. The infamous depictions of the ineffable beauty of a dead girl, cherished in fiction, sentenced women's alleged delicacy to the refuge of the safety of home "unquestionably by her own fireside – as a daughter, sister, but most of all as wife and mother."[54]

The female self-sacrifice resulting in silence or death is by some referred to as a hereditary quality in women maintained by the precious maternity.[55] Both love and death along with religion became undeniable parts of the proper sphere which women pertained to.[56] Subsequently, death inevitably became part of a woman's so-called career as a wife, mother, and home keeper. Peculiarly, Scottish physician of the late 18th century William Buchan even ascribes the high mortality of mothers at birth to their imagination, claiming many of them are preoccupied with the fear

[52] Mulhall, "The Romanticization of the Dead Female Body in Victorian and Contemporary Culture," *2–3.*
[53] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 162.
[54] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 162.
[55] Pauline Simonsen, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Redundant Women," *Victorian Poetry* 35, no. 4 (1997): 518.
[56] Avery, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 4.

of death which ultimately kills them.[57] Generally, Victorian doctors promoted maternity as a precaution to being perceived as masculine and losing their feminine beauty or even reproductive organs. The medical propaganda also advertised childbearing as a prevention of nervous diseases in women regardless of the actual medical complications of pregnancy and birth.[58]

The Victorian Era recorded an exceptionally hight infant mortality rate with nearly up to 20% of children dying within the first year of their life and one in two hundred mothers dying at childbirth. Given the lack of availability and effectiveness of birth control, on average a woman gave birth around five times per lifetime increasing the endangerment and physical perils of this precarious venture. These deaths were eminently reflected in the topical literature as well as the strong societal pressure on women to marry and have children.[59] Medical shortcomings and the inability to support women in childbirth resulted in their consecutive death standing as an epitome of feminine self-sacrifice and proof of how love, by the extension of marriage, inevitably leads to death. Death was not nearly as taboo of a topic as sex, or even pregnancy, in literature and if Elizabeth Barrett-Browning speaks for women who refuse to be placed socially and artistically, Christina Rossetti speaks for women who refuse to be idealised and idolised.

1.5 Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning

Already in her girlhood Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830-1894) was associated with the artistic movement Pre-Raphaelites, which her brother founded. Their works in a large part draw inspiration from the Italian Renaissance, which

[57] Laura J. Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 41, no. 1 (2013): 45.
[58] Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 1.
[59] Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 1.

significantly influenced Rosetti's work given their father was an Italian living in exile. Moreover, she was involved in social work from a young age. First, keeping a day-school at Frome-Selwood in Somerset alongside her mother, and later volunteering in the St Mary Magdalene Penitentiary at Highgate.[60] Religion motivated majority of her writing and life. She remained unmarried despite several proposals, which she refused for supposed religious scruples.[61] She has been both physically and mentally ill for a significant part of her life which likely contributed to her work. Except poetry, such as the discussed *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862), she has also published prose in 1870 entitled *Commonplace*.[62] In many of Christina Rossetti's poems, the speaker is a dead woman who speaks from the grave, her illnesses as well as her connection to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which had an unwholesome fascination with the subject of the dead women, were an immense inspiration for her.

Elizabeth Barrett-Browning (1806-1861) was a well-read and self-educated young woman, who already as a child has read many Shakespearian plays and other canonical texts from the English corpus as well as histories of Italy and other countries. Her vast knowledge of languages enabled her to read originals such was the case of Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*. She came from a family, which made most of its considerable fortune from sugar plantations. This inspired her prominent social injustice activism, which manifested in many of her publications including an issue of *Liberty Bell*, an American anti-slavery literary magazine. Elizabeth Barrett-Browning defined herself against several societal causes, such as slavery, child labour, and middle-class womanhood, which she saw represented in her own

[60] Burlinson, *Christina Rossetti*, ix–x.
[61] Burlinson, *Christina Rossetti*, ix–x, 61.
[62] Burlinson, *Christina Rossetti*, ix–x.

mother Mary Graham-Clarke. Her unconditional love for her mother is apparent from her letter correspondence, but the disdain for an evidently intelligent woman, who spends most of her life continually pregnant and tending to her family is undeniable.[63]

She too was suffering from mental illness after the tragic loss of her mother at twenty-two and being previously prescribed opium to treat a nervous disorder her health deteriorated, and she eventually moved with her husband to Italy. Together with him, a fellow poet Robert Browning, she had a son Robert Wiedemann "Pen" Barrett-Browning, who later became a painter. However, she did suffer many problematic pregnancies with several miscarriages both before and after Pen's birth.[64] All of these tragic circumstances project as themes in her verse-novel *Aurora Leigh* (1857).

[63] Avery, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 26.
[64] Avery, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 230–233.

2 Christina Rossetti

Christina Georgina Rossetti's narrative poem "Goblin Market" discusses the moral objections of women in the Victorian Era. The sister protagonists, Lizzie and Laura, are struggling to overcome the temptation of goblin's inculcating fruit with an obvious metaphorical significance. One of the sisters – Laura, eventually succumbs to temptation and fundamentally it is only female relationship that prevails and ultimately saves her life. Despite the storyline being presented by a third-person narrator, as a reader we have access to both of the sisters' emotions and motifs, never the goblins', however. No one definite allegorical interpretation has been established, instead it is the several possible interpretations which have solidified this poem as one of the author's most celebrated masterpiece.[65] "Goblin Market" was originally written in 1859 in London, but was not published until three years later, in 1862.

The poem was inspired by fairy-tale employing fable features, nursery rhymes but also the Bible. Overall, it is a clever combination of several genres set in an idyllic rural ambience. Rather than being intended for children audience, "[T]he function of fantasy in works such as *Goblin Market* (1862), […] is to deconstruct allegoric and didactic meaning;"[66] therefore it includes motives of forbidden fruit and themes of original sin from the Scripture. The poem is a clever depiction of contrast between caution and curiosity shown on Lizzie's fear of the goblins overwhelming her to the degree she abandons her sister, for whom she ironically risks her safety and chastity later by facing the mentioned goblins.

[65] Burlinson, *Christina Rossetti*, 7, 13.
[66] Roderick McGillis, "Simple Surfaces: Christina Rossetti's Work for Children," in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. David A. Kent (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 209.

Sisterhood is crucial for this analysis as it is inherently suggested as a solution or defence for women in a world of remorseless temptation and sexualization.[67,68] Notably, Rossetti's narrative of female companionship is intertwined with homoerotic undertones.[69]

Ironically, the general belief that women have a moral pre-eminence compared to men caused the unequal and inconsistent standards, which are still to a different degree prevalent today. These standards resulted in women suffering more serious and negative repercussions and prejudice in the face of the community than men did when it came to engaging in anything of sensual nature. In the Victorian era the societal expectations of women as well as their obligations and duties were exceptionally strict, most strict in regards of expressing sexuality.[70]

2.1 Angel in the House

Lizzie notably shares various qualities with the "Angel in the House," on the other hand, Laura, who previously did as well, becomes the epitome of a "fallen woman" after consuming the magic fruit, which according to this analysis is a personification of sexual intercourse. Hence, Laura is marked as amoral and vice-ridden. Depending on the interpretation the reader may consider Lizzie's oblation either an agitation stemming from internalised misogyny, or a genuine disgust.

> "Lie close," Laura said,
> Pricking up her golden head:
> "We must not look at goblin men,
> We must not buy their fruits:
> Who knows upon what soil they fed
> Their hungry thirsty roots?"

[67] Burlinson, *Christina Rossetti*, 36, 42.
[68] Janet Galligani Casey, "The Potential of Sisterhood: Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market.'" *Victorian Poetry* 29, no. 1 (1991): 63.
[69] Helena Michie, "There is no Friend Like a Sister: Sisterhood as Sexual Difference," *ELH*, 56(2), (1989): 416.
[70] Sudesh Vaid, "Ideologies on Women in Nineteenth Century Britain," WS-64

"Come buy," call the goblins[71]

Lizzie's reasoning does not seem to be justified by anything else but knowledge imposed on her by the oppressive system, which preaches women's sexual purity. Eventually, by the end of the poem, both sisters respectively achieve the ideal outcome possible for a woman of the 19th century – marriage and motherhood.[72]

With the thought of her sister possibly passing, Lizzie resolves to the decision of sabotaging her values and seeks out the vicious goblins with the intention to purchase the desired fruit. It is only the threat of her sister dying, which persuades Lizzie to for the first time actively give into the temptation. Her devotion and loyalty outweigh the risks, which essentially make her actions still principled as these are highly honourable virtues. Among these, comradeship, sisterly love and solitude are the qualities which Laura aims to delegate to the next generation. Regardless of the story's underlying message that fallen women are not irrevocably condemned, these elements remain integral attributes of "The Angel in the House," thus further reinforce its idea.

2.2 Fallen Women

Women were expected to remain virgins until they married, later be faithful throughout marriage and generally avoid the appearance of being interested in sexual activities. As opposed to men's sexual behaviour, which was not demonized, women who violated these high demands would be regarded as "fallen." This term could refer to a variety of actions including infidelity and sex work.[73,74] The ninetieth century painter, William Holman Hunt, has depicted such character in his

[71] Christina Rossetti, "Goblin Market" in *Goblin Market*, (London: Phoenix), 1996, 24. All quotations from this edition will be indicated in the text by parentheses for this Chapter.
[72] Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*, 2, 3, 74.
[73] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," 158, 169.
[74] Linda Nochlin, "Lost and Found: Once More the Fallen Woman," *The Art Bulletin* 60, no. 1 (1978): 139.

1853 painting "The Awakening Conscience." Holman Hunt was, along with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, an association of Victorian artists which, according to Dante and Christina's brother William Michael Rossetti, sought to produce authentic and aesthetic works rich in detail and colour.[75] The dynamics between men and women during this period are suggested in this highly symbolic painting by the cat, located in the bottom left corner, toying with a mouse moments before presumably killing it. Dante Rossetti's poem "Jenny" talks about a man encountering a prostitute on the street. In the significant objectification he draws attention to her hair, an instrument of her craft. Similarly, hair is the instrument of death in Robert Browning's "Porphyria's Lover," when a man strangles his lover. Christina Rosetti has likely been influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite Movement as she has been involved in many of their projects, for example modelling for many of their paintings.[76]

Most literary works of this time have represented fallen women abandoned by their close friends and family, often resulting in suicide. In her novel *Ruth* from 1854, Elizabeth Gaskell, Rosetti's contemporary and a fellow feminist author, has her female protagonist die of illness after being failed and rejected by the society. In "Goblin Market" however, Rossetti radically revises these conventional fates by allowing her fallen woman character, Laura, to recover and achieve redemption thanks to her sister's virtuous self-sacrifice and selfless love to her sibling.

[75] David Latham, "Haunted Texts: The Invention of Pre-Raphaelite Studies" in *Haunted Texts: Studies in Pre-Raphaelitism in Honour of William E. Fredeman*, ed. David Latham, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 12.
[76] Lindsay Duguid, "Rossetti, Christina Georgina (1830–1894), poet." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed 20 Oct, 2023.

In the poem we learn about the typical fate which met those who committed such sexual transgression throughout Lizzie's story of Jeanie. This behaviour marked them out as despicable and irredeemable.

> Do you not remember Jeanie,
> How she met them in the moonlight,
> Took their gifts both choice and many,
> Ate their fruits and wore their flowers
> Pluck'd from bowers
> Where summer ripens at all hours?
> But 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.
> You should not loiter so."
> "Nay, hush," said Laura: (28–29)

Simultaneously, Lizzie uses their friend's example as a cautionary tale, yet at this point it already comes too late as a warning for Laura and she soon meets the same misfortune due to committing a highly contemptible crime. They both become abandoned and barren, which is the most serious punishment as losing the ability to create life was considered a woman's greatest value to society and most worthy contribution. Other ambitions, feelings, and opportunities which were not connected to piety were not accounted for.[77]

Similarly, the depiction of the predatory behaviour of men in Hunt's painting "The Awakening Conscience," the goblins seduce young women only in order to disregard them immediately after satisfying their own inconsiderate desires. The tantalizing taste of the forbidden fruit is superseded by painful

[77] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," 152, 154.

rejection. The poem opens with the goblin's daily habit of luring young women into a seemingly innocent purchase.

> Morning and evening
> Maids heard the goblins cry:
> "Come buy our orchard fruits,
> Come buy, come buy: (23)

The goblin men, the antagonists of this narrative, represent sexual temptation, which significantly only targets young women and aims to destroy them physically with a social overlap. Resembling the unjustified illegible unequal rights and persecution of women in the Victorian period,[78] the origin of the goblins or the reason for targeting women is never further explained, and therefore appears unjustified.

The goblins praise their fruit winsomely and describe it as "Sweet to tongue and sound to eye;" (24) Their chant "Come buy, come buy" (23) which appears repeatedly throughout the poem urges women and incites engaging in morally corrupt behaviour.

> She heard a voice like voice of doves
> Cooing all together:
> They sounded kind and full of loves
> In the pleasant weather. (25)

The narrator even describes the invitations perceived as pleasant and alluring, its appeal could be caused by curiosity or enchanting infatuation. Initially, in order to achieve their goal, the goblins' behaviour gives the impression of being pleasant and harmless.

After Laura eats the fruit offered by goblins, they lose interest in her and renounce her. Having spoiled her in the eyes of society, she is no longer attractive to them either. They have succeeded in their efforts to tempt her, causing her to

[78] Jeremy Paxman, "Meet the Wife" in *The English: A Portrait of a People*, (London: Penguin, 1998), 216–218.

suffer as an outcast left to fall ill and die. Her infirmity is ostensibly mostly physical, but broadly speaking has societal impacts on Laura too.

> Laura turn'd cold as stone
> To find her sister heard that cry alone,
> That goblin cry,
> "Come buy our fruits, come buy."
> Must she then buy no more such dainty fruit?
> Must she no more such succous pasture find,
> Gone deaf and blind?
> Her tree of life droop'd from the root:
> She said not one word in her heart's sore ache;
> But peering thro' the dimness, nought discerning,
> Trudg'd home, her pitcher dripping all the way;
> So crept to bed, and lay
> Silent till Lizzie slept;
> Then sat up in a passionate yearning,
> And gnash'd her teeth for baulk'd desire, and wept
> As if her heart would break. (32)

Later, once she realizes she cannot hear the calling of the goblin men and that she is being denied their offerings and consequentially will never be able to taste the voluptuous fruit ever again, she begins to exhibit signs of depression. The singularity of their encounter strikingly alludes to the concept of virginity and its importance to the Christian doctrine at the time.[79] The foundation of their achievement is rooted in the girl's lack of comprehension of the consequences.

> Day after day, night after night,
> Laura kept watch in vain
> In sullen silence of exceeding pain.
> She never caught again the goblin cry:
> "Come buy, come buy;"—
> She never spied the goblin men
> Hawking their fruits along the glen:
> But when the noon wax'd bright
> Her hair grew thin and grey; (33)

Namely, Laura's hair is a reflection of her wellbeing. Both her mental and physical health is in decay and subsequently her connection to God is weakening. Hence her

[79] Burlinson, *Christina Rossetti*, 62–63.

inability to bear life, which goes beyond the impossibility to grow flowers, by extension implies she is unable to have children.

The absence of indications of Laura's enthusiastic engagement in "The Angel in the House"-like duties already suggests that she has been corrupted.

> She no more swept the house,
> Tended the fowls or cows,
> Fetch'd honey, kneaded cakes of wheat,
> Brought water from the brook:
> But sat down listless in the chimney-nook
> And would not eat. (33–34)

In Victorian culture 'fallen women' are typically represented as consumed with regret and despair, particularly after being forsaken by her seducer.[80] Laura's discretion about her suffering can be interpreted as either embarrassment after her sister has cautioned her so vigorously and she perceives it as a weakness to have submitted to the goblins; or she is ashamed of the strength of her desire and longing for the fruit, recognizing its oddity.

2.3 Gender and Sexuality

Essentially, it was self-restraint which made both girls cautious of the goblin men and their invitations. Each of the sisters is seemingly aware of the goblins' vice, and instinctively recognizes the sexual threat they pose. Naturally, despite being fearful they are simultaneously curious since the fruit is illustrated in a conspicuous sexual manner. The vivid language and literally devices used in this passage emphasise the physical reactions to the goblins' temptation. It is the evocative language which engenders the seduction of women by inciting thoughts of ineffable pleasures coming from tasting their fruit. Laura not only looks at them herself but urges Lizzie to do so as well.

[80] Glennis Stephenson, "Forsaken Women: The Voice of Frustrated Female Desire," *Victorian Review* 15, no. 1 (1989): 2–3.

"Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie,
Down the glen tramp little men.
[…]
"No," said Lizzie, "No, no, no;
Their offers should not charm us,
Their evil gifts would harm us."
She thrust a dimpled finger
In each ear, shut eyes and ran:
Curious Laura chose to linger (25)

Lizzie's fear on the other hand is powerful enough for her to flee and abandon Laura. Such sexual curiosity however was considered ignoble and dangerous for women in the Victorian Era.[81]

Strikingly, Laura is not presented as a morally corrupt woman with impure intentions either. She considers it dishonest to take the fruit without paying and as she does not have any money, she opts to selling a lock of her hair in exchange for the delicious fruit.

But sweet-tooth Laura spoke in haste:
"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." (27)

In this pivotal moment Laura loses control, and her finite decision is fundamentally a menacing foreshadowing of her eventual downfall following consuming the poisoned fruit. The last three lines of this excerpt underline the speaker's co-dependent relationship with nature. Her life relies on nature as it supports her existence. Symbolically, it insinuates her rural innocence and righteousness.

Her confliction is immediately followed by the ominous creatures' persuasion to give up a part of herself.

"You have much gold upon your head,"
They answer'd all together:

[81] Paxman, *The English*, 217–218.

"Buy from us with a golden curl."
She clipp'd a precious golden lock, (27)

By means of this process, a segment of her body is ultimately transformed into a commodity of commercial value. Observing the objectification of Laura in this manner elicits an allegorical representation of the fallen woman as understood in the context of Victorian culture.[82,83]

Their animalistic behaviour and general resemblance advocates savage predatory demeanour, which threatens and targets women as if mere pray.

Leering at each other,
Brother with queer brother;
Signalling each other,
Brother with sly brother. (26)

The usage of the verb "leer," meaning "to look or gaze with a sly, immodest, or malign expression in one's eye"[84] emphasizes that their trick is of sexual nature. Furthermore, the noun "brotherhood" adds to the idea of a universally accepted patriarchal conduct and generalizes men's attitudes towards women in the period. For the majority of the narrative, the goblins are described as animalistic but with a pleasant voice.

Interestingly, there is an obvious distinction in the goblin's behaviour immediately after Lizzie's declination of their advances. The modification of the manner in which the goblins interact with Lizzie subsequent her repeated refusal and resolute resistance to their persuasion is crucial.

They began to scratch their pates,
No longer wagging, purring,
But visibly demurring,
Grunting and snarling.
One call'd her proud,
[…]
Elbow'd and jostled her,

[82] Nochlin, "Lost and Found: Once More the Fallen Woman," 139.
[83] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," 154.
[84] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "leer, v.", September 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1266359242

Claw'd with their nails,
Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,
Tore her gown and soil'd her stocking,
Twitch'd her hair out by the roots,
Stamp'd upon her tender feet,
Held her hands and squeez'd their fruits
Against her mouth to make her eat. (37–38)

The deceptive affability and superficial flattery become supplanted by forceful violent tactics once the gobbling realize Lizzie cannot be persuaded to consume the fruit willingly. Their previously dubious behaviour evolves into daunting. This attack, when they aggressively force the fruit into her mouth, evokes attempted rape.

2.4 Christian doctrine

Christina Rossetti was devoutly religious, as a result she skilfully incorporates Biblical imaginary into her tale of enchanted fruit, temptation, and sisterly sacrifice. Throughout her life she has published numerous devotional poems and even six extensive religious prose works. More often than not, to an extent her poems reflect her religion.[85] This part of the analysis discusses the connection between Christian doctrine and reflecting in the feminist themes of the "Goblin Market." Additionally, how the Anglican doctrine is evident in Laura's perception of tasting the fruit as a superior experience, which suggests its fairness is a transient illusion and guiding Laura astray from her devotion to God.

While Laura is the embodiment of the aftermath following moral decay; Lizzie, in juxtaposition, through her actions becomes a Christ-like figure, or innate purity incarnated.

Sweeter than honey from the rock,
Stronger than man-rejoicing wine,
Clearer than water flow'd that juice;

[85] Burlinson, *Christina Rossetti*, 60.

[…]
She suck'd and suck'd and suck'd the more
Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;
She suck'd until her lips were sore; (27–28)

In accordance with the religious teaching of this time, premarital sexual activity was considered immoral, which lead to the establishment of hospitals intended for "fallen women", where sisters strived to rehabilitate such women via religious and moral guidance.[86] Noteworthily, Christina Rossetti was volunteering in such establishment, St Mary Magdalene Penitentiary at Highgate, when she wrote "Goblin Market" in 1859.[87] The foremost images of Laura seductively eating the forbidden fruit are enriched by the preceding reference to Psalm 81:16, God's provision to his dedicated followers.

The sexual violence is underlined by the vivid force with which the scene is described. Notwithstanding, they fail to defile Lizzie's purity due to her strong faith and a higher goal. Her devotion to both God and her sister Laura is so profound it motivates her resistance beyond the goblin men's power. It remains ambiguous whether it is her religion or sisterhood which saves her from the assault escalating. We shall conclude it is a fusion of both.

Like a lily in a flood,—
Like a rock of blue-vein'd stone
[…]
Like a royal virgin town
[…]
Though the goblins cuff'd and caught her,
Coax'd and fought her,
Bullied and besought her,
Scratch'd her, pinch'd her black as ink,
Kick'd and knock'd her,
Maul'd and mock'd her,
Lizzie utter'd not a word;
Would not open lip from lip
Lest they should cram a mouthful in:

[86] Regina G. Knuzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 22.
[87] Burlinson, *Christina Rossetti*, 45–46.

But laugh'd in heart to feel the drip
Of juice that syrupp'd all her face,
And lodg'd in dimples of her chin,
And streak'd her neck which quaked like curd. (38–39)

Lizzie, by the means of similes, continues to be described with language evoking imagery of strength, purity, chastity, and moral righteousness even in the middle of conflict and danger. Lizzie sacrifices for her sister's mistake and hereby saves her and reverses the damage impacting her family as well as the idyllic peace they have enjoyed. This image may be alluding to either one of the two biblical figures: Mirroring Mary's redemption for Eve's original sin; or alluding to Jesus, who has sacrificed for the sins of humanity through crucifixion. This biblical resonance is highlighted by Lizzie's instructions to Laura when she urges her to lick the magic juices off her face "Eat me, drink me, love me." (40) This echoes Christ's words during the Last Supper directed at disciples, when he urged them to eat his body – bread; and drink his blood – wine.[88] Moreover, the original acceptance of the fruit by Laura alludes to Eve accepting fruit from the Tree of Life and ultimately cursing herself.

The story reaches its climax when Lizzie leaves to obtain the fruit from the perilous goblin men, hoping it could potentially save her sister from imminent death. Her preparation for the transaction with the goblins, by taking the penny, proves her caution and awareness of both the real and extended threat that the goblin men impose. She refuses to give up her integrity despite essentially willing to risk her safety for her sister's sake when she seeks a meeting with the goblins at nightfall. These images result in evoking parallels to men's change in behaviour when approaching women after they deny them. The previous compliments and coy advances grow into shaming and possible attacks.

[88] Matthew 26:26–28 NIV

2.5 Sisterhood and Homoeroticism

Radically for its time,[89] in Christina Rossetti insists that fallen woman can be rehabilitated and despite Laura, the protagonist of the narrative, becomes the personification of the decay after yielding to temptation, she eventually achieves her happy ending. The recovery brought by the juice on Lizzies face left after her assault overnight resorts Laura to her healthy version.

> She clung about her sister,
> Kiss'd and kiss'd and kiss'd her:
> Tears once again
> Refresh'd her shrunken eyes,
> Dropping like rain
> After long sultry drouth;
> Shaking with aguish fear, and pain,
> She kiss'd and kiss'd her with a hungry mouth.
> Her lips began to scorch,
> That juice was wormwood to her tongue, (41)

Interestingly, the scene between the two women exhibits indications of erotic undertones, which for the contemporary reader is problematic due to both the incestual and homosexual connotations of their relationship.[90]

Initially, upon Lizzie's return, Laura fears for her sister. Distressed, she hears her sister has braved a meeting with the goblin men. She becomes alert and horrified at the thought that Lizzie could now possibly meet the exact fate as encountered Jeanie and herself. Following Lizzie's presentation of the medicine and Laura sucking the juices of the forbidden fruit from her sister's face, she seems to enter a state akin to a trance, behaving in a possessed manner; then for a moment, before the resurrection, Laura appears to be deceased. Lizzie precedes to nurture Laura during the night despite being injured after the goblins physically attacked her. Her efforts are met with success when both sisters delightedly discover Laura

[89] Burlinson, *Christina Rossetti*, 43.
[90] Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*, 7.

awakens fully recovered. Even her hair has regained its golden colour, signifying restoration of health and happiness.

The ending of the poem is reminiscent to an epilogue, where both sisters are presented as accomplished wives and mothers, and Laura tells their children a cautionary tale of the predatory goblins and their poisonous fruit from the time of her "early prime." (43) Notably, her story highlights her sibling's chivalry when facing the enemy for the sake of her sister.

> Would tell them how her sister stood
> In deadly peril to do her good,
> And win the fiery antidote:
> Then joining hands to little hands
> Would bid them cling together,
> "For there is no friend like a sister
> In calm or stormy weather;
> To cheer one on the tedious way,
> To fetch one if one goes astray,
> To lift one if one totters down,
> To strengthen whilst one stands." (43–44)

The poem ends with a moral advocacy for sisterhood, female companionship and the importance of mutual support and encouragement. The line "[F]or there is no friend like a sister," highlights the fundamentality of female solidarity and portrays it as the sole viable approach to confront the perils posed by predatory (goblin) men who consistently endanger people of a different gender withing the confines of the patriarchy.

Usually, fallen women experience tragic outcomes in the storyline, including social ostracism and even death. Correspondingly to Rossetti's characters Jeanie and Laura [before her salvation], women were denied marriage and motherhood, which in the 19th century were viewed as a woman's greatest virtue and purpose.[91] Thence, the goblins have stripped Jeanie of any attainable chance at

[91] Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*, 74.

happiness. Rossetti's differentiation from this pervasive message is significant as it sets itself apart from any other contemporary literature dealing with the theme of fallen women.[92]

By the explicit and conjectured implications of the poem, it is generally considered a feminist storytelling. From a modern-day perspective we must of course take into consideration the periodical social and religious framework of it as well, it is a poem written by a deeply religious humanist, who simultaneously rejected life in the cloister. Christina Rossetti creates a story where the value of anything or anyone depends on its dealing with. Both people and things can clearly be subject of trade, consumption, or consecration, her poem is thus not a resentment of human sensuality, but rather its elevation to a more venerable aspiration.[93]

Her work addresses many issues and ideas related to the complex dichotomies and expectations placed on women in the 19th century. The relevance of the story being passed on by Laura rather than Lizzie prevails it the alternative the ending of "Goblin Market" offers to the traditional silencing of "fallen woman" in the penitentiary institutions. By allowing Laura to share the story, the narrative suggests women are to support each other in publicly speaking out about their misfortunes. From her perspective the story transforms from a cautionary tale into "a story of female heroism, replete with pleasures and fears."[94]

[92] Burlinson, *Christina Rossetti*, 43.
[93] D.M.R. Bentley, "The Meretricious and the Meritoriou," in *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*, ed. David A. Kent (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 80.
[94] Burlinson, *Christina Rossetti*, 46.

3. Elizabeth Barrett-Browning

Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's poetry portrays maternity, a phenomenon expected if not required of Victorian women, in an untraditionally controversial way. The author's critique of forced motherhood becomes strongly apparent in her nine-book poem "Aurora Leigh," where she illustrates maternity's deadliness on the four central female characters: Aurora, Marian, Lady Waldemar, and Aurora's mother. Barrett-Browning challenges societal expectations related to maternity by presenting a range of maternal figures each encountering a different outcome. Furthermore, her work shows scepticism towards the institution of marriage and its connection to death for women, a periodically popular theme for poetry.

3.1 Aurora's Mother: Model Mother Personified

The beginning of the blank verse poem is dedicated to Aurora's late mother. The narrator speaks of her candidly and with praise, appreciating her motherly qualities and love. The immediate mention of the mother's death, preceding the description of anything else in the story not even of the narrator themself, signifies the importance and influence of a parent's death on a child. Elizabeth "Barrett-Browning was capable of approaching this topic both as a daughter who lost her mother and as a mother who faced difficult pregnancies"[95] and therefore has successfully portrayed the unmatched adoration and love in a mother-daughter bond that she describes in her personal diaries.[96]

Death of an affectionate mother at childbirth, or early after as in the case of Aurora Leigh, created an unattainable ideal for women's exertion. The speaker points out the irony of the narrative that an idea that the most selfless action a

[95] Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 43.
[96] Cf. Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 43.

mother can do, in terms of a sacrifice for her child, is to die. By talking about her absent mother Aurora exposes the mystic duality of a dead person and the legacy left alive after them. The ideal of the perfect mother unreachable when alive together with the undervalued and overlooked effort of women with children causes that no woman can realistically live up to the set standard.

> I write. My mother was a Florentine,
> Whose rare blue eyes were shut from seeing me
> When scarcely I was four years old; my life,
> A poor spark snatched up from a failing lamp
> Which went out therefore. She was weak and frail;
> She could not bear the joy of giving life–
> The mother's rapture slew her.
> […]
> I felt a mother-want about the world,
> And still went seeking, like a bleating lamb
> Left out at night, in shutting up the fold,–[97]

Aurora does not provide the reader with any medical reason of her mother's death; we only learn that "the joy of giving life" and "mother's rapture" caused her demise. The narrator goes on to describe a portrait of her late mother, which embodies the impossibility of attaining to the idea of a perfect mother, whom she was. The painting is full of ambiguity, Aurora perceives her mother "as both murdered and murderess," be that as it may she is inseparably linked to passing, "which sets the background for Aurora's story in which all women are associated with death."[98] Presumably, it was motherhood itself which has killed her. Instead of being cheerful and rewarding as traditionally presented this poem insinuates the prevalent jeopardy within maternity.

[97] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 5–6. All quotations from this edition will be indicated in the text by parentheses for this Chapter.
[98] Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 44.

3.2 Marian Erle: Motherhood vs Life

The only other discussed woman of "Aurora Leigh" who has a child, other than Aurora's mother, is Marian Erle. She is an antithesis juxtaposed to the aestheticization of death illustrated by the painting of a mother's corpse discussed above.[99] The reality of her motherhood is brought upon by a traumatic experience of rape, which does not prevent the unconditional love she has for her son. The unassertiveness of her character is reflected in her description as innocently childish with "infantile [a] smile" and an undistinguishable mediocre appearance, skin being "not white nor brown" and "Too much hair perhaps / (I'll name a fault here) for so small a head," of "twixt dark and bright" curls. In her essay, Laura J. Faulk convincingly associates these looks with her personality:

> Just as Barrett Browning describes Marian's appearance and manner as ambiguously placed between opposites, she is caught between her innate purity and the dangers inherent in her situation of poverty and immoral family.[100]

Alluringly, it is other maternal figures, who impose trafficking and exploitation onto Marian's life, which torment her since childhood.

Poverty, abuse, and harassment were formative circumstances of her upbringing, both on her parents' initiative and random strangers'. As she reports in the Third Book, the relationship with her own mother in particular was problematic as she would often physically beat her and eventually try to prostitute her.

> 'Good, free me from my mother,' she shrieked out,
> 'These mothers are too dreadful.' And, with force
> As passionate as fear, she tore her hands,
> Like lilies from the rocks, from hers and his,
> And sprang down, bounded headlong down the steep,

[99] Amanda Anderson, "Reproduced in Finer Motions: Encountering the Fallen in Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh," in *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 183.
[100] Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 44.

Away from both–away, if possible,
As far as God,–away! (105)

Finally, Marian manages to escape hoping to reach God. Quite typically of Victorian time, religion plays an important role in Marian's recovery and she finds rescue in faith. She continues to rightfully compare her experience to death itself saying "'And now I am dead and safe,' thought Marian Erle– / She had dropped, she had fainted." (106)

In the Sixth Book she describes in similar terms her rape after Lady Waldemar sends her to a brothel. Objecting to Aurora's suggestion of being impure due to giving to seduction she claims to have been murdered, only functioning for the sake of her son. Because, as she continues to say "When mothers fail us, can we help ourselves? / That's fatal!–" (220)

[…] What, 'seduced' 's your word?
Do wolves seduce a wandering fawn in France?
Do eagles, who have pinched a lamb with claws,
Seduce it into carrion? So with me.
I was not ever as you say, seduced,
But simply murdered.' (207)
[…]
[…] I'm dead, I say.
And if, to save the child from death as well,
The mother in me has survived the rest,
Why, that's God's miracle you must not tax,–
I'm not less dead for that: I'm nothing more
But just a mother. Only for the child,
I'm warm, and cold, and hungry, and afraid,
And smell the flowers a little, and see the sun,
And speak still, and am silent,–just for him! (209)

Although she physically survives childbirth, she thoroughly describes a figurative death indistinguishable from motherhood since they are both caused by belligerent male sexuality. The fatherless child is dependent on her despite its involuntary conception. Regardless, she loves her son unreservedly "[…] (drinking him as wine) / In that extremity of love, 'twill pass / For agony or rapture, seeing that love

/ Includes the whole of nature, rounding it" (202) but remains scared by the violation.

> Not much worse off in being fatherless
> Than I was fathered. He will say, belike,
> His mother was the saddest creature born;
> He'll say his mother lived so contrary
> To joy, that even the kindest, seeing her,
> Grew sometimes almost cruel: (204)

She is detached from her own autonomy unless she is speaking of her child, never fully recovering from the attack.[101]

According to the Victorian narrative, Marian fulfilled her life's duty, yet has nothing else to keep herself alive for. The reader witnesses the character utterly helpless and miserable even after giving birth, unable and unwilling to live for herself only. Her suffering might be initiated not only by her previous unfortunate experiences, but she is also socially scorned as a result of being fallen in the eyes of the public. "'Unmarried and a mother, and she laughs! / 'These unchaste girls are always impudent" (225) suggests Marian's mistress before she demands her to leave. Marian comments on the dreadfulness of her condition and the bleak prospects for her innocent child.

> I might sleep well beneath the heavy Seine,
> Like others of my sort; the bed was laid
> For us. By any woman, womanly,
> Had thought of him who should be in a month,
> The sinless babe that should be in a month,
> And if by chance he might be warmer housed
> Than underneath such dreary, dripping eaves.' (225)

Ironically, her maternity nears the ideal of the Virgin Mary as the circumstances of her pregnancy preclude any interference in her relationship with the child. Enduring the trauma of rape and childbirth, she emerges as a ghostly presence clinging to her

[101] Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 45.

living offspring,[102] suggesting that motherhood is tantamount to living death. Despite being abandoned by the community, she is undeniably one of the most admirable and resilient characters of the plot.

Marian's life is not ruined by her own sexuality but rather by being a victim of a sexual assault. However, societal acknowledgement of Marian's endeavour towards purity remains elusive, especially due to the reluctance of medical professionals to affirm a case of rape. The influence of the intoxicating substance she was given, prevented any signs of physical resistance and physicians would likely be more inclined to attribute any internal evidence of assault to the inherently lacking hygiene associated with her impoverished living conditions.[103] Marian does not become fallen due to the lack of her morals or faith, but she is exploited and dishonoured by other people. There is no redemption for her even when she has acted chaste and faithful out of her own moral conviction and personal religious beliefs. Instead of praising the sacrifice of one's life for the welfare of their child, Marian's story underscores the brutal reality of a situation requiring exactly that. The text neither portrays maternity as a vigorous benefit nor views pregnancy as a detriment to beauty. Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's poem prefers to provide critique of social and, in some instances, medical principles surrounding the concept of maternity.[104]

3.4 Lady Waldemar: Childless Materteral Figure

Lady Waldemar does not have any children despite being married once before and attempting a relationship with another man. Being widowed she intrigues against the bride-to-be in order to espouse Romney Leigh herself as

[102] Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 46.
[103] Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 46.
[104] Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 43.

marriage would redeem her defiling reputation as a dowager. Her physical attractiveness arises from her surface motherly features but does not extend to her character, therefore she signalizes her maternity not through her reproductive capability but her body. The only instance of a motherly caring trait appears when she tends to Romney after the arson incident, which leaves him blind.

> […] 'twas my recompence,
> When, watching at his bedside fourteen days,
> He broke out ever like a flame at whiles
> Between the heats of fever . . . 'Is it thou?
> 'Breathe closer, sweetest mouth!' and when at last
> The fever gone, the wasted face extinct
> As if it irked him much to know me there,
> He said, "Twas kind, 'twas good, 'twas womanly,'
> (And fifty praises to excuse one love)
> 'But was the picture safe he had ventured for?'
> And then, half wandering . . 'I have loved her well,
> Although she could not love me.'–'Say instead,'
> I answered, 'that she loves you.'–'Twas my turn
> To rave: (I would have married him so changed,
> Although the world had jeered me properly
> For taking up with Cupid at his worst,
> The silver quiver worn off on his hair.) (298–299)

He describes her in noble terms, however even then her intentions are not pure considering she acts out on egoistic interest to regain her social standing. She abandons him immediately upon discovering his affection for Aurora which leads to a forfeiture of advantages he could offer her under different, desired, circumstances. This forsaking is highly inconsistent with the conduct expected of a righteous woman, yet it is not completely unjust.

Her honour lies in her persistent beauty evoking images of the ideal woman – a mother. It is only her appearance which creates this illusion as she is neither a mother nor a wife.

> The woman looked immortal. How they told,
> Those alabaster shoulders and bare breasts,
> On which the pearls, drowned out of sight in milk,
> Were lost, excepting for the ruby-clasp!

> They split the amaranth velvet-boddice down
> To the waist, or nearly, with the audacious press
> Of full-breathed beauty. If the heart within
> Were half as white!–but, if it were, perhaps
> The breast were closer covered, and the sight
> Less aspectable, by half, too. (164–165)

Her appearance attacks the conservative idea that childlessness equals decay of femininity as she remains beautiful till a relatively advanced age. She employs her dispositions to manipulate her subject of longing, Romney, to lead him astray from Marian, her rival. This narrative disrupts "the typical stories' plot of the dead or perfect mother and the fulfilled, healthy mother of medical discourse."[105] Contrary to seeking solace in the idealized maternal aspiration, Lady Waldemar's audacious pursuit of self-realization precipitates Marian's languished experience and thereby impeding her own desired life trajectory.[106]

Her frightening confidence further contradicts the typically feminine delicate traits anticipated in a caretaker, neither pregnancy nor sexual desire intimidate her.[107] Despite both Aurora and Marian recognizing this as opposed to their male acquaintances, the narrator indeed interprets Lady Waldemar as a wifely, motherly figure.

> And Romney's marriage vow, '*I'll keep to* THEE,'
> Which means that woman-serpent. Is it time
> For church now? (217)
> […]
> She served me (after all it was not strange,;
> 'Twas only what my mother would have done)
> motherly, unmerciful, good turn. (223)

The frequent objectification on the men's behalf evokes images of Christina Rossetti's "In an Artist's Studio," where the female speaker confronts a man with the fact that he idolizes her and rather than being authentically in love with her as a

[105] Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 48.
[106] Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 48.
[107] Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 47.

person he has constructed his own personal idea of her. Similarly to what Romney feels for Lady Waldemar, the man can cannot comprehend the complexity of the woman's character. The self-awareness of her threatening sexual power in combination with Marian's conception omitting any sexual passion parallel the images of deadly womanhood in the portrait of Aurora's mother. However, Lady Waldemar's overt sexuality and feminine physique result in ruin rather than offspring.

3.5 Aurora Leigh: Mother to Art

For the majority of the narrative Aurora choses to remain single in the conventional way, the plot revolves around Aurora becoming a poet – a writer rather than a mother. She does not wrongfully idealize men, nor is she particularly interested in them sexually or romantically. As a consequence of her mother's death, Aurora might have feared maternity and therefore considered art her one true descendant. At the opening of Book Five she reminds herself to stay humble and lists the many aspects of life in which she finds her poetry coming short.

> And fears, joys, grieves, and loves?–with all that strain
> Of sexual passion, which devours the flesh
> In a sacrament of souls? with mother's breasts,
> Which, round the new made creatures hanging there,
> Throb luminous and harmonious like pure spheres?– (147)

Laura J. Faulk notes that Aurora's intimidation by sexual desire becomes apparent when she disregards discussing the sacramental aspects of it and shifts her focus on the "anatomization of the female body [which] replicates Aurora's denial of her body and its desires, her fear of sexuality and maternity."[108]

[108] Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 49.

Faulk likewise explains that rather than feeling compelled by religious society to restrain from entertaining any sexual thoughts she might have felt her innate sexuality but does not act on it based on personal conviction, fearing its effect on her performance as a poet. She does not want to corrupt her intellectual ambition given she lives through art "And wrote because [I] lived–unlicensed else: / My heart beat in my brain." (32) Marian intertwines motherhood with death via her son, meanwhile Lady Waldemar does the same through her sexualized body whilst Aurora seems to connect death and motherhood through her poetry.[109] Symbolically, "Aurora Leigh" consists of nine books, which just like nine months of pregnancy result in a new creation. The poem concludes with the idea that her art shall create "new dynasties of the race of men,–" (324).

In an era characterized by patriarchal dominance, the protagonist, despite critiquing the prevailing societal structure, continually succumbs to the male gaze. She assesses her value as a poet through the lens of male approval, seeking recognition from a man whose love she craves.

> But I am sad:
> I cannot thoroughly love a work of mine,
> Since none seems worthy of my thought and hope
> More highly mated. He has shot them down,
> My Phoebus Apollo, soul within my soul,
> Who judges by the attempted, what's attained,
> And with the silver arrow from his height,
> Has struck down all my works before my face, (158–159)

The manuscript she perceives as her legacy, representing her creative progeny, is considered worthy solely based on the judgment of Romney, therefore the woman's fate continues to be generally determined by patriarchal decisions. Throughout the narrative, male characters consistently adopt a condescending and patronizing tone

[109] Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 49–50.

toward the protagonist's creative endeavours, consequently her sense of accomplishment as an authoress is contingent upon securing male approval. This notion was familiar to women from marriages as well, since it required complete submission of the wife. Aurora's commitment to her poetic process reflects a nurturing and protective attitude of a mother, her manuscript is too a part of her identify, which ultimately causes her turmoil.

On several occasions Aurora mentions Renaissance artists, which is peculiar for two specific reasons. Firstly, the obvious romantic inspiration and secondly, the Victorian motif of a dead woman which stems from the Renaissance tradition following, for example, Dante's Francesca da Rimini from *Inferno* or Caravaggio's "Death of the Virgin."

> Like Shakespeare and the gods. That's very hard,
> The gods may laugh, and Shakespeare; Dante smiled
> With such a needy heart on two pale lips,
> We cry, 'Weep rather, Dante.' Poems are
> Men, if true poems: and who dares exclaim
> At any man's door, 'Here, 'tis probable (77)

The resuscitation of the Renaissance emblem of thwarted desire indeed previously idealized was deconstructed by Victorian writers in the portrayal of fallen women. The Renaissance-Victorian dualism is underlined in "Aurora Leigh" in the mentions of Dante, Boccaccio, or even Shakespeare. The intersection between these two historical periods facilitated the development of a nuanced and complex aesthetic that sought to reconcile the beauty found in life's brevity with a profound contemplation of death. Poe's conception as well as the rest of the male artists mentioned in sub-chapter 1.4 heavily lean into the sexualization of the dead girl, illustrating her as a subject of sexual and romantic desire. While Rossetti keeps to this side of interpretation employing sapphic imagery, Barrett-Browning tires to stive away from it altogether.

The narrative proves not all are fit or longing to be mothers, Aurora herself assumes a masculine role for the bigger part of the story but eventually marries Romney after his second proposal.

> 'Come with me, sweetest sister,' I returned,
> 'And sit within my house, and do me good
> From henceforth, thou and thine! ye are my own
> From henceforth. I am lonely in the world,
> And thou art lonely, and the child is half
> An orphan. Come, and, henceforth, thou and I
> Being still together, will not miss a friend,
> Nor he a father, since two mothers shall
> Make that up to him. I am journeying south, (226)

Aurora offers Marian protection and a harmonious coexistence, emphasizing the importance of a mother. On the other hand, Marian's childhood is an example of how misuse of maternal authority may lead to [spiritual] death. Therefore, driven by the fear of the potential outcome of her own maternity, Aurora decides that it shall be her poetry which will inspire men instead. To an extent, this epiphany leads to her eventual reconciliation with maternity. The previous justifiable apprehension, which possibly stemmed from Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's own experiences, extends to an irrational fear of sexuality and love for Aurora.

Exploring the oppressive nature and restrictiveness of espousal, the poem emphasizes the correlation between romantic relationships and power disproportion. Drawing from Victorian themes that romanticize death, Aurora addresses the potential dangers of normalizing such restrictive entrapment. Unlike the contemporaneous medical propaganda that presents the misleading positive effects of motherhood,[110] Barrett-Browning challenges the Victorian trope, presenting it as a threat to a woman's body and ambition. Aurora deliberately rejects the traditional femininity in favour of perusing a career and embracing her

[110] Faulk, "Destructive Maternity in 'Aurora Leigh,'" 41.

masculine side. According to Susan Rubinow Gorsky, few contemporaries, of any gender, viewed marriage critically. The predominant perspective regarded marriage as the central focus of a woman's life, an institution significant by default and structurally sound, a permanent union which rendered a woman legally invisible. This perspective found support in most literature, where marriage was portrayed as the ultimate desirable goal for nearly every woman, while also believed to be a natural aspect of almost every man's life. Despite the differing rules governing marriage for men and women, this idealization persisted and played a crucial role in shaping feminist attitudes toward womanhood and marriage.[111]

In juxtaposition, all of the women's fates in "Aurora Leigh" illustrate how the obsession with marriage leads to death and despair. The disproportionate separate spheres conclusively expose marriage as flawed, leaving the woman with what seems like the only alternative: embracing death. Consequently, many were campaigning for divorce reform, including Elizabeth Barret-Browning. She was among several authoress, such as Jane Carlyle, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Harriet Martineau, who signed the petition presented to Parliament in March 1856 by the Married Women's Property Committee. The petition aimed to legally protect married women by demanding their ability to own and control property independently from their husbands. It also advocated for maintaining their own authority during civil transactions and contracts.[112]

[111] Gorsky, *Femininity to Feminism: Women and Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, 19.
[112] Shapiro Sanders, "Marriage and Divorce," 4.

Conclusion

On the basis of the research presented in the first chapter the analysis of "Goblin Market" and "Aurora Leigh" examines the enforced morality, particularly in relation to women's sexuality, and how it has become a revered virtue. The institution of marriage during the Victorian Era brought about legal disparities, particularly stripping women of many rights and consigning them to domestic responsibilities. Marriage for many Victorian women, symbolized a transactional arrangement, requiring them to relinquish political influence for social standing.[113] The chapter explores the complexities of divorce proceedings, shedding light on the asymmetry between men and women in their pursuit of legal dissolution. Surprisingly, early Victorian feminists prioritized issues such as property rights, education, and voting rights over the concerns of a divorce.[114]

In the midst of dominant religious forces, gender became a topic of discussion with Charles Darwin's ground-breaking work *On the Origin of Species*, which challenged established religious beliefs, or other scholarly texts from different fields. Victorian intellectuals, influenced by cultural and scientific perspectives, grappled with issues of misogyny and the glorification of the medieval past. While facing criticism, the feminist movement of the era aimed at establishing political equality, Victorian feminists sought harmony and fairness, opposite to their perception as mere saboteurs of societal norms.[115] Together the two discussed poets, Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, provide a nuanced understanding of the Victorian era, capturing its complexities and contradictions in their art or activism.

[113] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 134.
[114] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 137.
[115] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 141.

When Laura succumbs to temptation it is the bond of sisterhood that ultimately saves her. Rossetti weaves a narrative that contrasts caution with curiosity, embodying societal expectations of women's sexual purity. While Lizzie aligns with these ideals, Laura, after consuming the magical fruit, becomes the epitome of a "fallen woman," sisterhood eventually emerges as a defence against the relentless temptations and the sexualization of women. The protagonists, Lizzie and Laura, grapple with the temptation of goblins' fruit, laden with metaphorical significance as the goblin men symbolize sexual temptation, targeting young women and echoing the unjust treatment of women in Victorian society. Unlike conventional narratives of that time, Rossetti allows Laura's redemption through Lizzie's Christ-like self-sacrifice and avoids the usually tragic consequences of a "fallen woman" – death or exile. The skilful integration of Christian imagery of temptation and sacrifice into the narrative underscores the poem's spiritual dimension, offering an allegory to the original sin of Eve from Genesis. Lizzie's sacrifice and Laura's redemption defy conventional norms by offering a feminist interpretation of the "fallen woman" trope as well as advocating for sisterhood, mutual support, and female solidarity.

Elizabeth Barrett-Browning challenges a conventional portrayal of maternity in her nine-book poem "Aurora Leigh," she critiques societal expectations surrounding motherhood and illustrates its exploitation and deadlines. Focusing on motives of death connected to maternity and marriage, this part of the analysis examines the nuanced perspectives on motherhood and the subsequent societal implications. In juxtaposition to the popular narrative of this time, the complexity of women in "Aurora Leigh" portrays them all as worthy of acceptance and respect, despite their conditions.

Namely, ambiguous imagery is used in describing a portrait of Aurora's mother, which exposes the mystic duality of a dead persona and an enduring legacy. Secondly, Marian Erle's story explores the intersection of motherhood, trauma, and societal scorn, her character challenges Victorian expectations by portraying the circumstances of her conception, which were abusive and engaged in human trafficking. The precarious situation contrasts her irrevocable love for her son, but unfortunately still results in her figurative death, which when intertwined with motherhood exposes the harsh reality faced by women regardless of their moral convictions. Thirdly, Lady Waldemar's physical attractiveness disrupts Victorian notions equating infertility with decay in traditional feminine beauty, she purposefully manipulates her advantages for selfish ambitions rather than virtuous maternity hence questioning the correlation between maternal qualities and ideals. Aurora Leigh's fear of maternity, on the other hand, is linked to her mother's death, leading her to consider art her one true legacy. Considering sexuality and artistic ambition, Aurora's complex relationship with motherhood eventually achieves reconciliation through her poetry.

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