The Forgotten Gothic of Christina Rossetti

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Introduction

Christina Rossetti has often been overlooked; she has been overshadowed by her more famous brother, Dante Gabriel, and sometimes by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, where she played a minor but significant part. Given this, her role as a model for painters, influence on other poets, and her part as a family member, has often been prioritised rather than her own efforts as a writer.

There are many factors contributing to the exclusion of Rossetti from the Gothic mode: she wrote mostly short poems, unlike her contemporary writers, she was a modest writer who did not try to stand out, but instead kept in the background, and the bulk of her Gothic work comes more than thirty years after the official end of the Gothic high period.

Few critics discuss Rossetti’s Gothic poetry, and when doing so, the poems are often criticized from a sociocultural or historical perspective. For example, Suzanne Waldman presents an analysis of the psychoanalytical element inherent in the demonic figures of a number of Rossetti’s Gothic poems, including “Goblin Market”, “A Coast Nightmare”, and “A Chilly Night”, poems that will also be presented here. Unlike Waldman, this essay intends to present these poems, and more, as evidence that not only did Rossetti write individual Gothic poems, but that the greater part of her non-devotional work can be classed as Gothic.

More specifically, Rossetti’s work is rarely appreciated for its engagement within the Gothic mode. Despite her personal angst being expressed in the form of Gothic poetry, her poems have never been fully recognised as such, but more often as Romanticism, fantasy or fairy-tales. Even though these modes are difficult to tell apart, there is clearly a darker theme in the Gothic mode, frightening the reader through stories draped with supernatural horror, mental degradation or merely ordinary death. Christina Rossetti may have been a romantic, but she was a suffering romantic, and while her poems might express love, it is the pain of love, and nothing else. This essay does not aim to define or redefine the Gothic itself, but to demonstrate that the poetry Christina Rossetti wrote that was not devotional was Gothic, and that it should be appreciated as such. It comprises central themes of love, death, and temptation, as well as offering classic images of ghosts, wastelands, and damsels in distress.

Therefore, it is the purpose of this essay to analyze Rossetti’s Gothic poetry and show how she should be included in the greater grouping of Gothic writers of her time. By presenting three central themes of the Gothic: Love, Death, and Temptation, this essay will show how the Gothic aspects are visible throughout her poems.
As a primary source, *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti*, collected and edited by Rebecca W. Crump has been used, as it must be considered the ultimate collection and guide to the works of Rossetti, including annotations and notes. For this essay, Rossetti’s poems were read and studied, and those considered Gothic by either this author or other critics were included in this essay. The poems were then put into groups according to theme, the groups were put in the order Love, Death and Temptation, with temptation coming last due to this theme appearing in “Goblin Market” and “The Prince’s Progress”, which must be considered not only the most popular Rossetti poems, but also the weightiest to analyse, due to their length and rich language.

The secondary sources include Margaret Sawtell’s biography, which has been used often in order to gather the facts concerning the poet’s life. Furthermore, Winters, Waldman and Pardo, among others listed in the Works Cited, have been used in order to analyse the poems and gather perspectives about them, the Gothic mode, and the life of the poet. These secondary sources are invaluable, regardless whether one agrees with them or not, since perspectives are the key to understanding and appreciating poetry.

Christina Rossetti’s religious devotion is impossible to question and almost as impossible to avoid in any reading of her poetry. Sawtell argues that it was in fact the elder sister Maria who was the most pious of the family, although Christina, with her thoughts on martyrdom and spiritual beauty, grew more passionate about her faith as she matured (22). It is easy to imagine that Christina felt some envy of her sister who later came to join the Anglican Community of All Saints to become a nun, something Christina had long considered herself. Maria had always been a great influence on her sister and Christina saw her almost as a saint, something that is reflected in much of her poetry (14).

Sawtell notes how Rossetti’s devotion to the Anglican Church might even have ended her engagement to James Collinson in 1849 because of him converting to the Roman Catholic Church (25). From reading her poetry, as well as from accounts in biographies from her family members (most notably her brother William), it is clear that this event had a tremendous impact on her life and her work. The specific psychological effects of it is unknown to us, but that it deeply affected her is obvious when reading her work from the time. There are signs that her emotional outlet for this event became her work and her religious devotion. Sawtell argues that “something had suggested to [Rossetti] the thought of martyrdom” and that her spirit was “fired with admiration for this particular manifestation of love for God” (21). Sawtell never explains what this ‘something’ might be, but Amy Jo Pardo indicates that a girl that has been plagued by sickness and the threat of death all her adolescent
life would find the thought of martyrdom comforting (134). If it this traumatizing event was the catalyst or not is unclear, but what is certain is that a gloomy outlook on life, and the idea of a spiritual afterlife as a salvation from earthly pain, would help to explain the fascination with the Gothic early in her life.

The Aspect of Love

“Far away a light shines
Beyond the hills and pines”

The aspect of love is central not only to the Gothic, but to most poetry, and Rossetti’s poems are no different. In the poems presented here, however, the problems surrounding love, and the pain and suffering that comes with it, are the central theme. Rossetti uses Gothic imagery to draw up not only environments with typically barren wastelands, but also characters similarly without hope of redemption or salvation.

In “Love from the North” (written 1856/published 1862) the reader follows a bride in a south land who is roughly seized from her wedding day by a man who takes her away to his own country, falsely promising to return her whenever she wishes. As the poem ends, she is bound to him and thus cannot return to her home.

I had a love in a soft south land,
Beloved thro’ April far in May;
He waited on my lightest breath,
And never dared to say me nay. (Crump, I, 29:1-4)

The poem starts with the betrothed talking about her “love in a soft south land” and describes how he is very attentive to her, doing all that she tells him, never refusing her. These sentences are ambivalent as they show a sense of comfort as well as a sense of tediousness. The bridegroom is very passive as the words “waited” and “never dared” (Crump, I, 29:3-4) give an image of servitude rather than love. Furthermore, the speaker presents herself as the dominant party, as she comes foremost in almost all the lines, him following her: “my yes his yes, my nay his nay” (29:8).

When the wedding-day comes in the third stanza, the bride is “pacing balanced in [her] thoughts” and at the same time thinking “it’s quite too late to think of nay” as if she is in doubt, hesitating about the marriage (Crump, I, 29:9-10). Similarly, the form of the phrase “the wedding hour was come” sounds ominous, a foreboding time of trouble (29:9). A reason for her hesitation is found in the line “thro’ April far in May” (29:2) indicating that their love
is new, and that this is making her uncertain. The couple is then meant to give their vows, and the groom answers first (even though we do not hear his answer, we must assume that it is an “I do” since nothing more is mentioned of it), and the bride follows, but does not have time to answer, for another voice answers “nay” in her stead (30:15). The guests and the groom are shocked (there is also a struggle prior to the answer), but the bride is surprisingly calm about the situation. She merely replies to the speaker in a challenging tone of voice what he would do if she said yes.

There is a suggestion in this poem that the bride wants to be taken away, or at least finds this new suitor intriguing. Her hesitation before the wedding and her initial reaction to the man from the north are indicators that this is something that she does not mind, or might even want. The stanza where she challenges the north-man also indicates that she considers herself to be more than the rest of the cowering wedding party who “shrank in fear” (Crump, I, 30:17) while she singularly “stood at bay” (30:18), and that perhaps this wild man can be more of an equal to her than the rest of the group. Like Lizzie in “Goblin Market”, this speaker meets the storm head on with pride, and accepts the challenge of the oncoming suitor. However, the difference is that Lizzie sacrifices herself for her sister, while the speaker in this poem is only acting in her own self-interest, not caring about anybody else.

The new character, this suitor, is described as “a strong man from the North”, “light locked, with eyes of dangerous grey” (Crump, I, 30:21-2), and he urges the bride to suspend her marriage and come with him until she wants to go back again, promising her that he will not deny her freedom if she asks for it, that he “will not say thee nay” (30:24). He proceeds (seemingly without waiting for an answer) to take her away on his horse “in his strong white arms” (30:25) to his own land where, since he never asks her “yea or nay” (30:28), she never has the opportunity to leave.

In the imagery, there are stark contrasts within this poem, clearly showing its Gothic aspects. These contrasts lie in the duality of north and south, personified by the bridegroom and the suitor. The barbarity of the man of the north and his uncivil ways are compared to the gentleness of the southern bridegroom and the other guests. In the same way, the flowers and sunlight of the wedding in the south are contrasted with the wild and rugged “crag, morass, and hairbreadth pass” (30:27) of the north land.

He made me fast with book and bell,
With links of love he made me stay;
Till now I’ve neither heart nor power
Nor will nor wish to say him nay. (Crump, I, 30:29-32)
According to Robert Miles, Gothic fiction is composed of three components: the 
medieval, the barbaric, and the supernatural (443). These three traits are found in almost all 
Gothic fiction, including poetry, in some shape or form. One of the most prominent examples 
of the medieval and barbaric is Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897) depicting the civilised 
westerners traveling to the barbaric Eastern Europe. Here, the medieval and barbaric is clearly 
visible in the man from the north, as he is obviously a barbarian robbing her away to his own 
lands, like a scene taken from any medieval bard’s tale of villainy, and the surrounding 
landscape further witnesses the barbarity that surrounds him.

The man from the north traps her using a number of tools “book and bell” and because of 
her love for him, or their “links of love” she cannot leave him for lack of “power … will nor 
wish” to do so. These lines could be interpreted as the suitor seducing the speaker, in a 
vampiric manner draining her of her willpower with tricks and seduction until she is too weak 
to leave him. In this fashion, Waldman interprets the character of the man from the north as a 
demon, an incubus who comes out of nature itself, claiming the woman for himself. Quoting 
Kristeva, Waldman puts the blame fully on the suitor, saying that the bride is overcome by a 
“seduction that she does not seek but nonetheless cannot resist” (53). I would disagree with 
this notion, and claim that the initial lines describing the bride’s uncertainty and her boredom 
with her husband-to-be are signs of a desire for something different. He is a response to her 
subliminal urges and desires and he fulfils them with no regard to her other wishes or 
responsibilities towards others, such as her husband (52-53).

Regardless of who is the more guilty party, the bride is “borne away” (Crump, I, 30:26); 
the classic image of the rogue carrying his prize away on his horse, and an image further 
enhancing the medieval tones of this poem, and as such, the Gothic sense of it. The north-man 
further “made [her] fast”, which signifies a mental as well as physical binding of her to either 
the marital bed specifically or the house in general (30:29). The book and bell mentioned in 
line 29 probably refers to the Bible and the church bells, and through these images, the law of 
not separating man and wife. This is a hint at the fact that once a wife is taken, she cannot 
leave the marriage, because she will be an outcast in society, a social criticism of Rossetti’s. 
Furthermore, these words could also be interpreted as the ceremonial book, bell and candle 
of the mass or an exorcism, also indicating that traditional rituals (such as marriage) are keeping 
her prisoner with him. This would be a very interesting reference in Rossetti’s case, 
considering her connection to Tractarianism and their focus on traditional Catholic rituals 
that, for example Aviva Briefel, discusses (410).
It is possible to interpret the last four lines as a kind of happiness in her imprisoned state (after all, if it was submission she was looking for, she seems to have found it) but there is also a melancholy tone to these lines, and the phrase “I’ve neither heart nor power / Nor will nor wish to say him nay” (Crump, I, 30:32) insinuates that she is perhaps not content in her situation. Is this perhaps because she cannot be satisfied, as Laura of “Goblin Market”, simply wanting more and more fruit, but still the mouth waters? Or is it because this life is not what she was promised, but he “never asked [her] yea or nay”, so she cannot leave (30:28)?

Either way she seems unfulfilled by her suitor by the end of the poem. Perhaps this man is too much for her and she has gotten more than she bargained for, or perhaps the life she sought with this wild man turned out to be something else than what she really wanted. Waldman argues that Rossetti’s demon lover represents the bride’s “fantasy of submission” and her inner narcissism, and therefore nothing good can come of him (53). Perhaps this is the case, and it would reflect Rossetti’s view that one should not give in to temptation and urges. Again, this might be reflective of her relationship to Collinson and her wish for something that she has been denied either by her parents, Collinson, or herself.

Continuing with marriages, “The Hour and the Ghost” (1856/1862) presents a bride and her groom, who are beset by a ghost who is tormenting the bride, urging her to come with him and leave the groom. This poem in many ways resembles “Love from the North”. Again, the reader is presented with a love triangle where the husband gets pushed aside in favour of another suitor, and the bride is torn by conflicting emotions, divided between the suitor and the groom.

There are, however, significant differences between these poems: in, “the conflict” of the bride the choice is not that between a familiar, ‘easy’ love (the groom) and the thrilling new suitor (the North-man), but instead the choice between the ghost of a man she has loved before, and the man she now loves. This bride is confused, not only because of selfish feelings of desire as the bride in “Love from the North”, but because of duties and obligations to the ghost. He tells her that “once thou wast not afraid” (Crump, I, 41:14) and later to “crown our vows” (40:7), showing that their history is one of love and even marriage. The bride is trying to stay with her groom, and tells him of her conflicting feelings, and how the ghost is drawing her away from him. It is clear from the beginning that she is fighting a losing battle where she “cannot stem the blast nor the cold strong sea” (I, 40:3-4). This indicates an inner struggle and the woman sees no chance of escaping her torment, possibly because it is symbolic of her own
inner conflict and guilt. She describes the ghost as trying to draw her into death where “far away a light shines … lit for me” (40:5-7). She becomes increasingly agitated throughout the poem:

Hold me one moment longer,
He taunts me with the past,
His clutch is waxing stronger,
Hold me fast, hold me fast.
He draws me from thy heart,
And I cannot withhold:
He bids my spirit depart
With him into the cold:–
Oh bitter vows of old! (Crump, I, 41:18-26)

It is shown in lines 19 and 26 that this ghost is connected to promises that she has made in the past, and it is also clear that the bride has no thought of being able to fight back the ghost. In her last stanza, she asks her groom to “forsake me not” (Crump, I, 42:42) and to “keep thy heart for me” (42:44) and “thy faith true and bright” (42:45). She is asking him not to do what she has done, and repeat her mistakes. The bride in this poem is being punished for her sins, which I interpret as re-marrying after the death of her first husband. The references to vows, “bed and house” (I, 41:34) and “for better and worse” (41:35) clearly indicate a marriage. The ghost further calls her “to our home, come home” (41:12) and does not understand why she fears him in death, when she did not in life, and he is taunting her “with the past” (41:19).

If one turns to the antagonist here, in the shape of the ghost, one finds the third component of Miles’ Gothic: the supernatural. Brendan Hennessy argues that Matthew Gregory Lewis (The Monk, 1796) was one of the first writers who successfully managed to create a “marriage between reality and the supernatural” (25). Not only the physical threat was considered (as in “Love From the North”), but also psychological terror was explored, and for Charles Robert Maturin (Melmoth the Wanderer, 1820) the importance of the Gothic was the inner conflict, the disintegration of the mind in the characters (28). In this poem, this inner conflict becomes very clear, as the ghost come back from the dead not only terrorises the bride with his presence but also with his words and her own memories and sense of guilt.

In the final stanza, the ghost foretells her future, giving her a view of his own existence. He tells her that she will watch her groom forget her as she has forgotten her first husband and see him marrying someone new as she has tried to replace him, “the gnawing pain I knew of old” (Crump, I, 42:55-6), while the ghost and bride spend their eternity “in the outcast
weather” indicating the ghostly world between earth and heaven (42:62). Similarly to the
demon of “Love from the North”, this ghost shows no sign of a possibility of redemption or
mercy. Waldman expresses an appreciation of this fact, as Rossetti’s Gothic
“uncompromisingly maintains a schism between illicit, abject gratification and symbolic
conformity” where women are on the verge of (seemingly) happy marriages only to be
tempted or lured away by demons or spirits, a choice which condemns them forever (51).

The bridegroom is given more room in this poem than the one in “Love from the North”,
and in his three stanzas, he expresses his confusion and acts as the reality anchor to his bride’s
visions. He tries to convince her that she is not going anywhere and that the light she sees is
only “the northern light” (Crump, I, 41:10). Furthermore, he is confused as he cannot see or
hear the ghost that she speaks of but “only ourselves, earth and skies, are present here”
(42:28). Finally, he urges his bride to calm herself, saying that she should “let these dreams
and nightmares cease” (42:49), and that no one has spoken of “death or change or aught”
(42:50).

The lines between these three characters indicate that the ghost is, in fact, a figment of the
bride’s imagination. The ghost speaks only to the bride, the bride speaks only to the groom,
and the groom only to the bride. The bride acts as the channel for the ghost’s communication
and this further enhances the sense that the ghost only exists in her mind as no one interacts
with him. He is a hallucination caused by her own sense of guilt over re-marrying after the
death of her first husband, and her mind is now being taken over by guilt as she is about to
remarry. She interprets the northern light as her old husband’s ghost and imagines him
speaking to her.

Naturally our thoughts wander back to Rossetti’s relationship and how it ended. If
Collinson’s religious views were as important to her as the biographies state, it is conceivable
that, for example, the ghost represents God winning back her heart, while the husband to be
(Collinson) is trying to convince her to stay with him. To deny her faith and marry a man who
does not believe the same becomes her “frail frail sin” (Crump, I, 42:51) and it is coming back
to haunt her as she imagines how her new husband will in turn remarry (as Collinson
converted) and live a happy life with his new wife while she is stuck in the ghost-world
limbo, lost between earth and heaven forever.

* 

The final poem of this chapter is the poem “Shut Out” (1856/1862), which tells of a speaker
who is turned away from the garden of her dreams by a spirit, and sealed off by a door with
iron bars through which she peeps in, longing to return. The speaker tries to reason with the spirit, to allow her to come back in, but instead he builds a brick wall to shut her out completely and she is left in a world which is not as beautiful as her own garden.

Interestingly, “Shut Out” is a devotional poem rather than a Gothic poem. The symbols and images in the poem as well as the message within it signify faith more than the other Gothic poems. However, it is included here because these symbols and this message can be directly related to the aspect of unhappy love, being discussed in this chapter.

From the very first lines (as well as from the title of the poem), the words of this poem signify exclusion. The speaker is watching “my garden, mine” (Crump, I, 56:3) on the other side of the door, a garden of much appeal “bedewed and green” (56:4).

From bough to bough the song-birds crossed,
From flower to flower the moths and bees;
With all its nests and stately trees
It had been mine, and it was lost. (Crump, I, 56:5-8)

This stanza describes the beauty of the garden, showing the affection the speaker has for it, and again repeats that she has once been there but “it was lost”, and the feeling of loss and exclusion is thereby further increased.

As the speaker continues to tell of her plight, the third stanza introduces the initiator of her banishment:

A shadowless spirit kept the gate,
Blank and unchanging like the grave.
I peering thro’ said: “Let me have
Some buds to cheer my outcast state.” (Crump, I, 56:9-12)

This spirit is the keeper of the garden and the door into it, and being “blank and unchanging as the grave” signifies that he is perpetual, possibly eternal. The phrasings in the third line, “peering thro” and “Let me have”, reflect a mental state of subordination in the speaker and the reader might imagine a child asking her parents for her toys back, or more sweets. Perhaps this childish tone represents a sense of self-deprivation, of the speaker humbling herself to the spirit, or a sense of deserving this loss inflicted upon her. This idea is further enhanced by the request to “Let me have / Some buds to cheer my outcast state” as the speaker asks, not to be let back into the garden, but only to have a sample of it.

There are different Gothic perspectives in this situation: the spirit that torments the speaker without saying a word gives room for the sublime sense of guilt that haunts the
speaker, as do the inner demons in Poe and Maturin. Furthermore, there are stark contrasts in this poem. For example: the bricks and mortar, being man-made (purposely blocking out the speaker as well as in being designed by men) is contrasted with the natural garden, a point made by Jerrold Hogle (9). This could also be a sign of a material blockade (the wall) from a spiritual paradise (the garden), as will be discussed below.

The act of blocking out the speaker is preceded by her asking for “one small twig from shrub or tree” (Crump, I, 56:14) and simultaneously begging the keeper to “bid my home remember me until I come again” (56:15-16). This last line indicates that the speaker does mean to return to the garden (even though it does not sound like it would be any time soon) and perhaps this shows that she intends to repent for whatever crimes she has committed, in order to reverse the decision to force her out of the garden.

The last two stanzas show how the speaker is grieving at the loss of her land “quite alone” (Crump, I, 57:21). This could be referring to either her mental or physical state or both. In her loneliness, the last stanza tells of the world outside the garden that the speaker must now be content with:

A violet bed is budding near,
Wherein a lark has made her nest:
And good are they, but not the best;
And dear they are, but not so dear. (Crump, I, 57:25-28)

This last statement shows that she is grieving her loss and that nothing can make up for it to the same extent and that she cannot be content with what she has, once she has had the garden of her dreams. In Christian symbolism, both the lark and the violet symbolize humility, as described by George Ferguson, in this case possibly meaning that the speaker must dedicate herself to humility before being allowed re-entrance to her garden (21, 40).

This leads to the question of who this speaker is supposed to be, and why she has been ‘shut out’. As indicated earlier, there is an obvious separation in this poem, which is possible to interpret as being between earthly and spiritual. This points to a biblical perspective where the garden is the Garden of Eden. Kathleen Jones presents this interpretation, wherein the speaker represents Eve (or in the larger perspective, mankind), while the spirit represents either God or a representation of God in the shape of an angel (72). This would explain why the speaker has been cast out of the garden, and why she feels that this is justly deserved, and also that she hopes to come back one day, either by repenting her sins and/or being taken into Paradise after her death. It would also explain the idea that no earthly garden can live up to
the Paradise that is Eden, as well as the violets and the lark, representing that she needs to learn humility before God and not desire to be God’s equal, like the biblical Eve (Gen, 3:5). Interpreting further the line, “I felt quite alone”, it is easy to imagine that either Eve did feel very lonely once cast out of Paradise with Adam accusing her of tempting him (3:12), or mankind is alone on earth in the absence of God.

Crump presents an additional stanza that was taken out of the poem by Rossetti herself:

Oh thought of solace gone before,
Faint thought of love no love could save,
By pathway of the narrow grave
At least shall I reach home once more. (Crump, I, 252)

Why this stanza has been taken out is unclear, but there is a possibility that these lines were a little too optimistic for Rossetti’s Gothic sense, giving the speaker too much of a chance to come back. It is also possible that this stanza would limit the possibility of interpreting the poem and that Rossetti wanted to keep a sense of mystery or uncertainty around it.

Another possible way to interpret this poem is that, like “Goblin Market”, it is a poem about coping with personal loss and temptation, or jealousy. If so, it means to show how the loss of something dear could be devastating. However, the gloominess and generally depressing tone of the poem is more indicative of grieving after loss than coping with jealousy. It is, of course, very befitting the Gothic to leave the happy ending out, and what is clearly visible here is that Rossetti intentionally makes this poem sadder by taking this stanza out, showing how she deviates from an otherwise romantic theme and creates a Gothic tone of her own.

It has also been suggested that this poem was written as a response to the ending of Rossetti’s engagement to Collinson and that it is a poem where she mentally works through her emotions over this loss. As Crump shows in her notes, an earlier edition of the poem had the subtitle “What happened to me” (I, 252), confirming that this poem is indeed reflecting on a personal experience (although we cannot be sure which experience). Following this train of thought, Sawtell has interpreted the spirit to be either Frances and Maria, Christina’s mother and sister, who did not approve of the relationship, or God splitting the couple up because of Collinson’s decision to go back to the Catholic Church (45).

Waldman argues that “Shut Out” shows representations of a psychoanalytical superego in the character of the spirit. She recognises this “ego-ideal” to represent God and considering Rossetti’s beliefs this is a likely interpretation. Religious ideals are here in conflict with the
character’s inner desires (40-41). The spirit represents authority, and this ego-ideal does not speak or give instructions so the speaker is left with her questions and her hopes of eventually being forgiven, or possibly, of forgiving herself.

My own interpretation of this poem is that it is devotional, and that the spirit represents God casting Eve out from Paradise. The symbolism in using a perfect garden is very indicative of Eden and also of the speaker making some mistake of her own, leading to her unwilling exodus. It is feasible that there is some reference here to the relationship between Collinson and Rossetti, but in my perspective, it is not likely that the essence of the poem is regarding the couple. It can be argued, however, that this poem shows the relationship that Rossetti had with God, her feelings of having been cast out, or rather, not being let in to his grace. Even if this were the case, it is easier to fathom this poem as representative of the feelings of all mankind, and not Rossetti herself.

The poems studied above, “Love from the North” and “The Hour and the Ghost”, “Shut Out”, present Rossetti’s view of love. The reader can see how she uses Gothic images of ghosts and spirits to problematize love, and that she never allows her lovers to be happy. It is a profoundly negative view of lovers that is put forth, even though the love itself may be a good thing. The couples are never allowed to remain content, but are haunted, either by their own thoughts, doubts or concerns, or by outer forces working against them. Truly, this is a Gothic view of love and romance, an image perhaps gained through Rossetti’s personal experience of love and loss.

Diane D’Amico argues how marriage was not important to Rossetti; that she advocated a single life consecrated to the spiritual love for God. In Rossetti’s poetry, she shows that marriage and love are threats to each other in different ways, mostly through temptation, further discussed in Chapter Three of this essay (67). However, it is to be unfair to Rossetti to say that she did not value physical or human love. Reading her poetry, the reader is shown a picture of a highly emotional, albeit, depressed writer who is much concerned with human emotions and love. It is clear that the relationship to Collinson and its unfortunate end affected her greatly, as her family confirms in her biographies. She valued spiritual love very highly, but her love for God was something she developed more fully later in life, perhaps as a substitute for other affections that were denied her.

In these poems, her use of fairy tales and Christian symbolism attempts to show how human love can help in reaching spiritual love, even though it might also hinder it (D’Amico, 68). A possible further way to show this is how her Gothic poetry was used to demonstrate the
strength of human love, not only to further spiritual development, but also in possibly overcoming even death itself.

**The View of Death**

“Living had failed and dead had failed”

Being a true Gothic writer, Rossetti spent much of her time devoted to the aspect of death. In the following chapter, it will be shown how she used her Gothic imagery to portray her view of life beyond the grave, and how it affects those who are still alive.

In “A Chilly Night” (1856/unpublished), we follow a speaker who gets out of bed “at the dead of night” (Crump, III, 247:1) to walk to the “lattice alone” and watch for her mother’s ghost in the moonlight (247:2). She is lonely, her friends have all failed her in some way and she also misses her dead mother. Other ghosts haunt her, but she is also visited by her mother’s ghost who tries to speak to her, but fails as she cannot create any sounds. Eventually the ghosts all disappear, and the speaker is left alone by the window lattice.

As in “Shut Out”, the first emotion that comes out of this poem is loneliness and this loneliness is further emphasized in the second stanza as the speaker’s “friends had failed one by one” (Crump, III, 248:5) culminating in the speaker feeling closer to the ghosts than “my friends that had grown cold” (248:8). The ghosts appear (as expected by the speaker, indicating that this has happened before) in the third stanza:

I looked and saw the ghosts  
Dotting plain and mound:  
They stood in the blank moonlight  
But no shadow lay on the ground;  
They spoke without a voice  
And they leapt without a sound. (Crump, III, 248:9-14)

Worthy of notice is that these spirits cast no shadow, just as the spirit in “Shut Out”, signifying that they do not have substance or value (i.e. no worth in reality). They speak “without a voice” and make no other sounds, meaning that they make no other impact on the speaker than the mere visual appearance. This indicates that they might not be real as they could appear only to the speaker and thus not exist in reality.

The speaker connects these visions of ghosts to her mother, and in the fourth stanza she cries for her mother to “make a lonely bed” (Crump, III, 248:17) for her where she is sheltered from the wind, thus asking for a sheltered womb to crawl into, to avoid being exposed to the cold, frightening winds of the world. She continues to implore her mother to
“tell the others not to come” (Crump, III, 248:19), and it is unclear if this is a reference to the other ghosts or her friends, but as she then continues to tell her mother’s ghost that “I need not tell my friends to be sure to keep away” (248:21-2) it leans to the former, as her friends already know to stay away and presumably do not need to be told off. Also, it would be redundant to refer to her friends twice, meaning the first group mentioned ought to be the other ghosts.

This further indicates loneliness in the speaker, but also a loneliness that is self-inflicted and self-perpetuated by her. Perhaps the other ghosts are memories of loved ones that the speaker has lost like her mother, and she is afraid of losing others close to her and therefore drives others away, or perhaps she is merely reminded of the pain of losing them. On the other hand, she claims not to need to drive her friends off, meaning they avoid her anyway for some reason. Either way she feels closer to the ghosts, even though they remind her of death and loss.

Her mother’s eyes are “blank and could not see” (Crump, III, 248:24), again echoing the spirit of “Shut Out” being “blank … as the grave” (Crump, I, 56:10). Nevertheless, her mother’s eyes still hold her “with their stare” seemingly watching her (Crump, III, 248:25-6). Her mother is simultaneously aware that she cannot be heard, she knows that the speaker cannot hear “the message that she told” (248:32) and she tosses her hair and “wring[s] her hands in the cold” (248:35-36) something that can be interpreted as a sign of frustration because she is expected to tell of the speaker’s future, and her coming death, but is unable to do this. No wisdom can thus pass from the dead to the living. However, since we do not know the intent of the ghost, if it is to help or frighten the speaker, we cannot tell if her dumbness is a positive or negative thing for the speaker.

The speaker is terrified by this vision and her “flesh crept on [her] bones and every hair was stirred” (Crump, III, 248:29-30). The significance of this is perhaps the realization that the ‘mother’ is in fact not the same person as she was in life, or that her mother is limited in death and cannot communicate with her, meaning that she is trapped as a wailing ghost that can merely observe the living.

The message the speaker assumes that the ghost is there to tell her (or the message she wants to hear), is “whether [she] had long to wait or soon should sleep in the mould” (Crump, III, 248:33-4). Pardo suggests that the word ‘mould’ could be interpreted in two ways, depending on its definition. Either, this mould could be the fungi signifying decay and death, or it could be a mould to shape things, indicating that the speaker is expecting the dead mother to come back and tell her how she should live her life in accordance with the rules of
society (in this case, the rules for women, specifically) (99). In the latter case, the tossing of hair and wringing of hands is in fact a joy that the speaker will not have to adapt to the phallocentric system, but instead make her own life without judgement from the past, meaning earlier generations (100). This interpretation is slightly misleading, since it is more likely that Rossetti would not have viewed the term ‘mould’ as meaning anything but ‘earth’, as fresh, newly dug earth. This term is also common in, for example, burial services, making it not only more appropriate for Rossetti’s use in this poem, but also shows her use of phrases in order to make her poetry more ominous. What can be more Gothic than freshly dug earth, making a grave for the recently deceased?

The final lines of this poem are as enigmatic as the rest of it: depending on what interpretation the reader accepts, the final lines are either mourning or celebration. “[L]iving had failed and dead had failed, and I was indeed alone” (Crump, III, 249:49-50) indeed show that both groups have failed in their purpose. The question is, of course, what their purpose is. The living have failed to reach the dead in finding out about the future and the dead have failed in telling of what death or the future holds. My suggestion is that the speaker longs to know what to do with her life and where to fit in, in spite of Pardo’s interpretation. When it comes to the lack of solitude and love, the speaker is left alone to realize that wisdom and knowledge come from life and the living, and that no memory of a person can replace real love.

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Another poem depicting love and loss is “The Ghost’s Petition” (1864/1866), where the speaker is crying at night, waiting for her husband’s return from a long voyage. As in a dream, the man does return, but as a ghost, having died at sea. He tells her not to weep for him, as it only disturbs his eternal rest, and that she should not worry for him, as he is happy in his slumber.

This poem is similar to “A Chilly Night” in that it tells of a speaker who is longing for someone to come to her. Both speakers are also visited by a ghost and are then left alone in their miserable state. In this poem, the speaker and her sister await the husband in their home, not knowing what has happened to him. The sister falls asleep while the wife stays awake “weeping, watching, weeping for one away” (Crump, I, 146:24):

There came a footstep climbing the stair;  
Some one standing out on the landing  
Shook the door like a puff of air–
Shook the door and in he passed.
Did he enter? In the room centre
Stood her husband: the door shut fast. (Crump, I, 146:25-30)

These eerie lines echo any classic ghost story and they describe how the husband enters the house after first climbing up the stairs outside. It is suggested that he does not open the door, as “in he passed … [d]id he enter? … the door shut fast”, but instead he has ‘passed’ inside, not entered, as the door is still shut.

The couple talk and she shows her concern for him being cold and damp from what she assumes to be the “night-dew”, and notes that he looks pale (Crump, I, 146:32). She also comments on the fact that he is late, although the context suggests that this is a slight understatement, that he might in fact have been gone for a very long time. The line: “the leaves are falling” indicate that the season has changed and it has become autumn (145:2).

The ghost husband cannot hold her, and says that she can find no comfort “in the shelter that [she] love[s] best” (Crump, I, 146:39):

Feel not after my clasping hand:
I am but a shadow, come from the meadow
Where many lie, but no tree can stand. (Crump, I, 146:40-2)

His description of the grave: “the meadow where many lie, but no tree can stand” suggests that he has died at sea. Despite describing himself as a shadow, not being able to give her any shelter, he is, unlike the ghosts of “Shut Out” and “A Chilly Night”, able to speak to her, and she understands him. He further goes on to comfort her verbally, saying that his only grief is her grief and that he wants her to be happy and not suffer for the loss of him, that he “could rest if [she does not] moan”, that her grief is in fact disturbing his eternal rest (Crump, I, 146:46).

She is startled to hear of his death, but says that she has heard rumours about it, and goes on to complain about the way that he has kept his promise to come back to her. Now she will be alone, as she has left her mother and brother and everything she had to be with him; that he has abandoned her. Nevertheless, she quickly recovers from this initial shock as her curiosity takes over:

“What do you do there, underground,
In the dark hollow? I’m fain to follow.
What do you do there? – what have you found?” (Crump, I, 147:61-3)
However, he cannot reveal anything about the other side, and his experiences there, except that he (and his men) are doing well and that she should not fear for them as their “fear is ended”, their “hope is blended with present pleasure”, and that “tender hand hath made [their] nest” (Crump, I, 147:67-9), presumably referring to God as the hand that has arranged their place in the afterlife. She answers him saying that their experiences sound pleasant and that she wishes to join him, since she cannot find happiness in her life without him, but that she will not grieve him since this “cannot please [him]” (147:74).

This story’s Gothic elements are similar to those in “A Chilly Night”: the stormy sea, the cold night, the lonely woman crying by the window latch alone, the frightening shaking of the door and the footsteps on the stairs are all significant of the Gothic, as well as the falling leaves outside signifying autumn weather. Moreover, the contrast between the cold, dead ghost and the warm, living woman, the ambivalence between dark and light and day and night, the pleasant underworld/heaven and the dreary cold reality are all typically Gothic aspects, similar to those in “Shut Out” and “Love from the North”. Furthermore, the scene itself is obviously Gothic with the ghost of the dead husband visiting the wife to tell her that her grief is in vain and in fact keeping him from peaceful rest.

There are final stanzas in the original manuscript of this poem, which Crump presents in her notes:

“Yours I was for sorrow or mirth
   “My heart is broken: give me a token,
   “Give me a token from heaven or earth.”–

“Dry your tears, mine own loving wife;
   “The token given came straight from heaven
   “That you may bear your most weary life:
   “Nurse our little baby for God;
   “To sing his praises, when grass and daisies
   “Cover us both beneath the sod.
   “Yet his vineyard its fruit shall yield;
   “Yet our Father will reap and gather
   “Sheaf by sheaf all his harvest field.” (Crump, I, 282)
These lines show the further depth of the poem, and one might wonder why Rossetti chose to leave these out. They introduce a child into the story and further implement the idea that God decides when death comes to us, suggesting that her wish for a premature death would be un-Christian (which it is). The ghost also tells her that his visit is a positive one, one “from heaven”, and this is a further indication that she should not grieve for him. Similarly to the stanzas taken out of “Shut Out”, these lines inspire hope for the character and brighten the otherwise gloomy spirit of this poem. Likewise, the religious references in these lines are clearer than the rest of the poem, which could also be a reason why they were left out. As with the stanzas of “Shut Out”, it is fair to assume that these stanzas were taken out for the same reason: in order to make the poem more Gothic, less devotional, and show how there is little hope for the characters, and thereby increasing the dread for the speaker.

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Continuing on the same topic as “The Ghost’s Petition”, “The Poor Ghost” (1863/1866) depicts a conversation between a woman come back from the grave, and her lover who is still alive. The man is upset because the ghost is haunting him and not staying at peace in the grave, and the ghost is in turn upset with the man for being afraid of her, but still having awoken her with his tears. Thus, this poem echoes “The Ghost’s Petition”: the ghost haunting his/her former love, and indeed, Crump shows us that this poem was initially titled “The Ghost’s Petition”, but this was changed for publication (I, 271). Whether or not these two poems are meant to be connected is unclear, but they do have a number of similarities.

The ghost in this poem touches upon the future where the man “know[s] the old, whilst [the ghost] know[s] the new: but tomorrow [he] shall know this too” (Crump, I, 121:7-8), indicating the same kind of secret knowledge that is displayed in “The Ghost’s Petition”. The man is frightened, interpreting her words literally, thinking that this is a premonition of his death. He cries out for “another year, another day” in hopes of prolonging his life (121:12). Crump shows us that these lines were originally followed by another stanza:

“Your body to die or your soul to live
It is not mine to withhold or to give.
You must depart when sentence you receive:
You must come home to me, and will you grieve?” (I, 271)
This shows us that the ghost takes no responsibility for his impending death, and it might also indicate that he has perceived her premonition correctly, since she does not deny that he might die in the morning. However, “is not mine to withhold” resembles the actions and words of “The Ghost’s Petition” and “The Hour and the Ghost” where the dead cannot foretell the future of the living. Unlike the original manuscript, the final poem does not let the ghost answer the man’s appeal for more time, increasing the sense of uncertainty and dread.

Instead, the ghost is offended by his fear and asks why he is afraid of her, and if she is “so changed in a day and a night”, indicating that she has died very recently (Crump, I, 121:13). She asks, since he recoils from her in fear, if he does not love her anymore, whereupon he responds that “death mars all, which we cannot mend” (121:20) and that “I loved you for life, but life has an end” (121:18). He then urges her to go back to her grave “where [her] bed is set” (121:22). The original manuscript then had the following lines:

“Wait for me there on the green hill
side;
Watch for me all my brief life-tide;
Watch where the daisies blow
hundred-eyed;
I will come back to you at last, O promised
bride.” (Crump, I, 271)

Thus, in the original version, the man urges her to wait for him while he lives his life, and promises that he will come to her eventually, giving the poem a much more uplifting tone than the final version. This “green hill side” is a picture of paradise or heaven that is not in tone with the rest of the poem with its dark colours, “drenching dew” (Crump, I, 121:6), “snowdrops” (121:3), and “tears” (121:33). Thus, the stanzas left out are similar to those mentioned regarding earlier poems.

In the final version, we are left with the sad words of the ghost explaining that:

“Life is gone, then love too is gone,
It was a reed that I leant upon:
Never doubt I will leave you alone
And not wake you rattling bone with bone.” (Crump, I, 121:25-28)

Instead she will “go home alone to [her] bed … warm enough for the forgotten dead” (Crump, I, 121:32). Of course, had the manuscript stanza been in the final poem, the ghost’s final words would have been all the more tragic. As she finishes her speech, saying that “life is
gone, then love too is gone”, she shows him how, despite his encouraging words of “I love you yet”, she does not have faith in his love, and she had hoped for him to come to her after death (which the original stanzas showed that he is intending), but has no faith in him any longer, which is something she has “leant upon” (121:26). In the final stanza, in an act of bitterness, she asks him why he has cried on her grave, why his “sobs wake [her]” (121:34) as she has been sleeping quietly “far enough away” (121:35) in “the other world” (121:5). These words ache of sadness as she points out that he has brought her there with his grief, in the same way that the woman crying in “The Ghost’s Petition” brings her husband back from the realm of the dead. As she has asked this, she also asks him to simply let her sleep until “Judgement Day” (121:36).

This poem shows much of Rossetti’s love for the Gothic contrasts, and it displays many of the contrasts that one also sees in “Love from the North”, and “The Hour and the Ghost”, such as life and death, tomorrow and today, and the old and the new. Rossetti uses these distinctions to increase the sense of dread in these poems as well as displaying the Gothic fear of the ‘other’. A popular tool in Gothic fiction, ‘the other’ was often characterized as a shape-changer, a demon that could transcend the boundary between human and inhuman, familiar and unfamiliar. The shape-changer symbolized the fear of the unfamiliar and through psychoanalysis, the fear of the inner self (Hennessy, 34-35). This fear of ‘the other’ in oneself is a natural reflection on the fear of other countries and cultures, religions and pretty much anything deviant from the reader’s surroundings. Thus, Victor Sage finds the other, the shape-changer, which becomes representative not only of the fear of the inner self, but also an expression of xenophobia and a fear of all things unfamiliar in the world. Dracula has become the most significant example of this, the main character having been interpreted as representing archaic societal structures, Judaism, homosexuality etc., that should be hunted down and destroyed (34-35).

In this case, the other becomes representative of an unnatural love/grief for the dead and the contrast displayed most is the man’s love for the natural living bride and his fear of the unnatural dead woman. In her he sees his own mortality, which is something he fears more than he can rejoice in the fact that his love has returned.

To increase the eerie feeling, the man is, perhaps unintentionally, cruel to his former love. She is haunting him because of his love and grief for her and, consequently, his tears on her grave, giving cause for her return. As he attempts to drive her back into her death-sleep, he unwittingly breaks her heart, even in death. “[D]eath mars all” he says (Crump, I, 121:20),
and in order for him to keep loving her she must remain in her natural state of death, and not break the boundaries of the other world.

This entire poem is, of course, very Gothic, with ghosts, the dread of death and the concept of peace in the grave being ruined. Noteworthy about these specific poems, however, are the stanzas that Rossetti has left out. As discussed before, the left-out stanzas would have given a sense of hope to the characters involved, and it is important to realise that this writer is deliberately creating a sense of hopelessness and despair for her characters in order to convey this emotion to her readers, in true Gothic style.

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Continuing with the topic of this other world, “A Coast Nightmare” (1857/unpublished), depicts a vision of “ghost land” and how this world between worlds looks (Crump, III, 268:1). The speaker tells about a friend she has “how early lost!” (268:2) and how this friend is haunting her, telling her “secrets of death’s deep” (268:34) and how “I feel his presence hover … my hair stand up, my body creep” (268:38). The speaker gives a full description of the ghost land, which is a coastal land “by the strong sea” (268:4) where “in every creek there slopes a dead man’s islet” (268:5). Furthermore, “neither night nor day” exists, but only perpetual twilight (268:7-8), similar to that of “The Hour and the Ghost”. Crops grow without being tended; no animals live there, only ghosts “in flocks and shoals … troops, yea swarms, of dead men’s souls” (268:18). There are towns in this land “from sea to sea” (268:20) and there live the “ghostly freemen” (268:25). One can only speculate as to what it is that they are free from, but following the Oxford English Dictionary definitions of ‘freeman’, one can come to the conclusion that the term should be interpreted as “one who is politically free”, i.e. not a slave, or, which is perhaps more suitable in this case, “free from the burdens of the world” (526).

In order to analyze this idea and the world itself, one needs a deeper reading into Rossetti’s view on life after death. A profound religious idea that was debated at this time was the idea of the existence of Hades, a world, or existence, between earth and heaven, where the souls of the living awaited final judgement, i.e. Purgatory. Linda E. Marshall interprets and comments on Rossetti’s own commentary on the Apocalypse: The Face of the Deep (FD) (1892). Marshall explains that for Tractarianism, the idea of Hades was profound, and this “allowed for prayers for, if not to the dead” (56). As we see in much of her Gothic poetry, including “The Hour and the Ghost” and “A Coast Nightmare”, the dead in Rossetti’s poems are merely resting, often sleeping, in an underworld where they are more or less content
(depending on the reading of the poems and the situation of the ghosts). The description of Hades in FD explains it as “the intermediate abode … illuminated by intermediate light, twilight” (206) resembling the “unended twilight” of the world in “A Coast Nightmare” (Crump, III, 268:7). Rossetti comforts her ghosts as she explains that “Hades includes Paradise” (FD, 206) and this could be a way of explaining the term ‘freemen’ as well, that they are free from life and struggle, and have entered the twilight preceding Paradise. Marshall admits that this view of Hades is not consistent between Rossetti’s different writings; the peaceful sleep of “The Ghost’s Petition” (“with present pleasure … we have rest” (Crump, I, 147:69)) is very different compared to the turmoil that is represented in “A Coast Nightmare” (“meteors whirling on their poles” (Crump, III, 269:16)). However, Marshall also reminds us that it is important to remember that the Church view on Hades and the afterlife varied during this time and it would be natural for Rossetti’s views to do the same (58).

This twilight afterlife is reflected in other famous Rossetti poems as well such as “Song (When I am dead my dearest)” (1848/1862). This beautiful little poem tells of a speaker who is on her deathbed, speaking to her lover, instructing him to neither “plant … roses at my head” nor “sing … sad songs” (Crump, I, 58:2-3) since this is no good to her when she is gone and “shall not hear the nightingale” (58:11). She asks that he remember her if he wants or “if thou wilt, forget”, as it will make no difference to her (58:8). Instead she will be “dreaming through the twilight that doth not rise or set”, indicating this same dream state world as in “A Coast Nightmare” (Crump, I, 58:13-4). There “haply [she] may remember, and haply may forget” and the events of this world will make no difference to her (58:15-16). D’Amico explains that the speaker is “rejecting the image of the grave”, since her goal is not the grave, but rather a world beyond it (33).

Even though “A Coast Nightmare” is retold as a dream, the story becomes more than this. The speaker discloses that even when she is awake, her friend “hunts [her] like a nightmare” (Crump, III, 269:37), and tells a “secret [she] must keep” (269:40). Note that this is a “wordless secret”, and thus the reader might imagine that it is as unspoken as the mother’s words in “A Chilly Night”. Nevertheless, it is communicated somehow. It is unclear how this happens, or what this secret is, since she never reveals it to the reader, but it is likely that it is the same secret of the nether-world that the ghosts of earlier poems such as “The Ghost’s Petition” and “The Hour and the Ghost” have been unable to communicate. The irony here is that as the speakers of those poems wanted to know of the future or about the other side, while this one is tormented by this knowledge and is forced (by her own consciousness, perhaps) to
keep it. This Gothic haunting, a ghost transcending the world between dreaming and consciousness, and life and death, is the deepest terror of this speaker, a true nightmare.

The Poetry of Temptation

“Come buy our orchard fruits, come buy”

The final chapter of this essay will discuss the two longest, and most famous poems that Rossetti wrote, “Goblin Market” and “The Prince’s Progress”. Temptation is a subject much discussed by critics of Rossetti, either from a religious, personal or feminist perspective. Here, it will be discussed how this temptation is shown through Gothic imagery and how the characters of these stories are Gothic characters, even though it is possible to interpret them from many perspectives.

Christina Rossetti’s best-known poem, “Goblin Market” (1859/1862), tells the story of the two sisters Laura and Lizzie who are beset by a group of goblin merchants. Lizzie knows to avoid the goblins, but Laura is enchanted by them and eats of the fruit they are selling. She becomes addicted to it, but is unable to find the goblins again and therefore starts to wither away as she does not eat or drink. Being able to hear them, but also afraid of becoming ruined herself, Lizzie does not dare to approach the goblins at first, but eventually does as she realizes that her sister is dying. Risking her life, she seeks out the goblins and asks for fruit, and the goblins invite her to eat with them. When she refuses, they become enraged and try to force their fruit onto her. She resists them and they eventually give up, leaving her to run home covered in fruit juice, which cures her sister.

Being Rossetti’s most famous poem, “Goblin Market” has been reviewed, criticized and analysed endlessly. The poem of the two sisters Laura and Lizzie and their encounters with the seductive goblin merchants has been viewed as a story about moral temptation, children’s greed, and sexual desire and seduction. Mostly viewed as fantasy or fairy tale, this poem can also be interpreted as a Gothic story with its underlying tones of moral deprivation, the tormenting cries of the goblin merchants’ “come buy, come buy”, the stark contrasts between night and day and the two sisters’ personalities, and the goblins’ shift in demeanour between friendly and evil. The rural life of the two sisters, their daily work and the biblical morality of the story can also be interpreted as Gothic elements of medieval times, much as in “Love from the North”.

The first aspects of the poem that the reader encounters are the goblins themselves and their fruit. The goblins are fable-like, animal-men, clearly meant to be creatures stemming from nature. They come hobbling and scurrying down the road in a group, but disappear to
different places in nature (the earth, brook, gale, etc.). The introduction of the goblins at the beginning of the poem is perhaps purposely done to establish them as fabled creatures and a part of nature, and to emphasize that they are not unique to the specific situation of Laura and Lizzie, who are presented later, but rather a part of cultural history.

However cultural they are, it is clear from the beginning of the poem that these goblins are evil creatures. Goblins as such are known throughout folklore to be evil, but Lizzie stresses that “Their evil gifts would harm us” (Crump, I, 12:66). It is not until later that the reader (and Lizzie) really witness their evil as she refuses to eat their fruit and “No longer wagging, purring / But visibly demurring / Grunting and snarling” they attack her fiercely (21:391-3). These beings who, in the beginning seemed quite harmless (only Lizzie perceives them as evil) and even charming, later show their evil nature when crossed.

Also notable in this introduction is that only “maids heard the goblins’ cry” (Crump, I, 11:2, my emphasis), indicating that this story is meant for maids (young virgins). More on that later, however, as in the first part, it is the fruit that is in focus:

Plump unpecked cherries,
Melons and raspberries,
Bloom-down-cheeked peaches,
...
All ripe together
In summer weather,– (Crump, I, 11:7-16)

D’Amico explains that this fruit is deliberately described in “sensuous terms” and that it is seen as “representing forbidden sexual experience … [for] unmarried Victorian women” (69). She further connects the forbidden fruit to Eve, and this becomes a parallel to the experience of “Shut Out”, where the speaker has already sinned and is now paying the price (70). The forbidden fruit is, of course, a classic image from Christian symbolism, as well as having broad sexual connotations, as depicted by Antje Lindenmeyer, making it an ideal image to use in this situation for expressing temptation and sexual seduction (17-8).

After an extensive presentation of the fruit of the merchants, impressively laid out to appear as tempting as possible, the two girls enter the stage. Laura and Lizzie are aware of the threat of the goblins (from common folklore, but also because they have already seduced another girl, “Jeanie”) as they are “crouching closer together” hearing the goblins cry (Crump, I, 12:36). Knowing the danger, Lizzie urges her to look away, not listen to the goblins, to hurry up, and she runs home. However, Laura cannot stem her curiosity; she looks and listens to the goblins, and her virtue is therefore ruined. With a lock of hair, she buys fruit from them
and greedily eats of it, sucking “their fruit globes fair or red” for what seems like an eternity (Crump, I, 14:128). She finally wakes up from her orgy of fruit eating and manages to make her way home, not knowing whether it is night or day. This scene of fruit eating and the vocabulary used further enhances the imagery of sexual seduction.

When Laura arrives home, her sister scorns her for dealing with the goblins, reminding her of Jeanie who died after eating the fruit. However, Laura will not listen and the next night she goes to buy more from them. To her great disappointment, she discovers that she can no longer hear their cries and she weeps bitterly in her bed over the fact that her sister can hear them, but she cannot, and that she will eat no more goblin fruit. Soon enough, she stops doing her daily chores, stops eating and drinking, and starts to fade away. She grows old, “her hair [grows] thin and gray” as she does not eat anything (Crump, I, 18:277).

As Laura is at the risk of dying, Lizzie decides that she must act in order to save her sister, and get her some fruit, something she has been afraid to do before. She goes to meet the goblins, but when they ask her to eat with them she objects and says that she merely wants to bring fruit home for her sister, and not eat of it. They argue that their fruit cannot be carried, that it will be spoiled and no good, but she insists on not eating any, and asks for her money back. At this point they grow angry and violently try to force her to eat of it, pressing fruit against her lips “to make her eat” (Crump, I, 21:407). The description of the attack on Lizzie by the goblins shows her true role in this poem:

White and golden Lizzie stood,  
Like a lily in a flood,—  
Like a rock of blue-veined stone  
Lashed by tides obstreperously,—  
Like a beacon left alone  
In a hoary roaring sea,  
Sending up a golden fire,— (Crump, I, 22:408-14)

Hill argues that the image of Lizzie as a “rock of blue-veined stone lashed by tides obstreperously” is an image of Christ, and the entire scene is a description of Christ’s sacrifice, just as Lizzie sacrifices herself for her sister (464). The image here is two-fold since it is both Christ as the rock, and the words “blue-veined” referring to the blood of royalty. Furthermore, Lizzie is also compared to “a royal virgin town” (Crump, I, 22:418) referring to the Virgin Mary, a royal figure of Christian faith, almost as much as Christ himself (Hill, 464; see also D’Amico, 74 and Peterson, Linda H. 219). This interpretation is perhaps rather hasty, and the comparison of Lizzie to Christ or the Virgin Mary seems conflicting with the sense of
sisterhood that lies over this poem, and there is little else in the poem that would indicate a connection to the two spiritual figures. Furthermore, it is difficult to see the Christian imagery in this scene, since no symbols here are uniquely Christian. It has already been explained that the sisters are blonde, as well as beautiful, and the image of a beacon becomes more descriptive than symbolic. Moreover, there are other images “fruit-crowned orange tree”, “standard” and others that are not directly Christian, and neither does Hill, D’Amico or Peterson address them (Crump, I, 22:415-421). The “lily in a flood” and “rock of blue-veined stone” are not clearly Christian images, and they do not specifically refer to Christ (22:409-410). Furthermore, the “royal virgin town” does not specifically refer to the Virgin Mary, and it is strange, to say the least, that this should be a natural connection. The sisters are virgins (maidens), and it is as simple an explanation as anything to say that Rossetti has chosen this merely as an image of a proud, innocent city besieged by their enemies (22:418).

Lizzie withstands their attack by merely resisting them and not opening her mouth, “lest they should cram a mouthful in”, and after a long time, they give up, throw her penny back to her and go away (Crump, I, 22:432). She runs home, covered in fruit juice, and on her return, she asks Laura to “suck my juices … eat me, drink me, love me” (Crump, I, 23:468-71). Laura is anxious for her sister, and asks if she has tasted the fruit as well and must now dwindle away like she has, but she does accept her offer and licks the fruit juice from her sister’s face.

This is one of the most famous and debated scenes of the poem, when Lizzie comes home with goblin fruit for Laura:

“[Laura] did you miss me?
Come and kiss me.
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
...
Eat me, drink me, love, me;
Laura, make much of me:
...
[Laura] clung about her sister,
kissed and kissed and kissed her:
...
She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth. (Crump, I, 23-4:465-92)
Lindenmeyer claims that food (and especially fruit) is intimately connected to lesbian sexuality to the verge of being “integral to lesbian existence” offering another interpretation of this poem as a celebration of lesbian sexuality and sisterly love (19). D’Amico sees Lizzie’s cry of “eat me, drink me, love me” as a further reference to Christ and also the Christian Eucharist. She further argues that the goblins and their fruit represent a temptation of the flesh and that this scene depicts the spiritual redemption of Laura through Lizzie’s sacrifice. D’Amico also maintains that this scene is not to be interpreted sexually, but merely as a celebration of spiritual love (78). Hill, however, has interpreted this story as an allegory of sexual development. In her article she argues with D’Amico and, although she views the goblins similarly as offering earthly, sexual temptation (that causes one to wither and die), she claims that Lizzie instead brings Laura earthly, erotic, sexual delight which simultaneously brings her closer to the love of God and the “spiritual union with Christ” (465).

Hill goes further in erotic interpretation when viewing the convulsions Laura suffers before regaining her true self as orgasmic (465-6). After her feast on the fruit of her sister, Laura experiences violent spasms and collapses onto the floor, and is put to bed for a night of anxious tending by her sister. When morning comes, Laura’s golden hair colour has returned and she is herself again, the spell of the goblins having been broken after this, seemingly sexual, relief. Hill agrees with D’Amico that there are scenes of “the erotic nature of human desire” in this poem, but she also suggests that Rossetti is “striving for something far more subtle in her depiction of desire” (466). Sara Fiona Winters argues that these scenes are in no way intended to be interpreted erotically, but rather that “to Rossetti, it could well have seemed that the representation of two sisters embracing automatically excluded any hint of eroticism from the physical expression of love”. The fact that the story is about two sisters is evidence enough that Rossetti wanted to focus on a non-sexual relationship (19).

It is presumptuous to say that these images must indicate a sexual relationship. It is quite clear in other parts of the poem that the two girls are sisters, and that this is sisterly love expressed emotionally. Lizzie is defending, protecting and rescuing her sister by any means necessary, and the fact that the two are embracing or kissing does not mean that there is a sexual connection between them. I could agree that one can read into the text that what the goblins are offering is something dangerous, something that kills, regardless if it is sex, alcohol or narcotics, but it is impossible to say if this scene celebrates spiritual or physical love, if anything. Rather, I would argue that this poem is a Gothic take on the classic fable of not accepting candy from strangers, not going into the forest or down to the brook, and other stories mothers have always told their children. Considering the moral of the ending, and
Rossetti’s engagement with nursery rhymes for children, it seems reasonable that one of her longer poems similarly would warn children about the dangers of the world. To wrap this into a Gothic tale of evil goblins is merely what Rossetti does best.

C.C. Barfoot comments that the fantasies of “Goblin Market”, as well as in other examples of Rossetti’s poetry, are representative of a “craving hunger for love in body and soul” and that these fantasies can only “function in a dream or … fantasy” (149). This would be indicative of a schism between human and spiritual love, which perhaps existed within Rossetti herself, where spiritual love was allowed to flourish, but physical love was to be kept hidden away. Depending on one’s interpretation of the imagery of this poem, I see no reason why these two forms of love must be separated in this poem. Considering the depth and the versatile imagery of Rossetti’s poetry discussed throughout this essay, it is relevant to imagine that this poem reflects Rossetti’s views on spiritual and earthly love, as discussed earlier in reference to “The Hour and the Ghost” and “Love from the North”. As I have argued before, it is possible that, being denied the love of Collinson, Rossetti would come to more profoundly dedicate herself and her love to God. This would explain how the later part of her poetry came to be more devotional, and the Gothic poems are produced around 1856-1864. I do not believe that Rossetti consciously hid away her love for people or men, but it is possible that she was so devastated by the separation from Collinson that she could not again face the idea of spending her life with a man.

The poem ends with a stanza where the two sisters are grown old and have children and husbands of their own. Laura tells the story of the goblins and how Lizzie saved her, and how fortunate she was to have a sister to look after her. Mainly because of this verse in the end, the two characters of Laura and Lizzie have been interpreted as representing Christina and Maria Rossetti. I agree with this interpretation of Christina as the easily tempted, tormented Laura, and Maria as the strong, almost saintly Lizzie who rescues her sister from certain ruin. Christina did indeed think that she was dying much of the time of her youth and perhaps she thought that this was her own fault, that she was not good enough to deserve life, or that she must have sinned to deserve the illnesses she suffered from (Sawtell, 55-8).

It has been speculated that what Maria ‘saved’ Christina from was the engagement to Collinson (Sawtell, 25). This idea sounds appealing, and it is possible that Rossetti had this specific event in mind when dedicating this poem to her sister, and that Maria saved her from her own inner thoughts and anxiety about it (Crump, I, 234). However, since there is no telling how Maria would have saved her from this specific engagement, this becomes mere speculation. Perhaps Maria saved Christina from the temptation of reuniting with Collinson,
or from a melancholy that she found herself in after the relationship was over. From what we know of Christina’s life, the latter is more probable than the former. Christina’s faith was arguably strong enough to not go back to Collinson, but she did have many inner goblins that she fought and the closing stanza, praising sisterhood, favours the interpretation that she was saved by her sister:

“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.” (Crump, I, 26:562-67)

* 

In the second major poem of Rossetti’s, “The Prince’s Progress” (1861/1866), this theme of temptation is continued. This story tells the tale of a prince travelling across the land in order to reach the castle of his princess bride. He meets people along the way who slow him down and when he eventually reaches the palace of his bride, he discovers that he is too late and she has already died. This poem is Rossetti’s version of Sleeping Beauty, giving it a significant timely Gothic atmosphere such as we have seen in her other poems, here enhanced by the inclusion of a prince, princess, a palace and other typically medieval aspects. The big difference from the original Sleeping Beauty is that this story, being a Gothic one, does not end happily as the prince eventually turns out to be too late to reach his bride on time.

What is interesting about the structure of this poem, as Crump tells us, is that "the Princess Progress” was first written as a separate poem called "The Fairy Prince Who Arrived Too Late” with lines 481-540 written in 1861, and lines 1-480 added by Rossetti in 1865 (Crump, I, 266). The first time this poem was written, it merely depicted someone (except for the title, not necessarily a prince) being too late, and his future bride having died while waiting for him. Crump does not explain why the first 480 lines were added to the poem, but it does give the story more of a background and even more allegory to delve into.

Simon Humphries connects the title of this story to John Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress, as does D’Amico. Similarly to Bunyan’s story, this is also a tale of a pilgrim on his journey, travelling through an allegorical, biblical landscape (Humphries, 684). Even though this prince is not very successful, never reaching his Christ-like princess waiting for him, the title is enough of a hint for us (not to mention the audience at the time of publishing) to read
this story from a religious perspective. Humphries further argues that “the most convincing recent readings of both “Goblin Market” and “The Prince’s Progress” have been those engaged with their religious symbolism” (685). He further states that there is no reason why these readings should collide with the feminist readings of Rossetti’s work, since her depiction of her Christian female heroes vouches for both, but that the theological design of her poetry must be taken into account (685). Using “The Prince’s Progress” as an example, Rossetti includes a wide range of references and details meant for “minds such as [hers]”, signifying those who have faith and set great store by the religious symbolism (qtd in Humphries, 685).

On his journey the prince has three encounters, all representing some form of temptation: The first one is a “wave-haired milkmaid, rosy and white” (Crump, I, 96:58) who gives him milk to quench his thirst and then requests that he stay with her “for one idle day” (97:82) as a fee. For the sake of courtesy, he submits to this request and stays with her for one day and one night. There is evil in this milkmaid, as we can see in the following lines:

So he stretched his length in the apple-tree shade,
Lay and laughed and talked to the maid,
Who twisted her hair in a cunning braid
   And writhed it in shining serpent-coils,
And held him a day and night fast laid
   In her subtle toils. (Crump, I, 97:91-6)

Even the narrator indicates that there might be something wrong as she asks if the milk maid is “a maid, or an evil dream?” (Crump, I, 97:68). The encounter with the dangerous milkmaid represents sexual temptation as the prince is tempted by the milk and the woman’s beauty in the same way as Eve (and the serpent) tempts Adam in Eden with the apple. Furthermore, she writhes her hair “in shining serpent coils” and is standing underneath an apple tree, two other obvious references to the story of Genesis. The prince is guided by his own greed for milk and lust for beauty, as well as his own pride, when deciding to stay with her for the night. He does not even consider the price of the milk before drinking it, but “quaffed” it down (97:63). Humphries also argues that this encounter indicates that this journey is the same as the one in The Pilgrim’s Progress, both starting in the Garden of Eden in Genesis and ending in Revelations (685).

The second encounter, after a long walk through a wasteland resonating of the Valley of the Shadow of Death is with an old man in a cave (Humphries, 687). This man is the visual opposite of the maid, and so is the land around him. In fact, much as in the other Gothic
poems discussed here, the nature scenes of this journey shift in character: the lush forests and green woodlands where the milkmaid awaits are contrasted to the cave and crags in the volcanic wasteland before the encounter with the old man; the stormy river and the mountain the prince has to cross by the end are opposed to the safe haven of the three nurses, and finally, the valley that he reaches in the end is described as an earthly Paradise.

The man in the cave, wherein the prince enters, is old and worn:

The veriest atomy he looked,
With grimy fingers clutching and crooked,
Tight skin, a nose all bony and hooked,
And a shaking, sharp, suspicious way;
Blinking, his eyes had scarcely brooked
The light of day. (Crump, I, 100:181-6)

He is also immediately recognised as some sort of wizard, “peering into a seething-pot, in a world of trouble” (Crump, I, 100:179-180). His demeanour is grim and evil-looking, and he says himself that he is “mildewed for the grave” (101:213). The prince, however, does not fear the man (as he is supposed to), but asks him for lodging for the night. He learns that in return he must help the old man with the brew he is stirring, of which the prince will also have a share when it is done. This is revealed to be an Elixir of Life, a potion giving youth and life to whoever drinks from it. The prince accepts to use a pair of bellows until “the steam curls rosy and free” and the “broth’s boiled enough” (101:209-10). He also thinks to himself that he will share his Elixir of Life with his bride when he reaches her, and therefore she will forgive the delay.

However, it turns out that this task takes longer than expected (although how long is hard to say from the context). Not until the old man’s “hundredth year was full”, and he dies, is the brew finished, the last touch being that the old man dips his fingers in the pot as he dies (Crump, I, 101:235). The prince makes sure that the man is really dead, takes some of the brew in a phial and sleeps outside the cave for one night before continuing on his way.

In this encounter, the prince comes face to face with age and he is offered a chance to stop the aging process and have eternal life, a sort of egotistical or hubris temptation, where he is given the chance to have God’s power over life. Here, he is also considering his bride and how she will live on together with him, but it is still sufficient to say that this is in his own interest, and therefore it is egotistical. The line “Life might miss him, but Death the blight / Was sure to find” refers to the old man, but is also much appropriate for the prince, as a reflection on how foolish it is to spend time in looking for more life, when one should
appreciate the life one already has, since death always finds us (101:233-34). Thus, this is a more general concept of seizing the day.

Humphries discusses the old man in the cave and his connection to the Jew of Gothic literature, saying that all evidence point towards an interpretation of this character as a Jew, being an outcast living in a cave, having a “hooked nose” (Crump, I, 100:183, and being comparable to Jewish characters of Gothic literature, like in Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) (Humphries, 688-91). However, a wandering Jew is not Gothic as such, and this is rather a possible reference to Maturin’s character, and thereby a sign of Rossetti connecting her story to her Gothic predecessors, knowing full well that her Gothic readers would appreciate it.

The third encounter is by accident as the prince tries to swim a stream, which turns out to be too strong for him. He almost drowns, but is saved by three women:

So the prince was tended with care:
One wrung foul ooze from his clustered hair;
Two chafed his hands, and did not spare;
   But one propped his head that drooped awry:
Till his eyes opened, and at unaware
   They met eye to eye. (Crump, I, 104:338-40)

They nurse him back to health, one of them being more caring in her treatment than the others, when the prince hears her “thrilling tender voice” claiming that he is “safe with [her]” (Crump, I, 104:345-8). These women ask him to stay with them, as they claim that he is safer and more comfortable with them and “all the sweeter if long deferred … is rest in the end” (105:353-4). He argues with them, and the narrator makes it clear that we should not judge him too harshly, since:

Had he stayed to weigh and to scan,
He had been more or less than a man,
He did what a young man can
   Spoke of toil and an arduous way–
Toil tomorrow, while golden ran
   The sands of today” (Crump, I, 105:358-60).

This is a sign that the prince is merely human, and cannot help falling into temptation. Time passes as he loiters with his rescuers, trying to explain why he has to leave.

As the third encounter of this story is by accident, it therefore also represents him coming into contact with *danger*. This becomes a perspective for the character as he is rescued by
three nurses who tempt him with *comfort*. They lure him with their talk of safety and taking the easier way out instead of the harder, more honourable road. Even though he lingers with them for a long time, he manages to do the right thing and carries on. Humphries identifies this passage as the part in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* where Christian must cross the River Death in order to come to the Promised Land. As we already know, the prince of our story fails this test as well, as he lacks the faith required and instead he is humiliatingly ‘rescued’ by the three women (693).

The three different encounters in this tale display prominently Gothic characters: a tempting succubus in the shape of a milkmaid, an old wizard in his cave concocting his brew of trouble, and the three sirens or witches who try to lure him into staying with them in comfort, making this one of the few Gothic poems where several types of demons appear.

As already mentioned, our prince is inescapably human, which is what Rossetti is here trying to show. At several points on the road we are reminded of this: he tarries and lingers, becomes lonely, and is easily distracted. Physical weakness in the shape of thirst brings him into his first encounter; mental weakness, induced by solitude, is what brings him into the cave with the old wizard; and foolhardiness is what takes him into the river and the arms of the three girls. The reader should not forget that he is also presented with many admirable qualities, such as strength, bravery, courtesy and decency. What he lacks is faith.

This poem ends with the death of the princess, who has waited a long time for her suitor to come to her. The prince’s guilt-ridden dread of being too late in spite of having crossed mountains and rivers is an interesting Gothic perspective in this poem. The lamentations of the princess’s maids “too late for love, too late for joy, too late, too late!” taunt the prince as he reaches the castle (Crump, I, 108:481-2). They explain the virtue and value of the late princess to the prince as he arrives and tell of what he has missed. They also say that he should not mourn her in death, since he is not worthy of her. They say that “[he] should have wept her yesterday, wasting upon her bed”, indicating both that he is just too late, but also that if he has not been there for her at the end, he may just as well not mourn her when she is gone (110:531-2). Metaphorically, she has wasted away in her love while he has been living his life on the road. She has waited for him her whole life, and she has now grown old and died. This Gothic image of not only being too late, but also being taunted by onlookers for tarrying and failing in your assignment, at the same time as you lose the person you love, is horrible and painful. It truly shows Rossetti’s emotions concerning the prince and his assignment, as well as her capability of using the Gothic to instil dread and terror in her readers and her characters.
Winters (together with Peterson) claims that this poem is representative of Christ making his Second Coming. The princess in this case represents Rossetti herself: impatient and angry with God that he does not come to save her from her existential anxiety (22). The prince of our story faces the temptations of Christ: sustenance (the milkmaid), the forty days and nights in the desert (the wasteland), the temptation and offerings of Satan (the old man offering eternal life), and the three women. However, Winters states that “The Prince’s Progress” is not meant to be a political or religious attack on the Church, but rather a personal expression of frustration with God (22-24). However, clearly the prince cannot be Christ, as all evidence points to him being human, having human weakness, being frightened of death and ultimately failing in his quest. Not only does he fail in his quest, but he also fails most of his tests of temptation, unlike Christ who is not tempted by the Devil’s different offers. Moreover, this story being a Gothic story, it is clear from the beginning that he would never succeed, Rossetti even wrote the ending before she wrote the beginning, creating a man who would never be able to do what Christ did: overcome temptation, death and save his bride.

Peterson instead claims that the poem was written with Dante Gabriel in mind. Indeed he was much engaged in the creation of it, among other things suggesting a tournament scene be added, although this idea was rejected by Christina, as she argued that this would have made her prince into a hero, which he is obviously not, something which further enforces the fact that he is not meant to symbolise Christ (222). Mary Arsenau further states that the last part of the poem, lines 481-540, were written with Dante Gabriel in mind, and more specifically his tragic relationship with Elizabeth Siddal, who died not two years after their long-postponed marriage in 1860. It does seem reasonable that this would be Christina’s way of writing a Gothic poem about her brother, the prince of the family. Considering Dante Gabriel’s lack of faith, Arsenau makes the similarly insightful argument that the poem was not meant to criticise the fact that Dante Gabriel took a long time before he married Elizabeth, but rather his inability to read “signs and events symbolically and spiritually”, much as the lazy pilgrim who cannot see what lies beneath the surface of his encounters, (291-3) and who is easily tempted from the path of the true faith by demons. If this allegory is correct, it further enforces Rossetti’s appreciation of the Gothic and how, as a very personal metaphor, she uses its capability to show impending doom and hopelessness.
Conclusion

Christina Rossetti was an immensely productive poet, and her considerable contribution to the Gothic must not be overlooked. The poems presented in this essay and the analysis of them have intended to show how this poetry not only individually contains all the aspects of the Gothic mode, but also how they represent the larger oeuvre that is Rossetti’s Gothic poetry. Within these poems we find three clear themes: love, death and temptation, all relevant for the specific style of Rossetti’s poetry, and all reflecting the life and religious views of a Victorian woman poet. Not only are these themes presented in these poems, but they are also presented in a distinct, Gothic fashion, creating a sense of dread in the situation of a marriage and fear for sinful temptation that leads to death.

In “Love from the North”, “The Hour and the Ghost” and “Shut Out”, the theme of love is addressed in various ways, and these poems show Rossetti’s gloomy outlook on human love after her personal experiences with James Collinson. Her contrasting of physical love and the spiritual love of God shows how love leads to conflict and suffering, more often the sublime internal struggle, rather than open conflict. She found shelter later in life in the spiritual love of God, and it is clear that whatever reason she had for breaking off the engagement with Collinson, it left its mark on her life and work for a long time, possibly guiding her into a lifetime of worship and service. This shows how a writer of Gothic poetry comes to live a very Gothic life of her own, constantly being haunted by her own ghosts of a past love life. These poems all follow a distinct pattern, containing roughly the same element: victimized women who are terrorised or abandoned by male antagonists. This is a feature typical for the Gothic, and it is used here with a purpose: to show Rossetti’s view of love and how, for her, it never had a happy ending.

In “A Chilly Night”, “The Ghost’s Petition”, “The Poor Ghost”, and “A Coast Nightmare”, Rossetti shows the reader her views on what happens when we die and leave the people who love us behind. In true Gothic spirit, she questions the bliss of death and the happiness that comes in the afterlife, whether our loved ones come to Hades/Purgatory as a suspended conscious sleep before Paradise, or as unconscious peace in the grave before Judgement Day. Unlike the three other poems, we find here another, equally typical, Gothic element of the restless ghost or spirit that inspire guilt and fear into the protagonist. Rossetti uses this element to demonstrate and warn of what happens when we do not make peace with our lives before we leave them, and how our premature death affects those who care about us.
In her most famous poems, “Goblin Market” and “The Prince’s Progress”, Rossetti shows the view of temptation and how it influences people’s lives: How it is possible to be saved through somebody else’s love and simultaneously how we are all human, and therefore prone to err and fail in life. “Goblin Market” is one of the few poems in Rossetti’s Gothic oeuvre that has a happy ending. However, the evil goblins and the sacrifice of the sister, combined with the horror of watching a family member slowly wither away must be considered Gothic enough. As in the first three poems, “Goblin Market” again shows victimized women haunted by evil spirits who threaten them sexually, while “The Prince’s Progress” depicts a fruitless rescue-attempt doomed to fail from the start followed by a haunting memory of the Prince’s failure. These poems show how Rossetti develops the Gothic mode into her own and how she uses her personal experiences and language to portray her emotions through it.

It is important to remember that the themes of these poems also connect and that several of them contain more than one theme. Taken together, they present not only the imagery of ghosts, storms, darkness, gloom and demons, they also show the essential spirit of the Gothic and the topics of temptation, guilt, loss and suffering. As an author who is already considered one of the foremost among the Romantic and Devotional poets, Rossetti proves also to be a master when it comes to the Gothic.

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