

# CHRISTINA ROSSETTI'S *GOBLIN MARKET* MARKET: CENTRAL IDEAS

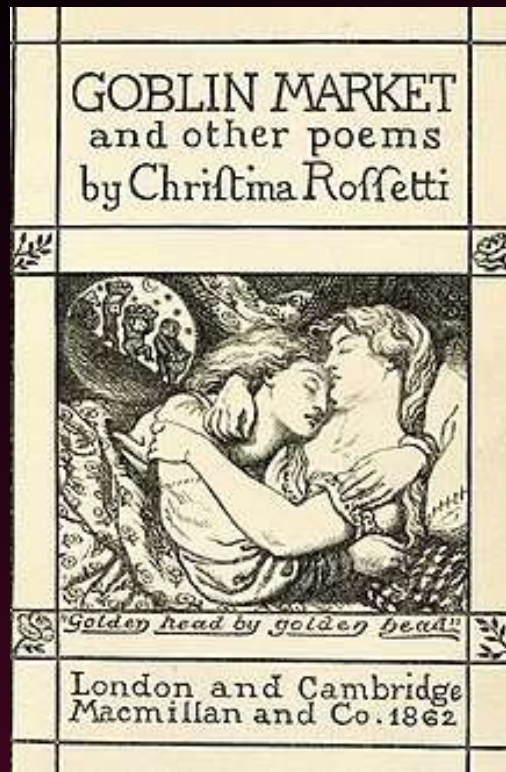


Illustration of Laura and Lizzie by D. G. Rossetti

# The Angel in the House

- The angel in the house is a powerful Victorian middle class ideology of womanhood. The angel in the house is a model for all ranks of Victorian women and a symbol of oppressed women confined in the gilded cage of Victorian male domination. Confining women to the home meant keeping them pure, innocent and away from the immoral influences of the world. The angel in the house is the ideal of behaviour that became entrenched in the material, meaning that people are expected to conform into whatever is laid out for them in this type of ideal. The angel in the house came from the idea that women must be as moral and proper as what society imagined Queen Victoria to be. Although the angel in the house may seem directed solely at women, it shows a family norm that is specifically English.



The term possibly originated from the concept of Victoria as the “Angel”, as indicated by Albert’s letter to her.

- My dearest, most beloved Victoria.

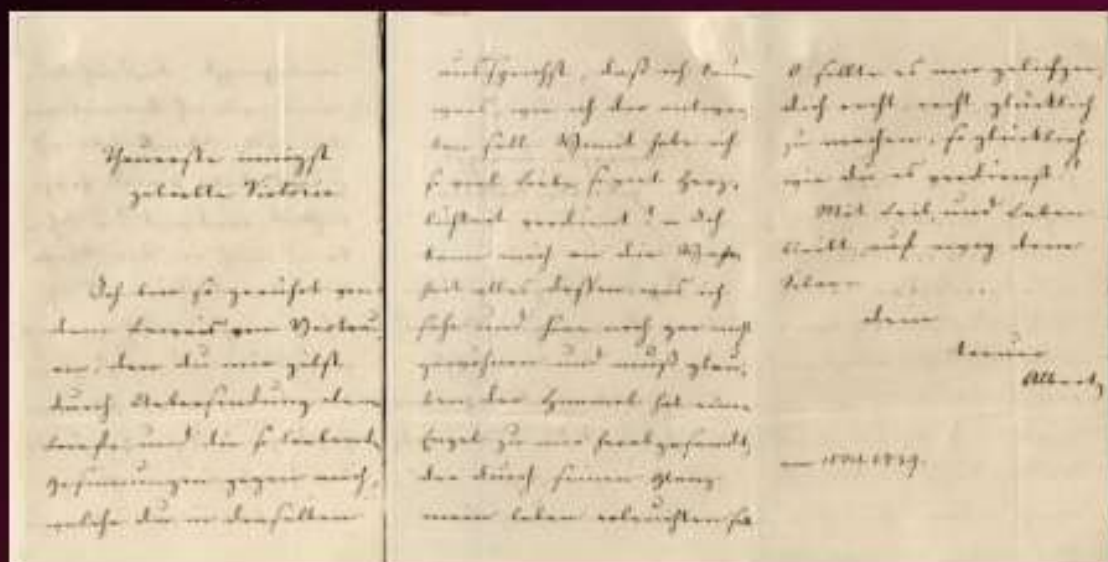
I am so touched by the evidence of trust that you give me in sending your letters, and by the so affectionate sentiments that you express towards me therein, that I scarcely know how to reply to you. How have I earned so much love and so much warm-hearted kindness?

- I am still unable to accustom myself to the truth of all that I see and hear, and can only believe that Heaven has sent down an angel to me, whose radiance is intended to brighten my life. May I succeed in making you quite quite happy, as happy as you deserve to be!!

With body and soul I remain for ever your slave

Your devoted Albert

on 15 Oct. 1839



An image of the letter written by Prince Albert

QUEEN VICTORIA PREFERRED TO BE PAINTED OR PHOTOGRAPHED AS AN ICON OF FAMILY VALUES. SHE ACTIVELY PROMOTED THE IMAGE OF IDEAL WIFE AND MOTHER.





“The Angel in the House” was also the name of a widely unpopular narrative poem by Coventry Patmore, first published in 1854, and expanded until 1862.

Man must be pleased; but him to please  
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf  
Of his condoled necessities  
She casts her best, she flings herself.  
How often flings for nought, and yokes  
Her heart to an icicle or whim,  
Whose each impatient word provokes  
Another, not from her, but him;  
While she, too gentle even to force  
His penitence by kind replies,  
Waits by, expecting his remorse,  
With pardon in her pitying eyes;  
And if he once, by shame oppress'd,  
A comfortable word confers,  
She leans and weeps against his breast,  
And seems to think the sin was hers;  
And whilst his love has any life,  
Or any eye to see her charms,  
At any time, she's still his wife,  
Dearly devoted to his arms;  
She loves with love that cannot tire;  
And when, ah woe, she loves alone,  
Through passionate duty love springs higher,  
As grass grows taller round a stone.



**The first few lines of the poem**

- Women did, though, require a new kind of education to prepare them for this role of 'Angel in the House'. Rather than attracting a husband through their domestic abilities, middle-class girls were coached in what were known as 'accomplishments'. These would be learned either at boarding school or from a resident governess. In Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* the snobbish Caroline Bingley lists the skills required by any young lady who considers herself accomplished:

"A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages... and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions." (ch.8)



Images from *Bowles' Drawing Book for Ladies* (1785) by Heckle A. Bowles





- A young girl was not expected to focus too obviously on finding a husband. Being 'forward' in the company of men suggested a worrying sexual appetite. Women were assumed to desire marriage because it allowed them to become mothers rather than to pursue sexual or emotional satisfaction. One doctor, William Acton, famously declared that 'The majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind'.
- Girls usually married in their early to mid-20s. Typically, the groom would be five years older. Not only did this reinforce the 'natural' hierarchy between the sexes, but it also made sound financial sense. A young man needed to be able to show that he earned enough money to support a wife and any future children before the girl's father would give his permission. Some unfortunate couples were obliged to endure an engagement lasting decades before they could afford to marry.



AND WHEN SHE AROSE FROM HER NAP

# DOMESTIC ANGEL



THE HOUSE WAS MIRACULOUSLY TIDY.



John Ruskin's lecture "Of the Queen's Gardens" is a prime example of the distinction between women's passive nature and men's active role within the public sphere, 1865.

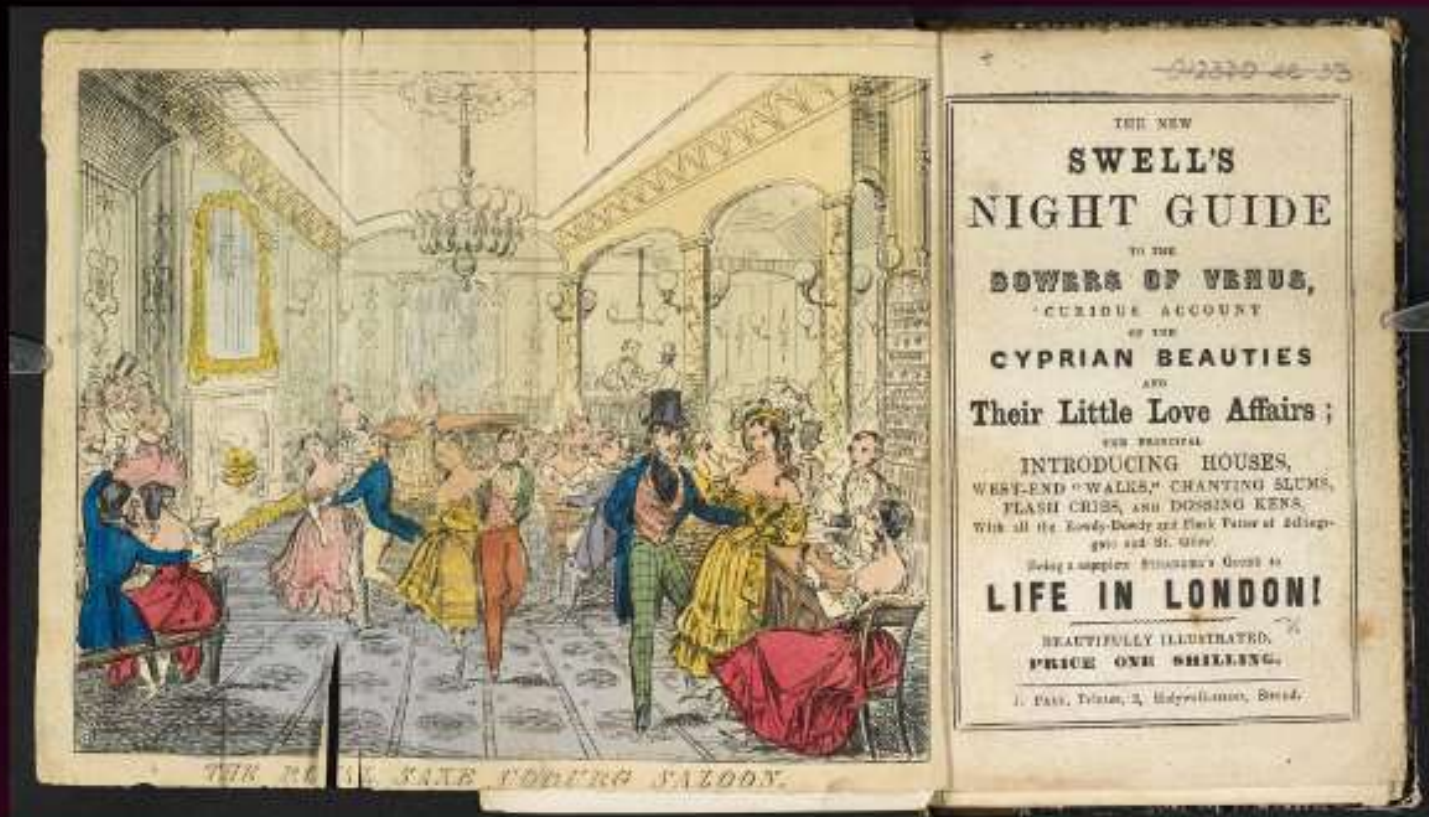
function. Let me try to show you briefly how these powers seem to be rightly distinguishable.

We are foolish, and without excuse foolish, in speaking of the "superiority" of one sex to the other, as if they could be compared in similar things. Each has what the other has not: each completes the other, and is completed by the other: they are in nothing alike, and the happiness and perfection of both depends on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give.

Now their separate characters are briefly these. The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just,

wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle,—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. She sees the qualities of things, their claims, and their places. Her great function is Praise: she enters into no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest. By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial:—to him, therefore, the failure, the offence, the inevitable error: often he must be wounded, or subdued, often misled, and *always* hardened. But he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence. This is the

- If a young man was particularly pious he might manage to stay chaste until he married. Many respectable young men, however, resorted to using prostitutes. All the major cities had red light districts where it was easy to find a woman whom you could pay for sex. Out-of-towners could consult such volumes as Roger Funnyman's *The Swell's Night Guide through the Metropolis*. Unfortunately syphilis and other sexual diseases were rife, and many young men unwittingly passed on the infection to their wives. For those unlucky enough to develop full-blown tertiary syphilis, the result was a painful and lingering death, usually in the mid-40s.





- Young and not-so-young women had no choice but to stay chaste until marriage. They were not even allowed to speak to men unless there was a married woman present as a chaperone. Higher education or professional work was also out of the question. These emotional frustrations could lead to all sorts of covert rebellion. Young Florence Nightingale longed to be able to do something useful in the world, but was expected to stay with her mother and sister, helping supervise the servants. She suffered from hysterical outbursts as a teenager, and could not bear to eat with the rest of the family. [Elizabeth Barrett](#), meanwhile, used illness as an excuse to retreat to a room at the top of her father's house and write poetry. In 1847 [Charlotte Brontë](#) put strong feelings about women's limited role into the mouth of her heroine [Jane Eyre](#):
  - "... women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags." (ch. 12)
  - This passage was considered so shocking that conservative commentators such as Lady (Elizabeth) Eastlake in a famously scathing review of *Jane Eyre* likened its tone to Chartism, the popular labour movement that advocated universal suffrage.

Portraits of the poet by her brother, D. G. Rossetti. Christina was closely associated with The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, often sitting for paintings as well as, contributing to the magazine, *Germ*.





The Rossetti Family photographed by Lewis Carroll





The first edition illustration by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (I have referred to this in my lecture)





Arthur Rackham's interpretation of *Goblin Market*







Laurence Housman's illustrations for the 1893 edition of *Goblin Market*. He was an English playwright and illustrator, brother to the poet, A. E. Housman.





Some of the fruits mentioned in the poem (clockwise from top left: quinces, barberries, bullaces, dewberries, greengages and gooseberries)



THANK YOU!