

## Coining Counterfeit Culture: Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*

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### **Abstract**

*Victorian slang is endlessly fascinating, but no readings of *Goblin Market* have considered its use of slang. This article examines *Goblin Market* through nineteenth-century slang, specifically slang connected to money and counterfeiting. For example, the phrase 'Jimmy O'Goblin' is nineteenth-century rhyming slang for 'sovereign', or a sovereign coin, and 'fig' is slang for a mediocre counterfeit coin. Tracing elements of slang such as these situates *Goblin Market* in conversation with other counterfeiting narratives of the period. Published in the popular periodical *Household Words*, Dickens's 'Two Chapters on Bank Note Forgeries' (1850) about the difficulties in identifying forged banknotes, and Sidney Laman Blanchard's 'A Biography of a Bad Shilling' (1851), a short story told from the perspective of counterfeit coin, conveyed mid-Victorian middle-class fascination with forgery. *Goblin Market* is different in that it focuses on middle-class anxiety. The poem relies on nineteenth-century slang, which has the ability to go undetected, in order to create a sublimated narrative about the perils of deceit. Looking at *Goblin Market* through its slang doubling reveals the hidden Victorian fears of counterfeiting and fraud, in the home and the marketplace.*

The mid-Victorians were fascinated by slang. John Camden Hotten's popular *The Slang Dictionary; or, The Vulgar Words, Street Phrases, and 'Fast' Expressions of High and Low Society* (1864) even included this advertisement: 'Copies of this work interleaved with finely-ruled paper, for the use of those who desire to collect such Slang and colloquial words as may start into existence from time to time, can be obtained from the publisher, price 9s. 6d'. Middle-class readers could purchase editions of Hotten's slang dictionaries equipped with lined paper, encouraging readers to collect and record slang they encountered, especially new slang as it came into existence.<sup>1</sup> Dictionaries such as these encouraged readers to participate in the use and documentation of slang. Peter Wright claims that rhyming slang was 'strongly established by 1851 [...] Costermongers [...] were amongst the earliest users of rhyming slang'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The advertisement for alternate editions appeared in Hotten's dictionary. In the preface to the 1864 edition, Hotten notes that *The Slang Dictionary* 'incorporated *The Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant, and Vulgar Words*' (p. v). First published by Hotten in 1859, this early edition included approximately 3000 words; a second edition was released in 1860 with approximately 5000 words. When *The Slang Dictionary* was published in 1864, it included nearly 10,000 words, demonstrating the increased recognition and recording of such language. John Camden Hotten, *The Slang Dictionary; or, The Vulgar Words, Street Phrases, and 'Fast' Expressions of High and Low Society* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1864).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Wright, *Cockney Dialect and Slang* (New York: Harper Collins, 1981), pp. 94-5.

One wonders how many writers participated in recording slang and using slang dictionaries as source material. We know for certain that some authors, such as Dickens, not only recorded slang but actively employed it in their writing. Did Christina Rossetti read slang dictionaries? As a poet, was she influenced by the costermonger's rhyming slang heard in Covent Market, as Clayton Tarr has suggested?<sup>3</sup> Did she read in a dictionary, of which there were many, that 'Jimmy O'Goblin', later reduced to 'goblin', was nineteenth-century rhyming slang for 'sovereign', a sovereign coin? If 'goblin' were the only instance of such slang in Rossetti's poem, it might remain an unremarkable footnote – but there are many more. While we cannot determine unequivocally what Rossetti knew, or read, or heard in the London markets, we can consider what the suggestion of such language in her poem means. In what ways does *Goblin Market* change if we read it alongside dictionaries of nineteenth-century slang?

The goblins of Rossetti's poem pose an invasive threat, but I argue the choice of goblins over other fantastical creatures, such as sprites or pixies, connects issues of language with those of economy. In traditional lore, goblins represent deviousness, mischief, and deception. Goblins are a 'force that invades the rural home and drains a family's resources through its boundless voracity. It is not always evil, but a thing of pure hunger, pure desire: close to home, but not a [...] reciprocating part of the home'.<sup>4</sup> Counterfeiting represents a similar insidious desire, a greed which does not reciprocate but subverts the rules of commerce. I use the term 'counterfeit slang' to describe both slang about counterfeiting *and* slang that does not look or sound like slang. Counterfeit slang includes such words as 'goblin', 'queer', 'sly', 'brown', 'fig', and 'utter'.<sup>5</sup> All these terms, along with others explored in this paper, have slang doubles associated with counterfeiting or 'bad' money. In her recent article on *Goblin Market*, Emily Bernhard-Jackson examines the concept of twinship in sources that may have influenced Rossetti.<sup>6</sup> What is a counterfeit, if not an object attempting to pass as the twin, or double, of a legitimate one? I argue that if we read *Goblin Market* through its slang doubles, we discover a sublimated narrative

<sup>3</sup> See Clayton Tarr 'Covent Goblin Market', *Victorian Poetry*, 50 (2012), pp. 297-316. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>4</sup> Molly Clark Hillard, 'Dangerous Exchange: Fairy Footsteps, Goblin Economies, and *The Old Curiosity Shop*', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 35 (2005), pp. 63-86 (p. 74).

<sup>5</sup> To this end, Jonathon Green's *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang* (2005) and *Dictionary of Slang* (2010), and the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* prove the best modern sources of for this type of linguistic research. Jonathon Green's *Dictionary of Slang* (2010) provides extensive citations including definition, date of origin, country of origin, and period of active usage, and, for this study, Green's dictionary served to cross-check information provided in the *OED* and nineteenth-century slang dictionaries, including Ducange Angilcus's *The Vulgar Tongue* (1859) and John Hotten's *Slang Dictionary*.

<sup>6</sup> See Emily A. Bernhard-Jackson, "'Like Two Pigeons in One Nest, Like to Seedlings in One Capsule': Reading *Goblin Market* in Conjunction with Victorian Twin Discourse', *Victorian Poetry*, 55.4 (2017), pp. 451-470.

about the perils of deceit that places the poem in larger discourse with other narratives about Victorian counterfeiting and fraud.

Fraud has been the subject of several critical studies of Rossetti's poem, including Rebecca Stern's rich research on food adulterations and Herbert Tucker's compelling analysis of the rise of seductive false advertising, connecting the dangers in Rossetti's poem with real threats in the Victorian marketplace.<sup>7</sup> While there are collections of nineteenth-century slang that document the colourful diversity and subversive power of this marginal language, there is not a focused study of counterfeit slang.<sup>8</sup> This gap in linguistic history perhaps accounts for the oversight of such slang in Rossetti research and Victorian studies in general. In the first section, I examine the counterfeit slang present within the poem and put the poem in conversation with other works of the period that use counterfeiting or respond to counterfeiting practices, a topic that seemed to capture the imaginations of mid-Victorian audiences. In the second portion, I interpret the visual representations of counterfeit culture in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's frontispiece and title page designs before analysing the goblins' attack on Lizzie as indicative of the dangers counterfeit economies present to legitimate ones.

### Victorian Counterfeiting

Near the mid-nineteenth century, urban idiolects adopted 'goblin' as slang for 'coin' – more specifically a gold sovereign, a 'golden goblin', a coin imbued with a high monetary value and emblematic of a sovereign's authority ('goblin').<sup>9</sup> In her seminal work on cant and slang dictionaries, historian Julie Coleman addresses both the origins and forms of cant and slang dictionaries, noting that '*slang* is usually short-lived' and 'cant is the secret language of thieves and beggars, and is used for deception and concealment'.<sup>10</sup> Coleman brings together and conducts a comparative study on such dictionaries, highlighting dictionaries in circulation in the first half of the nineteenth century. A small sampling of

<sup>7</sup> See Rebecca Stern's '„Adulteration Detected”: Food and Fraud in Christina Rossetti's „Goblin Market"', *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 57.4 (2003) and Herbert F. Tucker's 'Rossetti's Goblin Marketing: Sweet to Tongue and Sound to Eye', *Representations* 82 (2003).

<sup>8</sup> Jonathon Green's *Crooked Talk: Five Hundred Years of the Language of Crime* (2011) does include a section on the slang of forgery and counterfeiting, which surveys the most common slang terms including queer, snide, and sour. Green's collection, however, does not include several of the other slang terms that I examine here.

<sup>9</sup> See OED entry 'goblin, n.<sup>2</sup>' and Green's *Dictionary of Slang* (2010). The OED identifies 'goblin' as British slang for a sovereign, identifying its use now as obscure and historical. Dating slang can be tricky because slang is sometimes in use long before it is recorded and codified by slang dictionaries. Although 'goblin' is recorded by Green as common by the 1880s, it is probable that it was in use long before then.

<sup>10</sup> Julie Coleman, *A History of Cant and Slang Dictionaries: Volume II 1785-1858* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 1-2.

popular ones available in the first part of the nineteenth century includes Francis Grose's *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (first published in 1785 and reissued in expanded editions in 1811 and 1823); *The Lexicon Balatronicum: A Dictionary of the Buckish Slang, University Wit, and Pickpocket Eloquence* (1811) compiled by Francis Grose and Members of the Whip Club; *Ducombe's New and Improved Flash Dictionary of Cant Words* (c. 1850); and, Ducange Angilcus's *The Vulgar Tongue: A Glossary of Slang, Cant, and Flash Words and Phrases Used in London from 1839 to 1859* (1859); George Mastall's *Vocabulan* (1859); and, previously mentioned, Hotten's *The Slang Dictionary; or, The Vulgar Words, Street Phrases, and 'Fast' Expressions of High and Low Society* (1864), published just two years after Rossetti's *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862). Coleman also considers other popular literary works including *The Memoirs of James Hardy Vaux* (1819) and Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851), which became popular sources of cant and slang for Victorian readers. Finally, Coleman suggests that *The Lexicon Balatronicum* (1811) and the *Vocabulan* (1859) were based off Francis Grose's dictionaries published as far back as 1785, which points not only to the recycling of slang dictionaries but also the longevity of some slang terms. Dating slang, however, is notoriously tricky. Historian A.L. Beier claims that 'despite the efforts of lexicographers, it is difficult to fix precise dates on word usages, since they inevitably list the first written examples, which are probably delayed records of the spoken word'.<sup>11</sup> So, although Hotten's dictionary appeared after Rossetti's publication of *Goblin Market*, it remains a valuable resource for recording slang usage in the years preceding its publication.

Slang dictionaries were popular reading among members of the Victorian middle class. Ellen Bayuk Rosenman argues that such dictionaries acted as 'conduit[s] between the streets and the parlor' and allowed their middle-class readers to access the 'privileged knowledge' of the lower classes, knowledge which allowed tradesmen 'to manipulate customers' and 'communicate privately to fend off middle-class investigators'.<sup>12</sup> Along with slang dictionaries, readers had access to new reports on urban life, such as Mayhew's *London Labour* (1851), an early piece of investigative journalism.<sup>13</sup> Mayhew was particularly

<sup>11</sup> A.L. Beier, 'Identity, Language and Resistance in the Making of the Victorian „Criminal Class”: Mayhew's Convict Revisited', *Journal of British Studies* 44 (July 2015), pp. 499-515 (p. 511).

<sup>12</sup> Ellen Bayuk Rosenman, 'Rudeness, Slang, and Obscurity: Working-Class Politics in *London Labour and the London Poor*'. *Victorian Vulgarities: Taste in Verbal and Visual Culture*, ed. by Susan David Bernstein and Elsie B. Michie. (New York: Ashgate, 2009) pp. 55-70 (pp. 59-60).

<sup>13</sup> Slang dictionaries and Mayhew's work were highly commodified, and while I do not have the space to address this issue in detail in this text, I acknowledge their heuristic status with middle class readers. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see A.L. Beier 'Identity, Language, and Resistance in the Making of the Victorian 'Criminal Class': Mayhew's Convict Revisited'.

interested in traditional street cries of London costermongers, recording that a cry contained two parts: the product and the price. For example, the herb seller cries, 'a double 'andful of fine parsley for a penny', while the turnip seller shouts, 'A penny a bunch'.<sup>14</sup> The goblins' cry, 'Come buy our orchard fruits, / Come buy, come buy', does not disclose the two most important pieces of information, product – 'orchard fruits' is rather ambiguous – and price (Rossetti 3-4).<sup>15</sup> By adopting the sounds of the costermonger cries without adopting their formula, the goblin market offers mere mimicry, an aural deception, of a true London market.<sup>16</sup>

In *London Labour*, Mayhew also describes testing a young 'newly-trained coster lad', whom he quizzes, asking the boy to translate formal English words, such as 'equestrian', into a dialect of coster slang.<sup>17</sup> When Mayhew asks the boy to translate 'good-natured', Mayhew finds he '[can] not, on any of the three renderings, distinguish any precise sound beyond an indistinct gabbling' (p. 88). Rosenman suggests that the boy's 'gabbling' is 'a version of coster slang into which Mayhew has not yet been initiated' (p. 60). Mayhew's use of 'gabbling', remarkably close to the word 'goblin', to describe the inarticulate sounds of the coster, interests me. Mayhew argues that 'this slang is utterly devoid of any applicability to humour. It gives no new fact, or approach to a fact, for philologists. One superior genius among the costers, who has invented words for them, told me that he had no system for coining his term' (p. 88). Whether the 'genius among the costers' has no system, or if he simply refuses to share such knowledge with an outsider, is unclear. Mayhew's use of 'coining', however, is also complex, merging concepts of language with economy. To coin something means to create it, to give it form. To coin money is an act of transformation, converting metal into coins. In the marketplace, the language costermongers 'coin' can give them advantages over their middle-class consumers, leading to financial rewards. For costers, coining a catchphrase can transform language into money.

The opening lines of *Goblin Market* suggest just such a scene. The poem entices readers with a menu that 'construct[s] a vision of a bounteous and abundant nature that is seductive in its infinite variety'.<sup>18</sup> With twenty-nine

<sup>14</sup> Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*. 1861-62. 4 vols. (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1967) p. 37. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>15</sup> All citations from Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* are taken from *The Complete Poems*, ed. by R.W. Crump (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1979-90, reprinted by Penguin, 2001) pp. 5-20. Line references are indicated in the text.

<sup>16</sup> Neither the fruit nor the goblin coins present a price or value. The goblin is a species of gold coin used as official bullion and, therefore, minted without a nominal value stamped on either face. The absence of numerical indicators in the *Goblin Market* raises questions about value.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Rosenman, p. 60.

<sup>18</sup> Sean C. Grass, 'Nature's Perilous Variety in Rossetti's *Goblin Market*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 51.3 (1996), pp. 356-76 (p. 358).

different fruits, the goblin market explodes with an abundance of berries, plums, apples, figs, and citrons.<sup>19</sup> Watching from ‘among the brookside rushes’ (Rossetti 33), sisters Laura and Lizzie listen to the tempting goblins’ cry: ‘Come buy our orchard fruits, / Come buy, come buy’ (3-4). Laura warns Lizzie: ‘We must not buy their fruits; / Who knows upon what soil they fed / Their hungry thirsty roots?’ (43-45). Identifying the produce simply as ‘orchard fruits’, the ambiguity of language veils the fruit’s true origins. When Laura first meets the goblins, their actions belie deception:

When they reached where Laura was  
 They stood stock still upon the moss,  
 Leering at each other,  
 Brother with queer brother;  
 Signalling each other,  
 Brother with sly brother.  
 One set his basket down,  
 One reared his plate;  
 One began to weave a crown  
 Of tendrils, leaves and rough nuts brown. (91-100)

Through ‘leering’ and ‘signalling’, the goblins communicate their duplicitous intentions, but their descriptions as ‘queer’ and ‘sly’ illustrate the depth of their deceit (93, 95, 94, 96). In formal lexicons, ‘queer’ traditionally signifies difference or strangeness, and ‘sly’ means deceptiveness or quick wits. In nineteenth-century slang, however, a ‘queer’ is a counterfeit or forgery, especially indicative of counterfeit money (‘queer’), and ‘sly’ means illegal, illicit, or ‘suggestive of artifice’ (‘sly’). Translating the slang phrase ‘queer and sly goblin brothers’ reveals the goblins to be ‘counterfeit and illegal coins’.<sup>20</sup> The rural setting of the goblin market reinforces its position on the fringes of a legitimate economy.<sup>21</sup> The setting of the goblin market on what Jan Marsh describes as ‘the

<sup>19</sup> In ‘The Political Economy of Fruit’, Richard Menke examines the materiality of the Victorian fruit, noting that in Rossetti’s poem there are ‘twenty-nine kinds of fruits in twenty-nine lines’ (p. 110). Out of those twenty-nine, three types of plums are listed: greengages, bullaces, and damsons. As early-eighteenth century slang, *plum* indicated a fortune, or more specifically, 100,000 pounds (‘Plum’). In the nineteenth century, *plum* came to signify ‘any desirable thing, a coveted prize; the pick of a collection of things; or one of the best things’ (‘Plum’).

<sup>20</sup> Slang cant for general legitimate money includes, ‘bit’, ‘bunce’, ‘bustle’, ‘dimmock’, ‘duff’, ‘rag’, and ‘steven’ (Vaux p. 227, p. 230, p. 230, p. 235; Green p. 458; Vaux p. 261, p. 274). Slang for generalised counterfeit money includes, ‘queer’, ‘queer-bit’, and ‘shan’ (Vaux p. 260, p. 264). A coiner is a ‘bit cull’ or ‘bit-faker’, (Green p. 114; p. Vaux 227).

<sup>21</sup> Although out of date by the time Rossetti came to compose *Goblin Market*, Patrick Colquhoun’s 1806 accounts of counterfeiters’ practices identified ‘the Country’ surrounding London as ‘where all the dealers and coiners of [a particular silver] species of base money

frontier with fairyland' emphasises its position between lawful society and the lawless wilderness, associated here with a subversive counterfeit economy.<sup>22</sup>

The earliest recorded citation of 'queer' as slang for counterfeiting dates to the popular nineteenth-century sourcebook, *A New and Comprehensive Vocabulary of the Flash Language* (1812). Compiled by the self-confessed thief and twice-transported swindler James Hardy Vaux, the *Comprehensive Vocabulary* became an eminent nineteenth-century guide to the slang lexicon used by thieves and con men. In *Goblin Market*, if we look past the goblins to the items they carry, to 'plate', 'crown', and 'brown', we find other indicators of a fraudulent subculture. In the context of the poem, plate may very well be the platter the goblins use to carry fruit, but it was also the silver coating used to cover counterfeit coins of the period. 'One began to weave a crown / Of tendrils, leaves, and rough nuts brown' (Rossetti 99-100) can have two translations depending on which language system we use. The organic imagery of the scene suggests the goblins use the tendrils, leaves, and nuts to create a crown, the symbol of royal authority and a bit ironic, since the goblins are themselves imitation sovereigns. A crown, however, is more than just a symbol of power, it is also a coin – a crown coin.<sup>23</sup> 'Weave' means to create, but it also means to fabricate; the goblins fabricate a crown out of materials – tendrils, leaves, and rough nuts – that have no value. Add brown to this reading, which Vaux's dictionary identifies as slang for a counterfeit, or 'bad', halfpenny, and it reveals the goblins are not carrying fruit into the marketplace but counterfeit coins.<sup>24</sup>

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century definitions of counterfeiting break the crime into two subcategories: the manufacturing of counterfeit coins, known as coining, and forgery, the reproduction of bank notes.<sup>25</sup> Until the Forgery Acts of 1832 and 1837, both crimes carried death sentences, but these punishments were reduced in later years with coining commuted to a few months hard labour or time served and bank note forgery to a life term. For sentencing purposes after the 1830s, the distinction between counterfeiting and forgery depended upon proof of criminal intent. Nineteenth-century legal systems interpreted coining as the intent to produce 'unendorsed and potentially fraudulent copy, something whose

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resort'; in Patrick Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*. 7th ed. London, 1806. *Google Book Search*. [accessed 20 July 2017], p. 175. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>22</sup> Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Writer's Life* (New York: Viking, 1995), p. 229.

<sup>23</sup> A crown is the equivalent to five shillings, whereas a sovereign is twenty shillings.

<sup>24</sup> Vaux p. 230; Green p. 188. Neither Grose's 1785 or 1811 editions of the *Classical Dictionary*, nor his *Lexicon Balatronicum* (1811) note the usage of *brown* or *browns* as counterfeit coins. The entry does not appear until the 1823 edition. Although Rossetti is using 'brown' as an adjective to describe the colour of the 'rough nuts' and the slang dictionaries use 'brown' or 'browns' as nouns, I am advocating for an imaginative consideration of other ways this line might be interpreted.

<sup>25</sup> A counterfeit bank note is known as a 'queer screen' (Vaux 240).

true nature is disguised'.<sup>26</sup> Forgery, however, indicated a skill, artistry, or 'craftedness'; 'forgery' was applied 'particularly for [the] crafting [of] authority' as in the cases of forged signatures or papers' (p. 73). In her work on nineteenth-century forgery and fraud, Sara Malton asserts, 'forgery enacts a violation on several fronts: it signifies a transgression against property, identity, the authority of law, the nation-state, and the economic system. It is therefore deserving of the harshest of punishments'.<sup>27</sup> Bank note and signature forgeries were considered sustained threats to legitimate systems of authority; therefore, forgers received more scrutiny and harsher punishments than coiners. Malton also draws attention to the hermeneutics of forgery. In her discussion of Dickens's 'Two Chapters on Bank Note Forgeries', about the difficulties in identifying forged banknotes, which appeared in *Household Words* in 1850, Malton asserts that Dickens 'identifies forgery as disrupting not only financial economies, but also economies of knowledge. The forged note becomes the economic emblem of a world in which appearances are dangerously unreliable; its circulation shows that we cannot trust what we see' (p. 46).<sup>28</sup> Although interchanged synonymously with fraud, both counterfeit and forgery intimate a materiality that nineteenth-century definitions of fraud do not. Identifying a deception as a 'fraud' labels the exchange, but not the goods, as fraudulent. On the other hand, 'counterfeit' is a material fact; a product either is or is not genuine.

For nineteenth-century banking systems, counterfeiters and their goods proved difficult to identify, track, and eliminate. Robert Peel's 1844 Bank Charter Act established the primacy of Bank of England bank notes over notes issued by country banks and identified the Bank of England as the sole issuer of new notes. In 1855, new printing technologies enabled the creation of bank plates capable of printing identical bank notes.<sup>29</sup> Older plates deteriorated quickly resulting in non-identical notes of the same denomination, exacerbating the proliferation of forgeries. As bank notes gained financial security and popularity among Victorian consumers, periodicals of the period helped to garner the public's trust in them, which, Mary Poovey asserts, 'bank notes could not generate on their own' (p. 50). Poovey cites an 1850 article, 'Review of a Popular Publication', by *Household Words* editor William Henry Wills. Wills's 'popular publication' was a 'Bank of

<sup>26</sup> Nick Groom, *The Forger's Shadow: How Forgery Changed the Course of Literature* (London: Picador, 2002), p. 73. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>27</sup> Sara Malton, *Forgery in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture: Fictions of Finance from Dickens to Wilde* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), p. 1. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>28</sup> Forgery is a frequent theme in Dickens. For an excellent discussion of forgery in *Great Expectations* (1861), published one year before *Goblin Market*, see Simon James, 'Pip's Counterfeit Money: Forgery and *Great Expectations*' in *Fakes and Forgeries*, ed. by Peter Knight and Jonathan Long (Amersham: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2004), pp. 41-9.

<sup>29</sup> See Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Meditating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 49.

England note'; he 'insisted that the note's stylistic features – its 'pithy terseness' and its graphic 'flourishes' – instantaneously and automatically inspired confidence in its user'.<sup>30</sup> Unlike coins, whose internal composition of precious metals assured their value, notes offered no material guarantee of their worth.

Alongside shorter articles, such as those published in *Household Words*, book-length studies dedicated to identifying and policing the activities of criminals, including counterfeiters, also appeared. Magistrate Patrick Colquhoun, a founder of the Thames River Police in 1798, authored *A Treatise of the Police of the Metropolis* (1806) in which he summarises the various methods of coining, breaking the crime down into several divisions according to the coin's material (gold, silver, copper) and further subdivisions by the counterfeit's fabricated value (crown, half-crown, shilling, etc.).<sup>31</sup> Outlining the production of five species of silver coins, Flats, Plated Goods, Plain Goods, Castings of Cast Goods, and Figs, or Fig Things, Colquhoun reveals that the naming of the first four species reflect the methods of their origin (i.e. Plated Goods are essentially low-valued copper coins plated with thin layers of silver and stamped to resemble higher-valued silver coins) (pp. 174-9). Here, I am most interested in Colquhoun's recording of counterfeit slang, especially the facetiously named Figs or Fig Things. The Fig, he claims, is 'a very inferior sort of counterfeit money, of which composition, however, a great part of the sixpences now in circulation are made. The proportion of silver is not, generally speaking, of the value of one farthing in half a crown' (p. 179). In the years leading up to Rossetti's poem, however, there were an increasing number of fictions with plots dependent on fraud, 'reflect[ing] a public increasingly aware of frauds practiced more locally by tradesmen'.<sup>32</sup> In 1851, for instance, Dickens published in *Household Words* Sidney Laman Blanchard's 'A Biography of a Bad Shilling', a short story narrated from the perspective of a counterfeit coin. As the counterfeit shilling circulates with genuine ones, it reveals mid-Victorian anxieties connected with fraud, especially the increasing public awareness of a thriving counterfeit culture.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Poovey, p. 50.

<sup>31</sup> Although Colquhoun's work precedes Rossetti's composition of *Goblin Market* by more than 50 years, it remained an important source for slang used by counterfeiters, and much of the slang Colquhoun identified made its way into the slang dictionaries of the period. I refer to it here solely for its recording of counterfeit slang.

<sup>32</sup> Rebecca Stern, "'Adulteration Detected': Food and Fraud in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*", *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 57.4 (2003), pp. 477-511 (p. 484).

<sup>33</sup> As early as 1817, banks, such as Backhouse's Bank, released circulars warning customers of counterfeiters attempting to pass counterfeit notes. These announcements could include information on location as well as specific details to identify a counterfeit note. See 'From the Archives: Countering the Counterfeiters' *Barclay* (29 March 2017) <<https://www.home.barclays/news/2017/03/Countering-the-counterfeiters.html>> [accessed 3 June 2017] for more information.

In Blanchard's story, the counterfeit coin leads to the devastation of the coiner's entire family, including the imprisonment of his daughter, the transportation of his son, and ultimately the coiner's own death. Despite being labelled 'bad', the shilling asserts that it is the product of 'good' materials and expresses its moral outrage at discovering its own identity:

I believe I may state with confidence that my parents were respectable, notwithstanding that one belonged to the law—being the zinc door-plate of a solicitor. The other, was a pewter flagon residing at a very excellent hotel [...] How shall I describe my first impression of existence? how portray my agony when I became aware *what I was*—when I understood my mission upon earth? The reader [...] can have no notion of my sufferings!<sup>34</sup>

The shilling's discovery and final destruction comes when a child picks it up off the pavement and runs (ironically) 'into a shop for the purpose of making an investment in *figs*'; but, upon recognition by the shopkeeper as a counterfeit, 'the child went *figless* away' (p. 70; emphasis added). As punishment for its illegitimacy, the shilling '[is] nailed to the counter as an example to others' (p. 70). Reliant on the layering of cultural and linguistic contexts, the pun on 'fig' and 'figless' adds comedic irony to Blanchard's tale.<sup>35</sup> Nailing the coin to the countertop, the shopkeeper strikes violently at its interior, or the space which is the source of its value. 'A Biography of a Bad Shilling' warns of the consequences for counterfeiting (imprisonment, transportation, and death) and alerts readers to the dangers that counterfeit money poses to unwary consumers. Blanchard's personification of the counterfeit coin and his counterfeit slang ('fig') lends credence for mid-nineteenth-century authors incorporating slang vocabulary into their works and for reading Rossetti's poem through nineteenth-century slang.

### The Counterfeit Market

As symbols of counterfeit economies, the goblins are antagonists to the poem's two tokens of legitimate value – Laura's golden curl and Lizzie's silver penny. The enticement of fresh and ripened fruit lures Laura first:

Good folk, I have no coin;  
To take were to purloin;  
I have no copper in my purse,

<sup>34</sup> Sidney Laman Blanchard, 'Biography of a Bad Shilling', 1851. *The Financial System in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. By Mary Poovey (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), pp. 60-70 (pp. 60-1). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>35</sup> Blanchard misses an opportunity here for some wordplay with counterfeit and 'counter-fruit'.

I have no silver either,  
And all my gold is on the furze. (Rossetti 116-20)

With an expectation of formal marketplace conduct, Laura is surprised by the goblins' response: "'You have much gold upon your head', / They answered all together: / 'Buy from us with a golden curl'" (123-5). She succumbs and agrees to barter for goblin fruit with a 'golden lock' (126) and a 'tear more rare than pearl' (127). One way to interpret the cutting of Laura's golden lock is as a scene of prostitution, the exchange of part of Laura's body for fruit. I want to propose, however, another interpretation of this scene in line with counterfeit culture. Another trick that counterfeiters used to create counterfeit coins, especially gold coins, was known as 'coin-clipping'.<sup>36</sup> In the nineteenth century, as coins were circulated, handled, and used they would wear down and become misshapen. Counterfeiters could take the irregularly shaped gold coins and, using 'coin shears', clip away some of the gold, which could go unnoticed if a coin was already deformed. The clippings would then be melted down into bars and sold to counterfeiters to be recast as counterfeit coins. The now deformed and devalued coin could reenter the market with its face value intact. Laura's clipping of a golden lock may enact a similar scene. The loss of one lock is like the clipping of a gold coin – so small as to be unnoticeable. By clipping her hair, however, Laura unknowingly reenters circulation as a devalued object within the goblin's counterfeit economy.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See "From the Archives: Countering the Counterfeiters" *Barclay* (29 March 2017) <<https://www.home.barclays/news/2017/03/Countering-the-counterfeiters.html>> [accessed 3 June 2017]

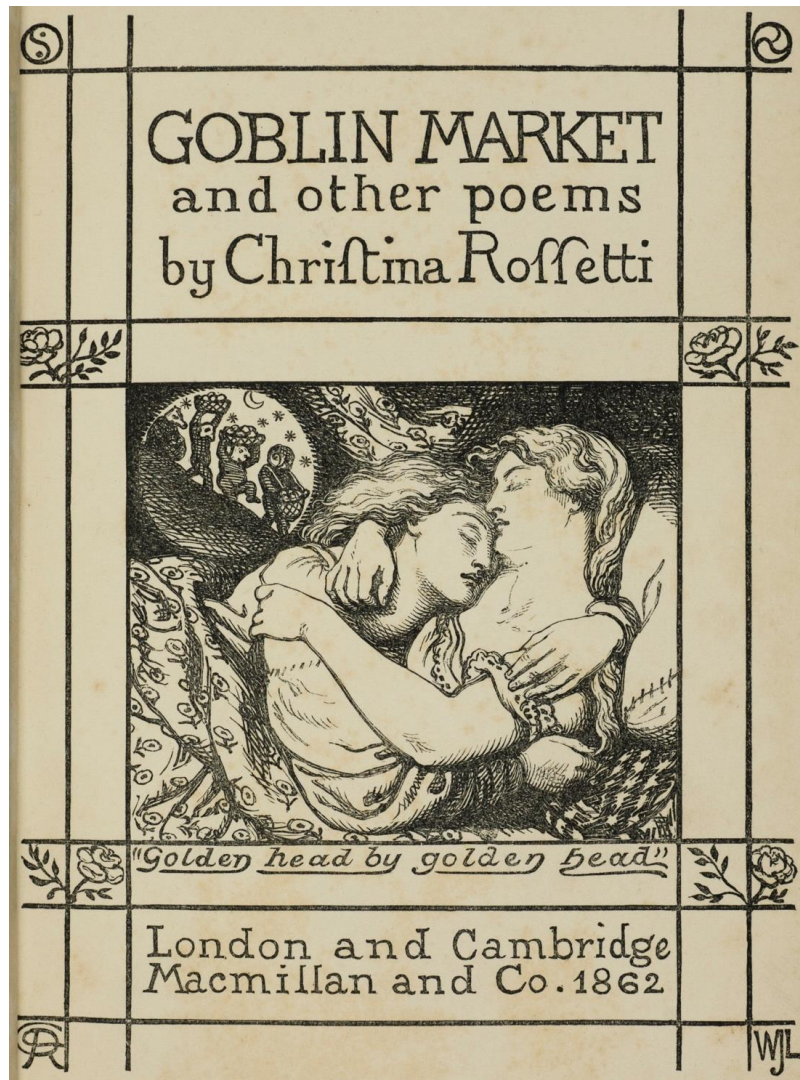
<sup>37</sup> Clayton Tarr notes that selling hair was a 'perfectly normal marketplace transaction – an exchange that is not charged with sexual transgression, which many have argued, but with symbiosis: Laura's hair is flaxen, valuable enough to the goblins for her to feast, and more valuable than Lizzie's "silver penny"' (305). See 'Covent Goblin Market', *Victorian Poetry*, 50 (2012), pp. 297-316.



**Figure 1** *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862). Frontispiece designed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's title page and frontispiece, designed for the 1862 publication of *Goblin Market*, visualises the sisters' relationship with counterfeit culture, depicting the moments directly before and after Laura's consumption of the goblins' fruit. Captioned 'Buy from us with a golden curl', the frontispiece shows Laura clipping her hair as the goblins threaten to overwhelm her. The cat-faced goblin threads her long strands of hair through its human-like hands. The owl-faced goblin holds aloft a plate filled with pomegranate, which sits sliced open, its seeds visible. Associated with the myth of Persephone, the pomegranate suggests Laura is in danger of meeting a similar fate. The owl-faced goblin, whose presence in this illustration has gone unremarked, is also associated with the Persephone myth. According to Ovid, it is Ascalaphus, the orchardist of Hades, who reveals that Persephone has eaten the pomegranate seeds. Demeter, her mother, then punishes Ascalaphus by burying him under a large rock in the

Underworld. Persephone, however, rescues Ascalaphus and transforms him into an owl. In Dante Gabriel's illustration, the pomegranate and owl-faced goblin serve as visual signals warning against deception.<sup>38</sup>



**Figure 2** *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862). Title page designed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

In the upper-left corner of the frontispiece, Lizzie trudges away from the scene, but looks back over her shoulder to observe the exchange. The posture of Lizzie's body and her look back towards Laura are suggestive also of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. In his grief after Eurydice's death, Orpheus travels to the Underworld, where he plays and sings so beautifully that he moves Hades and Persephone. Hades grants Eurydice's release with one condition – Orpheus must

<sup>38</sup> See Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting *Proserpine* (1874), Tate Gallery London. Comparing the disembodied hands and pomegranate fruit of this later painting provides an interesting study for the frontispiece and title page illustration.

lead Eurydice out of the Underworld without looking back at her. At the threshold between worlds, believing Hades has deceived him, Orpheus turns back – only to witness Eurydice disappear back into the Underworld. In Dante Gabriel's illustration, Lizzie's glance back does not condemn, it confirms – Laura is not following. The Orpheus and Eurydice myth is one of anticipated deception; like Orpheus, Lizzie anticipates the goblins are deceptive, and she is right. When she attempts to lead Laura out of the market, she cannot help but glance back.

The layouts of the frontispiece and the title page mirror one another. As Lizzie walks uphill in the frontispiece, the goblin men march downhill in the title page. Captioned 'Golden head by golden head', the title-page design depicts the sleeping sisters wrapped in a protective embrace:

Golden head by golden head,  
Like two pigeons in one nest,  
Folded in each other's wings,  
They lay down in their curtained bed:  
Like two blossoms on one stem,  
Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow,  
Like two wands in ivory  
Tipped with gold for awful kings. (Rossetti 184-91)

Intertwined, the sisters appear outwardly indistinguishable. The positioning of the sisters' hands, however, may give clues as to their identity. One hand grasps lightly, between thumb and forefinger, the end of a lock of hair. While another hand, disembodied and hovering directly above the first, appears wedged between pillow and hair. These two hands appear intent on touching the hair, the smaller hand actively grasping the end of a lock, while the larger hand appears to trap the strands tightly against the sleeper's back, pulling them taut in the process. Might this be Laura who, in her sleep, is gathering, testing, or weighing Lizzie's golden hair? Is she dreaming of fruit-laden goblin men, assessing how much fruit those strands could purchase? Or, could this be Lizzie, clutching at the ragged, clipped ends of Laura's strands and anticipating the goblin men's return for more? The answer remains unclear.<sup>39</sup>

Marching invasively towards the domestic space of the bedroom, the goblins are present but remain confined in a circular image. What is this circular image? In his analysis of *Goblin Market*, Victor Roman Mendoza weighs the ambiguity of the goblins' image in the title page, questioning what purpose their appearance serves: 'So is this inset image in fact a dream? Or is it some other window through which the goblin merchants might also 'gaze in at them'? Or might it be a *coin*, whose face, in juxtaposition with the sisters' own circular-shaped repose, adds even more significance to the reversible, antimetabolic

<sup>39</sup> See Bernhard-Jackson for a recent discussion of twinning in Rossetti's poem.

caption'.<sup>40</sup> With a knowledge of economic slang and counterfeit culture, Mendoza's reading of the goblin image as a coin makes sense. If 'goblin' is a gold sovereign, the caption 'Golden head by golden head' focuses attention on the symbolic images – coin and hair – of the two economies.<sup>41</sup> The presence of the goblin coin within the sisters' bedroom denotes the extent to which the counterfeit economy has penetrated the domestic one.

In Blanchard's story, the bad shilling passes successfully *only* when it blends in with authentic coins of real value. Similarly, in the title page, the two sisters are indistinguishable, their embrace signifying the protection that legitimate economies provide counterfeit ones. When Laura returns to the market, she can no longer hear or see the goblin men because she cannot differentiate them from real men. Laura and Lizzie, indistinguishable before, are now distinct. Unable to return to the market the next day, Laura begins to fade:

Her hair grew thin and grey;  
She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn  
To swift decay and burn  
Her fire away. (277-80)

The fading of Laura's golden hair symbolises a devaluation, transforming her from a gold coin to a silver one. Depleted, Laura no longer participates in the domestic economies of the home. Finding herself now solely responsible for the health of Laura and their domestic economy, Lizzie wavers over how to help her sister:

Tender Lizzie could not bear  
To watch her sister's cankerous care  
Yet not to share  
[...]  
Longed to buy fruit to comfort her,  
But feared to pay too dear  
[...]  
Till Laura dwindling  
Seemed knocking at Death's door;  
Then Lizzie *weighed* no more  
Better and worse;

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<sup>40</sup> Victor Roman Mendoza, "'Come Buy': The Crossing of Sexual and Consumer Desire in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*", *ELH*, 73.4 (2006), pp. 913-47 (p. 941; emphasis added). Mendoza identifies Lizzie's silver penny as a possible Maundy coin and a lost religious token, connecting Lizzie's economy with Rossetti's asceticism.

<sup>41</sup> D.G. Rossetti's 'Jenny' also connects gold coins and hair with prostitution and sexuality.

But put a silver penny in her purse. (299-302, 310-11, 321-24; emphasis added)<sup>42</sup>

The sudden appearance of the silver penny, I argue, symbolises a material calculation by Lizzie. Like a clipped coin, Laura's face value differs from her actual value, and Lizzie must *weigh* her to know her new value. In this calculation, Lizzie transforms herself into a merchant and goes to face the goblins as an equal. Just as the decline in formal language gradually exposes the falsity of the marketplace, the goblins' acceptance of gold hair and refusal of silver money reveals their dangerous deceit.<sup>43</sup>

Without any recognised source of income, the silver penny may constitute the whole of the sisters' financial resources. If true, Lizzie *must* calculate the risk of gambling their only penny without the guarantee of a return. Approaching the goblins, she calls out 'Give me much and many' (365), then 'Held out her apron, / Tossed them her penny' (366-7). Reinforcing the risk Lizzie wagers, her gesture of tossing the coin embodies a popular nineteenth-century marketplace game played by costermongers and their customers. Described by Mayhew as a simple coin toss, the customer tosses the coin while the pieman calls heads or tails; 'If the pieman [wins] the toss, he receives [the coin] without giving a pie; if he lose[s], he hands [the pie] over for nothing' (p. 196). Lizzie's coin toss possesses all the implications of marketplace gambling; the tossing of her silver penny, however, brings Lizzie legitimate economy into conflict with the goblins' illegitimate one. The attack that follows literalises the violent coexistence of two economy cultures in the nineteenth-century marketplace.

Initially unresponsive to her tossing of the silver penny, the goblins instruct Lizzie to 'Sit down and feast with us, / Be welcome guest with us, / Cheer you and rest with us' (Rossetti 380-82). Lizzie resists their offer, maintaining,

If you will not sell me any  
Of your fruits though much and many,

<sup>42</sup> The use of 'Tender' suggests both compassion and money. Lizzie is tender (compassionate) and tender (legal money). Rossetti employs 'tender' again near the poem's conclusion, when Lizzie and Laura are mothers with children newly minted: 'Their lives bound up in tender lives' (547).

<sup>43</sup> In "'Men sell not such in any town': Exchange in *Goblin Market*", *Victorian Poetry*, 28.1 (1990), pp. 51-67, Terence Holt notes the poem's abundance of 'economic language and metaphors, terms of finance and commerce ("buy", "offer", "merchant", "stock", "money", "golden", "precious", "sell", "fee", "hawking", "coin", "rich", etc.)' (p. 51). From the formal terms of 'offer', 'merchant', 'stock', and 'golden', Rossetti's syntax shifts to the more informal references of 'sell', 'fee', 'hawking', and 'coin'. The progressive decline of verbal formality outlines a cessation of legitimate marketplace practices and a turn to informal and potentially fraudulent ones.

Give me back my silver penny  
I tossed you for a fee. (386-89)

Ignoring the penny, the goblins become quickly agitated. Lizzie remains unmoved, 'white and golden', (408) as their attack escalates from verbal coaxing, to scratching, pinching, and ends in mockery and mauling:

Though the goblins cuffed and caught her,  
Coaxed and fought her,  
Bullied and besought her,  
Scratched her, pinched her black as ink,  
Kicked and knocked her,  
Mauled and mocked her,  
Lizzie uttered not a word;  
Would not open lip from lip  
Lest they should cram a mouthful in. (424-32)

The bruising left on Lizzie's body reflects their attempts to transfigure her, the scratches and pinches that cover her skin signifying their violent attempts to mould her. The verb 'pinched' (427) is significant for its slang doubling. Although more modern idiolects recognise 'pinch' as slang for stealing, mid-Victorian slang translated 'pinch' as 'to pass counterfeit money in exchange for goods'.<sup>44</sup> Their physical abuse of her body mirrors the production and passing of counterfeit money. Terence Holt suggests that 'the lines associate goblin sexual violence with writing, and although it attempts to render that writing deficient, claiming that the goblins fail in their assault on her virginity, the imagery of the ink contradicts the claim: Lizzie leaves the market marked by the goblin pens'.<sup>45</sup> Holt proposes the inky lines prove the success of the goblins' attack, and, although she certainly leaves the market marked, the lines are superficial and, I would argue, represent the artificiality of the counterfeit culture – Lizzie's interior, the source of her value, remains intact.

No matter how much they scratch and pinch, 'Lizzie uttered not a word; / Would not open lip from lip' (Rossetti 431-32). Beyond its common usage, 'to utter' also means 'to issue, offer, or expose for sale or barter' ('utter'). Refusing to utter, Lizzie rejects the threat to her interior. In nineteenth-century slang, 'to utter' denoted the movement, or passing, of counterfeit money.<sup>46</sup> By refusing to utter, Lizzie denies any productive inclusion in the goblin's fraudulent market.

<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Green, *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang*, 2nd ed, (London: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 2005), p. 1094.

<sup>45</sup> Holt, p. 57.

<sup>46</sup> This usage is recorded in several slang dictionaries popular at the time, including *The Vulgar Tongue* (1859) and *The Slang Dictionary* (1859, 1860, 1864).

Tired of her resilience, the goblins fling the penny back and disappear. Leaving the market with ‘juice that syrupe[d] all her face / And lodged in dimples in her chin’ (Rossetti 434-35), Lizzie hears ‘her penny jingle / Bouncing in her purse,— / Its bounce was music to her ear’ (452-54). In his slang dictionary, Hotten identifies the slang *wyn* as penny, but Hotten appends the note that *wyn* may stem from the Welsh *gwyn*, meaning ‘white: – *i.e.* the white silver penny’ (20). Lizzie leaves the goblin market with her penny safely in her purse – Lizzie gambles her *wyn* and wins.<sup>47</sup>

Returning home, she calls Laura to ‘Come and kiss me. / Never mind my bruises, / Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices’ (466-68). Laura must ingest the fruit juices to purge herself, undergoing an internal restoration: ‘Her lips began to scorch, / That juice was wormwood to her tongue, / She loathed the feast’ (493-95). Beginning at her lips and moving inward towards her tongue and throat, the once poisonous fruit moves swiftly, burning like an internal fire: ‘Swift fire spread through her veins, knocked at her heart, / Met the fire smoldering there / And overbore its lesser flame’ (506-9). Melted down by the heat, Laura undergoes a kind of recasting. Then, overcome with fever, she drops, as if fresh from the mould:

She fell at last;  
Pleasure past and anguish past,  
Is it death or is it life?  
Life out of death. (521-24)

The chiasmus interlocking Death and Life, Life and Death, reverses the effects of the goblins’ depletion, reinvigorating Laura with genuine value. Described in resplendent images of newness and gold, she awakes to begin her renewed life:

And early reapers plodded to the place  
Of golden sheaves,

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<sup>47</sup> Another potential slang term for penny is Polly, although it is less clear if the slang term would have been in regular use in Rossetti’s time. Early in *Goblin Market*, the parrot-goblin is described as ‘One parrot-voiced and jolly / Cried, “Pretty Goblin” for “Pretty Polly”’ (112-13). Compare the following quote from Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1853) in which a tavern bill is being calculated: ‘Four veals and hams is three [...] and four pints of half-and-half is six and three, and four small rums is eight and three, and three Pollys is eight and six’ (253). The waitress in the scene is called Polly, but here in the tallying of the bill a ‘Polly’ stands for a penny, the tip each of the three diners pays her. Green records the use of ‘Polly’ and ‘Pretty Polly’ as slang for penny in the 1970s but not earlier, and it does not appear in any of the other slang dictionaries, but, as Beier notes and as Coleman demonstrates, slang falls in and out of fashion, sometimes surviving for centuries through dictionaries and handbooks. So, the possibility exists that ‘Polly’ was still slang for penny at the time that Rossetti composed *Goblin Market*.

And dew-wet grass  
 Bowed in the morning winds so brisk to pass,  
 And new buds with new day  
 Opened of cup-like lilies on the stream,  
 Laura awoke as from a dream,  
 Laughed in the innocent old way,  
 Hugged Lizzie but not twice or thrice,  
 Her gleaming locks showed not one thread of grey. (531-40)

Signified by the new buds and the morning reapers cutting the golden sheaves, Laura's recasting allows her to reenter the domestic economy. The poem closes with the harmonious image of the sisters as wives and coiners of another kind of currency:

Days, weeks, months, years,  
 Afterwards, when both were wives  
 With children of their own;  
 Their mother-hearts beset with fears  
 Their lives bound up in *tender* lives;  
 Laura would call the little ones  
 And tell them of her early prime  
 [...]
 Would tell them how her sister stood  
 In deadly peril to do her good,  
 And *win* the fiery antidote (543-49, 557-59; emphasis added).

Responsible for the children's newly minted and tender lives, Lizzie and Laura perform the reproductive roles of wives and mothers. Laura's use of *win* recalls her game-like dealings with the goblin merchant men. Both sisters appear to escape the goblin market with no long-term damage; yet, after Lizzie's resuscitation of Laura with the words, 'eat me, drink me, love me; / Laura, make much of me', Lizzie never *utters* another word (471-72). Why is Lizzie silent? Does her silence enable Laura to speak and tell the children of her experiences? Within the new domestic economy of the family, Laura's duties are to warn the future generation away from the temptations that come in the form of goods, merchants, money, and desires. Her acts of storytelling allow an outering of her consciousness, while relieving the burden of her knowledge gained in the goblin market.<sup>48</sup> Throughout the poem, Laura is the sister associated with interiority by

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<sup>48</sup> In his discussion of psychodynamics and orality, Walter Ong asserts that 'interiority and harmony are characteristics of human consciousness. The consciousness of each human person is totally interiorized', accessible only through the acts of sound production (p. 71). Uttering becomes an act of outering one's interiority. For more on the constructions of orality and

way of threats to it, damages done it, and renewals of it; the continued outerring of her interiority in the conclusion follows form. Lizzie's actions from the beginning have been to preserve and prevent an outerring of her interiority. She admonishes Laura for 'peeping' at goblin men; *to peep* implies sight and sound, the opening of lids and lips. Lizzie refuses to peep, to utter or open herself up to the goblins' attacks. In a poem, where words and language can be deceitful, silence is self-preservation.

*Goblin Market* uses counterfeit slang to enact what it theorises – that language, like money, can deceive us. Reading *Goblin Market* through slang dictionaries and putting it in discourse with other works about counterfeiting reveals the depths of Victorian anxieties about fraud, especially the frauds that hide in plain sight. But the poem ends with an image of hope: 'Their lives bound up in tender lives / Laura would call the little ones / And tell them of her early prime' (547-9). At the conclusion, Lizzie has won and the cries of newly minted children replace those of the fraudulent goblins. The poem ends with Laura's proclamation that 'there is no friend like a sister / [...] / To fetch one if one goes astray'; even if one falls prey to a fraud or deception and 'goes astray', they can be redeemed.

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primary oral culture, see Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002).

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