

RETHINKING FALLENNESS IN VICTORIAN  
WOMEN'S POETRY

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### I

When contemporary critics of Victorian literature discuss the fallen woman, they generally admit that for nineteenth-century commentators the term covered a broad range of women's illicit sexual behaviors. In its most limited sense, the term "fallen woman" described middle-class Victorian women who engaged in sexual activity outside marriage, and thus whose fall was at once moral and social in nature. In its broadest sense, the term included the prostitute, and even, as Deborah Logan has recently argued, all women engaged in deviant sexual behaviors, serving as a catch-all for a wide range of women's departures from the expectations of middle-class ideology regarding sexuality. It has been the aim of recent critical attention to tease out a more complete sense of the role of the fallen woman in Victorian culture.

This study seeks to expand our understanding of the fallen woman by attending to the history of her representation in a small selection of fallen-woman poetry written by women who were directly involved in work among fallen women. Women's writing (and particularly that of middle-class women) offers a unique insight into Victorian attitudes toward fallenness and reclamation, for it was at them that much of the rhetoric of the reclamation movement was directed, either in terms of attempting to convince fallen women to enter an institution of reclamation or in terms of soliciting women to engage in volunteer work in such an institution. My analysis reveals that even among those directly involved in the reclamation movement there was often confusion about the class,

appearance, and temperament of the fallen women they were seeking to reclaim. This confusion on the part of the reformers is instructive, for it indicates that the conventional Victorian understanding of the fallen woman sometimes bore little resemblance to the actual women they were seeking to reclaim, and thus that the narratives describing them were in need of correction. It is in the fallen woman poetry written by women who were directly involved in work among the fallen that we can see these corrections taking place.

Only recently, with the publication of a handful of anthologies of Victorian women's poetry, have critics begun to turn their attention to some women poets who, while popular in the nineteenth century, have received little or no critical attention since then.<sup>1</sup> Of the poets I engage in this study, Christina Rossetti is by far the most widely-read today (and this almost exclusively because of feminist attention to "Goblin Market" since the 1970s) but the others—Dora Greenwell, Adelaide Anne Procter, and Augusta Webster—have received little or no critical attention.<sup>2</sup> It is one of the objects of this study to rectify this situation, in part simply by granting these poets the attention they deserve, but also by attending to the ways they represented the fallen woman in their poetry. My analysis reveals that these women often represented the fallen woman in ways that opposed conventional treatments of the figure, and thus their revisions allow us to trace shifts in Victorian thought about the fallen woman over the course of the figure's popularity.

There have been to date only a few book-length studies of the fallen woman in the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Deborah Logan, in *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing* (1998), raises an important point about most of these recent studies (and many which precede them): almost all of them treat the fallen woman in novels written by men, and thus

women's writing on the subject has, until recently, been neglected. While it is not the task of the present essay to compile a bibliography of modern critical attention to the fallen woman, it is important to note this critical omission in late twentieth-century studies of the figure, since it indicates the degree to which contemporary scholarship has virtually ignored the record of thought about the subject by many women who were directly involved in work among fallen women. Correcting this lack of attention to women's representations of the fallen woman is, in fact, part of Logan's explicit purpose for her book. As she explains in her introductory chapter, one of her aims "is to explore a representative sampling of women's writing about fallen-woman issues" (16). Logan rightly points out that to ignore women's treatments of the fallen woman is to ignore the ways that women writers

challenged evangelicals and moralists whose assumptions were promoted by the male medical establishment as scientific "fact" [by demonstrating that fallen women are not] genetically class specific, though they are produced by class stratification and power imbalances in society and as such are amenable to change. This shift in focus away from class-based character defects to the significance of environmental influences participates in the discourse of sociological disciplines developed during the Victorian period. (17)

Logan explains that by privileging the sociological over the moral the fallen woman became a vehicle for attention to issues which would eventually be combined under the rubric of "The Woman Question" and which would enjoy heightened political attention as the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts transformed public concern over

prostitution into a national political issue at the heart of which was a political debate about Victorian attitudes toward women.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, during its period of popularity, the fallen woman served as a rallying point for women wishing to engage issues relating to the condition of women.<sup>5</sup> Such attention to the fallen woman is not surprising; the representation of the fallen woman cut across economic, social, moral, political, medical, spiritual, and philosophical boundaries.

It is important to note briefly that the modern critical interest in the fallen woman (brought about largely by feminist inquiry into the figure) can make it appear that the political and literary popularity of the fallen woman lasted far longer than it actually did. There are a number of reasons that the figure of the fallen woman became, during this span of roughly thirty years, a staple feature of Victorian women's verse. The central feature of the debate about the fallen woman is without doubt the census of 1851, which had revealed a national demographic imbalance of 4%. The publication of the census data, in turn, led to a widespread and public debate over the fate of those women who were unable to be married that ranged from discussions of women's education and employment to frank discussions of prostitution. This last point is a critical one, for like many moments of political and public interest in an issue, public debate often results in issues eventually being absorbed, if not overshadowed, by the larger political concerns with which they are associated. The Victorian concern with prostitutes and fallen women was not immune to this process.

Logan's is one of the first to study the fallen woman by focusing exclusively on texts written by women, and this alone marks it as a milestone in critical studies of the subject.<sup>6</sup> Logan's analysis, however, concerns itself almost exclusively with

representations of the fallen woman in *novels* by women. I attempt to complement Logan's work by attending to representations of the fallen woman in women's *poetry*. Additionally, I aim to broaden the historical consideration of the fallen woman by exploring the ways the Victorian interest in her is prefigured by a long line of what Edward Bristow describes as "purity movements," all of which were fueled by sets of conventional narratives describing the fallen woman—and all of which underwent revision over the course of the century. As I will show, the term "fallen woman" was so hopelessly intertwined with cultural myths and sets of conventional narratives that even those who were intimately involved in work among fallen women sometimes found themselves forced to confront the inadequacy of their own stereotypes.

Aside from only a handful of the most recent historical analyses, the overwhelming majority of studies of the fallen woman focus on her as a literary figure rather than as an historical one, and attempt to reconstruct the Victorian ideology of the fallen woman from almost purely literary sources. To assume that such a complex figure in Victorian culture can be reconstructed from solely literary sources is particularly problematic, since it ignores the ways that, as Aram Veesser describes, "every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices" and "literary and non-literary 'texts' circulate inseparably" (xi).<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the present study draws upon the various discourses that both constructed and commented on the fallen women—literary representations, the records of hospitals (and specifically lock hospitals), penitentiaries and other institutions devoted to "reclaiming" fallen woman and prostitutes, police records, editorials, (auto)biographies, and sociological/medical studies (which largely focused on issues of public health). If we are to understand the Victorian concept of the

fallen woman, and in turn the history of the representation of the fallen woman, it is to the relationship between the "literary and non-literary" that we must attend.

Descriptions of direct interaction with fallen women (such as those contained in *The Magdalen's Friend and Female Homes' Intelligencer* (1860-64), William Acton's *Prostitution* (1858), and Felicia Skene's descriptions of institutions for the reclamation of fallen women are useful here, for they allow us to see the Victorians confronting the inadequacy of their notions of fallen women. In this introductory chapter, I will focus most closely on *The Magdalen's Friend*, a short-lived periodical written by and targeted at those involved in institutional efforts to reclaim fallen women and prostitutes. In the "opening address" of *The Magdalen's Friend and Female Home's Intelligencer*, the journal pledged:

to promote every measure for the prevention, removal, or alleviation of the 'great social evil,' either by making known the various remedial channels and preventive associations, which lead to these results, or by bringing into communication, through the medium of its pages, all who are labouring to advance the cause. (*MF* "Opening Address" 1)

*The Magdalen's Friend* contains numerous descriptions of direct interaction with fallen women. In one of these, a series of reports describing "midnight meetings" where prostitutes and other fallen women were encouraged to come and hear a brief sermon about their reclaimability and obtain information about institutions devoted to their reclamation, contains this remarkable description, worth quoting at some length:

A glance across the room would scarcely reveal the character of the assembly. Are these the "gay" and the "unfortunate"—the dashing

courtesans, or the starveling outcasts from the West End? They differ very little in appearance and demeanor from as many women of "the middle and lower classes"—to adopt Mr. Gladstone's discriminating phrase—taken promiscuously. With few exceptions there are no extravagant dresses—still less are there any symptoms of levity or indecorum. Gravely and quietly, with self-respect and silent courtesy, the refreshments provided are consumed or declined, and new comers provided with places, till not a vacant seat remains. . . . Here and there is one whose veiled or averted face indicates something of shame or disquietitude; but the great majority wear an aspect of cheerful gravity that sets the observer thinking painfully how hearts thus masked may be approached. (*MF* "Midnight Meetings" 59)

This passage highlights the reporter's preconceptions about fallen women and class, and reveals that these women do not resemble the two poles—"the dashing courtesans, or the starveling outcasts from the West End"—he had expected to encounter. These women are neither extravagantly dressed nor are they ill-behaved; their behavior is respectful, they act with "self-respect" and "courtesy," and they are, as he puts it, "of 'the middle and lower classes.'" While it is possible that this report is intended less as an articulation of the reporter's realization of the inadequacy of his own preconceptions than as an attempt to correct these preconceptions among the magazine's readers, the fact remains that this report reveals the degree to which such preconceptions about class and the fallen woman were a problem even for those involved in reclamation work.

The reporter later comments on the "the disparity of age" in the room, and his comments suggest that he had not expected such a wide range of ages at the meeting. This disparity of age, he writes, "strikes one now more than before," thus suggesting that this is not his first encounter with the various ages of fallen woman and prostitutes. Despite his apparent awareness that fallen woman and prostitutes do not all come from a limited range of ages, the reporter offers a pathetic description of each age group:

Here are mere girls—girls of sixteen or seventeen—girls who, if seen in pure and happy homes, would have recalled the poet's image of innocent white feet touching the stream that divides childhood from womanhood—girls on whose fair faces paint and drink have not yet replaced the natural bloom with streaks and patches. Here are women of the age at which wise men seek loving helpmates, and children are born early enough to be the pillars of household happiness. And here, too, are women in their ripening prime—women who should be rejoicing . . . in the strong arm of a husband's trust, and the golden girdle of sons and daughters—but women whose still healthful frames and comely features speak but of a physical vigour invulnerable to twenty years of dissolute pleasure and precarious livelihood. (*MF* "Midnight Meetings" 59)

Like the reporter's earlier remarks about the class of women attending the meeting, we can see here that the speaker is struck by the inadequacy of his preconceptions about the age range of women who would attend this meeting. The speaker's description, which moves through descriptions of "mere girls . . . of sixteen or seventeen" on the cusp of womanhood and of women who ought to be "loving helpmates" through "women in their

ripening prime" and establishes the set of idealized descriptions of chaste women against which the setting—this room full of fallen woman, of women who have fallen short of this ideal—works. In other words, these are descriptions of lost potential. But it is the description of the "disparity of age" that is most important here, since by the time of this report's publication William Acton's work had established quite clearly that the actual age ranges (and classes) of prostitutes and fallen women hardly resembled the conventional understanding of them.

Descriptions of other midnight meetings reveal a similar range of classes, attitudes, and appearances. An eye-witness at the Newington Causeway is struck by the diversity of fallen woman they encountered:

The greater part of the women present were young, one or two being mere children. Some few were tending to middle age, and had the appearance of miserable and degraded wretches. The faces of some told unmistakably the story of shame. The husky voice, the bloated countenance, and the restless eye, all proclaimed the melancholy fact that you were in the presence of outcasts. Others had fine intelligent faces, probably manifesting a lesser degree of depravity, and leading one to entertain a hope that there were not hopelessly irreclaimable. Some few were flashily dressed; the remainder being of a lower class, or of the very lowest. (*MF* "Midnight Meetings" 61)

Clearly these observers are struck by the diversity of age and class with which they find themselves confronted, and their descriptions leave the reader with the distinct impression that this demographic is decidedly *not* what was expected. But in addition,

this passage allows us to see the reporter drawing sets of distinctions among the degrees of depravity women attending the meeting: there are middle-aged "miserable and degraded wretches" whose life is a "story of shame" who are presumably professional prostitutes; and there are younger women who "[manifest] a lesser degree of depravity" and who are perhaps not "hopelessly irreclaimable." The point here is that within the umbrella term of "fallen woman" there existed a series of gradations of depravity (and perhaps even fallenness) that are discernible by the woman's appearance and demeanor.

A participant at another midnight meeting made a similar observation about the variety of women in the room, noting that the women who attended these meetings were not the well-dressed prostitutes he had expected:

I had a fair opportunity for the three quarters of an hour during which the refreshments were being served to scan the countenances and appearance of the nearly two hundred and fifty unfortunate young women thus congregated. It was evident to me that *at least one half* were not of the more fashionable class of fallen ones who frequent the neighborhood of Regent street and the Haymarket. Some were almost the lowest class; the majority I should say were from the class of domestic servants and other females of that rank; many, however, were well and fashionably attired.

(*MF* "Midnight Meetings 2" 85)<sup>8</sup>

Here, again, we can see the reporter confronting the distinction between the fallen woman (those "from the class of domestic servants") and the prostitute (the "well and fashionably attired"). Again and again in these reports of the midnight meetings, we find the reporter

astonished by the variety of fallen women the meetings attract, even, at one point, expressing relief when encountering the "kind" of fallen woman he had expected:

Here, however, to-night, was to be found the real *mulier formosa* in abundance—the fashionably dressed and elegant *habitué* of Regent Street and the Haymarket, and perhaps if one could dis sever from the mind all the painful associations and feelings linked with the scene, and look at it with the cold and criticising eye of an ordinary acute observer, no fairer specimen of English female beauty could be afforded than in the case of the 250 young women thus heterogeneously brought together. (*MF* "Midnight Meetings 3" 119)

These descriptions of direct encounters allow us to see both the inadequacy of the conventional narratives describing the fallen woman and the degree to which, as these last two descriptions indicate, workers who sought out "fallen women" expected to find themselves ministering to the well-dressed prostitutes of Haymarket and Regent Street. Indeed, the presence of such preconceptions among reclamation workers despite the portrayal in the visual arts of fallen women as poor and homeless (such as in Augustus Egg's *Past and Present* [1858] and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Found* [1853-82]) indicates the tenacity of the popular notion of the fallen woman and the prostitute. Clearly, these observers began this work with certain preconceptions about the types and classes of women they would encounter, imagining that they would find members "of the fashionable class of fallen ones who frequent the neighborhood of Regent Street and the Haymarket" (*MF* "Midnight Meetings 2" 85). Instead, these workers found themselves confronted with not only members of this "fashionable class of fallen ones," but also with

domestic servants and the urban poor—a much broader range socio-economic positions than they had initially assumed.

This conflict between the conventional notion of the fallen woman (that is, the idea of the figure derived largely from literary representations of her) and actual fallen women and prostitutes seeking assistance in a house of reclamation presents a series of problems of definition and, in turn, identification. Indeed, one installment of "Female Missionaries to the Fallen," a documentary series of articles published in the *Magdalen's Friend*, states bluntly that "it will occasionally happen (especially when a missionary first engages in the work) that a tract may be offered to one for whom it is not intended" (44). Thus, without obvious markers such as sexual disease or pregnancy, fallenness was often impossible to detect simply by *looking* at a woman.

This problem of identification points to a much larger problem, and it is one that modern critics of Victorian literature, in turn, have inherited. As these missionary sketches and reports from midnight meetings suggest, those involved in reclamation work apparently drew little or no distinction between the prostitute and the fallen woman who was not engaged in prostitution. Their failure to distinguish among different modes of fallenness stands in direct contrast to the conventional literary depictions of the fallen woman from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which often represented her as the victim of male seducers, and, more importantly, as rarely engaged in prostitution. It is this problem of definition, this incongruity, that the present study takes as its point of departure, for only by attending to it we can begin to approach the manifold questions that emerge about the fallen woman.

This study seeks to answer such questions by examining the representation of the fallen woman by four women poets, placing each of their treatments within the context of the nineteenth-century reclamation movement. This approach to the fallen woman allows us to see the literary representation of the fallen woman in contrast to descriptions of the figure written by those involved in reclamation work, and thus makes clear how writers such as Greenwell, Procter, Rossetti and Webster complicate and revise the traditional narratives describing the fallen woman and her reclamation in their work.<sup>9</sup> It is in this sense, then, that this study aims to offer a history of the representation of the fallen woman, first by sketching the eighteenth-century origins of the figure and then by attending closely to poetry composed between 1850 and 1880, when attention (both literary and political) to the figure reached its highest point.

My decision to examine only poetry during this period is not arbitrary; as I have already remarked, very few studies of the fallen woman in Victorian women's poetry have been published to date, despite the fact that the fallen woman was a staple of women's poetry at mid-century. There is, therefore, a need for critical attention to this form in contemporary efforts to assemble the literary history of the Victorian period. One of my aims is to broaden the current critical understanding of the Victorian idea of the fallen woman by tracing her representation in poetry written by women who were involved in efforts to reclaim fallen women. These women, I show, often represented the fallen woman in ways contrary to those descriptions of her offered by the reclamation movement. As I will show in my discussions of Greenwell and Rossetti, one of the most remarkable conclusions to emerge from such attention is the clear sense that these women sometimes found themselves writing *against* the descriptions of the fallen woman

advanced by the reclamation system within which they were working. I argue that the representation of the fallen woman by the reclamation movement presented a highly idealized vision of both the fallen woman and the process of reclamation, positing the fallen woman as somehow desirous of her own reclamation and eager to bring it about, and equally presenting a vision of the work of reclamation as the efforts of unfallen "sisters" working calmly to effect the reclamation of their fallen sisters. Such representations of reclamation work are not surprising, considering that much of this work (and especially that conducted by the Church Penitentiary Movement) was indeed conducted largely by middle-class women. My attention to Greenwell and Rossetti attempts to make clear the ways women writers involved directly in reclamation work quickly found that this image of the effortless reclamation of the fallen woman was sometimes little more than a fantasy. By describing the process of reclamation as difficult and complex, such writers attempted to counter the dominant representation of reclamation and offer instead a less idealized vision of the work.

Finally, this study is concerned broadly with the conventional fallen-woman narrative and its revisions in the last half of the century. Like Roxanne Eberle, I argue in what follows that this narrative was hardly a Victorian construction, and, as I will argue, William Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress* (1731) effectively codifies what will become, for the Victorians, the fallen woman narrative. While we can certainly identify examples of sexually promiscuous women in English literature earlier than Hogarth's work (Malory's Guinevere, for example), the eighteenth century saw the emergence of institutional efforts to cope with prostitutes (as well as well as diseased and abandoned women) which continued into the nineteenth century. It is to a brief discussion of the general parameters

of the Victorian construction of fallenness, and then to a discussion of the figure's origins in the eighteenth century to which I will turn next.

## II

The conventional representation of the fallen woman in Victorian literature can be seen in a large number of texts, with the most prominent literary examples occurring in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853), Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1857), Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1857), and George Moore's *Esther Waters* (1894).<sup>10</sup> Similarly, paintings such as Rossetti's *Found* (1854), Frank Dicksee's *The Confession* (1896) and Egg's series *Past and Present* (1858) offer conventional visual depictions of the fallen woman. None of these women are prostitutes. Instead, they are all either from the working or the middle classes, and, more importantly, possess thoroughly middle-class notions of sexual propriety and female virtue. Whether Victorian descriptions of the fallen woman resemble the women encountered in houses of refuge and at midnight meetings, the sheer amount of attention devoted to her points to the proliferation of discourses on sex and sexuality described by Michel Foucault in volume one of his *History of Sexuality* (1978). As Foucault explains, the nineteenth century in England saw not the eradication of sexual discourse, but instead the proliferation of discourses on sex and sexuality:

This is the essential thing; that Western man has been drawn for three centuries to the task of telling everything concerning his sex; that since the classical age there has been a constant optimization and an increasing valorization of the discourse on sex; and that this carefully analytical discourse was meant to yield multiple effects of displacement,

intensification, reorientation, and modification of desire itself. Not only were the boundaries of what one could say about sex enlarged, and men compelled to hear it said; but more important, discourse was connected to sex by a complex organization with varying effects, by a deployment that cannot be adequately explained merely by referring it to a law of prohibition. (23)

Foucault describes the emergence of "a political, economic, and technical incitement to talk about sex. And not so much in the form of a general theory of sexuality as in the form of analysis, stocktaking, classification, and specification, of quantitative or casual studies" (23-24). This institutional interest in sex and sexuality—in medicine, in law enforcement, and in population control—demonstrates that "we are dealing less with a discourse on sex than with a multiplicity of discourses produced by a whole series of mechanisms operating in different institutions" (33). Foucault points out the essential irony here: the apparent repression of sex by modern societies which "consigned sex to a shadow existence, [while they] dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the secret*" (35). In his introduction to *The History of Sexuality*, Victorian Britain served as the prime example of this process.

The early chapters of Foucault's study—those concerned directly with the history of sexuality in eighteenth and nineteenth-century England—are the most instructive here, for in them Foucault challenges the notion that the Victorian period engaged in a repression of sexuality by arguing instead that the century saw the proliferation of discourses about sexuality, whether it was channeled into medical, legal, or religious discourse (via the act of confession). As Foucault explains,

it is not simply in terms of a continual extension that we must speak of this discursive growth; it should be seen rather as a dispersion of centers from which discourses emanated, a diversification of their forms, and the complex deployment of the network connecting them. Rather than the uniform concern to hide sex, rather than a general prudishness of language, what distinguishes these last three centuries is the variety, the wide dispersion of devices that were invented for speaking about it, for having it be spoken about, for inducing it to speak of itself, for listening, recording, transcribing, and redistributing what is said about it: around sex, a whole network of varying, specific, and coercive transpositions into discourse. Rather than a massive censorship, beginning with the verbal proprieties imposed by the Age of Reason, what was involved was a regulated and polymorphous incitement to discourse. (34)

This passage is representative of Foucault's overarching argument throughout the first half of *The History of Sexuality* that far from silencing sexual discourse, the nineteenth century witnessed an explosion of discourses associated with sexuality. It is this notion of the channeling of sexual discourse into other, culturally acceptable modes, that is threaded through my study, for I read the Victorian interest in the fallen woman as yet another example of this discursive process Foucault describes.

Of those mechanisms Foucault describes that are responsible for the transformation of sex into discourse, one of the most significant to this study is the confession. As Foucault explains, the confession functions as a means by which "individuals [are compelled] to articulate their sexual peculiarity—no matter how

extreme" (60). More specifically, however, Foucault argues that the confession serves as a means of not only the revelation, but of the reconstruction in language, of sexual deviance:

the confession lends itself, if not to other domains, at least to new ways of exploring the existing ones. It is no longer a question simply of saying what was done—the sexual act—and how it was done; but of reconstructing, in and around the act, the thoughts that recapitulated it, the obsessions that accompanied it, the images, desires, modulations, and quality of the pleasure that animated it. For the first time no doubt, a society has taken upon itself to solicit and hear the imparting of individual pleasures. (63)

The significance of Foucault's notion that the confession functions as a means of recapitulating the sexual desires of the speaker becomes apparent when we consider that each of the poems considered in this study—with the exception of Christina Rossetti's "Noble Sisters"—takes the form of a dramatic monologue. Even more, some of these dramatic monologues (specifically, Greenwell's "Christina" and Procter's "A Legend of Provence") can be read as deathbed confessions. But at its heart, these fallen-woman dramatic monologues can be read as confessions, and thus can be seen as engaging in precisely the kind of transformation of sexuality and sexual desire into discourse that Foucault describes.

There is no doubt that, at least early on in the Victorian tradition of the fallen-woman poem, these confessions transform the fallen woman's sexual past desire and deviance into religious discourse—insofar as they advance a series of arguments about

the fallen woman's reclaimability and the process of a Christian reclamation. By the end of the century, in poems such as Webster's "A Castaway," that element of the Christian confession is beginning to fall away as the fallen woman is absorbed into the larger "Woman Question," which considered women's sexuality, women's enfranchisement, and women's employment. In this sense, then, this study attends to one specific iteration of the history of the representation of the fallen woman, which in turn can be seen as bound up in this Foucaultian mechanism of the confession as a means by which sex and sexuality is rendered as discourse.

Much of the Victorian interest in the fallen woman and prostitution, which came to be called the "Great Social Evil," can be seen as taking part in this proliferation of discourse about sex and sexuality. When we consider the Victorian interest in the emerging field of "public health," which in the Victorian period included everything from personal hygiene to prostitution, we find again and again a highly public and tremendously frank discussion of sex and the sex industry. If Henry Mayhew had worked in *London Labour and the London Poor* (printed in four volumes in 1861) to expose the existence of the underclasses to the rest of the world, in his landmark study of prostitutes in England, *Prostitution* (1858, revised in 1870), William Acton attempted to expose the flaws in the Victorian myths surrounding prostitution.<sup>11</sup> Prostitution was the "Great Social Evil" of England, and a great deal of philanthropic work was aimed at ridding England of prostitutes.

These efforts to rid the country of prostitutes were not exclusively Victorian. In fact, they derived from much earlier movements in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries. It is necessary at this point to discuss briefly a few key points of the eighteenth

century's interest in the suppression of vice, not only because they play a crucial role in the development of Victorian attitudes toward the fallen woman, but also because these movements demonstrate unequivocally that the Victorian interest in the fallen woman had much earlier origins. In *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (1977) Edward Bristow describes how the many societies for the reformation of manners and anti-vice organizations emerged in England between 1690 and 1880 (6). While many of these eighteenth-century societies were concerned with the public implications of prostitution—as the most public marker of vice and as a potential source of disease—Bristow argues that the societies saw themselves primarily as a supplement to a weak police force, and as such focused their energy on punishment rather than the reformation of the prostitute's character.<sup>12</sup>

Bristow notes, furthermore, that "there were four peaks of anti-vice agitation: the 1690s, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the 1880s and the early twentieth century [and] each left behind an important institutional legacy to carry on the struggle against sexual vice after the original fever had died down" (2). What late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century societies represent, in the end, is an older, pre-Victorian understanding of prostitution—characterized most significantly by the lack of interest in *reforming* the women—that, as I will show in what follows, had begun by the middle of the eighteenth century to be replaced by an interest in re-training and reformation. The founding of the Magdalen Hospital in 1758 is the most notable example of this shift in attitude, and it would serve as the model for most houses of reclamation throughout the nineteenth century. This is a crucial movement in the English attitude toward vice, and although it is roughly coincident with massive shifts in the

notion of identity and agency, agitation for reform of the penal system, the emergence of the novel, and the rise in philanthropic societies, it is important to note that the older, non-reformative attitude lingers throughout the nineteenth century in certain tenacious evangelical attitudes toward prostitution.<sup>13</sup>

I do not mean to imply that this shift in English attitudes toward sexual vice was immediate or total. Indeed, as I will describe, this collision of differing attitudes toward prostitution is in many ways responsible for the complex—and at times erratic—concept of fallenness the Victorians held. As the older notion of the fallen or ruined woman as doomed to an inevitable decline (at once physical, moral and financial) and death came to be challenged by the emerging notion that the fallen woman and prostitute were reclaimable, there emerged a highly complex attitude toward fallenness, informed by both an evangelical conception of the fallen woman in wholly moral terms and a range of philanthropic endeavors that had attempted to approach fallenness in material terms. Moreover, even those institutions arguing for the reclaimability of the fallen woman at times fell back upon the traditional moral framework by which prostitution had been typically understood. We can see this best in the literature surrounding the various philanthropic societies devoted to working with prostitutes.

Like the societies, many eighteenth-century satirists found much to attack in the sexual life of London, and the most enduring of these attacks are without doubt William Hogarth's. In the 1730s, Hogarth offers up a host of treatments of sex and sexuality in eighteenth century life: *A Harlot's Progress*, *A Rake's Progress* (1735), and *Before and After* (1736) as well as his later assault upon Gin Lane and, more generally, upon the dehumanizing conditions of urban London. These indicate the degree to which large

segments of the urban population in England during the eighteenth century were concerned with vice—and more specifically, sexual vice. As Ronald Paulson explains, Hogarth's attack in the *Harlot's Progress* is aimed primarily at the failures of the institutions which should protect Moll (46). But it is the narrative of the harlot's progress which is of particular interest here: the general parameters of his narrative, with its description of Moll's capture by Mother Needham, her descent from courtesan to low-class prostitute, her imprisonment, and her eventual death can be seen as a paradigmatic narrative that remain essentially unchanged throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>14</sup> It is both within and against this narrative, I argue, that Victorian women poets of the nineteenth century positioned themselves.

As Hogarth's social criticism indicates, one of the eighteenth century's interests was with combating vice in urban London, and the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries saw the emergence of a number of societies—such as the Society for the Reformation of Manners—aimed at eradicating vice and reforming London. As Bristow explains, these groups "were responsible for seven convictions per day, Sundays excluded, over nearly half a century" (19). These are remarkable numbers, and although the societies did not officially specialize in their efforts—that would not happen until the nineteenth century—Bristow tells us that records indicate a marked preoccupation with sexual vice, and with prostitution in particular.<sup>15</sup> In 1699, Bristow reports, "about five hundred disorderly houses had been recently suppressed" (23). Brothels were not the only element of the sex trade targeted by the societies; streetwalkers could be apprehended by local constables who were members of the societies. Bristow describes a drive to remove streetwalkers in 1730:

Amongst those arrested in the 1730 drive were, typically for this coarse age, a whore and client fornicating on one of London's new shop windows, and a group of women taken at 12 or 1 o'clock, exposing their nakedness in the open street to all passengers and using most abominable filthy expressions. One of the latter was Kate Hackabout, the name Hogarth gave to the central figure in his *Harlot's Progress*. (26)

Much as Hogarth's Moll Hackabout finds herself in the Bridewell, so, too, did many of these prostitutes find themselves incarcerated in the infamous London workhouse system.<sup>16</sup> The incarceration of prostitutes in the Bridewell system was common practice from the sixteenth century, and such confinement aimed at both curbing idleness and providing the confined some usable skill upon their release.

The Bridewell system was in many ways a unique element of the English prison system and occupies a special position in the history of the representation of the fallen woman, since it, like the Magdalen Hospital, focused on the reformation of character. As Pieter Spierenburg explains it, the Bridewell system was used primarily for the detention of "vagrants and servants who cheated their employers" (76), while prior to the American Revolution, "transportation was the preferred form of penal bondage" (76).

The Bridewell's emphasis upon the reformation of character—as opposed to transportation of physical punishment—marks it as the site of a crucial turn in the history of the English penal system. As Randall McGowen explains, "the distinctive purpose of these institutions was to reform as well as punish. They were intended to employ their inhabitants so that the prisoners would learn industrious habits. Many of the proposals offered by penal reformers in the 1780s were foreshadowed here, even in smaller details"

(83). In the aftermath of the American Revolution, which left England with limited options for the transportation of felons, penal reform suddenly became a pressing matter. McGowen explains that as eighteenth-century penal reform progressed, there emerged an interest in the reformation—and not just the punishment—of its prisoners:

In concentrating so insistently on the bodies and souls of individual prisoners, the reformers indicated an intensification of concern that had found expression for over a century. They rejected the idea of punishment as spectacle, suggesting that such displays produced callousness. Society should show a tender regard for the individual, thus fostering gentler manners. These goals demanded more attention to punishment, not to its relaxation. Nearly every author during these years had favorable words for some kind of solitary confinement. Even a defender of the gallows such as William Paley praised the ability of solitude to frustrate vice and promote virtue among the prisoners. (85)

This rejection of "punishment as spectacle" in favor of a system which encouraged "virtue among the prisoners" points to the degree to which the prison in the eighteenth century was being transformed into a place where confinement itself became the means of punishing the prisoner—and in addition, the process by means of which the individual prisoner's character was reformed (public executions ceased in England in 1858).

Foucault articulates this point clearly in his discussion of the disappearance of torture in the French and English penal systems; mimicking the voice of an English judge, Foucault writes: "do not imagine that the sentences that we judges pass are activated by a desire to punish; they are intended to correct, reclaim, 'cure'" (10). As I shall show in my

discussion of the Magdalen Hospital below, the emphasis upon reformation was not limited only to penology.

What I am locating here in Hogarth's work is the codification of a narrative describing the life of the prostitute that will remain in place, to however attenuated a degree, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, as I shall show in what follows, the notion of the prostitute's inevitable decline was challenged in the mid-eighteenth century by the emergence of the Magdalen Hospital, which offered a new way of imagining the prostitute by insisting that she could be retrained and eventually re-enter respectable society as a domestic servant. This is a significant development in the history of the English response to prostitution, for it holds that the prostitute's decline need not be so inevitable as Hogarth had imagined. Questions associated with prostitution remained significant topics for social critics through the last half of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth, and my attention to these earlier anti-vice movements has been aimed at allowing us to see the Victorian anti-vice movement's origins.<sup>17</sup>

My attention to the eighteenth century's concern with prostitution seeks to illuminate two threads in the English response to prostitution, for these two narratives, the Hogarthian and the reclamative possibilities raised by the Magdalen, constitute the dominant means by which the Victorians would conceptualize prostitution and the fate of the fallen woman. Because it was the first English institution devoted to retraining prostitutes and sending them back into respectable society, the Magdalen was by far the most important of the eighteenth-century institutional responses to the problem of prostitution. In 1758, Robert Dingley published *Proposals for Establishing a Public Place of Reception for Penitent Prostitutes*. In this pamphlet, he describes how

Noble and extensive are the Charities already established in this CITY:  
Unfortunate Females seem the only Objects that have not yet caught the  
attention of public Benevolence: but, I dare say, it will appear on  
reflection, a work of as great Compassion and Consequence, Necessity  
and Advantage to provide a Place or Reception for them, as for any under  
the protection of the Public. (3)

The absence of a facility like the Magdalen is a remarkable omission on the part of English philanthropy, since between 1690 and 1760, England saw the establishment of a striking number of charitable organizations devoted to providing aid or instruction to the unfortunate—but none aimed at providing assistance to prostitutes wishing to find other means of employment.<sup>18</sup> In his history of the Magdalen Hospital, H. F. B. Compston notes that in the five years between 1699 and 1704, over fifty charitable institutions came into being (19), but that none of them were aimed at providing assistance to prostitutes.<sup>19</sup>

As I shall show in what follows, Dingley was not the first to notice this omission. In such a climate of philanthropic charities and societies, the arousal of public sympathies for prostitutes and "girls deserted by their first deceiver" (Compston 24) would seem to have been inevitable. Compston notes that in March, 1751, a letter appeared in *The Rambler* calling for greater consideration of the plight of the fallen woman. The author describes how, upon walking past the Foundling Hospital, he was struck by the lack of any recourse for the mothers of those foundlings:

by a natural train of sentiment, I began to reflect on the fate of the mothers. For to what shelter can they fly? Only to the arms of their betrayer, for which perhaps are now no longer open to receive them; and

then how quick must be the transition from deluded virtue to shameless guilt, and from shameless guilt to hopeless wretchedness. (208)

Although the letter's purpose is to point out the failures in institutional assistance to the underclasses, it also attempts to elicit support for the establishment of institutions devoted to the reception of prostitutes and ruined women by offering up a sympathetic portrait of them. The letter achieves this by deploying the Hogarthian "downward path" of the fallen woman, describing her seduction, abandonment, and eventual descent into "hopeless wretchedness." The author does not insist, however, that the women are responsible for their fall. Instead, he insists, the "arts and insinuations" of their libertine seducers are to blame:

These were all once, if not virtuous, at least innocent; and might still have continued blameless and easy, but for the arts and insinuations of those whose rank, fortune, or education, furnish them with means to corrupt or to delude them. Let the libertine reflect a moment on the situation of that woman, who being forsaken by her betrayer, is reduced to the necessity of turning prostitute for bread, and judge of the enormity of his guilt by the evils which it produces. (208)

Like Hogarth, the author sees the libertine as one of the chief sources of the problem of prostitution, rather than laying blame upon the moral failures of the women who become prostitutes. And even more, we see here a remarkable awareness of the degree to which the material conditions of the fallen contribute to the numbers of prostitutes on the streets. In the end, the author laments the absence of an institution to receive them, remarking that

there are places, indeed, set apart, to which these unhappy creatures may resort, when the diseases of incontinence seize upon them; but if they obtain a cure, to what are they reduced? Either to return with the small remains of beauty to their former guilt, or perish in the streets with nakedness and hunger. (209)

While the author relies upon the conventional (Hogarthian) narrative of the fallen woman, his recognition of the ways infection and disease play a significant role in her condition re-focuses his argument on the ways the gaps in British philanthropy leave "these unhappy creatures" with the "small remains of [their] beauty" only two options: prostitution or poverty and death. These appeals were successful enough to garner support for the establishment of such an institution, and in 1758 the Magdalen Hospital opened its doors.

In *The Rules, Orders and Regulations, of the Magdalen House, for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes* (1759), we find a similar description of the material conditions of the prostitute's life. The pamphlet describes how "whatever our *national* prejudices may have formerly been, when we come to distinguish the various causes whence the miseries of life generally spring" the result is compassion for the "many *thoughtless young women*, who become *sacrifices*, by the means of those temptations to which their personal advantages exposed them" (4). We should note here the emphasis upon the fallen women's "personal advantages" as having "exposed them" to the situations which would inevitably lead to their fall. Such claims are not an indictment of the fallen woman; indeed, other than referring to her as "thoughtless" (which is immediately qualified with a

reference to her youth), blame is reserved for the libertines who are responsible for the seduction.

The pamphlet describes how these women find themselves "Surrounded by snares, too often laid with great *art* and *industry*," and claims that "it is no wonder that *fallacious promises*, which favor a *propensity to evil*, should sometimes prevail" (4). Thus far, the pamphlet has relied upon conventional narratives describing the origins of the fallen woman: she is, because of her youth, beauty, and inexperience, seduced by a libertine who abandons her, leaving her few economic options other than to become a prostitute. As the pamphlet goes on to explain, the result of this "national prejudice" against assisting prostitutes (and other forms of fallen women) is often counter-productive:

They soon behold themselves, as monuments to *delusion*, *abandoned* by the *seducer*, *forsaken* by their *relations and friends*, *despised*, and even *insulted* by the world. When thus left to struggle with *poverty* and *scorn*, what can be the consequence? Alas, it is too well known that they plunge the *deeper*, and become the *more abandoned*, till a noisome distemper ends their miserable lives. (4-5)

This suggestion of the ways that the prostitute's status as social pariah renders her more recalcitrant, and potentially hostile to efforts to assist her indicates how the Magdalen Hospital founders were consciously attempting to revise conventional English attitudes toward fallenness. Although the fallen woman narrative deployed here is thoroughly conventional, the pamphlet suggests that English prejudices contribute to the problem

rather than alleviate it. The Magdalen, then, attempted to offer up a new means of dealing with prostitutes, and in doing so, to revise English notions of fallenness.

Central to this effort to revise English attitudes toward the fallen was the Magdalen's insistence that the prostitute could be retrained and reintegrated into society as members of the servant classes. Nor were the founders particularly naïve in their hopes:

We are not therefore to conclude, that *all* who go astray in this manner will return to a sense of duty; let it suffice, that *some* of these unhappy women have continued in this dreadful way of living, through a habit of *necessity*, rather than a premeditated *choice*; and that others, less practised in the paths of iniquity, disdaining the insults to which they are exposed, *fly for refuge*. Were we to mark all offences with *extreme rigor*, the state of society would indeed be a state *of war*, and *mercy* no longer considered as an attribute of the deity. Let us then observe the *happy medium*, and *shew mercy to those who seek it*. (5).

Here we find the core of the Magdalen's philosophy—the notion that the prostitute might recover her character after some time in the institution—and thus its founding marks a significant moment in English attitudes toward fallenness, for it challenged the Hogarthian narrative of the prostitute's downward path. She was no longer without institutional recourse, nor was she *necessarily* irretrievably lost.

In the course of describing the opening of the Magdalen in August of 1758, Compston paints a remarkable scene:

A little company of forlorn girls and women made their way to the new Magdalen House, and the Committee considered each separate application. Six women were admitted immediately. . . . Two were promised admission as soon as they were cured of disease. One was admitted as servant to the matron. [One] was rejected, being no Prostitute. (Compston 46)

This is a telling passage, for it indicates the degree to which the Magdalen's initial policies drew distinctions among gradations of women's promiscuous sexual activity. The rejection of the woman seeking refuge on the grounds that she was "no Prostitute" indicates that, even as the Hogarthian narrative was being revised, gradations of fallenness were beginning to emerge.

As I have been describing throughout this treatment of the history of shifting attitudes toward the prostitute and the ruined woman, by the nineteenth century we find two distinctly different cultural models describing the fallen woman: one which insists upon her unavoidable fate, and another which insists upon her ability to be reclaimed, redeemed, and reintroduced into society. The older model, which as I have shown was codified by Hogarth in *A Harlot's Progress*, held that following her seduction, the woman's path was inevitably a downward one ending in her isolation, ruin, and eventual death. What is important to note about this belief is that because the woman's fate was believed to be determined, there was a complete lack of interest in effecting her reformation or reclamation. Instead, as my discussion of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners shows, the English response to the prostitute was simply to banish her. On the other hand, the letters to *The Rambler* in 1751 and the founding of the

Magdalen in 1758 indicate clearly that there had emerged by the mid-eighteenth century a counter-narrative to the Hogarthian one. This narrative insisted that the prostitute was not irredeemable, nor was she doomed to inevitable decline and death. Instead, the Magdalen offered a narrative claiming that the prostitute could be reclaimed, reeducated, and retrained for entry into domestic service—and respectable society. These two models were deployed simultaneously in multiple discourses, and will remain the principal modes of representing the fallen woman for the next 150 years (and arguably beyond), transcending generic boundaries and becoming, in many ways, one of the core elements of the emerging feminist movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the political battle over prostitution sparked by the Contagious Diseases Acts rendered the fallen woman a part of "the Woman Question."<sup>20</sup>

A comprehensive list of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, plays, and poems featuring fallen women would be impossible. Among the canonical novels of the eighteenth-century featuring prostitutes and ruined women are Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) and John Cleland's pornographic novel *Fanny Hill* (1749). Fielding's *Shamela* (1741) represents the conjunction of domestic service and prostitution. Female sexual promiscuity and prostitution also figure prominently in libertine drama of the Restoration and eighteenth century. However sympathetically the Victorian novel might present the fallen woman or the prostitute (such as Nancy in *Oliver Twist*), and however these novels often describe a metaphorical reclamation of the fallen woman (such as in Gaskell's *Ruth*), the broad outlines of the narrative are often little more than the Hogarthian cautionary tale rendered as tragedy, and so the conventional narrative functions as a social criticism rather than an exposure of the fallen woman's immorality. As I will

show, however, these conventions governing the representation of the fallen woman were by no means as stable as the Victorian novel's treatment of the figure would suggest, and the history of the representation of the fallen woman reveals that the figure underwent significant changes over the course of the century.

Within the nineteenth-century position that insisted upon the reclaimability of the fallen woman, there emerged a contradictory set of descriptions of the fallen woman. As these institutions working for the reclamation of the fallen woman attempted to solicit funds and volunteer support for that project, they offered up idealized descriptions of the penitent magdalen. However, in the minutes of meetings and in private correspondence, they offered up much less idealized descriptions of the fallen woman and her context. These mutually exclusive descriptions of the fallen woman—one idealized, penitent, and willing to be reclaimed, and the other recalcitrant, hostile, and decidedly less idealized—are in effect different kinds of fallen woman narratives. In this sense, then, I am interested in the history of the representation of the fallen woman. I am interested in the ways that the poetry of Victorian women takes part in this revision of the idea of the fallen woman.

The women poets I have chosen to study were all personally or professionally invested in some way in work among fallen women: Dora Greenwell wrote about and worked in refuges for the poor and the fallen; Adelaide Ann Procter's work was involved in the establishment of Catholic refuges; Christina Rossetti worked for over a decade at Highgate penitentiary for the reclamation of fallen women; Augusta Webster wrote widely on issues affecting women. These women poets, then, were the kind of unfallen women who would work for the reclamation of their "fallen sisters." Because of this

involvement, these women writers sometimes recognized the inadequacies of the conventional narratives describing the prostitute and the fallen woman, and a large part of my purpose in this study is to explore the ways that this experience affects their representation of the fallen woman and the prostitute.

Very little attention has been paid to the intersection of literary and non-fictional representations of the fallen woman and the prostitute, and even less has been paid to representations of the figure in verse written by women involved in reclamation work. By reading verse written by such women alongside non-fiction documents associated with the reclamation movement, we can see that even as the nineteenth century had inherited two narratives describing the fallen woman and the prostitute—one insisting upon the inevitability of her fate, and the other insisting upon her reclaimability—there were those who, while operating within the reclamation movement, worked to revise the narrative of reclaimability by exposing the inadequacies and weaknesses of all the narratives describing the fallen woman. My analysis of the history of the representation of the fallen woman reveals that even within the reclamation movement there were debates about both the fallen woman's reclaimability and the methods of those institutions devoted to her reclamation.

### III

In chapter one, I describe the ways that the mutually exclusive and competing notions of the fallen woman forced women writers writing about the fallen woman to carve out a new space for her articulation. I argue that in Dora Greenwell's "Christina" (1851), we can see the poet attempting to negotiate the traditional narratives of the fallen woman. Greenwell had experience working with the poor and the fallen, and wrote about

the need for a revision of English attitudes toward the objects of their philanthropy. In her secular essays, Greenwell describes the dangers of the myth of reclamation work—characterized by fallen women who are penitent—and insists upon the need to get beyond the "tinsel sentiment" that no doubt led many to engage in such work. Greenwell's poem works against the myth of an easy reclamation by describing the ways the fallen woman's status as pariah forces her to develop a resistance to efforts to reclaim her. "Christina," therefore, is a useful point of departure for this study, since it establishes the competing and mutually exclusive fallen-woman narratives that women writing about her were forced to negotiate. The result of this negotiation, I argue, is a departure from the traditional Hogarthian narrative and a representation of the fallen woman that, while seemingly operating within the conventional fallen-woman narrative, counters the reclamation movement's descriptions of the effortless reclamation by representing a fallen woman resistant to Christian intercession. In this way, I argue, "Christina" works to move the fallen-woman poem beyond the "tinsel sentiment" and toward a less idealized treatment of reclamation work.

In chapter two, I explore the ways that Adelaide Anne Procter's seemingly hopeful representation of a redeemed fallen woman in "A Legend of Provence" reveals the limitations of the ideology of the reclamation movement by describing the complications inherent in any attempt to erase (whether figuratively or literally) the history of the fallen woman. As I show, Procter's presentation of a reclaimed and restored fallen woman raises the crucial question(s) surrounding efforts to reclaim fallen women: even if the fallen woman were able to be reabsorbed into respectable society, what status in that society would she hold? In addition, Procter offers an examination of

the possibility of total reclamation, concluding ultimately that, whatever religious position efforts to reclaim the fallen might stake out, problems with the social dimension of reclamation remain effectively unavoidable: the fallen woman and her narrative continue to exist and proliferate.

In chapter three, I discuss Christina Rossetti's interest in the politics of female relationships and female communities. Although "Goblin Market" is the poem most often discussed in critical estimations of Rossetti's politics, in this chapter I argue that two poems she composed after working at Highgate Penitentiary, "Noble Sisters" and "Sister Maude," explore the ways that the politics of female communities and female relationships could work to push women away from those communities rather than protect or retain them. Rossetti, like Greenwell, had a great deal of experience with the reclamation movement, and her treatment of the fallen woman theme exhibits an awareness of the need for a revision of sentimental notions of the reclamation process. It is in Rossetti's treatment of the fallen woman in these two poems—unlike "Goblin Market," which, like "Christina," had relied upon the traditional structure of the Christian intercession as a means of the fallen woman's reclamation—that we can trace the beginnings of the movement away from the fallen woman as a religious poem. "Noble Sisters" represents a failed attempt to protect a (potentially) fallen woman from temptation, while "Sister Maude" offers up what can only be described as a botched intercession that fails to bring about the fallen woman's reclamation.

Augusta Webster is, without doubt, the most politically active of all the women considered in this study. She was deeply involved in efforts to reform the women's educational system, and in her essays for *The Examiner*, she consistently engaged a wide

range of topics affecting women. As I argue in chapter four, when we consider Webster's fallen-woman poem, "A Castaway" (1870), in the context of her political writing, we can see her consistently exposing the inadequacy of the traditional narratives used to describe the fallen woman. Webster's treatment of the fallen woman removes the traditionally sentimental approach to the figure. While writers such as Greenwell had believed in the necessity of such a de-romanticizing, in the end Greenwell's poetic treatments of the fallen woman had relied heavily upon the moral framework that had traditionally been used to describe her. And while Rossetti had approached a de-romanticized treatment of the fallen woman in her two sister-ballads of 1860, in an earlier poem such as "Goblin Market" (composed in 1858), Rossetti had relied heavily upon the traditional narrative of the fallen woman. Webster's treatment of the fallen woman almost entirely avoids that traditional narrative, however, and instead offers an essentially materialist representation of the fallen woman and her origins. In the course of offering up this treatment of the fallen woman, Webster goes about exposing the inadequacy of the traditional narrative of the fallen woman, placing in its stead a vision of her economic, educational, and social origins. The image that Webster paints is a particularly bleak one, describing the failures of the houses of reclamation, the arbitrariness of the English attitude toward prostitution, and, in the end, the degree to which prostitution is the unavoidable result of the limited occupational, educational, and social opportunities for women. More importantly, however, I argue that Webster's rejection of the traditional narratives governing the representation of the fallen woman amount to a rejection of fallenness as a moral category altogether, and marks the effective end of the fallen woman poem in Victorian literature.

It is my hope in this study to offer more than a discussion of how a handful of women poets—some more obscure than others—treat the fallen woman in their work. I seek, instead, to demonstrate the ways that attention to the history of the representation of the fallen woman reveals that the figure underwent a gradual transformation over the course of the century, and to argue that this transformation must be taken into account by contemporary criticism of the figure if we are to understand accurately the complexities of the fallen woman in Victorian consciousness. As I have already shown, there are very clear indications that even those involved in the reclamation movement were forced to confront the inadequacy of the conventional notion of the fallen woman. Acknowledging this confusion, as this study does, is a crucial step in constructing a thorough understanding of the history of the representation of the fallen woman.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Leighton and Reynolds's *Victorian Women Writers* (1995), Jennifer Breen's *Victorian Women Poets, 1830-1901* (1994), Tess Coslett's *Victorian Women Poets* (1996), Leighton's *Victorian Women Poets: A Critical Reader* (1996), and Virginia Blain's *Victorian Women Poets: An Annotated Anthology* (2001).

<sup>2</sup> For example, Dora Greenwell, who was a lifelong and tireless crusader for a variety of philanthropic endeavors and friend of Josephine Butler, has had no scholarly biography published. Adelaide Anne Procter, who was a wildly popular and highly political poet, has only in 2001 seen a scholarly biography. Augusta Webster, who was a prolific writer and longtime agitator for the reform of the women's educational system, has no scholarly biography. Amy Levy has seen renewed critical attention in the wake of Melvyn New's publication of *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy* (1993), but overwhelmingly criticism of her work focuses on her status as a middle-class Jewish woman writer.

<sup>3</sup> Most significantly Sally Mitchell's *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class, and Women's Reading, 1835-1880* (1981), George Watt's *The Fallen Woman in the 19th-Century English Novel* (1984), Amanda Anderson's *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (1993), Tom Winnifirth's *Fallen Women in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (1994), and Deborah Logan's *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing* (1998). Roxanne Eberle's *Chastity and Transgression in Women's Writing, 1792-1897* (2002) is a study with interests remarkably similar to my own.

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<sup>4</sup> See Judith Walkowitz's discussion of this in *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (1980), especially pp. 67-137. Hers is the seminal discussion of the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts.

<sup>5</sup> The Contagious Diseases Acts had not only effectively legalized prostitution in England, but had also had horrified many by allowing for the "inspection" of prostitutes—and even suspected prostitutes—by the local constabulary.

<sup>6</sup> Roxanne Eberle's recently published study, *Chastity and Transgression in Women's Writing, 1792-1897* (2002), offers a similar inquiry into the history of the notion of the fallen woman. Like the present study, she identifies William Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress* as the site of a codification of the conventional narrative of the harlot—seduction, prostitution, decline, and eventual death. Eberle, however, is interested in how the transgressive figure of the redeemed/reclaimed harlot challenges the conventional narrative, and thus registers the emergence of a "proto-feminist social activism" (7) on the part of "radical women writers" such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Josephine Butler. There are, nevertheless, remarkable similarities between the various trajectories our investigations take. Eberle grounds her discussion in an argument that Wollstonecraft stood as an archetype of a radical woman writer, jettisoning the conventional Hogarthian narrative of the harlot's progress in her novel, *Maria*, offering instead a novel concerned with a woman trapped in a bad marriage. Eberle traces the outlines of a series of proto-feminist rejections of this Hogarthian narrative, and argues that by the end of the century the New Woman signifies a cultural reclamation (as opposed to one by radical women writers) of Wollstonecraft. Her study thus serves as a

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fine supplement to this study, and I regret that it was published too recently for me to integrate it any more thoroughly into my own thinking on the subject.

<sup>7</sup> As Veeseer explains, the New Historicism "forsak[es] what it sees as an outmoded vocabulary of allusion, symbolization, allegory, and mimesis [and] seeks less limiting means to expose the manifold ways culture and society affect each other. The central difficulty with these terms lies in the way they distinguish literary text and history as foreground and background: criticism bound to such metaphors narrows its concern to the devices by means of which literature reflects or refracts its contexts. New Historicism renegotiates these relationships between texts and other signifying practices, going so far . . . as to dissolve "literature" back into the historical complex that academic criticism has traditionally held at arm's length." (xii).

<sup>8</sup> These "Midnight Meetings" span many issues of *The Magdalen's Friend*, and since it was a regular feature, all installments carry the same title. For the sake of clarity, I have chosen to distinguish among the different texts by including a number in the title.

<sup>9</sup> See also Eberle, 1-19.

<sup>10</sup> Gaskell's Ruth is seduced and then abandoned; Marian Earle in *Aurora Leigh* is raped in a brothel; Tess's fall is ambiguous at best, and Hardy is unclear whether she is raped or falls of her own volition; like Ruth, Eliot's Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede* is seduced by the attractive young member of the local gentry; and Esther Waters is seduced under promise of marriage by another domestic servant.

<sup>11</sup> In *Prostitution*, one of Acton's primary arguments is that far from being a lifelong career for women, prostitution tended to be little more than a temporary occupation, often lasting no more than 4 years: "I have every reason to believe, that by far the larger

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number of women who have resorted to prostitution for a livelihood, return sooner or later to a more or less regular course of life. Before coming to this conclusion I have consulted many likely to be acquainted with their habits, and have founded my belief upon the following data. Whatever be the cause of a female becoming a prostitute, one thing is certain—before she has carried on the trade four years, she has fully comprehended her situation, its horrors and its difficulties, and is prepared to escape, should opportunity present itself. The constant humiliation of all, even of those in the greatest affluence, and the frequent pressure of want attendant on the vocation of the absolute street-walker, clouding the gaiety of the kept woman, and driving the wedge of bitter reflection into the intervals of the wildest harlot's frenzy, are the agencies which clear the ranks of all but veterans who seem to thrive in proportion to their age" (Acton 72). See also Gertrude Himmelfarb's "Mayhew's Poor: A Problem of Identity" (1971), which is a discussion of the "problem of identity" in Mayhew's and Hemyng's descriptions of the urban poor.

<sup>12</sup> According to Bristow, the emergence of these kinds of societies at this point is no coincidence; from the 15th century, he argues, the lack of an organized police force led to the rise of a number of "societies" in order "to fill the gap in police" (14).

<sup>13</sup> The history of the English penal system is a complicated matter, and has recently enjoyed a revival of interest. See Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1979), as well as John Bender's Foucaultian discussion of the connections between the history of the novel, the prison, and identity in the 18th century. More recently, Randall McGowen and Peter Spierenburg have written eloquently on the history of the English penal system and its transformations. For examples of evangelical attitudes toward the fallen woman and the

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prostitute, see William Tait's *Magdalenism: An Inquiry into the Extent, Causes and Consequences of Prostitution* (1840), J. B. Talbot's *The Miseries of Prostitution* (1844), Richard Wardlaw's *Lectures on Female Prostitution* (1842), and Greenwood's *The Seven Curses of London* (1869). See also Walkowitz's discussion of criminal activity among prostitutes in *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 39.

<sup>14</sup> This pattern is modified slightly in the nineteenth-century. In the novel, the fallen woman typically experiences a social fall similar to Moll's, but this is not always accompanied by her becoming a prostitute. The fallen woman's death, however, is usually a prominent feature of the narrative throughout the nineteenth-century representation of the figure. This is especially the case in the novel.

<sup>15</sup> He reports that "of the 101,683 recorded convictions, the largest category is for lewd and disorderly practices, much of it street soliciting, indecent exposure and intercourse in the open. The attacks on bawdy houses, frequently located in taverns, and on the theatre, were aspects of the same struggle" (21).

<sup>16</sup> Bristow notes that even though prostitutes were often sent to the Bridewell, many times they "were bailed before they had beaten any hemp or suffered the celebrated floggings, naked from the waist up, that Londoners loved to attend" (26).

<sup>17</sup> As Boswell's *London Journal* indicates, even in the 1760s prostitution was still a staple feature of public life in London, as was sexual intercourse in public—indicated, at the very least, by Boswell's rendezvous with a prostitute on Westminster bridge. On Tuesday 10 May Boswell writes: "At the bottom of the Haymarket I picked up a strong, jolly young damsel, and taking her under my arm I conducted her to Westminster Bridge, and then in armour complete did I engage her upon this noble edifice. The whim of doing it

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there with the Thames rolling below us amused me much. Yet after the appetite was sated, I could not but despise myself for being so closely united with such a low wench" (255-56). This is only one of several encounters with prostitutes Boswell describes in his London journal. For the seminal discussion of prostitution in the nineteenth century, see Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society*.

<sup>18</sup> Bristow explains that England lagged behind other European countries in establishing such houses of reclamation: "The British were the last Europeans to undertake rescue work and the delay is related to its popular association with Roman Catholicism. When the idea was first mooted in 1749, there were protests in the *Gentleman's Magazine* against 'popish convents' and 'sacred prisons.' . . . In 1660 the Parliament of Paris suppressed virtually all of these houses. When the Bon Pasteur convent was finally established as the popular new prototype . . . its regime was so forbidding it quickly became 'the terror of women of bad life'" (64).

<sup>19</sup> The Westminster Hospital was founded in 1719, and Guy's Hospital in 1725; the Foundling Hospital was founded in 1739, the London Hospital in 1740, the Lock Hospital in 1746, and in 1749, the Clergy Orphan Corporation. The Queen Charlotte Lying-In Hospital in 1752, the Marine Society in 1756, the Lying-In Charity in 1757, and the Asylum for Female Orphans in 1758 (Compston 18-20).

<sup>20</sup> A comprehensive list of novels, plays, and poems of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth century would be impossible. Among the canonical novels of the eighteenth-century featuring prostitutes and ruined women are Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and John Cleland's pornographic novel *Fanny Hill*. Fielding's *Shamela* (1741) represents the conjunction of domestic service and prostitution. Female sexual promiscuity and prostitution also figure

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prominently in libertine drama of the Restoration and eighteenth century. However sympathetically the Victorian novel might present the fallen woman or the prostitute (such as Nancy in *Oliver Twist*), and however these novels often work to effect a metaphorical reclamation/restoration of the fallen woman (such as in Gaskell's *Ruth*), the broad outlines of the narrative are often little more than the Hogarthian cautionary tale rendered as tragedy, and so the conventional narrative functions as social criticism rather than an exposure of the fallen woman's immorality.

## CHAPTER TWO

### "BEYOND THE TINSEL SENTIMENT": NAVIGATING THE RHETORIC OF FALLENNESS IN DORA GREENWELL'S "CHRISTINA"

#### I

In her introduction to Dora Greenwell in *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, Angela Leighton remarks that Greenwell's poetry is characterized by a "disappointing conventionality" when compared to her prose (275). In many ways this is true; her prose, on the other hand, displays a remarkable interest in the politics and rhetoric of philanthropic work. In her highly appreciative biography *Dora Greenwell: A Prophet for Our Own Times on the Battleground of Our Faith* (1926), Constance Maynard describes Greenwell's seemingly tireless efforts to find homes for young fallen women (85). Greenwell's interest in philanthropy was lifelong; she was a longtime friend of Josephine Butler, a tireless crusader for the poor, a member of a number of philanthropic societies, and she published essays on social issues facing northern England. In his 1885 biography of Greenwell, William Dorling catalogues her philanthropic endeavors and interests, which included work with establishing (or reforming) asylums, work among "juvenile phosphorous match-makers of London" (154), and efforts to establish a hospital for insane children. Greenwell was, like many women at mid-century, taking part in the various causes and philanthropic societies emerging across the country, and as one might expect, her efforts resulted in close contact with poor, homeless, unfortunate, friendless, ruined, or fallen women.

Although she was a prolific writer on religious subjects, without doubt her two most famous essays are two secular ones: "Our Single Women" (originally published in

the *North British Review* 1862) and "Hardened in Good" (1866). Both of these essays are concerned with philanthropic work, its difficulties, and the possibilities such work raised for the employment of women. "Our Single Women" discusses the ways the demographic imbalance revealed by the 1851 census required a reassessment of the spheres of employment available to women.<sup>1</sup> In "Hardened in Good," Greenwell discusses the difficulties of philanthropic work and explains how many involved in charity work find themselves troubled by the size and complexity of the problem they confront:

A steadfast Christian worker may go on for a while pretty smoothly, then the current of his work will seem to bring him, as it were naturally, into the thick of some network of misery and evil so intricate and wide-spreading that he is inclined . . . to sit down "astonied." He feels powerless, helpless, hopeless. A chill recoil from his work, made up of disgust and weariness, steals across him; and for such recoils there is but one remedy—to *come yet nearer*. ("Hardened" 70)

Accepting the *realities* of the problems facing social workers, Greenwell argues, forces the worker to move "beyond the tinsel sentiment, and with it beyond the repulsion to natural feeling. . . . we learn to pity, to bear with, and even in a certain sense to love them *as they are*" ("Hardened" 70-71). Although Greenwell's failure to encourage reclamation here may seem an odd position for a proponent of social work at mid-century, it is consistent with the arguments of many who were closely involved in the day-to day activities of philanthropic organizations in England.

By the 1860s a wing of the reclamation movement had emerged which positioned itself in opposition to the "penitentiary model"—as exemplified by the Magdalen Hospital—according to which women were treated effectively as prisoners: their hair was cut, they were forced to wear prison-like uniforms, and to work long hours with little or no pay, and their living conditions were prison-like, complete with barred windows in some cases. The *Magdalen's Friend* contains one article which describes how "in former days, little study appears to have been given as to the best mode of reforming the fallen, and still less discrimination displayed in the means of relief applied to their condition. They were universally regarded as persons who were to be treated as *criminals*, and, accordingly, into penitentiaries were freely imported the penal character and degrading conditions of the *prison system*" ("Bath" 27-28). These older systems were a serious hindrance to reclamation work in the 1860s, as many prostitutes resisted efforts by reclamation workers, unaware that the penal model of the Magdalen was not the only option available to them. In response to this resistance to the Magdalen model, a series of new institutions for the reclamation of fallen women emerged. These new institutions, such as Emma Sheppard's Fromefield House and Dickens's Urania Cottage (funded by the Baroness Coutts), were established on a model of Christian charity rather than a penal model (even though they sometimes had greater affinities with the penal model than their literature would suggest), and they capitalized on the volunteer efforts of unfallen women in reclaiming their inmates.

At the heart of the reclamation movement (beginning with the Magdalen Hospital and continuing on through the nineteenth century) lay a rejection of the traditional fallen-woman narrative which had insisted that her path was inevitably downward, ending in

poverty, isolation, and eventual death. The reclamation movement insisted that this traditional conclusion was not inevitable, arguing instead that the fallen woman was capable of being retrained and sent back into respectable society. As I will show, attention to Greenwell's representation of the fallen woman as resistant to efforts to reclaim her marks a significant change in the representation of the fallen woman, and allows us to see the beginnings of a decades-long impulse aimed at exposing the inadequacies of both the Hogarthian fallen-woman narrative as well as those idealized descriptions of work among the fallen being advanced by institutions devoted to the reclamation of fallen women.

In *The Magdalen's Friend and Female Homes' Intelligencer*, whose run was roughly contemporaneous with the publication of Greenwell's essays, we find a number of articles which attempt to offer correctives to over-romanticized notions of work among the fallen. A series of "Missionary Sketches" (describing the experiences of one individual as he roamed the London streets attempting to persuade prostitutes to abandon their trade and take up residence in an institution seeking to reclaim them) begins with an insistence that the author has "detailed this history truly, neither, on the one hand, throwing a gloss of false and exaggerated sentiment over it, nor, on the other, paring down the actual facts of the case" (249). The author goes on to argue that to "excite a morbid sentimental interest in the condition of unhappy women" would be "to encourage a low estimate of the sinfulness of sin, or to present the features of this [description of a successfully reclaimed fallen woman] as indicative of the general tone of mind and state of feeling prevalent amongst fallen woman" ("Missionary" 249-50). In another

missionary sketch from 1862, we find a description of the importance of a thoroughly unsentimental attitude toward work among the fallen:

It is the object of these endeavours on behalf of the fallen, accounts of which appear from time to time in this Magazine, to present the work *as it really is*; to indicate truly the hopeful, and to exhibit also the discouraging experiences frequently to be met with in this work; to show that such efforts must not be regarded merely in light of sentimental and romantic missions to expectant and yielding subjects, but as difficult and often thwarted endeavours, for the rescue of the members of a class who are very frequently found hardened and obdurate in their sin,—a class whose life and habits of iniquity tend oftentimes to the obliteration from the mind of all sensibility, all conscience, all moral feeling, all views of God, of holiness, and of wrongdoing. ("Missionary Sketches" 17)

The author's insistence here upon the magazine's desire to present work among the fallen "as it really is" suggests, first, that there is some need for a correction of the notion that reclamation work is a matter of "sentimental and romantic missions to expectant and yielding subjects." Public appeals by these institutions aimed at soliciting support—overwhelmingly in the form of middle-class women volunteers—often deployed romanticized imagery emphasizing unfallen woman working for the reclamation of their fallen "sisters." Understandably, these appeals de-emphasized the potential dangers and difficulties of such work. This passage, however, is marked by its description of reclamation work as a "difficult and often thwarted" process among women who are "hardened and obdurate in their sin." The author's recognition that those volunteers

approaching such work under the "sentimental and romantic" illusions of finding the process of reclamation easy and the fallen women willing to be reclaimed is a significant innovation in the representation of reclamation work, for it suggests that by the 1860s even those involved in reclamation work had become aware of the need for a recasting of the image of both the fallen woman and the process of reclamation.

Writing a few years later in "Hardened in Good" (1862), Greenwell echoes these sentiments, arguing that such work is not to be undertaken lightly. Like the author of the "Missionary Sketch," in "Hardened in Good" she insists upon the value of de-romanticizing philanthropic work, and seeks to dissuade those with merely a passing interest from involving themselves in projects which would bring them into contact with not only the underclasses, but also with the vast network of socioeconomic forces that played a part in their making. In the essay, Greenwell describes these forces as "fearful systems of evil" and "outbranching complications of depravity . . . in the midst of things that it is impossible to set right," ("Hardened" 74) and insists that in their midst the worker among the poor must confront the basest of the human capacities: "He will find himself confronted with naked selfishness, greed, and cruelty; and over and under and through all beside, he will track the serpent-windings of that which is the waster of natural life, the loosener of family bonds, the death of nobler thought and sweeter instinct" ("Hardened" 74). Greenwell's description of the complexity of the problems charity work faces, as well as her admission that there are features of this socioeconomic context that are "impossible to set right," challenges any sentimental notions about any inevitable effectiveness of Christian charity in philanthropic work. As Greenwell insists, those who charity work seeks to aid are not merely formerly respectable middle-class

Victorians who have foundered. Instead, they are the antithesis of Victorian respectability: selfish, cruel, without concern for family, and without nobility.

Greenwell's remarks here about the difficulties of charity work and the kinds of people at whom such work is aimed sets up one of the larger points of her essay: charity work occurs among actual people, and they rarely resemble the poor and the fallen in paintings and novels.

Greenwell reminds her readers that such work hardly takes place among ideal subjects: "If we worked for the ideal poor man, brave, industrious, patient, grateful, philanthropy would indeed be an Arcadian pasture. . . . We work for the actual man, with his actual incapacities and imperfections, whom we must take, and, alas, must too often leave, as he is!" ("Hardened" 75). Greenwell's two points—that reclamation work does not take place among "ideal poor" men and that "the actual man" can sometimes not be helped—are crucial ones, for they reveal her recognition of the need to correct misconceptions that might be held by prospective volunteer workers. Such correctives to the notion of reclamation work held by prospective workers (as well as attitudes promoted by the institutions themselves as they attempted to recruit workers) were necessary in part because reclamation work relied largely upon the efforts of "unfallen women," and by mid-century sentimental descriptions of fallen women (in both literature and in descriptions of reclamation work) painted a picture of reclamation work that was, as Greenwell points out, often far from the truth.

Idealized depictions of reclamation work were common in appeals for volunteer workers and in proposals for the establishment of refuges for fallen women. The London Diocesan Penitentiary lamented in its prospectus that London had "not one home for the

fallen where their Sisters in Christ can labour for their restoration and guide the feeble steps of their penitence to peace" and expressed its hope that "ladies who act as Sisters will be led by God's grace to join this work" (qtd. in Marsh 219). The description of the fallen woman's "feeble steps" suggests at once a spiritual and physical withering the fallen woman has undergone during the course of her fall. Additionally, however, the description of the unfallen woman acting as a guide along the fallen woman's path to "restoration" suggests that the fallen woman is a willing participant in this process. Other depictions of reclamation work idealized different aspects of the process. In 1847, Dickens described Urania cottage, a home for fallen women he administered for ten years, in similarly romantic terms, imagining a home where fallen women might be retrained as respectable members of society:

[They might] be taught all household work that would be useful to them in a home of their own and enable them to make it comfortable and happy. In this home, which stands in a pleasant country lane and where each may have her little flower-garden if she pleases, they will be treated with the greatest kindness: will lead an active, cheerful, healthy life: will learn many things it is profitable and good to know, and being entirely removed from all who have any knowledge of their past career will begin life afresh and be able to win a good name and character. (Dickens 99)

Although this appeal is ostensibly directed toward fallen women who might enter Urania Cottage, Dickens's portrayal of the conditions there paint a picture of an ideal home-life. Interestingly, Dickens's argument relies upon installing fallen women amongst individuals who have no "knowledge of their past career" (Dickens 99) thus implying that

this past career will *not* be revealed once the fallen woman reaches her new destination. This argument, like many of those in favor of transporting of fallen women to the colonies, carries with it the tacit suggestion that a part of the fallen woman's reclamation relies—at least in part—upon the concealment of her past. This element of concealment and, to however limited a degree, transportation, plays a key role in the conventional reclamation of the fallen woman.

As the essays from the *Magdalen's Friend* indicate, Greenwell was not alone in her attempts to correct the rhetoric of the reclamation movement that, like Dickens's description of Urania Cottage, idealized reclamation work. Like many who were personally involved in efforts to assist the poor and the fallen, Greenwell found herself situated in the difficult rhetorical position of at once attempting to enlist further support for philanthropic efforts while at the same time endeavoring to provide an accurate description of the conditions of that work to any who might wish to undertake it. One writer for the *Magdalen's Friend* explains that "all the fallen are not *unfortunate*—all are not deserving of that extreme sympathy which must be felt for those who have been made what they are by the heartlessness and villainy of others" ("Rescue" 57). This notion that "all the fallen are not *unfortunate*" suggests the binarism that dominated Victorian attitudes about fallenness, one pole of which posited the fallen woman as the passive victim of some seducer, while the other regarded her as an agent of her own fall.

Anderson discusses the ways the fallen woman occupied a central place in Victorian debates about agency. As she explains, fallenness before the nineteenth century had been conceived in wholly religious terms, and her study is devoted to marking out the ways "the concept of fallenness, traditionally exercised by questions of

moral agency, came to figure an emergent set of threateningly secular determinisms, despite the continued use of religious imagery and concepts" (3). Central to Anderson's argument is her demonstration that "fallenness is assimilated to narrative itself, identified or equated with a 'downward path'" (9), and the result is "a text that is already written rather than an agent capable of dialogical interaction. In such instances, the fallen woman can evoke not only crises of readability but also larger concerns about the relation between people and books, between living encounters and reading, and between social and aesthetic experience" (10). While Anderson's treatment of the transition from religious to secular modes of apprehending fallenness is compelling, what is of interest to me is the narrativity of the fallen woman and the "crisis of readability" (10) that her argument describes. The rendering of the fallen woman as narrative—and the cultural practice of understanding her almost entirely in terms of these conventional narratives—is a crucial feature of the representation of the fallen woman, and many Victorian women writers found themselves deeply concerned with the disjunction between this narrative and their own experience working among the fallen.

All of this is not to suggest, however, that these fallen woman narratives were by any means *stable*, nor do I mean to imply that for the Victorians the category of fallenness was stable. Even though the Victorians tended to see all sexually promiscuous women—whether professional or not—as equally fallen, there were writers working to draw a distinction between the two kinds of fallen women. As George Watt notes in *The Fallen Woman in the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century English Novel*, writers such as "Gaskell, Collins, Hardy and, to a lesser extent, Dickens tried very hard to change" (3) the convention of not distinguishing between "prostitutes and non-professional women, the latter being

victims of one mistake or simply male craft" (2). The same is true for other aspects of the Victorian notion of the fallen woman, as well, for just as there were authors working to correct the Victorian tendency to consider all fallen women the same, there were also writers attempting to correct the notion of the fallen woman being advanced by the reclamation movement. Greenwell's efforts to de-romanticize reclamation work in her essays indicate that she was among them. What we are faced with in the mid-nineteenth century, then, was a critical moment in the history of the representation of the fallen woman, for it was here that both narratives governing the representation of the figure—the Hogarthian narrative and the revision proposed by the Magdalen Hospital—were contested from within the reclamation movement itself. It is in Greenwell's "Christina," I argue, that we can see an early example of a fallen-woman poem attempting to challenge sentimental descriptions of the reclamation advanced by the reclamation movement.

The result of the conflict between these multiple modes of understanding the fallen woman is what Anderson describes as a highly conflicted notion of fallenness which, however broadly defined, was constantly at odds with itself, at times seeking to reduce fallenness to easy moral polarities (and thus emphasize agency over fatalism) and at others to emphasize the socio-economic factors which combined to construct the fallen woman (and thus emphasize fatalism over agency) (Anderson 5-9). Because of this, writers like Greenwell found themselves in a curious position, since they attempted to conceive of the fallen woman as at once a sympathetic figure (and even as a penitent victim) and to counter cultural myths of fallenness by demonstrating that reclamation work was not always effortless, and that those who were to be reclaimed were not *always* noble, beautiful, well-educated, passive victims of their seducer—nor were they always

complicit in their fall. The terrain these reformers attempted to navigate was, understandably, difficult. In what follows, I shall show how in her fallen woman monologue, "Christina," Greenwell attempts to correct over-romanticized notions of reclamation by describing a fallen woman who is "hardened and obdurate in [her] sin" ("Missionary Sketches" 17). Greenwell accomplishes this corrective, I shall show, by first countering notions that the unfallen worker is entirely responsible for the fallen woman's reclamation, arguing instead that it is the fallen woman who initiates her own reclamation. Second, the poem argues that despite the fallen woman's apparent willingness to be reclaimed, the reclamation itself is not always an effortless process. As I shall show, Greenwell argues that the fallen woman's resistance to reclamation—even when she is willing—can be hampered by the public scorn she has been submitted to by those who would attempt to shame her into rejoining respectable society.

## II

"Christina" was composed in 1851, but was withheld from publication until 1869. In the poem, a fallen woman details her reclamation by her (unfallen) childhood friend, Christina. While on the surface poem offers a conventional description of the fallen woman, I argue that its description of a fallen woman who is resistant to her own reclamation challenges any notion of the fallen woman's reclamation being an easy matter. Finally, however, Greenwell presents us with a fallen woman who conceives of herself almost solely in terms of the conventional fallen-woman narratives the poem works to revise. These are two significant elements of the poem, for they allow us to see the two conventions governing the representation of the fallen woman juxtaposed: the poem's treatment of the fallen woman's reclamation seemingly aligns it squarely with the

ideology of reclamation advanced by the reclamation movement, while the speaker perceives herself as playing out an inevitable version of the Hogarthian narrative. It is in this sense that the poem becomes, then, the site of a conflict between competing modes of understanding the fallen woman. Additionally, however, even as the poem plays out this conflict, it also challenges notions of an easy reclamation by representing the fallen woman as resistant to the Christian intercession.

The monologue begins with the speaker appealing to some undisclosed "Father," imploring him to return a cross to Christina:

Father, when I am in my grave, kind Father,  
Take thou this cross,—I had it from a girl,—  
Take it to one that I will tell thee of,—  
Unto Christina. (1-4)

The vagueness of the reference to "Father" here allows these opening lines to operate both as a prayer and an appeal to an individual father-figure with whom the speaker has taken up residence (perhaps in some kind of refuge). In addition, the speaker's anticipation of her death suggests the poem's adherence to the conventional Hogarthian fallen woman narrative. These opening lines also suggest that the fallen-woman speaker sees herself as hopelessly bound up in this narrative: her fixation on her own death (a concern which frames the poem) indicates that she sees herself as playing out that traditional narrative at the point of its closure.

The cross the speaker describes holds a deep significance for her, for she claims that it records both her fallen and her unfallen states. Even more, she asserts the cross

marks the connection between herself and the unfallen woman responsible for her reclamation:

I may not part with it while I have life;  
I kept it by me, treasured it through years  
Of evil, when I dared not look upon it;  
But of the love and reconciling mercy  
Whereof it is a token, now it speaks,  
Sore bitten by the fiery flying serpent,  
Yet have I strength to raise my languid eyes,  
And fix them on that sign, for sin uplift  
Within the wilderness, and there my gaze—  
My straining gaze—will fasten to the last,  
Death-glazed, upon it. Oh! may then my soul  
Be drawn up after unperishing! (5-16)

While the speaker claims that the cross symbolizes for her "the love and reconciling mercy / Whereof it is a token" (8-9), her description of how she "treasured [it] through years / Of evil, when I dared not look upon it" (6-7) suggests that even though she "dared not look upon it," the cross symbolized for her at least the possibility of mercy—and with it, the possibility of some kind of restoration. This cross, then, which she carries with her "through years / Of evil," symbolizes a willingness on her part to maintain some limited connection with the unfallen and thus with the possibility of reclamation.

It is important to note the speaker's reliance upon Biblical language and imagery in these early portions of the poem. Indeed, while her diction shifts to the vernacular as

she tells her own story, the reliance upon such Biblical diction and imagery in the narrative frame emphasizes the spiritual and religious nature of her reclamation and provides a ready contrast between her reformed and fallen conditions. For instance, the speaker's description of herself as "bitten by the fiery flying serpent" (10) invokes the description in Numbers 21:4-9 (and later in John 3:14) of God sending "fiery serpents among the people" to punish the Hebrews for their rebellion and his ordering of Moses to "Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live." Like the Hebrews, furthermore, the speaker finds refuge "within the wilderness" (13).<sup>2</sup>

Her use of religious imagery continues as she describes her reclamation in terms of being saved from a fiery demise:

Thou knowest my life, that I have been  
Saved as by fire, — a brand plucked from the burning;  
But not before the breath of flame had passed  
On all my garments, not before my spirit  
Shrunk up within it as a shriveled scroll  
Falls from the embers, black, —yet unconsumed. . . . (17-22)

This image of the unconsumed element—"a brand plucked from the burning"—of the fallen woman remains despite her experience in "the burning" (18) is significant, for the notion of the fallen woman's incomplete corruption is a key element of the reclamation movement. Because this unconsumed spirit remains for a time, there is the possibility of the "brand" being "plucked from the burning," and thus the implication is that the fallen woman may be saved from total corruption if she is reached before "the breath of flame"

consumes her entirely. As the speaker explains, she was saved because "One in Heaven still loved me, one on earth" (23), a claim that clearly posits Christina as both a female Christ-figure and as the kind of unfallen woman who worked to reclaim her fallen "sisters" in the reclamation movement.<sup>3</sup>

While the speaker has been relying heavily upon evangelical rhetoric in the description of her fall, she is also negotiating between competing beliefs about the fallen woman's reclaimability. We can see this clearly in the speaker's description of listening to an evangelical preacher. She describes a "wild stern man" who "stood and cried, / Within the marketplace" (33-34), and whose

words were bold and vehement; as one  
Set among flints, that strove to strike a spark  
From out dull, hardened natures. Then he used  
The terrors of the Lord in his persuading;  
Death, Judgment, and their fearful after-looking,  
Grew darker at his words. . . . (38-43)

As the preacher concludes his sermon about the wages of sin with an exclamation to "Seek God, run after Him, for ye must *die*" (52), the speaker offers an alternative to the man's emphasis upon the afterlife:

Oh! Then, I thought, if one like me might speak,  
If I might find a voice, now would I raise  
A yet more bitter and exceeding cry,  
'Seek God, run after him, for ye must LIVE!' (53-56)

The speaker's claim that "if one like me might speak" a different position would be articulated is a crucial moment, both in the poem and in the larger history of the representation of the fallen woman in Victorian verse. This poem is, after all, a dramatic monologue which allows the fallen woman to speak for herself. As Angela Leighton argues, Greenwell's use of the dramatic monologue form is transgressive. The poem, she writes,

must be credited . . . with being one of the first dramatic monologues on the subject. The fact that it is spoken in the first person, by the unnamed woman herself, is an act of literary and social transgression which will be repeated in women's poetry throughout the century. The 'chasm' between pure and impure, which cannot be crossed in the story, is eloquently crossed by the single, univocal, female voice of the poem. (Leighton *VWW* 176)

Leighton is correct; Greenwell's use of the dramatic monologue is transgressive both insofar as it suggests that the fallen woman may be allowed not only to speak for herself, and also because it suggests that what she may have to say is somehow as valid—or as valuable—as speech by someone unfallen.<sup>4</sup> This transgression is exacerbated by the speaker's corrective to the preacher's emphasis upon the afterlife, since Greenwell is describing a fallen woman commenting on theology. In this sense, the poem insists that the voice of the fallen woman is worth hearing, and that she is capable of contributing to the discourse about the fallen woman. Greenwell's use of the dramatic monologue form is important here, then, because it suggests that there is value in the fallen woman's perspective and voice, which might differ significantly from the conventional moralist

treatments of the figure. In addition, as I remarked in the previous chapter, the use of the dramatic monologue allows the poem to function as an act of confession, and thus, the fallen woman's act of telling her history becomes an act of transforming her sexual deviance into discourse. In "Christina," the speaker's confession serves as a means of locating the speaker's fall and eventual reclamation in strictly religious terms, and thus clearly establishes the "Christina" and its deployment of the fallen woman as a religious poem.

While the speaker acknowledges the evangelical argument that the punishment for sin is a distance from God, she insists that threats based upon the unknowable conditions of the afterlife are useless. Her answer is to focus upon the knowable conditions of the fallen woman's existence:

I know not what it may be in that world,  
The future world, the wide unknown hereafter,  
That waits for us, to be afar from God;  
Yet can I witness of a desolation  
That I have known; can witness of a place  
Where spirits wander up and down in torment,  
And tell you what it is to want Him *here*. (57-63)

As she explains, appeals to a spiritual punishment that is unknowable ignore the more immediate hardships the fallen woman must endure. The speaker thus posits the knowable world as a kind of damnation, characterized by desolation, torment, and a distance from God. As the preacher's remarks indicate, the evangelical position emphasizes the afterlife ("Seek God, run after him, for ye must *die!*"); the speaker's

corrective ("Seek God, run after him, for ye must LIVE!") emphasizes the knowable conditions of the fallen woman's life. The speaker's rejection of the preacher's emphasis upon the afterlife parallels the institutional rejection in the mid-nineteenth century of the prison model of reclamation with which the Magdalen Hospital had come to be associated by the mid-nineteenth century. Just as the preacher emphasizes the *fear* of punishment as the primary means of moving women to seek reformation, many reformatories based on a penal model, such as the Magdalen Hospital, emphasized strict rules and difficult work as part of their reclamation process. Such institutions were troubled in two significant ways: fallen women were reluctant to submit to their methods (which sometimes included the changing of the woman's name, the cutting of her hair, and a prison-like wardrobe), and although they offered the promise of employment, the women were sometimes required to stay in the institution for as long as two years. In response, in the mid-nineteenth century there emerged a wing of the reclamation movement based on Christian charity and emphasizing retraining rather than difficult labor and punishment. It is with this wing of the reclamation movement—which included groups such as the Church Penitentiary Association and refuges such as Dickens's Urania Cottage and Highgate Penitentiary—that Greenwell is associated.

The speaker's rejection of the preacher's moralist understanding of the fallen woman allows her to discuss the material conditions leading to her fall. The manner in which she does this merits some attention, however, for it indicates the degree to which the speaker initially understands herself as playing out a generic fallen-woman narrative. She describes herself as a poor, yet beautiful, orphan-girl: "I had no friends, no parents. I was poor / In all but beauty, and an innocence / That was not virtue—failing in the trial"

(64-66). By deploying this common narrative, Greenwell is able simultaneously to invoke the traditional fallen-woman narrative and offer up a modification of it by exposing the ways ostracizing the fallen woman contributes to her resistance to reclamation efforts. But in addition, we should note that by deploying this generic fallen-woman narrative, the speaker indicates that she sees herself as taking part in this narrative, and potentially even as inevitably playing it out.

The speaker insists that the magnitude of her moral, social, and sexual failure is amplified because hers "is the common tale, and all the sadder / Because it is so common" (69-70). This "common tale" is ubiquitous in the records of encounters with prostitutes by reclamation workers: prostitutes came overwhelmingly from the poor and working classes; fallen women were largely from the ranks of domestic servants who had been seduced under promise of marriage and then abandoned; young orphans and match-stick girls, as well as factory workers and milliners, often found themselves reduced to taking up prostitution as a means of supplementing their paltry income.<sup>5</sup> The speaker, as she explains, possesses similarly common origins, and thus her remark that the commonness of her "tale" (69) renders it "all the sadder" (69) serves as a complaint, not only about her having fallen despite the cautionary tales of other fallen women, but also about the sheer numbers of fallen women whose lives follow this general narrative. The speaker, by describing her life as a "common tale" (69) indicates that she sees her status as fallen woman as having rendered her a narrative—with a predetermined course, and with no options beyond her path downward to depravity, disease, and death.

In her description of the fallen-woman narrative she sees herself taking part in, she raises a crucial point as she recounts her own fall: although her apparent perception

of herself as playing out a narrative would suggest fatalism, she is very clear in her assertion that she was, if not completely responsible, at least complicit in her fall. We can see indications of her belief in her complicity both in her description of her failure to heed the cautionary tale as well as in her reference to her own failures "in the trial" (66), both of which suggest that she sees herself as responsible for her fall. Despite this assertion of agency, she allows that other, external, factors contributed to her fall: socio-economic status, her beauty, her limited social and economic mobility, and, finally, her own moral, social, and sexual failures. The speaker is therefore simultaneously engaging a pivotal argument about the relationship between the fallen woman's moral weaknesses while also acknowledging that such notions of individual agency are always mitigated by factors external to the individual. Greenwell's is a remarkably nuanced representation of the fallen woman: she is neither wholly a victim of her circumstances nor entirely responsible for her fall. Such ambiguity regarding causation is important, for as the poem engages the difficulties of the reclamation process, there is tremendous emphasis placed upon agency not only in the fall, but in the fallen woman's reclamation. The fallen woman, Greenwell insists in this poem, must choose to be reclaimed—and as she argues both in her essays and in "Christina," the process of convincing the fallen woman to choose to be reclamation can be difficult, if not impossible. This argument about the difficulty of the reclamation which marks "Christina" as a significant poem in the history of the representation of the fallen woman, for although like most fallen woman poems it is sentimental in its treatment of the reclamation, it also challenges any belief in the inevitable or easy reclamation of the fallen woman. In terms of the present study, this is a crucial text, "Christina" can be read alongside Christina Rossetti's "Noble Sisters" and

"Sister Maude" as an example of fallen woman poems that present the difficult or failed reclamation of a fallen woman, and thus as a challenge to oversimplified attitudes about the fallen woman and her reclamation. In what follows, I shall turn my attention to the ways Greenwell mounts this argument while operating within an apparently conventional treatment of the figure.

### III

The speaker describes her fall, initially, as the conventional tale of seduction:

I was sought  
By one that wore me for a time, then flung  
Me off; a rose with all its sweetness gone,  
Yet with enough bloom to flaunt awhile,  
Although the worm was busy at its core. (67-72)

This densely packed description raises a series of issues central to Victorian debates about the fallen woman. Initially, the speaker describes herself as the victim of a libertine seducer for whom she is little more than a commodity: she is an item to be acquired, and her primary function is to serve as an adornment. As such, she is the object of a passing fancy, indicated by the temporary nature of her appeal—she is worn for a time, and then "flung off." The image, however, of the fallen woman as the "rose" the seducer wears and then casts away emphasizes the common tale she insists accurately records her own history: like the cut rose, the conventional fallen woman narrative dictates that her existence after her fall be one of unremitting decline, ending in her eventual death. Finally, the cutting of the rose suggests a parallel between it and the

fallen woman's the woman's fall, in which the conventional narrative held that a vain young girl was usually seduced at the height of her beauty.

The speaker's characterization of herself as a flower containing a "worm busy at [her] core" (72) suggests that she understands fallenness in terms of infection. This is not uncommon: often in fallen-woman poems the fall is characterized as a kind of infection. We can see this most clearly in Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (composed in 1859 just prior to her involvement with Highgate Penitentiary) where the fallen woman is infected after consuming the goblin fruit, and in Amy Levy's "Magdalen" (1884) (where the fallen woman is literally infected by venereal disease). In "Christina," the metaphor of infection makes clear the ways contact with the seducer has left the fallen woman with an inner corruption that slowly eats away the interior while leaving the exterior beauty intact. But the description of the "worm [being] busy at the core" does not necessarily indicate a complete corruption of that interior. Instead, the worm's being "busy" suggests that, despite its intrusion, there are still elements that it has not reached. When we consider that in terms of the representation of the fallen woman, the "worm" implies both corruption and infection, we can see that there remains some possibility of the worm's removal—or the fallen woman's cure. It is this possibility of cure that the reclamation movement of the mid-nineteenth century replied upon. As Greenwell makes clear in her essays, the fallen woman is sometimes resistant to that cure. They become, as the *Magdalen's Friend* argued, "hardened and obdurate in [their] sin," and therefore resisted any efforts to reclaim them. There are additional factors complicating the reclamation, however. Prostitutes and kept women who lived in relative comfort would potentially be reluctant to accept the deprivation that they would have found in a house of

reclamation—and fewer still would be willing to submit themselves to the prison-like conditions of an institution such as the Magdalen Hospital.

"Christina" is concerned with a kept woman's resistance to reclamation. More specifically, the poem concerns itself with representing a fallen woman whose resistance to reclamation stems, at least in part, from the public treatment she has experienced. The speaker, we learn, has enjoyed both the luxury such a life afforded and endured public scorn once her status became known. It is the effect of the latter on the fallen woman's reclamation with which Greenwell seems most preoccupied in the poem. The speaker describes her life as a kept woman, saying she "lived through the years / Of scorning, till my brow grew hard to meet it; / though all the while, behind that brazen shield, / My spirit shrank" (73-76). The vilification she experiences is so severe that even "the stones," she says, "Took up a taunting parable against me" (79-80). The result of her status as an object of public scorn, in the end, is that she comes to believe that "Being then unto myself so hateful, / I deemed that all did hate me, hating all" (86-87). Moments such as these establish the speaker's recalcitrance and antagonism toward the social assault to which she is subject. This "hardness" of the fallen woman is a crucial feature of Greenwell's treatment, for it reveals a significant problem in reclamation work: shaming the fallen woman can sometimes be counterproductive, for rather than move her to abandon prostitution, her shame might actually lead her to perceive herself as a kind of oppressed minority who recoils from "each hurtling arrow" (76) and who sees "on every wall . . . a Hand / Write evil things and bitter" (78-79).

Despite the speaker's perception of herself as being oppressed on all sides by those who would attempt to shame her into abandoning her life as a kept woman, and

despite her "hating all," the speaker claims that there was "one . . . I hated not" (87), her childhood friend Christina. This claim that her hatred is not total—and that, by extension, she is not unredeemable either in her fallenness or in her recalcitrance—echoes the speaker's earlier imagery of the worm "busy at the core" of the flower. As I have argued, the image of infection carries with it the possibility that, at least for a time, the fallen woman's infection is not irreversible. Her claims here about how within her hatred of "all" there existed "one . . . I hated not" suggest that just as the infection by the worm might not be total, her hatred, and thus her recalcitrance, also might not be complete. The speaker describes how she and Christina had been "Playmates in innocent childhood; girlish friends, / With hearts that, like the summer's half-oped buds, / Grew close, and hived their sweetness for each other" (92-94). The use of flower imagery here continues the speaker's earlier description of herself as a rose, where she is worn by her seducer and then discarded, and suggests again the notion that despite an exterior beauty, interior corruption may be occurring. This is not to suggest that the image posits the two women as either externally or internally identical. Christina is in many ways the antithesis of the speaker. Unlike her, she explains, Christina "was not fair like me unto the eye" (95); this alone suggests that Christina was under less of a threat of seduction, and thus less threat of falling. Even more, in contrast to the speaker's "innocence / That was not virtue—failing in the trial" (65-66), Christina was more fair of heart, which, as the speaker explains, "showed her by its light / Most lovely in the loveliness of love" (96-97). As I have discussed, this pairing of fallen women with unfallen women was a staple feature of Victorian representations of the fallen woman, and while it is especially

prominent in women's poetry, it is also a key feature of the reclamation movement, which insisted upon unfallen women working to reclaim their fallen "sisters."<sup>6</sup>

The argument that the fallen woman's corruption may not be total continues as the speaker describes how she and Christina remain connected to one another even after the fall occurs. The speaker describes a connective filament binding them together:

Had prayers and tears prevailed, we had not parted.

Long after me I heard her kind voice calling,

'Return!' yet I went on;—our paths struck wide,

As were the issues that they led to, then

She lost me, but I never lost her: still

Across the world-wide gulf betwixt us set

My soul stretched out a bridge, a slender hair,

Whereon repassing swiftly to and fro,

It linked itself unseen with all her lot. . . . (100-08)

Contrary to the reclamation movement's claims, here it is the fallen woman's "soul" that forges this connection, and not an unfallen woman who seeks to reclaim her. Although Greenwell emphasizes the uncorrupted kernel of the fallen woman that is the key to her reclamation, it is nonetheless remarkable that in this instance the fallen woman is actively engaged in establishing and maintaining that connection to the unfallen. This description of the connection the fallen woman's soul maintains with the unfallen woman emphasizes the degree to which the fallen woman must be actively engaged (whether or not she is conscious of it) in her reclamation. The fallen woman, Greenwell's imagery suggests, seeks out the means of her own reclamation by maintaining a connection to the unfallen

woman, who operates as a symbol of what she might return to upon being reclaimed. Thus, the speaker's desire to maintain a connection to Christina is also a desire to remain connected to a symbol of the life she might have led had she not "parted from all good" (99).

As the speaker's description of her connection to Christina becomes more explicit, we can begin to see the degree to which she understands Christina's life as a potential model for her own. Even more, she describes this connection as something she has internalized:

I took a portion of her innocent life  
Within myself; I watched her in her ways,  
Unseen I looked upon her in her home,  
Her humble home. (112-15)

The notion that the speaker has maintained some internal connection to Christina suggests again that the fallen woman is somehow responsible for initiating contact with the unfallen woman. Even more, the speaker's description of her internalization of "a portion of her innocent life" echoes her earlier metaphor of the worm that has infected her. These two elements that she sees herself containing—one which she associates with disease and infection, and one she associates with a life "not parted from all good"—suggest that she sees herself as containing both potentialities. Her observation of Christina, then, serves as a means of identification for her with that more desirable potentiality. Indeed, her envy of Christina's life is so great that it does not even focus exclusively on the positive elements of her life, and so she "know[s] not if it were its joys or sorrows / I envied most" (117-18). Christina, however, serves as more than an object

of desire for the speaker; she is a model for the speaker's remaking of herself. As the speaker explains, however, this remaking is not merely superficial; she wishes to be transformed entirely: "Oft seeking for a moment but to lose / The bitter consciousness of self, to be / Aught other e'en in thought than that I was" (109-11). The speaker's observation of Christina, as well as her connection with her, indicates that Christina is the model for this transformation.

The speaker's observation of Christina leads her to make a series of obvious comparisons between herself and the unfallen woman. Continuing the vegetative metaphor with which she had described their relationship earlier, the speaker explains that

*Her* tears were like the dew  
That lies all night upon the fruitful field  
That Heaven hath blessed, and rises there again.  
I was like the blasted corn shrunk up and mildewed,  
Like sere, dry grass upon the housetops growing  
Whereof the mower filleth not his arms,  
Nor he that bindeth up his sheaves his bosom. (118-24)

Unlike the earlier descriptions of herself as a flower (first as a rose, and later as one of a pair of "half-oped buds" [70, 93]), the speaker describes herself here in terms of utility and productivity rather than beauty: Christina's tears contribute to the fruitfulness of the Heaven-blessed field, and thus even her grief contributes to this production. The image, therefore, marks her as a productive member of respectable society. In contrast, the

speaker describes herself in terms of the wasted potential of "blasted corn shrunk up and mildewed" (121). For the speaker, this difference registers as a rejection:

Earth, earth methought and Heaven alike refused me;  
None gave me the kind wish, the holy word.  
I had no joys, no griefs; yet had I joyed,  
Then none had said, 'God bless thee!' had I grieved,  
Then none that passed had said, 'God pity thee!' (125-29)

In addition to indicating the speaker's lack of utility, this passage also signals her isolation on both social and religious levels. The isolation of the fallen woman is a fairly stock feature of Victorian treatments of the figure—especially in painting—and underscores not only her status as pariah, but also her lack of productivity. Augustus Egg's sequence of paintings, "Past and Present" (1858), and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting "Found" (1854) both represent the fallen woman as an isolated, marginalized figure. This practice of representing the fallen woman as socially distanced from respectable society, whether in painting or in literature, implies in the end that the fallen woman is a figure to be sought out by those who would seek her reclamation. This is particularly clear in Rossetti's "Found," which depicts a presumably fallen woman being discovered and lifted up by a male figure. No such effort is made to reclaim the speaker in "Christina," however, and this absence of a reclamative effort seemingly aligns the speaker's narrative with Egg's depiction of the fallen woman's increasing isolation, poverty, disease, and inevitable death. This is, indeed, one possible conclusion of the "common tale" in which she sees herself as an actor. The other—the possibility of reclamation depicted by Rossetti and proposed by the reclamation movement—is the one

denied her by the absence of "the kind wish" and "the holy word," and so the speaker resigns herself to an inevitable death.

As the speaker considers the possibility of her death while, notably, standing in the graveyard where Christina's daughter is buried, she allows for another possibility:

I sought not death, for that were but a change  
Of being, and a passage to a world  
Where thought would after me to hunt and vex,  
But to cease utterly to be, to find  
A place among the rocks, among the stones,  
With things that lived not, that would never live,  
To pass absorbed, and be at rest for ever. (175-81)

Her desire is not for death, she insists, since that would be merely a "change / Of being," and thus she would remain part of the discourse of the Christian morality which, she claims, would even in the afterlife "after me to hunt and vex." Instead, her wish is to "pass absorbed" and exist among inanimate objects that "would never live." Her desire in these moments, then, is to be outside the middle-class Victorian discourse of women's sex and women's sexuality of which she is a part of a "common tale," and which seemingly denies her any opportunity to transform herself into a productive and respectable member of society. Such a desire to be outside Victorian sexual discourse must also include a rejection of efforts to reclaim her, since those efforts relocate her within that discourse she seeks to escape. Indeed, the problem for the speaker is that her status as fallen woman, and the narrative she sees herself as playing out, are seemingly inescapable.

The speaker's resistance to reclamation is not based entirely on these grounds, however. Greenwell is careful in the poem to emphasize the ways the fallen woman's experience of seemingly constant public scorn have also contributed to her recalcitrance. However, the crucial element of Greenwell's representation of the fallen woman, and the element that marks the poem as significant among fallen-woman poems of the mid-nineteenth century, is Greenwell's insistence throughout the poem that the fallen woman's apparent unwillingness to be reclaimed is wholly exterior, and does not necessarily reflect her interior (and perhaps even unconscious) desires. Despite this potential willingness to seek out the means of her reclamation, however, Greenwell's fallen woman has developed a "brazen shield" (75) that must be overcome if efforts to reclaim her are to be successful. The poem's suggestion that the fallen woman's resistance to reclamation is a result of the public scorn she endures indicates the need for a rethinking of public attitudes to the fallen woman. What Greenwell describes here, then, is the degree to which treating the fallen woman as a social outcast encourages resistance to whatever efforts at reclamation might come her way.

The speaker's resistance to kindness is not unusual; since the 1750s, the literature of the reclamation movement had described how fallen women, so accustomed to harsh public treatment, were often resistant to philanthropic efforts designed to assist them. The fallen woman's resistance to her own reclamation would, of course, be directly related to her quality of life—a kept woman living in comfortable lodgings in Marylebone would have little incentive to give up her lifestyle and take up residence in a house of refuge where, many times, her name would be changed, her hair cut, her daily regimen would be draconian, and after such treatment, her only hope would be domestic

service. It was understandable, then, that many fallen women were reluctant to take advantage of the efforts to reclaim them. This was, even more, a problem for houses of refuge attempting to recruit women from the streets. Many of these new institutions had rejected the regulations of the penitentiary model, and yet found themselves working against the widespread notion that all houses of mercy possessed such strict rules. This is a crucial point, for it suggests that efforts to reclaim the fallen were not always immediately successful.

We can see this played out more explicitly in her description of the speaker's encounter with Christina. Christina misreads this fallen woman, imagining her to be a creature of angelic kindness—a reading the speaker immediately resists:

at her words a madness took my soul;  
They seemed to mock me; falling one by one  
Like gracious drops upon my heart, they smote  
Its stagnant waters, stirring there no spring  
Of life or wholesomeness; yet were they stirred.  
Now would I speak with her, the fire was kindled;  
Long had it smouldered, long enough consumed me.  
Now by its flashes she shall read my soul  
Methought, and look upon me as I am. . . . (200-08)

In terms of the imagery presented here, Christina's reference to her tears echoes the earlier description of them as a "dew" on a fertile field and the speaker's "stagnant waters" echo the description of her soul as a wasted field, and thus continues the set of distinctions between the two women that the poem had established earlier. More

importantly, however, the passage describes both the fallen woman's exterior resistance to Christina's kindness as well as the limited beginnings of the fallen woman's internal process of reclamation. She perceives Christina's kindness as mocking (201), and her own "heart" as a pool of "stagnant waters" (203) whose "smiting" (202) by Christina's kindness results in no immediate, miraculous, revitalization—but her efforts do, at least, stir the waters. As she describes, even though Christina's kindness fails to bring about some "spring / Of life or wholesomeness; yet they were stirred" (203-04). This is hardly the immediate repentance and reclamation we see in Procter's "A Legend of Provençe" or in Rossetti's "Goblin Market," nor is it like the repentance of Gaskell's *Ruth*.<sup>7</sup> Instead, the speaker's reaction echoes Greenwell's arguments in "Hardened in Good"; the speaker sees Christina's sympathy for her as mere "tinsel sentiment" (70), and her desire to force Christina to "look upon me as I am" (208)—that is, to see her as a fallen woman—is an attempt both to expose the shallowness of that sentiment and to discourage further efforts by Christina. In this sense, the speaker seeks to show Christina that she is not "the ideal poor [wo]man, brave, industrious, patient, grateful" (Greenwell "Hardened" 75) but is instead "the actual [wo]man, with [her] actual incapacities and imperfections" who must sometimes be left "as [s]he is" ("Hardened" 75).

The speaker of "Christina" is no different, and she reacts to Christina's misreading by positioning herself "beneath / A steadfast lamp that burned before a shrine" (215-16), thus mimicking the prostitute standing beneath a street lamp. The attempt to horrify Christina backfires, however, for she recognizes the speaker as a childhood friend:

Confronting her, I said, 'Now look on me;—  
Where is the blessing that thou speakest of?'

But to my words she answered not; methought  
She did not catch their import—so her gaze  
Was fastened on me—then her very soul  
Gave way in tears; she took me in her arms. . .  
And, sobbing, murm'ring to herself or heaven,  
In language half articulate, the words  
Came broken: 'I have found thee! I have found thee!' (217-30)

The speaker takes pleasure from this moment of exposure—not only of herself as a fallen woman, but of what she expects to be the "tinsel sentiment" of Christina:

And with the words unto my lips arose  
A laugh of bitterness, whose mocking tones  
Through all the dreary hollow of my heart  
Woke up the echoes of its desolation;  
'What hast thou found? Speak not to me of her  
Whose name perchance thy lips are framing now,—  
The Magdalene; my life hath been as hers  
But not my heart, for she loved much more—for this  
The more forgiveness meeting; I love none! (232-40)

Although the speaker has clearly identified herself within the Victorian discourse of sex by positing herself as a streetwalker standing beneath a streetlamp, here she resists any attempt to locate her within biblical discourse that would associate her with the Magdalen, insisting that such a stock analogy fails to account for the differences among fallen women. Her insistence here that "my life hath been as hers" clearly announces her

status as a fallen woman—and even collapses any distinctions between a kept woman and a prostitute—while her insistence that they differ in significant ways ("But not my heart, for she loved much more") works to challenge notions that all fallen women might be regarded as the same. In essence, the speaker rejects an exclusively Biblical model for the Victorian notion of the harlot, and insists that such narratives are rendered problematic by the individual temperaments of these women. As the speaker insists, she and the Magdalen possess different capacities for love (239-40), and thus they encounter different levels of "forgiveness." What is important here, however, is that even as the speaker understands herself as playing out a narrative and therefore acting out a part, she is also unwilling to accept any universal notion of the fallen woman's temperament. This is a key argument of the poem, for as it establishes that not all fallen women respond identically to efforts to reclaim them, it also further establishes Greenwell's argument that, since fallen women cannot be easily treated as a type, her reclamation is not always an easy process.

We can also see in the speaker's pre-emptive silencing of Christina that she has been conditioned to resist any kindness extended to her. Conversely, however, Christina also attempts to silence the speaker. In a gesture of silencing and containment, Christina "gently laid upon my mouth her hand, / A soft restraining curb" (243-44). Just as the speaker had exposed herself to Christina in an effort to control the discourse used to describe her, Christina's response is equally an attempt to control the speaker's discourse.<sup>8</sup> What emerges here is a pattern of repression countered by explosive manifestation. The speaker describes her response as a violent eruption:

now my speech,

Like an ungovernable steed sore stung  
And goaded into frenzy, spurned aside,  
And sprang the wilder. . . . (244-47)

The image of the "ungovernable steed" is telling, since it describes a wild animal incapable of being tamed and brought into service, and thus posits the speaker as untameable and incapable of being reclaimed. Additionally, however, the speaker's description of herself as "sore stung" and "goaded into frenzy" indicates the degree to which she has been conditioned to resist efforts to reclaim her in potentially violent ways. More importantly, however, this simile that parallels the fallen woman's reaction to kindness with a wild and frenetic reaction by an "ungovernable steed" implies that in addition to being difficult, efforts to reclaim—and retrain—fallen women might also be unproductive. The fallen woman, this passage implies, may in fact be ungovernable, untameable, and incapable of being reclaimed.

It is important to note, however, that this passage is concerned with the language used to describe the fallen woman. Just as the speaker had earlier rejected any attempt by Christina to compare her to Mary Magdalen, the speaker also rejects any attempt by Christina to appeal to her using either Christian love and charity or the imagery of the Christian afterlife. These notions, she argues, are alien to her:

Why should I vex thee with my words; of love  
I know but as I know of God, of good,  
Of hope, of heaven, of all things counted holy—  
Know only by their names, for nought in me  
Gives witness to their natures; so, to speak

Of them is but to take their names in vain. (250-55)

By emphasizing how "nought in me / Gives witness to their natures," the speaker makes clear how she perceives her lack of those qualities—"of God, of good, / Of hope, of heaven, of all things counted holy"—render her unable to experience those elements of Christian discourse that should provide comfort.<sup>9</sup> This resistance to Christina's kindness, and the terms by which she does so—claiming that "to speak / Of them is but to take their names in vain"—can be read as a continuation of her earlier resistance to any attempt to draw parallels between herself and Mary Magdalen: both counter the conventional terms by which fallen woman might be understood, first by rejecting the biblical type, and second, by rejecting the mode of appeal that might be used to bring about her reclamation.

Despite her resistance to these conventions, there is a vacillation on the speaker's part between resisting and accepting them that merits some attention. As I have shown, her notion of herself as corrupted by the worm "busy at the core" is countered by the connection she actively maintains between herself and Christina. Similarly, her resistance to any generalized classification of all fallen women in terms of Mary Magdalen reveals, as I have shown, a resistance to such oversimplified notions of the fallen woman's temperament. But in addition, it continues the speaker's acceptance of the position of fallenness as a category. Indeed, the speaker's descriptions of her fallenness—as infected by the worm at her heart's core, as like the Magdalen but differing in her capacity for love, and then finally as impure and therefore incapable of taking comfort in the Christian charity and hope extended by Christina—do not attempt to undermine the category of fallenness or to challenge its application to her. The speaker

very clearly accepts her status as a fallen woman, but she challenges any attempt to think about the fallen woman as possessing a generic temperament or as responding universally to conventional rhetoric.

This project does not preclude the presence of conventional elements of the fallen woman narrative in her monologue, and as I have discussed, her vacillation between accepting the conventional descriptions and challenging them allows her to expose the ways they fail to apply to all fallen women. We can see this process clearly as the poem works its way through a series of the speaker's descriptions of herself. For instance, she returns to her earlier vegetative simile as a means of explaining her condition to

Christina:

Oft hast thou told me how souls hang on God  
Like leaves upon a gracious bough, that draw  
Their juices from its fulness; long ago  
Mine fell from off that Tree of Life, thereon  
Retaining not its hold;—a withered leaf  
It lies, and bears the lightning's brand upon it. (256-61)

As with her earlier use of this vegetative metaphor, the speaker insists upon describing herself as withered and lifeless. But here, we should note, unlike the previous two instances, the speaker explicitly describes that vegetation in terms of its spiritual health. The "souls . . . like leaves upon a gracious bough" are nourished, she claims, through their attachment to God. This attachment whereby the fallen woman's soul was sustained by her relationship with "that Tree of Life," which the simile indicates is God himself, was broken by when hers "fell from off that Tree of Life, thereon / retaining not

its hold." The source of the separation is somewhat ambiguous, although the implication is that the failure is an individual one, and that the fallen woman's soul, after being separated from the source of its nourishment, withers and dies. Clearly, the image with which the speaker attempts to associate herself is one of the fallen woman's complete lack of reclaimability.

Christina's response—an insistence upon the possibility of regrowth, and thus, reclamation—results in yet another rejection. The speaker claims that such regrowth is impossible, and thus rejects any assertions about her reclaimability:

There is no root! a leaf, a withered leaf,  
Long tossed upon the wind, and under foot  
Of men long trodden in streets and trampled,—  
God will not gather it within His bosom! (273-76)

By emphasizing here the disconnectedness of the leaf from the "Tree of Life"—and thus an image of a literal fall—the speaker posits herself as entirely unreclaimable. There is, as she insists, no possibility of re-growth from "a leaf, a withered lead" which possesses "no root." The leaf, the image suggests, lacks the internal mechanisms for (re)growth, just as the speaker believes herself to be lacking the ability to change her current condition. Her reclamation, she argues, is impossible. Moreover, her consistent rejections indicate that the process of her reclamation will be difficult, if not impossible. This is a critical moment in the poem, for it bears a striking similarity to Greenwell's argument in her essays that romanticized notions of charity work often collapse when confronted with the poor and the fallen. Her representation of a fallen woman who is so

strongly resistant to efforts to reclaim her can be seen as an attempt to represent the difficulties of reclamation work, and thus as part of this project.

But as the ideology of much of the reclamation movement suggests, the reclamation is not entirely dependent the fallen woman. Much of the work with fallen women in many of these institutions was conducted by women volunteers. To some degree, such staffing decisions are entirely practical: minimizing contact between fallen women and male workers in such institutions lessened the risk of continued heterosexual promiscuity. But additionally, as Michael Cohen has described, the pairing of fallen woman unfallen women suggests a belief that the unfallen woman could "[cancel] all of the moral opprobrium that goes along with being fallen" (Cohen 86) and thus play a crucial role in the fallen woman's reclamation. As I shall show in later chapters, we can see this clearly in poems such as Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862) and Procter's "A Legend of Provence" (1851), both of which feature fallen women whose fall is erased through the efforts of a nearly-identical sister-figure.

But in "Christina," other than a reference to the two women as "half oped buds" (93), this is not the case. The poem contains no implication that the two are metaphorical sisters, and the speaker makes special note of marking out their differences. The speaker describes how Christina

was not fair like me unto the eye,

But to the heart, that showed her by its light

Most lovely in the loveliness of love (95-97)

Despite her insistence upon their differences, there are elements of the speaker's description of her conversion that are thoroughly conventional. Her conversion, for

example, is overtly physical (and remarkably similar to the reclamation of Laura in Rossetti's "Goblin Market"), positing the speaker's conversion as an orgasmic transformation:

so my torpid soul  
Slept numb, yet conscious, till within my heart,  
That had no movement of its own, but rose  
Upon Christina's heart that heaved beneath it,  
At length this miracle of love was wrought:  
Her spirit lay on mine. . . . (346-51)

This passage marks the moment of the speaker's reclamation, and its reliance upon a fallen woman being somehow revitalized through the efforts of an unfallen woman mirrors the reclamation movement's reliance upon unfallen woman as the principal means of contact with fallen women. While we can see here an assertion of the miraculousness of the conversion (this is also the case in Rossetti's "Goblin Market"), it is important to note that the image of the speaker's motionless heart rising "upon Christina's heart that heaved beneath it" recalls the speaker's positioning of Christina as a potential model for the remaking of her self: the motion of Christina's heart functions as a model for the speaker's, and, as the image implies, the two move in concert. Thus, the speaker's earlier hopes of revitalizing her corrupted interior self by relying upon an unfallen woman as a model have been brought to fruition through this process, which is described in both spiritual and physical terms.

The physical dimension of this conversion is notable, however, for its eroticism. While this is in many ways the language of the ecstasy of the evangelical conversion, the

description of the two women's hearts "heav[ing]" together, as well as the image of Christina's "spirit lay[ing] on" the speaker's, suggests a sexual encounter between the two women. The lesbian eroticism here has interesting implications, especially for those elements of the reclamation which the conventional notion of the conversion simply relegated to "the miracle of love." Indeed, the presence of such highly erotic imagery at the precise moment of the fallen woman's reclamation suggests that in light of middle-class Victorian taboos regarding the description of sex and sexuality in literature the only discursive outlet for women poets describing the fallen woman to treat her sex and sexuality lay in the reclamation, which, as we can see here, was represented as a fusion of Christian religious awakening and lesbian sexual encounter. Although this combination may seem bizarre, it opposes the moral and sexual deviance that had created the fallen woman in the first place—her moral lapse countered by a Christian (re)awakening, her heterosexual sexual encounter countered by a lesbian one.

Despite the degree to which the pairing of the fallen and unfallen woman is a conventional feature of both fallen woman literature and of the reclamation movement's methods, that pairing is a troubled one. Following the speaker's conversion, Greenwell introduces into the poem an aborted attempt at the traditional twinning/sister theme that is present in many fallen woman poems of mid-century. Indeed, nearly all of the poems treated in this study feature a pairing of a fallen and an unfallen women.<sup>10</sup> Even though the speaker has vacillated between invoking similarities and marking distinctions between herself and Christina throughout the poem, after the fallen woman's conversion experience Christina attempts to transform their relationship even further, asking the speaker to return home with her and replace her deceased daughter:

Be thou unto me even as a Daughter,  
In place of her God gave and took again,—  
So hath He given thee to me. (368-70)

Like the initial encounter between the two women where Christina and the speaker had attempted to silence one another both physically and verbally, this post-revitalization passage reveals an interest in domination and control in their relationship.<sup>11</sup> We can see this theme again here, where Christina's desire is to transform the speaker into a metaphorical daughter, and thus render her subject to the patriarchal structures governing the Victorian home.<sup>12</sup> Christina's suggestion demotes the speaker from sister—and thus from a potential equal to Christina—to a daughter, and her hopes that the speaker will replace the child she has lost would force the speaker to accept subjugation in such a familial structure.

Christina's belief that the speaker can replace her daughter suggests more than just a rebirth of the fallen woman. It implies that the fallen woman's past may be, if not completely erased, at least rendered inconsequential, and that her transformation may be so complete that she may simply become another individual. This notion that the speaker might be capable of becoming to Christina "even as a Daughter, / In place of her God gave and took again" (368-69) raises a key question in the fallen woman's reclamation: what happens to the fallen woman after her reclamation? If, as Greenwell argues throughout "Christina," the fallen woman is capable of being reclaimed, the question of the fallen woman's life after that reclamation remains. The speaker's rejection of Christina's request is telling, for it constitutes a rejection of this belief that the fallen woman-narrative of the speaker could simply be revised and her character recast in

another role, and insists that a crucial part of the fallen woman's reclamation must be her maintaining both memory of and accountability for her past. In the end, the reclamation that Greenwell imagines for this fallen woman is a limited one, with the speaker describing how she has "left the guilty city far behind me" (409) and taken up residence in "A goodly inn, where they have cared for me" (412).

Such an insistence upon the fallen woman's responsibility is not uncommon in women's treatments of the fallen woman—especially in poetry. To be sure, in novels such as Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) the treatment of the fallen woman focuses a great deal on the degree to which the material conditions of the fallen woman's existence play a significant role in her fall. Any effort to paint the fallen woman as a hapless victim—and thus as not an agent of her own fall—runs the risk of proliferating the "tinsel sentiment" against which Greenwell (and magazines such as *The Magdalen's Friend*) were working. This is the mode against which Greenwell works in "Christina," and it is for this reason that she forces us to attend to "the actual man, with his actual incapacities and imperfections" ("Hardened" 75) rather than the social forces which have contributed to the woman's fall. As Sally Mitchell notes, such cognitive dissonance was not uncommon:

Almost all of the factual writing emphasized the swift downward path of any woman who had sex without marriage: a relatively brief time, perhaps, as a mistress, then the streets, drink, and death. Yet even those who wrote it must have known, to an extent, that it was not true; factory reports and the annual summaries of Magdalen institutions made it obvious that the problem was not sex but dependency. Farm and mine and

factory girls, who had a trade in their own hands, could and did raise illegitimate children. Women who depended directly on the middle class for their livelihood—i.e. domestic servants—were the ones that lost their jobs and had to go on the streets. (53)

As Mitchell points out, though, this concern with the social causes of the fall is largely a feature of the novels of the 1840s and 50s, which focused "on the economic and educational reforms of importance for women who were forced to support themselves" (135). By the 1860s, the tone of the novels had changed markedly, Mitchell argues: novels "of the 1860s [insist that] the cause of woman's fall is not poverty, innocence, lack of protection, love of finery or repressive respectability; it is men" (102). This argument, with its condemnation of the fallen woman's seducer, indicates a return to the resembles the eighteenth-century's condemnation of libertines, and even more, minimizes the fallen woman's own agency in her fall.

It is in terms of this discussion of the relationship between the fallen woman's individual agency and her socio-economic context that "Christina" can be seen as attempting to offer a new fallen-woman narrative which allows for both internal and external influences to be considered. This new mode of presenting the fallen woman attempted to move beyond the moral polarities associated with the figure and suggested in turn a version of the fallen woman that attempted to allow simultaneously for moral weaknesses on her part and socio-economic factors to contribute to her narrative. As I described at the beginning of this chapter, this project of revising the fallen-woman was part of an entirely practical problem facing women who were involved in reclamation work,<sup>13</sup> and it is for this reason that the representation of the fallen woman by individuals

involved in reclamation work—and especially women, who often worked closely with fallen women in institutions devoted to the fallen woman's reclamation—merits close attention. As Greenwell argues, it is critical for workers in the reclamation movement to move beyond the tinsel sentiment and recognize that their work takes place among actual individuals rather than characters in conventional narratives. "Christina," with its representation of a fallen woman who is at times conventional, at times not, and who is initially resistant to efforts to reclaim her, can be read as a part of this project.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The census of 1851 revealed that women in Great Britain outnumbered men by upwards of 4%—certainly the most startling revelation of the study. The census marked the population of England and Wales at 17,927,609 (*Census 4*), and noted more specifically the demographic imbalance between men and women, counting 10,386,048 men and 10,735,919 women, a difference of 349,871 (*Census 5*). Even more startling, though, was the fact that when considered in terms of women and men *at home* when the census was taken (that is, excluding men living abroad), the difference grows to 512,361 (*Census 5*). This imbalance, the census points out, is largely the same as that revealed in the 1801 census: "to every 100,000 males there were 103,353 females; in 1851 the females were 103,369 to the same number of males. The proportion in both periods was nearly 30 males to 31 females" (*Census 5*). The situation was far worse in Scotland, where women outnumbered men by nearly 10% (110 females to 100 males), but in England, nonetheless, the imbalance was roughly 4% (*Census 5*).

<sup>2</sup> In addition, Revelation 12:6 describes the woman who retreats to the wilderness to give birth but is pursued by the "great red dragon."

<sup>3</sup> The speaker's claim bears a striking similarity to Procter's assertion in "A Legend of Provence" that the fallen woman's "place is kept" in heaven.

<sup>4</sup> This is, of course, not the first instance of a fallen woman speaking for herself in English literature. In the eighteenth century, both Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) present us with women the Victorians would have regarded as fallen who speak in the first person.

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<sup>5</sup> Although there are of course differences (at times significant) among these "kinds" of fallen woman, many Victorians tended to consider any woman who engaged in illicit sexual activity a prostitute. As Acton points out in *Prostitution*, "many forcible divines and moralists have maintained that all illicit intercourse is prostitution, and that this word is as justly applicable as those of 'fornication' and 'whoredom' to the female who, whether for hire or not, voluntarily surrenders her virtue. According to them, her first offence is as much an act of prostitution as its repetition" (29). Acton's definition is a bit more specific: "I shall here content myself with a definition sufficiently accurate to point out the class of persons who ought, in my opinion, to become the objects of legislation, and shall assume, for the purpose of my present inquiry, that the fact of 'hiring,' whether openly or secretly, whether by an individual or a plurality in succession, constitutes prostitution" (31). Later, Acton explicitly describes what he regards as the "classes" of prostitutes: "'the kept woman' . . . who had in truth, or pretends to have, but one paramour, with whom she, in some cases, resides; the common prostitute, who is at the service, with slight reservation, of the first comer, and attempts no other means of life; and the woman whose prostitution is a subsidiary calling" (61).

<sup>6</sup> See D'Amico for a discussion of this idea at work in institutions devoted to the reclamation of fallen women. See Cohen for a lengthy discussion of the trope of the pairing of fallen and unfallen in painting.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, while *Ruth* serves in many ways as the archetype for deploying the fallen woman as a means of engaging in social criticism, the moral lapse of Ruth's fall is mitigated by her youth and naïveté as well as her extreme poverty, and her conduct after

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her fall effectively redeems her. Nonetheless, Ruth's death, however tragic in proportion, functions as a part of the traditional fallen-woman narrative.

<sup>8</sup> Helena Michie has written at length about conflict in women's relationships as an attempt to control sexual discourse. As I discuss in chapter three, such conflict can also be read as an attempt by women to exercise political power over one another.

<sup>9</sup> The speaker's preoccupation with work is telling, for utility and the ability to work were of course key preoccupations of the Victorians, as the idea of work had crystallized in the Victorian mind as a virtue and an end in itself. As Houghton describes, "the glorification of work as a supreme virtue, with the accompanying scorn of idleness, was the commonest theme of the prophets of earnestness; for the full meaning of a life of work was identical in outward action (apart from the internal discipline of the character) with a life of moral earnestness" (243). Houghton discusses the Victorian obsession with work at some length in connection with the Victorian regard for earnestness as the mark of moral virtue. (242-62). See also Richard Altick's discussion of work as "the counterpart of faith" (168) in *Victorian People and Ideas*.

<sup>11</sup> See Michie's full-length discussion of this in "'There is no friend like a sister': Sisterhood as Sexual Difference."

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the significance of the Victorian home, see Houghton, especially p. 341.

<sup>13</sup> As Anderson explains in her introduction, "As a fated, false, or 'painted' character, the fallen woman reveals concerns about the formal rendering of character and occasions crises about the readability of subjects. Most prominently, fallenness is assimilated to

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narrative itself, identified or equated with a 'downward path'" (9). Anderson continues, noting that "Victorian conceptions of the self were gendered and . . . literary genres and popular cultural forms were themselves experienced as dangers or constraints. These constraints frequently become most visible in depicted encounters between fallen women and other characters, who often perceive the fallen woman as a text that is already written rather than an agent capable of dialogical interaction. In such instances, the fallen woman can evoke not only crises of readability but also larger concerns about the relation between people and books, between living encounters and reading, and between social and aesthetic experience" (10). In the end, Anderson's larger point is that writers treating the fallen woman often found themselves "attempt[ing] to preserve notions of moral autonomy and redemptive sympathy even as they insisted upon the pervasive power of larger social and aesthetic forces and structures" (199).

## CHAPTER THREE

### "AWAKENED ONCE, SHE COULD NOT SLEEP AGAIN": ADELAIDE ANNE PROCTER'S "A LEGEND OF PROVENCE"

#### I

While Dora Greenwell's treatment of the fallen-woman narrative attempts to describe the difficulties inherent in work among fallen women, the narrative she ultimately constructs is fairly conventional, deploying the standard elements of the tale: the innocent woman seduced largely because of her beauty and vanity, the resulting social fall that renders her a pariah, and the fallen woman's eventual isolation and death. Despite this, Greenwell's treatment of the figure makes remarkable claims about the ability of the fallen woman to be reclaimed, and thus challenges any assertions that the fallen woman was morally and spiritually irretrievable. Despite claims about the fallen woman's reclaimability, Greenwell stops short of suggesting that the fallen woman might be wholly reclaimed—and thus reintegrated into "proper" society with the stigma of her fall eradicated entirely. Greenwell's fallen woman experiences a spiritual reclamation, but not a *restoration* to her former position.

This is not the case in Adelaide Anne Procter's "A Legend of Provence" (1859), which envisions the fallen woman's *total* reclamation and her return to her unfallen life. Indeed, unlike earlier fallen woman poems which had presented the fallen woman's *social* reclamation as a limited one (like the speaker in Greenwell's "Christina," who regardless of her repentance remains, in the end, socially and economically isolated), "A Legend of Provence" describes a fallen woman's *complete* return to her unfallen existence—without any kind of social penalty. On the surface, the poem tells the deceptively simple story of

the nun Angela, who is lured away from her convent by the temptations of the world beyond it. After years of a wanton existence outside the convent, Angela, at the moment of her deepest despair, returns to find that the Virgin Mary has taken her place. This miraculous intercession allows Angela to return to her station, and thus forms the core of the poem's argument for the complete reclamation of the fallen woman. Clearly, like "Christina," "A Legend of Provence" continues to represent the fallen woman as a religious figure capable of illustrating the miraculous potential of Christian charity.

Procter's argument for the complete reclamation positions her squarely on the forefront of a serious issue facing those involved in work among the fallen, for the argument that the fallen woman may be totally reclaimed raises one of the fundamental questions of reclamation work. Even as social critics such as Acton were insisting that prostitution (and, by extension, fallenness as a broadly defined category of women's sexuality) was generally a transitional means of employment, the possibility of a complete reclamation of the fallen women remained another matter entirely. Indeed, the possibility of the reclaimed fallen woman's restoration to her former social condition posed a serious threat to Victorian standards of sexual conduct, which relied upon economic, social, and spiritual punishments awaiting any woman who violated those codes. Were the fallen woman to be reclaimed completely (either through religious or institutional means), those threats would be reduced to little more than temporary inconveniences.

Clearly, the prospect of the complete restoration of a fallen woman to her former status was a problematic matter. As the reports of workers in institutions devoted to reclamation indicate, a sizeable percentage of fallen women were domestic servants

before their fall, and it is something of an irony that these institutions generally attempted to procure work for the reclaimed in the same sphere from which they had fallen. While this may appear to be a social restoration, these servants, once dismissed without a character, would have found work almost impossible to obtain. That the houses of reclamation (such as the Magdalen and later Highgate Penitentiary) offered placement for reclaimed fallen women (and presumably a character) removed neither the stigma of their having once fallen nor the implications of their having once been dismissed from a position, which certainly limited their range of employment opportunities despite having received a new character.

In "A Legend of Provence," Procter engages a series of difficult philosophical questions about the fallen woman's reclamation: what is required (socially, politically, and economically) for the fallen woman to return to her unfallen condition? Once the fallen woman is restored, is she still a fallen woman? Or has her reclamation rendered her respectable? Is the stigma of the fall erased, or does it remain after her reclamation? If it is erased, then what are the implications for the fallen woman/restored woman's identity? If this element of her history has been expunged, is she even the same woman who fell? These are complex questions that directly affect any literary treatment of the fallen woman's reclamation, and their answers tell us a great deal about Victorian anxieties associated with the return of reclaimed fallen women to respectable society.

As I argued in the previous chapter, in "Christina," Dora Greenwell's treatment of the fallen woman's potential reclaimability takes place alongside her challenging of notions that the process of that reclamation would always be effortless. As I shall show in what follows, like Greenwell's "Christina," Procter's "A Legend of Provence" deploys

what is in large part a conventional fallen-woman narrative while at the same time arguing against the limited reclamation of the fallen woman, envisioning instead the possibility of the fallen woman's total restoration to her unfallen life. Total restoration is not without complications, however, and in the process of mounting her argument that the fallen woman might return to her former status, Procter confronts the likelihood that while the fallen woman might be capable of spiritual restoration, socially, such a process is limited by a human incapacity to forgive her. In addition to its treatment of the fallen woman as reclaimable, however, the poem also challenges the conventional narrative describing the woman's fall as the result of an explicitly male seduction. Indeed, while Greenwell had described how the fall results from both libertine seduction and individual weaknesses on the part of the fallen woman, in "A Legend of Provence" Procter demonstrates how the fall may occur even despite structures that might prevent it. Procter's demonstration of these institutional failures mark a critical turn in the history of the representation of the fallen woman, for although it operates overtly as a religious poem, "A Legend of Provence" also marks a turn toward the consideration of the institutional failures surrounding the fallen woman that we see engaged overtly in Rossetti and Webster.

## II

"A Legend of Provence" is composed of a series of layered narratives in which the speaker describes herself staring at a portrait of a nun, which reminds her of a story she heard in Provence, which in turn leads her to recount the legend told to her while she once visited there. The poem opens with a description of the speaker, in a darkened room, leaning against a hearth:

The lights extinguished, by the hearth I leant,  
Half weary with a listless discontent.  
The flickering giant-shadows, gathering near,  
Closed round me with a dim and silent fear. (1-4)

This opening invokes a set of gothic conventions: the darkness, the "listless discontent," the shadows, the vague "dim and silent fear" brought about by the scene, and in Browningsque fashion, the speaker's attention moves to the painting hanging over the hearth:

All dull, all dark; save when the leaping flame,  
Glancing, lit up a Picture's ancient frame.  
Above the hearth it hung. Perhaps the night,  
My foolish tremors, or the gleaming light,  
Lent power to that Portrait dark and quaint—  
A Portrait such as Rembrandt loved to paint—  
The likeness of a Nun. (5-11)

While this image of the painting illuminated by irregular and inconsistent flashes of light adds to the gothic setting, it also echoes how the inconsistent illumination of the portrait allows for only portions of it to be apprehended at once. Although the room is bathed in shadow, it is also intermittently illuminated; the painting, also, is periodically illuminated. The room's darkness renders its contents to a degree unknowable, and in this same sense makes distinguishing between the real and the imaginary difficult, if not impossible. Procter is clearly establishing a gothic setting here, and the attention in the poem's opening to what is knowable and what is not. This gothic setting plays a central

role in "A Legend of Provence," a poem whose centerpiece is the miraculous reclamation and restoration of a fallen woman through the intercession of the Virgin Mary. By providing this gothic invocation, and even more, by focusing on a scene in which the real and the imaginary are difficult to separate, the poem sufficiently distances itself from any expectations of realism, and thus establishes a world in which even miracles might occur.

Similarly, the source of the speaker's interest in the painting is indeterminate: it may be the darkness, perhaps the light, or even the speaker's own anxieties. The speaker's attempt to tease out discrete causes here is telling, for the options are presented with seemingly no acknowledgement that all of these factors might combine somehow to bring about such a response. Even more interesting in this vacillation between the knowable and the unknowable, however, is the speaker's shifting between descriptions of the painting as "a picture" (6) and "a Portrait" (10). While a picture can, of course, also be a portrait, it need not necessarily be. A portrait, on the other hand, implies that the individual represented in the painting at one point existed and the portrait, then, captures some actual moment in the life of that individual. The result of this shift from picture to portrait then, like the shift from darkness to light, suggests again that knowledge of this painting is, in the end, incomplete, and we cannot know whether the likeness it posits is based upon a real or imaginary individual.

We encounter even more of this epistemological vacillation as the speaker offers a reading of the painting:

I seemed to trace

A world of sorrow in the patient face,

In the thin hands folded across her breast—

Its own and the room's shadow hid the rest. (11-14)

As the speaker describes, she does not actually perceive "A world of sorrow in the patient face," but instead "seemed to trace" it there. In the end, we cannot know whether or not the sorrow is actually there. The painting's being cast in shadow, in combination with its own darkness, renders any clear reading of the figure's sorrow impossible.

In this scene of intermittent shadow and light, where surroundings and meaning become confused and difficult to ascertain, the speaker begins the poem's second narrative layer:

I gazed and dreamed, and the dull embers stirred,  
Till an old legend that I once had heard  
Came back to me, linked to the mystic gloom  
Of that dark Picture in the ghostly room. (15-18)

The gaze and the dream are at once active and passive, physical and imaginative processes, which the speaker is simultaneously engaged in and yet disconnected from; the "dull embers" indicate a fading and a lack of activity, and yet they "stir." Finally, while the legend itself suggests the fantastic, there exists alongside it some possibility of truth, and thus it can exist simultaneously as both truth and untruth (in the form of legend).

This legend is, in turn, linked to this picture (notable, the speaker shifts from describing it as a portrait, a change that allows the image to be either entirely fictional or an attempt to represent an actual figure) of the gothic scene and its epistemological difficulties.

The speaker describes a trip to Provence, where she is told the legend of a local convent: "one who had dwelt for long / In that fair home of ancient tale and song, / Who knew the story of each cave and hill, / And every haunting fancy lingering still / Within

the land, spake thus to me, and told / The Convent's treasured Legend, quaint and old" (37-42). The legend, then, is mediated by both the speaker's memory and the teller's narration. It is also, of course, mediated by its status as legend, which implies telling and retelling over long periods of time, and then again by its passage from the convent where it originated. Such a layering is not uncommon in the gothic, nor is the setting of the tale in France: the former allows the narrative simultaneously to distance itself from any claims of authenticity (and yet claim truth by pretending to possess historical significance), and the distant setting (both in terms of time and place) enhances the tale's believability by suggesting a far-away land where such fantastic events might be believed—and might even occur. While the poem is concerned with the presentation of the miraculous, it is perhaps more important to note that couching the poem's narrative in terms of the gothic allows Procter to explore the idealized, fantastic possibilities of the fallen woman narrative with minimal concern for the material factors contributing to her fall.

This legend describes a medieval convent in the south of France, where Sister Angela, before her fall, has lived her entire life. We are told that "She had known / No home, no love, no kindred, save their own. / An orphan, to their tender nursing given, / Child, plaything, pupil, now the Bride of Heaven" (73-76). Angela, however, is tempted by the world outside the convent after "war, cruel war, defaced the land, and came / So near the convent with its breath of flame, / That, seeking shelter, frightened peasants fled, / Sobbing out tales of coming fear and dread" (109-12). The war brings wounded soldiers to the convent to be cared for by the nuns, and Angela nurses a wounded knight who describes "the glories of his past; / Tourney, and joust, and pageant bright and fair, /

And all the lovely ladies who were there" (158-60). The knight's description of the world outside the convent tempts Angela to leave the convent and explore "The glorious world of joy, all joys above, / Transfigured in the golden mist of love" (167-68). Angela leaves the convent with the soldier and, after he abandons her, she grows "reckless more and more, / Until the humblest peasant closed his door" (204-05). Years later, Angela, on the verge of death, returns to the convent to find that the Virgin Mary has interceded and taken her place in the convent, thus allowing her to return to her former life without the sisters' knowledge (until she tells her story on her deathbed). In the end, the poem claims to reveal that the possibility of spiritual restoration always exists: we are told that "Besides the lesson of God's pardon shown" (19), the legend makes clear the surety with which the "pure ideal of a noble life / That once seemed possible" (321) but has seemingly been "lost . . . in this daily jar and fret" (325) nonetheless remains "Ready for us to fill it, soon or late" (328). Angela's narrative before her return to the convent is wholly conventional insofar as it describes a woman tempted by the luxury and finery unavailable to her in her present circumstances. The convent, in turn, allows for the easy dichotomies of the material and the spiritual, the luxurious and the humble, and the pure and the fallen, while also emphasizing the severity of the fallen woman's break with Victorian codes of sexual conduct.

The convent is the primary setting of the poem, and is initially described as being central to the community around it. The description of the way the convent bell "Bid all the country rise, or eat, or pray" (47-48) suggests that the convent regulates and organizes the daily activities of the community. The convent does more, however; it provides a

variety of services and plays a crucial role in sustaining the community by providing medical assistance, arbitration for disputes, and shelter for travelers:

Before that convent shrine, the haughty knight  
Passed the long vigil of his perilous fight;  
For humbler cottage strife or village brawl,  
The Abbess listened, prayed, and settled all.  
Young hearts that came, weighed down by love or wrong,  
Left her kind presence comforted and strong.  
Each passing pilgrim, and each beggar's right  
Was food, and rest, and shelter for the night. (49-56)

The convent is not so isolated as it might seem to be: it is a place troubled individuals seek out, and it restores balance to the community around it. The convent's various roles mark it as deeply involved in community activities. The convent's role as an arbiter of conflicts is of particular interest, since it suggests that it is a place that is in some ways sought out by conflict: the knight passes "the long vigil of his perilous fight"; the Abbess resolves both "strife or village brawl" and mends "hearts . . . weighed down by love or wrong." We can see the convent's role in the conflicts surrounding it most clearly in the description of the wounded soldiers who take refuge there:

after a fierce skirmish, down the road,  
One night came stragglers, with their load  
Of wounded, dying comrades; and the band,  
Half pleading, yet as if they could command,  
Summoned the trembling Sisters, craved their care,

Then rode away and left their wounded there. (113-18)

Just as the local villagers seek it out as a means of resolving their disputes, so too do those injured by war seek it out as a place where they might be healed. As this passage indicates, the convent's role as refuge and sanctuary renders it incapable of avoiding the conflicts that surround it.

The description of the soldiers being left in the convent's care in some ways mirrors Angela's history, who was, we are told, "an orphan, to [the Sisters'] tender nursing given, / Child, plaything, pupil, now the Bride of Heaven" (75-76). The wounded soldiers act out a modified version of this theme, and as we are told, the "straggling soldiers" do little more than deposit their wounded in the care of the Sisters and then depart. Thus, as was the orphan Angela, the wounded soldiers are left in the care of the convent. The soldiers' entry into the convent makes clear, furthermore, that at this point in the poem we are faced with competing sets of gendered communities, one military and male, one religious and female. This juxtaposition invites us to see the female community as the antithesis of the male one: the convent is the site of healing and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, while the male community is organized for purposes of violence.

In addition to the structure and purpose of the two communities, the presence of the soldiers signals a moment of confused (or perhaps compromised) authority within the convent. The soldiers' authority is strangely contradictory: they "plead" and yet "command"; they "summon" and yet "crave." The inverse is of course also true—the sisters are commanded and yet begged—and so the presence of the soldiers within the convent renders authority and autonomy within both communities at best problematic. In

the end, the presence of the soldiers in the convent serves as another example of the way that neither conventual nor military community is as exclusive as it might seem to be. Just as the convent is clearly an integral part of the community that surrounds it, it must necessarily witness a degree of movement into it from outside. In addition, the degree to which the convent orders the daily life of the community surrounding it suggests that the interaction between the two is by no means one-way. What we are presented with, then, are sets of communities that are not nearly as isolated as they might conventionally be.

As the nuns begin to care for the wounded soldiers, Angela's lack of experience sets her apart from the other nuns, who are charged with caring for the more severely injured. During her care of "a young foreign Knight, / Whose wounds were painful, but whose danger slight" (127-28), the speaker tells us that Angela finds her inexperience troubling:

What could she speak of? First, to still his plaints,  
She told him legends of the martyred Saints;  
Described the pangs, which, through God's plenteous grace,  
Had gained their souls so high and bright a place. (135-38)

There is an implicit analogy established here between the soldier's "plaints" and the "pangs" of the martyrs, and Angela's purpose is most certainly to provide her patient with examples of rewards awaiting him in the afterlife. Angela's initial question of how to speak to the soldier reveals her perception of conventual life as somehow inadequate or unimpressive in comparison to secular life, however, and her decision to describe the spectacular rewards—the "high and bright . . . place" of the martyrs—rather than their

faith, devotion, and sacrifice—reveals an interest in the luxury that will become more explicit as she continues her discussion with the soldier.

We can see Angela's interest in luxury more clearly in her descriptions of the convent's religious ceremonies and their trappings:

the glorious pomp sublime,  
In which the chapel shone at Easter time,  
The Banners, Vestements, gold, and colours bright,  
Counted how many tapers gave their light;  
Then, in minute detail went on to say,  
How the High Altar looked on Christmas-day:  
The kings and shepherds, all in green and red,  
And a bright star of jewels overhead. (141-48)

This description emphasizes the ceremonial trappings of the convent rather than the piety of the community: she is describing the two most sacred Christian holy days, and yet her description shows little interest in their religious significance or meaning. Instead, she focuses upon entirely external matters—"Banners, Vestements, gold, and colours bright" (143), "kings and shepherds, all in green and red" (147)—indicating an attraction to both the superficial and the luxurious. This is not our first indication of Angela's interest in such things. Earlier in the poem, we are told that Angela possesses a masterful ability to produce objects of finery:

Her hands it was whose patient skill could trace  
The finest broidery, weave the costliest lace;  
But most of all, her first and dearest care,

The office she would never miss or share,  
Was every day to weave the fresh garlands sweet  
To place before the shrine at Mary's feet. (79-84)

Here we can see not only Angela's attraction to the ceremonial trappings of the convent, but also the way her production of finery becomes itself a kind of ritual. Her "patient skill," it seems, produces primarily objects of finery: fine embroidery and costly lace. Most telling, however, is the revelation that "she would never miss or share," which suggests that this is hardly a selfless act of devotion for her but is instead a source of pleasure for her. Indeed, as with Easter and Christmas, the speaker's description of Angela's love of the May Queen ceremony reveals her attraction to the trappings of ritual:

Thus Angela loved to count each feast the best,  
By telling with what flowers the shrine was dressed.  
In pomp supreme the countless Roses passed,  
Battalion on battalion thronging fast  
Each with a different banner, flaming bright,  
Damask, or striped, or crimson, pink, or white,  
Until they bowed before a new born queen,  
And the pure virgin Lily rose serene. (87-94)

Angela's attraction to the various feasts suggests again a curious conflation of the spiritual and the luxurious: the feasts combine the luxurious with the religious, and her attention to their entirely external details—literally with their decorations—indicates again the ways that Angela's interests run to the superficial and the external.

As with her embroidering and weaving of garlands, Angela's attraction to the "pomp sublime" is closely tied to religious ceremony, and in some ways becomes a crucial part of that ceremony for her:

Though Angela always thought the Mother blest  
Must love the time of her own hawthorn best,  
Each evening through the year, with equal care,  
She placed her flowers; then kneeling down in prayer,  
As their faint perfume rose before the shrine,  
So rose her thoughts, as pure and divine. (95-100)

The daily placing of flowers upon Mary's shrine becomes for Angela an entirely personal ritual. Her prayers become like the "faint perfume" rising before the shrine, equally bound up in the ritualistic, the ceremonial, and the sensuous. Indeed, even Angela's act of devotion—the placing of hawthorn at the shrine—emerges from her certainty that although "the Mother blest / Must love the time of her own hawthorn best," a belief that amounts to little more than a projection of her own interest in the luxurious upon the Virgin Mary. Moreover, the explicit association of her "pure and divine" thoughts with the "perfume" of the flowers suggests that like the odor of the flowers, Angela's piety is superficial and temporary.<sup>1</sup> Angela's love of the ceremonial undermines the distinctions between the religious and secular worlds that the poem at first glance seems to rely upon. As Angela's descriptions make clear, what impresses her about the convent is not its piety, but instead its capacity for pageantry. These concerns, in turn, foreshadow the temptations that will play a crucial role in Angela's fall and suggest that despite the degree to which it might be expected to protect Angela from temptation, the convent has

nonetheless promoted the very temptations it seeks to dissuade. This is a significant development in the history of the representation of the fallen woman, for it suggests that even a community of women—upon which the reclamation movement had heavily relied—cannot prevent its members from falling. Indeed, as I will discuss more thoroughly in the next chapter, there are sometimes mechanisms at work in these communities that drive women away from them. But it is in Procter's "A Legend of Provence" that we can see, perhaps for the first time, that we can see a woman fall not only despite the efforts of the community of which she is a part, but also potentially because of the way that community is structured.

What I am outlining here is the way Angela finds her experiences both inside and outside the convent lacking when the Knight counters her description of conventual pageantry with tales of "the glories of his past; / Tourney, and joust, and pageant bright and fair, / And all the lovely ladies who were there" (158-60). Upon hearing his initial description, Angela asks "Could this— / This be the world? This place of love and bliss!" (161-62). This description of the luxury and grandeur of the world outside the convent runs counter to Angela's notion of the outside world as possessed of "the strange and hideous charm, / That never failed to bring the gazer harm" (163-64), and in this moment of dueling discourses, the appeal of the sister-community fails to measure up to the "glorious world of joy, all joys above, / Transfigured in the golden mist of love" (167-68) of the world that surrounds it. This failure is largely a matter of the representation of the extra-conventual; the knight has appeals to Angela's love of finery and pageantry, representing it as a secular version of the ritual and ceremony she finds so attractive within the convent.

The knight's appeals result in a temptation for Angela that manifests itself as a series of internal changes that are undetectable from the outside. After the soldier recovers, Angela seems outwardly unaffected by her time with him, and yet internally she is being silently corrupted by her "dream" of the "glorious world of joy" outside the convent:

days passed, matins and vespers rang,  
And still the quiet Nuns toiled, prayed, and sang,  
And never guessed the fatal, coiling net  
Which every day drew near, and nearer yet,  
Around their darling; for she went and came  
About her duties, outwardly the same.  
The same? ah, no! even when she knelt to pray,  
Some charmed dream kept all her heart away. (171-79)

This description of the conventual rituals is of particular interest, for at this point we should note how the description of those rituals has changed. Instead of functioning as a source of pleasure for Angela, here, they are merely a part of a list of other chores. While the unadorned description of the daily activities of the convent may function as a means of emphasizing Angela's temptation by the "dazzling phantoms" (170) of the world outside the convent, it also suggests that those elements of conventual life which had previously afforded Angela great pleasure have ceased to do so. They have, in short, lost their sensuous appeal to her when compared to the knight's tale of an enchanted world outside the convent.

Following Angela's departure from the convent—which the speaker nearly completely elides<sup>2</sup>—we are told that forces are working to prevent her from returning. The temptations of the extra-conventual world are describes as a "slow, foreboding, dreaded shade, / That floated nearer, until pomp and pride, / Pleasure and wealth, were summoned to her side, / To bid, at least, the noisy hours forget, / And clamour down the whispers of regret" (189-92). Notably, these forces appeal to Angela's love of finery. This description of Angela as hunted or pursued again returns us to the problematic question of agency, for if there are forces at work outside the convent that capitalize upon Angela's weaknesses, matters of agency and accountability become impossible to locate entirely within a single individual. If Angela, as we have seen, bears at least some complicity in her fall simply because she is attracted to the sensuous, then that degree of agency is mitigated by external forces. Nonetheless, these forces outside the convent—with their ability to summon wealth and pleasure—are at odds with the convent, which after her fall is presented to us as a kind of dream. This dream reaches nightmarish proportions, however, through the representation of those temptations as a shadowy, intangible force (189) capable of commanding a personified "pomp and pride, / Pleasure and wealth" to surround individuals (190-92).

Procter is describing how the fall can result from external forces acting upon individual predispositions and thus, like Greenwell, she challenges notions of the fall that posited fallen women as either victims of libertine seducers or as morally weak individuals. As I have shown, Procter argues that Angela's fall results from a combination of her own predispositions (such as her love of finery and pageantry) and a pursuit by shadowy forces outside the convent determined to prevent her return. The

emergence of a complex notion of the fall—as opposed to the reductive arguments about women as either victims or morally weak—marks a critical juncture in the history of the representation of the fallen woman, for it indicates that writers such as Procter (and Greenwell, also) were attempting to recast the fallen-woman narrative so that it acknowledged the complexity of the fallen woman's origins and allowed for the possibility of the fallen woman's reclamation. Unlike Greenwell's "Christina" however, "A Legend of Provence" expands the scope these revisions of the fallen-woman narrative to consider the implications of that reclamation, and the bulk of the poem is concerned with the presentation of the fallen woman as a fragmented narrative capable of being made whole again through reclamation.

### III

Before I discuss the poem's presentation of the fallen woman's reclamation and restoration, it is important to discuss in some detail the ways "A Legend of Provence," like most of the other poems treated in this study, engages the fallen woman's agency. As Amanda Anderson argues, the fallen woman's agency lay at the heart of a Victorian debate about not only fallenness, but also self-determination and fatalism. The heart of the question was simply, is the fallen woman *responsible* for her fall? Or is she the victim of socio-economic forces that have led to her fall? Like most of the poems examined in this study, Procter's answer to this question avoids altogether the reductive binarism inherent in conventional estimations of the fallen woman's agency and insists instead upon a causation that allows for both external and internal forces that might contribute to the fall.

As I have shown, despite the degree to which "A Legend of Provence" describes Angela as a passive victim, it also presents us with indications that her victimhood is based, at least in part, on her own weaknesses: the image of Angela as a victim of forces working to keep her from returning to the convent depends upon Angela's ability to be seduced by the pleasures of the extra-conventual world. These seductive aspects of the secular world—the "pomp and pride, / Pleasure and wealth" (190)—we can see, are "summoned to her side" (191) as a means of stifling any regret she might feel about her departure from the convent. Notably, though, even when she lived within the convent, Angela already possessed a predilection for the "glorious pomp sublime" (140) of the conventual ritual, and so the temptations drawn around her when outside the convent merely play upon weaknesses she already possesses. In this sense, then, Angela is *both* passive victim and agent in her own fall.

Angela struggles against these efforts to prevent her from returning to the convent, but as the speaker suggests, her labor is futile: "Still Angela strove to dream, and strove in vain; / Awakened once, she could not sleep again" (194-95). This is not the first time the poem has described Angela's perception of her existence within the convent in terms of dreaming. Before Angela's departure, her lack of interest in the daily routines of the convent is blamed upon a "charmèd dream [which] kept all her heart away" (178), and later, as the speaker laments Angela's fall, the possibilities of her former life are described as a dream: "What need to tell that dream so bright and brief, / Of joy unchequered by the dread of grief? / What need to tell how such dreams must fade. . ." (186-88). The implication here is clearly that the poem associates Angela's life within the convent with dreaming, while the world outside is associated with a waking state from

which she cannot return: once Angela "wakes" from the dream of conventual life, she cannot "sleep" again. Return to the previous conditions of her existence is impossible. This "waking," even more, describes Angela's emergent self-awareness of her fallen condition:

She saw, each day and hour, more worthless grown  
The heart for which she cast away her own;  
And her soul learnt, through bitterest inward strife,  
The slight, frail love for which she wrecked her life,  
The phantom for which all her hope was given,  
The cold bleak earth for which she bartered heaven  
But all in vain. . . . (196-202)

This passage marks both the dissipation of the "charmèd dream" that had lured her away and the failure of the "pomp and pride, / Pleasure and wealth" which had been deployed as a means of "clamour[ing] down whispers of regret" (193). Thus, the knight for whom she leaves the convent becomes "more worthless grown" and their love "slight and frail"; the world outside the convent ceases to be a "place of love and bliss" (162). The description with which we are presented suggests that she has been wholly transformed into a social pariah, and is shunned by the extra-conventual world:

Years fled, and she grew reckless more and more,  
until the humblest peasant closed his door,  
And where she passed, fair dames, in scorn and pride,  
Shuddered, and drew their rustling robes aside. (204-07)

The description of Angela in the world outside the convent is presented exclusively in terms of how she is shunned by other *women* outside the convent, and thus the poem presents us with a vision of Angela among a secular community of women. Unlike the women of the convent who provide sanctuary to the needy, these women shun such individuals. Angela is offensive even to "the humblest peasant," suggesting not only her status as a social pariah but also her loss of whatever class status she had enjoyed while in the convent. Indeed, as the "fair dames" (whose finery she had envied before her fall) who shun her indicate, she is a pariah at all social levels.

The use of the word "reckless" (204) is telling, though, since it implies both rashness and, in the same sense, thoughtlessness, and thus suggests a degree of mental defect on Angela's part. Such descriptions of the fallen woman as mentally, physically, and socially diminished are fairly common in both fictional and non-fictional treatments of her. As John Armstrong describes in a *Quarterly Review* essay from 1848, the life of a fallen woman carries with it hardships hardly capable of being endured:

Several statisticians of authority agree in saying that three or four years of such a life end the scene; while the most liberal computation stretches the career, on the average, to the length of seven years. By this time, at the latest, their strength is run out, their constitution gone. Late hours, exposure to wet and cold, intoxication to drown thought, ill-usage, disease, inevitable misery of mind and body, are enough in this space to break down the frail tenement of flesh and blood. But after seven years of such a course—after this brief and bitter apprenticeship to the hardest of taskmasters—what follows? (361)

Armstrong offers up a litany of reasons why the fallen woman's condition might discourage her from seeking out one of the refuges available to her, and suggests that we must consider that the "false but not unnatural shame which deters many from presenting themselves at the door of a Penitentiary" (365). He concludes by noting that "it may be often difficult for a poor girl, when she longs to repent, to know how to set about the task of obtaining admission, or where to go. The more she feels her own degradation the longer may she defer the step" (365). The fallen woman's awareness of her "degradation," then, can discourage her from seeking reclamation.

Procter makes a point of describing the fallen woman's degradation, and couches Angela's desire to return to the convent not as an indication of her desire to be reclaimed, but instead as the product of her despair:

Weary and worn—her comrades, chill remorse  
And black despair, yet a strange silent force  
Within her heart, that drew her more and more—  
Onward she crawled, and begged from door to door.  
Weighed down with weary days, her failing strength  
Grew less each hour, till one day's dawn at length,  
At first its rays flooded the world with light,  
Showed the broad waters, glittering blue and bright,  
And where, amid the leafy hawthorn wood,  
Just as of old the quiet cloister stood. (216-25)

Much of this description of Angela's condition is purely conventional: her begging indicates her fallen socio-economic status; her "failing strength" indicates her physical

decline; and her apparent lack of awareness of her surroundings—indicated by her sudden realization that she is near the convent—indicates a mental disarray that is also a moral disorientation. Additionally, Angela's physical transformation is so complete that she has become unrecognizable, and we are told that "Her face / Had lost all trace of youth, of joy, of grace, / Of the pure happy soul they used to know" (226-28). This transformation marks a significant moment in the poem, and as I shall show, raises a series of key questions about the reclaimed fallen woman's identity with which the remainder of the poem will be concerned.

As the description by Armstrong indicates, the conditions in which such women were believed to exist led invariably to their physical and mental decline. For Armstrong, and many involved in work among the fallen, the fall results in a near-complete change in the woman's character. For instance, the speaker devotes considerable space to describing Angela's (however problematic) piety while she lives within the convent, and as the poem moves into its description of Angela some years after her fall, we find that her fallen life is the antithesis of her unfallen life. Before her fall, Angela is described as the pride of the convent:

Of all the nuns, no heart was half so light,  
No eyelids veiling glances half as bright,  
No step that glided with such noiseless feet,  
No face that looked so tender or so sweet,  
No voice that rose in choir so pure, so clear. (63-72)

It is fitting that even as this description of Angela sets out to establish her as the personification of purity, it emphasizes her physical attributes and abilities—her eyes, her

beauty, her voice—for it is the loss of these features that will in part publicly mark her as a fallen woman.<sup>3</sup> This change is of particular significance here, for Angela is so changed that she becomes not only unrecognizable, but she becomes (figuratively and literally) another person altogether.

This complete transformation of the fallen woman allows for a relatively standard set of comparisons between pure and fallen, as well as religious and secular, and also allows Procter to lay out what appears at first to be an entirely conventional description of the fallen woman narrative. Until this point in the poem, however, the unfallen "sister" who is traditionally paired with the fallen woman—and who works to bring about her reclamation—has been absent. Without the presence of an unfallen sister working to bring about her reclamation, Angela's return to the convent is therefore not preceded by an encounter with an unfallen woman (as was the case in Greenwell's "Christina"). Instead, the impulse to return to the convent is entirely internal, manifesting itself initially simply as a desire to return to the circumstances of her unfallen life:

At last a yearning seemed to fill her soul,  
A longing that was stronger than control:  
Once more, just once again, to see the place  
That knew her young and innocent; to retrace  
The long and weary southern path; to gaze  
Upon the haven of her childish days;  
Once more beneath the convent roof to lie;  
Once more to look upon her home—and die! (208-15)

This "yearning" is unprompted by any external influence. We are told that as Angela begs her way to the convent, she is compelled by "a strange silent force / Within her heart" (217-18). These forces, the passage suggests, are wholly internal: the "yearning . . . fill[s] her soul" with "a longing" to return to the convent, where she might experience again the surroundings of her unfallen life. It is important to note here that this is not a desire for reclamation on Angela's part. She wishes merely to return and experience the conditions of her unfallen life, and the passage gives no indication that she associates this return with a reclamation. What is important here, however, is the emphasis upon how this return results from internal processes. The depiction of the fallen woman's desire to return, if not to an unfallen state, then at least to the circumstances of that unfallen condition, indicates that despite her status as a fallen woman and a social pariah, she is not beyond reclamation. Thus, the poem may be read as a continuation of much the same argument about the fallen woman's reclamation that I described in Greenwell's "Christina." "A Legend of Provence," however, does not stop with merely an argument for the reclamation of the fallen woman. Indeed, whereas Greenwell had been primarily concerned with both the possibility of reclamation and the representation of that process as sometimes difficult, Procter's chief concern in "A Legend of Provence" is with the representation of a fallen woman's total reclamation and restoration to her former life.

Additionally, just as Greenwood's fallen woman understood herself in terms of the conventional fallen-woman narrative, so, too, does Angela. We can see this clearly in her desire to return to the convent, which is both a desire for a return to the circumstances of the unfallen state is an articulation of penitence and a desire for a narrative closure.

Angela does not desire a complete return (indicated by the emphasis upon "once more, just once again" which suggests both repetition as well as an experience with temporal limits), but instead an opportunity not only to "see," "to retrace," "to gaze," and "to look," but also to die.<sup>4</sup> Unlike Greenwell's fallen woman, who had articulated a desire to escape the Judeo-Christian discourse that labeled her as either angel or harlot, Procter's fallen woman seems not only to recognize her place within Victorian sexual discourse, but also to perceive herself as taking part in the conventional fallen woman narrative.<sup>5</sup>

Procter's Catholicism is significant here, for the presence of an intercessor in the conventional fallen-woman narrative is consistent with the presence of a wide range of intercessor figures in the Catholic tradition.<sup>6</sup> Procter had converted to Catholicism (under the influence of the Tractarian movement) in 1851, and as Rudd notes, was deeply devoted to her religious life in a way perhaps uncharacteristic of religious converts:

With converts it is oftener like a badge which they are proud to wear, and which some are fond of displaying. Miss Procter's was one of those rare natures in which religion seems to strain back, as it were, and color the very fountain-heads of all thought and impulse, as they are colored by the associations of childhood. In her, it was not like regalia for the processions of life or a reserve fund for emergencies, but thoroughly assimilated and vitalized; a *living* faith; an actual, practical element in her daily doings, as present in her consciousness as her own individuality. Nor had she any of the combativeness of converts, whose zeal is apt sometimes to be aggressively meek and intolerantly lowly. (562)

In a poem such as "A Legend of Provence," the Catholic tradition provided her access not only to the wide range of intercessor figures, but also to the figure of the Virgin Mary, whose status as both a Catholic intercessor and as a woman impregnated outside of wedlock, allowed Procter to draw tacit parallels between the two women. The intercessor is also, of course, a crucial element of these early fallen-woman poems, which had concerned themselves with demonstrating the power of Christian charity.

Until her return to the convent, Procter's fallen woman plays out the conventional narrative that dictates that the fallen woman's unavoidable downward path must necessarily end in her death. Procter revises this conventional narrative by asserting not only the fallen woman's reclaimability, but also the possibility for a total *restoration*—Procter's fallen woman finds herself able to return *wholly* to the life she had abandoned and to live out the remainder of her life. It is important at this point to consider the specific terms of Angela's reclamation. Upon returning to the convent Angela finds that the Virgin Mary has occupied her place during her lengthy absence. As Mary tells her, "I filled thy place. / Thy flight is known to none, / For all thy daily duties I have done; / Gathered thy flowers, and prayed, and sung, and slept; / Didst thou not know, poor child, thy place was kept?" (268-70).<sup>7</sup> Because of this substitution, Angela is capable of simply reassuming her former life. This is an image of total transformation: Angela ceases to be "the poor beggar" (280) or "that wan woman, with the piteous face" (282), and becomes instead "only Angela . . . Laden with hawthorn blossoms from the wood" (283-84). The Virgin Mary's miraculous intercession, then, allows Angela to assume her former station without suffering any social penalty for her fall.

The few critics who have commented on this poem have focused on the "extraordinary" nature of the poem's presentation of the fallen woman's reclamation. As Gregory (relying upon Kathleen Hickok's treatment of the poem in *Representations of Women*) explains, such claims about the possibility of a total reclamation were indeed remarkable: "The poem unconventionally allows the fallen woman to resume her "place" and she is not blamed for her fall. Kathleen Hickok has written that 'A Legend of Provence' represented the 'apotheosis in women's poetry of the fallen woman redeemed.' 'In light of nineteenth-century attitudes toward the fallen woman,' Hickok writes, 'this total reclamation is 'miraculous' indeed.' She adds that, even though the poem is deeply religious and conventional in its expression of religious sentiment, the narrator's assertion that 'We always may be what we might have been' in conclusion 'was extraordinary' when applied to the fallen woman" (172-73). Gill notes that "by allowing Angela full reinstatement and a return to her past self, her fall becomes an episode for which she is not blamed. . . . She is not, however, the object of castigation or of a double-edged sympathy. . ." (173). Although prostitutes, single mothers, fallen women, and diseased women had had available to them places of refuge and the hope of reclamation since the early eighteenth century, the poem's presentation of the *total* reclamation of a fallen woman is a radical argument—even for those involved in reclamation work, since reclamation work generally insisted only upon the retraining of prostitutes for domestic service, and not their complete and unstigmatized return to their former lives. In this poem, Angela is not merely forgiven and granted re-entry into the community she has abandoned; she is redeemed both socially and spiritually, and experiences no social punishment for her fall. This is a stunning position even for those involved in the

reclamation movement, which had believed in the possibility of a total spiritual reclamation but only a limited social one—reclaimed women were trained almost exclusively for work as domestic service or, in cases where they were transported, physically removed from the circumstances of their former life (and, therefore, from those who might remember it).<sup>8</sup>

Procter's deployment of the Virgin Mary as the instrument of Angela's reclamation is of course significant, since in addition to her role as an intercessor, she is also in many ways a kind of fallen woman. Indeed, insofar as she finds herself pregnant outside of wedlock, she meets the Victorian requirements for fallenness. Even in the description of the revelation of her pregnancy in Matthew, we are told that Mary's condition was troubling even to Joseph: "Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily" (Matthew 1:19). Mary's pregnancy is rendered acceptable through a miraculous intercession of "the angel of the lord" (1:20), whose presence ensures that any social punishment that might ordinarily have been reserved for a woman in her condition is avoided, and any social stigma regarding her pregnancy is removed. The miraculous intercession of heavenly forces mitigates Mary's fallen status—or at least renders it acceptable, forgivable, and unpunishable.

"A Legend of Provence" relies upon this myth of miraculous intervention as a means of correcting a woman's fall, and Angela's reclamation through miraculous intercession echoes Mary's redemption. But more importantly, these two tales of a fallen woman's redemption become myth, and because of this cease to function as a cautionary tale about codes of sexual conduct, and instead become testaments to the capacity for

redemption and forgiveness among the faithful. Despite its remarkable vision of the fallen woman's restoration, the terms of Angela's reclamation raise questions about the problems inherent in completely restoring the fallen woman to her previous social condition. We can see the ways her reclamation is problematic soon after her return to the convent. When Angela returns to discover that Mary has kept her place, she is told that the act of intercession has been a secret one:

I filled thy place. Thy flight is known to none,  
For all thy daily duties I have done;  
Gathered thy flowers, and prayed, and sung, and slept;  
Didst thou not know, poor child, *thy place was kept?* (268-71)

This secrecy is the key to Angela's reclamation: the Virgin Mary has interceded by occupying Angela's place—by literally *becoming* Angela—and thus by concealing her departure, her fall, her return, and even the degree of her physical transformation from Angela. This deception indicates that despite its miraculousness, Angela's restoration nonetheless requires a remarkable degree of secrecy since, as the Virgin Mary explains, such deception is intended to counter the limitations of human mercy:

Kind hearts are here; yet would the tenderest one  
Have limits to its mercy: God has none.  
And man's forgiveness may be true and sweet,  
But yet he stoops to give it. (271-75)

Victorian standards of sexual propriety demanded that there were limits to the acceptance the fallen woman might encounter upon re-entry into society, and the message the Virgin's intercession conveys is two-fold: spiritual reclamation is always possible ("Thy

place was kept") and the degree of social restoration is limited by human failings. While Procter is primarily concerned with the spiritual reclaimability of the fallen woman, the reference to the limitations of social reclamation cannot be ignored. This is, in many ways, the central argument of the poem: however much the world might render the fallen woman a pariah, her spiritual reclamation is always possible since, our narrator tells us, "*our place is kept, and it will wait. / Ready for us to fill it, soon or late*" (327-28). And although (as I have shown in "Christina") the convention dictates that the fallen woman's social restoration be of a limited nature, in this poem Procter represents the possibility that the fallen woman's social reclamation need not be limited, and that a complete social restoration might accompany her spiritual reclamation.

The deployment of the Virgin Mary as the instrument of Angela's reclamation serves as a means of mediating the problems inherent in the fallen woman's reclamation. If, as Victorian convention dictated, the fallen woman would enjoy only a limited social restoration, Procter's use of the Virgin Mary as the intercessor on behalf of the fallen woman is crucial, since both of these women are protected from castigation by their absorption into myth. Just as the myth of the Virgin Mary transforms her narrative from the story of a fallen woman into a holy event, so does the divine intercession transform Angela's narrative from a cautionary tale into the "Legend of Provence," which at once removes the stigma of her fall and transforms her story into a "lesson of God's pardon shown" (318) and of the ever-present possibility of redemption and return—as the speaker tells us "we may always be what we might have been" (329).

But this notion that "we might always be what we might have been" introduces a series of ontological questions about the fallen woman and her reclamation, since

Angela's reclamation is, actually, far more than merely a reclamation; it is a restoration to her former, unfallen life. The Virgin's intercession allows Angela to return to her life—uninterrupted, so far as anyone knows, by her fall—and to re-assume her former station in the convent. Indeed, the Virgin's claim, "I filled thy place," however much it is an indication that her intercession has hidden Angela's fall from the convent, also carries with it the suggestion that during Angela's absence there have literally been *two* Angelas. Angela is, then, at once fallen and not. Thus, the two principal Victorian narratives describing women—that of the angel and that of the harlot—have been allowed to unfold *simultaneously* in Angela, and through the intercession the latter narrative is effectively eradicated.

The poem has subtly raised these questions of identity from the moment of the fallen Angela's escape from the convent. Angela is described as unrecognizable and wholly transformed as she makes her way to the convent:

Would any know her? Nay, no fear. Her face  
Had lost all trace of youth, of joy, of grace,  
Of the pure happy soul they used to know—  
The novice Angela—so long ago. (226-29)

Such descriptions of the fallen woman as physically transformed by her fall are fairly conventional. But what matters here is that the fallen Angela appears to be nameless. When Angela arrives at the convent gate and encounters Sister Monica, she is described by the speaker merely as "the stranger" (242), and after the sister leaves her to find the key to the gate, Angela is described as "the beggar" (248). She is without personal

identity at this point in the poem, and is described wholly in terms of the role she plays—stranger, beggar.

These matters become more complex once Angela encounters, paradoxically, herself. Upon her arrival at the convent gate, Angela is momentarily left alone by Sister Monica who "bade her wait, / Until she brought the key to unbar the gate" (246-47).

When, upon hearing footsteps returning, Angela raises her head, she finds that an apparently unfallen version of herself has come to her:

She raised her head; she saw—she seemed to know—

A face that came from long, long ago:

Herself; yet not as when she fled away,

The young and blooming novice, fair and gay,

But a grave woman, gentle and serene:

The outcast knew it—*what she might have been*. (252-57)

This passage marks the site of a moment of identity crisis: the face she sees is both herself and not herself, just as in her fallen, transformed state she is both Angela and not Angela. Indeed, just as the fallen Angela has been altered by both her fall and, presumably, the passage of time, the unfallen Angela has also been transformed from "the young and blooming novice, fair and gay" (255) into a "grave woman, gentle and serene" (256). We find no names here, and this absence raises a significant question: who is this Angela in the convent? Who is the Angela who has returned? It would seem, in other words, that Angela is *both* fallen and unfallen, and thus that the two narrative poles describing women have both been allowed to play themselves out simultaneously—Angela is both the angel *and* the harlot. In this sense, we can see the poem engaging in

both religious and gothic fantasy, and so realist questions about locating identity are to a degree inappropriate here. But as I have discussed already, when we consider that the Gothic invocation framing the poem raises a series of questions about distinguishing between the real and the fantastic, this description of two Angela's likewise presents us with a simultaneous vision of the real and the fabulous. Indeed, these potentialities are juxtaposed at the site of her return: the fallen Angela is physically altered by the realities of her condition; conversely, the Virgin Mary provides the fabulist vision of "what . . . might have been" (257).

Once the Virgin Mary reveals herself, names return—and thus identity ostensibly stabilizes:

But, as she gazed and gazed, a radiance bright  
Filled all the place with strange and sudden light;  
The Nun was there no longer, but instead,  
A figure with a circle rounds its head,  
A ring of glory; and a face, so meek,  
So soft, so tender. . . . Angela strove to speak,  
And stretched her hands out, crying, "Mary mild. . . ." (258-64)

While the appearance of the Virgin Mary differentiates between the two Angelas we have encountered, there is an equally puzzling set of questions raised by her disappearance.<sup>9</sup> After the Virgin Mary has explained to Angela that she has been forgiven for her fall ("Only Heaven / Means *crowned*, not *vanquished*, when it says 'Forgiven!'" [277-78]), Sister Monica returns to find "only Angela at the gateway stood, / Laden with hawthorn blossoms from the wood" (283-84). The Virgin Mary, who has taken Angela's place, has

miraculously exchanged the fallen Angela for the Angela she has pretended to be. But this intercession leaves us with serious ontological questions: is this "restored" Angela the same Angela who fell? Or is she a different person? Has the narrative of her fall been somehow erased? Or does it remain?

We can see the answer to at least this last question in the description of Sister Monica's return. We are told that after Sister Monica returns to find the beggar gone, she is affected by her failure to provide assistance to her:

And never did a day pass again,  
But the old portress, with a sigh of pain,  
Would sorrow for her loitering: with a prayer  
That the poor beggar, in her wild despair,  
Might not have come to any ill. . . . (285-89)

Clearly, the narrative of Angela's fall remains even after her restoration in Sister Monica's memory, and thus the Virgin's intercession has not *erased* this part of her narrative. But the narrative of Angela's fall is more than intact; it proliferates. Just as Sister Monica daily remembers "the poor beggar," Angela reveals her story on her deathbed:

And through that silence Angela told her life:  
Her sin, her flight; the sorrow and the strife,  
And the return; and then clear, low and calm,  
'Praise God for me, my sisters;' and the psalm  
Rang up to heaven, far and clear and wide,  
Again and yet again, then sank and died;  
While her white face had such a smile of peace.

They saw she never heard the music cease;

And weeping sisters laid her in her tomb,

Crowned with a wreath of perfumed hawthorn bloom. (306-15)

Angela's telling of her narrative, in addition to ending the deception that allowed her initially to reenter the convent, also marks the site of the proliferation of this fallen woman narrative. Indeed, if the Virgin Mary's intervention had effectively revised Angela's narrative, Angela's confession restores it to the community's memory, and thus renders her again a fallen woman. This status, however, is mitigated by the miraculous intervention of the Virgin, which endows Angela's restoration with divine approval, thus removing and social and religious stigma associated with her fall.

The narrative of her fall, in the end, continues to be told. And if the proliferation of her narrative is any indication, the narrative *demand*s to be told, and in the process of this telling and re-telling, transforms the conventional fallen woman narrative at the same time that it deploys it. Like the Virgin, the miraculous nature of the narrative affords Angela protection from social punishment. As this narrative spreads outside the convent and eventually becomes legend—and even more, as that legend is told to the speaker, who in turn re-tells it—we gain a clear sense that the fallen woman's narrative *cannot* be eradicated. Although Angela's tale is protected by the mythic nature of her reclamation from the charge of being *merely* a fallen woman narrative (and thus only a cautionary tale), she is, in the end, still a *kind* of fallen woman. The intercession of the Virgin Mary transforms Angela's narrative by de-emphasizing those aspects of it that operate as a cautionary tale—this is, in the end, less a poem about what Angela should have avoided than it is a poem about the possibility of the fallen woman's reclamation—and by

elevating elements of the poem that allow it to make broader claims about social or theological issues. If the cautionary tale relies upon the implicit notion that essentially all women are capable of falling and so offers an allegory describing what to avoid, the intercession here removes the generality of such an argument: the intercession is miraculous, and thus by definition uncommon, and its extraordinariness demands attention. In this sense, Angela's fall becomes less important than the theological arguments the intercession raises.

What Procter offers in "A Legend of Provence" is far more than a simple fallen-woman narrative, or an argument for the reclamation of the fallen woman. The poem makes a radical argument for the complete reclamation of the fallen woman at the same time that it raises issues about the implications of that reclamation. What seems at first to be a completely optimistic treatment of the reclaimability of the fallen woman becomes, under scrutiny, a treatment of the ways that reclamation itself poses a series of difficult (and potentially dangerous) questions about the status of the reclaimed fallen woman—and about the way we understand her identity. And while Procter's vision of a fallen woman reclaimed completely and reintegrated into her unfallen life may seem to be an optimistic treatment of the fallen woman theme, the poem's vision of Angela's reclamation seems far less hopeful than it had originally. In fact, despite the poem's attempts to describe the possibility of a total reclamation of the fallen woman, what it succeeds in exposing are the ways that if such a reclamation is to be accomplished, it requires at once miracles and deception—and concludes, ultimately, that even these are not enough to reclaim the fallen woman. Human mercy, as the Virgin Mary tells Angela, has its limits.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory remarks that the flowers in this passage carry with them a number of meanings: the repetition of "multiple moments of pleasure"; the expression of Angela's "desires with military precision" with the flowers "mirror[ing] the regimentation and strength of her arrangements, with the flaming roses suggesting passionate and triumphant love" (177). Additionally, though, Gill rightly points out (in contrast to his earlier discussion of "Angela's lack of definition" (177) that "the passion associated with the flowers speaks against the silence of the archetypal nun" and notes briefly the implicit "injunction to secrecy" implied by the "association with . . . *sub rosa*" (177).

<sup>2</sup> What little description of Angela's departure we are given is couched almost entirely in the Gothic description of the landscape: "Across the moonlit grass, with stealthy tread, / Two silent, shrouded figures passed and fled. / And all was silent, save the moaning seas, / That sobbed and pleaded, and a wailing breeze / That sighed among the perfumed hawthorn trees" (182-85). Such an elision is not surprising; of the poems in this study, none explicitly describes the woman's fall. As Sally Mitchell notes in her survey of literature about unchaste women, *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women's Reading, 1835-1880*, in magazines such as *The Family Herald* "A remarkable number of stories . . . tell the same tale but omit the crucial event. A young woman loves a man (usually of the higher class); he promises marriage but later loses interest; she dies of poverty and a broken heart. The sin which leads to her unhappy fate is not the sexual act but rather that she confesses love or even feels love before she is married" (9).

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<sup>3</sup> Commenting on this passage, Gill remarks that "Angela is depicted ironically as both priceless and without value since she lacks a history and a definition. The repetition of 'No' renders her almost absent, and she becomes a repository for the others' lack, need and pain. Without any firm ground, she is a figure of infinite malleability" (176). On the contrary, as I argue above, this passage is hardly an act of erasing Angela from the convent; instead, it is an assertion of her almost supernatural purity. In addition, the trope of the convent-child serves as a means of describing consummate virtue that has, presumably, been untested. And Angela's virtue, like the convent-child Ambrosio in Matthew Lewis's gothic novel *The Monk*, fails the test—although without descending to such demonic depths as Ambrosio.

<sup>4</sup> In an 1867 review of Procter's poetry in *Catholic World*, F. A. Rudd comments on Procter's use of death in her poetry, contrasting it with the treatment of death in Rossetti's poetry: "her ideas regarding death are very lofty. They are equally removed from the timorous, painful harping on dissolution that characterizes the *underdone* poetic organism, from the graphic grimness of Miss Rossetti's class of thinkers, who seem to take a ghastly delight in anatomizing the subject, and last from the passionate weak welcoming of the end—the coward courage which dares not live. In a word, Miss Procter was a Christian" (559)

<sup>5</sup> Gill makes a similar comment, although he is not specifically discussing the fallen woman's awareness of herself as discursive: "Procter depicts the struggle for a form which exists beyond the exiled and dreamlike figure of the fallen woman described by her father (whose apotheosis is seen in his [1823] poem 'The Girl of Provence') and beyond the figure of the inspirational woman who only functions in relation to the needs

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of others" (179). While Gill is no doubt correct in his assertion that in this poem Procter is searching for a means of articulating a fallen woman capable of escaping the traditional conventional narratives describing them, to insist that the best analogy here is with a poem composed in 1823 ignores the ways that English attitudes toward the fallen woman—at least popularly—had changed markedly in the intervening 36 years.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of Procter's Catholicism, see Gregory, p. 8-15. While his biography of Procter is as thorough as can be expected—we know remarkably little about her—it exhibits an unfortunate preoccupation with her father, the poet Bryan Procter, as the hub of her literary relations, and too often turns to analysis of his poetry as a means of apprehending hers. While a figure such as Bryan Procter certainly exhibited considerable influence on his daughter's work, Gregory's analyses too often lead him down unprofitable avenues, and decontextualizes the poem from the Victorian discourse about the fallen woman.

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, in his critique of the poem, Rudd finds fault with this moment: "This strikes us as a tremendous blunder. For the nun to know that her place was kept would knock the bottom out of the entire legend. Who wouldn't sin with his pardon drawn up in advance, and entire secrecy and perfect resolution awaiting the first active twinge of repentance? We cannot imagine for an instant how Miss Procter could overlook this; unless we have made some equally egregious error in our understanding of the poem and its scope" (560). No doubt, Rudd's critique fails to consider that the Virgin's statement can be read two ways. On one hand, it is a statement of the possibility of spiritual redemption; on the other, it is a statement of the possibility of an equally complete "social" place that has been kept, and thus implies that just as the fallen woman might re-

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assume whatever spiritual aspiration she might have had before her fall, so, too, might she return to her "pre-lapsarian" social condition.

<sup>8</sup> We can see Wilkie Collins's *A New Magdalen* playing out some of this anxiety, since it describes a reclaimed fallen woman working as a nurse in the Crimean War who assumes the identity of a respectable woman killed in a bombing. The possibility of the fallen woman managing to become respectable was the stuff of sensation fiction.

<sup>9</sup> In addition, the presence of the Virgin Mary provides the conventional comparison of the fallen woman with an unfallen (and often nearly *identical*) woman that has been lacking until this point in the poem.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RE-READING SISTERHOOD IN CHRISTINA ROSSETTI'S "NOBLE SISTERS" AND "SISTER MAUDE"

#### I

In her remarkable essay detailing Christina Rossetti's involvement with the Church Penitentiary Movement and its relation to her representation of the fallen woman in her poetry, Diane D'Amico rightly tells us that "we should . . . add to the list of sources for 'Goblin Market' the literature of the Church Penitentiary Movement" (78), thus offering a veritable call for further investigation of this rich and complex area of Rossetti studies.<sup>1</sup> But "Goblin Market" is not the only poem which merits further inquiry in light of Rossetti's involvement with the Church Penitentiary Movement; Rossetti worked at Highgate Penitentiary on and off from the summer of 1859 until 1870, and it is something of an irony that a poet who has, in the past 30 years, been under such intense scrutiny by largely feminist critical studies should have had such remarkably little attention paid to her involvement with communities of women both in her poetry and her real life.

Our awareness of Rossetti's volunteer work at Highgate is not new; her work there has been documented in her biographies for nearly a century. But until recently, few studies have thoroughly investigated the ways her time working in this community of women influenced her poetry about relationships between women. This is an unfortunate gap in Rossetti studies, since attention to the relationship between her poetry and her work at Highgate allows us to trace her engagement of significant socio-political and moral questions about the nature and capabilities of women's communal activities in the mid-nineteenth century.

In a poem such as "Goblin Market" (composed in April 1859), Rossetti would seem to be an advocate of women's collective activity and friendship, insisting that women's communities are not only viable, but that the instabilities which emerge within them are the direct result of male forces working outside the female community. But according to documentation currently available, "Goblin Market" was composed a few months *before* Rossetti began working at Highgate.<sup>2</sup> This is a significant point, because it suggests that although Rossetti had known of the work at Highgate for some time, it is probable that her understanding of the realities of Penitentiary work was limited only to what could be found in advertisements designed to gain the support of women in Rossetti's parish. Poems Rossetti composed after she began working at Highgate (such as the two sister-poems of 1860, "Noble Sisters" and "Sister Maude") offer treatments of sister-relationships that differ markedly from the sister-relationship in "Goblin Market."<sup>3</sup> These two poems, with their sister-relationships characterized by antagonism and competitiveness, are a stark contrast to the utopian possibilities "Goblin Market" seems to envision for female communities, and thus raise a series of questions about current estimations of Rossetti's attitude toward sister-relationships, women's communities and women's potential for communal activity. What I will show in this chapter is that these poems mark a crucial turn in both Rossetti's thinking on the fallen woman and, more generally, in the history of the representation of the figure. Rossetti's presentation in these poems of botched intercessions and failures of protective structures indicates a movement away from the fallen-woman poem's earlier status as a religious poem toward a much more secularized treatment of the figure.

What little critical attention "Noble Sisters" and "Sister Maude" have drawn has been preoccupied with the antagonism between the sisters: Joseph Bristow explains the ways in which poems such as "Noble Sisters" explore "the competing demands placed upon her sisters to support one another, to marry, and to pledge one's heart to God" (259) and Helena Michie argues that poetic treatments of this antagonism carve out "a place for sisterhood in Victorian tropology that allows for the expression of hostility among women" (407).<sup>4</sup> In addition to Bristow's and Michie's readings of these poems, I would like to suggest another: the radically different treatment of sister-relationships Rossetti offers in "Noble Sisters" and "Sister Maude" suggests her attitude toward communities of women changed dramatically after gaining practical experience working at Highgate. It is with these "post-Penitentiary" poems and their dystopic sister-relationships that this study is primarily concerned.

## II

"Noble Sisters" describes two nameless sisters who, as in "Goblin Market," live in a community apparently devoid of men. The poem is concerned with the conflict between the two sisters, one of whom wishes to leave the community with her lover, while another attempts to intercept the lover's advances. Clearly, any discussion of "Noble Sisters" is immediately hampered by the poem's lack of proper names for its two speakers.<sup>5</sup> While my terms—"protector-sister" and "protected-sister"—are certainly as problematic as any other, they echo the unequal distribution of authority within the sister-community while also reflecting the ways the sisters are defined both in terms of their relationship to one another and to the male figure from whom "protection" may be required.

The protector-sister's actions are clearly attempts to exclude the lover's advances, and, as in Rossetti's treatment of the goblin men outside the female community in "Goblin Market," the lover and the protected-sister play out the conventional themes of seduction and profligacy: the falcon who bears messages from the lover to the protected-sister wears "jingling bells about her neck" (5), and either a ribbon or a ring "beneath her wing" (lines 6-8); the "ruddy hound" (13) wears a "silken leash about his neck; / But in his mouth may be / A chain of gold and silver links" (17-19). The lover's messengers carry objects which might ultimately lure the sisters away from the community, and in this Rossetti offers a traditional treatment of the profligate attempting to lure young maidens away from home with the promise of a life of luxury—a common theme in Victorian literature. Indeed, one letter to the *Times* advocating Penitentiary work notes that the "story so common in works of fiction occurs over and over again in real life. The country girl accompanies some heartless villain up to London, is maintained in splendor for months, weeks, or days, is then deserted" (7). There are clear parallels (at least superficially) between the profligate enticing the young maiden away from home and the lover sending presents to the protected-sister in "Noble Sisters," and this is essentially the same model of seduction Rossetti had employed in "Goblin Market," where the goblin merchant men tempt the maidens in the community with their exotic fruits. But in "Goblin Market," when women succumb to the temptations of the goblin merchants, they return (even if only to waste away and die) to the sister-community, and it is in this way that Rossetti champions communities of women: even when members are lured away, the community is stable enough to reclaim them—providing, of course, that they return at all.<sup>6</sup>

But what Rossetti elides in "Goblin Market" is the degree to which dissatisfaction with the sister-community (or the home, in the case of both "Noble Sisters" and "Sister Maude") can be a component part of the temptation to leave it—or as I have shown in my discussion of Procter's "A Legend of Provence," the community may contain temptations its members may indulge in more fully only outside of it. In "Goblin Market," the temptation to leave the community stems from the luxuriance of the goblin-fruits, and thus the *lack* of luxury in the sister-community—the sisters' labor apparently provides only staples—becomes a source of dissatisfaction with the sister-community. Regardless, there is a tremendous faith in the sister-community throughout "Goblin Market": Lizzie leaves Laura alone by the brook, certain that she will return to the safety of their home.

Home is not so ideal a place in "Noble Sisters," and as the protected-sister's unflinching attention to what is outside its walls indicates, neither is it a place where *both* sisters desire to remain. But whereas there was a tremendous faith in the sisters' loyalty to the sister-community in "Goblin Market," in this later poem we find that this is not the case. In "Noble Sisters," the home has been transformed into a kind of prison whose walls, gates, doors, and windows are under constant guard. Even more, the protected-sister's constant attention to what is outside the sister-community suggests a failure within the sister-community. Whether that failure is sexual, economic, or imaginative is unclear, but the tensions within the dialogue between the two sisters—with one sister searching desperately for a highly romanticized lover who lavishes his wealth upon her, while the other sister struggles to subvert his attempts to contact her—suggests that the failures of the sister-community at least touch on all of these. While certainly "Goblin Market" registers some of these concerns about potential shortcomings of the sister-

community in the temptation of Laura, Rossetti's faith in the potential of the sister-community to withstand the world outside it never seems to waver, nor does her belief in the redemptive powers of sisterhood and her utopian vision of relations within women's communities.

This notion of the power and viability of the sister-community is common in the literature surrounding the Church Penitentiary Movement. Thomas Thellusson Carter, founder and first warden of the Penitentiary at Clewer, believed that penitents ought to meet with as little temptation from the outside world—and their old ways of life—as possible, and so the Penitentiary system often took on an almost xenophobic and prison-like attitude, restricting the inmates' movements to within the Penitentiary walls.<sup>7</sup> Such protectiveness and isolation are characteristic of the Church Penitentiary Movement, and in her 1865 diatribe against the Penitentiary system, *Penitentiaries and Reformatories*, Felicia Skene describes the difficulties involved in being an inmate in one of these institutions:

One of the cruelest parts of the system is their rigorous confinement to the house, and total want of exercise in the open air. . . . It is a fact that not one breath of fresh air is allowed to these poor prisoners through the day; not one half hour is granted them in which to look on the blue sky and the sunshine, and to meet the cool breeze with its invigorating power. (11)

But it was not only confinement with which the inmates had to contend. It was believed that penitents should at all times be kept under strict observation, and so "penitents were never left without a 'sister present,'" and each inmate's sleeping chamber was placed in such a way that it could be watched by a Sister "whose sleeping chamber [was] so

arranged to command it" (Quoted in D'Amico, 70). This close surveillance carries with it the sinister undertones of imprisonment, which, to a certain extent, are not surprising. The Penitentiary is, after all, an institution based on transgression, and because the nature of the penitents' transgression is simultaneously sexual, spiritual, and moral, it was believed that in order for a woman to commit such a break with contemporary standards of conduct, she must be "totally dead to all sense of right" (Skene 9).

The Penitentiary's methods struck a dissonant chord among many Victorians, who saw them as "a system of conventual rule and severe religious observance, which the best-disposed novice that ever sought to be trained as a nun would find hard to bear" (Skene 10). The confluence here of penitentiaries and convents points to an interesting phenomenon: even though the *nature* of the female communities is entirely different—one is based on transgression, the other piety and devotion—because Church Penitentiaries were often closely associated with religious sisterhoods (such as Reverend Carter's at Clewer), they were subject to many of the same arguments leveled against religious communities. Many of these arguments were anti-Catholic in nature and were connected to a tremendous anxiety surrounding the reinstatement of religious communities in the Church of England which began at mid-century.<sup>8</sup> In response, there emerges what Pauline Nestor has called a "thriving anti-conventual fiction" which either demonized nuns or associated the conventual life with a kind of kidnapping (4). Indeed, the preface to one of the novels Nestor mentions—*Sister Agnes; or the Captive Nun: A Picture of Conventual Life* (1854)—alludes to the profusion of "narratives of escaped nuns, and converted priests, and ex-confessors [which] are widely known" (4), and claims to expose

the real character of that state of seclusion over whose deformities the golden veil of romance has been too successfully drawn; and have awakened a strong feeling of compassion for the victims of a delusion so terrible as that which is systematically practised by the decoys of Rome, upon hundreds of the youthful and unsuspecting.

It is in the desire of inducing some to pause before they enter a prison—of all prisons the most hopeless—that this little work is sent forth; and in the further desire of adding impetus to the movement now happily begun, for obtaining an efficient inspection and control of British nunneries. (3)

Clearly, *Sister Agnes* appeals to both anti-feminist and anti-Catholic sentiments in its attempt to expose the dark underbelly of religious Sisterhoods, and while many of these charges may have been purely fictitious, the "scandals"—whether real or imagined—surrounding religious communities, combined with attacks on the rigidity of life within the Penitentiary, fed a popular belief in the inherent instability of female communities and aggravated an already polarized debate about women's potential for communal activity.<sup>9</sup>

Opposition to women's communal activities was not always based on gender, and writers such as Margaret Goodman, Penelope Holland, and Felicia Skene focused on the methods and structures organizing these communities in their discussions of their "problems." In *Experiences of an English Sister of Mercy* (1862), Margaret Goodman, a former member of the Sisters of Mercy at Devonport, remembers how she, "led chiefly by the wish to minister to the untended suffering, in the summer of 1852 . . . joined the Sisters of Mercy at Devonport. As time went on, Miss Sellon thought fit to develop such

conventual rules as pressed too heavily upon many of us; and, therefore, after a sojourn of six years . . . [I] returned to [my] former occupation" (1). Penelope Holland offers a similar complaint against the conventual life, and in an article in *Macmillan's Magazine* of April 1869, asks "whether it be right for women who have attained the full maturity of their intellects to submit themselves to a system by which they are treated as we should scarcely treat an infant in these days, when fools' caps have gone out of fashion" (536-37). Felicia Skene describes the Penitentiary's "wretched little stringent rules . . . arranged to goad and torment the unreasoning victims into utter disgust with the very idea of repentance or reform" (10). Clearly, many of the objections to the "conventual rules" leveled at Houses of Mercy and Penitentiaries focused on the rigorous daily regimen prescribed to those involved with these institutions. Many penitents and refuge-seekers did find the rigor of such "conventual rules" difficult to bear, and as Margaret Goodman's departure from Miss Sellon's Sisterhood indicated, just as there are forces outside the female community which might threaten the women within it, so too are there forces and structures *within* these communities that drive women *away* from them.

It is in this context that we can perhaps best understand the forces informing Rossetti's treatment of the sister-relationship in these poems of 1860, for certainly by this time she had gained sufficient experience to recognize that the work of reclamation was not always as successful as she had imagined in "Goblin Market." But more importantly, she had by 1860 gained insight into the ways the literature and rhetoric of the Church Penitentiary Movement, with its imagery of middle-class women working together (and in a conventual setting) in order to save their fallen (and *willing* to be rescued) sisters, had elided the internal struggles within these communities of women.

Reverend Carter pointed out the problems inherent in building up a mythology around Penitentiary work, saying that there existed a "common idea that the women who are admitted within the walls of a Penitentiary are penitents, as they are called [despite the fact that] those who have any practical experience of this work know that this is a fallacy" (Hutchings 85). Carter's insistence that "practical experience" in the Penitentiary demystifies any notions of an harmonious community of women living within it is particularly important to Rossetti studies, since undoubtedly, the reality Rossetti encountered was decidedly different from what she had imagined in "Goblin Market," and her treatment of the internal structures organizing women's communities in her post-Penitentiary poems indicate a change in her beliefs about communities of women. These poems posit sister-communities wherein sisters are hardly "friends" at all, and instead are at times openly hostile to one another.

We can see the source of this tension in the poem's "sister-phrases"—the pairings of the formal address "sister" with adjectives such as "dear" or "fair and tall"—for they mark out the system of value organizing the sisters' relationship, thus revealing the degree to which the women possess autonomy within the community. In the poem's final stanza, the protected-sister's reference to the protector-sister as "sister dear, sister dear" (2) suggests fondness, but on another level it indicates an hierarchical system of valuation within the sister-community. This system becomes more apparent in the protector-sister's reference to the protected-sister as "my sister dove" (11), which, like "sister dear" before it, suggests a fondness between the two women, while also insisting upon the innocence and naïveté of the protected-sister. When taken together, the two references to "sister" reinscribe the class distinctions that separate the two women: phrases such as "sister

dear" and "sister dove," which valuation and passivity, indicate the degree to which the two women do not possess equal authority within the community. Even more, the use of the phrase "sister dove" contrasts the innocence of the (sister) dove with the predatory falcon sent by the lover outside the community, and this insistence upon the innocence of the sister and the dangerousness of the lover's messenger (and by extension the lover, too) in turn suggests the danger of the extra-sororal world and the safety of the sororal world. Their relationship becomes, then, a "battle," to use Helena Michie's term, over perceptions of the relationship between the sister community and the world outside it.<sup>10</sup>

As Michie argues, one of the sites of conflict in the poem is the direction and control of conversations, and since the exchange between the sisters revolves almost entirely around the perception of the extra-sororal world, we can see this struggle played out in each of the protected-sister's inquiries. In each instance, the protected-sister couches her descriptions of the extra-sororal world in the imagery of chivalric romance and luxury—much like the wounded knight in Procter's "A Legend of Provence." The protector-sister's responses do not echo this imagery, and she consistently removes the luxury the protected-sister associates with the extra-sororal world and replaces it with the banal. She claims, for instance, to have seen only a falcon and a hound, in contrast to the richly adorned creatures for whom the protected-sister searched. She makes no mention of the page's "eaglets broidered on his cap, / And eaglets on his glove" (29-30), and describes the lover merely "a nameless man . . . who loitered round our door" (45-46) rather than reiterating the protected-sister's description of "a young man tall and strong, / Swift-footed to uphold the right / And uproot the wrong, / Come home across the desolate sea / To woo" (38-42). This tension between a highly romanticized description of the

extra-sororal world and the suggestion that any departure from the community is implicitly a sexual fall (the "young man," the protected-sister believes, has come "to woo" her, and thus for her to leave the sister-community is also to bring shame to the "father's name" [59]) is the most salient feature of the poem, and indicates that the perception of the extra-sororal world is also at stake in the dialogue.

The preoccupation with the politics of the sister-community—with how the sister-community perceives the world outside it, and how the sister-community's structure and behavior are affected by it—is a significant feature of the poem, most clearly visible in the aftermath of the protector-sister's telling the lover that the protected-sister already has a husband who "loves her much, / And yet she loves him more" (47-48). By cavalierly relating this encounter to the protected-sister, and thereby attempting to render her subject to the authority of the sister-community, the protector-sister commits what Michie calls an "overt act of aggression" (45), and becomes not unlike the "tyrannical woman" Eliza Lynn Linton predicted would emerge if women were granted excessive authority over others. Writing about the women's enfranchisement in her 1898 essay, "Nearing the Rapids," Linton prophesized that "when we have added the perilous arm of political power to the restless love of interference . . . we shall pass under a despotism greater than any the world has ever seen since old Egypt gave the reins to women. . . . For how tyrannical women are we can see for ourselves any day in the week" (383). This attitude about the potential problems resulting from women with power was not exclusive to anti-feminists, and it would seem that Rossetti, too, reached a similar conclusion after working at Highgate, for unlike "Goblin Market," where the primary threat to the sister-

community lies in the seductiveness of the extra-sororal world, "Noble Sisters" presents the tension *within* the sister-community.<sup>11</sup>

For the protector-sister, the extra-sororal world is a consistent source of disruption to the sister-community: each of the lover's messengers—both human and animal—is ostensibly sent away for fear it will disturb the protected-sister. The protector-sister's attempts to control the conversation here parallel the Penitentiary Movement's insistence that "fallen women 'need some such sisters to be ever at their side, watching them in weak moments, encouraging them in seasons of overwhelming gloom, checking outbreaks of temper with light words, directing and controlling their conversations. . . .'" (D'Amico 71). The object of this direction was largely to prevent the unfallen Sisters working in the Penitentiary being corrupted by stories told by inmates, but it also served another purpose: this rule reorients the penitents' perceptions of the world outside the community.

"Noble Sisters" echoes this revision of the extra-sororal world in the protector-sister's inversion of the protected-sister's chivalric descriptions of the lover's attempts at communication.<sup>12</sup> For the protector-sister, each masculine advance is a potential source of disruption: the falcon is a "thief" (12), the hound might "wake [the protected-sister] too soon" (24), and the page is turned away, "Lest the creaking gate should anger" (36) the protected-sister. For the protector-sister, the lover's attempts to gain entry into the sister-community parallel what V. I. Propp describes as the folktale villain's "attempt at reconnaissance" with the "aim of finding out the location of children, or sometimes of precious objects" (28). The result of the information gained by this reconnaissance is almost always some type of abduction, and so for the protector-sister the lover's intention

to woo one sister away from the community constitutes an overt attempt to disrupt the sister-community. The protector-sister, then, becomes the protector of the sister-community, and, in a sense, both its hero and a synecdoche for the community itself (Propp 25-65). Paradoxically, as the protector-sister challenges the protected-sister's assumptions about the relationship between the sororal and extra-sororal worlds, and as she insists upon the disruptiveness of the lover, she also becomes a kind of villain who imprisons the protected-sister within the community. Thus, when Rossetti engages the traditional features of the folktale—the hero, the villain, the damsel in distress—all of these staples of the folktale are inverted. In "Noble Sisters," each figure—hero, villain, damsel in distress—becomes embroiled in a series of redefinitions wherein the hero may be the villain, the villain the hero, and the damsel in distress hardly in distress at all.

Despite Rossetti's inversions of the folktale structure, the centrality of the male figure in that structure remains. By challenging the traditional formulaic relationships of the folktale, Rossetti demonstrates how women's relationships, even within female communities, are constantly triangulated in relation to men.<sup>13</sup> No matter how we may permute the folktale structure of "Noble Sisters," we cannot escape defining the sisters and their relationship somehow in terms of the male figure attempting to gain access to the sister-community: he is either to be defended against or longed for, and the sisters' relationship to one another, and our understanding of them, hinges upon a reading of their relationship which includes him. Indeed, even the poem's inversion of the structure relies upon such a triangulation, since the protector-sister has effectively assumed the role of the male villain. In this sense, then, the poem locates the male figure within the community by means of substitution, and the result is that we cannot examine the sister-

relationship on its own merits. Instead, we can only understand it in terms of the ways it responds to or is influenced by men.

But the lover outside the female community in "Noble Sisters" is not the only male figure affecting the sisters' relationship in this poem. We find reference to the father's power to define the sister-relationship, and the sisters' identities, in the protector-sister's final line: "If thus you shame our father's name / My curse go forth with you" (59-60). The protector-sister does not make her ultimate appeal to some sense of sisterly solidarity (of the sort Rossetti had deployed in "Goblin Market"), but instead to the authority of the father's name. This is a significant reference, for it indicates the ambiguity of the sister-relationship in the poem: are these women siblings? Are they members of a convent? Are they fallen and unfallen sisters living in a Penitentiary? What, precisely, the protector-sister means by "father," then, depends upon how we answer these questions. At the very least, though, the protector-sister's invocation of the father as the ultimate authority points to the patriarchal political structure organizing the sister-relationship. But even more, the reference to a common "name" between the two sisters emphasizes their own namelessness, and reminds us of how the terms we must supply in order to differentiate them from one another—protector-protected—only point out the ways in which relationships within the community have been determined by male influences all along. By invoking patriarchal authority in the sister-relationship, the protector-sister reveals those political structures that organize the sister-relationship and makes clear how the most significant bond between these sisters is not a sororal one, but rather the bond resulting from their mutual place within a patriarchal political structure.

Working at Highgate, Rossetti would have quickly learned that although the work of the Penitentiary was carried out almost exclusively by the sisters working there, there was, in addition, a clergyman (who served as warden) always available "to perform religious services and superintend religious instruction" (D'Amico 72).<sup>14</sup> These wardens, while invested with ultimate authority in the Penitentiary, were nevertheless not always personally engaged in its day-to-day operation. Indeed, at the Penitentiary at Clewer, Carter was "often absorbed and absent, yet could be very practical. Bishop Samuel Wilberforce used to say of him, 'He is often *upstairs*;' and so he was. . . ." (Hutchings 84). Despite Wilberforce's joke, the figure of the warden in the Penitentiary is a curious one: he is the official head who organizes the hierarchy and yet has minimal direct interaction with the community. His presence—and his absence—therefore, constitutes a hidden patriarchy which contradicts the conventual model espoused in the Church Penitentiary Movement's appeals for volunteer workers.<sup>15</sup> Just as the constant triangulation of the roles within the sister-community insists that women within the community define themselves and their relationships to one another in terms of a male presence outside the sister-community, the hidden patriarchy plays a significant role in the destabilization of the sister-relationship. The hidden patriarchy organizes the sister-relationship and structures the dispensation of authority within it; yet the members of the sister-relationship seem perfectly capable of operating without its constant presence and invoke it only as a last resort. Its presence, however, is felt most powerfully in the hierarchical dispensation of authority within the sister-relationship, and, as the difference between "Noble Sisters" and "Goblin Market" makes clear, in the ways this affects the internal dynamics of the community of women.

What "Noble Sisters" offers us, then, is a glimpse into two ways communities of women are destabilized: the sisters can be lured away by forces outside the community just as they can be pushed out of it by the power relationships within it—the protector-sister's lie to the lover, for instance, leads the protected-sister to leave the community and to "seek [the lover] thro' the world / In sorrow till I die" (55-56). This notion of women being driven by internal forces—rather than lured away by external temptations—from the community offers a sharp contrast to Rossetti's treatment of women's communities in "Goblin Market." While there *is* a goblin lurking outside the community here (in the form of the lover), in "Noble Sisters," Rossetti seems less interested in the threat he poses to the sister-community than she is with exposing the ways the politics governing it become an obstacle to the egalitarian vision of sisterhood she had offered in "Goblin Market."

### III

Rossetti's interest in the dystopic sister-community continues in another ballad of 1860, "Sister Maude," where again the home is the site of sororal conflict. The poem's lone, unnamed speaker, delivers her monologue to her sister, Maude. She, we are told, has uncovered a relationship between the speaker and a lover, and has revealed this relationship to the sisters' parents. There are certainly similarities here to the surveillance I have marked out in "Noble Sisters"; but in "Sister Maude," surveillance does not facilitate the protection (or the imprisonment) of a member of the sister-community. Instead, lurking, spying and peering, we are told, reveal Maude's jealousy: "Though I had not been born at all, / He'd never have looked at you" (11-12). The disruption of the sister-relationship caused by Maude's jealousy and competitiveness, the speaker claims,

will follow even into the afterlife: "My father may wear a golden gown, / My mother a crown may win; / If my dear and I knocked at Heaven-gate / Perhaps they'd let us in: / But sister Maude, oh sister Maude, / Bide *you* with death and sin" (17-22). The use of singular possessives here suggests the familial bond has broken down as well: the speaker suggests that Maude will be excluded from a reunion with their parents in the afterlife . In her demarcation of the centrality of male figures—and not the sororal bond—to the dynamics of the sister-relationship, we can again see Rossetti exploring the organizational structure of the sister-relationship. And while Michie's arguments in *Sororophobia* can help us understand this dystopic sister-relationship here in terms of its capacity for marking an explicitly sexual difference between the sisters (insofar as Rossetti is describing differences between fallen and unfallen sisters), it is important for us to note that Rossetti is also interested in the ways the politics of the sister-community can mark differences between sisters (Michie 17-18).

Rossetti's treatment of the sister-relationship in "Sister Maude" displays the same concern with patriarchy governing sororal relationships that had troubled the sister-relationship in "Noble Sisters." As in "Noble Sisters," the sister-relationship in "Sister Maude" is troubled by the triangulation of relationships within the community, for we cannot escape figuring in the (notably absent) lover in our estimation of the relationship between the sisters. In the poem's opening stanza—"Who told my mother of my shame, / Who told my father of my dear? / Oh who but Maude, my sister Maude, / Who lurked to spy and peer" (1-4)—each of the speaker's expressions of her relationship with another family member is mediated by her relationship with the lover. This pattern continues throughout the poem, either by direct reference to the lover or by reference to Maude's

report of the relationship to the sisters' parents. As I have already noted, in the third stanza, the speaker tells Maude, "Though I had not been born at all, / He'd never have looked at you" (11-12), demonstrating clearly how the lover's presence—as in "Noble Sisters"—complicates relationships between women by upsetting the egalitarian sister-relationship Rossetti had imagined in "Goblin Market" and replacing it with the inequality upon which envy is predicated. In the fourth stanza, the speaker describes the ramifications of Maude's actions, claiming that Maude's envy will result in her separation from the family in the afterlife: "My father may sleep in Paradise, / My mother at Heaven-gate: / But sister Maude shall get no sleep / Either early or late" (13-16). Although the speaker would happily lay blame upon Maude, here we can see that the presence of the lover, coupled with Maude's response apparent jealousy, has disrupted not only the sororal bond, but the family unit as well.

As in "Noble Sisters," the lover is not the only male presence which troubles the sister-relationship in "Sister Maude." Just as the poem's opening lines describe the presence of the male lover in the relationships between sisters and parents, Maude's report to the father constitutes her explicit adherence to the patriarchy which organizes the sister-relationship. While the poem's first two lines clearly describe the parents as the traditional authority figures in the hierarchy of the home, throughout the poem Rossetti draws careful distinctions between the degree to which they each command authority. The speaker mentions her parents three times in the poem, and in each she draws clear distinctions between their status: the poem's opening lines, "Who told my mother of my shame / Who told my father of my dear" (1-2), locates the speaker's "shame" as the responsibility of the mother, while the father's responsibility is the lover. These

distinctions continue in the other two references to the parents: in the fourth and fifth stanzas, the speaker differentiates between the parents' situations in the afterlife, saying "My father may sleep in Paradise, / My mother at Heaven-gate" (13-14) and "my father may wear a golden gown, / My mother a crown may win" (17-18). Here the parents clearly do not hold equal positions in the afterlife, with the mother and father separated by their proximity to Paradise and by their heavenly millinery. To identify hierarchy within Rossetti's representation of the family is not unusual, but here, as in "Noble Sisters," the patriarch is again the figure whose (unseen) presence in the sister-community transforms its political structure into hierarchy, and who thus makes impossible egalitarian women's relationships like those described in the literature of the Penitentiary movement—or in "Goblin Market."

As I have suggested, in these poems of 1860 Rossetti, like many critics of female communities, plays out the disastrous possibilities of female communities predicted by contemporaries such as Eliza Linton, Francis Cobbe, and Anna Jameson, all of whom believed communities of women were inherently unstable and required strict control by men (Nestor 21). Moreover, "Noble Sisters" and "Sister Maude" go to great lengths to point out those structures within female communities—whether in the Penitentiary or in the forced community of the home itself—which can account for the instabilities of female communities. By leveling such a complaint against the organizational features commonly structuring women's communities, Rossetti can be aligned with writers such as Felicia Skene, Penelope Holland, and Margaret Goodman, all of whom "refused to see the issue in terms of female incapacities, locating culpability, rather, in the system itself, which was blameworthy because it had built into it procedures which actually militated

against the potential for true friendship and community of which women were ordinarily capable" (Nestor 18). This is a crucial point, for it allows us to see Rossetti's treatment of antagonism and competition between women not necessarily as incompatible with twentieth-century feminist assessments of her politics, but instead as the site of an expression of political, and not just sexual, differences between women within female communities.

Rossetti is an apt figure for such a revaluation, since, despite claims of her proto-feminist politics (based almost solely upon her treatment of women in "Goblin Market"), her body of work features a number of poems wherein relationships between women are characterized by competition and antagonism. If we are accurately to assess Rossetti's politics, we must certainly consider these sister-poems and their problematic sister-relationships, for not only do they provide a fuller context of Rossetti's treatments of sisters, sister-relationships, and sister-communities, but they also force us to recognize that "Goblin Market," which has long stood as the central text in Rossetti studies, is a truly exceptional poem for her. In terms of the larger history of the representation of the fallen woman in Victorian women's poetry, however, Rossetti's treatment of the fallen woman in these two poems marks a significant shift in the fallen-woman poem's emphasis. Unlike Greenwell's and Procter's treatments of the fallen woman, Rossetti's treatment of the figure is markedly secular, and her critique of the failures of the reclamation system can be read as a continuation of the reassessment of the reclamation movement's own representation of the fallen woman I described in Greenwell and Procter. Rossetti's attention to the failures of the reclamation system, and the resulting secularizing of the poem, is indicative of the generally secular direction the fallen-woman

poem takes as it makes its way toward its effective end in the 1880s, when writers such as Augusta Webster will reject fallenness as a moral category altogether. It is to Webster's radical representation of the fallen woman that I shall turn next.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> This study is indebted to D'Amico's fine exploration of the inner workings of Highgate Penitentiary and Rossetti's possible experiences while working there.

<sup>2</sup> I should note here that D. M. R. Bentley has suggested that "Goblin Market" was actually composed as an allegorical poem to be read to the inmates at Highgate Penitentiary as part of their moral "retraining." However, given the paucity of information documenting Rossetti's *definitive* tenure there, it is difficult to substantiate these claims. See Bentley, 57-81.

<sup>3</sup> There are some inconsistencies in the dates attributed to this poem. In her standard edition of Rossetti's poems, Rebecca Crump claims the dates of composition are unknown, and that there is no manuscript available for "Sister Maude" (239-40, 254). William Michael Rossetti's *Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti* includes both "Sister Maude" and "Noble Sisters" under the heading "General Poems" and considers both of them poems of 1860. Jan Marsh discusses "Sister Maude" alongside "Goblin Market" and "Noble Sisters," suggesting the three poems were composed at roughly the same time. Packer describes "Sister Maude" and "Noble Sisters" as "two ballads of 1860" (151). For the purposes of this study, I am following William Michael Rossetti's lead and assuming a date of composition sometime during 1860.

<sup>4</sup> In *Sororophobia*, Michie examines "sisterhood as a structure for the containment and representation of sexual differences among women" (Michie *Sororophobia* 19).

<sup>5</sup> As Michie discusses in *Sororophobia*, often in sister-relationships each woman "is assigned and/or assigns herself a role in relation to the other." (Michie *Sororophobia* 21).

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<sup>6</sup> As Michie argues in *Sororophobia*, these potential instabilities in the sister-community are not limited to these ballads of 1860; as she argues, even in "Goblin Market," "the poem and the sisterhood that shapes its moral are always in danger of falling apart, of being dismantled from within" (33).

<sup>7</sup> See Hutchings, especially p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> See A. M. Allchin's *The Silent Rebellion: Anglican Religious Communities, 1845-1900* for a thorough discussion of the debate surrounding the revival of the convent in the nineteenth century.

<sup>9</sup> Such as the sensational case of *Saurin v. Starr and Others*, which began in 1869. The case heard the complaint of a nun against her own convent and its sisters, and laid bare many of the secrets of conventual life.

<sup>10</sup> See Michie's essay, "The Battle for Sisterhood," the whole of which is concerned with attempts by sisters in these poems to control sexual discourse.

<sup>11</sup> See Nestor, p. 21. See also Valerie Sanders, *Eve's Renegades: Victorian Anti-Feminist Women Novelists*.

<sup>12</sup> The reading habits of the Rossetti children can perhaps help illuminate some of these references. Along with Thomas Keightley's collections of fairy tales, the Rossetti children read the *Arabian Knights* and Perrault's *Fairy Tales*. Christina was a great fan of Keats's "Eve of St. Agnes" and Shelley's "To a Skylark," while the Rossetti brothers created "their own imaginative games based on the Waverley Novels, a bowdlerized Shakespeare . . . stirring *Stories from English History* . . . and illustrated forerunners of the comic book called *Tales of Chivalry and Legends of Terror*" (Marsh 20, 30).

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<sup>13</sup> Nestor describes this as a "continuing definition of women and women's friendships in relation to men" (Nestor 5).

<sup>14</sup> To these Sisters, Carter committed the "teaching and training of the penitents" to such a degree that "clergy had little communication with the penitents, except of a sacramental character" (Hutchings 85).

<sup>15</sup> In its prospectus for the Penitentiary, the diocese of London lamented that the city "has not one home for the fallen where their Sisters in Christ can labour for their restoration and guide the feeble steps of their penitents to peace . . . We earnestly hope that ladies who act as Sisters will be led by God's grace to join this work." (Quoted in Marsh 219).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### "MY OWN CURSE AT ONCE AND TOOL": AUGUSTA WEBSTER'S "A CASTAWAY" AND THE REJECTION OF FALLENNESS

#### I

Of all the women writers considered thus far in this study, Augusta Webster was by far the most politically active. She served on the London school board twice, and was a regular contributor to *The Examiner*, where she published essays on women's education, university examinations, and sometimes attacked evangelical moralists who insisted upon women's inherent depravity and moral weakness. Webster's analyses are relentlessly materialist in nature, and she consistently avoids couching issues involving women within a moral framework. On more than one occasion, Webster engages the moralist tendency to lament the numbers of depraved and fallen women in England, and her response amounts to a vigorous defense of women from the attacks of evangelical Victorians who brought to bear upon them an ever-expanding crusade against vice. One of the effects of Webster's materialist analyses, then, is that as she challenges these attitudes toward women, she forces her readers to consider the immense complexity and deep entrenchment of the obstacles (institutional and otherwise) women found themselves confronting daily.

The inadequacy of moralist notions of the fallen women is one of the chief subjects of her dramatic monologue, "A Castaway," which Webster published in 1870 as part of her collection of poems, *Portraits* (1870). The poem is remarkable not only because it gives voice to an unrepentant prostitute via the dramatic monologue (and thus also as a confession), but also because it challenges the conventional moral framework

for understanding the fallen woman, arguing instead that prostitution is merely a form of employment for women. It is in this sense that we can see the effects of the yoking together of the fallen woman and the larger political issues contained within the "Woman Question." Webster was among those writers who, in discussing the demographic imbalance revealed by the 1851 census, turned their attention to the need for dramatic reforms in women's education and employment, and her arguments in "A Castaway" can be read as part of this larger project.

This is not to say that efforts to revise popular Victorian notions of the fallen woman and the prostitute were not already in place. Indeed, there were numerous efforts underway aimed at locating the origins of the various social evils, but, as I have shown, many of these—from Acton's investigations of prostitution to Mayhew's sometimes sensational and voyeuristic descriptions of the London underclasses to the evangelical tracts published in *The Magdalen's Friend*—tended to approach these subjects in traditional, sentimental ways. Webster's arguments, in contrast, are consistent with a similar position carved out by Josephine Butler during the 1870s. In an essay for the *Contemporary Review* in 1870, Butler attacks the English treatment of the fallen as cruel and unchristian:

In spite of the terrible responsibility which Christ imposed upon the world by that significant "loveliness of perfect deeds," deeds abundantly witnessed and faithfully recorded, the world has continued to trample fallen women beneath its feet, to loose its bloodhounds after her, to thunder to her that above all other sinners she has sinned, that she at least has already passed the gate which bids us abandon love. ("Lovers" 19)

Even pioneers such as William Acton, as I shall show in some detail later in this chapter, were unable to divest themselves of the traditional moral understanding of prostitution and its causes. In contrast, Webster's "A Castaway" is relentless in its attack upon evangelical moralists who perpetuated "constructions of the prostitute as physically and morally diseased" (Sutphin 19),<sup>1</sup> and in the process counters those fallen-woman poems that had deployed the image of the her as subject to illness, privation, and eventual death.

In this sense, "A Castaway" is remarkably different from the other poems treated in this study, for even though authors such as Greenwell, Rossetti, and Procter worked within the conventional narrative of the fallen woman as they attempted to challenge and revise it, Webster avoids that narrative entirely—indeed, as I shall show, the poem works to expose the inadequacies of that narrative at nearly every turn. Webster's unflinching resistance to the charges of Victorian moralists indicate that she, unlike many others interested in the same sets of problems, managed to get "beyond the tinsel sentiment" (to use Dora Greenwell's apt phrase) and to apprehend the staggering complexity of the problems with which she was concerned. As I shall show, reading Webster's fallen-woman poem "A Castaway" within the context of her essays on the condition of women in England allows us to see the poem as a dismantling of the moral and sentimental framework that had traditionally defined the category of fallenness, in place of which the poem offers a thoroughly economic explanation for the prostitute that posits her as a worker engaged in a form of women's labor. More importantly, however, Webster's treatment of the prostitute as worker (rather than as a creature of vice) signals the end of the historical moment with which this study has been concerned, for her rejection of any

moral dimension of prostitution marks what is also a rejection of fallenness as a moral category describing women.

## II

Webster was a prolific writer, publishing several volumes of poetry, a novel, a play, and essays for *The Examiner*, many of which she later collected in *A Housewife's Opinions*, published in 1879.<sup>2</sup> In her essays, evangelical moralists are inevitably objects of satire. In "The Depravity of English Ladies," for instance, Webster describes the expansion of an evangelical paranoia about "impurity":

Week by week they have explained to us how impurity is lurking in all sorts of unsuspected places, is facing us at ever step—in our homes, in our ball-rooms, in our churches. . . . Week after week they have expounded the peculiar provocations of fashionable millinery, till it is our own fault if we do not appreciate them. . . . (17)

While Webster has great fun with such evangelical arguments, her emphasis is always upon exposing the dangers they pose to women. As she explains, the expansion of the definition of "depravity" inevitably affects women innocent of any charges of immorality:

There were, for unhappily there always are, careless mothers and disloyal wives to be found. Some of the types presented existed—whether enough to justify the generalising from them is another matter. . . . But, if we admit so much, we must needs infer that every silly girl who flaunts in the indiscreet fashions of the day, and giggles for admiration, is rejoicing in conscious impropriety and cherishing immodest aspirations; that every wife who is foolishly pleased with flatteries she ought to resent is given up

to vicious propensities? Must we believe the moralists, or may we trust our own experience of average men and women, and reject these imaginations of wholesale depravity, of assignations and intrigues, of guilt in the afternoon cup of tea, and danger in the morning call? (20)

This exposure of the hyperbolic nature of moralists' claims is typical of Webster's arguments, and she will follow similar lines of attack in other essays. But again, Webster's interests are focused not on the vice being attacked, but instead upon the arguments themselves.

As she explains in her satirical treatment of the temperance movement, "A New Sin," the expansion of already vague definitions to include an ever-increasing range of behaviors carries significant consequences. Operating under "the interpretation given by Mr. Walter, as Chairman, at the Newbury Conference, according to which intemperance means excess" (86), Webster takes the position to its logical extreme, exposing the arbitrariness of the anti-vice movement's choices. The definition, she says, "besides being sane, commonplace, and pertinent . . . has this advantage—it can be extended or contracted to fit the views of all sides" ("New Sin" 86). If Webster's essays are any indication, she was deeply interested in exposing the ways vague definitions can be "extended or contracted to fit" ("New Sin" 86) even the most extreme political positions—with serious consequences for those affected by this "expansion," since it would allow otherwise innocent activities to be considered vicious. In addition, Webster's arguments work to expose the degree to which such evangelical arguments rely on hyperbole and exaggeration as they outline the slippery slope that leads to prostitution and wantonness.

In her essay "Creating Sins," Webster discusses evangelical representations of the fallen woman, explaining that while it is "conceivable" that such descriptions contain "a little truth" (248), they very often fail to represent adequately the experiences of many fallen women and, moreover, often fail to locate the ultimate cause of the woman's fall. Even worse, Webster argues, is the way that evangelical paranoia creates a fall out of an otherwise innocent behavior:

It is quite conceivable, for instance, that there may be a little truth in some of the stories in pious books about the despondent profligates and fallen women who, on their hopeless death-beds, avowed that their whole moral ruin came from having joined in the dancing at a friend's tea-party, or having gone to see *Hamlet* acted, or having played beggar-my-neighbour, or some such damning dissipation. A weak and ignorant young soul fallen into what it believed abiding taint, and stripped of that comfortable sense of self-respect, might, no doubt, rush or glide, according to its nature, from the first appalling sin against conscience, represented by what ordinarily rational beings cannot even conceive of as blamable amusements, into absolute vice, and, thanks to early training, never to the end know the difference, though knowing well that the vices would not have been temptations in the innocent time when the round game or Sir Roger de Coverly proved so fatally irresistible. (248)

The near-complete dismissal of such purported causes of the woman's fall, as well as her suggestion that "rational beings" would find such entertainments completely harmless, suggests that Webster was interested not only in challenging moralists' attempts to

demonize normally harmless behavior, but also in also attempting to rethink the Victorian notion of the fallen woman by both exposing the arbitrariness of those behaviors.

Public challenges to Victorian misconceptions about prostitutes and fallen women were not uncommon. As one letter to the editor of the *Times* from 1858 makes clear, one of the greatest flaws in the middle-class conception of the fallen women/prostitute was that it imposed middle-class values on the poor. The author, "Another Unfortunate," writes in response to a previous letter from a purportedly fallen woman:

I am a stranger to all the fine sentiments which still linger in the bosom of your correspondent. I have none of those youthful recollections which, contrasting her early days with her present life, aggravate the misery of the latter. My parents did not give me any education; they did not instill into my mind virtuous precepts nor set me a good example. All my experiences in early life were gleaned among associates who knew nothing of the laws of God but by dim tradition and faint report, and whose chiefest triumph of wisdom consisted in picking their way through paths of destitution in which they were cast by cunning evasion or in open defiance of the laws of man. (Letter 24 Feb 1858)

There is, of course, no way to determine the veracity of the author's identity, but letters such as this say much about the ways traditional stereotypes about fallen women and prostitutes were in the process of being reconceived at mid-century, and Webster's attacks upon moralists in her essays, as well as her reworking of the fallen woman in her poem "A Castaway," very clearly take part in this movement away from the moral and

religious, and toward an economic understanding of the Victorian prostitute that describes her as a worker engaged in legitimate work.

"A Castaway" is a dramatic monologue spoken by a woman named Eulalie, who describes herself as a high-class and well-educated prostitute. As with the other dramatic monologues in this study, Webster's use of the dramatic monologue is significant, since it engages in the process of confession that Foucault describes in *The History of Sexuality* as one of the mechanisms by which sex is transformed into discourse: "An imperative was established: Not only will you confess to acts contravening the law, but you will seek to transform your desire, your every desire, into discourse. Insofar as possible, nothing was meant to elude this dictum, even if the words it employed had to be carefully neutralized" (21). But if, as Foucault explains, the confession served as a means of "transforming sex into discourse" (20)—and explicitly Christian discourse—Eulalie's act of confession resists the absorption of sex into Christian discourse about the body and attempts to locate it within other modes of discourse. Indeed, if the nineteenth century had been the site of a proliferation of discourse about sex—Christian, scientific, legal, sociological, and economic—then Eulalie's confession can be read as a clear attempt to relocate the fallen woman and the prostitute from the conventional Christian discourse into discourses of economics and labor. Webster's use of a high-class prostitute as a speaker thus marks the poem as a remarkable departure from the more traditional representations of the fallen woman this study has engaged up to this point.

### III

The poem opens with Eulalie reading through diary entries composed during her (unfallen) youth, an activity that leads her to compare her former self to her present,

fallen one. Like Procter's comparison of fallen and unfallen (or, less directly, Greenwell's and Rossetti's implicit comparison of the fallen and unfallen in their use of "twinning"), Eulalie's comparison of her younger to her present self similarly underscores the magnitude of the fall by fragmenting the fallen woman into her present and former selves and then juxtaposing them.

Eulalie offers examples of old diary entries, all of which provide a catalogue of the most mundane activities:

simple thoughts,  
Its good resolves, its 'Studied French an hour,'  
'Read Modern History,' 'Trimmed up my grey hat,'  
'Darned stockings,' 'Tatted,' 'Practised my new song,'  
'Went to the daily service,' 'Took Bess soup'  
'Went out to tea.' Poor simple diary!  
And did *I* write it? Was I this good girl,  
This budding colourless young rose of home? (1-8)

As we have seen in Greenwell and Procter, the fallen woman's recognition of her life as marked by a distinct rupture is purely conventional, and one of the effects of this juxtaposition is to privilege of the unfallen condition as the normative state, and thus to register the fallen condition as a deviation from that norm. Eulalie's monologue departs from this convention, however, by presenting us with a fallen woman who looks back at her unfallen self as something strange and wholly other from herself. By inverting this perspective, Webster inverts the traditional normative position and thus, from its very outset challenges the traditional approach to the fallen woman.

As I have been arguing throughout this study, such efforts to rethink the fallen woman were in place from at least the early 1850s. As an 1858 editorial in the *Times* claims, "the great bulk of the London prostitutes are not MAGDALENS either in *esse* or *posse*, nor specimens of humanity in agony, nor preparing to throw themselves from Waterloo-bridge, but are comfortably practicing their trade, either as the entire or partial means of their subsistence. To attribute to them the sentimental delicacies of a heroine of romance would be equally preposterous. They have no remorse or misgivings about the nature of their pursuit; on the contrary, they consider the calling an advantageous one, and they look upon their success in it with satisfaction" (25 Feb 1858). This editorial is notable for a number of reasons, however, since not only does it attempt to divest the fallen woman from the fictional notion of her, but it also explicitly characterizes prostitution as a kind of "trade," which is precisely how Webster's speaker will characterize it.

By focusing on Eulalie's early education, the poem also ridicules the typical education of young women at mid-century, and it is important to note how this diary effectively lists the domestic duties and educational activities of the angel in the house. Such expectations, Eulalie argues, fail to prepare young girls sufficiently for anything other than purely domestic duties—and prepare them poorly even for that:<sup>3</sup>

Did I so live content in such a life,  
Seeing no larger scope, nor asking it,  
Than this small constant round—old clothes to mend,  
New clothes to make, then go and say my prayers,  
Or carry soup, or take a little walk

And pick the ragged-robins in the hedge? (9-14)

The catalog continues as the speaker again emphasizes the "small constant round," and focuses on the ways that even the variations she experiences are merely repetitions of the same set of experiences available to her:

to improve my mind

And know French better and sing harder songs;

For gaiety, to go, in my best white

Well washed and starched and freshened with new bows,

And take tea out to meet the clergyman. (16-20)

The list of the mundane ends with the speaker's description of the young girl's life as one possessing "No wishes and no cares, almost no hopes, / Only the young girl's hazed and golden dreams / That veil the Future from her" (21-23). The image here seems clear enough: young girls delude themselves about what their lives will be like, and they are ill-prepared for that life by either education or temperament. The "small constant round," with its suggestion of both limited scope and the ceaseless repetition of a relatively small set of experiences, is a typical complaint in Webster's treatments of women's education. In addition, the emphasis upon the repetitiveness of the life—the "small constant round,"—mirrors both Procter's and Rossetti's treatment of the ways the limitations placed upon Victorian women can either render them more susceptible to temptation or can, in the case of Rossetti's ballads of 1860, push them out of the community.

This description of Eulalie's past self climaxes with her assertion that she finds it impossible to imagine her unfallen and fallen selves united: "So long since: / As if I could be one with her, of me / Who am...me" (23-36). For Eulalie, the distance between

the two selves removes the possibility of narrative reunification (as Procter had imagined), and this is underscored by her displacement of that older self as wholly other. Eulalie refers to her unfallen self as "her," and thus as a distinct person from the "me" of the present. It is, indeed, the "me" with which Eulalie is concerned, and much of the poem is devoted to filling the ellipsis in "Who am . . . me," which occupies the space of her aborted expression of identity. In the process of accomplishing this expression, Eulalie challenges the conventional fallen-woman narrative, insisting at all points upon a far more complex version of the figure than the evangelical tracts about her admitted.

Interestingly, however, even as she challenges certain elements of the conventional fallen-woman narrative, Eulalie admits—and even uses to her own ends—others. The speaker, like Procter's and Greenwell's fallen women, acknowledges the traditional narrative in which her "judges and accusers" (142) see her taking part. Such descriptions of fallen women are fairly common among evangelical writers concerned with combating "the Great Social Evil." One such writer, James Greenwood, describes fallen women in wholly conventional terms in *The Seven Curses of London* (1869):

It should incline us to a merciful consideration of the fallen woman when we reflect on the monotony of misery her existence is. She is to herself vile, and she has no other resource but to flee to the gin-measure, and therein hide herself from herself. She has no pleasure even. Never was there made a grimmer joke than that which designates her life as a short and *merry* one. True, she is found at places where amusement and wild, reckless gayety are sought; but does she ever appear amused, or, while she remains sober, recklessly gay? (202)

Attacks such as Greenwood's not only rely upon the conventional narrative describing the fallen woman's character, but are also characterized by that narrative's failure to distinguish among various types or classes of fallen women and prostitutes. Greenwood's characterization of the fallen woman's existence as a "monotony of misery," drunkenness, and self-loathing does not describe the common streetwalker; he is attempting to describe precisely the class of fallen woman to which Eulalie belongs:

I am not now alluding to the low prostitute, the conscienceless wretch who wallows in vice and mire and strong liquor in a back street of Chadwell, but to the woman of some breeding and delicacy, the "well-dressed" creature, in fact, who does not habitually "walk the streets," but betakes herself to places of popular resort for persons of a "fast" turn, and who have money, and are desirous of expending some of it in "seeing life."

(202)

As Eulalie's monologue makes clear, descriptions such as Greenwood's ultimately fail to draw distinctions among the various classes of prostitutes. Early in the poem, Eulalie reads an evangelical tract not unlike Greenwood's and uses it as a means of exposing the weakness of this conventional Victorian understanding of the fallen woman. These tracts become for her "choice texts and choicer treats"—little more than a meal to be "digested with champagne" (152)—and Eulalie immediately counters each of the tract's claims with an example from her own experience:

*'I prey on souls'—*

Only my men have oftenest none I think:

*'I snare the simple ones'—*but in these days

There seem to be none simple and none snared  
And most men have their favourite sinnings planned  
To do them civilly and sensibly:  
'*I braid my hair*'—but braids are out of date:  
'*I paint my cheeks*'—I always wear them pale:  
'*I—*' (153-62)

Eulalie's correctives point out the ways conventional notions of the fallen woman fail to describe her in any recognizable way. Such conventional descriptions, then, are little more than fantasy, and as her corrections indicate, these attempt to describe the entire class of fallen women in England in such unilateral terms are doomed by their failure to recognize that the category of fallenness contains its own internal types and classes.

More important, though, is the implication that such tracts are intended for fallen women. The tract's attempt to present a monologue spoken by a fallen woman suggests that its catalogue of conventional descriptions of such women—as predators, as ruthless and dishonorable, and as vain—attempts to force these women to recognize their moral depravity. As Eulalie's mocking makes clear, however, such tracts' dependence upon the conventional narratives describing the fallen woman renders them hopelessly inadequate for the task they seek to accomplish, since the characters they attempt to represent bear little or no resemblance to the women they are attempting to reach. Indeed, the correspondent to the *Times* made a similar claim in 1858:

I do not get drunk, nor fight, nor create uproar in the streets or out of them.  
I do not use bad language. I do not offend the public eye by open  
indecencies. I go to the Opera, I go to Almack's, I go to the theatres, I go

to quiet, well-conducted casinos, I go to all places of public amusement, behaving myself with as much propriety as society can exact. I pay business visits to my tradespeople, the most fashionable of the West-end. My milliners, my silk-merciers, my bookmakers know, all of them, who I am and how I live, and they solicit my patronage as earnestly and erringly as if I were Madam, the lady of the right rev. patron of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. (Letter 24 Feb. 1858)

Like Eulalie (and, by extension, Webster), the author of the letter exposes the inadequacy of the conventional narratives describing the fallen woman and the prostitute and describes her, instead, as a respectable businesswoman who may pass undetected in respectable society. This disconnect between these conventional narratives and the individuals was particularly problematic for the reclamation movement, for as Eulalie's response to the tract indicates, their appeals to fallen women were sometimes laughably inaccurate.

#### IV

Detectability was indeed one of the chief problems involved with work among the fallen. Fallenness, of course, carries with it no external markers other than (perhaps) poverty, disease, and pregnancy. And if the Victorians working to reclaim prostitutes and fallen women were operating under a notion of their visible characteristics, one of the chief problems inherent in work among the fallen was determining who was fallen and who was not. The ability to draw clear distinctions between the fallen and the pure, was, of course, a crucial element of such work.

As Eulalie makes clear, she bears no resemblance to the conventional descriptions of the fallen woman. Looking into her mirror, Eulalie describes herself as

a woman sure,  
No fiend, no slimy thing out of the pools,  
A woman with a ripe and smiling lip  
That has no venom in its touch I think,  
With a white brow on which there is no brand;  
A woman none dare call not beautiful,  
Not womanly in every woman's grace. (27-33)

Eulalie thus contradicts the traditional characterization of fallenness (she is not the hideous creature the fallen woman was popularly regarded to be), while at the same time suggesting that her condition as a fallen woman is undetectable insofar as she is not physically marked in some way by her condition. As Eulalie makes clear, her "brand" is purely a social one, and her crime is not physically detectable.

Eulalie makes much of this undetectability, and insists that one of the key features of her character is her ability to pass as a member of respectable society by appearing to be modest. This modesty, however affected, allows her to pass undetected among respectable women even though like the "drab" she is in the end

that thing  
Called half a dozen dainty names, and none  
Dainty enough to serve the turn and hide  
The one coarse English word that lurks beneath:  
Just that, no worse, no better. (62-66)

Despite her claims about solidarity, what is remarkable here is the degree to which Eulalie's contrasting of herself and the "drab" at this point demonstrates the fundamental problems with detectability at the heart of the conventional Victorian notion of the prostitute: sometimes notions of the character and appearance of the fallen woman and the prostitute were so horribly inaccurate that delineating the fallen from the unfallen was all but impossible. In addition, when taken together, Eulalie's descriptions of the differences between herself and the "drab" introduce the idea that among prostitutes, there exists a set of distinctions between the various ranks of fallen women.

These distinctions among various classes of prostitutes are important because, as I discussed earlier, reclamation workers often found themselves confronted with the realization that the women who attended their "midnight meetings" were decidedly not the kinds of women they had expected. The result of this mistaken notion of the fallen woman was an imposition of middle-class values onto women who were decidedly *not* of the middle classes, since fallenness necessarily implies a fall *from* somewhere. As the correspondent to the *Times* puts it, it is inappropriate to apply middle-class notions of sexual propriety to women of the laboring classes:

It is cruel calumny to call [such a wide range of working women] in mass prostitutes and, as for their virtue, they lose it as one loses his watch who is robbed by the highway thief. Their virtue is the watch, and society is the thief. These poor women toiling on starvation wages, while penury, misery, and famine clutch them by the throat and say, "Render up your body or die." . . . I lost—what? Not my virtue, for I never had any. That which is commonly, but untruly called virtue, I gave away. You reverend

Mr. Philanthropist—what call you virtue? Is it not the principle, the essence, which keeps watch and ward over the conduct, over the substance, the materiality? No such principle ever kept watch and ward over me, and I repeat that I never lost that which I never had—my virtue.  
(Letter 24 Feb. 1858)

The misapplication of middle-class values is one of Deborah Logan's chief concerns as she discusses the expansion of the category of fallenness to include all forms of aberrant sexualities—including non-reproductive women, working-class women, and the mentally ill. As Logan explains, "Since 'respectability' in this sense was primarily a middle-class concept, many women found themselves measured by standards foreign to their class and especially to their socioeconomic milieu" (6).<sup>4</sup> Eulalie crystallizes this discrepancy by apparently living out those middle-class delusions of Victorian prostitutes. She is, in effect, the high-class prostitute capable of "passing" for a respectable woman, and as such, she exposes one of the central weaknesses of the Victorian values: markers of class and respectability can be aped.

As Eulalie explains, the primary difference between herself and these "drab" prostitutes is her apparent respectability, which enables her to demand a higher quality of treatment:

yes, modesty's my word—

‘Twould shape my mouth well too, I think I'll try:

"Sir, Mr. What-you-will, Lord Who-knows-what,

My present lover or my next to come,

Value me at my worth, fill your purse full,

For I am modest; yes, and honour me  
As though your schoolgirl sister or your wife  
Could let her skirts brush mine or talk of me;  
For I am modest." (49-58)<sup>5</sup>

As Eulalie insists, her modesty distinguishes her from the common prostitute, but this is a completely affected modesty, as her rehearsing the delivery of her lines indicates. But more importantly, Eulalie's delineation of modesty as the mark of distinction between respectable women and those who are not raises the possibility that all such behavior—even potentially among "respectable" women—is equally affected.<sup>6</sup> The difference, she admits, is that her occupation has been arbitrarily singled out as unacceptable.

In addition to calling attention to the undetectability of the fallen woman and the inadequacy of the traditional markers of fallenness as a means of detection, Eulalie's discussion of modesty also draws a distinction between those characteristics of the prostitute which are a condition and those which are merely behaviors. For example, Eulalie's modesty in this passage is defined in terms of what she is not: she is not "drunk in the streets" (49); she does not "ply . . . for hire / At infamous corners" (49-50); she does not conduct her business among her "likenesses / Of humbler kind" (50-51). With the exception of this last example, all of these distinctions are kinds of conduct; they are not necessarily a condition inherent to fallenness or prostitution. This distinction suggests that, far from being inherent to the condition, the markers of fallenness are merely behaviors that can be affected (or in this case, *effected*, as well)—and thus this poses a significant problem for those interested in determining who is fallen and who is not.

As James Greenwood describes in his discussion of fallen women in *The Seven Curses of London* (1869), even those involved in work directly related to "the Great Social Evil" were often incapable of determining who, precisely, the prostitutes were:

At present [some classes of prostitutes are] not even included in the police-returns. Any blue-coated guardian of the peace, in humble hope of earning a sixpence, would be only too eager to touch his hat to her and open her carriage-door to-morrow, and that even at the door of her genteel residence, which is in a neighborhood much too respectable to permit it to be stigmatized as a "brothel."

The police-report just quoted specifies that the eight thousand six hundred prostitutes infesting the metropolis include nine hundred and twenty-one well dressed and living in houses of ill-fame. This on the face of it, however, is significant of how very little the police really know of the matter they venture to report on. The women here alluded to are of the unobtrusive and orderly sort, the mainstay of whose occupation is to pass as respectable persons. They would be the last to resort to permanent lodging at houses whose fame was so ill that the greenest policeman on beat could point them out. It is altogether too hard to fasten the imputation of infamous on the holders of the houses in which this class of unfortunates seeks lodging. (208-09)

As Greenwood's comments indicate, the ability of fallen women to pass undetected in respectable society poses a series of problems. In addition to the issue of prostitutes being afforded an undeserved level of respect from authority figures (which would in turn

devalue that respect), Greenwood's claim that the police are unaware of the significance of the "infestation" of prostitutes and brothels, however, indicates a fear that the number of prostitutes working in London is both far larger than the reports indicate and, by implication, far more threatening to the ability to maintain cultural markers of respectability. Although his discussion at this point centers on the difficulties of assessing the scope of the issue, Greenwood's concerns about the undetectability of prostitutes also point out, at the very least, the institutional failure of the police to decrease the numbers of prostitutes in London, and at worst the inadequacies of the Victorian notion of the fallen woman.

Greenwood relies heavily upon William Acton's *Prostitution*, which grapples with the problem of undetectability as well. Acton remarks that "there can be little doubt that numbers of women who live by prostitution lead apparently respectable lives in the lodgings or houses which they occupy; but all such are necessarily excluded from the returns" (36). His general impulse is to describe prostitution in economic terms, and he admits that it is, however disreputable, a "trade" to which many women are "reduced":

Every unchaste woman is not a prostitute. By unchastity a woman becomes liable to lose character, position, and the means of living; and when these are lost is too often reduced to prostitution for support, which, therefore, may be described as the trade adopted by all women who have abandoned or are precluded from an honest course of life, or who lack the power or the inclination to obtain a livelihood from other sources. (118)

Acton's economic descriptions of the prostitute, however, are sometimes troubled by an overtly moral tone. We can see this clearly when he attempts to supply a clear definition a prostitute:

What is a prostitute? She is a woman who gives for money that which she ought to give only for love; who ministers to passion and lust alone, to the exclusion and extinction of all the higher qualities, and nobler sources of enjoyment which combine with desire, to produce the happiness derived from the intercourse of the sexes. She is a woman with half the woman gone, and that half containing all that elevates her nature, leaving her a mere instrument of impurity; degraded and fallen she extracts from the sin of others the means of living, corrupt and dependent on corruption, and therefore interested directly in the increase of immorality—a social pest, carrying contamination and foulness to every quarter to which she has access. . . . (118-19)

When considered together, these two passages allow us to see a clear dichotomy at work here. In Acton's construction of the figure, the prostitute is both determined by socio-economic forces, "precluded from an honest course of life" (118) and a vile creature, not even entirely "woman" anymore, morally destitute, and a carrier of contamination and disease. She is, as Acton puts it, a "social pest." In these two descriptions of the prostitute, Acton effectively fuses the older notion of the fallen woman/prostitute as moral problem and a newer notion of the fallen woman as the product of a wide range of socio-economic forces.<sup>7</sup>

It is in this context that we can see the Victorian notion of the prostitute and the fallen woman undergoing a series of changes. As Acton's work indicates, there existed at mid-century a range of thinking on the fallen woman, and these ideas were often fused in odd ways as Victorians attempted to recognize the complexity of the fallen woman's origins while at the same time they struggled to understand the figure in moral terms. In the context of this public discussion of the fallen woman, Eulalie's monologue occupies a pivotal position, since it exposes the inadequacy of these approaches to the fallen woman. In the end, as I shall show in what follows, Eulalie's monologue attempts to supply a secular alternative to these older, religious approaches to the fallen woman, and to identify prostitution as a form of women's labor. As I discussed in the previous chapter, what I am describing here is an increasing secularization of the fallen-woman poem. By the time the genre reaches Webster, public discussion of the fallen woman (as evidenced by Acton's attempts to move beyond his moral understanding of the prostitute) has turned its attention to what are decidedly secular factors in the prostitute's origins, and the result is a deemphasizing of those moral and religious dimensions that had characterized earlier representations of the figure. The result, then, is that by the 1870s and Webster's writing of a fallen-woman poem, the genre has been transformed from a religious poem (complete with examples of Christian charity and miraculous intercession) into a vehicle for the discussion of women's work and education.

V

Acton's description of prostitution as a form of labor indirectly forms the core of Eulalie's argument about the prostitute. Eulalie's monologue expands upon Acton's description of prostitution as labor by devoting a great deal of space to describing how prostitutes (as a class of laborers) possess their own internal class distinctions. By doing this, the poem renders problematic any effort (including Acton's) to generalize about the prostitute's character and morals. Despite their differences, Eulalie admits that both she and the street-walking prostitute are bound together by their work:

I say let no one be above her trade;  
I own my kindredship with any drab  
Who sells herself as I, although she crouch  
In fetid garrets and I have a home  
All velvet and marqueterie and pastilles,  
Although she hide her skeleton in rags  
And I set fashions and wear cobweb lace:  
The difference lies but in my choicer ware,  
That I sell beauty and she ugliness. . . . (71-79)

As we can see, for Eulalie, similarities among prostitutes exist only insofar as they are both practitioners of the same trade; beyond this, they are as different as any individuals of more conventional notions of classes might be. Indeed, Eulalie carefully draws distinctions between the caliber of wares she and the "drab" sell: she is a provider of a higher class of product than her "kindred"; she transacts business in a choicer location; her physical appearance allows her to move among a more respectable class of clientele.

But despite these differences, in the end, Eulalie concludes that "Our traffic's one" (76).

It is in this passage, however, that we can begin to see Eulalie's core argument about prostitution, for despite the allegiance that she sees between herself and the drab as laborers in the same trade, the passage explicitly defines prostitution as a trade.

This notion of prostitution-as-trade is a key element of "A Castaway." For Eulalie, prostitution is an occupation—and, as she argues, one that is at least as legitimate as the many other occupations which go unreviled. When she discusses her beauty (which was generally associated with vanity, and thus regarded as one of the primary factors contributing to the fall) it is in terms of her occupation. Her beauty, she claims, is

my all,

Let me make much of it: is it not this,

This beauty, my own curse at once and tool

To snare men's souls, (I know not what the good say

Of beauty in such creatures) is it not this

That makes me feel myself a woman still,

With still some little pride, some little— (38-43).

Eulalie's beauty is one of the tools of her trade, and because of this, hers is hardly the conventional Victorian narrative of seduction, descent, and repentance. Instead, she is cavalier in her argument that prostitution is a legitimate means of employment for women. She is by no means sentimental in her description of her life and work: prostitution is her occupation, and she describes herself as a kind of worker, avoiding any pathetic descriptions of her situation. As Eulalie says, while the soul is important, "we've bodies to save too; / And so we earn our living" (168-69).

By treating prostitution as an occupation, Eulalie rejects any moral dimension it might hold in Victorian popular consciousness. Eulalie devotes a great deal of energy to pointing out the arbitrariness of attacking one occupation's "commerce" for its immorality and not another. Eulalie offers up a list of trades that ostensibly depend upon the practitioner being honest, but in which deception is commonplace—and publicly accepted as the way the world works:

I know of worse that are called honourable.

Our lawyers, who with noble eloquence

And virtuous outbursts lie to hang a man,

Or lie to save him, which way goes the fee:

Our preachers, gloating on your future hell

For not believing what they doubt themselves:

Our doctors, who sort poisons out by chance

And wonder how they'll answer, and grow rich:

Our journalists, whose business is to fib

And juggle truths and falsehoods to and fro:

Our tradesmen, who must keep unspotted names

And cheat the least like stealing that they can. (80-91)

As Eulalie argues, these occupations "feed on the world's follies, vices, wants, / And do their businesses of lies and shams / Honestly, reputably, while the world / Claps hands and cries 'good luck'" (93-96). In the end, Eulalie argues that prostitution ought to be privileged over these occupations, since it involves no deception and is "barefaced . . . all secrets brazened out" (97-98). The "unfortunate" who corresponded with the *Times* in

1858 had made similar claims, asking in the end whether or not the culture that created her ought to claim her as its own—in effect, she posits herself as the illegitimate child of a "fallen" society:

Now, what if I am a prostitute, what business has society to abuse me? Have I received any favors at the hands of society? If I am a hideous cancer in society, are not the causes of the disease to be sought in the rottenness of the carcass? Am I not its legitimate child; no bastard. Sir? Why does my unnatural parent repudiate me, and what has society ever done for me, that I should do anything for it; and what have I ever done against society that it should drive me into a corner and crush me to the earth? I have neither stolen (at least not since I was a child), nor murdered, nor defrauded. I earn my money and pay my way, and try to do good with it, according to my ideas of good. (Letter 24 Feb. 1858)

While this correspondent is primarily interested in countering moralists' claims about prostitutes by focusing on the prostitute as a both a member and a product of a Victorian economic system, her claim that she is, if not respectable, then at least non-criminal, is significant, for it describes her as a victim of an arbitrary and disproportionate social vilification who is, in the end, a law-abiding citizen working at her trade ("I earn my money and pay my way").

The argument in this letter parallels one of Eulalie's in her monologue. Indeed, to this point in my discussion of the poem, I have been describing Eulalie's attack upon the moralists who differentiated between respectable women and prostitutes according to an arbitrary set of characteristics and behaviors that amounted to little more than a false

semiotics. In what follows, I shall discuss Eulalie's attack upon the inflexible standards of decency advanced by moralists who, like those Webster attacks in her essays, held that all women were somehow either already depraved and fallen, or at best were on the verge of falling.

In her essay "The Depravity of English Ladies," Webster offers up a diatribe against moralists' attacks upon the character of English women. Webster describes their tactics as pure sensationalism:

there would have been nothing novel and surprising in making lamentation about the long familiar sins of men—about sowing of wild oats and the wasting of substance; any preacher in the pulpit could do that, and send his audience to sleep over it. The moralists must keep their audience awake. They have turned their lanterns on our homes, and showed us mothers, wives, and daughters, all wanton and mercenary at heart, saved from absolute dishonour only by their selfishness and the preventive etiquettes of society; their follies and their prudences, their mirth and their earnest, all alike prompted by sensual instincts and forbidden wishes, and regulated by considerations of material interests; their dress deliberately meretricious; their amusements intentionally dangerous. (Webster "Depravity" 18)

The result of this attack, Webster claims, is that "we settled down to the new view without the usual English resignation to a *fait accompli*, consented to the depravity of everybody's female relatives except our own, and, with our usual English want of logic, went about practically extending the exception to every lady we met" (18-19). In

essence, the broadness of such attacks renders them useless as any practical means of attacking vice, and instead leads to a much more insidious paranoia about women as somehow being automatically depraved and nefarious.

This "generalizing" (Webster *A Housewife's Opinions* 20) becomes for her a significant problem, and she suggests that while there may exist originals for the "types presented" (20), the expansion of fallenness to include broader, and non-sexual, behaviors of women threatens to transform the popular notion of women's character and capabilities.<sup>8</sup> Although Webster is discussing claims leveled at women who were not involved in the sex trade on a professional level, we can see that she is concerned with both the paranoia about sexual vice among women and the failure to draw distinctions—and in some cases, arbitrary ones—among different kinds and classes of women. Webster's implicit distinction between the merely immodest and the "guilt[y]" exposes not only the arbitrariness with which charges of fallenness might be made, but also the hypocrisy of attacking women for the most innocent of behaviors while allowing profligacy among men to go uncriticized.<sup>9</sup>

As Eulalie returns to her interrogation of the double-standard regarding prostitution, she asks "whom do I hurt more than they? as much?" (99), settling briefly upon claims that prostitution harms wives. She quickly dismisses this argument, describing the wives as "poor fools" (100) who lament the temptation of men not "worth crying for or keeping" (101), and proceeds to outline the ways the social expectations placed upon women limit their ability to see their husbands for what they are, insisting that they would be unfazed by their husbands' involvement with prostitutes were they able to be "seen by eyes / That may perceive there are more men than one" (102-03).

Eulalie asserts that maintaining a husband's fidelity is by no means an onerous or difficult task:

But, if they can, let them just take the pains

To keep them: 'tis not such a mighty task

To pin an idiot to your apron string. (104-06)

She even goes so far as to assert that the image of the jilted woman lamenting the loss of her husband to another woman is little more than a romanticized notion. According to Eulalie, these wives have simply failed to take on the task of maintaining their husbands' fidelity, and thus Eulalie implies that their loss is the result of what might be characterized as indolence:

wives have an advantage over us,

(The good and blind ones have) the smile or pout

Leaves them no secret nausea at odd times.

Oh, they could keep their husbands if they cared,

But 'tis an easier life to let them go,

And whimper at it for morality. (107-12)

Eulalie's argument here begins to collapse the distinctions between wife and prostitute, suggesting that the only difference between their reactions to this consistent male behavior is the absence of a "secret nausea" in the wife. The actions the two kinds of women must engage in are identical, and as the speaker implies, the wife could maintain her husband if she were willing to become more overtly like the mistress for whom she is being abandoned. This is a crucial moment, for buried here is not just a critique of

traditional attitudes toward fallenness, but also an argument that the institution of marriage is itself linked to prostitution through sex.<sup>10</sup>

In her essay "Matrimony As A Means of Livelihood," Webster engaged this issue at some length, arguing that despite the sentimental English notion of companionate marriage, at its core marriage is a means of subsistence for women:

Matrimony is not a profession for men, because their labours, even when for the home, lie outside the home, and are such as belong to Benedict and bachelor alike. But for women, who by becoming matrons undertake responsibilities and tasks which absorb the greater part of their time, and, oftenest, all their faculties, and which can have no place in solitary life, matrimony *is* a profession in the best and highest sense of the word. That is it is or ought to be so in the highest sense of the word: if not in that sense, then it is so, at all events, in the baser sense which considers a profession, not as a career chosen first from the impulse of fitness and which, beyond the necessary considerations of subsistence to be earned by it, is most of all its own reward, but as merely a way to earn the subsistence. ("Matrimony" 230)

By describing marriage as a means of subsistence, Webster collapses the distinctions between marriage and prostitution, suggesting that both exist as part of the continuum of roles in a sexual marketplace, and that in the end there is little to distinguish the two modes of subsistence other than arbitrary social convention. It is important to note, however, the differences in Webster's and Eulalie's positions. Webster explicitly deplores "the number of women who marry to be married, to be 'settled in life,' to have a

home and be thought a somebody and be taken care of and never be called 'old maid' and, above all, not to have to pinch and pine and perhaps starve at last in a struggle with the world for which they have had no sort of preparation" ("Matrimony" 231). Eulalie, on the other hand, is interested in exposing the hypocrisy of accepting one means of occupation and not another, and with teasing out the arbitrariness of Victorian distinctions between the licit and the illicit and the virtuous and the vicious.

Eulalie accomplishes this by interrogating the validity of claims about respectable women's virtue, arguing that the virtue being praised is an untested one—primarily because of respectable women's limited range of social experiences. The speaker attacks "respectable" women, with their

shrill carping virtues, safely housed  
From reach of even a smile that should put red  
On a decorous cheek, who rail at us  
With such a spiteful scorn and rancorousness,  
(Which maybe is half envy at the heart)  
And boast themselves so measurelessly good  
And us so measurelessly unlike them,  
What is their wondrous merit that they stay  
In comfortable homes whence not a soul  
Has ever thought of tempting them, and wear  
No kisses but a husband's upon lips  
There is no other man desires to kiss  
Refrain in fact from sin impossible?

How dare they hate us so? what have they done,  
What borne, to prove them other than we are?  
Dianas under lock and key—what right  
More than the well-fed helpless barn-door fowl  
To scorn the larcenous wild-birds? (113-31)

Eulalie insists that an untested virtue may lay no claims to superiority over a virtue that has been tested and failed. While conventional Victorian mores held up the "angel in the house" as the moral exemplum and the fallen woman as cautionary tale, Webster points out the practical problems such ideas present. Eulalie makes neither *overt* claims about the inescapability of her fall, nor about the unrealistic expectations placed upon women to be the angel in the house. However, her implicit insistence that the conventional dual narrative of the angel and the harlot depends upon a virtue that *must* be closed off and protected from temptation in order to sustain its moral superiority suggests that it is impossible for such isolation to be sustained for any length of time, and thus challenges the legitimacy of claims about the angel in the house's inherent moral superiority.

## VI

Eulalie's attack upon notions of the moral superiority of virtuous women and of "respectable" occupations—including marriage—constitutes a rejection of the traditional angel/harlot dichotomy that usually described conventional Victorian thought about the fallen woman. In the place of the conventional comparison of the angel and the harlot, Eulalie compares herself to other fallen women: "I have outfaced my own—that's harder work. / Aye, let their virtuous malice dribble on— / Mock snowstorms on the stage—I'm proof long since: / I have looked coolly on my what and why, / And I accept myself"

(134-37).<sup>11</sup> This wholly unsentimental acceptance of her "what and why" (136) marks a sharp break with the traditional fallen woman narrative. As I have shown in my discussions of Greenwell and Procter, according to the conventional elements of the theme of the fallen woman, she should abhor her condition, and yet here we find what appears to be an acceptance of her fallenness. Her view of prostitution as an occupation suggests that she is attempting to shift the terms of the discourse about the fallen woman away from the conventional moral narratives and toward an understanding of fallenness—and prostitution explicitly—as economically and socially determined positions—and thus outside the purview of the Victorian moral code that tended to apprehend them as opposite ends of a moral, rather than a socioeconomic, spectrum.

We can see the complexity Eulalie is attempting to inject into the Victorian notion of the fallen woman more clearly as she discards the evangelical pamphlet she has been reading:

Pshaw! the trash is savorless to-day:  
One cannot laugh alone. There, let it burn.  
What, does the windy dullard think one needs  
His wisdom dove-tailed on to Solomon's,  
His threats out-threatening God's, to teach the news  
That those who need not sin have safer souls?  
We know it, but we've bodies to save too;  
And so we earn our living. (162-69)

Her distinction between "those who need not sin" and those who have "bodies to save too" (167-68) challenges traditional notions that the women's fall is primarily the result of

a moral lapse, since her inclusion of "need" as a component of the fall (when contrasted with the "bodies" which must be saved by "earn[ing] our living") indicates that fallenness is not always caused by something so simple as a moral lapse, and that a more accurate understanding of the fallen woman and the prostitute must include a consideration of the socioeconomic factors involved in her entry into the sex trade.

Despite the poem's rejection of the traditional framework describing the fallen woman, elements of that conventional narrative remain. As we have seen in Greenwell and Procter, the fallen woman is sometimes characterized as possessing a drive for self-abnegation; Eulalie is to a certain degree no different, but as is typically the case with this poem, such tendencies are always qualified. The burning of the pamphlet leads Eulalie to imagine it having died "preaching to the last— / No such bad omen either; sudden end, / And no sad withering horrible old age" (172-74). The turn here to a discussion of old age and death is not surprising, since for her the "withering horrible old age" means, potentially, the loss of her livelihood, and thus looms as a terrifying prospect:

How one would clutch at youth to hold it tight!  
And then to know it gone, to see it gone,  
Be taught its absence by harsh careless looks,  
To like forgotten, solitary, old—  
The cruellest word that ever woman learns.  
Old—that's to be nothing, or to be at best  
A blurred memorial that in better days  
There was a woman once with such a name. (175-82)

In the end, Eulalie would rather die than meet such a fate: "No, no, I could not bear it: death itself / shows kinder promise . . . even death itself, / since it must come one day—" (183-85). Given the context of the discussion—Eulalie is claiming she would rather die than grow old—the "grey gloom" (185) with the "wretched thoughts it brings!" (186) suggest that she would commit suicide rather than watch herself grow old. While certainly Eulalie is expressing an anxiety over the unavoidable change into something other than herself that her aging will bring, her focus is on the inevitable isolation that will accompany such a change. But even more, it would seem that at the heart of Eulalie's anxiety over grown old is a fear of the change of herself from someone who is in some way remarkable and extraordinary (whether for good or ill) into someone who is, quite simply, ordinary. As Eulalie questions what brought on this flight of morbid fancy, she berates herself for having read her diary, and concludes that reverie is a worthless pursuit:

I hate the useless memories: 'tis fools' work  
Singing the hacknied dirge of 'better days':  
Best take Now kindly, give the past good-bye,  
Whether it were a better or a worse. (193-96)

This is a remarkable statement, wholly unlike Greenwell's and Procter's descriptions of fallen women who lament their condition and who desire, in the end, either a return to their unfallen past or an escape from their fallenness. Instead, her impulse toward self-abnegation stems from a fear of isolation and the gradual change into "a blurred memorial that in better days / There was a woman once with such a name" (181-82). In this anxiety, we can see elements of the earlier treatment of the fallen woman as

somehow physically altered by her fall as well as of the fallen woman's drive toward self-abnegation that I have described in Greenwell and Procter. The difference, however, is that for Eulalie these concerns are not grounded within a moral framework, but instead the loss of those "tools" by which she earns her living.

As Eulalie's discussion of her aborted attempt to seek reclamation makes clear, however, her anxieties about becoming ordinary have less to do with any kind of vanity than with her range of experiences as a fallen woman, which has left her unsuited to the life of a respectable Victorian woman. Eulalie describes her attempted reclamation as having been a "wild whim" (206) and a "sick fancy" (212). She explains that now she resists any urge to believe that she might return to her former state:

A wild whim that, to fancy I could change  
My new self for my old because I wished!  
Since then, when in my languid days there comes  
That craving, like homesickness, to go back  
To the good days, the dear old stupid days,  
To the quiet and the innocence, I know  
'Tis a sick fancy and try palliatives. (206-12).

Eulalie's expression here of a "new self" and an "old self" echoes Procter's similar construction in "A Legend of Provence." As I have already noted, this division of the two selves—the fallen and the unfallen, the past and the present—is a common feature of the representation of the fallen woman, and allows those who deploy it to emphasize the "depth" of the woman's fall by juxtaposing her depraved condition with her earlier pure life. The absence of such a juxtaposition in "A Castaway" suggests that Webster is

attempting to move away from that earlier, Christian model of reclamation. Unlike earlier treatments of the fallen woman, "A Castaway" contains no unfallen woman whose intercession through Christian charity results in the fallen woman's miraculous reclamation. Indeed, like Rossetti, Webster's representation of the fallen woman is marked by the failures of efforts to reclaim her.

As I have shown, Greenwell and Procter built into arguments for the reclaimability of the fallen woman a notion that there remains within her somewhere some core of goodness that might be excavated in order to effect her reclamation. Inherent in this belief in the fallen woman's reclaimability, however, is the idea that the fallen woman might, after retraining, simply be exchanged for her unfallen self. Less idealized arguments about the fallen woman (such as Acton's or Greenwood's) held that although a literal exchange or complete return to the woman's pre-lapsarian existence—in the sense of Greenwell—was impossible, reclaimed prostitutes could nonetheless return to respectable society. Webster's speaker challenges this notion: her claims that her own (however brief) belief in her reclaimability was a "wild whim" and a "sick fancy" suggest that for her the philosophy and rhetoric of the reclamation movement failed to compel her to work for her own salvation. It is important to note here, however, that another important element of this institutional failure stems from Eulalie's understanding of her status. She does not apprehend herself as implicated in any kind of moral economy (other than that prostitutes are victims of the Victorian double standard regarding sexuality); instead, her emphasis upon prostitution as a form women's labor functions as a rejection of that traditional moral dimension.

The speaker positions herself squarely in opposition to any notion that the former self might simply be reassumed. Her attack, interestingly, begins with an assault upon the staple of Victorian culture: the home. One of the more notable aspects of the fallen woman as she appears in letters to the editor and the reports of institutions devoted to reclaiming her was that to return her to her parents—and thus to her home—was an acceptable kind of reclamation.<sup>12</sup> The narrative is a fairly stock one: the fallen woman returns home to her respectable parents who take her in and allow her to resume her former life where she left off, since the fall begins, in many ways, with the departure of the woman from the home. This is the version of the narrative we have seen in Procter's "A Legend of Provence." Eulalie attacks the notion of the home as a site of healing and reclamation, arguing instead that once left behind, the fallen woman can never truly resume her unfallen life:

You go back to the old home,  
And 'tis not *your* home, has no place for you,  
And, if it had, you could not fit you into it. (213-15)

As we can see here, Eulalie is arguing that the fallen woman's return home might be difficult or impossible after her experiences outside the home. Unlike Procter's "A Legend of Provence" and Rossetti's "Goblin Market," which argue that the fallen woman may return to an unchanged home and resume her former life, or Greenwell's "Christina," which held that the fallen woman could be brought into some other form of respectable home, Eulalie argues that the fallen woman's place has not been kept in the home; the woman who returns is not the same woman who left, and so the home retains no place for this new "you" she has become. Eulalie asks a slightly modified question of the

possibility of the fallen woman's reclamation: "And could I not fit me to my former self" (216). The image of her "fit[ting] me to my former self" is, notably, different from her earlier question of fitting "in" a place, since it compares present and past selves rather than an ability to return to a physical location. In effect, what she is asking is whether or not it is possible for her two selves—the fallen and the unfallen, the past and the present, the worldly and the naive—to be reunited.

Eulalie argues that the split narratives of fallen/unfallen cannot be united by returning home; the transformation of the fallen woman renders such a complete return impossible, and she is incapable of imagining a situation wherein her reclamation would be possible. While the fallen woman's belief in the impossibility of her reclamation is fairly conventional (we have seen similar beliefs in *Greenwell*), for Eulalie this is not because she sees herself as too depraved for reclamation. Instead, she argues that her experiences have widened her view of the world to such a degree that she can no longer "fit" into the "small constant round" of a respectable life. Imagining a removal not unlike the one *Greenwell's* speaker in "Christina" had envisioned, Eulalie rejects any notion that she might go on to live a normal life:

If I had had the wit, like some of us,  
To sow my wild-oats into three per cents,  
Could I not find me shelter in the peace  
Of some far nook where none of them would come,  
Nor whisper travel from this scurrilous world  
(That gloats, and moralizes through its leers)  
To blast me with my fashionable shame?

There I might—oh my castle in the clouds!  
And where's its rent?—but there, were there a there,  
I might again live the grave blameless life  
Among such simple pleasures, simple cares:  
But could they be my pleasures, be my cares?

While this is a desire for a removal (although not as radical as the self-abnegation the speaker in "Christina" desires), it is also a vision of a retirement financed by returns from earlier investments made using the profits from her work as a prostitute, and thus she becomes a member of a class of rentiers.

Eulalie ultimately rejects this vision of the prostitute's quiet retirement in the country, pointing out that she could never be content in such a life:

What would there be in quiet rustic days,  
Each like the other, full of time to think,  
To keep one bold enough to live at all?  
Quiet is hell, I say—as if a woman  
Could bear to sit alone, quiet all day,  
And loathe herself and sicken in her thoughts. (233-38).

The monotony Eulalie detests in this vision—an interminable repetition of sameness, quietness, and ordinariness—is for her no different from the monotony of her experiences in a refuge for fallen women or the "small constant round" of her life prior to her fall. Like the retirement where "Quiet is hell" (236), the refuge represents for Eulalie an unbearable existence—even if only for a limited period of time:

They tried it at the refuge, and I failed:

I could not bear it. Dreary hideous room,  
Coarse pittance, prison rules, one might bear these  
And keep one's purpose; but so much alone,  
And then made faint and weak and fanciful  
By change from pampering to half-famishing—  
Good god, what thoughts come! Only one week more  
And 'twould have ended: but in one day more  
I must have killed myself. And I loathe death,  
The dreadful foul corruption with who knows  
What future after it. (239-49)

This final line, with its Hamlet-like ambivalence about suicide and the afterlife, constitutes a modification of the death-impulse I have noted in earlier fallen woman narratives, and Eulalie's profound uncertainty about the afterlife marks her as a distinctly different from the other fallen women I have to this point been discussing, since in both Greenwell's and Procter's fallen-woman poems, the fallen woman had looked forward to death. Her description of the conditions at the refuge echoes the charges leveled against them by those such as Felicia Skene, who, like Eulalie, had claimed that their prison-like conditions often undermined their efforts to reclaim these women.<sup>13</sup>

Eulalie expands upon this complaint, however, by offering up a vision of the sometimes dismal future that "reclaimed" prostitutes could expect to find after their time in the refuge, thus exposing yet another weakness of the reclamation movement:

And if I rambled out into the world  
Sinless but penniless, what else were that

But slower death, slow pining shivering death

By misery and hunger? (252-55)

In this bleak description of the possible future of the reclaimed fallen woman, we can see again how Eulalie constructs fallenness and its repercussions in almost entirely economic terms. As Eulalie expands on this claim about the economic realities awaiting the fallen woman upon her reentry into respectable society, she offers a dismal vision of the market for their labor:

More sempstresses than shirts;  
And defter hands at white work than are mine  
drop starved at last: dressmakers, milliners,  
Too many too they say; and yet their trades  
Need skill, apprenticeship. And who so bold  
As hire me for their humblest drudgery?  
Not even for scullery slut; not even, I think,  
for governess although they'd get me cheap. (266-73)

Eulalie makes clear the ways that employment opportunities for decent women (as opposed to fallen women) are simply not in place; the markets are flooded, and thus employment opportunities are incredibly limited. The result, Eulalie explains, is that as poor women scramble to find employment, they inevitably throw over some otherwise respectable woman, and force her to turn to prostitution:

And after all it would be something hard,  
With the marts for decent women overfull,  
If I could elbow in and snatch a chance

And oust some good girl so, who then perforce

Must come and snatch her chance among our crowd. (274-78)

Eualalie's description of the cycle—fallen women returning to respectable labor must displace the unfallen in the marketplace, who are then forced to turn to prostitution to support themselves—clearly locates the marketplace as the site of "production" of the prostitute, and in doing so counters the conventional narratives which explained prostitution in terms of moral lapses and weaknesses of character. In this description, women move back and forth from the "marts for decent women overfull" (275) to "our crowd" (278), which suggests an entry into another, illicit, marketplace. These two markets are closely related, with the population of one moving to the other, and vice versa. But as reclaimed women move to the "decent mart," their presence displaces the "good girl[s]" (277), who are then forced to find employment through less respectable means. This interaction points out a significant failure of the reclamation movement, which had assumed that reclamation itself would somehow lead to gainful employment and a respectable life, with little or no consideration of the economic position these women would find themselves in upon their release or attention to the kinds of employment available to women.

There were, as Eualalie insists, simply too many women needing either employment or a husband—or both—and the reclamation movement too often fails to recognize the importance of the demographic imbalance:

Why, if the worthy men who think all's done

If we'll but come where we can hear them preach,

Could bring us all, or any half of us,

Into their fold, teach all us wandering sheep,  
Or only half of us, to stand in rows  
And baa them hymns and moral songs, good lack,  
What would they do with us? what could they do?  
Just think! with were't but half of us on hand  
To find work for . . . or husbands. Would they try  
To ship us to the colonies for wives? (279-88)

Her questions expose one of the central problems of reclamation work: if these women are to be reclaimed, what is to be done with them *afterwards*? Considering the limited range of employment opportunities available, and the equally limited chance of marriage, there is, she implies, very little that *could* be done with them.<sup>14</sup> But it is Eulalie's reduction of the solution to its essential parts here that is most telling. The only options available to these women—and similarly to the reformers attempting to bring them into respectable society—are work or marriage (or both), and both those markets are flooded.

This is a crucial moment in Eulalie's thinking about the fallen woman, as well as for the line of thinking about the fallen woman that I have been considering thus far. In earlier versions of the fallen-woman narrative, we have seen little concern for the material implications of the fallen woman's reclamation. What will be done with the fallen woman after her reclamation is of little or no concern, since the suggestion in all but Rossetti is that such provisions will simply present themselves: Greenwell's fallen woman finds refuge after her reclamation; Procter's fallen woman is able to return to her unfallen condition; in "Goblin Market," Rossetti's fallen woman is able to return home, while in "Noble Sisters" and "Sister Maude," fallen women are potentially driven from

their homes as the process of their (potential) reclamation becomes difficult for them to bear. Eulalie's attention to what happens to the fallen woman after her reclamation, then, critiques the idealism of efforts to reclaim these women, and suggests, even more, the hopelessness of the situation. Indeed, many houses of reclamation insisted upon retraining fallen women for domestic service and then sending them back into respectable working-class society. The problem, as both the descriptions of the midnight meetings and the letter to the editor of the *Times* I have been discussing indicate, is that large numbers of fallen women came from these ranks to begin with, and so sending them back to the same station that played a role in producing them was hardly a solution, since it threatened to return them to the economic conditions that originally produced them. Even more, as Eulalie's monologue makes clear, the markets into which these women were sent to look for work were hopelessly overrun, and the inability to find work inevitably led many women who had been reclaimed no other option but to return to their fallen life. The failure of these institutions to consider the material implications of reclamation (as well as the material origins of her fall), then, is unlikely to reintegrate the fallen woman into respectable society in any successful—that is, permanent—way. This recidivism is hardly brought about by some kind of innate moral deficiency on the part of the woman; it is, if not determined, then at least informed by socioeconomic forces beyond the control of either the individuals being reclaimed or of those working in the reclamation movement.

In this context, the absence of any intercessor figure—either metaphysical or human—in Webster's poem holds even greater significance. If, as was the case with Greenwell and Procter, the fallen-woman poem was an essentially religious genre

wherein the fallen woman's reclamation is brought about effected Christian charity, the absence of an intercessor in this poem indicates that for Webster, the fallen woman poem is no longer religious in nature. The absence of the intercessor—and indeed of any attempt to reclaim Eulalie—calls into question the religious iconography underpinning the traditional fallen woman narrative: there is no miraculous intercession by a Mary or Christ(ina) figure in this narrative, and she reminds us again and again that with neither permanent provisions for employment nor the prospect of marriage, efforts to reclaim the fallen woman were hopelessly inadequate. As she puts it, such reclamation would only leave her "sinless but penniless" (253), and, as I have already pointed out, regardless of any evangelical insistence that the fallen woman must attend to saving her soul, Eulalie insists that "we've bodies to save too; / And so we earn our living" (168-69). It is in this last statement that we can see the ultimate rejection of the religious dimension of the fallen-woman poem, for here Eulalie focuses her attention squarely on the prostitute as an individual driven, in many ways, by economic forces.

This last point, though, is a significant one, for while it suggests a kind of economic determinism, it also carries with it the suggestion that these women choose (to however attenuated a degree) their lives. Thus, despite her seeming insistence upon a socioeconomic determinism, Eulalie does not entirely discount the possibility of individual agency. For her, life is

Like any other coin: spend it, or give,  
Or drop it in the mire, can the world see  
You get your value for it, or bar off  
The burying of its marts to grope it up

And give it back to you for better use?  
And if you spend or give, that is your choice;  
And if you let it slip, that's your choice too,  
You should have held it firmer. (555-62)

This is a remarkable metaphor for the economic conditions affecting the fallen woman, since it suggests at once that the individual is little more than a form of currency at work in a market and that that currency (in this case, the currency of the female body) is put to use by individuals who will sometimes "drop it in the mire." Notably, however, that currency does not lose its economic value when dropped; it can be reclaimed and spent again. That is, the female body does not lose its value in the marketplace simply because it has been "dropped." The process is devoid of any moral judgment, since even the remark that "you should have held it firmer" does not discount the possibility of the coin being recirculated. This is a crucial point, since the metaphor therefore describes the recirculation of the fallen woman's body in the marketplace that the traditional narrative describing her did not allow. Indeed, Webster's presentation of the prostitute as an individual taking part in an economy can be read as an attempt to transform the fallen-woman poem's from its earlier status as a religious poem concerned with Christian charity and the possibility of intercession. The result of this transformation is a fallen-woman poem that rejects entirely the moral dimension of the fall, and in turn, the notion of a fall altogether.

The insistence at the end of this passage upon individual agency is significant as well. Despite her attention to the fallen woman's socioeconomic context, Eulalie does not

insist that economic condition removes individual agency. Indeed, she claims that individuals are ultimately responsible for their choices:

Yours the blame,  
And not another's, not the indifferent world's  
Which goes on steadily, statistically,  
And count by censuses not separate souls—  
And if it somehow needs to its worst use  
So many lives of women, useless else,  
It buys us of ourselves; we could hold back,  
Free all of us to starve, and some of us,  
(Those who have done no ill, and are in luck)  
To slave their lives out and have food and clothes  
Until they grow unserviceably old. (562-72)

Again, we can see Eulalie insisting upon individual agency while at the same time removing any moral charges against the fallen woman. Indeed, these women, Eulalie argues, allow themselves to become implicated in a marketplace that "needs to its worst use / So many lives of women, useless else" (566-67). While this emphasis upon utility echoes Greenwell's description of the fallen woman's perceived uselessness in "Christina" and the distractedness of the "falling" woman in Procter's "A Legend of Provence," both of these earlier poems accept a notion of fallenness as both a matter of moral failing and economic uselessness that Eulalie does not. As workers circulating (and re-circulating) within the marketplace, these women are, Eulalie argues, merely moving to fill the needs of the market. And as their ability to be re-circulated suggests, the traditional narrative

describing the inevitable path of the fallen woman and the prostitute bears little resemblance to the real economic possibilities of such women's lives. In the end, Eulalie argues, what these women experience is not a fall, but merely a re-circulation within a market that largely determines what opportunities are available to them.

What we can see here, then, is that Webster is attempting to provide a representation of the fallen woman that allows for both individual agency and economic determinism. And although she offers no clear sense of resolution to this matter of negotiating the complex relationship between economic determinism and individual agency, her monologue at the very least attempts to move beyond the easy binary opposites of angel and harlot that had traditionally defined the terms of the discussion of fallenness in the nineteenth century. If, as I have been describing through much of this study, the Victorian notion of the fallen woman had suffered from romanticized ideas of the fallen woman and the prostitute, Webster's deromanticizing of the figure marks the emergence of crucial turn in Victorian thinking about the fallen woman. While writers such as Greenwell, Procter, and Rossetti had worked to expose the difficulties of reclamation work and expose the inadequacy of the conventional narratives used to describe such work (and the women whose reclamation they were attempting to bring about), they were also busy revising those narratives that described the fallen woman. But none of these writers was able to escape the essential feature of the narrative they were working against: the notion of the "fall" as a moral, sexual, and social descent from which a woman might be reclaimed. Eulalie's insistence upon a recognition of prostitution as a form of employment thus allows the poem to avoid that traditional moral framework altogether, and even to expose the hypocrisy required to sustain the fallen-

woman narrative. It is in this sense, then, that the argument put forward in "A Castaway" can be read as more than just a revision of the fallen woman narrative; it is, in effect, a rejection of the religious terms which underpinned the narrative and, by extension, the narrative itself.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Sutphin remarks in what is to date the only modern edition of Webster's poetry, *Augusta Webster: Portraits and Other Poems*, the use of "dramatic forms—monologues and verse plays—indicates that she wanted to call attention to the distance between her own experience and her poetry" (13). While this may be the case, there are nonetheless remarkable similarities between the arguments articulated by Eulalie, the speaker of the poem, and those put forward by Webster in her essays on a wide range of topics relating to Victorian attitudes toward women.

<sup>2</sup> Although Sutphin discusses Webster's nonfiction prose, she attends almost exclusively to Webster's arguments concerning women's education. Commenting on Webster's collection of essays from the *Examiner*, *A Housewife's Opinions*, Sutphin remarks that the "title is both self-deprecating and ironic, for her 'house-wife' persona takes on Greek translation and the rights of working women, and the essays dealing with traditionally domestic issues often incorporate knowledge one would not expect in the stereotypical middle-class housewife. Webster implicitly asserts the housewife's right to all kinds of knowledge as she combines this role with those of scholar and political commentator" (26-27).

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Sarah Ellis's *The Women of England* (1839) for a similar complaint. Although Ellis falls roughly into that category of moralists who decry the moral failures of women, her complaints center in large part upon the weakness of women's education: "When we meet in society with that speechless inanimate, ignorant, and useless being called "a young lady just come from school," it is thought a sufficient apology for all her deficiencies, that she has, poor thing! but just come home from school. Thus implying

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that nothing in the way of domestic usefulness, social intercourse, or adaptation to circumstances, can be expected from her until she has had time to learn it. If, during the four or five years spent at school, she had been establishing herself upon the foundation of her future character, and learning to practise what would afterwards be the business of her life, she would, when her education was considered as complete, be in the highest possible state of perfection which her nature, at that season of life, would admit of. This is what she ought to be. I need not advert to what she is. The case is too pitiful to justify any farther description. The popular and familiar remark, 'Poor thing! she has just come home from school; what can you expect?' is the best commentary I can offer" (79-80).

In *Daily Life in Victorian England*, Sally Mitchell provides a rough overview of the typical girl's educational experience: "At age eight or so, boys went to prep school and a more educated governess began teaching the girls English, history, geography, and conversational French. She also helped them learn to draw, play the piano, and sing—these skills (known as 'accomplishments') were important both for social life and as a means of lifelong recreation. From about age fourteen, a girl might have visiting masters . . . to give more advanced lessons in art, music, and languages" (179).

<sup>4</sup> Logan goes on to remark, rightly, that "the resulting 'wayward or unproductive sexualities' are so prominent and visible throughout Victorian literature as to suggest that angelic sexuality is the anomaly rather than the norm" (6).

<sup>5</sup> Eulalie's description of her ability to pass within respectable circles is similar to the moment in Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* where Mrs. Warren explains to Vivie how respectability is a pretence: "it's all only a pretence, to keep the cowardly slavish

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common run of people quiet. . . . Vivie: the big people, the clever people, the managing people, all know it. They do as I do, and think what I think" (1752).

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of respectability as a core Victorian value, see Altick, 174-79 and Houghton, 184-89. See especially Amanda Anderson, 13-16 and 22-65.

<sup>7</sup> As Anderson notes, despite the sometimes moralizing tone these reformers adopted, their efforts can be read as "follow[ing] from the early utilitarian and associationist traditions and is characteristic of the scientific ameliorism of the mid-Victorian period" (51). Although there is "a lack of systematicity" (51) in the work of these reformers, Anderson explains, their remarks may not be so moralizing as they might seem. While Anderson is no doubt correct about the impulses driving reformers such as Acton—who, notably, shocked his English readers by contradicting conventional wisdom regarding prostitution when he insisted that prostitution was a transient means of occupation rather than a permanent situation that lead inevitably to death—Acton's insistence that prostitution is an occupation (and thus, a kind of work) is a remarkable claim, for it allows an approach to prostitution that exists outside the traditional moral framework and which, moreover, locates it within the emerging Victorian interest in the social sciences.

<sup>8</sup> Deborah Logan discusses this expansion throughout her study, but specifically describes the expansion of the Victorian term "unchaste": "The term expands to incorporate alcoholics and anorexics, the insane, the infanticidal and depressed, and even slave women" (9). See also my discussion of Webster's essays from *A Housewife's Opinions* earlier in this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> The bastardy clause (69) in the first Poor Law of 1834 had briefly legitimized such profligacy by requiring that women were legally responsible for any illegitimate

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offspring they may have: "And be it further enacted, That from and after the passing of this Act so much of any Act or Acts of Parliament as enables any single Woman to charge any Person with having gotten her with any Child of which she shall then be pregnant, or as renders any Person so charged liable to be apprehended or committed, or required to give Security, on any such Charge, or as enables the Mother of any Bastard Child or Children to charge or affiliate any such Child or Children on any Person as the reputed or putative Father thereof, or as enables any Overseer or Guardian to charge or make Complaint against any Person as such reputed or putative Father, and to require him to be charged with or contribute to the Expences attending the Birth, Sustentation, or Maintenance of any such Child or Children, or to be imprisoned or otherwise punished for not contributing thereto, or as in any way renders such reputed or putative Father liable to Punishment or Contribution as such, or as enables Churchwardens and Overseers, by the Order of any Two Justices of the Peace, confirmed by the Sessions, to take, seize, and dispose of the Goods and Chattels, or to receive the annual Rents or Profits of the Lands of any putative Father of Bastard Children, and so much of any such Act or Acts as renders an unmarried Woman with Child liable as such to be summoned, examined, or removed, or as renders the Mother of any Bastard liable as such to be imprisoned or otherwise punished, shall, so far as respects any Child which shall be likely to be born or shall be born a Bastard after the passing of this Act, or the Mother or putative Father of such Child, be and the same is hereby repealed" (qtd. in Higgenbotham). This clause was repealed in 1844, and although it predates Webster's work by two decades, the bastardy clause represents a legal codification of the double-standard at mid-century.

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<sup>10</sup> Marx comments on the bourgeois institution of marriage transforming women into prostitutes in *The Communist Manifesto*. See also Washington for a detailed discussion of the complex ideological relationship between marriage and prostitution.

<sup>11</sup> The implication here is that competing with prostitutes for johns is less work than competing with wives for their husbands. As I have already discussed, Eulalie characterizes wives as little more than lazy workers unwilling to put forth the effort necessary to maintain their husbands.

<sup>12</sup> The "unfortunate" whose letter to the *Times* I have been relying upon in this chapter describes her parents as anything but idealized middle-class Victorians. She explains that her "Father and mother both loved drink," that "we knew nothing of religion," and that "No parson ever came near us. The place where we lived was too dirty for nicely-shod gentlemen" (Letter 24 Feb. 1858). Interestingly, in what is a story remarkably close to Hardy's poem "The Ruined Maid" (1866) the correspondent describes the effects of a fallen woman returning home to her "colony": "Frequently we had quite a stir in our colony. Some young lady who had quitted the paternal restraints, or perhaps, been started off, none knew whither or how, to seek her fortune, would reappear among us with a profusion of ribands, fine clothes, and lots of cash. Visiting the neighbors, treating indiscriminately, was the order of the day on such occasions, without any more definite information of the means by which the dazzling transformation had been effected than could be conveyed by knowing winks and the words 'luck' and 'friends.' Then she would disappear and leave us in our dirt, penury, and obscurity. You cannot conceive, Sir, how our young ambition was stirred by these visitations" (Letter 24 Feb. 1858).

<sup>13</sup> See my discussion of Skene in Chapter 3.

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<sup>14</sup> The solution for many—including Charles Dickens—was exportation “to the colonies for wives” (288). In a letter to the Baroness Coutts in November of 1847, Dickens wrote “It occurred to me that it would be an admirable means of promoting friendly and affectionate feelings among them, to have them to understand that no one should ever be sent abroad alone. It would be a beautiful thing, and would give us a wonderful power over them, if they would form strong attachments among themselves. To say nothing of the encouragement and support they would be to one another in a foreign country” (Johnson 108).

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

This study has been very consciously aimed at supplementing contemporary criticism of the fallen woman, which, despite its devotion to complicating the modern understanding of the fallen woman, has yet to explore in any depth the history of the representation of the figure. The tendency in contemporary criticism of the fallen woman, beginning with George Watt's *The Fallen Woman in the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century English Novel* (1984), is to view the fallen woman almost solely in terms of her pivotal role in nineteenth-century attacks upon the double-standard regarding Victorian mores governing sexual impropriety. As Watt explains, the fallen woman became an icon for reformers such as Josephine Butler, who attacked both the madonna/harlot dichotomy and the double standard which turned a blind eye to sexual impropriety among men. Reformers like Butler, Watt explains, "knew that while the collective voice was mouthing moral platitudes its hand was under the supposedly inviolate petticoat. But because the latter was not often seen, and the former was often heard, the dichotomy of the two classes of women persisted throughout the century" (3). Watt describes the attempt by some Victorian writers and thinkers to focus their attention on the double-standard in their representation of the fallen woman, and he explains how these writers used her as a key figure in their arguments about Victorian hypocrisies:

Dickens, Eliot, Gaskell, Collins, Gissing, Moore and Hardy each have, in at least one major work, questioned the absolute nature of the two groups of women—the pure and the fallen. They proved there was no one fall, no

single disgrace, no automatic placing in categories of purity or prostitution. Through the study of the sexual fall these novelists are able to highlight the intense and complex problems of Victorian women from all classes, expose the sham respectability which personifies the patriarchy, and give themselves the role of social reformer in the process.

(7)

Watt is certainly correct here. These writers exerted tremendous energy in their efforts to expose the hypocrisy of the Victorian double-standard, and they also made great progress in revealing the complexity of the forces that lead to the fall. But his characterization of the debate is telling. He describes the two camps that comprise the debate over the fallen woman: one which sought to uphold the conventional madonna/harlot dichotomy and one which sought to expose the hypocrisy required to sustain it.

In the broadest sense, Watt's characterization of the debate over the fallen woman is accurate. As my discussion of Webster's essays makes clear, there were a number of Victorian moralists who sought to maintain an uncomplicated and essentially religious notion of the harlot, and there were individuals who were interested in describing the harlot's origins as nuanced and complex, having been determined in many ways by socio-economic forces beyond her control. What I have attempted to demonstrate, however, is that within this camp of reformers, there existed a second impulse: first, to challenge the moralists who held that the fallen woman was morally depraved and, second, to correct oversimplified or inaccurate notions of the fallen woman and her reclamation deployed by the reclamation movement itself. Indeed, as my discussions of Greenwell and Rossetti

indicate, even within the reclamation movement there were highly nuanced debates about the fallen woman and her reclamation.

As I have shown, Greenwell mounts an argument for the fallen woman's spiritual reclaimability that also attempts to offer a corrective to reclamation movement rhetoric that had implied that the process of reclamation was easy, if not effortless. Procter, I argue, expands the terms of Greenwell's argument to show that the fallen woman's reclamation need not only be spiritual. Were it not for the limitations of human mercy, Procter argues, the fallen woman's reclamation could essentially be a total restoration to her former life. It is in Procter's study, however, that we can see the beginnings of what will emerge as a serious complaint against the reclamation movement, for she presents us with a fallen woman who has found the conditions of her unfallen existence—an institution devoted to the protection of its members from the temptations of the world outside it—insufficient. This is a significant point in the history of the representation of the fallen woman, for like Greenwell's challenge to the notion that the reclamation could be easy, Procter's description of institutional failures reveals that even within the reclamation movement there were areas of contention. We can see a similar argument about institutions of reclamation in two little-studied Christina Rossetti poems, both of which paint a very clear picture of the ways institutions devoted to the protection of women from outside temptations could actually contain structures that would drive women away. When we consider Rossetti's arguments in light of attacks upon the reclamation movement's methods, what emerges is the clear sense that both the rhetoric of the reclamation movement as well as its methodology were being rethought (and at times attacked) during the period under consideration.

Of the writers considered in this study, it is Webster who mounts the most powerful challenge to the reclamation movement, and who offers the most significant rethinking of the Victorian notion of the fallen woman. Indeed, Webster's poem is an attack on a number of elements of the Victorian notion of the fallen woman, ranging from the inadequate narratives describing her to the conditions of the institutions devoted to her reclamation to, in the end, a rejection of the moral dimension of fallenness itself and an argument that prostitution is a form of women's work. Webster's work serves as a fitting capstone for this study, since her poem effectively signals the end of the fallen woman poem as a popular form of verse for women poets.

With the exception of Amy Levy's "Magdalen" (1884), there are very few fallen woman poems after Webster's that are of any note. In the context of Webster's effective ending of the fallen-woman poem in Victorian women's poetry, Levy's "Magdalen" merits a brief discussion. The poem operates in the same mode of the confessional dramatic monologue I have attended to in Greenwell, Procter, and Webster. However, unlike earlier fallen-woman poems, Levy's poem features a resignation to her fate on the part of the speaker who is presumably dying in a lock hospital. From her "pallet hard" (3), the speaker explains "All things I can endure, save one" (1) regarding her condition: that her seducer was also aware that her seduction would result in her physical infection. It is in these terms that the poem functions as an invective against her seducer—not for the seduction itself, but instead for the resulting infection: "Yea, all things bear, save only this: / That you, who knew what thing would be, / Have wrought this evil unto me" (10-12). As Leighton points out, what is notable here is that this fallen-woman speaker's primary concern is neither the moral nor social dimension of her fallenness. As Angela

Leighton writes, "although ["Magdalen"] fits the popular genre of the 'fallen woman' poem, it is ultimately neither a work of social protest nor of emotional betrayal. . . . [T]his Magdalen is no longer fighting against the moral injustices of the world or passionately declaring her own feelings, but wearily and grimly accepting her fate" (591). Leighton's estimation of the speaker as having accepted her fate is accurate, but it is also important to note that the speaker does not seem to regard her fallen condition as moral one. Fallenness is, for her, a wholly medical condition, and her attention is focused squarely on the individual who has infected her. She describes him as having "wrought this evil unto me" (12), as the one who "work[ed] my woe" (34) and as one within whose kiss "a poison lurks" (43). She closes with a statement of independence from her infector: "That all is done, that I am free; / That you, through all eternity, / Have neither part nor lot in me" (83-85). The speaker's emphasis throughout the poem on the physical element of infection involved in her fall, rather than on her infection as a moral issue, indicates the degree to which the fallen-woman poem has moved nearly completely away from those concerns that had marked it earlier in the century.

Unfortunately, like most of the poets considered in this study, very little has been written about Amy Levy's poetry, and this omission indicates the degree to which the representation of the fallen-woman in the late nineteenth century is an area of Victorian studies deserving of much more attention. Indeed, there are still many areas of the history of the representation of the fallen woman that merit further (or even initial) attention. Roxanne Eberle's recently-published study has illuminated much history of the representation of the fallen woman from the late-eighteenth century through the early nineteenth. To date, however, Eberle's is the only study of this crucial period of

transition in the history of the representation of the fallen woman, and there is hope that her work will spark investigation into the pre- and early-Victorian attention to prostitution in England. Similarly, very little (if any) research has been conducted on the representation of the fallen woman at the end of the period. This would seem a rich area for inquiry, considering that the 1880s and 1890s saw tremendous advancements in women's education and employment, as well as a limited loosening of Victorian sexual mores. In addition, however, there is much work to be done on those questions of demographic imbalance which had initially framed the discussion, and there is some hope that, since the Public Records Office has recently made the 1901 census data for Great Britain available online, studies of the fallen woman in the last two decades of the nineteenth century will begin to emerge. Finally, there is a clear need for a study of the relationship between the fallen woman and the sexually-liberated New Woman of the last decades of the century.

More specifically, it is often the case that little, if any, inquiry has been conducted on the individual poets considered in this study. Even Christina Rossetti, without doubt the most popular of the poets studied here, suffers from a disproportionate attention to "Goblin Market," a poem which, I have argued, is representative of neither her politics nor her thinking on the fallen woman. The work of others in this study, such as Dora Greenwell or Adelaide Anne Procter, has begun to garner some critical attention, but for the most part they are still mentioned only briefly in studies of other topics. There is hope, however, that in the wake of Gill Gregory's biography of Procter (the first and only book-length academic study of her life and work) interest in her work by modern critics might be kindled. At this writing, Dora Greenwell still lacks both a modern critical

biography and any critical articles. Despite the lack of published studies of their work, Greenwell and Procter are being written about and discussed at highly-specialized conferences, and so there is hope that critical studies of them will be forthcoming. There currently exists no critical biography of Augusta Webster, although Patricia Rigg has begun work on one. Christine Sutphin's recent work on Webster has been most promising, and her publication of a selection of Webster's essays and verse will hopefully result in greater attention to Webster.

The absence of any significant amount of critical attention to these women is indicative of another crucial point about my study: there are only a handful of scholars currently working on a reassessment of the fallen woman. Most of these studies, like mine, are heavily indebted to Foucault's introduction to the *History of Sexuality*, which contradicted the conventional notion of the Victorians as having silenced any discussions of sex and sexuality. Foucault argues instead that the nineteenth century witnessed a proliferation of discourse on the subject as it was channeled into medical and scientific discourse and, as the mere presence of the reclamation movement indicates, into religious discourse. Like Foucault, Judith Walkowitz's historical work on Victorian prostitution in *City of Dreadful Delight* and *Prostitution and Victorian Society* is pivotal, for it challenges conventional critical thinking about the fallen woman by offering historical evidence to indicate that prostitutes and fallen women often bore little resemblance to their literary representation. As I have discussed throughout this study, Amanda Anderson's and Deborah Logan's analyses of the figure are seminal, for they both establish a much-needed investigation of the complexities and cultural significance of the fallen woman. Anderson has written about the rhetoric of fallenness as a centerpiece in

Victorian debates about agency. Similarly, Logan's study reveals the sheer breadth of the category of fallenness in Victorian culture, and it is to her work that the present study bears the strongest relation. But whereas Logan reveals the degree to which the category of fallenness came to be extended to a vast array of deviant sexualities—many of which were deviant insofar as they were merely non-(re)productive sexualities—I am chiefly concerned with the history of the representation of the fallen woman. My analyses and Logan's can be read, then, as complementary treatments of different aspects of the same problem in Victorian literary history: Logan's treatment exposes the breadth of the fallen woman as a feature of Victorian culture; mine attempts to account for that breadth by describing the various changes that the figure goes through during its period of public interest. Nevertheless, I have attempted to sketch the broad outlines of the picture.

The expansion of the category of fallenness to include such a wide range of deviant sexualities can be accounted for when we consider that the category itself was never actually stable for the Victorians. Even more, as I have argued, the language describing the fallen woman, and the narratives being deployed about it, were under a seemingly constant state of revision. The Victorians inherited two markedly different sets of narratives describing the fallen woman: the Hogarthian narrative, which insisted that the fallen woman life is one of unremitting decline, and the narrative advanced by the Magdalen Hospital, which insisted that the fallen woman could be retrained and reinserted into respectable society. As I discussed in my introduction, both these narratives were in play simultaneously during the nineteenth century, and as the reclamation movement reached its peak in the 1850s and 1860s, the narrative proposed by the Magdalen Hospital emerged as the dominant way of thinking about the fallen

woman. This is not to say that the Hogarthian narrative disappeared in the Victorian period. Indeed, as the emphasis upon the confession in the poems in this study indicates, the conclusion of the Hogarthian narrative—the fallen woman's eventual death—still occupied a central position in the conventional Victorian fallen-woman narrative. The difference between the eighteenth-century Hogarthian narrative and its Victorian version, however, lies in the fallen woman's reclamation, which punctuates her decline and shifts the terms of the fallen woman narrative away from the Hogarthian insistence upon inevitable punishment and toward a larger statements about the spiritual and social reclaimability of the fallen woman. What is clear, however, is that during the nineteenth-century the Victorian notion of the fallen woman was transformed from a moral understanding of her into an understanding of her as a figure that was in many ways economically determined. But more importantly, attention to the history of fallen woman's representation in verse written by women who were involved in the reclamation movement reveals that, when we talk about fallen women, we talk about a figure that was constantly under revision.

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