“Christina is now an associate, and wore the dress – which is very simple, elegant even; black with hanging sleeves, a muslin cap with lace edging, quite becoming to her with the veil” (Wm. Michael Rossetti, Poetical Works 485). The evocative image of Christina Rossetti, “elegantly” clad in the garb of an Anglican associate and hard at work reforming repentant prostitutes at the St. Mary Magdalene Home for Fallen Women on Highgate Hill even as she corrects proofs for her first volume of poetry, Goblin Market and Other Poems (1860; pub. 1862), has inspired a great deal of critical commentary establishing links between her “social” and “literary” work. Indeed, as early as 1904, William Michael Rossetti included the above description in a footnote to “From Sunset to Star Rise” (1865; pub. 1875), an interpretively elusive poem which he reads as the dramatic monologue of a “fallen woman”. While I would certainly agree that Goblin Market reflects Rossetti’s lifelong interest in the reclamation of prostitutes, as does her work at Highgate from 1859 to 1870, I would also suggest that in our eagerness to read Goblin Market through the biographical “veil” of Rossetti’s participation in an Anglican Sisterhood, we fail to acknowledge the ways in which her poem’s utopian vision radically differs from the type of reclamation practiced at Highgate. It is important to note that Goblin Market was written in 1859, just as Rossetti began her tenure at Highgate, and I will suggest that – in spite of its quasi-fantastical landscape – it represents the pinnacle of Rossetti’s optimistic belief in what we might call “practical” Christian social reform. While I believe that Rossetti’s enthusiasm for Anglican “sisterhood” certainly informs her long poem, Goblin Market’s utopianism depends upon Rossetti’s investment in a much broader constellation of discourses: that of Anglican “good works”, secular “feminized”
social reform, and, not insignificantly, Pre-Raphaelite aestheticism. Indeed, I will ultimately suggest that after working as a Sister at Highgate, Rossetti produces several poems that, in many ways, contradict the reform lessons of *Goblin Market*.

The trajectory I am tracing throughout this chapter actually begins in the mid–1850s when Rossetti is writing poems such as “A Fair World Tho’ a Fallen” (1851; pub. 1896) and “Up-hill” (1858; pub. 1862); these poems address the reformist role that must be taken by Christians in this world, if they intend to make it to the next. Throughout the 1850s we also find Rossetti romanticizing the vocation of the Anglican Sister, in both the novella *Maude* (1850), and the poems, “Three Nuns” (1849–50) and “The Convent Threshold” (1858; pub. 1862). And indeed, as other critics have pointed out, it is at this time that Rossetti’s own secular reform work actually begins. In addition to working with the Young Woman’s Friendly Society visiting the poor and the sick, she also volunteered for Florence Nightingale’s mission to the Crimea in 1854. Although she was rejected as too young, Rossetti’s aunt Eliza Polidori did join Nightingale’s nursing “sisterhood”. In Rossetti’s poetry of the 1850s, then, we see her own eagerness to find a vocation, but more significantly, perhaps, she reflects her culture’s general anxiety about the “redundancy” of unmarried Victorian women; it is a surplus which creates not only the unrewarded single woman, who “famished died for love”, but also the prostituted woman, who “shamed herself in love” (“A Triad” 1: 11, 9).

Before discussing the complexities of High Anglican theology and the impact of feminized social work, however, I would like to turn my attention to Pre-Raphaelite art and its influence on Rossetti’s poetics of social reform. While her eagerness to find a Christian vocation may have been rooted in her commitment to the parish community and heightened by the example of her Aunt Eliza in the Crimea, it seems likely that she found a focus for her reform interests in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood’s intent examination of the “Magdalen” in both their visual and literary works. *The Hireling Shepherd* (1851) and *The Awakening Conscience* (1853) by William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais’s *The Bridge of Sighs* (1858), and George Frederick Watts’s *Found Drowned* (1848–50) were all concerned with transgressive female sexuality and its “inevitably” tragic end. Indeed, as I discussed in some detail in Chapter 4, Victorian culture was particularly obsessed with the specter of transgressive female sexuality in these years, and we find representations of the prostitute in art, literature, and medico-moral publications. In the realm of social investigation, W. R. Greg published