A Queer Reading of *Goblin Market*

The social convention censors the transparency of queer community, but Christina Rossetti unapologetically takes advantage of the newfound sexual liberation in literature. In her poem *Goblin Market*, Rossetti explores homosexuality observed from the interaction between Laura and Lizzie and the experience of queer individuals in the society. The heterosexual norm, symbolized by the goblin market, is characterized by men assaulting, devaluing and commodifying women. In contrast, the queer relationships, represented by that of Laura and Lizzie, violate the heterosexual culture by featuring partnerships established on the basis of their gentle and genuine care for each other. Combating against the repressing social norms, *Goblin Market* endorses the peaceful queer relationships by accentuating how sexual identity cannot be confined to solely heterosexuality regardless of any coercion from the heterosexual culture.

Rossetti portrays Laura and Lizzie as one bound entity with intimate interactions to support the protective and tranquil aspects of queer culture, which violates the heterosexual standard. The goblin market depict the heterosexual norm that strictly defines a relationship between men with women, yet Laura and Lizzie’s partnership disregards this restraint. For instance, Lizzie covers her “blushes” (Rossetti 2) when she leans close to Laura, implying that they are more than sisters, as the romance between the two females surfaces when they are in proximity with each other. Furthermore, Rossetti writes, “Round their rest / Cheek to cheek and breast to breast / Lock’d together in one nest” (6) to exemplify the tender intimacy that they share as one unit. The repetitions of “cheek”, “breast”, and that of “two” (6) from “two pigeons”(6), “two blossoms”(6), “two flakes”(6) and “two wands”(6) depict two females, but ultimately that are “[l]ock’d together in one nest”(6), or bound as one existence. In addition, the rhyming words in this passage are purposefully selected to show how females find peace in their partners. “[R]est” (6) implies serenity; “nest”(6) symbolizes a safe harbor; “breast” (6) is a synecdoche, representing females. Collectively, “rest,” “breast” and “nest” create full rhymes that embody a female safe haven, where Laura and Lizzie belong as they are affectionately knitted together. Altogether, the rhyme engenders a romantic, sentimental sense enhancing the merit of homosexuality between the two females who shelter one another.

To critique heterosexual relationships and further endorse the queer counterpart, *Goblin Market* juxtaposes scenes where Laura consumes the juices from goblins and from Lizzie. In both scenes, Laura cries but for different reasons. When Laura consumes the fruits directly from the goblins, she cries because she is sacrificing her blonde hair, which epitomizes her virginity. Again, “pearl” (4) and “curl”(4) not only rhyme, but also emphasizes the magnitude of her loss, of losing something as precious as “pearl” (4). In fact, the tears are Laura’s reluctance and regret that characterize the exchange between her and the goblins, denoting the sexual intercourse between male and female. This scene illustrates how commonly in the heterosexual culture, females are coerced to lose their essential possession, their virginity, to the males. At the goblin’s market, Laura “suck’d and suck’d and suck’d” (4) the juices, portraying the aggressive lust and purely physical aspect of the heterosexual culture. For Laura, the loss is even more critical as she is pressured to act against her sexual orientation, resulting in senescence and diminishing health. However, when Laura drinks the juices from Lizzie, she sheds tears due to appreciation and attainment of sexual liberty. This time, the tears she drops “[r]efresh[e]d her shrunken eyes” (14), showing how invigorating licking the juices on Lizzie is to Laura. Rather than giving up part of herself, Laura regains her well-being and even innocence this time (15). The diction selected to describe the intimacy between Laura and Lizzie is differentiated from that of the scene directly involving the goblins. When Laura drinks juices from Lizzie’s body, as opposed to the violent consumption in which Laura “suck’d”(4) on goblin’s fruits, Laura “kiss’d and kiss’d and kiss’d”(14) Lizzie, portraying how the queer intimacy is gentle and incorporated with emotions.
Essentially, the two scenes contrast the sex and the overall relationships of heterosexual and of queer communities. The diverging significances of tears, diction, and outcomes of the two consumption events highlight how *Goblin Market* condemns the heterosexual relationship and laud the queer equivalent.

Finally, *Goblin Market* underscores that even with force, the heterosexual majority cannot change the identities of the queer community, as seen in how Lizzie resolutely fights against the goblins. The iniquitous goblins attempt to thrust the fruits into Lizzie’s mouth through multiple means, depicted by the alliterations employed in the actions: “[c]uff’d and caught”(12), “[b]ullied” and “besought” (12), and “[m]aul’d” and “mocked” (12). The alliterations in these pairs of verbs serve to highlight the goblins’ deplorable assault on Lizzie and intensify how frightening the goblins are to Lizzie. In addition, when the goblins try to shove the fruits inside Lizzie’s mouth, Lizzie “laugh’d in heart” (12) because the “juice that syrpp’d all her face”(12), or the juice that inadvertently spilled on Lizzie, saves Laura regardless. Simultaneously, this scene reflects how queer community mocks the rest of the society for futilely coercing them to convert their sexual identities to the heterosexual standards. Rather, the community only becomes more persistent in safeguarding their sexual orientations, as Lizzie does for herself and for Laura. Moreover, as opposed to simply buying the fruits, Lizzie confronts the goblins and endures the pain to acquire the juice. Her action embodies how the queer community may have to take detour, but are adamant on attaining their sexual liberty and freedom of oppression from the heterosexual majority. In a sense, the juice splashed on Lizzie serves as her victory trophy for receiving the antidote for Laura and successfully securing her identity as a homosexual individual.
Works Cited