

Tianna Tatum-Fisher

ENGL 333

Dr. Buchholtz

17 November 2018

**The Lesbian Savior: Redeeming Female Queerness Based on Christina Rossetti's,  
"The Goblin Market"**

It is without a doubt that "Goblin Market" should not ever appear on the shelves of the children's literature section despite its whimsical narrative. Its writer, Christina Rossetti, is not a known lesbian nor a queer writer, but her most famous work has indeed left readers puzzled. She has even been nicknamed, the "Queer Virgin" because of her focus on characters and their way of life, particularly viewed from a homosocial space and interaction. As the "Goblin Market" is focused on two sisters, presumed virgins, without age nor parental guidance, queer criticism has identified the allusions to female same-sex desire. The Victorian Era gave rise to the Age of the New Woman and later to the birth of Feminism therefore making women's sexuality a powerful force to focus on, acknowledge, and uncover, particularly within literature presumed to be heteronormative.

Tyson's third edition, "Critical Theory Today" has noted that lesbian, gay, and queer criticism has been shown through same-sex doubles, "same-sex characters who look alike, act alike, or have parallel experiences" (324). Even if the "Goblin Market" was never meant to be a comment on female sexuality the concept of sisterhood left Rossetti's writing in question. The famous line spoken by Lizzie in the final attempt to revive her sister Laura remains the biggest commentary on a homosocial act bordering on lesbianism, "Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices". Even more so as previously mentioned these sisters have no age nor parental acknowledgement in the story leaving their *sisterhood* to be a reference to the famous "Boston marriage", a term

used in the “late-nineteenth century to refer to a monogamous relationship of long standing between two single women who lived together. Although it’s impossible to know of any sexual relations, it is clear that the women involved shared a strong emotional tie and focused their time, attention, and energy on each other” (Tyson 303). The mentioning of them as “sisters”, even though not stated as related interprets in queer criticism to mean, in hiding.

In this story the goblin merchant men and their animalistic characteristics can be a snide remark to heteronormativity and how Rossetti or women in general view men: animals who sweet talk women with their gentle voices to be theirs with no promises of marriage after their fruit, code for their penises, has been touched, tasted, or in simple used which plays more in favor for the men. The addiction that Laura gets from consuming the fruits and her shunning by the goblins when she can no longer have anymore could represent the classic virgin and whore trope. The mentioned character Jeanie, who died from withdrawals of the fruit, can be a stand in representation of how in Victorian times an unwed or unmarriageable (non-virgin) lady often died alone. Women shunned or hurt by men has often led them, in fiction and in reality, to becoming suicidal, spinsters living alone with cats, or lesbians.

Throughout literature fruit has always alluded to sexuality. The goblin fruits are mostly depicted as small and round, berries and melons, symbolic of the female clit and breasts. None of them have phallic symbolism, except the apple (the first fruit mentioned). In regards to queerness the goblins, themselves can be a stand in for lesbians. The goblins are described as specific animals, but those with female symbolism: the cat (the spinster), the snail (fertility), and the wombat (a noted caregiver, but underappreciated). The negative description is the rat, an animal most associated with disease as such queerness (gay and lesbianism) has always been associated with mental disorder. Their features gives them the façade of corruption, removing

them as persons (lesbians) and turning them into things. As such the most common stereotype that lesbians are viewed as is the Butch, the masculine woman who takes on more male attributes, particularly the working man (instead of the non-working lady) which can be why the goblins are written as *merchant men*. Therefore if this is the case the goblins as lesbians and their forbidden fruit (tits and clits) are temptation to the villagers (the women). They desire to turn the women into lesbians which is why Lizzie warned Laura against speaking to them and accepting their fruits. Aforementioned the first fruit mentioned was the apple, most symbolic with the male because of its religious symbolism of Adam accepting the Forbidden Fruit in the Garden of Eden. In this story the apple along with its other companions are representative of sin.

Even if the “Goblin Market” cannot be found along the shelves of known queer literature Christina Rossetti, the Lesbian Savior did indeed write a tale of how to express and hide sexuality. Her fiction depicts the possibility of maneuvering around societal norms as well as expressing the hurt from either repressing one’s sexuality and/or accepting human curiosity about desire.