

Queer theory focuses on the topics of gender, sexuality, and identity. This theory suggests the readers come into the artifact with a heteropatriarchal view; meaning the patriarchy is biased in favor of traditional gender roles and in favor of heterosexuality. When this theory is applied to Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, a reader may immediately pick up on the overt sexuality within the poem, as well as the dominance of the female presence. Through the depiction of gender roles and an ambiguous relationship between two women, the reader must confront their assumptions.

Typically in the binary of male and female, the male is the favored of the two, according to the patriarchy. The *Goblin Market* contradicts this binary. The female characters, Lizzie and Laura, are the main characters and are favored by the narrator, as well as the readers. This can be seen through how the goblin men are depicted. The narrator states,

“One had a cat’s face,
One whisk’d a tail,
One tramp’d at a rat’s pace,
One crawl’d like a snail,
One like a wombat prowl’d obtuse and furry,
One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry.”

The goblin men are animalistic, which could be alluded to the devil, who himself was described as a serpent. In addition, the goblin men call, “Come buy, come buy.” The devil is known as the tempter. The goblin men tempt the women to buy their fruit. Although Laura does buy a fruit and eat from it, once again the patriarchy is contradicted. The patriarchy suggests if a woman encounters a problem, a man will come to her rescue. In the poem, Lizzie comes to Laura’s rescue. Lizzie states,

“For your sake I have braved the glen
And had to do with goblin merchant men.”

She saves Laura's life through love. An unquestionable sisterly love. Or is it?

In the poem, the two main characters have an ambiguous relationship. One may question this because the poem mentions that Lizzie and Laura are sisters. This is mentioned after Laura has eaten the fruit from the goblin men. Lizzie warns her of a friend who had died from eating the fruit but Laura retorts with, "hush, my sister: I ate and ate my fill, Yet my mouth waters still; To-morrow night I will Buy more;" and kiss'd her..." In this exchange, there is physical contact as well. A kiss. One may not question a sisterly kiss, yet earlier there was mention of prolonged intimate actions. The narrator shares, "Evening by evening...Crouching close together...With clasping arms and cautioning lips, With tingling cheeks and finger tips." Tingling cheeks and fingertips suggest a sexual connotation. The ambiguity of their relationship continues when Lizzie comes back from seeing the goblin men to save Laura's life. She cries,

"Come and kiss me.
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
Squeez'd from goblin fruits for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
Eat me, drink me, love me;
Laura, make much of me..."

In this instance, the relationship between Lizzie and Laura is overtly sexual. The poem explores sexuality outside of heteronormativity. This instance defies the heteropatriarchal view of sexuality.

When reading the *Goblin Market* through Queer criticism, the poem makes no attempt to disguise the opposition to assumed gender norms or sexuality. The female characters and their relationship is the priority throughout the poem. Though there is ambiguity about the label of the

relationship of the women, it is made clear that the love between the women is enough to save them. There is no need for the male hero or heterosexual love to be present.