

UCLA

Departmental Honors Theses

Title

Queer Desire as Restoration: The Rejection of Phallic Exchange in Christina Rossetti's
"Goblin Market"

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3x15p833>

Author

Sukonik, Jolie

Publication Date

2022-12-01

Undergraduate

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

QUEER DESIRE AS RESTORATION: THE REJECTION OF PHALLIC EXCHANGE IN
CHRISTINA ROSSETTI'S "GOBLIN MARKET"

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

BY

JOLIE SUKONIK

ADVISOR: HELEN DEUTSCH

LOS ANGELES, CA

DECEMBER 2022

ABSTRACT

QUEER DESIRE AS RESTORATION: THE REJECTION OF PHALLIC EXCHANGE IN
CHRISTINA ROSSETTI'S "GOBLIN MARKET"

BY: JOLIE SUKONIK

This thesis interrogates Christina Rossetti's 19th century poem "Goblin Market" through both an eco-feminist and queer lens by emphasizing that women's kinship to nature and intimate proximity to each other offer restoration and autonomy in the presence of violent, hegemonic, patriarchal systems. Current scholarship attends to these ideas but does not necessarily suggest that the queer acts of Lizzie and Laura fuel their rejection of the harmful economies of the goblin market. However, I argue that Lizzie and Laura's sensual relationship to both the natural world and each other generates enough energy to liberate their bodies from posing as transgressive economies for the goblin men. This argument is articulated in three parts. First, I argue that fruit operates as a euphemism to reveal how the goblin men pose a unique threat to the women's corporeality by inducing sexual, bodily harm through their heterosexual, male desire. Second, I position the circadian tempos of the natural world against the disorientation caused by the artificiality of the market space as expressed through Lizzie's interaction with the goblin men. Finally, I look to the embryonic glimpses of queerness in Laura and Lizzie's relationship, as well as the destruction of phallic imagery, to argue for queer acts as a restorative force against a violent and heterosexual bodily economy. These three core tenets are regulated by temporal markers that condition Rossetti's poetics, ultimately revealing that as women experience the cyclical rhythms of communing with nature, they escape the threat of male inscription within harmful hegemonic systems.

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by thanking my advisor, Professor Helen Deutsch, for showing me that in pursuing the literature we are most passionate about we inevitably discover sacred understandings about ourselves and the world. Without her endless patience, support, and guidance throughout this research and writing process, this thesis would not have made legible the arguments I feel must be articulated. Her wisdom taught me that hard work is worth pursuing, especially when it is about the literature we cannot stop ourselves from discussing, the literature that follows us into the everyday.

This thesis would have not been possible without the ongoing support of current PhD candidate Shannon Forest, who I consider an invaluable mentor and regard as the first person to introduce me to the liberative power of critical theory. Shannon introduced me to critical readings of “Goblin Market” as my TA in a sophomore year English class, which transformed my relationship to literature and allowed me to form the framework of the argument articulated in this thesis. I am indebted to her continued encouragement which urges me to both listen to the instincts I have about literature and defend my arguments when they push against existing scholarship.

I must also thank my peers who constantly inspire me to challenge my understanding of literary texts and the world. It has been an honor to learn from students in the English department through our compelling discussions, but I am most grateful for the moments of discomfort that all of our dissonant opinions generate which have helped me shape the relationship I have to both myself and to literature.

I am incredibly grateful for my close friends, Lexi and Sara, for their never ending support throughout my undergraduate career, and whose intellect has elevated both myself and my work to levels I had not thought possible. Beyond their many encouraging words and kind gestures, they never fail to inspire me with their creativity and academic insight which pushes me to become a better thinker, person, and friend.

I must also thank my family who provides me with the freedom to pursue what I love. To my mother, father, and brother, I am incredibly grateful that you uplift my intellectual pursuits as a token of your appreciation for the dedication I have to my work. Thank you for seeing the same drive that I feel deeply within myself, and for championing the power of literature through your never ending support of my academic journey.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
The Poetics of the Marketplace.....	10
The Liberative Power of Ecofeminist Frameworks: Lizzie and Laura Take Communion with Nature.....	25
Queer Acts as Restoration and Bodily Salvation: Repurposing “Goblin Pulp” and “Goblin Dew” into a Reviving Elixir.....	33
Closing Thoughts.....	47
Works Cited.....	49

Introduction

Christina Rossetti's 19th century poem "Goblin Market" creates an evocative world of desire and violence that allows for an interrogation of the female body's relationship to nature, violent hegemonic systems, and time. Rossetti's poetic work enlists the corporeal and the natural, articulating the oscillatory performances of the biological body and natural world through the rhythmic drives of language and poetic pacing. That Rossetti's poem forces readers into this subset of systems level thinking is just one example of our need to constantly negotiate—and renegotiate—the relationship of the body to the system it finds itself in, whether it be the body's mortal subjection to artificial structures—the goblin men's marketplace—or its rejection of extraneous and disruptive external forces—the goblin men's alluring cries. "Goblin Market" exhibits bodily desire, assault, and anxiety which condition the various forms of narrative pacing as the plot unfolds, and the poem lends itself to an energetic aspect that reveals the interactions that set the plot into motion, as well as what can be revealed when the plot is at rest. The marketplace is one area where we can locate high concentrations of energy in the poem, where the locus of control remains in the rhythmic repetition of the goblin men's cries of "Come buy, come buy."¹ The temporal drives of the marketplace assume a circadian rhythm that disrupts the natural passage of time, where the goblin men's cries of "Come buy our orchard fruits / Come buy, come buy"², become a repetitive driving force in the narrative.

The extensive listing of fruit coupled with the goblin men's cries create an entropic environment where, initially, the men are the ones producing the action and the women observe from a distance. The formal elements of this reveal how the goblin men are oppressive forces

¹ Christina Georgina Rossetti, "Goblin Market," in *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1893), 4.

² Rossetti, 3-4.

against women and nature through their manipulation of natural fruits for profit and commodification of the female body. As fruit is moved from the natural world into the marketplace, the demand to commodify goods becomes more legible. The goblin men's cries function to lure sisters Lizzie and Laura into the market so that their bodies might pose as transgressive economies from which the men can extract value and pleasure. I argue that the marketplace is driven by male, heterosexual desire and dispossess women of their relationship to nature. Upon entering the goblin market, Lizzie cuts a lock of her hair as a form of currency since she lacks traditional coins. This is the first explicit instance of the commodification of the female body and also alludes to men's desire to conquer nature rather than form communion with it. Although implicit, I argue that the description of her consumption of the fruit suggests that she is forced to perform oral sex on the goblin men. When exiting the market, Laura experiences a disorientation to nature, not sure of the time of day, when previously she had risen and rested alongside the day's circadian cycles. Therefore, we can posit how nature positions itself against artificial systems as something restorative and peaceful, while the marketplace disrupts the ability to predict the rhythms of mundane life.

Lizzie and Laura's communion with nature becomes the force of resistance against the market and the goblin's cries. In the natural world, women are able to perform daily tasks that engage with nature in a respectful and restorative way. When removed from the market, they rise with the sun, milk cows, bake bread, observe flowers in bloom, and rest peacefully beneath the moon and stars. This thesis relies heavily on eco-feminist scholarship which argues for women's intimacy with nature as a spiritual allegory and source of power against threats of male inscription within violent patriarchal systems:

Ecofeminism often perceives a male-dominated capitalist society as defining ‘liberty as social noninterference in the autonomous individual’s free pursuit of personal gain...in contexts characterized by environmental degradation [and] overconsumption,’ whereas ‘ecofeminism restores a self-in-relationship to human and nonhuman others’ (Gaard 259, 258)³.

Lizzie and Laura’s collaboration with nature offers them liberation from violent artificial structures. Moreso, they are able to restore their corporeality and health through their kinship with nature. When participating in the goblin market without “coin,” they are inherently refusing to perform as capitalist consumers and, therefore, are able to free the fruit of its commodity status.

The violent tendencies of the heteronormative goblin market are articulated through the goblin men’s desire for male conquest over nature and female bodies. Their concern for the fruit’s ripeness carries a reproductive implication that relies on male heterosexual desire. The ripeness of the fruit, described in close textual proximity to Lizzie and Laura as well as the “Maids” suggests that “‘women...share a material commitment to the survival of the planet through the children they bear’ that mirrors nature’s design to offer humanity a future (Madsen 125).”⁴ The reliance on this “material commitment” is reflective of the desire to create surplus capital within the goblin market. Reproduction has two concepts, as articulated by Aren Z. Aizura, the first being “biological reproduction: relating to human bodies’ capacities to menstruate, produce sperm or ova, and gestate” and the second being “social reproduction: how

³ Kathleen Anderson and Hannah Thullbery, "Ecofeminism in Christina Rossetti’s ‘Goblin market’", in *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 126, no. 1 (2014), 71.

⁴ Anderson and Thullbery, 76.

we care for and maintain the bodies, minds, and capacities of ourselves and others”⁵. In regards to these definitions we can ask why Lizzie and Laura’s intimate relationship poses a threat to the goblin men’s market. Historically, “the power of the modern state has been less concerned with sovereignty over things (land and wealth) and more concerned with maximizing the productive power of populations, the human body and reproduction.”⁶ Lizzie and Laura’s queer acts reject this tendency and make it impossible for the goblin men to inscribe the women’s bodies as transgressive economies Hegemonic structures that operate under the guise of heteronormativity do not have to argue their position of power, whereas queerness makes you aware of your own precarity vis-a-vis the family, the state, the labor economy etc.

If we consider that the goblin men are concerned with the first definition of reproduction through the conquering of women’s bodies in their capitalist market, then the women essentially *queer* the marketspace: “To queer...reproductive labor means unshackling reproductive capacities from heteronormativity and gender normativity.”⁷ The relationship between Lizzie and Laura—as well as their relationship to nature—positions them within the second definition of reproduction as they create alternative care networks for each other and establish mutually beneficial regenerative and self propagating relationships with nature.

The anxiety to enter male-driven markets is a tradition traced throughout 19th century literature. In “tracing an undisclosed intersection between female bodily and verbal emissions” Rossetti is speaking to a larger tradition “that has linked female expressions in ‘Goblin Market’ to female literary production in a male-dominated marketplace, where Laura and Lizzie struggle

⁵ Aren Z. Aizura, “Reproduction,” in *Keywords for Gender and Sexuality Studies*, ed. The Keywords Feminist Editorial Collective, (NYU Press: 2021), 188.

⁶ Bryan S. Turner, “Virtue and the Body: The Debate Over Nature and Nurture” in *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory*, (2008), 4.

⁷ Aizura, 192.

to find their own voice alongside what Catherine Maxwell terms the ‘male texts’ (goblin fruits) of a male-dominated poetic tradition (the titular goblin market)⁸. In Lizzie and Laura’s dialogue with each other, it appears that they are able to establish their voice over the cries of the goblin men. Moreover, my argument that fruit juice poses as a euphemism for male ejaculate is reflective of Victorian texts and saw a proliferation of literature about this theme during Rossetti’s time. The use of fruit as a proxy for the manipulation of women’s bodies allows the goblin men to use the product to “conceal their inner relations [and]...social realities”⁹. The poem’s “preoccupation with symbolic fluid speaks to very real mid-century anxieties about female physiological and poetic expression entering economic marketplaces” (Gilbert, Disease, 26).¹⁰ The marketplace’s fear of female infiltration reflects the idea that its status as a male-created, insular, hegemonic system is reliant on its ability for men to subjugate women. This can be traced “from the mid-century anxieties of the wet nurse’s expressions of diseased breastmilk, to the denunciation of female sex workers as contaminating the body politic with their diseased secretions, all the way to the disparaging construction of popular female authors as prostitutes who offer expressions of ‘moral contagion’ to their ravenous readers (Gilbert, Disease, 26).”¹¹ All of these actions that women perform are linked to natural entities and pose threat to male-driven artificial economies that can be unraveled if the reiterative practices of female subjugation are disrupted.

⁸ Anna E. MacDonald, “Edible Women and Milk Markets: The Linguistic and Lactational Exchanges of ‘Goblin Market’,” in *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 11, no. 3 (2015), 2.

⁹ Jordana Rosenberg and Amy Villarejo, “Introduction” in *Queerness, Norms, Utopia*, (Duke University Press: 2012), 12.

¹⁰ MacDonald.

¹¹ MacDonald.

The intimacy between Lizzie and Laura produces an energy that resists the forces of the goblin men's cries. Although their chants are a constant force in the poem and are uniform in nature, they can be anticipated as a generator of violence. As their verbal emissions create an increasingly entropic environment, the women can predict bodily violence that are indicative of capitalist drives. The intimacy between the women is a restorative force and offers a repairing of bodily trauma experienced in the marketplace. We are given glimpses into their queer desire when the women lie together which suggests a restoration that is found in intimate female-female relationships and argues for the power of queer desire. This argument becomes more explicit once the women engage in queer acts, such as when Laura licks and sucks the goblin juices off Lizzie's body and repurposes it into a reviving elixir. These oscillatory moments between restorative rest and violent high energy states are the places in which I've located the power of queerness and its arguments for networks outside the capitalist marketplace. As the women Lizzie and Laura transport their bodies from natural open spaces to constricting places of commodified exchange, the text interrogates how the body is regulated within different economies and is ultimately liberated when in communion with nature.

The Poetics of the Marketplace

This chapter begins with an interrogation of the goblin men's repetitive chants as an indicator of a violent marketplace, where the repetition of the poetics solicits bodily rhythms that are dissonant to the peace found in regulated cycles of nature. The goblin men's alluring cries of "Come buy, come buy" appear periodically throughout the poem, not only soliciting the consumption of their goods but also expressing the desire for women to position their bodies within their marketplace as collateral. The first lines of the poem immediately yolk together the urgency of capital, the natural passing of time, and heterosexual male desire. The active cry of the goblins positions itself against the passive observations of women on the outskirts of the marketplace:

Morning and evening

Maids heard the goblins cry:

'Come buy our orchard fruits,

Come buy, come buy'¹²

The goblin men's desires for consumer participation in their fruit market is articulated through the active "cry" while the "Maid's" assume a more detached and observational role with the passive "heard". Although initially opaque, the opposition of active and passive action in this stanza foreshadows the later violence that takes place against women within the market by the goblin men. The poetic tradition of the romantic lyric is helpful in interrogating how gendered power relations can be conveyed through language. Although Rossetti's poem is not explicitly employing romantic lyrics, looking to this tradition is helpful in understanding how poetics can help negotiate social themes. In her article "Syllables of Velvet," Margaret Homans discusses

¹² Rossetti, 1-4.

women's poetic works and how "The Petrarchan love lyric, and its nineteenth-century successor, the lyric of romantic desire, are a part of that cultural history that constructs speaking subjectivity as masculine and equates femininity with silence and with the object of desire."¹³ The goblin men are performing the action in this stanza while the Maids observe from a distance. More, the incentive of their cry is for women to enter the market system, and as Homans suggests, "the romantic lyric depends on an implicit plot, the plot of masculine, heterosexual desire"¹⁴. The goblin men's "implicit" desire for the consumption of women's bodies is rendered through their cries. The desire expressed is not only for their fruit-goods to be purchased, but also for the women to enter the market system and therefore, make their bodies and minds susceptible to its power.

The romantic lyric's implicit plot of male, heterosexual desire also tied to the growing power of capitalism in the 19th century. German philosopher Theodor Adorno argues that the "ascendancy of the romantic lyric in the nineteenth century reflects the bourgeois ideology of individualism that accompanies the increasing privatization of life under capitalism"¹⁵ which reflects how enmeshed the goblin men's marketplace is with the trajectories of male conquest that both heterosexual desire and capitalism demand. Their rhythmic and repetitive cry of "Come buy, come buy" that reappears throughout the poem is a type of consumerist language that veils the underlying desire to consume female bodies. The cry becomes the impetus for bodily violence and assault: "The structure of capitalism can be described as the "set of social relations—forms of property, and so forth—in which production takes the form of turning money,

¹³ Margaret Homans, "'Syllables of Velvet': Dickinson, Rossetti, and the Rhetorics of Sexuality," in *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 3 (1985), 569-70.

¹⁴ Homans, 570.

¹⁵ Homans, 570.

things, and people into capital.”¹⁶ Here, the women’s bodies and the fruit—two entities of the natural world—are turned into commodity goods in order to increase in the goblin men’s capital. The goblin men rely on the reiterative practices of subjugation that commodified goods perform in order to ensure their place of security and power within patriarchal, hegemonic systems.

The intervals at which the women experience the goblin cry is gauged with temporal markers. Immediately, we are conditioned by the temporal experiences that punctuate the women’s days as “Morning and evening / Maids heard the goblins cry”. The women’s daily experiences become entangled within the cyclical rhythms of the goblin men’s cries. These temporal markers soon reveal the more “carpe diem” and capitalist tradition of the marketplace as the first stanza continues. Just a few lines later, we are thrust into summertime when fruit grows “All ripe together / In summer weather.”¹⁷ Since the fruit is “ripe” we are not only cued into the importance of seasons as one set of temporal markers for the poem, but also how the fruit’s ripeness signals the urgency of consumerism and market participation. As the poem lists its commodity fruits, the market positions a microscopic lens on their ripeness window which becomes the entity to which the capitalist marketplace attaches itself:

Apples and quinces,
 Lemons and oranges,
 Plump unpecked cherries—
 Melons and raspberries,
 Bloom-down-cheeked peaches,
 Sweet headed mulberries,

¹⁶ Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex”, in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter, (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 161.

¹⁷ Rossetti, 15-16.

Wild free-born cranberries,
 Crab-apples, dewberries,
 Pine-apples, blackberries,
 Apricots, strawberries—¹⁸

The fruit's temporary value signals and suggests the "carpe diem" tradition of capitalism that ensures personal success and celebratory levels of self-worth are products of acquiring time-sensitive products with urgency. The "carpe diem" tradition can be traced within the poetic genre, such as the 16th century poem by Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress,"¹⁹ and so it can be argued that Rossetti is linking her poem very explicitly to capital. The sense of urgency that the goblin men's cries elicit reproduces the scarcity mindset on which capitalism relies, evoking feelings of urgency that demand fruit must be purchased now or the women risk losing the immediate value of goods that results in the goblin men's accruing of capital.

Nature inherently assigns temporary value to fruit within cyclical times of growth, ripeness, harvest, and death. However, the goblin market ignores the natural order of crops' lifespan, and specifically focuses on extraction and the small window of *ripeness*. Among the list of fruits are "Plump unpecked cherries"²⁰ which not only signals us to consider the urgency and limited availability of their ripeness, but also suggests the "Maids" virginity and purity which foreshadows Lizzie's symbolic rape by the goblin men within the market. Kathleen Anderson and Hannah Thullbery's ecofeminist reading of Rossetti's poem cites the link between women

¹⁸ Rossetti, 5-14.

¹⁹ See Andrew Marvell's poem "To His Coy Mistress," which is regarded as the poem most emblematic of the "carpe diem" tradition in English literature.

²⁰ Rossetti, 7.

and nature, and they suggest that “The young women in adolescence parallel the fruits in the vibrancy of their energy and the potential represented by their physical maturation.”²¹ The link between women and nature becomes increasingly evident as does the notion that the goblin men aren’t only seeking the consumption of fruit. We can interrogate their desire to consume bodies as “The goblin men see the young women’s potential only in sexual terms, just as they view the fruits only as ‘full and fine,’ ‘Plump unpeck’d’ consumables (ll. 21, 7) to be altered as they choose”²². The female body inherits the harvestable and untouched nature of the fruit and is therefore an entity that the goblin men want to cultivate.

The cultivation, harvest, and alteration of fruit by the goblin men reveals man’s desire to manipulate natural elements for profit. The “Wild free-born cranberries” have been ripped from the ground and displaced from a place of homeostasis to become a product for the goblin men to sell as an incentive to lure women into their market. It appears that anything free-born poses a threat to the integrity of the goblin men’s market and subverts their position in patriarchy. The women and fruit existing on the outskirts of hegemony as things both “Wild [and] free-born” means they can escape the goblin men’s reiterative practices of subjugation that maintain their positions of power. Anderson and Thullbery, most importantly, cite women’s relationship with nature as the place of restorative power against the harmful goblin men and their market. When Lizzie and Laura are formally introduced in the following stanza, the implications of the hegemonic systems become a site of interrogation:

Evening by evening

Among the brookside rushes,

Laura bowed her head to hear,

²¹ Anderson and Thullbery, 76-77.

²² Anderson and Thullbery, 77.

Lizzie veiled her blushes²³

Since Lizzie and Laura are brought forth within this framework, they are implicated within the sway of the market as “Evening by evening” they actively refuse its temptations. We are not formally introduced to them—barring their implied collective membership in the opening stanza’s “Maids”—until the market’s cycle is established. This appears to prime their bodies to serve as transgressive economies for the goblin men, however it allows us to interrogate the female body as a site of male inscription within the hegemonic structures of patriarchal power isolated within the text. This is also the first time their proximity to one another becomes legible, and we are given glimpses into an intimacy that seems embryonically queer. The “bow[ing]” of Laura’s head could feign submission to the goblin men’s cries or could alternatively create closer bodily proximity to Lizzie: “Instead of merely wares to be bought and sold, nature and women bond in the marketplace—shifting their objectification and restoring their distinctive identity and value by means of their interdependency.”²⁴ This alternative and more feminist reading is reinforced by Lizzie’s “blushes” and subverts the power relation between the goblin men and the women and challenges the idea that their bodies exist solely in the pursuit of heterosexual male desire.

To argue that Lizzie and Laura function merely as objects of desire for male consumption would be reductive, harmful, and would overlook the power of their intimate relationship. Ecofeminist theory has provided a liberative framework for Lizzie and Laura in this poem as women find communion with nature to create a mutually restorative relationship. In nature, the women are safe and “lay down, in their curtained bed”²⁵ while the marketplace proves to be

²³ Rossetti, 32-35.

²⁴ Anderson and Thullbery, 66.

²⁵ Rossetti, 187.

where we can locate sites of violence. This is first apparent in the lengthy list of commodity fruits that have been extracted from nature and adulterated by the goblins for profit. The ways in which Lizzie and Laura interact with cyclical time offers a refusal of the marketplace, which becomes more direct once they enter the market system: ““Laura and Lizzie live in a bubble of natural, cyclical time, seemingly cut off from any outside world.”²⁶ In this stanza the women are positioned against the goblin men as entities not yet cultivated by man, and the men continue their cries in attempts to lure women into the market and, ultimately, manipulate their natural bodies. When Laura explicitly states “We must not look at goblin men / We must not buy their fruits,”²⁷ she exercises caution that extends beyond the idea of fruit itself. She is performing a direct refusal of their attempts to render her and Lizzie consumers and participants within the market. Although Lizzie and Laura are seemingly safe among the “Maids” in nature, Laura’s verbal refusal “demonstrates how women’s relationships, even within female communities, are triangulated in relation to men”²⁸ and, might I add, are always under the threat of male inscription and subjugation.

Beyond the women’s direct verbal refusal of the market, the poetics of Lizzie and Laura’s dialogue offers a resistance to the goblin men’s cries. Rounjunaee Chatterjee’s article “Precarious Lives: *Christina Rossetti and the Form of Likeness*” posits “how feminine singularity—or a form of femininity that refuses consolidation under capitalism’s tenets—takes shape in a proximate

²⁶ Victoria Coulson, “Redemption and Representation in Goblin Market: Christina Rossetti and the Salvific Signifier,” in *Victorian Poetry* 55, no. 4 (2017): 428; citing Jennifer McClure’s article, “Rehearsing Social Justice: Temporal Ghettos and the Poetic Way Out in *Goblin Market* and *The Song of the Shirt*,” *VP* 53, no. 2 (2015): 156.

²⁷ Rossetti, 42-43.

²⁸ Ronjaunee Chatterjee, “Precarious Lives: *Christina Rossetti and the Form of Likeness*,” in *Feminine Singularity: The Politics of Subjectivity in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, (Stanford University Press, 2022), 92.

literary tradition to that of the English lyric.”²⁹ The individual lyric resists the goblin men’s unanimous collective “shrill repeated cry”³⁰ and therefore, pushes against the threat of “consolidation”. Their verbal exchanges generate an energy that thrives outside of the goblin market and locates power in their ability to commune with nature through activities like “fetch[ing] in honey, [and] milk[ing] the cows.”³¹ Chatterjee asks “what do poetics offer in the way of dismantling recognizable modes of organizing subjectivity—in this case, the violence (both psychic and bodily) or individuation—and replacing them with others?”³² In addition to Chatterjee’s articulation of the individual lyric as a rejection of the consolidating capitalist forces revealed through the goblin men’s unanimity, I would argue that the rhythmic drives and invocation of cyclical time as articulated through the poetic form are tools that can dismantle female subjugation. By breaking through the goblin men’s cries with the individual lyric, Laura engages in linguistic dissent through her wariness of the goblin men’s harm[ful] offers³³ and “evil charms.”³⁴ When Lizzie and Laura engage in dialogue between each other, they are producing what Chatterjee refers to as “likeness” but *not* “sameness”. In sharing similarities through sisterhood and their communion with nature, the women are able to overcome limited views of female communities on the outskirts of patriarchal hegemonic structures.

²⁹ Chatterjee, 91.

³⁰ Rossetti, 89.

³¹ Rossetti, 203.

³² Chatterjee, 95.

³³ Rossetti, 65.

³⁴ Rossetti, 66.

The discussion thus far has operated within the scope of Lizzie and Laura outside of the market, where heterosexual male desire is more implicit and the threat of a violent goblin market isn't entirely legible. Once "Curious Laura, chose to Linger"³⁵—and soon enter—the market after "Wondering at each merchant man"³⁶, we can trace the shift where the goblin men's desire for bodily consumption is written into legibility. Anderson and Thullbery's ecofeminist framework links the "social realities"³⁷ of the Victorian political economy in relation to women's bodies and quote 19th century academic and social critic, Elizabeth Helsinger, who "views this 'transgressive poem' as exploring 'a specifically female experience of Victorian political economy' characterized by women's conflicting roles, 'always at risk as objects to be purchased, yet also implicated as agents of consumption' (904)."³⁸ The natural, human urge for Lizzie and Laura to want to indulge in the fruit does not suggest they want to participate in the harmful market, especially as they come to the understanding that they will inevitably put their bodies at risk by the market's implicit drive of heterosexual male desire.

Laura is put at risk of consumption once she decides to look at the goblin men who pique her curiosity enough to lure her into the market. Whereas Lizzie "cover'd up her eyes"³⁹ as the goblins traveled "down the glen"⁴⁰, Laura "rear'd her glossy head"⁴¹ and encouraged her sister to

³⁵ Rossetti, 69.

³⁶ Rossetti, 70.

³⁷ See footnote 19.

³⁸ Anderson and Thullbery, 66.

³⁹ Rossetti, 50.

⁴⁰ Rossetti, 55.

⁴¹ Rossetti, 34.

look. Lizzie's aversion to the market is immediately legible through her bodily response as "She thrust a dimpled finger / In each ear, shut eyes and ran."⁴² Lizzie's self-induced response of sensory deprivation is opposite to her sister's curiosity and reflects a fear of having her body become infiltrated by an all-consuming force. However, "Despite their differing approaches to the goblin men (Lizzie plugs her ears to their cries, while Laura goes to meet them), here Lizzie and Laura are framed by the poem as commensurable; they are yoked by the rhythm of this stanza and the rhetorical logic of simile."⁴³ Simile connects the two women's bodies which is different from the metaphors that inscribe the goblin men's descriptions. Since the women do not have to bridge the gap of metaphor, they remain connected through their likeness which shields them from the inherent difference of the goblin men's fraternity. This acute difference becomes very prevalent in the third chapter as metaphor is explored within the descriptions of Lizzie's symbolic rape as well as the destruction of phallic imagery.

Laura's warning to shield her and her sister from the goblin men is not only an attempt at preventing her sister from entering the market, but also foreshadows the idea that the exchange happening within the goblin market is both corporeal and commodifiable. Thus, the goblin market allows for the interrogation of how women's bodies serve as transgressive economies in phallogocentric markets and become the axis on which capitalist exchange occurs, arbitrary value is placed, and natural products are extracted. However, Laura is ultimately influenced by the chants of "Come buy" which, when heard audibly, double as an invitation to "come by." When Laura is lured closer to the market she faces a barrier upon entry as she does not possess the traditional

⁴² Rossetti, 67-68.

⁴³ Chatterjee, 116.

type of currency—coins—to acquire fruit in the market because “Like many women of her time, Laura has no liquid assets.”⁴⁴ She explains to the goblin men

‘Good folk, I have no coin;
To take were to purloin:
I have no copper in my purse,
I have no silver either’⁴⁵

With “no coin”, Laura is forced into a currency substitution, and this act of exchange becomes the first instance in which the goblin market’s violent nature becomes legible. She “Long’d but had no money”⁴⁶ but in place of coins, “the goblins appraise her ‘golden curl[s]’ (line 125). Clipping a ‘precious’ (line 125) lock of hair from her head, she pays a symbolic price, a representative, physical exchange for the value of fruit and gold”⁴⁷. This is the first instance in which the body is explicitly commodified and seen as a source of extractable value for the goblin men. It can be argued that Rossetti is engaging with a larger literary tradition of women’s hair being cut as a symbolic signifier of women’s bodies posing as transgressive economies or political wagers, specifically as “A literary descendent of Alexander Pope’s *Belinda*⁴⁸ and other women whose sexuality is seized through a curl of hair, Laura trades a lock that ultimately surrenders her body.”⁴⁹ The goblin men’s desire to take Laura’s hair generates the threat of male

⁴⁴ Jill Rappoport, “The Price of Redemption in ‘Goblin Market,’ in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 50, no. 4, (2010), 854.

⁴⁵ Rossetti, 116-19.

⁴⁶ Rossetti, 106.

⁴⁷ Rappoport, 854.

⁴⁸ See Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*.

⁴⁹ Rappoport, 854.

inscription, and this exchange becomes the site in which the goblin men and market's violent behaviors are established. Laura's decision to enter the market and engage with the men puts her at risk of male inscription, but ultimately, her desire to consume their fruits is a testament of her relationship with nature. Laura, "unable to avoid the temptation of her natural inclination towards communing with nature, 'clip[s] a precious golden lock' (l. 126), in the process 'becom[ing] both the buyer and the bought, the agent and the object of exchange' Helsinger 922)."⁵⁰ Although she enters into a system that threatens and commodifies her body, she maintains her connection with nature, the place in which she and her sister derive their power, which will be expanded upon in Chapter 2.

When Laura uses her hair as entry to the market and currency to eat the fruits the transaction not only renders her both "'the agent and the object of exchange'", but also represents "the perils of female consumerism by becoming the very object consumed."⁵¹ The distinction between *exchange* and *consumption* is an important one because the values of the commodities exchanged are not equivalent: "Laura's 'gold' (line 123), a mere token of the nineteenth-century English gold standard, lacks the metal's intrinsic value. Too late she learns that the goblins will not be satisfied with this gesture; they want the real thing, the material object backing Laura's currency."⁵² The goblins obtaining Laura's hair renders her body a transgressive economy from which they can extract energy and power which "invites us to understand the goblins' specification of a lock of hair as an acceptable form of currency in terms

⁵⁰ Anderson and Thullbery, 75.

⁵¹ Rappoport, 853.

⁵² Rappoport, 854.

of a *strategy* to secure her compliance with their real goal, that of getting her to eat,⁵³ and to engage with their goods. When Laura finally eats the goblin's fruit the description is highly suggestive and I argue that it carries implications of oral sex as consistent with the demand of her body as payment for entry into the market. When she is consuming the fruit, it is described that she "suck'd their fruit globes fair or red."⁵⁴ Although not explicit, this detail evokes imagery that Laura is performing forced oral sex on the goblin men as "She suck'd until her lips were sore,"⁵⁵ a reading that is supported by future interactions in the poem. These sexual implications foreshadow Lizzie's suggested rape later in the poem and are also reinforced by the destruction of phallic imagery that takes place towards the end of Rossetti's work. Since sexual imagery reappears through the interactions between the women and the goblin men, I argue that the pattern begins here, with Laura's initial consumption of the fruit. As Laura takes in the goblin men's product, "She suck'd and suck'd and suck'd the more"⁵⁶ until she experienced "sore[ness]" instead of delight, joy, or satisfaction that would be expected from fruit, especially after she "stared" and "long'd"⁵⁷ for it. Instead, bodily discomfort is the result of the fruit consumption. The action is also repetitive and seemingly compulsive which is reduplicated by the rhythmic drives of the poetics. The uncomfortable and compulsive nature of the fruit consumption subjugates Laura as the consumer and renders the goblin men controlling of both her body and the products.

⁵³ Coulson, 426.

⁵⁴ Rossetti, 128.

⁵⁵ Rossetti, 136.

⁵⁶ Rossetti, 134.

⁵⁷ Rossetti, 105, 106.

As Laura consumes the fruit, the description of the taste interrogates the unspoken processes of extraction and manipulation of nature. The implications of “Sweeter than honey from the rock” and “Clearer than water flow’d that juice”⁵⁸ are such that the goblin men have taken fruit from its natural state and adulterated it for their benefit, ultimately positioning it in a violent economy for profit. This allows the goblin men’s ownership of the fruit to conceal the overarching threat of male inscription they pose on Laura and Lizzie’s bodies. Through the ownership and repurposing of natural fruit and bodies within an economic system, we are able to posit the tenets of heteronormativity and reproduction that are reduplicated within the goblin market. By stripping Laura of her hair as a method of entry into the market, it becomes visible that this system is the place in which women lose absolute power over her body and therefore, we can “locate the oppression of women in the heart of capitalist dynamic...to place women squarely in the definition of capitalism, the process in which capital is produced by the extraction of surplus value from labor by capital.”⁵⁹ The goblin men extract energy and power from Laura through their assault which ultimately disrupts her orientation with nature and brings her to the brink of death.

When Laura finishes the fruit and “flung the emptied rinds away,”⁶⁰ she returns home with a ruptured orientation to nature. As she approaches Lizzie and distances herself from the market, she “knew not was it night or day,”⁶¹ whereas before she entered the market, there were

⁵⁸ Rossetti, 129, 131.

⁵⁹ Rubin, 160.

⁶⁰ Rossetti, 137.

⁶¹ Rossetti, 139.

clear cyclical tempos of nature. With “Morns that pass by”⁶² and “Fair eves that fly,”⁶³ the natural world outside the marketplace is regulated and its behaviors can be anticipated. Laura’s disorientation to the natural world after exiting the marketplace establishes it as a disruptor of women’s kinship to nature and also reinforces the suggestion that violent sexual acts were forcibly performed and that the behavior of both the market and its controllers are unpredictable. The chaotic influence of the marketplace is immediate in the poetic space and also permeates the rather mundane aspects of natural life, puncturing both the start and end of the day’s cycle and disrupting those who enter the system. When the natural world and the marketplace as systems are positioned against one another, the artificial begins to shadow into the natural and both women and nature enter into a state of flux. The marketplace therefore becomes “the paradigm of the shared abuse suffered by women and nature at the hands of the mercantile goblin men”⁶⁴ which will be more thoroughly explored in the following section.

⁶² Rossetti, 18.

⁶³ Rossetti, 19.

⁶⁴ Anderson and Thullbery, 66.

The Liberative Power of Ecofeminist Frameworks: Lizzie and Laura Take Communion with Nature

The natural world outside of the goblin market is a place where we can locate flourishing and peaceful interactions, where “Maids” wander and Lizzie and Laura lie comfortably together. The locus of control remains in the hands of women and their relationship with nature. It appears that the marketplace, as an artificial and harmful structure, stands in opposition to the natural world: “The goblins strive to sever the spiritual connection between the women and nature, not only by abusing Lizzie and Laura, but by abusing nature through its physical manifestation—the fruit”⁶⁵. It is proposed that men—in this instance goblin men—“From an ecofeminist perspective...sever their spiritual tie to nature from a sense of entitlement ‘to ‘use’ the natural world in any way ‘he’ sees fit’ (Christ 314).”⁶⁶ The goblin men’s tendency to manipulate the natural world reflects their desire to build artificial systems and rely on arbitrary economies rather than recognize the power that lies in the world already at their disposal.

When Laura returns, Lizzie reminds both us and her sister of Janie, someone mentioned in the opening stanzas of the poem but not returned to until after Laura experiences the market herself. Previously a mystery, Janie is now revealed as someone who the goblin market has brought harm, who “Took their [the goblin’s] gifts”, “dwindled and grew gray”, and now “lies low”⁶⁷ in a grave. As another person who has been harmed in the market, the goblin men’s malicious intentions against women become more visible, and their effects prove to be detrimental. Laura expresses a desire to consume the fruit again, but it can be argued that this

⁶⁵ Anderson and Thullbery, 73.

⁶⁶ Anderson and Thullbery, 73.

⁶⁷ Rossetti, 149, 156, 159.

craving is independent of the idea that the goblin men are the harvesters, adulterers, and vendors of the fruit. She explains to Lizzie:

‘I ate and ate and ate my fill,
 Yet my mouth waters still;
 To-morrow night I will
 Buy more’⁶⁸

Although she emphasizes the quantity eaten with the repetitive “ate”, it appears to reflect the compulsive, repetitive, and uncomfortable “suck’d” that appears in the prior stanza. Instead, “The poem implies that it is natural to crave fruit and to consume it, but that women should receive it directly from the tree or each other, not from men, who contaminate what would otherwise be beneficial.”⁶⁹ Therefore, it is reinforced that women’s kinship with nature is a core tenet of their homeostatic state and protective force against male inscription.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Lizzie and Laura use their intimacy with each other to subvert the threat of male inscription from the goblin men. The intimate acts of care being performed between Lizzie and Laura when they are physically removed from the goblin market are such that they are “Crouching close together / In the cooling weather”⁷⁰ in refusal of the goblin men’s cries which reiterates the restorative practices that can be performed outside of hegemonic systems. However, their kinship with nature emerges as equally important. As the air “cool[s]” both the natural world and the women’s bodies are able to experience a state of rest, much different than the rhythmic repetition that drives the chaos of the goblin market. Lizzie and

⁶⁸ Rossetti, 165-68.

⁶⁹ Anderson and Thullbery, 71.

⁷⁰ Rossetti, 36-37.

Laura's introduction at the beginning of the second stanza is in close textual proximity to the goblin cry of "Come buy, come buy"⁷¹ that concludes the first stanza, which locates Lizzie and Laura adjacent to the cyclical nature of the marketplace although not directly within it. The language suggests a type of intimacy that can be generated between women outside of the marketplace in the beginning of the poem. This intimacy appears again once Laura exits the market and returns home to Lizzie as "They lay down in their curtain'd bed" "Folded in each other's wings."⁷² In their bed, the place that suggests the highest degree of intimacy, the women are described with language of the nature that surrounds them as "Moon and stars gaz'd in at them / Wind sang to them lullaby."⁷³ Nothing is disrupting them and they are able to experience rest and uninterrupted, restorative intimacy outside the marketplace.

As discussed previously, Laura experiences a disorientation to nature after leaving the goblin market. When she returns to Lizzie, the natural cycles of time *initially* appear to be restored as the women perform their daily tasks. They rise "Early in the morning"⁷⁴ and therefore seem to be reconfigured within the circadian rhythms that are articulated in the poem's opening stanza. Once the women are reset within these natural temporal markers, they go about their days in which they "Fetch'd in honey, milk'd the cows"⁷⁵ and "churn'd butter, whipp'd up cream"⁷⁶. Their daily tasks require them to engage and reconvene with nature, which seems to restore the

⁷¹ Rossetti, 31.

⁷² Rossetti, 187, 186.

⁷³ Rossetti, 192-3.

⁷⁴ Rossetti, 199.

⁷⁵ Rossetti, 203.

⁷⁶ Rossetti, 207.

natural order of rhythm, time, and mood in the poem. While the women “Talk’d as modest maidens should”⁷⁷ as they go about their tasks, the opposition of nature to the market is made clear yet again within their conversations. However, as the sisters engage in dialogue, “Lizzie [talks] with an open heart / Laura in an absent dream”⁷⁸ which initiates a shift in Laura’s relationship to nature. Lizzie’s openness appears to be a result of remaining in her natural setting, but Laura’s description provides an even more explicit link to the market’s disruptive and harmful actions. Laura appears to have lost part of herself in the market and is detached from both her reality and corporeality when trying to reintegrate into nature. As her body was commodified and repurposed for the goblin men’s profit—whether monetary or a surplus of sexual satisfaction—Laura is dispossessed of her ability to fully involve herself in her present life.

The description of the fruit’s ripeness in the first chapter that is argued to reflect the women’s virginity can also be reconfigured to demonstrate their kinship with nature where “sexuality and fertility are also portrayed as signifying the kinship between nature and women, whose combined forces defeat patriarchal domination.”⁷⁹ Both the women and the fruit possess an inherent autonomy that is disrupted once the goblin men remove them from their natural setting: “Like the fruit before it is manipulated or man-handled, healthy young women reflect a compelling beauty that can be depicted only in natural terms.”⁸⁰ They are “Like two blossoms on one stem [and] Like two flakes of new fall’n snow.”⁸¹ The novelty of the snow suggests the

⁷⁷ Rossetti, 209.

⁷⁸ Rossetti, 210-11.

⁷⁹ Anderson and Thullbery, 64.

⁸⁰ Anderson and Thullbery, 66.

⁸¹ Rossetti, 188-89.

refreshing rebirth and restoration that the women experience when they are together. When coupled with language derived from the natural world, the poetics of this description are able to perform the strong kinship the women share with nature, which is where they derive their power. In their natural setting, Lizzie and Laura are able to perform agency on the outskirts of hegemony through their ability to rest peacefully with one another, and perform their daily tasks that require them to interact with natural resources in a respectful and restorative way.

The locus of control is centered within the women existing in the natural world away from the goblin market because their ontological reality is not reconfigured for the satisfaction of goblin men or the ensurement of their production output. The abuse Lizzie and Laura experience is a result of the transition from nature into the goblin market. As the goblin men perpetuate violent behaviors in the market, their participation “reflects men’s impulse to conquer rather than commune with both women and nature—their assumed products to buy and sell.”⁸² The prioritization to “conquer” over “commune” stands in stark opposition to the women’s peaceful coexistence with nature and is ultimately what sends Laura into a deteriorative physical state. The goblin “men’s *impulse* to conquer”⁸³ is vocalized through their “iterated jingle / Of sugar-baited words”⁸⁴ where the iterations reflect a habitual, repetitive, and compulsory cry. It appears that Rossetti is describing this act as part of their nature, where their existence is made solely for the operation of the market and conquering of its participants. With their words described as “sugar-baited”, Rossetti is cuing us into the goblin men’s harmful intentions that are veiled beneath the fruit products they sell. The commodification of natural entities—both fruit and

⁸² Anderson and Thullbery, 64.

⁸³ Anderson and Thullbery 64; (emphasis added).

⁸⁴ Rossetti, 233-34.

bodies—through the repetitive “Come buy, come buy”⁸⁵ frames the intention of the goblin’s attempts to commodify, exploit, and repurpose elements of nature within their artificial systems.

The restorative and mutually respectful dynamic that Lizzie and Laura experience with nature “allows women to share an ‘otherness’ with nature that men cannot understand or emulate because of their ongoing attempt at ‘emancipation from’ it (Mack-Canty 156).”⁸⁶ The goblin men never leave the market and it appears that their position of power relies on their reiterative practices of subjugating nature and liberating themselves from it. This leads me to question how the goblin men would function in Lizzie and Laura’s world, and if a different natural order would emerge. In the marketplace, “The goblins’ salesmanship aims to divide the women from their connection with nature by employing the pretentious language of ownership: ‘Come buy *our* orchard fruits’ and “*Our* grapes fresh from the vine’ (ll. 3, 20; emphasis added).”⁸⁷ The goblin men rely on this sense of ownership and righteousness to maintain control because without a kinship to natural forces, they must continuously overcome the natural world in order to function in patriarchy. The fruit is inevitably adulterated by the goblin men, “Yet whereas nature lacks a choice, Laura allows herself to be bought and participates in her self-sale in order to be reunited with the fruit. While this gesture suggests a self-betrayal for which she pays with a nearly mortal illness, it also manifests a deep-rooted underlying kinship between herself and the earth whose bounty she craves.”⁸⁸ Although Laura’s involvement in the goblin market induces a life-threatening illness, it is brought about by an undeniable urge to cultivate the relationships in

⁸⁵ Rossetti, 3-4.

⁸⁶ Anderson and Thullbery, 73.

⁸⁷ Anderson and Thullbery, 74.

⁸⁸ Anderson and Thullbery, 75.

which she feels most fulfilled. When Laura's deteriorating physical state is enough impetus to drive Lizzie into the market with a full understanding of its consequences, she looks to the natural products as a remedy. However, "Lizzie feels no impulse to crush fruit or leaves or to deluge her sister with a superfluous abundance of water; she takes from nature only what Laura needs and works with its inherent nurturing qualities."⁸⁹ She understands the thresholds in which she can commune with nature that respects its boundaries while still ensuring that its healing properties can be taken as remedies.

Within their ecofeminist framework, Anderson and Thullbery write that "Historically, women's association with nature stems from an assumed inability to reason. Male thinkers as diverse as Cato, Swift, and Freud held that 'the work of civilisation' is 'men's business,' whereas women are a lower order of being whose assumed 'closeness to nature' has hardly been a compliment' (qtd. Plumwood 19)."⁹⁰ Male thinkers viewed nature as basic and simple as they involved themselves in the development of civilizations and the perpetuation of industrial economies. As women were excluded from these tasks, men equated them to their perspective of nature's simple and useless qualities. However, "this reductive view of women can be reinterpreted as recognition of the strength and vitality of the female soul"⁹¹ for their ability to recognize the complex powers of the natural world that we have at our disposal without the need to build artificial structures. Laura, as someone without money for her status as a woman in the 19th century, is able to reframe the commodification of fruit when she indulges in it: "Laura, without a coin to her name, arguably liberates the fruit from the commercial detachment of the

⁸⁹ Anderson and Thullbery, 75.

⁹⁰ Anderson and Thullbery, 71.

⁹¹ Anderson and Thullbery, 71.

goblins when she gives of herself to attain it and consumes it with relish.”⁹² In Rossetti’s placement of women in nature and relegation of men to the marketplace, she “not only explores women’s ‘unique and peculiarly risky’ relationship to ‘the Victorian marketplace’ (Helsing 904), but also depicts men’s related need to dominate, rather than cooperate with, nature”⁹³. When Lizzie and Laura enter the goblin market, “They do not imitate the men’s methods—competing with them in the misuse of nature for economic gain—but liberate nature from the goblins’ grasp—they are not ‘consumers’ in the conventional capitalist sense”⁹⁴. When the women consume fruit as an action of their *own* desire the juices are powerful and healing. It becomes evident that “The only time nature is poisonous against womankind is when the men make it so.”⁹⁵ Without economic motives, the women maintain a restorative relationship with nature. Their ability to recognize the natural world for the bounty it provides refutes the harmful idea of women’s inability to reason and instead, rather explicitly, indicates a certain logic that is able to elevate women as they look to the resources around them rather than gravitating towards a desire to create artificial and arbitrary structures. In the final chapter I reveal that Lizzie and Laura’s ability to commune with nature is ultimately the force of salvation in the poem as they repurpose the goblin men’s fruit into an elixir that revives Laura from her sexual and bodily malaise and restores her relationship to the natural world.

⁹² Anderson and Thullbery, 75.

⁹³ Anderson and Thullbery, 74.

⁹⁴ Anderson and Thullbery, 75.

⁹⁵ Anderson and Thullbery, 73.

Queer Acts as Restoration and Bodily Salvation: Repurposing “Goblin Pulp” and “Goblin Dew” into a Reviving Elixir

In this chapter, I explore how the text offers the possibility of Lizzie and Laura’s intimate relationship and mutual acts of care as resistance against the harmful goblin market. Their relationship presents glimpses of an intimacy that are embryonically queer which would suggest their relation as lovers rather than sisters and therefore, I argue for queerness as a restorative force for those under the threat of male inscription. In performing sensual acts that evoke queer desire, Lizzie and Laura are queering the structures that threaten to subjugate them under heterosexual desire and can ultimately experience liberation and a reestablished kinship with nature. Before revealing these links, however, we must first analyze the physiological consequences Laura experiences as a result of participating in the goblin market as well as Lizzie’s decision to enter the market in attempts to heal her sister. After Laura leaves the market and returns to nature, she awaits the goblin men’s cries “Day after day, night after night...keep[ing] watch in vain.”⁹⁶ Despite experiencing bodily harm and a ruptured relationship to nature, Laura remains held captive by the powers of the goblin men’s fruit and control, perhaps experiencing a harmful attachment to the market’s goods as “After she has tasted the goblins’ intoxicatingly delicious fruit but has discovered...that she cannot get it again, Laura ‘turned cold as stone’ and ‘kept watch in vain / In sullen silence of exceeding pain.’”⁹⁷ Now, instead of time passing within the context of nature’s daily cycles, Rossetti’s temporal markers are inscribed within a desire to reenter the goblin market, suggesting its permeable force that imprints on the body. Laura’s bodily condition deteriorates in this state of longing which reflects

⁹⁶ Rossetti, 269, 270.

⁹⁷ Homans, 586.

the harmful forces that have infiltrated her corporeality as she watches “While with sunk eyes and faded mouth.”⁹⁸

Much like the readers who have traced the rhythmic pattern of Rossetti’s poetics, Laura anticipates the only constant drive in the poem: the goblin cry “Come buy, come buy.” After being lured in by the continuous cry, Laura can no longer hear it. It appears as if the chant operates to target women as a singular threat, where the goblin men can induce harm and receive satisfaction in one interaction that doesn’t necessitate repeated customers but rather demands the novelty of women’s bodies. This is reinforced through the deceased character Janie who serves as a cautionary tale for women to enter the market. After meeting the goblin men in the moonlight and taking their gifts⁹⁹ she “She pined and pined away; / Sought them by night and day / Found them no more, but dwindled and grew gray.”¹⁰⁰ The incessant longing and craving of the market that Janie experiences deteriorates her body to an eventual death and foreshadows Laura’s illness. Laura is inscribed within the same patterns of longing, waiting day after day to experience the goblin cry. When she can no longer find it, she stands “In sullen silence of exceeding pain,”¹⁰¹ but the feelings of visceral absence that she experiences are not by choice but rather the uncontrollable desire to reinscribe herself within harmful male-dominated systems that condition women’s realities. Although Laura is consumed by thoughts of the fruit and feels it vital to maintaining her homeostatic state, she understands the detrimental effects of the market.

⁹⁸ Rossetti, 288.

⁹⁹ Rossetti, 148-49.

¹⁰⁰ Rossetti, 154-56.

¹⁰¹ Rossetti, 271.

She is conscious of its brutality and, despite being controlled by the goblin men's power, wants to protect her sister from the same fate.

When Laura realizes that Lizzie hears the cry that she can no longer find, "Laura turn'd cold as stone / To find her sister heard that cry alone."¹⁰² Not only is Laura in physical decline, but her relationship with nature is temporarily ruptured, "She no more... / Tended the fowls or cows"¹⁰³ as she did before. Her inability to commune with nature is linked to her bodily illness, reinforcing that women can derive power through their kinship with nature, and that when this connection is severed, women fall under the threat of the harmful economies perpetuated by artificial systems. In witnessing that her sister "Seem'd knocking at Death's door"¹⁰⁴ and had a strained relationship to nature, Lizzie "But put a silver penny in her purse."¹⁰⁵ She prepares her coin in attempts to gain entry to the goblin market and remedy her sister, and perhaps to escape her sister's fate of bodily commodification: "Whereas Laura's 'payment' with her golden curl had testified to her misrecognition of her encounter with the goblins as a standard commercial transaction, Lizzie's silver coin marks the terms of her resistance to what she perceives, correctly, as the goblins' *independence* of the contractual norms of the market."¹⁰⁶ Her decision to use coin "more clearly rejects the goblins' model of exchange...with the more conventional currency of a silver penny rather than a coerced curl."¹⁰⁷ However, the men reject her coin, and it

¹⁰² Rossetti, 253-54.

¹⁰³ Rossetti, 293-4.

¹⁰⁴ Rossetti, 321.

¹⁰⁵ Rossetti, 324.

¹⁰⁶ Coulson, 426-27.

¹⁰⁷ Anderson and Thullbery, 75.

becomes more explicit that the goblin men never wanted monetary payment but rather a currency more sexual and bodily. She attempts “mediate her relation to the sexuality it represents through a symbolic signifier, a silver penny¹⁰⁸ but is still reduced to her body revealing that the goblin men are only interested in the harmful and forced exchange of bodily payment.

Lizzie’s failed effort to use the coin in place of her hair, “to put figuration’s distance to her own use...may allegorize the woman poet’s perception of herself as having only a tenuous grasp on androcentric systems of representation—whether in the shape of economic power or of linguistic power.¹⁰⁹ However, the women seem to possess a rather firm grasp on these systems as expressed through Lizzie’s silence and understanding of how increasing proximity to the market is linked to more dangerous influence of the goblin men’s desires. Lizzie has to engage in a degree of “market research...to use coin instead, locating exchange value in a silver penny to safeguard her own body and restore Laura’s.”¹¹⁰ After witnessing the effects the market had on her sister, Lizzie calculates the cost of how much risk she needs to employ when saving her sister. As a result, “Lizzie distances herself from the marketplace even as she appears to participate in it, motivated to acquire the fruit for its healing properties in the benevolent effort to restore her sister’s tainted relationship with nature.”¹¹¹ She establishes these intentions of detachment and a refusal to participate before she enters the market, which ultimately primes her escape and ability to return home to Laura with the ability of reviving her from her deteriorating state.

¹⁰⁸ Homans, 587.

¹⁰⁹ Homans, 587-88.

¹¹⁰ Rappoport, 853.

¹¹¹ Anderson and Thullbery, 76.

Upon entering the goblin market, Lizzie performs her interactions while being “Mindful of Jeanie,”¹¹² aware of the harmful intentions of the goblin men and the threat it poses on her body and wellbeing. The men refuse her penny and instead invite her to feast with them as a “welcome guest”¹¹³ to which Lizzie replies ““Thank you... But one waits / At home alone for me.””¹¹⁴ Her rejection of the goblin men’s invitation is driven by her desire to return home to Laura. She has not entered the market to engage with the men or their products but rather, to obtain and repurpose the very commodity goods that poisoned her sister. In her attempts to subvert the power of the goblin men, the men’s demeanor transitions from one of “grinning”¹¹⁵ to that of evil looks.¹¹⁶ When the men realize that Lizzie does not want to entertain their desires, they assault her body as an expression of absolute power, conquest, and righteousness, as expressed through violent and symbolic imagery:

They trod and hustled her,
 Elbow’d and jostled her,
 Claw’d with their nails,
 Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,
 Tore her gown and soil’d her stocking,
 Twitch’d her hair out by the roots,
 Stamp’d upon her tender feet,

¹¹² Rossetti, 364.

¹¹³ Rossetti, 381.

¹¹⁴ Rossetti, 383-84.

¹¹⁵ Rossetti, 370.

¹¹⁶ Rossetti, 397.

Held her hands and squeez'd their fruits

Against her mouth to make her eat¹¹⁷

This very primal description of violence evokes the unrefined and violent nature of the goblin men. Instead of describing assault in one or two lines, the ongoing drive of the poetics and copious amount of detail evokes an acute and specific type of bodily harm. This violence is only performed by entities of the goblin's bodies and only targets aspects of the natural world: "Rather than selling Lizzie the fruit, whole and intact and according to her terms, they assault the fruit as they do her"¹¹⁸, reinforcing their desire to conquer rather than commune with nature. When the men "cram a mouthful in" and "laugh'd in heart to feel the drip / Of juice that syrrop'd all her face,"¹¹⁹ Rossetti's text evokes the instance of Lizzie's symbolic rape. In looking back to the argument I pose in Chapter 1 about the "red globes" that Laura was forced to "suck", I believe that the theme of sexual violence emerges more explicitly in Lizzie's scenario. It can be argue that the juice that "lodge[s] in dimples of her chin, / And streak[s] her neck"¹²⁰ continues in the tradition of fruit euphemism by posing as male ejaculate. This reading becomes the inflection point by which the women are healed when they reunite in nature to repurpose the fruit juice into a reviving elixir through acts of queer desire. As Laura licks the fruit juice off Lizzie's body and both women begin to heal, I argue for queer desire and queer acts as a restorative force against violent patriarchal and heterosexual systems.

¹¹⁷ Rossetti, 399-407.

¹¹⁸ Anderson and Thullbery, 73.

¹¹⁹ Rossetti, 432, 434-35.

¹²⁰ Rossetti, 435-36.

When the bodily violence ceases and Lizzie reemerges from this turbulent scene of assault, she is described as “White and golden...Like a lily in a flood,”¹²¹ still imbued with natural imagery and connected to the natural world despite being in an artificial system. Her physical description as dissolving into nature ensures that she still maintains a kinship with nature as a *result* of her refusal of the goblin men’s harmful methods of exchange. Lizzie does not verbally engage with the goblins after they violate her body and therefore, enforces another level of resistance against the market by not participating in verbal economies or exchanges. Although the goblins “Maul’d and mock’d her, / Lizzie utter’d not a word,”¹²² she remains silent “if she is to survive the goblins’ attempt to appropriate her body, and this silencing may be Rossetti’s paradigm for the fate of women who attempt to manipulate as subjects symbolic systems that depend upon women’s remaining in this position of the silent object of representation.”¹²³ However, Lizzie’s silence is a result of her understanding that she must not participate in the market in any way. Instead of engaging in exchange, “Lizzie saves: she saves her pennies, she saves herself, she saves her fruit juice, and at last she saves her sister. Lizzie saves but never spends, never consummates an exchange.”¹²⁴ Lizzie refuses to participate in the harmful capitalist market that forces her to put her body at risk and, “Put in Marxist terms, Lizzie refuses to succumb to commodity fetishization.”¹²⁵ This refusal is the power by which she is able to escape the market, heal her sister, and feel reconnected to her corporeality.

¹²¹ Rossetti, 408-409.

¹²² Rossetti, 429-30.

¹²³ Homans, 587-88.

¹²⁴ Pionke, 897.

¹²⁵ Pionke, 897.

After the assault, Lizzie is able to escape the market and run home to Laura. She is covered in the goblin men's juices but is not "prick'd by fear,"¹²⁶ rather solely driven by the desire to reunite with Laura. Since "the poem's representative female consumers succeed in maneuvering a male-controlled marketplace, their story 'becomes a fantasy of consumer power, where the empowered consumer is a woman and...triumph[s] over the market only to withdraw from it' (907)."¹²⁷ Lizzie's alleged "triumph" and immediate exiting of the market is a result of her motives of initially entering the system. She was not lured in by their cries but rather made the decision to enter after analyzing its effects on consumers—Laura and Janie—and is driven by the desire to save her sister. This is where we can locate the power of queer desire. As soon as she returns:

She cried 'Laura,' up the garden,
 'Did you miss me?
 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.'¹²⁸

This reunion evokes deeply sensual acts and also alludes to the juices as bodily fluids more than just fruit juices. It implicates nature as a resistant force against the goblin men's harm:

"Ironically, the very attempt at masculine control enables Lizzie to become nature's co-agent in

¹²⁶ Rossetti, 460.

¹²⁷ Quoted in Anderson and Thullbery, 66.

¹²⁸ Rossetti, 464-470.

Laura's healing. In refusing forcible addiction and saving the juice for her sister, Lizzie transmutes it back into its authentic form, as Laura discovers after consuming it."¹²⁹ The desire for Laura to "kiss" and "suck" the juices from Lizzie's face seems to be a queer act that will both revive Laura from her illness and also center Lizzie back into her body. Lizzie's cry, "'Eat me, drink me, love me'"¹³⁰ is perhaps the most evocative line that solicits a reading beyond their legible relationship as "sisters." To "eat" "drink" and "love" Lizzie's body is an act that pushes against the actions of the goblin men who "kick'd and knock'd her."¹³¹ For Lizzie and Laura to engage in each other's bodies in such a physical and sexual way posits that the lens of queer desire is the restorative force against the violent economies of the goblin market.

Why does the sensual relationship between Lizzie and Laura pose such a threat to the goblin market? As a system driven by heterosexual male desire and the impetus to conquest rather than commune with nature, there is a demand for phallic violence and (re)production. Through the lens of queer theory, as pushing against core tenets of heterosexuality, scholar Aren Z. Aizura argues for "Utopian or anticapitalist forms of mutual aid as reproductive labor,"¹³² to which I extrapolate that the mutual care that Lizzie and Laura practice for each other reproduces a restorative queer desire and a kinship with nature. As Laura "kiss'd and kiss'd her with a hungry mouth,"¹³³ she ingests the juices that syrup Lizzie's face which becomes the pivot point by which the fruit is transformed from an intoxicating poison to a reviving elixir. Immediately,

¹²⁹ Anderson and Thullbery, 78.

¹³⁰ Rossetti, 471.

¹³¹ Rossetti, 428.

¹³² Aizura, 193.

¹³³ Rossetti, 492.

“Tears once again / Refresh’d her shrunken eyes, / Dropping like rain / After long sultry drouth”¹³⁴ and Laura regains her vibrant corporeality. No transaction takes place here, and whereas heteronormative methods of exchange demand transaction, queer acts “point to forms of ‘conviviality’ and care that do not form through the exchange or transactional modes”¹³⁵ which point to a clear delineation between the women’s natural world and the goblin men’s marketplace. Moreover, Laura firmly regains descriptions that align with nature as her body parallels the revival of soil that an intense rain brings. As the women reunite with each other, they are also able to slowly regain their relationship to nature as evoked through the natural language in this stanza and thrive on the outskirts of hegemony.

The most powerful instance of queer acts as resistance against violent heteronormative systems occurs in the intense scene of revival that is rendered through the destruction of phallic imagery and also the suggestion of female orgasm:

Like the watch-tower of a town
 Which an earthquake shatters down,
 Like a lightning-stricken mast,
 Like a wind-uprooted tree
 Spun about,
 Like a foam-topp’d waterspout
 Cast down headlong in the sea,
 She fell at last;

¹³⁴ Rossetti, 487-90.

¹³⁵ See Park McArthur and Tina Zavitsanos (2013) for their work on queer and trans scholarship as quoted in Aizura’s, 193.

The “watch-tower”, “mast”, “tree” and, most explicitly, “foam-topp’d waterspout” are all erect structures that evoke images of the phallus. However, all of these metaphorical structures are being acted upon by destructive force which is a testament to the power queerness enacts against phallic structures. More specifically, it is the suggested result of the goblin men’s juice—or semen—being repurposed into a restorative liquid through queer acts. The totality of this imagery culminates in the “falling” of Laura which can be argued as a collapse into orgasm: “Laura’s totally unrestrained, orgiastic consumption of the ‘juices’ on her sister’s body is her restoration to life and health and...to desire.”¹³⁶ In concluding this scene with the potential for female pleasure, Rossetti’s text continues to suggest the restorative forces of queer desire that can act as a rejection of the harmful phallic economies of the goblin market.

Metaphor operates very legibly in this stanza but also maintains a strong importance throughout Rossetti’s poem. Beyond the phallic metaphors in this instance, “The fear and sublimation of female sexual desire and insistence upon the dangerous, if not fatal, effects of its indulgence emerges often—metaphorically, if not literally—in much of Rossetti’s poetry.”¹³⁷ Homans argues for the importance of metaphor and metonymy of the queer acts in this scene as related to a larger tradition of the poetic lyric demonstrated by Emily Dickinson’s works. Homans writes that “The lesbian sexuality suggested by this scene...thematically recalls Dickinson’s poem of lip sipping from lip,¹³⁸ and the metonymic structure of the pleasure here

¹³⁶ Mary Wilson Carpenter, “‘Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me’: The Consumable Female Body in Christina Rossetti’s ‘Goblin Market.’,” in *Victorian Poetry* 29, no. 4 (West Virginia University Press, 1991), 416.

¹³⁷ Anthony H. Harrison, “Christina Rossetti: Illness and Ideology Harrison,” in *Victorian Poetry* 45, no. 4 (West Virginia University Press: 2007): 416.

¹³⁸ See Emily Dickinson’s poem “All the letters I can write.”

recalls Dickinson's simultaneous rejection of the distances of metaphor and romantic desire"¹³⁹. The distance that metaphor generates is only present when discussing the goblin men's products, actions, or behaviors. When Lizzie and Laura are being described, "There is no distance at all to be crossed between these sisters, and metaphor does not enter into the description of their encounter, their contact."¹⁴⁰ They are also able to repurpose metaphor into a force that reconfigures the harm brought about by the goblin men. The same metaphor that figures fruit juice as ejaculate is also the metaphor that allows for the healing of their bodies: "When [Lizzie] arrives home, her imperative to her sister to 'Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices' puts in place a metonymic sexuality that privileges the proximity of two equally present bodies over the alienations of metaphor and romantic desire."¹⁴¹

The restoration of both Laura and Lizzie's bodies also parallels the healing and flourishing descriptions of nature. The "soul-consuming care!"¹⁴² that results from the reviving effects of the fruit juice's elixir-like properties is reflected in the natural world around them. Whereas Laura was previously in an "absent dream" after leaving the goblin market, now she "awoke as if from a dream"¹⁴³ which reaffirms the detachment she experienced from both her corporeality and reality after exiting the market. Here, she is able to reorient herself to nature through repairing the connection she had to Lizzie and her body before entering the goblin market and consuming its fruits. In an effort to continue repurposing the goblin men's harmful

¹³⁹ Homans, 587.

¹⁴⁰ Homans, 587.

¹⁴¹ Homans, 588.

¹⁴² Rossetti, 512.

¹⁴³ Rossetti, 537.

behaviors into restorative practices, the female body also inherits the fruit's qualities as both "regenerative and self propagating,"¹⁴⁴ taking on the most natural properties of the commodified good in its purest state. Alongside this regeneration, the circadian cycles of nature are restored to move through day and night while "new buds bloom" and "birds chirp about their eaves"¹⁴⁵. Nature, too, regenerates itself as something fruitful when the women are no longer dispossessed of their bodies, sexuality, or kinship with the natural world ultimately reinforcing the importance of the connection that Lizzie and Laura have to the homeostatic natural world.

At the end of the poem, the women become wives, although no other men are mentioned in the poem—besides the goblin men—so there is room to consider that perhaps they have wed each other. Through an ecofeminist lens, there is the possibility that

Because Lizzie retains and Laura regains health and vitality, both are able to reproduce and to transmit their acquired eco-moral vision to their offspring. Nature offers sustenance that, although initially perverted by the goblins and used against the women, eventually offers them a chance at healing and renewal. Such reproduction is mirrored in the bright outcome of the poem when Lizzie and Laura have 'children of their own' and, 'Their lives bound up in tender lives' (ll. 545, 547), have gone on to produce the next generation.¹⁴⁶

This is a more productive way to analyze the closing of the poem, to look towards the women's "eco-moral vision" rather than interrogating the formalities of their relationship. By positing a future in which Lizzie and Laura pass on their ability to commune with nature, whether through

¹⁴⁴Carpenter, 416.

¹⁴⁵ Rossetti, 535, 530.

¹⁴⁶ Anderson and Thullbery, 80.

offspring or not, we are able to uphold the liberative framework in which the women exist outside of the goblin market where they can rest peacefully and experience unrelenting desire in the natural world.

Closing Thoughts

The framework for this thesis emerged in my sophomore year when, upon discovering Rossetti's text, I was drawn to the embryonic glimpses of queer desire that operated within the text that serve as both a resistance to phallogocentric markets as well as a restorative force following bodily assault. I initially focused my literary scope on the queer acts and sensual desire that are evoked by Rossetti's text but throughout this thesis process, that lens has widened to consider a variety of other frameworks. This multi-year endeavor has offered me a multiplicity of understandings about myself and how I approach texts, and what to do with scholarship that complicates my understanding of literature.

Rossetti's "Goblin Market" allowed me to explore theoretical frameworks that offer the possibility of liberating texts from reductive and harmful criticism. Lizzie and Laura's intimate relationship with each other and kinship with nature is the driving force of Rossetti's poem. "Goblin Market" presents a world in which goblin men are relegated to the confinements of their marketplace, where they must manipulate and adulterate natural products from the earth as a demonstration of control and power. Within this artificial and hegemonic system, women are under the threat of male inscription but, ultimately, can resist subjugation through their eco-moral practices that acknowledge the natural world as a source of power and restoration. More importantly the queer desire that operates within the text acts as a restorative force against the violence that the goblin men enact on both Lizzie and Laura's bodies.

This research and writing process has allowed me to approach this poem in a way I felt was overlooked during my academic experience. In exploring the question, why do Lizzie and Laura's intimate relationship and queer acts of desire pose a threat to the goblin men and their market?, I have been able to interrogate the aspects of Rossetti's poem that always left me with

unrelenting curiosity. In pursuing this thesis, I have been able to continuously reconnect to this text in attempts to reveal what I find most important and compelling about Rossetti's work. I am indebted to this process for providing me the space to demonstrate my literary passions and, ultimately, serve as the culmination of my undergraduate career.

Works Cited

- Aizura, Aren Z. "Reproduction." In *Keywords for Gender and Sexuality Studies*, 188-193. Edited by The Keywords Feminist Editorial Collective. 2021.
- Anderson, Kathleen, and Hannah Thullbery. "Ecofeminism in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market.'" *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 126, no. 1 (2014): 63-87. <https://doi.org/10.1353/vct.2014.0012>.
- Carpenter, Mary Wilson. "'Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me': The Consumable Female Body in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market.'" In *Victorian Poetry* 29, no. 4, 415-34. West Virginia University Press, 1991.
- Chatterjee, Ronjaunee. "Precarious Lives: *Christina Rossetti and the Form of Likeness*." In *Feminine Singularity: The Politics and Subjectivity in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 90-123. Stanford University Press, 2022.
- Coulson, Victoria. "Redemption and Representation in Goblin Market: Christina Rossetti and the Salvific Signifier." In *Victorian Poetry* 55, no. 4, 423-50. 2017.
- Homans, Margaret. "'Syllables of Velvet': Dickinson, Rossetti, and the Rhetorics of Sexuality." In *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 3, 569-93. 1985.
- MacDonald, Anna E. "Edible Women and Milk Markets: The Linguistic and Lactational Exchanges of 'Goblin Market.'" *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 11, no. 3. 2015.
- Pionke, Albert D. "The Spiritual Economy of 'Goblin Market'." *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 52, no. 4, 897-915. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.
- Rosenberg, Jordana, and Amy Villarejo. "Introduction: Queerness, Norms, Utopia." In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18, no. 1, 1-18. Duke University Press, 2012.
- Rappoport, Jill. "The Price of Redemption in 'Goblin Market.'" In *Studies in English Literature*,

1500 - 1900 50, no. 4, 853–75. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Rossetti, Christina Georgina. “Goblin Market.” Poem. In *Goblin Market and Other Poems*.

1893.

Rubin, Gayle. “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex.” In *Toward an*

Anthropology of Women, 157-210. Edited by Rayna R. Reiter. New York and London:

Monthly Review Press, 1975.

Turner, Bryan S. “Virtue and the Body: The Debate Over Nature and Nurture.” In *The Body and*

Society: Explorations in Social Theory, 1-16. 2008.