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Mary Werner

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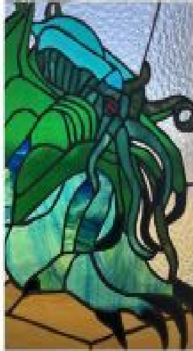

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Abstract

Presents *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as a rethinking of "Goblin Market," with its themes of punishment for certain types of sexual pleasure.

Additional Keywords

Food in literature; Goblins in literature; Lewis, C.S.—Characters—Edmund Pevensie; Lewis, C.S.—Characters—Jadis; Lewis, C.S. The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe; Rosetti, Christina—Characters—Laura; Rosetti, Christina—Characters—Lizzie; Rosetti, Christina. "Goblin Market"; Sex in literature

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Forbidden Foods and Guilty Pleasures
in Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* and Christina Rosetti's "Goblin Market"

Mary Werner

> Greed into herself would turn
> All that's sweet: but let her follow
> Still that path, and greed will learn
> How the whole world is hers to swallow.
> —C.S. Lewis, "Deadly Sins."

Since its publication in 1862, Christina Rossetti's masterpiece, "Goblin Market," has been the subject of intense scholarly debate. Written ostensibly as a work for children, this poem contains some peculiarly adult themes, such as Christian redemption, free market economy, and most overtly, sexuality. In trying to determine what Rossetti meant to portray in "Goblin Market," many critics have examined events in her life to ascertain whether the poem has any autobiographical significance.[1] That the poem was dedicated to her older sister, Maria Francesca, renders an autobiographical interpretation even more plausible. Maria, who eventually became an Anglican nun, was a constant source of inspiration and adoration for Rossetti, who reportedly considered herself "chargeable with some sort of spiritual backsliding" (qtd. in Packer 150). It is easy to read Laura, the "fallen" sister in "Goblin Market" as a representation of Christina Rossetti, and Lizzie, the steadfast and virtuous sister, as Maria. Almost a century later, Clive Staples Lewis published a novel, also intended for children, that bears a marked similarity to Rossetti's poem. While *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* has not received the considerable critical interpretation "Goblin Market" has, scholars nonetheless have discovered deeper adult levels of meaning in Lewis's text. The most obvious of these is the Christian symbolism, which Lewis clearly intended, but there exists also a sexual level, which he may not have been consciously aware of, and which ma! have been born out of events in his own life. An examination of the two texts in terms of their content, their origins, and the background of the authors, reveals that *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* appears to be Lewis's retelling of Rossetti's fairy tale.

In his early letters to his "first friend" Arthur Greeves, Lewis mentions "Goblin Market" several times. In the spring of 1916, he refers twice to an illustration of a "faery scene" from the poem (*They Stand Together* 101,113). Although he mentions being "attracted" by the picture, he says that the edition [of poems] is "not worth [getting] unless somebody presented it to you" (113). Later, however, he mentions that he is glad Arthur bought Christina Rossetti's poems because he wants to read them (115). A few days later, he is "longing" to see them (121), and later he recommends "some of the other Rossetti's pieces" (127). Whether he is referring to poetry by Christina, Dante Gabriel, or even William Michael Rossetti, is unclear, but the frequency with which the Rossetti name appears in these early letters leaves little doubt that Lewis eventually read "Goblin Market." When he did read the poem, he could not have failed to be struck by the strong Christian elements in the poem, as well as the fantastic animal-like goblins. As a child, Lewis had been fond of Beatrix Potter's creations, and even invented a magical world called Animal-Land. The terrifying whimsy of Rossetti's goblin men may have provided later inspiration for some of the evil characters in Lewis's Narnia Chronicles.

"Goblin Market" itself may have as its genesis the "career context" (Marsh 238). According to Jan Marsh, early in 1859, shortly before Rossetti wrote her masterpiece, she offered her services at the Mary Magdalen Home for "fallen women." The home was established for the rehabilitation of youthful prostitutes, and it is possible that Rossetti wrote "Goblin Market" for a similar purpose (Marsh 239). Perhaps the most significant event at the home was a tour by the Warden, at the end of which, she told the tale of three girls who stole apples and subsequently experienced intense remorse, even loss of appetite because they had tasted the "forbidden fruit." Marsh believes that if the poem were not written specifically *for* the girls at the home, it was at least written with them in mind, "prompted by the prospect or challenge of working there" (244). Thus, the strong moral tone of "Goblin Market," with its implicit warnings about wanton sexuality, seem appropriate coming from a philanthropic woman interested in the redemption of lost girls. The theme of salvation would, no doubt, have interested Lewis when he read the poem.

Like Rossetti, Lewis seems to have struggled with the impulses to be a good Christian coupled with a fascination for the fantastic and the arcane. Both writers seem also to have had an ambivalent attitude about sexuality — not only fearing its free expression, but also being unable to quell completely the desires they felt. Rossetti never married; she rejected two offers, and remained single, living with her family most of her life. Lewis married rather late in life, and then to a woman who was terminally ill. While this evidence alone does not prove a fear of sex, it, combined with excerpts from each author's writing, strongly suggest that sexuality was a difficult issue for both Rossetti and Lewis.

For Rossetti, exercising restraint and caution in sexual relations would have been natural and expected. In an era

characterized by at least the outward pretense of prudery, and in which the Queen had raged against the exploitation of women by "insatiable husbands" (qtd. in Crow 41), Rossetti's attitude is fairly unremarkable. What makes her views interesting is the conflict between her Christian ideals, her longing to be like her saintly sister, her desire to help the "fallen," prostitutes, and her obvious fascination with the prurient as evidenced by "Goblin Market'. The poem abounds with images of rape, oral sex, incest, and lesbianism; in fact, in 1973, *Playboy* magazine reprinted the poem (complete with modern lewd depictions), calling it "the all-time hard-core pornography classic for tiny tots" (115). Indeed, the poem is characterized by some remarkably suggestive incidents. "Goblin Market" opens with the virginal maids, Laura and Lizzie, hearing the goblins' cry of temptation, "Come buy our orchard fruits" (3). When describing the fruit, Rossetti uses sensual language, such as "figs to fill your mouth" (28), suggesting fellatio. Both sisters have "tingling cheeks and finger tips" (39), indicating that they are excited at the prospect. Ironically, Laura first warns Lizzie not to look at the goblins because "Who knows upon what soil they fed / Their hungry thirsty roots?" (44--45). The obvious phallicism of the word "root," along with the insatiable qualities of hunger and thirst point to an initial fear of male sexuality. Since the sisters do not know where the roots have been before, they do not want to risk disease. The goblins are also suspicious because they are half man, half beast, and they are described as "queer" and "sly" (95, 97).

Despite her initial reservation, Laura succumbs to temptation and trades a "golden curl" (125) for some goblin fruit.[2] Then, in an orgy -- of gluttony, Laura "Sucked their fruit globes fair or red . . . / She sucked and sucked and sucked the more / Fruits which that unknown orchard bore; / She sucked until her lips were sore . . ." (128, 134--136). Alas, she is unsatisfied by her experience. Then she returns to Lizzie, she laments, "I ate and ate my fill, / Yet my mouth waters still (165--166). In *The Erotic World of Faery*, Maureen Duffy posits that Laura's experience with the goblins represents masturbation, since she is ultimately unsatisfied afterwards (290). When Laura learns that she can never again hear the goblin cry, she begins to languish. She "gnashed her teeth for balked desire, and wept / As if her heart would break" (267--268). She becomes thin and gray, and she refuses to eat or tend the house. According to Duffy, Laura's condition resembles that of the habitual masturbator (290). In the nineteenth century it was commonly believed that masturbation could result in dementia and even death, and thus people, especially women, were often discouraged from auto eroticism.

As further "punishment" for her act, Laura's attempt to grow more fruit with the kernel stone she saved from her first feast is a failure. The seed's refusal to germinate represents barrenness, another possible consequence of illicit sexual acts. Fearing these same results, but motivated by love for her sister, Lizzie decides in desperation to act. She is further frightened by her memory of Jeanie, another girl who ate goblin fruit and died. Lizzie "thought of Jeanie in her grave, / Who should have been a bride; / But who for joys brides hope to have / Fell sick and died" (312--315). Because Jeanie had the bride's "joys" before she was married, she paid with her life. Keeping these hazards in mind, Lizzie seeks out the goblins and resists their caresses and kisses' and their invitation to "Bob at our cherries, / Bite at our peaches," (354-355). She pays for the fruit. but when she tries to leave with it, they cease in their seduction attempts, and instead resort to a sadistic oral rape. They assault her and shove the fruit against her face, but "Lizzie uttered not a word; / would not open lip from lip / Lest they should cram a mouthful in" (430--432). At last the goblins give up and leave Lizzie with their juices smeared impotently all over her face.

Clever Lizzie realizes that she has the elixir of life for her sister on her lips, so she runs home and invites Laura to "Eat me, drink me, love me," (471). When Laura realizes that her sister has risked her life, she wails, "have you tasted / For my sake the fruit forbidden?" (478--479). Finally Laura has begun to care for someone besides herself, and this is the beginning of her redemption. She licks the fruit from her sister's face, experiences a sort of exorcism, and finally laughs in her "innocent old way," suggesting that her purity has been restored (538). To show that she has indeed learned her lesson, she becomes the voice of caution for her children and for Lizzie's, telling them to be wary of goblin men, "Their fruits like honey to the throat / But poison in the blood" (554--555). This warning once again equates the goblins with disease; in this case perhaps syphilis, a common killer in the Victorian era.

While "Goblin Market" is a highly erotic poem, it is undoubtedly a didactic one as well. Motherhood is validated, as is platonic love between sisters, but all other forms of sexuality are questioned or rejected. Laura's association with Eve, tempted by the forbidden fruit, and Lizzie's with Christ the redeemer, reinforces the moral code of the poem. Through Laura, in the fantastic world of goblins, Rossetti could experience many forms of sex but ultimately reject them in favor of more acceptable pastimes; in this case, helping to keep other young women pure.

If Laura represents one side of Christina Rossetti, then Edmund Pevensie represents one side of C.S. Lewis. In his early life, Lewis was a skeptic, a self--professed Atheist, who later gave his life to Christianity. In *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, Edmund is the most skeptical of his siblings. Although all of them doubt Lucy's story about going to Narnia, Edmund is the cruelest in his ridicule of his sister's belief. Once he too discovers Narnia, he still pretends to disbelieve. Furthermore, he doubts the intentions of the good creatures: Mr. Tumnus, the robin, and the Beavers, and he tries to plant this doubt in the minds of his brother and sisters. This early portrayal of Edmund may be Lewis recreating in fiction the way he viewed himself as a young man. Like Laura in "Goblin Market," who needs

to taste forbidden food and suffer the consequences in order to be redeemed, Edmund too must undergo many trials because he indulges in greed and gluttony.

After mocking his sister and accusing her of imagining a world called Narnia, Edmund too finds his way into the magical place. Unfortunately for him, he does not meet the benevolent faun, Mr. Tumnus, but rather the evil White Witch. Lewis's description of the Witch reveals Edmund's awe, and perhaps his own discomfort with remarkable women.The Witch is described thus:

> . . . a great lady, taller than any Edmund had ever seen. She also was covered in white fur up to her throat and held a long straight golden wand in her right hand and wore a golden crown on her head. Her face was white — not merely pale, but white like snow or paper or icing-sugar, except for her very red mouth. It was a beautiful face in other respects, but proud and cold and stern. (34)

Edmund is naturally uncomfortable in the woman's presence because she is so unlike the women he is used to. Her height bespeaks power and strength, qualities that have typically been considered unfeminine. Furthermore, the phrasing "covered in white fur," implies that she has a vulpine quality and is something other than human. The abnormally red mouth suggests the vampire or succubus demon, and also imparts sexuality to the otherwise cold woman. Critics have also pointed to the white skin of the Witch as indicative of "dis-ease" or "nausea," foreshadowing Edmund's sickness after he eats the Witch's food.[3]

Lewis himself may have been afraid of aggressive women. In his autobiography, *Surprised By Joy*, he writes, "You may add that in the hive and the anthill we see fully realized the two things that some of us most dread for our own species — the dominance of the female and the dominance of the collective" (8-9). Indeed, "in Lewis's fiction there is always an underlying sense of male fear of female sexuality" (Filmer, *Fiction 44).* Awed by the Witch, Edmund is rendered almost completely inarticulate and appears to be an idiot. The female has thus effectively silenced and disempowered the male, a condition which most men would find unacceptable, if not terrifying. What Edmund does not know is that the Witch Queen is not a human at all, but is a descendant of Adam's first wife Lilith and is half Jinn and half giantess (88). The mythical figure of Lilith both frightened and enthralled Lewis, as is evidenced by his poem, "Lilith," in which he laments that those who succumb to her temptations and drink "witch's wine" (25) are left unfulfilled. Like Laura, whose mouth still waters after she eats goblin fruit, he who imbibes from Lilith's cup will "thirst for more" (14).

Since Edmund is unaware of the Witch's lineage, he ignores his fear and agrees to drink from her cup. The magical drink is "very sweet and foamy and creamy" (37), and he follows it with "several pounds of the best Turkish Delight" (38). On a literal level, Edmund's act of gluttony is foolish because he gorges himself on unhealthy food which is sure to make him sick in such large quantities. Moreover, he violates the traditional adult prohibition of taking candy from strangers (Firmer, "Speaking" 16). Symbolically, his feast carries with it additional significance. According to David Holbrook, "Lewis himself feared to eat certain foods because they might arouse sexual feelings" (30). Holbrook views Edmund's act of eating as masturbatory because the "sin" later can be detected by looking into Edmund's eyes, invoking the old belief that a masturbator's guilt is difficult to hide. (41). Also, the act is solitary, and the boy is unfulfilled afterwards, as Laura in "Goblin Market" is after her oral feast.

The equation of food with sin is a common theme in Lewis. In the [chronological] first Narnia book, *The Magician's Nephew,* another young boy, Digory, is tempted by Queen Jadis, an earlier manifestation of the White Witch, to eat a silver apple. Although Digory knows that it is forbidden to take an apple for oneself, and in fact, he has been instructed to take one to Aslan, the Creator of Narnia, the smell and appearance of the fruit is enough to tempt him. Jadis further seduces him with assurances that the fruit will save his dying mother, but Digory, much like Lizzie in "Goblin Market" fears the consequences and resists. Fruit also is equated with temptation and pleasure in *Perelandra:*

> Now he had come to a part of the wood where great globes of yellow fruit hung from the trees — clustered as toy-balloons are clustered on the back of the balloon-man and about the same size. He picked one of them and turned it over and over. The rind was smooth and firm and seemed impossible to tear open. Then by accident one of his fingers punctured it and went through into coldness. After a moment's hesitation he put the little aperture to his lips. He had meant to extract the smallest, experimental sip, but the first taste put his caution all to flight. It was, of course, a taste, just as his thirst and hunger had been thirst and hunger. But then it was so different from every other taste that it seemed mere pedantry to call it a taste at all. It was like the discovery of a totally new genus of pleasures, something unheard of among men, out of all reckoning, beyond all covenant. For one draught of this on earth wars would be fought and nations betrayed. It could not be classified. He could never tell us, when he came back to the world of men, whether it was sharp or sweet, savoury or voluptuous, creamy or piercing. (38)

This man is tempted to taste the fruit again, but he, like Digory, chooses temperance. He decides that one taste of the fruit is enough, and that "repetition would be a vulgarity" (39).

Edmund, however, has no such willpower. The moment he finishes the Turkish Delight, he wants more. The narrator states: "this was enchanted Turkish Delight and ... anyone who had tasted it would want more and more of it, and would even, if they were allowed, go on eating it till they killed themselves" (39). Like Laura, all Edmund can think about is how to get more of the food he craves. While Laura unwittingly puts her sister in danger as a result of her greed, Edmund knowingly betrays his siblings for more sweets. The Turkish Delight becomes an addiction,

an obsession, and even when he feels sick from gorging himself, "he still wanted to taste that Turkish Delight again more than he wanted anything else" (44). This preoccupation with his selfish indulgence leads Edmund to agree to bring his sisters and brother to the Witch's house, even though deep down, his instinct senses her cruelty. Before he leaves his siblings to report to the Witch, Edmund experiences what Laura did after her palate was poisoned by goblin fruit. At the hospitable home of the Beavers, Edmund is unable to enjoy a wholesome dinner because it is not what he craves; "and there's nothing that spoils the taste of good ordinary food half so much as the memory of bad magic food" (95). Unfortunately for him, when he does meet the Witch again, she gives him only stale bread and water. As when Laura realizes that she will never again hear the goblin cry and will never again taste what she so craves, Edmund gains a horrible understanding of the mistake he has made.

Just as Laura must wait for her sister's love and courage to save her, so too Edmund must wait to be restored by Aslan and by his sister Lucy. Aslan first sacrifices himself so that the youthful "sinner" can live. The brutality that he endures is similar to the encounters Laura and Lizzie have with the goblins. His glorious mane, "masses of curling gold" (168) is shorn, and then he is "surrounded by the whole crowd of creatures kicking him, hitting him, spitting on him, jeering at him" (169). Edmund's redemption is not complete, however, until his sister gives him an anodyne, a magic cordial made from "the juice of one of the fireflowers that grow in the mountains of the sun" (118). She puts the juice in her brother's mouth, and when he is finally restored, he has, like Laura, regained his innocence: " . . .Looking better than she had seen him look — oh, for ages .... He had become his real old self again and could look you in the face" (197). When he becomes a king of Narnia, Edmund is "great in council and judgment" and earns the title "King Edmund the Just" (201). Perhaps because of his fall and his rebirth into purity, Edmund is well-equipped to teach others the difference between right and wrong. In fact, in a later book, he is able to forgive his cousin Eustace and to assure him that his treachery was worse than Eustace's, but he was still able to be saved. Like Laura, the mother and storyteller, the restored Edmund becomes the voice of caution and compassion.

The happy endings of "Goblin Market" and *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* accord naturally with Rossetti's and Lewis' Christian beliefs and their own hopes for salvation. There is still, however, the disturbing equation of sexuality, particularly oral and solitary pleasure, with sin and penalty. Concurrently, they seem to be enthralled with eroticism, as long as the possibility for redemption exists afterward. The conflicting desires are thus explored vicariously in the world of the fantastic, enabling them to sample prurient delights through their fictional creations, subsequently purifying the characters so that the transgression leaves only a heightened wisdom, but no permanent spiritual collapse. It is interesting to note, these impulses find their most obvious expression in their children's literature, perhaps suggesting that Rossetti and Lewis felt as confused and innocent as adolescents in the arena of adult sexuality. ❦

Notes

1. William Michael Rossetti claims that he "more than once heard Christina say that she did not mean anything profound by this fairy tale — it is not a moral apologue consistently carried out in detail . . . still the incidents are such as to be at any rate suggestive, and different minds may be likely to read different messages into them" (459).
2. Maureen Duffy suggests that the "golden curl" is pubic hair (290), adding a new dimension to the traditional associations of hair with sexuality.
3. See Filmer, "Speaking in Parables," p. 16 and *The Fiction of C.S. Lewis*, p. 109.

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