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# Articles Not for Sale in *Goblin Market*

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*Goblin Market* (1862) begins with the voices of goblins – “Come buy our orchard fruits, / Come buy, Come buy” (3-4)<sup>1</sup> – that vibrate at the glen, where two sisters, Laura and Lizzie, go and draw some water from “the reedy brook” (216) with their pitchers every day. This text opened by goblins’ voices, as D. M. R. Bentley says, “evinces an oral manner that converts even a reader into a listener” (69). Those who face the text listen to various voices, because, as we shall see, quite a few narrators have devoted their voices to creating it. This paper aims to examine how female narrators including Christina Rossetti weave their own voices into the text, each of them, entrusting her hope to the next generation. A study of voice in this text, though it is indispensable for *Goblin Market* as a fairy tale, seems to be more neglected than other critical point of views.<sup>2</sup> Given that Christina herself regards the “vocal music” as “the highest form of so high an art” (300) in *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* (1885), the examination of voice in her works surely promises us productive results. I will also mention some other works of Christina in terms of women’s voices. The comparison of *Goblin Market* with the Grimm Brothers’ tale<sup>3</sup> makes possible a new interpretation of Laura’s fight with goblin men and gives the key to divulge how Christina herself manages to live through as a woman poet in the Victorian Age.

## I

“Maids heard the goblins cry: / Come buy our orchard fruits” (2-3) regardless of “[m]orning and evening” (1). The sisters, for certain, realize that they “must not look at goblin men” (42) and “must not buy their fruits” (43) because these wicked spirits do harm to girls,<sup>4</sup> but one day Laura finally falls into the temptation of goblin fruits. Here, the question occurs to us: why does not Lizzie but only Laura succumb to their temptation? While “Laura chose to linger / Wondering at each merchant man” (69-70), Lizzie can adroitly evade the hucksters and leave the glen at once. How can Lizzie cope well with goblins’ enchanting sales talk?

Lizzie covered up her eyes,  
Covered close lest they should look;  
.....  
She thrust a dimpled finger  
In each ear, shut eyes and ran. (50-51, 67-68)

Lizzie tightly covers not only her eyes but also her ears to resist the temptation to buy goblin fruits. It is natural that she “shut eyes” for fear that she should look at the sweet fruits, but why does “[s]he thrust a dimpled finger / In each ear”? Maybe should she have held her nose not to smell the luscious fruits before covering her ears?

Goblins’ bizarre appearance consisting of “cat”, “rat”, “snail”, “wombat”, and “ratel” (71, 73-76) precludes us from noticing another characteristics of goblins, that is, their voices. Goblin men have “voice of doves / Cooing all together: / They sounded kind and full of loves. . . . In tones as smooth as honey” (77-79, 108). No wonder these magnetic cries hold the power of lure the sisters to drop in goblin market in spite of themselves.

Probably, goblins' voices have the compelling attraction for the sisters as much as their fruits themselves. Thus Laura, who could not take preventive measures against goblins' voices, was allured by them and yielded to the temptation. Goblins' peaceful voices, however, strikingly contrast with their ugly appearance and wicked disposition. Why do the evil goblin men possess such a mellow voice?

Roderick McGillis makes an interesting observation on the influence of goblin fruits: "The goblin men have effectively silenced Laura; in accepting their fruit she has lost her voice" (212). Indeed, Laura, after eating goblin fruits, "said not one word in her heart's sore ache" (261) and in "sullen silence of exceeding pain" (271). It is possible that goblins sell their fruits to Laura in exchange for her voice. If we apply economic terms to the system of goblin "market", Laura is a "consumer" of goblin fruits, and her voice becomes a highly marketable "commodity". Goblin men must have disguised their ugly voices with the beautiful voices of which they robbed girls like Laura. On purpose to acquire more voices goblins avail themselves of female voices instead of their own voices when selling their sham commodity, fruits. Goblin fruits turn out no other than a decoy to attract girls now. If having traded their fruits as their precious staples, goblin men must not have "kicked their fruit" (439) roughly even when closing their market. Goblins astutely understand that no article exists in goblin market more valuable than women's voices. Laura's voice had been put on the shelf in goblin market as a commodity until Lizzie took it back. The article which goblins are eager to deal in is not their fruits but nothing short of women's voices. The management policy of goblin market where goblin men compel women into silence is nothing but the repression of women.

## II

After eating goblin fruits, as we have already heard, Laura has fallen seriously ill and kept silent. Lizzie, not abandoning Laura, resolves to go to goblin market so as to buy their fruits that Laura ardently wants to eat again. Lizzie asks goblins for their fruits in the following way: "Give me much and many [fruits]" (365), but goblin men deny her request. "Nay, take a seat with us, / Honour and eat with us" (368-369). They force Lizzie to eat fruits on the spot so that they can rob her of her voice. Against Lizzie continuing to repudiate goblins' demand, they at last resort to force.

They trod and hustled her,  
Elbowed and jostled her,  
Clawed with their nails,  
Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,  
Tore her gown and soiled her stocking,  
Twitched her hair out by the roots,  
Stamped upon her tender feet,  
Held her hands and squeezed their fruits  
Against her mouth to make her eat. (399-407)

The sequence of verbs in this citation clearly attests to the violence of ferocious goblins. They become desperate in their scheme to make Lizzie accept fruits.

Tho' the goblins cuffed and caught her,  
Coaxed and fought her,  
Bullied and besought her,  
Scratched her, pinched her black as ink,  
Kicked and knocked her,  
Mauled and mocked her,  
Lizzie *uttered not a word.*

(424-430, emphasis added)

However hard Lizzie is inflicted by goblins, so far from retaliating, she does nothing except remaining silent. Her way of disobedience seems at first sight quite passive, but in fact it is effective. "At last the evil people / Worn out by her resistance" (437-438) "scudded on the gale without a sound" and "vanished in the distance" (445-446). Lizzie succeeds in vanquishing goblins and bringing their fruits to Laura, but what is her decisive blow to goblin men in their fight?

The key to the mystery lies in another fairy tale from the Brothers Grimm, "The Prince Afraid of Nothing". The prince comes across a princess confined in an enchanted castle by dint of diabolic arts and tries to emancipate her. The princess tells him a means of exorcising devils.

You [the prince] must spend three nights in the great hall of the enchanted castle.... They [devils] will torment you in the most cruel fashion, but if you bear it *without uttering a sound*, then I shall be saved; they are not allowed to take your life. ("The Prince Afraid of Nothing" 346, emphasis added)

Her words mean that a complete silence is the secret stratagem to break the evil power. What she has predicted is immediately realized.

They [devils] pricked him [the prince] and beat him and threw him about and pulled at his arms and legs as if to tear him to pieces, but he bore it all and *didn't utter a sound*. ("The Prince Afraid of Nothing" 347, emphasis added)

Afterwards the prince, as expected, relieves the princess and marries her at the end of the tale.

Prince's tactics to defeat devils sheds light on how Lizzie wins her victory over goblin men. She is able to purge goblins' wicked power from the glen and deport them by uttering "not a word" (430) no matter how hard she is attacked, just as the prince can rout devils by uttering not a sound. When goblins have no other choice but to vanish "without a sound" (445), they have already lost their voices in return. It is a complete silence that triggers goblins' upset and causes the disappearance of their market. Lizzie is to Laura in *Goblin Market* what the prince is to the princess in the Grimm Brothers' tale. Now we can "see Lizzie as acting not like a heroine but a hero" (D'Amico 76) in *Goblin Market*. To assign Lizzie the role of hero subverts the conventional plot of a fairy tale: a male hero rescues and marries a female heroine captured by evil sprits. In *Goblin Market* no male hero exists, since he is replaced by the female hero, Lizzie. Concerning the marriage, Lizzie and Laura, unlike a prince and a princess, cannot get married each other, yet the relation between the sisters bears a great resemblance to that of a married couple and even implies lesbian love. For example, when Lizzie becomes desperate in her attempt to save dying Laura, she cries: "Eat me, drink me, love me; / Laura, make much of me" (471-472). Lizzie's passionate lines plainly show her sexual desire for Laura. Besides, the description of their sleeping figures are as follows: "Golden head by golden head, / Like two pigeons in one nest / Folded in each other's wings / They lay down in their curtained bed" (184-187). Laura and Lizzie in their bed look as if they were a married couple. The text of *Goblin Market* allows a woman to become a female hero, but never allows a male hero to enter into itself. Now it is obvious that Christina intends to break down the literary conventions prescribed by men.

Christina's strategy for subverting the established tradition also can be seen in "Monna Innominata: A Sonnet of Sonnets" (1881). In this text the ideal image of lady built up by men disappears because Christina, being against tradition in love-sonnet, changes a male narrator into a female one. It is not until the lady has her own voice that the figure of a real woman, never that of an idealized woman, materializes in "Monna Innominata". Christina succeeds in retrieving the woman from the imprisonment, where men impose strict silence on her, by conferring her own voice upon her.<sup>5</sup> The recovery of the voice enables the lady to act independently of male interference.

### III

In *Goblin Market* Laura and Lizzie, unlike the lady in "Monna Innominata", cannot keep their independent lives. They have regained their voices from goblin men, to be sure, but at the end of the tale, "both were wives" even "[w]ith children of their own" (544-545). The sisters become reconciled to their status of wife or mother like many other women in the Victorian Age. After all, Lizzie cannot fulfill her role as hero. Is there any hope that Lizzie can play the role of hero to the very end in *Goblin Market*? The sisters must have wished for a more satisfactory ending.

Another story, whose heroine is Jeanie, is incorporated in *Goblin Market* like a *mise-en-abyme*. This story has no title, but we can name it old *Goblin Market*. Lizzie begins to narrate the old *Goblin Market* to Laura. "Do you not remember Jeanie" (147)? Jeanie "met them[goblins] in the moonlight, / Took their gifts both choice and many" (148-149). The old *Goblin Market* at first sight quite resembles *Goblin Market* in the contents, but Jeanie, after eating goblin fruits, abruptly "died / In

her gay prime" (315-316). The old *Goblin Market*, unfortunately, ended with the overwhelming victory of goblin men. Goblins, needless to say, deprived Jeanie of her voice and made her silent forever. Therefore, instead of Jeanie who lost her voice forever, Lizzie has told Jeanie's story as the old *Goblin Market*. Yet, Laura, unlike Jeanie, has her voice restored thanks to Lizzie's act of hero and now can be a narrator to her children.

Laura would call the little ones  
And tell them of her early prime,  
Those pleasant days long gone  
Of not-returning time. (548-551)

What is her early prime's story in this passage? Laura relates to her children her own experience in meeting with goblins. The story that Laura tells here, as Richard Menke insists, "must be *Goblin Market* itself" (130). Laura not merely can become a narrator but also can change the story of *Goblin Market* from the victory of goblins into that of the sisters. Laura's filling the role of narrator makes possible the creation of a new *Goblin Market*.

The independent world of Laura and Lizzie without men, as stated above, has fallen down in the end. The new *Goblin Market*, though it has much improved compared with the old *Goblin Market*, must accept this unsatisfactory conclusion. The sisters, however, have never abandoned the hope of creating a new conclusion for the story of *Goblin Market*. The coming generation such as their children, will be able to revise it with their new voices. Each narrator has added some elements to the story in order to make its ending more satisfactory. As far as women have their own voices, they can pursue the possibility of retelling their story.

Christina is the narrator of *Goblin Market*. Lizzie recounts the old *Goblin Market* instead of Jeanie who has never been granted a role of narrator. And now Laura has just become the narrator of the new *Goblin Market*. Laura charged with her mission as narrator must continue to tell the new *Goblin Market* to her children. The more times the story is recounted, the more chance to produce a new ending is begotten.

It is worth noting that the men getting married to Laura and Lizzie never utter a word. For they are not given their voices in the text. Certainly, goblin men had their own voices and even plundered Jeanie and Laura's ones, but after being defeated by Lizzie, lost all voices. In *Goblin Market* Christina ingeniously reverses the voice-owner from men to women. The text opened with goblins' voices ends with Laura's voice. It is the woman that possesses her voice at the very end of the text. No doubt that numerous female narrators, even though their names are not recorded in the text, have devoted their voices to alter *Goblin Market*, or even in its process to may create a different story from *Goblin Market*. In fact no one can deny the possibility that a nameless narrator in *Speaking Likenesses* (1874), written by Christina after twelve years since finishing *Goblin Market*, is a descendant of Laura and Lizzie. *Speaking Likenesses*, which foregrounds the form of narration; as the title suggests, is also a fairy tale consisting of three stories spoken by the female narrator to her nieces. At the beginning of the text, the narrator calls:

Come sit round me, my dear little girls, and I will tell you a story. Each of you bring her sewing ... Now I start my knitting and my story together. (118)

This narrator's position surrounded by her nieces is quite similar to Laura's position at the end of *Goblin Market*. Laura's

narration has never been disturbed by the listeners, but the children in *Speaking Likenesses* often interrupt what the narrator says with their complaints and questions about her story: "What an odd name, Aunt!" (120), "What apple, Aunt?" (121), "How many children were there at supper?" (132) and so on. Even a child's dismal face forces the narrator to suspend her story and say: "Don't look shocked, dear Ella, at my choice of words" (132). Moreover, the narrator herself loses "her imaginative control over stories of her own invention" (Auerbach 319). No one predicts where the story goes on because many voices try to get involved in the story whenever it is narrated. The story is sometimes about to stop on its way when meeting with obstacles, but anyway the narrator manages to continue it by crying: "Attention! ... I go on" (129). It is the narrator's duty to patiently weave each thread into the story as if she took it from the sewing woven by each girl who participates in creating the story. The story told by the narrator is nothing less than the joint authorship made by the narrator and these girls. All female listeners challenge to revise the story with their own voices. Laura's hope that female narrators of the coming generation would exercise more power to change the unsatisfactory story into the satisfactory one comes true here in *Speaking Likenesses*.

For the purpose of teaching the importance of voice to the children the narrator in *Speaking Likenesses* asserts that: "Acoustics must have been most accurately studied" (134). One of the listeners, Maude, soon asks about the meaning of acoustics: "But, Aunt, what are acoustics?" (134). In answer to her question, the narrator says: "The science of sounds, Maude: pray now exercise your acoustical faculty" (134). Obviously this narrator manifests a deep interest in the science of voice and wants her nieces to learn it, but what is it useful for?

The study of voice must be advanced to distinguish goblins' voices from all sorts of voices. The narrator might have known the danger of goblins' voices from the story of *Goblin Market* narrated by her mother or grandmother. And when becoming a narrator, she takes over responsibility for telling the importance of voice to the younger generation lest these girls should be cheated out of their voices by goblins.

The first fairy tale in *Speaking Likenesses*, in fact depicts the critical moment when a woman's voice is suppressed. Flora, a heroine in the tale, nearly lost her voice during other boys' violence against her in the name of the game. In the roar of the players, the "only silent tongue was Flora's" (134). While being attacked by them, she did nothing but "bore it like a philosopher" (132) until the game stopped. Her way of resistance for certain was very passive, but she could evade this severe experience and recover her own voice. Flora's passive resistance reminds us of Lizzie's not active but effective way of battle against goblins. The fact that both women adopt the similar means for resistance may explain Christina's strategy for surviving "goblin men". Christina must have introduced her own experience in fighting against "goblin men" into the creation of her works. No doubt that there were numerous "goblin men" who aimed to deprive Christina of her voice in Victorian patriarchal society. Only after overcoming all kinds of hardships poured down from "goblin men", or even while caught in their violent attack, Christina could have her own voice not by taking the fierce offense but by assuming the tenacious attitude like a philosopher. It is true that "[t]he woman artist" in the Victorian Age "can be strengthened 'to live' only through doses of paradoxically bittersweet pain" (Gilbert 572). Christina as a woman poet, as widely known, put the highest value on her "vocal music" in her creation. Her

voice must be preserved from all attacks delivered by “goblin men”. The dose that Christina decided to take gave a terrible pain to her, but it had the great efficacy for defending her own voice.

*Goblin Market*, which has been or will be retold by many narrators, is the endless story about the women’s struggle for their voices. The women’s fight against “goblin men” must go on. For “goblin men” may open “goblin market” somewhere in the world and aim at women’s voices even now. Laura’s voice, though it was traded illegally in goblin market at one time, now sings merrily through the text of *Goblin Market*. Many voices of female narrators, which constitute the text itself, are artistically displayed in *Goblin Market* wearing a tag saying “Not for Sale” toward avid listeners to the story. *Goblin Market* invites the female listeners to be the next narrators whose vibrant voices are able to retell *Goblin Market* with a much more satisfactory ending.

### Notes

1. All quotations from *Goblin Market* (1862) are from *Christina Rossetti: The Complete Poems*, ed. R. W. Crump (London: Penguin, 2001).
2. For a biographical reading of the text, see Georgina Battiscombe, *Christina Rossetti: A Divided Life* (New York: Halt, 1981), 94-113. Many critics have done sexual readings of the text, see for example, Maureen Duffy, *The Erotic World of Faery* (New York: Avon, 1980), 315-322. For details about a religious reading, see D’Amico, 67-83. For a study of illustrations about the text, see Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, “Visualizing the Fantastic Subject: *Goblin Market and the Gaze*”, see Arseneau, 137-169.
3. The Grimm Brothers’ fairy tales have prevailed in England since the first translation: *German Popular Stories* (1823). For its details, see Peter Hunt, *Children’s Literature: An Illustrated History* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 137.
4. According to *A Dictionary of Fairies*, a goblin is a “general name for evil

and malicious spirits, usually small and grotesque in appearance." See Katharine Briggs, *A Dictionary of Fairies: Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies and Other Supernatural Creatures* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1977), 194.

5. In the Preface of "Monna Innominate: A Sonnet of Sonnets", the narrator declares: "These heroines [Beatrice and Laura] of world-wide fame were preceded by a bevy of unnamed ladies, 'donne innominate', sung by a school of less conspicuous poets... Had such a lady spoken for herself, the portrait left us might have appeared more tender, if less dignified, than any drawn even by a devoted friend", see Rossetti, "Monna Innominate", 294.

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