

DECONSTRUCTION PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS THE CHARACTERS IN CHRISTINA ROSSETTI'S "GOBLIN MARKET" POEM

M. Bahri Arifin, Singgih Daru Kuncara, Fatimah M.

Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Mulawarman
Jalan Flores No. 1, Samarinda, Kalimantan Timur
Pos-el: *fatimah_muhajir@yahoo.com*

Abstract

Jacques Derrida was the French philosopher and a founding father of deconstruction theory. He challenged the logo-centric Western tradition of the metaphysics of presence. His theory of deconstruction attacked the presuppositions of meaning in a literary works that literary text has conventional or fixed meaning. Deconstruction could bring a new meaning and perspective to Christina Rossetti's poem "Goblin Market". This research aimed to scrutinize the different facets towards the characters in Rossetti's poem *Goblin Market* from Derrida deconstructive theory. The researcher used descriptive qualitative method and objective approach in examining the text of the poem. The result of the study showed a new portrait of the personages of the poem after retracing the meaning of the text. The researcher analysed some characters of the poem namely, Lizzie and Laura as the representation of female characters in the poem, and the queer creatures called "the goblin" characters that were addressed to male characters. In this research, the researcher found some binary oppositions through deconstruction analysis of the poem includes, the idea of brotherhood vs. sisterhood, humanity vs. others, good character vs. evil character.

Keywords: *Jacques Derrida, deconstruction, characters, Goblin Market poem, Christina Rossetti*

A. BACKGROUND

The advent of post-structuralist allows people not merely tend to be stuck in one meaning of a literary text, however people can get wider meaning through the various interpretations. One of the approaches of reading literary text comprehensively is

deconstruction. It allows people not trapped in one point of view but another possible interpretation. Post structuralism enables people and readers to get new meaning behind of the text. The emergence of Post-structuralism is the form of critique toward structuralism. When the reader gives meaning to a literary work, the meaning cannot be fully or completely determined from one sign. Therefore, a literary text in deconstruction perspective is not meaningful, but polemical meaning (Eagleton, 1983:127)

According to Derrida as cited by Al-Fayadl (2005:79) deconstruction becomes a very influential approach in the study of meaning in literature. Derrida then compiles the debris left from the constructed text, destroys, arranges and then remodels it again. This theory rejects the view that language has definite, certain, and constant meanings as well as the views of classical structuralism. There are no linguistic expressions or forms used to express certain objects of particular meaning. This is the reason why understanding deconstruction is called poststructuralist. Jacques Derrida claims the people lean on taking away the text from its context, or release from its context or trace and come up as the final meaning. It is what Derrida call *logocentrism*. Meanwhile, Dobie (2012: 163), also states that reading a literary text, in one way to begin is to follow Derrida's own process, which called "double reading". The presence of deconstruction brings a new way of reading literature by giving notice to the way of "double reading" a text.

As in a literary text, *Goblin Market* poem written by Cristina Rossetti was published in 1862. The narrative poem tells the story of Laura and Lizzie as the female characters while goblin men as the representation of male characters. Rossetti claimed that the poem, which is interpreted frequently as having features of remarkably sexual imagery, was not meant for children. However, Rossetti often stated that the fairy tale poem *was* intended for children, and went on to write many children's poems. The poem appeared in her first volume of poetry, entitled *Goblin Market and other poems* which had been described by her brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, (Connor, 2010:143). Rossetti, instead of describing the male characters in the narrative poem as human being with good posture, good face or good skin color as human should be, Rossetti precisely illustrate the male

characters with the faces and bodies resembling animals, yet capable to attract the young girl to come and buy their peculiar fruits. The *Goblin Market* promotes both different sides of the poem genres, as the children's fairy tale while and as the adult erotic fantasy story (Connor, 2010:145).

Based on the view, the researcher realizes that the poem is able to be read with "double reading"; it allows the readers to get the various interpretations of getting meanings. For deconstructive reader, this poem becomes one of the interesting poems to be observed widely in order to get a wider meaning behind of the conventional meaning or fixed meaning. This research is conducted by using deconstruction theory in analyzing the significant new meaning toward conventional meaning of the poem.

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

1. Jacques Derrida and Deconstruction Theory

Jacques Derrida is a French philosopher born in 1930, he is one of the most influential and complex thinkers of the second half of the 20th century. He is the originator and namer of deconstruction. He published his first book "*Of grammatology*" (1976) Derrida developed the literary theory which gave contributions to a new breath in literary criticism. Jacques Derrida was the founder of "deconstruction" (Abrams. 1999:56). This term *deconstruction* firstly presented and developed by Derrida in the late 1960s. In a fundamental sense, it is associated with certain techniques for reading texts. With the advent of deconstruction, For Derrida and other postmodernism thinkers, all definitions and depictions of truth are subjective, simply creations of the minds of humanity. "Truth" itself is relative, depending on various cultural and social influences in one's life. Because these poststructuralist thinkers assert that many truths exist, not one, they declare that modernity's concept of one objective reality must be disavowed and replaced by many difference concepts, each being a valid and reliable interpretation and construction of reality. (Bressler, 1994:118).

Furthermore, in a book entitled "Dekonstruksi: Desain Penelitian dan Analisis" (2014), explains that the term of *deconstruction*

originally was taken from two words, “de” and “construction”. The word of “*De*” means, reduction, decline, or rejection the meaning of a text. While “construction” means structure. It means that definition of deconstruction in the simple way is destruction of a construction (Rohman, 2014:1). Regarding to explanation, deconstruction also tries to criticize *logocentricism*. Deconstruction believes a text-concept has something that can not be simplified, unreadable, binary opposition, and logic contradiction that eventually produce the rational thought. For Derrida, *Logocentricism* in western culture is referred to the idea that the existence of human mind that just trapped in *logo* (a certain symbols). Derrida did not believe the myth of *logocentrism* (the idea that knowledge is the pursuit of discovering one meaning or “truth”). This statement does not mean that there is no meaning in text and language. Derrida precisely emphasizes that meaning of a text is undecidable.

In addition, Barthes also explained about the term of “differing”. “Differing” is about the readers enable to give various meaning and different, those meanings are called *irreducible* or not simple, because of the text is *irreducible*; the meaning will be in deferment or called *differing*. Therefore, every meaning which without explanation will be always in *irreducible (differing)*. For this case, it can be contradicted through the examining center of totality that used as the basic *difference*. This fundamental contradiction is analogously with Freud’s neurotic symptom, Freud explained about a desire to “fulfill” or “suppress the impuls”. The desire to “fulfill the impuls” will be reflected in *centering technic* from totality and *difference*. Meanwhile, a desire to suppress the impuls is *decentering technic* and *differing* (Rohman, 1990:199)

Moreover, in a book entitled *Derrida*, Deconstruction as *dissemination* term which made the text looked like a big hole with and endless long hallway (Al-Fayyadl, 2015 79). From this statement, the readers are able to interpret a text from many sides of a literary work itself, and some important things that can be observed in deconstruction study such as, gaps, ironies, aporias, silences, paradoxes, shifts or breaks, contradictions, conflicts, fissures, digressions, ambiguities, puns, multiple meanings, linguistic quirks, repetitions, corruptions” In book *A glossary of Literary Terms*

written by Abram (1999), Derrida clarifies that the differential “play” in French (*jeu*) of language may produce the “effect” of decidable meaning in an utterance or text, asserts that these are merely effects a ground that would justify certainty in interpretation. Derrida coins the portmanteau term *différance*, in which, he says, he uses the spelling “-ance” instead of “-ence” to indicate a fusion of two senses of the French verb “différer”: to be different, and to defer.

2. Steps of Analyzing a Text in Deconstruction Study

According to Bressler (1994:131), deconstruction can be applied by a deconstructionist reading as a strategy of reading or interpreting a text by following some steps: **First**, identifying binary opposition. **The second** steps, a giving comment on the values, concept and ideas beyond the operations. **The third** steps, a trying to dismantle previously held conventional views. **Then** accepting the possibility of various perspective or levels of meaning in a text based on the new binary inversions. **The last**, it allows meaning of the text to be undecidable.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative research. As Vanderstep and Johnston state that qualitative research produces narrative or textual descriptions of the phenomena under the study (2009:7). It means that the data are taken from words rather than number as the data for the analysis. The Data in this research were taken from victorian narrative poem *Goblin Market* by an English poet, Christina Rossetti. This poem consist of 566 lines and 29 stanzas. This poem was published in London and Cambridge Macmillan and co. in 1862. The researcher tends to use library research method. Library research method allows the researcher to gather some literature from various sources such as through library research that can give us some information to support the data which are taken from bibliographical data or referential data. The data are obtained mainly from reading, some books, journal articles, previous researches etc. In conducting this research, the researcher focused on Deconstruction perspective towards the characters in Christina Rossetti’s poem *Goblin Market*

by NARhighlighting some important dictions, phrases, lines or stanzas from the poem to support the analysis, through Derida's deconstruction theory.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this part, the researcher presented the finding of the research; the researcher deconstructs the image of the characters in the poem. In *Goblin Market* poem, it influences the reader to do "double reading", for the text as the following findings:

1. Brotherhood vs. Sisterhood

For deconstructive reader, a text allows them to get binary opposition terms. *Goblin Market* poem enables the reader to get opposition meaning. In example, the idea of brotherhood in the narrative story. Meanwhile in the Rossetti's poem, it had been never really mentioned "men" clearly, except the "goblin" or "the goblin men", hence the concept of brotherhood in the poem refers to "goblins". Rossetti described the concept in the line "brother with queer brother" (94). This line shows that the use of this notion "brother" is referred to goblins, or peculiar human being, that illustrated by the poet as similar to animal. Moreover, Rossetti also mentioned it in the next line "brother with sly brother" (96). After mentioning that the "brother" or the goblins that are the peculiar human being, then Rossetti also mentioned them as the queer creatures. They are as a group of merchant man who sell the fruits. Rossetti leaned on calling them "brother" with the whole their traits and intrigues. The concept of brotherhood means that a group of brother, as well as a group of sister. If there is a notion of brother, it means there is also notion of sister, as two forms of binary opposition. Eventhough in general view or in universal view the most familiar using for calling a specific relationship of togetherness is "brotherhood".

After examining the text deeply, it can be said also that the term of "brotherhood" had been opposite with the term of "sisterhood". As the proof, Rossetti described two females characters or the

relationship between two sisters as can be called "sisterhood". This idea become a major theme description in the whole of the narrative poem. Moreover the text describes that sisterhood is more powerful than any relationship. It shows in the lines as below:

For there is no friend like a sister,/In calm or stormy weather,
To cheer one on the tedious way,/To fetch one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,/To strengthen whilst one stands.
“(561-566)

The above lines give the reader insight towards the idea of sisterhood as the opposition of brotherhood. The idea of sisterhood in this case is addressed to the relationship between two sisters, Lizzy and Laura as the female character contrast with the evil goblins, even though the goblins against the two sisters by deceiving them with their fruits, yet the goblins themselves did not fight each other. As the prove of the text, in lines 93 to 97, "Brother with queer brother;/Signalling each other./Brother with sly brother./One set his basket down./One reared his plate." The lines symbolize the idea of brotherhood. Their togetherness is clearly seen when they sell the fruits. It shows that the goblins men are helping each other, work together. In fact the goblin men have the slyly nature, they are evil however they did not fight each other, though in the sense of doing deception towards an innocent buyer. Unlike Lizzy and Laura who have had a different view toward the outside of life. Lizzy warns Laura, not to see goblins, "O! cried Lizzie, Laura, Laura, (48), Then Lizzie warns her sister "You should not peep at goblin men." (49). Yet, eventually Laura leaned on being selfish keep visiting the goblins, despite several warnings from Lizzie. Another example of the concern of Lizzie as sister as follow:

Full of wise upbraidings:/ "Dear, you should not stay so late,
Twilight is not good for maidens;/Should not loiter in the glen
In the haunts of goblin men./Do you not remember Jeanie,
How she met them in the moonlight,/Took their gifts both choice
and many, (141-148)

Being a sister, Lizzie is wise enough woman. She warns Laura not to stay out so late. Lizzie warns Laura more and more because she realizes "Twilight is not good for maidens" (142), even if the

girls loiter in the glen, because it is a dangerous place, the place of a haunted glen. For example, Jeanie, a girl who had ever met the goblin men in one night, taking their gifts but finally it became harmful for her. Thus Lizzie is unwilling if the same case will happen to her sister. Lizzie shows her care, feels responsible to save her sister. After coming from the interactions with the goblin men, Laura approaches her sister. Lizzie still gives a tirade, warning Laura of what will happen to her if she "loiters in the glen/In the haunts of the goblin men" (145-146). Laura responds in just two words: "Nay, hush" (163). After Laura achieves such pleasure from the goblin men, she increasingly ignores her sister's warning. At this point the two sisters are in the dissent eventhough they are in the bonds of "sisterhood". Jeane as a previous buyer becomes a victim of the queer fruit because she did not have any sister to save her after being dying and attacked by goblins, while Laura at last being recovered. It is because of the help of her sister, Lizzie. At this point, it can be meant that sisterhood also can build a power. Without the help of other sister, a woman cannot stand alone after being attacked by goblin men.

2. Good characters vs Evil characters or humanity vs other

In this poem, Rossetti also presents the characteristics of the characters between the goblins men and the young women. Rossetti clearly shows the opposing description between them. One is evil (bad) while other is good, or one is heroine while other is villain. From the poem the reader will directly concern that the goblins are the representation of evil men. The poem shows many descriptions that the goblins are bad characters. Then the reader assumes that the women are good characters because they are not really described as bad unless as victim of the goblins. The goblins are narrated as creatures that resemble animals, whose depiction is worse than human being in the following lines:

One had a cat's face,/One whisked a tail, One tramped at a
rat's pace,
One crawled like a snail,/One like a wombat prowled
obtuse and furry,

One like a ratel tumbled hurry-scurry./Lizzie heard a voice
like voice of doves (71-76).

From the lines 71 to 76, the direct meaning that can be gotten that unlike human posture and face as should be. The goblin characters are precisely described with peculiar creatures like animals. One goblin seems like a half human and with a cat's face, one has a tail, one like a rat, snail, prowled animals, furry and other can voice like doves. The lines above indicate that the goblins are certainly inhuman. Their physical appearance that resembles animals, of course the nature and behavior will resemble animals too. They "Down the glen tramp little men" (55). The goblin is described as little men in "the haunted glen," (551), Rossetti emphasizes the goblins as villain again in the next line "the wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men," (552).

In addition the description about the goblins as bad character can be substantiated in the other supporting lines and explanations. The reader may assume that if the goblin is only a man or merchant fruits, they will sell the fruits as should do. However, they are bad or evil character by deceiving buyer (women characters) with "their fruits like honey to the throat" (553). It can cause the buyers fall sick and even be dying, because their fruit is not a healthy one "But poison in the blood" (554). In the contradiction view, in the following lines, the women characters are assumed as good character. The women characters in the whole of the poem are narrated as good character. The reader certainly decides that Lizzie is a good character because she must be a heroine in order to save her sister. As in the last line, it explains "how her sister stood" (556), for the sake of Laura's save, without consideration anymore between "Better and worse" (321), even though "In deadly peril to do her good," (557), Lizzy must be willing to sacrifice for her lying sister. Based on this view, certainly she is a good one, and contrast with the image of bad character. Meanwhile after reading the text through the lens of deconstruction, the rigid conventional meaning, it turns to show contradiction side towards the goblin men.

In line (362), Lizzie states to the goblins "Good folk," which is indicated as the group of "good brother", eventhough Lizzie really realizes the goblins are villain who had ever deceived her sister.

When Laura came to see the goblin, she was greeted cordially by the goblins "with jolly, (110), the goblins show their kindness, with a very gentle and friendly, and they are "Pretty Goblin" still for "Pretty Polly"; (112), Laura speaks with them, by saying..."Good folk, ...115).

As the same case, it also is shown when, goblin men are sweet with Lizzie, but when she rejects them, they become violent. The goblins in some lines of calling "good folk", "pretty goblin" which is opposed by the evil goblins, even in the other description the goblins also called as "friendly", when at first Lizzie heard the goblins as very kind and friendly, with "a voice like voice of doves/Cooing all together/They sounded kind and full of loves".(76-78), even with "in tones as smooth as honey" (107), this illustration shows that goblin men can also be smooth to human being. Those criteria are very contrast and different with the previous description.

Like rough animals, they attack the young woman roughly, they are evil men, their kindness in the previously meeting to Laura just a form of gimmick, cover up with kindness, yet they are mischievous creature, however their tactics finally revealed. As Lizzie also described in the next lines, "At last the evil people, Flung back her penny, kicked their fruit/Along whichever road they took" (443-445).

Goblins are creatures that symbolize evil. So the women should stay away from them. The goblin men are trickery while the girls represent the innocence and purity. Rossetti seems like to represent the men character as seducer by addressing *goblin*. After tracing the meaning of the *goblin*, in *new world Encyclopedia*, the goblin is explained as a mythical creature of Germanic and British folklore. It is often believed to be the evil, or merely mischievous. They are like many such "small creatures that live in dark places and cause trouble. Despite local variations, goblins have almost universally been described as troublemakers". That characterization illustrated that they are bad characters, for they are as troublemakers.

After deconstructing the view, Lizzie also is a bad character. She herself breaks her promise and her principle without consideration between better and worse anymore. In example of inconsistency and contradiction form of the illustration can be seen in this view, as

Lizzie warns Laura after she seems like to be influenced by the temptation. As in the description, Lizzie warns, by saying "No," said Lizzie, "no, no, no;/Their offers should not charm us,/ Their evil gifts would harm us." (64-66). In line 42, Lizzie warns her sister not to meet the goblin men, and back home will be better than see the goblin, yet Laura did not obey her sister.

In addition the "other" is referred to "goblin men". Rossetti shows a queer creature as the representation of men, its symbol enables many readers to interpret it in many perspectives, include: Men are "other", in parallel meaning with queer creature. It is a distortion description in the feminist feature as the past that women are "other" for they are different to men physically. In fact, in the poem men are naturally described in the very queer creature physically which are similar to animal. From this illustration, it shows a differing, and deferral meaning. This is an implicit form of meaning, deliberately released by the poet. As a feminist writer, Rossetti wrote this poem without ever mentioning the male characters clearly except as the "goblin". It is like most people who know that goblins are "other" creatures. In this case it can be assumed that there is a reversal of meaning towards the two characters. In feminist books, women are called "other", because with the reason they are different from men who are called superior to women or "other". But in this poem it can be found that other creatures "other" actually refer to men. Hence it can be said that women become superior in this poem, because women have good posture as should be.

When Laura comes to the goblin man, she comes without any penny. It means in other contexts, it could be interpreted that she brings herself to the goblins. She herself is ready to be the main attraction for goblins as a means of buying fruit. She have no coins to pay, then said "I have no coins" in this case, Laura is indirectly the one who seduced the goblins to be given the fruit even though it is not exchanged by copper, silver or money. Laura is able to seduce the goblins for having some "gold" that could be seen by the goblins. Laura teases by offering what is on her body like her golden hair, "golden curls". She makes the goblins tempted by "much more valuable gold" rather than fruit and "tears are more precious than pearls". Instead of avoiding the goblin men and their fruits, she keeps

buying the fruits eventough the “Fruits which that unknown orchard bore”, (134)

3. Wives vs. Husbands

The other example of binary opposition is *wives vs husband*. In this narrative poem, in the last illustration of the story, the poet described that a few years later after Laura and Lizzie had a meeting with the goblins, at the end of the story, Rossetti illustrates that both of the sisters have become wives. Being mothers, with children of their own. As the illustration of the lines, “Days, weeks, months, years. Afterwards, when both were wives/With children of their own;/Their mother-hearts beset with fears,” (542-545).

In this case, Laura and Lizzie are being wives, yet the reader never met the husbands of the women throughout the poem. Principally, women hope and feel happy of having Marriage and having children. But the fact that Lizzie and Laura are still not clearly defined by their specific roles as mothers and wives, that neither their children nor husbands are given a distinct identity or name. The only names within the poem that are clearly seen namely the three women and the Goblins: Jeanie who fell and passed away, Laura who fell sick but recovered and Lizzie who had saved her sister. From this view, in binary opposition term, if there is a wife, it means that there is a husband as the notions that cannot stand alone. In this case, the notion of “husband” of the women is implicit description. The notion of the specific name and identity for “men” is suspending meaning. It is because throughout the poem, the reader only finds three women’s name that exist, as women are privilege than men. In other word, *wives* are privilege than husband.

Through the deconstruction theory, the researcher can analyze a deconstruction study through the steps of analyzing a text that was formulated by Bressler. For him analyzing or interpreting a text deconstruction study can follow several steps: First, find out the binary opposition from the text. The second steps, a deconstructionist reading tries to give comment on the values, concept and ideas beyond the operations. The third steps, a deconstructionist reading tries to dismantle previously held

conventional views. Then a deconstructionist reading accepts the possibility of various perspective or levels of meaning in a text based on the new binary inversions. The last is, it allows meaning of the text to be undecidable. Through the steps, the researcher can identify some binary opposition. The idea of brotherhood in the poem can not exist without sisterhood, brotherhood is addressed to “goblin men” as the only male characters in the poem. Meanwhile the idea of sisterhood refers to the two sisters, Lizzie and Laura. Both brotherhoods vs. Sisterhood terms are revealed through the interaction among the characters, goblin men as the merchant fruits, Laura and Lizzie as the “buyers” of the fruits.

In addition, the goblins generally are viewed as the really evil character for being had the peculiar creatures, resembling animal, or a half animal and a half human. Moreover in the narration of Rossetti, the goblins are the seducer men who sell the queer fruits with the cry “come buy, come buy” in many times. On the other hand the female characters always hear the cry from the goblin men continuously including Laura who finally really “come and buy” the fruits without money, while Lizzie keep giving notice, not to come and see the goblins, because she herself realizes the goblin are just the evil men who only seduce the women by the fruits from imprecise orchid. The contradiction view is clearly showed in this point, Laura comes to the goblin merchant men, to buy the fruit, but she did not have money. In this context, Laura is a buyer, and Goblin men are the merchant fruits. The problem is Laura “come buy” the fruit, she doesn’t have copper in her purse and does not have silver, doesn’t have any coin. This is the ironical sense of a buyer wants to buy without money. On the contrary, Laura has much gold upon the goblins. In commercial world, people know the term of “barter” which means transactions with other items without using money as the tools of changing. As seen in the poem, the goblin sale the fruits by changing with another thing. Laura has a precious golden lock, a tear more rare than pearl become the things to do exchange with goblin. In this ironical view, even though at first, the readers can assume the goblins are just the temptation creatures, but in the other perspective we can say that the woman herself shows the attraction for making goblins become tempted by the appearance. On the other

contexts, the woman brings herself to the goblins. She herself is ready to be the main attraction for goblins as a means of buying fruit. She has "much more valuable gold" rather than fruit and "tears are more precious than pearls". Keep buying the fruits without consideration about the effect.

E. CONCLUSION

The researcher draws conclusion that, reading Rossetti's *Goblin Market* poem enables the reader to get wider meaning. It is not only based on the fixed meaning of the poem itself but also the new meaning beyond the text through the lens of deconstruction perspective. Through the term of *double reading*, the poem potentially offers some binary opposition such as: the idea of brotherhood vs sisterhood, woman vs goblin men, the existence of wives vs husband, the concept of good character vs evil character or human vs other. The important aspect that also can be concluded in this poem is about the idea of conventional meaning and new meaning that can be found through deconstruction perspective theory which is used to examine the interaction among the characters the "goblin" and the two sisters, Lizzie and Laura. The reader can see that Rossetti narrates her narrative poem with the aims to give a wider insight to the readers that Goblins are the seducer merchant man who seduce the women. After deconstructing this conventional meaning that goblins are the evil man while Lizzie and Laura are really pure women, the researcher finally can get new meaning as fact that the "falling woman" Laura is not the guiltiness of goblins at all, but she herself is the seducer woman also. Thus, the researcher is possible to get the meaning based on their own interpretation. The analyzing of *Goblin Market* poem by using Derrida's Deconstruction perspective drives that meaning in a literary work is plural and undecidable.

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