

Goblin market essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

There are many themes presented in 'Goblin Market,' from the rather trite ideas of don't succumb to temptation and little girls shouldn't talk to strange men to the more controversial and indelicate themes of homosexuality, incest, drug addiction and the pain of rejected sexual desire. Rossetti presents the themes in an extremely effective, unusual manner and the style she uses aids in the expression of these themes. The thematic core of the poem is indisputably temptation and from the beginning of the poem Lizzie expresses how, 'You should not peep at Goblin men.

' This statement is the trigger that provokes Laura's overwhelming temptation to see the goblins and experience their 'orchard fruits.' Lizzie's warnings along with the refrain featured in the poem of 'come buy,' prove to be too much for Laura to resist. The style Rossetti uses when describing the fruits the goblins have to offer further emphasises the temptation felt by Laura. The more common formal structure of Rossetti's verse is replaced with a much less formal one, in which the goblin's hobbling, laughing energy is mirrored in the tumbling irregular metre. Furthermore, the way in which she lists the variety of fruits the goblins have to offer further emphasises their appeal to Laura.

As the reader is bombarded with the paratactic piling up of noun on noun, they are hastened along with Laura, towards the succulent temptations offered by the goblin men. The moral of the poem is ultimately that temptation is bad and should be resisted. This is illustrated by the drastic effects that giving into temptation had on Laura: 'Her hair grew thin and grey; She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn To swift decay and burn Her fire away.' However, it is interesting to see that when Laura initially gives into

temptation, Rossetti doesn't portray her as being weak or in the wrong, instead she states that: 'Laura stretched her gleaming neck Like a rush-imbedded swan, Like a lily from the beck, Like a moonlit poplar branch, Like a vessel at the launch When its last restraint is gone.' The imagery used here is of a positive nature and by referring to Laura with these positive images of swans, lilies and moonlit poplar branches she could be seen to be condoning Laura's actions.

This could be a result of Rossetti's religion and the fact that, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged' was 'the precept' of the Christian faith. Another theme present in the poem linked to the theme of temptation is that of addiction. Laura clearly becomes addicted to the fruit, for when she realises she can no longer hear the goblins she: 'wept As if her heart would break.' Laura's dependence upon the goblin fruits could be interpreted as a metaphor for a drug addiction.

This seems increasingly likely considering that Rossetti spent most of her life as an invalid and must have known the warming effects of certain kinds of opium. Furthermore, she would have definitely observed the effects of opiates upon her sister-in-law, Lizzie Siddal who died of an overdose of laudanum. The death of Jeanie in the poem and the decline of Laura could certainly be read as that of an addict who could not break her addiction. On the other hand, Laura's addiction could be deemed as being of more of a sexual nature.

During Laura's consumption of the fruit, there are many inferences made of sexual enjoyment: 'She sucked and sucked and sucked the more Fruits which

that unknown orchard bore. She sucked until her lips were sore. These lines are aching with reckless abandon and Laura's enjoyment of the fruit is couched in orgasmic terms, which suggests that her subsequent pining is for this once tasted, intense sexual pleasure. This theme of intense sexual desire present in the poem could stem from Rossetti's unrequited and suppressed passion for Bell Scott. On the other hand, it could equally be due to Rossetti's observance of the ill-fated love affair between her brother Dante Gabriel and Lizzie Siddal.

The relationship between Laura and Lizzie is something that is often seen as being sexual and it has caused a great deal of debate. Whether Rossetti intended to portray their relationship in a homosexual way is debatable, but she definitely uses their respective characters to symbolize many contrasting things. Lizzie can be seen to represent the Anglican sister and Laura the fallen woman. Rossetti was a devout member of the Evangelical branch of the Church of England and she consequently helped many fallen women to re-establish themselves into society. This religious outlook on the poem can be further extended by viewing Lizzie as a 'Christ-like figure.' She plays the role of a female saviour and offers her body for consumption in order to secure Laura's salvation.

This idea that a woman should be capable of a sacrifice akin to that of Christ's would have been striking to the heart of Victorian notions of femininity. In this context, Laura's moralising to her children at the end of the poem that: 'There is no friend like a sister' becomes a much more radical supposition, implying that women can take on the role of saviour and protector rather than simply requiring this protection as offered by men. The

poem confronts many themes and through it Rossetti is able to comment on the religious and social framework of nineteenth-century England. Perhaps the most impressive feature is her exploration of the dialectic between passion and denial, pleasure and sacrifice, desire and faith and especially love and death.