

The if we do not essay



The 'dark side' often deals with the suppressed subconscious elements of the human identity. It has the power to focus our attention on the intuitive subconscious realms of being which have the potential to form both creative and destructive forces within our lives. Christina Rossetti in her poem 'Goblin Market' (1862) explores this through the duality of Lizzie and Laura and the politics of their suppressed female desire and its commodification within the market place. Also, concurrently examining the dual nature of women in the market place as both objects and perpetually unfulfilled consumers.

Goblin Market can be viewed as a radical dreamlike work of expressive female desire and liberation at odds with the mannered commodification of love within Victorian England. During the mid-19th century Victorian society was framed by patriarchal conventions, the outward manifestation of which was the corset, which both physically and metaphorically kept female sexuality and the female identity codified. Rossetti's work reflected a binary opposition of the passive reticent female in public life, set against the more turbulent subconscious 'dark side' of the private unseen self, which gives the poem its dreamlike quality. 'Goblin Market' can then come under a Pre-Raphaelite context, which was a small art movement that radically began to reject the rational humanist enlightenment of the renaissance. The Pre-Raphaelites advocated a return to the thinking patterns of medieval times and a classical world informed by mythical archetypes.

Similarly, 'Goblin Market' is also set against the mythical framework of Persephone, which suggests a journey into the dark subconscious: "Our grapes fresh from the vine/ pomegranates full and fine" (#20-21). The poem

is framed by this recurring motif of the pomegranate, forming the backdrop to the poem as Laura is seduced by the calls of the Goblins and the market place. Moreover, Rossetti's poem in its exploration of the 'dark side' as dark Dionysian irrational forces of sexual desire and pleasure is also given a distinct mythological fairytale framework. Which allows the responder to mediate between the known rational world and the unknown irrational, potentially destabilising forces of human nature. Rossetti conveys the idea that the 'dark side' has the capability to consume the individual, as Laura becomes a slave to the pleasures of the Goblins.

Laura is bedazzled by the Goblins after she has eaten their fruit and the pleasures she experiences obsessively take hold of her: "I ate and ate my fill/yet my mouth waters still" (#165-166). Rossetti reinforces her thematic concerns through the conflation of the rhyming couplets and also emphasises the idea that the individual can never be truly fulfilled by the 'dark side'. This is then met with a cautionary anecdote from Lizzie of the potentially destructive forces of the Goblins sensual fruit. Jeanie the subject of the anecdote, the only other female character in the text 'pined and pined away' towards a barren death after tasting the fruit. Significantly at the end of the poem the idea of storytelling is given further importance, as Laura becomes the artist storyteller, retelling the story of female sisterhood that subverts the patriarchal structures of Victorian society. Moreover, within this context the Goblin men represent archetypal images from the collective unconsciousness of male sexual potency, their fruit and their pleasure elicits from Laura and literally possesses her soul.

Furthermore, the frequent temporal shifts between night and day further reinforce the poem's sense of a nightmarish dream, between states of being. As Rossetti through the use of hyperbolic imagery and the use of present participle: 'Listening ever... (#230) suggests that Laura is obsessively by her yearning to re-experience the goblins' fruit as Laura begins to lose all sensation unable to hear the goblins cry, where Lizzie can: "Laura turned cold as stone/To find her sister heard that cry alone" (#253-254), as she slowly slips into a fixed nightmarish world of unfulfilled desire for the goblins and their fruit. The combination of the alliterative force of the 's' sound with the onomatopoeic word choice and rhetorical question suggest the fixation of her desire: "Must she then buy no more such succuous pasture find/gone deaf and blind" (#158-159).

On the other hand, Rossetti also presents the idea that the 'dark side' can broaden the horizons of the individual, as Lizzie and Laura both move from innocence to experience following their encounters with the goblins. Rossetti also significantly sets up a contrast between the dark sardonic possessions of the female body by the goblins of Laura and Lizzie's experience and her individual will that exhaust the powers of the goblins: "At last the evil people/ Worn out by her resistance/Flung back her penny" (#337-339). Rossetti presents the idea that once the more Apollonian Lizzie confronts and acknowledges the Dionysian 'dark side' only then can she become whole enough to rescue Laura. Lizzie's triumph over goblins also has a strong feminist resonance of the female overcoming desire: "One may lead a horse to water, twenty cannot make him drink" (#422-23).

The sequences of similes following her assault by the goblins represent how she emerges stronger and attest to her inner strength and will. It must also be noted, are the plethora of similes and epithets at the beginning of the poem, as Laura is seduced by the calls of the goblins suggest her awakening sentient being: “ Like a vessel at the launch” (#85). Suggesting a movement from innocence to experience and a transgression outside the boundaries of Victorian England society into ‘ dark side’ and while Laura does become consumed by the desire for the fruit and the ‘ dark side’. However, at the end of the poem Laura emerges as the female artist free from the patriarchal restraints of the goblin and Victorian society. Finally, Rossetti also conveys the idea that only through the integration of the rational and the irrational forces which frame the text can the individual function within society. In the poem the Apollonian and Dionysian forces are represented through Lizzie and Laura who form a binary opposition or a divided self where by Laura in her movement from innocence to experience represents the shadow side, our sentient sensual being with all its potentially creative powers that ultimately needs to be reunited with the more rational earthed Lizzie, if one is to creatively live in this world.

This stark contrast between Lizzie and Laura’s psyche is represented in the balanced line: “ One content, one sick in part” (#212). Also what dynamically informs the heart of the poem through the vivid simile is the contrasting dispositions of Laura and Lizzie after Laura has been possessed and transfigured into a state of being that seems to have lost its instinct for self-preservation: “ Lizzie most placid in her look/Laura most like a leaping flame” (#217-18). The poems penultimate movement ends with the powerful

transfigurative union between Lizzie and Laura presented through the dynamic quality of Rossetti's onomatopoeic language and repetitive active verbs suggest a moment of violent sensual union between the anarchic irrational and Dionysian forces from the body and the rational ordered Apollonian tendencies of the mind: " Her lips began to scorch..

. /Her locks streamed like the torch" (#493-500). The union is given almost a religious significance as the sisters represent archetypal shadow sides of the human sensibility. It is only through this vital integration that Laura can break free from the patriarchal holds of the goblins and the discovery of their creative individual sensibilities can occur. In conclusion, through my study of Christina Rossetti's ' Goblin Market I have learnt that the ' dark side' can be both a creative and destructive force.

The text has also revealed to me that in order to function within society we must have an amalgamation of the irrational and the rational forces. The ' dark side' had the capability to broaden our humanity, while also representing the less virtuous aspects our identity.