

Seduction and Lust in Christina Rossetti's Goblin Market

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A seemingly innocent poem about two sisters' encounters with goblin men, Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" is a tale of seduction and lust. Behind the lattice of the classic mortal entrapment and escapement from fairyland, "Goblin Market" explores [Laura's](#) desire for heterosexual knowledge, the goblin men's desire for [mortal](#) flesh, and Laura and Lizzie's desire for homosexual eroticism.

Goblin men fascinate the sisters Laura and Lizzie, innocent virgins who were taught not to "peep at goblin men" (Rossetti, l. 49). Predominantly iambic tetrametric, "Goblin Market" follows a convoluted rhyming scheme and includes many enjambments, repetitions, and dialogues. This experimental form readily lends itself to natural storytelling and mirrors the experimentation of Laura and Lizzie. Laura, more curious than her sister, "[chooses] to linger/Wondering at each merchant man" (ll. 69-70). This curiosity and longing is expressed through Rossetti's use of diction and rhyme in describing the girls' "clasping arms and cautioning lips,/With tingling cheeks and finger tips" (ll. 38-39; italics mine).

Laura is tempted to taste the luscious grapes the goblins peddle, though she acknowledges that the fruits' "hungry thirsty roots" grow on alien soils (l. 45).

Laura's repetition of "Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie" betrays her restless longings. The consecutive commencements with the word "one" and the assonance on the vowel "O" in the lines describing the goblins set the tone of urgency: "One hauls a basket,/One bears a plate,/One lugs a golden dish/Of many pounds weight" (ll. 54-59). This technique, like a refrain, punctuates the entire poem and Laura, wi...

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...nd "dew-wet grass" (ll. 532-533). As with the girls' experiences with the goblin men, this homoerotic experience is like a dream (l. 537). Laura and Lizzie, by sharing of themselves, discover that "there is no friend like a sister" (l. 562). Their love, redeeming and life giving, surpasses the seductive yet bitter fruits of the goblin men.

[Christina](#) Rossetti's "Goblin Market", though punctuated with an air of innocence, is imbued with provocative imageries and rhymes. It encapsulates Laura's desperate yearnings for the goblins' fruits, the goblins' lascivious desire to entrap chaste mortals, and Laura and Lizzie's feverish love that is neither vulgar nor ephemeral.

Works Cited

Rossetti, Christina. *Goblin Market*. Illustrated by Laurence Housman. 1893. New York: Dover, 1983.

Work Consulted

Bellas, Ralph A. *Christina Rossetti*. Boston: Twayne, 1977.

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