

goblin market poem analysis

Goblin Market is a captivating poem written by Christina Rossetti and published in 1862. This narrative poem has intrigued readers and scholars alike for its rich imagery, complex themes, and moral undertones. In this analysis, we will delve into the central themes, character dynamics, and the poem's historical context, providing a comprehensive understanding of Rossetti's work.

Overview of Goblin Market

Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" tells the story of two sisters, Laura and Lizzie, who encounter a group of goblin merchants selling alluring fruit. The poem is notable for its lush, sensory language and its exploration of female sexuality, temptation, and redemption. It blends elements of fairy tales, folklore, and moral allegory, making it a unique piece in Victorian literature.

Thematic Analysis

The poem is rife with themes that resonate on multiple levels. Below are some of the most significant:

1. Temptation and Desire

The goblins represent temptation, luring the sisters with their enchanting fruit. Laura, who succumbs to the goblins' allure, embodies the dangers of unchecked desire. Her experience serves as a cautionary tale about the consequences of indulgence and the loss of innocence.

- Symbolism of the Fruit: The fruit symbolizes not only physical pleasure but also the broader theme of sexual awakening. Laura's initial delight in the fruit quickly turns into despair as she realizes the cost of her indulgence.

2. Sisterhood and Sacrifice

Lizzie's character represents loyalty and selflessness. After Laura's fall, Lizzie risks her safety to save her sister by confronting the goblins. This act of sacrifice highlights the strength of sisterly bonds and the theme of female solidarity.

- Contrast Between Sisters: The differences between Laura and Lizzie underscore the complexities of female identity. Laura, driven by desire, contrasts with Lizzie, who embodies restraint and courage.

3. The Duality of Female Experience

Rossetti explores the duality of female existence through her characters. While Laura's story reflects the peril of succumbing to temptation, Lizzie's journey illustrates the power of resilience and redemption. This duality raises questions about societal expectations of women during the Victorian era.

Character Analysis

The characters in "Goblin Market" are richly drawn and serve to amplify the poem's themes.

1. Laura

Laura is the more vulnerable of the two sisters. Her curiosity leads her to the goblin market, where her desires overpower her judgment. The impact of her choices is profound, as she experiences both ecstasy and despair.

- Transformation: After consuming the fruit, Laura undergoes a transformation marked by physical and emotional deterioration, symbolizing the consequences of yielding to temptation.

2. Lizzie

In contrast, Lizzie represents strength and moral fortitude. Even after witnessing Laura's downfall, she remains steadfast and determined to save her sister.

- Heroic Qualities: Lizzie's journey to confront the goblins illustrates her bravery and selflessness. She endures physical assault from the goblins but refuses to submit, ultimately leading to Laura's redemption.

3. The Goblins

The goblins themselves are intriguing figures, embodying both temptation and danger. Their seductive language and enticing offerings reflect the themes of desire and the moral pitfalls of indulgence.

- Representation of Evil: The goblins can be interpreted as representations of societal vices, preying on the weaknesses of the innocent. Their haunting calls are reminiscent of sirens, luring individuals to their doom.

Imagery and Symbolism

Rossetti employs vivid imagery and rich symbolism throughout "Goblin Market," which enhances the poem's emotional depth and thematic complexity.

1. Sensory Language

The poem is characterized by its lush, sensory descriptions of the fruit and the goblin market. This imagery immerses the reader in the world of the poem, evoking both beauty and danger.

- Examples of Imagery: Phrases like "fruits and sweets" and descriptions of the goblins' appearances create a vibrant yet unsettling atmosphere. The use of alliteration and rhyme further enhances the musical quality of the poem.

2. Symbolism of the Market

The goblin market serves as a multifaceted symbol. It represents not only the allure of temptation but also the broader societal pressures faced by women during the Victorian era.

- Commercialization of Femininity: The market can be seen as a critique of how women's desires are commodified and exploited, reflecting the societal expectations imposed upon them.

Historical Context

To fully appreciate "Goblin Market," it's essential to consider the historical and cultural context in which Rossetti wrote.

1. Victorian Gender Norms

The Victorian era was characterized by strict gender roles and expectations for women. Women were often viewed as passive and were expected to embody purity and virtue.

- Rebellion Against Norms: Rossetti's poem challenges these norms by portraying the complex inner lives of women and exploring themes of sexuality, desire, and autonomy.

2. Pre-Raphaelite Influence

Christina Rossetti was closely associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group of artists and poets who sought to challenge the conventions of their time.

- Artistic Movement: The Pre-Raphaelites emphasized vivid imagery and emotional depth, which is evident in Rossetti's use of language and symbolism in "Goblin Market."

Critical Reception and Interpretations

Since its publication, "Goblin Market" has been the subject of extensive analysis and interpretation. Critics have approached the poem from various angles, including feminist, psychoanalytic, and historical perspectives.

1. Feminist Interpretations

Feminist critics have highlighted the poem's exploration of female desire and agency. Lizzie's role as a savior and protector of her sister challenges traditional gender roles.

- Empowerment Through Sisterhood: The bond between Laura and Lizzie serves as a powerful symbol of female empowerment and solidarity in the face of societal challenges.

2. Psychoanalytic Readings

Psychoanalytic interpretations have focused on the themes of repression and desire. Laura's indulgence in the goblins' fruit can be seen as a metaphor for the struggle between societal expectations and personal desires.

- Conflict Between Id and Superego: Laura's consumption of the fruit represents the id's pursuit of pleasure, while Lizzie's resistance reflects the superego's moral constraints.

Conclusion

In "Goblin Market," Christina Rossetti weaves a rich tapestry of themes, characters, and symbolism that invites readers to explore the complexities of female experience, desire, and redemption. Through the lens of sisterhood and sacrifice, the poem challenges societal norms and highlights the struggles women faced in the Victorian era. As a result, "Goblin Market" remains a timeless work that continues to resonate with contemporary audiences, inviting ongoing analysis and interpretation. Its enduring appeal lies in its ability to provoke thought and inspire discussion about the intricate interplay between desire, morality, and identity.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the central themes of Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'?

The central themes of 'Goblin Market' include temptation, sisterhood, and the duality of desire and sacrifice. The poem explores the dangers of succumbing to temptation and the strength of familial bonds, particularly through the relationship between the two sisters, Laura and Lizzie.

How does Rossetti use imagery to convey the dangers of the goblin merchants?

Rossetti employs vivid and often grotesque imagery to depict the goblin merchants and their fruit. The descriptions of the fruit as alluring yet dangerous serve to symbolize the enticing but potentially destructive nature of desire and temptation.

In what ways does 'Goblin Market' reflect Victorian societal views on women and sexuality?

The poem reflects Victorian societal views by portraying women as vulnerable to male temptation and the consequences of sexual awakening. The goblin men represent predatory masculinity, while the sisters' experiences highlight the societal pressures on women regarding purity and morality.

What role does sisterhood play in the narrative of 'Goblin Market'?

Sisterhood is central to the narrative, as Lizzie's selfless act to save Laura highlights the theme of female solidarity. Their bond underscores the idea that love and support between women can overcome adversity and the perils of temptation, ultimately leading to redemption.

How does the structure of 'Goblin Market' enhance its themes?

The poem's structure, with its rhythmic verse and repeated refrains, enhances its themes by creating a musical quality that mirrors the seductive lure of the goblin merchants. The alternating voices of Laura and Lizzie also emphasize the contrast between surrender to temptation and resilience, reinforcing the poem's moral lessons.

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