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### Christianity in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market"

Though Christina Rossetti's poem "Goblin Market" is believed to be an allegory for fallen women, there are many other allegorical interpretations that can be applied to the work. Some of these interpretations work better than others when it comes to the specific symbolic images throughout the poem. However, one of the most direct interpretations of this poem ties to back to Rossetti's Christian beliefs. "Goblin Market" is an allegory for the Christian narrative, specifically the forgiveness of sins.

The poem begins with an image of goblins selling fruits. Women hear their cries of "apples and quinces, / lemons and oranges, / plump unpecked cherries," and dozens of other enticing fruits, all with the promise that they are "sweet to tongue and sound to eye" (5-30). These fruits become a symbol for sin: enticing by appearance but ultimately bringing about a kind of death. Laura is intrigued by these fruits because they pique her curiosity. Despite her sister's warnings, she lingers (69). Though the appearance of these goblin men is horrific and animalistic, their voices sound like doves "cooing all together: / they sounded kind and full of loves / in the pleasant weather" (71-80). The longer she lingers around these temptations, the more enticing they seem—even full of love. Like sin, these fruits and their merchants seem deceptively good. The longer she spends listening to these men, the more her curiosity turns into longing (106). This is comparable to the effect of sin; the longer one spends being interested in the temptation, the more one feels like he wants it.

In this allegory for the Christian story, the cost of the fruit becomes a symbol for the price of sin. For Laura's first taste of the fruit, she pays with a lock of her hair (126). This is important because Laura's golden hair not only symbolizes her purity and worth, but it also is a piece of herself that she must give up in order to get a temporary taste of this fruit. In the Christian belief, one gives up a piece of himself or his purity when he gives himself over to sin. Part of the problem of sin lies in that human beings owe their lives to their creator yet give themselves to lesser things that seem good in the moment. Laura gives up a lock of her hair that she cannot take back and receives a taste of fruit that seems overwhelmingly good in the moment. This taste of false goodness leads her to an overconsumption of the fruit, desperate to satisfy herself with the sweetness. Often, in a desperate attempt to feel satisfied, one who tastes the unsatisfying sweetness of sin gives into the sin entirely. Laura "sucked [the fruits] until her lips were sore," disregarding the state of her body in an attempt to feel fulfilled (136). Giving into sin not only leads to the disregard of the state of one's body but also his soul.

The cost of the fruits does not stop with Laura's hair and physical state. Likewise, the price of sin goes deeper than a piece of self or a neglect of the soul. As Laura returns to the marketplace to wait for the appealing call of the goblin men, she finds that she cannot hear them (253-4). This is an allegorical loss of appeal. When someone gives into a sin entirely, often the deceptive appeal of goodness it once had gives way into an addiction to something the sinner thinks he needs. Laura loses her ability to see the deceptive pleasantness of the fruits, but even so, her fixation on the fruits overwhelms her senses. Her golden hair turns thin and gray, and the fire, or hope, within her begins to die away (269-80). Even as a sinner is no longer able to experience the appeal of the sin, he may become fixated on the necessity of it in his life. His purity of soul is destroyed and his ability to experience grace or hope fades. Laura's inability to

eat or take care of her home can be paralleled to the sinner's inability to turn to spiritual nourishment. Ultimately, the cost of the "fruit" of sin ends up being a slow death of soul.

However, the Christian story does not end in ultimate death and neither does this poem. In the poem, Laura's sister Lizzie rises up as the savior. First, she immerses herself in Laura's life as much as possible, even going with her to see the goblin men so that she may try to convince Laura to leave them and come home (32-63). In the Christian narrative, God too immerses himself in the world by sending Jesus, fully man as well as fully divine, to walk alongside humanity and guide them away from sin. However, when Laura chooses to try the fruits, she does not join her nor prevent her from doing so (64-69). Likewise, Jesus did not participate in sin nor did he take humanity's free will away from them. When Laura suffers the consequences of eating the fruit, Lizzie suffers too because she loves her sister. As Laura's condition worsens until she faces almost certain death, Lizzie's love for her sister determines her following actions (320-3). As the human condition under the influence of sin causes souls to suffer with death or damnation on the line, Jesus is also driven by love to offer up nearly everything for the sake of his people.

Not everything is given up, however. In Lizzie's sacrifice of self, she does not give up her purity of heart. She faces the goblin men head-on and they abuse her body, tempting her with their fruits and promises. Still, she does not attack them, and her mind stays solely upon her sister (348-65). This parallels the Christian narrative at the time of Jesus's betrayal and sentencing. As he is scourged and beaten, he does not lash out against his attackers. His words reflect that his thoughts are only on God's plan and his love for the people who put him into this place. When asked to give in and dine on the deadly fruit, Lizzie refuses, staying true to her purity (383-9). Likewise, when Jesus is tempted on the cross to free himself and his companions,

he stays true to the predetermined plan and does not compromise his virtue for his own pleasure. He also does this throughout his life: rejecting sin during his forty days in the desert as well as through his parables and actions with his disciples. The goblins eventually attempt to force Lizzie to eat of the fruits, physically assaulting her as well as pressing them to her mouth (398-407). With these fruits symbolizing sins and the goblins sinners, this is paralleled by Jesus in that during his life, he was driven out of synagogues by mobs, conspired against by priests, and even tempted directly by Satan. He took the attacks without engaging or giving in. Eventually, he was crucified on a cross meant for a sinner. He took the punishment without willfully engaging in the act, like Lizzie tasting the juices of the fruits without willfully accepting them to eat. Because of this, both Jesus and Lizzie lose nothing of themselves to sin. "White and golden Lizzie stood, / like a lily in a flood," Rossetti writes (408-10). Her purity is on display despite the juices of the fruits smeared upon her face, leaving her attackers "mad to tug her standard down" (421). Despite the goblins' attempts to drag her into temptation, Lizzie accepts the abuse and does not give in and accept their fruits (390-420). When Jesus is upon the cross, his innocence and kingship is displayed despite being in the position of a thief. Despite his opposers' attempts to break down his standards, he does not give in. He accepts the abuse and chooses to love even his attackers, though not their sins. Ultimately, Lizzie's purity defeats the goblins, leaving them writhing and vanishing (437-46). She is able to go on her way, not pursued by goblins or stricken with fear (447-60). Likewise, Jesus's death on the cross is not the end. He rises from the dead and comes back to meet his disciples, like Lizzie comes back to meet Laura, and is unaffected by fear.

Some may argue that the Christian allegory is undermined by Lizzie's pursuit of the goblins and their fruits in order to help Laura. However, it is important to acknowledge that her

pursual is founded in love and desire to heal her sister rather than for the goods of the fruits themselves. She also does not engage in the consumption of the fruits and remains strong despite temptation and harsh abuse (365-446). Jesus's humanity and presence on Earth was his way of accepting the sins of the world for the sake of the ones he loved, though he did not participate in the sins of mankind. When faced with the sin of the ones he loved, rather than engaging in it, he accepted its consequences himself through abuse and death on the cross of a thief. In doing so, he was able to transform this consequence into the remedy for sin.

When Lizzie returns to Laura, Laura tastes the juices of the fruits off her sister's skin. This taste leads to a process of purification through her body that ends in a question: "Is it death or is it life?" (523). This question is answered with, "Life out of death" (524). In the Christian experience, accepting the consequence of sin through the person of Jesus leads to a different sort of death than that brought by the sin itself. Christians are challenged to die to themselves and their own desires in order to give their lives to serve their savior. Only by dying can they obtain the purified life promised by Jesus, who transformed the consequence of sin (death on a cross) into an opportunity for eternal life (through the acceptance of his self-sacrifice). In the poem, Laura's hair regains its golden hue and her youthful life returns because of her acceptance of goodness through her sister's act (540-2). Through Jesus, Christians also believe they are able to regain their purity of heart and life for their souls. In order to maintain this purity, the sisters in the poem continue to tell the story to one another and to their daughters as a reminder of not only the dangers of the fruits but also the power of the sister's sacrifice (557-67). Christians, too, live out their purest lives by sharing their stories as testaments to the power of Jesus's love and sacrifice.

Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" is an allegory for the Christian salvation narrative that gives a new context for understanding the actions of Jesus. Through the symbolism of fruit and its cost, she reveals the appeal and consequences of sin. In her character Lizzie's self-sacrificing action of love, she gives a new light to Jesus's ability to transform sin without partaking in it. Finally, through the sharing of testimony in the end, she reveals the importance for Christians to tell their story of salvation in order to remind themselves and teach others to avoid the deceptive appeals of sin.

Work Cited

Rossetti, Christina. "Goblin Market." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Major Authors*, edited by Greenblatt, Stephen. W.W. Norton and Company, 2018. pp. 862-74.