

Kennesaw State University
2020 Symposium of Student Scholars
Kennesaw, Georgia
16 April 2020

Fruits of Forced Desire: A Marxist Reading of Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market”

Christina Rossetti’s 1859 poem, “Goblin Market,” is a tale of two maidens fearful of goblin merchants who canter about the glen selling an array of tempting fruits. Outside traditional feminist interpretations, the poem demonstrates the Marxist theory concerning commodification and reification. The maidens reveal the process in which human beings become commodities, solidifying Marx’s statement that: “the increasing value of the world of things proceed in direct proportion the devaluation of the world of men.”

Using specific aesthetic features common in the works of art during the Pre-Raphaelite movement, the poem further underscores the overall effects of laborer alienation and industrial aggression towards the working class, the negative dominance of capital and commodity fetishism through the supremacy of industrialization, the abundance (as detailed by the multiple fruits Rossetti describes) of available mass-produced goods, and the consumerist desire for such commodities. Furthermore, a comprehensive examination of Rossetti’s application of rhythm and meter will demonstrate how the power of desire is manipulated and controlled by the goblin men to dehumanize the maidens, forcing them to assume the character of exchange-value, and ultimately selling their bodies for material desire.

The multiplicity of viewpoints that Marxist theory presents in “Goblin Market” exposes the ills of class inequality, commodity persuasion, and the conformity of the mass population to the bourgeoisie, resulting in the dehumanization of the proletariat. This presentation is a stylistic analysis of Rossetti’s poem to demonstrate how alienated the working class was in the mid-19th century. Furthermore, by applying a Marxist analysis of the poem, conclusions will be drawn to further discuss how desire of commodity effects current affairs.