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The “Goblin Market”: Corruption through Temptation and Labor

As Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” is a testament to the many human and societal complexities, one of its most powerful themes is the interpretation of capitalism seen from a Marxist’s lens. Through this literary frame the reader can understand the story is a comment on the corruption of consumerism through the introduction of a capitalist market whose power lies in the ability to seduce and tempt, symbolic of the inner self and outer societal struggle to refrain from consumer self-over-indulgence and societal passive aggressiveness to combat the powers that be whom supply the jobs, but make the most money, while its laborers profit little to none. Rossetti’s use of the metaphor constructs the story of a whimsical tale concluding in a happy ending, but the symbolism implied by the use of the metaphors turns the story into a grotesque narrative with an activist calling for change.

The “Goblin Market” accurately portrayed the social construct of the Bourgeoisie, the benefactors or the rich and the Proletariat, the poor. However the Bourgeoisie, even though first interpreted as the goblins themselves, are actually not even in the story. The goblins portray the labor market whom toil daily for the Bourgeoisie in a mindless repetition selling the eye-catching products “fruit” to themselves which in the case of the story are the two sisters, Laura and Lizzie. Laura noted the goblin are “merchant men”, but described them as having animal characteristics, “one had a cat’s face, one whisk’d a tail, one tramp’d at a rat’s pace, one crawl’d like a snail”. The use of these attributes de-personifies the men, the labor market, and turns them into non-human pieces of equipment called goblins, ugly creatures whose only function is to chant, “come

buy, come buy”, lure in those who will fall for the scheme of consumerism and over indulgence, and sell miniscule products which will only satisfy for a moment before the consumer desires more.

If the goblin labor market can't turn a profit then the hidden powers that be (the Bourgeoisie) could replace them which is why they attacked Lizzie, the Marxist conscious character who sees through capitalism and seeks to reform it. However in a more deconstructive viewpoint because Lizzie is attacking the labor force she is only harming the lower class like herself, not the overall problem. In a way the “Goblin Market” establishes the belief that by attacking the Bourgeoisie in attempt to reform a capitalist, consumerist, materialistic society will only destroy the labor force as they are the ones who need the money to live despite they are figuratively and literally dying to get out from underneath the Bourgeoisie by either working for them (the goblins) or by buying from them which they can't afford (Laura's exchange of blonde lock of hair), symbolic of handing one's soul over for material possessions. From what happened to the friend Jeanie who displayed the over indulgent consumer who died from self-destruction symbolizes the death for trying to live above one's means as well as the withdrawal from a capitalist society and the reviving of Laura proves to confront capitalism will equate to near death.

In the end because Lizzie used the squashed fruit juice nearly forced down her throat, symbolizing a bombardment of materialism, but also an implication of what will happen if capitalism is resisted to revive Laura the “Goblin Market” does not showcase the revolution of Marxism on a society, but is detrimental to it. Therefore a Marxist revolution is not possible in the grand scheme of things because on surface (which is what is cared about more) capitalism supplies jobs and satisfaction, if only for a moment which stimulates a society's economy and

culture, i.e., the “Goblin Market” story would not exist. However it stands to say without the temptation and consumption, the interdependence between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie would fall in on itself and crumble the very structure of living, symbolized through one’s wealth, economy, and culture.