

All Audiences

There seem to be many qualities to Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" that make it appropriate for children. I found it to be an easier read than much of what we've covered so far in this class. It didn't take me nearly as long to complete as many of the poems we've been assigned: I am usually rereading particular stanzas three, four or ten times. This is not to say that Rossetti's work lacks depth, but many of her meanings are more direct and understandable.

Children would be able to get through this much more easily than say Shelley's "Mont Blanc" or Browning's "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church" (although there might be a few unlucky five year olds who have parents reading them these kinds of stories before bed). It discusses many objects that are colorful and vivid, such as the "Crab-apples, dewberries, / Pine-apples, blackberries, / Apricots, strawberries;— / All ripe together / In summer weather,—" (1650). The piece also addresses sisterhood and the special relationship that can exist there, especially in youth: "For there is no friend like a sister / In calm or stormy weather;" (1663). These are lines that contain subjects and ideas that are very recognizable to children and to which they would respond; certainly more so than an imposing mountain or a priest with a very elaborate posthumous agenda.

I think that good children's entertainment is made to have many different layers, where someone from any age may find things to appreciate. Writing in a style that is accessible to children, as Rossetti did in this piece, does not disqualify it from being of interest to adults. In fact, there is a lot that can be done in that space; have you watched a Pixar film lately?

Re: Children as the Audience?

If not for the sexually suggestive content, one could easily imagine this story in a storybook with vivid and colorful illustrations that catch a child's interest. The tone of the poem would best be described as innocent and naïve. Both girls act like and have the rationale of a young child.

I'm wondering about the opinions some people have about this poem and its supposed sexual components. The girls are sisters, after all. So what are we talking about here: homosexuality with some sort of bizarre incestuous component to it? I'm inclined to believe that in innocence we do not concern ourselves with these kinds of ideas. Sharing a bed with your best friend or sister or brother or whatever isn't wrong like it is when you grow up. The word "gay" appears (as does "queer", if I remember correctly, although I don't have my textbook available to me as I'm typing this), but we're talking about the intended meanings of these words, not the slang-that-has-somehow-become-primary-meaning over the decades.

I was not able to determine the ages of the two characters (maybe I need to read through it again); perhaps that was done on purpose by Rossetti to add a strong dimension to the piece. If so, then it seems to have worked, or maybe had an unintended result.

Re: Forbidden Fruits and Creepy Goblins

I noticed all of these hidden sexual images Rossetti paints, like how the goblins grope the sister as they pass through the market and assault the girls with produce. Not to forget all of these allusions to temptation...

I interpreted these warnings to be temptation, but in an ambiguous form. There are countless things by which a person can be tempted, and perhaps sex tops the list most of the time, but the poem never really establishes what any of these are (except, as you mentioned, the familiar notion of eating forbidden fruit, which represents all kinds of things).

As our text mentioned in her introduction pages, Rossetti was strongly religious and self disciplined. If a child reads "Goblin Market", he or she may be thinking about why it's not a good idea to sneak into the cookie jar when nobody is looking; however, an adult reader may associate the general notion of temptation with very different things, like cheating on one's taxes or having a one night stand. The poem may be communicating the values of self control more than anything else—at least, that's how I interpreted it.

Re: Children as the Audience?

"Brother with queer brother" (line 94, page 1653). "In her gay prime" (line 316, page 1657).

If there is supposed to be sexually charged components to this poem then it seems to come in the form of incestual homosexuality, whatever the hell that means (see my other responses if what I'm saying here doesn't make any sense).