

Research Note

The Price of the Forbidden and the Value of Life

Yasak Olanın Bedeli ve Hayatın Değeri

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Abstract

Biblical stories serve as a foundation for European literature and artwork because of the mystical dimensions that address mankind and human qualities in general. Both the narrative of Adam and Eve and the fruit of knowledge have become well-known literary devices that have served as sources of inspiration for writers and poets throughout history. Both Christina Rossetti and Thomas Mann use the theme of forbidden fruit and its consequences as the subject matter that they handle in their literary works. They do this in order to demonstrate the consequences of giving in to the temptations of things that one should not want. In a postmodern way, both *Goblin Market* by Christina Rossetti and *Death in Venice* by Thomas Mann deal with the theme of surrendering to the temptation of an unlawful desire and the destructive effects of it through the depiction of the physical and psychological deterioration of the protagonists in each work.

Keywords: Fruit of knowledge, surrendering to temptation, forbidden desires, forbidden fruit, Christina Rossetti, Thomas Mann

Öz

İncil hikayeleri, insanlığa ve genel olarak insanın sahip olması gereken niteliklerine hitap eden mistik boyutları nedeniyle Avrupa'da oluşturulan edebiyat ve sanat eserleri için temel bir tema görevi görür. Hem Âdem ile Havva'nın hikayesi hem de bilginin meyvesi (yasak elma), tarih boyunca yazarlar ve şairler için ilham kaynağı olarak hizmet eden yaygın bir edebi konu haline gelmiştir. Yasak olanın cezbediciliği, edebi eserlerdeki kahramanlar için hem bir uyarı hem de bir sosyal yaşamı düzenleme kuralı olarak edebiyatçılar tarafından eserlerinde kullanılmıştır. Hem Christina Rossetti hem de Thomas Mann yasak meyve temasını ve sonuçlarını eserlerinde konu olarak kullanırlar. Bunu, kişinin istememesi gereken şeylerin cazibesine teslim olmanın sonuçlarını göstermek için yaparlar. Post-modern bir tarzda, hem Christina Rossetti'nin "Goblin Market" adlı şiiri, hem de Thomas Mann'ın "Death in Venice" adlı romanı, yasak bir arzunun cazibesine teslim olma temasını ve onun yıkıcı etkilerini, eserlerinde ki kahramanların yasak olanın tadına varduktan sonraki psikolojik ve fiziksel olarak çöküşünü edebi bir dile dökmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bilginin meyvesi, günaha teslimiyet, yasak arzular, yasak meyve, Christina Rossetti, Thomas Mann

Introduction

The consistent upheaval in the 20th century's social, political, and economic landscape led to a fragmented individual, both from the community and within the

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individual's inner peace. As a consequence, people started to lose their sense of individuality, their involvement in society, and their grasp on reality. The subjective and individual truth that people define regarding their viewpoints and beliefs of what constitutes the real and what does not is brought to light when individuals lose touch with reality and their uniqueness (Hutcheon 33). As shown in these literary works, *Goblin Market* and *Death in Venice*, succumbing to temptation results in the disintegration and degradation of the self. Individuals who are fragmented often tend to build their own versions of truth and reality. In addition, they are unable to maintain their engagement in the society, and as a consequence, they lose touch with reality. Both Laura and Aschenbach, the protagonists of *Goblin Market* and *Death in Venice*, find themselves in hopeless circumstances in their respective ways, and both lose contact with reality as a result. This is a similar subject that may be better understood by comparing and contrasting these two literary works in a postmodern way. Therefore, the use of postmodern literature makes it possible to comprehend a literary work not only by analysing the text on its own but also by considering the idea of intertextuality. Intertextuality is a literary study that examines the connection of a work of literature to other literary works. Its purpose is to create numerous truths by implying that there is no longer a single, overarching truth that is appropriate to the situation. Because of this, the focus of this paper will be on two separate works, *Goblin Market* and *Death in Venice*, and the similar topic of being tempted and the consequences of giving in to it.

Sources of Temptation and Warnings against It

Goblin Market by Christina Rossetti focuses on the concept of giving in to temptation. The poem is about two sisters, named Lizzie and Laura, who are in a forest where goblins are trying to get them to eat fruit that they are selling. Lizzie is a representation of self-determination because she chooses not to look at the goblins and does not consume the fruit of the goblins by shutting down her eyes and closing her ears. In contrast, Laura is a representation of the fallen woman of the Victorian Era because she chooses to look at the goblins and consume the fruits of the goblins, which destroys her both physically and psychologically. This poem may be understood as a monitory example of the Victorian Era, and it is an extreme example of Victorian repressed sexuality: it shows a great dread of female sexuality and the possible ramifications of that fear (Harrison 416). Lizzie is capable of resisting the seduction of the goblins' forbidden aspirations because she is a strong woman. On the other hand, Laura gives in to the allure of the world's illicit pleasures and wants, which ultimately leads to her downfall. The goblins leave her after they tempt her to consume the fruits. The goblins' abandoning of their role as her deceivers and her desire to ingest the fruits ultimately lead to her demise; Lizzie is the only one who can rescue her from this fate by putting her own life in danger to retrieve the fruits.

A threat of seduction of forbidden desires is posed in *Goblin Market* via the portrayal of an important personality, Laura, whom the creatures in the poem try to entice so as to enjoy their offerings representing the portrayal of man seducers, which was unacceptable during the Victorian period. This is accomplished via Laura's portrayal

in the story. The goblins in the forest try to entice her to taste their fruits. “She heard a voice like voice of doves / Cooing all together: / They sounded kind and full of loves” (Rossetti 76-79). Lizzie finds the temptation to indulge in the forbidden yearning to be seductive and alluring. Despite this, Lizzie demonstrates a healthy dose of self-assurance by refusing to look at the goblins, which allows her to avoid giving in to the temptation. Nevertheless, the temptingness of the goblins’ voices and the display of the fruits serve as a depiction of the things she needs but is not permitted to have. By characterizing the fruits in the following way, the goblins want to throw Laura off her game and cause her confusion:

Currants and gooseberries,
Bright-fire-like barberries,
Figs to fill your mouth,
Citrons from the South,
Sweet to tongue and sound to eye,
Come buy, come buy. (Rossetti 29-31)

The goblins purposefully use sensual language while describing the strange fruits that Laura has never had before since they know she will not understand. However, the purpose of the goblins’ use of eroticized language is to provoke Laura’s imagination over the flavour of the fruits that the monsters are trying to sell.

Whereas the attractiveness of the fruits as well as the rhetoric used by goblins to depict the fruits establish the subject of forbidden desire enticement, the narrative of Jeanie conveys an exemplary final disaster that Laura is unwilling to consider. Lizzie tells Jeanie’s story, the story of the girl tasting the goblins’ fruits long before the sisters encountered the creatures. Jeanie dies at an early age as a result of consuming the fruit when Jeanie “...should have been a bride; / But who for joys brides hope to have / Fell sick and died” (Rossetti 513-515). Jeanie’s tale is the precursor to the devastation awaiting Laura as a direct result of her consumption of the fruit that is strictly beyond limits. “In *Goblin Market* Lizzie reminds her sister of the tragedy which befell Jeanie who succumbed to the temptation of the goblin men” (Evans 163). Along with the harrowing tale that Jeanie has told, Lizzie has also cautioned her sister about staring at the goblins and consuming their fruit. Laura is so perplexed by the goblin men and their fruit that she is unable to resist giving in to the forbidden desire that they represent and hence gives in to temptation. In addition to this, Laura continues to insistently explain the motions of the goblin monsters and the splendour of the fruit in an effort to get Lizzie to take a look at the creatures. Lizzie tries to prepare Laura for the potential risks of this meeting by informing her that it is illegal to gaze at or make eye contact with goblins. Laura’s fixation on the fruit originates from the joys of her forbidden desires; as a result, she is oblivious to the idea that the consequences of her action will be lethal. Because of this, Laura is the personification of giving in to the lure of forbidden wants and the portrayal of people who ignore warnings about the consequences of giving in to forbidden desires.

Similarly, in Thomas Mann’s novel *Death in Venice*, the postmodernist portrayal of Gustav von Aschenbach deals with the issue of seduction of the forbidden passion in

the same way that the theme of giving in to temptation is dealt with in the poem *Goblin Market*. Aschenbach is an established and renowned writer who, in order to find inspiration for his work, goes to Venice. While there, he meets Tadzio, a Polish lad of fourteen years of age who has godlike beauty. Aschenbach is captivated with Tadzio. The very first thing that Aschenbach considers doing is to “follow beauty exclusively and you make a god of something in the physical world, outside yourself, something subject to decay and rotting and disease, which leads to decay in yourself” (Church 648). But the compassion which Aschenbach experiences towards this kid and his grace, in addition to the deadly disease in Venice brings about Aschenbach’s obvious end as he sits on a chair on the seaside while staring at Tadzio (Mann 121-122), the beauty of whom, from the point of view of an aesthetic, conquers Aschenbach. The attractiveness of Tadzio acts as an enticement of an unfulfilled need which eventually results in the decadent that Aschenbach experiences both in his mind and his body. Aschenbach views Tadzio as having a godlike or statuesque beauty, which he first dismisses as naive but eventually develops feelings for. “Aschenbach’s worship of the beautiful and good is but a calculation of what is profitable for him” when he first sees the boy (Church 650). Because of this, although he appreciates attractiveness from a point of aesthetics, Aschenbach is incapable of understanding that the elegance that the boy has will seduce him to his own downfall. This is despite the fact that he worships beauty as an aesthetic form. In a manner analogous to that of the fruits and vegetables in *Goblin Market*, the leading characters, Laura and Aschenbach, find it impossible to resist the allure of beauty and are oblivious to the impending doom despite having been forewarned about it. The fall of the leading character into temptation is brought about by beauty and its artistic charm.

Aschenbach is fooled by the brilliance that he observes in Tadzio, therefore he chooses to disregard the warnings that he has been given about the potentially fatal sickness that will infect the whole city. As he walks secretly behind his beloved Tadzio through the winding streets of Venice, he becomes aware of the odour of the germicide that permeates the whole city (Mann 86). When Aschenbach thinks about how much he loves Tadzio, he chooses to disregard the fact that Tadzio’s hairdresser has told him about the terrible sickness that is plaguing Venice. “It is dangerous and horrible yet it keeps him near Tadzio and seems, moreover, to present his own hidden corruption” (McNamara 234). Enchanted by his prohibited want, he can understand the consequence of his forbidden longing to love a boy might be his own death. This is because he has allowed himself to fall under the spell of the prohibited desire. The weather acts as a second foreshadowing to Aschenbach, indicating that the gloomy and dismal weather might be a glimpse of his final end, providing it is acknowledged that in works of fiction, the presence of unfavourable weather often serves as a metaphor for the trials and tribulations that lie ahead for the main character. Aschenbach is so completely blinded by getting closer to his origin of temptation despite the fact that he is aware that the climate is not fine for his health and that “this same weather had afflicted him, and impaired his health so seriously that he had to abandon Venice like a fugitive” (Mann 44). Aschenbach is resolute in his decision to remain in Venice, despite the many warnings he has received about the impending

sickness and the weather forecast, and as a result, he is the one who brings about his own demise.

Physical and Psychological Deterioration of Tempted Ones

In addition to the recurring subject of being tempted by a forbidden passion, Christina Rossetti depicts the deterioration of the individual who is being tempted and the degradation that this person experiences both physically and mentally. The job of the tempted character is to serve as a source of warning for the community that breaking the social standards would ultimately end in the breakdown and degeneration of society. Laure is portrayed by Christina Rossetti in such a righteous manner that the fall she experiences as a result of being seduced by the food and the goblins offers a lesson that should be taken into account. The first sign of Laura's physical deterioration is when she is no longer capable of hearing the call of the goblins, something she had previously been able to hear. In a manner similar to how Jeanie's body deteriorated, Laura's hair began to turn grey and thin as a result of the unfulfilled desire to consume the forbidden fruit. The hair, which is both a component of her outward look and a representation of her wellbeing, stands for the abundance of wellness and health that she has. "Temptation in *Goblin Market* is symbolized by the fruit, the great traditional symbol of sin and temptation in the Bible" (Parker 376). The offerings in the form of fruit are another symbol of "the forbidden fruit" that Adam and Eve were tempted by in the Garden of Eden. And as a result, they were responsible for bringing about their own destruction in heaven. In a similar manner, Laura causes her final expulsion for the excellent health and the delight of her age by eating the fruit that is prohibited to her. A further factor contributing to Laura's mental degeneration is the anguish she feels as a result of her inability to fulfil her prohibited desire to consume goblin fruit. "The fruits are not the real object either, since they feed the appetite instead of satisfying it; once tasted, they have served their purpose and cannot be found again" (Mermin 108). She becomes so preoccupied in her mind with the flavour and appearance of the goblin offerings that Laura is unable to cultivate the farm or do effective housework such as taking care of the cattle, cleaning, or bringing water from the water well. Because Laura is unable to completely eliminate the flavour of the fruit, she is unable to consume enough food or think rationally. As a direct consequence of this, her health and her capacity for reason begin to deteriorate. The primary purpose of Laura's deterioration in both her physical and mental health is to indicate, in a more general sense, that once a person has given in to the temptation of an illicit desire, it is no longer feasible for them to live the kind of life to which they were formerly used.

Similar to Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* also employs the leitmotif as the eventual demise for seduced Aschenbach by displaying his psychological and physical downturn after getting seduced by the charm of Tadzio. Along the same lines as Laura, Aschenbach succumbs to the all-consuming temptation of a forbidden passion, which ultimately leads to his death from cholera at the end of the novel. Thomas Mann places the narrative in Venice, which serves as a metaphor for Aschenbach's deterioration during the course of the novel. Due to the

fact that Venice was built on a marshy foundation, the city continues to sink at a rate of one inch annually (Ammerman and McClennen 1301). Through the course of Thomas Mann's work, Aschenbach gradually caves in to the seduction of the grandeur, which leads to his steady decline physically, analogous to the way that Venice eventually sinks into her own base. Aschenbach, who develops a dislike for his own appearance, listens to the recommendation of a barber and begins to apply lipstick and makeup to his lips in order to improve his self-perception. "He is a crossing of the bourgeois and the bohemian, of male and female; his intermediacy seems to underlie the degeneration which manifests itself in the form of homosexuality" (Wilper 98). At the start of the book, Aschenbach is not bothered by his age or appearance in any way. However, by the time the novel comes to the end, because of Tadzio's attractiveness, Aschenbach has lost his zest for life, is experiencing physical illness, and has the perception that he is much elder than he actually seems. "Aschenbach's passion for another male consumes him in a way parallel to the cholera epidemic which spreads through the canals of Venice" (Wilper 92). Even the quick contamination in Venice does not convince him to flee from the place where Aschenbach's terrible temptation might be found. Aschenbach is unable to give up his desire for the forbidden temptation, so he consumes some overripe strawberries. These strawberries infect Aschenbach with cholera, which ultimately leads to his death as he is sitting on a chair on the beach.

In addition to the idea of the bodily devastation that comes from indulging in forbidden impulses, Thomas Mann shows the psychological collapse of Aschenbach once he gives in to temptation. In the beginning, Aschenbach is shown as a guy who maintains his dignity and practices self-discipline, in addition to being a highly well-known and productive author of a high moral character. Aschenbach contracts cholera and dies as a consequence of his servitude to an illicit desire, which ultimately leads to his downfall. Aschenbach is so captivated by the boy's good looks that, he chooses to ignore the consequences of his actions and ignores the reality of the disease in his mind. Instead, he continues to live in Venice and pursues his illicit crave (Bauer 23). Moreover, Aschenbach cannot accept the reality of the forbidden love that he attempts to hide from himself. The concealing of the prohibited crave leads Aschenbach to chase the boy more with a hope that he and Tadzio may have a word. The quest for the boy's beauty prevents him from departing Venice; thus, brings him an eventual catastrophe in pursuit of this taboo lust. "As the city is increasingly consumed by plague, Aschenbach's desublimating homosexuality ever more rapidly consumes him; he takes pleasure in both" (Wilper 99). Aschenbach completely gives up to temptation when he has a meeting with the boy on an elevator where the eyes of Aschenbach contact with a grin from Tadzio, and he confesses his love for the youngster that he has been keeping a secret (Mann 54). The indulgence of Aschenbach's forbidden yearning would not bring him redemption but rather accelerate his descent into moral degradation, which would ultimately lead to his death. Therefore, the allure of Aschenbach's forbidden longing contributes to his bodily and mental degeneration, which ultimately leads to his passing away in Venice, a place of beauty as well as arts.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, both Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* and Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* are constructed around the central topic of the temptations that come from indulging forbidden impulses and the consequences that follow for those who give in to those temptations. While Rossetti takes a kind method to depicting seduced Laura, who is reborn as a result of the sacrifice made by her sister Lizzie, Mann provides a scathing criticism of lured Aschenbach by bringing him to his death on the beach. Furthermore, the tale of Adam and Eve's fall really does seem to continue to appear as a theme in works of art in a variety of genres, such as in the poem written by Christina Rossetti and the novel written by Thomas Mann. This is due to the fact that the Bible account of the forbidden fruit has such a profound influence on both literature and art. Therefore, the literary texts contain myths originated from the stories in the Bible. In addition to analysing literary texts from the point of literary theories, the biblical references in the texts open up a new way for the readers to better understand literature. The aim of choosing two different writers of different gender and from different countries is to show the universality of the theme of temptation of the forbidden desires accounted in holy books.

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