Feasts and Fasts: Christina Rossetti's Public Banquet and the Nineteenth-Century Politics of Femininity

Francis Rozon

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (English) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

July 2023

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Francis Rozon

Entitled: Feasts and Fasts: Christina Rossetti's Public Banquet and the Nineteenth-Century Politics of Femininity

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (English)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Chair

Dr. Stephen Yeager

_____ Examiner

Dr. Marcie Frank

_____ Supervisor

Dr. Jason Camlot

Approved by _____

Dr. Kevin Pask, Graduate Program Director

_____ 2023 _____

Dr. Pascale Sicotte, Dean of Faculty of Arts & Sciences

ABSTRACT

Feasts and Fasts: Christina Rossetti's Public Banquet and the
Nineteenth-Century Politics of Femininity

Francis Rozon

More often than not, critical readings of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" tend to frame the poem as a revision of the female tale of temptation by focusing on the goblin men and fruit as their primary object of interpretation. This essay instead proposes to analyze Rossetti's poem through its "food plots" consisting of more neglected elements and activities happening simultaneously around the goblin market. The feasts and culinary activities of Rossetti's heroines in *Speaking Likenesses*, the poet's response to Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, are considered alongside those of "Goblin Market" in order to extricate the ways in which these so-called food plots represent scenes of celebration of feminine hunger and industriousness in a rapidly expanding world of commodities. Drawing mainly from works by scholars such as Michael Parrish Lee, Helena Michie, Ronjaunee Chatterjee, and John Ruskin, the essay intends to demonstrate how Rossetti makes use of representations of food consumption and of the labor surrounding its production in her application to imagine a world where the Victorian woman is free to be industrious in her development of her sense of individuality.

Table of Contents

Feasts and Fasts: Christina Rossetti's Public Banquet and the Nineteenth-Century Politics of Femininity

"The days of eating fruit so primitively as you describe are over with me."
- Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (29)

Introduction

More often than not, critical readings of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" tend to frame the poem as a revision of the female tale of temptation by focusing on the goblin men and fruit as their primary object of interpretation. I instead propose to analyze Rossetti's poem through its "food plots" consisting of elements and activities happening simultaneously around the goblin market. In this essay, I will argue that like other Victorian women writers like Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell, Christina Rossetti enters into the debate surrounding the banishment to the confines of the private of feminine hunger through her depictions in her prose and poetry of hungry young female heroines. While critics such as Ronjaunee Chatterjee and Mary Wilson Carpenter recognize that female appetite stemming from stilted desire in the face of gendered opposition is problematic putting women's prospects at risk, they also acknowledge how the way to salvation for the hungry female is not to be found in the repression of that hunger. The repression of hunger as an aspect of literary "food plots" will be my focus in the first section of the essay. In the second section of this essay, I will examine the feasts and culinary activities of Rossetti's heroines in *Speaking Likenesses*, reading it as the poet's response to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* looking at the ways in which the small volume's three tales of young girls who find themselves incapable of satisfying their hunger can be read as an appeal to the reality that, much like their literal appetite, women's hunger for individuality and a sense of industry need not be relegated to the privacy of the home anymore. In this part of my thesis, I argue that one can read

in Rossetti's triad of tales for children the certitude that keeping the Victorian woman hungry prevents the development in feminine subjectivities of the sense of self and autonomy that is necessary for them to become fully formed and ethically conscious individuals. In the third section, I will then move on to "Goblin Market," in which I read the same desire for participation in the outside world which I observe in *Speaking Likenesses*, this time resulting in a lapse in Victorian table manners for Laura, who is banished from public society. In this section I will demonstrate how, like Edith, the heroine of one of the tales from the second section, Laura's salvation is not to be found in the face of gendered opposition, but in the act of turning to another woman, something Rossetti had done much of in her time working at High gate. I want to argue that Christina Rossetti, unlike her contemporary and peer Lewis Carroll, makes use of representations of food consumption and of the labor surrounding its production in order to provoke not the suppression a growing young woman's individuality but, rather, to help her attain the desired status of self-reliant and fully formed individual. In her writing, Rossetti put her application into imagining literary worlds where the Victorian female is free to be industrious, to display her hunger in public place, in a manner that is in direct concordance with the poet's lifelong contemplation of ethical thinking in a rapidly expanding reality of secularized commodity and greed.

I. The Conversation Around the Victorian Dining Table

Shortly after her gorging on goblin fruit, Laura, the more curious of the two sisters of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market", having grown "thin and grey" (277) receives aid from her more reserved sister Lizzie who, notwithstanding her apprehensions, confronts the goblin salesmen in order to purchase from them the precious pulp Laura is quite literally dying for. Upon her arrival at the goblin market, she is received with unexpected gallantry:

"Our feast is but beginning,
Night yet is early,
Warm and dew-pearly,
Wakeful and starry:
[…]
Sit down and feast with us,
Be welcome guest with us,
Cheer you and rest with us."
(371-4, 380-2)

Fruit is the main course of said feast "no man can carry" (376) for "Half their dew would dry, / Half their flavour would pass by" (378-9). Critics have been eager to attribute to the goblin fruit supernatural qualities, arguing "that unknown orchard" (175) whereon they grow must be not only exotic, but other worldly. What if, instead, the affirmation that this goblin fruit "no man can carry" is taken literally to mean that such fruit cannot be carried by a man, although a woman might. What one might infer after reading the whole poem is that the fruit the goblin men have to offer might be intended and destined for feminine usage are literally not meant to be held by men. The fact that Laura's dwindling into illness occurs after she is fed the fruit by the goblin men may corroborate such an interpretation. Once administered by another female (Lizzie) the fruit pulp transcends its poisonous nature and is turned into an elixir of life in the much cited "eat me, drink me" scene near the poem's apotheosis, a passage rife with Eucharistic significance. Feasting scenes like the one cited above are ubiquitous in "Goblin Market" as the piece abounds with instances in which Laura and Lizzie find themselves in scenarios involving either the production or the consumption of food. The narrative of "Goblin Market" turns these scenes into sites of feminine hunger that lead to the acquisition of power by the female consumer/producer. In this thesis, I will not read the many "feast" scenes of the poem allegorically as a retelling of the Fall, as has often been done. Rather, I will offer a reading that interprets representations of food confection and consumption in Rossetti's writing as loci of feminine industriousness. Such scenes of food

production and consumption will be read as a metaphorical public banquet desired to celebrate the forms of feminine hunger which transpire through Rossetti's ambrosial and timeless poem.

Previously regarded by the patriarchal tradition as commodities themselves, the mid-century Victorian women whose identities had until then partly taken shape through their culinary creations were now appealed to by new marketing techniques creating desire where there was none before and manufacturing a new target audience: the female consumer. Creeping out of their places of confinement to explore the nineteenth-century market where goods produced in British colonies were being sold, Victorian women were growing hungry for escape from the traditional domestic sphere and the exploration of manlier aspects of the public world, the field of mercantilism being one of them. My reading is more interested in this hunger for independence than in the literal hunger produced by the goods of the market. It is the allegorical use of the stomach, deemed by Kate Thomas to have been "an organ of intellect in the nineteenth-century" (73), and its sign-potent faculties that has influenced my choice of scenes from Rossetti's oeuvre that revolve around food. I will use Michael Parrish Lee's theory of the "food plot", "a tool that shows rather than feeds life" (Parrish Lee 512). Essentially, what this means is that food is rarely put to use in vain in Victorian literature. Sequences in works of the period revolving around the production or the consumption of food items generally represent moments in which the hunger they stimulate transcends the mere idea of nutrition, generating desire for things beyond the realm of dining. The food plot represents a moment in characters' lives from which arise occasions for change in their social lives. Parrish Lee examines the food plot device in order to identify how the Victorian novel "remov[es] food and eating from mere appetite and necessity and turn[s] them into intricate devices for revealing a complex and capacious social world" (513). I will demonstrate how the same critical approach can be extended outside of the sphere of the Victorian industrial novel and applied

to the analysis of poetry and works for children in order to reveal Rossetti's ingenuous re-appropriation of culinary symbols of feminine submission into allegorical occasions of feminine industry.

A fitting example of the critical use of the food plot can be found at the start of Parrish Lee's article on its use in Gaskell's novels, in which he begins his exploration of what removing food from its context as mere nutriment can reveal about the capacities of our social world with examples excerpted from *North and South* (1854) that (coincidentally) revolve around fruit. After the first instance of a meal occurring near the beginning of Gaskell's novel, Margaret Hale is asked by her father to gather some pears from the garden for dessert, with Henry Lennox, a family friend, dinner guest, and suitor, suggesting they "adjourn into the garden, and eat them there." (29) It is noted that "Mr Lennox looked more at her than at the pears" (29) under the eyes of Mr Hale, "but the idea of pears had taken possession of [his] mind, and was not to be got rid of." (29) In the course of their walk in tandem through the garden, Henry, "getting sudden possession of her hand" (30), proposes to Margaret, who declines. Afterwards, the pears make a final appearance in the chapter:

> It was well that, having made the round of the garden, they came suddenly upon Mr Hale, whose whereabouts had been quite forgotten by them. He had not yet finished the pear, which he had delicately peeled in one long strip of silver-paper thinness, and which he was enjoying in a deliberate manner. It was like the story of the eastern king, who dipped his head into a basin of water, at the magician's command, and ere he instantly took it out went through the experience of a lifetime.
>
> (32)

Upon a first glance at the text, the reader may find the pears are trivial to the narrative, yet Parrish Lee makes much of them: "Mr Hale's dessert encompasses an entire life that could be but isn't, a marriage that might come to pass but does not" (511). What if, rather than considering the pears

scene from *North and South* as a mere instance of eating, we were to regard each of the instances where the fruit is mentioned in the text as occasions igniting the possibility of social relations? As Parrish Lee so aptly puts it, "Henry's proclamation that "nothing is so delicious as to set one's teeth into the crisp, juicy fruit, warm and scented by the sun" (29) might at first seem to mark a sensuous preference but quickly becomes transparent as a way of getting Margaret alone by moving the party outdoors" (512). As for Mr Hale, his absorbing enjoyment of the pear becomes an increasingly evident plot device assuring Lennox the desired moment alone with Margaret. In this manner, the food comes to serve as a device for the ignition of potential and real social relations as well as for acts of agency. As the fruit at the center of the chapter gets "juiced" of its materiality, its status as an occasion for more serious matters to be discussed around a key Victorian occasion for togetherness, food, becomes more evident. And, as Gaskell's food plots are an accessory allowing for the identification of a key biopolitical problem of the Victorian realist novel, when applied to Rossetti's works, Parrish Lee's idea of the food plot highlights a silent feminine revolt which was beginning to soar. Through displayed hunger, young women effectively found a method for communicating their visceral need to be allowed to grow past childhood into socially included persons whose value was not allocated on a basis as subjective as purity, like crystals. This kind of hunger is to be found everywhere in *Speaking Likenesses,* Rossetti's later attempt at prose for children, as well as in "Goblin Market".

Although to Deborah Ann Thompson the socio-historical and feminist readings of the poem "undervalue" the literality of the food imagery offered by Rossetti in preference for more metaphorical readings allocating the goblin fruit some alleged symbolical meaning, I agree with Jerome McGann's view that "Goblin Market" is "a serious critique of its age and of the age's cultural institutions which supported and defined what was to be possible in love, social relations

and art" (251). Rossetti's choice of food as the core concern of her poem brings us closer to a new understanding of "what was to be possible in love, social relations and art" by appealing to a favourite Victorian trope. Thomas says that "realist novelists lingered over the dining table, attentive to the food their characters did and didn't eat" (73), while the Industrial age was bringing forth the rise of commodity culture: "In perhaps her most famous comment, Isabella Beeton, the doyenne of Victorian cookery, proclaimed, "Dining is the privilege of civilization"" (Daly & Forman 363). Beeton's proclamation, made in her *Book of Household Management* (1859), which by 1868 had sold nearly two million copies, reminds us that it is around food and victuals that Victorian culture saw its consolidation through social relations which were facilitated by the ritualistic quality accorded to meals. Having given rise to the cookbook as a popular cultural object, Beeton's novelty is also notable for how it acknowledged the changing trends and customs over time, being "nostalgic for the old ways of life and food production that were being lost, but also embracing of new, mass-produced, proprietary comestibles" (Thomas 76), two categories in which fruit interestingly enough inevitably falls into in a way which becomes apparent in "Goblin Market".

In the midst of all the changes brought into the lives of women by industrialization, a poem such a "Goblin Market" is all the more interesting to consider for the way the verse is endowed with a rich opacity that does not readily resolve questions surrounding the gendered nature of food. While critics like Thompson and Silver give attention to how Rossetti fashions her many representations of food consumption, neither consider the inherent connection between acts of consumption and production of food and how these interact in the text to create instances of feminine industry and, consequently, individuality or personhood. Where Carroll's Alice merely sits by waiting for magic mushrooms to appear out of nowhere and come to her aid, the girls of

Speaking Likenesses do not receive such supernatural boosts, and, more often than not, must fend for themselves in unforgiving settings. That they find the way out of their predicaments by themselves, aided only by their feminine hunger, is what I am referring to in this essay by the term "industry." The same goes for the sisters of "Goblin Market."

Some critics have considered the representations of food production in the emblematic piece. Terrence Holt, for instance, considers Laura and Lizzie as perfectly self-sufficient figures enacting the hermeticism of their domesticity through food production rendering it unnecessary for them to "resort to the market to trade for someone else's wares" (53), likening the goblin fruit to poison. Some scholars, such as Ronjaunee Chatterjee, find the possibility for feminine singularity not in the piece's food plots but, strikingly, in the forms of likenesses encountered in the work. In my own reading I will adopt Jan Marsh's definition of these forms of likeness as embodiments or caricatures of the heroines and their faults, self-images whose adventures also embody the story of their own moral life and the lessons they have learned (Marsh 419). As Chatterjee argues: "Rossetti's protagonists are forced to inhabit the minimal difference that likeness inaugurates in order to recognize their personhood at all." (748). I contend that not only are Rossetti's representations of labor and pining for food central to an understanding of the politics of femininity at play in her written work, but these food plots also serve as a point of contact enabling a symbiotic relationship to take place between the heroines and the market, or the outside world. By positioning the consumption of food items alongside their production in an analysis of Rossetti's food plots involving hungry young girls, we can come to a better understanding of her contribution to the discourse regarding the spot which should be reserved for women at the table. That is to say, by reading Rossetti's poetry and prose this way, one may find that what her hungry heroines demand through their author is for women to be able to satiate their

desire to cultivating their minds and expand their options in a globalizing world. Through an examination of the food plots in Rossetti's oeuvre which will mainly focus on "Goblin Market" (1862) and *Speaking Likenesses* (1874), I will demonstrate how Rossetti's use of representations of food consumption and of the labour surrounding its production through her hungry heroines reflect the poet's desire to see young girls become fully-formed individuals with minds and abilities of their own, and to appease their hunger for the better things existing outside the Victorian home.

II. *Speaking Likenesses*: Rossetti's Offensive Fairy Story, The *Alice* Books, & The Hungry Victorian Girl

Matthew Arnold once characterized the author of *Villette* (1853), Charlotte Brontë, as driven by "hunger, rebellion, and rage" (quoted in Briggs 212). Julia Briggs informs us that "it is precisely these qualities that critics have recognized in Christina Rossetti's *Speaking Likenesses* (1874), and have found offensive" (212), denying Rossetti's anomalous longest work for children a place in her literary canon. Jan Marsh, in her literary biography of Rossetti, tells us that "Biographers have been embarrassed by it […] Mary Sandars in 1930 ignored the book altogether; Georgina Battiscombe in 1980 called it simply an illustrated fairy story, which suggests she had not read it with attention" (418). Published by Macmillan with accompanying woodcut illustrations by Arthur Hughes in time for Christmas 1874, *Speaking Likenesses* failed to be successful upon its release. But dismissing the work altogether as a regrettable anomaly would be to ignore the seriousness (both in tone as well as in endeavour) of such an unfunny little book, to refuse to question the very reasons that might have brought Rossetti to write it.

In the following section, I will examine the three tales of *Speaking Likenesses*, paying close attention to the ways in which the hunger displayed by its three young heroines is telling of the reasons behind the apparitions of their speaking likenesses. As I will trace in the analysis that follows, the hunger displayed by Flora, Edith, and Maggie, transcends its literal form and turns into hunger of a more metaphorical form, as the three girls becoming increasingly bored with their domestic surroundings. In other words, the apparition in all three tales of its heroine's speaking likeness is prompted by a hunger, or a desire for expanding their worlds. I will demonstrate how these encounters serve the purpose of concretizing the Victorian woman's need for exploration of the ways in which the outside world may help them expand their minds and capacities. I wish to consider the work as an open embrace of feminine dissimilarity and industry. Lastly, I afterwards wish to consider *Speaking Likenesses* alongside a reading of "Goblin Market" to discern the ways in which this triad of tales for children clearly interacts with the lines of tension explored in "Goblin Market." These tales of young girls who continually fail to succeed in satisfying their hunger are effectively rich in sequences where Rossetti represents feminine hunger in ways that come to inform the lines of tension of "Goblin Market" and its own use of consumption and production of food by hungry women.

The idea of "speaking likenesses", Briggs advances, "implies a dualism, the similarity and/or opposition of self and antiself." (215) She further points out how the three interconnected tales are not only concerned with food; they are "all characterized by the withholding of food" (216). Although Victorian children's literature is a wide genre comprised of anything from fantasy to religious tracts and domestic novels, to name a few, much of this literature, Silver points out, praises the denial of appetite in young girls and the limitation of their food intake in pursuit of femininity: "Thus, children's books of the period often underpin a culture of anorexia, in which

control over the body and its desires are enacted through the control of food intake" (52). In *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* Deborah Gorham explains how, since the Victorian woman was supposed to maintain the minute aspects of childishness into maturity, the Victorian girl was "theoretically already an ideal woman": "A young girl […] could be perceived as a wholly unambiguous model of feminine dependence, childlike simplicity and sexual purity." (quoted in Silver 52)

This appeal to purity is also highly reminiscent of John Ruskin's 1866 collection of Socratic dialogues, *The Ethics of the Dust*, in which Ruskin anthropomorphizes crystals into young girls in order to argue for the primordial nature of their physical shape. The *Ethics* becomes relevant when considering a scene from *Speaking Likenesses* I will discuss shortly in which the children build houses with crystal blocks. I argue this scene can be read as a reaction to Ruskin's dialogues in which Rossetti imagines this "primordial nature" to be less about the appropriateness of shape than about said shape's (or nature's) unpredictability. To Ruskin, as with crystals, the same went for girls in order to attain a status of desirability: their bodies should be of an appropriate shape and they should be of an equally appropriate purity: "Their essential virtues are but two; - the first is to be pure, and the second to be well-shaped." (87) To solidify Gorham's claim, Ruskin, as Silver points out, associates beauty with youth, hence implying that true beauty is unavailable to the adult woman (59). The crystal, therefore acts not only as a metaphor for girls' bodies, but also for their natures: "Like Dickens, Brontë and Christina Rossetti, Ruskin views physical appearance as a corporealization of one's "inner" beauty, so that an unattractive, ugly shape offers evidence of a girl's unvirtuous character" (Silver 60). I find myself to be more in agreement with the place for feminine dissimilarity that is rehearsed in more recent readings of female crystallinity, such as Chatterjee's which, like Ruskin, compares the ways in which feminine dissimilarity

operates through the unpredictability (and incalculable nature) of the mutability of matter with the endless kaleidoscope of crystallization: "Typically read as another instance of masculine fetishism that seeks to not only control but also inhabit a fantasia of girlhood, the *Ethics* mobilizes the hardness of crystals together with the mutability of matter to produce a seeming erotics of the girl's unpredictable body…" (47) Readings such as this raise the possibility for girls' bodies to be, like crystals, properly regarded as formations that are shaped by the incalculable experience provided by life. This Rossetti might have picked up on herself as she was imagining a new architecture of selfhood based on the constant building of the self which she stages as a crystalline construction site. It is possible to read the texts I will be discussing shortly as responses to Ruskin's crystallizing of the feminine shape into a finite formation the uses of which correlate with the needs of the patriarchy. I believe that Rossetti successfully appropriates Ruskin's model of (acceptable) feminine predictability in order to reshape it into a more realistic vision of the unpredictability of the female experience while leaving room for crystalline self-shaping, for the development of one's sense of industry. This self-shaping, or self-development, I contend, leaves room for Rossetti's young heroines' minds to be under construction in a way allowing for the evolution of a certain diligence within them which I will refer to as a sense of industry.

A rhetoric seemingly in direct response to that of Ruskin's "crystal girls" is to be found within *Speaking Likenesses*, for instance, in a scene in which the children begin building glass houses. After the second feast I will discuss below in which Flora stands as a passive subject, "the whole birthday party trooped out through a door" (39) out to a spacious playground where they beg[a]n to build houses out of glass bricks which were "of all colors and many different shapes and sizes" (41) as well as multi-faceted and patterned like gemstones: "a single house might have all its blocks all uniform, or of twenty different fashions" (41). After long arduous work, "some

houses glowed like masses of rubies, and others shone like enormous chrysolites or sapphires" (41). Not only are the glass houses built "from within" (40), but contrary to traditional house-building practices, each house has four walls but "no roof, no upper floor; such was each house: and it needed neither window not staircase" (41). On the one hand, the effect gained from the variegation observed in the making of each of the similar but different glass houses is readily interpreted as a hard-to-miss appeal to the multiplicity of experience. Secondly, the houses' shared quality of incompleteness resonates with paradigms that view the human mind as something that is always under construction. This reading of the glass houses as representations of the multi-faceted self is supported by the way the color of each builder's creation seems to echo their own complexion: "Sticky's house was blue, and made her livid: Slime's house—a very shaky one, ready to fall to pieces at any moment, and without one moment's warning: --Slime's house, I say, was amber-hued, and gave her the jaundice" (44). Poor Flora, who is not intimated into participating into the house-building effort, finds herself being walled into the birthday Queen's appropriately amethyst-hued house, forced to confront her likeness directly. The clear opposition between the two dominating figures of masculine and feminine sexuality, the amethyst houses of the Queen and Hook, ultimately results in a scene of warfare which views stones being hurled at the structures, that have come to be a locus of the singular self. To Chatterjee, "the story vividly recounts a community built on antagonism, in which "play" repeatedly refers to situations of absurd violence, but a violence seemingly oriented around the claustrophobic interchangeability between the children" (103). I would argue that this imagery of multicolored glass houses standing in for the uniqueness of each individual self and of human experience, rather than inviting a feeling of "interchangeability" between the children, moreover, seems to be a direct response to Ruskin's crystal girls and his appeal to their shape and purity encouraging perhaps a vision of appearance

and selfhood encompassing a wider range of dissimilarity which, simultaneously, leaves room for the sense of industry Rossetti was to develop and instill in her heroines through the use of food.

No analysis in direct dialogue with the multiplicity of experience that is afforded to hungry Victorian heroines would be complete without mention of what is undoubtedly its prime example, albeit a rather uneasy one, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). When the Caterpillar asks her who she is, Alice replies: "I—I hardly know, Sir, just at present—at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then." (41, emphasis Carroll's). The root of Alice's troubles I believe, aside from the fact that "being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing" (41), lies in Carroll's peculiar relationship to food. Charles Dodgson, as Carroll was known outside of literary circles, shows much evidence in his personal writings of an "uneasiness surrounding appetite and consumption. He was known to be extremely controlling with food, often bringing his own meals to friend's homes when invited for dinner […] Carroll was also notably disgusted by a ravenous appetite in his many female child friends, their later reflections of the author indicating he would often berate them for being greedy and encourage them to only eat modestly" (Garland 26). Fittingly, as Garland tells us, "many of *Wonderland*'s most memorable moments concern the consumption of food" (25). At random times throughout *Wonderland*, Alice is fed strange items inscribed "EAT ME" or "DRINK ME", which she readily consumes without showing a trace of appetite. In its sequel, she expresses hunger and thirst only to obtain no satisfaction, as is notable in the chapter that sees her expressing dehydration following a run across the chessboard with the Red Queen only to be offered a dry biscuit in the end, which the Red Queen sardonically calls "refreshing" (143). Female hunger was a clear impairment to Dodgson's ideas regarding a young girl's purity, leading ultimately to the underlying force-feeding subplot to the children's classic: "Thus, within

the Alice texts, … Carroll was exercising his own desire through Alice's hunger and his feeding of her, with Alice the passive and therefore desirable object of the male author" (Garland 28). In opposition to Alice, and personifying the excess and greed Dodgson was so wary of, stands the Queen of Hearts, who becomes enraged when her tarts go missing. Towards the end of *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), however, Alice suddenly becomes aligned with the other adult, impure women of the book, when she reaches the pinnacle of her desire. At her coronation feast, unlike Rossetti's passive Flora, she "becomes similarly aggressive and violent […] despite being told it is impolite to eat food once it has been introduced to her by the two Queens [Alice] finds her hunger (which has constantly been either prevented from being satisfied or been satisfied without her feeling any hunger) overwhelms her to the point where she is prepared to kill to eat" (Garland 36).

Dodgson's gustatory peculiarities (whether textual or real) are relevant for considering Alice in relation to Rossetti's heroines, when it comes to food intake and confection. As I will discuss shortly, where Alice persistently remains under Dodgson's alimentary manipulation in order to remain as childlike as possible to the point that she begins to lose her sense of self and become hysterical, the young girls of *Speaking Likenesses* are left to fend for themselves in unforgiving scenarios that invite them to be insightful. I see the relevance of highlighting this contrast in the fact that it is Carroll's rendition of the hungry heroine formula that became canonical, a fact I read as telling of the kind of women the Victorians wanted to see young girls become. Garland's question about female agency is especially important. From the moment she sets on following the White Rabbit down the rabbit-hole, Alice is trying to be self-reliant and to prove she can have agency. But she pursues such self-reliance through Carroll's male creations. By mediating Alice's agency in this way, and by force-feeding her throughout his story, Carroll

succeeds in conserving the intactness of the power structures of Wonderland and makes his heroine a hysterical example of repressed feminine power. This renders the aunt of *Speaking Likenesses* all the more interesting, for she possesses that same quality that is stifled in Alice. Rossetti chooses to relocate this agency to the forefront: resourcefulness which stems from power. "The mastery of the adult woman is never in doubt in *Speaking Likenesses*," says U. C. Knoepflmacher (314), which brings us towards what could have possibly been a source of substantial disagreement between Dodgson and Rossetti: "If Carroll resents Alice Liddell for having grown far beyond the age of the fictional Alice, Rossetti scorns children for taking so long before attaining the maturity of grown-up women" (Knoepflmacher 314).

Upon meeting "mild-mannered" Charles Dodgson in 1863, Christina Rossetti would get a first insight into one of Dodgson's fresh solutions to detain some permanence of his female child friends when he came along with a camera, and made her and her family pose for him. This seemingly harmless instrument had, as Knoepflmacher points out, the power to "gratify his own urge to freeze mutability into permanence" (301). A sort of friendship between Dodgson and the Rossettis would follow, with more coolness and reluctance shown from Christina than from her brother Dante Gabriel (Knoepflmacher 305-6). Having very little praise for the inscribed copy of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* she receives from the author, Rossetti would produce, three years after the publication of *Through the Looking-Glass*, her own children's tale following her volume of nursery rhymes *Sing-Song* published alongside *Through the Looking-Glass* for Christmas 1871, referring to it in a letter to Dante Gabriel as a mere "Christmas trifle, would-be in the *Alice* style" (Quoted in Packer 305). Although her Christmas trifle, as seen previously, does offer a trifling subplot appealing to the multiplicity of experience through the glass houses scene, what sets *Speaking Likenesses* apart from other Victorian works intended for children lies in its

treatment of female hunger as an allowance for growth, which diverges widely from the common impurity associated with the character of the hungry girl in the *Alice* books. This "allowance for growth" which I read in Rossetti's treatment of the character of the hungry female, I contend, comes from the text's heavy reliance on the food plot in the advancement of its narrative which, consequently, becomes license for the heroine's hunger to be about more than a prescribed pursuit of femininity. Centered around the literal and metaphorical levels on which feminine hunger operates, the short volume's many food plots all point to one end. In these instances, the food represented invites the reader to consider what possibilities for social opportunity it generates. In other words, beyond the mere idea of nutrition, Rossetti's food plots become openings to the world to the feminine subjectivity coming to consume (or not) the occasion.

Just as Dodgson's focus for his tale seems to have been feminine consumption, I think it interesting to read *Speaking Likenesses* as Rossetti's own feminine textual consumption of the *Alice* books mirrored in the work's many plots revolving around food consumption. Seemingly, Rossetti's perceived coolness towards Dodgson, as well as the finished product of her "Christmas trifle" point towards Alice's adventures as having been only half-digested by Rossetti, who produces in retort a slightly modified recipe of Dodgson's tale of the hungry heroine. Judging by the lack of critical praise received upon publication, as well as by its subsequent omission by critics, we can infer that some element in the execution of this particular recipe presumably left the finished product with a half-baked quality leaving its readers perplexed. Aside from its established status as an oddity, I contend that the element having left the contemporary readers of *Speaking Likenesses* unsatisfied might have been just the ingredient Rossetti had modified from Dodgson's original recipe. Where the *Alice* books succeed with their blandness better suited to Victorian tastes in matters of young girls and their bodies, the tales of Flora, Edith, as well as

Maggie defy the culture's fashion with the addition of a specific element: feminine industry. This sense of industry one finds in the heroines of *Speaking Likenesses* is precisely the quality that was intentionally left out of Alice by her male creator who aimed at keeping her real-life namesake under his wing. All that Rossetti hoped for her heroines was that they be industrious enough not to find themselves in the kinds of situations Alice constantly finds herself in. Rossetti's version of the hungry Victorian heroine might even appear as bad plagiarism of Dodgson's canonical work. I am however convinced that this is precisely where the value of the work lies: where Dodgson remains stagnant in forcing his Alice to remain a helpless child, *Speaking Likenesses* (uncomfortably for certain) aims at pushing progress forward by forcing its young girl protagonists to make use of their own industry in order to propel them into adulthood, to help them develop a sense of individuality.

In the opening pages of *Speaking Likenesses*, we meet Flora, who is that very day celebrating her birthday: "To be eight years old when last night one was merely seven, this is pleasure: to hope for birthday presents without any doubt of receiving some, this is also pleasure" (4). Already, however, Rossetti's moralizing voice lets itself be heard through the voice of the aunt, presaging the didactic nature of the tales that are to follow: "yet I tell you, from the sad knowledge of my older experience, that to every one of you a day will most likely come when sunshine, hope, presents and pleasure will be nothing to you in comparison with the unattainable gift of your mother's kiss" (4). Soon enough, a first minor food plot appears in the narrative in the form of a short dispute over who got the most sugar-plums out of Flora's box. I will however move directly to the first meal of the tale, as the children at the party are led towards the furnished dinner table. Flora's sullenness grows in the midst of the ungratefulness she witnesses: "Was it fact? Was it fancy? Each dish in turn was only fit to be found fault with. Meat underdone, potatoes overdone,

beans splashy, jam tart not sweet enough, fruit all stone; covers clattering, glasses reeling, a fork or two dropping on the floor. Were these things really so? Or would even finest strawberries and richest cream have been found fault with, thanks to the children's mood that day?" (8-9). These two first encounters with the group of young birthday-goers effectively sets the mood for the rest of the narrative which, undoubtedly, appeals largely to childhood greed and ungratefulness. Flora has had enough with the grievances, for she performs a silent exit at her own party and is on her way towards a confrontation with her speaking likeness or, the confrontation of the self with its antiself.

Having gone a separate way from the rest of her party, Flora stumbles upon an animated door leading her to a room incorporated with furniture adapting to the shape of its user, which initially leaves her unfazed, for "the only uncomfortable point in the room, that is, as to furniture, was that both ceilings and walls were lined throughout with looking-glasses" (18). Flora rapidly becomes embarrassed as the boys and girls populating the room, being in the middle of a tea party, rudely ignore her. She is then approached by a kind chair adjusting itself to her small size and a small table adorned with enticing self-serving tea and strawberries in cream: "She took up in a spoon one large, very large strawberry with plenty of cream; and was just putting it into her mouth when a voice called out crossly: "You shan't, they're mine […] It's my birthday, and everything is mine"" (23, 25). This utterance of the birthday Queen stops Flora in her course, for "[she] was too honest a little girl to eat strawberries that were not given her: nor could she, after this, take even a cup of tea without leave" (25). As in the scene of warfare in the playground, Flora, who finds herself incapable of finding the door she came in from, finds herself in another instance that sees her walled in with the terrifying likeness she is forced to confront:

> The birthday Queen, reflected over and over again in five hundred mirrors, looked frightful, I do assure you: and for one minute I am sorry to say that Flora's

> fifty million-fold face appeared flushed and angry too; but she soon tried to smile good-humouredly and succeeded, though she could not manage to feel very merry.
>
> [But, Aunt, how came she to have fifty million faces? I don't understand. — Because in such a number of mirrors there were not merely simple reflections, but reflections of reflections, and reflections of reflections of reflections, and so on and so on, over and over again, Maude: don't you see?]
>
> (26)

This sequence, much like the instance in which Flora is walled in with the Queen in the amethyst house, emulates a similar feeling of entrapment functioning on both physical and psychic levels, for it simultaneously forces the girl to confront her own childish selfishness. Once removed from their materiality, the strawberries and cream become a mere vehicle for the birthday Queen/Flora's anger at that which stands in the way of her enjoyment of her birthday party, all the while portraying the appearance of an ethical conscience in the young girl who, despite her hunger, is "too honest" to eat that which is not hers. We need to dwell on the "fifty million" reflections of the Queen for an instant, for Rossetti's insistence on the "reflections of reflections" through the aunt's voice of reason offers many possible avenues of interpretation. The one I wish to propose is that, more than an image of self-reprimand, the Queen's likeness is being endlessly replicated, repeated, and refracted so it may be seen as an image of assertion, of a female figure of power re-claiming what is her lawful due. The mirroring effect transforms the Queen's complaint, endowing it with an added choir effect which enhances through repetition the pressing nature of the matter of feminine fancy. What we therefore have is Flora, literally hungry from the sight of a feast she is not allowed to partake in, and simultaneously experiencing mental hunger for some decisional power over the procession against which her own party is opposed. Facing Flora is her speaking likeness claiming with assertion that which is her own and will assuredly appease her hunger, the feast.

The discourse on the thwarting of feminine hunger engendered by this last quoted passage is reinforced by the aforementioned second dissatisfying feast which, much like the effect occasioned by the birthday Queen's endlessly multiplied image, exponentiates the emphasis Rossetti places on this oppositional force to female satisfaction. As the whole of the furniture in the looking-glass room slides towards the wall and adapts to its flatness, the children engage in two highly antagonistic and cruel games they refer to as "Hunt the Pincushion" and "Self-Help" until a yawn of boredom from the Queen signals the arrival of dinner time. After the furniture's contents are magically restored with "so many dishes and decanters filled with nice things as I certainly never saw in my lifetime, and I don't imagine any of you ever did" in order to accommodate the "suppose we say a hundreb (sic) thousand" (38) guests, without touching a single of the items on display in front of her, Flora witnesses the birthday Queen who, not giving her any notice, stuffs herself decadently along with the rest of her party:

> …and while successive dainties placed themselves before her and retired untasted. Cold turkey, lobster salad, stewed mushrooms, raspberry tart, cream cheese, a bumper of champagne, a méringue, a strawberry ice, sugared pine apple, some greengages […] to watch so many good things come and go without taking even one taste, and to see all her companions stuffing without limit. Several of the boys seemed to think nothing of a whole turkey at a time: and the Queen consumed with her own mouth and of sweets alone one quart of strawberry ice, three pine apples, two melons, a score of meringues, and about four dozen sticks of angelica, as Flora counted.
>
> (38-9)

The Queen's feast initially brings to mind Flora's (and her guests') dissatisfaction with the actual birthday dinner, conjuring the image of a mass of greedy children blustering over a decadent but fictional ideal of something which is already at hand under a more realistic and humble form. Going on, once removed from their primary function as feeding element, the items the children consume in gargantuan proportions draw attention to the repetition of Flora's imposed fasting

("was she eight years old at last for this?" [15]) and, more particularly its occurring in such a public setting as a dinner party while remaining unnoticed, or simply disregarded, adding perhaps a sociological lens to the picture of the hungry child witnessing but not partaking in affluence. This disregard also speaks to the very public merits and contributions of women remaining in the dark, which Rossetti had already dwelt on in "Goblin Market" by notably engaging with the economical benefaction provided by the female consumer at the Victorian market. Thus end the adventures of the first figure of deprivation of the volume, for after the chaos of the glass war reaching its paroxysm with the birthday Queen hurling a brick at Hook's house despite Flora's pleading protests, she awakens from her slumber and returns to her party, refreshed and having repented: "And I think if she lives to be nine years old and give another birthday party, she is likely on that occasion to be even less like the birthday Queen of her troubled dream than was the Flora of eight years old" (48).

The second, more lackluster tale of the three[1], follows Edith who, accompanied by a Newfoundland dog, a Persian cat, and a cockatoo, will attempt to light a fire in the woods and boil some tea for a gypsy tea party. Unable to receive attention from her adult guardians or the cook, she takes upon herself the task of bringing the kettle to the woods to prepare the tea while everyone is busy getting ready. Proceeding to the woods, and dropping all but six matches along the way, Edith subsequently fails *six* times to make a fire catch under the tripod supporting the kettle (ironically left empty), before receiving some aid in the form of more resourceful woodland critters who, despite their united efforts all still fail to help her in her task. The shortest tale ends as Nurse arrives, armed with adult woman knowledge to fix the fire. It is most interesting to note how,

[1] Knoepflmacher is especially unimpressed with this tale: "For, indeed, in what must surely be the most consummate hoax in English children's literature, Rossetti makes sure that the story about a tiny girl who could not light a fire will never catch a fire of its own" (Knoepflmacher 321).

despite the initially perceived 'emptiness' of the rather short tale, its conclusion not only serves the purpose of introducing its speaking likeness in the form of a more learned woman transmitting knowledge to a younger feminine sensibility who is hungry for this same resourcefulness and perceived independence she sees in her adult likeness, it is also useful when considered alongside Ruskin's theory of production as developed in his essay "Ad Valorem" from *Unto This Last* (1860).

The lack in the story of the physical presence of tea allows, when viewed in light of Ruskin's theory of production, for a clearer view of how feminine hunger can metaphorically operate. This metaphorical hunger is initially perceivable in Rossetti's second tale in the following quote: "Edith was a little girl who thought herself by no means such a very little girl, and at any rate as wise as her elder brother, sister, and nurse. I should be afraid to assert that she did not reckon herself as wise as her parents: but we must hope not, for her own sake" (51). It is only once we identify this source of feminine desire that we can fully come to understand what Edith is hungry for, which I interpret as a desire to participate in the means of production. Ruskin said that "labour of the best quality may be various in aim. It may be either constructive ("gathering," from con and struo), as agriculture; nugatory, as jewel-cutting; or destructive ("scattering," from de and struo), as war... I believe nearly all labour may be shortly divided into positive and negative labour: positive, that which produces life; negative, that which produces death" (80-1). I readily interpret Edith's attempt at making tea in the woods as an attempt at constructive labour, as she is planning on using the product of her labour to nourishing the guests of the gypsy tea party or, to produce life in an instance of positive production. Furthermore, Ruskin adds that "all *essential* production is for the Mouth; and is finally measured by the mouth; hence, as I said above, consumption is the crown of production; and the wealth of a nation is only to be estimated by what it consumes"(85,

emphasis is the author's). Here what we have is Edith working towards producing something which is to be consumed orally, hence enacting the 'crown of consumption' through essential production. It is worth noting that, unlike Alice who is actually sleeping throughout her adventures, the heroines of Aunt's tales are wide awake and facing reality, which is the reason why I believe that the middle tale in the triad has its heroine failing in her task. While supported by the two stronger tales bookending the volume, Edith's story shows that not only is failure a part of reality, but that it is also an occasion for growth. In the end, Edith receives feminine guidance and the tea ends up being made, which I think allows for her labour to be valuable in Ruskin's terms: "To be "valuable," therefore, is to "avail towards life." A truly valuable or availing thing is that which leads to life with its whole strength" (69). As an instance of feeding, the gypsy tea party is effectively the opposite of that which "leads away from life" (69), and represents that which Edith truly craves, which is self-development through the gathering of information and skills in order to become an active participant in positive life-producing labour. It is also notable that Edith's defeat occurs not in the comfort of the domestic sphere, sitting next to a pre-lit fire in the hearth and a book of conduct literature open in front of her, but in the outside world where she comes face to face with unforgiving nature that, through its elements, makes sure none of her matches can catch. This short tale of a little girl endeavouring to light a fire and prepare tea in the woods by herself subtly points to the hunger of Victorian girls for independence and presents an avenue by which to exercise self-reliance and become industrious, fully formed and productive adults.

Rossetti's triad of tales, upon the request of one of Aunt's listeners for a winter tale, is completed with the story of Maggie, whom we encounter spending Christmas Eve working at her grandmother/caretaker's fancy shop in the village, despite her young age. We are told this is the same shop from which Flora's birthday presents came, as well as Edith's doll. This detail is what

connects the three tales together, brings them a sense of cohesiveness. In spite of all the novelty to be found within her shop, Old Dame Margaret "was no fine lady, but a nice simple old woman who wore plain clothes, and made them last a long time", and "kept a plain table too", in what is perhaps a nod to the writer's own eating habits (72). Whenever a neighbour happened to be in need, the modest woman's "purse would be the first to open, and the last to shut" (72). Upon noticing that the doctor's young ladies have forgotten some parcels to put under their Christmas tree, including "not merely the red tappers, but a pound of vanilla chocolate, a beautiful bouncing ball, and two dozen crackers" (74-5), Maggie eagerly offers to traverse the oak forest towards the doctor's dwelling to deliver the victuals despite the raging cold outside. What is interesting when considering this work performed by Maggie is the manner in which it can be interpreted as both positive and negative labor: on the one hand, this action is undertaken with the intention of feeding, which is positive. On the other, not everything in the basket is destined for feeding. A large portion of what it contains are mere trifles purchased to encourage the secular greed Rossetti saw in the way Christmas was celebrated by Victorian children. The sight of hungry wood critters awakes Maggie's own literal hunger as she gazes at the chocolate in her basket intently. About to break off a corner of it to feed herself and some birds, she hears rapid footsteps approaching before she discerns a grotesque figure, referred to in the text only as "the Mouth" (93):

> A boy: and close at his feet marched a fat tabby cat, carrying in her mouth a tabby kitten. Or was it a real boy? He had indeed arms, legs, a head, like ordinary people: but his face exhibited only one feature, and that was a wide mouth. He had no eyes; so how he came to know that Maggie and a basket were standing in his way I cannot say: but he did seem somehow aware of the fact; for the mouth, which could doubtless eat as well as speak, grinned, whined, and accosted her: "Give a morsel to a poor starving beggar."
>
> (84)

After Maggie's refusal to feed the Mouth, the creature becomes persistent, and "the wide mouth was full of teeth and tusks, and began to grind them" before he "snatched at the basket" (85). But just as Flora would not eat strawberries that had not been given her beforehand, Maggie remains constant in her refusal: ""I'm hungry enough myself, but I wouldn't be a thief!" she shouted back to her tormentor" before he gives up in front of such resoluteness and hurries away. An additional piece of wisdom from *Ad Valorem* tells us that "the price of anything is the quantity of labour given by the person desiring it, in order to obtain possession of it" (78). Maggie is aware of this fact to a larger extent than the doctor's family due to her experience of both the marketplace and her lower-class background, which would explain her subsequent actions as well as the response they produce in the more wealthy recipients of Maggie's favor. Recollecting her promise to make haste, she finally reaches the door to the doctor's house, expecting to be taken in for some warmth and admiration of the Christmas tree. Instead, the parcel is taken in with short thanks given, leaving Maggie "chilled to the bone, famished, cross, and almost fit to cry with disappointment" (91). With a pigeon, a tabby kitten and a puppy added to her empty basket, she finally reaches the outskirts of the forest, and at her destination, is greeted by a spectacle of natural wonders:

> …in one moment the sky before her flashed with glittering gold, and flushed from horizon to zenith with a rosy glow; for the northern lights came out, and lit up each cloud as if it held lightning, and each hill as if it smouldered ready to burst into a volcano. Every oak-tree seemed turned to coral, and the road itself to a pavement of dusky carnelian.
>
> (94)

The volume thus ends with Maggie finally back home, having tea and buttered toast with Granny, the moral of the tale being that refusal belongs in the realm of feminine decisional power. As seen previously in the case of Flora, "again, Maggie is safe, having simply said 'No'" (Marsh 422).

Once removed from the equation the chocolate leaves us with two entities that reveal themselves to be in fact one single likeness and its reflection, and by the same token with the most

striking form of desire found in the short volume. It would be of interest also to note the way this hunger is presented under the form of nebulously gendered opposition. As Chatterjee explains:

> The gendered dynamic of this moment seems quite clear: thus far the story's focus on these feminine "small heroines" (in Rossetti's own words) shifts to a grotesque boy figure, himself a likeness of Maggie, but also an important marker of difference (qtd in Kooistra 129). Hughes's illustration additionally reveals a portly boy with exaggerated lips and sharp teeth, holding his arms out to her. Not only is this boy of the opposite sex, he is also impotent and incomplete, since he is notably missing his eyes (and can thus be read as metaphorically castrated). Maggie's "appetite" therefore generates a stilted form of desire, refusing clear gendered opposition in favor of this frightening physical asymmetry.
>
> (Chatterjee 751)

This amalgamation of the boundaries of boy and girl into Maggie's likeness and the symbolization of her feminine hunger takes us beyond the binary of masculinity and femininity, to a realm where "projected differences are really forms of likeness. These likenesses, furthermore, can never reflect a pre-existing idea of what girlhood or femininity should be. Ultimately, Maggie inhabits a world in which predictable forms of differentiation remain impossible" (Chatterjee 753). While all three of the tales focus on representing the literal and metaphorical levels on which feminine hunger operates, it is Maggie's which truly aligns with the idea of femininity Rossetti embodied herself, all the while maintaining the possibility for this feminine subjectivity to exist unrestrained by rigidly defined gendered boundaries. Although quite compelling for what it achieves in identifying in Maggie's likeness the refusal of a legible form of gendered opposition, a reading such as that of Chatterjee fails to consider the centrality of the relationship between food consumption and production preventing the full conveyance of the meaning behind what precisely brings likeness into being. Effectively, this scene occurs *because* of the food plot which ends up being the rootof the desire engendering the likeness of the Mouth boy.

Rossetti's choice to have her third and final tale take place in a toy store tended by humbler females on Christmas Eve is telling of the kind of femininity she wishes to see in nineteenth-century England. Indeed, not set in the blissful sun of pleasant summer days but in the unforgiving cold of a winter night, the ultimate story finds its starting point, as Julia Briggs observes, "in an almost Marxist contemplation of the means of distribution and consumption" (225). The final tale of *Speaking Likenesses* introduces not only the toy shop having supplied the trifles taken for granted by Flora and Edith in the previous stories, it also brings to the forefront the orphan Maggie (the nickname of Rossetti's older sister Maria [Briggs 225]), who is of a lower class than the two preceding heroines and an active participant in the means of distribution so often forgotten by the consumer. The small amount of the consumable goods in her basket does not prevent Maggie from readily and cheerfully distributing them to others at the shop. She also goes across a forest on a cold night to deliver them home to be enjoyed by their rightful owners, who coldly accept their due with no regard given to the labour undertaken in the course of the delivering of said goods. The difference between Maggie and the Doctor's children is that the former sells the latter the goods, and therefore knows the cost and labour that goes into the matter, while the Doctor's children do not. This insertion of a child more readily oriented towards ethics? in the ultimate tale of the work could be interpreted as some possible unease in Rossetti in the matter of not having introduced a more emotionally "wealthy" heroine before her tales would come to a close after such quantity of displayed greed. Briggs also notes this possibility, writing that "indeed the Christmas Eve setting suggests Rossetti's unease with the secularization of this religious festival, its becoming an occasion to indulge childish greed by loading children with presents—bouncing balls, chocolate, and crackers" (226). The northern lights, appearing after her demonstration of feminine hunger resulting in the suppression of a display of monstrous envy embodied by Mouth

Boy as well as the selfless rescuing of three animals, seem a divine compensation for Maggie's toil, to "signify the spiritual illumination that lies open to those who have accepted worldly deprivation" (Briggs 226). While Briggs bases her claims on the secularization of Christmas, I contend the same can be said of Flora, who stands at the end of the second feast as a figure of worldly deprivation in full witnessing of the gorging done by the rich. This is also true of Edith, who exhausts her resources in hopes of sharing her industriousness in the preparation of her mother's gypsy tea-party. This is precisely why I chose to refer to Maggie as a "more readily ethically-oriented child" rather than as the work's overall model of morality, for some digging into the discomforting world of *Speaking Likenesses* with particular attention to its food plots reveals that all three heroines display varying degrees of unease while facing the greed that is central to all three tales. I too believe that the work deserves a spot not only in Rossetti's canon, but also beside other Victorian classics for children with fantasies associated with the forming of a social conscience in the likes of Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1863) or Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843). While this has so far been curiously overlooked by critics, I believe a main motive of *Speaking Likenesses* is to portray the overcoming of the seven deadly sins by three young heroines. This is observable at first when Flora comes to overcome wrath by confronting her wrathful likeness, gluttony through achieving the awareness of food deprivation at her feast, as well as envy by not partaking in the fight over the biggest sugar-plums in her box. Edith displays and overcomes pride by attempting something out of her range of skills and receiving help afterwards. As for Maggie, she escapes from the hands of lust by defeating Mouth-Boy, from sloth by not partaking in a party sleeping in the wintry cold and risking an untimely death, and finally greed by being a poorer but more ethically conscious young person. I however hold firmly that one of Rossetti's ulterior concerns in the confection of this half-baked rendition of an *Alice* book

was to wash down the acidic taste that Alice's lack of resources had left in her mouth. I believe that the food plots I have been analyzing thus far can be read as direct responses to Carroll's controlling of Alice's size through her hunger. Rossetti on the other hand exhibits the resourcefulness generated by feminine hunger in young girls and the women she was eager to see them become. At the end of *Speaking Likenesses*, all that remains of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books' displeasing (and offensive) adult women is perhaps the Aunt herself who, as the Queen of Hearts does on the croquet grounds, "reveals her own hunger for domination" (Briggs 227) of young girls' hunger for leisure.

III. "Goblin Market": The Act of Turning to Another Woman

My reading of *Speaking Likenesses* has taken into account the emblematic ways in which the form of likeness serves as an avenue for self-development through feminine hunger. This reading guides my reading of "Goblin Market," especially considering the poem's heavy reliance on paradigmatic ways of displaying its appeal to female desire and resourcefulness. I have shown in the previous section how the hunger generated by the food items present in the three tales' food plots generated in its starring young women a desire for discovering the public world and learning skills, to become full citizens. I argue that the same goes for Laura, whose curiosity about the public nature of the goblin market is generated not by the public place itself but by the merchants' fruits, which in themselves symbolize the exoticism of the market. My intention with the remainder of this essay is to analyze what I perceive to be the four main food plots of "Goblin Market" by observing how the public display of female hunger observed in its heroines leads to avenues for industriousness. In the first scene of feasting at the goblin market by Laura, as in the later sequence which views her subsequent dissatisfaction with her domestic life as she prepares home-made

goods for consumption, and in the scene where Lizzie is assaulted by the goblin men leading to the infamous “eat me, drink me” scene, one can observe in Laura a marked frustration directed towards the forced relegation of feminine hunger to the private, which creates?? a desire to traverse onto the public side of Victorian life. From this desire would then emerge opportunities for feminine accomplishment that would otherwise remain out of reach for a woman in whom this sense of domestic dissatisfaction might remain dormant.

The opening lines from “Goblin Market" provide a rather long catalogue of enticing fruit using “a strategic hype that extracts them from origins and recontextualizes them in fantasies of exoticism and abundance” (Tucker 122). Indeed, the “grapes fresh from the vine” (20) as well as the “Citrons from the South” (29) come to be understood as a locus of desire when considered along some history of the fruit trade in mid-century Victorian England which was, at the time, experiencing some unseasonable frosts (Menke 107). Following a peculiarly mild winter, the peculiar spring of 1859 (“Goblin Market” was completed April 27th of the same season [Menke 107]) would begin in the same mild manner before abruptly switching to disastrous frost which proved fatal to a multitude of flowers, trees and fruit. As Menke notes, the unhappy situation suffered by British horticulture and the fruit trade is not at the origin of the “conspicuously plentiful and luscious fruit” of “Goblin Market”, but it does inform the ways in which feminine hunger can operate on a literal level in the poem, since “at the time the poem was written, fresh fruit would indeed have been largely the stuff of fantasy” (109). As seen previously in the tales forming the whole of *Speaking Likenesses*, this initial level on which “Sweet-tooth Laura's" (115) hunger operates is precisely what brings her to partake in the first food plot of the poem, which in turn serves as a pathway towards the transcendence of physical hunger to the profit of a more figurative rendition of the yearning it comes to stand for.

Having traded a golden lock in exchange for a taste of the goblin fruit, Laura begins feasting while seemingly engaging in hunger of more biblical proportions:

> …sucked their fruit globes fair or red:
> Sweeter than honey from the rock,
> Stronger than man-rejoicing wine,
> Clearer than water flowed that juice;
> She never tasted such before,
> How should it cloy with length of use?
> She sucked and sucked and sucked the more
> Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;
> She sucked until her lips were sore;
> Then flung the emptied rind away
> But gathered up one kernel-stone,
> And knew not was it night or day
> As she turned home alone.
>
> (128-40)

Like Milton's Eve, Rossetti's Laura is enticed by fruit which is "rife with sexual and creative implications as well as with the power which forbidden knowledge affords" (Shurbutt 41):

> What melons icy-cold
> Piled on a dish of gold
> Too huge for me to hold,
> What peaches with a velvet nap,
> Pellucid grapes without one seed:
> Odorous indeed must be the mead
> Whereon they grow…
>
> (175-81)

It is fitting that Rossetti would have her fruit of knowledge (referred to as "the fruit forbidden" at 479) be, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, too large for her female hero to initially hold, with the imagined odorousness of the mead "of knowledge", let's say, representing the vastness of all the human knowledge presented to her with pageantry. As with Eve, the temptation proves too much for "Curious Laura" (69) whose virginity is metaphorically voided by the transaction, all for a taste of the much desired knowledge. Like the novelty of the entrancing goblin fruit, knowledge should

get increasingly better and not "cloy with length of use" (GM 133). The form of desire performed here by Laura goes far beyond the limitations of literal nourishment. As Sylvia Shurbutt argues, "the hunger here is also for knowledge and creative expression, for poetic articulation as well as for carnality" (41). Removing the fruit from such a demonstration of hunger allows us to contemplate a young woman who, much like Milton's Eve or *Othello*'s Desdemona, craves what is external to her realm of knowledge, for what lies in exoticism and novelty.

Laura's public demonstration of feminine hunger, however, is a clear lapse in the social conventions of her time as Rossetti breaks from proper table manners by representing a young girl eating in public. Helena Michie tells us that

> crucial to the dinner party that figures and so prominently figures in so many texts of the period is the heroine, whose presence and conversations at these social encounters so profoundly influence their outcome. Conspicuously absent, however, in novels and conduct books that deal so closely with dinners, tea, and other social gatherings is any mention of the heroine eating.
>
> (12)

Having learned previously that the Victorian female child was, at the time, already considered a perfect woman, it comes as no surprise that conduct literature of the era such as Beckland's *Physiological Mysteries and Revelations of Love* equate certain kinds of foods with lust. To Beckland, therefore, meagre meals become a "corrective of puberty" (quoted in Michie 15), with the consumption of richer and spicier foods leading to a stronger sex drive. The constant use of the Fall rhetoric as a means of control over appetite in young girls also suggests in Victorian conduct literature an uneasiness with feminine hunger that "reaches far beyond the dinner table" (Michie 16), with etiquette books such as Mrs. H. O. Ward's *The Young Lady's Friend* (1880) conspicuously offering dinner as an occasion for the collection of one's "moral forces" (Michie

16). Following this rhetoric of fallenness, a lapse in table manners here is equivalent to a fall from grace, with the woman having fallen at dinner banished from polite society. It is also probably not a coincidence, Michie adds, that "most of the examples of unsafe behavior which lead to this domesticated version of the Fall revolve around fruit…as if the offering of fruit with the hands is too close a re-enactment of the moment of temptation in the garden" (19). Henceforth, Laura's re-enactment of the Miltonic scene of temptation, aside from bringing forth her hunger for a getaway from the confines of the domestic sphere's controlled knowledge, also highlights the ways in which the Victorians desperately toiled on a relegation of female hunger from the public to the private.

While the fact remains that a large portion of Victorians worked towards achieving this privatization of the hungry female body, there were also those who, like Rossetti, aimed at bringing back the possibility for a woman to publicly display her hunger and satiate it. The relegation of female hunger to the privacy of the bedroom is explicitly observable in the following two examples from notable Victorian novels also written by women which I include here to better illustrate what is at stake in Laura's lapse of privacy and table manners occurring in the first food plot of "Goblin Market." At Lowood, young Jane Eyre endures the "privations, or rather the hardships" (90) imposed upon the young girls' hunger and eats her small portion of burnt porridge without complaint. It is only in the confines of the private, Miss Temple's room, that her hunger finally stops being thwarted by ruined meals:

> And a tray was soon brought. How pretty, to my eyes, did the china cups and bright teapot look, placed on the little round table near the fire! How fragrant was the steam of the beverage, and the scent of the toast! Of which, however, I, to my dismay (for I was beginning to be hungry), discerned only a very small portion: Miss Temple discerned it too.
>
> 'Barbara,' said she, 'can you not bring a little more bread and butter? There is not enough for three.'
>
> (85)

This relegation of feminine hunger from the public to the confines of the privacy of the bedroom is also observable in a famous scene from Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853) in which the narrator describes the way Miss Jenkyns is habituated to eat her oranges:

> When oranges came in, a curious proceeding was gone through. Miss Jenkyns did not like to cut the fruit; for, as she observed, the juice all ran out nobody knew where; sucking (only I think she used some more recondite word) was in fact the only way of enjoying oranges; but then there was the unpleasant association with a ceremony frequently gone through by little babies; and so, after dessert, in orange season, Miss Jenkyns and Miss Matty used to rise up, possess themselves each of an orange in silence, and withdraw to the privacy of their own rooms, to indulge in sucking oranges. (26)

Aside from the strong association made here by Miss Jenkyns between the sucking on oranges and an eroticization of breastfeeding (eroticized by its being deemed an "unpleasant" association as well as by its associated act being confined for fear of perversion), "the seriousness with which Miss Jenkyns ponders the problem of how to eat the fruit, taken in conjunction with the retreat to the bedroom, betrays the codedness of the orange and its central place in the values of class and sex that serve as foundations for the town of Cranford" (Michie 20). In the primary food plot of "Goblin Market" we get a sense of protestation from Rossetti who opposes strict gender prescriptions on hunger by having her heroine assert her individuality by satiating herself on a symbol of the Victorian public place, the market, engendering a fracture shaking the foundations of the separate spheres for men and women by relocating female hunger to the public.

Laura turning home alone and being met by Lizzie at the gate only further emphasizes the fragmentation that has occurred between the two sisters or, more accurately, between the spheres of the public and the domestic. In order to emphasize the looming consequences such a fragmentation might incur, Lizzie tries to bring her stray sister on the righteous path by reminding her of their friend Jeanie, the unredeemed fallen woman of the narrative who "fell with the first

snow" (157) after accepting the goblin's "gifts both choice and many" (149): "I planted daisies there a year ago / That never blow" (160-1). Lines such as the ones recounting Jeanie's tragic fate are heavy bearers of semblance with another piece included in the same volume, "An Apple-Gathering", for the similitudes in their mutual handling of social death occurring through consumed carnal desire and loss of virginity represented through fruit:

> I plucked pink blossoms from mine apple tree
> And wore them all that evening in my hair:
> Then in due season when I went to see
> I found no apples there.
>
> (1-4)

The speaker, turning back with "dangling basket all along the grass" proceeds along the "selfsame track", mocked by neighbours who see her walk "so empty-handed back" (5,6,8). The empty basket's connotations are amplified by the "heaped-up basket[s]" (10) of some girls passing her by: "Plump Gertrude passed me with her basket full, / A stronger hand than hers helped her along" (13-4). The following stanza surprisingly engages in the conversation surrounding the logic of virginity:

> Ah Willie, Willie, was my love less worth
> Than apples with their green leaves piled above?
> I counted rosiest apples on the earth
> Of far less worth than love.
>
> (17-20)

This short quatrain, evidently, seems to plead for the privileging of the materiality of an earthly love over the intangibility of a concept as abstract as virginity. The argument gets lost on Willie, it seems, for "We shall not walk again!" (24). The seven stanza piece ends on a typically Rossetti-esque note of renunciation, with the growing night enveloping the speaker with chill and gloom as the other walkers hasten home: "but I loitered, while the dews / Fell fast I loitered still" (27-8). An ending such as this one might signify an earlier date of composition for this poem than for "Goblin

Market", which ends on the restored sociability of its fallen woman (having been inspired by Rossetti's work at Highgate) rather than in total social death.

Having had a taste of the public life, Laura becomes dissatisfied with the dullness of her daily chores, as exemplified in the second food plot of the poem which, incidentally, appeals to a form of hunger in close resemblance to that displayed by Edith earlier:

> Early in the morning
> When the first cock crowed his warning,
> Neat like bees, as sweet and busy,
> Laura rose with Lizzie:
> Fetched in honey, milked the cows,
> Aired and sets to rights the house,
> Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,
> Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,
> Next churned butter, whipped up cream,
> Fed their poultry, sat and sewed;
> Talked as modest maidens should:
> Lizzie with an open heart,
> Laura in an absent dream,
> One content, one sick *in part*;
> One warbling for the mere bright day's delight,
> One longing for the night.
>
> (199-214, my emphasis)

It appears that the powers possessed by a sister can be of use both in "stormy weather" (563) such as attacks by goblin men, but also in the calm ones, such as to "cheer one on the tedious way" (564) of the dullness of domestic chores. However, the difference having firmly established itself between the sisters transpires in lines 210-4. It is worth noting, I believe, that Laura is sick of her domestic life only "in part", suggesting it is not the whole of the experience of the production of goods for domestic consumption that is rendering her listless, but rather its domesticity, its independency from the more public marketplace. In "Goblin Market" the home, Terrence Holt tells us, "is also a scene of busy industry, wherein the sisters produce healthful goods

independently of the marketplace, foods that differ pointedly from the goblins' exotic fruits" (52). Holt's argument, centered around the claim that "the ostensible function of this discourse of the marketplace is to stress the difference between maidens and goblins" (52), which I readily agree with, stresses the sisters' self-sufficiency through domestic labour:

> The sisters produce foods for their own consumption, enacting on an economic level the hermeticism of their domestic scene. The description of the sisters as they set to work compares them to bees, and the simile is particularly apt: they are bee-like not only in the quiet hum of their industry, but especially in their self-sufficiency, producing with their own labor the food that sustains them.
>
> (53)

While in accord with the particular aptness of such a simile in describing the sisters, I am not particularly convinced by Holt's assumption that there should be "no need to resort to the market to trade for someone else's wares" (53). Holt notes how "the honey they gather is tainted: it has appeared already in the poem, literally in a goblin's mouth" (54) ("In tones as smooth as honey" (108)), claiming the goblin men's honey is poison "working in her veins" (54). My reading of the poem, by contrast, interprets the honey produced by the sisters as an element symbolizing trade and industriousness working in symbiosis with that of the goblins, and comes to give a new sense to Holt's claim that "the honey not only sustains the home but is at the same time an inducement to go outside it, to partake in the system of exchange that invades and undoes that world" (54) which I will readily agree with. I however want to stress the idea offered by my reading of the poem that, contrarily to what Holt argues, the honey working in Laura's veins is not to be interpreted as a "tainted," poisonous element, since the world it effectively "invades and undoes" is one that confines female opportunity. The honey, rather than contaminating Laura, becomes a feeding element on the literal and metaphorical levels. This second food plot, therefore, would once again aim to relocate feminine hunger to the public sphere dominated then by the English

market with a demonstration of an industrious maiden confined to the boredom of producing her goods only for domestic purposes, with hopes of having a hand in the trade happening there. We can readily see the resemblance in purpose establishing itself in Rossetti's heroines, for my last claim could just as easily connect to Edith and Maggie's desire to penetrate the world of trade. This could potentially explain why "Curious Laura chose to linger / Wondering at each merchant man" (69-70), for the wide variety that is to be found among the goblins is a testament to the diversity of people and goods at the market, creating conditions for Laura's desire to be piqued by the exoticism she witnesses through the bestial rendering of the goblins. Once effaced, the food produced in this busy scene of home industry leaves us only with an unenlightened maiden, content with her domestication, and another who, having had a taste of the public, has grown listless and yearns to be given the possibility for self-development and agency in a blooming world of mercantilism.

Upon their return to the goblin marketplace, Laura becomes all too aware of her banishment from public society brought up by her lapse in table manners, and silently suffers her imposed re-domestication. As Laura endeavours to locate the goblin men's chant, Lizzie exclaims: "O Laura, come; / I hear the fruit-call but I dare not look" (242-3), sending her sister into a stupor: "Laura turned cold as stone / To find her sister heard that cry alone, / That goblin cry, / "Come buy our fruits, come buy"" (253-6). Having come to understand her newly assumed position of social outcast, she "gnashed her teeth for baulked desire, and wept / As if her heart would break" and "dreamed of melons, as a traveller sees / False waves in desert drouth" (267-8, 289-90). To Tucker, what ails Laura is "what Colin Campbell has named modern autonomous imaginative hedonism and is better known in cultural-historical short-hand as Romantic insatiability. She is hooked not on the juice but on an ideology of pumped-up abundance that marketing and advertising

developments at mid-century were fast making familiar to every household in the land…" (125). One successful endeavour undertaken at the market, we know, was to appeal to the newly created figure of the woman consumer by creating want where there was none before through new marketing techniques. Having experienced first-hand this feeling of insatiable desire plenty created by the sights at the market ("I ate and ate my fill, / Yet my mouth waters still" (165-6)), it comes as no surprise when we learn that she no more tends to her domestic tasks which previously had been enough, but instead "sat down listless in the chimney-nook / And would not eat" (297-8). This seems to corroborate my idea that, despite Holt's claims, bee-like self-sufficiency is not sufficient for Laura, whose imprisonment in her private nook literally makes her ill and burns "her fire away" (280).

It is her sister's dwindling into "swift decay" (279) that finally prompts Lizzie to explore the harshness of the outside world and triumph over what could be referred to as a scene of assault and rape taking place in what I identify as the third food plot, beginning when the poem's narrative voice tells us that she "…for the first time in her life / Began to listen and look" (327-8). The lines cited at the beginning of my introduction are met with assertion by Lizzie, who means business. She is in a situation that has been experienced by countless women since the dawn of time, but her refusal to respond to the cat-calling of the goblin men turns them incendiary: "No longer wagging, purring, / But visibly demurring, / Grunting and snarling. / One called her proud, / Cross-grained, uncivil" (391-5). Not stopping there, the goblins proceed with "the ultimate expression of the violence of gendered opposition—rape" (Chatterjee 118) as they "Held her hands and squeezed their fruits / Against her mouth to make her eat" (406-7). Lizzie, however, much to the goblins' dismay:

> Would not open lip from lip
> Lest they should cram a mouthful in:

But laughed in heart to feel the drip
Of juice that syrupped all her face
(431-4)

Helena Michie tells us that "the delicate woman who does not assert her physical needs serves to recuperate the Fall and to reestablish lost innocence. Mythologically, her role is to refuse the apple and to keep her mouth firmly shut to temptation" (23) which, in the lines quoted above, is what Lizzie accomplishes quite literally. It is her proper gathering of moral forces at the banquet table, her assertiveness in her virginal sacrifice, that grants her the antidote needed to restore her sister's place in public society. Occurring at a moment one would judge as having strategic relevance equivalent to Maggie's encounter with her likeness under the form of Mouth Boy's physical asymmetry, Lizzie's act of endurance amounts to an instance of gender confusion effectively blurring the boundaries imposed by the masculine/feminine binary. As Chatterjee puts it, "Lizzie's sacrifice… nullifies the force of [gendered opposition's] difference in the poem… she alternately inhabits a phallic position, one 'like a rock of blue-veined stone,' and Christ-like strength: 'like a lily in a flood"' (118). The acquisition of syrupy fruit juice aside, what Lizzie accomplishes through her act of selflessness is to nullify Laura's banishment from society by abiding by what Michie would refer to as her mythological duty. In doing so, she succeeds in de-solidifying the predictable foundations of the barriers opposing the two constituents of the gender binary.

Having successfully cheated a violent system of exchange prompting her to give up her bodily autonomy to a herd of goblins without hopes of erotic compensation in return, Lizzie hurries home to find Laura and administer her the antidote in the Eucharistic "Eat me, drink me, love me" (471) sequence, enacting the fourth and ultimate food plot of the poem:

Hug me, *kiss* me, *suck* my juices
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
Eat me, *drink* me, *love* me;

Laura, *make* much of me
(468-72, my emphasis)

These lines, as well as the few following a little afterwards (485-92), more than a mere scene of exchange of sensuality between two women, contain a plenitude of terms relating to the bodily, Rossetti infusing in this instance her verse with such a sensorial quality that it becomes difficult to ignore the lines' erotic quality. To Black feminist theorist Audre Lorde, the erotic comes to represent each instance applied to "bring us closest to that fullness" that stems from a strong "sense of satisfaction and completion" (340), all the while existing externally to the exchange value demanded by a capitalist system. It is primordial to note here that, to Lorde, the erotic is destined for sharing in an exchange system which comes without any lessening of the erotic experience of the giver to the profit of the receiver: "The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person" (341). Lorde however notes how "the erotic cannot be felt second-hand" (343), meaning that the erotic possesses a certain purity which should be shared but never duplicated and resold. The erotic, "so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all" (Lorde 341), was unsurprisingly made to be viewed in women as an aberration not only to fear but to contain as a means of patriarchal oppression. This fear engendered by any mention of feminine erotics "that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women" (Lorde 342). In this scene of erotic sharing, Lizzie comes to stand as a bringer of possibility in a flawed political and social climate that conspicuously (and complacently) denies women the sensual enjoyment of their inner "distortions" (Lorde 342).

This act of turning to another woman for self-preservation was, as other scholars have pointed out, a means for Rossetti to address the hurt generated by the problematic position held by

women in Victorian culture. Mary Wilson Carpenter argues that the Anglican Sisterhoods directly associated with the churches Rossetti attended throughout her life, as well as their work with homeless and fallen women "gave the poet access to a uniquely feminocentric view of women's sexuality […] In particular, her immediate experience with the interaction between prostitutes and women's religious communities may have constructed Rossetti's representation of a "marketplace" in which "appetite" puts a woman at risk, but where her salvation is to be found not in controlling her appetite but in turning to another woman" (417). This rhetoric of finding salvation not in self-restraint but in a sisterhood of supportive women is evidenced in Rossetti's devotional prose (devotional prose and poetry having taken up much of the last two decades of her life), as in this passage from *The Face of the Deep* (1893), where she provides commentary on the Apocalypse:

> Eve exhibits one extreme of feminine character, the Blessed Virgin the opposite extreme. Eve parleyed with a devil: holy Mary "was troubled" at the salutation of an Angel. Eve sought knowledge: Mary instruction. Eve aimed at self-indulgence: Mary at self-oblation. Eve, by disbelief and disobedience, brought sin to the birth: Mary, by fait and submission, Righteousness.
>
> And yet, even as at the foot of the Cross, St. Mary-Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, stood beside the "lily among thorns," the Mother of sorrows: so (I humbly hope and trust) amongst all saints of all time will stand before the Throne, Eve the beloved first mother of us all. Who that has loved and revered her own immediate dear mother, will not echo the hope?
>
> (*FD* 310-1, quoted in D'Amico 175)

In this passage, Eve, Mary, and Mary-Magdalene all appear in what Diane D'Amico refers to as a "feminine triptych". These three women, D'Amico argues, "both as individual saints and as representative figures, characterize the limits and possibilities Rossetti sees as particularly feminine" (175). Eve, the disobedient daughter who, going after denied knowledge broke God's

law is nonetheless showcased alongside Mary, obedient daughter to the law. Rossetti points out how, yet, Mary and Mary-Magdalene, the sinner, stood together at the Crucifixion. "Therefore", D'Amico clarifies, "the disobedience that had cost Eve Eden need not cost her heaven" (175). Inevitably when Eve makes an appearance in the writing of Christina Rossetti, she appears as a weaker figure than her mate Adam, weak enough for her mind to allow itself diversion from the law of God: "Curiosity is a feminine weak point inviting temptation, and doubly likely to facilitate a fall when to indulge it woman affects independence" (*FD* 520, quoted in D'Amico 176). In simpler terms, Eve should not have wandered off to her own occupations. In *Monna Innominata*, Rossetti's sonnet sequence (in the introduction of which she offers a comparison of herself alongside "Great Poetess" Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, recognizing Browning's talent while admitting that her happy marriage to poet Robert Browning had prevented the crucial presence of longing and denial in her verse), the unnamed lady states that "woman is the helpmeet made for man" (5.14), and in "A Helpmeet for Him" she is "his shadow by day, his moon by night" (3). This portrait of women showcases their importance while highlighting the fact that this importance remains unacknowledged: while woman shadows man during the day, the public moment of the planet's quotidian rotation, she is his guiding light, his "moon" during the night when all are in their lodgings and out of public eye. It is through Eve's foolish choice that sin enters the world, and that Rossetti is acutely aware of while persevering in portraying her repeatedly in poetry and prose as a sympathetic figure (D'Amico 176). In "An After-Thought" our fair first mother, this "saddened Eve with sleepless eyes […] now slumbers [in heaven] forgiven" (8, 45). Rossetti understood that evil having entered Eden through Eve did not necessarily mean that she herself was part of the evil. Her reading of Genesis brought her to the conclusion that, although women ought to be somewhat more passive and tame than men, she

"did not deny any woman her humanity or spirituality, no matter the number or the nature of her sins" (D'Amico 191).

It is therefore fitting that Rossetti chooses to have her heroine be (once the antidote/pulp administered is removed) saved from earthly damnation through the erotic touch of a sister as she herself would have done at Highgate. Once administered, the antidote has Laura's lips "scorch[ing], / That juice was wormwood to her tongue, / She loathed the feast" (493-5), a tableau which brings to mind a particular scene from Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) in which Dr. John taunts Paulina with a glass of ale which he holds over the woman's head, claiming the beverage to be "deliciously sweet". However, "when he finally allows her to have a sip she discovers, like the model of femininity that she is, that it is far too bitter for her taste" (Michie 25). If one were to look at the poem from an ethnographic angle, we might come to regard the consuming of the bitter ale/potion as a rite of passage into the bitter reality of the manly, rough, mercantilist world, a cultural symbol in Rossetti's imagined world, which the "Life out of death" (524) sequence might render all the more plausible. Another reading of these lines might simply inform one that, as ale can be an acquired taste, creeping out of the domesticity in which you were until then confined into the world also requires some getting used to. The poem thus ends on the well-known assertion that "there is no friend like a sister" (562) leaving us, much to Deborah Ann Thompson's dismay, with an Eve-like figure who gets to express curiosity for what lies beyond her established helpmeet/maiden role, to experience the world she is part of, and ultimately to grieve for her mistakes and thus achieve her subsequent expiation, and all that through her feminine hunger.

To conclude this section, I would like to return to my assertion that, perhaps, the goblin fruit really "no man can carry." It would make sense, seemingly, that Rossetti would have what many have perceived as the locus of the poem be destined for feminine use only, as the world the

goblins and sisters inhabit, much like the "Nowhere" of *Speaking Likenesses*, is a feminized world devoid of patriarchal hegemony in which women are free to become emblems of industriousness and repentance. This assertion confirms Knoepflmacher's claim that "the mastery of the adult woman is never in doubt in *Speaking Likenesses*" and extends to "Goblin Market", all the while abiding by Rossetti's devotion to ethical thinking in a secularizing world. I think for instance of Flora, who asserts her individuality in the confrontation of her ever-livid likeness while being self-deprived of nourishment at a feast as a perfect figure of religious fasting, or Lizzie, who discovers her erotic self with a fellow sister following a violent attack by men. The women in the texts discussed in this essay are the result of hegemonic forces in that they both represent the sole figures of authority, but also because they successfully blur the boundaries of the stringent male/female dualism through psychic gender confusion occurring whenever a male figure appears and subsequently attempts to assume the role of an authority. The women in Rossetti's canon (including *Speaking Likenesses*) are figures not of subordination, but of possibilities, "zones of potentiality in a relation of forces" (Chatterjee 18).

Conclusion

The quote I have chosen as my epigraph from Gaskell's *North and South*, although taken quite out of context for the present purposes, perfectly encapsulates the idea I believe one should have of the peculiarity and primitive nature of Miss Jenkyns's eating habits when oranges are concerned, which is what I have tried to convey through my reading of Rossetti's use of food plots in this essay. I have argued that, having come to understand female hunger as a fundamental locus of righteous expansion of the mind which is not only deeply generative of feminine identity, but also a source for the elevation of the erotic self, it comes as no surprise that Christina Rossetti

would aim to relocate its unabashed embodiment from the bedroom to the more capacious world of the public, as the texts analyzed here, written between the 1850-70s, coincide in appearance with the period Victorianists regard as consonant with the "rise of liberalism" (Chatterjee 3). Such proto-liberalism she displayed through her engagement in the debate surrounding the place that should be reserved for women in public through her literary depictions of young women who were hungry for more than the same old domestic platitudes. Through her hungry girls, I have suggested that Rossetti shows how a woman's full potential can only be reached if she is allowed to partake in public activities from which arise opportunities for self-development, when she is allowed to satiate her hunger on the public place rather than in the bedroom. While the three young girls of *Speaking Likenesses* made use of their hunger in the development of a sense of industry as well as in the forming of a social conscience, the two sisters of "Goblin Market" were brought by theirs to curiously explore what lied beyond their hermetic domestic world and to be chastised before finding salvation in the embrace of another woman. Ultimately, all five heroines displayed varying degrees of Rossetti's own unease with the repression of their own hunger in the face of the public banquet which they saw in the masculine public sphere. Knowing the paradoxical demands imposed upon Victorian women (a prime example of such paradoxical demands would be the hourglass figure, requiring a woman have the most plentiful hips and breasts while having a minuscule, corseted waist), Rossetti would aim to liberate feminine hunger (literal and metaphorical) from the shadows by having it become the driving force of the feminine world she would create in her writing. I am thinking of Alice who, having arrived at the Mad Hatter and the March Hare's mad tea party, is rudely told that there is "No room! No room!" (*AW* 60) by the men sticking together. Upon noticing that "the table was a large one, but the three were all crowded together at one corner of it," Alice exclaims that "there's p*lenty* of room!" (60, emphasis Carroll's)

before sitting down at the other end of the table to claim the spot which is rightfully hers. Through her art, Christina Rossetti realized just such a claim.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Penguin, 2006.

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*. Penguin, 1998.

Gaskell, Elizabeth. *Cranford*. Oxford University Press, 1998.

Gaskell, Elizabeth. *North and South*. Penguin, 1995.

Rossetti, Christina. *Speaking Likenesses*. Macmillan, 1874.

Rossetti, Christina, & Crump, R. W. (ed). *The Complete Poems.* Penguin, 2005.

Ruskin, John. *The Ethics of the Dust*. Philadelphia: Henry Althemus Company, n.d.

Ruskin, John. *Unto This Last*. University of Nebraska Press, 1967.

Secondary Sources:

Briggs, Julia. "Speaking Likenesses: Hearing the Lesson." *The Culture of Christina Rossetti*. Eds, Arseneau, Mary, Anthony H. Harrison & Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Ohio University Press, 1999.

Carpenter, Mary Wilson. ""Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me": The Consumable Female Body in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market"." *Victorian Poetry*. Vol. 29, No 4, 1991, pp. 415-34.

Chatterjee, Ronjaunee. "Precarious Lives: Christina Rossetti and the Form of Likeness." *Victorian Literature and Culture*. Vol. 45, 2017, pp. 745-62.

Chatterjee, Ronjaunee. *Feminine Singularity: The Politics of Subjectivity in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Stanford University Press, 2022.

D'Amico, Diane. "Eve, Mary and Mary Magdalene: Christina Rossetti's Feminine Triptych." *The Achievement of Christina Rossetti*. Ed, David A. Kent. Cornell University Press, 1987.

Daly, Suzanne and Ross G. Forman. "Introduction: Cooking Culture: Situating Food and Drink in the Nineteenth-Century." *Victorian Literature and Culture*. Vol. 36, No 2, 2008, pp. 363-73.

Garland, Carina. "Curious Appetites: Food, Desire, Gender and Subjectivity in Lewis Carroll's Alice Texts." *The Lion and the Unicorn*. Vol. 32, No 1, 2008, pp. 22-39.

Holt, Terrence. ““Men sell not such in any town”: Exchange in “Goblin Market”.” *Victorian Poetry*. Vol. 28, No 1, 1990, pp. 51-67.

Knoepflmacher, U. C. “Avenging Alice: Christina Rossetti and Lewis Carroll.” *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Vol. 41, No 3, 1986, pp. 299-328.

Lorde, Audre. “The Uses of the Erotic.” *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. Eds, Abelove, Henry, Michele Aina Barale, and David Halperin. Routledge, 1993.

Marsh, Jan. *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*. Pimlico, London, 1995.

McGann, Jerome J. *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory*. Oxford, Clarendon, 1985.

Menke, Richard. “The Political Economy of Fruit: Goblin Market.” *The Culture of Christina Rossetti*. Eds, Arseneau, Mary, Anthony H. Harrison & Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Ohio University Press, 1999.

Michie, Helena. *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women’s Bodies*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1987.

Packer, Lona Mosk. *Christina Rossetti*. University of California Press, 1963.

Parrish Lee, Michael. “Gaskell’s Food Plots and the Biopolitics of the Industrial Novel.” *Victorian Literature and Culture*. Vol. 47, No 3, 2019, pp. 511-39.

Shurbutt, Sylvia Bayley. "Revisionist Mythmaking in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*: Eve's Apple and Other Questions Revised and Reconsidered." *Victorian Newsletter,* No 82, 1992, pp. 40-4.

Silver, Anna Krugovoy. “Christina Rossetti’s sacred hunger.” *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Silver, Anna Krugovoy. “Appetite in Victorian children’s literature.” *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Thomas, Kate. “The Culinary Landscape of Victorian Literature.” *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Food*. ed. J. Michelle Coghlan. Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Thompson, Deborah Ann. “Anorexia as a Lived Trope: Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market”.” *Mosaic*. Vol. 24, No 3/4, 1991, pp. 89-106.

Tucker, Herbert F. “Rossetti’s Goblin Marketing: Sweet to Tongue and Sound to Eye.” *Representations*. Vol. 82, No 1, 2003, pp. 117-33.