

## SUGAR AND SPICE AND ALL THINGS NICE: THE VICTORIAN WOMAN'S ALL-CONSUMING PREDICAMENT

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### *Abstract*

Haunted by the hunger of Eden's infamous apple-eater, women have long had to contend with condemnatory attitudes towards female patterns of consumption. Nineteenth-century conduct writer Elizabeth Pennell was certainly eager to assert that when Eve stretched forth to taste the Forbidden Fruit, she unconsciously thrust the female appetite into 'ill-repute'. 'Foolish fasting,' she argued, was suddenly 'glorified,' until 'a healthy appetite [...] passed for a snare of the devil, and its gratification meant eternal damnation'.<sup>1</sup> With the devil presiding over the dinner-table to consume, or not to consume, became a question which plagued angelic house-dwellers troubled by a grumbling stomach. However, the uneasiness surrounding women's hunger was far more than a mere dinner-table phenomenon. It entered the boudoir, becoming an indicator of sexuality, and saturated the social domain. With the birth of a consumer-crazed culture, it was assumed that women were hungry for *things*, corsets and crinolines, diamonds and dinner-plates, tea-cups and carriages, commodities galore.

This article analyses nineteenth-century variations on the notion of consumption and all its lexical derivatives. Using Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (1862) and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) as literary stimuli, this article ultimately exposes the perils of allowing consumer curiosity and hunger to collide in the public sphere. I broaden the discussion to include Rossetti's other 'consumer' skewed works and, more briefly, George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894). My analysis charts the dissolution of the boundary between consumer and consumed, contemplates visual consumption and its specular economies and, finally, traces 'vampiric' veins throughout the era's consumptive corpus, focusing on the Pre-Raphaelites.

In this paper I will argue that the Victorian woman faced an all-consuming predicament. But what exactly does this mean? Certainly, in its verb form, 'to consume' was a notion which infiltrated every social capillary of Victorian civilisation. From dinner-table dining through the advent of supermarket shopping sprees to the emergence of sartorial emporia, the Victorians loved to consume. However, in spite of this love for consumption, the era's females were faced with a highly contradictory rubric regarding consumerist practice. The nineteenth-century female was urged to curb her consuming tendencies, a prohibition I draw on in my discussion of Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (1862) and Lewis Carroll's *Alice* (1865-71). Through her adherence to the era's non-consumer code of conduct, I argue, the non-hungry heroine of Victorian culture eventually became a titillating

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Robins Pennell, *The Feasts of Autolycus: The Diary of a Greedy Woman* (London: John Lane, 1896), p. 9.

treat for male voyeurs and, ironically, an object of visual, sexual and gustatory consumption herself. Through an examination of popular periodicals, Rossetti's 'In an Artist's Studio' (1856) and George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), I will further demonstrate that the woman who wasted away through non-consuming endeavours unnervingly spurred male hungers for, and preoccupations with, pale, seemingly consumptive young women. Thus, moving full circle from consumer to consumed, this article will expose the dangers surrounding Victorian (non)consumerism, and, ultimately, attempt to untangle the Victorian woman from her all-consuming threads.

In 1899 Thorstein Veblen diagnosed Victorian culture as being conspicuously consumptive.<sup>2</sup> The symptoms of commercial consumption, however, were proliferating long before the epoch's close. According to Krista Lysack, 'the dangers and delights' of rampant 'consumerism' were infecting the corpus of Victorian Britain from about 1851.<sup>3</sup> London's Great Exhibition was described by Charlotte Brontë as a 'magic bazaar [...] majestically conjured up by Eastern genii [and] supernatural hands [who concocted] a blaze [...] of colours [with] marvellous powers of effect'.<sup>4</sup> In the aftermath of such a spectacle, dreary markets and rundown shops quickly transmogrified into dazzling sites of spectacular consumption. Like Dame Margaret's 'village fancy shop' in Christina Rossetti's *Speaking Likenesses* (1874) window displays meretriciously 'put forth extra splendours, and, as it were, blossomed gorgeously' luring the locals through visual means.<sup>5</sup>

Surrounding this consumptive pandemic there lingered putrid moral miasmas: when maidens went to market, or wandered through shops, they risked being (mis)led along the path to prostitution, or into the hands of goblin men. Moreover, when women wallowed in alimentary wonderland they were in danger of encountering the dietary devil. To consume or 'to be hungry, in *any* sense, was a social faux pas'. Accordingly, valiant 'denial became a form of moral certitude' and refusal of fetishised foodstuffs and consumerist yearnings were, in the words of Joan Jacobs Brumberg, 'a means of advancing in the moral hierarchy'.<sup>6</sup>

Aware of this 'moral hierarchy' from an untimely age, the Victorian child soon became waylaid with a rich flow of dietary didacticism and admonitory consumer advice. In 1895, Victorian psychologist James Sully remarked that 'the child is little

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<sup>2</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* [1899] (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Krista Lysack, *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Charlotte Brontë, 'To Reverend Patrick Brontë, June 7<sup>th</sup> 1851', in *Selected Letters*, ed. by Margaret Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 190-91 (p. 190).

<sup>5</sup> Christina Rossetti, *Speaking Likenesses* (London: Macmillan, 1874), p. 71. Further references will be given after quotations in the text.

<sup>6</sup> Joan Jacobs Brumberg, 'The Appetite as Voice', in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, ed. by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 141-61 (p. 153).

more than an *incarnation of appetite which knows no restraint*'.<sup>7</sup> It was thought that children, in general, like Lewis Carroll's Alice, 'always took a great interest in questions of eating and drinking'.<sup>8</sup> However, in a culture which idolised the frugal appetite and the saintly slender over the voraciously hungry and a thickset figure, the child's carnality became a contentious issue. Nineteenth-century culture promoted a fierce 'anorexic logic',<sup>9</sup> and under this rubric 'eating too much – or sometimes wanting to eat at all' was, in the words of Jacqueline Labbe, emblematic of the 'child's inherent viciousness, the residue of Original Sin'.<sup>10</sup> Thus, schooled from an early age in self-restrictive protocol, Victorian girls' dietary destiny was to be fed on air.

In a profusion of short stories and fairy-tales, girls were 'taught that they must control their appetites and, by implication, their desires and bodies, in order to be "good"'.<sup>11</sup> In Carol Gilman's *The Little Wreath* (1847) a mischievous child protagonist is warned not to 'spoil a pretty mouth by cramming it with food'.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, in the anonymously written *Little Glutton* (1860), the author scorns every 'young lady' who exhibits 'so lively a pleasure at the sight of anything to eat'. She scolds them for disclosing so strong a 'disposition to what is called gluttony – an ignoble fault which condemns us to the level of mere brute beasts'.<sup>13</sup> 'Don't be Greedy' became the catchphrase of Victorian girlhood.<sup>14</sup>

This conflation of restrained consumption with "goodness" is further highlighted by Elizabeth Gaskell when she records the recollections of one of the Brontë family's servants:

there was never such *good* children [...] they were so different to any other children I had ever seen. I set it down to a fancy Mr Brontë had [...] he thought that children should be brought up simply and hardly: so they had nothing but potatoes for their dinner; but they never seemed to wish for anything else; *they*

<sup>7</sup> James Sully, 'Studies in Childhood', *Popular Science Monthly*, 47:48 (September 1895), pp. 648-64 (p. 650) [emphasis mine].

<sup>8</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* [1865] (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> Leslie Heywood, *Dedication to Hunger: The Anorexic Aesthetic in Modern Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. xii. See also Anna Krugovoy Silver, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Jacqueline M. Labbe, 'To Eat and be Eaten in Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature', in *Critical Approaches to Food in Children's Literature*, ed. by Kara K. Keeling and Scott T. Pollard (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 93-104 (p. 93).

<sup>11</sup> Silver, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>12</sup> Carol Gilman, *The Little Wreath of Stories and Poems for Children* (New York: C. S. Francis and Co., 1847), p. 161.

<sup>13</sup> Anonymous, 'The Little Glutton', in *The Girl's Birthday Book: A Collection of Tales, Essays and Narratives, Especially Designed for Girls* (London: Houlston & Wright, 1860), pp. 315-33 (p. 315).

<sup>14</sup> Oscar Pletch and M. Richter, *Child-Land: Picture Pages for the Little Ones* (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1873), p. 18.

*were good little creatures.*<sup>15</sup>

Because nineteenth-century child-rearing regimes prescribed a bland diet bereft of sugary sweetness ‘food fantasies’ became, according to Carolyn Daniel, ‘a traditional ingredient in children’s stories’. The British classics, in particular, she suggests, ‘are a rich source of fictional feasting’.<sup>16</sup> The sensually intense *Goblin Market* is certainly no exception: lush lemons, mouth-watering melons, brilliant berries and rotund cherries infiltrate Rossetti’s tantalising market terrain:

Apples and quinces,  
Lemons and Oranges,  
Plump unpecked cherries,  
Melons and raspberries,  
[...]  
Swart-headed mulberries,  
Wild free-born cranberries,  
Crab-apples, dewberries,  
Pine-apples, blackberries,  
Apricots, strawberries  
[...]  
Taste them and try.<sup>17</sup>

As Kathryn Burlinson has suggested, such an abundantly rousing opening immediately betrays the sensuality of the poem and its infinite powers of seduction: its ‘*rich feast* of repetition’ which whets ‘the reader’s appetite’, activating ‘the mouths and tongues of any who read it aloud’.<sup>18</sup> As readers, then, we are tempted by Rossetti to literally consume the text, albeit at the risk of growing dependent upon the pleasure it provides. Like the readership who gorge upon the poem’s dainty delights, Laura and Lizzie too, are aroused by Rossetti’s rampant fruit frenzy. Despite their ‘cautioning lips’ (l.38), and their desperate attempts to mask ‘veiled [...] blushes’ (l.35), they betray their ‘tingling cheeks and fingertips’ (l.39). In a culture that used

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* [1857] (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 41 [emphasis mine].

<sup>16</sup> Carolyn Daniel, *Voracious Children: Who Eats Whom in Children’s Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Christina Rossetti, ‘Goblin Market’, in *Christina Rossetti: The Complete Poems* [1862] (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. 5-20 (p. 5), ll.5-25.

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Reynolds, ‘Speaking Unlikenesses: The Double Text in Christina Rossetti’s “After Death” and “Remember”’, in *The Culture of Christina Rossetti: Female Poetics and Victorian Contexts*, ed. by Mary Arseneau, Anthony H. Harrison and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999), pp. 3-21 (pp. 5-6). Kathryn Burlinson, *Christina Rossetti* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998), p. 42.

the blush to infer erotic stimulation, such symptoms were undoubtedly markers of a sexually awakened body. Positioned in a semantic field of sexually allusive lexicon, ‘plump’ (l.7), ‘wild’ (l.11), ‘ripe’ (l.15), ‘blushes’ (l.63), Rossetti’s goblinised cuisine becomes akin to the fruitful flesh of the corpulent woman, whose curvaceous body denotes active sexuality.

In a vast array of Victorian writing food acted as an indirect metaphor for sexuality. Rossetti’s specifically erotic equation between *fruit* and fallen-nature is made further explicit in Elizabeth Pennell’s *Feasts of Autolycus: The Diary of a Greedy Woman* (1896). In Pennell’s Eden ‘winter’s fruits [are] most delicious and suggestive’. Oranges become orgasmic: ‘the fragrant, spicy little Tangerine [...] is a magic pass to the happy land of *dreams*.’ Pears are ‘set [...] to *blushing* a rosy red’ by the warm ‘*kisses*’ of ‘a *passionate lover*’. Grapes are ‘*voluptuous*’; figs overflow with ‘*exotic* sweetness;’ peaches are ‘tender and juicy and *desirable*’. The succulent strawberry is exclusive ‘creator of *pleasure* [...] cool, scarlet and *adorable*’. Moreover, ‘the strawberry,’ she suggests, ‘has been proven fickle in its loves: a very Cressida among fruits: it *mates* with Cream; ‘offers *ecstatic* welcome’ to Kirsch; ‘*coquettes*’ with Champagne; and swells under the ‘hot *embrace* of Maraschino’.<sup>19</sup> It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the mouth-watering mayhem of *Goblin Market*, a text which is ‘neurotically focussed [on] the consumption of fruit’, becomes an apt site in which to explore the fallen woman’s fate.<sup>20</sup>

Lizzie is acutely aware of the sexual dangers the goblin’s exotic produce emits. She immediately cautions Laura ‘not [to] peep at goblin men’ (l.49): ‘Their offers should not charm us, / Their evil gifts would harm us’ (ll.65-66). However, for ‘sweet-tooth Laura’ (l.115) the ‘sugar-baited’ (l.234) succulence of these fruits proves too tempting to resist. Anticipating her fall, she ‘rear[s] her glossy head’ (l.52) until all ‘restraint is gone’ (l.86): ‘She sucked and sucked and sucked the more / Fruits which that unknown orchard bore’ (ll.134-35). Like the Greedy Woman of Pennell’s diary, Laura, in what Herbert Tucker refers to as a ‘nigh bulimic buzz’,<sup>21</sup> rapaciously indulges in ‘the love-apples that not the hardest heart can resist’.<sup>22</sup> She trades her luscious locks, invoking the traditional literary trope of sexual deflowerment, for the goblin’s ‘fruit globes’ (l.128). As a result she treads the startlingly thin line between consumer and consumed.

Indeed, Laura’s ‘anomalous position’, according to Catherine Maxwell, ‘aligns or even conflates her with [...] the prostitute [...] whose sole economic power

<sup>19</sup> Pennell, *The Feasts of Autolycus*, pp. 48-49, 56, 233, 236 [emphasis mine].

<sup>20</sup> Susan Honeyman, ‘Gingerbread Wishes and Candy(land) Dreams: The Lure of Food in Cautionary Tales of Consumption’, *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies*, 21:2 (2007), pp. 195-215 (p. 205). See also Alison Chapman, *The Afterlife of Christina Rossetti* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 131.

<sup>21</sup> Herbert F. Tucker, ‘Rossetti’s Goblin Marketing: Sweet to Tongue and Sound to Eye’, *Representations*, 82 (Spring 2003), pp. 17-133 (p. 118).

<sup>22</sup> Pennell, *The Feasts of Autolycus*, p. 132.

consists in selling her body, in making herself into an object of consumption'.<sup>23</sup> Although the resolution of the poem suggests that Laura is clearly no prostitute, at least according to the dictates of a society wherein the fallen woman would be condemned to death, 'found drowned' somewhere in her own immoral quagmire, she does come perilously close to endorsing prostitute-like politics. Despite Lizzie's advisory input – 'you [...] should not loiter in the glen / In the haunts of goblin men', 'twilight is not good for maidens' (ll.144-46) – 'Curious' Laura's choice 'to linger' (l.69) in the marketplace after hours eerily recalls the midnight meanderings of street-walking women who were *on* the market, rather than browsing *within* it.

In nineteenth-century society a maiden's trip to the market was ideally driven by necessity rather than urged by desire. As Lori Anne Loeb has demonstrated, in this period the female flowers were expected to be content in the 'walled-garden' of their domestic haven, sheltered from dangerous 'confrontation with the outside world'.<sup>24</sup> On the whole, they stayed at home, away from commercial encounters. As the following nineteenth-century nursery-rhyme suggests, the desire to venture into the marketplace is always supplanted by a more urgent need to return home: 'To market, to market to buy a plum bun, / Home again, home again, market is done'.<sup>25</sup> The hoof-clipping rhythm of this rhyme denotes the small space a maiden's trip to market should occupy. The syllable stress on the word 'home' emphasises the requirement to swiftly move back into the domestic province. Yet, as we have seen, Laura's 'linger[ing]' evokes a prolapsed span of time, again suggesting her venture into the marketplace is a transgressive and dangerous one.

Lizzie's tale of Jeanie, another maiden who 'met [men] in the moonlight' (l.148), further emphasises the perils of the market sphere. After frolicking with Rossetti's fruit men, Jeanie 'pined and pined away [...] dwindled and grew grey' (ll.154-56), an image which evokes the syphilitic stains of moral and pathological consumption. Rossetti's anxieties surrounding moonlight-marketeering were reinforced by the government's implementation of early closing hours. Associating late-night loitering with prostitution the Early Closing Movement, instigated in 1842, emerged, in part, as a corrective means to stifle 'the frivolous practices' of flirtatious 'night shoppers' who, as the *Daily Telegraph* put it in 1858, go "gallivanting about the streets after nightfall [...] making purchases which there is no earthly reason for them not to have made hours before".<sup>26</sup> The satirical periodical *Punch* was certainly

<sup>23</sup> Catherine Maxwell, 'Tasting the "Fruit Forbidden": Gender, Intertextuality, and Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*', in *The Culture of Christina Rossetti: Female Poetics and Victorian Contexts*, ed. by Mary Arseneau, Anthony H. Harrison and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999), pp. 75-102 (p. 88).

<sup>24</sup> Lori Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. vii.

<sup>25</sup> *Songs for the Nursery* (London: Darton & Clark, c. 1805), p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Lysack, *Come Buy, Come Buy*, p. 34. *Daily Telegraph* article qtd. in Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University

quick to pick up on the ulterior motives of the Early Closure schemes:

Only think what a dreadful thing it must be for a young lady, in the bloom of health and beauty, to get her blood infected with fever or *consumption*, or *goodness knows what*, and fall sick, and very likely become disfigured, or perhaps die, by venturing, incautiously, into the tainted atmosphere of late-closing linen-draper's horrid shops!<sup>27</sup>

As early as the late 1840s, newspapers were crammed with stories of the marketplace and its dangers. The *Lady's Newspaper* warned of numerous women 'being *forcibly* compelled to purchase an article which she did not want', presumably by sexually virile merchant men.<sup>28</sup> According to the *Girl's Own Paper*, 'a prudent shopper [would] *keep her eyes from straying* amongst the tempting array [...] *turn a deaf ear* to the insinuations of the shopkeeper'.<sup>29</sup> Lizzie, certainly fits the prototype of the periodical's prudent shopper. As Elizabeth Helsinger has demonstrated, Lizzie limits the meaning of consumption: shopping purely with pennies, rather than the counter-currency of desire.<sup>30</sup> Drawing upon the article's visual polemics, she understands the perils of 'peep[ing]' at goblin men; furthermore, she 'thrusts a dimpled finger / In each ear' (ll.67-68), sheltering her auditory senses from the goblins' cries. Laura, however, with her incessant desire to 'peep', and her naïve succumbing to 'elementary pleasures [...] to sound [...] to the hypnotic, sing-song effect of the lush opening lines', is far from prudent in her shopping.<sup>31</sup> Her defiant consumer conduct, as we have seen, leads to her fall. *Goblin Market*, then, is a text which neatly illustrates just how tangled the Victorian female became within the web of consumer practice. With its prominent focus on Laura's childish curiosity, the poem demonstrates how commercial spaces often became breeding-grounds for a hodgepodge of desire: for food, for sex, for new shopping sensations. It exemplifies just how easy it was for the female consumer to be consumed. But, perhaps most

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Press, 2005), pp. 86-87.

<sup>27</sup> 'Caution in Shopping,' *Punch* (March 12<sup>th</sup> 1853), p. 109 [emphasis mine]. Lewis Carroll also commented upon the undesirability of maidenly shopping excursions, particularly to 'bazaars' which brought a woman into contact with the unfamiliar. For instance, in a letter to Emily Wyper, dated November 10, 1892, he wrote: 'My dear Emmie, I object to *all* bazaars on the general principle that they are very undesirable schools for young ladies, in which they learn to be "too fast," and forward, and more exposed to undesirable acquaintances than in ordinary society'. *The Letters of Lewis Carroll*, ed. by Morton Cohen, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1979), vol. 2., p. 932.

<sup>28</sup> 'Shopping and its Dangers,' *Lady's Newspaper*, 147 (October 20<sup>th</sup> 1849), p. 213.

<sup>29</sup> Mary Selwood, 'The Art of Shopping,' *Girl's Own Paper* (July 16<sup>th</sup> 1881), p. 660 [emphasis mine].

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth K. Helsinger, 'Consumer Power and the Utopia of Desire: Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market"', *ELH*, 58:4 (Winter 1991), pp. 903-33 (p. 923).

<sup>31</sup> U. C. Knoepfelmacher, *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 323.

importantly, *Goblin Market* reveals that Victorian ‘curiosity’ came at a high price.

Alice falls into Wonderland ‘burning with curiosity’, instantly ‘peep[ing]’ at her seductive surroundings.<sup>32</sup> As she enters the fantastic realm where ‘objects and mysterious creatures titillate her senses’, Alice, like Laura, ‘represents the dangers that women run when roaming the streets in search of pleasure’.<sup>33</sup> Lysack has shown how Britain’s new shopping emporia, which sprung up rapidly in the 1860s, were designed to map ‘the continuity between home and marketplace’, specifically recalling a *mélange* of ‘domestic comforts’.<sup>34</sup> Outlets for light luncheons and tasty tea-breaks, in particular, became a rudimentary part of consumerist activities. If, as Nancy Armstrong suggests, Alice flaunts the behaviour of a typical shopper in Wonderland – picking up and putting back a jar of ‘orange marmalade’, and succumbing to such ‘unsubtle advertising ploys’ as ‘EAT ME’ and ‘DRINK ME’ – her rest-stop at the Mad Hatter’s Tea-Party becomes as dangerous as Laura’s commercial venture into goblin grounds.<sup>35</sup>

In a similar way to Laura, whose golden curls fall into the greedy paws of goblin men, Alice is threatened in an archetypal, Rape-of-the-Lock-fashion. Looking ‘at Alice for some time with great *curiosity*’, the Hatter rudely, and somewhat suggestively, remarks: ‘your hair wants cutting’.<sup>36</sup> Undoubtedly, this statement has sexual resonances. It is not the only allusion Carroll made in his lifetime to threatening young girls with phallic potency. Carina Garland has noted that ‘Carroll once sent a small knife to Kathleen Tidy, a child friend, as a birthday present’.<sup>37</sup> A critical look through Carroll’s letters suggests that the knife was intended to curb the cravings of this voraciously consuming girl. Carroll instructed Kathleen in using the knife to cut her dinner. ‘This way’, he asserts, ‘you will be safe from eating too much [...]. If you find that when the others have finished you have only had one mouthful, do not be vexed about it’.<sup>38</sup> Carroll’s logic resembles the self-restrictive eating protocol of the age at large.

As the above anecdote suggests, Carroll felt unease regarding gustatory

<sup>32</sup> Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, pp. 10, 9.

<sup>33</sup> Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> Krista Lysack, ‘Goblin Markets: Victorian Women Shoppers at Liberty’s Oriental Bazaar’, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 27:2 (2005), pp. 139-65 (p. 144).

<sup>35</sup> See Nancy Armstrong, ‘The Occidental Alice’, *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 2 (Summer 1990), pp. 3-40; Mary Wilson Carpenter, ‘“Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me”: The Consumable Female Body in Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market”’, *Victorian Poetry*, 29:4 (Winter 1991), pp. 415-34 (p. 415).

<sup>36</sup> Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 60.

<sup>37</sup> Carina Garland, ‘Curious Appetites: Food, Desire, Gender and Subjectivity in Lewis Carroll’s Alice Texts’, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 32:1 (January 2008), pp. 22-39 (p. 26).

<sup>38</sup> Lewis Carroll, ‘To Kathleen Tidy, March 30<sup>th</sup> 1861’, in *The Letters of Lewis Carroll*, vol. 1, p. 49.

rigmarole, and was particularly disgusted by the ravenous appetite of his female acquaintances. Carroll's nephew, Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, wrote in 1899 that 'the healthy appetites of his young friends filled him with wonder, and even [...] alarm'.<sup>39</sup> In light of this, the Mad Hatter's Tea-Party seems to fit a paradigm of Carrollian abstention: the focus of the feast is on 'tea', which, as Carol Mavor suggests, is 'a drink free of calories'. Moreover, being caffeine-suffused, tea is 'ascetic: it masks hunger, it feeds *without* food'.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, contrary to what one might expect from the classic, mid-century 'High-Tea', be it the basic staples of bread and butter or the more extravagant fare of cream-filled cakes and jam, Carroll's spread consists of not so much as a crumb. His guests (if the text's accompanying illustrations are anything to go by) are apparently to make do with hot air. Yet, according to Anna Krugovoy Silver, Alice is 'no ethereal fairy, but a serpent and a hyena whose appetite *needs* food to be fed'.<sup>41</sup>

Silver diagnoses Alice as having an 'enormous appetite', which, she suggests, 'clearly and hilariously subverts the conventional Victorian heroine's lack of hunger'. She claims that Alice's fervent appetite sets 'Carroll apart [...] from most Victorian writers of children's literature'.<sup>42</sup> However, Carroll's book is not, as Silver suggests, 'set apart' from iconic children's literature at all. Like the authors discussed at the outset of this article, he is constantly schooling Alice in the ways of dietary denial, and he punishes her when her calorie counting lapses. Rather than using Alice's hunger as a counter-narrative to the iconic literary trope of the non-hungry heroine, Alice becomes, I believe, a malnourished marionette, driven by Carroll's alimentary instructions.

In Wonderland, the *White Queen* (whose majestically pallid complexion symbolises the lily-like anorexic) proclaims: "the rule is, jam tomorrow and jam yesterday – but *never jam to-day*".<sup>43</sup> Alice might be compulsively concerned with 'questions of eating and drinking' but her 'enormous appetite' is never satiated.<sup>44</sup> Under Carroll's weight-watching eye, her food fantasies, "I *wish* they'd [...] hand round the refreshments!", seem more on par with the anorexic's obsessive, but nevertheless *unfulfilled*, desire for food, than a greedy girl's overindulging.<sup>45</sup> Like the anorexic, Alice is burdened with two selves; a bloated, bingeing self and a dietary-

<sup>39</sup> S. D. Collingwood, *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll* (New York: Century, 1899), p.134.

<sup>40</sup> Carol Mavor, 'For-getting to Eat: Alice's Mouthing Metonymy', in *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture*, ed. by Dennis Denisoff (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 95-118 (p. 103).

<sup>41</sup> Silver, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*, p. 73.

<sup>42</sup> Silver, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*, p. 71.

<sup>43</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* [1871] (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 143.

<sup>44</sup> Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 65.

<sup>45</sup> Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 95.

denying self: ‘this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people’.<sup>46</sup> At times, Alice does threaten to flaunt voracious hunger; the narrator comments that she had once ‘really frightened her [...] nurse by shouting suddenly in her ear, “Do let’s pretend that I’m a *hungry hyena*, and you’re a bone!”’.<sup>47</sup> However, even in these instances the foodstuff she envisages is barely a satiating fuel: a bone is for ‘chewing and gnawing [...] picking and licking. It’s really not much to eat’.<sup>48</sup> If Alice’s eating is about anything, then, it is about diminutive morsels and titbits, not gluttonous gorging.

Cast by Carroll in the role of pre-pubescent apprentice, and tutored in the ways of being a self-controlled, pretty little girl, it comes as no surprise that the food which most captures the alimentary attention of Alice is the mushroom: a magical provision which remarkably allows her to *regulate* her body’s fluctuations in size. The brilliance of this magnificent fungus lies in its powers of theoretically preventing her body becoming any larger. The fact that Alice turns to the mushroom (that is, a source of food) as a means of preventing her body becoming bigger may seem paradoxical, if not nonsensical. Yet, certain foodstuffs (as will be revealed later) were, in fact, thought to possess metabolic boosting properties which, in turn, were thought to aid the body in its fat-burning capacities. Nonetheless, it is often the case that within the *Alice* texts our pretty little heroine’s body does swell out of control, becoming preposterously massive and grotesque. It would appear, at times, that Carroll forces Alice to eat in order to feed his *own* hedonistic hunger for imposing patriarchal punishment on greedy little girls.

Like the Victorian physician, Carroll wants to experiment with Alice’s body, mould her into what he pleases, shrink her back down to an inferior size. Peppared with ‘potions [...] ointments, and references to medicines of all kinds’ from cooling ‘camomile’ to energy-sustaining ‘treacle’, Wonderland, as Talairach-Vielmas confirms, becomes ‘a male laboratory’, a sterile sphere in which Alice is ‘to be cured of her uncurbed desire [...] her fallen nature’.<sup>49</sup> Under the influence of Carroll’s medicinal malpractice, Alice is not able to predict her body’s fluctuations, and this loss of control is an acutely distressing experience for her. Eating becomes a laborious form of trepidation: she ‘anxiously [...] sets to *work*’ on the cake that Carroll displays under the performative label: ‘EAT ME’, all the while worrying what effect it will have on her body’s constitution.<sup>50</sup>

Yet, by the time we reach Alice’s more mature years in *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), she no longer requires Carroll’s doctoring. Alice is seemingly cured of what Carroll might call her nutritional neurosis. This later text opens with Alice

<sup>46</sup> Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, p. 124.

<sup>48</sup> Mavor, ‘For-getting to Eat: Alice’s Mouthing Metonymy’, p. 96.

<sup>49</sup> Talairach-Vielmas, *Moulding the Female Body*, p. 56.

<sup>50</sup> Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 15.

musings over how she herself can discipline her naughty kitty. Her punitive pattern of thinking leads Alice to think about her own behavioural disciplines: ‘suppose each punishment was to be going without dinner [...]. Well, I shouldn’t mind *that* much! *I’d far rather go without them than eat them!*’<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, when offered biscuits by Carroll’s *Red Queen*, whose scarlet complexion symbolises the erotically corpulent woman, Alice, ‘though it wasn’t at all what she wanted’, forces down one biscuit out of politeness (in case it might ‘not be civil to say “No”’) but emphatically refuses a second helping: “No, thank you [...] one’s *quite* enough!”<sup>52</sup> As both of these instances suggest, by the end of her alimentary apprenticeship the logic that informs Carroll’s fat-fearing gaze has wholly penetrated Alice’s psyche: the book’s panoptical endeavours have sufficiently curbed her juvenile carnality.

The oppressive weight-watching of Carroll’s *Wonderland* is a phenomenon which also infiltrates Rossetti’s *Speaking Likenesses*. Numerous critics have already marked the similarities between these two texts and Rossetti herself cannily admitted that the book is ‘merely a Christmas-trifle, would-be in the *Alice* style with an eye to the market’.<sup>53</sup> As the child protagonist of Rossetti’s first tale falls into a fantasy land of refracted mirrors, she squirms uncomfortably under the ‘very rude and ill-natured [...] *staring*’ of the dinner guests who surround her. The narrator informs us that Flora ‘felt shy at having to eat with *so many eyes upon her*’, but nevertheless ‘she was hot and thirsty, and the feast *looked* most tempting’ (p. 23). Like Laura, in *Goblin Market*, Flora eats with her eyes; the visual power of the tempting treasures set before her prove to be perilously appealing.

However, Rossetti’s extraordinary powers of repression and denial are far stronger than Carroll’s. Whilst Alice pecks at magic-mushrooms and nibbles currant-laden cakes, Rossetti’s heroine is starved of all. By the end of the story, she has still ‘not tasted a morsel’ (p. 27) and, moreover, has been repeatedly ‘reduced to *look hungrily on* while the rest of the company feasted’ (p. 38). Again, her gloomy gaze stresses the visual polemics surrounding consumer desire. Despite her abstention, Flora finds it ‘tantalizing to *watch* so many good things come and go without taking even one taste [...] to *see* all her companions stuffing without limit’ (pp. 38-39, emphasis mine). In the second story of Rossetti’s fairy-tale trilogy, such visual ploys take on a more ominous stance. Like the ‘cat-face[d],’ ‘rat-pace[d]’ (ll.71-73) merchants of *Goblin Market*, the monstrous Mouth-Boy of *Speaking Likenesses* evokes a sense of voyeuristic intrusion. Reminiscent of the ‘genii’ of Brontë’s description of the Great Exhibition, this threatening figure is conjured up as if by

<sup>51</sup> Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, p. 124 [emphasis mine].

<sup>52</sup> Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, p. 143.

<sup>53</sup> Christina Rossetti, ‘To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, May 4<sup>th</sup> 1874’, in *The Family Letters of Christina Rossetti*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: Brown, Langham, & Co., 1908), p. 44. For critical readings see, for instance, U. C. Knoepfelmacher, ‘Avenging Alice: Christina Rossetti and Lewis Carroll,’ *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 41:3 (December 1986), pp. 299-328.

magic. Lurking in the shadowy woodlands, he encroaches on his female prey with a 'wide mouth [...] full of teeth and tusks' (p. 85), a mouth which 'could doubtless *eat* as well as speak, grin [...] and accost her' (p. 84). In close proximity to this famished fiend, the 'little girl's' body, which, if true to nursery-rhyme tradition, is made of 'sugar and spice and all things nice' becomes precariously edible.<sup>54</sup>

Rossetti proceeds to inform us that this menacing antagonist's face 'exhibited only one feature' (p. 84): that is, unsurprisingly, his saliva-infested mouth. In the same way that Flora and Laura eat with their eyes, Mouth-Boy sees, stares, glares with his mouth: a notion which conflates visual and gustatory consumption. Rossetti's popular lyric, 'In an Artist's Studio', exposes another startling instance of this troubling conflation. The artist of the poem's title vampirically '*feeds* upon' his model's 'face by day and night', seeking out his prey from her 'hidden' safe-place 'just behind those screens'.<sup>55</sup> The model's instinctual 'hiding' evokes the impression of stolen glances, and furthermore suggests that she is acutely alert to his all-consuming capacity.

'In an Artist's Studio' tampers with the verb 'to consume', linguistically playing with the word's more disconcerting counterpart, 'consumption'. Throughout the poem Rossetti teases out consumption's allied meanings of 'wasting', 'doing away with' and 'causing to vanish'. As the model dwindles '*wan* with waiting', her youthful glow becoming '*dim*' (l.13), the reader is prompted to read her figure as being infected with the ravages of pathological consumption: her pale, lustreless visage resembles the stereotype of a tubercular aesthetic. A brief encounter with Edward Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871) allows us to better understand the consumptive logic that might inform the poem's mingling of insatiable vampirism and bodily wasting. Tylor writes:

[Consumptive] patients are seen becoming day by day, without apparent cause, thin, weak and bloodless [...] a satisfactory explanation [is] that there exist certain demons which eat out the souls [...] or suck the blood of their victims [...] [*Vampires* are not mere creations of groundless fancy, but cases conceived [...] to account for specific facts of *wasting disease*.<sup>56</sup>

Here, Tylor boldly claims that the figure of the vampire is the prime cause of consumption. Whilst Tylor's assertions might seem rather fanciful, I would argue that

<sup>54</sup> See Iona and Peter Opie, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 77.

<sup>55</sup> Christina Rossetti, 'In an Artist's Studio', in *Christina Rossetti: The Complete Poems* [1856] (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 796, ll.9 and 3. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>56</sup> Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom* [1871] (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 175.

the ideas which inform his declarations do, in fact, reverberate throughout the literature of the period, if only in a metaphorical sense. We can use Tylor's assumptions to suggest that the Victorian male, with his generic Carrollian love for dainty eating and a correspondingly slight figure, was in fact draining the Victorian female of her vitality: wilfully urging her, and at times forcing her, to waste away under the burning stare of his weight-watching eye.

Certainly, the vampiric feeding and reciprocal wasting of Rossetti's poem have often been read as a reflection of her brother's amatory felonies; critics frequently cast the personae of this poem into the roles of Dante Gabriel and his "consumptive" lover, Lizzie Siddal. Lizzie suffered from a 'mysterious illness' that 'long baffled medics and scholars'.<sup>57</sup> She remained 'unhealthily thin' throughout the entirety of her time with Rossetti.<sup>58</sup> In the latter years of her life, Lizzie rapidly deteriorated until she resembled the fragile victims of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). In 1854, Rossetti's peer, Ford Madox Brown, described Lizzie as 'looking thinner and more deathlike and more beautiful [...] than ever',<sup>59</sup> an unnerving image which pre-empts the 'ghastly, chalkily pale' complexion of the Count's emaciated victim, Lucy Westenra.<sup>60</sup>

This concept of the male artist as a vampire, habitually feeding upon the face of his wasting lover is also central to George Du Maurier's pre-Raphaelite inspired novel, *Trilby*. At the outset of Du Maurier's text his gargantuan heroine, with her 'mouth too large' and her 'chin too massive', appears to be more emblematic of Rossetti's Mouth-Boy than the consumptive beauty, Lizzie Siddal.<sup>61</sup> By the end of the novel, her striking figure has melted away and Trilby, like Siddal, has grown, 'day by day [...] more beautiful [...] in spite of her increasing pallor and emaciation' (p. 266). Trilby has become a fervent member of the 'aesthetic cult'. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar claim that Victorian culture obliged its women to "'kill'" themselves, to become 'art objects: slim, pale, passive beings whose "charms" eerily recalled the snowy, porcelain immobility of the dead'.<sup>62</sup> Such fatally feeble 'art objects' soon acquired celebrity status (not to mention hordes of adolescent admirers). Victorian culture was innately obsessed with woman's flower-like fragility, chastity and correspondingly *non-consuming* body. As such it became tasteful for healthy females

<sup>57</sup> Lucinda Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal: The Tragedy of a Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel* (London: Carlton Publishing Group, 2008), p. 69.

<sup>58</sup> Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal*, p. 69.

<sup>59</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ruskin, Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism Papers 1854 to 1862*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: George Allen, 1899), p. 75.

<sup>60</sup> Bram Stoker, *Dracula* [1897] (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 130.

<sup>61</sup> George Du Maurier, *Trilby* [1894] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 13. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>62</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd edn. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 25.

to acquire the frail physique that was symptomatic of the wasting diseases of the time.<sup>63</sup>

The pre-Raphaelite adoration of malnourished models and muses meant that consumption, a painful, debilitating and ultimately fatal disease, rapidly became a sought-after illness. It was, in many respects, the paintings of the pre-Raphaelite Movement which instigated the cultivation of such frailty: depicting its posers as ‘ethereal rather than emaciated, graceful rather than ghostly’.<sup>64</sup> What is more, an increasingly popularised cult of literature, spawned by works such as the hugely successful stage adaptation of Alexandre Dumas’s novel, *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848), also induced a widespread male passion for, and preoccupation with, ‘pale young women apparently dying of consumption’.<sup>65</sup> Following its 1852 stage premiere at the Théâtre du Vaudeville, the *Westminster Review* declared that *La Dame* had ‘set all [of] Paris running after’ its highly romanticised ‘picture’ of ‘hectic sentiment’.<sup>66</sup> The *New Monthly Magazine* went on to pronounce that the work’s consumptive heroine, Marguerite Gautier, was ‘the [...] preoccupation of a whole nation’.<sup>67</sup> She was, according to Jules Janin, an enchanting woman who ‘attracted all eyes’ (note the compelling visuality of such frailty) ‘and was followed everywhere by universal homage’.<sup>68</sup> In the words of Dumas himself ‘those who [...] loved Marguerite were too numerous to be counted’.<sup>69</sup>

Undoubtedly, with Dumas’s dying heroine being depicted as veritably ‘spirituelle’, an ‘angel’ who was ‘exquisitely beautiful’, it is perhaps not surprising that men were ‘smitten’ with her and ‘that invisible malady which was inevitably dragging her down to the tomb’.<sup>70</sup> Thus, as Bram Dijkstra has suggested, upon the realisation that a ‘consumptive look’ denoted ‘a saintly disposition’, flocks of females, who may have hitherto ignored the period’s ascetic urgings, began to pursue a ‘look of tubercular virtue by starving themselves’. Women ‘everywhere had acquired a taste for “slow suicide” and all foolishly heralded the rise of the ‘Consumptive Sublime’.<sup>71</sup> Through a rigorous adherence to the period’s non-

<sup>63</sup> See Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts’ Advice to Women* (London: Pluto Press, 1979), p. 98.

<sup>64</sup> Katherine Byrne, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Dormandy, *The White Death: A History of Tuberculosis* (London: Hambledon Press, 1999), p. 91.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Contemporary Literature of France’, *Westminster Review*, American Edition, 57:112 (April 1852), pp. 370-73 (p. 372).

<sup>67</sup> ‘Parisian Literary and Political Chit-Chat’, *New Monthly Magazine*, 96:383 (November 1852), pp. 323-45 (p. 327).

<sup>68</sup> Jules Janin, ‘Prefatory Notice’ to Alexandre Dumas, *La Dame aux Camélias* [1848] (Philadelphia: E. J. Hincken, 1857), p. 13 [emphasis mine].

<sup>69</sup> Dumas, *La Dame aux Camélias*, p. 87.

<sup>70</sup> Janin, ‘Prefatory Notice’, p. 13.

<sup>71</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford:

consuming code of conduct, the angel in the house was rapidly on her way to becoming 'an angel in earnest'.<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, as Thomas Dormandy has aptly demonstrated, in order to ensure that they were conforming to man's portrait of beauty, and subsequently securing their spot in the increasingly competitive marriage market, young women took to wilfully consuming harmful foodstuffs in order to 'make themselves look more alluring'.<sup>73</sup> In the same way that Alice experiments with the metabolic properties of Wonderland's magic-mushrooms, and, just as Laura is drawn to the bitter-sweet seductiveness of Rossetti's lemons in *Goblin Market*, many took to testing the fat-burning properties and appetite-quashing abilities of bizarre wares such as lemon juice and vinegar, chalk and charcoal, rice and soda. In 1874, for instance, Dr John Fothergill proclaimed:

Two very ruinous practices are commonly resorted to by girls who are becoming alarmed by their plumpness, and upon whom the dread of being fat weighs like an incubus; and these are the consumption of vinegar to produce thinness, and of rice, to cause the complexion to become paler.<sup>74</sup>

Effectively, then, a morbid aesthetic thrived in a culture where sickly slenderness had become a cultural shorthand for beauty.

Society began to warn young girls against the dangers of "consuming". However, this time, their pleas were against the ludicrousness of ingesting foul substances as a means of making themselves consumptively slender. For instance, in response to numerous letters written by fat-fearing females, the *Girl's Own Paper* gave the following advice:

you are doing a very rash thing in trying to thin yourself by taking carbonate of soda in daily doses [...] your being stout is a great advantage, *if not excessive*. You have some substance to waste safely in case of illness. Do you wish to look like the poor scarecrows with pipe-stopper waists?<sup>75</sup>

As the above quotation indicates, Victorian culture was becoming increasingly torn between amending the physical and psychological harm done through its non-consuming philosophy, and endorsing further, yet perhaps a little more cautionary, continuations of its restrictive eating advice. However, the editors of popular

Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 29.

<sup>72</sup> Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, p. 23.

<sup>73</sup> Dormandy, *The White Death*, p. 91.

<sup>74</sup> J. Milner Fothergill, M.D, *The Maintenance of Health: A Medical Work for Lay Readers* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1874), pp. 80-81.

<sup>75</sup> 'Answers to Correspondents,' *Girl's Own Paper* (February 26<sup>th</sup> 1887), p. 351.

periodicals, such as the *Girl's Own Paper*, were undeniably baffled by the outrageous lengths a girl might go to in order to become part of this consumptive cult. After receiving another letter from the appropriately named 'Hyacinth', (whose name, whether pseudonym or not, bespeaks the petal-like flimsiness so glorified by the period) the editor pertly responded: 'We cannot recommend any method of blanching your cheeks. Why do you desire to look sickly and woe-begone?'<sup>76</sup>

The answer to this last question was perhaps, because 'wasting was in style' and to be stylish, of course, was every girl's ambition.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, before 1882 (when the tubercule bacillus was discovered), the highly "stylish" modes of corsetry and tight-lacing were also widely held by doctors to be a principal cause of tuberculosis and respiratory consumption.<sup>78</sup> In the words of Patricia Branca, 'the lament was constant: women were sacrificing their health for fashion's sake'.<sup>79</sup> This, in some respects, brings us back to Mr. Punch's declarations, whereby sartorial consumerism, a woman's 'venturing, incautiously, into the tainted atmosphere of late-closing linen-draper's horrid shops', was thought to prompt her physical downfall: placing her not only in a dangerous, market environment but also in inappropriate garments which could infect 'her blood [...] with fever or *consumption*'.<sup>80</sup> Certainly, as Branca goes on to note, one common medical complaint was that 'consumption resulted from low-cut dresses and thin shoes'. Yet, more popular still 'on the subject of health v. fashion' was, as has already been suggested, 'tight-lacing and its evils'.<sup>81</sup> As early as 1839, *Cleave's Gazette of Variety* had announced:

Tight lacing! – bear it not! Lass!  
 Throw thy busk away –  
*Consumption fills it up*  
*With sickness and decay;*  
 Then shun the snare, sweet girl,  
 Lest it should be thy doom,  
 To close thine eyes upon the world  
 And find an early tomb!<sup>82</sup>

Yet, in the same way that advising against vinegar drinking and the like was pointless, all attempts to eradicate the corset were also futile. Even towards the close

<sup>76</sup> 'Answers to Correspondents,' *Girl's Own Paper* (May 15<sup>th</sup> 1880), pp. 319-20 (p. 320).

<sup>77</sup> Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 171.

<sup>78</sup> Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 71.

<sup>79</sup> Patricia Branca, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), p. 66.

<sup>80</sup> 'Caution in Shopping', p. 109.

<sup>81</sup> Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*, p. 66.

<sup>82</sup> 'Tight Lacing,' *Cleave's Gazette of Variety*, 2:36 (June 15<sup>th</sup> 1839), p. 3 [emphasis mine].

of the century, troops of females were still venturing into horrid linen-drapers shops, and non-consuming consumptives were still helplessly bound to the charming snare of the corset. Victorian Britain was overrun with scantily clad invalids, and infested with what Henry T. Fink called ‘Wasp-Waist Mania’.<sup>83</sup>

Given their vehement distaste for this consumptive craze, Gilbert and Gubar would undoubtedly delight in the early sections of Du Maurier’s novel, where the voluptuous, un-corseted, care-free Trilby is, in the words of Katherine Byrne, ‘the very picture of physical health’.<sup>84</sup> Trilby splatters Du Maurier’s literary canvas with an ‘almost too exuberant joyousness and *irrepressible vitality*’ (p. 90). As a ‘full-bosomed young grisette’ (p. 30). Trilby, to begin with, is perhaps more like the coquettishly crude, pre-Raphaelite model, Fanny Cornforth, ‘a curvaceous and loose-living “stunner”’, than the skeletal Elizabeth Siddal.<sup>85</sup> Entering the artistic-alcove of Du Maurier’s ‘musketeers of the brush’ (p. 27) Trilby’s vibrant corporeality immediately dazes her spectators. She sits ‘herself down *cross-legged* on the model-throne’ (an inappropriate posture to choose in a period where women’s legs were expected to be camouflaged with hefty skirts and puffed-up petticoats). As the artistic audience gawks at Trilby ‘curious and half embarrassed’ she pulls out ‘a paper-parcel containing food’, exclaiming: “‘I’ll just take a bite, if you don’t object; I’m a model you know”” (p. 15). Such behaviour instantaneously emphasises her social and moral failings.

Firstly, Trilby proudly declares that she is a model; and, like moonlight-marketeering, modelling was virtually synonymous with prostitution. Fully shameless and ‘quite unconcerned’ (p. 16) about her career choice, Trilby delights in the select committee of gentleman-painters who feed upon her figure as she poses *naked* in ‘the altogether’ (p. 16). Unlike *Goblin Market*’s Laura, who manages to escape a watery deathbed, Trilby, the narrator informs us, would even agree to sitting, like a ‘dirty tipsy old hag’, for Taffy’s ‘Found Drowned’ (p. 65), an idea which sordidly compounds the relations between artistic posing and prostitution. Secondly, like Elizabeth Pennell’s Greedy Woman, the novel goes on to imply that Trilby’s ardent appetite for food is equivalent to sexual desire. Trilby’s measly ‘bite’ burgeons into innumerable luncheons, and each time she dines, she titillates the men who leer at her. As she devours a ‘sandwich of [...] *fromage à la crème* [...] lick[ing] the tips of her fingers clean of cheese’ her virile voyeurs stare ‘at her in open-mouthed *admiration* and *delight*’ (p. 16). The scene’s erotic overtones become, as Byrne suggests, a problematic ‘source of [...] fascination and fear’ (p. 27).

Of course, such attitudes towards food and sex are curiously improper for a Victorian heroine, and society cannot tolerate them for long. Under the mesmeric sway of vampiric forces, Trilby is ‘forced out of innocence’ and a ‘slimy layer of

<sup>83</sup> Henry T. Fink, *Romantic Love and Personal Beauty* [1887] (London: Macmillan, 1902), p. 381.

<sup>84</sup> Byrne, *Tuberculosis*, p. 111.

<sup>85</sup> Byrne, *Tuberculosis*, p. 107.

sorrow and shame' (p. 31) begins to seep through the crevices of her character. Before long, the musketeers 'noticed a gradual and subtle change in Trilby' (p. 88). Her 'mouth, always too large, took on a firmer and sweeter outline', she grew 'thinner, especially in the face, where the bones of her cheeks and jaws began to show themselves. [...] The improvement was astonishing, almost inexplicable' (pp. 88-90). No longer hungry, Trilby consumptively wastes into the ideal heroine: a woman who prepares and serves food for her male companions, but keeps her own lips pertinently sealed.

Significantly, Trilby's withering begins after she becomes acquainted with the sinister Svengali, 'a big hungry spider' who makes Trilby 'feel like a fly!' (p. 52). Once under the hypnotic influence of Svengali, Trilby 'lost weight daily; she seemed to be [...] fading away from sheer general atrophy' (p. 264). Moreover, while Trilby retreats into thinness, Svengali grows fat. His once 'long, lean' (p. 73) figure becomes 'stout and [...] splendid in appearance' (p. 208), perhaps suggesting that the source of his corporeal nourishment is the vampirically-drained Trilby herself. Svengali is certainly equipped with the 'big yellow teeth', the 'canine snarl' and the 'insolent black eyes' (p. 92) of a vampire. Furthermore, the narrator describes Svengali as 'a [...] *haunting* [...] *uncanny*, black spider-cat, if there is such an animal outside a bad dream' (p. 72). These allusions to mystical vampire-lore become even more prominent when he growls: "I am *thirsting* for those beautiful chest notes! Come" (pp. 73-75). As Byrne suggests, the 'truly pathological force' of *Trilby* is, in fact, Svengali's 'hungry masculinity', a potent hunger that 'wishes to consume, possess and transform the beloved object'.<sup>86</sup> Svengali, then, is Tylor's consumption causing vampire, the unruly masculine power who metaphorically drains the Victorian female of her own consuming capacities. Like Carroll from his domineering position in *Wonderland*, Svengali contentedly watches Trilby wither as he mystically shrinks her back down to inferior size.

Indeed, as Du Maurier's 'fast-fading lily' (p. 271) rapidly disintegrates, Svengali remarks: "'how beautiful you are [...] I adore you. I like you thinner; you have such beautiful bones!'" (p. 91). His declarations make it perfectly clear that the source of Trilby's visual appeal seeps beyond her flesh: this is an unnerving exploration of beauty to the bone. Appointing himself as a hybrid conductor-surgeon, Svengali stands before his theatre of companion voyeurs, repeatedly running through 'a ghoulissh pantomime', taking 'stock of the [...] bones in her skeleton with greedy but discriminating approval' (p. 91). In Svengali's eyes, Trilby's wasting enhances her beauty because it displays more clearly the object of his desire: 'the fetishised female skeleton'.<sup>87</sup> It would appear that, for Svengali, the female skeleton is a sign of masculine triumph: devoid of the supporting tissues formally attached to her bones, the skeletally wasted woman is rendered powerlessly immobile, muscularly inept.

<sup>86</sup> Byrne, *Tuberculosis*, p. 114.

<sup>87</sup> Byrne, *Tuberculosis*, p. 116.

Certainly, as we have seen time and again, Victorian culture found the consuming woman threatening; her voracity aligning her with rampant sexuality. Yet, the woman who was herself consumed, be it by a vampire-like artist or the ravages of tubercular illness, was viewed as being endlessly appealing, primarily because she posed less of a threat. Because of the consumptive woman's invalid-status, the predominantly patriarchal society of Victorian Britain idolised her immobility; it preferred, as Dr Thomas Trotter had proclaimed long before the coronation of Queen Victoria, 'a sickly sallow hue of [...] countenance to the roses of health'.<sup>88</sup> Thus, reincarnated as the near-invalid la Svengali by the end of the novel, Trilby has metamorphosed into a sought-after, phthisical beauty whose photograph is permitted to adorn glitzy 'shop windows' (p. 90). This last image conflates the various notions of consumption – commercial, visual, pathological – that this article has sought to explore. Perilously placed on display, Trilby loses subjectivity, becoming objectified and exposed to consumer desire. Moreover, the art of photography crystallises its 'subject', an unsettling concept which implies that Trilby's countenance is open to voyeuristic violation *ad infinitum*.

With 'the taste of the original apple' eternally lingering in women's mouths, the inclination to consume was always imminent, and therefore in urgent need of being stifled.<sup>89</sup> Yet, with the proliferation of colonial goods and the ever-expanding horizons of commodity culture, the temptations facing Victorian women were unremittingly multiplying: 'an apple is an excellent thing – until you have tried a peach!' (p. 169) – or a pear, or a pineapple; not to mention a variety of non-edible goods. Certainly, the era's newfound taste for sartorial shopping sprees could very well have been the catalytic agent which impelled Robert Southey to alter the generic girl's composition from the eerily edible 'sugar and spice and all things nice' to being made of 'ribbons and laces and sweet pretty faces'.<sup>90</sup> Yet, as this article has hopefully demonstrated, a woman composed of 'ribbons and laces', or, more specifically, ribbon-suffused *corsets* and laces, was no less "edible" than her sugary predecessor. With vampire-like men hungering for "little" women with minuscule waists, the female consumer of sartorial goods was just as likely to be devoured, be it visually, sexually, metaphorically, or even matrimonially, as the sugar-plum fairy taken straight from the pages of fairy-tale fiction. Thus, eternally caught up in the consumer-consumed cycle that has remained omnipresent throughout this essay, the hunger haunting the Victorian woman became the fuel which fired a toxic, deadly *consumptive* pandemic.

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<sup>88</sup> Dr Thomas Trotter, *A View of the Nervous Temperament* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, 1807), p. 57.

<sup>89</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 195.

<sup>90</sup> See Iona and Peter Opie, *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, p. 77.

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