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"Make Much of Me": Sympathetic Reciprocal Consumption in
Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" and "In an Artist's Studio"

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Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" and "In an Artist's Studio" are both intensely concerned with consumption. In the first instance, they are both concerned with the ways in which men transform women from subjects into objects through acts of literal, visual, economic, and/or sexual consumption. Their subjectivity denied, the now-consumable objects – Laura and the artist's model, respectively – begin to waste away both physically and emotionally. But both poems then propose an alternate form of consumption of female bodies, one which enables a "radical female subjectivity" in which "female speaker[s] or subject[s] of discourse ... [do] not take up the conventional phallocentric position, in which the female body is the object of a male gaze" and is thus consumed unilaterally by men (Carpenter 419).¹ This proposed mode of consumption is reciprocal, sympathetic, feminine, and consensual: "Eat me, drink me, love me; / Laura, make much of me," says Lizzie (ll. 471-472). It does not diminish its object; it enlarges her, "make[s] much of" her. In "Goblin Market" it serves to reverse the transformation from subject to object, and although this mode of consumption is only partially enacted in "In an Artist's Studio," the poem constitutes an offer, from the speaker of the poem to the artist's model, of sympathetic and reciprocal consumption of female bodies which echoes Lizzie's request to be "ma[d]e much of" in consumption.

The most obvious way in which the goblin men transform Laura into an object for consumption is by asking her to pay for their fruit with a lock of her hair. As critics have extensively noted, in acquiescing to this request, Laura "becomes both the buyer and the bought, the agent and the object of exchange" (Helsing 922). In the very act of purchasing wares, Laura has also become an "object of exchange," an object to be consumed by the goblin men. Her transformation into an object for consumption is also completed, paradoxically, as she consumes the fruit in front of the goblin men for their voyeuristic pleasure. Their primary and preferred method of consuming women's bodies is visual, as is the method of the artist in "In an Artist's Studio." In "Goblin Market," the male gaze is shown as powerful enough to transform a woman into an object for consumption even as she herself becomes a consumer. The goblin men lure Laura in, then control her consumption by setting their price for the alluring fruit as a piece

¹ Carpenter's essay quoted here is concerned with how Rossetti's religious work with underprivileged women might account for "the extraordinary homoerotic energies of 'Goblin Market'" (418). I am focused less on the poem's homoeroticism than its reciprocity. Eroticism is one mode in which a reciprocal female connection can be expressed, but, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has pointed out, "women who love women, women who ... nurture, suckle, write about ... or otherwise promote the interests of other women, are pursuing congruent and closely related activities" (3). In both of these poems, Rossetti and her female characters can be said to do one or all of those things for other women. The eroticism of "Goblin Market" has received much well-deserved attention, but it is only one part of the spectrum of reciprocity among women which I am discussing.

of her own body, then provide her the objects to consume. At no point during the process is she in control of her own consumption: "She suck'd until her lips were sore / ... And knew not was it night or day / As she turn'd home alone" (ll. 136-140). Laura has been taken in by the goblin men, and in return for a very brief period of pleasure has given them apparently permanent control over her body. Her consumption continues long after any direct contact with them; she begins to waste away, "dwindl[ing], as the fair full moon doth turn / To swift decay and burn / Her fire away" (ll. 278-280). The long-term effects of her encounter with the goblin men are a literalized depiction of the effects on women of living in a restrictive patriarchal society. Her fading is a consequence of being co-opted by men, turned into an object for their consumption – and a throw-away object, at that – rather than a subject capable of and deserving pleasure in her own right.

Lizzie's later encounter with the goblin men spells out the violence of their consumption of women more precisely. While they merely try to lure Laura with the promise of pleasure, when Lizzie meets them, they "Hugg'd her and kiss'd her: / Squeez'd and caress'd her" (ll. 348-349). They have already begun to use her body as they desire, without her consent and apparently without giving her pleasure. When Lizzie attempts to take their fruit home, it becomes abundantly clear that watching her consume it, and controlling her experience of it, is vital to them. They try to shame her into consuming it in front of them by calling her "proud, / Cross-grain'd, uncivil" (ll. 394-395), and when that fails, they "Coax'd and fought her, / Bullied and besought her, / Scratch'd her, pinch'd her black as ink" (ll. 425-427), and so on. Their violence is unavailing, however, and Lizzie is eventually free to return home to Laura, feeling an almost post-coital "smart, ache, tingle" (l. 447). As Lizzie leaves the scene, she also, like Laura after consuming the fruit, "knew not was it night or day" (l. 449); but in Lizzie's case, her giddiness and her hurrying home "quite out of breath with haste / And inward laughter" (ll. 462-463) come from excitement that she has gotten what she wants from the goblin men without giving them what they want, despite their attacks. Lizzie has, against all odds, managed to get one over on the patriarchy; the goblin men have left her, "worn out with her resistance" (l. 438).

Moreover, she even manages to return Laura to a state of subjecthood, in the climactic scene of the poem. Returning from her encounter with the goblin men in which she has refused to be turned into an object for their voyeuristic consumption, she actually requests that *Laura* consume her. In doing so, she offers Laura the option of becoming a consumer herself rather than remaining permanently and ever more consumed by the male gaze; and because she freely offers herself up for consumption, she remains a subject herself, as well.

She cried, "Laura," up the garden,
 "Did you miss me?
 Come and kiss me.
 Never mind my bruises,
 Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
 Squeez'd from goblin fruits for you,
 Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
 Eat me, drink me, love me;
 Laura, make much of me;
 For your sake I have braved the glen
 And had to do with goblin merchant men." (ll. 464-474)

The language here is unambiguous: Lizzie requests that Laura literally consume her, but also at the same time that she "love" her and "make much of" her. The latter phrase is particularly

important. Laura has been consumed by the goblin men, and as a result is literally "dwindl[ing]" (l. 278) away to nothing, waning like the moon – her humanity and her actual existence has been made *little* of by her experience of the male gaze. Lizzie, by contrast, asks to be consumed in such a way that both she and her sister will be enlarged and supported by the experience. It is also important to note that while Lizzie has made a sacrifice for her sister, she has benefited from that sacrifice herself as well. If Lizzie did not confront the goblin men, "she [would] remain merely a happy little bird in her closed domestic cage" (Carpenter 429), never risking temptation or desire – and, as a result, unable to make her way through the potentially treacherous world of sex and marriage. With this in mind, it becomes clear that the climactic scene is a scene of mutual consumption, although only Laura's consumption of Lizzie is made explicit. Each sister benefits from the other's actions throughout the poem, and Lizzie's eagerness to be consumed by Laura suggests that she gains something from this scene in particular. This is another moment of paradoxical consumption; the very act of being consumed nourishes Lizzie, so she is at least in a manner of speaking also consuming Laura.

The language of the scene of sisterly consumption initially appears oddly ambiguous. Laura is said to "loath[e] the feast" (l. 495), and the "juice [is now] wormwood to her tongue" (l. 494); yet she is also worked up to bacchanalian heights: "Writhing as one possess'd she leap'd and sung, / Rent all her robe / ... She gorged on bitterness without a name" (ll. 496-510). This apparent contradiction can be explained without recourse to the suggestion of masochism. In tasting the fruit again, especially since its mode of delivery is bound up in Lizzie's example of resistance to the objectification of the male gaze, Laura recognizes that no fruit the goblin men can give her is worth having her subjecthood taken away. "Swift fire spread through her veins, knock'd at her heart, / Met the fire smouldering there / And overbore its lesser flame": the fruit is no longer appealing to her, and it is the reason for that which excites and overjoys her. Her consumption of her sister thus becomes a joyful and positive act even as it appears to disgust her in some senses.

"In an Artist's Studio" has none of the fervor of "Goblin Market," but it is a version of the same conflict played out in the mode of Victorian realism – and in fact it is played out among the characters of Rossetti's real life. The poem presents "an acute analysis of Dante Gabriel [Rossetti]'s relationship to his art, models, and women in general" (Spaise 59). Rossetti as the speaker of the poem describes her artist brother's objectification of one of his models – almost undoubtedly Elizabeth Siddal, whom Dante eventually married in 1860, some seven years after having promised to do so and only two years before her death (Helsing 910-911). In the meantime, he painted her over and over again, as "A queen ... / A nameless girl ... / A saint, an angel" (ll. 5-7) – as every type of woman, mythological and historical, but almost never as herself. Just as the goblin men transform Laura into an object for consumption by the male gaze through exerting control over her surroundings and her actions, in this poem Dante is seen as literally transforming his lover from a real woman into a series of objects: the paintings in which he completely controls her surroundings and in which she retains no vestige of her identity except the face which Dante can manipulate however he sees fit. His consumption of her is made explicit; he is said to "[feed] upon her face by day and night" (l. 9). Dante, who sees her "not as she is, but as she fills his dream" (l. 14), has thoroughly consumed her not only through the power of his own male gaze but also through the perhaps even more powerful means of art. "Every canvass means / The same one meaning, neither more nor less" (ll. 7-8), and that meaning no longer has anything to do with Siddal.

Rossetti, as the speaker of the poem, offers an alternative perspective on Siddal's identity and humanity. Through placing her into her own work of art, Rossetti also engages in a consumption of Siddal; however, her act of consumption is sympathetic rather than objectifying. Her poem reaffirms Siddal's humanity and subjectivity. Dante may not see her as a real woman, "wan with waiting" for him to marry her and "with sorrow dim" (l. 12), but Rossetti does. Although the line literally refers to finding paintings of Siddal behind screens in Dante's studio, Rossetti has also in a more figurative sense "found her hidden behind those screens" (l. 3) where Dante has placed her – that is, she has discovered the real Siddal hidden behind his paintings – and has reversed Dante's objectification of her in some degree by reaffirming Siddal's humanity in her own art. Rossetti's work of art also reflects her own subjectivity in rebelling against her brother's objectification of women (including Rossetti herself, whom he also consumed through painting her as various characters). Most importantly of all, Rossetti's poem in which Siddal's subjectivity is affirmed is actually a work of art consumable by Siddal in return. "In an Artist's Studio" thus provides, like "Goblin Market," a model of a feminine relationship in which the act of consuming each other sympathetically can provide some degree of protection against male objectification and consumption.

Both "Goblin Market" and "In an Artist's Studio" present similar models of reciprocal feminine consumption as a method of escaping from or mastering the objectifying and "soul-consuming" ("Goblin Market" l. 512) effects of the male gaze. Neither poem offers a perfectly feminist version of female solidarity. "Goblin Market" ends with the sisters absorbed into the patriarchal structure as "wives / With children of their own" (ll. 544-545), and seemingly content with carving out a small domestic space within existing patriarchal power structures in which feminine reciprocity can flourish without challenging those structures. "In an Artist's Studio" challenges Dante Gabriel Rossetti's objectification of women for his art, but the desired event for which Siddal is "wan with waiting" (l. 12) and for which once her "hope shone bright" (l. 13) – and the desirability of which Rossetti as the speaker of the poem does not necessarily challenge – appears to be marriage to Dante. Nevertheless, both poems clearly show that the effect of the male gaze on female subjectivity can be devastating, but also demonstrate that a saving alternative exists in being sympathetically consumed by the female gaze, which leaves open the option of consuming the consumer in return. The scene of such mutual consumption is ecstatic and sexualized in the fantastical setting of "Goblin Market," the literal consumption of one sister by another; whereas the realism of "In an Artist's Studio" suggests a less intimate version of mutual consumption through the vehicle of art. But both offer at least a temporary and limited version of something quite radical: "a 'sisterhood' which represses hierarchical differences and permits the female gaze to feast on the female form" (Carpenter 426), thus reclaiming female subjectivity from the destructive objectification of the male gaze.

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