Tamar Heller and Patricia Moran (eds.). *Scenes of the Apple. Food and the Female Body in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2003.

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1 Recent critical theory has demonstrated that food and its preparation exceed a mere quotidian function in women's lives, in order to represent the inconspicuous marker of their position within the micro- and macro-structures of power. Discipline and the surveillance of the body, that panoptical male connoisseur which resides in female consciousness, as well as the constraints of heterosexual economy in general, stand in stark opposition to the question of satisfying women's appetites and ambitions. This collection of essays highlights women's encounter with food and writing, from the Victorian era to the present. Following Hélène Cixous's focus on the biblical scene of the apple - where Eve's defiant eating of the forbidden fruit was seen as paradigmatic of female rebellion against the invisible patriarchy - the editors associate the process of eating with the desire to speak, gain prohibited knowledge, transgress, and, eventually, claim authorship. The process of eating and/or fasting is thus interrelated with female hunger, aspiration, self-denial, and nurturing; it reflects on women's complicated relationships within the networks of power and their ways of voicing and validating their own choices.

2 *Scenes of the Apple* is organized around three main rubrics: Appetite and Consumption in Nineteenth-Century Cultural Politics; Grotesque, Ghostly, and Cannibalistic Hungers in Twentieth-Century Texts; and Food and Cooking: Patriarchal, Colonial, Familial Structures. According to the editors, the late eighteenth century marked the time when food and embodiment became charged issues for women. Under the influence of capitalism, domestic ideology defined a segregated home and workplace, promoting an ideal of womanhood which deemphasized female sexuality, while underscoring women's spiritual power as a moral guide at home. Lustful Eves with appetites were relegated to the streets, whereas virtuous females could experience eating only vicariously, by nurturing others rather than the self. This ideology of a self-effacing female angel, lady-like weakness, and anorexia was strongly linked with the middle and upper classes, while buxom, hungry females were consigned to lower social spheres. Such a dichotomy was not clear-cut, however, since the ideal woman was expected to possess the qualities characteristic of these mutually exclusive paradigms; an incredibly narrow waist reminiscent of an emaciated urchin and broad, healthy hips, an indicator of reproductive capacity. This combination of the thin and the robust, delicate and

strong, was one of many self-contradictory ideals which confused and limited women.

3 The three essays in the first section deal precisely with these conflicting and competing messages. Adrienne Munich's article, "Good and Plenty: Queen Victoria Figures the Imperial Body," explains how Queen Victoria's round body and remarkably healthy appetite were signs of feminine transgression and imperial plentitude at the same time. On one hand, the empress's round figure went against the grain of Victorian assumptions about the slender and self-sacrificing female. Since enjoying food in an unrestrained fashion was an indication of woman's moral depravity, only famished bodies connoted moral superiority. This immediate correlation between decency and light weight did not destroy the opulent queen, however. Quite to the contrary, the widespread acceptance of her image demonstrated that the monarchic body was truly above the prescriptive fashions of the times. Ironically, it is Queen Victoria's hearty self - clearly reinforced by the prosperous and steady imperial economy of the time - that has contributed to her even larger popularity. Thus, in the end, it could be argued that her body took on a symbolic meaning at the forefront of a feeding frenzy, on one hand giving nourishment to her own vast population while, on the other, swallowing up entire colonies. Plump and voracious, she became the epitome of English prosperity, a metaphor for the Industrial Revolution's penchant for voracious consumption and output.

4 Pamela K. Gilbert's "Ingestion, Contagion, Seduction: Victorian Metaphors of Reading" focuses on the sensationalized fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon and the writer's position within the literary marketplace. In general terms, the essay traces prevalent views on the effects of popular fiction in Victorian times. It was thought that unwholesome sensationalism was quite like poisonous food, likely to mobilize in the reader an uncontainable and possibly calamitous desire. Thus popular novels were considered adulterated and prurient goods, and their female authors were viewed as prostitutes, since they gave the fruit of their efforts to many. The dangers of reading "corrupt" texts echoed the perils of sexual activity or the ingestion of toxic food. Reading for pleasure exerted a highly negative influence not only on young minds but even more so on their bodies. The author concludes that society's excessive concerns for one's reading options attests to a strong patriarchal surveillance of minds, bodies, and their boundaries.

5 Linda Schlossberg's "Consuming Images: Women, Hunger, and the Vote" highlights the figure of the hunger-striking suffragette. The author argues that deploying the strategy of starvation was a conscious political act for both the visual and written propaganda of the women's movement. Scenes of forcible eating executed on purposely starving female inmates

by the prison's (male) officials were often portrayed in strong graphic images both in pro-suffrage and conservative periodicals. This titillating image of oral penetration of physically restrained suffragettes testifies to their confinement executed by the opposite sex. The relentless effort to shut the female mouth turns this body part into a contested site, as it grows to stand for women's desire to nourish their political appetites and ambitions. Ironically, argues the author, manipulating their food intake and appetites only did a disservice to the women's movement, since it reinforced the restrictive image of women as morally superior only insofar as they transcended appetite and passion.