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# Alimentary modernism

Lisa Angelella  
*University of Iowa*

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ALIMENTARY MODERNISM

by

Lisa Angelella

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English in  
the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2009

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Cheryl Herr

## ABSTRACT

Modernism often reveled in the loss of control, the permeation of personal boundaries, the introduction of ambiguity, that evocation of the senses brings about. It strove to loosen the structures and categories culture inscribes. In this dissertation, I argue that food scenes constitute the crux of many pivotal moments in Modernist fiction and express a philosophy of the human subject. Modernists argue that, in eating, a person takes the outside world into him or herself. The senses that precede, imbue and follow eating threaten and transcend the integrity of the subject. I argue that by foregrounding such moments, Modernists posited a phenomenological view of subjectivity, one which can best be illuminated by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Guided by his theory of intersubjectivity, I explore the phenomenological presentation of particular sensual encounters with food in the work of Ernest Hemingway, Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and Willa Cather. I show how characters, in their encounters with sensual otherness, feel themselves overcome in poignant moments of ecstasy, disgust, or revelation of self-constitution through the alimentary. I also argue that Modernist fiction does not only display Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, but also nuances his timeless and placeless presentation of the encounter between a universal subject and any object, by considering the sensual eating experience within various historical food conditions, such as the explosion of the canned food industry and the gradual dissolution of the formal meal, and from various subject positions, based on gender, ethnicity or relative political empowerment. In engaging phenomenology, my project deviates from the long tradition in scholarship of considering symbolic and structural meanings to the occlusion of sense. In each eating scene I explore I consider how gustatory, haptic, and aromatic properties

of food objects—such as liquidness, sweetness, bloodiness and lightness—intervene in more cerebral human relations. Fundamental to the fascinating Modernist depictions of food and eating, is the idea that the senses have an undeniable impact on human affairs in their own right.

Abstract Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
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May 2009

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Cheryl Herr

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy  
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Doris Witt

To my husband, Toby, and my parents, Mary and Fran



I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty  
*The Phenomenology of Perception*

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## INTRODUCTION

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf famously grouses:

It is a curious fact that novelists have a way of making us believe that luncheon parties are invariably memorable for something very witty that was said, or for something very wise that was done. But they seldom spare a word for what was eaten. It is part of the novelist's convention not to mention soup and salmon and ducklings, as if soup and salmon and ducklings were of no importance whatsoever, as if nobody ever smoked a cigar or drank a glass of wine. Here, however, I shall take the liberty to defy that convention... (R 10)

Clearly, Woolf's novels are among many in her generation that proclaim eating worthy of literary representation. Some of the most striking scenes in Modernist literature are moments of perceiving and eating food. There is Nick's feast of canned beans and spaghetti prepared over an open fire in "Big Two-Hearted River," Mrs. Ramsay's ceremonious presentation of the Boeuf en Daube in *To the Lighthouse*, Bloom's fried kidney in *Ulysses*, chocolate rolls and honey cakes and pink iced pudding in Mansfield's short stories, and the warm aroma of kolache in Cather's "Neighbor Rosicky," among many others. Such moments epitomize Modernism's focus on the sensual and concrete. Depictions of food are especially salient because eating can mobilize all five senses.

However, sensations involved in eating are poignantly portrayed in Woolf's fiction and in other Modernist texts for much more than an aesthetic effect. Modernism often reveled in the loss of control, the permeation of personal boundaries, the introduction of ambiguity, that evocation of the senses brings about. It often strove to loosen the structures and categories culture inscribes. In this dissertation, I argue that food scenes constitute the crux of many pivotal scenes in Modernist fiction and express a philosophy of the human subject. Modernists show how, in eating, a person takes the outside world into him or herself. The senses that precede, imbue and follow eating

threaten and transcend the integrity of the subject. I argue that by foregrounding such moments, Modernists posited a phenomenological view of subjectivity. In this dissertation, I explore the social and political implications of such a view of the human subject.

While literature, unlike other discourses, is replete with references to the senses, literary criticism has often elided this level of the text in favor of more disembodied theoretical concerns. The senses are difficult to engage because they exist on a different plane than the cognitive, in which scholarship takes place. Literary criticism has not been unlike other academic disciplines in this regard. Ethnographer Paul Stoller theorizes the threat posed by sense: “To accept sensuousness in scholarship is to eject the conceit of control in which mind and body, self and other are considered separate” (*Sensuous* xvii). As it registers on all five senses, food is perhaps the most intractable of sensual subject matter. Food scholar Deborah Lupton suggests, “Food intrudes into the clean purity of rational thought because of its organic nature. Food is unclean, a highly unstable substance, it is messy and dirty in its preparation, disposal and its by-products; it inevitably decays, it has odour” (3). I contend, however, that it is precisely this rupturing, recalcitrant quality of food and its accompanying sensations that makes it interesting, both for writers themselves and critics.

Food studies is a growing field. Interdisciplinary in nature, it understands food to be an important nexus of fundamental dynamics in cultural existence. Representations of food and eating in literature have been one important focal point in the field.<sup>1</sup> However, much of the existing critical work therein (which I will broach in the following chapters) read food as a symbol, rather than as smelling, textured, arousing material substance

incommensurable with abstract concepts. This is because cultural food studies are generally traced to the structuralist thought of Levi-Strauss.<sup>2</sup> In such studies, food is seen to register a larger, social, political or economic dynamic and is erased in its non-anthropocentric dimension, its irreducible materiality.

Recent attention to object matter in literary and cultural studies in other realms has engaged the human encounter with the materiality of object matter. In his “thing theory,” Bill Brown has argued that subjects and objects are mutually constituting; despite what dominant histories of consumption say, we do not just possess our things, but are possessed by them (5). He looks at nineteenth-century American texts which demonstrate how we make ourselves through objects, organize our anxieties and affections through them, and use them to shape our fears and fantasies (4). Steven Connor, similarly, claims that an investigation of ordinary life objects could reveal ways they influence how we behave and occupy the world, how they in fact constitute our interiority: He proposes replacing our concept of intimacy, with that of “extimacy,” interiority constituted through external objects like handbags and theatres and sweets (“Cultural,” Part 9). In these ways, Brown and Connor offer a model for *thinking* the sensual and its role in constituting subjectivity.

In this dissertation, inspired by their examples, I aggressively rethink food studies from a phenomenological perspective. Specifically, I consider how Modernist scenes of eating express Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the intersubjectivity of subject and object in acts of sensual perception. The theory of perception Merleau-Ponty proposed in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) asserts the ontological implications of sensation. While Merleau-Ponty did not apply his theory specifically to eating, eating is the sensual

act which most literally involves a combination of subject and object. Using different terms, the contemporary philosopher Deane Curtin, in *Cooking, Eating and Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food* (1992), describes eating in a way which is phenomenological. He says, “To account for our openness to food requires a relational concept of self” (11). In this dissertation, I contend that Hemingway, Mansfield, Woolf, Joyce and Cather showed such a relational concept of self to inhere in the act of eating, and moreover, that they explored various social and political ramifications of such a merging.

### **Modernist Interest in the Body**

Modernists’ corporeal orientation intervened in a long western tradition which severed the mind and body and privileged the former. Plato proposed that the body constitutes a distraction from, rather than pathway to, knowledge and Christianity proposed the body’s desires undermined spiritual fulfillment.<sup>3</sup> While medieval and early modern culture were more open about and celebratory of the body, as Bakhtin and others have documented, Enlightenment culture devalued the corporeal, most famously through Descartes (Brooks 4-5). Along with this intellectualized view of the human person often came a privileging of vision (and less so, hearing) over what are generally considered the lower, “proximity” senses—touch, taste and smell. Vision has often been categorized as the most distanced, intellectual sense. Freud proposes an evolutionary reason for this in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1929). He says that when people began to assume an erect posture, the sense of smell became less important and sight became more so (Brooks 10). As McLuhan’s *Gutenberg Galaxy* argued in 1962, this orientation towards the visual was likely corroborated by the transition from oral to written culture. Touch



and sound were replaced as sources of information: Only what was seen seemed real. He argues, “writing is a visual enclosure of non-visual spaces and senses. It is, therefore, an abstraction of the visual from the ordinary sense interplay” (57).<sup>4</sup> In the late nineteenth century, however, Nietzsche and Bergson attempted to reverse centuries-old western prejudice toward the visual. Martin Jay in *Downcast Eyes* documents their critique of an “ocularcentric” world view, and their focus on bodily engagement in the world.

Moreover, the Symbolists and the Pre-Raphaelites also engaged, often in arresting and synaesthetic ways, senses which had been neglected in intellectual culture. We can see this in Baudelaire’s declaration that modern professors of aesthetics had “forgotten the color of the sky, the form of plants, the movement and odor of animals” and their “rigid fingers” were unable to “play over the immense keyboard of correspondence” (Classen 111). By the Modernist era, then, the image of the disembodied thinker no longer seemed tenable. In the 1880s Nietzsche critiqued transcendent knowledge via a dismissal of the ascetic ideal (Shapin 46). Likewise, Maud Ellmann notes that Modernist artists who attempted to proffer ascetic heroes came off as decadent and passé. Of Yeats’ *The King’s Threshold* and Kafka’s “The Hunger Artist” she remarks:

Yeats and Kafka both suggest that the creation of the work of art demands the deconstruction of the body. At the same time, though, their writings demonstrate the impotence of self-starvation, its obsolescence as a right of expiation. The image of the starving artist in their work appears decadent in their work, as does high art in bourgeois culture; that is, for the exclusion of artists from the life of commerce and their proud refusal to be ‘fed’ by capital. (*Hunger* 69)

Certainly Kafka’s hunger artist dies an unnoticed pile of bones in a cage and is replaced by a tiger, the epitome of corporeal prowess.

A century prior to Modernism, the Romantics initiated a period of embracing the body and its pleasure, and frequently drew upon food for metaphors. J.A. Ward has

written of the Romantics' use of eating as a metaphor for experience itself, an immersion in the best life has to offer, à la Keats and others (407). It was at this time, he says, that gastronomy, conceived of as an art, was invented to contrast gluttony, and in which the word "taste," previously connoting only bodily pleasure, came to mean aesthetic judgment as well. Brillat-Savarin's famous *Physiology of Taste* written in 1825, prepared the way for gastronomic works of the Modernist period, such as M.F.K. Fisher's *The Art of Eating*.

The Victorian sentiments which lay in between these two eras, however, kept writers largely quiet about matters of food. As Woolf notes in the quote at the start of this introduction, the quite prevalent dinners in nineteenth-century novels often present all of the ceremony and social mannerisms and none of the food. It was considered improper, in upper and middle-class Victorian Britain and Victorian America, to discuss the food being eaten at the dinner table, even to praise it, or to be seen enjoying it. An 1853 American etiquette manual states, "Eating is so entirely a sensual, animal gratification, that unless it is conducted with much delicacy, it becomes unpleasant to others" (Lupton 22). While there are notable exceptions, such as in Thackeray and Dickens, middle- and upper-class literature and culture of the generation preceding the Modernists, largely reflects this restrictive attitude.<sup>5</sup> In Modernism however, food is described with a new frankness and enables a new pathway of meaning. We are not left with only witty talk and fancy dress which ensure the maintenance of social poise in the midst of a threatening sensuality. In the works I will discuss, taste and smell and touch, and the intense human vulnerability to these things, are revealed in rather than ceremonialized out of all sensual existence.

Certainly, after Victorian repressions, we see much of the body in Modernist texts--for instance, Joyce's explicit depiction of expulsion, and Mina Loy's of childbirth.<sup>6</sup> To account for this corporeal orientation, Modernist critics have become interested in the body. Harold Segel explains that the presence of the body indicates the widespread suspicion of reason and language on the part of Modernist philosophy, psychology and arts, which motivated a turn to intuition, spontaneity and physical expression. This bodily orientation during Modernism even influenced writing style. The French feminists celebrated "writing the body" and Segel points out that modern dance influenced drama and prose (9). If celebration of the body was, to some extent, conceived as a return to the "natural" and spontaneous, however, the body was also being re-imagined in line with new physiological and nutritional discourse and new technological development.<sup>7</sup> There has been some critical attention to Modernism and the senses but to this point such work has focused principally on technological effects upon the sensorium.<sup>8</sup> Modernism certainly invites as much engagement with the proximity senses as these intellectual ones, however, and more needs to be said about Modernism's mobilization of these.

One recent book, Michel Delville's *Food, Poetry and the Aesthetics of Consumption: Eating the Avant-Garde* (2008), offers an important exception. Delville's study considers a pervasive interest in food across various media of the avante-garde. Delville comes to the same conclusion with Gertrude Stein, Wallace Stevens and the Futurists as I do with Modernist fiction. Though she does not engage Merleau-Ponty, she describes his idea of intersubjectivity: "Because it constantly takes us to the body's direct confrontation with material reality, gastroaesthetics defeats all attempts at a purely discursive, analytical elucidation of the subject/object relation" (3). As Deville describes

it, the avant-garde expresses the instability of the subject that inheres in eating, through their fluid renderings of form and she is thus interested in the “intersection of art and food” in the work of such “eat artists” (5). The texts I consider express only intersubjective *moments* within prose which is more realist and conservative, but they thus have the advantage of placing the phenomenon of intersubjectivity within an array of concrete dynamics and circumstances so that they can render it not just of aesthetic, but of social and political significance.

This dissertation constitutes, to my knowledge, the first book-length study of food in Modernist fiction. My consideration of eating scenes contributes to discussion of the body in Modernism by extending the concept of the body. I show how Modernists regard it as a thing not clearly self-contained, but fluid with various substances around it. A discussion of eating requires a non-anthropocentric consideration of what the body takes into itself to survive: The body as not just a trapped and interpolated unit but as a circulating, changing thing hard to pin down.

### **Theories of Eating**

There have been a few theorists who have posited the interpenetration of body and world in acts of eating, notably Bakhtin and Kristeva.

Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and His World*, postulates that in eating, “the body transgresses...its own limits: it swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world’s expense. ...Herein man tastes the world, introduces it into his body, makes it part of himself” (281). In his view, eating is not a humbling before the physical world, an admission of dependence on object matter, the view I am suggesting Modernist texts assume. Rather, Bakhtin sees eating as the triumph of man’s labor over nature in

which, “The limits between man and the world are erased, to man’s advantage” (281). Bakhtin’s Marxist interest was principally in whether men ate deservingly after a hard struggle with the earth, or whether they ate greedily what they did not earn.

Julia Kristeva, on the other hand, argues in *The Powers of Horror*, that ingestion constitutes an act of vulnerability, rather than of power. She draws on Freud’s “Negation,” which contended that the earliest oral impulse is a decision about what to take into oneself and what to keep out of oneself. Kristeva argues that anything a person ingests threatens the integrity of her selfhood, “le corps proper.” The threat is one of contradiction. Generally, people attempt to deny the ambiguities and contradictions which exist within them by turning in revulsion from anything that comes out of their bodies, or that exists in a liminal zone between clearly separate states (the corpse, for instance). Contact with what lies beyond one’s own body is both threatening and thrilling. While I am proposing here that Modernism describes a similar vulnerability, a similar dissolution of self in feelings of disgust or ecstasy, I find that Kristeva’s psychoanalytic model is too anthropocentric to account for the thorough engagement with, and vulnerability to, object matter described in Modernism.

I contend that Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology provides the best framework to account for Modernists’ constitution of human subjects through bodily engagement with the external world. Merleau-Ponty has been called “the patron saint of the body” (Shusterman 131). His work has long been in the shadows of structuralism in humanities scholarship but with recent critical attention to the body is beginning to regain recognition. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, he rejects the two major strands of thought used to describe the human relation with the object world: empiricism and

intellectualism. Empiricism is incomplete because never in their lived experience do people experience pure sensation without mentally organizing that sensation. Even if it is only to recognize a sensual stimulus as a figure against a background, people impose *perception* upon raw sensation. Intellectualism, of which we might say structuralism and social constructivism are examples, are also faulty, as people have the capacity to correct faulty perceptions (they can tell the difference between a daydream and reality, for instance). The only solution then, is that mind and phenomenal world are co-constituting. According to Merleau-Ponty, we cannot speak of a world that preexists our perception of it. Even more revolutionary in his thought, is the corresponding idea that we can likewise neither speak of an intact subject who preexists his encounter with the outside world. This idea undermines what most philosophies as well as common sense takes for granted, and it is this aspect of his philosophy which I assert Modernism underscores. Merleau-Ponty's contention that, "there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself" (xi) bears out in sensually-laden Modernist depictions of human life, particularly depictions of eating. According to Merleau-Ponty, and opposed to Bakhtin, then, we cannot say that a person eats and, in eating, incorporates the world into himself; it is rather through eating that he comes into being. Merleau-Ponty defines sensation, in fact, as "co-existence" or "communion" (213); the subject enters into a "sympathetic relation" with sense stimuli, rather than possessing the stimulators as objects (214). It is for this reason that Modernist eating scenes are not just aesthetic but revelatory: When engaging in the material world, characters' true selves seem to emerge. They are most salient, paradoxically, when most engaged, when overcome as intact subjects in their reception of the phenomenal world.

In fact, because there is no stable and continuous subject position from which to stand, there is no intact subject who *has* sensations; she rather abandons herself to them and can therefore never know or describe them completely. Merleau-Ponty offers the following concrete example, in which his tone notably reaches out of abstract philosophical distance to poetic ecstasy: “As I contemplate the blue of the sky...I abandon myself to it and plunge into this mystery, it ‘thinks itself within me,’ I am the sky itself as it is drawn together and unified, and as it begins to exist for itself; my consciousness is saturated with this limitless blue...” (214). Merleau-Ponty’s model of intersubjectivity limns the human relation to the world as vulnerable and instable, the qualities which define the loss of control experienced in Modernist scenes of eating. Merleau-Ponty writes that, whereas “language tries to impose essences on things” (xv), “phenomenology’s task was to reveal the mystery of the world and of reason” (xxi).

Fundamentally at odds with structuralism, then, Merleau-Ponty argues that language is only a second-order expression of our primary experience with the world. Merleau-Ponty’s goal was to challenge science and philosophy’s overly rational orientation to the world, but we can note that this philosophy also stands in opposition to commodity relations. What cannot be known, cannot be owned. Accordingly, he proclaims, “I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible” (xvii). The Modernists I discuss do talk about discrete food items like cakes, beans, meat, and others, thereby registering not just sensation, but perception. But in all cases, the food is described in a way that shows it is not exhausted by its name and is, in fact, ultimately uncontainable. Liquidity, which involves a spreading outward, is frequent in the foods—Hemingway’s camping food is

saucy, for instance, and Woolf's meats swim in juice. Smell and mess—two additional means of diffusion-- are also common, as are colors and tastes so trenchant they assault the eaters or perceivers of the food.

Perhaps the most famous moment of eating in Modernist literature is Marcel's *petite madeleine* scene in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*. It can be considered here as a paradigmatic Modernist depiction of how subjectivity is constituted through the sensory:

No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory—this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence...(48)

Proust here presents the physical sensations of eating tea and cake as ecstatic moments outside of time that overcome the protagonist completely. It would seem that Marcel ventures into this otherness only to be ultimately brought back to himself, to personal memories and meanings, and critics from Beckett to Blanchot to Kristeva have analyzed the scene for the way it demonstrates the processes of the human mind, while ignoring the status of the food (Dolphijn 13). However, without the sense stimuli, Marcel's personal memories do not exist; they are constituted by a sponge cake. Rick Dolphijn emphasizes, "it was the taste and the smell of the *madeleine* that pulled him into the endless depths of the immanent sweeping him from the mazes of childhood to those of his fantasies. A bundle of singularities that is actualized by the tasting and the smelling of the *madeleine*" (13). Merleau-Ponty similarly observed of Proust that his ideas were not contrary to the sensible, but rather, "its lining and its depth" (Carbone xiv).



It is Marcel's sensual encounter then, which ecstatically opens him, interacts with him, delivering him from his present moment. Such food ecstasy occurs repeatedly in American and British Modernist literature. When ecstasy is not present, disgust often is. The feeling of disgust registers the same sensation of encroachment upon one's boundaries, of merging in an uncontrollable way with one's surroundings. Because these emotions define key moments of Modernist eating, rendering vulnerability the dominant mark of eating, Merleau-Ponty's model of intersubjectivity best describes Modernists' rendering of the eating body's relationship to the world. Such a positing of intersubjectivity constituted an intervention into differing attitudes at the time intending to delimit subjectivity.

### **Influences Upon Modern Subjectivity**

Modernism's embracing of fluidity, exists at odds with many forces in early twentieth-century England and America which sought to keep subjectivity contained: forces that promoted alienation and that promoted fear of those people construed as less rational and more bodily, often women and "primitives."

As I will discuss in greater depth in Chapters 1 and 2, many felt life in the early twentieth century to be infused with alienation of various sorts. The theorist of everyday life Henri Lefebvre expands upon Marx's concept of alienation in the workplace to show how modern daily life as a whole is infused with the same feeling. In *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947), he says, people became oriented toward consuming and oriented toward each other as objects to consume. They felt no sense of control over the means of production, being allowed no ethical or rational decisions but rather having these made for them by a small body of "experts." They had lost a language of real objects and began

using an abstract metalanguage of empty forms. Advertising became their poetry; love reductively eroticized. These factors, of course, can work to alienate people from their own sensations. Baudrillard in *The System of Objects* suggests commodity culture seeks to delimit and package desires and personalities, rather than engage real, complex human beings who might pose a threat to the status quo (189-191).<sup>9</sup>

Working in tandem with enforcement of alienation was a fear of the body in an increasingly rationalized world. Against the early twentieth-century growth of science, industry and technology—the encroaching totalization of rationality as Weber described it—fear of the body, with all of its potential for unnamed, un-theorized sensations and connections with other people and objects, was likely intensified. The presence of the proximity senses in any affair challenge the breadth of intellectual propositions and the grip such an orientation grants us on the world. Many have speculated upon a political purpose behind this cultural anesthesia, arguing it is intended to banish disconcerting, discordant and anarchic sensory presences which might undermine normalizing processes of everyday life (Feldman 89). Sense is important because it engages us with the world around us, and the proximity senses do so unconsciously and pervasively—the sense of smell important in the bonding of mothers and babies and spouses, for instance (Classen, Howes and Synnott 2). The senses are also important as sites of freedom. Philosopher Susan Buck-Morss contends that “the senses maintain an uncivilized and uncivilizable trace, a core of resistance to cultural domestication. This is because their immediate purpose is to serve instinctual needs” (6). This freedom of the proximity senses can be threatening: Existing in excess of conceptual thought, existing to fulfill untheorized desires, they cannot be controlled. Carolyn Korsmeyer suggests taste may be at the head

of these: “Taste requires perhaps the most intimate congress with the object of perception, which must enter the mouth, and which delivers sensations experienced in the mouth and throat on its way down through the digestive track” (3). Famously, Kristeva theorized, that “all food is liable to defile,” since it signifies the natural entering the cultured body (Lupton 113).

In the nineteenth century, Marx argued that the sensory lives of workers in factories was impoverished and that they therefore could not lead fully human lives and also suggested that, moreover, when the bourgeois hoarded their wealth instead of spending, they also deprived themselves of sensory fulfillment (Howes 282-3). In the twentieth century, capitalism often attempted to seduce, rather than deny some senses, but it seduces them in a prepackaged commodified way which continues to occlude their subjective human aspect (Howes 289).<sup>10</sup> Some senses, like smell, are, however, completely elided. In *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell*, Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synnott remark, “smell has been marginalized because it is felt to threaten the abstract and impersonal regime of modernity by virtue of its radical interiority, its boundary-transgressing propensities and its emotional potency” (5). Geographer J. Douglas Porteus suggests, that smell invites fantasy, magic, imagination and play, “yet we have increasingly been socialized to disregard...these sources of enlightenment and pleasure” (197).<sup>11</sup> One way to deny the senses is to cast them off upon a “lower” order of society. Marianna Torgovnick has shown that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the so-called irrational--children, “primitive” cultures, and women—were the ones to be associated by writers and anthropologists with the “lower” senses.<sup>12</sup> Of more contemporary times, Serematakis argues that people are made to

experience their everyday lives as mundane in contrast to periodic “sensational events” such as elections, disasters, performances, accidents, etc. She argues that this “creates zones of privatized, inadmissible memory and experience that operates as spaces of social amnesia and anesthesia” (19). The result is not only a severing from imaginative possibilities, but from an empathic relation to other bodies as well. Stoller argues, “Through the sanitization of the consumer image, bodies are depersonalized; they are one among any number of realist objects, all of which are devoid of odors, distinction, and pain” (Stoller, “Conscious” 116).

The writers I discuss show us that in the face of modern alienation food remained for them an avenue of engagement, and thereby, of connection, with the physical world and with other people. Modernism embraces the irreducible sensuality of food. In Modernist fiction the belief inheres that, against the distinctions speech makes, the body is always intersubjectively combining with other people and substances in the realm of the senses. Smells and tastes interrupt dinner conversation and bring the subject out of herself in a striking moment, one that is generally marked by an extreme sensation, disgust or ecstasy.<sup>13</sup> Such moments are, moreover, not presented as distractions from the principle dynamics or narrative of the story; they are rather pinnacles of intensity and insight. Modernist fiction, with its non-narrative organizational techniques, like collage, stream-of-consciousness and juxtaposition, enabled this emphasis on such isolated moments. Joyce, for instance, described his “Laestrygonians” chapter as based on the biological process of peristalsis. Woolf in *The Waves*, created a rhythmic narrative, with its tonic in meals. In this way, food can exist as an actor in its own right, interrupting the human action of the story, rather than serving to underscore.

### **The Viewpoint from the Body**

Throughout this dissertation I attempt to account for both the subjectivity accrued in descriptions of eating and also to engage with the irreducibly material sensations themselves. Beyond the general philosophies and political claims—that people are embodied and thus dependent on, shaped by physical substance-- what can be said about the particular ways particular substances shape a character or story? Necessary to considering specific textural, olfactory, gustatory and sound qualities of food, is the endeavor to think not only more about the body, but more from the perspective of the body—the body’s gestures and perceptions as it encounters the sensations of the food before it.

True, particular sensations can become codified and operate as repositories of social meaning and Modernist writers certainly engaged such meanings. As I will discuss in the following chapters, for instance, in early twentieth-century Britain, the bloodiness of meat was associated with men, sweets with women, mess with the Irish. In America, various physical qualities were associated with different ethnic groups. My analysis of such social meanings will constitute a significant part of the last three chapters. But my ultimate interest, and I believe the particular contribution of this study, is to engage the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and consider how an object’s sensual impact exists in excess of social meaning.

Modernist food descriptions, in addition to the social or symbolic meanings they mobilize, disrupt regular cognitive associations that adhere linguistically to particular edibles. Modernists evoke this sensation in itself as it exceeds language, either by rendering a character speechless upon encounter with it or by describing it up close, in a

profusion or intensity that registers in the food a complexity that outpaces its name. In instances of the former, ecstasy or disgust brings eating (or otherwise perceiving) subjects to the edge of their knowledge and ability to name. The writer's description of this reaction informs us that words are falling short of experience and therein point to a larger impression of the sensation than can be described; the item is thereby highlighted in its inscrutable otherness. In other cases, Modernist writers decline to describe the foods by their name and instead consider them up close and piecemeal: "Streaks" of meat juice, "smears" of yeast, "wads" of cake, among other nuggets of Modernist description, reconfigure particular foodstuffs for readers, evoking them by textural particularities not accounted for in their regular designations.<sup>14</sup>

When considering foodstuffs not only as symbols, but as physical object matter, literary descriptions of food emerge, to some extent, as gaping holes, sprawling messes, in otherwise rational, symbolic texts. As the sensations are ultimately refractory and cannot be totally solved or unpacked, I have aimed to rather focus on how they operate in texts. I have identified moments in which sensations involved with eating perform as actors in a scene in their own right, grounding, destabilizing, focusing, assailing, liberating, or connecting characters. Unlike works which use physical detail only derivatively, to underscore preexisting dynamics, the sensual phenomena in the works I discuss are primary, motivating a broad range of moods, behaviors and personalities.

Albeit, Modernists, unlike Postmodernists, or the avant-garde described by Deville, embrace intersubjectivity in an ultimately limited way. Relational subjectivity is mostly felt in brief moments that rupture otherwise intact identities. Though the subjects are presumably always sensing and therefore always being permeated, they are not

continuously aware of this and thereby continuously ecstatic or disgusted. There is, in fact, in all the cases I explore, something unusual about the food experience that gives it a particular charge: for instance, it is eaten on a camping trip, it is for a party, or it is seen from the distance of another subjectivity. According to a modernist aesthetic, however, brief flashes of insight are not less representative of reality but more so. Woolf's "moments of being," Joyce's epiphanies, Hemingway's iceberg principle (not to mention T.S. Eliot's objective correlative, Ezra Pound's vortex or the Imagists' images) all describe fleeting moments of understanding that illuminate the always present, but unspeakable, intractable reality.

My reading of Modernist texts through the senses has the potential to shift our understanding of Modernism on a few counts. In the first place, as the Modernist period was one of increased cross-cultural contact, there has been much critical discussion in Modernist studies of the occlusion of "the other." According to phenomenology, however, people have no choice but to be constantly open to otherness. While literature can describe resistance to or disgust with such encounters, the Modernist phenomenological presentation of eating implies that the body is open where the mind is not and there is ultimately no refusing to engage with things other than oneself. In my final three chapters I show how Woolf, Joyce and Cather take advantage of this fact and foreground underrepresented groups by foregrounding their bodies. A second implication incurs from the phenomenological understanding of the body as ultimately vulnerable and oriented to the world in a receptive way, qualities generally posited as female and therefore aberrant of the norm. Modernism, with its emphasis on the World Wars, objectivity and wandering beyond the domestic sphere, has often been associated with the

masculine. To consider constitutive scenes of eating phenomenological is to consider the traditional female subjectivity as fundamental to Modernist depictions of reality. Two of the writers I consider, Mansfield and Woolf, suggest female characters' special susceptibility to sensual stimulation and two, Hemingway and Joyce, show men preparing meals, thereby having them occupy the normally feminine role of cook.

The chapters which follow will consider how human subjectivity was conceived by Modernists to exist in active, dynamic relationship with external sensations. I have selected texts on the basis of their adherence to the Modernist aesthetic of speaking through objects and sensations. The work I considers spans from 1913 to 1931 and is written by American and British authors of middle-class origin.<sup>15</sup>

It will be clear in each case that Modernist depictions of eating not only demonstrate the intersubjectivity that Merleau-Ponty posited inheres in sensation, but also complicate it by imagining instances of sensual encounter grounded in specific times and locations. Throughout, while I consider the characters' sense of being overcome by ecstasy or disgust, I am also considering the *authors'* manipulations of the sensual encounter. Modernists invoke the permeable boundaries of the body in order to reconfigure social and material relations. My first two chapters consider the phenomenological encounter with food within the specific historical milieu of the early twentieth century—one which I categorize as defined both by a new mood, alienation and by new products, canned food and snack foods. In the latter three chapters, I turn to writers who rather ground the phenomenological experience in place and social group. I show how writers considered different subjective positionings—those of woman,



colonizers, and immigrants—to create different proclivities for ecstasy or disgust in the encounter with eating or food.

My first chapter, “Bringing Canned Food Back to Nature: Ernest Hemingway’s ‘Big Two-Hearted River,’” considers this early short story by Hemingway which centers on a camping meal. I query protagonist Nick Adam’s hearty feast upon canned beans, peaches and milk within a wilderness setting. Canned food is a surprising choice of focus for this story of a man bonding with nature. I argue that by placing such industrial fruits in a natural context, Hemingway intervenes in modern industrialized food culture; he recontextualizes it, thereby brings the modern eating experience back to nature. In this way he was changing the modern person’s relationship to food and the natural world from which that food comes: from a relation of dominance to one of vulnerability. I place this story within a contemporary ecological movement that posited the interdependence of man and nature. I begin the dissertation with this chapter because it best shows the potential of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology to think in a nonanthropocentric way. Hemingway’s ecologically-minded consideration of the human’s positioning within a larger sensual world paves the way for the Modernist depictions of human vulnerability to material things which I describe throughout the dissertation.

In the second chapter, “Emotions and Jam: Sweets, Snacks and Feeling in the Stories of Katherine Mansfield,” I show how Mansfield renders her characters ecstatic in sensual encounters, thereby imagining human relationships with objects to compensate for social alienation. In the best cases, through their connection to food, characters are able to bond with each other. Here again, I place Mansfield’s phenomenological encounters within food history. I argue that the rise of snack and sweet culture motivated

Mansfield's vision of ecstasy in eating. Whereas the meal is a Victorian rite and imposes social order, characters often experience ecstasy in her works by eating sweets and other foods outside of formal meals. I look at children who express their fantasies through food, a repressed lesbian who can only recognize her own desires through the foods she eats, and a pair of formal intellectuals who secretly love each other, but finding love beneath them, can only express that in the food they eat together. In each case, the sensual space food opens up provides an avenue of liberation from the status quo: Mansfield also takes Merleau-Ponty's nonanthropocentric view to open characters to a world of relationships beyond the social.

In the remaining three chapters I turn to look at subject positions involved in eating within specific places and among specific groups of people. In these chapters, I consider not just the subjectivity of the eater, but that of those who observe the eating. In the third chapter, "The Meat of the Movement: Food and Feminism in the Fiction of Virginia Woolf," I argue that women's meat consumption in Woolf's novels empowers women sensually and simultaneously provokes disgust in male characters. The Victorian norms within which Woolf grew up had dictated women not take an interest in food. Woolf insists that they do, and moreover, in meat—a food associated with men. I look at three novels—*Night and Day*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Years* in which Woolf powerfully renders woman appetitive and consuming. The women look not just to themselves or each other for strength, but to meat, to its blood and muscle. Given the same nourishment as men, Woolf's meat-eating women are spurred by a new vitality, and act outside of their proper roles. The meat here is not just a symbol, but an irreducibly material substance which engages the female character's rebellious behavior.

In the fourth chapter, “Savage Eating: Colonial Disgust in Joyce’s *Ulysses*,” I further explore the eating of the “other” and give my fullest analysis of the disgust that can overcome the subject in a phenomenological encounter with food. My contention is that Joyce confronts readers with bodily processes usually deemed uncivilized and shunned in public discourse in order to elicit disgust in early twentieth-century middle-class British readers, and that he did so in order to mimic a colonial ideology that posited the Irish as animalistic, uncivilized, and dirty. Joyce depicts Irish characters eating in one of three ways: They are voracious, and thus a threat to the colonizer’s possession of goods, messy and thus a threat to the colonizer’s physical boundaries or defiant of taboos and thus a threat to imposed order. It is the sensual qualities constituting each of these transgressions which have the primary impact on the reader. Such sensations perform immediately and viscerally what abstract ideologies can only affect from a distance.

My fifth chapter, “Kolache and Leeks: Cather’s Intervention in the American Sensescape,” advances the argument by considering *social* subjectivities, those of American immigrants. I argue here that Cather’s works constitute a protest against the homogenization of the American sensescape. In the xenophobic World War I era, immigrant food was frequently considered threatening (and therefore, disgusting). While we often focus on the power dynamics in the contact zone, Cather endows a minority culture with a power not often enough considered—that to maintain a separate sensual identity which, I argue, actually generates their defining characteristics as a group. I focus on the foods of Czech, German and French immigrants. Cather’s writing of these alienated foods preserves both particular sensual realities, and the various separate

orientations to the world they enabled. Thus, here as in the previous chapters, sensual dynamics have the potential to both underscore and challenge the status quo.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Important books have included Doris Witt's *Black Hunger: Food and Politics of U.S. Identity*, Denise Gigante's *Taste: A Literary History*, and Timothy Morton's *Cultures of Taste/Theories of Appetite: Eating Romanticism*. These have been adjoined by numerous articles, anthologies and conference panels covering every period of literature. I will note throughout the dissertation entire books devoted wholly to considering food and/or eating in each of the authors I discuss.

<sup>2</sup> Levi-Strauss in *The Raw and the Cooked*, created a "culinary triangle," in which he discussed the relative social prestige of various ways of cooking: roasting, smoking or boiling. In *Structural Anthropology*, he put forward the concept of the "gusteme," to mirror the linguistic concept of the "phoneme." Later structuralists nuanced his approach. Mary Douglas, for instance, asserted the importance of rooting theories in studies of particular cultures, working from the "bottom up," rather than the "top down" (Wood 11). Roland Barthes and Pierre Bourdieu consider structuralist meanings within a Marxist analysis. Stephen Mennel, in *All Manners of Food*, finds fault with structuralists for failing to account for how societal regulations on eating change over time.

<sup>3</sup> Many of these dismissals of the body were framed directly in terms of the eating body. For instance, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates asks Simmias the rhetorical question, "Do you think that it is right for a philosopher to concern himself with the so-called pleasures connected with food and drink?" and goes on to declare, "Surely the soul can best reflect when it is free of all distractions such as hearing or sight or pain or pleasure of any kind—that is, when it ignores the body and becomes as far as possible independent, avoiding all physical contacts and associations as much as it can" (qtd. in Shapin 25). Deuteronomy famously declares that man does not live of bread alone, and St. Catherine instructed her readers to make the Word their food (Ellmann, Maud, *Hunger* 22). In summary of the many famous anecdotes about philosophers' indifference to food, Steven Shapin says: "...what these stories stipulate is that the truth-seeker is someone who attains truth by denying the demands of the stomach and, more generally, of the body" (22).

Perhaps the forcefulness of these admonishments reveals the extent to which, despite the philosophers' and theologians' best intentions, they were unable to deny the body's influence on the mind. In their book, *The Flesh Made Text Made Word*, Detsi-Diamanti, Kitsi-Mitakou and Yiannopoulou argue that, "Even if the mind/body binarism has framed most of Western thinking on embodiment, it has never been a fixed conceptual structure and has frequently failed to sustain the logocentric mind in an uncontested position of dominance" (2). They point out Plato's need to warn against the pitfalls of the flesh and Christianity's dictum that salvation is achieved *through* the body.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Delville mentions other theories by which the sense of taste was specifically denigrated. Kant dismissed taste as unnecessary to higher types of knowledge; Hegel devalued it on the grounds that a subject must come too close to the object of perception in tasting, therefore lacking the critical distance from which to philosophize (Delville 1-2).

<sup>5</sup> A very recent book by William Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (2009), defies stereotypes and asserts that Victorian fiction does reveal that writers of the time were thinking through the body. As Cohen frames his argument with Merleau-Ponty, among other theorists of the body, his study will be a very interesting one to read against my own, but unfortunately, I was unable to attain a copy of this new book in time to incorporate it here.

<sup>6</sup> In an essay on the “Penelope” chapter of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Richard Brown collects some statements on the body from canonical Modernists. He mentions that Woolf, in her essay “On Being Ill,” writes, “All day and all night the body intervenes...but of all this daily drama of the body there is no record” (Richard Brown 110). Similarly he notes T.S. Eliot’s comment in “The Metaphysical Poets”: “When poets ask us ”to look into our hearts and write” they are “not looking deep enough...one must look into the cerebral cortex, nervous system and digestive tract” (Richard Brown 110). Also, Wyndham Lewis declares, “the body is sung about, ranted about, abused, cut about by doctors, but almost never talked about...It is not however the body which is ailing, but our idea of the body” (Richard Brown 110).

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Birken, for instance, discusses the ramifications of the inception of sexology and its validation of individual bodies. Harold Segel points out the impact of the rise of physical culture, in the form of gymnastic institutes. Mark Seltzer and Tim Armstrong explore ways in which bodies were reconceived conceptually and practically in relation to new medical, industrial, communication and entertainment technologies.

<sup>8</sup> In *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception and Aesthetics* (2002), for instance, Sarah Danius proposes that early twentieth-century technologies created a chaos of the senses, inducing new ways of hearing and seeing, and hence enabling Modernist aesthetics.

<sup>9</sup> He writes that the system of “individual needs” is “somehow inventoried, classified and demarcated by objects: it thus becomes possible to control it” (189) and, worse, “objects work as categories of objects which, in the most tyrannical fashion, define categories of people—they police social meaning, and the significations they engender are rigidly controlled” (191).

<sup>10</sup> Howes writes, “It is in the domain of taste that capitalist sensualism...has enjoyed some of its greatest successes with respect to the commodification of subjective human sensibility...Many of the flavors consumers crave today have no natural prototype” (289).

<sup>11</sup> Porteus says, “In the present century, the growing homogenization of the world smellscape, under the pressure of American-style sanitization in housing, clothing, and food packaging and display is a process worthy of study” (34).

<sup>12</sup> The earliest anthropologists interested in smells and meals studied tribal cultures, rather than western ones (a situation Mary Douglas sought to redress in her study of British meals in 1972).

<sup>13</sup> In “The Sociology of the Meal,” the sociologist Georg Simmel notes the traditional idea that eating the same food with companions renders them of the same flesh.

<sup>14</sup> Bill Brown describes similar defamiliarizing strategies in the artistic depictions of objects he writes about. Brown says, for instance, of Paul Strand did of everyday pf photographs of common household objects: “by fragmenting the objects, Strand has shed them of their associations; freed them from their domestic, human context; and enabled them to achieve a formalism that obfuscates any exchange or use value...transforming them into both something less (fragments) than the objects they were, but also something more (forms)” (9).

<sup>15</sup> A consideration of literature by working-class or developing-nation writers in the same period would of course be less likely to demonstrate the pattern of philosophical orientation to food my study describes. A few famous studies amply document that the early twentieth-century British working class, far from having the privilege of regarding their food aesthetically, was living next to starvation: George Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Maud Pember Reeves’s *Round About a Pound a Week* and John Burnett’s *Plenty and Want: A Social History of Diet in England from 1815 to the Present Day*. This is not to suggest that such groups would not also be empowered by regaining contact with their senses.

**CHAPTER I**  
**BRINGING CANNED FOOD “BACK TO NATURE”:  
ERNEST HEMINGWAY’S  
“THE BIG TWO-HEARTED RIVER”**

The growth of the processed food industry constituted a major innovation to the early twentieth-century foodscape: Canning diminished the taste of food and occluded its natural origins.<sup>1</sup> By 1920 industrialized food had achieved its heyday in America (Levenstein, *Revolution* 37).<sup>2</sup> As Harvy Levenstein has documented in *Revolution at the Table*, the servant shortage, paired with women’s wide scale entrance into the workforce, left little time for previous generations’ laborious preparation of meals from scratch. Processed food, short as it may have fallen of home cooking, arrived to fill the gap. It became a staple even of lunch counters and dinner parties. At this moment of its inception, various powers vied over its image. Marketers put forth a vision of canned food as convenient, tasty and scientifically advanced. Modernist writers most often deplored its artificiality and inferiority. Canned food appears as an objective correlative of vexing moments of some famous American and British texts. In James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Bloom finds flecks of potted meat in his bed after his wife has had an affair and sees the canned meat indecorously advertised beneath his friend’s funeral announcement. In “Barn Burning,” William Faulkner’s Colonel Sartoris looks at shelves of canned fish, smelling their “hermetic meat,” as he is in the uncomfortable position of having to testify against his father. In Ernest Hemingway’s *Garden of Eden*, protagonist David Bourne discovers his wife’s infidelity while opening tinned mackerel (Stoneback 28). And in *The Road to Wigam Pier* George Orwell explicitly grouched “thanks to tinned food, cold storage, synthetic flavouring matters, etc., the palate is almost a dead organ...Wherever



you look you see some slick machine-made article triumphing over the old-fashioned article that still tastes of something other than sawdust” (204).<sup>3</sup>

These writers depict canned food negatively, on grounds of aesthetics or authenticity. Hemingway’s “Big Two-Hearted River,” capstone story of *In Our Time* (1925), offers an even deeper critique. I argue that Hemingway explores the consequences such drastically new foods and the new experience with the physical world they implied had on human subjectivity. Specifically, his story suggests that eating industrialized food produces a subjectivity which is cut-off from other living things, imposing, and embodies what Horkheimer and Adorno have described as the “logic of domination.” I argue that by reappropriating the canned food eating experience in a camper’s meal, Hemingway envisions a return of the modern eater to nature. Hemingway presents nature as a larger non-human context of which humans are part, which is accordingly not just a human concept or construction, but constituted by sensual particularities that evade any rational human grasp of them. He subverts modern industrialized food which shapes natural resources to human needs.

Several scholars have found a firm basis for ecological ethics in Merleau-Ponty’s idea of intersubjectivity.<sup>4</sup> What Merleau-Ponty contributes to ecological advocacy is the idea of a pre-rational, sensual interdependence between person and nature. It is at this level, I argue, that Hemingway’s story makes its strongest intervention into the relations between person and nature being forged by contemporary industry. His narrative is an American classic and perhaps not notable in its broad outline: it depicts a man’s venture into the wilderness to heal wounds inflicted by society, thereby showing dependence on and connection with nature. Hemingway’s Modernist engagement with the object matter

and sensations of nature, however, lends nature a newly powerful presence in such a narrative. He uses this modernist phenomenology to combat industry's unprecedented, invasive relation with nature.

Hemingway underscores the rather dominating relation taken towards the earth by agribusiness and the food industry by making his protagonist and eater of canned food a soldier and rendering the woods scorched. Nick is not called a soldier in the story, but Hemingway described the piece as a story "about coming back from the war with no mention of the war in it" (76). Nick is, however, a recovering soldier and wants to shed the logic of domination modernity ingrained in him. Critics have most often read the story as one of war trauma and healing: In a far corner of sylvan America, Michigan's Upper Peninsula, Nick endeavors a therapeutic fishing trip. Not only does Nick as soldier evoke domination, so does the destruction recently caused to these woods by a fire, leaving the trees mere stumps, the grasshoppers black and the land scorched. Nick looks to nature's healing for guidance: He has faith in the power of nature to live again and his penetration into the woods constitutes an advance past the burn line. As I will discuss below, though, his healing is not only, or primarily, based on an abstract model nature provides; it is constituted by Nick's direct sensual contact, bonding with, nature itself.

Criticism of the story long focused on Nick's psychology and underplayed his relationship to nature. Philip Young most famously put forward a "wound theory," which posits that Nick's unmentioned but underlying trauma is all pervasive in the story, even in the stark, halting prose style.<sup>5</sup> Some others have noted that the meal he prepares and eats, as ritual, is part of what performs this healing.<sup>6</sup> Such readings, while important,

account for only the human psychology and culture in the story and not the non-human nature to which Nick has deliberately immersed himself.<sup>7</sup>

Ecocritical approaches to the story, appearing more recently, have understood nature to play an active, and perhaps the biggest, role in the story. Frederick Brogger argues that the plot traces Nick's progress from anthropocentrism to eco-centrism. On this trip alone into the woods, in which his fishing is only partially successful, Nick ultimately "succumbs to nature rather than forcing nature to succumb to him" (27). This reading then, bestows importance on the external object matter of the story, the larger physical world of which he realizes he is part. Matthew Stewart suggests that after his wounding Nick "realizes that the daily pleasures of the physical are the only thing that matter and, indeed, are his only hope for inner rehabilitation" (88). These physical things, it is important to note, are always natural or combined with nature. Inherent in this change of focus is a reading of Nick as receptive, and therefore feminine, rather than active and masculine. Of Hemingway's work in general, the nature writer Terry Tempest Williams remarks, "Much has been said and written about 'the Hemingway code,' the hero holding himself together in a world without meaning. What would happen if we reversed it, turned it inside out, the hero held together by the physical world he or she inhabits?" (11). This chapter demonstrates how the implications this human-nature interdependence are deepened when Merleau-Ponty's intersubjectivity is brought to bear on them.

What my analysis furthermore contributes to this turn in the criticism is the contention that food serves as the lynchpin in the human-nature relationship. Nick needs to connect to nature through the food he eats, but he cannot because nature is obscured in

canned food. Therefore, Hemingway must narrate Nick's reappropriation of this modern fare. In the cans, Hemingway found a nexus of two factors severing the early-twentieth century person from nature—first, they represent the food industry and secondly, figuring rations, they evoke war.<sup>8</sup> Hemingway removes canned fare from its modern world and places it in a primitive, natural setting. Rather than grant his eater the expected bland, convenient nourishment, he creates of the canned fare a windfall of sensation and an ecstatic eating experience. In Hemingway's rendition of it, a canned meal becomes capable of fulfilling great hunger: Before describing his fulfillment, Hemingway writes, "Nick was hungry. He did not believe he had ever been hungrier" (139).

It is Hemingway's modernist, object-centered style that allows the natural world to be such an actor in the story. Nick himself says and thinks little. Early in "Big Two," having been dropped off near the wilderness, Nick "felt he had left everything behind, the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs. It was all back of him" (134). Being alone in the wilderness, Nick almost never talks. When he does venture speech he realizes, "his voice sounded strange in the darkening woods. He did not speak again" (139). Without thoughts of his own to hold him apart from the physical world, he experiences himself as part of his environment. Early critics often noted Hemingway's focus on objects and senses. In a contemporary review of *In Our Time*, Paul Rosenfeld contended, "There is little analysis in this narrative art. We are given chiefly, at times with marvelous freshness and crispness, what the eye sees and the ear hears" (68). In another review, Allen Tate noted, "you will not be able to separate, in his facile accumulation of *petites sensations*, the observer from the observation" (68). Tate here unwittingly expresses the phenomenological view inherent in Hemingway's object and

sense-centered style. Given this focus, it is understandable that the extensively elaborated encounter between person and food Hemingway writes of here finds extensive parallel in his corpus. In *A Moveable Feast*, a memoir of his life as a writer in Paris in the 1920s, Hemingway observed, “I found that many of the people I wrote about had very strong appetites and a great taste and desire for food” (101).

Key, then, to my analysis is the work objects themselves do to bring about Nick’s healing. Nature, and food which comes from nature, heals not in a symbolic way, but through the sensual impact they have on Nick. Previous critics have read food as ideas in Hemingway’s work. H.R. Stoneback sees the eggs and canned mackerel in *The Garden of Eden* as symbols of innocent and corrupted love. Linda Underhill and Jeanne Nakjavani note that Hemingway’s use of exotic food signifies the cosmopolitanism of Americans abroad. I believe, however, that such symbol-hunting orientations to Hemingway’s work have the effect of all but erasing the sensual, edible materiality which Hemingway goes to great lengths to establish. Hemingway himself professed to be against symbols, even in what has been taken to be his most allegorical story, “The Old Man and the Sea.” He said of it: “There isn’t any symbolism [sic]...The sea is the sea. The old man is an old man. The boy is a boy and the fish is a fish. The shark are all sharks no better and no worse. All the symbolism that people say is shit” (“EH on Writing” 4). He clearly meant readers to engage with senses themselves.

In this chapter, I first consider Hemingway’s two most famous war novels, which I argue position us to read the contrast between warring and eating in “Big Two-Hearted River,” *Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). I will show how Hemingway’s story actively reappropriates this foodstuff evoking war and industry to

grant his modern eater an interrelational subjectivity with nature that is constituted through the sensations of eating. I will end by considering Hemingway's presentation of the trout fishing itself, in Part II of the story, as a final corrective to the canned food industry.

### **Hungry Soldiers**

Hemingway depicts a modern subject position that is delimited, alienated, and oriented towards dominating, by associating the cans not only with the aggression of the food industry but also with war. As a soldier, Nick's canned items, carried in a backpack, evoke rations. In fact, beyond the general trauma Young and others have argued Nick displays, his canned food is perhaps the only concrete detail to suggest war. The historical motivation for the invention of canned food was a military one. It was first used for the Napoleonic Wars and later for the Civil War in the U.S. and the Boer War in England (Shephard 246, 254). Canned foods played a big part in sustaining World War I soldiers as well. In an address to the National Cannery Association in February 1918, Colonel Grove complimented the canning industry on feeding the army better than any army had been fed in the past. George Orwell remarked that, "The Great War...could never have happened if tinned food had not been invented" (84).

It is informative to consider Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* when reading "Big Two-Hearted River." All three are notable for juxtaposing combat (or in the case of the latter, memory of combat) with eating. While there are examples in real life and in literature of war-happy soldiers gnawing barbarously on meat or other food as a sign of their dominance, Hemingway writes his soldiers' meals in a way that underscores their vulnerability. He portrays the soldiers' great hunger, a hunger

which implies dependence on the non-human natural world, and he depicts the eating itself in a way which shows their appreciation for, rather than insensitive dominance over, the substances they eat. Also, Hemingway foregrounds nature in each eating scene. As in Nick's case, what the soldiers are ultimately connecting with is the earth that produced their foods. In the moment that they are engaged in this relationship with the earth, they are not engaging in their dominating soldierly subject positions, in what (in the case of World War I) Hemingway called "murder" and "butchery"<sup>9</sup> (*Men at War* xiv-xv).

In the only scene in which Hemingway depicts actual combat in *Farewell to Arms*, he simultaneously presents a meal. The protagonist, Frederick Henry, is an ambulance driver on the Italian front. In this scene, his regiment is expecting an attack and much work to follow, and so he and the other ambulance drivers try to hide out in a dugout and get a bit to eat before they are needed. He is able to secure a cold bowl of macaroni and a block of cheese. He must dodge firing while attaining the food, and then eat while the attack is beginning to start. Eating in this context, these soldiers make themselves especially vulnerable. Opposed to the grand act of warring, Hemingway presents them in a position of dependence on external objects. Their humility is underscored by the primitiveness of the scene. The men are shown gathered on the floor around the cold bowl of spaghetti. In a dugout, without any table, chairs, individual plates, or even utensils, they reach into this common bowl of noodles, lifting out strands by the handful. Hemingway employs images that make it clear he means to show the soldiers in a position of dependence upon, rather than dominance over, the food. Against a background of Skoda guns, bombs and minnenwefer mortar, he creates an image

wherein the men bow before this substance on which they are dependent: “They were all eating, holding their chins close over the basin, tipping their heads back, sucking in the ends” (54).

Hemingway describes the eating in rich, dramatic detail. Frederick Henry observes, “I put thumb and fingers into the macaroni and lifted. A mass loosened” (53) and “I lifted it to arm’s length and the strands cleared” (54). The terms “mass” and “cleared” and the slow-motion detail in which Hemingway renders the act, seem more appropriate to descriptions of war action, rather than eating. And in fact, structures are clearing and masses loosening as bombs and gunfire reach them. Even in the face of such larger military encroachments, though, Hemingway focuses on centrality of food to the men’s lives, their condition of being dependent, even when engaged in the activity of war.

In one interchange he depicts between Frederick Henry and his fellow-soldier friend Rinaldi, Hemingway explicitly presents the act of eating in sharp relief to heroic feats of war. After the dugout is attacked, Henry is lying wounded in the hospital. To Rinaldi’s question “Did you do any heroic act?,” Henry responds, “I was blown up while we were eating cheese” (63). Rather than present his protagonist in a heroic feat of dominance, Hemingway depicts him in an act of reception. He is not antagonistically positioned, but engaged in an act of merging. By showing Henry incorporating the earth into himself, Hemingway undermines the extent to which he is even an identifiable target, a unit extractable from the rest of the surrounding earth; he is rather an intersubjective creature.



Hemingway chose to have the men eat a food evocative of the war itself: spaghetti. In 1920s America, spaghetti was not the ubiquitous item it is today, but just beginning to emerge from its status as an ostracized ethnic food. For most Americans at the time, Nick's spaghetti would have suggested Italian/ American ties in World War I. During the war it was embraced by *Ladies Home Journal* and other women's magazines as the food of America's allies (Levenstein, *Revolution* 146).<sup>10</sup> What is notable here (and again with the spaghetti in "Big Two-Hearted River") is that Hemingway does not mobilize only the human, symbolic meaning of the spaghetti, symbolic meaning, but its non-human, inexpressible sensations. He fleshes it out in its own, strange sensual particularity. Hemingway makes the sensual qualities of this food object a salient presence, a non-human physical thing intervening in this scene of human conflict. It exists on a different plane than the war. He describes its coldness and its stringy and massy textures as well as the behaviors it necessitates from eaters (the sucking and head tipping and loosening with the fingers). By showing the soldiers eating, Hemingway brings a larger context to bear on this scene of war: one of food cycles and regeneration. Eating in the simple way that they do positions them not as members of a particular culture, but more generally as human bodies.

In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Hemingway presents a similar juxtaposition between eating and warring. Robert Jordan is a volunteer American soldier assigned to dynamiting projects in various guerilla territories during the Spanish Civil War. The novel takes place in the roughly four days he spends at the guerilla camp of Pablo, preparing to detonate a bridge when the Fascists attack. Hemingway renders Jordan a frequently hungry character. In his introduction of Jordan in the first chapter, Hemingway writes, "The

young man, whose name was Robert Jordan, was extremely hungry and he was worried” (4). Thus he is named, evoked as a complete being, in the same breath that he is evoked as hungry, and therefore incomplete. The chapter ends with a reinforcement of this hunger: The last line is, “Man, I’m hungry, he thought. I hope Pablo eats well,” (17). Thus the first chapter is framed on both ends by the soldier’s hunger. On his second morning, he wakes up with a hunger stronger than he had ever had. Hemingway, in fact, says of Jordan what he will say of Nick—that this is the greatest hunger of his life: “he had never been hungrier” (288). Hemingway follows this with a lengthy description of Jordan’s preparation of an onion sandwich. These scenes pause and jar with the action that advances the war effort.

In one of the book’s principle scenes, Hemingway contrasts eating with combat directly. Pablo’s guerillas watch their neighboring camp (that of Sordo) endure attack and ultimately destruction. The ground is full of bomb craters and stinks of explosives. Hemingway writes, “Then everything was quiet again and the quiet kept on and he knew that it was over” (323). He follows this immediately in the next paragraph with, “Maria came up from the camp with a tin bucket of stewed hare with mushrooms sunken in the rich gravy and a sack with bread, a leather wine bottle, four tin plates...” (323). The soldiers, even in this moment of great anger, pause in their antagonistic stance and open themselves to nourishment. Moreover, as with the spaghetti, which Hemingway makes present in the text in great detail, allowing its clumps and strands to intervene on the war effort, this meal is stewed and saucy and rich. In these details, Hemingway allows the surrounding object world a presence, even in this ultimate moment of human conflict.

Finally, I would like to note that each of the soldiers eats in a way that connects him with nature. Key to acknowledgment of one's utter dependence on food, is recognition of the fact that the food does not originate in factories, not in human endeavor, but from an extra-human source. Hemingway underscores the natural origins of food by depicting both soldiers eating outdoors: Frederick Henry in a dugout, Robert Jordan on a hill outside the camp. Combat generally does take place outside, which may make Hemingway's choice of setting seem a non-issue. However, Hemingway clearly aims to make nature present in each case. In *Farewell to Arms*, the soldiers do not eat in the ways their culture has taught them, at a table with utensils, but without culture, without manners and while sitting on the ground: Their relationship to the food is not mediated in these ways, but brings the soldiers back to the natural resources and gestures of their bodies. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the guerillas eat food that has come from the surrounding countryside—two hares which one of the guerillas has shot. Moreover, Hemingway blends sensations from the natural environment with sensations of eating the food, saying of Robert Jordan, “he took another big mouthful of wine, lifting the bag up to let the jet of wine spurt into the back of his mouth, the wine-skin touching the needles of the blind of pine branches that covered the automatic rifle as he lifted his hand, his head leaning against the pine branches as he bent it back to let the wine run down” (288). Hemingway situates the eating body and endeavoring body in the context of an all-encompassing nature: pine branches which almost cover up the rifle. Against these positively rendered natural contexts is the deadly technology of the war. In their natural context, Henry and Jordan, like Nick at the Big Two-Hearted River before them, seem to leave the limited, human context of the war and exist within a larger natural world. In this

larger context, they are only small actors dependent on the ecological whole. Ultimately, their eating undermines their warring.

### **Unsoldering**

Just as eating served as a reprieve from the dominating mentality of war for these soldiers, Hemingway understood it to be a healing activity for Nick. He positions him as eater in order to position him as receptive and interconnected, rather than oriented towards dominating. Hemingway stresses this openness, in the first place, by foregrounding Nick, like Robert Jordan, as a hungry character. He mentions five times that Nick is hungry and that he, in fact, has a superlative hunger. Secondly, as with Henry and Jordan, Hemingway inscribes his openness in his reception of the food and the sensations it gives: He has a great relish for, even ecstasy over, his meal. I describe his reaction as ecstasy rather than satiation because Hemingway's language suggests that Nick, as eating subject, transcends his own body, phenomenologically combining with what lies beyond him. Thirdly, like Henry and Jordan who eat outdoors, he reconnects to nature through his eating.

Eating is an experience for Nick in which he feels the boundaries of his subjectivity to be overcome by the food he consumes: He feels himself intermingle with nature through the meal. Though he eats from cans, Nick fuses his industrially-produced food back with natural elements. He makes his coffee with river water. He warms the meal with the natural heat of an open fire. As is the case with the eater in *Farewell to Arms*, he contacts the food without the mediation of man-made utensils—eating with his hands as he mops up the sauce of his dinner with bread, and drinking the apricots straight from the can. Much has been written on the elaborate repertoire of polite eating manners

and rituals implemented in most cultures in order to disguise the otherwise very bodily act of eating. Y.F. Tuan has argued that eating “forcefully reminds us of our animal nature. Culture masks human animality” (46). Having only the river and the mist for his dinner companions, Nick has no one from whom he needs to hide his animal nature.<sup>11</sup>

Nick thus actively takes steps to reintegrate his man-made food with the larger natural world it came from. Such steps cast a humility over this meal that began in the nature-appropriating products of agribusiness and mass production. But Hemingway establishes Nick’s ultimate vulnerability as eater by describing his reception of the physical qualities of the food itself. Hemingway describes food in such detail that it is like an actor in the scene instructing and healing Nick. As mentioned above, Philip Young and others have established Nick’s trauma and the robotic, stilted behavior it produces. Against such rigidity lies the story’s central image, the Big Two-Hearted River itself, where Nick will fish. Nick’s heating of the canned foods makes them approach the state of this river. The food is sensually similar to the river in that its defining property is liquidness. As he cooks, sauces and juices ooze out of solid pieces of food. Beans and spaghetti bubble in the pot. They form enough juice that Nick has to mop it up with a piece of bread. After that he has a can of apricots, packed in rich, thick syrup, and some coffee he makes with river water. It might also be noted that the following day Hemingway tells us Nick mixed pancake batter, “stirred it smooth,” slid a lump of grease “sputtering across” the skillet, and then poured the batter which “spread like lava” across the pan. Later he has an onion sandwich which he even dips in water before eating, allowing the current to carry away the crumbs and thereby directly links his food with the river.<sup>12</sup> As such, the loosening of Nick’s own parameters is informed by the textual

qualities of the very foods he eats. The liquidness of the foods provides an image of the softening of the soldier's delimited subjectivity in the act of eating.

Ebullience is a second physical characteristic of the food which intervenes in the scene. Hemingway depicts intense energy and rupture in his image of the boiling beans—"the little bubbles were coming faster now" (140), of the coffee overflowing--"the lid came up and coffee and grounds ran down the side of the pot" (141), and of the flowing syrup--"he drank the juice syrup of the apricots, carefully at first to keep from spilling, then meditatively, sucking the apricots down" (141). This bubbling up, overflowing, and pouring bring the canned items out of their cans and Nick out of himself.

Partaking of the food, Nick is unable to speak—after tasting his spaghetti and beans, he makes only vague expletives: "Chrissie. Geezus Chrissie." I argue that this exclamation suggests that Nick has lost himself in sensation. Sheldon Norman Grebstein claims of Nick's response: "the slurred enunciation of the oath copies the cautious deliberately slack contouring of the mouth when a person eats something hot and tries to say something at the same time" (151). In this reading, Nick's speaking mouth has become an eating mouth: Nick as acting, speaking subject, is overcome by the substances he ingests. It may seem an overstatement to propose that Nick's expletive expresses a reduction to speechlessness, and an overcoming of self, rather than, simply, satisfaction. But in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), published a year later, Hemingway has a gourmand express the value of allowing oneself to be overcome by sensation, without familiarizing that sensation through speech. The sophisticated character Count Mippipopolous objects to a suggestion that a toast be made over the wine he's brought: "This wine is too good for toast-drinking, my dear. You don't want to mix emotions up with a wine like that.

You lose the taste” (134). In this comment, Hemingway purports the value of being receptive to a food’s sensations, without trying to dominate and delimit its otherness with language. When Nick fails his sensations in words, he foregoes the most basic element of human domination over nature.

Moreover, this speechlessness resonates with a few other Modernist depictions of eating worth mentioning here. In these, the eater is not just *pleased* with the food he puts into his mouth but *overcome* as a delimited subject. William Carlos Williams’s speaker is, like Nick, made inarticulate by a plate of iced plums in “This is Just to Say—.” In this famously minimalist poem, he is also reduced to utter silence, beyond reporting the sensual qualities of the fruit he has eaten “Forgive me/ they were delicious/ so sweet/ and so cold.” Wallace Stevens’s “A Dish of Peaches in Russia” also sets up a situation in which eater celebrates the merger with food: “With my whole body I taste these peaches/ I touch them and smell them. Who speaks?”<sup>13</sup> These famous gastronomical moments suggest a Modernist belief, spreading beyond Hemingway, that the act of consumption could lead to an ecstasy that permeates individual subjectivity.

In his ecstatic vision of merging with nature, Hemingway was intervening in the conditions canned food imposed upon eating. At the turn of the century, food, extracted from nature and increasingly abstracted in its sensual qualities, lost much of its own identity. As I describe below, to eat was to dominate a substance, rather than to blend with it in an act of interrelational subjectivity. To experience the nature within his food, Nick must take the cans far out into the wilderness, develop a hunger distinctive to hiking in the woods and cook in a natural way.

## Canning the Wild

It might be thought that Nick's cans serve as natural camping food. However, they are a notable choice for a proud, self-reliant outdoorsman like Hemingway to give his protagonist. In a camping trip Hemingway took around this time, he and his crew brought with them notably fewer supplies than Nick does—mostly snacks and items which would complement game, rather than meals: malted milk, German sweet chocolate, bacon and cornmeal for cooking trout (Baker 24). Camping manual writers of the time, like Horace Kephart specifically instructed campers to outfit lightly and to avoid foods with considerable water weight (he mentions two foods on Nick's menu: baked beans, which are 50% water, and canned peaches, which are 88% water (178). Nick had to fear being considered a "tenderfoot," as those who took too much equipment into the wilderness were by the masculine proponents of "woodcraft" (as skills such as camping, hunting and fishing were known at the time). And in addition to this, Nick was here breaching an ideological code as well. James Morton Turner points out that the choice to participate in woodcraft was inherently an act of liberating oneself from consumer culture and bringing a lot of factory-made provisions along defeated the point: "Relying on too many consumer goods not only weighed down the woodsman's pack, more importantly, it threatened to erode traditional skills, distance the woodsman from nature, and implicate him in a consumer economy preoccupied with profit" (465). Hemingway deliberately associates Nick with all the industrial and commercial implications of everyday eating so that he can show how these habits might be brought back to nature.

Industrialized canning began in 1825. The process endowed considerable control over the availability of foodstuffs. The food industry removed the necessity to be



sensitive to the changing, demanding conditions of nature that one is susceptible to while hunting and farming. Food preservation, in fact, constitutes one of the greatest human triumphs over nature. Sue Shephard records how it enabled the end to a nomadic lifestyle among our ancestors and allowed them “to settle down in one place and build agrarian communities where they could live in reasonable confidence that they would not go hungry through the variable seasons and the many other difficulties that nature might throw at them” (15). The invention of industrialized canning and its expansion throughout the century enabled more preservation than was previously conceivable. Today, the Can Manufacturers Institute declares on their website that “the history of the can is literally a history of Western Civilization” (Can Central). In *The Story of Canned Foods* (1924), written a year before *In Our Time*, James Collins celebrates the liberation canned products grant from limitation to local foodstuffs or to contingencies of the growing season or even to the necessity of dealing with food in its natural, raw form (as foods, instead, come ready to eat in cans). He describes a canned cornucopia:

A regular Arabian Nights garden, where raspberries, apricots, olives, and pineapples, always ripe, grow side by side with peas, pumpkins, and spinach; a garden with baked beans, vines and spaghetti bushes, and sauerkraut bed, and great cauldrons of hot soups, and through it running a branch of the ocean in which one can catch salmon, lobsters, crabs and shrimp, and dig oysters and clams. (247)

The fairy tale frame highlights the extent to which the emerging conception of eating is a human construction—nature is present only in a highly idealized form.

It is fitting that canned food was first invented for war purposes: Both the food industry and the war express an imperative of domination. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Horkheimer and Adorno describe “the logic of domination” over nature that has inhered since the Enlightenment. They express the human consequence of mistreating the earth:

“men pay for the increase of their power with alienation from that over which they exercise their power” (47). That is, to exercise dominance over something is to inhibit any genuine knowledge of or relationship with it on its own terms. The dominating attitude that began in distanced knowledge of the earth later manifested itself in nineteenth and twentieth-century technology, such as that of the canned food industry. Marcuse laments, “Certainly, nature has always been an aspect (for a long time the only one) of labor. But it was also a dimension beyond labor, a symbol of beauty, of tranquility, of a non-repressive order. Thanks to these values, nature was the very negation of the market society, with its values of profit and utility” (52).

Food, when put into cans, lost several sensual dimensions indicative of beauty and power lying beyond human purposes. For the first time, consumers were encountering packaged foods that they could not see, smell or touch at the grocer’s (Koehn 350). Unable to perceive the colors or odors of the food, and unable to taste it, customers often responded to canned food with suspicion (Strasser 35). Historian Mark Wilde suggests industrial food producers waged a war against the organic:

Variations exist in all living things, including food. The basement vintner, the weekend baker, and the backyard gardener will all testify to that. For some people such variation can be a source of wonder, a subtle reminder of nature’s complexity. On a more basic level, the diversity of foods and flavors can be among life’s richest pleasures. Yet for modern food processors, variations in the organic have been viewed as a problem. (70)<sup>14</sup>

In fact, many food commodities no longer resembled any product of nature but were rather new phenomena resulting from the particular processing methods applied to raw materials—condensed milk, for instance. Customers considered them the fruits of a company, not of nature (Goodman, Sorj and Wilkinson 60).

Moreover, advertising emerged as a new power in the food industry, via marketing trailblazers like Heinz and Lipton. It tended to abstract foods, associating them with various immaterial qualities, and with visual, rather than smell and taste qualities. Displayed in magazines, or in pictures on the package, the foodstuff's primary appeal was through vision—the most intellectual sense replaced the proximity senses' direct comprehension of food. Y.F. Tuan more recently observed a larger phenomena in which we might couch this advertising phenomenon: “We are...losing touch, in the literal sense, with nature. Children still enjoy jumping into a pile of leaves, slithering down a tree trunk, or rolling down a bank of snow. But adults have learned to enjoy nature by simply looking at it” (41).

One of Hemingway's most significant reappropriations of factory-made food is to present it without the industrialists' imprint. Without a label defining the contents, there is room to acknowledge the presence of the unnamable, sensual otherness inside. While advertising made people's access to food more vision-oriented, Hemingway makes Nick responsive to the smell and heat of his food and records Nick's overall bodily engagement in the eating process. Nick notes, for instance, of the warming beans and spaghetti, “There was a good smell” (139) and is made hungrier. Hemingway registers the haptic, moreover, as Nick anticipates the heat of the meal burning his tongue (140). And Hemingway's visual depictions are innovative because they are dynamic. He presents the meal bubbling slowly and then faster and faster to the surface; he shows it spreading across the tin plate, and then Nick “mopping the plate shiny” (140). Overall, then, the identity of Nick's canned food lies in its rich sensuality, not in its brand name.

Moreover, Nick relishes his meal. When Nick eats the apricots, Hemingway has him comment that, “They were better than fresh apricots” (141). He furthermore makes the previously mentioned expletive about the canned spaghetti and beans. These comments are notable as, according to public opinion, canned food was largely considered inferior. Historian Harvey Levenstein defines 1920s American food culture by its “revolution in declining expectations.” A 1926 Department of Commerce Survey showed that people still overwhelmingly preferred the taste of fresh food to that of canned (Levenstein, “Revolution,” 163). Against this context, Hemingway’s depiction of Nick’s ecstatic joy appears a visionary corrective to the modern eating experience, rather than descriptive of real processed tastes. We do not know what brand of spaghetti induces Nick’s ecstasy. But in an article on Italian food in America at the turn of the century, Levenstein disparages the taste of all canned spaghetti available at the time: “During the 1920s Franco-American spaghetti was joined by equally bland versions from Campbell’s, Heinz, and others” (“American” 86). Because Hemingway places Nick in a remote outdoor setting, far removed from groceries, and gives him the hard work of hiking, he is made intensely appreciative of food that would likely be unattractive in the typical modern town in which it was abundantly available. In *The Hemingway Cookbook*, Craig Boreth comments,

Never before have pork and beans been afforded such heroic status as when Nick Adams settled in to eat by the shores of Hemingway’s ‘Big Two-Hearted River.’ While this dish may seem simple and common, when eaten alone in the bush by a favorite trout stream after a long journey you may understand its ascension into the pantheon of haute cuisine *littéraire*. (13)

Nick certainly has to labor assiduously to make this meal possible in the wilderness.

Nick takes pride in doing the difficult work of preparing his meal. In the essay “Camping

Out,” published in the 1920 *Toronto Star*, Hemingway said that if a camper “goes into the woods with a frying pan, an ignorance of black flies and mosquitoes, and a great and abiding lack of knowledge about cookery” the chances are his time will be very harsh (*Dateline* 44). He continues, “Outside of insects and bum sleeping, the rock that wrecks most camping trips is cooking. The average tyro’s idea of cooking is to fry everything and fry it good and plenty” (45). Even cooking canned food, takes “knowledge of cookery” when attempted in the woods. Horace Kephart, famous early-twentieth century writer of camping manuals, tells potential campers: “One glance at a camper’s fire tells what kind of a woodsman he is. It is quite impossible to prepare a good meal over a heap of smoking chunks, a fierce blaze, or a great bed of coals that will warp iron and melt everything else” (225). Hemingway thus reverses modern conditions by endowing Nick with a hunger and separation from the sources of food, as well as preparation requirements which are distinctively un-modern, defamiliarizing and challenging. As tastiness diminished, one of the major links between humans and the outside world was being eroded; Hemingway makes Nick vulnerable again to nature’s various sensations.

The loss of sensual dimensions in canned foods, such as the non-visual senses and especially taste, register the degree to which the human subject has power over nature: the power to render it utilitarian and not be influenced by its extra-functional meanings, such as the beauty and tranquility Marcuse describes. The food industry reduced people’s ability to access to nature through foodstuffs as well, by manipulating the natural states of foods. At the far extreme of the willingness to tamper with natural foodstuffs was the attempt to fabricate synthetic nutrients and thus provide nutrition directly from chemicals. A 1926 article in *The New York Times* reported that chemists were promising, “Proteins

and carbohydrates necessary for human diet will, in the future, probably be made in the factory rather than raised, on the farm” (19 Aug 1926, 7). Another article declared, “The synthetic age is at hand and the day is not far distant when the world will be freed from the tyranny of raw materials” (22 Aug 1926, 8:3). It reported the existence of fats made from petroleum, sugars from carbon dioxide and water, and proteins from carbon dioxide, water and nitrogen. In these manifestations, food no longer provides the connection between man and nature Nick sought. If the synthetic food movement remained at the fringes, it epitomized values that were being manifested in mainstream food production. Foodstuffs produced by industry often foregrounded the science behind their recipes. Ads for Van Camp’s spaghetti, for instance, in women’s magazines of the 1920s, declared it “perfected by chemists,” and “done by scientific cookery” (Van Camp’s). We might place this view to synthetic nourishment within the larger movement of the “New Nutrition.” The discovery of vitamins and minerals at the beginning of the century enabled people to employ a principle of substitution in their food choices. Sharing this abstractable value, it seems inevitable that foods, like commodities, would lose the aura they previously held.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the alienating qualities of canned food, Hemingway connects Nick to nature through food. Nick had combined his meal of canned goods with elements of the natural world around him and he approached it in a way that showed his hunger for and dependence on the fruits of nature. It is, to a considerable extent, through his food that Nick achieves the journey Brogger describes from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism. It takes Part II of the story, however, in which Nick engages in the trout fishing he came to the wilderness for, to make his transition complete.

### **Fishing for Connection**

Nick achieves his ultimate connection with nature, from out of his alienated modern state, in Part II of the story. When he wakes up in the morning, he again eats food he has brought, but in a way that integrates the processed edibles with nature: He prepares a breakfast and lunch to which he brings the river water. He makes his pancakes with that water and for lunch he prepares an onion sandwich which he eats on a log in the river and dips into the river before eating. His main activity of the day, though, is to seek food from that river itself. In his depiction of this endeavor, Hemingway places Nick in a position of complete awareness of and dependence on the nonhuman, natural world from which his food comes.

Nature writers frequently present eating in the wild as a central act by which they achieve communion with nature, thus demonstrating Merleau-Ponty's description of the sensing subject and object sensed merging in an act of sensation. In Hemingway's time, camping manuals and wilderness narratives such as Theodore Roosevelt's *Ranch-life and the Hunting Trail* (1888), and Ernest Seton Thompson's several early twentieth-century wilderness guides and naturalist reflections, as well as new nature magazines like *Field and Stream* all celebrated eating from the wild as part of the outdoor experience. The underlying ethos of these works is aptly expressed by Thoreau, whose writings were published in full during Hemingway's time. He professed that he went to nature to "live deep and suck the marrow of life." In a journal entry of 1845 he wrote that eating directly from nature while in the wilderness, "became a sacrament, a method of communion, an ecstatic exercise, a mingling of bloods, and [a] sitting at the communion table of the world" (I: 372). In 1851 he encouraged the readers of his journal to, "But taste the world

and digest it” (II:295). In a recent article on the contemporary anthropologist and writer Richard Nelson, Sue Ellen Campbell considers this desire of naturalists to combine with nature through food. She points to such lines of Nelson’s as, “Like the alder and spruce, the brown bear and black oystercatcher, the mink and great horned owl, I bring the earth inside myself as food. The bedrock of this island becomes soil, feeds the skunk cabbage and marigold, then becomes deer bone and muscle...then becomes me” (17). Campbell contends that Nelson represents many contemporary wilderness writers in “his desire to erase our sense that there is a gap, an opposition, between nature and culture, body and text, ourselves and the wilderness, to intuit instead that all is joined in one vast web of life and death” (17). A look at Hemingway’s own family history as well as various comments he made throughout his life suggests he likely took such an attitude himself.

Hemingway’s father, for instance, provided an example of how one might eat directly from the wild. Hemingway’s sister Marcelline recalls a story her father loved to tell about cooking a surprise dinner for friends during a journey through the Smokey Mountains. He not only shot the partridge and squirrel, which he fried in cornmeal, but also devised a way to steal honey right out of beehives which he mixed with wild blackberries to make a pie. Later on he regularly brought the family unusual game to eat, including woodchuck, opossum, fried squirrel and turtle meat and eggs (Sanford 22).

Throughout his life Hemingway’s own food preferences revealed the influence of this tradition. He reports refusing to eat anything but meat and fish when young (*Letters* 727). And late in life, in a letter to Charles Scribner in 1951, he said:

I only like to eat at sea or in the hills where I get hungry. What I really like is good fresh fish, grilled, good steaks (not those comic steaks they have bred for slob to eat so they have no taste but only size) but good steaks with the bone and very rare. Good lamb, rare. Elk, mountain sheep venison and antelope in that



order and grouse, young sage-hen, quail and teal, canvasback and mallards in that order. (728)

This preference for wild game, and a joy in the hunting this necessitates, places Hemingway and many of his characters in a dependent relationship to nature. It is not Hemingway's personal history alone which predisposed him to defy the food industry and posit the human reliance on nature. Contemporary ecological theory also described the relationship between human and nature in a way akin to the interrelational subjectivity I have been describing.

Beeman and Pritchard in their history of ecology, *A Green and Permanent Land* (2001), record how a battle cry of interdependence among ecological activists reached "virtual cult status" from the 1920s through the 1940s (21). This brand of environmentalism replaced the anthropocentric conservationism of Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot and stressed the interconnectedness of all things as a reason for treating the land with respect (Beeman and Pritchard 22). Conservationist Henry A. Wallace proclaimed a "declaration of interdependence" in 1934 and conservationist Stuart Chase asserted, "We are creatures of this earth, and so are part of all our prairies, mountains, rivers, and clouds" (qtd. in Beeman and Pritchard 22). The founding manifesto of Friends of the Land, a conservation organization, declared in 1940: "Any land is all of one body. If one part is skinned, bared to the beat of the weather, wounded, not only the winds spread the trouble, dramatically, but the surface veins and arteries of the nation, its streams and rivers, bear ill...We too, are all of one body. We all live on, or from, the soil" (qtd. in Beeman and Pritchard 22). The idea here is that the land is not something we should merely condescend to respect, but is rather inextricably intertwined with our own bodies, a philosophy which Nick's intimacy with nature clearly demonstrates.

Getting his dinner by fishing puts Nick in a dependent position, opposed to the aggressiveness of warring and the food industry. It might be argued of this fishing theme that, far from connecting Nick to any natural mode of eating, hunting makes him all the more a soldier. In this vein, Glen Love's *Practical Ecocriticism* charts Hemingway's complex relationship to the environment. While acknowledging Hemingway's protest against deforestation and declarations of awe for the earth in his stories, Love contends that, Hemingway's "kill record" as a hunter and fisher including lions, leopards, buffalo, rhinoceros, kudu, sable, bears, elk, grizzly bears, marlin, tuna, dolphin, turtles and a whale constituted a "war against the earth" (122). He ultimately decides that, "Nature exists in Hemingway's life and work primarily as a backdrop for aggressive and destructive individualism, the same individualism which, written large, has authored ecological devastation and poisoned the organic origins of the contemporary society" (123). It is only late in life, Love says, that Hemingway gave up hunting for sport, saying in a 1951 essay, "The Shot," "the author of this article, after taking a long time to make up his mind, and admitting his guilt on all counts, believes it is a sin to kill any non-dangerous game animal except for meat" (qtd. in Love, 131).

Whatever Hemingway may have been doing in his own life, he places Nick in a position of humility and awe before nature. In "Big Two-Hearted River," he fishes for food, not just sport. Hemingway writes, "He had one good trout. He did not care about getting many trout" (152). He distinguishes Nick from anglers who lack respect for the fish by having Nick disparage those who carelessly touch the trout though it causes a mortal fungus to grow on their skin. Also, he tosses the innards of his catch for the minks to find. Moreover, Hemingway depicts the hunter's subject position as one of humility,

rather than aggression. Opposed to the seeming complete control consumers of canned food can have over their food, the hunter/fisher must be a watcher and beseecher of nature.

First of all, weather, which partially determines the behaviors of animals and the ease of tracking them, cannot be controlled but only endured. The natural migration patterns must be studied and submitted to. The random whim of the animal, which can ultimately be neither predicted nor controlled for, plays as great a role in the outcome as does the hunter's skill. In fact, waiting on animals for great lengths of time, with great expenditures of effort, and often, desperation, Hemingway repeatedly attributes success in hunting to mere luck, rather than human prowess. He comments on his hunting in *Green Hills of Africa* in a telling way: "Now it is pleasant to hunt something that you want very much over a long period of time, being outwitted, out-maneuvered, and failing at the end of each day, but having the hunt and knowing every time you are out that, sooner or later your luck will change and that you will get the chance that you are seeking" (11). His language first seems to describe an inviting challenge to his power and will, but the claim ends without profession of power, only luck. Some of Hemingway's most famous work, such as the bulk of *Green Hills of Africa* and *Old Man and the Sea*, describe this process of waiting things out, quietly and obediently. In this way hunting is not an assertion of the will, but a humble beseeching.

In "Big Two-Hearted River," Nick has respect, even awe, for the trout. The first trout he attempts to catch actually overpowers him: Nick baits him but fails to reel him in. Nick describes the trout: "Solid as a rock. He felt like a rock, too, before he started off. By God, he was a big one. By God, he was the biggest one I ever heard of" (151). As

with his dinner, he reaches at expletives to describe his sense of being overcome. Nick further elaborates, “There was a heaviness, a power not to be held” (150). Unlike animals and plants processed in food industries, packaged and labeled, this fish is uncontainable.

Nick is aware of fish as having not just taste or calories, but a *life* he will incorporate into himself in the act of eating. He uses the word “alive” several times to describe a later fish he does succeed in reeling in: “the rod bending alive,” “pumping alive against the current,” and “the big trout, alive in the water” (152) and, “hard to hold, alive, in his hand” (155). Ever since he crosses the burn line at the story’s beginning, Nick is consistently impressed with the livingness of the natural world around him. First moving past the burn line, he noted, “Then it was sweet fern, growing ankle high, to walk through, and clumps of jack pines; a long undulating country with frequent rises and descents, sandy underfoot and the country alive again” (136). Healing from his own wound, he receives new life from nature in the form of fish he will eat. This is a literal application of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of subject blending with the thing observed. Even when he has skinned and gutted this and his second trout and he holds them back in the water, he comments that “they looked like live fish” (155), indicating he does not feel he has conquered or appropriated them, but is only sharing the life within them.

Finally, whereas the canned items he ate for dinner contained ingredients hailing from around the world (coffee, apricots, tomatoes, and beans), the trout is a food endemic to the Great Lakes region. Nick thus interweaves himself in the local ecosystem. Rather than imposing upon nature with man-made goods, which would intrude upon its ecosystem, Nick eats of the natural world as he finds it. Thus, in the act of fishing for his dinner, Nick completes the process of connecting to nature, something truly non-human

and other than himself, through food. Out in this sparse environment, burned to the ground and starting again, Hemingway restores the power of nature and bridges man's alienation from it. He brings canned food, in the spirit of the contemporary ecological movement, "back to nature."

Hemingway reflected, shortly before writing "The Big Two-Hearted River," "I have discovered that there is romance in food when romance has disappeared from everywhere else. And so long as my digestion holds out I will follow that romance" (qtd. in Underhill and Nakjavani 88). The comment underscores Hemingway's belief in the unique potential of food to excite, engage and connect, even within the context of the modern wasteland embodied in the burned Seney woods. "Romance" evokes the unattainable. Whereas industry made food eminently attainable, inauthentic and boring, Hemingway positions it in nature in order to render it part of something too big to ever consume. The eating of his humble soldier-protagonist constitutes not so much the consumption of an isolatable entity but a connection with a larger physical world and thus a return to an intersubjective positioning. Katherine Mansfield similarly envisions eating as a potentially ecstatic experience that brings people forth from their delimited subjectivities and facilitates connections. She goes a step further, though, in imagining connections not only with the food itself but also with other eaters.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Granted, the diet of Americans was made less monotonous in some aspects by the introduction of the condiments, jams and sauces that Heinz, Campbell's and others introduced (Alberts 41), but polls overall registered that people found foods in cans to be less tasty, as Levenstein documents and I will discuss below.

<sup>2</sup> New technology enabled the "crimping" of cans by a machine, so that they did not have to be manually soldered. This initiated a skyrocketing of can production. With the old method one worker could turn out a maximum of 1500 cans per day. By 1910 a single machine could produce 35000/day.

<sup>3</sup> Modernist poets staged their disregard by ignoring it altogether. Food in turn-of-the-century poems, for the most part, may as well have come from the Garden of Eden. T.S. Eliot's Prufrock dares to eat a peach, William Carlos Williams' speaker eats iced plums from the ice box, Wallace Stevens' a dish of peaches in Russia and H.D. writes of pear trees.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the Landscapes of Thought*, Ed. by Suzanne L. Cataldi and William S. Hamrick.

<sup>5</sup> Reading Nick's meal in this way, he describes the "chronologically ordered, mechanical, deliberate movements which begin to wear on one's nervous system" and "the pulsating monotony of the sentence-cadence" as betraying "a terrible panic...just barely under control" (45-46).

<sup>6</sup> Malcolm Cowley's theory was influential in this regard. He placed Hemingway's story within a tradition of American writers—Poe, Hawthorne and Melville—who invoke ritual to keep evil at bay (Smith 89).

In this vein, it might be noted that the 1916 U.S. *Manual for Army Cooks* stresses the importance of order in the mess: "The table must be set with care and kept scrupulously neat. Order in the dining room and conduct at the table are influenced by the care with which arrangements are made for the reception of the men" (U.S. War Department 110).

<sup>7</sup> Even his trauma itself may be not wholly war-based, but also ecologically-motivated. Hemingway scholar Susan Beegel has questioned the critical tendency to focus on just one of these, to "attribute [Hemingway's] elegiac stance to World War I and not to the disappearance of tall grass prairie land by the growth of Chicago and trees for timber from his beloved Michigan woods" (54).

<sup>8</sup> It should be remembered that though Hemingway is frequently depicted with a gun in his hand, he wrote some of the greatest anti-war fiction of his time. In the introduction to his anthology of literature on war, Hemingway sums up World War I: "The last war, during the years 1915, 1916, 1917 was the most colossal, murderous, mismanaged butchery that has ever taken place on earth" (*Men at War* xiv-xv).

<sup>9</sup> Hemingway writes in the preface to an anthology of short stories about war he edited: “The last war, during the years 1915, 1916, 1917 was the most colossal, murderous, mismanaged butchery that has ever taken place on earth” (xiv-xv).

<sup>10</sup> Italian-American soldier Angelo Pelligrino noted that after World War I his fellow American soldiers begged their mothers to learn from his mother how to cook pasta, though they had belittled the cuisine before the war (66). The war association of this food must have been particularly strong for Hemingway, who was also stationed on the Italian front and served spaghetti at mess (and even at the return party his family threw for him) (Baker 41, 58).

<sup>11</sup> Hemingway himself has regularly been deigned a primitive; for many he has appeared to blend in with the nature he speaks of. Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, for instance, remarked upon the immediate force his works impressed upon readers: “in contact with the earth and nature, big enough to bear the heavy apparatus of society and industry; it crosses the old stone Europe and iron America like a joyful rhinoceros who has taken its morning bath and rushes to its breakfast” (149).

<sup>12</sup> Though it is an idea foreign to us now, onions were also seen by some to have relaxing affects. In his widely-read camping manual, *Camping and Woodcraft* (1917), Kephart advises that they can be taken along anywhere: “Onions are good for the suddenly overtaxed system, relieve the inordinate thirst that one experiences the first day or two, and assist excretion” (194-5). Moreover, with the onions, Hemingway enters the realm of raw vegetables. Marcelline Hemingway reflects in her memoirs that the Hemingway children were taught to take onions from the ground: “Daddy taught us that wild onions pulled from the ground and smoothed through one’s fingers to remove the clinging black earth made a wonderful sandwich with plain bread and butter” (33).

<sup>13</sup> Todd Balazic writes about how well this testament to peaches bears out the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (114).

<sup>14</sup> He offers the example of process cheese, developed by Kraft for use by the US military during World War I, pasteurized at such high temperatures, never ripened or aged (142). It was cheese without personality.

<sup>15</sup> War-time rationing especially played up this exchangeability of foodstuffs: bread and meat, symbolic to northern hemisphere culture, both literally and metaphorically considered its nourishment and strength, were now rationed foods. Women’s magazines like *Good Housekeeping* made a nationalist project of producing recipes that substituted beans for meat and buckwheat and oats for wheat.

**CHAPTER II**  
**EMOTIONS AND JAM: SWEETS, SNACKS AND FEELING IN THE STORIES**  
**OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD**

In her early short story “Violet” (1913), Katherine Mansfield presents a striking food simile. The narrator, who is in a pension for her nerves, is censured by a friend for denying her emotions. The former explains that she is in fact able to access her feelings selectively: “I keep them tucked away, and only produce them very occasionally, like special little pots of jam, when the people whom I love come to tea” (*Collected Stories* 587). This jam jar simile is not arbitrary: It applies, in a surprisingly literal way, to a large number of stories Mansfield went on to write. Her characters’ repressed, alienated feelings are repeatedly unleashed via encounters with food. Characters who feel that their bodies or passions are alienated from society find themselves engaged with and drawn out of themselves by the sensual stimulation of edibles. As with the jam, Mansfield most frequently locates this power in non-nutritious, non-pragmatic, sweet and snack foods.

Alienation constitutes a major theme in numerous turn-of-the-century artworks and philosophies. Karl Marx (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* 1844) theorized the alienated conditions of labor and the alienation of consumers from their own desires, Emile Durkheim (*The Division of Labor in Society* 1893), an anomie that left modern people rootless and Georg Simmel (*Philosophy of Money* 1907), an abstract money economy that cultivated in people an objective, cold, uninvolved, intellectual relationship with things and people around them (Israel 122). While the causes vary, together they suggest the struggle to explain a dominant turn-of-the-century mood.

Mansfield’s stories participate in this struggle. Her biographer, Claire Tomalin defines it as her dominant tenor:



The particular stamp of her fiction is...the isolation in which each character dwells. Failure to understand or be understood is endemic in Mansfield. Foreigners misinterpret one another, adults and children are at cross purposes, gulfs of incomprehension separate wives from husbands. Neither happiness nor pain is shared very much, or for very long. (*KM* 6)

Particular conditions of estrangement vary and are never articulated outright; alienation in her stories does not fit neatly into any of the above formula. Pamela Dunbar contends Mansfield's was rather a "Modernist belief that loneliness is an essential aspect of the human condition" (58).

My interest is in how her stories use food to respond to the modernist mood of alienation. Hemingway healed Nick, alienated via his national and economic positioning within a logic of domination, by bringing him forth phenomenologically, connecting him directly to the natural world through his senses. So too does Mansfield bring characters alienated from *society* by an underlying early twentieth-century mood with various manifestations, into sensual communion with objects. In the best cases, alienated characters are then further brought into sensual communion with others. As does Hemingway, she depicts an ecstasy which, upon encounter with the food, dissolves the subject and calls her forth into such configurations of communion.

In order to bring the sensual to the fore, Hemingway divested his foods of their modernist packaging; Mansfield liberates them from their traditional social context: the meal. The foods which are most sensually stimulating are extra-prandial snacks and sweets. Existing outside the various hegemonic social configurations and decorum enforced by meals, they allot liberating spaces to characters. Mansfield's characters snack, encountering food outside of structure and convention.

Like the other Modernist texts I explore, Mansfield's fiction is consistently rooted in small, concrete objects and sensations.<sup>1</sup> These snacks and sweets incline towards intractable sense qualities. Expansive, they fill a room with smell or color. Their ponderous presence is too much to ever totally eat. Characters escape alienation not by consuming and thus annihilating, but by merging with this presence. A brief foray into the sensual can be transgressive, for in our sensory experiences we encounter the world in a way which cannot be abstractly summarized or governed, as I discussed in the Introduction. Herein lies the liminality of the senses, their hovering between nature and culture. It is this that explains the doors they open to a space beyond the status quo.

Mansfield's influences and interests positioned her to posit this authenticity and salience in sensation. Virginia Woolf, herself a master writer of the physical world, said that Mansfield "possessed the most amazing senses of her generation" (qtd. in Nathan 93).<sup>2</sup> Sydney Janet Kaplan discusses how Mansfield was deeply influenced by the *fin de siècle* Aestheticism movement and by Bergson. In the founding Aestheticist manifesto, *The Renaissance*, Walter Pater contends that sense experience is more authentic and revelatory than abstract philosophical knowledge.<sup>3</sup> In her youth Mansfield was greatly impressed by Pater's disciple Oscar Wilde and copied many of his injunctions in her notebooks. One was: "To deny the body is to castrate the mind" (qtd. in Kaplan 23). Kaplan notes, in fact, that Mansfield seeks to transform her own subjectivity in writing about objects, to become the very things she writes about (182). Kaplan suggests that she adopts Bergson's principle which he called "the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible" (182). This is an important observation, but our

understanding of the degree of sympathy with objects her stories advocated is even further illuminated by the use of a phenomenological model. While Bergson suggests emotional and intellectual blending, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology suggests there is no self to pre-exist such object encounters.

Two book-length studies have been devoted to food in Mansfield's work, which underscores the prominence of the theme. Both, like mine, consider eating in terms of alienation; but they focus on scenes which evince, rather than subvert alienation. Diane McGee in *Writing the Meal*, focuses on meals in Mansfield's work, arguing that there is a dissolution of this traditional ritual which should serve as a social adhesive. This leaves characters estranged, and, moreover, when characters are left to eat *outside* of meals they feel lonely and hungry and unfulfilled.<sup>4</sup> In the human encounter with sensual food matter itself in Mansfield's stories, McGee sees only ephemeral and superficial satisfaction: in the absence of a satisfying social context, the eating is meaningless<sup>5</sup> Characters' preoccupations with what she regards as mere object matter reveal "the tenuousness of their accommodation with life, the fine line between joy and despair" (90). Patricia Moran in *Word of Mouth* engages more deeply with Mansfield's presentation of the human relation to food as physical substance. She posits that Mansfield shows food to threaten female characters alienated from their bodies.<sup>6</sup> Moran delineates a theme in Mansfield of gluttonous, cannibalistic eating behavior displayed by unfavorable, domineering characters. Moran argues that Mansfield showcases such illustrations of eating in order to present the body as intrusive upon one's spiritual identity and threatening to one's contained subjectivity.<sup>7</sup>

While the above critical angles shed light on some scenes of eating within Mansfield's stories, there are others they do not explain at all. Mansfield's work is thoroughly sensitive and precise, and does repeatedly account for particular social contexts and ideologies which alienate characters from food, but I posit that a much more salient theme is that of sensual ebullience with food. In these situations, I argue, female (and male) characters do not perceive their bodies' desires for food as *threatening* to their subjectivity, as in the scenes Moran discusses, but in fact rejoice to be drawn out of themselves in sensual ecstasy. Moreover, Mansfield does not present their interest in food as derivative of their alienation from purportedly more important things (such as human relations, as in McGee's analysis) but rather as a meaningful alternative for engaging the world around them. My argument seeks to distinguish between the scene of isolation in which characters eat, and the sensual substance they partake of. In the stories McGee and Moran emphasize, food as a substance in its own right is mostly elided: Their emphasis remains on circumstances food: the uneven distribution of food, the politics of preparing food, or feelings about food. My chapter argues that sensual qualities of food--the texture of cake, the color of soup, the curves of fruit and so forth--are subversive of their social contexts, engaging characters bodily, allowing them to transcend various alienating hegemonic conditions of their meals. Interestingly, characters are then able to connect more genuinely through sense, rather than through formal structures.<sup>8</sup> Her food ecstasy ultimately has political and social relevance because it imagines a way out of the prevalent Modernist mood of alienation; it engages characters who would be otherwise disengaged or uninvolved with each other.<sup>9</sup>

I begin this chapter by establishing the British meal of Mansfield's time an instrument of social conformity. I then proceed to show how Mansfield envisions liberating sensation to exist outside of this social structure, via the eating of sweets and snacks, by looking at three stories from her collection *Bliss and Other Stories* (1919). When eating snacks and sweets, alienated characters achieve an intersubjectivity with food, and in the best cases, with others. Of the first story, "Sun and Moon," I argue Mansfield juxtaposes children's sensual apprehension of food with bourgeois commodity relations. In the second, "Bliss," I show that she corrects a distanced, acerbic bohemian art-for-art's sake aesthetic with an involved, embodied "food-for-food's sake" aesthetic.<sup>10</sup> In the third, "Psychology," she intervenes on disembodied ideas of psychology via a presentation of intellectuals eating. In each story the eater (or, at times, perceiver) of the food is brought forth from an alienated, delimited body—enforced by the hegemonic structure of the meal—and ushered into direct communion with his or her sensual world through food.

### **Sweet and Savory: The Food History**

In most societies, meals are one of the principle rituals of social cohesion. James Brown summarizes the social role of the meal as such:

Just as the mother serves as the infant's first introduction to the world, so the table becomes the locus of his initiation into society...and eating figures as an act of identification with one's compatriots and adherence to their values. Society maintains and perpetuates itself at the table: eating is a form of apprenticeship by which the child acquires the customs, manners, and beliefs of his fellow countrymen. (qtd. in Keeling 132)

In this way, as Mansfield's fiction reflects, food serves the conservative role of maintaining and perpetuating particular social conditions.

Mansfield, like Woolf, grew up in a culture in which meals were especially prescribed. Born to a bourgeois family in 1888, Mansfield would have been subjected to particularly decorous Victorian eating norms. What has been called the Victorian “rite” of the meal was a highly circumscribed event that limited the eater’s encounter with the sensuality of the food. Historian and writer Colin Spencer extrapolates on how the Victorian middle-class was nervous of pleasure: “any outward exhibition of pleasure should be controlled, so a sensual appreciation of food, any rolling around the mouth of an oyster for example, would be deeply shocking” (289). One was required to eat slowly and carefully, displaying no perceptible reaction to the food. That this system could only operate via constant suppression of more immediate feelings is evident:

A social dinner party was viewed as a minefield where the civilized veneer could crack to show the Darwinian beast beneath. There was nervousness as to what food could do to one. Food should be tamed to make it powerless, and the only effective way of doing that was to make it uninteresting and unattractive.(289)

While more of Mansfield’s stories deal with twentieth-century meals than Victorian ones, the residue of repression remains. Whether she is describing a meal in bourgeois society in which foodstuffs are commodities, or a meal in bohemian culture in which foodstuffs are fodder for abstract discussion and art, the meal is rarely a social structure which accommodates sensual otherness, existing with physical matter outside of social configurations. From bourgeois to bohemian society, the social structure of the meal itself is conservative and systematically quells the chaotic potential of sense.

One meal, of many in Mansfield’s work, which exemplifies such alienation can be seen in “Daughters of the Late Colonel” (*Garden Party* 1922). Mansfield here presents two elderly single women, Constantina and Josephine, who have spent their entire lives in the house of their patriarchal, commandeering father, kowtowing to convention. When

the latter passes away, the daughters invite his nurse to stay for awhile, even though this necessitates formal dinners and they would prefer to eat in their rooms at their whim. Nurse Andrews' acceptance of their invitation necessitates their adherence to the norms of the meal: It "meant they had to have regular sit-down meals at the proper times...and meal-times now that the strain was over were rather a trial" (54). As they must politely sit through Nurse Andrews' trying habits with the butter and the marmalade, the daughters escape into imaginative realms. Josephine stares at the table cloth "as if she saw a minute strange insect creeping through the web of it"; Constantia gazes in the distance, "far over the desert, to where that line of camels unwound like a thread of wool" (54). Outwardly regimented by decorum, each character remains internally in her own world. They are alienated from each other and from the sensations of the food which would call them out of themselves into interaction.

Occasionally, Mansfield's stories narrate the intervention of sense on the social structure of the meal. But the sensations involved in eating generally only strongly move characters when they eat under more independent conditions. During the early twentieth century, people increasingly ate outside of meals: Long formal meals began to lessen in length and complexity, partially due to women's liberation and the servant shortage, as I mentioned in Chapter 1. Meanwhile, commercially produced snack foods began to proliferate.<sup>11</sup> Historian Derek Oddy notes that chocolate bars, chocolate biscuits, and snack biscuits became available for journeys, picnics and holidays (105). In the interwar years a plethora of confectionary brands came into being (104). Similarly, fish and chip stands began to materialize for quick eating at the seaside, the park, or along the street

(106).<sup>12</sup> These increased the opportunities for eating independently and for pleasure, rather than for purposes of social ritual and nurturance.

Sweetness was a prevalent quality of these snack foods. At the turn of the century, sucrose was newly affordable and hugely popular with the bulk of the British population. Sugar and sugary products had become an essential part of the British national diet. By 1913 the average Brit was eating fifty-five pounds of sugar annually, a pound of sugar per week (Oddy 12). This quick energy is the very opposite, I would argue, of the laborious Victorian meal. It is a burst of energy with no strings attached; it can be ingested quickly and simply by individuals on their own. Anthropologist Sydney Mintz, in fact, suggests that this high-energy foodstuff emblemizes a fast-paced modernity (187).

Mansfield depicts sugar as elevating not only to the body but to the whole person. Recent theorists have postulated on the general transcendence such extreme tastes enable. Cultural phenomenologist Steven Connor proposes the sensation sweets produce is so strong it is ineffable: “Sweets are of course beyond words. All sweets are gobstoppers” (“Sweets”). As was the case with Nick Adams, we see repeatedly in Mansfield’s stories that, brought to a point of speechlessness, a human subject is dissolved. In the strong taste which overcomes the taster, sweets are forces of personal expansion in Mansfield. They oppose the forces of conservatism represented in the meal. Anthropologist Pasi Falk suggests that extreme tastes--foods which sting of the spicy, are foreign and strange, or extremely sweet-- overcome us. Forbidden fruit, Falk continues, involves “a confrontation with the ‘uncontrolled,’ the incorporation of which challenges the eater’s role thus endangering his or her bodily boundaries” and causing a situation in which “the



eater is overwhelmed by (the tastes of) food-allowing himself to be consumed by the experience” (88). Because it is so stimulating and indulgent, it is particularly suspect to social regulation. Claude Fischler suggests, that like alcohol, “sweets require a clear social context and meaning in order to be perfectly proper” (90). He says, “he or she who eats sweets alone runs the risk of incurring implicit reprobation for indulging in solitary pleasure, one that is not put to any useful, legitimate social use” (90). Mansfield’s stories explore the effects of introducing such a stimulant, unchecked by the social structure of the meal, into human relations.<sup>13</sup>

To return to my previous example, elsewhere in “Daughters of the Late Colonel,” Mansfield depicts eating outside of the alienating context of a formal meal. It is a tea for which the fare consists of bracingly sweet luxuries, which stimulate the previously uninvolved daughters. Mansfield’s descriptions of their behaviors suggests the food brings them forth from themselves. Polite, decorous, prescribed subjects at dinner, here Josephine is “reckless” and Constantia “winces.” Though the eating here is technically at a meal--the tea meal-- it follows the logic of snacks as everything eaten is extra-nutritious and no ruling presence or cause to adhere to order. Without their father or any guests necessitating formality, tea becomes an opportunity to give their feelings play in stimulating sensations. Mansfield depicts both women at the moment of cutting into the food, thus breaking open its borders and beginning the process of incorporating it. The thrill of this imminent merger is underscored by the language. Mansfield writes, “Josephine cut recklessly into the rich dark cake that stood for her winter gloves or the soling and heeling of Constantia’s only respectable shoes” (62). She says that Constantia, “winced faintly as she broke through the shell of hers” (63). Food here is not a *symbol* of

mental or emotional changes that incur in this unregulated meal; there is nothing else to explain the change. Food is its very occasion. It is in a liberated context, here and in the stories discussed below, that characters can attain a liberated encounter with food. Otherwise oppressed by society's central ritual of conformity, characters suddenly find themselves engaged with the world around them.

### **Housing Transgressions**

In the short story "Sun and Moon," Mansfield writes about a dinner party but without depicting the dinner itself--only the sedulous preparations and the mess left afterwards. In this way, she can engage the food outside its social occasion, which in this case is one of lavish bourgeois consumption. She undermines the meal by telling the story from the point of view of those excluded from the occasion: Rather than focus on the perspective of adults who give the party, she charts the point of view of their two young children, Sun and Moon. Having no stake in the party's social relations and no status to gain from their commodities, their whole concern is with the reconfiguration of their house and sensescape. Their parents' society will potentially alienate them from objects by configuring them as commodities. Mansfield shows Sun and Moon outside the socially instructive context of the meal, sensually engaged with objects.

The childlike daughters of the late colonel a case in point, it is often children in Mansfield's stories who are most receptive to the sensual stimulation of foods. Children of course, being young and fresh, have had less social conditioning than their parents. Victorian and early twentieth-century British society perceived children to be too vulnerable to the primal passions to trust with stimulating food. Spencer remarks:

The Victorians felt certain that they were highly civilized; anything untouched by civilisation made them nervous and not a little frightened. Darwin's theory of

evolution with its suggestion that the primate was a distant cousin seemed at first horrific and blasphemous. Children too could be untamed and unruly, not unlike that primate at times, and so they were punished severely, beaten and starved, to crush the devil within. (290)

It was by this logic, Spencer points out, that children were denied stimulating treats. The social framework seems structured to disallow children's pleasure in food. Sun and Moon's response to the party preparations can be taken as paradigmatic of the childish reaction to food in Mansfield's stories.<sup>14</sup>

Mansfield renders party food wondrous by depicting it from these children's inexperienced eyes and outside its familiar function and context in the meal. She records conceiving of the story in a dream, which further elucidates its fantastical nature: "I saw a supper table with eyes of 5. It was awfully queer—especially a plate of half melted ice cream" (*CLKM* II 66). Cherry Hankin has documented how Mansfield frequently identified as a child well into adulthood. Hankin argues that, if the extent of Mansfield's interest in childhood was idiosyncratic, the interest itself was a product of her age. The Edwardians had a deep nostalgia for childhood and the innocence it represented during their era of modern changes and looming war (28). However, Mansfield departed from her age in depicting the complexity of the childish mind in her fiction, "thinking herself unsentimentally into the mental processes of actual children" (33). Hankin's observation illuminates "Sun and Moon." Here the sensual wonders of a "supper table with the eyes of 5" have very grave bearings, suggesting to Sun's vulnerable mind, not just festive playfulness but an ideal reconfiguration of reality.

The explanation for the surprisingly sober attitude Sun assumes towards the gastronomical creations before him can be sought in the alienated conditions of childhood. In his family, the children play especially little role. Their mother's

indifference to them is shown in the fact that she only has time to say to them, “Get out of my way, children!” while rushing to prepare for her party (*Bliss* 117). During the festivities themselves, the mother instructs the maid to dress the children in lavish, demeaning costumes and make them then sit still and wait to be called. Mansfield underscores their sense of alienation by depicting them seated at a little table, listening to carriages arriving and the great mirth of guests convening below. Called down only momentarily to be coddled by guests, the children figure as mere possessions amongst their parents’ wealth.

Their parents do not invite Sun and Moon to engage with them, but the food, among the other sensual alterations to the house, does arouse the children’s interest and invite them into sensual interaction. Sun and Moon are culled by the strange curiosities: They cannot fit the altered sights and sounds of their house into familiar concepts and so the party preparations exist for them as wondrous, irreducible inexplicable sensual stimuli. Linguist Linda Pilliere proposes that Mansfield registers Sun and Moon’s failure to apprehend their surroundings at a linguistic level. She notes, for instance, that most of their lexical terms lack precision—they think through vague and piecemeal concepts like “bits” and “blobs” and “stuff.” Moreover, their observations are always sensual (147). The children’s liberation from the party and its socially-inscribed meal, I am arguing, inheres in this inability to perceive in the ways their society and language have prescribed. Their minds do not translate the sensual transformation into common words or social meanings.

Mansfield rather portrays the children as capable of accessing what Heidegger called things-in-themselves. Merleau-Ponty posits this ability as fundamental to the phenomenological experience:

When I glance at the objects surrounding me in order to find my bearings and locate myself among them, I can scarcely be said to come within reach of the world's instantaneous aspect. I identify here the door, there the window, over there my table, all of which are the props and guides of a practical intention directed elsewhere, and which are therefore given to me simply as meanings. But when I contemplate an object with the sole intention of watching it exist and unfold its riches before my eyes, then it ceases to be an allusion to a general type, and I become aware that each perception...reenacts on its own account the birth of intelligence and has some creative genius about it: in order that I may recognize the tree as a tree, it is necessary that, beneath this familiar meaning, the momentary arrangement of the visible scene should begin all over again, as on the very first day of the vegetable kingdom, to outline the individual idea of this tree. (49)

Freeing things from their social and categorical meanings, in this space outside the meal, Mansfield brings everything freshly to life again and posits the children's engagement with this as more story-worthy than the party itself.

Mansfield thus depicts children's sensual perceptions of food, which were revealed to her in a dream, to socially-conditioned, perhaps sensually-blind, adult readers. Both children walk around in awe as their whole house is turned upside down— she describes chairs being brought into the house “with their legs in the air,” a man sitting at the piano but not playing it, just banging it and looking inside, and people walking with flowerpots on their heads (*Bliss* 117). The greatest transformations happen in the kitchen. The family's cook invites the children to witness the “wonderful things” she and the guest chef are preparing for the feast. Before them the chef reveals “whole fishes, with their heads and eyes and tails still on, he sprinkled with red and green and yellow bits; he made squiggles all over the jellies, he stuck a collar on a ham and put a very thin sort of

fork in it; he dotted almonds and tiny round biscuits on the creams” (117-18). To the children, colors are appearing out of their normal contexts, sizes disproportionate, shapes, squiggles and dotting, playful. Endowing the fish with eyes and the ham with a collar, Mansfield presents the food as nearly alive to them. The cook proceeds to usher the children into the dining room where they witness the table setting. The table appears an alternative universe laid out before them. They see the lights turned into red roses, a lake in the middle of the table with rose petals floating on it, lions with fruit on their backs, salt cellar birds drinking out of basin, glasses winking, plates shining and knives sparkling (118). Mansfield writes: “Sun and Moon were almost frightened. They wouldn’t go up to the table at first; they just stood at the door and made eyes at it” (118). The strangeness of the food and of the eating environment, its existence outside the children’s own categories, makes it assertive and stimulating. The food and its accoutrements, however light and playful, initiate what Mansfield presents as quite a serious transgression of the children’s familiar world. Full of nameless sensation they cannot define or control, they are phenomenologically overcome. In their confusion and wonder they exist in communion with, not in domination of, the things around them. Mansfield positions their relationship to things in direct opposition to their parents’ commodity ownership.

The pinnacle of these striking food objects is an iced pudding, which Mansfield presents via free indirect discourse through Sun’s consciousness:

Oh! Oh! Oh! It was a little house. It was a little pink house with white snow on the roof and green windows and a brown door and stuck in the door was a nut for a handle. When Sun saw the nut he felt quite tired and had to lean against cook. (118)

This is a moment of dissolving boundaries, a sensation of being overcome by the sense stimulation of food—like Nick Adams with his camping meal and the speakers in Stevens’ and Williams’ poems. Certainly in the parents’ bourgeois society, the ornamental confection has value principally as an object of conspicuous consumption. In addition to their large real house, with its gilt chairs and piano and two cooks, they can buy a house just to eat it. To the children with little investment in their parents’ household, however, this house does not figure their own domicile, but constitutes an evocative alternative world. The nut embodies the liminal—the very passageway between Sun’s real alienating, upstanding household, and this inviting sweet pink one. When Sun sees that passageway into an alternative sensual universe, his house itself begins to loosen its hold: he experiences a sinking of the ground beneath his feet and nearly faints.

In this moment of ecstasy, Sun transcends alienation by receiving an external object within him; Mansfield does not show him to connect with any other perceivers of the pudding. The house shape of the pudding, however, suggests a social space and alternative social configurations. It is a house of sense posed not only within, but against the house of commodities. This house-pudding, like the pots of jam mentioned above, offer a space for feelings, to which the formal meal, the formal social configuration of the party, is inhospitable.

Sun, whom Mansfield names after the sober light of day, perceives with grave seriousness the potential of this house, its alternative to his own domicile. Deeply concerned, he inquires of the cook, “Are people going to eat the food?” (118). To her bemused affirmation, he is solemn: “Round and round he walked with his hands behind his back” (118). It is the space of the senses, and it is the space of beauty. His orientation

to the food is not to consume it, but to commune with it. He does not want this stimulating, almost living object to become just another of his parents' possessions via an act of complacent consumption. At the end of the night, when the party has ended and the still-awake children are invited down for some leftovers, Sun sees before him, among the debris, a melting pile of pink ice. He is horror-stricken:

But—oh! oh! What had happened. The ribbons and the roses were all pulled untied. The little red table napkins lay on the floor, all the shining plates were dirty and all the winking glasses. The lovely food that the man had trimmed was all thrown about, and there were bones and bits and fruit peel and shells everywhere. There was even a bottle lying down with stuff coming out of it onto the cloth and nobody stood it up again.

And the little pink house with the snow roof and the green windows was broken—broken—half melted away in the centre of the table. (121)

At this point, Sun's sister, unaffected by the destruction, happily reaches out and eats the small nut which had served as the door handle. She demotes what was a passageway to an alternative sensual world into mere digestible matter. His mother offers him a chunk of it half melted on a plate, and thus attempts to interpolate him into their bourgeois society of consumption. To this offer, Sun screams out in a way that impugns not just the meal but this whole society: "I think it's horrid—horrid—horrid!" (122). The expletive echoes what is perhaps the most famous denunciation of civilization given in Modernist literature, Kurtz's "The horror! The horror!" of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The allusion further inheres in Sun's name, poised against the darkness of this consuming culture. His reaction announces that at the heart of civilization, at the bottom of the fancy hams and clothes and flowers is only base acquisitiveness, not an interactive, sensitive engagement with the world. He had entered into the expansive sensual realm offered by the pudding; his parents' society only eats.<sup>15</sup>



The story does more than allegorize timeless alternative ways of relating to objects. The possibility offered by the ice pudding is particular to foodstuff that had only recently become widely available: ice cream. In Sun's reaction Mansfield posits the possibilities offered by ice cream to early twentieth-century phenomenological experience. Woloson asserts that ice cream was widely associated with the heavenly: "Being cool, light-colored, sweet and smooth, it embodied heavenly purity" (79). On a hot day, it "tasted and felt like pure ambrosia: its flavor lingered on the tongue longer than the substance lasted in one's mouth" (79). Mansfield's story develops these ideas by showing the bearings this heavenly food might have on power structures and on abstracted, alienated relations with objects. In being particularly stimulating, it calls forth new configurations of interrelational subjectivity. She underscores the food's power moreover, not through metaphors such as heavenly purity, but through the direct sensual perceptions of children.

### **Bliss and Symbol**

In "Bliss," the aptly-named protagonist Bertha *Young* is also filled with a childlike delight with food at her dinner party. It is an underappreciated fact of this, her most famous story, that Bertha's "bliss" is in most cases food-induced.

In "Sun and Moon" Mansfield posited how bourgeois commodity ownership alienated the body's engagement with the world; here she moves to the other end of the social spectrum and explores how bourgeois intellectualism has the same effect. Mansfield positions the party's social interactions as vapid in comparison to a bliss her protagonist Bertha experiences with food. They do not authentically engage the full person, as Mansfield presents food to engage Bertha physically and spiritually.

Mansfield's critique is not only of this particular dinner party, but of a dominant cultural idea. The story rewrites art-for-art's sake with food-for-food's sake.

Mansfield foregrounds the culture's alienation from the first page of the story, when she has Bertha eschew society's strictures upon the body, "How idiotic civilization is! Why be given a body if you have to keep it shut up in a case like a rare, rare fiddle?" (*Bliss* 67). In part, her comment implicates gendered sexual expectations, as many have noted: Bertha lives in a patriarchal early twentieth-century society where women's desires are repressed.<sup>16</sup> But it is not just old-fashioned, conservative attitudes which limit her. Those of her bohemian crowd do so equally. They are artistic, intellectual, abstract and distanced from the sensual world. Bertha and her husband have what she calls a "modern relationship": a sexless friendship. The rule of their relationship is underscored by the exception at the end of the story when Mansfield writes, "for the first time in her life, Bertha Young desired her husband" (76).

Bertha is the hostess of the party, but her feelings throughout constitute an unconscious undermining of the society. Her sensual sensitivity is her first transgression. Then the space this stimulation opens up—like the pots of jam and the decorative pudding—houses transgressive feelings. Critics have long been most interested in how Bertha's bliss, like Freud's hysteria, erupts from her repressed libido. Certainly this is a major component of the story. Not only are Bertha's conjugal feelings subterranean, she moreover has what is at least a homosocial crush on her friend and dinner guest Pearl Fulton. My contention, however, is that this sexual repression constitutes only one dimension of Bertha's alienated body. Mansfield starts the story by depicting Bertha's bliss over a sunny day, brings it to full bloom in her ecstasy over fruit and soup, and

concludes the plot with her bliss over a pear tree. The rapture she feels over daylight, music, and most of all food, do not just figure sexual alienation, but constitute a larger *sensual* alienation.

Via her positioning of Bertha as hostess, cook, centerpiece-arranger and server, Mansfield evokes women's traditional relationship with food. In the traditional patriarchal domestic social configuration, women were servers and feeders of others. Mansfield depicts Bertha's husband Harry eating with gusto within the context of the meal, while Bertha, in this context, garners enjoyment entirely from her role as server and is never depicted eating. While he rapaciously consumes lobster and ices, her pleasure at the table is in feeding her guests, "giving them delicious food and wine" (74). Mansfield evokes this traditional role only to subvert it, however, by depicting Bertha as an ecstatic consumer of food in moments prior, posterior, and tangential to the meal. Positioned as sensually engaged with the food, she is interacting with the world on her own terms. As sensing subject among other sensing subjects, she is on equal footing with her guests.

That the hostess should feel a sensual desire undermines the traditional meal. Bertha's specific attraction to sweet foods—fruits—is especially transgressive. Early twentieth-century society associated sweets with women as well as children. This non-nutritious foodstuff was understood to have a merely irrational appeal, to which the supposedly weaker sex was more vulnerable (Woloson 12). But it was more than a shameful indulgence: It was transgressive in its arousing of passions and pleasures. Because sweet things provided an outlet for women's cravings, women's unsanctioned consumption of them produced societal anxiety, Woloson contends, and so had to be supervised. While it was permissible for a woman to accept a box of chocolates from a

male suitor, it was improper for her to buy a box of bon bons for herself (116). Similarly, of the new upsurge of ice-cream parlors catering to women, Woloson says, “popular culture continued to express concern about these places of feminine refuge, because they allowed women some freedom” (85). Though the fruit which stimulates Bertha throughout the story is of course not a product of the sweet and snack food *industry*, it is a sweet and snack food, a fact which Mansfield underscores by depicting her encounters with it outside the meal. Any delight Bertha could have taken from this sweet fruit would have been transgressive; Mansfield goes so far as to give her a swooning ecstasy.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to its patriarchal norms, this dinner party is a confining social structure in its privileging of distanced wit and intellect over embodied involvement with the food at hand. In fact, the guests symbolically deprive food objects of their sensual substance by rendering them art (of the kitschy or shock-value variety). A guest named Face wears a dress which Bertha notes appears to be made of scraped banana skins, as well as dangling nut earrings. She announces plans to implement a “fried fish scheme” in a new interior-decorating job she has with chairs shaped like frying pans and curtains patterned with chips. All this food works only at a structural level: It has a social, rather than sensual presence. These bohemians do not allow the object world to interact with them sensually but see it only in terms of human meanings, and often fatuous ones. In their social history of Great Britain, *The Long Weekend*, Graves and Hodge remark of bohemian culture: “One sign of the perfect Bohemian was to use implements for unconventional purposes: for instance, to spread butter with a cut-throat razor, drink tea out of a brandy glass, or use a dish-swab as a hair net” (124).<sup>18</sup> Face is happy when her dress evokes stares in the train and her husband proud of her witty replies to those too

dull to appreciate the fashion. Like much of Bohemian culture as Graves and Hodge describe it, she is all show and no substance.

Similarly, if Harry's appetite is vociferous, the pleasure he gets out of food is comparatively superficial. Kaplan points out that he formulates his culinary enjoyment in a fabricated, Wildean style (32). His feeling is not quite the rapture Mansfield shows to overcome Bertha at her fruit pyramid; he is not reduced to speechlessness but is derivatively literary:

Harry was enjoying his food. It was part of his—well, not his nature, exactly, and certainly not his pose—his—something or other—to talk about food and to glory in his 'shameless passion for the white flesh of the lobster and 'the green of pistachio ices—green and cold like the eyelids of Egyptian dancers.' (*Bliss* 74)

Mansfield writes his thoughts in quotation marks to underscore their prefabricated nature. He does not, like Bertha, open himself to being moved by the sensual; the food does not exist for him in any way apart from its social context. Moreover, his engagement with food remains dominating in its suggestion of cannibalism. Cornut-Gentile D'Arcy, among other critics, has read a description of Pearl into these images of white flesh and green eyelids (262). It will later become clear that Harry is having an affair with this woman who is the very object of his wife's desire. But in a notable contrast, his encounter with the sensual, diametrically opposed to Bertha's, is dominating and not ecstatic.

In these ways we see that even though Bertha is the hostess of the meal, she does not control it. The condition of a meal itself, a primary institution of enculturation, implicates her as well as her guests. As liberated with and sensually manifested in the world as she may be, the dominant relationship to the world imposed by this meal in this society is patriarchal and abstractly intellectual. It is only in moments tangential to the

meal—prior to, aside from and happening in her own mind—that Mansfield places her in a direct relationship to the sensuality of the food itself, and gives her a subjectivity apart from that of hostess and server.

Before this party, for instance, while arranging a fruit centerpiece, Bertha experiences one of her most salient moments of “bliss” in the story. She had previously spoken of her body as encased, but in this moment Mansfield shows the sweet, lustrous, brightly colored fruit to release her from such delimited encasing and deeply engage her senses:

There were tangerines, and apples stained with strawberry pink. Some yellow pears, smooth as silk, some white grapes covered with a silver bloom and a big cluster of purple ones...

When she had finished with them and made two pyramids of these bright round shapes, she stood away from the table to get the effect—and it really was most curious. For the dark table seemed to melt into the dusky light and the glass dish and the blue bowl to float in the air. This, of course, in her present mood, was so incredibly beautiful...She began to laugh.

‘No, no. I’m getting hysterical.’ And she seized up her bag and ran to the nursery. (68)

The fruit here is powerful—a substance which Bertha does not consume, but rather enters into a communion with. First of all, as with the house of “Sun and Moon,” food is in the shape of buildings—two pyramids. It thereby constitutes an alternative space, a stage apart from the dinner table, which invites more open engagement of the body with things. As she does with the fantastical nature of Sun and Moon’s party foods, Mansfield underscores the strength of its effect, its freshness from the known via fantastical qualities: its exotic pyramid architecture and magical floating. Moreover, Bertha encounters it not as a mere object of consumption, but in its visual aura, as did Sun. She cannot eat and own it, but only stand in relationship to it, in an intense, prolonged visual perception. But this perception does not constitute a distanced visual relation, as with a

still-life painting, or in the bohemian's art-for-art's sake; it is a very involved, enraptured food-for-food's sake.<sup>19</sup> As Sun and Moon felt fear before the majestic pudding and fantastical table settings, she feels overcome with what she calls "hysteria." Mansfield presents this feeling not as a pathology but as a passageway. Taken beyond the normal realm of sensations, the subject is opened and becomes intersubjective with that which it does not define or control. In both of these stories, food is a force to contend with; it joyously overcomes the protagonists' subjectivity. It is a site of sense and beauty alternative to a limiting social world.

Bertha's ecstasy evokes Sun's but its ramifications surpass his. Not only does Mansfield show her to achieve an intersubjectivity with the object world, but, fleetingly, with another sensing subject, Pearl herself. Called forth from herself by her sensual engagement with tomato soup and later a pear tree, Bertha connects with this other woman also called into sensual interaction with the same objects. Though their first connection is actually at the meal, Mansfield depicts it as an aside, happening alternative to that social structure between just the two of them. Rapt with the beauty of the tomato color, hands engaged in stirring the soup, their eyes meet: "But Bertha knew, suddenly, as if the longest, most intimate look had passed between them—as if they had said to each other: 'You, too?'—that Pearl Fulton, stirring the beautiful red soup in the grey plate, was feeling just what she was feeling" (73). Mansfield renders the soup itself the grounds of their connection: She highlights the vividness of red against the gray and the energy of the stirring. Opposed to the bohemian's alienated bodies and resulting superficial communion with each other, Mansfield presents this as an authentic, engaged connection. Whereas Harry desired to consume Pearl like a piece of fish, Bertha's desire is to enter

this other world with her, a world alternative to the superficially arty and patriarchal society in which Harry's relationship takes place. Bertha later says, "What she simply couldn't make out—what was miraculous—was how she should have guessed Miss Fulton's mood so exactly and so instantly" (74). Bertha realizes the others do not partake in this sensual communion. When her attention is restored to the social context, the meal itself, she perceives their relation to food to be abject and not ecstatic: they are shoveling in food and wiping away crumbs. Moreover, they are laughing over another piece of food kitsch: a play called "Stomach Trouble," based on a facile alimentary conceit. Bertha reflects, "No, they don't share it" (74). Opposed to the art-for-art's sake ethic which holds the others at a distance from the object world, this food-for-food's sake draws Bertha and Pearl into it.

After the dinner has ended, Mansfield again manifests an intersubjectivity between the two, completely removed from those others and the social order their meal imposes. Pearl inquires of Bertha if she has a garden, and Bertha interprets the question as an invitation to retreat alone together to the window. There at the window, removed from the party, they directly face the lush growth and fruit at the borders of the domestic space. In a description evoking the out-of-body experience Bertha felt over the fruit pyramid, the women stand face-to-face with a pear tree and are ecstatically moved. Mansfield writes, "How long did they stand there? Both, as it were, caught in that circle of unearthly light, understanding each other perfectly, creatures of another world, and wondering what they were to do in this one with all this blissful treasure that burned in their bosoms" (75). Like the pudding house and the fruit pyramids, the tree serves as an alternative world—a circle of light—removed from this bohemian society. The women



allow themselves to be drawn out by it—to be “caught.” They incorporate and blend with it: the pear tree is within their bosoms. Opened to it, they feel intimate with each other—in a perfect non-verbal understanding. They do not try to contain or distance themselves from the moment with words. Like Sun and Moon, their communion with substance here exists unmediated by language or cultural meanings.

Back in the main crowd however, the bodies of the bohemians remain alienated, as registered by Mansfield in their relationship with food, and moreover, the very food which first drew Bertha and Pearl together: the tomato soup. Eddie, the writer of the group, expresses his admiration for a new poem called “Table d’Hote.” It begins with what he says is an “incredibly beautiful line”: “Why Must it Always be Tomato Soup?” (77). Eddie reflects, “It’s so deeply true, don’t you feel? Tomato soup is so dreadfully eternal” (77). Placing this sentiment in the mouth of a vapid character, Mansfield looks askance at this “deep truth.” Whereas soup and fruit moved Bertha to fainting and speechlessness, Eddie only quips. She clearly juxtaposes Bertha’s productive encounter with the soup with Eddie’s satirical response.

Mansfield designs this juxtaposition as more than a study in contrasted subject positions; here it constitutes the background to the turning point of the story. At the very moment in which Eddie is undermining the soup, Bertha happens to turn towards the hallway and sees something that shatters her connection with Pearl: Bertha catches sight of Pearl kissing her husband. Mansfield thus pairs this alienated attitude towards food with Bertha’s severance from her most authentic human communion in the story. Her transgression is stifled: Intellectual distance and a repression of women’s desires return jointly to quell her bliss.

But, unlike any classic adultery story, the alienation of human betrayal is not the end. Human betrayal is dwarfed by the larger world of sensual stimulation in which Mansfield has positioned Bertha. Alienated by her society, Bertha yet remains engaged with the object world.<sup>20</sup> Seeing the kiss, momentarily despairing of life and happiness, Bertha walks toward the window. In this act she is symbolically, if only momentarily, leaving her domicile and entire social set behind her. And as she looks out at the natural world of her garden at night, she is again assailed by the beauty of the pear tree. There in this sensual realm beyond the societal, she is reaffirmed in her ecstasy. Her cry, “ ‘Oh, what is going to happen now?’ is subsumed in pears: “But the pear tree was as lovely as ever and as full of flowers and as still” (78). As I will show to be the case in Woolf, society is not ready to gratify the desires of woman, yet the sensual world offers an open space to her. It is a reverse-Eve story in which Bertha is saved by, rather than falls with, fruit.

### **Psychology and the “External Life”**

Of the three stories I discuss, “Psychology,” narrates the fullest abandonment to sense. Eaters in the story achieve interrelational subjectivity not only with food, but with each other. Unlike in the others, Mansfield here presents no proper, socially inscribed hegemonic meal. Rather, a young woman (called only “the woman”) living and eating on her own has the freedom to redefine the tea meal as food- and sensation-centered, rather than socially-centered. She has bought rich, sweet foods for tea which she describes in a playful, childlike, and ultimately ecstatic way. When an unexpected guest (called only “the man”) drops by at tea time, however, the more sedate, sensually deficient norm for meals in their society presents itself, if only in the titillation her stimulating meal invites.

For a period they totter on the edge of abandonment. However, not long after the tea, the two regain the distanced, intellectual stance which appears to be the norm for them, through an abstract discussion of human psychology. The turning point in the story is thus that they move from engaging in their own bodies and feelings to talking about this science of human thinking and behavior. As in "Bliss," Mansfield underscores the desire for, sensuality of, and ecstasy produced by the food, with sexual overtones. She makes clear that the man and woman, both intellectuals and artists in their early thirties, adhere to intellectual poses and a near script of permissible conversation, though they desire an unfettered intimacy. A short spate of stimulating sweets, enjoyed beyond all proper intellectualism, turns out to be the closest they can come to physical abandonment. The woman's snack-like, sweet-filled, idiosyncratic non-meal has transcended its limiting society, but the subject positions it creates do not outlast the food.

Evoking a whole branch of modern thought in its title, "Psychology" makes the most global critique of the three stories. It serves as a commentary on the previous, and on all the food scenes in Mansfield's work which consistently present the human mind as embodied, inextricably bound with sensations, and that any scientific notions of psychology apart from this embedding are shortsighted and alienating. As in "Bliss," the alienation characters feel derives from their estrangement from their own bodies and sensations in a hyper-intellectual culture. As in the former, Mansfield portrays their erudite conversations as vapid, in contrast to their expansive and intimate encounter with food. Like the bohemian crowd in "Bliss," they are officially of the position that feelings are beneath them. The woman thinks to herself that she and the man are old enough to be beyond "any stupid emotional complication" and declares "Passion would have ruined

everything” (*Bliss* 84). When she reflects on their lives, declaring, “now was the time for harvest—harvest,” she is not referring to food or anything bodily, but rather to the separate artistic labors each has made. Considering what comes later in the story, it is ironic that Mansfield has her use a word descriptive of sensual, corporeal food in this abstract, metaphorical way. Both characters clearly aim for rational lives unencumbered by emotion or sense. Mansfield juxtaposes the abstract relations the characters engage in, the abstract ideas they have of themselves, and the fundamentally embodied psychology of their lives in which they live unaware. Only in transgressing their intellectual orientation, is alienation subverted.

We can see in the man’s struggle to resist its pleasures that the woman’s meal is defying norms. She employs a strong word when she asks, “Are you longing for tea?,” and he responds, “No, not longing” (83). He later reveals that he generally eats alone and while reading, thus allowing text to elide his sensations. He says he has formed a “habit of looking upon food as just food...something that’s there, at certain times...to be devoured...to be...not there” (85). He reduces food, thereby to a purely practical function. Crucially, though, he says that when he eats with her, his relationship to the object world changes. While he normally remains oblivious to the “external life,” he finds himself to be deeply receptive to food in her apartment. Mansfield shows this susceptibility in contention with his resistance from the beginning. Whereas text generally subsumes the experience of eating for the man, in the moment in which he meets the woman, Mansfield describes their words turning to food on their lips: “they *tasted* on their smiling lips the sweet shock of their greeting” (83; my emphasis). Mansfield suggests that it is not in their sophisticated intellectual understanding that authentic communion lies, but rather in this

unspoken shared sensation. This tasting is followed by the line: “Their secret selves whispered: ‘Why should we speak? Isn’t this enough?’” (83). In this, we see that Mansfield presents tasting mouths as more intimate than speaking mouths.

Despite their socially conditioned poses, the man and woman allow themselves to be quite overcome by this non-meal of lavish sweets and stimulating caffeine. The woman prepares, and the man anticipates, the tea blithely: “Two birds sang in the kettle; the fire fluttered. He sat up clasping his knees. It was delightful—this business of having tea—and she always had delicious things to eat—little sharp sandwiches, short sweet almond fingers, and a dark, rich cake tasting of rum” (82). Mansfield is clear that these foods, in their size, shape, taste and color, phenomenologically intrude on their normal, distanced subject positions and shows the breakdown of their normal personalities. From the man’s unfettered, unconditioned childlike excitement in these sweets and delicacies, he is vaulted into near interpersonal abandon, saying of the meal: “But it was an interruption. He wanted it over, the table pushed away, their two chairs drawn up to the light, and the moment come when he took out his pipe, filled it, and said, pressing the tobacco tight into the bowl: ‘I have been thinking over what you said last time...’” (84). The unleashing of the woman’s feelings as the tea boils is similar: She muses that she and the man have completely surrendered themselves to each other intellectually. Any efforts at restraint seem to finally fall to pieces as the woman goes on to serve the food in the next paragraph:

Carefully she cut the cake into thick little wads and he reached across for a piece.

‘Do realise how good it is,’ she implored. ‘Eat it imaginatively. Roll your eyes if you can and taste it on the breath. It’s not a sandwich from the hatter’s bag—it’s the kind of cake that might have been mentioned in the Book of

Genesis...And God said: 'Let there be cake. And there was cake. And God saw that it was good.' (85)

The woman asks the man to eat the cake "imaginatively." As with the fantastical shape of the iced pudding and the colors of fruit and tomato soup, Mansfield renders the cake expansive via the paean it inspires. Only through the sensuality of the food which rises up through the ceremony and official talk they build around themselves, do the characters access their authentic, embodied, selves. In this rash, impromptu feasting on rich sweets, Mansfield presents embodied human psychology in its fullest abandon.

Critics have tended to see the characters' excitement over food as a sublimation of sexual feelings. Tang-Campon argues that the man and woman attempt to "deny the materiality of the body by displacing the consummation of the flesh onto the consumption of cake" (117). Kaplan's less condemning analysis still dismisses the legitimate sensual presence of food. She argues that the man and woman cannot speak their feelings to each other and so "communicate unintended emotions through their differing responses to the same stimuli; through their delicately shifting moods seemingly out of keeping with the ordinary details of living: pouring tea, warming hands at the fireplace" (153). Kaplan mistakenly draws a dichotomy between the human and sensual in the story. The foods are not ordinary details, but the very fabric of embodied people's lives; an embodiment with which Mansfield wants to put the characters in touch. The food is not fallen back upon, but the very thing that instructs the characters how to be sensual, and engaged beings. McGee also demotes the food. She finds the sweet and non-nutritious food to be symbolic of a superficiality and says the great emphasis given it indicates the pair's shallow relationship (93). But the illogical pleasure of the food is its very point; Mansfield means to draw the man and woman out of their poise and intellect

and into the non-rational, the sensual, the sweet. The story embodies a phenomenological worldview: “there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself” (Merleau-Ponty xi). The above analyses see the food as existing apart from the characters’ sexuality, but as in “Bliss,” the food here clearly serves as a stimulus of the characters’ sensual feelings. Just walking into it grants them liberation from their social norms.

As in “Bliss,” though, this intersubjective abandon cannot survive a society alienated from embodied existence. From the corporeal ecstasy of their snack, the two escape into the abstract, beginning to discuss a book the man had recently left the woman. It is then that they go on to discuss the psychology of their era. With the subject of psychology, of dissecting human nature from afar, the two return to their emotional and sensual distance from each other and from their own feelings. The turn of the narrative reflects this adverse shift: The woman laments, “They were off and all was as usual. But was it? Weren’t they just a little too quick, too prompt with their replies, too ready to take each other up? Was this really anything more than a wonderfully good imitation of other occasions?” (*Bliss* 86). At the end of the conversation the man wonders, “What have we been talking about?” and the woman laments, “What a spectacle we have made of ourselves” (86). Mansfield shows their discourse to have been trivial: After engaging in their discourse the two feel themselves to be “grinning puppets jiggling away in nothingness” (86). Their intersubjective communion devolves from here and the man ultimately leaves. The intellectual orientation they take back up constitutes a return to the norms of their social group. The internalization of this norm

alienates them. It took food, engaging them sensually, to draw them out of this positioning.

Tellingly, Mansfield ends the story in a way very similar to “Bliss”: Upon the man’s leaving, the woman consoles herself by throwing herself back into sensations. Looking out the door, “She saw the beautiful fall of the steps, the dark garden ringed with glittering ivy, on the other side of the road the huge bare willows and above them the sky big and bright with stars” (87). Paired with “Bliss,” this story suggests Mansfield viewed the propensity for sensual abandonment as gendered. The character allegorically called “the woman” here, is moved by nature as Bertha is by her pear tree and repudiates the man’s values as Bertha bemoaned the encasement of her body: “But of course he would see nothing of all this. He was superior to it all. He—with his wonderful ‘spiritual’ vision!” (87). The gendered nature of her sensual sensitivity is reinforced by the fact that she feels totally purged of this pent emotion only when a female friend stops by with flowers.<sup>21</sup> Mansfield’s critique of a distanced, intellectual, anthropocentric science of the human mind here suggests solutions conceived as female.<sup>22</sup>

In intervening in the dominant discourse of psychology, Mansfield’s story contributes to intellectual culture at the time. Mansfield was critical of the fashion for psychoanalysis in contemporary novels, including those of her friend, D.H. Lawrence. She writes, “I am amazed at the sudden ‘mushroom growth’ of cheap psycho analysis everywhere. Five novels one after the other are based on it: its in everything. And I want to prove it wont [sic] do—its turning Life into a case” (*CLKM* IV 69). She, on the other hand, positions her characters not as abstract types, but in a very particular, embodied way. While the couple discourses of psychology abstractly--as a dynamic in a novel, as a



category of modern ills—what Mansfield foregrounds all the while is their own concrete behaviors in this story. While the two talk of abstract things, the way they think and feel is object-centered. It was food that stimulated the authentic feelings their society had oppressed and called them forth from their isolated subjectivities. Food is not mute matter upon which the man and the woman act out their separate human drama; it participates in their interaction. The couple is liberated from self-imposed restrictions and opened to their own true psychology, when they open themselves to sense. It is modern snack culture, the ability of these two to eat on their own and for pleasure, which allowed this, if only momentarily.

In all three of the above stories, the commensality that is suggested or briefly achieved, ultimately fails; food does not serve to completely breach alienation. Sun's ice pudding is crushed, Bertha's tomato soup reduced to a cheap poem, and the "woman's" cakes drowned out in abstract conversations. Admittedly, it is these failed efforts at human connection which constitute the main subject matter of each story. But in brief moments, Mansfield imagines the impossible through food. The way the narrative moves on from these foci of intensity does not erase the fact that for a moment the body has transcended the social and escaped into the realm of the sensual. In Mansfield, society alienates, but people connect through sense. In food, her characters have found an affirmation of their bodies and of their spontaneous desires. Mansfield's innovation is to ameliorate modern alienation in that realm. She does this, not by offering food as a benign palliative, but as a dynamic evoker of and repository for otherwise ostracized feelings. Mansfield's writing of food instructs us to look to a world larger than the human

world when considering Modernist alienation. As we will see, Woolf presents similar liberation through food for a particular alienated group, women, in her writings.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>But this triumph has also been her downfall. Claire Tomalin notes that Mansfield's attention to small details, to the "domestic aspects of life" has enabled critics to eschew her work as trivial and relegate her to the status of a minor Modernist ("KM" 298). T.S. Eliot, for instance, famously declared in *After Strange Gods* that because "Bliss" represented a masterful handling of the "minimal material," (that is, limited to the description of a sudden change of emotion without contemplation of social and moral ramifications) "it is what I believe would be called feminine" (36). And Mansfield's own husband, John Middleton Murray was similarly patronizing in his praise of her focus:

She was not a professional writer. She was not a person who constructed patterns of objective beauty; she was not a person who 'told stories;' she was essentially a person who responded—through the instrument of a 'more than ordinary organic sensibility'—to her experience of Life. (184).

These comments reveal a perception of her work as peripheral and even simply unthinkingly illustrative, rather than crafted.

<sup>2</sup>Similarly, in his introduction to a 1953 Oxford edition of her short stories, D.M. Davin described in Mansfield, "a sensibility almost morbidly alert to detail and to the evidence of the senses, to colour and shape, to the feel, smell and sound of things" (qtd. in Tolron 166).

<sup>3</sup> Pater says in his conclusion to *The Renaissance*, "Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end" and "With this sense of the splendor of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch" (158). Sydney Janet Kaplan notes of Pater's likely influence, "Mansfield must have been attracted to the notion of the 'tyranny of the senses,' to the references to flowers and perfume and to the complex of meaning created out of a mingling of objects, memories, sense impressions, longings—that complexity of meaning only expressible through the interaction of human emotion and physical objects" (59).

<sup>4</sup> McGee contends that this modern eating milieu results from the modern woman's increasing liberation from the kitchen. She argues that Mansfield celebrates women's freedom, but at the same time acknowledges a resulting gap in social togetherness.

<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Maria Tang-Campon argues that characters only resort to expressing their feelings through food when otherwise desperate to communicate. She suggests that such a material substance cannot bear the weight of the figurative and this causes further frustration and a breakdown of human relations (116). My contention is the very opposite in the sense that feelings do not precede food in Mansfield; the sensual interaction food invites rather culls response from characters whose feelings are alienated.

<sup>6</sup> Moran's study considers works by Mansfield and Woolf. She frames her overall study as such: "This study uncovers a writing of the body that, in contrast to that celebrated by

*l'écriture féminine* or *parler femme*, speaks of constraint and confinement, self-revulsion and self-hatred, and the rejection of the women writer of herself as woman-in-a-female body" (6).

<sup>7</sup> Several critics consider instances of gluttony in Mansfield, often specifically as a critique of an appropriating, consuming orientation to the world. Paula Dunbar, for example, in a discussion of her male fictional characters, contends that food is "Mansfield's most frequent indicator of an aggressive and overbearing attitude towards sex" (110). Marvin Magalaner's critique of eating moments is not so specifically gendered. He says of the story "Bliss" (discussed below): "While it is perhaps natural for one in love to wish to offer food and drink to the beloved, a rather more specialized perversity allows the loved one to become the food itself, as Bertha is transformed into a fruit and Pearl into a lobster and ices" (417). He also considers Mansfield's personal life and notes that she often described herself in her personal writings eating or being eaten by the two people she was closest to, her friend Ida Baker and her husband John Middleton Murry (417).

<sup>8</sup> Mansfield frequently uses alimentary language in her letters when expressing her intimate relationships. Mansfield remarked, "My love seems all to be expressed in terms of food" (*CLKM* II 183). She says to Middleton Murray, "I eat you. I see you. And my heart...does nothing but stir up things to give you" (*CLKM* II 63). She further writes, "I fed on our love" (*CLKM* II 66). Of a friend, she says: "I swear when Catherina has come here sometimes—just to be with her—to feel her health and gaiety has been bread and wine to me" (*CLKM* III 113). Of her sister Jeanne, she says, "I get hungry for her sometimes" (*CLKM* I 87). Magalaner reads this tendency as aberrant, but, in doing so, fails to view it in the context of her overall attitude toward eating—as not mere appropriating consumption but a spiritually elevating activity. This is born out in the fact that she eats her loved ones' words, as much as their physical presence. For example, she says to Middleton Murray, "Dearest darling, Two letters came—Saturday and Sunday heavenly ones full of rashers of bacon and fried eggs and casseroles. Oh I love what you write to me" (*CLKM* II 111) or, "There are two letters Extraordinary from you. Letters with icing, candles, marzipan, cupids and sugar" (*CLKM* III 23) or "God how I love telegrams—I could live on them supplemente par oranges and eggs" (*CLKM* II 222). Literature is also food to her. Of her recent purchase of Ben Jonson's works she remarks, "My mouth waters at all those new treasures" (*CLKM* II 109), and she reflects on Milton: "There are times when Milton seems the only food to me" (*CLKM* IV 300).

<sup>9</sup> Biographical sources reveal Mansfield felt herself to depart from a dominant milieu of alienation in her own life. In her letters, she acknowledged the euphoria she felt in her own life to be unfashionable in her day, a condition which endangered the longevity of her work in the Oxford Union library: "I'm in love with life—terribly. Such a confession is enough to waft Bliss out of the Union" (*CLKM* IV 324). Food moments provide brief, ecstatic forays into the sensual in which characters feel affirmed as bodies. Brief and non-conceptual as they are, they pose a major challenge to any universal statements we might make about the Modernist emotional palate.

<sup>10</sup> I would like to thank Mary Lou Emery for suggesting I think about a food-for-food's sake aesthetic in Mansfield in relation to an art-for-art's sake, upon reading an earlier draft of this chapter.

<sup>11</sup> The conditions were set for the eating style that persists today. C. Anne Wilson comments, in *Eating with the Victorians*, "Today a new generation has already emerged which favours the browsing or snack culture. It would be interesting to know whether this approach will eventually drive out the structured meal patterns we have inherited from the Victorians" (xviii).

<sup>12</sup> In fact, Mansfield's biographer, Claire Tomalin, said that Mansfield and Murry, at times "lived cheaply on cream, blackberry jam and eggs" (*KM* 130) and at others "lived mostly on the junk food of the day, meat pies and the cheapest possible restaurants; Katherine had no time to wash or cook" (104).

<sup>13</sup> Again, Mansfield's letters are informative about her own relation to food. In a striking passage, she explicitly describes the feeling of merging into food she perceived. She once wrote to her friend, the painter Dorothy Brett, exclaiming:

What can one do, faced with this wonderful tumble of round bright fruits, but gather them and play with them—and become them, as it were. When I pass the apple stalls I cannot help stopping and staring until I feel that I, myself, am changing into an apple too—and that at any moment I may produce an apple, miraculously, out of my own being like the conjuror produces the egg. When you paint apples do you feel that your breasts and your knees become apples, too? Or do you think this is the greatest nonsense. I don't. I am sure it is not. (*CLKM I* 330)

The apple here is not *used* by Mansfield, but *overcomes* her very subjectivity. Her experience with it is ecstatic.

Elsewhere, Mansfield's letters show her to feel overcome by sweet foods. And, like her characters, she does not gorge on the matter, but on the sensations they evoke. For instance, she rhapsodizes on the mere scent of food. In a September letter she says, "there is a feeling in the air that all over the round world fruit is ripening and falling. My God! These first apples—par example—the smell of them and when you bite into them how they bite back again sharp and sweet" (*CLKM II* 275). In a letter to her mother, she reports feasting on the sight of a dessert, "My dear! The illustration of the jam tart in your letter made my mouth water; especially did my eyes pop at the button of sugar on top" (*CLKM II* 24). Again, she describes her experience in ecstatic terms—she feels her body (joyfully) encroached upon by the food.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of child characters' rebellion from the socializing function of the meal in modern literature, see Kara Keeling and Scott Pollard's "Power, Food, and Eating in Maurice Sendak and Henrik Drescher: *Where the Wild things Are*, *In the Night Kitchen*, and *The Boy Who Ate Around*" in *Children's Literature in Education* 30.2 (1999): 127-143.

<sup>15</sup> The degree of passion Sun feels for a cake has most often been read as naiveté, rather than intervention. Marilyn Zorn reads the cake wreckage as symbolic of the rude upheaval of childhood bliss and innocence, a fall from their prelapsarian state (146). Pamela Dunbar describes the story as “a fable about the inevitable spoiling of perfection and of the child’s primal sense of contentment” (150). Kristy Cochrane differs from these, contending that Mansfield gives us Sun’s version of reality from his equally valid, but different sight-line. He comes out to the banquet table noting all the scraps about it, because these are directly at the line of his eyes. In her reading, Sun’s view of reality is not usurped by the adult version. The story rather causes us to ask, “what is real? How can we tell? Is truth after all a matter of perspective?” (153). I rather argue that the story’s sympathies do lie with Sun. His thoughts, in comparison to the cognizance of those around him, seem an illumination: At the end of the night, while the parents are drunk, and the little girl is young and silly, he is the only one who can be. Moreover, Mansfield’s prose richly and explicitly describes the pudding, thus giving the reader sympathy for Sun’s admiration.

<sup>16</sup> Moran postulates that, in this and other jubilant reactions, Bertha’s behavior resembles hysteria. Her middle-class socialization will not allow her to speak or even acknowledge her own feelings so the body speaks them out (20). D’Arcy, on the other hand, claims Bertha only calls her bliss “hysteria” because she has been taught by society to repel this taboo euphoria (257). Similarly, Dunbar argues that Bertha’s interest in this food speaks not so much to repression as to the nature of fluid female sexuality, which relates to the whole of experience, “in contrast to the single focus and goal-directed pursuit of the (male) lover” (112).

<sup>17</sup> Many critics have found Bertha’s joy to be excessive and hence intended ironically. The quotes I have listed in note 11, however, speak to Mansfield’s own repeated euphoria over food, and does one particular passage in her letters quite similar to Bertha’s scene. In this letter to Murry, Mansfield described “hysteria” she herself experienced over fruit. She writes of a trip in the country, “We found the most SUPERB fresh strawberries. They are grown there in gardens overhanging the sea. Anne and I took ours and ate them on the cliffs—ate a basket each (1/2 lb 8 d) and then each ate and drank our proper tea—and became ‘quite hysterical’ as she says—We could hardly move and stayed much longer than we had meant to—The whole afternoon in my memory is hung with swags of strawberries” (*CLKM* II 222-3). Mansfield, in this letter, describes herself and the afternoon as lost in strawberries. The strawberries seem to take over their surroundings just as the fruit pyramids did-- making the rest of the room melt before them, simply floating into the air.

A few other moments from Mansfield’s personal writings also work to validate the seriousness with which she invests Bertha’s bliss over the fruit arrangement. In one very similar moment she describes a fruit pyramid: “I have just eaten a juicy, meaty orange—an orange that hasn’t ripened [sic] among soup squares and blotting paper like the ones down here. And they’re not only food for the body—they positively flash in my room—a pyramid of them, with, on either side, attending, a jar of the brightest, biggest and vividest [sic] marigolds I’ve ever seen” (*CLKM* II 221). In another euphoric passage

depicting the visually aesthetic quality of fruit, Mansfield describes an arrangement made by her servant. Mansfield praises a sensibility in her servant that led her to buy bananas not “so much that they should be eaten but that they gave ‘effect’ to the fruit dish” (*CLKM IV 42*).

<sup>18</sup> The Modernist expatriot Baroness Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven offers one example of such behavior. She was seen around Greenwich Village wearing teaspoon earrings, a tomato soup can bra and a hat in the shape of a basket, with gilded vegetables inside (Deville 98).

<sup>19</sup> Pamela Dunbar suggests that the fruit pyramid, in its floating, becomes a symbol “of some abstract and archetypal beauty” and reflects the “excesses of the contemporary aesthetic movement, with its preoccupation with perceptual intensity and the detachment of the art-object from ‘real life’” (105). In this reading, Bertha’s food experience is no different than that of her guests’ fatuous kitsch. But just because she experiences it in a primarily visual way, does not mean she is detached from the food, as they are. The above quote about the apples (note 11) speaks to the fact that she felt herself bodily engaged, phenomenologically blending with things she only looked at, as does the following quote from Mansfield’s letters: “I was looking at some leaves yesterday—idly looking and suddenly I became conscious of them—of the amazing ‘freedom’ with which they were ‘drawn’—of the life in each curve, but not as something outside oneself—but as part of one...” (*CLKM IV 73*).

<sup>20</sup> Pamela Dunbar suggests that the bliss Bertha feels over objects in the story is not sensual, as I am suggesting, but sexual. Her stimulation by a wide variety of things demonstrates women’s “fluid,” rather than “goal-directed” desire (111). In line with this, it can be noted that the tall pear tree shooting into the clouds, can be read as phallic, and Dunbar reads the fruit pyramids as symbols of breasts (106). She also emphasizes that Harry’s rapacious eating suggests his sexual rabidity (110). Dunbar’s reading, however, in viewing Bertha’s desire only in terms of sex, remains anthropocentric, whereas Bertha, like all the characters I discuss in this dissertation, is shown to be phenomenologically receptive to and interactive with the qualities of the foods as they present themselves in their irreducible physical qualities, like color and shape, and not as mere human symbols.

<sup>21</sup> That Mansfield may have harbored a belief in women’s greater sensitivity to the sensual world is suggested by a letter she wrote to Murry: “I wonder if you would feed on the visible world like I do” (*CLKM IV 73*). In another letter she praises a female friend, Sylvia Lynd, for the sensual explicitness of a letter she had sent: “May I give you a small hug for your marvelous letter. It really is a heavenly gift to be able to put yourself, jasmine, summer grass, a kingfisher, a poet, the pony, an excursion and the new sponge bag and bedroom slippers all into an envelope. How does one return thanks for a piece of somebody’s life? When I am depressed by the superiority of men I comfort myself with the thought that they can’t write letters like that” (*CLKM IV 283*).

<sup>22</sup> Pamela Dunbar suggests of this story that Mansfield demonstrates a general Modernist tendency to conceive of human consciousness as defined by qualities traditionally

deemed feminine: passivity, fluidity, receptivity, acute sensitivity and irrationality. However, I would point out that the pressure the two characters feel to keep such tendencies of thought under control, speaks to a dominant ideology which instructed consciousness be otherwise.



**CHAPTER III**  
**THE MEAT OF THE MOVEMENT: FOOD AND FEMINISM IN THE FICTION**  
**OF VIRGINIA WOOLF**

This chapter marks a turn in my study, where I begin to consider various social and political ramifications of subjectivities phenomenologically construed by sense. In each case, I argue that the Modernist authors consciously present these ramifications, and in so doing, contribute important extensions to phenomenology. Whereas in the first two chapters I assumed a generic modern person interacting with food, in the remaining three chapters I consider eating done by particular social groups and how it is perceived by that group or by others. This does not constitute a turn to symbolic meanings, however: My contention is that the authors present the sensual characteristics of the foods they describe as a dynamic in their own right. In the first section of this chapter, I consider how Woolf showed the eating of meat to constitute a certain male way of being in the world in nineteenth and early twentieth-century British society. To eat it involved gestures not typically the realm of ladies (it is so tough it must be cut with a knife, rather than easily dissolving like a candy or pastry). Moreover, it was full of blood—which in part has symbolic value, representing vitality, power and sexual drive—but is also sensually prescriptive, being liquidy and uncontained, and requiring the eater to reach out broadly to contain it all (contrary to women's contained roles). When Woolf has her female characters eat meat, she does not just symbolically give them the role of men, but physically engages them in practices that constitute men. Women can assert their bodies more successfully with meat eating than they can sexually. Woolf saw potential in the sensual transgression of women's eating, where she could never write about their desires in the latter way.

In this chapter, I have two interests. I consider, on the one hand, Woolf's writing of the desire women show in, and vitality they receive from, meat eating. In concordance with this, I discuss her representation of the resistance women faced in such consumption. Specifically, I explore three female characters who heartily eat or preside over meat. In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay takes an interest in her *Boeuf en Daube*. The characters Mary Datchet, in *Night and Day*, and Sara Pargiter, in *The Years*, brazenly, and to great enjoyment, eat meat in public. Through these three, Woolf offered a powerful picture of woman as consumer. In eating a food thought to be a physical source of male power, Woolf's female characters represent a threat to the integrity of male culture and its dominance. In addition to its imperative to preserve the best resources for men, patriarchy also necessitates a policing of the limits of women's bodies, control of what they interact with. In eating, such boundaries are transgressed not just symbolically, but physically. When Mrs. Ramsay, Mary and Sara enjoy meat, the eating appears abject to male characters. Anxiety incurs from the lack of clear boundaries around the meat, which is a font of animal power. The breaking of clearly defined hierarchies appears to the men as chaos. Therefore, in their perception of each scene, it is stew-like or bloody qualities of the meat that dominate. In order to establish the role Woolf granted eating in the formation of subjectivity, I will start by exploring comments of hers and others which speak directly to this preoccupation in her prose.

### **Food and Subjectivity in Woolf**

Woolf's exquisite renderings of food have often been acknowledged. E.M. Forster noted food as one of the most striking characteristics of her prose, and one which, notably, affirmed her own hunger for the sensual in life:

It is always helpful, when reading her, to look out for the passages which describe eating. They are invariably good. They are a sharp reminder that here is a woman who is alert sensuously. She had an enlightened greediness which gentlemen themselves might envy, and which few masculine writers have expressed. There is a little too much lamp oil in George Meredith's wine, a little too much paper crackling on Charles Lamb's pork, and no savour whatever in any dish of Henry James', but when Virginia Woolf mentions nice things they get right into our mouths, so far as the edibility of print permits. We taste their deliciousness. (18)<sup>1</sup>

It is notable that Forster categorizes her writing about appetite as masculine. Another of her most famous contemporaries, W.H. Auden, also highlighted food when he defined Woolf's style as preoccupied with the everyday: Her work inspired him to summarize these as the "daily humdrum 'sausage-and-haddock' details" (qtd. in Woolf, *VO* 400).<sup>2</sup> Food was clearly central to her style and her depictions of human life. Feminists later suggested a feminine edge to this preoccupation.

Like Hemingway, Woolf was explicit in her conviction that there is no self, no intellect or soul, extractable from the body and what it does and ingests. In *A Room of One's Own* she writes, "The human frame being what it is, heart, body and brain all mixed together, and not contained in separate compartments...a good dinner is of great importance to good talk. One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well" (*R* 18). It is under this condition that meat eating is more than a status symbol, but conveys a physiological strength and a spiritual vitality.

Moreover, like Hemingway and Mansfield, Woolf felt that the body transgresses its boundaries by eating. So women who eat more heartily encounter and incorporate more of the outside world within themselves. Woolf's novels repeatedly illustrate diners' transcendence of themselves in eating. In *The Waves* (1931), Nelville contrasts the nature of dinner conversation (he summarizes it as, "I am this. I am that"), which holds people apart, with the true intercourse that lies in the dining itself: "But I eat. I gradually lose all

knowledge of particulars as I eat. I am becoming weighed down with food” (W 138). At a later dinner in the same novel, Bernard observes, “The fish, the veal cutlets, the wine, have blunted the sharp tips of egoism” (224). Moreover, as in Mansfield’s stories, eaters’ subjectivities blend not only with the food they eat, but also with their fellow diners. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Richard and Hugh dine with Lady Burton. When they get up to leave and return to their own affairs for the day, Woolf renders commensality very concretely:

And they went further and further from her, being attached to her by a thin thread (since they had lunched with her) which would stretch and stretch, get thinner and thinner as they walked across London; as if one’s friends were attached to one’s body, after lunching with them. (*MD* 112)

Woolf’s metaphor suggests that the act of eating together creates not only a social bond but a physical merging. With this understanding, we will see that when female characters eat meat in Woolf, their bodies circulate where they should not. They engage in not just symbols, but physical practices and sensations, lying beyond the round of experience to which the Victorian era confined.

### **Women and Food**

Insofar as one’s eating constitutes a principle component of her interaction with the world, the gestures and sensations women experienced in eating meat are not just small isolated gestures, but inextricable from women’s general presence in the society. Before considering meat eating in particular, I want to pause and consider Woolf’s general presentations of women and food.

In her feminist manifesto, *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf famously voiced a plea for the representation of food in literature, which I quoted at the beginning of the Introduction. Placed in this book, the appeal appears couched in a feminist argument. The placement suggests that the concrete matter of eating forms a part of her feminist vision.

Several critics, like Allie Glenny in *Ravenous Identity* and Diane McGee in *Writing the Meal*, have argued that in foregrounding food, Woolf is asserting the importance of women's traditional cooking and serving work.<sup>3</sup> This is certainly a goal present throughout her corpus. Repeatedly Woolf celebrates women's hospitality, as that of Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay, and cooking, as that of Susan in *The Waves*, and even of servants, like Mrs. Walker (in *Mrs. Dalloway*) and Mrs. Sands (in *Between the Acts*). But it is important to note that in *A Room of One's Own*, her path-breaking feminist tract, she is not actually showing women working with food: She is rather showing them eating. They are being served, and they are hungry and demanding consumers. Woolf portrays herself as diner, grousing that the nourishment is unsatisfactory. She complains of the "transparent liquid" passed off as soup, of the plain hunk of beef and of stringy prunes for dessert. She intones that the food is conventional and unimaginative: It does not excite the palate. This appetite is transgressive: The Victorian norms within which Woolf grew up had dictated women not take an interest in food. Woolf insists that they do. The poverty of women is at the heart of their diets and access to meat, in particular. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf notes that it is the work of men that supplies "beef and mutton" (92). Addressing woman at large, she notes their socialization into preferences for cheaper sources of nutrition: "If you prefer ice creams and peanuts to roast beef and beer the reason would seem to be economic rather than gustatory" (90). When Woolf shows women actually desiring the more expensive meat, she undermines this socialization. Women's appetites for what they are denied, like the room of their own, constitutes an important dimension of their liberation.

In real life, of course, Woolf often displayed anorexic behaviors. Roger Poole, in

*The Unknown Virginia Woolf*, made a feminist issue of these behaviors, linking them to the control male doctors and her husband, Leonard Woolf, wielded over her. According to Leonard Woolf, she frequently refused to eat. He described her as having a “taboo against eating,” a “particular deepseated guilt about it” (qtd. in Poole 149). Glenny suggests the sexual abuse Woolf received from her stepbrother as a child led her to consider the body and its desires pathological and out of control.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, her body was repeatedly appropriated by her husband and doctors, which likely exacerbated her disorder: They forced her at various times to gain up to three stone (Poole 154). Taking Woolf’s biography as their launching point, many critics who have discussed food in her work, such as Allie Glenny, Elizabeth Dodd and Susan Rubinow Gorsky, have focused on the moments in which female characters in her work fail to eat.<sup>5</sup> They are right to point out that we never actually see Mrs. Ramsay or Mrs. Dalloway partaking of the food they serve. Woolf’s fictionalized Elizabeth Barrett Browning, pining away in her bed in *Flush*, feeds her dinners to her dog. And Glenny has argued that Rhoda in *The Waves* is styled after Woolf herself and is anorexic. Moreover, Patricia Moran contends that Woolf regularly vilifies the female characters who do eat. Moran argues that while food nourishes the intellectual labor and writing of Woolf’s male characters,<sup>6</sup> women’s bodies stand between them and their art. Women who relish eating have either bought into the patriarchal system (willing to feed off the labor, and by extension, bodies of their mothers), or else given themselves up to a gross sensuality, their bodies out of control. The logic of anorexia Moran’s and the other readings postulate illuminate some, but only some of the many food scenes within Woolf’s corpus. Harriet Blodgett condemns the tendency to look at Woolf’s writing of food principally in this autobiographical way.

Woolf's aesthetic, she rightfully insists, was based on transcending her personality and speaking through the concrete. And as I have shown, Woolf's contention in *A Room of One's Own*, and her comments about food's central place in experience, show us that Woolf found eating to be central to the formation of human subjectivity. Along with its commentary on the vexed female eating experience, her work regularly contemplates a phenomenological relationship between person and food that precedes social prescriptions of eating.

In particular, scenes of meat eating in her work succeed in telling a truth about women's bodily desires, an endeavor in which Woolf felt herself to have generally failed. In "Professions for Women," Woolf says that while she feels she successfully killed the angel in the house, she did not succeed in telling the truth about her experiences as a body (*DM* 141). She imagines a scenario, much like her own, in which a girl is dashing through the deep seas of the unconscious, only to smash upon something hard, "something about the body, about the passions which it was unfitting for her as woman to say. Men, her reason told her, would be shocked" (240). That she declared herself unsuccessful at expressing sex should make us particularly attentive to the desires she was able to write. Mrs. Ramsay may not be able to assert her own needs to her husband, and Mary and Sara may remain always single and celibate, but they have manifested themselves as desiring beings through their eating.<sup>7</sup>

### **Meaning of Meat**

Meat surely derives some of its meaning for Woolf's characters from its symbolic history. It is important that I account for these, before going on to discuss the sensual qualities upon which Woolf's prose dwells. First, social history reveals a tradition of

meat eating that has empowered men. Carol Adams, in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, postulates a link between the exploitation of animals and of women. Plant-based cultures are more egalitarian; hunting cultures introduce a divide between a kind of work and food associated with women and that associated with men. Men are supposed to get their virility from meat, and so it is reserved for them. Moreover, a dichotomy is thereby produced wherein women are thought weaker. Women, who continue to grow and feed off plants, are thought to be passive and less evolved, and they therefore come to embody these qualities themselves (35). For this reason, Adams says, “The literal evocation of male power is found in the concept of meat” (34). The English language exemplifies this dichotomy, as “meat” is often used figuratively to denote represents the core of something: Adams mentions the phrases “meat of the matter,” “beef up,” or a “meaty question” (36). Meanwhile “vegetable” connotes passivity (36). Given the history Adams reveals, women’s relishing of meat in Woolf’s stories is a transgression not only upon male materials, but upon male power.

Meat eating concordantly constitutes an important practice of participating in the British state, of which women were left out, as Woolf documents in *Three Guineas*. Jeremy Rifkin, in *Beyond Beef*, defines the British as “the great beef eaters of Europe” (52). He notes that they identified with beef as a symbol: “roast beef” signified the well-fed British upper and middle classes (55). That Woolf herself acknowledged this nationalist dimension of meat is evident in several meat scenes in her work. In *Flush*, for instance, Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s dog, returning from a trip to Italy (the cuisine of which was dominated by wines and fruits), knows he has arrived back in England when he smells the following: “Odours of stew, odours of beef, odours of basting, odours of



beef and cabbage rose from a thousand basements” (*F* 145). In that novel as well, Woolf lists the butcher as central to the civilization of Wimple Street, London:

a prayer rises in the heart and bursts from the lips that not a brick from Wimpole Street may be re-painted, not a curtain washed, not a butcher fail to tender or a cook to receive the sirloin, the haunch, the breast, the ribs of mutton and beef for ever and ever, for as long as Wimpole Street remains, civilization is secure. (24)

Food historian Colin Spencer traces the English love of meat to Anglo-Saxon culture, in which carcasses were placed on the table whole (23). He remarks, moreover, that Protestant Britain used meat as a way to define and distinguish itself from Papist culture with its practice of regular fasting from meat. This impetus accounts in part for England’s engaging with meat in such grand and visceral, masculine, ways:

In reaction against the Papist associations of fancy fast day cooking came a new emphasis on meat, and on mutton, beef and venison in particular. There was a new national pride in their carcass beauty, so that there seemed to be a particular Englishness about eating great haunches of well roasted meat, cooked in the simplest fashion. (105).

The same identification of meat with Britishness held into the period of Woolf’s maturity, of which Spencer says, “The joint reigned supreme in the British house” in the 1930s (307).

The meaning of meat is not only symbolic, however. Julia Twigg, in “Food for Thought: Purity and Vegetarianism,” contends that the high status of meat in most meat-eating cultures is due not only to the danger or expense involved in procuring it, but also to the physical essence of the food itself: blood content. She argues that blood is that physical substance in which we most consider the life force to be grounded: “Blood is traditionally the seat of the soul, the bearer of life—as it ebbs away in bleeding we die—and from this derives its sacred power and its ability to defile—blood will not wash off a guilty hand” (22). This explains the attraction of the phenomenological experience of

meat, over and above its status. Roland Barthes similarly roots the status of steak in its physicality:

The prestige of steak...derives from its quasi-rawness. In it, blood is visible, natural, dense, at once compact and sectile. One can well imagine the ambrosia of the Ancients as this kind of heavy substance which dwindles under one's teeth in such a way as to make one keenly aware at the same time of its original strength and of its aptitude to flow into the blood of man. Full-bloodedness is the *raison d'être* of steak. (8)

Barthes underscores physical qualities; bloodiness, density, heaviness.

It may be thought that in Britain, where meat is so plentiful and eating it such a routine practice of civilization, that dominance upon the animal is too complete and systematic for meat to maintain this allure of raw life. But evidence speaks to the contrary. In her memoir of culinary life in Britain, *Fish, Flesh and Good Red Herring*, writer Alice Thomas Ellis, suggests:

Despite the studied scientific approach the Victorians imagined they brought to the subject, there is almost a religious fervor apparent in their writings, which leads one to speculate on the possibility of unconscious reference to those ancient, widely held convictions that failure to make regular bloody offerings to the gods and spirits would cause the world to stop going round. There is a hint of sympathetic magic in their approach, an irrational passion for blood—what they saw as the base element of life. (215)

Similarly, it was this power of meat which vegetarian Edward Carpenter reacted against when he wrote in 1892, animal food, “containing as it does highly wrought organic forces, may liberate within our system powers we may find difficult or even impossible to dominate...which may insist on having their way, building up an animal body, not truly human” (qtd. in Twigg 25). Meat, in these views, is a physical power. Though Woolf sometimes suggests meat as symbolically masculine or nationalistic, it is the sensual qualities of the material underscoring the symbols in which the real force of the power lies.

It is because of the great vitality meat, conveyed to the subject who consumed it in phenomenological fashion, that access to it by lower orders of society, like women and children, was policed.<sup>8</sup> There was a fear of inferring upon these populations too much vitality or sexuality.<sup>9</sup> And of women's access to meat, Elaine Showalter explains:

Meat, the “roast beef of Old England,” was not only the traditional food of warriors and aggressors but also believed to be the fuel of anger and lust. Disgust with meat was a common phenomenon among Victorian girls; a carnivorous diet was associated with sexual precocity, especially with an abundant menstrual flow, and even with nymphomania. (129)

Helena Michie remarks that physiological hunger in women is seen to pose a threat of desire for sex and power (13), and thus, “the portrait of the appropriately sexed woman...emerges as one who eats little and delicately. She is as sickened by meat as by sexual desire” (17). Michie shows Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* to reveal this logic: “at the tea table women are most feminine,” while rich meaty, or very spicy foods, are ‘male’” (15). Just as tea was a light, feminine food, so were the meats that were thought appropriate for women—they were of the white and bland variety, chicken or fish. Twigg notes that nineteenth-century health manual recommendations for pregnant and lactating women included “delicate” and “light” meats which echoed women's “feminine” nature-- dishes like chicken, fish or eggs (24).<sup>10</sup>

It is in this context that Woolf repeatedly chooses to lend the power of meat to female characters. Eleanor, in *The Years*, and Susan, in *The Waves*, serve as cases in point. Both serve, to varying degrees, a traditional female domestic role—Eleanor is lifelong housekeeper for her father, Susan a contented housewife. Eleanor returns home from a frazzled morning of errands, and, sitting down to lunch, is subsumed into her food: She “felt nothing. Merely a chicken-eater; blank” (Y 104). A similar dissolving of a

character's own life into the vitality of meat is seen in a discarded portion of the *Waves*.

Woolf writes of the character Susan

...she would like after this walk to drop into a chair and simply eat...And she felt her teeth must meet in the rather solid wing of a pheasant and her tongue roll its fibers; and then the delicious hotness and scent of pheasant, and the grey dry bread crumbs; and the heaping up of soft bread sauce, and the pungent curious taste of brussel sprouts...that would be very delicious—her being would subside in that. (qtd. Glenny xi)

Susan was a farm wife, and Woolf restricted her to the typical female arenas of home and nature: It is notable that this passage was ultimately cut as it shows Susan transgressing the boundaries of her world through eating--and, notably, of a masculine food (even if it was the more feminine, white, meat). Eleanor with her chicken, and Susan with her pheasant, put their bodies into circulation with an animal force traditionally the purview of men, and thus transgress proper feminine bounds.<sup>11</sup>

### ***To the Lighthouse: Carving Out Personal Space***

In "Professions for Women," Woolf announced her intention to kill "the angel in the house," in order to maintain the independent mentality necessary to a writer. Mrs. Ramsay of *To the Lighthouse* is generally understood to be Woolf's paradigmatic angel. But, while she does die early, perhaps overworked by her eight children and demanding husband (similar to the demands faced by Woolf's own mother, Julia Stephen), Woolf posits considerable resistance in her before she simply kills her. She is shown to possess the aptitude Woolf praised Julia Stephen for in "A Sketch of the Past:" the power to center the family. She must uphold the family, and by extension, civilization (*MB* 136). Critics have noted Mrs. Ramsay's accomplishments. Diane McGee notes that Woolf shows Mrs. Ramsay to be a civilizing force. Moreover, she is an artist. Eileen Bender says she has the power of a Circe to transform the meal (323). Elizabeth Dodd and

Bettina Knapp argue that Mrs. Ramsay's construction of the meal is an art, influenced by Cezanne and in accordance with current domestic aesthetics. Catherine Burgass reads the meal as a religious rite, by which Woolf privileges a female celebration of the flesh over an abstract male spirituality (95). In keeping with Woolf's ambiguous presentation, each of these critics then goes on to show how the praise is qualified. McGee notes that Mrs. Ramsay is old-fashioned and could, in fact, "belong to another century" (134). She says that her civilizing role is an inherited ideological and conservative one (137). Bender contends that her meal is ephemeral, a "surrogate art" offering only "transitory satisfactions" (323). Dodd argues that she does not allow herself to eat of what she serves.<sup>12</sup> Burgass points out that she herself dies early and remains an ephemeral, virginal figure (100). These are important critiques and I myself would not claim that Woolf is offering Mrs. Ramsay as a model of ideal feminist behavior. However, I do think that there is still room to appreciate accomplishments of this figure by taking seriously the materials of her work—the beef itself. Mrs. Ramsay has been innovative with it and a consumer of it in ways that have yet to be acknowledged.

Mrs. Ramsay interrupts the tradition in which she would normally be passive, and oriented toward serving, rather than consuming. First, the meat that she serves is prepared in a transgressive form; it is an innovative stew rather than a traditional roast joint.<sup>13</sup> In the second place, though, as Dodd aptly notes, Mrs. Ramsay is not actually shown eating the meat, she does consume its sense qualities conspicuously-- with a relish, in fact, out of all bounds of Victorian female propriety. Unlike the New Woman, Lily Briscoe, in the story with whom she is contrasted, her power is not in eschewing the domestic role, but rather re-conceiving it from within.

Certainly, the chapter containing what will be the triumphant moment of a *Boeuf en Daube*, starts off with her slavishly performing the prescribed role of serving her family. Mrs. Ramsay had earlier lamented that she would like to transcend her private, domestic, life and become an investigator into social problems. Instead, here she is, ladling out the soup despondently, arranging the seating, and making conversation with everyone who may feel out of place. Woolf conveys her thoughts: “But what have I done with my life? Thought Mrs. Ramsay, taking her place at the head of the table, and looking at all the plates making white circles on it” (*LH* 125). The serving of dinner seems, at this point, to fall far short of her potential: “She had a sense of being past everything, through everything, out of everything, as she helped the soup” (125). But then the chapter, and arguably the book itself, turns on the delivery of the beef. Mrs. Ramsay’s mood is transformed when the maid comes out carrying this entree from an old family recipe of Mrs. Ramsay’s, upon which she has worked and Mrs. Ramsay has worried for three days. Mrs. Ramsay is triumphant. For many, this salvation through dinner is not a breakthrough moment at all, but only serves to situate Mrs. Ramsay more firmly within her domestic role, establishing a false consciousness. But her behaviors with it are in fact not traditional.

It has often been remarked that cooking, insofar as it is done for men and according to men’s preferences is productive of women’s subordination. In *Women, Food and Families*, sociologists Nickie Charles and Marion Kerr suggest:

although women may have the day-to-day responsibility for food provision for their families, it is men who have the power and control. Women cook to please men, decide what to buy in light of men’s preferences, carry the burden of shopping for food and cooking food, but most of them carry out these tasks within a set of social relations which denies them power. (40)

The *Boeuf en Daube*, however, would not seem to cater to men's wishes. It is not in the form most associated with men or their British meat-eating tradition, roasted. It is rather a French recipe of Mrs. Ramsay's grandmother's, stewed, a mode of preparation associated with women (Twigg 24).<sup>14</sup> In stewed form, the meat is supposed to lose some of its association with the animal (Levi-Strauss 479);<sup>15</sup> less of its blood content is retained. It is supposed to taste milder. But perhaps its loosely-defined shape is what most lends it towards an association with women. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo says, "women are more involved than men in the 'grubby' and dangerous stuff of social existence, giving birth and mourning death, feeding, cooking, disposing of feces, and the like" (31). What might have been tightly delineated in joint form, still resembling the animal it came from, has been spread out. The men at Mrs. Ramsay's table want to keep dinner as contained as possible, to get over with the ceremony of eating and the carnality of food and get back to their intellectual labors. Mr. Banks, for instance, would prefer to consume his dinners without fuss in his room. And when elderly Augustus Carmichael requests a second bowl of soup, Mr. Ramsay says that he hates to see anyone "wallowing in food" (164). All profess the dinner a needless ritual, and all blame it on women. Charles Tansley, for instance, complains, "They did nothing but talk, talk, talk, eat, eat, eat. It was the women's fault. Women made civilization impossible with all their charm, all this silliness" (129). Indeed, the very form of Mrs. Ramsay's food represents a threat to keeping the food within contained boundaries.

In her choice of dinner, Mrs. Ramsay is not just intervening into an isolated set of dinner guests, moreover, but an entire British tradition.<sup>16</sup> The national palate distinguished itself from French by focusing on the plain, truthful quality of the meat

itself, and not on disguising it with all kinds of sauces. Spencer notes: “Meat, cooked separately from its sauce was somehow more truthful, more upright and worthy and undeniably English” (106).<sup>17</sup> A cookbook of 1925, which defined itself as modern, *The Gentle Art of Cookery*, declared in its meat chapter, “No recipes are given for plainly roasting or boiling” (187).<sup>18</sup> One would imagine that plain roasting or boiling do not even require a recipe—just a following of rote tradition. This cookbook calls forth a creativity and worldliness that engages women’s agency. Authors C.F. Lyeal and Olga Hartley argue, “A great deal of the dullness of English meat would be removed if we adopted the continental and Eastern habit of serving them with purees and compotes of fruit” (187). Mrs. Ramsay’s intoxicating brew certainly takes hold of this realm of men, this dullness of English meat.

Part of the psychological importance of this form, for the British generally, as for the guests at her table, is that the meat served in its own shape and not mixed with other foodstuffs. The typical British “proper meal” contains meat, potato and vegetable. Foods that are separated remain more contained within their own borders. Mrs. Ramsay’s *Boeuf en Daube* represents a notable deviation from this. Alice Thomas Ellis quotes a nineteenth-century cookbook writer who says of the kind of dish Mrs. Ramsay prepared:

with regard to made dishes as the horrible imitations of French cookery prevalent in England are termed, we must admit that they are very unwholesome. All the juices are boiled out of the meat which is swimming in a greasy heterogeneous compound, disgusting to the sight, and seasoned so strongly with spices and cayenne pepper, that it would inflame the stomach of an ostrich. (239)

This comment registers Mrs. Ramsay’s transgression of the norm. Anne Murcott, in a contemporary study of the traditional Sunday proper meal, explains how the separation of the foodstuffs is part of the logic of the meal:



The required form demands that items be served in discrete pieces, rather than an amalgamated mass, and each piece is to be of a size that first has to be cut into smaller pieces on the plate before being carried to the mouth. Indeed, the required manner of presentation leaves the items recognizable as in their raw state; none is minced or shredded so fine as to conceal their origin, none is incorporated with anything which might mask their nature. (685).

Thereby, we can infer that not only are individual foodstuffs kept within contained boundaries, but food as a whole is as well.

Mrs. Ramsay's entre, far from a composite of clearly distinct parts, is an amalgam. Woolf describes Mrs. Ramsay looking with appreciation upon the "confusion of savoury brown and yellow meats" (151). And in her description of the dish's "shiny yellow walls" we see the food has overcome the human serving implements, the dinnerware. Moreover, it reaches out beyond its dish in its aroma. Smells colonize the room: "an exquisite scent of olives and oil and juice rose from the great brown dish" (150). Its final power though, and thus Mrs. Ramsay's power, is that it effects a similar amalgam in the dinner guests. Its flowing together instructs their own. It erodes the social awkwardness and apathy preventing conviviality.

In describing the effect Mrs. Ramsay creates, Woolf uses language connoting witchery. Lily remarks of her, "She put a spell on them all" (152). Lily is referring to her overall transformation of the atmosphere of resistance and hostility into one of communion, but the food itself is the nexus of this. And, defined by its mixture, it resembles a witch's brew. If a Victorian angel in the house is oppressed in her role, a witch cooks with power.<sup>19</sup> *The Gentle Art of Cookery* contains an epigraph from Ruskin which identifies the cook with the power of the witch: "Cookery means the knowledge of Medea and of Circe and of Helen and of the Queen of Sheba. It means the knowledge of all herbs and fruits and balms and spices, and all that is healing and sweet in the fields

and groves, and savoury in meats” (vi). If Mrs. Ramsay had rotely served a joint, it would not have engaged her personal powers, but, in mixing things together she is proactive; she is overstepping bounds.

The overflowing of contained boundaries the *Boeuf en Daube* effects is thus transgressive in the first place because it shows the imposition of the sensual upon the intellectual, but also because it is an extension of Mrs. Ramsay. Its form enacts her own transgression of the boundaries into which she, as housewife, is placed. Not only does the creative cooking over which she presides suggest witchery, but Woolf also emphasizes the ways her body transgresses by merging with the meat. The *Beouf en Daube* itself is not simply cut, but must be plunged into. Mrs. Ramsay is the one to go first: she peered into “the depths of the earthenware pot,” she went “diving into that soft mass” (151). The meat, notably, is soft: not something with clear boundaries, but something into which she melds.

True, Mrs. Ramsay never combines with the meat by eating it. However, Woolf is clear that she ingests its sensual qualities. It enters her through the senses of sight, smell and touch; in these ways, she seems to receive this meat within her more deeply than any of the other characters do. While externally she may be serving, the sensations she feels themselves constitute an exquisite interaction and consumption. Woolf showcases the effect of the meat upon her more than we see it upon the guest whom she is most concerned with pleasing, William Bankes. His feelings, revealed in a brief comment of praise and in the free indirect discourse Woolf delivers, remain abstract and conventional: “It was rich; it was tender. It was perfectly cooked” (151). They fall short of the ecstasy and deep contemplation of Mrs. Ramsay: “she peered into the dish, with its shiny walls

and its confusion of savoury brown and yellow meats and its bay leaves and its wine, and thought..." (152). Later in the meal, Mrs. Ramsay feels herself delivered to the limits of speech, to eternity:

...all of which rising in this profound stillness (she was helping William Bankes to one very small piece more, and peered into the depths of the earthenware pot) seemed now for no special reason to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together. Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all round them. It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity...Here, she felt, putting the spoon down, was the still space that lies about the heart of things, where one could move or rest. (158)

Albeit, this excitement over meat cannot be considered completely apart from a more conventional stimulant: She realizes, at dinner, that her son has just become engaged. Though it seems shortsighted of Mrs. Ramsay to be excited for this marriage which will entail for the bride the same confinement Mrs. Ramsay feels upon herself, Woolf gives her excitement an edginess by manifesting it in meat. Mrs. Ramsay embarks upon a deep and improper communion with the smoke, tenderness and grandeur of the beef. Despite her conventional subservience as hostess, her ecstatic response to the beef fills her, and in way that defies Victorian British norms. According to Victorian etiquette, as noted in Chapter Two, there was to be little explicit consciousness of the food itself. Food was not to be talked about. British manners, according to Kate Fox, still dictate its subordinate presence: Focus should be not on the sensual, but rather on the intellect—conversation, rather than food, should be the centerpiece of the dinner (318-319). Mrs. Ramsay, as we see, shows no engagement in the conversation at all comparable to her excitement over the meat. But Mrs. Ramsay was transgressive in doing as much enjoying of the meat as serving of it. She engaged with it proactively, she opened up boundaries with it. Woolf does not need to show her actually eating it, she shows her doing more:

Mrs. Ramsay metaphorically enters it and imbibes its smells and sights ecstatically.

To the extent that Mrs. Ramsay's transgression is limited because subtle and internal, she is succeeded by the next two characters I will discuss. Mary from *Night and Day* and Sara from *The Years* are wholly consumers. Neither is shown in the domestic role of preparing or presiding over the meal herself. In fact, far from being angels in the house, neither gets married. They exceed Mrs. Ramsay's impropriety, moreover, by consuming in public. Their consumption of this men's food fills them with a vitality to speak out in the world of men—on politics and religion—and this shows practical implications of engaging in the physical practice of meat-eating.

### **Beef and Viability in *Night and Day***

Woolf makes Mary Datchet's consumption of meat in *Night and Day* notable by situating it amongst a slew of meals gendered more traditionally. This novel begins with a mundane, routine ritual of British life: afternoon tea. Katharine Hilbery, the young upper-class British protagonist, to whom Mary serves as foil in the book is, "in common with many other young ladies of her class...pouring out tea" (*ND* 3). Accustomed to the domestic task, she mindlessly goes through the "business of teacups and bread and butter" (3). This tea is only one of many in the book. Susan Fox, among others, has summed it up as a "tea party" novel (259). Throughout the book, Katharine is expected to maintain society with the "frail burden of silver trays and china teacups" (148). When the central conflict in the book (Katherine's engagement) reaches its point of highest tension, the kettle in the other room is heard to be boiling over: "To Katharine's mind it appeared this kettle was an enormous kettle, capable of deluging the house in its incessant showers of steam, the enraged representative of all those household duties she had neglected"

(522). Katharine turns out to have the spirit of a New Woman, but, like Mrs. Ramsay's ambition, such spirit must liberate itself from the business of the meal. The fluidity of dinners, like tea, is dependent upon women's complicity. So, for instance, when Katherine's father gauges that Katharine has behaved without propriety in forging a betrothal, he feels that "civilization had been very profoundly and unpleasantly overthrown that evening...his meals would be poisoned for days to come" (502). As the novel is a comedy, a peaceful resolution is ultimately secured and this too is expressed through dinner: "The lamps were lit; their lustre reflected itself in the polished wood; good wine was passed round the dinner-table; before the meal was far advanced civilization had triumphed" (528). In this New Woman novel, Woolf thus framed scenes of women's entrance into a wider world, with scenes of domestic meals, which are emblematic of what holds them back.

This frame sets up a standard from which many of the New Woman eating scenes in the book diverge, especially those centered around Katherine's foil, the suffragette Mary. Mary, who lives away from her family, alone, in London, epitomizes Woolf's liberated woman. Katharine admires her possession of a room of her own (57). Mary's dreams are "to be a great organizer" (77). Though she lapses periodically from her resolve, for the most part she devotes herself to work and so "did not want to marry at all" (82). She does at one point play the role of hostess, but with much more freedom from compulsion and convention than Katharine. Woolf describes her laying out a jug of coffee and pink cakes at her own residence, of her own will, and for an event involving bohemian guests and a literary lecture, rather than idle tea time prattle. Similarly, when Woolf does show Mary preparing and partaking of that traditional meal, tea, it is at her

office. And in that professional setting, the eaters are too exuberant over professional concerns (specifically, the suffragist cause) to worry about the appropriate, prescribed form of the event—plates clatter amidst the servers' excitement, the kettle boils over, and people pour their tea and forget to drink it (173, 274). During her independence, workaday life, Mary is able to enjoy food on her own, without the imperative to serve anyone. Woolf registers the deviation this constitutes from expected female eating behaviors by depicting Mary's feelings of guilt over the pleasure she takes from eating "breakfast alone in a room which had nice colors in it" (75). Neither at home nor in the office, then, is Mary bound by the food rituals that constitute so much of Katharine's life. Never feeling the need to fuss over others, she is free to feed herself and eat for pleasure and power.

Mary's engagement with meat serves as the pinnacle of her food freedom. At her lunch breaks at the suffrage office, she eats this invigorating food. And on a fateful outing with the one man she considers marrying (and thereby reigning herself into the domestic sphere), Mary partakes of the empowering national fare, the traditional English joint. In a novel rife with women at stifling tea parties, Mary's eating stands out as independent and empowering.

Mary's decision to eat out by herself in London transgressed contemporary etiquette. During the nineteenth century, women's only option for eating out was to order food up to their hotel rooms (Warde and Martens 23). In the Edwardian feminist journal *Freewoman*, Dora Marsden impugns readers who "regard it as an indecent exhibition, if they saw a woman looking as though she were very obviously enjoying food, or obviously gratifying any of her senses" (Green 227). At the turn of the century, it was

only New Women that ventured to eat out (Freeman 287). It took the average woman some time longer.

Woolf makes Mary's engagement with meat a practice of special note, as she juxtaposes it with the food preferences of her male colleague at the office, Mr. Clacton. A vegetarian, he feels regular need to deride her for her choice of lunch food. It is fitting that Mr. Clacton, as an advocate of suffrage, would be Woolf's only vegetarian. Showalter and Adams, respectively, document how nineteenth and twentieth-century feminist literature related oppression of women with that of animals and advanced the cause of vegetarianism (Showalter 129; Adams 121). Notably, however, Woolf chooses to associate her female suffragette, Mary, with meat. Mary's choice of lunch is more so notable since hunger-striking suffragists were so famously force-fed meat. Melanie Phillips describes the "ghastly procedure, which involved women being held down by several prison wardens while tubes were inserted through their nasal passages and down their throats" (226). In fact, Sara, in *The Years*, describes her Suffragette sister Rose "having meat crammed down her throat" (232). In such force-feeding, meat is markedly an instrument of male power, being used to control women's bodies.<sup>20</sup> By feeding herself, Mary takes control of the power inherent in meat; Woolf notably shows her to use it for, rather than against, the cause of suffrage. In the figure of Mary, Woolf bears out the philosophy *A Room of One's Own* reveals—feeding women according to their desires is part of empowering them.

Moreover, as was the case with Mrs. Ramsay and her *Boeuf en Daube*, Mary is most certainly not consuming a symbol of power, but actual meat. Woolf makes the visceral nature of it present to us: "Mary generally went to a gaudy establishment,

upholstered in red plush, near by, where, much to the vegetarian's disapproval, you could buy steak, two inches thick, or a roast section of fowl, swimming in a pewter dish" (80). Woolf here renders the meat substantial and describes it at length. Part of what is important about it, is that, like the *Boeuf en Daube*, it spreads outward from itself. The chicken is not stationary, but swims. And it is as if the texture of the walls—soft and red—have absorbed the substance of the meat. The permeation of Mary's boundaries, which it will effect, Woolf makes sensually clear.

This description of the meal is juxtaposed with Mr. Clacton's censure of meat eating. Mr. Clacton is an ironic figure for he leads his organization for woman's empowerment like a patriarch. At the office meeting Woolf narrates, he proudly takes his seat "at the head of the table" (169). He objects to Mary's passion for organizing, finding her "a little too much inclined to order him about" (87). This checking of her power is certainly linked to his objection to her meat eating. Against his admonishment, and the patriarchal strictures for which it stands, Mary's meat eating is transgressive. Through Mr. Clacton's patriarchal controls circumscribe Mary's suffrage work; on her lunch break she is able to immediately empower herself. Woolf shows that it is not just the vote that women need; small daily practices also create power. If Mary has not yet been successful in getting women a voice in the nation through the vote, she herself engages in an important practice of British nationhood by eating meat.

As she eats this meat in public, outside the domestic sphere, practicing her national identity among men, rather than under their domestic rule, so too she does later in the scene in which she comes closest to conceding to a domestic life. Though fiercely independent, Mary does struggle with her attraction to her friend Ralph. They have a



sophisticated platonic relationship based on books and political conversations, which she imagines would be undermined by romance. Ralph, meanwhile is in love with the upper-class Katharine, but somewhat tempted by the more feasible and practical union a marriage with Mary would offer.

The prospect of such a union seems imminent during a meat-centered meal they share at a country inn. Ralph has been visiting Mary and her family in the rural Disham for the Christmas holidays. One day the two engage in a stroll through the fields and find themselves moved by nature. Once the walk has roused good feelings, meat actively brings passions forth. Mary and Ralph stop at a country inn for lunch, and upon eating, Ralph, “whether it was due to the warmth of the room or to the good roast beef”(237) arrives at the decision that he will propose. Such a practical union would quash the passion and enthusiasm Mary brings to everything in her life. Moreover, Woolf has shown Ralph’s desire to control and use Mary throughout the book and it is clear a marriage with him would subdue her independence. While in many ways he is modern and shows respect for her, admiring, for instance, her public engagement (he “could not help respecting Mary for taking an interest in public questions” (133)), there is an element in him that desires to bend her to his will. He admits to himself that he has had “exacting and dictatorial ways with her” (232) and calls himself a “selfish beast” in regards to his behavior towards her (238). Ralph comes close to proposing over this meal, but he does not because before he is able to get it out, she lets drop that she “cares” for him. All of a sudden, he is struck by the fact that she has feelings of her own. She cannot, then, be just used for his own purposes. He forfeits his plan, and, at the end of the meal, Mary retains her independence. My interest is in the role the eating scene, and especially

meat, plays in this turn of events.

First, it is notable that Woolf positions this intimation of Ralph and Mary's domestic union within the egalitarian setting of a restaurant, where, instead of women serving men, man and woman are served together. Woolf creates a consciousness of this serving during the meal because at vital points in the conversation the waiter shows up to change their plates. While such serving is going on, Mary is instead conversing. Bound up with the practice of the traditional housewife's serving, is her selflessness. Here, as both parties engage in the practice of consumption, Mary is shown to have her own desires as much as Ralph has his.

Ralph and Mary are equally engaged with the same vitalizing foodstuff, meat. As Ralph is said to be inspired by his roast beef, our attention is drawn to Mary's relation to the meat during a moment in which she looks across the joint at him. This meat-grounded look is empowering, first of all, on a symbolic level, because of Mary's positioning in relation to Ralph in this locale. Earlier in the book, meat had encapsulated Mary's independence, and also, I suggested, her participation in the nation. Here that connection is deepened. The country inn they eat at is described as an institution of national pride and tradition. Even the cut of its window suggested "substantial fare" (235). Woolf writes, "For over a hundred and fifty years hot joints, potatoes, greens, and apple puddings had been served to generations of country gentlemen, and now, sitting at a table in the hollow of the bow window, Ralph and Mary took their share of this perennial feast" (235). But Mary, being of this country, is, by implication, the one more engaged in this national tradition, as it incurs in practices of eating. The meat is not only a symbol, however; it is also a formidable piece of muscle that plays a direct role in their

interaction. During the walk, Ralph had declared his intention to give up the London daily grind and buy a cottage in Disham. During the meal, Woolf shows Mary to consider this, over the empowering meat: “Looking across the joint, half-way through the meal, Mary wondered whether Ralph would ever come to look quite like the other people in the room” (235). From her position of power as consumer, particularly as consumer of a sizeable piece of meat, she makes a judgment upon him.

Having established Mary’s power in her eating, Woolf expresses her transition from love back to independence through the same object matter. Since the first attempt of which he thought better, Ralph has in fact gone through with the proposal. Mary, fully cognizant of its cold practicality, is vexed and adamantly opposed to it. She immerses herself in her work all day, and gives herself reign to think about it only at lunch. Woolf describes Mary first mentally “denouncing him for his cruelty” but she also does so with her body: As she lunches in the Strand, her fellow diners notice her “cutting her meat firmly into small pieces” (272). We can understand that frustrated desire is not turned destructively inward, but transferred onto meat. She is positioned as powerful in her activity of cutting. More fundamentally, to engage in the act of eating in the first place is to engage in fulfillment and nourishment; Mary is not completely deprived, when bereft of love. She does not cry, but eats. As she has from the beginning, she will continue to fuel her independent existence with this vitalizing, blood-filled, substance tough enough to be cut with a knife; the sensual opposite of the thin, liquid tea which Katherine poured at the beginning of the novel. At the end of the book, Mary remains single, but fulfilled.

### ***The Years: Blood and Passion***

As Mary's engagement with meat invigorated her political activism, Sara's invigorates her mental and spiritual vitality. She is a wit and a writer and Woolf's counterpart in the novel. Woolf so much identified with her that she wrote in her diary, "I hardly know who I am, or where; Virginia or [Sara]; in the Pargiters or outside" (*DVW* 148). The contrast between Sara's eating behaviors and those of Rhoda, who Glenny argues figures Woolf in *The Waves*, are notable. Rhoda shows a marked feeling of abhorrence towards food, and meat especially. As a child, she expresses horror of meal times, saying: "everything runs like streaks of fire when [the housekeeper] carves the beef" (*W* 45). As an adult, dining with friends likewise repulses her: She feels that, after eating, they are all "hung with other people like a joint of meat among other joints of meat" (162). Sara, on the other hand, is far from an anorexic figure. Like Mary, she heartily eats meat. We might note, that while Rhoda's feelings reflect the anorexic side of Woolf, there is evidence she felt Mary and Sara's exuberance in eating as well. In one, specifically meat-centered, comment, Woolf described her cooking as intertwined with her writing work: "I'm frying sausages for dinner as I write, and have just turned them delicately with the holder of this pen, having left the spoon in the kitchen" (qtd. in Glenny xii). Both meat and writing were transgressive for a woman. Fed with meat, Mary existed beyond her proper sphere in politics, and Sara in the intellectual world of men.

Like *Night and Day*, the novel is not frequently studied because it adheres to the realist tradition Woolf's aesthetics are most often defined against. But its realism renders it particularly valuable in considering the practical aspects of the vision Woolf puts forth

in *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf in fact claimed that *A Room of One's Own* and *Night and Day* were the precursors to *The Years* (Squier 176). *The Years* traces the separate lives of the members of the Pargiter family: Woolf aimed to chart how women born in the Victorian Era gradually became liberated in the early twentieth-century. Like *Night and Day*, it is littered with tea parties and framed in proper dinner rituals. Woolf originally intended it as an exploration of the sexual lives of women, which she professed her desire to speak openly about in "Professions for Women." There is very little desire in it we can call sexual; but the other transgressive oral pleasure, eating, is communicated.

Like *Night and Day*, *The Years* is framed in the prandial. In the latter, female characters achieve even more freedom from the strictures of the meal completely unfettered by traditional norms. Woolf begins by killing off the angel in the house and she ends with a spirited, de-centered meal. The book begins with a family dinner meal from which the matriarch, Mrs. Pargiter, is notably absent. Not only is she present to preside over dinner, but is in fact, disrupting the whole meal by dying in the middle of it. The nurse sends news of her rapidly plummeting state downstairs and the dinner comes to a halt: "they all held their knives suspended. Nobody liked to go on eating" (Y 36). The servant, Crosby, notes this lamentably: "the dinner was spoilt...the meat was dried up, and the potatoes had a brown crust on top of them" (37). But Mrs. Pargiter's failure to participate in the meal sets into motion a string of re-imagined proper meals. Unlike *Night and Day*, which ultimately brings domestic upheavals to order through a restoration of the domestic meal, *The Years* ends with a total upturning of the meal when the progressive Pargiter daughter, Delia, throws a dinner party. She invests little stock in dining ritual or etiquette. Short on tables and chairs, she leaves her guests to sit on office

stools and at typewriting tables, and lie strewn about on pillows on the floor. She has forgotten to have spoons put out, so her guests drink their soup straight from their bowls. Woolf records the chaos, “People were buzzing about with plates and glasses. They were stumbling over cushions on the floor” (415). The centerpiece is likewise disheveled: “the petals had fallen and lay among the hired knives and forks, the cheap tumblers on the table” (415). When the guest Nicholas wants to give a speech, he brings the room to silence by impropriously thumping his fork on the table (415). The progress from the opening Pargiter dinner to this one encapsulates the progress Woolf intended to chart in this novel.

In between these framing meals there are some particularly interesting eating scenes, involving Sara. She, like Mary, lives independently. She is shown in two dining scenes with men in which, rather than act the role of server. She, like Mary, is an avid consumer, and, as it was to Mr. Clacton, it is much to their revulsion.

Before these, Woolf presents Sara at a domestic dinner with women. She and her sister Maggie form an all-female household. When having guests, as they have their cousin, the suffragette Rose (whose own father and house are one year from destruction), they must perform the role of men. Sara brings out the meat, and Maggie “helps the cutlets” (166). The words Woolf uses to describe her serving echo a line in the book’s opening dinner in which Woolf had depicted the patriarch Mr. Pargiter “flicking cutlets onto plates” (36). The gesture is a revisiting and rewriting of the earlier one. Susan Squier points out that at this point in the novel, the patriarchal households in which the Pargiter cousins were born are beginning to break down (149). Sara and Maggie’s father has just died, his house has been sold, and they have dispersed from it. In this present meal,

women preside and thus carve. Margaret Visser notes, “Knives, in the traditional view, are ‘male’ weapons. They are wielded aggressively, and they pertain to the masculine realm of fighting, war and the hunt; they are essential for carving meat. From a symbolic point of view, knives are phallic” (277). It is notable that such power should be the purview of the women while they are living outside of their father’s house. Unlike the meat eaten by Mary as seen through the eyes of Mr. Clacton, or Sara’s meat later on as seen through the eyes of her male relatives, this female meat eating is seen only by women and is presented positively, not as repulsive.

A very different scenario is created during a meal Sara shares with a male cousin at a chop house in the city. She runs into her cousin Martin while visiting a cathedral and he invites her to lunch. From the hallowed ground of the church, Woolf changes the scene to the very visceral realm of the city chop house. Martin is the one concerned with maintaining order throughout, as we see in the discomfort he feels over the uncontrollable sensual dimensions of the meal--its smell and noise. Accordingly, in the course of conversation, he refers to himself as a god (the god of the old Pargiter servant Crosby, a woman and a member of the lower-class). Working from this sense of order, he perceives the event is full of abhorrent detail. He apologizes to Sara for the restaurant being a “beastly hole.”

This scene, thus, from his view, is chaotic. It is invasive in its heat: Woolf writes, “The room was very hot and crowded” (229). Noise similarly intrudes. The pair must eat in silence because, “Fragments of other people’s talk reached them in broken sentences” (231). And the warm, disseminating presence of the meat is the centerpiece of the affair. Martin describes it, submerged in “fug,” “a warm meaty smell” (233). As in Mr.

Clacton's perception of Mary's lunch and as with Mrs. Ramsay's meat, the chop house meat is a presence of great proportions and lacking in delineation. Here it is a joint, rather than a beef or chicken casserole, and thus maintains a likeness to its original animal form, but it is on a cart which rolls across the room. The description of it, given from Martin's point of view, emphasizes its broadness: "A vast brownish-yellowish joint was being trundled from table to table on a lorry" (228). Its smell and heat spread outward: Martin notes how "smoke, mixed with the smell of meat, made the air heavy" (232). He is finally brought to a breaking point at the end of the meal: "The fug, the warm meaty smell of the city chop house had soon become intolerable" (228). The sensual properties of the meat itself are no longer under the patriarchal, centralized control of the family meal. The meal is not circumscribed—doors keep opening and closing, people keep walking by, the smell and the heat are invasive, the meat is riding by on wheels, rather than under the knife of the presiding male, and that epitome of civilization—intelligent conversation-- is impossible above the general din.<sup>21</sup> Sara herself reflects this disorder. She partakes of the messy meat, she loosens her tongue in alcohol, she undermines the logos of the church, and she laughs as if to deride all order. Sara represents this chaos because it is in the breakdown of hierarchy and control that the one who would be more oppressed by that hierarchy gains an opportunity to manifest herself. The sensual chaos engages her.

Appropriately, then, we see her wielding a knife. Here, like Mary Datchet, and like her sister earlier, she takes up the empowered position and engages in the act of carving: "She took up her knife and fork and began to carve the admirable mutton" (228). Woolf calls the meat she carves "admirable," thus drawing attention to its large size, to the feat of carving it. It is not just meat but manly portions of meat, like Mary's two-inch



thick steaks. The designation evokes that history of grand British meat eating which began in Anglo-Saxons hacking from whole carcasses upon the table.

As meat eating engages Mary in a practice of nationalist power, it lends Sara a vitality to speak out against another institution seen by her to be patriarchal: religion. She still has the prayer book with her which she had at the cathedral where she met Martin. When Martin asks her about it, she taps it with the fork she has been using to eat the mutton. This act of irreverence has feminist implications: She touches an artefact of hallowed, transcendent philosophy with food and thereby defiles something from the realm of men into something from the realm of women.<sup>22</sup> More importantly for this discussion, she undermines the book and its abstract logos when she taps it with that instrument of sensual food. In response to Martin's inquiry as to what she made of its contents, she picks it up and announces: "The father incomprehensible; the son incomprehensible--" (229). He quickly seeks to contain this blasphemy, telling her to "Hush!...Somebody's listening" (229). He is quick to quash that vitality of her fork. She submits: "In deference to him she assumed the manner of a lady lunching with a gentleman in a city restaurant" (229). That she can put these behaviors on highlights their socially constructed nature, opposed to the more spontaneous, immediate, direct sensations and behavior the meat itself invited.

If her speech is silenced and her fork stilled, she goes on to transgress through that one other foodstuff which traditionally joins meat in being the purlieu of men—alcohol. Red wine evokes blood; and it also is a perilous source of invigoration. Margaret Visser notes that, "Alcoholic drinks, like knives, have always been thought especially dangerous in the hands of women, and men have taken great care to prevent their own partiality for

alcohol from infecting ‘the fair sex’” (278).<sup>23</sup> Martin registers the visible effect of her intoxication: “Her cheeks were flushed; her eyes were bright” (230). At first, he thinks alcohol might facilitate the process of becoming reacquainted with her: “Wine was good—it broke down barriers” (230). But by the end of the lunch, he feels the need to police her consumption: He puts his hand over the bottle and tells her, “you’ve had enough” (231). Martin feels that “he must damp her excitement. There were people listening” (231). Wine here fuels Sara’s mockery of politics, the way meat spurred her interception of religion. She is laughing at this point about her sister having “meat crammed down her throat!” Meanwhile, like Mary, she herself is the master of her own food. She goes on to participate in national concerns by denouncing the beginnings of war (it is 1914): “‘Roll up the map of Europe,’ said the man to the flunkey. ‘I don’t believe in force’!” (232). That the rebellious speech is grounded in, fed by, food is indicated by her subsequent actions: “She brought down her fork. A plumstone jumped” (232). The fork she used to eat the meat is the fork she uses to denounce religion and politics. At this climax to her transgressions, Martin looks around abashedly and suggests they leave.

Just as Sara is not subordinated by the traditional structure of a patriarchal meal at this chophouse event, neither is she at a meal she offers her cousin North at her own home. Though it is her domicile, she is no more the server of the meal than she was at the restaurant, for she lives in a lodging-house in which meals are provided. This puts her on even footing with her guest, rather than in a subservient position. North seems taken aback by this, preoccupied throughout the dinner by the absence of hospitality and service. Woolf reports his thoughts when he first sits down: “And there was no sign of

dinner, he observed; only a dish of fruit on the cheap lodging-house table-cloth” (314).

He finds the paucity of catering almost incomprehensible: “there seemed to be some hitch in the proceedings. The door was open; the table laid; but nothing happened” (318).

While he never explicitly notes it, his annoyance suggests he desires to play the hierarchal role in the traditional domestic dynamic in which Sara does not participate.

North is moreover sensitive to what appears to him to be the chaotic nature of every aspect of Sara’s apartment and meal. When he first arrives at her apartment, he finds the street it is on “dirty,” and he notes the “smell” and “oily” wallpaper of the hallway (311). The tablecloth, he observes, has been permeated with “gravy stain” (314). The servant, in his description, fails to make up for the hospitality in which Sara is remiss, but rather crashes upon the scene noisily: “the girl made a clatter laying the table with the knives and forks she held in a bunch” (315). It might be argued that Woolf intended these details merely as signs of Sara’s poverty,<sup>24</sup> but they do not just register lack, the sensual chaos creates freedom. Starting from the same family origins, she was unable to make it in the world like her male cousins. Squier argues that Sara’s room shows “appreciation of the city’s role in opening up possibilities to women—like a room of one’s own free from the demands of a tyrannical father (even if in a shabby lodging-house south of the river)” (178). My claim is that here, as at the restaurant, possibilities are opened up on a sensual level. Though not successful in the outside world like North, she does not remain confined like female predecessors but is deeply engaged with the object world.

Martin represented patriarchy in his upstanding upper-middle class family origins. North is of the same family and, moreover, a soldier and a colonizer. Sara had shown objection to his lifestyle earlier in the novel. When he went off to fight, she derided the

masculine imperatives of the project, mocking “the switch between his legs” (285). As a soldier, we would associate him with great meat consumption.<sup>25</sup> Rifkin notes of meat and its blood content: “Blood conjures up notions of aggression and violence—valued emotions among warriors, sportsmen, and lovers. Soldiers have always been favored with beef before battle” (239). J. Stavick postulates, moreover, that the eating of red meat was essential to British colonial identity and power. *Dracula*, he argues, betrays a fear of the British having another culture above them on the food chain. So, in both of his occupations, North traditionally would have been associated with/fortified by meat.

It is poignant, then, that Sara, a mere single woman and unpublished writer, is positioned as North’s fellow diner, rather than his server. Moreover, she once again engages in the assertive practice of carving the meat. Just as her joint at the chop house, an “admirable mutton,” evoked heroic hunks of meat, the joint here takes on large, animal proportions in its bloodiness—it is somewhat raw yet: “she took the carving-knife and made a long incision. A thin trickle of red juice ran out; it was underdone” (318). The two watch “the red juice running down into the well of the dish” (319). The scene is narrated from North’s point of view. As in the greasy walls of Mrs. Ramsay’s casserole dish, North registers that “the willow-pattern plate was daubed with gory streaks” (321). While he claims to be used to such things from having lived in Africa, and he declines Sara’s offer to send it back, he is the one who seems most invaded by its presence. When she asks him if he would like another cut off the joint, he declines, “looking at the rather stringy disagreeable object which was still bleeding into the well” (321). The raw vitality of this meat would most immediately be associated with the soldier, but the vitality he might get from it, goes to Sara instead. The rest of the meal scene is peppered with

images of her biting and wielding cutlery. Its diffusion across the plate invites the manifestation of Sara's own personality.<sup>26</sup>

That she maintains the upper-hand throughout the meal is reflected both in their conversation and in her manner with the food. He brings up an angry letter she wrote him, and, just as her indecorous comments earlier were wielded with a fork, her response here is rendered in terms of mastication: She "lifted her lip like a horse that is going to bite" (321). Here Woolf renders the very practice of biting an act of assertion, one to which Sara has as much access as the soldier. This power dynamic is maintained as the two go on to eat the pudding. It is characterized by a looseness with which Sara engages: just as she earlier banged a table with her fork and made a plumstone jump, thus engaging sensual disorder, here she is shown "sticking her spoon into the quivering jelly" (321). As in the case of the meat juice, Woolf shows her to feel comfortable with uncontained sense, while North does not. When they go for the final course, fruit, Sara consumes the banana. Woolf writes, "She began peeling a banana, as if she were unsheathing some soft glove" (322). Sara, like Mrs. Ramsay who went plunging into the beef, digs into the heart of the food. Sara's presence as masticator is pronounced: Just as Mary looked at Ralph across her joint, here North "looked at [Sara], biting little bits off her banana" (323). According to Bourdieu, the banana is the only fruit which can be eaten in a manly way, the others are "fiddly," and would feminize a man's rough grasp (190). Mrs. Ramsay's upbringing had taught her to occupy herself with serving; Sara has so greatly liberated herself from these expectations that her guest is left watching her chew.

Josephine O'Brien Schaefer contends that this meal constitutes a poor double of

Mrs. Ramsay's in *To the Lighthouse*, as it lacks fare and ambiance. She argues, "The underdone mutton trickling red juice, the cabbage oozing green water, the fly-blown fruit bring to mind the steaming casserole at Mrs. Ramsay's table" and she says, "The two lonely figures of Sara and North seated before that dismal meal in the ugly surroundings seem a monstrous parody of the family and friends gathered in the pleasant and communal setting of the Ramsay dining room" (142). True, Sara does not seem to have been able to bring her resisting male guest into her common fold, as Mrs. Ramsay had hers. But Sara herself has eaten pudding and banana, and most prominently, a bloody meat, with vigor, and does not seem overly concerned about pleasing her guest. The flowing outward of the meat and cabbage in blood and juice, which Schaefer describes as "dismal" actually sensually resonates with the flowing meals of Mrs. Ramsay and Mary Datchet and suggests the woman is expanding beyond her own boundaries. While Mrs. Ramsay, Mary and Sara fail to achieve professional goals or sexual fulfillment, they engage a wider world in this sensual way. To the extent that Woolf does parallel the two scenes, I would argue that the second is much less of a parody, than a correction of the former. The characters in *The Years* were intended to move beyond the Victorian era, where Mrs. Ramsay is. Mrs. Ramsay was able to clear some space for herself in her *Boeuf en Daube*: Sara brings it to a climax in this grasping hold of underdone meat. The fact that the women's eating of meat is off-putting to Mr. Clacton, Martin and North suggests underlying sensual parameters to patriarchal order and registers the women's sensual transgression. Disgust is similarly caused by the eating, the sensual assertion, of inferiors in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Forster's ultimate point is to say, "Our debt to her is in part this: she reminds us of the importance of sensation in an age which practices brutality and recommends ideals." He speaks to the self-assertion behind this choice of topic, saying that, he "could have illustrated sensation more reputable by quoting the charming passage about the florists' shop in Mrs. Dalloway, or the passage where Rachel plays upon the cabin piano. Flowers and music are conventional literary adjuncts. A good feed isn't, and that is why I preferred it and chose it to represent her reactions. Let me add that she smokes, and now let the *Boeuf en Daube* be carried away" (20).

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Woolf actually mentions this combination of meats herself in a diary entry describing what she was cooking for dinner on March 8, 1941: "And now with some pleasure I find that it's 7, and must cook dinner. Haddock and sausage meat" (*DVW*, 358).

<sup>3</sup> Glenny writes, "this dwelling on food was, as Woolf saw it, an act of female liberation. It was part of the process both of seeing the world through our own, female, lenses and, more actively, of righting a skewed world which had purged the sensual and elevated the rational" (xii). Diane McGee notes that Woolf is one of the first to present the traditionally invisible work of the hostess as worthy of literary treatment (108).

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of anorexia as symptomatic of women's lives within the nineteenth-century patriarchy, and its manifestation in women's literature, see Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic*. They consider anorexic heroines of Emily and Charlotte Bronte, Emily Dickinson's poem which states she had "been hungry all the Years," and the conflicted desire for food shown by the heroine of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (58).

<sup>5</sup> See Glenny's *Ravenous Identity*, Dodd's "No She Did Not Want a Pear," and Gorsky's "The Mask/Masque of Food: Illness and Art," all of which tie unhealthy eating behaviors in female characters to their general disempowerment.

<sup>6</sup> She mentions Hugh Whitbread who, having been fed Lady Bruton's lunch in Mrs. Dalloway, is fortified to write a letter for her to *The Times*, as well as the novelist Bernard in *The Waves*, whose imagination is triggered by the collapsing of boundaries that food effects.

<sup>7</sup> The interchangeability of the pleasures of sex and eating has been repeatedly posited by Western theorists. Cixous suggests both together in her argument about the Garden of Eden, and its centrality to Western culture. In Heller and Moran's words, it begins the "subjugation of female oral pleasure to patriarchal law" (1).

<sup>8</sup> That the lower class's access to meat was also limited is noted by Woolf as well in *The Voyage Out*. An upper-class character describes Mr. Perrott, a man born into a lower-class who rose through education, as "not quite" [a gentleman] because of his lingering

awkwardnesses. One of the signs of this is his way of eating meat: “a certain indescribable timidity and precision with his knife and fork which might be the relic of days when meat was rare, and the way of handling it by no means gingerly” (*VO* 139).

<sup>9</sup> Twigg notes that Queen Victoria’s children were routinely denied red meat, particularly the aggressive young Albert Edward (25). Likewise nineteenth and early twentieth-century education experts frequently recommended keeping red meat from adolescent boys as a way to deter masturbation (24).

<sup>10</sup> Even recently, Pierre Bourdieu has included meat-eating among the practices that distinguish male and female behaviors. He explains the internalization of women’s disassociation from meat: “Meat, the nourishing food par excellence, strong and strong-making, giving vigour, blood, and health, is the dish for the men, who take a second helping, whereas the women are satisfied with a small portion. It is not that they are stinting themselves; they really don’t want what others might need, especially the men, the natural meat-eaters, and they derive a sort of authority from what they do not see as privation. Besides, they don’t have a taste for men’s food, which is reputed to be harmful, when eaten to excess (for example, a surfeit of meat can ‘turn the blood,’ over-excite, bring you out in spots etc.) and may even arouse a sort of disgust” (192).

<sup>11</sup> Female characters who are portrayed as superficial, or who submit to a wholly traditional feminine role, by contrast, are associated with sweets. Rezia in *Mrs. Dalloway* “liked ices, chocolates, sweet things” (116). Of the fatuous sensualist Mrs. Manessa in *Between the Acts*, Woolf writes, “She took the little silver cream jug and let the smooth fluid curl luxuriously into her coffee, to which she added a shovel full of brown sugar candy. Sensuously, rhythmically, she stirred the mixture round and round” (*BA* 55). Woolf has Miss Kilman, of whom we know, “food was all that she lived for,” covet a little pink cake (*MD* 127). A female American visitor to England in *The Years* opts for ices over a tour of the Bodleian (*Y* 59). That Woolf sees sweet eating as a lazy indulgence is made explicit by Rachel in *A Voyage Out*. She connects women’s predilection for sweets with their tendency to grovel in emotion: “She liked women. But where emotion was concerned, they were like flies on a lump of sugar” (*VO* 321). In all of these instances, Woolf seems to adhere to the traditional damning associations of women with sugar, which Mansfield tried to invert.

<sup>12</sup> Dodd argues, though, that her very anorexia is a political statement, a response to her disempowerment. Women who fail to eat in Woolf “figuratively indict the patriarchal order and their own, perhaps ambivalent, identities in it” (156). She quotes Stephen Trombley, who argues that Woolf’s own anorexia was a form of resistance to “what she quite rightly viewed as an impingement upon her freedom, a violation of herself” (qtd. in Dodd 155).

<sup>13</sup> Most critics tend to associate Woolf with Mrs. Ramsay’s less traditional daughter, Cam, or with the New Woman of the story, Lily Briscoe. But that she could relate to the thrill of cooking, and cooking, moreover, which very much reflects Mrs. Ramsay’s own, is evident in her letters and diaries. She wrote for instance, regarding her excitement



about a new stove: “I go over the dishes I shall cook—the rich stews, the sauces. The adventurous strange dishes with dashes of wine in them” (qtd. in Glenny xii).

Kate Colquhoun, moreover, suggests that the development of casseroles in British Victorian cooking was liberating for women: “Casseroles were liberation incarnate. The mix of browned meat, garlic, wine and vegetables required no skimming and could happily be ignored, giving the housewife time to preare her house and herself...Roasting made you hot, frying made you smell, but it seems braising was the answer to a modern housewife’s problems” (325-6). She suggests, in fact, that Woolf was directly making this point through Mrs. Ramsay.

<sup>14</sup> Linda Wolfe, in *The Literary Gourmet: Menus from Masterpieces*, provides a recipe for *Bouef en Daube* which clearly emphasizes its saucy qualities. The last steps are to “strain the sauce, add the calves’ feet to it with small new carrots, small white onions, blanched olives and *fines herbes*, and pour everything on top of the meat” (235). A footnote recommends, “To make this dish truly *en daube*, when you place your casserole in the oven you should seal the rim, no matter how close-fitting it is, with a paste of flour and water so that not a breath of juice may escape the pot” (235).

<sup>15</sup> In *The Origin of Table Manners*, Levi-Strauss says: “Roasted food, being directly exposed to fire in a relationship of *non-mediatized conjunction*, whereas boiled food is the product of a two-fold process of mediation: it is immersed in water and both food and water are contained within a receptacle. So, on two counts, the roast can be placed on the side of nature, and the boiled on the side of culture” (479-480).

<sup>16</sup> Susan Forbes points out that when, at one point in the meal, Mrs. Ramsay attempts to engage in a verbal critique of British foods and cooking, thus participating in national discourse, entering the public sphere, she is laughed at by her fellow diners. This cogent point should make us pay even closer attention to Mrs. Ramsay’s transgression through practices.

<sup>17</sup> According to a 2000 article by D.W. Marshall, British culinary life still revolves around the “proper meal” epitomized by Sunday dinner, which consists of roast meat carved from the joint, with some accompanying potatoes, vegetables and gravy (210).

<sup>18</sup> Colin Spencer postulates that disruptions to normal eating patterns caused by World War I shortages, incited some innovation in British gastronomy (307). He mentions the cookbooks *The Gentle Art of Cookery*, which fused elements of foreign cooking with British tradition, as well as Florence White’s *Good Things in England*, which attempted to return to British folk traditions (307).

In *The Gender of Modernity*, Rita Felski considers the ways activities traditionally associated with women have been too quickly summarized as traditional in opposition to supposedly more modern masculine activities. She discusses, for instance, modern attitudes toward feelings and motherhood. I would suggest cooking might be such an activity as well. True, much about cooking remained old-fashioned, in women’s magazines, in widely-held expectations, and certainly these are reflected in Mrs. Ramsay’s attitude. Cooking per se, of course, is not modern. But there was consciousness

to be modern about it, as can be seen in this cookbook. Felski points out what a revolution in our understanding of modernity would be implied if we began to consider activities associated with women, modern: “How would our understanding of modernity change if instead of taking male experience as paradigmatic, we were to look instead at texts written primarily by or about women? And what if feminine phenomena, often seen as having a secondary or marginal status, were given a central importance in the analysis of the culture of modernity?” (10).

<sup>19</sup> Constance Classen argues that before the dawn of western science in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, women’s work with the material (doctoring, cooking, etc.) had a magical quality because nature was considered mysterious, but after the dawn of science, “as it was no longer considered infused with the magical forces of nature, much of women’s work, from child-rearing to cooking, lost its mythical dimensions and began to be portrayed as banal, simply a matter of good (or bad) housekeeping” (87).

<sup>20</sup> We might note as well that Woolf composed the novel in a period of convalescence, during part of which she was force-fed, as mentioned above. Woolf wrote to Lynton Strachey, of the treatment she was receiving during the composition of *Night and Day*: “I begin to despair of finishing a book on this method—I write one sentence—the clock strikes—Leonard appears with a glass of milk” (qtd. in Briggs 44).

<sup>21</sup> It is notable that this lunch is taking place in 1914, when England is on the brink of war. Dinner is that ritual by which civilization, particularly upper and middle-class Victorian British civilization is upheld, as we saw in *Night and Day*. The novel reflects larger world happenings through their effect on the characters’ personal lives. So here, the chaos of the meal reflects the broken world order. Martin, who should, as the male, preside over the event, can obtain no degree of control.

<sup>22</sup> An inverse dynamic is shown in *Between the Acts* in which a realm of food is transformed back into a spiritual realm. The larder at Pointz Hall used to be a chapel, and so the master of the house sometimes brought guests into the cook’s territory to see it. Woolf narrates from the perspective of the latter: the master takes his guests “Not to see the hams that hung from hooks, or the butter on a blue slate, or the joint for tomorrow’s dinner, but to see the cellar that opened out of the larder and its carved arch” (32).

<sup>23</sup> In a *Good Housekeeping* article of 1924 entitled “What Should a Woman Drink,” the answer was clearly not alcohol. Dr. Cecil Webb-Johnson wrote, “It is a scientific fact that women are more easily affected by alcohol than are men, especially when they are young” (31). He describes the dangerous affects: “The future is full of promise and the past is wiped out. This delightful state of affairs is also a temptation to the weak-willed; the desire to enjoy the pleasing sensations on a subsequent occasion is soon yielded to” (31).

<sup>24</sup> For examples of food scenes in English literature which communicate a revulsion at the lower-classes, see David Trotter, *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-*

*Century Art and Fiction*. Of a scene in Gissing's *Workers in the Dawn*, he writes: "The sizzling and steaming, the greasiness: this food repels, not because it tastes bad, but because it permeates; those who ingest it take it into their hair and clothes as well as into their stomachs; they take it, as William Worm had done, into their very being. Fried food is a condition rather than a nutrient. Metonymy becomes metaphor: you are what you eat" (242). While I am arguing the feeling of abjection is principally gender-based here, there are certainly other scenes in Woolf in which a revulsion to food is class-based. A scene in which Louis in *The Waves*, eats at a lower-class eating house, is full of invasive imagery: "A meaty, vaporish smell of beef and mutton, sausages and mash, hangs down like a damp net in the middle of the eating house" (93). Similarly, in her short piece, "Ode Written Partly in Prose on Seeing the Name of Cutbush Above a Butcher's Shop in Pentonville," Woolf contrasts working-class Cutbush's literary dreams to his visceral work cutting meat: "But I swam the Hellespont—he dreams.../ Shall I serve for ever Massey and Hodge meat/ merchants of Smithfield?" At this butcher job, "The/ meat blazes. The sides of oxen are patterned with/ flower leaves in the pink flesh. Knives slice./ The lumps are tossed and wrapped. Bags bulge on/ women's arms" (CS 239).

<sup>25</sup> In the short story, "Scenes from the Life of a British Naval Officer," Woolf imagined a military officer at dinner performing a ritual of dominance: "He sat alone at his dinner table as he had sat alone at his desk. Of the servants who put plates before him he had never seen more than the white hands, putting down plates, taking plates away. When the hands were not white, they were dismissed. His eyes never raised themselves above the hands and the plates. In orderly procession meat, bread [,] pastry [,] fruit were placed before the idol. The red fluid in the wine glass slowly sank, rose, sank [,] rose and sank again. All the meat disappeared, all the pastry, all the fruit. At last, taking a piece of crumb about the size of a billiard ball the Captain swept this round the plate [,] devoured it and rose" (233).

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Foster discusses Sara and North's dinner in *Transformations of Domesticity in Modern Women's Writing: Homeless at Home*. His focus is on how the dichotomy between domestic and public sphere was complicated by Woolf. He notes, for instance, that when North arrives at Sara's, she is on the phone, and therefore both inside and outside at once (108).

**CHAPTER IV**  
**SAVAGE EATING: COLONIAL DISGUST IN JAMES JOYCE'S *ULYSSES***

To move from Woolf's writing of the body to Joyce's would seem to shift between two completely different levels of British propriety. Woolf is famously prude and Joyce, of course, was banned internationally for his salacious subject matter. It is notable, however, that when the subject is eating, rather than sex, both are explicit: about the physical qualities of the thing eaten, the raptures of the eater, and the disgust invoked in others over such physical display. While for both it is partially a matter of aesthetics and philosophy that they sought to ground the body in the outside world, it is moreover a political act, an act of self-assertion for an underrepresented, subordinate group of people. In foregrounding women as hungry and improper eaters, Woolf presented them to be desiring beings and subjects active in the outside world. Just as Woolf focused on eating which was transgressive and disgusting to men, I will here argue that Joyce, throughout *Ulysses*, consistently displays his Irish characters eating in a way which offends early twentieth-century middle-class British sensibilities. Specifically, I propose that eating in *Ulysses* consistently transgresses by disgusting.<sup>1</sup>

It may not seem like self-assertion through disgusting eating would constitute a particularly pernicious strategy. However, British manners were made to register much of the supposed superiority of the British civilization. The book repeatedly flouts manners. Likewise, Irish inferiority was often constructed through a positing of Irish crudeness. So, when Joyce depicts Irish eating as repulsive, he is mimicking a colonial ideology according to which the Irish people were considered animalistic, uncivilized, and dirty. Early British responses to the book were often preoccupied with the book's sensuality, its sexual and scatological frankness. Even Woolf (who, as we have seen, was sensually

explicit herself in many ways) deemed Joyce “underbred” (Ellmann, Richard *James Joyce* 528). H.G. Welles denounced his obscene “cloacal obsession” (Brown, Richard 19). The book was banned in England until 1936.

To posit Joyce’s eating scenes as nationalistically inflected runs somewhat counter to postcolonial criticism of Joyce which argues that he mocks and avoids monolithic nationalism. In fact, in his famous lecture, “Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages,” Joyce himself questions the value of considering nations as discrete, unified entities. Clearly, the Ireland that he presents in *Ulysses* is far from homogenous: The three main characters are Hugarian-Irish, Spanish-Irish and an attempted émigré.<sup>2</sup> Vincent Cheng contends that Joyce did not subscribe to Celtic parochialism, but rather a cosmopolitan outlook, through which he liberated his people by transgressing the binary the British hierarchy set up.

One can concede that Joyce, a paradigmatic Modernist, was internationally or transnationally minded, however, and still acknowledge the significant ideological influence under which he and his Irish characters lived. Andrew Gibson has recently initiated a school of thought in Joyce studies--a historical materialism he calls “the London school”--which seeks to more carefully ground abstract theories we have of his philosophy and aesthetics in historical conditions. One clear fact is that Joyce grew up in an Ireland ruled by Britain and invaded by British values, education and products. In a recent collection of essays, *Joyce, Ireland, Britain*, Gibson and co-editor Len Platt say: “to think of Joyce in relation to Ireland also requires that we think of him in relation to Britain, not least because Ireland as Joyce knew it for most of his life was still in some degree a part of Britain. These relations are nothing if not intricate, nuanced, ambivalent,

even Byzantine” (20). In his own essay in the volume, Gibson explores how the British influence may underlie the debilitating propriety characters display in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, even when acting in the interest of self-liberation. So, Stephen’s trenchantly nationalist Aunt Dante strangely displays British proprieties, as Parnell advocated these for the erection of an indigenous ruling class. Likewise, Gibson argues that when Stephen plans for what will be his celebrated moment of confronting Father Dolan, his assertiveness is tempered with a politeness and humility that Gibson says reflects “Victorian English and genteel” etiquette (99). Clearly this imposed etiquette demeans him, as would adopting a foreign, imposed, etiquette of eating.

I position my argument within the context of British cultural influence that Gibson’s London School delineates. I begin by positing the insipient influence of Victorian and early twentieth-century British manners on the Dublin of *Ulysses*, which Joyce felt the need to shake.<sup>3</sup> This is a norm the influence of which Joyce establishes, I argue, when he begins the book with an account of the proper British meal—Haines’s breakfast. Joyce intends the breakfast to gesture to such etiquette norms and then ruptures the meal with depictions of acts that breach the norms. The eating scenes which follow throughout the work regularly brim with excess and mess. These scenes function as further means of rejection of imposed British proprieties.

Perhaps in an attempt to defend the book from accusations of baseness, critiques that do address the eating body have often rendered its sensuality symbolic. In *The Joyce of Cooking*, Alison Armstrong takes a Levi-Straussian approach to the gastronomical Joyce and reads his foodstuffs as a system of signs (229). Lindsey Tucker, in *Ulysses, Stephen and Bloom at Life’s Feast: Alimentary Symbolism and the Creative Process in*

*Ulysses*, does bring the visceral (digestion, defecation) to the fore, but her particular interest in disgusting acts lies more in their symbolism than in the immediate visceral response they provoke in readers. Tucker claims digestive imagery forms one of Joyce's major metaphors for the creative process. This enables her to read viscerally assertive moments as concepts.<sup>4</sup> These works are accompanied by many others which understand food and eating as symbolically-intended. While illuminating in some ways, such an approach can undermine the transgressive edge of the body and the interjection it makes into more abstract discourses of the book.<sup>5</sup> Joyce's own comments make clear that he intended for *Ulysses* to foreground the corporeal itself. He told Frank Budgen, "Among other things...my book is the epic of the human body...The words I write are adopted to express first one of its functions then another" (Budgen 21). Some recent critical approaches to the book have engaged more with the physical body, but this has yet to be done with food in *Ulysses*.<sup>6</sup> I bring *sensations* to the table and consider how they are situated within an early twentieth-century middle-class British sensibility.

To foreground the Irish in explicit visceral detail is provocative to a readership with such a sensibility.<sup>7</sup> Insofar as the mere concept of the Irish, as colonized Other, was repulsive to the British, their physical presence was likely to have been more so. As I discuss throughout this dissertation, an encounter with the tastes, smells, sounds and textures involved in people's eating can render their presence invasive to observers. The phenomenon of disgust is crucial to the formation of social boundaries. In disgust reactions, the combining of subject and object described by Merleau-Ponty is urgently felt. As in the ecstasy reaction, a subject perceiving a disgusting object or phenomenon has a sense of going beyond herself in an uncontrollable way. Joyce showcased the

bodies of his Irish characters as disgusting to early twentieth-century British sensibilities as a means of asserting the Irish in a direct, immediate way. As in the Mansfield chapter, potential for liberation lies outside prescribed eating rituals and is a matter of returning to the sensuality of eating itself; here the method of defamiliarization and liberation is disgust, rather than ecstasy. To be disgusting, precisely because it does indicate deviance from British social norms, is individualizing and liberating.

I begin this chapter with an introduction to theories of disgust and a brief history of British depictions of the Irish as disgusting. Then I analyze the breakfast meal of “Telemachus,” suggesting it serves as a model of British propriety against which to gauge other eating in the book. The rest of the chapter proposes three major categories of eating in the book which would be disgusting to early twentieth century middle-class sensibilities. Each stages a particular threat. First, eating crosses taboos operating in Britain, therein eschewing the order imposed by the colonizer. Second, eating is redolent with mess, which transgresses by spilling outside of prescribed parameter, such as those placed by the British. And, thirdly, eating is voracious and suggests the threat of the independent desire of the colonized. In each of these cases, I also consider how the same act presented as disgusting, is from another angle, empowering. Eating provided Joyce the imagery through which he could show the Irish pulverizing, digesting and desiring; that is, in acts of disgusting eating, he modeled their powers to destroy, consume, incorporate, and transform. Given its chapters’ widely diverging rhetoric and points of view, *Ulysses* is most often discussed on a per-chapter basis. Here I draw moments of disgust together from throughout the book, on the basis that they all equally serve to *interrupt* rather than realize any particular chapter’s narrative or point. While *language*



varies throughout the novel, the body and all its processes erupts within discourse in strikingly similar ways throughout the text.

### **Theories of Disgust**

Disgust is a psychological reaction to something repellant. Not a simple distaste, it is marked by the fear of being defiled (William Ian Miller 2). Critic Winfried Menninghaus explains that the experience of disgust “is a state of alarm and emergency, an acute crisis of self-preservation in the face of an unassimilable otherness” (1). A thing or phenomenon can be unattractive without being disgusting; the latter involves an immediate physiological repulsion. William A. Cohen describes the threat of a disgusting object phenomenologically: “By the time one has encountered and repudiated filth, it is too late—the subject is already besmirched by it. In this way, filth challenges the very dichotomy between subject and object” (x). The earliest thinking on disgust is generally attributed to Darwin, who hypothesized it served the biological purpose of protecting eaters from potentially defiling food (William Ian Miller 1). Later, cultural critics tended to focus on instances in which people recoil from things perceived psychologically defiling. Susan Miller thus notes that disgust will arise from abstract threats as well as physical polluters: People feel disgust at the smell of a beggar, for instance, not just because they fear disease but because they want to maintain distinctions between themselves and the lower class (7). In evoking reactions of disgust, then, Joyce was doing much more than prodding visceral reactions—he was attempting to breach parameters of identity.

Theorists since Darwin have largely agreed that disgust is never essentially, biologically hard-wired, but rather a function of a particular culture’s norms. Mary

Douglas argued in her seminal structuralist analysis of dirt, *Purity and Danger*, that dirt is that which falls outside the categories of a culture: “dirt is essentially disorder” (2).

Research has corroborated the idea that disgust is culturally, rather than biologically, based: Psychologist Paul Rozin had shown that children do not feel disgust until at least age 4 (William Ian Miller 12). In the words of William Ian Miller, “Disgust seems intimately connected to the creation of culture; it is so particularly human that, like the capacity for language, it seems to bear a necessary connection to the kinds of social and moral possibility that we have” (18). The British civilization of *Ulysses*, like other civilizations, defines itself against that which it repels as disgusting.

Because disgust-provoking things, like the Irish bodies of Joyce’s book, are actively excluded by a culture, they have the potential to subvert it. Menninghaus writes:

Precisely as that which transgresses civilized prohibitions, incites the (anal-sadistic) destruction of beautiful form, and laughingly transcends the symbolic order—precisely as this scandal, the disgusting advances into the abandoned positions of the inaccessible ‘real’ and of quasi-metaphysical truth. (11)

Joyce created a liberating space for his characters by rendering them disgusting. The disgusting thus becomes constructive, rather than garbage. William A. Cohen edited a recent anthology of essays on the filth, *Filth: Dirt, Disgust and Modern Life*, which all contemplate ways in which filth is not just waste, but reusable in creative ways. In his introduction, he proposes:

When people who understand themselves to be degraded, dispossessed, or abjected by a dominant order adopt and appropriate (sometimes even celebrate) what is otherwise castigated as filth, there is possibility of revaluing its aversiveness. Not merely owning up to, but taking comfort in, one’s own supposed dirtiness can serve powerful purposes of self-formation and group identification. In these senses, filth is put to important use, both psychologically and politically. (x)

By invoking disgust as a means of individuation and empowerment, as liberation from the imposition of a foreign enculturation, Joyce reappropriated it. The idea is similar to that of Bakhtin, who believed people achieved a kind of liberation by inverting the social order during Carnival, sometimes by engaging in gross bodily activities. But while Bakhtin's carnivals are open to charges of being catharses sanctioned by the power structure (Stallybrass and White 19), everyday stickiness, crumbs, and voracity can never be organized and appropriated; they spill out messily and brazenly into social order.

### **The Dirty Irish**

Edward Said has famously argued that colonizers establish their own self-definition in diametric opposition to characteristics they impose upon the colonized. British depictions of the Irish typify the way the phenomena generally worked: In contrast to its own civilization, rationality, masculinity, willpower, cleanliness, the Irish needed to be constructed as backward, sentimental, indolent, dirty (Lloyd 132).<sup>8</sup> This prejudice, centuries old, is evidenced in late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century documents: Sir J. Davies's *Discovery of the True Causes Why Ireland was Never Entirely Subdued* and Edmund Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland*. These works designate the Irish "wilde Beastes," accuse them of an "uncleanness in Apparrell, Diet and Lodging," say they lived in a "foul dunghill," in "swinesteads" and that they snatched food "like beasts out of ditches" (Stallybrass and White 132). L.P. Curtis, in *Anglo-Saxons and Celts*, finds evidence of the same in the nineteenth century. In building his argument that politicians invented the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic races as unified national heritages, he documents various instances of constructed dichotomies, according to which the Irish are rendered filthy. He remarks,

By common consent, the Irish did not know the difference between dirt and cleanliness. There is scarcely a description of Ireland in the Victorian era without its set passage on the dirt, misery, and primitiveness of the Irish cabin or rural dwelling. English tourists rarely failed to notice the pile of dung outside the door, the absence of ventilation and light inside, the dirt floor and shallow trench separating human and animal life, the filthy pile of straw on which the entire family slept, the pot used for cooking and storage of potatoes, the fetid smell of people and pigs living together in cramped quarters, the adults dressed in patched clothing, the children in rags and as likely as not half naked and barefoot. (57)

Such dirt took on an added connotation in the nineteenth century, when great strides in sanitation and industrialization rendered dirt more than a lack of personal hygiene, but a sign of overall backwardness. Curtis notes:

To Englishmen of the middle and upper classes who were increasingly self-conscious about public sanitation and personal hygiene, the squalor of Irish life meant not only that the country was uncivilized but that the people were downright barbarous. Adjectives like ‘savage’ and ‘wild’ recur intermittently in many accounts of the country. (58)

Even the religion and social dimensions of Irish culture were considered to be entrenched in filth. The Victorian British army officer, Sir Garnet Wolseley, commented of the Irish, “they are a strange, illogical, inaccurate race, with the most amiable qualities, garnished with the dirt and squalor which they seem to love as dearly as their religion” (qtd. in Curtis 52). Likewise, the English expression to “go to an Irish wedding” was used to mean emptying a cesspool (Curtis 52).

Some distinctions the British drew between their own national cleanliness and Irish national squalor were complete fictions. For instance, Stallybrass and White point out the error of Engels’s depiction of distinctively Irish filth in *The Conditions of the Working Class in England* (1844): “the Irishman allows the pig to share his own living quarters. This new, abnormal method of rearing livestock in the large towns is entirely of the Irish origin...the Irishman lives and sleeps with the pig, the children play with the

pig, ride its back...” (Stallybrass and White 132). In fact, Curtis notes that the pig was a common trope by which the British symbolized the Irish (*Anglo-Saxons* 58).<sup>9</sup> But Stallybrass and White report that keeping pigs in town was actually common English practice as well (132).

The greatest fiction is that the Irish are uncivilized, rather than simply being differently civilized. One way for Joyce to fight such constructions would have been to highlight some distinctions of Irish eating practices in a positive light. This was done by others. In his presentation of everyday Irish life in *Homelife in Ireland* (1910), nationalist essayist Robert Lynd presents Irish manners. Though he doesn't mention it, his tone of justification appears to speak to the prevalent British depiction of the Irish as without manners. Commenting on how one may find some Irishmen who keep their hats on during dinner, he says:

This, of course, is only a convention, and politeness expresses itself in various ways in various places. Even where the conventions permit a man to go through a door in front of a woman, and where they have not taught him the different uses of the knife and fork, or the side of a plate at which a tea-cup should stand, you will find the essentials of politeness among the people—kindliness, ease, and the spirit of equality. (280)

Lynd's statement points out the constructedness of British norms. It is the imposition of external practices and values according to which the Irish appear inadequate. In *The Path to Freedom*, Irish Revolutionary leader Michael Collins goes one step further and declares English civilization to be actually wrong for Irish people. He writes, “English civilization...For us it is a misfit. It is a garment, not something within us. We are mean, clumsy, and ungraceful, wearing it” (118). Joyce might have taken a similar approach and highlighted his Irish eaters as different, rather than disgusting. But while he would still be making a claim for Irish individuality, it would be without the confrontational edge he

achieves through disgust. Also, he would be leaving out the element of internalization of British norms that affected many, as well as some actual historical filth that factored into the equation.

While some stereotypes are fictional, there were sometimes inequalities of wealth which affected everyday manners and cleanliness. The decision to showcase the Irish as disgusting is perhaps also a way of confronting the British who imposed impoverishing conditions. In writing on Joyce and the body, Van Boheemen says, “Under colonial rule one group of people, the oppressors, are freed as much as possible from the limitations of bodily existence...while the others are reduced to body: slaves, servants, prostitutes...must live in a painful awareness of being gut and bone” (“Joyce’s Sublime” 40). So, not only were the colonizer’s demeaning views often turned inward, but, British practices produced a poverty which made the Irish actually live in ways that even they themselves felt were uncivilized, animalistic. As Edward Said has written, ideology can create the reality it describes (Cheng 24). Michael Collins describes the reduction of his compatriots to the state of swine: “They were so crushed during the British occupation that they were described as being ‘without the comforts of an English sow’ (128). He describes Irish people “crushed by destitution into living practically ‘the lives of the beasts’” (128). Collins’s remark resonates with Buck Mulligan’s designation of Irish culture as sickly, degraded and dirty, at the book’s opening breakfast meal. Mulligan says of the good Sandycove milk the peasant woman brings: “If we could live on good food like that...we wouldn’t have the country full of rotten teeth and rotten guts. Living in a bogswamp, eating cheap food and the streets paved with dust, horsedung and consumptives’ spits” (1.411-13). A claim such as this admits that the Irish were living

more filthy lives, but changes the meaning of that fact—the filth has not come about through their own fault, but through that of the British. This breakfast scene as a whole bears closer inspection because it is the book’s one staging of a formal meal and it is very British.

### **The English Breakfast**

*Ulysses* opens upon morning ablutions and a breakfast meal, served to Haines, a visiting Brit. For colonial reasons, it is notable that Joyce should have chosen to open with a breakfast meal: Aside from its roast beef, breakfast is one of England’s few distinguishing culinary marks. Historian Eileen White suggests that, “Breakfast is Britain’s most famous culinary contribution,” and she notes that it reached its peak of cultural importance in the Victorian and Edwardian eras (97). Thus, Joyce begins his book by making his Irish characters play out a standard British alimentary ritual. Enda Duffy contends, “Clearly, the level of Irish everyday life shown in *Ulysses*’s opening pages was that closest to British middle-class culture, from which it was mostly derived” (41). As the book progresses, the formal breakfast meal will clearly emerge as out of place in Joyce’s Dublin. Elsewhere in the book, food is largely eaten on the street, alone in bars, in bed, in brothels. Also, it is more often eaten in the form of casual snacks than in complete formal meals. In this opening English breakfast, though, standard breakfast fare—tea, toast, butter, honey, milk, rashers and eggs—are eaten around a table, ritualized by a prayer, and presided over by a housewife figure (a role assumed by the puckish Buck Mulligan). It seems that the guest Haines is the occasion for this atypical meal, because heading off to prepare the food, Mulligan comments, “the Sassenach wants his morning rashers” (1.232). The derogatory Irish term he uses for the Anglo evokes

nationalist rhetoric against the colonizers. And a hearty meal may have evoked English power and imperialism. White speaks of the English breakfast as “the first meal of the day that helped fuel Victorian industrial and colonial expansion” (97). The colonial connotation of the breakfast accords with other colonial dimensions of the opening scene: The meal takes place within the Martello Tower, a bastion of British military power, and the issue of Ireland’s colonial status underpins conversation throughout. From the start of the novel, then, Joyce is revealing food as political.

But it is perhaps more accurate to say that the English breakfast is gestured at rather than achieved in all of its dignity and formality. The meal repeatedly erupts with the disgusting and uncivilized. Not only are its formalities performed in an inadequate manner (Mulligan’s prayer is mocking, he ludicrously plays a housewife figure, and he has run out of an essential ingredient--milk), and uncivilized (Mulligan is described barbarously “hewing thick slices from the loaf” (1.381) and lunging towards his fellow diners with bread “impaled on his knife” (1.364), not to mention the fact that he strips at the table after eating), but also provokes disgust. Mulligan’s cooking erupts into a grease fire. David Trotter, in speaking of Gissing’s *Workers in the Dawn*, remarks that grease is a mark of a repulsive lower class in late nineteenth-century England novels. He notes of “the sizzling and steaming, the greasiness,” that “this food repels, not because it tastes bad, but because it permeates; those who ingest it take it into their hair and clothes as well as into their stomachs” (242). It is phenomenologically invasive. Moreover, Mulligan repeatedly stuffs his mouth full.

Accompanying the external improprieties, are Stephen’s thoughts throughout the meal. These are particularly repulsive and unappetizing in an eating context. The



milkwoman's appearance evokes in him thoughts of her own milk ("rich white milk not hers" (1.397-8)) as well as the process of milking the cow ("wrinkled fingers quick at the squirting dugs" (1.402)). Thus, the Irish milk which will be part of this British meal is associated with an old woman's breasts, with wrinkled skin, and with squirts. The disgust potential available in the drinking of human milk can be seen in the fact that Bloom's desire to drink Molly's milk was one of the most offensive aspects of the book to early readers. Moreover, while Mulligan was preparing breakfast, Stephen conjured several off-putting food-centered memories of his mother. For instance, he recalled the baked apples she would eat in immediate association with the bloody fingers she incurred from killing lice on the children. Suzette Henke contends this conjunction suggests cannibalism (18). Cannibalism, the ultimate Western taboo, is also evoked when Stephen refers to his mother as a "chewer of corpses."<sup>10</sup> Into the template of the English breakfast, then, erupts the greasy Irish kitchen, repulsive Irish milk, and barbarous Irish eaters.

Set at the beginning of the book, the breakfast is important for situating readers in a traditional British ritual, and therefore in a British perspective. The importance of this meal is reinforced through its echoing in a string of later breakfast scenes, all of which continue to abrade the original model of propriety. Bloom likes to taste urine in his breakfast, Molly wipes buttery fingers on the bed, Robert Emmett's breakfast is surrounded in bloodlust and gore, and Bella Cohen's breakfast fantasy includes sexual acts and she belches just thinking about it. There is no absolute perspective from which things are essentially disgusting, but framing the book with a meal of the British colonizer, invites readers to take this British perspective. The role of the Irish is to serve the British, just as Irish food was meant to feed them,<sup>11</sup> and so any depiction of the Irish

nurturing themselves with their own breakfasts would necessarily provoke disgust. But precisely in being unacceptable to early twentieth-century middle-class British sensibilities, Joyce's depiction of such eating provides the means for independent self-assertion.

### **Taboo Transgressions**

The eschewing of table manners is an especially menacing transgression, since such manners are intended to keep a potentially threatening situation—full of appetite and sharp objects—under control, as Margaret Visser argues in her history of table manners, *The Rituals of Dinner*. It is no less than the fear of cannibalism, she contends, that undergirds our dining rules:

Somewhere at the back of our minds, carefully walled off from ordinary consideration and discourse, lies the idea of cannibalism—that human beings might become food, and eaters of each other. Violence, after all, is necessary if any organism is to ingest another...Behind every rule of table etiquette lurks the determination of each person present to be a diner, not a dish. It is one of the chief roles of etiquette to keep the lid on the violence which the meal being eaten presupposes. (3-4)

The taboos upon which Joyce focuses bring the assertiveness of the eater to the fore. Without patience for utensils, hands are recklessly used. Cannibalism is a major motif in the book. And the book frequently displays chewed food and excrement, for a similar reason—as a display of what an eater is capable of doing to a formerly intact object. Joyce is not showing the characters to replace one set of taboos with another. Rather, he shows a trumping of cultural structure per se with unruly sensation.

The flouted taboos are not specifically British; they are larger, defying norms of Western civilization. As discussed above, when rendering the Irish dirty and disgusting, the British were not deeming them simply un-British, but generally uncivilized. Thus,

widely recognizable western improprieties are breached in the Burton. One man spits his food back on his plate (8.659-660), one man has his knife and fork upright and his elbows on the table (8.689-90), another talks with his mouth full (8.691-2), another seems to be licking his plate (8.676). Bloom models the reaction expected of early twentieth-century middle-class British readers accustomed to the degree of etiquette Haines expected at breakfast. Though he himself is of course, not British, he is modeling an acceptable sensibility in public under the present regime. Bloom deplores such eating as animalistic and disgusting. But while he walks out the door and considers himself to be moving on to a more civilized restaurant, the reader continues to encounter similar taboo transgressions throughout the book.

In *All Manners of Food*, Stephen Mennell charts the history of the “civilizing process” of French and English eating since the middle ages. He discusses the kind of fundamental dining rules I suggest *Ulysses* transgresses—for instance, eating with utensils and discretion with bodily processes—as fundamental *faux pas* against which the sophistication of British and French modernity defined itself:

...the gradual refinement of table manners, notably through the adoption of the fork, was associated with increasing revulsion towards touching food with the hands and even stronger feelings of revulsion towards such practices as removing food from one’s mouth and putting it back in the common bowl. And the gradually increasing control and removal behind the scenes of bodily functions such as urination, defecation and vomiting were equally associated with the growth of shame and disgust in cases where these functions were performed under the gaze of others. (291)

Such basic rules of British table etiquette are systematically broken by the colonized Dubliners of Joyce’s world. In this way, Joyce wrote to disgust early twentieth-century middle-class British readers.

First, characters repeatedly eat without utensils. Bloom is known to drink gooseberry fool straight from his plate (17.1924). Characters frequently hold food in their hands, even slimy, cold parcels of raw meat: Mrs. Breen reaches into Bloom's pocket for the pork kidney (15.492), Moses Dlugacz similarly holds a pork kidney in his hand (15.989) and in her memories of the Glencree dinner, Molly muses, "I could have picked every morsel of that chicken out of my fingers it was so tasty" (18.430-1). In "Laestrogonyians," Bloom notices one of the sandwichman pulling a hunk of bread from beneath his board, "crammed it into his mouth and munched as he walked" (8.126-7). He eats this without table or plate. When Bloom uses utensils, he errs. Molly grouses that he uses the wrong end of the spoon to eat his eggs (18.932), and she describes him trying to eat soup while walking: "he walks down the platform with the soup splashing about taking spoonfuls of it" (18.359-60). Without utensils, the element of culture is removed from between person and food. Moreover, eating without these mediating tools is more immediate and can accommodate greater animalistic voracity.

This reckless voracity is suggested by a number of cannibalistic scenes in the book. We know that cannibalism breeches a taboo in Dublin because Murphy expects disgust from his listeners as he details stories of the "maneaters" of Peru (16.470). Nevertheless, Joyce shows the Irish to share the trait with their fellow colonized subjects. As with Stephen's thoughts of his mother, the cannibalism throughout the book is more in thought than in deed, but nevertheless presented by Joyce in quite visceral detail, as with the bloody fingernails of Mrs. Daedulus. Bloom would like to milk Molly into his tea (18.578). Elsewhere, characters in their thoughts and word render sexual fluids food. Alimentary metaphors are perhaps not uncommon in the history of romantic and erotic

writing, but Joyce makes them provokingly scabrous. Semen is compared to celery sauce (13.1041) and gruel (18. 1355), women's sexual excretions to "lobster and mayonnaise" (15.3752), and their menstrual blood to "potted herring gone stale" (13.1033). Bloom famously compares Molly's behind to melons, and quite viscerally: "the mellow yellow smellow melons of her rump" (17.2241). And the "foot and mouth" motif in the book, which refers directly to the cattle disease, is manifested as the actual eating of a foot in the book's last chapter. With Bloom's head at opposite end of the bed from her onw, Molly feels herself to be sleeping with Bloom's foot in her mouth (18.1206). Any of these would serve, if only metaphorically, to justify Bloom's summary of the Burton: "Eat or be eaten. Kill! Kill!" (8.703). Some scenes are even more transgressive in that they depict sacred things being eaten. The dead and buried are devoured: Paddy Dignam emerges from the dead exhaling a "putrid carcassfed breath" (15.1203-4) and even the holy become food: Our Lady of Mr. Carmel turns to caramel in Bloom's stream of consciousness (8.149). It might be argued that, as the Irish are most often eating each other in the book, its cannibalism is more self-destructive than self-assertive. But the fact that the cannibalism is only in metaphor keeps Irish bodies intact while civilized sensibilities are fully offended.

Food that has been chewed or completely digested (and is in the form of excrement) appears repeatedly as well and, like the cannibalism, suggests the destruction eaters are capable of causing to formerly intact objects. Similarly, Joyce frequently mentions teeth in the book; Mulligan's repeatedly appear in "Telemachus." To present the Irish as eaters is to highlight their powers of destruction and digestion. And the repeated presentation of chewed food is a classic provoker of disgust. Psychologist Susan

Miller offers an explanation of this: “eating can involve the deliberate pulverization of a specific and recognizable thing...so that it becomes a pulp” (38). She contends, “we like others to keep their mouths shut when chewing so that we are protected visually (and thus, mentally) from witnessing the moistening and unmaking of familiar forms” (38).<sup>12</sup> Thus, the threat lies not only in the encounter with someone else’s saliva or digestive juices, but with the experience of disintegration itself. Herein, though, also lies its liberating potential. It is revolutionary to provide this model of destruction, in a nation that would like to tear down its shackles. Several Dubliners bring chewed or partially digested food out of their mouths through teeth-picking or other means. Joyce writes of Bloom in “Ithaca,” that, “occasionally he removed from his lips the traces of food by means of a lacerated envelope or other accessible fragment of paper” (17.1925-6). Miles Crawford openly flosses his teeth in the newspaper office and the vulgarity of the act is pronounced in the atmosphere of witty, sophisticated rhetoric, and Joyce renders it especially visceral in the sounds and dirt with which he describes it: “He took a reel of dental floss from his waistcoat pocket and, breaking off a piece, twanged it smartly between two and two of his resonant unwashed teeth” (7.371-3). Molly spits olives out (4.203). And, in the book’s most famous instance of removing chewed food from the mouth, she feeds Bloom pre-masticated seedcake. Many critics have seen this as a positive image—an erotic or motherly act, or an empowering gender reversal (a performance of female insemination) but these explanations reach to a symbolic register.<sup>13</sup> According to the taboos Mennell details, the chewing mouth or chewed food should not be shown. Moreover, the act resonates with Joyce’s other mentions of chewed food which are unambiguously crafted to disgust an early twentieth-century middle-class

sensibility—the dirty teeth, the flossing, the food spit out. To draw attention to the teeth and the powers of destruction in Irish digestive processes, is to pose a threat, is to propose a revolutionary formlessness, of the kind Susan Miller described.

Joyce takes this open display of digested food a step further when he narrates vomiting and defecation. Bloom defecates after his breakfast. Paddy Dignam cries from the dead, “I must satisfy an animal need. That buttermilk didn’t agree with me” (15.1234-5). Both Bloom and Molly are depicted flatulent. Stephen’s mother is shown vomiting. The waste is not only on visual display only; the Dubliners repeatedly *eat* it. Bloom likes to taste in his kidney “a fine tang of faintly scented urine” (4.4-5). Lindsay Tucker suggests he contemplates how his garden is fertilized with his own waste (49). Molly imagines that their old servant sneezed and farted into the pots (18.1083). And Bloom postulates that Reuben J’s son, who nearly drowned in Liffey, must have “swallowed a good bellyful of that sewage” while submerged (8.53). Finally, the protean dog of “Circe” eats its own vomit. For Joyce to make his Irish characters eat waste gestures to the roles Victorian and early twentieth-century middle-class Brits gave to them.

Joyce renders the Irish uncivilized and animalistic in these scenes. But to be disgusting to an early twentieth-century middle-class sensibility, is to defy that civilization and gain independence from it: a political move in a colonial context. Michael Collins had said that the Irish appeared clumsy attempting to don British mannerisms. The bodily liberation of this taboo-breaking carries a panache.

### **Messy Eating**

Sloppiness might appear to be the very antithesis of constructive action and therefore, not political. But mess, by definition, exists outside of order and is therefore

potentially subversive. It is a spreading outward, an overflowing of boundaries.

Throughout the colonial history, as I have shown, British observers found Irish mess to be evidence of their inferiority. When that mess is put forth in a novel of clear erudition and sophistication, it is not abashed, but abrasive. The liberation of mess lies perhaps in its evidence of sheer, brimming life.

Messes are a kind of exuberance: Sense objects overflow their boundaries—jam smears, crumbs spread. Some theorists, such as William Ian Miller, have postulated that the ultimate evoker of disgust is not the corpse, but overabundance, a swarming of excessive life (40). Similarly, the early twentieth-century German philosopher Aurel Kolnai explained, “one need only think of the connection to vermin, or of what is disgust to the spirit in the idea of effervescent vitality, of a qualitatively indifferent, reckless production of embryos and spawn” (qtd. in Menninghaus 18). Susan Miller engages William Ian Miller’s hypothesis and makes what is a phenomenological point: Our own personal boundaries are threatened by exuberant life around us (55). The material culture of the Irish exists in excess of the British paradigm, as Joyce clearly demonstrated in the opening breakfast meal. From British ethnocentric eyes, then, Irish material culture inherently constitutes a kind of mess. That the Irish should be seen feeding themselves, propagating these intractable bodies and lives, intensifies the impression of this swarming, this thronging of excessive life.

The diners at the Burton make what would be the biggest, most visceral, animalistic mess, from an early twentieth-century middle-class British sensibility. The Burton scene is an instructive one to start with, moreover, because Joyce provides not only the eating itself, but a perspective on it: Again, we can take Bloom to model the



disgust Joyce is intending to invoke: in public, he is a respectable, upstanding man, demonstrating dominant, British, sensibilities of etiquette. Walking into the Burton, he is affronted by diners “wolfing gobfuls of sloppy food” (8.655), and bearing a “sauced stained napkin” (8.658). He recoils from “a man spitting back on his plate: halfmasticated gristle” (8.659-60) and from another “sopping sippets of bread” (8.676). There is mess both in texture and sound: Bloom notes the “sticky clattering plates” (8.687).

Accompanying the invasive stickiness is “gumminess.” One image striking enough to linger in Bloom’s mind and resurface later in the day is “that chap in the Burton, gummy with gristle” (11.570). The smells of this eating scene equally permeate: Walking into the restaurant, Bloom’s first impression is: “Stink gripped his trembling breath: pungent meatjuice, slush of greens” (8.650-51). The food is simultaneously formless—a “slush”—and abrasive—it grips, is pungent. The smells invade him as long as he stands there: He recoils at, “Smells of men. Spaton sawdust, sweetish warmish cigarettesmoke, reek of plug, spilt beer, men’s beery piss, the stale of ferment” (139). He is driven to remove himself from what he has seen, both in thought, by declaring, “I hate dirty eaters” (8.696), and physically, by leaving the restaurant. But as with the breaking of taboos he deplored, the messy eating Bloom here shuns reappears throughout, from Mulligan’s cramming food into his mouth at breakfast to the flakes of meat Bloom finds in the bed at night. It is Irish materiality, the body, insistently asserting its presence, against imposed British order.

Both Irish commercial catering and home kitchens in the book are rife with what would likely seem mess to an early twentieth-century middle-class British sensibility. It is not just the Burton which is messy. Bloom describes Larry O’Rourke’s store: “From

the open doorway the bar squirted out whiffs of ginger, teadust, biscuitmush” (4.106-7). Rather than offering clearly defined foods, O’Rourke’s store offers foods which all waft together in a convoluted smell. Even the individual items constituting this miasma are themselves disintegrated—they are dust and mush; they “squirt.” For lunch, Bloom chooses Davy Bourne’s as a clean alternative to the Burton, but even there, food is depicted in a way likely to be off-putting to an early twentieth-century middle-class British sensibility. The cheese has a “feety savour” and the mustard on his sandwich gives him a “relish of disgust” (8.818-19). Bloom also describes the Ormond, where he eats dinner, as “clean” (11.569) but then this environment also displays mess and sticky substances. The liquor Boylan drinks there is repeatedly described as “syrupy,” and the description of Bloom’s preparation of his potatoes emphasizes their disintegration: He “mashed mashed” (11.553). Bloom’s thoughts of food while there also add to the general mess. In this environment his thoughts about animals fornicating are formed in terms of food-- “jamjam lickitup” (11.705). The Ormund waiter Pat reappears in “Circe,” bringing Bloom the meal he had in the bar: He “advances with a tilted dish of spillspilling gravy” (15.509). The repetition here, as with the mashing, performs the disintegrating mess it describes. The Blooms’ home kitchen is little better. Molly refers to this place where she does the family cooking as a “filthy sloppy kitchen” (18.335) and “the dirty old kitchen” (18.1094). Bloom notes that when he goes to the pantry at night he does not like “all the smells in it waiting to rush out” (8.23). We know there is a mess in the Dedalus kitchen as well because the family cat is shown “devouring a mass of eggshells and charred fishheads and bones on a square of brown paper” (16.274-6).<sup>14</sup> These messy Irish eating

places house and perpetrate eating likely to appear messy to early twentieth-century middle-class British sensibilities.

The affront of this messiness lies partially in its overflowing of boundaries. Frequently food is described as wet or sticky. The candy seller Bloom passes on the street in “Laestrogonyians” is “sugarsticky” (8.1). Bloom imagines that he would become all “pigsticky” eating the meat he bought in “Circe,” (15.658). Similarly, the “tender gland” of kidney he takes from Dlugzac’s in the morning is “moist,” and he “slid” it into his pocket (4.181). Mrs. Breen has a “soft moist meaty palm” (15.466). Bloom speaks of the Irish police “sweating Irish stew into their shirts” (8.546). The sailor in “Wandering Rocks” witnesses two urchins eating licorice with “yellowslobbered mouths”(10.245). Molly’s lips when feeding Bloom were “sticky gumjelly” (8.909). The sensual presence of these Irish eaters does not remain within neat containers, but self-assertively roams at large.

Along these lines, Joyce repeatedly shows food to be spilling over into areas of ideological purity or sacredness where its presence would likely be disgusting to early twentieth-century middle-class British sensibilities. Noble ideas are defiled by food—the marriage bed and romance brought down to the level of gross matter: Molly wipes her fingers “smartly on the blanket” (4.335) and gets crumbs of meat in the bed (17.2124-5). Of the moment when Bloom attempted a marriage proposal, she notes “my hands and arms [were] full of pastry flour” (18.200-1). She, like Bloom and the servant elsewhere, also farts.<sup>15</sup> Bloom’s sometime love interest, Mrs. Breen, in addition to the moist meaty palm, has in his romantic memories of her, “a daub of sugary flour stuck to her cheek” (8.272). Text is similarly reduced to its materiality and yoked to the services of digestion.

As previously mentioned, Bloom picks his teeth with envelopes (17.1925-6). He also uses a magazine as toilet paper: “He tore away the prize story and sharply wiped himself with it” (4.537). While at the *Freeman’s Journal*, he thinks about how discarded newspaper is employed, among other things, for the ignoble purpose of wrapping up raw meat (7.137). And he imagines the intellectual Lizzy Twigg reading poetry while drinking “sloppy tea” (8.334). Similarly, when Professor MacHugh debunks unsophisticated nationalism it is with a mouth ignobly full of biscuits (7.256-9), and this repast is followed by eructation: “a dumb belch of hunger cleft his speech” (7.860). Food mess even encroaches upon the solemnity of a funeral—the carriage Bloom rides to Paddy Dignam’s funeral is littered with crumbs (6.97). Such messes are likely to repeal early twentieth-century middle-class British readers from the bodies of these Irish eaters. But they also model a defiance of order—from cultural narratives, from bombastic rhetoric, from published texts (all instruments by which the dominant power operated, even if not all of the above examples are British)—that liberates the eaters. Joyce depicted them in ways which would seem messy to early twentieth-century middle-class Brits in order to aggressively assert Irish bodies.

### **Voracious Eating**

As the breeching of taboos provides a model of social transgression and mess of bodily assertion, voracity models the fulfillment of desires for the Irish. Any wanting on the part of the colonized is threatening to the privilege of the colonizers. Thus, by various means, Joyce marks eager eating in ways likely to disgust early twentieth-century middle-class British sensibilities. Whereas Hemingway and Mansfield invite readers to relish in a protagonist’s enjoyment of food, readers who adhere to these British

sensibilities are kept at a distance from the appetite of the Burton eaters, Bloom, and Molly. Joyce lends each edacious eater various associations which work to cast their appetites pejoratively.<sup>16</sup>

Only two generations removed from the famine, it makes sense that the Irish would eat heartily when food was available. But, as Stephen Mennell explains, in modernity, voracious eating marks one as lower class. As wealth and food security increased from the Middle Ages, gorging was steadily less practiced by the higher strata of society. Instead, beginning in the Romantic period, a slimmer body image came into fashion (37). Mennell contends that once food came to be readily available and affordable down the social line, the rich began to distinguish themselves by selective palates, rather than by the ability to overindulge. Gourmet writers began to shun obesity. Gorging was rather the mentality of the poor, those who lived with the threat of starvation, or had it in their recent past. Hence, the upper class frequently complained of the amount their servants ate. Of this, Mennell comments, “It is hardly surprising if people drawn from the ranks of society where the worry for centuries had been simply to get enough to eat did not immediately develop self-control when suddenly confronted with plentiful food” (38). So, in part, the disgusting cast given to scenes of Irish voracity can be attributed to the very poverty to which the British reduced them.

At the Burton, Bloom notes the diners “wolfing gobfuls of sloppy food” (8.655) and “scoffing up stewgravy” (8.676). One man “shoveled gurgling soup” (8.659), another is seen “ramming a knifeful of cabbage down as if his life depended on it” (139). Leaving the place, Bloom impugns their voracity: “Every fellow for his own, tooth and nail. Gulp. Grub. Gulp. Gobstuff....Eat or be eaten. Kill! Kill!” (8.701-3). James F.

Wurtz suggests that it is the memory of recent famine that motivates their gorging: “it is clear that these eaters are eating as though unused to the availability of food, wolfing down their meals before it can be taken away from them” (109). He says, “These restaurant patrons are more than simply representations of a past tragedy, but instead point to the continuation of that tragic past into the present” (109). But if such eating was a sign of being lower class, its exuberance registers triumph: After adversity, the country could eat again. It had been the custom in Irish literature in Joyce’s time to evade the subject of the famine due to its popular interpretation as a deserved punishment. Marie Smyth comments, “Remembrance of the famine rekindles that smoldering doubt we carry internally, ignited by the poisonous racist discourse about ourselves that we witness daily. Perhaps we are ‘savages’” (91). June Dwyer notes, in fact, that because of shame over the famine as divine intervention, food itself has been conspicuously absent from Irish Literary Revival texts (41). Against this silence, Joyce’s rendering of this post-famine, eager feeding emerges especially unapologetic and celebratory.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, it may also be Joyce’s intention to suggest larger appetites which were looked upon with disdain: hunger for economic and political gains.<sup>18</sup> That the British found such desires to be a threat is amply evidenced in the restrictions they imposed on Irish economic activity in order to forestall their competition. We can assume that the men at the Burton are working men, eating in town on break from their daily business. The effect is to animalize the urban Irish worker, the Irish middle class.

So too is the case with the worker we follow most closely. Even though Bloom is disgusted with the appetites of the Burton eaters, he himself is famously first presented in the book ardently speculating upon meats he might eat for breakfast: Joyce writes that he

ate inner organs “with relish.” Bloom’s eager desire for these is especially striking as it is a desire for things normally off-putting: His kidney, as mentioned before, is tinged with urine, and “oozing bloodguts” (4.145) at the butcher’s. The same eagerness leads him to forego his manners: “occasionally he drank voraciously the juice of gooseberry fool from an inclined plate” (17.1924). This is an appetite with which the reader positioned by the Haines’s breakfast meal is not likely to want to relate.<sup>19</sup> Such voracity transgresses all traces of civilization: It involves a desire for waste matter, and a willingness to eat barbarously, without utensils. Bloom is never far removed from thoughts of his appetite or digestion. Catherine Ryan catalogues all the food in “Lestrogonyians,” combining Bloom’s actual ingestion with his thoughts of, observations of and puns on foodstuffs, and finds eleven appetizers, forty-eight entrees, twenty-one beverages and thirty-two desserts (378-383). Stuart Gilbert contends that Bloom is always searching for food because, like his prototype Ulysses, he is a wanderer, and “the preoccupation when, where and how to procure the next meal is ever with the wandering man, be he Greek or Jew” (208). Unlike Ulysses, however, he is not fighting heroic battles in between. And he can not maintain the same civilized distance from his foodstuff: Not only is food often in his thoughts, it is also explicitly on his person. He carries meat and a potato in his pockets in “Calypso,” and these return, figured as part of himself--Mrs. Breen and Zoe take these to be his genitalia in “Circe.” These images suggest his dissolution into the food he eats. Even his imagined utopia is rendered alimentary: “Bloomuselum” is in the shape of a pork kidney. Moreover, this groveling in food can be linked to failures in other areas of his life, particularly the sexual, as he eats his dinner at the exact time that Molly has her rendezvous with Boylan. Suzette Henke proposes that Bloom fortifies himself

with a hearty meat meal because “Food offers sensual compensation for sexual loss” (130).<sup>20</sup> So the nature of the food eaten, the manner of its being eaten, and the reason for eating it, all give readers distance from Bloom’s feasting.

To further cast his voracity as disgusting and uncivilized from the viewpoint of an early twentieth-century middle-class Briton, Joyce repeatedly pairs Bloom’s eating with an animal’s eating. In “Lestrogonyians,” soon before his lunch, gulls greedily snatch up a Banbury cake he throws them.<sup>21</sup> Bloom attempts to distance himself from this behavior, as he does the Burton diners, inveighing against their greed (8.703). Joyce, however, continues to associate Bloom himself with animal hunger throughout the book.

Concomitant with Bloom’s relishing of his morning kidney, the cat runs crying for her meal of milk: “Gurrhr! She cried, running to lap” (4.38). The protean dog Bloom feeds in “Circe” “mauls the bundle clumsily and gluts himself with growling greed, crunching the bones” (15.673-4). The mauling, glutting and growling are a further representation of his morning’s “relishing” of inner organs. Finally, when in “Eumaeus,” Stephen and Bloom are riding home from their meal of coffee and bun in the bar, the horse of their carriage drops “three smoking globes of turds” (16.1876-7). As it is juxtaposed with the bestial, Bloom’s eating is not something early twentieth-century middle-class British readers can easily relish. His voracity is rendered uncivilized and animalistic.

Joyce portrays the epitome of these suggestions of animalistic voracity in “Circe.” There Bloom is made by his tormenter Bella to play the role of a pig rooting for truffles: He “sinks on all fours, grunting, snuffling, rooting at his feet” (433). Bloom has a sophisticated palate in the book. He appreciates burgundy and gorgonzola for lunch, introduces Molly to olives, and fantasizes about the fruits of the Near East. These truffles



are the costliest of the foods with which he is associated. Truffles are literally worth more than their weight in gold. When Bloom reaches at them, grasping at cultural sophistication and elite commodities, he is cast as pig. Enda Duffy suggests that Bella is an image of the colonizer, Cecil Rhodes (21). This pig, a classic image for the Irish, here on all fours before the British, is perhaps the animal which underscores all the others. Such a rendering demonizes Irish desires. Stephen also emerges as a swine in “Circe.” Though drunk rather than gluttoned, he renders himself pig with a metaphor: “filling my belly with the husks of swine” (15.2494-5). And Stephen goes on to describe Ireland itself as a pig—a disgusting, taboo-breaking cannibal pig: “old sow who eats her farrow” (15.4581-2). But the pig role-playing Bloom does is a farce, a performance from which he soon emerges unscathed. This suggests that all of these disgusting behaviors appears so via constructions, via British sensibilities, rather than reality.

If, from a British perspective, the thought of Irish eating is disgusting, through another lens the frequent images of Bloom enjoying food, provide a positive model of Irish fulfillment. In a country from which the best foods have been taken, where many are surviving on “potatoes and marge,” he satisfies his appetites. In a country where many, politically shackled, feel spiritually unfulfilled, where much of the day’s efforts lead to economic dead ends (including Bloom’s failed canvassing for the day), Bloom insists on complete satisfaction. From his first appearance in the book, he is making plans to go out and procure something delectable. In fact, Lindsey Tucker argues that Bloom’s physical hunger, “really a hunger for meaning, is accompanied by a sense of the sacredness of life” (70). For instance, he imagines the larger universe in terms of food— a pineapple

rock at the center of the world (67). And his attitude spreads. Critics have noted that he feeds many in addition to himself.<sup>22</sup>

Molly is another character who thinks about food lustily and frequently. As is the case with Bloom, her first appearance in the book shows her eagerness to eat: She is impatient for her breakfast, and yells down the stairs for Bloom to hurry up in the kitchen. The same preoccupation persists at the end of the day. In “Penelope,” she is lying in a bed studded with meat crumbs, digesting (she is flatulent) and her stream-of-consciousness returns frequently to various foods she has eaten or would like to eat. As mentioned in the Woolf chapter, for a woman to show appetite in turn-of-the-century British culture was to betray her femininity. That the same held true in Ireland to some extent is revealed by the fact that Molly admits to feeling the need to stop herself from eating everything on her plate at the Glencree dinner (18.432). But other thoughts lay the sheer brunt of her appetite before us. Of this unfinished Glencree dinner, she indecorously reflects that she wanted to “pick every morsel of chicken out of my fingers it was so tasty and browned and as tender as anything” (18.430-2). This gender transgression constituted by Molly’s appetite distances the cultivated reader from her eating. So while Bloom’s eating was demonized for suggesting economic ambitions, hers is for evoking gender transgression. It is a frequent imperialist technique to render the colonized woman masculine. African-American “mammy” figures, for instance, were depicted as more large, forthright and powerful than black men, a stereotype meant to further emasculate the men and suggest that, lacking refined women, the race was uncivilized. It was clearly Joyce’s intention, however, to render Molly’s brazenness and large appetites in an empowering way—Joyce explained that she is the Irish earth mother,

Geae Tellus. It is precisely her appetite, likely to appear disgusting and excessive to early twentieth-century British middle-class sensibilities, that gives her power as woman, and as propagator of Irish life.

### **The Dirty British**

Joyce, I have argued, embraces designations of the Irish as disgusting because the very repulsion that it effects is also a liberation. We can assume that most of the eaters in this book would not be welcomed to Haines's table. Not all British characters, however, are set up in juxtaposition to disgusting Irish eating, and I want to devote this last part of the chapter to the British who are messy, voracious, or who cross taboos. Although they make only brief appearances, these characters give the lie to the formality of Haines. Paired with the Irish eaters, they suggest that eating naturally tends towards the uncivilized; it inherently threatens culture with unwieldy object matter. And if the colonizer must engage just as much in bodily processes as the colonized, the designation of the Irish as disgustingly corporeal loses force.

Other champions of the disgusting have seen the imperative of bodily processes as a social leveler. Benjamin Lazier has argued this about early twentieth-century academic activism pertaining to disgust (279). He discusses, for instance, the fictional community imagined by Josef Feinhals, the "oletarians," who declared humankind's common denominator of filth. Lazier argues that this community's leveling quality is intended to oppose the contemporary Nazi Germany exclusionary policy (278). Perhaps Joyce intends Bloom to see similar potential in disgust. Following his initial repulsion at the Burton eaters, he reflects, "Am I like that?" And he concludes that yes, we "See ourselves as others see us" (8.662). This personal realization is adjoined throughout the book, as I

have noted, by many behaviors similar to the ones to which he reacts. British characters in the book might have been made to come to the same realization. Joyce shows several engaging in eating behaviors like those of the “dirty” Irish.

If the fact that both English and Irish eat means that both are bodily, the associations that incur to disgusting eating are different in each case. From an Irish perspective, as exemplified by nationalist sentiments throughout the book, the British have been animal-like in their greed and swindling of Irish resources. When Bloom, in “Hades,” sights cattle being transported to the slaughterhouse, he thinks, “Roastbeef for old England. They buy up all the juicy ones” (6.3934). As the English have often employed roast beef as a symbol of their identity, this comment suggests that British society as a whole is built on a swindling. Then, in “Proteus,” Stephen reconstructs the nursery rhyme to be, “Feefawfum. I z mellz de bloodz odz an Iridzman” (3.293) and thus renders the British cannibalistic monsters. Elsewhere, the Citizen refers to the British as “hyenas,” when discussing how they continued to export Irish food during the famine, effectively calling their voracity animal (12.1371). Joyce reinforces these explicit critiques of the British as voracious and uncivilized through descriptions of their eating.

In the first place, he places a few representatives of Britain’s political and military presence in the compromising position of eating. In “Circe,” Private Carr and Private Compton “burst together from their mouths a volleyed fart” (15.49-50). Above, I suggested that the eating of excrement was one of the most glaring transgressions of taboo in the eating Joyce depicts. While in the Bloom residence farts were only in the pots, here they are in the soldiers’ mouths. Joyce is undermining their speech, and by extension, the ideological justification for their presence there, by making them flatulent

at the mouth. Moreover, in “Proteus,” Stephen refers to Queen Victoria as “an old hag with yellow teeth” (3.232), a line which Lindsey Tucker takes to reference her pejoratively as eater (36). While Irish teeth, along with the objects of their gnashing, often redoubtably loom in the book, the queen’s teeth are sallow and old. Her force is divested of its governmental and militaristic forces, rendered in a single body part vulnerable to aging and decay, and to being disgusting.

It is not only the law itself, but the accoutrements of cultural power which colonize a nation. And Joyce brings these down into the muck of eating as well. In his discussion of the great British cultural icon, Shakespeare, Stephen focuses on material details of his private life. Among these is the fact that his father is a butcher (9.131), and that people in his audience ate sausages. It is British custom to avoid discussing the food, even at the table. To bring food onto the stage of high art, and into the birthplace of the national muse, is blasphemous. The affront is especially pointed coming from Stephen, who regards eating with disgust throughout.

Finally, through a mother figure, the British prostitute Zoe, Joyce represents the racial arm of the colonizing power. As a worker in sex, Zoe suggests motherhood. This is emphasized by the fact that her name means “life.” But Zoe is not a refined angel in the house, a spiritualized bodiless Victorian mother figure. She is grasping: She grabs Bloom’s potato from his pocket and she eagerly takes his chocolate. Taking up this chocolate with her hands, she indecorously declares, “Fingers was made before forks” (15.2708). To show a Brit as a prostitute and lower class, is in the first place an affront. To highlight her neediness, her grasping, swindling and gobbling of food, is even more so. Joyce moreover situates her in mess. Her lips are smeared with swinefat and her

cloying breath smells of stale garlic (15.1332, 1340). She is among the whores who “blow ickylicky sticky yumyum kisses” when Bloom and Stephen leave (15.4321).

These images associate her not with a superior race, but rather with the kind of swarming bug life, to which Miller and Kolnai attribute the epitome of disgust.

The motifs of this book likely to disgust an early twentieth-century middle-class British sensibility--cannibalism, flatulence, the removal of chewed food from the mouth, and others--all work to foreground the body. Emerging into the sophisticated discourses and allusions of the book, they constitute an immediate affront. But Joyce's revolution of frankness did more than advocate a frankness about the body's functioning in literature. Joyce showed how the body and its processes had a *voice* in everyday life. The body could rebuff, mock or challenge abstract discourses. At a time when Ireland was without its own nationhood, when its voice was submerged, Joyce brought this bodily voice to the fore.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Given Joyce's profession to be apolitical, post-colonial considerations of his work have been broached rather late. There are certainly other angles from which to view Joyce's decision to foreground the corporeal. It might be considered in terms of Modernist imperatives. For instance, Robert Newman contends that Joyce's characters, have bodies which are "grossly material" and fragmented and overflow any pre-existing cultural conception of the body (209, 216). Christine van Boheemen argues that Joyce is reacting to the technologizing and dematerialization of the body in the early twentieth century, a nostalgia for what was fleeting, as the Romantics celebrated disappearing nature ("Joyce's Answer," 33, 45).

<sup>2</sup> Richard Ellmann, in fact, touches upon such generalizing specifically in regards to eating. He says of the eminently visceral character, Bloom: "Bloom is unusual in his tastes in food, in his sexual conduct, in most of his interests. A critic has complained that Bloom has no normal tastes, but Joyce would undoubtedly reply that no one has" ("Backgrounds" 12). While no one else in the book likes say, the taste of urine in kidneys, while the characters are disgusting in different ways, it does unify the characters that their eating is all disgusting.

<sup>3</sup> According to Hasia Diner, however, there was no colonial imposition of food itself: "As a colonial power, the British made no effort to enculturate the Irish to a 'better' food system, to teach them to eat as their 'betters' did, and to encourage them to become British. As a colonized people, the Irish rejected the styles of the hated occupiers of their land. They had few venues for learning what rich folks ate, and few reasons to want to eat like the alien elite in their midst" (222).

<sup>4</sup> For instance, she contends that Bloom's flatulence in "Sirens" is music, that excrement in "Circe" is the source of new growth, and that cannibalism throughout is a kind of ritualistic, religious consciousness (87, 109, 63). Christine van Boheemen also contends that Joyce draws upon digestion and excrement as symbols of the creative process. She suggests he does this in response to D.H. Lawrence's phallic model of creativity. She writes, Joyce "symbolizes the undifferentiated nature of an art that refuses to detach a single organ and transform it into a transcendent signifier" ("Joyce's Sublime" 29).

<sup>5</sup> In a different symbolic reading of digestion, Benigno del Rio Molina considers cannibalism as a figure for how advertising images are devoured in the book (and characters, in turn, devoured by them). Many other essays also read the foods of *Ulysses* as symbols of various sorts. Robert Meritt in "Faith and Betrayal: the Potato in *Ulysses*," discusses joint symbolic meanings of Bloom's auspicious potato: It is both a reminder of his threatened masculinity and also a protector against various social threats: violence, whores, drunkenness and cynicism (270). In his introduction to the New Casebooks collection of essays on *Ulysses*, Rainer Emig suggests that while the characters and style of the book have received ample attention, objects have been neglected, considers symbolic readings of thematic foodstuffs—milk, he suggests, stands for fertility and life, and innards, for how parts relate to wholes (10-12).

<sup>6</sup>Richard Brown, for instance, edited a collection of essays in 2006 called *Joyce, "Penelope" and the Body*. He brings together essays that employ post-psychoanalytic approaches to consider Molly's body—Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, Bakhtin, and Deleuze and Guattari. Also, see below.

Seamus Deane has addressed the vulgarity of food in *Dubliners*. He argues that eating scenes in *Dubliners* are consistently squalid, and stand for a secularity which Joyce juxtaposes to the characters' spiritual revelations. Deane explores, for instance, the scene in "A Painful Case," in which Mr. Duffy is putting a spoonful of corned beef and cabbage in his mouth, just as he is reading the news of Mrs. Sincio's death. Deane writes, "As at several other points in the story, Joyce takes a moment in which gross physical detail indicates spiritual and emotional stupefaction and etherealizes it into one where the detail is cleansed of its grossness to indicate a spectral emotional or spiritual apprehension" (24). In this case, the gross eating is contrasted with the more abstract, etherealized gnawing of his rectitude he does by the story's end (25).

<sup>7</sup> In *Outrageous Fortune*, Joe Cleary proposes that the contemporary Irish punk band, the Pogues, similarly employs the tactic of presenting the Irish as rowdy and disgusting. They embrace the international associations of the Irish with drunkenness, squalor, filth, etc. and celebrate a "politically incorrect' hooligan mayhem," an "inexhaustible appetite for life" (285).

<sup>8</sup> David Lloyd offers a useful list of other stereotypes of the Irish, to which Irish nationalists attempted to affix a new connotation: In supposed Irish factionalism and the allegiance to family before nation, they saw loyalty, in supposed sentimentality, they saw piety and an empathy with the oppressed and in supposed backwardness, they saw a critique of Britain's brand of modernization (132).

<sup>9</sup> In a different work, *Apes and Angels*, Curtis traces cartoonists' simianized depictions of the Irish between 1860 and World War I. Such depictions replaced the amusing, feckless Paddy with a more aggressive image, thereby registering the threat of mass post-famine immigration to Britain and Scotland, as well as increased nationalist mobilization. However, he says that the depiction of the Irish as pigs outlived this iconography, as it did the Paddy image. After World War I, during the period of *Ulysses*' composition, the pig symbol again reigned (57).

<sup>10</sup> In Joyce's *Moraculous Sindbook: Study of Ulysses*, Suzette Henke notes a theme of cannibalistic images in this opening chapter. She situates it within the theme of Stephen's fear of having his personality and voice annihilated by expectations of tradition.

<sup>11</sup> Irish wheat, salt butter and bacon were particularly desired imports in England (Oddy 13, 17, 25). In *Ulysses*, the Citizen complains that Irish harvests fed British markets while the Irish starved during the famine: "Even the Grand Turk sent us his piastres. But the Sassenach tried to starve the nation at home while the land was full of crops that the



British hyenas bought and sold in Rio de Janeiro. Ay, they drove out the peasants in hordes” (12.1369).

<sup>12</sup> Miller also suggests that seeds in themselves may carry disgusting associations for some. She writes, “Older children and adults may associate seeds with something reproductive and gross, especially slimy seeds like those in a watermelon or tomato. Slimy seeds also threaten to slip down the throat without one’s deciding to ingest them” (8). It should be noted, though, that historically, seedcake has been a quite normal Irish food. Monica Sheridan, in *The Art of Irish Cooking*, reports of seedcake, “This was a great favorite when I was young. It was offered to lady visitors with a glass of port if they called in the morning or the afternoon” (136). And Kay Shaw Nelson confirms, in *The Scottish-Irish Pub and Hearth Cook Book: Recipes and Lore from Celtic Kitchens*, that seedcake “has long been a favorite Gaelic afternoon tea specialty” (200).

<sup>13</sup> Sheldon Brivic, in *Joyce between Freud and Jung*, conceives Bloom in the role of nursing infant, when given the seedcake (Tucker 75). It is, in fact, common in some cultures for mothers to feed infants foods they have already chewed. Lindsey Tucker sees it as insemination: “Molly spouts her seed into Bloom” (76). Maud Ellmann suggests that the moment has its saliency because Molly and Bloom actually combine in the act—they eat the seedcake as a substitute for eating each other (“Penelope,” 107). Joyce himself seemed to conceive of the food as a kind of ambrosia or intoxication. In a letter to Frank Budgen he said, “Fermented drink must have a sexual origin...In a woman’s mouth probably. I have made Bloom eat Molly’s chewed seed cake” (qtd. in Tucker 75).

<sup>14</sup> The Deadalus house is described in greater detail in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. As Stephen approaches his home, he smells “the faint sour stink of rotted cabbages” and notes the “disorder, the misrule and confusion of his father’s house” (176). At the end of his tea meal there, “Discarded crusts and lumps of sugared bread, turned brown by the tea which had been poured over them, lay scattered on the table. Little wells of tea lay here and there on the board and a knife with a broken ivory handle was stuck through the pith of a ravaged turnover” (176).

<sup>15</sup> In her study of farting in the Middle Ages, Valerie Allen describes how the fart threatens the distance between subject and object, as I have been describing throughout this chapter. She writes, “Invisible but audible and smellable, the fart draws us away from the economy of the eye to explore knowledge that one cannot apprehend at a safe distance...the noise of a fart violates the distance between subject and object...Smell...breaches that critical space between subject and object upon which subjectivity depends” (3). Because of our inability to hold a fart off at a distance as a concept or category, the fart constitutes the kind of assault of material, a mess, like the others in this section.

<sup>16</sup>I in no way mean to suggest that gluttony is embraced by the Irish outside this book. In fact a classic 12<sup>th</sup> century Irish text, *Aisling Meic Con Glinne (The Vision of MacConglinne)*, is about the effort to cure King Cathal Mac Finguine of Munster of his gluttony.

<sup>17</sup>Joyce elsewhere uses feasting to stand for the general joys of life. In “A Painful Case,” Duff’s epiphany is to realize that in living solitary without love, he has been “outcast from life’s feast” (118). In *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen is described appreciating the beauty of the world again after unburdening his soul of its sins via confession. His joy is expressed in his breakfast: “White pudding and eggs and sausages and cups of tea. How simple and beautiful was life after all! And life lay all before him” (158).

<sup>18</sup>Annette Cozzi writes about a similar demonization of the hunger of the socially ostracized, nineteenth-century English Jews in Dickens’ *David Copperfield*. It is to her argument that I owe the inspiration of this particular point. See “Men and Menus: Dickens and the Rise of the ‘Ordinary’ Gentleman” in *Edible Ideologies: Representing Food and Meaning*, Ed. Kathleen Lebesco and Peter Naccarato (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008).

<sup>19</sup>Fritz Senn suggests that the words Joyce employs in his list of Bloom’s favorite offal actually require us to make mouth movements we would make in chewing. Of the sentence, “He liked thick gibbet soup, nutty gizzards, a stuffed roast heart, liver slices fried with crustcrumbs, fried hencod’s roes,” Senn argues, “Our lips get busy and our tongues have to do an awful lot of moving about the palate: we come in fact as close to imitating what happens when we taste and swallow—or when we imagine it very vividly” (106). I think this suggests the great extent to which readers are submerged in the sensual muck of the book. The closer readers are brought to disgusting food, which offal increasingly became in the twentieth-century according to middle-class British sensibilities, if it actually gets into their mouths, as Senn suggests, the greater our repulsion will be.

<sup>20</sup>Robert Gibb also discusses food as a substitute for sex for Bloom in “Cloacal Obsession: Food, Sex and Death in Lestrygonians,” *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 10.3-4 (1989):268-273.

<sup>21</sup>In his biography, *James Joyce*, Richard Ellmann says that Joyce once commented to a friend on the same phenomena: “Seagulls are beautiful birds but greedy. See how they try to snap food from each other” (45).

<sup>22</sup>Stephen, on the other hand, Alison Armstrong suggests, marks himself as anti-social by constantly refusing food (226). It is interesting for us here that Bloom helps to propagate his race, while Stephen wilts.

**CHAPTER V**  
**KOLACHE AND LEEKS: WILLA CATHER'S INTERVENTION INTO THE**  
**AMERICAN SENSESCAPE**

At the turn of the century, forces of “Americanization” threatened important components of immigrant cultures, including food and eating habits. In this chapter I argue that Cather steadfastly recorded immigrant cuisines in her fiction in order to counter such forces. Her attitude towards the insidious influence of Americanization was clear. In a 1923 essay, “Nebraska: The First Cycle,” she admonished: “This passion for Americanizing everything and everybody is a deadly disease with us” (Cather, “Nebraska” 4). She goes on to say, “Colonies of European people, Slavonic, Germanic, Scandinavian, Latin, spread across our bronze prairies like the daubs of color on a painter’s palette. They brought with them something that this neutral new world needed even more than the immigrants needed land” (5).<sup>1</sup> Of the few details of “immigrant color” in the American culture she singles out in her essay are beer gardens and bakeries (4-5). If American culinary tastes worked to occlude ethnic cuisines, Cather’s fiction preserves them in rich sensual detail.<sup>2</sup> Her brush is broad: Over the course of her oeuvre, she depicts the foods eaten by settlers of Russian, German, Bohemian, French, Jewish, Swedish and African descent, as well as those cuisines that pre-existed American culture—Mexican and American Indian. Her kolache, leeks and wiener schnitzel intervene in the contemporary homogenization of the American sensescape.<sup>3</sup>

One of Cather’s most significant interventions into processes of Americanization as a whole, then, was to embrace and promote ethnic food. In this way, instead of abstractly depicting and condemning prejudice from afar, she directly intervenes into the American sensescape, for an immediate, sensory effect, like the one achieved by Woolf

and Joyce. The implications are again phenomenological. She believed subjectivity itself was constituted through particular sensations, which differ among ethnic groups and are especially present in cuisine. What is key to my argument here is the idea that these foods are not just *stand-ins* for ethnic subjectivities; rather, they are an inseparable component of character make-up. To bring different foodstuffs, then, to American consciousness, was to introduce different personalities, different ways of being oriented toward the world. In this chapter, I focus on three immigrant groups whose foods Cather most richly introduced into the American sensescape. I first look at her commemoration of Czech immigrant food in *My Antonia* (1918) and “Neighbor Rosicky,” (1932), then at German American food in *Song of the Lark* (1915) and *One of Ours* (1921), and by exploring the foods of French immigrants in *Death Comes to the Archbishop* (1926) and *Shadows on the Rock* (1931). In and through flavors and textures of Cather’s work, Czechness, Germanness and Frenchness come alive.

Cather’s presentation of various ethnic foods is phenomenological in each case because she shows how subjects are formed in specific ways based on their sensual encounters. Cather understood Czechness as a kind of fount—a well of passionate emotions. Out upon quiet, respectable American ways, Czech passions spilled. Their foods, likewise, often have rich, sweet fillings. Other times they are stored away in deep, dark containers, like sacking and chests and forests. The depth here is what repulses others and defines Czech cuisine as a discrete unit. This quality of depth also constitutes the Czech food intervention into one-dimensional industrialized food. Of the three, German food most resembles Anglo-American cuisine, but Cather is clear to show it as filling and hearty in a way the former is not. It satisfies American characters both

physically and spiritually. Cather associates French immigrants with light, delicate and fresh foods and envisions the source of their refined culture in light foods, like lettuce and leeks. Through these delicate substances, they define themselves against the heavy, rough frontier and the Indian foods surrounding them in the Southwest and Quebec. This celebration of fresh food intervenes in industrial food culture, particularly in the canned goods Cather so often denounces.

Concerned, as in Chapters 3 and 4, with a dominant culture's visceral reaction to the eating of the other, I find it useful here to establish the norms of the early twentieth-century American diet. While American food at the turn of the century certainly had regional differences and climate specific-nuances, it can largely be categorized as Anglo-influenced<sup>4</sup> and increasingly processed. Its derivation from British food is seen in its emphasis on red meat and starch with few fruits or vegetables, as well as its very conservative use of seasoning. This tradition, moreover, places the culinary arts low on its list of cultural priorities and does not ascribe to passionate eating. On top of this Anglo base, turn-of-the-century American food can be distinguished by industrialization, as I discussed in Chapter 1. The changes wrought therein often derived from an emphasis on quantity over quality.<sup>5</sup> Cather's fictional depictions of American foodways underscore this history: The food is conservative and bland, the eating rituals are generally bereft of passion or ceremony and food is more abundant than tasty.<sup>6</sup> Cather said in a 1925 interview, "I think the preparation of foods the most important thing in life. And America is too young a nation to realize it" (qtd. in Woodress 379). In contrast, she consistently depicts ethnic foods as honed by tradition and by a living culture of culinary appreciation.

It was according to these norms that ethnic food was Americanized. Cather's fiction shows the Americanization of immigrant food to be operating in a variety of ways:<sup>7</sup> The most invasive is insidious prejudice or active shunning. Additionally, she shows French, German and Czech immigrants to have all faced American land and weather conditions inhospitable to the growing of ingredients essential to their own cuisine. Moreover, America was defined by an increasingly industrial food culture that threatened appreciation of any traditional, time-consuming, subtle cuisine. For each of these immigrant cuisines, Cather also illuminates one particular threat posed by competing cultural norms. She depicts American disgust over immigrant food when she writes of Czech foodways, acknowledges the American shunning of German food during World War I, and records the vulgar American sensibilities that threaten refined French cuisine.<sup>8</sup>

### **Food and Ethnicity**

Throughout this dissertation, and particularly in Chapters 2 and 4, I have argued that sense experience remains an unscripted, ungovernable experience in otherwise socially inscribed situations. This last chapter serves as a qualification to that contention. While any given sense experience is constituted of stimuli too particular to verbalize and thereby render cultural, we can draw general parameters around the sensual stimuli members of a certain ethnic group are likely to perceive. Walter Ong theorized in 1967 that sense perception is cultural because societies teach their members to be more perceptive to certain stimuli than to others (Marks 206). Colors are perceived differently by different cultures, and taste and smell stimuli register differently based on past experience. The sensorium, or organization of sense experience, also varies culturally.

Different societies put emphasis on different senses altogether. The sensory motor cortex serves as a record of this (Marks 206). Two theorists have asserted the importance of the sensual memory for cultures underrepresented by discourse. In *The Senses Still*, anthropologist C. Nadia Serematakis documents the loss of local tastes, aromas and textures at the margins of Europe in the face of the European Economic Community's centralization of the market (3). Considering the effacement of a popular Greek peach breed, the *Rodhakino*, she asserts, "Sensory premises, memories and histories are being pulled out from under entire regional cultures and the capacity to reproduce social identities may be altered as a result" (3). This belief in the societal function of sense is what gives Cather's immigrants such a sense of urgency in their attempts to maintain traditional foodways. In *The Skin of the Film*, film theorist Laura U. Marks similarly argues:

These memories are especially crucial as repositories of knowledge for people whose experience is not represented in the dominant society. The memory of the senses, a nontransparent and differentially available body of information, is important to everybody as a source of individual knowledge. For cultural minorities, it is an especially important source of cultural knowledge. (199)

The contention Serematakis and Marks make, that sense experience is not a marginal dimension of cultural experience but a core repository of memories and identity, is one to which Cather's fiction repeatedly ascribes. The idea is clearly similar to that of Merleau-Ponty: subjects blend with the things they sense. Marks writes, "Smelling the magnolia I mingle with it sensuously; I take on some of its qualities" (214). The actual sensual qualities of ethnic foods reflect the overall character of that ethnicity in Cather's fiction. As with Hemingway, it is possible to speak of a certain aesthetic she held, which focused her attention on these sensual details.

### Cather's Aesthetic of the Everyday

It was precisely through everyday concrete details like food that Cather was able to present foreign cultures on their own terms. Her purported aesthetic, in Modernist fashion, allowed objects to tell their own stories, without attempting to gather them up into narratives or symbolism. In order to fully appreciate the significance of Cather's decision to include so much food, it is important to distinguish Cather's work from a realist tradition which made use of a multitude of physical details to create a reality effect, rather than as sites of struggle, repositories of sensation, and independent sensual entities in their own right. Cather eschewed Realism in her essay "The Novel Demeuble": "There is a popular superstition that 'realism' asserts itself in the cataloguing of a great number of material objects...and in minutely and unsparingly describing physical sensations" (45). Accordingly, food in her work does not simply document and illustrate what is explicitly stated; it adds another dimension. Critic Richard H. Millington suggests, "Far from bringing us closer to plot or a statement, Cather's method "leaves us with nothing to say...we do not judge, we witness. And in that shift from interpretation to observation, from allegory to 'anthropology,' Cather sets the novel and its readers free" (64).<sup>9</sup>

For this reason, mundane aspects of everyday life often play a surprisingly large part in her novels. Cather shows them to have an expressive ability all their own and she finds them more interesting than larger, more abstract, narratives and dynamics. For instance, when she based the protagonist of *Death Comes to the Archbishop* on the historical figure Archbishop Lamy, she chose to rewrite the historical sources by focusing on concrete details. She said, "What I felt curious about was the daily life of such a man



in a crude frontier society” (*On Writing* 7). She took legends as her model for this work because legends offered her an example, she contends, of literature that pays attention to the trivial. Cather comments, “In the Golden Legend the martyrdoms of the saints are no more dwelt upon than are the trivial incidents of their lives; it is as though all human experiences, measured against one supreme spiritual experience, were of about the same importance” (*On Writing* 9). Food constituted a significant part in these trivial incidents; it is the focus of several of the book’s most well-known scenes. Hermione Lee notes how Cather adds food to the story in the source text (Father Howlett’s *Life of the Right Reverend Joseph Machebeuf*): While Howlett only just mentions that Machebeuf, the model for Father Valliant, loved olive oil and salads, Cather created from this detail a scene in which he cooks an elaborate Christmas dinner (Lee 268). Cather was similarly explicit about her plan to focus on the everyday in *Shadows on the Rock*: “An orderly little French household that went on trying to live decently, just as ants begin to rebuild when you kick their house down, interests me more than Indian raids or the wild life in the forests” (Cather, *On Writing* 16). And here again, food is central to this living. Cather elaborates: “And really a new society begins with the salad dressing more than with the destruction of Indian villages. Those people brought a kind of French culture there and somehow sheltered it and tended it and on occasion died for it, as if it really were a sacred fire” (16). Salad dressing is not a detail of society in Cather’s conception, but its very fount.

In the above quotations, Cather formulates her attention to the everyday as an aesthetic agenda, but we can extrapolate its political ramifications. To communicate a culture by simply presenting the objects through which it manifests itself, devoid of

commentary, is to respect its otherness. In an interview, Cather said of her Czech immigrant novel, *My Antonia*: “I’m trying to cut all analysis, observation, description, even the picture-making quality. In order to make things and people tell their own story simply by juxtaposition, without any persuasion or explanation on my part” (qtd. in Middleton 48). In a large part, the characters in *My Antonia* tell their own stories through mushrooms and breads, as the above-mentioned French immigrants do through Christmas dinners and salad dressings.

### **Czech Depths**

The Czech immigration novel, *My Antonia*, is perhaps Cather’s most famous. In it, the protagonist, the young Jim Burden, is American, but the infatuation of his life is the eponymous Czech woman, whose passion and *joie de vie* far exceed any display of emotion he is accustomed to. Opposed to the staid, even-tempered, respectable, well-established American Burden family, the Czech Shimerda family is impetuous and intense. Cather locates the depths of Czech passion in their music, their generosity, and their frank emotions—jealousy, love, generosity, anger. All of these show rich interiority of character. It is Czech *food*, though, which Cather makes more sensually present to readers than any of these other manifestations of Czechness. Passionate interiors are as much a part of their food as any they are of other aspect of their culture—food hidden in cellars, or containing secret pockets, is defined by its interiority. Cather’s depictions of these things presages a later correlation the philosopher Gaston Bachelard drew between domestic interiors and psychological ones in *The Poetics of Space*: “Wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with their false bottoms are veritable organs of the secret psychological life” (78). These depths are what threaten the American

Burdens, but it is through this that Cather protects and preserves the Czechness Americanization sought to abrade.

The book records, in part, Cather's own history with the Czechs in her hometown. Jim, like Cather, moves to the Nebraska plains when young. In Jim's case, it is to live with his grandparents, after his parents have died. His family is comparatively well-off in the farming community, and are well established Americans. Antonia is based on Cather's own Czech immigrant friend, Annie Pavelka. The story's origin in biography underscores its relevance to history.

Jim's openness to the foreign culinary culture is tempered, especially at first—like his grandparents, he looks critically at their housekeeping methods and the materials this Bohemian family registers as food. Because readers associate with Jim as the narrator, we first experience this Czech sensual world through the American filters. Through him, Cather represents the barriers to the Czech sensescape. Because the book is, in part, Jim's bildungsroman however, the book progresses as Jim comes to see past his own cultural norms and be receptive to this foreign food: Through his example, Cather intended to lead readers out of their own culinary comfort zone as well.

The interactions between the two families generally centers around food. This is because they are out on the prairie, with harsh winters, sparse settlements and few public resources. Mere survival is a tantamount concern. The Burdens several times take the long, road-less trek, out to the isolated Shimerda sod house. They offer support to this family who is unable to get themselves established enough to store provisions for the blustery months. As food is largely the occasion for the visits, the Shimerdas' ability to feed themselves is generally the basis on which the Burdens judge them. For the most

part, the ruling is negative. While the Shimerdas repeatedly eat what Mrs. Burden prepares for them, Jim is the only Burden willing to eat the Shimerdas' food.

The Shimerdas' poverty, their dearth of resources out of which to build their culture, makes them appear cultureless to the Burdens at first. When the Burdens first go to visit, they find that the Shimerdas have been living on corn cakes and sorghum molasses (23). These foods were commonly eaten by the poor on the prairie.<sup>10</sup> Later in the winter when the Burdens again visit, they find the Shimerdas have nothing but rotting potatoes to eat (60). These foods constitute an Americanization by poverty. And the Shimerda dependency on Burden handouts-- potatoes, cured pork, fresh bread, butter and pumpkin pies--further this process. Squash, jerky and American style bread would be outside of Czech fare. When Mrs. Shimerda says that she would cook much better if she had better materials to work with, she suggests the alternative tradition that wants to manifest itself (73).

In warmer months, and as time goes on, the Shimerdas are able to nourish themselves in Czech ways. In instances in which the Burdens observe Czech food culture in action, they show disgust. Like the dark hole of a sod house they live in, the Shimerda's food has dark depths to it. The first example of this can be seen in Jim's observation that Mrs. Shimerda uses leftover dough from a previous batch of bread as yeast for the next loaf. The rankness of old, fermented bread dough has a temporal depth. This is an accepted way of creating a leavening agent in many cultures, but Jim describes it a way that registers his family's disgust:

I remember how horrified we were at the sour, ashy-gray bread she gave her family to eat. She mixed her dough, we discovered, in an old tin peck-measure that Krajiek had used about the barn. When she took the paste out to bake it, she left smears of dough sticking to the sides of the measure, put the measure on the

shelf behind the stove, and let this residue ferment. The next time she made bread, she scraped this sour stuff down into the fresh dough to serve as yeast (29).

Jim uses words which barely seem to refer to food at all-- "paste," "smears" and "residue"--to describe the Czech bread dough. Jim associates Czech yeast with ashes and sourness. His family is aghast. Like Mrs. Shimerda's own rancor, the yeast has a ripe age to it.

Fermentation constitutes one depth. The unlikely containers in which Mrs. Shimerda wraps her foodstuffs form another. At one point, Jim eats at the Shimerdas' house for dinner; his cultural norms are assaulted by the containers out of which Mrs. Shimerda extracts the meal. These render otherwise recognizable foodstuffs foreign:

She took from the oven a coffee-cake which she wanted to keep warm for supper, and wrapped it in a quilt stuffed with feathers. I have seen her put even a roast goose in this quilt to keep it hot. When the neighbors were there building the new house they saw her do this, and the story got abroad that the Shimerdas kept their food in their feather beds. (96)

Beneath the surface, brim cakes and meats--richness and succulence. These foreigners pull food from hidden recesses. This is a consummate image of the hidden wells of otherness which underlie all of Cather's depictions of immigrant food but also expresses the interiority by which she defines Czech character.

The most startling encounter the Burdens have with such strange, stowed-away foods, is when Mrs. Shimerda brings an unidentifiable substance, actually transported from the old world, out of a bag. The bag itself is even hidden away in a chest. Mrs. Shimerda wants to thank the Burdens for their kindness and so she shares with them a jealously guarded, tightly wrapped, prize possession. This is a distinctively Czech item in which Mrs. Shimerda takes pride: "You no have in this country. All things for eat better in my country" (64). Its disgust to the Burdens is proportionate with its palatability to the

Czechs. Cather writes the scene by, again, stressing interiority—deep, dark storage spaces:

she opened her wooden chest and brought out a bag made of bed-ticking, about as long as a flour sack and half as wide, stuffed full of something... When Mrs. Shimerda opened the bag and stirred the contents with her hand, it gave out a salty, earthy smell, very pungent, even among the other odors of that cave. She measured a teacup full, tied it up in a bit of sacking, and presented it ceremoniously to grandmother. (62)

The dark thing pulled from the depths of this container appears to Jim to resemble raw earth more so than food. When the Burdens return home, they look into the sack. Jim describes the interior further, again stressing earthiness and smell: “It was full of little brown chips that looked like the shavings of some root. They were as light as feathers, and the most noticeable thing about them was their penetrating, earthy, odor. We could not determine whether they were animal or vegetable” (64). The Burdens here fail to even recognize the stuff as a cultural item—it is earthy, primitive, not even cultural enough to fit into a basic category of the edible. Jake, the Burdens’ hired help, underscores this reception when he remarks: “They might be dried meat from some queer beast, Jim. They ain’t dried fish, and they never grew on stalk or vine. I’m afraid of ‘em. Anyhow, I shouldn’t want to eat anything that had been shut up for months with old clothes and goose pillows” (64). This unknown foodstuff serves as Cather’s supreme image of sensual strangeness. It is tainted all around with its packaging, which was utterly foreign. It fits into no known categories of the edible, according to American sensibilities. The Burdens refuse to even use it as animal fodder; incinerating the matter, they destroy every last trace of it.

It is only Jim who refrains from this full-scale Americanization of the Czechs, this effacement of the exotic. Jim is curious enough to brave the danger and taste something

outside his own sensescape. As his grandmother flings the matter from her and into the fire, he grabs a bit and opens himself to a strange, unidentifiable nugget of the Czech sensual universe. Looking back on that moment from adulthood, he underscores its lasting impression: “I never forgot the strange taste” (65). It is many years before Jim is able to penetrate through American impressions to the actual Czech name for this food. He says, “it was many years before I knew that those little brown shavings, which the Shimerdas had brought so far and treasured so jealously, were dried mushrooms” (65). The mere depths of a Czech sack had first seemed threatening, but knowing what the food is, Jim can go on to identify its own source, the ultimate interior from which it is extracted. He says, “They had been gathered, probably, in some deep Bohemian forest” (65). At this point, though, he relishes that culinary difference. His designation of the food is informed and no longer filled with disgust. Cather’s choice to bring Czech wild mushrooms to American consciousness is notable. This edible, called *houby*, was one element of the Czech cuisine most celebrated in America. One Czech heritage book from Cedar Rapids, Iowa says,

Houby hunting has always been popular with Czech people. In fact, it is a sport! And houby hunters are sometimes referred to as a ‘subculture of the Czech people.’ There are houby jokes, certain ‘grubbies’ to be worn while houby hunting, secret places to seek these delicacies, houby stories (which are something like fish stories) and many wonderful recipes to use in preparation for a houby feast. (Pat Moran 28)

Jim taps the depths of the Bohemian forest when he takes a bite of this cherished *houby*. In adulthood, he is not distanced from Czech cuisine by disgust, but only by the long physical road, and gap of mentality, from the sophisticated, urban area in which he now lives, to the holdouts of Czech culture in the Nebraska countryside, still thriving inside its caves and jars. He takes a trip back to the country and visits his childhood crush, Antonia.

Antonia is now married to a Czech man and mother of a large brood of children. She proudly shows Jim the great resources of food she has to sustain this community—her husband's farm, a thriving orchard, and a well-stocked fruit cellar.

Unlike those times when he came to the Shimerda sod house with his grandmother, bringing bread made of American yeast, American pumpkin goods, and the meat so much a distinctive part of American food, he has come to visit Antonia with nothing but a box of manufactured candy for the children. There has been a reversal: Now a Burden comes to receive Czech nourishment. Cather depicts Jim's engulfment within a Czech sensual universe by actually putting him within one of those Czech interiors he so frequently noted while describing their foods in childhood: He goes with Antonia and her children into her prized fruit cave. Standing in this cave, Jim is actually now within the container, in the Czech interior from which Czech foods come.

There is a remove, though. Cather brings Jim, and readers, close to this immigrant sensual otherness, but she does not let Jim, or the readers who identify with him, fully feel a part of this world. In the first place, even though he does stand in the cave, Antonia's Czech children continuously point to further containers, jars of things they think are exotic to him. The exoticness seems so ineffable, the children do not even speak it, but only point to it: "They said nothing, but glancing at me, traced on the glass with their finger-tips the outline of the cherries and strawberries and crab-apples within, trying by a blissful expression of countenance to give me some idea of their deliciousness" (252).

One of Antonia's sons is especially proud to show Jim some canned spiced plums. He asserts proudly, as his grandmother had asserted of the mushrooms,



“Americans don’t have those” (252).<sup>11</sup> The boy explains that his mother uses them to make kolache (a Czech pastry). A kolache is a cavern of its own--a sweet bun filled with something— fruit or poppy seed or cheese. Jim readily professes his own long experience with this food—he has entered its depths, as into the depths of Antonia’s passions. Cather ultimately has him feel distanced from this food culture, however. After he and Antonia have walked out of the fruit cave, they witness a magical exuberance. Cather writes an image in which the children explode from that fruit cave, as an emanation of that cave itself:

We were standing outside talking, when they all came running up the steps together, big and little, tow heads and gold heads and brown, and flashing little naked legs; a veritable explosion of life out of the dark cave into the sunlight. It made me dizzy for a moment. (252)

In this image, the interior of foods and of the Czech people are combined. They explode from the fruit cave as human life comes out of nutrients. Specifically, it is Czech life out of Czech foods. Their personalities themselves, this propensity to “explode,” rather than walk, shows a depth of exuberance, like the depths that hold these delicious fruits. Jim the American comes back to watch the perpetuation of immigrant life. He can encounter, but not fully partake of it—it makes him dizzy. Cather in this novel thus shows the resistance to Czech immigrant food through Jim’s parents, but ultimately writes its survival. The image of dark, malodorous mushrooms from out of a Czech interior is replaced with this sparkling explosion from out of the recesses of Czech fruit.

Through the acclimation to Czech sensations Jim himself makes in this bildungsroman, readers’ own sensescape is expanded. Thus, through the modern, urban, American Jim, Cather makes Czech food traditions and Czech sensations present to America. Cather was well aware of the absence of this sensual culture outside the prairie,

as she was living in Pittsburgh when she wrote the book. The suggestion in *My Antonia*, and in Cather's own comments elsewhere, is that Czech food is not just valuable because different, but it is actually of a superior quality than young, slapdash American food. In the above mentioned essay on Nebraska, in which Cather criticizes the Americanization of immigrants, she reveals a pining for this food culture of her childhood, "I could name a dozen Bohemian towns in Nebraska where one used to be able to go into a bakery and buy better pastry than is to be had anywhere except in the best pastry shops of Prague or Vienna. The American lard pie never corrupted the Czech" (78). Czechs themselves identified their food as more elaborate, tasty and cultured than that of the Americans. The *Bohemian-American Cook Book*, published in 1915, declares in its preface:

American cookery is, in many respects, more simple than Bohemian cookery, for in America many appliances and improvements are used which are not known in Bohemia. Besides those, baking powder is used extensively, often instead of yeast, and that is entirely unknown in Bohemia. Among Bohemians who came here from their mother country, there are many who think that American cookery is not as good as Bohemian. This is probably owing to the fact that many American housewives like to prepare only those dishes that require the least time and labor... (Rosicky 5)

From a Czech perspective, two defining aspects of modern American culinary culture—appliances and unwillingness to spend great amounts of time in the kitchen—lead to inferior food. This critique, though never as explicitly stated as the Burdens' disgust, ultimately leaves the stronger impression in the novel. It is invitingly laid out in mushrooms and pastries.

Cather focuses on the superior culinary sensibility of Czech foods in her later short story, "Neighbor Rosicky." This story takes place in the early twentieth-century, and feelings seem to have softened towards the Czechs: One of Rosicky's sons has married an American girl, and the local doctor chooses to eat his meals at their house

over any other in the area. Cather records no disgust here. The story opens when the doctor stops at their household for breakfast, after a late night call, knowing that he can always expect a hearty meal there. As Jim traveled out from his fast-paced urban life, back to the prairie to eat kolache on Antonia's farm, the doctor goes out of his way to have his meal at the Rosickys'. Throughout the story, Mrs. Rosicky is continuously pulling some Czech pastry or other out of the oven: hot biscuit, nice loaf of nut bread, hot, aromatic coffee cake, a fresh pan of apricot kolache, apple cake, prune tarts, and fresh bread. The doctor, the link between this Czech family and largely native-born American readers, is eminently satisfied with her cooking.

In this 1930s short story, Cather seems to be able to write the palatability of Czech foods more straightforwardly than she did in *My Antonia*. And she asserts them as a solution to a problem that faces American culinary culture as a whole. The farms surrounding the Rosickys' are primarily profit-driven, to the point that they forego enjoyment. Of the doctor's experiences with the Rosickys', however, Cather writes, "He didn't know another farm-house where a man could get such a warm welcome, and such good strong coffee with rich cream" (9). When a creamery agent comes to the Rosickys' to buy their cream, he is firmly turned away. Mrs. Rosicky deplores a family who gets rich off such sales by depriving themselves: "look at them Fassler children! Pale, pinched little things, they look like skimmed milk" (24). Czech food has a tradition, an aesthetic, an interiority, which Cather holds as a model over eminently practical-minded, profit-oriented and overly thin, American food producers. Cather does not just want Czech food to be tolerated; she presents it as an active intervention into a sensually impoverished American foodscape. Such a juxtaposition between industrially-produced, deficient

American foods and satisfying ethnic ones also features in her presentation of German foods.

### **Hearty German Nurturance**

Cather defines German food by its filling heartiness. Her focus on this characteristic reflect popular connotations of German food. A German American cook book of 1967 announces its “old-fashioned dishes that have made German cookery so popular throughout the world—good substantial food, *filling* and full of flavor, distinctive and eminently *satisfying*” (Simms 1, emphasis mine). While American food often featured similar foodstuffs—heavy dishes of meat and potatoes<sup>12</sup>—what it lacked was the quality of German foods. The American counterparts were certainly abundant and filling, but in a vulgar, tasteless manner, according to Cather. European visitors tended to object to the fact that Americans put emphasis entirely on quantity over quality, as Levenstein described. Alternatively, Cather shows German food to be filling in emotional and spiritual ways as well.

Opposed to the disgust reactions spurred by the Czech food, German food is uniquely satisfying to the characters in Cather’s novels, particularly to the protagonist of each, Thea Kronborg of *Song of the Lark* and Claude Wheeler of *One of Ours*. In these coming-of-age stories, Thea and Claude, like Jim and like Cather herself, feel too big for their small rural towns of origin and struggle to break free of confining provincial attitudes and lifestyles. Thea ultimately succeeds in becoming an international diva and Claude an officer stationed in the French theater of World War I. In each case, the youths have one of their first really moving encounters with something beyond their small sphere of origin through Germans and German food particularly. Not only does the latter

evoke an interesting alternative cultural relationship with food, it fills Thea and Claude in a way their normal fare does not. German food is nourishing to these young American bodies, and, more to the point, to these spiritually hungry souls. As with the breads and kolache of “Neighbor Rosicky,” German cakes and stews embody a long cultural tradition, nuanced sensations, and inflections of communal identity, which the new American processed foods lack. Certainly, Thea and Claude, like the doctor of “Neighbor Rosicky” are surrounded by foods preferred for some practical reason--health, yield or quickness of preparation-- rather than for any aesthetic or cultural value. Rich traditional foods intervene into an early twentieth-century rural American food culture that Cather characterizes by its canned and unimaginative fare. Once she sets up a distinct German culinary identity as an attractive intervention into American society, though, Cather then writes its occlusion. Both novels take place during World War I. In the latter, Cather writes the jingoistic resistance to this hearty, filling, traditional cuisine and the national character that grew in tandem with it. She explores an attitude expressed by the head of a women’s patriotic organization: “What kind of American consciousness can grow in the atmosphere of sauerkraut and Limburger cheese?” (Hooker 285).

*Song of the Lark* is often considered the most autobiographical of Cather’s novels. While the protagonist becomes an opera singer, rather than a writer, she follows Cather’s path out from a small town in the west, and heads to an urban area where she is educated and joins an artistic community. One of the characteristics by which Thea’s hometown is portrayed as too small-minded for her sensibilities, is its food culture. Thea’s mother prepares a fried chicken picnic one day, and she fries doughnuts for dinner, but for the most part, the culinary environment of Thea’s small town of Moonstone, Colorado, is

defined by foods that are cheap and easy. At night the streets of the town smell blandly of “fried potatoes and fried onions and coffee” (119). Further details underscore this situation of culinary impoverishment. The doctor’s wife skims his cream and subsists on canned salmon while he is away (33), the brakeman on the train admits to surviving on canned tomatoes and the “tinned cow” (100-101), and the train station agent lives on soda crackers and canned beef (106). Although there are exceptions to the rule, Moonstone is generally described in its comparative culinary dearth. Communities like this one are implied when Cather later describes people from American small towns looking to cities for alimentary stimulation: “lonely western homesteaders thought of Denver as full of food and drink” (294). It is not only American small towns, though, that are so deprived. Later, when living in Chicago, Thea notes the lack of ceremony about eating there: “in those days, Chicago people never stopped for tea” (246). Thea herself, however, shows a great sensitivity to food. In the first scene, the doctor brings her grapes, a rare treat (one generally used more for decoration than eating in Moonstone). The doctor observes Thea in an enraptured state with the grapes, “holding the almost transparent fruit up in the sunlight, feeling the pale-green skins softly with the tips of her fingers” (16). To Thea, food is more than a practical necessity that can be gotten from cans.

In this Moonstone atmosphere largely lacking in culinary arts or appreciation, Mrs. Kohler, a matronly German woman, stands out as the most notable cook of Thea’s acquaintance. In the first place, Mrs. Kohler’s garden is lush with fruits, whereas that grape was such a rarity to Thea. Some of these are actually from imported German seeds. Cather describes Mrs. Kohler’s endeavor to grow fruit in Colorado as a German one; she says Mrs. Kohler was attempting to “reproduce her Rhine Valley garden in American”

with cherry trees and peach trees and “golden plums” (21). As with the Czech mushrooms that could not even be recognized as food by the Americans in *My Antonia*, there are in Mrs. Kohler’s garden, “vegetables for which there is no American name” (26). Elsewhere, Cather depicts this German matriarch making *Hasenpfeffer*, a spicy rabbit stew (67). While Mrs. Kohler cooks it, her boarder Fritz plays Gluck on the piano. In a pairing that will reoccur in *One of Ours*, German food is accompanied by German song—physical with spiritual nurturance. In her role as landlady, Mrs. Kohler nurtures this music and musician, by always making things like soups and broths (89).

Later, when Thea goes to Chicago to study music, she boards with the German Mrs. Lorch. Like Mrs. Kohler, Mrs. Lorch is an older, matronly figure. And as with the luscious orchard Mrs. Kohler cultivated, there are two rows of apple trees and a grape arbor in Mrs. Lorch’s garden (147). Thea registers the extent to which Mrs. Lorch’s identity is entwined with her food: “her clothes always smelled of savoury cooking” (149). Thea further says that this cooking justifies all she had heard about it by the person who recommended she board with the Lorches. Thea declares, in fact, that she has “never been so well nourished before” (149). As Mrs. Kohler’s German *Hasenpfeffer* was accompanied by Fritz’s music, Thea is being fed by Mrs. Lorch’s food while she studies music. Notably, when Thea is a famous opera star, and goes to an elite restaurant famished after an exhausting performance, she orders herself a beer, instead of wine, because she is so hungry. This is certainly a nod to these early German nurturers who first filled her physically and spiritually.

*One of Ours* is set in another nook of the rural west and centers on Claude Wheeler, a young man who grows up on a family farm in Nebraska. The cultivation of

wheat and corn on the farm proceeds with ceaseless fervor. Claude's father, Mr. Wheeler, expects their farm will provide food for the war effort. Quantity, not quality, is the focus. Claude's family thinks eating in a restaurant is extravagant, but they are continually buying expensive new farm machinery to increase productivity (7). There is never a great amount of joy in the meals at Claude's house. People do not talk, and the food itself is less relished than regulated. Cather writes that Mr. Wheeler, "would have liked to regulate everybody's diet" (7). Cather's brother Bayliss promotes the making of *skim* milk on the farm, and constantly regulates others' coffee intake (90). Cather clearly positions this as a food culture of practicality, not warm nurturance.

Growing up in the midst of such a practical relation to food, Claude is quite surprised with dinner proceedings at the house of a German college friend, Julius Erlich. Meals at Julius's house are presided over by another matronly figure, Mrs. Erlich and are both nutritionally and spiritually fulfilling. Claude is amazed to witness the spirited conversation that prevails at the dinner table (41). Levenstein notes that foreigners often commented on the lack of ritual and conversation at American meals: "Foreigners often remarked on the eerie silence that reigned at American dinner tables, as diners seemed to concentrate on getting the tiresome burden of stuffing themselves out of the way in as short a time as possible" (*Revolution* 8). In large part through its food culture, Mrs. Erlich's house becomes a home for Claude in a way he never experienced his own house or family. One scene in which Claude arrives at the Erlich house one afternoon and catches Mrs. Erlich making German Christmas cakes is especially poignant:

She took him into the kitchen and explained the almost holy traditions that governed this complicated cookery. Her excitement and seriousness as she beat and stirred were very pretty, Claude thought. She told off on her fingers the many ingredients, but he believed there were things she did not name: the fragrance of



old friendships, the glow of early memories, belief in wonder-working rhymes and songs. Surely these were fine things to put into little cakes! (45)

This cooking is holy and complicated. It fills the cook with excitement. It invites her full involvement as a social creature—calling forth her cultural beliefs and memories.

Evocative of Thea's experience of being simultaneously nourished by German food and music, Mrs. Erlich accompanies her baking with a song, the sentimental German song, "Spinn, spin, du Tochter mein" (45). Claude does not eat the cake, but walks away nourished: "Every time he went away from her he felt happy and full of kindness, and thought about beechwoods and walled towns, or about Carl Schurz and the Romantic revolution" (45). As Thea said of herself, it seems Claude has never been so well nourished before.

Cather's own American kitchen forms a striking context to this. On the next page, Claude returns home from college for Christmas break to find the family's hired help, Mahailey preparing a batch of cornmeal mush. He feels tenderness to see her there at the stove, but the juxtaposition between traditional Christmas cakes, full of memories and beliefs and songs, and a vat of mush--homogenous, bland mass--could not be more dramatic. Cather writes the account of Claude's first vision of the kitchen scene as follows:

Mahailey was at the stove, stirring something in a big iron pot, cornmeal mush, probably,--she often made it for herself now that her teeth had begun to fail. She stood leaning over, embracing the pot with one arm, and with the other she beat the stiff contents, nodding her head in time to this rotary movement. (45)<sup>13</sup>

"Stiff contents" contrast to a cake, food designed for mashing contrasts to a highly particular sensual experience, redundant rotary movement to song. Mrs. Erlich is a cultured woman to whom Claude looks up, knowledgeable of music and fine

conversation; Mahailey a somewhat mentally slow and uninspired kitchen help. When Claude hugs her, she responds with affectionate scolding, “A little more’n I’d ‘a’ had my mush all over the floor” (46). With this image, Cather engulfs Claude back within an American sensescape which is totally uninflected, tasteless, shapeless mass that spills across the kitchen.

Claude explicitly acknowledges the gap between the two food cultures a bit later on. After a subsequent trip to Mrs. Erlich in Lincoln, he regrets the need to return home once again, saying: “If Mrs. Erlich and the Hungarian woman made lentil soup and potato dumplings and Wiener-Schnitzel for him, it only made the plain fare of the farm seem the heavier” (84). Savory lentils, dumplings and veal contrast starkly with mush.

In addition to his nourishing relationship with Mrs. Erlich, Claude feels well-fed by Mrs. Voigt, the German proprietress of a restaurant near a train station he travels through on his journeys between college and home. Even this German train station food is much heartier and more nurturing than the food he generally receives in his American home. Mrs. Voigt is plump and matronly. She serves him a hearty oyster stew, as just the precursor to the meal. She tells Claude she has “just finished roasting a chicken with sweet potatoes, and if he liked he could have the first brown cut off the breast” (35). Mrs. Voigt is proud, moreover, to tell him, “I put plenty good gravy on dem sweet pertaters, ja” (35). Her German accent is mixed up with this hearty meat. She stands lovingly over him as he eats: “She stood nursing her stumpy hands under her apron, watching every mouthful he ate so eagerly that she might have been tasting it herself” (36). Like the lively meals at Mrs. Erlich’s, there is passion and community in this food that is deeply nurturing to Claude.

In contrast, when Claude marries the American vegetarian Enid, she feeds him meals without any song or memory or rich, cultural tastes as those in Mrs. Erlich's food, and without any hearty meat or motherly love, as those in Mrs. Voigt's food. She, like Claude's eminently practical father and brother, is most concerned with health. Her personality is generally cold, and Cather presents her vegetarianism as an aspect of that lack of feeling. Enid talks about calories rather than tastes. She inherits her eminently soulless attitude towards food from her mother. Of the latter it is said that, minus her angel food cake and mayonnaise specialties, her husband and workers consider themselves undernourished. Cather writes:

Mrs. Royce went every summer to a vegetarian sanatorium in Michigan, where she learned to live on nuts and toasted cereals. She gave her family nourishment, to be sure, but there was never during the day a meal that a man could look forward to with pleasure, or sit down to with satisfaction. (121)

Claude feels the same way about the meals he receives from Enid. Cather depicts one such meal in particular detail. Claude comes in from working in the field and finds Enid has set the table for one. She has gone off to a Prohibition meeting (a meeting, thus, to prohibit a brand of consumption satisfying to many) and has left his dinner in the icebox: "a dish of canned salmon with a white sauce; hardboiled eggs, peeled and lying in a nest of lettuce leaves, a bowl of ripe tomatoes, a bit of cold rice pudding; cream and butter" (201). The meal is canned and cold and conspicuously meatless. And, far from the lively, talkative, musical dinnertimes at the Erlich house, Claude must sit down to it alone. A bit later a couple he is friends with commiserates with Claude's perpetual hunger and Enid's dearth of cooking and distinguishes themselves from Enid's homemaking ethic. The husband's words to his wife on this matter are notable: "I don't believe you would live with the sort of man you could feed out of a tin can" (205). As previously mentioned,

Levenstein notes that it was in part American women's liberation, their desire to spend time on their own leisure activities, that led them to feed their families canned, processed foods at the beginning of the century (*Revolution* 162). Enid, with her vegetarianism, her social activism and her driving off to meetings by herself, represents this New Woman. Such a New Woman figure appears elsewhere in Cather and is praised on many grounds, but cooking is not one of them. Rather, the attitude that this new American woman takes towards food, quite opposed to that of the German matrons, conspires with the food industry, to leave Claude deeply hungry.

Perhaps it is experiences such as those he had with Mrs. Erlich and Mrs. Voigt that make Claude run to the defense of hearty German cooking even in the midst of World War I. When Claude, as soldier, again stops for dinner at Mrs. Voigt's diner at the train station, other soldiers try to stop him, proclaiming, "She's a German spy, and she'll put ground glass in your dinner" (245). Claude adamantly defends Mrs. Voigt, thus vilifying their reactionary censure. Moreover, he compares her food favorably to the American food he is fed in the army. So when Mrs. Voigt proudly offers him a pot pie and green peas out of her garden, Claude is happy to eat them, saying, "We don't get anything but canned stuff in camp" (245). The food she offers actually constitutes a home to him; it does not embody for him, as for the others, the enemy across the sea. Claude says, "I've been away for a long time, and it seemed like getting home when I got off the train and saw your squash vines running over the porch like they used to" (245). In responding angrily to those American soldiers and relishing Mrs. Voigt's German food, Claude voices Cather's assertion of the value of this alternate culinary tradition.

Claude continues to embody Cather's sympathy for German cooking even when faced directly with German enemies he fights in France. Claude's unit takes some German prisoners-of-war. When these POWs offer to help prepare breakfast the cook stridently rejects them, saying, "they were so filthy, the smell of them would make a stew go bad" (424). The POWs are thus, "herded off by themselves, a good distance from the grub line" (424). Cather shows Claude to be sympathetic towards them, however, especially when they begin talking of their ties to America—the relatives they have there and their own desire to go there one day. This talk likely reminds him of the Germans he knew who added so much to his American sensescape-- Mrs. Erlich and Mrs. Voigt. Moreover, Cather presents the POWs sympathetically: They express a great exuberance, like that of the matronly nurturers, and willingness to be useful. The cook's attitude is representative of general American attitudes towards German food at the time; Claude's sympathy here is reflective of Cather's desire to keep the American sensescape open, even in the face of immediate political antagonisms. Cather shows German Americans (as well as potential German Americans) to actually feed the American war effort, to fill American soldiers in a way American food cannot.

Like the depths of the Czech food, the German food has a heartiness that makes it a valuable intervention into the American sensescape. To a land of skim milk, vegetarianism, cornmeal mush and canned tomatoes, it adds potatoes with plenty of gravy, pot pies, rich cakes and wiener schnitzel.

### **French Delicacies**

Cather showed Czechness to be deep, dark depths, and Germanness to be a heavy hardiness. Frenchness is opposed to both.<sup>14</sup> Frenchness in Cather's work is defined by a

freshness and delicacy, expressed through foods with such qualities. In her novels about French immigrants, liquids abound, for example wines, hot chocolate, soups and olive oil. The vegetables desired (if not always obtained in the rough American terrain) are of the lightest—lettuce and leeks. When meat is eaten, it is *saignant*, the blood still flush in the meat. In and through such light, fresh foods, Cather's French immigrants have like refined, delicate subjectivities.

Unlike as with the Czechs and Germans, what threatened the French was not actively hostile prejudice or politics, but simply vulgar sensibilities. Cather depicts scenarios in which, in order to continue to be French, the immigrants must find room for their fresh, light fare (and the eating rituals which make them further delicate) in a new land dominated by what they took to be crude victuals. These were represented not by mainstream American fare, but by American Indian and Mexican fare. The French immigrants she depicts, though not Cather herself, saw these as the opposite of their own cuisine—dirty, rough, vulgar.<sup>15</sup> The French immigrant stories she writes are set in places where these cultures dominated—the Southwest of the nineteenth century and Quebec of the seventeenth century. However, I argue that there is a present fear which lies behind this historical fiction and gives it its charge. The quality of unimaginative, slapdash crudeness by which Cather's French characters categorize Mexican and American Indian fare, resonates directly with Cather's own descriptions of the American food industry culture. Therefore, I preface my discussion of the French immigrant novels with a look at another scene in *One of Ours*, in which French culinary culture is actually threatened by American food and eaters in France.

The France of *One of Ours* is dependent on American food donations. Cather shows it to be appreciated but looked at as somewhat of a vulgar necessity. Its very abundance offends refined French sensibilities. This is especially evident in one striking scene which describes the Americans landing in France, after a long voyage by ship across the Atlantic. They immediately seek out baguettes and are then ecstatic to discover a cheese shop. Their American fare on the ship had been “greasy” (296) and “pretty bad” (295). Cather writes, “After sixteen days of heavy, tasteless food, cheese was what they all wanted” (319). The proprietress tells the soldiers the cheese is rationed, but far from respecting the cheese ration allotments, the soldiers gorge themselves on as much cheese as they can, right there in the store:

The boys fell upon the stock like wolves. The little white cheeses that lay on green leaves disappeared into big mouths. Before she could save it, Hicks had split a big round cheese through the middle and was carving it up like a melon. She told them they were dirty pigs. (325)

The cheeses have been delicately laid out on green leaves with an eye not just to corporeal, but also aesthetic consumption. Without so much as a nod to this, the soldiers proceed to shove the cheese in their mouths. They lack appreciation of fine sensations—instead of quality, the soldiers only know quantity. Crafted cheeses are hacked up like melons. The food is not tasted; it just “disappears.” The soldiers seem so unsophisticated, according to French sensibilities, that they are rendered animal. The text describes them as wolves and pigs. When they leave, the proprietress reflects on the American fare coming to France during the war:

An army in which the men had meat for breakfast, and ate more every day than the French soldiers at the front got in a week! Their moving kitchens and supply trains were the wonder of France...on the desolate plain of the Crau, their tinned provisions were piled like mountain ranges, under sheds and canvas. Nobody had ever seen so much food before; coffee, milk, sugar, bacon, hams; everything the

world was famished for. (326)

This passage does express awe towards the American stores. As with the cheese-rendered-melon, though, food here is vulgarly heaped up into a mountain range. Unlike the thoughtful combination of cheese and green leaf, it is a homogenous mountain of tin—various foods thrown into one indiscriminate pile of sugar and bacon and other unlike things. Americans eat without ritual: they hack and they pile. The vulgarity of these hungry soldiers does not represent the army alone; it reflects the uncouthness by which Cather defines American culinary sensibilities generally. The mountain of cans here is only an extension of the cans Claude was fed for dinner by his wife at home.

French immigrants face an America that appears to them to be immune to sensual refinements. Cather shows her French immigrants to encounter in America food that is not fresh but dried, not delicate but heavy and often so unrefined it is actually dirty. As in the previous works, Cather crafts scenes which capture the threat to identity at the level of textures and tastes and smells. She reflects common French perceptions of the depravity of American cuisine. One French cookbook of 1903 announces, “We believe that we will not be met with indignant protest in venturing to assert that cooking as an art is greatly neglected in America, this fact being only too frequently and universally deplored” (Caron 4). Berthe Julienne Low, the writer of another declares, “I appreciate the good points of American cooking and I have known some good American cooks, but their knowledge is limited and consequently their fare is monotonous. The palate gets tired of the same things cooked in the same way” (6). This monotony resonates with Cather’s piled cans of indiscriminate stuff. Low goes on to communicate how hard it has been, especially twenty years ago (in the 1880s—a period proceeding the ones Cather



writes), to get basic French seasoning elements like parsley and spices and to make the American palate amenable to things like garlic and onions (8,11). To French eyes, American fare is both monotonous and bland. In contrast, the author writes, “Eating in France is a very serious function” (53). Cather’s writing of the French immigrant experience emphasizes this seriousness.

*Death Comes to the Archbishop* opens in Rome and immediately sets up the culinary contrast between the old and new worlds. Cardinals there hold a meeting to discuss the vicar they will appoint to New Mexico, as that territory had been newly acquired by the United States. It is against this scene of urbane sophistication in an old European city, over dinner and a “superb” burgundy (10) that the rest of the book is pitted. Cather shows the cardinals to be more preoccupied with projecting upon what the physical conditions of the vicar’s life will be there, than on his actual spiritual mission. There is one weathered missionary among them who describes to the rest the likely circumstances the appointed missionary will face: “He will eat dried buffalo meat and fryoles with chili, and he will be glad to drink water when he can get it. He will have no easy life” (10). The missionary’s prediction about his hard life turns out to be true in many ways, notably, as he stresses, in terms of the alimentary. In order for the chosen priests, Archbishop Latour and Father Valliant, to maintain their cultural identity as Frenchmen, they must intervene into the holidays, sacraments, and general relationship with the earth the priests find practiced in America.

In one pointed and often discussed scene, Valliant, somewhat of an amateur cook, decides he has had enough of native fare and will venture the challenging task of preparing a French dinner in the desert. He sends away the Mexican cook and spends all

day struggling with the extremely underequipped kitchen, with its one open fire-place and one earthen-roasting oven. The religious occasion of this meal, Christmas, shows the extent to which food is bound up with culture, even in the ethereal dimension of the religious. In this meal, the priests are very explicit about the fact that when they eat French soup, they connect with their heritage; through that broth and those vegetables, they imbibe Frenchness itself. Father Latour says, upon tasting Valliant's soup, "a soup like this is not the work of one man. It is the result of a constantly refined tradition. There are, perhaps, a thousand years of history in this soup" (42). The cooking traditions of the native populations are described as crude, thoughtless, even uncultured by Cather's French immigrants. Against these stands a soup which has been refined over centuries. Moreover, its very texture embodies the sensual qualities which exemplify Frenchness in Cather's writing. Its delicate liquidness contrasts with the heavy chili native to the region.

Overall, however, Valliant's meal is only partially successful in an American environment. He is forced, for instance, to corrupt that classic French soup, by using onions instead of leeks. He also complains to Latour that the best he could do by way of salad was a bean salad, fresh lettuce being impossible to acquire in the desert. He demands: "Are we to eat dried beans and roots for the rest of our lives?" (45). Roots are subterranean, beans are dried, both are comparatively dense and heavy; neither has the crisp freshness of lettuce and leeks. However, Latour is able to dress the inferior ingredients in olive oil he has brought from afar, which drapes and renders more delicate the other food stuffs serving as poor substitutes for their light, fresh, French equivalents. Like the oil, candles on the table serve to consecrate the dinner as a whole. In the pools of

light they make upon the food, the candles ephemeralize in shine what still remains weighty in substance.

The old, dried-out quality of the beans and root vegetables is shared, in Cather's French immigrants' eyes, with the meat of the Southwest. Not only is jerky a staple, even fresh meat is consistently overcooked, according to French sensibilities. Cather foregrounds the French meat sensibility in a second dramatic food scene. In this scene, Valliant is performing missionary work amongst Mexican people, as he has many times before, and decides that he will no longer eat what is given to him. He asserts his French culinary norms, even as a guest in a Mexican house, taking over the Mexican cook's preparation of the mutton for dinner that night. Valliant's delicate sensibilities recoil from overcooked, heavy, dry meat. He further impugns the Mexicans' habit of cooking in fat. Cather registers his thoughts on "a kettle from which issued the savour of cooking mutton fat, all too familiar to Father Joseph" (66). In a scene which critic Joel Daehnke describes as cultural imperialism, Father Valliant boldly pushes aside the Mexican cook to Frenchify the mutton. Opposed to the heaviness of fat, is the lightness of blood. Valliant cooks the meat (much to the disgust of the Mexicans) rare. Cather describes the "delicate stream of pink juice that followed the knife" when Father Valliant cuts the mutton (67). What was going to be dried out and jerky-like via Mexican preparation, is ephemeralized in streams of juice and pinkness.

Rebecca West, in a review of Cather that celebrated her sensuality, suggested that Valliant puts as much care into this dish as he would into the holy office (64). As many have noted, food and Christ are combined in this literal image of the blood of a lamb. Cather's French missionaries thus manifest their Frenchness not just in its ideology, its

religious norms, but also in its sensations. By lending the food in this scene a no less than religious connotation, Cather suggests that food is as central to a culture as are its ideas..

As the novel progresses, Father Valliant eventually becomes acclimated to Mexican food, but for the higher-class Latour it remains as distasteful at the end of his career as it was at the beginning. At the end of the book, Latour reflects on how much harder life is for New World missionaries than for early church martyrs, who at least faced their torments in a familiar world. The stridency with which the cardinals, at their meeting in Rome displayed at the book's beginning, denounced the horror of beans is ultimately justified: Latour lists, among the hardships he faces in the New World, which would have been unimaginable in Europe, the "unclean and repugnant food" (317). Worse still than the dried-out, fatty food Valliant perceives among the Mexicans, is the food Latour encounters among the Indians he visits. To him, it seems literally unclean.

On one trip Latour takes into Laguna territory (accompanied by the Laguna guide, Jacinto), Latour must eat his dinner out of doors. The food out of which he must make a dinner on this trip, appears to him to be dirty and rough. The natural elements among which he eats do not remain confined to the background, but encroach upon his food: Cather describes "the sand curling about them so that the bread became gritty as they ate it" (102). From where he is sitting, Latour can see nearby Indians eating within their dwellings, but he describes these in such a way that seems to dissolve the walls, so that they too are situated in raw nature. Cather writes, so as to reflect Latour's consciousness, "down in the pueblo the light of the cook fires made red patches of the glassless windows, and the smell of pinion smoke came softly through the still air" (105). There is fire in the windows; there are trees in the food: Harkening back to the American Burdens'

reception of Czech food, the French reception of Indian food here does not acknowledge it as culture at all—only as wild nature.

The dirt Latour feels surrounded by when eating among Indians threatens his sensual proclivities for delicacy and refinement. The almost fantastical image Cather goes on to portray of a gaping Indian mouth heightens this threat. A ponderous, grotesque, Indian mouth-shaped cave faces Latour as he gets deeper into Laguna country. The image of a large mouth resonates with the voracity of American soldiers that shocked the French in *One of Ours*. At a later point in the above-mentioned journey, Latour and Jacinto must find some shelter from a storm and the only cover nearby is this cave used for sacred tribal rituals. Cather describes it as such: “two rounded ledges, one directly over the other, with a mouth-like opening between. They suggested two great stone lips, slightly parted and thrust outward” (146). Rather than appropriating this space, as Valliant did the Mexican kitchen, Latour remains literally circumscribed by it: He actually enters the mouth of the other (like Jim did in Antonia’s fruit cave). Cather writes, “Up to this mouth Jacinto climbed quickly by footholds well known to him. Having mounted, he lay down on the lower lip, and helped the Bishop to clamber up” (146). Not only is Latour’s body surrounded by the cave, it is also sensually infiltrated--the smell of the cave invades his senses: Cather writes that Latour “detected at once a fetid odour, not very strong but highly disagreeable” (147). He does not know what strange thing he is smelling and so cannot delimit its impression upon him by name. Likewise, Jacinto will not allow Latour to see all of the cave and therefore the latter cannot form a complete, containable mental image of the sensual otherness surrounding him: As he is unable to translate the

experience into words or image, the smell and feel of the mouth remain intractable and threatening..

The American sensescape is thus dominated for Latour by what he perceives to be a dirty, grotesque food culture. Into this sensual dearth, Father Latour decides priests should assert their food along with their god. Just as Valliant did in the Mexican kitchen, Latour realizes that to spread what he perceives to be civilization (but is in reality only his delimited culture, his Frenchness) here is not just to spread the fruits of god, but actual edible fruits. Into a culture he perceives to be dominated by dirty food and mouths made of dirt, Latour asserts fresh produce:

He grew such fruit as was hardly to be found even in the old orchards of California; cherries and apricots, apples and quinces, and the peerless pears of France—even the most delicate Varieties. He urged the new priests to plant fruit trees wherever they went, and to encourage the Mexicans to add fruit to their starchy diet. Wherever there was a priest, there should be a garden of fruit trees and vegetables and flowers. (303)

Latour, then, spends his retirement manifesting his culture not in cathedrals and scripture, but in food. He replaces “starchy” food with “delicate” food. This French garden constitutes Latour’s triumph over the sensescape of the New World, which had so horrified the European cardinals who sent him there. This book about the spread of civilization thus starts and ends in food.

Though it does not take place in America, but rather in Canada’s New France, the novel *Shadows on the Rock* is worth looking at briefly here as it corroborates the prejudices and preferences of the French immigrants in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. In *Shadows on the Rock*, Cather depicts a French father/daughter pair (Euclid and Cecile Auclair) living in nascent seventeenth-century Quebec.<sup>16</sup> As in the other novels, Cather shows that these French, without their eating rituals and without their food, cannot be

French. Cather writes, “Dinner was the important event of the day in the apothecary’s household...his dinner Auclair regarded as the thing that kept him a civilized man and a Frenchman” (19). Euclid Auclair is an apothecary in the employ of a count he has accompanied to the New World. His adolescent daughter Cecile joined him and keeps the house. Cecile’s creation of a domestic haven is vital to the maintainance of her family’s French identity in this wild, recalcitrant land. Auclair himself, in his apothecary role, is also a kind of cook: He has various edibles containing medicinal qualities regularly shipped to him from France. As an educated Parisian man, like the cultivated immigrant priests of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Auclair is a bastion of culture in the midst of a wilderness threatening to French civilization. While the priests intervened with their edible sacraments, an apothecary can intervene with his food-based medicines. In fact, at one point, Auclair declares to his daughter, “I am the guardian of the stomach” (149). He is vigilant about having the French people ingest only what is considered food in France.

More stridently than any of the other works, even *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, *Shadows on the Rock* records the immigrant’s perspective on the dire necessity of having particular food in order to maintain a particular sensescape and culture. Before she dies, Cecile’s mother tells her, “Your father has a delicate appetite...and the food here is coarse. If it is not very carefully prepared, he will not eat and will fall ill” (27). She makes her sentiments even more clear by proceeding with, “Without order our lives would be disgusting, like those of the poor savages. At home, in France, we have learned to do all these things in the best way, and we are conscientious, and that is why we are called the most civilized people in Europe” (28). In this regard, critic Tricia Currans-Sheehan points out that Cecile puts much effort even into growing

parsley, which will not be used as seasoning, but simply as decoration. She says of this family, “Food is more than nourishment for the body . Food is art. It is beauty amidst the ugliness of the new land” (50). This matter of aesthetics is, of course, one that is culturally inflected. Like the leaf beneath the cheese in the shop attacked by American soldiers in Paris, this parsley holds together a French identity. Currans-Sheehan is right to find this domestic detail key to the story.

In addition to her garnishes, the meals Cecile prepares can be defined by liquids; they are delicate. Each breakfast consists of hot chocolate. Dinner contains a soup and is accompanied by wine. The salad dressing Cather mentioned when first describing how the culture survived here, is defined by an oil. Light, refined foods manifest such a like subjectivity.

While the southwestern missionaries were surrounded with beans and overdone meat, Quebec is full of lard. A friend of the Auclairs, the woodsman Fricchette, tells the story of how he was once out on a mission with the priest, and their fare consisted of smoked eels and cold grease (166). A more dramatic story showed that he and his companions had to scrape the hair off their bear skins and eat that (219). When hungry in the woods, he has occasionally had to depend on the hospitality of Indians and eat cornmeal from dirty pots, dogs cooked with blueberries and meat that turned out to be an Iroquois prisoner. All of it is vulgarly cooked over an open fire, occasionally mixed with ash. It is this very earthy, rough, culinary environment into which the French settlers must aggressively assert their soups and fresh vegetables.

Another trapper, Charron, maintains a similar degree of separation from the food. He posits Indian food as utterly repulsive when he says to Cecile, “When you can go to



an Indian feast and eat dogs boiled with blueberries, you can eat anything” (218). Even more affecting is a story he tells to the Auclairs of a trip he took with a French professor into the woods. He explains that this professor, Chabanel, “fond of the decencies, the elegancies of life” (177):

The food was so hateful to him that one might say he lived upon fasting. The flesh of dogs he could never eat without becoming ill, and even corn-meal boiled in dirty water and dirty kettles brought on vomiting; so that he used to beg the women to give him a little uncooked meal in his hand, and upon that he subsisted. (177)

While the French grow fresh, delicate, vegetables and herbs in their basements all year round, garnishing them with parsley and oil, the Indians, in their view, eat only plain, dried cornmeal, or reach unimaginatively to domestic pets as food, all of which they cook in dirt.

Cather creates her most arresting image of French culinary delicacy by leaving the realm of food altogether and presenting a bowl of glass fruit as the object of Cecile’s awe. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Latour seeks refuge in his orchard. One of Cecile’s greatest fixations in this hostile, savage environment is this bowl of glass fruit owned by the Count. Not only is it fruit--fresh, light food—it is so far removed from the dirty earth, it is not even a natural substance at all—it is glass:

a crystal bowl full of glowing fruits of colored glass: purple figs, yellow-green grapes with gold vine leaves, apricots, nectarines, and a dark citron stuck up endwise among the grapes. The fruits were hollow, and the light played in them, throwing coloured reflections into the mirror and on the wall above.” (68)

No vulgar eating can even be done here—the fruit is all light and color, and that supremely delicate material--glass. Cecil says that it is much lovelier than real fruit (70).

Like the blooming orchards that Cather has Latour bring into the desert, the French bring glass fruit, into the rough, coarse frontier. In this way, this French family struggling in the

wilderness, manages to maintain their own identity. In writing, in loving detail, the foods that preserve them, Cather intervenes into a culture of crude sensibilities.

As the twentieth century progressed, ethnic foods went from being shunned to being trendy; perhaps Cather's works played some small role in acclimating Americans to them. Into a young American food culture, dominated by a bland Anglo tradition, valuing quantity over quality effort, made increasingly more homogenous and tasteless by the food industry by the food industry, Cather intervened with Czech depths, German heartiness and French delicacies.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Foodways were one of the only aspects of their social existence over which immigrants could exercise a modicum of control. Donna R. Gabbaccia says that amongst changed landscapes, languages, neighbors, workplaces, the table could be a rare bastion of tradition:

New immigrants faced many changes over which they had relatively little control—where they would live, what kind of work they would do, which language they would be required to learn to speak. At least they could exercise control over their meals. This feeling of mastery may have initially overwhelmed any normal, counterbalancing interest in the varied foods of their new homeland. (48)

The centrality of cuisine to specific national (as opposed to regional) alimentary identity should be historically placed, however. Hasia Diner notes that national cuisines emerged in the nineteenth-century age of nationalism (6), so, not too long before Cather's period and in fact after the period of French immigration she writes about.

<sup>2</sup> Several critics have discussed the prevalence of food in her work. Lionel Trilling attributed it to her humanistic impulse. He acknowledged her attempt to do more than create a realist effect with the many physical, particularly culinary, details she gave (which he generally denounced): "The elaborate fuss that she made about cuisine, about wine, and salads, and bread, and copper pots, was an expression of her sense of the unfeeling universe; cookery was a ritual in which the material world, some tiny part of it, could be made to serve human ends, could be made human" (349). Others have placed her writing of food within feminist concerns. Tricia Currans-Sheehan traces how Cather's works commemorate everyday female practices like cooking, baking and preserving (46).

Cather apparently took quite an interest in food in her own life, as well. Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant writes in her memoir that Cather was always, "delighted to hear of good cookery" (156) and that, "sharing a good meal with her remained...one of life's serious pleasures. Conversation must never divert one from the quality of the food on the plate and the wine in the glass" (51).

Roger L. and Linda K. Welsch, in an entire work devoted to food in Cather's novels, *Cather's Kitchen: Foodways in Literature and Life*, most thoroughly documents the alimentary within Cather's fiction. The authors gather recipes from cookbooks in Cather's personal collection and available in Nebraska during her time. They present these with background and commentary according to the various categories of food that appear in her work—meat, bread and cakes, vegetables, fruit and berries, gardens and orchards, drink and sweets and treats. They helpfully situate the foodways she describes within frontier culture.

<sup>3</sup> A few writers on immigrant foods in America have pointed out that it was impossible to transfer ethnic diets full scale to America. Shortridge and Shortridge, for example, point out that available ingredients change, as do the social contexts in which food is eaten (123). While these are negative factors, Hasia Diner points out that immigrants often actively chose to change their foodways, to take advantage of the new abundance of

foods they found in America (229). Also, Linda Murray Berzok notes that when she sought out her mother's Swedish recipes, she found that they were all stowed away and yellowed, and she hypothesizes that this reflects a general tendency of many immigrants to degrade and dissociate from their ethnic traditions (89). Cather tends to present her ethnic cuisines as static and jealousy guarded from change; her view should be considered a vision, rather than a reflection of reality.

<sup>4</sup> In *Eating in America: A History*, Waverley Root and Richard de Rochemont assert that, "For good or for ill, the United States was perhaps a political melting pot, perhaps a cultural melting pot, perhaps an ethnical melting pot, but it is not a culinary melting pot. Its capacity for digesting esoteric gastronomic contributions is narrowly limited" (276). They explain that, "The cuisines which were most successful in infiltrating American kitchens were those which resembled the cooking of the English—Dutch and German, for instance. Even Scandinavian cooking proved a little too foreign, and is confined chiefly to Scandinavian ethnic enclaves" (276). Harvey Levenstein agrees that, at the turn of the twentieth century, the American culinary scene continued to be dominated by British American conservatism and a suspicion of foreign foods (*Revolution* 4).

<sup>5</sup> Levenstein notes that many foreign visitors to the United States commented on this. He quotes, for instance, the English Frances Trollope, who described everyday American food as "abundant but not delicate" (*Revolution* 8). As for the lack of ritual in American eating, Levenstein quotes the Englishman Thomas Hamilton's recollections of a hotel dining room: "Each individual seemed to pitchfork his food down his gullet, without the smallest attention to the wants of his neighbor" (9).

<sup>6</sup> Cather only occasionally commemorates American foods, such as cornbread (in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*) and taffy (in *My Antonia*). She also waxes romantic about frontier food. In her novel, *A Lost Lady* (1923), the character Neil laments the passing of the frontier. Rather than mourn the loss of freedom and possibility the frontier represented, though, he regrets that "the taste and the smell and song of it" are gone (172). In *Song of the Lark*, Thea Kronberg experiences "the savor of coffee and bacon mingled with the smell of wet cedars dying" as part of her experience of the healing frontier, outside the hectic city (266). In *The Professor's House*, when Tom Outland returns west from a trip to the capitol, where he was forced to dine upon *hor deurves* and wine and other food he did not know how to eat, he feasts upon a hearty rabbit stew (242). In addition to these few American foods, she also celebrates American plenty--cherishing the cornucopia of American crops (the great wheat fields of *O Pioneers* or the American provisions sent to Europe during World War 1 in *One of Ours*). However, abundant as American food might be in these works, it is generally uninflected with identity, impressive but also vulgar in its immensity. In "The Bohemian Girl," the farmers on the Nebraska prairie have enough for mountains of chickens and hams and cakes and pies but instead of a ritualized, cultured dinner, they gorge in eating contests.

<sup>7</sup> Cather's own unusually receptive attitude towards immigrants can perhaps partially be explained by the fact that she grew up on the frontier, where native-born Americans were

the minority.<sup>7</sup> Though she was born in long-settled Virginia, her family moved to Nebraska when she was still a young girl. In Nebraska, according to the 1910 census, there were only 228,648 natives-born Americans to 900,571 foreign-born (Cather, “Nebraska” 5). Guy Reynolds argues that Cather was writing in a window in which the Americanization debate had been opened, 1916-18, but before the First World War, when nativism began to hold sway and open immigration closed.<sup>7</sup> The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 imposed national quotas, restricting the amount of immigrants who would be admitted from any given country to two per cent of the population from that country already living in America. The act worked to limit immigration from southern and eastern Europe. It was at this historical moment that Cather imagined a multicultural utopia: Reynolds says “she crystallized in fiction the hopes for a pluralist community” (73). Richard H. Millington, in fact, suggests that she was influenced by Franz Boas’s “cultural relativism,” put forth in *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911).

I should note that several other critics have argued that there were limits to her embrace of immigrants. Elizabeth Ammons, for instance, says, “Cather can put herself inside the experiences of Eastern European immigrants, French Americans, or Canadians, people in many ways quite unlike herself. But when it comes to Americans of other races, such as Indians, Asians, Chicanos, or blacks, her racism blinds her” (134). And Guy Reynolds himself points out that Jews and Chinese, who constituted a sizable portion of American immigrants in the early twentieth century are conspicuously absent (80).

<sup>8</sup> While I argue that Cather meant to diversify the American sensescape, it is not my intention to claim that her version of ethnic foods was necessarily liberating to the ethnic groups portrayed. All three of these characterizations reflect existing cultural stereotypes, which could be read as essentialist, alienating and dehumanizing because limited and one-sided. Her specific portrayals of ethnic eating are ultimately perhaps not as informative as her underlying idea that sense contributes to identity, and that ethnic foods thereby had the ability to affect the national identity. It is here that my ultimate interest lies.

<sup>9</sup> Millington and others have argued that it is this focus on objects for their own sake that makes Cather modernist. See also Janis P. Stout, editor of the recent anthology of essays, *Willa Cather and Material Culture* (11).

<sup>10</sup> Wheat, though preferred, was scarce on the Nebraska frontier, so cornmeal was a staple of the diet on the prairie (Gruber 10).

<sup>11</sup> Gabaccia points out that many fruit trees, especially those producing sour fruits, which were central in Czech pastries, could not be grown on the Great Plains (48).

<sup>12</sup> Richard Pillsbury suggests that several popular American foods have their origins in German influence—hotdogs, potato salad, doughnuts and lager beer (145).

<sup>13</sup> “Mahailey” is perhaps most frequently an African American name, and if this character were black, Cather’s depictions of her cooking as unimaginative and inferior could certainly be considered an ethnocentric slight upon a people who come from different

climes, have different food traditions (and were, moreover, brought to America against their will, where they had to make do among new foodstuffs). However, Cather nowhere makes reference to her being black in the novel. In fact, Cather's friend Edith Lewis noted that Mahailey was based on Margie Anderson, Cather's parents' "hired girl," employed while Cather was growing up. In *Willa Cather Living*, Lewis says that Mahailey's mother was the basis for Mrs. Ringer in Cather's later *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (Lewis 11), and Mrs. Ringer is clearly a white woman. So, it seems safe to assume that Cather was not critiquing a cuisine different from Claude's and her own Midwestern cuisine when she denigrated this mush, but that she was rather critiquing what she saw as dominant white American sensescapes.

<sup>14</sup> Cather's personal relation to French cuisine was even closer than it was to Czech. While she just visited Czech houses and bakeries, she employed a French cook within her home. Her friend Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant described finding Cather home at tea, enjoying "delicious, buttery crumpets, and crisp petite fours" (202). Cather wrote in a letter that she got all of her knowledge of French pots and pans from this cook, Josephine and she utilized this knowledge in *Shadows on the Rock* (Woodress 426). Cather is known to have been generally Francophilic. She expresses her emulation of French culture when she says, "most things come from France, chefs and salads, gowns and bonnets, dolls and music boxes, plays and players, scientists and inventors, sculptors and painters, novelists and poets...If it were to take a landslide into the channel some day there would not be much creative power of any sort left in the world" (qtd. in Woodress 426).

<sup>15</sup> See note 7: Several critics have impugned Cather for dismissing non-western peoples. In the cases I explore, Cather is certainly using Indian and Chicano cuisines as a foil of depravity to French cuisine's splendor. However, there are moments that suggest she was presenting this hierarchy from a French point of view, rather than her own. While in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Indian food is several times associated by the French priests with dirt, when the Archbishop actually eats in an Indian house, Cather shows him to be impressed by the delicacy he is served: hot corn bread with squash seeds, a dish Cather says is "an Indian delicacy comparable to raisin bread among the whites" (140). Also, though the priests are figures of religious authority and tend to represent their French culinary preferences as a kind of enlightenment, Cather undercuts this moral justification of what are mere cultural preferences in a scene in which she shows a Mexican girl asking Father Valliant if it is more pious to eat food without chilies, as he does. He is obliged to tell her no; that it is simply that Frenchmen do not like spicy foods (34). In fact, by the end of the book, Father Valliant has spent much time in Mexican communities and declares he has "learned to like chili Colorado and mutton fat" (235). Moreover, in *Shadows on the Rock*, where Indian food is presented by the French characters explicitly as cannibalistic, dirty and barbaric, Cather shows French hunters to be dependent on the kind generosity of an Indian who offers his own fresh kill to them, saying Indians can bear hunger better than the French (169). By portraying this act of generosity and triumph over bodily needs on the part of the Indian, Cather undercuts the French assumption that their culture represents the only way of being "civilized."

<sup>16</sup> Hermione Lee contends that Cather was attracted to Quebec because of her “interest in pioneering culture, at the point where inherited European traditions were adapting to the challenge of New World conditions, and before assimilation had set in. Quebec appealed to her particularly for being so un-assimilated” (292). She quotes Cather to say, “because they have remained practically unchanged for over two hundred years...Quebec would never have changed at all...if the American drunks had let it alone” (293).

## CONCLUSION

Throughout many literary eras, food and eating were mere props or occasions: They served to illustrate some particular character trait of the eater or they provided the occasion for social interaction. Modernists' evocation of the alimentary, however, was revolutionary for unveiling an intensity in food experiences which suggest food is not just something people own and use but to which they are rather in a relationship of vulnerability and dependence to it; through food and the senses it engages, people connect to the outside world in ways they do not ultimately control. Modernist works engage with the physicality of foodstuffs, the irreducible sensual qualities that exist in excess of human uses and meanings. As I have shown throughout, food in Modernist scenes does not simply underscore preexisting meanings and dynamics, but serves as an actor in its own right. Encountering its sensual beckoning, consuming it, Modernist characters feel their personal bodily boundaries overcome. Their feelings of ecstasy or disgust, or, in the case of Cather, self-constitution through food, register a Modernist contention that people do not stand alone, but are woven through with the external, sensual world. Such food scenes illustrate, but also advance, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, by considering social and political ramifications of this intersubjectivity. On the one hand, the sensual response of the body can be ideologically conditioned, as in the disgust towards disempowered gender or ethnic groups which I explore in the last three chapters. But, in all the cases I discuss, this fundamental connection with the physical world also offers an alternative to dominant social configurations: Hemingway's story suggests that eating undermines the logic of domination which defined relations to the physical world at his time, and Mansfield's story suggests that the sensuality of food



disrupts the meal, a fundamental ritual of social norms and values. Characters in both works, however, find themselves authentically engaged in the sensual. Woolf, Joyce and Cather, while acknowledging certain pre-existing sensual prejudices, manipulate the power of the sensual to assault, to transgress lines of social demarcation and assert the bodies of underpowered groups.

The statement that Modernist representations of human life were more corporeally oriented is in itself not new. But when we consider this fact specifically in terms of *food scenes*, new implications arise. Much scholarship has given most attention to the writing of the sexual body to the unfortunate exclusion of other types of sensual engagement. Freud established sexuality as deeply constitutive of the self and sex scenes are thus often valued by critics for their *personal* affirmation or expression. The involvement of the body in food scenes, I argue, rather highlights *communal* involvement. An intense sensual experience does not fit into one's world, but draws one forth from oneself. Eating is regular and compulsory; via the eating body, one is always engaged with the world. The Modernists' focus on the senses foregrounds the portals between the self and the surrounding world. The disgust described in the last three chapters shows the Modernist belief that, no matter the extent to which one has political or social control over another group, the former are vulnerable to the bodies of the latter. Likewise, people are vulnerable to the sensations evoked by the commodities they own, and thereby exist in communion with, rather than domination over, the physical world. A Modernist depiction of equally assailable sensual bodies is democratic and resists modern hierarchies of gender, ethnicity and power. Phenomenological scenes of Modernist eating show

engagement with the world and with others and thus resist forces of modern alienation; they evoke wonder and therefore resist processes of rationalization.

These Modernist texts reveal literature's potential to re-imagine prevailing conditions in the material world. Early twentieth-century urbanization, industrialization and commodity culture tended to make objects and sensations proliferating and ephemeral, and therefore, unremarkable. Moreover, advertising, coupled with an ideology of consumption, tended to occlude access to their sensual otherness. In this context, Modernism's ability to contemplate and foreground the powerful sensuality of single food objects constitutes an intervention into the socialization of commodity culture.

The new proliferation of manufactured objects during the Modernist era implied the human power to create and expand the material world without limit. This seeming total control of the material world likely impede notice of the power and uniqueness of any particular sensual item. Certainly, in Britain and America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, people were exposed to a greater variety and multiplicity of objects than ever before. Sensual appreciation might also be hampered by the barrage of sensation in an increasingly urban world. In "The Metropolis and the Mental Life," sociologist George Simmel famously argued that the constant barrage of sensory stimulation in the modern city changed people's relations to the outside world. Rather than having slow, steady, emotional, sensual relations to objects, things went by so quickly that they could only be apprehended rationally. Joining this sheer proliferation were manufacturing and marketing processes which colonized an increasing percentage of the nonhuman object world with human meanings. In *The System of Objects*, Baudrillard points out several aspects of the modern commodity which prevent people

from having a genuine encounter with its otherness, the type of encounter I have been describing throughout. He states that far from the uniqueness and integrity of the hand-crafted item, mass-produced items are produced serially and thus, being one small part of an overall endeavor, lack reality in themselves. Also, because they are made of synthetic materials, they have less of their own textures and natural multidimensionality and are easily appropriated into our system of signs. Far from carrying us outside ourselves, as in the phenomenological experience, Baudrillard says our commodities are like pets—we can project our own subjectivity upon them and remain in a narcissistic universe. However, in an era in which this modern *consumption of commodities* first began to initiate an increasingly abstract relation to the material world, Modernists foregrounded the literal, sensual *consumption of food*.

Modernists took measures to contemplate foods in isolation, amidst a barrage of modern stimulations, and to appreciate their individual, uncontainable sensual richness. Some of the writers, in their fictional portrayal of food, stepped away from the hustle-bustle of commodity culture and the urban in which they themselves were steeped. Hemingway's story carries him away from Paris, where he was residing at the time, to the Michigan wilderness. Cather *My Antonia* and *One of Ours* were inspired by trips home to the small-town Midwest from a busy life in New York. Woolf's novels whittle down the stimulations of London to isolated experiences with particular foodstuffs. Mansfield's stories filter down from conspicuous bourgeois consumption to an intense encounter with a single cake or fruit. Of the works I discuss, Joyce's *Ulysses* alone maintains a fast-paced, multitudinous display of senses and objects: Through Bloom's stream of consciousness down the streets of Dublin, Joyce finds room to mention one

object or sensation after another. However, his prose records the various objects and sensations as striking, despite the pace. His descriptions are consistently sensual, rather than merely conceptual, and I have argued that he endows his scenes with a salient “disgusting” edge, thereby disrupting the regular unremarkable flow of objects and sensations. All the writers I have discussed, then, describe foods in ways which make them stand out from an onslaught of material commodities.

Modernists’ belief in this constant, pervasive assailing of the sensual is registered in their prose. Their narratives bend to accommodate that which comes from beyond the rationally motivated world. The sensual intervenes and changes things. Surprising amounts of time are devoted to colors, textures and smells as a way of registering their importance, but never quite owning them. When Woolf is describing Mrs. Ramsay’s *Boeuf en Daube*, or Mansfield a tea time pastry, the prose seems to stand still.

While theorists such as Baudrillard have suggested commodity culture creates passive subjects, it is clear the Modernist writers I have discussed evince make choices about how to engage with objects. They therein demonstrate a countertrend in thinking about objects and everyday life which posits that the everyday offers a rich, complex fabric too complex to control. In this way Modernist renditions of the alimentary have a value that extends beyond the history of food culture; they ameliorate the modern person’s alienation from the object world, and restore the freedoms offered therein.

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