Body and soul: food, the female (in) corporeal, and the narrative effects of mind/body duality

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BODY AND SOUL:
FOOD, THE FEMALE (IN) CORPOREAL,
AND THE NARRATIVE EFFECTS OF MIND/BODY DUALITY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by
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M.F.A., Mills College, 1993
B.A., California State University, Fresno, 1990
August 2002
The self is empty, as empty
As a word. This is a simple truth
We all deny we know. Yet
The life of the body is waiting,
Waiting always, to be heard . . .

—David St. John, “Subject for the World’s Body”

Nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul.

—Robert Browning, “Rabbi Ben Ezra”

I’m all for you, body and soul . . .

—as sung by Billie Holiday
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been racking up and mentally concocting acknowledgements on this project all my life, and especially over the past fifteen years as I wound my way through higher education. This may be the only time when and the only forum in which I can give recognition to the many individuals and voices that have informed my intellectual journey and this, its milestone result.

My greatest accumulation of debt and of gratitude is owed to Dr. Michelle A. Massé, who directed this dissertation and who has set an incredible example of how one can negotiate the academy and still retain personal integrity. Her teaching, scholarship, service to students as well as to the academy, and capacity for empathetic guidance together are a model of professional and personal investment. Properly expressed, all that I wish to say will border on a psalm. So instead I will simply thank you. I will be thanking you for the rest of my life.

The rest of my dissertation committee was, as some have remarked, a “dream team.” Strong reading, solid responses, and, importantly, respect for my unique intellectual pursuits indeed mark this group as a special one. Professors Elsie Michie, Katharine Jensen, and Patrick McGee contributed time and thought, as well as personal encouragement, and never failed to help keep me just this far above the inevitable doubt that comes with learning how to write a book. My Dean’s Representative, Dr. Jennifer Jones, inadvertently offered me respite during a research trip to England, and was also a kindred presence on this committee. This group deserves my highest praise, and receives it whenever I have occasion to remark upon the very positive experience I have had in working with them.

Professor Emerita Panthea Reid, with whom I studied for several years and who initially was co-director of this project, is also due more than one word of thanks. From the moment she
encouraged me to apply to LSU’s graduate program in English and until her retirement, she took a personal interest in my progress and in my work. Her attention to detail and to the stylistics of writing have provided me with a strong example to follow. I am grateful for her influence.

Along the way, I have received additional encouragement and votes of confidence, and am lucky to have many and varied examples upon which to model myself in the future. Professors Sharon Aronofsky Weltman and Susannah Monta both have shown me that personal and professional ambitions need not be contradictory. Dean Ruth Saxton of Mills College helped me to clarify my goals, and helped me through the struggles of finding a Ph.D. program that best suited my unique background. Professors I encountered while I was an undergraduate student at California State University, Fresno, also pointed me in this direction: Jaqueline Doyle, Ruth Jenkins, and Linnea Alexander (Aycock), the latter of whom first suggested that I might have what it takes to earn this degree. The late Ernesto Trejo took a returning night-school student out of his poetry writing classroom at Fresno City College and gave her two things: abiding faith in the written word and the knowledge that there was such a thing as a college major in English.

For many of us, the idea of “family” is a relative one, and although my biological family has given me a certain foundation upon which to build, my family of choice has provided me with sustained spiritual, emotional, and sometimes financial abilities to complete this journey. I am thankful for the strength and resilience that I have inherited from my mother, Karen Forest, and my grandmother, Edith Forest. You both are missed. Annette Woods, Suzi Arnold, Anne F. Walker, Christine Juncker, Brian Anthony, and Stephanie Wade are all parts of my soul. Jonathan Hackford, the best-looking man in London, keeps in touch and cooked for me while I was a lonely researcher in the summer of 2002. Raymond Hatch and Jane Davies are central to
my understanding of how food and life, as well as mind and body, are necessary complements. While at LSU, I have been blessed with a strong group of supportive friends and new members of my motley clan: Dr. Ted Atkinson, Maxine Beach, Robin Becker, Jean C. Lee, Amy Montz, Dr. Alcena Rogan, Kristin Ross, Jan Shoemaker, Dr. Anne-Marie Thomas, Phyllis Thompson. Beyond the university gates also lies James Fischer, who has helped to make the final throes of dissertating relatively painless and far too fun.

Marilyn Gensler stuck it out, and helped me to keep the final product in clear view.

I would also like to thank several literary estates and archives for permission to quote from unpublished material. For Mass-Observation Archive materials: the Trustees of the Mass-Observation Archive, University of Sussex. For Virginia Woolf: The Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of Virginia Woolf. For Elizabeth Bowen: reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown Group Ltd, London on behalf of the Estate of Elizabeth Bowen. Copyright Elizabeth Bowen.
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ABSTRACT

This study combines philosophical, historical, and cultural modes of inquiry in order to explore what has occurred when selected authors have attempted to “write the body.” Augmented by archival and primary cultural research, the dissertation is grounded in the experiential, “everyday” qualities of women’s lives. Samples of women’s cultural materials such as beauty, cookery, and household management texts, and popular women’s magazines serve as informative backdrops for an investigation of middle- and working-class British and Anglo-Irish women’s culture during the twentieth century.

This study investigates some of the ways in which women have thought about food in relation to more global cultural concerns such as class and gender. As tropes within female texts, food and eating are bestowed with the properties of larger social concerns. By foregrounding consumption, authors can address difficult issues, such as sexuality and social class, obliquely. In order to make sense out of a rapidly shifting modernity, the women writers whose work I examine have used one of the most common, daily occurrences—eating—in order to grapple with changes in society and in social codes and roles for women. A close examination of some of the ways in which this has occurred can help to illuminate the connections of everyday cultures, so long relegated to women, to the larger structure of a modern world and to its impact upon female agency and social empowerment. By creating pairs of female characters who are oppositional with regard to food consumption, the authors examined all implicate the division of mind from body central to Western philosophies. The two are necessary complements, however, and my work does not seek to give primacy to either the flesh or the intellect, but instead examines ways in which the two work together, as well as the ways that the
coming together of the physical and the psychical are represented by authors concerned not with the and mind/body binary, but with problematizing the very division that has underscored cultural development.
INTRODUCTION: LONG DIVISION

The following pages will explore ways in which aspects of the mind and the body have been brought together—to varying degrees and with varying results—by selected British and Irish women writers of the twentieth century.¹ Though the mind and body, as components of individual subjects, have been driven apart from one another since Plato, since St. Paul, since Descartes, seemingly since time immemorial, there have also been writers and thinkers who have worked, whether consciously or unconsciously, to rhetorically reunite these elements that actually are never far from each other. Throughout literature, philosophy, and other academic disciplines (as well as beyond the academy) there exist many voices who have sought to explain the ways in which the flesh and the intellect are indeed only components of a whole entity known monolithically as the “human being.” In a mid-twentieth-century response to questions posed by psychoanalyst Felix Deutsch on mind/body division, Stanley Cobb refutes the idea that any further issue is at hand:

I believe that Freud’s statement about the ‘mysterious leap’ from the mind into the body is today meaningless. There is no separation between psyche and soma [...] there is no leap at all for one who believes that mind is not a supernatural phenomenon but is the active integration of the billions of nerve cells and hundreds of cell masses of the living brain. (Deutsch 11; original italics)

Henry M. Fox, however, is more willing to problematize this issue in regard to Deutsch’s question: “The dichotomy of body and mind represents a special case of the more general dichotomy of thing and thought. These dichotomies are misleading because they verbally allude to a split which does not correspond to the unitary nature of experience and of the living organism” (Deutsch 14). A grand difference between these two versions of a similar opinion—that the mind and body are indeed not separate entities, but exist as complementary parts of a
whole—lies in Fox’s identification of the role of language, of rhetorical construction, in this popular divergence of the mind from the body, a divergence that has proliferated and turned in upon itself so that issues related to mind/body duality have become some of the more complicated additions to theoretical debates at the turn of the twenty-first century. While for Cobb any consideration of a dichotomy of mind and body is an intellectual gaffe akin to belief in a flat planet Earth, for Fox the concessions that must be made to the limitations of linguistic expression, and to the roles played by such limited language in the construction of and interrelations of human experiences, open the discussion to scholarly inquiry, even if such inquiry can never reach a point of finality, of exactitude.

No actual separation of mind from body creates current troubles for theories of embodiment, of ontology, or of the ways in which discourse shapes epistemology. Rather, it is the long-standing belief—mostly in a culture loosely termed “Western,” but that can for the purposes of this project be located more readily in Anglo-European traditions—that the mind provides the domain for an “essential” human being, while the body is merely a vehicle through which the mind can project a preeminent intellectual self. “We conceptualize ourselves,” write George Lakoff and Mark Johnson,

as split into two distinct entities that can be at war, locked in a struggle for control over our bodily behavior. This metaphoric conception is rooted deep in our conscious conceptual systems, so much so that it takes considerable effort and insight to see how it functions as the basis for reasoning about ourselves. (13)

As a metaphor for the “self,” human intellect has historically borne the weight of human existence and experience, regardless of the necessary quantity of the body that is equally at work to act, to perceive, to explore. As Francis Barker explains, “From the spectacular semiosis of the Renaissance body [. . .] modernity fashions a new body” whose “passions are attenuated to a guilty residue; its status as a site of meaning is consigned to detritus. Depressed almost
completely below the threshold of signification [. . .] the body disappears into the past” (vi-vii). This historical privileging of the intangible, whether that be a mind or a spiritualized “soul,” at the expense of a more complete conceptualization of the self is at this root of the dichotomy of human experience, and until the body has been not only theoretically, but also popularly, reunited with the realm of intelligence (or of additional ephemeral qualities such as a conceptualized spirit), Western society will continue to be conflicted by the effects of this compromise. Until individuals have been encouraged through high and low cultures—through the media, the arts, and the daily newspaper—as well as through academic proclamations, to consider an equality of the psychological and the physical aspects of “being,” the two will remain merely conflicting halves of a difficult binary in which one side must necessarily be asserted above its other half. Until the body can be viewed, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes, as “not itself a thing, an interstitial matter, a connective tissue, but a sensible for itself” (Visible 135; original italics), the division through which we as human beings are asked to conceive of ourselves will be at odds with the inherent connectedness of the mind and the body within human experience.

This project began—as, I am certain, have many—as support for an agenda quite different from that which lies beneath the current study. A child of Western culture, of a United States so formed by multiple versions of the mind and the body (ethical, cultural, religious), I was no stranger to the metaphor (à la Lakoff and Johnson) that creatively fashions a self from the fodder found in the realm of the intellect. I was merely, until I had unearthed and interrogated a variety of theories of embodiment and of human subjectivity, unaware of the ways in which I have been complicit in my own separation of mind from body, and in which my own belief system had internalized the widely held mind/body binary that in turn formed the intellectual
basis for my initial scholarly pursuit of female embodiment in literature by women. As I searched for evidence of embodied female experiences in texts by women as a way to imagine whether women writers have an edge over their male counterparts when it comes to documenting and describing female experiences, however, I was as bound to the idea of a body divided from the mind as have been numerous others. Though I was discontent with the rationales of some current debates—debates that tend to polarize between essentialist privileging of the body and constructivist promotion of discursivity and intellect—and wished to examine them further so as to discover why such theories to me made little sense, until I began to follow not the trail of “the body” through literature, but instead a broader path trod by a more comprehensive female identity, I was unable to imagine the unification of mind and body that now is so central to my thinking in these many pages. My search for the body in these literatures, though an important step in the process of developing this study, was, I realized as I stretched my readings out into certain discourses of philosophy and psychology, not taking into account an entire female “self” that must be considered to be a conglomerate of mental and physical modes of being.

Interestingly, too, as I found through my chosen critical lens of food consumption those representations of embodied women I had set out to discover, I also found, right there beside them, their theoretical counterparts: disembodied, discursive “sisters” who serve as representations of the mind that must accompany those of the body in order for an author to make some “whole” sense from our collective fragmented understandings of individual ontologies and subjectivities.

A thinking through of the ways in which the mind and the body can be philosophically reunited in order to promote new ways to conceive of the individual human being is, I think, particularly germane to feminist discourses, especially to those discourses that have sought to
define female experiences as they relate to issues of sex and gender. In *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), Elizabeth Grosz posits a notion of sexual difference based not simply upon biological facts or effects, but instead upon an interrelated mind/body continuum that can “avoid the impasses of reductionism, of a narrow causal relation or the retention of a binary divide” (210). In many ways, my thinking stems from her challenge in that work to feminist scholars and thinkers that we imagine new models beyond the binary for future thinking about women in social and cultural contexts, as well as for imagining embodiment beyond the narrow function of physical vehicle for the intellect. The binary of a cultural mind/body division is reflexively evident in the division among many of the theorists, as mentioned above, who have typically viewed the body as either primarily a biological system (and as the entity responsible for sexual difference) or primarily a lesser quantity when compared to the power of the intellect and its mutable responses to the effects of language. If one can acknowledge the problems that a mind/body division can create for the ways in which we imagine the individual in society, then an extrapolation of such divisiveness from theory to theorist can in turn illustrate how such divisions of thought can be equally problematic, and certainly counterintuitive, for imagining those new models for feminist inquiry encouraged by Grosz.

Recently, the body as a concept has faced challenges more potentially terminal than simple subordination to the mental realm. In the last decade, theorists such as Judith Butler, while working toward an important understanding of the ways in which language helps to construct individuals, have also destabilized any previously understood *terra firma* of the body. The idea of the body as "fact" or fixed notion has been called into question in a way that could theoretically extend toward a negation of the importance of individual corporeal experiences and of personal contexts in order to privilege a notion of perception based upon “pure” discourse.
While the ideas of socialization processes and cultural constructs lend much to understanding how sex roles and gender ideals become socially and culturally standardized, and in turn play themselves out in everyday life, the idea that individual experience itself is at the basis of political motivation and necessity has historically been foundational to feminist thought. If the body is reduced to a series of cultural and social interactions—with the suggestion that such contact is random, relative, reaction to some previous interface—then the historicity of contemporary feminist theory is jeopardized as its theories become polarized, much like those other discursive models just discussed above. To remove the ground of the body and of personal/physical experience as a relevant starting point for liberatory thought is to turn from a vast amount of what has come to make up feminist thinking. But to simply embrace an essentialist definition of sexual difference is also a limited methodology; constructivist ideologies are an equally important part of the dialogue. As thoughts on the body expand to encompass a wider definition of "materiality" that includes the realm of the intellect, such a shift can only help to further not only philosophical inquiries into the nature of being and of embodiment, but also feminist inquiry itself.

To such ends, I chose to focus my examination of the novels included in this study—as I undertook my newly defined quest for the mind and body together in literary contexts—through the lens of food consumption (and other relationships to food, such as its preparation) in order to investigate issues of the body that are not defined exclusively through discourses of and representations of female sexuality, as those discourses in particular seem perilously close to endorsing an essentialist, biology-driven point of view. Many women writers (and some men, too) have explored issues of female embodiment via themes of motherhood, sexual expression (activity, orientation), or sexual abuse. Female bodies, however, enjoy (and deplore) a
multiplicity of additional physical experiences, most of which have been deemed less important than those “defining” female experiences that relate to female genital difference rather than to a more complicated idea of a sexual difference for which the center is not the vagina or the uterus. Female consumption can be considered as both a form of female experience and a direct aspect of the body and its becoming, moving the female body beyond those traditional ways in which it has been viewed. “For every act of eating,” Marcy J. Epstein writes of performative, public consumption, “there exists a signifying reaction that tells us in no uncertain terms that that body has just made [. . .] itself” (21; original italics). A consuming woman exemplifies, in this way, her body and the potential agency contained within that body. In order to place myself in a critical position removed from an essentialist view of the body as primarily a site of sexual difference (instead of as a site of multiple investments), as well as a position firmly anchored in the “everyday” material world, I have chosen to examine a physical activity that signifies the female body in many of its aspects, and that remains a part of the quotidian world that cannot be ignored if the body is to be considered with regard to the realms of experience and sentience. The act of food consumption, an act that must occur on a regular basis for basic survival, is a foundational activity for women as well as for men, though, as I will explore throughout this work, I believe that female consumption provides a basis for explorations of many aspects of female experiences and of constructions of femininity, and that the idea of a consuming female anticipates social and cultural anxieties about female empowerment and agency.

Perhaps ironically—and perhaps not—issues of female consumption and relationships to food, though removed from the literal field of female sexual and genital experiences, none the less implicate related ideas of motherhood and of female sexual experiences. Try as I might to remove myself from those fields of inquiry most directly related to female sexuality, the female
body, regardless of its status and activity, has become so culturally loaded with sexual (and biological) significance that it has become impossible (and eventually, for my argument, undesirable) to ignore the ways in which the consuming female body resonates with issues related to an embodied female sexuality. Good examples of such a linkage among forms of female sexual functionings can be found in Sarah Sceats’s recent work *Food, Consumption, and the Body in Contemporary Women’s Fiction*. Sceats’s chapter entitled “The food of love: mothering, feeding, eating, and desire” sums up aspects of female consumption and embodiment that are at once cultural imperatives and dubious traits. “For many people,” Sceats reminds us, “the connection of food with love centers on the mother, as a rule the most important figure in an infant’s world, able to give or to withhold everything that sustains, nourishes, fulfills, completes” (11). Discourses of psychoanalysis (put forward by Freud, Klein, and others) have illustrated many ways in which initiations into realms of consumption in infancy create intimate and long-lasting associations between maternity and eating, and certainly there can be positive connotations made between mother-love and the potentially soothing qualities of food consumption. Sceats notes the flip-side to this mother-food nexus, however, when she speaks of “the maternal capacity to devour” (15). The devouring woman, whether mother or not, is a source of potential cultural anxiety, for the devouring, desiring woman is culturally defined as a sexualized being, and is an “other” with the potential to escape from the bounds of normative social restraints that govern sexual practices and other, often gendered, behavior schemes.

The female body in either of these relationships to food—maternal or sexual—calls forth the notion of a body that exists in direct opposition to the “image of a body in accordance with a tradition of ideal architecture [. . .]. That body is [. . .] that of an abstract, adult man, lying down in a horizontal posture with his arms open, his legs spread and stretched” (Marin 107). Louis
Marin considers such a “classical” body (as expressed in the work of Bakhtin), even in such an unseemly posture that for a woman would be considered lewd, as representative of utopian qualities, different from the “abysmal cavity, pit, and orifice of the living body” (107). This spread-open male body offers up phallic “life,” and poses no threat to patriarchal, masculine order, while an equally opened-up female body would beckon, would potentially devour, drown, suffocate. That living body of cavities and orifices most typically becomes, through elision based upon generations of cultural forces, a female body, one whose blood and milk signify the maternal and sexual female body that cannot mask itself as a male alternative, and whose secretions threaten the social order apparent in that “traditional architecture” (noted by Marin) of social structures. While, according to Grosz, seminal fluid “is understood primarily as what it makes, what it achieves, a causal agent and thus a thing, a solid” (199), the fluids produced by the female body remain fluids, and such secretions are significant of what Julia Kristeva calls the abject: “What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). Though Kristevian abjection is very much an effect of embodiment, and read within the confines of masculine definition remains unchangeably connected to the realm of the flesh, the very status of the abject as in-between, and reliance of abjection upon systems of discourse in order to have rules to break, allow for considerations of its byproducts (blood, milk), and of such bodily functions as consumption, to take into account the workings between material and discursive planes. The abject, neither subject nor object, is a hybrid designation. Though often relegated to the realm of biological function, issues of maternity and of female sexuality can complement investigations of those other physical experiences (such as food consumption) more removed from the traditional Western definitions of “woman,” the parameters of which rely upon a lens of a fairly reductive female embodiment for their stability. As Kelly Oliver
writes (with regard to Kristeva), “the maternal body [. . .] provides the most fundamental and powerful example of the seam between nature and culture” (“Nourishing” 69), between what I have referred to as embodiment and discourse. By any nomenclature, such division provides a basis for a collective theory of the body that ultimately reaches an impasse when it does not take into account that “seam,” that dynamic site of tension which should be considered in theoretical discussions that seek to move beyond the trappings of binary systems in order to find ways in which components of dualities work together, and are mutually enhancing.

The female body, then, so culturally invested with Kristeva’s “abject,” cannot avoid the fact of its myriad abjectivities once any one of them—in this study, the abjection of eating, of consumption—has been illuminated. Once any single signifier of the body’s “horrors” is acknowledged, then the myth of a pure body—a masculine projection—must be confronted. “The body’s inside, in that case,” notes Kristeva, “shows up to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one’s ‘own and clean self’ [. . .] gave way before the dejection of its contents” (53). If, as Kelly Oliver reiterates, “to set up your own clean and proper identity of a self, it is necessary to jettison certain threatening elements from your own identity” (Subjects 53), then inversely, opening the door to a threatening element, allowing something into the body that may indeed defile that body, can obliterate any sense of an identity that might conform to cultural standards for the clean and the proper, and of that “corporeal ‘universal’” that “has in fact functioned as the veiled representation and projection of a masculine which takes itself as the unquestioned norm” (Grosz 188). Both abject seepages and internalized “threatening elements” are components of a body that is at the very least feminized, but most often strictly female. Lorna Sage writes of her mother’s fear of food as a “fear of the outside getting in”
(123), as an anxiety related to those uncontrollable natural forces that lay both outside her own
front door and, certainly, that existed within her own body. Complicating a female body that has
been traditionally codified as sexual and maternal with the problematics of consumption, of
ingesting and internalizing that which is “outside” or “other,” can allow for curious, exciting
new ways to imagine female experientiality, both those experiences that have seemingly been
exhausted in critical discourses, and those that have often been overlooked. If “what is excluded
at the overt level of identity-formation [the abject, the other] is productive of new objects of
desire” (Stallybrass and White 25), then so is what is included, what is consumed. The
consuming female, even as she necessitates reconsiderations of those more common
conversations about the female body, invites new ways to imagine female subjectivity.

Barker’s thesis in The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection establishes and
supports a rise in the importance of the individual, discursive “subject” at the expense of the
historical material body, and speaks of such a philosophical project as the “inception of
bourgeois modernity” (88). The increasing division—from Enlightenment onward and through
the present day—of the public world-at-large and the private individual, Barker asserts, is “a
caesura running through—and, by division, instituting—other separations; between knowledge
and the object, between language and the world, between the mind, soul or psyche and the body”
(vi). Though I might choose to complicate Barker’s understanding of that separation of the
individual from a larger social structure as the beginning point for further divisions and dualities
with my own burgeoning theory that the partitioning off of the intellect from the physical body—
part of a discursive history that pre-dates the Cartesian subject—may instead be the foundation
for an ensuing chronology of social and cultural separations, this theory is, at present, only half-
formed. In lieu of producing such a related but quite different philosophy than that which Barker
pursues, I instead wish to consider, regardless of which division may have lead the way, all such binaried divisions as a vast nexus of social and cultural forces that work together upon and through subjects that are individually composed of interdependent mental and physical aspects, and, more specifically, to consider through investigations of literary and cultural texts the crucial link between (female) subject formation and the treatment of the problem of the body by twentieth-century women writers. As with the circularity of debate over embodiment, debates founded upon the idea of a constructed subjectivity often find themselves with no way out: “A power exerted on a subject, subjection is nevertheless a power assumed by the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject’s becoming” (Butler 11; original italics). Rather than attempt any salvaging of one at the expense of the other (my own grappling with these issues is indeed no less circuitous than are the thoughts of others), in this work I hope to think through what can occur by and because of the connectedness, the circle within such logical circuity, what Grosz has exemplified with the continuous Möbius strip that has no top that is not also bottom, no inside that cannot be simultaneously construed as out.

Because diffuse mechanisms of forces and subjects working together at once, inseparable, are at the heart of much of the work of Michel Foucault, some of my theoretical bases (much of which is delineated in Chapter One) rely upon his thinking, regardless of Daniel T. O’Hara’s assertion that Foucault no longer matters due to “the ritual passing” of “our ‘postmodern’ moment” (142). Perhaps, O’Hara suggests, we have as a culture out-postmoderned ourselves, and have designed a definition of a new social order so relative as to have no room left for an acceptance of those very theories that have helped to establish such a thing as postmodernity. “Such a culture,” he muses, “may possess a morality, an imposed standard of public and customary mores, but it is not ethical, since there is no freely selected
rapport à soi ["oneself"] possible, except in the modes of pure negation, such as absolute irony and radical parody” (156). As Oliver directly states: “Some poststructuralist theorists have taken advantage of the precariouness of the subject” (Subjects 111). Accessing the absolute or the radical still calls forth a glimmer of resistance from a subject that, as Foucault establishes across his theoretical cannon, is a creature at once a result of external, social forces and of a complementary resistance much like that detailed by Michel de Certeau in The Practice of Everyday Life, another theorist whose work is foundational to my pursuit of a better understanding of the place of the modern female subject within discourses of embodiment. As I emphasize here in my opening paragraphs, what is more potentially invigorating than any decisive pull toward one end of a spectrum or binary for discussions of both the body and the subject is investigation of the rhetoric used in such conjecture. Our language allows for discursive constructs, but necessarily limits us in ways that draw us back to the center and to an acknowledgment of continua, to that “seam” where halves are joined and where the osmosis of ontology and epistemology occurs for selves who are subjects as well as subject to the external world, who are physically established individuals who possess established psychical capacities.

Butler argues that for Foucault, “a subject is formed through the prohibition of a sexuality, a prohibition that at the same time forms this sexuality—and the subject who is said to bear it,” and that “prohibition becomes” in itself “an odd form of preservation . . . a productive contradiction in terms” (103). In this sense, the sexualized self—a identity formation that implicates both subjectivity and the body—is both the site of yet another inescapable maze of inquiry and another context in which the formation of an embodied subjectivity can be considered. Because, as outlined above, the female body is defined so often in Western culture in terms of its sexuality, discussions of female sexuality are critical to establishing what might
constitute female subjectivity, as well as to the potential ramifications for female subjects of an identity that is itself a “productive contradiction in terms”: a mind and body joined together in such a way that is fruitful for the female subject, and in such a way that allows for further insight into both the lived experiences of women and the texts produced by female authors.

“Subjectivity,” writes Oliver, “is not the result of a dialectic jerking back and forth from self to other. Rather, if anything, self and other are [. . .] perhaps even the refuse of the continual process of intersubjective exchanges that nourish and sometimes threaten” (151). This idea of interchange to which I and those theorists with whom I am in chorus keep returning is inherent within the construction of sexuality in that the self and the “other” (whatever or whomever is the object of one’s desire) are at the center of that phenomenon known as sexuality. Female subjectivity, in perhaps its most “productive” form, is at once the result of an embodied sexuality and of the sexualization of women in social and cultural discourses. In order to unsnarl the ways in which women as a group have been maligned by such sexualization, and to consider simultaneously how those forces shape the female subject who can be productively resistant even while under social subjection, further consideration should be given to the interactivity of a female subjectivity that is a product of mental and bodily activities. Consideration should be given, too, to the processes involved in joining together those components of the subject, as well as to the cultural and social fission that demands division of the whole subject.

According to Oliver, “Julia Kristeva suggests that we become subjects, more precisely speaking subjects, because of, and in response to, the primary pleasure of eating” (“Nourishing” 68). Both within the maternal, psychoanalytic context of Kristeva’s thinking and in broader contexts, female consumption provides a strong lens through which to examine those links that exist among the interconnected qualities of female subjectivity, agency, embodiment, and
sexuality. From a feminist perspective, consumption provides a context fraught with examples of gender problematics: eating disorders, body image dysphoria, social and cultural disempowerment. As an act significant of positive associations with the female body, however, female consumption can also subvert some of the effects of those problems of the body. Epstein finds that staged eating—which I extend to include eating represented within a fictional text—"[situates] femininity itself as a residual, disembodying aspect of female bodies," and asserts that such a movement of the body out from behind discourses of gender can be "awesome and potentially liberating" (23). The consuming female body, then, is a productive site of female agency that is also complicated by social inscriptions, and examinations of consumption can allow for the significant potential of this female body to be included in ongoing conversations that importantly also must include those more disturbing effects of female embodiment. The consuming female, as a result of philosophical and cultural definitions of that monolithic "woman," lies at the intersection of subjectivity and embodiment so central to female identity.

Of course, in contemporary parlance, the word "consumption" has economic, as well as physically material, ramifications, and female consumption in many forms can affect the dynamics of female subjectivity, as well as the reception by the socius of the female subject. As Rita Felski points out, the "discourse of consumerism is to a large extent the discourse of female desire" (65), and female desire—female sexuality—is at the root of a number of cultural anxieties. At the turn of the twentieth century, shopping (and other forms of consumer consumption) "was seen as engendering a revolution of morals, unleashing egotistic and envious drives among the lower orders and women, which could in turn affect the stability of existing social hierarchies" (Felski 65). Consumerism—importantly, female consumerism and consumption—does not only intersect with the problem of the mind and the body, but also
provides a means by which to examine the plagued concept of a modern subjectivity as it expanded to accept into its folds women and other marginalized groups, such as the working classes. “Given a prevalent equation,” Felski extrapolates, “of bourgeois masculinity with reason and self-restraint, it was above all through the representation of the consuming woman that writers criticized the vulgar materialism brought about by capitalist development” (88). The female of the species, who already bore the weight of a suspect sexuality as the object of desire, under growing social investment in a capitalist project became imbued with an uneasy subject status as a consumer with desires of her own.

In a discussion of Baudrillard’s theories of consumption, Rachel Bowlby examines ways in which the consuming subject is further displaced within a system that already signals its demise: “the consumer citizen is not so much the possessor of as possessed by the commodities which one must have to be made or make oneself in the form objectively guaranteed as that of a social individual” (28; emphasis added). When consumption is a necessary practice, as it is within a capitalist social order, the consuming “subject” is at once a social agent and subject to those consumable items at hand and to cultural mandates to acquire them, much like that more general subject, discussed by Butler in The Psychic Life of Power, that is dependent upon the very power that constructs it. In such a culture, the consuming subject performs those central complications of historical divisions of subjectivity from an embodied self. If there is “ambivalence at the site where the subject emerges” (Butler 7), then consumerism and its ingesting, consuming subject together form a system of ambivalence that blurs those dominant definitions of social order and ultimately becomes a microcosm of that order: the system as a whole is played out through acts of consumption. The female consumer, in turn, embodies those particular problematics of female sexuality and agency that have become troublesomely
enmeshed, and provides a starting point for an exhumation of female subjectivity from mere ephemerality as the mind and the body are reunited.

One result of this division of the physical self from those less tangible qualities of the subject, a problem complicated by the blurring of the subject/object duality consolidated by a consumer culture, is what I call “auto-objectification”: the objectification of one’s own body through ideology that prioritizes a transcendental, purely discursive and intellectualized “self.” Though nearly anyone who has become acculturated to understand the body as separate from the mind is likely to exhibit some effects of auto-objectification, I believe that female subjects—already so strongly affected by social and cultural objectification and sexualization—exemplify this result of a particular cultural phenomenon. Women have historically been limited to a realm of embodiment (as opposed to that privileged masculine reason that has been historically allotted to male subjects) while at the same time encouraged through social and philosophical doctrines to turn away from their bodies. Under capitalism, participation in which is almost impossible to escape, women have become further challenged by this paradoxical social inscription: while female agency has increased with the rise of economic freedoms and participation in consumerism, women have simultaneously been subject to increasing levels of figurative and actual commodifications. The ambivalence of subjectivity and of consumer capitalism has in turn invested both men and women with ambivalence toward their physical selves, but for women, sexually objectified and allocated to a field of embodiment, such an ambivalence is magnified. The hiding away of the body behind discursive trappings of gender that Epstein discusses in her performance theories has led to an elision of the feminine with the female, and has enveloped the process of auto-objectification into social normalizations of gender ideals that affect all women. The body has not been returned to the realm of a “whole” subject, but has
instead become a thing at once a part of and separate from the individual, an object to shape and
bend at will in attempts to conform to (and occasionally, to refute) social and cultural standards
for behavior, for cleanliness, for beauty.

Conformity of all into a very few molds is central to maintaining any but perhaps an
anarchic social system. Auto-objectifying practices lie at the heart of such social maintenance,
and the rhetorics that have been produced as a way to dictate what one should be, wear, and look
like provide interesting examples of dicta for adhering to such standards, even as those
prescriptions change and evolve seemingly arbitrarily.7 In Chapter One, I explore a sampling of
cultural texts that have provided models of domesticity and femininity for women of the
twentieth century. In order to contextualize my discussion of twentieth century women and
women’s culture, I begin with selected texts from the late Victorian period that helped to shape
the foundational norms upon which social and gender codes of the following century were laid.
Through examinations of the rhetoric of household manuals that provided housewives with
standards for a general maintenance of the private sphere of the home, I explore the ways in
which the issues of cleanliness and order that began with the system of the English home
ultimately extended to those individual subjects residing within. Elizabeth Langland finds that
in the nineteenth century, such manuals were “aimed specifically at enabling the middle class to
consolidate its base of control through strategies of regulation and exclusion” (24), but as the
twentieth century began, and newly invented household aids allowed for middle-class domestic
standards to become the gold standard for the “English home,” manuals that provided rules for
maintenance were not simply aimed toward a middle-class audience, but reached women across
class strata. Books like those written by Mrs. Beeton, which outlined ways in which the middle-
class housewife might ensure that her household staff could keep order, were joined by mass-
distributed volumes that targeted all women who ran households, both those who kept servants and those who swept their own floors, did their own washing up. Standardization may have initially galvanized middle-class endeavors, but eventually, the need for an eradication of dirt knew few class boundaries.

With English homes thusly brought into similar order, the individuals inside those private doorways themselves became the subjects of a proliferation of manuals that addressed the health and well-being, as well as the physical appearance, of English citizens. Such discourses, too, furthered a cultural truncation of female embodiment. Nancy Armstrong notes that by “the mid-nineteenth century authors of advice for women accordingly found it unnecessary to articulate the whole body of the woman [. . .]. A fragment [. . .] could represent the whole” (16). The growth of medical science, and the identification during the nineteenth-century of germs as the cause of many diseases, also added to such literatures a rhetoric of health that became a basis for both home and bodily maintenance. Under the guise of health and medical certainty, too, manuals—aimed at women—that were actually no more than prescriptions for physical beauty added to the imperative tone of the rhetoric of bodily maintenance. As with the English home, the English body (especially the female body) that began as a middle-class entity eventually became the broadly accepted, and widely expected, form. Women’s bodies, so long kept hidden beneath layers of clothing and locked away during periods of confinement, in the twentieth century became the focus of a large amount of discourse that stipulated acceptable weights and appearances for English women as middle-class standards became the standards for all. That emphasis on moderation and morality at the center of the standards found in nineteenth-century household manuals reappears in these beauty manuals that explain to women of all classes appropriate standards of femininity demanded within a particularly circumscribed English social
system. Lorna Sage, whose post-World War II working-class childhood was nevertheless filled with middle-class standards, explains what was expected of her as a "fifth-form debutante": "discreet mouse make-up; a pastel coloured frock; small heels [. . .] no straps showing, but lots of straps (even if you'd hardly any breasts going bra-less was unthinkable, it would have announced you were some kind of retard, a lack of elastic armour was a sign of moral idiocy like being cross-eyed and slobbering)" (211; original italics). Properly bound, Sage represents the image of respectability necessary if one is to be accepted into what once was strictly the domain of the middle-class.

Prescriptions such as those found in housekeeping, health, and beauty manuals exacerbate the effects of auto-objectification. The amount of literature that has been produced (and that still is produced) in order to codify what it means to be a modern female subject, as well as what it means to be a female consumer within a culture driven by innovation and change, provides a foundation for ways in which a philosophical mind/body duality can materialize and become exhibited in all its ambivalence. When the flesh is little but an object to be maintained to code, it is difficult to reconcile the physical component of the subject with the intangible qualities that have long defined the subject in its entirety. Though the “self” is an entity comprised of both physical and intellectual or spiritual components, the material self has, through a process of acculturation, foundered in the “domination of the object-world” (Barker vi). Manuals that outline ways to efface dirt and other “matter out of place” (detailed by Mary Douglas in Purity and Danger and here in the first chapter of this project), as well as ways to diet, sculpt, colorize, and exercise the body into proper form, all add depth and breadth to the schism that has been maintained between the psychic and physical self. Such tracts, too, provide
certain ammunition for the impossible task of “dominating” the physical world that includes a physical self.

The chapters that follow my cultural history of such rhetorics outline, in different ways, the effects of auto-objectification on the creative processes of women who, as subjects within a culture that demands such division, have produced written texts that bear witness to that mind/body duality inherent within the culture from which they have been derived. Formal aspects such as characterization, narrative voice, and genre development, in the texts that I explore here, exhibit the ambivalence of the mind and the body, and the discomfort that stems from impossible social and cultural mandates. Though subjects are handed prescriptions for maintaining their homes, their families, and themselves, the irreconcilability of such a duality supported by maintenance literature with the actual make-up of human beings creates a cognitive dissonance that finds its way into the creative products of women such as Virginia Woolf, Barbara Pym, Edna O’Brien, Angela Carter, and Helen Dunmore, whose texts provide examples of the narrative effects of dividing the mind from the body. Lakoff and Johnson explain that “the very way that we normally conceptualize our inner lives is inconsistent with what we know scientifically about the nature of the mind” as embodied (268). Through grammar (the “I” who attempts to control the physical world, including its body) and metaphor (the “inner self,” etc.) we all are locked into a conflict between what we think, conceptualize, and perhaps ultimately transmit through the written word, and the “fact” of science or of sentience, of experience.

The concept of an “empirical philosophy” proposed by Lakoff and Johnson seems a contradiction in terms, but such a term encompasses, in essence, the sort of writing I explore in this study. When the body and mind are separated, even lexically, there will be some form of resistance, possibly on the parts of both the author and the reader, whose own embodiment—a
combination of mental and physical aspects—belies the separation of these components.

Whether writers use this duality as a trope for other divisions, such as Woolf does with issues of socioeconomic class in *Between the Acts*, or self-consciously play upon this well-trod duality, its appearance signals the cognitive register of a subject who understands, if only on an unconscious level (what Lakoff and Johnson call the “cognitive unconscious”), the problematics of mind/body division. Internalized as what I call auto-objectification, this division can result in narratives that fragment, split off, rupture, and that suggest a desire to reunite the two parts of a female whole, even when there may not yet be language enough for, or metaphors consistent with, such a being.

In each text examined in the following pages, the mind/body split is represented through divided characterizations of women aligned, through represented relationships (sometimes negative) with food and eating, with either the realm of the intellect or with that of the flesh. Though similar divisions of women have occurred in texts by both male and female authors, most often in what might be called the “madonna-whore” division of good and bad women characterized as oppositional through sexuality and, occasionally, maternity, in the texts explored in this study, the authors chosen demand a move beyond such an old and troubled definition of “woman.” These authors complicate the pat notions that women can be easily put into one category or another. In each of the works examined, the construct of the sexual versus the asexual, feminine woman is dismantled, and is illuminated as a construct incompatible with women who are more than bodies, and more than the gendered expectations set forward in beauty books and women’s magazines. The divided protagonists (divided between two characterizations, rather than within one) found in these works exhibit, through authorial use of
the mind/body duality, the very fact that such a duality provides an ineffectual way to define female experience.

Interestingly, too, within the consumer-based modernity of the twentieth century, all five authors weave food—eating, preparation, production—into their narratives as a way to make prominent the separation of the body that consumes from the ephemeral self who does not. I do not examine these texts for pathologies related to food, such as eating disorders, although those are important issues for feminist scholarship. Instead I look to the conflicting, multiple ways in which food signifies within these texts: as body, as feminine, as sexual, as female caregiver. Food has long been a daily part of the feminine, domestic domain; however, in the twentieth century, it has also become a referent laden with signification beyond the culinary or gastronomical. Auto-objectivity, complicated by the contradictions of consumption in the same way as is subjectivity, becomes, I argue, more apparent as the modern project grinds on. Early in the century, writers such as Woolf approach the binary with ambivalence, but are less aware of the construct that they put to good narrative use. Each of those post-war writers examined here, however, grapples self-consciously with such a construct, and attempts to make it a malleable one in her hands. As social and gender constructs in general were challenged, particularly by women, in the post-war world, those earlier, easier divisions of women into sexual castes were targets of the feminine pen; however, dismantling a duality that lies at the center of social and cultural divisions is a difficult task. Though some attempt to create, and some come close to creating, a female character whose mind and body are combined in equal parts, none of the writers whose work I examine is able to concoct a version of woman that defies mind/body duality, or its resultant auto-objectification. Though the separation is made
evident, and is deplored, it cannot be completely discarded. It has become far too ingrained into our collective “cognitive unconscious.”

Chapter Two begins my examination of literary examples of how women writers have used this mind/body duality in order to express concerns with issues of gender and class, as well as how their writing suggests those tensions that result from the unnatural request that we deny part of the subject at the expense of another. Throughout her literary canon, Virginia Woolf argues for a balance of what she calls, in her essay “The New Biography” (1927), “granite” and “rainbow”: those seemingly irreconcilable entities of human material experience and human psychology. As she approached the final years of her life, Woolf continued to explore new ways in which to bring those two realms together, with regard both to the individual subject and to the larger social order. In this chapter, I read together her last novel, *Between the Acts*, and an essay of 1941, entitled “The Leaning Tower,” in order to imagine that novel as an extension of Woolf’s search for the society that she imagines in the pages of her essay: one unimpeded by social class and free from the sorts of social divisions brought about by differing levels of access to education and other forms of cultural capital. In *Between the Acts*, Woolf characterizes her two dominant female figures as oppositional through food consumption and, by extension, through the signification of the class status of each of those women. The fleshly, vulgar Mrs. Manresa, an upstart in the older society represented by her opposite, Isa Oliver, is a woman whose materiality and consumer capacity are out of place in the English traditions of quiet country estates and quaint village pageantry. Class mobility—though the subject of her concurrently written essay, a phenomenon with which the middle-class Woolf had difficulty—provides the source of the novel’s tension, and although the theme of community is important to the novel, and has been the subject of much critical attention dedicated to the text, the characters
who stand on different sides of the dividing line between tradition and social change mark the ambivalence of the narrative.

While Isa is a creature driven by the language of poetry, and by the access she has had to all aspects of cultural and material wealth, Mrs. Manresa, though she has arrived in the middle class by marriage to a tradesman, is cast as a figure of difference and of scorn. Her sexuality, called into question by her embodied nature and her consumption practices, is the sexuality long associated with women of the working classes. Regardless of Woolf’s determination to imagine a collective new society for a future England, her creation of Mrs. Manresa is telltale of the limitations within which Woolf was able to envision a dissolution of class structures. In order to contextualize Woolf’s response to the sort of domestic and cultural auto-objectification outlined in Chapter One, I rely upon public (and unpublished) writings by her mother, Julia Stephen, on subjects such as domesticity and healthcare, as well as upon unpublished letters written by Woolf’s grandmother, Maria Jackson, who, as the wife of a colonial physician, had certain insights into and opinions on the workings of the human body.

Chapter Three moves forward, into and beyond the second world war, and considers the effects of food rationing upon the already problematic consuming female subject. This period of austerity (rationing began in 1939 and for some items continued through 1954) produced an abundance of cultural materials that provide an interesting way to foreground my reading of Barbara Pym’s novel, *Jane and Prudence* (1953). The war brought with it much social instability for England, and as men left to fight across the Channel, British women left their homes and learned to take on new roles and new skills as they battled the war from the homefront. The English home, however, still beckoned to those women when their shifts in the public sector ended. Women’s culture produced during this period maintained codes for female
conduct and for domestic and bodily maintenance perhaps more strict that that which had been
enforced before the German bombs began to fall on English soil. Standards for female sexuality,
and for female consumption, became mingled in the rhetoric of wartime cookery books,
women’s magazines, and BBC-produced programming such as serialized novels and daily spots
produced by Britain’s Ministry of Food.

Pym’s novel, written between 1950 and 1952, is a product of its time. For those living in
the rural vicarage that provides the setting for the novel, the continuation of food rationing for
the sake of European reconstruction has created a shortage of food, and the war has left the
village with an equally short supply of eligible men. Into this world, the realm of vicar’s wife
Jane Cleveland, comes her younger, attractive friend Prudence Bates. As with Woolf’s
oppositional characterizations, Pym’s dual protagonists are sharply divided by their respective
relationships to food, both its consumption and its preparation. The sensual qualities of food
become eroticized with respect to Prudence who, as a single woman working in the public
sphere, blurs the line between the home and the world beyond. While Prudence is adept in the
kitchen, and also enjoys such exotic (for the time and place) items as smoked salmon and fresh
garlic, Jane can only open a tin or escort her husband to the local tea shop when meal time
arrives, and little more. Unlike Woolf’s Isa and Mrs. Manresa, whose character opposition falls
along lines that conform more closely to those older methods of aligning women as either
physical or mental/spiritual, however, Pym’s Jane and Prudence are difficult to pigeonhole. Pym
plays with the traditional conventions of and expectations for using mind/body duality as a
method of characterization, and trades the domesticity that might more typically belong to a
housewife such as Jane for the intellectual ambitions she continues to nurture, years beyond her
academic life. Jane, too, dares to imagine equality for men and women, at least when it comes to
the division of the meat that arrives in the village in such sparse quantities. While Pym sets up what looks like a traditional opposition of mind and body, she problematizes those limited roles for women in a way that illustrates the changing social roles that existed for post-war British women, and that complicated the structure of post-war British society.

Chapters Four and Five both examine more formal narrative effects of mind/body duality. In Chapter Four, I consider the shift of narrative voice over the course of Edna O’Brien’s *The Country Girls Trilogy and Epilogue* (first published 1960-64, with the addition of the epilogue in the early 1980s). Though the setting of these novels shifts from England to Ireland, the same domestic and sexual standards for women of both nations are similar. Indeed, the more rigid prescriptions for women under the governance of not only a social system and its standards, but also of the Irish Catholic church and its more narrowly defined brand of femininity, magnify those codes for women detailed in the previous chapters. O’Brien’s Kate and Baba, respectively cast from portrayals based upon mental and embodied aspects of being, each tries on roles more usually aligned with her opposite. Kate, an intellectualized young woman from a traditional Irish background, finds herself disenfranchised in a newly developed nation whose economy privileges the sort of new money and social mobility seen earlier in Woolf’s Mrs. Manresa. Through her narrative voice, Kate constructs for herself an embodiment that betrays her “native” allegiance to the mental realm. That embodiment, though, falls prey to the very real problematics of female sexuality in 1960s Ireland. Having left behind her intellectual self for a false embodiment that cannot sustain her, Kate eventually loses her narration, first to a third-person narrator, and finally to Baba, her childhood friend. Baba’s voice, though it emerges only briefly, provides the context for a consideration of multiple female voices who can express a spectrum of female experiences. O’Brien’s duo are necessary complements, just as are psychic
and physical components of human subjects, and one without the other exists as only a fraction
of that whole female conceived by O’Brien from a combination of her two characterizations.

In Chapter Five, I look at two novels together: Angela Carter’s *The Magic Toyshop*
(1967) and *Talking to the Dead*, by Helen Dunmore (1996). Each of these novels uses particular
generic conventions (Gothic and mystery) that necessitate construction of tension through a
withholding of information, and each foregrounds an embodied, consuming female character in
order to maintain its narrative secrets. Through an elaboration upon theories of the body image
as developed in the field of neuropsychology, as well as upon other theories of reading and of
imagining, I explore ways in which the extratextual embodiment of readers serves as a catalyst
for reader identification with those embodied characters within these texts. Because the body
image has social and interpersonal, as well as personal, qualities, I consider how the bodies
within the texts—in these two cases bodies that are necessary to sustaining the separation of
overt and embedded narratives—call upon readers’ bodies in a way that results in an interactive
reading experience.

For a brief epilogue, I have chosen a selection of literary and cultural texts in which
women writers have attempted to combine the mental and physical aspects of female
subjectivity. Such a creature is still an uncomfortable, often troubled, sometimes parodic,
individual. For Woolf, the modern world offered little in the way of that wholeness she was in
search of when she ended her life in 1941. In an essay published shortly before her death, Woolf
identified the historical figure of Ellen Terry, a popular Victorian actress, as her best example of
an embodied female intellect. At the end of the century (and into this one), though,
contemporary writers battle with such constructions and, though several fictional and actual
women represent well such attempts to correct the unnatural duality that troubles female
subjectivity, the lasting effects of auto-objectification cannot be erased from either the female figures or from their critical receptions. While writers attempt to construct whole women from both the flesh and the mental realm, and while philosophers and theorists call for further considerations of the mind and the body, the results of such constructions—which do not fit into any secure, known mold—are ungainly in a culture that still demands moderation and adherence to standardized norms.

Notes to Introduction

1 As I suggest throughout this introduction, language necessarily limits us in the ways we can define such entities as the mind and the body. Though I use the terms in all their monolithic glory, I do so self-consciously, and at the peril of discounting the experiences of some bodies altogether. Because the basis for my consideration is philosophical and seeks to rectify multiple divisions, however, I hope that the ways in which I use the term “body,” or the term “female body,” are more broad-based than exclusive, and that this work imagines an ontology that is in some small way shared—beneath markers of class, race, ability, age, et al—by women who are products of Western or of Anglo-European culture. For the purposes of studying texts by English and Irish women writers of the twentieth century—women who have come from both middle and working class backgrounds—I necessarily locate my less philosophical, more cultural and sociological, discussions of women and their bodies within the contexts in which such writing has been produced.

2 This idea was first presented to me in the spring of 1997 by Professor Jim Borck, of Louisiana State University, in a seminar on the British novel during our discussions of Aphra Behn’s Love-letters between a Nobleman and His Sister. I have been considering the question since, and thank him for providing me with such food for thought. Though it might appear to beg further questions of sexed or gendered modes authorship (already hotly contested in some circles), I will not delve into such a discussion except to acknowledge its existence. My own examination in Chapter Five of the potential role of embodiment on reader response will bring up similar questions, questions that may help to theorize how women writers represent female experiences.

3 Grosz uses the Möbius strip—a sort of figure-eight model that has no bottom or top surface but offers both simultaneously—as a way to conceptualize her theories. This figure appears as a trope throughout Volatile Bodies.

4 Grosz outlines three schools of feminist thought on embodiment (15-9): “egalitarian feminism,” described in terms similar to what might be called liberal feminism, and in which the body, viewed negatively as something that “limits women’s capacity for equality and transcendence” (15), is removed from the field in order to privilege the masculine concept of the rational mind; “sexual difference,” a school of thought founded upon understanding the “lived
body” in which Grosz includes thinkers as diverse as Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak, and Hélène Cixous; and “social constructionism,” theorists who work toward an understanding of the role of social codes upon the body’s experiences. Though this three-tiered model works well for Grosz’s argument, I find she lumps together theorists that in another context might be construed as at odds with each other. Grosz does not get underneath the very different types of lived bodies, for instance, that Butler and Spivak discuss, and the very different critical ends that make up such theorists’ agendas. For the sake of my own argument, I prefer to consider the range of theorists at work recently on theories of embodiment as most easily divided into two groups.

5 Butler’s work in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (Routledge, 1990) and Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex” (Routledge, 1993), while important to the field of gender studies, are also problematic in their discounting of embodiment.


7 Other critics have used extensively the literature of conduct manuals for their studies of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts, but by the later nineteenth century, those manuals were much less popular than the housekeeping and culinary manuals, as well as the beauty books and other mass culture, that I find important to studies of twentieth-century culture. For discussions of earlier texts, see Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (Oxford, 1987); Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, eds., The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on Literature and the History of Sexuality (Methuen, 1987); Helena Michie, The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women’s Bodies (Oxford, 1987); and Elizabeth Langland, Nobody’s Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture (Cornell UP, 1995).

8 For examinations of single female protagonists who are themselves divided, see H. M. Daleski, The Divided Heroine: A Recurrent Pattern in Six English Novels (Holmes and Meir, 1984), and Nancy Armstrong, “Occidental Alice,” in Differences 2.2 (Summer 1990): 3-40.
REGIMENTATION OF THE PRIVATE AND THE AMBIGUOUS DIVERGENCE OF MIND AND BODY

Anthropologist Mary Douglas places her study of pollution and taboo within a broadly defined idea of "culture," and through examinations of several tribal communities draws conclusions analogous to those that can emerge from an analysis of English (indeed, of most Western) cultural maintenance, both private and public. Like much of the make-up of any general culture, the idea of order—or of its absence—is a relative one. More specifically, "dirt [is] matter out of place [...] is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements" (Douglas 35). Dirt, or a desire for its expulsion in the quest for cleanliness, is only apparent in the face of an ordered system that defines the acceptable, normative level of grime that might pass undetected in the home (an amount that has been drastically reduced over the course of the last one hundred fifty years). Discovery of and reaction to dirt is a direct result of specific processes of acculturation, and the collective discourse of dirt and of how to rid one's home of "matter out of place" is the result of similar phenomena in the acculturation of individuals to matters of their own hygiene. The discourse found in the literature of domestic maintenance, however, complicates the boundaries between the public and the private person by emanating from an author's position within a system while at the same time speaking of the actual public nature of issues regularly perceived as private.

To adopt the viewpoint of the housekeeping manual, which perpetuates a single standard set by one more overarching, is to privatize and, by extension, to internalize, widespread cultural standards for the daily function of one's household. If the relativity of dirt is accepted, however, then "cleaning then becomes a personal [...] activity, having [...] everything to do with how we define ourselves and our surroundings" (Horsfield 11). Our relationships to dirt and to our idiosyncratic definitions of household maintenance are at once subject to the public standards of
culture and intrinsic to the construction of each individual subject who cleans, cooks, or scrubs, of the subject who mediates culture and its standards as they become manifest within the home. The domestic setting, then, with its need for maintenance reflecting back the cultural standards of an external and public society, is a site that is dominated by those constructed standards while it concurrently provides them with a paradoxical challenge. For dirt can never fully be gotten rid of, and germs defy eradication; therefore, a high standard of physical maintenance, as it increased from the mid-nineteenth century and as it continues to increase (note the recent expansion in the market for merchandise labeled "anti-bacterial" as we continue a vain attempt to conquer the microscopic world), guarantees resultant practices that defy a defined norm. What is desired can never be achieved.

Throughout this chapter I will examine several such circular cultural narratives as I discuss components of various binaries and attempt not to separate them nor to judge one figurative end to be “thicker” than the other, but instead to understand the ways in which the oppositional qualities necessarily work together, as well as to theorize through an analysis of domestic and bodily maintenance about effects of duality on the construction of culture and on the nature of resistance to established cultural norms. This argument will extend throughout this study in an examination of how the mind and the body are simply parts of a whole enterprise that have been (often with dire cultural, biological, and political consequences) estranged from one another. One result of this separation of mental and physical components of the subject is the “auto-objectification” I began to outline in the preface to this project: the objectification of one’s own body and the epistemological contradictions that create complex issues for the “whole” being who has learned to grant primacy to the intellect at the expense of the flesh. As a society we seek to reach goals that, when it comes to constructed ideals based upon faulty dualisms, work against the grains of our lived experiences and visceral comprehensions of the world-at-large. Households that can never reach sparkling perfection are none the less toiled over as if the ultimate is possible; bodies that will defy sculpting and rigorous dieting will still be subject to ideals of beauty and health. Though logic will often provide us with a basic
understanding of the limitations of such dichotomies, we most often will continue to adhere to
the standards of acceptability provided by external forces. Processes of internalizing these forces
of culture and of making second nature our responses to anomalous objects or behaviors
eventually allows us to override our less-than-socially-appropriate instincts in order to survive
within the public sphere. We are, however, as subject to culture within in the "private" domain
of the home as without, and the very notion of privacy assumes a public opposite.

In 1877, an anonymous "old housekeeper" proclaimed, "Household governance is
nowhere better understood and practiced than in England; hence, domestic comfort is better
enjoyed here than in any other country, and the happiness of an English home has become
proverbial throughout the world" (Household Management 2). Just as legal, economic, and other
such "public" discourses aided in the solidification of a masculine realm beyond the well-swept
doorsteps of English domesticity, the rhetoric of household maintenance—found in a genre of
"how to" manuals that proliferated from the mid-nineteenth century—guided numerous English
housewives and housekeepers through the daily tasks it took to keep a household running with
practiced English grace. As Mrs. Isabella Mary Beeton, the patron saint of Victorian domestic
engineering admonishes, "muddle makes more muddle" (22): a well-run household does not
occur of its own accord, but rather must be sought after as one steers clear of the chaos of sooty
grates, crumby linens, and broken béchamel. Earlier domestic routines by necessity had focused
upon the creation of household provisions, but "cheap cottons from the mills, [. . .] commercially
produced clothing and soap and candles and butter meant that many domestic chores gradually
became obsolete in the nineteenth century" (Horsfield 50). Along with such an obsolescence,
however, came a new set of practices and standards by which to maintain and judge a household
and its occupants, and along with these new standards came volume upon volume listing the
requirements for achieving and running a proper domestic milieu.

While the middle-class housewife was less involved on a physical level with the day-to-
day cleaning and maintenance of her household, she was none the less responsible for its
management. Increasingly the "servant question" of the later Victorian age gave way in the
twentieth century to a push for servantless households. Christina Hardyment asserts that circa 1871, in a household "with an income under £300 a year, only one servant could be afforded," and in "such households [. . .] the wife spent more time scrubbing, dusting, cooking, and washing than she did queening it in the parlour with her callers" (35).¹ By the turn of the twentieth century, very few households could maintain more than cursory domestic help, if any help at all could be afforded, and women's periodicals lauded women who, like the Girls' Own Paper's iconic "Margaret Trent," diligently toiled away to maintain lovely homes. "Surely it would be well for intending brides," writes Mrs. J. N. Bell in 1902, "to go through a complete course of housewifery [. . .]. With such practical knowledge (and no other will suffice) one good servant [. . .] will often insure greater comfort in the home than two or even three inefficient ones" (10).

And the numbers of those who did benefit from domestic help continued to dwindle: "By 1947, 94 per cent of [British] women had no help of any sort in the home" (Hardyment 185). Increasingly, domestic manuals were written not to quantify and explain the duties of the household help, but were instead aimed toward the growing number of domestically involved housewives of the middle and working classes. Ideologies of masculine and feminine social and cultural responsibilities for most families emerged divided, and with each separate realm arose a separate discursive tradition founded to maintain the order of a new and rapidly shifting society.

The structure of public discourse, however, hardly surpasses that of its domestic counterpart in either specificity or complexity. As efforts to control what are essentially fluid and relative social apparatuses, the languages of law and laundry, of public and private, each seeks to regulate and to maintain some definitive measure of social and cultural norms, some prescription that would enable the home and the office, the scullery and the shop—and thus the larger English society in general—to hold together like a good steamed pudding or a finely wrought injunction. An examination of the language that provides order for domestic chaos illuminates just how much the public and private arenas have in common, and also underscores the formative nature of the domestic with regard to what has typically been thought of as a separate sphere of masculine influence. The contents of household manuals and the rhetoric of receipt
books (compilations of recipes for food and other domestic concoctions) provide a map of English social mechanics as telling as many of the public texts more traditionally venerated.

The very existence of this discourse of household maintenance and its imperatives for the vanquishing of dirt, dust, and germs, is itself indicative of a strong move toward social regimentation in England during the mid- and late-nineteenth century, when, according to Mary Poovey, a dense network of independent theories, technologies, and political disputes about policy simultaneously reorganized individuals' relations to their own and their neighbors' bodies and constituted the conditions of possibility for the formation both of the social domain and of the professionalized, bureaucratized apparatuses of inspection, regulation, and enforcement that we call the modern state. (Social Body 116)

The rapid increase in the production of this array of discursive traditions goes hand-in-hand with a rise in a national interest in the assimilation of citizens from all classes and regions into a homogeneous sense of what it meant to be "English." A definition of the truly English citizen became increasingly important as the influence of Empire crested and the homeland served as the example of civilization for inhabitants of all corners of the world.2 "The fastidiousness of the middle-class [English] woman," writes Clementina Black, "being in its essence an intensified passion for cleanliness, is very much more than a matter of her personal comfort; it is one of the nation's assets" (9). An established sense of English culture and, importantly, of English cultural norms, became increasingly desirable, and the strict, socially prescribed maintenance of both a household and its inhabitants helped to create the effect of such uniformity.

As this discussion of housekeeping and housework suggests, rules for living within the walls of the private home are just as dictated by societal and cultural constraints as are public regulations. These rules, too, are just as circuitous and as flawed logically as the binaried social system from which they stem. Housework, a systemic activity that helps to affix most women to domestically defined roles, is also a site at which the system's own logic breaks down. If, traditionally, women have been associated with "nature" and men with its flipside, with
"culture," then housework, as a process of acculturation and social normalization, doesn't quite fit the social schema. Though Simone de Beauvoir may hold that a "healthy young woman will hardly be attracted by so gloomy a vice" as housework (426), women of all age groups find themselves compelled to take on the role of housekeeper in the name of social order, and this social training is a powerful thing. The image of the domestic zealot is often parodied: "Fictional heroines who enjoy cleaning are frequently the targets of innuendo. Their mental health may be questioned, or their sexuality, or both" (Horsfield 16). Beauvoir writes of how "the rage for cleanliness is highest in Holland, where the women are cold," and champions instead (albeit in a rather racist manner) the sexualized women of southern Europe: "If the Mediterranean Midi lives in a state of joyous filth, it is not only because water is scarce there: love of the flesh and its animality is conducive to toleration of human odor, dirt, and even vermin" (426). But cleanliness and sexuality are not always treated oppositionally. If women are labeled, in a broadly stereotypical way, as inherently and transgressively sexual, they are in turn held almost exclusively responsible for the perpetuation of culture and of normative social behavior within the household. While Margaret Horsfield correctly identifies fictional women who, through an overidentification with household maintenance, "are at least laughed at, occasionally humbled, often scorned, sometimes even killed off" (16), ironically (or perhaps not so), sexualized women also meet with these exact fates in much fiction. While social definitions seem to hold citizens to a level of conformity, on one hand, they also contradict themselves, and create circular processes in which no singular identification can resist interrogation. How does one maintain a balance between cultural expectations and cultural nomenclature, between gender roles defined by tradition and by contemporary political ideologies such as feminism?

Cleanliness and morality in the English household

The domestic realm and its housekeeper are not without elements that resist such constraints and contradictions, and that call into question the definitive status of all those assumptions and agendas that we have taken into our psyches. One still has the potential to
interrogate constructs, and because of this cognitive ability, those constructs must develop and strengthen if they are to survive, though certainly (thankfully) not all do. Douglas suggests that "any given culture must confront events which seem to defy its assumptions. [...] we find in any culture worthy of the name various provisions for dealing with ambiguous or anomalous events" (39). Most of the tribes she explores respond to such ambiguity through rites and rituals of religious worship. Western traditions influenced by Christianity follow this pattern, and even when religious practices are not present, the idea of a secular, widespread moral code accomplishes the same task of socially aligning individuals and their various cultural practices. The state of the spirit or, in lieu of religious inclination, of the integrity or of the intellect, has been regarded most highly in post-Enlightenment Western societies, and to jeopardize this "higher" nature of humanity is perhaps the greatest transgression of the moral codes of the West as they have evolved over several hundred years. To risk the prized ability to reason or to commune with a higher power (depending upon one's spiritual or intellectual foundation) is considered the ultimate danger to a continuation of the societal standards of "morality."

Regardless of whether those codes are a standard idea of moral right-and-wrong or a more elliptical question of ethics, according to Douglas, "Attributing danger is one way of putting a subject above dispute [and] helps to enforce conformity" (40). When anomaly threatens a social system, it can be more easily contained if the perceived danger is a great one, because few will argue with those who only seek to correct an agreed-upon impending danger. The extent to which such systemic maintenance occurs is one important way to measure the efficacy of that system, and so failure to maintain the system is indeed dangerous. Danger from anomalous organisms or occurrences within a system or a society is not as dangerous as the danger that stems from the lack or maintenance of or complicity with the system itself: the social order is only as strong as those who serve it allow it to become.

Following the Wesleyan adage that equates cleanliness with godliness, the housekeeper, through her responsibility for the abolition of household dirt, is also responsible for the moral maintenance of those who reside therein and for the social projection of the morality contained
within the household, or at least for the projection of the moral code that a household hopes to represent to the outside world. A lack of household dirt can denote purity within, and an accumulation of matter out of place can in turn signify excess: gluttony, intemperance, lust. Because of its importance to the maintenance of a society, when moral or ethical fabric is perceived to be at risk, the threat of danger grows exponentially. In order to guarantee as much as possible the continuance of a given system of moral codification, its elements must appear within society in a diffuse manner; they must be an integral part of a majority of the systemic components. There are many aspects of a social order in which the idea of established morality resides, and thus many areas in which the survival of the social system can be perceived of as in danger, which in turn provokes reactive moves toward stabilization and conformity. The social order is maintained from many sides, and neither the public nor the private arena is without its moral or ethical investment, for only by preserving both spheres equally can the total survival of a moral status quo be achieved. Within the private, domestic agenda of housekeeping and household maintenance lies a fundamental “moral” aspect of the home itself, because "[u]ncleanliness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained" (Douglas 40). The maintenance of the system relies upon the foundational maintenance of home and hearth.

Dirt becomes a way to further divide society within lines already drawn by class and caste. Morality, or subscribing to at least the outward expressions of the social order, provides for shades of gray within more extremely segregated territories. In her recent memoir, Bad Blood, Lorna Sage presents the vicarage where she lived during her formative years in post-World War II Britain (her grandfather was an Anglican vicar in northeast Wales) as "a secret slum" (14), and the vicarage dirt was "almost a point of vicarage principle, a measure of our hostility to the world outside and separateness from it" (12). Her grandfather was a pariah within the region due to his adulterous and intemperate nature, and Sage plays with the notion that although their dirt was symbolic of the fetid moral code perpetuated from within the symbolic purity of the vicarage, no one was allowed inside to see it. By masking the state of their
household morality with a closed front door, the family was able at least to practice socially acceptable roles, and were thus never fully abandoned by the local congregation. Though her family was genteel only through its association with the Church, and lived in a state of impoverished squalor, Sage wryly muses, "If other children were dirty, that meant they were common, their parents were neglectful and slummy, you could catch things from them. [. . .] I mustn't play with dirty children. So there were two different kinds of dirt, theirs and ours" (12-13). The offense here is not the actual dirt, but the social transgression of showing one's dirt, of not having the sense—the "class," if you will—to adhere outwardly to public norms. Douglas notes this connection between practice and expression: "Pollution ideas can distract from the social and moral aspects of a situation by focussing on a simple material matter" (138). A good show of cleanliness can exalt a household—even one defiled by direct exploitation of the accepted code of morality—beyond its social and economic realities through simple distraction. If the rules of the system's game are followed only as rigidly as will prevent a disclosure of other habitual failings, then the game, it seems, has been won none the less.

Though Sage writes about a society more closely aligned, perhaps, with that of a contemporary Great Britain than with nineteenth-century England, the notions that bind dirt with ideas related to class, and that bind dirt with definitions of morality, had been codified by the British government for at the very least one hundred years prior to her upbringing. According to Poovey, the 1842 Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain, is "probably the most widely read government document of the Victorian period" (116). Its author, Edwin Chadwick, a "tireless agitator" (Horsfield 78) for the cleanliness of Britain and for sanitation reform, does not place the blame for slovenly behaviors directly upon the heads of the working classes, but he does find that questionable morals lurk within the same corners and crevices as do dirt and disease. The conclusion of his report, which helped to fuel the Public Health Act of 1848, stresses that "the removal of noxious physical circumstances, and the promotion of civic, household, and personal cleanliness, are necessary to the improvement of the moral condition of the population; for that sound morality and refinement in manners and health
are not long found co-existent with filthy habits amongst any class in the community" (424-5). Likewise, Chadwick finds that "conditions of the population, of habitual personal and domestic filth, are not necessary to any occupation; they are not the necessary consequence of poverty, and are the type of neglect and indolence" (316). In both passages Chadwick appears to express the egalitarian nature of immoral defilement by stating that "any class" can cleanse itself of its transgressions, and by expressing the view that poverty and dirt are not necessarily synonymous. He also notes, though, that "various forms of epidemic, endemic, and other disease caused, or aggravated, or propagated chiefly amongst the labouring classes [. . .] prevail amongst the population in every part of the kingdom [. . .] as they have been found to prevail in the lowest districts of the metropolis" (422).

The rampant quality here ascribed to poor dirt—to the dirt of an Other later hypocritically defined by Sage's grandmother, who "had the scented soap, but she didn't use it [she] bought it for its smell" (12)—is clearly not the dirt belonging to "any" class, but instead to that laboring class who "so exposed is less susceptible of moral influences" and for whom "the effects of education are more transient than with a healthy population" (423). The result is not any sort of "refinement," not even one constructed from the privacy and privilege of a shabby, dilapidated (but still State-sanctioned) vicarage, but instead is the equation of dirt with the working classes, and consequently of dirt with a lack of (middle-class) morality. To be unsanitary, then, is to be susceptible to the behaviors that create, in Chadwick's official conclusion "an adult population short-lived, improvident, reckless, and intemperate, and with habitual avidity for sensual gratifications" (423). Chadwick's study of the living conditions of laboring classes did result in his own interest in public health and did lead the British government to radically change the ways in which they dealt with waste, water, and housing schemes; however, the language he uses to describe his findings betrays his participation in a moral construct that has distinct class-related repercussions. While going against the system, he also maintains the elements that are necessary to its grander scheme of class divisions and distribution of wealth. By exposing "immoral" behavior within the working-class strata, and by
suggesting their state of affairs is a result of indolence, of will, rather than one of economic conditions, Chadwick created perhaps an amount of sociological refuse equal to the actual trash his theories helped later to clear away.

An important aspect of Chadwick's conclusions about class and dirt is this idea that dirt and disease are the result of individual will, of a desire to neglect the "proper" state of domestic affairs, which the report reifies as "moral and sanitary" (Poovey 119). By almost exclusively studying working-class life within its domestic arena, rather than on work sites or in shared social spaces, Chadwick's study "produced ideological effects that had a strong moralizing—and, ideally, regulative—component" (Poovey 119) with ramifications for ensuing definitions of a domestic ideal. The report does place certain responsibilities with the British government, but at the same time the idea is clear that regardless of one's physical circumstances, enough desire to effect change should allow the true state of the household to emerge if indeed the true state of the household is a moral one. With enough ingenuity to ensure cleanliness on a material level, proper inner cleanliness should out under such a theory. Because Chadwick "generalizes the domestic values of the middle class to society as a whole" (Poovey 126), he assumes a "combination of self-denial and susceptibility, [that] women of all classes presumably shared," creating this particular female ideal as a domestic one, and also assumes the theory that "working-class women could be counted on to transport middle-class values into the working-class home" (Poovey 124-5) through a normalizing domestic ideology. This particular documentation of dirt as an intrinsic part of the working class experience in mid-nineteenth-century England, however, further implies a certain inherent inability in laboring people (particularly in working-class women, who are implicated as responsible for the moral and the cultural up-keep of the household) to move beyond a low-level cleanliness; the dirt and the morality become like the chicken and the egg in that the fact of which one perpetuates the other is a moot point.

Dirt and moral baseness are equated, though the question of any eminence of one over the other is about as easy to ascertain as it is with the subject and object, or with the mind and
the body. Even when no concrete rationale for such an equation exists, individuals are subject to its code. Poovey notes that, for mid-Victorians, the "sanitary idea constituted one of the crucial links between the regulation of the individual body and the consolidation of those apparatuses we associate with the modern state" (115), including the moral apparatus of the state, and this link continues in contemporary society. If one exposes one's dirt to public scrutiny, one risks being perceived as morally flawed. Caroline Davidson provides a good example of how this popular association can manifest itself when in actuality the opposite is true: "Francis Kilvert, the Victorian clergyman and diarist, was surprised to find a married couple who had once lived in sin inhabiting a scrupulously clean cottage; he had expected it to be dirty" (117).  

Assumptions regarding one's personal, physical hygiene often result from assumptions made with regard to one's moral qualities. The taboo of dirt, even of one's own, private dirt, is an issue that cannot ever fully escape public scrutiny and advertisement, whether in official form (as with Chadwick's report) or simply in "unofficial" discourse such as neighborhood gossip.

This constructed relationship between dirt and morality (or between class and morality) is hardly unique to the Victorian period and the epochs prior to it. Years later, in 1951, a report by Mass-Observation made it clear that working-class British women who worked within the home spent most of their time attempting to bring those homes up to culturally-defined standards, likely in an attempt to avoid the blatant judgments of neighbors like Lorna Sage's grandmother. The bulletin, entitled *The Housewife's Day*, for which working-class housewives were polled and interviewed, states what many engaged in domestic labor could long before have confirmed. Mass-Observation's statistics show that the average woman's day in 1951 filled fifteen hours, of which eleven were spent specifically engaged in domestic duties. The theory that women's work is swift and their leisure time ample was discredited by the results of this study, but this "new" information was naturally not without its detractors. After reading advanced copy of the bulletin, James Benson, of Kemsley Newspapers (whose *Daily Telegraph* announced publication of the bulletin on 11 July, 1951), responded to the M-O offices:
I am appalled at the percentage of the housewife's life that is spent in drudgery. But I wonder how true it would be to say that the fault was not in her stars but in herself. Bearing in mind that the above investigation was confined to working-class housewives, it would be instructive to compare the information obtained from a parallel middle-class sample. Superior intelligence and, possibly, greater industry should show a dividend in terms of time saved for leisure. (letter of 3 July 1951)

The assumption made by Chadwick in his 1842 report is echoed here by Benson; however, his rhetoric includes a different twist. Simple sloth is not the only element that brings about excessive dirt and an increase in the amount of time needed to clean it. For Benson, "intelligence," as well as will or "industry"—attributed in a de facto manner to the middle classes—figures into a woman's ability to maintain an adequate household. The same morality erroneously linked to superior cleanliness is here implicated, through the ideal of the British household and its devoted housewife, as a by-product of the ability to reason and to think critically. Benson's letter illustrates the connection made previously between a morality generated by organized religious influences and the more rarefied morality of the superior and rational mind, as well as how the two are reflected in standards for sparkling domesticity. As Carolyn Steedman recalls of her own working-class childhood during the time following World War II, "there are people everywhere waiting for you to slip up, to show signs of dirtiness and stupidity, so they can send you back where you belong" (34).

With standards for household cleanliness firmly in place as a method of representing the moral hygiene of English citizens, the "pollution belief [. . .] can have the effect of aggravating the seriousness of the offense, and so of marshalling public opinion on the side of right" (Douglas 133). What is defined as "right" within public discourse implicates one's will to maintain certain domestic and moral standards, as well as a level of reason or of intellect necessary for the adoption of such standards. This method of maintaining cultural morality is merely a reflection of the efficiency of mass acculturation, in this case, of the ability of a middle-class moral and ethical standard to superimpose itself over a multiplicity of moralities and codes for behavior perhaps better initiated on a local or regional level than from any nationalistic
prescription such as those emanating from household manuals that beseech their readers to scrub away for the sake of English pride. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*, Michel Foucault suggests that one effect of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' "incitement" to an increase in the discourse of sexuality was "a centrifugal movement with respect to heterosexual monogamy" in which the "legitimate couple [. . .] tended to function as a norm" (38). This normalization of the monogamous and most likely married heterosexual couple results in two social phenomena germane to this discussion thus far. The first is a dependence upon the family unit, upon the household, as the primary venue for an enactment of normative morality, and the consequential need for maintenance of the household through a particular regimentation that leads to specific behaviors. Without this basic domestic structure, individual behavior can come into question; the maintenance apparatus of the household is not one-size-fits-all, but instead is particular to the legitimized norm. Without the sanction of domesticity, the individual can be viewed as an anomalous element, as not only a source of social pollution, but as pollution itself.

The second result of this movement toward a legitimate domesticity is the idea of an inherent security and privacy in such a model. For Foucault, this stems from a turning away from any examination of the sexuality of monogamy in favor of an exploration of whatever might deviate from that norm: the above-mentioned "legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality, had a right to more discretion,"; "[e]fforts to find out its secrets were abandoned" (38). Such an abandonment of the domestic realm in a search for (sexual) deviance from the accepted norm has never been permanent, however. The myth of a privacy granted to the (monogamous, heterosexual) household underlies the notion of a division between public and private, and assists in our definitions of masculine and feminine, but its structure is no more private than is any system that lies outside the home. Once granted this sense of exemption from public scrutiny, the "private" domain simply becomes subject to more insidious power schemes and regimentations. Dirt or other evidence of pollution, representative of the moral standards maintained within the home, becomes its figurative language, and the public eye will revert back toward the private world when that world appears in representative disarray. The discursive
qualities of cleanliness become a domesticated mode of representing and of interrogating the morality, and thus the sexuality, of those who reside within the thin walls of the private home.

In work that parallels (but pre-dates) the Foucauldian power scheme delineated in *The History of Sexuality, Volume One* and in *Discipline and Punish*, Douglas outlines a methodology of power she finds in "the interplay of form and surrounding formlessness," between the system and its polluting dirt, that is strikingly Foucauldian. Douglas summarizes: "first, formal powers wielded by persons representing the formal structure and exercised on behalf of the formal structure: second, formless powers wielded by interstitial persons: third, powers not wielded by any person, but inhering in the structure, which strike against any infraction of form" (104). Both the structure and those who are complicit with it are active parts of its maintenance. For Foucault, power “is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds onto or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (*History* 94). His "bio-power," a network "bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them" (*History* 136), is the same systemic power that normalizes both human sexuality and its representative cleanliness. Though there is no sense of immanent destruction attached to breaking the codes of such power (as opposed to codes that carry with them the certainty of severe punishments or of death), there is at once an opportunistic and an ethical interest in maintaining one's position within the structure itself, both of which work as deterrents to subversion of the structure. Foucault's theory of regimentation stresses a "double system: gratification-punishment" that, through ascribing "opposing values of good and evil" to observance and non-observance of social order, encourages complicity in the system through creating a desire for reward (*Discipline* 180). "The chief function of the disciplinary power is to 'train,'" notes Foucault; "[. . .] It does not link forces together in order to reduce them; it seeks to bind them together in such a way as to multiply and use them" (*Discipline* 170). Under such a power structure, the domestic realm functions as a site of linked forces. Proper maintenance of moral codes and of social norms for sexual and other expressions becomes
inscribed indelibly onto one another so that what matters is not the actual state of household affairs, but instead the total function of the household as a discreet unit within the larger social scheme. Just as the housewife of the Bemba tribe (who "believe that pollution of adultery is conveyed through fire") "seems to be obsessed by the problem of protecting her hearth from adulterous [. . .] defilement" (Douglas 138), the nineteenth- and twentieth-century English housewife, caught up in a system of private maintenance for a public "penal accountancy" (Foucault, *Discipline* 180), must devote herself to a regimentation of that by which her household and its conformity will be defined and judged.

A large component of Foucault's exegesis of the regimentation and rise of information regarding sexuality is the aspect of confession. "Western man," he notes (and, for the sake of my argument, let's include Western woman, as well), "has become a confessing animal" (*History* 59). The discourse of the power structure is not only that which is formulated about its subjects, but is also the information those subjects relay about themselves. Through a desire to add points to the positive side of the moral column log, atonement or purification is sought as a corrective, but a major result of this corrective process is the further implication of the individual with the structure and its moral codes. "The obligation to confess," states Foucault, "is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us" (*History* 60). As moral subjects within a system, we readily, indeed, compulsively confess when we find we have transgressed the boundaries by which we are circumscribed. In other eras or other societies, confession helped to ensure adequate compensation that would correct error, whether one erred against another individual or against a deity. Compensation in the form of payment or of sacrificial items was most easily obtained by a transgressor who confessed publicly to wrong-doing (Douglas 137). Certainly this sort of public confession has contemporary uses; in courts of civil law, for instance, the outcome of a ready confession is often payment due for the wrongful treatment of another's person or property. In contemporary criminal courts, too, confession is a helpful tool, and the result of an individual's confession is the symbolic (or sometimes very real, in the case of capital
punishment) sacrifice of that individual, a ritual offering to the gods of social order, with payment meted out in time or in an ultimate consumption of the individual by the system itself.

Public confession, however, is not the only confessional rite that must take place if the social subject is to be adequately made a part of the network of power that dictates the deployment of a system. The idea of easy atonement, too—of a sin today, confess-and-be-OK-tomorrow attitude—is incomplete within such a network, for it "enables people to defy with impunity the hard realities of their social system" (Douglas 137). One result of the increase in importance of the private individual—and of the removal of punishment from the spectacular, public arena to within hidden institutional facilities—is the need for equally private or subtle methods of maintaining the subject within the system. Foucault's theories of social order based upon Bentham's Panopticon (outlined in Discipline and Punish) illustrate the ways in which subjection to normalizing expectations must be submerged into the quotidian layer of existence so that "the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action" (201). Eventually, confession need not be extracted or coerced, but instead becomes a compulsion, and "the obligation to conceal [. . .] but another aspect of the duty to admit" (Foucault, History 61).

The emphasis ultimately falls upon the individual's willingness to speak of his or her "sins"; the discovery is only more titillating, more pronounced, because of the initial concealment. Social duty demands our singular pronouncements.

Perhaps no one confesses more compulsively, or more often confesses for sins not yet identified, than the modern housewife. Enter her home (or mine, or your own) and you are more likely to hear something similar to "Oh, goodness, the place is a wreck; I haven't touched the floor in a month!" than a list of triumphs, domestic or otherwise. Her fatal sin—that of sloth or of the lack of intelligent will expected of her by the Chadwicks and the Bensons of the world—is as much attached to her status in the social order as is her sexuality and sexual expression. Her home, which lies within a nexus of social functions and expectations, is a vehicle for a domestic expression of the moral conduct of herself and of her family. Cleanliness has become, in itself, her confession. Housework—the concealment of dirt—is a necessary part of the ultimate fact of
transgression. Because dirt defies even the most devoted of housewives, she lives under a constant threat of discovery. Even the vicarage family of Sage's childhood would not publicly flaunt its dirt, but instead shunned visitors who would have assessed the household accordingly. Later, Sage's mother, untrained for the expectations of "the advertisers and the social psychologists" and of "the people who'd planned" their newly built council house full of "light and hard, washable surfaces," continued the tradition of guarding "her genius for travesty when it came to domestic science" (119). "Women neighbours were never allowed in, nor were their daughters, who were suspected of being [. . .] household spies who'd run home and tell their mothers we didn't clean behind the sofa" (120). More usually, even when one is primarily a lackadaisical housekeeper, housework is the norm prior to entertaining guests. And although "at-homes" have long been out of both fashion and function, most of us hope unplanned-for guests will at least phone ahead. Whether dirt is all-but-removed or simply swept beneath the proverbial rug (or, in my case, up against the baseboards for later effacement), the woeful nature of sin itself—try as one might, there is always some sin to account for—is the domestic bottom-line within a system Beauvoir labels "Manichæist" (425). Compulsive confession serves as a way to atone prior to discovery, to assure that once one's dirt is found out, it will already have been neutralized by the act of confession. Domestic confession acts as a private version of public sacrifice: the social self is expected to compensate publicly for failing to maintain the system to its optimal specifications.

Modernity and the evolution of housework

In 1930, the Ladies' Home Journal charmingly encouraged this guilt-reflex: "Because we housewives of today have the tools to reach it, we dig every day after the dust that grandmother left to a spring cataclysm. [. . .] If our consciences don't prick over vacant pie shelves or empty cookie jars, they do over meals in which a vitamin may be omitted or a calorie lacking" (30). Modernized ways of caring for the home, too, have created difficulty for women just as they have produced the potential for additional leisure time. Washing machines, vacuum
cleaners, and other products created to make the housewife's occupation more appealing may also have created a sense of guilt rather than one of leisure, and may have added to the impulse toward moral concerns and domestic confession. "It is possible," suggests Elizabeth Roberts, "that some women felt almost guilty about the easier life the new machines brought and that therefore jobs had to be done more often to compensate" (32). Certainly the frequency with which houses were cleaned increased after the advent of domestic appliances. Horsfield queries, "Did a desire for cleanliness create new products, or did new products create an increased desire for cleanliness?" (139) and, though advertisements might appear to answer some loud cry for new conveniences, it is doubtful that already overtaxed housewives desired an increase in the standards they were expected to maintain. "I liked the new vacuum cleaner at first," Steedman recalls of the chores she performed while growing up, "because it meant no longer having to do the stairs with a stiff brush. But in fact it added to my Saturday work because I was expected to clean more with the new machine" (36). Modernity has resulted in an increase in the gap between expectations for domestic achievement and the actual ability to perform such feats.

With the mechanization of the household, imagined as the "substituting [of] machines for servants" (Hardyment 39), the housewife has had to incorporate levels of precision before only expected of machinery. The equation made between servants and machines expands to incorporate the housewife herself, though she is ostensibly evolved beyond the former and more cheerily domestic than the rumbling latter. Even early in the twentieth century, prior to the proliferation of household appliances, Bell chides that there "are an almost infinite number of appliances and machines, cookery-books, etc., in the market, but no automatic mothers or housewives. And although we might be clever enough to use all the first, and to repeat by heart all the second, nothing but personal effort will ever turn theory into practice" (12). The Hoover is not credited or blamed for the removal of carpet lint, but instead the (female) individual pushing the appliance must assume responsibility for the performance of the machine. Her "personal effort" is the source of her household's cleanliness, and therefore of its moral fiber. And as this machinery decreases the amount of labor needed to complete a task, and as the
expected frequency of performing those tasks mounts, the level of a housewife's personal investment also grows, bringing with it more guilt, more confessional apologies.

Standards for domestic order have unarguably risen along with the proliferation of modern conveniences, but the expected dividend of time does not often materialize. The women polled in the 1951 Mass-Observation study had not gained any additional amount of time in return for reliance upon modern machinery, nor had (regardless of conflicting opinion!) their middle-class counterparts. "The assertion that middle-class homes could be kept clean all the year round without the help of servants," Hardyment argues, "was hailed as one of the triumphs of the twentieth century, instead of being recognized as a tyranny just as great for the once proud managerial housewife as that formerly exerted on her hard-working tweeeny" (89). The ideal household, for most, became one that is self-sufficient; the housewife became houseproud through her ability to maintain without assistance the level of domestic order previously accorded to those who managed the home only with the help of a retinue. But gadgetry, though it made up to some degree for a lack of hired help, exists only to be used, and the more mechanical assistance received, the higher the standards for cleanliness will rise. Daily cleaning practices have replaced weekly events or, going back farther in time, to seasonal rituals such as "grandmother's" spring cleanings. Modernization has long produced an increased need for household labor: "the emergence of 'washing up' with soap and water [. . .] followed the expansion of the Staffordshire potteries at the end of the eighteenth century" (Davidson 133). Increased production of soap, another result of modernity, as well as the eventual removal of taxes upon soap products, followed, and this line of improvements can be traced through the twentieth century to automatic dishwashers, as well as to those ubiquitous anti-bacterial goods. Complicating this increase in improvements—and in their complicated effects upon household maintenance—is the nature of commercialism and the creation and reinforcing of markets for economic expansion. Though many of our "necessities" have been found to be of little consequence with regard to actual time saved or to the quality of machine performance, once a market for these machines opened up, numerous marketers and advertisers have become just as
invested in the nature of housework as the housewife herself has been. Even low-functioning products can be made to appear appealing through promises of cleaner floors, whiter whites, and stain-free grout.

One thing these new products did was to create a separation of the idea of "work" from the compounded tasks of housework. The implication of ease found (still) in advertisements for newfangled housekeeping aids negates the actual work—time and energy—it still takes to maintain even, or perhaps especially, a contemporary household. Again, the flaws in the logic of a system dedicated both to assisting the housewife and to keeping her social role intact become apparent. By the mid-twentieth century, when household appliances as basic to the contemporary kitchen as the refrigerator, the gas oven, and the vacuum cleaner were only beginning to radically change the way a home was managed, however, the idea of "work" had already been expunged from that of "housework." Adrian Forty details how, in the nineteenth century and in the earlier decades of the twentieth, there "was a danger that if the negative aspects of the work became too obvious, they would detract from the pleasure women were expected to derive from housework [. . .] housewives themselves avoided these contradictions by resisting making comparisons between housework and other kinds of work" (208). The dignity required of the houseproud woman, too, if she were to be the content specimen she was expected to be, had to be disassociated from the dinge of the work done by paid servants (Forty 209). But the more predominant household appliances became, and the greater cleanliness expected of housewives, the more actual work resulted, and not all chores can be adequately accomplished by machine. For some jobs, the housewife continued to use that "spare" time to maintain high standards better than the machine could do. In 1962, a Mrs. Kennedy (a working-class woman included in Elizabeth Roberts's oral history) got a washing machine, but "'I always washed the nappies by hand. [. . .] I gave them three or four rinses and I boiled them once a week'" (qtd. in E. Roberts 33). Even with two children in nappies, Mrs. Kennedy put her pride in her own abilities before her desire for leisure. What Forty calls the "idea that machines could turn housework from laborious drudgery into a few minutes' pleasure" (207) may have caught on with
advertisers, but in the wake of their four-color offerings for labor-saving devices were left
women expected to do more and to be like machines, and who were working as much if not more
than they would have in a simpler household.

When Prince Albert's 1851 Great Exhibition, intended to show off England's industrial
achievements, was installed in central London (and subsequently removed to Crystal Palace),
seven models of the newly invented washing machine were displayed (Hardyment 56). The
machines were more prototypes than anything else, and at that time, (as Hardyment stresses by
beginning her examination of household appliances with the date of the Exhibition) households
were virtually machine-free and free also of the high standards for cleanliness sought after today.
It is difficult to imagine the amount of time and energy it took women of all but the upper-
middle and highest classes to manage and—if lacking servants or if of the working classes and
not in service to someone else—maintain their households. Though for many years only the
relatively wealthy could afford items that came onto the market, eventually household
"mechanical servants" appeared regularly in homes of all classes. The rhetoric of household
maintenance reached not only middle-class women, but also those of the working classes who,
though they had left service as an occupation, were unable to escape the cultural demand for a
clean English home. The modernization of the household, though, not only disassociated "work"
from the reality of household maintenance; it also removed women from the physical reality of
their everyday lives. Woman has been modernized right out of the natural world of the physical
body that both biologically and culturally defines her. For a housewife to accept the rhetorical
stance that housework, with the assistance of modern technology, requires little manual, physical
labor, is for her to accept a de facto disassociation of herself from the activities she performs.
Through a negation of the physicality of the activities that take up most of the housewife's day or
that take up a good portion of the time spent at home by women who work beyond its front door,
the information that assists women to build beautiful homes also disassociates them from a basic
connection with their physical bodies, a process that assists in development of an auto-
objectified female subject. Without a rhetoric of the ways in which the practices of housework
make use of the body, one of women's fundamental social and cultural role divides them between two worlds: the physical world in which these functions are performed, and the intellectual world in which the value of these functions are constructed, a world into which the female of the species has only grudgingly been accepted. The domestically defined role for women—for those whose primary labor is housework, and for those who perform double-duty as laborers outside of and within the home—is one that engenders ambivalence: for the role itself, for the housework involved, for the domestic realm, and for the physical body necessary for keeping up with the increasing standards demanded by a modernized world.

**Discourses of health and the regimentation of the body**

The growth of certain scientific movements during the mid-nineteenth century had a great influence on the rapid rate of household modernization. Until the later part of the century, the spread of disease was thought to be a result of decaying matter and its accompanying odors, of poorly ventilated rooms in the homes of urban England. Chadwick's report on sanitation was based upon such a belief, and other Victorian health advocates, such as Florence Nightingale, embraced the "miasma" theory and in turn advised fresh air as a relief from "atmospheric impurities produced by decomposing animal and vegetable substances, by damp and filth, and close and overcrowded dwellings" (Chadwick 422).\(^5\) While the introduction of fresh air in the Victorian household could not have done any harm, certainly, given the reliance upon coal for heat and the only small advances in indoor plumbing, it did little to quell the diseases of the age. Once the theory that disease is spread by microscopic germs became widely accepted, however, the tactics for disease control and for household maintenance changed dramatically. Early in the 1880s, when "the bacilli of typhus, cholera and tuberculosis were identified" (Forty 160), the newly conceived-of germ became the enemy of all, but especially of the housewife. This hyperbolic allegory of warfare was underscored in textbooks of the first world war period, in which germs were "represented in the illustrations by German soldiers" (Forty 168). Connections like this between war and dirt enabled the movement to eradicate germs from the
front line of the household to take on the proportions of national effort. For housewives, the quest to rid homes completely of germs became part of their investment in the English standard: with the right products, "not only was it possible, it was their bounden duty" (Horsfield 92).

As scientific advances in germ theories furthered the search for domestic perfection, science itself likewise served as a model for the systematic study of household management. "Domestic science," as this discipline came to be called, is a phenomenon that changed not only the way in which household work was approached, as well as the manuals and periodicals that carried its message to women, but also the ways in which domestic education transpired both in and outside the home. Though the home economics movement had its most public roots in the United States due in large part to Ellen Richards's conferences on the theme in Lake Placid, New York (beginning in 1907), English educational systems also incorporated courses on household maintenance and stressed the importance of hygiene in the home. "From 1882," notes Forty, "all girls in London Board Schools had been given some instruction in basic cookery and housework to equip them for domestic service [. . .] as well as to prepare them for future marriage" (161). Though many young women, in 1882, still went into service of some sort in order to earn a living, by the turn of the twentieth century, the number who chose this route had dwindled considerably. Hardyment reports, "Between 1900 and 1951, the numbers of men and women in domestic service shrank from over 1.5 million to 178,000" (38). While the government continued through the early part of the twentieth century to support the training of domestic employees in institutions such as London's Lapsewood Domestic Training Centre (Horsfield, photo caption n.p.), women were also trained through cultural media that domestic science was an important aspect of their futures as keepers of their own homes. Ursula Bloom (Beauty Editor in the 1930s and 1940s for the weekly periodical Woman's Own), in Me—After the War: A Book for Girls Considering the Future (1944), stresses that training in professional cookery is an education "that you can take forward with you" into marriage; "remember that," she advises (18). Though training in vocational domestic arts continued to be offered, most women, it appears, were more interested in gaining knowledge that would enable them to create their own homes in
the image of traditional English comfort, and were encouraged "to make a study of the subject as complete as one does of any other branch of education" (Bell 8). Mrs. Bell advocates domestic work for women of all classes, too, as a way to avoid nervous ailments. "I heard of a lady who," she confides, "like many others, had no occupation, and therefore became hysterical and fanciful about her health [...] Constant occupation [...] will generally ensure health of mind and body" (52-3). According to Bell,

a thorough study of housekeeping and family tending, including such subjects as physiology, the chemistry of food, as well as the preparation of it, the cost per head according to the style of living and the number to be provided for, is quite as interesting, necessary, and educational, as many subjects now considered essential in a school curriculum. While training the brain let us also train the hand, and we shall soon find that it is better to work than to worry. (15)

Though her suggested curriculum might be limited in that it evolves from traditional gender roles and expectations for women, Bell's motivation—as well as that of some other early domestic scientists—is far more egalitarian than that of those who demanded better domestic training only for women of working classes in order to benefit from their increased understanding of modern household maintenance.

Clementina Black, who, like her American counterpart Charlotte Perkins Gilman, advocated for communal kitchens and co-operative "domestic federations," clearly saw the importance of domestic science for women of all classes as the servant population dwindled. During World War I, she cautioned that women who had found employment in factories and other sectors of the war-driven economy would hardly desire a return to domestic subservience. "The tendency of the future," she states,

intensified rather than retarded by the war, will almost certainly be towards the multiplication of women living in their own home and working, more or less in fellowship, outside it; and towards the elimination of women living in other people's homes and expected to merge their life-interests in those of their employers. (25)

Women, more firmly a part of the workforce than ever, at the end of the first world war were at the helms of their own homes, and thus fully responsible for controlling their own bacteria, as
well as for that of their families. Domestic science became a movement for the broad dissemination of principals of sanitation and disinfection, insisting that "every woman in charge of a house must inform herself about the spread of disease and the importance of hygiene" (Horsfield 94). One president of the British Medical Association agreed with his sisters in "science" that "the housewife [...] was responsible for stopping the spread of disease in the home" (Horsfield 96). Once the threat of germ-carried disease enters the already crowded picture of domestic expectation, housekeeping stakes are raised. "The slightest deviance from perfect cleanliness was a cause for social anxiety," notes Forty, "since the invisible passage of germs could put the health of the family, companions and even the entire nation at risk" (169). The social conditioning of domestic rhetoric, along with its attendant guilt, is multiplied when issues of health make housekeeping literally a matter of life and death.

The kitchen is one critical household center where disease must be battled for the good of the family: "A clean kitchen is, in nine-and-three-quarters cases out of ten, the criterion of a clean housewife and happy household" (Household Management 184). The housewife must work to ascertain the cleanliness of her kitchen and to avert any contamination of the food prepared within in order to maintain domestic equilibrium. The first items listed in the 1909 edition of Mrs. Beeton under "Advice for the Kitchen" stress the impact of less than three decades of germ theories on beliefs about kitchen hygiene: "Cleanliness is the most essential ingredient in the art of cooking; a dirty kitchen being a disgrace both to mistress and maid. Be clean in your person, paying particular attention to the hands, which should always be clean" (19). The passing of germs from one individual to another, rather than from random accumulations of decaying, miasma-producing matter, worked to implicate the housewife (or the cook, if applicable) as a source of disease. Not only must a kitchen be clean, but the hands of the individual must also be maintained to bacteria-free specifications. Of course, people do pass along disease, and the washing of hands is still considered to be the easiest and most common way to combat transmission of germs between individuals. This personalization of disease transmission, however, and the culpability of not the germ but of its messenger, only add to the
level of accountability the housewife must contend with. For a thorough exercise of hygiene, Mrs. Beeton recommends "non-porous walls" and "non-absorbent floor covering" (27); recently manufactured items such as enameled surfaces and linoleum made such criteria possible. Bright white surfaces of kitchen appliances like the Sears Coldspot refrigerator, too, "looked the physical embodiment of health and purity" (Forty 156) and "ensured that the slightest stain would clamour for instant removal" (Forty 170). Old-fashioned sinks and drainboards were made from wood, which could absorb bacteria and provide a breeding-ground for disease; mold and mildew also proliferate in such an environment. Modern conveniences made from metals such as stainless steel were a boon to the housekeeper in search of germ-free surfaces, but the availability of these items were limited for quite some time due to simple economics. Horsfield sites a passage from the 1940s children's novel Bedknobs and Broomsticks, in which Miss Price exclaims over her new sink, as illustrative of the high cost of cleanliness: "'Forty-three pounds seven shillings and tuppence, excluding the plumbing'" (126) As the self-reported 1945 income of one draughtsman, at £400 per year (M-O A TC 67/5/A), indicates, the cost of Miss Price's stainless sink is an exorbitant one for most of the middle and working classes. Cleanliness was mandated in order to protect the lives of those who depended upon scrupulous housewives to keep them on the right side of disease, but the level of cleanliness suggested by housekeeping manuals and by advertisements was difficult to come by until the laws of supply and demand helped to bring affordable non-porous surfaces, among other effects of modern technological advancement, into most English kitchens.

Though works like Mrs. Beeton's cookery and housekeeping manuals provided a wide readership with household instruction, for years the same sort of information was passed among groups of women and through generations of housewives and housekeepers. Household receipt books, kept by maids and ladies both, were forerunners of the mass-produced manuals and their instruction—perhaps without the emphasis on disinfection perpetuated by germ theories of the late Victorian period—served on a local level the purposes of regimentation that those later texts made widespread. While later, printed works grew specialized with regard to the particular
expertise emphasized, these earlier writings—preserved mostly in manuscript, though a few have been edited and published for contemporary audiences—are a jumble of household, medical, and culinary recipes that indicate the varied knowledge expected of a domestic manager. One such document, the Receipt Book compiled by a housekeeper of Gransden House in Huntingdonshire during the early nineteenth century, provides instructions on subjects as varied as how "To Salt a Tongue for Roasting" (11b), "To Make Leather water proof" (27a), and for "Easy and almost instantaneous cure for the Ague": "take a new-laid egg in a glass of Brandy and go to bed immediately" (29b). The cures and remedies for ailments both domestic and corporeal are mixed together in a way that indicates at least a rhetorical equation of a household's goods and its inhabitants. Though certainly the lady of the house might value differently a family member down with the "Hooping Cough" (23a) and a piece of broken china, advice on the maintenance of both appear together, indiscriminately, on these directive pages. A "Receipt for a Cough" (15a) lies between instructions on how "To Dress Cods" and "For Curing 2 Hams." The individual within the household was implicated in its general maintenance and established as some thing to be maintained, was part of its rhetorical representation as well as of its internal, systemic functioning.

Once the discipline of medicine took stronger shape in the later nineteenth century, and cures such as coal boiled in milk (Receipt Book, "For a Cough or Consumption" 26a) gave way to more scientific remedies, maintenance of the body, like that of the general household, became largely affected by processes of modernity. As basic levels of health were more easily accomplished, and as mortality rates declined in proportion to the rise in sanitation and in disease control, the discourse of bodily maintenance expanded to encompass a wide range of practices. Along with the proliferation of household manuals during the mid- and late-nineteenth century came an increase in discourses of how to maintain the human body to its optimum potential. With the basics of health care given over to medical science, more frivolous prescriptions for maintaining a proper body began to enjoy popular positions in English culture. To a degree, this new emphasis upon the appearance and hygienic maintenance of the bodies in
all of England had much to do with the sort of superimposition of middle class values over the entire English population, a socialization process suggested earlier by the class assumptions found in Chadwick's sanitation report of 1842. Dress and personal toilette have historically been significant of class status, but once industrialization was firmly in place in England, and once English citizens in turn began to experience greater possibilities for class mobility, emphasis on the external conditions of the body increased. Douglas writes,

The body is a model that can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious. [. . .] We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning [the body] unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society, and to see the powers and dangers credited to the social structure reproduced in small on the human body. (115)

Julia Kristeva’s theories on abjection comment nicely upon the type of symbol the body is be, the type of body that properly symbolizes society: “The body [. . .] must be clean and proper in order to be symbolic” (102). The tiny social and cultural rituals of dress, appearance, and personal hygiene, then, should be viewed not simply as appeals to vanity, but as projections of social and cultural anxieties resulting from issues such as class and gender, as well as those anxieties stemming from the already documented intersection between codified morality and issues of cleanliness.

A rhetoric of health, so attached to the literature of household maintenance through standards set for the control of dirt and germs, is also present in much of the literature written on the maintenance of the body and of its physical appearance, especially in that literature directed toward women. Health science and subsidiary disciplines such as physical education flourished simultaneously with the field of domestic science, and by 1937 the government joined the movement with its Physical Training and Recreation Act, which in part provided for "more and better educated teachers of physical education" (Bourne 110). Public awareness of advances in medicine made way for an evolution of fairly routine matters into educational disciplines and into "sciences," and the industries involved in the maintenance of the body—again, especially of the female body—adopted the languages of science and of medicine in a way that helped to
legitimize claims made for physical improvement and for control over the body's natural processes. An example of this combining of health issues with less pressing matters is the Women's League of Health and Beauty, which had "membership running into six figures" circa 1939 (Herbert 180). Maintenance of internal and of external standards became equally important and, as a part of the domestic sphere, such conditions fell under the auspices of the household manager. While the housewife was expected to maintain her domestic domain to rigorous standards, she was also responsible for assisting in the maintenance of the individual bodies residing under her roof for increasing periods of time as infant death rates and child labor laws established larger family units. This maintenance, too (beginning with that of her own body), is imbued with the same imperatives as is housework: "No woman, indeed, can be truly beautiful unless she is also healthy; and to be healthy, so far as we can, is a duty to ourselves, and to our husbands and children, if we are married and mothers" (Art of Beauty 1). The receipt books of earlier times had helped to keep the household body running smoothly for generations, but as scientific and other discoveries helped to shape unique, specialized discourses of cookery, cleanliness, hygiene, and beauty, the rituals involved in managing each individual body within a household multiplied. Information available to a growing readership flourished; contradictions ensued. Domestic science perpetuated the ideal of housekeeping as increasingly scientific, and its demands of perfection and rhetoric of life-and-death kept (and keep) housewives compliant through fear and guilt. Likewise, the increasing number of books devoted to the female body and its appearance also borrowed liberally from science, and the insidious result has been strikingly similar to that found within domestic practices: feelings of fear, guilt, and shame resonate with socially produced moral structures and have kept generations of women occupied with concerns about the maintenance of the body's outer boundaries. Standards for beauty and appearance, like standards for dirt and cleanliness, have become invested with the larger issues of the social system, and as representative effects of the system must be maintained to code.

In The Art of Being Beautiful: A Series of Interviews with a Society Beauty, the "Beauty" entices both her interviewer and the book's subsequent readership with rhetoric that makes no
attempt to hide its medical roots: "The doctor does not diagnose a disease in a moment, and if he attempted in a moment to describe it we could not follow him. You must come to me often, and if you will take the trouble [. . .] you will be beautiful, admired, beloved as you wish to be" (15-16). The quest for physical beauty, by the late nineteenth century, takes on a systematic quality based upon the professional dicta of medicinal and domestic sciences. Maintenance of all kinds requires specific agendas, executions, criteria for assessment. Advice books from this period forward specify quite particular (if conflicting) regimens for attaining that important element of beauty, and rarely fail to imply the desirable outcome: admiration, devotion, love. This odd admixture of romance fantasy and the language of "hard" sciences has birthed a paradoxical and confusing set of criteria for women of the twentieth century (and into the twenty-first). Rather than encourage women to understand physiology and biology in order to pursue the sciences, these cultural "textbooks" instead make it clear that science was meant to serve women only within prescribed functions, such as domestic maintenance and beauty routines. And authors capitalized upon the importance of science in women's search for physical perfection. In *Health, Beauty, and the Toilet: Letters to Ladies from a Lady Doctor*, Anna Kingsford (in letters that originally appeared in *The Lady's Pictorial*) secures her readers' trust with her title of "M. D." She ascertains that "the demand for such instruction is universal, and, obviously, one who is both a woman and a doctor, competent to understand at once what is required, and the most efficient method of supplying it, is, from every point of view, the fittest exponent of the subject" (iii-iv). Interestingly, the language and advice contained within Kingsford's book is uncannily similar to that found within *The Art of Beauty: A Book for Women and Girls*, published just a few years after Kingsford's and written by "'Isobel' of *Home Notes*." One of the best comparisons is the denunciation found in both texts of the drinking of liquids. "Isobel" advises, "Almost all liquids are fattening, even water" (33), and Kingsford chimes in: "Drinking notoriously increases corpulence, especially if indulged in between meals" (4). This should not imply, however, that liquids were shunned by all in the beauty business (they have long been embraced by medical professions). The "Society Beauty" mentioned above states plainly, "people don't drink water
enough" (88). Regardless of whether "Isobel" and Kingsford are one and the same, this bit of information is representative of the sort of conflicting information women were reading—and continue to read—in advice and beauty books as those books came into fashion. Though Kingsford may not have been a charlatan, her status as a doctor granted her, perhaps, more sway in some circles than did the status of the "Society Beauty."

While the rhetoric of health filled the pages of books such as Kingsford's and others', that rhetoric presented readers with a fine line to tread. Health not only means beauty, but also a level of physical fitness and bodily proportion. As interests in physical education and in regimentation of the body grew, calisthenics and other forms of exercise became popular in some sectors of the beauty industry—but within reason. Helena Gent's 1909 tract, Health and Beauty for Women and Girls, exalts the fact that women "will ride, walk, run, cycle, golf, hockey, skate and swim" (29), and provides photographic examples of exercises for women who wish to be "well developed and [. . .] finely proportioned, [. . .] brimming over with vitality" (25). Physical fitness, even in a book like Gent's that seems to eschew the usual fare of cosmetic and apparel advice, should only serve to heighten the femininity of woman; it should not compromise her attempts to be "woman 'womanly'" (25). Physical ability and agency are here parts of broader efforts of women to be attractive mates for their male equivalents. "The woman of perfect physical condition, " Gent encourages, "is so bright, winsome and vital. She is desirable and needful to man in more ways than as his partner in the home life" (15). In addition to household management, then, she must also be vital enough to perform any number of activities outside the home. Her physical appearance must serve, as must her physical capabilities. Like Mrs. Bell, who advises women of all classes to avoid idleness in order to avoid neurosis, Gent asks her readers to be sure to maintain their feminine appearance and demeanor while participating in masculine sport, and insists they steer clear of the caricature of the hysterical feminine woman so pervasive in popular imagination. She cannot be clear enough on this point: "the hysterical, unhealthy woman is such a bore and a nuisance that the less man sees of her at home or in political circles the better he is pleased, and when woman is not healthy she is very
apt to become of the latter type" (15). Though Gent prescribes physical fitness and movement, as opposed to domestic work, as a method of engaging women who might otherwise while away their hours into states of unseemly neuroses, the message is the same here as it is in Bell's work. In the twentieth century, it is not at all fashionable or practical for a woman to be self-indulgent. She must increasingly become responsible for her home and its upkeep, all the while working diligently toward the upkeep of her physical self. None of her activities, however, should serve the woman alone. Bloom, in fact, provides advice that combines personal and familial maintenance: "Household work is excellent for exercise. You can do breathing exercises whilst mixing cakes or puddings, you can practise keeping tummy and tail in, whilst you sweep. Mangling will develop the bust. If you want to reduce your hips, don't get down on your knees with a dustpan and brush, stoop to it" (Housewife's Beauty 142). Tied to roles—dictated by sex and galvanized by gender maintenance—that demand she define herself in relation to others (family, spouse, children), at the turn of the last century, the English woman was mobilized, but at the same time curtailed. Even as many factors deny her leisure, she is encouraged never to lag behind in her attempts to be ornamental and convivial.

Like the household whose bacteria cannot be eradicated, the body is a fluctuating biological system that resists efforts of normalization. It defies maintenance to standards of perfection like those advocated by Gent, as well as those implied more subtly by other authors and givers of advice. The late nineteenth-century "complexion specialist" Mrs. Anna Rupert defines beauty as "the union in woman of a pure complexion, firm flesh, mental delicacy, and refinement of bodily grace" (n.p.). The time and the effort that might be put into achieving these desired effects could certainly bring about stunning results, but the body, as a fluctuating system, cannot always be maintained to cultural mandate. The fine complexion needs cleansing and toning and masquing and moisturizing, but even then the occasional (or even constant) eruption might occur. (Because the skin also needs a lot of water, women following Kingsford and "Isobel"'s mutual prescription for dehydration will play a losing game on this front.) Firm flesh demands exercise, such as Gent proposes, but also will defy such conformity through age
or due to certain genetic make-ups. Mental delicacy is easily within reach, one can suppose, of those who spend a majority of their time pursuing those first two requirements, as is addition to the grace necessary to balance out the effort expended on the hockey field or while riding a bicycle. Rupert continues, "If beauty were not a pleasure to God he would not have given it to woman" (n.p.), but if beauty is the result of divine gift-giving, then why must it take so much effort to maintain? Of course, Rupert is simply imposing upon the body's order the same identification of order with morality: if beauty is God-given, then to let your own waste away is a sin as much as sloth, lust, or gluttony might be, though perhaps not quite as deadly. To become slatternly is to defy accepted standards of morality, and to wear such a disgrace upon one's person is even more transgressive than the disgrace of household dirt, which can be shut up behind doors and drawn blinds. According to moral codes that also serve as measures for standards of cleanliness and appearance, going against the grain of accepted beauty standards is a sign of relaxed attitudes and careless habits. Unwashed hair or unkempt flesh—like household dirt—is matter out of place, and as such initiates social responses to taboos of defilement, impurity, dirt. Rupert's invocation of high religion is an obvious example of connecting bodily maintenance with the function of a social order shot through with principles of Christianity. It is unlikely many contemporary examples would contain such rhetoric, though secular zealotry for bodily maintenance is definitely still in fashion. Even a cursory look through works one hundred years beyond Rupert's 1892 pamphlet, however, will unearth attitudes that can produce similar responses. The shame, guilt, and ultimate confession (whether verbally or nonverbally through the act of compliance) at the heart of normalization and cultural policing are reflexive activities in the world of beauty and of bodily maintenance. Firm rules for the body’s appearance and performance are necessary accompaniments to the regulations that order the broad social scheme, and greater comprehension of that bigger picture can be reached if it is seen as "writ small" upon the body, even within the smallest rituals of bodily maintenance.
Moderation and proper consumption

The 1877 *Household Management* stresses this sort of middle-class moderation as a mode of deployment throughout the home. Not only were the working classes affected by efforts to standardize individuals across class strata to the middle-class mean; increasingly, the aristocracy were scrutinized for signs of their own profligacy. Codes for economic expenditure and for household consumption went hand-in-hand with the close moral standards at least publicly demanded of and adhered to by most English citizens. "At Windsor Castle," the "old housekeeper" confides, "[. . .] reforms in the royal expenditure during the present reign have been great"; "three years' hire" of glassware by previous royal households for official functions "was sufficient to *purchase* an ample supply of glass" (3). The message is clear: aristocratic frivolity, perhaps at a peak during the ostentatious reign of George IV, falls outside the boundaries of acceptable expenditure by the middle of Victoria's. Though likely not quite the same aberration as that working-class squalor elaborated upon by Chadwick and others, royal abandon, too, must take measures not to fall outside the lines of propriety. In *Household Management*, the moderate court is lauded for its maintenance of standards expected now of all English citizens, regardless of class or caste and, for the author of this particular household manual, nowhere is as exemplary a site for moderate display and for a turn from domestic temerity than the dining room table. The manual quotes liberally on this subject from a work entitled *A Few Words to the Wealthy on Household Accounts* by W. H. Grey, Accountant, who admonishes the importance of "'a good and plentiful table, but not [one] covered with incitements to gluttony. Let the food be plain and in season, and sent up well dressed. When company is asked, a few well-chosen luxuries may be introduced'" (qtd. in *Household Management* 7-8). Like those manuals that adopt the rhetoric of medical science in order to legitimize their own discourse, this advice borrows from the language of economics as a way to assert the importance of prudence for all households.

Interestingly, the sort of table expected by Mr. Grey and by the "old housekeeper" is that labeled by Pierre Bourdieu as "the working-class meal," one "characterized by plenty (which
does not exclude restrictions and limits) and above all by freedom" (194). Bourdieu contrasts such a meal with one of decorum and of a self-imposed asceticism, and makes an analogous contrast between fatty and lean foods in one example (197-9), but the lean here is the more costly, and only signifies restraint on a singular level. The "plenty" of working class meals is plenty of "soups or salads, pasta or potatoes" (194), and not a meal served at that table chastised by the nineteenth-century advocate for economy, who notes, "Plain dinners are often spoiled by the addition of delicacies" (Household Management 8). Household Management even encourages the well-to-do to consume their leftovers: "make what remains from one day's entertainment contribute to the elegance or plenty of the next day's dinner. Vegetables, ragouts, and soups may be rewarmed; and jellies and blancmanges remoulded, with little deterioration of the qualities" (9). In this how-to guide, the effects of exceptional consumption are questioned in a way that subverts an equivocation of social power and economic status, and those at the highest end of the economic spectrum are brought, along with those from the other end, into a middle path of conditioned standardization. Manners at table, for instance, are simply an outward sign of such standardization, and without them, people from any class position "should all rush at the table pell-mell, and make for the food with as little restraint as an animal shows, or we should all stand about like a herd of frightened deer, only with less of grace, not knowing in the least what to do next or to say," as feared by the author of a 1902 etiquette manual (Etiquette 11-12). The very fact that most of the population neither rushes the buffet nor hangs back hungry due to some affinity with meeker animals exemplifies how behaviors attached to mealtime have become, even in a society as varied and classed as twentieth-century England, entrenched in the general maintenance of the social system. Of course, the meals consumed by those of various classes will vary with regard to content and method of preparation (as well as to the definition of "plenty"), but the desired overall outcome of such a discourse is the elimination of social transgressions such as gluttony. As a consuming mechanism, the body is a site upon which these social values are projected, and examination of food consumption is one way to detect the level at which a household or an individual functions within the social system.
Like the proper household that will allow for only a prescribed amount of consumption, the body—for the purposes of this argument and within the already established context, the female body—occupies a similarly rigid position when it comes to rules for eating as well as for other forms of consumption. As a way to maintain and to survey an individual's position within the moral and cultural structures of society, these rules have moved from slightly fanciful directives to the upper classes and growing bourgeoisie toward a more and more insidious and everyday regulatory function across class boundaries. Like the middle-class ideal of moderation, the body in its ideal is one that is neither too thick or too thin, and draws little attention to itself through transgressions of the drawn outline of social inscription. The properly maintained body—in all actuality an impossible entity—would be the ideal Foucauldian "docile body," one that "may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Discipline 136) at the discretion of the system. Such a body is subject to the system and its structures, and is also the agent of those structures: the docile body lacks an integral or organic sense of agency apart from that required of it by the system. "Agency," suggests Molly Travis, "as defined in terms of individual performance, is not an intention but an effect that is always read in a social milieu" (6), and certainly any act perpetuated by a social entity must be interpreted within the context of a social system. I propose, however, an agency that lies beyond the system as well as inside it, that is, if not pre-social, then perhaps contrasocial or, better, intrasocial. This agency is one that can initiate from the social mechanism but also from a mechanism that does not always concede to the social: the well-maintained body whose biology (genetic, metabolic, endocrinic) subverts attempts to conform to social prescriptions for size or appearance, or whose agent-effect exceeds the limitations of social constraints of a given milieu. The body is not simply a vehicle through which a socially constructed subject performs the rituals of the dominant culture, and not simply a vehicle used to enact willful expression. The body is an integral system within and beside other systems, and without its role in the equation of agency, the subject would indeed be a docile being. Systems of maintenance that encompass physical, intellectual, moral, and other realms would not be necessary were the subject simply a nexus of social effects, because the
construct would maintain itself. On some level, the subject defies attempts at regulation that go beyond reactions to that regulation. On the biological, corporeal level lie components of subjectivity that defy the social system and its regulatory measures.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau distinguishes between what he terms "strategies" and "tactics," both of which are germane to a discussion of agency—perhaps especially to explorations of female agency—and its necessary corporeal component. The "strategy" is a "calculus of force-relationships" that "assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper [. . .] and thus [serves] as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it" (xix). Certeau's "tactic" differs in that it is "a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality" (xix). The strategy is directional, goal-oriented, and acts upon an "other."

Systems of social regulation are strategic; they derive their position through separation from the controlled subject. The tactic, however, is "the intellectual synthesis of [heterogeneous] elements" that "takes the form [. . .] not of a discourse, but of [. . .] the act and manner in which the opportunity is 'seized'" (xix). There is no specific sequence or syntax within the tactic, but instead it is the impulse itself to "do" beyond the bounds of strategy. Tactics are functions in themselves; they are not functions of the system in place. A synthesis of the body with the intellect results in practices that lie just beyond the proper space of strategy, and thus will always be a little bit unruly, a little bit defiant of attempts to bind and to limit, as with household and bodily maintenance. Everyday practices that are by nature tactical, according to Certeau, include "talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking" (xix), all of which lie in the realm of "the thinkable, which is identified with what one can do" (190). Such practices "intervene in a field which regulates them at a first level" (they are inseparable from the milieu), "[. . .] but they introduce into it a way of turning it to their advantage that obeys other rules and constitutes something like a second level interwoven into the first" (30). Activities that result from syntheses of mind with body, tactical by design, are practices that do not simply conform to external strategies, but that redefine those strategies and subvert them in a way that becomes
epistemological. Once redefined through an interaction between the strategy and the tactic, the system can be understood as partially a product of the agent who deploys her own "mode of use" (30) as she negotiates the system. The performance of such negotiations are how the actions of the body will be interpreted and known by the intellect as they work in tandem. If one is to imagine a female agency that is in part engendered from the flesh, then the agency imagined is tactical, "an art of the weak" (37) that uses what is presented by the system/strategy, but that simultaneously uses the system idiosyncratically. This agency will, if only in small ways that escape all but the closest of gazes, be a subversive agency, one that provokes the regulatory functions of the social system.

The idea of "use" characterizes Certeau's tactic, and is what he calls "the labor of consumption" (30). Consumption, as a tactical mode of use, requires both passivity and action; it cannot be circumscribed by the system, but is in part a result of social values and cultural information. Consumers are receptacles, but also "carry out operations of their own" through which the facts of such use are "no longer the data of our calculations, but rather the lexicon of users' practices" (31). Though alone the tactic lacks syntax, the synthesis of the tactical practice and the larger system within which it is deployed and alongside which it exists creates a particular linguistic structure. The activity of consumption is itself a map of agency. Certeau illustrates his theory of consumption with the example of reading as a practice in which the consumer absorbs words chosen by another, but in which the act of reading depends upon what consumers "make of what they 'absorb,' receive, and pay for" (31). Interpretive acts that are a product of the tactical act of "reading" cannot be strictly enforced by systemic regulations, and in this way indicate the precarious nature of any ideology offered up to a normalized population. Consumption is "characterized by its ruses, its fragmentation [. . .], its poaching, its clandestine nature [. . .] in short by its quasi-invisibility, since it shows itself not in its own products [. . .] but in an art of using those imposed upon it" (31). The concept of an objective or literal interpretation is "the index and the result of a social power, that of an elite" (Certeau 171), but shifting, interactive "poaching" of information—taking up and using what one needs from the
confines of someone else's field of knowledge or from the product of another's labor—is a threat to that elite power structure.

The more "everyday" an activity, the more threat that activity will pose to the larger system. Functions such as talking or moving about (to recall two from Certeau's list of subversive tactical actions) occur more frequently and in the lives of more people, perhaps, than does the act of reading (and here I limit my definition of "reading" to an interaction of a reader with a written text). Certeau's theories can benefit an analysis that moves toward the most widely experienced tactics within a given population. At least some of the roots of female agency will be found among the most quotidian, the most "quasi-invisible" activities performed by female subjects. Within a metaphoric analysis of "consumption" such as Certeau's, one obvious trajectory for a discussion of everyday tactics is an examination of food consumption, which is a necessary aspect, and thus one of thus most daily of all aspects, of human existence. Like reading, eating is both a function (one chews, one swallows) and an interpretive act. The taste buds, together with the olfactory sense, allow for one to distinguish between sweet and sour, salt and bitter, as well as among a multiplicity of combinations of flavors. Texture, too, is an important component of the eating experience, and is a feature to be interpreted. On one level, this ability to distinguish among foods—to "read" foods or to tactically consume them—stems from a biological imperative: in order to alert the consumer to spoiled or poisonous food, the senses of smell and taste work together, hopefully averting sickness or death. The interpretive act of food consumption, though, is one capable of much fine tuning. Palates, when exposed to particular tastes, textures, and smells, can draw quite fine distinctions among those foods consumed. This is not to say that the tastes navigated must be "fine"; that is, any palate will function in this interpretive way, whether among the roasted joint and the boiled potatoes of a Sunday dinner, or between the white truffle oil and the chicken stock that might infuse a risotto's arborio. A good example of the ways in which the palate exhibits its ability to tactically interpret various elements is a "component tasting" done with wine and a few food items, the qualities of which can be found in the flavors of the wine. Once provided with the primary
flavor, the palate is left to interpret the wine with respect to that flavor. Not all palates, however, will interpret a wine (or a food item) in the same way, but this does not reflect upon the “distinction” of an individual palate.\textsuperscript{11} The tactic of consumption is not a tactic of evaluation, but of interpretation, analysis, synthesis. It is a process that allows for a range of responses, or for no response at all. Beneath consumption, whether of a text or of one's lunch, lies the potential for an agency that defies standardization.

When there is the potential for this defiant resistance, efforts to bring the agent into the center of the social order will increase. As women began in greater numbers to move beyond domestic roles (whether as mistresses or as maids) during the later nineteenth century, the discourse of private maintenance shifted from an emphasis upon domestic issues to one that elaborated a more personal maintenance of the body and, importantly, of how that body might appropriately travel through public domains. The role of food consumption, and of attempts to maintain the social agent through controlling the tactic of eating, is rarely absent from the maintenance literature of the late-nineteenth century and increasingly is accentuated in the beauty and self-care texts of the twentieth. Eating, in this literature, is not only standardized methodologically, but also with regard to quantity and to frequency. More typically investigated texts, such as etiquette or conduct manuals for women, certainly provided women with a set of rules for dining decorum, but their audience was predominantly limited to women from families with economic and/or social status.\textsuperscript{12} As class lines blurred during the period of the early twentieth century, when the first world war and the advent of a strong Labour government initiated a destabilization of England's caste system, not only did conduct manuals begin to reach a wider audience than they had previously sought, but they also shifted from a discourse of manners to one that more firmly emphasized standardized behaviors, including food consumption. A look at two conduct manuals for women, both published by C. Arthur Pearson, Ltd. (a London publisher of mass-marketed books on subjects ranging from \textit{Things a Woman Wants to Know} to \textit{Consult the Oracle: How to Read the Future}), illustrates this in a particular context. The 1902 \textit{Etiquette for Women: A Book of Modern Manners and Mores}, is an
anonymous text authored by "One of the Aristocracy." The only reference this manual makes to female food consumption: "eat slowly, but do not dawdle" (46). Other references to mealtime have more to do with placement at table and with interpersonal, rather than gustatory, conduct.

Pearson's 1928 offering, *Etiquette for Women: A Book of Modern Manners and Customs* (not a later edition of its predecessor, but an updated coverage of themes similar to those found in the 1902 text) illustrates the ways in which expectations for women—and the ways in which women themselves—had changed since the publication of the earlier version. With regard to eating methods, this second manual (penned by Irene Davison, a "real" woman rather than untouchable royalty) is far more instructive, and the attitude here is not so much *how* one eats as *how much*. The admonition of the 1902 tract is repeated in this later one, but with an added piece of advice: "If everyone else has finished their course, and you are half-way through yours, it is much more polite to [. . .] let it be cleared away, than to keep others waiting while you finish" (66). The directive here advocates a denial of food and of hunger that flourishes in later works, particularly in the genre of the beauty manual. Other directives seem to aim toward a correct manner of eating, but reveal a move toward limiting the amount of food a woman should eat, the better to maintain not necessarily her physique, but her conformity to social prescription. For instance, the advice to "tilt your [soup] plate slightly, if you need to, but always *away* from you: don't try to scoop up the very last drop" (62-3), allows for a slight breach of high etiquette, which would not suggest the plate be tipped at all. Instead, the amount of food to be eaten is the issue at hand. Similarly, the warning for dining on small game birds does not emphasize the method, but the outcome, the amount to be eaten: "you are expected to cut the meat only from the breast and the wings [. . .] even though this be but a mouthful. It is not correct to [. . .] try to get all the meat from the bones" (63-4). By limiting the quantity and the potential quality of these and other eating experiences, standards such as these work to limit the interpretive potential of eating, and return consumption to the realm of the system and its strategies. Tactical consumption will take what is allowed within the system and use those prescriptions for the benefit of the consumer, and will resist the stringent codes of manners and moderation.
Maintenance of body size and appearance

The beauty manual, of course, differs from the conduct manual with regard to the rationale presented for personal and bodily maintenance, but when it comes to food consumption, the two genres are quite similar in their advice and their proposed results. The beauty manual does differ from the guide to etiquette, however, in that eating in this context is not simply a tactic in and of itself, but recognized more so as something to be controlled in order to ensure proper proportions of the body. An 1885 manual published through the Tit-Bits office, *Beauty: How to Get It and How to Keep It*, reminds readers that "everyone likes what is called a 'trim figure'" (7), suggesting not that everyone desires to be trim themselves, but that the trim figure is the standard "liked" by "everyone"; "trim" is the cultural norm for women's bodies, as early as 1885 and still to this day. This manual discusses eating in a way that utilizes the health rhetoric discussed earlier, but in ways that dictate the mode of consumption, as well as the effects of standardized behavior. "Eat plain, nutritious food, partaking very sparingly of highly-seasoned, savoury dishes, and rich pastry [. . .]. Eat abundantly of fresh, ripe fruit. There is nothing like it for purifying the blood and, as a result, the complexion" (7). (The use of nutrition rhetoric in the maintenance of cultural norms will be discussed in Chapter Three.) To advocate for a healthy diet is far from a crime (and actually, the emphasis on fresh fruit is rather ahead of its time), but the directive to eat only plain food is one that certainly undercuts effects of tactical consumption.

"Isobel"'s *The Art of Beauty* also recommends a "slender, well-proportioned figure" in 1899 (32), and supplies additional cultural information as regards exact standards for female bodies. Though the quest to be trim is thought of almost always in terms of weight reduction (and indeed, the number of pages devoted to that issue far exceeds those that address the underweight), "Isobel" cautions readers to avoid looking "'scraggy'" (39), something also reviled by "'Madge' of Truth" (Mrs. C. E. Humphrey), who slips advice for bodily maintenance into her 1893 *Housekeeping: A Guide to Domestic Management*: "Thin arms should be carefully concealed as though they were crimes. They have a half-starved, impoverished look that robs
their owner of some of her dignity" (162). Considering the difficulties of obtaining proper nutrition for those in the working classes, where a lack of protein could mean "that children of twelve years of age who went to private schools [c. 1902] were, due in large part to better nutrition, on average five inches taller than those who attended state schools" (R. Roberts 119), those who fell below the ideal often were as unlikely to reach the published standards as those whose weights fell beyond those standards were. "Isobel" understands that "if, on reaching maturity, the figure still remains thin and undeveloped, it is natural enough that the woman should sigh for more ample proportions, and seek to use every legitimate means to ensure them" (39). This is no small undertaking, but resembles the sort of rhetoric that entices young men to join up and defend their country. The use of "every legitimate means" is a battle cry, and the under- as well as over-developed reader is called upon to do everything she can in order to bring her proportions into the accepted range.\textsuperscript{14} The underweight addressed here, though, are not falling behind a prescribed figure that is truly ample; the suggested weight provided for the woman of five feet, six inches tall is 10st. 1lb. (141 pounds)\textsuperscript{15}—hardly a different prescription than women would be handed one hundred years later. For the woman who falls above the designated weight, "legitimate means" include "Amiral Soap," which "possesses the valuable property of gradually but steadily decreasing superfluous flesh wherever existing" (37). If the effectiveness of this soap is hardly scientifically legitimate, the standard for female proportions certainly is legitimized by the use of scientific language and pressure to conform to cultural ("moral") norms. The standards have little to do with actual health standards or with attractive qualities of beauty, but increasingly add to the regimentation of the private sphere on the individual level. Excess flesh, like dirt, like an unkempt appearance (and the sexual and moral transgressions that such things signify), is matter out of place, and as an element that transgresses the accepted boundaries of the system, the flesh is something that must be normalized if the system is to be maintained.

During the mid-twentieth century, writers such as Ursula Bloom controlled much of the discourse of beauty and body maintenance. Bloom was not only the Beauty Editor of *Woman's*
Own for many years, with weekly columns running alongside ads for products such as Marmola Antifat Tablets ("It is folly to stay fat in these scientific times"), but also authored countless books that provided women with assistance for reaching desired cultural standards for the body and its appearance. "I put it on if I'm not darned careful," she empathizes, "and being a beauty editor I'm not allowed to waddle about like a tub. [. . .] I look yearningly after fried potatoes, and nice creamed cakes. But that's all part of the game" (Me 8). For Bloom and for others of the World War Two and post-war eras, the "game" included diets such as the "Bread and Butter Diet," which includes nothing but bread, butter, milk, and tomato juice for twenty-one days. "The difficulty," worries Bloom, "is to get hold of [a diet] which at the same time does not undermine the health" (Housewife's 52); she then proceeds to detail the "famous" Bread and Butter plan, which hardly provides for balanced nutrition. According to Bloom, "Perseverance is the latch-key to all true beauty" (Wartime 16), and with the various and often conflicting methods prescribed and treatments available at that time, perseverance, for the body as well as for the home, would certainly be necessary if one were to even come close to the ideal. "Apples have never yet fattened anyone," she states (Housewife's 74), but evidently, exercise has: "Lots of exercise that you take during the day is quite fattening [. . .]. Cycling, for instance, will develop legs, thighs and sit-me-down at an enormous rate" (Wartime 15).

Healthy movement, such as that earlier advocated by Gent, becomes taboo in the face of muscle mass, and health itself, though its rhetoric is recalled here and there, is less important than the happiness achieved when falling within the narrow range of accepted physical standards. This belief is echoed by Muriel Cox in a manual published by Good Housekeeping, who cautions against swimming to slim, stating, "it tends to bulging muscles, which are no more attractive in a woman than bulging fat" (68). The ideal at this time is streamlined, the sort of figure that might fit into the straight-skirted styles made necessary by the lack of available, affordable fabric during World War Two and by the clothing promoted by the British government's Utility Scheme. "The fat woman, more particularly now-a-days, is conspicuous, is worried about her condition and does not feel well" (Housewife's 72), writes Bloom in 1941, for
whom the ideal weight of a woman five feet, six inches tall is 9st. 9lb. (138), just two pounds less than the ideal advocated in 1899. And how could women riding above that weight not indeed feel conspicuous after reading Bloom's beauty manifesto, or that of anyone else?

Jill Adam, a contemporary of Bloom who published *Beauty Box: A Book for Women about Bodies, Faces, Make-Up, Let-Downs* in 1940, provides similar and even more paradoxical advice for her readers. She begins her book by decrying societal pressure on women to achieve "the film ideal of beauty, which has narrowed down the meaning of the word [beauty] to a long-lashed, red-lipped, peach-cheeked siren" (5), and laments the fact that "modern insistence on the desirability of the boyish figure has made women think that a natural, correctly proportioned feminine figure [. . .] needs slimming" (11). Her statistics for ideal proportions, however, are actually less than Bloom's; though she provides a range for weight rather than a single number, her 5'6" woman should weigh between 129 and 135 pounds, with the ideal weight given at 132 (13). The middle ground, by mid-century, is quite the narrow path. Adam, like Bloom and others, guides women toward a standard that continues to lose its feasibility due to its shrinking, limited range of acceptable standards. Cox suggests that "if you are more than six pounds over, or seven pounds under, your prescribed average, you should get to work" (61), which allows for very little leeway, and which prescribes a goal most unlikely for a majority of women. Cox does take into consideration some of the "subversive" bodily factors mentioned previously, such as age and genetic tendencies, but does so in a very limited and unsympathetic way. She assures some readers that she understands how this weight schedule is rather out of reach for some: "don't take it too terribly to heart, especially if you are the 'fine girl' type and Nature gave you a framework of good, solid bones to carry you through life" (61). Her words, however, lack a certain depth of feeling, and even the "fine girl" is left to feel remiss for not fitting into Cox's thirteen-pound range of acceptability. As for age, Cox takes into account that one will weigh more as one gets older, but lacks a real sense of knowledge about the factors involved in aging. At age twenty, her ideal weight is 9st. 6lb. for those standing 5'6"; at age thirty, this extends to 9st. 12 (61). Cox gives no weight suggestions for those over thirty, but Adam provides advice
where Cox leaves off. "At forty and over which would you rather be?" she prods. "Fat, untidy, flabby, or angular, hatchet-faced, nervous? Answer is, why be either?" (77) The goal for a lifetime, then, is what lies between these two sets of obviously undesirable qualities, which seem to be found at above 135 and below 129 pounds, respectively. By perpetuating customs that help to standardize both the form and the tactical functions of the female body, this aspect of women's culture has worked (and continues to work) hand-in-hand with other strategies of social conditioning.

Though these prescriptions for female proportions can appear to be quite specific, many of the books available do contradict each other. Weights given are not extremely varied, but change from year to year, from publication to publication. The 9st. 9 mentioned above is from Bloom's 1941 *The Housewife's Beauty Book*; in 1943's *Wartime Beauty*, the ideal for a woman of the same height is listed as 9st. 10 (14). In *Me—After the War: A Book for Girls Considering the Future* (1944), Bloom again lists ideal weights for women, but this time suggests that one should (at 5'6") weigh 9st. 8. The discrepancies here are minor, and likely are a result of shifting numbers released each year in government or insurance charts. Bloom's weight prescriptions are telling, however, in their obvious arbitrariness, in their reliance not upon a single, sustainable ideal nor even upon a real, lived ideal (unless, perhaps, Bloom recorded her own weight each time she penned in a number), but upon one that was handed down from some other, likely "official" source and disseminated via mass media to countless women across regions and class strata. The mandates of public sector interests are heavily invested in by those within the private, and ultimately are the foundation of private doctrine. The fact that in these volumes, women are complicit with the system and its strategies for body maintenance only adds to the problematics of such a cult of femininity (this aspect of women’s culture will again be addressed in Chapter Three). Rhetoric of the beauty culture begins with the authority of masculine spheres, and in turn that authority becomes Bloom's, or Hill's, or the domain of anyone who can properly adopt the tone and emphasis of public discourses. The result of feminizing the system's most
overt apparatuses is the same type of control and regimentation found within the areas defined by science, law, and other public measures of standardization.

Though these standards for female bodies do vary in a relatively arbitrary manner, they do not vary much. In fact, from the turn of the twentieth century and through the 1940s, published standards for weight changed very little. From "Isobel"'s 1899 prescription of 10st. 1 to Cox's low-end 9st. 6 for the twenty-year old woman of 1946, the standard only deviates by nine pounds. Apply Cox's range of thirteen pounds to this historical range, and the result is that women of 5' 6" tall who weigh above 147 pounds or below 125 are found culturally (and morally, socially) transgressive for at least half a century. Gent's 1909 work, even with its emphasis on health and exercise, not only suggests an ideal for weight, but adds the perfect measurements for bust, waist, and hips: 36-28.5-39 (26), likely a difficult match for the 9st. 13 she suggests for the woman building muscle mass through exercise. The body should not only achieve an ideal for density, but also for distribution of weight, regardless of any mutual practicality between the two. In most of the books from this genre, the prescriptions are so precise that few women, for many reasons, can reach them. Kingsford suggests that "the waist should be twice the size of the throat" (92), and many beauty manuals even today provide readers with similar methods for calculating the proper number of inches for hips, thighs, or bust in relation to other body parts. The dynamic body is reduced to a series of mathematical calculations, none of which might be appropriate for a given body. All of these regulative processes, however, encourage women to continuously evaluate themselves accordingly, and to devote time and attention to their attempts to reach unrealistic ideals.

While published standards changed little through the first half of the twentieth century (and really did not change all that much during the second half), popular representations of the female form varied wildly from era to era. The late-Victorian and Edwardian ideal, when represented visually and not by charts of weights and measures, is fairly full-figured (and presents a shape much enhanced by boning and lacing), as is one popular cinematic image of woman from mid-century, exemplified by film stars such as Diana Dors and by images exported
from Hollywood (Jane Russell, Marilyn Monroe). The 1920s, though, offered the leaner image of the flapper, a look again popularized during the 1960s, when very thin fashion models were touted by Sloane Square as one ideal for British women. This variance in visual prescriptions for female beauty only adds to the efficacy of a regimentation of the private, of the body, as limitations for individual behavior narrowed and as rules for navigating societal expectations grew more rigid. There has often been a discrepancy between the published and the visual versions of the ideal, and this only increases the difficulty of most attempts to attain perfection.

The gap between the two versions also increases the amount of effort expended in such a pursuit, however. For example, during the 1970s and 1980s, published standards suggested a standard for female weight that allowed for five pounds—to be added to a baseline one hundred pounds—for every inch in height above five feet (the 5'6" woman, then, would be ideal at 130 pounds under such a prescription). At the same time, though, the average woman found on the cover of a glossy fashion magazine reached over five feet, ten inches tall and weighed between 120 and 130 pounds. That visual standard has changed in recent years to an even slimmer, often drastically unhealthy image (e.g. "heroin chic"), and yet in one recent article from Woman's Own, Lisa Pender happily reports, "I'm now down to 10st 4lbs and a size twelve, which is just perfect for me at 5ft 6in" (Hart 13). Pender's image, though close to the range of published standards acceptable for much of the twentieth century, is far removed from the image of a rail-thin Victoria Beckham (Posh Spice of Spice Girls fame), found a few pages later in a pictorial on breast augmentation (Beckham has recently publicly confessed to having battled with eating disorders). Which standard should readers trust? The number of young women who are affected by anorexia, bulimia, and other eating disorders indicates that the desirable figure is more Posh than Lisa, but either way, the body is explained and understood as a thing to be changed, manipulated, controlled. The confusion that results from the differing ideals presented only enhances the ways in which one must engage with the information. By encouraging a certain analysis of these ideals, the dichotomy actually engages readers rather than driving them
away, leaving them with an impulse to standardize, but with no clear set of standards to aim toward, a result of the strategies deployed by a system of maintenance upon women’s bodies.

**Mind/body duality and auto-objectification**

This paradoxical information bolsters the ages-old division perpetuated by traditional Western thought of the intellect from the material body. As something women are trained to manipulate and control, the female body has grown increasingly divorced from the concept of a "whole" female entity. Though tied to the body through a socially insidious negation of female intellect, "woman" is also coached to negate her corporeal experiences via the distancing apparatuses of physical standardization, creating a schism that ultimately negates the individual herself, for both mind and body are formative elements of human experience. The whole individual is forced into components that split ambivalently, resulting in a subject whose physical self has become objectified by her intellectual self. There is dynamic flow within a unified "self," an interchange of social, biological, and psychological forces that blend and shape each other in the wake of each day's experiences. When such a unified identity is split apart by social and cultural forces, however, the result is not harmonious, but is at the very least ambivalent, and will ultimately result not necessarily in clinical but in figurative schizophrenic identities increasingly naturalized in a world of unceasing modernization. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari speak of this brand of schizophrenia, propelled by encroaching social functions, in terms of production and desire, and note that "productive synthesis [. . .] is inherently connective in nature" and creates paths of connection and desire "in every direction" (5). These "desiring-machines" are "binary machines" in that they are made up of necessarily interactive components, but the scope of the construction of such an organism places that "machine" beyond what might generally be thought of as a dualistic binary.

The human being, made from both tangible and intangible elements, can be thought of in terms of the ones and zeros of binaried computer code rather than in terms of a pair neatly soldered into one. There is always dialectic exchange and play, and the whole being is a
language: a functioning, producing, desiring, and always-communicating source of information. Like Certeau's tactic, the desiring machine—an entity that depends upon synthesis and exchange—has no syntax specific to itself, but instead is its own mode of expression, is the language of its own development and existence. Though these machines "work only when they break down" (8), this does not reference the breaking down found in a separation of parts from the whole, but speaks instead to the dynamic tension present within and between elements of the whole. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari elaborate upon the idea of the desiring machine, but have transformed their earlier theories into the idea of the "rhizome," which "is not a new or different dualism. [but] connects any point to any other point"; it "has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and overspills" (20-1). Like Certeau’s tactic, the rhizome is plural, and allows for a multiplicity of signs and interpretations of the information found in everyday life. The effects of social standardizations like those prescriptions found in beauty manuals (as well as in texts that order the private individual on larger scales, such as household, cookery, and other books) are counterintuitive to this dynamic, interdependent machine of the "self." The standardization of the female body shuts down the flow and exchange that is necessary for a relationship between the physical and the psychical components of an individual female, and aids instead in promoting the subjection of both realms to a larger social system. What Deleuze and Guattari call the "primitive territorial machine" is the social order that sacrifices, through a process of division, the individual to the machinations of a collective order. Even the individual who "enjoys the full exercise of his rights and duties has his whole body marked under a régime that consigns his organs and their exercise to the collectivity. [. . .] a founding act [. . .] through which man ceases to be a biological organism [. . .] following the requirements of the socius" (144). Even as suggestions for synthesis are presented as viable options for the beauty manual's female reader, they are simultaneously contradicted by the standardization that fractures the modern subject.

Just as with the discrepancies between published and visual prescriptions for beauty, or between ideals such as those represented by Pender and Beckham, contradictory information
about this unity of mind and body has often been expressed in manuals of standardization. The "Society Beauty" interviewed in 1902 appears rather prescient in her insistence that "the intellectual and the physical must be wedded if you would have general and durable beauty" and that "the absurd idea which has crept into fashion that mental and physical charm cannot go hand in hand is both pernicious to happiness and derogatory to the sex" (116). The impetus for this discussion, however, is not a search for some natural unity, but is an indictment of the growing number of women who were seeking education and employment at the turn of the twentieth century. The "Baroness," as the Beauty is slyly referred to, begins her series of dialogues with a dismayed discussion of "the class of clever women that is becoming more prevalent day by day" who "withdraw from their physical bank to pay into the mental one, and, of course, lose in the translation" (19). She quotes from a speech delivered by Lord Salisbury to the Royal Academy, in which he deprecates that a "few years hence, those who are then alive will see all the principal ladies of their acquaintance as Aldermen and Common Councillors. How do you imagine that they will dress themselves?" (11) "Is not this picture true and terrifying?" asks the Baroness. "It shows that there are people who really cherish the hideous!" (11) The hideous nature of the intellectual woman lies not in her state of disassociation from her physical body in any philosophical sense, but instead lies in the lack of standardized beauty this masculinized creature projects through her dress and appearance. Though the idea of synthesis with which she begins her instruction is interesting to find in this otherwise didactic conversation, synthesis, thus situated within such a context and surrounded by other, more imperative prescriptions, is only a fleeting contradiction, and one that loses its way in the forest of standardization.

Jill Adam, whose examples of contradictions with regard to weight ideals appear above, also presents readers with dichotomous ideals for a unity of self. Just as she deprecates Hollywood's beauty standards while at the same time presenting others just as rigid, she begins her treatise on beauty with an extended metaphor likening a whole woman to a flourishing tree, a tree, however, that is inaccessible to those caught up in the prescriptive elements of the rest of the text. She explains,
In order to have a flourishing tree of life, it is necessary to have wholeness. [. . .] civilization has made it possible, for the first time in history, for the woman to be a whole tree herself. Yet so far she hasn't quite managed it. The traditional 'wife and mother' attends only to the root [. . .]. The modern 'worker' woman forgets about the roots and concentrates her energy upon the branches [. . .]. The 'kept' wife or mistress [. . .] is often a poor dry stump, no good to anyone, and quick to rot. [. . .] the tendency in modern life to specialize has made us lose sight of the fact that the human organism is a complete whole, with each part—mind, body, spirit—interdependent and related. (5-6)

On its own, this sounds much more like the contents of a contemporary women's magazine or self-help book, one of the genre that hopes to guide women back out of late-twentieth-century ideals of superwomen who could bring home bacon, fry it up in a pan, etc. As doctrine from 1940, Adam's musings are provocative and, like the Baroness, she seems to prophesize rather than to fall into the same mode of prescription as do her contemporaries. Within an illustrated book of beauty and diet advice that neglects both the intellect and the spirit once her opening admonishments end, though, this advice does little but provide readers with problematic and contradictory information, and even if those readers do not stop to critically assess the dissonance, seeds of the problem will be planted by the time the text has been completed. On a cognitive level, there will be some understanding that not only are there prescriptions for physical beauty to be adhered to, but that there are also additional elements to consider on the road to a "real" beauty of wholeness. In order to have strong roots and leafing limbs, further ideals must be sought after, further standards deployed. Here, too, morality is meshed with standards for physical "housekeeping," and beauty (or its lack) seems to stem as much from the gender role one performs ("wife and mother," "worker," mistress) as it does from any other regimen. Adam reinforces the social functions and moral policing that underlie the dicta for cleanliness and for physical maintenance, illustrating through moralizing over the "poor dry stump" of the sexually transgressive female how a division of mind from body actually serves the system, is a primary aid in the regulation of individuals within society.

The result of this regimentation of the body and of a division of the dynamic factors that constitute an individual result in what I call "auto-objectification": the objectifying of one's own
physicality by the intellectual, "subjective" component of the individual woman. While early in the twentieth century some women may have been less likely than others to come into contact with conduct or etiquette manuals (especially those from poor classes or who resided outside of urban areas), by the onset of the first world war, books on beauty and other aspects of physical maintenance (not to mention the variety of housekeeping and other manuals) were mass-marketed by publishers such as C. Arthur Pearson, and appeared as readily to the reading public of those first decades as do the multitude of pulp diet and exercise books that await contemporary shoppers on line at the supermarket. Escaping this particular consequence of the prescriptions laid out in these texts was not always, perhaps rarely, possible. Much has been written about the objectification of women by men, by masculine discourses and conventions, and by the male "gaze" effected within visual and performing arts (painting, photography, film, television, video). Though I do not mean to discount either that work or the real social and cultural effects of these mechanisms, I find a more damaging, more foundational objectification to be that which originates within one's own cognitive experience, for auto-objectification lays psychic groundwork for some outcomes of other, secondary objectifications. Once a "self," an individual's epistemology of being, is divided by an array of social and cultural practices that function to contain an individual within the limits of an existing system, the dynamic process of production and connection breaks down. Though women have historically been disenfranchised from the realm of reason and intellect, a morality-driven social system invested so heavily in the idea of intellectual primacy will still privilege a disembodied sense of femininity above the transgressive female body. Judith Butler notes that "there appears to be no 'one' without ambivalence" (Psychic 198), but once a dynamic ambivalence of the "one" is converted to a static, dualistic hierarchy, the individual female subject, especially under the beauty and other regimes available to her, is apt to objectify her own physical being; the body has become something to manipulate, to exert one's will upon in an effort to standardize and to normalize the self to a variety of social codes. The more objectified her body becomes from her own vantage point, the more effective those regimental processes delineated in cultural texts such as beauty
manuals, as well as in those from similar genres. Kristeva suggests that “dietary prohibitions” (though her argument is based upon the religious literature of Leviticus, do not books on beauty and femininity themselves garner a fanaticism akin to religion?) might be a “screen in a still more radically separating process [. . .] an attempt to keep a being who speaks to his God separated from the fecund mother” (100). Prescriptions that dictate laws for eating and that codify what enters the body aid in the distinction between the materiality of the female body and the discursive qualities of the intellect. If the body is little but an object separate from a self understood, through divisive strategy, to be an inner, ephemeral self unconnected to the flesh, then the body is vulnerable to damaging behaviors and self-imposed strategies. The rise in physically altering behaviors such as eating disorders and plastic surgery, and in more commonplace processes such as dieting and body piercing, is proportionate to the distancing of the modern psyche from its physical self.

Sciences such as neuropsychology (to be further examined in Chapter Five) and those that investigate cognitive processes have already discovered the necessary connectedness of the mind and the body, but theoretical and other discourses continue to perpetuate the division and to aid in the distancing of the mind from the body, even when seeming to seek liberatory truth in the space between the two. But the body is a component of one's mode of being; it is necessary if one is to access that rational thought so privileged by most modern societies. "Because our conceptual systems grow out of our bodies," assert George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, "meaning is grounded in and through our bodies" (6). Our bodies, along with our minds, are the bases of epistemology, of processing the information so rapidly produced in a world that has been sped up exponentially over the last one hundred years. This unity, as a fundamental element of how an individual knows the world and her position within it, is therefore foundational to what proceeds from that knowledge, and to individual initiative based upon how a given environment is perceived. Split asunder, the mind and body limit the quantity and the quality of experience that can be processed by the individual, and limit as well any action that can proceed form that experience. The mind/body split fostered by a regimented and normalizing society, then, poses
real consequences for an understanding of individual agency. A "freedom of the will" is "based on the more basic notion of freedom of action" (Lakoff and Johnson 190), and without a dynamic and fully integrated whole that benefits equally from the flesh and from the intellect, any freedom to act is truncated; individual will is compromised. Once private regimentation dismisses the importance of the body to the function of the individual, auto-objectification in turn diverts activities toward the primary object of the self (the body), thus limiting actions that involve the world beyond the individual. That is not to say that there is no longer agency, action, or resistance. Though social regimentation establishes the perimeter of the system, within which most social and cultural activity takes place, there is still dynamism inherent within the structure of the individual, if to some (and sometimes large) degrees modified by the effects of social inscriptions. The lines that circumscribe behavior are permeable, and whether through everyday "tactics" or more sweeping gestures of transgression, there will always be at least the potential for an agency that issues from the exchange between the mind and the body, and not from the strategic mechanisms that work to drive wedges through the connections that structure complete individuals.

Notes to Chapter One

1 In Nobody’s Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture, Elizabeth Langland discusses how Coventry Patmore and John Ruskin “both adopt the metaphor of ‘Queen’ to designate the middle-class woman and rely for their arguments on a notion of women’s ‘power’ as opposed to her ‘sphere’ or ‘influence’” (68-9). Hardyment’s reference to such a trend in Victorian culture works to refute the notion of the lady of leisure promoted by these and other nineteenth-century writers. For a lucid and thorough examination of Ruskin’s use of this metaphor, see Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, Ruskin’s Mythic Queen: Gender Subversion in Victorian Culture (The Ohio State UP, 1998). In The ABC of Housekeeping ([1902]), Mrs. J. N. Bell refers to Ruskin’s “letter to young girls,” which advises young women to perform much of their own housekeeping, as foundational to her own philosophies. Though widely noted in discussions of women’s domesticity in Victorian England, Ruskin seems to also be cited in sometimes contradictory manners.

2 Chapter Four will explore some of the issues that can arise when colonial subjects—in this case the Irish—adopt and appropriate certain aspects of such an Englishness for their own uses.
3 Though the OED shows no link, I am interested in the connections between the use of the word “sluttish” to refer to a poor housekeeper, and “slut,” which denigrates female sexual expression. Certainly the idea of dirt and pollution is an important link between the different uses of this word.

4 Beauvoir elaborates upon the role of the housewife: “The essence of Manichæism is not solely to recognize two principles, the one good, the other evil; it is also to hold that the good is attained through the abolition of evil and not by positive action” (425).

5 Julia Stephen, mother to Virginia Woolf, was also a follower of such health practices. For more on her writings, see Chapter Two.

6 Julia Stephen, as well as others, wrote in opposition to such federations, and instead advocated for better training of more servants as a way to ensure the continuance of the English middle-class way of life. See her two essays on this issue in Gillespie and Steele.

7 Though her title might have granted her prestige, her other publications might cast a slight doubt upon Kingsford’s credentials: *Rosamund the Princess, and Other Tales; River Roads* (poems); *Astrology Theorized (Weigelius), with an Essay on Bible Hermeneutics; and The Perfect Way; or, the Finding of Christ* (with Mr. Edward Maitland).

8 Rupert’s tract states, “Mrs. Rupert has secured the four floors at 89, Regent Street, where she now has elegant Reception Rooms, Private Consultation Rooms, and separate departments for Complexion, Corsets, Manicure and Chiropody.” Branches also existed in Manchester, Brighton, “Edinboro’,” and Paris.

9 Meals outlined in this manual, though, are indeed far from the frugality implied in these passages: “[. . .]the First Course consists of soups and fish, removed by boiled poultry, ham, or tongue, roasts, stews, &c.; and of vegetables, with a few made-dishes, as *ragouts*, curries, hashes [. . .] For the Second Course, roasted poultry or game at the top and bottom, with dressed vegetables, omelets, macaroni, jellies, creams, salads, preserved fruit, and all sorts of sweet things and pastry are employed [. . .] Whether dinner be of two or three courses it is managed in nearly the same way. Two dishes of Fish, dressed in different ways, if suitable, should occupy the top and bottom; and two Soups, a white and a brown, or a mild and high-seasoned, are best disposed on each side of the centre-piece [. . .] The Second Course [. . .] consists of roasts or stews for the top and bottom; turkey or fowls, or *fricandeaux*, or ham garnished, or tongue for the sides; with small made-dishes for the corners [. . .]” (9). The actual layout of such tables can be seen in Add. ms. 64127 of the British Library, “a collection of household receipts and dinner menus compiled by Jane Walker, wife of Dr. Thomas Andrews F. R. S. (d. 1885)” (manuscript description). Mrs. Walker drew the table, and its dishes, as she planned for several meals including Christmas dinner, the first course of which was to include “Plumb Broath,” “A Ragoo of Pallats” (likely “pullets”; noted later as “commonly a side or corner dish”), “A Loin of Veal,” “Boiled Puddings,” and “Geese.” The second course included “Wild fowl,” “Rabbits,” “Mince pyes,” “A Fricacy,” and “Brawn.” The term “side dish” originally meant that the dish would be placed to the side of the centerpieces; corner dishes were placed at the corners of tables.
10 It is said, too, that heightened sensitivity in pregnant women to certain foods is a result of the body’s guarding against ingestion of spoiled or unhealthy foods that may be detrimental to the fetus.

11 Pierre Bourdieu discusses “taste” in a way that signifies cultural hierarchy: “Tastes in food [. . .] depend on the idea each class has of the body and of the effects of food on the body [. . .] It is an incorporated principle of classification which governs all forms of incorporation, choosing and modifying everything that the body ingests and digests and assimilates [. . .] the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste [. . .]” (190). For Bourdieu, “taste” is not simply a function of the body, but is what forms the body through its incorporations. My current discussion of taste locates taste as a sensory response, not an evaluative activity. For the purpose of the current argument, taste should be considered to be identifying and interpretive, as in “that tastes like a strawberry,” and not “that tastes like a strawberry, and I like them; they’re wonderful and good for you and better than gooseberries.”

12 In The Ideology of Conduct: Essays in Literature and the History of Sexuality, Nancy Armstrong explains that such material “set the standards for polite demeanor to which the prosperous merchant’s wife or the daughter of a gentry family was supposed to aspire” (4).

13 Female alcohol consumption is referred to, as well as that of food. "Young ladies should not indulge in a variety of wines, nor in much wine. [. . .] do not empty the glass in one gulp—it is vulgar to do so [. . .]" (45), is an admonition found in the 1902 manual.

14 The woman who wanted a reduction in size had ample advice available for diets and other slimming devices, including stays and corsets. The Tit-Bits manual advises that a trim figure “requires a corset” (7), though ‘Isobel’ cautions: “the physiological reasons which make the excessable tight-lacing a positive crime. The smallest size permissible should be nineteen or twenty inches, and for most women this will be very small, too small for either health or comfort” (53). Kingsford, too chimes in on desirable waist measurements: “No adult woman’s waist ought to measure less in circumference than twenty-four inches at the smallest” (92). This conflicting information is nothing short of confusing, and likely added to women’s anxiety regarding their body sizes. In 1939, Bloom has advice for the “reader who is very flat chested”: “Drink a pint of Jersey milk every day [. . .]. Swing the arms in circles [. . .]. Splash vigorously with hot and cold salt water alternately. And, until you notice an improvement, wear a brassière that is a little too big, and pad it slightly with cotton wool” (Woman’s Own April 1, 1939). Perhaps she might have limited her suggestions to that final, fool-proof piece of wisdom.

15 One stone is equivalent to fourteen pounds.

16 Apples are often lauded in women’s cultural material. Mrs. Bell notes of the fruit: “Apples are valuable as food and medicine, purifying the system and acting as a solvent on the uric acid, an excess of which causes gout and rheumatism” (26).

17 A factor that further confounds the contradictory height and weight charts is the information in charts that prescribe caloric intake for women. The “Cover Girl” chart published in 1941 by a London Health and Beauty Bureau suggests a daily intake of 2800 calories for women engaged
in the “light” work of six to eight hours of housework, and notes that the League of Nations recommended 2400 calories per day for the sedentary woman. Experience would likely be enough to create some doubt in most women that such intake could ever result in the body weights listed in those charts found in beauty books.

18 For Pender and her millennial figure, weight training is an important part of her body maintenance. A major slant of this Woman’s Own article is the fact that Lisa’s husband is a personal trainer, and that she felt, when “a size 18 and rising,” as if when she “was introduced as Tim’s wife [she] could see the shock on people’s faces. They clearly expected a Pamela Anderson clone” (Hart 12). The fact that her muscle mass will certainly push her beyond the limits of most weight charts, but will still be foundational to her contentment with her body size, is an issue rarely included in the rhetoric of women’s body maintenance until recently, and charts for ideal weight still belie the fact that muscle toning will create a wider spectrum of height-to-weight proportions than would be taken into account if no muscle mass were added to the frame.

19 Of course, the paradox of the simultaneously desirable small frame and large breasts only adds to the conundrum of bodily maintenance, and adds cosmetic surgery to the already troublesome lists of diets, etc., that women use to control their bodies and bodily proportions.

20 Similar contradictions have long been present in women’s magazines, with advertisements and rhetorical content often at odds with each other. Articles on women’s careers or physical fitness, for example, can be dichotomous next to advertisements for cosmetics or other products that feminize and sexualize women. Such a problem was part of the cessation in publication of Ms. magazine in the late 1980s; in order to avoid the conflict, Ms. re-organized and began publishing without ad content a few years later.
LUNCHEON AT “THE LEANING TOWER”: CONSUMPTION AND CLASS IN VIRGINIA WOOLF’S BETWEEN THE ACTS

The nineteenth- and twentieth-century zeitgeist of cleanliness, morality, and a thorough exclusion of the material and everyday qualities of life from the privileged sphere of the intellect—a point of view passed on through generations of social and familial training—has left its mark on various areas of cultural production. In this chapter I will begin, through examinations of work by Virginia Woolf, to investigate the ways in which attitudes toward the body, and toward the lack of interaction allowed to components of the mind and the body, have helped to form literary texts by women. In the case of Woolf, whose opinions on the body in its many forms and with its many functions have been examined by numerous critics, the body presents an interesting problematic. Herself a survivor of sexual abuse and improprieties at the hands of her step-brothers, George and Gerald Duckworth, as well as a woman of seemingly ambivalent sexual orientation,1 Woolf throughout her fiction and her nonfiction represents the body as both a site of potential horror as well as one of rich possibility. In the memoir “A Sketch of the Past” (begun in 1939), she recalls “feeling ecstasies and raptures spontaneously and intensely and without any shame or the least sense of guilt” while a child, “so long as they were disconnected from my own body” (68). Her lifelong preoccupation with the contrasts between body and mind, literary realism and psychological fiction, and other issues that she would come to term, in her 1927 essay “The New Biography,” “granite” and “rainbow,” provides an example in many parts of the ways in which Woolf viewed the world around her as made up of components that she both loathed and desired to reconcile. Teresa Fulker notes that “Woolf’s expressed uneasiness about sexual bodies and bodies involved, among other things [. . .] those daily functions which she seems to have thought it uncouth to include in works of
fiction” (7), and certainly Woolf’s fiction withdraws from taking the same delight in the rough or scatological body as can be found in the fiction of James Joyce (whose *Ulysses* the Hogarth Press—operated by Virginia and her husband, Leonard—declined to publish). Rather than utilize the body and those experiences of the flesh too real for her own fiction, however, Woolf did work to encompass ideas of embodiment, and to consider the ways in which the body itself could complement the inner world she sought to explore primarily in her earlier fictions. Fulker acknowledges that in Woolf’s writing, she posits “the experiences of the body to be crucial to the construction of consciousness” (5), and Mark Hussey notes, “Woolf saw the body as lived rather than merely as a given environment for a shadowy self” (19). As I will further examine in Woolf’s last works, both critics point to a theory of embodiment Woolf continued to work out as she crafted her numerous novels and essays. The body would also, however, provide Woolf with perhaps her greatest creative challenge.

Woolf herself was no stranger to a rhetoric of the body such as that previously described in Chapter One: one that codifies the body as an object separate from the inquiring mind. Her early orientation toward embodiment, however, is not what might be considered typical for a woman who came of age at the turn of the twentieth century. Though she struggled with many aspects of the body, as the granddaughter of a physician and daughter to a woman whose own writings have contributed to discourses of bodily and household health and order, Woolf would have been familiar with conversations about and discourses of issues related to the body that her contemporaries may not have been party to. Her mother, Julia Stephen, who appears as the do-gooding Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, was known especially in St. Ives, where the family had a second home in which they lived during the summer months, as a healthcare provider. Though her activities—visiting the sick and the indigent, nursing the poor—could be and have
been viewed as simply a dutiful form of *noblesse oblige*, Julia expressed “a desire to be more professional” (Gillespie and Steele 195), and such a desire is evident in her pamphlet *Notes from Sickrooms*, originally published in 1883. As a public agnostic, too, Julia was interested in not only a more professional profile, but also in defending her ability to remain “moral” outside the bounds of Christianity, to remain clean and to maintain cleanliness, against the view that “morality, or concern for others, depended upon faith, and the entire social structure depended upon morality” (Gillespie and Steele 197). In addition to her public writings on health and nursing, the establishment of the Julia Prinsep Stephen Nursing Association (Woolf, “A Sketch” 131) is testament to the level of commitment Woolf’s mother had to her duties to others. As a child, Virginia occasionally chided her mother in “anonymous” writings for the family newsletter, *The Hyde Park Gate News*, and in October 1892 notes, “Mrs. Stephen who is really like a ‘Good Angel’ to the poor of St. Ives is now trying to get enough ‘Filthy Lucre’ to start a nurse [the nursing society] in the town” (Add. Ms. 70725 77a). Six weeks later, young Virginia again uses her already burgeoning wit to report to the family, “Mrs. Stephen declared that it was positively wicked to spend so much money on eating. Perhaps she thought it would be better employed if it was spent upon her nurse” (Add. Ms. 70725 88a). Not only were the children quite aware of their mother’s activities as a caretaker outside the home, but Julia’s other message regarding excessive consumption comes across clearly here, as well. By age ten, Virginia Woolf’s familial orientation toward the body had been established: the flesh is something to be maintained to code, either by oneself or by others. Regardless of any religious departures on the Stephen family’s behalf, the same connections between morality/ethics and the body found in Christian belief systems—especially as regards consumption—are present here in one child’s observations of the world around her.
Sir Leslie Stephen, Woolf’s father, writes in *The Mausoleum Book* (an elegiac manuscript penned upon Julia’s death) of Julia’s “little book *Notes from Sickrooms*,” and praises his wife as “a thoroughly skilful nurse” (40). Julia’s pamphlet indeed indicates her attempt to work beside the ill as a professional healthcare provider, and not simply as a middle-class woman who felt obligated to tend to the sick. Her theories of nursing reflect some of the reforms begun by Florence Nightingale and others during the mid-nineteenth century, and advocate for good ventilation and for cheerful but professional treatment of all “cases”: “The genuine love of her ‘case’ and not of the individual patient seems to me the sign of the true nursing instinct” (218). This distancing of nurse from the individual personality of the patient is a mark of professionalism, and does foreground Julia’s desire to treat each patient as equal to the next, but in her professionalism she also supports the notion of the ill body as void of individual characteristics that complete the “whole” human being. The rhetoric of *Notes from Sick Rooms* addresses the well-being of each “case,” but while Julia suggests remedies for the “torment of crumbs” in an invalid’s bed (219), or sighs over the fact that “a sick person, who has been unable to sleep all night, will drop off the moment after she has asked for her meal” (230), she also supplies monolithic prescriptions for treatment that negate the very important individuality naturally found among invalids of differing social classes, sexes, and diagnoses. Certainly a portion of Julia’s work toward an equal treatment of her patients stems from her need to assert her own brand of morality against popular notions that “there can be no incentive to help those suffering here if we are not certain of their fate hereafter” (“Agnostic” 242). “We think,” she responds, “no woman who has the charity and the power to become a sick nurse will waver” (“Agnostic” 243). Julia’s professionalization of her work is founded, rather than upon care for the soul-filled, heaven-bound patient, upon the belief that “doctrine is out of place in the
sickroom” (“Agnostic” 242). While such a notion is admirable in that it extends the field of nursing through support of the idea that “while women wish to work and have power to help others, no difference of creed should cause their help to be rejected” (“Agnostic” 246), Julia’s theories also suggest a certain coldness in her approach to the sick, and to the physical life of her “cases.” The distinct separation of the ill physical body from those intangible mental or emotional human qualities dominates Julia Stephen’s view from beside her invalid patients.

Julia Stephen, with her understanding of human health and her impetus toward a definite (if unorthodox) sense of morality, exhibits both the professional nature of her physician father and the moral qualities of her mother, of whom Leslie Stephen writes, “Nothing was more striking about Mrs. Jackson than the high strain of moral feeling which she transmitted to Julia” (71). Although Maria Jackson’s morality was strongly rooted in the Christian faith (to which she tried in vain to return her daughter), the overall sense of “morality” noted by Julia’s husband transcends religious dogma, and emerges from within both mother and daughter as a notable character trait. Another, related, characteristic shared by mother and daughter is their interest in the human body from the point of view of the healthcare provider, though Maria Jackson certainly availed herself of the care of others (including her daughter) more so than she provided any such care. This interest in the physical body is one both women shared, a probable result of the influence of Dr. John Jackson, husband to Maria and father to Julia, a man who practiced medicine in India for twenty-five years before returning to England to take “his M. D. degree at Cambridge” in 1855 (“John Jackson”). During Jackson’s tenure in the Indian colonies, he was appointed to the General Hospital at Calcutta, and lectured at the Medical College of Calcutta (“John Jackson”). The long-term relationship of not only Dr. Jackson, but also of his wife and family, to health-related matters is evident in Julia’s public writing, as well as in unpublished
letters written by Maria Jackson to her daughter upon many occasions. Most Woolf biographers have been quick to note Maria’s preoccupation with health—especially with her own—as that of a hypochondriac. Indeed, Maria’s letters are full of what Panthea Reid calls “superb Victoriana” (459), and Reid finds that Maria’s continual references to her own health, both fair and foul, cast her as “a caricature of upper-middle-class Victorian respectability and indulgence” (458). A string of letters from c. 1880, sent from various points along a journey taken by both Jacksons through France, provide a host of examples that support this view of Maria. “My bowels are getting sound,” she writes to Julia from Vichy, “and my tongue is cleaner” (27 June [1880]; CP Ad1 1/2); “The Dr has just been to tell me that in future I may have my Bath at nine & have it warmer [. . .] I think my forlorn looks touched his soul with pity!” (4 Aug. [1880]; CP Ad1 2/11). While, as Reid points out, such news makes for abysmal mother-daughter correspondence, they also support a notion of shared interests in physical health and well-being (though Julia’s letters, were they available to scholars, would likely not detail her own often difficult health in the same way). I do not mean to ignore the fact that Maria Jackson was a cranky lady with a narcissistic investment in her own physical complaints; however, I do find reason to reconsider her desire to discuss medical issues with her daughter, and to imagine how this preoccupation can contain other possibilities. In October of 1883, Maria writes to Julia, “your notes from Sick Rooms [. . .] I read it with such pleasure” (5 Oct.; CP Ad1 1/3), a message that conveys the mother’s approval of her daughter’s interest in nursing, and that also acknowledges this interest as one the two women have in common.

Other correspondence, at least that from Maria’s desk (Julia’s letters, with few exceptions, are not available to the public), reinforce the idea of Maria Jackson as not simply a whining geriatric case, but as an interested and informed wife of a physician who sought out
medical information in order to better understand the workings of the human body. Far from the idea of another high Victorian caricature—that of a woman unable, due to gendered issues of propriety, to discuss the body in any direct sense or through use of any overt terminology—Maria often explores themes in her letters that some might have found shocking, and the fact that these letters were addressed to her daughter suggests that senses of familial propriety were not necessarily breached by Maria’s mentioning such indelicate subjects to her daughter. During the illness and upon the death of another of her daughters, Adeline (for whom Adeline Virginia was named), Maria writes frankly of the nature of the illness:

I am sure they have never told Dr. S[eton] of her uterine complaint [. . .] Papa mentioned it to him [. . .] (7 April [1881]; CP Ad1 2/13)

I think it not unlikely that she may be suffering from disease of the womb [which] the retching and diarrhoea [would] so increase [. . .] I dare say the rectum is sore. [. . .] Question her about her womb. You will feel whether it protrudes. (12 April [1881]; CP Ad1 2/13)

In other letters she mentions with similar frankness the ailments of others, noting that one of her servants is “about to undergo an operation [. . .] the tumor is in the womb so I suppose it is ovarian” (25 Feb. [1883]; CP Ad1 2/12). Jackson not only writes of female illness, but also speaks of male health, as well, when writing after the death of her husband:

We have talked over all the illness and he [the doctor] is quite clear [about] there having been stone in the kidney [which] had come lower down & caused hemmorhage from the artery. [H]e says he saw arterial blood [which should] not have been the case if it had come from the Prostate as Mr. J. supposed. [. . .] if he had partially recovered he [would] have had an abcess & always have been a sufferer.” (11 April [1887]; CP Ad1 2/15)

While many of her letters are overrun with information about Maria Jackson’s bowels and baths, as well as her seeming fondness for “the morphia,” letters such as these from which I’ve excerpted contain information that suggests Maria’s solid interest in medicine, and her desire to gain a further understanding of the ways in which humans proceed through life and death. An
additional spate of letters urge her daughter, Julia, to be vaccinated against smallpox, a process she outlines in detail and with an almost clinical comprehension. Rather than view her interest in health-related issues as only part and parcel of her concerns over her own health, one can consider Maria Jackson to have been a woman interested in the discipline of medicine, and in sharing her knowledge with her also-interested daughter. For Virginia Woolf, home-schooled by her mother for some years and part of a household in which a variety of matters, both common and uncommon, were discussed by those around her, such open and clinical discussions of the human body would have infused her intellectual foundation, as well as her orientation toward the body. Though they would provide her with uncertain subject matter for her novels and essays, some issues of the body were likely not foreign to Woolf and, though made problematic by other of her experiences, this familial training provided her with healthy struggle as she worked to integrate the physical and the material within her writings.

In her 1930 essay “On Being Ill,” Woolf addresses such topics together: that of the physical body, of illness and its effects on the body, and of the ways in which the human body can and cannot be articulated through language. Though in this piece Woolf wonders, “Considering how common illness is [. . .] it becomes strange indeed that illness has not taken its place with love and battle and jealousy among the prime themes of literature” (193), she also faults “the poverty of the language” when it comes to finding a full range of expressions for the body’s experiences: “The merest schoolgirl, when she falls in love, has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her; but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and the language at once runs dry” (194). Woolf admits that the body should find its way into literary texts, but appears to be at a loss with regard to expressing the “daily drama of the body” (194). A far cry from the exclusively psychological novelist Woolf is often viewed as, in this essay she
firmly acknowledges the idea that the “creature within cannot separate off from the body like the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea for a single instant; it must go through the whole unending procession” of physical sensations and experiences “until [. . .] the body smashes itself into smithereens, and the soul (it is said) escapes” (193-4), and what Fulker sees as Woolf’s “understanding of the importance of the somatic” to characterization (9). The “granite and rainbow” metaphor here explodes into a discussion based upon the material fact of embodiment, interestingly through the metaphor of physical health, the predominant theme of Woolf’s matrilineage. The ill, Woolf explains, are “deserters” from the push and pull of modern life, while “in health the genial pretence must be kept up and the effort renewed—to communicate, to civilize, to share, to cultivate the desert, educate the native, to work together by day and by night to sport” (196). To be forced, through illness and attention to one’s own body, is to retreat from the constructed world around one, to leave behind social and cultural forces at work on the intellect for a natural world that “has been going on all the time without our knowing it!” (197). Through this exegesis of illness, Woolf is able to posit a site where the mind and the body together function as one entity, where the language and knowledge of the body garnered in the familial training of her youth can bind together with Woolf’s impulse to express the inner workings of the human psyche. In this essay, too, Woolf conceives of the body as a sort of anti-modern entity, and as a challenge to a modernist foregrounding of the psychological at the expense of fully representing the necessary complement of embodiment.

The idea of a separation of mind from body that in this piece draws Woolf’s attention is one that infuses the work of the next, final decade of her life and career. A unification of the mind/body split, however, is not one that Woolf approaches easily, nor is she able to fully reconcile the two even as she so thoroughly attempts to unearth the ways in which such division
is reflected in other aspects of the world around her. While a metaphoric use of a relationship between the material and intangible elements of life extends itself to Woolf’s struggle with bringing the actuality of the body into her fiction as an important component of existence, she also finds similar divisions of the particular from the general as she philosophizes about aspects of ontology. Her theories on moments of “being” and “this cotton wool, this non-being” (71), explored in “A Sketch of the Past,” delineate the dailiness of “ordering dinner; writing orders to Mabel; washing; cooking dinner; bookbinding” (70) as distinct from those rare exceptions when an inner life blazes forth and transcends the quotidian elements that take up most of one’s day. One of Woolf’s “moments of being,” however, actually leads her to a broader view of the complexities of the world and of the interconnectedness of the physical with the more elusive realms: “‘That is the whole,’ I said. I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower” (71). Her circular recognition of the ways in which the natural world connects to more arbitrary, aesthetic notions such as beauty, and her use of this experience to document the different qualitative levels of existence, engage Woolf’s ongoing thinking through of the other ways in which facets of being that might otherwise be viewed as mutually exclusive can also be thought of as comprising a “whole.” For Woolf, this drive for wholeness—experiential, intellectual, social—is at the heart of her most insistent problematic, and as the events of a world on the brink of the second world war escalated the fragmentation of society, Woolf worked hurriedly to propose ways in which the pieces could be drawn back together into a complete and sustainable world.
In a later essay, “The Leaning Tower” (originally a talk delivered in Brighton to the Workers' Educational Association during May, 1940), Virginia Woolf outlines two “classes” that in her view had, through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, made up English society. On the one hand, she signals, is an elite group of educated, middle-class (male) writers who view from high above the world about which they write, who maintain that vantage point still known as the “ivory tower,” a place of influence and of privilege granted to those few with the means to achieve the intellectual capital associated with education. On the other, very heavy hand lies “the immense class to which almost all of us must belong” (180). The dividing line between Woolf’s two classes, as discussed here, is educational access and the “connexion between [. . .] material prosperity and [. . .] intellectual creativeness” (165). The novelist writing prior to World War I, she implies, had a quite different version of a classed society: “the aristocracy; the landed gentry; the professional class; the commercial class; the working class; and there, in one dark blot, is that great class which is called simply and comprehensively ‘The Poor’” (165).11 From this lofty view, a precursor of those whose writing careers began after, and thus were affected by, the first world war looked down upon these class divisions and “accepted them so completely that he became unconscious of them” (166). Once the sedate progress of English society was shattered by the effects of war, though, these towers were destabilized, engendering skewed lines of vision from which later authors were doomed to monitor their subjects. From their “slanting, sidelong” points of view (171), those writing post-World War One—“Day Lewis, Auden, Spender, Isherwood, Louis MacNeice and so on” (170)—“do not look any class straight in the face [. . .]. There is no class so settled that they can explore it unconsciously” (171). Once the twentieth century has been permanently scarred by World War I, the social landscape no longer neatly collects into Woolf’s two groups. Once the privilege of cultural capital gave way
to the shifting social system of Britain between the wars, the old ways of viewing the world no longer work for that world’s scribes. Importantly, too, once the stratifications of class were radically revised during the period between the world wars, those who took their pens to paper were no longer always those who dwelled in towers, leaning or otherwise. Not only did social roles and codes change, but so did the voices that recorded and attempted to make sense of a rapidly driven modernity.

Though in the essay she presents the possibility of a society moved beyond such class divisions, Woolf also shows the difficulty of escaping her biases with regard to class, to its divisions and definitions. Alex Zwerdling writes of “a distinct nostalgia in her description of the nineteenth-century writer’s belief in permanent class distinctions” (99), and although I find Woolf had trouble reconciling her desire to fully embrace social change with her inescapable desire to maintain her middle-class lifestyle, I do not feel as strongly as does Zwerdling about Woolf’s glance backwards toward those older distinctions. By the essay’s end, Woolf leaves behind any splitting up of classes by so many hedgerows—“like a landscape cut up into separate fields” (165)—but has yet to present through her authorial praxis a society uninhibited by such socioeconomic shrubbery. Instead, Woolf has boiled society down to two groups; however, her groups are not quite proportionate to those more typically known as the middle and working classes. Due to her idiosyncratic definition of “class” vis-à-vis the cultures of writing and literature, the scales of privilege appear to weigh heavily in favor of far fewer individuals than actually were comfortably ensconced in positions of privilege. In order to provide a sense of camaraderie between herself and her working-class audience, Woolf found common ground in the concept of access: to education, to public sector discourses that provide enfranchisement to the underclassified. Woolf’s two groups are self-consciously overgeneralized, certainly, but they
do ultimately point to larger issues with which she grappled with during the later part of her life and career. Elena Gualtieri understands “The Leaning Tower” to be, in part, a response to criticism regarding Woolf’s difficulty with class issues, and notes that Woolf was “the object of attacks as the representative of an excessively refined sensibility with no understanding or concern for the material conditions of life” (81). Speaking about the importance of literacy and education to a group of working-class individuals whose socioeconomic status was far different from her own, Woolf’s stance is interesting and, from the cusp of the twenty-first century, perhaps a bit appalling. Though Woolf certainly lacked a formal education, she was schooled by a literate mother in a home of relative leisure. She was encouraged to roam her father’s library and able meet and learn from many noted Victorian literati. She was not subjected to the leanness of a village school education, nor was she forced to learn between shifts at a factory or during intervals separating one load of washing from the next. In attempting to align herself—as a woman, indeed as one who earned much of her own luxury through her writing—with the working-class Brightoners, though, Woolf does work to complicate the ways in which such a global concept as “class” can be defined, and emphasizes the intangible capital of culture above the material and economic indexes more typically used to construct the boundaries of a tiered class system.

Even while this emphasis on reading culture might seem appropriative when her audience is considered, and Woolf might be viewed as a woman attempting through education to socialize the working classes straight into her own bourgeois milieu, her rhetoric is more provocative than such a simplistic reading suggests. Her stance, however troublesome, illustrates Woolf’s conflicted sense of class, and opens up a new way to look at much of her later work. Reading is not simply an act of cultural codification in “The Leaning Tower.” Reading, whether within the
academic sphere or on one’s own as a “common reader,” is an educative tool, and, as Pierre Bourdieu notes, “educational qualification [. . .] guarantees cultural capital more or less completely, depending on whether it is inherited from the family or acquired at school” (13). Woolf ends her essay with a call to arms: “Literature is no one’s private ground; literature is common ground. [. . .] Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves” (181). Woolf here parallels Michel de Certeau’s theory of reading as a subversive act, as an everyday “tactic” that defies codification because it is by nature interpretive, relative to the individual reader. This is a reading act not “overprinted by a relation of forces (between teachers and pupils, or between producers and consumers) whose instrument it becomes” (Certeau 171), but rather is one that promotes alterity, plurality. Though trained to read for a primary idea or meaning, a reader can gain interpretive agency via “a transformation of the social relationships that overdetermine his relation to texts” (173). Once constructions of gender or of class, for example, are restructured to meet the changing needs of a social body, old texts can provide readers with new, and perhaps strikingly contemporary, meanings. Perhaps it is not so much the tower that leans, but the whole slab of terrain that slants, providing both author and reader with a multiplicity of linguistic tactics unavailable prior to events (such as World War I) that jostle the social horizon. “The reader,” Certeau insists, “produces gardens that miniaturize and collate the world, like Robinson Crusoe discovering an island” (173). Not only does the author, then, gaze out over a hedgerow maze of class strata, but the reader—Woolf, her Brighton workers, any who pick up a text without preconceived notions of what the meaning might be—is free to re-imagine the ways in which those stratifications are structured, and to redefine what it means to reside within a given class or to perform the effects of a classed culture. In this essay, Woolf stresses the importance of the act of reading with regard to the changing face of English social order.
Because education, even auto-didacticism, can affect “the chances of movement up or down the social scale as indicated by the nature and extent of occupational and hence social selection” (Floud 99), the gaining of knowledge through literacy occupies a clear place in the process of social mobility and, in turn, in the potential for economic freedoms. As a way to gain access to the privilege of cultural capital through education, reading, for Woolf, is an empowering act. It is an act still fraught, however, with the assumptions of middle-class emphasis upon elevating the intellectual above the material world, “which can only be acquired by means of a sort of withdrawal from economic necessity” (Bourdieu 53-4). Though Woolf’s impulse to empower the working classes—or to enable them to empower themselves—is a noble one,¹³ it cannot begin to embrace the material realities those Brighton workers faced daily, or the problematics (levels of literacy, access to reading materials, time constraints) of preaching social revolution via cultural assimilation.

In addition to the two “classes” defined by Woolf in “The Leaning Tower,” there are two distinct worlds at the heart of her essay, worlds separated not by economics or even by education, but by the wide-scale warfare of the first world war and by the destruction imminent in 1940, when Europe was on the brink of the next. These two spheres are the “dying world” of hedges and class divisiveness, and “the world that is struggling to be born” (179). By 1940, Woolf had adopted a distinctly socialist sensibility, and so for her this new world would be one without “classes and towers,” a world in which “we are all to have equal opportunities, equal chances of developing whatever gifts we may possess” (178). Between these two worlds, though, is a liminal gulf of twenty years: the years between the world wars, years during which Woolf and others struggled to represent the world around them as they lived and viewed it. Though Woolf had adopted a political stance at odds with her own economic privilege, she did
not do so without discomfort. Desires to rely upon the sort of access now famously available to one with “a room of her own and five hundred a year” (A Room 98), and conversely to radically change the social and economic orders of England, compete for narrative primacy in much of her later work. This conflict lies just below the surface of “The Leaning Tower,” in which Woolf lists the worth of privilege afforded the Oxford man upon his leaning tower at “seven hundred a year, to be precise,” an amount that results in “several rooms of his own” (173). Between one world and the next, between the heady musings of pre-1914 privilege and the egalitarian vision Woolf did not live long enough to test, lay a difficult, uncomfortable period during which class structures and individual lifestyles changed rapidly, but which was also a time when those old rules governing privilege resisted that change. That group of “leaning tower” writers, from which Woolf curiously excludes herself, were by the effects of war “stung into consciousness—into self-consciousness, into class-consciousness, into the consciousness of things changing, of things falling, of death perhaps to come” (176). Like Woolf herself, whose first modernist experiment, Jacob’s Room, came on the heels of Katherine Mansfield’s remark that the linear romance plot of Night and Day, published in 1919, was “a lie in the soul,” because, post-war, “as artists, we have to take [the war] into account and find new expressions, new moulds for our new thoughts and feelings” (380; 10 November 1919), this group of writers whom Woolf chronicles must operate under the influence of a double consciousness, one that understands the world intimately as it was, but that also sees clearly the changes irrevocably brought upon that world. This division of the world socially, culturally, and historically left Woolf, as well as the subjects of her essay, in positions without definition. No longer balancing upon the same fulcrum of pre-war privilege with regard to economics or narrative stylistics, Woolf worked through formal issue after formal issue in search of a way to express the reality of
what was left after World War I, and of what was rebuilt in place of that solid, more certain civilization of her youth. By the time she composed “The Leaning Tower,” Woolf had already drafted the narrative pastiche of *Between the Acts*, and that novel, her last, puts into fiction the same tension and unease that Woolf cannot hide in her essay. Divisions between the cult of the material and the capital of culture, a theme at the center of “The Leaning Tower,” is also foundational to this novel.

Though when looking at Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts* scholars have been quick to note Woolf’s preoccupation with a group ethic akin to her hopes for the post-war future—with “‘I’ rejected: ‘We’ substituted” (*Diary 5* 135)—in this chapter I will examine ways in which Woolf has woven a trope of consumption into her desire to, and failure to, create an image of a societal “whole,” as well as a composite of the mind and the body. In her novel, Woolf has certainly set forth a representation of community, regardless of how fractured that community might be. Underlying this unified whole, however, is a faultline along its narrative, a division signaling “have” and “have not” and reinforcing English class systems even as they have begun to disintegrate. Woolf was hyperaware of her own position as a classed individual, and her attempt to minimize class divisions helps to define the novel, but at the same time mars its narrative. Woolf cannot escape the more personal, emotional division of class into two: cultural and material, the old values and those newly developed measures of worth and of wealth. While the Pointz Hall pageant is meant to bring together members of every corner of the locality, divisions, especially division with regard to consumption, are inescapable. The pageant itself expresses division: audience separate from performers, townies from the landed gentry, the natural surroundings from theatrical artifice. While “the most marked tendency of leaning tower literature [is] to be whole; to be human” (176), *Between the Acts* is marked by an unrelenting
exposure of the ways in which both society and the individual within it are fashioned not as whole, smooth entities, but rather are results of their very fractures and divisions, and of the rough tissue newly formed at the sites of unity. Woolf foregrounds one specific division early in her narrative in the personae of Isabella Oliver and Mrs. Manresa, women whose relationships to consumption in general—but to food in particular—characterize them as oppositional figures. In a discussion of class performance, Georgia Johnston reads pageant creatress Miss La Trobe as a class-based opposite to Mrs. Manresa, but a consideration of Woolf’s characterization techniques via issues of unity, society, and the body allows for Isa Oliver to emerge as oppositional to the difficult-to-classify Mrs. Manresa. Woolf’s own struggles with class issues emerge through her use of consumption imagery as a means of deciphering class status and structure. The ambivalence of the mind/body division outlined more generally in the previous chapter here takes the shapes of Woolf’s female pair, who together embody the components as well as the problematics of this basic ontological binary.

Through the latter decades of the nineteenth century and until the advent of the first world war, “more people had more to spend for a longer part of their lives than they had ever before. [. . .] Some of these gains were spent on rising rents, but the rest was spent on consumption: first on food—more and with greater variety—then on clothing, household goods and leisure” (Fraser 233). Material consumption steadily increased, becoming part of the leisure profile of most English citizenry. Prior to the onset of the second world war in 1939, when Between the Acts is set, people from all walks of life were held in the sway of a capitalism firmly in place. In December of 1938, Woolf wrote in her diary:

But I have invented a good scheme, putting weight on enjoyment not duty. I think it works. I am going to make out a private budget for the New Year. Clothes; presents; &c: & see if this will give me more money to spend lawfully on myself. Last year [. . .] £348 given or lent, with a philanthropic element [. . .].


This I must control. I must continue A[ngelica]’s 100 and Sophie’s £10. but draw in the other miscellaneous givings. (Diary 5 192)

Though the instinct to assist others is evident here, Woolf also relishes not only her ability to consume, but a certain license to do so. In order to act as a proper middle-class woman, her social role must include some philanthropic tendency (as did her mother’s role), but as a writer whose novels earn her an income, she also is poised to participate in Britain’s consumerism. Woolf is here caught at the nexus of two axes: one of gender relations that require her to perform a certain ascetic self-denial (this gender ideal is further explored in Chapter Three), and one of a modern consumerism that demands she participate in self-fulfillment. Though she still feels the pull of the rarefied capital found within intellectual pursuits, Woolf obviously relishes the idea of succumbing to the material pleasures of consumption. In her diary, as well as in her fiction and essays, a desire to forge change is complicated by the appreciation of the comfort inherent in the old system that bases worth not simply on wealth, but on an individual’s difficult-to-define association with high culture, for which the “petit bourgeois is filled with reverence” (Bourdieu 321; original italics).

In Between the Acts, Isa Oliver and Mrs. Manresa are characterized through their relationships to consumption, but consumption does not simply link them into the economic system. Because in England, most women had historically been denied access to income and assets, their roles as consumers prior to the twentieth century were limited, and middle-class women especially were most often relegated to consumerism via the domestic realm (such as the consumerism related to household appliances and other goods discussed in Chapter One), via the incomes of spouses or of male relations (though after World War One, working-class women stayed home in growing numbers, and were subjected to the same domestic standards and economic limitations as their middle-class counterparts). As a traditionally masculine
enterprise, then, consumption in *Between the Acts* marks the female characters and divides them, creating a binary that underscores the novel in its entirety. Division within the female sex defines the consuming Mrs. Manresa as abhorrent, even while Woolf’s methods of characterization suggest that Mrs. Manresa might exhibit modern, desirable qualities akin to a liberatory feminist ideology. As a rampant consumer of not only food but also of material goods, Mrs. Manresa emerges as the novel’s most embodied character, as the woman most in touch with the material world and with her own physical, corporeal presence. Associated with the dailiness of the human body and of its basic needs, Mrs. Manresa is significant of the material culture at odds with Woolf’s investment in intellectual pursuits.

But how to reconcile the daily, the material, with the inner workings of the mind so innate to Woolfian fiction and characterization? In *Between the Acts*, food and the domestic realm from which it comes provide a material backdrop for a narrative that is ultimately constructed from fragments of language, but the divide between language and materiality deprives the narrative of the synthesis Woolf continually sought. Harriet Blodgett writes that an investigation of Woolf’s “food imagery [. . .] confirms her aesthetic values” (46); although such imagery does benefit the visual qualitites of Woolf’s fiction, her formal sensibilities, in this novel, suffer through her use of food and of a related embodiment as a way to navigate the shifting class structures of the time. The mutual exclusion of granite and rainbow, in this novel seen most readily in the two prominent females, undermines Woolf’s final attempt to produce a work that anchors life’s abstractions to its solid matter and, escaping synthesis, this exclusion also underscores the evident division of class in the novel. Though on some levels Woolf works toward a collective spirit or moves toward a “whole” being beyond binary separations, the split between the material and the mental/spiritual at the level of characterization makes it difficult to
fully embrace Woolf’s attempts at collectivity on other levels. “Real” and cultural capital—in
the forms of consumable goods and language-based knowledge—are awarded to Mrs. Manresa
and to Isa respectively, with the cultural ultimately presented as the more desirable. Bourdieu
suggests a strong link between cultural capital and “ascetic consumption in all areas”; excessive
consumption is “‘vulgar,’” and is “close to that of the working classes” (185). With the realms
of the tangible and intangible, the material and cultural, so linked to consumption in the novel,
representations of class division are essentially linked to consuming practices and, in turn, to
those who consume.

Even with this separation evident in the text, evidence exists, too, that Woolf is
attempting to remedy such a division. The text is rife with the tension created from the tug
between her desire to create a new vision and her middle-class socialization, and in order to
adequately assess Woolf’s final work of fiction, one must look closely at that tension in order to
see the complexity of both the novel and of its author’s worldview. If the solid, the material, is
akin to what Woolf has called life’s “granite,” then this materiality reflects a sort of “truth” with
“an almost mystic power” (“New Biography” 149). By extrapolation, then, the material and the
mental/spiritual—most often placed at opposite ends of some continuum—in this particular
Woolfian theory vie on a level plane. This mysticism of the material promotes what is generally
relegated to a lower sphere as equal to a life of the mind or of the spirit.18 In Between the Acts,
food takes on this spiritualized position: the Oliver larder was a chapel before the Reformation
(32), and what is now repositioned there is imbued with the qualities of the wafer and wine of high
church communion. In this “semi-ecclesiastical apartment,” “hams that hung from hooks [. . .]
butter on a blue slate [. . .] the joint for tomorrow’s dinner” (32) are transubstantiated far beyond
ordinary English fare. They are relics of not only a sanctioned spirituality, but also of folk tales
and traditions associated with the house’s working class. The kitchen workers are wary of the larder, and “heard dead men rolling barrels” there, “saw a white lady walking under the trees” (32-3). Food in its spiritual, mystical incarnations cuts across class boundaries: both high and low religion co-exist in the kitchen beneath Pointz Hall. While in other places in the text food and consumption are obvious markers of class divisions, in this scene the elevation of materiality, in the form of food, to the level of the spirit suggests ways the consuming body can act as a vehicle for class mobility, as indicated by Mrs. Manresa later in the text.19 The complexity of this food/spirit nexus is Woolf’s most successful attempt in Between the Acts at blurring the duality of mind and body, intellectual and material.

Though food, as a mystical substance, in some ways is represented as equal to matters of the spirit, the consumption of that food does not always fare as well in Woolf’s hands; any “whole” entity suggested by the techniques just discussed is quickly torn asunder by issues of eating. This same pull between an interest in food and a distrust of its necessary qualities is paralleled in Woolf’s own life. A recent full-length study by Allie Glenny, Ravenous Identity: Eating and Eating Distress in the Life and Work of Virginia Woolf, is an excellent chronicle of some of the ways in which food signified for Woolf, and Glenny’s chapters each thoroughly explore various theories of how Woolf’s “eating distress” might have affected her creative enterprises.20 Though I do not wish to negate the importance of Glenny’s work, her focus upon themes of anorexia (as well as upon themes of childhood sexual abuse and psychoanalytic parent-child dynamics) does not suit my own current investigation of other ways in which issues of eating and embodiment are present in Between the Acts. While Woolf’s difficult relationships with food (such as her refusal of food during her periods of mental instability and Leonard’s forceful attempts to fatten up the invalid Virginia) have been well documented (and I do think
Glenny’s work is a good place to find a chronology of Woolf’s problematic eating), I prefer to assert that she also had a fondness for food that has often been overlooked by those who ask where the food is in Woolf’s novels, those for whom Glenny writes “the omnipresence of food” in Woolf’s writing “was apparently invisible” (xvi). In a reproduced typescript letter to Grace Higgs, Vanessa Bell’s cook at Charleston Farmhouse, appears Woolf’s own request for the recipe for “the delicious cake which we both enjoy every day at tea” (Higgsens [6]), and her diaries and letters especially are wonderful sources for Woolf’s interest in food from the points of view of both cook and consumer. Leonard Woolf allowed that Virginia had “some complex about food,” but also assured a corespondent that “she really enjoyed food in a perfectly normal way” (557). While I agree with Glenny that there “was a tension in [Woolf] between healthy involvement with food” and a problematic relationship with eating (xiii), I do not wish to pathologize that troubled relationship for the sake of this current argument. Because I find such tensions important to the issues of auto-objectification that are central to my own study, I am interested in the dichotomy of attitudes toward food that might be deemed “healthy” and those that are restrictive, such as those at the root of the comment regarding the wicked cost of made by Julia Stephen and reported by young Virginia in the Hyde Park Gate News (above). Auto-objectification, I believe, is a much broader phenomenon than are anorexia and other diagnosable eating disorders, and thus for the purposes of my argument here food-related issues must be contextualized differently from those addressed in Glenny’s project.

A strong example of the sort of tension I find useful in my own examination can be found throughout Virginia’s juvenilia in the Hyde Park Gate News. Glenny examines the two stories by Woolf that originally appeared in the family newsletter, but reads those early fictions without looking also at the material that can be found in other writings from the same time period. In the
months just before the first installment of Virginia’s “A Cockney’s Farming Experiences”
appeared, her other reports to the Stephen family include many comments seemingly poking fun
at her own enjoyment of food. “Mrs. Worsley on passing by,” notes the youngster on 30 May
1892, “remarked that Miss Virginia had taken in a good supply [at tea]. But apparently Miss
Virginia did not think so for she took another piece of cake as soon as she got home which very
soon she did” (Ad. ms. 70725 47a). At other times, meals are the activities that warrant the
author’s most fervent attentions: “The most delightful part of the entertainment for Miss
Virginia was now begun, namely tea,” she writes later in that issue of the News, and the next
week, “The luncheon was perhaps the most interesting part to our author as it was pie and
strawberry ice” (Ad. ms. 70725 48a). Either the Stephen family attended quite boring events, or
the young Virginia enjoyed her sense of taste as much as most children might. Glenny states, “I
do not think it is going too far to say that, on some level, she was [in “A Cockney’s Farming
Experiences” and “The Experiences of a Pater-familias”] already attempting to explore and
communicate the ways in which her relationship with food had been distorted and her existence
in the body crushed” (13), and although food is certainly a theme in these two stories, Glenny’s
reading of the stories occurs outside the context of the Hyde Park Gate News. The ironic wit of
Virginia Woolf, aged ten, comes through clearly in her writing of the time, and so when Glenny
finds that Woolf’s depiction of a city dweller turned country gentleman, and of his inability to
milk a cow, evidence of “milk starvation” that “can be related back to Virginia’s own early
weaning” (14), I cannot help but think she is missing a point. “I, after a half an hour’s hard
work,” muses Woolf’s cockney narrator, “managed to get about half an inch of milk at the
bottom of the milk jug [. . .] thinking that that was all one cow usually gave” (“Cockney’s” 15).
The writer here has her tongue firmly in her cheek, and far from veiled cries from within a cage
of eating distress, these passages, if anything, indicate the class biases already present in the young Miss Stephen and later explored in writing such as “The Leaning Tower” and Between the Acts.

The tensions identified above and explored differently by Glenny and by me are evident in the representations of eating found in Woolf’s last novel. Once food becomes something to be consumed, any transcendent status it might have been granted through an association with matters of the spirit changes, and is directly affected by the class and gender status of the individual consumer. When Giles Oliver stumbles upon “a snake [. . .] choked with a toad in its mouth,” consumption becomes “birth the wrong way round—a monstrous inversion” (99).22 I agree with Betty Kushen, who sees in such symbols a “defense against separation” (279), but rather than her emphasis upon loss of mother similar to that suggested above by Glenny, I find the figure of the choked snake one representative of the cultural separation of mind from body, and of the discomfort that occurs in response to this reunited dualism. This odd “synthesis” of the novel’s two dominant female character types—she who consumes greedily and she who does not consume—is its own strange whole, but not a pleasant ideal of consumption. The impasse of life and death, of consuming and expelling, casts light on the position of the consuming body in Between the Acts. Consumption beyond reasonable limitations here is the inverse of the birthing act biologically relegated to females as “natural.” So, while food can take on spiritual qualities before it enters the body, that passage is “monstrous” and unnatural, specifically for the female consumer. Unlike the classical body outlined by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, which “has no openings or orifices” and in which “the bourgeois individualist conception of the body [. . .] finds its image and legitimization” (22, original italics), this “grotesque,” consuming snake’s body is representative of a transgressive female body (as well as of those non-ascetic behaviors
associated with the working classes). The digestive “spasm” that makes the toad’s “ribs contract” (99) mimics childbirth’s contractions. Writing on the laws of Leviticus, Julia Kristeva argues how the link between maternity and food prohibition illuminates the transgressive nature of that most “natural” of female processes: “Dietary abomination has [. . .] a parallel—unless it be a foundation—in the abomination provoked by the fertilizable or fertile feminine body (menses, childbirth)” (100). Deviations from the privileged, classical masculine ideal of a body that does not bleed, that does not seep or excrete, are equated: the transgression does not necessarily lie in an act of eating or of giving birth, but is inherent in the cultural valuation of the female body. Ultimately, the acts themselves signify the corporeal experiences—in all their various and messy formulations—of the female body, and the biological difference of that body at direct odds with the acceptably pure body that is codified as a symbol of the socius. The significance of Woolf’s fusion of toad and snake, of consuming and expelling, is clear, as is Giles’s act of killing the coupled snake and toad. Whatever creature is formed when the mind and the body, represented through consumption imagery, are reunited, it is not pleasing to the dominant (masculine, public) culture (a subject to which I will briefly return in the epilogue to this study). The bloodstain from his action remains on Giles’s white shoes throughout the novel, and reinforces this death as “necessary.” The increasing disparity between the oppositional natures of Isabella Oliver and Mrs. Manresa is strengthened in this moment in the text, as is the masculine reaction to an embodied female intellect found so unnatural within Western traditions.

The snake, easily symbolic of Biblical evil, resonates with the lusty consumption of Mrs. Manresa and stereotypical of others in her socioeconomic position. She is “new money,” one of the many who, especially in the period between the world wars in Britain, help to blur the
distinction between the classes as the old system of landed wealth and of aristocracy slouches toward disintegration. Citizens such as the Manresas bring “the old houses up to date, adding bathrooms” (74); they thwart the old order of status based upon cultural capital with the vulgarity of material wealth. Though as Bourdieu points out, one can become educated into the world of cultural capital, there are “different—and ranked—modes of cultural acquisition”: “early or late, domestic or scholastic,” as well as “the classes of individuals” who inhabit such rankings (2). Because education-based “capital is in fact the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school” or other venue in which culture is accumulated (Bourdieu 23), some simple math establishes that those without familial or inherited cultural knowledge, even when they acquire such knowledge through educative methods, will have less access to culture than will those who are raised in an environment that provides them with cultural comprehension. Consumerism, however, remains a threatening social equalizer and, though Mrs. Manresa’s conspicuous wealth is simply a sign of the rise of the consumer and of consumer power, such display is in direct opposition to the understated, socially acceptable wealth of the Oliver family and of the upper-middle class in general. According to Rita Felski, “the growth of consumerism was seen as engendering a revolution of morals, unleashing egotistic and envious drives among the lower orders and women, which could in turn affect the stability of existing social hierarchies” (65). This parallels Joseph Litvak’s theory of sophistication in Strange Gourmets: Sophistication, Theory, and the Novel, in which he establishes grounds for an understanding that “the class politics of sophistication are inseparable from its sexual politics” (3), and that sophistication differs from the bourgeois “distinction” among cultural artifacts elaborated upon by Bourdieu, which “can pass itself off as asexually ‘pure’” (6).
Mitchell Leaska as circa December, 1938), the snake is “gloating, glutton” (Pointz Hall 109),
aligned with unabashed transgression. Since Manresa represents lust to Giles (99), the sin of
gluttony here becomes difficult to separate from sexual sin (this idea strengthened by the image
of the snake) and thus from the idea of the sexualized female body, from Mrs. Manresa and her
consuming persona. Female consumption, like female sexuality, is denoted as transgressive,
and its association with not only sex but also with death here elaborates female consumption into
mortal sin.

For consuming women, “[s]atisfaction is [. . .] impossible because there is no objective
need that is being addressed” (Felski 78) by a rampant consumption. Such a subject can be
considered insatiable, and woman as insatiable or wanton is at the root of a variety of cultural
anxieties about female sexual power and social privilege. With no fixed desire, the female
subject—sexualized via her consumerism—is capable of devouring anything, even the male of
the species. This idea of a devouring woman echoes delusions of *vagina dentata*, of the
castrating woman. Woolf’s Mrs. Manresa, through her very nomenclature as well as through her
consuming activity, is one of these devourers. Though her name can sound like a punnish
allusion to her ability to excite a man to erection, it also has additional connotations. The word
“raze,” a near homonym of the final two syllables of “Manresa,” indicates demolition; “the
Manresa,” as Woolf’s Isa calls her (110), does more than titillate. Her very position as a
consuming female subject, as an agent of destabilized potential, makes her one of that feared
club of “man-eaters.” As an unknown quantity due to her position as a consuming female
subject, Mrs. Manresa is nearly a caricature of what some males fear from women: social and
cultural annihilation. Since Mrs. Manresa is the product of a female imagination, however, this
sex-based site of potential anxiety is not entirely accurate. The fear of the oversexed consuming
woman is also intimately connected with middle-class fears of being displaced from the socioeconomic order through the class mobility occurring so rapidly between the world wars.

Woolf’s construction of Mrs. Manresa as a consuming subject helps to position the character as a progressive female, even as that construction also emphasizes class issues. Mrs. Manresa, though ultimately problematic, is refreshingly untraditional; both her shifting class status and her sexuality work to construct her as a woman unfettered by the mores of what had traditionally been known as the English middle class, especially of the class represented by the Olivers and by Pointz Hall. This construction is provocative because Mrs. Manresa is middle class in some respects, such as income and consumer capacity, but as a woman who has acquired her cultural capital but was not raised as a middle-class citizen, her class position is mutable. Johnston views Mrs. Manresa’s class status as performative, and suggests that Manresa flaunts middle-class morality but still “needs the strictures of class to remain in place so that she can oppose them,” which “knowingly and paradoxically strengthens her peers’ support of them.” She uses that performance role purposefully to promote her own ends” (64). Whether performative within the text or an effect of Woolf’s characterization, however, Mrs. Manresa’s sexualized class position is very much in line with the sort of long-standing social codification of the working class with their embodiment (such as that discussed with respect to Chadwick and his sanitation report in Chapter One). In addition, her role of consumer implicates her physicality, and as an overtly embodied female, Mrs. Manresa surpasses the more usual characterizations of women based on gender codes rather than on biology or corporeality. Woolf’s characterization of Mrs. Manresa is based upon physical acts and bodily effects.

When first introduced into the narrative, Mrs. Manresa is immediately associated with food, with the picnic lunch she and William Dodge have brought to the country. Her lunch,
complete with champagne for which she has not even brought along a corkscrew, so used is she to being waited upon (another allusion to her class performance and unstable classification), is a frivolous meal, the meal of a woman from a certain class and of a certain disposition. Her reputation as a woman who “strolled the garden at midnight in silk pyjamas, had the loud speaker playing jazz, and a cocktail bar” (39) precedes her; she is a known creature of license and of luxury, but tainted as distinctly nouveau riche. Her role as a voracious consumer is readily apparent: her fingers are ringed, she is “over-dressed for a picnic” (41). She is, at base, vulgar, much like Monsieur and Madame Louvois in Woolf’s unpublished sketch “Waiting for Dejeuner,” who are oblivious to the world around them until their “eyes lit with lustre; for down on the marble topped table in front of them the sleek harried [waiter] slapped a plate of tripe” (MHP Ad. 24). Mrs. Manresa is, too, “over-sexed” (41), and the link here between her expression of consumption and of sexuality define her as a creature of the body. Her faith comes from the material world, from the materiality of the everyday: “had she not complete faith in flesh and blood?” (39) This faith finds a genesis in the food of their luncheon, echoing the divinity of the pantry and its contents. Through Mrs. Manresa, the spirit is made solid, tangible in the form of food. Though she is not a working-class woman, she places herself “on a level with [. . .] the servants” (45), and her class performance is part of the world of the body, of verbs, of physical action stereotypically designated as the working-class world.

Mrs. Manresa is the last in a line of Woolf’s more experimentally drawn women characters and is, I think, the most challenging of her “radical” females. In Manresa, Woolf implicates the idea of a physical body moreso than in any other of such characters. In 1931 Woolf had hoped to create “an entire new book [. . .] about the sexual life of women” (Diary 46), but the result of that impulse, The Years, eventually only hints at such a physical, sexual
existence for women. Her ambivalence toward her own body and sexuality, as well as acceptable codes for novels of the day, had before Between the Acts given the idea of “the body” only cameo appearances upon the Woolfian landscape, but those earlier glimpses inform Woolf’s characterization of Mrs. Manresa. Florinda in Jacob’s Room is an overtly sexualized female, and Eleanor, in The Years, has knowledge of birth control. Perhaps more closely connected to the idea of Mrs. Manresa, however—a character whose class and sexual status position her outside the generally accepted region of the “feminine”—is the fictionalized Ellen Terry found in Woolf’s Freshwater. A kiss from Ellen’s lover, really her sexual awakening, causes her to think of “beef steaks; beer [. . .] crowds of people; hot chestnuts” (29). Just a few years before Woolf brought together food and sexuality in the character of Mrs. Manresa, a similar way of indicating the importance of female physicality can be found in the character of Ellen. Woolf’s later interest in Terry at the end of her life, simultaneous with her drafting and revising of Between the Acts, may indeed inform her characterization of Mrs. Manresa.

If Mrs. Manresa were advanced as the sole or even the major protagonist of Between the Acts, then Woolf would have been forging truly new territory by creating such an embodied character based upon imagery of consumption and consumerism. Female characters, perhaps especially in women’s fiction, were before the twentieth century often drawn from characteristics related more to gender than to sex, more to social than to biological factors, and Helen Dunmore notes that Woolf’s use of images related to fertility or fecundity rarely occurs when she addresses the subject of the body, but instead appear in Woolf’s fiction to express a life of the mind (“Virginia Woolf” 7). A woman like Mrs. Manresa, so connected to the body and to its pleasures, its comforts, would have been a distinctly different female character in a generalized “tradition” of British women’s writing had she been put forward solo and
unapologetically. If she had done so, however, Woolf would have been abandoning her own place in such a tradition, as well as her own bourgeois point of view which, regardless of her professions of allegiance with the working classes, presented her with political and literary challenges. Instead, Woolf has placed Manresa alongside Isabella Oliver, a character far removed from the physical realm of the body. Ironically, Isa, who is wife and mother, avoids implications of sexuality and maternity through an almost entirely language-driven characterization that negates the physical being readers are not requested to acknowledge. Though both women are constructed in terms that actually move sexuality from the central position it often has in representations of women—Mrs. Manresa through a displacement onto consumption, Isa via a lack of embodiment—associations with consumption mark them as distinct from one another. If Mrs. Manresa resides in the physical world of consumables, then Isa is purely of the psychical realm of language, of poetry, of the ephemeral.

An early scene in *Between the Acts* links language to food, but in a way that undercuts the materiality of the physical world; reality is questioned here in a manner that is anti-phenomenological. While some consumables have a specific “shelf life” and cannot exist forever, language, Woolf reminds us, can be quite durable. Words, for some (for Isa), are more solid than the material, more long-lasting. As Pointz Hall is introduced to readers, nursemaids walk along its terrace “rolling words, like sweets on their tongues; which, as they thinned to transparency, gave off pink, green, and sweetness” (10). The next scene introduces Isa Oliver, whose body is acknowledged once but then is narratively extinguished as she slips quickly into the poeticism that characterizes her throughout the novel. “‘Abortive,’ was the word that expressed her” (15): both one who terminates and, strangely, one who is only a partial,
“aborted” being, a disembodied woman characterized by intellect rather than through her material presence or her actions.

Woolf proclaimed herself a dismal poet, yet she created whole poems for Isa to murmur as she makes her way through the novel’s June day. Isa’s association with language and with poetics, rather than with the stuff of the body (including the body’s own excesses), purifies her in a way that simple abstinence, whether from sexual pursuits or from a more general consumption, cannot. A negative image of Mrs. Manresa, Isa seems to live on language rather than on food, expelling in excess the effects of her textual consumption. Her expulsion, however, in no way implicates the “negative,” bodily excesses typically associated with food consumption.

Language is nourishment for Isa; books—language—are a means of “staving off possible mind-hunger” (16), although books are not necessarily the sole conduit of language in Between the Acts. Though she is “[b]ook-shy” (19), Isa is a fount of language—she does not take words in so much as create them. This internalization of the type of cultural education available to a woman of a more established middle class divides Isa from Mrs. Manresa economically in the same way as does consumption. The sort of class solidarity based upon a “common readership” like the one Woolf suggests in “The Leaning Tower” is problematized by Woolf’s use of language as it connects with Isa. Though reading and food consumption can both be classified, via Certeau, as socially subversive “tactics,” reading in a Bourdieuan sense provides far more cultural capital than does eating as a general practice (before the issue of “taste” or “distinction” becomes involved) because it is an educative practice. Isa’s rarefied relationship to language, rather than to material goods such as food, solidifies her class position. The idea that knowledge comes from within, rather than from the external world of books, newspapers, etc., separates Isa’s “inherited” knowledge from that of the everyday English citizen who likely gains knowledge
through more common routes. Newspapers contain facts, but facts—like food, like tangible and material goods—are not language. Facts can be imparted via language, and yet are not discursive, a dichotomy illustrated by the all-too-material fact of rape about which Isa reads in the daily paper (20). Isa herself seems to straddle that line between discourse and physicality. Though she is a “fact”—a mother, a woman, a wife, a hostess of pageants—she is, centrally, both a producer of and a product of language. Her character has nothing “solid” upon which to base itself, as that of Mrs. Manresa has with its consumables. Isa escapes the body’s horror by “becoming” language.

By avoiding the trappings of the body, Isa in turn avoids definition through her sexuality, especially when compared to Mrs. Manresa. Though she is a mother of two, her representation via linguistic, rather than material, conventions allows for her characterization to eschew the maternal role. As a sexual being, she is neutered by her lack of embodiment and by contrast with Mrs. Manresa. Isa imagines herself “‘in love’” with Rupert Haines, the married gentleman farmer, but her interest in him is romantic, not sexual. Her interest in “his ravaged face [. . .] his silence, passion” (5) helps to construct Haines as closer to the romantic visions of a Rochester or a Heathcliff than to a real, contemporary (and accessible) love interest. Isa feels connected to Haines through language more so than through any physical association: “the words he said [. . .] could so attach themselves to a certain spot in her; and thus lie between them” (15). Haines’s “words” conjure up an image of an “aeroplane propeller” in a way that replicates female orgasm—“faster, faster, it whizzed, whirred, buzzed, till all the flails became one flail and up soared the plane away and away” (15)—but this hint of sexuality is so removed from the body as to render it still another romantic flight of fancy. She is mentally excited by Haines’s language, rather than sexually attracted to his physicality. Whereas Mrs. Manresa is presented through her
physicality as a sexual entity, Isa’s sexual nature is withdrawn, hidden within the realm of poetic conventions: image, metaphor, synecdoche.

Contrary to this mostly imagined, unrequited emotion that Isa feels for Haines, a more significant bond forms between her and William Dodge, Mrs. Manresa’s fellow traveler. Isa’s husband might whisk Mrs. Manresa away to the greenhouse for what can only be assumed to be a sexual, or at least physical encounter, but Isa’s companion for a visit to the greenhouse is the homosexual Dodge. Isa might be drawn to Haines, but it is Dodge whom she can actively seek out and address: “they talked as if they had known each other all their lives [. . .] . Weren’t they, though, conspirators?” (114). Dodge acknowledges Isa’s ability to open up to him, and ascribes it to a woman’s ability to freely express herself to a homosexual man (113). With an understanding of Woolf’s characterization of Isa as incorporeal, however, this pull toward the sexually “safe” William Dodge takes on further meaning. As a disembodied creature of language, and as an ethereal female figure whose sexuality has not been developed within the narrative, Isa cannot accost Haines, cannot take action with regard to her husband’s wandering attentions. Without the vehicle of a fully constructed body, Isa is denied action and agency. She may have an active life of the mind, might speak in complex streams of poetry, but she cannot act on a physical, material level because she has not been characterized as an agent, as an actor in her own narrative. Her connection with Dodge is an example of this: though they exist beside each other as physical beings, their physicalities are unnecessary for their communion. Isa and William share ideas, share language, rather than any physical activity, including the fellowship of food, which is a part of his friendship with the embodied Mrs. Manresa.32

Though Isa’s lack of consumption is a critical aspect of what I refer to as her “disembodiment,” I do not mean to imply that Isa is an anorectic or that her eating is
“disorderly.” Rather, I believe it is more important to move beyond pathology in order to examine the methods of characterization used by Woolf, and importantly to look closely at the effects of such characterization. One can easily assume that Isa eats regular meals; her body is “like a bolster” (5) and “[t]hick of waist, large of limb [. . .] she never looked like [. . .] one of the beautiful young men who adorned the weekly papers” (16). Here Isa’s body size is identified, as is an implication of womanhood (she is not lithe or slim like a pretty young man might be). The fact that she is not the image of wasting away is important here—my point is not body size, but body image and representation of the body. The image of Isa, over the course of the novel’s progression, leaves behind this thick body and, narratively speaking, disinherits it. Our image of Isa is contingent upon her own projected body image, which is severely underdeveloped. The fact that she is not shown to be eating is really only noticeable when Isa is paired with Mrs. Manresa, with a female character whose essence is created from the idea of consumerism and eating. Woolf does not emphasize the amount of food eaten or not, but uses consumption to concretize the differences between these two classed individuals.

Like Isa, Mrs. Manresa is a fleshy woman, as might be assumed from her intake of tarts and cream and cake. The text states plainly, “she was stout” (42), but Mrs. Manresa’s nature is explicated through her physicality, through her body and its flesh, just as Isa’s “nature” is made clear through an inverse use of the body. Soon after her arrival at Pointz Hall, Mrs. Manresa announces to all assembled that once in the country she becomes physically free: “‘I take off my stays [. . .] and roll in the grass’” (42). This impulsive act, though perhaps a bit scandalous for luncheon conversation, underscores her body and her own image of her body. Woolf is clear, when it comes to how readers should perceive Mrs. Manresa, that her body is a primary source of her character. The place of the body in the make-up of female agency is clear, as well, since
Mrs. Manresa “had given up dealing with her figure and thus gained freedom” (42). “Dealing” here, though, does not equal dieting. Compared to Isa, whose physical limitations—not her physical size—in turn limit her ability to act on so many levels, Mrs. Manresa and her verbal, physical, and sexual agency directly reinforces the idea that a woman must have access to her own body unfettered by social and cultural constraints in order to freely access the world around her. Recognizing that Isa’s and Mrs. Manresa’s bodies are similar in physical dimensions is important for a consideration of the ways in which these bodies are or are not emphasized within the text and through methods of characterization. Unlike Isa, Mrs. Manresa revels in her embodiedness and thus projects a picture of an embodied character upon readers’ imaginations (this concept will be considered further, with regard to other texts, in Chapter Five).

It is interesting to note how Woolf’s depictions of Mrs. Manresa changed over the course of her writing *Between the Acts*. Though Isa remains much the same character throughout the typescripts of the novel, Mrs. Manresa is, if anything, even *more* embodied in earlier drafts than in the final, published version. Woolf worked carefully with Mrs. Manresa’s portrayal and, too, with how issues of embodiment were to be parts of that portrayal. Mitchell Leaska’s edition of the “early” typescript of the novel[33] shows a more decadent, quite physical Mrs. Manresa:

“I take off my stays,” Mrs. Manresa said (here she pressed her hands to her billowing sides—she was stout) “and roll in the grass. Roll!—you’ll believe that . . .” She laughed roguishly. Her figure gave her immense freedom. It was so large that nothing could be done about it; she [could] <had ceased to> take [no] <any> responsibility, none whatsoever, for her figure. (*Pointz Hall* 66, Leaska’s editing symbols)

Responsibility here might imply more than attempts to rein in the flesh and control the body’s size. Mrs. Manresa is also alleviated of the responsibility for any of her own body’s actions, including transgressive actions. Her sexuality, and her acceptance of her own life on terms outside those accepted in polite society, is something she need not be accountable for. She is not
assimilated into the middle class position afforded her by her husband’s income. Though Woolf obviously toned down such an expression of bodily abandon by the time her final draft had been crafted, this play with body imagery and with body image cannot be accidental or even incidental. The pair of women in the text—Isa and Mrs. Manresa—create a dichotomy of embodiment and consumption, and allow Woolf to navigate the difficulties of a shifting class structure.

Though Mrs. Manresa works as a central figure in *Between the Acts*, she is also its central problem. Given Woolf’s awareness of her own class status, Mrs. Manresa is both an enrichment of and anathema to *Between the Acts* and, eventually, to its narrative structure. To create a character such as Mrs. Manresa as representative of some new world order (vis-à-vis her class) is not only to malign the old order, but also to jeopardize Woolf’s own relationship to the “two worlds” discussed in “The Leaning Tower.” Though Woolf is highly critical of that older, more Victorian order, as a solidly middle-class woman she is also unsure of her place in the next, classless world. She asks, “how can you altogether abuse a society that is giving you, after all, a very fine view and some sort of security?” (“Leaning Tower” 171)—especially when no security is offered up from any other quarter, whether established or still to come. Woolf might have cast herself as an outsider in her speech to working-class readers, but she understands the difficulty of real solidarity with people of the working class. Herself in a tower—if one that perhaps leans farther than those of her male contemporaries—Woolf knows that the “discomfort” and “anger” raised by one’s realizing the implications of such a position can be a challenge (171). Zwerdling addresses “the impediment to a genuine left-wing commitment among people of [Woolf’s] class,” and explains how for Woolf, this was compounded by her understanding of “how
essential her capital had been in making it possible to follow her artistic vocation” (105-6).

Louie Mayer, who worked for the Woolfs, recalls that “Mr. Woolf explained that their day was very carefully planned, almost hour by hour, and it was important nothing should happen that could alter their routine” (Noble 154), an incredible luxury made possible not only by the Woolfs’s earned income, but also by the capital Virginia brought with her into the marriage. Both subject of and to the classed society of which she is a member, she can rail against it, but she must also accede to the privileges that society grants her. In her final novel she attempts both, but her attempt is undermined by her use of a divided female protagonist. The two women, as opposites across the boundary established through consumption imagery and innuendo, only serve to reify the hegemonic class structures and sex roles that Woolf desired to break away from so strongly later in her life.

Regardless of such a desire, as a daughter of upper-middle-class parents, Woolf would have been used to a certain brand of late-Victorian domestic, as well as economic, privilege: her mother, Julia (and later, her sisters Stella and Vanessa), was responsible for the day-to-day running of the household both at 22 Hyde Park Gate and at Talland House, where the Stephen family summered for many years; however, all the work necessary for the running of such a household was ultimately the occupation of others. Popularly envisioned class stratification lent itself to the ideology of domestic service. Diane Gillespie writes that “young girls going into service were taught by books like Advice to Young Women Going to Service and periodicals like Servants’ Magazine that God instituted the social hierarchy” (204). Just as religious doctrine assured the position of the royal family, so did it help to assure the continuance of social classes and of a culture of domestic work such as that already elaborated upon in Chapter One. The English middle class had such a stronghold on domestic ideology that the idea of the middle-
class household metonymically stood in for the idea of “home.” Woolf’s mother, Julia Stephen, addressed the concept of domestic arrangements in two essays (unpublished in her lifetime), and her association of “home” with her own home cannot be too far from a broader English mindset. “The comfort of an English home,” she notes in “The Servant Question,” an essay of circa 1893, “has been a proverb. And this comfort is due in great measure to our servants and the fact that they are not only working to make the home comfortable but [are] part of that comfort themselves” (252; Gillespie’s brackets). Such a domestic solipsism negates the idea of English homes other than those like the Stephen’s and others of their class. This assumption, though it appears to have been written in a benign fashion, certainly implies the primacy of a passive domestic economy, of a domesticity provided to and for one rather than by one. Work—invisible, discounted—is not part of the domestic sphere, but instead the end result is valued: a clean home, a balanced account book, well-prepared meals.

This “English home” was the sort of home, the sort of domestic set-up, that Virginia Woolf was raised in and very much raised to duplicate. Even though Woolf could understand the poor conditions that her family’s servants had to endure, and even as her social consciousness later was raised to a level where she could understand the inequities of the English class system, she was still an indoctrinated member of its privileged middle class. Woolf wrote to Ethel Smyth in 1941 about the trouble of cleaning rugs: “I’d no notion, having always a servant, of the horror of dirt” (Letters 478). In “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf recalls the servants’ quarters at 22 Hyde Park Gate as a frightening, almost viscerally disconcerting place:

the basement; in the servants’ sitting room. It was at the back; very low and very dark [. . .]. One could hardly see [. . .] anything [. . .] for the creepers hung down in front of the window [. . .]. I remember the wood cupboard in the passage [. . .] and once when I rummaged there for a stick to whittle, two eyes glowered in a corner, and Sophie [the cook] warned me that a wild cat lived there [. . .]. The basement was a dark insanitary place for seven maids to live in. “It’s like hell,”
one of them burst out to my mother as we sat at lessons in the dining room.”  
(116)  

This image parallels the experience of Hannah Cullwick, whose chronicle of her own service in a nineteenth-century scullery allows us further definition of this kind of “hell.” Even the woman now noted for her enjoyment of difficult and dirty manual labor was appalled by the conditions in one middle-class kitchen:

The kitchen was very low down underground—the area was latticed over in front & one could barely see without gas & I wasn’t allow’d on any errands at all. [. . .] the scullery was very dirty & all under the tables was inches thick of solid mud & the passages & stairs too & so dark in every place I could see to do nothing without a light, that I could not think I should ever feel happy in it [. . .].” (56)

Though middle-class families desired well-prepared meals and variety in their breakfasts, lunches, dinners, they also for the most part desired only the meals and nothing of the preparation that went into what was eaten. Just as our contemporaries most often like their meat (when they like it) wrapped in cellophane and far removed from the idea of the slaughterhouse, so did Victorian families—at least those who could afford the luxury. The labor and methods of food preparation, though part of a middle-class woman’s “official” domain, was far from part of her everyday existence.

Sophie Farrell, the Stephen family cook through generations, was an integral part of family life while Virginia was a child; Woolf called her the head of the “‘denizens of the kitchen.’”  
(35) “At dinner time,” Woolf recollects, “we would let down a basket on a string, and dangle it over the kitchen window [. . .] . If she were in a good temper, the basket would be drawn in, laden with something from the grown-ups’ dinner” (“A Sketch” 132). Though Woolf recalls Sophie fondly as a part of her childhood memories, Sophie was clearly of a netherworld below stairs and performed the tasks that allowed the family to eat and to exist in comfort.  
(36) While the family was allowed to act as consumers, they were also able to ignore the rest of the
social food chain, notably those who undertook the cookery and preparation, including such
tasks as disemboweling fish and poultry. This reliance upon others for sustenance produced
additional generations of middle-class individuals who reaffirmed the class structure even when
they, as Leonard and Virginia Woolf did, eschewed that structure otherwise. In her domestic
life, as becomes apparent in her essay “The Leaning Tower,” Woolf’s class identity and her
desire for collectivity were in direct conflict, as were her husband’s similar inclinations.

Virginia records in her diary that Leonard is “hard on people; especially on the servant class [. .
.] exacting; despotic” (Diary 4 326).37 Though both Woolfs were politically progressive with
regard to economics and theoretical issues of class, they none the less could not shed fully their
middle-class socialization.

In Between the Acts, the theme of food consumption is anchored early in the narrative in
scenes of food preparation and through the construction of Pointz Hall’s cook, Mrs. Sands.
Perhaps modeled on Sophie Farrell, Mrs. Sands is an example of pragmatism and of authority.
She dislikes the fact that the younger women who work beneath her fall prey to superstition and
other folk tales, as mentioned above, and her manner is no-nonsense. Woolf’s description of
Mrs. Sands’s preparation of the luncheon filets of sole is perhaps the most detailed passage of
Woolf’s oeuvre with regard to cookery. Though the boeuf en daube of To the Lighthouse is one
of the most often cited food-related passages from Woolf’s writings,38 readers are never privy to
its preparation or even to its ingredients; the dish simply appears as if from some great beyond.
Mrs. Sands and her filelets are explicitly represented, and add to the early portion of the novel and
to an understanding of the Oliver household: “Mrs. Sands took an egg from the brown basket
full of eggs; some with yellow fluff sticking to the shells; then a pinch of flour to coat the semi-
transparent slips; and a crust from the great earthenware crock full of crusts. Then, returning to
the kitchen, she made those quick movements at the oven, cinder raking, stoking, damping [. . .]” (33). This description is notable for several reasons. The fluff sticking to the egg’s shell is a reminder of the less than pristine origins of most meals, and the crock of crusts—where old bread is saved and stored for use in later meals, perhaps in puddings or to bread filets of sole—is a homely indication of food’s versatility and of the thrift involved in much of traditional housekeeping (and advocated in the 1877 manual *Household Management*). Each step through preparing the mid-day meal here is believable and appears to be based upon a different understanding of cooking than do Woolf’s earlier attempts at describing scenes of domestic labor.

It may be that later in Woolf’s life, she was actually more privy to such rituals of preparation due to the longer lengths of time she and Leonard spent in Rodmell, Sussex, at Monk’s House, where they often stayed but eventually decided to reside at in order to escape the bombing of London once the second world war was underway. Though Monk’s House was cherished by both Virginia and Leonard, it is a relatively small home. Its kitchen would have been central to Woolf’s life during her stays in Rodmell simply due to its proximity—likely a nearer proximity than that of any kitchen previously known to her. The real, daily business of food preparation, more accessible to Woolf during her increased stays in the country, eventually found its way into her work. Of course, for the most part Woolf was not actually engaged in this preparation. Virginia and Leonard kept their own staff, if a smaller and more pragmatically designed staff than that kept by Virginia’s parents. Though Virginia received pleasure from cooking, until quite late in life she did not perform her own food production on any regular basis. According to Hermione Lee:

[The Woolf’s] initial relationship to the village was as employers—as the Stephens had been at St. Ives, thirty or forty years before. At first, when Nelly
and Lottie [their domestic workers in London] did not come down with them, Mrs. Dedman, or the carter’s wife, Mrs. Thomsett [. . .] came in to cook. Later, Annie [Thomsett] “did” for them regularly; Louie Everest, a local girl, replaced her in 1934. (424-25)

Mabel Haskins, a London maid-of-all-work, also spent time in Rodmell and was additional kitchen help. Until a long-standing difficulty with Leonard drove away Haskins, Woolf relied upon others for her daily bread. In October of 1940, when Haskins left the Woolf’s employ, Virginia became quite active in her own kitchen, perhaps for the first time. “The delight of being without a maid in the house is such that I don’t mind an hour’s cooking—indeed its a sedative. I’ve been bottling honey,” Woolf relates in a letter to Ethel Smyth (Letters 434). Diary entries and letters such as this one exhibit a fondness and aptitude for the undertaking, but also a limit to Woolf’s culinary abilities: “Economy on Mabel means less variety in food” (344). Of course, this smaller household menu was further complicated by wartime rationing (a subject I’ll explore further in the following chapter).

Woolf’s characterization of Mrs. Sands might have benefited from her more intimate connection with the kitchen and with cooking while at Monk’s House and at work on Between the Acts, but the position of the cook, as a domestic worker, is still quite clearly expressed in the novel. Lucy Swithin descends to the kitchen to prepare sandwiches for those busy decorating for the pageant and, set next to the working class Mrs. Sands, she magnifies the differences in class distinctions through both her (lack of) familiarity with the ways of the kitchen and her obvious displacement there. The sandwiches are a mixed lot—“some neat, some not” (35)—and point to the lack of ability Mrs. Swithin, even in old age, has been able to acquire when compared with Mrs. Sands, who assumingly has created the neat ones. Lucy’s connection to food is tenuous at best; this is exposed in her thoughts while slicing and compiling these refreshments. The idea of bread (more so than the actual bread) makes her mind wander “from yeast to alcohol; so to
fermentation; so to inebriation; so to Bacchus; and lay under purple lamps in a vineyard in Italy “
(34). Mrs. Sands, in opposition to Lucy’s ephemeral quest, “heard the clock tick; saw the cat; noted a fly buzz; and registered [. . .] a grudge she mustn’t speak against people making work in the kitchen” (Between the Acts 35). Lucy desires to do something kind for the staff who are decorating for the pageant, but in doing so forgets that she is making extra work for others. Her understanding of the kitchen is lacking on many levels, and importantly on the level of the interpersonal. Woolf seems to have grown to understand this as she worked on the passage. In the early typescript of the novel, when Lucy departs with the sandwiches and “assumed, without a flicker of doubt, that Jane the kitchenmaid would follow after” with the lemonade (35), Woolf has Mrs. Sands in solid approval: “<an assumption for which Mrs. Sands respected her>” (Pointz Hall 60). This line, though added after the initial lines were drafted, disappears in the later typescript. Mrs. Sands is certainly confined to her station in Between the Acts, but Woolf eventually included in the novel the difference between respect and deference. This revision is indicative of the sort of social and political conscience Woolf attempts in “The Leaning Tower.”

A novel concerned with issues of modernity, Between the Acts is also fraught with throwbacks to the older traditions, such as Mrs. Sands’s kitchen and the representations of the domestic arrangements between employer and employee. The nineteenth century is alive and well below stairs at Pointz Hall, though above ground the modern world is fast approaching, bringing with it a new social order that is expressed as both welcomed and utterly confusing. The anxiety produced by Woolf’s narrative of modern consumption appears throughout the text as a series of small, almost unnoticeable repetitions, most often a word repeated three times. When these brief repetitions are examined as a series of formal repetitions, however, the incidental takes on new meaning, and the eventual falling short of Woolf’s attempts at a
narrative of unification can emerge. *Between the Acts* has been discussed as a novel of time, and
time certainly does work on many levels throughout the novel. David Higdon calls time in this
novel “polymorphous time” (124) because of the constant juxtaposition of past, present, and
future, and because of Woolf’s self-conscious play with time and with historicity. Higdon,
though, has missed this less obvious part of time’s structure in the novel. Beneath the superficial
structure of the novel, time becomes repetition, and time’s trajectory ultimately implicates the
idea of modernity, and thus of the disembodiment implicit in the novel’s conceptualization of the
modern. Time becomes machinated, modern, and its path should lead readers, lead a society-at-
large, down that path toward the “new world” suggested in “The Leaning Tower.” Through the
mediation of the modern, though, time in turn becomes tainted by the idea of modern
consumption and by extension with what Mrs. Manresa comes to represent in the novel (class
mobility, sexual transgression). Rather than follow the trajectory to the utopian future Woolf on
some levels desires, the narrative becomes derailed by the horror of bodily avarice associated
with earlier eras, and by the aversion to the uncertain realities of class mobility. *Pace* George
Lukács, who finds that “In the [genre of the] novel, meaning is separated from life, and hence the
essential from the temporal” (122), in this novel it is precisely the connection of the essential
materiality of life with the temporal that defines the narrative and aborts its original destination.

Like the English history portrayed in Miss La Trobe’s pageant and like the accepted
course of chronological history in general, the “history” traced by Woolf’s repetition follows a
linear pattern, and begins with the early, primordial age of a land before time. Early on, as a
narrative of an English system in place as long as anyone need remember, this narrative is also
one of stasis, driven by a rhythm of “beat, beat, beat,” the slow percussion that will, through
mutable repetitions, drive the narrative onward toward modern culture. One of the novel’s
backdrops is H. G. Wells’s *An Outline of History*, which Lucy Swithin reads in order to imagine “the entire continent [. . .] populated [. . .] by elephant-bodied, seal-necked, heaving surging, slowly writhing [. . .] barking monsters” (8), and the earliest segments of this subtext of serial time is equally “prehistoric”: “if no human being ever came, never, never, never, the books would be mouldy, the fire out and the tortoiseshell butterfly dead on the pane” (17). The narrative’s “beat” echoes the life force of a world before the advent of human beings, before the sense of history as progression that drives the narrative closer to its own surface, at the level of plot and of the parody of the pageant, which outlines English history. Woolf’s repetition here speaks to what might be called a sense of “pure” time, time not manufactured by the human mind, with its clocks and its calendars, but regulated by the ebb and flow of a natural world ordered upon its own rhythmic turns. Pages later, Pointz Hall is “[e]mpty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent [. . .] singing of what was before time was” (36). Beat; never; empty; silent. Time, as a concept of human construction, as a “modern” concept, is not part of this hushed repetition. The stillness of the pattern, thus far, lulls readers into an understanding of tradition and ritual both within this home and without, the estate simply standing in for the larger state and for the ways in which England has run its course and protected its hierarchies, perhaps most noticeably among which is the stratification of the country’s class structure.

Immediately following this last repetition (which ends that particular scene), the narrative introduces Mrs. Manresa, who represents not only the consumption issues I have already discussed at length, but who here also introduces a different beat that will remain throughout most of the rest of the novel. Regardless of the quietude of the country, of the foundational England upheld by the Oliver household, “it was essential. There must be society” (37). Into the ooze of natural time enters the larger aspect of the social, and here is where this series of
repetitions becomes most interesting. The stasis and the change alluded to here connect the juxtaposition of prehistoric and social/historical time to that of the two social traditions—the old and the new orders—represented by the Olivers and the Manresas, particularly the traditions of consumption implicated by the two representative women from each household. The entrance of Mrs. Manresa, whom the narrative begins here to link thoroughly to the idea of modernity, not only changes the sense of narrative time (from natural to artificial), but also accelerates time. With the introduction of this “new” definition of the social, embodied in Mrs. Manresa and magnified by that embodiment evident in the luncheon scene, time pulls the narrative forward at a consistently quickening pace.

The entrance of a paradoxical modernity, in the form of the Manresa, into the novel not only heralds a shift in time and in sequence, but also helps to create a unique structure out of these repeated, fragmented word trios. The earliest of the repetitions occurs on page sixteen of the Harcourt Brace Jovanovich edition of the novel, with the next two series fragments, “empty” and “silent,” occurring on page thirty-six. The number of pages between the novel’s opening and the first fragment is almost the same as that of the pages between the first and second groups of fragments. Once the shift in focus takes place from the presocial to modern society, and importantly, once readers pass through the luncheon scene and its exposition of Mrs. Manresa as a consuming agent of dubious class distinction, the next fragment appears, on page seventy-three; again, this is a doubling of the number of pages between fragments. Thus far, the trios have been doled out in nearly perfectly increasing measures of narrative sequencing. Once the luncheon scene is over, however, the next fragment offered bears the effects of modernized time: “Hurry, hurry, hurry [. . .] Hurry, hurry, hurry” (73-4). The fragment is repeated twice,
emphasizing the shift in the way these fragments are used and in the ways in which the implication of time has jumped drastically into a modern tempo.

For the next many pages, beginning on page seventy-six, the fragments come in rapid-fire succession and, through a connection with the machinery that helps to define our industrialized, modern age, these fragments emphasize the pull of the modern on the reader as well as on a larger society. The narrative of the pageant, and of those taking part in the larger plot of the novel, is marked by the “chuff, chuff, chuff” of a gramophone that “buzzed in the bushes” (76), the machine in the ghost of the ephemeral world that indicates natural time and unquestioned traditions. Each break in the pageant, and thus each movement through the progression of English history as displayed in the pageant’s scenes, is punctuated by the mechanical repetition of the gramophone’s motor moreso than by the music emanating from this machine. Modern machination and the eminence of modern time are next connected by the “tick, tick, tick” (82) of the needle at the end of each record: now the machine creates the cadence of chronological history, for the pageant and for the novel’s inhabitants. In fact, by intermission, this tick is what connects the members of the audience (154); the modernity of social, constructed time is the only thing that seems able to maintain any sense of community, of collectivity, for those present at the pageant.

Early in her introductory explanation of her ideas on the complex of the “everyday” and the English serial novel, Laurie Langbauer states that life’s everyday occurrences help to create “a certain rhythm and repetitiveness to life like the hum and tap of a sewing machine” (2). Though seemingly an incidental statement made as she initiates her readers into an understanding of her own working definitions, the analogy implicates the intimate rhythms of life’s minutiae, and the rhythms those small qualities help to create and to sustain a life. Routine
and ritual are part of what maintains life in some coherent fashion; they are beneath the catalogue of “facts” that make up the everyday. Life’s pattern and tempo, then, are punctuated by everyday functions like work and by commonplace items, such as household goods. The combination of Langbauer’s everyday rhythm and her sewing machine are typical of how the bulk of life—what Woolf calls life’s “cotton wool” (“A Sketch” 71)—provides the thread that binds a life together.

The machine-driven pace of the narrative, which invokes the change of the older order into the modern world of the twentieth century, does not sustain itself through the novel’s end. In fact, the very idea of modernity, and of the impact of a rapidly changing society, breaks down Woolf’s initial impetus toward the “new”: Manresa’s embodiment; utopian collectivity. The narrative’s ür-consumer, Manresa is the modern signifier embedded within the old England of land and of gentility. As the beat quickens, it brings with it images of each “flat with its refrigerator . . . plates washed by machinery” (182-3). The domestic world of food and food production, already part of the realm of Mrs. Manresa and of others like her who consume without restraint or remorse, is no longer the world of Mrs. Sands’s kitchen, but has become reliant upon the idea of modern convenience. As the clock ticks more quickly, the machine becomes not simply a modern miracle, but instead a necessity of modern life. The vision of a new life beyond the old strictures has become not a pastoral ideal of classless socialism, but a machinized world, another modern horror. Mrs. Manresa, who initially engenders new possibilities of female embodiment, and thus of a woman with the necessary vehicle to create political and social change, is finally exposed as part of the machine. “You could trust her to crow when the hour struck like an alarm clock; to stop like an old bus horse when the bell rang” (177), old Bart Oliver realizes. Though she initially appears as the “wild child” of the natural,
pagan, presocial world, and though her freedom with food and with other consumables seem originally to push her past the boundaries of hierarchies and of social constructs, these qualities are ultimately contained. Mrs. Manresa’s embodiment provides a challenge to the narrative of modernity that must be controlled in order for progress to continue. The world of the machine, perhaps of the impersonality of such a modernity, becomes a world to distrust, to turn away from, although such a movement away from the future is impossible for those who continue to live in the modern world.

Though early in the novel, Mrs. Manresa could be perceived as the novel’s protagonist (albeit a quite different protagonist than can usually be seen in such novels), her presence ultimately demands that the problematic nature of the modern world be scrutinized, and that everyone—Woolf, her readers, her cast of characters—understand their own complicity in such a modernity. Woolf understood the difficulties of both positing a new world and dwelling as a privileged member of the old one (hence her own “leaning tower”), but cannot fully give up the world of Pointz Halls and Olivers and quaint country pageants. The divided protagonist of Isa/Manresa for a time helps Woolf’s narrative to straddle the quandary of the new, but eventually tradition wins out, and the new world is left to be envisioned another time. During one of the pageant’s several satiric love scenes, the romantic Isa thinks “It was enough. Enough. Enough” (91). The final two beats of this repetition are as much a command as a suggestion and, though the “chuff chuff chuff” and “tick tick tick” of the modern world still attempt to assert themselves, the gramophone winds down. When the modern audience is forced to become part of La Trobe’s production via ten minutes of silence, when they themselves must provide the action and discourse of present day “history,” the understated twist in the pageant is rejected. “This is death, death, death, “ Miss La Trobe notes, “when illusion fails” (180). The trajectory
of history, of time, onward toward the new age ceases, seemingly mourned by the “[t]ears. Tears. Tears” of the sudden rain that interrupts the silence (180). The world reflected in the “[s]craps, orts and fragments” that reflect the audience back upon itself is the same one that existed at the pageant’s opening, indeed, at the opening of the novel.

The result of this rejection of a newer, modern spirit of time and of lifestyle is not only evident in the gradual cessation of this series of repetitions, but also in Woolf’s odd move away from the collective spirit of the pageant, which works to shift the structure of society through using the area’s working-class citizens to portray the elite of English history. Moving away from what Mrs. Manresa represents, the role of protagonist shifts awkwardly and ineffectively to Isa’s nonexistent shoulders, and her presence, neglected by the larger problematic of an embodied modernity, is not sufficient enough to maintain such a role. In the midst of the pageant’s movement, the idea of love, asserted through one of the many of the gramophone’s songs, has become “sugared, insipid; bored a hole with its perpetual invocation to perpetual adoration” (118). The traditional plot has given way to the rhythm of life: “‘Working, serving, pushing, striving, earning wages—to be spent—here? Oh dear no . . . by and by” (119). The final repetitive series, uttered by Isa, is one of choice: yes and no (215). The narrative turn, at the novel’s close, however, toward the idea of a romance plot, is an odd answer to Isa’s dilemma. Disembodied, she is an unbelievable answer to the narrative’s own dilemma of whether to move toward the new or away, back to the basic coupling of man and woman who “must fight [. . .] would embrace” and from whom “another life might be born” (219). If this represents a traditional vehicle of closure, reaffirming a life force and suggesting another cycle beginning, then it is only a half-hearted, reflexive return to such an ending. Caught between the traditions represented by the romance plot with its middle-class inhabitants and the frighteningly
modernized world in which socioeconomic equality can be possible, Woolf’s final burst of fiction remains as fractured as the society she hoped to help unify.

Notes to Chapter Two

1 The most influential writing on Woolf’s sexual abuse is Louise DeSalvo’s Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on her Life and Work (Ballantine, 1989); a host of related articles, presentations, and other scholarship has followed. Allie Glenny’s book on Woolf and food, mentioned below, is much influenced by DeSalvo’s. For an informative explication of Woolf’s work with regard to her lesbian relationships, see Suzanne Raitt, Vita and Virginia: The Work and Friendship of Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf (Oxford, 1993). Eileen Barrett and Patricia Cramer have also edited Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings (NYU P, 1997). Panthea Reid has argued for a more lateral understanding of Woolf’s sexuality, as have others. Reid finds evidence in Woolf’s private writing of an enjoyment of her physical relationship with Leonard.

2 Adeline Virginia Stephen (later Woolf) was born on January 25, 1882. Upon their father’s death in 1904, she and her siblings removed themselves from the family home at 22 Hyde Park Gate in what has since become a famous move to Bloomsbury’s Gordon Square. Soon after reaching majority, Woolf achieved some measure of independence from the constraints of the Victorian middle-class household in which she had been raised.

3 Cf. Gillespie and Steele 21.

4 The sixty-nine surviving issues of this newsletter—designed and written by Virginia along with her sister, Vanessa, and their brother, Julian Thoby—comprise Add. mss. 70725 and 70726 in the manuscripts collection of the British Library. Though few of the written pieces are signed by their writers, the writing has predominantly been attributed to Virginia. Quentin Bell remarks that Virginia “half giggling at her own audacity, half seriously [. . .] apes the grandest journalistic style” (29).

5 The professional obituary of John Jackson appeared in the British Medical Journal on 4 June 1887. A letter written by Maria Jackson to Julia Stephen on that date (CP Ad. 1 2/15) indicates that Leslie Stephen wrote the piece for publication, perhaps with Julia’s assistance.

6 Bell, Lee, and Reid all understand Jackson within the context of her having been dubbed “the invalid of Hyde Park Gate” while a resident of the Stephen family household during her final years. Reid’s biography of Woolf provides particular insight into Maria Jackson’s character though close readings of her unpublished letters, held in the Special Collections at the University of Sussex. An appendix to that biography explores a selection of the nearly one thousand letters contained in that archive, some of which I draw upon in this chapter.

7 The year has been provided by archivists at Sussex, and here is supported by the publication date of Julia’s pamphlet.
8 Even if her bowels are mentioned frequently, Maria Jackson’s preoccupation with her lower gastrointestinal tract only mirrors a real, ongoing cultural preoccupation with healthy colonic function. Nearly all of the beauty books discussed in Chapter One, as well as other forms of mass culture considered within this study, mention the importance of bowel functioning for overall health. In 1899, ‘Isobel’ recommends that women take prunes and other fruits that have laxative qualities, and in her 1946 beauty book, Muriel Cox writes, “[. . .] ‘inner cleanliness’ is of the greatest importance to outer prettiness. The Chinese have a theory that a man’s whole disposition depends upon the state of his intestinal tract [. . .]. Certainly a woman’s beauty depends upon that part of her body far more than she might believe” (5).


10 Zwerdling notes how for Woolf, “illness is always associated with a retreat into oneself and often linked to creative power (178). For related thoughts on links between time spent on introspection and the production of culture, see Josef Pieper, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture* (St. Augustine’s P, 1998).

11 Interestingly, though this catalogue of class strata is lengthier, it is a strong echo of an explanation of class presented in the *Hyde Park Gate News* by a Virginia on the cusp of turning thirteen. Using a persona called “Miss Sarah Morgan,” Miss Stephen writes, “There are three layers of society. Firstly, the Rector, the Squire, the Curate and one or two ladies, who retired here from the world with the title of ‘decayed’ prefixed to their names, amongst whom I must number myself and my sister. Secondly, the rich retired trades people, with whom we never, as becomes the second cousins twice removed of a baronet, associate; and thirdly, the dregs of human existence, the very lowest layer of all, the poor working classes” (Ad. ms. 70726 3b). Though the young writer’s irony is clear, her explication of society is quite similar to that which she explains in “The Leaning Tower” as the older method of defining various classes.

12 Though Woolf may have been defending herself in this essay against such attacks on her politics, she presents herself in all her political complexity in “Am I a Snob?,” an essay prepared in 1936 for delivery to Bloomsbury’s Memoir Club. She writes, “like a rash or a spot, I have the disease” of social snobbery (207). Woolf’s consistent interrogation of her own socioeconomic status helps to place her intellectual musings about the status of others in a context of broad political inquiry, and not simply in the context of a middle-class woman with a “guilty conscience” (Zwerdling 99).

13 In this instance Woolf provides philanthropy very much like her mother did, although Woolf’s attention from the intellectual lives of the working classes is different to Julia Stephen’s attentions to the ill and to their physical needs. Rosalind C. Chambers notes that although between the wars some aspects of service and philanthropy began to change, “it would have been almost inconceivable that in a philanthropic organization the relationships of e.g. committee members and clients could be interchangeable, or that members of particular trades or industries or even residents of a ‘poor’ locality could take part in social service, much less in the control of
such service” (383-4). Though Woolf’s stance in “The Leaning Tower” and elsewhere might be politically motivated, she also still adheres to traditional social and gender roles as regards her community outreach.

14 In My Apprenticeship (1926), noted socialist Beatrice Webb discusses this phenomenon—the realization of middle-class complicity in the disparity among classes—as the “consciousness of sin [. . .] a collective or class consciousness; a growing uneasiness, amounting to conviction, that the industrial organization, which had yielded rent, interest and profits on a stupendous scale, had failed to provide a decent livelihood for a majority of the inhabitants of Great Britain” (174). Quite an opposite view was taken by others for whom “the benevolent impulse merges with modern capitalist management” (Zwerdling 100). Zwerdling cites Octavia Hills’s Homes of the London Poor (1875) as one example of what he calls “concerned surveillance” (100), and discusses Eleanor Pargiter, of Woolf’s The Years, as a literary example of that type of public servant.

15 For a discussion of this aspect of the novel, see Mark Hussey’s eponymous article “‘I’ Rejected; ‘We’ Substituted’: Self and Society in Between the Acts,” in Reading and Writing Women’s Lives: A Study of the Novel of Manners, ed. Bege K. Bowers and Barbara Brothers (UMI Research P, 1990).

16 Jane Lewis writes, “The Married Women’s Property Acts of the 1870s and 1880s permitted women to control their own property, although married women were not given the same capacity as single women to acquire, hold and dispose of property until 1935. Nor did the Acts change the right of landed families to make settlements on their daughters in order to protect the family property from the rapacity of sons-in-laws and from any action of the daughter herself which might prove contrary to the family interest” (78). Only slowly were women allowed the same access to capital, and thus to consumption, as men had historically been afforded.

17 According to Lewis, “In the years following World War I, the exodus of married women from the workplace was rapid, owing to trade-union agreements made at the beginning of the war, and the intense pressure exerted by the press, government committees and trade unionists (male and female) for married women to give up their jobs for the sake of returned men, and the future welfare of the race” (151).

18 Allie Glenny’s chapter on Between the Acts focuses almost exclusively upon such connections between food and various spiritual traditions.

19 Manresa introduces the rhyming oracle, “Tinker, tailor, soldier, spy,” as she counts the stones from her slice of cherry tart, and through this rhyming game introduces her position as a radical “wild child of nature,” (50) furthering the mysticism of food, of materiality. In this scene Mrs. Manresa’s connection to materiality, to the natural, is also a connection to the spirituality of pagan, rural worship traditions. Cf. Glenny 221.

20 Though I am not familiar with her scholarship, I would like to also acknowledge here Ros Peers, who was at work on a doctoral thesis on Woolf and food at the time of her death in 2000.
Perhaps the recipe requested is the one for “Chocolate Whiskey Cake,” printed in Diana Higgens’s *Grace at Charleston*. The mixture of sponge-cake fingers and whiskey and chocolate was often served at Bell’s Sussex retreat. This recipe, and others, is included in *Grace at Charleston*, a cookbook that in July, 2001, was available for sale at Charleston Farmhouse, Firle, Sussex.


In *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (Routledge, 1995), Mary Russo elaborates a theory of the grotesque in which all “grotesques” are female/feminized, underscoring the cultural attitude toward female bodies and transgression.

Interestingly, this spasm also suggests the act of bulimic vomiting; the “proper” toad is symbolic of the (female) body in denial.

In a letter to Vita Sackville-West of Christmas Day, 1938 (written while Woolf was at work on *Between the Acts*), Woolf connects, and fondly, memories of eating with those of a sexual nature: “Well that was a princely thought—the pate, and better than a thought, it practically saved our lives; pipes frozen; electric fires cut off; nothing to eat, or if there were, it couldn’t be cooked [. . .] I can eat it forever—I could have been content to freeze almost, if I could eat such gooses liver forever. [. . .] How tremendously in the vein of the pink, and the pearls and the fishmongers porpoise this pink cream with the black jewels embedded is—or was. Oh yes! and then what about Love—to which you so tantalisingly refer?” (*Letters* 307). The rhapsodizing over a gift of paté, for Woolf, both rhetorically and narratively transitions into a recollection of the time, a decade before, when Vita and she were lovers.

All of Woolf’s novels contain at least one female who lives beyond the norms of society. Two of the more well known of these women are Miss Kilman, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and Lily Briscoe of *To the Lighthouse*. Because many of these “experimental” females are unmarried women, a good thematic exploration can be found in Sybil Oldfield’s essay ““From Rachel’s Aunts to Miss La Trobe: Spinsters in the Fiction of Virginia Woolf” in *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters: Unmarried Women in the Twentieth-Century Novel*, ed. Laura L. Doan (U of Illinois P, 1991).

Hussey writes of Jinny in *The Waves*, “Of all the novels’ characters it is Jinny [. . .] who is most ‘at home’ in her body, most completely embodied” (5). I find Mrs. Manresa’s raw physicality more representative of the world of the flesh than Jinny’s veiled sexuality. Because *The Waves* is perhaps Woolf’s most exemplary psychological novel, her methods of characterization in that work necessarily limit Jinny’s capacity to adopt a more physical ontology.

Grace Radin has edited the manuscripts of *The Years*, and her edition includes some passages that indicate Woolf’s attempts to implicate the female body and female sexuality into that novel. See Radin, *Virginia Woolf's The Years: The Evolution of a Novel* (U of Tennessee P, 1981).
In addition to Hussey’s explication of Jinny’s embodiment, Fulker sees Clarissa Dalloway, a character traditionally read as ephemeral, as very much an embodied presence in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

In “A Letter to a Young Poet,” Woolf says she must “own up to those defects, both natural and acquired, which, as you will find, distort and invalidate all I have to say about poetry,” and makes “a clean breast of these deficiencies” (183). Her nod to the ways in which formal knowledge of poetry is gained—“The lack of a sound university training has always made it impossible for me to distinguish between an iambic and a dactyl” (183)—echoes Bourdieu’s conclusions as to the ways in which cultural capital can be acquired. As a “common reader,” Woolf was well read, but unless rules of rhyme and meter are taught, then such literary devices cannot be known (although they can be ascertained by the ear, if left unnamed).

These poems can be found in Appendix D to Leaska’s edition of *Pointz Hall*. Originals are maintained in the Berg Collection, New York Public Library, and in the Monk’s House Papers, University of Sussex.

Dodge also connects with Lucy Swithin in this intellectual fashion.

Leaska uses Woolf’s own dates from her typescripts to date the two versions of the novel. Working dates run from 2 April 1938 through 23 November 1940 (*Pointz Hall* 16), and appendices to this edition include revisions (typescript and holograph) made after 23 November 1940. The page on which an intermediate version of Mrs. Manresa’s stay-free roll in the grass might appear is missing from the later typescript, according to Leaska (*Pointz Hall* 287).

In an unpublished memoir, “Life at Hyde Park Gate 1897-1904,” Vanessa Bell echoes Woolf’s own memory; Gillespie (who was allowed by Angelica Garnett to read and discuss the manuscript) writes that Vanessa thought their servants “must have had eyes like cats [. . .] in order to produce clean plates and cooked food” (207).

For a character sketch based upon Farrell, see Woolf’s “The Cook” (ed. Susan Dick, *Woolf Studies Annual* 3 (1997): 123-42). The manuscript version is part of the Monk’s House Papers holding at the University of Sussex.

In an issue of the *Hyde Park Gate News* (25 July 1882), Woolf reports, “Mr. Gerald Duckworth [. . .] declared his intention of photographing Sophia the Cook. So he went into the kitchen and announced his intention to her but it was not favoured with a kind reception but the comely damsel was only made to submit when the head of the house (who is Mrs. Stephen) entered and at once commanded Sophia to be still” (Ad. ms. 70725 59a). This command may have been Julia’s inheritance from her aunt, the pioneering photographer Julia Margaret Cameron. In *Freshwater: A Comedy*, Woolf satirizes her great-aunt’s penchant for ordering her subjects—whether human or inanimate—to be still as she took their pictures.

Louie Mayer recalls Leonard, however, as “a very kind and thoughtful man” (Noble 162).
Bettina Knapp writes of the dinner-table scene in To the Lighthouse as influenced by the painting of Cezanne. See “Virginia Woolf’s ‘Boeuf en Daube’” in Literary Gastronomy, ed. David Bevan (Rodopi, 1988).

The Woolfs purchased Monk’s House in 1919, but used it predominately as a country getaway until 1940, when their home in London’s Mecklenburgh Square was damaged by bombs.

Interestingly, however, it was indeed Woolf’s bread that she was herself responsible for. Mayer recalls that “there was one thing in the kitchen that Mrs Woolf was very good at doing: she could make beautiful bread. [. . .] It took me many weeks to be as good as Mrs Woolf at making bread [. . .]” (Noble 157).

In a letter to Woolf from Elizabeth Bowen, the younger author writes, “I told Alan all about your omelette, and he said he would like to have a competition with you. I rather tactlessly said that I thought your omelette would win” (18 February 1941; MHP Letters III).

This scene is reminiscent of the “Time Passes” section of To the Lighthouse both in the stillness evoked and the role played by the natural world. Lotus Snow, in “Visions of Design: Virginia Woolf’s ‘Time Passes’ and Between the Acts” (Research Studies 44.1: 24-34), explores connections between the two novels.
AND THE WAR TAKETH AWAY: SEXUAL EXCESS AND WOOLTON’S RATIONING SCHEME

With the onset of World War Two, the “chuff chuff chuff” of Woolfian modernity ground to a startled halt. Fruits of progress—machinery making possible refrigerators, motor cars—morphed into elements of destruction, and the effects of war reached far beyond the fronts on which it was fought. One of the most staunchly defended of those fronts was not defended by the men of Britain’s armed forces, however, but rather by the women who provided themselves and their families with meals made from what scarce supplies were available as the war raged on overseas and overhead. From the earliest days of confrontation and long past the final surrender, the Kitchen Front—so coined by Britain’s Ministry of Food—was one of the country’s most stable, and most important, battlefronts. On the wireless and at the cinema, in countless newspaper and magazine advertisements, and through public cookery demonstrations and nutrition exhibitions, the Ministry attempted to reach all of Britain in order to ensure sound physical health and a secure homeland. Though nearly all who remained in Britain reaped the benefits of this program, and of the rationing scheme that helped to distribute food equally throughout the country, British housewives were the target audience of Ministry efforts that merged the realms of public and private. One Ministry pamphlet illustrates the ways in which housewives were “inducted” into the war: “The line of Food Defence runs through all our homes. It is where we must always be on our guard. The watchword is careful housekeeping” (*Wise Housekeeping*). Control of consumption became a national duty. “The general effect,” the Ministry reports in *How Britain Was Fed in Wartime: Food Control 1939-1945*, “was to help the housewife to cope with wartime problems more confidently than would otherwise have been the case” and to make use of available rations in the face of “added complications: with the
blackout, air raids, lack of fuel, and with the different members of the family demanding different meals at all hours of the day and night to fit with their duties in factory, Home Guard and Civil Defence” (50-1). While women were encouraged to serve in some public capacities (such as the Women’s Auxiliary Territorial Service, or WATS), the rhetoric begun by the Ministry and propagated within popular culture indicates that women’s most effective participation lay in their abilities to control the consumption of the British citizenry.

The Ministry of Food’s rationing scheme and domestic propaganda helped to ensure, foremost, that the problems of the first world war would not ravage the country once again. During the Great War, food rationing was only voluntary until 1917, by which time the economic inequity of food distribution had leveled the working classes. When rationing was finally conceded to by the British government, Board of Trade figures indicated a rise in food prices of eighty-nine percent from prices in 1914; “the housekeeper, if she lived in the style possible on a £10 a head pre-war allowance, would now have to spend practically £1 per head” (Peel 17-18; original italics). In October 1917, “Sir Arthur [Yapp, Director General of Food Economy] said that he always felt that compulsory rationing, which was good enough for Germany, was perhaps not quite English” (Jones 13), and likely he merely echoed the prevalent attitude of the House of Lords, which of course was largely populated by those whose incomes could absorb wartime prices. But the Daily Mail of 5 November 1917 stressed that perhaps defeat would be less English than governmental control of foodstuffs: “We have got to choose between eating less and submitting to being defeated [. . .] the clearest and most urgent duty of the Government is to set in motion immediately a system of obligatory rationing for the entire country” (qtd. in Jones 19-20). The voluntary rationing, which did not ensure price controls, had hardly been reduced enough at the onset of the war to provide a significant change in food
distribution: suggestions allowed men four to eight pounds of meat per week, for example, and five and three-eighths pounds per week for women. Mrs. C. S. Peel, in a cookery manual published right on the heels of compulsory rationing in 1917, indicates that “a prompt response to the Food Controller’s recommendations will avert a national food disaster” (15), and lists the amount of meat allowed under the late-breaking scheme at “2 1/2 lb. per head per week, weighed raw with bone and fat” (7; original italics), a sharp reduction from those previous suggestions for voluntary austerity.\(^2\) Though this plan went into effect late into the war, and the government agency set up to oversee the rationing plan was needed relatively briefly, a skeleton organization was kept in place once the first world war ended “to function in a small way during any national, regional, divisional or local dislocation, such as strikes, etc.” (Jones 211). The development of this small office “eventually resulted in the setting up in 1936 of the Board of Trade (Food Defence) Plans Department” (Jones 211). Britain had learned her lesson, and protocol for any further rationing was developed during the years between the world wars.

As the second world war approached, the Board office began its preparations. Ration books were printed in 1938, and by the time rationing was announced in September of 1939 (Great Britain, *How Britain Was Fed* 56), structures were in place that would govern the next fifteen years of British life. The Office was made a full-fledged Ministry in that year, as well; soon Lord Woolton became its head and, ultimately, both an icon of social stability and a source of political ridicule. Nevertheless, Britain’s rationing provided for the country’s well-being, and when Woolton passed along his office in 1943 (he became Minister of Reconstruction at that time), he left behind a well-defined network of food control. The country had food officers who oversaw control on regional levels, and on smaller scales, local Food Control Committees were in place to ascertain the welfare of their friends and neighbors.\(^3\) So that “accurate forecasts of
the requirements of each trader [could] be made” (Great Britain, *Rationing* 10), families and individuals, beginning in late 1939, were required to register with merchants\(^4\) in order to buy items initially proposed for rationing: “butcher’s meat (*i.e.*, beef, mutton, lamb, pork and veal), bacon and ham, butter and margarine, cooking fats (*i.e.*, animal lard, compound cooking fats, dripping and suet) and sugar” (Great Britain, *Food Control*), and rationing of sugar, bacon and ham, and butter began in January of 1940. Meat rationing was delayed until March. When 1939 rations are compared with the rations of the first world war era, those earlier amounts seem decadent. Bacon, for instance, was allotted at four ounces per week in June 1939, and meat was initially portioned out at a price value of 1s. 10d. (approximately one pound) per person over six years of age each week (price controls were in place to ensure that this amount would actually purchase an equal portion for all). Throughout the period of rationing, which for some items lasted until 1954, the allowed amounts changed, depending upon supply and upon need in other parts of the world (particularly post-war, when some rations decreased dramatically in order to provide relief to European nations), but rarely did they increase beyond the initial amounts.\(^5\)

Ration books varied according to age and occupation (and, later, special books were developed for those suffering from certain ailments, for vegetarians,\(^6\) and for practitioners of various religions): “General, Child’s [under six years of age], Traveller’s, Adolescent Boy’s [13-18 years of age], Heavy Worker’s, Weekly Seaman’s, Emergency, Leave or Duty [issued by armed services]” (Great Britain, *Food Control*). Amounts of meat consumed figured heavily into the need for various types of books, as did registration requirements. Unrationed foods, especially those in short supply (canned meats, condensed milk), became sources of contention until the “points” scheme was introduced in December of 1941. Personal points, covering chocolate and sweets (and set up to include cigarettes and tobacco, though such rationing was never
implemented), were introduced in July of 1942. By this point in Britain’s rationing history, food, though scarce, was distributed rather equally. As an homage to the egalitarian nature of this program, one of Queen Mary’s rationing books is displayed prominently in the Imperial War Museum in London. Even the Queen Mum had to (ostensibly) watch her intake of rashers and butter for the sake of Great Britain.

Even with the House of Windsor participating in the rationing program, however, there were inequities, but perhaps perceived disparities created as much social discomfort as did those that were real. In 1940, when importation of fruit was banned in order to reduce the number of ships used for food shipments and increase the fleet involved in the war effort, items from overseas, such as bananas, at once became scarce. A December 1940 Mass-Observation poll, though, indicates unrest among those who faced shortages, higher prices, and time-consuming queues. “The rich people have got all the fruit [. . . ],” one working-class woman, aged forty-five, assessed; “The Royal Family’s got plenty” (M-O A TC 67/2/B). Whether or not the Queen had her own stash of tropical fruits is unknown; however, the perception of some members of working and middle classes that those above their own socioeconomic stations could avoid the harsher realities of food control created problems for the Ministry of Food. In order for rationing to work at its optimum, the entire nation had to be behind the effort. Though all indications point to a rationing scheme that did indeed improve the health and nutrition of Britain, and that was as fair and equitable as possible, there were ways around the scheme for those who could afford certain luxuries, such as dining out. “Caterers” (restaurateurs), after a brief attempt at collecting ration coupons for items consumed during a meal, were exempted from this task, and so those who ate at restaurants were able to save coupons for later in the week. Restaurants were controlled as far as the specific amounts per person they could serve, and the number of courses
was limited to three (including bread), but a chop eaten out on Monday helped to ensure the existence of a roast joint come Sunday afternoon. One male employee of the Savoy Hotel explained, “The rich will always manage to eat in restaurants and get meat every day, whereas the poor man has to make due on his shilling meat ration for the week” (M-O A TC 67/3/E). Though restaurants might charge only a maximum of five shillings per person, per three-course meal, the ability of some to dine in certain establishments did provide those individuals with a greater selection of food and certainly with more of it than was available to those who could not afford to eat in restaurants. With some factory wages falling in the range of twenty-eight shillings per week—approximately £73 per annum (M-O A TC 67/3/C)—a meal out might be possible, but not with the frequency enjoyed by those in middle and upper classes. The Ministry did oversee “British Restaurants,” which began as canteens for working people who could not dine at home during their shifts. These restaurants eventually became a staple of British food culture during the rationing period, and provided meals for countless individuals. By July of 1943, there were 2,115 such establishments throughout the country (Jones 123), all governed by price controls that enabled workers to make use of them.

In its quest to bring all of Britain under the umbrella of its food control, the Ministry launched a campaign equal in force to the domestic front maintained by its citizens. Magazines bore “Food Facts” advertisements that not only reinforced ideas such as the importance of the potato (“the splendid crop that saves our ships”) to the British diet, but that also occasionally included brief recipes. A Ministry of Food ad in the February 5, 1943, issue of Woman’s Own lists “4 parts to the Potato Plan”: 1) Serve potatoes for breakfast three days a week; 2) Make your main dish a potato dish one day a week—potato dishes can be delicious and satisfying; 3) Refuse second helpings of other foods until you’ve had more potatoes; 4) Serve potatoes in other
ways than ‘plain boiled.’” The January 1943 issue of My Home contains a Ministry of Food ad that calls upon British housewives to renew their dedication to the Kitchen Front: “You, and you alone, can take over from the Government, the vital work of keeping your family fit. The Government makes available the essential food. In your hands lies the rest! [. . .] You have done magnificently during the past three years. Let us keep working together and this year do still better.” As the war drew on and food supplies continued to wane, it was necessary to increasingly give Britons, especially female Britons, encouragement to view imposed rationing and scarce supplies as part of a necessary national effort. Though women’s periodicals such as Woman’s Own and My Home shrunk in size considerably during wartime due to decreases in paper supplies and in manufacturing capacities, they still maintained their pre-war publication schedules, and existed as one of the foremost vehicles through which the Ministry of Food reached its target female audience. Food Flashes at the cinema during news reels, along with BBC radio broadcasts, reached a wider audience of both sexes, but women were still the main, and important, focus of Ministry attentions. In morning broadcasts, well-known music hall actresses Elsie and Doris Waters (sisters who performed as “Gert and Daisy”) helped to popularize, perhaps even to glamorize, food-related issues, while speaking as official representatives of Woolton’s Kitchen Front. Food-centered broadcasts over BBC airwaves were also aimed at school children, and the Ministry published Food and Nutrition, an official publication written for domestic scientists as well as for housewives, until early in 1952, when the Food Advice Division was dissolved.14 Publications released by Woolton’s office enabled news about changes in rations and in points values assigned other goods to be disseminated quickly. Along with Ministries of Agriculture and Supply, the Ministry of Food also printed and distributed numerous pamphlets outlining everything from “National Flour” to “Raising Rabbits
for Meat.”¹⁵ In order to maintain the support of its important female clientele, the Ministry of Food became its own little propaganda industry and, as a result of its consistent efforts, managed to keep British citizens (both male and female) as content as possible for most of the rationing period.¹⁶

One intriguing way the Ministry reached out to British housewives was through a series of Kitchen Front Exhibitions: public exhibitions designed to educate the masses and to promote various components of the rationing scheme. These exhibitions were also good venues for the distribution of various pamphlets and other printed information provided by the Ministry.¹⁷ The ideal meals suggested in these pamphlets and at the exhibitions, though, were not always useful for a cross-section of British housewives. Responses to early pamphlets such as Wise Housekeeping in Wartime and How to Eat Wisely in Wartime (both published c. 1940) were mixed, and working-class women found the Ministry’s suggestions somewhat ludicrous, especially early in the period of rationing, prior to adequate price controlling and education of the public as to the benefits of proper nutrition. In May 1940, one woman (forty-five years old, from class “D”) remarked that eating according to pamphlet suggestions would only be possible “according to your income. Oranges 2d each! And carrots are just out of the question” (M-O A TC 67/2/C), even though the carrot was touted by the Ministry as second only to the potato as an important component of Kitchen Front efforts. A similar opinion was voiced by another working-class woman, explaining “who can afford salads, carrots are 10d a pound, butter—you can’t afford it [. . .] the working class can’t afford it [. . .] Oatmeal, yes, that’s cheap, but everyone can’t afford honey. Margarine and bread, that’s our mark” (M-O A TC 67/2/C). Likewise, reactions to the Kitchen Front Exhibitions, though occasionally positive, more often suggested the gap between the ideas of Woolton’s Ministry and the ways in which those ideas
were likely to be played out in most people’s everyday lives. One heavily-advertised exhibition in May of 1940 was held in the ticket hall of Charing Cross Station, in London’s West End. Display cases presented passers-by with examples of meals that could hypothetically be prepared for a shilling each, but two middle-class women near age fifty were heard to exclaim, “That must be 4d, that 6d—oh, it’s sheer theory”; “it couldn’t be done for 1/-” (M-O A TC 67/2/D). The combination of this reality with the poor choice of location—one of London’s most expensive commercial districts—made this early attempt of the Ministry to advocate for its new policies rather a botched one. The Mass-Observer who covered the event sums it up succinctly: “If working class housewives are to be interested in food and cookery exhibitions, they must be presented in a working class context, and not one of bright greens and yellows, and wrapped up in a £10 a week atmosphere. The Exhibition was simple, but it was a phoney simplicity, the simplicity of a phase in household fashion, and not of necessity” (M-O A TC 67/2/D). Indeed, one working-class woman who did attend responded in a way that distinctly explains why the Ministry had to change tactics when it came to approaching members of classes other than their own: “those four meals [displayed at the exhibition] seem unnecessary & wasteful. You don’t need tea & supper. Working class families have a good meal midday usually & then something light in the evening” (M-O A TC 67/2/D). Until these very basic discrepancies were overcome, the Ministry battled uphill. Archives indicate, though, that by September of 1940, similar exhibitions were held in North London neighborhoods at schools and other easily accessible locations.18 Regardless of this rocky beginning, the success of the rationing scheme and the Ministry’s ability to appease the broad population provide some evidence that they soon found ways to ensure that their programs of wise household management and healthy eating reached a majority of the population.
Along with its attempts to sway the public in favor of the rationing scheme, the Ministry of Food had a large and increasingly vested interest in educating the British public about subjects related to health and nutrition. Fears that a public ignorant of the basics of nutrition would weaken the domestic front, as well as weaken the pool of young men who were to replenish the armed services, were not unfounded. Pre-war studies indicate that this public was already affected by a certain lack of understanding of such matters, and “suggested that, on the basis of food actually purchased, nearly half the population was not getting sufficient of the required nutrients” prior to the war (Great Britain, How Britain Was Fed 46). The pamphlet How to Eat Wisely in Wartime promotes a version of the by now well-known “four food groups”: body-building foods (proteins, milk, cheese); energy foods (a diverse group including bacon, bread, lard, and sugar); and two groups of “protective” foods (dairy and fruits/vegetables). “Far more is known to-day than in 1914-18 of the effect of food on health,” this tract asserts. “Let us take every possible advantage of this knowledge.” As part of its BBC series, the Ministry of Food provided commentary from Dr. Charles Hill, “The Radio Doctor,” who spoke on subjects such as “That Sunday Joint” and “Green Leaves Make Rosy Cheeks.” Dr. Hill chided those who did not take pains to entice family members by cooking well their inadequate rations: “The wife has learnt to cook a few dishes and is content with them. She doesn’t read the cookery book or the cookery articles [. . .] Mrs. Beeton’s, rather like St. Paul’s Cathedral, is known by everyone and visited by few” (Great Britain, Wise Eating 4). Dr. Hill’s example clearly demonstrates the role of the British housewife during the second world war. She was to work not only to control the amount of food consumed by her family, but also the nutritional value of that food. The continuance of a healthy Britain was her domain. Along with the emphasis on nutrition and education perpetuated in the Ministry’s broadcasts, publications, and exhibitions, the
government began the Vitamins Scheme late in 1941, which at base provided all children under five years of age and expecting mothers with free orange juice and cod liver oil (additional fish oil, for added vitamins A and D, was provided to pregnant women only). Additional provisions were made for low-income families, providing milk and vitamin supplements for those in need (Jones 181). Milk was promoted as one of the most important elements of a balanced diet (“No other single food provides the same food values as milk.”), and it was suggested that a “growing child should have at least a pint a day”; schools provided free and reduced-price milk (Great Britain, How to Eat Wisely).

Wholemeal bread, too, was a key item in the Ministry’s attempts to align good nutrition and necessary restriction. In the government-issued pamphlet National Flour, Lord Woolton is quoted as promising, in the House of Lords, “a good bread, good in substance, good in texture, and agreeable to the palate.” According to Sir Thomas Jones, some Medical Officers of Health believed that “Britain’s falling birthrate during the last 72 years [from 1872-1944] was due in some measure at least to the country’s changing from wholemeal to white bread” (156) and, though this point is highly arguable, it does indicate a concern over the content of the British loaf. One middle-class woman responded to a lack of such advocacy in a Kitchen Front Exhibition, remarking, “the bread people are having now is rubbish” (M-O A TC 67/2/D). The public never caught on completely to this governmental advice, but none the less, brown bread was to be part of British fare long after the war ended. As an unrationed and relatively inexpensive source of carbohydrates, bread, regardless of its hue, was a necessary dietary staple during the rationing period.

Though a most common food, bread was also something not to let go to waste. Rhetoric instructed citizens to save bread, and to consume every bit of it, in order to save lives. Ships
were needed to fight against German invasion, and not to bring wheat from Europe and elsewhere. A war poster bearing the slogan “Bread into Battle” cautions, “a wasted crust can mean a wasted convoy,”\textsuperscript{25} and \textit{How to Eat Wisely in Wartime} strengthens such advice: “If every man, woman and child in the United Kingdom were to waste 1/2 oz. of bread daily, the total for a year would amount to 250,000 tons of wheat. That is nearly two weeks’ supply. To bring it to this country, 25 or 30 ships would be needed.” It was necessary for everyone to cut back and to avoid wastefulness. Helpful hints (tips for using a loaf to its utmost include making rusks, breadcrumbs, and puddings) were part of the Ministry’s initial attempt to bring housewives on board from the early stirrings of war. These tips became infused with a nationalism that changed as the war continued, and as it became all too apparent that rationing was absolutely vital to the nation’s people, and not simply a way to gain solidarity. As part of this increased attempt to rally Britons to participate in the food scheme, a 1942 Kitchen Front Exhibition promoted wholemeal bread and explained ways to economize by using leftovers, a far cry from the slightly glitzy spin put on rationing in the 1940 exhibitions. The fight on the Kitchen Front moved from rhetorical to imperative. Using for soups vegetables that might otherwise have been thrown away and using fat from bacon for frying other meal items became necessary parts of daily life. Anything not consumed was also put to use, and the Ministry of Supply printed posters reading “We Want Your Kitchen Waste” as a method of increasing participation in turning superfluous human food into food for pigs raised on home soil. Another campaign called for “Bones for Fertilizers”; nothing was left out of the effort to sustain Britain. Regardless of the difficulty, most people agreed with the Ministry: “Better Pot-Luck with Churchill today than humble pie under Hitler tomorrow [. . .] Don’t waste food!”
The Ministry of Food was by no means alone in the effort to recruit British housewives for duty on the Kitchen Front. Ministry rhetoric that governed public opinion of waste and of the importance to the nation of the rationing scheme was abundant, too, in numerous areas of women’s popular culture, and this rhetoric is perhaps nowhere as evident as in the cookery books published during the rationing period. Lydia Chatterton’s *Win-the-War Cookery*, published on the heels of Ministry organization in November of 1939, prefigures the government agency’s own pamphlets and propaganda. Chatterton, who “lived through the Great War [and] learned in home and canteen how to make a little go a long way,” calls housewives to arms:

[. . .] at home our workers are toiling to produce more food and on the seas our sailors are risking their lives that we may live. So we housewives must show our gratitude and admiration by making a firm resolve that nothing shall be wasted in our households, that, in fact, we should be proud for our sailors to see the emptiness of our rubbish bins. ECONOMY must be our watchword. True economy does not mean going short on food but using every scrap to the very best advantage, cooking it in a way that will make it yield the most nourishment. (1)

Here, at the beginning of a humble cookbook, she encapsulates what the public would hear for years to come from the Ministry of Food. The idea that the feminine role during wartime should include the maintenance of not only her family’s physical well-being, but also the health of the nation itself, was not an idea simply perpetuated by the British government. This gendered concept had only lain in wait for the outbreak of war, and was presented in many guises from both public sources and from voices of peers, of women who took up the cause and hoped to bring their sisters along in tow, all the better to ensure the continuance of the country. Cookery books served, during the second world war, in the same capacity had those early receipt books and venerated tomes like those by Mrs. Beeton: as texts that provide information affecting the most intimate and basic qualities of human life. As a result of this quality of intimacy, the transmission, like the subject matter, takes on a personal tone. Like gossip or advice from a
confidante, the information provided by cookery books (as well as by the other sorts of maintenance manuals discussed in Chapter One) is shared knowledge passed from one cook (in these instances, cooks are always assumed to be female) to another. One clear implication of the language used in these wartime cookery books is the issue of solidarity. Chatterton is performing a feminine ritual of initiation, a sort of maternal ritual of training others, in this instance in those domestic arts that necessarily stem from want. Texts such as hers were a part of wartime women’s cultural knowledge, and provided knowledge based upon connection among women, what Mary Belenky et al. have termed “connected knowing,” an epistemology that “builds on the subjectivists’ conviction that the most trustworthy knowledge comes from personal experience rather than the pronouncements of authorities” (112-3). Though Chatterton speaks with authority, to be sure, it is not the authority of a superior, but rather of a woman who has gained experience from which someone else might benefit. Wartime women’s popular culture encouraged a sense of community and continuity that strengthened the practices promoted by the Ministry of Food and other government agencies. When prompted by Woolton’s publications, women responded as patriots, but when they involved themselves in the collaborative practice of sharing household information, they responded to that information as sisters in a united battle. When Chatterton explains how to prepare a single kidney “cut in the thinnest possible slices and [. . .] placed in a hot pot between layers of vegetables,” or recounts how “a supper of Jerusalem artichokes boiled, then fried in egg and breadcrumb and served with [. . .] anchovy sauce, kept everyone guessing what kind of ‘fish’ they were” (1), she is passing along the elements of a culture not often documented as part of the war effort, but a culture that was, indeed, a large and well-choreographed effort affecting British women from all walks of life.
This sort of cookery—that made necessary by wartime rationing and the culture of austerity created through national denial—is representative of what Michel de Certeau calls “making do”: tactical responses to the materials at hand, “ways of using the constraining order of the place” (30, original italics). Cookery, as a tactic that subverts the rigidity of the governing system, “must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities’” (xix). To such an end, Certeau extrapolates, “in the supermarket, the housewife confronts heterogeneous and mobile data—what she has in the refrigerator, the tastes, appetites, and moods of her guests, the best buys and their possible combinations with what she already has on hand at home” (xix). This tactical premise is almost identical to culinary admonition found in the frontispiece blurb of the Good Housekeeping Institute’s *Fish, Meat, Egg and Cheese Dishes* cookbook (1944):

[. . .] difficulties are a challenge; and now, in wartime, the housewife has an opportunity she may never possess again to learn the real art of cooking. For the art of cooking consists not of putting together many sumptuous ingredients in the most expensive possible way. It consists of taking the ingredients at hand and using them with wit and imagination and skill [. . .] of being alive to suggestions, ready to try out new dishes [. . .] above all, of being more ready to get up and try something new than to sit back and grumble about the lack of variety. (n. pag.)

Like Certeau’s suggestion that opportunity lies within the confines of restriction, this cookery book identifies as an opportunity the challenge for housewives that exists within the culture of rationing. Making do, for the wartime British housewife, consisted of putting together sometimes meager, often disparate ingredients in order to provide her family with balanced and varied meals. Rationing, on paper, supplies each individual with the same quantity of food, but the quality of that food and of its preparation is left up to the cook and to the *bricolage* of meal preparation under extreme circumstances. Note, too, how this book asserts that the *proper* way to cook is the very method suggested for austere times (as shown earlier in the BBC transcripts of Dr. Hill, who indicates that innovation can override circumstances). Correct cooking, it
implies, is engendered by such a culture; only an ill-equipped chef will allow for a diet of
mundanity to invade the lives of her family, regardless of how limited her choices might be.

In the context of this wartime culture, the idea of “making do” lends itself to what
amounts to culinary trickery, and cookbooks from across the period exemplify Certeau’s notion
of everyday tactics as subversive. Turning Jerusalem artichokes into “fish” with a bit of anchovy
paste, as Chatterton blithely suggests, is the sort of counterfeiture that stems from a culture that
limits the scope of cookery while at the same time demanding variant excellence from those in
the kitchen. Such practices are what Certeau discusses as “la perruque” (wig), a method of
deception by which “order is tricked by an art” (26, original italics). The practitioner of la
perruque “cunningly takes pleasure in finding a way to create gratuitous products whose sole
purpose is to signify his own capabilities through his work and to confirm his solidarity with
other workers or his family” (25), as does the housewife who refuses the lowest common
culinary denominator and instead opts to reinvent the ways in which limited supplies of food can
be thought of. As a way to signify her own ability, as well as her identity as a proper cook and
not as one who would allow the challenges of the day to control the quality of her products, the
wartime housewife uses artifice as a way to transcend the parameters of the ration book. Of
course, not all of her products are particularly transcendent. Good Housekeeping’s 100 Recipes
for Unrationed Meat Dishes, for instance, explains how “pig’s fry” (a combination of scrap offal,
likely whatever the butcher has on a given day) can become “Mock Goose,” a layered
casserole-type dish. “Mock Crab” (Chatterton 7) is about as appealing, and contains little to
relate it to the real thing, but instead is sliced tomatoes doctored with a bit of grated cheese and
served on toast. The strange combinations that result from such kitchen trickery are not the
important aspects of these recipes, however. Instead, what is notable is the refusal of wartime
women to admit defeat, to go without duck, without crab, as a matter of course. Life as usual, regardless of the scarcity of raw materials, is a strong message of both state and cultural rhetorics. The role of the housewife includes the maintenance not only of household order, but of normalcy, if only its semblance. If she is to rise beyond competency and perform her role to its utmost, then she will put to use what Certeau calls the “mobile data” of her grocer’s bare shelves and create not only tasty, nourishing, and varied meals for her family from those meager stores, but also an essence of peacetime, an element of Britain’s post-war potential.

While her role mandated a particular use of imagination with regard to the meals she might present to her own family, it also centered on a certain amount of self-denial. Denial has typically been a part of an ultra-feminine construct of woman. In the context of austerity and of wartime rationing, however, that denial is based far more upon on reality than upon an ideal concept of a self-sacrificing female. This gendered nationalism asked that women not only give of themselves for the good of their households and families, but also for the greater good of the country. The feminized role of helpmeet expanded to include a broad population of British women, and not simply those involved in raising families or in providing secure homes for their mates. Women hitherto able to pursue choices independent of the domestic realm became implicated in a movement to nurture the nation. As women were increasingly asked to turn to traditional values and to uphold the cultural and social integrity of Britain, the equity suggested by Woolton’s Ministry of Food and their propaganda was at odds with real gender divisions. Though the Kitchen Front effort cast women as incredibly important to the sustenance of a British way of life, those fighting on literal fronts, both within the country and overseas, emerged as most important. Interestingly, government agencies such as the Ministry of Food were not the primary propagators of this inequity. Much of the discourse of female denial came straight from
women’s cultural sources, such as periodicals. As the war effort demanded more of women in the workplace and in the day-to-day efforts of wartime, the rhetoric of femininity became increasingly pronounced within traditionally feminine strongholds. “What a test of affection,” gushes one *Woman’s Own* writer in the September 14, 1940, issue, “to lay down your sugar ration for your husband-son-boy friend! Yet who wouldn’t if it meant he was going to get a really good package from home.” Who wouldn’t, indeed, lay down her rations for those soldiers who lay down their lives for those at home? When it was commonly understood, though perhaps irrationally, that “the wholesaler [. . .] has to let the troops have 85% of all the chocolate he has” (M-O A TC 67/2/B), the added suggestion from this “insider” source within women’s culture that denial is optimum incites its audience to an extreme feminine impulse to caretake through self-sacrifice. Unlike the cookery books, whose intimate rhetoric helped to solidify a community of women battling scarcity, these other sources of wartime “advice” for women reinforce those limited roles typically ascribed to the feminine realm. Advertisements from the same period contain similar, if muted, language of feminine self-denial: “Make up for the rationing of butter and meat by giving your family extra large helpings of this rich, creamy custard pudding—Cremola” (*Woman’s Own*, April 27, 1940). The exclusive emphasis here on the family and the erasure of the female self is a reminder that the care and feeding of *others* was to be the paramount concern of British women during the second world war.

When Chatterton suggests, for instance, that it “is possible to live on potatoes and milk alone” (31), it is highly doubtful that she is suggesting this diet be offered up to the entire family. The rest of the family is worthy of Cremola, of sweets, and requires meals of balanced variety and nutrition. *Hard-Time Cookery*, published by the Association of Teachers of Domestic Subjects soon after Chatterton’s own cookery book was published, lists a number of food items
that “the housewife should try to include for each individual member of her family” on a daily basis: a pint of milk, fruits and vegetables, fats, cheese, and protein (9).30 “The present situation calls,” they write in 1940, “even more insistently than usual, for a sound knowledge of the principles of diet so that meals may be well planned and well balanced, even when some foods are scarce” (3). In contrast to this suggestion, Chatterton’s advice has more in common with the popular “bread and butter” diet than with the sorts of meals advocated by professional agencies such as the Association of Teachers of Domestic Subjects and the Ministry of Food. Those balanced meals, however, seem to belong more to those within the household than to the household manager herself. Such self-denial did not go unnoticed by others in those households, however. In 1940, early on in the rationing period, one man remarked to a mass-observer, “it’ll affect my wife more than me” (M-O A TC 67/2/B),31 and nine years later, another husband echoed that thought: “Strongly suspect wife of going without a lot of things” (Mass-Observation, Our Daily Bread).32 In keeping with these concerns of men that women were not benefiting from the public emphasis on health and nutrition, some women reported how they made do on very little. One woman from Slough wrote to Mass-Observation in 1948, “Potatoe ration: 3 lbs. a person a week. Don’t think that I ever exceed this for myself alone. I often consume much less” (M-O A TC 67/5/D); there is a note of pride in her explanation that is in keeping with the ascetic ideal, though it appears she lives alone and her sacrifice would thus not be for others’ direct benefit, but for a national good. This attitude is mirrored by another mass-observation respondent in 1950, who writes, “I found that a small tin of meat was enough for three days. A smoked haddock was also enough for three meals, useful, as the fresh meat ration was not enough for two days” (M-O A TC 67/5/E). Of course, not everyone agreed with these two women; in 1947, a woman remarked on the decrease in potato rations to three pounds, “I
don't think it’s going to be adequate” (M-O A TC 67/5/C). Though the number of people reporting that they were not getting enough food rose from one-fifth of those surveyed in 1941 to two-thirds in 1946 (Mass-Observation, *Future Outlooks 1946* 4), and certainly that number includes men as well as women, it may well be that the number early on included those women who were encouraged to send their rations to men overseas and to serve others before they served themselves, and later grew to include a wider cross-section of British society.

Though women were encouraged, with regard to consumption, to live as conservatively as possible for the good of the nation, they were also cautioned soundly to avoid some of the pitfalls of poor health and bad nutrition. Their rations might be meager, but their beauty was not to suffer. In *Wartime Beauty*, the ubiquitous Ursula Bloom challenges her readers not to waver in their quests for beauty: “Looking lovely in wartime is not as easy as looking lovely in peacetime, but not one whit less important” (2). An attractive appearance, as well as an attractive attitude, was defined by some areas of women’s culture as part of their wartime effort. The idea was made clear in any number of media that after the war, one must be prepared to return to traditional roles, and that when that time would come, one’s appearance would play an important part in home-front reconstruction. Meanwhile, too, women were encouraged to remain attractive in order to bolster the morale of servicemen and of those men who stayed home to work in factories and in other war efforts within Britain. Bloom’s win-the-war rhetoric added to the militaristic flavor of the Ministry of Food’s ads and publications, but called women to a battle of a kind different from that waged on the Kitchen Front: “It is our duty to do the best that we can by ourselves. [. . .] It is your duty to eat your full fat ration because this is necessary to health. It is your duty to get proper exercise [. . .] If you can do exercises on rising, remember that they [. . .] will have you ready to face the day in full fighting trim” (2-3). While encouraged
to eat their full ration of butter and margarine, women must also maintain “fighting trim” in order to fulfill the potential of wartime beauty. The very specific standard for female beauty and height-to-weight proportions was not set aside during wartime; if anything, women’s ideal appearance became a more frequently discussed issue in some publications. As with any war effort, Bloom notes that “[p]erseverance is the latch-key to all true beauty” (16). Not a thing to come by naturally, “true” beauty is, according to Bloom, something to fight for as tenaciously as one would for freedom from Nazi invasion, something to wage war for on the road toward the probability of peace. Bloom, as well as other beauty experts, penned numerous beauty manuals during the war years, and her Woman’s Own columns reflect the frivolous side of women’s wartime culture. Tips for looking good in uniform, as well as during the black-out, were standard topics for Bloom during the early war years, and her columns continued to advise women on how to enlarge their busts and get their fingers to taper while the conflict across the Channel raged on. Actress Ruby Miller (in an article from an unidentified women’s magazine) called women to wage war with their beauty: “Don’t be an added horror! [. . .] Be as attractive as you can at work and in leisure hours, and you’ll soon discover what a delightful impression you make on friends and how formidable you can be—indirectly—to foes!” (qtd. in Waller and Vaughan-Rees 81). Though women were a large part of Britain’s homeland war efforts within and outside of the home, their physicalities were more often addressed by these publications than were the activities they performed in ways more directly related to the battles abroad.

While women worked to maintain their physical attractiveness, they were also called upon to perform other, less traditionally feminine tasks, and for many that meant donning those uniforms Bloom seemed to view as just another form of fashion. Periodicals such as Woman’s Own and My Home minimized much of this new occupational territory that women were asked
to inhabit, and though they addressed women’s wartime work in columns and in feature articles, the slant of these reports were often trivializing, and emphasized the temporary nature of such labor.35 Women joined organizations such as the WRNS (Women’s Royal Navy Service) and the WAAF (Women’s Auxiliary Air Force), but the ways in which much of the work performed by these units was publicized continued to reinforce the importance of femininity rather than of any new-found freedom from traditional gender roles. Many organizations used women’s periodicals as venues for advertising their needs for women to work in a variety of positions, but often the rhetoric of such “articles” was linked more to the ways in which women could nurture the men of the British forces. During the middle years of the second world war, My Home ran a series of features on various occupations available to women who joined the war effort outside the home and kitchen; too often, though, that labor only mimicked the work done within the confines of the domestic sphere. In February 1943, the magazine promoted positions available for WAAF cooks:

It is the WAAF Cook who serves the fighter-pilot with a tempting dish when he comes down to re-fuel his plane, during sorties. Tea or supper for the Bomber Crews before they set out on their flights are got ready in the kitchens of the WAAF, and likewise a grand breakfast to welcome them on their return. [. . .] A little known “side line” of theirs is to act as “housekeepers” for the Aircrews of the Flying Boats in Coastal Command [. . .]. They choose and pick the rations which the men cook for themselves in the tiny galley amidships. Could you volunteer for this important work? (6)

In the May issue, the subject was canteen workers, and though this plea for able-bodied female workers does more to outline the rigor demanded by such an occupation, it still links female war work with traditional feminine roles:

Canteen work is more than just handing out cups of coffee to service-men with a lovely smile! There are countless back-scene chores as well: pushing loaf after loaf of bread under a bread-cutting machine, making sandwiches ad infinitum, washing up, scraping carrots—and the endless collection of dirty dishes. Tiring,
monotonous duties these, perhaps, sometimes, but they are done cheerfully by women in every part of the country. (8)

Of course, such work, too, took place daily and with little fanfare in homes throughout the Isles, but in the context of serving a “party of Commandos [. . .] or a crowd of sailors with a long way to go and little time to spare” (8), common women’s work becomes glamorous, its tone imperative. Work done on the Kitchen Front pales when compared to the same work done for men in the armed forces. While such work was necessary for the sustenance of British resistance to Nazi occupation, such rhetoric recasts traditional roles for women, as well as female attractiveness and sexuality, in order to entice women aged seventeen-and-a-half to fifty to become surrogate wives and mothers for British troops. By appealing to a feminine identity, one that reinforces a woman’s “appropriate” desire to assist masculine efforts, these publications helped to ensure that the destabilization of gender roles during the war would be short-lived once the war was over. If a woman was not bound to return to work only within her own home, then many of the occupations offered to women after the end of the war hardly differed from those available to them for the previous century. An ad inviting volunteers to serve as cooks and housekeepers for the Royal Navy makes clear the fact that any inversion of social and gender roles that had occurred during the war would end once the fighting did: “If you join, while serving your country, you can prepare for your own future. Domestic work on modern lines is the coming career for intelligent, home-loving girls” (My Home, September 1945). The “cutting edge” of female employment at the mid-point of the twentieth century is a hollow echo of that from the mid-nineteenth century, when mangles and machinery were used to entice women into believing in the feminine appeal of domestic service.

In their important archival study of women’s wartime periodicals, Jane Waller and Michael Vaughan-Rees explore the ways in which women’s magazines during the war years
helped to encourage women to explore new vistas that in turn led to dialogue about issues such as child care, sexuality, and education. They do concede, however, that those same “magazines did little in the post-war period to encourage these aspirations. For the most part they contented themselves with advising women how to resume and make the most of a life of domesticity” (127), a life that continued to contain many of the problematics of war, such as food rationing and fuel shortages. Bloom, widely known throughout the war years both as a romance novelist and as the Beauty Editor of Woman’s Own, penned Me—After the War: A Book for Girls Considering the Future, a 1944 volume addressing potential careers for the post-war woman, but her emphasis on traditional female employment (domestic work and cooking) is only balanced out with exegeses of careers tinged with glamour, such as modeling.36 Likewise, in 1950, My Home ran a year-long series of articles on careers for women, but these, too, were either traditional (“Nursing in a Children’s Hospital”) or largely out of the reaches of most women seeking employment (“Working with the Airways,” “In the BBC”).37 Though the changes brought about by war in the number of women who desired careers (as opposed to those for whom employment was a necessity) were positive in the overall social progress of British women, careers were designated almost exclusively as something one did prior to marriage and a return to more traditional roles. While My Home ran their career-oriented series, for instance, Woman’s Own presented a series of columns touting “Undiscovered British Beauties.” The October 5, 1950, issue highlights Jenny Price, the description of whom epitomizes a typical rhetorical mode for representing the concept of careers for women: “a successful career girl, but she makes no bones about the fact that she looks forward to marriage, a home and children” (22). Though women could “play” at having careers (unless, of course, economic conditions mandated their presence in the working world), the expectation—within society-at-large and depicted
within women’s popular culture—after the war’s end was that women would once again mind
the feeding and keeping of the rest of Britain. Even during the war, when WRNS were sought
out and women’s issues addressed unabashedly, the emphasis placed upon the post-war
household and its traditional (if highly stylized, modernized) nature was clearly evident in
women’s periodicals. My Home, for instance, in 1943 ran a series of artfully drawn pictorial
spreads focusing on “The Home You Hope to Have Sometime,” namely, after the war is over
and life returns to a comfortable, gender-specific version of normalcy. Tucked away within the
cramped newsprint pages of the wartime publication, these four-color centerfolds come across as
relatively pornographic: women were set to lusting for a post-war domesticity long before the
surrender of Axis powers.

Such conditioning seems to have done its job. One WAAF member wrote in November
of 1944, as her war career was at its end,

My plans are simple and ordinary. My aim is to return to a sane and sweet
normality [...] I want to marry, for marriage is the aim, confessed or
unconfessed, of the healthy normal girl. I aspire to being a good cook and
housewife, one who makes a house a home, and can [...] tackle all the repair jobs
that constantly crop up in a house. [...] I aim at being useful to my country as a
good wife and mother, but as we shall be living in a new labor-saving house [...] there will be no reason why I should not also have a career. I cannot aspire to
greatness or fame [...] I shall fill a small niche somewhere in business as a part-
time typist, teleprinter or secretary. [...] Having a field of interest outside the
home, I should make a more interesting wife and mother of broader
understanding. (qtd. in Waller and Vaughan-Rees 124)

Her wartime work, as well as the work she plans to undertake once “normality” has been
achieved, is not necessarily something to be done for reasons of personal growth or for social
empowerment, but will merely supplement her as a wife and a mother when the time comes for
her to don those robes. Rather than release women from domestic servitude, in many cases such
as this one, knowledge gained during the war made it instead possible for women to take on even
more work in both the public and the private realms. After the war, if one were “healthy” and “normal,” one would certainly seek out a path toward having it all. The “Superwoman” mythology often thought of as a product of 1980s liberal feminism apparently began much earlier, and is perhaps one of the more neglected social and cultural by-products of World War Two.

While women were asked to maintain cheerful and patriotic attitudes in the midst of austerity, and while they were challenged to rise above scarcity and to “make do” daily on the Kitchen Front, they also were persuaded through the arena of popular culture to maintain appearances and demeanors as close to that of “normal,” peacetime femininity as possible. Like prescriptions for physical proportions and for household cleanliness, the more abstract gender-based role for women directly following the second world war is one reached only through precarious balance: there is little room for deviance from the norm suggested in these women’s magazines and cookery books, and the same suggestions are echoed in countless voices of women who saw their future within the pages of such texts. Lorna Sage describes “the model family of the 1950s ads: man at work, wife home-making, children (two, one of each) sporty and clean and extrovert” (89), and the post war era as “the time when married women, having been sent back home en masse, were encouraged in every possible way to stay there—first demobilised and then immobilised” (119). With Council housing like that occupied by Sage’s family making possible a “middle-class” lifestyle for a greater percentage of the population than existed prior to the war, more women than ever came under the edicts handed down through women’s culture. Even though opportunities for women had been pried open during the war years, cultural as well as personal rhetorics maintained that the best way to live one’s (female) life was that way depicted in the adverts and colorful centerfolds of women’s periodicals. In
1940, one woman replied to Mass-Observation that young women “don’t prepare for marriage these days, they want a career,” and indicated that women on the career-track were slack when in their kitchens, did not measure up to the ingenuity of women concocting mock oysters:38 “So long as the food’s there they’ll use it the way they always have,” and not in those new ways that signified possibility in the face of war (M-O A TC 67/2/C). Both during and after the war, however, women were held to much different standards, both in the kitchen and with regard to their “careers.” Women were, for the most part, asked to cook well and with inspiration, to look good, and to retreat to a traditional domesticity as soon as their duty to Britain became one of solely domestic proportions. These perscriptions were not perpetuated by any Ministry, however, but could often be found within the culture of women’s programming and women’s periodicals, typical modes of information-gathering and components of leisure for women. Mass-Observation reports in “The Housewife’s Day” (1951) that “relaxation from domestic demands took the form of [. . .] sitting and reading—books, newspapers, magazines—listening to the wireless, watching TV [. . .]” (13). The ways in which such women often chose to retreat from their domestic duties ironically tied housewives, as well as other women, even more tightly to the mores of the home and to the roles for women strongly encouraged during the post-war era. When they were not actually performing the feats of cooking and cleaning and caretaking, women were often engaged in reading about such activities, and about how to better perform those activities once their too-brief leisure time was up.

“She could cook like an angel and looked like one. What more does a girl have to do to get a man?” reads the caption above Steve McNeil’s story “She Knew What She Wanted,” which ran in the July 6, 1950, issue of Woman’s Own. Popular fiction appearing in magazines of the post-war era represented women’s roles in much the same manner as did the advertisements
beside them. In McNeil’s story, Sally Hannegan seems at first to want nothing but golf lessons from good-looking pro Jimmy Vernon, but ultimately wins his heart by the proverbial way of his stomach. Under the guise of taking lessons only to impress a spectral near-fiancé, Sally, in the name of thrift (a virtue in this time when British staples such as tea and meat are still rationed), packs enough lunch for two and wins over the “slender young man with intense blue eyes, and hair which, when the sun caught it, looked as blond as overripe wheat” (9). After one meeting, Jimmy recounts the credentials of this “long-legged, slender creature with a pert face [. . .] blue eyes and hair the color of Turkish coffee”: “She can cook, she can sew, she can speak foreign languages, she loves children, and she looks like an angel. [. . .] She can sail a yacht and play tennis. She can dance, she has a sense of humour, and in her old age she won’t run to fat” (9). Though this list is one put into Jimmy’s head by Sally herself (with the exception of that last prediction), and is a superb list of accomplishments, it is Sally’s cooking that wins him over. When she lays out their first “impromptu” luncheon, Jimmy “sipped his coffee. It tasted like ambrosia. [. . .] The strawberry tart tasted like strawberry tart that Grandmother used to make if she could have made strawberry tart that tasted like the one Sally made. The chocolate fudge melted in Jimmy’s mouth, and his heart melted along with the food” (34). By the time Sally remarks, “I am completely without guile, believe me. Lots of women would bring a big lunch out here just to show you that they can cook, but not me” (35), readers have their doubts, but Sally’s veiled guile is justified by her superbly domestic nature. Her sexuality, though it flares once when she “put one hand on his cheek [and] put up no defence worthy of the name” when Jimmy kisses her (35), is subdued by her appropriate relationship to cookery and, by extension, to domesticity, to marriage, to prescribed roles for British women in that post-war time period.
Sally does not entice Jimmy to think thoughts impure; instead, he explains how she “is the only one I ever saw who makes me think of paying a grocery bill and looking at furniture advertisements” (9). Sally’s expertise in the kitchen not only wins over the man, but also ensures her continued position as his nurturer and as a woman who fulfills her duty to Britain. A product of the scarcity of war, and a woman who has to make do with what rations might be available to her, Sally fits Bloom’s standards of a woman who can also keep up her appearance and attract a mate. Her self-denial is abandoned only as far as it must be in order for her to gain this appropriate companion; any other excess on Sally’s part is avoided. Her characterization relies upon the food in her picnic basket: she can create food, she can improvise, she can be thrifty, but she also is the agent of the food, and not its primary consumer. The food that melts in Jimmy’s mouth, thus melting his heart, does not touch Sally’s lips from a textual standpoint. The feminine relationship to food, as represented here through the character of Sally, is one removed from its actual consumption. Sally’s food contains elements of nationalism, of the feminine, and of the promise of domestic capabilities to come. As a creator of, rather than a consumer of, food, Sally occupies the role suggested on other pages of Woman’s Own, as well as in numerous cookery books and other household manuals. With the sugar ration in January of 1950 at the same level as it had been since 1948 (Great Britain, MOF Bulletin 1), Sally also displays the sacrifice called for early in the war years; she is giving over one of her more precious rations, in the forms of tarts and fudge, to please her man. Through her proper relationship to food, Sally is desexualized, despite her final giving in to Jimmy’s kisses. With certain nuptials on her horizon, a few kisses fall within the boundaries of sexual propriety.

Post-war women’s culture, such as that found within the pages of popular periodicals like Woman’s Own and My Home, was a strong force in the “demobilising” (to use Sage’s
terminology) of women and in a pointing of female Britons back toward any domesticity they may have abandoned for the war effort. With a large and diverse female readership, these sorts of periodicals (as well as their counterparts in other print and broadcast media) acted as forums for encouraging women to take on roles they had left behind when called to work in factories and with organizations like the WRNS and WATS. The representations of femininity displayed within their pages made these magazines some of the strongest proponents of the self-denial and domestication expected of post-war British women. Women who displayed that trusty ability to deny their own desires and appetites in the midst of austerity (an austerity that defined not only the availability of foodstuffs, but also the population of young men available as potential mates, their number having been decreased by wartime casualties) epitomized post-war expectations for a majority of British women. From the time food rationing began in early 1940, and throughout a post-war period that saw continued need for that governmental scheme, prescribed femininity included a particular relationship with food: women were to nurture and feed, to do so with thrift and scarcity always in mind, and were encouraged to do without unless it meant that their appearances would suffer. In order to transcend the trappings of her flesh (including her sexuality) and to function in an appropriate context, a woman must, like Sally, “cook like an angel and [look] like one” and must, apparently, consume like one as well. The same standards for women’s household and bodily maintenance were in effect after the war as had been prior to it, and if possible, such standards were even more intertwined than they had been before as a result of the effects of rationing and the imperative of self-denial. Cultural texts such as women’s periodicals increasingly reached out to a broad audience, thus combining the realms of the household and the physical body previously addressed in separate publications. After the war, Woman’s Own began advertising appliances and highlighting aspects of domesticity in
addition to their coverage of beauty and more “frivolous” aspects of the feminine. The effects of
the rationing scheme, which had asked women collectively to nurture and feed their country and
thus had blurred lines separating roles for a variety of women, drew more than a population of
housewives to subscribe to the more popular post-war roles offered to women. When in June of
1950 My Home ran an advertisement for Mrs. Beeton’s Household Management—in near-
continuous publication for a century—the role of the housewife as one responsible for
maintenance of the household and of the physical well-being of its inhabitants was as strong as it
had been when the first editions of Beeton’s advice were published. This advertisement, though,
reached an audience made up of women ushered into a new era for female Britons, one that
would remove many of them from a workforce they had but recently experienced and, unless
they remained unmarried or were of a selected sector of the working classes, would entice them
into a world much like that depicted within the pages—once again glossy and multi-colored—of
those weekly and monthly women’s magazines that had begun to function as a new literature of
maintenance for women. Such a literature, too, was available to an audience broader than that
which might previously have read Mrs. Beeton, Lydia Chatterton, or Ursula Bloom in those
books devoted strictly to housekeeping, cookery, or the upkeep of physical beauty.

As this new, broad readership consumed the contents of women’s post-war periodicals
for enjoyment and leisure, they became susceptible to the variety of social prescriptions enclosed
within those colorful covers. The messages perpetuated within these forms of women’s culture,
too, were often mixed, and though their public lives were radically minimized as their domestic
lives expanded to fit an ideal womanhood, the idea of life beyond the home still hung heavy in
the post-war air. A balance of public and private, of the freedoms allowed during wartime and
the reduction of those freedoms once the war had ended, was often touted within the pages of
women’s periodicals, as well as in books such as Bloom’s catalogue of post-war vocations for women. The realities faced by most British women in the period following World War Two, however, rarely allowed for such a balance. While roles other than domestic were outlined within the pages of these magazines, and while combinations of female roles were discussed as viable (such as the mother-wife-typist described above by the former WAAF member, or the multi-talented Sally of McNeil’s short story), most women were encouraged to fulfill one role, and found real social support for combining their interests to be in as short supply as was sugar or beef. Most women found themselves either turning inward toward the home and its maintenance, or gazing out toward a public existence with which female sexuality was cast as complicit. In August of 1945, *My Home* contributor “The Man-Who-Sees” addressed the duality of female experience, what he terms the “worldly and unworldly” aspects of womanhood. The unworldly woman, he muses, “never goes to dances or to the pictures, rarely to parties. [. . .] does her duties [. . .] reads religious books, mostly; and poetry. [. . .] can go into raptures over a sunset or a flower-bell, but not over a new dress or a fine pudding!” (26) Her opposite: “Gay, bright, laughing [. . .] jostling, mixing, quarreling [. . .] knows which side of her bread is buttered [. . .] thoroughly enjoys her food [. . .] She wants to marry a man with enough money to give her a good time!” (26) This very distinct division among types of women—those who are aligned with the body and those who instead are natives of the intellectual realm—perpetuated in the magazine’s advertisements as well as in its domestic agenda, is here approached from a philosophical point of view and by a male writer who assumes a peculiar omniscient authority. The same mind/body duality found prior to the war in Woolf’s Isa and Mrs. Manresa once again surface here, after the war, in this Man’s column.
Though this Man distinctly defines as oppositional these female archetypes, he also encourages an intertwining of the characteristics claimed for each sort of woman. He suggests that “we can try to harmonize the two sides” of ourselves (52), our fleshly selves-of-the-world and our ethereal, unworldly other halves. The unworldly woman, he writes, “thinks that it is vastly more important to live on Beauty than to live on Porridge! But it is her body that mediates much of the beauty of the world” (52), while her worldly sister (whom, he despairs, the unworldly woman often connects “with the devil”) must not neglect her “inner life” or risk becoming “a vast emptiness, a leaf lying by the roadside in the gutter” (52). His thesis—the transcendence of a mind/body duality that is harmful to “the happiness of a woman, as a woman, a complete woman” (52)—however laudable, is unfortunately undermined by the quite biased rhetoric he injects into his descriptions of womankind. Much like Jill Adam’s allusion (discussed in Chapter One) to the woman who is sexual outside of marriage as a rotting tree stump, the Man-Who-Sees depicts the embodied woman without a developed intellect as so much trash, as the excess of the world. Status as a “vast emptiness” is quite different from that of one who merely “couldn’t go into raptures over the beauty of a sunset if she had never seen a sunset with her bodily eyes” (52), as he says of the unworldly woman who forgets the importance of her physicality. This woman, however, simply needs to remind herself of her sensuality; the worldly woman must expunge her sensuality, and by extension her sexuality, in order to achieve a balance of inner and outer worlds and to avoid becoming a cast-off specimen by the side of the road. The Man on one hand supports a joining together of one ontological duality, but on the other states that in order to do so, the worldly woman should “have a cell to go into now and then, where she can be alone and make her Self” (52). The “Self,” obviously, in this case is indeed not an entity of combined physical and intellectual qualities, but is instead an
interior self. Regardless of his explicit premise, the Man-Who-Sees only reinforces through rhetoric a mutual exclusion of mind and body, of intellectual and physical aspects of female experience. If an intellectual Self is still defined as primary within this duality, then the Man’s initial descriptions of unworldly and worldly women do not serve merely as extremes to be tempered through adding together the flesh and the spirit, but instead serve as instructional devices. To be unworldly and without delight in matters of the flesh (such as food) is still to have a Self; however, to be worldly and without that inner life creates, by oppositional construction, a psychic void, a being without subjectivity.

Such a division of women via supposed allegiances to either the mind or the body—as represented not only in this *My Home* article, but in numerous other venues—continued on as the cultural norm for women during the post-war era. With these widely available and popular women’s magazines serving as a new form of maintenance manual, their edicts for female behavior became entrenched within the social discourse of a Britain that had conquered on one front, but that still battled to regain and maintain social order in the homeland. Along with the domestic agenda of women’s culture and the move toward a normalization, once more, of the home as woman’s sphere, came a retreat from avenues of female agency that ran concurrent with female sexuality. Embodied agency, “worldly” agency, is not the sanctioned agency of the domesticated, unworldly subject whose sensuality is acceptable only when it enhances her aesthetic sensibilities. The woman who “thoroughly enjoys her food” and who prefers Porridge to elements of natural Beauty embodies aspects of a female experience that imply decadence and excess. In this period of rationing and austerity, the excessive, worldly woman stands out as more than simply self-indulgent, even when compared to representations of female self-denial, such as McNeil’s Sally. Women’s proper, once-removed relationships to food center around
their abilities to prepare it for others, and to “make do” as they create a semblance of a stable Britain. With the Ministry of Food guiding a nation’s behavior toward food and toward consumption in general, and with rationing’s foundation resting upon a strong sense of nationalism, the woman of excess signifies abhorrence on several fronts: sexual, national, economic, ethical. Hardly a creature of equal portions mental and corporeal, the consuming woman—especially during a time when asceticism is not only a mandate placed upon women by a patriarchal social system, but also a central notion to women’s culture as defined by women en masse—is a fleshly, threatening entity whose lack of control and whose inability to be controlled signals the inherent instability of any post-war normalcy attempted by British society.

The idea of such a consuming female—one fashioned from excess and whose position vis-à-vis the social order is extraneous—though an idea rampant throughout this and other periods, is hardly without its avid detractors. Examples from this era of women who are represented as composites of physical and intellectual elements exist, and such examples work to problematize the notion of women as divided between these two realms, as well as the notion that women should fill a single social role. Examples from various aspects of women’s and other cultures, even when not created as perfect balances of mind and body, indicate ways in which traditional methods used to delineate groups of women did not always suit, and were not always accepted by women themselves. One strong literary example of this post-war destabilization of mind/body duality can be found in Barbara Pym’s 1953 novel, Jane and Prudence. This novel emphasizes both the concept of the threatening female consumer and the ways in which such a simplistic characterization falls short of representing the complicated nature of a modern female subject. Though on one level Pym’s narrative conventions seem obtuse and appear to cast her protagonists in traditionally binaried roles, closer analysis exposes characterizations that
problematize the use of consumption as a trope for female transgression and sexuality, and that point to the ways in which women, once the war had shifted their social and cultural use value, could not be so easily fit into singular molds. In this novel Pym manipulates the rhetoric and imagery of women’s culture, especially of women’s periodicals (such as the oft-mentioned *Vogue*), in order to play upon their conventional wisdoms for post-war women, resulting in a narrative that is at once familiar but simultaneously out of synch with mass culture’s glib depictions of women. Written between 1950 and 1952 (Pym, *Private Eye* 337), when Britons were weary of the rationing scheme they had by then endured for years, Pym’s use of food and of consumption as modes of characterization magnify these tropes, creating caricatures of Jane (the intellectualized vicar’s wife) and Prudence (the worldly, single career woman). Beneath these overdrawn personae, however, lie representations of women who fit no specific roles and who defy the post-war cultural and social ideologies that attempted to narrowly define actual British women.

One initial assessment of Prudence Bates comes from Jane, a woman some years her senior who was her Oxford tutor a decade prior to the novel’s initial scene. In Jane’s eyes, Prudence is “like somebody in a women’s magazine, carefully ‘groomed,’ and wearing a red dress that sets off her pale skin and dark hair” (9). Jessie Morrow (eventually Prudence’s rival for the affections of widower Fabian Driver), too, imagines Prudence as someone straight from the pages of a women’s periodical: “swinging her sun-glasses in her hand, like a picture in *Vogue,*” with “crimson toe-nails that peeped out through the straps of her sandals” (169). This objectification of Prudence by women in the novel not only defines her as a part of the culture of women’s periodicals and of their mutual agendas, but also distances Prudence from the ethos of the novel’s female community, the other members of which seem much better suited in manners
and in appearance to their post-war existences. Though Vogue signals more haute couture than Mrs. Beeton, the slick imagery and particular prescriptions contained in high-fashion magazines are not dissimilar to those found within more quotidian publications such as Woman’s Own. Prudence and her jaunty demeanor, her good grooming, is an example of the femininity described by Bloom and others who insisted that women’s beauty be considered an important part of national prosperity and security. Associations of Prudence with a magazine such as Vogue, though, further distance her from those women who are more associated with the home and with the domestic occupations of cooking and wise economy. Vogue typically contains images that cannot be realized by most women; the photography in such a periodical captures clothing and situations that do not enter the lives of the majority. While domestic perfection is itself something that might not be reached completely (as previously outlined in Chapter One), the setting for that type of perfection is the familiar (to most) model of a single-family household. Fashion spreads made up of impossible-to-own clothing, though, are compounded in their unreality for most readers by the rarefied settings in which they are displayed: a pristine meadow, resort beach, or weekend-in-the-country. Fashions like the “New Look,” which exemplified a movement away from the severe apparel of the Utility Scheme and an ostensible surge in the availability of textiles, were for many women difficult to imagine or to achieve. Carolyn Steedman recounts her mother’s dismay at not being able to own a garment constructed in this excessive style, and notes that “dresses needing twenty yards for a skirt were items as expensive as children” (29). While My Home may have suggested domestic principles not necessarily aligned with the average British home of the post-war era, its focus upon domesticity—an encouraged national pastime for women of that era—allowed its contents a certain realism that the pages of Vogue cannot be afforded. Prudence is not just “like” a
women’s magazine: in her *Vogue*-like difference and elegance she allows for an emphasis of the social and cultural chasm between “unworldly” domestic interests and the frivolity and fantasy attached to the world beyond shortages and queues.

Instead of being included in the cult of femininity central to the English parish in which much of the novel is set, Prudence is created as a romantic figure of mythological proportions. The difference that results from her *Vogue*-ish outward appearance is enhanced by the ways in which those around her (but primarily other women) shroud Prudence with their own assumptions about her actions and about the significance of those actions, especially with regard to her sexual behavior. Prudence is “twenty-nine, an age that is often rather desperate for a woman who has not yet married” (7), and doesn’t quite fit into the milieu suggested by her background and education. Only three women in Prudence’s college class at Oxford have not married, and when it is pointed out that “Eleanor has her work at the Ministry, and Mollie the Settlement and her dogs,” Jane fills in the gap in this narrative of the unmarrieds: “Prudence has her love affairs [. . .] for they were surely as much an occupation as anything else” (10).

Prudence actually has her own career as an academic editor for Dr. Grampian, an economist. Another vicar’s wife remarks that Prudence’s career “must be ample compensation for not being married” (10), an opinion that might have come straight from the pages of *Woman’s Own*. Likewise, a reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* found Prudence “sadly rootless” (“Family Failings”), ostensibly because she moves from one dating relationship to another but never settles down into marriage. With an attitude typical of the era, all three of these views overlook Prudence’s public status as a working woman, and instead see Prudence’s romantic life as primary. The narrative itself builds upon this feminine ideal, and Prudence is often constructed via hyperbolic rhetoric that echoes the contents of women’s periodicals. Prudence
(who, like Pym herself, is no stranger to unrequited love) harbors romantic feelings for her employer, Dr. Grampian, and the explanation of how these feelings came into existence rivals the fiction found within more popular venues:

[. . .] it had been one of those rare late evenings, when they had been sitting together over a manuscript, that Prudence’s love for him, if that’s what it was, had suddenly flared up. Perhaps ‘flared’ was too violent a word, but Prudence thought of it afterwards as having been like that. She remembered herself standing by the window, looking out onto an early spring evening with the sky a rather clear blue just before the darkness came [. . .] and then suddenly it had come to her Oh, my love . . . rushing in like that. (37)

Here Prudence herself lends some credence to a romanticization of her character, but she also subverts the notion that she is a figure cut solely from the fantasy world of romance fiction. Her recollection of this moment in the past perfect creates an ironic distance between the actual occurrence and its turn into romantic territory. Her passion had not necessarily flared, but Prudence self-consciously admits (via the third-person narration) to having constructed that passion in such fiery terms. She goes on to admit that “for want of better material, [she] had built up the negative relationship [. . .] with the something positive that must surely be there underneath it all” (37-8). Prudence is aware of her position with relation to the typical romance plot, and she keeps the reader aware of that position, as well. Others may take the easy path and identify Prudence with the genre of romance fiction, but those who read her closely will find the gaps in Prudence-as-generic-construct. Fabian Driver has apparently joined the parish women in romanticizing Prudence, associating her with the traditional trappings: “Wine, good food, flowers, soft lights, holding hands, sparkling eyes, kisses . . .” (111); though he sees how evenings built upon such an ideal “have little reality,” he also fails to see Prudence beyond the glamorized version of her femininity that is bolstered by popular culture. Prudence herself ingests romance fiction without any self-deception, curling up with a novel that describes “a love
affair in the fullest sense of the word and sparing no detail [. . .]. It was difficult to imagine that her love for Arthur Grampian could ever come to anything like this, and indeed she was hardly conscious of him as she read on into the small hours of the morning to the book’s inevitable but satisfying unhappy ending” (47). For Prudence, this plot is obviously as much a fantasy as her own version of a love life is, but that does not make the reading any less pleasurable. Instead, it reinforces the notion that Prudence understands her position within the fiction she has concocted, as well as what she represents in the fictions others have created from their knowledge of and assumptions about her.

Jane herself seems to read such publications only when she visits the dentist (78); the image she helps to construct of Prudence for Pym’s readers is not only fictive, but is also created from remnants of a context quite alien to Jane’s daily life. When Jane later tries to discover whether Prudence has a sexual relationship with Fabian Driver, the fact that her understanding of sexual relationships is not grounded in the real world is clear. She asks, “‘[. . .] there’s nothing wrong between you’ [. . .] using an expression she had sometimes seen in the cheaper women’s papers where girls asked how they should behave when their boyfriends wanted to ‘do them wrong’” (123). When Prudence is unable to decipher the meaning hidden within this remark, Jane continues to imagine “full-blown Restoration comedy women or Nell Gwynn or Edwardian ladies kept in pretty little houses with wrought-iron balconied in St. John’s Wood” (123). Prudence’s ambiguous response to Jane’s inquiry is a blithe “one just doesn’t ask [. . .] either one is or one isn’t and there’s no need to ask coy questions about it” (123). Rather than confirm or deny any sexual activity, Prudence allows for the enigma created by those around her to be kept in place. Jane’s coy question is met with an equally coy answer, and Prudence’s sexual endeavors are abandoned as indeterminate. Because the rhetoric of women’s culture relies
heavily upon sexual definitions in order to classify women into social castes, Prudence’s “none of your business” response does more than chastise Jane for her nosiness; rather, the fact that the question remains unanswered illuminates a critical cultural impetus to classify Prudence on the grounds of her sexuality. All who seek to “read” Prudence are foiled on this very basic level, because while Pym makes use of common tropes for female sexual transgression, the fact of any such transgression is kept a mystery. Readers (of the text as well as within it) are thus led to question the existence of a lapse in Prudence’s sexual morality, as well as to interrogate the significance of figurative renderings of sexuality, such as those connected with food.

*Jane and Prudence* is a novel of its time; the cultural climate of a Britain under its Ministry of Food is impossible to separate from the narrative that follows Prudence’s quest for love and Jane’s best intentions to help her along that path. Food in this novel and during this era is meted out in particular fashions with regard to practices of both governmental rationing and a more traditional, hierarchical method of dispensing edibles. The vicarage housekeeper, Mrs. Glaze, bemoans the fact that “meat has never been at such a low ebb as it is now, what with everything having to go through the Government” (18), and she offers up with a reverent tone the bit of liver put aside for Jane and Nicholas Cleveland by the town’s butcher. She assures them that the butcher “shares out the offal on a fair basis [. . .] but everybody can’t have it every time” (21); the butcher has, however, made certain that the Clevelands have meat upon their arrival into the parish.43 In a manner reminiscent of Woolf’s connection of material and spiritual realms through food imagery, Pym has Jane muse how this gift of liver to the new vicar is like “‘meat offered to idols’” (21). Its scarcity raises meat, even unrationed offal, to a sacrosanct position within post-war culture, and indeed, Jane’s simile is not incongruous to the ways in which meat (and other scarce stock) is discussed during the period. Jane further extends this
figurative analysis of meat’s status: “‘people in these days do rather tend to worship meat for its own sake’” (21). A relatively sturdy food item, meat here is metaphorically transformed into a thing of the spirit, as well as into a thing that conveys the spirit’s matters.

More than a representative of the spirit, though, meat is a sharp indicator of social hierarchies. Even under rationing, an attempt to distribute food equally, meat and other items in short supply are often the domain of those with certain social importance, such as vicars and, in a text nearly as devoid of men as the butcher’s case is of beef, to those few men who do remain within the village.44 The widowed Mrs. Mayhew pronounces that “a man must have meat” (30), and Mrs. Crampton, who runs the local teashop along with her, is just as insistent that “a man needs eggs” when she serves Nicholas two eggs to Jane’s lonely one (51). Mrs. Crampton suggests a meal of bacon and eggs rather than the day’s menu of toad-in-the-hole or beef curry: “we can sometimes, you know, but not for everyone” (50). Some minutes later, bachelor Mr. Oliver is served “a plate laden with roast chicken” (52). Though Jane agrees with the idea that men need these foods from the body-building group, she also blasphemously wonders, “surely not more than women did?” (51), and concludes that such preferential treatment comes down to the idea that “the very best [. . .] is what man needs” (52). Jane’s comment supports Annette Weld’s belief that “Pym recognized that food could be an indicator of social status, with women usually shortchanged” (100). Self-denying women and others might make the most of potatoes and milk, à la Chatterton, or of “Woolton Pie” (potatoes, carrots, and swedes [rutabagas] wrapped up in flourless potato pastry), but not everyone need be content with meager meals all of the time; some rationed goods were governed by powers greater than the Ministry. The effects of post-war gender roles influenced the ways in which popular sentiment regarding food consumption was constructed and perpetuated.
When Jane considers the spiritual implications of meat during rationing, she presents a Biblical adage that will echo throughout the novel. “‘You will remember that St. Paul had no objection to the faithful eating it,’” she remarks, “‘but pointed out that it might prove a stumbling block to the weaker brethren’” (21). Jane is most likely referring to verses from I Corinthians in which Paul asks, among other things, that Christ’s new followers abstain from eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols: “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he? All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not”; with respect to food, this second verse appears in *The Living Bible*, translated into modern English, as “[. . .] it’s not against God’s laws to eat such meat, but that doesn’t mean you should go ahead and do it” (I Cor. 10:22-3). Paul’s concern with regard to meat consumption does much to imply free will and to distance his teachings from the Levitican laws of Judaic traditions, but he also emphasizes the fact that temptation may as well be avoided, that for some, eating this meat will lead to former idolatric practices. Here the “dirt” is not the impurity avoided through abstinence from certain consuming practices, but is instead a pervasive moral or ethical impurity. “Ye cannot,” Paul warns, “drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils” (I Cor. 10:21). Improper food consumption makes one subject to temptation that, under early Christian versions of dietary law, threatens eternal salvation. Meat (as well as other food items elevated in importance because of their scarcity) is its own false idol in a culture governed by rationing, and covetous thoughts of meat are akin to the world of sin outlined in Paul’s epistle. Rationing, too, creates a general moral climate not unlike that laid out in Paul’s Christian teachings. Austerity is championed in this letter as a moral brass ring, and is itself a recipe for avoiding the fall inherent in the consuming of idolized foodstuffs. “Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats” Paul
preaches: “but God shall destroy both it and them” (I Cor. 6:13). “God has given us an appetite for food and stomachs to digest it,” the modern version clarifies. “But that doesn’t mean we should eat more than we need. Don’t think of eating as important, because someday God will do away with both stomachs and food” (Living Bible). Food, until made unnecessary in the afterlife, is something to be taken in only as much as one needs to, and not as much as one would like to. The British government’s moral appeal to its citizens to conserve and make do is parallel with the heavier layer of morality that already dominates the Anglican landscape of England and of Pym’s rural vicarage.

Though some food is necessary for survival in this world, other practices are not at all tolerated within Paulinian teachings. “Now the body is not for fornication,” Paul declares on the heels of scorning pleasurable food consumption, “but for the Lord” (I Cor. 6:13). Abstinence rather than austerity is the dominant lesson of this letter, and within the same verse of this chapter Paul continues from his discussion of food consumption to a discussion of sexual sin; that one here follows directly from the other illuminates a religious foundation for cultural connections between excessive food consumption and excess sexuality (sexual activity outside the sanction of matrimony). Interestingly, in Pym’s text it is the women, rather than the men who read the Lessons during church services, who rely upon this Christian doctrine in order to assign meaning to the elements of the world around them. If men need meat, then they are certainly among the “faithful” mentioned by Jane when she alludes to St. Paul’s mandates. Eating meat, for men, falls within what can be considered acceptable consumption practices, because such consumption is not excessive, but necessary. Following the logic of the parish and of collective beliefs as indicated within cultural texts, however, meat (along with those other foods equated with meat under the rationing scheme) is not a necessary food for women.
Women who engage in excessive consumption of meat, eggs, or other delicacies, by extension, are implicated in the sexual transgression made complicit with excessive eating by Paul, as well as by Jane, who invokes his teachings. When the formerly adulterous and rather narcissistic Fabian Driver eats “a casserole of hearts,” which leads Jane to ask herself, “Did he eat his victims, then?” (33), the obvious connections between his sexual behavior and his eating habits are made humorously explicit; however, as a man in need of meat, Driver can receive both spiritual and social atonement for any excessive consumption on his part. The woman who dares to transgress via her palate, however, is subject to a different scrutiny.

In contrast with the deceased and therefore rather saintly Constance Driver, wife of the philandering Fabian, who “had not appreciated good food” and had been so self-effacing that she “had even invited his loves to the house for week-ends” (57), Prudence Bates, along with her glamorous appearance, possesses equally glamorous, exotic gastronomical appetites. Though she is depicted while drinking alcoholic beverages and while smoking cigarettes (both unladylike, though 1950s glamorous, habits), those are not the actions that define her as transgressive, as excessive. Her relationships to food—to consuming food and to preparing it, as well as to her general attitude toward food—are far from those codified, justified relationships to food expected of post-war women. Alone, she prepares a meal far more interesting than one might expect from a desperate spinster of twenty-nine, and certainly one far more textured than would be a meal based upon merely the basic needs of the flesh: “There was a little garlic in the oily salad and the cheese was nicely ripe. The table was laid with all the proper accompaniments and the coffee which followed the meal was not made out of a tin or bottle” (47). Food considered “womanish” in this text is that which is “simple [. . .] the kind of thing that a person with no knowledge of cooking might heat up” (113); for Jane, this turns out to be shepherd’s pie.
Fabian Driver can have his hearts, his steaks, his “half bottle of St. Emilion” (113), but women are relegated to simpler, less pleasurable fare. The “weaker brethren” of Jane’s Biblical allusion appear to be the members of the “weaker” sex. Though they dominate the text, women cannot equally dominate the consuming practices represented by Pym. Prudence, though, slips through this scheme, and rather than settle for her gendered allotment, she seeks out food that enhances her being just as much as do her red toenails or the “green-and-gold shot taffeta cocktail party dress” she dons for the parish whist drive (86). Her glamorous appearance is one straight from the pages of women’s magazines, and her exotic appetites are right out of Elizabeth David. Garlic, a part of Prudence’s salad and something imported, Mediterranean, is distinctly separate from basic English fare, as well as from any idea of a “womanish” culinary simplicity. Janice Rossen finds Prudence’s solitary feast emblematic of her “high self-esteem” (47): “the question of self-image is tied directly to what the characters eat when they are alone. [. . .] they place a high value on themselves because they make solitary meals an occasion” (46). Jane firmly replies to Prudence’s suggestion they rub the salad bowl with a clove, “‘I should have liked the kind of life where one ate food flavoured with garlic, but it was not to be’” (156). The kind of life, or lifestyle, signified by the garlic and by Prudence’s affinity for the exotic, is not the life of a vicar’s wife, but instead is a life that runs against the grain of St. Paul and his admonishments to the citizens of Corinth.

Prudence’s consuming practices are interesting for the ways in which they shift as Prudence moves from one venue to another. At home and alone, she presents herself with the meal described above, one enhanced by garlic and ripe cheese and freshly brewed coffee, all items relatively different from the ordinary English meal that has been defined by Ministry regulations for so many years. In public, however, the food she consumes is often dependent
upon both locale and companion. Consumption is a performative practice for Prudence; she can adhere to or eschew social constructs of femininity and of female sexuality, depending upon who might be watching her eat and what their interpretation of her consumption might be. When she and Jane lunch together in London, for instance, they choose to dine at a vegetarian restaurant: very unmasculine, very lacking in the meat that defines transgressive consumption for women. The same woman seems to be dining there on both occasions, as well, a woman who Jane imagines “looked the kind of person who might have been somebody’s mistress in the nineteen-twenties” (72), but who has since been relegated to the realm of “a raw salad [and] a hot dish of strange vegetables” (72). When eating alone, on her lunch break, Prudence reads a volume of Coventry Patmore’s poems while “having to choose between the shepherd’s pie and the stuffed marrow” (41). She thinks of the dining establishment (perhaps a descendent of the British Restaurant) as a place for “women alone,” and sees it as “a small, rather grimy restaurant which did a lunch for three and sixpence, including coffee” (41). In this setting Prudence also imagines herself to be less sexually desirable than she does at other points in the text: she “became conscious of herself sitting alone at a table that could have held two. She was still young enough—and when does one become too old?” (41-2). The idea of the single, young hopeful filling her mind with Victorian verse and her body with meager fare is a far cry from the image of this same woman dangling her sunglasses or assuaging her appetite with triple-cream brie. In this public, vulnerable venue, however, Prudence simply fills the role expected of her by public mores, and shifts her consumption in order to avoid suggestions of impropriety. When she spots her colleague, Mr. Manifold, sitting across the room, she realizes that she “had never seen him eating before, and now averted her eyes quickly, for there was something indecent about it, as if a mantle had fallen and revealed more of him than she ought to see” (43). The very image of the
virgin in the garden, here Miss Bates in the restaurant is shamed by the image of this man’s appetite, his “‘tucking into’” a steamed pudding she herself had avoided (43). She is an unwilling viewer of an act that shocks her perhaps as much as seeing the man’s genitals might have. In a deft revision of Genesis mythology, Prudence denies a connection with even original sin. Her public persona, for the most part, is impeccable.

Voracious eating is defined as masculine through this depiction of Manifold (a definition bolstered by Prudence’s prim reaction); his participation in an act of explicit dining in a public place is sharply different from Prudence’s behavior in the same location. Men need meat et al., and they also have social license to consume it in public and in whatever fashion they might choose to without the taint of any sexual excess affecting them in the way it would a female consumer. As masculine domains, consumption and sexuality are strictly forbidden to women, and because one signifies the other, Prudence’s forays into excess with regard to food consumption imply that her sexuality should also be inspected for breeches of propriety. Prudence’s consuming acts, though, are not necessarily defined as excessive by their proportions, but are very much defined by their composition, by their exotic, and therefore sexual or erotic, natures. Consumption of quality as well as of quantity is a masculinized event, and Prudence’s sexuality, her tendency to overdress in adherence to fashion rather than to social situation, and the aggression lent to her by those “desperate” descriptors, all add together with her consumption to cast her as inappropriately (for the era) gendered.47 Her penchant for Regency furniture, the style of which “was a move away from 18th-century refinement toward exoticism, greater richness, and exuberance” (“Regency furniture”) and is emblematic of George IV’s debauched reign as Prince Regent, is a further indication that Prudence’s character must be scrutinized for evidence of transgression. Fabian Driver himself has decorated in this same
manner, but in matters of furnishings, as well as in matters of consumption, masculinity has a different moral boiling point than does its feminine complement. While on her way to that grimy restaurant, Prudence passes a men’s club and imagines her employer, Arthur Grampian, “shaking the red pepper onto his smoked salmon” alongside “undistinguished-looking but probably famous men [. . .] professors and bishops” (41); in other words, Grampian consumes exotically not only in public, but in the company of those who represent the Church and the state, as well as learned institutions. His consumption is fully sanctioned, while hers is necessarily suspect, and made more so by the austerity of the post-ward period.

Little mentions of items such as smoked salmon resonate in this text as markers of exoticized consumption, and in this and other works of Pym’s add specific effects, especially with regard to sexuality and to gender. In A Glass of Blessings (1958), Pym opens a later exploration of social niceties with a distinction of smoked from tinned salmon, the former definitely significant of quality tastes, as well as of evocative lifestyles. This heroine, Wilmet Forsyth, forms an opinion of “mild dumpy little Father Bode, with his round spectacled face and slightly common voice” (7) based upon the predilection for tinned fish she suspects he has. “I was sure,” she concedes, “that Father Bode was [. . .] worthy of eating smoked salmon and grouse or whatever luncheon the hostess might care to provide. Then it occurred to me that he might well be the kind of person who would prefer tinned salmon, though I was ashamed of the unworthy thought for I knew him to be a good man” (7). His worth, both social and cultural, is presented early in the text based upon his ability to appreciate the quality of a food item unrelated to the likes of shepherd’s pie.48 Father Thames, who later retires to an Italian villa, has by contrast a more evolved palate than does Bode; he exclaims over the coq au vin promised the priests by their new housekeeper (60). Though a later example of post-war Britain and relatively
unconcerned with the remnants of Woolton’s rationing scheme, A Glass of Blessings consolidates the importance Pym places upon food consumption and gastronomical tastes in Jane and Prudence. Of a meal served for a dinner party of both men and women, Wilmet remarks, “[. . .] Sybil had chosen all my favorite dishes—smoked salmon, roast duckling and gooseberry pie with cream. The men,” she continues, “would not of course have realized that [the food] had been chosen just for me, looking upon the meal as no more than what was due to them” (13). Though this might be catalogued as just one instance among many that Anne M. Wyatt-Brown reads as Pym’s “hostility to men” (78), in the context of examining how food and relationships to food signify various methodological elements of Pym’s characterization, this small scene follows others such as that in which Jane muses that men need (read expect) the best in life. Their excesses are central components of their defining masculine characteristics, while female excess is a definition of a different sort, with both explanations underlining the “isolation and hunger that twentieth-century men and women continually [faced]” (Schofield 8). The gulf between the sexes is emphasized in their inability to read meals, or each other, with adequate precision.

In A Glass of Blessings, Pym further complicates her sexed and gendered notions of consuming practices by implicating the tastes of homosexual characters, notably of the vicarage housekeeper, Mr. Bason, and of Piers Longridge’s lover, Keith, whose hair “glistened like the wet fur of an animal” (192). Both are constructed as domestic and as feminized, but their epicurean tastes exceed their gendered selves. Keith, for instance, has made a pristine “home” for Piers, who has otherwise lived in alcoholic squalor, while Bason brought civilized cooking to the parish priests used to living on English basics such as “baked beans and chips” (57). When Wilmet notes her appreciation of Lapsang Souchong, an exotic blend of tea, Bason remarks, “I
feel that women don’t really understand the finer points of cooking or appreciate rare things” (57). Though both Bason and Keith are explicitly defined as sexual transgressors due to their sexual orientations, neither need demur when it comes to his tastes or appetites. In the worlds Pym creates, there are ramifications of appetite and taste on levels of both sex and gender. The gay men, already considered obvious fans of excess according to dominant moral codes, need not worry about any additional scrutiny if their excess is displayed, unlike Prudence, who must fight a more stringent set of expectations for the unmarried woman. Along with the social constructs of gendered concerns, however, Pym’s worlds suggest a basic association of men (regardless of their masculinity) with the consumption of excess. While men need meat, they also “want only one thing” (JP 70; original italics), suggesting an innate animalistic element beyond gender that is injected into the way Pym’s male characters are accepted by those around them. While Pym problematizes these issues through contradiction and conflicting representations, her characters are staunch examples of post-war social and cultural expectations for individuals of all sexes, genders, and appetites.

As with her characterizations of Bason and Keith, Pym’s portrayal of Prudence is one that is layered and not as easily deconstructed as those who surround her within the text may believe. As discussed briefly above, Prudence’s actual sexual behavior is indeterminate: she neither confirms nor denies that her affair with Driver is a sexual one, but she admits that “he had never stayed for a night” (198), and that his good looks might have made him “no more than just another ‘amusing’ object” (199), like garlic just another example of Prudence’s exotic desires. Pym’s emphasis, however, is less on Prudence’s actual nature, and places more importance upon the ways in which those around her assume an understanding of that nature based upon the going ideal for women of the period. Pym herself liked her creation of Prudence,
declaring her and Wilmet Forsyth “my own favourites” in a 1964 letter to Philip Larkin (*Private Eye* 223), and far from sketching her as a creature of deplorable character, Pym has drawn Prudence in a way that calls attention to the dangers of jumping to conclusions. Pym’s readers, as well as her created textual milieu, run the risk of misreading Prudence if the broad lines that define cultural images of women are the ones used to decipher her characterization. Though I cannot agree with Wyatt-Brown, who believes that Prudence “finds sex distasteful” (91) and assumes the same of Pym herself, it is possible as a textual truth that Prudence Bates’s sexual behavior is less than her consuming practices make them out to be. While Jessie Morrow (who wins over Fabian Driver by the novel’s end) audaciously wears his dead wife’s dress when she first flirts with him, is caught stealing oyster patties at the whist drive, and “‘may have stooped to ways that Miss Bates wouldn’t have dreamed of’” in order to gain his favor (209), Prudence operates on a more subtle plane.

A creature of women’s magazines, of romance novels, of fanciful culinary excursions, Prudence is none the less a pragmatic character who understands the irony of her position as a woman who has been modernized beyond the roles allowed to her by a society trying hard to catch up with itself. She thinks of Fabian Driver “sensibly”: “he would probably make a good husband [. . .] the right age, they had tastes in common [. . .]. And this was not unimportant, he was good-looking” (102). The unromantic way in which she conceives of Fabian is underscored when she turns from him to the menu, thinking more of the dinner to come than of her dinner companion, choosing her courses “perhaps more carefully than a woman truly in love would have done” (102). Her sexuality is not necessarily what is transgressive, but instead what defines her as such is her inability to fit into the narrowly defined definition of femininity she is asked to perform as a woman of her time. “The chicken will have that wonderful sauce on it,”
she dreams while “looking into Fabian’s eyes” (102): her own pleasure and her own needs are in her mind equal to his. She has cast aside the ideology of the other women in Pym’s world who posit satisfaction of the male appetite as of primary importance. The smoked salmon, brie, wine, and coffee with brandy that Prudence consumes is for her the most important part of this occasion; Driver’s menu goes unnoted, and his presence is less engrossing than is the food. In this key scene, Prudence discloses that her embodied nature (which is defined via her relationships to food) does not necessarily equate with either an overt sexuality or an allegiance to the feminine codes of women’s cultures of both the textual parish and the extratextual world-at-large. What Pym toys with throughout the novel—the socially driven assumptions made about women and appetite—here becomes as destabilized and as impossible to pigeonhole as Prudence’s sexual actions.

Of women who, as Jane Cleveland once did, desire to pursue a life of the mind and to write books, Prudence asks Fabian Driver, “‘You’d prefer them to be stupid and feminine? To think men are wonderful?’” (103). Though she is seemingly worldly, embodied, and only comes close to intellectual endeavor when “emending footnotes and putting in French accents” for Grampian, clearly this description of non-intellectual women is one in which she does not include herself. Prudence cannot be made to neatly fit into the mold made for the woman of excess. If her consuming practices should, by cultural definition, yield an equally excessive sexuality, then her “negative relationship” to Grampian and her disinterestedness in Driver both explode that notion. Even if Prudence’s lack of sexual activity within the text is merely elliptical, a ruse to keep the reader’s nose out of such business, the definition of her sexuality comes, for the most part, from what is negative, from what is not there. Her explanation of a post-Fabian relationship with Geoffrey Manifold (the man of whose eating she caught that
indecent glimpse) as “nothing negative about it. Quite the reverse!” (217), might appear to jeopardize Prudence’s escape from any positive identification of her consuming self with a sexually transgressive identity. Jane, however, chimes in with lines from Marvell that allow for Prudence to maintain her ambiguous subjectivity: “‘Therefore the Love which us does join / But Fate so enviously debars, / Is the Conjunction of the Mind, / And opposition of the Stars’” (217). Prudence agrees with Jane’s summing up through poetry her relationship with Manifold as a meeting of minds, but not necessarily of bodies. The “positivity” of this conjunction, though teasingly close to betraying a fact about Prudence’s sexual activity, is here problematized in a way that once again disallows any easy connections between embodiment and sexual transgression. When Prudence later reappears in *A Glass of Blessings* as a dinner companion for Wilmet Forsyth’s husband, Rodney (*A Glass* 249), her sexuality once again becomes suspect according to social dogma. Her behavior, however, hardly indicates what novelist Anne Tyler calls “the whole shocking story of Prudence Bates’s later life” (xvii). Tyler, it appears, has fallen prey to Pym’s self-conscious use of cultural biases, emphasizing the importance of the reading lesson Pym has worked into her novel of post-war manners. Tyler misses the fact that Rodney describes Prudence as “most attractive and intelligent too” (135), a combination perhaps more shocking to social mores than Prudence’s willingness to dine (even twice) with a married man.

Jane Cleveland, who in her disassociation from food serves as Prudence’s opposite with regard to consumption, is also part of Pym’s “lesson.” She, like Prudence, is constructed from what on one level is a “negative” relationship to food and to her own body, but on another level has a far more complex relationship to a mind/body duality. Jane, too, is subject to the preconceived notions, in her case to those assumptions that come with her inept domesticity and
to her life as a vicar’s wife that cannot include such exotic items as garlic or smoked salmon. Even Prudence, who dislikes the judgments that others pass upon her unmarried status and worldly interests, unjustly sees Jane as disconnected from the “excess” she herself admires, and as a result casts Jane into a realm of unworldly blandness. When Jane invites her for a weekend at the vicarage, Prudence balks: at the Cleveland’s home, the “food wasn’t even particularly good; it seemed that Jane would stop to admire a smoked salmon in the window or a terrine of *foie gras*, but in the abstract” (73). Jane’s relationship to food, as laid out by Pym for readers and confirmed by Prudence, characterizes her as a member of the intellectual and spiritual planes, and does not intimate a life comprised of any fleshly pursuits. In fact, when Prudence forms this opinion of her friend, Jane has indeed just come from browsing in a provisions store and looking at *foie gras*, “feeling that she had been vouchsafed a glimpse of somebody else’s life” (72). “‘How can a clergyman’s wife,’” she wonders, “‘afford to buy *foie gras’?’” (71). Jane finds the atmosphere of the shop “almost holy” (71), but certainly the large jar of paté, at a cost of 117 shillings, is part of a mode of worship unrelated to Jane’s moderate Anglican sensibilities.

Expense, however, is the least of what keeps Jane from experiencing those aspects of life so central to Prudence’s existence. Even the most basic of foodstuffs seem beyond the ken of Jane, who lives instead in a distracted world filled with the “vivid fancy” (17) of early Renaissance poetry and distant recollections of her days at Oxford. By her own admission she is “undomesticated,” especially when compared to a woman in the Cleveland’s last parish who “had one of her hints published in *Christian Home*” (68). Her lack of culinary affinity is noticed by all, and is discussed like gossip by the men of the Parochial Church Council. Jane’s failings are as much up for dissection as are Prudence’s perceived indiscretions. Mr. Mortlake, a member of the parish council, deplores Jane’s feebleness in the kitchen as a poor reflection on
her role as vicar’s wife: “‘They say Mrs. Cleveland hardly knows how to open a tin. It isn’t fair on the vicar’” (132). Mrs. Cleveland does in fact seem able to open a tin; however, that may be the upper limit of her culinary inclination. “‘We could open a tin,’” Jane suggests on their first night in the vicarage, prior to the appearance of the town butcher’s tithe of liver to the new clergyman; the statement is made “as if this were a most unusual procedure, which it most certainly was not” (16). Though early in the rationing period tinned food became “one of the prizes of shopping,” with “the purchase of any tin [. . .] looked upon by housewives as the greatest favour and privilege” (M-O A TC 67/3/C), in Pym’s world, the tin merely contains an unsophisticated relationship to food in its more natural, desirable states (as seen in Wilmet Forsyth’s comparison of tinned and smoked salmon, and her subsequent prejudice against Father Bode). As a vicar’s wife as well as a mother, Jane is transgressive by virtue of falling quite short of the imperatives contained in domestic manifestos such as Chatterton’s. Far from a practitioner of Certeauian “perruque” when rations run short or when the food items available are incongruous, Jane suggests luncheon out rather than make do in the kitchen. “‘Mrs. Glaze did say something about there being sausages at the butcher if one went early,’” Jane recalls, “‘but I’m afraid I forgot, and now it’s nearly half-past twelve’” (49). Lost in her own mental activity and an aura of metaphysical poetry, Jane appears to be a complete opposite of both the properly domestic woman as well as the worldly, both of which are oddly embodied in the persona of Prudence Bates.

Though her lack of concrete relationships with food causes some consternation among parish busybodies and allows for Prudence’s skeptical appraisal of Jane’s modest lifestyle, Jane’s position vis-à-vis food actually complements her role as vicar’s wife, especially during this period of austerity. The conjunction of church and state in Britain makes Jane, through her
marriage to Nicholas, not only a representative of Anglicanism, but also complicit in the laws of
the land, including its rationing scheme. The nationalistic spin placed upon stoic adherence to
Woolton’s mandates emphasizes the importance of self-denial for the good of the country.
Jane’s disassociation from food increases her level of association to the statutes of the British
government, as well as to its spiritual branch. Her “unworldly” ways, cast in opposition to
Prudence’s lavish tastes, are precisely those required of a vicar’s wife. The fact that she is
predisposed to think it more important to “live on Beauty than to live on Porridge” (in the words
of the Man-Who-Sees), to live on poetry and abstraction rather than on the tangible dailiness of
food (or even its preparation), actually defines her as a highly acceptable member of the
established order. Following St. Paul’s attitude toward matters of the flesh, Pym has constructed
Jane in a manner that aligns her with Paul’s rigid teachings, and with the ideal for clergymen and
their families. Jane faults her predecessor, Mrs. Pritchard, for having had a drawing-room that
was “a little too well-furnished—those excessively rich velvet curtains and all that Crown Derby
in the corner cupboard” (22), preferring her own functional presentation “as long as nothing
unsuitable appears among these dim bindings” on her husband’s bookshelves (16). Jane’s
“negative” relationship to food and to excess, and thus to an explicit embodiment and any hint of
impropriety, enables her to fulfill her narrative position of vicar’s wife and church affiliate,
regardless of any lack of domestic inclination that comes with her disembodied territory. Mr.
Mortlake might find any woman lacking in domestic skills guilty of the charges he levels against
Jane and her distant connection with can-openers; however, as a woman defined by her public
connections, her private world is second to the ways in which she displays allegiance to
dominant social systems. The vicar has Mrs. Glaze to prepare his meals; his wife fulfills a
different, more structural function in the narrative of the parish. Pym’s characterization of Jane,
which takes her out of the kitchen and away from the caretaking expected of other women, strengthens Jane’s position as Prudence’s opposite, and in turn builds a strong foundation for the more immediately visible binary divisions of worldly and unworldly, body and soul.

Just as Prudence’s positive relationship with excess masks the important fact of her negative relationships with men, though, the construct of Jane’s disembodied relationship to austerity in the name of foundational British institutions helps to hide the fact that her more critical “negative” relationship is with the intellect itself, with her lost aspirations to become a literary scholar. What she terms her “stillborn ‘research’” was lost in her decision to become a wife and mother, to fulfill the very roles in which she appears delinquent: [. . .] the ‘influence of something upon somebody’ hadn’t Virginia Woolf called it?—to which her early marriage had put an end. She could hardly remember now what the subject of it was to have been—Donne, was it, and his influence on some later, obscurer poet? Or a study of her husband’s namesake, John Cleveland?” (11). Though her mind and her conversation are filled with the poems she studied and loved while at Oxford, that verse has developed into little but matter that blocks her ability to approach life head-on. Like Woolf’s Isa, Jane is prone to filtering the world around her through verse, but unlike Isa, whose verse comes from within and is a result of some creative source, Jane’s poetic utterances are fragments of the life work of others. The basis for Jane’s subjectivity, for Pym’s characterization of her, is not at all central to who Jane has become as a mid-century woman: vicar’s wife, Flora’s mother, Prudence’s good friend. Her abilities to be any of these are compromised by her intellectual attributes, though that intellectualism was long ago thwarted by expectations for feminine conformity. When she attempts to rediscover her lost scholarship, years later, she finds only relics of her “early promise” (11):

She sharpened pencils and filled her fountain-pen, then opened the books, looking forward with pleasurable anticipation to reading her notes. But when she began
to read she saw that the ink had faded to a dull brownish colour. How long had it been since she had added anything to them? [. . .] Then she remembered that her copy of the *Poems on Several Occasions* was upstairs and it seemed too much of an effort to go up and get it [. . .] She sat for a long time among the faded ink of her notebook, brooding, until Nicholas came in with their Ovaltine on a tray and it was time to go to bed. (131)

What Prudence calls Jane’s “‘great gifts’” (103) are about as useful to her as would be a book by Elizabeth David. Her association with the life of the mind is undermined by the fact that for Jane, her other life ended upon her marriage and entry into a world dominated by standards for women embodied in social institutions and by cultural ideology so central to constructions of femininity during the mid-twentieth century.

Though presented as one half of a mind/body schema, Jane, like Prudence, does not fit neatly into her assigned slot. This unworldly vicar’s wife with her heady thoughts and her lack of contact with the tangible world of food and embodiment is not, under closer inspection, the representative of the intellectual realm that she appears to be when viewed through a lens of cultural expectations for women such as those presented in numerous examples of women’s culture of the time. Once Jane’s position is exposed as more complicated than might initially be perceived, her character can be interpreted as a complex example of women during this period who, although adequately adhering to dominant social codes, cannot comply with the going cultural notions. Jane muses over the idea that men need meat (or eggs, or smoked salmon) and asks herself whether they need life’s best more so than do women (even during food scarcity and culturally mandated self-denial), and she expresses her opinion that Milton’s “‘treatment of women was not all that it should have been’” (30). If such ideas come from a disembodied woman seen as complicit with the staunch ideologies of Britain, then they can easily be forgotten as non-sequiturs in the same way that her random quotations from Donne and Marvell can be.

Once these same beliefs become part of a female subjectivity that cannot be defined in the ways
often used to categorize women who resemble Jane, however, her atypical philosophies indeed do follow from an identity that on an integral level refuses allegiance to the system. Jane is another example of the ways in which modernity and forward motion, both prior to and during the years given over to the second world war, have redrawn indelibly the ways in which women will fit—and not—into the postwar world. “People don’t realise the importance of the body nowadays,” Jane remarks, acknowledging her own distance from contemporary desires to split apart the whole individual along imaginary lines.

Though the Man-Who-Sees suggests this mingling of the physical and intellectual components of human beings, his own rhetoric stops short of the sort of problematized notion of subjectivity proposed by Barbara Pym in *Jane and Prudence*. “You can’t keep the soul alive in this world,” he claims, “without the help of your body” (26) and, regardless of whether his treatment of mind/body duality in the pages of *My Home* reaches its attempted mark, his premise presages Pym’s vision of the aftermath of World War Two and the ways in which women might be able to proceed in a changed Britain. Ultimately, neither Jane nor Prudence is a character composed of qualities found on only one side of a binaried representation of women. Instead, Pym’s rhetorical stance, as evidenced in her characterizations of these two women, suggests the spectrum and necessary commingling of elements present within both corporeality and intellectual identity. The changes in women’s public roles made necessary by war, combined with the relentless effects of twentieth-century modernization, provide implicit examples of women that cannot be founded upon older, more tested methods. Jane and Prudence both are not, however, represented as the shapes of things to come, but signify the very indeterminacy of women’s places in a changing social order. While the novel seems to belong to Jane when it opens upon her arrival in the parish, and appears to become the tale of a woman (Prudence) who
has cast aside traditional definitions of femininity in order to brave an unmarried path and the consequences of sexual excess (whether actual or imagined), Prudence herself is seen as a “cast off” (191) by young Flora, Jane’s daughter. Flora, who studies English literature at Oxford like Jane did, who is domestically reliable as well as culturally astute, and who imagines herself on the cusp of a life that will include love affairs and exotic interests, may provide more promise than either of Pym’s protagonists. Like Woolf’s Elizabeth Dalloway, who crosses Victoria Street on her way into a century changed by the first world war, Flora Cleveland is a young woman whose life will include little from the era that has passed as a result of the second. As Flora comes of age at the end of European reconstruction and with the dissolution of the scarcity that works to create feminine caricatures of her mother’s and Prudence’s generations, excess will no longer pose the threat that it does in Pym’s novel, and Flora, perhaps, will become a still finer merging of the mind and the body.

Notes to Chapter Three

1 How Britain Was Fed in Wartime: Food Control 1939-1945 explains that at various times during the war, “surveys of middle-class households showed that there was little difference between their diet and that of the working-class household, reflecting the general leveling out of food distribution during the war” (49).

2 Note that “[s]parrows and wood pigeons are not included in the ration” (Peel 7).

3 Committees were comprised of fifteen people, of which five were in trade and ten were consumers. A minimum of two members were women.

4 Likewise, retailers had to register with wholesale distributors of rationed items.

5 Rationing of Food in Great Britain (MOF) lists the June, 1945 weekly ration amounts as follows: meat, 1s. 2d. worth; butter and margarine, six ounces, but no more than three ounces of butter; cooking fat, two ounces; sugar, eight ounces; cheese, three ounces; tea, two and a half ounces; bacon, three ounces (10).

6 In a letter dated December 18, 1945, John Snow writes to Mass-Observation, “I have only been a registered vegetarian for a few months, and naturally find all the extra fruits, nuts and fats helpful [. . .]” (M-O A TC 67/5/A).
Points were set initially at sixteen per four-week period; this gradually increased to twenty-four, but were reduced to twenty in May, 1945. Points were abolished in May of 1950. Examples of points products: sardines (ten points per pound); American pork sausage meat (eight points per pound); currants (sixteen points per pound); tinned spaghetti (six points per pound).

A woman from Mid-Durham who kept diaries for Mass-Observation writes the following: “The queue for cakes is forming at 7 o’clock. Women stand until their turn comes at 10 or 11 o’clock, then trudge down the street to join another queue at the greengrocers shops. And then, having got all they can in their own town, off they go to others.” Another woman (middle-class, thirty-five) is quoted indirectly by a mass-observer, saying that queuing is “a disgusting waste of time. We’re not ladies of leisure. It’s very annoying indeed. Still if we came late there’d be nothing left at all, let alone a choice” (M-O A TC 67/3/C).

Mass-Observers used codes to identify those interviewed and otherwise quoted. For example, this woman is coded “F 45 C”: female, forty-five years old, and of class “C.” The following were used to identify social class: A—Rich people; B—The Middle Class; C—Artisans and Skilled Workers; D—Unskilled workers and the least economically or educationally trained of our people. This is taken from M-O A information available at the University of Sussex.

I have documentation for this phenomenon reaching through April, 1948. Mass-Observation archives contain a good number of menu cards from the Rhos Abbey Hotel, Rhos on Sea, Colwyn Bay, that make the following disclaimer: “By order of the Ministry of Food, a meal may consist of only three courses, of which Bread counts as ONE” (M-O A TC 67/5/D).

This is from an “overheard,” or information written down by Mass-Observers in public places. This information about wages was gained at “Mack’s Coffee stall” in London on May 27, 1941.

A participant in Mass-Observation who describes himself as a married male, aged thirty-eight, a father of two, and a draughtsman with an income of £400 per year, submitted the following information as part of his menu submission in May of 1945: Lunch “At a British Restaurant: fried fish pots, greens, parsley sauce with fish, Roll, margarine, jam, (in place of the usual steamed pudding which is not very nice through lack of sugar—a great fault with all British Restaurants” (M-O A TC 67/5/A).

A Ministry of Food ad in the February 1943 issue of My Home promotes “Viennese Fish Cakes”: 1/2 pound of boiled, mashed potatoes; 1/2 teaspoonful dried eggs; 1/2 teaspoonful of anchovy essence; one tablespoonful of breadcrumbs; pepper, salt to taste. These are fried “fish” cakes, and the recipe is representative of those promoted during the rationing period. Perhaps the foreign nomenclature was an attempt to provide some added elegance to an otherwise poor relation to the real thing.

The final issue of Food and Nutrition was published February 8, 1952.
15 In *A Spell of Winter*, Helen Dunmore fictionalizes this practice during World War One. Rabbits raised at home could offset the meager meat ration, and in some cases could provide additional income on the black market.

16 Some Britons, however, could not be appeased, especially toward the end of the war. In *Let’s Eat!*, James Devon encourages the Ministry to end rationing as soon as possible: [. . .] because your rule is wise, benign and indespensible in time of war, the peril arises that you may be influenced to prolong it into time of peace [. . .] the heritage of freedom resides as much in the domain of food and catering as in the sanctions of Habeus Corpus or the Great Charter” (2,4).

17 Disturbingly, a 1942 exhibition entitled “Children: Feeding in Wartime” included a stall run by the Eugenics Society. Though possibly tangential to good health and welfare, this suggests a lack on the part of the Ministry in judgment and in understanding the range of its constituents (M-O A TC 67/3/E).

18 Documentation exists for exhibitions held in post codes N4, N6, N8, N10 (M-O A TC 67/2/D).

19 The Ministry of Health, of course, had its own investment in these issues, but their attentions lay in other areas. By mid-1941, the number of cases of sexually transmitted diseases rose by 70%. In October of 1942, the Ministry of Health began running ads in women’s magazines that warn readers about the dangers of disease transmission. Though I have found their ads in later (1944-45) issues of *My Home*, I did not find the ads in similar samples of *Woman’s Own*. According to Wallace and Vaughan-Rees, the ads ran in all women’s magazines (77). Their late-war target audience, at least, seems not to have been a wide female audience, but instead the same audience of (married) housewives targeted by the Ministry of Food. *My Home* was directed at a relatively middle-class female readership, seemingly a readership of married women with homes of their own. The fact that this group was targeted by ads related to sexually transmitted diseases might indicate that women were being alerted to the possibility of GI-husbands returning to Britain diseased, but these ads were also an effort to frighten women into maintaining marital fidelity until the end of the war.

20 In a comment that borders on the derogatory, Jones recalls a story heard in southeast Scotland: “On cod liver oil, a mother declared that the child would not drink it, but she rubbed her all over with it” (195). Such a remark stems from a stereotype of the Scottish—indeed, of all those from the north of the country—as much less intelligent than their southern, especially their London-based, fellow Britons.

21 According to the Jones, “free supplies of milk and vitamin products are supplied to beneficiaries under the following conditions: Where the income of two parents is 40s. per week or less, plus 6s. per week in respect of each non-earning dependent; or, in the case of a single surviving parent, 27s. 6d. per week or less, plus 6d. in respect of each non-earning dependent” (Great Britain, *How Britain Was Fed* 181).

22 The Milk-in-Schools program was begun between the wars, in 1934. In 1940, subsidized milk distribution became more widespread, and all children under five and pregnant women were initially allowed one pint of milk per day at less than half the regular price. Eggs in the shell (as
opposed to powdered eggs) were also allowed to these groups, as well as to some ill individuals, in greater supply than was allowed to the majority after November, 1941 (Great Britain, *How Britain Was Fed* 61-2).

23 The inclusion in the British diet of wholemeal bread was advocated much earlier than the second world war. In a letter dated February 8, 1882 (CP Ad. 1 2/14), Maria Jackson, Virginia Woolf’s maternal grandmother writes to her daughter, Julia, “You will find inside the petti: a loaf of Whole Meal bread [which] I want you to taste[. I]f you like it[.] it is said to be so much more nutritious than the white flour. The Meal is prepared by the Bread Reform League & it [would] be so good for the children. One can buy the flour of certain Millers & make one’s Bread of it.”

24 A whole “Conference on the Post-War Loaf” was held in 1945, and at that time the bran content of flour was set at fifteen percent, an amount that held for some time. According to *The World Food Shortage* (Great Britain, London: HMSO, 1946), production of grain in European countries was 31 million tons at the end of the war, compared with 59 million before the war (3).

25 This poster, as well as all others quoted from in this chapter, are on display at the Imperial War Museum, London.


27 Though the Good Housekeeping Institute is best known as a staple of United States feminine culture, this publication (as well as others of theirs used in this study) was published in Great Britain, and was targeted toward an audience of British women readers and housewives.

28 *Good Housekeeping’s 100 Recipes for Unrationed Meat Dishes* notes, “Liver, lights [lungs], and heart are often sold together as lamb’s or pig’s fry, sheep’s pluck or calf’s haslet” (32; original italics).

29 Mock Goose consists of one pound pig’s fry, two apples, two pounds of potatoes, one pound of onions, one dessertspoon powdered sage, pepper, salt, and a little flour. Mock Crab: four medium-sized tomatoes, two eggs, one ounce margarine, four tablespoonfuls milk, one ounce grated dry cheese, salt, pepper, hot toast.

30 The list is fairly diverse, though precise: “1. 1 pint of milk daily. 2. An orange, or half a grape fruit, or a tomato, or a helping of raw salad daily. The salad should, if possible, include watercress. 3. An ounce of butter or vitaminised margarine daily. 4. Cheese. 5. Eggs or some sort of fatty fish, e.g. herrings, sardines or canned red salmon. To this list carrots and potatoes would be useful additions, and some at least of the bread eaten should be wholemeal, if possible. Not less than 3 pints of water, or beverages made form it, should be drunk daily” (9).
Of course, this man—aged forty and from class “C”—also worried, “It will be difficult to get meat for the dog. [. . .] I’d rather go short myself than let the dog go short.”

This quotation comes from a newspaper compositor, aged forty-eight, and was published in 1949.

This title is part of Bantam’s “Home Front” series, which includes titles such as *Gardening: How to Use Manures and Fertilizers*.

Miller adds in one last, virtually parenthetical, coda to her frivolous article, that by staying attractive, “Incidentally, you will be helping British industry, especially textiles, to carry on and maintain that financial stability without which wars cannot be won.” Evidently, this industrial and economic information was much less important to female readers than was their collective duty to be charming and well-groomed.

Though by the end of 1941 a large majority of the female population of Britain was “either at work or in uniform” (80% of single women aged fourteen to fifty-nine; 41% of wives and widows; 13% of mothers of children under fourteen years of age), most of the magazines took it for granted that these women would return to other, more traditional labor once the war ended.

I briefly discuss this text in Chapter One.

The total series addressed the following careers, in the following order: “Working with the Airways,” “The Occupational Therapist,” “Nursing in a Children’s Home,” “The Hairdresser,” “The Hospital Almoner,” “In the Big Shops and Stores,” “In the Women’s Services,” “The Librarian,” “The Teacher of Physical Education,” “The Laundry Manageress,” “The Midwife,” “In the BBC.”

Sardines disguised by those ever-present bread crumbs and served on the half-shell passed as their more sophisticated relation, the oyster.

The overlapping audiences of many sectors of high and popular cultures illustrate the ways in which various groups shared common interests. The BBC program *Women’s Hour* serialized novels by several prominent writers of the era, and by way of that medium increased readership for authors who otherwise might not have reached such a diverse group as the one tuned in to the radio to listen to programs about cooking and nutrition. Magazines that ran fiction such as McNeil’s story also ran reviews of writing by authors whom some might consider quite out of the realm of those who were reading such magazines. *My Home*, for example, monthly reviewed a variety of works by such writers as T. S. Eliot, Rose Macaulay, and Vita Sackville-West. Reviews such as these support the idea of a broad readership for women’s periodicals, and of the subsequent wide-ranging impact of the rhetoric of feminine domesticity contained within their pages.

Wyatt-Brown notes that *Jane and Prudence* contains an “emphasis on the austerity of the postwar economy—both the shortage of meat and the shortage of eligible men” (77–8). The loss of men during World War Two added an interesting emphasis to the place of women in this
social system: they were encouraged to return to the domesticity of an earlier period, and yet for many women the war brought about a necessary independence from men. Communities of women, which have strong historical significance, at this time carry more authority than they have at other times, and such social importance is evident in Pym’s novel.

Younger women, though, are depicted as having quite a different opinion about Prudence’s love life. Two of her office colleagues “discussed Miss Bates’s passion for Dr. Grampian” and “came to the conclusion that any feeling one might have for such an elderly man [of forty-eight . . .] could hardly be counted as a love life” (97). Pym is careful to represent this generational difference, and seems to suggest that Prudence’s younger co-workers can see beyond the romantic concept that so captivates the older women and into the reality of Prudence’s relatively meager social life.

When describing her relationship with Grampian to Jane, Prudence remarks, “It isn’t so much what there is between us as what there isn’t [. . .] it’s the negative relationship that’s so hurtful, the complete lack of rapport [. . .]”; Jane replies, “Of course a vicar’s wife must have a negative relationship with a good many people, otherwise life would hardly be bearable” (14-5). The two opinions of the worth of such a “negative” relationship point to the humor with which Pym has used the term. Prudence is not necessarily comic, but neither is she meant to be viewed as a tragic heroine in a romance novel, either. As in the later passage, Pym creates a sense of irony in her portrayal of Prudence that helps to complicate her characterization.

Of course, rationing could never allow for complete equality of distribution. Mass-Observation examined the effects of post-war economy on cities such as London, to which many returned at the end of the war. With more people competing for the same amount of food, practices such as barter and racketeering became more commonplace than they had been during wartime. One woman “told how she gives sugar to her butcher & in consequence has as many tins of corned beef as she wants” (M-O A 67/6/E).

This sentiment is not a result of post-war ethos, but is a long-standing belief that appears in many ways throughout rationing codes and throughout the period of Ministry control of food. In 1940, a mass-observer overheard a woman (aged fifty, class “C”) remark, “They ought to have more meat—men like that [laborers who load coal and cargo onto trains]. They need it. Cereals! What’s the use of them to a grown man!” (M-O A TC 67/2/C). Clearly any suggestion that people go without meat and other protein-laden foods did not include the adult male population.

According to Barr and Levy: “English Foodie goddess. the only person everyone in the Foodie world agrees about [. . .] to the just-post-war British she opened up a new life. American Foodies such as Richard Olney and Alice Waters were influenced by Mrs. David [. . .].” Her first of many influential cookbooks, *A Book of Mediterranean Food*, was published in 1950. Of this exotic fare, the “goddess” writes: “The ever-recurring elements in the food throughout these countries are the oil, the saffron, the garlic, the pungent local wines; the aromatic perfume of rosemary, wild marjoram and basil drying in the kitchens; the brilliance of the market stalls piled high with pimentos, aubergines, tomatoes, olives, melons, figs and limes [. . .] all manor of unfamiliar cheeses [. . .] endless varieties of currants and raisins, figs from Smyrna on long strings, dates almonds, pistachios, and pine kernel nuts [. . .] Over picturesque, perhaps, for
everyday, but then who wants to eat the same food every day?” (v-vi). David’s introduction of such cuisine made for a radical change in English cooking practices.

46 Interestingly, though, as an unmarried woman Prudence does seem to adhere to Paul’s pronouncement: “I say therefore unto the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide as I’ (1 Cor. 7:8). If Prudence does abide as Paul and is a hopeful celibate, then she is merely guilty of transgressions of the palate, and not of the rest of her physical person.

47 Prudence’s penchant for expensive food items is also unfeminine when compared to the watchword “economy” proposed by Chatterton. Two items she enjoys—smoked salmon and ripe cheeses such as brie, were under strict price control during rationing, but still surpassed in cost more common food items. In 1940, a working-class woman responded to a Mass-Observation questionnaire about Ministry of Food suggestions for meals, “I don’t know much about salmon, so much, it’s too expensive [. . .] cheese is so dear. And what you get is chalk—all crumbly” (M-O A TC 67/2/C). A pound of smoked salmon, in November of 1949, was sold sliced for 16/0, and sold unsliced for 11/3. Imported cheeses were sold at 4/0 per pound during the same pricing period. By contrast, a pound of smoked bacon—both rationed and price controlled—sold for 2/4 (Great Britain, Retail Price List). Smoked salmon was removed from price control in April 1950 (Great Britain, Retail Price List Supplement); during the years when Pym drafted Jane and Prudence, the price of this delicacy was likely higher than it was when controlled by the Ministry of Food.

48 Tinned salmon gets the same sort of treatment in Jane and Prudence when parish women discuss what Mr. Fabian Driver has been served for lunch. “[. . .] Mr. Driver was to have only a light lunch—a salmon salad with cheese to follow. Not tinned salmon, of course,” relates spinster Miss Doggett, to which Jessie Morrow wryly replies, “No, one could hardly give a man tinned salmon” (168). The general parish point of view concerning men’s gustatorial needs is here quite precise: both quantity and quality are of the utmost importance when it comes to the food served to men.

49 Though many were one-sided infatuations, through her younger years Pym did have a series of affairs, some of which were sexual in nature. Pym herself was careful with regard to disclosing the natures of her relationships with men. Pym carefully tore pages from her diary entry of 15 October, 1932, for example; the lines that are left indicate, perhaps, losing her virginity: “Today I must always remember I suppose. I went to tea with Rupert [Gleadow] (and ate a pretty colossal one)—and he with all his charm, eloquence and masculine wiles, persuaded . . .” (Private Eye 17). What followed in several pages were destroyed. Pym also burned diaries from the year during which she was in love with Gordon Glover, a man divorced from her good friend Honor Wyatt (Private Eye 97; cf. diary entry for 17 February 1976, p. 285).
Though Irish culture, by the time of the post-war period, had been relatively de-Anglicized, the cultural climate for Ireland’s women was hardly different from that which shaped the codes for female conduct in Britain. Domestic expectations for women of most Western nations continued to vary little during this era, although the advent of social change was certainly beginning to impact the lives of women in industrialized Europe. Emancipation of Ireland from the British Empire had at first been considered a potential moment for reflexive freedoms for Irish women from the difficulties faced by English women (lack of suffrage, lack of support for their entry into the public workplace), but the 1937 constitution drafted under Éamon de Valera severely limited any promise for further change in women’s roles in the near future, and indeed “was markedly less liberal in its attitude toward women than the Collins Constitution of 1922” (Kiberd 404). Article 41 of the later document provides rhetoric parallel to that English domestic doctrine previously explored in Chapter One: like the women at the center of the British Empire, an Irish “woman by her life within the home gives the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved”’ (qtd. in Kiberd 405). The links made between the Irish nation and its family unit—and the homes in which those families reside—are the same as those that use English domesticity as a trope for the state of the nation, and promote the same rigid imperatives for the maintenance of the body and for the protection of that body from external impurities as those found in the rhetorical nationalism of English domestic tracts. This regimentation, and resulting representations of mind/body rupture, is evident in fiction by Irish women writers as well as by their British sisters. Irish women’s culture, in addition to imported cultural materials coming in (periodicals, films) from Britain once the war had ended,\(^1\)
encouraged women to head in differing directions, and offered conflicting information to young women who were at once enticed to explore the shifting roles for women and limited by social mores to minding the homes of their fathers and husbands. Women of post-war Ireland faced an almost identical cultural conundrum as did women in England, one that resulted in tension and confusion as social roles began to drift away from those rooted in tradition.

Edna O’Brien, whom Declan Kiberd notes earned a “reputation as a scandalous woman” for her portrayals of “the sexual passions and betrayed emotions of a whole generation of Irishwomen” (566), is an example of a woman novelist whose work exhibits concern for the ways in which women’s social roles after the second world war became increasingly confusing in their multiple, contradictory prescriptions. In her earliest efforts, a trilogy of novels published during the early 1960s (all of which were banned in Ireland), O’Brien emphasizes Republic-wide shifts that directly affected women’s status in Ireland—from domestic routine to sexual experimentation, from agrarian economies to consumer-driven capitalism—and that serve as social and cultural backdrops for her representations of Irish women who are “neither paragons nor caricatures” but “believable, fallible, flesh-and-blood women” (Kiberd 566). As women who both must and will no longer adhere to dominant ideals of Irish womanhood, O’Brien’s Kate (Caithleen) Brady and Baba (Bridget) Brennan are constructed as women unlike those who “represent national ideals or goals, particularly [ . . . ] figures like Cathleen ni Houlihan, Mother Ireland, Dark Rosaleen and the Shan Van Voght” (Howes 12), all feminized allegories for a beloved Ireland. As Marjorie Howes cautions, “a comparison between a nation and a woman should provide the beginning of an enquiry rather than a conclusion” (45), and O’Brien constructs such a inquiry over the course of her early trilogy. Unlike the often overt elision of nation and gender often used by Yeats and other writers, O’Brien moves her female protagonists
in *The Country Girls* (1960), *The Lonely Girl* (1962),³ and *Girls in Their Married Bliss* (1964), and the trilogy’s 1986 epilogue (now published with all three novels in an omnibus edition), not simply out from under the weight of the nation, but ultimately, literally out of the Republic of Ireland itself in order to better represent the problematics of gender unfettered by the masculinist project of Irish independence. Across the trilogy, O’Brien foregrounds the importance of giving rise to a distinctly female Irish voice, and addresses, too, the challenges faced when such a voice attempts to add itself to the chorus of male voices that have traditionally made up Irish cultural expression.⁴

Both Kate and Baba, as respective representatives of that older, traditional Ireland of renaissance imagination, and of a country sculpted by modernity and threatened by changing post-war roles for its women, both emerge as female protagonists who are, although scandalously passionate enough to merit book banning, still limited by the social context from which each woman emerges. Through use of a representative mind/body duality and of the culturally engrained associations of consumption and embodiment, O’Brien interrogates traditional femininity prescribed by religious and national doctrines, as well as those newer, “modern” forms of female expression—particularly sexual expression—that complicate the lives of women even as they present them with additional freedoms and choices. Like Barbara Pym, O’Brien explores the ways in which such stereotypes of mutually exclusive female intellect and embodiment ultimately cannot adhere to any adequate, rounded representation of twentieth-century women. Kate is the product of those traditions inherent in Irish Catholic culture, and her characterization is founded upon those traits (stereo)typically assigned to women of Eire: silence, submission, piety, a “useless kind of goodness” (381). Kate’s plight is perhaps the more familiar of the two, but O’Brien also shows, through her construction of Baba, how other roles
for women can be just as binding, just as prescriptive. Baba is a product of twentieth century modernity, and her childhood of economic comfort and social privilege, though it sets her apart from Kate, also leads O’Brien’s other female protagonist into the confines of her own limitations. Ultimately, neither woman can move beyond the trappings of her origins, regardless of the economic and cultural trajectories of the nation. While Kate finds that she is unable to rise above the dismal drama perpetuated upon Irish women (such as her mother) by both Church and state, in Baba, O’Brien illustrates the difficulties that can arise for women who cannot access the assets of such traditions. Baba finds herself without the emotional freedoms that would complement her life of luxury, and is as trapped by ownership and consumerism of the late twentieth century as Kate is by the femininity she finds she cannot escape. Though Baba explores a sexual freedom unavailable to Kate and her natural affinity for the mental realm, Baba faces those social and cultural limits still imposed upon female sexuality even after female sexual “liberation.” As two parts of what O’Brien explores as the plural experiences of Irish women at mid-century, Kate and Baba—citizens of those very different realms of mind and of body—together indicate what is lost when women are confined to any one social role, even when such a role can be conceived of as “modern” or progressive.

Through her use of the type of female voice that Susan Lanser calls a “public personal” voice (one that narrates publicly to an implied readership but narrates information more typical of interpersonal communication such as conversation or letter writing), O’Brien breaks the silence of an archetypal Irish femininity ill-suited to women in a changing post-war society. The figure of nineteenth-century servant Anne Devlin, who, “despite protracted torture at the hands of her British captors, would not betray her master or the nationalist cause to which he was devoted” (Gibbons 107), is one popular example of this type of silent femininity, and Luke
Gibbons also points out that “[…] Mary, the virgin mother, became the model which Irish women were supposed to emulate, and […] silence was a central attribute of this ideal” (108). O’Brien taps instead into the complexities inherent in such an ideal, into the middle-ground of “the dichotomy between passivity and action” (Gibbons 108) found both in the figure of Devlin and in the binary opposition of mind and body. Kate and Baba each narrate truths about their experiences as specifically Irish women in ways that smacked of betrayal when those voices were first heard; O’Brien flaunted the codes of silence imposed upon generations of women in an attempt to document the spectrum of social and sexual pitfalls faced by women of post-war Ireland.

Across the span of her trilogy, O’Brien posits the narrative self-construction of working-class Kate against that of her more affluent (for purposes of era and rural region) friend Baba in a manner that both relies upon and refutes the dichotomy of active/passive in its interrogation of expectations for Irish women with regard to their embodiment, sexuality, and their own independence from patriarchal rule. The importance of the concept of “voice” to feminist inquiry (noted extensively by Lanser in the introduction to and throughout her work in Fictions of Authority) is multiplied by O’Brien’s creation of not a single female voice, but of two conflicting female voices and, as a result, of differing perspectives that emerge and call into question the stability of a solitary voice while suggesting the potential political and social impact of unified female voices, even when (perhaps especially when) those voices represent radically divergent points of view. Because in first-person narration, “both the narrator’s possession and lack of knowledge play an equally important role” in the construction of a textual reality, (Glowinski 109), each of O’Brien’s protagonists is necessary if a narrative is to unfold that will surpass the idea of a singular truth. Kate and Baba share the narration of the events that shape
their lives, and each offers differing interpretations of the events that unfold across the trilogy which, when read as a single narration in multiple voices, attempts to represent the multiplicity of Irish women too often forced into a singular mold. While for previous generations of Irish women it might have held that “the Cathleen ní Houlihan of real flesh and blood must impersonate [. . .] the sort of woman [men] want her to be, and she must leave her own desires unimplemented” (Kiberd 294), O’Brien’s two women actively seek out their different desires on the road to an identity disassociated from a nationalistic project. Such women, O’Brien suggests, are perhaps forging another nation altogether.

The first two novels of O’Brien’s trilogy belong to Kate: they are narrated by her in the first person, and through her own narration Kate’s position in romance plots of her own construction unfolds. Literary narration, for Kate, is initially a site of empowerment, and as she develops her own identity she also presents an image of herself that surpasses the actual, material bases for her characterization and the restrictive aspects of sanctioned feminine behavior. Because the majority of the trilogy is presented through the lens of Kate’s experiences (and is molded by Kate’s own narrative agenda), she appears initially to be its sole protagonist; however, O’Brien eventually allows for other viewpoints to emerge. In the third novel, Baba’s voice emerges in four of the twelve chapters (the other eight are narrated in third person, an issue further examined below), and the epilogue belongs to Baba alone. It becomes her task to complete the story of Kate’s life, and to allow for a version of her own character to appear that is perhaps more complete than the Baba presented by Kate. Baba provides both a cultural opposition to Kate’s character and a (sometimes drastically) contrasting voice and point of view from which to consider both their childhoods and their adult lives. As a child of relative privilege, Baba represents the “new” Ireland—almost ahistorical, certainly forward moving—
and lacks any nostalgic vision of nation or tradition. For Baba, the future, and not the past, contains her heart’s desire. For Kate, however, the impetus for desire is rooted in traditions of Irish femininity. Kate’s narration is marked by the generic effects of romance, and she paints equally quaint, fragile portraits of her homeland and of the relationships with the men whom she hopes will help her out of her indigenous surroundings even as she remains marked by her affiliation with County Clare. This conflict between the antiquated ways of her Irish ancestors and the modernity displayed by families like Baba’s create a complicated network of desires over which Kate can take only tenuous control. Once her searches for love and for social mobility become conflated, Kate is caught between various allegiances and, importantly, between her identification with the mental realm that allows for her narration and with the physical world of material comfort and sexual embodiment. By the end of *The Lonely Girl*, her ability to maintain her own narration dissipates, leaving room for other points of view, and for the idea of multiple feminine attitudes to grow from that single, nation-bound ideal Kate struggles with but none the less represents.

Kate—Caithleen—is an obvious reinvention of Cathleen ní Houlihan, a figural allegory for both an Irish nationalism and a “‘femininity’ [. . .] particular to the kind of Irish nationality imagined by Celticism,” one that “inscribed the double-edged virtues of Celts: idealism, self-sacrifice and spiritual victory through material defeat and impoverishment, as well as the class hierarchies connected with them” (Howes 45). These older models, though, forged in an equally idealistic period of national renaissance, are ill-suited to a woman of the later twentieth century. Kate is heir apparent to her father’s ruin and alcoholism; by the time her narration begins, when she is fourteen, Kate’s family has devolved into a state of emotional, financial, and material disrepair. The house in which they live has seen better days, as have the rural Irish who
have lived off of the land only to lose it in the rush of modern, consumer-driven economics. The Bradys have indoor plumbing that is no longer functional (5), a domestic metaphor that expresses their decline in social standing as the value of turf and grazing land is reduced in the face of an increasing importance placed upon deliverable consumer goods. Kate explains, “[. . .] my father, unlike his forebears, had no pride in land, and gradually the place went to ruin”; because “the Tans burned the big house” (10), the family lives in a smaller house in which “things were either broken or not used at all” (5), a result of the deterioration of many decades. Mr. Brady has “the name of being a gentleman” (27), but little else to indicate his lost social standing. Any capital that might enable this family to maintain its meager lifestyle is jeopardized by Kate’s father, who consumes the household income during serial drinking binges.

When Kate’s narration opens, her father “had gone, three days before, with sixty pounds in his pocket to pay the rates” (7), and Kate wonders whether her father will return from his current bout with the bottle having given yet more of their livelihood away: “‘Mother, meet my best friend, Harry. I’ve just given him the thirteen-acre meadow for the loveliest greyhound’” (7). There is no real disposable income left in the wake of her father’s indulgences, and the little that Kate receives in the way of “excess” comes from her mother in the form of “little dainties” (8): sweets and cakes tucked away in Kate’s school lunches like talismans to ward off the realities of the relative poverty she faces at home, “mother-daughter rituals [. . .] enacted principally through the sharing of food” (Graham 17). Upon her mother’s disappearance with a local man and subsequent drowning during an attempt to escape her predicament, Kate’s one connection to such “luxury,” as it were, is severed. As an economically and emotionally “orphaned” child (whose father can supply the dictums of patriarchy to his daughter, and little else), Kate is left to construct herself from a position of absolute disempowerment. The brand of
femininity inscribed upon her by tradition and nationalistic pride is as useful to Kate as is her father’s ruined social status.

The early connections made in Kate’s narration between food, social power, and sexuality are subtle, but such connections become the basis for Kate’s first-person self-construction. Narrated by a young woman perhaps just beyond the nineteen-year-old Kate upon whom *The Country Girls* closes,7 the first installment of the trilogy relies heavily upon the sexuality implicit within the idea of the consuming, embodied woman. Kate’s mother, who provides her daughter with the few treats she can extract from the ransacked domestic sphere she struggles to maintain, receives her own “dainties” through interactions with men other than her husband. Jack Holland, who owns a local drygoods shop *cum* tavern, plies Mrs. Brady with “candied peel and chocolate and samples of jam that he got from commercial travelers” (14) in return for the occasional groping of the married woman’s knee (at least once while her husband sits across from them), as well as other small liberties. Tom O’Brien, with whom Kate’s mother drowns, leaves town with her and “two bags of groceries” (41). Mrs. Brady, who within her marriage cannot attain the lifestyle she desires (and who cannot maintain against economic odds the lifestyle the family once enjoyed), uses her sexuality as a means to achieve consumables beyond those basics provided for her by her husband. Her drowning may seem nothing more than stereotypical poetic justice for her transgressive behavior, but the means to her end finally exist more as legacy than as moral example.

Kate not only has been trained to enjoy those treats that represent to her the mother and that mother’s love, but also comprehends, if simply and on a child’s level, the relationship between food and sexuality signified by her mother. Kate recalls the day when she was twelve years old and her mother dared her to kiss the farmhand, Hickey, “ten times for a piece of fudge”
Though this act, conceived of as a result of the happiness brought on by Hickey’s having earned a good price for a heifer at the local fair, might be thought of as an act of innocent fun during a moment of joy, there are other implications in the suggestion and in the act itself. The close nexus of food, sexuality, and economics is evident in this scene, and the potential to barter one’s sexuality for food and for economic gain (even when very small) is one of the formative lessons of Kate’s childhood. Her training at her mother’s knee captures the very essence of a socially and culturally constructed relationship between food consumption and female sexuality, and to the restraints placed upon women at the site where those older economies of money and of gender converge. That message is the strongest with which Kate is left, and is a refrain that will repeat throughout her first-person narration. When Kate recalls how Mr. Gentleman, a wealthy man who later becomes her love interest in *The Country Girls*, offered her an orange with “a certain slyness on his face” (13), she posits this expression of potential sexual exchange as the early beginnings of her initiation into romantic love and its implicit sexual connotations. Amid “the smell and sizzle of a roast” and an elegance beyond her reach, Kate experiences the first stirrings of desire: “[. . .] as he shook my hand I had an odd sensation, as if someone were tickling my stomach from the inside” (13). This desire is not simply sexual, however; Kate’s longing extends itself beyond the romantic person of Mr. Gentleman to include a life of “elegant glasses of sherry [. . .] soufflés and roast venison” (13). Like Pym’s Prudence Bates, O’Brien’s Kate looks beyond the man to the (consumable) goods he can provide her with; unlike Miss Bates, however, Miss Brady cannot see beyond the trappings of the traditional romance plot. The relationship of food to sexuality, and the subsequent connection of sexual seduction to the seduction of material wealth, is already part of Kate’s understanding of the world, and on the
cusp of her mother’s death, Kate is presented with a man who promises access to what lies beyond her own restricted means.

That Kate’s self-construction begins on the very day of her mother’s death is no small detail. Her sense of affiliation, prior to that day, is not to nation, father, or the land on which she lives, but is one filtered through her relationship to her mother. This affiliation, however, is not a distinctly female allegiance. Her fourteen-year-old sense of her mother (even later, as she narrates the events of her adolescence) is limited and rests upon the memories Kate has of her mother in relation to men, to her father as well as to others. The few recollections of her mother that Kate presents involve issues of the food/sexuality relationship, and thus Kate’s vocabulary of femininity appears to be limited to that gained through an understanding of these narrowly defined instances. Her narrative self-construction, then, is based not upon a range of opportunities for women or upon any changing ideas of femininity (as is the case with Baba), but instead upon the loaded notion of a tragic female sexuality engendered in her by her mother’s life (and death) and further complicated by Irish Catholic mandates of silence and suffering for women. There are numerous examples of Kate’s association with a life of the mind, but her ability to access the opportunities offered to her in the form of a scholarship to study beyond the National School curriculum is thwarted when she adopts for herself an affiliation with embodiment like that of her mother. While Kate’s “natural” affinity (as she is characterized by O’Brien) is actually for the mental realm, for the language she masters through education and displays in her narration, she has no image in which to fashion herself other than that left to her young consciousness: one of a woman whose life as well as death hinged upon a sexualized embodiment and upon the ability of her body to accomplish a set of limited aspirations. Kate inherits her mother’s world, both what it lacks and its few avenues for achievement. Left with
the scarcity of her father’s world and its inability to provide her with only basic material
necessities, along with the mean prescriptions for women of the place and time, Kate narrates
herself beyond her father’s offerings, but because of her acculturation to the ways of an earlier
Ireland cannot transcend the limitations of her mother’s. Amanda Graham discusses ways in
which O’Brien’s female characters turn from the mother/food nexus in order to avoid the social
inscriptions of reproduction and sexuality, but Kate—perhaps because her mother dies, leaving
Kate without a same-sex parent against whom to revolt—instead embraces the legacy of her
mother’s food-infused quest for material comfort and of the tragedy in which that quest results.
The day that invests Kate with a scholarship to a convent school as a reward for her intelligence
also leaves her with a static model for her feminine future. As Kate embarks upon what might
otherwise be a narrative of learning and of new knowledge, she is instead forced to conform to
those older truths passed down to her.

Her voice, her intellect, is the one seemingly inalienable function left to Kate. The
adherence of Kate’s narration to the ubiquitous romance plot, even when those plots are thwarted
and inconclusive, however, belies the grammatical subjectivity of her first-person narration.
Though Kate is constituted as an “I” by the very fact of her narration, her narrative authority is
compromised by her acceptance of her mother’s orientation toward embodiment and a sexuality
defined by patriarchal norms. Rather than speak as a creature of combined physical and
intellectual components, and thus exhibit an ability to access an agency engendered through both
her physicality and her intellect, Kate narrates the effects of having been socialized to view those
physical aspects of subjectivity as separate from any intellectual endeavors of that self. Her
narration, as well as the narrative structure of the trilogy as a whole, exemplifies the auto-
objectification that results from that mind/body duality as it is in
English. Kate attempts to negotiate this divide, and to represent herself as both physical and psychical, but she cannot escape the limitations of an “either/or” construct as she sets out to narrate herself into a discursive embodiment that will enable her to access and to consume. As Lanser notes, traditionally a “major constituent of narrative authority [ . . . ] is the extent to which a narrator’s status conforms to [the] dominant social power” (6), though some female and other marginalized writers have sought alternative strategies to display an authority not reliant upon the dominant culture. Kate’s narration, however, is very much constituted by an adoption of the dominant codes of a particular cultural moment during which the separation of mind and body is central. Her position within this specific socius is at odds with the public voice of her first-person narration, a contradiction suggestive of the actual conflicts experienced by women of the time as their growing public access continued to be truncated by social (in this case Irish Catholic) tradition, and as the new roles opened up to women demanded that they take part in both physical and intellectual lives. If, as Lanser hypothesizes, “the way out of the marriage plot is through public voice” (143), Kate’s constructed romance plots, developed in order to constitute her own subjectivity, are actually anathema to the continuance of her public voice and her ability to control her own narration. Eventually, that public voice serves not her own authority, but the authority of the ür-plot of romantic entanglement and, by extension, the authority of the male subject within the romance narrative. This circuitous privileging of the very authority Kate’s narration ostensibly would subvert “limits the narrator’s personal authority by appealing to (masculine) authorities outside the self” (Lanser 177), and the result is a narrative that consumes itself in its attempt to represent Kate as a consuming member of the status quo.
As a foil for her own limited access to material wealth, Kate draws Baba in the image of privilege, as a young woman raised in the middle-class comfort of a new Irish economy. The disparity between Kate’s own deteriorating home and Baba’s is striking: “Their house was like a doll’s house on the outside, pebble-dashed, with two bow windows downstairs and circular flower beds in the front garden” (14). Kate’s description of the Brennans’s house is one straight from the pages of periodicals such as the British My Home, and is infused with the envy engendered by color advertisements and idyllic domestic images. The daughter of the local veterinarian, Baba can enjoy the benefits of economic privilege, and access to such comforts is for her a right to be demonstrated, often at Kate’s expense. During the morning upon which the novel opens, Kate carries a bunch of lilac with her to school as a gift for the teacher, but this gift is intercepted by Baba, who rides by on her new bicycle and swoops up the flowers. Kate surmises that Baba will “give Miss Moriarty the lilac and get all the praise for bringing it” (15). Acquisition and possession are integral components of the Baba whom Kate presents, and Baba’s ability to dominate not only Kate but also the land-based class signifiers such as this homely gift of home-grown flowers is underscored later in the day, when Baba insists upon gathering up more of the Brady flora to take home: “Mammy’s having tea with the Archbishop tomorrow, so we want bluebells for the table” (22). In the economy delineated in O’Brien’s trilogy, the new-monied wealth of the Brennan family carries with it more clout than does the older gentility of the Brady clan. Baba’s ability to consume extends itself to the products of Kate’s birthright, and Kate appears vulnerable to the whims of the friend who is, she says, “the person I feared most after my father” (14). Maintaining her own precarious middle-class status against the cultural traditions of Kate’s family history, though, necessitates Baba’s barring Kate from acquiring any security in the changing cultural milieu.
Kiberd explains how the new middle class of an independent Ireland “had, quite simply, arrived too late, missing out on the heroic period of the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century, that phase when its members learned how to found heavy industries and factories. [...] the vast majority of them never learned how to produce, only how to consume” (551), and the Brennans appear to bear out his theory. Whereas in English culture (as exemplified in the texts discussed earlier in this project) the crass embodiment significant of class mobility and sexual excess is something to be excised through various acculturative processes, in the Irish cultural landscape explored by O’Brien, the reverse is true. Production—a practice belonging to the older, land-based economy—is not a component of the middle-class make-up exhibited in this world, but instead consumption is at the center of the Irish bourgeois project portrayed in the trilogy. Far from the collective, level landscape envisioned by Virginia Woolf in “The Leaning Tower,” Baba’s Ireland is a land fractured by consumer capitalism and its inherent schisms. Baba is the child of this quintessentially twentieth-century zeitgeist, and her characterization (and later, narration) by opposition solidifies Kate’s position as a child of lack whose voice is compromised by the social paradox that demands participation in consumer culture but at the same time presents her with a limited ability to procure and consume. Cathleen ní Houlihan cannot compete in this new, consumer-driven arena.9

Food emerges as one of the best indicators of the differences between Kate’s and Baba’s social standings, as well as of Baba’s privileged usurpation of others’ belongings. During an after-school visit to Kate’s home, Baba’s actions appear simply to stem from a classed and childish arrogance: when offered a biscuit, she takes all the chocolate ones from the tin, and as she prepares to leave, she helps herself to a couple of pounds of freshly made butter (26). The scene inside her own home, though, is one of such lavish gustatorial excess that Baba’s behavior
appears to be an abhorrent result of greed. When the girls arrive there, Baba’s mother and brother are sequestered inside the elder Brennans’s bedroom, with “a cooked chicken on a plate in the center of the big bed [. . .] overcooked and falling apart” (30). The feasting is clandestine so that “the aul fella won’t get it” (30); Mr. Brennan is the odd man out when it comes to the pantry stocked by the proceeds of his veterinary practice. Upon his return, the picked-apart fowl is stashed in a wardrobe, rests alongside “summer dresses and a white fur evening cape” (32). Martha, Baba’s “fast” mother with her own taste for liquor, offers Kate a chicken wing, and Kate’s wistful narration of eating that morsel contains all the elements of the narrative strategies she relies upon in order to position herself as Cinderella in a romance plot of her own fashioning. “I dipped it in the salt cellar and ate it,” she states plainly. “It was delicious” (30). Her humble acceptance of one of the chicken’s least profitable parts, and her small delight in such a gift, is similar to her own mother’s willingness to barter herself for the odd chocolate box or jar of jam. On the very day of her mother’s death, Kate already exhibits having internalized the elder woman’s acceptance of those little favors, and the residual humiliation of having to be content with the scraps of other people’s excess.

The gathered members of the Brennan family treat Kate more like they do their household help than as a guest, and Kate accepts such a reduced position in this hierarchy as readily as her mother accepted her own role in sexualized power negotiations. Martha Brennan reportedly mistreats Molly, her maid, and “locked her in a bedroom whenever Molly asked to go to a dance in the town hall” (31), behavior that adds an air of the fairy tale (and of the hierarchy of those tales) to their household. Their young domestic also complains that “they, the Brennans, ate big roasts every day while she herself got sausages and old potato mash” (31). Kate is as marginalized as Molly is by the consumption practices of the family, and her role
within this system enhances her lack of social and economic power. As more food is brought into the bedroom, she eyes a “Pyrex dish half full of trifle [. . .] a slice of peach, a glacé cherry, a cut banana, and uneven lumps of sponge cake” (31) that reminds her of her mother and of her mother’s patently feminine self-denial when favoring even farmhand Hickey when she would plate the sweet and leave herself “only a spoonful” (31). Kate’s training, more typical of the conduct expected of Englishwomen and thus of Irishwomen who display the more genteel effects of British colonialism, is markedly different from Baba’s own apprenticeship in her mother’s home. When Baba lies, “‘She doesn’t eat trifle,’” Kate can only stand back and observe: “my mouth watered while I watched them eat” (31). Without the economic agency necessary inside this household and the culture with which the Brennan family is synonymous, Kate can only watch as others consume, and can only wait to be offered a bit of their good fortune.

In a later scene, prior to the two girls’ leaving for convent school, Kate still lingers as an onlooker at the outskirts of consumer capitalism, this time while Baba has a birthday party to which Kate (living with the Brennans after her mother’s death) has not been invited. Standing on the other side of a French window, Kate eyes the dancing and gaiety, and offers to Baba the fresh cream she has brought from her father’s farm “so that she could have it with the jelly we had made” (48). “‘Gimme,’” Baba responds. “‘Be off, trash’” (49). Kate presents Baba without tempering her greedy and gluttonous nature. At this early point in the novel, too, Kate has succeeded in presenting herself as a completely disenfranchised, sympathetic character. The narrative is punctuated by Kate’s seemingly innate inability to achieve the status of someone like Baba, someone with a socially sanctioned ability to possess and consume the products of a modern world, as well as those homely goods produced in Kate’s: cream, butter, and other products of the land. Much later, when Baba’s narration begins in Girls in Their Married Bliss,
Baba admits to having been “jealous as hell of course” of Kate during their childhood (381), but while Kate has control of the narration, Baba appears only as the creature of consumption who suits Kate’s self-construction. In order to validate her desire to rise above her humble beginnings, Kate constructs herself in opposition to Baba and, as a result, Kate emerges as both a creature of need and one of sympathetic proportions.

Once Kate has established herself as the novel’s sympathetic underdog, her narration throughout the remainder of *The Country Girls*, and continuing in *The Lonely Girl*, moves Kate toward higher social and cultural status through her self-fashioning into a romantic heroine. The first two novels in O’Brien’s trilogy center upon Kate’s quest to rise above the legacy she has inherited and instead construct options that will facilitate her navigation beyond those dictated by traditional parameters and into a society driven by consumption. The two models Kate has for female upward mobility—her mother and Baba—combined indicate that the desired status in this community should ensure one’s access to material goods (if to varying degrees), and that achieving this status is dependent upon one’s relationships to men. In that she is initially identified via her intelligence when she receives her scholarship and set apart from Baba, for whom Kate writes school essays (381), Kate’s “natural” affinity is for the mental realm. O’Brien’s characterization of her as psychically oriented proves to be the largest obstacle to Kate’s narrative progress through this world very much dominated by materialism.

In order to access the material world, Kate must narrate herself into her own embodiment, but at the same time that embodiment must remain within the parameters of her narrative control. In order for Kate to follow the path laid out for her by community standards for social mobility, she must mask her “authentic” intellectual self in order to adopt an embodiment that will enable her to convincingly posit herself as a romantic and, importantly, as
a potentially sexual female presence in the narrative. Her body emerges as a narrative function, and becomes not only something created through her narrative quest for romance, but also the thing that drives the narrative forward and, ultimately, that eclipses Kate’s “authentic” intellectual self. The evidence of her intellect—her control of the narration of her own life and, continentally, of Baba’s—is what Kate has to barter in exchange for that body she believes she can claim only through male acknowledgment of her desirability. The only thing she “owns” is her intellectual affinities and her access to language, and these will serve as Kate’s currency as she negotiates consumer society. Whereas her mother and, later, Baba, exchange through sexualized embodiment in order to acquire goods and to gain some form of subjectivity in a world that privileges consumption, Kate is initially removed from the physical plane, and so she must first gain access to herself as a physical being before she can attempt to negotiate for herself in such a system.

Kate’s first romantic suitor, and the man who first enables Kate to narratively construct her own embodied means to achieve beyond her beginnings, is Mr. Gentleman, the enigmatic Frenchman who is “such a distinguished man with his gray hair and his satin waistcoats that the local people christened him” with his amusing name (12). His difference interests Kate, and he is a perfect complement to her romantic notions. When they begin their courtship, Mr. Gentleman escorts Kate to her first meal in a city hotel, at which Kate attempts to order Irish stew, “the cheapest thing on the menu;” Mr. Gentleman, however, insists upon their both having “little chickens,” followed by ice cream for Kate and some indulgent “white cheese with green threads of mold” for him (55). At this meal Kate not only begins her entry into amorous territory, but also breaks her confirmation pledge (55) when taking wine with her lunch, casting aside one doctrine to which she is expected to conform. The luncheon takes an erotic turn when
Kate explains how Mr. Gentleman behaves with her after this meal: “He had a way of looking at me that made me feel innocent. He was staring now. Sometimes directly into my pupils, other times his eyes would roam all over my face and settle for a minute on my neck. My neck” (55). Beginning with this interaction, Kate becomes the romantic and desirable figure she wishes to be, and this initiation is also the point from which her body will figure as a driving element of her process of narration.

The morning before her first meal with Mr. Gentleman, Kate weighs herself on a public scale and reports that she is “seven pounds too light” according to the chart on its side, and Kate is ashamed of her “thin and white” arms (54), a reaction reminiscent of Mrs. Humphrey’s 1893 admonition against such scrawny appendages (162; cf. Chapter One). Days later, as she prepares for convent school, Kate relates that her legs are thin, too, and that she is altogether “thin and much too tall for my fourteen years” (60). Baba, by comparison, is “plump and round,” and looks “like an autumn nut, brown and smooth” (60). The two girls are different with respect to body size, as well as to the pictures of health that each presents. Kate is the essence of lack, and is suggestive of poor nutrition and a weak constitution, while Baba is the vigorous beneficiary of her middle-class existence. Until the end of *The Lonely Girl*, and of Kate’s turn at narration, however, this will be the last time Kate and Baba will be represented as oppositional in this particular way, with Kate as the thin girl and Baba the plump. As children, the girls fulfill one divided definition of female embodiment, but as they grow up, the expectations for their bodies, and for the desirability of those bodies in a sexual context, will change. As Kate turns her flirtation with Mr. Gentleman into a full-blown romance plot and invests her faith in its outcome, she will also “gain” her body, both literally in size and figuratively as a site of sexual desire.
Thus embodied, Kate can attempt to compete in both the culture of which Baba is native and the sexually charged romantic world of Kate’s own creation.

Kate’s next exchange with Mr. Gentleman, at her return home for Christmas, fits generic expectations for such an encounter and also brings with it evidence of Kate’s developing embodiment. When she meets with Mr. Gentleman at the Brennans’s home, her thoughts run to those typical of romance, made perhaps even more hyperbolic by their issuing from a fourteen-year-old girl. “When he walked into the room,” she sighs, “I knew that I loved him more than life itself” (87) and the next day, when they are alone together, she imagines, “[. . .] everything I had suffered up to then was comforted in the softness of his soft, lisping voice, whispering, whispering, like the snowflakes” (90). Kate has cast herself as a damsel awaiting rescue from the economic and social realities of a traditional Eire, and Mr. Gentleman, with his foreign mystique and his access to the requisite elegance of a romantic tale, is Kate’s perfect knight-like swain arrived to whisk her into the modern world. (The fact that he is married, as well as many years her senior, seems not to figure into Kate’s scheme.) As a man who is distinctly not Irish, Mr. Gentleman can provide Kate not simply with romance or with love, but also with a route away from the world of her father, her priest, and her economic shortcomings as a female member of that prescriptive world.

As a result of his attentions, and as an extension of Kate’s budding success on the romantic playing field, her embodiment slowly makes known its presence. During a tryst in Mr. Gentleman’s car, the first words he speaks to Kate acknowledge her body and its almost sudden appearance: “You got plump,” he remarks after a period of silence (89). Her embodiment is not simply a discursive product of Kate’s narration, but becomes a part of her newly material mystique and her sexual promise. While Kate’s adolescent “blossoming” may not seem out of
the ordinary, this scene, however, comes on the heels of a full exposé of the horrors of dining-hall food at the convent school that she and Baba have attended during that fall term. Never mind Virginia Woolf’s famous complaint about the meals served to the young women of “Fernham”: “beef with its attendant greens and potatoes—a homely trinity” (A Room 17). The food at the convent rivals that of Jane Eyre’s Lowood in its ability to turn one’s stomach. Offerings such as “gray-green soup” and “dry gray bread” are followed by a plate filled with “a boiled, peeled potato, some stringy meat, and a mound of roughly chopped cabbage” (75). The relentless repetition of adjective-noun grammatical construction in this presentation of the food at the convent emphasizes the bleak quality of life there. Kate recoils: “My meat was brutal-looking and it had a faint smell as if it had gone off. […] I couldn’t eat it”; her cabbage contains a slug (75). In such an environment, it is unlikely that Kate’s new-found plumpness, so noticed by Mr. Gentleman, is the result of her eating habits. Instead, her body is integral to Kate’s narrative strategy, and she posits it as significant of her potential class mobility and her ability to move upward through her relationship to Mr. Gentleman. Once his attentions are hers, Kate becomes initiated into a world where material gain becomes possible, and her narrative becomes not simply one of romance, but one directly affected by the presence of her self-constructed physicality that serves as a vehicle through which she can thwart the old, gendered traditions.

Kate’s process of entering the physical realm through an increase in her body size should not be misconstrued as an indication that the standards for female beauty are different in Ireland during this period than they are in England. Though Kate emerges as a physical entity through her own narration of her body and its fullness, she also points out that her shape is not one that conforms to cultural ideals. Baba’s body changes, too, as Kate’s does, but Baba, already a child of privilege and therefore able to access material wealth regardless of any represented
embodiment, becomes the thinner cultural, sexual ideal as defined by the femininity of the “new” culture from which she comes. By the time the girls are seventeen and heading for Dublin after having been expelled from convent school, Kate describes Baba as “small and thin, with her hair cut short like a boy’s [. . .] any man could lift her up in his arms and carry her off” (121). Baba’s body is elemental to her physical attractiveness, as well as to her place in material culture; however, Kate’s body serves a different purpose. Though her young co-worker at the grocer’s where she finds work in Dublin compares Kate to a pin-up girl (139), she is careful to establish that Baba’s figure is that which fits the general cultural mold. Her own grows beyond the standard for physical beauty, and Kate reports that a customer has called her “‘Rubenesque’” as she looks in the mirror and thinks, “I was getting fat alright” (144). This shift in her body size, though, is not a concern for Kate, as her body is the thing that she fashions in order to gain her heart’s desire: “[. . .] young men. Romance. Love and things” (145; emphasis added). Kate desires the romantic images she knows from films and novels, and not the sexual, physical aspects of the body such as those that Baba gravitates toward. Kate needs her embodiment to serve only her discursive purposes.

While Kate seeks romance, Baba exclaims, “‘We want to live. Drink gin. Squeeze into the front of big cars and drive outside big hotels. We want to go places” (145). Baba would “do anything for a few bob” (189) and consistently uses men for material comforts, such as dinners out and dancehall gatherings, but unlike Kate or Kate’s mother, who await the morsel of material comfort doled out by men, Baba demands material goods and entertainment as her privilege. When she meets her future husband, and receives a gift of flowers from him, she reports, “The first thought I had [. . .] was, could I sell them at cut rates” (383). When she and Kate are girls together and living in Dublin, her gauge of a prospective date is pragmatic, economic: “my
fellow has every bit of himself initialed. Tiepin, cuff links, handkerchief, car cushions. The lot. He has leopards in his car as mascots” (144). Kate, on the other hand, holds out for her romantic dream, and has trouble assessing the economic realities of the dating game. When on a date with a friend of Baba’s monogrammed beau, Kate refuses to give in to his “‘vile and horrible’” (155) advances. She seems not to “know the price of a good dinner” (152), though it seems that Baba does when later she comes “downstairs fastening the gold chain around her waist” (155) in order to rescue Kate from the lecherous owner of a stocking factory with whom Baba has set Kate up. Kate does not yet fully understand the complexities of the exchange learned from her mother of sex for “things,” but instead is bent upon maintaining her narration within the generic confines of romance. Her narratively constructed, represented body is a vehicle Kate needs in order to access a culture that privileges consumption, and as long as she controls her body as a discursive function, she is provided with the opportunity to rise above her father’s class status and to take her place in post-war consumer culture. The disparity between her body and Baba’s ideally sized physicality is not a primary issue for Kate; for her, the body enables a multiplicity of desires, and is not simply desire’s slave.

Kate’s relationship with Mr. Gentleman reaches the peak of its narrative potential when he finally propositions Kate for sex and makes plans to take her to Vienna in order to “get this out of our systems” (163). Until this time, their interaction is based upon romantic ideals and upon Kate’s own need for Mr. Gentleman’s validation of her embodiment. When he begins to actively desire that body, however, Kate’s narrative strategy is placed at risk. Her ability to control her own body as a product of her narration, as a product of discourse, is central to her narrative project, and in order for her to maintain this control, her body cannot make the shift from its function as the vehicle for Kate’s own desires and become the object of another’s
(sexual) desire. Kate’s embodiment is the basis for her self-constructed narrative subjectivity, and the structure and continuation of her narration depend upon her ability to represent her own body while not abandoning her intellectual identity for a life defined by embodiment. Mr. Gentleman, many years Kate’s senior, is a proper object of her idealistic generic narrative because his masculinity results from his economic status and not from any real physical prowess. Her choice of a man who will provide her narration with little challenge is telling: she has not chosen a young, physically virile man as the object of her affections, but has instead chosen a man with little potency left with which to threaten that precarious balance between her intellectual self and her adopted embodiment. Kate describes his “pale face of an old, old man” (157), and comments upon “the pallor of his high cheekbones” (161). The closer she gets to the point in the narrative when he will ask, “‘Show me your body. I’ve never seen your legs or breasts or anything’” (164), the more Kate emphasizes the fragile physical state of Mr. Gentleman. Whereas in Kate’s youth his fine clothes signified for her his economic power and the material wealth to which he could potentially provide her with access, when Kate first sees Mr. Gentleman’s naked body, she notices, “He was not half so distinguished out of his coal-black suit and stiff white shirt” (164). Without those signs of his economic strength, his appeal decreases.

More importantly, though, Mr. Gentleman’s functionality decreases as he attempts to control Kate’s narrative—through what she conceives of as control of her body—through introducing her into the realm of sexuality that will demand from Kate her stake in the intellectual world and, in the extreme, demand her narrative voice in payment for her single fare into the territory of the body. Kate’s understanding of sexual expression other than Mr. Gentleman’s kisses and rather reserved fondlings comes from childhood memories of her
mother: “Reluctant and frightened as if something terrible were being done to her” (50). Kate
dreams for simple expressions of desire: “[. . .] a kiss. A kiss. Nothing more. My imagination
did not go beyond that. It was afraid to. Mama had protested too agonizingly all through the
windy years” (145). Romance narratives are within Kate’s control, but the potential addition of
an embodied sexuality into the mix signals for Kate a resulting inability (like that of her mother)
to control her own destiny. Sexual intercourse (perhaps one of the more recognizable
manifestations of female embodiment in late-twentieth-century culture) would threaten Kate’s
narrative system, would provide the out-of-place element that would (and eventually will)
silence her. As she stands before Mr. Gentleman naked and under his appraising gaze, she is
awkward and uncertain of the implications of her own embodiment: “So I put my hand up to my
throat, a gesture that I often do when I am at a loss” (164). Her gesture is protective. As she
makes herself sexually vulnerable to the man, she places her hand over the physical site of her
voice and of her authentic intellectual self.

When Kate receives Mr. Gentleman’s telegram stating that he must break off their
relationship and cancel their Vienna plans, it could be inferred that the romance plot that Kate
has created so carefully has backfired, and that O’Brien has provided no closure to the narrative
of The Country Girls. In order for Kate to maintain a precise construction of herself as a
narrator, and as a woman who will rise beyond her material means, however, she must reject the
sexual relationship offered to her by Mr. Gentleman. If Kate is to maintain her voice, her
authentic self, then she cannot fall into the other side of the mind/body binary O’Brien has
presented through her characterizations of Kate and Baba. As a single novel with its own
distinct narrative, The Country Girls alone does not provide sufficient textual evidence of Kate’s
narrative strategy, but her continued narration in The Lonely Girl—made possible only by her
final avoidance of Mr. Gentleman’s advances—provides further examples of Kate’s embodiment as a narrative element and of her risk-taking with that embodiment. In fact, over the course of the second of the trilogy’s novels, Kate loses her ability to narrate through her affair with another man, one whose controlling nature and successful seduction of Kate turns her heady romantic ideal into merely a result of the narrow confines of traditional Irish femininity. In order for Kate to continue her quest, she must move onward from Mr. Gentleman; her realization that he has retracted his offer is actually a moment of freedom, at least for the time being. The ideal that Kate pursues is a traditional one, and its proper conclusion is hardly two weeks in a Viennese hotel with an elderly man. An older Kate with new, urban experiences and a certain amount of independence from her father must shed the “new god” (57) of her adolescence—for whom the God of Catholicism was cast off—for yet another idol who can potentially offer her the correct ending to the fairy story she seeks to construct. In *The Lonely Girl*, Kate has a second chance at constructing both herself and the life she desires. As a result of her self-construction, Kate appears to have reached a certain form of social equality with Baba, as well. Kate’s relationship with Eugene temporarily provides Kate with more cultural capital, and with a sense of more material capital (via Eugene), than the single Baba can access.

The narration in *The Lonely Girl* continues to exhibit Kate’s construction of herself in the guise of romantic heroine, and its narrator, now fully invested with an embodiment that conveys her heroine-like desirability, continues in increasingly overwrought language to instill her tale with the essentials of the genre. Sue Harper, who compares the novel with O’Brien’s tighter film script, calls the source narrative “loosely slung and florid” (112), and indeed, the precursor to the screenplay is well-matched to its own roots in the tradition of the romance novel. On the first page of the text, Kate’s debt to the genre is made evident: “All the nicest men were in books—
the strange, complex, romantic men; the ones I admired most. I knew no one like that except Mr. Gentleman, and I had not seen him for two years. He was only a shadow now, and I remembered him the way one remembers a nice dress that one has grown out of” (179). Here not only does Kate seem to hint at a desire to locate a man similar to the protagonist in her latest read, Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night*, but her initial set-up reminds readers of the existence of that space left in her world upon Mr. Gentleman’s timely departure. Those familiar with opening scenes of romance-driven novels will comprehend quickly that Kate’s quest for love will continue, that this search for a romantic counterpart will be the stuff of the ensuing narration. As in the previous novel, however, Kate’s quest in this text is not simply the “old, old story” (387) of her desire for romantic love, but is also a desire for a life of increased material goods, increased consumer capacity, and, importantly, for a life that is not constricted by the bounds of traditional Irish expectations for women. Still living in Dublin when the novel opens, and still out from under the rule of her father and the shadow of his socioeconomic demise, Kate continues to construct her necessary embodiment as she seeks to establish herself in the image of those who, like Baba and the Brennan family, are natural citizens of the consuming classes.

Kate’s body size is a significant force in the progression of her narration of *The Lonely Girl*, as it was in its predecessor. As before, too, her body is represented through a mode of consumption and as a site of consumption, and not as a body that conforms to cultural standards for feminine beauty. Kate describes her appearance, hardly changed from the last glimpse of her in the previous novel: “My face in the mirror looked round and smooth. I sucked my cheeks in, to make them look thinner” (179). Though Kate plays with a thinner self-image, and even reports that she “longed to be thin, like Baba” (179), she merely pays a reflexive homage to the cultural norm in this opening moment. Her embodiment, truly a vehicle for her attempts to
narrate herself beyond her beginnings, is never again considered to be a negative or undesired aspect of her identity. In order for Kate to position herself to obtain from men the material goods and quality of life she desires, Kate must (in the logic system she has inherited from her mother and, indeed, from generations of women unable to obtain material wealth on their own) wear the body that will enable her access to the sexual arena through which she can achieve her material goals. Still, though, Kate must balance that embodiment with her intellectual identity, and to that end she recalls her introduction to Eugene Gaillard (who emerges as her second romantic interest) as “the literary fat girl” (184), a combination of overt physical and intellectual characteristics. For a few pages in this novel, until she meets Eugene and begins to fall in love with him, Kate seems to have struck a balance between the mental and physical realms.

Kate’s literary identity, though, is more manifest in her ability to narrate than in any formal knowledge of a literary canon: when Eugene likens Kate to Anna Karenina, she “thought she must be some girlfriend of his, or an actress” (203). Kate does read, and works to maintain a basis for her self-representation as literary, but her weekly “free read” in a local bookshop leans more toward the genre she is so enamored of, and includes titles such as “The Charwoman’s Daughter” (195). Kate aspires to high culture, but misses the mark, and erudite documentary director Eugene appears to be the very man who can offer Kate the cultural and economic package she has sought since adolescence. Unlike Mr. Gentleman, whom Kate had cast in god-like terms, Eugene is like a saint “carved out of gray stone” (185), not god but mere mortal, if perhaps a cold, unmovable version. When Kate admits, “I had that paralyzing feeling in my legs which I hadn’t felt since I’d parted from Mr. Gentleman” (186), Eugene ascends to his role as successor to Kate’s first love, but his relative youth, his cultural capital, and the fact that “[d]iscipline and control were the virtues he most lauded” (344) make this suitor a far more
dangerous one for Kate and her narrative project. His suggestion that she come to the country in order to be his “amauensis in [his] shooting lodge” (219) is a good indication of the threat that Eugene will pose to Kate’s narrative voice and to her intellectual self. His desire to co-opt her relationship with language in order to serve his own creative interests is a precursor to the physical seduction and eventual narrative downfall Kate will face later in the novel.

Typical of the charming, interesting romantic hero, Eugene is not presented as sinister or as particularly dangerous. He at first is quite kind to Kate, and escorts her around Dublin, holding her hand “naturally, the way you’d hold a child’s hand or your mother’s” (199). True to his narrative function, too, Eugene provides for Kate materially: he buys her a new coat and “six pairs of stockings and we were given one free pair as a bonus” (202). This shopping boon reminds her “of mama and how she would love it,” and Kate thinks, “I knew that if she could she would come back from her cold grave in the Shannon lake to avail herself of such a bargain” (202). As Kate becomes more familiar with Eugene, however, his controlling nature and consequent challenges to her narrative voice unfold as insidious elements of an otherwise familiar tale. Eugene is a difficult hero for Kate’s constructed romance because he is married (later divorced), but, due in part to her need for distance and control of her romantic narrative, her choice of Eugene—remote, geographically removed, married—fits her patterns established earlier during her relationship with Mr. Gentleman. She sets out to include Eugene in a narrative confection that suits her own goals, but in time he turns out to be a force that her narration cannot bind.

His subtle control of Kate’s voice begins with his ability to alter her identity through changing her name. While she is referred to as “Caithleen,” even as “Caith,” in The Country Girls, once Eugene dubs her “Kate,” that label is her last. She explains, “He called me Kate, as
he said that Caithleen was too ‘Kiltartan’ for his liking” (202). Only Kate’s father, a man of traditional Irish values, insists upon a continued use of the Celtic pronunciation. Though Eugene was raised in Dublin, his French-sounding surname and the possibility of his being a Jew are enough to provide him with a foreign distance from Irish culture and from any attachment to Kate as a surrogate for a struggling nation. With this Anglicization of her name, Eugene initiates his attempts to change Kate from the Irish colleen so attractive to Mr. Gentleman, whose use of her given name reminds Kate of “the bullrushes sighing [. . .] the curlew, too, and all the lonesome sounds of Ireland” (163). Her desire to disassociate herself from those trappings of her nation and her social class induce Kate to follow Eugene’s lead, but his wish is for a Kate quite different from that heroine first imagined by the young Caithleen. Eugene “liked frugality and did not eat very much” (320), and though he can provide Kate with a stable economic and material foundation, his tightfisted nature—extending from his wallet to his emotional make-up—ensures that with Eugene, Kate will not gain what she hopes to through a successfully constructed romance plot.

Still, Eugene offers Kate the most likely chance she has yet been given to move beyond the confines of her meager birthright, and so her self-fashioning takes the shape of Eugene’s vision of what Kate should become. His manipulation of her self-construction and of her narrative development begins with her name change and extends itself slowly through all aspects of Kate’s life. Kate is indiscriminate, and has been trained to desire those “things” to which she has not had access. In a manner typical of Bourdieuian “distinction,” Eugene is less concerned with materiality than with the quality of “things,” and his shaping of Kate into a culturally normative image is in direct opposition to the ways in which Kate has previously portrayed herself as different from cultural standards (especially with relation to her embodiment). Soon
after the two meet, he asks her, “‘Tell me, what sort of food do you like?’” and is “appalled” by her answer: “‘I like everything’” (219). Although Kate has attempted to emulate the sort of modern consumption practices represented by Baba and her family, she has had no understanding of the cultural stratification of those goods that lie beyond her ken. Only with Eugene does Kate begin to see the challenges of social mobility, the varied gradations and classifications of “things” that can set apart natural from naturalized citizens of privilege. Eventually, Eugene’s tastes, including tastes for food, become Kate’s. Though she has “developed a disgust against all eggs, even against the little brown pullets’ eggs [. . .] coddled for me, so long ago” (134), Kate later, with Eugene, eats them once again. Eugene, too, uses that moment as a defining one in their relationship: “‘This is life, this now, this moment of you and me eating boiled eggs’” (320). Not only has Kate changed her approach to aspects of culture (and of consumption) based upon Eugene’s principles, but their relationship is defined by her acquiescence to his particular tastes.

When Kate realizes that she might distinguish among various tastes and desires, she frets, “I was sorry then that I didn’t pretend to have some taste” (219). Though it may be a matter of idiom, her use of a conjugate of the verb “to do” (“didn’t pretend”) and not of the past perfect form of the verb “to pretend” (“had not pretended”) expresses her understanding of this inability to discern quality as a general problematic rather than as an isolated incident. At this moment in Kate’s narration, she expresses grammatically what she cannot expose diagnostically. Kate begins to see her class status as Eugene sees it: as a chronic symptom of a larger disease and not as an issue of social difference that can be effaced through experience and education. Though Kate has a voice—obviously, as she is the one who narrates the events of the novel—Eugene states that she hasn’t “‘learned to speak yet’” (358), to speak in the ways that will register in his social
sphere and in other settings unlike those with which Kate is familiar. “I try to educate you, teach you how to speak, how to deal with people, build up your confidence [...]”, he tells her at a point when his efforts have reached a result quite short of his goal, when Eugene defines Kate as unable to change in ways that will allow her to fit effortlessly into his life (358). Because Kate cannot suit Eugene’s plan for her, he finds her incorrigible and ultimately unworthy of further social and cultural education.

Eugene cannot recognize Kate’s voice or her intellectual self, but that is because his efforts have eroded Kate’s natural affiliation with the mental realm. She has changed in accordance with Eugene’s teachings, regardless of his inability to see those changes simply because they are not as extensive as he might desire. Her narration of The Lonely Girl—occurring from the other side of this initial and most narratively destructive phase of her relationship with Eugene—contains elements of the changes he has influenced her to make, and exists as a last vestige of Kate’s own narrative voice and ability to construct herself and her subjectivity. When Kate says, “I was sorry then that I didn’t pretend to have some taste,” her use of the past tense expresses the fact that at that later point (on the cusp of losing control of her narration and thus of her self-construction) she has indeed become able, if not adept, at such pretension. Her following of Eugene’s lead has led her to change in a way that cannot be reversed, and as she attempts to fit into his social strata in order to avoid that of her father, she also succumbs to his insistence that she fit into his sexual schema. Her embodiment, though initially a necessary component of her narrative project, becomes its ultimate liability. Once Kate leaves behind her romantic notions for the material, physical realities of a sexual relationship with Eugene, Kate is left quite changed indeed.
Kate is unable to escape Eugene in the way that she was able to swerve from Mr. Gentleman’s reach. Her insistence upon constructing herself through a represented embodiment has presented Kate and her narration with previous threats, but Eugene’s controlling nature is ultimately more than Kate can herself control, and her romance plot morphs into a tale of seduction as she re-casts herself according to Eugene’s standards for female behavior. The early influences on Kate of her father and the Catholic Church lead her to adopt a passivity she otherwise might be free from. The narrative that she has directed and controlled as a grammatical subject is exchanged, through the addition to Kate’s developed romance plot of a sexual component, for a narrative of sexuality in which Kate must present herself as the object of Eugene’s desire. Because the two narrative positions cannot be synthesized during a cultural moment with such rigid prescriptions for femininity and for a mind/body duality, the conflict between them can only be rectified through either a negation of Kate’s sexual experience and a reassertion of herself as a narrative subject or through Kate’s abdication of that narration. Since her sexual relationship with Eugene cannot be expunged from the narrative, however, Kate is left with no other choices once that choice to engage in a sexual relationship with Eugene has been made. The prescriptions for female sexual excess under Irish Catholicism don’t allow for the same sort of ambiguity allowed to Pym’s Prudence in her Anglican context. She does avoid the issue, and his advances, for several nights, and though she expresses mortification over her inability to accept him, she continues also to express the same sentiments toward sex that she did when previously considering a physical affair with Mr. Gentleman: “[. . .] If only people just kissed, if all love stopped at that” (233). In his continued efforts to “educate” his protégée, Eugene loans her a book entitled The Body and Mature Behavior; he implicates her youth
instead of a holding out against acquiescence to the dominant power hierarchy of the sexual relationship Eugene offers to Kate.

Only when Kate escapes from her father after he abducts her from Eugene does she realize the limited choices left to her by the trajectory of her narrative and by that narrative’s roots in the social system from which it has been derived. Kate must begin to face the conflict implicit in the paradox of creating a place in the new social order through use of the old, old traditions of romantic love and strictly limited, gendered behavior. Unwilling to stay on at home as her father’s caretaker, she returns to Eugene, who can only provide Kate with a small part of what she had originally hoped to achieve. When she accepts Eugene’s ring and his sham marriage vow—“With this expensive ring, I thee bed” (314)\textsuperscript{13}—Kate accepts the consequences of her self-constructed embodiment and the injustice of a social order that discourages a mind/body synthesis for both women and men. Kate’s fate, however, illustrates how the burden of such division in this particular society is heavier for women. Kate feels, once she has “passed—inescapably—into womanhood” that her choice is the correct one: “[. . .] I had done what I was born to do” (316). As with her mother, Kate’s sense of herself as a woman, once she has passed over the threshold of her sexuality, becomes inextricably linked with a fated biology.

Her sexed sense of fatalism accompanies Kate’s slow loss, henceforth, of her narrative control and of the intellectual identity expressed through her narrative subjectivity. This result is not the finale Kate anticipated as she entered into her affair with Eugene, and the impact of this long-avoided sexual closure to her fantastic attachment to romance is lasting. Once she enters, via sexual consummation, an embodiment that is not simply a construct, but a physical reality, Kate irrevocably jeopardizes the authentic intellectual self who has controlled her own destiny through the power of narration. As soon as their “honeymoon” has begun and Kate has ceased
her struggle to maintain the balance between the physical and the intellectual, her “mind dwelt on foolish, incidental things” (316), and Eugene remarks that Kate is “like a doll” (317), merely material and losing quickly her ability to command and construct what comes next. Rather than the fanciful aspects of romance that led up to this moment in the narration—“perfume, and sighs, and purple brassieres, and curling pins in bed, and gin-and-it, and necklaces” (316)—an entry into a life based upon sexual realities is, for this woman and in this particular time and society, one that will guarantee further alignment with gendered expectations and social constrictions. Though Eugene has made Kate into his devoted pupil, once she has assumed her place in his vision of their life together, he no longer seems to wish for her to make cultural changes: “‘I don’t want you sophisticated,’” he says; “‘I just want to give you nice babies’” (317). Her entry into sexual embodiment has shouldered Kate with the responsibilities of biology, and now her position is fixed through her body, whereas her identity was granted at least the capacity to change and to grow when it existed as one based upon discourse and intellectual occupation.

Eugene wishes to maintain Kate as he first saw her: “‘[. . .] a simple girl, gay as a bird, delighted when you pass her a second cake [. . .]. A simple, uncomplicated girl’” (340). The process he has chosen by which to achieve this version of Kate, however, is at direct odds with that “authentic” self she has lost, and the gap between the two ensures Eugene’s disappointment with the Kate whom he has shaped. Formed from his vision and not from her own, this Kate becomes completely dependent upon Eugene for continued narrative existence. Near their climactic argument and ensuing separation, Eugene asks, “‘I wonder where Caithleen is?’” (357) That original version of O’Brien’s protagonist, however, is nowhere to be seen.

Once Eugene rejects Kate, her dependence upon him for narrative continuance necessitates her loss of voice and of the semblance of control with which that voice provides her.
Her final attempt to control her narration appears in her attempt to win Eugene back by returning to Dublin from his country home and forcing him to follow her directives: “[. . .] he would search for me and swear never to let him out of his sight again” (360). Her command of the language and of certainty of tone, lost when she was content with her immersion in embodiment, returns to take one final turn, but even though her narration regains strength, it is a strength based upon Eugene and founded from his actions, and not from Kate’s. Her reactivity is significant, here; her narrative persistence, prior to this point in the novel, has been directed at achieving through male affiliation a more sure social and cultural access. Here she returns to a forceful stance only to gain the man, and not the social and cultural capital with which he can provide her. She has traded her control completely, and the result is one that leaves Kate in a gender role unchanged from the one that she attempted to escape. Developed over centuries, the gender constructs of her rural Irish upbringing have become too engrained in Kate’s personality.

When Kate passes a note to Eugene that she imagines will bring him looking for her, she feels much like she had prior to throwing her lot in with him: “[. . .] I ran out of the hotel and felt more exalted than I had for ages” (362). Her agency and narrative energy, however, stem only from her expectation that these actions will bring about a particular end.

When Baba, to whom she returns while awaiting a recalcitrant Eugene, asks Kate to chuck all and follow her to London, Kate replies, “’Ah, no, he’ll want me back’” (363), a statement phrased in grammatically certain syntax. Kate’s use of verbs such as “I knew” underscores her certainty, as well as her clear understanding from a point in the narrative future of the unswaying belief she holds to within her own plot construct. Kate decides to pretend to travel to England with Baba, all the while “knowing” that her itinerary will be interrupted by Eugene’s certain return and rescue. This chivalry is an element of that old and abandoned
romance plot, the one Kate left behind upon her entry into a sexually defined reality, and spectacular masculine actions such as these can no longer be expected. “In a letter,” she recalls, “I had told him the exact time we were sailing and where from, so I knew he’d come” (368). Unaware of her loss of narrative power, Kate still expects her directives to produce the desired effects of assertive, performative speech. Only a last call for visitors to disembark and the slow drifting of the ship from the edge of Ireland jostles Kate into the reality with which she has been left. Eugene is not her romantic hero; she is no longer a controlling narrator; she has been abandoned to a lonely state of embodiment without the validation of the man who encouraged her allegiance to the materiality of the flesh rather than to that materialism of consumer society Kate set out to achieve. In contrast to her separation from Mr. Gentleman at the end of The Country Girls, which allows Kate to maintain her narrative voice, this separation is one that leaves her with virtually nothing. In a digressive turn to the present-tense, when Kate recounts her “marriage” to Eugene and their celebratory champagne afterward, she remarks, “I asked to be given the cork and I still have it. It is the only possession I have which I regard as mine, that cork with its round silver top” (315). Kate’s only other “thing” is her own body, and that body is a territory in which she will never become a comfortable resident. She has refused to remain affiliated with her intellectual self, but is not a citizen of the material world except for through Eugene, and once he abandons her, Kate is once again disenfranchised both economically and sexually. Her hard-won embodiment is no longer a necessary form of identification for Kate, who cannot pass through the modernized world without the male escort made necessary by her romantic constructs.

Kate’s narrative coda, the novel’s brief final chapter, provides evidence of the point from which she has narrated the events of The Lonely Girl. Transplanted to London and without
Eugene’s assistance, she explains, “I work in a delicatessen in Bayswater and go to London University at night to study English” (376). The “literary fat girl” who initially charmed Eugene Gaillard, however, is no longer the Kate who exists to narrate the past. Presaged by a moment during her time under her father’s rule when Kate, sans Eugene, “ate without enjoyment” (263), the Kate who has lost Eugene and traveled to London “no longer had to suck in [her] cheeks to look thin” (373). Without the romance connected with Eugene, Kate has no incentive to represent herself as embodied, and instead attempts to present herself as stereotypically literary, a “right drip, wearing flat shoes and glasses” (377). She cannot escape her adopted embodiment, though. In this culture and historical moment, Kate’s sexuality marks her indelibly. The impulse for her narrative voice—gaining materially through acquiring male affections and physical validation—is what ultimately deprives her of that voice. Eugene writes to Kate, “‘[. . .] you will be a different person because of knowing me; it’s inescapable . . .’” (376), and Kate attempts to locate this difference in her return to education and in the intellectual significance of literary study. In her final words, she says, “[. . .] I’m finding my feet, and when I’m able to talk I imagine that I won’t be so alone, but maybe that too is an improbable dream” (377). Though she indeed speaks, she discusses her learning to speak in the much the same way as Eugene had previously. Kate’s university education is her way to gain that knowledge and cultural capital on her own, without Eugene or another man in his place. But her preoccupation with finding a voice when she already has one—and has had one over the course of two novels, two affairs of the heart, and a difficult coming of age—is indicative of Kate’s intellectual disempowerment. She has ended up as bereft as she was when her narration began: silent, passive, another Anne Devlin or any of the other women encouraged to meekness by the Church or for the sake of the nation. The improbable dream that seems to be made up of a desire to alleviate her loneliness is
actually the dream of achieving that “other” voice, one that she might have developed had she
not been tied to the feminine models from her childhood: her mother, Baba’s mother, and other
Irish women locked into roles limited by gender and biology. Kate’s final narrative act is the
narration of her embodiment and its certain effects on her ability to proceed as her own narrator.
Her dream to achieve the successes deemed worthy by the society that produced her, and to be
the subject of that narrative, is Kate’s final, impossible dream.

In the last novel of O’Brien’s trilogy, *Girls in Their Married Bliss*, Kate’s experiences
are narrated in the third person, from a distance, though through a consciousness of limited
omniscience quite close to her own. Regardless of any attempts to “learn to speak,” she is no
longer granted the right to compete for her own narrative. Instead, her story and Baba’s
emerging narrative compete for primacy. As a native of the psychical world who has been cast
out and into a land ruled by materiality and physicality, Kate no longer can access the voice with
which she began at the onset of the trilogy. She has given up her intellectual self for a
physicality that should grant her the access to material gain she set out to possess, and her
cultural ties cannot allow for her to find that new voice that would be recognizable in Eugene’s
world, or even in Baba’s. Kate’s narrative function, on a grammatical level, has been
reallocated: the “I” has been erased. Instead of a first-person narrator in control of the events—at
least the version of events—contained within her narration, Kate has become a defamiliarized
third-person, a “she” who has no say in the quality of her representation or of the filter placed
between her reality and the romanticized edition of the tale she would prefer for readers to see.
Her first-person narration is “a narration that cannot be verified” because “when a story is told in
the first person, the narrator is equal to any other character belonging to the realm of ordinary
mortals and, therefore, fallible” (Glowinski 104). The subjectivity of a first-person narrator, a
grammatical fact inherent in the construct, allows for “[a]ssumptions, fantasies, and lies,” notes Michal Glowinski, and thus Kate’s first-person narration cannot be assessed as the truth (nor can Baba’s). When in control of the narrative, Kate could choose to leave out small details and to cast a softer glow over harsh moments, or, as with her recollections of Mr. Gentleman after her fondness for him faded, remove them to another volume of narration altogether. Mid-way through *The Lonely Girl*, Kate divulges that Mr. Gentleman had often spoken to her with “impatience” that she had heard when she “asked him to write in [her] autograph book,” or “wanted to keep his red setter dog for one night, so as to feel close to him” (262). Years beyond her romantic attachment to him and to what he had represented to her, Kate can indulge readers and explain that Mr. Gentleman “was bitterly ashamed of the times we had been together, in each other’s arms, kissing, and saying ‘I love you’” (261). As a third party, only a *dramatis persona* of someone else’s scripted activities, when Kate flounders on in her attempts to follow her quest for romantic fancy, she cannot protect herself from the more objective point of view of a narrator who has not the same investment in presenting Kate as sympathetic as she herself had.

In this novel, Kate has been reunited with Eugene, and has become his proper wife and the mother of their child, Cash (Eugene’s version of status gained, one might suppose), but regardless of having reached the fundamentals of the goal she set out to attain, she has paid a price too high prior to achieving what might have been a storybook ending to another narrative. Without narrative control, Kate cannot ensure the outcome, and rather than the rosy one she set out toward at fourteen, she has settled into a life in which she can “ascend her own stairs, meet her own husband on the first landing, see him turn away, and hear him cough politely as if she were a deformed person” (397). She continues to seek what Baba calls “the De Luxe Love Affair” (501), but without the control of where such relationships can run to, Kate finally exalts
the quest itself above the already gained outcome, and indulges in one too many romances, ultimately at the expense of her precarious position as Eugene’s wife. As happened before, when Eugene failed to pull Kate from the ship that took her to England, when Eugene and Kate separate for good in this novel, she is left without the material comforts that he can provide, but this time Kate is also left without the ability to expose the details of her life on her own terms.

Unable to construct romance for herself, Kate is equally unable to participate in a life defined by her embodiment such as that represented by the changing female ideal on the advent of the 1960s sexual revolution. If she had made that transition successfully, then her life beyond that one defined by her intellect should manifest itself positively, as equally suited to Kate as were her discursive endeavors. Her one venture into sexual expression, however, once she has left Eugene, becomes a hollow enterprise. Though Kate is initially attracted to the man because of his romantic potential, the outcome of her experience is a relatively impersonal one-night-stand, and Kate is presented as complicit and without the romanticization she might have hid behind, had the narrative been her own. Instead, the third-person account states, “She who had come home with him in heat was dry now and quite systematic!” (499) This account expresses Kate in a much different way than did her own; O’Brien has not simply switched from a first- to a third-person narration, but has developed a narrator who can illuminate the corners of the narrative that Kate herself had left darkened. The nature of third-person narration commands readers “to accept the author’s statement as unquestionable knowledge” (Glowinski 103), and such narration carries an authority that the first-person “I” cannot, even though narrated events might have occurred to the narrating “I.” The narrator who exists only for the sake of its discursive function and who is not a character within the narrative is construed as the most reliable. This third-person narrator does not condemn Kate, but allows for a spectrum of
experience and psychological response to emerge as the narration unfolds without allegiance to Kate, to Ireland, to consumption, to romance, or to any of the conflicting allegiances that colored Kate’s own exposition. She cannot access romance, nor can she participate in the cultural moment in which she finds herself, and the emotional (as well as narrative) dissonance that results from this predicament is emphasized by the impersonality of the third-person narration.

When Eugene leaves England with Cash, and Kate finds herself truly alone (more lonely, certainly, than she was in *The Lonely Girl*), she is driven “to that last pitch of desperation, that mindlessness of hers” (503) that marks Kate until her death. Without Cash, who represents the only real gain Kate has made through her submission to the femininity demanded of her by Eugene, and without the narrative voice that once represented Kate’s authentic psychical self, she is not simply silent, but has become “mindless,” and such dislocation will never be reconciled. Kate’s response to her family’s relocation is to have herself surgically sterilized (507), which is her final act to be mediated through the third-person narration. She remarks to Baba, “at least I’ve eliminated the risk of making the same mistake again” (508); through her sterilization she has made it impossible for anyone else to rob her of another child, and she has also eliminated the possibility of anyone else demanding those same things of her that Eugene had. Without the central biological function of childbirth to signify her social worth, however, and having already excised her intellectual identity in exchange for the life of sexuality and maternity offered her by Eugene, Kate has become little more than the name that signifies her existence, “motionless as the white bedpost” (508). Baba, at Kate’s bedside, “was looking at someone of whom too much had been cut away, some important region that they both knew nothing about” (508), at a woman who, given the options of having her life defined by either its intellectual or its material qualities, has been denied access to both by her attempt to maintain
her tenuous connections to both. The original trilogy ends on this bleak note: Kate’s loss of self, regardless of it’s physical or metal attributes. Though her life will continue for another twenty years, Kate appears in the epilogue (added by O’Brien in 1986) only posthumously, funneled through Baba’s very different brand of narration.

As explained above, for most of the trilogy, Baba appears only through Kate’s interpretive narration, and often seems to exist only as a component of Kate’s own self-construction, whether as an oppositional construct or as a model to follow. In *Girls in Their Married Bliss*, however, when Kate loses her narrative voice, Baba’s voice begins to emerge. Her version of Kate’s life, and of her own, is allowed to compete as a viable version of the narrative truth, though Baba’s first-person narration, as with Kate’s, is just as subject to the fallibility of any first-person narrative. Indeed, having been set up as Kate’s nemesis over the course of two novels, Baba, even when speaking for herself, may suffer from less reliability than has the sympathetic Kate. As Kate’s negative, Baba has thus far been circumspect: her manners are far from the gentility expected of a middle-class woman, and her moral codes are questionably materialistic. Her embodied, sexualized status, too, can signify any of those negative traits previously discussed with regard to Woolf’s Mrs. Manresa or Pym’s Prudence Bates. The woman of excess (whether she is constructed as a consumer or is overtly sexualized) encapsulates cultural anxieties that stem from class and gender issues; such figures also, by comparison with the cultural and social *status quo*, can instigate interrogations of more widely accepted standards for behavior. Baba, as a daughter of a new Ireland, is thus both problematic and promising. Though a woman such as Baba compromises those social codes adhered to by the tradition-bound Kate—and is in some ways significant of important and forward-moving
potential—she also presents a perhaps distasteful idea of where modernity, and the subsequent breakdowns in social castes of class and of gender, might lead to.

Though Kate’s narration is invested with its own complications and with the limitations of her traditional upbringing, Baba’s voice emanates from the opposite end of cultural and economic spectra: her voice is often one of greed, of social privilege at its most destructive. Like Kate, though, Baba serves as one example of those limitations of a femininity produced from within a specific time and place, and she speaks from and of a body that is both free to express itself sexually and yet still tied, often rather painfully, to cultural notions of women’s roles and abilities within society.16 The addition of Baba’s voice to Kate’s allows for a shift from the individual narrator to what Lanser calls a “sequential communal voice” (264).17 As Lanser suggests of the narrative strategy in Amy Tan’s The Joy Luck Club, in O’Brien’s total narrative, the “fact that none of the narrator’s stories is wholly constituted suggests, perhaps, that the book’s emphasis is the representation of a spectrum [. . .] within an ethnically and geographically defined community” (264). By the third novel in the trilogy, Kate’s point of view cannot sustain itself as primary; Baba enters to enlarge the possibilities for and the methods of defining the lives of post-war Irish women. As a singular voice, Baba functions, much like Kate does but with an added sense of dramatic irony, as a “public personal” narrator, and as such she includes her own opinion to those presented previously, at times refuting and at other times confirming those narratives presented by Kate.

Baba’s narrative makes no attempt to rescue her from any false charges, however, nor does she bear any apologies for any of her actions as a younger woman. Even when presented through her own point of view, Baba leans toward the inhumane, especially in her treatment of Kate. “I told Brady we were having a dinner party and if she wanted any scraps she could come
around to the back door for the leavings,” she shortles with regard to a scenario reminiscent of her adolescent exclusion of Kate from that birthday party long before. Baba’s voice is forthright and clear, much as one might expect of the woman of whom Kate remarks, “I could never get her to whisper, and people were always looking at us in the streets, as if we were wantons” (147). Baba’s speech is crisp, colloquial, and makes no bones about the state of her affairs: her dissatisfaction with her marriage, her difficulty with taking the same joy in life she did when newly arrived in Dublin. As O’Brien’s embodied half of a textual duality, Baba has already been set up as material, as sexual and very much as a woman whose body is a significant part of her characterization. Through Kate, Baba has been presented as a consumer, as materialistic, and as having espoused an idiosyncratic morality. In her own voice, Baba confirms such description, but does so in such a way that her differences from Kate do not appear as abhorrent, simply as oppositional to those standards implicit in traditional definitions of middle-class femininity.

When Baba chronicles her courtship and marriage with wealthy but uneducated Frank, whom she calls “my builder” (382), her attraction to his money and his acquisitive spirit is evident. Baba is not—definitely not—a romantic like Kate who yearns for love to solve life’s ills. Raised to appreciate the comforts and cultural status that money can buy in this modern Irish economy, Baba is merely amused when Frank demands respect simply because “his wife was wearing a Balenciaga” (409). She does not settle down into marriage with Frank out of love, and is direct on the subject of her lack of sexual attraction to the man: “I liked his money and his slob ways [. . .] but I had no urge to get into bed with him. Quite the opposite” (385). By relating such information about her own life and from her distinct point of view, Baba not only confirms her difference from Kate as a consuming, embodied woman, but also as a woman without romantic
notion, without ties to the traditional femininity of Irish culture, and thus without bonds to the traditions of patriarchy with which Kate’s characterization has been so infused.

With Frank, Baba can consume, and indeed, Frank often displays his wealth through food and dining, and to gain cultural capital through asserting his ability to afford and appreciate fine food. As Alan Warde notes, “Some knowledge and a capacity to make small talk about food and restaurants is an aspect of cultural capital, being a practice presumably most useful among those who entertain clients, travel, frequently, or eat out regularly with colleagues” (107). Though Frank is a man of self-made material wealth, and thus lacks the foundation for cultural knowledge, he attempts to build up his cultural capital in order to pass as a member of the middle-classes who shares what he sees as middle-class values. Baba recalls that Frank “got cranberry sauce in some house and […] thinks it’s the biggest deal he ever had”; when she tells him that in order to serve cranberries, they must serve turkey, he responds, “‘Well, bloody well have turkey […] Have two turkeys” (432). Frank also orders up soup because he “thinks it’s the poshest thing out […] because they only had it once or twice when he was a kid” (415). As someone born into middle-class privilege of a sort, though, and who had a familial, as well as an institutional, cultural education, Baba is not so impressed with what Frank chooses to ornament his newly built existence: Dior and Balenciaga, “oysters and snails and swank stuff” (415). She may still bear traces of County Clare, and might not have the sense of distinction that would mark her as thoroughly sophisticated,18 but Baba is steps ahead of both Frank and Kate when it comes to classed access and sensibilities. Baba is, for Frank, further plumage, yet another way to express his ability to fit into social classes other than that from which he came. While he provides for her consumption habits, she assists his class mobility as a living effect of his material wealth.
Consumption, however, is only part of Baba’s characterization and, though it figures her embodiment, her consumption alone does not amount to her narrative subjectivity. A large component of Baba’s embodiment, and of her split from traditional femininity via that embodiment, is her overt sexuality. As opposed to Kate’s reticent, “feminine” approach to sexual activity, Baba is bluntly sexual, and narrates her desires and experiences in a manner quite removed from any blush or sigh of romantic fantasy. Used to men “who expected you to pay for the pictures, raped you in the back seat, came home, ate your baked beans, and then wanted some new, experimental kind of sex and no worries from you about might you have a baby, because they liked it natural, without gear” (384), Baba at first finds charming Frank’s fumbling inexperience. Soon, though, she tries to explain to him that “it wasn’t as simple as he thought, that for women hand manipulation, coaxing, et cetera had to come into it” (410). Frank’s response—that “it made [a woman] sound like a bleeding motor engine”—and subsequent sexual roughness (410), leaves Baba without an outlet for that sexuality so central to her character. Her marriage to Frank, though it provides for her material interests, cannot simultaneously provide for her physical, sexual needs.

Locked into a role composed of purely material/sexual attributes, Baba faces as limited an existence as does Kate in her natural, intellectual mode. One early foray into sexual experience outside her marriage to Frank leaves her “not having a bit of enjoyment [. . .] only exertion” (431), and later, in her epilogue, a middle-aged Baba recalls a fling during an island holiday as a “long way from Tipperary” (517). Aside from that exotic excursion, both Ireland and London have left Baba without any desirable outlet for the sexuality into which she is locked, having turned away from the silent, disembodied femininity asked of her by cultural traditions. Of the Church and its Pope, Baba remarks, “He’s still for keeping women in bondage,
sexual bondage above all, as if they weren’t fucked up enough with their own organs, and whoever said that all women enjoy all the fucking they have to do” (522). Baba realizes in this unfinished sentence that women’s roles, whether based upon the intangible qualities of gendered “bondage,” biology, or any newly acquired sexual license, are inadequate unless they allow for mutable combinations of the mental and physical, of active and passive modes of existence that shift depending upon mood and circumstance. Though sexual revolution and shifting gender codes have allowed Baba a choice beyond that patriarchally forced upon Kate and previous generations of her kinswomen, without an ability to properly exercise that choice, Baba becomes a mere caricature of sexual freedom. At the end of the epilogue, after a stroke has left Frank even less able to provide for her sexual needs, Baba is left “making love or half-love to a man with the most of his body bajexed and […] his eyes struggling for performance” (520). Without an intellectual or imaginative component to her characterization that might have pressed her to find a more suitable mate or a life beyond her sexual and materialistic make-up, Baba ends up playing the role of a vapid consumer, without an essence of the desire or fulfillment required by her strictly embodied, sexualized persona.

Both Baba and Kate ultimately face deplorable consequences of the mind/body duality so prevalent in Western culture. Through her use of such a binary scheme in the characterizations of her divided protagonists, Edna O’Brien has emphasized some of the problematics of this construct for women at mid-century and beyond. The narrative carving away of Kate—first of her intellectual qualities and then of that embodiment (including her reproductive organs) at which she worked so diligently to develop—is a chilling result of her attempts to bring the traditions of romance together with the bald truths about many women’s lives that result from traditions of gender, whether in rural Ireland or cosmopolitan London. If Kate represents
monolithic “woman” struggling to become her own nation and to pledge her own allegiances, then the potential of such struggle is minimal, indeed. Likewise, Baba, the free “new” woman of a modernized, sexualized, consumer-driven twentieth century, finds her path just as troubling, just as much a dead-end as the road followed by Kate. O’Brien’s trilogy explores the social and cultural limitations of both old, colonial Ireland and its new Republican form, neither of which adequately serves the multiple needs of its female citizens. The inherent divisions created from a separation of the cultural importance of production from that of consumption, added to the already problematic, dominant schism between the mind and the body, have for many women multiplied the limits placed upon a search for identities of mental and physical wholeness. By giving rise to multiple voices, and to a multiplicity of female and feminine types, O’Brien signals the ways in which female potential lies beyond all prescriptions, regardless of how progressive those prescriptions might at first appear.

Notes to Chapter Four

1 British culture was not only imported into Ireland, but was also considered when Ireland created new policies to keep up with new technical innovations such as television. A report by a seminar convened by the Knights of Columbanus in 1964 explains how respondents were discouraged by the possibility that Irish television might replicate what they found in BBC and other British programming: “an excess of drama devoted to the kitchen sink school, in which the sordid and immoral seemed to be the only things which could be found worthy of the pen of the playwright” (qtd. in Gibbons 46). Luke Gibbons points out an ironic discrepancy in this damning of the “kitchen sink” aspects of programming that actually was increasingly based upon working-class experiences, the very experiences that formed the foundation for literary representations of Irish people during the Irish renaissance (46-7).

2 Howes’s book on Yeats (from which I have quoted) provides extensive examples of the ways in which Irish cultural production has relied upon gender and class metaphors in order to construct a postcolonial “Ireland.”

3 Published in paperback as Girl with Green Eyes in 1964, the year in which the novel was also made into a film bearing that later title. O’Brien herself adapted the novel for the screen (Harper 112).
Though my research in this matter has hardly been exhaustive, I have found little information on women in works of Irish cultural or literary criticism beyond the roles played by some particular women in the resistance and subsequent creation of the Republic of Ireland. For example, Kiberd’s seven hundred-plus-page volume on Irish literary culture offers a single paragraph on O’Brien, and though he notes her importance, he does not treat any of her literary works. His index, like those of most other prominent contemporary Irish critics, lacks a category dealing with “women”; this is one area of Irish studies that begs for further inquiry.

In *Translations*, Brian Friel also plays with this popular feminine ideal in his characterization of the mute Sarah.

Ironically, such an “Irish” femininity—in all its nationalistic and gendered manifestations—is in perfect alignment with that brand of femininity long prescribed for English women. Though this is not the place for any extensive consideration of the complicated relationships between British colonialism, Irish nationalism, and the subsequent treatment of women in the Republic after independence, O’Brien’s Kate may provide one strong example of the paradoxical nature of this “new” feminine Irishness when viewed beside the same old English womanhood that continued to be perpetuated through the later part of the twentieth century.

Though there are no markers to determine Kate’s exact age when narrating this novel, her narration of the second novel in the trilogy, *The Lonely Girl*, takes place at the time of that novel’s closure (with its shift from past to present tense), when Kate is approximately twenty-one or twenty-two years of age. The narration of the first novel might be considered part of one narration that occurs through the course of two volumes, but either way, the narrator is not too far removed from the events narrated, and also cannot be granted the narrative wisdom often found in narrators who speak from a place far removed in time and experience from that during which the narration occurs.

Baba’s name helps to strengthen her privileged, catered-to status: “baba” is a term for “baby” (305).

Graham quotes from Edna Longley’s reading of Paul Muldoon, who suggested an anorexic female should represent a troubled modern Ireland: “‘Anorexia should [. . .] personify Irish women themselves: starved and repressed by patriarchies like Unionism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Nationalism’” (qtd. in Graham 16). Kate’s attempts to construct her own embodiment suggests her struggle with such prescriptive systems that disenfranchise their female citizenry.

If Kate’s self-fashioned femininity is decidedly anti-Irish in that it rejects the allegorical self-denial found in figures such as Cathleen ni Houlihan, then a foreign man like Mr. Gentleman or, later, Eugene Gaillard, provides Kate with a stepping stone away from the roots of Irish nationalism and the expectations it maintained for women. O’Brien’s own husband (they divorced in 1964), Ernest Gébler, was of Irish-Czech descent.
11 Later in the novel, Baba’s increasing thinness is the result of tuberculosis (159); however, at this stage in Kate’s narration, Baba is healthy and her body size lends itself to the representation of Baba as a sexual and desirable woman.

12 When Kate’s father, accompanied by village men, appear at Eugene’s home and attempt to remove Kate from certain seduction, one man remarks of Eugene, “‘Look at the nose of him— you know what he is? They’ll be running this bloody country soon’” (299). Kate tells her landlord, Joanna, that Eugene is from “‘Bavaria or Rumania or some place’” (205). His ethnicity is ambiguous, but is questionable in so far as Eugene is not of Celtic-Irish descent.

13 By the time this scene has made its way into the screenplay, Eugene’s vow becomes even more contemptible: “‘With this ring I thee bed and board for such time as you remain reasonable and kind’” (Harper 113).

14 Later, when Eugene leaves Kate for good, her weight is noted as 8 st. 7 lb. (119 pounds). Though such a weight is far from the large body size indicated by Kate at the height of her romantic potential, it is also not necessarily an unhealthy weight. More important than actual body size, here as throughout this project, is the projected image of the body, and the use of embodiment as an element of characterization. Kate’s growth and subsequent loss of her body is narratively tied to her ability to participate in consumer culture; whether or not it is an actual change in body size is not relevant to the projection of the image of the body.

15 Though this information is presented as free indirect discourse, it is the result of the understanding of a narrative “other,” the narrator.

16 Baba reports: “‘Millions of women getting hit every day, and I myself forced to strip once on the imprimatur of my husband because three of his pals bet I had no navel’” (408).

17 The inclusion of the mediating third-person narrator, for a time, problematizes the idea of a communal narration, but with the epilogue and O’Brien’s ultimate establishment of Baba as necessary to the whole narrative, the third-person narrative can be viewed as a transitional period of narration, and the narrative of two exemplary women finally takes shape as a communal project.

18 I use the term “sophisticated” here in a sort of cosmopolitan sense, as opposed to the way in which Joseph Litvack uses the term, discussed in Chapter Two.
BODY AS TEXT, BODY IN TEXT: READER-RESPONSE THEORY AND THE CONSUMING BODY

A primary goal of this project has been to examine ways in which the mind and body can and do come together, rather than to argue for the insistence of one over the other. Polarized discourse, though, is by no means limited to theories of the body. As the impact of social and cultural orders upon the human psyche and upon the products of human labor have become important parts of contemporary theoretical discourse, those very attempts to understand the relationships between an individual and his or her surrounding environs have created quite problematic theoretical contexts through which to examine society and culture. Results of cultural production—art, literature, music, media—can no longer be thought of as discrete objects, but rather should be viewed as part of a larger milieu of interconnected thoughts and practices. Literary interpretation, while benefiting from ever-broadening terrains of inquiry, has also become a part of the conundrum of current theoretical trends. Whether the reader and text create each other has become a moot point in many ways; instead, theoretical discourse of interpretation has become caught up in the same sort of chicken-or-egg scenario as theories of embodiment. Just as the body and the mind cannot be separated but instead necessarily work together, the reader and the text—one hardly meaningful without the other—have been posited as oppositional quantities while both actually constitute a mutually defined system. Theories of reader response (among others) have done much to free the idea of the text from any definitive method of interpretation, but in the process, notions of "reader" and "text" have been nearly segregated. While, for Roland Barthes, the "more plural the text, the less it is written before I read it," Barthes also suggests that "I is not an innocent subject, anterior to the text" (10). Though theorists such as Barthes introduce a balance between the malleable text and the active,
working reader, such balance is precarious if only because of a naturalized desire within contemporary culture to posit the relevance or importance of one (reader, text; mind, body) above the other. The idea of a preeminence of text or of reader, rather than of their unique combinations, is a threat to the ways in which we read and interpret texts of all kinds, including the text of the human body. What must become important, if anything beyond a radical relativism is to be considered in any dialogue, is how parts work together to become whole experiences, even if those experiences are idiosyncratic and transient.

In order to examine how readers and texts work together and in various combinations, this chapter will examine how the interaction between the two in turn mirrors interactions of minds with bodies. Both dyads are caught up in a theoretical struggle between discourse and materiality, and to examine the two pairs together, to consider the ways in which each binary construct sheds light on the other, can help to assert how it has become more important to look at the mechanics of contemporary thought rather than at its mechanisms, to understand the ways our theories work instead of stagnating in a circuitous search for a definitive model for anything. Further, in the novels I examine in this chapter—Helen Dunmore's *Talking to the Dead* and Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*—represented bodies within the texts are necessary catalysts for readers' interpretation of the texts beyond the surface narratives. Both novels rely upon familiar, generic conventions in order to mask embedded, more difficult narratives of incest and murder, and only through considerations of the represented physical, consuming (female) body can the ways in which the two narratives within each novel depend upon each other be clearly discerned. Initially perceived divisions of mind and body (vis-à-vis consumption) in both texts compel the reader to respond to the buried narratives beneath the generic constructs. By
presenting the body as a conduit for reader-response, the narratives themselves play out the inseparable natures of reader and text, of mind and body.

To understand how the mind and the body work together, one needs a model to express ways in which this functioning takes place. The "body image"—an intellectually projected version of the physical body as explained in discourses of psychology and neuropsychology—is a combination of physical and virtual components of embodiment and will serve as my model for examining how the mind and body are not only interdependent, but also how they relate to the text/reader dyad. If the body—due to its reduced state in some contemporary discourse to a sort of inert surface made intelligible only as a result of cultural inscription—has become a questionable structure, then considerations of its projection/image rectify this reduction through an emphasis of the primacy of the connection between the physical body and its iterative image, rather than of either one or the other. The body image "attests to the necessary interconstituency of each for the other, the radical inseparability of biological from psychical elements" (Grosz 85) by displaying ways in which the body works through the psyche and the psyche manifests itself in the flesh. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains, "my whole body for me is not an assemblage of organs juxtaposed in space. I am in undivided possession of it and I know where each of my limbs is through a body image in which all are included" (98). Beyond the fact of the body is the way we come to understand the body: the image of the body, of our own and of others', is the way we come to acknowledge and to understand that thing we call "the body." Paul Schilder, a neuropsychologist whose work The Image and Appearance of the Human Body looks extensively at the ways the body and mind work as one, defines the term:

The body schema is the tri-dimensional image everybody has about himself [sic]. We may call it 'body-image'. The term indicates that we are not dealing with a mere sensation or imagination. There is a self-appearance of the body. [. . .] although it comes through the senses, it is not a mere perception. There are
mental pictures and representations involved in it, but it is not mere representation. (11)¹

The image of the body is like the physical component of the body itself in that it is three-dimensional. It differs from other bodily "images" of a visual or representational manner, however, because of its direct rapport with the material body it describes and perpetuates within the human psyche. The body image is a predominant feature of the body's own epistemology. It provides the body with a method through which to know itself and its existence: its physical experiences of pressure, pain, and temperature sensations sorted out by the various nervous response systems. Recent scholarship on aspects of the female body, often dealing with female eating disorders and body-related self-esteem, has appropriated the term to such a degree that "body image" is now in common discourse related to body size and to one's perception of the width and girth of one's (most often female) body proportions. The image created by the mind and of the body, though, is a much more complex designation of the term, and exploring this phenomenon adds to the conversation on the body itself, as well as extends that conversation to better include mind/body connections. As a way to understand a "psychology of movement," Schilder posits the body image as the basis of all human movement: "undeveloped psychic knowledge [. . .] finds its development only during the performance of the action [. . .]. In this plan the knowledge of one's own body is an absolute necessity," but "intellectual knowledge is certainly, as pathology proves, insufficient" (51-2). One's own corporeal knowledge, then, is more than an intellectual, mental understanding of the body itself. The image created as a guide to sensory and other responses is a visceral, embodied knowledge; it is a knowledge fundamental to motility and thus to human agency. The body image is the body's own trope: it is the narrative that explains the fact of the body and of its everyday existence.
Schilder discusses the body and its movement, how it originates in time and space through the body image, as a "gestalt": "the whole which is more than the sum of the single parts" contrasted with "the 'und-' connection of parts which are added to each other" (11). Ontologically, the gestalt is systemic, complete only in and of itself; it should not be understood as a series of discrete parts. Western thought has moved toward dismantling such systems and an objectification of such parts that results in what I have termed “auto-objectification,” but indeed, if we are ever to understand connectivity rather than divisiveness, then a complete model must be understood as the foundation of anything such a dominant thought produces or creates. A strong analogy can be made between this use of the gestalt concept in Schilder's work on the body and the necessary mind/body connections I advocate. For Schilder, movement as a total experience is a gestalt, and as such it involves the entire moving being. Movement "develops out of inner motives" and "contains as parts its previous stages of development" (61). In other words, as I lift my leg up and onto the barre in order to stretch, that movement stems from an internal drive and desire to do so (impetus, decision), and is also the sum of each point along the arc of the gesture: the foot moves from floor to barre; the hip rotates; the knee turns outward. Such "human action confirms us [. . .] in the idea that a gestalt has to be acquired and created and produced by inner and outward activities" (61), by the coming together, unconsciously, of the mind and the body. The materiality of the flesh, then, articulates the body’s desire to move. Between desire and movement, though, ensuing motion is understood by the individual through the psychic image of the body itself, so that the barre can be reached without the aid of visual acknowledgment. Movements can be produced without conscious establishment of how and where and when, can be accomplished with eyes closed, with sight turned inward toward the image that is the psyche's guide to the outward nature of the body.
Together the mind and body create a gestalt—or, more precisely, develop *from* a gestalt—that should be encountered as a single sum of both its intellect and its corporeality. The gestalt of the mind/body combination, though, should not be understood as something fixed or regulated, but as a creation that shifts and flows depending upon context: "a construction and destruction connected with the needs, strivings, and energies of the total personality" (Schilder 211). This continual building up and tearing away at the gestalt of the mind/body is illustrated in the way a body image changes as an awareness of physical surroundings change, as individuals experience their lived bodies differently depending upon motility, emotion, and other fundamentals of everyday life. "We expand and we contract the postural model of the body," Schilder writes; "we take parts away and we add parts; we rebuild it; we melt the details in" (210). Thus the cane becomes an extension of the body/image; the anorectic envisions a larger counterpart within the mirror than stands without; the "personal space" we use to psychically protect ourselves shrinks and expands according to the identity of whomever sidles up beside us. The gestalt of the body/image (both the physical body and the image of the body envisioned from within) is a result of various equations and derivatives; it is a sum of its passivity and its resistance, its unknown surroundings and its recorded experience. As such, how can it ever be broken into fragments that maintain definition, that refuse change? If the body/image is the result of "the continual activity, the trying out" (Schilder 211) of various states of being, then it can only be taken as the sum of its parts, as a whole structure, and not as qualities of the mental or the physical realm inducted into a hierarchy that negates the entire being by subjugating a selected stratum.

The body image stresses the interconnectedness of the mind and the body, and presents the individual as a gestalt of physical and mental spheres. To discuss "the body," then, is to
speak of more than flesh, but of intellectual activities of individuals, as well. The flesh is the external exhibition, in many ways, of the "inner activities" Schilder mentions as part of the body's gestalt (61). To discuss "the body" is to implicate more than simply the physicality of some one person. The gestalt of the body is both inscriptive surface and intelligible text, both image and context, material and intellectual. Its textuality can be "read" as a site of culture and of biology. The body is the medium for all human expression and for human interpretation of the nexus of cultural and material experience. Michel Foucault delineates the body's textuality from its experience by suggesting two registers of embodiment: "a useful body and an intelligible body" (*Discipline* 136). For Foucault, the "two registers are quite distinct, since it [is] a question, on the one hand, of submission and use and, on the other, of functioning and explanation" (136). Susan Bordo puts Foucault's terminology into play through analysis of anorexia and other feminine "disorders" (hysteria, agoraphobism), and explains the intelligible body as the body symbolic: for example, "the nineteenth-century hourglass figure [. . .] representing a domestic, sexualized ideal of femininity" (181). The useful body differs from the symbolic through its relationship to praxis, in Bordo's case a feminine praxis: "straightlacing, minimal eating, reduced mobility [. . .] rendering the female body unfit to perform activities outside its designated sphere" (181). Cultural practices are joined to their resulting social and cultural significance at the site of the body.

Though I find both Foucault's and Bordo's theories of the body excellent lenses through which to begin to examine the body's textuality, the Foucauldian notion of "docility"—at the heart of his theories in *Discipline and Punish* and of Bordo's extrapolations from them—which "joins the analysable body to the manipulable body" (136), lends itself too much to an external/material image of the body and to that body’s use value as a site of cultural inscription.
Docility joins together only the materiality of bodily practices and their significance; Foucault leaves out the interiority of the body and the body's intellectuality. What can be viewed from the outside by another, in Foucault's terms, has nothing at all to do with the view of the body by itself through the extended body or body image. Though Bordo asserts the danger of "giving a kind of free, creative rein to meaning at the expense of attention to the body's material locatedness in history, practice, culture" (38), often her discussions of the female body, particularly of the anorexic body, tread closer to a fixed idea of docile bodies than her disclaimers might suggest. In her essay "Material Girl" (in Unbearable Weight), Bordo explains bodily effacement through examinations of the body's "plasticity": the body’s ability to be reconstructed through plastic surgery, diet, and exercise, often results of auto-objectification. Though she acknowledges a cultural ability to efface the body if the body is viewed only as a site of cultural inscription and normalization, she still defines “the body” only in terms of its materiality. To trim away flesh is to affect far more than the body's shape and size; the shapes of body images and of psyches change as well with each developed muscle, shed pound, or Botox injection. Further investigations into the effects of auto-objectification should consider the potential plasticity of the brain and any resulting, lasting imprint upon the psychic component of the “self” that results from the ways in which bodies are constructed and reconstructed for cultural conformity. Just as the body can change in size and appearance, the body image will change in order to account for lost or added physical dimensions, and phenomena such as phantom limbs experienced by amputees call into question a notion of that newer image as primary or as stable. Discussions of the body, if they are to take into account the body's psychic components, must include the more complex ways in which the body can be read as a gestalt of the mental and the physical.
Daily, our bodies are "read." We read the bodies of each other as we pass in streets or come together in offices and classrooms. Reading the body as text is one of the most fundamental literacies in which we engage. Reading the body as object—its size, shape, the cultural significance of the body as a thing—is an automatic response, but it is also naturally a very subjectively determined evaluation. As symbols, as purely "intelligible" bodies, objectified (and auto-objectified) bodies convey only the meaning bestowed upon them, much like texts taken to be readily transparent, fully accessible in at least similar ways to a variety of readers. Because interpersonal relations are part of the goal of communication, the body must surpass an object-status in order to convey not only meaning derived through cultural assumptions on its part of the reader, but also meaning that stems from the resistance of the textualized body. Texts—both the written, printed texts and the textualized bodies I implicate here—are always both intelligible and resistant. Though the static, material text (the “book”) may not change except as pages weather and print fades, that text’s meaning will shift with each reading experience. Some meaning will appear as hardly arguable, such as actions and empirical effects. Questions of desire, impulse, or motive, though, are not always easy to discern. Furthermore, such questions can most often only be answered through a complicity of both the text and the reader. Non-verbal communication such as posture or facial expression offers readers both the casual meaning of, say, a frown that denotes sadness, and at the same time presents a series of questions: Why is she sad? How can that emotion be changed or rectified? Am I only reading sadness where there is none at all?

Beyond the "face value" of the body's communications, beyond the international symbols of frowns, happy faces, and the like, a literacy of embodiment depends upon a physical empathy or understanding between reader and body/text as well as an emotional or intellectual
interpretation. To watch someone rush across a room, and to begin to understand the activity, one must not only understand the pace of the actions and the movements of the body. One must also be willing to interpret how it feels to be rushed, how such strides feel in muscles, and how the material body moves through space. In short, one's own body image comes into play when one reads the textual body of another. The psychic understanding of one's own physicality is what allows one to negotiate his or her own actions and motility, and it is that knowledge of the self (a physical and mental conglomerate) that allows for responses to the nuances of physicality in general. The body image interprets what it means to move through space, to extend one's arms and legs, and to insinuate through expression that one is in a hurry, please step aside. This image, as well, is the empathic device that lies between one body and another, between the reader of a body and the textuality of the body undergoing interpretation.

As with the material body—which is textual but which also certainly exists for purposes other than interpretation—the represented body within a text, that which we might more easily understand as a "textual" body, can be understood via the body of the reader. The extension of a reader's own body image is a large part of what enables that reader to comprehend a represented body within a text. As a mixture of mind and body, the body image is analogous to that meeting point between text (printed material) and reader, between an amorphous "meaning" of language and the experiential existence of the lived body. If a body represented within a text is to be considered as something other than pure object, if it is to be understood as representative of the human model I have defined as a gestalt of the mind and the body, then the body of the reader, the reader's body/image, is a necessary element of the reading experience.

In order to untangle the dual narratives of Carter's and Dunmore's texts, I wish to propose a theory of reader response in which the body is complicit, in which the body/image of the reader
acts as a central catalyst for a comprehension of the bodies within texts. Both Carter and Dunmore rely upon female consumption in order to create and maintain clear character sympathies and reader response, and the consuming bodies in both texts help to signify "appropriate" ways to read the surface narratives of each text. For Barthes, the human body is the "single object from which the [symbolic field] derives its unity" (214), and as such the represented body within the field of a text commands a certain amount of notice: it makes sense of a variety of symbols that otherwise may have little meaning for the reader. If the body (or signifiers of the body) is absent from the textual field, then it becomes difficult for the reader to understand the text in any way beyond the purely intellectual. Because readers are creatures of both intellect and materiality, those readers make sense best from information that appeals to the gestalt of their individual experiences, from information that passes through the body image of each reader.

As I have discussed in earlier chapters, connections between the female body and the activity of consumption invoke a general cultural anxiety of woman as licentious, sexual, and transgressive. As transgressive, female consumption displays a means of resistance to the social order, but also indicates for the reader the fact that a network of codes exists against which to transgress. Through a retrieval of the idea of social codes from the reader's unconscious and recall of these codes by the reader, the act of reading becomes a self-conscious one. Consumption within the text signifies consumption from without. In his understanding of reading as "only one aspect of consumption, but a fundamental one," Michel de Certeau helps to shed light on the connections between the consumption of food and the idea of reading as consumption (167). There is a basic error in the assumption "that the public is modeled by the products imposed upon it," states Certeau. Reading, as active, interpretive, and, for Certeau, a
potentially resistant activity, helps to explain how all forms of consumption can be viewed as modes of agency. Too often, consumers are viewed as passive receptacles of commerce, of food, of information. "To assume that," according to Certeau, "is to misunderstand the act of 'consumption.' This misunderstanding assumes that 'assimilating' necessarily means 'becoming similar to' what one absorbs, and not 'making something similar' to what one is, making it one's own, appropriating or reappropriating it" (166). Reading is not necessarily an act of control, one in which the text predictably plays upon the reader (although, as I will explain, that can be one function of the text). Reading is an act of play, as well: the reader "insinuates into another person's text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralizes himself in it like the internal rumblings of one's body" (Certeau xxi). The pleasure derived from this form of consumption, from reading as an appropriation of the texts of others, is at once intellectual and physical. As a source of pleasure, reading can act upon the body in similar ways as do other sentient experiences. Molly Travis defines the pleasure within Certeau's theory to be specifically sexual, and redefines it as "jouissance" (8), but to locate such pleasure only in the realm of the sexual is to remove from it the very plurality Certeau emphasizes in his discussion of reading as an everyday and resistant act. The body's pleasure can take many forms, can "rumble" through the body in a diffuse way, but it will always resemble the locus of its pleasure, will always recall through a psychic experience of pleasure the physical sensation by which it has been engendered. Though Certeau insists that in the act of reading, the "autonomy of the eye suspends the body's complicities with the text" (176), I argue that the represented body within the text recalls for a reader that reader's own body, that the body is inherently complicit with the text; therefore, one pleasure of reading lies, in part, within pleasurable experiences chronicled within the text.
For most readers, acts of reading require imagination and revelry, the ability to suspend belief in one world in order to enter the world within the text. Imagination, in turn, requires a referent, something that stands in psychically for the material, physical entity created through the power of recall. Hardly separate from the thing that is imagined, the act itself—the intellectual act of inventing, imagining—is dependent upon the object at its base: "the object tends to be coterminous with and only knowable through that object" imagined (Scarry, *Body* 164). When that object is the human form, represented within a text, the body/object is understood through the reader's own embodiment, with the reader's body/image providing a map for understanding the actions and sensations of the textual body. "I cannot understand the function of the living body," writes Merleau-Ponty, "except by enacting it myself, and except in so far as I am a body which rises toward the world" (75). Our bodies "rise toward the world" through their textuality; they rise as bodies within written texts rise toward their readers' own bodies and toward communication. As the nexus of solid flesh and the mind's emphemerality, the body image is the conduit for interplay between the reader and the text, between the physical experience of reading and the discourse laid bare on the page. This is not to say that the act of reading equates the experience stored within the reader's memory and the experience recounted by an author within a text, but rather that the two interact through the mediation of the gestalt of the body. Between the experience of physical practices and any recording of them into language, "the image, the phantom of the expert but mute body, preserves the difference" (Certeau 42) and at the same time mediates the exchange.

The human body writ large, recreated through the text and through the (textual) image of itself, is fundamentally a site of a production of knowledge, knowledge of our own bodies and of the bodies of others. The body image, both physical and mental, indicates the lexical nature of
the body: as communicable, the body envelops a system of language, of communication through one body image and to another. In language as well as in relation to external objects, the human body is "transformed to be communicable and endlessly sharable" (Scarry, Body 255). "The mute facts of sentience" can only be, according to Elaine Scarry, shared within a "culture of language" (Body 256), and I agree, but with the understanding of the body itself as linguistic, as the origin of a certain form of communication transmitted by the psychic extension of one's own body. Spoken or written "language" does not bind the body's meaning; the body shares itself through its self-image. The body image is the way in which one body "perceives the body of another, and discovers in that other body [. . .] a familiar way of dealing with the world" (Merleau-Ponty 354). Reading the body of another, whether within a text or within the world, involves a fundamental relating of experience, of both sentient and intellectual encounters. The "whole" of the body, when met with some other whole, morphs into a new version of each body/image, each body becoming an extension of the other and at the same time forming a new, larger unit made cohesive by the interaction of both body images. One gestalt considers another: "as the parts of my body together [comprise] a system, so my body and the other's are one whole, two sides of one and the same phenomenon" (Merleau-Ponty 354).²

Schilder's work on the subject of the body image strengthens this idea of the body as "sharable," as a way to gain understanding of the realm of the body.³ "Experience of our body-image and experience of the bodies of others are closely interwoven with each other" (16), he explains, in a way that makes the body inherently social through the body image concept. Some of Schilder's cases involved patients whose inability to locate sites of sensation on their own bodies or to point out their own body parts (agnosia) was linked to their abilities to make the same identifications on the bodies of others. From this discovery, he believes that "where we are
not able to come to a true perception of our own bodies, we are also unable to perceive the bodies of others" (44). It is possible, then, to reformulate this to state that we can only "know" the bodies of others in as much as we know our own physicalities. Where there is a limited ability to function or a lack of experience, the body as a receptor of information is self-limiting. One might be able to imagine climbing Half Dome or running a marathon even when one has not, but in a much different way than can one who has shared a similar experience. Without certain commonalty of sentient experience, one can only imagine via analogy: how like that experience is this one I have had? Running a shorter race might enable one to explore some of the physical sensations of marathon running, but running through a grocery store in order to purchase a missing ingredient for dinner is an experience that limits the analogy and thus one's ability to adequately imagine all physical experiences of another. The body image is a critical part of motility and of perception, both sensual and psychological. The boundaries of one body image in part define the ability to comprehend other corporeal experience, including experience represented in discourse. Regardless of this limitation, however, the body image is central to our ability to understand, to "read," the experiences of another. Without the fundamental knowledge of our own states of embodiment, there would be no foundation for any creation of connection and analogy as we work toward comprehension of others.

The confines of our own body images and experiences perhaps lead to what seems to be an often exorbitant, sometimes prurient interest in the most common of human experiences. We may not all have run a marathon, but there are some activities shared by most, if not all, individuals. These "everyday" practices allow for a network of experience that create commonalty where there might otherwise be none. As such an everyday practice, consumption, eating, works in this way, creating the potential for an understanding of the scope of another's
motility and impulse. As a phenomenon with a distinctly psychological dimension, the body image contains within it the cultural codes absorbed by the psyche, and so the relation between one body/image and another is more than the interconnectedness of physical beings and experience. There are also connections between what is represented by the body image and its experience, by what becomes "intelligible" through socialization and through the sociability of the body image. Eating is a standard practice, and it is an activity that must be carried out in order for existence to be sustained; it can thus be understood as an action based in need and that most often brings with it a certain satisfaction, whether that of simple sustenance or of pleasure derived from grander fare. As a social and cultural practice, though, eating is also fraught with messages about the body: its maintenance, class, sexuality, etc. The body's psychological responses to food, too, play a part in the reaction of one body image to another. Depending upon the cultural messages incorporated into one's psyche, for example, the feeling of satiety may engender a response of pleasure or one of abhorrence (or, in the cases of some bodies such as those of bulimics, a combination of such responses can occur). The body image carries with it these byproducts of culture, and this can add a layer of further connection and understanding for those who share cultural practices and information. The level of one body's comprehension of another will depend upon how these two registers of knowledge occur together, and upon whether they occur together at all. But even when cultural assumptions about bodily practices are quite different, the sharable body image is a universal concept, and allows for an essential understanding of other bodies, whether those bodies are actual or representational.

There is certainly an advantage to reading the textuality of "real" bodies in the immediate world, but the body image also works as a site of mediation during the reading of represented bodies within written texts. One basis of knowing the bodies of others in our surroundings is
vision, and vision is perhaps the main sense evoked during the act of reading. Not only is written information taken in through the visual apparatus, but the information processed during the act of reading is often of a visual quality: sights and scenes are large parts of our literary landscape, and the world of objects is more easily transcribed than are those of taste or smell. The secondary senses can only be approximated in language through metaphor and simile or with the use of adjectives, and the margin for interpretive error with such figurative language is much greater than with language used to explain the phenomena of objects. A sense of sight is, next to the kinesthetic sense, the primary way sighted people understand the world. There is, therefore, more precise and more sharable language to define and describe the physical world. The body image exists without sight, but it has a definite, important "optic" quality that lends itself to reading representational bodies. Bodies represented in language are created from language that relates directly to our sense of the visual, and a reader's comprehension of represented bodies, can be understood as originating from similar sensory impulses to those that create our actual visual impressions.

In some of Schilder's cases, patients could only begin a motion if they were looking at the limb in question (22). The embodied self we visualize psychically is an important part of the mechanism of the body image. Even when "the majority of the optic images of normal persons never come into the full light of consciousness" (Schilder 22), the optic impressions made by the body image upon individual consciousness are a necessary component of body comprehension. Unconscious knowledge of our own bodies (and of their extensions within the body image) create strong synaesthetic impressions within the psyche: the visual quality of the optic image is the forerunner of all other sensory data. In order for one to register where the body is touched, what it is touching, how it will move toward obtaining something it desires, the optical, projected
version of the body must mediate the sensory experience. The body must "read" itself in order to process motor impulses and sensory information. Importantly, too, the "optic impressions concerning our own body [. . .] are in no way different from the optic impressions we have concerning the bodies of others" (Schilder 234-5), including those bodies rendered from language. External stimuli, such as verbal instructions, can alter the optic image and create derivative optic perceptions, such as when "the subject is asked to imagine his hands three times their normal size, [and feels] his imagined giant hands heavier" than they actually are (Schilder 115). Schilder points out that this shift from optic image to optic perception takes place through a "clouding of the consciousness" (115) and does not cause a permanent adjustment in the body image, simply a situational change sympathetic to the stimulus from which it derives. This clouding of the consciousness can also, in some cases, be called the "imagination," and the imagination is the primary clearinghouse for the information and ideas taken in during the act of reading.

Imagination, typically understood as a flight of fancy or as "the ghostly enfeeblement of images in daydreaming" (Scarry, Dreaming 40), is redefined by Elaine Scarry, in Dreaming by the Book, as an act that can supply vivacity to its perceived objects, especially such imagination as that required in the reading process. More so than in other media, she theorizes, "in the verbal arts [. . .] images somehow do acquire the vivacity of perceptual objects" (5). Whereas in painting there can be actual texture and color absent from a written text, painting as a method of communication has "elaborate commitments" to its "immediate sensory content," while verbal arts are completely lacking in sensory stimuli and only present "mimetic content" (6-7). The difference in the perception necessary to read a painting and to read a written text is the act of perception itself: "the verbal arts enlist our imaginations in mental actions that in their vivacity
more closely resemble sensing than daydreaming" (16). The content of these "verbal arts" is altogether hidden within the imagination of the reader, while different levels of sensory and other "content" is provided for the viewer/listener/consumer in music, visual art, and theater. Imagining the visual qualities of the written text demands the full participation of the reader. The act of "mimesis," Scarry writes, "is perhaps less in [the objects represented in a text] than in our seeing of them" (6). Writing is not the sole source of mimesis, but reading is also mimetic action; mimesis is performance. As a mode of reading, mimesis is also an act of consumption: "imagining the flowers is also a way of ingesting or at least interiorizing them" (Scarry, Dreaming 66). The act of the mind to make meaning from not only the words on the page but from the objects they represent requires the vehicle of the body in order to process language into something like life. The vivacity missing from the imagination without the verbal instruction of the text, the "enfeeblement" evoked by Scarry above, is restored to the act of reading by virtue of the action and motility with which reading is invested. "Perceptions are only formed on the basis of their motility," Schilder notes, so that "[. . .] changes in the motility in its broadest sense will be of determining influence on the structure of the body image" (15). Each image within a text will thus interact with and change the body image itself, if only for the moment of reading, the way a verbal cue can result in a temporary growth of the image of one’s hands. The connection of the physical and mental aspects of our beings are quite evident in the acts of reading and perception, for without an idea of how we move through time and space, the spatiality and vivacity of represented images within a text would have no method by which to present themselves; the reader would have no way to make meaning from actions represented by the printed word. According to Schilder, "imaginations [. . .] change under the influence of motor
impulses and motor imaginings" (115), under the influence of the body and its self-made image. 4

Scarry's work on imagination in *Dreaming by the Book* extends from her earlier work on the body and from the ways she herself tried to posit the sensory experiences of the body as "knowable." The vast divide between discourse and the body that hinders (one could say "enfeebles") Western thought, though, also limits Scarry's exploration of *The Body in Pain*. The body is part—a necessary part—of the sense-making processes of the mind and its perception. The body is always complicit in and part of language, not simply derived from it or marked by it, as some theorists seem to suggest. For Scarry in her earlier work, "the sentient fact of the person's suffering"—and I'll extend the issue of pain outward to include all of the body's sensory experiences—"will become knowable to a second person" only "through one means of verbal objectification or another" (13). While Scarry reaches toward this more complex nexus of mind and body, materiality and discourse, when she states that "the advantage of the sign is its proximity to the body," she never moves beyond this nearness and into a full interaction between the mind and the body. In the second half of this sentence she discounts her first assertion: "its disadvantage is the ease with which it can then be spatially separated from the body" (17). The sign or referent must not necessarily be the body in order for the body to be implicated in the act of language, of reading. When the body is that which is imagined through reading, its representation has extra significance due to the embodied nature of the act of reading. Though Scarry's later work moves theoretically beyond such a sharp divide between mind and body, the act of imagining remains a circuitous route from object through psyche and back again. That sense of reading as play, as pleasurable and unpredictable, is missing from her later ideas. The
interplay of mind and body, their always-interdependent state, is needed in order to invigorate and expand upon her imaginings.

As with Scarry, for whom the response of the imagination depends upon the "vivacity" of the image at hand, for Marie-Laure Ryan, "immersion" in a text "depends on the vividness of the display" and, like perspective in a work of visual art, such a vividness integrates the reader into the text (“Immersion” par. 5). The primary element for response to a text is the quality of its image, and of the ability of the image to evoke the action of mimesis from the reader. As an act of the gestalt of the body and the mind, mimesis—perceptive reading and image-making within the imagination—enables the act of reading to move beyond the sphere of immersion, which implies a one-way activity of reader onto or into text. For Ryan, immersion allows for the imagination to take over the reader, and "the medium must become transparent for the represented world to emerge as real" (“Immersion” par. 8). In this way, the verbal medium must transcend the materiality of printed pages and book boards, the chair beneath the reader as well as his or her environment. As with Scarry's proposals, which fail through their inability to integrate the body with the mind, Ryan falls short of this same integration through her separation of immersion from interactivity, which she defines through an examination of virtual reality and related technologies. Interactivity, she explains, "requires a dynamic simulation" of the external world, and certainly virtual reality provides a high level of that type of interaction (“Immersion” par. 25). Dynamic exchange, however, is not limited to VR's altered ontology.

Ryan does allow for a relation between reading and interactivity, but does so only through a discussion of postmodern texts and metafiction:

The most efficient strategy for promoting an awareness of the mechanisms of fictionality is [. . .] to engage the reader in a game of in and out: now the text captures the reader in the narrative suspense; now it bares the artificiality of plots; now the text builds up the illusion of an extratextual referent; now it claims "this
world is mere fiction." Shuttled back and forth between ontological levels, the reader comes to appreciate the layered structure of fictional communication. (“Immersion” par. 28)

This "in and out" of interactivity is precisely the way in which the extratextual body and the body within the text relate: each reflects the textuality of the other; each creates, through the mediating body image, itself in the other's likeness. The narrative need not be fragmented; it need not be self-referential in order for interactive reading to take place. The represented body within the text is itself a referent for the body of the reader. Through the activity of the imagination in its perceptions and mimetics, the body within the text is "ingested" by the body of the reader looking in. When Schilder's idea of the unconscious optic image of the body (22) is revisited, we can understand that these responses need not, in fact are not likely to, be visible or understood on the conscious level: they occur simply because the mind and the body work together in the act of reading as they do in all other activities, because "in some way there may be a continuous interplay between the body-images of ourselves and the persons around us" (Schilder 235). The merging, through the body/image, of the text and the reader may just be the "complete agreement" that Wayne Booth believes can exist between an author and a reader, agreement that enables the "most successful reading" of a text (138).

Ryan imagines an eventual dissolution of the tension between immersion and interactivity by way of turning "language into a dramatic performance, into the expression of a bodily mode of being in the world" (“Immersion” par. 39). This very tension, though, is what defines her idea of interactive reading; tension is necessary for the dynamic interplay of reader and text, of bodies, that will enable a text to be imagined differently than it can be if the realms of the mind and body are left intact and separate. A false distinction, it is a split that nevertheless has saturated the way we think about language, about bodies, about being at all,
whether in the world or in the text. The amount of new life, of unexplored levels of narrative
that can be explored, once the mind is theoretically harnessed to the body, will be an amazing
quantity. Perhaps especially for women writers, who have so obviously worked with this tension
as their attempts to move between mind and body—and to negotiate any resulting auto-
objectivity—have led them in new and interesting directions, this way to imagine reading
through and of the body will prove a fruitful tool. The realism of the everyday, of the domestic,
of the small objects and resistant qualities that make up a life, provide the means for readerly
immersion into familiar perspective, long-trod ground. The vehicle of the body, however, is
what will carry readers across that ground as they travel unique journeys through the text and
among the bodies that populate it.

Though one can assume with relative certainty that characters in fictional texts have
bodies, those bodies are not always significantly present within the text. For a variety of
reasons—social codes, narrative technique, limited observation—the physical body does not
appear readily in many texts, even in those texts of the later twentieth century, when the
boundaries of acceptability grew wider and more flexible than they had been in the past. When
the physical body is represented, though, it is not always a site of characterization, but simply of
description and verisimilitude. A more textured and evocative method of foregrounding the
body within a text calls for the crafting of a character from the actions of his or her body, often
from its most manual, rote activities. Not only can such a focus upon the common actions of the
everyday provide a means for reader identification and response, but it can also allow the idea of
the body to push through layers of language and landscape and to engage the reader's own body
scheme during the process of reading and explicating the body's textual terrain. The use of food
imagery, when connected to representations of consumption, is one way such a foregrounding of
the body can occur. Because images of eating and consumption can signify the human body,
fictional characters whose representations revolve around food, such as those discussed in previous chapters, can easily invoke the idea of the body, thus allowing for a more intimate and sustained interchange between the reader and the body within the text.

When eating and food are central to the make-up of a fictional character, issues of embodiment, power, and subjectivity should be considered essential to character creation. As a biological necessity, eating is not among the list of activities that can be ascribed to the praxis of a Foucauldian "useful" body. Certain eating habits do complement certain cultural prescriptions, but eating as a basic practice transcends (or, rather, rescinds) the trappings of culture. Though Certeau sees cooking, rather than eating, as an everyday and therefore resistant activity, eating is even less a product of cultural mandate than is food preparation. Eating is action; it is central to the creation and sustenance of life. Eating is one of the few processes that all bodies have in common and, as a process that defines the body as active, and therefore as a site of other potential activities, eating signifies the body's potential for conscious agency beyond a social network. As indicated earlier, the body's motility, which extend to include the idea of agency in its active sense (and not to agency that only designates a nexus of cultural responses), is dependent upon its own image, and is not simply a result of or a response to external influences of society or culture. There is an internal, psychic will to movement, toward agency, and eating-as-action contains within it the body's resistance and propensity for unique, subjective experience.

Represented eating, too, is pure (if merely represented) activity, and provides a basis for the emergence of the body from within a text. When characterization occurs through represented acts of eating, and thus through representations of the physical body, it can, as I have shown, indicate anxiety linked to various aspects of consumption, such as class and sexuality. Through cultural associations of eating with such anxieties, though, characterization based upon consumption can also provide a simplistic way of reading based upon cultural assumptions and attitudes about the consuming body, especially when that body is female. In Dunmore's and Carter's novels, this "narrative of the flesh" is easily understood by readers who are well-versed
in general cultural attitudes toward eating, who accept, even if only unconsciously, the idea that taking extreme pleasure in eating is abhorrent, sinful, suspect. Other, more problematic narratives, when they are less familiar to readers and especially when they are removed from the reader's body (the vehicle of response) and bodily experiences, are subjugated to the story of the body and of its actions: "given any two phenomena, the one that is more visible will receive more attention" (Scarry, *Body* 12). More complex narratives, especially when they are the narratives of discomfort that appear in these two novels, are clouded by the idea of the body, by the sharable nature of the body that, present within the text, communicates with the reader's body without.

In Helen Dunmore's *Talking to the Dead*, two sisters, Nina and Isabel, are characterized through their relationships with food perhaps more than any other pair of female characters I discuss in this project. The two are opposite in other ways: Nina is urban London, while Isabel lives in rural Sussex; Isabel is maternal, and the younger Nina creates instead through artistry. Their most prominent opposition, though, is through food. Nina's character is founded upon her relationships to food, both cooking and eating. Isabel's character is not simply absent any represented activity of eating, as is Woolf's rendering of Isa; this characterization is based upon a lack of food and a lack of the multiplicity of desires made explicit in Nina. "There was a time," Nina recalls, "when Isabel used to be able to eat in front of me, as if I were part of herself" (80). The time when Nina and Isabel were thus united, though, has passed and, in the present time of the novel, the two are far removed from each other. The embodied Nina has been cleaved from Isabel through their divergent relationships to the process and the sharing of eating. This dualistic characterization sets mind and body at odds on the surface of the narrative action, and Nina and Isabel quickly become known by their relationships to food and, thus, to their own bodies.

The novel's prologue indicates quickly that the narrative to follow is Nina's: Isabel is dead, and the tale to come will be explanatory, will lead readers to an understanding of the inevitable event. Nina's narration begins on a note that makes the idea of food, of eating, central,
and her emphasis on the importance of food creates a schism early on between her own value system and that of her deceased sister. "After a funeral you have to eat, to prove you're still alive," Nina muses. "There are foods that are suitable [. . .] ham, or cold chicken. Quiche is very popular, and Australian wines. [. . .] Someone was asking me if I would like fresh pineapple to garnish the ham, or tinned" (3-4). Food here is equated with life, with a life force, and is both something for the living and something that resonates with life; it reminds us we are alive. The choice of foods and of preparations is one of pure agency, and agency necessarily stems from the act of living. Isabel, though later revealed to be a disorderly eater who may not make such choices at all, at the inception of the text's prologue certainly cannot make any choice regarding food, because she is no longer alive to eat it. Nina not only belongs to the realm of the living, but to its auxiliary spheres of choice and of agency, and through her immediate association with food and with life, she takes on a role of solidity, of the flesh. In addition, food here is not just for the practical task of feeding mourners at a wake, but is also a matter of style. Nina is not simply a living and eating entity, but is also a discerning consumer whose tastes elevate her beyond her intrinsic position as Isabel's survivor. At the center of a complex network of meaning suggested through food, Nina emerges early as synonymous with activity and agency, and with the potentially positive qualities associated with the active role of protagonist.

As the novel proper opens and shifts into the past in order to lead readers to Isabel's death, Nina is more specifically viewed in an act of eating in such a way as to further align her with matters of consumption and of the body. Nina recalls the event that has brought her from London to Sussex, Isabel's home and the setting for the novel. Isabel has just given birth, but because of complications has also had to undergo a hysterectomy. Her illness establishes a need for Nina to visit in order to help Richard, Isabel's husband, with the day-to-day running of their home. When Nina hears from Richard about Isabel's emergency surgery and weakened condition, she becomes frightened and concerned: "[m]y hands shook [. . .] I had a pain in my throat" (12). Her next action, really the first action of Nina's beyond the dialogue with Richard, is to eat. "[. . .] I went straight into the kitchen, cut a thick crust of a fresh white loaf, smeared it
with butter and then with apricot jam, and ate it fast, cramming it into my mouth. There was sweat on my forehead, so I wiped it off and kept on eating. I was not going to think of the things Richard had just said [. . .]" (12-13). In order to block out the psychic aspects of her body, Nina resorts to an act of eating that is charged with both desperation and energy. The verbs used here to express her actions—"smear," "cramming"—indicate a forceful action, as well as an action that can help to mediate between thought and flesh. As a receptor of images related to Isabel's ruptured uterus and "brown summer belly, her deep navel" (12), Nina can partially imagine through her own body image the acute reality of Isabel's experience. She must remind herself of the differences between their bodies: "I touched my skin and ran my hand across it to feel that it was unscarred" (12). This initial scene brings in an idea of the ways bodies can understand each other, a concept that will become critical as the novel progresses and its narratives divide. Nina's passion for food in this scene is evident. Her act of eating bread and jam, an act that could be treated as negligible, is fraught with information about Nina that will soon be necessary in order to understand her further acts of passion and of self-indulgence. The act of eating helps to define Nina as impulsive and rash, but also as a creature of comfort. Eating in this scene carries with it the notion of food's healing properties and, again through Nina, the understanding of food's life-giving and -sustaining powers are reinforced.

Nina's relationship with food does not come simply through the act of eating, however. Her character is founded on multiple associations with food and, in addition to her enjoyment of the consumption of food, Nina also enjoys food preparation, and a love of good cookery is another central part of her characterization. Her presence in Isabel's home ensures a certain bounty, and Dunmore's poetic voice in this novel works in no other passages as well as in those that express Nina's culinary visions. For Nina, food is not only something to take pleasure in, but also—perhaps even more so—a medium through which she can offer pleasure to others. Just as her freelance photography and its "splinters of light, splinters of sound" (90) allow Nina a way to express outwardly what she experiences inside, careful construction and composition of a meal, with each course complementary of the others and each guest taken into consideration,
gives rise to Nina's creative prowess. (The interpretive skills that go into Nina’s meal exemplify Certeau’s principle of “making do,” considered previously in Chapter Three.) Her narrations of food and of her plans for each ingredient are meditative, and the final products are combinations of parts, whole expressions of the palate available to her: "Today I'm going to cook. [. . .] I'm going to bake the salmon, very slowly, with dill and juniper berries. I'll serve it just warm, with hollandaise sauce, with new potatoes, French beans, a big ripe cucumber that tastes of fruit, not water, and plum tomatoes [. . .] then an apple tart, and a gooseberry fool" (66). Like Pym’s Prudence Bates, who exhibits exotic influences of Mediterranean food culture, Nina is a product of a new age of foodism, and her culinary creations are carefully considered masterpieces that go beyond the typical English meal. As she imagines each component of the meal, their shapes take on new meanings. Her voice orchestrates her vision of the meal just as her camera would capture the Irish gypsies or Romanian orphans she exposes onto film. The verbal creation is a synaesthetic, and the warm flesh of the salmon against the crisp, full feel of the cucumber is hard to discern from the gin-spice of juniper. Nina's description of the apple tart she will bake explains her theories: "When you close your eyes and bite you must taste caramel, sharp apple, juice, and the short, sandy texture of sweet pastry all at once. No one taste should be stronger than another" (68). This precision imagery is one way the narration calls for a visceral response from the reader. Who but the recently fed or those allergic to salmon would not read this description and begin imagining the feel of food's textures, the flavors making their ways across the tongue? Without asking, Nina draws those who listen to her recipes to respond to them, to invest not only in the creation of the meal, but also in its outcome.

This call to the palate is instructive as well as inviting. As I will address throughout this chapter, Nina, as narrator, offers continual clues as to how a passage or a representation should be read and decoded, and through her culinary discourse she also hooks readers into accepting her narration as a reliable source of information. Simple exegesis of the meal at hand would not have the same impact as this deliberate, sensual description of Nina's feast. There is a precise, authoritative quality to the way she expresses her plans for the fish and its accompaniments; this
is no novice expressing doubt in her own ability, but a sure hand, a ready professional. Though Richard calls Nina a "food snob" (158), her attitude toward food and the generosity with which she presents her products express a different motive. In Nina, there is a deep appreciation of the craft of the kitchen, and her day job as a photographer, her connection to high art, lends extra credibility to her domestic expertise. There is room for experimentation, but none for error; Nina assures readers of that:

The tart will take the longest. I've bought white Normandy butter, pastry flour, three pounds of sharp, sweet, Jonagold apples. They are not the right apples, but I won't get better in the tail end of the season [. . .]. They must be cut evenly, in fine crescents of equal thickness, which will lap around in ring after ring, hooping inward, glazed with apricot jam. The tart must cook until the tips of the apple rings are almost black but the fruit itself is still plump and moist. (68)

The interest she takes in providing just the right ingredients and in creating a desired effect both visually and gustatorially surpass snobbery, and indicate a certain care for quality and for the experience others will take in her cooking. For this meal, her attention to the simple, seasonal fare advocated by chefs of the "nouvelle" tradition only adds to her "lady bountiful" pose, and undermines any distrust one might have for the food dilettante who only dabbles in what's fashionable. Right down to the brown sugar Nina will sprinkle on vine-ripe tomatoes, her knowledge is exact, secure. Early in the novel, at the time of this first feast, any doubt of Nina's integrity resulting from her passion for eating is tempered by her prolific culinary nature. Her care with the hollandaise, which "swallows" twelve lumps of butter, "fattening on what I've given it" (69), and with buttering her hands before lifting the salmon so as not to mar the perfection of its scales, reinforce the nurturing, durable nature of food and of Nina, and emphasize her ability to provide as well as to consume.

In stark contrast to Nina, Isabel’s character is removed from food on all levels. Without Nina, her kitchen is sorely lacking: cupboards contain "[i]nstant coffee, two packets of Weetabix, cheap jelly marmalade" and a freezer is "full of white bread and beef sausages" (156), a woeful catalogue of what to some might be considered typical English fare. Husband Richard,
a financial consultant, is away on business often, and Isabel adamantly avoids food. She "can't eat round a table with other people" (79), and is somehow able not to participate in Nina's grand meal, instead watching, a passive onlooker distanced from the activity of eating. Her substitution for eating, as it is for many others, is smoking: "the cigarette makes a barrier between her and the plate" (181). But Isabel is not simply an overly motivated dieter or a picky eater. Her ability to eat in front of others, perhaps to eat at all except for a meager sustenance, has been limited for twenty-five years, since the sudden death of Colin, the brother of Nina and Isabel who ostensibly succumbed to cot-death (SIDS) while an infant. Nina wonders whether, in fact, Isabel has ever eaten for enjoyment, the way she does: "Was there a time once [. . .] that we could stand in front of the baker's shop together and point at cream slices and Eccles cakes and eclairs? [. . .] when we'd both watch jealously as the tinned pineapple was divided [. . .]? (184). Even though she is a new mother and nursing baby Antony, Isabel refrains from too much food, and indicates to a concerned Nina that she exists on "oatcakes and dried apricots" and justifies this diet by adding that "they're full of iron" (79). Isabel is weakened by the birth and by the recent surgery, but her invalid status seems to have much deeper roots. She appears to be emotionally tough, but her frailty and her fondness for close quarters, construed by Richard as even potentially agoraphobic, all add together to discount any vitality of Isabel's near to that of her sister. The one thing she seems most emphatic about is her lack of desire for food, which she equates with her distaste for sex: "You soon get used to not having it. I remember thinking the same about food. All those people thinking they had to have food all the time or they'd die [. . .] and yet it wasn't really necessary at all" (185). This knowledge is a sort of secret for Isabel, who flits at the edge of its annihilating boundaries. Regardless of her attempts to assuage Nina's worries with her drawer filled with healthy snacks, later and closer examination show the apricots at Isabel's bedside, which "should have been plump and moist," to be dried out: "the packet's been open too long" (289). Isabel seems to exist on nothing.

Though through characterizations dependent upon their relationships to food Nina and Isabel are obvious concoctions of the body and of the mind, they are never completely or easily
relegated to their respective realms. The typical division of women via the body and its sexuality—that old madonna/whore division—of course becomes important here, but again, the separation does not happen in a neat fashion. Dunmore has complicated the division between flesh and psyche in several ways, and at base plays with the opposition of the two most obvious methods of representing female embodiment: the sexual and the maternal. Food, however, problematizes this division for Dunmore's purposes, but in a wider sense also helps to illuminate the basic problematic of the division itself. The idea of the nurturing mother joins together mother and food, feeding (a most basic nurturing), as almost synonymous aspects of caretaking, with "the giving away of food [. . .] announcing connection, goodwill, love" (Sceats 11). In *Talking to the Dead*, the two are woven together in ways that both work with and tear through traditional schemes that suggest motherhood is a natural mode for women and part of the same domestic arrangement as are food and food preparation. The already introduced stress in the novel on the connection between nurturing and food skews the traditional division because the main representation of nurturing is Nina, not Isabel. Isabel, though disembodied—nearly literally—through her lack of connection to food and eating, nonetheless does produce food in the form of the milk she produces for her child, Antony. In the scenes where her role as food provider in this sense is illustrated, though, Isabel's breasts seem removed from her body because her nurturing is forced, her body otherwise inactive. When Nina first arrives, Isabel is weak, thinner, but "her breasts are round and hard as stones beneath the thin lawn of her nightdress" (29). Under her clothes, Isabel's breasts are as like the rest of her body as stones are, and just as remote. The next day, Nina notices that Isabel's "wrists are oblong, showing their bones. Only her breasts are heavy" (36). As Isabel evaporates, her motility dries up, her body and body image become reduced. Her potential for agency, therefore, becomes limited almost to the point of extinction. As a provider of breast milk, Isabel is like a machine; she has no desire to feed Antony, and in no other way does she pursue an active, culturally acceptable mode of motherhood. The only "active" elements of Isabel's body, her breasts, which might in another
case signify maternity and maternal nurturing, here only emphasize her lack of connection to the body in spite of her inability to become completely disconnected from it.

As might be expected, the passionate, sensual, and consuming Nina, by contrast, is not only sexual, but transgressively so. "As they say in the north of England, anybody can fook, but not many people can cook" (Barr and Levy 20); Nina, apparently, not only can do both but thoroughly enjoys one as much as she does the other. In relation to her sexual transgression, Nina also exhibits abhorrently gendered behavior. Her masculinized persona, while at odds with her roles of nurturer and cook, is created through her affiliations with food, but with her consumption rather than with her cooking. This adds yet another complication to the ways one might read images of nurturing, mothering, and sexuality in Dunmore's text. Not only does Nina control its pace and disclosure of the narrative, but she also directs the domestic and social patterns of her sister's home from its helm, the kitchen, and thus the level of social discourse within the text. As a photographer, too, Nina is placed in the subject position: both her voice and her focalization control the novel's structural development, most importantly its division into two narratives. While such a position of power and control might seem desirable, it eventually calls Nina's behavior into question, which is often found to be far from the normative mark, particularly with regard her femininity. "It took me years," Nina thinks, "to realize that it might be easier to do things like shave my legs or make an appointment at a good hairdresser's than not to do them. [. . .] I'd like to believe those things were a part of me [. . .]. Maybe that's why I take pictures. No one looks at the person behind the camera" (21). Nina herself directly relates her bogus femininity with her desire to be behind the scenes, subject rather than object. Her subjectivity, like her sexuality and her consuming practices, emerges as masculine, and complicates her more appropriately gendered duties in the kitchen.

Though her cooking is active and feminine simultaneously, her eating is what ultimately pushes Nina into this realm of gender transgression. Eating not only signifies sexuality in her case, but also further works to masculinize Nina and her behavior. Just after arriving in Sussex, Nina eats alongside Richard, Isabel's husband. She cuts a slice of pie for Richard, initially a
"feminine" task of feeding the man of the house. Responding to her own hunger, though, she proceeds to slice another piece for herself, and then douses them both with heavy cream, "thick and yellow" (38). "I've always liked eating with Richard," Nina notes, "because he is greedy, as I am. [. . .] He leaves the plumpest gooseberry until last [. . .]" (39). This equality-through-consumption destabilizes the gender codes of the novel. Nina becomes a troublesome figure who demands sympathy, and yet who also defiantly mocks the ground upon which sympathy for a protagonist is generally founded. Her consumption, forceful in the bread-and-jam scene, is reinforced here as "greedy," and greed is not a desirable trait, particularly in women. Gluttony and lust are equally mortal sins, and Nina, much like Woolf’s Mrs. Manresa, embodies both. Her greed, and not Richard's, seems to parallel the greed of Edward, another visitor in the house, who is a close friend of Isabel and is homosexual. Though nothing in the text indicts his sexual orientation, he is set up as a foil for Nina's transgression. Both Edward ad Nina thwart the propriety of the heterosexual and domestic scheme of Isabel and Richard's home. Edward, too, is greedy. He is also furtive about his consumption, both a silent admission of guilt and an acknowledgment of the nature of greed as sinful within the boundaries of social norms. When Nina cuts the pie for herself and Richard, she notices that "Edward has been at it since lunch, digging out the fruit, which he prefers to the crust" (38). Not only does Edward eat between his meals, but he eats in such a way that destroys food for others. By leaving the crust and not its contents, Edward displays a lack of respect for the next person who might want some pie, not to mention a lack of manners as regards the going social customs. At other points in the novel, he also has left only one slice of almond cake in its tin (110) and devours gooseberry fool—uneaten during the salmon dinner discussed above—straight from its bowl (81). Edward's greedy eating constructs him as both unlikeable and untrustworthy, and thus complicates the notion of greed, of consumption and its relationship to Nina's character traits. While Nina's greed places her on par with Richard and seems to free her from gender constraints, Edward's greed calls for a re-evaluation of Nina's consumption practices. As a potentially questionable member of the house
party, Edward reflects back upon Nina what she hopes, through her disparaging comments, will stick only to Edward.

A character such as Edward, who casts doubt upon Nina's role and in turn upon her narrative authority, is important if Nina's sexual narrative is to receive the attention it must in order to mask the hidden narrative of Colin's death and of who may have been responsible for it. Though Nina initially emerges as a sympathetic and reliable narrator-protagonist, her relationship to food and to her body—to sex—calls this first impression into question. If Nina were simply sexualized, then her role would not be so muddled; it would be easier to discount her place in the text. Her complicated characterization, though, is integral to the novel's divided narration and is a key to an unraveling of the text as a whole. In order for Nina to become suspect, readers must identify her body as transgressive, must share in the identification of certain actions and decisions as beyond the range of acceptability. Nina's body, as well as its actions and motility, are the focal point of this readerly response, and her eating habits, from early on in the novel, are what signify her physicality. By the time Nina herself equates her appetite for food with her sexual desire, it is almost already a given because of the long social and cultural associations of female consumption with unfeminine sexuality. "I like food, and I like fucking," (94), she tells Richard, and this comes as no surprise for several reasons. The most obvious, maybe, stems from Nina's deep sensuality, her bodily reactions to things as unsexy as Isabel's kitchen, which "calls out in me that small almost sexual shiver I can't fake" (17). A less acute, but more important, reason for Nina's sexuality to emerge as an issue from early in the text results from her characterization as an eater, as someone who embraces the idea of greed and who has no qualms about her own body and its actions and responses.

Cultural and social codes regarding food neatly identify Nina as likely to transgress in additional ways beyond those of the palate (as seen in Mrs. Manresa, Prudence Bates, and Baba Brennan, as well as in Carter’s Melanie in The Magic Toyshop). Readers who share in (whether consciously or unconsciously) these ubiquitous culturally constructed attitudes toward female consumption will likely make such a leap of definition through their own bodies and attitudes.
toward embodiment while negotiating Nina's corporeal infractions through their reading. Like Richard, who carries "some pattern in his head" (108) of Nina's body, readers of the text will necessarily form an image of Nina within their own psyches, one based upon their own body/images. Partially made up of psychic elements, that image will be infused with the codes that help to fashion our social behaviors and responses. Because there are relatively strict cultural norms for women's eating practices, and such expectations will become part of the individual body image. Direct, unabashed eating like Nina's, then, eating directly at odds with acceptable eating standards for women, will skew the level of comfort available to the reader from within the projected image of a body such as Nina's. The push-and-pull of these elements of her characterization make Nina at once sympathetic and offensive to readers on both the cognitive and visceral levels that together make up an epistemological model of the body/image.

By the time Nina begins an affair with her brother-in-law, Richard, the act is hardly shocking because Nina has long been coded as transgressive, Dunmore’s use of food-related activities and imagery. This understanding does not negate her more positive qualities, however. Rather, Nina is created from the tension that flows between the psychic realm and the physical, and unraveling her story is nearly as difficult as is a true division of the mind from the body.

Isabel, as indicated earlier, relates to her own sexuality in the same manner as she does to the act of eating: she doesn't. She explains this to Nina, noting that pregnancy and hormones have had little to do with the absence of any physical desire on her part for Richard. "No, it never was much good," she recalls, "[. . .] now I can't bear it. I can't have him near me" (183). Like food, sex is something in which Isabel finds no desire and little necessity. "She'd got it worked out so it only took one go," Richard confirms in a discussion of Antony's conception (179). Aside from that unique procreative moment, sex for Isabel has no meaning, does not signify. Her own body, too, once stripped of any desires for food or for sex, appears as beside the point, an afterthought. Without any identifiable measure of embodiment, Isabel retreats into an ephemeral state. Like Woolf's Isa, she is "mother" and "wife," but simultaneously lacks most of the mechanisms necessary to adequately perform such roles. She is void the "vivacity"
suggested by Scarry as necessary for mimesis, and as such it becomes difficult to mold Isabel into a viable image of embodiment. The reader has little, if any, access to "knowing" Isabel because the route to comprehension of her character has been removed. By negating her own embodiment, she denies others—but primarily denies Nina—access to her histories, her motivations. While one might assume that her lack of connection to food and to her sexuality makes Isabel a "positive" character, just as Nina is sullied by her own eating and sexual activities, this is far from the case. Isabel herself is more complicated than such an assumption would allow, and serves as more than an opposite by which Nina can be defined. Isabel's lack of corporeal accessibility to readers is perverse in its own way. Through a denial of the body within the text, the reader is asked to deny his or her own physical existence, and, because of the actual embodiment of the reader and the embodied nature of the act of reading, this cannot quite ever be done. It is one thing to suspend belief while reading in order to envision new worlds or to accept bizarre coincidence; it is a far different thing to suspend disbelief beyond the edges of one's own body. Apart from the body/image, there is no way to know the world or to fully accept the existence of another individual. So, while Isabel's gustatory prudence and chaste ways coincide with cultural expectations for the feminine woman, her own nullification of her own body offers little but discomfort for readers. In different but equally compelling ways, Isabel and Nina simultaneously subvert and adhere to feminine norms, thus making it difficult for readers to accept either woman's version of events past. Both evoke some level of accord from readers, but neither is to be completely trusted.

Like Dunmore, Angela Carter, in _The Magic Toyshop_, uses the trope of consumption—or, in Carter's case, the lack of consumption—as a way to obfuscate the narrative counter to the one riding the novel's surface. Carter's oppositional characterizations, though, are more complicated than Dunmore's, because in her novel, opposition constructed via food and eating is itself hidden through the figure of a third, mediating female. The appearance of two mind/body oppositions in Carter's novel—one providing a narrative effect that veils another, more damaging dualism—allows for the novel's two narrative strands to remain separate until the
secret of incest is uncovered. Melanie, the ostensible protagonist of the novel, is showcased in a manner that confuses the incest narrative that ultimately trumps the novel’s tale of consumption. Though she initially figures as the character cast against her thin and spectral Aunt Margaret (134), Melanie proves to be little more than a ruse who is cast from idioms of the flesh in order to complicate the two strands of narrative progression. She is a proverbial wrench thrown into the workings of Carter's novel. Five-year old Victoria, Melanie's sister, is actually the character who figures as the novel’s voracious consumer, but Melanie must stand between Victoria and "Our Lady of Famine," Aunt Margaret (113). If Margaret is to keep secret her sexual relationship with her brother, Francie Jowles, then her body and its potential for (sexual) agency must be minimized, and Victoria presents an unlikely opposition to an adult, married character. Instead of emphasizing Margaret's ephemerality (as embodied females have been shown to do), however, Victoria suggests the underside of Margaret's history, her errant sexuality and self-satisfaction at the expense of cultural propriety. Unlike O’Brien’s Kate, whose embodiment is constructed in order to mask her native psychical identity, Margaret, in Carter’s tale, is a woman of the flesh who cannot risk identification of her embodiment. In each of the novels I have examined thus far, the pairs of female characters who are created from images of consumption and its lack are relative peers, and can provide adequate contrast for each other. At five years of age, though, Victoria is hardly visible as a narrative component of Margaret's physicality. She instead provides a provocative balance for Carter’s characterization of Margaret, and is as much a necessary part of Margaret as she is an individual character. Without Melanie to provide a division between this constructed mind/body pairing, Victoria's presence would jeopardize Margaret's secret through suggesting Margaret's decadent self. To this end, then, Melanie is foregrounded in a Gothic-style narrative of her own, and she diverts readers' attention away from the incest narrative that Margaret must conceal.

Melanie initially appears as an embodied character, and functions as the narrative’s primary, obvious opposition to Margaret. The novel’s opening line presents Melanie as "of the body": "The summer she was fifteen, Melanie discovered she was made of flesh and blood" (1).
Her adolescent quest to discover this new-found body leads her to what is nearly an obsession with that body and its appearance, with the ways in which it can be manipulated and dressed (enactments of auto-objectification) in order to maximize the effects of a burgeoning sexuality. Her embodiment becomes particularly important to the narrative once Melanie and her siblings are orphaned and subsequently sent to live in south London squalor with Margaret and her husband, Philip, maker of toys and sadistic patriarch. Melanie's body must be conjured up in order to suggest her role as a Gothic heroine prior to her entering the bizarre world of her uncle's home. Her role as such a heroine necessitates a fear of sexual peril, and in order for this peril to become a real possibility to the reader, Melanie's body, young and lissome and vulnerable, must show itself. At times, Carter does undermine this presentation of Melanie as body, but Melanie's position in a narrative that feels familiar because of its Gothic cast pulls readers through such moments too quickly for them to make much difference. Melanie is noted as "skinny" (15), and described in relation to the human skeleton: "She felt [. . .] as if she had taken even her own skin off and now stood clothed in nothing, nude in the ultimate nudity of the skeleton. [. . .] her very hands might have been discarded like gloves, leaving only the bones" (21). Regardless of Carter's attempts to foil Melanie's embodied status and to provide readers with signals that point to Melanie's doubled, liminal role in the text, the initial emergence of an embodied and sexualized young woman is the representation that lingers.

Of course, body size should not necessarily be considered a primary marker of physicality (as I have discussed in other chapters), but the imagined evaporation of Melanie's body here signifies its tangential status in the narrative. Without her parents, and placed in a role dictated by Margaret’s secret narrative, Melanie becomes "an amputee" (31); part of her becomes like the phantom limb examined by Schilder and considered by him to be a critical example of the workings of the body image, a “reactivation of a given perceptive pattern by emotional forces” (67). She has lost "a tender, budding part" of herself (31). If what is lost (or "amputated") is replaced by phantom physical extensions, then Melanie, from this early point in the novel, is herself mostly phantom, and will experience her own corporeality as psychic
afterthought rather than as a vehicle for agency. As with Margaret, whose embodiment is masked by a constructed psychical characterization, with Melanie, Carter performs a parallel (if reversed) bait-and-switch of the mental and the physical components of her narrative make-up. Constructed as an embodied woman, Melanie finally exists only as a construct that will disallow identification of Margaret with the body and its potential for agency.

Though Melanie is not the novel's primary consuming female, she is the second, and most visible, polarized "body" to Margaret's represented ephemeral status. Uncle Philip grumbles of Melanie, "God knows she eats enough," (133), and, along with Melanie's initially embodied characterization, his opinion strengthens Melanie’s opposition to Margaret. Different from Kate Brady of O’Brien’s trilogy, whose consumption narrative begins with the death of her mother, after the death of Melanie’s parents, she "could not eat for the weight of guilt and shame which seemed to have settled on her stomach" (23), much like the aversion of Dunmore's Isabel to eating after the death of brother Colin. Melanie's fear—that she herself is somehow to blame for the death of her parents in an airplane disaster—accompanies her shift away from a central position in a narrative that appears as if it might become a bildungsroman, and toward a more peripheral, contingent position vis-à-vis the story of Margaret and her secret existence. Caught between the surface, Gothic narrative of her own romance plot and the submerged narrative of Margaret's incestual love for Francie, Melanie occupies a difficult position that is difficult to assess. She is a complementary body to Margaret's disembodied state, but appears less solid than the young Victoria, who is all impulse, all id. Melanie ponders that "a cool nothing [. . . ] was her own climate. No extremes [. . . ] She was in limbo and would be for the rest of her life" (76). She occupies middle ground rather than any definitive oppositional extreme. As both a mediator between Margaret and Victoria, as well as between the novel’s two narrative strands, Melanie is placed in the position of "ego," navigating the way between Victoria's raw desire for creature comforts and Margaret's mute performance of duty, and between a fanciful Gothic romance and a love affair that breaks social and cultural taboo. Viewed in this way, the shifts in Melanie's characterization can be understood as mechanisms of narrative mediation rather than
as problematic representational effects. The important represented qualities of consumption and of the body are components of Carter’s characterizations of Margaret and Victoria, and the narrative functions of eating provide some of the few clues to their interdependence and to the submerged incest narrative.

In the midst of the chaos of The Magic Toyshop, Victoria can almost escape the casual reader. Her extreme youth relegates her to that less-important, seemingly simplistic world of childhood, and her appearance is often more comic relief than serious suggestion of either the depravity of the Flower household or of anyone who lives within. Victoria is a consumer par excellence: she does not stop to consider her actions and, at five years old, cares nothing about any of the consequences of unbridled eating that an older female might consider. As opposed to her sister, who "was afraid that if she ate too much [. . .] she would grow fat and nobody would ever love her and she would die a virgin" (3), Victoria "had no sense of guilt. She had no sense at all. She was a round, golden pigeon who cooed" (5). When Melanie cannot face food after the death of their parents, Victoria "demands," "Can I have Melanie's nice bacon?" (23), and focuses only on her own immediate gratification. While Melanie is introduced as a body ripe for objectification à la Toulouse Lautrec or D. H. Lawrence (1-2), Victoria first appears "beating her spoon upon the table," awaiting bread pudding (3). A "fine, plump little girl" (48), Victoria is a solid, material contrast to the Melanie who is embodied only to the extent that her body allows for her sexual fantasies and the sexual danger she must be ushered into as her Gothic narrative progresses. Victoria, on the other hand, does little but consume food, which anchors her more firmly in the realm of the body. Considerations of the two sisters together can belie the fragility of Melanie’s embodied construct, but due to Victoria’s marginal role in either of the novel’s narratives, such considerations are not those that are most readily presented to readers. Victoria’s childhood innocence allows for her associations with Margaret’s embodiment to escape notice.

The language used to position Victoria in the realm of the body is curious; her entire characterization depends upon the rhetoric of food. She is shown to be eating nearly every time
she appears in the text, and sometimes eats inappropriate foodstuffs, such as "the fringes off the hassocks" in church (9). Consumption is not simply sustenance for Victoria, and goes beyond indulgence, as well. Her eating borders on the compulsive, and carries with it an implied pathology that reflects Margaret's hidden activities. Her eating is reckless and, like Nina in *Talking to the Dead*, Victoria comes to food through forceful, willful verbs that indicate an uninhibited desire for food. At various points in the text, Victoria "demand[s]" and "clamour[s]" for food (5, 27), and shouts "'I want my pudding NOW!'" when crisis detains her dessert (27).

Carter's descriptions of Victoria also borrow from the vocabulary of consumption, and Victoria has "lollipop paws" (6), a "melon-wedge grin" (42), and speaks "with fat satisfaction" (183), emphasizing not only her relationship to food, but also an unselfconscious ease with regard to eating. Though as a child, Victoria might arguably be exempt from the cultural anxieties toward eating and toward "fat," when compared to the eating distress of Dunmore's Isabel (or even to the self-conscious eating Nina performs while a child) at age seven, Victoria's attitude is strikingly different in its single-mindedness. Her consumption is reminiscent of Mrs. Manresa's rolling in the grass without her stays: there is freedom to consume in these characters that is hard to come by in the other females thus far examined.

Victoria's connection to food occurs very much at the sensory, rather than at the intellectual, level, and with Victoria, Carter's method of representation is an effective one for engaging readers via the body. Because she is a child, Victoria escapes sexualization through her relationship to food and eating (Mrs. Manresa, Nina, O'Brien's country girls, and Pym's Prudence are all depicted as sexual with regard to consumption), but her eating does not escape a direct connection to the idea of passion, of complete abandonment to the act itself. Carter underscores this immersion in food by literally immersing Victoria in food: more often than not, Victoria is wearing her food as well as eating it. In episodes that intensify over the course of the novel, Victoria not only takes food into her body, but also wears it upon the surface of her body. In this way, food becomes a method of inscription in a way that remarks upon the interconnectedness of the material and the discursive: food signifies, culturally, but at the same
time is a physical marker. For Victoria, food is the language of representation, as well as the ink with which that language is written. With "cream and jam smeared on her cheek" (41), Victoria's sloppiness at first appears whimsical; kids always get a little something on them in the course of a meal. Later, though, the food-turned-body-art accelerates, and the hedonistic streak in Victoria's eating becomes apparent:

With a spoon, she scoured the crumbs from a used jar of raspberry jam. [. . .] Her hair was stuck in spikes with jam. An angry rash of jam surrounded her mouth and her dress was smeared and sticky. She was content. She had grown fatter than ever. She was always clutching a fistful of sweets or biting into a between-meals snack of bread and condensed milk or scraping out bowls [. . .]. (88)

Her passion, though contradicted by her contentment, is obvious, and here even a bit unnerving. By age five, children are expected to have become somewhat socialized, and to have accepted a more rigid mode of behavior than that exhibited by Victoria. For Victoria, food as “matter out of place” is simply a matter of course; her consuming practices betray social codes and mores. Her voracity is not the greed we see in Nina or in Edward, because her consumption is the result of gifts freely given and does not rob someone else of sustenance or enjoyment. Victoria, defined through the act of eating and through her almost becoming the food that she consumes, is the embodiment of consumption as a pure act. Unlike Melanie, whose body is contingent upon another's desire (whether real or imaginary) as well as upon narrative function, Victoria is constructed as wholly embodied in a primal sort of way. Her connection to consumption, and to orality in general, bestows Victoria with the missing bodily qualities of the ghost-like Margaret.

Victoria's orality extends beyond acts of consumption to include the practice of speech as a way to emphasize the confounding link between Margaret's lack of consumption with her muteness. The vehicle for Margaret's embodiment, Victoria has the ability to speak freely (if in a way limited by her age and relative vocabulary) in a way that the mute Margaret does not. As noted above, Victoria can be heard demanding her food and other creature comforts; she asks without hesitation for the things she desires. She also can point out Philip's undesirable nature: "'E's 'orrible!" Victoria pronounces soon after the children are sent to live in the Flower
household (75). She is the only female in the household who dares to speak her mind against the head of this motley clan. While Francie and Finn, Margaret's youngest brother, make known their attitudes toward Philip and his tirades, neither Melanie nor Margaret expresses herself on the subject. Margaret, of course, cannot (in most respects) due to her muteness; her lack of speech, especially viewed against Victoria's childish boldness of speech and of consumption, underscores the negation of her orality, of her agency and her ability to desire. Her muteness, too, when compared to the stony silence of her husband, which "had bulk, a height and weight [. . .] could crush you to nothing" (168), emphasizes her disembodiment and her vulnerability, though in a questionable manner. On one hand, Margaret's loss of speech "on her wedding day, like a curse" (37) easily signifies the loss of power and agency that has occurred as a result of her marriage to the oppressive Philip. Margaret’s muteness, however, is more problematic than such a reading calls attention to.

Margaret must remain mute in order to avoid a rashness such as Victoria's, yes. She must also avoid the "unspeakable" subject of incest, must not dare speak of her taboo love for Francie. Most importantly, however, Margaret must be presented in such a way that any reference to her as desiring, as libidinal, is erased. The site of primary consumption—the mouth—must be rendered virtually unnecessary in order to construct a screen that keeps her "real" story hidden from view. Her aphasia, a result of psychological rather than of biological determinants, is at once her "curse," as Francie suggests, and her option. Though Margaret's lack of speech helps to hide her actual agency, it is also most duplicitous in that the very muteness is itself an act of Margaret as a social agent. Her code of silence is broken at the novel's end because her ties to Philip have been severed and because her secret has been discovered: "Catastrophe had freed her tongue" (197). Once she has no need for muteness, she discards it as suddenly as she came by it. Her muteness, too, renders invalid Margaret’s adopted psychical, discursive construct. Those “true” natives of the intellect (Woolf’s Isa, O’Brien’s Kate) are inextricably connected to language and to the ephemerality of discourse. Margaret, an actual natural citizen of the
physical world, has no such tie to the sphere of language, and her muteness is a negative factor of her hidden embodiment.

In addition to her speech disorder, Margaret is denied access to the desire signified by orality through a distancing of her character from the consumption of food. Margaret is not totally distanced from food itself, though; her role as oppressed domestic caregiver is reified through Margaret's perpetual occupation of the kitchen. As the sole source of sustenance for her family, Margaret is a fixture in the family kitchen, which is the domestic and social center of the Flower home. "'She's a gran' cook [. . .] Such pastry!'" Finn proclaims as an introduction of Margaret to the children when they arrive in London (38). Throughout the novel, Margaret resides almost exclusively within the kitchen and at the center of the household routine.

Whether the day of the week calls for everyday plates adorned with a light willow pattern or "finer china, plain white with a green band" (74) and imported from Ireland (like the three Jowles siblings themselves), food or the suggestion of food shapes both the progression of the narrative(s) and Carter's characterization of Margaret. Whether the meal consists of simple fare, such as morning porridge, or the more extravagant meals served on Margaret's Irish china each Sunday, Margaret is the one who undertakes its preparation, who presides over the consumption of others. Her kitchen produces food that is aligned more with the domestic prescriptions of Mrs. Beeton, though, and that is more staunchly English, than any food produced in Nina’s sultry, sensual world. Sunday tea is "shrimps, bread and butter, a bowl of mustard and cress and a rich, light, golden sponge-cake baked that morning in the oven with the Sunday joint" (113). A roast goose appears on Christmas dinner, much to the chagrin of Philip, who forbids the celebration of holidays. Margaret's culinary repertoire is vast and exhibits expertise not commonly associated with tenements or with the poverty otherwise rampant throughout the rest of the home.

Her transgression through the preparation of a Christmas goose, though, is her only subversive attempt to utilize food as a weapon or as a method of power. Carter uses the kitchen and cooking in this novel to signify traditional roles for women (such as those outlined in earlier
chapters), which are in turn linked to the severe oppression Margaret endures as Philip's wife. Margaret's culinary endeavors are hardly more than her duty. Unlike Nina in Dunmore's novel, who takes sensual pleasure in cooking and in the feeding of others (and whose relationship to food via cooking is sexualized), Margaret cooks because of the duties associated with her gender. A reason for this differing use of cooking activities might well be the sexual and culinary revolutions that took place between 1967, when *The Magic Toyshop* was published, and 1996, when *Talking to the Dead* first appeared. Not only have women's social and cultural roles shifted away from those largely associated with domestic duties, but the role of the cook (as well as that of the heretofore male chef, whose place in the public kitchen has been successfully encroached upon in recent years by numerous women chefs) in society has changed dramatically over the last few decades of the twentieth century. At the end of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, culinary skills are sought after, are big business; depending upon the bill of fare, eating can now, more than it has been in recent history, be an activity significant of cultural capital and of pleasurable excess. “Behind all this,” writes Brian Harrison, “lies a revolution in food retailing [. . .] Sainsbury’s tandoori chicken and Marks and Spencer’s avocado pears from Israel and plums from Chile promoted new tastes and defied the tyranny of the seasons” (146).

In the world developed by Carter for Margaret, however, neither sexual nor culinary revolution has taken place. The homely Sunday joint, when compared to Nina's buttery salmon and fresh cucumbers, provides a contrast between tradition and experimentation, between the old ways and those new methods of cooking that have more recently crossed over from the sanctity of the chef's kitchen into the average English domestic sphere. Nina's cooking borrows from the authority of the chef, while Margaret's cuisine, though good, still represents the traditions of home cooking and of feminine duty to her family's basic needs. "She must [. . .] be nice if she cooks so well" Melanie thinks (47), connecting the stereotypical dots of maternal/feminine domesticities and sympathies, and underscoring the quite traditional context in which to view Margaret.
An even more overt representation of Margaret's oppressed (feminine) positions of housekeeper and caregiving wife occurs via the only piece of jewelry she owns and that she wears each Sunday. This necklace is made "of dull silver, two hinged silver pieces knobbed with moonstones which snapped into place around her lean neck and rose up almost to her chin so that she could hardly move her head" (112). In keeping with the special Sunday use of fine china and with the extraordinary tea Margaret prepares each week, Margaret's sabbath appearance is more spectacularly fashioned on that day than on others. The collar of silver (made by Philip as a wedding gift for his mute bride) is *de riguer* for Sunday dinner, as are styled hair and Margaret's one good dress. The neck gear is an obvious symbol of Margaret's status as chattel: it is a collar or yoke, and it impedes her motility, her ability to function as she would normally. We know from Finn that "'they make love on Sunday nights, [Philip] and Margaret'" (114), and so the connection between her oppressed position and her sexual relationship with her husband is far from subtle. Margaret is not a willing partner in any facet of this relationship except for the most basic: she remains in Philip's household, "chooses" not to remove herself in order to pursue a better existence for herself and for her two brothers. This "choice," however, is in keeping with the extremely limited amount of actual choice to which women such as Margaret—indeed, even women much less restrained than is Margaret—have historically had access. In the context of the novel's more obvious of its two narrative trajectories, the amount of agency Margaret has within the confines of her marriage to Philip Flower is nil. The silver collar—"sinisterly exotic and bizarre" (112)—represents the lack of freedom Margaret has within this relationship, and because of its obvious nature is one of the novel's most clumsy signifiers.

This collar, though, allows for a comparison of the two instances of Margaret's food consumption within the novel. Margaret's first meal with the children and Philip together presents her as equally without agency and appetite:

Aunt Margaret, frail as a pressed flower, seemed too cowed by [Philip's] presence even to look at him. She had only the tiniest portion of porridge, a Baby Bear
portion, but she took the longest to eat it, nibbling in tiny crumbs from the edge of the spoon. She had not finished it when Uncle Philip crashed down his own spoon on an empty bowl. (73)

Her relationship to the meal at hand illustrates as well as her silver collar or aphasiac symptoms do the lack of visible drive with which Margaret is endowed. Her portion is that of "Baby Bear," but regardless of any "just right" quality, Margaret is unable to eat more than a fraction of what her husband and the others present at the meal can consume. Presumably, if one is aware that one's meal will end when the plate at the head of the table is empty, then one would learn to eat at a pace rapid enough to allow for the consumption one wishes to undertake. Margaret's inertia at the breakfast table, while yet another representation of her plight under Philip's rule, is also a misleading (lack of) action. Through Margaret's relationships to food and to eating, Carter has characterized her in terms of old-fashioned subjugation and submission, has woven her from common perceptions of women living with domestic violence. In addition to emphasizing the charged nature of the household, her apparent lack of agency disguises Margaret's actual transgressive sexual behavior, and is a divisive technique used by Carter to maintain two separate narratives within the single text.

The second passage in which Margaret is depicted while eating is during Sunday tea. While Philip eats "a battalion of shrimps [. . .] a loaf of bread spread with half a pound of butter" and "the lion's share of the cake," all Margaret can do is to "sip painfully at a meagre cup of tea and toy with a few shoots of mustard and cress" (113). Her consumption here is presented as different from the eating she does so little of in the previous scene by virtue of the moonstone-encrusted collar: "When she wore the collar, she ate with only the utmost difficulty" (113). This difficulty actually varies little from the truncated meal of porridge earlier in the text, but is still emphasized here through the significance of the collar and its relationship to Margaret's purported total victim status. Both scenes draw heavily on the ways in which oppressed women commonly have been depicted. Carter has capitalized on the understanding many readers would bring to the tale of Margaret's life with Philip—that her diminished physical and emotional capacities indicate a lack of ability to shake the shackles of his control—in order to draw
attention away from the fact that Margaret is actually making choices laden with more social and cultural significance than any decision to remove herself from marriage would approach. As with the breakfast scene, the passage that introduces the collar uses food and eating imagery as a way to bluff the reader. While the collar can certainly (how can it not be?) be a symbol of restrictive traditions and gender mandates, it is "hinged," can be removed from the throat that will not swallow, will not speak. On each day besides Sunday, Margaret is free of this neck-piece and all it signifies; the rest of the week is void of Philip's sexual demands and from the prescribed feminine apparel he insists Margaret wear. The collar, which surrounds a neck that otherwise is the predominant site of Margaret's symptomatic muteness (and which is also the gateway to her thin, disembodied physicality), illuminates how beneath the artifice lies a different truth. Free of the bonds represented by the collar, Margaret finds ways to access the agency signified by her voice (hidden but available to her eventually) and the body so closely identified with the pleasures of eating.

Both Helen Dunmore and Angela Carter in these novels use cultural assumptions about the consuming female in order to direct readers' attention toward narratives that veil each novel's ultimate truth. Though each author uses such imagery differently, both play upon widely accepted stereotypes and anxieties associated with various social and cultural roles for women: voracious consumer, sexual siren, nurturing caretaker, oppressed victim. While some women certainly do fulfill these roles, in these works of fiction the images of women that are evoked—especially within the surface narratives of each text—exist primarily as catalysts for reader response. By evoking the body through represented acts of eating and consumption, Dunmore and Carter both in turn call forth the reader's body/image as a site of that response. With the entrance of the physical body into the act of reading, reader attention can be effectively directed away from the narratives of discomfort that become apparent at each novel's end. In the next section, I will explain how representations of eating directly affect the progressions of the separate narrative strands, and will show how the cultural effects of represented eating within
these texts implicate the body image of the reader and allow for the respective secrets of each
text to be withheld until their final moments.

Both Dunmore and Carter have created novels fraught with the tensions inherent between
the culturally divided spheres of mind and body, and each works with this tension in a slightly
different manner in order to provide the same narrative protection for her text's ultimate
revelation. These divided narratives, along with their divided female protagonists, both imitate
and exacerbate the problematic effects of wrenching the materiality of the body away—even if
only figuratively—from its necessary psychic counterpart. The novels' structural bifurcations
are disruptive: the textual representations of consuming female bodies are skewed, and result in
two distinct narrative "realities." The texts suffer from the same sort of distorted (re)presentation
as does a typical anorectic who sees reflected back in the mirror not the "real" body and its true
dimensions, but instead an alternative image of her own creation, an image based upon social
and cultural assumptions that have become internalized and eventually inscribed upon not the
physical body itself, but upon the body's own perception of itself (body image) and of its place in
the world-at-large. Body image disturbance common to anorexic disorders is a result of a
disassociation of mind from body, of what I have called “auto-objectification,” and, though the
textual body is not a direct corollary for the real flesh and blood of real women's bodies, the
metaphor is apropos of the sort of distortion that occurs within these texts when the mental and
the physical are forced into separate and unnatural realms. In the Carter and Dunmore texts, one
narrative is inscribed upon the other in a way that results in the masking of the actual "reality" of
the text. Like the real proportions of the anorexic body, however, the underlying, uncomfortable
narratives at the bases of these two novels are hidden from view by accumulations of culture, by
networks of social significance related to the consuming female body.

At the risk of overextending a metaphor, consider the two narratives in each text as "big"
and "small," "fat" and "thin" paths of progression through the novels.12 As with the anorectic's
narration of a self-image much different from her actual thin body, the "large" narratives in these texts are not the expressions of the "real" facts of murder or of incest, but instead are narratives of consumption and of its attendant cultural baggage. These "large" narratives are in no way in excess of their thin counterparts simply by virtue of their relationships to food consumption, but instead because of the nature of their construction. The surface narratives—those that direct readers to experience the texts through a shallow lens of cultural association—are composed from little-challenged analogies made between strong appetites of all types, and such construction has little basis in the ultimate reality of either text. The "thin" but very real narrative that hides behind the façade of consumption in each text is the narrative of real female agency and very real, if socially deviant, female activity. The actions associated with the submerged narratives of both Isabel's and Margaret's transgressions must be denied by the text, as well as by the reader, in keeping with the denial perpetuated by each character through her disassociation with food and, by extension, with her own body and its errant potential. The more benign bodies of Nina, Victoria, and Melanie are invested with negative social and cultural messages attached to food consumption, resulting in "inflated" narratives that enable the narratives of discomfort to remain hidden until the final pages of both novels.

Carter and Dunmore both rely upon more than codes related to food and food consumption in order to “flesh out” the surface narratives of their novels. Both also rely upon certain constructs of generic fiction as a way to create with the broadest of strokes a familiar and captivating narrative, the progressions of which readers can identify and likely will not interrogate. Guided by the multiple components of these surface narratives, reader responses based upon the consumption of food and, in turn, upon the body/images presented in the text, join with responses to the trappings of, specifically, mystery and Gothic genres. Pierre Macherey explains that in the genres of the gothic and of mystery, the “depths are less fascinating than [the] frail and deceptive surface,” and Carter’s and Dunmore’s respective utilization of these generic conventions, as Macherey continues, indeed “lasts for as long as it can cling to appearances” (29). Such novels are the products “of two different movements” that
are not “successive [. . .] but are inextricably simultaneous” (Macherey 34). Once reader attention is shifted to more obvious and more comfortable (or traditional) narrative developments, the thinner lines of the novels' transgressive underpinnings can exist without the detection of the reader, and such a narrative strategy allows for appearances to be clung to, and for narrative tension to become well established before it is reconciled in the production of narrative closure. The tension produced by such narrative divisions, though, and by the narratives of discomfort present even though relatively invisible, creates the suggestion of difficulty in both novels considered in this chapter. Because of the interconnectedness of the material and psychic components of human experience, there is an inherent discomfort in separations of mind from body, whether social or textual, real or represented. The divisions within these novels result in ambivalence both within the text and within the experiences of reading the texts and of making sense of their narrative structures. To escape this uncomfortable reading experience, readers gravitate toward the conventions they can best make sense of: culturally defined gender and sexual codes—genres in and of themselves—and the codes of generic plot development. The broad, obtuse narrative achieves primacy when readers resist the uneasy rumblings of the submerged alternatives.

Along with the narrative conventions relied upon by both Dunmore and Carter, the actual narrations of these novels are integral to their complexities. While Carter places her narratives under the care of a distanced third-person narrator, Dunmore metes out information through the voice of Nina herself. This difference is important to consider in a discussion of the ways in which the novels' submerged narratives reveal themselves: the secret narrative of Colin's death at the hands of his sister in Talking to the Dead appears to readers in bursts that are often connected to Nina's acts of consumption and of bodily awareness; Margaret's incestuous relationship with her brother is announced quickly and brutally, and provides final punctuation for the novel itself. A less-than-academic or scrupulously close reading of Carter's text reveals nothing of this relationship, and even reading with the intention of discovering the clues to the incest discloses few fissures in the surface narrative that might allow for the thinner, darker
narrative to emerge. Margaret's muteness extends to her ability—perhaps to her refusal—to dictate the details of her own plot. Any references to the transgressive connection between Margaret and Francie come from Francie himself. "'It is right,'" he tells Melanie at their first meeting, "'for brothers and sisters to be close'" (37-8), and his "'strange grace'" at the dinner table, "'Flesh to flesh. Amen'" (46), implies some moral, if not legal, validity to their physical union. Rather than prayer for delivery from the "sin" of sexual transgression, Francie inverts the traditional morality that govern such behaviors, as well as those domestic arrangements that signify a socially codified morality. Margaret's inability to speak allows her to divest herself of any narrative accountability or agency, and places the decision to express or to suppress the truth squarely within the domain of her male counterparts. "'There is no law, that [Finn knows of], to prevent'" the Jowles from being Irish (35), but Finn's reference here to the law underscores the patriarchal duty of the brothers both to common law and to their own familial law. Finn's wry observation about law and ethnicity implies that there are other laws that dictate a proper understanding of bloodlines and of shared heritage. As the bystander who holds the knowledge of incest but who does not participate in breaking the laws of the land, Finn actually emerges as the novel's gatekeeper. The level of omniscience granted to the narrator of Carter's text is limited to an excruciating degree, and Finn holds the key to the novel's silence on the matter of incest. Like Margaret, whose lips clamped shut on her wedding day, the narrator, ostensibly in control of the progression of the narrative, is actually in the grasp of the unsayable beneath the novel's Gothic structure and of Finn, its antihero.

In Dunmore's text, Nina's narrative authority is key to a reader's making sense of the novel's intertwined narratives. Though Nina provides a relatively stable commentary on daily events throughout the novel, her role as adulterous sister calls into question her point of view and her motives. Like O'Brien's Kate, Nina is what Susan Lanser calls a "female personal narrator," one who "tells the story [and] is also the story's protagonist" (19). As such a narrator, Nina "risks the reader's resistance if the act of telling, the story she tells, or the self she constructs through telling it transgresses the limits of the acceptably feminine" (Lanser 19). (As a first-
person narrator, Nina, again like Kate, also runs the risk of the narrative unreliability that accompanies such a narration.) Nina's frank sexuality and close association with her physical body are flaunted through her narration, and her delight in the physical world of food and of the senses in general is perhaps more an affront to any "acceptable" femininity than are her sexual transgressions with Richard. Though Nina is the "true" narrator, her reliability is precarious throughout the bulk of the novel and is jeopardized by Isabel's version of the same histories as Nina relates. Isabel, who conforms to traditional and acceptably modes of the feminine, subtly co-opts Nina’s memories, and thus her narration of the past, and this act helps to ensure the reader's resistance to Nina's rendition, thus protecting her own role in Colin's death. As mentioned above, though, Isabel's disassociation from her own body and thus from her psychic/intellectual self, as well, indicates that her point of view might not be much more believable than is Nina's. As the younger sibling, Nina's sensibility includes her deference to Isabel and to Isabel's authority as suggested by chronology: when it comes to stories, Nina is "in the habit of believing Isabel's version" (19), and in order for the mystery surrounding Colin's death to remain submerged, the reader must also accept, to some degree, Isabel's differing narration.

As Nina’s older sister, Isabel has certain privileges with regard to reconstructing their mutual childhoods. Nina, although the de facto narrator of Dunmore’s novel, does not actively own her narrative purpose, but instead discounts her own recollections, as they surface, acquiescing to her sister’s familial authority. Nina’s transgressive behavior already calls into question her license to speak, and responses to Nina from Edward and from Margery Wilkinson (Isabel’s neighbor and the mother of Susan, her nanny) based upon the more typical suspicions of embodied women (such as those levied against Pym’s Prudence Bates), assist with a destabilization of her narrative authority. Margery, a “carefully dieted woman” (104) who, with her “expensive blondness” and “lot of gold jewelry” (103), is an embodiment of combined successes in the arenas of socioeconomics and femininity, and for Nina is a watchful someone “you have to look out for” (108). By contrast and through her distrust of Nina, this visitor adds
an additional layer of suspicion to that which has already settled over Nina’s narration. Regardless of her unstable, suspect narrative authority, however, Nina’s memories slowly come to the surface of her narration, beginning with more benign moments of sibling difficulty and eventually coalescing in her version of the events leading up to baby Colin’s death. “She was the big one,” Nina recalls of Isabel, “the sensible one, and I was the toddler who could scream and bite” (43). Isabel was the narrator of Nina’s childhood, though she sometimes delivered a version of questionable validity. Nina comments, “Isabel was so sure of things that sometimes I thought it was her certainty that made them happen. [. . .] She even knew when I was going to cry” (44). But those childhood stories told by Isabel do not always measure up to the facts lodged in Nina’s psyche. Nina recalls how once Isabel had played at drowning her doll during a game of “baptism,” and then had attempted to explain to their mother Nina’s hysterical tears upon having been told that her “baby” was “dead”: “Nina’s crying because Mandy fell into the water and she thinks she’s dead. I keep telling her that she isn’t, but she won’t listen”” (101). Isabel fails to mention the fact that she had held the doll beneath the water, watching as her sister’s reaction became increasingly desperate and emotional. This foreshadowing of Isabel’s own death by drowning here also works to call into question the authority Nina has constructed for her sister. Dunmore’s dueling narratives are thus further problematized by a seeming lack of any reliable source for “truth” in the novel. Each sister’s relationship to a mind/body duality provides the total narrative with social and cultural instability, and the discrepancies between their individual authorities further complicate readerly abilities to decipher any hidden verity within the sisters’ conflicting histories.

Eventually, Nina defines Isabel’s authority differently than she has in preceding pages: “She’s so persuasive that it doesn’t seem like persuasion, but like the truth” (130). Once Isabel’s version of the past is acknowledged as a rhetorical situation, and not as an absolute version to be accepted into and disseminated via her sister’s narration, Nina becomes free to adjust her memory to include events that she has previously either suppressed or neglected. Their vastly different versions of Colin’s death become the defining conflict between the two sisters and their
respective narratives and, along with the food narrative, drive apart two women who at one time seemed inseparable. The neutral story of a brother who died of cot-death becomes a struggle for each sister’s reclamation of innocence and denial of having taken an active role in Colin’s early passing. When Nina recalls the day of their brother’s death, she begins to imagine a distressing alteration to what had beforehand served as her memory of the event:

[. . .] Isabel is braced, on tiptoe, leaning over the baby. [. . .]She is pressing down on the baby’s back, pressing and pressing, pushing him into the mattress. I can see his weak purple legs thrashing, but there’s no sound. His face is hidden in a muslin cloth. [. . .] Her face is cold and hard, like a snake’s face, but her face is soft as a whisper. “He was crying. I’m getting him to sleep. Go back to our room.” (142-3)

If Isabel could serve as a stable point of reference for the truth, then this memory might pass as a flight of childhood fancy revisited by Nina as she watches Isabel tend to her new child, Antony. Nina, however, has already established Isabel’s situational indifference to the truth in her flashback to the baby-doll baptismal enacted by Isabel and her in their youth (as well as in other like recollections). But while Nina’s narrative authority and her sister’s questionable narratorial status combine to drive doubt into the long-believed medical cause of Colin’s death, Nina’s sensual connections to the world of food and her sexual behavior have long since derailed her own ability to command any solid control of her own narration. The “bulk of Isabel’s truth, advancing like an iceberg” (145) enters to contradict Nina’s own: “I went in and I found what you’d done. The pillow was still over his head,” states the elder sister (146). Already at odds vis-à-vis their relationships to food and to eating, as well as to any embodiment signified by those relationships, the sisters here verbalize the significant differences between them, before only made implicit through characterization and represented effects of the body. The conflict between Nina and Isabel, and their attempts to superimpose subjective or constructed truths over objective fact, strengthens the division Dunmore has initiated through her use of mind/body duality as a method of character construction.
What ultimately allows for Nina’s narration to emerge as more believable than her transgressions might allow, however, is the very fact of her body, regardless of the ambivalent status of that body as it relates to her sexual expression. Though her embodiment creates a problematic for the way Nina is characterized, the interrelatedness of textual bodies and the bodies of readers—as understood through those social qualities of the body image explained by Schilder—allows for comprehensions of and sympathies with Nina’s experiences that Isabel’s relative lexical disembodiment denies readers, even if the elder sister’s domestic and maternal qualities allow for her to appear as the more socially acceptable character and voice. The qualities of unreliability inherent within her first-person narration are, for Nina, recovered through the presence of her body and its role as a catalyst for reader response. The “immersion” of a reader within a text, as discussed by Ryan, suggests that for the duration of a reading experience, a reader is “inside” the world invoked by mimetic narration, and such proximity of the body image of the reader with the represented body/image within the text complements and strengthens immersive experiences. Ryan presents a caveat for understanding first-person, present-tense narrations such as Nina’s, but the addition of an embodiment that foregrounds the sensual responses of the reader help to ensure that this narration of events—but namely of the events surrounding Colin’s death—destabilizes the “truth” of the narrative whole.

Ryan writes that the “immersive edge” of the present tense “becomes considerably duller when the present invades the whole text,” and that “[c]ontinuous presence becomes habit, habit leads to invisibility, and invisibility is as good as absence. For immersion to retain its intensity, it needs a contrast of narrative modes, a constantly renegotiated distance from the narrative scene, a profile made of peaks and valleys” (Narrative 137). The lack of shift from one narrative mode to another, the reliance of Nina’s narration (and of Dunmore’s novel) upon realistic mimesis rather than upon any postmodern sensibility, is balanced by the very “real” presence of Nina’s body as a carrier of narrative experience. The narrative structure of Talking to the Dead may not invite readerly attentions to the narrative act, and indeed may not in itself provide the immediacy or “presence” necessary for immersion in the narrative, but the narrative as defined
by Nina’s embodiment is hardly a narrative of invisibility. The presence of her body is key to the success of the narrative structure as a whole, with regard both to an avoidance of the unsatisfactory results of reading realism maintained by Ryan’s theories, as well as to the maintenance of narrative instability necessary if the disclosure of the full circumstances of Colin’s death are to be withheld from the reader in the generic manner of the mystery novel. While Nina’s flaunting of sexual and gustatorial proprieties destabilize her narrative authority, her embodiment also provides the key to immersion as the object that the reader-as-focalizer (a full participant in the narrative system of the novel) must follow as the narrative progresses. The contradictory explanations provided by each sister cannot be reconciled if narrative tension is to be maintained and if the secret of the novel’s submerged narrative is to remain hidden until its final instance.

While critics such as Peter Brooks have considered the role of desire in narrative, and the role of the (female) body in the construction of narrative fiction, I would like to move beyond an examination of Nina as a desiring or desired body, and even beyond the role of desire in potential reader responses to the display of her body and its sexual exploits. While immersion in a scene of sexual interaction can certainly result in the sexual arousal of a reader, the narrative function of Nina’s physical display and overt sexuality does not constitute disclosure or an invasion of privacy devoted to “consciousness of a reserved space of intimacy” that “strangely, perhaps pathetically, depends on relentless intrusion into it” (Brooks 257). Nina’s physicality is a formal mechanism necessary for the stasis of secrecy that defines the novel as a whole, as well as the genre upon which it is modeled. So, while reader response to scenes of sexual intercourse or of other erotically charged moments may encompass certain aspects of desire, such response is not of primary importance to the totality of the narrative structure. Passages such as those that detail Nina’s sexual encounters with Richard, for example, as well as her sensuality in the kitchen, serve not simply to open doors closed upon transgressions (or their signifiers), but also to occlude the passage of information from one level of narrative to another, from the submerged level of narrative accessible only through Nina’s memory and into the larger plot structure.
Identification of readers with Nina’s material presence, with her visible and textually tangible presence in the text, maintains reader response to the familiar narrative bound together by conventions of gender and of genre, and limits reader ability to become immersed in the taboo subject of murder that lies beneath. The social qualities of the body image allow for “an interplay of parts or of wholes” (Schilder 235) of one body/image with another, both in actuality and, through the dimensions of imaginative play (such as outlined by Scarry and discussed above) and mimetic construction, during the act of reading a text. Because, as Schilder states, it “might almost be said that the erogenic zones of the various body-images are closer to each other than the other parts of the body” (236), represented sexual encounters can induce strong relationships between readers and texts, perhaps some of the strongest degrees of textual immersion via the body.

Nina’s sexuality, then, both obscures her authority as a narrator (and thus her version of events) and draws readerly attentions to her body as the bodies of readers comprehend her physicality through their own. When Nina narrates a sexual experience with Richard, it can appear to be a gratuitously explicit scene in a novel otherwise given over to psychological effects:

The grass is short, crisp, and prickling with drought. I get down on hands and knees, then let the weight of my body fall onto my forearms. There is a marigold at eye level, so close I smell its peppery smell. The dry grass under me, the grainy heart of the marigold, the long, still exposure, are all one. I get into position, raising myself, and Richard’s finger slides, parting the lips of my wet vulva. [. . .] My body stretches, every membrane willing to let him in. (96)

The synaesthetic qualities of this passage, however, and its emphasis upon Nina’s movement, her motility, as well as the ensuing act of intercourse, all invite the reader—a voyeur now and not simply a sleuth working with clues to the truth of the narrative—along the journey Nina takes as she sinks to the ground, positions herself for sex, and actively engages in sexual performance. As with my earlier ballet metaphor, with which I explain an epistemology of the body as limbs move, and as the body comprehends the motion and the location of those limbs through the body
image, here Nina’s deliberate explanation of her movement onto her forearms and into a sexual position draws readers along that path with her. The sensations narrated by Nina can be synthesized only as far as a reader can conceive of the feel of the grass, the weight of her body, and the sexual anticipation throughout her body, but narratively located in her genitalia. The weight of Nina’s body mass shifts as her physical positions shift, as does the reader’s experience of her body through his or her own. The sexual nature of the passage (as well as others like it) does not necessarily create a ruse that turns a reader’s attention from other aspects of the narrative, but rather aligns a reader with Nina through her, and his or her own, body/image. Isabel, lacking in the qualities of textual embodiment granted to her sister, cannot command the same reader identification. Although her word and Nina’s are at odds and occasionally Isabel even appears to have a firmer grasp of the truth than does Nina, textual embodiment in its active, subjective form controls the ways in which readers can immerse themselves in this particular textual world. In Nina, discourse and materiality together provide her with an edge that Isabel, whom readers can know only through that more intangible sphere of language, cannot access.

An interesting problematic of Nina’s physicality as it relates to concentrated reader response (and to the maintenance of narrative duality), however, is that while her sentient presence helps to guide readers’ attentions toward the gendered narrative of sexual transgression and betrayal, her unfolding comprehension of childhood experiences is nearly always simultaneous with her most embodied experiences. While readers experience Nina’s body as a catalyst for response to the surface narrative, Nina herself experiences her own bodily epistemology in ways that force the submerged narrative to engage with that other, broader narrative above. While Isabel began to deny her body through a denial of food soon after Colin’s death, and thus to suppress her role in that death, Nina continuously calls forth that other version of the “truth” each time she indulges in physical excesses of both sex and consumption. Her embodied characterization, as it maintains reader focalization during instances of such excess, ensures that readers are thus present (to varying degrees of physical identification) with Nina each time she revisits events that call into question Isabel’s version. Nina’s body as both a
barrier to and a key to the submerged narrative controls the pace of access to the hidden aspects of the novel.

When she recalls Colin’s funeral, as well as the eating distress that overcame Isabel at that time, Nina is lying beside Richard after one of their garden encounters. She watches her sleeping brother-in-law, thinking he “looks content, fucked out,” and then immediately her thoughts turn to Colin: “I can remember Colin’s funeral. His coffin was so small that my father carried it down the aisle of the white church as if it was a baby” (113). She also remembers imagining, at that earlier time, “me and Isabel without bodies, but [. . .] couldn’t” (113). The connection of sexual transgression with her recollection here is the first of several such conjunctions of Nina’s embodied agency with her memory of losing her younger sibling through questionable circumstances. Her vision of Isabel’s smothering their brother follows directly upon a later tryst with Richard, and that emotional, condemning encounter with Isabel prompts a dream in which Nina conjures up the voice of a woman telling the girls’ mother that Isabel had turned “‘her back to [Colin’s] pram, though she’d gone and left it right on the edge of the pier with the break off’” (152). Nina wakes from that dream “hungry” (155), and heads to the bakery to buy “cheese bread and a wheel of fresh pizza in a white cardboard box, two French sticks and a sticky dark loaf with sunflower seeds in it. [. . .] a box of homemade shortbread, and five cream-filled doughnuts” (156). Back in Isabel’s’ kitchen, Richard feeds a croissant to Nina in a scene that clearly evokes fellatio “I eat it with my eyes shut: the jam, the cold, salty butter, the warm, dissolving layers of pastry. He feeds it into my mouth inch by inch, and I eat it down to the crisp, burnt point” (162-3). The back-and-forth between sensual gratification and Nina’s recollections infuses readerly experiences of one with the other, and although the force of her embodiment drives the narrative most visible to readers, the connection of that embodiment with the novel’s primary point of contention also enables a slow but steady unfolding for readers of matters that lie beneath the plot of excess.

Unlike Dunmore’s novel, in which the submerged narrative unfolds slowly and is both obscured and illuminated by Nina’s body, Carter’s *The Magic Toyshop* depends exclusively
upon the reversal of the roles of mind and of body in order for Melanie’s constructed embodiment to emerge as a device that conceals Margaret’s actual alignment with the body and with a sexual agency that transgresses the social norm. As previously mentioned, Melanie’s embodiment is concocted; she is presented as “body” in order to re-position Margaret into the sphere of the mind and away from an embodiment that would betray her relationship with her brother. Melanie’s narrative—the “fat,” surface narrative that almost completely hides Margaret’s tale—is one of Gothic chaos, and within this generic construct, Melanie is the heroine who must both attract threat and escape from it. Her state of chronic peril consistently raises her body into view as the object of sexual and other threats, and the danger presented to Melanie is simultaneously presented to the reader and to the reader’s body image. The same social qualities of body images that allow for reader identification with Nina’s body in Dunmore’s novel also allow for perceptions of danger to be filtered through the bodies of Carter’s readers.

Schilder explains connections of body image to human perceptions of pain and of danger, and finds it “more than probable that the child’s conception of pain is prior to its conception of danger, and that danger means for a child something which will sooner or later inflict pain and disrupt in this way the unity of the organism and its image” (103). For Schilder, then, pain is a basic, primary theme of human orientation to the body. As Scarry elaborates in *The Body in Pain*, that sensation is important to the ways in which the body’s epistemology has been socially and culturally defined, as well, and thus when pain or its perceived precursor, danger, is presented within a text, readers are invited to respond to that commonality between the external and textual worlds. Pain invites immersion into a text in similar ways as do sexual stimuli, and danger of disruption of the body, of its image, or of the ontological gestalt of mind and body calls forth the possibility of pain, and thus also invites the interactivity of readerly and textual bodies. Melanie’s perpetual danger, even when it is cast as the result of an overactive adolescent imagination, functions to maintain a heightened awareness of her embodiment, and therefore controls reader attentions through the submission of Melanie’s young body to the necessary
dangers of the Gothic genre. With all eyes upon Melanie, Margaret can slip beneath to the narrative below, a level of narrative that is nearly imperceptible as a result of the casting of Melanie in her role as embodied young woman in distress.

Because of this correlation between perceived danger and the body image, the most immediate dangers connected with Melanie are more likely to result in reader response than is any assumed distress on the part of Margaret. While the idea of the older woman’s weekly sexual duties to her brutish husband might be cause for disgust, Melanie occupies a more precarious position because of her age, her lack of parental protection, and her generic status as Gothic heroine. Sexual threats to Melanie can be directly associated with her represented physical body, whereas Margaret, whose body is narratively suppressed, cannot call forth as visceral a response from readers as can the younger woman. Melanie’s vulnerability, too, allows for scenes that only border on the dangerous to blossom into threats with greater resonance than they might exhibit in other contexts, or if related to other of the novel’s characters. The specter of Bluebeard (who survives in legend as a man who kills women by dismembering them) is invoked twice in the novel, for example, an allusion that both underscores the Gothic vein of Carter’s text and strengthens the aura of physical and sexual precariousness that surrounds Melanie, even when the related event is actually her hallucination, and not a real physical or sexual threat. One afternoon in the kitchen, Melanie opens a “dresser drawer to put away the knives and spoons” and in it “was a freshly severed hand, all bloody at the roots” (118). The passage continues,

It was a soft-looking, plump little hand with pretty, tapering fingers the nails of which were tinted with a faint, pearly laquer. There was a thin silver ring of the type small girls wear on the fourth finger. It was the hand of a child who goes to dancing class and wears frilled petticoats with knickers to match. From the raggedness of the flesh at the wrist, it appeared that the hand had been hewn from its arm with a knife or axe that was very blunt. Melanie heard blood fall plop in the drawer. “I am going out of my mind,” she said aloud. “Bluebeard was here.” (118)
Although Melanie has only imagined this severed limb, the fear factor of the scene, and the implied threat to Melanie’s physical well-being, are cause for a perception of dangers to come for this young protagonist. While Melanie’s narrative—even hallucinated trajectories of that narrative—maintain readers’ suspense and focus, Margaret’s narrative continues, almost without notice.

A good juxtaposition of these narratives, and of their quite different appearances in the text, is presented over the course of the novel’s two presentations of Uncle Philip’s creepy puppet shows. The puppeteer is an overbearing perfectionist who insists all members of the household turn out to view his craft and the twisted scripts meant to deride certain members in the audience. The first show obviously implicates Philip’s wife, Margaret, and also her brother/lover, Francie. In retrospect, the scene is a nod to their sexual connection, perhaps even an indication that Philip suspects the incestual relationship that takes place under his own roof. Without the benefit of such hindsight, however, and buried in the midst of Melanie’s larger narrative, this puppet show can be easily overlooked as readers focus upon Melanie and in turn upon Finn, Melanie’s erstwhile protector, who is pushed from the rafters by Philip at the show’s finale for having botched the performance. The puppets, which represent Mary, Queen of Scots, and her lover, Bothwell, are described as simultaneous representations of Margaret and Francie: the Queen “wore a collar like Aunt Margaret’s” (129), and Bothwell “walked with Francie’s toppling fall” (130). This clue to the existence of the submerged narrative, while available to readers once the disclosure of the transgressive relationship occurs, at this point in the overall narrative has little significance. In addition, because Margaret is only represented by the wooden puppet, and because any physical presence on her part is completely removed from the event, any sense of danger to her physical person is nullified. Margaret, therefore, is unable to invoke the bodily response of a reader in the same way that Melanie can. The scene does more to underscore Philip’s zest for mocking and abusing his pastiche of a household than it does to suggest his knowledge of secret events or any anger that might exist as a result, and because of this, there is no perceived danger to Margaret’s physical being (though perhaps to the emotional
and mental components of her being). Without the body there to serve as a catalyst for reader response, Margaret’s secret remains safe, even if it glimmers at the center of this particular passage.

The later show, a Boxing Day event that does not limit itself to wooden creatures, but also includes Melanie in its cast of characters, is the raison d’être for a scene that not only strengthens Melanie’s identification with the body, but also provides one of the most important moments for the type of embodied reader response theorized in this chapter. The holiday performance takes mythology as its theme, rather than history, and Melanie is cast as Leda to Uncle Philip’s hand-crafted swan. This passage provides a pinnacle to the dangers encountered by Melanie and, unlike the scene of the imagined hand in the kitchen drawer, this narrative event is played out at the site of Melanie’s body in a simulated rape by a beast controlled by Philip. Though the rape is an act of performance, and not what might typically be thought of as a “real” sexual violation, the narrative threat to Melanie at this point reaches its height, and seemingly solidifies her alignment with the physical world. Melanie follows her uncle’s bidding as he directs from above. “‘Leda attempts to flee her heavenly visitant but his beauty and majesty bear her to the ground’” (166), and Philip manipulates both wooden and fleshly participant as the swan “settled on her loins” and “mounted her,” with “its head [. . .] nestled in her neck” and “gilded beak dug deeply into the soft flesh” (167). In a white chiffon tunic and with flowers in her hair, Melanie’s Leda is the picture of innocence, and of innocence defiled once “the passionate swan had dragged her dress half off” (167) and completes the figurative rape. The contrast of this puppet show with the earlier performance that implicated Margaret with the body is drastic. There is no equating the suggestion of sexuality through wooden puppets with the actual use of Melanie’s physical presence, a presence that by this point in the novel has become fully established, surely constructed. The danger to Melanie in this scene is both real and perceived, and the pain (as well as other sensations) that results from the simulation adds with that perceived through imaginative elision of the performance-rape with the actual violence this act signifies. Like the earlier puppet show, which helped to guarantee Margaret’s secrecy
through a denial of her body, this show functions to contain the novel’s thin, submerged narrative by foregrounding Melanie’s embodiment, thus reinforcing reader responses to that embodiment and to the larger narrative trajectory.

As with Dunmore’s Nina, Melanie is exalted by a narrative of the flesh that commands primary attention from readers as it works to erase the narrative of discomfort contained within The Magic Toyshop. Ultimately, though, both Melanie and Nina are destabilized as designated textual bodies when the embodiment, and embodied agencies, of Margaret and Isabel are brought to light. When Philip returns home to find his wife and her brother engaged in sexual congress, the delicate balance of the Flower household, and of the novel’s narrative structure, is irrevocably upset. Margaret regains her ability to speak, no longer having any need for her affected aphasia, and escapes with Francie and Victoria from a toyshop set ablaze by Philip in his wrath. Thus reunited with her “other half,” with the child who has all along signified her actual allegiance to her own body, Margaret takes her “true” position in the narrative. Margaret, and not Melanie, becomes the protagonist who earns the right to escape from the Gothic context of Phillip’s toyshop. As the two strands of the novel become one, so do the two components of Margaret’s characterization. The novel’s ending, devoted to this disclosure and to a subsequent re-embodiment of Margaret through the addition of Victoria to her composite, turns from that which might be expected from a Gothic tale. Melanie, through this narrative turn, is disenfranchised. Her constructed embodiment, only necessary while Margaret and Francie’s relationship remains hidden, no longer has a place in the function of the novel’s narrative projection beyond its final pages.

As the text closes upon Melanie and Finn, who “faced each other in a wild surmise” (200), their world is an apocryphal one promised by the generic codes of the surface narrative that has now become a part of Margaret’s, and not of Melanie’s, future. Without her narrative, and without the structure of the genre to carry Melanie forward, Melanie’s story has come to a close. She and Finn stand as last man and woman left to reconstruct, perhaps to repopulate the world to which they have been abandoned. The life Melanie has imagined she will have with
Finn, one of “pervasive squalor and dirt and mess and shabbiness” (177), indicates the end of the modern cycle, a retreat back into the world preceding order and cleanliness and domestic tranquillity. Though Melanie reaches the end of the novel with Finn by her side, as could be expected from the Gothic romance plot contained within Carter’s larger project, she also observes, from that moment when the toyshop “burnt like a giant chrysanthemum” and she and Finn stand in a “neglected garden [. . .] full of discarded tins, jam jars, rubbish thrown over the wall” (199), the end of her narrative self. Cast out from the sphere of embodiment as Margaret reclains her natural place in that land, Melanie remains only as a ghost of her former self, and stands in the midst of a garden gone to rubbish, a plot of former natural order in which the idea of organic life has become extinct.14 The life force commonly found at the end of romance plots has been extracted from Melanie’s, and the young woman who was figuratively compared to an amputee after her parents’ death becomes narratively disembodied through the role reversal of mind and body, of herself and Margaret.

As in Carter’s text, in Dunmore’s the revelation of the buried narrative comes at its final moment, and that revelation is cause for a reassessment of the ways in which Isabel and Nina have been relegated exclusively to realms of mind and body in order to maintain narrative tension and obstruction of the actual circumstances of baby Colin’s death. The fact that Isabel was the sister who actually smothered the baby, however, is not the last detail on the subject to be disclosed. In fact, only Isabel’s suicide by drowning, expressed as a reflection of her guilt, is there to mark the fact of her physical, embodied role in the death of her brother. No admission of guilt or material fact bears absolute witness to her true place in the narrative. Unlike Margaret, though, who emerges as an embodied character at the end of The Magic Toyshop, Isabel rejects her embodiment through this extreme act of self-abnegation. For Isabel, motherhood has opened a door to her own body that she cannot not pass through without both acknowledging her role in her own brother’s death and in “what Colin’s death had done”: an eradication of “Love and hope. Those things my mother had felt,” says Nina, “when Colin was born” (293). For Isabel, coming to terms with her embodiment means accepting her act and its
results, and also risking the same deep despair she faces as a mother of a child who might at any
time be taken from her. For Isabel, whose embodied agency has lead to painful and lasting
experiences, permanent disavowal of the body through death is preferable to embodiment.

For Nina, however, the death of her sister does not put to rest the question at the heart of
this “moral whodunit” (Kino). Carol Kino, in a New York Times review of Talking to the Dead,
asks “Does guilt lie in desire or action?” and ultimately this is Dunmore’s central question.
Regardless of Isabel’s guilt-in-action and her actual embodied status, Nina’s complicity in the
act becomes apparent, and inverts much of what has been understood of Nina over the course of
the novel. At last, as she recalls her sister, as a child, telling her “‘I’d do anything for you’”
(299), Nina recalls the rest of the story:

The baby is everywhere. The baby has opened the door to my mother’s room and
then closed it again behind the two of them, leaving me outside. The baby fills
my ears and my mouth until I can’t think of anything else. My lips move, and
Isabel bends to hear me. I speak.
“Will you really do what I want?”
“You know I will,” she answers. “I’ll do anything you want.” (299)

As the novel closes upon Nina and Isabel, in recollection, heading “up the endless staircase, hand
in hand” (300), Nina’s selfish desire and her role as the impetus of a death that has plagued both
sisters ever since becomes clear to her and to readers at the same moment, as does the power of
Nina’s language, of her narration even at the age of four, when she asked her sister to perform
for her a most horrific favor. Though infused with elements of the physical world, Nina’s
characterization is ultimately clarified by a re-association of her character with the field of
language, and with an active, forceful life of the mind. She is not disembodied or
disenfranchised in the way Melanie is, but the destabilization of Nina’s character is the last and
lingering effect of the narrative. A return to the preface, narrated by a Nina who is fully aware
of her own role in an action that fractured the lives of each member of her family, finds Nina
thinking to her sister, “I am on your grave, the warm mound of it shaped to me like a body” (6).
Newly defined as an inhabitant of the intellectual, discursive world, Nina seeks out her sister’s embodiment, though she can find only a poor substitution, a simile that cannot measure up to the actual embodiment she needs in order to appear as an accurate representation of a mind/body duality. She imagines, “Nothing can separate” her from Isabel (6), but the embodiment that expired with Isabel off the coast of Sussex escapes her needy reach.

The dual narratives that interact in Talking to the Dead and in The Magic Toyshop cannot sustain themselves beyond the reconciliation of body with body, and of mind with mind. Both novels, finally integrated into one narrative strand at their respective ends, become “whole” tales of complex interactions that belie any surface representations or novelistic reliances on the cultural assumptions attached to female consumption, as well as to female sexuality. Interestingly, each text mimics in its own duality the mind and body splits so central to their constructions. The mirroring of form and content suggest a more ready convergence of “fat” and “thin” ways of seeing and of reading, however, than is generally possible for those whose body image dysphoria pervades each encounter with her reflection. My use of this metaphor might not hold up if considered in that manner, but instead, I imagine the ways in which both texts discussed in this chapter, and the multiple ways in which they can be read and responded to because of the interactivity of bodies and of body images, suggest the many and varied ways women see both themselves and others, and the ways we both concede to and resist cultural attitudes that shape our experiences as creatures who necessarily are mind and are body, and who should be encouraged to unify in ways similar to those reflected in the integration of the narratives of these novels. Though neither Carter nor Dunmore is able to reconcile mind with body in any one female protagonist, both emphasize the interconnectedness of the two
components, and explore through formal, narrative expressions of auto-objectification a
suggestion of such wholeness, and its possibility for future women, for future readers.

Notes to Chapter Five

1 Following Henry Head, Schilder also uses the term "postural model" when discussing the
"body-image." Both terms indicate one's psychic understanding of his or her own physical body,
as well as understandings of the bodies of others. I will use the unhyphenated, more
contemporary term "body image" rather than Schilder's, but will also discuss "body/image" as
my own way to speak of the dual role of the mind and body with regard to such a intellectual
projection of the physical body.

2 The original (Phénoménologie de la Perception; Gallimard, 1945) reads: "désormais, commes
les parties de mon corps forment ensemble un système, le corps d'autrui et le mein sont un seul
tout, l'envers et l'endroit d'un seul phénomène, et l'existence anomyne dont mon corps et à
chaque moment la trace habit désormais ces deux corps à la fois" (40, emphasis added). I have
changed the word "compromise," which appears in the Routledge Smith translation, to
"comprise" in this sentence, and believe there to be an error in either printing or translation.

3 A related study investigates links between “awareness of body topology and auditory
comprehension of body part names” and discusses patients’ difficulty in naming body parts on
charts when given a linguistic referent. See Maria-Jesus Benedet and Harold Goodglass, “Body
Image and Comprehension of Body Part Names,” Journal of Psycholinguistic Research
18.5: 485-96.

4 Such a phenomenon can be related to Kate’s narrative embodiment in Edna O’Brien’s trilogy
(see Chapter Four). In that instance, though Kate may or may not actually have grown larger or
smaller, she imagines, and thus projects, her own narratively embodied state.

5 Between the original drafting of this chapter and the final editing, Ryan released a full-length
study of the relationship between interactivity and narrative. Later in this chapter, I use that
work to refer to theories she began in the original article, from which I quote here in the chapter
and elsewhere.

6 Texts already examined by Pym and by O’Brien provide examples of ways in which such
simplistic characterizations and subsequent readings of characters can be complicated when used
self-consciously.

7 Nina is perhaps a precursor to Nigella Lawson, self-proclaimed “domestic goddess,” whom I
will discuss briefly in the epilogue to this study.

8 The addition of Edward to the group collected at Isabel’s creates a cast of characters much like
those assembled in Woolf’s Between the Acts. In a related conference paper, “Consumption
Asunder: Woolf, Dunmore, and the Mind/Body Split” (delivered at the Eleventh Annual
Virginia Woolf Conference, University of Wales at Bangor, June, 2001), I explore the possibility
of Dunmore’s novel as a revision of Woolf’s. Dunmore has acknowledged (in an e-mail to the author) that Isabel’s Sussex garden is modeled after that at Charleston Farmhouse, which was the home of Vanessa Bell, Woolf’s sister. Dunmore has also explained that the relationship between Virginia and Vanessa, in part, forms the basis for that of Isabel and Nina.

9 In an interesting aside, Melanie likens Victoria to Bertha Mason of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, and imagines her “like Mrs. Rochester, a dreadful secret in the back bedroom” (7). While this reference supports Melanie's self-identification with Jane Eyre, and also works to create the Gothic context for Melanie's narrative, the allusion suggests something sinister and perhaps sexual *in potentia* about Victoria's consuming practices. Bertha Mason is "intemperate and unchaste" (302), both of which "prematurely developed the germs of insanity" (302). The wild nature of Rochester's wife, when invoked in relationship to Victoria, adds a depth to the passion of her consumption that creates an idea of sexuality where there would otherwise be none. Though, at five, she lacks the biological and psychological wherewithal to be a sexual creature in the manner of the other female consumers examined within this project, Victoria, it is implied, certainly will grow to fill a role similar to those of Mrs. Manresa et al.

10 Sceats notes, “What it means to feel at home in a culinary tradition—where the practices are understood and some of the meanings attached to foods are familiar—is important to many women writers. Angela Carter often deliberately locates her fictional characters in relation to archetypal English food” (127). In this way, Margaret’s ostensibly submission to patriarchy and to Phillip is underscored by her subscription to traditional foodways. By contrast, Nina’s foodism in Dunmore’s novel (as well as Prudence Bates’s in Pym’s) emphasizes her transgression through illustrating her lack of adherence to culinary—and thus to cultural and social—norms.

11 Brian Harrison notes that “King George V thought anyone who refused roast beef on a Sunday could not be an Englishman” (139). The Sunday joint of beef is indeed metonymically associated with English cuisine.

12 I owe a debt of thanks to Michelle Massé for her suggestion that I consider using such a metaphor in my investigation of differing narrative trajectories.

13 In *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*, Brooks discusses such phenomena extensively, locating in the genre of the novel (and elsewhere) a desire to unlock the privacy granted the body through social and cultural ethos. While I find much in Brooks’s work for further inquiry, my current argument significantly diverges from his.

14 There is indication earlier in the novel that Finn and Melanie will not find their end in a fruitful, life-sustaining relationship. When he kisses her first in the “‘graveyard of a pleasure ground’” (101), their relationship begins on a bleak impulse. This “graveyard” is the park at Crystal Palace, the location to which Prince Albert’s Great Exhibition of 1852 was moved after its first run in the center of London. The monument to Victorian innovation later burned to the ground, leaving little but the stone statues that stand alongside Carter’s would-be lovers. A significant starting point for British domestic and cultural order, as well as for the machinery that drives cultural modernization, this site—now the end of the line for several south London bus
routes—ironically serves as a strong allusion to the doomed, anti-modern world left to this young couple.
Perhaps to read experiences of embodiment beyond the mind/body duality embedded in Western culture is also to imagine, to change our own bodily epistemologies. Encounters—in the text, in the world—with new combinations of the physical and the psychical can perhaps allow contemporary women to integrate the sorts of embodiment denied to them through numerous aspects of culture and by many social prescriptions. Where, then, can we look for such creatures, for female characterizations that repair the division that has become seemingly irreconcilable? In 1886, Anna Kingsford suggested that the stress of city life, of “modern” life, was a cause for physical malaise: “it is extremely difficult, in the era and centre of perpetual motion and constant excitement,” she so wisely explains in *Health, Beauty and the Toilet*:

[. . .] in the country, hours are more regular, letters, telegrams, and similar worries less frequent, sleep more undisturbed and prolonged, and the general current of existence smoother and more peaceful in its flow than is possible elsewhere. [. . .] an animal of fidgety temper never fattens well, nor do nervous and anxious persons ever ‘put on flesh’ to the same extent as those of an even and placid disposition. (9)

Though Kingsford here prescribes a placid country life for those who wish to gain weight, her words work well within a metaphoric conception of modernity, and of the increasing privileging under a modern aegis of an intellectualized self at the expense of a figurative embodiment that has all but evaporated. Of course, each epoch will have its detractors, and perhaps Kingsford’s glance behind her toward a “simpler” time is the same glance cast currently toward the 1950s by conservatives who long for an earlier “morality,” or toward the 1960s by political activists who long for a time during which ideology was not as dirty a word as it seems to have become. Regardless of Kingsford’s place in a long line of nostalgic detractors who refuse to see the future in all its potential, I believe she was on to something, and that she only presented an idea,
already established by the late nineteenth century, that has since followed generations of women for over one hundred years. Modernity has brought with it many beneficial advances and advantages, but at the heart of its mechanisms lies a fundamental problem for the human subject, and particularly for the female subject. And, over time, that problem which has driven subjects to participate in their own self-effacement has only grown as the pace of progress has quickened, carrying the necessity of embodiment along in its swift-running currents.

For Virginia Woolf, the historical Ellen Terry provided a model for a woman who could somehow reconcile her contradictory natures. Rather than look forward, as she does in “The Leaning Tower,” in her essay “Ellen Terry” (written in January 1941), Woolf glances backward, away from the modern moment and its attendant “chuffing” toward an unstable future. For Woolf, Terry was a “mutable woman, all instinct, sympathy, and sensation” (71), a changeling who emerged equally as “mother, wife, cook, critic, actress” (71), and who defied the laws of a culture that perhaps would rather have affixed to her only one or another of those labels. Woolf’s fascination with Terry, as well as her growing comprehension of the actress as a full complement of mental and physical, of public and private, spheres, is evident in typescripts of the piece, worked out during the last months of her life. Woolf was moved by the discrepancy between the actress who was physically trained for her craft as a child—“her ears were boxed, her muscles suppled” (68)—but who, once upon the stage, became bodiless: “Her body lost its weight” (67). In a fragment of writing deleted from the finished essay, Woolf explains of Terry that her “expression [. . .] was spoilt by a look of extreme vivacity. For the beauty of a woman’s countena[nce] consists, it has been said, in a still repose, as of a sheet” (MHP/B4 16).¹ Unlike a smooth, inanimate length of linen, and unlike women such as Woolf’s own mother, whose portraits stare without emotion from within their frames, Terry, for Woolf, exuded life through
her physical being, as well as through the inner Ellen projected through craft that each night was “rubbed out,” leaving “only a wavering, insubstantial phantom” (67). “But,” Woolf points out, “she is quick to tell Mr. Shaw that she does not work with her brain only” (71). In the figure of Ellen Terry, Woolf finds together those components she had divided in *Between the Acts* among two women, but she still muses over how Terry had managed to encompass both sides of the binary: “Was she a great actress, or was [. . .] the gift of acting merely one of her gifts?—& was she at heart, a mother [. . .]” (MHP/B5a 3).2 The ampersand with which Woolf joins these two sides of Terry is both semantic conjunction and figurative slippage; Woolf, who perhaps might have written “but” rather than join these two Ellens, does in her typescript what she remains skeptical of in the questioning polished prose of the final draft.

The Terry to whom Woolf is drawn is at once complicated and simple. Terry’s autobiography, *A Story of My Life* (first published in 1908), provided the basis for Woolf’s contemplation of a woman whom she had all but spoofed a few years earlier in *Freshwater*. Woolf is drawn to the type of domesticity, detailed by Terry, that is reminiscent of that which she knew in her youth. In a deletion, Woolf notes, “She read Mrs. Beeton, not Shakes[pea]re” (MHP/B5a 35), and the analogous passage in Terry’s life writing confirms this: “I studied cookery-books instead of parts. Mrs. Beeton instead of Shakespeare” (Terry 67). Terry’s few years in the country, away from the London footlights, amaze Woolf, who later expanded the passage from the previous mere echo: “[. . .] in the heart of domesticity. She is up at six. She scrubs, she cooks, she sews. She teaches the children. She harnesses the pony. She fetches the milk. And again she is perfectly happy” (69). And Terry’s domesticity, though constructed by a woman who for much of her life had little appreciation for convention,3 conformed to social standards to such a degree that “when a doll dressed in a violent pink was given to Edy [Craig,
her daughter], she said it was ‘vulgar’!” (Terry 67). Woolf initially saw these two Ellens—she who commanded the stage as Desdemona and she who maintained a country cottage—as “incompatible” (MHP/B5a 44). By the time she had completed the essay, however, Woolf changed the adjective to “contradictory” (69), and had begun to imagine how to “put the scattered sketches together” in order to form a complete picture of the famous actress who was also a mother, the sexualized female for whom “the main-spring of her art is imagination” (71).

Woolf ends her essay with an assertion that Terry was one of a kind, a new type of woman: “now and again Nature creates a new part, an original part. The actors who act that part always defy our attempts to name them” (72). In the past, and not in the mechanized future, Woolf found an ideal of the embodied mind in Ellen Terry. “So though she read the book,” Woolf wrote, “she read it with her body; she read with the whole of her” (MHP/B5a 60).

Though Woolf found such combinations possible, as the twentieth century wore on and drew to the millennial close that brought with it new technologies and new ways of communication, women writers who attempted to craft contemporary archetypes of their own that would blend the two sides of mind/body duality have not always found models for such a being. The authors whose fiction I have already discussed in earlier chapters have been able to confront such a duality, and to suggest the importance of bringing together the material and the intangible worlds, but are ultimately unable to do so themselves. Some recent examples of female fictional characters whose intellects and embodiments are equally prominent features of their constructions do exist, but they are most often uneasy creatures who appear as quirky exceptions to the rule.

Helen Fielding’s popular *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (1996) provides a good example of such a strange remainder in the eponymous Bridget, who, though a product of the British university
system and a working, self-sufficient woman, cannot seem to reconcile her embodiment with her female subjectivity. If not a model for the sort of perfect blend that Woolf presents in Ellen Terry, Bridget is a perfect model of the sort of auto-objectification faced by women in a culture that demands perfection from their careers and their figures. Her diary entries recount each day’s caloric intake, the number of alcoholic beverages consumed and cigarettes smoked, and any number of other everyday details. Though Bridget is concerned with her body weight in a manner not unlike that prescribed in any number of maintenance manuals written throughout the twentieth century, what is most striking about her proportions is that they fall right in the center of those weights prescribed for the ideal woman. Her weight at the beginning of the novel and at the end is but one pound different, and at 9 st. 2 lb. (128 pounds), she “embodies” the ideal she is so certain eludes her. On Christmas Day, she writes, “9 st 5 (oh God, have turned into Santa Claus, Christmas pudding or similar)” (300). Unless she is of a height that is not average (and if she were, then she would likely bemoan that fact), then Bridget Jones exemplifies the body type sought after by so many women. The ironic humor of the novel is captured in Bridget’s holiday statement: Fielding parodies the constant conflict between appearance and reality that typically result from cultural standardizations. A book read by Bridget tells her that when times get tough, “[w]hat you have to do is be a heroine and stay brave, without sinking into drink or self-pity and everything will be OK” (195). Such agency-producing wisdom for the modern female subject, however, is in direct conflict with that wisdom which drives Bridget to diet her way to 8 st. 7 lb. (119 pounds). When her friends tell her that at that weight she looks “‘tired and flat,’” Bridget thinks, “Eighteen years of struggle, sacrifice, and endeavor—for what?” (107). The struggle for personal achievement or fulfillment accorded her in one text is negated by the numerous other cultural messages she receives. “‘You career girls! I don’t know!’” her mother’s chum chides
her. “Can’t put it off forever, you know. Tick-tock-tick-tock” (11). Her choices to pursue an intellectual or mental self are disdained as inconsistent with a “natural,” biological destiny. Though Bridget can be seen as simply one example of what it can mean to be a late-twentieth-century woman, she has, however, often been viewed with a shake of the critical head when not with scorn. Her neurotic obsession with men and with her physical appearance, when combined with her real ability to be economically and socially independent, may not strike chords of truth for Bridget’s readers unless they are, like she is, thirty-something Singletons at the mercy of late millennial women’s culture. She seems, to some, unlikely, unrealistic. But Bridget Jones is, perhaps, one of the best examples of an embodied mind that can be produced during an age in which social and cultural mandates still hand down ambivalent messages to women.

Like Bridget Jones, the title character of Rachel Cusk’s novel, Saving Agnes (1993), is “riddled with terminal caprice” (2). Her whimsy, however, takes on more serious proportions than those with which Bridget is afflicted. Agnes Day, Cusk explains, “painted her face and starved herself; she shaved her legs and plucked her eyebrows and scrubbed the gravelly flesh on her thighs with a mitt of similar texture” (17) in the name of standardized beauty. As a child, she tried to change her name to Grace in the hopes of becoming an “honoured guest in [the] house, a favoured foster-child who emanated sunshine and laughter wherever she went” (15). Try as Agnes might to project herself as the ideal of a “thrusting young professional running on a tight schedule,” she nevertheless declares herself a “failure extraordinaire” (12). Throughout the novel, Agnes runs ragged while attempting to construct herself in an image she does not quite fit. Without a man in her life, she is “a house without an occupant, a church with no religion” (21), and when she falls for her college beau, who is “indubitably diminutive” (22), she finds that she has physically shrunk in order to become his ideal. “Through sheer love, it seemed, he had made
her his perfect match. It did not occur to her to wonder why,” Cusk’s narrator wryly notes, “he
had not succeeded instead in making himself smaller” (23). Like the “New Zealand passport and
inherited income” Agnes tries to conceal in order to fit in with her roommates (44), whom she
met while at Oxford (no dummy, Agnes), her “real” self is consistently an entity she finds
horribly sub-standard. Eventually, Agnes cannot maintain her auto-objectifying behavior, but
rather than work toward integration, she first succumbs to a numbness that is near a nervous
breakdown, during which she stops caring about her appearance, gains weight, and finds that
men look at her as either “an object of admiration or studied avoidance” (170). The either/or
construction of Agnes’s life eventually gives way to a sort of reconciliation, and the novel ends
upon a quiet note of hope for her recovery and ability to navigate the next phase of her life.
Rather than take on the modern world, though, Agnes finds peace in a way that anachronistically
harkens back to Woolf’s portrait of Ellen Terry: “There was no hurry, after all. For ordinary
people such as herself, there was nothing to hasten towards, no defining moment” (217). In
Cusk’s novel, modernity appears as bleak as it does in Woolf’s Between the Acts, and just as
potentially damaging to female subjectivity.

One real-life example of a woman who attempts, through the medium of food, to reunite
mind and body is Britain’s Nigella Lawson, whose Channel Four series, Nigella Bites, has only
just made it to American airwaves. Her two cookbooks, How to Eat and How to be a Domestic
Goddess, have turned her into a sensation not only because of her cooking techniques, but also
because of the sensual pleasure she takes in cooking and in eating (her television series has been
hailed as “gastroporn”). She has been called the United Kingdom’s most beautiful woman, and
her high profile as the daughter of Margaret Thatcher’s Chancellor of the Exchequer has allowed
her to cross those lines that prevail between luminaries of one class and another. She writes, “in
cooking, as in eating, you just have to let your real likes and desires guide you” (6), and her sensual persona is parallel with this attitude. I have yet to delve far into Lawson’s cookery, but I find her mixture of blatant embodiment with a dash of Mrs. Beeton considerable fodder for further investigation. The “basic” cuisine she promotes, and her domestic-goddess agenda are simultaneously incongruous and appealing: why not be both an advocate for simplicity and a gourmet who advises that a cook should simply “relax and do what tastes best to you” (86)? What ties Lawson interestingly to the other authors whom I have discussed, though, is her will away from the bustle of modern life. Perhaps in order to become a domestic goddess, or any version of a redesigned female subject that includes mental and physical components of being, the constructions of modernity must be themselves reconsidered. Lawson explains:

That’s why I love this sort of cooking; the rhythms are so reassuring. I no longer feel I’m snatching at food, at life. It’s not exactly that I’m constructing a domestic idyll, but as I work in the kitchen at night, or on the weekend, filling the house with the smells of baking and roasting and filling the fridge with good things to eat, it feels, corny as it sounds, as if I’m making a home. (77)

Her domestic patter and promotion of eating well combine through out How to Eat in a way that recalls those cookery books of earlier times, but are quite different in that Lawson blurs traditional domestic activities with an attitude that defies some strongholds of femininity. Women such as Lawson may pave the way for hybrid constructions of the feminine that include the body, that make a bit more acceptable female consumption and excessive revelry in the senses, and that clearly indicate the need for a voice of one’s own that is grounded in everyday life. Though Lawson is still a bit of an oddity, as are other women who practice lifestyles that attempt to unify what has been divided, as more examples of such variants on the age-old theme of duality are presented to readers and to viewers, then perhaps slowly, definitions of female subjectivity will move beyond the confines of modernity, and will resist its rigid restrictions.
Notes to Epilogue

1 Early twentieth-century beauty writer Helena Gent, too, sees Terry as an ideal woman, and calls her “remarkably attractive and magnetic” (31).

2 In the final version, Woolf simplifies this query to imagine “the two Ellen Terrys—Ellen the mother, and Ellen the actress” (70).

3 Terry lived for six years with Edward Godwin, with whom she had two children out of wedlock. Terry never publicly denied her children’s illegitimacy, though she did concoct for them the *faux* surname of “Craig.”

4 Ironically, when the recent film version of the novel was released, critics harped not on the film or on the acting that earned several award nominations. What was most important, it seems, was the fact that the film’s star, Renee Zellweger, gained twenty pounds to play the “chubby” English woman.
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