"Wholesome Nutriment" for the Rising Generation: Food, Nationalism, and Didactic Fiction at the End of the Eighteenth Century

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THE ROLE of food in culture has become a fertile scholarly field during the past two decades. Building on the earlier structuralist works of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, and Roland Barthes, recent critics suggest that food, its production, and its consumption form a set of practices that can be read as signifying systems with meanings that are determined primarily by the cultural context in which they are practised. As the anthropologist Carole M. Counihan points out, "in every culture, foodways constitute an organized system, a language that—through its structure and components—conveys meaning and contributes to the organization of the natural and social world."[1] This system works to produce and solidify group identity, and to mark the boundaries between social groups. In general, "people who eat strikingly different foods or similar foods in different ways are thought to be strikingly different, sometimes even less human."[2] This essay takes up and literalizes Counihan's notion of food as "language," by examining the uses of food as image and metaphor in writing of the late eighteenth century.

Writers at the end of the eighteenth century in Britain used food figuratively as a way of negotiating a number of cultural

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[1] Carole M. Counihan, *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 19.

[2] Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985), 3.

and social issues, including gender, class, race, revolution, and nationalism. Significantly for my exploration here, writers also commonly used metaphors of food to figure the process of producing literature and, more importantly, the consumption of literature, especially by what was referred to as the "rising generation" (what we call "young adults" or "youth").[3] Here, I will focus on three of these areas. First, I will lay the groundwork for my argument by demonstrating that popular ideas about food can be identified across a range of texts and genres—including cookbooks, philosophy, and child-rearing manuals—and that these ideas constitute what Michel Foucault would call a "discursive formation," or a set of ideas and practices that develops around a particular topic. Second, I will examine the ways in which literary consumption by young people is figured in terms of the consumption of food. Third, I will show how discourses around food construct and reinforce a form of patriotic nationalism in young readers of the late eighteenth century. The conceptual use of food that I examine here fulfilled a political function by defining the boundaries between nations through the identification of foreignness with exotic, unusual, or spicy cuisine. While writers throughout the eighteenth century used food as a way of constructing a notion of Britishness, the growth of bourgeois values, the increase in colonial trade, the development of Romantic ideas of nation, and the threat represented by the French Revolution combined at the end of the century to make such references standard, and symbolically overdetermined, in the didactic literature of the period. In my analysis, I draw on a range of late eighteenth-century didactic texts for young adults in order to show that the writers of these texts used food as a way to organize their understanding of both nation and literary consumption and to ensure the transmission of traditional values to the next generation of readers.[4]

In identifying the audience for "young adult" fiction of the Romantic period, I follow Sylvia Kasey Marks, who bases her

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[3] For a discussion of how food is used figuratively to represent contemporary concerns around the novel genre, see Lisa Wood, *Modes of Discipline: Women, Conservatism, and the Novel after the French Revolution* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003), chap. 1.

[4] Eighteenth-century texts here include those published during the "long" eighteenth century, which for my purposes concludes in 1820.

categorization of readers on Sarah Trimmer's definition in *Guardian of Education*, the periodical Trimmer edited from June 1802 until September 1806, which "distinguishes between books for children, that is, those up to the age of fourteen, and those books that would be appropriate for young people, that is those up to the age of twenty-one."[5] Didactic fiction of the period represented the teenage years as a particularly vulnerable period for young people, who had moved beyond the protected space of childhood and had to make choices that could impact the rest of their adult lives. The fiction represented youth as a period in which young people's agency had to be carefully balanced by parental protection and guidance, which countered the impressionability that many people believed youths shared with children. Philippe Ariès, among other historians, argues that the eighteenth century was a period in which concepts of the child and the family changed, and that an affectionate, child-oriented model became dominant among the middle ranks.[6] This model, which incorporated the central imperative of protecting children from "dangerous" influences, encouraged the extension of this time of dependency into the young adult years. Didactic fiction focused on and was produced primarily for middle-class readers, who would have been likely to experience the luxury of an extended childhood.

Discursive Contexts

Both John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau were central figures in a proliferating body of literature related to childhood and education in the late seventeenth and well into the eighteenth century. During the middle years of the eighteenth century, conduct manuals, originally aimed primarily at the ruling classes, targeted the "middle ranks," which were thought to be, as Mary Wollstonecraft argued, "in the most natural state."[7] In addition

[5] Sylvia Kasey Marks, *Writing for the Rising Generation: British Fiction for Young People 1672–1839* (Victoria: English Literary Studies, 2003), 24.

[6] Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Random House, 1992). For more on what Lawrence Stone terms the "child-oriented, affectionate and permissive mode" of parenting that developed during the eighteenth century, see Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin-Peregrine, 1982), 254–85.

[7] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Miriam Brody (1792; London: Penguin, 1992), 81.

to the child's mental development and conduct, this body of child-oriented literature also focused on the corporeal aspects of child-rearing. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), Locke famously argued that the goal of child-rearing should be a "sound mind in a sound body" [citing Juvenal's *Satires*: "mens sana in corpore sano," 10.356], for which Locke prescribed healthful exercise and simple food.[8] Similarly, Rousseau argued for a simple diet, beginning with maternal nursing during infancy, rather than the common practices of wet-nursing or "dry feeding."[9] He claimed that "when mothers deign to nurse their own children, then will be a reform in morals; natural feeling will revive in every heart; there will be no lack of citizens for the state; this first step itself will restore mutual affection."[10] Thus, the child's physiological consumption of nourishment became a key element in the establishment of Rousseau's ideal state, by "restoring" the benevolence and fellow feeling that existed innately in children, as well as in a hypothetical "golden age" of human society.[11] Food, then, was not merely bodily fuel, but was centrally implicated in the production and reproduction of human morals and social virtues. Colin Heywood points out that arguments in favour of maternal breastfeeding constituted "a weighty tradition in place long before Rousseau and his contemporaries in the Enlightenment made their famous pleas for 'maternal solicitude'";[12] however, the social effect of these arguments in altering maternal behaviour were much more significant in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Ruth Perry argues that the Enlightenment view of maternal breastfeeding led

[8] John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. John W. Yolton and Jean S. Yolton (1693; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), introduction, [p. 1], para. 1.

[9] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile* (1762; London: Dent, 1974), 15. For a discussion of the history and practice of wet nursing in Europe, see Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times* (Oxford: Polity, 2001), 63–69.

[10] Rousseau, *Émile*, 15.

[11] For an elaboration of this ideal phase in human history, see Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, in *The Social Contract; And, The First and Second Discourses*, ed. and intro. Susan Dunn (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 69–148. An online text is available at http://www.constitution.org/jjr/ineq. htm (accessed 7 May 2009).

[12] Heywood, 63.

to what she calls the "colonization of the breast," or the subsuming of female sexuality into a model of bourgeois motherhood, one in which biological mothers became the source of both physical and moral nourishment.[13] This conflation of biological and moral consumption provided the basis for later conceptualizations of the social and moral functions of didactic literature, much of which was produced by and addressed to mothers as the primary caregivers in the early years of children's lives.

Another important site of discussions on food and the nourishment of children in the eighteenth century can be found in contemporary books of household management. The popular *Housekeeper's Pocket-Book and Compleat Family Cook* by Sarah Harrison (in its ninth edition in 1777) provides extensive information on acquiring, preserving, and preparing common ingredients into healthful meals, in addition to details on how to properly maintain a middle-class home.[14] British cookbooks from the eighteenth century emphasize wholesome simplicity in cooking, as well as ease and frugality in preparation. Generally, "where French cookbooks tended to represent their recipes as fashionable and innovative—dishes were often labeled *à la mode*—English ones advertised their recipes as traditional."[15] Additionally, while most French cookbooks were written by male chefs to the aristocracy, English ones were primarily written by women such as Harrison, Eliza Smith, and Hanna Glasse (whose best-selling *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy* [1747] incorporates even in its title the notion of English simplicity), disentangling the practice of cooking from the aristocracy and repositioning it within the feminized sphere of middle-class domesticity. Stephen Mennell notes that "whenever a technically more elaborate, socially more prestigious cuisine has begun to develop, it has necessarily involved differentiation both technical and social from the everyday cookery of the majority of the people. Since the latter is generally associated

13 Ruth Perry, "Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2 (October 1991): 204–34.

14 Sarah Harrison, *The Housekeeper's Pocket-Book and Compleat Family Cook: Containing Above 1200 Curious and Uncommon Receipts in Cookery, Pastry, Etc. With Every One Their Own Physician, by Mary Morris*, 6th ed. (London: R. Ware, 1757).

15 Ben Rogers, *Beef and Liberty* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2003), 38.

with women cooks, it is highly likely that any process of social differentiation will involve distancing from the food of the lower orders and from the women who cook it."[16] The prevalence and popularity of English cookery books by women therefore reflects the growing dominance of bourgeois values in eighteenth-century Britain, and differentiates British values from those of the luxurious *ancien régime* of French aristocrats and the revolutionary innovation that followed it.

Significantly, Harrison's *Housekeeper's Pocket-Book* was bound together with Mary Morris's *Every One Their Own Physician*, which incorporates recipes for "cheap, easy, and safe Remedies" such as "The Negro Caesar's Cure for Poison" and "The Duke of Portland's Receipt for the Gout and Rheumatism." The material practices of cooking and curing (in the medical sense) link together in this context through the multivalent word "receipt," which describes the instructions for making both food and medicine. In this context, cooking and medicine come together as two aspects of a similar domestic process: each is associated with the maintenance of a healthy family and a well-ordered home. There is a long history in Europe of what Sidney W. Mintz calls "drug foods," or foods that can be simultaneously classified as food and as medicine, the consumption of which rose "sharply among European populations from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, including tea, coffee, chocolate, tobacco, rum, and sugar," as well as spices.[17] Beginning in the thirteenth century, sugar, for example, became so central to medicine that "the expression 'like an apothecary without sugar' came to mean a state of utter desperation or helplessness."[18] Most of these "drug foods" were imported from tropical colonies or the Middle East, and late eighteenth-century concepts of food and medicine were therefore necessarily tied to imperialism and foreign trade.

The understanding of food as having medicinal attributes allowed for public discussions of the beneficial effects of food, and also the converse: its potential to damage in the form of poison. George Cheyne, a doctor and an influential writer on diet

16 Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 201.

17 Mintz, 99–100.

18 Mintz, 101.

who was active during the mid-eighteenth century (and was also Samuel Richardson's physician), explicitly ties food choices to health: "Since French Cookery has been in such Repute in England, and has been improv'd from Spain, Italy, Turkey, and every other Country that has any thing remarkably delicious, high, or savoury in Food; Since *Eastern* Pickles and Sauces have been brought to embellish our continual Feasts" … "all the Poison, Malignity, and destructive Part of high rank Foods" have become a form not of nourishment but contamination.[19] Cheyne distinguishes between two functions of food—nourishment and poison—and positions them within a nationalist agenda that equates foreignness with poison. Earlier in the century, Joseph Addison half-seriously drew a causal relationship between diet and moral decline when he wrote in the *Tatler*: "I may perhaps be thought extravagant in my Notion; but I must confess, I am apt to impute Dishonours that sometimes happen in great Families to the inflaming kind of Diet which is so much in Fashion," of which a "*French* Ragoust" was the prime "pernicious" example.[20] Didactic writers of the Romantic period extended this idea of food as morally and physically hazardous to the consumption of literature.

Food and Didactic Literature

Late eighteenth-century didactic writers using the metaphor of literature as food, then, drew on a well-established intellectual discourse that incorporated concepts from medicine, domestic management, pedagogy, and morality, and correlated ideas of food, medicine, poison, and nationalism. In her preface to *Discipline*, for example, Mary Brunton writes: "The appetite for fiction is indeed universal, and has unfortunately been made the occasion of conveying poison of every description into the youthful mind."[21] She positions her critique within a discourse that links both physical and moral health to what is consumed. By this logic, good food—or moral literature—becomes the antidote to the "poisonous" effects of immoral fiction, thereby

[19] George Cheyne, *The English Malady* (1733), 51, 185, cited in Rogers, 64.

[20] Joseph Addison, *The Tatler*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 4 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol. 2, letter 148, 21 March 1710.

[21] Mary Brunton, *Discipline* (1815; London: Bentley, 1849), 59.

coupling food and medicine (as cookbooks and medical literature did). This conjoining of culinary metaphors and literature had the important effect of positioning the "battle" against immorality and corruption, especially from revolutionary theories, within the domestic sphere; as Jane West puts it in *The Loyalists*: the "domestic hearth" must act as a protection against "the wildest theories of democracy."[22] In her conduct manuals, *Letters to a Young Lady* (1806) and *Letters Addressed to a Young Man* (1801), West emphasizes the necessity for a mother's active role in the education of her children; she locates the success of the "rising generation," and thus the imagined future of Britain itself, in the maternal "nourishment" of developing minds. As in Rousseau's model (though West herself would reject this connection to the "father" of the French Revolution), the mother's care for her child is imagined both in terms of the physical nourishment of its body and the metaphoric nourishment of its mind and morals. The culinary metaphors underscore the redefined and key role that West and other didactic writers of the period attribute to mothers, in ensuring the morality of the next generation and consequently (according to their arguments) the preservation of the stability of British society.

In didactic novels, the objects of this maternal influence are both young men and women, in spite of the general tendency in moral fiction to focus on girls. In her novel *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, Hannah More argues about popular literature: "Let us then endeavour to allure our youth of fashion from the low pleasures of the dissolute; to snatch them not only from the destruction of the gaming-table, but from the excesses of the dining-table, by inviting them to an elegant delight that is safe, and especially by enlarging the range of pure mental pleasure."[23] In this passage, More incorporates vices—gambling and gluttony—that may apply equally to "youth of fashion" of both sexes, or perhaps even more appropriately to young men. The equation of dining with gaming represents the dangers to be found even within the domestic space of the dining room and underscores the neces-

22 Jane West, *The Loyalists: An Historical Novel*, 3 vols. (London: Longman and Rees, 1812), 1:8. References are to this edition.

23 Hannah More, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife: Comprehending Observations on Domestic Habits and Manners, Religion and Morals*, 7th ed., 2 vols. (1st ed., 1809; London: Cadell and Davies, 1809), 2:33. References are to this edition.

sity of regulating consumption. With a similar strategy, Brunton uses a food metaphor in *Self-Control* to demonstrate the dangers of imprudent literary consumption for a young man whose romantic passion is exacerbated by inappropriate reading: "his mother ... took care that his new appetite [for reading] should not ... pine for want of gratification. To direct it to food wholesome and invigorating, would have required unremitting, though gentle labour; and to labour of all kinds Mrs Hargrave had a practical antipathy. But it was very easy to supply the young man with romances, poetry, and plays; and it was pleasing to mistake their intoxicating effects for bursts of mental vigour."[24] Maternal negligence is clearly identified as the cause of her child's inappropriate consumption of literature, and his subsequent rakish behaviour and ultimate suicide are directly attributed to this early miseducation in consumption.

An idiosyncratic use of figure in Brunton's description provides a link to the patriotic nationalism evident in didactic fiction of this period. In this passage, intoxication, which is the result of negatively portrayed consumption, is opposed to invigoration, which is the positive effect of consuming "wholesome" literature. Brunton's unusual attribution of intoxication to the consumption of food significantly connects to British anxieties around nation and nationalism during this post-Revolutionary period. In the late eighteenth century, intoxication as an effect of consumption was not regularly associated with food; rather, it was most often described as an effect of alcohol, a substance consumed in excess only by dissipated characters in didactic novels. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, however, points out that during this period the effects of intoxication or unnatural "elevation" were attributed to various substances other than alcohol, including coffee, tea, tobacco, opium, sugar, and spices.[25] Unlike alcoholic beverages, these products, like Mintz's "drug foods," were all imported through colonial trade. As such, they were the locus of economic concerns around the effects of colonial imports on domestic production. Charlotte Sussman argues that in Tobias Smollett's *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771),

24 Brunton, *Self-Control* (London: Bentley, 1849), 45. References are to this edition.

25 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants*, trans. David Jacobson (New York: Pantheon, 1992).

the representation of food embeds "anxiety over the dissolution of English self-sufficiency," and, therefore, that "inter-cultural exchange" is figured as "a kind of poisoning, newly possible at the domestic table."[26] Sussman uses the concept of "transculturation" to explain the anxieties represented through food in *Humphry Clinker*. Transculturation implies the incorporation of a foreign culture into the domestic and the consequent transformation of domestic culture. In *Humphry Clinker*, then, the "penetration of individual digestive tracts replicates the penetration of English culture by its supposedly subjugated colonies."[27] Transculturation provides a useful lens through which to examine British attitudes towards French cuisine in the eighteenth century. In the discourse of the period, the ingestion of foreign—and particularly French—foodstuffs served to "poison" the British constitution, both individually and collectively. In opposition to the syncretic cultures made possible through intercultural exchange, didactic writers idealized a form of national purity and autonomy through their representation of food.[28]

As Benedict Anderson points out, a nation represents an "imagined political community" that defines itself in opposition to other nations, and the maintenance of the ideological limits of national boundaries against other sovereign and colonized nations is essential to the coherence of its identity.[29] The French Revolution stimulated increased anxiety in Britain, particularly among conservatives, that imports—of both goods and ideas— could weaken British economic self-sufficiency and the stability of the social structure. Thus, the figures of poison and food that represented the dangers of literary consumption could apply equally, as in *Humphry Clinker*, to fears around economic and ideological contamination through the literal consumption of foreign imported goods. In 1806, James Gillray issued a print representing these fears through the use of a metaphor of

26 Charlotte Sussman, "Lismahago's Captivity: Transculturation in *Humphry Clinker*," *ELH* 61, no. 3 (1994): 597–98.

27 Sussman, 597–98.

28 On a simple economic level, "[a] pound spent on a French chef or French wine was a pound denied to English cooks and native produce" (Rogers, 57–58).

29 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 6.

Figure 1. *Tiddy-Doll, the Great French-Gingerbread-Baker, Drawing out a New Batch of Kings* (1806), by James Gillray (1757–1815). Reproduced courtesy of The New York Public Library.

cookery. *Tiddy-Doll, the Great French-Gingerbread-Baker, Drawing out a New Batch of Kings* depicts Napoleon and Talleyrand as gingerbread bakers producing political figures for their empire, using cannonballs for fuel (see Figure 1). In the left foreground of the print stands a basket labelled "True Corsican Kinglings for Home Consumption and Exportation" (in 1804 Napoleon crowned himself Emperor, and during 1806 he appointed his brothers Joseph and Louis as the kings of Naples and the Netherlands, respectively). Gingerbread's association with fairs and festivities ties this print to European popular culture, and particularly to children, who were increasingly associated with the whimsically shaped cookies. Additionally, while gingerbread had a long history in Europe (dating back at least to the fifteenth century), ginger itself remained an exotic import, identified with foreign trade and British concerns around economic destabilization. The print exemplifies the conflation of politics, consumption, and cookery in literature of this period, and shares its conservative didactic message of resistance to French political power and revolutionary theory.

Writers such as West, Brunton, and More presented an antidote to foreign "poison" (both culinary and philosophical) in the form of "plain old English food," and didactic writers of this period habitually described their work in these terms. At the beginning of West's *The Infidel Father* (1802), for example, the narrator explains that her book, in contrast to "high-seasoned French and German cookery," is "a little old English fare, dressed in a plain style, and, if not more *piquant*, at least more *wholesome*, than those outlandish farragoes."[30] The nationalism underlying this culinary figure repeats in the introduction to *The Loyalists*, in which the book is labelled as "plain old English food" (1:2). West also describes the act of writing in terms of food in a letter to Bishop Percy in 1810: "It is often a relief, when writing a long work, to take off the mind to another; and a line of poetry and prose intermingled will make a sort of layer pudding, which I think excellent food."[31] By conceptualizing continental literature in terms of excessive "seasoning," West

30 West, *The Infidel Father*, 3 vols. (London: Longman and Rees, 1802), 1:6.

31 West to Bishop Percy, 18 November 1810, in John Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth-Century*, 8 vols. (London: J. B. Nichols and Sons, 1817–58), 8:425.

builds on contemporary cultural anxieties, addressing both eco-
nomic and ideological concerns with a single figure. When she
constructs an opposition between her novels and "high-seasoned
French and German cookery," she establishes a model of "whole-
some" literary consumption that implies the concept of a coher-
ent national identity.

In general, "moral" books (such as didactic novels) are, ac-
cording to West, a "wholesome nutriment" to satisfy the "crav-
ings" of young middle-class readers.[32] In these moral texts for
youth, exemplary characters are associated with the consump-
tion of simple, unadorned food, and this practice becomes an
indicator of their virtue. At the home of Brunton's ideal hero in
Self-Control, "punctual to a moment the dinner appeared, plain,
neat, and substantial. It was served without tumult, partaken
of with appetite, and enlivened by general hilarity, and good
will" (275). Similarly, the mentoring Mrs Mason in Elizabeth
Hamilton's *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808) takes pleasure in
a simple Scottish meal: "The sowans [a paste made from the
husks of oats] were excellent; the milk was sweet; and the fresh-
raised potatoes, bursting from the coats in which they had been
boiled, might have feasted a queen."[33] In contrast, West's nega-
tive exemplar, Susannah Richmore, in *The Sorrows of Selfishness*
(1802), grows ill from injudicious eating: "The improper food
which she had been suffered to devour, in such an unreason-
able quantity, so much disordered her, that a very serious illness
was the consequence."[34] In valorizing simplicity over complex-
ity in food—as in West's description of French and German
dishes as "farragoes," or complicated mixtures—these writers
replicate the opposition that David Simpson notes between
British "common sense" and European "theory."[35] The opposition
is similarly politicized: English simplicity is upheld as a positive

[32] West, *Letters Addressed to a Young Man On His First Entrance Into Life, and
Adapted to the Peculiar Circumstances of the Present Times*, 2nd ed., 3 vols.
(London: Longman and Rees, 1802), 1:xxvi.

[33] Elizabeth Hamilton, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie; A Tale for the Farmer's Ingle-
Nook* (1808; Edinburgh: Stirling, Kenney, 1837), 159.

[34] West, *The Sorrows of Selfishness; Or, The History of Miss Richmore*, 4th ed.
(1802; London: J. Harris, 1812), 46.

[35] David Simpson, *Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt Against Theory*
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

value, in relation to the negative values associated with the principles and actions of French thinkers and revolutionaries.

If food in these texts marks the virtue of exemplary characters, it also functions as a vehicle for the promotion of self-discipline in youth. When Susannah Richmore devours "improper food" in *The Sorrows of Selfishness*, her mother grows ill and dies from nursing her, underscoring the narrator's contention that teaching self-discipline in childhood is the best way to avoid a descent into misery. In Maria Edgeworth's "The Orange Man," a text for younger readers, the good and bad boys are distinguished by their responses to the temptation of a basket of oranges. Though the narrative never refers to their non-domestic provenance, the oranges themselves are desirable due to their exoticness, as contemporary readers would recognize. Edgeworth draws child readers into a moral exercise through the use of a rhetorical question: "Little boys who read this story, consider which would you rather have been—*the honest boy*, or *the thief*?" This question at the end of the story has only one answer if the reader has learned the lesson provided in the narrative: the thief, who shows insufficient self-restraint, is ostracized by the townspeople, while the honest boy is rewarded with a hatful of oranges and general adulation. The correct response to the question appears earlier in the text in a direct narratorial address on the subject of temptation: "Little boys who wish to be honest beware of temptation. People are led on by little and little to do wrong. The sight of the oranges tempted Ned to touch them. The touch tempted him to smell them, and the smell tempted him to taste them."[36] This passage acknowledges—even emphasizes—the sensuality and pleasure of food as a multi-sensory experience in order to underscore the need for eternal vigilance against temptation.[37]

[36] Maria Edgeworth, "The Orange Man," in *Early Lessons* (1801) (London: Routledge, n.d.), 165, 162.

[37] Food has been central to children's literature more generally, from eighteenth-century stories like these to magically transformative food in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, to "midnight feasts" in mid-twentieth-century school stories and the recent Harry Potter series. The didactic function of food remains evident in twentieth-century children's novels, such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), in which characters like Augustus Gloop, the glutton, are negatively characterized by their greed in the face of the phenomenal temptation offered by Willy Wonka's chocolate factory. For the most part, however, modern children's literature exploits

The literary representation of temptation for young adult readers is much more complex, involving primarily resistance to sexual temptation and luxury. But the lesson remains constant: self-discipline ensures moral correctness, and individual moral correctness provides the basis for a strong social structure. West repeats the lesson of "The Orange Man" more compellingly in her *Letters to a Young Lady*: "A slight indiscretion, which scarcely alarms the most scrupulous conscience, if suffered to pass without observation, prepares the mind for a serious error; error delivers it over to crime; and crime, when often repeated, petrifies the moral feelings into insensible depravity."[38] In Brunton's *Self-Control*, the protagonist's ultimate choice of the frugal and self-disciplined suitor over the wealthy, rakish, and undisciplined aristocrat, Hargrave (who improvidently consumes "intoxicating" literature), reinforces the message of the text as a whole, that "self-control" is the key to happiness and social order. Hargrave's association with empire—his military posting is in Canada—further marks the desirability of the domestic over the exotic, as the positive male character has "no ambition," as he tells his mother, therefore "all my joys must be domestic" (264). His domesticity is represented in the "clock-work regularity" (287) of his lifestyle and the simplicity of his tastes, both literal and figurative.

Food, then, had both intra- and extra-textual significance in the didactic literature of the late eighteenth century, and provided a conceptual method for explaining the role of literature in the defence of British political and social stability in the face

what Henry Jenkins terms the "ket aesthetic" ["Alison James has explored how children's relations to cheap candies (which are called "kets" in British slang) suggest an oppositional aesthetic, one that challenges or reverses adult categories and carves out a kids-only culture"]. Jenkins argues that food—particularly candy—has become an important aspect of children's culture, and one of the ways in which children distinguish their own culture from that of adults. Thus, food in children's literature has shifted from being a method of social control through didacticism, to a symbol of children's empowerment through the establishment of a distinct culture with its own literal and metaphoric "tastes." Jenkins, "Introduction: Childhood Innocence and Other Myths," in *The Children's Culture Reader*, ed. Henry Jenkins (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 28–30.

[38] West, *Letters to a Young Lady: In Which the Duties and Character of Women are Considered Chiefly with a Reference to Prevailing Opinions*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (London: Longman, 1806), 1:263.

of revolutionary threats from the Continent. West and writers like her drew on common conceptions of food, medicine, and morality in order to emphasize the importance of literature as an "antidote" to "false principles." In addition, their reliance on these cultural and culinary stereotypes reinforced the distinction between home and away, and between familiar and exotic, helping to construct a strong British national identity. These concepts were drawn together in the representation of literary consumption as literal consumption; according to this model, by consuming the "plain fare" of didactic literature, the impressionable young reader of the eighteenth century also consumed an insular model of nation that was intended to produce loyalty and patriotism, thereby ensuring the extension of traditional British values into the future.

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