Writing the Kitchen Front:

Food Rationing and Propaganda in British Fiction of the Second World War

Ariel Buckley

Department of English

McGill University, Montreal

June 2010

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	1
Table of Contents	2
Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	4
Abbreviations Used	4
Introduction	5
Chapter 1: Reading Ministry of Food Propaganda	13
Chapter 2: Solitary Meals and Communal Feeding in Barbara Pym	44
Chapter 3: Dining and Domestic Tyranny in Elizabeth Taylor	70
Conclusion	89
Works Cited	93

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores ways in which Second World War food shortages, rationing, and propaganda affected midcentury British fiction. Arguing that food imagery offers a useful barometer of the domestic war climate, the thesis is divided into two main sections: the first focusing on the representation and regulation of food by the government, and the second analyzing the depiction of food in contemporary fiction as a response both to the government's martialization of food and to the shortages themselves. Taking novels by Barbara Pym and Elizabeth Taylor as examples, it discusses ways in which the "official food narratives" defined in the first chapter were acknowledged and transformed in contemporary fiction.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse explore les façons dont les pénuries alimentaires, le rationnement de la nourriture et la propagande gouvernementale de la deuxième guerre mondiale ont touché la littérature britannique de l'époque. Soutenant que l'imagerie des aliments offre un baromètre utile du climat domestique de la guerre, la thèse est divisée en deux sections principales : la première se concentrant sur la représentation et la règlementation de la nourriture par le gouvernement, et la deuxième analysant la représentation de la nourriture dans la fiction contemporaine comme réponse à la fois à la « martialisation » de la nourriture par le gouvernement et aux pénuries alimentaires eux-mêmes. Prenant des romans par Barbara Pym et Elizabeth Taylor à titres d'exemples, elle traite de la façon dont les récits officiels des denrées alimentaires définis dans le premier chapitre ont été reconnus et transformés dans la littérature contemporaine.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful first and foremost to Professor Nathalie Cooke, whose encouragement, support, and expertise have shaped every stage of this thesis. Many thanks to Professor Allan Hepburn for introducing me to the authors who now define my academic existence, and to Professor Ned Schantz, for helpful feedback and a passing grade. To Anneli Must, for fluency under pressure – aitäh. Thank you to the illustrious members of the Centre for Excellence, for countless screenings, discussions, and pep talks, and for always upholding the standing of rounds. Love and thanks to my family, friends, and fella for putting up with me and keeping me well fed. This thesis was written with the generous support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

AML – At Mrs Lippincote's

EW – Excellent Women

GB – A Glass of Blessings

JP – Jane and Prudence

MB – The Myth of the Blitz

MOF – Ministry of Food

PW – The People's War

VPE – A Very Private Eye

INTRODUCTION

"I tell about myself, and how I ate bread on a lasting hillside, or drank red wine in a room now blown to bits, and it happens without my willing it that I am telling too about the people with me then, and their other deeper needs for love and happiness… There is a communion of more than our bodies when bread is broken and wine drunk. And that is my answer, when people ask me: Why do you write about hunger, and not wars or love?" M.F.K. Fisher, *The Gastronomical Me*

"The destiny of nations depends on the manner in which they are fed." Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste*

By August 1939, weeks before Chamberlain's September 3rd declaration of war was broadcast to the nation over the BBC, 50 million ration books had been quietly printed and moved to warehouses across Britain to await distribution to civilians (Zweiniger 16). This seemingly surprising level of preparedness for shortages was based in part on the British government's early recognition of the inevitability of the Second World War, and in part on the hard-won experience of wartime food-supply issues gained in the First World War two decades earlier. Rationing officially took effect on January 8, 1940, with the introduction of set limits on butter, sugar, bacon, and ham; over the course of the war, the Ministry of Food expanded this list to include the majority of foods consumed nationally, introducing and enforcing a complex set of rationing systems based on points, price, or weight. For the next 15 years, food shortages and controls would remain a fundamental feature of life in Britain,[1] long outlasting the international conflict that had rendered such controls necessary.

[1] While this study focuses primarily on the effects of rationing in England and on the English writers Pym and Taylor, other United Kingdom countries and writers were also affected by food shortages and Ministry of Food policies: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland were effectively one nation under the MOF for the duration of the war, and subject to many of the same "national" attitudes and tendencies. For the sake of simplicity, however, I refer only to England and Britain—as nation, state, and imperial power—throughout this study.

The state's unprecedented level of involvement in civilian life was not limited to food control. As a "total war," the Second World War reached beyond the battlefield to play out on the home front; the government accordingly engaged through legislation and propaganda with nearly every aspect of daily existence, from conscripting housewives into factory work to setting legal limits on the number of pleats in a jacket. More dramatically, the threat of invasion and the bombardment of English cities in the London Blitz of 1940 and later V-1 and V-2 bombings underscored the fact that English civilians and their homes were in real physical danger. The proximity and pervasiveness of war shattered the boundaries between public and private, sometimes literally. While the war's more horrific aspects were felt acutely, the chronic monotonies and inconveniences of life on the home front figure prominently in the collective unconscious conveyed in the writing of the midcentury. Food rationing provides a particularly evocative symbol for the experience of total war, both because every citizen was affected and because food and foodways are so fundamental to notions of culture, class, gender, and national identity. With the establishment of the Ministry of Food in 1939, the political became intensely personal. At the same time, the personal became political, as individual food choices were understood to directly impact the collective project of war. This study seeks to demonstrate that this interplay between private and public had a profound effect on the people shopping, cooking, eating, and writing in midcentury England. It also seeks to situate the symbolic importance of food in the literature of the later modernist period in relation to larger political and social realities, using what Wesley Kort dubs "an argument by synecdoche" (6). Close readings of novels by Barbara Pym and Elizabeth Taylor therefore focus on ways in

which the new food attitudes promoted by the government filtered into the creative imaginations of British writers, while also examining the extent to which Pym and Taylor registered their responses to the martialization of food by the British government.

In addition to offering a creative response to wartime inconveniences, home front food writing[2] fits into a larger midcentury trend toward the documentation of daily life in England. In the years immediately before, during, and after the Second World War, a series of rapid political and social changes "forced the English to perform a thorough self-examination in a relatively short period of time" (Kalliney 1). Between 1930 and 1960, Peter Kalliney explains, "England would participate in a world war and the cold war, elect its first majority Labour government, establish the basic foundations of a welfare state, and concede statehood and self-determination to most of its colonial territories" (1). In response to this diminution of British imperial power, writers were forced to reconsider notions of Englishness, citizenship, and national identity, with the end result that "a discourse of intrinsic cultural particularity gradually replaced symbolic dependence on extrinsic colonial mastery" (Kalliney 2). Jed Esty dubs this increasing interest in the particularities of daily life "the anthropological turn" in midcentury writing: that is, the "discursive process by which English intellectuals translated the end of empire into a resurgent concept of national culture" (2). He further asserts that insularity and

[2] "Food writing" refers here to any fiction or nonfiction writing about food, whether literary, documentary (diaries, Mass Observation anthologies), or culinary (cookbooks). Generally speaking I exclude the propaganda and pamphlets put out by the MOF from this definition, although there are some interesting areas of overlap between official and unofficial food narratives; MO anthropologists, for instance, were often employed by the government to gather information on public opinion.

autoethnography allowed English writers to reconcile themselves to the fragmentation of the modern world and to the "shrinking island" that had formerly been the far-reaching British Empire. Exploring the alimentary aspects of English "cultural particularity" (a phrase used by both Esty [3] and Kalliney [2]) therefore allows British authors to engage with the public and political while simultaneously asserting the importance of the private and domestic.

My critical approach takes for granted Patrick Deer's assertion of an "official culture of war" in England, one offering, "a modern cultural tradition that claimed to cure and unite the diverse, fragmented spheres of everyday life" (6). In *Culture in Camouflage: War, Empire, and Modern British Literature*, Deer argues that government-subsidized artistic and cultural productions constituted a crucial intermediary between British state and citizen during the Second World War (7). This official war culture demanded engagement with national ideals and events and inspired a resurgence of popular imperialism, partly through the aforementioned focus on the cultural particularities at work in everyday life. Deer astutely observes that this "obsessive attention" to minutiae "was designed to colonize everyday life for the purposes of the war effort" (8), but he touches only briefly on the existence of the Ministry of Food, and does not explore its crucial role in shaping and perpetuating the national mythologies central to English war culture. I therefore seek to extend Deer's theory of war culture to include MOF legislation and propaganda as well as Pym and Taylor's interventions in this official narrative. I argue that Pym's *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings* and Taylor's *At Mrs Lippincote's* offer nuanced depictions of the centrality of food to human relationships and to wider cultural interactions.

National cuisine is an important lens not only for scrutinizing the microcosms of contemporary literature, however. On the macro level of international relations, readings of an "inward turn" in midcentury Britain are supported by a close examination of the British food supply system. England was in a unique global position prior to the war in that its food was mostly imported, with roughly two-thirds of all foods consumed coming from outside of the country (Fenelon 55). Over the course of the war, Britain increased home production exponentially, and through a balance of coercion and compulsion moved its citizens away from a diet consisting of foreign goods to a more literally and symbolically British diet. As the first chapter of this study demonstrates, during the war the British nation turned inwards to domestic agriculture in order to feed itself physically, while looking backwards to a shared cultural heritage in order to sustain itself psychologically. English farms and plots increasingly fed English people, while national ideals of stoicism and heroism extended to national food attitudes. Globally, the turn away from vast networks of imports and exports provides a literal enactment of the assertion made by theorists of midcentury culture that Britain became a "shrinking island."

Although social historians have reported on the experience of rationing at length, no literary critic has yet theorized the preoccupation with food discernible in ration-era English writing as directly linked to the wider midcentury project of detailing English culture. Andrea Adolph's recent *Food and Femininity in Twentieth-Century British Women's Fiction* contains a chapter on the war years that discusses Pym's *Jane and Prudence* at length, but her study is primarily preoccupied with an interest in mind/body duality and its implications for feminist criticism.

Allison Carruth's recent article "Food and the Politics of Late Modernism" explores its eponymous topic through cookbooks, poetry, and theatre, yet while it does touch on British literature its politics are primarily American.[3]

Perhaps not surprisingly, much of the existing work on home front fiction is concerned with wartime gender politics. In her groundbreaking study of British women's writing of the Second World War, Phyllis Lassner demonstrates the interplay between public and private in the "domestic novels" of the war period, noting that they "not only address women's unequal status in their own homes; they also challenge the patriarchal state which made conflicting demands on them: to do war work, evacuate children, and 'stand firm' at home while coping with relocations, shortages, and deaths for a war effort which also classified young mothers and old women as 'immobile'" (128). Rather than merely engaging in symbolic debates, that is, Lassner argues that women's wartime fiction analyzes "actual domestic and foreign policies that were perpetrated by and affected the lives of both men and women":

> In interactions between women's self-portrayal and their consciousness of propaganda and social codes deployed in broadcasts, newspapers, and women's magazines, we can see how women do not merely ingest images of victimization or power, but act, react, and represent themselves in both roles, sometimes at once. (9)

[3] Carruth does invoke British food politics in order to contrast them with American policies and propaganda, and makes some useful points about their wider implications. Yet she also makes some significant factual errors in her analysis of British rationing, mistakenly attributing Lord Woolton's expression "luxury feeding" to George Orwell (177), and asserting that rationing began in October 1939 rather than January 1940 (795).

Lassner's assertion that wartime gender politics are at once public and private is a guiding assumption in this study. Yet while she provides the most perceptive and contextually rich reading of Elizabeth Taylor's *At Mrs Lippincote's* available, Lassner does not specifically discuss food or rationing in the novel. By focusing on official and unofficial food narratives, I sharpen and extend her argument to show that wartime writing about food and foodways illustrates the interplay between public propaganda and the private imagination while reflecting more universal concerns with the cultural and social resonances of food.

In light of wartime legislation and propaganda as well as recent criticism emphasizing the importance of cultural particularity in the later modernist period, I read British cuisine and national food attitudes as a useful means of negotiating with and representing English cultural identity in midcentury literature. Barbara Pym's anthropological attention to the details of the daily menu in *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings* make these useful works for exploring contemporary food attitudes, and for contrasting the alimentary situation in the immediate and later postwar periods across a relatively narrow economic spectrum. Elizabeth Taylor's *At Mrs Lippincote's* treats food and cooking in a similarly attentive way. Both Taylor and Pym write about food purchasing, preparation, and consumption both for its own sake and for its evocative potential in illuminating personal and social relationships. In unpacking the official food narrative put forward by the government and beginning to delineate the unofficial food narratives developed by these two novelists, this study seeks to demonstrate the centrality of English cuisine to England's national identity. Food writing is both crucial to midcentury war culture and part of a wider preoccupation with English cultural particularity as a

means of responding to the collapse of British imperialism. In midcentury literature, culinary traditions constitute a doubly important cultural marker, reflecting British nationalism and identity in a time of global uncertainty.

CHAPTER ONE: Reading Ministry of Food Propaganda

With the British government's imposition of the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act in 1940, personal property was officially rendered public.[4] Under martial law, C.R. Attlee's famous assertion that each must make his contribution was in effect a legally binding contract, enacted not only through the seizure of waterfront properties and the evacuation of homeowners for defence purposes, but through the regulation and control of the country's resources, the most important of which was food. Armed with knowledge derived in part from the First World War, the government formally established the Ministry of Food for the latter purpose a mere five days after Britain's official declaration of war on September 3rd, 1939.[5] Although the regulation of public eating habits was rightly recognized as a contentious political issue, the imposition of food rationing went surprisingly smoothly, and by 1940, the Ministry constituted a crucial cog in the British war machine. As historian Norman Longmate observes, "[t]he Kitchen Front was the only one where Great Britain never lost a battle" (140). Through the development of national nutrition guidelines and the introduction of food allowances, the

---

[4] The Emergency Powers (Defence) Act was passed in limited form before the war began in August 1939 (*PW* 32); in September 1940, the House of Commons voted to extend the Act, granting the government "complete control over persons and property, not just some persons of some particular class of the community, but of all persons, rich and poor, employer and workman, man or woman, and all property" (Attlee qtd. in *PW* 107).

[5] The Ministry of Food was initially formed in 1917 after German U-boats interrupted American wheat shipments the previous year; it continued to function until 1918, when the end of the First World War rendered controls unnecessary (Zweiniger 13). As the threat of war loomed in the 1930s, the Food (Defence Plans)

government defined and reinforced food-related social roles in accordance with a national food narrative informed by notions of romantic heroism, imperial strength, and a gendered division of labour.

The logistics of food regulation were for the most part based on quantifiable, physical need. Practically speaking, a nation of hungry and malnourished citizens lacks the stamina essential to the war effort: factory workers, firefighters, and farmers, to say nothing of soldiers and sailors, must be well fed in order to be "fighting fit."[6] Policymakers determined early on that absorbing the inflated cost of basic foodstuffs at the governmental level would be cheaper in the long run than coping with the cycle of inflation that would inevitably result from heightened food costs and the concomitant protests from organized labour, demanding wages on par with the higher cost of living (Mackay 197). Yet for the British government, it was also "held to be imperative for the morale of the nation that its will to work for victory was not undermined by having too little to eat, whether through the shortage of food supplies or their high cost" (Mackay 196). Rather than constituting an active step toward social reform, although it was often framed as such, the reasoning behind the rhetoric of "fair shares for all" at least began as a reactive limitation of anticipated collateral damages: a "not undermining." The government was in fact reluctant to interfere with what it considered the private issue of food consumption; even while First Lord of the Admiralty, Churchill was adamantly opposed to

---

Department formed to make precautionary plans, and solidified as the Ministry of Food when Churchill set up his war cabinet.

[6] This expression is used repeatedly in MOF campaigns of the 1940s (see, for example, *Times,* October 2, 1940), yet it was apparently coined by imperialist writer Rudyard Kipling as early as 1891 (*OED*, 2nd ed., s.v. "fighting").

rationing schemes, feeling they would adversely affect popular support of the war (Mackay 53). Yet officials were even more wary of the prospect of dealing with the kind of public outrage over hoarding, queuing, and shortages that had precipitated rationing in the First World War. The complex ideological issues surrounding food control were thus translated into martial terms as a matter of national morale.[7]

The problem of maintaining morale was a big one. Even the official history of wartime food control, published in 1946 by His Majesty's Stationery Office, admits in its opening sentence that "[s]ince 1940 Britain has suffered a shortage of nearly all the more *appetising* and *popular* staple foods" (HMSO 1, my emphasis). At various points during and after the war, rationed foods included not only butter, sugar, bacon, and ham, but also tea, cheese, margarine, oil, eggs, and milk, the last two of which were most readily available in an unappetizing powdered form. Fresh meat was rationed by price; canned meats, tinned fish, and fruit preserves were on the points system; "personal points" were used for sweets and chocolates. Most goods were generic and inferior in quality to their prewar equivalents. 1940s consumers, with the advent of rationing and nationalization, suddenly found themselves unable to purchase their preferred food brands, and "what there was often appeared in bland official packaging, wanly labelled 'Biscuits X.Y. 124' or left unwrapped" (Minns 89). Many non-rationed goods, such as fresh fish, fruit, and offal, were difficult or impossible to obtain and when available had to be queued for.

---

[7] For an exploration of the wartime implications of the term "morale," see Robert Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain during the Second World War*. Following Mackay, I apply the term both individually and collectively to refer to "a composite of attitude and behaviour" in relation to the war (2), where "high morale" is exemplified by qualities such as interest, commitment, determination, and calmness (3).

Bread was not rationed until after the war, but the extraction rate of flour was increased so severely throughout the 1940s that the resultant Wholemeal Bread (a.k.a. "National Loaf") was grey in colour and generally abhorred despite its nutritional superiority.[8] Given the scope and severity of rationing, it is not surprising that contemporary public opinion surveys indicate that food shortages were "the biggest single concern on the home front early on in the war" (Zweiniger 63).

Throughout the war, the MOF was therefore dependent on public relations to maintain the support and cooperation of the civilian population in the larger war effort. Under the direction of the sympathetic Lord Woolton and with the assistance of the Ministries of Health and Education (HMSO 50), the MOF was largely successful in this venture, faltering only when the era of austerity failed to end with the hostilities. Crucial to this ongoing success was a straightforward approach to informing the British public of the rationale behind rationing. Early Mass Observation reports had "found that people will put up with almost any inconvenience, *provided the reason for it is frankly explained to them*" (Harrisson 397, original emphasis). So in order to reassure the English public that rationing schemes were not randomly imposed limitations on personal freedoms—dictatorship was what the Allies were fighting against, after all—the MOF attempted to operate on a basis of full disclosure. Given the importance of food distribution in

[8] The specifics of rationing have been so often detailed by social historians that most of the information in this paragraph may be considered common knowledge. In studying the era of austerity, however, I found the following texts particularly useful: *How Britain Was Fed in Wartime* (HMSO); Angus Calder's *The People's War*; Norman Longmate's *How We Lived Then*; Raynes Minns' *Bombers and Mash*; and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska's *Austerity in Britain*.

determining public attitudes to the war and postwar governments, the shaping of public opinion became a central concern for the MOF.

Moreover, "the psychological importance of traditional foods to which the public was accustomed was given considerable weight in the planning of supplies" (HMSO 46). Ministry officials thereby acknowledged the wider emotional ramifications of dietary choices, underscoring the social, cultural, and familial importance of food in the framing of official policy and using this awareness as a means of shaping food attitudes and behaviours. In so doing, the MOF sought to develop what I term a "national food narrative" that was firmly rooted in historical and popular conceptions of a shared cultural heritage and that reiterated gendered romantic conventions. While Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska has explored the implications of austerity-era propaganda and legislation from an economics perspective, and Robert Mackay and Siân Nicholas discuss MOF propaganda in their respective studies of wartime morale and the BBC, no scholar has yet sought to theorize this official food narrative in relation to the unofficial ones recorded in fiction works of the period. Closely linked to Patrick Deer's notion of war culture and the widely acknowledged focus on cultural particularity, the ideals and attitudes surrounding food were crucial to wartime literature and culture.

"Your Passport to Food": Individual Consumption and the National Mission

By the beginning of 1940, 45,000,000 specialized ration books had been distributed to the British public in accordance with information received on National Registration Day (HMSO 42). Each one entitled its bearer to a set amount of foodstuffs based on the specific dietary needs of his or her age or occupational

group, as determined by the MOF under the direction of Scientific Advisor Jack Drummond. Emphasizing the centrality of national identity, the ration book was identified in MOF bulletins as the British citizen's "passport" to food. Tailored nutritional guidelines for babies, children, youths, adults, and expectant mothers effectively split the home front into regiments, identified by the colours of their ration books: buff for adults, blue for youths (5-18 years old), green for pregnant or nursing mothers. This process of food-based categorization contributed to the individual's understanding of the specific way in which she or he fit into larger familial, social, and national groups, and informed the specific way in which each was expected to make his or her contribution. Individual responsibility is apparent even in early registration notices: "YOU must register now to enable the Ministry of Food to distribute meat fairly to the shops around the country, and to assure YOU of your fair share when rationing begins" (*Times*, January 5, 1940; original emphasis). The existence of different ration books for civilians, labourers, and those in active service provided a dietary parallel to the total war rhetoric of the government, and allowed the Ministry to easily enact special programs for "vulnerable" groups, such as School Milk for children or allowances of cod liver oil and concentrated orange juice for expectant mothers (HMSO 42).

Moreover, the registration system put in place for rationing tied consumers to particular shops and shopkeepers, setting up a chain of personal loyalty and private responsibility linking from the consumer-producer relationship back to the state (which allocated public supply accordingly). Coupons cut out of ration books were surrendered to shopkeepers at point of sale. As a result, customers faced the decision of whether to buy all off-ration goods at the shop where they were

registered—in the hopes of getting preferential treatment—or shop around to get the best variety. Barbara Pym underscores the politics of such decisions in her wartime diary, noting that "[observing the blackout] has become doubly important since the war as our Air Raid Warden is the grocer with whom I am not registered" (*VPE* 96).

Furthermore, although Woolton declared that "[f]ood control does not mean preventing the other fellow from getting something" (qtd. in Longmate 153), the MOF took great pains to ensure that sacrifices were not felt merely by the lower classes. When the public complained about hotels and restaurants undercutting fair shares by providing off-ration meals to those who could afford them, Woolton publicly declared an end to "luxury feeding" (*Times*, July 9, 1940) and instituted a price cap and regulations on the number of courses a restaurant could offer. For the most part such measures were lauded, although it was widely acknowledged that they were not entirely effective. George Orwell was particularly vocal about the rich, elitist counterculture known for circumventing price caps by paying cover charges at certain restaurants (Davison 146). A similar concern with illicit gourmandizing pops up in midcentury novels such as Patrick Hamilton's *The Slaves of Solitude* (1947) and Nigel Balchin's *Darkness Falls from the Air* (1942), both of which underscore the complexity of wartime morality and the peculiarly contingent ethics of midcentury foodways.

In order to reinforce the importance of ethical eating, it was crucial for the government to explicitly link patterns of food preparation and consumption to loyalty, treachery, and the wider national mission, particularly since the scale of Second World War rationing constituted an unprecedented level of public impingement on private life. While rationing had come into play in the First World

War, never before had it been so inclusive, restrictive, or prolonged. The MOF therefore sought to emphasize the British national identity as ideally suited to heroic sacrifice, linking mundane dietary abstentions to a much more marketable version of patriotism. This patriotic mandate is clear in contemporary advertisements. An MOF ad entitled "Medals for Housewives," for instance, rewards culinary acts of bravery, such as "[m]aking delicious dishes from homegrown vegetables" and "[n]ever accepting more than the rations," with symbolic "medals" (qtd. in Minns 110). In so doing, the British government was not merely employing military rhetoric but tapping into a larger history of "popular imperialism"; that is, the general tendency of the British public to understand self and nation in terms of imperial interests and attitudes (Mackenzie 11). By echoing the "implicit imperialism, partly economic, partly moral, [which] underlay most propagandist and entertainment output" in the first half of the 20th century, Churchill's government manipulated what was already a "core ideology in British society" (Mackenzie 11).

MOF advertisements appealing to loyalty and patriotism warned against small-scale treacheries, discouraging black market transactions as well as other ways to circumvent rations—erasing pencil marks made in a ration book to get a second share of unrationed but scarce goods, for instance (Longmate 145). Connections between food waste and treachery were far from subtle. A 1942 "Food Fact" confidently asserts:

> If you saw your neighbour throw away a loaf of bread, you'd be very indignant. 'That woman is as bad as a traitor,' you'd say, 'Doesn't she realise that wasting food is wasting shipping space—and that we need our shipping space for munitions?' And you'd report the matter to the Ministry of Food.

> But though waste on a big scale is criminal, waste on a small scale is serious, too. (*Times*, May 21, 1942)

MOF ads imagine a unified society of true patriots and explicitly articulate the existence of a nationalist code of food conduct. One similarly blatant ad from 1941, entitled "It Isn't Clever," claims:

> You've met the friend who tells you in a whisper that she got a couple of chops from the butcher without coupons. It isn't clever. No more clever than looting... Tell your friends that if they try to beat the ration, they are trying to beat the Nation. England expects us all to honour the Food Code. (*Times*, June 18, 1941)

Such ads take for granted the reader's desire to uphold the so-called "Food Code," a system predicated on honour, valour, and commitment with the nation at its centre.

Other advertisements put a Hitlerish face on greed to emphasize that hoarding or consuming contraband goods constituted a betrayal of the nation, akin to selling state secrets. Cartoons promoting wartime Savings Certificates featured the "squander bug," a devil-horned, swastika-covered insect with a penchant for convincing naïve women to waste their money on frivolous goods (Minns 133). Such ads declare: "[t]he Squander Bugs get a good laugh to see money thrown away on needless things," warning, "[d]on't take the Squander Bug when you go shopping!" (qtd. in Minns 160). Like squanderers, hoarders were vilified and set

against the wholesome heroism of the greengrocer or the thrifty shopper in personified ads, such as those in "The Butcher/Grocer Says…" series.[9]

Emphasizing such national identity and collectivism throughout the Second World War, the MOF used heroic and treacherous conceptions of food behaviour to translate the normally private act of purchasing, preparing, and consuming food into a public and patriotic act of heroism. As Carruth notes, "rationing signified a sacrifice made not only to win the war but also to maintain the empire, and the pride that many citizens expressed about wartime austerity measures—or rather, that the Ministries of Food and Finance expressed on their behalf—reveals how essential not only German defeat but also imperial possession were to British national identity" (784). The MOF slogan "We not only cope, we care" (Longmate 154) underscored the Ministry's public mission to serve each citizen as an individual, as well as its mandate that individual morality and loyalty should be made to serve the communal purpose of British victory.

Indeed, while the administrators behind the Food (Defence Plans) Department had initially intended merely to ensure the fair pricing and distribution of "essential foodstuffs," with the formation of the Ministry of Food this mandate gradually evolved into a multifaceted approach to the challenges of total war (HMSO 42). With over 50,000 civil servants at its peak in 1943, the MOF controlled the purchasing and distribution of the vast majority of domestic and imported foods. In addition to regulating the distribution and cost of essential foods, the Ministry

[9] This series of MOF ads, featuring fatherly food vendors giving patriotic shopping advice, appeared in newspapers throughout the 1940s. See for example the *Times*, September 8, 1941, or Minns 111.

would ultimately concern itself with the provision of communal and emergency feeding, the improvement of the nutritional value of the general diet, the protection of the consumer, and the education of the public (HMSO 42-50).

Food Education and Public Relations

According to its official history, "[t]he general [wartime] policy of the Ministry of Food was to explain to the consumer, as fully as security permitted, what was happening to the food supplies and why" (HMSO 50). Public food education in wartime was based on a two-fold objective: to improve general nutritional knowledge and to explain the process of food distribution. The MOF therefore endeavoured to provide basic nutritional guidelines, offering practical information about the amounts and types of foods necessary to improve and maintain overall health:

> As a part of this policy [of food education], the Ministry from early in 1940 continuously advised the public on wartime cookery and food values. In this it had the co-operation of the Ministries of Health and Education and of many voluntary organisations. A small staff of dietitians and cookery specialists provided expert advice, which was passed on to the public by means of advertisements, broadcasts, and films. In addition, there were practical demonstrations arranged by some 50 Food Advice Centres in the larger towns. Information bulletins were issued regularly to schools, public utility companies, women's organisations, etc. The general effect was to help the housewife to cope with wartime problems more confidently than would otherwise have been the case. (HMSO 50)

Moreover, the MOF stressed the importance of eating properly as a means of keeping the mind as well as the body healthy. Certain foods were described as particularly good for the "nerves," particularly during the Blitz, and housewives were expected to always have food ready for emergencies, when hot soup would be invaluable in treating those who had been bombed out. "Try to make soup every day so that you always have some ready to heat up" one "Food Fact" advises. "A hot drink works wonders at a time of shock or strain" (*Times*, February 10, 1940). It likely was a small comfort and relief to the newly homeless or grieving to be given something warm and soothing, and modern health knowledge supports the idea that well-fed people are generally more capable of dealing with physical and emotional stress.

The Ministry also determined to educate the public about the specific shipping and security issues affecting its ability to regulate food supply, cost, and distribution. To this end, the MOF developed the slogan: "Food is a munition of war. Don't waste it!" which was used to remind consumers that wheat and weapons drew upon the same set of resources. Frugality was linked to victory, while its counterpart, waste, was not only vilified but criminalized, with a number of people being brought up on charges in trials designed to demonstrate the hard line of the Ministry of Food (Woolton). One advertisement showing a sinking ship and a dinner plate asserted: "Food wasted is another ship lost. FOOD is necessary. VICTORY is vital. So don't waste the first and delay the second!" (qtd. in Minns 87). Anti-waste campaigns extended to many areas of civilian life, but bread was one of the most vital. Whole leaflets were printed explaining what to do with stale bread and how to get the most out of your loaf. One MOF bulletin noted that while in peacetime

"indulgences" such as snacking, throwing away scraps, or eating extra at meal times are unimportant, "[i]n wartime they matter *vitally*! We must save the nation's money and free the cargo space which is needed for munitions. Remember that this is not only a war in the air and on land and sea, but a war in the kitchen as well" (*Times*, August 5, 1940). The same bulletin reminded the reader "that if everyone in Great Britain wasted ½ oz. of bread daily we should be wasting 250,000 tons of wheat a year, and that 30 wheat ships would be required to carry that amount" (*Times*, August 5, 1940). By quantifying the equivalent relationship between daily waste in domestic spaces and its cumulative effect on the public waste of resources in the militarized spaces of cargo ships, the Ministry illustrated the interconnectedness of the domestic and public spheres.

Sir Frederick Marquis, Lord Woolton, was the face of the Ministry of Food from April 1940. A former social worker and freelance journalist as well as a shrewd businessman (he ran a large chain of department stores), Woolton was an entrepreneurial philanthropist who seemed to "radiat[e] goodwill towards all," perceived as "a man on the people's side" from his very first public appearance (*PW* 382). As "one of the first truly 'media-conscious' British politicians" he also deliberately kept his profile high throughout the war (*PW* 382). Under his direction, Ministry publications "were phrased in sympathetic language with a touch of humour and implicit appeals to patriotism, and in this way they were able to persuade people to accept with relative cheerfulness rationing, shortages, even the National Loaf" (Hope 255). His "homely phrase-making" and schoolmasterly manner made him immensely popular among the majority of the British public (*PW* 382).

The Times' report of the luncheon address given by Lord Woolton on October 16, 1940 exemplifies this homeliness, while at the same time linking the home directly to heroic nationalism and the military. In this address, Lord Woolton enumerated "the losses and gains in the food situation after 14 months of war":

> we had reduced consumption very considerably… yet here we were—well fed and, so far as he could see, reasonably happy… He took the very simple view that we were all in this war together. If it was more important at any particular time that we should have aeroplanes rather than bacon, then he would explain to the public why we could not have bacon, and he thought they would be satisfied that that was the right decision. *(Times*, October 16, 1940)

The use of the shared pronoun by both Woolton and the *Times* reporter underscores the element of sympathy so crucial to MOF propaganda, while the use of the word "simple" reflects the minister's desire to speak directly and plainly to the consumer. However contrived, Woolton's straightforward attitude to food supply was much appreciated by the British public. Being provided with the information to make informed decisions about behaviour, people were at least given the impression that they were involved in the process rather than being assigned arbitrary rules, and were thus more likely to abide by those rules. Discussions of wartime food policy often reflected the necessity of persuading the public to make dietary changes voluntarily (Spiekermann qtd. in Trentmann 161). The MOF's emphasis on education was therefore ingenious, as it laid out specific guidelines for the individual's development of expertise in terms of food selection for both health and

enjoyment. By providing much-needed tips and recipes, the government encouraged creativity and flexibility within a strictly regulated regime.

"Eat British": Regulating Protectionist Agrinomics

Britain's dependence on imports was the most immediate cause of concern for administrators who remembered the German U-boat campaigns of the First World War. As the fighting intensified, increasingly dangerous waterways and the diversion of ships, fuel, and manpower to the war effort would mean that cargo boats formerly devoted to food supply would become unavailable. Government officials aware of the inevitability of global conflict had therefore taken great pains to preempt potential shortages and crises by the time war was actually declared. In order to ensure that its army and navy would have all the necessary resources for victory, Britain sought to move to a homegrown agricultural system that freed up as much as possible the complex infrastructure of ships, sailors, and cargo space formerly devoted to foreign foods. A quick glance at the prewar import rates of dietary staples—88 percent of total wheat and flour quantities, 96 percent of butter, 76 percent of cheese, 74 percent of fruit (Fenelon 48)—underscores the correlation between products coming from outside of Britain and those which were rationed most severely or, like many fruits, were simply unavailable for the duration.

The MOF's agricultural plan worked along several lines intended to maximize production and minimize dependence on imports (HMSO 9). First, it decreased imports of animal feed, "since several tons of animal feedingstuff are required to produce one ton of meat or eggs" (HMSO 7). Second, it increased the home production of animal feed in order to make up part of this loss, with a

particular emphasis on feed for dairy cows, since milk was considered essential to the national diet. Third, it reduced pig and poultry farming (for the same reason imports of animal feed were decreased). Fourth, it sought to increase the production of crops suitable "for direct human consumption," in particular wheat, potatoes, sugar-beet, and other vegetables (HMSO 7). In combination with the strict regulation of meat, egg, milk, butter, and cheese distribution, these measures were not only instituted at the industrial level but also encouraged at the individual level through hugely successful amateur farming initiatives.

Practically speaking, decreasing imports and increasing home agriculture made sense, but it also had the interesting side effect of undoing years of imperial expansion in terms of imported foodstuffs. While it is possible to view this inward turn as potentially damaging to British imperialism in that it suggests an incapacity to maintain colonial import structures, Woolton's "Eat British" campaign reflects a protectionist nationalism in the face of global uncertainty that actually supports popular imperialism. By suggesting that Britain possessed an inner strength independent of its colonies, the government was able to buttress the nation's image as the powerful and self-sufficient seat of empire—even as this empire was in the process of contracting. Moreover, the means by which the MOF encouraged an increase in home production supported the image of Britain as a unified nation. The "Dig for Victory" and "Lend a Hand on the Land" campaigns were the most famous of these initiatives. The "Dig for Victory" campaign, launched early in the war, turned every available garden, plot, or ditch into arable land, encouraging people to grow their own fruits and vegetables. People also began keeping their own poultry or pigs if they could, to supplement the much smaller import numbers. Average

citizens were further encouraged to assist with farm work through the "Lend a Hand on the Land" campaign. This initiative encouraged children and adults to spend their vacations working on country farms during harvest seasons. In a similar fashion, the Women's Land Army recruited many women with no farming experience into agricultural work in order to make up for farm hands off fighting. The overall effect of such campaigns, in addition to bolstering national supplies of staple foods, was that "the war broke down the barriers between the producers and consumers of bacon and eggs, potatoes and greens" (Calder 430). Gardening, like housework, was a small individual action that could become communal, and served the nation's war effort by freeing up shipping space and manpower for fighting and munitions.

The government also cut down drastically on the amount of land given over to livestock feed and grazing in order to grow crops with a higher calorie-to-acre ratio, despite attempts by the Ministry of Agriculture to "loyally defen[d] the livestock farmers as far as possible against the indignant calls of the Ministry of Food (always insatiable for more potatoes)" (*PW* 421). Certain foods, which flourished in Britain, remained widely available, and were therefore heavily promoted by the MOF. The two most important of these foods were the carrot and the potato; enter popular wartime cartoon figures "Dr. Carrot" and "Potato Pete" (see Minns 101, for one of countless examples). Faced with a huge carrot crop, the MOF started a campaign asserting that "Dr. Carrot will help you see in the black-out," claiming that the carrot's alleged vision-improving effects were responsible for the success of ace fighter pilots like "Cats-eye" Cunningham in the Battle of Britain. In reality, the development of radar was responsible (Longmate 154). Emphasizing the carrot's high sugar content, the MOF encouraged its use in desserts, and

introduced a toffee-covered version as a replacement for the rare toffee apple. Meanwhile, the humble potato got a lot of press for its nutritional value and ready availability within England. One "Food Fact" exclaimed, "[t]hink of the potato! Think of it as a weapon of war. It is not a new one. Napoleon once planned to starve-out England. Till then potatoes had been only a 'fancy' line. Suddenly they became a front line of our defence. Now history repeats itself" (*Times*, October 28, 1940). Calling upon England's history of military victory, official propaganda extolled the importance of eating homegrown foods and emphasized their link to the glorious history of the British people and the land itself. Contemporary advertisers picked up on MOF rhetoric in advertisements like the following promotion for Vita-Weat crispbreads:

> A smile in the darkest moments and a mind alert and clear—that's what the country needs to-day. And thousands of men and women are finding that a lightweight breakfast keeps their nerves in fighting trim, helps them feel lighthearted and cold-headed…Vita-Weat springs from British soil and it builds British nerves" (*Times*, September 2, 1940).

The practical justification for increasing home production was clear, but just as clear was the symbolic implication that Britain was indeed "standing alone" in the Second World War. No longer importing half of its food supply, England's trade network shrank temporarily, forcing the country into an insular diet that necessitated a dependence on locally produced food. The massive increase in domestic agriculture and what we would now refer to as locavorism rendered the nation physically and figuratively self-sufficient, while implicating average citizens in the physical labour of food production. The end result was similar to that predicted by George Orwell in

The Road to Wigan Pier: "to throw the Empire overboard," he observed, would "reduce England to a cold and unimportant little island where we should all have to work very hard and live mainly on herrings and potatoes" (136). Herrings, as it turns out, were hard to come by.

The British Restaurant: National Identity and Communal Feeding

Indeed, a curious side effect of the war was that, whether it had previously been terrible or not, the stereotype of bad English cooking was in effect legislated into reality.[10] Stephen Mennell in *All Manners of Food* argues that although rationing necessitated inventiveness in the kitchen, "war tended to reinforce the Englishness of English cooking—more cakes and puddings, more oatmeal, more dumplings, more leftover dishes" as well as "old staples of the poor" (249). Restricted imports meant foreign ingredients were unavailable, and exotic and flavourful dishes unlikely. The most common complaint on behalf of the British was that food was monotonous. This was partly addressed by the MOF's campaigns for cookery reform, which sought to cut down on waste and correct the English habit of overcooking (as one MOF pamphlet notes, "[n]o country in the world grows

[10] The emergence of stereotypically bad English cooking may be traced back to the 19th century, when increased social mobility encouraged conformity and imitation among and between class groups. Colin Spencer notes that restrictive social mores in the Victorian age were largely responsible for "a mass movement towards the bland and the nondescript" in both cuisine and comportment; in the former, flavour was often subjugated to appearance in the preparation of dishes (288). Mock recipes (such as Mock Turtle Soup) were therefore extremely popular for their ability to visually mimic more expensive, higher-class dishes (288), usually at the expense of taste, while ingredients that might lead to social missteps—like bad breath or messy eating—were to be avoided (289). Raw foods were generally regarded with suspicion, and vegetables in particular were overcooked out of a belief that raw or undercooked produce was germ-filled and hard on the digestive system (288-9). Pre-19th-century British cooking was actually very interesting by comparison.

vegetables better than we do, and probably no country in the world cooks them worse" [*Eating* 141]). Yet on the whole monotony had to be borne. As a result, food providers and legislators picked up on nationalist rhetoric and emphasized what I term "micro-heroism," or the application of heroic ideals to even the most mundane and insignificant acts. In restaurants, for example, "certain 'patriotic' dishes, like lentil cutlets, were labelled with a V for Victory" (Longmate 151) to make them more appetizing, while one conservative MP claimed, "'one needs to be British to "take it" in a British restaurant'" (Sir William Darling qtd. in Ziegler 251). As Sonya Rose notes in her examination of national identity and citizenship in wartime Britain, "[p]atriotic discourse in World War II centrally featured the idea that the members of the national community were self-sacrificing citizens" (14). Allison Carruth similarly observes that the celebration of austerity is what differentiates English rationing propaganda from that of the United States (where rationing was also effected, but to a lesser extent and mainly to enable Americans to send food over to beleaguered Britain). The self-perpetuating image of the stoic Briton—stiff upper lip and all—was crucial to public understandings of the importance of rationing for the duration of the war.

This emphasis on strength and stoicism rendered meat rationing particularly problematic, as meat consumption was traditionally associated with national and masculine identities. Most English citizens considered meat essential, so that the working classes and "[m]ale manual workers in particular felt that their diet was inadequate due to the reduction in [meat] consumption" (Roodhouse 247). As Gardiner notes, "[t]he rationing of meat led to more complaints than any other (except perhaps cheese) since meat and masculinity were inextricably linked, and

manual labourers were vociferous in their complaints that they couldn't be expected to do a full day's heavy work on the 'pansy' rations they were allowed" (146). The Ministry of Food attempted to educate the public on this point. One cartoon shows the silhouette of a hulking labourer flexing his muscles next to a petite woman provocatively posed in mock-flex; the caption reads "A meaty subject… She needs as much meat as he does!" (qtd. in Patten 29). Such attempts were clearly unsuccessful, however, and the government acknowledged that "[p]urely nutritional considerations had to make way for national habit and tradition. Although the manual worker's need was for additional calories rather than protein, *he* obtained in fact extra meat, the traditional food of the heavy worker" through communal feeding in factory canteens (HMSO 47, my emphasis). Regardless of occupation, far more men than women complained about the lack of meat in their diets, both during and after the war (Zweiniger 80). Food politics remained clearly gendered.

"Shoot Straight, Lady": Gendering Food Roles

While other ministries focused on recruiting women into jobs outside the home, the MOF encouraged women to treat their jobs as housewives as the top priority in wartime. Churchill may have articulated a universal call to arms, but Woolton called women to the *batterie de cuisine* rather than the munitions factory. Government rhetoric was unquestionably subject to gendered boundaries of behaviour. Those at home, however, were also expected to "fight." One MOF advertisement shows a housewife aiming her rolling pin like a rifle under the heading "Shoot straight, Lady"; the micro-heroism inherent in food roles—and its negative inverse—are laid out clearly in the text that follows:

> *You've* got a fighting job on hand, too. These are significant days and anyone—man, woman, or child—who is less than fighting fit is a pull back on the total war effort. *FOOD is your munition of war*. The Government sees that you get the right stuff and it's vital that you should know how to use it to full advantage… Serve everything appetisingly as you so well can do. Then you can be proud of your vital, active part in the drive to Victory. (qtd. in Minns 115; original emphasis)

In the "significant days" of the Second World War, every action had something to do with the nation.

Ironically, although the private home was coming under attack during the Blitz, it nonetheless continued to symbolize a sacred space separate from the horrors of the battlefield. Domesticity "represented a permanent value system throughout the war years" (Lassner 130). The MOF privileged and protected the institution of family, through Vitamin Welfare Schemes, School Milk, and the coveted green ration books entitling expectant mothers to extra milk, eggs, and vitamins as well as acting as an unofficial passport to the front of the queue. Increasingly, the domestic sphere was linked to the same rhetoric of heroism and labour that the government applied to the rest of the nation. Several months into the war, Lord Woolton observed:

> One other thing we had gained was the interest of the women of this country in a war job. Never before had they been called upon to help in quite the same way—by doing their own job, and in the knowledge that by doing it they were really helping in the war. Housekeeping might be dull, but we were dependent on the women for winning this war, for unless we could get

> our men fed they could not make munitions and they could not fight… The women were right in the front line, and they would carry through the job of feeding the people of this country. (*The Times*, October 16, 1940)

Woolton's description of women's housework and food preparation activities as "doing their *own* job" implicitly contrasts the suitability of this domestic work of caring for the family with that of other, presumably less suitable, jobs available to women during the Second World War.[11] Yet as Lassner observes, "[n]either government policy nor its propaganda recognized the particularly embattled conditions of women on the home front" (128) as they attempted to balance the domestic duties of shopping, preparing, and serving food with daytime work in factories. By relegating women to the home and demanding that caring work become the priority, Woolton's MOF insisted on the sanctity of home and family and simultaneously placed it within the larger hierarchy of military and nation. This tendency to link nationhood to the family was not limited to the kitchen.

As a means of further justifying the insistence on housework as war work, the government deftly translated salvage campaigns into domestic terms. Frugality and salvage drives directed at housewives were in fact suggestive of large-scale acts of "culturing" as theorized by Claude Lévi-Strauss. Just as Lévi-Strauss reads the transformation of raw into cooked as a crucial and particularly female act of creating

---

[11] Marjorie DeVault's definition of "caring work" as the unpaid, "invisible work" of purchasing, preparing, and serving food to the family (as well as other "housework," such as cleaning), which has traditionally been done by women, is particularly useful in this context. In *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*, DeVault notes that while many women also engage in paid labour, unpaid caring work constitutes an additional set of responsibilities historically entrenched in western gender roles (1-18).

civilization and culture, these campaigns hinged on collecting and transforming the ingredients and tools of cookery into the fuel feeding the war machine and by extension the total war culture. The immensely successful "Saucepans into Spitfires" campaign, yielding a thousand tons of aluminum, demonstrates this process of transformation succinctly: contemporary "cartoons showed women looking proudly up as a fighter made of kitchen utensils flew overhead and claiming to identify their particular saucepans" (Longmate 282). Bones and excess fat were similarly called for in munitions factories. As Penelope Fitzgerald notes, "[t]he [British] nation defended itself by counting large numbers of small things into separate containers" (96). Each cook made her contribution. Every citizen who offered up her kitchen to the British arsenal acknowledged that the fate of the nation represented a higher culinary authority than palate or tradition.

Despite the necessity of recruiting women, the government portrayed active war work in factories, in the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS, or the "Wrens"), or in the Women's Land Army ("Land Girls") as a temporary and secondary role, constituting an inappropriate substitution for male labour forces akin to the development of "mock" recipes in the face of war shortages. Ads aimed at women therefore privileged domestic language and took for granted the interim quality of nondomestic female war work. As Rose notes, "sexuality and motherhood were fundamental" to the conception of good citizenship among British women, so that "[e]ven if she were an excellent machinist working on airplanes, or a cooperative and loyal member of the ATS [Auxiliary Territorial Service], or an efficient tractor-driver in the Women's Land Army, a woman would not be a 'good citizen' if she was thought to be sexually promiscuous… [or] neglecting her

children" (118). The ideal war jobs for women essentially consisted of doing caring work outside the home. A 1944 ad for Hoover vacuum cleaners lauds the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) under the headline "The Hand that held the Hoover helps the Bombed!":

> When an 'incident has occurred', nobody is more welcome to 'bombed out', wardens, and demolition workers, than the W.V.S. with their mobile canteens. Now there is a bite to eat, and a cup of tea to hearten them. That's only one of the many jobs W.V.S. do, voluntarily, and without pay, and they nearly all have homes to run and families to look after as well. (qtd. in Minns 72)

In addition to illustrating the classically euphemistic heroism of Britain under bombardment, as well as the idea of food and tea as palliative care, this advertisement exposes the prevailing Victorianism with regard to the propriety of women's war work: it should be domestic in nature, unpaid, and in addition to rather than instead of work in the home. The national state of emergency made it morally acceptable for women to leave their kitchens, but the practical necessity of feeding the nation buttressed the moral imperative for women to carry on queuing and cooking regardless of new and conflicting responsibilities.

The Wireless and *The Kitchen Front*

In addressing the public on the topic of rationing, Lord Woolton determined that Ministry publicity "should take two forms… the clear statement of government decision should appear in the newspaper, but for the explanation I should depend upon the personal approach of the wireless" (Woolton 250). Taking advantage of the

radio's ability to vocally infiltrate the family home, Woolton used his broadcasts to explain new food policies in plain, sympathetic language phrased as a direct address to the individual citizen. In his memoirs, he notes that he would often spend over eight hours preparing each 12 ½-minute broadcast (251), aiming to "reason and explain, sometimes taking the public into confidence… sometimes explaining government decisions" (250). The radio was a particularly important medium during the war, nearly as universal as the need for food: as George Orwell observed sardonically in the 1930s, "[t]wenty million people are underfed, but literally everyone in England has access to a radio" (82-3). The centrality of the wireless to daily life on the home front was such that over the course of the war "the function of the radio itself changed, from a provider of private or familial enjoyment and self-improvement to a vital instrument of public information and entertainment" (Nicholas 63). By manipulating formerly private media into public tools to convey information and directives, the government was able to shape attitudes and behaviour in an effort to regulate national health and food morale.

In addition to Woolton's broadcasts, the wireless provided one of the most important ways in which the MOF reached its audience: a ten-minute BBC program called *The Kitchen Front*, which from June 1940 ran every weekday at 8:15, directly following the 8:00 news (Briggs 39). Although *The Kitchen Front* was not the direct responsibility of the MOF, many of its contributors were associated with both the government ministry and the national broadcaster, and collaborations and cross-promotions were continuous. Particularly in its early stages, the program was developed in collaboration between the institutions, and the BBC "showed all scripts dealing with food questions to the Ministry before they were broadcast" (Briggs 39).

The MOF also reserved the right to veto any programming about food that was considered contrary to official policy. As Asa Briggs notes in his history of British broadcasting, the first title suggested was actually *The Food Front*, but "Howard Marshall, the well-known broadcaster, then working at the Ministry of Food, said that his Ministry was very keen on the title 'The Kitchen Front'" (39). Lord Woolton himself recruited "music-hall artistes" Elsie and Doris Waters—known on the wireless as Gert and Daisy—to try and get people to laugh, "even if it was only a somewhat wry smile" (Woolton 251), about food rationing. Along with other regular guests providing advice and entertainment, Woolton claimed Gert and Daisy "helped the public to realize that food economy was not all gloom" (252). While most of the BBC's wartime programming was criticized as "contrived, patronizing and out of touch" (with daytime broadcasts faring particularly poorly among audiences) (Nicholas 63), food, gardening, and health talks were all "among the BBC's war-time successes" (Briggs 39). *The Kitchen Front* reached an audience four times higher than other programs in similar timeslots (Nicholas 63). With its "practical treatment" of rationing and other wartime inconveniences, it was "the first 'women's' programme on the BBC to find general approval among working-class housewives" (Nicholas 77). Over the course of the war, there were some 1,200 broadcasts on food (Gordon qtd. in Briggs 39). *The Kitchen Front* allowed the MOF to provide valuable information on how and why to eat for the public good along with humourous and entertaining programming.

In addition to these daily BBC broadcasts, which generally appealed exclusively to women, the "Food Flashes" aired on cinema newsreels directly addressed servicemen by incorporating lightly misogynistic humour, alcohol-fueled

jokes, and the equation of food with attractive femininity. In one of countless appeals to increase potato consumption, a male voiceover notes: "[m]ore potatoes are about now, and some are smaller, and like this [young woman] are equally good with jackets on and off!" ("Small Potatoes," No. 1, March 5, 1945). These broadcasts open with a superheroish "M of F" on a black screen, and a crashing sound. They are pithy, clever, and memorable, heavy on puns and wordplay, and designed to translate the enforcement of economy in all areas of food and eating into entertainment. Like Gert and Daisy, Food Flashes appeal to the public by assuming a lighthearted rather than preachy approach to the war. They take for granted the willingness to help that was the predominant sentiment during the war, and embody the robustness that the Ministry of Information had explicitly determined ought to be the predominant attitude conveyed in public broadcasts. Most importantly, they seem specifically designed to appeal to men, and in particular returning soldiers.

Food, Life Writing, and Everyday Heroism

Because the physical threat of battle extended into English homes, all home life was elevated to a certain level of heroism. Angus Calder argues that this is because English civilians "'made sense' of the frightening and chaotic actualities of wartime life in terms of heroic mythology" (*MB* 14), reading their everyday actions as fulfilling specific supporting roles on the larger stage of world history. As this chapter has shown, such heroic readings of domestic life were encouraged in great part by official appeals to small-scale heroism. The potential for everyday life to take on heroic dimensions, though, may also be linked to the newfound interest in

anthropology and autoethnography in Britain, driven by the Mass Observation movement and the general rise of cultural studies (Esty 2).

Indeed, the desire to document national conditions in order to bear witness for future generations led many to record the details of their daily lives during the 1930s-40s. The Mass Observation movement, founded in 1937, encouraged writers to document quotidian activities such as eating, cooking, and even grocery shopping for posterity. Life writing was at an all-time high, as anyone with access to pens and paper seemingly became a diarist. The outpouring of writing about present conditions was such that Cyril Connolly, editor of the literary journal *Horizon*, published a notice declaring that:

> *Horizon* will always publish stories of pure realism, but we take the line that experiences connected with the blitz, the shopping queues, the home front, deserted wives, deceived husbands, broken homes, dull jobs, bad schools, group squabbles, are so much a part of our ordinary lives that unless the workmanship is outstanding we are prejudiced against them. (5-6)

Mass Observation pushed civilians to observe and document the activities of ordinary people on a day-to-day basis. As a result, masses of people went around recording the activities of other masses, with many of their works being eventually published in various anthologies and stored in archives in the University of Sussex. Some of these anthologies were commissioned by the government, which drew upon the information collected about public opinions in determining official policies and public relations initiatives.

In midcentury fiction, similar attempts to recuperate a particularist national identity through cultural studies constituted a response to the threat of literal

fragmentation as well as an artistic reaction to the fragmentary aesthetic of modernism, which culminated in the shattering and disorienting experience of total war (Esty). Elizabeth Bowen famously describes writing about total war as the difficulty of adequately grasping or conveying "something vast that is happening right on top of you" (99), asserting instead that it is only possible to describe certain aspects of it from close up. Her description of her own wartime stories is equally applicable to the novels of Pym and Taylor: "[t]hey are the particular. But through the particular, in wartime, I felt the high-voltage current of the general pass" (99). Autoethnography constitutes a means of recording particularities in an attempt to understand and convey a universal experience.

As official regulations and propaganda prodded, encouraged, and enforced "cheerful" cooperation through security measures that sometimes seemed draconian, British citizens sacrificed private freedoms for the public sake on an unprecedented scale. Further, the government's depiction of certain food behaviours as heroic—such as digging "victory gardens" or eating readily available produce—encouraged individuals to view their own lives and diets as participating in a larger national narrative. In a war driven by conflicting ideologies, it should perhaps come as no surprise that so many writers should have responded by attempting to commemorate English culture, both as it existed before the war and as it persisted while the war raged on.

Yet in the immediate postwar period, rationing not only continued but actually increased in severity, so that an increasingly frustrated public was forced to contend with points, stamps, and shortages until cheese, fats, and meat finally came off the ration in 1954. Postwar changes in popular attitudes to rationing reveal that

British citizens, and more specifically the housewives who were the most affected by food shortages, were not "passive recipients of public policy and propaganda" (Zweiniger 99), but instead chose to overlook their personal issues for the greater good. Angus Calder leaves space on the final page of *The People's War* for the observation that "with bread rationing looming ahead and spirit and flesh rebelling against further effort, the nation could consider only wanly the good fortune which had spared her the destiny of Germany, or Russia, or Japan" (586). That food concerns reemerged after the war as "a central, if not the most important, problem in the public mind" (Zweiniger 63) represents at least in part the collapse of the government's rhetorical justification for rationing, as the continuation of austerity following the war rendered popular imperialism and its romantic food narratives increasingly obsolete. It is in this late war and postwar context that Elizabeth Taylor and Barbara Pym did most of their writing. In exploring the literature of the age of austerity through their novels, I will argue that these so-called domestic fictions employed a focus on minutiae to respond to official food narratives in an increasingly critical way throughout and after the war.

CHAPTER TWO: Solitary Meals and Communal Feeding in Barbara Pym

In the introduction to *À La Pym: The Barbara Pym Cookery Book*, John Francis observes that students interested in the history of the 20th century "will find in [Pym's] pages a truthfulness wholly missing from lesser writers… There are tables and sociological statistics available galore if you have a taste for that sort of thing, but it is to novels that those interested in the scent and flavour of the past must go" (15). With her anthropologist's eye and Mitfordesque alertness to propriety and social strata, Pym's writing is steeped in details of dress, drinking, and above all, dining habits. Her literary dishes collectively form a remarkably large and evocative slice of social, cultural, and culinary history.

Throughout her career, Pym treated food with the same interest and affection she reserved for her characters, lacing her works with "sly insights into culinary anthropology" (Visser 19). In the context of war shortages and rationing, however, Pym's literary attention to food takes on an additional set of meanings, ironically responding to official food narratives while continuing to illuminate contemporary understandings of class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and religion. In *Excellent Women*, which upon its publication in 1952 reflected a still-rationed England, "the lean years have come" (Liddell 33). Pym captures the startling austerity of life in postwar London in this novel's unappetizing meals and anxious food behaviours. In contrast, the 1958 work *A Glass of Blessings*—published at a comfortable distance from the end of rationing in 1954—is set in a much less austere world. Yet while there is no shortage of food, the impact of the war is still felt in the culinary legacy of the cafeteria and the collective memories of the cooks and hostesses in its pages.

Taken together, these works serve as bookends to Pym's experience of rationing and offer an important glimpse into the impact of wartime food attitudes on the creative imagination.

Situated within the Austenian tradition of the novel of manners, Pym's early novels scrutinize middleclass English society, accurately recording the food-related rituals of everyday life in the 1950s while at the same time exposing the hollowness of stereotypical domestic roles and food behaviours. Moreover, Pym hones her attention to detail to a social science: her background in anthropology informs her depictions of characters and culture through the examination of the social rituals surrounding food purchasing, preparation, and consumption. Anthropology also allows Pym to facetiously use the figure of the cannibal to play on the unclear boundaries between varying degrees of civilization and civility, as well as hyperbolically mirroring parasitic or predatory relationships. Food operates as an indicator of social roles in her novels, and Pym deflates romantic ideals of the division of food labour in the confusion of gendered boundaries surrounding work and the home, the depiction of distinctly undomestic housewives, and the misdirection of romantic energy in the use of food as a means of seduction and sexual innuendo. Pym's novels further undercut the potential for romantic and quintessentially British heroism among her male characters by depicting gourmets and aesthetes, with Continental tastes often eliciting suspicion or a sense of impropriety on the part of her socially conservative characters. Rather than critiquing these qualities, Pym subjects the self-sacrificing and self-righteous food behaviours of her "excellent women" to the same scrutiny. By emphasizing the cultural significance of these tiny details of food behaviour, Pym at once illustrates

the increased importance of private life during the war and acknowledges its virtual sublimation into a public narrative based on a shared ideology of English culture and cuisine that appeared more important when its destruction seemed imminent.

Exposing Private Consumption

In a now-famous 1977 issue of *The Times Literary Supplement*, Philip Larkin and Lord David Cecil helped relaunch Barbara Pym's literary career by naming her the most underrated writer of the last 75 years. Larkin argued that her novels "give an unrivalled picture of a small section of middle-class post-war England. She has a unique eye and ear for the small poignancies and comedies of everyday life" (*TLS*, January 21, 1977). As Barbara Brothers notes, this ability to faithfully record what Henry James dubbed "minute social truths" (qtd. in Brothers 159) aligns Pym's work with the Austenian "novel of manners," in which "the domestic reflects the values of the society in which the individual lives" (159). Pym's novels are therefore concerned not merely with the intricacies of private life, but with the interactions between the public and private spheres. Her characters accordingly negotiate acceptable and suitable food behaviours (that is, both what is generally acceptable in middleclass society and what is specifically suitable for each member of that society) with an eye to the conflicting mythologies surrounding class and gender in the 1940s and 50s.

Much of the force and humour in Pym's novels derive from the alternate substantiation and subversion of class and gender-based notions of hospitality. Food traditionally operates as an indicator of social hierarchies, yet with the leveling effects of rationing during and immediately following the war, the ability to eat

decadently and to display wealth and benevolence on the dining table was severely impaired. Moreover, the egalitarian bent to Ministry of Food propaganda—and governmental propaganda more generally—officially discouraged overt displays of wealth through "luxury feeding," while at the same time reinscribing historically gendered divisions of domestic food labour. While Pym's protagonists are primarily middleclass women who retain a strong sense of their social positions, wartime and postwar circumstances make their duties more difficult to carry out; the typical Pym heroine is "unmistakably a gentlewoman, but living at the shabby lower end of gentility" (Cooley 4). In *Excellent Women* in particular, 1950s shortages of food and housing make it impossible to maintain a façade of easy and graceful hostessing. Indeed, the apartment-sharing necessitated by the housing shortage in this novel effectively collapses the boundaries between food presentation and its physical function. When Mildred Lathbury first meets Helena Napier, the former is "bent low over the bin and scrabbl[ing] a few tea leaves and potato peelings out of the bottom of [her] bucket" (8). Mildred is embarrassed that she and her neighbour should have met in this way, having meant to ask her over for coffee. "It was to have been a gracious, civilized occasion," she fantasizes, "with my best coffee cups and biscuits on little silver dishes" (8). She is likewise embarrassed when Helena publicly addresses the private issue of toilet paper in the shared bathroom, thinking, "I come from a circle that does not shout aloud about such things" (12). Signalling excretion and waste as the end of consumption, trashcans and bathrooms are the antithesis of the genteel social occasion imagined by Mildred. Just as bombs exposed internal spaces to the public eye or forced strangers together in crowded shelters, Helena and her husband Rockingham's domestic disputes are clearly audible to Mildred from an

apartment that is "not properly self-contained" (12). The dirty underbelly of fine dining is repeatedly apparent in the proliferation of filthy dishes and food scraps throughout the novel. The postwar world exposes private spaces to public scrutiny.

Anthropology and Religion: The Ritualization of Food Behaviours

Against this public exposure of private consumption, Pym's novels view civilized English society with a critical and often comic detachment, as well as an anthropologist-like attention to detail informed by the author's background as editor of the anthropological journal *Africa*. Pym's novels portray small, overlapping communities riddled with clergymen, civil servants, and anthropologists, with the same and similar characters reappearing in multiple works. Anthropology is both a theme and a narrative technique. Upon hearing that Helena is an anthropologist, for example, Winifred Malory giggles nervously, "I hope she isn't going to study *us*" (*EW* 16), the obvious joke being that "she" (Pym) already is. As a discipline, anthropology relies upon the scientific dissection of behaviours usually taken for granted, even dismissed—as Pym's works often were—as trivial. By treating such trivialities as central to the narrative, Pym enacts in literature the same tendency to scrutinize daily life apparent in so much nonfiction writing and propaganda of the period. Yet unlike MOF propaganda, Pym refuses to elevate or heroicize the quotidian. Rather, she emphasizes the exposure of all human behaviours to critical scrutiny, setting the universality of human emotions against the cultural specificity of life in suburban, middleclass, postwar England.

The anthropological quality of the narration also serves to illuminate the highly ritualistic nature of cooking and eating. Convention is central, not merely

because it indicates class, but because it offers a map for negotiating the complex world of human relationships. Religion and food are closely linked, as for Pym church provides not spiritual enlightenment but a sense of community, in which shared meals at church functions, jumble sales, and social evenings prove as important as the services themselves. Mildred likewise takes comfort and pleasure in the predictable lead-in to teatime with her housekeeper Mrs. Morris, who makes her eleven o'clock announcement that the kettle is boiling "so regularly that [Mildred] should have thought something was wrong if she had forgotten" (*EW* 22). Pym describes the ceremonial function of the daily meal with humour, but recognizes its importance in providing a framework for understanding the world and bringing individuals and communities together. The choice of food often defines the tone of the occasion, and people may be classed according to whether they prefer smoked or tinned salmon (*GB* 7), tea or martinis (*GB* 52). Some elements of the meal, however, are merely empty formalities which characters adhere to out of social atavism or nostalgia. This is sometimes a source of anxiety. Mildred watches William Caldicote "apprehensively" as he tastes the wine at their annual luncheon, "for he was one of those men to whom the formality meant something and he was quite likely to send the bottle back and demand another" (*EW* 67). For her part, Mildred implicitly understands the rituals of fine dining as motions that must be gone through but not acted upon; any deviation would be embarrassing. William's sense of entitlement, however, leads him to take full advantage of such ceremonies as a means of bolstering his own self-importance and comfort. Laying bare the occasionally pointless rituals that make up her characters' lives, Pym nonetheless acknowledges that the rituals themselves are often the point.

Cannibals, Parasites, and Infestations

In addition to highlighting the ritualistic nature of eating, the autoethnographical quality of Pym's food writing reflects the wider national preoccupation with creating a democratic record of Englishness. For midcentury writers like Pym, anthropology offered "a new way to represent social difference within a dynamic, but knowable and bounded, social field,"

> that is, within a totality corresponding to the idea of national culture… By transferring the holistic ethos (writing about 'an entire way of life') from small-scale colonized societies to their own shrinking nation, English intellectuals found a distinctive way to respond to the imminent collapse of British hegemony. (Esty 10)

Pym's literary assumption that England constitutes a civilization as open to critical scrutiny as the "primitive" nations through which her anthropologist characters travel hints at the postwar collapse of British imperial thinking. As Charles Burkhart observes, "[o]ne of the great richnesses of [Pym's] novels derives from the contrast between the world of anthropological Africa and the ceremonies of the world her characters… think of as civilized":

> It is the contrast between the raw and the refined, between the Congo and the Cotswolds, between the anthropophagist, if such there be, and the anthropologist, who bravely attempts to bridge the two worlds. This juxtaposition is the comic staple of the novels. (48)

Pym plays with these distinctions repeatedly, particularly in her humorous studies of English eating habits. At a meeting of the Learned Society in *Excellent Women*, for example, Rocky facetiously observes of the anthropologists, "I dare say these types

are little better than primitive peoples when it comes to eating,'" to which a nearby man responds:

> 'My dear sir, I fear we are even worse… The so-called primitive peoples have an elaborate order and precedence in eating but I'm afraid that when we get started it's every man for himself.' 'The survival of the fittest?' Rocky suggested. 'Yes, perhaps that is it. I hope we shall remember our manners sufficiently to offer refreshment to the ladies first,' continued the old man, with a little bow in [Mildred's] direction. (83)

A moment later, the man helps himself to a generous meal without even a glance at Mildred, forgetting his manners altogether and underscoring the falsity of self-flattering distinctions between civilized and primitive, imperial and colonized cultures. Further collapsing such boundaries, Pym's characters often confuse the terms "anthropology" and "anthropophagy," or the cannibalistic consumption of human flesh. Beyond offering an irresistible opportunity for wordplay, such confusion signals an increasing discomfort with colonial culture in midcentury Britain. By blurring the line between civilization and savagery, the cannibal serves to embody a culture's anxieties about its own barely suppressed appetites (Kilgour vii), and thereby hints at the dark side of the popular imperialism closely linked to Britain's national identity throughout the Second World War. Yet in this context Pym humorously reduces English imperialism to an "irrelevant" comment by a particularly ancient scholar: "'*No* ceremonial devouring of human flesh?' he repeated in a disappointed tone, and sat down, shaking his head and muttering" (*EW* 93). The fragile worlds inhabited by Pym's detached and observant spinsters reflect cultural anxieties on a much more modest scale.

Indeed, the image of the cannibal reappears in muted form throughout Pym's works as a series of parasitic relationships. In *A Glass of Blessings*, for instance, Mary Beamish's overbearing mother is imagined "crouching greedily over a great steak or taking up a chop bone in her fingers, all to give her strength to batten out her daughter with her tiresome demands" (21). Mrs. Beamish's constant demands on her daughter constitute a sort of eating away at her freedom, so it is unsurprising when Mary marries shortly after her mother's death. In *Excellent Women*, moreover, Allegra Gray's acceptance of food gifts appears selfish and unsuitable, particularly when Mildred's reluctance to eat Allegra's jam ration is set against the latter's flippant acknowledgment that the ration is actually someone else's (*EW* 79). Both Rocky and Father Julian Malory likewise take advantage of Mildred's hospitality, taking her for granted as a non-threatening and sexless female companion who provides the comforts of home-cooked meals with no strings attached. Mildred's preparation of a meal for Rocky using her hoarded olive oil is therefore both touching and pathetic, and recalls the wartime expectation for women to sacrifice their own rations (a tendency proven by the MOF campaigns against it) as well as the emergency feeding of Blitz survivors and other distressed citizens by the WVS. Rocky's statement, "'[t]o think that you should have come in just at this moment, this awful crisis, and given me a delicious lunch,'" (*EW* 146) both emphasizes and devalues Mildred's heroic role. His freely bestowed charm makes her realize that as a woman, she is fully replaceable, for "even a less attractive man than Rocky would have a devoted woman to prepare a meal for him on the day his wife left him" (145). The parallel between Rocky and Julian is brought to the forefront when Julian arrives hoping for tea just after Rocky has declared "'I think I should like some tea

now'" (146), having already been served lunch. Desiring to be alone, Mildred retires to the kitchen sink, where she knows no man will follow her; when Rocky finds her nearly done the massive cleanup in his apartment, rather than thanking her or intervening he tells her to join him in her own apartment when she has finished with the saucepans. The sense of entitlement inherent in these actions, so evident to the 21st-century reader, is underscored by the clear disappointment both men express when the tea is weak—and unsurprisingly so, given that Mildred has been forced to stretch her rations to accommodate her numerous houseguests. It is therefore appropriate that Mildred should grow to care not for Rocky or Julian, but for Everard Bone, as he is the only man who does not help himself to her rations or force her to cook for him. Although she at first assumes that he expects her to prepare the roast he invites her over to share (and later feels guilty for refusing the invitation on this assumption), when she finally does dine with him he takes the surprising step of hiring someone else to cook the meat, so it is roasting in the oven when she arrives. Furthermore, he is the only person attentive to Mildred's taste in food and drink, noticing that she dislikes beer and asking "'[w]hat do you really like?'" (142). Despite this apparent attentiveness, the final scene in the book shows Mildred and Everard warm with wine after their shared meal, with Mildred looking forward with resignation and amusement to the prospect of proofreading, indexing, peeling potatoes and washing up for and with Everard.[12]

Throughout *Excellent Women*, images of infestation and predatory consumption also reflect wider concerns about the sanctity of home life in postwar

[12] Although *Excellent Women* ends on this somewhat uncertain note, *Jane and Prudence* reveals that Mildred does actually marry Everard Bone.

England. In an extension of the woman's role as heroic housewife, women are repeatedly blamed for damage inflicted by ravenous pests. Going through old clothes for the jumble sale, Winifred—herself a rather pathetically romantic spinster—notes: "'[o]ne hears that so many husbands coming back from the war find that their civilian clothes have been devoured by *moth*… That must be a dreadful shock'" (43). The "duty" of keeping the moth at bay, as Father Malory puts it, falls to the wife; he asserts that "'the women should look after that sort of thing… mothballs, camphor and so on'" (43). Rockingham's moth-eaten suits therefore suggest that as a professional woman and self-professed "slut," Helena is not suited to the responsibility of ensuring that there is a caring and comfortable home for her husband on his return from the war. Indeed, Mildred cannot imagine Helena "doing [such] methodical, wifely things" (43) as laying mothballs, as the latter not only refuses to cook or clean up after herself, but attempts to embark on an extramarital affair with a fellow anthropologist. As a result of her domestic neglect, Rocky's desk is "riddled with" woodworm, a prospect that seems disturbing and sinister to Mildred: "It was disconcerting to think that worms or beetles could eat their way secretly through one's furniture. *Something is rotten in the state of Denmark*…" (173-4). The *Hamlet* allusion further underscores the national ramifications of such domestic invasions. The disintegration of the family home as a result of the neglectful or slovenly wife appears shocking and potentially traumatic for the returning veteran, no longer assured of his position within an inviolable domestic space, and may presage the larger disintegration of the family unit on an individual and national scale. At the same time, the language of infestation recalls the figure of the squander bug, as well as the general wartime fear of invasion, whether by

military force or by stealth and creeping ideologies. The image of woodworm eating away at an officer's desk while he is off serving his country (even if in Rocky's case this consists mainly of being charming to Wrens [*EW* 11]) reflects popular concerns about espionage, treachery, and collaboration in postwar England. Literal infestations move beyond the level of inconvenience to signal large-scale fears about national security and culture, all predicated on an undermining of the domestic unit.

Excellent Women and the Gendered Division of Labour

In both the private and public spheres, Pym's "[m]en and women are still divided into two classes—those served and those who serve" (Brothers 159). The act of service, and in particular the act of preparing and serving food, does provide a means of distinguishing between different characters, yet Pym renders the gendered division of labour absurd through irony, comedy, and the varying degrees of self-awareness attributed to her characters. Although they often acknowledge the ridiculousness of being forced to literally cater to men, however, women generally continue to wryly prop up the type of "reciprocal relationship" defined by Mark Penfold in *Less Than Angels*: "the woman giving the food and shelter and doing some typing for him and the man giving the priceless gift of himself" (76). Indeed, Brothers notes that the crux of the conflict in Pym's novels lies in the ostensible "class" distinctions between men and women: "her women struggle not with society and its political and economic discriminations but with the expectations and stereotyping of desire that are inherent in the designations of masculine and feminine" (161). While rationing sought to provide fair shares for all, the means by which such shares were gathered and distributed within individual families were

dependent on these gendered designations. As the first chapter of this study demonstrates, the gendered "expectations and stereotyping of desire" governing romantic and professional relationships are also apparent in the government's wartime appeals to British women. MOF propaganda characterized the perfect housewife as exhibiting patience, perseverance, resourcefulness, and self-sacrifice, qualities which were also demanded of the wider British public by Churchill and the Ministry of Information; in terms of food politics, however, these qualities were specifically contingent upon the feminine performance of a domestic role within the larger theatre of war. Yet in Pym's novels wives are seldom the stoic and capable domestic managers idealized by the MOF. Pym undercuts the romantic heroism of the stalwart English housewife by associating "excellence" in women with dull pragmatism and self-sacrifice, underscoring the failure of such behaviour to consistently provide women with husbands or happiness.

Throughout her novels, Pym records quotidian meals as a means of rendering visible many of the tasks comprised in the predominantly invisible domestic work traditionally done by women. This acknowledgement of the amount of labour involved in food preparation and purchasing as well as the refusal to omit the less glamorous details of cooking and cleaning reveal a sense of the increased importance of domestic tasks during the war. The government's recognition of such work *as* work constituted an important acknowledgement for many women labouring at home, even as the amount of work was exponentially increased as a result of shortages. Just as Lord Woolton encouraged the housewives of England to contribute "by doing their own job" throughout and after the war, even though "[h]ousekeeping might be dull," the single and married women in Pym's novels are

aware of their primary responsibility towards others: to "get our men fed" (*Times* October 16, 1940). In Pym's works, the public acknowledgement of the housewife's heroic labour is deflated and reduced to empty flattery on the part of men who view housekeeping as falling unquestionably to whichever woman happens to be nearest. As Robert Liddell acknowledges, "[t]he changes in post-war life put heavier burdens upon the 'excellent women' of the Pym world than on anyone else—indeed a man whose 'womenfolk' were particularly excellent must have felt them comparatively little" (32-3). This is because women tended to absorb relative changes in the availability and quality of food throughout the era of austerity by sacrificing their own interests (Minns, Zweiniger). Even as she paints a very deliberate picture of "excellence," however, Pym rejects a noble portrait of womanhood. Although Mildred fulfils the wifely duties of purchasing, preparing, and serving food out of a sense of obligation, she resents the expectation that she should always be responsible for cooking and cleaning.

Moreover, the gendered division of food labour extends into the workplace. Pym often parodies the figure of the working woman, poking fun at the difficulty of balancing domestic and professional duties. In *A Glass of Blessings*, Wilmet Forsyth and her mother-in-law Sybil laugh over the prospect of women "who carry baskets as well as briefcases and look both formidable and worried, as if they hoped to slip into the butcher's before going to their desks" (11), and discuss a newspaper story about "a woman civil servant who was discovered preparing Brussels sprouts behind a filing cabinet—poor thing" (11). This ludicrous image encapsulates contemporary anxiety about women's ability to balance work and domestic duties, both during the war and in the postwar period, when many women were expected to give up jobs

outside the home as men returned from fighting.[13] Furthermore, as Sybil reminds her daughter-in-law, "single women also have to eat or may be entertaining friends to dinner" (11). Women entering the workforce in Pym's novels continue to find that "offices … replicate the rituals of the family, including the making of tea and the expectation that women will make the tea" (Brothers 159). While Pym allows her heroines to reject social expectations on an intellectual level, they seldom deviate on a behavioural level. Subversiveness is restricted to subversive thinking; we are aware of Mildred's resentment only because *Excellent Women* is a first-person narrative.[14] Regardless of what they feel, Pym's women tend to cook and clean in silence.

On the other hand, *A Glass of Blessings* illustrates the opposite problem: the plight of the postwar housewife, formerly engaged in active war work and now returned to a domestic life of idleness. Throughout, Pym seems to deflate several ideals of womanhood. Wilmet, as an unemployed housewife, occasionally feels purposeless, and fills her days with a series of seemingly useless tasks in order to give the illusion of a full life. She envies the "comfortable busyness" of her friends with children (17), but does not envy them their children, and actually prefers the quiet leisure of her life and meals despite occasional guilt. Staying with friends Rowena and Harry for the weekend, Wilmet is grateful not to join the family for

---

[13] As Nathalie Cooke has demonstrated in a Canadian context, the problem of balancing work and domestic duties is not unique to housewives of the 1940s and 50s, but remained a persistent anxiety throughout the 20th century, and continues in today's dual-income world. See "Home Cooking."

[14] In *Less Than Angels*, which is written in the third person, female characters express little resentment about the unequal distribution of domestic labour.

breakfast, observing, "I was glad to lie in bed the next morning, listening to the sound of the children getting up and Harry shouting at them to be quiet, until a tray of orange juice, coffee and toast was brought to me" (40). The contrast between the luxurious breakfast in bed and the screaming family downstairs undermines the idealization of motherhood so crucial to MOF propaganda, just as the unmarried Piers Longridge discourages Wilmet's attempt to fill her days with Portuguese lessons. "Haven't you enough occupation?" Piers chides. "That's what I like about you—your air of leisure and elegance… You can always do church work if you want a worthy occupation" (*GB* 161). Discounting Wilmet's potential to do meaningful work in any unconventional capacity, Piers underscores the domestication of female labour. Interestingly, his partner, a handsome, young catalogue model named Keith, comes closest to fulfilling the idealized vision of the housewife put forward by the MOF, as he cooks, cleans, and fusses over Piers with enthusiasm. By contrast, Sybil's "pie-dishes full of pottery fragments" (*GB* 10) suggest a misdirection of energy in the kitchen, as she has apparently chosen a profession (archaeology) over baking.[15] Yet Sybil is nonetheless thoughtful in her meal selection, planning a birthday meal for Wilmet comprised of her favourite dishes. Sybil's culinary freedom is perhaps attributable to widowhood, as she has already paid her dues by marrying and raising a son. In the end, she remarries for

[15] In fact, neither Wilmet nor Sybil has to cook, thanks to the reliable servant Rhoda of the excellent cheese soufflé. That Wilmet and Rodney still live with his mother points to the shortages at the edges of the narrative, hinted at by Piers' shoddy flat and neighbourhood. After Sybil's marriage to Arnold forces her son and daughter-in-law out of the house, however, Wilmet will presumably have to learn to cook, although the novel closes with the younger couple on their way to Sybil and Arnold's for dinner.

love, and is one of the few Pym women who find both romance—evidenced by Arnold Root's extravagant roses and thoughtful card—and reciprocity.

Courtship and Seduction: The Power of Shared Meals

Alimentary and sexual hungers overlap in Pym's novels, occasionally becoming comically indistinguishable. Obvious puns and innuendos abound, and Pym playfully delves into the capacity for food to act as an instrument of seduction. As *Excellent Women* demonstrates, the preparation of a meal is a particularly meaningful gesture in the context of rationing, constituting a real sacrifice regardless of the wealth of the provider. Moreover, the implicit intimacy of shared meals operates as a catalyst for socialization. In *A Glass of Blessings*, a novel less preoccupied with shortages (both because it was written post-rationing and because its heroine is insulated by wealth and marriage), the scenarios in which meals are prepared and consumed nonetheless challenge Wilmet's preconceived notions about appropriate pairings. When Wilmet meets Piers Longridge for lunch, for example, he takes her to a cheap restaurant on Fleet Street that is "not the kind of place [she is] used to being taken to." But her "first feeling of disappointment [gives] way to one of pleasure that he should consider [her] the kind of person who could fit into his ordinary routine in this way" (*GB* 159). Like the sense of community deriving in part from shared sacrifice that unified the English in the era of austerity, sharing unimpressive meals allows for intimacy in a way that a gourmet meal does not.

The interconnectedness of eating and romance is a common theme. When Mary tells Wilmet that Father Marius Lovejoy will lodge with her and her mother and "cook his own breakfast on a gas ring" (*GB* 51), Wilmet is both annoyed that

the "[t]all, dark and handsome" (62) new curate will be living with her morally upright but dressed-down friend and "amused at the picture of him cooking his own breakfast on a gas ring. The whole thing seemed most unsuitable" (51). The real reason for her annoyance is of course that she is jealous of Mary's enforced proximity to the flirtatious bachelor (clergyman status notwithstanding). She later responds defensively to Sybil's suggestion that either Mrs. or Miss Beamish will get any enjoyment out of the arrangement, emphasizing that they will not be sharing meals: "'I don't imagine they'll see much of him,' [she says] quickly. 'He is having his main meals at the clergy house and just making his breakfast on a gas ring at the Beamishes'" (*GB* 62). Wilmet salves her touchiness at the missed opportunity to socialize with Marius with the knowledge that while providing meals for a man constitutes an appropriate and effective means of courtship, it is one denied to Mary Beamish.

While cooking offers a means of seduction and courtship, however, Pym rarely depicts the accepted union of devoted wife catering to loving husband. Instead, she conflates and confuses traditional food roles, overturning the categorical divisions of labour running through MOF campaigns. As Ellen M. Tsagaris argues, food is one of the means with which Pym subverts conventional romance plots (10). Although hunger often takes precedence over lust as a more immediate and important need, food can nonetheless appear highly sexualized. When Wilmet and Harry go to dinner, for instance, he takes her to a "rather masculine sort of restaurant, famed for its meat, where great joints were wheeled up to the table for [their] choice and approval" (88). Perhaps as a nod to the black market meats of austerity Britain, the massive roast seems sinful to Wilmet. She associates it with

virility, adultery, and lust, and consequently finds herself "turning aside with a sort of womanly delicacy, hardly able to look it in the face, for there was something almost indecent about the sight of meat in such abundance" (89). As Mrs. Morris observes "obscurely" in *Excellent Women*, meat is traditionally associated with "'[s]trong passions, isn't it… Eating meat, you know, it says that in the Bible. Not that we get much of it now'" (22). Despite this initial association of meat and virility, however, Wilmet translates Harry's desire that the two of them have extramarital "fun together" into the safer prospect of "[e]ndless good lunches with lots of lovely meat," an interpretation that at once encourages Harry to become "more obviously flirtatious" (*GB* 89) and defuses the situation. Because these hypothetical encounters centre on "endless" food and flirtation rather than a series of perfunctory meals ending in sex, they appear harmless. Both Harry and Piers are revealed as sexual dead ends for Wilmet: Piers because he is homosexual; Harry because Wilmet's husband Rodney does not see lunch as a threatening meal to share with a man. Pym plays on the fact that the association of red meat with virility was particularly poignant in the context of meat rationing, when extreme shortages forced the majority of British citizens to drastically reduce their intake—a fact acknowledged in Mrs. Morris' telling "[n]ot that we get much of it now." The link between meat and manliness, brought to the forefront during the war, renders episodes in which clergymen and old women crave red meat doubly hilarious, as these cravings seem more properly the domain of dashing bachelors than grandmothers or men of God.

Continental Cuisine and the Church of England

In a similar manner, Continental cuisine often indicates a certain inappropriateness or suspiciousness of behaviour within the restrictive boundaries of the Anglican or Anglo-Catholic societies inhabited by Pym's characters. As Margaret Visser observes, "British cuisine has always despised and rejected frivolous, dishonest, or merely confused Continental concoctions; the ideal has always been 'the best ingredients, undisguised'" (18). Continental countries, with their evocation of romance, aestheticism, and rich, flavourful cooking, represent the inversion of the stodgy, English heroism so heavily promoted by the MOF. Particularly in the early years of the war, England was and saw itself as acting alone, a solitary hero against a formidable enemy. The famous "Dunkirk spirit" was based on a self-perpetuating and officially-upheld myth emphasizing tribalism and insularity (*MB*)—an insularity that extended to the dining table. Pym therefore uses Continentalism (gastronomical and otherwise) as shorthand for aestheticism or effeminacy, playing on stereotypes of masculinity and femininity with regard to cooking. In *Excellent Women*, Italy is the country in which Rocky Napier spent the war "in a luxurious villa overlooking the Mediterranean," with very little to do "but be charming to a lot of dreary Wren officers in ill-fitting white uniforms" (9). Rocky's cooking skills and fastidious tidiness further associate him with the antiheroic aestheticism of upper-class intellectuals. Although a penchant for cookery may signal homosexuality in Pym (as with homosexual homemakers Mr. Bason and Keith), it can also be a class designation, indicating a leisurely lifestyle seen as undesirable and inappropriate in the context of international conflict. Rocky, who appears in both *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings* (though in the latter in

memory only), is therefore associated with heterosexual romance, charm, and idleness, but lacks the honour and vigour of chivalry. Similarly, Rodney suggests that Sybil's presumed rival for Arthur's affections has failed romantically because of the sheer Englishness of their relationship. After ten years of hiking vacations in Exmoor, Rodney observes, it is not surprising that Arthur decides to accompany Sybil on the Continental excursion that becomes their honeymoon: "'[s]itting on mackintoshes, eating packed lunches over the years, and then tramping home again through the rain—one can see how he would yearn after Portugal'" (*GB* 186). English lunches appear less conducive to love than the more romantic luncheons associated with Continental travel. Yet while exoticism can be appealing, it is often subjugated to national pride and the insularity of English cookery. As Wilmet observes, "Rowena was a good cook and would have liked to make exotic dishes, but the tyranny of Harry and the children made it necessary for her to keep to plain wholesome English food" (37). Despite the allure of rich, Continental flavours, "plain wholesome English food" appears better suited to the English family unit.

The idea of Continentalism is also captured in the constant oscillation behind High and Low Anglican church services. For Pym, religious communities are not sacred but open to criticism, susceptible to aestheticism and gourmandizing. Father Thames' insistence that the breakfast provided for Father Ransome may be "'light'—even 'continental'—he would not require more than that" therefore appears to Wilmet "rather presumptuous, for the new curate might well have a hearty appetite and would surely deserve more than a light breakfast after saying early mass" (*GB* 26). The appetites of the clergy provide a constant source of humour, particularly when the physical appetite takes precedence over spiritual

needs. Even during Lent, although the appropriateness of a properly austere meal promises deeper rewards than the hedonistic pleasures of a lavish one, in Pym's world, indulgence often wins out. Mr. Bason thus serves octopus and sole *véronique* to the clergymen, his choice of menu complying with the letter if not the spirit of Lenten law. Similarly, when Wilmet learns that the surprisingly irreverent Father Ransome has given up drinking, she questions him about such religious minutiae:

> 'All these abstinences and fastings are rather difficult for lay people to remember,' I said. 'I always find them very muddling. I suppose one could always ask the clergy when in doubt.' 'Of course,' he agreed, 'or write to our favourite church newspaper. "Is there any liturgical objection to eating hot cross buns on Maundy Thursday?" you might ask.' 'And whatever would the answer to that be?' He looked at me solemnly, then said in a prim tone, 'We *know* of none, though we should *not* care to do so ourselves.' *(GB* 147)

This passage highlights in a *reductio ad absurdum* manner the ritualistic nature of religion and cuisine, and the disjunctions between ideal and practice. In *Excellent Women*, the less cynical Mildred often refers back to an idealized vision of "the early Christians," set about on all sides but holding together: surely a transparent image of England in wartime. The "feeling of intimacy with each other and separateness from the world" (49) Mildred observes in the congregation huddled together in a bomb-damaged church reflects the larger sense of community among a people who "had all things in common"—even kitchens (8). This parochial lifestyle seems to live on in Pym's novels, underscored by the gossipy reportage of even the tiniest menu details: Dora Caldicote gloats over her fellow teacher's mistaking whale meat for Lenten fare (97-8); Julian and Winifred Malory "hardly noticed what

they ate or drank, so a meal with them was a doubtful pleasure" (*EW* 16). Although Pym herself was not religious, her fascination with the trappings of Anglicanism is apparent in her affectionate depictions of insular communities. Her novels seem to suggest the possibility of deriving satisfaction from following rigid behavioural guidelines, however arbitrary they may appear to the outsider. In church as in society, rules and rituals provide comfort and a means of mediating and offsetting the distance between the individual and the community.

Womanly Meals: The Bland Taste of Rejection

Like Virginia Woolf before her, Pym often pokes fun at the idea that lone women do not require or desire elaborate meals. Her female characters repeatedly contemplate the appropriateness of certain dishes for certain occasions, their choice of meals when alone indicating their roles either as "excellent women" such as Mildred Lathbury or slightly "less fine" (*GB* 103) women like Wilmet Forsyth. Pym's own appetite was by all counts healthy, and she apparently worried from an early age about "whether she could reconcile her creative instincts with her love of food and comfort" (Wyatt-Brown 23). Such anxieties reinforce the notion that comfort is antithetical to meaningful achievement, an idea implicit in the MOF's wartime promotion of self-sacrifice. As with Lenten fare, the most appropriate meal is often the least desirable. Moreover, by depicting women enjoying not glamorous feasts or tragic famines but "common meals of cafeteria food and baked beans on toast," Pym humorously uses food to "subvert romantic discourse" (Tsagaris 11). Meals often reflect the emotional state of the eater, particularly with regard to expectations of what lonely women might be expected to prepare for themselves.

Mildred is amused by the contemplation of these ideas, and after the perceived "rejection" of her affections by the newly betrothed Father Malory, she returns home to eat cod, as it "seemed a suitable dish for a rejected one and I ate it humbly without any kind of sauce or relish" (*EW* 134). Having never actually been in love with Julian, Mildred is by no means disappointed, and her humble meal is playfully and not pathetically described. Yet it does fit into her larger pattern of devaluing her own time and enjoyment. She later eats "a melancholy lunch" in the form of "[a] dried-up scrap of cheese, a few lettuce leaves for which I could not be bothered to make any dressing, a tomato and a piece of bread-and-butter, followed by a cup of coffee made with coffee essence. A real *woman's* meal, I thought" (176). Even before Rocky arrives home from Italy, Mildred has already begun anticipating and accommodating his needs, foreseeing the necessity of letting him into the flat in his wife's absence and consequently choosing to scarf down her own dinner—half a tin of baked beans. When he acknowledges his inconveniently timed arrival, she brushes aside his apologies:

> I explained that I had just finished supper and added that I found it rather a bother cooking just for myself. 'I like food,' I said, 'but I suppose on the whole women don't make such a business of living as men do.' I thought of my half-used tin of baked beans; no doubt I should be seeing that again tomorrow. (*EW* 32)

That she had not even met Rocky when she made the decision to begin catering to him emphasizes the ridiculousness of her position; guided by social mores, she assumes that it is her responsibility to put his hunger before her own. For many of

Pym's female characters, taking the time to prepare a delicious meal only to consume it in solitude seems neither worthwhile nor appropriate.

The British Restaurant: Grin and Eat It

Mirroring the austerity of these solitary meals, communal feeding in Pym's work often hints at the "grin and bear it" stoicism of the lean years; characters are forced to dine in countless dismal cafeterias, usually serving meals that constitute more of a test of fortitude than a potentially enjoyable experience. By ridiculing the practical reality of state-subsidized canteens and cafeterias, Pym undercuts the connection between communal feeding and the vision of a heroically unified British nation put forward by the MOF. When Wilmet follows Sybil into one such cafeteria, she observes that "[a]lthough [Sybil] knew about good food, she had a rather splendid indifference to it where it concerned herself and I had often been with her to places which my own fastidiousness or squeamishness would have stopped me from entering alone" (*GB* 22). With its resonances of the factory canteen and the British Restaurant (a patriotic term apparently coined by Churchill himself [*PW* 445]), the cafeteria is a rather revolting example of the types of communal eateries introduced during the war. When Wilmet amuses herself by wondering whether her husband would be capable of flirting with another woman over a meal, she is unable to picture him anywhere but in the Ministry (we are never told of what) canteen—which might be sufficient for seducing a typist but would hardly be worthy of a briefcase-bearing Ministry woman. Mildred's cafeteria experience is even more horrific, leaving her standing with a tray full of food she has no desire to eat and no memory of choosing. Yet in this crowded cafeteria she is forced into contact with

her fellow citizens, and inspired to contemplate a new vision of a unified nation under God. "These are our neighbours," she thinks, "and we must love them all" (*EW* 75). This strange revelation illustrates Esty's claim that "the immediate postwar period saw invocations of cultural wholeness challenged by the dawning recognition that the post-imperial nation would be a multicultural and heterogeneous place" (165). Such communal dining experiences purport to contribute to cultural unity even as they represent a departure from more appealing dining traditions. Sybil's hearty attitude and the "detached efficiency" (*GB* 22) with which she treats her food as fuel parodies the ascetic approach to eating encouraged by the MOF during the war, yet in Pym as in reality, cafeterias are distinctly unromantic. At a moment when austerity was crucial to national identity, such communal dining spaces represent a uniquely British attitude to food, based on utility and democracy rather than enjoyment.

Conclusion

Drawing on a vast system of signification that owes as much to Lord Woolton as to Roland Barthes, Pym uses the evocative potential of food purchasing, preparation, and consumption to situate various characters within and outside of social boundaries. In so doing she both acknowledges and undercuts distinctions laid out not only within the limited communities of *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings*, but in the wider world of wartime England. Her fascination with the intricacies of quotidian meals fits in with a larger tendency in wartime fiction: to focus on the seemingly insignificant details of everyday life in an effort to combat the encroachment of the master narrative of total war.

CHAPTER THREE: Dining and Domestic Tyranny in Elizabeth Taylor

"It is incredible," novelist Elizabeth Taylor wrote in 1943, "that women can demand so much of their fellow-creatures." Having just moved with her children into a massive, furnished house in order to be near her husband during his military posting, Taylor was describing its kitchen: "the cavernous gas-stove, the sink, in its black corner, the high-up shelves, the uneven stone floors. Ah, it's unbelievable" (qtd. in Beauman 113). This impression of a forbiddingly gothic domestic space directly informs *At Mrs Lippincote's*, which describes the experience of an officer's wife, Julia Davenant, in a garrison town late in the war. Her reaction to the kitchen as the site of domestic drudgery reveals not just the intimidating scale of the impractically large houses both Taylor and Julia were forced into by the war, but a keen understanding of the tyrannical power human beings wield over one another. Taylor's tendency to read the brutalizing quality of the war through the mundane details of everyday domesticity informs her writing and gives profound resonance to her depictions of cooking, shopping, hosting, and eating. *At Mrs Lippincote's* undercuts traditional notions of hospitality and traces the MOF's vision of household management back to the archaic model of Mrs. Beeton as well as the ideal of the aristocratic British landlord. The novel likewise draws from the eras of both Austen and Woolf in depicting illness, invalidism, and the nurturing preparation of food. Illustrating the contingencies of domestic life in wartime, Taylor underscores the highly problematic links between home, army, and nation. In so doing, she distinguishes between the relative stability of the Victorian period and the uncertainty of the midcentury, acknowledging the continuing influence of

historical British foodways while simultaneously associating such oppressively gendered models with death and decay.

Hospitality, Mrs. Beeton, and the British Estate

At Mrs Lippincote's revises the British estate novel by subjecting it to the disruptions and displacements of the Second World War. During the period of uncertainty spanning the war and subsequent decline of British imperial power, the estate novel offered a vehicle for nostalgic meditation on the perceived loss of a "genuine" English identity (Su 121-2). At the same time, estate novels themselves constituted an aspect of national heritage, drawing upon and contributing to a literary history of Britishness. John J. Su traces this pedigree back from Evelyn Waugh through Jane Austen and even to Ben Jonson's "estate poems," arguing that such narratives "seek to reconcile national divisions by fusing past, present, and future values" in the historically rooted symbol of the estate (200). Like Jonson's "To Penshurst," they are contingent upon the figure of the benevolent landlord, a natural aristocrat whose gentility and generosity are intricately bound up with estate, land, and a national genealogy of nobility.

In *At Mrs Lippincote's*, these ideals are complicated by wartime displacements and interruptions in the normal sequence of inheritance. The Davenants have been forced to move from London because of Roddy's military posting, while the Lippincotes in turn have been forced to lease their home due to the difficulty of maintaining a large estate during the war. In complicating notions of cultural inheritance linking benevolent ownership to national and imperial identities, Taylor uses food and cooking imagery to expose the general absence of traditional

hospitality during the war. Partly because they are not the house's rightful owners, that is, the Davenants fail to fulfill the hospitable role expected of them. Roddy lacks the basic generosity required of a landlord, and must be ordered to host a party by his commanding officer (61). His desire to keep up the appearance of benevolence, evidenced by his obsessive attention to filling people's glasses, is belied by the low quality of the goods he chooses for his guests, particularly the female ones. At their housewarming, for instance, Roddy brings in "a concoction which was mainly poor Burgundy and bits of cucumber and which the women were expected to drink" (79); at dinner with the Mallorys, Julia tastes the wine he has chosen "with a wry mouth… wondering what it was she was sipping and if it were turning her teeth black" (154). Offered a refill, Mrs. Mallory places her hand over her glass. Roddy's lack of care in serving his guests points to the difficulty of entertaining during wartime shortages, yet more importantly indicates a failure of the traditional model of sharing the bounties of landed wealth. Unlike the Wing Commander, who showers the Davenants with gifts of food, Roddy offers only the minimum necessary "to preserve the *status quo*" (*AML* 196).

Taylor further complicates the symbol of the estate by linking it to archaic notions of domesticity, epitomized by the rigidly prescriptive code of conduct laid out in *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*. Haunted by the huge tome's articulation of domestic ideals, with its assumption of a large and well-staffed household and assertion that "there is no more fruitful source of family discontent than badly-cooked dinners and untidy ways" (Beeton 1), Julia represents a generation displaced and rendered domestic-helpless by the war. *Household*

Management renders explicit the sheer amount of labour involved in successfully managing a household, yet demands both basic culinary expertise and a desire to cater to the husband. In the context of a total war precluding the stability of the era out of which Mrs. Beeton wrote, the cookbook's prescriptive guidelines appear oppressive rather than instructive.

In response to this oppressiveness, the novel's gothic resonances and images of culinary hauntings underscore the dead and decaying nature of the world of Mrs. Beeton and Mrs. Lippincote. That the rented house is a "Big House" is reflected in the very substance of the building: kitchen, dishes, cutlery, and the meals preserved in old-fashioned wedding photographs, are literally huge. Taylor distinguishes the austere and uncertain wartime present from the relative luxury and security of the past, emphasizing Julia's disconcertedness in surroundings she repeatedly links to the mysterious castles of gothic romances. While Eleanor can humorously deflate the terrifying scale of the crockery, making Roddy smile by using the term "cruet" (*AML* 10)[16] and unperturbedly laying out "knives like scimitars" (14), Julia is "frightened by a soup tureen the size of a baby's bath" (9) and serves their first meal, "a pound of burnt sausages … on the smallest dish" (11) she can find.

Although Mrs. Lippincote's lifestyle will never recover its prewar glory, the house's photographs and uninventoriable dish cupboards become a powerful motif, enduring as increasingly unappetizing monuments to the culinary legacy of the

[16] In the 1956 collection *Noblesse Oblige,* Alan S. C. Ross describes the distinction between the languages of Upper and Non-Upper class English speakers. In the same volume, Nancy Mitford lists several comparative examples of "U and Non-U" speech, among which she cites the term "cruet" as distinctly "Non-U" (39).

house's previous inhabitants. Surveying Mrs. Lippincote's wedding photos, Julia describes the gap between past and present as two contrasting meals:

> 'And now it's all finished,' Julia thought. 'They had that lovely day and the soup tureen and meat dishes, servants with frills and streamers, children. They set out that day as if they were laying the foundations of something. But it was only something which perished very quickly, the children scattered, the tureen draped with cobwebs, and now the widow, the bride, perhaps at this moment unfolding her napkin alone at a table in a small private hotel down the road.' (10)

Set against perishable food and long-perished people, the soup tureen is emblematic of the ostensible permanence of such a life. In this passage, however, "draped with cobwebs," the tureen suggests death and decay rather than timelessness. The passage of time and intrusion of the war reveal upperclass life as outmoded and unsustainable. Having outlived her marriage, Mrs. Lippincote is a relic of a mostly extinct race, forced to give up her home and belongings and "await the return of her broken world" (qtd. in Beauman 113) over solitary meals in a private hotel. As Julia observes, there is "[n]othing of [Mrs Lippincote's] security, in these days. What would she have said to this? No home of one's own, no servant, no soup tureen, no solid phalanx of sisters, or sisters-in-law, to uphold her" (*AML* 12). Status remains linked to patterns of food consumption and shared meals. Taylor's use of parataxis acknowledges the centrality of the shared meal to the happiness of home life; sisters and soup tureen are of equal symbolic importance. Just as crucial as community and family are the material securities that war has threatened to remove. As interim mistress of the house, however, Julia feels "burdened by Mrs Lippincote's

possessions" (13) rather than grateful for their solidity, cognizent of her role as invader. The kitchen is particularly intimidating because it appears already occupied: Julia imagines "Mrs Beeton servants, with high caps and flying bows to their aprons," and notes that "the ghosts haunted; they did not help or encourage" (9). With no live servants to help her, Julia must negotiate the archaic architecture of the house and attempt to bridge the problematic gap between upstairs and downstairs. Her first meal is a failure because she is incapable of navigating this culinary space; "[t]he smell of burnt sausages could not reach beyond the doorway" (10). Rather than subscribing to a nostalgic vision of what an English estate represents, Julia remains aware of her intermediary position between kitchen and dining room, and rejects romantic domestic ideals as fantasy.

Moreover, the reappearance of certain dishes throughout the novel parallels the residual and decaying splendour associated with the house. Although they appear mostly immune to wartime shortages thanks to Roddy's privileged position within the army, before their departure to London the Davenants finally partake of austere meals: "Roddy expected—and received—the most unappetising of meals, odds and ends to be finished up and Julia's mind not on her cooking" (200). Further, the egg sandwiches eaten on the train journeys that begin and end the novel signal the circularity of the narrative[17] and link the novel to other wartime works that start and finish in transit. As Julia observes, "we are back where we started" (205). The

[17] That eggs are so abundant that Roddy resents having to eat egg sandwiches (*AML* 210) is quite surprising for a novel set in the 1940s. Yet Taylor seems irresistibly to associate boiled eggs with humble convenience and travel; *Palladian*'s Cassandra Dashwood also eats egg sandwiches on a train, "smuggl[ing]" them up to her mouth and eating "secretly and without enjoyment" (15).

novel's hauntings, suggestive as they are of gothic romance, are made substantial and unromantic, as the repeated appearance of leftovers signals the alimentary monotony of the era.

Illness and Invalidism

Just as the house itself insists on management, its inhabitants must be cared for through a combination of standard food preparation and specialized nursing treatment. Throughout *At Mrs Lippincote's*, illness thus reflects both the actual threat of war and the gendered imperative of nursing those afflicted by it. Taylor repeatedly links the causes of and treatments for disease to various forms of consumption. As other critics have noted, the importance of the broken and deformed body in wartime serves as a record of war's institutionalized violence; in this novel, Mr. Taylor and Oliver are the clearest victims of such violence. Mr. Taylor's sick body is primarily symptomatic of the Blitz, during which he was not only bombed out of his Soho restaurant, but also apparently made ill by being forced to endure the terror and other peoples' responses to it. He describes the Blitz itself as a sort of poison, telling Julia: "[y]ou get up in the morning with your stomach tender from the fear you've been in all night. Can't be any good for you, can it?" (101). As the narrator observes, "[p]ut in this way, air-raids became a matter like taking snuff or smoking; to be indulged in or given up as one might think wise" (101). The uncertainty and stress of life under constant threat of bombardment takes a physical as well as a psychological toll. Having lost his possessions, restaurant, and the ability to carry out the food preparation and service that was his *raison d'être*, Mr. Taylor never recovers his health or his will to live: his assertion, "[m]y life ended

just the same, whether I was killed or not" (97) is true. The war acts as a slow-moving illness, aging him prematurely and eventually killing him.

By contrast, Oliver's constant invalidism and insipid diet parodically mimic the monotony of the British diet in wartime while at the same time imitating the physical delicacy of a romantic heroine. Even before his illness, Oliver imagines breakfasting on gruel like Jane Eyre, and just as in Victorian novels, Oliver's invalidism represents a plot device with which to restore order and bring family groups together. His illness links him closely to his mother, who acts as nourisher, nurse, and protector; as Lassner observes, "[o]nly Julia can save her son from the lingering illness which… is a symptom of war" (175). His improvement is therefore causally linked to Julia's culinary expertise, which allows her to coax him into incrementally increasing his consumption. "Each day Oliver ate a little more arrowroot mould. Julia made it every way she could think of—white (vanilla), brown (chocolate), pale-brown (coffee) or just pink. Sometimes, layers of all these and then she was late with the lunch" (*AML* 32). While Julia loves her son fiercely, however, her insistence on restricting him to a child's diet results in his inability to gain weight; he begs to be treated as an adult, crying, "'[w]hy shouldn't I have supper? I am *growing*… I need food'" (8). His indignant response illustrates a desire for freedom that mimics his mother's own entrapment within a world of arbitrary rules.

Moreover, because he prefers books to the physical adventure and sportsmanship encouraged and embodied by Roddy, Oliver appears weak to his father. Incapable of seeing the strength in his son's thin wrists, Roddy repeatedly wishes that Oliver might "run wild" (31); even the romantically literary Wing

Commander is complicit in his vision of what a good, strong boy should be like. He disdains the invalid diet offered to Oliver, who eats a ridiculous amount of arrowroot mould: "'Called that stuff 'shape,' when I was a boy,'" he insists. "'Children like it nowadays. We never did'" (49). With this nostalgic suggestion of the "nursery diet," the commander evokes an idealized Victorian past in which making children eat "food to which they actually felt an aversion was seen as a necessary part of breaking the child's peevish will" (Mennell 296). Although he eventually regains vitality, Oliver's body remains thin, symbolically linked to the English nation—itself on a restricted diet. Like Eleanor's breakdown and Chris Aldridge's real or imagined terminal disease, Oliver and Mr. Taylor's illnesses stand in for the casualties of war not directly addressed in the novel.

Invading the Kitchen: Domestic Labour and Culinary Interventions

The novel in general appears to steer away from a direct engagement with national and international concerns, yet just as in Pym, links between individuals repeatedly point to wider social and political issues. While she cooks to please her son, for example, Julia rejects the notion that her needs and desires should always be subjugated to those of her husband and nation, and in so doing rejects the larger role laid out for her by the state. At the same time, she repudiates the *Mrs Beeton's* assertion that "a mistress must be thoroughly acquainted with the theory and practice of cookery, as well as all the other arts of making and keeping a comfortable home" so she can "compete with the attractions" of clubs and restaurants (1). In *At Mrs Lippincote's*, Roddy's dissatisfaction with his wife and Julia's own disillusionment are both predicated on his acceptance and her rejection of such notions. In Roddy's

opinion, Julia fails to realize that "those generalisations invented by men and largely acquiesced in by women… are merely conveniences, an attempt to oil the wheels of such civilisation as we have" (*AML* 26). Feminine acquiescence to the role of the heroic housewife is indeed understood to be a crucial part of oiling the wheels of civilization, and in particular the war machine, yet Julia resents and rejects this role. Cooking for the Mallorys after Oliver's concussion, she bitterly wishes "that she might go to bed, instead of preparing food for other people" (153). As Lassner notes, "Julia's refusal to acquiesce to 'the little rules' that unify the life of a house signals the breakdown of the power of domestic ideology" (175). Contrarily, Eleanor's notion that Roddy should have "some woman behind him to make his career her life's work, and to be an inspiration and incentive to him" (*AML* 20) is guided by the very romantic narratives Julia rejects; it is also crucially dependent on Eleanor's incomplete knowledge of Roddy's character, a stark contrast to Julia's critical perceptiveness. Preferring to be her husband's partner rather than his helpmate, Julia admits that she loves Roddy "in a vague, bewildered way" (26) but tells him: "I have never admired you, Roddy, in the ways in which you expected admiration. In which women are supposed to admire men" (214); that is, in the way in which Eleanor admires him before he is revealed as an adulterer. Marriage and its associated housekeeping duties therefore become drudgery, requiring mental and emotional fortitude. When the Wing Commander demands to know the point of his daughter's Greek lessons, asking Julia, "'[w]hat use will [Greek] be when she leaves school? Will it cook her husband's dinner?'" Julia replies that knowing Greek "'will help her to endure doing it, perhaps… like storing honey against the winter'" (107). In a similar way, Julia stores up observations to be gone over while engaged in a menial

task such as shelling peas (99). Just as Lord Woolton encouraged housewives to endure housework for the sake of the nation, so must Julia and the women around her submit to the monotony of domestic labour as part of their purportedly heroic domestic duties. Displaced from her own social life in London, Julia recognizes that the role within the social sphere she has come to inhabit is dependent on her position as a spouse. Her life in the village is made up of remnants; "now, having no life of her own, all she could hope for would be a bit of Roddy's, what he might have left over and could spare" (20). The imagery of eating only the scraps of what her husband has chosen not to consume not only reflects a relatively common wartime practice (Minns), but also underscores Julia's subsidiary position within a military town in which she is recognized merely a wife.

Further, Wing Commander Mallory's repeated interventions into Julia's culinary routine underscore the impingements of public life onto the private lives of families and individuals. As a military wife, Julia "lives under the authority of an institution which often portrays itself as a 'family,' thus making her subject to two patriarchal authorities: her husband's and the military commander's" (Enloe 47). Wifely duties become doubly important, as they are linked not only to the overall health and satisfaction of the household but also to the strength of the military group and overall power of the nation. As Julia's superior wifely equivalent, Mrs. Mallory represents a world in which women sacrifice their own interests to serve those of their families and country. For the Wing Commander's wife, food preparation and consumption are therefore a full-time occupation, and she appears incapable of discussing anything else. She "recite[s] the names of grocer, doctor, dentist and dairyman at Julia" (25) like a litany, and even bears a striking resemblance to a pot

constantly on the boil (34). Echoing the MOF's insistence on playing one's part for the national good, the narrative wryly notes that "[s]ociety necessarily has a great many little rules, especially relating to the behaviour of women. One accepted them and life ran smoothly and without embarrassment, or as far as that is possible where there are two sexes. Without the little rules, everything became queer and unsafe" (*AML* 105). Such statements are indicative of what N. H. Reeve calls "the coercive nature of the Home Front" (66). Lassner elaborates:

> the contiguous communities of home and army, village and military base, are seen to reflect an uneasy alliance, a cold war which questions the purpose of the nation. Through the expression of power and patriotism represented by army life, women are shown to be manipulated into believing that they must repress their needs for individuation and submit to the higher and more public purpose of protecting the nation. (172)

Throughout the novel, the Wing Commander intervenes repeatedly into the Davenants' home life by sending gifts of food and coordinating various social activities: he suggests a housewarming party, stops in for tea, initiates the hosting of dinners. As one of the few characters Julia can have a real conversation with, he appears sympathetic, yet as the novel progresses he reveals that he is directly responsible for her presence in town—it was his decision, not Roddy's, that Roddy should find a house and invite his wife there (111). In light of this revelation, his constant gifts of food represent not only the privileges associated with Roddy's military position, but an attempt to assist Julia in the performance of the wifely duties that Mallory feels help to "settl[e] an officer" (111). Subject to her husband's authority, she must also contend with his commanding officer's interference.

Mallory's interventions into Julia's domestic life are not merely personal overtures, that is, but an attempt to legislate marital faithfulness out of a conviction that the army represents a mediator between family and nation, and that each concentric circle must remain strong for the overall structure to hold.

Culinary and Literary Legacies

In spite of the negative connotations of food preparation, Taylor insists on the possibility of maintaining positive relationships with and through cooking. Indeed, she often signals her own creative inheritance through food, alluding to Austen, the Brontës, and Virginia Woolf by paraphrasing and linking characters, motifs, and themes to their narratives. Julia's revelation that the baked apples she serves the Mallorys are from *Villette* underscores her participation in this community of brilliant women and enacts Woolf's famous assertion that women think back through their mothers, to which Mallory responds that "[i]t takes a woman novelist to describe a dish of food" and Roddy jokes that Mrs Beeton would therefore have been "a prodigious novelist" (*AML* 155). When Julia describes *To the Lighthouse*'s *boeuf en daube* with sensual pleasure—"[o]ne of the best meals I ever ate in my imagination'" (155)—the Wing Commander remarks that "'Virginia Woolf is a little too modern for me… She has not stood the test of time. She has not been approved by posterity.'" As an exotic and sensually appealing dish, *boeuf en daube* represents the unconventional appeal of Julia herself, which neither Roddy nor the Wing Commander understands or appreciates. Moreover, in maligning Woolf, Mallory reveals his implicit support of conventional, linear romance narratives (such as *Jane Eyre*, which Lassner observes ends with Jane's romantic

acquiescence to Rochester), while rejecting the more ambivalent and critically feminist narratives of modernity. Julia rejects this argument, however, cleverly replying, '[w]e have none of us been that… But we can still enjoy a meal'" (*AML* 155). Mallory, intelligent and thoughtful as he is, nevertheless ascribes to a certain cultural nostalgia predicated on an idealized vision of past stability; tellingly, Virginia Woolf's complexity of narrative and high modernist style is a strong influence on Taylor's own fiction. Julia's readings of 19th-century literature seem to reflect an increasingly critical evaluation of domestic fiction, which "inscribes a romance that conforms to beliefs women are socially pressured to internalize" (Lassner 174). Julia's ability to read her own home equally unromantically thus "gives her the critical language to dissect the romantic legends which seduce women into feeling nourished by their private space" (Lassner 175). While Lassner asserts that Julia's acts of reading serve as a means of rejecting toxic romantic conventions, however, her reading is not merely critical, but suggests a legitimate affection for the authors and for the cultural particularities captured in their novels. While ultimately choosing her own life, unglamorous as it may be, she finds real emotional sustenance in the romantic fictions Lassner describes as "deadly" (174).

Authenticity, Treachery, and Official Food Narratives

In drawing her recipes from literature, Julia implicitly rejects contemporary food narratives insisting on austerity and frugality. Contrarily, Mr. Taylor's description of the failings of English cuisine might come directly from a Ministry of Food publication. Speaking "as if he were quoting the words," Mr. Taylor tells Julia:

> 'The English cook is a terrible combination of wastefulness and meanness. She would throw into a dustbin what a French family would make a meal from…' 'Yes, we all know that,' said Julia impatiently. 'Personally, I think they're welcome. I loathe that French family gathered round the dustbin and having a high old feast from potato peelings and fish-bones decorated with carrot tops.' (*AML* 102).

Julia's comical contempt for the imagined family is indicative of the fatigue many consumers felt late in the war after years of inundation by governmental propaganda. The juxtaposition of potatoes and carrots highlights the MOF connection even further. This speech seems to be pure mimicry coming from Mr. Taylor, who himself expresses disdain for the "stiff upper lip" mentality so prevalent in wartime culture: describing life in London during the Blitz, he calls "the people who refuse to have their morale destroyed… the worst part of the whole affair" (101). As a seemingly automatic reiteration of the MOF's antiwaste campaigns (and a similarly automatic dismissal of a hackneyed narrative), this exchange reveals the ubiquitous nature of official food narratives in wartime.

In the same conversation, Julia attempts to delve into the secrets of Mr. Taylor's prewar kitchen, inquiring about the truthful representation of certain recipes and ingredients. The problem of artificiality is a crucial one, hinting at the wider difficulty of discerning truth during the war. The leveling effects of rationing may have obscured social distinctions (at least in theory), but the proliferation of substitute ingredients and mock recipes played into larger fears of wartime concealments, treachery, and espionage. As noted earlier in this study, traditional British cooking demands a certain straightforwardness that Continental cuisines

theoretically lack; even when Julia inquires how much and what type of wine Mr. Taylor uses in his cooking she explains her curiosity as a desire "not to be fooled" (101). Because Julia is unconcerned with adhering to convention, moreover, she is capable of great cooking, but refuses to kowtow to the everyday drudgery of attracting her man to the table. As a result, even when she serves a hurried meal, Robert Mallory comments on its authenticity, exclaiming: "[t]his really *is* soup… A meal in itself" (154). In delineating characters' relationships to food and hospitality, Taylor undercuts the potential for the estate to serve as a cipher for an "authentic" ideal of class and of Englishness. She reveals a disjunction between appearance and reality in social interactions centered on food.

Rather than linking authenticity with English cuisine and the official food narrative put forward by the MOF, *At Mrs Lippincote's* seems to demonstrate the impossibility of conveying any kind of honest emotion through the highly conventional food behaviours associated with military Britain. Mallory's comment about Woolf resonates as an almost imperialist sentiment in its rejection of the exotic French dish, *boeuf en daube*, in favour of Jane Austen's dreary British mutton. *To the Lighthouse*, associated as it is with an exotically Continental dish (richly seasoned and flavoured with wine), is unacceptable for its newness and its foreignness rather than for any literary shortcomings; the Wing Commander appears to uphold the status quo in his culinary as well as his literary tastes. If Englishness is associated with dreariness and nostalgia, the vibrant sensuality of foreign cuisine signals excitement and empowerment. Tasting garlic, Roddy mentally accuses Julia of recklessness (154). Food provides a measure of authenticity in Taylor's works, in that characters are either openly appreciative or guided by convention. The sensual

appreciation of food thus provides an antidote to the strictly legislated social behaviours governing male-female relationships and the military world, as the craving body somatically reveals truths that conventions gloss over. Julia's appreciation of the special lunch laid for her by Mr. Taylor underscores her joy in accepting hospitality, as she "had eaten in his restaurant as if she were a guest" (98). Moreover, Mr. Taylor dislikes officers for the way they "showed off over wine lists while their women-folk giggled and said things like they 'didn't mind,' or 'anything would be nice' and 'leave it to you,'" deciding "that he would rather have the greedy elderly women, mixing their own salads with their ringed fingers, eating in silence" (98). The straightforward assertion of desire and pleasure appears more sympathetic than adherence to superficial codes of behaviour, and stands in direct contrast to characters like Roddy and his friends, inordinately preoccupied with social niceties.

Although Julia fantasizes about illicit shared meals, imagined as fleeting *tête-à-têtes* over tabletops, she reasons that she does not want the actual experience of "ignoring someone in public, to whom in private, in *very* private, I… no, it is the last thing" (72). Despite her love of pleasure—envisioned as a frosted glass and the brief touch of a hand (72)—the emotional honesty that is Julia's defining characteristic leads her to scorn hypocrisy in all its forms, even at the cost of her own happiness. Because private love cannot be reconciled with public respectability, she refuses it, asserting: "I would rather be a good mother, a fairly good wife, and at peace" (204). The disjunction between the legitimate and the artificial, whether in mock recipes, badly-made punch, or marriage, exposes a wider concern with misrepresentation.

Taylor acknowledges that hospitality can be a pleasure, and that food can offer sensual as well as emotional rewards. But she draws a clear distinction between cooking as a creative process and the menial tasks required in everyday food preparation. Julia repeatedly uses the verb "cherish" to indicate caring work undertaken willingly and in a thoughtful way, placing acts of cherishing in direct contrast to domestic drudgery. Cooking "almost always fired [Julia's] imagination" (42), yet she wishes to cook only of her own volition. In a similar way, Mr. Taylor's memories of his prewar life centre on patterns of consumption: shopping for vegetables with his colleague; preparing, selecting, and serving meals to his customers. The act of selection itself was a particularly fetishized prospect during the war, when many items were "in short supply," and these memories of marketing are described with sensual pleasure. "He had loved the morning outings with Louise; loved to see her quick fingers among endive and artichokes; liked to see her buying a pear or melon or choosing asparagus" (97). Mr. Taylor's grief over the loss of his restaurant and the food-based relationships it signified is made more unbearable in comparison with the overall wartime loss of life, which render it relatively insignificant but no less tragic. His treasured stock of wine, so intricately tied up with his sense of self, can "never be grieved-over in public, because human beings had been lost" (98). Although the mourning of material things represents an antiheroic and potentially anti-English attitude in that it undermines national morale, Taylor acknowledges that such losses can be legitimately tragic. His social fall, from *maitre d'* and chef to waiter to barman, reflects the distinction between the pleasures of creative cookery and the drudgery and potential for debasement in service.

Conclusion

Like Barbara Pym, Taylor uses characters' emotional and physical connections to food to develop and question a complex set of conventions, expectations, and loyalties in wartime England. *At Mrs Lippincote's* therefore places food preparation and consumption at the centre of a hierarchy of behaviours linked to an idealized vision of family, army, and nation. Subverting the nostalgic nationalism of the midcentury by exposing the difficulties of maintaining traditional hospitality in wartime, Taylor draws connections between the English estate house, cuisine, and authenticity. She likewise plays with gothic conventions to read the Victorian residence through the lens of *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*, and underscores the gender and class divisions inherent in such a household. Although she is ostensibly mistress of the house, Julia Davenant's residency in Mrs. Lippincote's home is temporary and an outcome of the national state of emergency. Her discomfort in its borrowed kitchen signals a wider insecurity with regard to the war, while her own domestic position is defined in relation to military and nation: socially subjugated to her husband Roddy, Julia is also subject to the interventions of his own social superior, his commanding officer, who contributes to and concerns himself with her culinary life. Exploring and inverting official food narratives of dreary resilience, Taylor instead aligns herself with a rich literary heritage and embraces the creative power of cookery.

CONCLUSION

In *Human Voices*, a comic novel about the BBC in the 1940s, Penelope Fitzgerald describes a misguided broadcasting campaign entitled "*Lest we forget our Englishry*," which called, "as a matter of urgency, for the recording of our country's heritage" (28). After a brief stint of attempting to capture the sound of coughing Londoners—"England's wheezing before the autumn fogs" (29)—the engineers in charge delivered countless hours of footage containing no sound but the windblown swinging of a rusty church door. Despite the absurdity of recording something so uninteresting, this story only slightly exaggerates an actual tendency in midcentury English culture. During the Second World War, recording the seemingly mundane details of daily life did become an urgent project—and judging by the proliferation of diaries, autobiographies, and meticulously detailed works of fiction, it was a project British citizens were more than willing to take up. This "anthropological turn" on the part of English writers combined with the mass legislation of daily life to breathe new significance into what might otherwise have been considered trivial details. In wartime, as Elizabeth Bowen observes, "[e]very writer… was aware of the personal cry of the individual… of the passionate attachment of men and women to every object or image or place or love or fragment of memory with which his or her destiny seemed to be identified" (*MT* 97). In the years of austerity spanning the 1940s and 50s, the destiny of the British people seemed inextricably linked to food.

In an attempt to assure the success of the most massive rationing campaign in British history, the Ministry of Food's wartime publications transformed food from a private concern to a public and political issue. By emphasizing national

identity and collectivism, government publications portrayed specific food behaviours as either heroic or treacherous, directly linking the purchasing, preparation, and consumption of food to the war effort. Such propaganda encouraged consumers to think about their daily battles on the kitchen front as contributing to a much larger war, and laid out explicit roles—most notably the heroically economical housewife—governing participation in this war. These roles were contingent upon a gendered division of labour and linked to an idealized image of the family as the fundamental unit of the nation, so that the housewife's ability to stretch the ration became a crucial component of citizenship and an essential contribution to the war effort.

Despite the linking of food with a heroically patriotic narrative, the atmosphere of insecurity with regard to material possessions gave rise to widespread frustration during the war. Wartime writers equate the selection of goods and products with personal identity, and accordingly describe food shortages as a form of identity theft. In his 1947 novel *The Slaves of Solitude*, Patrick Hamilton imagines the war "slowly, cleverly… emptying the shelves of the shops" like "a petty pilferer" (101). Even in ostensibly safe spaces such as the countryside home in Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*, international conflicts show themselves in a sinister shorthand: the packet of dried eggs; the clutter of individual butter dishes on the tea table.

In response to this legislated austerity, many writers turned to hedonistic descriptions as an escape from the monotony of the wartime present. Perhaps the most famous example lies in Evelyn Waugh's preface to the 1959 reissue of *Brideshead Revisited*. Calling the war "the period of soya beans and basic English,"

he apologizes that "in consequence the book is infused with a kind of gluttony, for food and wine, for the splendours of the recent past… which now with a full stomach I find distasteful" (1). Elaborate descriptions of Sebastian Flyte's luncheons reflect the fetishization of food in the English imagination; despite the book's ostensible focus on the 1920s and 30s, Waugh therefore offers it to "a younger generation of readers as a souvenir of the Second War" (2). Images of rationing evoke an entire era of willing and unwilling culinary sacrifice.

If wartime narratives look back fondly on an era in which food selection based on individual tastes and sensual enjoyment was possible, the same principle holds true in cookbooks. In the preface to the reissue of her *Book of Mediterranean Food* (1950), Elizabeth David asserts that "even if people could not very often make the dishes here described" in ration-era England, "it was stimulating to think about them; to escape from the deadly boredom of queuing and the frustration of buying the weekly rations" (12). Defining her exotic cookbook in terms of escapist fiction, David underscores the potential for food to fire the creative, private imagination despite the overwhelming imperatives of public legislation. Moreover, she draws a distinction between the lifegiving power of food, even if only imagined, and the "deadly boredom" and monotony of food legislation in wartime.

Such foodie nostalgia is ironically transformed in the postwar years, in which writers look back to the era of rationing and austerity as a Churchillian "finest hour"—if not gastronomically, at least morally and culturally. Just this year, London's Imperial War Museum featured a Ministry of Food exhibit depicting daily life on the kitchen front, with props, propaganda, and eyewitness accounts. "Nostalgic" reprintings of wartime recipes abound in the present day, and the "era of

austerity" provides a fruitful source for the romantic narratives of bestselling authors like Charlotte Bingham and Elizabeth Jane Howard. Contemporary readers remain fascinated with this culinary moment. Further, the ongoing interest with the era of austerity recalls the heroic narratives within which people defined their everyday lives at the time. As Angus Calder argues, individual and collective experiences of the Second World War "were understood in terms of existing mythologies. War created conditions in which people could invest [their unrealized potential] in an everyday life now suffused with history" (*MB* 14). In war, personal food behaviours and routines seemed to take on a greater sense of meaning and necessity (*MB* 23). Wartime food writing remains exciting precisely because it is so monotonous.

Written in this culinary context, both Taylor and Pym's wartime novels are fundamentally concerned with cultural and social realities and their impact on the individual. Each responds to the social roles laid out in official propaganda and their connections to gender, nationhood, and culture. Like other writers of the midcentury, Pym and Taylor reflect and respond to the government's martialization of food—through advertisements, nutritional guidelines, and propaganda—within their written works, using food scenes to reassert the importance of private lives in relation to public narratives. Yet within these public narratives lies a link to an idealized cultural past providing a means of understanding the role of the individual citizen in the larger war. By reading individual food behaviours through the lens of official food narratives, it is possible to illuminate the connections between the peculiarly fraught culinary situation in the 1940s and 50s and the wider domestic, social, and political concerns in the fiction of the midcentury.

WORKS CITED

Primary Sources

Balchin, Nigel. *Darkness Falls From Above*. 1942. London: Cassell, 2002.

Bowen, Elizabeth. *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*. Ed. Hermione Lee. London: Virago, 1986.

David, Elizabeth. *A Book of Mediterranean Food*. 1950. New York: Penguin, 1960.

Eating for Victory: Healthy Home Front Cooking on War Rations: Reproductions of Official Second World War Instruction Leaflets. Foreword by Jill Norman. London: Michael O'Mara Books Ltd., 2007.

Fisher, M. F. K. *The Gastronomical Me*. New York: Duell, Sloane and Pearce, 1943.

Fitzgerald, Penelope. *Human Voices*. London: Collins, 1980.

Hamilton, Patrick. *The Slaves of Solitude*. 1947. New York: New York Review Books, 2007.

Johnson, Pamela Hansford. *An Avenue of Stone*. New York: Macmillan, 1948.

Mitford, Nancy. "The English Aristocracy." *Noblesse Oblige: An Inquiry into the Identifiable Characteristics of the English Aristocracy*. Ed. Nancy Mitford. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956. 35-59.

Orwell, George. *The Road to Wigan Pier*. 1937. New York: Penguin, 1989.

Pym, Barbara. *A Glass of Blessings*. 1958. Kingston, RI: Moyer Bell, 2008.

---. *Excellent Women*. 1952. New York: Penguin, 1983.

---. *Jane and Prudence*. 1953. London: Jonathan Cape, 1979.

---. *Less Than Angels*. 1955. Kingston, RI: Moyer Bell, 1978.

---. *Some Tame Gazelle*. 1950. Kingston, RI: Moyer Bell, 1983.

Taylor, Elizabeth. *A Wreath of Roses*. 1949. London: Virago, 1994.

---. *At Mrs Lippincote's*. 1945. London: Virago, 2006.

---. *Palladian*. 1946. London: Virago, 1985.

Waugh, Evelyn. *Brideshead Revisited*. 1945. Toronto: Penguin, 2000.

Woolton, Frederick James Marquis, 1st Earl of. *The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Woolton*. London: Cassell, 1959.

Literary Criticism

Adolph, Andrea. *Food and Femininity in Twentieth-Century British Women's Fiction*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009.

Beauman, Nicola. *The Other Elizabeth Taylor*. London: Persephone Books, 2009.

Brothers, Barbara. "Love, Marriage, and Manners in the Novels of Barbara Pym." *Reading and Writing Women's Lives: A Study in the Novel of Manners*. Ed. Barbara Brothers and Bege K. Bowers. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990. 153-70.

Brothers, Barbara and Bege K. Bowers. "Introduction: What Is a Novel of Manners?" *Reading and Writing Women's Lives: A Study in the Novel of Manners*. Ed. Barbara Brothers and Bege K. Bowers. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990. 1-17.

Burkhart, Charles. "Barbara Pym and the Africans." *Twentieth Century Literature* 29.1 (1983): 45-53. *JSTOR*. 7 Jan 2010. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/441142>

Carruth, Allison. "War Rations and the Food Politics of Late Modernism." *Modernism/Modernity* 16.4 (November 2009): 767-95.

Cohen, Debra Rae. *Remapping the Home Front: Locating Citizenship in British Women's Great War Fiction*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 2002.

Cooley, Mason. *The Comic Art of Barbara Pym*. New York: AMS Press, 1990.

Deer, Patrick. *Culture in Camouflage: War, Empire, and Modern British Literature*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2009.

Esty, Jed. *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1988.

Gillette, Jane Brown. "'Oh, What a Something Web We Weave': The Novels of Elizabeth Taylor." *Twentieth Century Literature* 35.1 (1989): 94-112. *JSTOR*. 27 July 2009. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/441778>

Grove, Robin. "From the Island: Elizabeth Taylor's Novels." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 79.11 (1978). *ProQuest*. 27 June 2009. <http://gateway.proquest.com/>

Hanley, Lynne. *Writing War: Fiction, Gender, and Memory*. Amherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 1991.

Kalliney, Peter J. *Cities of Affluence and Anger: A Literary Geography of Modern Englishness*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2007.

Kilgour, Maggie. "Foreword." *Eating Their Words: Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Cultural Identity*. Ed. Kristen Guest. Albany: State U New York P, 2001. vii-viii.

Klein, Yvonne. *Beyond the Home Front: Women's Autobiographical Writing of the Two World Wars*. Washington Square, NY: New York UP, 1997.

Kort, Wesley A. *Place and Space in Modern Fiction*. Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2004.

Lassner, Phyllis. *British Women Writers of World War II: Battlegrounds of Their Own*. New York: Palgrave, 1998.

Liddell, Robert. *A Mind at Ease: Barbara Pym and Her Novels*. London: Owen, 1989.

MacKay, Marina, and Lyndsey Stonebridge, eds. *British Fiction After Modernism: The Novel at Mid-century*. Toronto: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

MacKay, Marina. *Modernism and World War II*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.

Mengham, Rod, and N. H. Reeve, eds. *The Fiction of the 1940s: Stories of Survival*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Mukherjee, Neel. "A Fiendish Mood: The Mid-century Novels of 'the other Elizabeth Taylor.'" *Boston Review* 33.1 (2008): 37-41. *ProQuest*. 27 June 2009. <http://gateway.proquest.com>

Plain, Gill. *Women's Fiction of the Second World War : Gender, Power, and Resistance*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

Pym, Hilary and Honor Wyatt, eds. *À La Pym: The Barbara Pym Cookery Book*. Intro. John Francis. London: Prospect Books, 1995.

Raz, Orna. "Dandies, Acolytes and Teddy Boys: Ambiguous Treatment of Male Sexuality in Barbara Pym's Novels of the 1950s." *Partial Answers* 4.1 (2006): 107-28. *Project MUSE*. 30 June 2009. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/partial_answers/toc/pan.4.1.html>

Schofield, Mary Anne. "Well-fed or Well-loved? Patterns of Cooking and Eating in the Novels of Barbara Pym." *U of Windsor Review* 18.2 (1985): 1-8.

Su, John J. *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2005.

Tsagaris, Ellen M. *The Subversion of Romance in the Novels of Barbara Pym*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1998.

Wyatt-Brown, Anne M. *Barbara Pym: A Critical Biography*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1992.

Socio-historical Background

Alcock, Joan P. "Food in a Time of War: Food Rationing in Britain during World War II." In *Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, 2007*. Ed. Susan R. Friedland. Blackawton: Prospect Books, 2008. 9-19.

Briggs, Asa. *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume III: The War of Words*. 4 vols. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1970.

Brown, Mike and Carol Harris. *The Wartime House: Home Life in Wartime Britain 1939-1945.* Gloucester: Sutton, 2001.

Calder, Angus. *The Myth of the Blitz*. London: Pimlico, 2003.

---. *The People's War: Britain 1939-45*. London: Cape, 1969.

Cooke, Nathalie. "Home Cooking: The Stories Canadian Cookbooks Have to Tell." *What's to Eat? Entrées in Canadian Food History*. Ed. Nathalie Cooke. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2009. 228-44.

Davison, Peter Hobley, ed. *Orwell and Politics: Animal Farm in the Context of Essays, Reviews and Letters Selected from the Complete Works of George Orwell*. London: Penguin, 2001.

DeVault, Marjorie L. *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991.

Enloe, Cynthia H. *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarisation of Women's Lives*. London: Pluto Press, 1983.

Fenelon, K. G. *Britain's Food Supplies*. London: Methuen & Co., 1952.

Gardiner, Juliet. *Wartime Britain: 1939-1945*. London: Headline, 2004.

Harrisson, Tom and Charles Madge, eds. (a Mass Observation publication). *War Begins at Home*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1940.

His Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO). *How Britain Was Fed in Wartime: Food Control 1939-1945*. London: HMSO, 1946.

Higonnet, Margaret R. *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1987.

Hope, Annette. *Londoners' Larder: English Cuisine from Chaucer to the Present*. Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1990.

Longmate, Norman. *How We Lived Then: A History of Everyday Life During the Second World War*. London: Hutchinson, 1971.

Mackay, Robert. *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain during the Second World War*. New York: Manchester UP, 2001.

Mackenzie, John M. *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*. Dover, NH: Manchester UP, 1984.

Mennell, Stephen. *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present*. New York: Blackwell, 1985.

Minns, Raynes. *Bombers and Mash: The Domestic Front 1939-45*. London: Virago, 2006.

Nicholas, Siân. "The People's Radio: The BBC and its Audience, 1939-1945." *Millions Like Us? British Culture in the Second World War*. Eds. Nick Hayes and Jeff Hill. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1999. 62-92.

Patten, Marguerite. *We'll Eat Again: A Collection of Recipes from the War Years*. London: Hamlyn, 2001.

Roodhouse, Mark. *Black Market Activity in Britain: 1939-1955*. Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge. 2003.

Rose, Sonya O. *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2003.

Tallis, Raymond. *Hunger*. Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008.

Trentmann, Frank and Flemming Just, eds. *Food and Conflict in Europe in the Age of the Two World Wars.* New York: Palgrave, 2006.

Visser, Margaret. *Much Depends on Dinner: The Extraordinary History and Mythology, Allure and Obsessions, Perils and Taboos, of an Ordinary Meal*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986.

Ziegler, Philip. *London at War: 1939-1945*. London: Pimlico, 2002.

Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Ina. *Austerity in Britain : Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004.