Virginia Woolf’s Starving Artists

Beverly Ann Beyer
College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences, babeyer@gmail.com

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VIRGINIA WOOLF'S STARVING ARTISTS

A Thesis

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Christy Burns

J. H. Willis, Jr.

Nancy L. Gray
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ABSTRACT

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf asks, “Now what food do we feed women as artists upon?” An equally provocative question is, “What food does *Woolf* feed women as artists upon?” Close readings of *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando*, *Flush*, and *Between the Acts* reveal that she actually starves her female artists. Food is generally not necessary for artistic creation; rather, eating interferes with their art.

In addition to the fact that “food is an important sub-theme of the Bell biography, Leonard's autobiography and of Virginia's letters and diary,” as Stephen Trombley notes, “All readers of the novels are aware that some of the most outstanding passages in them are concerned with this subject [food and eating], and that they play an important structural and thematic role” (55). That role has its roots in Woolf's deep conflicts about food; her tensions about food invest it with intentionally symbolic or unconsciously displaced meanings. Often, food in Woolf's fiction and in her personal writing has everything to do with nurturance, both tangible (such as a room of one's own) and intangible (social encouragement, for example). Woolf defiantly writes about female artists who succeed *without* sufficient nurturance, while she simultaneously criticizes the social situations that starve these women.

Through the lives of her starving artists and throughout her own life, Woolf attempted to understand and to control the hands that fed her as well as her ability to produce literary fare for others. A chronological analysis of her artistic women presents the possibility of a correlation between her writing and her changing attitude toward food (often connected to her psychological difficulties) during her lifetime, as documented in her extensive diary. Significantly, Woolf's ambivalent statements about food in this source justify its close analysis in her texts. Woolf herself asserts, “I think it is true that one gains a certain hold on sausage and haddock by writing them down” (*Writer's* 351).
These then were two very genuine experiences of my own. These were two of the adventures of my professional life. The first—killing the Angel in the House—I think I solved. She died. But the second, telling the truth about my own experiences as a body, I do not think I solved. I doubt that any woman has solved it yet.

Virginia Woolf
“Professions for Women”
VIRGINIA WOOLF'S STARVING ARTISTS
In a discussion of Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster notes that “a good feed” (21) is not conventional in literature. Likewise, in *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf states that “it is part of the novelist's convention” to “seldom spare a word for what was eaten” (10). She resists this convention in the text and concludes: “One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well” (18). Woolf, then, recognizes the basic connections between health and life, between nutrition and happiness. She also articulates a connection between food and art: “Now what food do we feed women as artists upon?” (53). Her narrator, “remembering . . . that dinner of prunes and custard” (53) with the women at Fernham that “was not good” (18), answers that we do not feed them well, literally or figuratively. Given Woolf's own ambivalent attitude toward food, which is well documented by her biographers and in her personal writing, what food does she feed women as artists upon? For Lily Briscoe, Cam Ramsay, Orlando, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Isa Oliver, and Miss La Trobe, food is generally not necessary for artistic creation; rather, eating interferes with their art. These characters, starving artists insofar as they struggle to create against social norms, not only mirror their creator in this respect but also chronologically embody part of her lifelong struggle with food. Specifically, as she wrote *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando*, *Flush*, and *Between the Acts*, Woolf grappled to control the sources of her nurturance (what she consumed) and the success of her work (what she produced) through her literal and figurative relationship to food.
Three concepts of my argument—control, nurturance, and success—require particular explanation. I do not mean to imply that Woolf exercised perfect dominion over her environment, or even over herself. Rather, consciously or unconsciously, she used food to establish an illusion of control, if not actual control, of her life and her art. While often rejecting food for her body, Woolf recuperates it metaphorically in her diary and in her fiction, the realms under her control. This distinction between the literal and the figurative is central to Woolf's struggle. The nurturance necessary for artistic creation is both tangible, as in a room of one's own and sufficient food to eat, and intangible, as in intellectual, emotional, and social support. Likewise, artistic success can be tangible, as in the material triumph of public artists, or intangible, as in the self-satisfaction of all artists, public or private. As evident in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf sees the vital link between tangible and intangible, between body and mind, with "the human frame being what it is, heart, body and brain all mixed together" (18). But at times she insists on a separation between mind and body with a Victorian denigration of the latter. Woolf attempts to control both mind and body, both intangible and tangible elements of her nurturance and her artistic success, particularly through her literal and figurative relationship to food; food becomes the object of her displaced anxieties as well as a metaphor for other kinds of nurturance. Although the term "starving artist" connotes the romantic ideal of suffering for aesthetic greatness, I intend the term to emphasize artists' great need for some concrete support from society. Woolf implies in her fiction that female artists can create without eating, without this support, that they can intangibly feed themselves and have no need for actual food. Furthermore, Woolf uses her starving artists to explore the
nurturance and success of women like herself in the various settings of *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando*, *Flush*, and *Between the Acts*. Woolf's diary, the personal writing of the literal starving artist, parallels this exploration in her fiction. She not only asserts the success of her starving artists but also criticizes the social conditions that deprive them of proper nurturance. Her fiction and her diary, analyzed in tandem, reveal how Woolf's attitude toward food, metaphorically and literally, changed over time. But before examining Woolf's efforts to understand and control her nurturance and success through her starving artists, I will examine Woolf's deep ambivalence toward food as observed by her biographers.

Of the numerous biographers who investigate Woolf's ambivalent attitude toward food, several use psychoanalytic theory insightfully. Louise DeSalvo roots Woolf's contradictory feelings in childhood sexual abuse. In "A Sketch of the Past" (*Moments* 61-137), Woolf describes being sexually assaulted when she was six or seven years old by her half brother, Gerald Duckworth, on a ledge reserved for dishes near the dining room door (DeSalvo 104).¹ The biographer concludes: "No more significant a place could exist for sexual assault than this--being fingered by someone on a ledge where plates of food were placed on their way to and from the dining room. Can there be any mystery in why Virginia Woolf had trouble eating later in life?" (104). This experience, according to DeSalvo, results in the possibility that "the very sight of a plate of food must have made her sick" (104). Perhaps the connection seems farfetched, but Woolf herself prefaced the story of Gerald's abuse, "I must have been ashamed or afraid of my own body" (68). If Woolf speaks truthfully--and she has "no motive for lying about it" (69)--that Gerald's
actions caused lifelong shame and fear of her body, then logically these deep negative feelings would affect how Virginia fed that body.

To DeSalvo, Woolf's difficulty with food stems from not only her sexual abuse but also an absence of close parental care: "To starve yourself means that someone has starved you" (254).\(^2\) Rudimentary as the statement sounds, DeSalvo describes the striking deficiency of food in Virginia's juvenile novel, *A Cockney's Farming Experiences*, a deficiency that DeSalvo relates to Victorian children's lack of control over food, a practice likely enforced by Virginia's parents (142). DeSalvo stresses the "possible" (142) connection between the story's lack of milk and Virginia's early weaning. (Interestingly, although the fictional mother of the juvenile novel feeds the baby, the father's needs have priority [150].) DeSalvo is at least correct to equate the lack of milk with an absence of general nurturance in the story (142). Since milk is a baby's first form of sustenance and continues the connection with its mother's body, milk is *the* nurturance food. DeSalvo correctly argues that milk is a metaphorical or metonymic substitute for parental love in this story. In fact, milk continued to carry significant connotations of both control, when prescribed by her doctors, and nurturance for Virginia, who writes in her diary of needing to nurture *herself*, to "milk [her] brains" (3:102), in order to write. Provision of food in this early novel and in general, then, signifies parental validation of children's needs.\(^3\)

Similarly, Phyllis Rose, noting the universal tie between maternal love and food, attributes Woolf's refusal to eat during times of mental stress in later life with "continued guilt about her mother's death" (114). Rose believes that Virginia "wanted less" because she somehow "felt she had already taken too much" (114)--her mother's very life.
Nevertheless, according to Rose, Woolf was still “always hungry for affection” (115) and sought that “maternal protection which Virginia had insight enough to realize was what she had always most wanted from everyone close to her” (178). Furthermore, Quentin Bell describes how, after Julia’s demise, the children spent their mealtimes listening to their “miserable and bewildered” (1:40) father long for death. Bell goes on to note that in 1904, after the loss of her father, Virginia “heard voices urging her to acts of folly” and “believed that they came from overeating and that she must starve herself” (1:89). Shirley Panken describes this 1904 refusal to eat both as a way of grieving for her father and as a rebellion against her sister Vanessa’s and her friend Violet Dickinson’s maternal authority (50). Ironically, Virginia’s periods of illness, as Rose notes, often reduced her to infantile dependency on others for feeding (168): by refusing to eat, Woolf could sublimate her need for parental care.

While childhood sexual abuse and parent-child relationships offer partial explanations for Woolf’s ambivalence toward food, they do not exclude other, related factors. For example, Stephen Trombley, in a discussion of the Woolfs’ honeymoon, says that “the food problem has an important sexual component” and that Virginia reacted negatively particularly to food administered by Leonard (57-58). Or perhaps Virginia at times felt unable to meet or even to have any material needs: her ambivalence toward food may relate to her attitude toward conspicuous consumption. Whatever the causes, however, biographers clearly document Woolf’s lifelong ambivalence toward food. According to Bell, in 1910 Woolf again displayed “a strong impulse to reject food” (1:162). At her doctor’s suggestion, she stayed at a “nursing home in Twickenham”
(1:163), where “wholesome foods would be pressed upon her” (1:164). Although Virginia complains to Vanessa of “all the eating and drinking” (Letters 1:431), Bell describes the easy relationship between Virginia and her nurses that allowed her “to break rules about . . . food” (1:164). Virginia also writes to Vanessa of “feel[ing] her brains, like a pear, to see if its ripe; it will be exquisite by September” (Letters 1:431). Indeed, she recovered, but Bell reports that once again in 1913 “her aversion to food had increased to a frightening degree” (2:12). Unfortunately, the visit to Twickenham that was successful in 1910 accomplished little in 1913 (2:13), although Virginia writes to Leonard that “they make [her] eat all day” (Letters 2:32) and that she is “enormously fat” (2:34). Bell elaborates that “arguments about food” increased because Woolf “became convinced that her body was in some way monstrous, the sordid mouth and sordid belly demanding food-repulsive matter which must then be excreted in a disgusting fashion; the only course was to refuse to eat” (2:15). Consequently to Bell, Virginia’s lifelong criticism of her friends’ table manners “perhaps connected with her own phobias about eating, phobias which, when she was ill, could make her starve herself and, at ordinary times, made her always reluctant to take a second helping of anything” (2:170). In fact, Clive Bell reports that after her 1913 attempt at suicide, Virginia was “intractable about food--the key to the situation so they say” (qtd. in Quentin Bell 2:17).

Leonard Woolf’s meditations in Beginning Again on this consistent feature of his wife’s illness merit full quotation here:

For instance, one of the most troublesome symptoms of her breakdowns was a refusal to eat. In the worst period of the depressive stage, for weeks almost at every meal one had to sit, often for an hour or more, trying to
induce her to eat a few mouthfuls. What made one despair was that by not eating and weakening herself she was doing precisely the thing calculated to prolong the breakdown, for it was only by building up her bodily strength and by resting that she could regain mental equilibrium. Deep down this refusal to eat was connected with some strange feeling of guilt: she would maintain that she was not ill, that her mental condition was due to her own fault--laziness, inanition, gluttony. This was her attitude to food when she was in the depths of the depressive stage of her insanity. But something of this attitude remained with her always, even when she appeared to have completely recovered. It was always extremely difficult to induce her to eat enough food to keep her well. Every doctor whom we consulted told her that to eat well and drink two or three glasses of milk every day was essential if she was to remain well and keep off the initial symptoms which were the danger signals of an approaching breakdown. Everything which I observed between 1912 and 1941 confirmed their diagnosis. But I do not think that she ever accepted it. Left to herself, she ate extraordinarily little and it was with the greatest difficulty that she could be induced to drink a glass of milk regularly every day. It was a perpetual, and only partially successful, struggle; our quarrels and arguments were rare and almost always about eating or resting. (79-80)

In the first weeks at Dalingridge the most difficult and distressing problem was to get Virginia to eat. If left to herself, she would have eaten nothing at all and would have gradually starved to death. Here again her psychology and behaviour were only a violent exaggeration of what they were when she was well and sane. When she was well, she was essentially a happy and gay person; she enjoyed the ordinary things of everyday life, and among them food and drink. Yet there was always something strange, something slightly irrational in her attitude towards food. It was extraordinarily difficult ever to get her to eat enough to keep her strong and well. Superficially I suppose it might have been said that she had a (quite unnecessary) fear of becoming fat; but there was something deeper than that, at the back of her mind or in the pit of her stomach a taboo against eating. Pervading her insanity generally there was always a sense of some guilt, the origin and exact nature of which I could never discover; but it was attached in some peculiar way particularly to food and eating. In the early acute, suicidal stage of the depression, she would sit for hours overwhelmed with hopeless melancholia, silent, making no response to anything said to her. When the time for a meal came, she would pay no attention whatsoever to the plate of food put before her and, if the nurses tried to get her to eat something, she became enraged. I could usually induce her to eat a certain amount, but it was a terrible process. Every meal took an hour or two; I had to sit by her side, put a spoon or fork in
her hand, and every now and again ask her very quietly to eat and at the same time touch her arm or hand. Every five minutes or so she might automatically eat a spoonful. (162-63)

Even in times of mental stability, according to Leonard, Virginia felt that “she ate too much” (80). As Vanessa wrote of her sister, “Virginia is so difficult to feed that meals become rather an uneasy problem” (qtd. in Dunn 231). In addition to the numerous internal factors that I have already suggested, external factors, such as “the scarcity of food” (Rose 240) due to rationing during times of war, doubtless affected Woolf’s feelings about food. A disturbing pattern variously recurred throughout her life: stress, from whatever source, resulted in “exasperating mealtimes” (Bell 2:26) and rapidly losing as much as “half a stone in weight” (2:195). In fact, Bell notes Dr. Octavia Wilberforce’s description of Virginia’s “cold thin” hand (2:225) shortly before her suicide. According to Rose, “more than anything, Virginia feared that rest cure” (245), and her suicide was at least in part motivated by that fear: “if she was going mad again, she would choose the cure” (245).

Although several biographers mention Virginia’s ambivalence toward food and in 1980 Mark Spilka even describes her as a “notoriously anorectic woman” (122), few explore the seriousness of her condition. Jane Dunn mentions in passing that, symptomatic of Woolf’s breakdowns, “she would punish her body in an anorectic denial of its most basic needs,” but Dunn does not investigate further; instead, she falsely assumes that Woolf “showed little interest in food, although she could write about it sublimely” (178). Likewise, Rose shies away from mentioning anorexia in her text. In a footnote, she states just that “the technical name for this symptom [of Woolf’s], the refusal to eat to
the point of self-starvation, is *anorexia nervosa*" and that its "explanations are suggestive in connection with Virginia Woolf" (279-80). While DeSalvo lists "eating disorders" as a topic in the index of her 1989 book, she does not explicitly explore anorexia. In fact, DeSalvo articulates that Woolf is "an anorexic" only on the dust jacket of Jenefer Shute's 1992 novel, *Life-Size*.

Although Roger Poole makes no reference to eating disorders, he believes that Virginia's refusal of food stemmed from "what was clearly a neurosis of some kind, which Virginia felt about her body image" (54). "It is obvious," he argues, "that Virginia feared food" (54). Poole chastises Leonard, who never gained weight regardless of what he ate, for failing to perceive or to accept his wife's fears. Excepting the effects of rest cures, Virginia was "very thin, if not under weight, all her life" (55), but she lived in terror of becoming overweight and obtuse. This connection is crucial in Poole's analysis: Virginia believed that obesity related directly to dull brains, lethargic spirits, and callous souls: "for Virginia, eating, digesting, and sitting still, were loathsome activities which led directly to visual ugliness, as well as to spiritual and intellectual decadence" (56). Particularly, Poole analyzes "the morbid obsession with food, eating, fatness and weight" (55) and finds "a very great suppressed anxiety" (55) in her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, completed, significantly, during the Woolfs' honeymoon. Poole posits that Virginia found both eating and sex absurd, and absurdity was antithetical to the intelligence and freedom that she so highly valued. He concludes his analysis of her "food phobia" (285) with these words: "The menace consists in the 'food' being presented as strictly unnecessary" (58).
Citing an unpublished letter from Dr. Miyeko Kamiya to Leonard wherein the doctor offers the posthumous diagnosis *anorexia nervosa* (60), Trombley nevertheless says that although “some would find *anorexia nervosa* during one particular episode” (10), “to accept this diagnosis would be to confuse the issue” (60). He finds a 1978 definition of anorexia too narrow for the “existential, sexual, ontological” (60) nature of Virginia's ambivalence toward food. According to Trombley, “existential hunger” is thematically important in at least one novel (72). In his discussion of the sexual component, Trombley adamantly asserts that her rejection of food does *not* entail a rejection of femininity. Although he acknowledges that low body weight interferes with sexual functioning, Trombley insists that Virginia always embraced femininity—through her concern “with buying clothes, new ways of doing her hair” (perhaps superficial examples of femininity)—but sometimes rejected *male* sexuality (61). Although Trombley may have a point here, his summary of the facts is incorrect: “It is important to remember that there is no mention anywhere of Virginia refusing to eat prior to her marriage. In later life this ceased to be a problem” (64). Even if Trombley discounts Bell's information, Virginia herself writes to Vanessa on 17 September 1904, eight years before she married Leonard, that she does not intend “to have any more disgusting scenes over food” (*Letters* 1:142). And Virginia's diary evinces that her ambivalence toward food was lifelong. Also, Trombley, unlike Poole, downplays the argument that Virginia adhered to the naive ontological myth that corpulence signals dullness, that her self-denial reinforced her perception of her intelligence. Basically, Trombley refuses implications of anorexia because “the explanation for Virginia's condition is not to be found in a broad social
perspective, but in a unique personal one" (62). Surely, Virginia's ambivalent feelings about eating--Trombley is right that she had no "insane hatred of food" (73)--stem from both her individual situation and her socialization: investigating the connection between Virginia and anorexia significantly elaborates the multiple causes of her ambivalence.

Only Elaine Showalter and Shirley Panken confidently link Woolf's attitude and behavior to anorexia. Showalter asserts that "anorexia was to become the most predictable accompaniment of Virginia Woolf's attacks" (269). The critic links Virginia's first breakdown to the onset of menstruation and points out that anorexia is a way to keep the body in its prepubescent state. To Panken, Woolf's periodic aversion for food was both a mental illness and a way to combat the Weir Mitchell treatment for depression and restlessness that dictated daily glasses of milk (50): "starving herself or anorexia might at this time [1904] have been Virginia's defiant reaction to the recommendation of her doctor advising a diet of rich food" (278). Panken posits that, as a result of the treatment, Woolf "felt shame regarding the effects of over-eating on her already devalued body" (50). Stating that Virginia did not have anorexia nervosa per se, Panken argues, ten years after Showalter, that Woolf was "intermittently anorectic and showed some of the same behavioral patterns such as ambivalence regarding mother, denial of femininity, and the wish to undo the biological changes of adolescence; fear of growing up and assuming an adult female role, feeling sexuality is dangerous, and envying men their power" (50-51). For example, Panken notes the "severe manifestation of anorexia in 1913, when her [Woolf's] sexuality and femininity, highly emotionally charged issues for her, were in question" (68). As Showalter recognizes, anorectic practices often cause menses to
cease, and Panken points out that Leonard, who carefully noted Virginia's cycles, recorded that she did not menstruate when at her lowest weight, between August and November 1913 (69).\(^\text{13}\) While at this weight, she was "acutely disturbed" (69), requiring the care of four nurses. At first refusing to eat, Woolf eventually submitted to the Weir Mitchell mandate for rich foods (70) and temporarily recovered.

Biographies of Woolf aside, the most convincing evidence of her sometimes anorectic, but often ambivalent, attitude to food comes from her personal writing. In a 1904 letter to Violet that mentions the voices in her head, Virginia writes that she "thought they came from overeating--but they cant [sic], as I still stuff and they are gone"\(^\text{14}\) (1:142). Indeed, she writes elsewhere that "unless I weigh 9 \(\frac{1}{2}\) stones I hear voices and see visions and can neither write nor sleep" (qtd. in Spater and Parsons 73).\(^\text{15}\) In these instances, Virginia seems to recognize that she needs nurturance in order to write and to function properly. And yet, especially later in life, the rich foods and consequent weight-gain of the rest cure seemed to her an impediment to her writing. In a 1941 letter responding to Dr. Wilberforce's suggestion that Virginia write in exchange for cream and milk from the doctor's farm, Woolf laments: "I want to continue the argument--the very one-sided argument, books v. cream. I dont see how you can brave it out. Nothing we both ever to the end write can outweigh your milk and cream at this bitter and barren moment" (6:458). A month or so later, she adds, "You've reduced me not to silence quite, but to a kind of splutter--I mean, the cream: the cheese: the milk" (6:474). Panken associates this "splutter" with forced or overfeeding (294), part of the rest cure. Woolf despairs of her state: "If I cant write, I can eat. As for writing, its a washout" (Letters
6:463). Writing, producing, is antithetical to eating, consuming, and Woolf can not seem to manage output and input simultaneously. Virginia complains to Dr. Wilberforce: “This hand doesn't shake from book hugging, but from rage. Louie being gone to a funeral, I cooked lunch: and the rice floored me. That's why I rage, and am now consulting a cookery book. So how am I to write your book?” (6:458). In addition to her ambivalent attitude toward food in general, Woolf clearly experienced contradictions specifically between eating and writing.

Contradictions between eating and writing manifest themselves not only in Woolf's diary but also in her fiction. Leonard's hypothesis that Virginia's interest in food and recognition of its significance in her fiction compensated for her self-denial in daily life (Trombley 60) is far too simple. In “Virginia Woolf and the Scene of Writing,” Patricia Moran rightly notes that “ravenous female figures insistently disrupt Woolf's texts and complicate her portrayals of female artistry” (97).16 In the same sentence, she asserts that “women's artistry cannot succeed without sufficient nurture” (97). As an example of this nurture, Moran quotes Woolf's “rooms of their own and five hundred a year,” but Moran's focus is actually “eating or being fed” (97). For Woolf, of course, “eating or being fed” carries the displaced meanings of other tangible, as well as intangible, nurturance. Crucially, Moran's assertion that “women's artistry cannot succeed without sufficient nurture” (97) makes sense if one has a healthy attitude toward food, but Woolf did not. Although success can be defined in various ways, most of Woolf's female artists succeed without sufficient nurture, either figuratively in the form of sustenance from their patriarchal culture or literally in the form of food. Woolf herself achieved great success,
her triumphant work characterized by Forster as "a row of little silver cups" (25), despite the fact that she did not always have or allow herself to have enough to eat. Moran notes that "in her own life, Woolf often chose to forego eating" (emphasis added, 95). An anorectic perspective would deny the necessity of food, as Woolf repeatedly did. In her fiction, the denial that food is necessary for writing or other artistic creation is even more pronounced. Although Moran's article is enlightening, she is only partly correct in asserting that Woolf "portrays eating both as necessary to and as interfering with a woman's ability to write" (emphasis added, 81) or, by extension, to artistically create. Rather, eating is unnecessary and an impediment in nearly every case. Of course, Woolf's ambivalence means that there are exceptions. In fact, the variables in the unusual cases where Woolf feeds her artists well are instructive for understanding her social criticism. For the female artists of To the Lighthouse, Orlando, Flush, and Between the Acts, however, eating almost always interferes with artistic creation.

Rose, among others, observes a pattern in the relationship between eating and writing over Woolf's lifetime. Sources show that Virginia experienced four major breakdowns, after: her mother's death in 1895, her father's death in 1904, acceptance of The Voyage Out for publication in 1913, and completion of the typescript of Between the Acts in 1941 (Rose 168). Rose notes that in the 17 October 1934 entry of Virginia's diary, as she finished the first draft of The Years, she alludes to other periods of instability after The Waves and To the Lighthouse (168). The connection between finishing a novel and temporary depression persisted from her first novel to her last: "Even now [after Between the Acts], close to sixty years old, the author of eight novels and many other
books, revered and famous, she still doubted the worth of what she had written” (Rose 240). Leonard confirms “that the weeks or months in which she finished a book would always be a terrific mental and nervous strain upon her and bring her to the verge of a mental breakdown” (148-49). He attributes not just Virginia's perfectionism but “an almost pathological hypersensitiveness to criticism, so that she suffered an ever increasingly agonizing nervous apprehension as she got nearer and nearer to the end of her book and the throwing of it and of herself to the critics” (149). Rose recognizes the “postpartum depression” (168) experienced by many writers upon completion of books but suggests that Woolf's was particularly severe, as indeed her anorectic refusal of food would indicate.18

Biographical information about Virginia, then, clearly establishes her anxieties about both writing and eating. These anxieties are interesting in themselves but carry much greater significance. Virginia's ambivalence about food emerges repeatedly in her diary and her fiction as a metaphor for control. Through the treatment of food in her writing, Virginia investigates the extent to which female artists can control their sources of nurturance in patriarchal cultures. Analysis of Woolf's most personal writing, her diary, in conjunction with her fiction, reveals the possibility of a correlation between her writing and her changing attitude toward food during her lifetime. This changing attitude matters because, when Virginia writes about food, she also writes about the tangible and intangible nurturance of the female artist. She writes not only about her own ambivalent attitude toward food but also about the fight for nurturance faced by all female artists, the struggle that she explicitly describes in A Room of One's Own.
As Virginia writes about herself, she puts “in shred after shred of feeling so that one may compose the salad” (3:233) of her life from her diary. Her journal of course contains many such references to food, statements that are not unusual. For instance, she documents dinner with friends and refers to meals in structuring her days. Food is also an indication of class: “people of our own standard dropping in; ease, slippers, smoke, buns, chocolate” (3:42). But other references seem particularly telling in light of Virginia's ambivalence. For example, Virginia wonders in 1918 “whether it is the act of eating & drinking that degrades, or whether people who lunch at restaurants are naturally degraded, [for] certainly one can hardly face one's own humanity afterwards” (1:199). Here Virginia denigrates human corporeality, or at least the physicality of restaurant patrons. And as she creates her starving artists in To the Lighthouse, Orlando, Flush, and Between the Acts, Virginia's comments in her diary about food illustrate tensions between writing and eating, as well as her complex ambivalence toward both activities.

Food imagery in the diary often functions metaphorically for literature itself, as it does while Virginia writes To the Lighthouse. In 1925, she needs to “let the Lighthouse simmer, adding to it between tea & dinner till it is complete for writing out” (3:19). The novel will feed Virginia as surely as her tea and dinner do. Similarly, public praise for her books at this time is “a buttery crumb” (3:37), and she would “glut [her] itch ('glut' and 'itch'!) for writing” (3:40). She also describes retold stories as being “stale, managed, pulled this way & that, as we used to knead & pull the crumb of bread, till it was a damp slab” (3:36-37). Furthermore, discussing literature with “second rate writers” is “pecking up grains with these active stringy fowls,” at which her “gorge rises” (3:71). In fact, the
whole “hierarchy of lit.” starts with “the ornament on the tea pot” and proceeds down to “these good people, ruminating tea, & reflecting all the depths of the suburbs tinctured with literature” (3:115). Perhaps by using food as a metaphor, Woolf can better control the anxiety created by producing this fiction about her family for public consumption. Positively or negatively, in any case, Virginia clearly associates meals with literature while writing To the Lighthouse, her most autobiographical novel.

Since Elizabeth Dodd argues convincingly of To the Lighthouse that the novel's "attitude toward food is that of the anorectic woman" (151), it follows that Woolf does not describe Lily Briscoe eating tangible food. But Lily, like Woolf, uses food metaphorically, although with an interesting difference. The central female artist in the novel, Lily associates food with the antitheses of her painting, Mr. Ramsay's work and Mr. Bankes's science. Specifically, she consistently symbolizes Mr. Ramsay's intellectual activity as “a scrubbed kitchen table [that] . . . lodged now in the fork of a pear tree, for they had reached the orchard” (23); at the thought of Mr. Bankes's endeavors, “involuntarily, sections of potatoes rose before her eyes” (24). Although Lily eats no pears, she solidifies her impressions of Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Bankes “so that even the fissures and humps on the bark of the pear tree were irrevocably fixed there for eternity” (24), as her thoughts dance “in and about the branches of the pear tree” (25). Through food imagery, Lily perhaps quells her anxiety about unknown male pursuits, while Woolf subtly points out the material nurturance available to intellectual men but not artistic women.
Furthermore, although Lily apparently says "little things about the soup" (18), the reader does not see her eat at the meal that is the centerpiece of the novel. Interestingly, in 1926, Woolf records in her diary: "We dined last night at the Ivy with Clive; & then they had a supper party, from which I refrained. Oh & mixed up with this is the invigoration of again beginning my novel" (3:57). Perhaps the connection between refraining from the meal and beginning her novel is coincidental, but her words allow for a possible causal link. A few weeks later she complains of having "a razor edge to [her] palette" and also "little appetite to write." Again, the connections may be superficial, or they may be evidence of Woolf's controlled hunger, her self-denial. Not surprisingly, then, the narrator of To the Lighthouse never specifically mentions Lily (or, for that matter, any female character) taking a single bite of the lavishly described dinner.

During the meal, Lily thinks negatively of Charles Tansley that he is "determined to make sure of his meals" (85), evidence that Lily denigrates such self-assertion and his (perhaps class-motivated) fierceness about food. Likewise, she disapprovingly recollects that Mr. Bankes "would prose for hours (until Mr. Ramsay slammed out of the room) about salt in vegetables and the iniquity of English cooks" (24). An undomestic woman, Lily also seems to think of food as beneath her when she mentally ridicules Mrs. Ramsay: "How absurd she was, sitting up there with all her beauty opened again in her, talking about the skins of vegetables. There was something frightening about her" (101). Lily is conscious of Mrs. Ramsay's beauty, just as Virginia was conscious of her mother's. Virginia herself writes of feeling "too broad," her neck "so ugly" (3:132), on the same day that she records happiness with much of To the Lighthouse, especially its dinner party.
The writer is so self-conscious that she needs a new hair cut in order to have less fear of dining out (3:127). Regardless of Mrs. Ramsay's beauty, her role as the Angel in the House causes Lily's fear. Woolf describes the Angel in the House in her essay "Professions for Women": "she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own" (59). And so the independent Lily is further disturbed when Mrs. Ramsay solicits her agreement about "the iniquity of the English dairy system" (103), agreement that Lily never gives. Ironically, Lily, like Mrs. Ramsay, sacrifices herself, but Lily renounces her tangible needs for her art while Mrs. Ramsay renounces them for others' needs: Lily is a sort of Artist in the House.

Like Lily, Woolf is an Artist in the House. Food without the power of metaphor merits the author's contempt: she describes lunch at the Etoile despite having had "a nice veal & ham pie at home (this is in the classic style of journalists)" (3:36). Furthermore, while writing To the Lighthouse, Woolf links corporeality with emotional stagnation: "She [Elena Richmond] sees flowers, dogs, houses, people with the same quiet, stolid, almost coarse, at any rate dull indifference. Her hands are thick. She has a double chin" (3:39). Virginia is disillusioned with Elena--"that human nature should sink so low, he [Leonard] said" (3:40)--and so Virginia's warmth toward her, this "thick, dowdy" (3:39) woman, has become "a solid tallow candle" (3:40). Both Virginia and Lily esteem their art above food for their bodies, unless this nurturance is metaphoric and under their control.

In order to cope with Charles's animosity and her ambivalence toward the maternal Mrs. Ramsay, Lily thinks not about food but about her painting. Interestingly, however,
she links its artistic solution to a salt cellar. Bettina Knapp presents several interpretations of Lily's "choice of salt-cellar [sic] as a mnemonic device" (31), one of which is that salt both destroys and preserves, much like food in Woolf's eyes. According to Knapp, salt also "spells spiritual nourishment" (32), a possible substitute for all that Lily misses at this meal. Like Lily, Woolf uses food imagery to describe her artistic process. In her diary she notes that she writes To the Lighthouse freely, since "what fruit hangs in [her] soul is to be reached there" (3:59). Woolf's description of milking her mind (3:102) seems particularly fitting, since Mrs. Ramsay is based on Virginia's mother. Again, her words suggest sustenance through art, not through actual food. Writing or thinking about food strengthens Woolf's conception of intangible self-nurturance, both for herself and for Lily.

In contrast to Lily, the male poet Augustus Carmichael has not one bowl of soup but two, much to Mr. Ramsay's irritation (95). Furthermore, the male and female artists evince different perspectives during dinner. Although everyone is "brought . . . into sympathy momentarily" by Rose's arrangement of fruit, Augustus particularly enjoys the sensuous centerpiece by "feast[ing] his eyes on the . . . plate of fruit" (97). But Lily sees "as in an X-ray photograph, the ribs and thigh bones of the young man's [Charles's] desire to impress himself, lying dark in the mist of his flesh," by "screwing up her Chinese eyes, and remembering how he sneered at women, 'can't paint, can't write'" (91). While Augustus revels in the sensual dining event, Lily must grapple with social hostility to her role as artist. Lily's perspective perhaps resembles Woolf's, who "inherited" from her father "spartan, ascetic, puritanical" (Moments 68) views. If Mr. Ramsay, who "hated people wallowing in food" (96), is like Woolf's father, then Virginia's bouts of physical
austerity have a good model. In contrast, the male artist, nurtured by Mrs., if not Mr., Ramsay, luxuriates in a satisfying meal, while the female artist metaphorically goes hungry. Lily has no appetite for what her mother-figure offers: the diet of the Angel in the House. Phyllis Rose in fact sees Lily as a painter “who can accept Mrs. Ramsay as a fellow-artist but wants to reject the preconditions of her art, the cultural formulae by which she works— that people must marry and have children, that women must sacrifice themselves in order to nourish men’s egos, that men must need them to do so” (emphasis added, 170).

Even though Woolf does not describe Lily eating, she does depict Lily painting. In the opening of the final section of the novel, Lily sits “at her old place at the breakfast table, but alone” (145) and contemplates getting herself another cup of coffee. “Among the clean cups,” the empty cups, she can “go on watching” (146) as an artist must. Significantly unable to fill Mrs. Ramsay’s role of suggesting that tea be sent to the lighthouse, Lily associates physical craving with the natural, unforced sensations necessary to paint: “she thought, looking at her empty coffee cup. Mrs. Ramsay dead . . . repeat it as she might, it roused no feeling in her” (146). Lily pretends “to drink out of her empty coffee cup so as to escape him [Mr. Ramsay]” (147). Much as she may admire that he allows his wife to “trim his hair in a pudding basin” (25), she has no desire to nurture him emotionally (or, for that matter, herself physically), to uphold another social custom that impedes her art. Augustus, of course, continues to eschew such conventions: he “fetched his coffee, took his cup and made off to sit in the sun” (147). Thinking of Augustus's dislike of Mrs. Ramsay, Lily unsurprisingly reflects on the woman's failures and foibles in terms of the meals that she must provide: “she was so methodical with the tea cups” and
would get “annoyed because somebody was late, or the butter not fresh, or the teapot chipped” (196). And, although Lily thinks that the sailing party “would be at the Lighthouse by lunch time” (192), the reader never sees her eat. Lily successfully completes her personal masterpiece, she “triumphs as an artist” (Diment 101), but she goes hungry to do so, insofar as Woolf fails to note Lily’s physical sustenance. Of course, this triumph, unlike Augustus’s, is purely personal: Lily believes that her painting will “be hung in the attics” or “destroyed” (208). Furthermore, with the exception of William Bankes’s observations, Lily never suffers the anxiety of public criticism that Woolf did. Based on Woolf’s literal (and of course not realistic) description, eating is not particularly necessary for Lily’s personal success; conversely, without sufficient nurturance, the female artist struggles to make even a private contribution to art.

Cam Ramsay, who is, according to Galya Diment “likely to become a writer” (97), is somewhat more satiated than Lily Briscoe. The difference may have something to do with age expectations regarding food: as Woolf rewrites six pages of the novel each day, she describes an acquaintance who can revert “to her arch girlish days, when she could eat soup & potatoes without any thought of her figure” (3:117). But Cam generally seems to have a positive attitude toward meals. Although it is just a toy, “a tenpenny tea set made Cam happy for days” (59). Of all of the children, it is Cam who serves as a go-between for Mrs. Ramsay and the cook, and Cam includes in her enthusiastic report a description of “an old woman in the kitchen with very red cheeks, drinking soup out of a basin” (55). The word “Flounder” (56) alone—not “daybreak” (55) or “King” (56)—can hold Cam’s attention near the beginning of the novel, while, near its end, she intently watches the
mackerel and other fish caught by Macalister's boy (169, 203). In the last section of the novel, Cam thinks about her mother and “all those plates and bowls” (185); perhaps she will one day write about her childhood nurturance as Woolf has written about hers in To the Lighthouse. In any case, Cam feels protected by her father as she peels “her hard-boiled egg” (205); she “can go on thinking whatever [she] like[s]” (205). Her father's nurturance, both intangible protection and tangible food, then, feeds Cam's imagination; without her mother, the Angel in the House, Cam's sustenance has an even more androgynous prospect. Unlike Lily, Cam positively incorporates food in her artistic double-vision: “it seemed as if they were doing two things at once; they were eating their lunch here in the sun and they were also making for safety in a great storm after a shipwreck” (205). She creatively worries, “Would the provisions last?” (205). Cam is “telling herself a story but knowing at the same time what was the truth” (205): she will not starve on the boat. The implication is that she will have at least the basic food, at least some tangible nurturance, that she needs in order to write as she grows up. She does not want her sandwich, however, and would waste it in the sea if Mr. Ramsay did not instruct her to save it (205). As a source of energy, intellectual for Mr. Ramsay and artistic for Cam, food should not be wasted: it should be shared. Therefore, Mr. Ramsay “gave her, from his own parcel, a gingerbread nut, as if he were a great Spanish gentleman, she thought, handing a flower to a lady at a window” (205). The patriarch shares his material resources with his daughter. Although Cam's refusal of the sandwich and Mr. Ramsay's power in this scene offer a counter-reading, Cam, an artist of the next generation, certainly eats better than Lily. By contrasting two female artists in Lily and Cam, Woolf seems to
offer hope for satiated female artists in the more androgynous future, the future free of strict gender roles like the Angel in the House.

But as *To the Lighthouse* nears publication and Virginia worries about its reception, life is ajar: "the coffee [is] a jar; everything [is] a jar" (3:133). Aside from the mention of Clive having "gone too far in eating drinking" (3:135), too far in "such beef & beer or champagne" (3:136), Virginia writes little about food or, for that matter, anything else, in her diary immediately after the novel appears on 5 May 1927. Perhaps she does not write because, having exposed her highly autobiographical novel to the public eye, she is "nearer suicide, seriously, than since 1913" (4:253). Actually, while comforting herself about aging on 16 September 1929, Virginia convinces herself that her periods of fragility intangibly feed her creativity: "these curious intervals in life--I've had many--are the most fruitful artistically--one becomes fertilised--think of my madness at Hogarth--& all the little illnesses--that before I wrote *To The Lighthouse* for instance" (3:254). But reading *To the Lighthouse* on 20 November 1929, consuming what she has produced, provides little comfort for her stress. On November 25, Virginia writes scathingly of Hope Mirrlees, a recent convert to Catholicism, that she "has grown very fat--too fat for a woman in middle age who uses her brains" (3:268). Moran says of this passage that "the woman who starves lays bare her mind, whereas the woman who eats subordinates her intellect" (91). Virginia has laid bare her personal past as a source of self-nurturance, and she must use her brains to seek new sources of nurturance and forms for success.

Woolf again addresses the nurturance and success of the female artist in *Orlando*. Unlike the tension required to delve into her personal past for *To the Lighthouse*, this
fictional biography allows Woolf more distance from her subject matter. She turns from autobiography to provide “food for thought” (141) by presenting the female artist both beyond British culture and in more than one time period. While well engaged by Orlando, Virginia opens the 22 October 1927 entry of her diary with “this is a book, I think I have said before, which I write after tea” (3:161). Seemingly in contrast to most statements about To the Lighthouse, Virginia implies here that her tea might sustain her uninhibited and easy efforts at Orlando. In this freedom, Woolf is like the Orlando who reaches the modern era after a long struggle to both write and eat well. But Woolf differs from Orlando in two important ways. Firstly, Orlando begins her very long life as a man. Since my concern is with Woolf's female artists, I will not analyze the male Orlando's diet, although Woolf clearly describes him eating as he writes (82). Secondly, Orlando's original is Vita Sackville-West (3:161), a writer not wholly esteemed by Woolf (3:141). Although Virginia is whimsically ironic in her treatment of Vita as Orlando, I contend that she nevertheless takes the nurturance of any female artist, even a less-than-brilliant one, very seriously. After all, in A Room of One's Own, Woolf assures her readers that each great writer of the past “is an inheritor as well as an originator, and has come into existence because women have come to have the habit of writing naturally” (109): all efforts of female artists are significant in the big picture.

As a woman living with gipsies in Turkey in the seventeenth century, Orlando eats well.24 She milks goats, steals eggs, crushes grapes, drinks from goatskin, cuts herself hunches of bread, and learns cheese making and bird snaring (141-42). The gorgeous mountains appeal to Orlando's poetic sensibility, but, since “the gipsies have no word for
"beautiful," Orlando cries, "How good to eat!" (142). In this rustic, exotic setting, food provides both basic sustenance and simple pleasure; certainly eating is necessary for enjoying all that nature has to offer. But when Orlando resumes her "long, blank verse poem" (145), "The Oak Tree," her skills at milking and cheese making decline (146). Significantly, Orlando makes her "ink from berries and wine" (145): she both demonstrates her resourcefulness and writes with what she might drink. Her text becomes an object of consumption.

Orlando's writing interferes with eating, instead of the other way around. An entry from Woolf's diary echoes Orlando's situation: "... I enjoy [writing Orlando] as much as I've ever enjoyed anything; & have written myself into half a headache & had to come to a halt, like a tired horse, & take a little sleeping draught last night: which made our breakfast fiery. I did not finish my egg. I am writing Orlando half in a mock style very clear & plain, so that people will understand every word" (3:162). Notably, the artist Orlando, having "the odd conceit of those who write that words written are shared" (145), writes for her personal pleasure rather than public acclaim. In fact, her writing actually makes the gipsies "suspicious" (145). The artist values herself too much to remain where her writing would impede her sustenance and therefore her ability to continue writing; she abandons the environment that might consume her. Sitting under "the little fig-tree" when the weather is dry like "a gigantic skull picked white by a thousand vultures" (150), Orlando longs for her home in England after the vision of it is "swallowed up" by "the blazing hillside which a thousand vultures seemed to have picked bare" (151).
In England, however, eating interferes with her writing. En route to her home, Orlando dines with Captain Nicholas Benedict Bartolus, who serves her “a slice of corned beef” and presses upon her “the tiniest little slice [of fat] the size of [her] finger nail” (155). She refuses the fat but finds refusing him to be “delicious” (155), implying a connection between food and sex. Not surprising in eighteenth-century British culture, Orlando denies herself physical food in favor of emotional, if not sexual, food from a man. From the ship’s balcony, Orlando gazes “at coffee-house windows” (166) and learns about their “wits” and “poets” (167), all of whom the Captain identifies as men. As a female artist, then, Orlando is symbolically no more than an observer of men writing and dining: eighteenth-century Britain offers little social support for her art. Once home, the sight of her “orangeries and the giant medlars” (171), rather than eating of their fruits, gives her pleasure, which implies that eighteenth-century Britain tenders her only slight tangible nurturance. A “crumb of pastry” (172) in Queen Mary’s prayer book (along with other remnants) sparks Orlando’s contemplation of poetry. She does not eat as she thinks about “The Oak Tree”; she only looks at a crumb. She does not eat, but she writes, although she “hid[es] her manuscripts when interrupted” (187). A female artist in this culture has very little nurturance to go public.

If the female artist is as materially endowed as Orlando is, then she can participate as a patron. Unlike Orlando, who has “a positive hatred of tea” (213), the male writers Addison, Pope, and Swift are “fond of tea” (208). And so Orlando has “poured out tea for them all” (211) and “put[s] bank notes . . . beneath their plates at dinner” (212). She also has “feasted them royally” (211) and hung their pictures around the dining room, like
a stereotypical supporting woman. Orlando nurtures these writers both tangibly and intangibly. On these occasions, she has “kept a book in which to write down their memorable sayings, but the page remained empty” (208). Although Woolf humorously implies that it remains empty because these great men have no memorable sayings, Orlando certainly would not have time to write down someone else's ideas, let alone her own, if she is always pouring out tea. Like the narrator in A Room of One's Own, Orlando's femaleness blocks her access to intellectual resources, symbolized by the so-called memorable sayings of these great literary men. Furthermore, the consumption of tea here seems to connote privilege or power, insofar as Orlando, the unknown female artist, serves tea to the likes of Addison, Pope, and Swift. As Trombley says of tea elsewhere in Woolf's fiction (67), it represents metaphorical consumption of identity, so that the famous male writers appropriate Orlando's creative energies by drinking her tea. At the very least, they embrace her financial and emotional support.

When she realizes that these men do not respect or nurture her intellectual freedom, Orlando “let[s] the sugar fall with a great plop . . . into Mr. Pope's tea” (214). He then burns her cheeks with a line from his “Characters of Women,” and Orlando turns from these men to find refuge “in the nut grove” (214), whose trees she later freely clips in her knee breeches (221). Little wonder that the company of Nell, a poor girl, “taste[s] like wine” (218) after that of the biased, selfish men. In fact, Orlando has “made it her business to furnish generously” a “Punch bowl” (219) for the communing street women: Orlando stops nurturing men in order to nurture women. Unlike Pope's tea, the sweet, most likely intoxicating, punch indicates the free conversation of equals. Indeed, the bowl
of punch stirred by Nell seems to symbolize inclusion and the removal of class boundaries, whereas the tea of "society wits" (218) signifies exclusion and hierarchy. While the great male writers go on "drinking tea together" behind a blind with "the bent female shadow" (222) ministering to their needs, Orlando moves toward independence from conventions and toward the revelation that freedom and nurturance are necessary to write.

Although Orlando seems closer to unproblematically connecting eating to writing at the end of the eighteenth century, the oppressive spirit of the nineteenth century keeps her from eating well. Ironically, then, the huge monument representing the spirit of the nineteenth century has "something of a banquet-table air" (232). In her library, Orlando sits down "to a dish of muffins" (235) and drinks the detestable tea; shortly thereafter, Bartholomew comes in "to clear away tea" (237) and Basket is "picking up the muffins" (238), leaving the reader to wonder how many, if any, Orlando eats. She has in fact been thinking about "The Oak Tree." Bartholomew's entrance causes an ink blot, and "writing poetry with Basket and Bartholomew in the room" is "impossible" (238): Orlando's room is not entirely her own. But as they clear away the muffins and the tea, Orlando writes "the most insipid verse she ha[s] ever read in her life" (238). She finds that feeding interferes with her writing, melodramatic though it may be: "there was the manuscript of her poem, broken off in the middle of a tribute to eternity. She had been about to say, when Basket and Bartholomew interrupted with the tea things, nothing changes" (263). Furthermore, Orlando once again would nurture men, although timidity overpowers her desire to "help him [the porter] to grill his chop on a bucket of fiery coals" (247). In this state, she meets Shelmerdine, the unusual man with whom Orlando talks about anything,
including "how to cook an omelette" (253). Somewhat problematical in terms of the female artist's quest for control, she marries him although she wants "more than anything in the whole world, to write poetry" (264).

Orlando fulfills her wish in the nineteenth century, but her writing still negates eating. She hungers for her poetry rather than food: she "felt very hungry, and something fluttering above her heart rebuked her with having forgotten all about it. It was her manuscript, 'The Oak Tree'" (276). Although Woolf may be playing with the stereotype of the soulful poet in Orlando's case, she also makes a related statement on 28 November 1928, when she records that Orlando does extremely well: "I have a mind that feeds perfectly dispassionately & apart from my vanities & jealousies upon literature" (3:209).

Reading or writing literature for both Orlando and Woolf means self-nurturance. In contrast to Orlando (and often Woolf), the newly renowned Victorian critic and former poet, Nick Greene, revels in food as much as in literature. In "a superb restaurant," so different from the Elizabethan "tavern or coffee house" with "its bowls of punch and chocolate," Greene, without his sleeves that used "to dip in the broth," has "a glass of wine," helps "himself to hors d'oeuvres," and approves "the turbot au gratin" (277-78). Like Lily Briscoe at the Ramsay's dinner party, Orlando never takes a bite in front of the reader. "Among the coffee cups and the liqueur glasses" (280), Greene sanctions the "The Oak Tree" for publication and potential material success.

This encounter with Greene and his article about John Donne causes Orlando to reflect on the relationship between life and literature. Woolf certainly employs irony here, but her ambivalent attitude toward food adds another layer of meaning. Orlando wonders:
“I don't like cake; and though I'm spiteful enough, I could never learn to be as spiteful as all that, so how can I be a critic and write the best English prose of my time?” (286). To write well, then, one might need to eat cake, but Orlando's writing precludes eating. She denies her need for sustenance in order to write, and perhaps she is not alone since “it would be impolitic in the extreme to wrap a ten-pound note round the sugar tongs when Miss Christina Rossetti came to tea” (291), an image that sharply contrasts the monetary omnivorousness of tea-swilling Addison, Pope, and Swift (212). Male, not female, artists demand public, tangible nurturance. Orlando also notes “(here were half-a-dozen invitations to celebrate centenaries by dining) that literature since it ate all these dinners must be growing very corpulent” (291). Her insight suggests both a connection between big meals and thick Victorian novels and a disparaging of this relationship. Orlando, like Woolf, associates fat with dullness and would slim down her writing through thorough editing.

In striking contrast, Woolf feeds the modern Orlando well. When Orlando has her son, the narrator slips into “such silly hops and skips [as] the mind takes when it slops like this all over the saucer” (294). The birth—a production like “The Oak Tree”—connects with “the plum tree” and “the almond tree” (293) and the pleasure and freedom of wine. Interestingly, Woolf explicitly connects children, literature, and feeding in her 28 November 1928 diary entry when she professes that she could continue to write in the Orlando style because “the tug and suck” are at her to do so (3:209). Like Woolf's, Orlando's attitude toward food in the twentieth century is not without problems. For example, she goes shopping for “sardines serrated like a saw” (300) but never buys them.
Furthermore, she is shocked that Sasha, her lover and inspiration from long ago "ha[s] grown so fat, so lethargic," comically from "leaning over the banks of the Volga, eating sandwiches" (303). But Orlando "understand[s] crops" and thinks of her literary fame and tangible success as connected to eating: "to dine, to meet; to meet, to dine; fame--fame!" (312). The literate public feeds well when it approves. Nevertheless, modern society still withholds at least intangible success from female artists: "a porpoise in a fishmonger's shop attracted far more attention than a lady who had won a prize" (312). Still, Orlando's words "fell like ripe nuts from a tree, and proved that when the shrivelled skin of the ordinary is stuffed out with meaning it satisfies the senses amazingly" (315). Finally, after centuries of hunger, Orlando has "cut herself a slice of bread and ham, clapped the two together and beg[u]n to eat," after which she "tosse[s] off a glass of red Spanish wine" (emphasis added, 316). Satiated, she regrets that "never would beer be spilt" (318) in her now historic house. Little wonder that once the Orlando manuscript reaches its conclusion, Virginia longs for the reward of "the sun; wine; sitting doing nothing" (3:177). (But instead she presses ahead with her book on fiction, "a hand to mouth book" [3:190].) In the end, Orlando describes her successful poetry--humorously a book in "seven editions" (325)--as "the stammering answer she made all these years" to her surroundings, including "the kitchen and the fields, so laboriously bearing wheat, turnips, grass" and "yellow corn stacks" (325). The modern Orlando eats to write.

Fittingly, Virginia's income from Orlando allows her almost to buy a house, "La Boudard," a house that means "eating cakes in the new hotel at La Ciotat; driving off to Aix; sitting on the harbour dining; seeing the sardine boats come in" while consuming "a
great deal of cheap wine & cigars” (3:232). Perhaps, having denied herself while writing Orlando, Virginia has earned by its tangible success the right to indulge. But she does not buy the house and gratify herself in this way, any more than the modern Orlando buys her sardines. Although no diary entry is in evidence for 11 October 1928, the day of Orlando's publication, the next time Virginia writes, on October 27, she makes the vital connection between food and life that appears in A Room of One's Own: “I am back from speaking at Girton, in floods of rain. Starved but valiant young women—that's my impression. Intelligent eager, poor, & destined to become schoolmistresses in shoals. I blandly told them to drink wine & have a room of their own” (3:200). Is Virginia “starved but valiant,” denying her body for her mind, or does she feed herself and “drink wine,” physically nurturing herself? If Orlando's experiences over several hundred years are any indication, having the tangible resources does not necessarily mean self-nurturance and public creation. While justifiably pleased with her achievement in dashing off Orlando, Woolf of course already thinks about how to “brew another decoction of illusion” (3:234), another fortifying—metaphorically at least—production. Her next experiment in fiction (The Waves) will retain some of Orlando's “externality” but without sinking into “this appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner” (3:209). Once again, food without metaphoric significance is of little interest to Woolf. Her historical exploration through Orlando at least demonstrates that the best hope for nurturance of female artists lies in the modern age, since Orlando is most satiated at the novel's end.

Like Orlando, Flush is a fanciful biography that makes serious social commentary about the nurturance of female artists in the past. Although ostensibly a biography of
Elizabeth Barrett Browning's dog, in the novel Woolf "thinks back through her mothers" (Room 97) to Elizabeth Barrett Browning herself. Perhaps because Woolf's subject is an actual, historical figure, she finds Flush more difficult to write than she did Orlando, and this adversity manifests itself with food imagery. On 3 January 1933, Virginia has tried "to re-write that abominable dog Flush in 13 days" and has also just "ate [herself] into the heart of print & solitude--so as to adumbrate a headache" (4:139). Sating herself in literature and quiet, if not food, at Rodmell is supposed to relieve the tension created by Flush. Virginia intended the same effect from a party in London the night before, where "we were eating ham & chicken & ices & rolls & paté sandwiches--& drinking wine" (4:140). She indulges her appetite at the party, "a night of chatter" that she "insisted upon" (4:139), as a release from the discipline and denial required for her novel: Virginia seems to feel justified in nurturing herself only after much production. Woolf describes the party elaborately but then stops because "nothing but thin water comes from [her] brain" (4:141), as opposed to the milk that usually flows (3:102). Forcing herself to work on Flush in the following weeks in fact causes a headache and stiffness in her back and neck. Significantly, Woolf wonders, "What connection has the brain with the body? Nobody in Harley St could explain, yet the symptoms are purely physical & as distinct as one book is from the other" (4:143). Virginia plainly recognizes a link between her novel and her body: producing Flush seems to take its toll on her perhaps neglected health.

Woolf may have seen her delicate state mirrored by Elizabeth Barrett Browning's, and maybe she envisaged such a happy ending as Flush's for herself. Just as Orlando's attitude toward food changes through the ages, in Flush Woolf's conception of Elizabeth
Barrett Browning's diet changes over time. Initially, food interferes with the contemplation necessary for her writing. When she is in the throes of thought-induced melancholy, Miss Barrett finds comfort in Flush, but she is sure that, had he been able to speak, he would have ruined the moment and “said something sensible about the potato disease in Ireland” (38). Alone in the room with Flush, Miss Barrett's “fingers [were] for ever crossing a white page with a straight stick” (38). But Flush notices the strange change that Wilson, with “a tray of food” (39), of course interrupting Miss Barrett's writing, brings into the atmosphere of the room that is not entirely her own. Woolf herself remarks about the same kinds of uncontrollable interruptions. On 7 August 1931, Virginia works easily on Flush in the mornings at Rodmell, with “no one to say dinner's ready, or to be stumping about in the kitchen” (4:37). Without the disturbance of meal preparations, she can work away at her novel. Not meals themselves but the intrusion of others that they necessitate is the distraction: Virginia must remind herself to put Annie's pie in the oven (4:37). For Miss Barrett, visitors, welcome and perhaps supportive though they may be, leave her “very white, very tired” (41).

After having company, rather than eating to restore her strength for writing, Miss Barrett is “too tired to eat” her “dinner on a tray” (42). In fact, she greets “the plump mutton chop, or the wing of partridge or chicken that had been sent up for her dinner” with “a little sigh” (42). When Wilson lingers, “she fiddle[s] about with her knife and fork” (42), conscious of the social compulsion to eat and of her own lack of control over her meals. Once alone, in fact “directly the door was shut,” Miss Barrett gives to Flush her dinner, “a whole chicken's wing . . . impaled” on a fork and “half a rice pudding
clotted with thick cream” (42). The language used to describe this dinner sheds light on Miss Barrett's lack of appetite: a “whole” chicken wing and half of a pudding--hardly a huge feast--are far too much for her to consume. Fortunately, Flush eats so neatly that he leaves “no trace behind” (42) to offend his mistress's sensibilities. When she later contemplates Flush's devotion, she remembers the service that he does her by having “eaten chicken and rice pudding soaked in cream” (70).

Thanks to Flush, Miss Barrett can pretend to have “made an excellent dinner” (42) when her father visits: “His eye at once sought the tray. Had the meal been eaten? Had his commands been obeyed? Yes, the plates were empty “ (43). Trombley feels that here “food begins to lose its taste and assume a symbolic meaning which is associated with male aggression and a blind enforcing of 'empirical method’” (57), as in the rest cure. At the very least, food is clearly about control in this situation, and Miss Barrett subverts her father's authority because she does not feel that she needs to eat in order to write. Just as Miss Barrett rejects such enforced tangible nurturance, Woolf's thoughts about food have everything to do with control. In the 10 August 1931 entry of her diary, Virginia records a bad day: although she can “not go on with Flush because of [her] head,” she can yet salvage the day by seeking “quiet & control,” by “eating apples” (4:38). In this instance, Virginia associates feeding herself with control and eats perhaps because she can not write Flush.

Possibly more problematical for a feminist reading than Orlando's marriage to Shelmerdine, Miss Barrett's love for Mr. Browning changes her attitudes toward both food and life. The difficulty for some feminists might lie in Miss Barrett's dependence
upon a man to save her from her metaphorical starvation. In stark contrast to the dinner scene described above, after Mr. Browning's first visit “she ate her chicken to the bone” (57). In fact, “not a scrap of potato or of skin was thrown to Flush” (57). Miss Barrett's revived hunger may be commensurate with her sexual appetite. Interestingly, with only fifty pages of Flush remaining to correct, Virginia describes an evening at Vanessa's studio, complete with “large dishes of hot, writhing sausages, looking indecent, like black snakes amorously intertwined” (4:144). The link here between food and sex is undeniable. While Miss Barrett's appetite is less blatantly sexual, her new interest in food demonstrates hope for her future happiness. Although Miss Barrett does not eat all of the cakes brought by Mr. Browning, because “the cakes [he] left” (71) go to Flush, she likely eats at least one since he brings them upstairs to her.

When Flush is dog-napped, however, worry over him means that “Miss Barrett could not eat her dinner” (100) though she still writes about her attempts to save him. Anxiety keeps her from eating but not from writing, just as it did before Mr. Browning's first visit. Ironically, when Miss Barrett bravely goes (against the advice of the men in her life) to rescue Flush, she deals with an obese woman who is “fat enough to have had an easy conscience all her life” (95), an ambiguous statement that seems to link overeating to moral carelessness. This link appears subtly in a reference to Virginia's mother-in-law in her diary: she is “old & pink & wattled & overdressed, demanding amusement, pleasure, cakes, drives” (4:37). Leonard's mother has not Virginia's capacity to employ herself, and the writer resents her voracious demands. Moran in fact asserts that “Woolf always characterizes her mother-in-law as a devouring mother” (92), Virginia denigrates such
corporeality. As work on *Flush* continues, she also writes disdainfully of a Mrs. Hunter, who “dies standing eating drinking dressing penniless, ruined discredited” (4:145). Woolf here associates eating and drinking with human failure. Furthermore, the day that she notes *Flush*’s success with the American Book Society, Virginia, again vilifying large physical appetites, writes somewhat sneeringly of girls who “squawked a little; too genteel over their tea, which they devoured” (4:174) and of “credulous fat faced old women” (4:175). Woolf of course contrasts thin and concerned Miss Barrett, the female artist, to the “immense fat woman,” the “immense feminine bandit” (95).

With *Flush* safely returned and the trouble passed, Miss Barrett continues both to eat and presumably to write when she is not busy preparing for her covert elopement. On her secret wedding day, she “go[es] out directly after breakfast” (103). Unaware, Mr. Barrett still “looked as usual to see that the chop was finished, the wine drunk” (104); Mrs. Browning and *Flush* continue to live under “a blanket of silence, of eating and talking and lying still” (105). Finally, slipping “past the drawing-room, the library, the dining-room” (106), the two are free of the control of Mr. Barrett and British domestic culture.

Italian domestic culture satiates Mrs. Browning. Rather than “sipping a thimbleful of port and complaining of the headache, she tossed off a tumbler of Chianti and slept the sounder” (114). Life in Italy is literally fruitful, of course with her new child, but also with “a flowering branch of oranges on the dinner-table instead of one denuded sour, yellow fruit” (114). Happily away from England’s “shoulders of mutton,” Mrs. Browning “tossed off her Chianti and broke another orange from the branch” (115). Back in England, Woolf has dutifully “pared the cold mutton & put it in the pot” (4:185) for her guests: she feeds
others, then, both metaphorically through *Flush* and literally. In contrast, Italy's freedom and fullness allow Mrs. Browning's interest in faddish crystal balls and knocking tables. At a "luncheon party" (152), she and her acquaintances go "on drinking tea and eating strawberries and cream" (153) on a knocking table. Free from the restrictions of English society, Mrs. Browning can both eat and write while exploring new ideas: she is complete. Little wonder, then, that on 25 April 1933, while at the stage of correcting proofs, Virginia records, along with doubts about *Flush*, her longing to escape to Italy, where she can "rise, like a bubble out of a bottle" (4:151).

When *Flush* comes out, Virginia has just emerged from a day of illness--spent in bed reading a book she describes as "a rotten pear" (4:181)--to a beautiful morning where "the pear tree has a spatter of bright leaves" (4:182). The pear imagery here is as ambivalent as Virginia herself regarding food and writing: the literature she consumes may be rotten, but she can still produce succulent phrases of poetic imagery. Woolf also notes that earlier in the week, she had dined out on "a vast plate of beef" (4:182); four days later, she feels relieved that the wave of response to her production *Flush* has passed: "Desmond praises: Morn P. tears me between the rough, coarse yellow feeble teeth of poor Mr Grigson" (4:185). In this instance, Virginia knows that, just as she has devoured beef, the critics can devour her through her new novel, seemingly an image of failure here. Although *Flush* receives favorable reviews, Virginia writes of another's novel as "unmitigated trash--a sickly slab of plum cake iced with pink fly blown sugar" (4:186), somewhat like the stale cakes consumed by *Flush* (72). Supposedly, Virginia now thinks
of her biography *Flush* as more substantial: she has demonstrated through this novel that leaving Britain or having a supportive partner can nurture a female artist.

As she did with *Flush*, with *Between the Acts* Virginia conceives of herself as prey for her critics. On 20 May 1938, while enjoying “the airy world of Poyntz Hall” (5:141), the world of *Between the Acts*, Woolf herself becomes food. As in a previous entry (4:45), she refuses to be caught and devoured: “The pack may howl, but it shall never catch me. And even if the pack—reviewers, friends, enemies—pays me no attention or sneers, still I'm free” (5:141). Perhaps as evidence of this freedom, on a day shortly thereafter when Virginia is “writing [*Between the Acts*] gaily,” she buys “cakes in Lewes” (5:149). Still “taking a frisk” at *Between the Acts*—but only for an hour—Virginia reports “dinner cooked, & smoked, on dining room fire” (5:179). Hence, restricted time for writing allows more time for and attention to meals: Woolf is happy with *Between the Acts* but writing only “in spurts” interspersed with time for “cooking alone” and wine (5:336). Unable to focus on her novel on 13 October 1938, she thinks instead about picking apples and that it is “nice to come home to duck” (5:180): Woolf again displaces anxiety about her lack of control. Furthermore, the end of the book causes some problems, and Virginia can not write, a cessation that is “a natural slimming process” (5:338). So, she throws “masses on to the potato box” (5:339), an alternate activity that revives her sense of control. For the last time, Woolf experiences particular tension between food and a novel.

The connection has its roots in her childhood, for she remembers being “a little creature, scribbling a story in the manner of Hawthorne on the green plush sofa in the
drawing room at St Ives while the grown ups dined” (5:192). Literature itself can be rotten food, so that a Dickens novel has “gone stale, like a cheese thats been cut in & left” (5:257). But Woolf manages to thresh Between the Acts “till perhaps a little grain can be collected” (5:289): the result is “a new combination of the raw & the lyrical” (5:259). Woolf's great aspirations for this book might account for so much food imagery for literature, so much displaced anxiety, while writing Between the Acts. Woolf proposed: “all lit. discussed . . . but 'I' rejected: 'We' substituted . . . 'We' . . . composed of many different things . . . we all life, all art, all waifs & strays--a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole--the present state of my mind?” (ellipses both added and quoted, 5:135). How do female artists fare in this grand scheme?

Thoroughly rooted in British culture like Woolf, the private poet Isa Oliver of Between the Acts does not eat, write, or live with Mrs. Browning's abandon. Although she falls in love with “the romantic gentleman farmer” (14) when he hands “her a teacup” (15), food keeps Isa from devoting her full self to her poetry; a modern woman, she has not yet killed the Angel in the House. While trying to compose a poem, she calls to order fish: “'Soles. Filleted. In time for lunch please,' she said aloud. 'With a feather, a blue feather . . . flying mounting through the air . . . there to lose what binds us here . . .’” (ellipses quoted, 15). While writing the novel, Woolf similarly comments in her diary about “words words & now roast beef & apple tart” (5:183): all are produced and consumed, but not by everyone. For Isa, food's interference with her poetry is inevitable: “Mrs. Giles [sic] had to visit the kitchen” (emphasis added, 17). It is her responsibility to nurture others (as it is Mrs. Ramsay's), to know that “veal is dear, and everybody in the
house is sick of beef and mutton” (18); she must of course monitor her children's diets (24). Similarly, on 22 June 1940, Virginia must turn to the “role” of “dinner to cook” (5:298) despite that fact that she has not finished her novel.

Certainly, food connects Isa to the family, so that she and Mrs. Swithin can discuss the freshness of the fish (28). For Woolf, however, such a connection is negative. As she enjoys writing her novel, she nevertheless disparages Leonard's mother (once again) for her talk about “suites of dining room chairs, coffee cups” (5:160): commentary about these accouterments of food seems to be beneath Virginia, who confronts death and age “face to face, after tea” (5:200). The human connection through food is ambivalent to Isa, too, for she meets Giles fishing, loves him when “the salmon . . . leapt” (48), and now must hide her poetry from him in an accounting book. Isa feels torn between genteel and chivalrous love symbolized by “a cup of tea at a tennis party” and earthy and predatory love symbolized by “the salmon [that] leapt like a bar of silver” (208). Such imagery is significant because Isa does not get sufficient food or sufficient love in the novel. Indeed, Isa, who encourages herself with “on, little donkey, patiently stumble” (156), remembers the story of “the donkey who couldn't choose between hay and turnips and so starved” (59).

Likewise, as Woolf progresses with her novel, she would seemingly eat lightly, if at all. On 16 September 1938, Virginia, “kicking [her] heels” with Between the Acts, complains of a lunch “very heavy, stodgy, full of meat & wine” (5:171). Little wonder that Woolf never shows Isa, like Lily Briscoe and unlike Mrs. Manresa, taking a bite of food. Her “sweet wine at luncheon” makes her long for just water: “A beaker of cold
water, a beaker of cold water,' she repeated” (66). In contrast, Mrs. Manresa, no
cconventional artist but certainly theatrical, adds “a shovel full of brown sugar candy” (55)
to her coffee, then luxuriates in stirring it and even more so in drinking it. Isa, on the
other hand, never gets her beaker of cold water: “desire petered out, suppressed by the
leaden duty she owed to others” (67). Isa's unquenched thirst is particularly significant
since “water connotes the past in general, and has a strong connection with sexuality”
(Trombley 285), and Isa has conflicts regarding both. On a more literal level, water is a
basic requirement for life, one that Isa must sacrifice in order to nurture others.

Breaking off her poetic train of thought “to have tea” (96), self-effacing Isa
follows assertive Mrs. Manresa. While Mrs. Manresa is “the first to drink, the first to
bite” (102), Isa must press “her way to the table” (103). Her mind turns to poetry as she
holds out her cup and drops two lumps of sugar into her tea, but “the noise of china and
chatter drowned her murmur” (103). The sounds of food being served essentially stifle
her poetic voice, and the chatter that overcomes her murmuring is about food: “Sugar for
you?" they were saying. 'Just a spot of milk? And you?" 'Tea without milk or sugar’’
(103). For Woolf, dinner with friends means that “private life must be postponed”
(5:300): both women must delay their art for these communal meals. Ironically, Isa still
longs simply for water (104). Her wish merely for water when presented with tea and
actual food signifies denial of her bodily needs. And so Isa and William Dodge, two
private artists, stand in silence, not sipping but “holding their cups” (105) of tea. William
sees Isa change roles to give her son George cake and “a mug of milk” (105), to nurture
others, but he never sees her in the role of a nurtured, confident poet.
Unlike Orlando and Mrs. Browning, Isa remains a starving artist like Lily. During the second interval, she finds herself wandering and musing near the pear tree, with its fruit “hard as stone” (155). Touching but not eating an unripe pear, she mutters her unripe poetry about being burdened by the past, perhaps implying the constraints of her role as nurturing woman. Dinner is similar to lunch, with no description of Isa eating and with the “strained” (106) interaction between her husband and herself. At dinner, “with its sheaf sliced in four, exposing a white cone, Giles offered his wife a banana” (213). She refuses the phallic banana: indeed, at her rejection, Giles “stubbed his match on the plate . . . with a little fizz in the raspberry juice” (213). Only after dinner, with “no fish to order” (214) and a temporary relief from her burdens, can Isa gaze out of the window, murmur her cadence of “this year, last year, next year, never” (214), and contemplate her life and art.

As a public artist and an unconventional woman, Miss La Trobe is a foil for Isa but also her mirror: before the reader, both artists do not themselves eat but feed others. Miss La Trobe was rumored to have “kept a tea shop at Winchester; that had failed” (58); she does not necessarily feed others in Isa’s traditional way. Additionally, her art is her sustenance, as she makes turbans from “sixpenny dish cloths” (62). Her art also sustains others, as symbolized by the butterflies that are attracted to the “sweetness” of her costumes: “Red Admirals gluttonously absorbed richness from dish cloths, cabbage whites drank icy coolness from silver paper. Flitting, tasting, returning, they sampled the colours” (63). These images appear in the 17 October 1940 entry of Woolf’s diary, when she resumes her novel after some time away from it; the day of her return is “a perfect
day—a red admiral feasting on an apple day” (5:330). She sees “a red rotten apple lying in the grass; butterfly on it” and so lets her “mind feed like the Red Admiral” (5:330). Five days later is “a lovely almost a red admiral & apple day” (5:332). (Perhaps it is not quite perfect because the sound of a “rat gnawing” (5:332) in the kitchen is actually a guest who complains about being fatter, maybe striking a nerve in Virginia.) The transformation of this imagery from the diary to the novel has interesting possibilities. Woolf eliminates the apple, so that Miss La Trobe's butterflies do not actually eat anything. They feed off only her art, reinforcing its richness. Miss La Trobe feeds the audience more forcefully than she does the butterflies in that “her words peppered the audience” (78). While she is devoted to her art above material concerns, she is nevertheless “a slave to her audience—to Mrs. Sands' grumble—about tea; about dinner—she had gashed the scene” (94): eating disrupts her art. Although the “butterflies feasted upon . . . dish cloths” (98) and her audience dines during the first interval, Miss La Trobe does not.

She does not need to eat to create, but her play continues to nourish the audience. Its repeated nursery rhyme describes “the Queen . . . in her parlour / eating bread and honey” (115, 122, 182), which ironically contrasts with Miss La Trobe not eating behind her tree. But her audience's “eyes fed on [Mabel Hopkins] as fish rise to a crumb of bread on water” (122). Miss La Trobe's play, like Woolf's Between the Acts, abounds in displaced food imagery. Mabel Hopkins as Reason speaks of “Commerce[']s . . . Cornucopia” (123), “honey” (123), and “eating and growing” (125) as necessary and glorified in English history, the “kitchen” and “a cup o' tea” (172) being practically synonymous with England. In the play within the play, Where there's a Will there's a Way
Lady Harpy Harraden presides over “a china tea service” (125), demands “a dish of chocolate” (147), and feeds her servant “on apple parings and crusts from [her] own table” (148). Miss La Trobe satirizes demanding women (recall Virginia's attitude toward Leonard's needy mother [4:37]) in this selfish character. The playwright may also be satirizing the stereotypical controlling man who “at dinner on Wednesday attend[s] another--turtle soup” (162) and “spy[s] too in the kitchen” (163). Furthermore, Miss La Trobe's “Picnic Party” (164) echoes Woolf's dinner party in *To the Lighthouse* as the actors discuss everything from “the game pasties” (167) to “the cream” (168) to God's “bounty” (171). Miss La Trobe even *literally feeds* her actors, perhaps in reward for their efforts: “Corks popped. Grouse, ham, chickens were sliced. Lips munched. Glasses were drained. Nothing was heard but the chump of jaws and the chink of glasses” (169).

Why does Woolf use the passive voice here? The diners seem to be disembodied, as perhaps Virginia would be.

Food, then, is part of the art while not part of the artist's body; Miss La Trobe, like Woolf, seems to be emphasizing the sustenance that she does not allow herself. In the audience, Mrs. Lynn Jones pragmatically responds to the picnic, “They did eat. That's true. More than was good for them, I dare say” (169-70). If Miss La Trobe intends something less literal by including the feast in her play, the audience has missed it. Bartholomew thinks that all Miss La Trobe can possibly want in thanks is “like that carp . . . darkness in the mud; a whisky and soda at the pub” (203). Indeed, she “drop[s] her suit case in at the kitchen window” (211) and seeks out the release of a drink. In the pub, with “smoke . . . tart on the roof of her mouth” (212), she drinks but does not eat. Unfed, she
hears "the first words" (212) of a new artistic creation. On 29 December 1940, although Virginia writes of "being a great amateur of the art of life, determined to suck [her] orange" (5:346), she also complains of feeling "tart" (5:347) in her old age. Does Woolf suck her orange? Does she hear the first words of her next creation?

In fact, on 27 June 1940, Woolf writes that she has only *Between the Acts* to sustain her and that she cannot conceive of living another year. (In this bleak state of mind, she sees Duncan Grant as "patched & peeled like an onion" and Bunny Garnett as "bluff & burly & beefy as a Farmer" [5:299].) The Germans "are nibbling at [her] afternoon walks" (5:300), an indication that the war certainly increased Virginia's concerns about survival: "My little triumph today was that Flint [*Lewes grocer*] gave me extra tea. Now margarine is rationed; & I have a horrid skinflint morning ordering dinner, suspecting Louie who of course helps herself to this & that" (5:305). Virginia assertively goes on "gathering apples all the afternoon," despite a German raider flying over (5:325). But she can not always ignore the effects of the war: "Food skimpy. No butter, no jam. Old couples hoarding marmalade & grape nuts on their tables" (5:356). Her diary on 16 and 19 December 1940 evinces that rationing (not surprisingly) negatively affected Virginia (5:343-45). The war connotes British loss of control in the world, while the rationing that results exacerbates Woolf's loss of control over her tangible sustenance. Vita quotes Leonard as attributing his wife's suicide to "the strain of the war and finishing her book, and she could not rest or eat" (qtd. in Stape 80).

The rationing greatly magnified Woolf's ambivalence about food. Bell notes that "with an appetite so sharply set, she ate whatever there was to eat more heartily than ever
before; she even confesses at this period to an occasional guzzle, when guzzling was possible” (2:222). Virginia's thank-you note to Vita for a gift of butter in November 1940 is both comical and poignant:

I wish I were Queen Victoria: then I could thank you--From the depths of my Broken Widowed heart. Never never Never have we had such a rapturous astounding glorious--no, I cant get the hang of the style. All I can say is that when we discovered the butter in the envelope box we had in the household--Louie that is--to look. Thats a whole pound of butter I said. Saying which I broke off a lump and ate it pure. . . . then sat down and ate bread and butter. It would have been desecration to add jam.

You've forgotten what butter tastes like. So I'll tell you--its something between dew and honey. Lord, Vita!--your broken po, your wool, and then on top your butter!!! Please congratulate the cows from me, and the dairy maid, and I would like to suggest that the calf should be known in future (if its a man) as Leonard if a woman as Virginia.

Think of our lunch tomorrow . . . in the middle of the table I shall put the whole pat. And I shall say: Eat as much as you like and I cant break off this rhapsody, for its a year since I saw a pound, to tell you anything else--I dont think anything else seems important.

Its true all our books are coming from the ruined house tomorrow: all battered and mildewed. Its true I've been made treasurer of the Women's Institute [Rodmell]: also I want to ask you about lantern slides of Persia; and will you come and talk: But this is mere trifling. Bombs fell near me: trifles; a plane shot down in the marsh: trifles: floods damned--no, nothing seems to make a wreath on the pedestal fitting your butter. (Letters 6:447-48)

Rationing meant a reversal for Virginia: no longer denying herself but being denied by others resulted in periodic omnivorousness. Although deprivation thwarted Virginia's efforts to maintain actual control of her sustenance, she still had metaphoric control.

While obsessed with the rhythm of Between the Acts, she was disturbed by some stolen butter, and, on 23 November 1940, when she finished the novel, butter imagery reappears:

The exact narrative of this last morning [of Between the Acts] should refer to Louie's interruption, holding a glass jar, in whose thin milk was a pat of butter. Then I went in with her to skim the milk off: then I took the pat &
showed it to Leonard. This was a moment of great household triumph. I am a little triumphant about the book. I think its an interesting attempt in a new method. I think its more quintessential than the others. More milk skimmed off. A richer pat, certainly a fresher . . . . (5:340)

This is fittingly the day after Virginia writes of buying her "cream separator: a sieve with which you skim the milk" (5:341), and of course Dr. Wilberforce regularly brings her milk and cream (5:346).

Significantly, Woolf proclaims: "How one enjoys food now: I make up imaginary meals" (5:347). The implication is that Virginia has not enjoyed food in at least the immediate past. Furthermore, making up imaginary meals may be an indication of deprivation of actual meals. When Virginia records "such a heavy woman, as Louie put it, feasting spontaneously upon the grave" (5:352), she restates an important concern, the connection between fat and death, be it physical or mental. On 29 January 1941, Virginia reports losing several pages of Between the Acts and eating: "5 small trout for lunch. Octavia's cream." (5:354). Loss of her writing leaves room for this lunch and "talk of soup making" (5:354). Similarly, "clearing out kitchen" (5:354) is a way to exert control, stave off depression, and take a break from rewriting her novel. On 26 February 1941, Virginia again reports finishing Between the Acts, and the entry is almost entirely about food:

Then at Fuller's. A fat, smart woman, in red hunting cap, pearls, check skirt, consuming rich cakes. Her shabby dependant also stuffing. Hudson's van unloading biscuits opposite. The fat woman had a louche large white muffin face. T'other was slightly grilled. They ate & ate. Talked about Mary. But if she's very ill, you'll have to go to her. Youre the only one . . . . But why should she be? . . . I opened the marmalade but John doesnt like it--And we have two pounds of biscuits in the tin upstairs. . . .
Something scented, shoddy, parasitic about them. Then they totted up cakes. And passed the time o' day with the waitress. Where does the money come to feed these fat white slugs? (ellipses quoted, 5:357)

She hardly conceals her scorn of such indulgence. In the same diary entry, Woolf confesses: “Food becomes an obsession. I grudge giving away a spice bun. Curious--age, or the war? Never mind” (5:357). The juxtaposition of these two stances in a single diary entry highlights Woolf's profound, lifelong ambivalence about food. She simultaneously wonders, “But shall I ever write again one of those sentences that gives me intense pleasure?” (5:357). In the next entry, on 8 March 1941, Virginia describes “the shell encrusted old women, rouged, decked, cad[a]verous at the tea shop” (5:357); is this what Virginia fears becoming? The description is in fact in the penultimate entry of her diary, and she notes: “And now with some pleasure I find that its seven; & must cook dinner. Haddock & sausage meat. I think it is true that one gains a certain hold on sausage & haddock by writing them down” (5:358). As her diary suggests, Virginia often gained a hold on food by writing it down because of her ambivalence about consuming it. Her many texts reflect, through food, the tensions between stereotypical feminine self-effacement and feminist self-assertion. Woolf's starving artists both meet the feminine stereotype by denying themselves food and defy the stereotype by asserting themselves through their art.

Virginia Woolf, at times a starving artist herself, re-creates underfed artistic women in her novels. Through her fiction, she depicts what she describes in A Room of One's Own regarding women and art: “the effect of discouragement upon the mind of the artist should be measured, as I have seen a dairy company measure the effect of ordinary
milk and Grade A milk upon the body of the rat. They set two rats in cages side by side, and of the two one was furtive, timid and small, and the other was glossy, bold and big” (53). If Woolf’s fiction is such an experiment, how healthy and productive are her rats, her artistic females? Lily Briscoe, unconventional and independent, needs no food to personally triumph in her painting. The soon-to-be writer Cam Ramsay eats better than Lily, perhaps offering hope for a more androgynous future. Orlando's life chronicles the hunger of an unfed woman writing from the seventeenth century through the twentieth, when she finally eats freely and writes successfully. Like Orlando, the story of Elizabeth Barrett Browning suggests that in nineteenth century Britain at least, writing for the female artist precludes eating. Isa Oliver and Miss La Trobe are two sides of the same coin, women in the 1940s who sacrifice food for their art. Despite the dissimilarities of these artists' experiences, Woolf's rats do not drink Grade A milk but are still glossier than one would expect, in that they write and paint anyway. This twist is not surprising in light of Woolf's ambivalent attitude toward with food: her characters can have their cake (freedom from the corporeality of food) and eat it too (write and paint). Eating interferes with artistic creation for all but Cam, modern Orlando, and Mrs. Browning. Through these women, Woolf seems to look with hope about artistic sustenance toward the future, love, and different cultures. Disturbingly, however, Isa and Miss La Trobe are the starving artists that Woolf successfully creates just before her suicide. Although Moran asserts that “women's artistry cannot succeed without sufficient nurture” (97), Woolf's life and fiction contradict her.
But Virginia Woolf is not a typical female artist. As an exceptionally successful artistic woman, she both embodies the struggle of all female artists to prosper in often barren circumstances and points the way for succeeding generations to cultivate their social environment. Woolf rightly says in *A Room of One's Own*—“our literary feminist bible” as Jane Marcus calls it (*Languages* 5)—that since “gifts, whether of mind or character, can [not] be weighed like sugar and butter” it is supremely “important at the moment to know how much money women ha[ve] and how many rooms” (105). Without these basic provisions, female artists have little hope of producing: Woolf's fictional artists (like herself) are conspicuously not working-class. But beyond subsistence-level rations, women also need nurturance, from both mother- and father-figures; they need the freedom to choose a rich and varied diet of education and experience in order to fulfill their potentials. And though “to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worth while” (114) so that Shakespeare's sister can “put on the body which she has so often laid down” (114), feminists must not only kill the self-sacrificing Angel in the House but also see to it that all women have access to “five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own” (113). After all, as Marcus asserts, “Her [Woolf's] place in modern European letters, next to the giants of her age, was won by defiance, rebellion and deliberate self-consciousness as an outsider” (*Essays* xiv). Although sources show that Woolf's feminist political activity and personal support of female artists were peripheral to her writing at best, it is through her texts that she has fed the feminist corpus. Lucio P. Ruotolo describes how Lily Briscoe “steps back from the center to allow her creation to take on a discernibly eccentric life of its own” (17), and Woolf's creations have likewise developed feminist lives of their own.
John Mepham accurately captures the nature of her creations:

Virginia Woolf's lack of coherence . . . was not a failure but was her
greatest strength. She resisted the temptation to make a final statement
about life, about what it is to be a person, except the statement that to be a
person is always to be riven inwardly by divisions and differences. . . . Her
integrity as an artist can be seen in her adoption of inconclusiveness as a
principle. (xvi)

The multiplicity of perspectives in her writing and her position not in the center but on the
margins powerfully challenge patriarchal, hierarchal finitude and ordering in writing.

Marcus rightly notes that "as a literary critic, Virginia Woolf is the mother of us all"
(Essays xiii). But Woolf's contributions extend beyond literary criticism to social
criticism: Forster said that feminism pervaded her work and "was constantly in her mind"
(qtd. in Marder 1). As Virginia Woolf attests in her diary, her writing was the very fruit of
her soul, and it is a rich feast for feminists indeed.
NOTES

1. Quentin Bell attributes this particular incident to George, rather than Gerald, Duckworth. He cites a letter from Virginia to Ethel Smyth describing the behavior of her “half-brother” (44), but a description of this incident in “A Sketch of the Past” (Moments 61-137) clearly attributes the behavior to Gerald. Roger Poole untangles Bell's confusion and notes that “22 Hyde Park Gate” (Moments 140-55) implicates George in molesting Virginia on other occasions (28-30).

2. Thomas C. Caramagno argues that DeSalvo's approach is too simplistic since it fails to take the neuropsychiatry of “abnormal brain chemistry” (57) and its genetic factors into account. Interestingly, research shows that “few authorities today question the role of familial factors in the pathogenesis and maintenance” (Strober et al. 239) of eating disorders.

3. Shirley Panken makes similar connections between adult eating and childhood nursing, but she perhaps embellishes Woolf's “archaic memories of an intense aversion to her mother nursing her younger brother, and otherwise ministering to his infantile needs, witnessed by Virginia in early childhood, thinking her brother omnivorous and insatiable; angry her mother had not accorded her such a rich suckling experience” (68). That Woolf enjoyed smoking as an adult has interesting implications for the oral fixation implied by these biographers. For an insightful analysis of the mother-daughter relationship in Woolf's life and fiction, see Ellen Bayuk Rosenman.

4. As James King says, “The words 'mad' and 'insane' (although she did employ them to describe herself) are not of much help in describing Virginia's bouts of depression, acute anxiety and psychosis; in fact, they are misleading, uninformative and, ultimately, condescending” (91). Stephen Trombley thoroughly questions the notion of Woolf's mental illness or madness. The use of these labels here connotes the perceptions of Woolf's doctors and perhaps Woolf herself, rather than any objective, empirical fact.

5. In addition to an excerpt from Leonard's Beginning Again (79-80), Trombley cites part of a letter from Virginia to Lytton Strachey dated 8 September 1925: “I have been spending 10 days there, blasted by dissipation and headache. When I was at my worst, Leonard made me eat an entire cold duck, and, for the first and only time in my life, I was sick! What a hideous and awful experience!” (Letters 3:206). In contrast, Showalter benignly states that “one of Leonard's regular responsibilities during their marriage was to watch over her [Virginia's] diet in health and spoon-feed her in sickness” (269).

6. Virginia's diary (for instance, the 18 December 1928 entry [3:212]) suggests contradictory feelings about spending money on various goods. While Rose states that
Woolf "hated shopping, being fitted for clothes, wearing a new outfit" (7), Virginia writes on 14 May 1925, "My love of clothes interests me profoundly" (3:21) and on 16 October 1934 that "buying a blouse" (4:253) has helped to cure her illness. But on 25 May 1932, she "hate[s] Bond street & spending money on clothes" (4:103). Perhaps, as with food, Virginia felt torn between the self-sufficiency, the strength of denying her needs, which is in fact the maternal mandate, and the arguably masculine right to assert them ("the male virtues are never for themselves, but to be paid for" [4:95]).

7. Trombley interprets this comment as "mocking of the 'empirical method'" (258-59).

8. In this description, Caramagno sees evidence for the Freudian view that Virginia associated food with guilt (56), the view held by her husband (79-80, 162-63), Rose (114), and others. Noting Leslie Stephens's "incessant obsession with digestive functions" and Julia's "attentiveness to them," Panken interprets this quotation to suggest that Woolf "confuse[d] oral and reproductive functions" (68); she cites a vivid scene in *Between the Acts* of "birth the wrong way round--a monstrous inversion" (99). The inverted birth scene had its origins on 4 September 1935: "We saw a snake eating a toad; it had half the toad in, half out, gave a suck now & then. The toad slowly disappearing. L. poked its tail; the snake was sick of the crushed toad, & I dreamt of men committing suicide & cd. see the body shooting through the water" (Diary 4:338). Bell's description of Woolf's monstrous view of her body at least indicates a tendency to view the mind and body as separate entities in a power struggle, with the intellectual preferred to the corporeal or the sensual. As Trombley argues, Woolf "felt as if her body was not the centre of her 'self'" (10).

9. Trombley does not date this letter. He notes that Dr. Kamiya is "a Japanese psychiatrist who planned to write a psychological study of Virginia" (60), an incomplete study that resulted in the short paper "Virginia Woolf: An Outline of a Study on Her Personality, Illness, Work."

10. Such a narrow view counteracts any impetus for social change that would decrease the incidence of eating disorders. Ironically, the personal explanation proposed by Trombley—that Virginia's refusal of food relates to her rejection of sex with Leonard—arguably has broad social components, such as the prescription of procreative heterosexual relations within marriage. Trombley is more willing to incorporate sociological explanations in his analysis of food in some of Woolf's novels: "Food has occupied a prominent place in the rituals, myths and taboos of many societies from time immemorial, and the manner in which Virginia deals with the subject here [in The Waves] reflects its perennial meaning" (71).

11. Many biographers note that Woolf hated to be viewed. For instance, Rose records that "being photographed was agony for her and sitting for a portrait bust almost brought on a nervous breakdown" (168); Trombley in fact posits "an analysis of embodiment" (10)
as a vital tool for understanding Woolf's difficulties. Woolf herself writes in her diary: “Never was anyone so tossed up & down by the body as I am, I think” (3:174). As for the results of overeating, George Spater and Ian Parsons report some of their findings as follows: “On September 30, 1913, three weeks after her suicide attempt, Virginia weighed 8 stone 7 pounds. Leonard's tabulation shows that she had gained more than a stone by January 13, 1914, and put on another three stone by the end of 1915—a gain of roughly 60 pounds in a little more than two years” (73).

12. Panken posits that “in not wishing to have children, Leonard rejected her as a woman, Virginia felt, forbidding babies and sex” (70). Furthermore, the biographer adds that “a profound sense of humiliation and failure regarding her [Virginia's] sexual and maternal roles added to her disillusionment with Leonard for not adhering to what she thought had been spelled out in premarital exchanges” (70). Panken distrusts Leonard for his “discussions with numerous doctors concerning the advisability of having children, negating any prior consultation with his wife, annihilating her wishes, despite her considerable emotional investment in becoming a mother” (69); the biographer accuses Leonard of “replacing her [Virginia's] family physician with a succession of physicians until he found those who agreed with his predilection, namely, to avoid having children” (70). Panken's portrait of Leonard on this topic (61-67) is unflattering, to say the least. Other tenable connections between anorexia and having children include issues of bodily control and autonomy. Interestingly, based on an undated partial letter from Violet Dickinson to Vanessa Bell, King asserts that, during her 1904 breakdown, “Virginia became obsessed with the idea of having—or looking after—a baby” (92), and so the tie between refusal of food and childbearing may have begun at an early age.

13. While acknowledging that this cessation of menstruation “might seem to support the diagnosis of anorexia” (61), Trombley argues that “the refusal of food (rejection of sexual relations) was a reaction against the ban on childbearing, and that this rejection took the form of a cessation of menstruation” (64).

14. Hereafter, I leave the casual punctuation and spelling of Woolf's diary and letters intact and unacknowledged.

15. Caramagno notes: “Woolf's association of weight with hallucinations is not unreasonable. Body weight can drop rapidly during manic episodes, out of proportion to the reduced intake of calories. The rest cure, with its emphasis on overfeeding, did sometimes restore her, and even today an increase in the patient's weight is often regarded by physicians as a herald of recovery” (24).

16. Moran does not give examples of “ravenous female figures” in this particular instance. Her specific interest is the parallel between Woolf's creative impulse and a certain hysteria associated with feeding and mothers: “For if hunger functions symptomatically as the expression of repressed and guilty desires for the maternal body, the impregnation that results from ingestion and that is represented corporeally and
textually bespeaks both the desire to violate the mother's body and the reparative creative act that restores it" (83).

17. Trombley records that “according to Quentin Bell's chronology, Virginia was an 'inmate' of Burley on four occasions: 30 June to c. 10 August 1910; 16 to 26 February 1912; 25 July to 11 August 1913; and 25 March to 1 April 1915” (255).

18. Interestingly, while writing the third chapter of *Orlando*, Virginia confesses that she now prefers her books to children: “And yet oddly enough I scarcely want children of my own now. This insatiable desire to write something before I die, this ravaging sense of the shortness & feverishness of life, make me cling, like a man on a rock, to my one anchor. I don't like the physicalness of having children of one's own” (3:167). To Virginia, then, writing is like giving birth, without that corporeality.

19. As Dodd notes, “the only characters who are actually described as eating anything are men” (152): Charles Tansley, Mr. Bankes, Mr. Carmichael, and even Andrew merit special description apart from Mrs. Ramsay's general reference to “them all eating there . . . husband and children and friends,” “they were all helped” (105).

20. A 5 February 1925 letter to Jacques Raverat demonstrates that Woolf greatly enjoys the food that she often refuses: “She [Mary Hutch] has a ship's steward to serve at table, and whether for this reason or another provides the most spicy liquors, foods, cocktails and so on—for example an enormous earthenware dish, last time I was there, garnished with every vegetable, in January—peas, greens, mushrooms, potatoes; and in the middle the tenderest cutlets, all brewed in a sweet stinging aphrodisiac sauce. I tell you, I could hardly waddle home, or compose my sentiments” (3:164). Once again, Woolf associates eating with paralysis, both physical and mental.

21. Rosenman discusses the most important characteristics of the Angel in the House (67, 96-97, 100, 112), as well as Mrs. Ramsay as this Victorian icon (65-69).

22. Like Rose (170), Virginia R. Hymen notes that Lily takes Mrs. Ramsay's *creative*, not domestic, place in the last section of the book (143); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also wonder if Lily is symbolically “a resurrection and transformation of the sacrificed Mrs. Ramsay, mother-artist of the domestic, into artist-mother of the new” (38).

23. Diment notes that Lily's success as an artist happens precisely when she embraces life's duality (101), although this duality does not seem to include a need to eat.

24. Virginia seems later to have found such freedom herself while on holiday, as she records in the 8 May 1932 entry of her diary: “Then I had the vision, in Aegina, of an uncivilised, hot new season to be brought into our lives—how yearly we shall come here, with a tent, escaping England & sloughing the respectable skin; & all the tightness & formality of London; & fame, & wealth; & go back & become irresponsible, livers,
existing on bread yaot, butter, eggs, say in Crete” (4:97).

25. Moran says that “no doubt Woolf would be amused by my proposing to take seriously her contention that 'beautiful' and 'good to eat' are interchangeable” (81). The connection, however, can certainly be taken seriously in light of Woolf's personal ambivalence toward food.

26. Trombley argues for Woolf's autobiographical identification with Flush. The connection is particularly interesting in light of Virginia's letter to Vita on 15 July 1931, in which Woolf conceives of herself as a dog, Potto, wasting away (refusing food) due to Vita's neglect (4:362). Since this paper focuses on Woolf's female artists, however, Flush's attitude toward food (Trombley 288, 289, 292) is tangential. Trombley argues specifically for a connection between Flush's confinement in Miss Barrett's room and Virginia's experience of rest cures: “And Flush's reaction to being shut up at various times in his life coincides with Virginia's own hatred of the routine of bed, a darkened room, and warm milk, which was often imposed upon her” (275). But the parallel is not so direct in terms of food when Flush is "stolen and kept starving in a basement in Whitechapel" (276). If Trombley is right that this incident has Virginia "recalling the horror of her confinement at Burley, at Dalingridge Place, and in her own home, attended by four nurses" (276), then she starves the hungry Flush as she wished to starve herself, despite the abundant food of the rest cures. Trombley notes that “food is perhaps the most important signifier” in the Whitechapel basement scene, but he exaggerates its “abundance of food” (293), since the other “half famished” dogs' “ribs stood out from their coats” (Flush 83).

27. Fittingly, Leonard chooses to end A Writer's Diary with these words.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


VITA

Beverly Ann Beyer