



ON FALLING TO AT THE TABLE OF LITERARY ALIMANT

In Wilkie Collins's 1875 sensation novel *The Law and the Lady*, Benjamin—clerk, faithful family retainer, and most conservative and middle-class of men—finds himself faced with an uncomfortable set of questions concerning the former Valeria Brinton's new husband. Utterly unprepared for dealing with such gentlemanly unsavoriness—dead wives? poison? marriage under false names?—he attempts to calm Valeria down, to put such improbable tales aside, by turning to the simple pleasures of the table. “Suppose we get on with our dinner?” he asks wearily. “Here is a loin of mutton, my dear—an ordinary loin of mutton. Is there anything suspicious in *that*? Very well, then. Show me you have confidence in the mutton; please eat. There's the wine, again. No mystery, Valeria, in that claret—I'll take my oath it's nothing but innocent juice of the grape. If we can't believe in anything else, let's believe in juice of the grape. Your good health, my dear” (49–50).

But Benjamin's faith in the pleasures of the table is as misplaced as it is in the case of Valeria's problematic husband: in *The Law and the Lady*, as in any number of nineteenth-century British novels,

confidence in mutton and claret is, in fact, an extremely complicated and nuanced proposition. As Benjamin is soon made uncomfortably aware, there is nothing overplayed about his guest's misgivings concerning her husband and his friends—the alimentary realm, so central to the construction and deconstruction of these men (and, indeed, to their dealings with our heroine), is precisely where the masquerade and mystification they trade in comes to a boil. In the gentlemanly world of *The Law and the Lady*, tea and poison are as one; champagne and biscuits hold keys to selfhood and history; and truffles stewed in Burgundy are deeply flavored with class, gender, tradition, modernity, and the performance and the creation of the self. Though Collins's novel is sensational in its engagements with food and drink, it is hardly unique in its preoccupations. In the novels of nineteenth-century Britain, when it comes to the gentlemanly table, the mutton is always deserving of suspicion; the wine is always mysterious; food and drink are always more than they appear to be.

Though eating is, as Benjamin insists, the most basic and prosaic of human operations, it is also among the most fraught: at once insistently public and intensely, intimately bodily, alimentary consumption reveals a great deal about the consumer, bringing into play the technologies, the pieties, the hierarchies, and the economies of the world in which this consumption takes place. Food, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett puts it, is “larger than life . . . highly charged with meaning and affect” (1). Aliment serves as a potent site of revelation for a host of social, economic, and cultural issues. It is an unavoidable act, an unshakeable marker of our animal selves, which also serves to constitute us as social, transactional beings of appetite, desire, discernment, control, and culture. Aliment is an unavoidable locus of power and danger: it is the means by which the individual writes and rewrites him- or herself, the marker by which societies define themselves. As Jean-Anthelme Brillat Savarin famously wrote in his 1825 gastronomic bible, *The Physiology of Taste*, “[T]ell me what you eat, and I shall tell you who you are” (3).

In her cookbook *How to Eat*, the British food personality Nigella Lawson announces, “I have nothing to declare but my greed” (xv). This is what table and taste reveal: what we are greedy for, what we hunger for, what we cannot live without—and conversely, what we fear, that which is to be swallowed which makes

us tremble. The table is a site both of great pleasure and of great fear and loathing: what we eat is, inevitably, not a part of us but a part of the world beyond and outside us, always to some degree uncontrolled, inscrutable, unknown. Food and eating are weighted with continual interdictions concerning what may and may not be considered aliment, what may or may not be eaten when and in what manner, in an endless attempt to impose the rule of law on this perpetually problematic set of substances. The table is, for the nineteenth-century literary gentleman, a key locus of socioeconomic display, a place of demonstration both of one's wealth and of one's inherent taste, fitness, and bloodlines. But at the same time, for the gentleman—always seeking place, clarity, and recuperative power—the idea of taking in the alien, outside world through aliment is fundamentally threatening.

This book is about appetite as a force that reveals the gentleman's most elemental self, even as it lays bare the layers of what Claude Lévi-Strauss would call "civilization"—the social, the political, the cultural. I turn to aliment to reveal and understand a figure who is the embodiment of power and yet hardly embodied, a figure who is much read and little looked at in Victorian literature. Tracing the construction of gentlemanliness through aliment across the nineteenth century, I interrogate class, gender, culture, and the rhetorical construction of identity. Aliment and appetite, I argue, constitute a crucial means of casting light on the shifting, elusive identity of the gentleman. By analyzing his cravings, his fastings, and his feastings, I undertake to open the literary understanding of both the gentleman and the world through which he moves, to newer, fuller, and more potent possibilities. The gentleman is a dangerous alimental force: always threatened with placelessness, he seeks to locate and mark himself through his feasting and fasting; but in doing so, he inevitably threatens to starve, to subsume, to swallow the community around him. His alimental monstrosity, then, is the nightmare of the anxious, shifting middle class.

#### ON IMAGINING THE ALIMENTARY

Benjamin, of course, is hardly alone in underestimating the hidden depths of aliment. Even in our own food-obsessed times, serious

talk about the table as a site of sociocultural investigation is a rare dish, and hardly ever a delicious one. At a conference recently, I had lunch with a group of academics. The conversation turned to food culture—and immediately shifted to eating disorders, the disgusting problem of American gluttony, the appalling nature of high-end cuisine (foie gras! caviar!), and the virtues of veganism. The subtext of the conversation was clear: food is self-indulgent, inappropriate, decadent. Only by disciplining the appetite, by refusing luxury and pleasure in the realm of the alimentary, can we keep ourselves safe from the dangers of that which crosses the boundaries of the body in public, through the mouth, revealing our desires and our failure of control to those with whom we share the table. The solution is to put mind over matter, to equate virtue with denial: to turn away from the pleasures of the palate or at least to separate them from the serious sphere of work. When, at another conference, an organizer asked participants to be prompt for meals, explaining emphatically, “We have a lot to do, and we don’t want to waste time eating,” there were nods of agreement all round.

These same questions, problems, and issues make their presence known in novels, cookbooks, home health-care manuals, and gastronomic essays across the British nineteenth century. Aliment is a potent site of sociocultural construction and revelation, and food is troubling stuff. Meals are physical, temporal, and psychological spaces in which class and gender behaviors are marked and remarked upon; in which good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable, and constructive and destructive ideas and actions are negotiated through manners and etiquette as well as through the food that is taken in or refused. Meals are sites of formative rituals that, as John F. Kasson writes, “mediate between ambiguous and frequently contending realms of value. They allow participants to negotiate between various aspects of their experience and often to articulate in heightened form elements that are to some degree embattled or suppressed in everyday life” (*Rudeness and Civility*, 183). In this sense, society comes to itself through the transaction of the meal: precisely because of its insistence on form (or, equally tellingly, its insistence on the refusal of form), the rite of alimentary consumption constitutes a ground on which the sociopolitical realm is made and remade. Eating, in other words, makes culture.

And this is particularly true of eating that is done in the presence of others.

But eating is also a hazardous operation, particularly when it is done in the presence of others. If the post-Enlightenment process of coming to consciousness is the work of believing in the self as an enclosed being, an independent “I,” then the necessity of eating renders that work impossible. Food penetrates the boundaries of the body, bringing the outside into that putatively contained self and reconstituting the physical being; it refuses to be kept out by the desire for control, for cleanliness, or for completeness.<sup>1</sup> Taken into the body across the boundary of the mouth—the most concrete site of language and speech and in this way arguably the body’s most potent locus of self-construction<sup>2</sup>—food cannot be controlled. Indeed, as Deborah Lupton writes,

Food is a liminal substance; it stands as a bridging substance between nature and culture, the human and the natural, the outside and the inside. . . . As the process of incorporation is inextricably linked to subjectivity it is the source of great anxiety and risk. By incorporating a food into one’s body, that food is made to become self. . . . [I]f one does not know what one is eating, one’s subjectivity is called into question. It is not only the life and health of the eater that are challenged by the incorporation of food, but also that individual’s place in culture. Thus the incorporation of the wrong type of substance may lead to contamination, transformation from within, a dispossession of the self. (16–17)

If alimentary consumption, as Norbert Elias posits (xii–xiii), is the most visible site of social “civilization” or self-control, it is also the realm of magical thinking, an arena in which the fantasy of self-definition may be endlessly indulged even while this fantasy is most clearly under attack. The idea that one incorporates the essence of what is ingested into oneself—for instance, that the cannibal gains the strength of his or her victim through the ritual of ingestion (Fallon and Rozin, 27)<sup>3</sup>—is highly potent and (in cannibal-free form) widespread. Such imagining is at work in rhetorical

endeavors to endow foods with classed and gendered elements: when one swallows food at table, the logic goes, one also ingests and incorporates the sociocultural and political elements that adhere to that food. The eater is thus elevated or debased by his or her encounter with sustenance. In this sense, all food is manna: the desires and disgusts, the social narratives and self-constructions of the eater are present in the contents of the plate.

Similarly, the eating body, under social scrutiny, is constructed by means of cultural assumptions about food and eating: thinness and fatness, to choose an obvious dichotomy, are read in terms of the individual's ability to "control" his or her appetites for certain classes and types of food, and the individual is classed (and, to some degree, gendered) via this presumed relationship to food. The display of appetite or bodily control at table is interpreted as a sign and signal of the moral character, the true self, of the eater, as the marker of civilization, of an animal nature, of decadence; at the same time, aliment's invisible work inside the body marks and configures the physical self, making appetites evident, written on the skin. This sort of ocular judgment in turn works to construct aliment, lending it distinctly moral qualities. As Louis Marin has observed, "[O]ne might say that every culinary sign is Eucharistic in some sense and to some extent; or, to pursue this vein of thought one step further, one might say that all cookery involves a theological, ideological, political, and economic operation by the means of which a nonsignified edible foodstuff is transformed into a sign/body that is eaten" (121). Food is always at once definitive and excessive.

#### ON FOODWAYS AND FOODMEANS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

The British nineteenth century was a period of much alimentary contradiction. It was, famously, an age of conspicuous consumption in England; but it was also a time of famines and near famines,<sup>4</sup> a period during which social and political change were often motivated by the literal hunger of the masses. It was, for the gentle classes, a time when the rituals of the table constituted crucial signs of class,<sup>5</sup> but it was also a time when ladies and gentlemen lined up at the slaughterhouse to "partake of a strengthening glass of blood" (Tannahill, 292) and men of high birth marked their place through in-

discriminate, inordinate consumption. Feasting marked one's wealth, but gluttony was condemned;<sup>6</sup> alimentary restraint was at once, in the same social circles, an indicator of want or pathology and a sign of sophistication. And concerns about what one ate, where one ate it, and with whom one ate were, as the novels of the period reveal, substantial: uncountable plot turns and revelations of character depend on the semipublic theater of meals, from the ball supper in *Pride and Prejudice* to Jane's solitary supper on the moors in *Jane Eyre* to the revelatory dinner tête-à-tête shared by Moreau and Prendick in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. The drinking habits of the schoolboys in *Tom Brown's School Days*; Jos Sedley's outsized, childish appetites and their unfortunate effects in *Vanity Fair*; the forlorn Christmas dinner in *Small House at Allington*; the squire who eats peas on his old-fashioned knife in *Cranford*; the Earl of Mt. Severn's gout-defying suppers in *East Lynne*—all are central to the construction of gentlemanliness in the world of the novel.

Notions of when one ate and what one called one's meals were equally important. The English nineteenth century often imagined itself as a realm of speed and innovation in tension with tradition, and aliment was fundamentally imbricated in this imagining. As the focus of middle-class labor, for instance, shifted to the City, the structure and timing of meals shifted as well.<sup>7</sup> The substantial early dinner waned in popularity, a victim of the vicissitudes of commuting and the demands of office life; ladies' luncheons became a staple of appropriately feminine domesticity, and late dinners and teas became signs of sophistication for the rising rich. Class, gender, labor, wealth—all were marked by the timing of one's dinner, the question of supper, the presence or absence of coffee in the dining room.

The rituals of dinner were not all that became subject to change: the very nature of food was undergoing transformation as it was reconceptualized and reconstituted by industrialism, science and technology, and urbanization. Lévi-Strauss famously writes, in *The Raw and the Cooked*, of what he calls the culinary triangle: food, he posits, is uncivilized when raw; cooking—the magical transformation of food from dead animal to something else, distant from its source and impacted by technology—is the marker of civilization, while rot (food seeking to become dirt or waste) is the sign of decline,

decadence, the downward spiral back to the uncivilized. The nineteenth century saw the advent of uncountable new technologies of food and drink. These included pasteurization, which allowed food to travel across time and space (obviating the need to rely on local fare), and canning, in which food arrived at locations utterly unrelated to its source, estranged from its original identity as animal or vegetable, and already more or less cooked. As Lynette Hunter notes, “Where the technology of cookery had for most people remained largely the same for several hundred years, the . . . nineteenth century saw the introduction of gas fires, gas refrigerators and cookers . . . and where marketing, preservation and conservation had been central to the housewife’s work for centuries, suddenly there were commercially bottled and canned foods, and shops with unusual foreign foodstuffs, and pre-packaged foods” (57). Unsurprisingly, the reception of such fare was highly charged, demonstrating at once an infatuation with the newfangled and a distrust of the unknown. New transportation technologies meant that city dwellers could choose to eat fare grown in the countryside, instead of risking their health with, for instance, milk and meat from tired, penned, and often tubercular city-raised animals.<sup>8</sup> But these technologies of civilization could also be signs of the failure of transparency and coherence in the food supply, the folly of trusting to others, and the very real dangers of the modern, the new, even of technology itself. Empire and revolution overseas were also imbricated in notions of food and drink at home. English eaters (like Austen’s picky Mr. Woodhouse) struggled with the implications of curries and French sauces, debated the merits of the homegrown versus the imported, chewed coca leaves or ate opium, drank port wine or coffee, or rejected the dangerous, self-altering fruits of the foreign—that is, they imbued aliment with all of the issues surrounding nationalism and Englishness. Radicals used aliment to protest colonialism, economic policies, and industrialism itself.

As knowing the source of one’s food became more and more difficult, as foreign recipes and foodstuffs made their way in an everyday sense into the diet of the nation, and as food became increasingly subject to the vicissitudes and potential dangers of the free market (competition leading to adulteration to produce cheap foodstuffs, for example), anxieties about what was taken into the body be-

came paramount. Alimentary adulteration (to make production cheaper in the open market and to make it more visually perfect and thus saleable) became rife just as alimentary hygiene became a constant topic of discussion; as food came from farther and farther afield and was presented to the consumer in forms that were more and more highly prepared, ocular proof of food safety became at once crucial and impossible to trust. In the matter of food and drink, consumers literally were unable to believe their eyes. The proliferation of trial publications concerning poisonings played on this fear. Such anxieties appear, for instance, in Collins's *Law and the Lady* in the most frightening, most domestic of alimental moments: the dutiful husband who brings a cup of tea to his suffering wife, ill in bed.

Aliment was also an important site and means of social control in the British nineteenth century. Temperance movements, the increasing popularity of coffee, the medicalization of eating and its links with hygiene movements: all were means of reshaping the body—and the body politic—in response to socioeconomic pressures and requirements. Aliment was increasingly subject to professional scrutiny, and the consuming self was increasingly pathologized, both in medical and in social terms. Foodstuffs were elevated or demonized as the notion of the self in society was endlessly rewritten, in service to competing ideologies and interests. Cookbooks, gastronomic guides, etiquette books, and medical texts proliferated: the rules shifted constantly, and notions of the appropriately feeding body were continually in flux.

Medicine, meant to cure the body of such ills and incursions, created its own set of specifically alimental anxieties. Drugs, food, and drink were conflated and confused: all were aliment in the nineteenth-century imagination. Just as arsenic and tea are mixed in *The Law and the Lady*, so too did medicalized and mind-altering substances become indistinguishable from comestibles that were more prosaic, in the absence of a bright line between them. Opium was, famously, “eaten” (that is, drunk) in laudanum form; beer soup was consumed at breakfast by industrial workers looking for something nourishing to get them through the day; cocaine was thought to be an excellent source of nutrition.<sup>9</sup> Nostrums, instant cures, and medical diets proliferated, complicating not only the trustworthiness

of aliment and its legibility but also basic issues of control over the body. The language around drug imbibing shifted across the century, oscillating from healing to hurting, from pleasure to salvation to addiction. Indulgence, healing, nutrition, and inebriation—the substances responsible for those effects were at once healthy and fatal, longed for and interdicted in the cultural and medical imagination. Opium and cocaine were connected to imperial practices, the dangers of the foreign, the fear of degeneration, and the horrors of industrial and medical modernity at the same moment they might be viewed as cure-alls, portals to a better self, even makers of manliness.

The British nineteenth century, then, was an age of sustained and substantive fear and loathing in the arena of the alimentary. A close look at what is taken into the body and what is refused, what is served up at table and what is hoarded and eaten in secret is also, unavoidably, an exploration of politics, of economics, of foreign policy, and of the very concepts of the body, of selfhood, and of the nation during the period.

#### ON ALIMENT AND THE GENTLEMAN

Over the past three decades, gender scholars who focus on nineteenth-century bodies have written a great deal on women and their appetites: bingers and starvers; women who refuse meat for fear of heating the animal self and those who eat indiscriminately, hungrily, without end; women who drink and women who abstain; and women who fail to eat, by choice or by social compulsion. The appetites of working-class men have also been amply explored, as scholars seek to understand the casting of the workingman as saint or animal, ascetic or unbridled consumer. But the alimental gentleman, the upper-class man who stuffs or starves or obsesses at table, has hardly been glanced at, though his troubled and troubling relationship to food is a central concern of the novels he inhabits. My aim here is to make the gentleman visible through his alimental practices, and, thus, to come to a better understanding of the construction and implications of this paradigm-shaping figure, whose very power has led to his near-elision in the critical literature.

Gentlemanliness was a problematic concept through the nineteenth century, a slippery ranking that exceeded and bypassed all attempts to delineate it. Money played a role; so did birth and profession; so did a certain sense of character or morality or standing. But none of these markers was fixed and conclusive, and no single marker was sufficient in and of itself. As Thackeray's Clive Newcome puts it, "I can't tell you what it is, only one can't help seeing the difference. It isn't rank and that; only somehow there are some men gentlemen and some not" (quoted in Gilmour, 84). In the nineteenth century, "the nature of gentlemanliness was more anxiously debated and more variously defined than at any time before or since" (Gilmour, 2). Middle-class social and economic ambition, the protective behaviors of those with inherited positions, the increasing illegibility of class, the changing role of the gentleman in the community, and the new valences of work—all of these made gentlemanliness an increasingly fraught idea. The gentleman was a creature of his age in the most problematic of ways: a figure whose position was based at once on a myth of stability and on the economic forces that undermined it; rhetorically positioned at the center of the family and of the community but facing a looming threat of marginalization; and situated at the heart of the struggles between past and future, tradition and innovation, city and country, birthright and merit.

Gentlemanliness, then, was in flux and in dispute through the nineteenth century—and the anxiety and potential disorder that this state of affairs engendered is present in nearly every novel of the period, from the most formulaic of marriage-plot tales to the darkest of horror stories. But though he is the real center of power in virtually every nineteenth-century narrative, though the plot revolves around him (his choices and compulsions, for good or ill, regarding marriage; his money or his debts; his work in Parliament or in the civil service or in the army or in jail, or his inability or refusal to work at all; his desires, his rules, his laying down of the law or his failure to do so), the gentleman remains less than fully explored as an embodied creature. Indeed, in many novels he is barely visible, his physical self disappearing behind his manners, his words, and his actions.

But this is not the case when the gentleman sits down to eat: for this crucial literary figure, the table is a site of potent revelation. In nineteenth-century British novels, meals are highly visible rites, spaces where (even in the most proper accountings of the most proper echelons of the gentility) desire and the body are exposed. If one is constituted by what one eats, where one eats, and with whom, then the meal in nineteenth-century fiction is that rarity, at once a locus of recuperative reestablishment of socioeconomic order and a site of possibility, of social mobility, where class, gender, and position can be taken in with port wine and French or Russian service. No wonder *Emma's* Mr. Elton gives Harriet a detailed description of his dinner at the Coles' when he should, in Emma's estimation, be courting the poor girl: he is, instead, busily courting a socially elevated vision of himself, reveling in his place at the table when he describes "the Stilton cheese, the north Wiltshire, the butter, the celery, the beet-root and all the dessert" (88–89). When he falls to at table or pushes away his plate, when he dines on health food or demands French sauces, when he feeds others on poison or dainties or old-fashioned homemade dishes, when he offers up a figurative glimpse of his glittering teeth or his growling belly, the gentleman is most fully on display, exposing the makings of his body and of his mind.

The table is the place where Dickens's Mr. Merdle works his magic, where Dorrit presides like a king or breaks down like a pauper; where Collins's Miserrimus Dexter comes to himself, cook and gentlemanly eater both, and makes his power and horror evident; where Anne Brontë's aristocratic bingers reinscribe their prerogatives on their bodies; where Austen's Mr. Woodhouse is at once most needy and childish—most superannuated—and most in control of his putative fiefdom. The table is the site of self-fashioning, a place where the gentleman remakes and rewrites himself and those who gather at his board. It is a potent site of display, of wealth, a stage on which money and power can be displayed and their lessons imbibed. The meal is a theatrical production, in which "[t]he guest is a beneficiary, a co-producer and an interpreter of the performance. . . . The organizer is a priest, the eater a communicant" (Aron, 216). Eating presents the gentleman with the imperative of performance and display even as he undertakes the most intimate

and bodily of operations, and the table affords a rare opportunity to look into the body and mind of the gentleman of privilege. This is the case, too, when the alimentary consumer moves away from the table: Stoker's problem drinkers and Stevenson's solitary, alienated imbibers interrogate and perform gentlemanliness, class, and gender with every swallow.

#### ON MAKING A MAN

In *Making a Man*, I address the issue of the alimental gentleman in a series of novels that span the nineteenth century. I look to Mr. Woodhouse in Jane Austen's *Emma*; Arthur Huntingdon in Anne Brontë's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; William Dorrit and Arthur Clennam in Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit*; Miserrimus Dexter in Wilkie Collins's *Law and the Lady*; Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case*; and Dracula and the band of brothers who fight him off in Bram Stoker's end-of-the-century horror story. Analyzing this pivotal figure as alimental stockpiler and uncontrolled gourmand, as feaster and faster, this book explores the ways in which food, appetite, and eating make, remake, and unmake the gentleman. Anxieties about status and place, I contend, are made strongly manifest when the gentleman sits down to eat in these texts; he is a profoundly unplaced figure, pulled apart and overwritten by technology, class movement, money, and sociocultural change. Unable to fathom himself, to understand himself, the gentleman stuffs or starves himself, feeds on health food or binges on wine or turns to more troubling, autophagic sources of nutrition to find a means to locate himself. In doing so, he inevitably threatens the health of the community that gathers at his table.

Chapter 1, "Annals of Gruel," focuses on the valetudinarian gentleman at the heart of Austen's novel *Emma*, investigating his fraught relations with food—his fixation on gruel, his obsession with food purity, and his anxious oversight of the eating habits of his neighbors—in light of early-nineteenth-century preoccupations with changing food technologies, foreign fare, food adulteration, and radical dietary theories. At the cusp of the century, Mr. Woodhouse's alimentary behavior calls into question the notion of the appropriately bounded old-fashioned gentleman: the effects of his

alimentary requirements foreground the problematic ambiguities of the gentleman's role in the community, as he grapples with the implications of productivity and structure in the industrial age. Mr. Woodhouse's appetite for gruel—an appetite that foregrounds bodily disgust and class liminality, that makes manifest his mistaking of the gentleman's body and the body politic—threatens his community with stasis, impossibility, and engulfment.

Chapter 2, “An infernal fire in my veins,” takes up the issue of aliment as a locus and force of social control in Anne Brontë's surprisingly explicit novel of drink and its consequences, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. The rhetoric of antidrinking movements and midcentury thought on alimentary discipline are crucial to the understanding of the much-vilified Arthur Huntingdon's problematic gentlemanly body as it drowns itself in drink. *Tenant*, in its anatomy of the decline and fall of a drunken husband, engages precisely with the issue of what constitutes a gentleman, literally and figuratively, in the striver's age. Here the alimentary ideologies of the middle class—and, indeed, the very construction of the middle-class body—come into direct collision with the notion of gentlemanliness as a state apart: the upper-class gentleman of leisure finds himself continually compelled to write and rewrite his class difference on his body through alimential excess, in a process that at once constitutes him and destroys him.

Chapter 3, “By Heaven I must eat at the cost of some other man!” looks to Dickens's voracious William Dorrit and the persistent faster and would-be moral gentleman Arthur Clennam of *Little Dorrit* to explore the issue of the self-constituting gentleman and his relationship to the social transaction and transubstantiation of the table. This novel posits an economic gentlemanliness based on acquisition and lucre and inseparable from hunger and desire—a gentlemanliness that simultaneously demands the performance of a complete obviation of want. The capitalist gentleman's appetites engulf and erase; for the gentleman who refuses appetites that swallow or starve others, the danger of self-erasure looms. But in the end, the novel offers a true commensality, a means for the gentleman to become whole through full, transactional engagement with the social realm.

Chapter 4, “An ‘insatiable relish for horrors,’” focuses on Collins’s ravenous, wheelchair-bound epicure, Miserrimus Dexter, in *The Law and the Lady*. Half man, half machine, and arguably at least half mad, Dexter is a howling dandy and an old-fashioned gentleman for the machine age, an industrial cyborg pinup, a connoisseur of truffles and fine wine whose other, more dreadful appetites are both signs and engines of serious monstrosity. Dexter is a complicated envisioning of the future of the wealthy gentleman: a middle-class nightmare of a corrupt and decadent gentlemanly cohort united with working-class mechanization, perpetuating itself by feeding on the heart of the social body, the True Woman. Dexter’s appetites challenge the underpinnings of the social structure, the notion of advancement, and the possibility of social renewal and fecundity.

Chapter 5, “Those appetites which I had long secretly indulged,” explores a different sort of gentlemanly duality—that of the successful, prosperous professional gentleman. The chapter begins with an exploration of what constitutes perhaps the strangest appetite in Stevenson’s much-read novella, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*: the seeming puritan Mr. Utterson’s habit of drinking gin. Positing that colliding notions of gentlemanliness and professionalism create a problematic of gentlemanly place and embodiment in the late nineteenth century, the chapter looks first to gin, then to wine, and finally to Dr. Jekyll’s nostrum and its real-life counterpart, cocaine. All of these, I contend, are alimental attempts to literally and figuratively fix the gentleman in place, to obviate the endless shuttling between worker and gentleman—a shuttling predicated, the novella posits, on the social imperative of striving. The true class horror of Stevenson’s gothic tale, I argue, is the fear that the middle-class gentleman, as Jekyll says of Hyde, “did not even exist” (52).

Chapter 6, “His special pabulum,” explores the gentleman on the cusp of modernity. The vampire in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is not the only locus of terrible appetites in this novel of overdetermined horror and indeterminate gentlemanly boundaries. Stoker’s gentlemen, I argue, are estranged from themselves and the world around them by the press of technological modernity; they seek wholeness,

authenticity, and connection. To find it—even as they hunt the vampire, seeking to bring clarity and order back to a corrupted England—they turn to Dracula’s own “special pabulum,” a substance strongly evocative of Thomas De Quincey’s opium eating and medicalized morphinism—aliment formative of, irresistible to, and fatal for the end-of-the-century gentleman. But the wholeness that they crave proves to be imaginary, impossible; the thirst for place and connection leads instead to a bloody, autophagic morass sloshing beneath the skin of chivalric heroism.

The alimental gentleman is a seeker: after wholeness, after clarity, after selfhood, after place. Just as the critical reader has had difficulty distinguishing him from the world he has built in the nineteenth-century novel, so too does the gentleman seem to have trouble finding his own bodily boundaries. As his alimentary habits demonstrate—his monstrous cravings and insistent refusals; his unquenchable thirsts and finicky tastes—he continually troubles the lines between self and other, mistakes the society around him for himself, erases or engulfs. And to solve his insistent alienation from himself and from the social order, he eats, he drinks, he tries over and over again to swallow himself down in order to make himself manifest, to write himself into being.