

**MATTERS OF TASTE:
EATING, AESTHETICS, AND AMERICAN IDENTITY, 1720-1865**

by

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Abstract**MATTERS OF TASTE:
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“Matters of Taste” demonstrates how leading cultural, political, and literary figures from the late colonial era through the Civil War viewed the cultivation of the American palate, like the cultivation of aesthetic taste, as essential to shaping a democratic citizenry.

Reading texts ranging from Thomas Jefferson’s emancipation agreement with his personal chef, James Hemings, to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s metaphorical presentation of *The House of the Seven Gables* as a “dish offered to the Public,” I document the emergence of a distinctly American sense of taste, one that is composed of moral and political, as well as aesthetic criteria. I argue that this composite sense of taste expresses the republican ideals associated with the nation’s formation, and at the same time, incorporates its enduring contradictions of race, gender, and class. By offering a cultural history of American taste that originates in the act of eating, I hope to expand the narrative of the nation’s founding to acknowledge the influence of foods such as Indian corn and figures such as Hemings, as well as written works that reveal the relation of good taste to good citizenship. In so doing, I also hope to open American aesthetic discourse to a more inviting—and flavorful—form of cultural inquiry.

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Dedication

To Elaine Niederhoffer, who would have read every word, and made it better.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Matters of Taste:
Eating, Aesthetics, and American Identity

1

Chapter One

The Taste of Virtue:
Benjamin Franklin's Bodily Aesthetics

15

Chapter Two

A Taste of Liberty:
Eating and Aesthetics in Thomas Jefferson's America

65

Chapter Three

"A Matter of Taste":
Lydia Maria Child's Recipe for Social Reform

111

Epilogue

The Taste of America
Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*

165

Bibliography

180

Introduction

Matters of Taste: Eating, Aesthetics, and American Identity

“Matters of Taste” demonstrates how leading cultural, political, and literary figures from the late colonial era through the Civil War viewed the cultivation of the American palate, like the cultivation of aesthetic taste, as essential to shaping a democratic citizenry. Through readings of texts that range from Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* (ca. 1771-90) to Thomas Jefferson’s emancipation agreement with his personal chef, James Hemings (1793); from Lydia Maria Child’s domestic manual *The Frugal Housewife* (1828) to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s metaphorical presentation of *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) as a “dish offered to the Public,” I document the emergence of a distinctly American sense of taste, one that is composed of moral and political, as well as aesthetic criteria. I argue that this composite sense of taste expresses the republican ideals associated with the nation’s formation, and at the same time, incorporates its enduring contradictions of race, gender, and class.

As a result of his interest in Scottish moral philosophy, Franklin understood the relation between the cultivation of the sense of taste and the cultivation of civic virtue. As Jefferson incorporated this conception of taste into his ideas about the cultivation of a tasteful, republican simplicity, he found it difficult to confront the contradictions of race and class that still persist to this day. In Child’s efforts to include both Native Americans and African Americans as full participants in the national culture that Franklin and Jefferson had helped to create, she recognized the individual sense of taste—for food, for art and fashion, and for America’s distinctive natural beauty—as a force that would

engender common sympathies among all people, and therefore would sustain a shared set of cultural values and political ideals. Hawthorne, in his exploration of the uses—and limits—of the sense of taste, suggests that additional models of social change, and modes of aesthetic contemplation, might be required as America entered an age of industrial capitalism. By offering this cultural history of American taste, one that originates in the act of eating, I hope to expand the narrative of the nation's founding to acknowledge the influence of foods such as Indian corn and figures such as Hemings, as well as written works that reveal the relation of good taste to good citizenship. In so doing, I also hope to open American aesthetic discourse to a more inviting—and flavorful—form of cultural inquiry.

Aesthetics, as a field for study, as Terry Eagleton explains in the opening lines of *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, is “born as a discourse of the body” (13). Eagleton reminds contemporary critics that the word “aesthetic” initially referred “to the whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarefied domain of conceptual thought” (13). In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), John Locke had explained the workings of the rational mind, but the subjective aspects of sensory experience, what Eagleton describes as “that which takes root in the gaze and the guts and all that arises from our most banal, biological insertion in to the world,” remained under-theorized (13). To expand upon this inquiry into the nature of aesthetic judgment, I focus on how the act of eating—“that which takes place in the guts”—relates even more closely than Eagleton might allow to our current understanding of the “sense” of aesthetic taste.

In this way, “Matters of Taste” is most closely aligned with the two major works that consider the significance of the act of eating in relation to the philosophical discourse of aesthetic taste: Carolyn Korsmeyer’s *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (1999), and Denise Gigante’s *Taste: A Literary History* (2005). Korsmeyer’s study is among the first to explore how, in the eighteenth century, before the word “aesthetic” had entered common parlance, philosophers and cultural critics had *only* the metaphor of the sense of taste—the actual, gustatory sense—with which to formulate their ideas about aesthetic experience and judgment. To these thinkers, a group constituted primarily by the British cultural critics Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, Joseph Addison, and Richard Steele; and the Scottish philosophers Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Henry Home, Lord Kames, the idea of the sense of taste seemed to best represent the way in which aesthetic experiences are first registered by the body, and then processed by the mind. They also saw a correspondence between the model for the cultivation of an individual’s taste for food and the process of the cultivation of an aesthetic sense. These critics and philosophers recognized certain universal standards for assessing tastefulness, as well as other acquired cultural standards that could be internalized. They also believed that each person possessed his or her own, internal, subjective criteria for determining the pleasure and worth of an experience, whether in consuming something edible or perceiving a work of art. This development in the eighteenth century of a composite conception of the sense of taste, as clearly traced by Korsmeyer, provides the philosophical foundation for my study.

Gigante’s work, which considers how Milton, Wordsworth, Lamb, Byron, and Keats deployed the gustatory sense as a metaphor for aesthetic taste, supplies my project

with a critical model for how these philosophies of taste might be detected, extended, and challenged in works of literature. Gigante's focus is on England, which was then undergoing both a consumer and an industrial revolution, and so her study concentrates on how the sense of taste emerged, in that context, as the "most vivid strand of a complex civilizing process in which individuals were taught to regulate themselves, and their motivating appetites, from within" (7). She observes, importantly, that the British Romantics' use of gustatory metaphors becomes a critique of the dominant Romantic belief in the ability to transcend history and politics through poetic language and other forms of high art. Similarly, Paul Gilmore argues, in *Aesthetic Materialism* (2009), that the writers associated with American Romanticism—including Emerson, Fuller, Whitman, and Poe—employ metaphors of electricity, which he describes as "a kind of embodied transcendence," as a "vehicle for imagining aesthetic experience in scientific, sociopolitical, and spiritual terms" (5). However, Gilmore's work does not examine metaphors of food and eating, or acknowledge the influence of gustatory experience on the philosophical discourse of aesthetic taste.

In my study, I show how American writers already were deeply attuned to the "embodied" aspects of aesthetic experience that Gigante and Gilmore identify as emerging from British and American Romanticism. Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), introduced to America in the transatlantic exchange of the 1830s and 40s, awakened in American writers an attention to the word "aesthetic." As Gilmore notes, Elizabeth Peabody begins the *Aesthetic Papers* (1849), a collection better known for its inclusion of Thoreau's "Resistance to Civil Government," with an exploration of the aesthetic—what she called "this vague, this comprehensive, but undefined word" (1). It is also significant

that, in the same essay, Peabody defines “taste” quite easily. She explains that this “school of criticism” considers as its central question, “Does this work satisfy and please my taste, that is the taste of cultivated persons; the taste of the best judges or authorities?” (2). Peabody asserts that the conception of taste—a related, but nonetheless distinct school of criticism from the “German formula” of aesthetic judgment—is grounded in personal experiences of satisfaction and pleasure. This sensibility can be shared by other “cultivated persons,” but it remains subjective with respect to its standards of assessment and to the quality of the response elicited (2). Peabody readily formulates this definition of taste, even as she struggles to define the word “aesthetic,” I suggest, because the philosophical discourse of taste was so infused in America’s founding, and remained a guiding force throughout the era that she examined in her *Aesthetic Papers*.

America’s founders understood the ability to make tasteful decisions about literature, and other forms of culture as indicative of a greater capacity for moral judgment, and consequently for appropriate political behavior. The cultivation of good taste, as the contemporary literary critic Elizabeth Maddock Dillon explains, “ideally produced subjects who enacted their freedom in a moral and lawful manner, thereby creating the ground for a new political community—a community of taste—united by individual consent and judgment rather than by constraint and subordination” (498). By introducing a conception of taste that is both gustatory and aesthetic into the body of scholarship that Dillon eloquently summarizes, I therefore renew the work that was begun by Michael Warner in his landmark study *The Letters of the Republic* (1990), and that was further explored by David S. Shields, in *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (1997), about how participation in the individual acts of reading and

writing (Warner), as well as in the shared experiences that took place in literary salons, coffee houses, and social clubs (Shields), not only “formaliz[ed] a practice of good fellowship,” but also became “closely [linked] to the performative values of civic virtue” (Shields 196, Warner xiv).¹ It is my contention that these “performative values of civic virtue”—by which I mean the expressions of taste that indicated an individual’s ability to subjugate his appetite to reason, and consequently to elevate the cause of the public good over personal interest—not only derive from, but were also conveyed through, the act of eating.

Benjamin Franklin, who provides Warner with his primary exemplar of the performance of civic virtue, and who, according to Shields, is among the men most responsible, in eighteenth-century America, for allowing *belles lettres*, private societies, and a host of other “discursive” practices and institutions (including eating clubs) to function as communities of taste in the public sphere, was a vegetarian for most of his life, or at least that was what he claimed (Shields xiv). Franklin’s dietary restrictions did not prevent him, for instance, after experimenting with a Leyden Jar and an unsuspecting wild turkey, from reporting to a member of the Royal Society, in 1750, that “birds kill’d in this Manner eat uncommonly tender” (*Franklin Papers* 4:111).² In the discussion of his vegetarianism in his *Autobiography*, however, Franklin repeatedly emphasizes how deliberate choices with respect to eating can contribute to intellectual advancement and financial gain. His personal account attests to his awareness of the numerous benefits of the regulation of appetite by reason.

In Chapter One, I show how Franklin’s conception of taste, though never fully articulated as a theory, takes shape in his aphorisms, essays, editorials, and letters. I

connect Franklin's admonition to "eat not to Dulness," which heads his famous list of virtues, to his comments about—and interactions with—the major thinkers associated with the emerging discourse of taste, most notably David Hume (*Autobiography* 149).³ Among the Scottish philosophers, Hume most clearly articulates how the "moral sense" can be cultivated in a similar manner to the sense of taste, according to a socially-prescribed set of rules. In this way, Hume provides Franklin with a conception of taste that similarly integrates aesthetic and moral concerns. One of Franklin's earliest published essays states his mission as "improving the Taste of the Town" (*FP* 1:122). He continues to pursue this project during the twenty-five year period in which he publishes *Poor Richard's Almanack*. Described in the introduction to an early volume as containing "Scraps from the Table of Wisdom, that will if well digested, yield strong Nourishment to thy Mind," the *Almanack* illustrates Franklin's consistent use of the idea of eating in order to suggest how Americans might strengthen their minds and morals (64). By the time that he met Hume, Franklin was at mid-career, on a visit to Scotland as a representative of the Pennsylvania Assembly. He had already developed a more practical, and in this way, a more American recipe for virtue. This recipe, I claim, is one in which good taste is cultivated through everyday experience, and then applied to the service of the common good.

After Independence, the need for this particular form of virtue was more acutely felt. If the nation's newly empowered citizens were to be trusted to make appropriate political decisions, they would need to cultivate their inner sense of taste. In this regard, America's cultural and political leaders faced a major obstacle. The new nation lacked significant examples of American literature, fine art, and architecture, to serve as a

foundation for the development of this essential sense. Thomas Jefferson, who worked with Franklin to craft the Declaration of Independence, famously lamented that Europe is “where genius is most cultivated, [and] where are the most excellent models for art” (*Notes on the State of Virginia* 70).⁴ At home, Jefferson perceived surroundings of “rude, mis-shapen piles, which, but that they have roofs, would be taken for brick-kilns” instead of buildings (*Notes* 158). Eventually, Jefferson turned to food as a model of a new American aesthetic.

In Chapter Two, I illuminate Thomas Jefferson’s distinctly American sense of taste. A self-described Epicurean for whom the pursuit of happiness was a goal of life, Jefferson sought out pasta from Italy, ice cream from England, and wine from France, despite his persistent financial troubles. At his home in Monticello, he not only perfected the design of a macaroni machine, which he first saw in Europe during his appointment as Minister to France, but he also invented a host of food- and service-related devices, such as the dumbwaiter, which eliminated the need for servants to enter the dining room between courses, thereby interrupting the meal. Jefferson also introduced the use of the round or oval table, so that dinner party guests could more comfortably see one another, and converse while they dined. In fact, Jefferson’s particular style of dining came to be known as the “American Manner.” Later, this American table was imported to France, where it was imbued with republican significance. Jefferson believed that the informality of the round table represented the egalitarianism that was a critical component of America’s republican ideology. The collegial conversation that took place at the table was considered an extension of democratic principles. The abundance of American agricultural products that were served on the table reflected the bountiful possibilities of

the new nation. Each of these features of American dining points to Jefferson's understanding of how values and ideals could be transmitted through a range of aesthetic registers.

At the same time, the reliance on devices like the dumbwaiter demonstrates the social and political significance of what—or more accurately, who—remained hidden from view. By this I refer to the dozens of slaves whom Jefferson depended on for the cultivation of crops, the care of livestock, the preparation of food, and—in this case, the serving of meals—each an essential component of Jefferson's project of producing a national sense of taste for America. In Chapter Two, I thus also explore the impact of Jefferson's slaveholding on his ideas about taste, arguing that Jefferson's commitment to cultivating taste in United States citizens, in fact, contributes to the conceptual basis of some of the most enduring social, cultural, and economic divisions of American society. By analyzing the material traces of Jefferson's relationship with James Hemings, Sally Hemings's older brother, whom Jefferson took to France and whom he had trained as his personal chef, I illustrate the ways in which Jefferson's complicity in the institution of slavery undermines his attempts to inculcate taste in American citizens. Expanding upon recent scholarship about the eighteenth-century obsession with enumerating populations and their identifying features, I show how Jefferson's construction of racial and national hierarchies depends upon quantifiable physical qualities, as well as qualitative assessments of blacks' and whites' divergent tastes. I conclude that the “temperate liberty” to which Jefferson aspires, throughout his life, is ultimately attained only in the written record that describes the development of his republican taste (*Notes* 91).

The recognition that the principles of liberty and equality were not, in fact, transmitted through the example of Jefferson's American table was a key factor in the next generation of American writers' redoubled efforts to instill a sense of taste in their fellow citizens. In Chapter Three, I consider Lydia Maria Child's under-examined 1829 cooking manual *The Frugal Housewife* in the context of her range of writings—novels, short stories, political treatises, and personal essays—and discuss her various attempts to influence the politics and tastes of the American public. The daughter of a baker whose “Medford crackers” were sold throughout New England and even in England, Child identified herself, throughout her life, with the “middle class” of “farmers and mechanics, who proudly work with their *hands*” (Qtd. in Karcher xiv). She saw little distinction between the work of her writing and the labor of her cooking; both pursuits expressed aspects of the virtuous republican taste, derived from Franklin and Jefferson, that she sought to inculcate in her readers. Her family's Thanksgiving eve tradition, in which “all the humble friends of the Francis household—[the teacher] ‘Ma’am Betty,’ the washer-woman, the wood-sawyer, and the journeymen... some twenty or thirty in all—were summoned to a preliminary entertainment,” where they “partook of an immense chicken pie, pumpkin pies (made in milk-pans), and heaps of donuts,” and “went away loaded with crackers and bread,” struck Thomas Wentworth Higginson as “such plain application” of her values and ideals that he included this tableau, among her literary accomplishments, in his profile of Child in *Eminent Women of the Age* (41).

There were times in Child's life, as when she was shunned by the Boston literary elite for publishing her *Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called the Africans* and when she was compelled to part with her house in order to cover her husband's

formidable legal debts, that Child needed to remind herself that the expression of values and ideals stemmed from inner resources. It was then that her notion of taste as a model for the exercise of personal conviction began to coalesce. Child proposed that this sense of taste encompassed pleasure not only in the appreciation of natural beauty and high art but also in the experience of sympathy shared among individuals. In this way, she anticipates a major shift in American ideology, from the notion of an internal sense of taste that guides citizens to behave with virtue, in full accordance with the nation's ideals to a conception of sympathy that would create an emotional bond among all people. This sympathetic sense of taste, Child believed, would lead citizens toward effective political action, so as to ensure that the ideals of the republic—liberty, equality, and opportunity—would be experienced by all.

In the dissertation epilogue, I show how Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The House of the Seven Gables* employs accounts of eating, together with metaphors of cultural consumption, to pursue his own investigation of the function—and limits—of the sense of taste. He employs the genre of romance, the same one that Child believed would most “take hold of the public mind” and allow her to “undermine Prejudice,” in order to frame the transformation of appetite into taste that is first noted by Franklin, that is invested with republican meaning by Jefferson and is expanded by Child to include an aspect of sympathetic response (Qtd. in *Romance* vii). By representing this conception of taste in the character of an old man, however, Hawthorne expresses doubt that this model of taste can carry the nation into the era of industrial capitalism. Instead, Hawthorne conveys hope that a new, not yet fully crystallized form of aesthetic judgment will be the impetus to lead the United States towards a unified national culture. This is the same form that

Elizabeth Peabody identifies, in the prospectus for the *Aesthetic Papers*, as one that will “be evolved from the union of the many-colored rays, [and] that shall cultivate an harmonious intellectual and moral life in our country” (iii).

In 1851, Hawthorne’s conception of this new mode of perception was as inchoate as the “kaleidoscopic pictures” that he conjures, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, from the murky waters of Maule’s Well (225). Hawthorne resists ceding the future to a form of taste that is motivated purely by consumerist impulses. However, he does not fully embrace a more rarefied form of taste that is determined by disinterested aesthetic judgment. In the novel, Hawthorne invests two young characters—the sympathetic Phoebe and the emotionally-detached Holgrave—with the shared responsibility of discerning the beauty and meaning of the “many-colored rays” that Peabody, only two years earlier, had struggled to articulate. In this way, *The House of the Seven Gables* functions as the capstone of one era and the harbinger of the next. Hawthorne’s portrayal of democratic citizenship illuminates a significant transition in the American people—from consumers of simple food to consumers of complex fiction, from producers of armed revolution to producers of American taste.

When scholars review the development and expression of American aesthetic thought, they often look to Hawthorne’s intellectual milieu—and in particular, to Elizabeth Peabody. She was the owner of the West Street Bookstore, the host to Margaret Fuller’s famed “Conversations,” and the erstwhile business manager of the transcendentalist journal, *The Dial*. It was this milieu that introduced the idea of the aesthetic, together with related Romantic ideologies, into American literary culture. More recently, scholars have begun to connect the sentimental literature that was dominant in

America at mid-century and that included works by Child's most famous successor, Harriet Beecher Stowe, to this philosophical lineage.⁵

However, "Matters of Taste" reveals how the "aesthetic element"—what Peabody characterizes as "neither a theory of the beautiful, nor a philosophy of art, but a component and indivisible part of in all human creations"—is evident in a range of literary antecedents (1). Early American cultural, political, and literary figures, as well as the nation's citizenry, recognized the aesthetic value in a variety of material objects, including that fundamental "matter" of taste, food. Although the introduction of German aesthetic theory in the late 1830s led to the diminished influence of the Scottish "moral sense" philosophy, requiring critics such as Peabody to distinguish, for the first time, between the personal sense of taste and a more universal form of disinterested aesthetic judgment, it was clear that a shared cultural language of food had already taken root in America. This national consensus about the interdependence of the cultivation of the American palate and the cultivation of virtuous citizenship became a strong current evident even today in America's national culture, due in large part to the influence of Franklin, Jefferson, and Child. Each of these American taste-makers enlisted the idea of eating in order to identify—and then shape—the habits and tastes that they believed would sustain the health of the national body.

¹ While Dillon provides the most clear articulation of this view, the essay in which this quotation appears treats the aesthetics of the sentimental poetry of the 1850s, and is therefore less central to my study.

² Referred to hereafter as *FP*.

³ Referred to hereafter as *A*.

⁴ Referred to hereafter as *Notes*.

⁵ See Camfield, Dillon, Merish, and Noble.

Chapter One

The Taste of Virtue: Benjamin Franklin's Bodily Aesthetics

Shortly after Thomas Jefferson arrived in Paris to replace the ailing Benjamin Franklin as Minister to France, Franklin held a dinner party at his estate in Passy, just outside the city limits. Among the attendees was the Abbé Raynal, who contended, famously, that American plants and animals were smaller and weaker than their European counterparts. Recalling the events of the dinner in a letter to a friend, Jefferson describes how Raynal “got on his favorite theory of the degeneracy of animals, and even of man, in America,” and how Franklin cleverly chose to respond (*W* 18:170). Having already observed the “accidental stature and position of his guests at the table,” Franklin rose to address the group:

Let us try this question by the fact before us. We are here one half Americans, and one half French, and it happens that the Americans have placed themselves on one side of the table, and our French friends are on the other. Let both parties rise, and we will see on which side nature has degenerated. (*W* 18:170)

The American guests, Jefferson recounts, “were of the finest stature and form; while those on the other side were remarkably diminutive, and the Abbé himself particularly, was a mere shrimp” (*W* 18:170). With this evidence of American bodies, the debate was laid to rest and the dinner could proceed.¹ Perhaps a pudding was served, or a plate of hot fish. In any case, the guests ate their fill. And as the aromas subsided and the dishes were cleared, one lesson remained: the importance of looking at the body.

There are many things that we can learn by looking at the body: its size and shape; what it thinks and feels; how it relates to other bodies and things; what other

structures the body might resemble; and how we might better understand those bodily structures by understanding of the workings of our own corporeal selves. Benjamin Franklin intuited each of these implications, and for this reason, he made the comprehension and control of his body the central project of his life. Franklin's rules for living, as articulated most clearly in the "Thirteen Names of Virtues" recorded in his *Autobiography*, are centered around the body and its acts (A 149).² His advice about temperance, the virtue on which all others depend, is simple: "Eat not to Dulness. Drink not to Elevation" (A 149). Eat and drink temperately, Franklin argues, and it will "procure that Coolness and Clearness of Head, which is so necessary where constant Vigilance was to be kept up, and Guard maintained, against the unremitting Attraction of ancient Habits, and the Force of perpetual Temptations" (A 150). With this causal relation in mind, the experiments with vegetarianism that Franklin describes in his *Autobiography*, the maxims about food and eating that he prints in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, and his many thoughts on this subject that appear in his newspaper articles, editorials, essays, and letters, each expand in significance. They tell us things about Franklin's body, about his habits and his tastes, and about the habits and tastes of the America of his time.³

Franklin focuses on the act of eating, initially, because it encapsulates the economy and efficiency that together undergird his pragmatic approach to life. But Franklin's life story, as narrated in his *Autobiography*, recorded in his aphorisms and essays, and documented in his personal correspondence, reveals the evolution of a more complex—and as yet unexplored—philosophical position. Franklin's shift from emphasizing the benefits of maintaining an indifferent attitude towards the taste of food

to extolling the advantages of attentiveness to food's flavor corresponds to his recognition of the role of the senses—and in particular, the sense of taste—in mediating between bodily experience and rational thought. “The tasting self hangs in the balance between subjective response and objective principles,” explains Denise Gigante, in *Taste: A Literary History* (17). For later aesthetic philosophers, most notably Immanuel Kant, the notion of the Man of Taste “hang[ing] in balance” threatened to destabilize their rigorous theories about beauty and pleasure. As a result, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the notion of taste was excised from discussions of aesthetic discernment. But for Franklin, the idea of the “tasting self,” positioned between the “subjective response” of the apperceiving body and the “objective principles” of the rational mind, presents an ideal stance from which to explore the function—and the limits—of reason.

In Franklin's writing, the sense of taste thus emerges as a primary metaphor with which to describe the process by which individuals learn to identify their bodily appetites, and then moderate these appetites from within. Through his many literary personae, such as Silence Dogood, the Busy-Body, Richard Saunders, and the character of Franklin himself, he provides a functional model of the exercise of taste for the American public. Furthermore, by employing frequent references to eating habits and food preferences, Franklin attests to the importance of the idea originated by the English cultural critics of the early eighteenth century, and developed by the Scottish moral philosophers later in that century, of the direct relationship between personal taste and public virtue. In so doing, Franklin formulates a prototypal version of a distinctly American taste, that incorporates the qualities of temperance and simplicity, and the virtues of self-improvement and public service. Most often remembered for his appetite for knowledge,

Franklin should also be considered a progenitor of American aesthetic theory. Franklin's inquiry into the nature of sensory experience, initially framed as an investigation into the limits of the rational mind, develops into a full-bodied philosophy of the function of taste. By calling attention to the importance—and the implications—of making virtuous choices in the consumption of food, Franklin enlists good taste in the service of the common good.

Aesthetics, Appetite, the Sense of Taste

“Aesthetics is born of a discourse of the body,” writes Terry Eagleton in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, reminding contemporary critics that the philosophical inquiry into the aesthetic is rooted “in the gaze and the guts and all that arises from our most banal, biological insertion in to the world” (13). In his reference to “the gaze and the guts,” Eagleton evokes the original meaning of the word “aesthetic,” which referred, initially, “to the whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarefied domain of conceptual thought” (13). Eagleton emphasizes the distinction between the immediate, “biological” experiences registered by the senses, and the more abstract, conceptual thinking that takes place in the mind. But as recent scholarship by Carolyn Korsmeyer and Denise Gigante has shown, what takes place in the guts—in particular, the act of eating—relates quite closely to the eighteenth-century origins of modern aesthetic thought. Korsmeyer documents that, during the early eighteenth century, “the sense of taste stands right next to aesthetic Taste in philosophical writings” (40). Gigante argues, more specifically, that as a “new mode of embodied cognition,” the physicality of the sense of taste “provided access” to the aspects of human experience left

unexplained by Enlightenment theories of the rational mind (6). As both a metaphor for subjective judgment, and as its own unique “mode” of encountering the world, the gustatory sense of taste supplies eighteenth-century aesthetic theorists with a tangible model through which to explore the interplay between the body, the senses, and the mind (6).

Scholars of eighteenth-century philosophy generally agree that Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, was the first modern critic to formulate a theory of aesthetic taste. In essays written between 1705 and 1710, later collected as *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Shaftesbury traces the contours of an internal “sense” that registers, and subsequently responds to, instances of beauty in art and nature (10). Shaftesbury is primarily concerned with how the cultivation of this sense relates to the development of a person’s social refinement and moral character, however. His most significant contribution to aesthetic philosophy remains the notion of *sensus communis*, or common sense—what the literary critic David Shields describes as “a form of communal identity brought into being by speech acts or writing” (xviii). While Shaftesbury refers to a shared aesthetic sensibility as a key feature of this “communal identity,” he does not explicitly identify this quality as the sense of taste. That connection is most commonly ascribed to Francis Hutcheson, whose 1725 *Inquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* condensed and rearticulated many of Shaftesbury’s main ideas, to give what George Dickie describes as the English-speaking world’s “first relatively sophisticated theory” of aesthetic taste (3). In *The Century of Taste: The Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century*, Dickie explains that Hutcheson’s incisive account of what “we commonly call a *fine Genius or Taste*” shifted

“the focus of theorizing” about individuals’ encounters with the material world “from objective notions of beauty to the subjective notion of taste” (9, 3). Most significant for literary study, Hutcheson, with the publication of his *Inquiry*, secures the metaphorical link between gustatory and aesthetic taste, guiding discussions of subjective judgment from the eighteenth century into the present day.

Hutcheson’s reference to the fact that the metaphorical usage of the word “taste” had already entered common parlance points to the larger culture of taste that coursed through the early years of the eighteenth century, well before he formulated his philosophical theory. Lance Bertelsen, the literary critic, describes a general “atmosphere of burgeoning consumption” during which discussions of taste “became the vogue” (45). As a result of the greater availability of food, clothes, and other commercial goods—and the increasing need for individuals to assess the quality and appropriateness of these goods—popular journals of culture and taste had begun to flourish. Eighteenth-century scholar Erin Mackie argues that these journals “reflect regulative responses to the increasing proliferation of cultural forms in a commercialized market in the form of prescriptions for proper standards of taste” (321). With examples from *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, published between 1709 and 1714, Mackie shows how “the critical discourse of taste, along with the forms of production it would govern, becomes a popular, public interest” (321). Eighteenth-century citizens, with their attention trained on the social and cultural significance of the goods they consumed, attempted to enter into—and subsequently direct—the conversation about how their habits and tastes might be formed.

A key indication of how the interest in taste cut across popular and philosophical planes is provided by the example of Shaftesbury himself. Shaftesbury functioned as the model for a fictional Man of Taste, whose adventures in conspicuous consumption were recounted each week in the pages of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. The journals' editors, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, subscribed to Shaftesbury's belief that individuals were inherently tasteful. They agreed with Shaftesbury, moreover, that individuals' instinctual preferences could be cultivated and refined. With examples of tasteful consumption—of food and of other commercial goods—Addison and Steele instructed their readers in the habits and behaviors that were appropriate to their augmented social status. In so doing, the journalists helped to promote and sustain the *sensus communis* that Shaftesbury identifies, and that Hutcheson would soon endorse—a community united, socially and culturally, as well as aesthetically, through a shared set of values and tastes.

Franklin joined this community of taste upon his arrival in London, on Christmas Eve, 1724. Although this was Franklin's first visit to London, as the literary critic Douglas Anderson points out, "Franklin had in fact prepared for this direct exposure" to the *sensus communis* of London "by schooling himself in the collected volumes of *The Spectator*, a complete set of which was available in his brother's print shop in Boston" (7). Franklin's familiarity with Addison's and Steele's essays—which, as Franklin himself reports, he read "over and over" in an attempt to internalize their style and tone—would surely have supplied him with an awareness of the major topics and concerns of the early eighteenth-century British cultural elite (A 62). In the *Autobiography*, Franklin even claims to have committed the third volume of *The Spectator* to memory:

I took some of the papers, and making short hints of the sentiment in each sentence, laid them by for a few days, and then, without looking at the book, tried to complete the papers again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length and as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should come to hand. (A 62)⁴

He concludes that this process allowed him learn “method in the arrangement of thoughts” (A 62). Surely, this exercise would also have resulted in an intimate knowledge of the “sentiments” and ideas expressed in each paper. And perhaps, such immersion in the ideas of *The Spectator* would have allowed for Franklin to mentally rehearse the behavior that he would soon be required to model as a member of London’s community of taste.

But the ability to articulate the contents of *The Spectator* in his own manner, or even to demonstrate the tasteful behavior that the magazine depicted, would not have prepared Franklin for the intensity of the ideological debate that occurring in London during the winter of 1724-5. The topic that ignited discussion in local coffeehouses and taverns was Shaftesbury’s claim, as popularized by *The Spectator*, that “if any *Appetite* or *Sense* be natural, the *Sense of Fellowship* is the same” (51). Like Shaftesbury, Addison and Steele adhered to the belief that virtue is directed by an innate social sense, that derives pleasure from observing—and participating in—acts of outwardly-oriented benevolence. (“Pleasure... was the daughter of Happiness, who was the child of Virtue, who was offspring of the Gods,” wrote Addison in *Spectator No. 183*). In response to the overwhelming public support for this position—after all, who wouldn’t like to believe that their instinctual behaviors and preferences were indicators of their social virtue—Bernard Mandeville felt compelled to expand and republish his contrarian *Fable of the Bees* (1714). The revised version of the *Fable*, published in 1723, a year before

Franklin's arrival in London, reinforced the Hobbesian position that the impulse towards benevolence eschewed any internal basis. Based on the ideas expressed in *Leviathan*, Mandeville argued that public virtue was, simply, a by-product of the satisfaction of individual appetites and desires.

Most scholars of "moral sense" philosophy, as the school of thought begun by Shaftesbury is known, believe that the resurgence of the Hobbesian position—and its discussion in leading intellectual circles—was the primary impetus for Hutcheson's *Inquiry*. (Shaftesbury, who in all probability would have responded to Mandeville's charges, had died in 1713). Anderson explains how "Hutcheson's account of the disinterested moral sense in man directly engaged Mandeville's ingenious but reductive psychology of prideful self-interest" (7). Gigante directly connects the "moral and intellectual struggle waged" between Shaftesbury and Hutcheson on the one side, and Mandeville on the other, to "the tension between the conceptual spheres of taste and appetite in the early years of the eighteenth century" (6-7). With evidence ranging from *Paradise Lost* to *The Prelude*, Gigante convincingly demonstrates how "taste became the most vivid strain of a complex civilizing process in which individuals were taught to regulate themselves, and their motivating appetites, from within" (7).

Gigante does not examine the parallel "civilizing process" that would subsequently unfold across the Atlantic, however. Her focus centers on how the "complex relations between aesthetic taste and the more substantial phenomena of appetite" are played out in Romantic poetry (3). For that matter, Anderson points out that Franklin's "personal experience with the dialogue between Mandeville and Hutcheson gave him memorable exposure to the contemporary exchange between moral philosophy

and practical psychology,” but he does not connect this intellectual “exchange” to the underlying tension between appetite and taste (7). In this chapter, therefore, I will show how Franklin, through his exposure to the culture of taste in London, as well as through his interest in the philosophical debate about its origins and functions, formulates his own ideology of taste and its relation to appetite, and incorporates his own life experiences into his theory.

From “Perfect Inattention” to Taste “Unconfi’d”

Well before his arrival in London, Franklin was attuned to certain aspects of the development of his personal tastes. He attributes his father’s emphasis on worthy dinner-table conversation, rather than on the particular “victuals” being served, to his own tendency to ignore the tastes and flavors of even the most delicious foods (*A* 55). In the first pages of the *Autobiography*, Franklin describes how, at his childhood table, his father “always took care to start some ingenious or useful Topic for Discourse, which might tend to improve the Minds of his Children” (*A* 55). “By this means,” Franklin explains:

He turned our Attention to what was good, just, and prudent in the Conduct of Life; and little or no Notice was ever taken of what related to the Victuals on the Table, whether it was well or ill dressed, in or out of season, of good or bad flavour, preferable or inferior to this or that other thing of the kind, so that I was brought up in such a perfect Inattention to those Matters as to be quite Indifferent what kind of Food was set before me, and so unobservant of it that to this Day if I am asked I can scarce tell a Few hours after Dinner what I dined upon. (*A* 55)⁵

In this passage, Franklin affirms his father’s belief that too much “Notice” of the particular foods being served might distract from the accompanying conversation. This early experience of “perfect Inattention” suggests a developmental basis for Franklin’s

ensuing indifference to issues of taste. From his father's example of elevating the knowledge of that which is "good" in the "Conduct of Life" over the "good or bad flavour" of the food, Franklin comes to believe that the improvement of the mind should take precedence over the "Gratification" of the senses. Franklin's subsequent observation that his indifference towards the taste of food "has been a Convenience to [him] in traveling, where [his] Companions have been sometimes very unhappy for want of a suitable Gratification of their more delicate because better instructed Tastes and Appetites," reveals a conception of the cultivation of the mind as distinct from—and more worthy than—the "instruct[ion]" of the senses (A 55). Furthermore, his casual commingling of the terms "Tastes and Appetites" reveals a lack of familiarity, at that time, with the debate that placed taste and appetite on opposite sides of a philosophical divide. Evidently, the young Franklin had yet to develop a position that acknowledged the positive impact of cultivating appetite into a more refined sense of taste.

Other episodes in Franklin's adolescence provide evidence of his position of indifference with respect to matters of taste. In particular, his discussion of the benefits that are derived from vegetarianism confirms his belief in the "convenience" of indifferent taste. In the *Autobiography*, Franklin explains how, while working as an apprentice at his brother's print shop, he "happen'd to meet with a Book" by Thomas Tryon (A 63). Tryon's book, *The Way to Health, Long Life, and Happiness; Or, a Discourse of Temperance, and the Particular Nature of all things Requisite for the Life of Man*, argued for the extended benefits of "the Vegetable Diet," and included, according to David Waldstreicher, "not only recipes but impromptu speeches by cows, sheep, birds, and horses, against their oppression" (99). In his biography of Franklin, Waldstreicher

suggests that Franklin, as a disempowered apprentice, may have been drawn to Tryon's doctrines because of feelings of affinity with the oppressed animals. Another Franklin biographer, H.W. Brands, argues for the appeal, to Franklin, of the moral aspects of vegetarianism. The "essence" of Tryon's argument, Brands surmises, "was that the creatures to be eaten had done nothing to deserve death at the hands of humans and therefore ought to be allowed to live out their innocent lives" (40). But if Tryon's teachings resonated with Franklin for personal or for moral reasons, it is not evident in his initial account of the benefits of vegetarianism. Explaining how he "prepar[ed] some of [Tryon's] dishes, such as boiling potatoes or rice, making hasty pudding," Franklin underscores the financial impact of his vegetarian diet: "I presently found that I could save half of what [my brother] paid me. This was an additional fund for buying books" (A 63). His emphasis is on the interrelationships of food choice, personal economy, and intellectual advancement. Again, Franklin demonstrates his preference for food choices that facilitate learning, rather than for any benefit derived from examining the experience of eating, itself.

Franklin displays little interest in exploring the benefits that the actual taste of food might provide, preferring to focus on the positive financial impact of adhering to a vegetarian diet. In fact, Franklin extols additional "advantages" that stem from the simplicity of a meal of "no more than a Bisket or a Slice of Bread, a Handful of Raisins or a Tart from the pastry Cook's, and a Glass of Water" (A 63). He explains that while his brother, and the other employees of the printing house, went outside for their meals, he "remained there alone" (A 63). Because he could quickly "dispatch" his "light Repast," he "had the rest of the time till their Return, for Study" (A 63). Not only did Franklin's

abstemious eating habits save him time, but anticipating his account, featured in Part Two of the *Autobiography*, of his formulation of his famed list of virtues, Franklin proudly reports that he “made the greater Progress from that greater Clearness of Head and quicker Apprehension which usually attend Temperance in Eating and Drinking (*A* 63).

Later, when Franklin justifies his decision to place temperance at the top of his list of virtues, he explains that temperance with respect to eating and drinking “tends to procure that Coolness and Clearness of Head, which is so necessary where constant Vigilance was to be kept up, and Guard maintained, against the unremitting Attraction of ancient Habits, and the force of perpetual Temptations” (*A* 151). With the phrase “Coolness and Clearness of Head,” Franklin echoes the “Clearness of Head” that he notes in his account of his experiment with vegetarianism. In his later statement, however, Franklin amplifies the effects, crediting temperance with the ability to keep “constant Vigilance” and maintain “Guard” against more profound temptations. The tone of the statement, with its hyperbolic evocation of the “unremitting Attraction of ancient Habits,” and the “force of perpetual Temptations,” underscores the strength of Franklin’s conviction about a temperate diet as the basis from which all other virtuous behaviors extend.

Thus, it cannot be said that Franklin’s vegetarianism supplies him with any indication of the impact or benefits related to the taste of food. It is, rather, the events that surround Franklin’s decision to resume eating meat that provide him with the first hint that food, itself, might serve as a source of instruction. To that end: Franklin includes his “return to eating Flesh” in the two-page outline of his *Autobiography*, but makes no mention of the experiment with vegetarianism that preceded it (*A* 268). Describing the

end of his vegetarianism in the text, Franklin recounts how he had “hitherto... stuck to [his] Resolution of not eating animal Food,” and how—here alluding to a deeper understanding of Tryon’s teachings—he viewed the “taking every Fish as a kind of unprovok’d Murder” (*A* 87). “But,” Franklin explains matter-of-factly:

I had formerly been a great Lover of Fish, and when this [particular fish] came hot out of the Frying Pan, it smelt admirably well. I balanc’d some time between Principle and Inclination: till I recollected, that when the Fish were opened, I saw smaller Fish taken out of their Stomachs: Then thought I, if you eat one another, I don’t see why we mayn’t eat you. (*A* 87)

In this anecdote, Franklin acknowledges that his taste for fish, stimulated by the sumptuous smell of fried Block Island cod, triggers a conflict between “Principle” and “Inclination.” In “Franklin and the Revolutionary Body,” Betsy Erkkila argues that this passage “is the first in which Franklin suggests the instability of ‘Reason’ as the ground of the enlightened self and the new secular order he seeks to embody” (722). In citing Franklin’s conclusion—“So convenient a thing it is to be a *reasonable Creature*, since it enables one to find or make a Reason for every thing one has a mind to do”—Erkkila calls attention to “a major moment of crisis in Franklin’s narrative and in the political grammar of reason, rights, liberty, and happiness on which the American Revolution would be founded” (722). Certainly, this passage raises the issue of the malleability of reason, and suggests that the “enlightened self” may not prove to be as reliable as Franklin would like to believe (*A* 87). But it is also noteworthy that Franklin now links “convenien[ce]” with the faculty of reason, whereas previously he had associated convenience with an indifference towards the taste of food. From this point on, Franklin acknowledges the role of the senses—and in particular, the sense of taste—in mediating between the impulses of the body and the decisions of the mind.

This significant transformation in Franklin's thinking coincides with his arrival in Philadelphia where, having fled from his infelicitous apprenticeship to his brother, he begins the first phase of his adult life. On his first day in the City of Brotherly Love, Franklin meets both Deborah Read, the woman he would later marry, and Samuel Keimer, the man who would employ Franklin for years to come. In spite of the central role that Keimer played in Franklin's professional development, Franklin, in the *Autobiography*, consistently relegates Keimer to a role as his foil. Franklin appears to be intent on conveying his superiority to Keimer in every way. Keimer "kn[ew] nothing of Presswork," notes Franklin, while he, on his first day of work, was able to "put [Keimer's] Press... into Order" (A 78-9). Keimer was a "Knave in his Composition," while Franklin describes himself as an exemplar of expository style (A 79). Keimer was "very ignorant of the World," while Franklin prides himself on his knowledge of international affairs (A 79). The comparisons continue, culminating in Franklin's account of his own superior mind. Franklin recalls how he "us'd to work [Keimer] so with [his] Socratic Method," to the point where Keimer "would hardly answer the most common Question, without asking first, *What do you intend to infer from that?*" (A 88). This contest of reason results in a plea of *nolo contendere* for Keimer, whose abilities in this area are no match for Franklin's carefully-honed rhetorical skills.

Franklin also strongly conveys to his readers that Keimer "was usually a great Glutton," and indicates his continued belief in the importance of mind over (edible) matter (A 88). In relating an anecdote in which the two decide to establish a "new sect," with doctrines ranging from not shaving their beards (Keimer's contribution) to not

eating meat (obviously Franklin's), he emphasizes Keimer's particular difficulty in adhering to the latter (*A* 88). Franklin gleefully recalls:

We had our Victuals dress'd and brought to us regularly by a Woman in the Neighbourhood, who had from me a List of 40 Dishes to be prepar'd for us at different times, in all which there was neither Fish Flesh nor Fowl.... I went on pleasantly, but poor Keimer suffer'd grievously, tir'd of the Project, long'd for the Flesh Pots of Egypt, and order'd a roast Pig. He invited me and two Women Friends to dine with him, but it being brought too soon upon table, he could not resist the Temptation, and ate it all up before we came. (*A* 88-9)

In contrast to Franklin's report of his measured response to the aroma of fried fish, in which he takes time to "balanc[e]" between his appetite and his inclination, before constructing a rational explanation for eating the fish, Keimer is described as consumed by his appetite. In this account, the pleasures of the table are intensified by Keimer's request for a "roast Pig," and by the appeal of the "Women Friends" who dine with him. The suggestive nature of Franklin's concluding sentence implies that Keimer is undone because of an array of "Temptation." Although Franklin subsequently distinguishes between temperance "confin'd to Eating and Drinking," and "the moderating of every other Pleasure, Appetite, Inclination or Passion, bodily or mental," in this episode, Franklin conveys the value he assigns to rational control over all bodily appetites (*A* 149). Franklin portrays Keimer's inability to subject his appetite to reason as the most unfortunate consequence of his inferior mind.

In fact, in recounting his years as an apprentice in Philadelphia, Franklin consistently characterizes Keimer as the embodiment of appetite and desire. Keimer's inability to regulate his diet is depicted as a constant impediment to his professional success. When both men see the governor outside their print shop, Franklin waits patiently upstairs. Keimer, on the other hand, "r[uns] down immediately" into the street

(A 80). And when Franklin's measured response results in an invitation to accompany the governor to a tavern down the street, Keimer "star[es] like a Pig poison'd" (A 80). Once again, Franklin's characterization of Keimer suggests his distaste for Keimer's unbridled impulses. Over a century before Brillat-Savarin coined the phrase, "Tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you what you are," Franklin infers a direct relation between the food a person consumes and the attributes he embodies (3). In the narrative of his relationship with his employer, Franklin imbues—with character and flavor—a juxtaposition between the man of appetite and the man of reason.

The Water-American and his Sense of Taste

Franklin's ideas about the benefits of temperance, acquired at his childhood table, and refined throughout his adolescence, shape his experiences at Watts's and Palmer's, the two printing houses where he finds employment while abroad. Franklin's account of how he "endeavor'd to convince" his British colleagues to adopt his abstemious diet offers the first evidence, aside from his efforts with Keimer, of an attempt to inculcate his personal habits and tastes in others (A 100). He takes palpable pleasure in the fact that "a great Part" of his coworkers "left their muddling Breakfast of Beer and Bread and Cheese" in order to follow his "Example" (A 101). Similarly, his pride in describing how he acquired his nickname, "the Water-American," underscores how readily he assumes his position of influence within the print shop:

On occasion I carried up and down Stairs a large Form of Types in each hand, when others carried but one in both Hands. They wonder'd to see from this and several Instances that the Water-American as they call'd me was *stronger* than themselves who drank *strong* Beer. (A 99-100)

This passage, which couples Franklin's recollection of his feat of strength with an account of others' reactions to it, shows how Franklin had become increasingly attuned to others' perceptions of his tastes and behaviors. Furthermore, the title of "the Water-American" accords equal weight to Franklin's dietary (and drinking) habits, and to his identity as an American. The fact that the title was assigned to Franklin by his British peers most likely contributed to his realization that his personal behavior might carry additional cultural and political implications. In her essay, Erkkila argues that Franklin, as "the Water-American," becomes an emblem of a "new conceptualization of the body as separate, independent, responsible, and self-regulating," and signifies the emergence of a distinctly American "corporate ideal" (723). Certainly, Franklin, in the *Autobiography*, relies on accounts of his body to represent the "separate" and "self-regulating" American body politic. At the time, however, Franklin's title was significant in that it alerted him to how others might interpret his personal habits and tastes.

Even as Franklin embraces the opportunity to model his temperate diet, he also welcomes the occasion to exercise his financial acumen. In the same episode in which he describes convincing certain coworkers to follow his abstemious "Example," Franklin explains how he, personally, "acquir'd considerable Influence" in the print shop. To those who failed to adopt his temperate diet and, instead, "continu'd sotting with Beer all day," he offered his own savings as a source of credit (*A* 100-1). Franklin explains that his role as the print shop's self-appointed banker "supported [his] Consequence in the Society," since so many of his colleagues relied on him for supplementary funds (*A* 101). His relative social prominence leads to him being "recommended" for extra tasks around the printing house, which, in turn, leads to his becoming "generally better paid" (*A* 101). As

indicated by his light-hearted conclusion, “I went on now very agreeably,” Franklin does not lose his focus on his own well-being (*A* 101). In spite of his increasing awareness of how he might employ his own example to enhance the lives of others, the eighteen-year-old Franklin had yet to place public good ahead of personal profit.

Franklin’s early—and for that matter, his only—explicitly philosophical work confirms the position conveyed through his actions: that public good stems, simply, from the side-effects of self-interest. This work, “A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain,” was prompted by a treatise by William Wollaston, which he typeset while at Palmer’s. Franklin’s response to Wollaston’s argument, which Franklin determined to be “not... well-founded,” so closely adhered to the Mandevillian view that it earned him an invitation to meet Mandeville himself (*A* 96). In *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*, HW Brands explains that Mandeville “saw in Franklin a kindred spirit who might carry the fight forward” (74). However, the “Dissertation” came to be viewed as a philosophical failure. Brands states charitably that “some of its premises were open to question” (74). Gordon Wood, another Franklin biographer, describes the “Dissertation” as “rather sophomoric” (29). A third biographer, Walter Isaacson, offers a similar judgment: “Franklin’s ‘Dissertation’ does not belong in the annals of sophisticated philosophy” (45). In point of fact, Franklin later repudiated the essay, burning all but one copy. But considering that, in 1725, Franklin had only just become aware of the extended implications of his personal tastes, it could be argued that an examination of his formulation—and subsequent repudiation—of the “Dissertation,” in effect, illuminates the full trajectory of Franklin’s philosophical thought.

Despite the critical consensus about its lack of sophistication, certain sections of the “Dissertation” offer insight into the development of Franklin’s ideas about taste. In particular, his discussion of the relation between pleasure and pain provides an example of how eating functions, for Franklin, as an entry point into the derivation of more complicated philosophical concepts. In that discussion, Franklin reflects:

You have a View of the whole Argument in a few familiar Examples: The *Pain* of Abstinence from Food, as it is greater or less, produces a greater or less *Desire* of Eating, the Accomplishment of this *Desire* produces a greater or less *Pleasure* proportionate to it. The *Pain* of Confinement causes the *Desire* of Liberty, which accomplish'd, yields a *Pleasure* equal to that *Pain* of Confinement. The *Pain* of Labour and Fatigue causes the *Pleasure* of Rest, equal to that *Pain*. The *Pain* of Absence from Friends, produces the *Pleasure* of Meeting in exact proportion. &c. (*FP* 1:57)⁶

Franklin utilizes the “familiar Example” of the “*Pain*” of hunger, together with its complement, the “*Desire* of Eating,” as a tangible model for his conception of the equal and opposite relation between pleasure and pain. In reference to this passage, Douglas Anderson points out that the “surprising introduction of more complex affections in Franklin’s last example make the ‘fixed’ nature of pleasure and pain seem far less reductive and fatal than the first example implies” (39). Indeed, Franklin’s progression from the physical “*Desire* of Eating” to the abstract “*Desire* of Liberty” and “*Pain* of Absence from Friends,” suggests the development of an increasingly nuanced conception of the nature of pleasure and pain. The process of eating—in which physical desires are satisfied, and then sensory pleasures are produced—prefigures the causal relation that Franklin subsequently identifies between immediate, bodily “*Desire*,” and the more rarefied “*Pleasure*” that is “produce[d]” or “yield[ed] upon the satisfaction of that desire. In the context of Franklin’s careful attention to his food choices, and of his heightened

awareness of their cultural and political implications, the “familiar” example of eating gains additional philosophical significance.

The figurative language of the “Dissertation” further demonstrates how Franklin employs ideas about eating in order to convey more complex philosophical relations. In the paragraph that precedes the passage quoted above, Franklin employs the trope of taste—his first recorded usage of that term—in order to express his understanding of the process by which pleasure is perceived. “’Tis impossible to taste of *Pleasure*,” he writes, “without feeling its preceding proportionate *Pain*; or to be sensible of *Pain*, without having its necessary Consequent *Pleasure*” (*FP* 1:57). Franklin’s use of “taste” as an active verb allows him to retain the gustatory connotations of the term. As indicated by the parallel construction of “tast[ing] *Pleasure*” and “be[ing] sensible of *Pain*,” Franklin shows how he conceives of gustatory taste as a metaphor for other sensory processes. Although he does not directly comment on the philosophical significance of the sense of taste, as Francis Hutcheson did in his *Inquiry*, published two months prior, Franklin’s figurative usage of the term suggests that he views the act of tasting, in its literal sense, as an important example of the interplay between the body, the senses, and the mind.

In the final section of the “Dissertation,” Franklin in fact proposes a model for the philosophical relations among the body, the senses, and the mind. There, he writes:

All our Ideas are first admitted by the Senses and imprinted on the Brain, increasing in Number by Observation and Experience; there they become the Subjects of the Soul’s Action. The Soul is a mere Power of Faculty of *contemplating* on, and *comparing* those Ideas when it has them; hence springs Reason: But as it can *think* on nothing but Ideas, it must have them before it can *think* at all. (*FP* 1:57)

In this statement, Franklin affirms the Lockean conception of the mind as a blank slate, with ideas “imprinted on the Brain” through “Observation and Experience.” At the same time, he acknowledges that ideas, being “first admitted by the Senses,” exist prior to logic and reason. Franklin’s comment that the mind “must have [ideas] before it can *think* at all” underscores his belief in the power that the senses have over the mind. This realization, that the senses exist “out front” of the mind and hence must be strictly trained, is, according to contemporary philosopher Susan Buck-Morss, “the whole point of philosophical interest in ‘aesthetics’ in the modern era” (6).⁷ Indeed, Franklin’s thoughts about this topic, intimated in his account of his sensory response to the fried fish, and inferred from his depiction of Keimer’s devouring of the roast pig, are, surprisingly, clearly articulated in his often overlooked “Dissertation.”

The Project of “Improving the Taste of the Town”

Franklin returned from London with his philosophical interest in taste clearly piqued, only to encounter a more pressing concern at home: the “ill Taste” of his fellow colonists (*FP* 1:117). Forced to abandon any attempt to amend his fledgling theory, Franklin focused his efforts, instead, on a practical solution to improving colonial taste. Modeling his approach after Addison and Steele’s, Franklin fashions his own fictional persona, the Busy-Body, whose observations about everyday life, Franklin hoped, would help to shape the tastes and behaviors he believed should be possessed by American subjects. Quoting a statement by Franklin from that same time, that a “*true Gentleman*” is one who “can take a Walk, or drink a Glass, and converse freely, if there be occasion, with honest Men of any Degree below him, without degrading or fearing to degrade

himself in the least,” David Shields provides additional evidence as to how Franklin returned to America deeply concerned with “the problem of becoming genteel” (38). Shields argues, moreover, that “one can understand Franklin’s insistence that gentility demanded something more than imitating well-mannered persons,” since it “entailed a consciousness that could not be transmitted by mechanical imitation. Instead, one had to cultivate an attunement to what was appropriate to a situation, a sensitivity for the qualities of persons and things, a critical judgment” (39). Shields goes so far as to label this attunement “taste” (39). But in keeping with his focus on “speech acts” and other discursive formations, Shields concludes that Franklin believed that good taste was acquired “most readily by participating in the conversation of persons with taste until one had entered into the *sensus communis* of their expression” (39). He emphasizes Franklin’s inclusion of “convers[ing] freely” in his description, since it supports his own thesis about conversation as the primary means of cultivating taste.⁸ But it is also important to acknowledge the act of “drink[ing] a glass” that accompanies the conversation, since this act of consumption supplies Franklin with an additional model through which to cultivate the “sensitivity for the qualities of persons and things” that Shields so eloquently describes.⁹

In his “Busy-Body” essays, Franklin demonstrates both methods of cultivating taste—writing and eating—often in parallel. In “Busy-Body No. 4,” which includes some of his most explicit comments about the acquisition of taste, Franklin begins by inviting “the Learned and the Ingenious” amongst his readers to join in his project of “improving the Taste of the Town” (*FP* 1:122). His suggestion that “such Gentlemen take this Opportunity, (by trying their Talent in Writing) of diverting themselves and their

Friends” directly supports Shields’s claim about the primacy of wit in promoting and sustaining the *sensus communis* of British America (*FP* 1:122). Franklin further demonstrates his social awareness by acknowledging that “the Generality would never read beyond the first Line of my Lectures, if they were usually fill’d with nothing but wholesome Precepts and Advice,” and his subsequent decision to “therefore... humour them in their own Way” (*FP* :122). By disclosing a conscious effort to entertain others “in their own Way,” Franklin also exhibits his ability to “converse freely” with those below his social status (*FP* 1:122). In this way, Franklin provides both a method, and a model, of the tasteful behavior he hopes to effect in his fellow colonial subjects.

At the same time that Franklin illustrates his “Talent in Writing,” he also employs the act of eating in order to convey additional characteristics of good taste. Franklin devotes the second half of “Busy-Body No. 4” to an extended account of a Turkish custom involving food. He deliberately specifies that the custom takes place “When you visit a Person of Quality,” suggesting that his readers might learn from the example (*FP* 1:122). After you “have talk’d over your Business,” Franklin narrates:

[The host] makes a Sign to have Things serv’d in for the Entertainment, which is generally, a little Sweetmeat, a Dish of Sherbet, and another of Coffee; all which are immediately brought in by the Servants, and tender’d to all the Guests in Order, with the greatest Care and Awfulness imaginable. (*FP* 1:122)

The conclusion of this ritual meal, Franklin explains, “is understood to give a civil Dismission to the Visitants; intimating to them, that the Master of the House has Business to do, or some other Avocation, that permits them to go away as soon as they please” (*FP* 1:122). Noting that he intends to “put something like it in Practice” in his own home, Franklin remarks that he “expect[s] all Company will retire, and leave me to pursue my

Studies for the Good of the Publick” (FP 1:122). It is noteworthy that, in the process of translating the Turkish custom into an American context, Franklin inserts the additional aim of pursuing public good. So, too, the foreign nature of the ritual invites a sociological explanation. In this way, Franklin is able to mask the “Precepts and Advice” that he offers to his readers. Without condescension, Franklin explicates not only how, but also why he intends to implement this custom in his own home. Again, Franklin provides both a method—of how a meal that is deliberately presented and consumed serves a social function—and a model—in the form of his subtle technique of instruction—of the tasteful behavior that he believes is required for the continued health of the colonial body.

Franklin demonstrates a less subtle approach in the aphorisms that he prints in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, which was published annually between 1732 and 1758. This collection of *bon mots* provides additional evidence of Franklin's attempt to inculcate taste in American subjects by advising them on what and how to eat. In the first volume, Franklin intones, “Eat to live, and not live to eat” (*PRA* 7). He reinforces this position over many years, with multiple aphorisms about the importance of eating to satisfy hunger, rather than to indulge in superfluous desire: “I saw few die of Hunger, of Eating 100,000” (1736), “Eat few Suppers, and you'll need few Medicines” (1742), “A full Belly is the Mother of all Evil” (1744), and “If it were not for the Belly, the Back might wear Gold” (1750). Despite the criticism of these aphorisms as “pointless, obtuse, third-rate flapdoodle” (Joe Queenan), or as evidence of Franklin's ability to find “a hundred different ways to say the same thing” (Edmund S. Morgan), they provide important, if obvious, confirmation of how Franklin viewed eating as the basic act from which additional personal tastes—and social virtues—extend.

In the narratives that introduce each year's *Almanack*, written from the perspective of the frugal and god-fearing Poor Richard, Franklin elaborates on his ideas about eating. In the introduction to the 1742 volume, Franklin, as Poor Richard, asks, "Woudst thou enjoy a long Life, a healthy Body, and a vigorous Mind, and be acquainted also with the wonderful Works of God? Labor in the first place to bring thy Appetite into Subjection to Reason" (*PRA* 100-1). As always, Poor Richard speaks in plain language, and by "Appetite," here, he certainly refers to one's appetite for food. The position of this statement, at the end of a long paragraph that includes specific instructions about how to assess the "Condition of the Stomach" and the consequent "Measure of Food," supports a literal interpretation. But by introducing the idea of subjecting appetite to reason in the same terms as the theories of taste that he read while in London, Franklin conveys a secondary message to his readers about his own belief in the extended implications of individual food choice.

The conclusion to the 1742 essay underscores how Franklin's philosophical thinking is intertwined with his opinions about the benefits of deliberate food choice for life on earth, and even in the hereafter. Again as Poor Richard, Franklin explains:

A sober Diet makes a Man die without Pain; it maintains the Senses in Vigour; it mitigates the Violence of the Passions and Affections. It preserves the Memory, it helps the Understanding, it allays the Heat of Lust; it brings a Man to a Consideration of his latter End; it makes the Body a fit Tabernacle for the Lord to dwell in; which makes us happy in this World, and eternally happy in the World to come, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. (*PRA* 102)

Transcending his assessment of the practical benefits of his abstemious eating habits in the *Autobiography*, Franklin, in this passage, does not merely link the effects of a "sober Diet" to time or money saved. Instead, he places food choice at the beginning of a chain

of increasingly profound consequences. The implications of a temperate diet extend from the “Senses” to “the Passions,” “Memory,” and “Understanding.” For the devout Poor Richard, the ultimate aim of this diet is, evidently, eternal salvation. But for Franklin the deist—a religious position, like his philosophical stance, that he acquired while abroad—the main goal may be to accentuate the myriad effects that are attributable to food choice.

In view of the range of implications that Franklin associates with deliberate food choice, as well as his stated aim, in “Busy-Body No. 4,” of “improving the Taste of the Town,” it is perplexing that Franklin does not endorse the cultivation of the sense of taste itself. In the *Almanack*, his most explicit comments about the gustatory aspects of taste are negative in nature. In 1748, for example, Franklin prints: “Finikin *Dick*, curs’d with nice *Taste*, / Ne’er meets with a good dinner, half starv’d at a feast” (*PRA* 150). Here, the notion of “nice *Taste*” not only interferes with the satisfaction of basic appetite but also precludes the pleasure that a “good dinner” ideally imparts. Franklin inverts the supposition that a more cultivated sense of taste results in an enhanced experience of pleasure. In this axiom, the man of taste ends up “half starv’d.” It is difficult to determine whether the harsh view of taste expressed here reflects an admonition against excess, or a deeper sensitivity to the limited financial means—and opportunities for indulgence—of typical *Almanack* readers. In either case, this indictment of “nice *Taste*” complicates Franklin’s prior emphasis on the importance of attending to food choice. In the example of the “sober Diet,” Franklin emphasizes the importance of moderation in eating in order to “maintain the Senses in Vigour.” Here, the implication is that the benefits of wellbeing accrue from the suppression of the sense of taste. Reaffirming the conclusion drawn from his childhood dinner table, Franklin here returns to an earlier model of indifferent taste.

In another indictment of the cultivation of taste, from October of the same year, Franklin offers a more extensive—but no less perplexing—statement about the value of pure, sensory pleasure. He states:

How happy is he, who can satisfy his hunger with any food, quench his thirst with any drink, please his ear with any musick, delight his eye with any painting, any sculpture, any architecture, and divert his mind with any book or any company! How many mortifications must he suffer, that cannot bear any thing but beauty, order, elegance & perfection! *Your man of taste, is nothing but a man of distaste.* (PRA 156)

Franklin exults in the common pleasures of everyday life, and as in the adage about “Finikin Dick,” denigrates the refinement of taste. Franklin discounts the gratification associated with the aesthetic criteria of “beauty, order, elegance & perfection” in favor of uninhibited and indiscriminate sensory pleasure. In this assertion, Franklin appears to reject the culture of taste, and all of its underlying philosophy. However, a closer analysis reveals the importance that Franklin attributes to the gustatory sense of taste. In particular, Franklin’s attention to oral gratification, as well as to the pleasures of the “ear” and “eye,” indicates his awareness of the sense of taste as a significant component of the human sensorium. Moreover, his progression from the satisfaction of hunger and the quenching of thirst, to the “pleas[ure]” and “delight” of the higher senses, and, finally, to the diversion of the mind with “book[s]” and “company,” resonates with the arguments made by Shaftesbury and Hutcheson about the affinity between the bodily and social senses, in terms of the experiences of pleasure that each produce.¹⁰

Franklin’s intent in addressing the readers of his *Almanack* seems designed to encourage temperate habits and simple tastes. When speaking to an audience of peers, however, Franklin allows himself to indulge in an exploration—if not an embrace—of

the benefits associated with the pleasures of the table. In the only extant meeting notes from the Junto, the “Club for mutual Improvement” that Franklin formed in 1727, he records a query directly related to gustatory taste:

Whether it is worth a Rational Man’s While to forego the Pleasure arising from the present Luxury of the Age in Eating and Drinking and artful Cookery, studying to gratify the Appetite for the Sake of enjoying healthy Old Age, a Sound Mind and a Sound Body, which are the Advantages reasonably to be expected from a more simple and temperate Diet. (*FP* 1:259)

Implicit in this query is Franklin’s fundamental belief in the importance of subjecting appetite to reason; he attributes the same set of benefits—“healthy Old Age, a Sound Mind and a Sound Body”—to a sober diet. Here, however, Franklin also acknowledges some tension between these “Advantages,” and the sensory “Pleasure” that is gained from “artful Cookery.” By framing his question from the perspective of “a Rational Man,” Franklin suggests that there might be room in the mind, as well as in the stomach, for a diet that includes the luxurious tastes of the age. His next question, “Whether those Meats and Drinks are not the best, that contain nothing in their natural Tastes, nor have any Thing added by Art so pleasing as to induce us to Eat or Drink when we are not athirst or Hungry after Thirst and Hunger are satisfied,” further documents this dinner-table dilemma (*FP* 1:259). Franklin makes no record of his response to either query, in contrast to his note of the answers to most of the other questions addressed by the Junto. Instead, the minutes of the meeting register Franklin’s ambivalence about the potential benefits of gustatory pleasure, as opposed to his proven recipe for soundness of mind.

The Art—and the Taste—of Virtue

Franklin took temporary leave of the Junto, and ceased publication of *Poor Richard's Almanack*, when, as a representative of the Pennsylvania Assembly, he set sail for London for a second time.¹¹ Instead of marking the end of Franklin's project of "improving the Taste" of his fellow colonists, his return to London initiated a second serious inquiry into the form and function of aesthetic taste. During this period, Franklin became acquainted with David Hume, the leading philosopher of the mid-eighteenth century on the subject of taste.¹² Hume's notion of "moral taste," introduced in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1740) and developed in his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), represented a more rigorous formulation of the idea of an "inner sense" of virtue that was proposed by Hutcheson (based on Shaftesbury's conception, earlier in the century). Hume proposes that virtue was guided by innate feeling or "sentiment," rather than rational thought (*Enquiry* 294). He emphasizes pleasurable experience as the basis for both moral and aesthetic judgment. In this way, his theory links the exercise of virtue and the expression of taste.

In his essay, "Of the Standard of Taste," published in 1757, the same year as Franklin's return to London, Hume clarifies his argument about the significance of sensory pleasure in determining judgments of taste. In this essay, which George Dickie hails as "the greatest expression that the theory of taste was ever to achieve," Hume asserts that "strong sense" must be "united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice" (Dickie 3, "Taste" ¶23). The proposition that "sense," once "united" to "sentiment," could be "improved" and "perfected" through "practice" and "comparison," resonated with Franklin, who was in

the process of developing his own ideas about how colonial taste might be refined. Moreover, Hume's emphasis on sensory pleasure, and his insistence on the "great resemblance between mental and bodily taste," helped Franklin reevaluate his view of virtue based on temperance, as exemplified by a "sober diet" ("Taste" ¶16). Through a consideration of Hume's theory of taste, and through his newly-formed awareness of the link between aesthetic and moral judgment, Franklin concedes that there are certain benefits that derive from exulting in the full range of sensory experience.

In fact, Franklin would experience first-hand confirmation of the positive role of sensory pleasure, when, two years later, he had the opportunity to dine with Hume in Scotland. In *Benjamin Franklin in Scotland and Ireland*, the historian J. Bennett Nolan provides an account of how Hume "aimed to make his new residence not only the intellectual but the gastronomic center of Edinburgh" (173). Nolan reports that Hume "was very proud... of the culinary proficiency of his Peggy [Irvine, his cook], protesting that her sheep's head soup was the best in the world, and that 'the Duc de Nivernois would bind himself apprentice to my lass to learn to make sheep's head soup'" (173). According to Nolan, Hume himself "loved to go into the kitchen and concoct a *soupe à la reine* after the recipe given him in France by Madame de Boufflers," and apparently, he excelled: "Henry McKenzie, 'the man of feeling,' praised a *bouilli* which David cooked for him, and Boswell marveled at three kinds of ice cream" (173). Nolan relates these details with the intention of providing a rich historical account of Franklin's travels through Great Britain. However, this anecdote about the "marvel" and "praise" that Hume elicited by his artful cooking highlights how the shared meal provides what Denise Gigante describes, in Shaftesburian terms, as "a materialized version of the *sensus*

communis” (9). United by the experience of sensory pleasure, and sustained by the “intellectual” satisfaction of the accompanying conversation, Franklin, and the guests at this distinguished table, participated in the process by which, as Hume had theorized in his essay, standards of taste are established and maintained.

Despite his first-hand exposure to Hume’s community of taste, Franklin took several years to digest the philosophical significance of this convivial gathering. In a series of letters to Hume’s contemporary, Henry Home, Lord Kames, Franklin documents his appreciation of what he will later regard as “Six Weeks of the *densest* Happiness I have met with in any Part of my Life” (*FP* 9:5). In a 1760 letter to Kames, who had previously disclosed that he was at work on a “Collection of Maxims for the Conduct of Life” for his children, Franklin proposes his first methodological formulation of how virtuous behavior might be refined. Franklin posits that:

To exhort People to be good, to be just, to be temperate, &c. without *shewing* them *how* they shall *become* so, seems like the ineffectual Charity mention’d by the Apostle, which consisted in saying to the Hungry, the Cold, and the Naked, *be ye fed, be ye warmed, be ye clothed*, without shewing them how they should get Food, Fire or Clothing. (*FP* 9:103)

As in his *Almanack* and *Autobiography*, Franklin focuses on the virtues of goodness, justice, and temperance. But what distinguishes this passage is Franklin’s emphasis on the role of social influence in the development of virtuous behavior. In stating that people must be “shew[n]” how to be virtuous, rather than simply being told how “to be good,” Franklin acknowledges the limits of exhortation, in favor of instruction formed from observing the preferences and behaviors of others. Here, Franklin admits to a necessary social basis for the cultivation of virtue.

As early as 1749, Franklin identifies the pleasure created by those who participate in this form of social instruction, although he does not yet specifically discuss the cultivation of virtue. In his “Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania,” Franklin posits that “if Men may, and frequently do, catch such a Taste for cultivating Flowers, for Planting, Grafting, Inoculating, and the like, as to despise all other Amusements for their Sake, why may not we expect they should acquire a Relish for that *more useful* Culture of young Minds” (*FP* 3:397). As in his letter to Kames, Franklin underscores the importance of instruction by others. In this instance, Franklin accentuates the potential pleasure that is to be experienced by those who choose to participate in the “Culture of young Minds.” In suggesting that “Men” intent on “cultivating” their gardens might, instead, “Relish” the cultivation of youthful intellect, Franklin, like Shaftesbury, and in anticipation of Hume, links the pleasure that results from public-minded benevolence to the satisfaction of personal taste.

In a second letter to Kames, from 1761, Franklin returns to these comments about the pleasures of cultivation, and explicitly links them to virtue. In response to Kames’s *Introduction to the Art of Thinking*, Franklin writes, “You sow thick in the young Mind, the Seeds of Good Sense concerning moral Conduct, which as they grow and are transplanted into Life must greatly adorn the Character, and promote the Happiness of the Person” (*FP* 9:374). Here, Franklin employs the metaphor of cultivation in order to describe how an individual’s “moral Conduct,” once ingrained in the “young Mind,” becomes “transplanted,” and subsequently expressed, in all aspects of life. Significantly, Franklin’s conception of virtue as an adornment to Character suggests that pleasure

results not only from cultivating virtuous behavior in others, but also behaving with virtue oneself.

During the course of his correspondence with Kames, Franklin clarifies his views about the process of cultivating virtue, and the responsibility that each individual has to develop his or her instinctual sense of virtue into a cultivated moral taste. “Most People have naturally *some* Virtues, but none have naturally *all* the Virtues,” he declares. “To *acquire* those that are wanting, and *secure* what we acquire as well as those we have naturally, is the Subject of *an Art*” (FP 9:103). He explains to Kames that virtue:

is as properly an Art, as Painting, Navigation, or Architecture. If a Man would become a Painter, Navigator, or Architect, it is not enough that he is *advised* to be one, that he is *convinc'd* by the Arguments of his Adviser that it would be for his Advantage to be one, and that he *resolves* to be one, but he must also be taught the Principles of the Art, be shewn all the Methods of Working, and how to acquire the *Habits* of using properly all the Instruments; and thus regularly and gradually he arrives by Practice at some Perfection in the Art. (FP 9:103)

Through analogy, Franklin describes the “Art” of cultivating virtue in a manner that closely resembles Hume’s characterization of the process by which one refines “mental taste.” Franklin suggests that the prerequisites for pursuing an “Art” go beyond the advice or “Arguments of his Adviser.” He specifies that a man must have sufficient instinctual affinity in order to be “*convinc'd*” to begin training, but that then he must demonstrate a personal resolve. Only after having been “taught the Principles” and “shewn all the Methods,” and, crucially, having “acquire[d] the *Habits*” of the Art” through “Practice,” can a man arrive “at some Perfection” in his appointed craft. Having integrated his ideas about the importance of social instruction and individual perseverance, Franklin connects the pursuit of artistic perfection to the cultivation of virtue. Thus, he announces to Kames

that his own “little Work for the Benefit of Youth [will] be call’d *The Art of Virtue*” (FP 9:103).

In a letter to Kames from 1762, Franklin for the first time explicitly acknowledges the relation between the “Art” of cultivating virtue, and the process of cultivating taste. In response to Kames’ *Elements of Criticism*, Franklin states: “I am convinc’d of your Position, new as it was to me, that a good Taste in the Arts contributes to the Improvement of Morals” (FP 10:147). Although Franklin attributes this “Position” to Kames, most scholars believe that these ideas are derived from Hume’s more rigorous moral philosophy.¹³ Given Franklin’s closer relationship with Kames, however, it is no surprise that he should view *The Elements of Criticism* as the source of the theory. Noting, moreover, that the volume “gave [him] both pleasure and instruction,” Franklin sheds some of his abstemiousness, and demonstrates that he no longer views pleasure and edification as mutually exclusive experiences (FP 10:147).

It is also significant that Franklin discloses his conversion to this “new” position in the same letter in which he describes his preparations to return to America. Previously, he had written of his “Intention of finishing [his] Art of Virtue” in his “first Leisure after [his] Return to [his] *other* Country” (FP 9:374). Upon his return to America, however, the western frontier erupted in war, and the colonies’ relations with England began to unravel. Although Franklin would return to England in 1765, and to Scotland in 1771, he would never again consider Great Britain to be his adoptive homeland. His involvement with the events of the American Revolution precluded the completion of his “little Work,” and as a result, his theory about the relation between virtue and taste remained incomplete. As late as 1793, a friend inquired after the status of *The Art of Virtue*,

expressing his belief in its “consequen[ce] of aiding all happiness both public and domestic,” but Franklin was never persuaded to return to the document (*FP* 38:694).¹⁴ The changed political climate required that he put his provisional theory into immediate practice. Franklin’s influence on the health, “happiness,” and prosperity of the fledgling American nation would thus derive from this personal model of his habits, virtues, and tastes.

The National Body and Its Sense of Taste

Although Franklin never completed his *Art of Virtue*, his wide range of comments about eating, appetite, and pleasure offer convincing evidence of what he conceived as being the relationship between public virtue and personal taste. For instance, many scholars believe that Franklin composed the *Autobiography* with an eye towards elucidating his moral theory.¹⁵ In the course of narrating his life story, Franklin elaborates upon a notion of virtue as derived from shared experiences of sensory pleasure, and he provides an experiential version of a philosophy of moral—and aesthetic—taste. In his recollection of the events of his first day in Philadelphia, mentioned earlier in this chapter, Franklin illustrates the exercise of personal and public virtue through the sharing of food. Having purchased “three great Puffy Rolls” that were so large that he had “no room in [his] Pockets” to carry them, he decides, once “fill’d with one of [the] Rolls, [to give] the other two to a Woman and her Child” (*A* 76). Franklin demonstrates his adherence to the virtues of temperance and moderation, as well as to the social virtues involved in sharing his food with others. It is significant that, only after sharing his “great Puffy Rolls,” does Franklin describe being “refresh’d” enough to continue his journey (*A*

76). This account offers his readers an example of the personal satisfaction that derives from acts of public-minded virtue, linking an experience of sensory pleasure to the exercise of moral taste.

In addition to his examples of eating, Franklin employs the figurative language of food and taste in order to convey his view of the pleasure that derives from exerting a positive influence on others. In a verse recorded in the second volume of *Poor Richard's Almanack*, Franklin responds to his early critics:

Some envious (speaking in their own Renown)
Say that my Book was not exactly done:
They wrong me; Yet, like Feasts I'd have my Books
Rather be pleasing to the Guests than Cooks. (*PRA* 20)

Franklin's reliance on the familiar trope of author as cook, employed by Addison and by Hume, points to his acceptance of the position, stated clearly in *The Spectator*, that "a fine taste in writing" is acquired "after the same manner" as a fine taste in food (Mackie 383). In the analogy that Franklin draws between "Feasts" and "Books," he suggests the similar experiences of pleasure that result from ingesting food and acquiring knowledge. Furthermore, in stating that he would "Rather" have his almanac "be pleasing" to his readers than to his envious critics, Franklin demonstrates his commitment to satisfying the tastes of those who choose to dine—or to read—at his table. Through this simple verse, Franklin establishes his editorial stance that pleasing his readers' palates through a surfeit of knowledge will remain the *Almanack's* primary concern.

In a subsequent volume of *Poor Richard's*, Franklin returns to the metaphor of knowledge as food in order to discuss the more complex effects of individual appetite. In

this example, Franklin emphasizes the importance of pleasing his readers' range of tastes, alongside his attention to a less assiduous audience:

Be not thou disturbed, O grave and sober Reader, if among the many serious Sentences in my Book, thou findest me trifling now and then, and talking idly. In all the dishes I have hitherto cook'd for thee, there is solid Meat enough for thy Money. There are Scraps from the Table of Wisdom, that will if well digested, yield strong Nourishment to thy Mind. But squeamish Stomachs cannot eat without Pickles; which 'tis true, are good for nothing else, but they provoke an Appetite. The Vain Youth that reads my Almanack for the sake of an idle Joke, will perhaps meet with a serious Reflection, that he may ever after be the better for. (*PRA* 64)

Franklin assures his “sober” readers of the substance and value of his book, indicating how he has provided them with “Meat enough for [their] Money,” and “Scraps from the Table of Wisdom” that, if properly “digested,” will nourish their minds. But he also acknowledges that certain portions of the *Almanack* may appeal more to “squeamish Stomachs,” who require “Pickles” in order to “provoke” their “Appetite” for knowledge. Through this influence, Franklin discloses a deliberate attempt to shape the palates—and minds—of the “Vain Youth.” His hope is that, having stimulated their “idle” appetites, he can then attempt, through his aphorisms and essays, to continue to refine their tastes.

As these examples from the *Almanack* demonstrate, Franklin often embraces appetite as a positive, motivating force. In this way, he departs from the taste philosophers—and, at times, his otherwise stated opinion—in his lack of concern with the total subjugation of appetite to reason. According to the pragmatic Franklin, appetite requires regulation only when a person's appetite leads to “unworthy” choices, or outstrips legitimate need (*PBF* 499). In the comedic “Dialogue between Franklin and the Gout,” Franklin presents himself as an example of ill-considered appetite, while

reproached by his gout, personified as a woman. Madam Gout rebukes Franklin for his habits of eating and drinking “too freely”:

Why, instead of gaining an appetite for breakfast, by salutary exercise, you amuse yourself with books, pamphlets, or newspapers which commonly are not worth the reading. Yet you eat an inordinate breakfast, four dishes of tea, with cream, and one or two buttered toasts, with slices of hung beef, which I fancy are not things the most easily digested. (*PBF* 499)

This account of Franklin’s morning routine links the frivolity of his “amusing” himself with books and pamphlets “not worth the reading” with the self-indulgence associated with eating “an inordinate breakfast.” Here, Franklin reveals his personal deficiencies in moderating his appetite both for food and for (superfluous) knowledge. His own choice of foods not “easily digested” contrasts with his emphasis, in the *Almanack*, on ensuring that his readers properly “digest” the “Scraps” from the “Table of Wisdom” so as to “yield strong Nourishment” for their minds. By allowing Madam Gout a final reproach: “You philosophers are sages in your maxims, and fools in your conduct,” Franklin acknowledges how his own example diverges from his well-meaning advice (*PBF* 502). In this dialogue, Franklin demonstrates his awareness of the force of appetite in what he chooses to eat and read. At the same time, he suggests that his readers might be better served by attending to their needs for “nourishment” in these area without diversion or excess.

The notions of economy and efficiency, central to Franklin’s approach to life, extend to his ideas about appetite and its relation to taste. In a letter to John Adams, composed while serving as Ambassador to France, in 1784, Franklin reflects on his increasing diplomatic responsibilities (“Treaties to be made with I think twenty Powers, in two years”) in terms of eating, appetite, and appropriate taste (*FP* 42:101). “You will

see that a good deal of Business is cut out for us,” he writes to Adams, “so that we are not likely to eat the Bread of Idleness; and that we may not surfeit by eating too much, our Masters have diminish’d our Allowance” (*FP* 42:101). Here, Franklin suggests that the “Business” of public service must be conducted with a diet of economy and moderation. His initial comment about how “their Masters” in the United States government have attempted to rein in their diplomatic efforts from afar by “diminish[ing] their Allowance” hints at the sarcasm that will follow. Alluding to the reports of his luxurious lifestyle that dogged Franklin throughout his tenure as Ambassador, he “commend[s]” the “Readers of Connecticut Newspapers” for their sense of “Oeconomy,” and vows to “imitate it by diminishing” his own “Expence” (*FP* 42:101). He declares that his “Countrymen” shall no longer “be troubled with any more Accounts of our Extravagance” (*FP* 42:101). However, he upends the critique by employing his admitted tendency towards excess as a metaphor for his commitment to public service. Vowing that the Connecticut readers “must be contented for the future, as I am, with plain Beef and Pudding,” he implies that his diplomatic work might suffer should he be required to restrain his extravagant tastes (*FP* 42:101). Ultimately, however, Franklin reconciles the advantages in efficiency at work and simplicity at the table, suggesting that his display of luxurious taste results simply from circumstance. “For my own part,” he concludes, “if I could sit down to Dinner on a Piece of their excellent Salt Pork and Pumpkin, I would not give a Farthing for all the Luxuries of Paris” (*FP* 42:101). Here, Franklin demonstrates an awareness of his own tendency towards excess, and a willingness, when prompted, to modify his habits accordingly, as in his arch dialogue with Madam Gout.

Interestingly, Franklin engages the idea of “eating the Bread of Idleness” in a metaphorical manner and then shifts his subject to eating in a literal sense. Moving from a mock defense of his diplomatic pursuits to a realistic rebuttal of reports of his “Extravagance” in entertaining while in France, Franklin demonstrates his public commitment to modeling this form of taste. In his declaration that his French guests “must [in the future] be contented” with “plain Beef and Pudding,” which he personally finds appealing, Franklin indicates that his own tastes still conform with those of his fellow citizens. Concluding that he would prefer to dine on Connecticut “Salt Pork and Pumpkin,” instead of the “Luxuries of Paris,” Franklin affirms his allegiance to the choices and cultivation of an American taste.

In a 1779 letter to his daughter, Sarah Bache, Franklin demonstrates his personal commitment to cultivating an American taste. Reproaching his daughter for her request for French “lace and feathers,” Franklin explains that demands of “conscience” require that, during wartime, he purchase only items “that are useful and necessary” (*FP* 29:612). He suggests that his daughter show “great pride” in wearing the items that represent his specific choices and tastes:

The war indeed may in some degree raise the prices of goods, and the high taxes which are necessary to support the war may make our frugality necessary; and as I am always preaching that doctrine, I cannot in conscience or in decency encourage the contrary, by my example, in furnishing my children with foolish modes and luxuries. I therefore send all the articles you desire that are useful and necessary, and omit the rest; for as you say you should “*have great pride in wearing any thing I send, and showing it as your father’s taste.*” (*FP* 29:612)

Although this letter does not directly mention foodstuffs in its discussion of material goods and “luxuries,” it nonetheless illuminates Franklin’s awareness of the model that is served by his personal “example.” He reminds his daughter of his constant “preaching”

about the “doctrine” of “frugality,” and implies that he is unwilling to contradict, even for his children, the virtue he endorses for the nation. By refusing to supply his daughter with “foolish modes and luxuries” and instead suggesting that she “have great pride” in “showing” her “father’s taste,” Franklin demonstrates his willingness to make adjustments not only in his personal appetites, but also in his family’s demands for luxury.

As his personal and his professional correspondence each reveal, Franklin was constantly attuned to the economic, cultural, and political ramifications of his choices in food and other material goods. In *Franklin and his French Contemporaries*, Alfred Aldridge includes an account of a meal in which Franklin’s friends “suggested greater moderation” in the content and tone of his editorials in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (111). These friends, Aldridge explains, acted out of concern, on Franklin’s behalf, that advertisers would withdraw their financial backing. As Aldridge relates, Franklin responded by inviting his well-meaning friends to dinner, during which “his wife served nothing but pudding and water” (111). He continues: “After they had all concluded their meager fare, Franklin thanked them for their advice, but explained that ‘he who can subsist upon saw dust pudding & water, as can Benjamin Franklin, needs not the patronage of any one’” (112). As in his defense of “plain Beef and Pudding” in the letter to Adams, and in his admonishment that his daughter take “pride” in simple dress, Franklin models, through his personal behavior, the symbolic impact of frugal choice—in this instance, through a pointed demonstration at the table.

Throughout his life, Franklin consistently emphasizes the symbolic function of food and eating, and he employs figurative language to emphasize his intended message.

In a letter to his niece, Elizabeth Partridge, composed in his eightieth year, Franklin reasons that “People that will live a long Life and drink to the Bottom of the Cup [must] expect to meet with some of the Dregs” (*FP* 46:137). He compares the “maladies” that he experiences, “the Gout, the Stone, and Old Age,” to the ill-tasting residue at the bottom of an otherwise pleasurable cup of wine or coffee (*FP* 46:137). Life itself, Franklin here suggests, is a drink to be consumed. In this same letter, Franklin comments on his recent discovery that “all [his] Books containing Copies of [his] letters” had apparently been lost. He jokes to his niece, who was in search of a copy of letter from Franklin that, she revealed, had been eaten by mice: “Poor little innocent Creatures; I am sorry they had no better Food. But since they like my Letters, here is another Treat for them” (*FP* 46:137). In this humorous inversion, Franklin suggests that his life work will become, simply, food.

In the final years of his life, in a sardonic letter to his sister, Jane Mecom, Franklin reflects upon how his life’s work has been consumed by the American public. In contrast to his letter to Adams, in which he describes his public service in terms of an act of eating, here, Franklin characterizes himself as the food upon which the public dines. He writes to Mecom, “When I inform’d your good Friend Dr. Cooper that I was order’d to France being then 70 years old, and observ’d that the Publick having as it were eaten my Flesh, seem’d now resolv’d to pick my Bones; he replied that he approv’d their taste for that *the nearer the Bone the sweeter the Meat*” (*FP* 45:248). By relaying this figurative account of having been “picked” at and “eaten,” Franklin conveys an internal sense of his profound sacrifice for the public good. His interlocutor’s reassurance, nevertheless, provides unexpected confirmation of the success of his project of

“improving the Taste of the Town.” Over the course of his life, Franklin offered axioms about taste in his *Almanack*, a theory of taste in his *Art of Virtue*, and examples of taste in his *Autobiography*. But here, finally, in the “sweet” flavor of his body, Franklin finds evidence of the American “taste” that he helped to form.

Benjamin Franklin’s Body: Food for the Nation

At the age of twenty two, Franklin already contemplated his death—and his potential legacy—through the famous, fictional epitaph that he wrote for himself. In the epitaph, he describes his dead body “Like the Cover of an Old Book / Its Contents torn Out,” buried in the ground as “Food for Worms” (*FP* 1:109). Michael Warner suggests that Franklin’s imagery “has a suggestive power that exceeds the familiar logocentric distinction between accidental substance (body, book) and plenary meaning (spirit, text) (74). But if, according to Warner, “the epitaph is disturbing because it treats print and life in equivalent terms: to live is to be published,” there is a second implication, less disturbing when considered in the context of the eighteenth-century culture of taste: to have lived is to be consumed.

As recorded in the letter to Jane Mecom, Franklin’s body—and his body of work—are not merely “Food for Worms,” but, rather, the source of “sweet” and tasteful sustenance for the growing nation. This, I propose, is the essence of Franklin’s legacy, as confirmed by his contemporaries and by commentators through the present day. Thomas Jefferson once remarked that Franklin was “the greatest man & ornament of the age and the country in which he lived,” and he later urged his grandson to “imitate Franklin” (*W* 7:276, qtd. in Shklar 136). In her *Biographical Sketches of Great and Good Men* (1828),

Lydia Maria Child commended Franklin's economical sensibility, anticipating her own formulation of an economical sense of taste that would link politics, life and letters: "He was frugal in his own expenses, frugal in his system of politics, and frugal even in his words" (13). Nathaniel Hawthorne held Franklin in equally high regard. In his "Biographical Stories," he comments that Franklin, through his almanac, functioned as the "counsellor and household friend to almost every family in America" (although a second character notes that his aphorisms "teach men but a small portion of their duties") (345). Herman Melville portrayed Franklin in a work of fiction, *Israel Potter*, and although he admits that he "depicts [Franklin] in his less exalted habitudes," Melville makes it clear that he, himself, viewed Franklin with significant esteem: "Having carefully weighed the world, Franklin could act any part in it" (82, 81).

In the twentieth century, historians, political scientists, and literary critics have all sought to comment on Franklin's "part" in shaping the national character of America. However, the significant role that Franklin played in establishing the parameters of American taste has received far less attention. Paul Gilmore, in *Aesthetic Materialism*, describes how Franklin's experiments with the lightning rod provided an early model of how to "tame wild impulses" into aesthetic discernment (74). But the current of Franklin's influence on American taste runs deeper. Through his carefully composed writing, as well as the model of his deliberately honed behavior, Franklin becomes a singular exemplar of American national taste. In his published works, his private letters, and in his own life story, Franklin demonstrates the virtues and tastes that define the national character of the growing United States.

In recent years, literary critics such as Gilmore, David Shields, and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, have each discussed how, in the eighteenth century, the ability to make tasteful decisions about art and culture was viewed as an indication of the “democratic capacity for humankind to participate in their own governance,” and therefore, was increasingly emphasized in that era of political change (Gilmore 27). Dillon extends her analysis to include how American literary and cultural figures, and civic and political leaders, together understood the capacity to identify and process aesthetic experience as essential to “produc[ing] subjects who enacted their freedom in a moral and lawful manner, thereby creating a ground for a new political community—a community of taste—united by individual consent and judgment rather than by constraint and subordination” (498). Indeed, Franklin anticipated many of these subsequent observations. He firmly believed in the importance of producing “moral and lawful” subjects. He maintained, moreover, that those virtues and laws could—and should—be refined. His conception of taste, although never fully articulated as a theory, incorporated an understanding of how an American national body could be united through shared experiences of sensory, social, and political pleasure.

From his first written forays, Franklin recognized how examples of eating and appetite, and other topics relating to food choice, might resonate with his readers. In his attempts to codify his habits and behaviors for the edification and enhancement of the American public, Franklin encountered the vagaries of his own “tasting self.” But in acknowledging the dynamic interplay among appetite, taste, and reason, Franklin arrives at an original conception of how the body and the mind work together to determine actions of personal—and national—consequence.

¹ At least for the time being—several years later, Jefferson requested that a New Hampshire moose be captured, skinned, and shipped to Paris, so that Buffon and his disciples could be acquainted with the true size and stature of creatures raised in America. For more on this incident, see Jefferson’s correspondence with the New Hampshire governor, John Sullivan, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*.

² References to Franklin’s writings are as follows:

A: The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, ed. Edmund S. Morgan.
New Haven: Yale-Nota Bene, 2003.

FP: The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, ed. Ellen Cohn et al. New Haven: Yale UP, 1954-2010, 47 vols.

PBF: The Portable Benjamin Franklin, ed. Larzer Ziff. New York: Penguin, 2003.

PRA: Poor Richard: The Almanacks for the Years 1733-1758, ed. Van Wyck Brooks. New York: Bonanza, 1976.

³ I use the term “thing” with conscious reference to Thing Theory, Bill Brown’s model for interrogating the “mutual constitution of subject and object” (5). Because the act of eating entails an actual process of incorporation, it demonstrates this “mutual constitution” more directly than most other symbolic acts. Furthermore, since food preference functions as a marker of social distinction, in addition to being a basic requirement of human life, it can illuminate cultural as well as biological desires. As Brown asks us, as critics, to move beyond an “account of things themselves” so as to explore the “tropological work, the psychological work, and the phenomenological work entailed in the human production of materiality,” an analysis of things eaten can play an essential—and as yet unacknowledged—role (6-7). Franklin’s frequent use of metaphors of food and eating help to expose the “tropological work” of things. His lifelong struggle between needs and desire, and between appetites and reason, clearly manifested in his relationship to food, help to expose things’ “psychological” function. Finally, Franklin’s numerous accounts of the consequences of the things he eats contribute to an understanding of the “phenomenological work” of things—how things are experienced by the body, processed by the mind, and are ultimately expressed in writing.

⁴ Throughout his life, Franklin considered *The Spectator* a source of consummate literary and oratorical style. In a 1751 essay on the “Idea of the English School,” Franklin proposes that the journal be used to practice “Reading with Attention, and with proper Modulations of the Voice according to the Sentiments and Subject,” as well as for students’ inspiration: “Where the Judgment is not ripe enough for forming new Essays, let the Sentiments of a *Spectator* be given, and requir’d to be cloath’d in a Scholar’s own Words” (*FP* 4:101). His assertion that the “Sentiments of a *Spectator*” could supply the contents for young scholars, nearly half a century after the journal’s initial publication, confirms his high opinion of its rhetorical and cultural worth.

⁵ In his edition of the *Autobiography*, Edmund Morgan notes that “though Franklin’s tastes may have been relatively simple, he thoroughly enjoyed good food, and his wife Deborah knew it. He wrote her appreciatively of the roast beef and mince pies she sent

him in the winter of 1756 when he was building forts in the Pennsylvania mountains and of the dried apples and other “goodys for my Pappy” she shipped to him in England later. And among his papers are several recipes, some in English, some in French, for various dishes he appeared to have enjoyed” (A 55).

⁶ The criticisms of the “Dissertation” do not stop. Lorraine Pangle, the political theorist, describes this section of the essay, in particular, as a “most curious and unsatisfactory argument” (57).

⁷ In fact, Hutcheson’s *Inquiry* departs from this same insight.

⁸ Indeed, Franklin’s Busy-Body essays confirm Shields’s claim: Franklin’s explicit acknowledgement of the “Benefit of Conversation” in No. 2, his intent, as stated in No. 4, to “encourage all Wit of our own Growth and Produce” by publishing essays contributed by readers, and his overall goal, as stated in No. 1, to offer “Weekly Entertainment for the Publick, that will give a rational Diversion, and at the same Time be instructive to the Readers” (*FP* 1:117, 122, 113).

⁹ In *Spectator* No. 409 (1712), in which Addison presents his opinion as to “how we may acquire that fine Taste of Writing,” Addison begins with a discussion of the dual usage of the word “taste” (Mackie 383). He posits that the metaphorical use of the word would “not have been so general in all tongues, had there not been a very great conformity between that mental taste which is the subject of this paper, and that sensitive taste which give us a relish for every different flavor that affects the palate” (Mackie 383). His first example of good taste, in fact, derives from an example of drinking a glass of tea:

I knew a person who possessed [good taste] in so great a Perfection, that after having tasted ten different Kinds of Tea, he would distinguish, without seeing the Colour of it, the particular Sort which was offered to him; and not only so, but any two sorts of them that were mixt together in an equal Proportion; nay, he has carried the Experiment so far, as upon tasting the Composition of three different sorts, to name the Parcels from whence the three several Ingredients were taken. A Man of fine Taste in Writing will discern, after the same manner, not only the general Beauties and Imperfections of an Author, but will discover the several Ways of thinking and expressing himself, which diversity him from all other Authors, which the several Foreign Infusions of Thought and Language, and the particular Authors from whom they were borrowed. (Mackie 383)

Here, Addison presents a formulation of “fine Taste in Writing” that is inextricably linked to fine taste in consuming food. At first glance, Addison seems unable to articulate the criteria for aesthetic taste without first describing good gustatory taste. Not only does he refer to fine taste in writing “after the same manner” of fine taste in food, but he draws upon the metaphor of a tea “infusion” with which to characterize how foreign influences “of Thought and Language” may be expressed on the page. A closer examination reveals how the language of other arts is equally embedded in Addison’s formulation of fine taste in food: the connoisseur notes the tea’s “Proportion,” like a building or a work of art; he comments on its “Composition,” like a painting, an essay, or a poem; and finally, he “name[s] the Parcels from whence” the tea came—a nod to the commercial market in which all cultural forms circulate. Although Addison goes on to “lay down Rules” for determining whether a person “is possessed of this Faculty [of fine taste in writing],”

additional instructions for “the acquirement of such a Taste,” as well as “Methods for Cultivating and Improving it,” it is important to note that his formulation of fine taste in writing, in both structure and significance, depends on prior knowledge of fine taste in food.

¹⁰ Certain poems, and other lines of verse that Franklin selects for inclusion in the *Almanack*, reinforce the argument that he might find value in the metaphor of taste, if not cultural standards. In the 1747 *Almanack*, Franklin reprints these lines by the seventeenth-century poet, Edward Young:

A *decent Competence* we fully taste;
It strikes our *Sense*, and gives a constant Feast:
More, we perceive by Dint of *Thought* alone;
The Rich must *labour* to possess *their own*,
To feel their great Abundance; and request
Their humble Friends to *help* them to be blest;
To *see* their Treasures, *hear* their Glory told,
And *aid* the wretched Impotence of gold. (*PRA* 140)

In the first line, Young enlists the associations of the gustatory sense of taste in order to convey the richness contributed by sensory experience; the “*decent Competence*” sought by the speaker is registered as a “Feast” only after it is “fully taste[d].” In the subsequent lines that describe the competence “strik[ing] our Sense,” resulting in “*More*” than is “perceive[d]” by “*Thought* alone,” Young affirms the added value of sensory pleasure. Young’s suggestion that the “humble” can help the rich not only “to feel,” “to see,” and “to hear” their “great Abundance,” but also “to aid” in enhancing its value, implies his own conception of a sense of social virtue. By extolling the tastes and virtues of the humble man, Young’s poem suggests—to Franklin and to his readers—how certain forms of taste might hold social, as well as personal, value.

¹¹ Franklin finalized the copy for the final volume on the boat to England, before deciding that he would be unable to continue publishing the *Almanack* while abroad.

¹² Walter Issacson pronounces Hume “one of the most important logical and analytical thinkers of all time” (196). The precise nature of the first meeting between Hume and Franklin remains unknown, however. The only evidence derives from the fact that when Franklin arrived at Hume’s home in Scotland, he mentions that they had already crossed paths in London.

¹³ Although Franklin attributes this “Position” to Kames, most scholars view Kames’s moral philosophy as derivative of Hume’s more rigorous theory (see Dickie, others).

¹⁴ Two years later, the friend, Benjamin Vaughan, exhorted Franklin again: In the mean time let me adjure you by every consideration that can affect the mind of a man of philanthropy and extensive views, to perfect your *life* and your *art of virtue*. In my opinion your being the author of the greatest revolutions in the world is a satisfaction not in the smallest degree comparable to that which you may anticipate, as likely to follow, from the latter work particularly, well treated by *you*” (*FP* 43:168).

¹⁵ In his introduction to the *Autobiography*, Morgan explains that Franklin “had long planned to give [his “Project of arriving at moral Perfection”] a more extended treatment in a separate book to be called *The Art of Virtue*, which he had promised his friends to

write but never did” (*A* 23). In a footnote, Morgan again states: “At this point Franklin begins to discuss the scheme for moral improvement which for many years he had planned to develop into a small book. By 1784 he probably realized he would never write such a separate work, so he compromised by including the main outlines of his plan into the autobiography here” (*A* 148).

Chapter Two

A Taste of Liberty: Eating and Aesthetics in Thomas Jefferson's America

When Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin set sail for New York in 1794, he was neither the best-selling author nor the illustrious epicure he would later become.¹ He was, rather, an unremarkable member of the Estates-General (later the National Constituent Assembly) who had managed to avoid most of the revolutionary terror by never really taking a side. A proponent of the philosophy of “better safe than sorry”—and an obedient son with an overprotective mother—Brillat-Savarin fled France just to be sure.

But America, even in the early republic, was perceived as a land of opportunity, so Brillat-Savarin set his sights high: on securing a meeting with Thomas Jefferson. The men had crossed paths in Paris when Jefferson served as Minister to France, from 1785 to 1789. Before becoming government officials, both men worked as lawyers. And most significantly, or so Brillat-Savarin presumed, both men understood—and exulted in—the pleasures of the table.

It would take until June 1, 1796, shortly before Brillat-Savarin was scheduled to return to France, for a meeting with Jefferson to take place. According to Thierry Boissel, Brillat-Savarin's biographer, a mutual friend arranged the visit to Jefferson's estate at Monticello.² Boissel describes a distracted Brillat-Savarin only partially absorbing Jefferson's anecdotes about life in Washington. As Boissel tells it, Brillat-Savarin was waiting to ask Jefferson a most pressing question: how to prepare his favorite American delicacy, wild turkey. At a suitable break in the conversation, Brillat-Savarin made his unusual inquiry. Initially, Jefferson seemed flummoxed, but then he began to laugh.

Jefferson had received countless guests at Monticello, but not once had he been asked about wild turkey.³ Engaged by this topic, the men talked into the evening. Two weeks later, Brillat-Savarin set sail for France, with notes about American dining habits—and the famous recipe—tucked in his jacket pocket. Although it would take nearly thirty years for him to publish *The Physiology of Taste; Or, Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy*, there, in America, Brillat-Savarin's ideas about food and taste had begun to brew.⁴

Jefferson, on the other hand, made no mention of an encounter with Brillat-Savarin in his notebooks or letters. While biographical sketches of Brillat-Savarin from as early as 1835 provide details of a hunting expedition with Jefferson, during which a similar conversation about wild turkey is described, no first-hand accounts of the interchange remain.⁵ Given the anecdotal nature of the evidence, it is entirely possible that such a meeting of culinary minds did not take place at all.⁶ It is interesting, nonetheless, that a conversation with Jefferson has been incorporated into the mythology of Brillat-Savarin. This speaks to Jefferson's perceived role as a founding father, not only of the United States, but also of modern gastronomy.

An interest in eating contributes in substantial ways to Jefferson's private life and public persona. Although Jefferson has been claimed by epicures and oenophiles as America's first true gastronome, literary critics have not yet incorporated his fascination with food into their arguments about his life and work.⁷ It is my belief, however, that Jefferson's ideas about food and eating illuminate his ideas about aesthetics and taste. His personal actions, as well as his written accounts, reveal a conviction that eating serves as an essential means of cultivating a tasteful, republican simplicity, and that the American

dining table serves as a powerful platform for its expression. Jefferson's writings, moreover, suggest a view of food as among America's greatest cultural exports. Jefferson believed that the richness and abundance of the American table could rival any European culinary display. For Jefferson, the American experience of eating expressed the egalitarianism that was infused in the nation's founding, and reflected the bountiful social and political possibilities of the new republic.

The idea of eating, furthermore, animates the theoretical tensions between appetite and pleasure, need and desire, and economy and excess—tensions that often underlie, and at times bring about, the profound contradictions of Jefferson's life and work. Issues of appetite and pleasure feature prominently in Jefferson, a self-described Epicurean for whom the pursuit of happiness was a goal of life. Eating, which is simultaneously an expression of natural appetite and an experience of aesthetic pleasure, provides Jefferson with an everyday example of the tasteful, temperate living that he frequently describes in his writing. At the same time, Jefferson's pursuit of the pleasures of the table underscores his personal struggle to exercise restraint. Jefferson's difficulties in distinguishing luxury from necessity, which are of significant consequence for his thoughts—and his actions—concerning slavery, are clearly manifested in his relationship to food.

Following Roland Barthes, I contend that issues relating to the pleasures of the table are best explored through an investigation of the pleasures of the text. It should be registered as a coincidence, but not a surprise, that Barthes examines the writing of Brillat-Savarin in formulating his ideas for *The Pleasure of the Text*. Noting that Brillat-Savarin “desires the word as he desires truffles,” Barthes identifies a “fusion or

ambiguity” between writing and eating in *The Physiology of Taste* that is evident in Jefferson’s work as well (259). For Brillat-Savarin and for Jefferson, words signify pleasure and also produce it. The modern conception of aesthetic taste, which Brillat-Savarin describes and which Jefferson demonstrates, is created in language and sustained by pleasure. On display in the richness and abundance of the American table, this new conception of republican taste emphasizes the opportunities promised by the young nation, and incorporates the oppositions present within its delicate Constitution.

The Physiology of Taste and the Aesthetics of Eating

There is no indication that Jefferson read Brillat-Savarin’s masterwork.⁸ Nevertheless, there is substantial evidence regarding the similar intellectual backgrounds of the two men. Brillat-Savarin and Jefferson developed their ideas about aesthetics and taste from the same sources. They were both influenced by Enlightenment empiricists like John Locke, early British cultural critics—among them, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, and the Earl of Shaftesbury—and Scottish Enlightenment thinkers including Francis Hutcheson, Lord Kames, and David Hume. Both Brillat-Savarin and Jefferson subscribed to Shaftesbury’s belief that men were naturally tasteful, although they also believed, following Hume, that a sense of taste could be cultivated and refined.⁹

The Scottish thinkers were significant influences on both Brillat-Savarin and Jefferson in their reconfiguration of the concept of aesthetic discernment. In particular, they viewed the pleasures associated with material and cultural consumption as a reflection of individual virtue as well as of a manifestation of benevolence towards others. In terms of the notion of taste, the major contribution of the moral sense

philosophers was their emphasis on what Lori Merish characterizes as “ethical subjectivity,” the idea that individuals express their tastes, and consequently their values, through the items they consume (32).¹⁰ These values derive from an appreciation of the pleasures of promoting social harmony, as well as from a delight in natural beauty.¹¹ When Brillat-Savarin writes, “The pleasure of eating is the actual and direct sensation of satisfying a need. The pleasures of the table are a reflected sensation which is born from the various circumstances of place, time, things, and people who make up the surroundings of the meal,” he aspires to place the “pleasures of the table” in this more elevated category of consumption (182). In doing so, he expresses his own formulation of a virtuous, refined, market-driven, and socially-oriented sense of taste.

While the distinction made by Brillat-Savarin between “direct” and “reflected” sensations suggests an attempt to extend Locke’s bipartite model for the processing of sensory experience, his emphasis on pleasure has earlier origins. Both Brillat-Savarin and Jefferson were followers of the ancient Greek philosopher, Epicurus. But while Brillat-Savarin embraced the hedonistic foundation of Epicureanism as the basis for his thought, Jefferson sought to reclaim Epicurus as a proponent of temperance as well as of pleasure.¹² In an 1819 letter to William Short, Jefferson’s former secretary and subsequent neighbor, Jefferson identifies himself as “an Epicurean,” explaining that he “consider[s] the genuine (not the imputed) doctrines as containing everything rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us.”¹³ Epicurus, Jefferson continues, “give[s us] laws for governing ourselves” (*L* 1431). The emphasis on self-regulation appealed to Jefferson, who believed that common good emerged from personal virtue.

For Jefferson, Epicurean philosophy represented an appealing balance between virtue and pleasure, and between self-motivated action and public-minded beneficence.

In Epicurus, Jefferson locates the conception of happiness that he later declares to be an inalienable right. So as to present this conception to a contemporary audience (and to distinguish Epicureanism from the “imputed” doctrine of hedonism), Jefferson applies an empirical method of organization to the classical text. In his letter to Short, Jefferson maps out a “syllabus” of Epicurean moral tenets:

Happiness is the aim of life.
 Virtue is the foundation of happiness.
 Utility is the test of virtue.
 Pleasure active and In-do-lent.
 In-do-lence is the absence of pain, the true felicity.
 Active, consists in agreeable motion; it is not happiness, but the means to
 produce it.
 Thus the absence of hunger is an article of felicity; eating the means to obtain it.
 (L 1433)

Here, Jefferson reveals a composite conception of happiness, rooted in a practical behavioral ethic, and sustained by experiences of pleasure. Lee Quinby has interpreted this syllabus as an example of Jefferson’s “fusion of art and morals, whereby reflective beings are capable of discerning the path to virtue through aesthetic experience” (338). She does not, however, address the example of aesthetic experience that Jefferson provides: the “active” pleasure of eating.

But can eating be considered an aesthetic experience? And did Jefferson truly consider it as such? Brillat-Savarin considered eating to be an art form, to be sure. In *The Physiology of Taste*, his project was to reclaim taste—in its literal, gustatory meaning—as a valid form of aesthetic experience. Throughout the history of aesthetic thought, the gustatory sense of taste is often relegated to the bottom of the hierarchy of sensation.

Summarizing the main philosophical argument, Carolyn Korsmeyer explains that taste “does not furnish significant information about the external world; it delivers only bodily pleasures; and hence it offers temptations that without strict control can lead to gluttony and intemperance” (§8). In her own philosophical work, Korsmeyer points to the distinction, present since antiquity, between “sensations,” which the bodily senses like taste and touch provide, and “perceptions,” which the distance senses, like sight, supply about the world (§9). Brillat-Savarin attempts to reduce the hierarchical divide between bodily and distance senses with the addition of a sixth sense, “*amour physique*,” which “invade[s] the workings of all the other senses” (27, 29). By ascribing the uncontrollable aspects of pleasure to a separate sense, Brillat-Savarin aims to reestablish his notion of taste as a regulated, perceptive sense, distinct from unrestrained physical desire.

Jefferson, on the other hand, does not seem concerned with distinctions between sensations and perceptions. In his most direct statement about aesthetic taste, recorded in an 1814 letter to his friend, the philosopher Thomas Law, Jefferson instead concerns himself with clarifying his prior equation of taste and morality:

We have indeed an innate sense of what we call beautiful, but that is exercised chiefly on subjects addressed to the fancy, whether through the eye in visible forms, as landscape, animal figure, dress, drapery, architecture, the composition of colors, &c., or to the imagination directly, as imagery, style, or measure in prose or poetry, or whatever else constitutes the domain of criticism or taste, a faculty entirely distinct from the moral one. (*L* 1336)

Jefferson notes a distinction between aesthetic impressions that are acquired “through” the senses, and those that enter in “to the imagination directly.” He does not acknowledge the gustatory sense of taste. Instead, he focuses on vision as a modality of sensory perception. Jefferson’s attention to the imagination as a repository of sense impressions

acquires special significance, however, in the context of the “domain of criticism or taste.” According to Jefferson, “criticism” and “taste” are interchangeable, an expression of his conviction that good taste informs any assessment of an object’s aesthetic worth.

Jefferson’s conception of taste, a composite “faculty” involving sensory perception and aesthetic judgment, while not applied explicitly to gustatory experience, anticipates the “analysis of the sensation of tasting” supplied by Brillat-Savarin in *The Physiology of Taste* (40). Brillat-Savarin’s conception of taste includes three forms of sensation: “direct” and “complete” sensation, both closely tied to the physical experience of eating, and a “reflective” sensation, “the opinion which one’s spirit forms from the impressions which have been transmitted to it by the mouth” (40). His inclusion of the individual’s “opinion” in his definition of gustatory taste corresponds to what Denise Gigante identifies, in *Taste: A Literary History*, as a general movement away from “aesthetic disinterestedness” and towards “the aesthetic art of judgment” (xvii). For Brillat-Savarin, and, I will argue, for Jefferson as well, the act of eating combined an experience of sensory pleasure with an opportunity for aesthetic judgment. This reformulated definition of taste was appealing because it enabled each man to demonstrate his carefully cultivated sense of aesthetic taste to an impressionable public, one that was hungry for cultural guidance as well as for flavorful food.

Republican Virtue, Republican Taste

The conception of taste as a sensory experience, coupled with an assessment of that experience, led the gustatory sense of taste to become what Korsmeyer characterizes as the “guiding metaphor used to describe the ability to discern beauty in art and nature”

in eighteenth-century discussions of aesthetics (¶11). By the start of the nineteenth century, at about the time that Brillat-Savarin and Jefferson composed their major works, the idea of a sense of taste had expanded to apply not only to the identification and appreciation of beauty in art and nature, but also to the ability to make tasteful decisions in the marketplace. As Gigante confirms: “Writers deployed the gustatory metaphor of taste in the full awareness that by this point in the extended culture of taste, its subsets were not only taste and appetite but also a commingled version of the two in consumerism” (*Taste* 3).

Jefferson was attuned to the market-driven “culture of taste” that Gigante describes, and he used the metaphor of taste, with its range of connotations, in his notebooks and letters. In a 1784 letter to George Washington, Jefferson exclaims, “All the world is becoming commercial... Our citizens have had too full a taste of the comforts furnished by the arts & manufacturers to be debarred the use of them” (*L* 787). Here, Jefferson employs the idiom of taste in order to express his concern that citizens can no longer be expected to limit their material consumption, a result of having too fully internalized the “comforts” these items provide. In a letter composed in 1814, Jefferson employs the trope of gustatory taste specifically to characterize a form of cultural consumption. In regard to a defamatory article, coincidentally about George Washington, Jefferson laments the fact that newspapers “are rapidly depraving the public taste, and lessening its relish for sound food” (*L* 1317). Here, again, is evidence of an idea of taste that fuses gustatory sensation with aesthetic discernment, applied as a metaphor to describe the way in which Americans consume their culture. In this way, Jefferson’s conception of taste reflects the dominant conception of taste of the time.¹⁴

Jefferson considered taste in more than a metaphoric sense, however. He viewed the exercise of good taste—in its new, composite meaning—as a pathway to happiness. In a 1787 letter to James Currie, a Virginia physician, Jefferson sketches his vision for a virtuous existence, sustained by hard work and tasteful, temperate consumption:

I know of no condition happier than that of a Virginia farmer might be, conducting himself as he did during the war. His estate supplies a good table, clothes himself and his family with their ordinary apparel, furnishes a small surplus to buy salt, sugar, coffee, and a little finery for his wife and daughters, enables him to receive and visit his friends, and furnishes him pleasing and healthy occupation. To secure all this he needs but one act of self-denial, to put off buying anything till he has the money to pay for it.¹⁵

It is significant that “a good table” is the first indicator of a happy American home, and that “salt, sugar, and coffee” top the farmer’s list of extras. Jefferson does not register these particular items as luxuries.¹⁶ Instead, they are among the acceptable uses for a “small surplus” of funds. For Jefferson, food is a fundamental pleasure. In this depiction, the pursuit of the good table stands for the pursuit of happiness, characterized by a version of Epicurean virtue that is grounded in utility and achieved through the moderate consumption of material goods. Although in his own life, Jefferson was unable to adhere to the “one act of self-denial” that here sustains this felicitous existence, in his characterization of the Virginia farmer, Jefferson summons the industriousness, temperance, prudence, and fortitude—classical Epicurean virtues—that he seeks to instill in his fellow citizens.

For Jefferson, the farmer represents the apotheosis of American virtue, and as such, functions as a model of taste for the rest of the nation. Numerous critics have commented on his pronouncement, in the *Notes*, that “those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God” (*W* 1:229). David Shi reads this “saintly” statement as evidence

that “to Jefferson, agriculture was not primarily a way to wealth but a way to goodness” (86). Similarly, John Kasson describes this “ferve appeal to a pastoral ideal” as evidence of Jefferson’s belief that “America derived her virtue and vitality... from independent and direct contact with nature” (19). Throughout the *Notes*, Jefferson argues that because the farmer works closest to the earth, and sustains his family by his own industry, he cannot be corrupted by the temptations of the marketplace or by the lure of exotic goods from abroad. For Jefferson, only a life of farming will ensure that a citizen’s “virtue” remains intact (*W* 1:229). “Let our work-shops remain in Europe,” he continues:

It is better to carry provisions and materials to workmen there, than bring them to the provisions and materials, and with them their manners and principles. The loss by the transportation of commodities across the Atlantic will be made up in happiness and permanence of government. The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body. It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigor. A degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats to the heart of its laws and constitution. (*W* 1:230)

In this statement, Jefferson suggests that farming not only functions as a method of preserving the “vigor” of the populace by supplying it with food, but also provides, by means of its behavioral impact, a method of preserving the people’s “manners and spirit.” By contrast, commerce is useful only in so far as it functions as a rhetorical device, as Jefferson exchanges “provisions and materials” for “manners and principles,” and then “manners and principles” for ideas about “happiness” and “pure government.” In his vision of America as an agrarian idyll, Jefferson replaces the topic of trade “across the Atlantic” with the trope of circulation within the “human body.” His implication is that an unhealthy human body—or a national one—would experience more than the symptoms of sickness; it would be “eat[en] to the heart.” In his characterization of this

commercial “degeneracy,” Jefferson inverts the idea of eating to dramatic effect. An industrialized America, cannibalized by its citizens’ excessive tastes, would itself be consumed.¹⁷

The American farmer, involved in both the production and the consumption of “provisions” and “principles,” defines Jefferson’s republican project in several ways. Jefferson trains a critical eye on tobacco planters, who produce goods not for their own tasteful consumption, but for commercial gain. While the virtuous farmer makes appropriate use of the “generative force of nature,” the planter requires an “uncommon fertility of soil” in order to produce enough tobacco to sell to others (*W* 1:231). Jefferson decries this form of profit-driven production, motivated not by the (acceptable) desire for a “small surplus” but by the acquisitive desire for economic gain. The plantation system, according to Jefferson, “is a culture productive of infinite wretchedness” (*W* 1:232). As Timothy Sweet suggests, by Jefferson’s use of the word “culture,” he “may be alluding to slavery” (102). But it should be noted that his language directly addresses the difference between commercial farming and the sustenance-based society that he envisions for America. Jefferson emphasizes the imbalance created by commercial farming by comparing its “infinite wretchedness” to the “generative” cycles of the earth’s harvest. By using the word “productive,” he demonstrates his awareness of the forces of production and consumption, as well as the strain that industry places on the natural balance between the two. That the plantation system produces “wretchedness,” not wheat, underscores Jefferson’s assessment of its unnaturalness and, in addition, suggests its detrimental effect on the moral character of the nation. By characterizing the plantation system in this context as a “culture,” Jefferson secures its status as a manmade and

marketplace-driven phenomenon.¹⁸ It is not the divinely inspired and naturally sustained practice of farming that Jefferson aims to encourage in America.

As his primary example of the imbalance brought about by the plantation system, eating enables Jefferson to illustrate the effects of commercial farming on citizens' natural appetites and desires. The practice of plantation farming is unsustainable, Jefferson explains, because "those employed in it are in a continued state of exertion beyond the powers of nature to support. Little food of any kind is raised by them; so that the men and animals on these farms are badly fed, and the earth is rapidly impoverished" (*W* 1:232). Again, Jefferson postulates a direct link between the exhaustion of the human body and the exhaustion of the earth's resources. By invoking the "impoverishment" of the earth, Jefferson underscores his conviction that maintaining America's natural wealth ought to take precedence over the development of its commercial markets. Capitalizing on the cultural resonance of the language of consumption, Jefferson uses this account of "being badly fed" to reinforce the connection between the moral vacuity brought about by the plantation system, and the actual hunger experienced by those who participate in it. His example of eating works on both moral and literal levels, offering evidence of his belief that nourishing citizens' natural appetites leads to virtue and productivity, while feeding their desires for monetary gain results in corruption, hardship, and fatigue.

Just as Brillat-Savarin in *The Physiology of Taste* attempts to reconfigure the idea of appetite into a more cultivated form of consumption—cf. Aphorism II: "Animals feed themselves; men eat; but only wise men know the art of eating"—Jefferson in the *Notes* takes steps to define a new form of appetite that is distinct from hunger, and that can be

cultivated in order to express taste. He finds evidence of this refined form of appetite in America's wheat farmers. Of their industry, he observes:

Besides cloathing the earth with herbage, and preserving its fertility, it feeds the labourers plentifully, requires from them only a moderate toil, except in the season of harvest, raises great numbers of animals for food and service, and diffuses plenty and happiness among the whole. (*W* 1:232)

Unlike the farming of tobacco, farming wheat results in plentiful food and "happiness" among its participants. In keeping with his example of the Virginia farmer, this characterization of the cultivation of wheat illustrates a central tenet of Epicurean virtue: hunger satisfied and happiness attained through moderate labor. In a departure from that statement, however, Jefferson symbolically reassigns the beneficiary of such industriousness from the farmer to the natural world. Instead of suggesting that an agrarian life can satisfy a moderate appetite for material goods by allowing the farmer to "clothe himself and his family," Jefferson underscores the importance of "cloathing the earth." Rather than imply, by way of mention of "wife and daughters," that the farmer will be able to find a productive outlet for his sexual appetite, here Jefferson emphasizes the "fertility" of nature. In his encomium on wheat, Jefferson minimizes the individual focus of the various appetites and desires that are supported by farming. In doing so, he anticipates Brillat-Savarin by reconfiguring the "art of eating" according to the tradition of taste in the Scottish Enlightenment, so that the exercise of taste becomes a virtuous action performed by the individual for the benefit of others (3).

American Taste at Home and Abroad

Throughout his life, Jefferson adhered to the belief, at the center of Scottish theory, of the interrelation between art and virtue, and of the importance of fine art in cultivating a socially-oriented sense of taste. But before American citizens could look upon their own art and architecture as “models of taste” and refinement, they had only the example of eating from which to formulate their ideas about republican taste.¹⁹ Thus, the American table provided social and political, as well as practical, lessons. But with regard to the latter, Jefferson faced a dilemma, since America lacked appropriate examples of art with which to inspire this essential sense. While Jefferson in the *Notes* defends American artists against the claim that the nation had “not yet produced one good poet,” he admits several lines later that Europe is “where genius is most cultivated, [and] where are the most excellent models for art” (70). In a 1785 letter to Charles Bellini, a Florentine viticulturist who moved to Virginia in order to provide assistance in establishing a vineyard, Jefferson again extols the state of the arts in Europe: “Were I to proceed to tell you how much I enjoy their architecture, sculpture, painting, music, I should want words. It is in these arts they shine” (L 834). At home, Jefferson was surrounded by “rude, misshapen piles, which, but that they have roofs, would be taken for brick-kilns” (*Notes* 158). In America, the passage continues, “the genius of architecture seems to have shed its maledictions over this land” (*Notes* 159). While several critics, including Duncan Faherty, have commented on Jefferson’s interest in architecture as an example of his utilitarian approach to art in America, it is my belief that Jefferson’s interest in food, and the related pursuit of farming, more closely models his method of cultivating this particular version of virtuous, republican taste.²⁰

It might be noted that Charles Bellini failed in his experiments with grape-growing. Thanks to a character reference from Jefferson, however, he was subsequently hired as Professor of Modern Languages at the College of William and Mary. This easy transition, from agriculture to education, reflects Jefferson's deeply held conviction in the close relation between the two. In his later life, Jefferson committed his energies to building up the infrastructure, both physical and intellectual, of the University of Virginia. Jefferson held a sustained interest in the development of a Southern university, and he hoped that such a school could inculcate the genteel behavior of the agrarian South in its students.²¹ He applied a two-pronged approach, first designing buildings that would provide "models of taste & good architecture" for its residents, and then constructing a curriculum that would encourage attention to the agrarian arts. Jefferson believed in the ability of agriculture, just as much as architecture, to cultivate taste on campus.²² In his 1818 "Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia," Jefferson declares his intention to "harmonize and promote the interests of agriculture," on the grounds that knowledge of this "art" would help "form [students] to habits of reflection and correct action, rendering them examples of virtue to others, and of happiness within themselves."²³ Jefferson's core belief was that the cultivation of the earth was an endeavor that would directly result in the cultivation of those who participated in it.

Jefferson believed, moreover, that any American citizen, with appropriate instruction, could cultivate a refined sense of taste. In the University of Virginia report, Jefferson makes use of cultivation as a metaphor in order to argue in favor of education for all:

As well might it be urged that the wild and uncultivated tree, hitherto yielding sour and bitter fruit only, can never be made to yield better; yet we know that the grafting art implants a new tree on the savage stock, producing what is most estimable both in kind and degree. Education, in like manner, engrafts a new man on the native stock, and improves what in his nature was vicious and perverse into qualities of virtue and social worth. (“Report”)

Jefferson employs a specific form of farming—the “grafting art”—as the dominant trope in his comparison of agriculture and education. His use of grafting is significant, because this technique is one that must be taught. Jefferson makes sure to emphasize that the effects of engrafting can be experienced by even the most “savage stock.” Several sentences later, when Jefferson contrasts his own conviction in the forward-looking lessons of formal education with the Indians’ desire for a “return to the days of eating acorns and roots,” he further distinguishes his form of cultivation from (his perception of) the unsophisticated approach of the native tribes (“Report”). Anticipating the argument of the noted modern structural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, Jefferson directly links the transformation of raw food into cooked to the progression from nature to culture. For Jefferson, a particular form of farming—that is, the “art” of agriculture—is the practice that leads to a virtuous, cultured, and cultivated sense of taste.

Throughout his life, Jefferson maintained his belief in agricultural education as a cornerstone of virtue. This virtue, according to Jefferson, was what would enable America to adhere to its republican ideals. In an 1803 letter to David Williams, Jefferson asserts that agriculture is the subject that comes “first in utility, and ought to be the first in respect” (*Writings* 428). Before he was able to enact his design by endowing a Chair of Agriculture at the University of Virginia, Jefferson envisioned agriculture in a role of prominence at all American educational institutions:

In every College and University, a professorship of agriculture, and the class of its students, might be honored as the first. Young men closing their academical education with this, as the crown of all other sciences, fascinated with its solid charms, and at a time when they are to choose an occupation, instead of crowding the other classes, would return to the farms of their fathers, their own, or those of others, and replenish and invigorate a calling, now languishing under contempt and oppression. The charitable schools, instead of storing their pupils with a lore which the present state of society does not call for, converted into schools of agriculture, might restore them to that branch qualified to enrich and honor themselves, and to increase the productions of the nation instead of consuming them. (*Writings* 430)

Here, Jefferson brings together several themes, each of which course through his conception of taste—the emphasis on utility, as evidenced by the “solid charms” of agriculture, the importance of tempering desire, as demonstrated by the decision to reject the allure of “other classes” of work and “return to the farm” instead, and finally, what Lori Merish identifies as Jefferson’s “concern with economic self-sufficiency and ownership of *productive* property” (36, 40). In fact, the final clause of Jefferson’s statement, to “increase the productions of the nation instead of consuming them,” supports Merish’s assessment of Jefferson’s agrarian, anti-consumerist stance. Similarly, David Shi maintains that Jefferson realized “only too late” that “the rising tide of commerce, manufacturing, and agricultural speculation could not be held back,” and for this reason, Jefferson was eventually, if reluctantly, forced to embrace the idea of America as a global commercial power (99).

What these critics do not acknowledge, however, is that from the start Jefferson conceived of farming as an American cultural product, one that could convey the country’s republican values to the rest of the world.²⁴ As an expression of America’s emphasis on education, its opportunities for advancement, and its adherence to its political ideals, the fruits of farming, Jefferson believed, were ripe for European picking.

When Jefferson traveled to France, he instructed the French leaders to inspect their own food supply, seeing it as an indicator of the health of the government. In a 1787 letter to the Marquis de Lafayette, Jefferson directs him to visit the countryside:

It will be a great comfort to you, to know, from your own inspection, the condition of all the provinces of your own country, and it will be interesting to them at some future day, to be known to you. This is, perhaps, the only moment of your life in which you can acquire that knowledge. And to do it most effectually, you must be absolutely incognito, you must ferret the people out of their hovels as I have done, look into their kettles, eat their bread, loll on their beds under pretence of resting yourself, but in fact to find if they are soft. You will feel a sublime pleasure in the course of this investigation, and a sublimer one hereafter, when you shall be able to apply your knowledge to the softening of their beds, or the throwing a morsel of meat into their kettle of vegetables. (*L* 895)

In this passage, Jefferson applies an empirical approach to economics, advising the General that he acquire knowledge of his country “from [his] own inspection.” Jefferson believes that “bread” and “vegetables” give the best indicator of the health of the nation. He correctly identifies that what citizens consume reflects their day-to-day hardships, such as over-work and over-taxation. Here, the quality of the countryman’s stew directly relates to the quality of his country’s government.

For Jefferson, food consistently functions in this symbolic capacity. In the *Notes*, attributes of food, such as quality, availability, and abundance, stand in for the abstract principles that Jefferson associates with a “republic in vigor” (*W* 1:230). When he advises Lafayette that he should be able to “apply [his] knowledge” of the lives of his countrymen “at some future day,” Jefferson uses food as an example that stands for republican values and ideals, those he hopes Lafayette will be able to introduce into post-revolutionary France. The act of “throwing a morsel of meat into their kettle of vegetables” at once makes reference to the actual food shortages that plagued France in

the years leading up to the Revolution, and to the redistribution of wealth and power that the French Revolution, in the person of Lafayette, attempted to implement.²⁵

Significantly, Jefferson's own "investigation" into eating habits results in a "sublime pleasure," similar to his experience of sublimity in the contemplation of Virginia's Natural Bridge. Many critics, such as Harold Hellenbrand, have commented on Jefferson's account of the bridge, what he describes as the "most sublime of Nature's works" (26). Hellenbrand suggests that the famous passage adheres to a "model of experience" that recurs throughout the *Notes*, characterized by a transition "from sublime sensations of confusion and pain to a calmer appreciation of far prospects and of [nature] itself" (5). This model, Hellenbrand argues, "applied to more than just sensing and understanding nature; it explained as well the process of feeling and comprehending human nature" (5). While the visual tableau of "ferret[ing]" farmers "out of their hovels" in France scarcely corresponds to that of peering "over into the abyss" below the Natural Bridge, Jefferson's account of the "sublime pleasure" of the investigation, followed by the "sublimier one" that results from applying the powers of government in order to improve citizens' lives, mimics the feeling of sublimity that Jefferson experiences at the Natural Bridge, and illustrates the transformative model, from concrete to abstract, that Hellenbrand describes (26). Surely, Jefferson conveys a similar "process of feeling and comprehending human nature" in his foray into the French countryside. His experience of eating, moreover, demonstrates that food can result in the same "sublime pleasure" as any work of art.

Jefferson's American aesthetics include the perceptual criteria of order and beauty, as well as the political concepts of life, liberty, and happiness. In fact, Jefferson's

measures of pure beauty and pure government often overlap. While acting as Minister to France, Jefferson traveled across Europe assessing the effects of a range of political systems. In his travel journals, Jefferson advises those interested in the “politics of each country” to “examine their influence on the happiness of the people” (*W* 17:292). His method of examination, again involving food and eating, is similar to the one he recommends to Lafayette:

Take every possible occasion for entering into the houses of the laborers, and especially at the moments of their repast; see what they eat, how they are clothed, whether they are obliged to work too hard; whether the government or their landlord takes from them an unjust proportion of their labor; on what footing stands the property they call their own, their personal liberty, &c., &c. (*W* 17:292)

For Jefferson, “what [laborers] eat” directly corresponds to their government’s success—or failure—of securing their rights to “property” and “personal liberty.” These keywords, familiar to any student of political philosophy, are the words that Locke employs in his *Second Treatise on Government*, and the ones that Jefferson appropriates in his draft of the Declaration of Independence in the phrase, “life, liberty and property.” Noting that in the final version, Jefferson changed the word “property” to “the pursuit of happiness,” Garry Wills concludes that Jefferson “meant a public happiness which is measurable; which is, indeed, the test and justification of any government” (164). This happiness, more specifically, is one that can be measured in food.

For Jefferson, food functions not only as a “test and justification” of a government but also as evidence of a government’s success. For this reason, Jefferson consistently viewed food as a legitimate cultural product, if not always a viable commercial one. America’s abundance of food not only reflected its engagement in the virtuous practice of farming; food came to represent republican virtue itself. Citing the next generation of

American writers, such as Lydia Maria Child, James Fenimore Cooper, and Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Mark McWilliams argues that “choices in what and how to eat helped locate individuals and the nation itself within the central debate between what came to be seen as European luxury and what was claimed as American virtue” (365). But before these authors employed fictional representations of food to stand for ideas about American identity, Jefferson made use of food as a concrete example of America’s egalitarian, anti-aristocratic stance. And this—America’s political bounty—was a product that Jefferson believed could be exported abroad.

In a 1785 letter to James Madison, containing observations about property rights in France, Jefferson excoriates that country for its “enormous inequality” and the “misery” that results (*L* 841). He writes, “Whenever there are in any country uncultivated lands and unemployed poor, it is clear that the laws of property have been so far extended as to violate natural right” (*L* 841-2). For Jefferson, inequitable land distribution is evidence of nothing less than a “violation” of natural rights, the same rights that he believed warranted the War of Independence. Reasons for revolution must have been on his mind, for he continues his letter with a comparison of the two countries: “It is too soon yet in our country to say that every man who cannot find employment, but who can find uncultivated land, shall be at liberty to cultivate it, paying a moderate rent” (*L* 842). In this statement, Jefferson’s vision of the self-supporting Virginia farmer becomes a political mandate. Not only should “every man” be encouraged to pursue a life of farming—but, he continues—the government should also take steps to encourage this lifestyle “by every possible means” (*L* 842). For Jefferson, farmers are the “most precious

part” of the republic (*L* 842). Their value lies not only in their productive pursuits, but also in their nation-sustaining virtue.

As if to confirm his belief in the broad-ranging results of individual virtue, Jefferson, in the letter to Madison, shifts his perspective from the political to the personal. He describes his recent encounter with one “small landholder” in France, a man cutting ferns:

I went to him under pretence of asking the shortest road to town, and afterwards asked for what use he was cutting fern. He told me that this part of the country furnished a great deal of fruit to Paris. That when packed in straw it acquired an ill taste, but that dry fern preserved it perfectly without communicating any taste at all.

I treasured this observation for the preservation of my apples on my return to my own country. They have no apples here to compare with our Redtown pippin. They have nothing which deserves the name of a peach; there being not sun enough to ripen the plum-peach and the best of their soft peaches being like our autumn peaches. (*L* 842-3)

Here, the “preservation of [his] apples” seems to stand for the preservation of his values and ideals. The vehemence with which Jefferson declares that “they have no apples here to compare with our Redtown pippin” and that “they have nothing which deserves the name of a peach” mirrors his earlier critique of the French political system. This subconscious synecdoche of apples for America illuminates Jefferson’s belief in the interconnectedness of political virtue and practical aesthetics.²⁶

It is revealing that Jefferson’s description of his encounter with the French farmer hinges on taste, both in structure and in significance. The fear of “communicating” foreign taste, both gustatory and aesthetic, is one that concerned Jefferson throughout his life. At various times, as in an 1785 letter to the lawyer John Banister, he expresses his apprehension that “an American coming to Europe for education, loses in his knowledge,

in his morals, in his health, in his habits, and in his happiness” (*W* 5:188). Even traveling from the South to a “Northern seminary,” as Jefferson worries in an 1821 letter to James Breckenridge, may result in “our sons imbibing opinions and principles in discord with those of their own country” (*L* 1452). The symbolic language of both statements, as well as their literal meaning, reinforces Jefferson’s understanding of the sense of taste as one that is at once gustatory and aesthetic, a composite of “knowledge,” “morals,” “health,” and “habits,” one that is easily communicable and readily “imbibed” by impressionable youth.

Jefferson’s time in France—and in particular, his experiences at the French table—allowed him to develop a sense of taste that, while influenced by French high culture, was distinctly his own, and was seen as valuable in its own right. Shortly after his arrival in Paris, Jefferson wrote to a friend in praise of the French: “In the pleasures of the table they are far before us, because, with good taste they unite temperance” (*L* 834). As early as this 1785 letter, Jefferson identified eating as an activity that encouraged “good taste,” in addition to the crucial Epicurean attribute of “temperance.” But by 1787, Jefferson began to see flaws in the French system. A letter to Anne Willing Bingham laments the “empty bustle of Paris,” consisting of appointments scheduled continuously between dinner and supper such that, instead of enjoying each meal in a leisurely manner, “the days of life are consumed” (*W* 6:81). In a letter to Nicholas Lewis from that same year, requesting a variety of foodstuffs from America, Jefferson describes how he has begun to cultivate, in his garden in Paris, “Indian corn for the use of my own table, to eat green in our manner” (*GFB* 181). Jefferson’s account of the indigenous food he serves at his “own table,” and his use of the phrase “our manner” to describe its preparation, point

to the development of a distinctive American table that not only united good taste with temperance, but also was infused with republican virtue.

In his uneven, and ultimately unfinished autobiography, Jefferson devotes nearly a quarter of its pages to his time in France. He explains that his position as Ambassador “forbade [him] to intermeddle with the internal transactions of [the country],” but in recognizing his unique vantage point, he attempts to recall his version of the events leading up to the French Revolution (*W* 1:154). His most direct but, he maintains, inadvertent, involvement in the events was a dinner party which his old friend Lafayette scheduled at Jefferson’s house without first asking permission. Jefferson recalls how, after the “cloth being removed and wine set on the table, after the American manner,” the political strategizing began (*W* 1:156). His reference to the “American” manner here, in contrast to his mention of his “own” manner of dining in the letter to Lewis, points to the codification of Jefferson’s personal taste that took place over the thirty years that separate the two documents. At this particular meal, the manner of dining sets the tone for a discussion of “coolness and candor” (*W* 1:156). In Jefferson’s account, all aspects of the conversation, its “logical reasoning,” its “chaste eloquence,” and its overtones of the “finest dialogues of antiquity,” parallel the temperance and simplicity of his republican taste (*W* 1:156). His recollection that the discussion remained free of the “gaudy tinsel of rhetoric” suggests, additionally, an equivalence between visual and verbal presentation (*W* 1:156). This fusion of sensory experiences relates to the “sublime pleasure” he felt after observing the eating habits of the French peasants, and confirms that Jefferson was convinced that values and ideals can be conveyed in a range of aesthetic registers.

The day after this triumph at the table, when Jefferson confesses to the authorities that he had played host to the dinner that “decided the fate of the [French] constitution,” he receives reassurance of the positive impact of his republican taste:

[Count Montmorin] told me he already knew everything which had passed, that, so far from taking umbrage at the use made of my house on that occasion, he earnestly wished I would habitually assist at such conferences, being sure I should be useful in moderating the warmer spirits, and promoting a wholesome and practicable reformation only. (*W* 1:157)

Confirming Jefferson’s crucial role in the writing of the French constitution, Montmorin identifies Jefferson’s primary task as “moderating the warmer spirits,” a phrase that could apply equally to the character—and to the habits of consumption—of his dinner party guests. In Jefferson’s retelling, the Epicurean attributes of moderation, “wholesomeness,” and utility resurface at his dining table, infused with additional political significance. Here, Jefferson also discloses an awareness of his particular position as host, as much an opportunity to model his own republican taste as an obligation to satisfy the tastes of others.

As Secretary of State, Jefferson hosted a series of dinners that closely resembled this formative meal.²⁷ At one such event, James Madison and Alexander Hamilton joined Jefferson for the purpose of working out the Compromise of 1790. The “Dinner Table Bargain,” as the agreement is also known, relocated the national capital from the city of Philadelphia to the banks of the Potomac River in exchange for the support of the South on several legislative acts, and, in effect, condoned the continued existence of slavery. Setting aside the political significance of this event, historian Merry Ellen Scofield explains that the meal “confirmed for Jefferson that power rested not in public debate but in private conversation, and that politics, cloaked in the informality and congeniality of

an intimate dinner, produced results” (459). Focusing on Jefferson’s serving style, Scofield argues that the “American manner” of dining emerged out of the anti-aristocratic atmosphere of the early republic, and as such, contributed an air of mutual respect to the legislative discussions that took place. While politically expedient, however, this particular meal continued to cloak the injustices of slavery. The “informality and congeniality” encouraged by Jefferson as host, moreover, masks his own complicity in that abhorrent institution.

Taste, Temperance, and the Issue of Slavery

Isaac Jefferson, a slave at Monticello, later recalled that Thomas Jefferson “never went into the kitchen except to wind up the clock” (Qtd. in Fowler 19). This observation, as culinary historian Justin Sarafin astutely points out, is significant for what—or, more accurately, for whom—it omits. Jefferson owned dozens of slaves, all of whom, whether through the cultivation of crops, the care of livestock, the preparation of food, or the serving of meals, contributed to his project of producing a new, republican sense of taste. One slave, in particular, contributed specific and indispensable culinary knowledge: James Hemings, Sally Hemings’s older brother, whom Jefferson took to France and had trained as a *chef de cuisine* at his Parisian residence. As noted by Annette Gordon-Reed in her recent biography of the Hemings family, James Hemings’s role as chef “made him responsible for every success and failure regarding a critical component in that diplomatic household” (227). To be sure, Jefferson’s dinner-table diplomacy—and, in all likelihood, the popularization of his particular version of American taste—would have been impossible without Hemings’s gastronomical skill. In his particular reliance on

Hemings, however, Jefferson demonstrates in his own life a contradiction at the core of American identity, a conflict brought about by the persistence of slavery in a country defined by its republican ideals. Jefferson's heightened attention to issues of taste, placed in the context of his acquiescence to the institution of slavery, accentuates the ways in which his private thoughts and personal actions undermine his vision of a republican identity for all Americans.

The 1793 document that established the conditions for Hemings's emancipation, written by Jefferson and witnessed by his *maitre d'hôtel*, reflects the conflict between Jefferson's desire to reward Hemings for his exemplary service in the form of his freedom, and Jefferson's awareness of the immediate and profound impact that Hemings's emancipation would have on his table. The agreement reads:

Having been at great expense in having James Hemings taught the art of cookery, desiring to befriend him, and to require from him as little in return as possible, I do hereby promise and declare, that if the said James shall go with me to Monticello in the course of the ensuing winter, when I go to reside there myself, and shall there continue until he shall have taught such person as I shall place under him for that purpose to be a good cook, this previous condition being performed, he shall be thereupon made free, and I will thereupon execute all proper instruments to make him free. (Qtd. in Gordon-Reed 489-90)

The implications of slavery on the development of republican taste are here apparent. According to the terms of the agreement, Hemings must exchange his culinary knowledge for his personal liberty. Jefferson's agreement—for in truth, Hemings had no choice but to consent—exemplifies the form of barbarism that Saidiya Hartman identifies in *Scenes of Subjection* as evident not only in the “constitution of slave as object but also in the forms of subjectivity and circumscribed humanity imputed to the enslaved” (6). Indeed, Jefferson's measured tone and offer of friendship illustrate, in bas relief, the

incontrovertible authority of Jefferson as master, and the resultant subjection of Hemings as slave. In the agreement, Jefferson characterizes himself as a benevolent force of liberty, but his concern with the practical implications of Hemings's release reveals the ways in which his heightened valuation of the "art of cookery" takes precedence over the foundational rights of the republic. By stipulating that Hemings instruct a replacement cook before he can be freed, Jefferson ensures that Hemings's absence will be neither felt—nor tasted—at Monticello.

Jefferson's approach to the emancipation of James Hemings, characteristic of the gradualist theory of emancipation that he endorsed throughout his life, demonstrates how his heightened valuation of the sense of taste interferes with his ability—and his willingness—to address the issue of slavery in America. In the *Notes*, Jefferson inveighs against the "unhappy influence on the manners of the people produced by the existence of slavery," although he does not implicate his own manners—or his tastes—in this assessment (*W* 1:225). As he continues to insist upon his particular version of taste as a model for the nation, he contributes to what Eric Sundquist identifies as the "state of unresolved crisis" of American identity that persists to this day (30). Sundquist locates the origin of this conflict in the incompatibility between the constitutional legitimization of slavery in the United States, and the "overarching ideology of liberty" that "authorized its cultural independence, territorial expansion, and rise to world power" (30). Certainly, Jefferson's incorporation of the "ideology of liberty" into his conception of republican taste, at the same time that he employs this sense of taste as a justification for the continued enslavement of James Hemings, and all other black Americans, perpetuates this "crisis" of national identity.

Less immediately evident is how Jefferson's insistence on the need for a national sense of taste underlies his construction of a hierarchy of racial difference. This hierarchy, in turn, subtends his philosophical arguments both for the continued enslavement of black Americans as a group, and for the eventual expatriation of freed slaves to Africa. Jefferson's assessment that blacks are "dull, tasteless, and anomalous," incomprehensible today, reproduces the phenomenon that David Kazanjian, following Etienne Balibar, identifies as the "rise of numerous, hierarchically codified, particularistic differences" that accompany any movement towards group equality (*W* 1:194, 2). Kazanjian's analysis emphasizes Jefferson's "codification" of race in terms of quantifiable physical qualities and measurable population units—the influence, he contends, of Enlightenment empiricism. But taking into account the additional emphasis on aesthetic discernment, it is my premise that Jefferson also develops his "indelible" racial categories by attending to qualitative assessments of blacks' and whites' divergent tastes. Rather than ascribe the contradiction between Jefferson's republican ideology and his opinions about race to his personal deficiencies, as many have argued, or to a generalized "crisis" of national identity, as Sundquist might claim, this theory of the interdependence of equality and difference provides a model for understanding Jefferson's ideas about taste, race, and nation as a single, albeit flawed, conceptual system.

Jefferson's belief in the strong relationship between race and nation has, in fact, already generated significant critical attention. In relating Jefferson's ideas about taste to this substantial body of scholarship, my aim is twofold: to demonstrate how Jefferson's high valuation of the sense of taste contributes to his formulation of national identity as a

racialized national identity, and to delineate more precisely how Jefferson's reliance on his sense of taste impedes the fulfillment of his republican ideals. Peter Onuf, for instance, asserts that Jefferson perceived African-American slaves as "constitut[ing] a *distinct nation*," and for this reason, viewed the range of "crimes" committed against them—captivity, relocation, and bondage—"in national terms" (3). This conceptual link between race and nation helps to explain why, in the same Query in which he comments about the absence of taste in black people, Jefferson also criticizes one former black slave, Ignatius Sancho, for his extravagant writing style. Although Sancho's essays had been uniformly praised in Europe, Jefferson disparages Sancho's work for "escap[ing] incessantly from every restraint of reason and taste" (*W* 1:196). Jefferson indicts Sancho's excess in taste just as he previously lamented the inferior taste of black Americans as a group. Jefferson is reluctant to acknowledge any similarity in taste between black and white Americans, for this acknowledgment would challenge Jefferson's conception of national taste—and consequently, would challenge the nation itself.

The Query from the *Notes* entitled "Manners," which contains Jefferson's most famous published statement against slavery, helps to determine more clearly how Jefferson employs the idea of taste to define and defend a national identity for America. Evoking the tone and the moral force of a Puritan jeremiad, Jefferson expresses his fears about the future of an America still dependent on slavery:

I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep forever: that considering numbers, nature and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation, is among possible events: that it may become probable by supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest. (*W* 1:227)

As noted by many critics, Jefferson derives the basis of his philosophical argument from the Lockean formulation of slavery as a state of war. In these oft-quoted lines, Jefferson conjures a “contest” of divine magnitude. His distress over the notion that God cannot “take side” with white America underscores his conviction about the fundamental differences between white and black people. He readily adapt his ideas about the association between race and nation to conform to Locke’s critique of slavery. But by invoking both “numbers” and “nature,” Jefferson again demonstrates how his belief in the inevitability of emancipation emerges from his view of blacks and whites as discrete populations and as qualitatively separate subjects. Jefferson is unable to envision an America in which blacks and whites live together as equals both because of his perception of their distinct national affiliations, and because of his intractable ideas about their irreconcilable individual tastes.²⁸

Jefferson’s scrupulous attention to issues of taste is, paradoxically, among the major factors in his condoning the continued existence of slavery in America. Consider Jefferson’s conclusion to the passage quoted above: “But it is impossible to be temperate and to pursue this subject through the various considerations of policy, of morals, of history natural and civil. We must be contented to hope they will force their way into every one’s mind” (*W* 1:227). His supposition that it is “impossible to be temperate” with respect to the subject of slavery, combined with the fact that the passage appears in the Query on manners, confirms his conviction about the crucial role of taste in determining matters both “of morals” and “of policy.” According to his statement, the lack of temperance that slavery’s abolition would entail, in Jefferson’s opinion, would prove too damaging to the nation’s emergent sense of self. Because America’s political institutions

had not yet stabilized, and its (white) national identity had not yet sufficiently coalesced, Jefferson was unwilling to endorse any action that would detract from his project of producing tasteful citizens.

Throughout the *Notes*, Jefferson reinforces his argument for the importance of taste in shaping a national identity for America. He frequently employs the trope of temperance, a signal attribute of his republican taste, in order to explain how the political principles are affected by the individual exercise of taste. In regard to the potential danger that immigrants pose to the young nation, Jefferson states:

They will bring with them the principles of the governments they leave, imbibed in their early youth; or, if able to throw them off, it will be in exchange for an unbounded licentiousness, passing, as is usual, from one extreme to the other. It would be a miracle were they to stop precisely at the point of temperate liberty. (*W* 1:120)

Jefferson draws upon the philosophical discourse of taste, as a sense that is influenced both by individual experience and by culturally sanctioned rules, in order to convey his perception of the threat posed by foreigners seeking entrance to the United States. Here, Jefferson returns to the trope of imbibing, utilized earlier to dramatize the process by which students from the South lose their virtue and vitality when they travel to the North for schooling. In this instance, he employs the idea of imbibing to illustrate the process by which individuals acquire their values and tastes. His use of the phrase “temperate liberty” refers to his idea that immigrants must become fully assimilated into the national culture in order to become American. In addition, the phrase provides an uncannily accurate description of his pragmatic political philosophy. Jefferson believed that all men were “endowed by their Creator” with the unalienable right to liberty, but only if that liberty could be tastefully acquired (*W* 1:29).

In view of the significance that Jefferson places on the role of taste both in determining qualitative aspects of America's identity and in supporting the nation's claim to cultural superiority, it is ironic that Jefferson identifies temperance as the virtue that will eventually guide the nation to abolish slavery. Jefferson anticipated that the next generation of citizens, raised on American soil, nourished by American crops, and most importantly, impelled to action by the influence of American taste, would ultimately address the issue of slavery. In a 1785 letter to a British correspondent, he explains: "These [young men and women] have sucked in the principles of liberty as it were with their mother's milk; and it is to them I look with anxiety to turn the fate of this question [of slavery]" (*W* 5:56). Jefferson articulates his vision of an end to slavery with a simile structured around the composite meaning of taste. He suggests that the "principles of liberty" nourish the mind, just as a "mother's milk" fortifies the body.²⁹ He evokes the sense of taste in order to convey his confidence in the moral force of American culture, and employs the idea of eating in order to reinforce his belief in the need for each citizen's total incorporation of republican values. In his symbolic language, Jefferson implies that a taste for liberty, acquired and cultivated in youth, will provide the impetus to confront and resolve the issue of slavery in America.

A Taste for Liberty—or Luxury³⁰

The circumstances surrounding Jefferson's personal relationship with James Hemings expose the contradictions inherent in his formulation, as well as in his application, of American taste. In particular, the details of their relationship substantiate Jefferson's stated concern with the negative consequences of citizens' "disposition to

luxury” (*W* 5:182).³¹ Jefferson’s desire to recoup the “great expense” of Hemings’s training, as expressed in his agreement with his chef, appears to be of greater concern to Jefferson than any ideological imperative to free Hemings. Structurally premised on Jefferson’s outlay of personal funds, the agreement reveals Jefferson’s focus on his own financial health—to the detriment of Hemings’s well-being. The subsequent course of events bears this out. Hemings designated his younger brother, Peter, as his replacement, and Jefferson came to extol the younger Hemings’s culinary abilities as much as his older brother’s French techniques. In 1802, he wrote to his daughter, “Pray enable yourself to direct us here how to make muffins in Peter’s method. My cook here cannot succeed at all in them, and they are a great luxury to me” (*FL* 238). Because Jefferson was unwilling to relinquish his taste for the “great luxury” of Peter’s muffins, he refused to allow that cook to ever negotiate his freedom. Consequently, Peter Hemings remained in servitude, and was among the slaves sold at the time of Jefferson’s death in order to settle the debts of his estate.

The conflict between the taste for luxury and the commitment to liberty emerges in Jefferson’s writings as he attempts to codify his personal habits and behaviors for the American public. At the same time that he imbues certain luxury items with republican significance, he does not acknowledge—either at his table or on the page—any detrimental effect from an interest in luxury itself. Assessing the potential for American independence from foreign goods, Jefferson writes: “It is not easy to say what are the articles either of necessity, or comfort, or luxury, which we cannot raise, and which we therefore shall be under a necessity of importing from abroad, as everything hardier than the olive, and as hardy as the fig, may be raised here in the open air” (*W* 1:235).

Significantly, Jefferson's primary examples of luxury items reflect his own particular preferences, rather than an engagement with prevailing cultural and political arguments against luxury.³² The precise nature of Jefferson's examples is also revealing. He introduced the "hardy" fig to Monticello in 1769, while his numerous attempts to cultivate the olive tree ("a tree the least known in America, and yet the most worthy of being known") each failed in a spectacular way (*W* 6:200). In contrast, it is difficult to know how Jefferson construes the concepts of "necessity, or comfort, or luxury." From his account, it is truly "not easy to say" what are Jefferson's criteria for distinguishing luxury from necessity. In this attempt to define the parameters of taste for the American public, Jefferson struggles to maintain the boundary between the virtues of self-sufficiency and the reality of his own luxurious desires.

In determining how to sustain his virtuous, republican sense of taste, Jefferson strains to set appropriate limits on his own—and his countrymen's—appetites. He readily concedes that there is justification for seeking some luxury goods from abroad, taking a weak position with respect to the culturally and politically controversial items of "sugar, coffee, and tea." (*W* 1:235). He explains that these items "are not between [the] limits" of cultivation in America, and "habit having placed them among the necessaries of life with the wealthy part of our citizens, as long as these habits remain, we must go for them to those countries which are able to furnish them" (*W* 1:235). As long as these products are grown in other countries, it seems, the impact of their becoming "placed" among the necessities of life will not affect the cultivation of American virtue. The "limits" Jefferson attempts to establish are the practical limitations for farming, not the limits of actual need. His interest lies in what "may be raised" in America, not in what may—or

may not—be consumed. Referring to the “habits” of wealthy citizens, Jefferson suggests a certain immutability in their patterns of consumption. From this passage, Jefferson seems altogether uninterested in examining the moral implications, or in challenging the socioeconomic processes, of appetite as it overcomes legitimate need.

Jefferson’s numerous accounts of restraint in his choice of foods contrast sharply with the reality of his luxurious tastes, and with his eagerness to satisfy them. Late in life, in a letter to a doctor friend, Jefferson describes how he has “lived temperately, eating little animal food” (*L* 1416). In conjunction with the tenets of his republican taste, Jefferson’s decision to eat meat “not as an aliment, so much as a condiment for the vegetables, which constitute [his] principle [*sic*] diet,” emphasizes his moderation (*L* 1416). His misspelling of “principle,” while almost certainly unintentional, underscores the influence of his eating habits on his political ideals. His remark that he has “been blest with organs of digestion which accept and concoct, without ever murmuring, whatever the palate chooses to consign to them,” further accentuates his readiness to “accept” without questioning what his cultivated palate indicates that he should eat (*L* 1416).

Jefferson’s preoccupation with satisfying his personal tastes often precludes a full consideration of the impact of his indulgent lifestyle. In a letter in which he rejects an invitation to join a French antislavery organization, Jefferson identifies a conflict between his ideological support for the abolition of slavery and the tasteful behavior that he believes is required of him in his role as Ambassador to France:

You know that nobody wishes more ardently to see an abolition not only of the trade but also of the condition of slavery. But... I am here as a public servant; and those whom I serve having not yet been able to give their voice against this

practice, it is decent for me to avoid too public a demonstration of my wishes to see it abolished. (*W* 6:428)

Jefferson fails to acknowledge, however, how his personal slaveholding—especially while he resided in free France—might present a paradox more weighty than any “public demonstration” of his desire to see slavery abolished.³³ In keeping with his conclusion, in the *Notes*, that it is “impossible to be temperate” with respect to slavery, Jefferson again defers political action. For a second time, Jefferson’s desire to be a model of good taste takes precedence over what would seem to be a republican ideological imperative to abolish slavery.³⁴

Nevertheless, Jefferson’s sense of taste should be valued for how it helps unravel several major strands of the contradiction of American cultural identity: the tension between the practice of slavery and the principles of life and liberty, between the conception of these principles as universal and the particularistic distinctions that preclude their application, and between the temperance that sustains republican virtue and the passivity that compromises its underlying ideals. In tracing how Jefferson attempts to reconcile his taste for liberty with his taste for luxury, the instability of the sense of taste, itself, becomes exposed. “However strictly the senses are trained,” Susan Buck-Morss explains, “all of this is *a posteriori*. The senses maintain an uncivilized and uncivilizable trace, a core of resistance to cultural domestication” (6). This aspect of the sense of taste, the “uncivilizable trace” that resists acculturation, enters into—and profoundly shapes—Jefferson’s vision for a cultural identity for America.

As much as Jefferson attempts to distill virtue from pleasure, and strains to reconfigure his own appetite into a refined sense of republican taste, the tensions between

his appetites and pleasures, and needs and desires, remain. When he writes, “The whole of my life has been a war with my natural tastes, feelings, and wishes. Domestic life and literary pursuits, were my first and my latest inclinations, circumstances and not desires led me to the path I have trod,” Jefferson reveals his awareness of an internal “war,” with a significance that becomes amplified in light of his involvement in the War of Independence (Qtd. in Hayes 14). In suggesting that his “natural tastes” might have been better fulfilled through an altered life course, Jefferson acknowledges the practical limits of defining a cultural identity for all of America. The bucolic existence that he envisions, consisting of “domestic life and literary pursuits,” implies a further recognition that the acts of eating and writing, among others, might be better suited than political engagement to the cultivation and expression of republican taste.

In his analysis of the life work of Brillat-Savarin, a man who pursued each and every one of his tastes, feelings, and wishes, Roland Barthes describes how, in providing a written account of his food adventures, Brillat-Savarin “presents the power of language in all its ambiguity” (263). Barthes describes how writing about eating, like language itself, “calls up the pleasures of its referent just when it traces its absence” (263). For Jefferson, attuned to the power and the pleasure of language, his written discussion of republican taste may have represented an attempt to address the ambiguities of his own life in a format more pleasing to his palate than the opportunities afforded him by public office. To be sure, Jefferson acknowledges the distasteful nature of slavery more readily on the printed page than in any of his political actions. At the same time, he registers no awareness of the impact of his own slaveholding on his formulation—or in his demonstration—of his republican taste. By exposing the absence of liberty in his

conception of taste, Jefferson contributes in his language, if not in his life, to the eventual resolution of this fundamental contradiction of American identity.

The True Taste of Wild Turkey

In the *Physiology of Taste*, Brillat-Savarin recalls an autumn weekend spent at the home of a gracious American farmer. The farmer leads Brillat-Savarin on a hunting expedition, during which Brillat-Savarin shoots a “superb winged creature” (82). The hunting party returns home, where they are served from a “plentifully laden table” (81). They discuss several topics of interest to the Frenchman: George Washington, the War of Independence, and American agriculture. The next morning, as Brillat-Savarin prepares to depart, the farmer approaches him:

You see in me, my dear sir, a happy man, if such there be on earth: everything around you and all that you have so far observed is a product of what I own. These stockings I wear were knitted by my daughters; my shoes and my clothes come from my own sheep; they help also, with my gardens and barnyards, to furnish me with simple nourishing food. (84)

But Brillat-Savarin is not listening. “It may be believed that I was pondering the parting speech of [the farmer],” he recalls, “but I had something quite different on my mind: I was considering how best I should cook my turkey” (84).

Here, in *The Physiology of Taste*, is a scene that strongly resembles the biographical account of Brillat-Savarin’s meeting with Jefferson—except that his interlocutor, instead, is a Connecticut Yankee by the name of Bulow. Certainly, Bulow exemplifies many aspects of Jefferson’s republican taste. He is “happy,” self-sufficient, and devoted to the cultivation of his crops. Just as Jefferson’s Virginia farmer “furnishes” his family with a “small surplus” to sustain a “good table,” Bulow similarly “furnishes”

his family with the ingredients to prepare “simple nourishing food.” In directing his attention towards his daughters and his guest, Bulow also demonstrates the benevolence associated with Jefferson’s formulation of the sense of taste. But by modeling an idealized version of American taste, this Connecticut farmer does not accurately reflect the realities of the republican project. Only by replacing the affable and assiduous Bulow with the complex figure of Thomas Jefferson does this depiction of American taste become complete.

With the country’s third President serving as host, Brillat-Savarin’s preoccupation with the taste of turkey no longer comes across, as Robert Fanuzzi has argued, as a comic inversion of the “priorities of [American] citizenship” with the pleasures that the French associate with eating (2). A table shared by Brillat-Savarin and Thomas Jefferson places American taste on equal footing with the French. That the Frenchman’s culinary fantasy is of wild turkey, acknowledged elsewhere in *The Physiology of Taste* as “one of the most delightful presents which the New World has made to the Old,” further reinforces the idea that American gastronomy, in conjunction with American ideals, contribute to the conception of a distinctly American sense of taste (78).

The significance of Thomas Jefferson seated at this representative table does not end with the taste of turkey. Relocating the conversation from the “backwoods” of Connecticut to Jefferson’s estate at Monticello also injects the shade of slavery into the encounter (Brillat-Savarin 81). Although even in the embellished version of the anecdote, the presence of Jefferson’s slaves remains unmentioned, their contributions—including, most likely, those of James Hemings—surely were tasted in the meal. In view of this additional context, Brillat-Savarin’s lack of interest in listening to a first-hand account of

America's founding might reflect his awareness of the ironies of the republican project. Certainly, the example of an indigenous American bird, prepared by an African-American staff, provides a fuller taste of America than Jefferson's false display of his republican virtue.

Finally, it seems only fitting that this encounter between Brillat-Savarin and Jefferson takes place in writing, since Jefferson relied upon the written word to express the convictions that he could not act upon in his life. Despite his dramatic report, in the *Notes*, of his "trembling for [his] country," Jefferson is consistently unable to acknowledge the more profound implications of his personal manners and tastes. His insistence on providing a model of tasteful behavior for the American public, ironically—and with tragic consequences—impedes his ability to guarantee the "inherent and inalienable" rights that he set forth in the Declaration (*W* 1:29). The contradiction between Jefferson's thoughts and his actions concerning slavery, as well as the damaging effects of his continued insistence on satisfying his personal tastes, detract from his republican vision for America. His commitment to cultivating taste in United States citizens, instead, lays the groundwork for the social, cultural, and economic divisions in American society that remain entrenched to this day. Ultimately, the "temperate liberty" to which Jefferson aspires throughout his life is attained only in the written record of his republican taste.

¹ Critics often comment that the aphorisms about eating that begin Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's *Physiology of Taste*, published in Paris in 1825, recall those from *Poor Richard's*, itself a runaway bestseller in early nineteenth-century France. One French critic goes so far to refer to Brillat-Savarin as the "French Franklin," for his attempt to codify his personal habits and tastes for his middle-class readers.

² This friend was Constantin Volney, an author and intellectual in his own right. His relationship with Jefferson, and with Brillat-Savarin, can be traced through various correspondences.

³ My translation of Boissel: "Thomas Jefferson en reste interdit. Il a vu se succéder à Monticello bien des visiteurs et a eu avec eux bien des sujets de conversation. Mais comment préparer un dindon sauvage, ça jamais!" *Brillat-Savarin: Un chevalier candide* (Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 1989) 149.

⁴ Reportedly, Brillat-Savarin carried the manuscript for *The Physiology of Taste* on his body for over 25 years, before publishing it two months before his death in 1825. This anecdote is alluded to in Boissel's biography, and mentioned in Denise Gigante's anthology of nineteenth-century food writing, *Gusto: Essential Writings in Nineteenth-Century Food Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2005) 143-4.

⁵ The anecdote, first reported in a "sketch of the history and present state of cookery" published in *The Quarterly Review*, can be found in essays and biographies about Brillat-Savarin throughout the nineteenth century, including the August 29, 1868 issue of *All the Year Round*, a journal edited by Charles Dickens (143). There, he describes the conversation in more detail:

Jefferson, on their way home, began relating interesting anecdotes of Washington and the War of Independence. Seeing M. Savarin quite absent, and paying no attention, Jefferson stopped, a little nettled, and was about to leave him. "My dear sir," said the epicure in exile, "I beg ten thousand pardons, but I was just thinking how I should dress my wild turkey."

⁶ In recent years, Boissel's scholarship has come under increased scrutiny. A sample quote from Giles MacDonough: "As usual, Boissel gives absolutely no evidence to support his assertion." *Brillat-Savarin: The Judge and His Stomach* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1992) 223.

⁷ Some of the most significant studies of food and taste from a historical perspective, including Waverly Root and Richard de Rochemont, James McWilliams, and Susan Pinkard contain substantial sections on Jefferson. *Dining at Monticello: In Good Taste and Abundance*, edited by Damon Lee Fowler, provides the most thorough collection of essays about Jefferson from the perspective of food studies. The pioneering culinary historian Karen Hess was working on *Mr. Jefferson's Table: The Culinary Legacy of Monticello* (in contract with the University of North Carolina Press) at the time of her death in 2007.

⁸ The text is not included in the catalog of volumes sold to Congress after Jefferson's death, nor do any earlier French gastronomical texts exist in Jefferson's 6,487 book collection purchased by the Library of Congress in 1815.

⁹ In “Thomas Jefferson, the Virtue of Aesthetics, and the Aesthetics of Virtue,” Lee Quinby acknowledges the “profound respect for Shaftesbury’s work” that Jefferson displayed in his journals, noting that Shaftesbury’s “fusion of ethics and aesthetics” appealed to Jefferson’s ideas about morality and virtue (341). Historian Garry Wills offers a more in-depth analysis of Jefferson’s relation to Shaftesbury, claiming that Jefferson’s opinions about the existence of a “moral sense” were derived from Shaftesbury, and then filtered through the ideas of Hutcheson, Hume, and Kames (204). Fabrice Teulon credits these same Scottish theorists, as popularized in France by Antoine Destutt de Tracy, Pierre Cabanis, and Jean-Baptiste Say, with providing Brillat-Savarin with the “necessary tools to analyze and incorporate pleasure... into an economic and social model of the new bourgeois order of liberalism” (42).

¹⁰ Merish explains how “Scottish theory rearticulated luxury goods as expressions of subjective, imaginative ‘freedom’ and, through what these writers described as the expansion of human sympathies in market society, the formulation of ethical subjectivity per se” (31-2). For Merish, the significance of this conceptual shift—from the interest in luxury as a reflection of an individual’s captivity to market forces to an expression of the “freedom” to consume—is that it distanced capitalism from slavery. This transformation is particularly significant for Jefferson’s stance on slaveholding, which I will address later in this chapter.

¹¹ Similarly, *The Physiology of Taste* synthesizes what Fabrice Teulon, in “Gastronomy, Gourmandise, and Political Economy,” describes as “two complimentary discourses focusing on the senses, on the one hand, and on economy on the other” (42). Teulon credits the Scottish theorists mentioned above, as popularized in France by Antoine Destutt de Tracy, Pierre Cabanis, and Jean-Baptiste Say, with providing Brillat-Savarin with the “necessary tools to analyze and incorporate pleasure, or in this instance the pleasures of the table, into an economic and social model of the new bourgeois order of liberalism” (42).

¹² David Shields suggests that Brillat-Savarin adhered more closely to the Cyreniac-Aristarchan, rather than the Epicurean school of hedonism, which viewed “pleasure as pleasures, variable in quality and capable of amplification” (221).

¹³ Qtd. in *Letters 1760-1826* 1431. Referred to hereafter as *L*.

¹⁴ Interestingly, for Franklin as well, the metaphor of taste appears most prominently in discussions of writing. In correspondence with Samuel Johnson, Franklin attributes his poor book sales to “the Badness of our General Taste” (*FP* 5:260). In a second letter to Johnson, Franklin clarifies his position: “I wish I could with Truth give you a good Account of the Sale of those excellent Pieces of yours; but where the general Taste is bad, the best Work comes to the worst Market” (*FP* 5:157).

¹⁵ Qtd. in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* 6:230. Referred to hereafter as *W*.

¹⁶ Many of Jefferson’s contemporaries were deeply concerned with the damaging effects of luxury on American citizens, and consequently, on America itself. John Chester Miller claims that Jefferson intuited a “proximate” relation between the “passion for money-making and the profligacy, luxury, and ostentation to which it gave rise” and the eradication of slavery: “not only did a people vitiated by a fixation upon wealth lose their

love of liberty; such a people, Jefferson believed, also lost their zeal to do justice to their fellow men” (36). See note 21 for a continuation of this discussion.

¹⁷ The trope of cannibalism has its own fascinating literary history. See Kyla Tompkins for an recent analysis of cannibalism as it relates to ideas about individual and group identity.

¹⁸ See Raymond Williams’s discussion of the term “culture” in *Keywords* for an extended analysis of its varied (and shifting) meanings (87-93).

¹⁹ A quotation that refers to Jefferson’s architectural plans for the campus of the University of Virginia. Qtd. in “Letter to William Thorton, May 9, 1817.”

²⁰ See *Remodeling the Nation: The Architecture of American Identity, 1776-1858* (Hanover: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007).

²¹ In an 1821 letter to James Breckenridge, Jefferson laments that “We are now trusting to those who are against us in position and principle, to fashion to their own form the minds & affections of our youth. If, as has been estimated, we send 300,000.D. a year to the Northern seminaries for the instruction of our sons, then we must have there at all times 500. of our sons imbibing opinions and principles in discord with those of their own country. This canker is eating on the vitals of our existence.” Note the conflation of consuming food and consuming knowledge, e.g. “imbibing opinions and principles” (*Letters* 1452).

²² “Letter to William Thorton, May 9, 1817,” *The Jefferson Digital Archive* (U of Virginia). Accessed 17 October 2008 < <http://etext.virginia.edu/jefferson/texts/> >.

²³ “Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia, 1818.” *The Jefferson Digital Archive* (U of Virginia). Accessed 17 October 2008 < <http://etext.virginia.edu/jefferson/texts/> >. Referred to hereafter as “Report.”

²⁴ Joyce Appleby, in “Commercial Farming and the ‘Agrarian Myth’ in the Early Republic,” makes this claim in more general terms, although her argument has not achieved critical consensus. See her article in *Journal of American History* 68 (1982): 833-849, as well as Lance Banning’s summary of its critical response in “Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited: Liberal and Classical Ideas in the New American Republic,” *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series* 43.1 (January 1986): 4-19.

²⁵ See Susan Pinkard 155-242 and Rebecca Spang 88-145 for additional historical context.

²⁶ Michael Pollan provides a contemporary account that confirms what Jefferson tasted in his pippins. American apples, Pollan explains, “were as distinct from the old European stock as the Americans themselves” (13).

²⁷ Later, as President, Jefferson would institute a similar program of informal dinners at the White House. See Scofield for a full account of these meals.

²⁸ It is tempting to interpret this passage as a reflection of Jefferson’s awareness of the negative impact of slavery on the nation’s ideological underpinnings, and in so doing, resolve—at least in part—the contradiction between Jefferson’s political philosophy and his ideas about racial difference. Indeed, John Chester Miller, a historian of the early republic, argues convincingly that the passage reveals a conviction that slavery “created an atmosphere deadly to the kind of public and private virtue without which a republican form of government could not survive” (41). To be sure, Jefferson viewed slavery as

damaging to republican virtue, but it is this virtue, predicated upon his highly developed sense of taste, that allows him to condone the continued existence of slavery in the United States.

²⁹ The image of “sucking... mother’s milk” would have carried tremendous cultural resonance at the time; most people believed that breastfeeding conveyed social attributes, as well as nutritious value. See Janet Golden for a thorough account of breastfeeding in the eighteenth century.

³⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, in demonstrating how an individual’s taste with respect to his or her choices in what and how to eat corresponds to their economic ability to consume, distinguishes “between the taste of necessity, which favours the most ‘filling’ and most economical foods, and the taste of liberty—or luxury—which shifts the emphasis to the manner (of presenting, serving, eating etc.) and tends to use stylized forms to deny function” (6). I derive the title of this section from Bourdieu’s phrasing.

³¹ Perhaps because of the magnitude of this deferred responsibility, Jefferson trained a critical eye on habits and behaviors that he believed might impede the process of cultivating American taste. As evidence mounted of citizens’ tendencies towards ostentation and indulgence—the result of the years of economic expansion that followed the War of Independence—Jefferson registered, according to Drew McCoy, an increasing “concern with American manners, morals, and character, and hence with the fate of the republican experiment (95). Citing personal correspondence between Jefferson and then Secretary of State, James Madison, Miller confirms that Jefferson intuited a “proximate relevance” between these expensive tastes and the eradication of slavery: “Not only did a people vitiated by a fixation upon wealth lose their love of liberty; such a people, Jefferson believed, also lost their zeal to do justice to their fellow men” (36). In this statement, Miller encapsulates Jefferson’s ideas about the incompatibility between a “love of liberty” and a love of luxury. Miller fails to acknowledge, however, the extent to which Jefferson’s own love of luxury precluded his ability to “do justice” to his “fellow men.”

³² For an overview of the cultural resonance of the idea of luxury in the early republic, see “Republicanism Transformed” in Shi 74-99. For a discussion of the influence of this discourse of luxury on Jefferson’s thought, see Miller 31-37. See note 9 for a distillation of Miller’s argument.

³³ During the time that Jefferson and Hemings lived abroad, France adhered to the “Freedom Principle,” which held that any enslaved person who set foot on French soil should be, from then on, considered free. See Sue Peabody for additional historical context.

³⁴ Jacques Brissot, the recipient of this letter, was the founder of the French *Société*, as well as—significantly—the son of a restaurateur. See Robert Fanuzzi for an application of Brissot’s familiarity with fine dining as a lens through which to examine his account of his time in America.

Chapter Three

“A Matter of Taste”: Lydia Maria Child’s Recipe for Social Reform

A meteoric rise to fame, and to a lesser extent, fortune resulted from the publication of the first issue of Lydia Maria Child’s *Juvenile Miscellany*, in 1826. The popularity of the children’s magazine that Child conceived of and edited for the first eight years of its ten-year run capitalized on the literary acclaim of her first novel, *Hobomok, A Tale of Early Times* (1824), and erased the debts incurred by the commercial failure of her second, *The Rebels, or Boston Before the Revolution* (1825). As in these works, Child sought to depict “American scenes and American Characters,” thereby counteracting the “emphatically *English*” features that characterized much of the literature that circulated in the United States in the early nineteenth century (*Evenings* iii). So it followed that when Child began to consider the set of “American Characters” to profile in the *Miscellany*’s second issue, an obvious candidate soon emerged: that “first American,” Benjamin Franklin.¹

“Few individuals have been as useful to mankind as Benjamin Franklin,” Child’s profile begins, “and very few even in this happy land where the path to honorable distinction is ever open to talents of industry and integrity, have experienced a greater reverse of fortune” (18). Child thus expounds on Franklin’s life achievements, focusing throughout on his “industry,” “integrity,” and economic sense. Reminiscent of the way in which Jefferson instructed his grandson to “imitate Franklin,” Child urges her readers to model their lives after “this extraordinary man” (13). Her profile concludes with an admonishment to the upper class:

If the laugh of the gay and fashionable, should ever make industry and economy appear like contemptible virtues, let them remember that Benjamin Franklin, a poor, hard-working mechanic, became, by means of these very virtues, a philosopher, whose discoveries were useful and celebrated throughout Europe. If they grow weary of application, and despise frugality; let them think of a dirty, printer boy, eating his roll of dry bread, in the streets of Philadelphia, afterwards ambassador to the Court of France; welcomed to the most splendid of Parisian saloons; and his grey hairs crowned with a wreath of laurel, by the young and fair of that enthusiastic nation. (22-3)

In these lines, Child identifies many of the principles that will guide her own life and work: her emphasis on “industry” and “frugality” as the foundation of American virtue; her attention to the story of the “poor, hard-working mechanic” as an object lesson to the “gay and fashionable” demimonde; her belief in the value of both manual and intellectual labor; and finally, her confidence that even a “dirty printer boy,” nourished by American virtue and a “roll of dry bread,” might rise in station to a position of acclaim by foreign governments, and, by the end of his life, become anointed by his own “enthusiastic nation.”

The figure of Benjamin Franklin indeed looms large for Child, both as a weighty exemplar of her belief in frugal living, and with his writing, as a model for much of her own work’s content and tone. Child’s most significant contemporary biographer, Carolyn Karcher, notes how, in the passage above, Child “foreshadow[s] her appropriation of [Franklin’s] role” as a dispenser of economical advice, and how, in her retelling of Franklin’s life story, she subtly “adapts Franklin’s message to her own ends” (69). In Child’s version of the story of this American icon, Karcher explains, she “stress[es] his acquisition of knowledge, rather than wealth,” and “define[s] usefulness to humanity as his ultimate achievement” (70). In the 600 pages that follow, Karcher convincingly

demonstrates how Franklin functions as an embodied example of Child's own argument in favor of the benefits of industry, economy, and public virtue.

Even in her own time, Child was recognized as Franklin's closest successor. In 1829, William Lloyd Garrison, the abolitionist and social reformer, anointed Child the "first Woman in the Republic," having recognized how she had done "more to reform the manners of the age" and to "restore the simplicity of the good old days of our fathers," than any other writer, "male or female," since Benjamin Franklin (Qtd. in Goodman 202). The perception of Child as an inheritor of Franklin's virtuous legacy followed her throughout her life, even as she moved away from writing didactic fiction in favor of a career divided between political journalism and other literary pursuits. In remarks delivered at her funeral, on October 23rd, 1880, the famed orator and abolitionist, Wendell Phillips, praised Child for her efforts in her own life to refashion Franklin's "despicable virtue, 'prudence,'" into a more socially-oriented trait, and for the public example of her "economy, her painstaking industry, her interest and activity in reforms, and the scrupulous fidelity with which she cultivated every power" (*Letters* 265, 263).² In extolling Child's virtues, Phillips emphasizes the "economy" and "industry" that Child underscored in her biographical sketch of Franklin. In linking those qualities to "her interest and activity in reforms," Phillips demonstrates that he, himself, had absorbed Child's lesson about "usefulness to humanity" as the "ultimate achievement" of a person's life.

However, Phillips's remark about how Child worked to "cultivate" those qualities in herself has remained largely unexplored. Neither Phillips—nor Karcher, for that matter—investigate Child's focus on the process by which public virtue is formed. It is

my contention that Child, much like the Scottish philosophers—indeed, like Franklin himself—views the development of public virtue as the outcome of the cultivation of taste. In *Hobomok*, her earliest published work, the story of an Anglo-American woman who marries a Native American man after her Episcopalian lover is banished from her insular Puritan community, Child demonstrates her conviction that there exists a distinctly American sense of taste, as manifested in specific aspects of the New England table. These aspects, which reflect the Jeffersonian emphasis on republican simplicity, as well as her own endorsement of indigenous American foods, provide the foundation for the acquisition of public virtue. In Child's subsequent project, a series of didactic volumes for women and children, Child imbues her depiction of the American table with the additional values of industry and economy. It is these qualities, together, that Child presents as the basis for a national sense of taste.

Child's attention to the significant relation between public virtue and the everyday act of eating, as well her conviction about the interrelation between participation in that basic act and the development of a national sense of taste, informs the story that she tells about Franklin's transformation from a poor boy "eating his dry roll of bread," to Ambassador to France, "crowned with a wreath of laurel." Child's final depiction of Franklin, "enthusiastic[ally]" anointed by the "young and fair of that enthusiastic nation," reveals her belief in how this exemplar of national taste, could, through the model of his life and his values, unite and elevate American citizens in shared sympathies. By insisting upon the relationship between personal sympathy and national taste, Child charts a new course toward the social and political reforms that, she believed, would restore the nation to wholeness.

Indeed, the trajectory of Child's written works—from *Hobomok* to the *Juvenile Miscellany*; from her cooking manual, *The American Frugal Housewife* (1829) and its follow-up domestic advice book, *The Mother's Book* (1831), to her range of writings against slavery and prejudice; from the belles-lettristic *Letters from New-York* (1843) to *A Romance of the Republic* (1867), the book she considered the capstone of her literary career—documents the evolution of her conception of sympathetic taste. In *Hobomok*, Child explores the act of eating as a meaningful mode of sensory experience and works to establish a distinctly American sense of taste at the table, as well as in the culture at large. In the *American Frugal Housewife*, Child imbues her beliefs about the sense of taste with political significance and attempts to instill in women readers the importance of economy, not only in the home, but also in the nation. In the 1830s, as Child's involvement in the abolitionist movement grew, she refined her views about the strength of the relationship between personal taste and political opinion, and about the influence of that sense of taste on cultural norms. In the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, the abolitionist newspaper that she edited in 1842 and 1843, Child thus mounts a dual campaign, attempting to inspire an appreciation for both aesthetic taste and civic virtue in her readers. When Child edited and republished her columns from that paper in a single volume, *Letters from New-York*, she redoubled her efforts to encode social and political issues in the “garland of imagination and taste” (Qtd. in Karcher 273). In *A Romance of the Republic*, her final book-length endeavor, Child explicitly placed her faith in fiction, over and above political journalism, as the mode of writing that she believed would guide the nation through Reconstruction. By transferring the virtues—and sympathies—associated with American taste from everyday life to literature, Child proposed a model

for a new sense of taste for the growing nation, originating in the act of eating, but, registered, ultimately, in the heart and mind.

Hobomok: A Taste of Early Times

“Ah, there is nobody knows the troubles and distresses of a new settlement, but those who have tasted thereof,” sighs Mrs. Conant, the mother of Mary Conant, the heroine of *Hobomok, A Tale of Early Times* (44). In this comment, Mrs. Conant exemplifies Child’s initial conception of the sense of taste, inherited from Franklin, as both a specific register of sensory experience and a metaphorical model for one’s encounter with the world. In addition, the comment points to the pivotal role that food and eating play in the novel, as Child provides an account of the origins of America’s national cultural identity. As the narrator soon reveals, the difficulties “tasted” by the settlers included the physical sensation of hunger, a cultural aversion to unfamiliar foods, and the emotional distress evoked by the constant threat of violence from so-called “hostile” Indian tribes. Mrs. Conant’s remark appears in the context of a scene in which a group of settlers gather at the news of a thwarted Indian attack. United in their concern, the settlers share stories of the past trials they have endured. Each account, no more than several lines long, links the literal and figurative “taste” of life in early America. One man recalls being shot by an Indian arrow that, as luck would have it, “stuck fast in a bit of cheese rind in [his] jacket pocket” (44). A second woman relates how an Indian “shot [her husband] through and through, when he was digging for clams in the sands” at Plymouth (44). A third settler laments how her husband perished simply from starvation, lacking “food wherewithal to keep life in his body” (44). By relating these accounts in

immediate succession, Child implies, moreover, that the “troubles and distresses” “tasted” by each individual reflect a collective experience shared by the culture at large.

As the plot of *Hobomok* unfolds, Child continues to dramatize collective cultural experiences, as well as cultural differences, through the accounts of individual bodies and the foods that they consume. The novel’s principal narrator, an Englishman from the Isle of Wright, registers his first impressions of the Naumkeak settlement in terms of bodies and food.³ Upon his arrival, he immediately notes the physical—and cultural—contrasts that distinguish him from the men who “came down to the shore to meet” him (8). He recalls: “There were but one or two who seemed like Englishmen. The remainder, sickly and half starved, presented a pitiful contrast to the vigorous and wondering savages who stood among them” (8). In this portrayal of first contact, the narrator is astonished that the “vigorous and wondering” Indian “savages” evince the strength and vigor that he had always associated with “Englishmen.” The British colonists, on the other hand, “sickly and half starved,” embody the struggle they will endure in the process of adapting their own native culture to the New World. The relative strength of their bodies (or lack thereof) reflects the physical—and cultural—challenges they face as they work to establish a Puritan colony in Naumkeak.

It is not simply the adequacy of food supply, however, that distinguishes the British colonists from the native Americans, and from the newer arrivals from England. Child clearly depicts the significance of the function of taste in these encounters. In describing the breakfast that welcomes the narrator to Naumkeak—significantly, his first interaction with his American compatriots—Child highlights how his refined British palate separates him from the more established settlers as he is exposed to uniquely

American foodstuffs. The meal “consisted only of roasted pumpkin, a plentiful supply of clams, and coarse cakes made of pounded maize,” he recalls. “But unpalatable as it proved, even to me, it was cheerfully partaken by the noble inmates of that miserable hut” (9). Here, the narrator explicitly contrasts his own tastes, which prevent him from enjoying the “plentiful” breakfast, with the “cheerful[ness]” and pleasure experienced by the “noble inmates” of New England. In addition, by specifying the particular components of the meal—pumpkin, clams, and maize—Child enters the bounty and enjoyment of indigenous foodstuffs into American culinary and cultural history. It was not true that English colonists embraced native foods at that time, as Trudy Eden explains in *The Early American Table*. Historical accounts—accounts that Child most likely read—“all emphasize that not only did Anglo-Americans eat English foods but, on the whole, they ate much better than their social counterparts in England” (100).⁴ As an extreme example of the aversion to the foods newly available to them, Eden references an account by John Smith, recorded in 1608, of the Jamestown settlers refusing to eat “this savage trash” (3). Even with twenty years separating the establishment of Jamestown from the Naumkeak settlement—Child’s novel begins in 1629—Anglo-American eating habits had not yet shifted significantly. By featuring a description of a meal of native foodstuffs, Child contributes a vital culinary component to America’s national origin story. By emphasizing, moreover, how the colonists “cheerfully part[ook]” of these foods—in dramatic contrast to the narrator’s disgust—Child documents a crucial moment in the development of a distinctly American sense of taste.⁵

In Child’s view, it is significant that the taste for indigenous American foodstuffs must be deliberately acquired. Throughout the novel, Child reinforces this idea. When

Lady Arabella Johnson, a symbol of old world aristocracy to the residents of Naumkeak, as well as to Child's readers, arrives from England, Mary Conant sets out to provide her a fitting welcome. This welcome takes the form of a breakfast, not unlike the one that first greeted the narrator. Mary explains to Arabella, "I have honored you more than ever did any guests in America, for see mother's damask cloth is spread over our pine table" (97). She reveals concern that the rustic "pine table," as well as her first offering of food, may prove as unpalatable to Arabella as it once did to the novel's narrator.⁶ To her nineteenth-century readers, however, Child underscores the idea of simple taste and plain living as distinctly American cultural traits, just as pine underlies damask. And if Child's readers failed to perceive this message, Arabella's response accentuates the point. "I have come into the wilderness too," she explains to Mary, "and I must learn to eat hominy and milk, and forget the substantial plum puddings of England" (97). In her words, Arabella expresses a willingness to "learn" to appreciate the simple meal of "hominny and milk," thus adapting her palate—and her tastes—to American daily life.

The version of American taste that Arabella seeks to acquire, built upon the plain flavor of "hominny and milk" and the simple living symbolized by the "pine table," also incorporates a moral component. Similar to the way in which Jefferson presents a simple yet plentiful table as an expression of republican virtue, Child here imbues the preference for readily available American foods with moral as well as cultural significance. The always well-intentioned Arabella, when subsequently entreated to "taste some" venison, a luxurious dish prepared especially for her, declines the offer (97). "No, thank you," she explains, "I am going to try some of Mary's pumpkin and milk" (98). With examples such as these, Mark McWilliams asserts, Child establishes herself as a crucial voice in

constructing the “myth of republican simplicity” that emerged in the literary works of the early nineteenth century (365). In this instance, Mary’s father’s response to Arabella’s decision—“I trust hereafter nobody will speak disrespectfully of pumpkins, inasmuch as it hath pleased the lord to feed his people thereupon for many years”—reinforces McWilliams’s claim about the moral, as well as the social meaning that Child conveys through her scenes of food and eating (98). Here, Mr. Conant expresses his opinion that partaking of pumpkin, that abundant American ingredient, reflects a respect for “the lord” and his virtues. Child clearly endorses these values, implicit in her simple American taste.

Considered in the context of the eighteenth-century discourse of taste, Lady Arabella’s decision to acquire a taste for “pumpkin and milk” becomes particularly significant. Indeed, Child demonstrates through her discussion of food, and of other forms of culture as well, how the British settlers must deliberately engage in the cultivation of taste for their new surroundings in order to truly embrace their American identity. It is Mary, again, who models the ability to derive tasteful pleasure from the unfamiliar environs of Naumkeak. The narrator recalls how, at that first breakfast, Mary’s eyes “sparkled as brightly, and the rich tones of her voice were as merry, as they could have been when her little aerial foot danced along the marble saloon of her grandmother” (9). As she matures, Mary finds in her lover, Charles Brown, a “being who underst[ands] her feelings,” and with whom she can exult in the natural beauty of the American landscape (47). When Brown is banished from Naumkeak, however, Mary experiences the “loneliness of unreciprocated intellect” (91). She despairs at her Puritan brethren, who are “not open to the influence of nature,” and remain too caught up in “contests of opinion” to contemplate the “latent treasures of the mind or the rich sympathies of taste”

that she and Brown, together, could perceive (91). Child accentuates the loss of Mary's companion in the "rich sympathies of taste," as she "sob[s] herself" to sleep after burning her supper (77). Child thus documents Mary's inability to experience the sensory pleasures—and the natural beauty—of the New England landscape without her partner in the experience of American taste.

Child conveys her belief in the aspects of American taste that derive from the distinctive natural landscape in her description of how—and why—Mary turns for companionship to the Indian, Hobomok. In Hobomok, "whose language was brief, figurative, and poetic, and whose nature was unwarped by the artifices of civilized life," Mary recognizes a partner with whom she might once again share the "sympathies of taste" she could no longer experience with Brown (121). In fact, several critics have explored how each of Mary's lovers represents a similar blend of nature and culture, which distinguishes both men from their Puritan counterparts. Karcher cites the lines quoted above as evidence that Hobomok's "narratives are closer to the elegant literature Mary learned to value so highly in England than anything Puritan Naumkeak [could] boast" (28). Karcher reprises this argument in her introduction to the modern edition of the novel, identifying a "kinship" between the "native artistry" Hobomok exhibits when explaining to Mary how to design a wampum belt and the practiced craft exhibited by the "artists who produced the paintings in her grandfather's mansion" (xxix). Karcher's analysis concludes: "It is because Hobomok feeds her craving for poetry and beauty that Mary prefers him to her fellow settlers" (xxix).

Hobomok not only "feeds" Mary's "craving" for poetry and beauty," however. He also guides Mary towards a fledgling sense of American taste. The language that Child

employs in the wampum belt scene, for instance, reveals how Hobomok teaches Mary to see the beauty of nature through an aesthetic lens. “You see that shell, the color of the sky when the sun goes down?” he asks Mary. “Put him in the big moose there,” he then instructs, “pointing to the middle of the belt” (86). Hobomok describes each shell as an aesthetic object, but in terms of the colors and forms of nature, not art. One is “like the rainbow,” another “like the heaped snow” (86). By the end of her lesson, Mary has learned to perceive the shells according to Hobomok’s natural aesthetic. The “native elegance of mind” and “native fervor of imagination” that had allowed Mary, as a child, to exult in the pleasures of song and dance in the early days of English settlement is here refined, under the influence of Hobomok, into a more fully cultivated form (35).

Child emphasizes the primacy of natural experience as the foundation of the development of American taste. To expand upon the earlier lesson of the wampum belt, in which Mary learned to appreciate native American art objects according to native American aesthetic standards, Mary is led, while accompanying Hobomok on a hunt, to see the “glittering beauty” of nature itself through the prism of Hobomok’s sense of taste (88). With Hobomok “by her side,” Mary observes:

The mellow light of the moon and star looked down upon the woods, and the trees danced to the shrill music of the winds, their light was reflected by ten thousand undulating motions, in all the rich varieties of frost work. It seemed as if the sylphs and the fairies, with which imagination of old, peopled the mountains and the stream, had all assembled to lay their diamond offerings on the great altar of nature. (88)

In her reading of this scene, Karcher links Mary’s feelings towards her two lovers by arguing that the hunt with Hobomok “arouses in [Mary] the same mixture of aesthetic, sensual, and spiritual feelings that she had experienced dancing with Brown” (29). It is

certainly true that these “diamond offerings on the great altar of nature” parallel the “mental riches” of Brown’s “shrine of genius,” and that these “ten thousand undulating motions” mirror the “intoxicating witchery of light and motion” that she recalls of her childhood dance with Brown (78). But while the “mellow light” of the moon, the “danc[ing]” motion of the trees, and the “shrill music of the winds,” experienced with Hobomok evoke earlier sensory pleasures, Child suggests that Mary’s understanding and appreciation of those sensations develops along with her more nuanced sense of taste. Mary’s pleasure in aesthetic beauty is no longer limited to the perception of an object or art or craft, such as the wampum belt. Her “native fervor of imagination” is now sated through an expanded range of sensory experience and aesthetic pleasure, stemming from the contemplation and appreciation of nature.

As Mary considers a marriage to Hobomok, she distances herself more fully from the vestiges of British culture—and taste—that she would, by necessity, relinquish. She clutches a “miniature” of Brown to her chest as she looks “out on the scenes she was so soon to leave” (123). She contemplates how Brown himself, who “could once boast so much dignified beauty,” had been reduced to an art object devoid of meaning (123). In the absence of Brown’s refined British taste, she cannot partake of the “civilized” aspects of America that she first identified as absent from Hobomok’s “unwarped nature.” Her desire “see England again—again tread on her classic ground, and gaze on her antique grandeur and cultivated beauty” also recedes without Brown to share in its pleasures (73). To Mary, the choice is clear: “If she went to England, those for whom she most wished to return, were dead. If she remained in America, what communion would she have with those around her?” (121). Without the possibility of intellectual or aesthetic

“communion,” Mary sees no alternative but to marry Hobomok. By framing her decision as a choice between England and America, as well as between men, Child underscores how each represents a distinct cultural identity, between which Mary must also choose. In deciding to marry Hobomok, Mary continues the course of development of her own American sense of taste.

Many critics interpret Mary’s failure to fully accept Hobomok as her husband as evidence of Child’s inability to envision a cultural identity for America that is composed equally of Anglo-American and Indian influences. Certainly, the narrator’s report that “kind as Hobomok was, and rich as [Mary] found his uncultivated mind in native imagination, still the contrast between him and her departed lover, would often be remembered with sufficient bitterness,” suggests that Mary is unable to calibrate her personal tastes and preferences with those of the Indian society she has attempted to join (135). Considered in the context of the observation, made by a friend, that Hobomok “seemed almost like an Englishman,” the “bitterness” with which Mary continues to view the “contrast” between Brown and Hobomok confirms that Hobomok can never be truly considered a part of Mary’s native culture (137). Nevertheless, the path suggested by Mary’s marriage to Hobomok, and the subsequent birth of their son, points to the formation a new American cultural identity—indeed, the formation of a new American sense of taste—even if it will more strongly reflect Anglo-American than Indian features.

In this regard, the final scene is most significant for the way in which Child depicts the acquisition and cultivation of this sense of taste. When Brown returns to Naumkeak in search Mary, after it is revealed that he has not perished at sea as previously believed, Hobomok informs him of his own marriage to Mary in his

characteristically poetic language: “The handsome English bird hath for three years lain in my bosom; and her milk hath nourished the son of Hobomok” (139). Thus the “son of Hobomok,” an embodiment of the literal consummation of Anglo- and Native American cultures, is “nourished” by Mary’s “milk” to develop appropriately (white) American taste. The fact that the child is later sent away to boarding school in Cambridge, and then sent to England to continue his studies, where his Indian identity is all but lost, presents an enigma to scholars seeking to discern Child’s vision for the future of American civilization. Hobomok’s final vision of his son, however, a scene of “Mary feeding her Indian boy from his little wooden bowl,” which he observes from a hidden vantage point before he disappears into the wilderness, offers an unequivocal message: the act of eating would play a pivotal role in the development and cultivation of American taste (141). This sense of taste would develop through subsequent generations of American citizens of all cultural backgrounds and racial identities to reflect its Anglo-American rather than Native American antecedents. Child herself would reexamine the theme of interracial marriage throughout her long literary career, and she would refine her ideas about how to best characterize—and to instill—the principles of a shared cultural identity in all Americans. In *Hobomok*, however, Child presents her first evidence of an ideology that links food and eating to the development and cultivation of American taste.

“Willie Wharton”: From Natural “Attractions” to American Taste

Child further develops her ideas about the formation of an American sense of taste at the intersection of two cultures—her own nineteenth-century American culture and the Native American culture increasingly under threat—in “Willie Wharton,” a short

story that appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1863. For the most part, the plot of “Willie Wharton” follows a traditional trajectory of captivity and restoration: the eponymous protagonist, lost in the woods as a child, is carried away by Indians; twenty years later, he returns to his family—with his Indian wife, A-lee-lah. Child’s story becomes an important exploration of the mores of the predominantly white American culture of her time as she depicts the Wharton family’s embrace of A-lee-lah, and their thoughtful (if fundamentally misguided) attempts at instruction and guidance. Child reveals her ideological views about the acquisition of American taste as she demonstrates both how readily A-lee-lah adjusts her natural affinities in order to conform to white American standards of taste, and how certain American citizens, bound by their cultural and racial prejudices, stubbornly resist accepting A-lee-lah’s full membership in their society.

Child locates this story about the ideological dilemmas inherent in the development of a national sense of taste in “one of our Western States,” as opposed to the New England setting of *Hobomok*, and chooses a timeframe that is contemporaneous with her writing (*Hobomok* 253). Indicating an awareness of the country’s rapid cultural change, the narrator of “Willie Wharton” notes how the “landscape had greatly changed” during the two decades that Willie had been away from white American civilization (*Hobomok* 271). In particular, those first “cabins in the wilderness” had become “kitchens appended to larger and more commodious dwellings” (*Hobomok* 271). While Child presents a historically accurate observation—outgrown homes were often repurposed as external kitchens instead of being demolished—her particular focus on this domestic transformation as an indicator of cultural change emphasizes the significance of the home.⁷ Child implicitly understands the extent to which the kitchen, and the food

prepared therein, function as its literal and figurative foundation. In fact, Child describes Willie's absence from his family in terms of his absence from the table. During his time away, the narrator reports that "out of the family [Willie] was nearly forgotten," while in the Wharton household, "his chair retained its place at the table" (*Hobomok* 271). In sequence, Child establishes the frontier, the home, and the table, as the crucial sites for Willie's reacculturation into white American culture.

Child emphasizes the cultural significance of the family table, and the particular array of foods prepared, as she portrays Willie's return to his native civilization on Thanksgiving Day. The narrator relates how "wild turkeys were prepared for roasting, and the kitchen was redolent of pies and plum-pudding," while the entire extended family, "Father, Emma, Uncle George, Aunt Mary, Bessie and her young Squire, Charles's wife, baby, and all," were there to welcome Willie to his familial—and cultural—home (*Hobomok* 275). Although it was not until six months after the publication of this story that Thanksgiving Day was declared a national holiday, Child's readers would have understood the cultural implications of this festive scene. By this time in American history, indigenous foods, such as wild turkey, plum-pudding, and pumpkin pie had become linked to the story of America's origins. Thus nineteenth-century readers would have readily interpreted the bounty of the Wharton family table as symbolizing the nation as a cultural whole.⁸

It was one of Child's contemporaries, an occasional contributor to the *Juvenile Miscellany*, Sarah Josepha Hale, who spearheaded the nearly twenty-year campaign to recognize Thanksgiving as a national holiday. Hale asserted, in *Godey's Lady's Book*, in 1852, that the observation of Thanksgiving would unite "our great nation, by its states

and families from the St. John to the Rio Grande, from the Atlantic to the Pacific” (Qtd. in Kaplan 194). In her analysis of these efforts, Amy Kaplan discusses how Hale demonstrated to nineteenth-century women how actions and events that took place in the home could, in fact, have national consequences.⁹ Kaplan emphasizes Hale’s important role in uniting “individual families across regions and bring[ing] them together in an imagined collective space,” thus endowing “each individual family gathering with national meaning” (194). Nevertheless, as Kaplan points out, Hale created this “common history by nationalizing a regional myth of origins and imposing it on the territories most recently wrested from Indians and Mexicans” (194).

Although as Kaplan reveals, Hale’s version of the Thanksgiving story “makes no mention of Indians,” Child creates a central Indian presence in her holiday narrative in “Willie Wharton” (194). For example, shortly after Willie is welcomed back into his home and into his family’s culture at the Thanksgiving table, he introduces his family to his Indian wife, A-lee-lah. His parents—and Child’s readers—recognize that Willie and A-lee-lah had unknowingly played together as children. Then, they had been described as “unconscious representatives of races widely separated in moral and intellectual culture, but children of the same Heavenly Father, and equally subject to the attractions of great Mother Nature” (*Hobomok* 260). In this way, Child explains the “attractions” that Willie and A-lee-lah will later feel for each other, as husband and wife, as well as their shared instinctual basis that will allow both to assimilate, as adults, into the national culture of America.

Child accentuates the cultural significance of food and eating as she describes how the Wharton family “guide[s]” the newly arrived couple “into increasing conformity

with civilized habits” (*Hobomok* 285). As in the scene of Mary Conant feeding the “son of Hobomok,” Child again emphasizes the experience of eating, as much as the particular foods consumed, as important to the process of acculturation. Significantly, at the Thanksgiving dinner, Willie’s first meal as part of his reunited family, his brother, Charles, takes “every precaution to have his brother appear as little as possible like a savage,” including supervising the preparation of the food itself: “Without mentioning that [Willie] would like raw meat better than all their dainties, [Charles] went to the kitchen to superintend the cooking of some Indian succotash, and buffalo-steak *very* slightly broiled” (*Hobomok* 277). This subtle shift towards the American style of preparing meat, instead of indulging the assumed Indian preference for serving meat raw, indicates the Wharton family’s approach to gradually exposing Willie and A-lee-lah to more culturally sanctioned principles of manners, dress, and aesthetic taste.

In Child’s characterizations, members of the Wharton family act on the conviction that both Willie and A-lee-lah are capable of internalizing the appropriate standards of an American sense of taste. As they gently acclimate Willie and A-lee-lah to the family’s model of manners, dress, and taste, Willie demonstrates immediate acuity. The narrator describes how Willie regains his use of the English language “with a rapidity that might have seemed miraculous, were it not a well-known fact that one’s native tongue forgotten is always easily restored” (*Hobomok* 277). The Whartons devote extra attention to A-lee-lah, who has much more to learn, but they employ the same method as with Willie. Just as “everything was done to attract William to [the American] mode of life, but still no remark was made when he gave a preference to Indian customs,” so, too, with regard to A-lee-lah, the family “agree[s] not to manifest any distaste for Indian fashions”

(*Hobomok* 280, 282). The narrator observes that both “William and A-lee-lah ha[ve] Indian ideas of natural politeness,” as well as instinctual “affections” shared with their white compatriots. These advantages are viewed as the basis for their ability to be “guided into increasing conformity” with the conventions of the local society.

Perhaps in order to disarm any bias anticipated in her readers, Child emphasizes the high level of refinement that A-lee-lah attains over the course of her life with the Wharton family. The narrator reveals that A-lee-lah achieves a higher level of aesthetic discernment than her husband. While Willie learns to “work industriously on his farm,” he never loses “his predilection for hunting” (*Hobomok* 286-7). A-lee-lah, on the other hand, becomes “almost as skillful at her needle as she [once] was weaving baskets and wampum” (*Hobomok* 287). In addition, “her taste for music improved,” and “her taste in dress changed also” (*Hobomok* 287). In her conclusion, which notes that “nature guided [A-lee-lah’s] taste correctly,” Child recalls her earlier accounts of Hobomok’s “natural eloquence” and “native manners” (*Hobomok* 287). In this way, she conveys to her readers her belief in the natural aptitudes and instinctual affinities of Native Americans for white American culture—aptitudes and affinities that, according to the message of “Willie Wharton,” need only to be cultivated and refined.

Again in a manner that recalls *Hobomok*, Child concludes “Willie Wharton” with a short account of the child of Willie and A-lee-lah. However, Child’s description of the girl, Jenny, offers a subtle contrast to her portrayal of the son of Hobomok and Mary Conant. The son of Hobomok, whose “Indian appellation” is “silently omitted” only “by degrees,” is sent away to England; America cannot yet embrace his him for the fusion of cultures that he represents (*Hobomok* 150). Jenny, on the other hand, whose name does

not disclose her biracial background, flourishes in America. The narrator relates that she is “universally admitted to be the prettiest and brightest child in the village” (*Hobomok* 287). Mr. Wharton reports that “her busy little mind makes him think of his Willie, at her age,” and her Uncle Charles “says he has no fault to find with her, for she has her mother’s beautiful eyes and wears her hair ‘like folks’” (*Hobomok* 287). In this context, these comments suggest that Jenny’s cultivated intellect derives from Willie, as part of her white American inheritance. And with the mention that she “has her mother’s beautiful eyes,” she appears to transform her natural, Indian beauty so as to adhere to white American standards of aesthetic taste. Even Uncle Charles, who initially resisted welcoming A-lee-lah into the Wharton family, can find “no fault” with Jenny as an exemplar of a national sense of taste.

With the cultural (and gender) hierarchy encoded in this description of Jenny, however, it is difficult not to view the overall message of “Willie Wharton” in terms of the “imperial process of civilizing” that Kaplan identifies in her essay on Hale (184).¹⁰ It is worth considering, nevertheless, that in contrast to Hale’s conception of the American home, which, according to Kaplan, “makes race central to woman’s sphere not only by excluding nonwhites from domestic nationalism but also by seeing the capacity for domesticity as an innate, defining characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race,” Child’s story of Willie and A-lee-lah Wharton suggests a more inclusive conception of the nation (198). Still, it remains difficult to overlook Child’s inclination to subsume Indian cultural influences within a then-dominant Anglo-American national identity. How, then, might Child’s evident belief in the superiority of white American culture be reconciled with her sensitivity to the social inequality faced by cultural and ethnic groups? What I will

suggest, here, is not that we disregard these significant contradictions. In fact, important work has been done to unravel this conflict.¹¹ Contributing to this discourse, I propose an interpretation of “Willie Wharton” based on the fact that Child was writing primarily for a white audience—an audience not necessarily willing to admit Native Americans into the national culture it had worked so hard to create. Considered in this way, Child’s lengthy descriptions of the Whartons’ extended family, friends, and neighbors’ difficulty in accepting A-lee-lah become a critique of the negative effects of prejudice on that era’s sense of taste. By incorporating these negative responses into her narrative, Child suggests that a sense of taste is best instilled in American citizens from within. In this way, Child addresses the damaging social pressures that interfere with the exercise of individual taste.

In fact, the “moral and intellectual culture” that Child establishes, in the story’s opening lines, as the defining feature of white civilization, is challenged by the return of Willie Wharton and his wife to his family. First recall that Willie and A-lee-lah are identified, as children, as “representatives of races widely separated by moral and intellectual culture.” Then consider how the “more enlightened portion of the community” responds in a positive manner to Willie and A-lee-lah, while others who are “not distinguished either for moral or intellectual culture”—the identical phrase first used to distinguish Anglo from Indian— “sneer” at the Wharton family’s decision to embrace the couple. Child contrasts these “undistinguished” citizens with Willie’s parents, who “had been so long in the habit of regulating their actions by their own principles” that they make the more culturally tolerant choice in welcoming A-lee-lah into their home and family (*Hobomok* 284). By adopting the language of self-regulation—in fact, the same

language employed by Benjamin Franklin in his discussion of the transformation of appetite into taste—Child suggests that the sense of taste should serve as the primary model for guiding each American citizen in his or her behavior, values, and judgments.

In fact, “Willie Wharton” offers a direct indictment of standards of taste and behavior that are adopted without regard to inner principles. For example, shortly after Willie’s return, his cousin, Bessie, remarks to her father: “I feel as if I ought to invite William and his wife to dine with us, but if any of my husband’s family should come in, I should feel *so* mortified to have them see a woman with a blanket over her shoulders sitting at my table!” (*Hobomok* 283). Although Bessie “feel[s]” that she should welcome Willie back to society with an invitation to a family dinner, she cannot reconcile her instinctual kindness with her concern for other’s judgments of her actions. “Besides,” Bessie concludes, “they like raw meat, and that is dreadful!” (*Hobomok* 283). From this account, it is difficult to decide whether Bessie finds Willie and A-lee-lah’s taste for “raw meat,” or rather, A-lee-lah’s taste for Indian fashion, to be more repugnant.

In either case, it is Bessie’s behavior that is cast as being worthy of further consideration. Her father, offering a “philosophical way of viewing the subject,” suggests that the issue, for Bessie, is both literally and figuratively a matter of taste (*Hobomok* 283). “Certainly it is not pleasant,” he explains, “but I once dined in Boston, at a house of high civilization, where the odor of venison and of Stilton cheese produced much more internal disturbance than I have ever experienced from any of their Indian messes” (*Hobomok* 283). This example of a meal at a “house of high civilization” that nonetheless smelled worse—and “produced much more internal disturbance”—than “any of their Indian messes” exposes the difference between a thoughtless adherence to external

standards, as opposed to the cultivation of taste from within. The father's "philosophical way of viewing the subject" reveals to his daughter, and to Child's readers, the deeper significance to be found in gustatory taste. While a shared sense of taste, either gustatory or aesthetic, can unite a culture—or, as Hale observed, even unite a nation—this shared taste retains its value only when it derives from inner principles, principles that are subsequently cultivated and refined.

The Frugal Housewife: Cultivating Taste in the Home and for the Republic

Child presents her own "philosophical" view of the subject of taste, and its relation to the formation of a distinctive national identity, most explicitly in *The Frugal Housewife*, released in 1829 to immediate and widespread acclaim. Renamed *The American Frugal Housewife* in 1832, in anticipation of its first printing abroad, Child's domestic manual remained the most popular book of its kind throughout the 1830s.¹² In her 1964 biography of Child, Helene Baer relates that the book "was read in fashionable boudoirs, in farm kitchens, and in the tradesman's cottage; and any country girl who came to town to buy a length of silk for her wedding gown was likely to bring back the *Housewife* as well" (55). The 1841 publication of Catherine Ward Beecher's *Treatise on Domestic Economy* provided the first serious competition for Child's volume. Sales of Beecher's *Treatise* began to outpace the *Housewife* in the mid-1840s, but only after the *Housewife* had gone through twenty-eight printings. Even as late as the 1880s, many women, including the activist Caroline Healey Dall, continued to extol Child's book. "Modern cooking schools and modern cookery books invariably cater to the tastes of those who live in luxury," Dall explained, while the *Frugal Housewife* "showed people

how to make broth instead of *bouillon*, brown bread instead of ‘angel’s food,’” and “simple inexpensive desserts” instead of “*meringues* or *soufflés*” (Qtd. in Karcher 131). The terms of Dall’s juxtaposition of “the tastes of those who live in luxury” and the actual recipes of the poor illustrates how, even in the Gilded Age, the notion of taste retained its dual connotations. Dall describes the “tastes” of the rich in the context of a lifestyle of luxury, while she describes the equivalent tastes of the poor in exclusively gustatory terms.

Dall’s comment also points to an awareness of Child’s intended audience: those who, by choice or by necessity, adhere to economy in their eating habits. Indeed, Child composed *The Frugal Housewife* with this audience in mind. As she would explain three years later, in the preface to *The Mother’s Book* (1831), her follow-up, of sorts, to the *Housewife*, among the “great variety of cookery books already in the market... I did not know of one suited to the wants of the middling class in our own country” (vii). While, admittedly, at that point in her career, Child was skilled at making a pitch to her target readership, she was also astute in this assertion. The leading “cookery book” at the time, Frances Parkes’s *Domestic Duties; Or, Instructions to Young Married Ladies on the Management of their Households and the Regulations of their Conduct in the Various Relations and Duties of Married Life* (1825), seemed, to Child, as she wrote in an 1828 review, to “presuppose great wealth, high station, and fashionable habits” (Qtd. in Karcher 128). Child noted that the ‘whole tone’ of the advice book, written by a British woman, reflected “wealthy, aristocratic England” (Qtd. in Karcher 128). “We should indeed tremble for the twenty four *Disunited States* of this republic, if we thought such books would become necessary here,” she concludes (Qtd. in Karcher 128). In this

statement, Child expands the practical perspective of *The Mother's Book* by imbuing her observations with political significance. Whether or not Child intended by her choice of phrase to evoke Jefferson's concern, as expressed in the *Notes*, about trembling for his country at the fear of a future still dependent on slavery, Child asserts her awareness—and adherence—to the belief that indulgence in a taste for luxury poses potential danger to the “*Disunited States*” as a national political, as well as cultural, whole.

Because her conception of taste incorporates specific gustatory preferences, as well as more abstract cultural and political values, Child posited a direct relation between choice recipes for distinctly American foods, and the formula for a national cultural identity. In regard to the absence of cookbooks “suited to” her “own country,” Child was accurate in her alarm. The earliest American imprint of a cookbook appeared only in 1742, a version of Eliza Smith's *Compleat Housewife*, which was first published in London in 1727. The first authentic American cookbook was printed a decade after Independence, in 1796.¹³ Written and compiled by Amelia Simmons, a self-proclaimed “American orphan,” this volume, as Glynis Ridley observes, was “the stuff of sentimental literature: the vulnerable female child cast upon the good offices of strangers rises to become a pillar of the community and a credit to the charity of those who cared for her” (115). According to Ridley's reading of the cookbook's preface, Simmons' decision to emphasize her orphan status reflected a personal need to become “indispensable in everyone's home, whereas she was previously indispensable in none” (115). Even in this eminently practical work, Simmons' attempt to coax a sympathetic response from her readers emerges along with the aroma of delicious flavors from food.

In compiling her own cookery book, Child strives for another form of reader sympathy as she introduces herself, her values, and her tastes, into her fellow citizens' homes. In the *Frugal Housewife*, Child seeks to create a community of readers who share her values and tastes and thus can together experience the "rich sympathies" of daily life in the early republic. In this way, Child's authorship of *The Frugal Housewife* supplements the views expressed in *Hobomok*, in which taste is considered both a specific mode of sensory experience and a model for the process of acculturation. In *The Frugal Housewife*, Child anticipates the "philosophical way of viewing the subject" presented in "Willie Wharton," in which the taste for food, and aesthetic forms of culture, are linked to a set of distinctly American values and ideals. Child dedicates her volume "To those who are not ashamed of economy," and explains in the introduction that she has deliberately "written for the poor" (*Collected Works* 21). She then directs "those who can afford to be epicures" to consult instead Eliza Leslie's *Seventy-five Receipts for Pastry, Cakes and Sweetmeats* (1828) (*CW* 20). Distinguishing her recipes from Leslie's *Receipts*, Child explains, "I have attempted to teach how money can be *saved*, not how it can be *enjoyed*" (*CW* 11). In this way, Child constructs a community of readers, united in their prudence and by financial circumstance, in order to provide instruction about her particular version of American culinary, cultural, and political taste.

Child leaves no doubt as to the broader implications of the exercise of economical taste for her readership. In the introduction, she asserts that "living beyond [one's] income" is "wrong—morally wrong, so far as the individual is concerned; and injurious beyond calculation to the interest of our country" (*CW* 19). In "Hints to Persons of Moderate Fortune," a section appended to later editions of the book, Child redoubles her

efforts to instill the tenets of economical taste in as wide a sample of American citizens as possible. There, she emphatically decries extravagance as the “prevailing evil of the present day,” identifying the injurious effects of an individual’s inability to resist the temptation of luxury on the health and vitality of the nation. “A republic without industry, economy, and integrity, is Samson shorn of his locks,” she exclaims, “A luxurious and idle *republic!* Look at the phrase!—The words were never made to be married together; every body sees it would be death to one of them” (*CW* 111).¹⁴ Thus, while Child dedicates her volume to those “not ashamed of economy,” she argues that every citizen, regardless of financial circumstance, has the responsibility to rein in luxurious tastes in order to ensure the health and integrity of the nation.

Thus, in her recipes, Child offers a practical model as well to those readers not compelled by necessity to utilize her economical taste, so that they too might learn to cultivate a taste for frugal living. Consider advice offered by Child, under the heading of “Choice of Meat”:

The richest, tenderest, and most delicate piece of beef for roasting, or for steak, is the rump and the last cut of the sirloin. It is peculiarly appropriate for an invalid, as it is lighter food than any other beef.

But if economy be consulted instead of luxury, the round will be bought in preference to the rump. It is heartier food, and, of course, less can be eaten; and it is cheaper in price. (*CW* 59)

Here, Child distinguishes between the tastes of “luxury” and “economy,” and anticipates Pierre Bourdieu by nearly 150 years. Those who develop an appreciation for economy in gratifying their palate, Child suggests, will derive satisfaction—and even pleasure—from “heartier food” and good value. In keeping with the contrast she draws between her recipes and Eliza Leslie’s, Child does not indulge the taste of luxury. She admits that the

rump of the steak is, in fact, the “richest, tenderest, and most delicate” cut. However, by recommending this cut of meat “peculiarly” for “an invalid,” Child steers her readers away from luxury, and instead reinforces the development of a personal own sense of taste.

Through the recipes and commentary that she offers, Child is clear about her conviction that the exercise of virtuous taste is distinctly American in economy and flavor. While recipes for roast beef and green peas, British culinary inheritances, are comprised by only instructions, Child inserts qualitative notes at times, as when discussing tomatoes. This indigenous North American food, Child reports, is “a delicious vegetable” (*CW* 47). Similarly, she commends the versatility of Hasty Pudding, advising her readers that it can be cooked with “Indian meal or rye,” and seasoned with molasses, each a distinctively American product (*CW* 78). In the section “Extracts from the *English Frugal Housewife*,” appended to later editions of the book, Child remarks, “It was the intention of the author of the *American Frugal Housewife*, to have given an Appendix from the *English Frugal Housewife*; but upon examination, she found the book so little fitted to the wants of this country, that she has been able to extract but little” (*CW* 134). Instead, she concludes with a final section, “To Carve a Turkey,” which she highlights, in large type, as “Written for the *American Frugal Housewife*” (*CW* 136). Just as she purposefully includes “American scenes and American Characters” in the *Juvenile Miscellany*, Child fills the *Housewife* with recipes designed for a distinctly American sense of taste.¹⁵

Child also emphasizes that one’s individual sense of taste—for American food and for American culture—must be guided by internal standards. When preparing

“Fricasseed Chicken, Brown,” for instance, Child recommends preparing the gravy by adding “sweet herbs (marjoram or sage) according to your taste” (*CW* 67). When preparing the roasting sauce, Child offers several options: “Some, who love onions, slice two or three, and brown them with the chicken. Some slice half a lemon, and stew with the chicken. Some add tomatoes catsup” (*CW* 67). When describing how to best season and sweeten a pie, Child again turns the responsibility over to her readers: “There is no way to judge but by your own taste” (*CW* 83). These instructions, which, on the surface, appear to convey purely practical advice, are nonetheless indicative of Child’s particular conception of taste. A statement in the section on “Philosophy and Consistency,” another appendix to her volume, reinforces Child’s personal view. Child writes, “Examine, compare, choose, reject; but stand to your own judgment” (*CW* 115). The importance of determining flavors—and actions—according to one’s “own judgment” is a fundamental principle of Child’s sense of taste.

Child reasserts her primary belief in the necessity of determining taste according to internal, individual standards, and later encodes this exact principle in the story of “Willie Wharton.” She demonstrates how certain foods considered luxurious do not in fact taste as good, or provide as much satisfaction, as other, less refined dishes. She points out that “many people buy the upper part of the spare-rib of pork, thinking it the most genteel; but the lower part of the spare-rib toward the neck is much more sweet and juicy, and there is more meat in proportion to the bone” (*CW* 59). As a rule, Child advises her readers to place their trust in their own assessment of taste. Again, when Child explains that a meal of pig’s head “is despised because it is cheap; but when well cooked it is delicious,” she argues in favor of an independent sensibility, free from reliance on

popular, but misguided assumptions (*CW* 60). In an additional instance, Child describes how pigs' tongues are often dismissed as unpalatable, but when “sold for rein-deer's tongues,” they are “under that name, considered a wonderful luxury” (*CW* 56). Child exhorts the readers of her cookbook to eschew popular opinion and instead make judgments based on individual taste.

Notably, Child does not ignore the influence of a taste for luxury. If the taste of “rich cooking” can be obtained with economy and ease, then Child eagerly disseminates these recipes to the American public. In her instructions for curing ham to make bacon, she reflects, “Some very experienced epicures and cooks, think the old-fashioned way of preparing bacon is troublesome and useless. They say that legs of pork placed upright in pickle, for four or five weeks, are just as nice as those rubbed with so much care” (*CW* 55). She explains, “Any one can prepare bacon, or dried beef, very easily, in a common oven, according to the above directions,” and for this reason, this recipe is a worthy example of tasteful food (*CW* 55). For reasons of efficiency and taste, Child includes this recipe as a worthy example of the development of the American culinary tradition. Child enriches her perspective with a focus on the choice and preparation of food not simply as a marker of economy or industry, but also as an expression of each individual’s carefully calibrated sense of taste.

An examination of the critical responses of reviewers to *The Frugal Housewife* reveal the extent to which Child’s work challenged existing notions of early nineteenth-century taste. Nathaniel Willis assailed Child’s book for its “thorough-going, unhesitating, cordial freedom from taste” (Qtd. in Karcher 134). A member of Boston’s literary elite, and a former suitor of Child, Willis found fault in Child’s language, as well

as in her taste. He writes, “No word is used where there was a plainer or ruder one to be had,” and no “attempt is made to... qualify expressions to which a delicate ear is unused” (Qtd. in Karcher, 134). The recipes themselves, he argued, were written in a way “at which a palate of tolerable nicety would revolt” (Qtd. in Karcher 135). From Wills’ assessment, it is difficult to determine whether his intellectual “palate” or his palate for food experienced more disgust. In either case, Child’s attempt to reform the tastes of her “middling” readers offended his own decidedly upper-class taste.

Sarah Josepha Hale, who, in addition to editing *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, would later go on to write her own best-selling cookery book, was more diplomatic in her critique of the *Frugal Housewife*. Hale observed, simply, that “there is not sufficient system in the arrangement of its items” (Qtd. in Karcher 133). Whether or not the disorganized format of the book reflected Child’s “harried frame of mind during the period of its composition,” as Karcher claims, or whether it indicates, as Hildegard Hoeller argues, a radical “democracy” of counterpointed “ideas,” Child’s self-described “patchwork” demands of her readers that they develop their own personal strategies in order to make the most efficient use of the volume, much in the same way that she counsels her readers to develop their own standards of economical, American taste (100).

Considered in this way, the opening lines of the introduction, “The true economy of housekeeping is simply the art of gathering up all the fragments so that nothing is lost,” invite additional interpretation (*CW* 17). Interestingly, Child follows this sentence with her own explication: “I mean fragments of *time*, as well as *materials*” (*CW* 17). With the example of her own close reading, Child implies that another aim of *The Frugal Housewife*, in addition to the inculcating of taste, is to instill in her readers an ability to

read and interpret her “patchwork” book (*CW* 17). Although in *The Mother’s Book* she would devote considerably more attention to the cultivation of literary taste and methods of interpretation, Child here initiates a shift in responsibility from writer to reader, not simply for the purposes of preparing tasteful food for her family, but also for directing the moral course of the nation.¹⁶

An Appeal to American Readers’ Tastes

In the *Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called the Africans* (1833), Child invests the sense of taste that she had worked to establish in *The Frugal Housewife* and *The Mother’s Book* with a more serious moral import. She puts her trust in her readers’ judgment—as influenced by their personal taste—in order to respond appropriately to the issue of slavery. Child begins her *Appeal* by entreating the reader:

READER, I beseech you not to throw down this volume as soon as you have glanced at the title. Read it, if your prejudices will allow, for the very truth's sake:— If I have the most trifling claims upon your good will, for an hour's amusement to yourself, or benefit to your children, read it for *my* sake: — Read it, if it be merely to find fresh occasion to sneer at the vulgarity of the cause: — Read it, from sheer curiosity to see what a woman (who had much better attend to her household concerns) will say upon such a subject:— Read it, on *any* terms, and my purpose will be gained.

Child offers a variety of reasons for why one might choose to read her book: “for truth’s sake,” “for an hour’s amusement,” to “benefit [the reader’s] children,” to benefit the author, to “sneer at the vulgarity of the cause,” or simply, to satisfy “sheer curiosity.” By “beseech[ing] her readers to “read [the *Appeal*], on *any* terms,” even those readers who might consider it “vulgar,” Child shows her confidence in the virtuous American taste that she had worked so hard to instill in her fellow citizens. She places her faith in her

readers' abilities to "stand by [their] own judgment," while believing that after reading the *Appeal*, their tastes will guide them correctly to the truth.

Unlike the story Child tells in "Willie Wharton," however, in which the reader must discern Child's message by interpretation; and unlike the "fragments" she presents in *The Frugal Housewife*, in which the reader must create a "patchwork" from the text, here Child presents her argument in a linear form. Karcher explains that, in composing the *Appeal*, "Child had to collect facts from a wide variety of sources and synthesize them into a coherent argument addressing all aspects of the slavery controversy—moral, legal, economic, political, and racial" (176). She sought to cover more historical ground, appeal to a wider audience, and even extend her argument beyond abolition in order to encompass the enduring prejudice that she, with great foresight, anticipated that freed blacks would face. These efforts, Karcher concludes, "amounted to nothing less than writing her own textbook on the subject, the first of its kind" (176).

In recent years, several other scholars, including Robert Fanuzzi, Travis Foster, and Paul Goodman, have joined Karcher in celebrating Child's prescient politics, expressed for the first time as a treatise in the *Appeal*.¹⁷ Child not only was among the few abolitionists of her generation to reject the idea of repatriating freed slaves to Africa or the Caribbean, as Jefferson and his contemporaries had first proposed, and not only was she in favor of the incorporation of black Americans into a truly United States; but she also anticipated twentieth-century arguments about the pernicious effects of racial prejudice on black Americans, especially as it impeded their efforts for social, educational, and political empowerment. Among the most modern chapters in the *Appeal* are those that critique the purported "intellectual inferiority" and diminished "moral

character” of the African “class” (155, 188). Such assumptions, Child asserts, are nothing less than the “most absurd apology, for personal prejudice, and the oppressive inequality of the laws” (155). “For this reason,” she explains, “I shall take some pains to prove that the present degraded condition of that unfortunate race is produced by artificial causes, not by the laws of nature” (155). Over a century before the general acceptance of arguments about the strong influence of cultural forces in society, education, and politics, Child here presents a fully-developed argument about the origins of racial prejudice and oppression in America.

Attuned as she was to the force of culture as a major influence on intellectual and moral character, Child focuses particular attention on the cultivation of African American taste (180). Contemporaneous African and African American authors, Child comments, “generally evince bad taste” (181). In a departure from Jefferson’s similarly troubling statement, however, Child clarifies her assessment: “I do not pretend that they are Scotts or Miltons; but I wish to prove that they are *men*, capable of producing their proportion of Scotts and Miltons, if they could be allowed to live in a state of physical and intellectual freedom” (181). As she outlines her thought, she connects the issue of taste to the issue of slavery: “But where, at the present time, *can* they live in perfect freedom, cheered by the hopes and excited by the rewards, which stimulate white men to exertion? Every avenue to distinction is closed to them” (181). In keeping with her general argument about the debilitating effects of prejudice, Child insists that the fundamental lack of freedom experienced by enslaved African Americans forecloses the possibility of intellectual “distinction.” Had they, like Willie Wharton and his Indian wife, experienced “perfect freedom” and been “cheered” by its “hopes” and “rewards,” then they, too, might be

“stimulate[d]” to literary greatness, and “generally evince” a more culturally-sanctioned form of taste.

In fact, Child identifies the potential for refinement in individual intellect as among the common bonds of people of all races. Citing a definition on which “naturalists are universally agreed,” Child explains that “the identity of the *human* type” can be determined by the ability that allows them, “by any process, [to] be enabled to perceive moral and intellectual truths” (155). As she will later demonstrate in “Willie Wharton,” with her discussion of the range of responses to Willie and his wife, the ability to “perceive moral and intellectual truths” may be a common feature of humanity, but the perceptions themselves are not correlated to a particular culture or race. Rather, Child emphasizes that it is the “process” by which an individual can “be enabled” to perceive these truths that constitutes humanity.

Child extends her discussion of the process of refinement in order to demonstrate her belief in the cultivation of taste as one of the most significant characteristics of humanity as a whole. She writes:

We all know that beasts, however sagacious, are incapable of abstract thought, or moral perception. The most wonderful elephant in the world could not command an army, or govern a state. An ourang-outang may eat, and drink, and dress, and move like a man; but he could never write an ode, or learn to relinquish his own good for the good of his species. (155)

In this passage, Child again identifies “abstract thought” and “moral perception” as the defining markers of man. In her examples, Child focuses on two major human achievements: the ability to “govern a state” (or to wage war), and the ability to cultivate appetite so that it becomes taste. Significantly, the transformation from the orangutan who “eat[s],” “drink[s],” and “dress[s] like a man,” to the human being who can “write an

ode” is accompanied by an expression of social virtue: the ability to “learn to relinquish his own good for the good of his species.” Thus, Child’s comment, in the *Frugal Housewife*, that “true economy is a careful treasurer in the service of benevolence,” here acquires greater significance (*CW* 21). Economical taste is not simply an indicator of individual virtue, but rather, it is a reflection of the cultivation of the innate potential of the human race.

When recounting the history of African civilization, Child thus emphasizes the many accounts of Africans, and African Americans, who exhibit this refined, socially-oriented sense of taste. She relates an instance recorded by the eighteenth-century Scottish explorer, Mungo Park, in which he is brought “a very fine fish” by a village woman, who proceeds to broil it for his supper, in spite of a general feeling of “distrust of the white man’s purposes” (189, 191). At a later point in his travels, Park finds himself in a village where “corn was so scarce that the people were actually in a state of starvation,” but nevertheless the people “pitied his distress and brought him food” (192, 193). When Mr. Park falls ill with a fever, he is taken in by a man named Karfa, who cares for him as he recovers. After inquiring if Park “could eat the food of the country,” Karfa provides him “with a mat to sleep on, an earthen jar for holding water, a small calabash for a drinking cup, and two meals a day, with a supply of wood and water, from [his] own dwelling” (193). To Park, the weary traveler, and to Child, the *Appeal’s* compiler, Karfa’s concern about Park’s food preferences, and his hospitality, present a vivid example of the generosity and benevolence of the so-called “class” of Africans.

Child consistently contrasts examples of African and African American generosity with respect to food, such as the accounts of Mungo Park, with numerous

references, throughout the *Appeal*, to Anglo-American slave owners who deny their slaves the most basic sustenance. She explains how slaves, as a matter of course, must eat “what kind or quantity of food the owner of the human beast may choose,” and how they are often “weakened by want of sufficient food” (10, 27). Her final example is a detailed account of “a well known country representative, who makes a very loud noise about his democracy,” but who nevertheless once “dismissed a strong, industrious colored man, who had been employed on [his] farm,” rather than invite him to dine at his table (218). Child conveys the slaveholder’s dubious rationale in his own words: “I am too great a democrat... to have any body in my house, who don't sit at my table; and I'll be hanged, if I ever eat with the son of an Ethiopian” (218). Underscoring her point, she incorporates information from her earlier historical examples: “Had he been less ignorant, he would not have chosen ‘son of an *Ethiopian*’ as an *ignoble* epithet; to have called the African his own equal would have been abundantly more sarcastic” (218). In this way, Child exposes the hypocrisy—and the ignorance—of the “democrat” by drawing upon the social and political significance of the shared table.

In her essay “Catharine Beecher, Harriet E. Wilson, and Domestic Discomfort at the Northern Table” Marie Drews calls attention to an 1834 engraving, “Family Amalgamation among the Men-Stealers.” Produced one year after the publication of the *Appeal*, and included in the *Picture of Slavery in the United States of America*, the engraving depicts a wealthy white family seated at a dinner table—the husband and wife at opposite ends, with their children seated in the middle. In the foreground, a young servant with shaded skin offers tea to the mother; and in the background, behind the table, another servant, positioned between the father—fork in hand—and his two young

sons, presents a dish to the family. Drews points to the engraving's title as evidence that its inclusion in the volume is intended to "illuminate and critique racial mixing, specifically miscegenation" (89). Drews interprets the engraving as suggesting that it is "around the dinner table" where "'amalgamation' takes its fiercest toll" (89).

Even before the *Appeal*, Child situated herself on the opposite side of the nineteenth-century debate surrounding racial mixing. In spite of the ways in which his Indian identity is erased, the biracial son of Mary Conant and Hobomok nevertheless symbolizes a positive direction for America's future. In the *Appeal*, however, Child identifies interracial marriage and the shared table as the most potent symbols of American equality. For this reason, she recognizes, that these two factors are the most distressing to racist whites. In summarizing the various arguments against the education of African Americans, she uses these two examples, together, for maximum effect. "It has been said, that information will make the blacks discontented; because, if ever so learned, they will not be allowed to sit at the white man's table, or marry the white man's daughter," she states (138). Here, Child employs these two possibilities, ones that are the exact opposite of the "picture of slavery" shown in the engraving, as a composite example of a situation so misguided that black Americans, themselves, could not but become disillusioned. Child's subsequent scenes, in her own fiction, of the inclusive American table, and her illustrations of gratifying interracial marriages, seem to comprise a deliberate attempt to present an alternative vision to her readers, one that represents the possibilities of a truly integrated American democracy.

By framing her antislavery treatise as an "appeal" to her readers' subjective judgments, and by punctuating her work with examples of generosity and benevolence at

the table (or the lack thereof), Child encourages to her readers to question—and recalibrate—their own standards of taste. In a final instance, Child describes the tragedy that befalls biracial children, one that is especially significant since, throughout her life, she employs the symbol of the child as the embodiment of America’s future. Adopting the voice of her readership, she declares, “This injustice exists with regard to *honest*, industrious individuals, who are merely guilty of differing from us in a matter of taste” (218). In this assessment, Child identifies a “matter of taste” at the root of racial injustice. Thus having established a sense of taste, both gustatory and aesthetic, as a source of cultural identity, as she does in *Hobomok*, and having invested each individual with the responsibility to cultivate that sense of taste from within, as she does in *The Frugal Housewife*, Child here defines the issue of slavery as a “matter of taste.” From then on, she places her trust in her readers, so that they can decide, according to their own principles, on an appropriate course of action for America.

“The Garland of Imagination and Taste”: Child’s *Letters from New-York*

Having identified the moral dilemma of slavery as one that would be decided by personal choice, Child worked to shape each citizen’s tastes and values according to her particular view. As a result of the *Appeal*, she quickly found a platform for her project; the abolitionist leader William Lloyd Garrison, having recognized that Child could “impart useful hints to the government as well as to the family circle,” offered her the editorship of the *American Anti-Slavery Standard*, one of the two major antislavery newspapers of the time (Qtd. in Karcher 171).¹⁸ Child edited the paper for two years, while continuing to consider how she might attract as wide an audience as possible. She

also wrote a popular column, “Letters from New-York,” in which she related observations about the city, along with the underlying social and political issues they exposed. In her farewell editorial, she reveals the moral basis of her journalistic project:

The New York Letters were inserted upon something of the same principle that the famous Timothy Dexter sent a stock of Bibles to the West Indies, with warming pans, to be used for sugar ladles and strainers. No purchaser was allowed to have a pan, unless he would buy a Bible also. Thus I have brought some to look candidly at antislavery principles, by drawing them in with the garland of imagination and taste. (Qtd. in Malone 239)

In disclosing of the origins of her “honest and open trick,” Child notes how the necessity of preparing food was once linked to the aim of circulating religious ideals (Qtd. in Malone 239). But in translating this “principle” of persuasion to her nineteenth-century audience, Child replaces the lure of the warming pan, a sought-after cooking implement, with the attractive “garland of imagination and taste.” In this way, Child signals a shift in her rhetorical focus, as a writer, from the presentation of food for thought, as she indicated in the *Appeal*, to the attempt to inculcate a particular form of virtuous and benevolent taste. The acquisition of a sense of taste, Child believed, would guide citizens to recognize the injustice of slavery for themselves.

Child’s purposeful efforts to cultivate a socially-conscious sense of taste in her readers is evident from the very first of her New York “Letters.” On August 19th, 1841, Child introduces her readers to a new mode of perception—and contemplation—of the sensory richness of the city street. She relates:

The noisy discord of the street-cries gives the ear no rest; and the weak voice of weary childhood often makes the heart ache for the poor little wanderer, prolonging his task far into the hours of night. Sometimes, the harsh sounds are pleasantly varied by some feminine voice, proclaiming in musical cadence, “Hot corn! Hot corn!” with the poetic addition of “Lily white corn! Buy my lily white corn!” When this sweet, wandering voice salutes my ear, my heart replies—

'Tis a glancing gleam o' the gift of song—
 And the soul that speaks hath suffered wrong. (9-10)

Several critics, including Laura Mielke, have commented on the way in which this introductory passage combines “the spiritual and the material, the ideal and the political, and... the aesthetic and the practical” (180). Certainly, Child’s ability to detect the “musical cadence” and the “poetic” language of the street-vendor’s cries, within the “noisy discord” of the street, fuses “the aesthetic and the practical,” and points to her facility at distilling pleasure from all aspects of urban life. It is of particular significance that Child hears in the cry of “Hot corn! Lily white corn!” a plea that crystallizes her aesthetic understanding. Child will continue to rely on the gustatory sense as a model for processing the wide range of sensory—and emotional—experience that she includes in her definition of taste. The expressive lines in which Child’s “heart replies” with poetry illuminate Child’s conception of taste as one that fuses aesthetic and sympathetic response. She identifies in the corn-seller’s song both an instinctual musicality (a “glancing gleam” of the “gift of song”) and evidence of a soul who “hath suffered.” By emphasizing how her “heart” responds with compassion to the corn-seller’s “sweet, wandering voice” in similar measure to how her “heart ached” for the “weak voice” of the other “poor, weary wanderer,” Child suggests that a strong sympathetic response might outweigh reliance on conventional aesthetic standards.

In the philosophical musings prompted by the corn-seller’s “sweet” cries, Child explains her heightened pleasure in observation and in sense of sympathy and communion, in the context of her special attentiveness to street scenes:

There *was* a time when all these things would have passed by me, like the flitting figures of the magic lantern, or the changing scenery of a theatre, sufficient for the

amusement of an hour. But now, I have lost the power of looking merely on the surface. Every thing seems to me to come from the Infinite. Do I see crowds of men hastening to extinguish a fire? I see not merely uncouth garbs, and fantastic, flickering lights, of lurid hue, like a tramping troop of gnomes,—but straightway my mind is filled with thoughts about mutual helpfulness, human sympathy, the common bond of brotherhood, and the mysteriously deep foundations on which society rests; or rather, on which it now reels and totters. (10)

Critics have commented on Child's use here of "the Infinite" as evidence of a fledgling transcendental philosophy. (Indeed, she had attended Emerson's lectures both in Boston and in New York). But evident in her comparison between the "flitting figures of the magic lantern" and the "fantastic, flickering lights" of a blazing fire is a new, radical conception of the aesthetic. She dismisses the magic lantern show and the theater as "sufficient for the amusement of an hour." Instead, she expresses a desire to seek pleasure below the "surface." She does not register the "lurid hue" of the fire or the "uncouth garb" of the men. On the contrary, she perceives "mutual helpfulness, human sympathy, [and] the common bond of brotherhood." Contemporaneous critics such as Thomas Wentworth Higginson distinguished the *Letters* from the *Appeal* in terms of an aesthetic, rather than a moral focus. However, it is plainly evident in this account how Child's "aesthetic feeling" derives from moral criteria as well.¹⁹

Child's "aesthetic feeling," as Higginson termed it, exults in experiences, like the corn-seller's cries, or the "lurid fire," that stimulate the full range of human sensation and emotion, rather than a controlled aesthetic response. In "Letter II," Child expresses her preference for the "various small gardens" of New York, "with their shaded alcoves of lattice-work, where once can eat an ice-cream, shaded from the sun," over and above the "circumscribed" environments of the city's more renowned public parks (12). As in the scene with the street-vendor, Child registers the pleasure in a fusion of sensory

experience. She asserts that the experience of eating an ice-cream in the shade is more pleasurable than a stroll amidst the “nicely trimmed circle of hedge,” and the “well-rolled gravel walks” of Union Park (12). She posits that even the “eye of taste” would “prefer variations, and undulations of outline,” in place of the overly manicured park (12). Among the attractions of the sense of taste, Child proposes, is the freedom to assess a particular experience according to one’s individual standards, rather than pre-determined cultural norms.

Child’s conception of taste depends on the exercise of individual judgment in the context of experiences freely accessible to all. For instance, in regard to St. John’s Park (now Gramercy Park) she comments, “Though not without pretensions to beauty, [the park] never strikes my eye agreeably, because it is shut up from the people” (12). Child reveals in her observation how evidence of social exclusion elicits such a distasteful response in her that it interferes with the aesthetic contemplation of the park’s cultivated beauty. Her praise of New York’s small gardens, such as the lattice-covered garden described above, is accompanied by a fervent sense that these natural pleasures should be available to all. She calls attention to the fact that there are “none such” gardens in Boston, as “they would probably be objected to, as open to the vulgar and the vicious” (12). Child asserts an inclusive point of view that leads her to believe in the possibility of refinement of taste in all Americans:

I do not walk through the world with such fear of soiling my garments. Let science, literature, music, flowers, all things that tend to cultivate the intellect, or humanize the heart, be open to “Tom, Dick, and Harry;” and thus, in the process of time, they will become Mr. Thomas, Richard, and Henry. (12)

Both in her hopes for the future and in the language she employs, Child stresses the interplay among various forms of sensory, aesthetic, and intellectual experience. These factors become the basis of the opportunity to experience what she had once described, in *Hobomok*, as the “rich sympathies of taste.” The image of Child walking “through the world” without fear of “soiling [her] garments” suggests how she remains receptive, through her body, to the range of sensory experiences on display in the city. Child views “all things,” including but not limited to “science, literature, music, [and] flowers,” as presenting an opportunity to “cultivate the intellect” and “humanize the heart” in every “Tom, Dick, and Harry.” She concludes that “the refined should think of what they can *impart*, not of what they can *receive*” (12). Ultimately, she recommends that her readers might cultivate their intellects, and humanize their hearts, by considering how they might “impart” the lessons of refinement to others.

It is not only through her florid descriptions of city parks and gardens but also through her generative accounts of gardening that Child conveys her deeply-held belief about the pleasure that can be derived from the process of cultivation itself. In “Letter XVI,” Child relates the difficult situation of Jane Plato, a free black woman whose “neatly-kept garden and white-washed fences” had recently been destroyed by a fire (70). Child describes how, “After her daily toil,” Plato “might be seen, till twilight deepened into evening, digging round the roots, pruning branches, and training vines” in her “little garden-patch” (71). Child documents the painstaking process of cultivation by which Plato transforms an unassuming plot of land into a “flowery oasis in a desert of bricks and stone,” and remarks that she, herself, “should mourn most for the [loss of a garden] in which the *heart* had invested stock” (70, 71). She reveals how the emotion invested in

the work of cultivation contributes to the value of—and pleasure derived from—the results. Concluding that the “common wild-flower that I have brought into my garden, and nursed, and petted, till it has lost all home-sickness for its native woods, is *really* more valuable than the costly exotic, purchased in full bloom from the conservatory,” Child offers a veiled comment about her preference for the “native” flavor, in place of the “exotic” or foreign (71). She suggests, moreover, that the ability to coax beauty from the “common wild-flower” and to successfully transplant it from its “native woods” to a more cultivated environment provides the most tasteful pleasure of all.²⁰

As Child formulates her conception of virtuous, benevolent taste more fully, she makes specific efforts to differentiate between the physical pleasures of eating and the more rarefied pleasures of taste. She contrasts her account of Plato’s garden, which as a result of the time and labor invested in its cultivation, became the “endeared companion of many a pleasant hour,” with the example of the garden of a rich man, tended to by others, which leaves his “soul unsatisfied” (71, 72). Of the rich man, Child observes:

One moment he beholds his flowers,
 The next they are forgot;
 He eateth of his rarest fruits,
 As though he ate them not. (71)

In these lines, Child employs the idea of eating in two distinct ways. In the first (“He eateth of his rarest fruits”), Child suggests an understanding of eating in terms of its basic meaning as a biological process. In the second (“As though he ate them not”), she employs the act of eating as a device for examining the meaning of the rich man’s experience. From this point on, Child will focus on eating as a metaphor in order to examine issues of taste and social virtue. Food itself will no longer function just as a

symbol of tasteful consumption. Instead, the act of eating will represent a more profound expression of virtuous, sympathetic taste.

Child in fact criticizes a “love[] of good eating” when it is associated with serving up a host of moral ills (55). In “Letter XII,” Child describes a New Year’s tradition in New York, inherited from the Dutch, by which “every woman, that *is* 'anybody,' stays at home, dressed in her best, and by her side is a table covered with cakes, preserves, wines, oysters, hot coffee, &c.,” while “every gentleman is in honor bound to call on every lady, whose acquaintance he does not intend to cut” (55). This results in a “very considerable” amount of “eating and drinking done” by the most “fashionable beaux,” Child recounts (55). She assails this tradition not only because of the “considerable rivalry in the magnificence and variety of the eating tables,” but because the “object” is “to minister to heartless vanity, [and] tempt a sated appetite” (55). Commenting that “this custom is eminently Dutch in its character, and will pass away before a higher civilization,” Child at once asserts that a “higher civilization” will not seek to indulge a “sated appetite,” and implies that a more refined American culture will supersede the vestiges of Dutch culture in New York (55).

Child’s commitment to cultivating taste in her readers, instead of presenting them with an abundance of metaphorical food, is disclosed in the debate surrounding the editorial tone of the *Standard*—the ideological clash that led, ultimately, to Child’s decision to relinquish her position as the newspaper’s editor and devote the remainder of her career to fiction-writing. In a fiery editorial published in the *Standard*, shortly before the Society’s 1842 meeting, William Lloyd Garrison proclaimed, “The milk that has hitherto been used must now give place to meat “ (Qtd. in Karcher 285). Garrison’s use

of the figurative language of food reveals his belief in the function of the newspaper, and the American Anti-Slavery Society as a whole, as one tasked with preparing hearty portions of antislavery arguments for consumption by the American reading public, just as Child had once encouraged her readers, in *The Frugal Housewife*, to prepare more filling portions of roast beef. Maria Weston Chapman, one of the more radical voices of the Anti-Slavery Society, “accused Child of substituting ‘flapdoodle’ for the ‘roast Beef’ [that] the *Standard* needed,” using the metaphor of fortifying food to express her view of the function of the newspaper as a vehicle for feeding strong abolitionist principles directly to the public (Qtd. in Karcher 288).

Child’s response to these attacks reveals how her conception of the *Standard*—and more generally, her ideas about the most effective way to accomplish reform—included a stronger role for the influence of personal taste than Garrison or Chapman’s model allowed. In her most assertive response to Chapman’s critique, addressed to Wendell Phillips, another AAS member then advocating for more radical measures, Child defends her strategy in terms of the metaphor of meaty food used by Chapman, herself: “Taste, principle, and philosophy would alike forbid me to prepare such hyena soup with brimstone seasoning, as suits many of our friends” (Qtd. in Karcher 289). Here, Child reinforces her belief that three components, “taste, principle, and philosophy,” contribute, in equal measure, to her approach to abolishing slavery. Her refusal to “prepare such hyena soup,” as would “suit many of [her] friends,” acknowledges the rift she perceives between her opinion and the views of her fellow abolitionists. Child insists on the crucial role of personal taste, alongside “principle” and “philosophy,” as the major aspects of the movement to determine the outcome of the issue of slavery in America.

Having recognized, through the *Letters From New-York*, how she might envelop her “antislavery principles” in “the garland of imagination and taste,” Child thus transitioned from her position of editor of the *Standard*, to that of contributor to the *Boston Courier*, and, two years after that, to full-time fiction-writer, reprising the role that launched her career nearly twenty years before. Although she continued to maintain an active political agenda, participating in many of the campaigns for social reform in the nineteenth century, from this point on she viewed herself as a fiction-writer. “Formed as my character now is,” she explained in an 1844 letter to Francis Shaw, “I cannot do otherwise than make literature the honest agent of my conscience and my heart” (Qtd. in Karcher 301). In literature, Child realized her best—and most fruitful—opportunity to instill her concept of sympathetic taste in others.

The “Good Taste” of the Republic

By the time that Child composed *A Romance of the Republic*, in 1867, she had witnessed the end of slavery and consolidated her particular conception of American taste. In another significant development, she had also refined her literary focus as a force for social change. As she explained to Robert Purvis, “I thought a Romance would take more hold of the public mind, than the most elaborate arguments; and having fought against Slavery, till the monster is legally dead, I was desirous to do what I could to undermine Prejudice” (Qtd. in *Romance* vii). Child’s personal and literary self-assessment encapsulates her efforts throughout her career to promote a wide range of “elaborate arguments” against slavery and prejudice. The commercial success of the *Letters*, in comparison to the *Appeal*, attests to the wisdom of this particular course. In *A*

Romance, Child adeptly employs that literary genre to engender sympathy in her readers, and thus to encourage them to confront the damaging effects of prejudice on a personal level. In so doing, Child presents the essential aspects of her version of American taste, distinct from the tenets of European aesthetic taste, as well as from its New England antecedents. She proposes that this American sense of taste stems primarily from the experience and appreciation of everyday life rather than from the contemplation of privileged artistic forms; and that this conception of taste is readily accessible to the nation's multiracial and multiethnic citizens, including those who had once been enslaved. While the *Romance* also reveals significant limitations of Child's worldview—most visibly, in her consistent portrayal of the cultural impressibility of nonwhite Americans—Child nonetheless demonstrates her vision of an inclusive republic, in which all citizens are united by a national sense of taste.

In the expansive *Romance*, which extends through one war, across two continents, and over three generations, it is significant that Child sets the final scene at a Boston breakfast table. Child presents a multigenerational, multiracial family reunion in an unequivocally American tableau:

Under festoons of the American flag, surmounted by the eagle, stood Eulalia, in ribbons of red, white, and blue, with a circle of stars round her head. One hand upheld the shield of the Union, and in the other the scales of Justice were evenly poised. By her side stood Rosen Blumen, holding in one hand a gilded pole surmounted by a liberty-cap, while her other hand rested protectingly on the head of Tulee's Benny, who was kneeling and looking upward in thanksgiving. (440)

Vividly, Child depicts this family “of all ages and colors” joined in delightful song (441).

After a rousing rendition of “The Star-spangled Banner,” they all “adjourn[] to the breakfast-room, where refreshments [are] plentifully provided” (441). As the family

partakes of its plentiful breakfast, and satisfying “refreshment” gives way to “sweet converse,” a final song marks the end to the day’s festivities (442). “Prepared by the good taste of Mr. Blumenthal,” the narrator relates, the evening—and the novel—conclude with a “Song of Praise” (442). Through the narrative arc of the novel, in which Mr. Blumenthal, a hard-working immigrant, transcends racial prejudice in order to marry Flora Royal, a multiracial American citizen, Child asserts her belief in the ultimate republican romance: that the exercise of “good taste” will guide the nation through Reconstruction, and help it become the truly *United States*.

From the first “plentiful” breakfast that Child describes in *Hobomok*, served on a plain pine table and consisting of pumpkins, clams, and maize, to this expression of American culinary—and cultural—abundance, Child describes the origins and development of a national sense of taste. This conception of taste emerges from ideas about eating, and the way in which individuals process sensory experience according to their own internal judgment. But Child expands her view and proposes a model for the formation of a national cultural identity, one in which preferences and behaviors are based on the cultivation of a distinctly American taste. Child’s enduring belief in this model of cultural guidance, as well as her work for social reform, would lead her to distance herself from those who called for more direct measures of action. However, the most radical message remained hers: the future of the nation—its unity or its dissolution—would be determined as “a matter of taste.”

¹ Historians credit Frederick Jackson Turner with first assigning Franklin the title of “the first great American,” although earlier instances can be found. See Wood 1-4. Also see HW Brands, *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*.

² Although nearly half of Philadelphia would turn out for Franklin’s funeral, his public image would undergo significant scrutiny in the nineteenth century. To some, as Gordon Wood explains, “Franklin came to stand for all of America’s bourgeois complacency, its get-ahead materialism, its utilitarian obsession with success—the unimaginative superficiality and vulgarity of American culture that kills the soul” (5). For more, see Wood 4-8.

³ Child creates not one but two framing narratives for her novel. In the preface, Child conjures a scene of two friends, who, after considering the success (or lack thereof) of “Sir Walter Scott, or Mr. Cooper” in writing “a New England novel,” set out to write their own (3). Or, more specifically, the friend writes the novel, and the narrator has it printed. In that novel, the narrator presents a second, inner narrative: a condensed version of an “old, worn-out manuscript” written by one of his “ancestors” (6). Before ceding his narrative voice to that man, however, he remarks at the “glow of national pride” that he feels as he contemplates his “own, [his] native land” (5). Although Child’s decision to cast each of these characters as male suggests a number of interpretations, it is evident at each level of *Hobomok* that Child is attentive to issues of national cultural identity, and seeks to develop a story of America’s origins.

⁴ Child prided herself on her deep archival research. Karcher documents how Child sought histories, narratives, journals, and other sources, for each of her major (and minor) projects.

⁵ It is also worth noting how Child envelops the description of the breakfast table in a larger scene redolent of sensory pleasure. The narrator observes how Mary Conant’s eyes “sparkled as brightly, and the rich tones of her voice were as merry, as they could have been when her little aerial foot danced along the marble saloon of her grandmother” (9). Child replaces the high-toned environment of the “marble saloon” with the rustic breakfast table, laden with indigenous foods, suggesting that the pleasures experienced while dancing—evident in the “sparkle” of Mary’s eyes and the “rich tones” of her voice—might be similarly found in the sensory experience of eating. In addition, she perhaps underscores the relation between gustatory and aesthetic taste.

⁶ Eden again documents a distinction between fiction and fact: “New colonists and European visitors were often astonished at the diet and lifestyle north America offered and frequently commented that the bulk of the colonists ate like the well-to-do of England” (161).

⁷ For an extended discussion of the evolution of the American kitchen, see James McWilliams, 203-211.

⁸ In her analysis of several mid-century works, Marie Drews observes, similarly, how the dinner table functioned as a potent symbol of democratic promise. Frederick Douglass, in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), “used his own inclusion at the table to illustrate the promising character of the North,” Hannah Crafts, in *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*

(ca. 1850), “illustrates a scene of welcome and human interaction at a shared table,” and Harriet Wilson, in *Our Nig* (1859), employs the dinner table to “illustrate the inconsistencies of Northern practices at the local level” (93, 95, 90). The Thanksgiving scene in “Willie Wharton” thus supplements Drews’s analysis. But as *Hobomok* makes plain, Child was already attuned to the symbolism of a shared table, many years before these fictive representations of food.

⁹ Kaplan explains, “*Godey’s* published detailed instructions and recipes or preparing the Thanksgiving feast, while it encouraged women readers to agitate for a nationwide holiday as a ritual of national expansion and unification” (194).

¹⁰ In constructing her larger argument about the meaning of the woman’s sphere, Kaplan focuses on the dual meaning of domesticity—not simply as the home, but also as a process of domestication, “which entails conquering and taming the wild, the natural, and the alien” (184). “Domestic in this sense,” Kaplan explains, “is related to the imperial process of civilizing, and the conditions of domesticity often become markers that distinguish civilization from savagery. Through the process of domestication, the home contains within itself those wild or foreign elements that must be tamed; domesticity not only monitors the orders between the civilized and the savage but also regulates the traces of the savage within itself” (184).

¹¹ In fact, important critical work, including essays by Carolyn Sorisio and Shirley Samuels, has explored this contradiction in *Hobomok*, as well as in other of Child’s works. See Sorisio, “The Spectacle of the Body: Torture in the Antislavery Writing of Lydia Maria Child and Frances E.W. Harper,” *Modern Language Studies* 30.1 (Spring 2000): 45-66, and Samuels, “Women, Blood, and Contract,” *American Literary History* 20.1-2 (Spring/Summer 2008): 57-75.

¹² The insertion of “American” in the manual’s title was primarily pragmatic; Susannah Carter’s *Frugal Housewife* (ca. 1765) remained popular among British audiences, and Child sought to avoid confusion with that volume. For more on the publication history of *The American Frugal Housewife*, see Karcher 125-150.

¹³ This volume’s full title: *American Cookery, or the art of dressing viands, fish, poultry, and vegetables, and the best modes of making pastes, puffs, pies, tarts, puddings, custards, and preserves, and all kinds of cakes, from the imperial plum to plain cake: Adapted to this country, and all grades of life*. For an in-depth discussion of American cookbook history, see Eden 104-8.

¹⁴ Child’s language here is interesting, also, in light of her fixation on the symbolic significance of marriage.

¹⁵ In her analysis of *The Frugal Housewife*, Hildegard Hoeller offers a compelling reading of the volume’s title page. Comprised of the dedication, followed by a line identifying “Mrs. Child” as “the author of *Hobomok*,” and concluding with two aphorisms from *Poor Richard’s Almanack*, the title page, Hoeller asserts, is “clearly marked to be both a practical guide and a contribution to a larger, public, literary, and political discourse” (93).

¹⁶ Indeed, *The Mother’s Book*, focused on the education of children, contains several extended passages on how to form taste “for the best novels” and “good poetry,” as well as for painting, music, and dance (90, 99).

¹⁷ See Travis M. Foster, "Grotesque Sympathy: Lydia Maria Child, White Reform, and the Embodiment of Urban Space," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 56.1 (2010):1-32, and Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹⁸ Garrison's assessment drew, primarily, from Child's "Hints to People of Moderate Fortune," which had been republished in numerous newspapers. Child was "doing more to reform the manners of the age" and to "restore the simplicity of the good old days of our fathers" than any other writer, "male or female," since Benjamin Franklin (Qtd. in Karcher 171).

¹⁹ The *Letters* "did almost as much to develop 'aesthetic feeling' as the other book [*The Appeal*] had done for moral feeling," Higginson wrote (Qtd. in Karcher 606).

²⁰ In "Rosy O'Ryan," included in the short-story collection, *A New Flower for Children* (1856), Child presents a figure who both enacts and embodies the pleasures of cultivation. Through her description of how Rosy, much like Jane Plato, applies her industry and attention to her garden, planting seeds "with her own small hands, and water[ing] them every night," Child demonstrates how Rosy grows up "bright and fresh as the blossoms in which she delighted" (174, 175). Opining that "the poor have a great advantage, in being able to find something new in the most common and simple things," Child concludes her short story with the observation that "no costly presents from London or Paris ever gave more satisfaction, than Rosy received every day from her Morning Glories" (175).

Epilogue

The Taste of America Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*

In “Civic Banquets,” the final essay included in *Our Old Home* (1863), Nathaniel Hawthorne expresses his assessment of eating in mid-century America:

[As] abundantly as Nature has provided us with most of the material requisites, the highest possible dinner has never yet been eaten in America. It is the consummate flower of civilization and refinement; and our inability to produce it, or to appreciate its admirable beauty, if a happy inspiration should bring it into bloom, marks fatally the limits of culture which we have attained. (242)

As Monika Elbert points out, Hawthorne's observation reflects the culmination of a “lifelong fascination, perhaps even an obsession, with food” (153). Hawthorne's journals, especially his *English Note-Books*, reveal the intensity of his interest in the process of preparing such a meal, from growing herbs to harvesting grapes, from methods of cooking pork chops to strategies for facilitating social pleasure.¹ In the “Civic Banquets” passage, Hawthorne conveys his belief in food and eating as the ultimate display of “civilization and refinement.” In this context, his assertion that the “highest possible dinner has never yet been eaten in America” expresses a sentiment beyond disappointment. To Hawthorne, the “inability” of American citizens to “produce” the consummate dinner, or to “appreciate” its “beauty” as an aesthetic experience, “marks fatally the limits” of American taste.

The awareness of the function—and limits—of the sense of taste is also evident in many of Hawthorne's major works. In *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), once extolled by Carl Van Doren for elevating American literature into art, Hawthorne presents a detailed picture of the evolution of American taste.² He shows the

transformation from appetite into taste that Franklin continually explores in his life and work. Hawthorne documents the benefits and virtues of a simple, republican table—the table first proposed by Jefferson in his notebooks and letters, and subsequently promoted by Child in her *Frugal Housewife*. In a crucial scene in the novel that marks the return of Clifford Pyncheon, physically and emotionally diminished after many years of wrongful imprisonment, Hawthorne presents an extended description of an American meal. This scene documents the change in the Pyncheon family—and in the national culture—that had occurred during Clifford’s time away. By depicting the decline of “aristocratic taste,” the emergence of republican virtue, and the evolution of sympathetic response, Hawthorne illustrates his own impression of the emergence of a distinctly American sense of taste (110).

At the same time, Hawthorne acknowledges, with some ambivalence, that a new formulation of taste might be required in order for the nation to continue to develop—to surpass the “limits of culture” which mid-century America had reached. Because of the country’s western expansion and overall population growth, the nation had become too large to be significantly shaped by any individual. As Native Americans, African Americans, and other ethnic groups had become absorbed into the country’s expanding boundaries, the nation had become too diverse to be united by a sole cultural ideology. The country’s increasing class stratification also contributed to cultural fragmentation. In addition, as a result of the increasing pace of social, scientific, and technological change, it was no longer possible to uphold the model of republican taste that had endured into the age of industrial capitalism.

For these reasons, Hawthorne includes two other characters in *The House of the Seven Gables*—the ravenous child, Ned Higgins, and the emotionally-detached daguerreotypist, Holgrave—as models of opposing conceptions of future American taste. Ned is a representative, for Hawthorne, of a mode of capitalist consumption that fails to attend to social, moral, or aesthetic issues. In Holgrave, Hawthorne replaces the eighteenth-century reliance on the subjective aspects of the sense of taste with a more objective mode of aesthetic judgment. While Hawthorne seems uncertain about whether to endorse this shift towards a more disinterested mode of perception, he clearly prefers Holgrave’s aesthetic discernment to Ned’s unrestrained appetite. In any case, Hawthorne recognizes that personal taste will no longer exert as strong an influence on the development of national culture as it had in early America. *The House of Seven Gables* thus functions as the capstone of one era, of the sense of taste, while it opens up a well of possibilities for the nation’s future, one in which America would attempt to achieve its cultural potential—and resolve its enduring social and political contradictions—by other, as yet unknown means.

In his depiction of the pivotal scene of Clifford’s return, Hawthorne provides a clearly drawn example of the sense of taste, both gustatory and aesthetic, that informs his own American sensibility. “Life, within doors, has few pleasanter prospects than a neatly arranged and well-provisioned breakfast table,” the narrator begins, before making the reason for his anticipation of “pleasant prospects” more clear:

We come to [the breakfast table] freshly, in the dewy youth of the day, and when our spiritual and sensual elements are in better accord than at a later period; so that the material delights of the morning meal are capable of being fully enjoyed, without any very grievous reproaches, whether gastric or conscientious, for yielding even a trifle overmuch to the animal department of our nature. The

thoughts, too, that run around the ring of familiar guests, have a piquancy and mirthfulness, and oftentimes a vivid truth, which more rarely find their way into the elaborate intercourse of dinner. (72-3)

Hawthorne favorably contrasts the “material delights of the morning meal” with the more “elaborate,” and hence more mediated “intercourse” of a formal dinner. He registers his appreciation of a breakfast menu “fully enjoyed,” and acknowledges both the “gastric” and the “conscientious” responses that such an experience invites. He notes the “ring of familiar guests” that enhances the social pleasures of the meal. Moreover, by articulating his belief that the “thoughts” prompted by a table “neatly arranged and well-provisioned” have “oftentimes a vivid truth,” he reinforces the template, introduced by Benjamin Franklin, of the simple yet filling meal as the “material” basis from which “vivid truths,” and other American virtues extend.

As an elaboration of his own ideas about the expression of a distinctly American taste, Hawthorne presents a comprehensive account of the preparation of this pleasurable breakfast. He describes how Clifford’s sister, Hepzibah, a classic old maid, eager to give her brother a fitting welcome, consults a “Cookery Book” of the genre that Lydia Maria Child, several decades earlier, had decried (71). Consistent with Child’s critique, the volume is “full of innumerable old fashions of English dishes, and illustrated with engravings, which represented the arrangements of the table at such banquets as it might have befitted a nobleman to give, in the great hall of his castle” (71). The novel’s narrator describes how Hepzibah buries her nose in the volume “as if with the hope of gaining an olfactory acquaintance with its contents” (71). It is soon revealed, however, that Hepzibah’s seemingly overly-attentive mode of perception is motivated by a more practical concern: her eyesight is so poor that she cannot read the recipes. From multiple

perspectives—of intended audience, of content, and even of print size—this antiquated, aristocratic cookbook fails to meet Hepzibah’s needs. Hawthorne echoes Child, as well as Jefferson and Franklin, in his supposition that recipes based on aristocratic English cookery have little relevance to the development of an American sense of taste.

Hawthorne proposes a conception of American taste that resembles the model formulated by Franklin, then demonstrated by Jefferson, and elaborated upon by Child in her numerous works. The central tenets of this view are virtuous simplicity, and a reliance on indigenous foods. Hawthorne endorses these tenets of American taste when Hepzibah decides to “put aside the savory volume,” and instead asks young Phoebe for cooking advice (71). Phoebe’s idea is to “make an Indian Cake, after her mother’s peculiar method, of easy manufacture, which she could vouch for as possessing a richness,” and “a delicacy, unequalled by any other mode of breakfast cake” (72). In contrast to the complicated recipes recorded in the old-fashioned, British-influenced cookbook, Phoebe’s “easy” method derives from her mother’s homespun advice. To enhance the American flavor of the meal, Hepzibah summons the local fishmonger, and selects the “finest mackerel in his cart” (71). Although the narrator remarks, with some derision, that the “ghosts of departed cook-maids” most likely “peeped down the great breadth of the [chimney] flue, despising the simplicity of the projected meal,” Hepzibah and Phoebe remain absorbed in the cooking process, unaware of how their simple methods of preparation, and the local ingredients that they employ, diverge from the aristocratic practices of the cook-maids, or from the tastes of their common ancestors whom the cook-maids once served (72).³ As confirmed by the flavor of Phoebe’s Indian cakes, reported to be “the sweetest offering of all,” the two women experience pleasure in

their culinary feat, as well as in working together to prepare this simple, tasteful, and distinctly American meal (73).

Hawthorne's view of the development of an American sense of taste expands upon the ideas of Franklin, Jefferson, and Child, however, by offering a more fully elaborated account of the transformation of appetite into taste. By describing how Clifford, the guest of honor, initially approaches the meal with "a look of appetite," Hawthorne distinguishes his character's initial mode of consumption from the more refined sense of taste he will later learn to display (78). Hawthorne first expresses the Hobbesian view of appetite as the most powerful motivating human force, as Clifford exhibits "nothing intellectual" as he proceeds to eat the meal, consuming it "with what might almost be termed voracity" (78). The narrator reports that Clifford "seemed to forget himself, Hepzibah, the young girl, and everything else around him, in the sensual enjoyment which the bountifully spread table afforded" (78). Unlike the narrator's initial musings about breakfast as the meal that brings one's "spiritual and sensual elements" into "accord," Clifford demonstrates none of the refinements that might allow him to experience the tasteful pleasure of the meal, or even to note that his devoted relatives are present. Explaining that Clifford's "inherent" attraction to the sensual "delights of the palate" would most likely have "been kept in check," and possibly "even converted into an accomplishment... had his more ethereal characteristics retained their vigor," the narrator seems to explain Clifford's unabashed display of appetite as stemming from his lengthy imprisonment (78). In this way, Hawthorne articulates his own view—one that is more aligned with Shaftesbury and the Scottish philosophers than with Hobbes and

Mandeville—that each individual possesses the innate capability to transform appetite into taste.

In a manner that is consistent with the views of Franklin, Jefferson, and Child, Hawthorne focuses on the crucial role of eating in facilitating the cultivation of appetite into taste. Hawthorne's ideas on this subject are crystallized as he describes Clifford's experience at the breakfast table. After an initial burst of appetite, Clifford soon "bec[omes] sensible of the fragrance of the yet untasted coffee" that Phoebe had prepared (78). It is significant, here, that the coffee is described as "untasted," rather than simply not yet consumed. The narrator's recollection of how the coffee's "subtle essence acted on [Clifford] like a charmed draught, and caused the opaque substance of his animal being to grow transparent, or, at least, translucent; so that a spiritual gleam was transmitted through it, with a clearer lustre than hitherto," seems to mark the transformation of Clifford's "animal" appetite into a more "spiritual" sense of taste (78). As a result of the "subtle essence" of the coffee, Clifford realizes how a more discriminating mode of perception might allow him to experience the "substance" of the world more fully, and he cries for more "with nervous haste in his utterance, as if anxious to retain his grasp of what sought to escape him" (78). Clifford's language, as well as the intensity of his request, "This is what I need! Give me more!" reflect Hawthorne's belief in the need to cultivate a refined sense of gustatory taste (78).

Hawthorne reinforces his belief in the significant role of eating in the cultivation of a refined sense of taste when he draws a direct connection between aspects of gustatory and aesthetic taste. The narrator describes Clifford's change in perception "under this delicate and powerful influence" of taste in explicitly aesthetic terms (78).

After tasting the coffee, Clifford “look[s] out from his eyes with a glance that [takes] note of what it rest[s] on,” and he is finally able to register a deeper meaning in the objects (and people) that he observes (78). In clarifying the scope of this new mode of perception, the narrator explains:

It was not so much, that his expression grew more intellectual; this, though it had its share, was not the most peculiar effect. Neither was what we call the moral nature so forcibly awakened as to present itself in remarkable prominence. But a certain fine temper of being was now,—not brought out in full relief, but changeably and imperfectly betrayed, — of which it was the function to deal with all beautiful and enjoyable things. In a character where it should exist as the chief attribute, it would bestow on its possessor an exquisite taste. (78)

In this description of the characteristics of “an exquisite taste,” the narrator acknowledges an “intellectual” component that resembles Franklin’s attention, in his *Autobiography*, to the “Coolness and Clearness of Head” that accompanies the tasteful, temperate consumption of simply prepared foods.⁴ The narrator also identifies an “awaken[ing]” of the “moral nature” that Child vividly describes in her *Letters from New-York*.⁵ But in this account, neither an enhanced intellect nor a rekindled “moral nature” constitutes the most prominent feature of this “exquisite taste.” The expression of taste discussed here is most notable as a reflection of its “function to deal with all beautiful and enjoyable things.”⁶ For this reason, the narrator asserts that aesthetic taste is “always selfish in its essence” (79). It is insufficient to register the “human sympathies” that writers such as Child and the reformers that followed her had come to recognize as an essential aspect of the sense of taste, the taste that would guide the nation towards the fulfillment of its republican ideals.

Hawthorne endorses this notion of sympathetic taste, as evidenced by his portrayal of Clifford’s relationship with young Phoebe. The narrator explains that anyone

enveloped by Phoebe's warmth and kindness would "be certain that [his or her] place was good in the whole sympathetic chain of human nature" (100). Because of his extended prison term, Clifford is particularly affected by Phoebe's comforting presence. The "reality, and simplicity, and thorough homeliness of the girl's nature" causes Clifford's "heart to tingle with the keenest thrills of pleasure," recalling the effects of his initial response at the breakfast table (100). In fact, Clifford at first compares the pleasure that Phoebe elicits in him to the music coaxed from a "long-silent harp," but then he realizes that what he feels is not primarily of an aesthetic nature (100). The narrator elaborates that Clifford's experience "seemed rather a perception, or a sympathy, than a sentiment belonging to himself as an individual" (101). By documenting the expansion of Clifford's emotional range, and the additional pleasures that accompany it, Hawthorne clearly registers his support for Child's belief that compassion is an essential component of a sympathetic taste.⁷

Less optimistic than Child, however, Hawthorne recognizes that the next generation of American citizens, those born into the changed landscape of mid-nineteenth century America, might not dedicate themselves to the dutiful cultivation of sympathetic taste. Through the character of Ned Higgins, whose arrival, significantly, marks the completion of the breakfast scene, Hawthorne conveys his urgent concern about the need to instill new modes of virtue—and sympathy—in American citizens. Ned's most notable trait is his insatiable appetite, especially for the gingerbread cookies that Hepzibah sells at her cent-shop. His first purchase is a cookie shaped like Jim Crow, which he demands of Hepzibah, and then devours head-first. Ned's unthinking consumption of the figure of Jim Crow—and his purchase of another cookie, two minutes later, with "the crumbs and

discoloration of the cannibal-feast, as yet hardly consummated,” and still “exceedingly visible about his mouth,” signifies a mode of cultural consumption that diverges from Clifford’s refined sense of sympathetic taste (38). Ned fails to display any of the “sensual enjoyment” that Clifford experiences, or to express any interest in contemplating the social or political meaning of his frenzied “cannibal-feast.” In a subsequent visit to the shop, Hepzibah attempts to offer Ned “first a wooden dragoon, and next a handful of marbles”—objects he might play with, rather than consume (50). But Ned rejects both, “neither of which being adapted to his else omnivorous appetite” (50). With the example of Ned’s “omnivorous appetite” for all “men and things,” Hawthorne displays his intuition that the next generation of American citizens would become overly absorbed by consumption, to the exclusion of interest in aesthetic, moral, and social concerns (83).

When Thomas Jefferson, in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, characterized the increasingly industrialized landscape that he observed around him as a cankerous “sore” that would “soon eat to the heart” of the republic, he expressed his fear that an industrialized America, driven by its citizens’ excessive appetites, would itself be consumed.⁸ His preferred vision was of an agrarian America, one populated by virtuous, industrious farmers, who would set among their primary goals a well-provisioned dinner table, and a “small surplus to buy salt, sugar, coffee, and a little finery” for their wives and daughters.⁹ Evidently, Jefferson did not anticipate how his own “Dinner Table Bargain,” one of his many concessions to the institution of slavery, would be reflected, seventy years later, in Hawthorne’s characterization of the “little cannibal,” Ned Higgins, who devours cookies in the shape of Jim Crow (37).¹⁰

Similarly, Benjamin Franklin failed to understand the ramifications of his own acquiescence to the institution of slavery. His essay against the slave trade, published three weeks before his death, in 1790, constitutes the only written evidence of the more progressive stance that eighteenth-century abolitionists had long sought from him. Despite his own role, in his youth, as an indentured servant, Franklin's commitment to instilling the virtues of individual economy and industriousness in his fellow colonists (and later citizens), impaired his ability to confront the social and political inequities already evident in American daily life. For instance, in his 1766 essay, "Homespun: Further Defense of Indian Corn," Franklin cites the example of giving "food made from Indian corn to our slaves" in order to demonstrate the superior nutrition of that indigenous American food and the economic acumen of his Anglo-American compatriots: "Our slaves," he writes, "cost us money, and we buy them to make money by their labour" (*FP* 13:44). Although there is an element of irony in his assertion, Franklin never fully acknowledged the evils of chattel slavery. In fact, he later refers to this very example as a reflection of "ever so much the *good sense* of [his] countrymen" (*FP* 13:44). This conception of "good sense," reflected also in his essays and letters, exposes the limits of his lifelong preoccupation with hard work and financial gain. Nevertheless, Franklin remains a seminal figure in his contribution to the development of a distinctly American sense of taste. His formulation of this "sense" is among the first to connect the philosophical discourse of taste with the republican conception of virtue.

In her retelling of Franklin's life story, which focuses on his contributions to the public good, Lydia Maria Child demonstrates her own model of instilling "good sense" in her fellow citizens. In the *Frugal Housewife*, Child identifies the distinguishing features

of her economical sense of taste, and expresses her conviction about the responsibility of each individual to cultivate this sense, on the basis of his or her own internal standards. In order to illuminate the troubling social and political issues that will require the exercise of taste, Child shifts her focus to fiction, and, in particular, to the genre of romance. In her later works, the conception of taste that she proposes—and hopes to imbue in her readers—merges aesthetic judgment and sympathetic response. This formulation of sympathetic taste is used by Hawthorne, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, where it animates the relationship between the aging Clifford and the youthful Phoebe. Although the narrator observes that there was, indeed, “something beautiful in the relation that grew up between this pair,” Hawthorne’s choice of an elderly man and his young cousin to embody this “relation” suggests that the fusion of taste and sympathy, however “beautiful,” will not exert a generative effect on the future (101).

Instead, Hawthorne invests the character of Holgrave, the daguerreotypist, with the responsibility of guiding the tastes and sympathies of the next generation of American citizens. Holgrave’s observational mode, as reflected in his chosen profession, allows him to “understand the feeling, without possessing it” (127). By separating himself from his immediate sensory experiences, Holgrave introduces a new perspective based on contemplative distance. This view differs from the conception of taste developed by Franklin, Jefferson, and Child, which stemmed primarily from the experience of eating. In this way, Hawthorne signals the end to the era of the sense of taste, and the arrival of a new mode of disinterested aesthetic judgment. As Holgrave explains to Phoebe, who inquires as to his interest in the Pyncheon family:

It is not my impulse... either to help or hinder; but to look on, to analyze, to explain matters to myself, and to comprehend the drama which, for almost two hundred years, has been dragging its slow length over the ground where you and I now tread. (154)

Holgrave's interpretive mode is to "look on, to analyze, to explain," and "to comprehend." Identifying the "drama" as one which "has been dragging its slow length over the ground" for "almost two hundred years," Holgrave delineates the bounds of the history of America itself. In this way, Hawthorne suggests that Holgrave—and his detached aesthetic mode—will provide a new model for explaining the contradictions of the nation's past to its future generations.

Although uncertain about what this future may hold, Hawthorne predicts that new forms of artistic representation will create new modes of perception, and consequently, will engage new matters of taste. While the eighteenth-century notion of the sense of taste may have served as the cultural basis that helped to bring America from the colonial era into the early republic, Hawthorne, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, initiates an exploration of what a new American aesthetic might mean. It is of profound significance that Hawthorne presents his novel as "a dish offered to the public" and casts himself as its cook, since *The House of the Seven Gables* not only charts the transformation of American citizens from consumers of food to consumers of fiction but also secures the role of American writers as producers of taste.

¹ See, for instance, Hawthorne's entry for October 26, 1856, which contains an extended description of a dinner at a public-house (144-7).

² Van Doren's 1921 study, *The American Novel*, is most famous as the source of the formulation of the "three matters" of American literature—early settlement, the Revolution, and the frontier (17). Interestingly, in order to arrive at that formulation, Van Doren traces the pathway from the first American printing of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, in 1744, by "that shrewd judge of public taste and private profits, Benjamin Franklin," to its apotheosis, in 1851, with the publication of *The House of the Seven Gables* (1). This history is among the reasons I have selected *The House of the Seven Gables* as the focus of this epilogue.

³ In this regard, it should be noted that the satisfaction that the two derive from preparing the meal is overshadowed—literally—by the portrait of their common ancestor, Colonel Pyncheon, whose "Puritan face scowled down out of the picture, as if nothing on the table pleased his appetite" (73). In this way, Hawthorne underscores his critique not just of the taste of English aristocracy, but also of the Puritans—the same pleasure-less existence that Child's Mary Conant found to be so limiting.

⁴ See page 30 for original discussion.

⁵ One might recall her account, in the *Letters*, of the revelation that allows her to experience the pleasure of the "mutual helpfulness, human sympathy, and common bond of brotherhood" beneath the surface of the "uncouth garb" of the city's firemen. See page 153 for this discussion.

⁶ Hawthorne's formulation of aesthetic taste, as expressed by Clifford at the breakfast table, is derived as much from the British Romantics, whose conception of subjective judgment reached the United States through the Transcendentalists, as it is from the Scottish philosophers who influenced Franklin, Jefferson, and Child.⁶ Evident in the narrator's account of Clifford's attraction to "the quivering play of sunbeams through the shadowy foliage," his "appreciating notice of the vase of flowers," and in the "unconscious smile with which he regarded Phoebe, whose fresh and maidenly figure was both sunshine and flowers," is a particular mode of perceiving beauty in nature that is based in the romantic poetry in which Hawthorne, himself, was immersed (79). Here, Hawthorne participates in the transcendentalist project, as documented in his sister-in-law's *Aesthetic Papers*, of rejoining the Germanic and the American trajectories of taste.

⁷ Although I do not discuss the ways in which, for Hawthorne, the division between sympathy and taste occurs along gender lines, it is clearly evident in the way the narrator describes how Phoebe's female "sphere" of sympathy is manifested in Clifford's "feeling for flowers" (105). It "was very exquisite, and seemed not so much a taste as an emotion" (105). Remarking that "this affection and sympathy for flowers is almost exclusively a woman's trait," and that "men, if endowed with it by nature, soon lose, forget, and learn to despise it, in their contact with coarser things than flowers," Hawthorn underscores the division between the sexes in the perception of sympathy versus the cultivation of taste (105).

⁸ See page 77 for original discussion.

⁹ See page 75 for original discussion.

¹⁰ It should be noted that “Jim Crow” would itself persist as a negative stereotype, an image of cultural appropriation, and even as a descriptor of the policies of racial segregation that endure well into the twentieth century.

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