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“EVERYTHING ‘CEPT EAT US”
The Antebellum Black Body Portrayed as Edible Body

by Kyla Wazana Tompkins

The Venus [speaks]:

Petits Coeurs
Rhum Caramel
Pharaon
Bouchon Fraise
Escargot Lait
Enfant de Bruxelles
(Rest)

Do you think that I look like
one of these little chocolate brussels infants?

Venus: A Play by Suzan-Lori Parks

Toward the end of Suzan-Lori Parks’s play *Venus*, the embattled Saartje Bartman, also known as the Venus Hottentot, is offered a box of chocolates by her lover and captor the Baron Docteur. Parks’s 1997 play dramatizes the life of Bartman, a nineteenth-century woman who was brought to England from Africa as a freak-show performer because of her allegedly large buttocks and hips. Following Bartman’s death, her body was dissected by her lover, and her genitals preserved—pickled even—in a jar in Paris, until her remains were returned to her tribe in 2002 (Swarns 3). Over the last two decades, historians, theorists and artists have rediscovered Bartman’s life; it has become a central example of the confluence of scientific racism and commercial entertainment in the nineteenth century¹

The violence and intimacy of the racist desires that the western white imaginary demonstrates toward black bodies is one of the central themes of *Venus*. The seemingly benevolent cultural connections between black bodies and food objects—here frankly embedded in eroticism—bring to the forefront the violence and ambivalence of American racial politics in which desire and disgust for black bodies commingle intimately and produce representations of market, parlor, and kitchen cannibalism. At its most extreme, the connection between food and black bodies emerges in the representation of the black body *as food itself*, and thus in the desire to consume those bodies. This desire is shockingly represented in the scene quoted in the epigraph, in which the Venus eats chocolate bonbons as her lover watches her and covertly masturbates. An “exotic” food item introduced to Europeans through the colonial conquest of Mexico, chocolate is today associated with

sexuality, female desire, and romantic love. In these passages, chocolate's color, history, and cultural valences easily bear the weight of a metaphoric association with the black female body.

Written in the late twentieth century but set in the nineteenth, Parks's play makes clear that the history of this representation stretches across at least two centuries, finding its origins in the intimacies of the slave economy and expressed in multiple visual and literary representations of black bodies.² Most famously crystallized in modern representations of Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben, these images are, as Doris Witt has written, "products of the dialectic(s) between commodity capitalism and popular culture [. . .] created to suture contradictions of racial, ethnic, gender, and class difference" (39).

How did this close association between black bodies and food come to be? What are the origins of this image and why does it continue to resonate today? The earliest iteration of the black-body-as-food trope that I have found is in the kitchen-bound black bodies of the nineteenth-century novel. This article is thus concerned with the edible politics of race in that period. Specifically, this paper examines the figure of the black body as food in three antebellum novels: Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*. While each of these novels figures this trope differently, given their political projects, in all of these texts the edible black body is linked to white, often female, embodiment. These images were not restricted to the nineteenth century; such was the power of these pictures—often of black children being eaten by alligators, the famous "gator bait" image—that they continued to appear in late nineteenth-century advertising,³ early twentieth-century silent film,⁴ and, as Parks's play demonstrates, in late twentieth-century art.

Parks's play reworks the connection between blackness and food in the twentieth century, giving the Venus character considerable agency in the chocolate monologue scene: far more than just a passive object of the Baron Docteur's gaze, she both holds and interrogates his desire, consuming the chocolates that form the object correlative for his objectification of her body. The image of black passivity in the face of white appetite was similarly contested in nineteenth century literature, as it had been, no doubt, in the micro-encounters of everyday life. This paper concludes with a discussion of how one nineteenth-century black author, Harriet Wilson, responds to this extreme objectification, finding in the image of the black body as food a space from which to refute black dehumanization.

Wilson's novel raises another issue, that of genre. The images of the black body as food in *The House of Seven Gables* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* signal the minstrel theater's association of the black body with violence and comedy, enacting what Freud would come to see as the inevitably aggressive underbelly of the joke.⁵ In *Our Nig*, with its early intimations of naturalism, the black body is not food but rather raw and agonized flesh, and the representation of black pain is not comedy, as it is in so many minstrel tropes, but rather, tragedy. In Wilson's "kitchen scenes" the reader is not invited into the text in order to consume the black body bibliophagically.⁶ In other words, Wilson does not invite the white reader into her text with either the promise of textual or alimentary pleasure—both of which, in laughter or consumption, provoke open, consuming, mouths. In *Our Nig* the reader/consumer's mouth is shut and the reader bears witness to Frado's open mouth, as it testifies to black hunger, black voice, and white inhumanity.

Modernity's Cannibals: Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables*

"The way us niggers was treated was awful. Marster would beat, knock, kick, kill. He done ever' thing he could 'cept eat us."

Charlie Moses, ex slave. Testimony from
the Works Progress Administration⁷

Perhaps the most famous representation of the black body as an edible object in U.S. literature takes place in Hawthorne's 1851 *House of the Seven Gables*, in which a young boy enters Hepzibah Pyncheon's store to buy a "Jim Crow" cookie.⁸ Entering through a door that has been cut into the side of the house to make a shop, the boy makes the purchase—her first sale—that marks Hepzibah's entry into the market economy. In this chapter, which occurs early in a book very much concerned with the emergence of modernity in the United States, eating is quickly associated with with class identity:

A lady—who had fed herself from childhood with the shadowy food of aristocratic reminiscences, and religion it was, that a lady's hand soils itself irremediably by doing aught for bread—this born lady, after sixty years of narrowing means, is fain to step down from her pedestal of imaginary rank. Poverty, treading closely at her heels for a lifetime, has come up with her at last. She must earn her own food, or starve! (Hawthorne 36)

The phrase "narrowing means" implies that Hepzibah's diet of "aristocratic reminiscences" has thinned her out; thus we begin the chapter on Hepzibah's entry into marketplace modernity with the sense that her aristocratic history has rendered her barely physically present, a ghost in the already-vibrant capitalist culture that the boy so easily inhabits as a consumer.

Resisting her new role as merchant, Hepzibah refuses the penny payment. The boy leaves the store with the cookie and soon returns:

No sooner had he reached the sidewalk (little cannibal that he was!) than Jim Crow's head was in his mouth. [. . .] She had just placed another representative of the renowned Jim Crow at the window, when again the shop-bell tinkered clamorously; and again the door [. . .] disclosed the same sturdy little urchin who, precisely two minutes ago, had made his exit. The crumbs and discoloration of the cannibal-feast, as yet hardly consummated, were exceedingly visible about his mouth. (47)

The "renowned Jim Crow" here refers to the first blackface act in American theater history, the 1830 performance by Thomas "Daddy" Rice. An image borrowed from minstrelsy, the Jim Crow cookie suggests the bawdy physical humor of antebellum blackface, as well as the impulse for racial impersonation that underlies that medium's structuring joke. Rather

than projecting a white body into black physicality however, Hepzibah's black cookie is eaten by the white child.

That ingestion is here marked as "cannibalism" gestures to the curious acknowledgement of species likeness that cannibalism seems to always designate. Across modernity, cannibalism has signified the total primitive otherness against which (white) Western rationality measures itself. And yet, in order for the full moral repugnance of the act to take force, the term always already undermines itself: the eater must be of the same species as the eaten, a likeness that is furthered by the act itself, in which the difference between self and other is collapsed through ingestion. Rather than marking total otherness cannibalism acknowledges and constructs sameness at the same time as it seeks to obliterate difference through bodily assimilation.

In fact, the "crumbs and discoloration of the cannibal-feast" return us to the scene of the minstrel theater, albeit as a photonegative of minstrel makeup: the child's white face is marred by the brown crumbs leftover from the "cannibal-feast," in contrast to the typical blackface makeup characterized by a black face marked by large white-outlined, white, or red lips. Hepzibah's entry into capitalism is thus marked not only by her opening a store inside her home (and in fact most early retail ventures took place in houses and homes), but by her selling a food item that invokes slavery and the minstrel theater. This trope reduces the black body to total dehumanization at the same time as it clearly denotes the desire on the part of the white subject for intimate communion with Jim Crow. In this passage cannibalism functions as the mark of whiteness.

When the "little cannibal" comes around to ask for "that other Jim Crow" that Hepzibah has put in the window, she is forced to gather her courage and demand payment:

"Well, here it is for you," said Hepzibah, reaching it down; but, recognizing that this pertinacious customer would not quit her on any other terms, so long as she had a gingerbread figure in her shop, she partly drew back her extended hand, "Where is the cent?"
[. . .] Looking somewhat chagrined, he put the coin into Hepzibah's hand, and departed, sending the second Jim Crow in quest of the former one. [. . .] It was done! The sordid stain of that copper coin could never be washed away from her palm. The little boy, aided by the impish figure of the negro dancer, had wrought an irreparable ruin [. . .] as if his childish gripe had torn down the seven-gabled mansion. (46)

Karen Sánchez-Eppler has argued that children consistently figure in Hawthorne's fiction as the sign of market desires, "suggesting how closely Hawthorne associates the market with children."⁹ She argues, further, that the popular understanding of children as little primitives during that period represents the "felt similitudes between the project of raising good, white, middle-class, Christian, American children and raising an economic and cultural American empire" (Sánchez-Eppler 186). I want to note here that this child's "gripe," as Hawthorne puts it, nearly tears down the mansion, that space that has enclosed Hepzibah Pyncheon in the strictest of domestic confines. Gripe here denotes the clutch of this "true-born Yankee's" hand, but it also motions to it's the medical meaning of "spasmodic contractions, often in the bowels, as in colic pains."¹⁰ This act of consumption

then not only threatens the total dissolution of Hepzibah's aristocratic private life, but also signifies towards profound, literally deep, digestive effects as she enters the market unwillingly. If we wish to play a little fast and loose with this idea of "gripe," Hawthorne has allowed us to follow the second Jim Crow, "in quest of the first one," into the bowels of the white body.

While the meal seems to disagree with the child, the interaction also affects Hepzibah, staining her palm. The miscegenating implications of the child's consumption, as blackness penetrates the white body, are here also enacted on Hepzibah's body, newly implicated in the market economy: her hand is stained, not black, but copper, a miscegenated color that is never to be washed away, marking her participation in, and facilitation of, the murderous "cannibal feast." However, later in the chapter the coin becomes a talisman, "fragrant with good," and "endowed with the same kind of efficacy, as a galvanic ring".¹¹

Hepzibah, at all events, was indebted to its subtle operation, both in body and spirit; so much the more, as it inspired her with energy to get some breakfast, at which [. . .] she allowed herself an extra spoonful in her infusion of black tea. (47)

What I wish to mark here are the ways in which the text connects white bodily constitution with blackness. On the one hand, the consuming child's whiteness is referred to as cannibalism and thus the cookie's racial otherness is annihilated at the same time as it is consumed; on the other hand, that difference remains behind, marking the child's face. But it is also implied that Hepzibah—who in fact doesn't consume the cookie—changes color, the child's appetite serving as proxy for her own. It is no coincidence that Hepzibah is later moved to give herself an extra infusion of black tea: both of these white subjects are re-energized and re-embodied by their encounter with Jim Crow.

The central theme here is Hepzibah's traumatic interpellation, her "galvanization,"¹² into modernity. In this bizarre and violent "consummation," as Hawthorne calls it, between whiteness and blackness, blackness is defined by paradox: it is inanimate and "dancing,"—"renowned" and replaceable. However blackness is *always* desirable, and *always* animating of whiteness, even when Hawthorne exhibits his problematic ambivalence toward blackness and slavery¹³ by rewarding white consumption with negative and positive physical results: the gripe and the stained palm, Hepzibah's exhaustion and her energized physicality. Importantly, while it is the male child who consumes the cookie, and not Hepzibah, nonetheless it is her body that is most radically remade by the *publicness* of this encounter. As private producer of these cookies, Hepzibah is not transformed; as public merchant she is, in effect, miscegenated. The figure of the Jim Crow cookie reveals that while modernity forces the encounter between domestic (here, aristocratic and female) space and capital,¹⁴ for Hawthorne that encounter also forces an incursion into the constitution of the white body, revealing the fantasy of white liberal subjectivity as atomic, complete and whole, to be just that: fantastic. When the incursion of market concerns into the Pyncheon house is rendered as the public violation of its intimate inner spaces, the intimate inner spaces of the white body—the mouths and digestive systems of both Hepzibah and the child, and the skin of the former—are similarly revealed as both public and vulnerable.¹⁵

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, the black body is described as food in terms far more explicit than in either of the two novels that I will explore in the next two sections. But that frankness, enabled perhaps by Hawthorne's own avoidance of abolitionism, which would likely have demanded that he accord a black figure some approximation of subjectivity, ultimately offers the critic a new site through which to track the intimate subtexts that lie beneath the anxious formation of white racial dominance. In citing miscegenation as a trope here, it is of course impossible to ignore the issue of the sanctioned but illicit sexual relationships that produced the anxieties over racial "pollution" in the nineteenth century, and indeed sex as an act that also threatens racial purity, always haunts eating. At the same time, however, I wish to point critical attention toward that other cavity—the mouth—through whose metaphorical properties the porous and fictional boundaries between the races might also be represented. For in examining the alimentary, that is, *oral* desire for blackness exhibited by whites in the nineteenth century, we further uncover the profound ambivalence toward, and ongoing dependence upon blackness, upon which nineteenth-century whiteness relied. Blackness becomes something that must be absorbed into whiteness as a precondition both of white modern embodiment and of entry into modernity.

Embodiment, as the term is used in this paper, refers to the ways that humans live inside, understand, and act through their own flesh. In other words, the term refers to the processes through which the seemingly extra-social matter we call flesh is interpreted and shaped as part of the social process that Judith Butler has called "subjection": "the process of becoming subordinated to power as well as the process of becoming a subject" (*Psychic Life* 4). This process is here understood as motile and historically contingent: as different subjects are produced and produce themselves at different periods in history, so do practices of embodiment change. Embodiment in the texts I discuss here is produced relationally, through the deployment of difference. Difference is here understood as a matrix of intersectional possibilities: bodies are thus never produced within single social categories; rather they are produced through the intersections of race, nation, gender, and class. To examine images of black bodies as food in the antebellum nineteenth century is thus to examine white embodiment, variously gendered, in process of formation.

The curious perversity and intimate congress of the representation that is examined in this paper—the image of putting blackness into the inner recesses of the white body—complicates current discussions of white embodiment and racial formation in the nineteenth century, particularly in terms of gender. While previous discussions of male working-class racial formation in the minstrel theater have systematically ignored the idea that white women may have also actively formulated their racial identities in relation to blacks, the representation examined here forcefully argues that one cannot exclude white women from this possibility, particularly given the impossibility of extracting eating as a social act from cooking as female labor in the nineteenth century.¹⁶

While the image of the black body as food may open up ideas about white gendered racial formation, it also opens new avenues for food studies by uncovering eating as a racially performative act. In defining eating as performative, as a "ritualized repetition,"¹⁷ through which subjectivity and embodiment come into being, whiteness is revealed in these these texts both *in* process and *as* process. Eating is an act through which the body maintains the fictions of its materiality, both discursively and biologically. In nineteenth-

century terms, the body *is* what it consumes on a deeply literal level, a belief structure that returns us, somewhat forcefully, to the symbolic status of that which is eaten. Eating in the nineteenth-century text is a performative nexus through which physicality and political subjectivity coalesce in the flesh as it is ritualistically constituted through the repetitive ingestion of materials. In examining eating in these texts as an act of subjection, we discover some of the ways in which white bodies materialize through processes of discursive constitution that simultaneously produce ideas about which bodies matter and which bodies don't. Examining food objects in literature—even, or perhaps particularly, when they are so closely linked to raced subjectivities—uncovers a set of complicated relations through which the raced materiality of the body appears to be substantiated, but through which it is in fact located within discourse.¹⁸

The image discussed here also complicates the critical tendency to romanticize food culture and history as a kind of “happy” history. Histories of food items often focus on the history of consumption, sometimes of luxury items, usually by privileged white classes.¹⁹ As Sidney Mintz has demonstrated in his work on sugar, however, behind every fantasy of plenitude is a history that includes profoundly unequal political, social and economic relationships, on the local and global level.²⁰ The image of the edible black body renders these inequities apparent, displaying the conflation of desire and disgust that a devouring relationship towards an objectified other must contain, demonstrating that eating and food culture are nexuses through which the white relationship to otherness is often negotiated. Eating, that sometimes happiest of pastimes, is also a profoundly aggressive act. When it is unpacked to examine fantasies about racially marginalized subjects as they have been represented in popular culture, the multiple forms of violence that are contained within both the domestic sphere and the national imaginary become apparent.

The House of the Seven Gables, written during the heat of national debates about slavery, seems to ignore the issue that was threatening to sunder the nation. In this very small but significant scene, we begin to see that, despite Hawthorne's terror of miscegenation, he nonetheless begins to acknowledge that black bodies, here rendered in the most extreme representation of objectification and dehumanization, must nonetheless enter into and change the white body (and thus the white body politic) if it is itself to enter into modernity. Indeed, if we read Hepzibah's shop as a liminal site²¹—both temporal and spatial—between private Puritan past and public capitalist modernity then the path from production to consumption—from kitchen to shop to street—offers insight into the profound interconnectedness between white female domesticity and public racial and national formation. In that formulation, black bodies might circulate as commodities: but blackness also held whiteness and the nation seemingly predicated on it, in its “gripe.” Writing at the same time, and publishing her first book in the same year as *House of the Seven Gables*, this was a truth that did not escape Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Reader as Eater in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Food images in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* take place within domestic space, where Stowe's abolitionist and feminist goals complicate Hawthorne's representation while retaining a

thematic connection with both white embodiment and female participation in the public sphere. As many critics have noted, the kitchen is a crucial space in Stowe's best-selling novel of the mid-century.²² At their most idyllic, Stowe's kitchens lure the reader in with passages that linger on the intertwined pleasures of food and language; at their most problematic, the class and race inflections that construct the semiotic of the antebellum kitchen allow Stowe to speak in vernacular languages that would otherwise be forbidden to her. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, four interconnected representational strands mark the conjunction between food and African-American bodies. The first, which I have been developing, is the representation of African-Americans as food themselves, an image that mirrors the slave's status as object and commodity and that serves as the precondition both for white women's embodiment and emergence into the public sphere. The second is the literary function of the kitchen; the third is the figure of the cook, who appears in the literary kitchen as both the threat of domestic disruption—a threat that may or may not enter the dominant subject's body through their open mouth—and the precondition of white middle-class female performance and power. The fourth, which unravels and develops from the previous three, is the ongoing connection between food and vernacular speech, in turn represented, as Gavin Jones has argued, as hyper-embodied speech.²³

Throughout the novel Stowe sets up parallels between slaves and food that underline her desire to both unveil and trouble the status of slaves as "living property."²⁴ In the first chapter, for instance, Eliza's child Harry is made to scamper and dance after a handful of raisins that Shelby has thrown to the floor, while the slave trader Haley suggests that the child can be sold into another position as a waiter:

Why, I've got a friend that's going into this yer branch of business—wants to buy up handsome boys to raise for the market. Fancy articles entirely—sell for waiters, and so on, to rich 'uns, that can pay for handsome 'uns. It sets off one of yer great places—a real handsome boy to open door, wait and tend. They fetch a good sum [. . .](46)

The phonetic echo here between "raisin" and "raise" is set off by the visual parallel that is implied between Harry and the raisins—each small and black, each on the floor.²⁵ It also inaugurates the first instance of what will prove to be a theme represented in cultural artifacts throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: a fascination, in the white imaginary, with the dermatological differences between white and black skins, and a projection of this difference into a materiality that is taken from, and reflected onto material culture. For example, both Harry and the raisins are, in the racist mythos of the nineteenth century, sun-darkened; this apparently material difference in turn offers a host of metaphoric possibilities that are themselves enabled by the ways in which black bodies have historically been impregnated with marketplace significance. As subjects first brought into the North American imaginary as commodities, the representation of African-Americans as marketplace objects makes horrible sense as part of the historical progression of racist capitalist logic.

Stowe further develops the analogy between slaves and food when Shelby attempts to distract Haley from his discussion of Eliza's market worth. Food here begins to play a

more complicated role than it does in *The House of the Seven Gables*, as the unsavory politics of the body overlap with the unsavory language of the trader:

“By Jupiter . . . ther’s an article, now! You might make your fortune on that ar gal in Orleans, any day. . .”
 “I don’t want to make my fortune on her,” said Mr. Shelby, dryly; and seeking to turn the conversation, he uncorked a bottle of fresh wine, and asked his companion’s opinion of it.
 “Capital, sir,—first chop!” said the trader . . . “Come, how will you trade about the gal? What shall I say for her—what’ll you take?”
 (46)

Again the rich metaphorical possibilities offered to the language of slavery by the language of food are picked up in this passage when Shelby’s clumsy attempt to distract Haley from Eliza replaces her figure with a glass of wine. The language here is decidedly that of the mouth: Shelby’s “dry” language is countered and refuted by the “wet” language of the bottle of wine he is offered as distraction.

Haley’s response signifies multiply: his refusal to be distracted implies that he continues to speak about Eliza while appearing to speak about the food and wine—as an evaluative statement, in response to Shelby’s attempt to distract him, “first chop” in this sense implies the first cut of meat off a carcass. Eliza then is a first-rate article, her monetary value (or lack of human value, for Haley) represented by a bottle of first-rate wine and a cut of meat, and outlined in Haley’s telling turn of phrase: as he savors the wine, he asks, “What shall I say for her?” The metonymic line from human object to food object becomes clear, as Eliza’s commodification allows Stowe to play upon the connections between sexual and alimentary desire.

Food metaphors thus work to further Stowe’s critique of both the dehumanization of African Americans in the slave economy, and the congruent dehumanization of the slave-trader as he descends into crass appetite and consumption: to trade in humans is to consume them alive. What the issue of food imagery also speaks to, however, is Stowe’s dexterity with the vernacular. Ann Douglas captures Stowe’s fascination with vernacular speech and its social implications when she writes that “Stowe knew the vernacular and the wit it inspired were officially off limits to American women . . .”²⁶ As Douglas so elegantly explains, Stowe, like many of her contemporaries, was clearly intrigued with the literary potential of vernacular languages. In fact, Stowe opens the first chapter by marking the linguistic (and therefore class) differences between the slave-master Shelby and the trader Haley. She comments that Haley’s

conversation was in free and easy defiance of Murray’s grammar, and was garnished at convenient intervals with various profane expressions, which not even the desire to be graphic in our account shall induce us to transcribe. (42)

We can see that from the first Stowe is interested in the cultural politics of speech, speech that is here liberally inspired by drink: she tells us that wine and brandy are on the table.

This then is a messy exchange indeed, marked by the mutual interpenetration of food, wine, vernacular speech and economic need, as well as by the limits of what is utterable by the cultural norms of the moment. Stowe is at pains early on to let us know that much of what Haley says—the “various profane expressions”—is outside the limits of what she can “transcribe.” What is outside those limits is replaced, in the mouth, by what can be eaten: food here begins to mark both the limits of what is sayable—the speech patterns of those at the edges of social decorum—and the realm of what is unsayable, namely the carnivorous capitalist desire to feed upon Eliza’s body.²⁷

Stowe’s fascination with the vernacular is well displayed as in the fourth chapter, which is also the first kitchen scene. Here the mutual constitution of the vernacular and the culinary makes itself visible most obviously in the character Chloe, who is the first of a series of cook figures to appear in the novel. As the mammy figure, the black female cook is often characterized by a sort of succoring benevolence as well as a minstrel-show stereotyping that provides the text with racist levity. The comedy of the mammy lies in what seems to be her empowered place in the household: speaking from the kitchen, she seems to speak from power, a power that is undercut by the broad vernacular of her speech and her embrace of manual labor:

“What does get into ladies sometimes, I don’t know; but sometimes, when a body has the heaviest kind o’ ’sponsibility on ’em, as ye may say, and is kinder ‘*seris*’ and taken up, dey takes dat ar time to be hangin’ round and kinder interferin’! Now, missis, she wanted me to do dis way, and she wanted me to do dat way; and, finally, I got kinder sarcy, and, says I, ‘Now, Missis, do jist look at dem beautiful white hands o’ yourn with long fingers, and all a sparkling with rings, like my white lilies when de dew ’s on ’em; and look at my great black stumpin hands. Now, don’t you think dat de Lord must have meant *me* to make de pie-crust, and you to stay in de parlor? Dar! I was jist so sarcy, Mas’r George.”

“And what did mother say?” said George.

“. . . says she, ‘Well, Aunt Chloe, I think you are about in the right on ’t,’ says she; and she went off in de parlor. She oughter racked me over the head for bein’ so sarcy; but dars what ’t is—I can’t do nothin’ with ladies in de kitchen!” (73)

Chloe’s physicality is central to this scene; large and comforting, she has “stumpin” hands made for making “pie-crusts.” Chloe’s monologue, in which she seems to assert the power that rests in the kitchen, obscures the material suffering—and punishing labor—that played itself out in the kitchens of slaveholding plantations. Any incipient power suggested by Chloe’s berating of Mrs. Shelby is negated in two ways. First Chloe’s speech is never really articulated to Mrs. Shelby but only repeated and acted out second hand, to a minor power of the household—the young Master George. Indeed, the spectacle of a black woman publicly berating or confronting a white woman in a Northern kitchen would have been almost unmanageable in terms of the time; in slave-holding states it would have been physically dangerous.

The second strategy that Stowe uses to contain and manage the political force of Chloe’s speech lies in the passage’s elaboration of the black-body-as-food theme; Stowe extends the

food imagery that she has used to represent Eliza and her child by suggesting that Chloe's defiance of Mrs. Shelby is represented by her "sarcy-ness." The food imagery of this scene opens itself up to a rich multiplicity of readings that returns the reader's attention to the play between the black body and the alimentary. Simmering underneath that surface reading lie the volatile politics that Stowe barely covers with the veneer of comedy. In depicting Chloe as "sarcy," Stowe deepens the analogy between the African American body and the edible object. Although Chloe's kitchen insurrection is contained and repressed not only in its method of recounting, but also in her avowed commitment to what is, in a sense, her own servitude, nonetheless it is also true that Chloe's "sarcy-ness" also contains the threat of her intimate association with the Shelbys. That is, in representing Chloe's berating of Mrs. Shelby as sauciness, Stowe hints that her sauciness is a dish that the Shelbys must swallow. Chloe's speech—her sauciness—threatens to reach into the mouths, throats, and bodies of those who listen to her, even as they might desire to consume her.

Is it clear then that the intimate associations between mistress and slave that are enacted within the kitchen through these alimentary metaphors can also be a threat. Consider Stowe's use of the term "stumpin'" in the passage above. While it is meant to represent the contrast between Mrs. Shelby's parlor femininity and Chloe's laboring and powerful physicality, the term also implies the idea of political speech.²⁸ Chloe's hands speak with a certain political import; thus the products of those hands, "meant" to make piecrusts, carry the heavy weight of unsaid political critique. This form of speech, it must be noted, is in direct contrast to the opening scene of the chapter, in which George is teaching Tom to write. George's apparent ownership of written language, much played up by Chloe herself—while Tom is noticeably silent—is thus countered by another mode of speaking altogether. As we will see, Stowe allows the exchange between Chloe and George to set the young slave master up for a significant critique that, while on the surface is indulgently maternal towards a child figure, is nonetheless also a powerful reprehension.

This trope of Chloe's edibility continues throughout the chapter:

a round, black, shining face is hers, so glossy as to suggest the idea that she might have been washed over with white of eggs, like one of her own tea rusks. [. . .] A cook she certainly was, in the very bone and centre of her soul [. . .] she was always meditating on trussing, stuffing and roasting. [. . .] Her corn-cake, in all its varieties of hoe-cake, dodgers, muffins, and other species too numerous to mention, was a sublime mystery to all less practised compounders; and she would shake her fat sides with honest pride and merriment, as she would narrate the fruitless efforts that one and another of her compeers had made to attain her elevation. (67)

What haunts the figure of Chloe is not simply the problematic representation of her happy and willing servitude but rather that her physicality comes to essentially embody her labor. Offering the fruits of her labor to Mas'r George—who eats even before Chloe's children, as Stowe not uncritically notes—and then, descending hierarchically, to her husband and children, the value of her labor is collapsed into the value of her very flesh. Stowe's Mammy is an object of pleasant consumption—for the reader as for slave-owning character—at the same time as she is one barb in Stowe's anti-slavery critique.

This portrayal of Chloe as an object of consumption also embeds itself in the narrative as a discussion of Chloe's essence, in the culinary sense. She is, "in the very bone and centre of her soul" what, like a soup bone, gives the chapter its flavor—she is, in fact, much like one of the chickens and fowls over whom she holds dominion.²⁹ This trope is carried further as her face itself becomes a sort of cake, as shiny as though she were glossed with "white of eggs." The parallels here between Chloe and the chicken clearly draw upon folkish images of the busy mother hen; however, their comic status is undermined by what awaits those animals—trussing and roasting. In this parallel we see that the benevolence of the barnyard imagery is outlined and shadowed by the very real specter of terror that haunts the slave body, a terror that will ultimately be enacted in the climactic scene of the novel.

The centrality of the kitchen within the cabin makes George's appetite for Chloe's food—her pan-cake—an important thematic concern, as their dialogue and the early action of the chapter leading up to the prayer sequence is dominated by his eating. When she describes George stuffing himself with Chloe's baked goods—which are, we have established, analogous to Chloe herself—while her children wait to one side, hungry, she is leveling her critical gaze at George, at his imperiousness and sense of entitlement, just as surely as she levels her criticism at Haley. Indeed both George and Haley perform the same gesture, throwing food to the floor for black children to eat; George, despite his ambivalent construction as a benevolent slaveholder, is nonetheless a slaveholder. Until the religious meeting that closes the chapter, George is "always ready for anything that makes him of importance":³⁰

". . . Ah, Mas'r George, you don't know half your privileges in yer family and bringin' up!" Here Aunt Chloe sighed, and rolled up her eyes with emotion.

"I'm sure, Aunt Chloe, I understand all my pie and pudding privileges," said George. "Ask Tom Lincon if I don't crow over him, every time I meet him."

Aunt Chloe sat back in her chair, and indulged in a hearty guffaw of laughter, at this witticism of young Mas'r's, *laughing till the tears rolled down her black shining cheeks, and varying the exercise with playfully slapping and poking Mas'r Georgey, and telling him to go way, and that he was a case—that he was fit to kill her, and that he sartin would kill her one of these days; and, between each of these sanguinary predictions, going off into a laugh, each longer and stronger than the other, till George really began to think that he was a very dangerously witty fellow, and that it became him to be careful how he talked "as funny as he could."* (71, italics added)

The mounting aggression that underlies this passage is astonishing once it is read closely, and brings to mind Freud's famous injunction that aggression is a central impulse behind the comic.³¹ That is to say, while it clear that Master George's sense of privilege—his "pie and pudding privileges"—is here exercised in his right to eat first and best, as well as in his congruent ability to read and write, it is simultaneously clear that Chloe is pushing and prodding him to such extremes of self-importance that while the minstrel mugging of the scene would on first glance make her to be its comic object, in fact she has stuffed him full

of himself, making him the object of the joke. Chloe's laughter, each laugh "louder and stronger than the other" contains the sublimated aggression of the chapter, twinned with tears, and masking what she actually says: "sanguinary predictions" that he should "go way," that he is "fit to kill her" and "sartin would kill her." Each laugh sounds "louder and stronger" than the last, as Chloe slaps and pokes him: the joke, naturally, is on George. In Chloe's bloody speech "sanguinary" violence emerges as a bitter aftertaste, the visceral underbelly, of comedy.

Here then is Chloe's "sarcy-ness," sneaking into George's very sense of self so that it only lingers on the edge of his, and the reader's awareness: George begins to think that he "was a dangerously witty fellow, and that it became him to be careful how he talked as funny as he could" (71). But what has George done but eat and talk? And what has Chloe done but talk and feed? What is most consumable in that kitchen has been the bodies of the slaves themselves, but Stowe is also able, in this chapter, to use that analogy to take fierce critical aim at both the white appetite for those bodies, and the white appetite for racist comic discourse.

How then are we to judge the desire on the part of the white subject to devour blackness in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the representation of black bodies as food signifies Stowe's engagement with the problem of black commodification even as the text turns on the white desire to consume blackness. This representation points toward a latent understanding in the text that race is an American problem that will not be banished but that must be absorbed into the body politic. More radically, in engaging with the symbolic possibilities of cannibalism, Stowe signals to the idea that the fictional lines that divide blackness from whiteness are fine, if often fragile; at the same time, the desire to devour blackness also indicates the desire to annihilate it, to use it only in terms of its capacity to regenerate whiteness. Yet even as the text of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reflects upon, even digests this idea, it is clear that Stowe's manifest resolution is excretory, one of exclusion towards the darker regions, as Eliza, George and their family move on, as processed and exported American products, to Africa. Even Topsy herself later becomes an African missionary.

In dividing up Chloe's body and feeding it to George, and importantly, by not showing Tom eating despite the fact that he is eating alongside George in this scene, Stowe offers up the black body as the dehumanized, materially dense object that the racist ideologies of the nineteenth-century United States saw it to be. And while Stowe's critique of slavery cannot be ignored, she is ultimately unable to separate white enjoyment of and desire for black bodies from her incisive critique of slavery's strategy of dehumanization. Stowe's representation of this desire is then complicated by her feminist agenda, for in positing women as avatars of social change, in interpellating them directly in her text, she posits them as mediators and consumers of black subjectivity. And while this problematic relationship is meant to propel white women into the sphere of public action, and while it most interestingly positions white female embodiment in a similar complicated relation to blackness that men in the public spaces of popular culture were already engaged with, the text nonetheless ultimately upholds white female bodily hegemony even as it indicates Stowe's awareness of its bloody visceral consequences.

In her use of food as a metonym for the black body, Stowe, unlike Hawthorne, offers a powerful critique of white male embodiment and entitlement; nonetheless it is clear that, for Stowe, white women—as readers and as middle-class overseers of slaves and servants—also

exist as crucial mediators of black access to freedom. If Stowe's representation of blackness as food serves to develop the metaphor of objectification, like Hawthorne's she also renders the black body appetizing to her readers. And while the invitation to consume blackness is not explicit, the extensive food metaphors would seem to indicate that the desire to commune with and consume blackness is latent in the text. Given the abolitionist drive of the novel, how, then, might the political problem of slave emancipation be embedded in these images? This, I argue, is to be found in contradictory relationships between white embodiment, black embodiment, and citizenship. That is to say: if whiteness is the condition on which citizenship is constituted in the antebellum period, the possibility of black citizenship is here tested out in the idea that blackness can be absorbed into the white body politic. Yet in encoding eating as a readerly act, particularly in this highly politicized novel, the representation of the enslaved body as tied to the materiality of often-appetizing food products reveals, as Saidiya Hartman has discussed, that "rather than bespeaking the mutuality of social relations or the expressive and affective capabilities of the subject, sentiment, enjoyment, affinity, will and desire facilitated subjugation, domination, and terror *by preying upon the flesh, the heart and the soul*" (5, italics added).³²

In the novels of oppositional writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and, as I show later, Harriet Wilson, this literary and political tendency is complicated: in these novels, white appetite signifies unthinking privilege and aggression, but it also represents the desire upon which both white female citizenship *and* the future of the post-emancipation republic rests. The text thus presents the reader with an impossible conundrum: to empathize with the slave is to internalize her, but to do so is also to annihilate her subjectivity. Therein lies the problem upon which so many early and contemporary relationships between feminist white women and people, especially women, of color has foundered: if black citizenship is to be tested out through white women's bodies, black citizenship, on its own terms, will always be obscured.³³

Stowe's domestic translation of the tropes of minstrelsy reveals that white women's cultural production, although ostensibly limited to private space, was as intertwined with an embodied relationship to blackness as was the (supposedly largely male) arena of public theatrical performance. Linking white racial embodiment with reading and acting upon the demands of an abolitionist book, Stowe advances her nascent feminist politic by positing her readership's bodies as analogous to the body politic, both absorbing and appropriating racial difference.³⁴ White women's politicization—interpellated both as sentimental structure of feeling and embodied existence across the boundaries of slaveholding and free states—thus becomes the bedrock upon which the future of the nation resides. In this relationship Stowe assumes white women to be as aggressively desiring of an intimate communion with blackness as the white men performing on the minstrel stage. To further embody white womanhood through the intimate association with blackness is to underline exactly that physical "too-muchness" that exiles white women from the public sphere of disembodied male citizenship,³⁵ but it also reveals, like the emperor's new clothes, the embodied status of white citizenship that power otherwise seeks to obscure.

Food metaphors seem to contain these political desires to the private sphere while allowing white women to engage in forms of racial play—including, as Ann Douglas writes, vernacular speech—otherwise reserved for men in public spaces.³⁶ But there are other contestations that express themselves through the trope of eating that not only reveal

Stowe's mastery of her craft but also a committed critique of entitled white embodiment that complicates her borrowing from the minstrel stage. In the eponymous chapter four, Stowe's depiction of the broad humor of Chloe's kitchen reveals a subtle game of power that is inextricable from the politics of who-gets-to-eat-first and who-gets-to-eat-best. A close look at Stowe's language in this scene reveals that it is a game that hinges upon but also unerringly skewers white appetite.

The Black Mouth Opened: *Our Nig's* Kitchen Scenes

Every Black woman in America has survived several lifetimes
of hatred, where in even in the candy store cases of our childhood,
little brown niggerbaby candies testified against us.

"Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger"
Audre Lorde

While in one sense fieldwork has come to represent the most abject space of enslaved black labor, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and other texts tell us that the kitchen and food culture, considered broadly, are sites of primary importance in representing the visceral politics of the nineteenth century: Certainly the methods of torture, debasement and dehumanization that were imposed on black bodies mirror the sort of brutality only unleashed upon the animals that humans consume. While white desire for the black body appears in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The House of the Seven Gables*, it is in Harriet Wilson's 1859 semi-autobiographical novel *Our Nig* that we begin to see that white desire critiqued and rebuffed by a black subject.

In particular, Harriet Wilson's anti-sentimental text explores these tropes as a way of complicating the domestic tropes of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. For Julia Stern, Wilson's brutalized body and tortured existence testify against the ideology of domesticity and instead mark *Our Nig* as a gothic novel. Stern argues that

In pitting gothic antinurture against sentimental maternity, Wilson reaches out to the same audience that embraced *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a novel that, more than any other fictional work of the 1850s, is structured by a Manichean poetics of familial love. But Wilson's phantasmagoric representation of motherhood is far more critical than that of Stowe, whose vision is nothing less than redemptive. (441-442)

In her article, Stern begins to develop the idea of what she calls the "food chain" as part of an economy of bestial metaphors that play throughout the novel. In particular, she persuasively argues that to Mrs. Belmont, and, in a continued perversion of maternal sentimentality, to her daughter, the tortured Frado becomes less than human and thus closer to animal.

Much of the violence perpetrated against Frado does echo that perpetrated against those animals consumed for domestic use. For instance, when Mrs. Bellmont threatens to “take the skin from her body” it is as though Frado’s skin will be put to use as leather, an image that gestures forward to the Nazi use of Jewish skin to make lampshades. When Frado becomes, as Stern says, “potential food” (454), particularly when Mary throws a carving knife at her in the kitchen, the metaphor that I have been exploring in other texts becomes even clearer. In depicting Mary’s rage towards Frado within the space of the kitchen, Wilson allows the extent of her dehumanization in the eyes of the Bellmonts to appear: in their eyes, she is no more than meat.

However, food as metaphor for the black body has a radically different valence in *Our Nig* because it is less about enabling white female subjectivity and white embodiment, and more about calling upon the reader to witness the black self in the process of becoming a subject. That is, it is not white subjectivity and embodiment that comes into being here, but rather black bodily pain that is made visible and legible to the readership. Even more radical, the text for the most part refuses the readership (which is, as Wilson tells us, both white and black)³⁷ the kinds of readerly pleasure in consuming that both Hawthorne and Stowe count on. While Wilson does not entirely avoid borrowing from minstrel comedy, in scenes that, like much minstrel comedy, rely on black proximity to pain,³⁸ we are far from comedy here in this early instance of naturalist fiction.

To survive being a black servant in the free north, the author argues, is to risk being consumed alive. It is also to speak from the spaces that have otherwise been colonized by white desires. Thus, the kitchen functions as the primary site of Frado’s domestic labor and her suffering, and the conflicts between Frado and Mrs. Bellmont are referred to as “kitchen scenes”:

It is impossible to give an impression of the manifest enjoyment of Mrs. B. in these kitchen scenes. It was her favorite exercise to enter the apartment noisily, vociferate orders, give a few sudden blows to quicken Nig’s pace, then return to the sitting room with *such* a satisfied expression, congratulating herself upon her thorough house-keeping qualities. (66)

Here, as in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the opposition between the kitchen and the sitting room is defined by the difference between black female labor and white female leisure. Wilson also allows us to see that which both Hawthorne, and to a lesser extent Stowe, do not allow us to see: the agony that the hegemonic politics of white female dominance enables. The Bellmonts’s kitchen is resoundingly not the site of happy production and pleasant consumption.

In *Our Nig*, white appetite is confronted with its consequences: Wilson reverses the trope of the white mouth turned toward the consumable black body. In *Our Nig*, Frado’s body offers no nourishment to the white reader; rather, the narrative forces the reader to stand witness to starvation. In a stunningly brutal scene, Mrs. Bellmont and her daughter beat Frado “inhumanely; then propping her mouth open with a piece of wood, shut her up in a dark room without any supper” (35). The image of Frado, locked up, “her mouth wedged apart, her face swollen and full of pain” aims to trump any possibility of white desire and

instead turns the reader's attention away from his or her own mouth and towards Frado's, which remains forced open, hungry and wordless, stuck in the shape of a perpetual but silent scream (36). This representation seems to render Frado's open mouth, and thus the figure of the consuming subject, monstrous, in fact the image reveals white female inhumanity. Yet there is another mode in which the open black mouth is important to this text, and it is an image that returns us to the material conditions that drive the book. For if Wilson refuses to be consumed the need to eat is what primarily motivates the production of this text. As she writes in the preface, "Deserted by kindred, disabled by failing health, I am forced to some experiment which shall aid me in maintaining myself and child without extinguishing this feeble life" (3). Hunger lies at the very center of this text.

The monstrosity of the open mouth is central to rendering Frado's suffering visible, even as it locates Frado's pain beyond what is linguistically transcribable. Mrs. Bellmont consistently stops up Frado's mouth to keep the sounds of torture from leaving the kitchen, and thus while sounds come from the kitchen as Frado is beaten, her mouth is either propped open with blocks of wood, or stuffed with a towel. In one incident, Frado is so ill from caring for the sick James, and from "drudgery in the kitchen," that she can barely stand. Mrs. Bellmont comes into the kitchen and

[. . .] commanded her to go to work. "I am sick," replied Frado, rising and walking to her unfinished task, "and cannot stand long, I feel so bad. [. . .] she seemed left to unrestrained malice; and snatching a towel, stuffed the mouth of the sufferer, and beat her cruelly. [. . .] [Frado] bore it with the hope of a martyr, that her misery would soon close. Though her mouth was muffled, and the sounds much stifled, there was a sensible commotion, which James' quick ear detected. [. . .]
"Call Frado to come here . . ." Susan retired with the request to the kitchen, where it was evident that some brutal scene had been enacted. (Wilson 82–83)

This "sensible commotion," the reader infers, is the sound of the beating and, despite her being gagged, ultimately speaks her pain to other parts of the house. Experiences that happen at the outer limits of human suffering are thus expressed in sounds that, though communicative, are outside of spoken language.³⁹

In a seminal moment in the novel, Mrs. Bellmont's son invites Frado out of the kitchen and into the dining room to eat a proper meal. A crucial conflict takes place between Mrs. Bellmont and Frado in this scene when Mrs. Bellmont refuses to let the child eat from a clean plate and instead forces her to eat from Mrs. Bellmont's dirty one. Frado hesitates for a moment and then gives the plate to her dog to lick clean before eating from it herself. The story of the subtle one-upping of Mrs. Bellmont's domestic terrorism is referred to as the "kitchen version" of the tale; any other version remains untold, as Frado's "kitchen version" is the only version that the reader has direct access to. In a very real sense, the entire novel thus becomes a "kitchen version" because it is precisely in that room that Frado's formative years, and ultimately her health itself, are spent.

In *Our Nig*, we are horribly far from the apparent idylls of Harriet Beecher Stowe's kitchens—Chloe's pancakes, Dinah's gourmet disorder, the Hallidays' Edenic breakfast—but the

visceral subtext that is inherent to nineteenth-century kitchen scenes nonetheless emerges as full and manifest brutality. Wilson's novel, which tells its story from the kitchen, turns the metaphor of body as food around: refusing to extend the invitation to consume on which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* relies, the text demands that readers identify themselves *against* the violence of white female domestic mastery and *with* the subject of the kitchen scenes. Reappropriating these food tropes in her narrative, Wilson brings black subjectivity into being despite these characterizations. In refusing to embody these horrible fantasies, her novel delivers a stinging rebuke to an important trope of white female literary subjectivity and white literary embodiment. In *Our Nig* it is not blackness that occupies a lower place on the food chain than dogs and white women: it is white women, whose cruel appetites place them lower than dogs.

The closing lines of the preface, which movingly calls to Wilson's "colored brethren universally for patronage, hoping they will not condemn this attempt of their sister to be erudite, but rally around me a faithful band of supporters and defenders," invokes not only a public space for black writers but a reading black public. The plea for patronage points the reader back to the basic reason for the text: to feed Wilson and her son. In repudiating the relationship between black objectification and white female embodiment, Wilson works to claim public space for black subjectivity in the antebellum North by infusing with feeling the body that Mrs. Belmont insists on treating with impunity. Testifying to the hunger that drives the novel, blackness in *Our Nig* is not a function of white modern embodiment; rather, it makes a claim for black subjectivity beyond white cruelty and despite white benevolence.

* * *

Exploring the representation of the black body as an edible object in these three mid-century novels offers a few new critical insights. First, it opens up at least part of the history of an important and problematic representation in American culture, one within which we can discern some of the violently desiring relationship that white America has had with black America. Second, these representations in texts concerned with white women's interactions with the politics and economics of the public sphere offers insight into the various modes through which white women were represented and conceived of, and represented and conceived of themselves, in intimate communion with black physicality.

In the end, what is ultimately rendered visible by these images is a very specific, historically located embodiment, one that calls on scholars to further investigate white women's historical and literary investment in proprietary and violent relationships with blacks as well as their fantasies of blackness. These are not insignificant images: across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these images reappeared in visual culture, a fact that testifies to the ways in which they captured and expressed an important social relationship. This ongoing and intimate relationship will, I hope, further invite critics to investigate other spaces—the theater perhaps—in which the majoritarian presence of white women has been ignored.

What is significant in these texts, for both food and literary studies, is that rather than citing the typical blackface relationship, in which white bodies are projected into black

bodies, blackness in these texts is ingested and consumed. At times these representations are explicitly linked to the representation of white female entrance into the nineteenth-century public sphere, testifying to the modes through which abolitionist feminism was founded on the commodification, consumption, and at times attempted annihilation of black bodies—even in those texts in which white women sought to make progressive claims for black subjectivity. In examining this problematic through the figure of eating, however, we also find new insight into both the study of food and eating and the embodied constitution of the white subject in this period. As eating and the labor that produce it are, in terms of these novels, inseparable from the politics of domestic space, white embodiment must also be read as inseparable from the harsh and bloody visceral inequalities of the kitchen.

Further complicating recent investigations of white working-class male embodiment as it took place through the investment—literally the “putting on”—of blackness, these images of ingesting blackness reveal the profoundly desiring and violent relationships that antebellum whites had with black bodies (Lott 18). What differs is that blackness is not so much put *on* a white body in these images as it is put *in*: thus they hinge on oral, that is, alimentary, desire, on the image and idea of whites putting black bodies in their mouths. Not entirely divorced from the broad bawdiness of the minstrel theater, the black body as food in the novels invites the (presumably white, often female) reader to consume what is clearly described as an appetizing black body; at other times a white character literally consumes a representation of the black body in the narrative. That these are intextuated black and white bodies in no way lessens the insight that these relationships provide into eating as a form of performative embodiment. For while white cannibalism in these texts is indubitably a violent attempt to annihilate blackness it is also a deeply desiring act: both Stowe and Hawthorne portray blackness as sweet, as profoundly desirable.

The colloquial nature of eating, its everydayness and seemingly asocial biological imperative renders it invisible as a socially constructed and highly discursive practice. This essay aims to contribute to a shift in what we might call, after Raymond Williams, the “structure of feeling” that governs perceptions of food studies. To study and write about food is at times an unabashed pleasure; unfortunately the pleasures of the field have often led critics to perceive our scholarship as hobbyist. Examining the political and cultural meaning of food culture, as those of us who work in the field well know, opens up a multitude of questions central to critical reflection about the production of asymmetrical social relations, both historical and contemporary. For, as Alice B. Toklas once wrote, every good meal begins with “Murder in the Kitchen.”⁴⁰

NOTES

Many people have kindly read this paper in its various iterations as dissertation chapter, manuscript chapter and article draft. This paper began as a paper for Jay Fliegelman’s 1840s class at Stanford University: thank you, Jay. I would like to thank Sianne Ngai, Arnold Rampersad, Estelle Freedman and Linda Hutcheon for their comments on dissertation chapter drafts. Thanks too to my colleagues at Pomona, particularly Dara Regaignon and Aaron Kunin. Nicole Fleetwood pushed me to stop hiding behind other writer’s ideas. Krishnendu Ray and Amy Bentley gave me valuable feedback at the NYU Feast and Famine workshop. Many thanks to the anonymous reviewers at *Callaloo*. All errors in this paper are entirely my own.

1. Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985). I engage with Parks's play here because it demonstrates many of the central themes of the paper, including the use of food to represent racial difference and the problematics of the white desire for the racial other as they are enacted through food metaphors.
2. Although this is a play set in England, and about European colonialism, I am taking some liberties and reading this play in terms of its American implications. Nonetheless I recognize that the history of Saartje Baartman has specific ramifications for reading this play that I do not explore here.
3. In the penultimate chapter of my book project, I look at the trope of the edible black body as it continues into late nineteenth-century chromolithographic advertising.
4. Edison, Thomas A. *The Gator and the Pickaninny*, Edison Manufacturing Company, 1900. In this film, an alligator eats a black child. His father cuts open the animal after the boy disappears and finds him intact, unaffected by being consumed alive. In many ways, this trope exemplifies the violence inherent to white imaginings of black corporeality and embodiment. The key here is the black child's indestructible body, which emerges intact and unharmed from the belly of the beast, thus testifying to the ways that blackness is historically conceived of as impervious to, and therefore capable of bearing more, pain. At the same time, the narrative action of the film rests upon the spectatorial pleasure of witnessing the consumption of a black child. For a brief but interesting discussion of this film in relation to other examples of early racist films see Anna Everett, "Lester Walton's *Écriture Noir*: Black Spectatorial Transcodings of 'Cinematic Excess,'" *Cinema Journal* 39.3 (Spring 2000): 30–48. Walton's discussion explores the possibilities of black counter-hegemonic spectatorial strategies in early film, but nonetheless posits white spectators as the assumed audience. See also Michele Wallace, "Uncle Tom's Cabin: Before and After the Jim Crow Era," *TDR: The Drama Review* 44.1 (2000): 137–156.
5. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960).
6. In the Oxford English Dictionary, a "bibliophagist" is a devourer of books. In his delightful and exuberant rereading of Bakhtin's reading of Gargantua, Michel Jeanneret links the enjoyment of words to the enjoyment of food in his examination of symposium literature in the Renaissance. For Jeanneret, the hyper embodiment of food talk enables the emergence of the vernacular, the form of speech most closely connected to the space (and thus cuisine) from which it emerges. In symposiac literature, "table talk" is that talk in which food becomes words and words become foods. Hence, bibliophagy. Michel Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words: Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991).
7. Charlie Moses, interview by Esther de Sola, *Born In Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936–1938, American Memory from the Library of Congress*, 9 Jan. 2007 <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>>.
8. Here I wish to note that my reading is very much in conversation with David Anthony's wonderful essay, "Class, Culture, and the Trouble with White Skin in Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*," in which he explores this scene at length. Anthony's discussion of this scene focuses on the ways that "race acted as a crucial third term in negotiations of class and culture during the antebellum period." As he argues, "what the novel shows is the inextricable relation between representations of white men [. . .] and the representation, both literal and figurative, of blackness." While Anthony interrogates this connection between white women and blackness, I shift race from a functionalist signifier of class difference to a signifier upon which white antebellum embodiment, both male and female, are dependent, quite on race's own terms. As my investigation of this trope across three novels indicates, I am concerned to argue that white women's interrelationships with blackness is as crucial an issue in this period as is white men's. David Anthony, "Class, Culture, and the Trouble with White Skin in Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 12.2 (1999): 251.
9. Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005) 53. Sánchez-Eppler cites Meredith McGill's *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834–1853* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2003) and Elizabeth Freeman's "Honeymoon with a Stranger: Pedophilic Picaresque from Poe to Nabokov," *American Literature* 70 (December 1998): 863–897.
10. "Gripe," Def. 2b, *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 2nd ed. (1989). "An intermittent spasmodic pain in the bowels. Usually *pl.*, colic pains."
11. Hawthorne 46.
12. Hawthorne 47.
13. Jean Fagan Yellin's article "Hawthorne and the American National Sin" in *The Green American Tradition: Essays and Poems for Sherman Paul* is the classic essay on Hawthorne's ambivalence towards and avoidance of the issue of slavery.

14. When I speak here of white women's entrance into public discourse and spaces, or the interpenetration of private and public, I am not referring to the separation of spheres as a material fact but rather to the continued relevance of that separation as a discursive regime. The question of the difference between private domestic spaces, and the public sphere, in the Habermasian sense, is thus construed as one part of the antebellum political imaginary, closely linked to the hierarchical relationships between middle-class white women and men.
15. Or is it the *excursion* of market concerns? Conversations with Meredith McGill at the American Antiquarian Society in December of 2003 led me to consider that this feminist trope of the penetration of the domestic sphere by the market economy may in fact be historically inaccurate. The original use of the word "market" is in the sense of "going marketing"—that is, going shopping for household goods, usually made in other households. Was the market then initially a product of the domestic sphere instead of the opposite? Conversations with author, December 19 and 20, 2003, and Meredith McGill, "Market." "Session 684: Keywords in Nineteenth-Century American Literary Studies II," paper presented at the 2003 Modern Languages Association, San Diego.
16. In his 1999 article, "The Pursuit of Whiteness: Property, Terror, and Expansion, 1790–1860," David Roediger argues that, "the new literature on white identity, especially among workers, overwhelmingly focuses on white male identity." In his call to complicate whiteness studies, Roediger makes the claim that the "crying need is for studies that discuss race, gender and the market together, accounting for the ways in which exceptional women performed and challenged whiteness in public and for the ways in which white female identity was (re)made in private spaces" (587). Roediger's insights call for literary critics to consider the historic construction of female whiteness and to interrogate the relationship between white women's cultural production and their public and private racial formation. David Roediger, "The Pursuit of Whiteness: Property, Terror, and Expansion, 1790–1860," Spec. issue of *Journal of the Early Republic* 19.4 (Winter 1999): 579–600.
17. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993) x. (Hereafter Butler.)
18. On another level, as I discuss in my 2004 dissertation and my book in progress, blackness can be read the sign of materiality itself, the object correlative, as it were, for what seems to be the "thingness," the quiddity, of the body and the world. To represent black subjects as objects in literature points to the problem of representing materiality in literature. Embedding that problem in a food image points to the fact that the body should remain at the center of studies of literary materialism; food studies, in turn, must deal with the question of eating's place in both the philosophical problem of materialism and the social history of things. For another discussion of blackness and materiality see Bill Brown, "Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny." *Critical Inquiry*. 32. (Winter 2006) 175–207. In that article, Brown points to "the possibility that our reluctance to think seriously about things may result from a repressed apprehension—the apprehension that within things we will discover the human precisely because our history is one in which humans were reduced to things (however incomplete that reduction)." (Brown 207)
19. Jack Turner, *Spice: The History of a Temptation* (New York: Random House, 2005); Sophie D. Coe and Michael Coe, *The True History of Chocolate* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000). Among others.
20. Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1986).
21. In fact, most retail ventures in the early Republic and antebellum period, even in urban centers, were either attached to or entirely located in domestic spaces.
22. See Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990) and Haryette Mullen, "Runaway Tongue: Resistant Orality in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Our Nig*, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and *Beloved*." *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1999): 244–264. As Mullen nicely puts it, "the compartmentalization of the bourgeois home, with its parlor, kitchen, servants quarters, and family living space, which tends to reify the existing relations of domination and exploitation between social classes and genders" (254).
23. Gavin Roger Jones, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America*. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1999).
24. Harriet Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Or, Life Among the Lowly* (New York: Penguin, 1981). Chapter V is titled "The Feelings of Living Property." As Lauren Berlant has noted, the issue of "feelings" is significant as part of Stowe's program to "[promote] a way of exploiting apparently reducible social differences to produce a universalism around, especially, modes of suffering or painful feeling." The idea that "this structure has been deployed mainly by the culturally privileged to humanize those very subjects who are also [. . .] reduced to cliché" structures this essay: no text, as Berlant notes,

has ever so completely exemplified majoritarian culture's ambivalence toward those subjects whom it wishes to liberate. See Lauren Berlant, "Poor Eliza," *American Literature*. 70.3 (September 1998): 635–668.

25. This parallel was first suggested to me by a later echo of the word in Chapter 12 in which Haley sells the infant of a young woman he has acquired to a man he meets on the boat south:

"I've got a good place for raisin', and I thought of takin' in a little more stock," said the man, "One cook lost a young 'un last week,—got drowned in a washtub, while she was hangin' out the clothes,—and I reckon well enough to set her to raisin' this yer" (206).

The alimentary pun that I am arguing is implicit in the "raisin'" of the infant by the bereaved cook is strangely echoed by another pun implicit in the word "stock." While the first reference is of course to the idea of livestock, inherent to the word stock is another image—that of boiled stock, rendered from raw materials, usually the odds and ends left from other meals. That this child is meant to replace another that "drowned" in a tub only underlines the parallel. In Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: Penguin Viking, 1981) 206.

26. Ann Douglas, "Introduction," *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: Penguin Viking, 1981). (Hereafter Douglas.)
27. The vernacular marks the intersection between the body and language, as the discursively constructed hyper-embodiedness of the "lower orders" necessarily reworks (and at times consciously and strategically renders itself opaque to) the language of the middle and upper classes. Vernacularity thus also gestures to regional identity in the same way as vernacular food and language—intimately connected to local and everyday ways of being—describe the boundaries of, and differences between, local identities. On another level, however, food language brings together the ineffability of bodily sensation with those desires that hover at the edge of permitted social discourse. To taste food, and to taste certain forms of desire, is to experience that which cannot be put into words.
28. The OED notes that the first use of "stump" as a verb in *Peter Pilgrim; or, A Rambler's Recollections . . .* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1838). It is picked up by John Camden Hotten's *Slang Dictionary* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1874) to mean "to go about speechmaking on politics or other subjects." Stump speeches, full of malapropisms were a popular form of minstrel skit.
29. "Not a chicken or turkey or duck in the barn-yard but looked grave when they saw her approaching, and seemed evidently to be reflecting on their latter end . . ." (Stowe, 67).
30. Stowe 76.
31. See Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. (New York: Norton, 1960) 115–116.
32. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997).
33. Discussions of this problem over the last twenty years have been so numerous it is impossible to enumerate them here, but to begin with see writings by Angela Davis, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Hazel Carby, Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Mohanty, Jacquie Alexander, Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal, among many others.
34. Karen Sánchez-Eppler writes, "The human body has always served as an emblem for conceptions of the body politic. The bodily biases of the state are evident in the white male privilege that has pertained within American society. Feminist political theorists are reappraising the constitutional rhetoric of disembodied, naturally equal and interchangeable "persons." [. . .] The feminist and abolitionist [agenda] [. . .] reveals the bodily basis of women's and blacks exclusion from political power and uncovers the physical attributes of whiteness and maleness implicit in such power." Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993).
35. Compare Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993).
36. As such, food metaphors lend themselves nicely to the politics of sentimentality in which, as Lauren Berlant has written, "when sentimentality meets politics, it uses personal stories to tell of structural effects, but in so doing it risks thwarting its very attempt to perform rhetorically a scene of pain that must be soothed politically. [. . .] The political as a place of acts oriented toward publicness becomes replaced by a world of private thoughts, leanings, and gestures." Lauren Berlant, "Poor Eliza," *American Literature* 70.3 (Sep. 1998): 635–668. Quote above, 641.
37. In her preface Wilson refers to her readership as "the public" and writes, "I have purposely omitted what would most provoke shame in our good anti-slavery friends at home," inferring that aboli-

tionists may read or hear of her book and then concludes with an "appeal to my colored brethren universally." See Harriet Wilson, *Our Nig; Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story White House, North: Showing That Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, 2nd ed. (New York: Viking, 1983). (Hereafter Wilson.)

38. I refer here to the scenes in which Frado cavorts for the field hands, tempting a sheep to chase her down to the river and fall in. Wilson 54–55.
39. Elaine Scarry writes, "Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language. [. . .] Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned." Elaine Scarry. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985) 4.
40. Alice B. Toklas, *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954). She writes, "When we first began reading Dashiell Hammett, Gertrude Stein remarked that it was his modern note to have disposed of his victims before the story commenced. Goodness knows how many were required to follow as a result of the first crime. And so it is in the kitchen. Murder and sudden death seem as unnatural there as they should be anywhere else. They can't, they can never become acceptable facts. Food is far too pleasant to combine with horror. All the same, facts, even distasteful facts, must be accepted and we shall see how, before any story of cooking begins, crime is inevitable."

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