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Introduction

A BEGINNING AND AN ENDING GADIGAL COUNTRY/SYDNEY

THIS BOOK IS about what novels do, and how they do it.

I'm not the first to tell this story. But I'm offering a new version, and I'm telling it in an experimental, playful form that moves between academic analysis and creative nonfiction. Novels in English began in the early eighteenth century as a literary technology that could depict people's inner lives and share them with others. In doing this, novels changed the nature of personal inwardness itself for private, often solitary readers. They changed how people understood their own internal experience, and how they understood themselves to be in community with others.

But novels were just one of many ways in which humans all over the eighteenth-century world conceptualized and represented interiority. Across the globe, communities and cultures used rituals and ceremonies to celebrate, understand, and transform their inner selves. The most widely practiced of these, over millennia, were eating rituals. Through daily, ordinary, necessary actions of eating and drinking humans contacted their own inwardness and shared their inner lives with others, including other-than-human or more-than-human beings.¹ In this book I'm connecting stories about ways that people ate and drank with the emergence of the realist novel as the dominant imaginative form in Britain and its empire. I'm showing that writing and eating are deeply entangled even as they're very distinct. I'm arguing that once we understand the novel as a form that's closely bound up with metabolic systems for accessing and sharing inwardness, we need to read novels and the story of their creation differently because they absorb and include much bigger systems for making and managing inwardness than are conveyed by the words on a page.

The stories I'm telling in this book are complex; I can of course capture only part of the big picture I'm describing. I've tried to make the arguments with as much nuance as I can, to pay attention to subtle entanglements between how we read, which is a primarily cognitive, imaginative undertaking, and how we eat, which is embodied, sensory, and directly connected to metabolism. It's important to remember that writing and reading are themselves metabolic in nature, part of how we humans can spend energy. And metabolism, a process of change and transformation, making matter into energy, invites creative attention and interpretation. Reading and eating are intimate strangers: alike and unlike, brought into newly complex relationships in the eighteenth century, when the novel was created and the British Empire expanded. People arriving in new places, often after forced migrations, established connections with themselves and their communities both through eating and writing, responding to the textures and sights of food, plants, animals, and landscapes through literal taste, rituals around ingestion, and imaginative descriptions. And while dislocated and forcibly uprooted people remade selfhood in local communities and among families and friends by eating and writing together, it was also the case that eating, drinking, and writing were monitored and measured with growing alarm by those in control of the British Empire. Empire's profitability depended on making sure that it cost less to feed the people, plants, and animals whose labors and expenditures of energy produced commercial goods than it did to make and transport them. This hyper-focus on eating in order to work, what we might call bare metabolism, eating without true sustenance, is recorded in hundreds of formal documents of empire and in eyewitness accounts.

The metabolic lives of people and other beings are directly interconnected with the rise of the novel. Writing is made metabolically, by authors, editors, printers and readers, and writing also involves systems of life among which the makers and readers of texts are living. The landscapes that gave rise to early novels, and were shaped by them in turn, remain today, in still-living archives of place, holding the lingering traces of worlds out of which imaginative writings emerged. The details of ordinary, small-scale, unseen metabolic lives are mostly omitted from formal records, but the writing of the eighteenth century is entangled with vast systems in which humans and other beings expressed self and identity through metabolism. By viewing texts as traces that were and are still entangled with the living systems in which they were made, by paying attention to landscapes that were transformed in part by

novels and other written records, we glimpse identities and ways of having interiority that make texts complex testimonies of lives beyond those of their imagined characters, their authors, or readers.

Metabolic subjectivity is represented in fictional characters' embodied, energetic, consumptive, appetite-driven lives—and in the fact that when we read, we feel as if characters *are* alive. As I've said, human imagination and metabolism become more deeply interconnected in the eighteenth century, because during the decades that the novel emerged as a form, intensified British colonialism and the implementation of plantation economies caused eating, drinking, and metabolism to be increasingly subject to surveillance and regulation. At the same time, novels borrowed their earliest accounts of what inwardness was from Protestant religion in England. As they did so, the Anglican Sacrament, the eating ritual through which Christians are understood to consume the body and blood of Christ, was increasingly used to regulate people's inner lives in Britain and its expanding empire around the globe. I start by looking at the difficult, complex ritual of the Protestant Sacrament, but I will stray far from the bread and wine of Communion, into dirt and fruit and pocketbooks and pineapples and oysters and mangroves: all manner of things that defy the rules of how eating and inwardness were supposed to work either in religion or in fiction, across the British colonial world.²

I've described the subjectivity that is made by eating and drinking as "metabolic" rather than more simply "digestive" because metabolism describes the complex cellular processes through which all organisms make energy and maintain life. Metabolism implies interdependence among living things whereas digestion is oriented to individuals. Metabolism is what enables humans and other beings to live; it is shared across species, and it is at once entirely impersonal and needed for individuals to experience personal inwardness at all. Metabolic subjectivity in my account is the felt experience of having subjective, interior awareness of making and spending energy, and of organizing personal and community identities around metabolic activity. As many scholars have observed, metabolism is a form of energy that can be exploited and extracted like any other; during the emergent Plantationocene period in the eighteenth century, plant, animal, and human energy was extracted to drive sugar production in ways that are analogous to the nineteenth-century extraction of fossil energy for fuel.³ Moreover, exploited human metabolisms in the eighteenth century led to

the systems of extractive energy production and industrial labor a century later: “The plantation profits derived from the direct appropriation of land and labor helped develop the infrastructure—first canals and then railways—connecting slave ports like Liverpool to the factories of the industrial Midlands that churned out manufactured goods for the triangular trade.”⁴

Human metabolism turns food into usable energy and connects individual human bodies to the complex biological systems that produce food and reabsorb waste after human bodies have expelled it. Metabolic subjectivity, then, is the form of subjecthood that emerges from an organism’s ability to consume, produce, and expend energy, and while the subjects I discuss in this book make energetic selfhood by consuming food and drink, they also participate in complex energy systems involving nonhuman animals, plants, and other organisms. In the examples I look at, metabolism is often treated extractively. The “plantation’s energy regime was handed down through the science of heat energy and accomplice to nineteenth-century European industrial imperialism: thermodynamics,” writes Nicholas Fiori in an essay about metabolism as a capacity of living beings to make extractable energy. So Fiori describes the “Atlantic circulation—of (‘free’ and coerced) metabolic energy, calories, and fossil fuels” from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries and beyond.⁵

It was because human and nonhuman metabolisms were interdependent that eating rituals and practices became increasingly important ways of defining and maintaining colonial authority. In many settings around the colonial world, local, Indigenous eating and drinking practices were used to construct and celebrate selfhood, connecting human with nonhuman metabolisms, emphasizing exchanges and circulation of energy that extend across all living beings. The theorist Adam Dickinson has developed the term “metabolic poetics” to account for ways in which imaginative and critical writing can represent these complex interactions between human and nonhuman metabolic systems, “revealing the molecular intimacy between humans, non-humans, anthropogenic pollution, and the circulation of energy and capital.”⁶ Work of this kind, establishing a theory of metabolic value and exchange, focuses on energy circulation among human and nonhuman systems, including ecological, social, and imaginative systems (including the novel). In *The Barbarous Feast*, “metabolic subjectivity” captures conceptions of inwardness that are constructed by consuming food or drink, which

involve the production and expenditure of energy, and which consciously or unconsciously participate in the metabolic lives of many interconnected systems of life.

When I came back to Sydney while finishing this monograph, I was returning to a place that is profoundly reshaped, sometimes beyond recognition, by British colonization, a process that was itself accelerated by the cultural phenomenon of early literary realism (which disseminated written templates for imagining inwardness among communities of readers) as well as the need to generate new sources of food and other resources to fuel the metabolisms of empire. Australia was colonized in the late eighteenth century, and Australia's colonial history continues today, if not in name. At the same time, many people all over Australia are reckoning with deep time, invasion, and settlement, investigating how pasts and presents are continuous and interdependent, never resolved. In Australia, as in all colonized places, Black, brown, and white cultures and ways of writing, eating, and knowing are entangled, and First Nations, Anglo-Australian, and other migrant communities navigate what Wiradjuri poet and activist scholar Jeanine Leane calls the "historical and literary binds of settlerism,"⁷ or the realities of clean and uncluttered identities being impossible and, indeed, undesirable. Bundjalung poet Evelyn Araluen makes the point that the entangled, cluttered identities of post-invasion Australia are also pathways to compassionate decolonization: "black and convict ancestors met, each from somewhere else between one and two centuries—some taken, some lost, some left. We try to care through entanglement."⁸

This idea that cluttered identities and layered, entangled perceptions of space and time are not obstacles but conduits to making compassionate, newly curious literary and cultural histories has immense resonance for me. Writing and eating aren't simply related activities, but activities that are related because they are made by turbulent, complex interactions among humans, places, other beings they live among, and the past, present, and future of each interaction. While it's impossible to capture all this in any single critical argument, having it in mind while putting together the readings and arguments has been key to the process of writing this book. I've learned a great deal from the Australian Aboriginal concept of "Everywhen." The term

became available to non-Indigenous people via Yamatji artist Stephen Gilchrist, when he curated a landmark exhibition of Indigenous Australian art at the Harvard Art Museum in 2016. “Everywhen” captures an Indigenous concept of time that “exists in an active relationship with the natural and ancestral worlds” and that turns away from time “as a linear narrative that moves towards increasing progress and complexity.”⁹ While I hope to have avoided theft or inappropriate use of Indigenous concepts and timeframes, I am trying to work in alignment with the First Nations understanding that “being in landscape and experiencing one’s body and one’s voice as part of a landscape—the touch of wind on one’s skin, the smells, sounds, and sights of a place” are crucial to rethinking narrative modes that have reinforced colonial assumptions about linearity, progress, and mastery.¹⁰ Returning to Sydney as I finished this book, I saw that I was immersed in a living archive of early eighteenth-century England, its global empire and the early novel itself, and at the same time I was living on unceded Gadigal country, with the millennia of knowledge it holds.

I’ve alternated chapters of conventional scholarly writing with sections of creative nonfiction so I can tell connected and parallel stories. The nonfiction essays serve several purposes. First, they reflect some of the clutter and disorder involved in the process (for me, anyway) of making scholarly arguments. I investigate the turmoil of personal insights, embodied knowledge, and sense perceptions that are in the background of scholarly claims, and which don’t look like formal research. I took seriously the idea that mental and sensory turbulence add value to scholarship rather than diminishing its credibility, since cluttered, tumultuous experience is the condition in which writing, eating, and nation-building occur. Second, in writing a book about inwardness and the many guises it takes in the eighteenth-century colonial world, I wanted to say something about the experiences that were informing my critical judgments at the level of sense and feeling. To give an account of how inwardness was represented in fiction, religion, and by colonial eating rituals, I wanted to capture the experience of being in a place that had itself been reshaped and changed by the very historical phenomena I was analyzing. I was aware of having what the scholar Jonathan Kramnick calls a “paper mind,” or “the setting down or eliciting of perceptual or emotional or cognitive experience on the page.”¹¹ In Australia, I’m intensely aware of how place and landscape have inwardness and metabolic subjectivities of their own, and at the same time I perceive place through the lenses of literary realism, cultural Protestantism, and my own embodied sense of self. In short, I was writing this book in a

landscape that retains its own sovereignty and metabolic inwardness while at the same time being reorganized by colonial British conceptions of interiority and superimposed meanings of place (which are the conceptions I inherited). Mixed writing modes also helped me suggest that critical thinking is less fixed and more uncertain than Anglophone scholarly writing usually lets us acknowledge. The kind of inwardness realist fiction depicted depends on an underlying claim that readers, writers, and their characters are shaped by the subtle inwardness that flows through places and times, and which was then, and is now, still tender and lacerated from many forms of grief, loss, and violence.¹²

Why is the eighteenth century such a crucial period in which to study human inwardness? Across the century the world changed with unusual rapidity and abruptness as European powers competed for domination as modern global states. The social, political, and cultural changes catalyzed by imperial rivalries absorbed vast numbers of people into newfound global financial and social systems that they did not yet know how to navigate, often did not want to participate in, and over which they had very little personal control. These were the conditions in which the English realist novel came into being. Novels offered a new kind of access and orderliness to the tumult of many people's internal lives, and they had the formal capacity to share the disorder and disobedience with which most people think and act. For Claudia Johnson, the development of the novel traces the ever more urgent need to depict disorder, tumult, and disarray, not just in individual inwardness but in the political and social worlds of England, as the century ended with the unprecedented political violence and dislocation of world revolutions. "The fiction of the 1790s is a commanding, imaginative response to a world riven with crisis," she writes, in what remains an essential account of the form. Austen's immediate predecessors "disrupt the notions of verisimilitude" that Ian Watt thought were the signal indicators of realism, and Johnson argues that the "emotional excess" of late-century novels indexed both heightened psychological alarm and intensified political feeling.¹³ A key starting point for this book, then, is that reading novels as overwrought, excessive, and internally divided is, in fact, at stake in the genre from the outset. Rather than reading the "rise of the novel" in a linear way, as a form that starts with narrow plausibility in early eighteenth-century England and evolves into the transformed, hybrid, historically inflected version of the Anglophone novel today, I read it

as a form that is in flux, from the very beginning attuned to its own possibilities and limitations for depicting internal turbulence and collective chaos. The concept of metabolic subjectivity lets me describe forms of inwardness—whether personal or communal in nature—that are often in tension with the highly individualized, thinking, feeling, primarily social subjects represented in early novels.

Deidre Lynch has written that “edginess and complexity” signal the kinds of deep emotional engagements that characterize strong emotional responses to literature—a suggestively complex phrase since we’d expect love of literary texts to be cozy and straightforward. Lynch argues that when we incorporate emotional ambivalence and internal division into the experience of reading, we gain deeper and more robust literary knowledge. In *Loving Literature* she offers a wonderful list of the divided feelings we have when we read with “love,” and I borrow her list to capture some of what I’m trying to get across in the juxtapositions between writing an account of the inner life of novels from a scholarly point of view, and responding personally, through sensation and feeling to the much larger context in which I’m living, having my own metabolic life, and developing my ideas. When we read literature with strong personal feelings of attachment, affection, and love, we are caught in “misrecognition, overvaluation, self-congratulation, aggressivity, transference, fetishism, and/or jealousy,” along with “sometimes unreasonable” expectations of intimacy with a text and its characters.¹⁴ Like the first readers of English novels, I’m bringing a personal archive of largely unexamined memory and intergenerational experience to being in fiction and thinking about the phenomenon of interiority, shaped by my experience of place and my metabolically produced subjectivity. Versions of this awareness, themselves changing and differently inflected, is what I’ve traced in the nonfiction sections of *The Barbarous Feast*.

Eighteenth-century novels represented imagined human subjects in language, penetrated their inner lives, and shared them with others using newly emerging descriptive and narrative techniques. As such, early novels offered a robust and enduring imaginative technology to help sustain British colonial power. But at the same time, the new form of the novel was a strangely ineffectual way to tell stories about selfhood. English novels were just one system for representing inwardness, authenticity, and sympathy.¹⁵ To many people they remained a very peripheral system. Novels’ capacities to depict the inner lives of characters and their intimacies with other people depended on

developments in Anglo-European philosophy about how human thoughts and emotions work, about what made one person's mind and understanding different from another's, or the idea that it's possible to represent people's motivations and desires in language. These were claims that most people around the world simply did not believe or care about. So one of the starting points for this book is that the specifically English understanding of inwardness and sympathetic recognition as it appears in early novels tends to be defensive and anxious at the outset. From a global perspective and even seen from the perspective of people in Britain living at the margins of mainstream Protestant, Whig belief, it was immediately obvious that novels could not represent inwardness with anything like enough range or complexity to give sovereignty to the characters who inhabited their pages. As decades of the work by scholars such as Frances Ferguson, Nancy Armstrong, Deidre Lynch, Sandra Macpherson, Lynn Festa, Nancy Yousef, Wendy Lee, and others has shown, novels have always been in a state of division and anxiety about their claim to represent and share sympathy and intimacy among readers and characters, and the intimation that any site of sympathy is almost always counteracted by absences of sympathy and recognition elsewhere.¹⁶ To paraphrase Claudia Johnson again, novels have always been equivocal.

The people for whom novels were a peripheral form are subjects who tend to be visible at realism's margins. Such figures are sometimes real individuals and sometimes fictional characters, and they are important to this study because I am arguing that their appetites, their inner lives, and their ways of making selfhood through metabolic rituals are in some ways resistant to the literary. They don't require literary voices, characters, and forms of identification to sustain them. But at the same time these subjects are foundational to the emergence of character and interiority in eighteenth-century fictions. It was precisely because they were entangled with nonliterary systems for managing and making interiority and sympathy that these noncompliant, vibrant subjects became alluring and fascinating to novelists. In her study of settler colonial sincerity, Ana Schwartz makes the point that being sincere—just to name one dominant expression of sympathy in novels—was a way to control and manage New Englanders' perception that they needed a forceful and unique way to express inwardness in a world where many kinds of interiority proliferated and appeared to threaten Puritan selfhood. Schwartz writes that "sincerity has come to seem to be the special purview of words. A crucial feature of that ascent, however, is its near-invisibility—sincerity's

maturation took place through becoming less visible rather than more; less by rising and more by soaking into and saturating the loam of settlers' ideas about what humans were and how their souls moved."¹⁷ I'm offering a parallel or co-history of Schwartz's observation by looking closely at communities of believers and the rituals they practiced in which sincerity, authenticity, and intimacy are expressed metabolically, by eating, allowing the embodied energy of metabolism to infuse and animate words on a page, passing into the metabolic lives of readers.

Anyone who spends time in archives and documents from the early eighteenth-century English colonial world sees that our collective global present is all but inevitable. It's during this century that what Rob Nixon has called "slow violence" becomes apparent. Nixon describes a form of violence "that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales."¹⁸ During the eighteenth century it became a norm for nation states to transport humans and nonhumans around the globe, most often without consent. This process was often in pursuit of sugar and other commodities that made life easier, sweeter, more readily sociable for those who ate and drank sugary foods, often while reading novels. Kyla Wazana Tompkins calls it "a sweetening of the world that accompanied the global reorganization of race, capital, labor and knowledge," and she accounts for the interconnected systems of production and labor that emerged in the period: "the enslaved and forced production of sugar, tea, coffee, tobacco and chocolate on plantations in the colonial geopolitical order [that] shaped the resultant reorganization of labor in the reorganized white proletariat class of the global North."¹⁹ Complex systems of production, transport, and colonial development in the eighteenth century mean that the small-scale domestic arrangements described in early novels are shadowed by much larger networks of metabolic lives that are almost but not quite invisible.

The objects of large-scale movement included enslaved or captured people and other living beings and plants; indentured and convicted humans; forced migrants and oppressed or displaced British and European settlers in search of land, money, and freedom. In short, it became an index of prestige in Europe and the Americas to command nonvoluntary migration and transportation of both human and more-than-human subjects. The period has become known as the Plantationocene, because it is a "watershed event" in which being productive meant growing a "single exotic crop" and using involuntary labor to do so.²⁰ The normalization of large-scale migrations and

geographic and temporal displacements of humans and other beings had a very significant impact on the nature and meanings of personal inwardness. Judith Carney observes that “plantations instantiate a founding model for the Great Acceleration’s carbon-consuming and carbon-emitting industrial food production system, and anticipate the agribusiness monocultures, factory meat production, and simplified ecologies implicated in biodiversity loss and species extinctions.”²¹ Plantation systems, in other words, have a simultaneously complicating and thinning impact on inwardness, since they use overly complex movement and migration to service overly simple models of labor and agriculture. As Anna Tsing has argued, “plantations deepen domestication, reintensifying plant dependencies and forcing fertility. Borrowing from state-endorsed cereal agriculture, they invest everything in the superabundance of a single crop. But one ingredient is missing: They remove the love. Instead of romance connecting people, plants, and places, European planters introduced cultivation through coercion. . . . No one loves plantation sugar cane.”²² When British politicians, landowners, philosophers, theologians, intellectuals, and other public voices made crucial decisions during the first decades of the eighteenth century about how England could best become a modern state and compete effectively for prestige and wealth, their commitments reshaped inwardness and the many ways it was represented and imagined, because metabolic lives in Britain and around the globe were fundamentally restructured by the priority to make and maintain plantations. These realities are absorbed into the writing and eating habits of empire.

It’s well known that the English novel started with Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* (1688) and Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), both set in the extended Caribbean. These works are recognized as realist because they depicted settings, actions, and stories that seemed plausible, even familiar, although the places, people, and events described were either unknown or nonexistent. Key to these new stories was the fact of their being purposefully ordinary and ostensibly realistic, seeming to grant near-total access to characters’ interior lives and private selves while also sharing that selfhood with others. Early novels made inwardness seem visible and sharable with such casual plausibility—through ordinary language and quotidian detail—that the often the violent audacity of looking into other people’s interior lives was largely unremarked in literary texts. The aspect of early realism I want to emphasize is that it offered a template for personal inwardness and sympathy according to European philosophies of “human nature” *just at the moment* that it became clear that

inwardness and sympathetic feeling were wildly different for different people worldwide. Why does it matter that English imaginative writing learned how to enter and possess the private lives of ordinary people when it also became apparent that inwardness could not be known or possessed except through domination?²³ The answer I'm giving is that the novel was contending, successfully, not merely with other subjects and inner lives but also other representational technologies for making and managing inwardness in community. In this sense the form was an aggressive reaction to inner lives that were independent of or indifferent to realism, and early fiction writers also grappled actively with metabolic subjectivity as a way of understanding self.

Much of this book isn't overtly about novels at all, but about rituals and practices and ways of being in a place that make subjectivity metabolic. In the language of evolutionary biologists, metabolism happens when a living being "senses its local nutritional environment and responds accordingly." Metabolism is both a highly intuitive internal process: "living beings know, innately, what they ought to eat," and it's also a process that can be interrupted and overwritten by humans and other beings as they react to local conditions.²⁴ So the kind of inwardness that metabolism makes both depends on external circumstances and is also capable of becoming separate or disconnected from them. Individual metabolism reveals stories of much larger surrounding systems and tells the story of a single being within a system. Metabolism is, moreover, a process with a long literary history. Human metabolism—which includes the consumption, absorption, and excretion of nourishment—was used to describe and represent personal, social, and political transformations in literary texts from the classical period to the present day. In this study, metabolic subjectivity is simultaneously cognitive and embodied and is made by transforming food into energy and meaning, including the energy used in reading and writing. Metabolic inwardness is in one sense the opposite of inwardness that is made from words. It doesn't require language at all, in fact. Metabolism is systemic and impersonal, which means that unlike novelistic inwardness it doesn't emphasize the idea that individual beings are peculiar or special, or even individual. And at the same time, each being's metabolic life expresses their particular energetic aliveness—in ways that are analogous with representations of self in novels. My point is not that metabolic inwardness is *better* or more authentic than interiority made through language, but that

metabolic processes are powerful systems for making inwardness, and that including them in understanding how novels depict energetic subjecthood in turn invites the recognition that novels participate in much more expansive metabolic systems than is evident from the relatively small cast of living beings depicted in any given text.

My title *The Barbarous Feast* alludes to Robinson Crusoe's description of a Carib "cannibal" ritual he witnesses in the colonial Caribbean.²⁵ I'm borrowing the phrase to refer to many kinds of consumption. When eating and drinking is not free, when it does not express meaningful beliefs and sovereignty, or when the demands of other people's appetites and habits of consumption keep individuals apart from the communities they belong to, we are in the presence of barbarous feasting. I write about a wide range of feasts and eating practices taken in the wrong way on and off the pages of early novels. By "taken," I mean both consumed and interpreted. Throughout the century, people ate and drank in bad faith, and they misinterpreted and misjudged other people's practices for making selfhood through eating. I argue that metabolic subjectivity can be seen everywhere in eighteenth-century novels and that it is in a sense indifferent and resistant to this new imaginative form but crucially also integral to it. I'm writing about barbarous—unorthodox, disobedient, or uncivil—ways of eating and drinking, arguing that they had a unique and underrecognized power in the period.

In thinking this argument through, I'm deeply indebted to Abenaki writer and scholar Lisa Brooks. Her brilliant study *The Common Pot* tells the story of land, people, and practice in North America and shows how Indigenous literary writing recovered and reclaimed lifeways and forms of knowledge that inhere and persist in the landscapes, plants, and beings of the Northeast. The "common pot" was a sign of balance, harmony, and enoughness in Indigenous society. European colonization interrupted large metabolic and cultural systems that had been stable and widely available for millennia, as the phrase "common pot" reveals. "As soon as Europeans settled on the coast, they became inhabitants in Native space," Brooks explains. "In the common pot, shared space means shared consequences and shared pain. The actions of the newcomers would affect the whole."²⁶ The loss of the common pot was described in a letter from the Mohegans to the Connecticut Assembly in 1789, which explained that the cultural practice of sharing food freely and equally had been radically disrupted and damaged. "Where there had been 'abundance,' 'harmony,' and land 'in common,' there was now scarcity, acquisitiveness, and division; misery, starvation, and death." The idea of harmonious

communal eating is often, as Brooks observes, a “nostalgic ideal, even strategic romanticization,” but as Brooks argues across the study, the colonization of metabolic lives among Native North Americans interrupted and reorganized every aspect of their culture, knowledge, and practice, because eating habits belonged to metabolic systems that brought humans into relationship with all other beings and elements of landscape.²⁷ The many forms of barbarous feasting that occur on lands which have been invaded, colonized, resettled, and forcibly enclosed across the British colonial period affected the metabolic lives of all beings in colonial systems. They also permeate and shape realist fictions even as they are rarely directly named. The “barbarous feast” is no less than a metonym for the early English novel, in fact. The novel was a formal innovation that would disrupt existing systems of inwardness and remake them, and it would also affect the eating habits, rituals, and metabolic lives prevalent in the societies that fictions described. Readers, writers, and their fictional characters who were already at the margins of colonial food systems and whose metabolism were therefore already precious were often left at the edges of realism. Like the dispossessed subjects of the eighteenth-century colonial world, dispossessed fictional characters tended to suffer scarcity, misery, and starvation also.

In the chapters that follow, I study a variety of eating habits in England and its empire, and examine their relationship to the emergence of realist fiction. I look at religious rituals that used food and drink to connect private faith to communally held beliefs. I examine oaths and ceremonial eating habits that created tight, purposeful communities, both inside and out of England, in the face of marginality and loss of freedom. I study practices involving the capturing and consuming of plants and animals, important because they tend to recognize shared metabolic lives among humans and other-than-human beings, and deprive human interiority as paramount. Within England I call attention to a range of ways to define self by obtaining and eating food, from poaching game to eating breakfast; in the Caribbean I revisit the capturing and predation rituals among an Arawak diaspora known improperly by the catchall term “cannibalism”; I write about grave-dirt oathing among enslaved Africans and Afro-Caribbeans; and about medicinal plant use among Indigenous North Americans. I interpret the imaginative politics of growing and eating tropical fruit in colonial Barbados. I close with poaching, begging, and scavenging as ways to express self through appetite in midcentury England.

The eating ritual that anchors the book is the Protestant Lord’s Supper, which also organized state-endorsed and ceremonial eating habits in the

colonial period. Historically, the Lord's Supper, often referred to simply as the Sacrament, is the most important eating ritual in Protestant belief, and it both collaborated with and resisted the realist novel's emerging dominance as the literary technology for accessing personal inwardness. The Sacrament was a widely used, often aggressive and harmful piece of imaginative architecture that spread throughout the eighteenth-century colonial world, a tool of state power and colonial authority. But, like the novel, it was also often a mechanism for building deep community in the face of personal and collective suffering. The Eucharist, renamed the Lord's Supper by Protestant Reformers, is translated from the Greek εὐχαριστία for "gratefulness or thanksgiving." In medieval England it was "a frugal repast," to use Caroline Walker Bynum's phrase, a commemoration not of carnival and plenty but ordinary life, lived in the hope of salvation. "From the very beginning the Eucharistic elements stood primarily not for nature, but for human beings bound into community by commensality," Bynum writes.²⁸ The ceremony entered English Christianity in part through pagan and early Christian fasting and feasting practices, gave people a way to express piety metabolically.²⁹ In early Christian practice it emerged from the celebration of Passover, the ceremonial Jewish feast that gave thanks to God for a nation's deliverance.³⁰ By the eighteenth century, however, the Lord's Supper was the ritual adopted by the eighteenth-century British Christian state to make and manage participation in obligatory religious consensus and mainstream political agendas. At the same time, the Sacrament remained an important private ritual in marginal and dissenting versions of English religious belief, and it was central to Roman Catholic worship, where it was accompanied by the belief in the "real presence" of Christ's flesh and blood in Holy Communion, known as transubstantiation. In English colonies across North America and the Caribbean, the Sacrament often functioned as a vital ritual for building communities that felt isolated and imperiled. It played an important role in religious conversion because it involved literal consumption and digestion, offering African and Native American converts a visible ritual on which to focus their awakened piety. And it was used to reinforce unequal social and racial hierarchies in a rapidly expanding colonial world.

The Lord's Supper, in short, was arguably the most widespread ritual for making and managing subjectivity in the eighteenth century. Stephen Greenblatt wrote that there was a particular Protestant obsession with digestion as an index of spiritual fitness in post-Reformation culture, and this asserted the necessity of consuming, absorbing, and excreting the bread

and wine of the Lord's Supper to be spiritually awake. To put this another way, the spiritual potency of digestion and metabolism "led the Reformers to dwell on the progress of the Host through the guts of a mouse."³¹ A willingness to confront digestion frankly "is the precondition of a liberated spirit," an insistence that it is this very recognition of the vulnerability of matter that allows inwardness to be free.³² The early Sacrament made self through a literal eating ritual, asserting that eating is constitutive of selfhood in a very basic way. But the Sacrament did not merely "progress" through the guts of a mouse, becoming waste; it was absorbed into the metabolic system, generating energy and connecting human metabolism to those of animals, plants, and, indeed, Christ. When English Protestants colonized and settled new territories, they used the Sacrament to organize and contain plantation communities. Their beliefs about the ritual clashed, often violently, with metabolic cycles and ways of eating among other religious and cultural communities. The shared understanding across diverse cultures that metabolism expresses the essence of life and self, and connects individuals to systems, meant that the Sacrament quickly became a flashpoint for communities living at the margins of England and the colonial world, whose beliefs about how digestion and metabolism made meaning were at odds with mainstream Protestant doctrines.

I explain in chapters 1 and 2 that at around the time the first novels appeared in England, the Sacrament was recruited for use by the English and colonial governments to expand their political authority. Receiving the Lord's Supper according to the rites of the Anglican church, along with an oath about what it meant, was required of anyone wanting to hold public office in England, several parts of North America, and the Caribbean colonies. The legislation was known as the Sacramental Test Act, and its intention was to exclude Roman Catholics, nonconforming Protestants, and other religious minorities from public life. Similar oaths about the meaning of the Lord's Supper were used in naturalization (citizenship) ceremonies to manufacture conformity among immigrants and foreign-born citizens. It's no exaggeration that the Sacramental Test Act was the most contentious political and religious mandate of the eighteenth century, provoking pamphlet wars for more than fifty years. It incited massive public debates about the nature of private, personal inwardness and whether personal belief could be forced to play a role in political community. Every public intellectual in the first half of the century weighed in on the topic, including Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, and Henry Fielding. But debates about the Sacrament and political testing have never been

examined in relation to the rise of the novel, and in particular the claim that the novel is a new way to make and manage subjectivity at a time when other rituals for doing so were under threat and in crisis.

While novels seem to hold metabolism and digestion at arm's length, censoring and correcting characters who eat and believe in the wrong way, metabolic subjects are also perverse objects of attraction and disavowed longing. Narrators and protagonists of early realism are consistently drawn to characters who possess vibrant, metabolic lives of a kind that English novels aren't built to handle. Think, for example, of Robinson Crusoe's zeal for possessing Friday and converting him to English Protestant belief, which I discuss at length in chapter 3. Crusoe says it's because he's horrified by cannibalism and regards it as the ultimate act of savagery. But my suggestion is that he's specifically attracted to Friday's cannibal appetite. Crusoe recognizes in Friday a resilient, metabolically constituted selfhood that makes him "a cannibal in his nature," unwilling and indeed unable to part ways with the eating culture to which he belongs.³³ As I will argue, it's vital that Indigenous predation rituals among Arawak-speaking Caribs held human subjectivity to be continuous with nonhuman beings, and instead of dividing subjects into aggressors and victims, moved between the categories of wild and tame or predation and adoption to organize relationships across species. My suggestion is that Crusoe's identity as a settler colonial and the first protagonist in English realism is partly defined by his longing for Friday's metabolic subjectivity, a form of selfhood that Crusoe knows he cannot have.

I've put metabolism at the center of this work because I'm suggesting that novels are searching for a way to accommodate their readers' desire to bring embodied, energetically driven, nonliterary presence to literary form. I discuss these ideas in chapters 4 and 5, with reference to a wide variety of eating practices among Christians and non-Christians in the colonial West Indies. Early realism reaches toward other representational forms that insist on embodied belief and metabolic continuity across human communities and species, even as fiction also offers alternatives to embodied self.³⁴

The allure of wild or savage metabolic subjectivity will persist even when the English novel retreats to the seemingly safe ground of the English village. We see this a century after *Robinson Crusoe* in *Pride and Prejudice*. An early, important turning point in Austen's novel comes when Elizabeth Bennet is shown into the breakfast parlor after a hot and dirty three-mile hike to Netherfield to see her sister, who is ill. Against his better judgment, Mr. Darcy is irresistibly attracted to her. As the scene unfolds, Austen's narrator laughs at

the buffoonish Mr. Hurst because he is “thinking only of his breakfast” when all the other characters are occupied guessing and second-guessing one another’s thoughts and motives. The joke is also on the reader however: Why shouldn’t Mr. Hurst be thinking of his breakfast at breakfast-time? English novels, Austen reminds us, often don’t know what to do with characters whose metabolic lives are paramount. But in *Pride and Prejudice*, characters’ metabolisms end up being what matter most. Mr. Darcy at first longs to possess Elizabeth for similar reasons to those that make Crusoe want possess Friday. As Crusoe desires Friday for his cannibal nature, Mr. Darcy specifically desires Elizabeth Bennet for the very “animal spirits” he disdains in her sister Lydia but cannot stop wanting for himself: She has a relentless energy and appetite that he cannot refuse and that he cannot know or possess. Crusoe and Darcy are made overtly queasy by their encounters with flagrantly metabolic subjects, but they are also profoundly attracted to forms of vitality and inwardness that don’t need novels to organize them. In chapter 5 of this book, I look at the pivotal mid-eighteenth-century novel *Tom Jones* and argue that Fielding makes the leap from imagining metabolic subjectivity as a primarily religious construction, to becoming a way to create fully embodied, eating, drinking, tasting subjects in the secular landscapes of realism. For Fielding the value of metabolism is that it enables him to track subjects who live outside the mainstream social economies that realism depicts, and whose experience of their embodied and metabolic lives reflect the circumstances that dominated most people’s lives in England and its global empire in the midcentury: mass migration, population displacement, and food scarcity.

I feel awkward sharing the creative nonfiction sections of this book, which belong to the chaotic and divided the worlds of eating, drinking, energy-making characters and literary voices I write about more than to academic analysis. But I wanted to keep a sense of unease, experiment, and uncertainty, bringing my own metabolic selfhood into scholarship and showing how the making of energy and the embodied sensations of being in an energetic world are part of reading, writing, and thinking. I’ve tried to be as honest as possible about my experiences, and especially about feelings that have not explicitly entered my critical writing before. I often had the impulse to retreat to scholarly prose, but more importantly I wanted to explore the idea that there’s more than one way into critical arguments, and that complex ideas are best

expressed in different registers of writing. I don't always understand the interactions between my own inner life, the intergenerational lives of my family and culture, and the scholarly arguments I make. But by including the unstable realm of the personal in a scholarly study, I'm trying to relinquish control over my knowledge and critical claims while at the same time taking responsibility for knowing that my life story deeply impacts the way I develop ideas. Inwardness, the subject of this book, is after all intensely personal, private, and particular to each individual self. But at the same time, it's entirely impersonal, unrelated to self, belonging to systems of life and metabolic energy in which individuality and singular sympathetic attachments don't have meaning.

I close my introduction by describing a marine artifact that captures the capacious and suggestive meanings of the Lord's Supper as a metabolic ritual by transforming it into a secular, postcolonial, multispecies feast. At a faculty dinner a while back (a distinct kind of meal in extremis), Rob Nixon told me about the underwater sculpture *The Last Supper* (2012), by the British Guyanese sculptor Jason deCaires Taylor. As I reflected on its expressive complexities and ambiguities, the sculpture became fundamental to my thinking about the relations between the intertwined narratives that fictions and metabolic rituals make, at once co-constructing and contradicting one another. *The Last Supper* is in the Museo Subacuático de Arte, an underwater exhibition space on the seabed off the Cancun coast in Mexico. The work uses the story of the Lord's Supper to retell a history of human appetite and inwardness that is invasive, extractive, and based on inequalities of power and authority. At the same time the sculpture redefines what it means to be in metabolic community across species. Human viewers instinctively "read" the sculpture and interpret it through the story of the Last Supper, but they are obliged to do so while being literally immersed in the marine ecosystem where the sculpture exists, breathing through a snorkel or oxygen tank, or repeatedly surfacing to take a breath. Immersed in water, human viewers are always conscious that we are visitors in an environment where fish, plants, and other organisms carry on their metabolic lives without assigning symbolic meanings to the objects on which they feast. The artist chose the Last Supper trope because for human viewers it tells powerful and resonant stories of despair and renewal, which are both tethered to and decoupled from the specifically Christian setting of the



FIGURE 1. Jason deCaires Taylor, *The Last Supper* (2009). Courtesy of MUSA. Sculpture and photograph: Jason deCaires Taylor.

ceremonial meal to which it refers. Cast in stone, immovable and immutable, the table in the sculpture is like a drowned altar. It appears at first to depict a Last Supper that is defined only by scarcity and a sense of impending doom, its religious and historical associations with renewal fallen away. The sculpture's form and subject matter insist on deprivation, erasing from the story of Christ's final meal with his Disciples the Christian promise of ongoing life and human salvation. Instead, a stone surface is set with a bowl of cement fruit and carved hand-grenades that remind viewers of violent, weaponized human interventions in natural ecologies and foodways. At either end of the table dinner plates hold stone fish-skeletons, figuring widespread marine death from unsustainable industrial fishing, an effect of human overconsumption. When swimmers visit the sculpture, they will hold an underwater communion or communication with this broken feast—the first of many barbarous feasts to appear in my book—such that the viewer's enforced immersion produces a sense of pressure, reduced sensory experience, and the awareness of not being able to breathe (let alone eat) freely. In short, deCaires Taylor suggests that the metabolic, celebratory aspects of feasting are gone, and that the despair of the Last Supper story remains.

The sculpture's setting in the Caribbean links the stories it tells about human greed and metabolic failures to a larger history of European Christian colonial settlement across the Caribbean Sea. As I argue in the chapters that follow, the Sacrament was historically a crucial ideological instrument in Caribbean colonization, used by Protestant and Catholic planters and other island officials to impose repressive hierarchies and a false sense of social order on the plantation world. But the sculptural medium and underwater location divest the story being told from the history of the novel, or other printed colonial texts that supported Protestant culture on the islands, suggesting instead that the Lord's Supper has literally sunk to the bottom of the sea. DeCaires Taylor's allusion to the central Protestant ritual of the colonial past also reminds viewers that the repressive plantation template is ongoing in the Caribbean and elsewhere, with overfishing and commercial misuse of marine environments. The image of the Last Supper, in other words, makes explicit connections between marine ecologies in which it has become impossible for the beings who inhabit them to feast freely, safely, and pleasurably and the colonial European system of value extraction that proliferated in the eighteenth century, sustained by Christian rituals that had themselves lost spiritual value. The sculpture reminds viewers of the complicity of the Last Supper and Christian imperial aggression in the European resettlement of the Caribbean and its repressive, destructive aftermath, and connects the marine crises of the present to enforced Atlantic migration of African and Indigenous people in the colonial period.

But there's another, crucial aspect to the story this sculpture tells, and that is a parallel narrative of renewal and the promise of a return to celebratory feasting. While this Last Supper is not religious, deCaires Taylor describes the sea itself as a sacred setting, commanding human reverence and care. In his many underwater sculptures, deCaires Taylor gestures to a reverse-colonization of the seabed by installing artificial reefs that will be repopulated—"reclaimed" in his language—by marine plants and animals. *The Last Supper* is a sculptured elegy to the loss of habitat, while also being a replacement reef that will foster new marine life. The work provides a built landscape that will be transformed over time as marine flora and fauna inhabit it, affirming the Caribbean's resilience after centuries of aggression and violence. *The Last Supper* therefore does embrace the possibility of metabolic redemption and return to freedom through reawakened care for the marine world.

Artificial reefs reclaim and restore marine habitats, but they also memorialize the loss of living corals and other organisms through overproduction and extractive misuse. The writer Tao Leigh Goffe writes, “Corals have eyes, ears, teeth, and intricate ways of sensing danger. They have witnessed over half a millennium of Atlantic tragedy. Embracing the wreckage of ships, corals often build homes using the structures as scaffolding for new marine life. Corals have digested this maritime history. As they grew on ships, they formed a submerged transatlantic dungeon that protected possibilities of growth for other species.”³⁵ The stories that corals tell, which include coral death and reef replacement programs, are not merely analogous to the “Atlantic tragedy” of plantation slavery but are literally interfused with the histories of African and Indigenous migrants, whose passage over these seas was one of many signs of waterways being used extractively to sustain plantation capitalism. In building new reef, deCaires Taylor makes coral metabolism a conduit for Caribbean multispecies history and future. Even in the presence of promised renewal, deCaires Taylor’s visual imagery of bare table, stripped bones, and violent fruits recalls the ongoing fragility and vulnerability of all ecologies that are desired and possessed, even when the act of possession is imaginatively generative, as in this sculpture. By inserting the provocatively human, Christian story of the Last Supper into a primarily nonhuman ecology, the sculpture is an ongoing reminder that the Caribbean Sea was, and still is, the object of ravenous colonial appetites.

DeCaires Taylor’s first underwater sculpture park was sited off the coast of Granada in the West Indies, close to the imagined setting of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) as well as Ligon’s *True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (1657) and Richard Steele’s retelling of Inkle and Yarico (1712), all of which I discuss as instances where metabolic subjectivity collaborates to make imperial authority. DeCaires Taylor’s work recognizes the ongoing power of the Caribbean to call new forms of imaginative representation into being: in his case the first reef-art. By re-siting the Last Supper to the seabed he widens the lens from a colonial preoccupation with human appetites and their regulation in plantation economies to express the idea that human and nonhuman metabolic systems are always interdependent. All living beings eat together, all the time, and commensality, which the Last Supper makes into a Christian ritual, is not an expression of belief but a necessary condition of life. This means in turn that inwardness extends beyond sentient organisms into plants and ecosystems that include nonliving things, such as rocks and metals. Beginning a study of the early novel with a reminder that

eighteenth-century interiority includes individual consciousness as well as a vast network of interconnected metabolisms allows us to turn to eighteenth-century texts and reread them more expansively as places of convergence in which representations of sympathy, identification, and intimacy bring living beings, landscapes, and the humanmade world of texts and objects into porous, open, and curious relationship.

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