

WOMEN, FOOD EXCHANGE, AND GOVERNANCE IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

Madeline Bassnett



EARLY MODERN LITERATURE IN HISTORY

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Women, Food
Exchange, and
Governance in Early
Modern England

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Early Modern Literature in History
ISBN 978-3-319-40867-5 ISBN 978-3-319-40868-2 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-40868-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016948576

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

For Hermione

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book began life over ten years ago as a dissertation at Dalhousie University. I remain immensely thankful to Christina Luckyj, who not only shepherded this initial venture, but greeted my vague longings to think about early modern food with enthusiasm. Without her welcoming encouragement this book would not have been written.

I have been fortunate to receive funding from numerous sources during the book's various incarnations. Early research was funded by an Eliza Ritchie Scholarship for Women, an Isaac Walton Killam Memorial Scholarship, and a Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada Doctoral Scholarship. I am extraordinarily grateful to have received a Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada Postdoctoral Fellowship, which gave me a blissful two years to explore other avenues of research and begin to revise the dissertation.

My department at the University of Western Ontario has been unstintingly supportive; I'm lucky to have such excellent colleagues. I also appreciate the faculty and university support that gave me a term teaching release, which was integral to finishing the book. A Dean's Travel Grant allowed me to take a final and necessary trip to the British Library. Students in my graduate and undergraduate seminars on early modern food reminded me why food is so interesting, and our conversations played a substantial role in helping me rethink and revise my earlier work. I was pleased to be part of examination committees for two excellent dissertations on food-related topics, by Fatima Ebrahim and Nina Budabin McQuown; their work further inspired my own thinking about how food functions in literature.

Several people have read parts or wholes of the book at various stages, and I am indebted to them for their various interjections: John Baxter (who will be pleased to know that I have finally discovered the value of the *Homilies*), Margaret Ezell, Ronald Huebert, Katherine Larson, Christina Luckyj, Randall Martin, Edith Snook (who introduced me to the recipe books at the Folger Shakespeare Library), and Paul Stevens (whose post-doctoral guidance allowed me to branch out and eventually return).

The chapters of this book have been presented to a number of different audiences over the years, including those at the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies at the University of Toronto, the Renaissance Society of America, and the Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies. [Chap. 3](#) got its start at an MLA panel on Food and Early Modern Women; I thank Mihoko Suzuki for inviting me to be part of that discussion.

An earlier version of [Chap. 5](#) was published as ‘Dietary Virtue and Good Governance: The Domestic Politics of Lady Mary Wroth’s *Urania*’, *Modern Philology* 111.3 (February 2014): 510–32, and the core of [Chap. 6](#) as ‘Gifts of Fruit and Marriage Feasts in Mary Wroth’s *Urania*’, *Revealing Mary Wroth*, ed. Katherine Larson and Naomi J. Miller with Andrew Strycharski (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 157–68. I had the pleasure of presenting part of this book chapter at a Mary Wroth panel at the Symposium on Early Modern Women at the University of Miami; thank you to Naomi Miller and Andrew Strycharski for including me in this celebratory conversation.

I am grateful, as well, for the supportive guidance of Cedric Brown and Andrew Hadfield as editors of the Early Modern Literature in History series. Kind permission for the cover image, a detail from the frontispiece to Hannah Woolley’s *The Ladies Directory* (1662), was granted by the University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Ann and Peter Bassnett, who taught me the value and pleasures of food and familial commensality. Little did any of us know that my childhood enthusiasm for eating would result in a book. My sister, Sarah Bassnett, has fed me with numerous dishes of wise conversation about our shared profession. I thank my partner, Randall Martin, for his excellent cooking and immeasurable support of my work. My daughter Hermione has lived with this book all her life; in the tradition of mothers passing their food knowledge down to daughters, it seems fitting that I dedicate this book to her.

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Introduction

In 1598 the European traveller Paul Hentzner enjoyed the special privilege of visiting Elizabeth's presence chamber at Greenwich, where he observed the symbol-laden ritual of the Queen's public dining. Reporting on this event in his *Journey into England*, Hentzner highlights the close involvement of women in handling and managing foodstuffs in an account that simultaneously communicates a woman's political power and control:

A Gentleman entered the room bearing a rod, and along with him another bearing a table-cloth, which after they had both kneeled three times, with the utmost veneration, he spread upon the table . . . Then came two others, one with the rod again, the other with a salt-seller, a plate, and bread . . . At last came an unmarried Lady, (we were told she was a Countess) and along with her a married one, bearing a tasting-knife; the former was dressed in white silk, who when she had prostrated herself three times, in the most graceful manner approached the table, and rubbed the plates with bread and salt, with as much awe, as if the Queen had been present: When they had waited there a little while, the Yeomen of the Guard entered . . . bringing in at each turn a course of twenty-four dishes, served in plate most of it gilt; these dishes were received by a Gentleman in the same order they were brought, and placed upon the table, while the Lady-Taster gave to each of the guard a mouthful to eat, of the particular dish he had brought, for fear of any poison. . . . At the end of all this ceremonial a number of unmarried Ladies appeared, who with particular solemnity lifted the meat off the table, and conveyed it into the Queen's inner and

more private chamber, where after she had chosen for herself, the rest goes to the Ladies of the Court.¹

Hentzner's immortalizing account of royal grandeur hints at many of the gendered and political dynamics of food exchange explored in this book. While the men carry in tableware, it is the women who take charge of the food, first cleansing the plates with bread and salt and then scooping up morsels for the guards to taste. This odd interaction presumably ensures that the guards do indeed eat: they have a witness and enforcer in the body of the woman offering them the tasting-knife. From this perspective, the event might also recall a scene of infant-feeding, reminding the audience of women's powerful primordial link to nourishment and their corresponding ability to influence the bodies of others. Yet all these rituals overreach the domestic, for they establish a female ruler's wealth, importance, and authority over household, court, and country. One might imagine this performance, witnessed at the end of four years of stark food shortages, to be a conscious representation of a regulated and plentifully fed nation. The Queen's distribution of her dinner to the ladies who serve her demonstrates the smooth circulation of food from the greatest to the lowest, and models an integral relationship of mutual exchange, dependence, and support: invaluable virtues, especially during periods of dearth. Although like any good woman the Queen disappears into religious contemplation—Hentzner notes that she is at prayers during these preparations—it is, as Hentzner remarks, 'as if the Queen had been present'. Each carefully choreographed interaction with the bountiful table reminds visitors of the obedience and reverence due to the reigning monarch.

The Queen was not the only woman to understand and use the performance of food exchange as a means of communicating or establishing political power. As I argue in this book, elite women frequently depict and discuss food practices, which depend on the relational and political acts of giving and receiving, in relation to concepts of virtuous governance. To investigate these dynamics, I examine the texts of four elite women spanning approximately forty years: the *Psalmes* of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke (completed by 1599); the maternal nursing pamphlet of Elizabeth Clinton, Dowager Countess of Lincoln (published 1622); the diary of Margaret, Lady Hoby (written 1599–1605); and both parts of Mary Sidney, Lady Wroth's prose romance, *Urania* (published 1621; manuscript continuation c. 1630). Influenced by the Protestant and

providential belief that food was a gift from God, these women envisioned female-mediated exchanges, such as hospitality, gift-giving, and charity, to reflect and extend that gift. Closely related physiological concepts, which understood ingestion to affect body, mind, and spirit, further guided their perception that food was a key regulator of the self, defining the ability to function in a godly manner and thereby positively guide and affect others. Although many of the scenes of food exchange I discuss might be understood to comment more broadly on governing ideals, these literary moments also illuminate elite women's own contributions to a network of governing opportunities. Repeatedly, these authors situate food exchange in the countryside and on country estates, reflecting their own positions as managers of sizeable rural households and drawing attention to the close relationship between a bountiful God and the women who administer his nutritional blessings. In aligning themselves with 'our Nourisher', as Adam so evocatively names God in *Paradise Lost*, these authors both suggest that virtuous women of their class perform God's work, and imagine female involvement in multiple spheres of border-crossing authority: from country estate and regional community, to the national polity and the complex networks of transnationalism.²

In examining food exchange in women's writing, I hope both to elucidate the overlooked relationship between food practices and women's political agency, and to establish women's writing as fundamental to scholarly discussions about early modern food. Critical examinations of women's writing frequently identify female authority and the gendered negotiation of power as rooted in the household, especially in light of women's legal and biblical subordination to men. Conduct literature, household manuals, and popular culture all repeatedly relegated women to the home and lectured readers on the evils of challenging male authority or gossiping too readily with female friends. As Margaret Ezell argued in 1987, however, early modern women should be understood not simply as oppressed and downtrodden, but as active arbiters of patriarchal authority, especially in the household.³ Despite the socially accepted 'little commonwealth' model of domestic regulation, with the husband ruling over wife, children, and servants to maintain and model a household discipline that reflected idealized hierarchies, women found numerous ways to wield influence. Wendy Wall's attention to the subversive violence of the domestic sphere, especially in the realm of the kitchen, and Catharine Gray's adoption of the term 'counterpublics' to recognize the 'fluid and porous nature of the public/private divide', usefully exemplify recent scholarship

that foregrounds the permeability of the household and private life and the contributions of these realms to the public sphere.⁴

This scholarship is nuanced by historical and literary research that examines the political lives of women, especially those belonging to the elite and landed classes. Barbara Harris's influential and groundbreaking work on the political engagement of Tudor noblewomen is particularly invaluable for the assumptions I bring to this book. As Harris argues, we should properly interpret the activities of noblewomen's domestic lives as constituting publicly significant 'careers'. Women accrued considerable political influence through commonly held duties that included property management, supervision of household staff, administration of estate expenses, and oversight and charitable care of tenants and neighbouring families. They further maintained and arranged political alliances, managed marriage negotiations, and participated in social exchanges such as hospitality, gift-giving, and patronage.⁵ Because men were frequently absent from estates, wives were required to act in their husbands' steads, conducting the family's interests in local and regional affairs and becoming significant partners in running the business of the estate.⁶ Such women often acted, as Julie Crawford observes, as 'mediatrixes', or 'go-betweens for the various interests and offices that made up political life', and supervised their households as 'bases of operations' to further their own religious and political agendas.⁷ For women of a certain class, therefore, the work of the household was both public and political. Whatever the theoretical division of gendered spheres imagined by male writers of treatises and manuals, elite women's experience reveals how misguided it is to separate public from private, political from domestic.⁸

The careers of Sidney Herbert, Clinton, Hoby, and Wroth actively illustrate these scholarly observations of politicized domesticity. Although none of the writers I discuss wielded official political power, each is remarkable for her independent management of country seats and properties. Elizabeth Clinton and Mary Wroth both wrote as widows, a status that allowed them to assume unquestioned the role of householder. Margaret Hoby, a remarried widow, was unusual in retaining ownership over her Hackness estate, inherited from her deceased husband Walter Devereux. Guarding her privilege of sole ownership until the last years of her life, she supplanted her husband as legal head of household and exercised a 'seigneurial proprietorship' that belies the stereotypical female role as subordinate partner.⁹ Mary Sidney Herbert was a literary and political force in her own right, partly due to her inheritance of

her brother Philip's aspirations and sentiments. Although the Earl of Pembroke was still alive during the period under discussion, Sidney Herbert was a 'key mediator for her husband's political position', contributing to the local governance of the Pembrokes' many estates and properties.¹⁰ Uniting in their own lives the skills of domestic management, property ownership, and estate and county governance, these four writers are especially well placed to communicate the implications and functions of food and food practices in relation to the traditional and informal arts of governance and local administration.

As this book investigates how women's writings about food practices are crucial to the work of estate hospitality, personal and political alliance, and relations of private and public authority, it also contributes substantially to the growing field of early modern food studies. While valuable work has been done on literary and historical food culture,¹¹ domesticity,¹² and the recipe manual,¹³ few scholars venture beyond women's recipe books to investigate how women themselves imagined the cultural, social, and political functions of food exchange. By considering how women write about food in their diaries, pamphlets, poetry, and romances, I aim to establish both that food discourse is skillfully used by those who are most responsible for the feeding and care of the household, and that we cannot gain a full picture of what food meant to the early modern English without looking at the works of women. The arts of food management and preparation were historically a sizeable component of women's domestic activity. Numerous printed recipe books and household manuals amply substantiate the assumption that food was under women's purview. Titles of manuals such as Thomas Dawson's two-part *The good huswives Iewell*, (1587, 1597) and Hugh Plat's *Delightes for Ladies* (1600), alerted female readers to the novel and pleasurable instructions to be found between their covers; Gervase Markham similarly appealed to the self-improving housewife in his aptly named *The English Huswife* (1615).¹⁴ Historical evidence further suggests that noble and gentry women were often left to shoulder the bulk of estate business. In charge of keeping visitors and their immediate families and ranks of servants fed, women also kept accounts, oversaw all types of food production, mediated the details of dinner preparation and service, and presided over the distribution of food to the poor. Hoby records receiving grain and supervising the preparation of fields for planting, as well as planting and harvesting in her own kitchen garden, while Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths observe a similar pattern in the household of Alice Le Strange in the 1620s and '30s.¹⁵

Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, likewise grudgingly acknowledges the essential contribution made by women to the management of estate hospitality in his letter of advice to his son in approximately 1609: 'The man's care, if this hospitalitie be nourished, must be content to trudge abroad, to employ his wyfe at home'.¹⁶ Women, even those of the upper classes, also turned their hands to the arts of cookery, especially the creation of sweets, a legitimized outlet for female creativity. Grace, Lady Mildmay was renowned for her dessert-making abilities, and was described as 'one of the most excellent confectioners' in an anonymous report on her hospitable reception of James I in 1603.¹⁷ Food production and preparation were practical skills, but they were also part of regularly staged performances that included highly politicized entertainments like those at which Grace Mildmay's creations shone. As my opening illustration of the Queen's public dining suggests, food exchanges were key to forming and retaining political alliances, asserting social and political status, and maintaining local order. To ignore women's own depictions of domestic food practices is thus to neglect a significant 'symbolic universe' that might illuminate not only constructions of female subjectivity but also women's relationship to social, religious, and political networks.¹⁸

THE POLITICS OF FOOD EXCHANGE

My discussion of the politics of food exchange, and in turn, the relevance of that exchange to concepts of governance, is dependent on an early modern Protestant understanding of providence, which identified God as the food-provider, and physiology, which understood temperance as a means to virtue. This discussion is further underpinned by theoretical and historical concepts of gift-giving, a capacious category of behaviour that enables us to consider food exchange and its effects as actively political, and to discern how processes of exchange influence and comment on the border-crossing work of governance. The doctrine of providence that imagines God to intervene in people's lives in daily and intimate ways is particularly crucial to the interweavings of food, governance, and exchange. As providential thinking outlines, while God might deliver judgements—of war, disease, and famine—he is also the source of grace and mercy. These benevolent acts were figured primarily through metaphors of bounty, growth, and nourishment, as communicated in commonly held texts such as the Psalms.¹⁹ In the words of Psalm 37:3, 'Trust

thou in the Lord & do good: dwel in the land, & thou shalt be fed assuredly.²⁰ Such precepts and allusions are especially relevant for early modern women, who draw extensively and consistently on biblical and religious contexts in their writing. They do no differently when it comes to the topic of food. Women reveal themselves not only as managers and providers of foodstuffs, but more significantly as intermediaries in a divinely directed system of food exchange. As the providential God feeds his good subjects—materially, through providing good harvests, and metaphorically, through his word—and starves his bad ones, he models a system of circulation and exchange that can be absorbed and imitated, informing an ethos that connects the practices of feeding to the practices of rule. Accordingly, in the work I examine here, women establish the domestic site of food exchange as also political, as they extend, comment on, and advise others about the virtues of manifesting God’s good governance on earth.

The providentialist doctrine that underlies the relationship between feeding and governance also determines my theoretical focus on the processes of exchange. Such processes, which include the fundamental practices of hospitality and charity, are most usefully discussed by historians and theorists of the gift, who establish the broad and inclusive definition of gift-giving. Marcel Mauss, whose foundational anthropological work remains integral to any discussion of exchange, suggests that the concept of gift-giving might describe a wide variety of interchanges, including ‘courtesies, entertainments, ritual, military assistance, women, children, dances, and feasts’.²¹ Historian Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos extends the notion of gift exchange to include informal ‘systems of support between groups such as parents and children, kin, households and neighbourhoods, patrons and clients, friends, parishes and guilds’.²² Felicity Heal’s complementary look at the gift further highlights its importance to court culture and diplomatic negotiations.²³ Gift-giving might thus include the many types of food exchange I discuss in this book: agricultural cultivation, hospitality, charity, nursing, dining, and gift-giving itself. Practices such as these are not only within the purview of domestic duties, as I have observed, but also are fundamental to fostering and mediating a wide range of religious and political interactions and relationships.

The power of the gift, at least for the early moderns, comes from the idea that the first giver is God himself: as Natalie Zemon Davis observes, ‘everything we have is a gift from God’.²⁴ His is only the first of a series of

reciprocal exchanges. Humans, as *Paradise Lost* asserts, should repay God's gifts through faith, worship, and prayer. The inner 'paradise'—explained by the archangel Michael to Adam and Eve before their expulsion from Eden—is achieved through demonstrations of thankfulness, namely 'faith / . . . virtue, patience, temperance, add love, / By name to come called charity'.²⁵ Michael's directive points out that God may be thanked for his gifts directly as well as indirectly, through charitable circulation of material bounty. Because humanity can never truly repay God, belief in this first gift ensures an ongoing practice of reciprocal exchange. Recipients of God's grace were constrained continually to 'obey him, love him, be grateful to him, act always for his honor and glory, and exercise good works towards [their] neighbours'.²⁶ Charity, hospitality, patronage support, and other types of benevolent liberality mediated by women functioned to express gratefulness for an initial gift, to infuse God's grace into society, and to attract further blessings.²⁷ While food was not the only item available for giving, it took prime place in this cycle, whether in banqueting halls or at the gates of charitable lords and ladies.²⁸ Women's writing in particular adopts the close, religiously defined relationship between feeding and God's benevolent governance to reveal this foundational cycle based on myriad rituals of exchange.

In its source as a divine gift, food in early modern England was also necessary for the cyclically and reciprocally driven 'production and reproduction of . . . social relations'.²⁹ As Heal maintains, food was 'the most basic form of offering, set apart from others because of its roles in commensality, hospitality and the relief of need . . . the offering of food was still a means of constructing a distinctive bond between giver and receiver'.³⁰ The commensality of dining, which in the great houses rarely if ever was embarked upon in isolation, held together the fabric of the household and the surrounding locality by keeping servants nourished, maintaining appropriately amicable relationships with thankful tenants, and providing the orts for charitable distribution to the poor following the meal.³¹ Hospitality permitted the host to show off his or her wealth, to put important people in debt, and to forge and maintain alliances. Likewise, charity assisted in the maintenance of social order, preventing food riots in times of dearth, and creating the illusion, at least, of social cohesion around the local estate and its benevolent owners. Food was a flexible gift, one that could be grown in the backyard or killed in deer parks; it could be as substantial as a feast and as minimal as a bowl of cherries. While a gift of rare and imported foods was a symbol of the giver's wealth and status and

perhaps also a sign of the importance of the receiver, who might give more in return, it was possible to give ‘many, yet small, gifts’ of food as constant reminders of ‘one’s existence and goodwill’.³² Most importantly, food and nourishment nestled particularly in the domestic domain of women who regularly offered hospitality and charity to kin, servants, and strangers alike. This ‘basic form of offering’ was thus vital for women, who used food to establish their participation in an extensive network of exchanges as well as to model their own virtue, magnanimity, and affinity to God.

If the exchange of foodstuffs could be understood as a reflection of God’s benevolence, it could further reflect the way in which God’s gifts of food contributed to his work of governance. This relationship was providential, but it was also physiologically based, guided by the belief that the temperate feeding of oneself was an initial step in the divine cycle of gift and reciprocity. Dietaries, sermons, and husbandry and housewifery manuals all insisted that the moderate ingestion of simple foods was necessary to sustain a virtuous existence. As these theories of digestion clarified, food was a key regulator of the self, defining one’s ability to function ethically in relation both to oneself and to others, and determining overeating as a sin that could cause moral as well as physical disruptions in an indulgent subject.³³ In temperate eating, a subject honoured food as a gift from God, and further nurtured a relationship with the divine that allowed her to distribute his blessings and nurture others with food and godly governance. The traditionally female attributes of virtue and piety might thus be considered of a piece with the practice of governance that properly extends from a nurturing God. The popular association of good governance with nursing a child, a biblical precept adopted by both Queen Elizabeth I and King James I, who styled themselves as nourishing parents of their subjects, most profitably illustrates these connections between feeding, governance, and godly virtue. For instance, William Younger’s sermon *The Nvrse Bosome* (1617) describes the good governance of the Magistrate as akin to carrying his people ‘in his *Bosome*’, just as the ‘*Nvrse beareth her sucking Child*’. As he conflates the divinely initiated practices of feeding and governance, Younger advises that the virtue and piety of the governor is essential to ensuring that ‘his *milke*, I meane his *Gouernment* bee wholesome and pure’.³⁴ As we will see, Elizabeth Clinton’s insistence on the virtues of maternal breastfeeding likewise implies that infant nursing is a work of godly governance, and that the virtuous female feeder is another provider of the linked nourishment of milk and good rule.

With this in mind, the artful dining-in-presence of Queen Elizabeth might be understood as a gift meant to mirror those provided by God. As Davis suggests, a gift does not have to be directly named as such; instead, ‘Setting, phrases, and gestures allowed giver and recipient to understand that a gift relation had been established. The spirit of gifts was carried not by names alone, but by whole situations.’³⁵ What mattered was the performance of giving, which drew attention to the ‘careful arrangement’ of the space in which ‘the act of giving was incorporated and displayed for others to watch and observe.’³⁶ In producing a bountiful table, the Queen publicly assures her people of her continued intimacy with God, as the divine gift of food is laid out for her subjects to witness and admire. In keeping with her concurrent attendance at prayer, the table, with the ritualized ‘veneration’ performed by the Queen’s servers, is reminiscent of the Eucharistic table, a Lord’s Supper reminding viewers of the ‘alliance of grace’ between God, Queen, and the country.³⁷ Although observers will not pass through the doors of the Queen’s chamber, they play the role of invited guests. As Ben-Amos elucidates, ‘These spatial and temporal dimensions of the event subtly impressed on and magnified the honour of the giver as well as the subordination of those on the receiving end of the circuit of gifts.’³⁸ Relational hierarchies are reaffirmed and submitted to: the Queen’s gift, like God’s, cannot be repaid, demanding instead a faith in and obedience to the monarch and demonstrating that the Queen’s governance is in alignment with divine purpose.

The rhetorical and religious connections between feeding and governance are not only about piety and virtue, however; they are also about place. Throughout this book, I engage with the recent critical turn towards investigating local and transnational identities and relationships in early modern England. The dynamics of food exchange helpfully draw attention to the ways in which local parts contributed to, contended with, and transcended national wholes. This book demonstrates that women, no less than men, engaged with these vital political processes.³⁹ In the early modern period, when local cultivation and self-sufficiency was the norm and large estates produced most of the household staples—meat, fruit, vegetables, grain, bread, and beer—food was first and foremost a local commodity, often consumed where it was grown. Similarly, food gifts were especially useful in maintaining relationships within localities—both between landlords and tenants and among regional kin and neighbours of similar social standing. A gift such as venison, or even a home-grown basket of fruit, was a ‘powerful gesture in the cycle of local reciprocity’,⁴⁰

and arguably maintained the ‘vitality of the concept of neighbourliness’ as a means of keeping communities coherent and orderly. Grounded in a ‘combination of *place*, personal *knowledge*, active *reciprocity*... the *avoidance of conflict* (or at least its *reconciliation*) and aspirations towards a condition of Christian *charity*’, neighbourliness required the willingness to participate in these exchanges, which in turn held out the rewards of social cohesion, stability, and a sense of shared identity.⁴¹ Such ideals were further embedded in government proclamations that commanded the return of the landed classes to the countryside, ‘to keepe hospitalitie’ for ‘the reliefe of their poore neighbours, as well for foode, as for good rule’.⁴² The writing of women actively depicts a female participation and investment in these practices of exchange that bolstered and influenced local and regional power structures.

Food exchange might contribute to the coherence of localities, but it might also imaginatively establish further border-crossing connections. As Heal discusses, the food gifts and neighbourliness that created cohesion in the countryside could be used to forge and maintain relationships between the regional interests of the country and the nationally focused court. It was not uncommon for ‘the products of local estates’ to be ‘carried to the capital’, for instance, to provide family and friends with a taste of home and perhaps more importantly, to ‘remind the great of [one’s] existence and . . . possible needs’.⁴³ Similarly, the rites of gift exchange and hospitality could make important statements in the international sphere, managing and nurturing international alliance, or alternatively, establishing hierarchies of national superiority and expressing disapproval and disaffection.⁴⁴ Although many of the international exchanges that Heal discusses are pursued through official means, as we will see depicted in Wroth’s episodic romance, alliance and influence might be aspired to unofficially, during the finely crafted dinners of local noblewomen themselves.

The networks of exchange that Heal illustrates further reflect the interlocking dynamics between regional, national, and international interests, as observed by local historians of early modern England. Extending from Alan Everitt’s work on the county of Kent, and his suggestion that pre-Civil War England ‘resembled a union of partially independent county-states or communities, each with its own distinct ethos and loyalty’, local historians recognize the nation not as monolithic, but as made up of ‘distinctive parts’.⁴⁵ As Norman Jones and Daniel Woolf observe, ‘one’s locality is as broad as one chooses to make it . . . [it is] best conceptualized as a series of overlapping . . . spheres beginning with individual

and family' and extending through 'parish, town, nation' to include 'the wider globe'.⁴⁶ Early moderns—including both men and women, commoners and elites—thus understood community, locality, and belonging as a continuum that encompassed both large and small. In writing out of domestic, local, and regional positions of power that depended in part on socially cohering practices of food exchange, early modern women identified the potential of these exchanges and used them to influence and establish national and transnational religious and political networks. In reading food in women's writing, we are thus encouraged to reassess not only how and what women wrote, but also how they contributed to and participated in political and religious debates that understood the English nation and its international interests as an expansive polity of distinctive yet interdependent parts.

WOMEN'S FOOD, WOMEN'S GOVERNANCE

Each chapter in *Women, Food Exchange, and Governance* addresses a diversity of food practices that in turn highlight a variety of methods of exchange. As food is exchanged—whether through agricultural cultivation, through godly or mortal hospitality, through gift-giving or nursing, or through feasting, fasting, and charity—political relationships likewise take shape. Household food practices contribute to estate governance, yet they also contribute to national discipline during countrywide crises of dearth and plague. The exchanges extending from the little commonwealth of the estate further reflect on foreign policies, imagining internationalist alliances and alternative communities that transcend national borders. I have organized the book to reflect the two influential concepts of providence and physiology; while these underlying 'habits of thought' cannot be completely distinguished, they serve first to elaborate the implications of godly feeding and second to establish how women imagined its interpersonal and communal effects.⁴⁷ In further contextualizing my analysis through readings of husbandry and housewifery manuals, dietaries, government proclamations, sermons, and other documentary material, I also aim to show the pervasive nature of the food discourses I discuss. If women were using depictions of food practices to write about governance, men were as well; I contribute to providing a broader reflection of a cultural and historical moment during which recurring crises of dearth and war highlighted the foundational significance of food and encouraged the formation of a Protestant food ethic.

The first two chapters are loosely linked through the crises of agricultural dearth in the 1590s and 1620s, which were attributed country-wide to God's providence. The works of Mary Sidney Herbert and Elizabeth Clinton adopt this paradigm, illuminating dearth as God's punishment and nutritional bounty as divine favour, and drawing attention to local conditions of feeding, both agricultural and maternal. **Chap. 2**, 'Providential Gifts and Agricultural Plenty: The *Psalmes* of Mary Sidney Herbert', investigates Sidney Herbert's practice of augmenting and 'Englishing' psalmic metaphors of husbandry and agricultural cultivation in her substantive and rich completion of the psalm translations begun by Philip Sidney before his death in 1586. In arguing that her translation choices highlight the providential belief that food was a gift from God, I also draw attention to the corollary, that the years of crop failure and food shortages experienced in 1586–7, and especially in 1594–7, must be considered a form of divine punishment. Laying responsibility at the feet of the Queen, Sidney Herbert's agricultural focus pursues the advisory slant of her *Psalmes* by asserting the place of the monarch as God's husbandman, who ensures nutritive bounty by aligning her rule with God's will. As I read the *Psalmes* alongside husbandry manuals that praise the contribution of monarchs and military leaders to crop cultivation, I argue that Sidney Herbert associates the health of the countryside with militant Protestant action on the continent. These *Psalmes* suggest that wars must be pursued to protect and expand Reformist interests and to restore the fundamental exchange between God and the English. National and regional food supply and security, Sidney Herbert implies, is a political issue to be addressed through foreign, not domestic, policies that realign England with militant factionalism and God's ostensible will.

Chap. 3, 'The Milk of Wholesome Government: Elizabeth Clinton's *The Covntesse of Lincolnes Nvrserie*', further addresses the implications of providentialism in relation to breast milk and maternal nursing, situating divine gifts of food not in the land, but in the bodies of individual women. Published in 1622, amid another period of crop failure, this pamphlet appears to respond to the proclamations of James I, which command the landed classes back to the countryside to preserve public order by offering hospitality and charity to the needy. In asserting the nutritive plenty supplied by her daughter-in-law Bridget Clinton, the new Countess of Lincoln, Elizabeth Clinton appears initially to confirm her family's participation in this nationally defined strategy of local and regional feeding. Maternal breast milk might be considered the ultimate home-grown food,

originating in the body of a particular mother to feed the child of her womb. Like other milk-producing animals, as dietaries and child-rearing manuals suggest, milk-producing women are dependent on local foods and conditions for the production of healthy nourishment. Nursing in turn evokes the wholesome governance provided by God, who stimulates agricultural growth and delivers the ‘milk of the word’ to his adherents. Yet the feeding that Clinton praises, I propose, also anticipates the Puritan secessionism that would lead her daughters aboard the emigrant ship *Arbella* to Massachusetts in 1630. Local feeding can be nationally supportive, but it might also gesture towards the new possibility of forming independent and transnational covenants with God. Clinton’s pamphlet thus suggestively positions local feeding in opposition to the Crown, and substitutes the nourishing and providentially bountiful body of Bridget for a monarch who can no longer govern and protect food supply.

The last three chapters develop the second main strand of the book, underpinned less by providential doctrine and more substantially by Galenic and humanist theories that connect food ingestion with moral conduct. These chapters turn to the interpersonal and communal exchanges of gift-giving and hospitality, feasting and fasting. Taking place within households and on country estates, the food-based interchanges I discuss consolidate regional authority and national order, support or destroy the virtue and governing capabilities of monarchs, and initiate the overthrow or entrenchment of political power. [Chap. 4](#), ‘Prayerful Dining: The Diary of Margaret Hoby’, begins by considering the close rhetorical relationship between praying and dining in Hoby’s manuscript diary, suggesting that these acts should be understood as two halves of a whole. If prayer readies Hoby to observe a temperate and godly dining practice, her dining prepares her body and spirit for further practices of worship. As the Elizabethan *Homilies* and housewifery manuals by Gervase Markham and Thomas Tusser indicate, how one feeds oneself also indicates the calibre of one’s self-regulation, which similarly establishes the quality of further acts of management over the household, estate, and nation. Hoby’s careful recording of when she eats and how she governs food production on her estate at Hackness confirms her food practices as vital to maintaining a personal relationship with God and thereby accruing spiritual and regional authority for her Puritan household. Yet she also documents episodes of commensality that reveal the connection between the dynamics of the table and the formation of religious and political relationships. Whether refusing Catholic rivals a place at her table,

or gathering her spiritual community during the time of the plague, Hoby indicates that dining has private and public ramifications that shape regional and household bonds and distinctions, just as it shapes the self.

The final two chapters, both of which focus on Mary Wroth's *Urania*, further advance my investigation of the relationship between food ingestion, personal behaviour, and the authority to govern by delving more deeply into the practices of hospitality and gift-giving. **Chap. 5**, 'The Quintessence of Good Governance: Humanist Hospitality in Mary Wroth's *Urania*', examines several episodes from Parts 1 and 2 of that work that portray both positive and negative influences of food on kings and queens. In pairing Wroth's attention to food with contemporary criticisms of James I's court and its love of gustatory excess, I argue that Wroth, like her aunt Mary Sidney Herbert, uses depictions of food practices to communicate a critical view of the regime and to offer political advice. In episodes focusing on the characters of Nereana and Selarinus, Wroth reveals how rulers can be led astray by pride and by the corrupting and seductive hospitality of intemperance, and how they might be restored to rational behaviour through self-control, local foodstuffs, and the hospitality of virtuous noblewomen. As her depiction of the Lady of Robollo's virtuous hospitality further establishes, Wroth positions women like herself as humanist hosts, guardians of moderate dining, shapers and advisors of royalty, and local rulers in their own right. While this chapter focuses most directly on a local-national dynamic, it also leads towards the transnational emphasis of the final chapter by showing how women might use the permissive framework of hospitality to deliver advice on matters of international conflict.

In the second of these linked chapters, **Chap. 6**, 'Shaping the Body Politic: Mobile Food and Transnational Exchange in *Urania*', I look more extensively at the broadly defined practices of gift-giving in Part 2 of *Urania* in order to examine the politically expansive potential of food exchange. I first examine food's border-crossing effects: not only do scenes of raucous or virtuous dining show a moral relationship between conduct at the table and food's effects on the diners' bodies, but these scenes also reveal food's corresponding effects on the body politic. As I further suggest, the exchange of food gifts in the guise of fruit and the provision of celebratory or charitable hospitality reveal the dynamic political function of food practices. The rippling effect of alliances and indebtedness, created by the gift, leads to a variety of political consequences for giver and receiver alike. If, in the first instance, political power can be squandered or consolidated through

behaviour at a feast, then wars can be lost or international coalitions nurtured through gifts such as fruit. Regional and national control might be fortified by the alliances forged during wedding celebrations, or alternatively, overthrown, as illustrated by the episode of the virtuous pilgrim Parselius who takes advantage of hospitable traditions to remove a tyrant. This chapter argues that elite women believed in their right to advise royalty on their behaviour and that they recognized the far-reaching effects of local food practices on regional, national, and international affairs.

Throughout this book, we see not only that women think about food practices, but also that they use these practices to enter and engage with the public sphere. Even apparently private scenes of exchange such as nursing have political implications, informed by the underlying assumption that food is always implicated in a cycle of gift and gratitude that begins with God. Women are not unique in their observation of this dynamic, but it is in women's writing that the primary and influential relationship between God and women, who share the ability to feed, might be discerned most clearly. Likewise, women draw on this relationship to illuminate the powerful connection between feeding and governance. Depicting food practices that deliver God's nourishing gifts to others, women claim for themselves the ability to govern through their relationships to food. The practices of food exchange thus provide women with a uniquely gendered and culturally accepted political discourse that opens the doors of the household to the world.

NOTES

1. Paul Hentzner, *A Journey into England. By Paul Hentzner, In the Year M.D.XC.VIII.*, ed. Horace Walpole (Twickenham, 1757), pp. 51–3. Walpole translates Hentzner's report from the original Latin publication (Hentzner 1757).
2. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (London and New York: Penguin, 2000), 5.398 (Milton 2000).
3. Margaret J.M. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987). For a more recent historical examination of this topic, see also Bernard Capp's *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) (Capp 2003).
4. Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) (Wall 2002); Catharine Gray, *Women Writers and Public Debate in 17th-Century*

- Britain* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 5, and ‘Introduction’, pp. 1–35 (Gray 2007).
5. Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450–1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 5–6 (Harris 2002). Also see Harris’s article, ‘Women and Politics in Early Tudor England’, *Historical Journal* 33.2 (1990): 259–81 (Harris 1990).
 6. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, p. 8.
 7. Julie Crawford, *Mediatrix: Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 12, 15 and ‘Introduction’, pp. 1–29 (Crawford 2014).
 8. Harris’s perspectives have been extended into the seventeenth century by James Daybell in his edited collection, *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450–1700* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2004) (Daybell 2004). Other recent work that addresses early modern women’s blurring of public and private, political and domestic, includes: Crawford, *Mediatrix*; Gray, *Women Writers and Public Debate*; Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne, eds, *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007) (Richards and Thorne 2007); Hilda L. Smith, ed., *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) (Smith 1998); Mihoko Suzuki, *Subordinate Subjects: Gender, the Political Nation, and Literary Form in England, 1588–1688* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003) (Suzuki 2003).
 9. Crawford, *Mediatrix*, p. 20.
 10. Crawford, *Mediatrix*, pp. 18–20. See also Margaret P. Hannay, *Philip’s Phoenix: Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) (Hannay 1990).
 11. Especially helpful historical sources include: Ken Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002) (Albala 2002); Steven Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985) (Mennell 1985); Joan Thirsk, *Food in Early Modern England: Phases, Fads, Fashions 1500–1760* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007) (Thirsk 2007); C. Anne Wilson, *Food and Drink in Britain: From the Stone Age to the 19th Century* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1973, 2003) (Wilson 2003 [1973]). Recent examinations of early modern food and literature have likewise been invaluable: Robert Appelbaum, *Aguecheek’s Beef, Belch’s Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections: Literature, Culture, and Food Among the Early Moderns* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006) (Appelbaum 2006); Joan Fitzpatrick, *Food in Shakespeare: Early Modern*