

## **The Hunger Artist: Stephen Dedalus, Food, and Creation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Hunger has been a tradition in Western culture. Following this tradition, Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses* assumes a detached and negative attitude toward food intake and refuses solid foods on 16 June 1904. A form of speech notwithstanding, food denial signifies detachment from the other and the material world. Denying actual food consumption, Stephen resorts to artistic creation by transforming food into language, in an attempt to protect himself against the invasion of the threatening other and to assert an autonomous self released from constraints, but in so doing traps himself in the myth of artistic transcendence which he questions and challenges. Representing the appetitive Leopold and Molly Bloom in contrast to Stephen, James Joyce may attempt to deconstruct the long-lasting tradition of hunger, to turn rejection of the other into connection with the other, and to construct an omnivorous identity capable of innovation, exploration, and change. Food, in this respect, acts as an important key to Stephen's growth as an artist. Suggestive of fertility and creativity, food ingestion makes possible creation of all kinds, and food denial indicates the denial of creativity. Therefore, only when Stephen transforms from a food denier into a food receiver may he wake up from the nightmare of hunger in Irish history and equip himself with inexhaustible creativity.

### **KEYWORDS**

Stephen Dedalus; *Ulysses*; food; hunger; creativity

## 飢餓藝術家：史提芬·戴德勒斯、飲食、創作

### 摘要

飢餓乃是西方文化之傳統。承襲此一傳統，《尤利西斯》中的史提芬·戴德勒斯對飲食攝取抱持疏離與負面態度，在1904年6月16日這天拒食固體食物。拒食行為固然可視為一種發聲，但同時影射與他者以及外界的隔離。拒絕飲食攝取，史提芬將食物轉化為語言，投身於藝術創作，藉此保護自我免於險惡他者的侵害，並宣示自我主體不受外界束縛，但卻因此陷入藝術超越論的神話，儘管他質疑並且挑戰這一神話。藉由呈現愛好飲食的布盧姆與莫莉以對照史提芬，喬伊斯試圖解構由來已久的飢餓傳統，將拒絕他者轉化為接觸他者，同時建構得以創新、探索、改變之雜食性主體。就此觀之，飲食扮演史提芬成為藝術家之重要關鍵。隱含生產力與創造力，飲食成就所有形式之創造活動，而拒食即代表了排拒創造力。因此，唯有史提芬由拒食者轉變為受食者方能自愛爾蘭飢餓歷史的惡夢當中醒轉，並且具備源源不絕之創造力。

關鍵詞：史提芬·戴德勒斯、《尤利西斯》、飲食、飢餓、創造力

## **The Hunger Artist: Stephen Dedalus, Food, and Creation**

Reay Tannahill argues rightly that food is a foundation of human history: “Without food there would be no human race, and no history” (xv). In their study of alcoholism in Ireland, Peter Farb and George Armelagos relate the chronic problem of heavy drinking in part to the island’s history of food shortages: “A long history of uncertain food supply and occasional severe famines has also contributed to heavy drinking in Ireland. Almost as a protective measure, the Irish developed a culture characterized by a tendency to eat irregularly, a willingness to fast, and feelings of shame about not having food good enough to offer as a form of hospitality” (181). As Farb and Armelagos go on to note, alcohol “provided the social and psychological satisfaction, as well as the caloric energy, that people elsewhere obtain from food” (181). In other words, concerns about food are central to the formation of a crucial part of Irishness, occupying an important part of Irish history -- a history in which hunger is a recurrent theme.

Having experienced regular famines for centuries, the Irish are no strangers to hunger. Maud Ellmann states that the Irish “have a long tradition of starvation and the British a scandalous tradition of ignoring it” (11). Ellmann’s statement highlights the connection between starvation and political forces. Although natural disasters could cause the failure of crops and hence shortages of food, it is often political factors that lead to starvation. Indeed, Jack Goody reminds us that food-related activities, such as production and distribution, are closely related to the workings of power (37). The more power one has, the more control one exercises over food. In a land with centuries of colonial history, power obviously resides in the colonizer rather than the colonized, along with the “entitlement” to food, to borrow from the economist Amartya Sen (1). Referring to the Irish famines, Linda Civitello argues that “There was no shortage of food in Ireland, but there was inequality in food distribution” (246). Historically, in fact, Ireland functioned as the granary for Britain, producing food for the colonizer, and thus there was always plenty of food available, even in times of scarcity. Nevertheless, the majority of

the Irish had no access to their produce, which was exported to Britain for sale. In this regard, food can be seen as one key to the Irish problem, which intensified the antagonism of the ruled toward the rulers and encouraged support for home rule. The long-term hunger of the Irish can thus be seen as a hunger for both food and freedom. It is noteworthy that the “long tradition of starvation” made the Irish turn involuntary hunger into a voluntary act, and then use it as a weapon. As Ellmann points out, fasting or hunger strikes have long been employed as a means of protest by the Irish, whether by creditors or victims of injustice in the Middle Ages, the Fenians in the nineteenth century, or suffragettes and nationalists in the twentieth century (11-12). Ellmann thus says about the hunger strikers: “By starving themselves voluntarily, the Irish hunger strikers of [the twentieth] century may still be trying to defeat the bloodsuckers and to overcome the nightmare of their history.” (11). Voluntary or involuntary, hunger has been a recurrent issue in Irish history, which often centers on food-related issues -- whether the consumption, shortage, or denial of food.

Not only has food dominated Irish history for centuries, but it is also a recurrent theme in James Joyce’s texts: food and food-related events, such as the Hallow’s Eve dinner in “Clay,” the Morkan sisters’ party in “The Dead,” and the Christmas dinner in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, all have profound thematic significance. *Ulysses*, in particular, is permeated with food images and dietary reports: the novel begins with Stephen, Mulligan, and Haines’s breakfast in the Martello tower at Sandycove, and ends with Molly’s recollection of mouthfeeding Bloom the seedcake on Howth Hill. For Joyce, himself a gourmet hungry for both art and food, writing and eating were inseparable from each other. Ira B. Nadel tells us that Joyce wrote and ate in the kitchen, the “ideal location for blending language and food” where “[h]is hunger, artistic as well as physical, was best met” (218). “A meal for Joyce,” Nadel continues, “was always festive and an occasion for song and story, as well as an opportunity to display Irish hospitality” (221). In other words, dietary consumption (a meal) is closely linked with artistic creation (song and story) as well as national identity (Irish hospitality), suggestive

of life, gaiety, and creativity. If eating relates to creating so profoundly in Joyce's personal and artistic life, what does non-eating imply? There are numerous hearty eaters in *Ulysses*: Buck Mulligan, Leopold Bloom, Molly Bloom, and many other minor characters. However, there are also starvelings and non-eaters in the text. The Dedalus daughters, for example, suffer from long-term poverty and hunger, doing their best to look for food and feed themselves on 16 June 1904. Unlike the Dedalus daughters, Gerty MacDowell starves herself voluntarily to conform to the norms of feminine beauty, seen by Vike Martina Plock as a case of "latent anorexia" (39).

Among the non-eaters in the text, Stephen is probably the most notable, cast as the only major character who shows little enthusiasm for food. After his breakfast in the Martello tower, Stephen consumes only liquids and rejects food for the rest of the day. Stephen thus differs from the ever-hungry Bloom and Molly in his negative attitude toward food, and a number of critics have noted this behavior. Lindsey Tucker contends that Stephen feels uneasy about eating because he associates ingestion with devouring, and fears being devoured by the threatening other, such as his mother and the external world, and thus tends to transform literal eating into literary consumption. As Tucker observes, despite Mulligan's claim that Stephen has "eaten all" that is left (*U* 1.524), "we have no view of Stephen eating in 'Telemachus;'" rather, "[w]hat Stephen does during the meal demonstrates ... his tendency to transform meals and eating into words and metaphor" (31). While Tucker's study focuses on the examination of "the function of the digestive processes as they relate to the creativity and language" (2), Miriam O'Kane Mara's is a psychoanalytic and postcolonial reading of Stephen's refusal of food. Like Tucker, Mara also notes that "Joyce carefully describes Mulligan's self-indulgent eating behaviors ... but eschews to do the same for Stephen Dedalus" (103). Her analysis centers on the argument that food crosses physical borders and represents a threat to Stephen's troubled, colonized, and feminized identity. Uncertainties about identity, Mara asserts, trigger Stephen's problematic food behavior (94). Not specifically anatomizing Stephen or Joyce, Ellmann investigates the relationship

between starving and writing in *The Hunger Artists* (1993), and argues that self-starvation has functioned as “a form of speech” (3) that has been most often employed by artists and hunger strikers in acts of creation and protest. If hunger serves as a form of speech related to creativity and resistance, what message does Stephen’s hunger reveal? How does his attitude toward eating impact his artistic creation, an issue Mara does not address? Does his fear of being devoured carry any political overtones, which Tucker seems to have overlooked and thus fail to register? Above all, why does Joyce represent the hungry Blooms in contrast to Stephen? This article, inspired by the aforementioned critics, will borrow, synthesize, and complement their ideas, seeing Stephen as a troubled hunger artist and examining his dietary behavior in relation to creativity and identity in the Irish sociocultural context.

### **I. Food and Solipsism**

Food can be seen as the “other,” encroaching upon the border of the self. If the human body that consumes food acts as the subject, the food being consumed is the object. Dietary behavior indicates a fundamentally self-other relationship, suggestive of the exchange and interaction between the subject and external world. This exchange and interaction imply a process of boundary transgression: the food as object in the outer world transgresses physical boundaries and enters the inside of the human body, being digested and processed, partly absorbed and assimilated into it, and partly discarded by and discharged from it. In this way, the transformed object inside the body transgresses the physical boundary once again and enters the outer world, and thus completes the circle of exchange between the inside and outside. Food, in this respect, blurs the boundaries between self and other, inside and outside, and connects the subject with the material world. But connections are made not only between the subject and the consumed food; other subjects contributing to the eater’s consumption of the food or eating the same food are also linked with the eater at the same time. As Elspeth Probyn argues, eating could be seen as “a powerful mode of mediation” that “joins us

with others” (12). By the same token, Ellmann considers food to be “the prototype of all exchanges with the other, be they verbal, financial, or erotic” (112). Nadel also states that “Food provides the moment when self and other merge, linking an outer and inner geography that is simultaneously mythic and physical, abstract and literal” (216). However, food is always surrounded by uncertainties -- it could be stale, unhygienic, or poisonous -- and the incorporation of food into the body may have uncertain outcomes. “This sense of danger around food and eating in relation to bodily boundaries,” Deborah Lupton declares, is “central to any act of eating” (16). Accordingly, one’s attitude toward uncertain food or food in general reflects to a considerable degree the self’s attitude toward the uncertain outside world, insinuating the self’s complex relation and interaction with the other. Erich Neumann argues persuasively: “eating and food ... signify a manner of *interpreting the world* and integrating oneself with it” (qtd. in Tucker 4; emphasis added). Dietary behavior thus epitomizes the interaction between the subject and external world.

This interaction between self and other contributes partly to the shaping of identities -- national, religious, class, gender, and so on. Dietary behavior is inseparable from the issue of identity. People from different cultures consume different foodstuffs or cook the same ones in diverse ways. Even people from the same culture may develop various dietary behaviors according to their class, gender, age, religion, occupation, and so on. Food consumption thus determines and represents a part of one’s identity. Lupton maintains that “By incorporating a food into one’s body, that food is made to become oneself” (17). In other words, not only does food blur the boundaries between self and other; but, more importantly, it makes up a part of the person and contributes to what one is. As a matter of fact, the values of food have long been thought to be transmitted to the eater in the act of ingestion, being carried on to the eater’s physical and mental makeup. Such a concept, popular in Europe since the nineteenth century, is best summarized in the maxim “you are what you eat,” coined in 1850 by the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (Plock 37-38). Lupton explicates the concept: “By the act of purchasing

and consuming the food as commodity, those values are transferred to the self. The food is chosen to reflect to oneself and others how individuals perceive themselves, or would like to be perceived" (23). The choice of non-eating thus also represents the self: its rejection of the transferred values from the food, or refusal to be intruded upon or contaminated by the other. Whether by food intake or refusal, dietary behavior reflects the self's reaction to the other in the form of food. But as mentioned previously, food and eating are surrounded by uncertainties. The more omnivorous one is, the more dangers one may encounter. The eater's health and even life, Claude Fischler points out, could be at stake when putting something in their mouth, as could their identity (281). In view of this, one needs to be cautious about eating in order not to "lose the awareness of certainty of what one is oneself" (290). Notwithstanding the dangers associated with it, Fischler is nevertheless positive about omnivorous behavior, associating it with diversification, innovation, exploration, and change (277-78). Being omnivorous, Peter Scholliers comments, gives people "the chance to innovate, experiment and adapt norms, willing or not, consciously or not" (8-9). Rejecting food, on the other hand, suggests the subject's doubts about or detachment from the external world, or even their fear of invasion by the other.

As food patterns suggest one's identity and indicate one's interaction with the other, Stephen's negative dietary behavior reveals his problematic relationship with the external world.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Bloom, who eats "with relish" (*U* 4.1), and Molly, who delights in all forms of consumption, Stephen is not enthusiastic about eating. In fact, we observe Bloom having meals in "Calypso," "Lestrygonians," and "Sirens," and Molly recollecting numerous food-related events in "Penelope," but throughout the day we see Stephen partaking of only breakfast in "Telemachus" while omitting lunch and dinner, and in the breakfast scene he is by no means a hearty eater like Buck Mulligan. Having a good appetite in the early morning, Mulligan "crammed his mouth with fry and munched and droned" (*U* 1.385), "drank [milk] at [the

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<sup>1</sup> Mara compares Stephen with an anorexic: they both attempt to build an identity by means of food rejection. See Mara 106-08. For the formation of identity in relation to food denial, see, for example, Brumberg; Bynum; Lupton.

milkwoman's] bidding" (*U* 1.410), and "filled his mouth with a crust thickly buttered on both sides" (*U* 1.446-47). Although he accuses Stephen that "You have eaten all we left, I suppose" (*U* 1.524), we witness his eating more than Stephen's, and the only textual description of Stephen's eating is "Stephen said as he ate" (*U* 1.374)<sup>2</sup> -- a neutral description without details of the eater's attitude toward the food. We are told vaguely that *Stephen eats*, yet we know very little with regard to *how and what* he eats. More precisely, he thinks more than he eats, corresponding to Tucker's statement that Stephen tends to transform food and eating into language (9). "Telemachus" is not the only episode in which Stephen has access to food, though. In "Oxen of the Sun," he presides over the feast attended by Bloom and the medical students in the National Maternity Hospital. While the students feast on "loaves and fishes" (*U* 14.720), there is no sign that Stephen eats anything. Later in "Eumaeus," when Bloom offers him a bun and suggests that he should try more solid foods, he declines, saying he "[c]ouldn't" (*U* 16.788), and telling Bloom that he has not eaten since "[t]he day before yesterday" (*U* 16.1577). Judging from his physical and mental exhaustion in the early hours of 17 June 1904, it is likely that Stephen has confused the date of his breakfast in the Martello tower. But it is also plausible that he -- consciously or unconsciously -- omits it from his recollection due to his place being usurped by both Mulligan and Haines, his co-diners, or the "gay betrayer" and the "conqueror" (*U* 1.405). Whether he dined "[s]ome time yesterday" (*U* 16.1574) or "[t]he day before yesterday" (*U* 16.1577), it is nevertheless evident that Stephen has refused solid foods since breakfast in the tower, in spite of his heavy drinking throughout that day.

Stephen's refusal of food, to a considerable degree, symptomizes his dubious attitude toward the outer world as the other. Referring to Sheldon Brivic's argument, Tucker contends that "Stephen's rejection of solid foods is associated with his rejection of the material world ... that goes back to his mother's death and her association with things mutable" (127). Undeniably, a feeling of guilt over his mother's death haunts Stephen throughout the text. Mothers not only traditionally

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<sup>2</sup> Mara makes similar observations. See Mara 103.

play the role of food provider, but are themselves *the* food, their milk being the first meal a baby has. May Dedalus nourished and cared for baby Stephen: “With her weak blood and wheysour milk she had fed him and hid from sight of others his swadding bands” (*U* 2.166-67); yet this nourisher also acts as a devourer in her attempt to overpower her son, “to shake and bend [his] soul” and “to strike [him] down” (*U* 1.273, 276). To put it another way, Stephen as a baby consumed liquid food from his mother, which entered into and was assimilated by his body. It is this assimilation, however, which disquiets Stephen, for in the process his mother transferred her “values” to him, encroaching on his being and bending his will. She is, as Stephen believes, both a nourisher and a devourer, embodying the “Ghoul” and “Chewer of corpses” (*U* 1.278), or the “snotgreen sea” (*U* 1.78) that engulfs a hydrophobe like Stephen. His negative attitude toward eating probably derives from this fear of his mother as the initial food and primitive other, a fear that likely contributes to his subsequent rejection of food but not alcohol, a pain-killer which allows him to escape temporarily from reality. By means of rejecting food, Stephen endeavors to reject his mother and what she endorses and represents: the church, the homeland, and the other, which all intrude into his body and soul. He also dreads that his mother as food is now a part of him, one that devours his being. Indeed, the trap of “you are what you eat” resides in the fact that while food makes up the person, the person also faces the threat of being taken over by food, which turns the self into “what you eat” and jeopardizes the self *per se*. However, May Dedalus acts as only one of the devourers for Stephen,<sup>3</sup> whose unease about eating and being eaten is inseparable from the ordinary fear of the process which necessarily accompanies the consumption of food. Tucker defines this process as “the manifestation of energy in growth, maturation, and decay, all the transformations that involve man and the cosmos” (28), and declares that in Stephen’s consciousness this process “involves a sense of devouring, and the eating function is transformed into a vast symbol of devouring by nature” (36). Tucker is convincing in ascribing Stephen’s fear of eating to a fear of mutation and decay,

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<sup>3</sup> Mulligan represents another devouring figure in Stephen’s mind. See Tucker 27-31.

but Stephen dreads being devoured by sociocultural as well as natural forces, as his mother -- the embodiment of feminine power -- represents not only Mother Nature, the sea, but also the cultural dominion of the Catholic Church and Erin. Seen in the Irish colonial context, however, Stephen's unease about food could imply the anxiousness and antagonism of the Irish toward the British, the strangers who invaded the colonized's homeland. As mentioned earlier, Stephen leaves the Martello tower due to its invasion and occupation by the Englishman Haines and his Irish follower Mulligan, the "Usurper[s]" (*U* 1.744) who take possession of his home. Being usurped by those associated with colonial -- and hence masculine -- power, Stephen the colonized subject becomes homeless, and thus begins his wandering in the city of Dublin. Accordingly, his fear of eating could be politically motivated, and be more sociocultural than personal.

Stephen's fear of invasion by the other in the form of food is not unlike that of religious devotees, women in the majority, who conceptualize food as an "external thing that 'invaded' their bodies" (Lupton 133). On account of this conceptualization, "[s]elf-denial through starvation becomes a source of pleasure" for these fasting devotees, who reject the invasion of the other by denying food, "a foreign object within that is not self" (Lupton 135).<sup>4</sup> Food refusal, in other words, allows these devotees to be free from the intrusion of foreign objects and so possess an untainted identity. Stephen's status as a colonized, thus feminized, subject (Mara 96), renders him similar to the devotees with regard to fear of both the invasion of the other and the contamination of their identity. However, as food makes connections between the self and outer world, food denial could signify the "denial of relationship," as Carole M. Counihan reminds us (95). Indeed, the denial of food implies the denial of the other. But as identity is shaped in the interaction between self and other, food denial is also, in a subtle sense, a denial of self, suggestive of the inertia and closure of identity. Ellmann argues convincingly: "starvation seems to represent the only means of *saving* subjectivity from the invasion of the other in the form of food" (30; emphasis in original), but "this denial of the other

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<sup>4</sup> For the relationship between female devotees and fasting, see also Bynum.

necessarily entails the isolation and annihilation of the self,” an act that “fortresses the self against the world” (93). Denying food, Stephen may attempt to prevent his subjectivity from dissolving, and yet in so doing he denies the other and eradicates the self at the same time, and therefore “exemplifies the delineation of food as threatening to identity” (Mara 102).

Stephen’s fear of the dissolution of his identity is manifested in his Shakespeare theory, which he has long been thinking over. Referred to by Mulligan in “Telemachus,” but not delivered until the “Scylla and Charybdis” episode, the theory epitomizes Stephen’s dread of the invasive other and highlights the necessity of solipsism if one is to achieve a non-invaded selfhood and become a creative artist. Overall, the theory criticizes a myth of the construction of patriarchal history, and attempts to deconstruct the law of the father.<sup>5</sup> To put it more specifically, under the cover of artistic transcendence, the tyrannical law of the father marginalizes the other, the feminized body of creativity imagined by masculine culture to be the key to the future. This transcendence ensures the fatherhood of the offspring, namely the artistic work, and thus represses the fear of cuckoldry. The father as lawgiver, in this respect, is possessive and domineering by nature. This possessiveness leads to an inevitable antagonism between father and son, “sundered” by a “steadfast” “bodily shame” (*U* 9.850). Stephen dissolves the father-son conflict by parodically making the father and son into one: the poet becomes “the father of all his race,” the “all in all” (*U* 9.868-69, 1018-19), an androgynous angel fathering his own offspring -- understood not as a self capable of accepting the other, but as a Nietzschean solipsist who needs no other. As Laura Doyle points out, however,

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<sup>5</sup> Many critics have registered the covert political implications in Stephen’s delineation of the theory. L. H. Platt reads “Scylla and Charybdis” in the context of the Irish revival, and regards the theory as a challenge to the high culture of revivalism (745). Patrick McGee observes that Stephen criticizes and undermines “the univocity of the patriarchal discourse” on which the Shakespeare theory feeds (68). In the light of “the sexual and racial metaphysical formula of transcendence,” Laura Doyle investigates Stephen’s questioning and parody of the sexually discriminatory myth of patriarchy that “transcends” the feminized body into masculine art (166). Christine Froula interprets the episode from the perspective of psychoanalysis, noting that “Stephen’s theory dramatizes and supplements his culture’s essentialist construction of sexual difference as female womb/male ‘void’ by diagnosing, fetishizing, and self-ironically cultivating a psychohistorical wound of sexual betrayal to turn to artistic gain” (110).

Stephen's attitude toward the myth of artistic transcendence is ambivalent; he questions yet internalizes it, parodies but is trapped in it (173). Moreover, the parodic casting of Ann Hathaway as willful adulteress subtly betrays, once again, Stephen's repressed and irreconcilable fear of the mother as other, whose imposing -- and devouring -- love is as tyrannical as the law of the father. Stephen acknowledges the inevitability of *amor matris*, but he is conscious of its ambivalent nature, and hence seeks to dethrone the tyrant of this secret love. When he constructs his Shakespeare theory -- which aims to dethrone the father -- he is simultaneously rejecting the mother: "The eyes [of the mother] that wish me well. *But do not know me*" (*U* 9.827; emphases added). Deconstructing the law of the father and meanwhile denying the love of the mother, Stephen is inevitably trapped between Scylla and Charybdis, between "[t]he devil and the deep sea" (*U* 9.139-40). Despite his aim of challenging the myth of artistic transcendence, Stephen is further trapped in it by delineating the self-sufficient artist who denies the other, echoing Ellmann's argument that the "denial of the other necessarily entails the isolation and annihilation of the self" (93).

It is noteworthy that Stephen's Shakespeare theory is delivered after the episode of "Lestrygonians," which is full of food and eating, and in which Bloom consumes his lunch of Burgundy and a cheese sandwich. In spite of his being cast as an outsider alienated from the community in Dublin, Bloom is making connections with the material world via food -- and urination -- at midday of 16 June 1904, whereas Stephen neglects his lunch -- and dinner, too -- delivering a theory which delineates a self-sufficient solipsist who keeps the other at bay. Such an act demonstrates once again Stephen's focus on literary intake and rejection of food.

## II. Hunger and the Artist

Not unaware of the limitations that his Shakespeare theory faces, Stephen nevertheless resorts to artistic creation and assumes a detached attitude toward the material world, as manifested by his reaction to the other in the form of food.

Stephen's fear of contact with the outer world and the ingestion of food may be inseparable, or even derived from, the mind/body dichotomy deep-rooted in the Western tradition. Susan Bordo notes that "Disdain for the body, the conception of it as an alien force and impediment to the soul, is very old in our Greco-Christian traditions" (149). It is, indeed, a commonplace to argue that Western culture has long exalted the mind over the body, the soul over the flesh. Food thus plays a key part in achieving exaltation of the mind:

Aristocratic Greek culture made a science of the regulation of food intake, as a road to self-mastery and the practice of moderation in all things. Fasting, aimed at spiritual purification and domination of the flesh, was an important part of the repertoire of Christian practice in the Middle Ages. These forms of diet can clearly be viewed as instruments for the development of a "self" -- whether an "inner" self, for the Christians, or a public self, for the Greeks -- constructed as an arena in which the deepest possibilities for human excellence may be realized. (Bordo 185)

Notwithstanding the differences between Greek and Christian cultures, control of diet was seen by both as a means to better one's spiritual self -- one's mind and soul -- at the expense of one's corporeal self, thought to be inferior and hence in need of "regulation" and "domination." Studying "fasting girls" in Western society, Joan Jacobs Brumberg ascribes female fasting in part to this tradition (179): for centuries, women had been associated with corporeality or materiality, and men with spirituality, and this association explains the need for women to limit their material intake and regulate their corporeal being in search of spiritual exaltation. Brumberg argues that the ideal of femininity was attributed to women "who put soul over body," for whom "[d]enial became a form of moral certitude and refusal of attractive foods a means for advancing in the moral hierarchy" (179). The exaltation of spirituality and debasement of corporeality, in other words, leads to the regulation of eating, which has long been practiced in Western culture for the betterment of one's self, or the improvement of one's mind and soul.

Food is thus central to the mind/body dichotomy: spiritual exaltation entails

the control of eating, which is commonly associated with one's gross physical and animalistic nature. Admittedly, food itself is ambivalent: it nourishes and satisfies the eater on the one hand, but may disgust them on the other. Lupton makes this clear: "Delicious food is only hours or days away from rotting matter, or excreta. As a result, disgust is never far from the pleasures of food and eating" (3). On account of this, food represents "a source of great ambivalence: it forever threatens contamination and bodily impurity, but is necessary for survival and is the source of great pleasure and contentment" (3). Its association with bodily waste renders food problematic to some. Indeed, constipation was regarded as a virtue in the Victorian era (Brumberg 175), and religious devotees in the Middle Ages were highly esteemed "for suppressing excretory functions" (Bynum 213). Furthermore, the eater may likely reveal their animalistic nature in the act of eating -- "a sensual, animal gratification" -- "unless it is conducted with much delicacy" (Lupton 22). Delicious food, in other words, tempts and gratifies the eater, and to refuse it is thus to resist temptation and desire. As Lupton declares: "Control of the diet, particularly involving paring it down to the bare essentials, eschewing luxury foodstuffs such as meat and sweet foods and reducing heightened flavours or spices, are typical ascetic practices indulged in by religious devotees anxious to prove their ability to override the temptations of the flesh" (131). Despite changes in the meaning of fasting over the centuries, "[w]hat appears to remain prominent," Lupton states, "is the discourse of self-control over the desires of the body that underpins fasting" (133). Food control, in short, is analogous to self-control -- the overruling of one's animalistic desires.

In this respect, self-starvation could be seen as a language, and Brumberg argues that appetite could serve as "a form of expression" (5). By the same token, Ellmann regards hunger as "a form of speech" (3). For the artist in particular, eating seems to be in eternal conflict with creating. Ellmann explains this conflict: "the fact that language issues from the same orifice in which nutrition is imbibed means that words and food are locked in an eternal rivalry.... Since language must compete with food to gain the sole possession of the mouth, we must either speak

and go hungry, or shut up and eat” (46). While it may be undeniable that “the spoken word is too ethereal for nourishment,” “the written word can actually take the place of food”: it is in writing that “language is emancipated from the mouth and ultimately from the body as a whole, in that *the written word outlives the mortal flesh*” (47; emphasis added). “[T]he expression of the word requires the repression of the flesh,” Ellmann concludes (47; emphasis in original). Ellmann’s argument pinpoints the ambiguous but inseparable relationship between the artist and food denial: starvation is necessary for artistic creation, because “the artist has to starve in order to perfect the work of art . . . hunger for the sake of an implacable aesthetics that demands the decreation of the flesh” (59). Hunger is thus deemed “the food of poetry” (62), the creation of which “demands the deconstruction of the body” (69). The language of hunger, in short, is an expression of artistic transcendence, a manifestation of the exaltation of the creative mind over the flesh. To put it slightly differently, literal food is transformed into or replaced by literary food -- as we have seen in our earlier discussion of Stephen Dedalus.

As a matter of fact, artistic transcendence is considered by many to be the threshold to freedom: in controlling food intake and transcending the flesh into art, the artist endeavors to be free from constraints. Ellmann argues that medieval saints fasted not so much “to overcome the flesh” as “to explore the limits of corporeality” (13). In other words, fasting aims -- at least partly -- to transcend corporeality, and this transcendence leads to release from secular constraints. Ellmann puts it this way: “*self-inflicted* hunger is a struggle to release the body from all contexts, even from the context of embodiment itself. It de-historicizes, de-socializes, and even de-genders the body” (14; emphasis in original). Fasting, in this respect, is not unlike writing: “both attempt to rise above the flesh in order to escape its mortal bounds” and “enable the ‘wild mind’ to overleap the shackles of the flesh” (92). As mentioned earlier, however, to eat is to be in contact with the other and the external world, and denying food is denying this contact -- and simultaneously denying oneself, so to speak. Counihan pinpoints this “concentrat[ion] on denying self” evident in those who refuse food: “Food no longer serves primarily to connect them

to others but rather to enable them to transcend their mundane and earthly selves in the quest for piety or perfection” (99). Seen in this light, Stephen’s rejection of food signifies a denial rather than the assertion of self, despite his attempt to assert an autonomous self released from the impact of the other. In view of this, it is dubious whether artistic transcendence could be considered as a form of real freedom -- and Stephen himself has doubts about the credibility of his own Shakespeare theory of solipsism. When John Eglinton asks him if he believes it, Stephen promptly says “No” (*U* 9.1067). And yet it is nevertheless undeniable that Stephen fears being invaded and devoured, and thus dreads ingestion and aims to transcend the mundane world into art. Tucker has observed that Stephen tends to turn physical functions into language or metaphor to diminish “their threatening nature” (27), stating that “Food, expressed in language, becomes something other than food; it becomes words that stand for words” (129). Not dissimilar from Tucker, Margaret McBride maintains that “Stephen rejects his physical body ... to confine his reality to the rarefied intellect” (qtd. in Mara 105). Whether or not Stephen actually does “reject his physical body” may be ambiguous, yet he does confine his reality to the rarefied intellect when he does not eat and instead transforms food into language. Mara’s remark that Stephen, like anorexics, “uses food denial to feel superior” (108) may sound simplistic and problematic, but it nonetheless underlines Stephen’s symptomatic food behavior: in denying food, he attempts to transcend matter into art, so as to detach himself from the abject reality of colonial Ireland, or in Ellmann’s words, “to release the body from all contexts” (14), whether historical or sociocultural.

“The Parable of the Plums,” a creation saturated with food items and eating, serves as an example of how food is sublimated into language. Tucker reminds us that the Parable is oral, and argues that in the “Aeolus” episode “Stephen finds the ingestion of food an analogue for the creative processes and establishes a vital language to replace empty rhetoric as he grounds his art in body process” (96). This does not suggest that Stephen sees actual alimentary consumption as fundamental to creativity, but rather indicates that he turns the ingestion of food into a creative

process and works of art. In other words, the Parable clearly reveals Stephen's "tendency to transform meals and eating into words or metaphor" (Tucker 31): food functions not as a substance for survival, but rather the material for artistic creation. As the material of his created work, food and eating are depicted in great detail in "The Parable of the Plums": the two Dublin vestals "buy one and fourpenceworth of brawn and four slices of panloaf at the north city diningrooms in Marlborough street from Miss Kate Collins, proprietress" (*U* 7.939-41), and "purchase four and twenty ripe plums from a girl at the foot of Nelson's pillar to take off the thirst of the brawn" (*U* 7.941-42); "When they have eaten the brawn and the bread and wiped their twenty fingers in the paper the bread was wrapped in they go nearer to the railings" (*U* 7.1002-03); "They put the bag of plums between them and eat the plums out of it, one after another, wiping off with their handkerchiefs the plumjuice that dribbles out of their mouths and spitting the plumstones slowly out between the railings" (*U* 7.1024-27). One of the vestals, moreover, is portrayed as a diner who "takes a crubeen and a bottle of double X for supper every Saturday" (*U* 7.950-51). Food and eating, in short, dominate the Parable, in which Stephen depicts food items and dietary behavior while in reality he rejects food himself. Oral consumption gives way to oral creation, echoing Ellmann's presupposition that language competes with food to gain the monopoly of the mouth (46).

Notwithstanding Stephen's uncertain attitudes towards food, "The Parable of the Plums" represents a realistic picture of life in turn-of-the-century Dublin, created out of the incorporation and reorganization of his earlier encounters in the city. An improvisation given in the newspaper offices of the *Freeman's Journal*, the Parable manifests Stephen's artistic credo of a focus on the here and now, an appropriate theme for the setting. As Stephen asserts in "Scylla and Charybdis": "Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past" (*U* 9.89). What is important for Stephen is thus the immediate environment of contemporary reality, the here and now, which connects the past with the future, and is therefore what one has to accentuate and embrace. Robert Spoo presents a convincingly detailed and comprehensive reading of the Parable by viewing it as the product

of Stephen's discursive assimilation and aesthetic imagination (128). He also delineates how Stephen transforms incorporated discourses: the old women on Sandymount Strand metamorphose into the Dublin vestals, Deasy's adulteresses into Nelson the adulterer, misogyny into an implicit criticism of imperialism, and so on (129). What one could add here is that Stephen, like Joyce, translates what lies *nacheinander* in time -- chronological dots in memory -- into the *nebeneinander* -- a picture mediated by the author depicting the general paralysis of Dublin -- before the eyes of his audience. On hearing Stephen's depiction of the two vestals, Professor MacHugh responds, "Vestal virgins, I can *see* them" (*U* 7.952-53; emphasis added), implying the vividness and concreteness of Stephen's imagery. Set in contemporary Dublin, the Parable, or in Spoo's words, "countervision of Irish history" (127), places its emphasis on the reality of turn-of-the-century Ireland. It is essentially an anti-parable, which, instead of focusing on "sowing the good seed and preaching the kingdom of heaven," as Biblical parables do (Suvin 59), presents two impoverished old women in a colonial land where seeds ("plumstones" [*U* 7.1027]) are spat out at random and the kingdom of heaven is a paralyzed colony under imperial control, symbolized by Nelson's pillar. The omniscient and omnipotent God becomes "onehanded adulterer" (*U* 7.1018) laid bare for ridicule in spite of his dominating power, while the paralyzed Dubliners unknowingly pay homage to their ruler. In a land with intrusive strangers in the house, eating is not associated with life and satisfaction, but rather with abjection and paralysis: plumjuice "dribbles out of [the women's] mouths" while they spit "the plumstones slowly out between the railings," "too tired to look up or down or to speak" (*U* 7.1023-27). Naming his work "The Parable of the Plums," Stephen creates a new kind of parable -- indeed, a new genre -- distinct from the traditional one, undermining the sacredness of Christianity, challenging the authority of imperial domination, and revealing the real predicament of contemporary Ireland at the same time. Stephen calls his parodic Parable a "vision" (*U* 7.917), which is simultaneously a work of art and a short page of Irish paralytic history, "sacrific[ing] neither aesthetic vision nor historical reality" (Spoo 134). It brings Stephen's

assimilation of discourses and encounters in the city to a summary and climax.

Undeniably, however, the food-saturated Parable is created at the expense of actual food consumption, as despite his depiction of food and eating Stephen does not eat at all during this noontime episode, whereas the ever-hungry Bloom is about to enjoy his lunch in “Lestrygonians.” It could be argued that Stephen, the hungry artist, in the literal sense of the phrase, satisfies his midday hunger with literary food; and yet by depicting materiality so vividly in the Parable, he also betrays his ambivalence toward materiality: an rejection/sublimation *and* obsession with it. Meanwhile, in his attempt to challenge the hegemonic vision represented by Nelson’s pillar, Stephen is further trapped in the myth of artistic transcendence, which, without his awareness, is at one with the imperial and patriarchal vision he challenges. By portraying the Stephen as a man who endeavors to construct a de-materialized identity by sublimating materiality into language, Joyce lays bare this ambivalence and irony, and deconstructs the “vision” Stephen presents. The Parable, in fact, is depicted in an episode characterized by rationality.<sup>6</sup> By inserting a tale filled with materiality in such an episode, Joyce may be attempting to challenge the traditional mind/body dichotomy which values spirituality, rationality, and transcendence, and rejects materiality, animality, and decay.

### **III. Stephen, Food, and Creativity**

As Stephen’s creations, both the Shakespeare theory and Parable are presented in the oral form: the first signifies Stephen’s rejection of the other as well as his ambivalence toward solipsism, while the latter manifests the sublimation of food into language. Different from both, the vampire poem represents the only written work Stephen creates on 16 June 1904. If oral creation is “too ethereal for nourishment,” the vampire poem acts as the sole work that could “[outlive] the mortal flesh” (Ellmann 47). Curiously, while the Shakespeare theory and Parable are entirely delivered orally, the vampire poem is given merely in fragments in the

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<sup>6</sup> The art of “Aeolus,” according to Joyce’s schemata, is rhetoric (Gifford and Seidman 128), which is inseparable from rational thinking and linguistic manipulation. Full of rhetorical devices, the episode therefore suggests the workings of the mind and the dominance of rationality -- at least on the surface.

“Aeolus” episode, despite the detailed representation of the related creative process in “Proteus.” Artistic creation, as critics have pointed out, embodies a form of vampirism or self-vampirism. Ellmann associates language and food consumption with vampiric behaviors, arguing that “in speaking as in eating, the human species feeds upon itself, sucking words and sucking flesh in an endless convoluted plagiarism” (55). Notwithstanding her reference to speaking, Ellmann’s argument focuses on creation in general, which necessitates interactions with the other for discursive incorporation, as human life requires the eating of food. But creation corresponds to vampirism in yet another sense. As mentioned previously, the transcendence of the flesh into art has a long tradition in Western culture, called by Ellmann a “vampiric relationship of words to flesh,” which “typifies the literature of self-starvation”: “The thinner the body, the fatter the book” (22). Joyce, Ellmann observes, is familiar with this vampiric relationship, as “Joyce describes the writer as a squid who disappears behind his ink” in *Finnegans Wake* (26).

Written on Deasy’s letter about foot-and-mouth disease, the vampire poem is not revealed to us until “Aeolus,” the same episode in which Stephen delivers “The Parable of the Plums.” Similar to the Parable, the poem exemplifies the re-accentuation of assimilated discourses: it is essentially a “souped-up” version of one of Douglas Hyde’s translated verses (Gifford and Seidman 62). Critics have investigated the significance of the poem in relation to Stephen and creation. Christine Froula, for example, examines the image of the vampire and regards the poem as “a tiny, parodic prophecy of *Ulysses*’ greater poetry and the symbolic process that underlies [Stephen’s] theory of masculine art and philosophy” (91).<sup>7</sup> An intriguing point is why the poem is written on the blank end of the letter about foot-and-mouth disease. Bettered by the domineering Deasy in their confrontation, Stephen may have avenged himself by tearing off the blank end of the letter, and thus turns the sense of subservience he feels when confronting the headmaster into an impulse to create. And yet there seems to be something more behind this. Foot-

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion of the vampire poem in relation to Stephen’s artistic development, see Froula 96-105.

and-mouth disease “affects cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, and frequently man” (Gifford and Seidman 37). Furthermore, “there was no dependable cure for animals afflicted with the disease, and attempts to develop methods of immunizing cattle had had inconstant results” in the early twentieth century (37). Cattle are raised for human consumption, and when afflicted with the disease they are no longer fit for this use. What is more, the disease may infect human beings. Written on the same paper on which Deasy shows his concern about foot-and-mouth disease and proposes a cure, the vampire poem implicitly connects eating with artistic creation:

*On swift sail flaming  
From storm and south  
He comes, pale vampire,  
Mouth to my mouth. (U 7.522-25)*

The line “Mouth to my mouth” reminds us on the one hand of May Dedalus, who “send[s] out an ashen breath” (U 15.4228), and on the other hand of Molly’s mouthfeeding Bloom the seedcake. The pale vampire comes to feast on his prey for either alimentary or creative nourishment. Conversely, the vampire may come to feed the first-person speaker, nourishing and inspiring the speaker as poet. The poem, in short, describes artistic inspiration and creation in terms of eating. As the poem is the only written work Stephen creates that day, its fragmented representation may suggest the insufficiency, or even unrepresentability, of the work itself, as well as of Stephen the creator -- insufficient owing to his denial of the material world as the other, as manifested by his rejection of food. After all, the poem is compared to snot at the end of “Proteus” by Joyce, who makes the materialized, food-loving Leopold and Molly Bloom his spokespersons rather than the de-materialized, food-rejecting Stephen. Writing is necessarily vampiric -- for discursive assimilation and re-accentuation serve as forms of vampirism -- but not self-vampiric in the solipsistic sense. It seems that only when Stephen sees the vampire as one who mouthfeeds him *seedcake* rather than one who sends out an ashen breath, or when he turns from a denier of food/life into a receiver of them, that he can become a full-fledged artist with inexhaustible creativity, thus capable

of representing his written work in its entirety. To put it in other words, instead of spitting out the seeds like the Dublin vestals in the Parable, he needs to receive the seedcake as Bloom did, who, in return, sowed his seeds in Molly's womb, leading to the conception of Milly, their daughter.

Self-inflicted hunger, as mentioned earlier, has long been a tradition in Western culture. On the other hand, food shortages were a common occurrence for the majority of the population in poverty-stricken Ireland for many centuries. Aware of this tradition of voluntary and involuntary starvation, Joyce depicts Stephen as a hunger artist who refuses solid foods on 16 June 1904. As Mara declares: "Food refusal in Joyce's work ... builds upon an Irish historical and cultural tradition of food refusal as a form of political speech and suggests a way to rebuild fractured identity" (94). Unlike most of the Irish who go hungry involuntarily -- i.e., due to famine or poverty -- hunger strikers and artists reject food themselves, using food denial as a way to express themselves. Following this tradition, Stephen assumes a detached and negative attitude toward food, in an attempt to protect his subjectivity against the invasion of the threatening other, and to assert an autonomous self released from constraints. Notwithstanding its importance as a form of speech, food denial also signifies a detachment from the other and the material world. Ellmann argues persuasively that "the very need to eat reveals the 'nothing' at the core of subjectivity" (30). To fill in this blank, one therefore needs to eat in order to nourish and to create. The setting of the maternity hospital in "Oxen of the Sun," an episode combining the medical students' feast, Mrs. Purefoy's hard labor, and the development of literary styles, clearly suggests the interconnection between food, creativity, and art. Tucker asserts that "Joyce associates food with fertility" (96), and employs "food as a structuring dynamic for creativity" (100). Jaye Berman Montresor also remarks that "Joyce [sees] in food the raw material for art" and "use[s] food assimilation as his method of transcending the limitations of familial, national, and religious identity in his art" (202). In other words, eating for Joyce signifies the transgression of boundaries, blurring the distinction between inside and outside, self and other, and thus transcending the limitations of identity. What

is crucial, Joyce seems to suggest, is not the transcendence of one's flesh into art, a belief Stephen embraces, but rather food consumption itself, which makes possible creation of all kinds. If food is associated with fertility and creativity, food denial thus indicates the denial of creativity. Accordingly, a positive and accepting attitude toward food ingestion is indispensable for the artist. This may explain why Stephen gets together with the food-loving Bloom and is treated by him at the end of the day -- or rather at the beginning of the next. Although he rejects Bloom's offer of a bun in the cabman's shelter, he accepts the cocoa in the kitchen of 7 Eccles Street -- commonly interpreted as their sharing of "a secular communion" (Tucker 133). Whether Stephen will consume more solid foods after the communion, as Bloom advises, remains a textual mystery. Nevertheless, only when the food-denying Stephen accepts Bloom's advice and transforms into a figure closer to the food-loving Joyce can he wake up from the nightmare of hunger in Irish history, equip himself with inexhaustible creativity, and compose a mature work like *Ulysses*. After all, the eating of food, as mentioned before, suggests life, gaiety, and creativity to Joyce's mind. By introducing the gourmet Bloom to food-denying Stephen, and by representing Leopold and Molly Bloom, who delight in food, as spokespersons for the new Ireland under construction, Joyce may attempt to deconstruct the long-lasting tradition of self-starvation, to turn rejection of the other into connection with the other, and to construct an omnivorous identity capable of innovation, exploration, and change. Food, in this respect, acts as an important key to our interpretation of Joyce -- and to Stephen's growth as an artist.

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