

ARTICLE

Self-Fashioning, Food, and Masculinity in George III's Monarchy

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Abstract

George III was a family man, a modest eater, and a thoughtful ruler who wrote about the big questions of the day, from royal sovereignty to the best methods of agriculture to feed a modern nation. His writings provide a glimpse of his version of monarchy, which placed him at the head of a national family, where he embodied the habits of self-regulation and temperance in keeping with the sensibilities of late eighteenth-century manhood. This article brings together George's meals and his essays, considering the histories of food, masculinity, and self-fashioning, to argue that George was a monarch who embodied a new form of masculinity, as marked by his agricultural interests and insistence on a modest diet. His eating habits, along with his intellectual interests and public persona, bring us to the intersection between the private man and the public monarch. Drawing on newly digitized data, alongside contemporary caricatures and descriptions, and George's own writing, we argue that moderation was central to George's creation of an image that appealed to the emerging British nation of the late eighteenth century; food was central to this image, highlighting both his masculine self-control and his ability to be useful to the nation.

After a royal hunt in 1768, Philip Goldsworthy, equerry to George III, is said to have complained about the king's drinking habits: 'I never heard of such a thing in my life! Barley water after a whole day's hard hunting!'¹ Elite eighteenth-century men were notoriously heavy drinkers; Goldsworthy's supposed complaint alerts us to the ways in which George III fashioned his masculine and monarchical identity as a counterpoint to aristocratic manliness.² George III's regimen was distinctly non-aristocratic, as another contemporary described: 'Exercise, air and light diet are the grand fundamentals in the king's idea of health and sprightliness; his majesty feeds chiefly on vegetables, and drinks little wine.'³ Crucially, the king was aware of public opinion.

¹Fanny Burney, *Diary and letters of Madame D'Arblay*, I (Philadelphia, PA, 1842), p. 491.

²On George's temperate drinking habits, see Charles Ludington, 'Drinking for approval: wine and the British court from George III to Victoria and Albert', in Daniëlle De Vooght, ed., *Royal taste: food, power and status at the European courts after 1789* (Abingdon, 2011), pp. 65–6.

³Thomas Williams, *Memoirs of the late George III*, I (London, 1820), p. 175.

His early essays, for example, hinted at his thoughts on the role of the monarch and the potential for fashioning an image of usefulness. With his food, drink, and actions being a matter of public record, the king's body belonged to the nation.⁴ The king was able to position himself as a patriotic Briton, articulating a version of monarchy in which he was the head of a national family and embodied contemporary masculine habits of economy and temperance.⁵ In this article, we analyse what George ate at his family home at Kew to argue that his tastes aligned with those of the middle classes, who consumed a meat-heavy diet that underpinned their masculine independence and vigour.⁶ Drawing on George's writings to understand his concept of rulership, alongside contemporary caricatures and descriptions, we contend that moderation was central to George's creation of an image that appealed to the emerging British nation of the late eighteenth century; food was central to this image, highlighting both his masculine self-control and his ability to be useful to the nation.

George III embraced a version of masculinity associated with being a responsible head of household. This required a degree of self-control, and indeed what some have referred to as frugality. While Charlotte's restrained eating habits might be considered appropriate within contemporary notions of femininity, George's abstemiousness regarding food was also gendered. Cindy McCreery argues that while George was lampooned for 'his frugality, enjoyment of an irreproachable moral domestic life and agricultural hobbies', it was these very qualities that 'endeared' him to his subjects and 'equipped him for his role as "the Father of the People"'.⁷ In this article, we consider the cultural significance of George's simple tastes, and his role in promoting that image. Gender, and indeed masculinity, have been the subject of numerous studies of this period, notably by Matthew McCormack and Karen Harvey, who have shown how changing social and political structures were reflected in new ideas about a man's role.⁸ Other scholars, such as Cynthia Herrup, have focused on the gendered bodies of monarchs.⁹ But these two strands of research

⁴Biographers have noted that George III had simple tastes in food and rulership. See for example John Brooke, *King George III: America's last monarch* (London, 1972); Stanley Ayling, *George the Third* (London, 1972); Ian R. Christie, 'George III and the historians – thirty years on', *History*, 71 (1986), pp. 205–21.

⁵Karen Harvey, *The little republic: masculinity and domestic authority in eighteenth-century Britain* (Oxford, 2012); Hannah Barker, 'Soul, purse and family: middling and lower-class masculinity in eighteenth-century Manchester', *Social History*, 33 (2008), pp. 12–35, at pp. 31–2.

⁶See Ben Rogers, *Beef and liberty* (London, 2003). In this article, we use the term middle classes, given that by the end of the eighteenth century this social category can be seen to be developing a sense of class awareness. We acknowledge that the term middling sort, more typically used with reference to the early modern period, is also relevant, but have made a choice to stick with one terminology for the sake of consistency.

⁷Cindy McCreery, 'Satiric images of Fox, Pitt and George III: the East India Bill crisis 1783–84', *Word & Image*, 9 (1993), pp. 163–85, at p. 171.

⁸Matthew McCormack, *The independent man: citizenship and gender politics in Georgian England* (Manchester, 2005); Harvey, *The little republic*. See also for example Antony Fletcher, *Gender, sex and subordination in England, 1500–1800* (New Haven, CT, 1995); Philip Carter, *Men and the emergence of polite society, Britain, 1660–1800* (London, 2012); Karen Harvey, 'The history of masculinity, circa 1650–1800', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), pp. 296–311, at pp. 305–8; Barker, 'Soul, purse and family', pp. 30–1; Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning masculinity: national identity and language in the eighteenth century* (London, 1996).

⁹Cynthia Herrup, 'The king's two genders', *Journal of British Studies*, 45 (2006), pp. 493–510. See also for example Purificación Martínez, 'Failure as man, failure as king: Fernando IV the unmanly king in the chronicle of Fernando IV', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 94 (2017), pp. 575–90.

have not generally overlapped; monarchs' gendered identities sit outside of mainstream gender history. As such, research about masculinity's transformation by new ideas about family life and domesticity in George III's reign has tended to overlook the extent to which the king himself embodied the new patriarchal role, or indeed how his son's lack of popular appeal can be connected to his failure to apprehend this new manly ideal.

Our study builds on E. C. Spary's assertion that choosing which foods to eat or avoid was a micropolitical act and an exercise of bodily autonomy.¹⁰ Building on this idea, we argue that the dinner table was a site where the king could display his masculine respectability through his seemingly simple tastes.¹¹ This article brings together three historiographical strands – food, masculinity, and self-fashioning – to argue that George was a monarch who embodied a new form of masculinity, as marked by his agricultural interests and insistence on a modest, mostly locally sourced, diet. His eating habits, along with his intellectual interests and public persona, bring us to the intersection between the private man and the public monarch. George's ideas about sovereignty and masculinity – specifically their manifestation in his public persona of Farmer George – can be traced through his early essays on monarchy, eating habits in middle age, and interests in agricultural modernization.

Recent scholarship on food history by Spary and Rebecca Earle has shown that eighteenth-century men used food to demonstrate that they were enlightened and rational consumers, while monarchs increasingly considered their diet in relation to the security of the body politic.¹² Food was also important to the development of national identity, through the invention of national dishes and cuisines as rallying points to engage subjects' loyalties.¹³ While George did famously encourage a bit of national pomp and ceremony, particularly from the 1780s, he was less interested in pomp at home.¹⁴ Instead of lavish banquets, George ate responsibly and with restraint, performing the form of monarchy he envisaged for himself.¹⁵ George's reflections on the nature of monarchy and sovereignty also highlighted his frugality, agricultural interests, and familial devotion.¹⁶ During an age of revolutions, George seemed to recognize that he needed to appeal to his subjects in order for them to confer him legitimacy as a monarch.¹⁷ Charles Ludington argues that the port in the royal cellars was there because the monarch was aware that this had come to

¹⁰E. C. Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment: food and the sciences in Paris, 1670–1760* (Chicago, IL, 2012), pp. 254, 286, 295.

¹¹Herrup, 'The king's two genders', p. 501; Martinez, 'Failure as man, failure as king'.

¹²Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment*; Rebecca Earle, 'Political economy of nutrition in the eighteenth century', *Past & Present*, 242 (2019), pp. 79–117.

¹³Ken Albala, *The banquet: dining in the great courts of late Renaissance Europe* (Chicago, IL, 2007), p. 358.

¹⁴Linda Colley, 'The apotheosis of George III: loyalty, royalty and the British nation 1760–1820', *Past & Present*, 102 (1984), pp. 94–129.

¹⁵Christie, 'George III and the historians', p. 210. He also sees George as intellectually curious and dedicated to his monarchical duties.

¹⁶George III Essays, 1746–1810, London, Royal Collection Trust, GEO/ADD/32/1-2485.

¹⁷Historians tend to agree that post-Restoration monarchs had their power conferred on them by the state, rather than being the embodiment of divine rights of the state itself. See for example Paul Kléber Monod, *The power of kings: monarch and religion in Europe, 1589–1715* (New Haven, CT, 1999), 311; Clarissa Campbell Orr, ed., *Queenship in Britain 1660–1837: royal patronage, court culture and dynastic politics* (Manchester, 2002), p. 5.

be considered a more manly and patriotic drink than wine by the middle classes.¹⁸ He suggests that wine ‘symbolized all the major pillars of political legitimacy’ and is an ideal lens through which to observe Britain’s move from a predominantly aristocratic to an increasingly bourgeois society at the turn of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ Crucially, Ludington argues that the monarchs who chose their wine for its symbolic function were doing so intentionally, setting themselves up as taste setters for the nation. The port in George’s cellars, alongside the food he was served, reveal his awareness of the significance of food and drink for nation-building, especially how it enabled him to embody and to display middle-class ideas about manliness and British nationhood.

Whether intentional or not, these actions served to demonstrate George’s fitness as a good father of the nation. This was particularly significant at a time when other monarchs, like Louis XVI in France, were failing to fulfil such a role.²⁰ For George, his kingship and his masculinity need to be considered together, as he deliberately adopted a type of manliness based on respectability and self-control – virtues that were central to the increasingly dominant masculinity of industrializing Britain.²¹ The emerging expectation for masculinity was created in direct opposition to the masculinity more typically adopted by elite men, which was associated with conspicuous consumption, French cuisine, and foppish effeminacy, including the macaroni style that became popular during George’s early reign. Underpinning this juxtaposition was an assertion that middle-class men should have more political power than they did, given the unfitness of the elite men in power.²² At home, George was a loyal husband, seen by his subjects to adhere to the middle classes’ conception of family values; both Linda Colley and Marilyn Morris, for example, have argued that George III played on his conjugal fidelity and family values to boost his popularity and underscore his fitness to rule.²³ This domestic version of kingship was central to both his public image and private life.

No economic or class considerations shaped George’s eating habits. Instead, he moderated his diet and exercised self-control in his daily life by choice in ways that aligned him more closely with the version of manliness of the middle classes than that of the aristocracy. Self-fashioning (the construction of one’s public-facing identity) played an important role in George’s reign.²⁴ The monarchy retained an important place in British politics, as well as hints of its former sacred and secular

¹⁸Charles Ludington, ‘“Claret is the liquor for boys; port for men”: how port became the “Englishman’s wine”, 1750s to 1800’, *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009), pp. 364–90.

¹⁹Ludington, ‘Drinking for approval’, pp. 59–60.

²⁰Marilyn Morris, ‘The royal family and family values in late eighteenth-century England’, *Journal of Family History*, 21 (1996), pp. 519–32, at p. 529.

²¹Fletcher, *Gender, sex and subordination*; Carter, *Men and the emergence of polite society*; Harvey, ‘The history of masculinity’; McCormack, *The independent man*; Barker, ‘Soul, purse and family’; Harvey, *The little republic*.

²²Cohen, *Fashioning masculinity*; Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family fortunes: men and women of the English middle class 1780–1850* (London, 1987).

²³Colley, ‘The apotheosis of George III’; Morris, ‘The royal family and family values’.

²⁴On the concept of self-fashioning, see for example Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance self-fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, IL, 2005; orig. publ. 1980); Soile Ylivuori, ‘Whiteness, polite masculinity, and West-Indian self-fashioning: the case of William Beckford’, *Cultural and Social History*, 18 (2021), pp. 669–89.

symbolism. Whereas the medieval concept of the king's two bodies explained the simultaneous divine and mortal identity of monarchs, with power conferred by God, the modern one emphasized the duality of a body that was public-facing and domestic and with its power vested in the state. The emphasis was no longer on seeing the monarch as God's earthly representative but instead the creation of a royal public image encouraged people *themselves* to identify with their monarch.²⁵ Desacralized kingship blurred boundaries between public persona, private personhood, everlasting monarchy, and mortal bodies; the goal was 'an image of pious respectability characteristic of the middling ranks of society', something which appealed as much to George as to the British populace.²⁶ Our analysis of George's personal choices and habits suggests that he was attuned to the values of his subjects and fashioned himself accordingly.²⁷

To understand the significance of the relationship between food and monarchy, we situate the royal household's meals within an analysis of George's thoughts on monarchy and agriculture, as well as caricatures where food is used as the means of highlighting the royal family's moral failings. The royal household's daily diet can be identified through their kitchen ledgers. In this study, we focus on the Kew Ledger (1788–1801), a volume that details the food served to the royal household during their visits to Kew.²⁸ William Gorton, the Clerk of the Kitchen, updated the ledgers daily with a list of what foods were being served. The ledger lists 22,655 dishes served over 410 unique days to 50 groups of eaters that included family, courtiers, visitors, and servants. Alongside this, we analyse a year's worth of food served to the prince of Wales and his household at his London home, Carlton House (1812–13).²⁹ This second volume helps us to contextualize George III's habits, through comparison with his son and successor, who ate differently, and was perceived by the public to have quite different moral failings; as we shall see, where the father was seen as miserly, the son was more despised for appearing as a glutton. Understanding George's moral choices and embodied masculinity cannot be done solely through his eating habits. We also analyse his reading and writing, which show us how, as a young man, he approached the task of learning to be a king, by pursuing history and natural philosophy, politics, and agriculture.

²⁵ Monod, *Power of kings*, p. 315.

²⁶ Quotation from Orr, ed., *Queenship in Britain*, p. 2. On George as representative of cultural shifts from martial masculinity to respectable self-restraint, see G. M. Ditchfield, *George III: an essay in monarchy* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 5.

²⁷ We cannot discount the role of others who might have also participated in creating a royal image, which Burke identified in the case of Louis XIV as including an entire industry and complex process of committee decision-making. Evidence suggests that George actively contributed to developing his image. Peter Burke, *The fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven, CT, 1984).

²⁸ Kew Ledger, 1788–1801, London, The National Archives (TNA), LS/9/226. For a more detailed analysis of the ledger, see Adam Crymble, Sarah Fox, Rachel Rich, and Lisa Smith, 'Three thousand dishes on a Georgian table: the data of royal eating in England, 1788–1813', *Food & History*, 21 (2023), pp. 161–89. The full dataset is available on open access: 'Three thousand dishes on a Georgian table, 1788–1813 – dataset', Zenodo, <https://zenodo.org/records/8070132>.

²⁹ Menu book for the prince regent and his household, principally relating to Carlton House, 1812–13, Windsor, The Royal Archives, MRH/MRHF/MENUS/MAIN/MIXED/1.

Considering these sources together makes visible the symbolic functions of food within George's rulership, from building a strong nation to demonstrating his fitness for kingship. George's self-fashioning choices at the table suggested the kind of man he was: someone who aligned his notions of sovereignty with the concept of public utility. In a culture where greed and unruly appetites were believed to expose themselves at the table, George was not a greedy man, as highlighted by many of the existing caricatures and through comparing his dinner menus with those of his eldest son. While the king and his son both had access to the finest chefs and ingredients, the king maintained a relatively modest diet (for a king) based largely on local ingredients and techniques; his son, by contrast, favoured large quantities of rich foods, French cuisine, and novel confectionaries.

I

To understand the ways in which George – the man and the king – presided over his household, the Kew Ledger provides us with information about the structure of the household.³⁰ Decisions about who ate what reflected the king's moral authority, and were underwritten by the Clerk of the Kitchen on behalf of the nation. The personal preferences of the king and queen are discernible, along with the preferences of some of the more powerful members of the household, such as the princesses and the equerries. The ledger was organized by rank, title, and occupation, but given the importance of gender as an organizing principle for both domestic and family life, the menus also contain implicit information about gendered bodies and dietetics, or contemporary knowledge about the connection between food and bodily health.

Meals at Kew, like so much of royal life, took place in a liminal space that was simultaneously public and private. The king's dinners became particularly public during the periods of his illness when his meals were closely observed by physicians and courtiers.³¹ The public nature of these meals also drew attention to the king's very real power in being a representative of enduring monarchy and a manifestation of the state's power.³² As such, the king's power was underscored by the visibility of his everyday bodily functions, in the same way that French King Louis XIV had aligned his body with the body politic through the public performance of waking up, washing, or dining. Whereas such rituals emphasized Louis's divinity, they served another related purpose for George, which was to reveal his humanity.³³ The royal family was embedded in London life; to watch a play or the opera, the king needed to visit the theatres just like anyone else. The small royal household (fewer than 1,500 in comparison to 10,000 at Versailles) with its state-controlled costs could not become a cultural centre like Versailles.³⁴ But this meant constant royal visibility to an urban audience, not just a display of power before courtiers. The informality of his lifestyle gave George an opportunity to show his approachability in a carefully controlled way

³⁰Kew Ledger, TNA.

³¹There are numerous books that refer to George III's illness, but see for example Ayling, *George the Third*; Lewis Namier, *The structure of politics at the accession of George III* (London, 1957); Brooke, *King George III*; Janice Hadlow, *The strangest family: the private lives of George III, Queen Charlotte, and the Hanoverians* (London, 2014), pp. 352–416.

³²Monod, *Power of kings*, p. 315.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 218; Burke, *Fabrication*, p. 90.

³⁴Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707–1837* (London, 1992), pp. 199–200.

that could enhance his popularity.³⁵ No matter how ordinary the king's physical body might be, the underlying message of putting vulnerability on display was that the monarchy (and British state) was perpetual and powerful, existing beyond the body of one man.

Even so, George needed to monitor his physical body (and appetites) closely, given that it was on regular display. He repeatedly expressed concerns about his own and his family members' weights.³⁶ Fatness, after all, was associated with wastefulness and lack of control.³⁷ Eating the right types of foods was also important. Bodies (including the body politic) were believed to be porous, easily affected by the environment or diet; moral (or immoral) qualities might enter the body, depending on what was eaten.³⁸ Anomalous bodies of any kind were noted. Disabled bodies, for example, were routinely portrayed as monstrous, although even able-bodied people might cross the boundary between human and monster if they behaved incorrectly. The fop (a man of excessive fashion and vanity) was considered the opposite of independent masculinity, while an obese person represented greed and was considered ugly or a curiosity.³⁹ People carefully observed the royal family – including their dining habits – during any public appearance. When the king and queen attended the Egham races in 1784, for example, the crowd watched them eat a plain lunch, consisting of cold meats. This tied into their wider reputation for abstemiousness when it came to food.⁴⁰

Food was understood as both a cure for and cause of illness; despite newer ideas about alimentary chemistry, humoral dietetics continued to influence decision-making about food, even at the royal table.⁴¹ According to humoralism, foods had different qualities that could promote health or treat ailments; moreover, each person had an individual constitution – shaped by status, age, and sex – that could be affected through dietary choices.⁴² In both the Kew and the Carlton House Ledgers, servants' lower social status was reflected first and foremost in their lack of choice. The kitchen prepared large quantities of one type of meat (usually roasted) each day, which were then served at all the tables.⁴³ This was certainly a practical decision in terms of kitchen and food management, but significantly, the meat provided to the entire household was humorally 'temperate' (or useful for a wide range of people). The common meat tended to be mutton or veal, although beef also made a regular appearance. Beef in small doses was understood to be healthy for most temperaments, but it was never the only choice at any of the elite tables in the household, being considered gross and indigestible, except for coarser constitutions. This chiefly meant 'country persons and hard labourers'; but secondarily 'all that

³⁵ Monod, *Power of kings*, pp. 311–13, 315.

³⁶ Hadlow, *The strangest family*, p. 11.

³⁷ E. C. Spary, 'Food', in Lisa Wynne Smith, ed., *The cultural history of medicine in the Enlightenment* (London, 2021), pp. 29–50, 39–40.

³⁸ See for examples James Kennaway and Rina Knoeff, eds. *Lifestyle and medicine in the Enlightenment: the six non-naturals in the long eighteenth century* (London, 2020).

³⁹ Monica Mattfeld, 'Animals', in Smith, ed., *Cultural history of medicine*, pp. 73–102, at p. 88.

⁴⁰ Percy Fitzgerald, *The good Queen Charlotte* (London, 1899), pp. 101–2 fn. 1.

⁴¹ Spary, 'Food', p. 29.

⁴² David Gentilcore, *Food and health in early modern Europe: diet, medicine and society, 1450–1800* (London, 2015).

⁴³ Kew Ledger, TNA.

be strong of Nature', according to the sixteenth-century physician Thomas Moffett, whose book was still widely read and reissued in the eighteenth century. Those coarse bodies of the labouring classes, moreover, should avoid foods suited to more delicate constitutions; this included food like partridges and other game birds, which only ever appeared at the elite tables, such as those of the king or the equerries.⁴⁴ All servants at Kew were served a diet of red meat, with beef appearing up to three days a week. This made sense, given that beef was thought to be well-suited to the coarser bodies of the servants.

Beef had one place in the humoral theory of dietetics, but a different place in the imagined community of Britain. The food item most associated with masculinity, both in contemporary discourse and in current scholarship, is red meat.⁴⁵ Spary suggests that this association is the outcome of past arguments about corporeal delicacy (effeminate) and political empowerment (masculine); alimentary ideals, she argues, were political projects, imbuing material objects (food) with the potential to affect one's identity as they were consumed.⁴⁶ For centuries, the availability of meat as part of the British diet was a matter of pride; William Harrison, for example, wrote that white meat and dairy products were for the poor, 'whilst such as are more wealthy do feed upon the flesh of all kinds of cattle'.⁴⁷ Roast beef had special significance in Britain, as illustrated in numerous satirical drawings and even in poetry. Take, for example, the connection made by Henry Fielding in his 1731 ballad 'The Roast Beef of Old England':

When mighty Roast Beef was the Englishman's food,
It ennobled our veins and enriched our blood.
Our soldiers were brave and our courtiers were good
Oh! the Roast Beef of old England,
And old English Roast Beef!

In approving a large quantity of roast beef for his household, George was therefore consciously British in both content and cooking method. Roast meat generally, and beef particularly, had been associated with British character and outlook for over a century.⁴⁸ Notions of the honest British common (middling status) man, marked by plain speaking and plain food, and personified by the figure of John Bull, had gained traction by the later years of George's reign. Bull eventually became a symbol of a politically assertive public, and a method through which satirists could chastise the aristocracy for their lavish and essentially un-British lifestyles.⁴⁹ The provision of

⁴⁴Thomas Moffett, *Health's improvement or rule* (London, 1746), pp. 103, 144 (first published in 1655).

⁴⁵See for example Matthew B. Ruby and Steven J. Heine, 'Meat, morals, and masculinity', *Appetite*, 56 (2011), pp. 447–50, at p. 448; Jeffery Sobal, 'Men, meat, and marriage: models of masculinity', *Food and Foodways*, 13 (2005), pp. 135–58, at p. 137.

⁴⁶Spary, *Eating the Enlightenment*, p. 293.

⁴⁷William Harrison, *A description of Elizabethan England*, XXXV, Part 3 (New York, NY, 1909–14) (first published in 1577).

⁴⁸Jennifer Stead, 'Georgian Britain', in Peter Brears *et al.*, eds., *A taste of history: 10,000 years of food in Britain* (London, 1993).

⁴⁹Tamara Hunt, *Defining John Bull: political caricature and national identity in late Georgian England* (London, 2003), p. 164.

regular roast beef and pudding to the servants in royal palaces sent strong messages about George's nationalism and paternalism both within the royal household and beyond its walls.

Just as food shaped bodies, meals shaped the day. In their daily routines punctuated by meals and tea or coffee drinking, the royal household followed a similar pattern to their subjects. Like her middle-class contemporaries, Charlotte used her diaries to record her family's routines and interactions.⁵⁰ Her days resembled one another, with much time spent indoors and a small circle of intimates. George differed from his predecessors in being a family man, who enjoyed spending evenings at home, playing music or cards, and surrounded by his family and their close inner circle. In this, his lifestyle resembled the modest social lives of many of his subjects, more so than the aristocracy with their elaborate and busy London social lives. Breakfast came after early prayers. Dinner was usually served at four o'clock but could sometimes be a bit later if other things were happening. Coffee always came after dinner, while tea was drunk at eight in the evening. At ten, or a little later, supper was served, with some of the circle who had been present for tea occasionally staying to supper, a short meal since the queen generally retired around eleven. With at least eight dishes on the supper table each day, the ledger gives the impression of a significant meal; but the short amount of time at table hints at the fact that many of the dishes may have been left over, to be later eaten by servants. Although it was the middle classes who were referred to as clock-watchers, with their timekeeping and love of routine encapsulating their class identity, it is clear that George and Charlotte also lived a domestic life imbued with respectability by virtue of its predictability.⁵¹ Following routines rather than impulses meant that meals were similar from one day to the next, without undue embellishments or self-indulgence.

George and Charlotte's meals were made of a vast number of bird, fish, and animal species, but their preference was for simple dishes prepared in predictable ways.⁵² Their moderation is made more apparent when we contrast it with the meals their son ordered at his home at Carlton House during his regency. The prince regent's meals were both larger and more elaborate than his parents', with more new ingredients, and difficult to make pastries and confectionary. At Kew, one soup was always followed by two courses, with a remove in between. The dishes served were the same as those which could be found in the main published cookbooks of the era; there was nothing avant-garde at the king's table at Kew. The prince regent, by contrast, was an adventurous eater. His menus included luxurious dainties like cockscombs, novelties like chipolatas, and extravagant confections like pastry rockets.⁵³ He also ordered much larger meals than those served at his parents' table, and probably entertained on a grander scale. At Carlton House, there were almost always two soups at dinner, a more complex set of dishes, and an extensive sideboard. Typically, dinner for George and Charlotte might run to fifteen or eighteen separate dishes, while the

⁵⁰Diaries, essays and notes of Queen Charlotte, Windsor, The Royal Archives, GEO/ADD/43/2.

⁵¹Rachel Rich, "'If you desire to enjoy life, avoid unpunctual people': women, timetabling and domestic advice, 1850–1910", *Cultural and Social History*, 12 (2015), pp. 95–112.

⁵²Overall numbers of species can be found in Crymble, Fox, Rich, and Smith, 'Three thousand dishes on a Georgian table, 1788–1813 – dataset'.

⁵³Menu book for the prince regent and his household.

prince regent was routinely served twenty or more, supplemented by a sideboard of hot and cold meat. While the volume of food on the king's table was large, it was on the modest side for royal eating.

II

Even by contemporary standards George IV was an extravagant eater, providing rich fodder for caricaturists like James Gillray. George III, by contrast, was a modest eater, both by preference and out of concern for his weight. Intentionally or otherwise, this dietary restraint aligned him with the values of respectable domestic masculinity of his more middle-class contemporaries. Indeed, looking at late eighteenth-century recipe books, we can see that George III's dinners most closely resemble those of the aspirational middle classes, whereas his son was eating items which had not yet made it into the English language.⁵⁴ Hannah Glasse, the best-known domestic cookery author of this period, had recipes for most of the foods served at Kew, while her suggested bills of fare include ingredients that would have been familiar to the kitchen staff at Kew. Glasse's readers were instructed on roasting meat, preparing fish and vegetables, cooking soups and stews and hodgepodge, and making pies and tarts and cheesecakes, all of which were also served to their majesties George and Charlotte. Glasse's suggested bills of fare included items like turkey à la daube, French patty, ham, and chicken, just the sort of thing George would have expected at his own table.⁵⁵ Like his subjects, George ate dishes that, even if they sometimes had French names, were recognizably British and widely available.⁵⁶

The table was a place where a person's inner character was revealed to the outside world.⁵⁷ Doctors, moralists, and other commentators revealed their awareness of this in a variety of media, while satirists made use of mealtime settings to highlight the moral and political failings of the powerful. While George aimed to be (and to appear) useful, the media portrayed him in both flattering and derisory ways by pointing at his abstemiousness, his behaviour at the table, or the food he ate. George was aware of his public image; he and his son both appreciated political satire, and were avid collectors of caricatures.⁵⁸ He read newspapers and collected satirical prints including (it is presumed) Gillray's portrayal of him and Charlotte cooking sprats and muffins over the fire or eating cabbage (Figure 1).⁵⁹ Given the link between personal sovereignty and bodily control, satirists were quick to use clues from the dining room as a source of royal caricature and criticism. Satirical depictions made

⁵⁴Certain foods served to the prince regent at Carleton House were not yet in circulation according to the OED, suggesting that George was ahead of his time when it came to his kitchen.

⁵⁵Hannah Glasse, *The art of cookery, made plain and easy* (London, 1796), p. xxxvi.

⁵⁶On the Frenchness of much of English cuisine, see for example Stephen Mennell, *All manners of food: eating and taste in England and France from the middle ages to the present* (2nd edn, Chicago, IL, 1996), p. 102.

⁵⁷See for example Michael Curtin, 'A question of manners: status and gender in etiquette and courtesy', *Journal of Modern History*, 57 (1985), pp. 61–81; Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, eds., *The ideology of conduct: essays in literature and the history of sexuality* (London, 1987); Anna Bryson, *From courtesy to civility: changing codes of conduct in early modern England* (Oxford, 1998).

⁵⁸Kate Heard, 'The Royal Collection of satirical prints in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', *Print Quarterly*, 35 (2018), pp. 173–82, at pp. 173–4.

⁵⁹Nancy Siegel, 'Feeding the body politic: culinary satire in the reign of George III', IHR Food History Seminar (22 Oct. 2020).



Figure 1. James Gillray, 'Temperance Enjoying a Frugal Meal', 1792. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Adele S. Gollin, 1976.

clear that the king's earthly body was temporal, and subject to the same judgments as anyone else's; it was possible to criticize royal power, then, by focusing on the king's natural body, while leaving the body politic untarnished.⁶⁰ In portraying George at the table, satirists humanized his body; the narrowed gap between his real and sovereign bodies allowed viewers to question his authority. James Gillray, one of George's most prolific caricaturists and critics, often placed George at a meal, suggesting George's animalistic side and placing him in a liminal space along with other 'deformed bodies'. George needed to manage simultaneously two bodies, which were not easily separated: his personal (but visible one) and his royal body. Humanizing his body made him appealing to his subjects while also (potentially) undermining his

⁶⁰David Morgan, 'The crown and the crowd: sublimations of monarchy in Georgian satirical prints', *European Comic Art*, 9 (2016), pp. 63–87.



Figure 2. James Gillray, 'Monstrous Craws at a New Coalition Feast', 1787. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Philip van Ingen, 1942.

royal powers. But therein was the crux of his power. George III's subtle and negotiated power required constant maintenance; his careful lifestyle demonstrated that he was the 'right' kind of man to be sovereign. Yet even given this care, the way George ate could draw negative attention from his detractors.

The food people ate was interpreted as an outward manifestation of inner worth, and too little appetite could be as problematic as too much.⁶¹ Gillray produced a large number of satirical prints of the royal family in the 1780s and 1790s in which he used the king's personal tastes and habits to call into question his ability to act as the head of the nation. The 1786 exhibition of the famous 'Monstrous Craws' (three disabled people displayed because they were supposedly bird-like) in London was accompanied by widespread public interest in animality (Figure 2).⁶² Gillray, for one, readily engaged with the possibility of connecting this 'freak show' with the royals, using the dinner table as a setting to portray the royal couple as greedy for their use of public funds to settle their son's debts. In stark contrast with the king's reputation as an abstemious eater, the image of the 'Monstrous Craws at a New Coalition Feast' (1787) depicted George III, Charlotte, and the prince of Wales as greedily scooping up and eating huge spoons of gold coins. Their craws, or gullets, are sacks under George and Charlotte's necks, filling up with gold as they eat. In front of them, their shared bowl is labelled 'John Bull's Blood', referencing their new agreement for the state to

⁶¹See for example Rachel Rich, *Bourgeois consumption: food, space, and identity in London and Paris, 1850–1914* (Manchester, 2011), pp. 31–8.

⁶²Mattfeld, 'Animals', p. 88.

pay off their son's considerable debts. That food could be used to cast George as, in turns, greedy and stingy in dangerous ways shows its power as a metaphor.

The image of a greedy George was less usual than a focus on his abstemiousness. 'Temperance Enjoying a Frugal Meal' (1792) offers a more familiar image of George and Charlotte at the dinner table (Figure 1). In this print, Gillray implies that George's well-known frugality denoted unfitness for kingship rather than being a virtue. The books on the money chest, for example, evoke miserliness. There is the 'Spare Diet' of physician George Cheyne (*An essay of health and long life*, 1724), which was popular amongst the elite who could ostentatiously control what they ate. The second book refers to 'Old Elwes' (John Elwes), a recently deceased (1789) member of parliament so famed for his miserliness that the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry for 'Miser' provided a three-page account of his life.⁶³ The third book gestures to an essay 'On the price of provisions' by Charles Lind (1769), which criticized rising food prices and oppressive landlords.⁶⁴ In 'Temperance', George and Charlotte feast on leaves and eggs. They might eat sparingly, but they shovel food into their mouths indecorously, hinting at a moral void as deep as that depicted in 'The Monstrous Crows'. Perhaps as a nod to George's well-known drinking habits, the couple drink Aqua Regis (King's Water) instead of wine; but aqua regis was actually a chemical used by counterfeiters to put a gold sheen on lead. The clear message was that the royal couple had a false veneer rather than true royalty.⁶⁵

Even so, there was truth to the king's abstemiousness, which raised questions about what it meant for his rulership. Gillray correctly assumed that both eggs and vegetables were frequently eaten by the royal couple.⁶⁶ According to the Kew Ledger, eggs and spinach was the forty-sixth most common dish served to the royal couple, appearing twenty-eight times across 410 days (about once a fortnight); eggs with other types of leaves, like sorrel or cress, appeared in another eight dishes. A recipe for eggs with spinach in Elizabeth Moxton's frequently printed book highlights the dish's simplicity; spinach was cooked with butter, then served with poached eggs on top.⁶⁷ The simplicity of this dish when served to George and Charlotte was only relative, though, since the egg dishes were served as one of the eighteen or so dishes that made up a typical dinner at Kew. Egg dishes in general appeared frequently on their majesties' table (152 times – about twice a week), with four egg dishes appearing in their top 100 dishes (besides eggs with spinach, this included scholars' eggs, boiled eggs, and buttered eggs). Eggs were frequently served to their pages, too, but less often to the equerries and the princesses. The suggestion that George's abstemiousness was for show rather than substance was one thing, but equally concerning

⁶³ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 'Miser', XII (Dublin, 1793), pp. 176–9.

⁶⁴ Charles Lind, *Essays on several subjects* (London, 1769), p. 117–56.

⁶⁵ Adam Crymble, 'How criminal were the Irish? Bias in the detection of London currency crime, 1797–1821', *London Journal*, 43 (2017), pp. 36–52.

⁶⁶ For example, the equerry Robert Fulke Greville also referred to George III's modest meals (and sick dishes), including spinach and eggs. Annie Gray, 'Kew Palace: the mind behind the myth, research into George III's diet when "mad" and other bits' (unpublished report, 2020), pp. 7, 9.

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Moxon, *English housewifery, exemplified in above four hundred and fifty receipts* (Leeds, 1758), p. 140. Also mentioned as a typical example in Gray, 'Kew Palace', p. 17.

was the implication that it undermined his manhood. If, as stereotypes hold, roast beef signified manly British independence, then the masculinity of a king whose character was summed up by eggs and spinach was called into question.⁶⁸

As with his father, the prince of Wales's food choices risked undermining his masculinity, but this as the result of bodily unruliness rather than excessive restraint. The prince was known to be much fonder of meat than eggs. Indeed, he rarely ate eggs with leaves; when he did eat eggs (which appeared ninety-four times on his table in the year we reviewed), the dishes were more elaborate and diverse. The prince's eggs were typically served as omelettes (sixty-five varieties) or were accompanied by plovers (twenty-nine times, making it his sixty-fifth most common dish). Gillray identified the prince's dining habits as excessive, painting him as the 'Voluptuary' who drank so much that he had to hide the empty bottles under the table and ate so much he had to unbutton his trousers (Figure 3). A filled chamber-pot sits next to the table, pinning down several unpaid bills (including – significantly – one for the butcher), while books on gaming and horse-racing and dice are strewn on the floor, along with his 'Debts of Honor Unpaid'. The picture points directly to his lack of physical and moral continence: unable to manage his own household, how could such a fop manage a kingdom? Gillray might have lampooned George III's plebeian tastes, while aristocrats like Goldsworthy mocked his abstemiousness, but his adoption of a traditionally patriarchal masculinity, combined with the moderation and restraint of the middle classes, was a crucial part of his image. George III's food choices aligned him, both morally and economically, with those of his middle-class subjects.

III

George's careful attention to his own diet was matched by the attention he paid to the farming needs of a wealthy and populous nation, and even to the agricultural concerns of his other constituency in Hanover. A great admirer of the agricultural innovator Arthur Young, George even went so far as to pseudonymously publish some of his own musings on farming under the name Ralph Robinson in Young's journal, *Annals of Agriculture*. He was also acquainted with Mr Duckett, who rented a farm at Petersham in Surrey, and about whose methods of farming George wrote enthusiastically in 1778.⁶⁹ Many contemporary stories emphasized his agricultural interest, recounting his 'walks about his farms' and 'many pleasant little incidents...on meeting with rustics'.⁷⁰ George's interest was not merely frivolous, however, and needs to be considered within wider eighteenth-century concerns.⁷¹ E. P. Thompson, for example, identified the importance of the concept of a moral

⁶⁸Kew Ledger, TNA.

⁶⁹Letters from Ralph Robinson to 'Annals of agriculture and other useful arts', TNA, GEO/ADD/32/2012-2015.

⁷⁰Joseph Taylor, *Relics of royalty, or remarks, anecdotes & conversations of his late majesty George the Third* (London, 1820), 80.

⁷¹See for example Pamela Horn, 'The contribution of the propagandist to eighteenth-century agricultural improvement', *Historical Journal*, 25 (1982), pp. 313–29; John Martin Robinson, 'Model farm buildings of the age of improvement', *Architectural History*, 19 (1976), pp. 17–92.



Figure 3. James Gillray, 'A Voluptuary under the Horrors of Digestion', 1792. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Adele S. Gollin, 1976.

economy in which access to food was needed to keep the peace; more recently Earle has argued that eighteenth-century rulers were aware of the potential uses of nutrition for maintaining order and promoting the political and economic success of nations.⁷² Certainly, George's essays on agriculture, penned between 1746 and 1801, show a consistent interest in husbandry and farming, and that his was part of his understanding of the importance of food within the moral, economic, and

⁷²E. P. Thompson, 'The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century', *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), pp. 76–13; Earle, 'Political economy of nutrition'. See also R. W. Unger, 'Sources of food supplies for European capitals in the eighteenth century', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, Italie et Méditerranée*, 112 (2000), pp. 577–87.

political responsibilities of the sovereign.⁷³ Although George was interested in scientific discoveries in general, he was profoundly practical in its applications: feeding the nation required efficient, effective agricultural practice.

In the later part of his life, one of the king's nicknames was Farmer George. The nickname was both a pun (georgic referring to agriculture, and poems about agriculture) and a reflection of his real interest in farming. The image of the king as farmer has sometimes been interpreted as signifying nostalgia for an idyllic rural past. Rachel Crawford and Colley have both suggested that the Farmer George moniker diffused and distracted from the less palatable elements of George's reign.⁷⁴ It distracted the public from the devastating loss of America, and diverted attention from the rising tensions across the sea in France by invoking a nostalgia for older, paternal methods of land management. The all too real agricultural modernization taking place, in the form of the enclosure movement, was also creating hunger and hardship for the poorest of George's subjects, by limiting access to land for the rural poor, while the cost of wheat, milk, and meat was also rising.⁷⁵ But George can also be seen to have taken agriculture seriously. He took advice on sheep farming from the naturalist Joseph Banks and was visited by the agriculturalist Arthur Young, who even found the farms at Windsor to be in 'admirable order', declaring the king to be 'the politest of men'.⁷⁶ His interest in new agricultural methods and the livestock quality of British sheep, as well as the establishment of several farms in Windsor, Kew, Richmond, and Mortlake, resulted in this becoming a crucial element of George's persona.⁷⁷ Images of Farmer George evoke his homeliness, the fertility of the soil, and perhaps even the recognition of George's sincere vision of himself as father of the nation.

As a king who wished to be useful to his people, George felt the need to be well-versed as much in practical matters as in abstract principles. Among the various texts and treatises that George read and copied for his own papers were Arthur Young's *The farmer's letters to the people of England* (1771); *The complete farmer* (1776); and David Henry's *The complete English farmer* (1771).⁷⁸ Such texts were of great practical significance when it came to a king thinking about how he might feed the nation. Indeed, the restriction of available foodstuffs as a result of both war with the French and the rapid growth of urban populations who had little access to physical space or the means to grow food, presented a constant drain on the rates of

⁷³George III Essays, Agriculture, Windsor, The Royal Archives, GEO/ADD/32/2012-2044, 2049, 2051, 2441. See also James Fisher, 'Farmer George? Notes on agriculture' blog, Georgian Papers Programme, <https://georgianpapers.com/2017/01/19/farmer-georges-notes-agriculture/> (accessed 4 Feb. 2022).

⁷⁴Rachel Crawford, 'English georgic and British nationhood', *ELH*, 65 (1998), pp. 123–58, at p. 148.

⁷⁵Mark Overton, *Agricultural revolution in England: the transformation of the agrarian economy 1500–1850* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 147–67.

⁷⁶Christopher Hibbert, *George III: a personal history* (London, 1999), p. 197.

⁷⁷Jeremy Black, *George III: America's last king* (New Haven, CT, 2008), p. 137.

⁷⁸George III Essays, Notes and essays on agriculture, Windsor, The Royal Archives, GEO/ADD/32/2019–2028, GEO/ADD/32/2037; Arthur Young, *The farmer's letters to the people of England*, I (London, 1771), p. 5. The first line of Geo Addl MSS 32 2019 corresponds to p. 5. George III Essays, 'Advantages of the old and new husbandry extracted from the complete English farmer', Windsor, The Royal Archives, GEO/ADD/32/2033–2036.

urban conurbations such as London and Manchester. Fluctuating grain prices created unrest amongst the labouring sorts at a particularly fragile moment in time, as Britain watched political developments in France. It is perhaps unsurprising that this period saw an explosion in the publication of treatises on agricultural techniques and land management. These agricultural treatises effectively created a link between the nation and its soil. The attention that George gave to making notes from these books suggests that he approached the task of learning about the best modern farming techniques with enthusiasm and sincerity.

George wanted to make an active contribution to the modernization of British agriculture. His interest in agricultural innovations went beyond superficial fashion, and he clearly identified such innovations with patriotic values. The king corresponded about his ideas on this subject with Mr Duckett, a much-admired farmer whose innovative methods had enabled him to cultivate land previously thought uncultivable. In a letter to Duckett, George asked him to share his 'entirely new style of husbandry' suggesting that in doing so Duckett would be 'of more utility to your country than you may be aware'.⁷⁹ From Arthur Young, George had taken the notion that agriculture was 'the foundation of every other art, business or profession, it is the chief attention of every wise state to see that this and manufactures are proportionally encouraged but that the preponderance ought to be in favour of the former'.⁸⁰ He also copied a passage from David Henry about the benefits of the 'new husbandry' and took a great interest in the benefits of saintfoin or holy hay for feeding cattle, from his reading of *The complete farmer*. These notes reveal the importance placed on the concept of utility, and on George's regard for effective agriculture as the basis for the pursuit of other forms of wealth, since an ill-fed population could not work effectively:

HUSBANDRY is, with great justice, placed at the head of human arts, as having a very great advantage over all others, both with regard to antiquity and usefulness. It had its birth with the world, and has always been the genuine source of solid wealth, and real treasures; for it will furnish a people with everything necessary to render life happy and desirable, form the principal revenues of the state, and even supply the defect of all others, when they happen to fail.⁸¹

Perhaps, then, the Farmer George persona embodied a sort of tension between the modernizer who wanted enclosure and the 'new husbandry', and the traditional monarch who espoused wealth from the soil, while remaining suspicious of wealth from manufacturing. Some political theorists questioned the link between liberty and prosperity, worrying that wealth might lead to national decline, but George saw a strong nation and national wealth as closely entwined.⁸² In encouraging Britain's agricultural modernization to enhance its prosperity, George placed the importance

⁷⁹ George III Essays, Letter to Mr Duckett, Windsor, The Royal Archives, GEO/ADD/32/2016.

⁸⁰ George III Essays, Notes and essays on agriculture, Windsor, The Royal Archives, GEO/ADD/32/2037.

⁸¹ *The complete farmer: or, a general dictionary of husbandry*. George III's notes from this book can be found in Windsor, The Royal Archives, GEO ADD 32 2029-2030.

⁸² Henry C. Clarke, 'Is political liberty necessary for economic prosperity? The long eighteenth century', *Journal of Policy History*, 29 (2017), pp. 211-37, at p. 216.

of feeding the nation above all else. This was, nonetheless, in line with Montesquieu's thinking; British wealth, which came from commerce, containing the spirit of 'that of frugality, economy, moderation, work, prudence, tranquillity, order and regularity'.⁸³ These qualities – so closely connected with the middle classes – were exactly those which George himself exhibited in his domestic habits and his agricultural interests.

IV

For George III, the purpose of his kingship was unclear, amidst the fluctuating social order and political unrest domestically and abroad: what should royal sovereignty be?⁸⁴ Enlightenment philosophes considered the limited (or constitutional) monarchy of Britain, which placed the power of the nation in parliament, to be superior to absolute monarchy.⁸⁵ An emerging sense of nationalism managed to exist alongside royal sovereignty in Britain, but George was aware that his power had limits, describing his country as a 'republic under mask of royalty'.⁸⁶ The successful co-existence can be partly explained by George's adoption of politeness (self-control) and domesticity (household management) as core elements of his sovereignty. Philosopher David Hume, for example, argued that politeness could be a political tool wielded by the sovereign to protect civil society from Hobbesian dangers, while historian and politician Edward Gibbon saw a sovereign's domesticity as a space that could disrupt the public sphere. After all, the boundary between public and private was often blurry in the eighteenth century; even public administration, for example, was based on the model of household accounting.⁸⁷ George's private life, moreover, was the public face of monarchy – and the source of his popularity – for the growing middle class who saw masculinity as bound up with domestic authority.⁸⁸ Domesticity highlighted George's manly self-restraint and control over the royal household, demonstrating in turn his fitness to rule the nation.

From the start of George's reign, the links between the royal household and the nation began to emerge. Throughout George's reign, monarchical power became increasingly symbolic, with parliament placing limits on all monarchical institutions – beginning with the household.⁸⁹ When twenty-two-year-old George

⁸³Cited in *ibid.*, p. 219.

⁸⁴H. T. Dickinson, 'The eighteenth-century debate on the sovereignty of parliament', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 26 (1976), pp. 189–210; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, 2016), pp. 6–7.

⁸⁵Anderson, *Imagined communities*, p. 7; Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the creation of the modern world* (London, 2001). Dan Edelstein and Bilianna Kassabova have recently questioned this dominant perception, however: 'How England fell off the map of Voltaire's Enlightenment', *Modern Intellectual History*, 17 (2020), pp. 29–53.

⁸⁶George III Essays, Notes on 'Of laws relative to government in general', Windsor, The Royal Archives, GEO ADD4 MSS 32.706, p. 223. See also Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp. 7–10.

⁸⁷Peter DeGabriele, *Sovereign power and the Enlightenment* (Lewisburg, PA, 2015), pp. 58, 86.

⁸⁸Clarissa Campbell Orr, 'Queen Charlotte, "scientific queen"', in Orr, ed., *Queenship in Britain*, p. 241; Herrup, 'The king's two genders', p. 510; Harvey, *The little republic*, p. 98. According to Herrup, earlier concepts of kingship had expected monarchs to be simultaneously womanly (merciful) and manly (courageous), but this was slightly different to domesticity.

⁸⁹Monod, *The power of kings*, p. 30; Marin Terpstra, 'From the king's two bodies to the people's two bodies: Spinoza on the body politic', *Early Science and Medicine*, 25 (2020), pp. 46–71, at pp. 66–7.

came to the throne in 1760, he agreed to turn over his hereditary income to parliament in return for an annual provision of £800,000. But within a year, George's spending had proven excessive, and the new Lord Steward, William, Earl Talbot and assistant Clerk of the Green Cloth, William Bray, investigated the household. They found that many office-holders were not doing their jobs and that many roles were, in fact, unnecessary. The kitchen particularly needed restructuring, and the staff of 220 in 1760 was reduced to 140 in 1761. Other reforms aimed to prevent corruption and to make paperwork and payments more efficient, with the royal household increasingly accountable to the government. In all these reforms, the dinner table was treated as the centre of the home; curbing expenditure began with curtailing excesses in food and drink.

By 1777, all royal household accounts and the Civil List (civil government costs, such as the salaries of judges or ambassadors) had to be approved by parliament before it paid the royal expenditures. Under Edmund Burke's Economical Reform Bill of 1782, parliament asserted the right to control the composition of the royal household, with the aim of managing its spending.⁹⁰ In a world in which manliness was defined by independence, the king's lack of financial control might have diminished his stature, but the financial resources at his disposal were so large, and his authority over the Civil List so significant, that in reality he could continue to operate as a patriarch in his daily life. In absolutist France, by contrast, there was only a vague sense of what came in and went out of the royal budget, with no specific oversight of the king's household spending.⁹¹ If anything, the parliamentary oversight enhanced George's legitimacy by avoiding any hints of tyranny that might be perceived in, for example, the French monarchy's mode of expenditure.

Within the British system, the limits placed on the king's spending did not diminish the political power he continued to wield through personal patronage and via the Civil List.⁹² This continued to be the case even once Burke's reforms gave parliament increased supervision of the list. The king retained significant input, which he used as a political tool to reward supporters – and, crucially, to fund the costs of waging war and making peace.⁹³ The importance of the Civil List should not be understated; Hume, for example, saw a king's ability to distribute offices prudently and carefully as a form of sovereignty that enabled tactful and polite political interventions, ensuring political stability by balancing political unpredictability.⁹⁴ Tactful and polite interventions in this area operated in conjunction with moderation and 'dignity of manner'. The king was known for his 'habitual abstinence from the customary pleasures of the table' which was 'scarcely equalled by any private person in

⁹⁰R. O. Bucholz, ed., 'Chronological survey 1660–1837: the later Hanoverian household, 1760–1837', in *Office-holders in modern Britain. Volume 11 (revised), court officers, 1660–1837* (London, 2006), pp. cv–cxxxi. British History Online www.british-history.ac.uk/office-holders/vol11/cv-cxxxi (accessed 15 Mar. 2021).

⁹¹Robert D. Harris, 'Necker's compte rendu of 1781: a reconsideration', *Journal of Modern History*, 42 (1970), pp. 162–83.

⁹²See for example Orr, 'Queen Charlotte', p. 245.

⁹³E. A. Reitan, 'The Civil List in eighteenth-century British politics: parliamentary supremacy versus the independence of the crown', *Historical Journal*, 9 (1966), pp. 318–37, at pp. 324, 335–6.

⁹⁴DeGabriele, *Sovereign power*, pp. 60–1.

his dominion who had enough to eat'.⁹⁵ By downplaying the pleasures of the table George could align himself with the ideas of moderation which we know were central to the self-image of the middle classes. The king's table was both public and private, like the king's body itself. While the Civil List gave the British king real political power among his peers, the fact that he shared his sovereignty with parliament added to his political power with the wider constituency of the nation; as a popular king capable of harnessing public opinion, George promoted continuity and political stability. Here, the body of the king came together with the body of the man, as George fostered an image of respectability befitting emerging notions of respectable masculinity designed to appeal to the British middle classes.

Questions of personal sovereignty haunted George throughout his reign in another way. Just as the king's first body (the institution of the monarchy) was being limited, the king's second body (his real body) was also contested. Parliament certainly had a vested interest in controlling the king's spending, but it was also clear that George was a young man who wanted to challenge the Whig dominance that had developed under his grandfather's reign – and many were sceptical that he was acting independently, with satires depicting him as childish and subject to the corrupting influences of his mother and Lord Bute (loathed primarily for his Scottishness). George III's early failure was underscored by the lack of a permanent ministry during the 1760s, as he switched between political factions six times.⁹⁶ His political position, as man and monarch, was complicated in 1788 when the start of his mental illness caused the Regency Crisis, which led parliament to debate the king's fitness to rule. During his illness, he was hidden from public view while incarcerated at Kew Palace, although the press provided daily updates on his health.⁹⁷ The king's illness posed both an emotional and a logistical problem for the nation, particularly in light of the ongoing French Revolution; newspapers and caricatures, for example, suggested that the madness in the head of the body politic might infect the entire nation.⁹⁸

George understood this and shaped his rule accordingly, reflecting both on the need for consent and on the patriarchal structure of monarchy. As Katherine Lewis has noted for medieval monarchy, kings deliberately cultivated their monarchical personas, particularly in terms of masculinity.⁹⁹ George also managed his image, and his notes and essays written between 1746 and 1805 reveal some of his pre-occupations. Among the king's papers are four pages of notes on William Temple's 'An essay upon the origin and nature of government' (1680). He made notes summarizing Temple's argument, that climate, education, and manners determined the type of government (arbitrary or limited by laws), as well as considering the extent to which authority was derived from certain qualities (wisdom, goodness, valour,

⁹⁵Anon., 'Anecdotes of his late majesty George III', *La Belle Assemblée: Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* (1820), pp. 74–80, at p. 75.

⁹⁶Lisa Forman Cody, *Birthing the nation: sex, science, and the conception of eighteenth-century Britons* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 215–17.

⁹⁷Dana Rovang, "'When reason reigns": madness, passion and sovereignty in late eighteenth-century England', *History of Psychiatry*, 17 (2006), pp. 23–44, at p. 24.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁹⁹Katherine Lewis, *Kingship and masculinity in late medieval England* (London, 2013).

piety, prosperity, and splendour). Temple also considered the parallels between family and kingdom, as well as government and the consent of people.¹⁰⁰ George's notes are suggestive. For example, he occasionally quoted directly from the essay, as with the first section: 'all government is a restraint on liberty'. This was the longest part of his notes (one and a half pages out of three), in which he elaborated that any demands for liberty were merely about changing those that rule or regaining earlier rights. George summarized the middle section of the essay, which focused on the relationship between a monarch and his people, in just under a page. He commented, providing his own attribution of meaning as he summarized the content, that 'a kingdom is nothing but a great family'. His notes on the last third of the essay were sparse, but include a key point that 'Governments founded on contract [i.e. the British form] may have succeeded those built on authority [e.g. Ottoman empire]; but they seem rather to have been agreements between Princes and subjects, then between men of rank and power'. George III, then, recognized that his rule went hand-in-hand with recognition from his subjects. His emphasis on the middle part of the essay suggests that rulership was more than contractual to him; indeed, the idea of being the father of his country, with his subjects as his family, was a compelling model of monarchy. The real limits of his sovereignty were not enforced by his government's demands, but by his responsibility to the family as a whole, or to the collective will.

V

As a young man, George was interested in the nature of sovereignty. His essays suggest a man with a sense of duty as well as a desire to be seen in a good light. Later essays on agriculture picked up on themes of utility and national security; for George sovereignty and husbandry were closely allied. The importance of food in eighteenth-century political discourse is well established and our detailed analysis of George's eating habits and agricultural concerns builds on this scholarship. George sought to cast himself as the father of the nation, and his table was served with the kinds of dishes middle-class families might recognize. Here, the goal was not fashion, but rather a stolid sort of respectability. In this, he can be said to have modelled his paternal role at the head of the table on the middle classes, rather than following the aristocratic model which others – like Philip Goldsworthy whose words opened this article – might have thought more suited to a king.

Understanding the interplay between the king as a man who needed to eat to live, and the king as a public body who needed to feed his kingdom to survive, opens up new ways of thinking about how histories of the monarchy might enhance our understanding of the cultural and political history of food. In this article, we have looked at some of the ways food helps us to understand George III's masculine identity, the choices he made to shape the public's perception of him, and both positive and negative responses to these choices. Because food mattered to George, it makes sense to use food as a lens through which to establish a better understanding of his public-private persona. Building on Spary's argument that food choices can be

¹⁰⁰William Temple, 'An essay upon the origin and nature of government', in *The works of Sir William Temple, Bart* (4 vols. London, 1814), I, pp. 29–57.

micropolitical acts, we have set the Kew menus alongside George's political and agricultural essays to find that food played an important part in George's ideas. At the same time, the public's ideas about George were also mediated through ideas about food, for example through Gillray's cartoons in which the royal couple were also situated at the dinner table. By taking the king's private body, tastes, and writings as our starting point, we have argued that through his eating habits the king can be studied alongside his subjects, with whom he shared a sense of the importance of agriculture, nutrition, and self-control. George's popularity depended on his ability to fit the middle-class masculine ideals of his day. The king, as it turns out, had successfully crafted a powerful image for his nation, which included emphasizing his eating habits. By the final decade of his reign, he represented a modern form of monarchy centred on personal popularity in which he could walk through the street with a handful of attendants and no guards, welcomed by the crowds: 'happy in the love, and rejoicing in the liberty of his people...an event, such as the oldest man then living had never seen, and such as the youngest, but a few years before, scarcely ever expected to see'.¹⁰¹ The emphasis on George III's sparing diet and respectable behaviour had played an important part in his popularity with his fellow Britons.

Acknowledgements. The authors would like to thank the British Academy and the Leeds Beckett Centre for Culture and Humanities for their financial support for this research. We are also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their supportive and constructive feedback.

Funding statement. This research was supported the British Academy grant number IC4/100235.

Competing interests. The authors declare none.

¹⁰¹Taylor, *Relics of royalty*, p. 22.