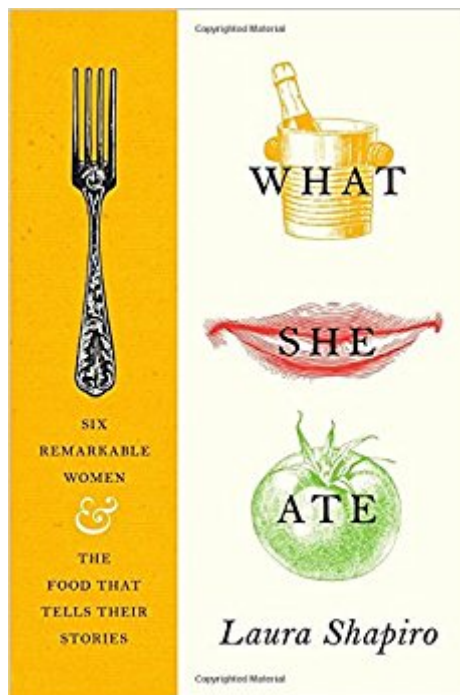




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# What She Ate: Six Remarkable Women And The Food That Tells Their Stories



## Synopsis

“If you find the subject of food to be both vexing and transfixing, you’ll love . . . What She Ate.” •Elle“Fascinating.” •Moira Hodgson, Wall Street Journal“How lucky for us readers that Shapiro has been listening so perceptively for decades to the language of food.” •Maureen Corrigan, NPR Fresh AirSix “mouthwatering” (Eater.com) short takes on six famous women through the lens of food and cooking, probing how their attitudes toward food can offer surprising new insights into their lives, and our own. Everyone eats, and food touches on every aspect of our lives—social and cultural, personal and political. Yet most biographers pay little attention to people’s attitudes toward food, as if the great and notable never bothered to think about what was on the plate in front of them. Once we ask how somebody relates to food, we find a whole world of different and provocative ways to understand her. Food stories can be as intimate and revealing as stories of love, work, or coming-of-age. Each of the six women in this entertaining group portrait was famous in her time, and most are still famous in ours; but until now, nobody has told their lives from the point of view of the kitchen and the table. It’s a lively and unpredictable array of women; what they have in common with one another (and us) is a powerful relationship with food. They include Dorothy Wordsworth, whose food story transforms our picture of the life she shared with her famous poet brother; Rosa Lewis, the Edwardian-era Cockney caterer who cooked her way up the social ladder; Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady and rigorous protector of the worst cook in White House history; Eva Braun, Hitler’s mistress, who challenges our warm associations of food, family, and table; Barbara Pym, whose witty books upend a host of stereotypes about postwar British cuisine; and Helen Gurley Brown, the editor of Cosmopolitan, whose commitment to “having it all” meant having almost nothing on the plate except a supersized portion of diet gelatin.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Laura Shapiro has put together a rich meal. . . . A seriously and hilariously researched culinary history. Susan Stamberg, NPR Morning Edition "[F]ascinating . . . Shapiro, like a consummate maître d', sets down plate after plate . . . and an amazing thing happens: Slowly the more familiar accounts of each of [the women's] lives recede and other, messier narratives emerge. . . . How lucky for us readers that Shapiro has been listening so perceptively for decades to the language of food. Maureen Corrigan, Fresh Air "If you find the subject of food to be both vexing and transfixing, you'll love . . . What She Ate. Elle "Such a fun read . . . Shapiro deftly uses food to link one woman to another and to us today. . . . Writing this book, Shapiro notes, has made her aware of all the food stories that will never be told. . . . A deliciously satisfying read." Chicago Tribune "Shapiro approaches her subject like a surgeon, analytical tools sharpened. The result is a collection of essays that are tough, elegant and fresh." Washington Post "A collection of deft portraits in which food supplies an added facet to the whole . . . What She Ate redeems the whole sentimental, self-indulgent genre of food writing." Slate "Fascinating." Moira Hodgson, Wall Street Journal "Delectable Buy this book, read this book and then spend a few seconds before every meal thinking about what message the dish sitting in front of you could be sending to your dinner companions. PureWow.com "History gets plated. Vanity Fair "Simply a fun read. Bon Appetit "Fascinating . . . you'll quickly see that food choices are more revealing than you might expect. Bustle "Clever . . . This dissection of diet is a telling window into the lives of these fascinating historical figures." PopSugar "Mouthwatering." Eater.com "If anyone knows how to gather a group of women together, it's [Shapiro]. . . . Her nose for a good story doesn't fail her. Bookforum "An unconventional approach [that] works deliciously. Fort Worth Star-Telegram "Six crisply written, ardently researched, and entertainingly revelatory portraits of very different women with

complicated relationships with eating and cooking. A bounteous and elegant feast for hungry minds. **BookList**, (starred review) "A unique and delectable work that sheds new light on the lives of women, food, and men." **Kirkus Reviews** "Offering an interesting angle from which to view the lives of various women, [What She Ate] will appeal to not only food readers but also to anyone wishing to learn more about women's history." **Library Journal** "Like a textbook for my own feminist food studies curriculum." **Austin American Statesman** "Chock full of iconic repasts and lesser but no-less-piquant morsels, What She Ate establishes Laura Shapiro as the founder of a delectable new literary genre: the culinary biography. It's never just food is Shapiro's mantra as she sifts through letters, journals, manuscript drafts, and of course scads of recipes, to derive six thrilling food stories spanning two centuries and a spectrum of appetites. Only as fundamental a subject as food and as skillful a writer as Shapiro could bring Dorothy Wordsworth, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Helen Gurley Brown together happily in one richly satisfying volume." **Megan Marshall**, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life* and *Elizabeth Bishop: A Miracle for Breakfast* "The idea that eating habits reveal aspects of character is ever-intriguing, and it's presented here with charm and insight." **Mimi Sheraton**, former restaurant critic for the *New York Times* and author of *1000 Foods to Eat Before You Die* "Laura Shapiro has done it again! She's given us a fascinating and wonderfully entertaining history of six women of the last two centuries you might never have thought of as foodies, yet here they are, distinguished by how differently they dealt with the overwhelming importance of food in their lives. What She Ate argues—and proves—that every woman has a food story. It ought to inspire all of us who love food to get busy on our memoirs." **Marion Nestle**, professor of nutrition, food studies, and public health at New York University and author of *Soda Politics* Praise for Laura Shapiro "[Laura Shapiro] changed the way I thought about American food, and did so in the most entertaining and informative way possible." **SheKnows**

Laura Shapiro has written on every food topic from champagne to Jell-O for *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *Slate*, *Gourmet*, and many other publications. She is the author of three classic books of culinary history. Her awards include a James Beard Journalism Award and one from the National Women's Political Caucus. She has been a fellow at the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library,

where she also co-curated the widely acclaimed exhibition Lunch Hour NYC.

Laura Shapiro looks at six women and how what they ate, or didn't eat, shaped their lives and the lives of those around them. She begins with Dorothy Wordsworth. While she was the caretaker and companion of her brother, her meals were nutritious. When she slid in to dementia after having been displaced by his wife as the main female in Wordsworth's life, she ate constantly. Rosa Lewis rose from being a servant to becoming the foremost chef of her age. Her ticket to high society was food. Eva Braun, was more into champagne than nutritious food. Although Hitler was a vegetarian, he binged on champagne and sugar. Eleanor Roosevelt used food as a weapon. Angered by her husband's affair with Lucy Mercer, she served some of the worst meals ever encountered in the White House. Barbara Pym's novels are filled with the type of food nice English ladies served to their clerics. People may think the food was bland, but Pym presents it as a good background to the society of the day. Helen Gurley Brown appreciated food, only as it related to the man in her life. I suspect that could be said for the other women, but Brown indulged her man while being practically anorexic herself. This is a fascinating book. I hadn't realized how much we can learn about people, not only women, from how they approach food. The book doesn't psychoanalyze these women, but some themes are evident such as Eleanor Roosevelt using food as pay back. I highly recommend this book if you're interested in how women express themselves through food. I received this book from Viking Penguin for this review.

I think this is an excellent start to a much needed aspect of study. Not just girls insight into female subjects; but, men as well. Hope you see more. In this case, it gave a very unique lens to reconsider what we "know " about these influential women

This is an oddly intriguing book. Is it a history book? Is it a culinary book? What is it exactly? It is difficult to label this one, but it is simply interesting. By far the best part of the book is the section about Eleanor Roosevelt. Her relationship with food spoke volumes. This is a quirky, fun read.

What She Ate is an interesting book that, in the end, made me examine (and appreciate) my own food story. Of the six stories, two stood out for me. Shapiro introduced me to author Barbara Pym. Upon finishing her story I placed a couple of her novels on my TBR list. I'm not

sure why she wasn't there before! Equally interesting and more entertaining was Eleanor Roosevelt's chapter. I'm always intrigued when I hear about people who treat food only as fuel and not a source of enjoyment. I loved learning about the food served at the White House during her husband's presidency. All in all, I found *What She Ate* to be a worthwhile read and recommend it to fans of culinary biographies. Thanks to the publisher who sent a copy in exchange for my unbiased review.

I suspect that mostly women will read this book. I wish that would not be the case. Laura Shapiro is a talented writer who book is, of course, focused around food. (I have a British son-in-law who, for Christmas, loves black pudding which to me is one of the disgusting looking dishes I've ever encountered, as bad as my maternal grandmother's offerings of bear and raccoon--and I'm not kidding about that.) The description of how black pudding was produced in the section about Dorothy Wordsworth made me laugh. But it also confirmed just how awful that stuff is that my son-in-law loves. I am very fond of Eleanor Roosevelt, the greatest first lady (although I think Michelle Obama is right up there too). And because I've read a lot about Mrs. Roosevelt, I was particularly interested in the food aspect since I assumed--correctly--that she had little interest in what she ate. And again I laughed: seems you can toss anything on top of a slice of toast and call it lunch. Who knew! Great book. You'll love it.

Laura Shapiro, author of *Julia Child : A Life*, has written a culinary biography featuring six very unique women, who, unlike Child, were not necessarily known for being great cooks. The premise as outlined by the author in the introduction was intriguing: "'Tell me what you eat, I longed to say to each woman, and then tell me whether you like to eat alone, and if you really taste the flavors of food or ignore them, or forget them a moment later. Tell me what hunger feels like to you, and if you've ever experienced it without knowing when you're going to eat next. Tell me where you buy food, and how you choose it, and whether you spend too much. Tell me what you ate when you were a child, and whether the memory cheers you up or not. Tell me if you cook, and who taught you, and why you don't cook more often, or less often, or better. Please, keep talking. Show me a recipe you prepared once and will never make again. Tell me about the people you cook for, and the people you eat with, and what you think about them. And what you feel about them. And if you wish somebody else were there instead. Keep talking, and pretty soon, ... I won't have to tell you what you are. You'll be telling me.'" The six women Shapiro chose to research and answer those questions about will interest some readers who will enjoy the book as I did, and bore others, so I

suspect the book will draw strong reactions. They span a historical period of 200 years and many will be unknown to modern readers. Two of her subjects from the World War II era will be known by most readers, Eleanor Roosevelt ( whose White House was known for indigestible food ) and Eva Braun (who loved champagne, catered to Hitler's vegetarianism, and cared mostly about having a slim figure ). Here is an excerpt about luncheon food regularly served in Roosevelt's White House: "There were curried eggs on toast, mushrooms and oysters on toast, broiled kidneys on toast, braised kidneys on toast, ... chipped beef on toast, and a dish called "Shrimp Wiggle," consisting of shrimp and canned peas heated in white sauce, on toast. ". Another figure, Helen Gurley Brown, editor of Cosmopolitan magazine from 1965 to 1977, was famous for her obsession with dieting and remaining thin at all costs: "I have dumped champagne (which I adore) into other people's glasses when they weren't looking or, in a real emergency, into a split-leaf philodendron, wrapped eclairs in a hanky and put them in my purse, once in an emergency, sequestered one behind the cushion of an upholstered chair • in a napkin of course. She is famous, I think, for an era of women being made to feel that they should be thin to the point of anorexic to be considered beautiful. The three other women she chose to write about were fascinating to me but will be obscure to many modern readers: Dorothy Wordsworth, the sister of the famous English poet William Wordsworth, Barbara Pym, a British author, and the fascinating Rosa Lewis, who was born a Cockney in Victorian London, but became a famous cook, caterer, and hotelier for the high society Edwardian set including the King of England prior to World War I. Lewis was the subject of a great Masterpiece Theater drama in the past called The Duchess of Duke Street. Again, Shapiro's choices of her subjects were interesting to say the least, but I enjoy Shapiro's unique writing style so I very much enjoyed the book as I did Shapiro's biography of Julia Child. Thank you Viking and NetGalley for the advanced Reader's Copy of this book and for allowing me to review it.

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