

Women's Imaginary Cooking and Appetites Across Cultures

Women's Imaginary Cooking and Appetites Across Cultures:

*Studies in Literature,
Media and Film*

Edited by

Dana Bădulescu,
Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru
and Florina Năstase

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editors and Contributors.....	viii
Introduction	xv
Dana Bădulescu, Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru and Florina Năstase	
Part 1: Charting Women's Tastes, Food Cultures and Disorderly Behaviours	
Chapter 1	2
Women Travellers' Culinary Glimpses in the Romanian Principalities in the Late Nineteenth Century and the Beginning of the Twentieth Century	
Virginia Petrică	
Chapter 2	17
"Dorul, acest cuvânt atât de românesc" and the Diaspora Diet	
Christene D'Anca	
Chapter 3	33
Exile Confessions and "Kitchen Memory": Relevance, Forms, Emblematic Authors in Post-Communist Romania	
Emanuela Ilie	
Chapter 4	46
"Three Apples Fell from the Sky" in Armenia and the Balkans	
Dana Bădulescu	
Chapter 5	65
Capital Literary Tastes	
Ioana Pârvulescu (translated by Dana Bădulescu)	
Chapter 6	70
Writing, Imagination, and a Trail of Steak Smoke	
Doina Ruști (translated by Florina Năstase)	

Chapter 7	78
The Corselet	
Mariana Codruț (translated by Dana Bădulescu)	

Part 2: Culinary Witchcraft, Magic, Healing and Cannibalism

Chapter 8	86
“A Slut is She Who Eats”: Food and Desire in Feminist Fairy Tale Adaptations	
Maria Stehle	

Chapter 9	102
The Case of Love Potion: A Gendered Construct in the Magical Universe of <i>Harry Potter</i>	
Athira Mohan	

Chapter 10	117
“A Space for Exorcism and Healing”: Eating as Resistance in Domnica Rădulescu’s Prose	
Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru	

Chapter 11	140
An All-Consuming Love: Feeding Desires through Cannibalism in Hazarika’s <i>Aamis</i>	
Balagopal S. Menon and Rituparna Das	

Chapter 12	158
“Shall I [Eat] the Body and the Blood of You?”: Cannibalism, Desire, and Love in Angela Carter’s <i>The Erl-king</i> and Neil Gaiman’s <i>Harlequin Valentine</i>	
Ruth Ramirez	

Chapter 13	174
Comfort-food Cannibalism at the <i>Whistle Stop Café</i>	
Anomitra Biswas	

Chapter 14	195
Textual Consumption and Cooking in the Translation of Doina Ruști’s <i>Mâța Vinerii</i>	
Florina Năstase	

Part 3: From Food Disorders to Food Aesthetics and Poetics

Chapter 15	214
Nourishing Stories: The Therapeutic Power of Cooking and Storytelling in Jeanette Winterson's <i>Medley of Festive Tales</i> Alina Preda	
Chapter 16	231
"I might apply the art of grafting to myself": Hunger and Hybridity in Jeanette Winterson's <i>Sexing the Cherry</i> Laura Stoica	
Chapter 17	248
Flavour Profiles: Laurie Colwin, Nora Ephron and the Recipes They Wrote Lucy O'Connor	
Chapter 18	265
Of Otherworldly Appetites: Locating Women in the Crossover of the Gourmet-Fantasy <i>Mangaverse</i> Ananya Saha	
Chapter 19	282
The Transnational Violence of "American Meats": De-Pathologising Akiko Ueno in Ruth Ozeki's <i>My Year of Meats</i> Stephanie Couey	
Chapter 20	298
Quiet Activism and Faith in Contemporary American Devotional Food Literatures and Media Heidi Oberholtzer Lee	

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Contributors

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Dictionary of the Iași Contemporary Poetry. Authors. Books. Themes (2011, 2013); *Fantastic și alteritate/ Fantastic and Otherness* (2013); *Didactica limbii și literaturii române/ Romanian Language and Literature Didactics* (2014, 2020); *Corpuri, exiluri, terapii/ Bodies, Exiles, Therapies* (2020). She is the co-editor or co-author of other collective books, including dictionaries in these academic fields. She is a member of the Romanian Writers' Union and other cultural or academic associations (A.L.G.C.R., "A. Philippide" Cultural Association, "Junimea '90" Cultural Association). She has received several national and international prizes for the critical or the didactic activity. She frequently publishes in "Convorbiri literare", but also in "Ficțiunea" and "Expres cultural" (cultural publications to which she is a member of the editorial board).

Heidi Oberholtzer Lee earned her PhD from the University of Notre Dame. Her dissertation was titled "Appetite and Desire in Early American Travel Writing." She currently teaches Writing at Eastern University, in St. Davids, Pennsylvania. She specialises in American literatures (Anglo and Ibero), food studies, religion and literature, and travel writing. Her work has appeared in publications such as *Food and Faith in Christian Culture*, *The Literary Encyclopedia*, *Christian Scholar's Review*, *Journal of Narrative Theory*, *Early American Studies*, *Religion & Literature*, and *American Literary Scholarship*. Her essay "Tasting: A Hermeneutic of Appetite in Early American Travel Writing" appeared in *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing* (2020). Her essay "Katherine Anne Porter's 'Flowering Judas': Mexican Politics, Appetitive Language, and Alimentary Religious Symbolism" is forthcoming in *Significant Food in American Literature* (U of Georgia P).

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Ioana Pârvulescu is a writer and professor of Romanian modern literature at the Faculty of Letters in Bucharest. She has published more than 20 titles of prose, essays, children's books, many of which are bestsellers and perennial favourites in Romania. She has translated from German and French, Angelus Silesius, Rilke, Maurice Nadeau, Kundera and several volumes of Asterix and Obelix comics, and has coordinated collective volumes, the most important being *Și eu am trăit în comunism (I Also Lived Through Communism)*.

Pârvulescu has dedicated two novels to Bucharest in the Belle Époque, *Viața începe vineri (Life Begins on Friday)* (translated into 15 languages) and *Viitorul începe luni (The Future Begins on Monday)*, and one to her native Brașov, *Inocenții (The Innocents)* (translated into German, Italian, Polish and Bulgarian). *Prevestirea (Jonah and His Daughter)* (translated into English in 2024) is the story of the biblical Jonah. Her latest novel is *Aurul pisicii (Cat-Gold)* (2024). Ioana Pârvulescu won major national awards and, on two occasions, the European Union Prize for Literature (2013 and 2018). Her novels have been translated into 15 languages.

Virginia Petrică graduated in 2002 from the Faculty of Letters (Romanian-English) and in 2003 from the Cultural Studies Master's at Ovidius University of Constanța. She defended her PhD thesis in 2017 at Ovidius University of Constanța. She has written various articles focused on travelogues, spatiality, and taste, and authored three books: *Româna la prima vedere, Identitate culinară românească din perspectiva călătorilor străini, and Topography of Taste: Landmarks of the Culinary Identity in the Romanian Principalities from the Perspective of Foreign Travellers (Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries)*.

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Doina Ruști is a major Romanian author. Woven through with strong social commentary and an unmistakable lyrical style, her novels have become bestselling classics, with such titles as *Omulețul roșu* (2004), *Zogru* (2006), *Fantoma din moară* (2008), *Lizoanca la 11 ani* (2009), *Patru bărbați plus Aurelius* (2011), *Mămica la două albăstrele (Adulterul)* (2013), *Logodnica* (2017), as well as her Phanariot trilogy made up of *Manuscrisul fanariot* (2015), *Măța Vinerii* (2017) and *Homeric* (2019). Her most recent novel is *Paturi oculte* (2020) which has been followed up by two short story volumes: *Ciudățenii amoroase din Bucureștiul fanariot* (2022) și *Depravatul din Gorgani* (2023).

Almost all of her work has been reissued in multiple reprints and there is currently an Author's Series in development at the Litera publishing house, with four novels having already been republished. With over 40 titles translated in over 15 languages, including Chinese, Doina Ruști has received numerous critical accolades and starred reviews in a variety of international publications. Among the most recent translations, one can find the second edition of the novel *L'omino rosso* (2021, Rome), *The Book of Perilous Dishes* (2022, London), and *Zogru* (2022, Marseilles). She was awarded the Prose Prize of the Writers' Union of Romania in 2008 and the Ion Creangă Prize of the Romanian Academy in 2009. She holds the academic title of Professor, with a specialisation in the history of culture and universal civilisation in film studies.

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INTRODUCTION

DANA BĂDULESCU,
MARIA-SABINA DRAGA ALEXANDRU
AND FLORINA NĂSTASE

The title *Women's Imaginary Cooking and Appetites across Cultures: Studies in Literature, Media and Film* was inspired by Virginia Woolf's statement "I make up imaginary meals" that makes one of her diary entries sound mundane and ethereal at the same time. Indeed, Woolf is a guiding spirit for us today. Her feminist concerns, coupled with a zest for modernist innovation in culture, the arts and in her own writing, shed light on the most essential aspects of life that get to be projected by the human mind, which for Woolf was androgynous.

This volume is as much about women's cooking, the female body and women's appetites, a poignant topic of the new millennium, as it is about women's charting distances in time and space, exploring their own displacement, exile, (dis)orderly behaviour(s), culinary witchcraft, magic and cannibalism, as well as their newfound storytelling and media experimentation and representation.

The editors have devised a three-part structure for the volume, informed by intersectional approaches: women's studies (WS), food studies (FS), travel writing studies (TWS) combined with other fields such as memory studies (MS), Postcolonial Studies (PS) and Translation Studies (TS). The structure envisaged starts from Part 1: *Charting Women's Tastes, Food Cultures and (Dis)Orderly Behaviours*, which sets the scene and lays the table; Part 2: *Culinary Witchcraft, Magic, Healing and Cannibalism* focuses on the culturally ironic twist of women's voraciousness and insatiability and also explores the healing effects of women's cooking and storytelling; Part 3: *From Food Disorders to Food Aesthetics and Poetics* shifts the focus to the body, while keeping appetites in mind, and seasons the menu with aesthetic flavourings.

As this introduction will show, this is an organic volume by design: its articles are not isolated research enterprises, but an orchestration of voices engaged in a polyphonic dialogue on a variety of topics delving

through the most intimate articulations of womanhood, food and appetites of all sorts. After titillating the readers' curiosity and building their interest in (occasionally) erratic womanhood in its first section, it will plunge them into the danger zone of feminine witchcraft, magic, cannibalism and perilous appetites ranging from a total loss of desire for food to an insatiable hunger, in its second and third sections. The last section takes all these aspects to their last level, which is that of feminine (trans)creativity. The chapters of the volume connect both within and across its three sections, reinforcing its core themes and issues, and often including in their analyses the same writers or the same texts approached from several angles and explored in the complexity of their facets.

Part 1: *Charting Women's Tastes, Food Cultures and (Dis)Orderly Behaviours* is designedly broad in its scope. Drawing from intersectional theories in women and gender studies, food studies, post-colonialism, memory studies, translation studies, etc., it tackles themes of travel, exile, diaspora, transnation, transgression, identity and hybridity, and thus it anticipates the following sections, which zoom in on more specific topics.

Given the rather unexplored space of the Balkans (and in particular Romania) in the critical approaches to the topics of our concern, Part 1 opens with "Women Travellers' Culinary Glimpses in the Romanian Principalities in the Late Nineteenth Century and the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," which is emblematic of the intercultural, transcultural, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary nature of the whole volume. The chapter written by Virginia Petrică focuses on the accounts of the Irish Maude Rea Parkinson and of the Canadian Ethel Greening Pantazzi, who spent twenty, respectively ten years in Romania. The author shows that these writings provide glimpses of certain food items of Romanian cuisine – such as "dulceață," "mămăligă," "cozonac" or "colivă" – and practices – the funeral alms or the Easter tradition of cracking red eggs. However, Petrică notices that culinary references are not as frequent or ample as one may expect from a lady traveller, and so the chapter also aims at investigating the possible reasons for the scarcity of food details.

Part 1 continues with Christene D'Anca's "'Dorul', acest cuvânt atât de românesc" and the Diaspora Diet." D'Anca's is an exploration of works by women writers of Romanian origin: Sanda Nițescu (*un fir de mărar și cerul albastru*), Carmen Bugar (*Burying the Typewriter*), Maria Elena Sandovici (*Dogs with Bagels*), and Liliana Nechita (*Cireșe Amare*). The selection of texts sheds a fresh light on the transcultural aspect that is so much at stake in the volume: the writers of these texts have historically been underrepresented in literary studies, yet their voices have emerged

over the past thirty years in the production of numerous works that engage socially, politically, economically, and culturally with contemporarily relevant topics, not least among them trauma, specifically stemming from the recent communist era and the diasporic existence that came as a result of it. D'Anca's chapter looks into the multiple meanings of food in these women's diasporic writing, and of the relationship between eating and another action performed by the mouth – speaking – which in the case of these texts translates into writing, ultimately equating food with creating, and even more specifically recreating the self. Further, Simona Popescu's *Exuvii*, although not concerned with the diaspora, is analyzed in this chapter for the intersectionality between food and memory studies through the author's recollections and depictions of food that model recurring modes of expression found in the aforementioned chronologically later works.

Emanuela Ilie's "Exile Confessions and 'kitchen memory.' Relevance, forms, emblematic authors in post-communist Romania" ties in organically with D'Anca's chapter, broadening the scope of the volume's transcultural explorations and leading the readers into getting to grips with the sour-sweet taste of exile, Romanian style. Ilie shows that, with the aid of the recuperative artifice of "kitchen memory" (Liiceanu 2008), writers of diaries and memoirs of exile (signed by Gabriela Melinescu, Nina Cassian, Sanda Nițescu, etc.) manage to do much more than isolate and describe a stage of their own identity crystallisation or a particular atmosphere: they reconstitute and interpret a way of life, a cultural code and, ultimately, an entire world. Especially in the nostalgic discourse of exiled diarists or memorialists who revalue the tastes of the past, food references become emblems of the meaningful intimacy of the worlds of yesteryear.

Dana Bădulescu's "'Three Apples Fell from the Sky' in Armenia and the Balkans" takes the imaginary culinary journey from where Emanuela Ilie left it in her approach to the nostalgic discourse of exiled women diarists and memoir writers. The readers are back in the Balkans to taste savoury Turkish and Romanian dishes, with substantial Armenian ingredients added to them. Bădulescu's chapter is a cross-cultural meta-narrative inspired by Narine Abgarian's title *Three Apples Fell from the Sky* (2015), which in its turn draws on an Armenian folktale ending, also used in Turkish tales, "Three Apples Fell from Heaven." Bădulescu shows how the cuisine in the Balkans shapes the narratives of Elif Shafak in *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) and Doina Ruști in *Măța Vinerii* (2017) (translated as *The Book of Perilous Dishes*). Shafak's story weaves the female characters' culinary and sexual appetites into a global novel where two cultures at odds meet in the kitchen and gastronomy provides a *lingua franca* in whose delights they share. The American-born Armanoush Tchakhma-

khian, who mixes cultures in her blood and family situation, is instrumental for the denouement of Shafak's transcultural story in which food is a catalyst. Armanoush's Armenian ancestry in a novel written by a writer of Turkish descent gave Bădulescu the idea to weave her approach around the essentially rewarding act of writing and reading typified by the Armenian folktale ending. The apple of the Armenian formula "associated with love, fertility, and immortality" (Avakian 95), serves the author as an overarching symbol of writing and reading stories steeped in an ancestral desire to attain the immortality of the story by immersing oneself in the immanence of food.

In "Capital Literary Tastes" Ioana Pârvulescu takes the reader on a journey through the canon of European literature from Rabelais's gluttons, Goncharov's *Oblomov*, whose character is an epitome of torpor and apathy, Shakespeare's emotional tyranny embodied by Lear, Dostoevsky's arrogant protagonists, Molière's not so emblematic Harpagon, outperformed in his greed by a Romanian character and continuing a whole line of misers opened by Plautus, and further developed by Balzac, Dickens, etc. Although these vices that count as capital sins, which include Baudelairean lust, taking a comic form in Boccaccio, are not directly related to gluttony, and therefore to immoderate food consumption, Pârvulescu argues that "the shared symbol of all the seven sins is the mouth." The associations Pârvulescu makes with characters of canonical Romanian texts in this exceptionally dense survey of the European canon through this lens broaden the vista.

Continuing the thread of original essays on food, cooking, and literary exploits, Doina Ruști's essay, 'Writing, Imagination, and a Trail of Steak Smoke' is a fascinating look into the novelist's "kitchen", as she reflects on the literary and historical documents and cookbooks she consulted in order to write the magical, historical and culinary novel, *Mâța Vinerii* (tackled from separate perspectives by both Dana Bădulescu and Florina Năstase in this volume). With the panache of the storyteller, Ruști weaves in tales from her childhood with anecdotes on etymology and witchcraft in order to establish the magical connections between cooking, writing, and imagination, all set within the Balkan and Romanian landscape. The distant and exotic eighteenth-century of *Mâța Vinerii*'s world is resurrected on the page through recipes and atmosphere, though Ruști argues that the twenty-first century can offer us just as many surprises in terms of culinary imagination.

In "The Corselet" Mariana Codruț harks back on the old days of her childhood spent in a Moldavian village soon after the onset of communism in Romania. Her vividly sensorial and nostalgic evocations of the

tastes of traditional dishes are descriptions of the process of cooking. Some of the items in Codruț's lexicon (e.g. *mămăligă*, *cozonaci*, *sarmale*) recur in other chapters of this volume where Romanian cooking is in the limelight, others are regional, while some others, like *halva* and also *sarmale*, belong in the culinary repertoire of the Balkans.

The second section of the volume is dedicated to *Culinary Witchcraft, Magic, Healing and Cannibalism* and it complicates the discussion around women's food cultures by exploring the esoteric significance eating may sometimes take, with cannibalism as its darkest extreme. From the magic aspects of cooking and eating to sheer witchcraft and benefic forms of cooking/eating as healing, food gathers a multitude of significances that make it a powerful cultural signifier.

"A Slut is She Who Eats': Food and Desire in David Kaplan's *Little Red Riding Hood*" (1997) by Maria Stehle explores the role of devious women, witches, and food in modern adaptations of three well-known fairy tales. Little Red Riding Hood walks through the woods to bring food to her granny and, in early renditions, her appetite for granny's food, for the wolf, and for granny are the reason she gets "eaten" herself. Kaplan's 1997 short film adaptation of the tale rewrites Little Red Riding Hood's appetite and her transgressions as sexual agency, play, and trickery. "Rapunzel" (and its many adaptations) also starts with food. It is the appetite of a pregnant woman for greens from the witches' garden that sets the whole story in motion; and it is this appetite for the garden greens that Sexton's poetic adaptation of the tale focuses on to recast it as a tale of queer desire (Sexton, *Transformations*, 1971). "Hansel and Gretel" revolves centrally around food. Not only do the parents decide to abandon their children because they would otherwise all starve, but the children binge on the gingerbread house, and the witch feeds them and fattens them so she can eat them. Oyeyemi's novel *Gingerbread* (2019) plays with and re-writes these tropes as playful, feminist revenge, prompting readers to ask, "why won't you try the Gingerbread?" (14). Using these examples and their adaptations, Stehle shows how fairy tales tie food to sexuality, gender regimes, and the control and demonisation of female bodies. Greed and gluttony thus become rebellious bodily acts, establishing political and feminist relationships to food, desire and plotting, in revenge against acts of violence and control.

Shifting from the demonisation of female bodies to demonic potions, Athira Mohan's "The Case of Love Potion: A Gendered Construct of Potion and Poison in the Magical Universe of Harry Potter" attempts to introspect on into the nature of culinary magic, specifically the case of love potion in *The Harry Potter* series. Mohan explores ways in which the

subaltern status of a woman's body is attributed to the subaltern status of the potion itself. A love potion is understood to be an item used as a deceptive agent to hoodwink or lure someone into a relationship. In the series, there are several women, ranging from Merope to Romilda Vane, who are seen to be relying or believed to have relied on love potions to cause infatuation in their love interests and expose the site of food preparation as being almost always gendered. Love potions help Mohan identify two categories of female witches (since magic and secrecy are the forte of women), who use what one may call black and white magic. Since it contains bodily secretions, a love potion is almost viewed as a poison (women's weapon), an allusion to the historical and mythical examples of women poisoners like Circe, Hecate, Agrippina, and Medusa. This chapter explores the ways in which the concepts of woman and food are often linked to nurturance (which can be life-giving or poisonous). However, when this deep seated cultural code is subverted or challenged (as women rely on food to make poison), a definite anxiety is created around women's role as food-givers.

Women's roles as providers and/or achievers are radically questioned in Domnica Radulescu's fictional and non-fictional exile narratives, as suggested in Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru's chapter titled "'A Space for Exorcism and Healing': Eating as Resistance in Domnica Radulescu's Prose." Domnica Radulescu's first two novels that depict a Romanian exile saga just before the anti-communism revolution – *Train to Trieste* (2008) and *Black Sea Twilight* (2010) – use food as a metaphor of resistance, recovering from trauma and healing. In *Country of Red Azaleas*, Radulescu's novel about the Yugoslav war, sexual and culinary appetites overlap to an even greater extent: Lara and Marija set out on their lifelong bond, which crosses huge geographical distances and intensely traumatic moments. They resist war through sharing the white body of their lover Milko (pun intended: the Serbian male name "Milko" reminds one of the English word "milk") in flamboyant acts of sexual magic and cannibalism that in a sense predict the spectacular metamorphoses of both characters throughout the novel, through trauma alternating with fulfilment and bliss. In her memoir *Dream in a Suitcase*, published in 2021, Radulescu reveals "the real Domnica," who, like her fictional protagonists, firmly believes in herself ("I am my one and only suitcase", *Dream* 16) and, as stated in *Black Sea Twilight*, believes in the kitchen as "a space for exorcism and healing" (*Twilight* 328). Losses do not prevent Radulescu's strong female characters from reinventing themselves in new countries, from completing their studies and seeing their professional and personal dreams come true. This chapter will analyse their evolution in the fictional/non-fictional plots

of Radulescu's four prose books to show that, in them, food, cooking, eating and unhindered sexual appetite (sometimes to the point of imaginary cannibalism) are acts of magical creativity and reinvention of the self, which offer substantial support mechanisms in moments of difficult transition or pain.

Love as cannibalism, whether imaginary or almost concrete, as consumption of the lover's body and soul, is next addressed in Balagopal S. Menon and Rituparna Das's chapter titled "An All-Consuming Love." This is an analysis of Bhaskar Hazarika's 2019 film *Aamis* (released internationally the same year under the English title, *Ravening*), which tells the story of an extramarital affair between a Ph.D. scholar working on meat-eating practices in North East India and a doctor who later begins to develop a craving for her lover's flesh. Unlike traditional representations, the film may be noted for its depiction of the act of cannibalism as one of love, reminiscent of Chris Foss's reading of Cixous's representation of "a cannibalism that is [...] generous, and loving, and fulfilling," in *The Book of Promethea* (*Scenes of the Apple* 150). The authors look into the film's portrayal of such an all-consuming love as an attempt to present a new configuration of the "monstrous-feminine." Based on Barbara Creed's study of the archetypes of the female monster in cinema, the chapter will draw on Kristeva's concept of abjection in the film's central female figure as a beautiful but deadly killer, while also exploring the film's combination of South Asian mythic prototypes with established Western symbols of horror and love in telling the story of its central couple.

Love cannibalism becomes even more explicit in Ruth Ramirez's "Shall I [Eat] the Body and the Blood of You? Cannibalism, Desire, and Love in Angela Carter's *The Erl-king* and Neil Gaiman's *Harlequin Valentine*," which enquires into the motifs of female hunger, voracious appetites, and subversive eating habits as they often appear in fairy tale and fantasy narratives. Both texts tackled in this chapter centre around young women whose curiosity leads them to meet enticing and dangerous characters. Eventually, these women take active part in an act of cannibalism that symbolises their desire to unite with their lovers. This analysis will demonstrate that, in these narratives, eating the lover's body is not only a valid expression of romantic and sexual desire, but it also allows the female characters to showcase autonomy and agency over their bodies, needs, and desires. The act of cannibalism initiated by the female characters becomes a moment of empowerment, as it acknowledges their carnal appetites, and shows them as fully capable of acting on them without fear of prosecution, positioning them as active, liberated subjects and protagonists who challenge normative constructs of gender.

Anomitra Biswas's approach to Fanny Flagg's novel *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* employs concrete and metaphorical cannibalism to address multigenerational racism and segregation, with Afro-American characters appearing not just as staff but valued customer. Particular attention is paid to the depiction of the dietary and culinary practices of the characters and their cultural significance, both in the near-contemporary frame-narrative and the inter-war nested narratives. Food plays a central role in the assertion of both identity and independence for several of the characters, allowing Idgie Threadgoode and Ruth Jamison financial independence, and Evelyn Couch a new relationship with her embodied selfhood. In her chapter titled "Comfort-food Cannibalism at the *Whistle Stop Cafe*" Biswas explores the many roles played by the Whistle Stop Cafe throughout the novel, as a magical anchor for the community and for Idgie's charitable and illegal efforts to shore it up through the Depression, as well as a focal point for Idgie, Ruth and the extended Threadgoode family. Most intriguingly, the cafe also allows Idgie and her co-conspirators to not just get away with murder, but make it profitable: after the cook Sipsey kills Ruth's abusive spouse Frank Bennet in self-defense, they roast him in the fire-pits and serve him up to their appreciative customers, including the detective investigating Bennet's disappearance. Cannibalism thus becomes a commentary on the tough social rules of the Depression age, but also a source of dark humour that makes the story of the community move on.

Florina Năstase's "Textual Consumption and Cooking in the Translation of Doina Ruști's *Măța Vinerii*" takes consumption into the realm of the textual. Pâtea's story in Ruști's novel (translated into English as *The Book of Perilous Dishes*) transports its readers to an eighteenth century Phanariot Bucharest of age-old mysteries and thus connects Part 2 to Bădulescu's chapter in Part 1, which analyses the stories woven around the cross-cultural complexities of Balkan culinary and sexual appetites. Năstase examines the similarities between cooking, storytelling, and translation and the various processes of consumption involved in translating a text which is itself concerned with consumption, devouring, and transformation. The infamous cookbook of "perilous dishes," filled with recipes, which can mould and undo the minds of those who eat them, is at the heart of the novel's magic, and it provides a fascinating quandary in terms of reading and translation since Doina Ruști employs words and spellings that are difficult to 'digest' even in the source language (Romanian). Thus, the book plays with meanings and recipes on a meta-textual level too, giving out "ingredients" that both translator and native speaker must hunt and "consume" in order to enter the magic of the text and story. This chapter

also looks at ambiguous moments in translation and explores the translator's choices with regards to textual and cultural omissions and additions.

The third section, titled *From Food Disorders to Food Aesthetics and Poetics*, traces an evolution from the chaotic nature of food disorders to aestheticised views on food, cooking and eating. Its aim is to pull threads together with a view to reaching a conclusion regarding current views on women's imaginary ways of relating to food. The chapters gathered here range from studies of the relationship between women's bodies and their eating habits – a topic that has gathered particular attention due to its role in freeing the spirit, liberated from the female body abused by centuries of patriarchal oppression. Further, this section also celebrates the art of cooking and the joint relationship between cooking, storytelling and art as modes of self-expression that can both sustain and subvert the various ways of living in the world as a woman.

Alina Preda examines the "Therapeutic Power of Cooking and Storytelling in Jeanette Winterson's Medley of Festive Tales," diving into Winterson's 2016 collection, *Christmas Days. 12 Stories and 12 Feasts for 12 Days*, a collection which includes autobiography, anecdotes, stories, and recipes, highlighting personal rituals and the gastronomic connection between the self and the 'story' of the self. Preda aims to underline the "palliative function" of cooking and storytelling, which is present not only in Winterson's personal collection but in women's writing across decades, from Gertrude Stein to Isabel Allende. This chapter thus in a sense proposes a positive, constructive, festive, highly aestheticised view on cooking and/as nourishing storytelling and healing, as compared to Stoica's interpretation of hunger as a lack in Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*.

Laura Stoica's chapter "I might apply the art of grafting to myself": Hunger and Hybridity in Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*" adds piquancy to the readers' taste of Winterson's flavoury writing, connecting with Alina Preda's chapter "Nourishing Stories: the Therapeutic Power of Cooking and Storytelling in Jeanette Winterson's Medley of Festive Tales" in the volume's last section. In this chapter, Stoica analyses the interesting split and tension between Old World and New World food cultures in the seventeenth and twentieth-century landscapes that the novel weaves together seamlessly. Dwelling on the slippery nature of food signification, Stoica explores the novel's metaphor of "grafting" hybrid species of cherry trees, as well as the metonymic function of the banana and the pineapple in representing femininities and masculinities. By highlighting the symbiotic consumption between personal and collective history, the author finally argues that food becomes the ultimate disruptive consumer, devouring boundaries, bodies, and nationalities. This conclusion ties in

Năstase's metaphor of textual cannibalisation (in section 2), which may be the (self)consuming trope of any text, whether translated or not.

Tackling the relationship between cooking and storytelling, Lucy O'Connor looks at the way recipes are embedded and incorporated in women's writing, focusing particularly on Laurie Colwin's *Home Cooking: A Writer in the Kitchen* (1988) and *More Home Cooking: A Writer Returns to the Kitchen* (1993) and Nora Ephron's *Heartburn* (1983). O'Connor argues that female authors use cookbooks and recipes to disrupt and enrich the genres of the memoir and the novel. By doing so, they showcase an interesting symbiotic relationship whereby novels are structured through recipes and a compendium of recipes are "intended to be read like a novel." Such experiments not only rethink the domestic cookbook, but they also question the boundaries between fact and fiction, the domestic and the public.

Cooks, this time of a supernatural variety, are also present in Ananya Saha's "Of Otherworldly Appetites: Locating Women in the Cross-over of Gourmet-Fantasy *Mangaverse*" which delves into the fascinating world of *shōjo*, a manga genre that focuses on women's roles in domestic spaces. Saha tackles the sub-genre known as gourmet manga, which developed in Japan during the economic boom of the 1980s. During the less prosperous decade of the 1990s, gourmet manga shifted to the supernatural/fantastical realm, since, as Saha argues, Japanese readers had little access to "gastronomic titillation within reach." By focusing on the changes that traditional, female-oriented manga underwent in recent years, Saha tracks the journey of the female cook across gastronomic tales that place her above the mortal realm and into a supernatural setting. In this way, Saha explores issues of consumption, gender, and sexuality that pervade Japanese culture, but not only.

Stephanie Couey's "The Transnational Violence of 'American Meats': De-Pathologising Akiko Ueno in Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats*" adds to the transcultural and transnational character of the volume, especially in its first section, by transporting the readers to two sides of the world: America and Japan. Couey starts from the premise that Akiko Ueno, one of the two protagonists in Ruth Ozeki's 1998 novel *My Year of Meats*, is misrepresented by critics as suffering from bulimia. Couey argues against this pathologisation and contends that such a reading obfuscates the significances of her behaviours. The author shows that bulimia is most often driven by the perceived need to self-discipline the body; for Japanese housewife Akiko, purging meat is her body's means of rebellion. Drawing from scholarship in women and gender studies, food studies, and literary theory and criticism, Couey thus demonstrates how purging for Akiko is

an anti-disciplinary act, a means of rejecting the interconnected, transnational violence of large-scale meat production and patriarchal social formations.

The final chapter of this section brings many of the previously discussed elements together in an examination of the genre of devotional food literature, which combines elements of storytelling, religious worship, and (female) empowerment. In "Quiet Activism and Faith in Contemporary American Devotional Food Literatures and Media", Heidi Oberholtzer Lee offers a reading of "sermonic narratives" from Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox authors who turn to culinary devotionals with a view to quietly advocating for social and political change, animal rights and environmental protections. The strategy of "gentle agitation" that these culinary narratives employ highlights the genre-defying possibilities of the female-authored cookbook.

This intentionally eclectic and wide-ranging volume is an attempt to chart a vast variety of approaches to food studies, read primarily from a feminist perspective, but also in the context of a plethora of cultural discourses that interact with the feminist one. From "rooted" cultural approaches to female cooking to food and cooking continually repositioned in acts of transcending and transgressing limits, the chapters that make up our volume interweave stories built around the gendered act of cooking and eating. Such stories transgress into the realm of border studies, as initiated in the eighties by Gloria Anzaldúa and continued by postcolonial and transnational discourses around the gender implications of relocation, but this time invested with the materiality of food. Thus, the first section charts a protean space of interplay of glocal food cultures and translocal ones, showcasing their complexity, diversity and shiftiness. The ambit of the diverse and challenging representations of womanhood in the context of food (trans)cultures stands out. The following two sections grow organically from the body of the first, exploring monstrous, deviational or healing aspects of womanhood engaged in food practices, to eventually delve into the food aesthetics and poetics that give shape to the multifariousness charted in the book. Apart from the focus on the relevance of food to such territorial and conceptual relocations, we propose a focus on the Balkans (and particularly Romania) as a pivotal point in a comparative cross-cultural discussion, in which food becomes the ground on which female appetites for transcending limitations, for rebellious resistance and the desire to acquire agency find a foothold. Despite some common concerns, our volume chooses womanhood as a staple topic of exploration in the context of food studies, and it includes other media than just film.

PART 1:

CHARTING WOMEN'S TASTES, FOOD CULTURES AND DISORDERLY BEHAVIOURS

CHAPTER 1

WOMEN TRAVELLERS' CULINARY GLIMPSES IN THE ROMANIAN PRINCIPALITIES IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

VIRGINIA PETRICĂ

Even if voyages have always involved food consumption as a daily necessity, this has not often represented the object of the accounts. Until the last decades of the twentieth century – when the freshly developed interest in food culture culminated with the emergence of gastronomy tourism and the blooming of culinary travelogues – travellers used to record taste aspects usually tangentially, and rarely as main cartographic generators. Sight was the prevailing sense, which focalised the walking trajectories and generated narratives with a strong visual impact on the reader. Voicing taste in the travel notes happened less frequently and in a fragmentary manner, meant to complement and spice up the descriptions of a different reality, and often emphasised the paradigm of otherness and strangeness. This chapter examines the way women travellers incorporated culinary glimpses in their testimonies about the Romanian Principalities¹ in the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. In order to elucidate whether there are specificities of the ladies' taste cartography, several questions are to be answered: What do they focus on in their food-related accounts and why? What does their gastronomic decoupage reveal about themselves? Are there certain culinary landmarks women voyageurs tend to highlight in comparison with their male counterparts? What are the possible reasons for the relatively low prevalence of the taste references in the women travellers' discourses? The analysis draws on criticism in food, gender and spatial studies and this multifocal approach aims to explore not

¹ I used the term Romanian Principalities as I also took into account excerpts which refer to Transylvania before the Great Union with Romania (1918).

only what the gustatory sequences reveal about the other's profile but also about the writers' own identities.

1. Voicing Taste in an Unknown Space

In the nineteenth century, the number of voyageurs who crossed the Romanian Principalities and wrote about the encountered realities progressively increased. The rising interest in these territories was due to social, economic, and political causes. The Unification of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859, the election of a Western dynasty Prince, Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, as the monarch of Romania in 1866, and the adoption of a modern constitution contributed to the further development and a higher visibility of the country, as well as to its political stability. Moreover, the introduction of trains and steamboats marked the beginning of the new tourist era as they favoured the accessibility to remote areas, inspired sociability, and reduced the dangers of the travel considerably. Analysing Daniela Bușă's brief statistics, in her foreword to the tenth volume of *Călători străini despre țările române în secolul al XIX-lea* (*Foreign Travellers about the Romanian Countries in the Nineteenth Century*), there were 42 records in the first two decades, 76 between 1821 and 1840, and 129 between 1841 and 1861 (6). However, taking into account also the tenth and the eleventh volumes, out of 331 accounts in the series only 14 belong to women. Most of them were on their way to other destinations, usually towards Constantinople or back, some accompanied their husbands, a few were employed to teach languages, and there were also some adventurous ladies, who fancied the idea of exploring the less known eastern Europe. The reality is that there are few women travellers who gave comprehensive accounts of these territories, and even fewer provided glimpses of the culinary aspects.

Despite the improvements in the general state of things in the country, in the late nineteenth century the Romanian Principalities were not yet very well known as a tourist destination and still perceived as barbaric lands, not particularly safe, especially for a woman. Thus, an Irish lady, Maude Parkinson, who expressed her intention of going to Romania to teach languages – in 1889 – had to face her friends' disapproval of such a decision: “‘Why, you must be quite mad to think of going so far away to a country of which nobody knows anything at all!’ was one of the mildest criticisms I came across in my project” (17). Yet, she confessed her fascination for these territories – which have “something of the glamour of the Orient” (Parkinson 6) – where she lived around twenty years, and only the outbreak of war made her return home. Mary Adelaide Walker – a British

woman, who visited Romania several times (in 1872, 1884, and 1888) – also highlighted the fact that towards the end of the eighth decade of the nineteenth century the country was still *terra incognita* for the Westerners: “In these days of eager exploration it would seem incredible, but is nevertheless perfectly true, that a beautiful region of civilised Europe remains as yet unknown and unvisited by the ubiquitous English traveller” (*Eastern Life* 211). In spite of the fact that the title of her own travel account – *Eastern Life and Scenery with Excursions in Asia Minor, Mytilene, Crete, and Roumania* – indicates an Oriental dimension, Walker integrates the Romanian lands in the “civilised Europe” and promotes their tourist attractiveness.

Another British lady, Florence K. Berger, emphasizes the liminality of this space. The capital of Romania, Bucharest, appears thus in a state of in-betweenness: “it is not the East, still less the West” (35). Moreover, the same ambiguity of the city profile is configured by the negative constructions of an old idiomatic phrase which embeds an interplay of culinary terms: “It is neither flesh, nor fowl, nor good red-herring” (Berger 36). The discrepancy between the traveller’s expectations and the encountered reality triggers a new spatial mapping, dominated by a rhetoric of imprecision, generalised to the taste markers as well. Taking into account the terms of Henri Lefebvre’s conceptual triad of spatial representation (33–9), it can be noticed that the preconceptions embedded in the conceived space do not allow a fluid transition towards the lived space, and the perceived space is described as ambivalent, liminal, and paradoxical: “You can drink *braga* like a Bulgarian, sherbet like a Mussulman, beer like a German student, or *petit Bordeaux* like a Paris *burgeois*” (Berger 35–6). Her spatial cartography of Bucharest, which shapes a city of contrasts, with Phanariot reminiscences, is complemented by the taste topography, which displays a list of food items – not the traditional and representative ones – that form a strange *mélange* meant to reflect a chaotic accumulation of eastern and western elements, and to suggest an absence of its own landmarks.

Yet, other lady travellers focus on certain specific culinary landmarks, such as *mămăligă*, which Mary Walker labels as the “universal national dish”² (*Eastern Life* 237). This comment concurs with Ken Albaladejo’s observation, according to which travel writers play an important part in spreading food stereotypes and contribute to the development of the sense of national identity (224). *Mămăliga* is established in various trave-

² As Alex Drace-Francis notices and comprehensively analyses, *mămăliga* represents for Romanians more than “a staple food but a cultural signifier” (3), with rich social, economic, ethnical, and political implications.