Feast or Famine?
Food and Children's Literature

Feast or Famine?
Food and Children's Literature

Edited by

Bridget Carrington and Jennifer Harding

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

Feast or Famine? Food and Children's Literature
Edited by Bridget Carrington and Jennifer Harding

This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN-(10): 1-4438-6142-1, ISBN-(13): 978-1-4438-6142-7

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF PLATES (IN CENTREFOLD)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cover illustration copyright © Helen Cann. Reproduced from *Little Leap Forward* by Guo Yue, by kind permission of Barefoot Books Ltd. www.barefootbooks.com.

Every effort has been made to contact copyright holders. If any have been inadvertently overlooked, the publisher will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.

INTRODUCTION

BRIDGET CARRINGTON

> I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy Child well Nursed is at a year Old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome Food, whether Stewed, Roasted, Baked, or Boyled, and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a Fricasie, or Ragoust.
>
> (Jonathan Swift, 1729)

This volume in the series which records the topics addressed in the annual IBBY UK/NCRCL MA conference hosted by Roehampton University marks a significant milestone in academic study, being the product of the 20th such conference at one of the UK's pioneering centres for the study of children's literature. That it concentrated on that constant subject of childish attention – food – seems particularly appropriate, as did the appearance on the day of the conference of a celebratory cake for the Tiger who Judith Kerr first invited to tea for our delectation 40 years ago.

Children, Food and Literature

Food and sex perpetuate our species. In adult literature (especially 'Adult' literature), food and sex are both served in order to whet the reader's appetite. In literature for children, as several of the writers observe in this volume, because direct reference to sex is deemed inadmissible, food is often used as a signifier of both. The variety of feast- and famine-related writing by the contributors spectacularly reflects the pervasiveness of food, cooking and eating in prose and poetry for children, as befits a staple of life. Both food and famine can engender extreme behaviour, and the

following pages are laden with an abundance of examples of this, both textual and pictorial.

Inspired by my own admiration of Jonathan Swift's social conscience and caustic wit, and by the title of Nicki Humble's chapter, with its interpolated '[for]' between 'cooking' and 'children', I chose to preface my Introduction with a food/child image that shocks the twenty-first-century reader as surely as it did those of the early eighteenth. Indeed, in one of the many appearances of *A Modest Proposal* on the internet, there is a cautionary note added to indicate that the writing is satirical, and that its recommendations are not actually meant to be followed. I suspect that the note was added in all seriousness. David Lucas recalls that a similar health warning was issued by a critic when one of his books referred to a chocolate mother who melts, which children might find distressing! Karen Williams shows us that a century after Swift, 'edible children' had well and truly entered children's literature. I would argue that some twentieth-century adults' view that the work of Roald Dahl was new, shocking, subversive and undesirable for tender young minds seems to have been formed in ignorance of much tougher earlier fare. Sinéad Moriarty's study of Heroic-Era Antarctic literature examines genuine, historic acts of eating that took place because of impending starvation, and which, like Swift's suggestion, transgress accepted Western norms. Simone Herrmann looks at Victorian Robinsonades for children, in the course of which we discover that this genre of adventure fiction perpetuated the opinion widely held within the British Empire that indigenous peoples – 'savages', 'natives' – were incapable of civilisation, and that stories of their cannibalism demonstrated this. Several contributors look at food in works of fantasy, and the diet therein also proves at times unusual, even bizarre – often disgusting and transgressive.

A Cookery Book for Children

While digesting the rich and hugely varied diet offered by all the contributors to the conference, I noted with some surprise there was no reference to an abiding memory from my childhood, *The Chalet Girls' Cook Book.* I was, and remain, a great fan of Eleanor Brent-Dyer's Chalet School, a fictional boarding school for girls, which from its inception in 1925 until 1938 was situated in the Austrian Tyrol. Having removed it to British soil for the duration of the Second World War, Brent-Dyer returned it in the 1950s to Switzerland. This Teutonic boarding-school setting resulted in many references to food in the 60-odd titles, particularly to 'Kaffee und Kuchen' which, in my immediately post-war child's world of rationing, seemed representative of an exotic, exhilarating and enticing world of which I could only dream in the extremely *unexotic* corner of south-east London where I lived. I devoured every Chalet School title I could lay my hands on in the local library, and when in 1953 *The Chalet Girls' Cook Book* appeared, my sixpence-a-week pocket money was saved until the required sum to purchase it was achieved, and by attempting one or two recipes, I could feel that I had become an honorary Chalet Schoolgirl.

Rationing finally ended the year after the book's publication, so many of the recipes seemed incredibly unusual in a world in which almost the only foreign food eaten in traditional British homes was curry, a legacy of a fast dwindling Empire. Brent-Dyer chose to set her *Cook Book* within a Chalet School narrative, in which four of the girls who are about to leave the school, Jo Bettany, Simone Lecoutier, Frieda Mensch and Marie von Eschenau, are confined to quarters by an outbreak of mumps, and compile the book as a way of passing the time, and as a present for Marie, who is about to be married. The recipes chosen reflect the nationalities of the girls recording them, and those additional ones that they have learnt from friends at the school, so English, French, German, Italian, Austro-Hungarian and Russian favourites are added. 'We've got all sorts of continental recipes, and people might like them'

(2009: 25), says Jo, and they begin to assemble their book, from soups to 'odds and ends' by way of fish, meat, vegetables, creams and puddings, cakes, biscuits and sweets, cheese dishes, egg dishes and drinks, a slightly odd arrangement to modern eyes. There is even a Chinese recipe (the Chalet School over the years welcomed girls from almost every country), and this, chop suey, is garnished with beansprouts and a soy sauce that Frieda insists is 'just like Bechamel sauce, only made with soya bean flour instead of with ordinary flour' with the addition of 'a tablespoonful of peanut butter' (p.66). Understandably, the editorial team from the 2009 republication by Girls Gone By, Ruth Jolley and Adrianne Fitzpatrick, think it unlikely that Brent-Dyer had ever tried some of these recipes.

The section of the book on odd and ends contains useful advice for girls who have never kept a house before, with advice on pots and pans, a list of weights and measures, and on laying the table. In the early 1950s women had returned from the men's jobs that they had highly competently filled during the Second World War, and they were once more expected to confine themselves to marriage, childbearing and housekeeping. Brent-Dyers' advice was therefore helpful for the teenagers reading her *Cook Book*, although by doing so she reinforced the stereotypical image of women which had existed prior to the war. To show just how catastrophic it would be to lay the table incorrectly, Brent-Dyer shows Marie, the daughter of a Graf (duke) starting to giggle, and on being asked what the joke is, she replies, 'I was just thinking about a story I've often heard Mamma tell' (p.175), and she relates the appalling sight of knives and forks, napkins and glasses in the 'wrong' place on the table. This error of etiquette has arisen from the efforts of a rich girl who has recently married a poor man 'who couldn't give the poor girl dozens of well-trained servants'. In the mid-twentieth century, let alone a generation earlier, such a girl would probably not have laid a table herself before, and a man would never have been expected to help with domestic chores, so would have relied on his mother or wife to undertake the task, and

never gained this social skill. 'But the funniest thing of all,' Marie continues, 'in peals of laughter' (p.175) is that when the husband began to carve the meat (this, of course, being a skill only a man could master …), 'the most *awful* smell arose' because '*She had cooked that chicken with all its insides in!*' (p.175). Marie tells the girls that because of this debacle her mother 'vowed to herself that, if she had any daughters, she would see to it that they knew how to do everything about the house … all sorts of housework, even to cleaning the stoves, and blacking the boots' (p.175). Moreover, showing a far more enlightened attitude, 'Papa decided that his boys should also learn handiwork in the house, for the man was as helpless as the girl'. Luckily, as Marie relates finally, the newly wedded man is soon left a large fortune, and 'they went to New Orleans to live, and were able to have servants to do everything' (p.176). This presents the reader with a different vision of enslavement, far removed in the 1950s from the experience of most young British readers, but probably familiar from their viewing of films in the cinema, and their reading of tales set in the Americas and the British Empire.

The Chalet Girls' Cook Book was by no means the earliest cookery book specifically for children. Eleanor Brent-Dyer herself had contributed recipes to annual volumes of additional short stories in *The Chalet School Book for Girls* published in the late 1940s. She seems to have followed in a tradition of cookery books for children set within a story, with Lucy Crump's *Three Little Cooks* (1906), published by Edward Arnold, one of the twentieth century's earliest. In answer to a query to *The Guardian* in November 2012 about the earliest cookery book for children, Julia Eccleshare cited Crump's book, together with two others, but noted that 'I'm sure recipes for children to follow were written 'down before that, but they wouldn't have been widely published and therefore are hard to find today'. The others mentioned by Eccleshare are an American story by an author with a suitably culinary name, Jayne Eayre Fryer, *Adventures among the Kitchen People* (1912), and Moira Meighn's *Adventure Book of Cookery*, an

Oxford publication from 1937. Fryer's book, whose intention is to help 'a little girl whose great ambition was to help her mother' (1912: n.p.), includes some 40 recipes in its pages of 175-page fantasy narrative, the recipes helpfully listed after the contents page. Republished under a variety of titles over the years, this was obviously a popular book for young cooks. Meighn's book was altogether more serious, and earned itself an excellent review in the article recommending Christmas books for children in an issue of *The Tablet* of December 1937:

> A most unusual present for a girl who likes keeping house in a holiday cottage or caravan, is Moira Meighn's Adventure Book of Cookery [sic]. It begins at the beginning, and explains everything from the tools you should have for the job and the heat of different kinds of stove, to the most entrancing recipes collected from here, there and everywhere. It only costs 3s. 6d. from the Oxford University Press. I shall keep this book for myself.

Despite encouraging young readers/cooks to use a variety of cooking methods such as paraffin stoves, which health and safety would not approve in the twenty-first century, Meighn had clearly found a recipe for success. Similar success was replicated in the delicious fare on offer at the 20th IBBY UK/NCRCL MA conference!

Works Cited

Brent-Dyer, Eleanor ([1953] 2009) *The Chalet Girls' Cook Book.* Bath: Girls Gone By.

Eccleshare, Julia (2012) Children's Book Doctor: When was the first cookery book for children published? *The Guardian* 19 November 2012. www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2012/nov/19/childrens-cookery-books.

Fryer, Jayne Eayre (1912) *The Mary Frances Cook Book; or, Adventures among the kitchen people.* Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co.

Hallack, Cynthia (1937) The Books they would chose for themselves. *The Tablet* 4 December 1937 (p.24).

http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/4th-december-1937/24/the-books-they-would-choose-for-themselves.

Meighn, Moira (1937) *Adventure Book of Cookery for Boys and Girls between Nine and Fourteen or for Any One Interested in Cooking*. Oxford: University Press.

Swift, Jonathan (1729) *A Modest Proposal: For Preventing the Children of Poor People From Being a Burthen to their Parents or Country, and for Making them Beneficial to the Publick*. www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1080.

CHAPTER ONE

CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD THROUGH FOOD IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

JEAN WEBB

A keynote speaker carves us three ways in which food is used to give the reader insights in children's literature. Jean Webb examines how writers through the ages have constructed and portrayed childhood by using food as a mode of representing philosophical perspectives, and notions of class and gender.

Contemporary British media and culture demonstrate a great deal of interest in food with a notable number of television programmes associated with cooking and food. Such programmes are not confined to adult audiences nor to adult participants since there are a number designed for children. The following demonstrates how there are close associations between how the chef chooses, uses and prepares food, and the ways in which authors construct and portray childhood, employing food as a mode of representing philosophical perspectives, and notions of class and gender. The discussion is divided into three sections: 'Hearty Meals to Build a Nation', 'Of Bygone Dishes' and 'Quirky Recipes: Deconstructed Banoffee Pie'.

A current approach taken by chefs on contemporary British television cookery competitions, such as *MasterChef* and *The Great British Menu*, is to produce a dish by cooking the central ingredient three ways, such as rabbit three ways, or, as my vegetarian ex-husband said the other week, 'Cheese sandwich

three ways!' Such an approach to preparing a dish calls for creativity and interpretation of the focal ingredient, resulting in a dish that reflects the interests of the chef and demonstrates his/her skills. The dish will also be related to and influenced by particular cultural and philosophical influences and also, I would suggest, matters of class and economy.

An Irish chef might well take pork and cook it three ways using locally and responsibly sourced ingredients, since pork has been widely produced in Ireland for centuries and is a central component of Irish cuisine. The Irish chef might well serve the three-ways pork dish with champ, a distinctively Northern Irish dish of creamy mashed potatoes and spring onions. However, if the chef was from Eire it would be a similar side dish to champ but called colcannon and include regional variations such as kale or ham. Ingredients and the dishes created by chefs and cooks can therefore be seen to be related to national identity.

Although very likely delicious, the pork dish would be unacceptable to Jewish diners or those who follow the Islamic faith for matters of religious law, as the pig is regarded as unclean. Moreover, a vegetarian would obviously neither cook nor eat the dish, whilst an omnivorous diner may be concerned as to whether the ingredients were ecologically produced and from local organic sustainable sources and that the pig had been well treated. Furthermore, whether the breed of pig was a traditional breed and had been reared outdoors in more natural conditions might well be factors of consideration associated with particular philosophical views. Food can therefore be readily associated with cultural and philosophical perspectives that lie behind the seemingly uncomplicated matter of a dish for consumption.

Social class also comes into the kitchen and the dining experience. Tom Kerridge, an English chef of renown who now has his own television series, owns and runs the only pub that has two Michelin stars attributed to the quality of the food. The accolade of the Michelin star is normally associated with the higher ranks of fine dining in restaurants as opposed to the public house.

Kerridge's determination is to produce dishes associated with the genre of pub food that is affordable and notionally attractive to certain class sectors of society, as opposed to expensive and exclusive fine dining experiences. One of the determining differences between the pub and the fine dining experience is that of the presentation of the food, the nuances of construction. Kerridge is also intent upon saying that no food is restricted by class boundaries. Furthermore, he often adds a gendered slant to his dishes by describing them as 'man food', i.e. substantial and satisfying, suggesting that the dish is suitable to sustain the active male engaging in physically demanding activities. In fact the phrase 'man food' has been added to the publicity material for his latest cookbook. Masculinity was a focus of the boy's adventure story in the nineteenth century and was a central component of the construction of national identity and nationhood through English children's literature. However, as will be demonstrated, the construction of the nation was not constrained to men only and for women food was an important contributory element in building the nation and the British Empire.

Hearty Meals to Build a Nation

Michelle J. Smith's fascinating study *Empire in British Girls' Literature and Culture: Imperial Girls, 1880–1915* discusses how 'girls were shaped by, and were imagined as shaping, the British Empire' (2011: 1) and 'also situates these girls' texts in the contexts of discourses of the period about femininity, education, and race' (p.1). Smith draws particular attention to the work of Bessie Marchant (1862–1941) who wrote adventure stories featuring girls, earning herself the title of 'The Girl's Henty'. Marchant wrote over 130 novels that featured girl heroines. The stories were set across the British Empire in isolated locations, although Marchant herself never left England. They are therefore creations of the imagination that embed British values of colonialism and the creation of and sustenance of the Empire.

Marchant's heroines are intrepid, practical and, whilst being adventurers, are also homemakers. They represent the essential support to the adventuring colonial male who would, it was hoped, secure land and riches, thus contributing to the power of the Empire as in Marchant's *Waifs of Woollamoo* (1938). By implication, it is set in Australia around the time of the 1851 Gold Rush, for no dates are given in the novel. The household is that of the bachelor Captain Brandreth who has taken in three children for different reasons. Meg, the eldest girl, is his niece, her mother having been housekeeper for the Captain and then later died. Lionel is the orphaned son of one of the Captain's ex-crew, whilst Dot, the youngest, was taken in by the Captain on being orphaned, rather than being sent to an orphanage. The three children make up a family and call themselves 'the waifs and strays'.

The Captain is charitable and kind, yet does not always make the most sensible decisions. Although he creates a family for these children on his small farm, he loses his money through speculation and throws them into the jeopardy of destitution. Meg takes over the responsibility of looking after the household when the Captain decides to leave to speculate for gold to alleviate their dire financial situation. Central to the novel, Meg is the source of stability, responsibility and sound decision making. In contrast, the adults are unreliable, make poor decisions and leave their children to fend for themselves. Paradoxically, the actions of the adults are those that epitomise the adventuring spirit and attitudes that drove the development of colonialism and the Empire through financial speculation and seeking to make wealth from the land that they were colonising. The text can thus be read in some ways as a feminist critique of imperialism, placing the female and the family community as the focus of the action, as opposed to the potential high adventure that could have been told of the goldfields.

The community of the family grows with children from neighbouring families who also go to the goldfields. Prior to his leaving, the Captain regales the children with tales of the great

fortunes to be made on the goldfields where gold can be found by chance, waiting to be plucked from the streams and undergrowth. He communicates the sense of adventure when he says that one of the reasons for going is to prevent himself from 'being caught in a rut' (p.19). The reaction of the children a little later when the Captain has ridden off without a backward glance is to take his sudden decision making as part of the behaviour of adults to be smiled at rather than condemned. They have a wisdom beyond that of the adults, saying that he was 'bitten by the speculation-bug' and that 'People of his age are often taken like that' (p.21).

The values of the domestic community centred on the Captain's farm and particularly in the children represent the positive attributes of colonial settlers who will make a successful life in the new land, and such values and attributes are focused and magnified in Meg. She represents the essentials of domestic stability and reliability symbolised in the emphasis given to food in terms of preparation and adaptability, particularly when she takes over from the Captain as full-time housekeeper and cook, which duties she had previously carried out only during the school holidays. Meg assumes her responsibilities with a clear sense of responsibility and is described as 'taking command' (p.25). All the children contribute. Dot, the youngest of the original three, feeds the poultry and livestock, whilst Meg milks the cows. There is the sense of the involvement in food at each stage, from husbandry and hunting to cooking and enjoying the feast. The importance of the kitchen and food, often described as 'abundant and appetising' (p.17), and as being at the centre of the household, is marked by the mention of the stove providing both comfort, heat and the means of cooking. Whilst proficient at bread making, Meg also learns how to cook a wild pig that has been causing mayhem on the farm of the neighbours who have brought their young children to the Captain's place and left their eldest son Jack in charge of the homestead. Interestingly, there is a fulsome description of the damage done by the wild pig, which would be informative for the child reader in the safety of the English countryside where pigs

would be confined to sties. The wild pig has tunnelled under the wire fencing, slain six sheep and killed a sheep dog. Jack's decision is to hunt down the wild pig. On his way he meets Meg and the others by chance, who are about the business of the farm.

Throughout, there are inclusions of the work of producing food such as milking, taking the milk to the creamery, carting fodder for the animals, etc., all the requirements that go into the production of the provisions from which they produce their meals in an environment where there are no shops. This is engagement with food through all the processes from beast and field to the table. Emphasis is also given to the fact that they work up good appetites and satisfy them with simply cooked foods, such as bread and fried eggs, as in the case of Jack on the way to his pig hunt.

Whereas the adventure for the adults is in hunting gold, adventure for the children is in the danger and success of hunting the pig for protection of their livestock and the ensuing roast-pig feast they enjoy. However, having managed the tricky business of killing the pig, achieved by Cicely, they then discuss what should be done with the carcass. Again processes are gone through in the conversation that follows. Jack thinks it will be too tough and too strong, a statement counteracted by Cicely, who reminds him of their school history books that told them that boar's ham was considered a 'luxury in medieval times' (p.81). She then thinks through what they will have to do, knowing that they will have to 'get that beast cut up and the hams smoked properly' (p.81). Raised in an essential self-sufficient manner, these children are aware of the procedures required to produce meat, whereas most child readers of the period and now would not be. She knows that the creamery owners will do it for them as 'they always smoke our bacon when we kill a pig' (p.81). Dot joins the conversation, emphasising the history and pageantry associated with roasting a boar, declaring that they have

> got to have the boar's head. … For truth to tell 'tis a lordly dish, and in its jaws we'll put the biggest lemon. Oh, we'll take the head

> to Woollamoo, and we'll have a great feast to celebrate our victory. (p.81)

Jack responds to Dot's eulogy in a somewhat dampening way, stating that 'Boar hunting is no place for girls' (p.82), which is countered by Lionel reminding him of Cicely's part in achieving the kill. Marchant is thus placing girls at the centre of the action and demonstrating that they are equally able to provide, even in dangerous circumstances. The following feast is one enjoyed by all, after they have taken account of the size of the animal and how they can provide for the future by salting and preserving the meat. Again they are knowledgeable about where they can obtain the saltpetre for pickling, how to do so and how to prepare the pickling vats. Food therefore is used by Marchant to emphasise equality and capability against the prejudice ingrained in the older boy. The scene also demonstrates the responsibility of the children and their awareness in having to plan for the future, which again is in direct contrast to the behaviour of the adults.

When the Captain and the other parents do return from the goldfields they are sick, half starved, have been robbed of all they gleaned and are in a worse situation than before. It is the children who save the situation, for Meg has been astute in her management of the farm and the livestock, having developed the cow herd and raised horses, resulting in a lucrative sale.

Marchant's waifs are of the stuff of Empire builders and colonialists, for they can survive without adult support and provide for their otherwise unfortunate elders. At the centre of such achievements are young girls proving that heroism does not have to be on the battlefield but can be on the domestic front.

Dot's fulsome description of the boar presented as at a medieval feast, albeit in her imagination, draws attention to the place of food in history and in historical fiction.

Of Bygone Dishes

Food can be an integral means of constructing childhood in bygone times as by Kevin Crossley-Holland's *The Seeing Stone* (2001), which is the first of his Arthurian trilogy. Crossley-Holland is a medieval scholar as well as an award-winning children's author. His story of Arthur is deeply informed by his scholarship and gives a vivid depiction of medieval life, including the part food played in the medieval community. The novel is a combination of social history and the fantasy of the legends of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. The boy Arthur, the focal character in the text, is the son of the Lord of the Manor, a manor frequented by Merlin who gives him a piece of obsidian, a jet-black volcanic glass. In the obsidian, Arthur sees the playing out of the life and legend of King Arthur and, through this insight into another world, contemplates his own life, his future and the part he will play. For much of the novel Arthur is wondering whether he is *the* King Arthur and whether this is his future. In the obsidian, Arthur holds present, past and potential future; what the reader holds in the text is a vivid insight into medieval life with birth, death, sickness, joy, sorrow and feasting.

Crossley-Holland brings together sickness and imminent death with joy derived from food in the presence of a pigeon pie. Baby Luke is very ill. He is the youngest member of the Lord of the Manor's household and his sickness carries with it the memory of the loss of another baby a year earlier when no medicines would work and the child wasted away. Almost painfully, Crossley-Holland includes a scene of joy through food, set against this dark scenario, emphasising as Merlin says to Arthur 'that everything contains its opposite' (p.23). After the long night of suffering and sadness, to cheer them up, the cook serves 'a surprising pie' for dinner:

> The pastry was shaped like a dovecot, and there was a feather sticking out of the top of it. … Well, when my father cut open the crust, there was a great commotion inside the pie. My mother and Sian squealed and stood up. Then a pink-eyed pigeon poked out its

> head and flapped its wings. We were all showered with bits of crust, and the pigeon flew up into the gallery. Everyone clapped,' and then the real pie was carried in. (p.23)

This moment of playfulness is some relief from the misery. Live birds and animals encased in pastry were a feature of medieval cuisine in wealthier families. As Melitta Weiss Adamson in *Food in Medieval Times* (2004) notes:

> English cooks in particular liked to make towers and castles out of dough. … But more than buildings it was animals that inspired imitation dishes in the Middle Ages. (p.74)

These dishes, such as the one described by Crossley-Holland, variously included live birds, giving rise to the 'four and twenty blackbirds' of nursery rhyme fame. As well as the live bird pie, *The Seeing Stone* also includes information about medieval foods that are known today, but in a somewhat different form. For example, when Arthur tells of Slim, one of the characters, who brings

> over a large covered dish from the side table, and planted it in front of my father. 'Herbolace!' he announces.
>
> Then my father lifted the dish lid, and helped himself to a large dollop of scrambled eggs and cheese and herbs, while Slim brought over another dish, … which I shall tell you about in just a moment. (p.65)

Herbolace was the precursor of the omelette, being a mixture of eggs and shredded herbs, baked in a buttered dish. Over the centuries it became more elaborate, being finished with grated cheese and sometimes flavoured with ginger – imitating a French dish of the same name. The other dish was that of collops, which was a dish of slices of meat. Although the derivation is obscure, the Oxford English Dictionary indicates that it may be related to the old Swedish word kollops, but also suggests a German origin (klops), both of which would reflect the cultural influences on medieval England. Originally the meat would have been venison, but then the term was more widely applied to any meat. Crossley-Holland is opening up the opportunity for the reader to learn of

the diverse origins of dishes and how they are linked linguistically with the component influences that shaped the British nation. Matters of national identity are embedded here, and also the interchange possible through cooking and foodstuffs travelling across nations.

With transportation, foods that were exotic in the medieval period are now taken as unremarkable and staple ingredients in Britain. At the meal of herbolace Arthur's father is speaking of the relationship between King Richard and Saladin who, when his enemy was ill:

> sent King Richard pomegranates and grapes, lemons, cucumbers: rare fruits almost as costly as jewels. (p.67)

All the foods nominated here are common and unexceptional today. Once an exotic fruit, the pomegranate, originally a native of Persia, is now recognised as a fruit with valuable health-bearing properties as it contains compounds that benefit the reduction of blood pressure and can help to reduce cancerous conditions. It is also favoured by contemporary chefs – especially Nigella Lawson – to add to salads and other dishes. More than a delicious addition to a meal, these foods are used by Crossley-Holland to subtly incorporate deeper political and moral considerations. Through a conversation about exotic foods Arthur's father is able teach Arthur that those on opposite sides in a bitter religious war could still respect each other.

What Arthur learns through these incidents associated with food is that there is respect and generosity beyond the differences that lead to bloody war and division; that food is a way of coming together in some understanding. This is also the position for the reader, and has resonance and pertinence today with the divisions between East and West; between Islamic extremists and Western culture; and between right-wing activists and intolerance for immigrants. Through the inclusion and subject of food, Crossley-Holland thus introduces complex ideas for contemplation, ways of thinking that will shape future attitudes and approaches to life. In *The Seeing Stone* there are a number of other associations to be

made through the subject of food, such as recipes and the need for the cook to balance flavours; the contamination of foods in medieval times owing to the lack of refrigeration, and how foodstuffs can be used both medicinally and for enchantment; the methods employed to catch and prepare meats; and how traditional games such as apple dipping can be a simple source of fun and enjoyment. However, the final way I wish to discuss how Crossley-Holland uses food concerns morality and the law.

Whilst the better off sectors of medieval society enjoyed a diet that fulfilled their needs beyond the basic requirements, others at the bottom of the social scale were not so fortunate and could be living on the edge of starvation when harvests were poor and their access to hunting, foraging and forestry rights were limited by the law. Hum, one such serf, is accused of stealing a leg of mutton from the manor kitchen. Arthur attends the manor court where Hum is tried. Crossley-Holland thus gives insights into how important food was and the regulations surrounding access. Under usual circumstances Hum's offence would be punished by hanging, however Arthur's father is well respected by the official of the court and so leniency is given and Hum's punishment is to have his right hand cut off. Leniency seems an inappropriate term in one way, for the lack of hygiene and medical knowledge will result and does so in the wound becoming gangrenous and Hum suffering a painful and prolonged death. In medieval times, life was precariously balanced against the workings of nature in ways that are, for some of the world's population, not a matter of either concern or awareness. The organisation and actions of society in relation to the essentials of life could either give or take, could decide between either life or death.

Arthur, the child in *The Seeing Stone* is placed as an observer. As the novel progresses and he matures, he is more directly placed in the events of society, those kinds of happening that he has watched in his piece of obsidian, his 'seeing stone'. The seeing stone itself is a piece formed by ice and fire in the formation of the very world we inhabit. It has a mirrored surface like glass. In it

Arthur is reflected as he watches. Through *The Seeing Stone,* Crossley-Holland invites and enables the reader as an observer, as a thinker, to connect past, present and future. He uses food as a means of making connections through the known to the unknown and thus encompasses subjects that are deeply rooted in the substance of the construction of society. Crossley-Holland's construction of childhood is that of the child as a thinker, a learner, and a potential activist to make a better and more tolerant future. However, childhood is also about play and playfulness.

Quirky Recipes: Deconstructed Banoffee Pie

My third and final construction of childhood is 'Quirky Recipes: Deconstructed Banoffee Pie', which is a rather more playful consideration of the role of the chef and cooking in two texts for younger readers: Peter Bently and Chris Harrison's *Monster Chef* (2012) in the Vampire School series and *Chef Shocker* (2006) by Sue Mongredien and Teresa Murfin in the Frightful Families series. Both play on the current popularity of cheffie cookery series and competitions on television such as *Masterchef* in three versions, *The Great British Bake-Off* and Nigel Slater's *A Taste of My Life*.

Monster Chef is about a school cookery competition. The plot is unoriginal in that it is about the good hero child and the cheating villain who compete in the competition, the villain being defeated. What is original is that the school is one for young vampires. The playfulness in the text is linguistic, circulating around the names of dishes and associations with the world of television chefdom. The free meal offered as the prize for the winner is a meal in 'The Fat Bat', which is an allusion to Heston Blumenthal's world-class restaurant 'The Fat Duck' that has been awarded three Michelin stars and the accolades of the Best Restaurant in the World and the Best Restaurant in the UK. The other quirky element of this text is the punning on the names of dishes, such as 'Coq au Fang', making them desirable for vampires.

Chef Shocker tells the story of young Amy, whose parents own a somewhat unusual restaurant, not in terms of the clientele, but in the bizarre food served. Ingredients are oddly combined and turned into grotesque dishes. Amy's school has been invited to join in a television programme called *Life Swap*, again playing on a contemporary UK reality programme. Amy's parents take over the school kitchen and the school cook runs their restaurant. The cook produces traditional dishes in the restaurant and the parents continue with their bizarre concoctions, including serving snail stew. Matters are happily resolved when the parents rein in their eccentricities and produce a more normal and edible menu.

These two texts raise an awareness of food for the child reader and they are amusing. The fun comes from playfulness with language and also knowing the parodying of the foodie world portrayed on television and beyond in which the authors engage. Here are texts that call for an awareness outside the texts themselves in order to understand and enjoy the humour. The child reader also has to either have an understanding of food and UK food culture, or be introduced to that by someone who does. The school cook in *Chef Shocker* also cooks healthy food for the most part, with only one inclusion of chips. So there are links to be made with nutritious healthy eating as opposed to junk foods, whilst also placing the school cook as the heroine. There is an implied association here with the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver's 2009 campaign for healthy school food, food education and appetising school dinners, which has had a considerable impact in raising public awareness to the problems of poor nutrition and diet previously provided by school meals, which would not, however, include deconstructed Banoffee Pie.

By this point you may be wondering about the relevance of deconstructed Banoffee Pie. For those of you who are yet to be initiated into the wonders of Banoffee Pie, it is a dessert comprised of a pastry or biscuit-crumb shell filled with caramel made from condensed milk and topped with sliced bananas and whipped cream: an indulgent and sweet delight. I had a deconstructed