Food Cultures across Time

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Edited by

Anca-Luminița Iancu
and Alexandra Mitrea

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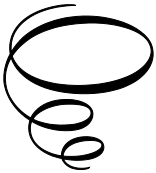

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

ANCA-LUMINIȚA IANCU
AND ALEXANDRA MITREA

> "Food . . . is a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behavior." (Barthes 24)

Inspired by the fact that the editors' native Sibiu was elected European Region of Gastronomy for 2019, this volume brings together a number of distinguished scholars in the fields of literary, cultural and linguistic studies writing on a common theme, that of cuisine. Food and its lack have always been ubiquitous concerns not only in literature but also in everyday life and in the intercultural communication that is mediated by the English *lingua franca*. This volume offers literary and cultural representations of abundance, scarcity of food and consumption, more broadly, in an attempt to show how they inform and modify each other. It argues that literary and cultural products participate in the shaping of food cultures, looking into the ways in which our relation to literary texts and cultural artifacts reflects our approach to social and ethical issues related to the production and consumption of food.

Various volumes published in recent years attest the growing scholarly interest in the role and significance of food in literature and culture. Many of these volumes have been influenced or have taken issue—as do quite a number of the essays included in this volume—with Roland Barthes' ground-breaking essay "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption" (1961), one of the first systematic approaches to foodways. Barthes' structuralist analysis has foregrounded food as a system of communication and has viewed it as "an indicator of a set of more or less conscious motivations, . . . [a] real sign, perhaps the functional unit of a system of communication" (24). The twofold value Barthes has ascribed to food, "nutrition as well as protocol," has led him to the conclusion that "*food has a constant tendency to transform itself into a situation*" (29). The French structuralist theoretician has constructed "a veritable grammar of foods" (25) and has illustrated, by transformational analysis, how the changeover from white to brown bread, for example, has

meant a difference in signification. Claude Lévi-Strauss has followed in Barthes' footsteps and has further developed the idea of food, more specifically food preparation, as a language system in his essay "The Culinary Triangle" (1966), where he concludes, optimistically, that "we can hope to discover for each specific case how the cooking of a society is a language in which it unconsciously translates its structure—or else resigns itself still unconsciously to revealing its contradictions" (47). From food as a language system to food as a code, whose message could be found in various types of social relationships, there was only one step, and Mary Douglas (1971) shrewdly took it and "deciphered a meal," suggesting that "the message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries" (61).

In his eloquent history of human civilization written from the perspective of culinary practices, *Food Is Culture* (2006), Massimo Montanari embraces and explores this structuralist approach to food, and pertinently argues that "Like spoken language, the food system contains and conveys the culture of its practitioner; it is the repository of traditions and of collective identity" (133). Additionally, he argues that food can be looked upon as "an extraordinary vehicle of self-representation and of cultural exchange – a means of establishing identity, to be sure, but also the first way of entering into contact with a different culture" (133). Montanari brings up the issue of the self and the other in his culinary excursion, and, starting from the premise that "Eating the food of the 'other' is easier, it would seem, than decoding the other's language," he rightly concludes that "Far more than spoken language itself, food can serve as a mediator between different cultures, opening methods of cooking to all manner of invention, cross-pollination and contamination" (133).

The dialogue between the self and the other mediated by means of food is elaborated on by Wenying Xu in *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian-American Literature* (2008). His analysis of seven Asian-American authors sheds light on the relationship between food and identity and investigates it through the lens of race/ethnicity, gender, class, diaspora, and sexuality. Food is regarded "as one of the key cultural signs that structure people's identities and their concepts of others," while at the same time organizing, signifying, and legitimating "our sense of self in distinction from others who practice different foodways" (2). Xu views food as stratifying in terms of classes and races/ethnicities, even to a larger extent than gendering. He also points to the moral dimension of our assessments of food practices: "In differentiating foodways, we often

believe that our food not only tastes better but is also more healthful and cleaner than others'. . . . Such demarcation is never simply a line drawn between good and bad cuisine or even clean and filthy food" as food "informs the construction of a moral judgement of a particular social group" (6). Worth mentioning in this context are the other connotations that food can carry and that further demarcate the border between "us" and "them" even within particular social groups: "The food habits of each cultural group are often linked to religious beliefs or ethnic behaviors. Eating is a daily reaffirmation of cultural identity" (Kittler and Sucher 4).

Another direction which has emerged in the field of food studies and which has also been explored in several of the pieces included in this volume is that which approaches food from the perspective of power against the background of gender studies. On the one hand, as Carole M. Counihan and Steven L. Kaplan argue in *Food and Gender: Identity and Power* (1998), "the ability to produce, provide, distribute and consume food" (1) is a key indicator of men's and women's power, and it varies in keeping with their culture, the class they belong to, their family structure, and the overall economic architecture of the society they live in. But food can also reflect personal power, as the two theoreticians argue, since men's and women's relationship to food and its meanings contributes to a valued sense of self. "Men's and women's attitudes about their bodies, the legitimacy of their appetites, and the importance of their food work reveal whether their self-concept is validating or denigrating," leading to "gender complementarity and mutual respect or produc[ing] gender hierarchy" (1-2). Counihan further explores the role played by food in perpetuating, to a certain extent, class, caste, race, and gender hierarchies, and, in *The Anthropology of Food and the Body: Gender Meaning and Power* (1999), she investigates the meaning of food from the perspective of "the relation between the sexes, their gender definitions, and their sexuality" and correctly points out that "In many cultures, eating is a sexual and gendered experience throughout life. Food and sex are metaphorically overlapping. Eating may represent copulation, and food may represent sexuality" (9).

Representations of food in literary works have also benefited from increasing attention in the last decades. Thus, in *History of Food in Literature: From the Fourteenth Century to the Present* (2017), Charlotte Boyce and Joan Fitzpatrick offer a comprehensive history of food as it appears in a great array of classical works in the last seven hundred years, pointing out that "the use of food in novels, plays, poems, and other works of literature can help explain the complex relationship between the body, subjectivity and social structures regulating consumption" (4). At the same time, food may signal "wealth or power, cultural difference or a sense of

belonging, status and identity in terms of rank, and moral standing" (Boyce and Fitzpatrick 3). Consequently, our volume, which gives ample space to the implications of food references in fiction and in culture, asks topical questions about significant issues such as food production and consumption, labour migration and the ethical distribution of the earth's resources, women's role in the contemporary world, the politicization of food, food culture and its imbrication in visual culture, as well as translation endeavours as an expression of intercultural consumption. Given the centrality of food to human life and survival, and recurring anxieties about the depletion of the land as a result of growing populations or other forms of crisis such as global warming, representations of food (and starvation), which are so abundant in world literature, are investigated from various vantage points in the essays included in this collection.

Furthermore, in keeping with the new material turn in cultural and literary studies, we conceive of taste as a corporeal rather than cognitive category, including aesthetic taste; however, corporeal taste summons up memories and structures memory (particularly what Marcel Proust calls "involuntary" or associative memory) and generates narrative (Tigner and Carruth 107); in other words, body and mind are not separated in our essays. Furthermore, we concur with Amy Tigner and Allison Carruth who profess to follow Barthes, Lévi-Strauss, Douglas and their descendants in "defining food as worthy of serious study and in theorizing the procedures and practices that transform edible matter into the stuff of symbolic communication, story, ritual, power, and so on—a semiotic system, in structuralist terms, that creates meaning beyond its 'material reality'" (6). We also develop Tigner and Carruth's argumentation according to which "literary texts do not just transmit or depict food cultures and food practices: they also help to structure them" (1). Consequently, our approach foregrounds textual analysis in the interpretation of food as deserving serious study and highlights the practices that help food mediate communicative, narrative, ritualistic or power systems. Therefore, this volume integrates close reading of contemporary fiction with cultural materialism and anthropology, as well as empirical and archival research.

On the other hand, the present volume also explores the intricacies and complexities of food in culture and aims to map food cultures and food routes in fiction, by analysing consumption-related matters in the literary endeavours of authors from countries as diverse as Ireland, Romania, the United Kingdom, or the United States of America. More specifically, the first part of this vibrant inter-disciplinary collection of essays discusses topics such as comfort/discomfort fiction, representations of food and the female body, the intersections of class, race and identity

via food, the subtle connections between food and fiction to create consciousness-raising literary experiences, food as a mediator of memory, the absence of food resulting in displacement, imprisonment, and trauma, or the conundrums of translating food references.

The volume opens with Merritt Moseley's essay, which offers an insightful inquiry into the sub-genre of "cozy mysteries," specifically "mysteries with recipes," a sub-genre extensively consumed by readers of popular fiction. By analysing "comfort" and "discomfort fiction," Moseley indirectly raises the question of aesthetic taste, since what readers consume and take great delight in, has, in the long run, axiological implications. Food can, indeed, provide both comfort and discomfort, as Ana-Karina Schneider argues in her analysis of Anne Enright's novels. By taking an in-depth look at the complexity of Enright's fiction, Schneider demonstrates how the food cultures and food practices depicted by the Irish novelist engender questions regarding the commodification of women's bodies, the gendering of consumerism, eating disorders, women's relegation to the domestic sphere, as well as Irish identity, sexuality, self-image or social insecurity. Food and the sense of social (in)security is also foregrounded in Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help*, examined in Anca-Luminița Iancu's essay. As Iancu argues, the physical spaces of the white and black kitchens become emotional spaces that provide the female protagonists with *food for thought* and *for the soul*, as storytelling, writing, and cooking Southern food help them to acquire some agency and an individual identity in the process of mediating the challenges posed by racial, class, and gender expectations. The close relationship between food and the construction of identity represents the main focus of Alexandra Mitrea's essay, which discusses Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction with a view to demonstrating how food occupies a significant place in the formation of Asian-American subjectivity in the case of first- and second-generation immigrants in the United States. In addition to being important markers of identity construction, the culinary practices of Lahiri's characters reflect their emotional states and individual choices at different key moments in their lives. Food as emotional nourishment and its connection to memory are examined by Alessandra Pino in her essay on the novel *Dreaming in Cuban*, by Cuban-American author Cristina García. By employing the concept of "food-memory language," Pino argues that, as the memories of the three female protagonists (who live in Cuba and in the United States after the Cuban Revolution) are mediated and remediated through the food they prepare and consume, the language that connects memory and food also expresses the anxieties related to their ethnic identities in transnational contexts. Such anxieties are also reflected in the selection of

novels by contemporary Romanian female writers examined by Monica Manolachi. As she points out, the food-related imagery and figurative language used by the respective authors capture and reflect the social, political, cultural, and emotional contexts navigated by the protagonists, as well as the difficulties brought about by the experience of migration, nostalgia for the home country, or about the trauma of war, at the same time raising questions about fraught family relationships and/or ethnic identities. On the other hand, lack of food, more specifically, hunger, as an emotional and a homeostatic state, is a recurrent feeling that pervades the comparative approach proposed by Corina Selejan in her essay on two recent novels, by African-American author Jesmyn Ward and Romanian-born German novelist Herta Müller. Selejan sheds light on how "the vividness of the sense of hunger" in both novels is expressed through the use of a powerful language based on sensory-motor metaphors. Similarly, in her analysis of food references in several plays by William Shakespeare, Anca-Simina Martin employs the framework of conceptual and linguistic metaphors to explore the link between food, sexuality, and representations of women in the plays. Martin also discusses various translation choices of the food references in Romanian and points out the difficulties inherent in rendering the figurative meanings of Shakespeare's bawdy metaphors.

The second part of the volume includes essays on various culinary treats, such as the Italian *frutta Martorana* and the British syllabub, and on "traditional" Romanian restaurant dishes. Thus, Rissa Miller offers a compelling history of the *frutta Martorana*, Italian marzipan sweets, by examining their origin, their ingredients, and their use and significance in cultural and religious contexts, such as the Catholic celebration of All Souls' Day (November 2). Moreover, Miller emphasizes the connections between food and art by looking at the *frutta Martorana* as art objects, thereby arguing for the inclusion of the legacies of culinary art traditions into the canon of art historical scholarship. In a similar vein, Ruxandra Vişan focuses in her essay on a popular eighteenth-century British dessert, the syllabub, tracing its history by analysing how the culinary information about ingredients and recipes is structured in the lexicographical entries in British and French dictionaries and encyclopaedias of the time. In this context, she points out how the connotations acquired by the term in time reflect its linguistic and cultural ambiguity. The volume concludes with an essay by Anca Ignat and Monica Borş, in which food, language, and cultural references are analyzed in the restaurant menus of the 2019 European Region of Gastronomy (Sibiu, Romania). From a linguistic perspective, Ignat and Borş examine some of the infelicitous translations (from and into Romanian) of various ingredients

and dishes of Romanian or international cuisine (Italian, French, etc.) with a view to demonstrating the cultural hybridity of culinary globalization and to highlighting the desire to preserve or recreate the illusion of authenticity of local cuisine.

The diverse culinary flavours expressed in the literary and cultural endeavours explored in this volume emphasize the idea that the food-related discourse often operates as an indicator of psychosocial phenomena essential for the representation of identity. In the current context in which globalization seems to be levelling everything, in which "electronic mediation and mass migration" mark the world of the present as forces "that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of the imagination" (Appadurai), the emerging counterforces are often manifest at the level of cuisine, where the strife for authenticity is ever more noticeable. However, this strife for authenticity propagates at all levels, touching all aspects of our lives, including the construction of subjectivity where, it is ever clearer that we should pay more attention to the role played by the senses, as many of the contributors to this volume convincingly argue. We are, after all, what we eat, and although intellectuals have often avoided the topic of food, deeming it too banal and trivial, we might be forgiven by the Bard when reformulating his words and saying that "we are such stuff as our food is made of," as many of our endeavours, whether we admit it or not, are often related to food. Thus, this volume aims to contribute to the relatively new field of food studies by looking into the practical and theoretical aspects of various modes of production, consumption and aesthetic appreciation of food, while also interrogating the ethics of eating and consumerism, major current concerns worth further scholarly inquiry.

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A Feast of Fiction: Novels with Recipes

Merritt Moseley

Why is there so much eating in novels? There are several excellent reasons why novels contain food and eating. Eating is a part of life, and, as such, is likely to find its way into at least realistic fiction. But other universal features of life—shaving, eyeglasses-wiping—receive much less attention; admittedly these are not necessary for life. More importantly, meals are also major occasions for interaction between persons; they can be used to advance the plot, to bring characters together or drive them apart, to give occasion for revelations. And what people eat and how they eat it—and often how they cook and serve it—may reveal something significant about them to readers. Examples, chosen from a nearly endless list would include the dinner party in *Pride and Prejudice* at which Mrs. Bennet's vulgarity and indiscretion repel Mr. Darcy; Leopold Bloom's enjoyment of a "feety Gorgonzola" in *Ulysses*; Huckleberry Finn's celebration of food cooked together, when "things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better" (2). Charles Dickens is a great celebrator of eating, but also of not eating, as when Oliver Twist in the workhouse earns trouble by asking for more gruel.

But a narrower focus leads to this question: why do novels contain recipes? There is no single answer. In Kurt Vonnegut's *Deadeye Dick*, the recipes provide ironic juxtaposition: a short section about a family's Nazi past is followed by a recipe for "Mary Hoobler's corn bread"; another more troubling Nazi reminiscence by the recipe for "Mary Hoobler's barbecue sauce" (28-29). The same explanation may account for Jason Matthews' *Red Sparrow*, a spy thriller, in which each of the short punchy chapters ends with a recipe. For instance, the line '"Even remotely interested?' she asked to his infinite horror" is immediately followed by a recipe for "Golov's Mediterranean Clams" (420), and "It's all arranged. She'll be arrested the morning after the call" leads to a recipe for "Gigantes—Greek Baked Beans" (490). In Georges Perec's *Life: A User's Manual*, a recipe is included as part of that book's effort to enclose a

world in a 99-room apartment building. Joanne Harris' *Five Quarters of the Orange*, like many of her books (the most famous being *Chocolat*) has much to do with cooking and eating. In this case, the cuisine is entwined with the sinister history of a French family's collaboration with Nazi occupiers, and a young woman, who is using her mother's recipes, realizes that they tell of more than cookery, including the history of long-ago betrayal.

Another very large category of novels with recipes is the sub-genre called "cozy mysteries." One definition for this kind of novel states that '"cozies' are distinct from other mystery genres due to a few specific qualities: The crime-solver is almost always a well-educated woman and an amateur detective;" furthermore, "the more graphic content seen in other mystery subgenres is limited or absent, and there's usually no shortage of tongue-in-cheek humor and eccentric characters" (Corbray 0A). Another appreciation of this sub-genre explains: "cozy implies a particular sort of setting, tone and cadence. It's a genre that deals less with the violent or sexual elements common to 'hardboiled' mysteries and more with colorful characters and small towns" (Frenzel E4). And Katharine Vester adds the most relevant note: "Many of the protagonists despise diets and enjoy good food in hearty quantities . . ." (31).

Consider Isis Crawford's *A Catered Christmas*. This is the fourth in a series called "mysteries with recipes." Set in a small town ("picturesque Longley, New York"), it features professional caterers as amateur sleuths. And, as the back cover boasts, it "Includes Scrumptious Holiday Recipes for You to Try!" That encapsulates the "cozy" appeal. Novels that are not mysteries can be equally cozy. *The Hindi-Bindi Club* by Monica Pradhan presents a group of friends who, though not without conflicts and difficulties, are united by long, warm friendship, adherence to tradition—and food. Here (as in Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* or, in another way, in Harris' *Five Quarters of the Orange*), food binds together the generations, mothers and daughters. Into the narrative are interpolated such seductive recipes as "Meenal's Chicken Curry" (38), "Saroj's Famous Samosas" (130) and "Rani's Chocolate Sandesh Truffles" (90). It seems likely that beyond the usual satisfactions of reading novels, these may add the same attractions that make so many people watch cooking shows and read recipes of dishes they have no plans to make. Americans, at least, of all ages—including university students for whom a dish of ramen noodles is a big night in the kitchen—obsessively watch television shows about cooking, chefs, kitchen confidentials, and particularly *The Great British Bake-off*, which arguably appeals because it provides a cozy experience.

An incisive review of Harris' novel *Five Quarters of the Orange* provides some insight into why novels contain recipes:

> Underpinning the action is food. Presumably this is what sold *Chocolat*, too: food equals good . . . You must be all right if you can make rillettes, stuff a pike, and get your jams and jellies to set. This seems a crushingly simple view of life . . . But I suspect this is Harris's secret weapon. Every reader of a cookery column is in reality plotting his or her glorification on the altar of domestic bliss, and this novel reinforces the notion. (Jaine)

That puts it too strongly, probably, but the reviewer makes a strong point with the declaration that, in fiction, "food is good." Food is cozy; cooking is traditional; recipes are intergenerational messages of love and comfort, evoking nostalgia and warm feelings.

Comfort. This links literature to the category of eating summed up in the phrase *comfort food*. The authors of *Comfort Food: Meanings and Memories* approve this definition from the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "food that comforts or affords solace; hence any food (frequently with a high sugar or carbohydrate content) that is associated with childhood or with home cooking" (Jones and Long 3). This is quite telling: the nostalgic or sentimental value, even the *high caloric nature*, if that can be applied to the sweetness of the cozy novel, mystery or otherwise, that includes recipes. Comfort food varies between cultures, so it is hard for someone from another culture to judge the Indian recipes in *The Hindi-Bindi Club* or the Mexican recipes in *Like Water for Chocolate*. In the United States, comfort food, which is often the food that people enjoyed when they were young, includes macaroni and cheese, meat loaf, apple pie, grits (for Southerners, at least) and corn bread, as featured in Vonnegut's novel. To characterize most fiction, including recipes, one might say that the novelistic counterpart of *comfort food* is *comfort fiction*, a kind of fiction that "provides a nostalgic or sentimental value to someone," and it is there that readers should expect to find recipes.

One book will serve as an illustration of this thesis, as a representative of a very large group of novels. It is called *Miss Julia Stirs Up Trouble*, by Ann B. Ross. It is one in a series of novels (twenty at last count) about Miss Julia Springer, a spunky elderly Southern widow living in a small town in North Carolina. In each of them, Miss Julia gets into some predicament, shares wisdom with her faithful housekeeper, interacts with neighbors, friends, and church people, unleashes a tart tongue on the unworthy and the inane, and in the end resolves all difficulties for herself and others. These books are not mysteries in the usual sense, though there

are mildly mysterious things within them, mostly dubious identities, but they are extremely cozy. The cast of characters is almost entirely middle-class older women, all of them white, except for a few African-American servants; the setting is a small, sleepy southern town; and preparing, serving, and eating food looms large in each of the novels.

In *Miss Julia Stirs Up Trouble*, the plot is activated as Hazel Marie Pickens, a younger woman, suffers a setback when her cook is injured and cannot prepare meals for six weeks. Hazel Marie has never learned to cook. In this traditionally patriarchal milieu, no one has any serious expectation that her husband might do the cooking. So, Miss Julia comes up with a solution: "What if I ask each person to contribute an easy recipe? *Then* ask them to go to Hazel Marie's house and show her how to make it?" (19). The result is a collective, multi-generational, multi-racial support effort, and, as we might expect, the recipes are supplied in the book. Somewhat unusually, the author includes the making and eating of the dishes in the ordinary narrative; following it is a miniature cookbook, with all the recipes presented just as in an ordinary cookbook with precise measurements and step-by-step instructions. Though the novel contains a few additional twists, including a sinister clergyman, its main function is as a delivery mechanism for the recipes, which are in the classic Southern comfort-food mode: dishes like Etta May's Chicken Cacciatore, Emma Sue's Good Beef Stew, Binkie's Mother's Corn Chowder, Company Grits, and Cornbread Dressing.

Compare these dishes with those described in a different category of novels with recipes, novels that deserve to be called *discomfort fiction*: Death Roe; scrumptious deep-fried mole crickets from the Philippines; mackerel and blackberry loaf; badger Wellington *farci* with gun-dog pâté and magic mushrooms. These are among the inventions of Gerald Samper, an expatriate Englishman living in Tuscany and featuring in three novels by James Hamilton-Paterson, *Cooking with Fernet Branca*, *Amazing Disgrace*, and *Rancid Pansies.* Samper is a preening, effete snob who thinks of himself as an intellectual and paragon of high culture but earns his living ghost-writing autobiographies for sportsmen and other semi-literate celebrities. He is also an amateur chef of amazing self-confidence. His recipes sometimes look normal on the page aside from their surprising ingredients: for instance, "Ghost Souffle," built around calves' brains and explained as "aiming to capture the Spirit of Cow" (*Disgrace* 163). In *Cooking with Fernet Branca* he provides the instructions for "Alien Pie," which includes smoked cat and puffin along with, of course, Fernet Branca, the Italian herbal liqueur that Samper swears by. Others are presented in a discursive, rather than documentary style; instead of the

kind of list of measurements and terse instructions that can be printed on a 3x5 card (or presented in a cookbook or in the paratext of *Miss Julia Stirs Up Trouble*), he explains his choices and narrates his process, in a way that would permit a reader to duplicate the dish if desired. For his sister and some friends, he prepares his famous mice vol-au-vents. He starts with eleven field mice:

> One can cook the meat very gently with a little butter for a bare minute or two, add the merest dribble of mouse broth and use this delicate hash as a vol-au-vent filling. On the other hand you can cream the meat with a pestle and mortar, ideally with a little goose fat and a teaspoon of the best Armagnac you can find, set out the mixture in blobs on a baking sheet and grill them quickly [this is his famous "mice krispies"]. . . . I put the tiny giblets and skeletons . . . on to boil in a bare cup of water with a quarter of the smallest shallot I can find and a single juniper berry. . . . Ideally, I would like to add an additional dish of sweet beetles for my diners to crunch on . . . But in default of such exotica in Suffolk I think I shall accompany my groundbreaking *hors d'oeuvres* with my patented liver smoothie (served with a slice of lime, a sprig of basil and a sprinkling of hundreds and thousands [sugar sprinkles, usually used on cakes or cookies] as a final touch of festive playfulness). (*Rancid* 40-41)

He serves this with his "inventive haddock marmalade" (41). The result, not too surprisingly, is an outbreak of violent sickness among his fellow diners.

Hamilton-Paterson's novels are comedies, even farces. Samper's house falls over the cliffside shortly after he has served his gun-dog pâté; in the next novel, he learns that his home has become a place of pilgrimage due to a rumor that all the diners' lives were spared by a visitation of Princess Diana's ghost, and he is shortly working on an opera about Diana, parts of which are shared in *Rancid Pansies*. Samper is a comic character, whose preposterous recipes are just part of his pretentiousness. And, aside from some projectile vomiting, no harm comes from his eccentric ingredients.

A much different experience meets the reader in John Lanchester's *The Debt to Pleasure*. In its opening sentence, the narrator, Tarquin Winot, declares that "This is not a conventional cookbook" (xi). It certainly is not. Instead, it is a deepening horror show of the black comedy variety, revealing depth after depth of the sociopathy of Winot, a man whose self-regard and pomposity make Hamilton-Paterson's Samper seem like Mother Teresa. In his preface and note on structure, Winot explains that the presiding spirit of his work is Brillat-Savarin, author of *La Physiologie du Goût*. But there is another inspiration:

> Over the years, many people have pleaded with me to commit to paper my thoughts on the subject of food. Indeed the words "Why don't you write a book about it?," uttered in an admittedly wide variety of tones and inflections, have come to possess something of the quality of a mantra—one tending to be provoked by a disquisition of mine on, for instance, the composition of an authoritative *cassoulet*, or Victorian techniques for baking hedgehogs in clay. (xiii)

Some of his narcissistic blindness to other people is clear from his bland quotation of "Why don't you write a book about it?" and from his later admission that "I myself have always disliked being called a 'genius.' It is fascinating to notice how quick people have been to intuit this aversion and avoid using the term" (13).

At any rate, Winot's story proceeds by, and in fact seeps through, his organization by menus. There is a travel narrative, in which he is clearly stalking a young couple, and a family story, built around his resentment of his brother, who, it is clear despite his scoffing, was a brilliant, world-famous sculptor. Winot, by contrast, explains his previous objections to writing a book about cookery by his unwillingness to "distract attention from my artistic work in other media" (xiii), though it is never clear what those media might be. His contempt for his brother's work might suggest that he is some sort of visual artist, but no artwork is ever adduced.

In the earlier parts of the novel, his explanations of food preparation are clear, and, unlike Samper's, tell how to prepare food that one might want to eat, for instance, a *bourride* or fish stew. He gives guidance on the choice of fish, then gives measurements (though these are sometimes not precise "—reduce the sauce by an amount that feels appropriate") and tells how to cook the dish. It is then a trigger for reminiscence: "It was on an evening when I had prepared a *bourride* that I received my first visit from Pierre and Jean-Luc, my Provençal semi-neighbors" (55). So back and forth between cookery instructions, reminiscences, digressions, and odd facts the narrative wanders. Some data are just interesting: "In Polish, the language of Poland, all green vegetables are known as *włoszczyzna*, which means 'things Italian'" (141). Others, particularly as they accumulate, begin to produce more unease than satisfied curiosity: "chowders (from *chaudière*, stewpot, a word which also refers to the kind of domestic gas boiler whose explosion was to kill my parents)" (53).

As Winot's travels accelerate, as the reader comes to know more and more about his history and his present (the book functions almost like a journal rather than being written entirely in retrospect), it becomes ever

more unlike a conventional cookery book. For a menu featuring curry dishes and mango sorbet, he impatiently explains: "As to the mango sorbet, you should 1) buy a *sorbetière*, 2) buy some mangoes, 3) follow the instructions. The curry recipes you can look up in a book" (122). By this point, it is becoming clear that Tarquin Winot (given name actually Rodney) is a sociopath and a murderer and has been since childhood. He casually admits to poisoning a hamster and to framing a maidservant for theft. He blandly tells us how he "moved down the thronged aisle" of the market, "delivering a quasi-accidental blow with my knee to the temple of a child who had been caroming noisily around the stalls" (197).

His by-the-way comments, sometimes in the course of describing meals, convict him of having killed another household servant, several neighbors in France, his parents and his brother. His brother died from eating poisonous mushrooms, a subject on which Winot evinces an encyclopedic knowledge. The main mover of the plot is his disguised pursuit of a young couple on their honeymoon. His motives are complex, including both desire for the woman and resentment of her husband, and competition with his brother. She is a student of his brother's sculpture, about which she is writing a book, and takes the opportunity to interview Tarquin about him, a project he suavely foils by talking relentlessly about himself. They spend their last night with him, and, as he gathers mushrooms to serve them a breakfast, the auspices are not good. In the last line of the novel, as they drive away after he has served them mushroom omelettes, he refers to them as "the murdered couple" (250). It is only fair to acknowledge that he gives a clear explanation of how to make a poisoned omelette.

How very, very different *The Debt to Pleasure* is from *A Catered Christmas*, though both contain recipes. In one, and in the very large class of fictions of which it is an example, the recipes are mouth-watering and sources of comfort, hence the term comfort fiction. The author clearly expects that some readers will wish to try the dishes and provides sufficient information to permit that, either discursively or in outright recipe form. The distance from that to Hamilton-Paterson's books and *The Debt to Pleasure* (and the much smaller class of fictions they embody) is the distance between attractive meals of good rich traditional comfort food and sautéed field mice or an *omelette aux champignons toxiques*, and a measure of the difference between comfort fiction and discomfort fiction, between the use of recipes to reassure and console and their use to ridicule or horrify.

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THE CURIOUS DIET OF CHARACTERS IN ANNE ENRIGHT'S NOVELS

ANA-KARINA SCHNEIDER

In the novels of contemporary Irish writer Anne Enright, characters are frequently portrayed shopping for food, cooking, eating, drinking, or organising dinner parties. Their diet, however, does not always adhere to established or accepted norms. One of Enright's minor characters confesses: "I wrote words down and I ate them, but I knew they would not keep me alive" (*What Are You Like?* 247). One of her protagonists is even rumoured to be a cannibal. A baby eats her grandmother's "rubber bathing hat whose famous yellow flowers appeared in [her] nappy the next day," and the grandmother "at the thin end of the month [makes] a stew that was only vegetables—jungle stew, she called it, the carrots were 'tiger meat' and the parsnips 'camel chews'" (Enright, *The Gathering* 99, 184). Food, famine and consumerism are frequent tropes in Enright's work, and they are central to her treatment of women's experiences and women's identities. A vocal feminist whose work has participated in the momentous shift in contemporary women's writing from denunciating patriarchy to foregrounding difference and otherness, Enright writes novels which thematise aspects of women's lives that had previously been long silenced, particularly those having to do with inhabiting their bodies in satisfactory ways. Women's desires (sexual, but also for food, fashionable clothing, luxury items), their need for affection, for connecting with their families (particularly their mothers and children), but also with their own bodies—all these themes contribute to Enright's project of foregrounding the materiality of women's experiences. Enright is remarkably creative in enlisting representations of the Irish people's vexed relationship with food and drink to her preoccupation with contemporary womanhood. This essay investigates the ways in which food cultures and food practices structure representations of the material body in Enright's fiction, enabling ethical interrogations of consumption and proactive attitudes towards the commodification of women's bodies—that is, towards their transformation into "edible women," to use Margaret Atwood's evocative phrase.

Enright's career as a writer began just as Ireland was entering upon a liberal stage in its evolution. This stage was inaugurated by the election of a woman, Mary Robinson, to the Irish Presidency in 1990, and, as Patricia Coughlan shows, it "particularly affected women's experience, greatly diminishing the patriarchal character of the state by legal and social reform" (175). Women's condition did not improve overnight, and many of the earlier limitations on women's lives were replaced with others:

> in the neoliberal era where economic relations supplant social ones and individualism is the dominant model of selfhood, the drive towards style, affluence, success, and a guise of self-sufficiency places new obligations—including, ironically, the obligation to achieve pleasure—upon increasingly isolated subjects. (Coughlan 178)

Despite the persistence of such pressures, women derived a new sense of empowerment from these changes, as illustrated by Enright's radical treatment of the relationship between identity and desire. In an article about Ireland's new women writers by Justine Jordan, Enright is quoted commenting that, "[t]raditionally, Irish writing has been about breaking silences. The biggest silence has continued to be about the real lives of women." Enright's own fictional project has been to break this "biggest" of silences by dramatizing the corporeality of women's experience, the centrality to women's lives of experiences such as sexual desire, pregnancy, lactation, craving and hunger. Her representations of food, then, are part of a feminist aesthetic that interrogates the ethical implications of viewing issues such as plenty and penury, commodification and consumption as markers of women's identity and of the traditional consignment of women to the domestic sphere.

In short stories such as "Little Sister" and "Green" (in *Taking Pictures*, 2008) and novels such as *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2002) and *The Green Road* (2015), but also in her non-fiction memoir, *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood* (2004), Enright foregrounds the female body as both in need of, and a source of, nourishment. Her representations of this theme take the most varied forms, from motherhood and lactation to cannibalism, from organic farming to alcoholism, and from anorexia to interminable shopping lists and lavishly described banquets. The sensorial intensity of her writing has been widely noted, as has the explicit critique of mindless consumption and waste. The study of her representations of food offers ample opportunity for approaches that reveal issues as diverse as the gendering of consumerism; ethnicity and consumption; the banalisation of war and starvation vs. banalisation of

consumption; the commodification of the female body; consumerism and ethics; eating disorders as forms of resistance to consumerism, to name but a few. Beyond this complex critique of consumerism, however, there is also a feminine aesthetic that foregrounds the pleasure involved in eating or refusing to eat, an aesthetic that is inescapably visible in the extravagant menus and sensuous descriptions of food and eating that pervade Enright's works.

Feasts, famine and cannibalism loom particularly large in *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, a novel whose entire structure follows the logic of digestion, from appetites and cravings to evacuation and abjection.[1] A real-life Irish adventuress who had escaped the Great Famine of 1845-1849 as a child, Eliza Lynch briefly became one of the richest women in the world as the illicit consort of Paraguay's dictator, Francisco Solano López, in the 1850s and 1860s. As described by Enright, Eliza's life in Paraguay revolves around a series of banquets, picnics and dinner parties through which she attempts, mostly unsuccessfully, to consolidate her social status. As she tries to settle in, she organises a picnic aboard the *Tacuarí*, the ship on which she had arrived in Asunción, in order to placate the matriarchs of Paraguay's capital. Her guests watch an almost implausible procession of imported goods brought to the table in Sèvres porcelain: "'Truffled turkey,' . . . 'Eggs *à la neige*, pepper-cured ham, smoked eels.' . . . The eels were from Russia, the ham from Xeriga, the *foie gras* from Strasbourg" (*The Pleasure* 78). These are followed by local delicacies cooked according to the European fashion, but also, wonder of wonders, by "a heap of asparagus, sown . . . on the deck of a ship in a French port and nurtured on the voyage out . . . through the forced spring of the Atlantic passage, so that when they arrived in the high summer of Asunción the spears showed white at the roots. Ripe" (78-79). The drinks list is equally enticing, including "champagne and claret and, for the fainter-hearted, syllabub, negus and punch," as well as "canteens of strawberry juice and pineapple juice" and "bottles of Montbello water for the more dyspeptic" (78). The ladies of Asunción struggle to contain their greed yet are determined not to allow the visibly pregnant Mme Lynch to preside over her own picnic. Snubbed and thwarted, Eliza orders her servants to throw the entire meal, crockery and even tablecloth, into the river, then she gives the captain orders not to move the ship, letting the snobbish socialites stew in the sun while she sits in the shade. The episode is never forgiven by the women of Asunción's high society, to whose houses Eliza is not invited.

The picnic plays an important role in establishing Eliza's identity in the novel. In being set outdoors, it evokes Eliza's illegitimate status:

although she bears five sons and one stillborn daughter to López, he never marries her. Although López builds her a magnificent *quinta* in the suburb of La Recoleta, being unwed, she has no respectable home to invite the women of Asunción to. She therefore invites them onboard a ship, which suggests her transient role in Paraguayan history. She remains defiant, even as the women continue to despise and reject her. She is all the more objectionable because she continues to bear children to López, the visible evidence of her adultery. This minor battle of wills foreshadows the more decisive conflict between the forces of liberalisation and modernisation represented by López and his father, on the one hand, and the conservative forces in the country, on the other, and, on a larger scale, between Paraguay and the expansionist Triple Alliance of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. Moreover, the food itself and Eliza's relation to it are definitive of her character: her love of luxury and of extravagant French fashions, her greed for food and her good taste in serving it are recurrent traits that place her firmly within the sphere of illicit pleasure, rather than domesticity.

The picnic recalls another, more rustic meal Eliza had shared with López while watching a battle of the Crimean War from a neighbouring hill at the beginning of their relationship:

> She would always remember what she ate that day, the feel of it on her tongue, as through her lorgnette she watched one hundred Mishas in their Hussar jackets risk their body parts and lose them, or simply slide down the flanks of their horses to be lost underfoot. She would recall with perfect simplicity the dryness of the chicken, the honey glaze on its cold, dimpled skin; the crunch where fat met the bone; the fizz of champagne, as the guns cracked below. (Enright, *The Pleasure* 13)

The taste and texture of the food become objective correlatives for the expendability of human life and body parts during such conflicts. This association of eating with death remains one of the novel's central tropes. Eliza's own status as spectator, rather than participant, and the fact that she is eating mark her out as belonging to the class of instigators, rather than victims, of the carnage. During the War of the Triple Alliance, too, she is suspected of inciting López to ruthlessly sacrifice his army and execute those who oppose his strategies. Relatedly, she is rumoured to be a cannibal eating the flesh of soldiers during the penury that ensued. Her cannibalism is metaphoric rather than actual, and it becomes part of the broader themes of consumption and corruption that organise the entire novel. Eliza, in her turn, is "eaten" by the soldiers "with their eyes" (135).

This narrativization of war as consumption, in which Eliza is alternatively victimiser and victim, is both revealing and problematic. During the Irish Famine, an old woman had "reached out a purple knuckle to graze my cheek saying, in a soft kind of way, that she would eat me, I was so lovely and so fat" (Enright, *The Pleasure* 207). Later Eliza notes that López, too, looks at her as at "a good dinner before he eats it—the happy thing being that with Francisco Solano López the eating is never done; there is always another course, and then another" (103). Her objectification as a food item seems to justify Eliza's own excesses: she must consume because she is herself consumed by others. The War renders cannibalism more general, if more insidious: the dogs snatch the detached body parts of the wounded soldiers and in their turn become the starving soldiers' dinners. The entire world becomes a gaping maw "into which you threw bodies, perhaps your own body, as though the sky itself were starving" (135). In this context, the soldiers "did not exactly blame Eliza her portion" (135): her voraciousness becomes naturalised amidst this cyclical eating and being eaten, while the war itself is a means of feeding the earth and the starving sky. This domestication of war as eating is consistent with Enright's intention of offering a feminine alternative to male views of history in this, her only historical novel to date.

In *The Gathering* (2007), the protagonist-narrator Veronica Hegarty proffers an even more pessimistic worldview, as she briefly fears that bearing children is just a way of "feeding the grave" (79). By and large, however, in this novel, the relationship between death and eating follows the logic of mourning, whereby the death of a family member, Veronica's brother Liam, is internalised through the ritual eating of the wake dinner and funeral luncheon. At the wake, the food, though plentiful, is not extravagant, but the eating is prodigious:

> Ernest, the celibate, is particularly terrible to watch. Even my mother eats with a sudden greed, as though remembering how to do it. Some surge of recognition sends her scampering from one Ritz cracker to the next, she gets in people's way, and they are, for a tiny moment, aggrieved. The neighbours take a little on their plates and set them down, and then, after a while, they forget themselves so much as to scoff the lot. . . . my father's brother is helping himself with thick fingers. He works pragmatically fast, amused by the array of little treats, concerned to get a decent amount of food into himself before night. (Enright, *The Gathering* 202)

The pattern is repeated after the funeral: "We eat it all up. Down to the apple tart and ice cream. We do not stint. We put slabs of butter on bad

white rolls, and we ask for second cups of tea. I am inordinately interested in the food" (247). The family's greed is consistent with their eagerness to overcome the grief of having lost a relative to suicide. Veronica, who is most affected by Liam's loss, is a bemused observer of and participant in this ritual eating that brings the family together and heals old wounds. According to Freudian theories of grief, which Enright is familiar with,[2] eating in such circumstances is an act of symbolic cannibalism, whereby the bereaved consciously incorporate the deceased as part of the normal mourning process. Accepting food is a sign that the bereaved have accepted the reality of their loss and are ready to separate from the lost object. As a result, they become free to form new attachments (Freud 154). The experience of communally breaking bread helps Veronica begin to confront her grief and deal with the guilt of having failed to prevent her brother's suicide, so that by the end of the novel she can plan on having another child and calling him Liam.

Enright frequently concatenates various features of Irish identity with incidents involving food and drink. In *The Gathering*, Liam Hegarty's depression had been caused by a "crime of the flesh" (Enright, *The Gathering* 1)—he had been sexually abused as a child—and enhanced by his later alcoholism. The Catholic background, the alcoholism and the child molestation are incidents that place the novel firmly within an almost stereotypical late-twentieth-century Irish context.[3] In *What Are You Like?* (2000), when Rose Cotter, one of the twin protagonists, learns that she is Irish, she is taken by her English boyfriend to a former abortion clinic turned restaurant. She finds the experience at once distasteful and epiphanic: "Most of the time, Rose did not know who she was. She was a woman. But, until now, being an English woman had not come into it. Maybe it was time to bring in food" (Enright, *What Are You Like?* 136). Being English in London had not made a difference to her, but, learning that she is actually Irish modifies her sense of identity in ways she correlates with her eating habits:

> She was a person who picked at her food. She picked at her food because she was a woman. She picked at her food because she was English, because she was Irish. She picked at her food . . . because she had a famine gene, or a food-picking gene, or because when she was young her mother told her to sit up straight and not wolf her food. She picked at her food because she was middle class. (136)

The first sentence of this excerpt is unequivocal about Rose's equation of her food-picking with her identity, rather than a quirk of her behaviour. Her gender, class and ethnicity are expressed by her food-picking. Her

boyfriend, by contrast, mashes the various foods together on his plate and eats greedily. Rose speculates that gendered eating behaviour might be caused by a cultural privileging of male children: "Less time at the breast if you're a girl. The thorough, satisfied boy child. The fearful, precise girl child. The knife-and-fork man. The anorectic" (137). Although not an anorectic herself, she can see how maternal behaviour, signified here as breastfeeding, can lead to psychopathology, and wonders to what an extent her biological mother's rejection has caused her own "hole in her head" (140). However, she finds this speculation unsatisfying, as it does not help her understand "what it meant to be 'Irish'" (139). Having been educated by a middle-class English adoptive mother, Rose associates her frugality with her upbringing, but her newly-discovered Irishness, in its historical association with poverty and famine, adds an entirely new dimension to this aspect of her identity. A long history of destitution, orphanhood and exile is evoked by Rose's experience of dining at the abortionist's clinic.[4] Rose's identity thus emerges as the intersectional result of oppressions and discriminations that devolve from her gender, ethnicity, class, upbringing and historical circumstances.

In Enright's first novel, *The Wig My Father Wore* (1995), food-related imagery is similarly associated with selfhood, specifically with the instability of young working women's identity in a changing world. Coughlan comments on the implausible recipes that pad the walls under the wallpaper in protagonist Grace's living room: "In the rubbing, mincing, chopping, simmering, and blanching . . . Enright finds an inspired language for this whole underlying anxiety about incorporation and about the leaching away of selfhood which *Wig* stages so vividly" (185). The stress on washing, covering and blanching, Coughlan shows, indicates the sexual anxiety and prudery of an earlier generation, also signalled by the father's eponymous wig. Grace's decision to rip off the wallpaper and whitewash the walls suggests the changing mores of the 1980s. Her relationship to food, however, continues to be marked by anxieties of various descriptions. When she and her co-workers fear that the television show they are producing, LoveQuiz, might be axed by the broadcaster that employs them, they go to the cafeteria and eat

> food that tastes like our own lives cooked up, cooled down and reheated. I have paranoid peas, with manipulated mashed potatoes and a web of intrigue on the side. Frank has Pork du Prince a la Machiavelle with chicanery chips and stuff-you-stuffing in a worried gravy. The researchers have Fuck You Foie Gras and Sole on the Dole. None of us can face dessert. (Enright, *The Wig* 122)

The bland cafeteria dishes are thus spiced up by phonetic associations with recent rivalries and apprehensions. Grace's dissatisfaction with her work, suggested here by her bizarre fare, effectively leads to a crisis of identity that is resolved by the end of the novel by her decision to resign from the broadcaster and become a single mother instead. Enright's figuration of that decision is the novel's closing image of milk spilling from a carton in Grace's basket as she rides her bicycle in the rural west of Ireland (215).

Although Enright's linguistic inventiveness creates humorous effects that enhance the social satire, it also serves as an instance of a broader destabilisation of signifying systems as diverse as moral codes, sexual mores, even social hierarchies, but also the mass media and language itself. Like many of Enright's protagonists, Grace is a young professional specialising in communication. Her involvement with language allows Enright to showcase her own stylistic prowess. Another communicator, Gina Moynihan in *The Forgotten Waltz* (2011), describes her occupation as a translator in terms of drinks: she specialises in the languages of "the beer countries, not the wine," she tells us (12). Her friends and acquaintances signify their middle-class status by giving up smoking, by not eating the chicken skin at parties, by knowing the price of Krug champagne, and by participating in wine and chocolate tastings in Switzerland. Set in the years leading up to the economic crash of 2008-2009, *The Waltz* is in many ways an updated version of *The Pleasure*, that other novel about a polyglot adulteress who travels the world and enjoys its diverse delights. Thus, if in *The Wig* food usually signifies more private anxieties having to do with sexuality or self-image, in *The Waltz*, as in *The Pleasure*, it is a marker of social insecurity in a world that demands proof of one's sophistication and acceptability. Like *The Pleasure*, *The Waltz* is a satire of Ireland's Celtic Tiger years and the excesses they accommodated.

If in *The Wig* Enright's inventiveness with food-related language reflects an age of change, in *The Green Road* (2015), as in *The Waltz*, it suggests an age of abundance and intemperance. *The Green Road* is the story of the four Madigan siblings and their mother, Rosaleen, during the decades of liberalisation and increasing cosmopolitanism at the turn of our century. In preparation for a family reunion for Christmas 2005, Constance, the eldest of the children and now a mother of three, goes on an epic shopping expedition that is worth quoting at some length:

> . . . celery, carrots, parsnips . . . Sausage and sage for the stuffing, an experimental bag of chestnuts, vacuum packed . . . a case of Prosecco on special offer to wrap and leave on various doorsteps and . . . eight frozen pizzas in case the kids rolled up with friends. Frozen berries. Different ice cream. She got wine, sherry, whiskey, fresh nuts, salted nuts, crisps,