

ENGL 4384: Senior Seminar  
Student Anthology

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Spring 2014  
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Department of English & Philosophy

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UNIVERSITY *of*   
West Georgia

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# “Savage Delight”: Food and Eating in Literature and Popular Culture



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# “Savage Delight”: Food and Eating in Literature and Popular Culture

Dr. Patrick Erben



If the adage that “We are what we eat” is true, then food reflects and determines our identity, our subjectivity, and our very being. Food can epitomize cultural refinement; industrial production and genetic manipulation today highlight our increasing separation from food sources; and yet, eating still links us to our own brutish nature. When he “caught a glimpse of a woodchuck stealing across [his] path,” Henry David Thoreau reported in *Walden*, he “felt a strange thrill of savage delight, and was strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw; not that I was hungry then, except for that wildness which he represented.” We eat so we may live, but more intriguingly, we desire what food represents—fullness and fulfillment, sensory stimulation, love and sex, family and community, tradition and cultural authenticity, diversion and excitement, a return to our primal selves, a remembrance of things past, and even a communion with the divine. And yet, our superabundance and excess consumption of food contrasts sharply with food scarcity at home and across the world.

Literature (as well as music, film, visual art) abounds in images of food and the actions of producing (growing, killing, or engineering), preparing, craving, eating, sharing, wasting, and digesting it. Our seminar unpacked and dug into the many intersections—both real and metaphorical—between food and language which writers and artists have prepared for us. We studied a smorgasbord of texts, films, and images and whetted our appetites for theoretical and critical interrogation. Like true foodies, we sampled and critiqued these works, and collaboratively

created an anthology of essays demonstrating that, as English majors, we have become true connoisseurs of arts and letters.

# Food Memory: Nikki Giovanni, Edna Lewis, Scott Peacock and the Southern Food Revival

Katie Anderson



i mean its my house  
and i want to fry pork chops  
and bake sweet potatoes  
and call them yams  
cause i run the kitchen  
and i can stand the heat

—Nikki Giovanni, excerpt from “My House”

Historically, Southern culture has marginalized certain populations, particularly based on racism, homophobia, and sexism. The entire region faces stigma from the national and international world based on its divisive, exclusionary history. Yet, one positive aspect of southern culture can usually elicit a harmonious response from inside and outside the south: the deliciousness of the food. Whether it's on Food Network, in glossy magazines, or in most every southern novel, traditional southern food makes the mouth water and the stomach growl. Food and southern culture go together like black-eyed peas and cornbread. Many a reader knows how Margaret Mitchell's *Scarlett* enjoys a southern feast at the pre-Civil War party and, after the war, famously declares she will never go hungry again while holding a dirty, limp turnip. Eudora Welty writes about the bounty of southern funeral food in *The Optimist's Daughter*. Images of church picnics, family reunions, and Sunday dinners abound in southern literature. Proustian

memories of these happy gatherings as “madeleine moments” allow the food to act as a conduit to the past.

Yet, despite Proust’s best efforts to convince us otherwise, not all Madeleine moments are necessarily happy, especially for society’s outcasted others. In southern culture, historically and still today, African-Americans, women, and the LGBT community have all been considered “less than” and, to varying degrees, have not been afforded the same rights as their white male counterparts. The Madeleine moment for a repressed, oppressed southerner would be much more complicated than simple nostalgia for a warm and fuzzy past. Many marginalized southerners have left their homes for greener, more open-minded pastures. Today, urban sprawl continues to grow around Atlanta, arguably the “Capital of the South,” while south Georgia’s population declines dramatically each year. This move toward urban areas in the South was preceded by the Great Migration of blacks in the ‘40s, moving from the rural South to the urban North, taking their food memories and their recipes with them.

Nikki Giovanni, renowned African-American poet, was just two months old in 1943 when she and her family moved from Knoxville, Tennessee to Cincinnati, Ohio in search of better job opportunities. She went on as an adult to write food poetry that deals with her memories of spending summers and her high school years in Tennessee with her grandparents (Fowler 42); through this food poetry, Giovanni revisits her Tennessean ancestors, connecting with them in the present, and allowing them to live on through her writing. Similarly, the southern food about which she writes has inspired a cultural revival of traditional southern cooking with a modern makeover; this revival has had a major impact on the national food scene. By destabilizing the idea of the “Madeleine moment,” southern food memory can act less as nostalgia and more as empowerment by connecting certain marginalized southerners in surprising ways, by combining the old and new, and resulting in a more heterogeneous, inclusive community at the southern dinner table.

Giovanni’s sense of home and community in her writing rests in her grandparents’ home in Tennessee. This southern, extended family home symbolizes safety, happiness, warmth, and security for her, although she actually spent most of her childhood in the North. Because her parents grew up in the South, she was raised with southern Appalachian values; however, Giovanni identifies those values less as “southern” but more as “black” (Fowler 43). Often, white Americans lose sight of or have never made the association that many aspects of southern culture have their

roots in Africa: the abiding presence and importance of the past, the importance of place, the significance of oral tradition, and the centrality of food (Fowler 43). Colonization and the slave trade led to cultural blending that affected virtually every area of life including food. Slaves learned European cooking techniques from white plantation owners and used local ingredients along with traditional African and Native American ingredients and techniques to produce a unique southern cuisine (Davis 3). In the 1960s, according to the Association of Black Women Historians, “up to 90 per cent of working black women in the South labored as domestic servants in white homes” (Carmon 1). Even today, white women in the south are still hiring black cooks to help in their homes with daily meals and/or parties. The African-American contribution to southern food culture has not received the attention it deserves because of the marginalization of African-Americans and women in the south.

African-American female poet Giovanni celebrates her southern, black tradition in her appreciation of the past, her ability for storytelling and her use of food culture to tell her stories. For her, the ancestor, always female, is an important presence represented in food and associated with comfort, warmth, and safety (Fowler 45). In her poem “Knoxville, Tennessee,” she discusses liking summer best, with all of the foods associated with summer in the south: “fresh corn,” “okra,” “greens,” “cabbage,” “and lots of barbeque,” “buttermilk,” “and homemade ice cream at the church picnic.” She discusses her love of summer, which to her means food, her grandmother, gospel music, and being warm. Her food memories of southern summers contribute to the last two lines of the poem, which refer to being warm “all the time / not only when you go to bed / and sleep,” allowing her to be comforted when she is not in her grandmother’s home in Tennessee. Although the poem is about the summer, the title is “Knoxville, Tennessee” rather than “Summer” (Fowler 46). Giovanni remembers her warm summers as having a distinct sense of place and community.

In her poem “Legacies,” Giovanni connects with her southern-ness via her grandmother’s homemade rolls. The grandmother wants to teach her little granddaughter the art of making the rolls. The little girl “knew / even if she couldn’t say it that / that would mean when the old one died she would be less / dependent on her spirit so / she said / “i don’t want to know how to make no rolls” (6-11). The grandmother speaks proudly, it says, wanting to share her knowledge and skill, but the child refuses. Again, southern food plays a significant role in her work about

her grandmother, familial bonds, traditions, and passing the torch; elements that are all a part of southern culture. She also refers to her desire to be with her grandmother, even though she grew up mostly away from her, and knows there will come a time when her grandmother will die. Her grandmother will live on through the roll recipe and technique; if the little girl does not learn it, presumably her grandmother will not die. The poem is a bittersweet food memory from a southern childhood that deals with an aspect of the circle of life that the speaker could not accept at the time, as a young child.

To contrast the goodness of southern food memories with bad news, Giovanni writes about it again in "When My Phone Trembles." Here, she writes that when her phone "trembles" after midnight, she immediately assumes bad news is on the other end. She never thinks "good news: someone's birthday, an overseas friend...I never smell / apples baking / or nutmeg dancing / on sweet potatoes / yeast rolls rising / fish frying...I always look / for a way to hold / myself / together / being a 60s person / I know / you have to be / strong" (5-22). To her, these food smells are as good as a birthday, or hearing from a friend who is far away. Food, specifically southern comfort foods from her childhood, equals the safety of good news. The reader gets the impression that in order to hold herself together, the speaker remembers the community of her Tennessean roots, because being a "60s person" who is both black and female took strength and connection with others to get through. The phrase "60s person" overflows with meaning for marginalized southerners and Americans: the political and social upheaval of Civil Rights, women's rights, and gay rights and the violence associated with these movements would understandably result in a 60s person's longing for a safe place. For Giovanni, that place was a connection to the strong, southern, black women of her youth.

Not only was her grandmother and family a foundation of her southern food memory poetry, but also an elderly couple in Southwest Virginia, who were friends of hers while she taught at Virginia Tech and about whom she wrote in "A Theory of Pole Beans (for Ethel and Rice.)" Giovanni compares the black couple to pole beans and states in a recording with the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities that they are "ordinary yet substantial...and the people who eat pole beans are also ordinary and substantial, and that they show us we are here and we will be" ("Pole Beans"). The poem states "pole beans are not everyone's / favorite they make you think of pieces of fat back / corn bread / and maybe a piece of fried chicken / they are the staples of things

unquestioned / they are broken and boiled” (Fowler 47). Yet, despite the couple’s difficult time and place, they still “bought a home reared a family / supported a church and kept a mighty faith / in your God and each other”; hence, they did not just survive, they endured. Giovanni ends with reassurance that “your garden remains in full bloom,” as a nod to their teachings being carried on and a hope for the future (Fowler 48). The choice of memorializing an average person in poetry makes the ordinary extraordinary; likewise, Giovanni makes pole beans worth studying and expands readers’ understanding of this couple and of pole beans in a broader sense. Her connection to this couple through southern food communicates that while they were living their lives, she was paying attention, learning life lessons from them, and through her poetry, will continue to teach their history and their lessons.

The elevation of the everyday individual through southern food links Giovanni with another native Virginian, famous southern chef Edna Lewis, who came from humble beginnings. In Giovanni’s poem, “The Only True Lovers Are Chefs or Happy Birthday, EDNA LEWIS”, she acknowledges the “Grand Dame of Southern Cooking”, aka Lewis, which allows a combining of food, black women, and ancestral power and legacy. To conserve space, an excerpt is provided:

...so yes this is a love poem of the  
highest order because the next best cook in the world,  
my grandmother being the best, just had a birthday  
and all the asparagus and will greens and quail and  
tomatoes on the vines and little peas in spring and half  
runners in early summer and all the wonderful things  
that come from the ground said EDNA LEWIS is  
having a birthday and all of us who love all of you  
who love food wish her a happy birthday because we  
who are really smart know that chefs make the best  
lovers (Fowler 50).

Here, while Giovanni wishes celebrity chef and famed cookbook author Lewis a happy birthday, she also celebrates her grandmother and all black female ancestry who nourished and loved their family and friends through their cooking. She notes that the real cooking knowledge comes from the heart, and that grandmothers teach us that valuable piece of knowledge (Fowler 50). Coincidentally, like Nikki Giovanni, Edna Lewis (1916 - 2006) was also one of the Great Migrators to the North.

She grew up in Freetown, Virginia, a town of freed slaves (her ex-slave grandparents were two of the founders), and was forced to move during the Depression to find work. She left for New York City and went to work as a cook at Cafe Nicholson (*Fried Chicken and Sweet Potato Pie*). Uprooted southern blacks used food practices to maintain familial and community bonds in the North. Like Lewis, many black women used cooking as an economic opportunity, progressing from exploited cooks to entrepreneurs (Davis 3). The idea that southern blacks used food to keep a sense of community becomes even more significant when considering that so many black families were separated during slavery and that tracing their ancestral roots is nearly impossible.

At Cafe Nicholson, Lewis became acquainted with the expat southern literati, several of whom were homosexual: Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, and William Faulkner, among others. She loved Capote and his humor and enjoyed feeding him biscuits and gravy (*Fried Chicken and Sweet Potato Pie*). Most of the famous southern writers of the time ate her food, providing them a connection to their home. She became quite famous and a writer herself, authoring the Southern cooking bible, *The Taste of Country Cooking*, in 1976. The style of cooking in her cookbook was the focused and “close-to-nature cooking” of her childhood; the cookbook became more of a study of Southern cooking than just a collection of recipes, and helped change the stereotypes of brown, fried Southern food into a more sophisticated, nuanced cuisine; hence, a Southern food revival. In 1989, she said of her cooking, “As a child in Virginia, I thought all food tasted delicious. After growing up, I didn’t think food tasted the same, so it has been my lifelong effort to try and recapture those good flavors of the past” (Asimov and Severson 1). Her cookbook was a form of “life story” or autobiography; it allowed Lewis to recall a history and memorialize a place that no longer existed (Zafar 32). Both Lewis and Giovanni achieved this goal in their writing, despite living through some of the most volatile years of racial strife in our country. Their food memories and writing helped them connect in a positive way to a culture that did not accept them as equals. Through cooking, Lewis stayed connected to her past while also helping her fellow southern transplants/creative types stay connected. By doing so, these individuals bonded, forming their own subculture—a modern community based in southern food tradition that included African-Americans, women, and the LGBT community.

After retiring in the mid-90s, Lewis founded the Society for the Revival and Preservation of Southern Food, and one of the members

was James Beard award winner Scott Peacock, who at the time was an Alabama chef working at the Governor's mansion. They developed a close friendship and became the "Odd Couple of Southern Cooking": an elderly, African-American lady and a young, gay, male chef. Their bond developed over a desire to preserve classic Southern dishes. Peacock said that meeting Lewis convinced him that cooking southern food was the path he was meant to take. He told *The Advocate*, "When we met I was taking the first tenuous steps out of the closet and was planning to move from Georgia to Italy to reinvent myself. Miss Lewis was working in New York City, but she thought a few good cooks should stay in the South. I stayed... Over time Miss Lewis helped me see the value of myself—as a Southerner, a cook, a gay man, and a human being (not necessarily in that order.) She never passed judgment, celebrating me for exactly who I was, yet her unconditional love inspired me to always strive toward being a better person" (Buhl 1). Southern food and food memory brought these two marginalized Southerners together and helped them form their own community, which in turn influenced Southern culture as a whole as they became roommates, went on to found the Southern Foodways Alliance and wrote a successful cookbook together, *The Gift of Southern Cooking*. He acted as her caretaker for six years until her death in 2006.

This "odd couple," or—even better—this dynamic duo helped reframe the meaning of "southern" as well as southern food. In an essay written by Lewis, she describes what "southern" meant to her:

Southern is a spring breakfast of herring with its roe...Southern is a meal of early spring wild greens—poke sallet before it is fully uncurled, wild mustard, dandelion, lamb's-quarter, purslane, and wild watercress...Southern is Truman Capote...Southern is a guinea hen, a bird of African origin...Southern is a moss rose, a camellia, a buttercup, a tea olive tree sending its fragrance through the air and into the kitchen...Southern is William Faulkner...Southern is desserts galore—coconut cake, caramel layer cake, black walnut whiskey cake, groom's wedding cake, fig pudding, mincemeat pie...Southern is Carson McCullers...Southern is all the unsung heroes who passed away in obscurity...We are now faced with picking up the pieces and trying to put them into shape, document them so the present-day young generation can see what southern food was like. The foundation on which it rested was pure

ingredients, open-pollinated seed—planted and replanted for generations—natural fertilizers. We grew the seeds of what we ate, we worked with love and care (Lewis 2-5).

Lewis dedicated her life to documenting and teaching the Southern way of eating, helping future generations understand how their ancestors lived. She included information on the past not as a way to simply remember the good old days through misty eyes, but so that later generations would carry on (Zafar 44). The word *sankofa* is an African (Akan) word that means returning to the past to progress in the present; the term represents a continuance of a “communal, diasporic identity.” Lewis’s choice of African-inspired clothing exemplified how she linked the present, the southern American past, and the African diaspora (Zafar 45). This term describes the specific experience that southern Americans like Giovanni, Lewis, and Peacock have used to go beyond mourning the past to commemorating in the present and *sankofa*. Their individual and communal journeys connected them in unique ways to enable them to form their own community within the mainstream southern subculture to the degree that they and their food memory helped spark today’s national local and organic food movements.

Lewis and Peacock’s organization merged with the Southern Foodways Alliance, based at the University of Mississippi and led by John T. Edge. The Alliance’s mission statement hints at the ideas behind the *sankofa*: “The Southern Foodways Alliance documents, studies, and celebrates the diverse food cultures of the changing American South. We set a common table where black and white, rich and poor—all who gather—may consider our history and our future in a spirit of reconciliation” (southernfoodways.org). The SFA awarded Edna Lewis with their first Lifetime Achievement Award, and Edge credits her with “[singing] the gospel of local and farm-fresh,” along with other white, male southern figures like Jimmy Carter, Paul Prudhomme, Frank Stitt, and Bill Neal (Wolf 5). Edge asserts that the southern regional cuisine movement began because of the complex racial history and the interplay of Western European, West African, and Native American influences on the food. He also argues that the South was an agriculturally-centered region for a longer period than any other region in the U.S., and the farm-to-table concept was easier to renew. When questioned about whether southern food can bridge the gap between cultural differences, Edge points out that while a common food history can help bring people of different race and class together, it can also be a “stratifying” force. In order to

avoid that obstacle, the SFA puts the barbecue pit master on the same pedestal as the white-jacketed chef in the fine dining restaurant. Edge and his fellow Alliance members want a celebration of all people who devote their lives to cooking, and not just the hipster farmer who has recently discovered food (Wolf 3).

Clearly, the diverse problems in the south that have marginalized individuals by race, class, gender, and sexual orientation can not easily be solved by a plate of fried chicken. Even so, a shared food culture and thoughtfully prepared regional cuisine can bring diners of different backgrounds to the symbolic table. Some of the best restaurants can be found by looking in the parking lot or peeking in the door: if the cars outside are a varied mix of Mercedes, Toyotas, pickup trucks, and station wagons, and the diners range from white collar to blue collar and all colors in between, the food usually has a great reputation. The enjoyment of a meal in such a place comes from more than the taste of the delicious food; the community of people from all walks of life gives a sense of shared experience and connection with neighbors. If diners can find common ground through regional food, perhaps there is hope, but certainly no guarantee, that they can find common ground on weightier issues. When diners write about their food culture in poetry like Nikki Giovanni, or in cookbooks like Edna Lewis, or when they devote their life to cooking regional cuisine like Scott Peacock, they create a form of expression that has the power to draw in other like-minded individuals. For marginalized members of southern culture, art and food can help them commemorate their past and keep moving forward together. The future will depend on how we tend our cultural garden; only then will we discover whether, as Giovanni wrote, our garden “remains in full bloom” (Fowler 48).

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# Mindful Teaching: Overcoming Malnutrition and ADHD in the Classroom

Katie Boatwright



As an educator, having an awareness of the major aspects of young students' lives that affect their ability to learn is extremely important. Educating oneself about the obstacles inhibiting students' success in school requires consideration of their development and their mental and physical health. The documentary *A Place at the Table* recognizes that hyperactive behavior, often diagnosed in American children as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), is significantly affected by, and often even caused by, sensitivity to the modern diet. Findings relating hyperactivity to diet are scientifically proven facts of which the general public should be knowledgeable and to which teachers should be pedagogically responsive. I have found through both research and personal experience that many teachers are unaware of the influence that they have over the rising epidemic of ADHD diagnoses and the use of harsh psychostimulants used to treat the disorder. Although teachers are likely unable to intervene medically, they have considerable influence over parents' decisions to have their children tested and treated based on what the teacher observes and reports regarding the child's behavior in the classroom. Instead of referring parents to seek the quick and easy fix of harsh psychostimulants drugs like Vivance, Adderall, and Ritalin, the most best action that teachers can take is to structure their methods of teaching and classroom management in a way that considers the characteristics of their students' development (both mental and physical) as well as additional hyperactivity that can often be attributed to the children's hunger and/or consumption of low qual-

ity, common preservatives. Every teacher will inevitably have to teach students who not only struggle with ADHD, but are also then treated with prescription drugs and suffer from side effects such as loss of appetite, mood swings, head aches, and restlessness. The amount of children being treated for ADHD in the United States is increasing rapidly, which is why it is so important for teachers to react in the best way that we can, by participating in decision-making regarding the foods that students eat (both in the classroom and outward into the community), by structuring lessons and classroom management procedures in ways that are conducive to various student behaviors, and by advocating for our students towards more natural methods of handling both hyperactivity and malnutrition in the school setting.

In today's public schools, ADHD is considered a learning disability and qualifies diagnosed students for special education classes, which are often separate from those of their peers. Snowman and McCown write in *Psychology Applied to Teaching*, "Many children who have a learning disability are also diagnosed as having ADHD... Some studies have found that as many as thirty percent of children with ADHD exhibit aggressive behaviors that are consistent with the psychiatric diagnosis of conduct disorder." The text goes on to explain that ADHD and conduct disorders are seen "more frequently among children from urban homes than suburban homes" and are associated with "significant social, behavioral, and academic problems" (205). Minimal inference is required to realize that the quality and quantity of food and other environmental factors in urban (often lower income) homes blatantly parallels the statistics both for ADHD diagnoses and aggressive behaviors. The text continues, "The American Psychiatric Association recognizes three types of children with ADHD: (1) children who are predominantly inattentive, (2) children who are predominantly hyperactive and impulsive, and (3) children who exhibit a combination of all three behaviors" (Snowman 205). These descriptions likely sound familiar to anyone who is well versed in developmental psychology or teaching education because they are also age-level characteristics of normal children from the earliest years of education through adolescence. The recognition of similarities between normal behaviors and those diagnosable for ADHD does not invalidate the existence of a neurological cause for the symptoms associated with ADHD, but rather calls attention to the specific care with which adults must consider the underlying causes of what may be perfectly normal behavior in children that are labeled as having a learning or behavioral disorder.

First and foremost, teachers and parents must realize that an ADHD diagnosis for a child is very serious. Rafalovich expresses this severity in his article, “Disciplining Domesticity: Framing the ADHD Parent and Child;” he begins, “In applying the ADHD mental disorder label to a child, adults take on the responsibility for structuring the child’s life to meet the perceived treatment requirements in conjunction with the child’s life” (373). He goes on to explain that this includes educators, clinicians, and parents equally. Each individual that plays a role in the student’s support system should take his or her role very seriously and do the necessary research before seeking or suggesting medical treatment. Historically, treatment for ADHD would be sought out as a result of various behaviors observed in a child that seemed to deviate from what was, at the time, “normal.” Even today, an appropriate test is not mandatory for a medical doctor to prescribe narcotics for the treatment of ADHD. “For a student to be judged as having ADHD, the symptoms have to appear before the age of seven; they have to be displayed in several settings, such as at home, at school, and at play, and they have to persist over time” (Snowman 205). Although this is the standard set by the American Psychiatric Association, ADHD can be diagnosed at the doctor’s will for a variety of vague and questionable characteristics, such as impulsivity or talkativeness. For this reason, teachers should consistently consider, and update if necessary, their knowledge of child and adolescent development in order to more carefully distinguish normal developmental characteristics and behaviors from those that signal genuine disorders. For instance, psychologist Jerome Kagan categorizes all students as either “impulsive or reflective, depending on their strategy for problem-solving”, but without knowing this information a teacher might assume that any student who is impulsive has a disorder as opposed to a propensity towards a completely normal learning style (Snowman 125). If a child is found to have ADHD, he or she is likely prescribed a mainstream drug containing methylphenidate, which has a chemical structure and side effects most similar to cocaine. Authors of a study of methylphenidate write, “a recent report shows that more than seven million people in the U.S. have abused ADHD stimulants and as many as 750,000 teenagers and young adults show signs of addiction” (Yong 2915). Teachers and parents need to be aware of these alarming statistics so that they realize the importance of not only understanding normal stages of development, but how to incorporate that understanding into their teaching methods as well.

As a student teacher of a sixth grade public school English class, I recently experienced all the different parts of the ADHD machine working together at once, specifically the role of diet and nutrition. I saw the children arriving early in the morning, either lethargic and hungry from missing breakfast (I asked them regularly if and what they were eating at home) or wired from just having eaten a sugary toaster pastry or other quick meals. I saw many of them exhibiting disruptive behavior, while some of them were completely isolated yet unable to complete class work. At lunch, many of them did not eat at all, and it was not common to see a student bring a sufficient lunch from home. At least once per week, teachers collaborated to sell sugary sodas to raise money for the school and handed out candy to award high achievers in class. When I began attending parent conferences, I watched parent after parent shed tears for concern of their child's academic and behavioral issues and, in nearly every meeting I attended, one or more teachers suggested that the child be tested for ADHD or take an increased dosage of current treatment. On two different occasions, teachers described behavioral issues that related to the student taking excessive trips to the bathroom, which immediately evoked my own memories of stomach pains and sickness from taking ADHD medication. Having been treated with psychostimulants myself (without ever being formally evaluated for ADHD), I was devastated to discover how many of my students were being treated with harsh drugs such as Adderall and Ritalin. I began to do research and converse with my cooperating teacher about the issue and the possibility of their diets playing a key role. As we expanded our knowledge of nutritional causes and considered our education as teachers, we began to truly see the severity of the ADHD phenomenon.

In addition to understanding various temperaments of students as normal stages of development, teachers need also to be acutely aware of the role of nutrition in controlling those temperaments. In the scientific community, the escalating amount of ADHD diagnoses in the United States is often considered an environmental health issue that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has blatantly ignored. After collecting a sufficient amount of scientific, published evidence that attributes ADHD to specific food preservatives, Bernard Weiss wrote the article "Food additives and Hyperactivity," which recognizes the FDA's apathy towards the results of studies that the Administration itself funded. Regarding the publication of a clinical trial conducted in 2007, Weiss writes, "food additives, particularly synthetic colors at levels prevailing in the diet, induce adverse behavioral responses. Many later publications

have confirmed their results.” He explains that his study should have had notable effects on the amount of diagnoses of ADHD and was funded by the FDA, yet “the FDA has remained blindly obstinate” (Weiss 241). Studies dating as far back as 1973 have claimed, and proven, that the hyperactivity in children, which is more and more frequently being diagnosed and treated as a neurological disorder, is actually a sensitivity to certain elements of the diet” (Weiss 1). Incidentally, the American Psychiatric Association found that between 1990 and 2000, the amount of children and adolescents diagnosed with ADHD in North America quadrupled from 950,000 to approximately 5 million, while the sales of psychostimulant medications rose at a nearly equal rate (Foy 450). It is not surprising that the United States, a country which relies heavily on mass production of low quality foods controlled by agribusinesses over fresh markets and local farming, is the highest in the world for diagnoses of a mental/behavioral disorder that is caused by lower quality foods. It is also not surprising that the Food and Drug Administration, which benefits from said agribusinesses and pharmaceutical sales, would stifle findings that support natural, cheaper alternatives to treating the ADHD phenomenon. Knowing this information, it then becomes the duty of the parents, local politicians, educators, and other members of the community to take an active role in finding ways to prevent adverse behavior with food choices and respond to the ADHD epidemic responsibly.

Two major ways in which teachers can control their student’s nutrition and resulting academic success include staying informed while advocating for school food programs and social welfare programs that help local hunger, and maintaining control over the food and drink choices that are made in the classroom. Instead of passing out candy for rewards in class or selling sodas to students to raise money, teachers can sell and reward students with healthier snack alternatives or small prizes like school supplies, accessories, and passes (to sit with a friend at lunch or omit a quiz) that will still make them feel validated but will not impede their ability to participate and learn.

In *A Place at the Table*, Dr. Chilton led a determined group of mothers to lobby in Washington D.C. for an increase in funds that would go towards feeding hungry children in urban city schools. Many of the mothers and their children were interviewed individually and shared the intimate struggles that they faced in school as a result of hunger and malnutrition. Dr. Chilton explains, “any type of nutritional deprivation in the first three years of a child’s life can have life-long consequences

for that child.” Considering that in 2013, thirty percent of Americans were food insecure (meaning that they do not know from where their next meal will come), it suddenly seems only logical that an increasing amount of students in the United States are exhibiting behaviors of apathy and inability to focus; they truly have bigger problems on their minds and it affects them at a cognitive level. (Goldman, *A Place at the Table*). Even at the Title One suburban middle school where I recently student taught, hunger was a very real issue among many of our students. Dr. Mariana Chilton discusses the hunger epidemic in American public schools. She explains that students suffering from hunger/malnutrition will often exhibit “constant physical sickness and infections, halted cognitive development, and an inability to work with others” (Goldman, *A Place at the Table*). A teacher who is quick to suggest the presence of ADHD might easily observe a student who does not work well collaboratively and decide that it is because he or she is talkative or impulsive. Later, they suggest to the parent that these are signs of ADHD, when really the child is suffering from symptoms of malnutrition. Such situations undoubtedly occur often in the school system, but that is not to say that it is because of any insidious motives of the teacher or parents. Neufeld and Foy articulate one of the common beliefs that is often included in dialogue about resisting the ADHD phenomenon; “One troubling and very real possibility is that ADHD could be used wittingly or unwittingly to absolve teachers, schools, and caregivers from playing any casual or facilitative role in the troubling behaviors of children and youth—even when such absolution was unwarranted, or at least arguable” (Foy 455). Although the diagnosis and treatment of ADHD as an easy way out of more strategic intervention is a notable theory, it is unreasonable to assume that this is always or even most commonly the case. Most often, child and adolescent students are referred by educators to seek evaluation for the disorder and are taken to do so by parents because both authorities are completely unaware of the true causes of specific behavior and the detriments of mainstreamed drug treatment. Presently, most are unaware because this is a relatively modern issue and the adults treating the children neither followed the same diet of questionable chemicals and additives nor experienced the physical and mental wear from regular intake of psychostimulant drugs. Today’s adults must assume the responsibility of educating ourselves on the best ways to raise healthy children and teens so that we embrace their differences, just as we teach them to do with one another.

One positive response that that teachers can demonstrate is to embrace the personality differences in our students as opposed to “other-ing” those who are more difficult to teach because of behavioral responses to food or medications. In 1890, researcher William James described children who would likely be diagnosed as having ADHD today; he considered the difference in character as “normal” and called it “explosive will.” He wrote, “There is a normal type of character, for example, in which impulses seem to discharge so promptly into movements that inhibitions get no time to arise. These are the “dare devil” and “mercurial” temperaments, overflowing with animation, and fizzling with talk...”(Foy 253). Teachers who assume a more positive outlook on their students’ unique temperaments will be most effective towards school-aged children. Teachers know that students are driven by high expectations and they will perform accordingly, so why not institute the same philosophy as we deal with hyperactivity? Students of Educational Psychology learn that “In 2005, children who were judged to be at risk for academic failure because they demonstrated such maladaptive behaviors as aggression, defiance, lack of sustained attention, and poor ability to follow instructions (the last two characteristics being directly connected with ADHD), scored at about the same level on a standardized test as their not-at-risk peers when they experienced high levels of emotional and instructional support from their teachers. These teachers were characterized as having ‘exciting, pleasant classroom atmospheres, high expectations of students, and overall awareness of students’ needs, moods, interests, and capabilities’” (Snowman 157). In *A Place at the Table*, when fifth grade teacher Leslie Nichols realized that one of her students was struggling to focus because of hunger, she not only helped provide food, but she got creative and made a sticker for the student’s desk that was made with bright colors and said “FOCUS!” as a visual reminder for when she lost focus. The student explains in the film how much the small gesture was able to help her pay attention in class (Goldman, *A Place at the Table*). A teacher like Ms. Nichols who is conscious of her students’ individual needs might also use especially active students to help pass out and collect materials or lead kinesthetic activities in order to help them exercise built up energy.

Teachers must be cognizant of the connection between diet and ADHD and prepared with specific pedagogical solutions to issues that arise in the classroom as a result of both ADHD symptoms and side effects of psychostimulant drugs. For most teachers, the most familiar term that can be associated here is “differentiation”. To differentiate

simply means that the teacher changes methods of presenting material, studying concepts, applying learned material, and evaluating students for mastery. In essence, this allows for the individual needs of students to be met instead of utilizing one method of learning and leaving the others to struggle, fall behind, or become mislabeled as having a disorder or deficit. Snowman and McCown explain in *Psychology Applied to Teaching*, “Because the typical classroom contains two dozen or more students who collectively exhibit several [learning] styles, teachers must be flexible and learn to use a variety of teaching and assessment methods so that, at some point, every student’s style is addressed” (Snowman 126). Although various learning styles and genuine behavioral disorders are admittedly two different entities, the concept of differentiation can be applied across the board to accommodate diverse groups of students. Incorporating kinesthetic activities, or simply allowing students small breaks to move from their seats would benefit hyperactive students. This is where it becomes the most difficult for teachers; they must somehow adhere to the needs of students who need movement during learning time while also minimizing distractions for students who learn in more calm and quiet settings. If it is impossible to allow students to move about, which is likely to be the case, it might help to offer the hyperactive students stress balls or other small objects that they can hold and manipulate with their hands.

Allowing snacks for students so that those on medications that cause fluctuating appetites remain comfortable would curb a great deal of disruptive behavior. In this same vein, it is important not to over-dictate students’ trips to the restroom. Structured procedures, such as carrying a pass, should be in place for using the restroom (or leaving the classroom for any other reason), but too many teachers take away restroom “privileges” as a punishment when truthfully, using the restroom is a natural human right. Unless a student begins showing patterns of misbehavior during bathroom trips, teachers of middle and upper grade students should respect the privacy of their students and trust in general that they are going for legitimate reasons, especially considering the amount of them that are prescribed diuretic ADHD medications.

Communicating with parents about having their children arrive early enough to eat school breakfast, which is often only one or two dollars, would help with issues related to students’ hunger throughout the day. Incorporating hand signals and structured rules about speaking aloud in class, as well as representing them visually in the classroom (on signs or posters) will help remind impulsive and/or talkative students to mind

the rules for discussion. Embracing social and talkative students in order to engage in meaningful discussions and help relate material is beneficial not only for those students but for other students as well.

Rewarding students with small prizes as opposed to candy would help to eliminate reactions to the artificial flavors and food dyes that affect behavior and the ability to focus. However, there are certain circumstances in which celebrations and parties call for bringing food into the classroom. In these cases, adverse reactions to food coloring and additives should be treated as an allergy and avoided in exchange for alternative foods. Teachers and parents can also reasonably decide that in some cases the child will be exposed to the food, and the adults should be prepared for possible adverse reactions that day. Still, the exceptions should be clearly communicated between the teacher and parents just as they would be with any other health concern. Taking these precautions not only benefits the student, but it also communicates to others that the teacher (and parent/s) takes the natural treatment of the student's food sensitivity seriously and helps to justify the decision to omit harsh drug treatment.

Teachers cannot feasibly feed every malnourished student nor find the cure for every mental and behavioral disorder, but we can alter our teaching methods to facilitate learning for students who suffer the effects of either, or both, dilemmas. In addition to classroom procedures, teachers can vote and take active parts in advocating for policies that help finance school lunch programs and feed hungry families in the community. Teachers are undoubtedly busy professionals, but staying informed about politics that affect students, and even laws that affect the processes of our food industry, will help to make our generation more conscious and therefore more apt to teach and care for upcoming generations. Plenty of resources and an abundance of literature are available for parents and teachers who are looking to seek information on effectively teaching students with ADHD. Most importantly, as teachers, students, parents, policy makers, and all other consumers of modern American culture, we must be aware of our health and maintain agency over our own physical and mental well being. As scientists make discoveries and advances towards understanding the human body, we are learning that more and more ailments from which we suffer are actually more closely related to our diets than we have previously believed. Education and literacy are of vital importance to our futures, but human beings cannot grow and learn if we are malnourished.

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# *Gilmore Girls, Wall-E, and The Hunger Games:* **Representations of Cultural Food Paradigms In Relation to Social Interaction and Conversation**

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Food is undoubtedly a crucial aspect of human life in regards to providing nourishment and sustainability to the body. However, it also provides a source for interaction with others, which helps sustain a healthy mind and soul. On the surface level, the main purpose of food is to eliminate hunger and maintain life, but looking at food through a social lens, the purpose changes. Consumption becomes a medium through which conversation and human connection are able to take place. The sharing of food with others transforms into a socially constructed act where people are able to build relationships, make connections, and have conversations with one another, which is a dire facet of the human experience. Without adequate social interaction with others, mental stability becomes faulty. The human race is able to sustain itself within the social domain with the support of food. Socialization relies heavily on food because it is virtually everywhere. Food is placed at the forefront of birthday parties, weddings, funerals, sporting events, and other gatherings, which transforms the act of eating into a social activity. Therefore, the biological necessity to eat has transpired into a phenomenon that incorporates food into social gatherings and ultimately fuels social interaction. However, just like many other facets of life, too much or too little of a good thing can disrupt the order and functionality of a socially constructed system. When food is over consumed or too readily available there becomes a breach in the food/socialization paradigm and conversation is inhibited. A shortage of food also causes the same disruption of interaction within the social sphere. When there is

a lack of food, especially in relation to poverty, the importance of meal-time interactions is no longer deemed necessary to every day life. The three tiered relationship between food and social interaction is rooted deeply in the television show *Gilmore Girls*, the animated film *Wall-E*, and the pop culture phenomenon *The Hunger Games*. *Gilmore Girls* represents food forging relationships in both conventional and unconventional ways, *Wall-E* epitomizes the inhibition of social interaction due to overconsumption, and *The Hunger Games* characterizes the way that a shortage of food delineates the social construct. The concept of food fueling social interaction is an important idea to contextualize because it plays a significant role within modern society. Food has the power to heal, nourish, and satisfy, but it also the power to control. The act of consuming can either act as a benefit to socialization or as a detriment. The examination of the three ways that food can affect social interaction through the individual texts shows the power that food has over relationships. Food consumed for the right reasons can yield many positive results, but consuming food in excess or out of starvation limits development, independence, and social mobility.

When a natural balance of food and consumption is found between a group of people or family, food takes a backseat to conversation, as it should. In this construct, food is still consumed primarily for nourishment, but it also provides a medium for interaction and familial bonds, which is overtly visible in *Gilmore Girls*. *Gilmore Girls* is an American comedy-drama series that aired on the CW between 2000 and 2007. The show features a diverse and eccentric cast of characters who come together to create a whirlwind of fast-paced dialogue, make an abundance of pop cultural references, and consume an array of food that interestingly allows them to form and sustain relationships of varying degrees. According to Haupt, “*Gilmore Girls* can be understood as a commentary on “correct” consumption and how that consumption informs one’s mothering performance” (Haupt 114). Food within the show allows there to be an importance placed on family mealtime, which is no longer a common aspect of primetime television programs. From the pilot episode of the show to the series finale, food plays a fundamental role in the progression of the plot as well as character development, especially for the various female characters. Ranging from the prestigious Friday Night Dinners at Emily and Richard’s to breakfast or lunch at Luke’s Diner, food creates a conversational glue that not only perpetuates conversation between the characters, but it also becomes representative of the innumerable relationships that are

intertwined into the loosely structured, fun loving plot line, namely the two binary mother/daughter relationships.

The most strained and tumultuous relationship featured on the show comes by means of the mother/daughter duo of Lorelai Gilmore, witty, free-spirited single mother, and her mother Emily Gilmore, the respectable, uptight matriarch of the Gilmore clan. Lorelai and Emily's relationship is never viewed as healthy or stable but instead is seen as cordial with tense and arduous undertones. Despite the animosity between the pair, wealthy Emily agrees to pay for Rory's, Lorelai's daughter, private school tuition in exchange for a weekly Friday night dinner in which both Lorelai and Rory are required to attend. Haupt argues, "These dinners are emblematic of the parental and patriarchal control from which Lorelai has spent her adult life attempting to extricate herself" (Haupt 115). At her first opportunity, teenage Lorelai escapes the controlling hand of her elitist family in lieu of a more simplified way of being in Stars Hollow; agreeing to a weekly dinner with Emily shows a sense of desperation to perpetuate Rory's need for advanced education. On the other hand, Emily, desiring to be a prominent member in both her daughter and granddaughter's lives, unabashedly uses her fortune as well as food to procure an inexhaustible place hold in her estranged family's world, which, for the most part, works out in both Lorelai and Emily's favor. Emily gets the opportunity to forge a relationship with Rory and rekindle a relationship with Lorelai. Lorelai is also able to reconnect with her estranged mother through a common mealtime scenario while simultaneously getting Rory the educational resources and financial stability she needs. Here, the food consumed during the dinners forges a time for bonding that otherwise would not exist.

The way in which Emily handles her elaborate Friday night dinners, dinner parties, and other food related functions also becomes representative of her economic status and class rank. According to Haupt, "Anthropological studies of women's control of domestic foodways focus on the mother as "gatekeeper"...A family's relationship with food is often a direct reflection of its class status, and the mechanics of its consumption and distribution in the home speaks to the gender hierarchy within the family" (114). Therefore, the food and the presentation of the food at the immaculate Gilmore home in Hartford, Connecticut is polished, lavish, and very much controlled by Emily. She exquisitely plans the menu, coordinates the guest list, and controls when the meal will be served. Emily is the quintessential, governing "gatekeeper" when it comes to food as well as mealtime conversation because she regulates

them both with acute force. However, despite Emily's abrasiveness, she does place a high importance on mealtime socialization with her family members. Although she might not always go about it in the normal, nurturing way, Emily is always inquiring about Lorelai and Rory's day-to-day life because she desires to share in those special moments with them, which the weekly sit down dinners allow her to do. According to Larson, Branscomb, and Wiley, "For many families, mealtimes are the only time of the day when their members come together. These shared meals have come to symbolize family unity" (1). For the most part, Friday night dinners are the only opportunity where three generations of Gilmore women are able to somewhat put aside their differences and share a cordial meal where facets of their daily lives are shared and appreciated. Emily understands the need for the family to come together and reconnect through a prototypical family dinner even if she must arrange that family mealtime through manipulation and passive aggressiveness. Food does not necessarily heal the relationship or fix all of the problems, but the dinners allow the women to share their ideas and develop functioning relationships.

Conversely, the mother/daughter relationship between Lorelai and Rory is much more acclaimed and stable than the relationship between Lorelai and Emily. Unlike the stuffy, forced bond that Lorelai shares with her mother, the connection between Lorelai and Rory is effortless and noteworthy. Lorelai is understanding, trendy, and lets Rory eat cake for dinner, which is something Emily would never allow. Brinkema states, "Lorelai and Rory are posited as best friends and enact a verbal economy that is structured around sameness, contiguity, and overlapping voices unto the singular" (15). Lorelai and Rory are not just mother and daughter. They are a tight knit family of two who live their lives without a dominant patriarchal figure and who unequivocally share a love of witty banter, shoes, and mass-produced junk food. Lorelai uses exceedingly different parenting techniques than Emily in that she does not take on a controlling mothering persona with Rory. Instead, Lorelai acts as a guiding influence and encourages Rory to partake in the same bad eating habits as she does. Their relationship thrives off of their shared interests, primarily the freedom of choice regarding food and conversational topics.

Beginning with the pilot episode of *Gilmore Girls*, the bond between Lorelai and Rory is depicted as fun loving and laid back, much like Luke's Diner, which is coincidentally the first place in which the dynamic duo is introduced. Luke's Diner, over the course of seven seasons, provides a

constant backdrop for mealtime conversation between Lorelai and Rory as well as a plethora of other town residents. At Luke's, there is a definite change in Lorelai's personality compared to her uneasy disposition while partaking in Emily's Friday night dinners. The atmosphere at Luke's allows Lorelai's true, vibrant colors to shine through in which her speech is much slower and her interactions and antidotes are much more sincere. Therefore, the hostility and tension present around the dining room table at Emily's house is symbolic of the relationship between Lorelai and her mother while Luke's Diner and Stars Hollow as a whole represents the easy going mother daughter bond that Rory and Lorelai share.

Apart from the Gilmore's Friday night dinners in Hartford, the majority of the food related scenes take place in the laid back town of Stars Hollow, which is the town where Lorelai found solace in at the age of sixteen when she found out she was pregnant with Rory. The town, made up of eccentric residents who live unconventional lives, allows Lorelai and Rory to fit into the mold of a nontraditional family in which a traditional patriarchy is not imperative and dinner at Luke's or pizza in front of the television constitutes as a formal dinner. Although the pair's eating habits are not the stereotypical means of consumption, their arrangement works best for them, which allows the two women to interact and relate in a way that places them more on equal ground instead of mother and daughter. Haupt states, "Lorelai has raised her daughter as her best friend, her partner in adventures marked by copious coffee consumption and staggering amounts of junk food...their bonding as a mother-daughter dyad is couched in the procurement and consumption of convenience foods" (121). Avoiding Emily's way of parenting, Lorelai allows Rory to make her own decisions and does not force her to adhere to an elitist set of rules in regards to life and food consumption. The Gilmore girls eat freely, which allows them to converse without restraint. Lorelai and Rory's food intake only brings them closer together and provides them with numerous bonding experiences over the course of the show.

Despite an over abundance of food that is often consumed on *Gilmore Girls*, the characters never allow the food to overtake their lives in a way that it inhibits their mobility and social interaction with others. However, that is not the case in the Disney Pixar film, *Wall-E*. *Wall-E* represents today's consumerist obsessed society in which leisurely social outings/communal meals are being replaced with the drive-thru culture. Therefore, mealtime interactions decrease, and food becomes an overly supplied commodity within the consumerist market. The film,

an environmental critique on consumerism, is set in a futuristic time where Earth is no longer inhabitable by humans due to the immense accumulation of trash and non-disposable waste created by the merciless consumer class. According to Howey, “Genre conventions and traditions of science fiction facilitate the engagement of *Wall-E* with issues of consumption and programming. The creation of a future world through extrapolation from current conditions is a common practice in science fiction; in *Wall-E*, contemporary anxieties about garbage disposal and over-consumption are extrapolated to create a compelling visual image...” (45-46). The underlying plot of *Wall-E* depends on the idea that consumerism in excess destroys not only the Earth but socialization as well. Once the Earth becomes too polluted for humans to populate, they take residence on a spaceship that is operated by a large corporation called “Buy N Large.” The company’s logo is printed on everything, which symbolizes the continued reliance on the consumerist culture despite having previously destroyed the Earth into non-use. Furthermore, the humans do not learn from their past mistakes but instead continue to partake and perpetuate the consumerist ideals even within the confines of the spaceship. The result is that overconsumption inhibits proper socialization between the people on the ship.

The humans on the spaceship, *Axiom*, travel through the large ship by means of a hoverchair and are provided with an unlimited supply of food by means of a slurpee-like cup, which draws a striking resemblance to the fast food phenomenon that is so prevalent in today’s society. With fast food chains of various kinds on every street corner mixed with subliminal messages and tempting advertisements, the desire to consume convenient, unhealthy food leads to an alarming obesity rate. According to Crawford, “In recent years ‘the environment’ has been identified as a potentially potent source of influence on eating and physical activity behaviours and thus risk of obesity...Fast foods are marketed on the basis that they are convenient, with a key aspect of that being that they are readily accessible” (249-250). Much like the consumers in today’s market, the humans featured on *Wall-E* are very much a product of the environment of which they are a part. With their food readily available at the touch of a button, they are more likely to over consume as well as allow food to become a social deterrent in regards to their interactions with others. Fast food creates an atmosphere in which it is meant to both be cooked and consumed quickly, which takes away the conversational aspect that food typically allows between groups of people during both preparation and consumption.

Many critics consider *Wall-E* to be an “environmental cautionary tale” in that it provides an overt warning, visual imagery included, about the effects that pollution and overconsumption has on the welfare of Earth. However, the film also provides a strong critique on the overarching power of consumerist culture and the big time corporations fueling that control. The companies and advertisements influence the actions of the humans and provide them with an endless supply of food and technologies that not only diminishes their need for face-to-face interaction but also takes away their individuality. Howey argues, “Through both robots and human characters, therefore, the film suggests that the ultimate danger of programming is loss of individuality. *Wall-E* reinscribes the value of the individual as the basic premise on which the critique of consumerism and environmental destruction rests” (54). Throughout the course of the film, the humans unquestioningly adhere and conform to the trends and socially constructed behaviors put in place by Buy N Large, which becomes comparable to the large companies that make up corporate America in modern consumerist society. In one eye opening scene, the corporation, Buy N Large, decides that the humans should all wear blue instead of red, so they flash a slogan on the countless jumbo trons that reads, “blue, it’s the new red” (*Wall-E*). Instantaneously, all of the humans push a button on their hoverchairs that automatically switches their clothing from red to blue. The humans are so entranced by material possessions and are used to everything coming free and easy to them that they do not realize their way of life is unhealthy and unnatural. They depend on food as a socially constructed entity that is overly consumed because the corporation says so, and their social interactions with others are severely lacking. Being confined to a hoverchair and having an overabundance of food at all times of the day does not allow food to perpetuate conversation like it typically does when food acts as the conversational glue.

Overconsumption in the film plays a crucial role in highlighting the social magnitude of over indulgence concerning both health factors and the social/familial sphere. In regards to health, the humans are immobile and rely on their hoverchairs to transport them from one place to another. Their sedentary lifestyle does not lend them the opportunity to incorporate exercise into their daily lives because they continuously eat into oblivion, which they do not see as a problem. Also, the corporation does not market exercise as a worthwhile endeavor so the humans do not see the need to partake in an activity that would label them as individual, which consequently further inhibits their physical contact

because the hoverchair provides their food and technological resources. The theme of overconsumption also takes away the familial bonds and mealtime interactions due to the fact that food is always being consumed and there is not a dire need for the family to sit down and enjoy a meal together. According to Larson, Branscomb, and Wiley, “Family mealtimes are a crossroads of both people and interactional processes. They are an occasion—a fairly unique occasion in some families—of family members’ engagement around an at least partly shared agenda” (2). In the film, the humans are never seen straying from the confines of their chairs or having personal contact with anyone let alone having a communal meal with family and friends. When the balance between food intake and social interaction gets off kilter, a disruption in social interaction as well as social individuality takes place, which leads to overwhelmingly tragic circumstances such as impersonal relationships and detached families.

Overconsumption is not the only social inhibitor in regards to food and interaction; a shortage or lack of food causes a disruption in the social realms as well, which is inextricably demonstrated in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games*. The dystopian novel focuses extensively on food or a lack thereof. Food is not a plentiful commodity, so the characters are always searching for food as a means of survival. They are never seen communicating happily over a shared, structured family dinner except within the confines of the Capitol, and even then the conversation is poised in the direction of strategy instead of communal bliss.

Before Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist, becomes “the girl on fire,” she is trying to survive day-to-day life within the poverty-stricken District 12 where starvation is a part of life: “Starvation’s not an uncommon fate in District 12. Who hasn’t seen the victims? Older people who can’t work...Stragglers through the streets. And one day, you come upon them sitting motionless against a wall or dying in the Meadow... Starvation is never the cause of death officially. It’s always the flu, or exposure, or pneumonia. But that fools no one” (Collins 28). The Capitol, the governing body of Panem, controls and limits the amount of food within the districts to the point that the poorer districts, namely District 12, have to create a black market where the residents secretly exchange commodities and food in order to survive. It is evident that the people of District 12 are financially struggling to the point where they are forced to break the law in order to make it through the day. Also, coming from a place where starving to death is an all too common occurrence, the district as a whole is not able to adequately use food to

fuel their social interactions. Instead, the lack of food causes the people's attention to avert from a sense of community to a survival mindset in which everyone looks out for themselves. The consumption of food is no longer a social activity. According to Fisher, "the overwhelming impression of District 12 is of a society bent double by manual labor, in which shopping is by no means a leisure activity" (29). The inhabitants of the twelfth district spend a majority of their time working in the coalmines for low wages, which leaves them with no time to partake in the preparation and consumption of a normal family dinner on a regular basis. The Capitol takes away many privileges and freedoms of the people, including the opportunity to bond with both family and friends over a hot, nourishing meal.

Furthermore, the shortage of both food and mealtime conversation in the district contributes to a lack of development and social skills for the children, which is represented through Prim, Katniss' younger sister. According to Larson, "Mealtimes provide special potential for fostering development, first, because they are a context in which children are a captive audience, at least for the few minutes it takes them to eat. In addition, mealtimes provide opportunities for parents to model, coach, monitor, and control children's behavior, as well as opportunities for children to be apprentices in meaningful activities" (3-4). Prim, because of her family's economic status and deceased father, is not provided with a basis for fundamental interaction during mealtime like other children in the more affluent districts. The mother is weathered and beaten down from years of living a stressful, impoverished life, and Katniss focuses on hunting in order to provide meat for the family, so the two "authority" figures in Prim's life feel the need to coddle her instead of nourishing her developmental progress. At the age of twelve, Prim behaves and speaks more like a toddler, which makes Katniss feel as if she needs to protect her younger sister: "I protect Prim in every way I can, but I'm powerless against the reaping. The anguish I always feel when she's in pain wells up in my chest and threatens to register on my face. I notice her blouse has pulled out of her skirt in the back again and I force myself to stay calm" (Collins 15). No one has the time to teach Prim the necessities of life because they are dealing with stressful, adult issues. Mealtime typically lends the opportunity to learn valuable bits of information from family and friends, but Prim is not given that luxury because jovial, sit down dinners in District twelve are few and far between. Therefore, a shortage of food creates a dynamic in which social interaction is not regarded as a crucial aspect of human existence, which proves to be detrimental to

the development of children's social skills and independence. The adults who lack social interaction suffer as well. Typically, food allows adults to converse and discuss important issues, but when food is in short supply, people are not able to vent as easily. All in all, a lack of food directly causes a breach in nourishment and sustainability of the body, but it indirectly causes a limitation of free-spirited conversation and leisurely social interaction. *The Hunger Games* places a huge emphasis on issues regarding poverty and starvation, and it shows just how much living in an impoverished state of being can limit or destroy any sort of luxury that most humans take for granted like a warm conversation over a simple dinner (Simmons 30).

Both food and mealtime conversations provide the human race with a plethora of opportunities to sustain itself in regards to mind, body, and soul. The power of a morning cup of coffee with a family member or a glass of wine with a group of girlfriends is uncharacteristically heart-warming and comforting, especially in a society where it is difficult to take the time to truly appreciate the company of others. Food has the power to heal, to forge relationships, and to create a sense of camaraderie with a mutual group of people, but only if it is prepared and consumed with the right intentions and under the right circumstances. In a world where food is either too plentiful or too absent, it becomes easy to let food consume one's life for the wrong reasons, which is clearly seen in both *Wall-E* and *The Hunger Games*. However, *Gilmore Girls* provides a stellar example of how food can work to bring people together and allow them to overcome their differences, which is exactly how food should always operate. Food should supply nourishment and perpetuate conversation, but with the ever looming issues of gluttony and poverty, food is often times unable to facilitate necessary social development and human interaction.

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# The Weight Watcher's Dilemma

Jessyca Chapman



Sit back and consider all the features you would like to change about yourself. Next, imagine yourself perfectly. Imagine that you look exactly the way you want to look, think of how confident and satisfied you would feel. Now, what's stopping you from achieving these goals of personal perfection? Do they seem out of your reach? Flipping through the channels, one finds no sign of obesity or malnourishment, until one happens upon a charity commercial featuring Sarah McLaughlin or a new episode of *True Life: I Want the Perfect Body* on MTV. As soon as the television is turned off, the vision of reality restores. Humans are huge! In the past we naturally lost weight and maintained a healthy lifestyle through manual labor and subsistence. Now the world swells with laziness and slobbering obsessions, and industrialization spoon feeds the bad habits. The dilemma most health conscious individuals face start from the core and branches into other dilemmas including eating habits, media consumption, food anxiety, and economic factors.

Marissa Wolfson wrote and produced a documentary called *Vegucated* and although it effectively demonstrates the problems to industrialized food it doesn't offer an easy solution—Veganism. Similarly, the documentary *Forks over Knives* illustrates how eating healthier can yield a healthier lifestyle, but organic food is more expensive and the documentary fails to introduce other factors that contribute to healthier living like mental health and exercise. In both documentaries, subjects with diagnosed weight disorders are transformed into vegetarians, vegans, and pescatarians to demonstrate the benefits of eating healthier but

both films leave out mental health and exercise as contributing factors. On the other side is MTV's *True Life* Series. The episode, "I Want the Perfect Body" demonstrates how healthy manifests differently for different people. It also shows how healthy living can evolve into obsessions veiled by the media's perception on health. The images represented in the media depict optimum—westernized—health and fail to reveal the true depth of the character, like implants, tanning beds and steroids. Three young adults, Rebecca, Ryan, and Kevin, strive for the "perfect body" while continuing to overcome obstacles of food consumption, injuries, media persuasion, and failure. Between *True Life*, *Vegucated*, and *Forks over Knives* the directors present several avenues for healthier lifestyles but none suggest that mental stability is a valid factor that contributes to optimum health.

The problem seems external, considering all the unattractive side effects of obesity; however, the true dilemma of a weight watcher lies within the mind. The mind has the ability to manipulate the limbs and generate action. Evidence suggests that emotions can release chemicals in the brain that will make a situation better or worse. To completely neglect the mental factor of optimum health creates a problem because all other efforts will render temporary results. For example in *Vegucated*, Lola, one of the transforming vegans, enjoyed the idea of veganism and was moved by the effect she would have on animals, but when she was around her family they would laugh and enjoy meals around her. She sat picking at vegetables that she obviously hated, just to make a political statement and lose a few pounds. At the end, the film reveals that she did not remain a vegan but instead adopted vegetarianism, which suited her lifestyle better. The solution rests in the ability to overcome the different perspectives on ways of life naturalized by outside forces like the media and industrial companies. The body is known for adaptation and will adjust to whatever it is given, in moderation. Essentially, we should exercise the mind in confidence and self-satisfaction, which will result in happiness that will perpetuate a healthy body. When developing a new way of life it is often difficult to simply *adopt* healthier habits rather than allow healthy choices to consume you. Humans are known to perfect and essentially obsess over what they want. When discussing the dilemmas of a weight watcher it becomes clear how a simple lifestyle change can turn into a mind rattling infatuation that reverses the desired effects. First, let's consider the effects of the media and public opinion.

In the first few minutes of meeting someone new, a person assumes they know everything about the person, strictly based on aesthetics and

body language; and the media capitalizes on this idea. Unfortunately humans have developed a naturalized understanding of the structure of beauty based on the media. They assume beauty equals health or that the “beauty” illustrated is natural. In the *True Life: I want the perfect body* episode, one of the interviewees, Rebecca, loves the way the women look in the fitness competition magazine. She goes to a competition and moves to become a contender. She failed to realize the rigorous training the women go through and the stress they put on their bodies. Eventually she injures her hamstring and has to sit out of a competition. To her, these women illustrate health. If other women were to ingest this idea of health it may yield many more injuries like Rebecca’s and her obsession with this performance of health. The *Youtube* video entitled “Fat Girl to Skinny Girl Photoshop” demonstrates how easily the media manipulates the bodies and minds of the public. In the video a photography of a plus-size woman is put into editing software where the editor shapes the woman into the image suitable for public consumption—a skinny woman. This same project can be found thousands of times on Youtube. It’s obvious that people shape and manipulate these bodies because the perfection in print media seems almost unfathomable, but for some reason, the public digests these manipulated images as fact. The women in the fitness competition have well-trained bodies but they are augmented as well, some undergo surgery for implants and spend hours tanning to seem like the “perfect” description of health but even they can’t control all feature given naturally. Cartoons and children’s television often portray the children fairly similar in weight and often cast an overweight child as the other—usually the bully or traumatized loner. This child is also struggles to accomplish the tasks that others complete easily. The media effectively naturalizes the minds of children and adolescents to believe that life is better when you appear to fit in. The cartoons *Family Guy*, *American Dad*, and *The Cleveland*s use the same animation structure to satirize typical American life and although they are a humorous cartoon, when they portray crowds it’s often similarly shaped bodies with indistinguishable faces. This causes the viewer to naturalize the idea of conformity. They are meant to look like a mass, nothing threatening and nothing divergent. In Rebecca’s competition she shaped and molded herself and there was nothing that distinguished her from the others physically; however, she was the only contestant to have a masters in neuroscience. This idea suggests that the importance of the mind, and nutritionist and dieters often overlooked the power of the mind in favor of aesthetic qualities presented by the media.

The naturalized perceptions of the media translate into false ideas about good health and nutrition. Maria del Mar Bibiloni wrote an article called “Body Image and Eating Patterns among Adolescents” in which she discusses her research analysis on the habits of teenagers’ self-perception as it relates to eating habits. She found that “fifty-one percent of boys and sixty percent of girls that wished to be thinner had less than or equal to 3 eating occasions per day” (12). The people who desired to be thinner ate less of what it takes to lose weight such as vegetables and the proper amount of calories for daily activities. They unconsciously believed that eating less would result in losing weight; however in Rebecca’s case she had to consume triple the amount of calories she normally ate to lose weight. The *media* shifts the healthy eating construction to appear as though less is more; however, if you’re eating fewer amounts of processed-unhealthy foods and no healthy foods at all, weight loss becomes practically inconceivable. The body stores fat because it believes it will never eat anything worth processing again, for example, clean fruits and vegetables move swiftly through the digestive system being stripped of valuable nutrients and eventually discarded. The processed foods start their journey and never end because the body has no idea what to do with the fat saturated foods and decides to hold on to the fatty portions so it can say, “I got something we could use—eventually”. These same teenagers who starve themselves are the same minds that consume the manipulated images on television; they believe the woman in a video is the epitome of health and perfection and thus the dilemma begins with *perception*. Weight loss usually starts when one makes a conscious effort to change habits for better appearance and a longer life expectancy; now one must consider how to eat—if at all.

*Vegucated*, *Fork over Knives*, and *True Life* all attempt to overcome the hurdle of what to eat. Rummaging through the fridge has to be the absolute hardest obstacle to tackle for someone concerned about weight. What you put in your body can make or break a diet, and is the difference in a pound or two on the scale as soon as you consume it. An overly conscious individual often takes into consideration the time of day in which they should eat, the caloric intake, the carbohydrates, the nutritional value, the genetically modified ingredients, the chemically infused “food products” i.e. Kraft Singles cheese product, and many other factors. After this contemplation you may just close the fridge and go to sleep hungry and in fact this is what often begins the journey to eating disorders. In *Vegucated*, Marissa Wolfson offers veganism for a healthier lifestyle but more importantly because the industrialization

of food is so “inhumane.” *Forks over Knives* suggests an organic diet that has been proven to reduce the chances of several mainstream cancers and weight diseases like diabetes. This sounds beneficial but when considering the amount spent on organic food it almost seems unattainable for the lower economic classes, which in turn makes this choice elitist. Finally, the *True Life* episode offers different eating styles for different weight goals; however, all require an obscene amount of food a day that can definitely become expensive. In the *Omnivore’s Dilemma* Michael Pollan suggests it has become harder and harder for Americans to eat healthy. He proves that the majority of consumed products generates from genetically modified corn that eventually poses potential threats to the human/animal body. He goes on to suggest the humans should adopt a wholefood diet; eat foods that are closer to their origin for example, eat a steak instead of ground beef or a burger. He researches the industrial food companies’ unsanitary habits which in turn cause dieters to believe they must live near a fresh market and make a certain income in order to subvert the effects of processed foods. There are so many voices giving advice but none have recalled the evolution of the human digestive system; for example, some humans are lactose intolerant because as infants, humans produce an enzyme that breaks down milk and as we get older the enzyme goes away—or it used to. This enzyme evolution is called lactase persistence (Wikipedia). There are many people that can consume milk with no problems; others have yet to develop this mutation. This simply shows that the body will eventually adapt to what is available for consumption. What we should focus on, is what makes us different from other species which is how our brain regulates our weight.

If you don’t possess an organic-food budget what can you eat? What are your options? According to Pollan’s prescription you may be out of luck. Organic food purchasing is very much an elitist ideology, making the richer healthier and the poor, poorer and obese. When a person chooses to take a journey to a healthier lifestyle and, like Pollan, discovers all the obstacles to overcome to achieve this success, it becomes overwhelming. When you start considering all the processed foods, and the magnitude of the corn industry and finally realize that something as simple as sugar is even made of corn can cause the average dieter—me—to give up. This shows how fragile the mind it. It has the ability to choose your lifestyle for you. If it becomes overwhelming it will quit.

For someone that tries to manage and watch their weight there are alternatives but they aren’t as publicized as others because right now

there is an organic food movement that is overwhelming the stores. Pollan reveals a major problem in mass food producing but fails to offer a viable alternative. The vegan and organic food nutritionists and doctors in *Vegucated* and *Forks over Knives* are probably not priced for someone in a lower income. Health insurance companies do not cover holistic doctors. Most times people have you go into personal savings to experience this luxury. Even healthier choices at fast-food restaurants are priced higher than processed foods making it unreachable to be healthier for someone with thinner pockets. Dr. Mehmet Oz, the show host of the popular *Dr. Oz show* geared towards healthy living, wrote an article entitled, “Give (Frozen) Peas a Chance and Carrots too.” Here he works to dispel the myths associated with organic versus frozen or processed foods. He describes organic food as “great, [but] it’s just not very democratic. As a food lover, [he] enjoy[s] truffle oil, European cheeses and heirloom tomatoes as much as the next person. But as a doctor, [he] know[s] that patients don’t always have the time, energy or budget to shop for artisanal ingredients and whip them into a meal” (39). He goes on to explain that although organic food is less tampered with it actually doesn’t last as long as processed or frozen foods. He says frozen foods that are “flash-frozen” shock essential nutrients that eventually break down faster in organic foods. Once these nutrients break down in organic foods, which take only a few days upon purchase, you realize you didn’t have enough time to finish it and the hard earned money you spent is wasted. Organic food was meant for people who have money, time, and the appropriate tools to prepare extravagant meals. Another article that promotes the use of certain industrialized foods, especially vegetables, by David H. Freedman called “How Junk Food Can End Obesity” candidly suggests that if we overcome the “fantasy” of organic food we can eat what is already abundantly supplied and affordably priced and live healthier and feasible lives without succumbing to the expensive wholefoods movement. Another moment in his argument that calls into question the value of the wholefoods diet is preparation. He says, “Many of the foods served up and even glorified by the wholesome-food movement are themselves chock full of fat and problem carbs” (Freedman). He described some of the staple foods found in the stores and the names themselves are problematic; “fried peas” and “corn sautéed in bacon fat and topped with bacon.” But it is okay—right? Because it came from a wholefood store that doesn’t use any genetically modified ingredients? Wrong! We have to be just a conscious of the ingredients used to prepare an organic meal just as much as we have to read the labels on processed

foods. Too much of anything is a bad thing. We must employ our minds to effectively distinguish between honest healthier foods and the *idea* of a healthy food. Often times we neglect our personal mental capacity to make the right decision because we depend so heavily on other's advice on what is right we forget we have capable minds as well. We have to learn to think smart about food.

Now who do you listen to? When you go to the grocery store do you look for the packaged processed foods that emphasize naturalness with earth tones and recyclable packaging or head straight for the expensive easily perishable organic food that you must pick and scrutinize yourself. The problems go on. Now after you decide what you are going to eat you must decide how you are going to get it off you—exercise. A few days ago a close friend approached me in tears about how much she was eating and how she couldn't stop because she was always so hungry. Well, the amazing thing about exercising—which she is doing six days a week and twice a day—is that it yields an intensified hunger which leads many to believe that their intake will not accommodate their physical efforts. She is visibly losing weight but because the amount of food she was consuming didn't match the norm she panicked and began obsessing. Contradictory to traditional American practices of three meals per day, exercise may require more small meals. *Vegucated* and *Forks over Knives* negate exercise as an option for healthy living all together and *True Life* presents exercise as an extremely difficult entity to master. Ryan, Kevin, and Rebecca all undergo straining exercises and all eventually sustain a progression-pausing injury. To the viewer, these models of epitomic health seem unattainable and physically taxing. Food anxiety, fear of the consumption and effects of food are just the beginning, and tend to overwhelm the weight watcher and the next logical step for most people is to exercise until the calories consumed equal less than the amount burned at the gym. It becomes an obsessive number game. Exercise began as the means to generate and sustain life and now poses a threat to human existence and physical stability. The gym becomes the prescription and much like other prescriptions if used in excess it becomes an addiction. The ideas behind exercise are notably addicting, even the names given to workout routines are problematic. The workout regime *Insanity* is a national craze that requires the person to do short amounts of workouts where instead of pushing the body to its limit it challenges the mind to work beyond comprehension. I decided to partake in this obnoxious exercise and it literally becomes a war of the mind to keep going. The amazing part of the exercise is if you can

train your mind to ignore the signals from the body to continue going you complete the workout and feel completely triumphant. Eventually you see results. The word insane or crazy, according to Albert Einstein, means to continue doing the same thing expecting different results and this workout shatters this definition. After a while of doing the same exercise over and over you definitely see results. This idea that the mind controls everything that happens to the body essentializes weight loss. How a person perceives, understands, and eventually begins and ends weight management begins with perception.

The mind has the ability to radically determine the outcome of the body. Černelič-Bizjak conducted a study and describes her findings in an article called “Impact of Negative Cognitions about Body Image on Inflammatory Status in Relation to Health.” She discusses the effects of negative self-image on a person’s health. She eventually finds that “body dissatisfaction relates to biological processes and that negative cognitions can influence physical health through the complex pathways linking psychological and biological factors” (270). Finally she says that “a person’s negative cognitions need to be considered in psychologically based interventions and strategies in treatment of obesity, including strategies for health promotion” (277). In other words, negative thoughts correlate to perpetuation of obesity and body disorders by releasing a toxic chemical in the brain. This means that if I think I’m ugly, day by day, I will become ugly, hypothetically. So, if I believe I’m overweight and associate this idea with negative thoughts, my brain will release toxic chemicals that will cause me to directly gain weight or engage in weight gaining functions like eating unhealthy foods that release dopamine or endorphins that will make me feel better temporarily. When the dopamine wears off, the cycle begins again and I will continue gaining weight and continue eating which results in obesity and health disorders. This idea proves that the mind has a major impact on the outcome of the body. Henry David Thoreau wrote about a time when he “lived deliberately” and in order to do so he removed himself from society and began living on the fruits of his own labor. A significant moment rises from Thoreau’s attempt to grow beans. It began simply for subsistence and he began obsessing over the vitality of the beans. Soon he realizes he was living for well-being of his beans instead of using the beans to live. His mind overwhelmed him with his ideas of health and subsistence and he no longer thought clearly. This shows that although outside forces influence the mind, even when left alone the mind has to be trained in stability. In terms of health and fitness and essentially the weight watcher’s dilemma,

the obstacle is that of the mind. Humans naturally develop an obsessive nature. When it comes to fitness, once you find something that works it becomes habit and the mind possess the ability to control to what extent this habit becomes a problem or addiction.

To combat the obstacles that come with changing a lifestyle there are a few things to take into account. The images on television are far from the truth. Behind the scenes of most shows the even show you how these features don't come naturally with the application of, make-up, tanning, surgery, and over or under eating. Once people realize the "picture of health" on television manipulates for mass consumption it *should* expose false realities. In other words, it's naive to believe the constructions built into the celebrities and the ridiculous body structures. Second consider eating "frozen peas." All foods in the grocery store, no matter the packaging, are not all bad for you. Overcoming the popularity of organic food and learning about feasible ways to eat the food provided will aid in healthier living. And finally, the general concept of marketing reflects back the image it receives. If the world changes how others perceive them than the media would showcase different shapes, sizes and colors of people. The mind has the ability to change reality. Once people begin to perceive themselves positively and optimistically they can become and come to terms with the person in the mirror today. The key to optimal health lies in overcoming mind-control and gaining positive self-consciousness and image, sprinkled with a little walking.

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# You Only Feast Once: Understanding a Generation through Food Elegy

Diamond Forde



For almost six years I have worked at my city's conglomerate grocery store—the leading chain Kroger. Kroger owns a slew of markets all over the nation, including such places as Fred Meyer's, Ralph's, and King Soopers. Manning the grocery store checkout, I have been exposed to any number of food purchase oddities. Upon one occasion, a customer—blonde, middle-aged, exhausted—drifted into my lane with enough frozen blueberries to make a week's worth of pies. She, with little prompting, explained that the ingredients were to assemble a quick dessert for a coworker. His father had, quite unfortunately, passed away earlier that week, and she was taking food to help him during his tough time. This small, intimate moment proved enough to launch the gears to knotting. Why do we offer food in that time of passing? Why, when the funeral procession is over, do we get together for some small feast, letting tears plummet into the steaming folds of collard greens? Always attracted to the realm of language, I looked to poetry for answers. Often, when seeking to understand a generation, we look to the writers of that time; the Lost Generation, for instance, embodied themselves in the fantastical snippets of Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*. We understand the history of the Modernist movement by understanding the way the modernists wrote. So, why not understand ourselves the same way? Why not understand my generation's approach to death through the strange emergence of the contemporary food elegy?

*The Oxford English Dictionary* defines elegy as “a poem of serious reflection, typically a lament for the dead.” The food elegy steps further,

lamenting, but with the help of yesterday's bagel brunch or a heaping pile of mac and cheese. Food elegies utilize all the comforts of the tastes we love in combination with life's ultimate end. George Bilgere's "Corned Beef and Cabbage," Mark Strand's "Pot Roast," and Li-Young Lee's "Eating Alone" deftly handle the balance of bemoaned loss and scrumptious tidbits.

Out of the multiple food elegies I found, I chose these three poems for their similarities, the same poetic movement they all sought to achieve: a switch away from memory. It is important to mention that this is only a small sample to copy this similar movement; other poems like Patricia Smith's "When the Burning Begins" and Honorée Jeffers "The Gospel of Barbecue" executed movements almost parallel to the others. However, these three poems most successfully blended into one conclusive understanding: time for the current generation hinges primarily on present experiences. Even the past is subjective to the now. To establish this, I will first introduce food's relationship with death, the long-standing tradition of the funeral meal and the fall of the community surrounding it. Then a move into the elegy, its original stanzaic function and how that function has changed over time to allow for the rise of the food elegy. Next, a brief look at Wallace Stevens, whose poem, "The Emperor of Ice-Cream," situated the idea of death and food in poetic history as well as initiated the assertion of life in the food elegy. Lastly, a close reading of the poems, breaking down their meaning at line level in order to open a wider understanding of the significance of our generation: a generation that centers on the present in order to defy the limitations of time and death.

Funeral feast rites have narrowed its focus from community to the individual. In order to understand food's role in death, one must first understand its history. Interacting with Lonnie Yoder's "The Funeral Meal: A Significant Funerary Ritual," one quickly realizes that food and funerals are as long-standing as the cultures that carry them. Yoder explains, "[the] funeral meal is not just a cultural anomaly" (149). Taking place in multiple countries, the funeral meal varies only in expense and the designated cook. She also mentions that "the mood surrounding this ritual in one instance may be celebrative and in another quite somber" (Yoder 149). So while the scale of food and death differs from culture to culture, the instinct to associate the two ingrains deeply into any human history. Yet, the community funeral meal has seen a fall in contemporary funeral rites. "The increasing urbanization and modernization of our society have led to a developing individualistic understanding of

mourning” (Yoder 151). No longer does the community come together at grand dinner tables to mourn with the family of the deceased, but instead leaves the individual to grapple with death alone. This rising occurrence only instigates the noted single-mindedness of the current zeitgeist. Narcissism and self-importance, values often associated with our millennial generation, prop on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. Life, and now death, hinges on a mind that begs to understand its grief. Food has become a solitary act. Family dinners fall wayside and now, even the funeral meal follows. Because of this increasing occurrence, the funeral meal becomes a solitary act, forcing individuals to come to death on their own terms, allowing for the possibility of selfish and self-comforting conclusions.

The elegy, too, changed with the increase of population and industrialization. Initially strict in meter and form, the elegy dug its roots in Greek and Roman literature. According to Max Cavitch, it is “one of the oldest and most distinguished verse traditions (1), having established its own meter: an alternation of hexameter and pentameter lines. Once established in England, elegies described poems of solemn meditation. Victorians viewed themselves, in the words of John Stuart Mill, in an “age of transition, caught between a vanishing past and uncertain future” (Rosenberg 1). This Victorian sentiment, intersected with the world of elegy, produced one of the most famous elegiac pieces created: Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*, which intentionally and formally lamented a death. John D. Rosenberg states that *In Memoriam* “articulate[d] a unique mix of intensely private grief over the death of Arthur Hallan and the larger cultural shock of a world in which faith has yielded to doubt” (3). Meanwhile, in America, the funeral elegy represented “a function of Puritan resource and resolve” in order to “preserv[e] the ephemera of memorial culture” (Cavitch 33). Though different in elegiac approach, both cultures sought the aid of the elegy to establish or accent their sense of self. The elegy voiced their generational concerns.

Elegies met a particular challenge with the technological advances contingent to war. For example, the more precise ability to chart losses “enabled detachment and physically rewarded the habit of quantification.” Furthermore, it “enhanced the difficulty of retrieving and conserving [the] identities for memorialization.” This sentiment would not falter in the oncoming years, and humanity would continue “collectivizing the dead” (Cavitch 239). However, this tendency to collectivize would not inhibit man’s grapple with death, rather it “seems to betray the writer’s uncertainty as to the future of dead.” This uncertainty

complicated further once the lost men came to exist as “a confused mass of name” (Cavitch 241). This distance from the personal echoes the fall of the funeral meal, in which time forces the writer to seek the self for answers.

A key transitional player, Wallace Stevens’ “The Emperor of Ice-Cream” best launched the function of the “now” in elegy. Often debated for intended meaning, some view Stevens’ poem as a celebration of death—a party of the living where boys woo wenches with “flowers in last month’s newspapers” (6), while others argue the poem functions as an angry condemnation of God (the “emperor of ice-cream” refrain). Regardless of Stevens’ motives, most analysts can agree on the emperor’s import, the critical function of the ice cream in relation to either life or death. Viswanathan briefly discusses a relation between Wallace Stevens’ emperor and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Viswanathan quotes, “where ‘a is eaten, a certain convocation of politic worms are e’en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet” (84). He explains that “both Hamlet and Stevens juxtapose eating and dying, the biological function that sustains life and the event that terminates it” (Viswanathan 84). This moment elaborates a long-standing tradition musing food’s role in life and death, further complicated by Stevens’ use of ice cream. Viswanathan continues, “[ice cream] embodies an evanescent paradise, or more precisely, the principle that the unreal is composed from the ingredients of the real” (85). This statement is crucial to understanding the food elegy. Death represents the ultimate in unknown terrain. Its mysteries haunt even the greatest man in his darkest hour, and while the realm of the dying might never be understood, life and the experiences lifted to lip by the spoonful comforts that lack of knowledge. Thus, this generation does not seek to turn inside themselves as a product of narcissism and ignorance alone. Rather, they seek to guard themselves from the only things they cannot comprehend. The current mode of food elegy functions as an option to the current generation so that we might negotiate death when there is nothing else left to understand it.

In George Bilgere’s “Corned Beef and Cabbage,” life refuses to constrain to the confines of its own timeframe. An elegy to the speaker’s mother, he taps into his mother’s strength through cooking, more specifically—chopping up a head of cabbage. However, it is not until the end of the poem, the final three lines, that the presence of the speaker’s mother is confirmed as absent, whether by death or distance, “Missing her, wanting / To chew things over / With my mother again” (19-21). A curious choice accented by the progressive use of verbs in Bilgere’s

“Corned Beef and Cabbage”. The poem’s verbs begin in the present, “I can see her in the kitchen” (1). A second read establishes that, obviously, the mother’s presence is not physical, rather something of the speaker’s imagination or mindset. The mother is absent and yet, she is in the kitchen, “Cooking up, for the hundredth time” (2). Initially the statement seems to speak to the habitual: a speaker who watched his mom cook in the kitchen so often that seeing her there again is almost second nature to him. Yet, Bilgere follows the statement with such an imagistic vividness that the moment seems more present than past. He writes of the “Cigarette going in the ashtray, / The red wine pulsing in its glass” (5-6). The verbs in these lines, just as the “Cooking” of line two, categorize as either present participles or ongoing actions. These lines do not elicit just habitual actions, but actions that continue without ceasing. This grammatical occurrence adds to the assertive presence of the mother in the poem. She asserts herself over the meal, “boil[ing] / The beef into submission” (10-11). By “Chopp[ing] her way / Through the vegetable kingdom,” (12-13) she continues to embody the active. This phenomena demands attention; it suggests to a generation terrified of the end that even death cannot completely stop a life.

The mother in Bilgere’s “Corned Beef and Cabbage” also destabilizes tradition. Though she exists in the realm of the domestic, the kitchen, she defies containment. Just as she will not be possessed merely in the moment, so too does she refuse to be detained to the submissive world of women. She avoids the role of the oppressor, instead looking for self-fulfillment and a quiet power that “was simmering / Just below the steel lid / Of her smile” (8-10). Nothing will stop her, even as the speaker taps into his mother’s memory:

With the broken-handled knife  
I use tonight, feeling her  
Anger rising from the dark  
Chambers of the head  
Of cabbage I slice through (14-18).

No longer present, the memory of the mother still penetrates her son until he “feels her anger.” Her emotions “rise.” The mother illustrates a woman unopposed by death. She continues existing, almost tangibly, in a time outside of her own (both in tradition and physical being). Moreover, by the speaker reliving her experience through the fine slicing of the cabbage, he also exists beyond time. Just by the speaker cooking his

mother's corned beef and cabbage, death loses the terror of distance. The elegy quiets death in a generation forced to grapple its cry individually.

Out of the three poems, Li-Young Lee's "Eating Alone" best destabilizes the perception of time. The images initially connote the passing of time; it begins with the approach of winter, as the speaker pulls "the last of the year's young onions" (1). The landscape takes on winter's charm, "The garden is bare now. The ground is cold, / brown and old" (2-3). Writers often associate the images of winter with death or old age. All life is subjected to winter, even the day, which "flames / in the maples," (3-4) a tree known for losing its leaves to the changing seasons. Furthermore, the speaker sees this tree "at the corner of [his] / eye" (4-5). Too quickly time passes, exemplified in the line, "I turn, a cardinal vanishes" (5). Almost instantly the beauty is there and gone, which seems hauntingly familiar. However, time becomes fluid as the poem introduces the father, a common character in Li-Young Lee's poetry. Switching from present to past tense, the speaker recollects walking with his father "among the windfall pears" (9) and, despite remembering the specifics of this moment, the speaker is unable to "recall / our words. We may have strolled in silence" (9-10). Although silence also stakes its place in Lee's poetry, the real core of recollection occurs when the speaker introduces food, in this case, a rotting pear. "I still see him bend that way-left hand braced / on knee, creaky-to lift and hold to my / eye a rotten pear" (11-13). The food stimulates the image of the father, concrete and focused. They share a moment cloaked in silence and food. The poem moves on to the description of the pear. In this moment, time slows in both diction and alliteration. Not only does Li-Young Lee use the word "slow", but his toggle between a "s" and "g" alliteration, "a hornet / spun crazily, glazed in slow, glistening juice," (13-14) deliberately slows its reader, forcing him into the sticky catch of its repetitive sound.

In one deft movement, the speaker's past becomes his present, and his father enters the territory of now. The second stanza states:

It was my father I saw this morning  
waving to me from the trees. I almost  
called to him, until I came close enough  
to see the shovel, leaning where I had  
left it, in the flickering, deep green shade (15-19).

The father, a figure lost and susceptible to elegy, waves to his son from the trees. To put it simply, the father no longer exists in this world.

Rather, the paternal memory links to the present gardening moment. The two moments coexist on the same plane: the father, reemerged from an image of a rotten pear, and the deep green of the speaker's garden.

The "Eating Alone" speaker then seeks solace in food. Piling over a bowl of white rice, green peas, and "shrimp braised in sesame / oil and garlic," Lee's character tucks into a hearty serving of dinner and his "own loneliness" (21-22). He is not the only individual to do so. James Nolan also describes a relationship between gumbo and the act of mourning, where "making gumbo can be a Creole good-bye for the dead" (47). In Louisiana, the mourning process lasts for one-year and a day. Therefore the act of cooking functions as a critical component to remembering the deceased after their "passing." Breaking down the steps of gumbo making, first one "starts with a carcass" and then "gather[s] the ingredients around you like an old friend" (Nolan 49, 50). Each element defines a necessity to healing, but Nolan quickly admits there is only one pertinent element to recovery post-loss. He writes, "making gumbo and the decomposition of a body have little in common except that, like grief, both take time" (47). Because time is so essential to the acceptance of death, being able to collapse said time, creating little distance between past, present, and future, allows for a much quicker recovery after grappling with a painful loss. Thus, by focusing on a present that so quickly becomes memory anyway, the generation learns one more method of coping.

One might begin an argument against the use of Mark Strand's "Pot Roast" by explaining that it was never meant to be read as a personal elegy. Quoted by Matt McNees in his article, "George Herbert and Mark Strand," Strand stated, "When I wrote "Pot Roast," I was reporting on what I saw out the window: no living thing. That was real. But other parts of the poem, like lifting my fork, never happened" (83). He goes on to say that even the tastes he claims in the poem are unreal and unfamiliar. However, it is his last sentence in that quoted selection that provides the most insight, "So I did lean on the real, but the urgency of the poem doesn't really depend on it" (McNees 83). A statement embedded in fact, the poem does not depend on its validity. Some elements of truth do, technically, point to elegy. The food, the pot roast, derived from what Strand admitted was "the only cookbook my mother had in our house" (McNees 83). This statement ties a direct memory from meal to matriarch. That aside, the poem's elements, how it functions and what it signifies, relay the most important truths of "Pot Roast."

A poem operating primarily in present experience, "Pot Roast," like Li-Young Lee's "Eating Alone," also uses taste to collapse spatial differ-

ence, but in an effort to applaud the present. The poem begins with the speaker delving into a plate of pot roast, “I gaze upon the roast, / that is sliced and laid out / on my plate” (1-3). The sensation of spooning the gravy over the meat allows the speaker to “not regret / the passage of time” (7-8). The pot roast possesses a power over the speaker and his perception of time. He succumbs to this power, stating, “one could do worse / than yield / to the power of food” (21-23). Food’s power allows memory to occur. Constantly man muses over the connection between food and memory, jumping between the planes of the emotional to the biological. Investigating evolutionary predilections for fat and sugar, as well as a conditioning to the physical results of the food we eat (whether or not certain foods make us sick or give us joy), biologist have developed some links in understanding memory’s connection to taste. However, for the large part, the correlation remains a mystery.

Yet, Strand’s poem seems to make the connection both simple and exact, connecting back to “the first time / I tasted a roast / like this” (28-30). The exactness of the recipe, the carrots and onions, transcends time. Food knows no limitations. This simplifies the function of the recipe. Not just a how-to for good food, the recipe allows cooks to participate in a long-standing history surrounding cooking. Similar to instinctual methods of conditioning, the recipe allows cooks to avoid certain foods without personal, agonizing experiences and to tap into those ingredients most prone to stimulating gustatory desires. The foods harmonize into a symphony of flavors that prods the speaker into mentioning them specifically: “the gravy” and the “odor of garlic and celery” (38, 39). These specific foods launched the recollection of a specific place—Seabright, Nova Scotia—where the speaker describes his mother:

My mother leaned  
over my dish and filled it  
and when I finished  
filled it again” (34-37).

The action is ongoing. With each emptied dish, the plate refills again and again. It is a poem that avoids metaphorical ending. In fact, the poem does not even end in a mode of recollection. Not only does the poem return to the present, it deflates the change of time entirely. Strand defines it, “And now / I taste it again, / The meat of memory / The meat of no change” (42-45). This statement creates a direct parallel between the meat and memory. If the meat resists change, so too does memory.

Regardless of the effects of time, nothing actually changes. To that realization, to the present experience, the speaker then raises his fork and eats (46-47). It symbolizes a moment of triumph, echoing the ever-popular *carpe diem* (or the unmistakable and dreaded phrase, Y.O.L.O.). Thus we are a generation that not only bends time, but focuses on the present, a common reaction when faced with the ever-looming threat of death.

Regardless of how single-minded our generation might seem, the inward pull corresponds with a natural response to our own mortality. As a sense of intimacy and community continues to crumble, in contrast, our sense of personal preservation rises. The funeral meal has been a long-standing tradition, down to the very beginnings of civilization. Despite all those centuries of existence, the funeral meal dwindles in prevalence as cities grow and industries prosper. Perhaps the evolving approach to death instigated the change in elegy. Victims lost their identity, breaching into the realm of statistic, and so individuals longed to assert themselves. They seized to real and available experiences for their understanding, like ice cream cones and T-bone steaks. Food provided the most successful negotiation of time, its recipes and flavors able to live beyond any century. Even now, ingredient availability willing, I could sample similar flavors to the Middle Ages with just a quick search for the recipe. Through food, time becomes meaningless and thus, death loses its stronghold on the living. We can all breathe easier and lose ourselves in one more bowl of chili, staving off that ever-gnawing fear of our own mortalities. The food elegy means hope is not lost. After all, if one stressed and frazzled woman could step into the bowels of Kroger to bake a few pies for a friend, who says community (or life) is dead?

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# Cooking With Identity

Emily Goodwin



Humanity has found numerous ways to triumph over situations and prejudices by relying on what they possess in their soul. Through raw ingredients, humans have the ability to mold and transform themselves into a new creation by mixing the ingredients they have at their disposal. Humans generate from raw ingredients such as passion, determination, and perseverance that allow them to achieve this greatness but what about a rat? In Disney and Pixar's film *Ratatouille*, characters with various backgrounds and ambitions are transformed by their passion for food, and through their new discoveries in cooking, these characters also create a new identity for themselves. Throughout their journeys, characters conquer obstacles such as gender bias, community oppression, and ignorance due to tradition through preparation of food and the power they gain from creating their new identities. Not only do the human characters become the ones that experience these particular scenarios, but so does the narrator a rat named Remy who goes through the same situation with his rat colony.

Paul Wells brings an argument to the table when he states, "The idea that animation is an innocent medium, ostensibly for children, and largely dismissed in film histories, has done much to inhibit the proper discussion of issues concerning representation" (Wells). Wells argues that an animated film's only intention is to entertain children with sweet stories and loveable characters. On the surface it appears that Disney embraces this idea and characterizes their films to fit this mold. When it comes to the film *Ratatouille*, Disney can be assumed to be pushing

against this formula and creating exemplary literary critiques worthy of discussion and debate. Using help from Pixar, Disney brings to life these literary metaphors of human personality ingredients by challenging male and female roles in the work place, embracing the conflict between tradition and improvement, and exploring the process of finding liberation against oppression from enemies and even more importantly from one's own community. By excavating the malleable ingredients in each of the character's personalities within the film, Disney finds a way to reconnect the audience to the film and inspire the viewers to take inventory of their personal ingredients and mold their own identities.

"This is me. I think it's apparent that I need to rethink my life a little bit" sets the foundation that Remy, the rat is indeed unhappy with how he is currently living his life. Remy, one of the main characters is raised to believe that the life he has been raised in is all he can aspire to be. However, living in a human household, Remy discovers the abilities that humans possess, "they don't just survive, they discover, they create. Just look at what they do with food" (Bird), and he starts to understand that even as a rat he possess the ability to accomplish the same tasks. In secret, Remy begins to push the boundaries of his traditional rat upbringing by following his passion for cooking. Anderson and Brandes describe the character of Remy as "idealistic and determined" which give Remy just enough perseverance to defy his father. These are Remy's raw ingredients of his personality that will assist in his journey of molding who he desires to be. Unlike other rats, Remy walks on two paws to remain sanitary for cooking, teaches himself to read, watches TV in the human's living room, and is not satisfied eating out of the garbage. Remy's father, Django, does not approve of any of this and his brother, Emile, tolerates Remy's peculiarities in secret, though it is clear he uncomfortable keeping Remy's secrets. When Emile comments, "I don't like secrets. All this cooking and-and reading and TV-watching, while we... read, and... cook. It's like you're involving me in crime, and I let you. Why do I let you?"(Bird) the audiences gets the essence of how the clan feels about Remy's interest in cooking. They consider it a "crime" and against their nature. Even when Remy uses his acute senses to save the colony from rat poison, Django still does not accept that his son has a gift for cooking, but rather puts Remy in charge of poison control for the colony. Remy "has confirmed his fear that his family will not understand his desire to cook. Instead, he makes a vain attempt to educate his brother" (Allen). Deep down, Remy is not trying to rebel

against his rat upbringing just to upset his father, but because he truly believes that both he and his family are capable of a better lifestyle.

Although Remy's cooking passion is not encouraged in his family, it becomes evident that it does not hinder Remy from learning all he can about cooking. When Remy is asked by the Gusteau apparition about the different roles in the kitchen Remy is able to recite every position and explain why they are important. In the same scene when Remy witnesses Linguini ruining the soup, he cannot help but doing all that he can to save the sabotaged dish. Gusteau encourages him "You know how to fix it. This is your chance..." (Bird), because Gusteau understands that even with the talent and determination that Remy has, it will not be enough for humans to agree about a rat cooking in a kitchen. In secret, Remy is able to make an exquisite dish without the use of a recipe or measuring utensils, but rather gauges what he needs by the way the soup smells and tastes. Remy begins to understand and embrace that he has raw talent for culinary arts, and with this discovery he unlocks a strong determination to prove himself as a chef and allows his passion for cooking to flourish. Remy understands that as a rat he will never be allowed into the kitchen, which forces him to give the praise and credit to Linguini because that is who everyone sees doing the cooking.

However, before Remy understands that he must use Linguini to his benefit, he does not believe the boy has any purpose or business within the kitchen. When Gusteau insists that Linguini is an "anybody" and that "anyone can cook" Remy rebuttals by saying "well yeah anyone can (cook) that doesn't mean anyone should" (Bird) Remy gains constant inspiration from Gusteau's opinion about anyone having the ability to cook, and it applies to him personally, but Remy has difficulty relaying the motto to someone who seems as hopeless as Linguini. Even though Linguini does not have any potential promise as a gifted chef, Remy does. As Remy learns to embrace what he is- not a rat, not a human, but a chef- life begins to fall into place. When his family recuses him they are baffled about why he is going back to a restaurant that does not even want him and Remy replies, "Because I am a cook!"(Bird). Throughout the film, Remy's perspective changes from thinking that only select people can cook to teaching his family to cook. Remy gets served the "perspective" that Anton Ego requests for dinner by realizing that he is able to teach even his skeptical family the culinary arts:

I'm sick of pretending. I pretend to be a rat for my father. I pretend to be a human through Linguini. I pretend you exist

so I have someone to talk to! You only tell me stuff I already know! I know who I am! Why do I need you to tell me? Why do I need to pretend? (Bird)

In the above quote, Remy is becoming frustrated with the Gusteau apparition and realizing that he can never been fully satisfied with his life until he owns up to his own identity. Once Remy embraces his own abilities and accept that he is a chef that also happens to be a rat, he lets go of Linguini as compensation to the human world. Since Remy is able to create and mold his own identity, he is able to give Linguini the same chance of claiming his true self as well. Also, once Remy allows himself to blossom he gains another raw ingredient that he possesses throughout the film but has not utilized much, which is instinct. When serving the dish *Ratatouille*, Colette is concerned because “it is a peasant dish” (Bird). Remy sticks with his gut instinct and goes with the recipe, which wins over Ego and saves the restaurant.

The other main character that becomes Remy’s vessel in the human world is Linguini. When Linguini is first introduced the audience, he is depicted as intimidated by the kitchen staff and awkward around the solidified clockwork that is the kitchen. The boy has no form of self-confidence and relies on his mother’s past relationship with Gusteau in order obtain a job. Allen also point out “He has no idea how to behave at work, how to form new relationships, where he fits into society or how to look after himself” (Allen), further solidifying Linguini’s incompetence. Even with the reputation of his mother, Linguini’s self-worth is only able to get him the modest role as garbage boy. When it appears he cooks an appetizing soup that receives praise from a critic, all the head chef has to say to Linguini is, “What are you playing at?” (Bird). The head chef does not even try to consider that Linguini actually may have a talent for cooking, but rather sets Linguini up for what the head chef expects to be unavoidable failure by making Linguini cook the soup again. Brandes and Anderson discuss in their article where they parallel between Disney’s *Pinocchio* and *Ratatouille* by explaining how “He [Pinocchio] did not have a develop[ed] a sense of self; this was provided by Jiminy Cricket”, explaining that Linguini has Remy as a conscious and Remy has Gusteau as one as well. Only when the characters finally begin to mold their own personalities and self, do they rid themselves of their “Jiminy Cricket” that controls them and hinders their true abilities.

After Linguini is “discovered” courtesy of Remy, he begins to use food as a way to solidify his place in the world. Linguini uses cuisine as a way

to receive acceptance and familiarity with the other workers within the kitchen. Linguini thirsts for knowledge as much as acceptance. He allows Remy to control his body to create new recipes and learn how to operate in the kitchen. He understands that Remy and he must be a team, “Look, I know it’s weird and stupid, but neither of us can do this alone. So we gotta do it together” (Bird). Linguini has the upmost respect for Remy’s talent and refers to him as “Little Chef” the entire time that he works alongside the rat. Linguini trusts Remy enough to welcome the rat into his home and risk his new job in order to give Remy a chance to cook.

Remy is not the only chef that instructs Linguini though. Linguini also begins to study under Colette, never minding that she is a woman, but rather respects her most admirably for being the talented chef that she is. He takes her advice to heart and follows it vigorously the best that he can. He even begins to start following Colette’s direction over Remy’s. Linguini sees the malleable ingredients in both Remy and Colette and respects them both for it. He appreciates Remy’s raw talents that create new dishes and improve old dishes, while also respecting Colette’s knowledge and determination to be honored as a chef and not judged as a woman.

A kitchen has always been considered a focal point of the typical household. It is where the mother cooks dinner, children do school work, and the father reads the local paper. However, when it comes to cuisine at a prestigious restaurant, “You cannot be mommy” (Bird), according to Colette. Never mind that Colette is the only woman in the kitchen, but she is immensely talented as well and has worked hard to reach the status she currently holds. She demands the same amount of respect as the men do and she conducts herself with confidence, but not arrogance. Colette is a strong believer of Gusteau’s motto and uses it as a way to support Linguini’s creation, even if he is just a garbage boy. Even when her boss, the head chef, plans to fire Linguini, Colette speaks up and argues, “How can we claim to represent the name of Gusteau if we don’t uphold his most cherished belief?...Anyone can cook” (Bird). She risks her job by arguing with her boss, but the motto of her former employer is something she believes in and therefore will defend it with all that she can. When Colette says this she receives mummings and head nods from the other chefs showing they agree. They do not stand back and let her do this on her own, they respect her ability to stand up to the chef for what she believes in and they do not hesitate to support her.

However, her bold statement to the head chef causes her to receive Linguini as an apprentice, not because of her talent, but because “since

you (Colette) have shown an interest in his cooking career, you're responsible for it" as the head chef states it. (Bird) When Linguini is first assigned to Colette, he attempts to compliment her with flattering words of praise. Colette jumps in quickly and says:

No, you listen! I just want you to know exactly who you are dealing with! How many women do you see in this kitchen?... Only me. Why do you think that is? Because haute cuisine is an antiquated hierarchy built upon rules written by stupid, old, \*men\*. Rules designed to make it impossible for women to enter this world. But still I'm here! How did this happen?...Because I am the toughest cook in this kitchen! I have worked too hard for too long to get here, and I am \*not\* going to jeopardize it for some garbage boy who got lucky! Got it? (Bird).

The whole time she makes her speech, she is knifing Linguini's sleeve to the chopping block, causing him to feel physically and socially threatened. "Colette's 'lecture' to Linguini is a powerful gaze/audition introduction to the politics of gender, race, class, age as practiced at Gusteau's kitchen from her point of view" (Hodek). By hearing this from Colette, Linguini receives the feminist gaze and opinion in a world that is designed and ran primarily by males, even though a kitchen tends to be considered a feminist space. Colette refuses to be coddled as some woman who does not deserve to be there or is not proficient at doing her job. She assures Linguini that she is more capable than he is and if he wants this position in the kitchen he must work for it. Just because she stood up for him earlier does not mean she is going to go easy on him. Although the meeting of the two starts of negative and feeling tabooed, Colette proceeds on teaching Linguini the best that she can. She unknowingly takes Remy's raw talent and inadvertently helps him mold it into something that is desirable in a master chef and even brings some Linguini's hidden talent out as well. The two male characters are not only being molded by their own endeavors, but also by the guidance and critiques of Colette. Colette does not allow Linguini to do anything halfheartedly, but assures that he takes her seriously by giving sharp directions such as, "I'll make this easier to remember: keep your station clear, or I WILL KILL YOU" (Bird). This seems harsh and even brings some negativity to her character because of how strict she seems on the inexperienced cook. "Her voice in the cinematic and narrative discourse is represented as the voice of

a smart but dominant woman”(Hodek), showing that she does not come off as maternal in any manner at first, but tries to treat Linguini as one of the guys.

By teaching Linguini, Colette proves Gusteau’s quote that she believes so enthusiastically in and even proves Remy wrong that indeed anyone can cook. Still fully relying on the motto Colette explains that not all chefs are “snooty” (Bird) , but rather they all come from unusual and unexpected backgrounds. At the end of the training, Linguini does not have respect for Colette because she is an attractive woman, but rather because he has come to respect her as a gifted chef. After he thanks her for the advice, her reply is simply “Thank you, too...For taking it”(Bird) showing that even though she has come far in a male dominated work place, she still appreciates that what she has to say matters to Linguini. Although both male characters learn from Colette, Remy still embraces his natural instinct and desires to make his identity as a chef on his own verses by not allowing Colette to fully shape it for him. This prompts Remy into replacing Colette’s sauce on a dish with his own. Linguini resists this because he trusts Colette and does not want to insult her knowledge of cooking. However, Remy’s recipe is a success and brings Linguini further up the ladder within the kitchen. Even with Linguini appearing to ignore her advice and getting ahead of her in the kitchen, Colette never doubts herself or her own culinary abilities. She knows her identity and nothing makes her waver on who she believes herself to be. She discovered her own ingredients long ago and has perfected to art of manipulating her ingredients into the identity she desires. The only time she walks out on Gusteau’s motto is when she first finds out that Remy is the chef, not Linguini. Even then, she comes right back into the kitchen after a few moments of realizing she believes that anyone can cook, even a rat. Throughout the film, both Linguini and Remy have at least one person who supports them in their cooking endeavors. However, there are a few characters that have no desire to see either one of them succeed in the kitchen. Remy’s father and brother do not try to sabotage Remy’s dream to be a chef, but they do not support it either. The only time that Remy is allow to pursue his passion is when his family goes missing and there is no one to tell him otherwise. Another character who poses a threat to both Linguini and Remy is the food critique Anton Ego. In the beginning of the film, Ego sets the foundation of the film by stating, “Amusing title, “Anyone Can Cook!”. What’s even more amusing is that Gusteau actually seems to believe it. I, on the other hand, take cooking seriously. And, no, I don’t think anyone can

do it” (Bird) which sets the forefront on Ego’s prejudice thinking that a talented chef must come from a well-bred and educated background.

Remy’s father, Django, embraces tradition. He explains to Remy that they are rats, they will always be rats, and that there is nothing Remy can do to change it. “This is the way things are. You can’t change nature” is all the Remy’s father has to say to him when he shows Remy the rats in traps set by humans. Even though it is saddening, Remy has tasted freedom and knows what it is like to cook and not have to hide it anymore. This prompts Remy to stand up to his father and say, “Change is nature dad. The part that we can influence. And it starts when we decide” explaining to his father that he has made the choice to remain in the human world pursuing after cooking. Django still does not seem to grasp his son’s attitude and Remy attempts one more time to answer his father’s question of where Remy is going by saying, “With luck, forward”. Remy is done with allowing his past to rule his future. He knows he still is empowered by his raw talent as a remarkable chef and no amount of rat DNA or his father’s lectures can take that away from him. Remy’s brother, Emile, just wants Remy to forget about cooking and please their dad. However, when Emile discovers that Remy can get the rats into the food supply, then the attitude about Remy’s cooking changes slightly. Only when there is something to benefit the clan does Remy receive the family support he has always been looking for.

Even with the harsh past, Remy’s family comes through for him when he needs them most. Family saves Remy from the locked chef’s car and becomes Remy’s kitchen staff when Linguini loses all the support of his friends because of lying about his identity. Django understands fighting for what is believed in and he truly does want to reconnect to Remy. Django looks at Remy and reminds him, “We’re not cooks, but we are family. You tell us what to do and we’ll get it done” (Bird) assuring Remy that the colony will support him the best they can. So when Django discovers cooking as a way to get on his son’s level he accepted it and, “even more importantly, cooking was what made his son happy, and Django gave to him his whole-hearted, albeit belated, support” (Brandes and Anderson).

As for Ego, he comes into the restaurant with full intentions of shutting the place down. He hates Guestau’s motto and does not enjoy the fact that people think anyone has the potential to cook. He intimidates the kitchen staff and Linguini in any way that he can and proceeds to set them for failure by not ordering anything in particular, but telling the waiter to have the chef, “hit me with his best shot”. (Bird) Ego possesses

raw ingredients of tradition similar to Django, but also the respect and dedication to food as Colette does. He gives his criticism full heartedly and does not sugar coat any words of disappointment when he does not enjoy a meal, specifying “I don’t swallow” (Bird) if he does not like to food. When the Ratatouille dish is served, the last thing Ego intends to have is a Madeleine Cookie moment as described by Proust in his document, The Cookie. With one bite “suddenly the moment revealed itself” (Proust) and Ego is transported back to a memory of being a young boy with a skinned up knee. His mother has cooked Ratatouille to comfort him and this is what wins Ego over at Gusteau’s restaurant. The dish is so impressive that the marvelous Ego waits till closing to meet the chef that cooked the meal. When he understands Remy is the chef, he writes the critique:

In the past I have made no secret of my disdain for Chef Gusteau’s famous motto: “Anyone Can Cook”. But I realize only now do I truly understand what he meant. Not everyone can become a great artist, but a great artist can come from anywhere. (Bird)

Anton Ego’s concrete disdain for both Gusteau and his motto becomes completely unhinged by one simple “peasant” dish created by the most unlikely of chefs. Rather than being angered or non-accepting of this information, he allows himself to be molded by others raw ingredients into a new identity as a critic. Ego even acknowledges in his critique that, “The world is often unkind to new talent, new creations” and he praises the new rather than condemns it for not conforming to the more traditional route.

Through the trials and tribulations, food indeed prevails. Ingredients are the core of all food and the creation of cherished dishes. Ingredients that form and mold the characters in Disney and Pixar’s, *Ratatouille* bring out the potential of the creations that each character can be. Whether the character is triumphing in a gender oppressive work place, wrestling with the conflict of defying tradition, or allowing themselves to overcome the judgment of their communities, each character use their raw ingredients in their soul’s to mold and produce their new found identity. With this new identity made from the ingredients the characters have possessed all along, they are able to triumph over the oppression they are faced with.

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**Ethical Eats:**  
**Postcolonial Politics of Food and the**  
**Consumption of Capitalism in Thoreau's**  
*Walden and Soylent Green*

Mark Hendrix



In the 1973 futuristic dystopian ecothriller *Soylent Green*, Charlton Heston portrays police detective Robert Thorn, assigned to investigate the murder of William R. Simonson, a wealthy government bureaucrat and key player in a dysfunctional food rationing system. Aided by his ultra-literary police consultant roommate Sol Roth—part of a group of experts aptly identified in the film as “books”—Thorn discovers that rather than soybeans and lentils (the term “soylent” formed as a portmanteau of the two), human corpses in fact serve as the foundational ingredient of the titular food supply. Although initially seeming merely to offer a satirical solution to impending human self-destruction in the vein of Swift’s *Modest Proposal* (though within a particularly apocalyptic set of circumstances designed around twentieth century concerns), *Soylent Green* in fact stealthily examines a type of postcolonial scrutiny of capitalism. Indeed, the film exposes the horrifying capabilities of a capitalist food system’s willingness to not only ignore basic ethical considerations and morality through covert cannibalistic practices, but implement unchecked large-scale exploitation of both its available resources and native peoples (coincidentally amalgamated in this context) for the material gain and wealth of the powerful few.

Similarly, recalling his “experiments” in *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau also assesses and confronts a troubling investigation into highly-specific and individualized inequality, focusing on the rights of plants and animals in a world centered on, attendant to, and tailored by human needs. A vastly alternative type of probe from *Soylent Green*’s prodigious global

concerns, *Walden* thus offers a proportionally precise and localized post-colonial analysis of the United States' own capitalist food system, challenging the morality of consuming animals as food as well as considering the ethicality of mankind's impact on and manipulation of the land through agriculture for both sustenance and profit. Additionally, *Walden* examines this system's willingness to ignore both animal and plant rights in favor of specifically anthropocentric interests; within a postcolonial context, Thoreau therefore designates human dominion over plants and animals as the same type of egocentric and megalomaniacal authority banished within capitalist (and imperialist) power structures.

To effectively discuss the intersection of *Soylent Green* and *Walden*'s respective types of postcolonial critique, defining postcolonialism itself becomes necessary. Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge call it a "slippery term ... notoriously difficult to define, pivoting as it does around that potent hyphen" (377). Some critics have "frantically called for a 'secret handbook for post-colonial'" scholars to aid in explaining its interests (377). Critical theorist Stuart Hall explains that "postcolonial is not the end of colonisation," but that it rather discusses how a current state arose from previous circumstances (quoted in Mishra and Hodge 377). "[I]t is what it is," Hall says, "because something has happened before, but it is also something new" (377). Both texts therefore respond to a postcolonial type of critique—one that seeks to simultaneously explore not only the contextual circumstances that led to the situation but the consequences of what the future offers as well.

For *Soylent Green* and *Walden* to critique their circumstances, each must respond to the particular legacy that brought them to their individual points of convergence. In effect, *Soylent Green* thereby discusses the problematic exploitation of people as resources through a global critique of capitalism through a postcolonial lens, while *Walden* focuses on a different type of particularly localized exploitation of plant and animal rights. *Walden*'s critique therefore requires an additional type of redefinition for postcolonialism—that it also functions as the exploitation of plants and animals as food sources directed by a primary species toward another species.

Furthermore, postcolonialism "capture[s] a seemingly unique moment in world history, a configuration of experiences and insights, hopes and dreams arising from a hitherto silenced part of the world ... creating an altogether different vantage point from which to review the past and the future" (378). Seemingly limited in its vantage point, *Walden* poses its view within a burgeoning industrial society not yet

inaugurated by a global economy or widespread intercontinental and international trade. However, Thoreau's concerns remain especially valid in a hyperconscious contemporary society concerned with both value and ethics of processed and organic foods. *Soylent Green* crafts a vastly complex vantage point within a potential worldview of the future.

The film suggests, at length, that the United States' democratic system remains effectively in stasis in comparison to the world of today. Corporations and governors clearly rule in power and retain major influence in the world of *Soylent Green*, although the rampant corruption seen in the opulence of the wealthy indicates a somewhat more oligarchical distribution of power—still, this system of government clearly does not function as a dictatorship. A particularly American legacy of power originally began in response to Britain's disregard of colonial rights during the Revolutionary war—a legacy subsequently perpetuated by the United States' unipolar dominion of the globe.

Human survival requires sustenance and provision; *Walden* thus addresses a largely theoretical concept that human exploitation extends to its heedless consideration of plants and animals as mere resources rather than rights-bearing entities. Journalist Jeffrey Kluger discusses the “fraught relationship” that humans share with animals:

Our dodge—a not unreasonable one—has always been that animals are ours to do with as we please simply because they don't suffer the way we do. They don't think, not in any meaningful way. They don't worry. They have no sense of the future or their own mortality. They may pair-bond, but they don't love. For all we know, they may not even be conscious. “The reason animals do not speak as we do is not that they lack the organs,” Rene Descartes once said, “but that they have no thoughts.” For many people, the Bible offers the most powerful argument of all. Human beings were granted “dominion over the beasts of the field,” and there the discussion can more or less stop. (Kluger, “Inside the Minds of Animals”)

However, Descartes seems to have overlooked an important question, claims animal rights activist and philosopher Peter Singer. In his book *Animal Liberation*, Singer cites Jeremy Bentham's inquiry into the rights of animals: “The question is not Can they *reason*? nor Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?” (quoted in Singer 8). Although Descartes does not believe that animals possess any understanding or ability to think or

reason, he makes no mention of the suffering of animals as a contributing factor to the treatment of animals by humans. In other words, regardless of whether or not animals retain the faculties of thinking and reasoning, Singer argues, the reflection upon the kindness and interest in equality of humans toward other species should suffice as reason enough to act in fairness.

Highlighting a distinct fragmentation of class hierarchy, *Soylent Green* catalogues troubling and contradictory value systems, identified most visibly within the acts of control wielded by the wealthy aristocracy over raucous proletariat mobs on ration distribution days, enforced directly by menacing riot-gear-clad police patrols armed with individual weaponry and a fleet of ominous, physically-domineering “scoops”—a type of utilitarian combination crowd-control bulldozer, paddy-wagon, hearse, and waste disposal truck. In addition, government-mandated nightly curfews require all citizens to remain indoors or obtain permits in order to venture out after dark.

*Soylent Green* suggests that the future world of 2022 suffers from serious problems: overpopulation on such a vast scale that people sleep literally stacked on top of each other in apartment hallways and fire escapes; extremely limited access to food and clean water distributed through a rationing system so wholly inefficient that police officers expect a weekly riot duty obligation; and a depleted environment visibly suffering the effects of a chemically-induced climate change through both high temperatures late into the evenings as well as looming green-tinted smog.

*Walden's* notion of life as a qualifying condition for responsible and moral treatment, however, proves difficult regarding the film's nominal food product Soylent Green. As the third iteration of the Soylent Corporation's processed rations, Soylent Green purportedly consists of both soybean and lentil derivatives, as did previous offerings Soylent Yellow and Soylent Red. However, Soylent Green claims to additionally infuse “high-energy plankton” as a source of protein harvested from the oceans—the only likely agricultural growing medium remaining in the environmentally-depleted world. While investigating Simonson's apartment following his murder, Thorn finds the classified study *Soylent Oceanographic Survey Report, 2015 to 2019*, giving it to Sol Roth to interpret. Roth subsequently realizes that the report indicates that the oceans no longer produce plankton; with the help of a scholarly collective called the Exchange, Roth determines that Soylent Green's protein content must instead comprise human remains, the only other remaining consistently-available supply of protein. Although most viewers of and

characters in the film alike extend little concern to the notion of supplementing and sourcing Soylent products with plankton, identifying the origin of Soylent Green's protein supply as human immediately inserts a shocking ethical dilemma and wealth of inconvenient knowledge too troubling for Roth: the aged consultant instead chooses to pay a final visit "Home," the name of the city's assisted suicide facility.

Albeit far less amplified than Roth's life-ending response as a means of avoidance, Peter Singer explores such a sentiment regarding the gory specifics of slaughterhouses and animal processing, explaining that "[i]gnorance, then, is ... the first line of defense" (228). Singer asserts that "people do not *want* to find out the truth [emphasis in the original]. 'Don't tell me, you'll spoil my dinner' is the usual reply to an attempt to tell someone just how that dinner was produced" (228). Singer indicates that such information becomes so problematic and unappetizing that the newly-informed diner would no longer take interest in his or her meal.

In her analysis of Toni Morrison's novel *Tar Baby* (a text highly concerned with food, postcolonialism, and environmental justice), Allison Carruth identifies the obfuscation of hierarchical tensions in a more literal, concretized amalgamation within a supermarket's role in the text as a type of "built environment" in which "the spatial familiarity prevents most shoppers from perceiving the social relations that underlie its commodities" (598). Having discovered the secrets behind the "built environment" of Soylent Green's food sourcing, Sol Roth quite literally cannot contend the moral implications of the newfound information and chooses to end his own life.

As a clearly-defined cultural taboo, classifying the consumption of human remains as categorically wrong appears fairly simple and rooted deeply within human conscience; determining ethical and moral culpability for eating plants or animals becomes far more complex. Though the culinary formulation of Soylent Green as a food product seems somewhat rooted in a logical response—an (admittedly unpleasant, and thus shameful and secretive) adaptation for the consumption of a clearly overabundant resource—literary theorist Alex Mackintosh recognizes that something far more symbolic and sinister exists within this specific type of act. "Killing and eating a body, whether animal or human," Mackintosh explains, "is a direct expression of power; so too is dictating what others may or may not eat" (24). Politicians in *Soylent Green* not only enact cannibalistic consumption, but directly dispense the quantities of food rations to the city residents; both actions therefore

exhibit the expression of power Mackintosh discusses. In his essay “Crusoe’s Abattoir: Cannibalism and Animal Slaughter in *Robinson Crusoe*,” Mackintosh explains that *Robinson Crusoe* author Daniel Defoe “often used food practices as a justification for—and a means of—imperial conquest” (24). The social hierarchy and resultant clashes in *Soylent Green* clearly depict little separation between the conquests of imperialism and the conquests of capitalism, and each type ultimately proves to suppress a population in the interest of political domination and power.

In *Walden*, Thoreau weighs the advantages and disadvantages of uprooting a native St. John’s wort colony in order to cultivate an immense, cumulatively seven-miles-long crop of beans (for both financial and personal sustenance), at one point openly questioning “why should I raise them?” (146). Indeed, probing further, he directly investigates the notion of his individual authority and dominance over the land: “what right had I to oust johnswort and the rest, and break up their ancient herb garden?” (146). Notably this examination takes place at the convergence of both his potential capitalistic gain and his personal interaction with (and conquest over) nature.

Peter Singer additionally questions Thoreau’s inquiry into the rights of the plant and additional outlying ethical considerations: “How do we know that plants do not suffer?” (Singer 247). He explains that “[t] here is no reliable evidence that plants are capable of feeling pleasure or pain” (248). Furthermore, “there is no observable behavior that suggest pain; nothing resembling a central nervous system has been found in plants; and it is difficult to imagine why species that are incapable of moving away from a source of pain ... should have evolved the capacity to feel pain” (248-249). According to Singer, this inability to feel pain should allow humans to clearly delineate the lesser of two evils: if animals clearly exhibit their suffering, and no evidence exists that plants suffer in the same way, an ethical obligation to prevent suffering.

Thoreau also learns that his incessant, “curious ... Herculean labor” in the expansive bean field affords a mere “pecuniary profit” of just under nine dollars (146, 154). Although he believes (rightly) that his efforts produced little in proportion to the amount of work, Thoreau ultimately gains a greater understanding of the extreme amount of labor required of farming, labeling the profession as “the meanest of lives” and identifying the landscape as “deformed” by it (156). Thoreau discovers that the work and worry required to produce the food pays little in terms of economic dividends, although his toil ultimately leads him to a far greater understanding of the costs expended and benefits gained.

Indeed, his interest in the rights of both plants and animals as a non-exclusive consideration separated from financial gain thereby provokes inquiry into humanity's motivations to manipulate its surrounding biological resources—and whether or not humanity should view those biological entities as resources at all. Thoreau therefore appears to indicate that capitalism cannot coincide within a morally pure food culture; that, in some way, opportunistic commercial interaction should not interfere with the production of food, and that the willful production of food as a commodity at all may, in fact, ultimately lead to the types of consequences seen in *Soylent Green*.

In his book *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Michael Pollan agrees, describing the physical impact of the United States' agricultural system on the land as the world's largest man-made landscaping project: the "great American lawn ... an area twice the size of New York State; even from outer space you can't miss it" (65). Indeed, the immensity of such agricultural sprawl echoes Thoreau's "pecuniary profit" on a larger scale. Although clearly economically profitable to major corporations like Cargill and Monsanto, U.S. taxpayers spend around \$19 billion per year on payments to farmers through government subsidies (61). The overwhelming reliance of commodity corn within the food system (not only serving as feed for the animals as meat, but in additives and preservatives for food as well) serves as another example of Mackintosh's argument—that the distribution and control of the types of food purchased and eaten by American consumers exhibits a display of capitalistic conquest and power.

The etymology of "postcolonialism," interestingly enough, connects directly to food: "'Colony' comes via French from the Latin *colonia* and *colonus*, farmer, from *colere*, to cultivate, dwell ... Webster's 1905 dictionary defined it as 'A company of people transplanted from their mother country to a remote province or country' but, importantly, 'remaining subject to the jurisdiction of the parent state'" (Mishra and Hodge 378). This notion of "jurisdiction" appears in both *Walden* and *Soylent Green*, either through anthropocentric interests in regards to food enforced by humans or by politicians enforcing their self-preferential interests.

Thoreau expands on the amount of time-consuming hassle involved in obtaining food, specifically regarding meat, explaining how "[t]he practical objection to animal food in my case was its uncleanness" (200). Next, after having "caught and cleaned and cooked and eaten" his meat, it "seemed not to have fed me essentially," admitting that "[a] little bread or a few potatoes would have done as well, with less trouble

and filth” (202). If by no other means to appeal to his audience through the complexity of moral and ethical considerations, Thoreau makes an attempt to simply identify the process involved to eat animals as food by describing the animals as dirty and troublesome.

Furthermore, connecting his considerations directly to intellectual clarity and purity, Thoreau explains he believes that “every man who has ever been earnest to preserve his higher or poetic faculties in the best condition has been particularly inclined to abstain from animal food” (202). Thoreau thus asserts that the body and mind become enriched, quite literally, by the same means: “when we feed the body ... they should both sit down at the same table” (203). By keeping the body, and arguably, one’s moral intentions pure, Thoreau therefore indicates, the mind remains free from external distractions.

A slightly more nuanced version of the corruption of capitalism within oppressive and prejudicial behavior emerges in the sharp condescension directed toward women by men in *Soylent Green*: Thorn refers to Simonson’s concubine Shirl and her friends and coworkers as “furniture,” further exposing a disconcerting indication of the degradation of society. Film critic Scott Ashlin identifies this social arrangement as “an especially stark illustration of the devaluation of human life” within a world in which “wealthy men like Simonson ... rent their dwellings ‘furnished’ with attractive young women who serve as both domestic help and sex objects.” Although Shirl admonishes Thorn for his use of the derogatory slang term, Ashlin explains that, in the world of the film, “a woman with the allure to succeed as ‘furniture’ counts herself among the privileged few.” This highly complex (and appallingly misguided) sentiment appears clearly echoed by Shirl’s explicitly vocalized anxieties over whether or not future tenants will retain her services: though she recognizes that Thorn’s stereotyping and objectification subjugates her on a personal level and exhibits his lack of respect, her career dictates a coexistence and compliance alongside the very selfsame subjugation.

Theorist Martha Gimenez analyzes the complicated intersection of capitalism and the oppression of women specifically in the context of their careers, which she claims “are shaped both by gender oppression and class exploitation” (11). Indeed, the oppression of women “brings to mind a variety of psychological, economic, social and political phenomena affecting women’s lives” including “low-paid and gender-segregated employment ... the sexual division of labor, domestic labor, and the contradiction between domestic and work demands ... and, unavoid-

ably, patriarchy” (14). Clearly many if not all of these individualized types of oppression exist in Shirl’s employment.

Despite its bleak outlook on the future, the film nonetheless offers a compelling perspective on the potentiality of humans to irreparably injure the planet as well as our own stations within society. *Walden* predicts that the consequences of ignoring Thoreau’s advice to “live deliberately” (86) stand to contribute to these very selfsame problems (though, certainly, it’s unlikely Thoreau ever conceived of such worrisome issues as the ozone layer depletion or global warming), therefore locating itself at a prime pivot for a contemporary conversation between the two texts. Although *Soylent Green* offers no solutions to its critique of multifaceted human overconsumption (instead focusing on an examination of the effects that current practices stand to contribute to a near future), *Walden* recognizes and emphasizes the import of awareness of the rights of all living beings—plant, animal, and human alike.

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# Consuming Burnt Bread: the Consumption of “The Girl on Fire” in *The Hunger Games* Trilogy

Saporita Kimbrough



*The Hunger Games* Trilogy, by Suzanne Collins, is a violent, yet romanticized portrayal of a dystopian society set in the country Panem. Panem, which derives from the Latin phrase *panem et circenses* meaning “bread and circuses” was coined by Roman poet Juvenal. It was used as a political strategy to keep the peace among the country by diverting the attention of the Romans away from the real political issues by distributing bread and providing entertainment. Similarly, Panem uses the same strategy to control the districts by hosting the annual Hunger Games, which diverts the districts attention from the Capitol’s detrimental political power to the violence of the games. Although the Capitol does distribute physical bread for the districts to consume, they also give the districts Katniss Everdeen, a tribute that is consumed both mentally and physically by the Capitol, the people of Panem, and later by the Rebels of District Thirteen. Bread and its physical consumption is seen throughout *The Hunger Games* trilogy as a means of life, or giving life. Katniss soon possesses a seemingly life-giving agency by becoming the bread that the people of Panem can consume. Much like Jesus Christ, who is called “the bread of life” because he is consumed for others to have life, Katniss becomes the bread of life to many because she gives them life through hope. Katniss and her defiance of the Capitol in the Games spark a rebellion throughout the districts, evolving her into more than the poor girl from District Twelve; Katniss becomes the “Girl on Fire”, the Mockingjay, a symbol of bravery, compassion, and hope. However, in order for Katniss gain the agency as the Mockingjay,

she must be consumed both physically and mentally by those around her. *The Hunger Games* Trilogy convey the belief that in order for Katniss to gain the power to save others as their bread of life, or Mockingjay, Katniss must lose her own agency by being mentally and physically consumed by the people around her.

Katniss becomes the bread of life to others as they consume her sacrifice and rebellion. Katniss is identified by many critics as a Christ-like figure because of her willingness to sacrifice. "...Katniss unhesitatingly sacrifices herself to take Prim's place as tribute aligns completely with an identity that has always considered itself as a potential sacrificial object" (Tan 57). Katniss is indeed a sacrificial object because she sacrifices her life not only for her sister, but also for Peeta, a young man from District Twelve. Katniss is always willing to sacrifice her own life to save others, like Jesus Christ; however, her sacrifice exceeds the physical matters. Katniss literally sacrifices her own sanity and agency of self to be the hope that people look up to. She is no longer Katniss Everdeen, the young girl who hunts in the woods to provide for her family; she is now Katniss, the Mockingjay, and the "Girl on Fire" that will save Panem. However, before she becomes the bread of life to the people of Panem, Katniss is a young girl from District Twelve that outsmarts the Capitol in the 74<sup>th</sup> Hunger Games. In her first act of rebellion, Katniss defies the Capitol by refusing to allow them to have a victor in the Games. She decides to consume "poisonous" berries along with Peeta, stating, "...the dark berries glisten in the sun. I give Peeta's hand one last squeeze as a signal, as a goodbye, and we begin counting.... The berries have just passed my lips when the trumpets begin to blare.... "Stop! Stop...I am pleased to present the victors of the Seventy-fourth Hunger Games...the tributes of District Twelve" (*Games* 344). "In choosing to die, [Katniss and Peeta] not only deny the Capitol the captured life of a victor, they also deny it their deaths. Death in the arena ceases to be a reconfirmation of the Capitol's power, and becomes instead an act of refusal" (Fisher 30). Katniss makes the Capitol a public mockery by denying them the power over her life. Instead, Katniss takes agency by putting her life in her own hands, and willingly sacrifices herself for the sake of defiance and rebellion. Katniss's rebellion causes her to be thrust into the beginning of a revolution because she gives the other districts something that they have lost a long time ago: hope. Katniss unknowingly becomes the bread of life to the people of Panem, as they continue to consume her sacrifice, and now her bravery to rebel against the Capitol. In the second novel, *Catching Fire*, Katniss states "The full impact of what I've done

hits me. It is not intentional—...but I have elicited something dangerous” (Collins 62); Katniss does not know the detriments her rebellion has caused. Her agency as the bread of life for the people of Panem comes at a price, however, as the Capitol displays its disapproval of what Katniss has done. After being taken out of the arena, Katniss’s mentor, Haymitch states “...Word is the Capitol’s furious about you showing them up in the arena. The one thing they can’t stand is being laughed at and they’re the joke of Panem...” (*Games* 357). In order to reassert their power and control over Katniss, the Capitol will do anything it can to diminish her agency. The Capitol will not allow Katniss to have the agency as the bread of life; therefore they devise a way to keep Katniss in control.

The agency Katniss possesses as the bread of life, and soon, the Mockingjay, can only be validated as long as she is consumed not only by her followers, but by those in control; the Capitol and the Rebels of District Thirteen. In *Catching Fire*, Katniss begins to lose agency of self as President Snow and the media consumes her both mentally and physically. In order to restrain the mounting rebellion due to Katniss’s behavior, the Capitol first consumes Katniss mentally. President Snow visits Katniss in District Twelve and Katniss is well aware of the intentions of his visit, stating, “...this man who despises me. Will always despise me. Because I outsmarted his sadistic Hunger Games, made the Capitol look foolish, and consequently undermined his control” (*Fire* 18). President Snow threatens to kill not only Katniss, but her family if she does not restrain the rebellion she has caused among the districts. Although Katniss has yet to evolve into the Mockingjay, her agency is clearly seen as a threat, which is why President Snow must consume Katniss mentally. By allowing her to believe that her life and the lives of those she loves are on the line, Katniss is now in his control once again. Katniss can no longer live a relatively normal life after the Games; she is now a pawn of the Capitol, whom they control not only mentally, but also physically by making Katniss a public spectacle. Like a circus, Katniss is consumed for the audience of Panem to enjoy. Katniss must put on a literal show for President Snow by trying to convince him that her romance with Peeta is real. In order to save her family, Katniss must please those in control, allowing her to give up agency of self. She can no longer be Katniss Everdeen; she is now the Capitol’s property. By keeping Katniss in control, the Capitol is attempting to destroy her agency as the bread of life. However, the Capitol’s power over Katniss does not dispel her agency, which can be seen as Katniss and Peeta go on tour to all of the

districts as the victors of the games. As Katniss gives her closing remarks on her tour to District Eleven, the home of the deceased Rue, the loyalty and support that her followers have for her is conveyed: “Then from somewhere in the crowd, someone whistles Rue’s four-note mockingjay tune....The one that meant safety in the arena....What happened next is not an accident. It is too well executed to be spontaneous, because it happens in complete unison. Every person in the crowd presses the three middle fingers of their left hand against their lips and extend them to me” (*Fire* 61). The act does not come without consequence however, as “[a] pair of Peacekeepers drag[ed] the old man who whistled to the top of the steps. Forcing him to his knees before the crowd. And putting a bullet through his head” (*Fire* 62). The public murder of an innocent man is the Capitol’s way to show Katniss, and those who have hope in her who is really in control. Katniss’s agency has grown from more than just the bread of life for the people; she is now beginning to evolve into the Mockingjay, the symbol of rebellion.

However, the Capitol sees Katniss’s evolution as the Mockingjay and in attempt to further destroy her agency as such, the Capitol announces the Quarter Quell, a replica of the Hunger Games for the victors of past Games. Originally held every twenty-five years, President Snow decides to host it only a year after the Hunger Games and Katniss once again finds herself fighting for her life in an arena. As Katniss becomes acquainted with other victors, she learns that the mockingjay pin she wore in the first games became popularized by the gaudy people of the Capitol, reducing its significance of hope and power to a mere fashion statement. Katniss does not understand why Cinna has given her a mockingjay pin to wear; however, Katniss explains what a mockingjay is, stating “A mockingjay is just a songbird. A mockingjay is a creature the Capitol never intended to exist. They hadn’t counted on the highly controlled jabberjay having the brains to adapt to the wild, to pass on its genetic code, to thrive in a new form. They hadn’t anticipated its will to live” (*Games* 92). The explanation of the mockingjay mirrors Katniss because the Capitol intended to get rid of her existence in the Quell; however, the Capitol is unaware of Katniss’s will to live and save her family. “Her sense of self is characterized by inherent rebellion, by independence and self-sufficiency” (Tan 57); Like the Mockinjay, Katniss is self-sufficient, and with her rebellious spirit, the Capitol cannot try to get rid of her so easily. Katniss is not only willing to fight for her life to survive, but she is also doing so while defying the very power structure trying to destroy her. As the news of her return to the arena sets in,

Katniss recognizes what the Capitol is trying to prove, stating “[t]hey, or should I say we, are the very embodiment of hope where there is no hope. And now twenty-three of us will be killed to show how even that hope is an illusion” (*Fire* 175-76). The Capitol does not only want to annihilate Katniss, but also the hope that she represents. As the weight of the reality of returning to the arena becomes clear to Katniss, she slowly begins to lose her mind because she is convinced she will not be able to survive a second time in the arena, meaning the President will kill her family. Everything that Katniss has worked for is in vain, and the consumption of her being proves to result in only detrimental consequences. However, even though Katniss has allowed her agency of self to be lost by being so consumed by the powers around her, she can see the mistreatment the Capitol is thrusting on her for defying their power, and she is not going to go down without a fight. Along with the other victors, including Peeta, Katniss returns to the arena and she seems to give up hope of making it out alive. However, Katniss has realized that she has had enough and once again outsmarts the Capitol by destroying the force field surrounding the arena. Collins allows the audience to see Katniss truly transform in front of their eyes as the Mockingjay. As Katniss raises her bow to fire at the force field, she states, “I have always known who the enemy is. Who starves and tortures and kills us in the arena. Who will soon kill everyone I love. My bow drops as his meaning registers. Yes, I know who the enemy is...” (*Fire* 378). Katniss now realizes that her real enemy is not the victors in the arena fighting for their life along with her; the real enemy is the powers she allowed to consume her body and her mind, the powers that have made her a public spectacle: the Capitol. *Catching Fire* ends as Katniss is whisked away from the arena by the Rebels of District Thirteen, which the audience finds out does in fact exist. Although Peeta could not be saved and is now being held captive by the Capitol, the country of Panem has now launched into a war. The Rebels of District Thirteen take Katniss in, along with other survivors of the District Twelve, which has been destroyed by the Capitol. As Katniss adapts to the Rebels rigid, controlled daily schedule, she soon begins to realize that the methods of control used by the Rebels is identical to those of the Capitol. The Rebels consume Katniss’s mental and physical being as a way to control her agency as the Mockingjay. In book one, *The Hunger Games*, the Capitol molds Katniss into a fit, healthy tribute to fight in the games. Similarly, the Rebels aim to mold Katniss, like the kneading and molding of bread.

Katniss is once again consumed by others so that she can be the Mockingjay. Katniss is mentally unstable, using medication to help ease her panic attacks; however, the Rebels waste no time forcing Katniss to be the face of the revolution. Katniss agrees to be the Mockingjay, which would appear to allow her to gain full agency as the bread of life to others. However, even as the face of the revolution, Katniss is still controlled and consumed by the Rebels, and their President, Coin. In light of Katniss agreeing to serve as their Mockingjay, President Coin announces to the district that Katniss will serve her role, and if she does not do what is asked of her, “[t]he immunity would be terminated and the fate of the four victors determined by the law of District Thirteen. As would her own... In other words, if [Katniss] steps out of line, [they] are all dead” (*Mockingjay* 58). Katniss realizes that she is once again being controlled and manipulated by the powers around her. However, in order to be the Mockingjay, and the bread of life to those who look up to her, Katniss willingly gives up her agency of self as the Rebels physically mold her into the Mockingjay they want her to be. By the time the prep team has finished making Katniss up and dressing her, she is unrecognizable. Katniss stands in the mirror and states, “I do not know who this person is” (*Mockingjay* 71). “Her body is not her own... Katniss’s commodification has made her object becoming a consumer item [that is] changed and defined by the demands of an audience” (Tan 57-58). She has been physically altered to be who the Rebels want her to be so that she is a marketable figure to the media the Rebels wish to entertain. However, in the mist of being molded into the Mockingjay, Katniss begins to lose herself. Katniss slowly begins to fade away to make room for the gaudy, overdramatized Mockingjay that the Rebels want to display for the world to see.

As *The Hunger Games* Trilogy progresses to book three, *Mockingjay*, the mental and physical consumption of Katniss is highlighted as she deals with not only her mental instability, but the media consumption she must endure by the Rebels. Much like the media spectacle the Capitol molded Katniss into, the Rebels do the same, causing Katniss to become physically consumed by the audience. The Rebels are no different from the Capitol; they crave power, and use over-the-top antics to display their powers. Katniss is their new object, or “consumer item” (Tan 58), as they force her to shoot numerous promotion videos to air to the other districts. Katniss is forced to “perform” for the cameras that constantly follow her every move as the Rebels try to catch every possible cameo shot for a future promo video. The productions that

the Rebels put on for the war are so overdramatized, that it is clear that Collins is suggesting the severity of the war is being diminished and turned into a media farce, much like the meaning of the Mockingjay being tarnished by being made it a fashion accessory. The commercial-like productions they film strip Katniss from the true meaning of what a Mockingjay is and what it represents. However, in order to be the bread of life to others, she must perform. In her first outing since her episode in the arena, Katniss visits District Eight. A bombing soon occurs, destroying the hospital full of wounded people and the rest of the district. Furious, Katniss and Gale take down the planes, and Katniss gives an empowering speech to the Capitol, full of sincere emotion. However, the Rebels take the footage and alter it, corrupting the true agency Katniss has as the Mockingjay. Collins states, "Flames engulf the screen again. Superimposed on them in black, solid letters are the words: IF WE BURN...YOU BURN WITH US....The words catch fire and the whole screen burns to blackness" (*Mockingjay* 106). Although the footage captures Katniss in a moment where she conveys her true agency as the Mockingjay, the Rebels take that agency away by making it a public farce rather than a genuine moment of power. Katniss has the agency to be the Mockingjay, however she has been so consumed by the powers around her that she loses faith in herself, causing her to lose agency of self once more.

However, Katniss's agency as the bread of life is untainted, even in an altered, molded state. Despite being physically transformed to look different and portrayed as an action movie star rather than a heroine, Katniss is still the hope for many. As stated earlier, Katniss visits District Eight and its hospital, full of wounded people from a bombing that had occurred before her arrival. The hope and faith the people of Panem have in Katniss is conveyed as the people become ecstatic as she presents herself to them. Collins appears to give Katniss agency in Christ-like healing abilities as Katniss states, "...my voice...erases the suffering momentarily" (*Mockingjay* 89). "Katniss! Katniss Everdeen!" The sounds of pain and grief begin to recede, to be replaced by words of anticipation. From all sides, voices beckon me....Nothing of importance, no amazing words of inspiration. But it doesn't matter. Bogg is right. It's the sight of me, alive, that is the inspiration. Hungry fingers devour me, wanting to feel my flesh" (*Mockingjay* 89-90). Collins uses the word *devour* as if to convey the literal consumption of Katniss by these people as her bread of life. Katniss is once again likened to Jesus Christ because she sacrifices her life to save others in District Eight,

and she is devoured by the people to heal them, much like the sick who touched the hem of Jesus Christ's garment and were healed. Although Katniss has lost her agency of self by being consumed by the Capitol and the Rebels, she is given agency as the bread of life because no matter how much she is altered and transformed, she still represents hope. She not only gives people hope to live, but to fight as well. Katniss recognizes her agency as the bread of life, stating "[a] new sensation germinates inside me....Power. I have a kind of power I never knew I possessed. Snow knew it as soon as I held out those berries. Plutarch knew when he rescued me from the arena. And Coin knows now. So much so that she must publicly remind her people that I am not in control" (*Mockingjay* 91). Katniss has power; however, her power is only validated by the consumption of her mental and physical being by others. As the war in Panem grows worse, and the consumption of Katniss as the Mockingjay escalates, Katniss and her team go to fight at the Capitol. Katniss desires to kill President Snow and as they approach his home, bombs drop, killing Prim and physically consuming Katniss's body with flames. The fire consumes her body and she begins to mentally drift away, losing all hope in living, stating "Trapped for days, years, centuries maybe. Dead, but not allowed to die. Alive, but as good as dead. So alone that anyone, anything, no matter how loathsome, would be welcome" (*Mockingjay* 349). Surviving the flames, Katniss looks at herself in the mirror, stating:

but the mirror reflects my naked fire-mutt body. The skin grafts still retain a newborn-baby pinkness. The skin deemed damaged but the salvageable looks red, hot, and melted in places. Patches of my former self gleam white and pale. I'm like a bizarre patchwork quilt of skin. Parts of my hair were singed off completely; the rest has been chopped off at odd lengths. Katniss Everdeen, the girl who was on fire. (*Mockingjay* 352)

Collins has literally transformed her into an amalgamation of the "Girl on Fire" and the Mockingjay, resulting in the resurrection of a new creature. "The mockingjay in itself is a purification of an evil thing, a resurrection of a species that was supposed to simply die out, the image we get when we *combine* the "girl on fire" with the mockingjay is that of the phoenix" (Barlett). However, her transformation comes with a price as Katniss not only begins to lose her mental stability, but her body is

distorted by the flames as well; Katniss has now been literally consumed, like a piece of bread that has been burnt.

Furthermore, Katniss transformation into a phoenix represents her resurrection as a fragile façade of Katniss Everdeen, the “Girl on Fire” rather than the Mockingjay. A phoenix is a bird that is consumed by fire and is reborn again from its own ashes. Katniss’s resurrection; however, is hidden by Collins controversial ending of the trilogy. Katniss murders President Coin and sent away into seclusion with her new husband, Peeta, and their two children. However, considering the agency that Katniss has as the bread of life, her agency would have remained eternal if she had not been sent into seclusion, or even killed, instead of being placed in a rather typical maternal role. It is as if Collins has taken Katniss’s agency of self away by allowing her to live as such. Although it appears to be a happy ending, Collins does signify that Katniss is no longer the girl the audience was introduced to in *The Hunger Games*; she has been consumed so much that she is no longer herself anymore. Katniss has been reborn and resurrected like a phoenix; however, she is not reborn into the Mockingjay, the symbol of hope for all. Katniss is now resurrected into a woman plagued with nightmares, grief, and fear. She states, “But one day I will have to explain about my nightmares. Why they came. Why they won’t ever really go away. I’ll tell them how I survive it....That’s when I make a list in my head of every act of goodness I’ve seen someone do. It’s like a game. Repetitive. Even a little tedious after more than twenty years. But there are much worse games to play” (*Mockingjay* 390). Collins conveys that Katniss will never escape the games; while they are physically gone, the mental impact on her life will forever be there; therefore, her agency of self will never return.

*The Hunger Games* trilogy conveys much more than the rise and fall of an evil dystopian society; Suzanne Collins conveys the detriments of the consumption of a person in order to be a savior to others. Although Katniss did not live a rather glamorous life before the Games, she now lives in a constant state of fear because she has been so consumed. Katniss is introduced to the reader as the “Girl on Fire”, the young woman who will save the people of Panem from the control of the Capitol, and Katniss succeeds in bringing Panem out of the power of the Capitol. However, in return Katniss gives up her agency of self. Katniss is now a fragile woman that has been over consumed by the powers around her; however, she has given Panem the hope and freedom they have lost so long ago.

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**Feeding the Family:  
Re-writing the Recipe for Femininity in  
*Like Water for Chocolate***

Jenna Morris



In Laura Esquivel's novel *Like Water for Chocolate*, Mama Elena upholds the traditional "recipe" for femininity and forces Tita, the primary cook for the family, to follow the constricting instructions. Mama Elena loses her husband before Tita's birth; in her grief, she does not physically nurse her. As a result, Elena's strict rules and unloving nature ultimately render Tita as desperately hungry for nourishment. Despite her "hunger," Tita also works as the provider of food for her family. From birth, Tita, connoisseur of all things food, practices precision in the kitchen, understanding the appropriate amount of heat to deliver to her food in order to create a delicacy. Descriptions of Tita cooking are rampant throughout the novel, but the detailed explanation for how Tita prepares hot chocolate epitomizes her own situation: "it's advisable to toast the cocoa beans just until the moment they begin to give off oil. If they are removed from the heat before then, they will make a discolored and disagreeable-looking chocolate, which will be indigestible besides. On the other hand, if they are left on the heat too long, most of the beans will be burned, which will make the chocolate bitter and acrid" (165). Importantly, this prescription applies to Tita herself; involved in a complex love triangle, Tita battles between her "hot" encounters with Pedro and the "warm" ones with John Brown. Regardless of the rejuvenating nurture John provides her with, Tita is still drawn to Pedro, reveling in the heat they share that allows her to rewrite standards of female sexuality, even if she ends up burned from it. Though she has no children of her own, Tita provides a revised version of moth-

erhood. Tita refuses to carry on her mother's recipe for women, creates her own book of recipes, and then passes it down to future generations. Unexpectedly, Tita's role as a cook does not oppress her as traditionally displayed in woman's literature; instead, Tita rewrites the recipe for the female experience and establishes hope for the subsequent generations.

*Like Water for Chocolate* raises pivotal questions regarding the origins of domestic oppression; from Mama Elena's actions, she clearly feels the need to uphold the standards of her culture, and Tita ultimately rebels from her mother's rules. Mama Elena follows a tradition set before her, much like a recipe. In fact, critic Susan Dobrian keenly points out that "by literally providing a culinary recipe at the beginning of each chapter and promise for a new one in the next, Esquivel foregrounds the prescriptive element of socially determined femininity" (58). Mama Elena follows a stringent order because she has no knowledge of any other lifestyle. In an article analyzing the mother-daughter relationships in *Like Water for Chocolate*, Jeanine Perez explains that "she [Mama Elena] feels the need to perpetuate tradition because of what society expects from her" (193). Certainly, toward the end of the novel, Tita learns that her mother was separated from her lover because of social conventions regarding racial differences, and though Mama Elena is miserable because of their separation, she oppresses Tita in the same way. Additionally, we learn from reading Nacha's perspective that "the mama of Mama Elena had sent [her fiancé] packing" (36). Thus, the separation of lovers in this text stems from generations of stringent rules about female sexuality. Yet when Tita first asks Mama Elena about Pedro, Elena responds, "you don't have an opinion, and that's all I want to hear about it. For generations, not a single person in my family has ever questioned this tradition, and no daughter of mine is going to be the one to start" (11). Importantly, Tita *is* the "one to start" raising these questions. Thus, uncomfortable with Tita's patterns of non-conformity, Mama Elena keeps Tita under her tight regiment.

While Mama Elena may have some sort of wisdom in trying to keep Tita from Pedro, her character functions not only as a source of oppression, but her inability to properly feed Tita lends to a missed opportunity for an imperative connection, ultimately leaving Tita "starved" for love and nourishment. When Tita's father suddenly dies of a heart attack, "Mama Elena's milk [dries] up from shock" (7). Mama Elena readily passes on the role of feeding Tita to Nacha as "she had enough responsibility running the ranch" (7). According to psychologist Erik Erikson, the relationship that a mother and baby develop through a nursing

interaction is imperative: “the mutuality of relaxation thus developed is of prime importance for the first experience of friendly otherness ... the baby also develops the necessary groundwork to ... identify with her” (60). In his study, Erikson even further suggests that the lack of laying this “necessary groundwork” can inhibit the child from developing a sense of basic trust with the world. Throughout the novel, Tita clearly portrays examples of insecurities, and is constantly looking to “light the fire” inside of her. Even more, critic Sarah Sceats claims that this interaction (or lack of interaction) through feeding can skew the child’s sense of love: “Implicit in positive maternal nourishing...is the congruence of food and love. At the initial stage of an infant’s life, indeed, they are almost inseparable, especially for mothers who breastfeed, and women almost invariably express love for their children through food” (20). Thus, as Sceats implies, the correlation between food and love for an infant is extremely important. For Tita, food and love interconnect in a complex manner—they are almost impossible to extrapolate one from the other. For example, the food from the kitchen actually calls Tita into existence. Tita claims that “it might have been the unusual combination of sardines and sausages that had called her and made her decide to trade the peace of ethereal existence in Mama Elena’s belly for a life as her daughter, in order to enter the De la Garza family and share their delicious meals and wonderful sausage” (9). Quite literally, Tita is born hungry for food; Nacha even comments that Tita “would eat anything” (30). Though Nacha praises Tita for her appetite, it seems that Tita’s tendency to ingest “anything” is problematic and potentially leads Tita to pursue the heat that Pedro offers her. To put it simply, Mama Elena’s neglects to physically feed Tita and leaves her unable to understand love. In a way, Elena pushes Tita into Pedro’s hot, welcoming arms. Certainly, Tita’s first sexual encounter happens because the fear that Mama Elena had previously imposed on the inhabitants of the ranch protects Tita and Pedro from inquiry when their consummation sparks literal fireworks: “this fear of encountering [Mama Elena] is what provided Tita and Pedro the perfect opportunity to profane her favorite place with impunity, rolling voluptuously on Gertruidis’s bed” (159). Thus the fear of Mama Elena provides a halo of protection for Pedro and Tita, allowing Tita to explore her sexuality, but in a way that eventually becomes problematic.

In lieu of receiving proper nourishment and love from her mother, Tita finds her acceptance in the kitchen; Tita’s experience as a cook alters the traditional viewpoint of womanhood in that her food allows

her to become an active sexual participant, creating a new template for sexuality. In the kitchen, Tita develops nurturing relationships with both Nacha and Checha. Devoid of substantial relationships with her mother and sisters, Tita creates a new family unrestricted by biology in the kitchen. Though some critics feel that writing Tita as a cook further perpetuates the domestic standards of women, Tony Spanos understands that the kitchen becomes a place of artistic innovation for Tita, saying, “although this type of novelty may appear highly incompatible to many feminist critics, other women writers and women in general whose message is to reject patriarchal dominion and to move beyond the confines of the domestic life, Esquivel reclaims the kitchen as a very serious domestic sphere which is the most sacred place in the house, and from which the protagonist controls her destiny through recipes” (30). Importantly, Tita is actually born in the kitchen: “thanks to her unusual birth, Tita felt a deep love for the kitchen, where she spent most of her life from the day she was born” (6). At first, the kitchen is a place where Mama Elena doles out orders, but eventually, the kitchen comes to have new purpose for Tita. One critic has suggested that “[the] true meaning of the kitchen [is] strikingly similar to a secret laboratory, where a self-absorbed sorceress tests her daring experiments” (Zubiarre 36), but this is quite apparently an invalid argument. When Tita feels her family the quail in rose petal sauce, she has no intention of altering their chemical makeup, as Zubiarre’s article might suggest. Instead, Tita’s emotions overwhelm her and influence her food in a way that she cannot intentionally predict. In a way that is completely new to Tita, the food becomes a conduit for sexual pleasure: “that was the way she *entered Pedro’s body*, hot, voluptuous, perfumed, totally sensuous ... Pedro didn’t offer any resistance. *He let Tita penetrate* to the farthest corners of his being...” (emphasis mine 52). Though mystical as Zubiarre suggests, Tita is not self-absorbed in her cooking; if anything, she is far too absorbed with Pedro. Yet Tita does clearly explore her own sexuality through her cooking; she finds “hot” pleasure with Pedro, hot enough to scorch her.

The relationship between Pedro and Tita is problematic, but Pedro’s role is imperative for Tita’s emancipation; Tita finds pleasure in her encounters with Pedro and uses the heat from his gaze to “cook” herself, and thus is able to breastfeed Roberto. Tita uses Pedro as a heat source—or, a metaphorical stove—to produce nourishment for the baby through her breasts. Instead of the expected objectification of a woman subjugated to a male gaze, the looks emancipate Tita when she returns

her gaze back to Pedro. Just as when Tita brazenly stared at Pedro as he indulges in the quail in rose petal sauce, she returns his steamy gaze when he comes upon her in the kitchen and “Tita look[s] up without stopping her grinding and her eyes met Pedro’s. At once, their passionate glances [fuse] so perfectly that whoever saw them would have seen but a single look, a single rhythmic and sensual motion, a single trembling breath, a single desire” (67). Tita continues to cook to provide tangible nourishment while also looking back at Pedro and sharing an intense moment of mutual gratification. Tita’s pointed look back at Pedro offers a different reading for the stereotypical “male gaze.” Tita does not feel degraded by Pedro; their passion is mutual, and the focus they share points toward mutuality. Tita uses this heat inspiring gaze and becomes a mothering source of nourishment to Pedro and Rosaura’s son, Robert. In the scene, Pedro actually breaks the eye-to-eye gaze when he notices Tita’s breasts, but Tita boldly presents her body to him: “she stopped grinding, straightened up, and proudly lifted up her chest so Pedro could see it better” (67). The tone of this statement suggests that Tita is neither mortified nor degraded by Pedro’s gaze. In a sense, Tita offers her breasts as a form of nourishment in the same way that she cooks for her family. Tita explains that “after that penetrating look that saw through clothes, nothing would ever be the same. Tita knew through her own flesh how fires transform the elements, how a lump of corn flower is change into a tortilla. . . . In a few moments’ time, Pedro had transformed Tita’s breasts from chaste to experienced flesh, without even touching them” (67). Tita significantly likens this moment to the process of making a tortilla because she can feel the pleasurable conversions she endures under Pedro’s watch. Thus, Tita’s experience alters the traditional ideology of a woman in the kitchen and the male gaze—instead adopting a role of servitude, her ability to cook and provide nourishment along with the heat from Pedro’s gaze enralls Tita.

Though she celebrates the heat that Pedro provides her and the skill of nursing that she develops from it, Tita’s nourishing of Roberto becomes all-consuming when she loses her identity in her relationship with the baby. In using the heat from Pedro’s gaze, Tita becomes a rejuvenated symbol of motherhood; contrasting Mama Elena, she empowers herself with Pedro’s gaze to become a source of desirable nourishment for both himself and the child. Even though Tita finds empowerment in her ability to provide food for Roberto, eventually the responsibility of feeding Roberto begins to squelch her autonomy. When Pedro comes and sees Tita nursing Roberto, he “[isn’t] in surprised in the least, nor

did he need an explanation” (76). How could Pedro have known that Tita would gain the ability to breast feed? Zubiaurre makes a good point in her analysis when she claims that Tita’s role as a virgin mother

perfectly suits the patriarchal order. Since sexuality is by definition and according to Judeo-Christian belief and tradition a ‘dirty’ and sinful, though necessary, business, there is no purer, more devoted (and, hence, better) mother than one unblemished by sexual intercourse. As if to confirm it, Pedro witnesses with great satisfaction without any sign of surprise or puzzlement that highly unusual circumstance of a breastfeeding virgin. (45)

As if to protect herself from Pedro’s now coddling gaze, Tita takes this moment to cover her breast from his eyes. While she could be trying to preserve the purity of her motherhood, it is more likely that Tita now attempts to shelter her breast from the patriarchal assumptions about the roles of a mother. It is important that Tita does cover herself, though. Previously, Tita understood that the pleasurable gaze that she and Pedro shared was mutual, but here, she covers her breast and refuses to be objectified by his assumptions.

Shortly after Tita develops the ability to nurse, Mama Elena sends Rosaura, Pedro, and Roberto to San Antonio; in the absence of her most important consumer, Tita has no outlet through which to perform her work of cooking. Though Tita initially feels empowered in being a pseudo-mother to Roberto, her role as a “mother” without a baby (or, a cook without a guest) ultimately leaves her weakened: “from then on, her main interest lay in feeding that pathetic baby pigeon. Only then did like seem to make a little sense. It didn’t compare with the satisfaction derived from nursing a human being, but in some way, it was similar” (93). Clearly, Tita feels compelled to provide nourishment; without Roberto to feed, she loses her purpose. This is problematic; Tita must have another way to identify herself. Sceats says that “maternity provides a figure of limitless, irresistible authority...mothers are overwhelmingly powerful but at the same time are socially and domestically disempowered by their nurturing, serving role” (11). This disempowerment is exactly what we see with Tita and Roberto, especially after Roberto is gone and Tita loses her purpose. In being a mother to Roberto, Tita loses her identity, and Pedro seemingly approves of Tita offering her literal body as nourishment for his child. In this way, it is apparent that the emancipation that Tita receives from Pedro is problematic; eventually, it is through this experience and

her relationship with John Brown that Tita discovers how to truly be a mothering source of nourishment for a child.

Because Tita does not receive proper “nourishment” from Mama Elena, she is devoid of a maternal example and must find a way to be re-born herself so that she may be an appropriate mother for Esperanza. It is not until Tita spends time with John Brown that she chooses not to nurse Roberto’s daughter, Esperanza as she “[knew] better than to establish such an intense relationship with a child who wasn’t her own” (148). In this “maternal” relationship, Tita does not crucify herself; the elements of sacrifice are inherent in the nurturing relationship Tita provides Esperanza, but this time, it is not to Tita’s defeat. John, on the other hand, actually teaches Tita how to be a mother by nurturing her himself. Tita actually becomes crazed after Roberto dies, and John Brown is her benefactor, rescuing her from Mama Elena’s home and keeping her on his own property so that she will not have to stay in an asylum. In John Brown’s house, Tita is, in a sense, reborn. Tita is infantilized, unable to feed or bathe herself. John takes on these mothering responsibilities in a respectful way: “John’s large, loving hands had taken off her clothes and bathed her and carefully removed the pigeon droppings from her body, leaving her clean and sweet-smelling. Finally, he gently brushed her hair and put her in bed with starched sheets” (108). Here, mothering crosses genders; John can act as a mother to Tita, and his care for her actually revolutionizes her thoughts about the world. When she first arrives at John’s house, Tita describes herself as an infant: “Instead of eating, she would stare at her hands for hours on end. She would regard them like a baby, marveling that they belonged to her” (108). Tita admits that up until this point, she had never known what to do with her hands as they had been something that belonged to Mama Elena. Now, however, she is free to do as she wishes. When Mama Elena is injured while trying to defend the family, Tita returns to her, and Mama Elena “sees a strange light in Tita’s eyes” (129) Unlike Tita’s first false emancipation from Pedro, John Brown really does teach her something new about herself: with him she is reborn.

After her rejuvenation with John Brown, Tita does not attempt to be Esperanza’s physical mother, but she still nourishes and her provides her with the ability to live a more freeing life than Tita experienced. Just as with Mama Elena and Tita, Rosaura is unable to nurse Esperanza when she is born: “the death of her mother affected Rosaura so deeply that it brought on the birth of her daughter and made nursing the child an impossibility” (146). Importantly, Mama Elena has

passed away, and Tita admits that even after Mama Elena is gone, she still feels her lingering presence, even in the kitchen. One of the most pivotal moments in the text occurs when Tita claims that she cannot follow the recipes that her mother laid out for her, acknowledging that she “couldn’t resist the temptation to violate the oh-so-rigid rules her mother imposed in the kitchen . . . and in life” (198). Tita takes her role as a cook seriously, and despite the trials she experiences, Tita learns that she cannot follow her mother’s prescriptions. Even further than trying to preserve herself, Tita negotiates with Rosaura and takes up the role of “feeding” Esperanza. Though Tita feeds Esperanza because her mother cannot, she does not try to breastfeed her in this case: “this time, Tita would not take on the role of wet nurse, as she’d done with her nephew, and what’s more, she didn’t try, perhaps because of the devastating experience she’s had when they took the child from her. Now she knew better than to establish such an intense relationship with a child that wasn’t her own” (146). Tita learns that she has more to offer Esperanza than physical food. As the “cook,” Tita provides more than the physical nourishment that she gave Roberto: “even though it wasn’t part of the deal, she took advantage of the moments Esperanza spent with her to provide the child with a different sort of knowledge than her mother was teaching her” (238). Tita not only teaches Esperanza to cook, but she constructs a foundation upon which Esperanza can lead a more fulfilling life. The last chapter of the novel describes a wedding ceremony between Esperanza and John Brown’s son, Alex. It is as though Esperanza exemplifies a “new Tita,” making the choice to marry a “Brown” while remaining an autonomous individual.

Though she dies while consummating her love to Pedro, ultimately Tita’s choice to be with him is significant because it is just that: her *own* choice. From the way Pedro considers Tita, it is clear that she needs to be cautious of him. For one thing, we know that Pedro is immature; he serenades Tita while drunk at one point, and at another, claims he wants to “smash [John’s] face in” (231) to keep him away from Tita. Even more alarming, Pedro possessively claims that he wants to make Tita his own (139). As is apparent through reading the novel, Pedro does not seem to be the right choice for Tita; John Brown is mature and caring in his approach toward Tita, yet she cannot stay away from Pedro. John Brown tells Tita that the breath of a loved one is like oxygen to a flame, and that the fire “is what nourishes the soul. That fire, in short, is its food” (115). Unfortunately, John Brown’s “warmth” is not enough for Tita. In a sense, Tita is so “malnourished” as a child that she must find

a way to intensely fuel her fire, and she does this in the most passionate way that she can: with Pedro. At one point in the novel, Tita runs from Pedro when he comes upon her showering, she remembers his eyes on her later, and recalls a song taught to her by Nacha: “You are the light of my eyes, my eyes/I’m brought to life by you” (156). In some sense, the connection between Pedro and Tita is romantic—their forbidden, passionate encounters are enthralling for Tita. Yet the fact that this is what “brings her to life” is problematic. Tita can see nothing else when she is with Pedro: she is ultimately deemed with “tunnel vision,” and certainly Tita does end up following Pedro down the bright tunnel to her own death. While many critics have read Tita and Pedro’s death as romantic since they are bound in eternal love, there is a sense of something lost along with Tita’s death, but there is a greater sense of something reborn from what Tita leaves behind for future De la Garza women.

Without a doubt, it is immensely important that Esperanza’s name means *Hope* in Spanish; the knowledge Tita provides her with becomes the new “recipe” for the De la Garza women to live by. Importantly, Esperanza and Alex share the same “heat” that Tita and Pedro relish, but since Tita has constructed an appropriate world view for Esperanza, she does not have to worry about being “burned.” The text says that Esperanza told Tita that she felt “like dough being plunged in boiling oil” (238) when she saw Alex, paralleling the metaphor Tita used to describe Pedro. While this could be alarming, we also know that Esperanza had a revolutionary upbringing compared to Tita. Though Tita had Nacha and Chenchá, she had no one to teach her to stand up for herself, which she does for Esperanza. As part of her nourishment-giving role, Tita “taught her [Esperanza]...the secrets of love and life as revealed by the kitchen” (239). In doing this, Tita creates a new standard for her family: she re-writes the recipe. Importantly, after Tita and Pedro consummate their love, the entire ranch catches on fire. The only salvageable piece of the wreckage is the cookbook Tita has left behind. Significantly, the narrator of the novel is Tita’s grand-niece; from reading her perspective, it is clear that the revolution Tita sparked in Esperanza has been passed down through the generations. Perez says, “The narrator of the story, Tita’s great-niece, daughter of Pedro and Rosaura’s only child Esperanza, belongs to the branch of the new women of the family. Although she and her mother share Tita’s passion for cooking, they have the opportunity of living according to their desires. And such liberty they owe to Tita, who is the first to say what she thinks is harmful to women about tradition” (198-199). Tita makes a large sacrifice for her family; she is

like a pioneer, paving the way for future generations through the recipes she leaves behind for them.

Despite the complicating ending, the imperative point is that Tita makes a *choice* to be with Pedro and sets an example of a woman who refuses to follow her mother's rules. As Pedro and Tita depart from the earth, their blistering romance causes the house to burn down, and the ground upon which the house stood is said to be "the most fertile in the region" (245). As a final note, Tita's niece ensure readers that she and her family enjoy the fruits and vegetables provided by the land, and that Tita will "go on living as long as there is someone who cooks her recipes" (245). Tita, then, becomes the revolutionary figure in the novel; as the cook for the house, she sets up a new recipe for femininity, one that uses an appropriate amount of heat, somewhere between hot and warm, to "nourish the souls" of the women in the subsequent generations.

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# Food Porn: The Interplays of Sexual and Gustatory Desire in Media

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Take a moment to think about this: a deep chocolaty velvet cake, divided into fluffy layers. At the top, smooth, glossy peaks of chocolate frosting shimmer and stand tall, like a dark mountain. Take a moment to imagine taking a bite, envisioning the rich taste as a few crumbs fall here and there, a bit of frosting stuck to the roof of your mouth like fine silk. Are you hungry yet? The phenomenon known as “Food Porn” requires proper descriptors when it comes to describing a very rich food, such as a chocolate cake: expect words such as “rich,” “savory,” “decadent” to crop up at least twice when talking about a single food item. In modern speak, “food porn” has very little to do with actual sex or pornography, although eroticizing food to the point beyond mere deliciousness is highly encouraged and embraced to an extent. The ingredients utilized in various dishes emphasize the flavor and value of their respective dishes, running the gamut from fattening butter to bitter chocolates and robust coffees, and the cooking process becomes as critical in the food porn experience as the product itself. Exactly what the viewer feels while watching the chefs perform their craft—or even simply viewing a picture or reading vivid descriptions of food—may vary widely from person to person, but whether it is an internet video or a simple sentence, the goal of food porn remains the same: to produce a desire that may or may not be linked to an actual physical hunger. Even if hunger fails to be present in a person, seeing food made and arranged in a very specific fashion has an effect on the mind that can produce a wide variety of feelings, from wanting the food to wanting what the food represents.

Food porn has existed since the ancient times of Romans and their lavish feasts (McBride 41), but the term itself did not appear in the modern vernacular until 1979, when it was used as a means to “connote a food so sensationally out of bounds of what a food should be that it deserved to be considered pornographic” (qtd. in McBride 38); Michael Jacobson, the man who coined the term food porn was no doubt discussing the over-the-top flavors and rich ingredients that chefs often incorporate to make such foods. Food porn itself is a controversial term, dividing food professionals and culinary wizards from everybody else. The main point of contention lies in the fact that several people in the food industry claim there is no connection between food and sex; the only reason the term exists is due to the old saying: “sex sells” (qtd. in McBride 42). Regardless of the divided opinion regarding food porn’s relevance in our vernacular, however, there is no doubt that the food industry itself intentionally titillates the senses through both the use of food and the people who prepare said food.

TV Food Network is especially well-known for its wide range of shows that range from down-to-earth home cooking to hot-blooded competitive cooking. Of special focus are the home cooking shows, which often feature very attractive forty year old women who often act half their age whenever they are in the kitchen. There are two cooking show hostesses who stand out in particular: Giada de Laurentiis and Nigella Lawson, the widely proclaimed “Queen of Food Porn.” Both women act as fan-service, albeit in opposite ways—de Laurentiis is perky and always has a bright smile on her face, while Lawson takes a more sultry approach in her cooking, giving the camera a sexy, inviting stare as she prepares her meals. However, food does not always require a physically present host on hand to be provocative. Laura Esquivel’s novel *Like Water for Chocolate* also caters to the food porn phenomenon through the vivid descriptions of food interlocking with passion and sex; in fact, food becomes both symbol and substitute for sexual desire and intercourse. Food also gains prominence through mass media, similar to pornography. Videos on the internet abound with images of food that has been dolled up specifically for the camera, without a recipe or a chef in sight, at the mercy of the audience’s gaze. These various food-related media all share the common intention of linking food with desire, even if that longing is not related to hunger. The end result is that food becomes a visceral projection of human want, symbolizing humanity’s deepest, most intense, and idealized passions, which are largely sexual in nature.

While seemingly innocuous due to its presence on cable television and access to an audience of all ages, many signs point to TV Food Network catering to our base desires; one simply needs to look at the myriad of cooking shows featuring perky hostesses in low cut shirts. Andrew Chan has this to say about Food Network's method of bringing food and sexiness together: "With slick production values, the program itself has less to do with food and more to do with the manufacture and packaging of the host/chef himself" (48). One of the "packaged" darlings of Food Network is Giada de Laurentiis, the host of shows *Giada at Home* and *Everyday Italian*. According to her online biography, de Laurentiis was born in Rome and is the granddaughter of famed film producer Dino de Laurentiis. Giada has a strong Italian heritage that heavily influences her own cooking; she even teaches her audience how to make homemade pasta, all the while the camera focuses on a close-up of her hands kneading pasta dough. Her biography also states that although she graduated with a degree in anthropology, de Laurentiis eventually received culinary training from Le Cordon Bleu in Paris, "specializing in both cuisine and pastry." Her strong culinary background means that not only does she have extensive knowledge of both food and process, but like in sex, she can manipulate both in ways the viewer would never have thought previously possible. Because of her Italian roots, family also plays a strong role in de Laurentiis' image. The introductory credits to her show *Giada at Home* portrays her as a devoted wife and mother, walking along the beach with her husband and young daughter as an upbeat score plays.

However, the side of Giada de Laurentiis the audience sees in the kitchen is portrayed as playful and even flirty, winking at the camera as she instructs the audience on how to make a hot fudge sundae with her signature Italian twist ("Italian Hot Fudge Sundae"). Her status as a sort of "food sex symbol" comes up often as the camera loves to shoot close-ups of her hands regardless of whether or not she handles food; the most opportune time being when she is handling dough and there is always a close-up of her nail polish. As hands are critical in making the food, it makes sense that such emphasis would be placed on these extremities; by being "dolloed-up" with nail polish, the fetish is taken further. Despite her flirty nature, we are always reminded that first and foremost, Giada de Laurentiis is a family-oriented chef. Therefore, any desire she brings to the cutting board gets chopped up into fine pieces, reminding us that television still serves to tease us in our desires while yanking the proverbial chain and denying us any sort of actual pleasure due to unrealistic idealizations.

While Giada de Laurentiis represents the perky but unobtainable female host, her competitor for “most provocative cooking show host” is Nigella Lawson, the sultry and curvy “Queen of Food Porn.” Lawson owns her image completely: her outfits consist primarily of clingy, low-cut tops in blacks and reds designed to show off her prominent bust, while her kitchen is bathed in dim lights as if waiting for a lover—an image Andrew Chan supports by likening her to a “seemingly unfulfilled housewife” (49) on her show *Nigella Bites*. No doubt her image is the “naughty girl” of the kitchen to contrast with Giada de Laurentiis’ perkier personality. To drive this point further, Lawson’s video for her caramel croissant pudding recipe starts out with her in a black dress, and ends with her wearing a black silk robe, slowly scooping the finished pudding out of a bowl and eating it, while moaning suggestively (“Caramel Croissant Pudding”). Lawson is well aware of the image she presents and plays up the sex factor with gusto.

In contrast to Giada de Laurentiis’ stronger background in cooking, Nigella Lawson relies on being a “self-declared amateur cook” (Chan 49) who does not show any inklings of a family life in her videos; in fact, the only hint viewers get of her personal life is a wedding band that shows up on the occasional instances where the camera shows her hands. Her lack of professional training also comes through in the fact that her love of food comes from the fact that she worked as a restaurant critic for a time, since her background is strictly based in literature (“Nigella Lucy Lawson”). Lawson’s lack of professional training also appears in her kitchen presence: oftentimes she handles utensils rather daintily, and the camera focuses more on the components going into the bowl than the hands that place the ingredients into said bowl. To make up for her lack of expertise in the kitchen, Lawson exudes pure sex appeal, suggestively describing her food as “luscious” and “smooth” as she stirs together melted chocolate and sugar, or when she whips heavy cream and eggs into a bowl. Although she lacks the skills of a professional chef, Nigella Lawson does command a certain kind of presence in the kitchen that Giada de Laurentiis does not quite have. Andrew Chan likens her to a “fertility goddess” due to her curvy figure and constant promotion of not being ashamed of one’s body (50). He notes that “Men are attracted to her like naughty schoolboys with a crush on their teacher; women love her because she is their virtual girlfriend, a confidante” (50). Lawson’s brand of sexuality is decidedly less subtle in its approach to entice the viewer, thus making her and her food a more accessible target to fetishize over.

Although notably lacking a charismatic host to smile suggestively at viewers over a pot of boiling water, food in literature encompasses several elements that are capable of engaging an audience, from recipes and photos we see in Betty Crocker™ cookbooks to several paragraphs devoted to feasts in your favorite novel nestled comfortably between the rest of the actual narrative. Laura Esquivel's novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, takes this a step further by combining novel and cookbook into a single entity, wherein each month is represented by a different recipe that has some sort of mystical effect on the lives of Tita, the protagonist and expert cook, and the various characters with whom she interacts. *Like Water for Chocolate* is one of the best exemplifiers of food acting as a projection of desire because it becomes apparent very early on that the food Tita makes is a way for her to cope with her oppressive mother and stifling family tradition. Because the novel plays heavily with Tita's emotions, one chapter is devoted to her making a wedding cake for her lover, Pedro, and her older sister Rosaura. Because she is both bitter and depressed at the prospect of not being able to marry the man she loves and instead is forced by her mother to participate in preparing the wedding banquet, Tita cries as she mixes the cake together. Her tears fall into the mixture, carrying her heartbreak with them and "changing the consistency" (35), affecting everyone who eats the cake—in this case, after feeling particularly sorrowful, many start to puke. Vomiting in this case symbolizes not just purging an unpleasant feeling, but expelling the feeling of despair from the body, as this comes into direct conflict with desire. Through the painful process of having to prepare a feast and bake a cake for an occasion Tita will never get to experience, the wedding scene establishes the magical realistic theme of the novel and the cake becomes symbolic not just of desire, but of having desire yanked away or denied. In this way, the novel shows that the desires projected from food are not always positive and works to show the conflicts that come from the denial of satisfying desire.

*Like Water for Chocolate* takes the projection of desire to new extremes in the chapter following the wedding, further showing the power food has over our baser instincts. The chapter entitled "March" is the one of the most vivid in the entire novel with regards to what happens when human passions reach critical levels of overload. Tita makes her infamous quail in rose-petal sauce recipe using roses that Pedro gave to her in front of his own wife. Because she unknowingly mixes her own blood with the roses, Tita again puts a part of herself within the dinner; this time, her passion for Pedro seeps into both the food and everyone who eats

it. The power of Tita's food causes Pedro to remark, "It is a dish for the gods!" in front of his own wife and mother-in-law (51). Bizarrely, it is Tita's older sister Gertrudis who acts as a medium between the lovers; overwhelmed by passion, Gertrudis ends up setting the bath house on fire culminating in her having sex on horseback, all the while, the scent of roses lingers in the air; this scent, the remnants of physical passion, remains even in the present time of the novel, quenched by "[n]either fire nor the passage of time" (59). This chapter becomes critical to the plot for a number of reasons. Tita realizes that she can use her cooking to communicate her feelings to Pedro; by projecting her desires through her food, she does not have to sacrifice her happiness. The meal also represents the literal projection of desire as seen through Tita's sister Gertrudis, who not only has her future husband arrive so she can run away with him, but through her, Tita and Pedro have a revelation regarding their passions: they both want each other in a way that they cannot have, but Gertrudis is able to do so for them. In this regard, desire comes through by means of food that still cannot be achieved, despite the lovers' intense passion towards one another. While this longing dominates the main narrative, the presence of food always remains close by, due to the role it plays in attempting to fight the denial of pleasure brought on by a larger, overwhelming force.

While the human presence can provide a certain personality to cooking, or even influence the meal in ways beyond mortal comprehension, the food itself cannot be ignored as it is the tool cooks use to extend desire further, albeit in ways that still require some need for external intervention. Camera manipulation abounds in shows such as Giada de Laurentiis' *Everyday Italian*, focusing not only on close-ups of her hands, but also of the ingredients that go into her mixing bowl as she brings all of the essential components together. When she makes her Italian cake, the camera zooms in just in time to watch some vanilla extract dribble off the tablespoon she uses to measure. Evoking the image of the mixing of sexual fluids, heavy cream is poured slowly into a measuring cup, to which de Laurentiis generously adds two whole containers of marscapone cheese, one of her favorite foods ("Italian Cake"). When she cuts an apple for an appetizer, the knife sinks into the fruit, crunchy and slick at the same time ("Fig Appetizer"). Andrew Chan speaks of the preparatory process as a kind of "foreplay, in which the ritual of cooking is announced with sensory cues" (47). Every sound, every movement is calculated and crucial in order to pique the audience's interest and leave us wanting more. We are compelled to continue watching because

the sights and sounds play cater to our senses, but without having the other components of sensory pleasure present (smell, taste, and touch), we are thwarted in our efforts to have any real sense of gratification.

Nigella Lawson's recipe for devil's food cake does double duty compared to de Laurentiis' Italian cake by emphasizing symbolism as much as the baking process itself. The kitchen set-up is not only dimmed significantly, illuminated only by red lights, but Lawson herself wears red and black, catering to her "naughty girl" persona with gusto. When she creates the frosting for the cake, smooth jazz starts up in the background, paralleling the kind of cheesy music that might show up in pornography whenever the action is about to begin; she heightens the sexual imagery by talking about how she "coaxes" the frosting as she prepares it ("Devil's Food Cake"). Lawson continues to describe her food as "luscious," moaning every few minutes to indicate that she is pleased with her progress, and that the audience should experience the same pleasure. By catering to a theme of sinful debauchery, Lawson piques the intrigue of her audience, which in turn keeps their interest held in both the meal and its creator.

Lawson continues this trend of sexualizing her food with her recipe for cherry cheesecake; specifically, she claims her dessert is so amazing that it "nearly got [her] expelled" from school ("Cherry Cheesecake"). This particular creation also shows a difference between her and Giada; while the latter has no problem using prepackaged cake mix to make a cake ("Italian Cake"), Lawson discourages cheating, preferring to make her cheesecake filling from scratch ("Cherry Cheesecake"). Even cherry jam loses its innocence when placed in Lawson's hands. She slowly spreads the jam mixture on top the cheesecake, as the jam glistens in dim lighting. Cherries themselves have a component of naughtiness to them, due to their ties with female virginity—also known as "popping the cherry"; by incorporating the cherry jam into her food in an erotic manner, Lawson works to take away the innocence or "virginity" of her food. Through the use of atmosphere, her own body language, and highly suggestive foods, Nigella Lawson takes food porn to another level, placing as much emphasis on herself and her sex appeal as much as her own food. As with Giada de Laurentiis' cooking, the individual components of Lawson's meals also work together to create heavily sexualized imagery, thus heightening audience desire.

Part of the charm of *Like Water for Chocolate* is the fact that in addition to relegating a specific dish for each chapter, Esquivel goes out of her way to not only list the ingredients used for each dish, but

also uses the narrative as a kind of instructional guide. Because food is one of the main focuses of the novel, the description of how to make the dish does not detract from the narrative, but instead piques the reader's interest while they sympathize with Tita's plight. The result is an informative guide to cooking that is still written within the confines of the narrative's prose, straight and to the point. What is even more remarkable is the inherent symbolism in the choices made for each dish that represents their respective month. Tita's infamous quail-in-rose-sauce dish represents the month of March, an important month in many symbolic aspects. Although one thinks perhaps of February or even summer when roses are brought up, it is actually interesting for it to be relegated to March, the month that heralds the beginning of spring, as this symbolizes how the romance between Tita and Pedro reignited after the disaster that was the wedding. With Pedro's proclamation that Tita's quail dish contains god-like qualities (51) another element of mysticism is added not only to the food itself, but to the strong emotions that link the food to the lovers.

The actual quail dish that Tita creates holds more meaning when one breaks the meal down into its basic components. Esquivel lists the ingredients in the quail dish as such: roses, chestnuts, butter, cornstarch, attar of roses, anise, honey, garlic, quail, and pitaya (also known as dragon fruit) (46). A number of the ingredients in this dish are actually aphrodisiacs. Garlic is surprisingly included in this mix, due to claims that the bulbous plant has the ability to increase blood circulation, therefore stimulating the sexual organs (Obringer, "How Aphrodisiacs Work"). Butter is an icon for fat and rich flavor, adding to the decadence of the dish. Honey and chestnuts both equate to sweetness, and anise is comparable to licorice in flavor, indicating that these ingredients are intended to cancel out the gaminess of the quail and add a unique flavor that is as compelling as it is delicious. In ancient Greece and Rome, anise was used to increase desire by "sucking on the seeds," and the aniseed even contains estrogenic compounds (Obringer). Even without incorporating the rose petals, the quail dish becomes food porn in itself, incorporating a medley of different flavors and textures that burst with flavor. The roses that Pedro gives to Tita are merely the piece de resistance: the novel even foreshadows the fateful aftermath of the tasting by stating that the rose petals must be plucked carefully, because "the petals could soak up the blood that might alter the flavor of the dish and even produce dangerous chemical reactions" (47). Because Tita clutches the roses tightly in her hands before she prepares the dish, "the blood that was flowing

from [her] hands and breasts” (48) merged with the petals, creating an “explosive combination” (51) of her and Pedro’s intense love for each other, and therefore bringing an element of sex into the meal by merging the two lovers through means beyond mere intercourse. Although the dish is not successful in bringing the lovers together initially, we can see that the mystical ingredients of the dinner come together to create an intense passion that arouses the main characters, and keeps us as the reader similarly engaged.

However, food porn does not necessarily need a middle man (i.e. the chef) present in order to convey a sense of desire. Food can be just as powerful on its own, in its own parts without the need for human interaction; the only difference is that because there is not a human presence to focus on, there is a level of disconnect in our desire as we focus on just the food itself. Carte Noire is a coffee company based in France, dealing in espressos that vary in flavor—the site describes some as “silky,” others as “velvety.” The perfect accompaniment to a cup of coffee of course is a pastry and in a bid to garner attention to their product, the website ran a teaser trailer expressly titled “Girls Only!”; the result was a blurred out image of a cream puff pastry, provocative and clearly intended to make light of pornography. The resulting video, part of a series of color-themed pastries, uses the color pink (or “rose”) as its theme in order to provide viewers and potential customers with a look at the creation of a seemingly innocent cream puff. However, the video is anything but innocent. Utilizing several close-ups of the food, the audience is treated to images of rapidly rising dough, the mixing of raspberry crème and heavy cream, and the filling of the puffs with said liquid mixture. What is supposed to be a feast for the eyes suddenly becomes a sexual metaphor made even more apparent by the squeezing of cream out of a pipette, evoking the act of ejaculation. Clearly, Carte Noire intends for the experience to be titillating to senses beyond that of mere sight and taste, an indulgence as luxurious as it is erotic. As opposed to having a person somewhere in the shot, flirting with the audience, it is the cream puff itself that flirts with viewers, inviting those who watch with its smooth pink frosting and frost-like sprinkles. Carte Noire’s rose cream puff is a feast for the eyes and the ultimate guilty pleasure. However, the lack of a chef to provide guidance and commentary in creating the pastry disconnects viewers from the experience and therefore their own desire as the puff pastry becomes unrealistic in design and therefore unobtainable. Compared to Food Network where the chefs provide recipes and even to Esquivel’s novel, Carte Noire’s cream puff turns into the exact teaser promised by

their trailer video and leaves the audience enthralled as much as they are confused and frustrated.

Food porn creates desire by catering to the audience's baser instincts in regards to cuisine. By utilizing rich, indulgent ingredients that are often backed by the talents of a competent and attractive chef, food transforms from a mere form of nourishment into a work of art that simultaneously creates the need for pleasure. While this pleasure cannot be instantly achieved due to a heavy sense of idealization and distance from the presentation—because of being separated by screen or page—often times instructions are left behind so that the viewer can create their own version of food porn, although any sexual elements may be lost in this creation due to the lack of a sexy host (but can just as easily be achieved with a partner, if desired). Whether or not pleasure through food is achieved depends the person, but it cannot be denied that the food porn phenomenon has its place in the culinary industry, by both bringing in and keeping alive the interest of mainstream audiences.

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# The Overconsumption of Entertainment

Laura Leigh Reaves



Suzanne Collins became a household name after her *Hunger Games* trilogy— comprised of three novels titled *the Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, and *Mockingjay*—exploded into a multi-million dollar franchise. The dystopian series, which is intended for young adults, follows the struggles of Katniss, a teenage girl who becomes a key figure in overthrowing the oppressive government. In the world of Panem, twelve districts are forced to serve the Capitol, where citizens lead outlandish lifestyles and have no understanding of what it means to struggle for survival. Every year, the Capitol forces each district to send one boy and one girl to participate in the Hunger Games, a brutal battle to the death among the teenagers that leaves a single victor. This horrible practice becomes nothing more than a sporting event for the Capitol citizens. Even more alarming, however, is the fact that the greedy overconsumption of the Capitol mirrors American society. After the success of the books, Lionsgate Films turned the novels into screenplays. The first two movies were instant box office hits and are both ranked among the top ten of highest grossing movies to date.

Along with the books and the movies, the *Hunger Games* franchise has expanded to include a plethora of items such as t-shirts, posters, backpacks, and pencils, just to name a few. Jennifer Lawrence, the actress who play the role of Katniss, was relatively unknown before the release of the first movie. Now, her popularity has exploded due to the success of the games. Americans eagerly support the franchise, thrilled by the exciting plot and obsessed by the complicated love triangle among Kat-

niss, Peeta, and Gale. The fact that the Hunger Games force teenagers to murder one another does not seem to faze American audiences. As long as the story is entertaining, the audience overlooks the tragedy. The massive overconsumption of the trilogy parallels the way in which the Capitol completely consumes the tributes. Alarming, the incredible success of the trilogy suggests that Americans have actually embraced the very idea that the trilogy cautions against. In order to draw parallels between America and Panem, Collins uses several parallel structures: District 12's tesserae represent America's food stamps, and the preparation of the tributes for the arena represents the industrial food chain. By using these recognizable structures, Collins attempts to sensitize today's youths to the problems of modern day America and help teenagers understand the problem with overconsumption.

The first way in which Collins parallels Panem and America is by referencing tesserae, which are Panem's version of America's food stamps. The American government began issuing food stamps in 1939. The program provided "two kinds of stamps to welfare recipients. The stamps could be used to buy food from authorized retailers" (MacDonald 2). In order for the program to work, the stamps were color coded orange and blue, with orange stamps being eligible for any food item while blue stamps were only eligible for certain federally-approved food items. The blue stamps were subsidized by the government, theoretically allowing people who did not have money to purchase the items that they needed for survival (MacDonald 3). However, with the rising cost of food, food stamps no longer offer people the security they need. According to the documentary *A Place at the Table*, "a survey from the U. S. Department of Agriculture reports that one in six Americans say they don't have enough to eat." This illuminates the severe problem of food insecurity. Unlike true hunger, which is a rare occurrence in the United States, "food insecurity is the idea that you don't know where your next meal is coming from" (*A Place at the Table*). Nearly a third of the American population can be classified as food insecure. This introduces the problem with food stamps—they offer relief to a certain degree, but the food stamps only aid basic survival need.

Food stamps allow people to purchase calories rather than nutrition, which leads to many types of health problems among food insecure people, particularly obesity. Due to the high cost of food, particularly fruits and vegetables, the majority of food stamp recipients must rely on processed foods for survival. James McGovern from *A Place at the Table* attempted to live on a food stamp budget for one week after

learning that “the average food stamp benefit was three dollars a day.” He quickly realized that in order to buy enough food to last until the next week, food stamp recipients must “add up every penny.” His conclusion is that “you really can’t” live well on a food stamp budget. The program simply does not offer enough value for the recipients to get nutrition from the foods they can afford. While the food stamp program intends to alleviate some of the stress related to food insecurity, “providing food stamp income actually reduces nutritional efficiency,” which ultimately does nothing to actually help the recipients (MacDonald 66). While the program allows the recipients to survive on a basic level, the lack of sufficient nutrition can lead to multiple health problems, particularly heart disease and obesity due to the high intake of processed sugar. Even though many recipients of food stamps attempt to eat as healthy as possible, “if you only have a limited amount of money to spend, you’re going to spend it on the cheapest calories possible. And that’s going to be processed foods” (*A Place at the Table*). While the government did not intend for the program to be this lacking in nutritional value, “there is considerable evidence of a gap between concept and practice” (Clay 157). The concept of the food stamp program appears to be solid and helpful, but in reality, the program falls short of truly aiding people because “the single most important aspect of ration planning is how many people need food” (Clay 160). When so many Americans suffer from food insecurity, the government cannot afford to raise the value of food stamps in order to aid everyone in both food and nutrition. This terrible reality is one that many Americans choose not to think about on a daily basis unless they suffer from food insecurity themselves.

Similarly, Collins introduces tesseræ as a government-allotted portion of food that simply insures survival rather than offering any nutritional value. In District 12, when someone is “poor and starving,” they have the option to sign up for tesseræ, which “is worth a meager year’s supply of grain and oil for one person” (Collins 13). This “food stamp program” offers the recipients just enough food to insure their survival. Nutrition needs are not considered. When Katniss travels to the Capitol to participate in the Hunger Games, she is treated to a lunch of “chicken and chunks of oranges cooked in a creamy sauce laid on a bed of pearly white grain, tiny green peas and onions, rolls shaped like flowers, and for desert, a pudding the color of honey” (65). Katniss is amazed at the lavish food and stunned by the difference between the Capitol food and the food from District 12:

I try to imagine assembling this meal myself back at home. Chickens are too expensive, but I could make do with a wild turkey. I'd need to shoot a second turkey to trade for an orange. Goat's milk would have to substitute for cream. We can grow peas in the garden. I'd have to get wild onions from the woods. I don't recognize the grain, our own tesserae cooks down to an unattractive brown mush. Fancy rolls would mean another trade with the baker, perhaps for two or three squirrels. As for the pudding, I can't even guess what's in it. Days of hunting and gathering for this one meal and even then it would be a poor substitution for the Capitol version. (65)

In District 12, finding food is a process. Like recipients of food stamps in America today, citizens of District 12 must carefully calculate the cost of each trade they make for something else. Even after receiving the tesserae, Katniss "couldn't stop hunting and gathering" because "the grain was not enough to live on, and there were other things to buy, soap and milk and thread" (51). In the same way, food stamps are not enough to live on. Recipients still need other items in order to live decently. Like the tesserae, food stamps only insure survival, not a decent, healthy, secure life. Each of these forms of welfare comes at a cost. In order to receive tesserae, teenagers are literally required to gamble with their lives by placing their names in the drawing for the Hunger Games. Americans on food stamps often gamble with their lives in the form of health problems. Food stamps do not allow recipients the nutrition they require in order to maintain perfect health. In both of these cases, the long-term costs outweigh the short-term benefits, but many Americans, just like the people in District 12, have no choice but to rely on government assistance for food.

Along with using tesserae to reference food stamps in order to parallel Panem and America, Collins link the two societies by using the method of choosing and preparing the tributes for the arena with the industrial food chain. The fact that the words *reaping* and *tribute* are associated with the method of choosing the participants for the Hunger Games is especially troublesome because it labels the chosen participants with a food connotation. The reaping refers to the ceremony in which names are drawn to choose which two teenagers from each District will compete in the Games, and those who are chosen are then referred to as tributes. A reaping, traditionally, "suggests a celebration of the harvest, when workers rejoice in the fruits of their labor. This reaping, however, is a

celebration of the Capitol's victory over its people and a reminder of the cost of rebellion in lives" (Olthouse 45). The Capitol uses the term "to make the murder of innocent young people seem as natural and necessary as a fall harvest" (Olthouse 45). To make this implication worse, the word *tribute* "originally referred to a payment by a less powerful state to one of its more powerful neighbors" and was considered to be "a sign of respect and a contribution to the well-being of the state, something between a gift and a tax" (Olthouse 45). Traditionally, tributes consisted of food or money. The Capitol reinforces this tradition by taking all of the food from the districts. When Katniss and Rue form an alliance in the arena, Katniss is surprised that District 11, in charge of growing food, does not receive more to eat than District 12, the fuel district. Rue responds by telling Katniss that they are "not allowed to keep the food" (Collins 282). The Capitol literally demands that the districts give up everything in tribute. Not only does the Capitol take precious items such as food and fuel, but the Capitol demands that the people from the districts pay tribute with their very lives. This all-consuming tribute serves to provide the Capitol citizens with entertainment. Because of this, the participants are likened to cattle, which are simply fattened up and prepared for slaughter so that Americans can enjoy them.

Collins likens the tributes to cattle throughout their training for the Games to show that the teenagers have no control. The Capitol consumes them through interviews, television appearances, and by gambling on them in the arena. By being prepared for the Games, the tributes are being prepared for slaughter. The entire process is similar to the industrial food chain. To begin with, the way the tributes are taken from their families mirrors the weaning process in cattle. After the reaping, the tributes are given a few minutes to say goodbye to their loved ones. The separation that follows represents a "weaning," which "is perhaps the most traumatic time on a ranch for animals and ranchers alike; cows separated from their calves will mope and bellow for days, and the calves, stressed by the change in circumstance and diet, are prone to getting sick" (Pollan 71). Katniss's separation from her family is certainly traumatic: "And then the Peacekeeper is at the door, signaling our time is up, and we're all hugging one another so hard it hurts and all I'm saying is 'I love you. I love you both.' And they're saying it back and then the Peacekeeper orders them out and the door closes" (Collins 37). The Capitol rips teenagers away from their families much the same way as the industrial food chain takes calves from their mothers. The process of weaning, although necessary at some point in life, is

often performed early in an effort to free the cows for a new pregnancy. In the same way, tributes, particularly younger tributes such as Rue, are ripped away from their families much too soon. The calves are weaned as soon as possible in order to keep the industrial food chain moving as quickly as possible, because the American demand for beef is high. The tributes are “weaned” simply because the Capitol demands entertainment. This suggests that America, like the Capitol citizens, is obsessed with overconsumption because the tragedies of the industrial food chain are often overlooked; as long as the demand is met, both Americans and Capitol citizens remain happy.

The second way in which the tributes represent cattle shows in how they react to food that is not part of their natural diet. Cattle are “animals exquisitely adapted by natural selection to live on grass [and] must be adapted by us—at considerable cost to their health, to the health of the land, and ultimately to the health of their eaters—to live on corn” (Pollan 68). In the same way, immediately after the reaping, Katniss and Peeta are treated to a “supper [that] comes in courses. A thick carrot soup, green salad, lamb chops and mashed potatoes, cheese and fruit, a chocolate cake” (*Games* 44). Immediately after eating, Katniss is “fighting to keep the food down. [She] can see Peeta’s a little green, too. Neither of [their] stomachs is used to such rich fare. But if [she] can hold down Greasy Sae’s concoction of mice meat, pig entrails, and tree bark—a winter specialty—[she’s] determined to hang on to this” (Collins 45). Katniss, used to surviving on bland or natural food, literally cannot stomach the Capitol food. Just like cattle, which naturally survive on grass but must adapt to eating corn because most Americans enjoy corn-fed beef more than grass-fed beef, Katniss must adapt to the Capitol food because that is what she is offered. The complete change in how she eats surely cannot be good for her health; although the rich Capitol food probably offers her both more calories and more nutrients, her stomach is not used to that type of food. Similarly, the sudden change in diet for cows cannot be a healthy change because it is not a natural diet. The diet of corn, much like Katniss’s new diet of Capitol food, serves only to fatten the cows and tributes up and prepare them for the slaughterhouse.

Another similarity between the treatment of the tributes and the industrial food chain is the expectation to follow a certain plan. After calves are weaned from their mothers, they are “confined to a pen, “bunk broken”—taught to eat from a trough—and gradually accustomed to eating what is for them a new and unnatural diet” (Pollan 72). Simi-

larly, when Peeta and Katniss venture out onto the roof of the Training Center, Peeta “holds out his hand into seemingly empty space. There’s a sharp zap and he jerks it back. ‘Some kind of force field throws you back onto the roof’” (Collins 81). The tributes are confined to the Training Center, just as cattle are confined to a pen. Furthermore, the tributes are expected to uphold a certain standard. Once Effie whisks Katniss and Peeta away from District 12, she is relieved to see that the tributes have “decent manners. . . the pair last year ate everything with their hands like a couple of savages.” Katniss responds to this statement by thinking “the pair last year were two kids from the Seam who’s never, not one day of their lives, had enough to eat. And when they did have food, table manners were surely the last thing on their minds” (Collins 44). Not only are the tributes expected to appear civilized under all circumstances except, ironically, in the arena, but they are also expected to maintain a perfect appearance. Katniss must endure people “scrubbing down [her] body with a gritty foam that has removed not only dirt but at least three layers of skin, turning [her] nails into uniform shapes, and primarily, ridding [her] body of hair. [Her] legs, arms, torso, underarms, and parts of [her] eyebrows have been stripped of the stuff, leaving [her] like a plucked bird, ready for roasting” (Collins 61). In this way, Katniss has been “bunk broken.” She has been taught to eat and act like a Capitol citizen, but the Capitol literally confines her and forces her to conform to their standards, just as the industrial food chain confines cattle and forces them to adapt to certain food and conditions.

Lastly, the preparation of the tributes for the arena mirrors the preparation of a cow for slaughter. Throughout the training process, Katniss eats more than she ever has in her life. Just as a steer will “convert thirty-two pounds of feed into four pounds of gain—new muscle, fat, and bone” (Pollan 80) every day, each day of training, Katniss put on pounds that aid her in the arena. She admits that she doesn’t “feel too bad. The days of gorging myself have paid off. I’ve got staying power even though I’m short on sleep” (Collins 152). Just as cattle are gorged on corn to prepare them for slaughter, everything Katniss does during her time at the Training Center prepares her for the slaughterhouse of the arena. She also learns new skills that prepare her for the Games, because the tributes must attend training that consists of various stations, where some “teach survival skills, others fighting techniques” (Collins 93). All of this serves to “fatten” Katniss. The problem with this, however, is that “cattle rarely live on feedlot diets for more than 150 days, which might be about as much as their systems can tolerate” (Pollan 78). Katniss

cannot endure the strange way of life in the Capitol for long. There is a time limit to how long she can remain healthy under the strenuous conditions she encounters while in the arena. By “fattening” Katniss, the Capitol consumes her and views her as “prize meat.”

The complete and total consumption of Katniss as a victor strengthens her position as “the prize meat.” The Capitol citizens adore Katniss because she is such a capable participant in the games. Katniss cannot identify with the Capitol citizens because their mindset is so different from hers:

What must it be like, I wonder, to live in a world where food appears at the press of a button? How would I spend the hour I now commit to combing the woods for sustenance if it were so easy to come by? What do they do all day, these people in the Capitol, besides decorating their bodies and waiting around for a new shipment of tributes to roll in and die for their entertainment? (65)

The Capitol citizens are obsessed with entertainment. The troubling fact, however, is that dystopian novels often reveal “what’s happening, right this minute, in the stormy psyche of the adolescent reader” (Miller 134). The overconsumption of the Capitol mirrors American society by reflecting the American obsession with being entertained. In the novels, “the Games both “entertain a frivolous crowd in the Capitol, which revels in the conspicuous consumption the system provides” and “reminds those in the districts of the Capitol’s relentless power” (Clemente 24). The fact that the Capitol revels in this system of consumption reflects how America has so enthusiastically embraced the *Hunger Games* trilogy. Even the fact that many of the Capitol citizens “are so dyed, stenciled, and surgically altered they’re grotesque” (Collins 63) mirrors America’s “current obsession with reality TV, body art, and mass consumerism” (Gant 43). The *Hunger Games* are broadcasted across the country of Panem just as reality show such as *Survivor*, *The Voice*, and *The Bachelor* are broadcasted across American and consumed by millions of people every week. The Capitol citizens are no different from American citizens. Both cultures shared an obsession with being entertained. The *Hunger Games* films, which garnered even more interest in the series, feed America’s hunger for entertainment even as they water down the message Collins wants to convey. Instead of understanding the criticism the books make of overconsumption, Americans have whole-heartedly

embraced the series. The troublesome fact is that “this isn’t just a dystopian future; it’s the dystopia of present-day America” (Frankel 49). Although “the books argue for the necessity of increased awareness, despite the uncertainties and often painful consequences that engagement brings” (Clemente 21), the message has ultimately been lost on Americans. As a result, Katniss is consumed by the American society as well as the Capitol.

The films contribute the most to the overconsumption of the trilogy. While the basic plot remain the same both in the books and in the movies, the filmmakers have “watered down” the tragedy of the Hunger Games and instead use the fighting to appeal to the audience. Critic Lana Whited claims that “the film is a diluted interpretation of the text, like a landscape painting with the pastels watered down” (Whited 4). The emotional aspect of the text all but disappears in the movies because the audience finds the fighting more appealing. Because of this calculated audience response, the filmmakers “seem more interested in the show than in Katniss’s real, emotional life” (Whited 6). While the books play up the turmoil in Katniss’s mind, the movies focus more on the excitement surrounding the games. As critic Steve Vineberg states, “the opening images of poverty in District 12 are poignant, but they’re the film’s only evidence of sensitivity. Everything that follows is melodrama engineered to play on our most easily accessed emotions. How can an audience fail to be revved up by scenes of teenagers killing each other?” (1). The fact that the filmmakers use the plot to entertain the audience mirrors the way in which the Gamemakers project the Hunger Games on live television to entertain the Capitol citizens. Americans have embraced the Hunger Games as much as the Capitol citizens have. Because the audience responds more positively to movies which contain fighting and blood, the filmmakers often cater to this aspect. The movies leave out the criticism that Collins’ makes on American society in the books. Instead, the filmmakers focus on the entertainment aspect and how to draw the biggest audience possible. By catering to the audience and giving them what they desire in the movies, the filmmakers contribute to the overconsumption of the trilogy, the very thing Collins criticizes in the books.

By illustrating how the Capitol completely consumes the tributes, Collins calls into question the morals of American society today. In Panem, the Capitol citizens live for entertainment and have no limitations on how to receive the entertainment they crave. In a society where entertainment occurs primarily by watching teenagers murder

each other, moral are surely corrupt. However, the American culture has embraced the same ideology. People who do not need food stamps constantly look down on food stamp recipients without understanding how little the program actually supplies. Americans ignore the horrors of the industrial food chain because it supplies them with a huge demand. The most troubling part, however, is that Americans have embraced the horror of the Hunger Games as eagerly as the Capitol citizens because the franchise feeds the hunger for entertainment. When the first movie was released, the box office was flooded with people eager to see the novel come to life because of the exciting plot. No one appeared to have a problem with the dark subject matter of the novel. Americans blinded themselves to the true horror of the novel because they were entertained by the plot. Alarmingly, this is exactly what the Capitol citizens have done. By pairing the two societies in the ways, Collins shows that there is no difference between the two; America is Panem.

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