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Anne Collett

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Front Cover:
Diana Wood Conroy, ‘Fragility of Love’ (detail), 50 cm x 90 cm, tapestry fragment on canvas with acrylic, gesso and gouache, 1997. First shown in an exhibition curated by Vivienne Dadour, Sarajevo, at Ivan Dougherty Gallery Sydney in 1997. The image is from the Shellal Mosaic, brought from Jordan in 1918 to the Australian War Memorial Canberra.

Kunapipi refers to the Australian Aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol of both creativity and regeneration. The journal’s emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory of Australia.
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EDITORIAL

Recently moving away from home and becoming more intimately acquainted with the day to day ordinary lives of others, my daughter was surprised to discover that the variety of evening meal with which she had grown up was not the norm. The young Australians with whom she mixed, many coming to Sydney from rural areas of New South Wales, had been raised on the ‘meat and 3 veg’ that was the staple of my generation’s childhood — or rather the staple of a generation of Anglo-Celtic descent at various stages of remove from Britain; and those of Italian or Lebanese or Vietnamese descent, for example, had been raised in the food tradition of their transplanted parents, grandparents or even great grandparents, with the exception perhaps of the ubiquitous ‘hazi-barbi’ (Australian barbeque). They did not eat Chicken Mysore on Monday, Cheese and Spinach Pie on Tuesday, Lasagne on Wednesday, Chilli Con Carne on Thursday, Stir Fry Beef & Black Bean on Friday. This also came as something of a surprise to me, for I had assumed that Australia was the multicultural nation it purported to be, and that this multiculturalism would necessarily be represented in the food ‘we’ eat. It is of course represented in the food available at cafes and restaurants, in the variety of produce available in supermarkets and shopping mall food courts, and the local ‘take-away’ or global fast-food industry; but the style and type of food cooked and eaten in the kitchen of the individual Australian home, is not as various or multi-cultural as I had assumed.

This gave me pause for thought, more perhaps about myself and my own heritage, than about the cultural practices of Australians in general. The kinds and styles of food I cook in my kitchen, say something about my personality and my interests: I have always been fascinated by difference and eager to experience new ways of doing and being in the world — food is just another example, like my interest in commonwealth literatures, of that predilection. But we are what we eat (and what we read), and food (and literary) consumption and associated practice is inherited — a matter of custom — whose residue remains to some degree no matter how far the diversification from that state of origin.

Although my memory of childhood dinners is dominated by various forms of ‘meat (mainly sausages and lamb chops) and 3 veg (mainly potato, carrot and cabbage)’, prepared solely by my mother (or on occasion by my grandmother) until I was old enough to cook; it is also marked by deviations that, although probably shared by many Australians of similar family background, taken together constitute an idiosyncratic inheritance. My mother, for example, was (and still is) addicted to technology — so throughout the 1950s and ’60s of my childhood and adolescence, she purchased and experimented with a wide variety of kitchen technology and associated recipes: my memory of the wonders of the modern ‘electric’ kitchen include an electric frypan, an electric slow-cooker, a Mix-Master (electric beaters), an electric coffee percolator, and (bizarrely) an electric yoghurt
maker; but perhaps most memorable of all was not the new but the old technology of bottling fruit (with a Vacola bottling set) and jam-making.

Every summer would be devoted to the mammoth task of harvesting and preserving the fruit of my father’s enthusiastic participation in the greening of Canberra (a planned ‘garden city’ designed by Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahoney Griffin). All manner and variety of trees and plants were available free from the Canberra nursery in the early years of the city’s development. The trees that took my father’s fancy were not the native Australians — the gum, wattle and bottle-brush — but the silver birches and maples, the roses, wisteria, forsythia and lilac: this was the front garden. The back garden was an Eden of fabulous fruits — loganberries, youngberries, blackberries, pears, apricots, peaches, nectarines, plums. Every spring the garden was a fantasia of pink and white blossom and every summer we children secretly glutted ourselves, usually at the first blush of colour — too impatient to wait for full ripeness (the result of course was a stomach ache but that did not stop us). The halved or sectioned fruit would be packed with syrup into jars of various size and shape, fitted with rubber rings and metal clasp tops, and brought to the required temperature in a huge green vat. Great pots of fruit and sugar boiled on the stove, the mixture tested on saucers for setting quality, and then poured into glass jars and sealed with wax. The preserved fruit and jam was then packed into the kitchen cupboards and onto the shelves of a small room at the back of the garage, to be eaten at leisure — the desert (usually eaten with ice-cream) that always accompanied our evening meal — throughout the remaining year. I was recently reminded that bottled fruit (and vegetables) are more than the preserve of the private domestic sphere when my eye was caught by an ingenious bottled vegetable man, on display in the Regional Produce section of the Royal Easter (Agricultural) Show. Fruits and vegetables transported and transplanted from another hemisphere are preserved and publicly exhibited as icons of Australian national heritage.

The migration and adaptation of plants and peoples is integral to the story of the food that made me. It includes my father’s involvement with the migrant population whose labour helped build the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Scheme — begun in 1949 and completed in 1974. Many were housed in bleak army-style barracks on the outskirts of Cooma, a town some 100 kms from Canberra. Apparently the Italians were the most vociferous in their complaints about the English-style cooking and their demands for ‘spaghetti’, which were ultimately accommodated by an Italian contractor employed to build houses for the management, who set up his own mess and had pasta sent from Melbourne. My father taught the ‘New Australians’ to speak English, and with that teaching came the salami and smelly cheeses that would become the staple of our weekend lunches. I cannot now remember what we had for lunch before bread, salami and cheese and it is a tradition I have continued with my own family, with the addition of olives.
The story of the food that made me and the food that made my children is a story of ordinary and extraordinary practice — the story of making and doing, of remembering, reiterating and developing in a material way; but the other story that accompanies this, is the written story — the place of food in literature and the literature of food, of which the recipe itself is a literary form in its own right — a genre upon which the tools of literary and cultural analysis might be applied with interesting result.

As the essays, stories, poems, photographs and recipes in this special issue demonstrate, food — its plenty or its lack; as practice, politics or metaphor — has an important if not dominant place in much of the literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It often acts as a barometer of well-being — of the body and the body politic; it is sensitive to changing relationship between peoples and between people and the land that sustains them. This issue charts some of the vast wealth of food writing and writing about food in the colonial and postcolonial world; and it also comprises a cookbook of itself — each of the contributors being asked to include a recipe, either integral to their contribution, or of personal significance. Thus the Kunapipi Cookbook (The Kookbook) is food for body, mind and soul; *bon appetit*!
Christmas Brandied Fruit

I moved away from Canberra in my eleventh year, but returned in the early years of my marriage some ten years later. The house was and is still there, its white weatherboard barely discernable now behind the trees that have grown up like the rampant vegetation that obscured the castle of Sleeping Beauty. Returning to the house of my childhood evoked memories of summer fruit, and moving into a house with peach trees in the back yard, I decided to try my own hand at bottling. My mother’s Vacola set was long gone, but I advertised in the local paper for bottles and vat and was inundated with replies. The golden light and perfume of the peaches I bottled that first summer are laid down in the memory of the senses, and no peaches, fresh or tinned, could approach the flavour that came with the success of a loving labour, and now assuredly enhanced by the nostalgia of years. I no longer live in a climate suited to stone fruit, and no longer have the time or inclination to spend my summers bottling fruit even if I did. This recipe for brandied fruit that requires neither fresh fruit nor Vacola bottling kit, was passed on to me by an old school friend, and is one of which my mother would have approved, given her advocacy and practice of labour-saving techniques in the kitchen. I have given the measures of the original recipe, but a 15 oz tin would correspond to one of approximately 500 gms.

**Ingredients**
15 oz tin cherries  
15 oz tin peaches  
15 oz tin crushed pineapple  
½ cup sultanas  
½ cup raisins  
1 cup chopped prunes  
½ cup sugar  
1 cup brandy

**Method**
1. Boil fruit juices and sugar, raisins, sultanas and prunes and stir until thick.  
2. Add chopped, seeded fruit and when cool add brandy.  
3. Pour mixture into glass jars and keep in the fridge.  
4. The fruit is best prepared at least a week before use.

I often top up the jars with additional brandy and keep the fruit in the back of a cupboard rather than fridge if the weather is sufficiently cool. As the flavour of the fruit intensifies and mellows over time, I usually try to prepare it a month before Christmas. It is lovely poured over ice-cream.

Anne Collett
Food, Precious Food: Migrating The Palate

Border Lover

Right after my long flight,
I wore it on a tree
under a canopy of green flags,
my banana heart
magenta velveteen and just
beginning to open.

My petticoated flirt:
three layers of heart-skin unfurled
in the air,
a la Monroe flashing
not pale legs,
but tiny yellow fingers
strung into a filigree of topazes.

But yesterday,
Grandmother plucked it,
stripped it to the core,
desecrating aesthetics and romance,

One half she served fresh,
dressed in vinegar;
the other, she cooked in coconut milk and chilli
while humming about young girls who fly to learn
strange ideas in a stranger tongue.

Later plying me with more rice,
in the dialect, she said,
‘Honi. Duwang putahe hale sa sarong puso —
Here. Two dishes from one heart.’
I could not eat,
not on a hollow growing
peculiar in my breast.

(Bobis 1998)
The banana heart, a vegetable in grandmother’s kitchen in the Philippines, migrates to Australia as a precious artefact: a metaphor — indeed, aesthetics and romance. With both literary technique and romantic bent, the migrant writer rarefies and ‘makes precious’ a domestic food image from the firsthome; or perhaps it is the writer’s tongue/palate/sensibility that is reconfigured in the process of migration. These transformations will be addresed in this essay using my own experience as migrant writer, and an examination of the literary and the lived correlation between food and migration. I will cite my own literary negotiations with the food metaphor and the domestic realities in the Filipino migrant’s kitchen and table. I will chart how migration re-invents the migrant’s representation of food and eating, and inevitably her own representation of herself.

In this scene from my short story story ‘Border Lover’, the migrant protagonist returns to her doubtful grandmother:

But something strange stirred in (these bones), the marrow was changing colour. I heard it, saw it, smelled it. My English she considered un-Filipino and my ‘accented dialect’, she found even more strange — ‘siguro, you now have a new heartbeat as well and we’re all out of step here’ — then, in her banana orchard, the memory of the white light of Australian winter, pale as a naked pear, and all the shades of Oz crept in. And the fragrance of fish and chips with vinegar impinged on the sharp sourness of her fish soup, rose-coloured with young, sweet potato leaves.... (1999a 127)

In the hybridised palate, Filipino and Australian food are equally rarefied, migrating their tastes into each other, into a new concoction. ‘Nothing is ever pure again in my tongue’, a Filipina migrant once lamented. It is impossible to de-contextualise taste. The palate cannot un-know what it has come to know. It is now adulterated by foreign tastes. Even so, it makes sure it does not forget old loyalties. So in the new country, we keep cooking our rice, our coconut milk, our dried fish, and once in a while we ditch cutlery and eat with our fingers, and lick our chops in the old way. Eating becomes a ritual of remembering. Nothing beats the immediacy of body memory in the process of ingesting food: smell and taste affirm old loyalties and bring comfort. Eating becomes a symbolic homecoming. Food from home becomes more precious when eaten far away from home. ‘Foodspeak’ is doublespeak for the writer and the migrant. Both the literary and the domestic discourse are layered, ambivalent and often shifting between exposure and subterfuge — a state evoked by the image of the banana heart in my novel Banana Heart Summer. The ‘petticoated flirt’ reveals and hides itself in many velveteen folds: ‘... a purple skirt lifted here and there, a yellow filigree exposed like some lacy slip, a row of flowers uncurled like diminutive legs. This is how hearts open, often shamelessly’ (2005 112).

The burden of shame or hiya is abhorrent to most Filipinos, especially in relation to the public face of their kitchens and tables. ‘We cannot be seen to be poor by our guests’ and ‘We might be poor but we have dignity’ are sentiments often expressed by Filipinos. Filipinos clean out their savings or borrow money to serve an abundant table during a fiesta, or butcher the only chicken in the yard for
an unexpected guest. Most Filipino migrants have not quite exorcised this fear of losing face at the table. We still cook for ten if there are five guests, and we must never allow the rice pot to grow empty. To some extent, this public (and often overstated) presentation of food is a representation of dignified survival that, like food, is a source of nourishment for the meticulous host. It seems that when away from the first home, the migrant cooks and eats with even more fervour.

Most Filipino migrants still talk about going home, even when they have made Australia home for more than twenty years. When they do go home, though, the experience is fraught with ambivalence. ‘Too hot.’ ‘Too dirty.’ ‘Too poor.’ ‘I’m whinging too much.’ ‘Great to see family.’ ‘Family thinks I’m loaded with dollars to dole out.’ ‘But the food is so tasty, it will make you forget your name.’

The journey from the first to the third world is a shock to the system, especially if the third world is ‘home’, not some playground where the tourist can ‘live well so cheaply’. The in-your-face poverty a few metres from the airport unhinges me the moment I land. I am now an Australian citizen with all the comfortable trappings of the West, and yet each time I return to the Philippines, I am stripped of all these defences. I am peeled back to the core, like the banana heart plucked by grandmother from my safe, writerly meanderings in the West — and cut in two. She feeds this heart of the matter to me, the truth that I am, in a way, riven by my departure sixteen years ago. All my loves and loyalties are shuttling between two homes in constant push-and-pull. Yet, in every homecoming, ‘the food is so tasty, it will make you forget your name.’

For the migrant, this local superlative takes on another layer of meaning: as the meal progresses at grandmother’s table, I become nameless. I, in fact, lose my public identity (both as Filipino and Australian) and for the moment it is all right. On return to the old rituals of the body, the public face loses currency and grandmother’s scepticism follows suit.

This peeling of layers of defence happened in the community writing and performance workshop that I conducted for eight Filipina migrants in 2001. The workshop was spread out through three lunches where the women brought their own cooked food from the first home. The third meal we cooked together, while still doing exercises in storytelling, writing and devised theatre. Each activity was geared towards producing stories about food, family and migration.

Despite being non-writers, the women quickly fell in love with metaphor. When we read Pablo Neruda’s ‘Ode to a Lemon’ they all saw that indeed ‘Cutting a lemon / the knife leaves a little cathedral’ (1967 237). This ‘foodspeak’ was nothing new. Back home they had used layered language with food. Suddenly around the workshop table, they began telling food stories from the first home in met aphoric language. ‘Remember the very rare Christmas treat of cheese? Blade-thin, you could hardly taste it.’ The inevitable doublespeak progressed, the shifting between exposure and subterfuge. Most stories were little glimpses into little or lack of food, into poverty, but quickly hidden by good humour. The food
banter continued with much laughter, until someone grabbed a box of tissues and set it in the middle of the table. I realised all had begun crying. The banana heart had been stripped to the core, but quickly the women built fresh layers to restore it, inventing new food metaphors that will speak to this new home. Among them was one about the smell of caramel as illustrated in this excerpt from one of the short stories written in the workshop:


[Do you still cook rice-cake every Sunday, Mother? I can smell the banana bark when you cook the cake. It floats inside the house — like sweet air. Caramel scent … mother scent.] (Filipina Workshop text, 2001)

‘Caramel scent … mother scent’ is a simple yet potent metaphor. The critic Herbert Read defines metaphor as ‘the swift illumination of an equivalence’ (1963 25). The ordinary caramel is made equal to mother scent. The point of course is that the smell of caramel reminds the migrant of mother when she cooked caramel in the Philippines, but the simplicity (and purity) of rendition makes it even more poignant and urgent. Food does not only remind her of home; food is home. What is so ordinary as caramel in the Philippines takes on ‘a preciousness’ once brought over to Australia, because it is now invested with all the longings of the heart. It is not just caramel; it is my mother; it is my first home; it is my first heart.

In the workshop the women learned about narrative, image and metaphor, and used these tools in writing their own stories and poems. We consolidated these works into a radio piece, which was eventually recorded and broadcast in the Filipino program. One of them wrote about cooking taro leaves in coconut milk to tell the story of her sister’s horrible death from rabies in the Philippines. It was the first time that she told it in Australia. Previously she did not have the confidence to tell her Australian husband of eighteen years about this death and her grief. After the workshop, she made two copies of her story, one for her husband, another for her mother-in-law. In all my years of teaching creative writing, I have never seen such physical release and joy, after finishing a manuscript. The point of the exercise was achieved. The workshop was about validating the personal stories of the migrant and, in her own language, defining and dignifying herself to the host culture, as if to say, ‘I too have stories, I come from somewhere, I am someone’.

The owning of the self and its representation is not an experience shared by many Filipina migrants, especially those who are too conscious of the Filipina mail-order bride stigma. Some even deny they are Filipinas, but not Amy (not her real name) whom I mistook for a South American. She was tending a fruit stall in Kings Cross. She recognised me as a compatriot and proudly announced that she was Filipina. I bought fruit regularly from her. She kept inviting me to a meal at her place, which we never had. I took her to lunch instead. When she learned that I am a writer, she asked me to write her story. She had divorced her Australian
husband because of domestic violence, and even hinted at sexual abuse of her Filipina daughter by the ex-husband. Time passed, her fruit stall disappeared. I wrote a short story, not hers but one inspired by the image of a Filipina tending a fruit stall in Kings Cross.

I am forty. Divorced. No children. I own a fruit stall in Kings Cross. And I am Filipina, but this is my secret. People ask, ‘Are you Spanish? Mexican? Italian?’ A big man, brushing his hairy arm against my waist, whispers in his beer-breath, ‘Aha, Latina!’ Cringing, I say, ‘Sí, sí, sí’ to him, and to all of them. I am Filipina, but this is my secret.

I dyed my hair brown. It goes well with this pale skin from my Spanish grandfather whom I never saw. He owned the hacienda where my grandmother served as housemaid. They sent her away when she grew a melon under her skirt.

Melons have their secret, too. No one knows how many seeds hide in their rose-flesh. Or who planted them there. Mother used to say, it is God, it is God who plants all things. I don’t believe her now.

‘Is this sweet?’
‘Very sweet. And few seeds.’ I pretend to know a secret.

But he’s not interested. This man frowning at the melon sounds like a customer back home. He touches the fruit doubtfully, tentatively. His hand is smooth and white against the green rind.

‘Want a taste?’ I offer the last slice from a box labelled ‘For Tasting’. I pretend I am a fruit seller at home where we let the buyer sample the merchandise before any business takes place.

Sample the merchandise. This is how the men who go to my country to find themselves a nice, little brown girl put it. ‘They’re great, these rice-ies. Give them a bowl of rice and they can fuck all night!’ A US serviceman said this once, grabbing me by the waist. I was twelve then. I remember I went home crying. (1999b 5)

‘Give them a bowl of rice and they can fuck all night!’ is a quote from an American in one of the bars around what was then the US bases in the Philippines. The Filipina is associated with food and sex, not far from how some Australian men have pigeonholed the bride they seek in the country where ‘one can live so cheaply’.

This time, food is the representation of the Filipina. The fruit motif runs through the short story as a metaphor for the Filipina treated as commodity: a fruit to buy and consume. The reader finds out how the Australian husband treated his Filipina wife: her constant humiliation, the marital rape and the forced abortion because he does not want ‘brown kids’. This is an extreme and shocking story of migration, not exactly the story of Amy whom I met but not completely fiction either. I have been told worse stories of violence committed against Filipinas by their Australian husbands. Unfortunately, while there is also the reality of successful marriages, victimhood seems to be the dominant narrative with which Filipina migrants are judged by the mainstream: the ‘poor Filipina’ is incapable of agency. On rare occasions, the flipside takes centre stage: the Filipina has too much agency as the gold-digging witch who will clean out her ‘poor Australian husband’.
In the stories of migration, the focus is often on the migrant. Those left behind tend to remain invisible, so I attempted a short story about them. Like ‘Fruit Stall’, this story was inspired by an actual situation. Rica (not her real name) is the saddest little girl that I have ever met. When she was three, her mother left for Paris to work as a domestic helper. She was desperate to ‘complete her family’, so she engineered childish schemes to pair me off with her father. Her mother eventually left the marriage for good, because she had another family in Paris. The mother that Rica knew at three years old never returned.

This short story developed into ‘The Sadness Collector’, my narrative about the phenomenon of Filipina domestic helpers working probably in all seven continents now. Again I use food and eating as metaphors. In order to comfort her daughter after her mother leaves, the father invents a bedtime story about Big Lady. Here is an eating metaphor and a child’s defence mechanism, a Big Lady who eats our collective sadness:

She senses that there’s more to a mouthful of sadness than meets the tongue. A whisper of salt, even the smallest nudge to the palate, can betray a century of hidden grief. Perhaps she understands that, for all its practice, humanity can never conceal the daily act of futility at the dinner table. As we feed continually, we also acknowledge the perennialness of our hunger. Each time we bring food to our mouths, the gut-emptiness that we attempt to fill inevitably contaminates our cutlery, plates, cups, glasses, our whole table. It is this residual contamination, our individual portions of grief that she eats, so we do not die from them — but what if we don’t eat? Then we can claim self-sufficiency, a fullness from birth perhaps. Then we won’t betray our hunger.

Food evokes more than good things. It makes the mouth water or the stomach grumble. These undeniable physical responses remind us that food also evokes the lack of it. It is bound with hunger, evident in this excerpt from the short story ‘The Kissing’:

Gingered chicken in green papayas, smothered with coconut milk, never fails to keep the tongue moist long after the meal is over. So does slightly burnt sugar lodged at the roof of the mouth, melting with infinite slowness. The acrid sweetness teaches the tongue not to forget. Such is the taste of a kiss at the front door, when one foot must already seek the first step down, while the heart remains on a plate at the head of the table.

Delectation bound with longing: every Filipino migrant or overseas worker’s departure comes with this gift and scourge of the tongue. The sweetness of the touching of lips also evokes the loss of the sensation, the loss of touch. A thing houses its opposite, its absence. Food evokes hunger and hunger evokes food, which are the main players in my novel, *Banana Heart Summer*.

The protagonist, Nenita, comes from a poor family in a small Filipino town. At the age of twelve she leaves school to work as a maid in a neighbour’s house. Two months later she migrates as a maid to America where her memories of home shift between an impoverished and violent household, and food. Almost every
chapter in the novel is a Filipino dish that becomes a metaphor for survival: the *palitaw* (a rice-cake) is remembered as ‘floating faith’; the *acharra* (pickled green papayas) teaches the art of preserving dignity and self-respect; the *halo-halo* (an iced mixture of sweets) is a ‘mix-mix’ of life’s enduring moments.

This endless array of food in the novel might raise doubts in the reader. Is the writer simply pandering to the West’s love for ‘exotic morsels’? I cannot deny that there is always the writerly play with language in any literary representation. Metaphors are a tool that can make precious even the most banal or domestic image. But it is not only the writer that manipulates a cultural representation for her or his own end. I think of how Filipino migrants always gather around food — food feast, food talk, food made precious all the time and shared with Australian guests with pride, as if to say, ‘We do come from somewhere special’. Exactly the spirit with which Nenita, the migrant in the novel, serves the dishes in her memory. All are comfort food. All have been reconfigured as stories of dignified survival. In America she fixates on food to allay the hunger for home and mother love. She threads all the hungers of her old street in the Philippines. She finds comfort in this kinship in want: ‘Hunger we all experience. Hunger is the greatest leveller of humankind, if it wishes to be levelled. But how and whether we appease it always restores the social order’ (2005 71).

In the social order, Nenita is a domestic helper in America. Subterfuge cannot be called upon in this instance. It is a fact that there are approximately eight million Filipino overseas workers around the world. They have perfected the art of departure and the long-term absence of family for the sake of basic survival. In 2005 their remittance to the Philippines amounted to 10.7 billion US dollars. The Philippine government hails them as the country’s ‘new heroes’ — such a lame lauding of brave, hardworking and long-suffering citizens from a country with an appalling record of government corruption, poverty, unequal distribution of wealth and human rights abuses. Of course, governments have perfected the art of manipulating cultural representations for their own end: ‘New Heroes.’ If only they could return home and live this name within a country that could take care of its own.

In all corners of the world, these heroes endure like Nenita. ‘It is all right,’ she assures herself, or perhaps ‘It is going to be all right’ (2005 266). A stoic belief or wish lodged in the heart and the gut. As she cooks, she attempts to balance flavours. To still feel like the old home while learning to love this new landscape. To preserve the old configurations in the heart while conjuring new ones. To manoeuvre between exposure and subterfuge so as not to lose face. To live well this layered heart. An earnest cook in a difficult kitchen, she is ‘the master of the ritual of appeasement, of making better, and ultimately of balance’ (2005 266).

Nenita evokes both migrant and writer: she writes and rewrites her story in each dish that she cooks. Food preparation is a migration of home into a foreign kitchen, where home is re-affirmed and re-contextualised. True, this food bears
stories of home, but served on someone else’s table, it is no longer ‘the old dish’. Adapted to this new country, it is different, more precious, a gift of the first heart, like the migrant’s poem or story set before the Australian reader — and the serving body or sensibility is as reconfigured, strange even to itself and hopeful. Sometime at this new table, perhaps it will be seated not as suppliant or guest, but as kin.

NOTES

1 There is distinction between Filipina (female) and Filipino (male, or sometimes a generic qualifier for something of the Philippines).

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Bobis, Merlinda 2005, Banana Heart Summer, Pier 9, Murdoch Books, Sydney.


**Banana Heart in Coconut and Chili**

**INGREDIENTS**
- 1 large banana heart (sometimes called ‘banana bell’)
- 1 cup shelled fresh prawns
- 1 tsp Philippine or Malaysian shrimp paste (‘blachan’)
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 thumb-sized piece of ginger root, crushed
- 1 stalk lemon grass, knotted and crushed
- 2 red chillies, chopped (the small, hot variety)
- 1 can coconut milk

**METHOD**
1. Peel the purple layers off the banana heart until you get to the whitish pink layer. Shred this core of the heart then ‘bleed it’ (get rid of the sap by wringing shreds by the handful).
2. In a wok, boil the coconut milk with the spices and shrimp paste for 5 minutes.
3. Add the banana heart shreds. Boil for 3 minutes, then simmer and cover the wok.
4. When the banana heart is nearly cooked, add the prawns or calamari. Simmer. This dish needs perfect timing, so the banana heart is fully cooked and the prawns/calamari are done just right.
5. Season with salt as desired.
Bev Braune

‘RUN DUN’ / ‘REN DANG’: FOOD-TALK WITH PRAMUKA

My palms are red hot
from rolling dumplings, for Pramuka,
though they seem like witchity-grubs during a dry season
the soft kneaded, rolled flour grubs plump up my stew
for the Indonesian beauty smiling for her new Haekal
born under a lucky star and warm as summer in winter
when he sleeps near her breast to remember her milk.
Tonight, though, is for Ibu and I,
to fill our vocabulary with more than the common pot
we had before we met ‘run dung’ / ‘ren dang’
of garlic, black pepper, vinegar, eschallion, thyme,
mackerel, onion, Jamaican country pepper,
tomatoes and four cups of coconut milk
the fish to be soaked for half-an-hour,
washed, de-boned; the milks boiled too
for half-an-hour until oil crests the edges of the pot,
seasoned to sweeten and simmer
till the aroma fills all of the house.
Tonight I will send her this plough of red beans,
garlic, coconut milk, thyme, black pepper and mixed spice
for its white Asian bed of jasmine rice grains
reaped, winnowed, heaped sailing past the shores she called home
to reach me 20 thousand miles from the place I was born.
Tonight, I return, full, to Ibu, the plastic containers
she wraps lovingly with “I cooked too much, take this home”
that we exchange through our first born,
now women with their shaping grace and full-bellied laughter.
I will fill my glad-wrapped boxes saved from the Chinese take-away
so we talk with tastes that binds us to each other’s tongues.
Maccaback Soup

INGREDIENTS
pimento,
thyme,
salt,
black pepper,
Jamaican country pepper,
1 kilo fresh Maccaback fish,
10–12 green bananas.

METHOD
1. Clean and wash the Maccabacks and immerse them in a pot of cold water. Put that on a medium heat and boil for 15 minutes.
2. Remove the Maccabacks from the boiling water. (Do not throw away the water.)
3. Remove the bones from the Maccabacks and break up the flesh into small pieces.
4. Return the fish pieces to the pot and add thyme, pimento and Jamaican country pepper.
5. Add salt and black pepper to taste.
6. Peel the green bananas and add the peeled bananas to the pot.
7. Your Maccaback Soup is ready when the bananas are soft.

[Acknowledgement: Adapted from Teresa E. Cleary’s Jamaica run-dung (1970).]
CHRISTINE CHECINSKA

Consuming Colonisation:

*Excavatin’ Escoveitched Fish*

*Escabèche* (pickled) is a spicy marinade of Spanish origin, used to season and preserve fried (occasionally poached) fish and sometimes poultry. *Eskoveitch* is the Jamaican name for this dish. *Eskoveitch/’Skoveitch* a Jamaican dish of fried fish that is then pickled in vinegar, spices, hot pepper and oil.

*Consuming Colonisation*, the working title of my current research project which is based on interviews with my family, investigates the relationship between food, culture, memory and the negotiation of physical and metaphorical borders central to the African diaspora experience. Just as its spoken and written word is creole in character, Jamaican cuisine is an amalgam of African, Arawak Indian, Spanish and English colonial inspirations. In this context, this essay argues that the consumption of creolised dishes, such as eskoveitched/’skoveitch fish, in the postcolonial moment, reveals not only personal memories of real and imagined homelands, but also the interrelated histories of the coloniser and the colonised. Food is seen as more than sustenance; the preparation and consumption of food is regarded both as a means of communing with and reconstructing the past, and as an expression or materialisation of interwoven cultures.

The initial concept for this essay came from a meal that was recently shared with friends in a small, back street, late-night café in Barcelona, where I randomly ordered ‘fish’ with no real idea of what I was about to be served. When my order finally arrived, I was somewhat disturbed to find that I had inadvertently ordered a spicy mixture of fried fish and onions that looked, smelt and tasted like the fried fish that my mother routinely made for me during my childhood, and frequently still makes for me on my visits home or as a gift, carefully packaged in greaseproof paper, when she comes to stay with me in London. I closed my eyes and was immediately transported back in time and to a different location; I could have been in my mother’s kitchen.

Through charting the changing eskoveitched/’skoveitch fish recipes across three generations of Lawson women, *Consuming Colonisation* considers the ongoing process of creolisation, as the original family recipe, rooted in the Spanish and African traditions, mutates as sisters migrate from colony to metropolis —
that is, from Jamaica, to England, to Canada and the USA — and as re-configured recipes are then passed on to daughters and grand daughters; the circulation of recipes mirrors the circulation of people criss-crossing the Atlantic. The ceremony surrounding the preparation of the dish is also considered: the futile search for snapper fish in 1950s England; the tying of one’s head with a headtie before descaling and frying; the slow steeping over night; and the telling and retelling of stories in the kitchen. In this instance, the alchemical powers of the recipe at the hands of such skilled cooks is a reminder of Olive Senior’s ‘Yemoja: Mother of Waters’, African ‘mother of origins, guardian of passages’ and ‘generator of new life’:

Always something cooking in your pot
Always something blueing in your vat
Always something growing in your belly
Always something moving on the waters

(Senior 131)

The cultural theorist, Homi Bhabha, and the anthropologists, Marcel Mauss, David E. Sutton and Richard Wilk, inform my theoretical approach. I take up some of their key concepts, namely: the physical and metaphorical border as a site of innovation and transformation; the notion of gift, reciprocity and exchange as central to human solidarity; the place of food within the formation of cultural identities and historical consciousness; and the concept of home cooking as food for the soul, to narrate and examine my case studies.

I begin my reflection by briefly outlining the historical milieu out of which the dish emerged. As my chance encounter with *escabèche* fish in Barcelona revealed, and as the definitions in my subheading indicate, the spicy marinade is thought to have a Spanish ancestry, revealing, through its ingredients and method, the identity of Jamaica’s earliest colonisers. Remember that Christopher Columbus ‘discovered’ the island in 1494, having set sail on a second voyage from Paolos de la Frontera, under the commission of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, via Hispaniola and Cuba. Jamaica was under Spanish rule for little more than 160 years, when British forces then captured it. It was the Spanish who first brought African slaves to the island as early as 1517, beginning the process of creolisation long before the arrival of the British.²

The Spanish occupation began in 1509. However there is a lack of detailed information readily available about this period, possibly as a result of poor record keeping since, as Sidney Mintz points out, ‘between its conquest by the Spaniards and its seizure by the British … Jamaica remained a Spanish imperial backwater’ (35). Indeed, the historian, Clinton Black, in describing Jamaica as ‘more of a burden than a benefit to Spain’, highlights the fact that few details about this
period are included in transcriptions of Spanish history, while English records are equally as scant and there are apparently no surviving records in Jamaica itself (25). The first settlement, founded in 1510, was located at New Seville, (La Sevilla Nueva). Sevilla was abandoned in 1534, the settlers relocating to Spanish Town, (Villa de la Vega), which was then established as the capital (Black 18–34).

The Spanish introduced various fruit trees including orange, lemon, and lime, and other edible plants to the island. (Lime, as you will see from the recipe I have included, is one of the ingredients in the 'skoveitch pickle.) In fact, Jamaica is indebted to the Spaniards for the introduction of such staples as plantains and bananas. (Black 28) Just as its other cultural expressions, such as its spoken and written word, are creole in character, Jamaican cuisine is an amalgam of African, Arawak Indian, English and Spanish colonial influences. Or as Myrtle, one of the respondents to my questionnaire, puts it: ‘(Escovietched) ‘escabeche’ is of Spanish origin which is made by pouring a tangy marinade of oil, vinegar, pimento over fried fish to Jamaicanise this dish. Scotch bonnet pepper was added to the fish which was eaten hot or cold’ (emphasis added). The Scotch bonnet pepper is a characteristic ingredient of Jamaican cooking; its fiery flavour gives a distinctive kick to many local dishes such as jerk chicken and rice and peas. Hot peppers and hot pepper sauces are a favourite seasoning in many African-Caribbean kitchens and on many Caribbean diaspora tables. It is interesting to note that the Amerindians who populated the Caribbean before the arrival of the Europeans used hot peppers in their cooking (Parkinson 286). So my pensive savouring of familiar scents and flavours in a late night Spanish café, in hindsight, transported me back on a metaphorical journey through time and space, that stretched way beyond my childhood home in England’s Gloucestershire.

This brings me to my main body of research: a series of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires conducted amongst the female members of my family located in Orange Hill; Jamaica; Toronto; Canada; and the UK. (Questionnaires were forwarded to relatives in Washington and New York, but responses had not been received by the time of writing). The aim of these investigations was to assess the extent to which the preparation, serving and eating of 'skoveitch fish in the post-colonial moment reveals individual and collective memories of homelands, the interrelated histories of the colonised and the coloniser, and the ongoing cultural exchanges that occur as we engage with each other and with our environments.

My investigation started by asking what, if anything, was known about the origin of the term eskoveich or 'skoveitch. Myrtle, based in Orange Hill, gave the most comprehensive answer, stating clearly the dish’s Spanish heritage that then became 'Jamaicanised’ over time. In contrast, Hyacinth’s initial response was ‘I couldn’t tell you’, but when questioned further she explained that ‘fried fish’ was ‘always called that’. She had grown up with it being called ‘’skoveitch’: ‘we get it from our gran’parents … so we don’t really know where it comes from. I expect
it’s from their parents and their parents’ parents’. Whilst Jackie, my older sister’s response, though very carefully considered, reads as less experiential:

"My understanding, from reading is it’s Latin, it’s Spanish or Portuguese. So brought to Jamaica as a way of cooking fish, it describes a way of cooking fish that was brought to the Islands by lots of different people who were there, were colonised and may have also integrated with people that were already there."

Yovanka, my cousin, born in Jamaica but now based in Toronto, and the youngest respondent, had no ideas about the origin of the terms or the dish. Similarly when it came to the details of the recipe itself, she was unable to answer, saying instead: ‘I know it is fry-fish’. Perhaps unsurprisingly the most informed recipes were those of the two older women, Hyacinth and Myrtle, both in their mid to late seventies. (Hyacinth’s recipe has been transcribed in full at the end of my essay.) The ingredients suggested in their recipes are very similar; for example, both recommend the use of snapper fish and ground black pepper. However, Myrtle is much more specific about the quantities of each item; for example, ¼ cup of flour and ½ teaspoon of black pepper.

Although Jackie had never cooked the dish herself, she did have a clear opinion about what the ingredients were and what the method entailed:

"Well I think, then, it’s a mixture of reading, going to meals, or lunches provided at work for occasions for people from different islands foods, and I would say that the fish is fried first and then vinegar, onions, peppers and, I’ve forgotten the name of the vegetable, but it’s a green vegetable …"

"Cho-chos?"

"Cho-chos or St Christophe is put on as well and then it’s steamed the next day or you can have it cold with bread."

"So it’s like a marinade thing?"

"Yes, it’s like a marinade, two processes."

The level of detail and accuracy in Jackie’s reply, in spite of never having cooked it, is intriguing. As will be seen from the recipes that I include and as I will discuss, there are indeed two processes. Her knowledge is gleaned primarily from reading, consuming and ‘absorbing’:

"It is kind of something that was always around that you have sort of absorbed, so I don’t actually remember watching it or learning. I remember smells but I don’t remember the process of putting it together although if somebody asked me how to do it, even though I haven’t done it myself, I could describe a process."

This notion of absorption relates back to Hyacinth’s comments about origin: ‘I expect it’s from their parents and their parents’ parents … your older parents, your old grandparents, they make it up as they go’. Myrtle also talks about her recipe being passed on from the older generations: ‘this recipe was handed down by my grandmother, not written’. She then goes on to explain: ‘As Caribbean people, recipes pass down from generation to generation. I was taught to cook this dish
by my grandmother then mother with slight variations as we went from wood fire
with freshly caught fish to using gas or electric with frozen fish’.

Although for each of the women there was a reluctance to veer away from
their adopted recipes, unless there was a very good reason for doing so — for
instance, the unavailability of key ingredients — recipes do change over time, as
Myrtle suggests. Innovations in terms of cooking utensils and kitchen equipment,
migration and limited access to ingredients, differing lifestyles and tastes, and the
means by which the recipe is learnt, all add to the reconfiguration of the dish.

Speaking about her arrival in England in the late 1950s, Hyacinth recalls the
difficulties experienced in trying to locate fundamentals like black pepper: ‘for a
start you couldn’t get black pepper, it was white pepper’. She had to make do with
white pepper. She was also forced to improvise when unable to find her preferred
red mullet or snapper fish:

Those two we used to use do that … but when we first come here you couldn’t, you
didn’t get it, a long afterward now West Indian people go into the fish mongers an’ ask
for that type of fish. So they begin to get it an’ you could get it afterward too… Instead
we have to use cod or whitin’ or hake… a fillet.

In contrast, later in the interview, Hyacinth reminisces, through ripples of
laughter, about my grandmother, Granny Drina, buying fish from either the local
market in Jamaica or else from Uncle James, the fish-man:

Hyacinth: We don’t live near the coast, but a bloke used to come in the village, Green
Hill, where we live. When he go down, he go to either Runaway Bay or
St Anne’s Bay, that’s where they get the fish, at the sea side. Him bring it
roun’ an’ sell it to the people … in the village like. … Sometimes he, you
know, would bring for Mamma; bring fish for Mamma…

Christine: Can you remember what his name was?

Hyacinth: Uncle James. (laughter)

Christine: Ahh! Did he have a trolley or something?

Hyacinth: Him ride his bike.

Christine: Oh right!

Hyacinth: Yeah! An’ then he have like the basket at the front. Because his parents
land and Grandpa Tommy’s land join. You see.

Judging by the excitement surrounding these particular memories, Uncle James
was clearly the best person to buy fresh snapper and red mullet from!

Sometimes ingredients were difficult to obtain even on the island as Myrtle
points out: ‘Over time recipes have changed as a result of availability of
ingredients. The authentic Scotch bonnet pepper, pimento and allspice may be
difficult to obtain. Use can be made of cho-cho, tamarind to substitute for vinegar,
which is quite interesting’. So changes occurred not only as a result of migration
and cultural exchange. Making a comparison between Myrtle’s observation above
and Jackie’s recipe, it is interesting to note that in the recipe that has been handed
down via the oral tradition — Myrtle’s recipe — the use of cho-cho is not seen as part of the authentic ‘scoveitch fish recipe. Yet for Jackie, whose recipe is an amalgam of what she has read and what she has absorbed, cho-cho is an integral part of the dish. Similarly, Myrtle, who was kind enough to send me a copy of the recipe as the home economics department of her local school teaches it, notes that their recipe, written down like those that Jackie is more familiar with, includes carrots. The recipe, or the perception of what is considered to be the ‘authentic’ recipe, appears to mutate even as it is fixed by the written word. The formal teaching of the dish in the local school also leads me to question whether the passing on of the recipe verbally from mother to daughter has ceased to occur. For this reason, I have chosen to include transcriptions of two recipes. The first, Hyacinth’s, has been passed down by word of mouth, generation after generation. The second is taken from a recipe book, (a gift received from my sister some ten years ago), produced in the UK and written by Jamaican, Norma Benghiat.

The rise in tourism has also shaped current recipes:

*Myrtle:* This Escoveitched fish is now served in hotels with adaptation of use of spices and use of fillet and fish steaks (NO BONES)

It is implied that the absence of bones and the re-configuration of the spices used, (I assume they are toned down), makes the dish more suitable for the palettes of foreign tourists.

I turn now to the issue of food and memory, reminiscences of childhood and of real and imagined homelands. Regardless of age, location, and background knowledge about the dish, the women unanimously agreed that the experience of preparing, sharing and eating the fish, the materiality of the experience — the texture of the fish, the smell and taste of the oil, even the scraping sound as the fish is de-scaled — conjured up images of their individual family homes and of Jamaica:

*Hyacinth:* Yeah. When me come here [England] an’ could get it [‘scoveitch fish], it bring back memory of home. It bring back the memory of home; what your mom used to cook give you an’ what an’ what she used to do.

*Myrtle:* Escoveitched fish reminds me of my food heritage brought by the different people who came to the Caribbean. The social and nutritional significance it has even today in the mainstream meal preparation in Jamaica cultural food habits and cuisine.

*Jackie:* I suppose as a snack it’s having a traditional snack, that’s an association.

*Yovanka:* I would associate feelings of being back home, of my mother, of warm island breezes, a nice Red Stripe Light and laughing with my sister.

A corresponding recurring theme was the association of the dish with social gatherings such as on public holidays, weddings, and work or family outings, where it is often served with hard dough bread, rice and peas, plain rice or fried dumplings:
Yovanka: I would most likely eat it on holidays – especially if the holiday is taking place IN Jamaica as fish is always best eaten back home!

Myrtle: This dish can be served at family gatherings, weddings, graduation.

Jackie: (elaborating on an earlier comment about eating the dish in adult life primarily on special occasions) I suppose when I say celebrations … it’s sort of initially holidays, so like Easter or something like that.

I would like to sift out this connection between ’scoveitch fish, Easter and specifically Good Friday, as a means of ruminating on the alchemical nature of certain dishes, home cooking as food for the soul, hospitality and, drawing on Marcel Mauss, food as gift.

During my interview with Hyacinth she not only talked about the tradition of eating fish on Fridays but also discussed the integral part that ’skoveitch fish played in Good Friday preparations. This tradition was seen as stemming from Christian teaching: ‘yes, the festival. They have fish. We don’t have meat Good Friday…. We were brought up where they cook fish on Good Friday’. Recalling the anticipation of Easter, Hyacinth spoke about Mamma preparing the fish the night before and remembered waiting expectantly to eat it:

Christine: But I seem to remember a while ago when we spoke you mentioned that on Good Friday, was it Good Friday, that you didn’t used to shop or you didn’t used to cook until a certain time?

Hyacinth: No. You don’t cook until after 3. That’s just the tradition there. They say that at that time the crucifixion finish. So after you get up on Friday morning, Good Friday morning, and you have breakfast, make fire and have breakfast, no fire no make up after that.

Christine: So if you were having fish after 3 on Good Friday, did you used to, did Granny Drina make it on Thursday night?

Hyacinth: Yes, you do it on the Thursday.

Christine: and leave it to one side and after 3 that was when you heated it up?

Hyacinth: Mm. Heat it up and eat it.

Christine: So if I asked you, if we sat down and ate a plate of ’scoveitch fish now, what kind of memories spring to mind when you smell the fish, what would you say?

Hyacinth: It come in like, you know, it bring in mind like when you young girl growing up, isn’t it.

Christine: A fun time?

Hyacinth: It remind you of that. And then Good Friday, when especially you looking forward to the fish with bread.

It would be true to say that spirituality, Christian or otherwise, is an integral part of everyday life in the Caribbean and the Caribbean diaspora; there does not
Christine Checinska

appear to be the separation between the spiritual and the secular that we find in the West. The fish has been a universally recognisable symbol of Christianity since it began and the eating of ‘scoveitch fish with hard dough bread has obvious resonance’s with Jesus’ feeding of the 5000. Perhaps more pertinent to my study, since it leads me into the notion of home cooking as food for the soul, is the event surrounding His post resurrection appearance to His disciples, who, perhaps naturally, thought that they had seen a ghost. In an effort to dispel their fears, Jesus asked: “‘Do you have anything here to eat?’” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, … and ate it …’ (Luke 24: 36–4), thus proving that he was indeed flesh and blood, he was indeed alive and, from a Christian perspective, wholly human and wholly God.

Whether one believes this to be an historical truth or whether one believes it to be a myth is not my concern here. What does concern me is the association of food with wholeness, with what it is to feel human, with personhood. The African-Caribbean in exile could be seen as occupying a position of absent presence within the West; a somewhat ghostly existence whereby the visibility of the individual is all too often masked by the fact of blackness and an ambivalent colonial gaze.

It is in these moments of ‘fixity’, (Bhabha 75), that one needs to regain a sense of connectedness. I would argue that one way of achieving this is through food. Marvelene Hughes, writing on African-American soul food, equates the cooking and eating of culturally rooted foods with the reclaiming of women’s identities. This speaks directly to my observation. Hughes stresses that food preparation is at the hub of African-American oral history; the cultural heritage that shapes African-American identity is kept alive through the process of cooking and sharing food. To that end, soul food, to the black woman, is an expression of nurturance, creativity and survival; ‘the very core of her African heritage are embodied in her meal preparation’ (Hughes 274). She goes on to describe an intimacy and spiritual connectedness that takes place through sharing food that is reminiscent of Mauss’ study of gift. Hughes’ examination of the place of soul food in African-American communities parallels Richard Wilks’ work on home cooking in Belize. According to Wilks home cooking is equally as concerned with well-being and wholeness as it is with nutrition. This type of cuisine, he explains, is grounded in shared histories and the common knowledge of places and people. He also draws out the relationship between home cooking and ‘slow food’; ‘scoveitch fish, with its two-part cooking process, certainly falls into this category. In my opinion, the serving of slow food in this moment, when time as a commodity is at such a premium, says something about caring for the self and for others. It is about nurturing in a holistic sense.

Furthermore, viewing the 'scoveitch fish served on Good Friday through Mauss’ eyes, where food is part of the gift economy, to receive the dish, to consume it, is also to receive part of the giver or the cook’s ‘spiritual essence’. According to Mauss, the gift economy is that which involves the circulation of
material objects and the circulation of selves. Similarly, reflecting on the culinary gifts from my mother, carefully packaged in greaseproof paper, I recall feeling almost as though she were still with me whilst tucking into my ‘presents’ long after she and my father had driven back to Gloucestershire.

Likewise, Jackie’s observations about eating ’scoveitch fish at special occasion dinners, particularly when the dish has been made by the guests themselves as opposed to outside caterers, highlights Hughes’, Wilk’s and Mauss’ analysis of the role of food beyond sustenance:

Jackie: If you were to make it yourself or even if you have some that somebody else has cooked, it’s not an easy snack, because usually when you think about snacks now it’s something that’s really quick to do. Because it has got that two part process so it feels like something that somebody’s spent some time over, even though it’s something that you might pick at as a snack, it is something that somebody’s spent time over; at least a couple of days.

Christine: So does it make it feel … you know, does it feel more valuable, for example, I don’t want to lead you, but does it feel …

Jackie: Um … not valuable … it just feels as though you’ve been thought about; that somebody thought it was worthwhile making that dish for people rather than just steaming some fish or something like that. It’s an effort. Mm … and I suppose as well it links back, because I don’t, even though I know how to do it in theory, I don’t do it myself. I choose not to because I can’t be bothered (laughter) But …

Christine: Is that because of the long process?

Jackie: Yes! And life isn’t like that; my life isn’t like that. And so it does take it back to somebody who can be bothered, so back to … I then sometimes will think about when I had it first, when it was eaten when I was younger; because I am always surprised that if you do go to somewhere that there’s loads of it that hasn’t been done by a caterer but has been done by the people that are attending there, I think: ‘God! You must have taken ages and been really motivated to do this!’ (laughter)

Christine: So would you say that it is almost like a gift?

Jackie: Mm. Because you have to be bothered to do it.

By commenting on the motivation for cooking such a time consuming dish, Jackie draws attention to both the notion of food as gift and the determination and commitment to preserve and pass on, what Hughes describes as the ‘soul in food preparation’.

I would also like to suggest, in light of my findings, that the definition of the ‘giver’ could be seen in metaphorical terms, for example, as Jamaica itself, or indeed as Senior’s ‘Yemoja’. Expanding the definition further still, in the case of home cooking ‘soul’ food for oneself, as implied above, particularly in Hyacinth’s comments about finally being able to find the right ingredients to cook ’scoveitch
successfully during the 1950s, the alchemical process of preparation and consumption could be viewed as a giving back to oneself—a way of regaining a connectivity with and a rooted-ness in the self. By this I mean that the preparation and consumption of such foods is tied to recapturing and experiencing a sense of belonging at a personal level that contests the colonial gaze.

In conclusion, having explored the themes of food and historical and cultural consciousness, food and wholeness, food as gift and food and memory, it is possible to deduce that eating creolised dishes such as 'scoveitch fish in the postcolonial moment, reveals not only personal memories of real and imagined homelands, but also the interrelated histories of the coloniser and the colonised. Home cooking clearly is so much more than sustenance. Through the preparation, sharing and consumption of 'soul' food, interwoven histories and cultures materialise, communal solidarity is created and maintained, and a sense of individual wholeness or rooted-ness can be regained.

It would also appear that food culture has the ability to transcend geographical borders, blurring the boundaries of what we define as local and global. Certainly recipes do mutate at the point of culture clash and exchange, but the essence of the dish—the frying of the fish and the slow steeping of it in the oil and vinegar based marinade—has remained. This demonstrates connection. The sharing and eating of 'soul' food connects us both to ourselves and to others. In this schema, I would suggest that there is a correlation between one's inner essence and one's 'lost' cultural heritage.

Correspondingly, the importance of the recurring theme of memories from childhood that is present in the interviews lies in the fact that culture is socially learned. As we see from the brief extracts referred to in this essay, the migrant home forms a focal point from which cultural expressions, in this case culinary cultural expressions, are produced, consumed, re-configured and reintegrated. The kitchen is but one of the spaces within the home that allows this cycle of cultural production to be enacted and embodied.

Finally, since this essay has been about my personal impressions of and my family’s reflections on excavatin' 'escoveitch fish, it seems only right to let my mother have the last word. My effort to close the interview by expressing my hope that one day she would teach me her recipe, carrying on the oral tradition, was met with:

And you don’t even want the fish eye look 'pon you! … An’ Christine never want to look on the fish eye! (laughter)

NOTES

1 Lawson was my mother, Hyacinth’s, family name. She and her three sisters, Gem, Dor, and Miss G, grew up in 1930s/40s rural Jamaica, together with one brother, Frankie. While she emigrated to England during the late 1950s, her sisters and her brother migrated to Canada and the USA. She has one half sister, Myrtle, who remained in Jamaica.
My use of the term ‘creolisation’ draws on Brathwaite’s *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, and C. Allen’s, ‘Creole The Problem of Definition’.

Myrtle’s opinion that the Spanish recipe was ‘Jamaicanised’ by the addition of hot peppers reminds me of a recent article in *The Gleaner* where Rosemary Parkinson was forced to defend a vociferous email from an angry reader who made the mistake of challenging her on a previous article about the history of certain common ingredients in Jamaican cuisine. The reader, a university lecturer ‘originally from an African village on the Guyana coastland’, having challenged the origins of hot pepper, claiming them to be African, was met by the response: ‘I cannot get my knickers in a twist over semantics but, I will over peppers! Sorry doctor, dem definitely ours!’ (Parkinson 2006 E5.)

**WORKS CITED**


Hyacinth Shaw’s Eskoveitch/’Skoveitch Fish
(Extract from an interview with Hyacinth Shaw, 29th May 2006)

Ingredients
2 fish cut into 4 slices — jack fish, snapper or red mullet recommended
plain flour
onion or shallots — sliced
salt
black pepper
chilli pepper or Scotch bonnet pepper — 2 small strips
malt vinegar
fat for frying

Method
1. De-scale, clean and wash the fish. Dry it off thoroughly and slice.
2. Heat the fat in a frying pan. Make sure it is well hot.
3. Put the flour and black pepper onto a dish, and roll the fish in it until it is covered,
   but pat off any excess with a kitchen towel.
4. Fry in the hot oil. When one side is fried, turn it over and do the other side. Take
   the fish out and put it into a dish.
5. Fry the onions or shallots with the chilli or Scotch bonnet peppers. (Don’t let the
   onion burn)
6. Spread the fried onions and peppers on top of the fish. Pour a bit of the fat on it,
   with a little vinegar. Then cover it up for it to settle.
Use the following day. (Serves 4)
**Norma Benghiat’s Eskoveitch/Skoveitch Fish**

Snapper, jack, sprats, parrot, grunt and kingfish are best for this dish, but any fish will do. The secret of success lies in the freshness of the fish. When you are buying fish make sure that the eyes are bright and shiny and the gills red (Benghiat, 1985, p.81).

**Ingredients**
- 2 lb (1 kg) fresh fish
- juice of 2 limes
- salt
- black pepper
- oil
- pickle:
  - 1–2 cho chos or cucumbers
  - 2 onions — sliced
  - 2 hot peppers, Scotch bonnet if possible — sliced
  - 2 tablespoons pimento berries
  - 1 cup (8 fl oz, 250ml) vinegar
  - salt

**Method**

Clean and wash the fish, rub them with the lime juice, and dry them with a kitchen cloth or paper.

Sprinkle them on both sides and inside with salt and pepper.

Heat plenty of oil in a frying pan until it is very hot and begins to smoke very slightly.

Place the fish in the hot oil one at a time, taking care that they do not overlap.

Reduce the heat a little and fry the fish on both sides. If they are difficult to turn, then the oil is not hot enough. Leave them for a further couple of minutes to allow the underside to brown, then turn.

When the fish are done, drain them and arrange them on a larger platter or in a deep bowl.

In the meantime, peel the cho chos and cut them into halves and then into long strips.

Put them in a saucepan with the onions, hot peppers, pimento, vinegar and a little salt to taste.

Bring the mixture to the boil, simmer for 2 minutes or so, then remove from the heat.

Pour this hot pickle over the fish. The fish is often left to marinate in the pickle for a while (it will keep for up to 3 days), but I prefer to serve the dish while the pickle ingredients are still crisp.

Serve it hot or cold. (Enough for 4 – 5)

(Benghiat, 1985, pp. 81–82)
My mother-in-law Fatima sends us cardboard boxes filled with biscuits all the way from Algiers. Amine, my husband was so excited the first time one of these boxes arrived, he raced home from work on his bicycle, the box tucked under his arm and waving triumphantly with his other, the bike doing crazy zig-zags along the road. I was waiting on the wall outside our apartment for his return. We hadn’t been married for long.

‘Look, look — it’s arrived! Finalmente!’ Finally. He wheeled the bike inside the grand old wooden doors that led into our building. We’d been living in Piazza Morlacchi almost a year, a quiet pocket right in the centro storico of Perugia, a mountain city in Umbria. Amine dropped the bike under the stairs and waited impatiently for me to unlock the door. He raced straight over to the bed, patting it for me to sit down. The package was wrapped in brown paper and tied firmly with string. Amine tried unsuccessfully to break the string with his teeth; I opened a drawer and passed him a knife. Two layers of aluminium foil followed and finally a grease-stained, slightly swollen cardboard box was revealed. Numerous paper doilies lined the box and covered over its contents, Amine, who had torn through the outer layers, now paused, slowly and carefully lifted the edge of each doily until he reached the biscuits.

‘Tcharak Ariane, Makrout — Haluat talia!’ Amine’s voice was raised and mellifluous, words that I’d never heard rolled off his tongue in near ecstasy as his hand rested lightly over each biscuit. I sat silent; scrutinizing the contents of the box. The infamous biscuits that I’d heard so much about. I noted they were very large biscuits, not at all the size I’d imagined. Tcharak Ariane were shaped like small croissants, sprinkled with finely chopped peanuts. I learnt later they were filled with crushed almonds, orange-blossom water, cinnamon and sugar. The Makrout were slabs of deep fried semolina, all sticky with honey in silver foil wrappers and the Haluat Talia were shaped like starfish, the size of a man’s palm and twice as thick. They were iced with white and pink icing and had silver cashews embedded in their centre.

‘Aren’t you going to eat any?’ I asked.

Amine shook his head, ‘Tomorrow, for breakfast. I’ll keep them for then.’

I shook my head and shrugged. ‘But you waited so long for them to arrive; don’t you want to have just one?’

Amine shook his head, ‘You have one, go on.’

I shook my head. The biscuits were ornate and each one formed with precision, even after their postal delivery they still looked like something out of a swish...
Amouries of Love

boulengerie. I’d seen photographs of Fatima, none of them smiling, all with an imperious tilt of the head and a clear, firm gaze. She was a decade or so younger than my mother and the sort of woman whose beauty was in the structure of her face and left unchanged with time.

Fatima was also the mother of eight children and the woman Amine spent every Friday night with at SIP, the Italian public phone room. Their conversations were always lengthy and animated. I would lean against the outside of the phone booth smoking cigarettes, Camel after Camel. Fatima’s voice would spill out of the receiver, an impenetrable sing-song that would set my nerves on edge as the clock ticked over and Amine would push another cinque mille lire at me to swap for another phone card. It didn’t matter how exciting the conversation had seemed to me as I listened or even how many times my name was mentioned followed by laughter or exclamations I recognized like, ‘Woallah, sah’ I swear to God it’s true, or ‘mesh kitch’, at the termination of the call his answer to my question, Well? What did she have to say? was always the same.

‘Niente, non molto.’ Nothing much. Amine would slump back out on the street deflated and silent. It always took him a good half hour to recover after a phone call home.

My stomach knotted as I stared at those biscuits smooth and smelling of almonds and strangely of flowers in their box. I was repelled at the same time that I itched to chip off a piece of pink icing from the Haluat Talia or break a tip of the Tcharak Ariane. Having plainly declined to take a biscuit, I could hardly press my finger into the crumbs at the bottom of the box and then bring it to my tongue. I estimated that box contained a full three days labour; finger curling, palm pressing, hand rolling labour. That box was an armory of love I couldn’t and wouldn’t breech.

Two years later Fatima came to visit us in Perugia all the way from Algiers. She arrived one afternoon in the height of summer, dropped off at our door by an Algerian friend with a car who had picked her up from the airport in Rome. Amine wasn’t allowed a day off work. We had moved to a self contained monolocale or bed-sit in corso Garibaldi and my anticipation of Fatima’s arrival was dampened by the thought of sharing a room with my mother-in-law for two weeks.

Within minutes of her arrival, Algerians from all over Perugia began turning up on our doorstep. I had barely managed a shy greeting, hanging back behind Amine, when our apartment was flooded with young men, freshly shaven and bashful. Unperturbed, Fatima settled herself on our bed, Amine at her side and our unexpected guests encircling Fatima, on chairs, the floor, while some remained standing. Their eyes glistened and the timbre of their voices became uncertain, yet eager and boy-like. Enraptured they listened, as I did, seated at the window in the furthest corner of the room, to Fatima’s every word. They anticipated the punch line to her stories with slaps on their thighs and trembling laughter. A mother, any body’s mother was a precious and rare commodity then.
Michelle Hamadache

I would have been daunted, afraid even, but not Fatima. She was right at home with an audience. Elegantly dressed for travel in an emerald green tailored dress with small white polka dots, her hair smooth raven black and her hands like swallows, never still but never uncontrolled in their movements, she kept her audience on tenterhooks. The Algerian dialect that I’d listened to so much of between Amine and his friends, melted on Fatima’s lips. It became a language of enchantment, animated and full of sounds that I could never reproduce. I sat mesmerized and envious. Not of Amine’s clear, strong affection for his mother but rather for the seemingly unending endowments of grace and beauty, humour and confidence that had been bestowed upon Fatima, no doubt at birth.

I was too self conscious at twenty-two to competently fuse the little French and Algerian I knew with the languages of mime, body, and expressions that may have allowed Fatima and me the opportunity to talk. For a first encounter between mother and daughter-in-law, perhaps that was a blessing in disguise.

Amine worked long hours at a car wash just outside of Perugia and Fatima and I were left to while away the hours with no shared language. The evenings in particular had seemed interminable as Mother and femme would lean out the window of our second storey apartment awaiting his return. We both enjoyed dissecting the people passing below. Fatima, I noted was verging on acerbic in her criticisms. Perhaps I simply minced my words more.

Fatima disliked being idle and not having thought to bring her sewing with her, would pace uneasily. She was not one to take coffee out just for the sake of it or to meander through the streets with no purpose other than to kill time. The dimensions of our monolocale had never seemed so confined as those days shared with Fatima.

I worked cleaning and doing errands either mornings or afternoons most days for an elderly woman, La Signora Crivelli-Visconti. The mornings I was home with Fatima were easy enough to fill with cooking and cleaning. I thanked God I had been working some time for Signora Crivelli. I was somewhat prepared for Fatima, who every morning swept and washed the floors, stacking furniture on the bed, moving aside cupboards and dusting in crevices that have probably been untouched for centuries. I aided her as best I could but mostly tried to look unimpressed as though this were something I did each morning too.

The afternoons that I worked I would dawdle over the simplest tasks exasperating the poor Signora Crivelli-Visconti until she would order me from her house shaking her head and half laughing.

‘Return home to your mother-in-law, there’s a sheep’s head stew waiting for you!’

Mildly chastened I would lollygag along the length of the street, pick up a few bananas, some eggs. Often as not stop and have a café coretto alla sambuca and a cigarette for fortitude. Yet I would still fail to return home later than Amine.
Fatima is like Amine. They will do anything to make you laugh but nothing
to make themselves appear undignified or foolish. Occasionally Fatima would
mime an action, describe a certain unheard of fruit with her hands but she always
knew instinctively, unconsciously where to draw the line. Her small competent
hands once rose to trace the arc and pull of a needle and thread with exquisite
ease, ‘You want a needle and thread? You want to buy a needle and thread? Let’s
go! Sortire?’

I took Fatima directly to the haberdashery section of a supermarket. She
looked nonplussed. ‘Pour …’ I wriggled and jerked my finger and thumb joined
together. Fatima shook her head. I took her to another shop and another each
time performing the same frantic movement. Fatima just wanted to see some examples
of Italian handiwork. It’s no wonder I can’t sew, I made it look difficult even
without a needle and thread.

Fatima earned an income from her beautiful and lavish embroidery skills. She
also hand made clothes and jackets for wealthy clients, some of whom were
French — pied noir. A story Fatima told with pleasure was of a particular Madame
Vernou who came for measurements one morning.

‘Ahh, c’est bien. Madame’s house is very beautiful — so clean. Madame has
no children?’

‘Mais oui — I have eight.’

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The last time I saw Fatima, I was nearly thirty and had my own son, three
years old, named Noureddine after his paternal grandfather. Fatima had been
widowed nearly four years by then. We arrived at the airport in Algiers, from
Sydney where we had settled some years prior. Amine’s brother-in-law dropped
us off at Fatima’s apartment in Bab Ezzouar. Bab Ezzouar is a suburb on the
outskirts of Algiers and it was the last place on earth I would have imagined
Fatima or Amine coming from.

Apartment building after apartment building, all decrepit, and all twelve,
fifteen stories high rose out of the dirt and blighted the skyline. A road of faded tar
dribbled its way through gouged pale dirt and swarms of discarded black plastic
bags hovered close to the ground. Rubbish was piled high outside each group of
apartments, putrefying in the heat whilst cats and kittens wound their way around
individual garbage bags. Behind us, on the other corner was a café with alfresco
seating. My glazed and feverish eyes skated over the clientele who were all men
sitting watchful and motionless in the blazing heat. Children stared at us from the
gutters and between piles of garbage scattered amongst the ruins of those hideous,
crumbling buildings that sprung out of the dirt every few metres or so.

We climbed the staircase up eight flights, me dragging my heels and squeezing
Noureddines’ hot little hand, scuffing my feet in the dust and grime on the stairs.
As we reached the seventh floor, the stairs shone like polished marble, I lifted
my head and the door above me flew open and there was Fatima. She was still beautiful. It was like a butterfly had enveloped Amine who had bounded up ahead. Fatima’s housedress was all billowing fuchsia and the rainbow colours of Kabyle embroidery. It was my turn next, to be embraced, drab and travel wearied, and then Noureddine who recoiled and refused to be extracted from my legs.

Once inside I sank into the salmon velour of the modular settee and closed my lids an instant longer than a blink. I allowed my gaze to flit with caution about the room. It was an oasis of gleaming surfaces, ornate but elegant furnishings, arched doorways and silk flowers. Photos that I had sent of Noureddine took pride of place above the television. No sooner had I settled than Fatima walked over, standing in front of me,

‘Ter cul, Michelle?’ Will you eat? She asked awaiting my response. I had understood her question but slowed with fatigue and a violent case of déjà vu, I remained silent and unblinking. Fatima repeated her question. I was thinking of the time she’d visited us in Italy. She’d brought hand sewn stomachs stuffed with rice on the plane with her, a favourite of Amine’s I learned. They travelled well and were obviously meant to be a pale green as neither she nor Amine suffered food poisoning the next day. I had declined as politely as I knew how the halal sausages — mergez — and olive studded salami and nibbled delicately on Tcharak Ariane instead. I am conservative when it comes to meat travelling on planes.

* * * * *

For the next thirteen days Fatima manned our kitchenette. She was heavy handed with an Algerian form of lard and being poor back then we could only afford to buy offal or mince, neither of which are my favourite cuts of meat. For the following ten days I learned to dread mealtimes. My heart would sink when Fatima would utter those words, ‘Ter cul, Michelle?’

The eleventh morning of her stay, Fatima had risen early. Amine and I were sleeping on the floor beside her, so when she made her way to the kitchen, I had woken. For two hours, until seven when I could bring myself to surface, I had listened to her quiet labours. I had felt like the miller’s daughter in rumpelstiltskin when I opened up the door. The backs of our kitchen chairs and table were covered with t-towels and strung over these were pale coils of rechta. Rechta are noodles finer than vermicelli and lighter. Inside your mouth they maintain their spring and then dissolve to nothing in an instant. Later that same day Fatima had made couscous. Mouth ajar, eyes wide and inept hands tucked firmly out of sight, I watched a pale grind of semolina transformed beneath the deftest fingers of them all. Even in Algiers Fatima’s dishes are famous for their levity. They were the best meals I have ever eaten. She had cooked enough to fill our freezer for weeks after she had gone.

So as she stood before me in her own lounge room uttering those words, ‘Ter cul, Michelle?’ Will you eat? I paused, considering the odds. I was famished but
could I face a plate of stomachs? Or brains? What if it were *rechta*? Could I say yes, and then change my mind depending on what was on offer? I decided not. I shook my head,

‘*Non, merci, ca va.*’

I should have known Fatima would prepare something she knew I liked for our first meal in Algiers. Amine and Noureddine had sat down to bowls of *rechta* with cinnamon spiced chicken and chickpeas. Noureddine had picked up handfuls of the noodles and pushed them into his mouth ‘til he could barely chew. Fatima’s face had shone with pleasure, she had cooed around him heedless of the mess and filling and refilling his bowl. I watched them from the balcony that adjoined the kitchen.

Fatima sent me a recipe book not long after our stay with her. It is a small paperback book all in French, a language I don’t speak. *Recettes de Cuisine Algérienne* by Farida Yahyaoui-Bakhti. It has chapters on soups, vegetables, chicken, lamb and fish. The very last chapter is devoted to biscuits. When the book arrived I flipped through its pages until I got to the chapter entitled *Patisseries*. *Makrout, Ghribia, M’Hancha, Katayef*, they were all there in un-biscuit like black and white. I peered through the titles, sounding them out phonetically until I could recognize what biscuit they denoted. The very last recipe was for *Tcharak Ariane*. I searched through old boxes of books until I came up with a French dictionary and painfully, laboriously translated the list of ingredients and the instructions that followed. Exhausted I left it until the following day to gather my ingredients — *eau de fleurs d’oranger*, almond meal and flour are simply not staples in my kitchen.

As I mixed up the filling and the fragrance of orange flowers drifted up from the bowl, the spoon I wielded seemed light in my hand. It was summer and a bright late morning light streamed through the Venetian blinds. The mix was gritty and sweet, almost divine. The pastry, too, was simple and as I rolled it out *tres mince* I imagined Amine’s pleasure when he came home from work for the first time in nearly ten years of marriage to find a stash of homemade biscuits. I visualized him on the phone to his mother,

‘*Wooallah-sah!* Michelle made biscuits — *son tres bien*. I swear to God, it’s true.’ Much laughter would follow that news, I was sure.

The first two biscuits went well, not perfectly but still they were recognizable, a little bulbous for croissants but undoubtedly *Tcharak Ariane*. The problem was it had taken me nearly twenty minutes to make them, to cut just the right sized square, to find just the right amount of filling to allow me to roll them, to pinch the ends just enough so nothing would spill out yet retain the integrity of the biscuit. My feet began to itch, my palms sweated and just the slightest tremor went through my stomach. I had things to do; washing, some cleaning, and a book I wanted to finish. Things that had to be done before Noureddine woke up from his morning sleep. I wanted to go to the beach after lunch; I wanted to visit
my mum. On I ploughed through the pastry that began sticking to the roller, to my fingers, and to the laminex. Too much butter, I feared, perhaps not enough? I was hardly an expert. The biscuits got bigger and bigger and still the pastry would not finish. When I had fifteen biscuits I slammed the oven door shut on them and rested my back against the wall. I threw the remaining pastry in the bin and ate up the almond meal filling with a spoon. I would never make those biscuits again, I vowed. The kitchen was all flour and empty bowls and butter softening in the summer heat, sweat ran freely down my face but I had to laugh as I watched the filling seep out the tips onto the oven tray.

‘I made some biscuits this morning,’ I said to Amine when he’d been home from work a while. ‘You might like some.’ He must have heard the quaver in my voice because he nodded although he rarely has afternoon tea. I put the biscuits on a plate and carefully centred them on the table.

‘Tcharak Ariane! No! You made Tcharak Ariane!’ He took the biggest and ate it all and then another. They didn’t look like Fatima’s but they did taste the same. I blushed and smiled and felt quite bashful, something I hadn’t felt for years.

‘Tcharak Ariane! You could make some for Foedil — you know he’s all by himself here.’ Amine looked at my face and smiled. ‘Perhaps not. These are good you know — a bit of practice…,’ he trailed off again as my brows knitted and my jaw set.

There have been no more Tcharak Ariane from my kitchen. Occasionally I’ve turned to the page with its miniscule scrawlings of English in the margins but the very sight of it is enough to make me quickly shut the book up tight. Instead, I await Fatima’s parcels. Now postal security is so tight they often arrive wrapped in garish red plastic, with green stickers notifying us the parcel has been opened and searched. Sometimes the biscuits are no more than a box full of pastel icing splinters and crushed biscuits. Silver cashews, unstuck and rolling haphazardly about the bottom of the box like loose marbles.

I feel great sorrow and anger when I see that carnage caused by the hands of strangers. I know the postal system is looking for anthrax and bombs and the parcel is from Algeria after all, but still there’s something vandalous, senseless and cruel in such destruction. Occasionally a searched parcel of biscuits does arrive unscathed. The biscuits then seem both miraculous and fragile, doubly handled. I imagine the gentle, knowing hands that lifted each biscuit, turning and replacing it with care before sealing the box once again with tape and only then placing it in its red plastic bag. Now I don’t care the biscuits have been touched, travelled fourteen thousand kilometres and were baked a month before, I’m the first one to reach in and help myself to the biscuit that takes my fancy. And if the taste is not as fresh, a little stale, it is all the more sweet.
Tcharak Ariane

INGREDIENTS
1 jeune d’œuf

Pour la Pâte:
2 tasse d'farine
8 cuillères à soupe de beurre
pincée de sel
1 œuf
3 cuillères à soupe de sucre

Pour La Garniture:
1/3 tasse de sucre
1 tasse d'amandes moulues
2 cuillères à soupe d'eau de fleurs d'oranger
½ cuillère à café de cannelle

METHOD
1. Préparation de la garniture: Mélanger les amandes, le sucre, l'eau de fleurs d'oranger et la cannelle. Incorporer assez d'eau pour obtenir une pâte ferme. Laisser reposer.

2. Préparation de la pâte: Dans une terrine, mélanger l'œuf, la farine et la beurre. Ajouter assez d'eau pour obtenir une pâte souple. Pétrir jusqu'à ce que la pâte soit lisse et élastique.

3. Étaler la pâte au rouleau en une bâisne très mince. Détailer en carrés (10 x 10cm). Prélever un peu de garniture et rouler en forme de cylindre.


5. Continuer jusqu'à épuisement de la pâte. Disposer les croissants sur une plaque et mettre à four moyen préalablement chauffé. Laisser cuire jusqu'à ce qu'ils soient dorés.

Tcharak Ariane

INGREDIENTS
1 egg yolk,

For the Pastry:
2 cups flour
8 tablespoons butter
pinch salt
1 egg
3 tablespoons sugar

For the Filling:
1/3 cup sugar
1 cup ground almonds
2 tablespoons orange blossom water
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

METHOD
1. Filling preparation: Mix the almonds, sugar, orange blossom water and cinnamon. Add enough water to make a firm paste.
2. Pastry preparation: In a terrine, mix the egg, flour and butter. Add enough water to make a pliable dough. Knead until the dough is flexible.
3. Roll out the pastry very thinly. Cut it into squares (10 x 10cm). Take a bit of filling and role it into a cylindrical form.
4. Lay a square of pastry on a work-top. Place a cylinder along one of its sides. Then roll it up to make a cigar. Wet it a bit to fuse the edges together. Fold up the ends as you would to make a croissant. Brush the yolk over the croissant.
5. Continue until the pastry is finished. Put the croissants on a tray and put them in the oven, pre-heated to moderate. Leave them to cook until brown.
Refusing to Be Fat Llamas: Resisting Violence through Food in Sozaboy and Purple Hibiscus

I took a bite, finding it as sweet and hot as any I’d ever had, and was overcome with such a surge of homesickness that I turned away to keep my control. (Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, 200)

Food and foodways are among the most potent of cultural expressions. The food people eat and the way it is prepared speaks volumes about their relationship to their culture, their place in society, and their interaction with the environment. As with all artistic expressions of culture, cooking can be eminently practical or wondrously elaborate. On a most basic level, though, food has the ability to remember home, to reconstruct cultural memory from the integration of ingredients, seasonings, and preparations. As John Egerton writes in the introduction to Cornbread Nation I: ‘At the very least, the foods of our formative years linger in the mind more tenaciously — and favourably — than almost anything else’ (5). The loss of those foods, or their prolonged absence, then, brings about a cultural displacement that emphasises the distance from home.

Two recent Nigerian novels use food to speak to the protagonists’ distance from their community and culture, and, through that distance, to look at the health of Nigerian society. In Sozaboy (1995) by Ken Saro-Wiwa, the decay of social norms is reflected by the changing eating patterns of the characters. The Biafran War alters what and how the title character eats, and his changing eating patterns become a metaphor for the cultural disintegration caused by the war. In Purple Hibiscus (2003) by Chimanda Ngozi Adichie, food clearly represents class, and the more privileged a class is, the further its food is removed from traditional consumption and production patterns of the majority of Nigerians, both rural and urban. The main character’s increasing comfort in her aunt’s kitchen, cooking traditional Igbo ingredients, echoes her growing strength and resistance to her father’s abuse of her.

Sozaboy begins with a description of the protagonist’s village on the eve of the Nigerian civil war:

Although, everybody in Dukana was happy at first.

All the nine villages were dancing and we were eating plenty maize with pear and knacking tory under the moon. Because the work on the farm have finished and the
yams were growing well well. And because the old, bad government have dead, and the new government of soza and police have come. (1)

The happiness and normality in the nine villages of Dukana is very clearly reflected in the food the people consume and the consumption of that food is connected to conversation and the cyclical nature of agriculture. That this contentment is connected with the harvest and planting offers a real sense of foreboding to the beginning of the novel, because ‘although, everybody in Dukana was happy at first’ the ‘new government of sozas and police’ brings starvation with it. By the end of the Biafran War between 500,000 and 2 million people will have died of starvation and related illnesses (Biafran War).

Near the close of the novel, the protagonist, Sozaboy, travels from refugee camp to refugee camp looking for the Dukana people and especially his mother and wife. The description of people’s ordinary lives again revolves around food, but the description is a horrific parody of the happy scene that opens the novel:

So I will leave that camp and go to another. And again na soso the same thing. Plenty people without no dress or little dress walking round with small small bowl begging for food to eat: small small picken with big belly, eyes like pit for dem head, mosquito legs and crying for food, and small yarse and waiting for death, long line of people standing, waiting for food. And still I do not see the Dukana people much less, or rather, much more my mama and my beautiful wife with J.J.C. Nevertheless you must remember that as I was going from one camp to another, I was passing the villages of the Nugwa people and I must say that what I saw in those villages can make person cry. Because all these people cannot find food to chop. There is no fish so the people are beginning to kill and chop lizard. Oh, God no gree bad thing. To see all these men and women who are children of God killing and chopping lizard because of can’t help is something that I will be remembering all the days of my life for ever and ever, amen. (149)

The description of the ‘small small picken with big belly’ is a description of a child dying from kwashiorkor. This is a disease of malnutrition that affects young children. When it was first identified by the Western medical community in 1935, it had a mortality rate of 90%. A recent Bulletin of the World Health Organization article indicates that while the mortality rate has dropped slightly, it is still extremely high and that most children still die even after the onset of treatment (Kwawinkel 910). Kwashiorkor is often found following periods of civic unrest.

Kwashiorkor is the most extreme version of the way foodways have been changed by war. Before the protagonist has decided whether or not to enlist, he overhears a conversation in the Upwine Bar that will resonate throughout the novel:

The tall man was sitting down again and singing and dancing and he was talking again as he was eating okporoko and drinking tombo. ‘Everyday they hala about it. Many people have dead. Therefore some more people must to die again.’

‘And you think it is good thing?’ the short man was asking.
‘Well, I don’t think it is a good thing or bad thing. Even sef I don’t want to think. What they talk, we must do. Myself, if they say fight, I fight. If they say no fight, I cannot fight. Finish.’

‘But is it good thing to fight?’ the short man was asking as he chopped \textit{ngwongwo} from the plate.

‘I like to fight. Yes. It is a good thing to fight. If somebody take your thing by force, if e want by force you to do something wey you no like to do, then you fit fight am.’

‘Well, as for myself, I like to chop \textit{ngwongwo} and drink \textit{tombo}. Anything that will disturb me and stop enjoyment, I cannot like it.’

That is what the short man said as he drank another glass of \textit{tombo} and chopped \textit{ngwongwo} and belched one big belch — etiee! I begin to think of what those two men were saying. I think I agree small with the short man. But I not too sure. I cannot too sure. (17)

The unnamed short man offers a vision of removal from the looming violence. Like most of the common people in the novel, he would rather eat goat soup than participate in war. His anonymity, however, signals that his desire for a simple life will soon vanish under the wave of violence and starvation the civil war will bring to Nigeria.

The other participant in the conversation, the tall man nicknamed Manmuswak, will appear to Sozaboy throughout the novel as a prescient figure representing the kind of person many surviving child soldiers will become. Though Manmuswak is a soldier and, as he states above, used to taking orders, he has no loyalty and switches sides seemingly at will. Unlike the people of Dukana at the book’s opening, he has no concern for anyone but himself. He is totally unsuited for life in a community. Unlike the short man, Manmuswak revels in both the order of the military and the chaos war will bring. He is perfectly adapted for life during wartime. He appears in the book as the ultimate survivor, and, unlike a contestant on Western reality shows, that designation does not make him worthy of admiration. Manmuswak survives by destroying others.

Through Sozaboy we see what may have driven Manmuswak to his individualist greed. Sozaboy’s description of the life of a common soldier shows the depravity the young men are subjected to:

And something was very bad for that place, you know. Water to drink no dey. Common well sef, you cannot get. So that all the time, it was the water in the swamp that we were drinking. And that is also the place that we are going to latrine. Na the same water that we are bathing and using to wash some of our clothes. And na the same water we were using for cooking. That is if we get something to cook like eba and soup. But as you know, not every time that we can cook soup and eba. Even when we cook, na sozaman cook we dey cook. Just throw water, salt, pepper and small fish for pot at the same time. Otherwise, always small biscuit and tea for inside mess pan without sugar or anything. Christ Jesus, man picken don suffer well well. (90–91)

This is before Sozaboy has seen the children dying of kwashiorkor, and he cannot imagine the starvation and disease the war will bring to his people. Prior to his enlistment, the older men of his village talk about the changes in food patterns the
war has already brought to Dukana, and those changes bring back memories of a much-earlier conflict:

‘Bom, I think it is time for us to die,’ said Duzia.
‘Why?’ Bom asked.
‘Buy one cup of salt for one shilling? Whasmatter?’
‘It is very worse at all. How will person begin to buy one cup of salt for one shilling?’
‘Can person marry or even chop if salt begin to cost money like that? … But why? Eh? Kole. Have you seen anything like this before?’ Duzia was asking.
‘In all my life this is the second time that this thing have happened.’ Kole said. ‘The first time na Hitla do am. Hitla very strong man, oh. If as he is fighting, they cut off his arm today, he must return tomorrow with another hand complete and new. Very tough man at all. He first hold up all ship bringing salt to Egwanga. No salt again. Everywhere. Man picken begin to suffer. Even by that time you cannot find salt to buy at all. Now again no salt for second time. Praps some strong men have hold up all the ships again’. (24)

Kole’s connection of the Biafran War with the Second World War, where he was sent by the British to fight ‘Hitla’ in New Guinea, emphasises the similar nature of both conflicts: both wars were primarily about natural resources and in both it was the common people who suffered the most, who were displaced from their homes, deprived of everyday necessities, and killed in the millions. It is this desire to become one of those strong men or at least to challenge them that leads Sozaboy to leave Dukana and his ‘Agnes sweet like tomato’ (36) behind for the depravity of a soldier’s life.

Sozaboy quickly learns, however, that wartime only makes the wealthy more powerful. As he is reduced to eating uncooked snails and raw cassava root in the forest and the rest of the Dukana people huddle in refugee camps starving, the army officers, his village chief and pastor stockpile food and liquor and tobacco becoming more sleek and rounded as everyone else’s bones push out from their flesh. At the novel’s opening, Sozaboy comments upon the simplicity of the Dukana people:

The people of Dukana are fishermen and farmers. They no know anything more than fish and farm. Radio sef they no get. How can they know what is happening? Even myself who travel every day to Pitakwa, township with plenty brick house and running water and electric, I cannot understand what is happening well well, how much less all these simple people tapping palm wine and making fishermen, planting yam and cassava in Dukana? (5)

The one thing the people of Dukana have been able to count on is producing enough food for themselves. Now that ability has been taken from them, and they must rely on the Red Cross for their survival. As Sozaboy repeats, ‘Water don pass gari’ (104), meaning that everything has reversed. Again, he uses a food metaphor: gari, dried granulated cassava, usually eaten as thick porridge has been made useless by the addition of too much water.
Similarly, food comes to have different meanings during wartime. Alcohol, once used for community celebrations and the praising of the gods and ancestors becomes a tool to subvert the enemy, as Manmuswak causes the humiliation of Sozaboy and his mentor and friend, Bullet. Because Bullet steals liquor and tobacco from the captain at Manmuswak’s urging, the captain deprives Bullet and his platoon of water and food, relenting only to make Bullet drink urine:

Then the soza captain opened one bottle and give i to Bullet to drink. So Bullet who have thirsty quench just took that bottle for him hand put the drink for him mouth. Look, I am telling you that what I see that day, I can never forget it until I die. Because I was looking at Bullet face as he drank that drink. And his face was the face of person who have already dead. And when he finished the bottle, the soza captain begin laugh and the san mazor laugh too. Then they asked us to get out. Bullet no fit walk by himself. Na we hold am. I think that he must die. God no gree bad thing. (102)

Waste products have become sustenance. By the end of the novel, Sozaboy will be afraid of being transformed into meat himself. He imagines Manmuswak, who has found him in the forest, fattening him up to be eaten:

‘All this one that I am giving you food and chooking you medicine you don’t know I am just making you to fat like llama so that we can shoot you and you can go and join your friend Bullet. Sozaboy, just wait for me. I will show you pepper. One day be one day. I am Manmuswak and you must fear me. As everybody who have hear my name in war front must fear me. Because I am soza and I am war. I have no friend and I can fight anybody whether whether.’ So I begin fear either for sleep oh or for morning or afternoon or evening. The fear no gree make I chop. I did not want to fat like llama. Some time if I am not fat, Manmuswak and his people will not think of killing me. (122)

Later Manmuswak threatens to cut out Sozaboy’s tongue, penis, and testicles and fry them up and force him to eat them. Cannibalism and forcing one to eat oneself echoes the destruction of Nigerian society. Not only are the Nigerians devouring the breakaway Biafrans, but both sides are also destroying themselves through treachery and betrayal. Describing the people on both sides who profit from the war, Kole says:

They see everything. They smell everything. And they hear everything. So they chop everything. Because they want to chop for today, tomorrow and even for many tomorrows to come, they even hear things which nobody have said, they see things which their belly told them to see and they smell things according to how their belly tell them to smell. So these bellyman are friends of the sozas and of the politicians and the traders. And they are all trading in the life of men and women and children. And their customer is death. (156)

The character that exemplifies these bellymen¹ in the novel is Manmuswak, but Kole’s comments emphasise that he is merely a tool of the true destroyers. The bellymen and their superiors have replaced the comfort and culture of food with that of death. At the end of the novel, Sozaboy rejects that culture of death and leaves Dukana, where the war has turned him into a ghost in the eyes of the
villages who survived the war. Even though he has no destination, he has refused to become a bellyman like Manmuswak, and though his future seems bleak, there is power in his resistance.

Food and resistance are central to Chimanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel *Purple Hibiscus* as well. The novel takes place during one of the military coups in Nigeria, probably the 1983 coup that ousted President Shehu Shagari. The narrator of the story, Kambili, is fifteen years old and the daughter of an important pro-democracy leader and Church elder. Kambili’s father, Eugene, has broken from his own father because he follows traditional African religious belief. Eugene also beats and tortures his wife and children, Kambili and Jaja, because they do not meet his standards of holiness:

‘Kambili, you are precious.’ His voice quavered now, like someone speaking at a funeral, choked with emotion. ‘You should strive for perfection. You should not see sin and walk right into it.’ He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen. He was crying now, tears streaming down his face. I saw the moist steam before I saw the water. I watched the water leave the kettle, flowing almost in slow motion in an arc to my feet. The pain of contact was so pure, so scalding, I felt nothing for a second. And then I screamed.

‘That is what you do to yourself when you walk into sin. You burn your feet,’ he said. (194)

The domestic violence Eugene unleashes on his family is part of his attempt to control everything within his domestic sphere, and that includes food consumed. Eugene is able to publish his pro-democracy newspaper and donate money to the Church because he has a very successful juice bottling business. The family is forced to test each new juice, and, like every ordinary experience in Kambili’s life, tasting the bottled juice becomes a source of terror as her father presides over the table:

I reached for my glass and stared at the juice, watery yellow, like urine. I poured all of it down my throat, in one gulp. I didn’t know what else to do. This had never happened before in my entire life, never. The compound walls would crumble, I was sure, and squash the frangipani trees. The sky would cave in. The Persian rugs on the stretches of gleaming marble floor would shrink. Something would happen. But the only thing that happened was my choking. My body shook from the coughing. Papa and Mama rushed over. Papa thumped my back while Mama rubbed my shoulders and said, ‘O zugo. Stop coughing’. (14)

Food is associated with restrictions and punishment for Kambili. A monthly menu is posted for each child’s lunch: half the month one meal, the other half another. Not only does Kambili associate meals with punishment, she also associates fear with food: ‘After every test, a tough lump like poorly made fufu formed in my throat and stayed there until our exercise books came back’ (52). She knows that if she does not get first place in her class she will be beaten. She will be beaten if she does not run to the car the moment class is dismissed. Socialising with any
other children will bring about a severe punishment. If as Egerton suggests, tastes
associated with childhood have the most resonance in memory (5), then the food
of Kambili’s childhood tastes like fear:

I started to wolf the cereal down, standing. Mama gave me the Panadol tablets, still
in the silver-colored foil, which crinkled as I opened it. Jaja had not put much cereal in
the bowl, and I was almost done eating it when the door opened and Papa came in.
Papa’s white shirt, with its perfectly tailored lines, did little to minimize the mound
of flesh that was his stomach. While he stared at the glass bowl of corn flakes in my
hand, I looked down at the few flaccid flakes floating among the clumps of milk and
wondered how he had climbed the stairs so soundlessly.
‘What are you doing, Kambili?’
I swallowed hard. ‘I … I….’
‘You are eating ten minutes before Mass? Ten minutes before Mass?’
‘Her period started and she has cramps — ’ Mama said.
Jaja cut her short. ‘I told her to eat corn flakes before she took Panadol, Papa. I made
it for her.’
‘Has the devil asked you all to go on errands for him?’ The Igbo words burst out of
Papa’s mouth. ‘Has the devil built a tent in my house?’ He turned to Mama. ‘You sit
there and watch her desecrate the Eucharistic fast, nwka nnidi?’
He unbuckled his belt slowly, It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather
with a sedate leather-covered buckle. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then
Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm, which was covered by the puffy
sequined sleeve of her church blouse. I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on
my back. (102)

The consumption of food in Kambili’s household is always a dangerous affair, even
if there is no pleasure in eating. Eugene sees the cornflakes as an impediment to
the grace brought by the consumption of the Eucharist sacrament. His worldview
has no space for menstrual cramps, and the violence he unleashes on his family is
designed to discipline them into obedience with his fundamentalist expectations.

Kambili’s association of food with fear only changes when Jaja and Kambili
go to visit their Aunt Ifeoma in Nsukka. It is Ifeoma who shows the children
‘freedom to be, to do’ (16). She teaches them defiance, and as Jaja butchers his
first chicken it is clear that he is also killing the fear of his father:

There was a precision in Jaja, a single mindedness that was cold, clinical. He started
to pluck the feathers off quickly, and he did not speak until the chicken had been
reduced to a slim form covered with white-yellow skin. I did not realise how long a
chicken’s neck is until it was plucked.
‘If Aunty Ifeoma leaves, then I want to leave with them, too,’ he said. (235)

Ifeoma has taught Jaja that he does not have to take his father’s abuse. She tells him
that ‘Being defiant can be a good thing sometimes’ (144), and while Jaja will not
free his family from his father, he will defy his mother and accept responsibility
for his father’s death.

Defiance is something Kambili must also learn, but she also must learn to
enjoy life. Through her aunt and a priest, Father Amadi, she will learn that life
can taste like more than fear. Food at Ifeoma’s in Nsukka is not bottled juices
and leftovers are not given away to the poor. Ifeoma is a university professor, but the government has frozen all university salaries. The class differences between Kambili and her aunt’s family are strikingly revealed when the power goes out on the university campus:

Aunty Ifeoma was cleaning out the freezer, which had started to smell because of the incessant power outages. She wiped up the puddle of wine-colored foul water that had leaked to the floor and then brought out the bags of meat and laid them in a bowl. The tiny beef pieces had turned a mottled brown. The pieces of chicken Jaja had killed had turned a deep yellow.

‘So much wasted meat,’ I said.
Aunty Ifeoma laughed. ‘Wasted, kwa? I will boil it well with spices and cook away the spoilage.’

‘Mom, she is talking like a Big Man’s daughter,’ Amaka said. (246)

Kambili is a Big Man’s daughter; though her father resists the despotism of the military governments, he rules his family as they do the country. It is impossible not to see the abuse Eugene inflicts on his family as echoes of the violence the authorities do to other characters in the novel. It is through Ifeoma that Kambili learns that she does not have to be imprisoned by the way she was raised. She learns to resist the badgering of her cousin about their class difference:

‘Why?’ Amaka burst out. ‘Because rich people do not prepare orah in their houses? Won’t she participate in eating the orah soup?’
Aunty Ifeoma’s eyes hardened — she was not looking at Amaka, she was looking at me. ‘O ginidi, Kambili, have you no mouth? Talk back to her!’
I watched a wilted African lily fall from its stalk in the garden. The crotons rustled in the late morning breeze. ‘You don’t have to shout, Amaka,’ I said, finally. ‘I don’t know how to do the orah leaves, but you can show me.’ I did not know where the calm words had come from. I did not want to look at Amaka, did not want to see her scowl, did not want to prompt her to say something else to me, because I knew I could not keep up. I thought I was imagining it when I heard the cackling, but then I looked at Amaka — and sure enough, she was laughing.

‘So your voice can be this loud, Kambili,’ she said.
She showed me how to prepare the orah leaves. The slippery, light green leaves had fibrous stalks that did not become tender from cooking and so had to be carefully plucked out. I balanced the tray of vegetables on my lap and set to work, plucking the stalks and putting the leaves in a bowl at my feet. (170)

The simple act of preparing a meal with her cousin is Kambili’s first real moment of community. It gives her a sense of a possible life not lived in fear. Food, one of the trappings of oppression in her household, is revealed to be a source of strength in another. By embracing this communal preparation of food, by revelling in food her father considers too common to eat, Kambili is reconnecting with a culture from which Eugene has divorced himself. Also by disagreeing with her cousin, Kambili discovers her defiant voice which will give her the strength for the difficult times that lay ahead for her family.
When she watches her grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu, pray for her father, Kambili completes her transformation. Though Eugene will severely scald her for eating in the same house as her grandfather and beat her nearly to death for bringing a painting of him home, Kambili will not forsake his memory.

Papa snatched the painting from Jaja. His hands moved swiftly, working together. The painting was gone. It already represented something lost, something I had never had, would never have. Now even that reminder was gone, and at Papa’s feet lay pieces of paper streaked with earth-tone colors. The pieces were very small, very precise. I suddenly and maniacally imagined Papa-Nnukwu’s body being cut in pieces that small and stored in a fridge. (210)

Kambili associates Papa-Nnukwu with the meat that earlier she would have discarded. Now, through her aunt and cousin she knows better. There may be things about traditionalism that she will need to discard — its sexism, for example, about which Ifeoma openly scoffs — but, like Ifeoma and her family, Kambili is hungry, and her grandfather offers one of the few sources she has to cultural nourishment. Though her father will beat her senseless, Kambili will stay and protect the torn pieces of the painting because they offer sustenance of a kind her father has always refused her.

At the end of the novel, Kambili travels to the jail where Jaja is imprisoned to bring him the news that he will be released. As she travels there she turns on the car’s stereo and puts in a Fela Kuti cassette. The choice of Fela, the Nigerian singer, songwriter, and advocate for democracy, is significant, for his lyrics resonate with the theme of the novel. Fela was a very vocal opponent of the military but equally critical of religion and the middle-class that embraced Western ideals at the expense of African values and heritage:

I no be gentleman like that
I be African man
Original (Fela 1973)

he sings on his 1973 song ‘Gentleman’. In evoking Fela, Kambili is keeping her father’s crusades for democracy separate from his religious intolerance with which he scarred his family. She has learned from her aunt to boil memories well with spices and cook away the spoilage.

Even more resonant considering the incident in the bath-tub is the Fela song, ‘Water No Get Enemy’ which insists upon the centrality of the common people’s experience to African society:

Nothing without water
Water, it get no enemy
Oh me a water-o
No go fight am, unless you wan die
I say water no get enemy (Fela 1975)

For Fela, resistance to oppression and insistence upon justice were a rising tide in Africa, borne upon the backs of the generations of those who suffered under
colonialism and neocolonialism. Similarly, both Sozaboy and Purple Hibiscus argue that the most important things in Nigeria’s transition to postcoloniality is a respect for the people’s experience. The inequity of foodways serve to highlight the continuing divisions in society, the scars left by the colonial era which must be healed in order for true freedom to come to Africa. By resisting both the cultural imperialism that threatens to erase the preparation of orah soup and the rise of the bellymen that threaten to devour everything of value in the region, the youth of Nigeria — and it is no coincidence that both books have youths as protagonists — can chart a new way for themselves, one that values the lessons of the past but cooks the past well with spices and cuts away the corruption.

‘But now if anybody say anything about war or even fight, I will just run and run and run and run. Believe me yours sincerely’ (181). The closing words of Saro-Wiwa’s novel indicate that the protagonist has grown amidst the horror and grief of the war; he is now firmly with the short man in the Upwine Bar who wanted to sit and eat goat and not fight. Adichie’s closing goes even farther, with Kambili imagining a garden with orange tree and ixora blossoms. By turning from destruction to cultivation, the novels suggest that there is culture that resists violence, but the imagined future can only be reached if people turn to the wealth of their culture, carve off the spoiled parts, and move forward with what remains, always refusing to be a victim.

NOTES
1 Saro-Wiwa uses this term in the singular form to indicate both singular and plural.

WORKS CITED
Groundnut Stew

**Ingredients**
1 whole chicken, cut up
3 large onions
4 cloves garlic
2 stalks celery
2 carrots
1 3-inch piece ginger
1 green bell pepper
1 hot chilli pepper
4 tomatoes, cut up, or 1 14 1/2 oz can tomatoes
1 cup chicken stock, or 1 chicken bouillon cube, dissolved in 1 cup water
2 cups natural peanut butter
1 tbsp fish sauce
2 tsps garam masala
salt, black pepper, and cayenne to taste
peanut oil for frying

**Method**
1. Salt and pepper the chicken pieces on both sides.
2. Place in the bottom of a steamer: 1/4 of one onion; 1 stalk celery, roughly; chopped; 1 carrot roughly chopped; and half the ginger, cut into coins.
3. Add water to right below steamer insert. Place chicken in steamer. Bring water to a boil, cover, and steam for 30 minutes.
4. While chicken is steaming, chop 1 onion, 1 stalk celery, 1 carrot, the bell pepper and the chilli pepper, and mince 4 cloves garlic and the remaining ginger. Sauté the vegetables in oil until tender.
5. Purée the remaining onion and the tomatoes, and add to the sautéed vegetables and purée them as well. Set aside.
6. Remove the chicken from the steamer. Heat oil in a large skillet. Fry chicken in batches until the outside is crispy. Drain any excess oil, and then add the puréed mixture and the chicken stock to the skillet. Fry, stirring continually, until it thickens and darkens slightly. Add the peanut butter, the fish sauce, and the garam masala. Stir until well blended. If the sauce is too thick, add extra stock or water to loosen.
7. Return the chicken to the skillet and add salt, black pepper, and cayenne to taste.

Serve over brown rice.
Marcelle Freiman

THE FACTORY

I remember him in his study, a photograph
of Albert Schweitzer at his shoulder,
or sitting on the veranda at the end of the day,
sweet caramel smoke of his pipe,
stars of an African night,
tears of dew caught in the wool
of his cardigan, the wool of his hair, like pearls.

My father’s factory,
smell of burning oil, workers shovelled coal,
the boiler boomed for the cooling tower
steel pylons vast against the sky,
an industrial plant to manufacture food:
great steel vats fermenting nutrients
for Puza Mandla, sour drink made from maize.
In warehouse stores its white dust peppered floors
of corridors between piles of sacks, danced
in dawn sun-shafts through the windows —
Protone, a soup of soya, mixed with water
to feed a starving child
for a penny each day.

How many children stayed bright eyed, their skin firm
against kwashiorkor in Rwanda, the Congo, Transkei?
Did the boy later become the soldier,
or remain white-shirted schoolboy, then teacher
in a green village near a river? Was the girl who held
the tin cup of soup in her hands,
belly filled with proteins,
later the mother lying killed, her baby still tied
in a blanket on her back, its cries by a dusty road?
Or does she still teach her daughters
to pound maize in a wooden vat,
sit waiting at sunset for the children to return
along the dust road,
leaving their footprints in the red sand?
And what of the prisoners in their island jail
drinking *Puza Mandla*, who awaited apartheid’s end, waiting for their freedom?

How to implicate one’s heart beyond the borders of apartheid?
My father dreamed of life while hunger was everywhere. Just one man, he willed to subdue it — the factory pumps and wheels echoed his heart-beats, thundered against the horizon, filled stomachs and returned the light to hunger-dulled eyes.

He could not see the Parkinsonian worm that crawled into his heel, turned his legs to fibres, his back to a frozen arc, it would steal from him the pillars and pylons, the cooling tower’s wide embrace, the fire in the boiling belly.

*Kwashiorkor* — disease of malnutrition

Nutritional Foods Pty Ltd *is the company founded by my father and his partners in Industria, Johannesburg in 1954. It is still operating, under different owners.*
IN OUR HOUSE

She sang while she swayed
polishing the parquet,
her tongue-click voice like a bell,
I’d crouch beside her warm hip
my knees knobbly on gritty floor,
piney wax-polish in its tin

  *my nanny, her back where I rest my face is cotton, so clean and washed I breathe sunshine and a hot iron*

afternoons she sat on the concrete path
beside the house in the sun, legs straight out,
she’d push her white doek
to the back of her head, and I was shy
to see her naked ears, hair soft as combed wool,
her lunch on the cream enamel plate,
brown bread, peanut-butter
tea in the blue mug

afternoon was her tired time
her back against the wall

  *she’d bathed and dressed me, ironed shirts and pants and underpants,
p Peeled carrots and potatoes, sliced paw-paws and oranges, dusted venetian blinds, stirred pots of beef and chicken, folded sheets, swept verandahs, dusted bookshelves*

she’d hold me when we crossed the road
my life in her hands
her life in our house.
Baked Pumpkin

These recipes correspond particularly with the poem ‘In Our House’ where I write about the domestic world of a young white child growing up in South Africa under apartheid during the mid-1950s. Our family life at home, at the slightly-later time of the 1960s recalled in the second poem ‘The Factory’ when my father became involved in producing nutritional food products, had similar features. The recipes are for the kind of foods cooked by our African cooks and nannies who were negotiating between European and African cultures. In our house, politics was intimate and domestic: it was in every moment, space and action of our lives — meals, child-care, cleaning, laundry, gardening — because living in a white suburban household in Johannesburg meant living with African servants who did the work of childcare, cleaning, cooking and gardening.

This was the place of my childhood — it was rich with the comfort of close contact and friendship with nannies and gardeners who, in my recollection, were certainly more attentive to the children in their care than our parents were. I have only a few memories of my mother’s cooking because servants learnt quickly how the family liked food to be prepared and they were often very good at cooking.

My nannies and the male gardeners (there were several, as often they did not stay in the job for long, though sometimes they did) were kind, caring and most of all, physically affectionate. They cooked delicious food both for the family and for themselves; food that was European for us (in our case, specifically Jewish), while their own food was different because the economic access they had to food was limited — an obvious manifestation of the inequities of apartheid. The food they prepared for themselves was also far more African than the food they prepared for us, although they would creatively introduce African tastes into our dishes, such as black pepper or cinnamon or cayenne — spices that were part of the Malay and Portuguese influences in African culture. For the most part domestic ‘separation’ meant that there was a difference between the food consumed in the house and in the backyard — even though, paradoxically, the relationship between house and servants was so intimate.

Although my family was humane and enlightened, it was also part of the system. So it was the case that at that time food was supplied by the employer to the domestic workers as portions of mielie meal, sugar, jam, tea, coffee, brown bread, ‘stamp mielies’ (crushed dried maize kernels), meat and oranges, though they would also take the surplus from the cooking done for us. The servants would cultivate vegetables in our backyard and garden, and this is where I learned how to germinate seeds and grow beans, mielies and pumpkins. I also learned the taste of the food in the backyard — thick slices of brown bread with apricot jam, sweet tea, dry mielie pap (maize porridge) with peppery meat, tomato and onion sauce which was delicious and different and which they would happily share with us children. I was young and experienced all this as just another part of our home life, although from very early on
I was also aware of the difference in the living conditions of those who cared for me. As I grew up I could not tolerate the system, but it has also formed who I am.

The recipes are for pumpkin dishes — do not forget to save the seeds, as our cooks always did. Dry them in the sun and either eat them shelled, as snacks, or use them for planting.

**Baked Pumpkin I**

1. Place slices of peeled or unpeeled seeded pumpkin in a single layer in a shallow baking dish or tray.
2. Season with salt and pepper, dot with butter.
3. Sprinkle with cinnamon and a tablespoonful of golden syrup or brown sugar, and bake in a medium-hot oven 180°C (360°F) until soft and somewhat caramelised.

This is eaten as a vegetable with a main course.

**Baked Pumpkin II**

1. Slice butternut pumpkin lengthways in half, scoop out pips and fill the hollows with diced onion, green pepper and mushrooms which have been sautéed in butter and seasoned with salt and pepper.
2. Put the two halves together again, wrap in foil and bake in a medium-hot oven 180–200°C (360–400°F) for 1–2 hours until tender, depending on the size of the butternut.
This essay is an edited section of an autobiography in progress.

It is December 1941 and there are six of us in the kitchen. The new baby, Peter, is in his pram being rocked by our father while our mother stirs apricot jam on the top of the wood fire. The apricots have been sent to her by her mother who lives in Angaston in the Barossa Valley where they are abundant at this time of the year. Edna, my mother’s red-haired sister, brought them when she came to visit. Edna has caught the bus for her long trip home, and we are left alone with the apricots and the heat.

When my mother was a girl she and her sisters, Nora, Edna and Eva, used to have fruit fights with quinces. ‘One day you girls will want for fruit!’ yelled Granny. In my mother’s case she was proved right because we lived on the edge of a desert with very little rain and the only fruit that grew was a scarlet sour native called quandong.

In fact, our mother never had much fruit after she left her mother’s house in 1935. Her sewing machine was lashed to the side of her new husband’s Buick for the drive up around the top of Spencer Gulf, and then south down the Eyre Peninsula to Tumby Bay. ‘Sit on him!’ advised Granny when my father unwittingly tied the sewing machine on upside down and the cotton reels fell out of the drawers. (There was much mirth about this advice in later years not least because my father almost always did exactly what was expected of him. And he did it with good grace because he had a mild and generous nature.)

The new house to which they were heading was one the stock and station company had provided. The car also belonged to the firm, and it was his new appointment to open the first branch of Elders Smith and Company that had allowed my father to propose marriage to our mother in a small park in Angaston in 1934. ‘You can kiss me Brink!’ she said and he did.

While our mother stirs the apricot jam with a long flat wooden implement, my other brothers, Tucker and Bill, go on eating our breakfast of boiled eggs and toast which our father made for us because of the boiling jam, which cannot be left, but must be stirred continually with this stick which, misshapen like a blade, has a flat end that helps to prevent the jam from sticking and burning on the base of the pot.

Baby Peter is being rocked because he is in pain from an abscess, the result of an infection that he got in the hospital when he was born. Our mother is in pain
too because she has the same infection in her breasts. This child was their fourth in five years and it seems to me now that our parents were bewildered by their fertility. I think they, especially our mother, were at their wits’ end. In fact, their close friends who were unable to conceive and who had been married for years had offered to take this baby and rear him as their own. But in the end our mother could not do it. Yet some word must have been spoken, perhaps by Dr. Wibberley, the only doctor in the town and the only doctor between Tumby Bay and Pt. Lincoln which was twenty-five miles south, because Peter was the last baby.

Outside in the hot air, dust rose from the white road that ran along in front of the beach. White daisy bushes grew and behind them tamarisk trees waves with their fronds of pale pink blossom. To the south of the house, which was at the end of the small town, rose white sand dunes clad only in grey fronds of a wiry plant that held the dunes in place. Stretched out to the far horizon, a wide pale bay seemed held down by two jetties like two fingers on a blue piano.

Above the bay, an inverted saucer of pale blue with a few white clouds held the whole world in place.

There were no angles except where the jetties joined the beach. Everything was curved and everything was bright. The light went on all day and the sun bore down peeling our noses, bleaching our hair and, when we played in the sea in our bathers, turning the tops of our shoulders red. My brothers seldom wore shoes and everybody learnt to swim without being taught. One day we could dog paddle and the next we could swim. Day after day it was forty degrees. We had one rainwater tank on that first house and that water was to last us all summer.

Across the bay in front of this our first house, lay Spencer Gulf, then Yorke Peninsula, with its foot shaped like Italy. The land rose in the east and on the eastern shore of that gulf was Adelaide, the State’s capital, where our father’s parents lived. When we visited our grandparents or had to have our eyes tested, or to visit some specialist for our health, we flew from Pt. Lincoln airport south of Tumby Bay directly across these two gulfs and the Yorke Peninsula on which, in about its middle, lay Minlaton, the town which we had not yet heard of but where our father would be sent by Elder Smith and where we would live for three years.

The names of these towns on Eyre Peninsula were given by Matthew Flinders when he sailed in The Investigator charting the southern coast in 1802. He named Pt. Lincoln after his home county Lincolnshire, in Ireland, and he named Tumby Bay after Tumby Island which was also a parish in Lincolnshire. Pt. Lincoln was the town where we sometimes were driven to buy red apples. ‘Let’s go to Lincoln to buy some shinies!’ I would say when the thought struck me. Shinies were red Jonathon apples which had been polished by the fruiter and living as we did with so little fruit they seemed as glamorous as cherries to me. My mother in her white felt hat would buy a pound or two of the apples and we would eat them driving
home. ‘One day I will plant fruit trees,’ she would say. ‘And you children will sit beneath them and eat the fruit while the juice runs down your arms.’

It took another dozen or so years, but that is what she did. And the strange thing is that when that farm was sold, the orchard she had planted in the front garden was dug up and the land was made into lawn that, when I saw it, left me thunder struck. How easily we destroy somebody’s accomplished dream.

Our mother loved Tumby Bay and she loved our father and so, perhaps as a consequence, at least of the former, so did we. When her sisters had heard that she was leaving the Barossa Valley with its vines and orchards to live on the edge of what they thought of as a desert, they told her she would hate it. But she loved it. She loved the daisy bushes on the edge of the beach, she loved the people and their hospitality.

Were we enchanted? Was it all a fable of our mother’s making? Why did she love our father to such a degree? Were we the only happy family in the country? I can’t say, but for whatever reason, there we were the six of us fighting merrily among ourselves but blessed with this strange enchanted felicity within the home. It formed us all.

* * * * *

Here now is my brother Peter making apricot jam in two big batches. It is 28th December, 2006 and we are at his home at Brighton near Adelaide. Last night I watched him cut and stone the fruit which he picked from the big tree in his back garden. He has netted this tree to keep the birds from the fruit. I watched him meticulously weigh the fruit on old scales kilo by kilo using apricot stones laid on the granite bench to number the kilos. Not knowing what the stones were for I had swept them away with a dish cloth into the bin when he was not looking. Patiently, because he has a sweet nature like our father, he went to the bin and lifted them out.

‘You don’t need too much sugar,’ he said. ‘Only use two thirds sugar to fruit. Too much sugar and you lose the flavour of the apricots. See, I’ve got nine kilos of apricots here and I’m only going to use six of sugar.’

He left two big pots of fruit and sugar to macerate overnight and he has brought them out to his barbecue on the back verandah. I see the pots begin to boil and ask, ‘Aren’t you going to use any water?’ Turning to me as he stirs with a huge wooden spoon, he says, ‘You don’t use water in jam! Water makes it go mouldy. The only jam you use water in is quince and it is a buggar because it always goes mouldy!’

Then, seeing two thermometers hanging from the side of both pots, I ask what temperature he is trying to get the jam to reach. ‘You need to get it to 105 or 110 degrees quickly. But it’s almost impossible to get it to that very fast. The quicker it boils to that heat you see, which is the setting point, the better the colour.’
Because the fruit has only been picked yesterday, its freshness seems to make it take a little longer than usual to reach setting point. After what seems to me an unusually short time for jam, a saucer of it laid out on the table beside us shows it has set. The heat is turned off and the pots are lifted into the kitchen where the jars Peter has sterilised in the oven are set out. As he fills the jars he puts a desert spoon into each one, as our mother did, to prevent the glass from breaking with the hot jam. His thumb or forefinger goes in on the inside of each jar and so unknowingly he spoils the sterilised condition of the jars. But I say nothing because I do not want to interrupt or to seem a critical older sister. Also, I can see he knows much more about jam-making than I do, even though I have been making it for fifty years. I know, too, that his jam doesn’t spoil and is famous for its flavour. In fact, when I gave a big jar of Peter’s apricot jam to my friend, Peri, she gave part of it in a smaller jar to her daughter, Justine, who took it to a café where she had breakfast every Saturday morning. It was left there as their weekly treat and became a thing they talked about because they thought it was so good. I have told Peter this story and he is quietly pleased.

Day after day, as the hot days went on and the evening sea breeze cooled us, the man went on making the jam until he had over fifty jars standing on the kitchen bench. Then he lifted the jars up into a set of glass-fronted cupboards that are lit from within. He had had them specially made to display his jam. There it sits, a memorial to our mother, to our childhood and to all those who made apricot jam at Christmas in the heat among the crying children.
Margaret Atwood’s Canadian Hunger Artist: Postcolonial Appetites in The Edible Woman

In Margaret Atwood’s The Edible Woman (1969), food serves a crucial function in the novel’s engagement with the feminist and postcolonial paradigms fundamental to Atwood’s writing. In her introduction to the novel, Atwood describes how early inspiration for the novel came from pondering the seemingly consumable figures of the bride and groom frequently placed on top of wedding cakes. This image first features in her unpublished novel, Up in the Air so Blue (1964): ‘She walked past the next few stores; then there was a confectionary shop with a cardboard and plaster-of-Paris wedding-cake in the window. She stopped to examine the miniature bride and groom perched on the top tier beneath a flowery paper archway’ (Atwood Collection 16:3:48–49). The cannibalistic overtones of this interest in food and symbolism in Atwood’s work are more fully realised in The Edible Woman where food takes on a new resonance in the feminist and postcolonial discourses of her fiction. The processes of formation and transformation that the protagonist undergoes in the novel are at every turn intertwined with consumption and consumerism as her relationship with food, and in particular her increasingly diminished appetite, serves as an indicator of the unstable state of her self-image and subjectivity.

Food is recognised as an all-important metaphor for the main character’s identity crisis. Much like Kafka’s Hunger Artist in his short story of the same name, Marian MacAlpin’s refusal of food is an act of resistance, in this case a protest against the limitations of ‘the options for a young woman, even a young educated woman, in Canada in the early sixties’ (1969 Intro.). While the feminist elements of the novel are most vividly expressed in the representation of food in the text, and have been the focus of most of the critical attention paid to the novel since its publication, the references to Canada in The Edible Woman serve as an important reminder that the power relations explored are relevant to the forging of a national as well as female identity; the novel presents a recipe for self-preservation in national as well as individual terms and lays the foundation for the more developed exploration of the precariousness of Canadian identity, and survival as a key symbol of Canadian culture, in later novels, most famously Surfacing (1972). The novel marks a crucial moment in Atwood’s development as a feminist and postcolonial thinker; a key aspect of the text, to which
critics have not paid due attention in previous discussions, is that the corollary between feminist and postcolonial narratives, which is so striking in Atwood’s later work, is also evident in *The Edible Woman*. In discussions of Canadian-American relations, Atwood shows an acute awareness of how Canada’s cultural sovereignty is perennially threatened by its more powerful southern neighbour. In her fiction, this is often expressed through a feminisation of Canada — one that does not reduce the women in her fiction to national emblems, but rather explores the points of contact between feminist and nationalist politics. This feminisation of the national is most profoundly expressed in *Surfacing*, but also in *The Robber Bride* (1993), and in short story collections such as *Wilderness Tips* (1991). In Atwood’s literary imagination, the experience of being female resonates powerfully with the experience of being colonised, and the complexities of Canada’s postcolonial identity are frequently written onto the lives of women in Atwood’s work. This is well-documented in criticism on *Surfacing*, but it is also important to the way in which later novels such as *The Robber Bride* revisit Canada’s colonial past through women-centred narratives, texts in which growing up female and Canadian is given unparalleled attention. This longstanding interest in the interaction of feminist and nationalist identity in her work is inevitably informed by Atwood’s commitment to Canadian cultural nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s. In the preface to *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), a book that represents the cultural and literary renaissance that characterised this period, Atwood identifies a number of victim positions evident in Canadian literature and goes on to examine these diverse manifestations and variations of victimhood in detail. She classifies a wide range of works as portraying different victim positions, from denial through to the creative defiance of victimhood, and ultimately returns to the conclusion that: ‘The central symbol for Canada — and this is based on numerous instances of its occurrence in both English and French Canadian literature — is undoubtedly Survival, *la Survivance*’ (1972 32). This politically-charged interest in survival might also be seen as a significant subtext in *The Edible Woman*. Toronto may seem to be a rather anonymous backdrop to the novel, but there are a number of subtle but revealing references to Canada that shed new light on Marian MacAlpin as one of Atwood’s earliest survivor figures.

The main character of *The Edible Woman*, Marian MacAlpin, works for a market research firm and, in spite of her misgivings, accepts her boyfriend’s proposal of marriage. Once the engagement is made public, she loses her appetite, as her body refuses each of the food groups in turn. Towards the end of the novel, she rejects her fiancé, Peter, and reclaims her autonomy by baking him a cake in the shape of a woman — a miniature version of herself. The first ‘survivor’ to appear in Atwood’s fiction is, then, faced with a fundamental threat to her existence as a basic requirement for living is taken from her. Although it might not seem to relate to the survival theme as readily as those novels that
are more explicitly about Canada and Canadian national identity, *The Edible Woman* engages implicitly with one of Atwood’s most influential contributions to criticism on Canadian literature and culture.

The symbolic significance of food is fully realised in the later stages of the novel, but what is often overlooked is that it is, in fact, an important source of imagery from the outset; although it is not until the second part of the novel that Marian’s relationship with food emerges as a metaphor for her withering autonomy, references to food recur throughout the first part in a number of different contexts. The details of Marian’s appetite and choice of meals are relayed in full and she often refers to the healthy demands of her appetite: ‘I was hungry again. I had been eating in bits and pieces all day and I had been counting on something nourishing and substantial’ (27). Descriptions of pregnancy early on in the novel draw on a range of plant and animal imagery, and various vegetables and fruits are evoked in a caricature of the pregnant female body. The character of Clara is likened to ‘a strange vegetable growth, a bulbous tuber’ (32) and ‘a boa-constrictor that has swallowed a water melon’ (31), while her new-born baby in its nursery cot is introduced as one of many indistinguishable ‘red shrivelled prunes’ (132). Further to this, Clara manages to break every rule of culinary etiquette as laid down by *Joy of Cooking* (the recipe book and conduct manual from which the epigraph of the novel is taken), as her chaotic attempt to host a dinner party in Chapter 4 bears a striking resemblance to the Mad Hatter’s tea party reconstructed later in the narrative. Also, in the first part of the novel, food is the medium through which the actual and social architecture of the research company for which Marion works is portrayed. The office fan ‘revolves in the centre of the ceiling, stirring the air around like a spoon in soup’ (17) and, perhaps most significantly, the office hierarchy at Seymour Surveys is described as being like ‘an ice-cream sandwich’ (19). There are a number of additional uses of food as a metaphor for social relations in these chapters in earlier drafts of the novel. For example, according to one early draft, a comparison of what survey interviewees recruited by the company are prepared to accept as consumers and what they might rightfully demand bears the same relationship to that which ‘a cellowrapped pack of processed cheese has to a chunk of lovingly-mellowed cheddar’ (Atwood Collection 18:20:14), though this and other references are edited out in the final manuscript. It is almost as if Atwood is sensitive to the risk of over-playing the use of food imagery early on and detracting from the impact of the food-inspired drama that unfolds in the later sections of the novel.

The diagnosis of Marian’s eating disorder as ‘a repudiation of an exploitative consumer culture’ (Rigney 33) is representative of the approach taken by those who view the novel as an exposé of female objectification. Margaret Atwood’s suggestion that ‘Marian’s difficulty is that she comes to identify with the objects the society is consuming, especially food. And because she’s making that identification and seeing herself as the consumed rather than the consumer, she
stops eating’ (1990 28) would seem to validate this line of thinking. Furthermore, in the first full draft of the novel (held in the Atwood Collection), the character of Duncan draws exactly the same conclusion in relation to Marian’s plight, though this is also edited out in the published version:

‘I know it isn’t just Peter. I start feeling smothered by things and then I’m afraid of dissolving, but then at other times I seem to be afraid of something opposite, getting stuck, not being able to move. But most of all it’s this food thing.’ She felt a pang of hunger as she spoke. ‘I’m afraid of eating, most of the time I seem to have lost my appetite completely, but I’m afraid of not eating too.’ Funny, she thought, how detached I’m being. ‘You’re a mess, all right,’ Duncan said pleasantly. ‘They tell me that these days it’s fashionable to regard the fear of doing something as very close to the fear of having it done to you, I wonder what that means, if anything?’

(Atwood Collection 18:32:257–58)

Again, the decision to tone down Duncan’s frank assessment of Marian’s eating disorder ensures that the novel does not provide too emphatic a diagnosis of the character and allows for the ambiguous ending so characteristic of Atwood’s early novels. This ambiguity is itself a reflection of Atwood’s suspicion of absolutist ideologies, whether in relation to feminism or discourses of national identity. Atwood’s work does not offer any easy solutions to the dilemmas encountered in her explorations of Canadian identity and the Canadian postcolonial mentality. In contrast to the theme of survival, Atwood identifies the primary unifying symbol of American literature as ‘The Frontier, a flexible idea that contains many elements dear to the American heart: it suggests a place that is new, where the old order can be discarded […] a line that is always expanding, taking in or ‘conquering’ ever-fresh virgin territory’ (1972 31). Her choice of survival as the primary symbol of Canadian literature resonates with the experiences of many of her main characters, who are more concerned with endurance against the odds than with victory. In contrast to the equation of consumption and conquest with success and achievement, figured here as being the central preoccupation of ‘The Frontier’, there are many moments in Atwood’s work where she resists this assumption by making the apparently marginalised victim position the preferred and, indeed, more interesting position. This applies to The Edible Woman in the way that Marian’s inability to eat ultimately comes to mark a positive moment of change and transformation, even if the promise of change is not fully realised at the end of the novel.

The character’s revulsion towards food develops in distinct phases, as the different food groups seem to take on a life of their own. The same phenomenon, and further evidence of Atwood’s long-term concern with the politics of eating, is first introduced in an unpublished short story, ‘Oyster Stew’, written in the early 1960s. Interestingly, in this story the relationship with food is reversed as the female character relishes every bite, while her male counterpart looks on, appalled by her appetite:
He forced himself to look away, to pick up his knife and fork. He jabbed at an oyster and fished it to the surface. It was huge, pale pink, with round blunted ends and involuted ruffles. Where did these mute things grow? Who knew…. Some people ate them while they were still alive. The idea that the oyster might still be alive, … he watched it as it quivered at the end of his fork, and realised that his hands were shaking, had been shaking for some time. (Atwood Collection 40:2:6)

This revulsion is rewritten and extended in Marian’s loss of appetite as, working her way through the food groups, she is unable to override her body’s refusal to eat: ‘She was becoming more and more irritated by her body’s decision to reject certain foods. She had tried to reason with it, and accused it of having frivolous whims, had coaxed it and tempted it, but it was adamant; and if she used force it rebelled’ (177–78). In spite of the fact that ‘she had been brought up to eat whatever was on the plate’ (204), both in terms of food and female socialisation, her body systematically refuses food as a gesture of protest.

In introductory notes on ‘Power Politics’, found amongst drafts of a preface to her collection of poetry of the same name, Atwood concludes:

Power is our environment. We live surrounded by it; it pervades everything we are and do, invisible and soundless, like air. We notice it only when there is a break in the current, a conflict, when the balance of power is upset. The rest of the time things flow smoothly, each in its appointed place in the power structure, and we along with them. (Atwood Collection 56:9)

This comes close to being an endorsement of a Foucauldian view of power relations, and Marian’s loss of appetite or refusal to eat represents exactly one such ‘break in the current’ identified by Atwood — a political act of resistance. In Atwood’s early writing this anxiety about power politics is visible in the Canadian nationalist as well as the feminist elements of her work; this is a preoccupation that is most explicitly propounded in her second novel Surfacing (1972), and sustained in different forms throughout her writing career. In her early work, it is driven by a need to explicate what she sees as Canada’s victim status. Later novels, The Robber Bride in particular, move on from this and cast a cool revisionist eye on her earlier nationalism, so that the crucial paradigms of Survival are rewritten to interrogate the motif of Canadian victimhood. Nevertheless, even though the mature Atwood is capable of effectively writing back to her earlier work, what is maintained throughout her career is an interest in the impact of national and historical discourses of power on the day-to-day life of the individual. Marian MacAlpin’s identification with food is closely linked to the more general theme of consumerism in the novel. In her work as a market researcher, managing research surveys in towns and cities dotted across the map of Canada that hangs on the wall of the Seymour Surveys office, she is accomplice to, as well as victim of, the mass consumerism that she later identifies as defining her relationship with her fiancé, Peter. The character’s relationship with food and her struggle towards self-determination is, then, played out against a determinedly Canadian backdrop as are, it might be argued, Atwood’s nascent concerns about the survival of the
country’s cultural autonomy. Indeed, there are moments in Atwood’s writing where the Canadian fear of consumption by the cultural hegemony of the United States is expressed in terms that find particular sympathy with the food imagery in *The Edible Woman*. In an article entitled ‘Nationalism, Limbo and the Canadian Club’, written in 1971, Atwood’s metaphor for American-Canadian relations contains the same ingredients as those central to *The Edible Woman*:

‘They’ had been taught that they were the centre of the universe, a huge, healthy apple pie, with other countries and cultures sprinkled round the outside, like raisins. ‘We’ on the other hand had been taught that we were one of the raisins, in fact, the raisin, and that the other parts of the universe were invariably larger and more interesting than we were. A distortion of the truth in both cases, let us hope. (87–88)

This gives a new inflection to the idea of being as ‘American as Apple Pie’, as the cosy domestic image is reconfigured in a damning critique of the power politics of the United States in relation to the rest of the world.

Sarah Sceats applies Foucault’s theory of power (in particular the idea that power is exercised discreetly in everyday social processes) in identifying the complex politics underlying food and eating and its representation in literature: ‘feeding is established psychologically as the locus of love, aggression, pleasure, anxiety, frustration and desire for control. Precisely, in other words, the ingredients of power relations’ (118). Atwood shows a similarly keen awareness of the politics of food as the earliest expression of subjectivity: ‘Eating is our earliest metaphor, preceding our consciousness of gender difference, race, nationality and language. We eat before we talk’ (1988 53). Atwood’s metaphorical use of food goes beyond the dramatic conceit of the ‘edible woman’. It is, for example, no accident that one of the products being researched by Seymour Surveys in the novel is ‘Moose Beer’, which is suggestive of the Canadian tourist-industry clichés of which Atwood is aware and contests throughout her fictional oeuvre. One of Atwood’s primary concerns as a writer in the late 1960s and 1970s was to develop a more meaningful narrative of Canadian national identity in order to ensure the future of Canadian literature. The mapping of Canada by Seymour Surveys is also revealing in the way that tensions between different regional identities are exposed in the attitudes of the company’s Toronto-based employees. A disconcertingly comic example of this can be seen in the discussion of a planned survey of laxative products in Quebec: “I guess people are just more constipated there. Don’t they eat a lot of potatoes?” [...] “It can’t only be the potatoes,” Ainsley pronounced. “It must be their collective guilt-complex. Or maybe the strain of the language problem; they must be horribly repressed” (23). Thus, the motif of consumerism in the novel shows that the commercial and marital marketplace have much in common, and, at the same time, effectively draws attention to distinctively Canadian political pressure points.

In her introduction to ‘The CanLit Food Book’, Atwood comments on the prevalence of cannibalism — metaphorical and actual — in Canadian literature
Margaret Atwood’s Canadian Hunger Artist

(55); with this in mind, it seems all the more important to place *The Edible Woman* in the context of this broader tradition of Canadian writing. Even though the novel is interested in the effect of consumer culture on its female protagonist, the nationalist concerns more fully expressed in Atwood’s later writing, most directly and extensively in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), can be identified as an important subtext.

Sceats observes that the interpretation of the significance of food and eating patterns and rituals and the ways in which they are invested with social, political, and psychological meaning is most relevant to reading twentieth-century women’s writing: ‘Because of the close cultural association between women and food, or because of feminism’s politicisation of the domestic, or because of the advance of material culture, the work of women writers in the latter half of the twentieth century is particularly fruitful for an examination of the relations between power and food’ (117). The exposition of such power relations is most striking when played out in the denial or refusal of food. Atwood’s novel is one of the most dramatic contemporary examples of this exposition, both in the main character’s refusal to eat and in the ironic ‘politicisation of the domestic’ involved in her decision to bake a cake as a sacrificial effigy of herself.

In *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing and Imprisonment*, Maud Ellmann charts the history of hunger and starvation in a range of national, political, and historical contexts from a broad base of psychoanalytical, anthropological, and sociological perspectives. She draws on a number of literary examples to complement the arguments that she makes about food as an ideological weapon or, alternatively, as a medium through which political protest may be registered. For Ellmann, there is an important political difference between the hunger-striker and the anorexic. Marian MacAlpin’s refusal of food has been casually described as both a feminist hunger-strike and an eating disorder, but it is necessary to identify more closely the nature of her refusal of food within these parameters for the purpose of better understanding its motivation and effect. Ellmann usefully engages with what theorists currently posit about anorexia:

> is it anorectic women who are really hunger strikers in disguise, and who are starving to defy the patriarchal values that confine their sex as rigidly as walls of stone or bars of iron? Since women succumb to anorexia more commonly than men, many feminists interpret the disorder as a symptom of the discontents of womankind. Anorexia, they argue, has now replaced hysteria as the illness that expresses women’s rage against the circumscription of their lives. A self-defeating protest, since it is women who become the victims of their own revolt. (Ellmann 2)

With Ellmann’s definition in mind, the representation of Marian MacAlpin’s crisis seems to convey effectively the political protest of the hunger-strike without realising its self-defeating effects. As far as the psychology and social statement of the hunger strike and anorexia are concerned, Marian’s case defies a number of the key motives and symptoms in either case. For Ellmann, the suffering inflicted
upon the body is, in the case of the hunger-striker, a declaration of protest: ‘The starving body is itself a text, the living dossier of its discontents, for the injustices of power are encoded in the savage hieroglyphics of its sufferings’ (Ellmann 16–17). In the case of the anorexic, this is deemed to be counterproductive: ‘Instead of freedom and liberation we find obsession, and in it the underlying quest for identity and development is drowned’ (Chernin 22). Yet, it is crucial to note that Marian does not endure genuine physical suffering as a result of her protest — the implications of the metaphor are never fully realised. In spite of her early panic: ‘I hope it’s not permanent; I’ll starve to death!’ (152), it emerges later in the narrative ‘that she hadn’t really lost much weight’ (221).

Similarly, Marian does not easily fit the psychological profile of an anorexic, for whom, ‘Self-starvation is above all a performance…. Anorectics are “starving for attention” they are making a spectacle of themselves, in every sense’ (Ellmann 17). Far from declaring her reasons for refusing food (as in the case of the hunger-striker), or drawing attention to the spectacle of her starvation (like the anorexic), Marian tries desperately to hide her eating disorder, especially at the various dinner parties that take place in the later stages of the novel.

The edible woman in the shape of a cake is the symbolic punch-line in Atwood’s food metaphor in the novel, representing Marian’s exposure of the threat posed by Peter to her autonomy and her reclamation of agency. However, this result is also complicated by Peter’s refusal to eat the cake in the shape of a woman. It is Marian who cannibalises the edible woman, helped rather ominously by Duncan, the solipsistic misfit whom she befriends when carrying out door-to-door market research surveys. For Sceats, this is the main complication of the ending of the novel: ‘Marian has learned assertiveness, that sexual politics means “eat or be eaten”, but although it has the desired effects of frightening Peter away and returning Marian’s appetite, it does not address the conundrum of how she can live without either being consumed or becoming a predator’ (2000 99).

This concern with the predatory nature of gender politics — something that is vividly illustrated by Marian’s fiancé being repeatedly imagined as a hunter in the novel — marks another point of contact between Atwood’s early feminism and the Canadian wilderness. The untamed aspects of gender politics and of the Canadian landscape were, I would argue, crucial and interlinked dimensions of Atwood’s literary imagination, even before the appearance of Surfacing. In The Edible Woman, Atwood’s interest in survival as a Canadian theme is already being explored in the unexpected context of modern urban Toronto. In the tradition of hunger and starvation in literature, Marian is ultimately compatible with Kafka’s original hunger artist. His plaintive explanation of a life devoted to the spectacle of starvation is simply, ‘weil ich nicht die Speise finden konnte, die mir schmeckt’ (257) [because I could never find the food I wanted to eat]. It is ultimately upon the same premise that food functions as such a vivid and complex metaphor in The Edible Woman, marking a new departure in the feminist impetus of Atwood’s
work, but also sowing the seeds of Atwood’s preoccupation with the relationship between feminist and nationalist discourses of power.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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**Puff Paste or Pâte Feuilletée**

**INGREDIENTS**

- ¼ lb. sweet butter
- ¼ lb. all-purpose flour
- 2 – 2 ½ oz. ice water
- (1 teaspoon lemon juice)
- ¼ teaspoon salt

**METHOD**

It is best to use flour that has a high gluten content, to develop real elasticity — and this is hard to come by. We do succeed, however, with all-purpose flour by using the procedure we describe. To be ‘puffy’ the paste must be chilled, well-kneaded, and handled in such a way as to trap air, and finally baked in a hot, thoroughly preheated oven. Then the air inside the dough expands with almost explosive effect. The surface on which you work — preferably marble — the tools, the ingredients and your fingers should be chilled throughout the operation, as it is necessary to hold the fat, which is in very high proportion to the flour, in constant suspension. (From The Joy of Cooking [1931].)

* * * * *

The epigraph to The Edible Woman is an extract from a recipe for puff pastry taken from The Joy of Cooking (1931). Its inclusion firmly places the novel within the broader social and historical discourses of food and domesticity. The Joy of Cooking by Irma S. Rombauer and Marion Rombauer Becker might be seen as the Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management for 1930s America. It contains chapters on formal and informal entertainment and related etiquette. Recommendations made go beyond the successful execution of a recipe and extend to the conduct of the hostess, who at times seems to have much in common with the Mistress of Mrs Beeton’s Victorian middle-class home. In a description of how to deal with cooking for ‘eminent and distinguished persons’, the book advises: ‘Like the rest of us they shrink from ostentation; and nothing is more disconcerting to a guest than the impression that his coming is causing a household commotion. Confine all noticeable efforts for his comfort and refreshment to the period that precedes his arrival. Satisfy yourself that you have anticipated every possible emergency — the howling child, the last-minute search for cuff links, your husband’s exuberance, your helper’s ineptness, your own qualms. Then relax and enjoy your guests’ (15). This sheds further light on Marian McAlpin’s troubled relationship with food: a 1930s American household classic, The Joy of Cooking symbolises the life that lay in store for young married women in Canada in the late 1950s and 1960s and it represents a recipe for living that the character that Atwood’s character simply cannot stomach.
HELEN COUSINS

Banana Rebellion: Food and Power in Lindsey Collen’s *Mutiny*

The banana is a culturally important food in much of Africa. Originally an Asian food, it has been grown in East Africa since the time of Arabic trade. It forms a staple food for much of the African population (*afrol News* online); but the Mauritian writer, Lindsey Collen, takes a surprisingly lyrical approach to, ‘A fruit that’s also a vegetable. A vegetable that’s also a staple. The most magic of all fruit, all vegetables, all staples’ (247). Such praise for the banana recognises it as extraordinary; indeed, the abundant, common and often comically phallic banana is given iconic status in her novel *Mutiny*. Collen employs the banana as a potent symbol of resistance to oppression. Out of context, the image of women prisoners taking one banana and raising a mug of tea in an oath of solidarity might appear more amusing than seriously defiant and, certainly, one of the attractions of Collen’s writing is her capacity to explore important issues with a light touch. However, as the themes of the novel develop this culminating moment takes on a resonance as a powerful moment of female unity against injustice and repression.

*Mutiny* is the story of a prison breakout set in Mauritius. Three women, Juna, Leila and Mama Gracienne, share a cell in Porlwi women’s prison. All three are held or have been convicted on dubious charges which makes the reader more sympathetic to their escape plans. Juna has been told that allegations have been made against her of framing another woman on a drugs charge; it seems more likely that her recent appointment to secretary of the trade union has prompted her arrest. Leila has broken into a drug dealer’s house who has organised a contract killing on her father; she is a minor but she is in the adult prison as she attacked one of the policemen who arrested her. Mama Gracienne’s beloved daughter, Honey, has died but no cause of death can be found; out of grief and confusion, Mama Gracienne has confessed to murder. Prison conditions are basic; the women are often cold and always hungry. They begin to share recipes as a way of sublimating those physical pangs and this begins to form a common ground between them from which rebellion can spring. When Juna receives a message from outside (from her politically active friends) about the twin cyclone moving towards Porlwi, they begin to plan for a mass escape to be effected when the eye of the storm passes over the prison. However, the authorities begin to suspect trouble and try to provoke internal violence, which could be ruthlessly repressed through cutting the banana ration from two to one a day.
For the inmates of Porlwi women’s prison, the banana is essential nutrition where diet is very poor and limited. From this practical beginning, it becomes something more: as Juna, the narrator, points out, ‘Bananas are more than gold in here … bananas are holy’ (100). Bananas are used as currency — one of the characters, Juna, gives up a banana a day for one week to another inmate in exchange for a pencil — but they are also invested with more than economic value. They are ‘beautiful’ and ‘sacred’, and have been won by a prisoner strike. As Juna explains, ‘On the chunk of bread we get margarine. But only since the hunger strike in 1979 … Meat twice a week only since then too. And the two bananas. Inalienable right’ (252). The weekly ration of two bananas is the result of the prisoners hard-fought battle with authorities and it is the linking of bananas with the rights of prisoners and the justice they should have that makes the banana such a significant symbol in the novel.

Food, as mentioned earlier, is a weapon in the struggle for domination in Collen’s narrative. Its lack caused the strike of 1979 and withdrawal of food is commonly threatened by the prison guards, who are known as Blue Ladies. Prisoners are told that if they ‘put a foot wrong’ or ‘don’t watch [their] tongue’ they will be reduced to ‘bread and water’ (55, 186). It is a given that these guards control every crust of dry bread we get in here.’ (75) Even with the additions of meat and margarine, the prison diet is restricted to barely adequate levels, partly one assumes for economy but also it appears as a deliberate ploy to oppress the prisoners’ spirit.

Juna notes: ‘[w]e are always hungry, all of us…. We think about food all the time’ (252). With their minds focused on their aching stomachs, the prisoners have no space to consider defiance or rebellion. At best they are reduced to petty complaints and bullying directed at their peers more often than at the Blue Ladies who have the power to punish fairly arbitrarily. Quite literally, they are ‘driven nuts by food’ (75) and by talk of it: “I’m hungry,” [Leila, Juna’s cell mate] says. “I’m starving.” These words drive me mad’ (21–22).

Food as a tool of control is not limited to prison in the Mauritius of the novel. In colonial times starvation was a punishment for slaves. In ‘Green Square … [called] execution square … they used to chop the heads off male slaves and hang the female slaves to starve in public’ (216). In contemporary Mauritian society (when this novel is set), people are no longer publically executed by starvation but Collen makes her opinion clear that those in power still make decisions that result in some people dying through lack of food. In the novel, Mama Gracienne has lost two children as infants; she had been visiting Mauritius with her two young sons when the Chagos Islands were ‘closed’ and the inhabitants evicted so that the British could rent them to America (Baird, 2002). Mama Gracienne cannot return to the rest of her family and soon her two little boys die of diarrhoea — which one assumes was brought on by the malnutrition and disease that comes with homelessness and deprivation. Collen makes the claim that starvation now
occurs in the name of economics as policy makers ‘cause starvation. En masse. They lower wages and sack people, with intent. They raise prices and close factories. Leaving the little children to suffer without give us this day our daily’ (274). Collen’s comments would seem to be directed at Mauritian legislators and industrialists, and outside agencies (such as The World Bank) who offer help attached to imposed conditions of restructuring. They remain free despite the personal costs which can be associated with their decision making; in fact, their actions are often publicly praised as improving the economy.

More specifically, food of a particular kind is linked with corruption. Juna tells her cell mates the story of how her father ‘got corrupted’. He stands as a Bicycle Party candidate in local elections. This is a democratic grassroots political party where adults — men and women — can debate and ‘come to conclusions’ (44). He is elected as a Village President but one day is invited, along with other Village Presidents, to a meeting with the rich and powerful Dr Bythee. Bythee imposes his own autocratic decisions on the meeting regarding an area representative, clearly choosing someone whom he knows will concur with the Government line. The meeting has been set up as a meal, apparently innocent enough, but the setting is intimidating: ‘Each man takes a seat regretfully at the enormous oval table. Napkin, what to do with it. Cutlery frightening them’ (47). When Juna’s father tries to instigate a discussion, he is silenced: “Don’t want to make a meal out of it.” The literal and indulgent meal that follows, brought in by ‘Servants in white livery’ (48), seals the decision and binds these men in complicity. From this point on, Juna feels that she has lost her father and he is lost himself. Significantly, the Blue Ladies are also ‘overfed’, connecting them with this privilege and corruption; but tools of control can be grasped and used by the oppressed too.

At the beginning of the novel, Juna finds a way of using food against the authorities through games she plays with her cell mate, Leila, in order to survive the boredom and stress of imprisonment. Initially these games are not food related, consisting of the ‘question-and-answer game’ (19), where conversation between them proceeds through one asking questions to draw out the meaning of the others’ deliberately veiled comments and training exercises. In these they march and run on the spot; this game develops into Leila boosting Juna up to the cell window where she begins to file away one of the bars in preparation for their escape. Juna is aware of the prison authorities’ deliberate intention to occupy the prisoners’ minds with thoughts of food and hunger. The new game that Juna introduces is one of exchanging recipes between herself, Leila and the third occupant of the cell, Mama Gracienne, an older woman. This game starts as a way to ‘pass the time’ (21); the rules are that recipes discussed must proceed alphabetically and that ‘we can’t talk about being hungry all the time … we’ve got to ration ourselves’ (22). By controlling talk about food and hunger, Juna begins to diffuse the maddening effect.
The food has resonance with characters’ moods; the first two recipes requested by Leila are bitter dishes of aubergine and gourd rings. It is recognised by Juna that Leila ‘can’t bear to think of anything sweet’ (22). However, the food here is necessarily imaginary and the recipes have a more subversive intention:

Concentrate all out on food. Tell recipes to lighten the weight of the boredom. Talk about food to quell the pangs of hunger that gnaw at the pits of our stomachs, talk to tame the obsession with eating. . . .
Then forget about food. Ban the subject all together. (25)

In this way, the mind is freed from its obsession with food. Space is made in the prisoners’ minds for those thoughts of rebellion and escape that the prison authorities would like to suppress. By recipe number five (Edible Elephant Ear), Leila tells Juna she has been practising the recipe Mama Gracienne told her — ‘trying to remember it off by heart for when she gets out’ (206). For Leila, the concept of being outside, the idea of escape is now in her consciousness, and from the idea can spring the action.

However, this is not the only purpose of the recipes in the novel. Traditionally in Mauritius, women are the home keepers of the society (Matusky, 2006). Food production, provision and preparation has been the domain of women, as in much of sub-Saharan Africa (Africaguide, 2006). In a situation where these women could so easily fight, bully and destroy each other, Collen uses the sharing of recipes to create a bond between the women within this cell. By setting her novel in a prison, Collen creates a micro society where it is in the authorities’ interests that the women prisoners are at odds with one another. When Juna is put in the first cell with two old hands, her ‘instinct says don’t give in, fight them’ (8). Individuals have to struggle in a hierarchy and those at the bottom are bullied and harassed. Juna’s involvement with the trade union has raised her consciousness about the importance of solidarity and she gradually realises that this is equally as important in prison. She is supported in this by her politically active friends outside, particularly Boni, who do not abandon her. Boni had warned Juna to be careful when she became secretary; helps Leila to give herself up; and sends a message to Juna via Mama Gracienne when she hears Mama Gracienne is about to confess to the murder of her daughter. Boni ends up in the prison too and is instrumental in helping Juna build unity between all the prisoners.

Collen frequently explores the notion of female solidarity in her novels. It is often suggested as a tenet of African feminism that traditional structures have created a commonality between women which fosters a spirit of co-operation. However, in this text Collen suggests that this is not a given. In the prison, the inmates will have to find common ground if they are to resist the injustice of their situation. Furthermore, the female guards are in no way aligned to the women they guard. In fact, they are barely human. Juna describes them variously as encased in artifice: ‘starched and dyed . . . [with] false teeth’ (52); reeking: ‘the smell of all the blue lady’s lotions and potions . . . It stinks’ (116); and inhuman: ‘Extra-
Banana Rebellion

By aligning themselves with institutional authority, these guards have made themselves as trapped as the inmates. Juna sees right from the beginning that they are ‘just as much imprisoned as we are’ (4). This provokes no sympathy in Juna; in fact she hates these guards (3). As mutinous feelings grow with the cyclone’s development, the guards become more imprisoned than the inmates. They have accepted responsibility in exchange for privilege and now they are duty bound to stay and guard the prisoners. Juna’s recipe game which, she says ‘we are bound to play’ (252), binds the prisoners to a different responsibility: first by acknowledging a common anger about the lack of food, then by directing that anger first at the overfed Blue Ladies and then, more generally towards a legal system that, from Collen’s point of view, is designed to oppress the poor rather than punishing criminals. Short interleaved chapters throughout the novel quote laws copied by Juna from legislative documents in the prison library. These relate to stories the characters tell of their own experiences and of others they know and show how circumstances of poverty have often led to trouble with the police and arrest. Their agenda (a free choice) is to leave whilst the Blue Ladies agenda (imposed upon them) is to remain inside.

The sharing of recipes also binds the women together as family. Although a cultural history of women as home-makers who take responsibility for the preparation of food would suggest that the women of Mauritius usually learn recipes from other women, particularly from their mothers and grandmothers, when Leila asks to be told how to prepare fish pickle, Juna observes that she ‘want[s] to know how to choose and prepare the fish … and make the pickle. Nobody ever shows me anything,’ by which she implies a lack of mothering (244). Indeed, Juna has earlier described herself as ‘born without a mother’ (193) as her mother died soon after her birth. The sense of loss is exacerbated by her father’s refusal to explain consistently how this happened, variously claiming childbirth, drowning and being hit by a falling coconut. Juna’s cellmates have experienced a similar break or breakdown in the female line. Leila’s mother had tried to get Leila ‘declared out of control and locked up’ so that she would ‘no longer [be] a threat to her family’s reputation’ (209) and put out a contract on Leila’s father’s life. Mama Gracienne has lost two families: she is separated from her family on the Chagos Islands, and her infant sons die; later, she loses her second Mauritian husband and Honey, the daughter of that marriage.

However, in prison, Juna identifies the three of them as ‘this family’ (108). Mama Gracienne is ‘the mother I have found. Inside’ (193). The emphasis on ‘inside’ here reminds us that Juna is pregnant and probably will soon be a mother herself. Leila is a teenager who should rightfully be in a juvenile prison but her crime — spilling the blood of a policeman — condemns her to the adult prison. She is also pregnant — not only a child but imminently a mother too. So here
a family of grandmother/mother, daughter/mother and mother/grand/daughter is created.

Having two of the three inmates in one cell pregnant might appear to be a surprising coincidence, but it does serve to emphasise the burgeoning hunger for freedom. These two ‘pre-people’ might be inside in two senses but once they are born they will be free under the terms of the law. It also draws attention to a mainly female concern, that in considering the future ‘for us, women, there are the unborn who get involved. The inside’ (275). In this way the family is extended beyond the living but also recognises its procreative purpose and potential in reaching forward and shaping the future.

Juna’s identification of a family inside the prison seems important to her recognition of the further possibility of solidarity: ‘This family. Can we mutiny? The three of us? And others?’ (108). Juna cannot accomplish an escape on her own, but as part of a family she has the power to draw other women towards her and into the mutiny. Furthermore, as the relationships in this family are not biological but socially constructed, the family unit can include any woman who chooses or is chosen to become part of it. So solidarity between the prisoners becomes a possibility through several strategies.

Of course, the reader might question the right of these women to rebel; after all, surely society needs ways of punishing crime and protecting the innocent, and these women are incarcerated because they are criminals. Collen however suggests that justice is not so simple. Whilst Leila is proudly guilty of her crimes, Juna claims that the allegations made against her are false, and Mama Gracienne appears to have confessed to the murder of her daughter out of guilt, grief and because no one can tell her how and why Honey, her daughter, did die. Of some of the other prisoners, we are told:

One just walked the streets. Soliciting. So much for free trade. Another went to see a backstreet woman. One stole a tin of sweetened condensed milk from a supermarket, for a babe on a milkless breast. One administered noxious substance to her husband. Three took on their husbands’ drug-peddling charges. A clutch of broken down addicts.

(274)

It may be argued that Collen deliberately mixes this range of ‘crimes’ to challenge our own morality and perceptions of justice. Many readers will differentiate between these women seeing some as innocent and others as guilty; but then Collen asks the reader to compare them to those who declare war and make munitions. Juna questions the justice in this: ‘They walk free. Maim and kill people by the hundred. By the thousand. Collateral’ (274). Juna similarly questions the morality of those who make the economic decisions which create the deprivation that might lead someone to steal food, and asks who then should be punished? What Juna appears to want to establish is the truth — something she sees as separate from justice as defined by the establishment; and again Collen uses common food-related metaphors to express this:
I am hungry. And thirsty. All the time …

Maybe I will write about milk … And food. *Milk of human kindness … Food for thought.* … Thirst to be quenched by opening up the throat and … pouring in delicious sweet gurgling milk. *Thirst after righteousness.* Hunger. Hunger to be stayed by tasty morsels of bread and a little something. *Hunger for truth.* (75)

Juna’s arrest has coincided with her appointment as secretary for the new union at work. Whilst the allegations against her are for planting drugs, the suggestion is that these are false allegations. The implication is that her arrest is more likely a way of intimidating those who engage in this type of grassroots politics. Like her father and, more recently her brother, Juna has been targeted by the authorities because she is perceived to be a dangerous voice of dissent. She questions the nature of ‘justice’ in her society — on what it is founded and by whom. She asks who can speak about justice and who can challenge it — the ‘people’ or only the privileged elite? This justifies mutiny in Juna’s mind but she also questions the effectiveness of a localised mutiny. However, by this stage of the narrative she is not paralysed by fears of ineffectuality or bound by conventional rules.

Earlier, Juna notes that ‘Recipes are instructions … Like the criminal code. Telling you what to do and what not to do’ (23). When she gets her first message regarding the mutiny, she complains that they are not more directive — ‘I prefer getting orders. Instructions, directions. Recipes for escape’ (118) — but she is told that ‘if these were recipes, they would know them too’ (118). Juna has to move outside of the conventional mores of society in order to ferment her rebellion. She has noted that ‘In any society they say that the first writings are laws and recipes … then stories’ (24). Juna has been copying down parts of Mauritian legislation and recounting her recipes but now she has to accept that these rule-bound texts will not help her nor address society’s corruptions. She is advised by her political-activist friends to discuss multiple expressions of mutiny, to make a map, use riddles and guessing games (119). These are the tools of story-telling and therefore unknowable to the rule-bound Blue Ladies and the institution more generally. By using less predictable texts, plans will stay hidden.

This is not a generic novel of prison escape for the usual ‘ingredients’ are often absent: plans of action secretly plotted, actions taken, moments of near discovery, feats of bravery and sacrifice. In fact it remains somewhat unclear how the narrative arrives at the moment in the meal hall where the women unite in the face of the ‘provocative cut in banana rations’ (325). Instead it would seem that several elements combine to bring this to pass — the ‘smell of rebellion’ (13) creating mutinous feelings in the inmates; the impending cyclone; Juna’s hidden knowledge of the prison electronics; the Blue Ladies’ increasing disquiet; the arrival of Boni, the activist. These various elements work together to create meaning for the reader. Thus, little narrative drive is created as in a genre text but thematically a convincing solidarity between all the women in the prison is achieved. It might be suggested that the text itself works in the way that Juna has been encouraged to work.
When the order is given ‘Only one banana each!’ (312) every woman ‘makes a stand’ (318), takes her one banana and an ‘oath’. The cut in banana rations, a blatant disregard for one of the few ‘rights’ of the prisoners, has been a calculated ploy by the authority to disperse the rebellion in meaningless actions, such as a riot. They can manage this with violence and repression. However, there is no way to redress what appears to be a non-rebellion and this reveals the power that the prisoners have:

We are taking the power in a process that has already begun and the knowledge — conviction even, because it is our own choice — that we will be acting soon means that we are already acting, means victory is possible, means a certain degree of victory is already here with us, inhabiting us. (318)

In this text, the victory is not so much escaping physical imprisonment but an understanding that by working together, oppressed people can challenge the status quo.

In terms of the prison escape genre, this novel is a failure. The women do escape in the eye of the cyclone, but they are driven back to captivity by the devastation caused by the ferocity at the other side of the cyclone. They are left ‘helpless, struggling, starving’ (341). Additionally, we are not told of the fate of Mama Gracienne; of Juna’s brother; or the babies born (or not?) to Leila and Juna. In fact, all characters except Juna vanish from the narrative. This works to focus the reader’s attention on the actual achievement of the mutiny. The ‘certain degree of victory’ (318) remains despite the fact that Juna is back in her prison cell; but now she does not have recipes or rules: she has tools, she exercises in preparation and she is ‘not the only one’ (342). The escape is thought of as ‘[t]hat time’ in anticipation of a ‘[t]his time’ (342). She has realised that, for women particularly, but also for anyone subject to (instead of in control of) institutions such as the law, the rules of society do not protect but oppress freedom. These instructions for society cannot be used by women to empower themselves. What is required is a more flexible system — one which lays out the ground then offers the option of many paths and strategies; the ‘map of a mutiny’ (119).

NOTES
1 All italics are Collens’.

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Crab Soup

This is one of the recipes shared by the inmates of Poorlwi prison in Mutiny by Lindsey Collen. I have tried to rewrite it as a recipe but the text is not specific about quantities or times so this is only for experienced cooks who know how to judge amounts! For the fully lyrical, mouth-watering description see pp. 131–33.

**Ingredients**
- butter
- onions, chopped
- fresh leaf coriander (including stalks and roots if possible)
- a piece of root ginger
- some cloves of garlic
- curry leaves (if available)
- a chilli, seeds removed
- turmeric
- oil
- crabs, cleaned
- salt
- tamarind or lemon juice

**Method**
1. Melt the butter in a pan and brown the onions.
2. Remove the coriander leaves and chop. Put them aside for sprinkling on top of the soup.
3. Crush into a paste: the roots and stalks of the coriander, the root ginger, the garlic, the curry leaves, and the chilli. (The easiest way to do this is in a blender but the book suggests finely chopping all the ingredients then ‘squashing’ them with a mortar and pestle, or a flat knife or using a ‘grind stone’ type of arrangement).
4. Add turmeric if required.
5. Fry the mixture well with the onions, adding oil if necessary to stop the paste burning. Stir constantly to make sure it does not burn and become bitter. Continue until the mixture smells cooked.
6. Add the water and the crabs. Bring to the boil then reduce to a simmer for 15–20 minutes.
7. Season with salt and tamarind / lemon juice to taste. Sprinkle with reserved, chopped coriander leaves and serve immediately.
I am interested in macro-photography, particularly in the ways that natural objects or substances, when viewed at close range, are transformed into intriguing abstract patterns or conjure unfamiliar worlds. My favourite subjects for this are bark, sand, rock and snow, and, to a lesser degree, flowers and fruit. The colours, textures and shapes of the everyday things we take for granted or simply pass without noticing can become fascinatingly alive. For me, the experience of a kind of existential dislocation produced through detail revealed by alteration in the size of objects (and through lighting and framing) relativises our anthropocentric apprehensions, reminding us of our own perceptual limitations. Even within our homes and gardens, the world is experienced (and no doubt understood) in ways vastly different from our own, by the millions of living beings with whom we share the planet. (I remember the astonishment, and for some, the horror, at the images revealed by electron microscopy of the alien ‘wild life’ ever present on human skin; that bees ‘see’ a field of flowers in a very different way from humans has long been remarked.)

The alteration in scale afforded by the electron microscope (or just a macro-lens) does not always transform all ‘ordinary’ objects into something extraordinary, but together with lighting, the alteration in scale defamiliarises so that we see some things, literally, in a new light. I enjoy taking close-up pictures of fruit and vegetables using sunlight and various artificial lights to accentuate colour, to give mandarin or orange quarters for example, unexpected refulgence. The rough texture and ‘ropey’ patterns of rock melon skin — each one subtly different — can reveal in close up anything from a pattern of dolphins dancing to a simple design of rectangles. A slightly unripe tomato slice suggests the soft vulnerability of mouth tissue, while a magnified section of corncob emerges as the yellowing human teeth that will eat it. Some fruit and vegetable close-ups, without offering specific correspondences to human anatomy, are nevertheless redolent of the body which eats them and which they will in fact become. The cliché ‘we are what we eat’ has, like all clichés, a degree of real truth, or in terms of more recent ecological discourse, such similitudes as macro-photography can produce remind us of the processive nature of being, in spite of our determined separation of the world into discrete objects and substances.

I am drawn to macro-photography — as I am to literature — by the transformative mystery and power of the metaphoric process. In photography, however, the play of difference and similarity in which metaphor consists is energised not by language, but by light and by the small made large or the large, small.
Green Leafy Curry

My mother always hated cooking, particularly because the obligation to cook food took her away from the garden where she preferred to spend her time. She regretted not living into the twenty-first century, in which, she firmly believed, there would be pills we could just take with water (and perhaps chocolate) and get back out to the garden, cooking having been eliminated. For her, however, it still had to be done, and meals were traditionally English (meat and three veges with the hell boiled out of them) even if colonially filtered through that Australian culinary bible, the W.M.U. Cookbook. The W.M.U. Cookbook’s instructions were a peculiar mixture of the risibly elementary and the sweepingly assumptive, from the almost ‘how to boil an egg’ (for the completely clueless) to cake recipes with no measures of ingredients and no indication of cooking times — a practice which called for experience, judgement and straws from a broom.

I have long given up English ‘cuisine’ for Indian, Italian and Thai; and I love buying recipe books in India (or Italy) that have been designed for a local market (in India particularly these are often in English to cater for different local language readers) just as the W.M.U. Cookbook was. The following recipe comes from my ‘bible’, a tiny paperback on South Indian cooking I bought in Bangalore. It did not of course call for tinned coconut milk or desiccated coconut, and was unspecific in terms of amount. I have adapted it for those unfortunate enough not to have a real coconut (if you do, this really does taste better) and those who like ingredient amounts and cooking times specified. It’s quick and easy to make though, and of that my mother would certainly have approved.

**INGREDIENTS**

4 cups spinach (or other green leafy vegetable)  
½ can coconut milk (or coconut cream)  
2 dessertspoons (or more to taste) desiccated coconut  
2 heaped teaspoons mustard seed  
4 heaped teaspoons urad dhal  
chillies to taste  
¾ teaspoon salt (or to taste)  
2 teaspoons tumeric

**METHOD**

1. Fry the mustard seed and urad dhal in oil till the mustard seed crackles and the dhal gently browns.  
2. Add spinach (or any green leafy vegetable), chillies, tumeric, salt, coconut milk and coconut. Stir.  
3. Simmer with lid on pot for 15 minutes.
Indian Writing on Food: A Skewed Representation of Contemporary Social Reality

Food is a basic requirement for life, and it remains only that for a painfully large proportion of the human population. In India, for more than a quarter billion people food is a matter of sheer survival. Even though the fame of India’s riches may have spurred the European race to seek out India from the fifteenth century onwards, its image in the West is predominantly one of a poor country with regular droughts, famines and starving millions. Today neither the picture of amazing riches nor of stark poverty is completely baseless. Quite characteristically, this land of extremes and contradictions remains a place where one finds appalling poverty and fabulous riches, starvation or near-starvation and a glut of gourmet food, co-existing. At the same time that the lives of a very large proportion of the population revolve around the search for livelihood and the urgency of putting two square meals before their families, there are others for whom there is a plethora of choices and an almost unsurpassed range of Indian food and international cuisine. These choices have multiplied for certain classes of Indians today through books, travel, careers that involve moving to new places, inter-marriages between people of diverse regional and cultural groups, and the growing availability of a large variety of foods. Through all the consequent interest in new foods and writing about it flows the undercurrent of class. India being a land of contradictions is not just a cliché — while the 30% of the population that live below the poverty line survive on less than the minimum dietary requirements of 2100 calories per day, the affluent classes provide a market gourmet foods and for cookery books, popular columns on food in newspapers and magazines, and TV programmes on cooking that probably rank next only to the most popular category — programmes based on Hindi films and saas/bahu (mother-in-law/daughter-in-law) soap operas. In the context of a very large number of Indians not having the buying capacity, leisure, luxury, or exposure to need or appreciate writing on food, the genre is based on the implicit assumption of a certain class of readership and the associated exclusion of other classes. In the case of writing in English, the language itself serves to set apart certain classes in terms of access. Recipe books and food writing in English newspapers and popular magazines cater to an elite section’s appetite for gourmet food and international cuisines. The representation of contemporary Indian society in this writing, however, does not acknowledge that representation as partial and specific.
In glossing over the disparities of class, this writing reveals the disjunction between the affluent, Westward-looking upper classes and the poor. Its partial picture of Indian society effectively hides the other face of India and troubling facts such as, malnutrition being more common in India than in Sub-Saharan Africa, and half of India’s children not meeting their basic needs for optimal nutrition (IFPRI report). Mari Marcel Thekaekara describes in Info Change how poverty equates to hunger:

In India, of our famous one billion people, 350–400 million are below the poverty line…. In India, poverty is hunger. Real hunger. Never having even three basic meals a day. Poverty is hearing your children cry themselves to sleep because there is no rice and dal or a few chappatis to give them. (online)

Nor does this situation become drastically different on crossing the magical line: people may be obtaining the basic minimum requirement but only just managing it and living with the hanging sword of uncertainty — the fear that with the smallest change in circumstances, often beyond their control, that situation may change. In a country where there is hardly any concept of social security as enjoyed by developed countries, hunger is — for a very large number of people — a very real fear. Yet, writing on food hardly ever addresses its assumption of class: a class set apart firstly by being above such fears, and then by distinctions based on buying capacity, leisure, luxury, exposure, and education.

In this context such writing takes on immense significance in terms of the implied audience — seeming to be addressed at a generalised and homogenised notion of Indians even though it is clearly beyond the classes who don’t frequent the exclusive places the author mentions or who are unfamiliar with the foods described. As for most things in the Indian context, what is true for one section or class may not apply at all to another. Writing on food however, while representing only a very small segment of Indian society, does not directly acknowledge the limitedness of its representation. Additionally, the implicit class basis of this writing makes it a tool for creating new social mores around food by making the capacity to read and appreciate it, as well as to afford and appreciate fine food itself, markers of a privileged social class.

This exposition is supported by the writing of Vir Sanghvi, an eminent food writer for over three decades whose collection of food columns from *The Hindustan Times* has been published (in 2004) under the title *Rude Food* by Penguin. Sanghvi writes in a signature style on what may loosely be termed ‘food criticism’ for a class of readers who are literate, read English newspapers, aspire to social mobility and to a better quality of life. Reviewers are profuse in their praise for this collection, but perhaps because the writer is so highly regarded, remark on the elitist bias and the implicit snobbery is only occasional and mild. Dileep Padgaonkar in a *Hindustan Times* review says that ‘greater heed to our own culinary traditions would enable Vir to deflect the criticism that much of his writing can appeal to the upper crust alone and that the praises he occasionally
sings for desi khana [local food] is a telling example of inverted snobbery’ (online). However, he quickly abandons this pertinent note of critique — what he himself calls ‘quibbling’ — and commends Sanghvi for ‘reveal[ing] an India that is rapidly coming of age in the gastronomic area as well’ (online). In a similar vein, Sujit Chaudhari notes that the section dealing with ‘delicacies like caviar, oysters, truffles, swiss chocolates, foie gras, smoked salmon etc.’ concerns ‘high society’ and ‘seem[s] far away from the plates of the hoi polloi’ but is quick to sugar-coat the criticism with praise for being ‘full of witticism and information’ (online). Critics would appear then to be complicit in this classist bias and hardly quibble over it or object to the unqualified generalisations that may be found in his food columns, as for example his comment that, ‘the idea [was] to demystify food, to make all the wonderful new dishes that were now available at our restaurants accessible to everybody’ (xxiv). There is no qualification about the general ‘availability’ for ‘everybody’ or of the problematic ‘accessibility’ that is simply assumed to be a matter of information.

Bhaichand Patel, an ex-diplomat, reviewing Sanghvi’s collection in *Outlook* calls him the best food writer in India: ‘No one in India writes on food as well as Vir does. No one else comes even close second’ (np). As one of the best-known and respected writers in the genre, Sanghvi’s writing is typical of the genre’s myopic representation of Indian society. The obvious basis of class underlying such writing and the sweeping generalisations that give a picture that is true only for a specific section of Indian elite classes as a general one, reveal the attitudinal chasm that exists between the classes in India today. Such writing implicitly excludes certain classes not only through its assumption of economic status, but also through its choice of the English language. Even the class that reads writing on food is neither unified nor uniform; there are many sub-classes within the broad class of those that have the means to be interested in food as a source of pleasure rather than as a means of survival. One obvious class distinction is that of readers who are literate and who have the means and leisure to read English newspapers. Further, one might distinguish between those who can afford food for pleasure and adventure and those who can identify with the author by recognising the places (in India and abroad) that he mentions, and can afford to eat at the fancy restaurants he recommends. Another set of readers may be those who read to broaden their minds as armchair gourmets or as aspirants to the good life. Some of these classes overlap and intersect but they are collectively apart from a large section of the Indian population for which this kind of writing would not only be inaccessible but also utterly meaningless. Yet, there is hardly any acknowledgement of the existence of these classes amongst the Indian population that is treated as if it is largely homogeneous — an assumption very hard to sustain with even the briefest acquaintance with India.

Despite sporadically adopting a chatty style peppered with ‘you and I’ statements, Sanghvi largely deals with people, places and foods that would be far
from most Indian readers’ experience. His easy and familiar manner of writing about these subjects establishes his own superior and elite place in the social hierarchy. The majority of readers of *The Hindustan Times* would not be part of the elite class that regularly eats at fancy places, travels abroad, and is familiar with fine dining and gourmet foods. When Sanghvi writes of foods that even most educated Indians would not know how to pronounce, recognise or where to buy, is Sanghvi offering a glimpse of the life of the elite class and the lifestyle of the rich and famous, less for the benefit of those who actually belong to that class than as a window into a possible realm and class that those with ambition can aspire to? By fuelling a desire for new and ‘foreign’ foods, such writing may be seen to serve as a tool for shaping social aspirations through the ‘snob quotient’ of certain foods and locales that makes claims on the cultivation of ‘good taste’, ‘style’ and discernment. Recipe books and columns on food in popular newspapers and magazines create and fan the desires of the middle classes who, having reached various levels of affluence, might be seen to look to this writing to ‘fancy-up’ their experience of food through education, travel and wider exposure. Even though none are jet-setters or globe-trotters and few among them stay at five-star hotels or even dine in one, they are as much the readers of such writing as of articles on foreign travel that often include critiques of the food. Even though its tone and content are clearly removed from the experience of its readers, its circulation in the mass print media serves to familiarise and eventually popularise gourmet food to the section of readers who could potentially be its consumers. As one analyst puts it,

one of the core strengths of the Indian middle class is that it has a great aspirational buoyancy. It is a class incorrigibly seeking to get on the fast track to upward mobility … [for] the middle class … the waterline of hope somehow always remains a few notches above that of despair. A person who owns a cycle is dreaming about a scooter. Somebody with a fan wants a cooler. Somebody with a small car wants a bigger car…. As people clamour on the lowest rung of the middle class, the possibility of becoming rich overtakes the fear of being inevitably poor. (Varma np)

Middle class readers may read such articles not because they would rush to buy those foods or visit those places, but as one of the ways of expanding their aspirational horizon. Food, for this class, takes the form of a status symbol and an affordable indulgence that speaks of having made it to a certain level of affluence. This fuels both the growth of the food industry and writing concerned with food. In the times of booming consumerism affecting Indian middle classes, food becomes one more arena for exhibitionism fuelled by the desire to match or exceed the next person’s acquisitions. Here, rather than quantity, ‘stylisation’ and exclusivity function as markers of status. Reading about top-rung eating places, new fads in food and the food preferences of celebrities becomes an easy way to pick up information that helps in ‘fitting in’ with the status that one aspires
to or has newly acquired. The newspaper format is especially appropriate for such readers and that may explain the genre’s success. While newspapers provide access to such information incidentally, and in passing, the reader/buyer of a book on the subject would need to be driven by more than a passing curiosity. In fact, Sanghvi, in his introduction to the volume, admits his apprehensions about a collection of articles of this sort: ‘People may be willing to read a food column in a newspaper or a magazine. But would they actually pay good money to buy a book of columns?’ (xxx). There is thus, a further division in the reader-base of the two formats. There are other distinctions at work too. The author seems to be aware that his readers will not include even some of those who do frequent five-star restaurants and host large hotel parties when he mentions that many among them ‘can’t tell the difference between good and mediocre food’ (151). When he writes disparagingly of the moneyed class with no taste, he is clearly not visualising this class as the readers despite their ability to afford the best food at the most exclusive places. In a piece on rude waiters, he writes that waiters are increasingly less likely to be rude to guests because ‘five-star hotels make their money from black marketeers and corrupt politicians’ and because ‘yokels’ who chew with their mouths open and ‘bumpkins’ who belch in contentment, spend more money than anyone else (189). While at one point he refers to celebrities knowing nothing about food (194), at another he bemoans that ‘luxury is a concept that fewer and fewer Indians seem to have time for — though people are much richer today than they used to be’ (130). There is a distinction between ‘classy’ and ‘moneyed’ and it seems that although the possession of money is presupposed in the intended reader, so is sophistication, etiquette and style. While sarcastic distinctions among the moneyed class are made in this vein, the teeming India outside of the posh areas and five-star hotels/resorts hardly registers on the radar of this writing.

Even on the rare occasions when this writing makes a reference to social classes, it is in very broad terms: as between ‘serious foodies and gourmets’ who can afford to spend upwards of £70 a kilo on smoked salmon and ‘the rest of us’ who can only buy from the Oberoi (a chain of five-star hotels) (72). Similarly, when Sanghvi advises readers to steer clear of ‘outrageously priced crap’ (65), he makes a passing reference to economic class in terms of the subtle differences in chocolates and wines being ‘of little use to us (and of less use to our wallets)” (65). The problem again is that there is no clarity about which class of readers Sanghvi affiliates himself with. Readers would probably remember that in his other pieces he writes of places, people, and things quite out of their reach, so the unqualified ‘us’ is as problematic as the condescension that he more characteristically practices. Even when Sanghvi seems to be self-deprecating, his snobbery is apparent: hardly any of his readers would be able to recognise the names or relate to the experience of the author and his ‘gastronomically illiterate peers at Oxford’ who ‘when the young Raymond Blanc opened Les Quatre Saisons in Summertown … went there
and pronounced the food “not in the same league as Elizabeth, just fancified Frog rubbish” (140).

The rare occasions when the writer mentions prices and availability or affordability seem to be a conscious effort to deflect the charge of elitism. However, even these references are only in relative terms. In one of the few instances where he actually mentions prices, he writes of the buffet lunch at the Taj (a super-luxury hotel in Bombay) as costing around Rs.12 per head but then he is quick to place this in perspective with prices of his childhood days when ‘rooms cost Rs.100 to 150’. His class bearings become quite clear when he mentions that ‘even kids given pocket money for a special treat could afford it’ (159). The only set of readers who could possibly identify with this would be those whose children receive 1/5th the cost of a room at a five-star hotel as pocket money. In a piece on the risotto Sanghvi provides a recipe where he seems to recollect that there are some distinctions in Indian society and mentions that the Italian rice brands and vegetable stock cubes he recommends are available only in ‘fancy markets’ (251). In the same piece he actually hesitates to recommend truffle oil because it is ‘hardly a staple at most markets’ (252). However, this is only in terms of availability and not affordability; hence the advice: ‘but if you can get it — go for it!’ (252). At certain times the intended reader is a little easier to visualise: as in the piece on truffles, the advice is for the ‘loads of Indians who go to London and bring back £25-bottles of malt whisky’ (61). That money to travel abroad and splurge on expensive items is not enough for the writer is evident in the edifying tone of the advice for such people: ‘Any fool can drink whisky anywhere. Why not try and broaden your horizons with something more adventurous, the next time you travel’ (61). When for this class of Indians, the writer suggests the ‘cheaper’ alternative of buying fresh truffle and shaving it over various foods, or of going to ‘Perigord or Alba, if not … [to] Paris’ (60), one realises that it can only be a relative cheapness. The writing seems to hang in some sort of vacuum untouched by social and economic realities.

The genre, while glossing its obvious basis in class, provides a clear commentary on class difference, and functions as a shaping force for class distinction. Such writing brings out very clearly the attitudinal distance between the classes within Indian society; the very absence of any class awareness here being a marker of this disjunction. This is not to say that writers such as Sanghvi are writing of something that does not exist. There is definitely a boom in prosperity for certain classes of Indian society as evidenced by the shining new shopping malls and multiplexes, clothing and jewellery stores with designer labels, foreign cars, impressive houses. In an article in Outlook it is claimed that ‘eating out is urban India’s most overpowering collective passion. There are more than 22,000 registered restaurants in India today; and the food service sector in the country is worth a whopping Rs 30,000 crores [nearly £8 billion]’ (‘Bharat’ 48). Yet a sampling of the genre in which writers such as Sanghvi have made
formidable reputations, not only does one find no acknowledgement of how small this segment of Indian life and population is, there is no qualification of the general term ‘Indians’ in terms of class.

In his essay on the ‘beautiful future’ of poverty Ashis Nandy offers some psychological insight into such relegation of poverty to a passé issue:

Everyone knows what the problem is, and determined scrutiny only embarrasses one and disturbs normal life. The three richest persons in the world have wealth, the UN Human Development Report of 1998 tells us, that exceeds the combined gross domestic product of the 48 least developed countries. One of them is Indian and instead of grimly talking of poverty all the while, many Indians have diffidently begun to celebrate such national achievements [and to] … spend enormous psychological resources [to ensure that the disturbing facts] do not interfere with our ‘normal’ life by burdening us with a crippling sense of guilt. (95)

It is such a disjunction that allows Sanghvi to write about dal and rice as ‘therapy’ — which he illustrates by narrating how he once ordered this ‘simple food’ as the Michelin-starred staff at Tamarind watched incredulously (116). It should be kept in mind here that this is staple food for millions of Indians and would be manna from heaven for the many other millions of poor and struggling lower-income and below-the-poverty-line-Indians — but then one would hardly suspect the existence of these other classes of Indians through reading Indian food writing. Perhaps the genre presupposes the exclusion so well that there are no qualms about proceeding with blindness to the existence of this other face of India and Indians. It is not even considered necessary to qualify sweeping remarks about ‘we Indians,’ ‘most Indians,’ ‘most of us’. Even in a place where the writer is apparently trying to place himself at the level of the readers the disjunction is quite clear: he answers the question whether you should make a Caesar Salad ‘the way that Cardini used to’ with his opinion that while restaurants must do so, ‘for the rest of us’ it doesn’t matter because if you want to mix leftover boiled potatoes and other ingredients ‘it is entirely your own business, not Jacques Medecin’s’ (281). The pertinent question that the author sweeps aside is whether ‘the rest of us’ would recognise these names he assumes are known to all his readers.

In a piece titled, ‘Seeing Through bottled Water’, Sanghvi writes: ‘We Indians … treat anything that comes out of a tap with suspicion’ and further in the context of expensive bottled water he poses the question ‘why does water have to be so expensive?’ answering it with the superbly sweeping reply: ‘It doesn’t. We are just willing to pay those prices’ (208). Again, one wonders who this ‘we’ is. A cursory glance at Indian data on availability of water to Indians brings up such statistics of inequities:

13% of Delhi’s citizens do not get water supply every day; 40% of households in Madhya Pradesh are not supplied even 40 litres per person per day … by 2015, 244 million people in rural India and 90 million in urban India will still not have access to safe, sustainable water supply … an average room in a five-star hotel in Delhi consumes 1,600 litres of water every day. VIP residences consume over 30,000 litres
per day. But 78% of Delhi’s citizens, who live in sub-standard settlements, struggle to collect or buy 30-90 litres per capita per day ... daily wage-earners pay up to 20% of their wages on water; slum-dwellers pay Rs 5 per can of water; others tap into water lines illegally, or pay the local mafia for the supply. (D’Monte online)

Rather than being suspicious of what comes out of a tap, most Indians — both rural and urban — would love to have running water available through a tap, and ‘most Indians’ are not able to afford bottled water on a regular basis. According to Central Public Health Engineering Organisation (CPHEEO) estimates, as on 31st March 2000, 88% of the urban population had access to a potable water supply; but this by no means implies that people actually get the water, because the supply is highly erratic and unreliable. Water is typically only available for between two and eight hours each day in most Indian cities. The situation is even worse in summer when water may be available only for a few minutes, sometimes not at all. A news report of 7th March, 2006 in The Hindustan Times is headed ‘Taps Still Dry in South Delhi’. According to another source approximately 13% of Delhi households do not receive water every day and in places in Gujarat water availability goes down to thirty minutes every alternate day (‘Politics’ online). A World Bank study of 2001 of 27 Asian cities puts Delhi and Chennai as the worst in terms of hours of water availability, with Mumbai and Calcutta at second and fourth position respectively. So much for the so-called Indian ‘fondness’ for bottled water. In similar vein, in another essay Sanghvi bemoans the lack of any diet with an Indian name. He goes on to make a gross generalisation that ‘most Indian women seem to be on diets of some description’ (213). The statement has no qualification in terms of class or status and completely ignores the fact that ‘most Indian women’ are poor and malnourished and have no concept of dieting.

It is not that poverty is only a rural phenomenon. The Urban Development Minister is quoted on a Government of India website as saying in a speech on 19th January, 2006 that sixty-seven million urban people live below the poverty line. This large population does not live in some sort of self-contained, insulated world apart from the more affluent classes of the urban populace. It is these people who work in homes as servants, who hawk vegetables, who segregate garbage, who live and die on the city streets. Yet from the kind of writing in which Sanghvi engages, no sense of this other life of India and Indians can be obtained. In some wilful insulation from the world all around him, Sanghvi’s view of Indian society is limited to the world he lives in. In his upper class residential area of Delhi, his sabziwallah (greengrocer) ‘has all kinds of fresh vegetables flown in from Thailand’ which logically leads him to the unqualified statement about ‘Indian sabziwallahs who fly in asparagus from Holland and fresh fruit from Bangkok’ but stubbornly refuse to order fresh mushrooms from the East or the West (250).

What is the value of this pose that ‘forgets’ how a very large number of Indians live? Is it mere snobbery that the potatoes in the markets are described as ‘useless’ and if one cannot follow his example and buy ones’s potatoes on ones’s
overseas trips then the only way to make them ‘edible’ is to follow his rich recipe for mashed potatoes (301)? How might this wilful ignorance of the existence of classes of Indians other than those who can identify with, or at the least be impressed by, someone who can write in a land where many would die without access to food of any kind, be understood? In a moment of candour and brief self-analysis, Sanghvi comments in his introduction on the early pieces of his writing that reflected the missionary zeal of ‘demystifying the whole business of fancy food and fine wine’ but that he came to realize that

the column had moved away from its original intent. I hoped that the pieces would deal with foie gras, caviar and truffles without seeming pretentious, but it was clear that I had wandered far from my original brief: how many of my readers actually shaved truffles over their pasta and how many needed to know the difference between beluga and servuga? (xxviii)

The possible explanation of why, despite this admission, he shows scant concern for whether the writing appears pretentious is that the columns were often written without much time or research and ‘almost all of them came off the top of [his] head’ (xxix). But this take-it-or-leave-it attitude reveals another disjunction between the writer who questions how many of his readers will be able to relate to the foods he writes about, and the writer who does not care to modify his subjects or style. A justification for the matter and tone of such writing seems to be its role as an educator about high-end elite food products for those who are interested in such things, whether they can actually afford them or only aspire to them. Despite hardly ever acknowledging its basis in class, it reinforces the idea of the eating experience as a marker of affluence and privilege and as an elite affair that those not in the circle can still find fascinating.

As this critique of a particular volume of contemporary Indian food writing indicates, the genre ignores the heterogeneity of Indian society as well as its own exclusivity and addresses itself to an unexamined, unqualified notion of Indianness. Since this is an influential food writer and a trend-setter of reputation and influence, the volume is exemplary of this kind of writing and speaks of a cultural divide between the moneyed, privileged classes in contemporary Indian society, the middle classes who enjoy varying degrees of affluence and comfort, and those millions who struggle for the basic requirements for life. In his column in *The Hindu* Shashi Tharoor refers to the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) surveys of 1986 and 1994 that found that

India’s consumers could be divided into five classes, not three: the very rich, of six million people (or one million households), the ‘consuming class’ of some 150 million (half the conventional estimate), the ‘climbers’ (a lower middle class of 275 million), the ‘aspirants’ (another 275 million who in America or Europe would be classified as ‘poor’), and finally the destitute (210 million). Of course the numbers have gone up by another 100 million or so in the decade since the survey was conducted, but the relative balance amongst these five classes, despite some progress in all of them, is unlikely to have changed dramatically. Cumulatively, the NCAER survey concluded, India has a
‘consuming population’ of 168 million to 504 million people. But what they consume, and how much they can afford to pay for it, is another matter altogether. (Tharoor np)

These distinctions seem to be simply wished away and left out of the definition of ‘all of us’ and ‘most of us.’ It is not seen as necessary to qualify sweeping statements on Indian cultural life, and the consequent treatment of a highly heterogeneous society in a simple and generalised manner shows a troubling disjunction between the small elite class and all the other classes. Rajesh Kochhar, writing in the respected *Economic and Political Weekly*, asserts that the Indian middle class has divested itself of any sense of noblesse oblige and, declaring autonomy, has adopted a lifestyle that mimics the one in economically advanced countries. The emergence of this denationalised middle class that sets its standards in the West is linked by Kochhar to ‘mandalisation’ (caste-based access to education and employment) and globalisation. He argues that the Indian middle class has decoupled from mainstream India. However, he treats the class as an upper-caste dominated one, neither distinguishing between the many levels that make up the middle class nor taking into account the change from caste-basis to that of money, power and influence. Although the aspirations of upward mobility mark the entire middle class, his remarks about seeking legitimacy as well as standards from the West, apply more precisely to what is a sub-class — the upper-middle class, constituted of the business and professional people who seek to model themselves on the Indian class above them, that is, the upper class comprising the very rich, the celebrities and the movers and shakers, and the Westernised lifestyle that this class seems to offer as the universal standard of the ‘good life’. Such modelling speaks for the commanding position of the new social mores and the social aspirations of a society in the middle of a new prosperity and a shaking up of traditional classes. The opening up of the Indian economy and the impact of Westernisation through globalisation of trade and commerce, as much as of culture, underlie the curious phenomenon that upper classes of India can feel more in common with a global culture of affluence, than with the millions of Indians not in the same class as them. It is not as if writing on food is the only place where this disjunction is apparent — a similar disjunction is obvious in writing on fashion, travel, and the ‘good’ life in general; but in food writing it becomes more apparent and more troubling because food, unlike the other obvious markers of status and class, is not primarily a luxury item but a necessity of life. It speaks to, and of, an upper class that lives in a self-contained and insulated world of money and privilege, and to other upwardly mobile classes that look up to it, all the while turning a blind eye to their fellow compatriots who do not conform to their standards.

**WORKS CITED**


Recipes for a Typical Single Course North-Indian Meal

This is the everyday food that ‘classy’ food writing does not deal with — the kind of ‘simple food’ Sanghvi mentions eating occasionally as ‘therapy’. Yet, it is the staple food of a large section of the population, and the dream food of those who live in the hope of getting any food at all, and for whom this would be a feast.

**Dal**

**Ingredients**
- ¾ cup red lentils or split peas
- ½ tsp turmeric powder
- salt to taste
- ½ tsp cumin seeds
- ½ tsp garam masala
- green coriander leaves

**Method**
1. Wash and soak lentils in 3 cups water.
2. Add salt and turmeric powder.
3. Bring to a boil and cook on slow heat for 20 mins, stirring occasionally.
4. Take off heat when lentils are done and the water has been reduced by about ½ cup.
5. Take butter or ghee (clarified butter) in a large ladle, heat on high, take off fire, add ½ tsp cumin seeds and ½ tsp garam masala, plunge this very hot ladle into the cooked lentils.

**Raita**

**Ingredients**
- 1 tub plain yoghurt
- 1 cucumber
- 1 small onion
- 2 tsp cumin seeds
- paprika powder
- salt to taste

**Method**
1. Grate or finely chop cucumber.
2. Finely chop onion.
3. Dry roast 2 tsp cumin seeds and grind coarsely.
4. Add all the above, salt and paprika to lightly whisked yoghurt.

Chill before serving.
Stuffed Eggplant

**Ingredients**
- 6 thin, long eggplants
- 2 onions
- 10 cloves garlic
- 2 inches ginger
- 3 tbsp fennel seeds
- 3 tbsp coriander seeds
- 1 tsp chilli powder
- 2 tbsp mango powder
- salt to taste
- vegetable oil (preferably mustard or sunflower oil)

**Method**
1. Finely chop onions.
2. Make paste of ginger and garlic.
3. Dry roast fennel and coriander seeds, grind coarsely.
4. Mix all the above along with the chilli powder, mango powder, salt and 2 tbsp oil.
5. Wash and cut off the heads of the eggplant. Slit open along the middle. Stuff the mixture into the slits.
6. Heat 3 tbsp oil in a shallow pan. Lay the stuffed eggplants in the hot oil. Cover and cook on a low flame for 5 mins.
7. Turn the eggplants around by fully lifting them and replacing them in different positions so they cooked on all sides, taking care the slit side does not face completely down to avoid spilling the stuffing.
8. Uncover after another 5 mins and cook on low flame till the skins become golden and translucent on all sides.
9. Arrange on a serving dish and sprinkle chopped coriander leaves.

Serve dalh, raita and eggplant together. Roast papads and pickles will go really well with this meal.
JANE DOWNING

A Cookbook for the Tropics

The *Kochbuch für die Tropen*, first published in Berlin in 1907, has on the titlepage the information that the book was compiled by Antonie Brandeis née Ruete and is based on her many years experience in the tropics and subtropics. The cookbook went to four editions, all in the original German. Whether, a century later, that success can be attributed to the quality of the more-than-three hundred pages of recipes or to the name of the author, is difficult to say. Antonie Brandeis clearly wanted her maiden name advertised. The German book-buying public, and more especially those interested in the colonies of the tropics and subtropics, would have recognised the name, ‘Ruete’, for Brandeis’ mother, Emily Ruete, was a Princess of Zanzibar and Oman, whose memoir, published at the end of the nineteenth century, had given the name a measure of notoriety.¹

Antonie Brandeis née Ruete was born in Hamburg in 1868, the daughter of Heinrich Ruete and Emily, formerly Sayyida Salmé of Zanzibar and Oman. She was their first daughter and their first surviving child. A son, born in Aden after the princess’s flight from Zanzibar, had died within weeks. A diplomatic furor abated when the couple withdrew to Germany, though the Sultan and subsequent Sultans, all of whom were Sayyida Salmé’s brothers, never forgave her affair with the German trader and more damningly, her conversion to Christianity. Antonie was presented with two siblings in quick succession, a brother in 1869 and a sister in 1870. When Heinrich was killed in a tram accident on the streets of Hamburg in August 1870 the former princess was left a widow with three children under the age of three.

The little family led a peripatetic life, chasing cheaper and cheaper living circumstances from Hamburg to Dresden, Rudolstadt, Berlin and Cologne. It was only at the age of nine that Antonie learned from a school friend of her brother that their mother was a princess. As her mother writes of their discovery, the children ‘behaved somewhat strange towards me’ but they soon adjusted and found something to be excited about. ‘Come, come! Mama is going to unlock the big cupboard and we can have a quick look at the Arab things’ (1993 490).² Emily Ruete did not want to give up on the ‘Arab things’ she had left behind, and in 1885 and again in 1888 she made aborted attempts to return to Zanzibar to claim her inheritance. In this she was a pawn to Bismarck’s wider political game based on Kaiser Wilhelm’s aspiration to establish colonies like the other European powers. East Africa was the prize, and Zanzibar was eventually traded off for the closer island of Heligoland: Emily Ruete and her German-born son, a potential puppet Sultan of Zanzibar, were no longer of use. Emily felt the family could no longer
live in Germany and, when Antonie was in her early twenties, she settled on the (then) Syrian coast, first at Jaffa and then Beirut. Antonie’s experience in the subtropics became the basis of her cookbook — early experience that would be extended by time spent, upon marriage to Eugen Brandeis, in the German colony of the Marshall Islands.

Antonie was thirty on marriage, Eugen fifty-two with a full life in the Pacific already behind him. Robert Louis Stevenson, more famous for Treasure Island and Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, had devoted an entire chapter to Brandeis in his book on the Samoan situation, A Footnote to History. Stevenson obviously admired Brandeis’s in his role as ‘Prime Minister’ to the Samoan chief Tamasese during the inter-colonial conflict over those islands. The Stevensons, husband and wife, later met up with Brandeis when cruising the Pacific on the Janet Nichol. On Jaluit, in the Marshall Islands, Fanny Stevenson was also much taken with the German Landeshauptmann or Commissioner, a man with ‘the most extraordinary eyes of glittering blackness.’ (150). But then he was also named in a briefing document for the 1919 Versailles Peace negotiations after World War I for his treatment of indigenous peoples under German colonial rule, having, it was reported ‘flogged with an excess of zeal’ while in the Marshalls (qtd in Hempenstall 94).

Antonie arrived on the island of Jabwor in the atoll of Jaluit in 1898, a new wife in a new and difficult situation. Jaluit, the centre of administration for the Marshalls, was about as isolated a situation as a colonial hausfrau could find herself. Just a few degrees above the equator, the islands were not only hot but humid, and prone to typhoons: one would demolish her home within months of her leaving it in 1905. Though it was the busiest port in Micronesia, with six or seven ships in anchor at any one time, Jaluit was isolated, being thirty-five days from Sydney, Australia, and three months between any question and its reply from her mother in Beirut. The colony was founded on the copra trade and when formerly annexed by Germany in 1885 the islands were at first administered by the trading firm the Jaluit Gesellschaft, a merger of Hermsheim & Co. and the Deutsche Handels- und Plantagen-Gesellschaft de Südsee Inseln zu Hamburg, or the DHPG (more colloquially known as ‘the long-handled firm’). By 1898 the European community on Jaluit numbered about forty people and by 1900 they could boast a two-storey hotel, the Germania Inn, said to be the most elegant structure in Micronesia, which included a tap room, billiards hall, restaurant and general store. The town also included administration buildings, a courthouse, a post office, a small hospital and the headquarters of the trading firms. The European residences were whitewashed and fenced like any German town, simply relocated across the world. Despite this European façade, it was not going to be easy keeping appetising food on the table in an ongoing battle with the heat and isolation. However, to put Brandeis’ worries on this score into context, alongside this European development, the local population had been diminished by about a third in the previous thirty years.
A nostalgic reminiscence of her time in Jaluit, ‘Südsee-Erinnerungen’, was published in the *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* (German Colonial Newspaper) in January 1908 over three instalments. Brandeis writes that she immediately fell in love with the inhabitants of her new home. She was to be there five years as ‘Mrs Commissar’ or ‘Woman belong Commissar’, and during that time gave birth to her two daughters. She also had time on Jaluit to sew the almost entire dowry of both girls (1906c 36). From these observations and the subsequent publication of her cookbook directly targeting young *hausfrau*, it would be easy to dismiss Antonie as the archetypal wife and mother, but this would be a misconception, for Antonie did much more than devote herself to domestic life. She took many photographs, developing the plates at night when the water was cooler (1908c 37), and she compiled a collection of material culture from the Marshall Islands and Nauru for the Freiburg Ethnographic Museum at the request of the director (1908a 6).

Antonie mostly traded with women — bartering cotton dresses for the desired items; but despite hobbies and ambitions, the household duties were not to be neglected, nor the standards diminished. Antonie herself appears in photographs of the time immaculately in white. The staunchness and cleanliness of the colonial household should never be threatened. As she writes in the introduction to her cookbook:

If she herself [the young *hausfrau*] has to put her hand to it [cooking], it can be done in the shortest possible time, and she should structure her time in such a way that she can wash herself and put on a clean dress before the dinner is served. (1907 4)

Antonie Brandeis introduces her *Kochbuch für die Tropen* by stating a number of aims: she wants it to be ‘useful’; she wants to ‘arm’ the young *hausfrau* against the ‘wearing-down climate’ and ‘daily nuisances’. Her advice is immensely practical and demonstrates her belief that where good nutrition is available less alcohol is consumed (excessive consumption of alcohol being identified as a lamentable problem in colonial life); while good cooking, she believed, also prevented all manner of health problems. But for Antonie, good cooking is not just a question of nutrition, but also one of adequate management – a question in the colonies directly related to the relationship established between the *hausfrau* and her staff: ‘young and inexperienced hausfrau’, she observes, ‘are faced with the difficult question on how to direct coloured staff’ (1).

This is a difficult question indeed. Even at the time this was a contentious issue, and one that makes for uncomfortable reading now. The adversarial tone, both in the words said and not said, speaks of her unquestioned idea of racial superiority. Although for Brandeis this superiority was not entirely confined along racial lines. In her world servants were a given: she had a wet nurse as an infant and even in the straightened circumstances of her mother’s widowhood in Germany there was always a maid to help look after the children and the household. However the racial element cannot be played down. Brandeis is adamant that,
Whether they are yellow, brown or black rulers of the cookhouse, they all have a considerable portion of stubbornness, and in many cases also some malice, therefore it is important to be always friendly but firm…. Don’t think this is easy. (5)

She warns the *hausfrau* to control herself at all times — to be punctual, to be prepared and never to give up, break down, or ‘surrender to the goodwill of the servants’ (6); and always taste before serving!

Antonie describes the less than perfect circumstances, as when there is only a kitchen boy to help, in which case essential chores must be taught (grinding coffee, plucking the chickens, breaking up the salt among them) and she notes that it is imperative he should always be kept busy or he’ll ‘go for a walk, meat will be grabbed by the cat and the casual thief will steal the bread from the cupboard’ (7). Later, in Brandeis’ advice on how to set up a kitchen, she interrupts her discussion with one more warning — expressed with a passion that denotes actual experience:

Do not tolerate that the people do any work in the kitchen with a naked upper body, otherwise they will sling the dishtowel over their sweaty shoulders and soon after use it on the glasses and plates. (13)

If this were not bad enough, in the worst case if the *hausfrau* is without the help of even the semi-naked factotum, the *hausfrau* is admonished to keep her composure. There are standards to be maintained and whether in the jungle or a colonial headquarters, these standards were not to be forgotten.

Antonie herself got around the ‘problem’ of hiring the ‘lazy’ and ‘unreliable’ locals who needed the greatest training by employing a Chinese cook and a Chinese houseboy direct from Hong Kong (1908a 7). She does not however mention this to the *hausfrau* audience. She also arrived on Jaluit with a personal maid, a Sudanese woman, who caused quite a stir amongst the Marshallese because of the colour of her skin. She was only the second black person to come there (the first being Tom Tilton, an African-American who owned a hotel and restaurant there in the 1870s [Hezel 1993]). (How a Sudanese woman had come so far from home is the province of speculation. It may be a coincidence that Brandeis’ grandfather Sayyid Sa’id bin Sultan, the longest reigning Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar (1804–1856), was one of the greatest slave traders in world history.) But after advice on nutrition and management of staff, there was one more stated aim to the *Kochbuch für die Tropen*: running the household according to Brandeis’ advice, with the natural result of ‘delight’ and ‘pride’ in well served dishes, would mitigate against the ‘boredom and apathy’ women tend to fall into in the tropics (3). Her optimism shines through all.

Yet the romance and poetry often evident in Brandeis’ reminiscences in the *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* are nowhere transferred into her cookbook. In her descriptions of the tiny atoll on which she lived for five years, she is entranced by beauty. The surface of the lagoon ‘reflects all colours in the daylight’; at sunset the colours are like an opal, with an ‘overpowering play of colours’; and at night
the lagoon has a ‘fairy tale’ appearance when the stars and moon are reflected on its surface. As for the fish in the lagoon, they are colours a northern European could not even dream about. The hausfrau’s dreams were, on the contrary, to be of stoves (petroleum or wood), of flymesh (not only against flies, but also cats and chickens) and of keeping the dishcloths clean. Order and cleanliness, order and control are priorities.

Before any recipes are presented, first the hausfrau and thus Brandeis in her directions, must work on the setting up of the kitchen (Kücheneinrichtung) and the arrangement of the larders (Einrichtung der Vorratsräume). The directions are definitive.

The kitchen must be downwind of the house so smells would not invade the residence, and separate so the house would not be burnt down in a cooking accident. Shade trees and large windows (well-netted with flymesh) were recommended, as was an interior coat of white — preferably oil — paint. There was, ideally, a scullery for the washing, and an anteroom for plucking poultry, cleaning fish and cutting up pigs. Other animals, dead or alive, it was preferable to keep out. Crevices and cracks should be covered against wasps and vermin, and all table legs should be placed in pots of petroleum to prevent ants climbing up (this advice extended to the legs of a baby’s cot, as she says in her newspaper article when discussing the birth of her daughters). The tables should be away from any wall for the same reason. A mat placed at the front door on which to clean feet before entering the house was just as essential.

Within the kitchen kingdom, the hausfrau was to stock items made of the best galvanised and enamelled materials lest they be lost to rust. Enamelled items were easier to clean, ‘where you don’t have to worry about clumsy staff’ (7). If you did have to worry, Löwenmarke (Lion Brand) grey enamel showed the chips less noticeably than brown or blue. Brandeis provides a complete list of necessary pots, pans, knives, sieves and cucumber slices.

The larder was even more a labour of love in her description. Once again the larder buildings were to be away from the house, if possible, but also away from the kitchen since the heat ‘gets through the wall and spoils everything’ (20). In the anteroom to this structure the hausfrau could store suitcases and all those things she had put in the attic in Germany. The storage of food was more problematic.

The larder needed to be meticulously ordered for it would only be filled at long, often irregular intervals. For Brandeis in the Marshall Islands, orders were filled from Hamburg, Berlin, Sydney and San Francisco (potato, onion, oranges, apples, other fresh fruit and vegetables and table wine from the latter two, all else from Germany). She kept a ledger with the date of the order and the approximate date of arrival. It was a constant juggle: calculating against all contingencies, all those unexpected events like the arrival of scientific expeditions, while not getting in too much that would decay in the hot and humid climate (1908c 36).
According to the instructions in the *Kochbuch für die Tropen*, there should be sheds for the wheat and maize (for the chickens) because of beetles contaminating the cereals, and this on the sunny side to protect the rest of the larder from the sun. Each building should be built off the ground, so potato, onion, yam, sweet potato, taro and so on could be stored underneath. The rest of the foodstuffs were to go on the shelves on all sides of the actual larder. Above the shelves a cardboard label, nailed on, helped with the ordering, though a colour code system was recommended for the servants (one could ask a servant to ‘bring the blue/red/yellow’). The zigzag fringes on the shelf edges would not have raised eyebrows when recommended to the German colonial housewife, though they could well do today. Behind the decorative fringes, tins were to be lined, six tins deep, always with the forward side of the label showing. This pattern also helped the woman of the house to instantly recognise if anything had been stolen. Tins should be ordered and separated (meat, vegetables, fruit). Sugar, sultanas and anything else of ‘interest to ants’ (21), plus tea, coffee, spices, should all be stored in sterilising jars against the humidity. Hams, sausages, tongues, should be hung from nails along a length of dowel from the ceiling, while all meat being marinated in vinegar or milk, or sausages in the midst of being made, should be kept under a fly cage made of brass flymesh.

There were no butchers, bakers or candlestick makers in these circumstances. Brandeis passed her wisdom on. The colonial hausfrau must do it for herself, and she must supervise her staff. She must clean and clean again. ‘Dust shelves weekly’. Mop and sweep. ‘Sweep ceilings too for spider webs’. Even if the larder was one small room, or just a fly proof cupboard, the basic advice was sound. Brandeis advises the *hausfrau* to be sure it can be locked, that it is not exposed to the heat of the kitchen, and to educate the servants ‘so there is always order and cleanliness’ (22).

It is of course easy to take a mocking tone from a hundred years in the future with the knowledge that there are now refrigerators and weekly airflights, but Brandeis’ impulse is universal across time: order is something to cling to when faced with the unknown. When in a strange place, control of the food on the table might be the only control a *hausfrau* could realistically aspire to. New stores to fill the prettily decorated larder shelves may not arrive for months, sickness might strike, or cats through the flymesh, or silverfish in the flour. Yet still the *hausfrau* is responsible for presenting a menu day-in-day-out, and that responsibility is deemed to be a personal one, even if she has the luxury of a cook and a kitchen boy and a personal maid. This cookbook is no frivolous exercise for Brandeis. It is the work of a pedant, but one whom circumstances had perhaps made that way as she followed her princess mother around Germany and then the world; adjusting to life in Beirut; then to a husband with ‘glittering eyes’ and a zealous flogging arm; giving birth in a tiny isolated Pacific island.
Kochbuch für die Tropen consists of more than three hundred pages of recipes: soups and meat, poultry, fish, vegetables, legumes and cereals, tubers and potatoes, hors d’oeuvres, salads, sauces, egg dishes, dumplings, puddings, breads and pastries, beverages, pickles, conserves; meals for those who are ill (krankenkost) and for picnics (picknicks), for the family, the bachelor, for unexpected guests, and for large scale entertaining. It includes food to remind of home (the breads, the dumplings, roasted quail and schweinefleisch), and meals that acknowledged the situation of the cookhouse (roast breadfruit, mashed breadfruit, Samoan breadfruit dumplings). Brandeis acknowledges that for any new circumstance:

…in foreign countries the conditions are so different, the preservation of the food, the preparation of the meat, and the utilisation of food stores and supplies is so different compared to home. (1)

The heat is unbearable, and lingers in the evenings long after the sun lifts from the tin-roofed house, but routine has to go on. Kitchen and staff must be administered efficiently, the larder must be full and food must be put on the table at the appropriate time and in the appropriate manner. Set up first, ‘so you don’t need to despair’ (10) she optimistically recommends.

NOTES
1 Emily Ruete born Sayyida Princess of Zanzibar and Oman, Memoirs of an Arabian Princess from Zanzibar. A number of English translations exist.
2 From a collection of unpublished Letters Home and Sequels to the Memoirs that have been translated and published more recently, An Arabian Princess Between Two Worlds.
3 Robert Louis Stevenson, A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa.
5 For a good understanding of the colony during the time Antonie Brandeis would have been there, see Francis X Hezel, Strangers in Their Own Land, pp. 48 ff.
6 A commemoration of 100 years of the museum was published in 1995, acknowledging Antonie Brandeis’ contribution and particularly the ethnographic commentary she put to the items. See E. Gerhards, Als Freiburg Die Welt Entdeckte, pp. 109–45.
7 Gratitude to Dr Spennemann for the English translations made orally which have been used here.
8 All descriptions from the first instalment of her ‘Südsee-Erinnerungen’, p. 6.

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Creme à la Sultan

Add 90g of sugar to ½ glass of fresh water in a stew pan and heat until brown, then add 1 L of cooked milk and a little cinnamon leaving it to boil, pour the milk through a sieve and let it cool. Then take a little sugar, 6 egg yolks, the peel of a lemon and the chilled milk, mix them in a porcelain bowl, place the bowl in boiling water until the creme solidifies then let it cool down. Beat the whites of the eggs with 2 spoons of sugar and some lemon peel, place the solidified creme into the centre of a serving bowl and take the beaten whites and place this around the creme. Finally sprinkle the creme again with sugar. (From Antonie Brandeis Cookbook for the Tropics, p. 277.)

Note
This is a popular recipe; there is no indication in the text that Antonie Brandeis’ grandfather was a Sultan.
Lady Nugent’s Second Breakfast

Of the few personal journals that record details of West Indian everyday life during the period of slavery one of the best known is Lady Nugent’s Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805.1 The journal’s author, Maria Nugent (1770–1834), journeyed to the island with her husband George, on his way to take up appointment as Governor of Jamaica, then one of the most important colonies of the British Empire and at the peak of its powers as a sugar producer. When the Nugents reached Jamaica in July 1801, Maria was just 30 years old and George, who had served in the British army’s colonial wars, was aged 44. They were unusual as a couple; few of the earlier governors of Jamaica arrived with wives, and while in the island Maria gave birth to two children, one in October 1802 and the other in September 1803. Although Maria became a ‘Lady’ only in 1811, six years after she left Jamaica, she has regularly been given the title for her time in the island. Certainly her four years in Jamaica centred around the imperial role of her husband and the growth and development of her children but Maria often found space in her journal — first published in 1839 — to describe and reflect on varied aspects of the larger society in which she found herself. It is the richness of her descriptions and the trenchancy of her opinions, as well as the general rarity of published journals, that have contributed most powerfully to her longevity as a valued historical source.

Some of the most commonly cited passages of Nugent’s Journal are those that describe what she regarded as the appalling behaviour of the island’s whites, particularly their love for food. Nugent traces aspects of this bad behaviour to the insidious influence of slave society but was broadly critical of colonial culture, and disparaged creole speech and sexual mores. The food of the island, from kitchen to table, preparation to consumption, frequently turned her stomach. Even the timing and terminology of creole meals worried Nugent, above all the remarkable ‘second breakfast’ that the people so loved. The slave-owning creoles used these rituals to mark their status and distinguish themselves from their colonial rulers and British tradition. Locally, eating to excess and eating rare and costly foods were prime markers of conspicuous consumption for whites in Jamaica’s slave society. They set themselves apart from the enslaved most publicly and regularly by gorging themselves in the late morning or middle of the day, while plantation workers toiled in the fields or subsisted on coarse foods. Nugent experienced this practice on a grand scale. She distanced herself from such unbecoming behaviour, to uphold her status and class, and to prove her own refinement by her speech,
dress and manners. As Kamau Brathwaite notes, Nugent could be ‘quite prissy’ (110). The table provided an ideal site to display her superiority.

The Governor’s official residence was King’s House in Spanish Town, the colony’s capital, but he and his family frequently travelled out into the countryside and had regular access to planter society. It was during her tours of Jamaica that Nugent made her most trenchant remarks on the gluttony of her hosts. The planters wished to demonstrate their hospitality in the way they knew best but it was too much for Nugent and the excess and the strangeness of creole culinary culture was seen nowhere more starkly than in the odd custom of ‘second breakfast’. She mentioned the institution first after she had been in Jamaica for six months, in her entry for Friday 15 January 1802, but on that occasion she did so without remark and the second breakfast was served at King’s House. The Governor had gone off early, at 4.00 a.m., to review the militia in Kingston. Nugent spent some time writing, then, she did not note the hour, had breakfast. After that,

Major and Mrs. Cookson, their two daughters and a little boy, a black maid, and two men, came on a West India visit, to spend the day. Mrs. C. is a perfect Creole, says little, and draws out that little, and has not an idea beyond her own Penn. Had fruit for the children at 10; then second breakfast a little after 11. — Dined at 3, and the hopeful family took their leave at 6. (52)

How this second breakfast became part of the habits of King’s House is not clear but most probably it was an institution before Nugent’s time and a normal expectation. Nugent offered no clues to what was served.

Nugent’s second mention of second breakfast came a couple of weeks later, on 4 February, and this time she provided details. First she had to tell of a substantial creole breakfast, eaten before the second breakfast. She had set out early with her husband and some others for Bushy Park, the sugar estate of William ‘King’ Mitchell, located in St. Dorothy parish. In the plantation’s ‘truly Creole’ house, with its ‘galleries, piazzas, porticoes, &c.’, they

breakfasted in the Creole style. — Cassada cakes, chocolate, coffee, tea, fruits of all sorts, pigeon pies, hams, tongues, rounds of beef, &c. I only wonder there was no turtle. Mr. M.’s delight is to stuff his guests, and I should think it would be quite a triumph to him, to hear of a fever or apoplexy, in consequence of his good cheer. (55–56)

From Bushy Park they went on to Spring Gardens, the estate of an absentee planter, to review the militia. The ragged performance of this ‘motley crew’ was followed by ‘a magnificent second breakfast, which … proved that, at Spring Gardens, the business of ménage, or eating and drinking, was better understood than military tactics’ (56). No wonder fevers were common, she thought, reflecting on the second breakfast:

Such loads of all sorts of high, rich, and seasoned things, and really gallons of wine and mixed liquors as they drink! I observed some of the party, to-day, eat of late breakfasts, as if they had never eaten before — a dish of tea, another of coffee, a bumper of claret, another large one of hock-negus; then Madeira, sangaree, hot and cold meat, stews and
fries, hot and cold fish pickled and plain, peppers, ginger sweetmeats, acid fruit, sweet jellies — in short, it was all as astonishing as it was disgusting. (57)

A week later, Nugent mentioned another second breakfast, this time eaten at 11.00 a.m. at the Old Harbour Inn, when returning from Vere, and on a top of ‘a fine breakfast’ eaten at their host’s place at sunrise (59).

The pace picked up when, in the early stages of her first pregnancy, Nugent set out on a grand tour of the island, with husband and entourage, in March and April 1802. On 11th March she had ‘a profuse second breakfast’ at Holland Estate, in St. Thomas-in-the-East (69), followed two days later by ‘a sumptuous second breakfast’ at Castle Comfort, in Portland (71). At Bog Estate, near Port Antonio, on 15th March, Nugent sat down to ‘a second breakfast at two o’clock’, without protesting its timing (73). A ‘profuse second breakfast’ taken at Agualta Vale on 21st March was even later in the day, probably, and Nugent remarked that this was ‘in every respect an immense dinner, though otherwise denominated’ (77). On 24th March, in the middle of the morning, following another review of militia, this time that of the parish of St. Mary, there was ‘a sumptuous second breakfast, consisting of hot fish, all sorts of cold meats, pies, &c. abundance of cakes, confectionary, fruit, &c. and the greatest variety of wines’ (79).

The next day, 25th March 1802, at Ramble near Port Maria, the Nugents had ‘second breakfast’ at about 2.00 p.m., following breakfast at 8.00 a.m. (79). It was a revealing meal for Nugent:

I now found the reason that the ladies here eat so little dinner. I could not help remarking Mrs. Cox, who sat next to me at the second breakfast. She began with fish, of which she ate plentifully, all swimming in oil. The cold veal, with the same sauce!! Then tarts, cakes, and fruit. All the other ladies did the same, changing their plates, drinking wine, &c. as if it were dinner. (79)

Nugent escaped to her room as quickly as she could and slept, but returned to dinner at 7.00 p.m. and dancing at 10.00 p.m. The following day, 26th March, the same thing happened, with an ‘immense second breakfast’ served at 2.00 p.m. at Shaw Park Estate, St. Ann, the time determined by the party’s slow travelling (79). From Shaw Park they proceeded to St. Ann’s Bay and Seville, where the Governor was summoned urgently to Spanish Town to deal with matters of state. Nugent spent most of the day, 28th March 1802, in her room ‘crying and reading’, feeling unwell. She ‘joined a large party at dinner’ but it was this meal that evoked her best known broadside, saying it was hardly a surprise the white men were so unhealthy, ‘for they really eat like cormorants and drink like porpoises’ (80–81; qtd James 127; Brereton 243.)

From Seville, where the Nugents had breakfast at 8.00 a.m. on 31st March, they went on to Rio Bueno and found there ‘a profuse second breakfast prepared for us, at the inn’ (82). Continuing westward along the north coast of the island, Nugent remained unwell and had to rest regularly. While in Falmouth, she noted on 7th April that ‘At 2 the white housekeeper came and said, “Ma’am, shall I
have the honour to offer you your breakfast”, luncheon being always called so. — Mine consisted of chicken soup, ham, oysters swimming in oil, &c.’ (86). Two days later, at Ironshore Estate, there was ‘a great second breakfast’ some time after midday (87), and the following day at Montego Bay ‘an immense dinner party, as well as breakfast and second breakfast, and crowds of visitors all day’ (88). On 11th April, a Sunday, Nugent was given a ‘splendid second breakfast’ after church, and on the Monday a ‘more than usually large second breakfast’ on account of the review of the militia (89). The party then travelled overland from Montego Bay to the south coast.

Halfway across the island, at Knockalva, the party got up at 4.30 a.m., hoping to ‘escape’ before their hosts rose, but found ‘the house lit up, and a profuse breakfast prepared’. Worse was to come. When they reached Paradise Estate, there was ‘A large party, breakfast ready’. Once they had dealt with this, they proceeded to Savanna-la-Mar, another review of militia and another ‘grand second breakfast’. These three breakfasts were capped by a ‘a profuse dinner’ around 6 p.m. and finally a dance and supper (91–92). Then on Easter Sunday, 18th April 1802, after service in Black River, there was ‘a grand second breakfast’ at Luana (94). The following day they set off after ‘breakfast’ for Lacovia Estate and arrived to find ‘another breakfast ready, though it was only ten o’clock’. Still at Lacovia, they were served at 1.00 p.m. ‘a third breakfast of fish, hot stews of all sorts, &c.’ (94). The next morning at 7.00 a.m., Nugent ‘sat down in the piazza to a complete overseer’s breakfast of salt fish, salt beef, Irish butter, &c. &c.’ (94–95). At Derry in upper Clarendon, on 21st April, she found a ‘fine second breakfast prepared for me’ when she reached there at 2.00 p.m. (95). They reached Grove Place, near Porus, at 1.00 p.m. the next day and found a ‘superb second breakfast ready’ (96), and the day after had breakfast at 6.00 a.m. and ‘second breakfast’ at Mr. Osborne’s at 2.00 p.m. (97). On 24 April they were back in Spanish Town.

Following the grand tour, Nugent stopped mentioning second breakfasts until after the birth of her son on 12th October 1802. She described in detail her ‘Creole confinement’ and the role of her black nurse Flora (123–24). Exactly a month after the birth, Nugent was staying at Government Pen, south of Spanish Town, and it was there she once more referred to ‘second breakfast’ as a part of her household schedule (128). There was another ‘second breakfast’ at the Pen in February 1803, by which time Nugent was once again pregnant (147). The next mention came in April when she had ‘second breakfast’ somewhere in interior St. Mary (154). On 17th April at Decoy, visitors arrived ‘just as we were taking our second breakfast in the piazza’ (154). Then on 13th June at Government Pen she had both breakfast and ‘second breakfast’ (162). Thus second breakfast was firmly established as part of the regime followed by the Nugent household, whether at home or visiting.

A second interruption of Nugent’s journal-writing occurred around the time of the birth of her second child, a daughter, born on 8th September 1803. Nugent began recording second breakfasts again, starting on 28 October, when one
‘Nurse Flora’ reproduced from the 1839 edition of Lady Nugent’s journal.
was given for a large group at King’s House. There were many French people in the island and much talk of the revolution in St. Domingue. Further second breakfasts were noted by Nugent, on 31st October, and 3rd, 6th, 7th and 17th November (180–82). They were great occasions for collecting stories but Nugent said nothing about the food eaten or the times of its consumption. After this flurry, she recorded no more for almost a year, then on 13th September 1804, she noted that she had, ‘at 11, a second breakfast, of fruit, wine, cake, &c.’ before setting off from Spanish Town to Admiral’s Pen, near Kingston (213). The next morning, Nugent had breakfast, went into Kingston to shop, and found a second breakfast ready when she returned to Admiral’s Pen at 2 p.m., the meal consisting of ‘mutton chops, &c.’ The party then ‘creolized till 3, when we went to dinner in our morning dresses; and, notwithstanding the late second breakfast, the whole party did ample justice to the Admiral’s dinner’ (213–14).

Back at King’s House, Nugent noted second breakfasts on 2nd and 4th November 1804 (216). These were remarkable because of the large numbers of people present. On 26th December there was a smaller second breakfast at King’s House, some friends of the Nugents joining them to witness the festival in the square and on the nearby streets of Spanish Town, with ‘bonjoes, drums, and tom-toms, going all night, and dancing and singing and madness, all the morning’ (219). The next second breakfast was not noted until 19th April 1805, when the regiment was in Spanish Town, and two others, in May and June, when the militia was reviewed (229, 235, 242). Nugent was then preparing to leave Jamaica for England, and mentioned just one more second breakfast, on 24th June 1805, four days before she embarked at Old Harbour (244). On board ship, her regime was to take ginger tea or coffee when she woke, followed by breakfast, then ‘luncheon’ at midday, and dinner soon after 4.00 p.m., and some porter at 8.00 p.m. before sleep (250–51). Second breakfasts disappeared from her journal.

While in Jamaica, Nugent recorded eating ‘creole’ breakfasts, some of them ‘abundant’, at various times before 9.00 a.m. Breakfasts of the more generic variety were eaten no later than 8.00 a.m., and as early as 6.00 a.m. or sunrise. Her second breakfasts were never earlier than 11.00 a.m. or later than 2.00 p.m. Although she recorded more occasions (seven of them) when she sat down at 2.00 p.m. than for any other particular time, these may have been remarked because of their lateness and attributed to delays on the road. Second breakfast was good for any day of the week. During the 1802 tour, that lasted fifty-two days overall, Nugent noted sixteen ‘breakfasts’, seventeen ‘second breakfasts and forty ‘dinners’. She ‘dined’ an additional six times. ‘Suppers’ were rare, eaten only after dances in the middle of the night and Nugent thought they were not part of the Jamaican regime (11). In spite of her protests that ‘second breakfast’ really constituted ‘luncheon’ she hardly ever referred to a meal by this term while in Jamaica (41).

The Dictionary of Jamaican English prepared by F.G. Cassidy and R.B. Le Page in the 1960s listed ‘second breakfast’ as a Jamaicanism, identifying the
earliest citation as Nugent’s initial reference of 15th January 1802. Earlier uses are indeed rare but the first half of the nineteenth century produced a large crop (Marsden 6; Anon. 69; Madden 1:237). The practice was not confined to the plantation regime but shared by the town merchants who had ‘second breakfast’ typically at 11.00 a.m (Marsden 6). John Stewart in 1808 identified a pattern peculiar to creole women, saying ‘The ladies here … sit down to breakfast about nine, or past it, have what they call second breakfast at twelve, dine at three or four, and drink tea at eight; but seldom eat much, if any supper’. Of all these, he declared, ‘the meal called second breakfast is the most favourite’. Further, ‘This meal has something peculiar in it. It must consist of certain favourite viands [and] must be eaten with the assistance of the fingers alone; for knives and forks are on this occasion proscribed! In short, so fond are the ladies in general of this second breakfast, that they would … relinquish all the other three, rather than part with this one’ (190–91).

Nugent’s experience of second breakfast reflected the eclectic mix of endemic, indigenous, naturalised and imported plants and animals that characterised Jamaican food culture more broadly. The process of naturalisation paralleled the social creolisation that Nugent often associated with these meals. Some of the ingredients, with roots far away across the globe, had already come to be thought of as Jamaican, and their creole status took on a rooted indigeneity. Other things, such as breadfruit and ackee, were too new to the island to have acquired such a standing. The process was still working itself out at Nugent’s table. The great melange celebrated at second breakfast was a significant contributor to the selection of what would and would not enter the culture. It was a meal indulged in by the leisured classes during slavery but its dishes were directly or indirectly the creations of enslaved cooks, both African and creole-born, for whom the process of culinary creolisation was equally important.²

What exactly was served when Nugent was present? For creole breakfasts, eaten before 9.00 a.m., there were cassava cakes, fruit, pigeon pies, hams, tongue and rounds of (salt) beef, salt fish, oysters (with lots of oil), butter, chicken soup, and to drink chocolate, coffee and tea. Specifically for second breakfast, Nugent mentioned hot and cold meats (including mutton chops and cold veal), pies, stews and fries, most of these dishes highly spiced, as well as hot and cold fish pickled and plain (in lots of oil), peppers, tarts, cakes, confectionary, ginger sweetmeats, fruit (some of it ‘acid’), sweet jellies, and to drink wine (including claret and hock-negus, Madeira and sangaree), mixed liquor, coffee and tea.

A modern Jamaican, lining up at the buffet of a Sunday brunch would expect to find ackee and salt fish, mackerel rundown, escoveitched fish, liver, callaloo, boiled yam, boiled green bananas, roast breadfruit, bammy, flour dumplings fried and boiled, fried plantain, avocado pear, fruit, juice, coconut water and coffee. Nugent mentioned none of these specifically, apart from the fruit and the coffee. Her pickled cold fish was probably the equivalent of escoveitch and her cassava
cakes came close to the bammy, but the gap remains wide. One reason for this perhaps surprising difference is simply that some of the signature dishes of modern Jamaica are in fact more recent arrivals than may be commonly appreciated.

Although ackee and salt fish, Jamaica’s so-called national dish, has been attributed by some writers to the period of slavery, firm evidence of the combination does not appear until after abolition, and until the middle of the twentieth century it was always called ‘salt fish and ackee’ with the weight decidedly on the fish. Nugent knew the ‘acqui’ but seems not to have tasted it herself and merely reported what others said about the fruit (26). The ackee was a recent introduction to the island, though, and coming from West Africa, it was well known to the enslaved people. The breadfruit was also a late arrival, reaching Jamaica with Bligh only in 1793. Nugent mentioned it but only to say that the trees flourished (28). The people of Jamaica were still to develop a taste for this Polynesian food. The absence from Nugent’s list of boiled green bananas is no surprise because, although the fruit had been long established in the island, it was not highly regarded until the late nineteenth century.

Nugent may have omitted some items from her lists of foods (or mentally placed them among her frequent etceteras) because they were just too common, as regulars on the menu or absolute basics. This may apply to the roasted and boiled tubers such as yam, coco and sweet potato, which dominated the diet and provision grounds of the enslaved people and were common on the tables of the planters. The same might apply to roast plantain, though fried plantain was a food the poor could rarely afford. The avocado was common and freely available to all comers and, Nugent noted, used by some of the English instead of butter on their breakfast toast (26). It was no luxury.

Again, it is fair to say that Nugent listed few exotic items among the things she had for breakfast. The pigeon baked in a pie may have included the ringtail pigeon which became scarce in the twentieth century but was regarded as one of the iconic delicacies of Jamaica in Nugent’s time. Similarly the fish she ate may have included the mountain mullet, the second of the most praised delicacies of the island. The third delicacy, the black land crab, is completely missing from her account.

Among the hot and cold meats mentioned by Nugent, the mutton chops would have come from the island’s sheep, though ‘mutton’ was soon to become more commonly associated with the goat. The cold veal, the flesh of young cows, was a luxury in Jamaica at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the late seventeenth century the island’s veal had been highly praised but the expansion of the sugar industry created a great demand for working cattle so it became much more usual to kill cows for meat only after they had spent some years hauling the wagons of the estates (Marsden 12). The methods of cooking these meats were derived directly from British practice, stewed in stewpans, fried in frying pans and baked in ovens, but given a Jamaican flavour through the application
of pimento (allspice), hot peppers, and seasonings such as thyme, garlic and
scallions. Nugent did not mention salt meat in this context, though it was much
favoured by the planters, who especially enjoyed hams. It was frying and baking
that set the cooking of the planters apart from that of the enslaved who generally
had access only to boiling, stewing and roasting. The same applied to the cooking
of fish, only the richer people possessing the pans and oil needed for frying, and
as Nugent noted they chose to be profligate in the use of oil, lard and butter even
for salt fish dishes.

Nugent did not specify the kinds of cakes that formed part of a Jamaican
second breakfast, but they must have approximated the ‘breakfast cakes’ included
in The Jamaica Cookery Book published in 1893 by Caroline Sullivan (89). This
was the island’s first cookbook. Nugent and her cooks had nothing specifically
Jamaican to consult in their time. To make breakfast cakes:

Throw a cupful of wheat flour on a pastry board and mix it with half a teaspoon of
baking soda and half a teaspoon of salt.
Add a walnut-sized lump of butter and an equal amount of lard, and chop into the flour
mixture.
Beat an egg and mix with a saucerful of bani.
Add this mix to the flour and make a dough.
Roll out the dough about 1 cm thick and cut into shapes.
Bake for about 30 minutes in a hot oven.

In this recipe, based on Sullivan’s version, the most obviously Jamaican element
was the bani, derived from the Anglo-Irish ‘bonny-clabber’ meaning curdled milk
or milk naturally clotted or coagulated on souring. Cassidy and Le Page identify
bani as a variety of the Jamaicanisms ‘bonny’ and ‘banikleva’. It was the bani and
egg, and the lard, that distinguished these breakfast cakes from scones. Cow’s
milk can be substituted for the bani.

The tarts noticed by Nugent probably contained local fruits such as plantain,
mango and chocho (long recognised as a substitute for stewed apple). They may
also have included gizadas, the pastry shells filled with grated fresh coconut,
sweetened and spiced, and these items blended into the confectionery and ginger
sweetmeats. Nugent’s acid fruit would have included indigenous varieties such as
pineapple, pawpaw, soursop, guinep and cherimoya, and introduced exotics such
as citron, seville orange, shaddock, jimbling, bimbling and pomegranate. Sugar
was readily available, so all of these could be made into sweets with sufficient
proportions added.

Jamaica produced none of the wine derived from grapes because the fruit did
not flourish. Thus the claret, hock-negus, and Madeira were all imported. Hock
was a dry white wine, originally associated with that produced along the Rhine.
Negus was made by mixing wine (particularly port or sherry) with hot water and
sweetening with sugar. The combination with hock and other wines was popular
in the eighteenth century.
Madeira was much more common. It began as a cheap and simple table wine but by the beginning of the nineteenth century had become one of the most favoured of drinks, and modified specifically to satisfy West Indian taste. It was by Nugent’s time highly-processed and expensive, a drink fit for the Governor’s table. Madeira was typically produced from unblended stock and fortified with brandy to reduce the wine’s sweetness. However, David Hancock contends that the planters preferred ‘dark, sweet wines’ with less brandy, and sometimes specifically ordered ‘a quarter cask of red must [new wine or the unfermented juice as pressed from the grape] and another of brandy along with a pipe of unfortified wine so that it could be colored and strengthened to taste’ (1998 197, 207; 2005).

Sangaree was made with sherry, mixed with water, nutmeg, lime peel and sugar. Nugent also mentioned unspecified ‘mixed liquor’ and it was probably in such concoctions that the island’s rum came to the fore. As to the coffee, Jamaica emerged as an important producer only at the end of the eighteenth century but by Nugent’s time, with the St. Domingue industry depressed, it had become one of the world’s greatest exporters, and she must have drunk the local brew. Tea, of the Indian and China varieties, was imported but was joined by local styles such as ginger tea and a wide variety of herb teas.

During slavery, second breakfast was a term and a meal rarely shared by the enslaved (Lewis 407; Sturge and Harvey 263; Bleby 114). After abolition, it became a more common and broadly spread expression, but by the middle of the twentieth century ‘second breakfast’ was largely confined to the rural peasantry. It was then generally reduced to ‘breakfast’ (though eaten around midday) and contrasted to ‘morning-breakfast’ or ‘tea’ (the first meal of the day) when nothing more might be taken than herb tea (Cassidy and Le Page 68, 305, 399). The moveability of breakfast became a broader social model, as expressed in the Jamaican saying ‘no ev’ry man brekfas ready de same time’, meaning that individuals must set their own pace and accept that their responsibilities and possible good fortune may come at different stages of life (Watson 129).

Second breakfast may be forgotten in modern Jamaica but elements of the meal, and of its association with Nugent, do survive. In 1994 the Friends of the Georgian Society of Jamaica, in the United Kingdom, served an inaugural ‘Lady Nugent’s Breakfast’, the menu including salt fish and ackee, escoveitched fish, mackerel run down, fried plantain, avocado pear, hard dough bread, fried johnny cakes, boiled green bananas, orange juice, coffee, and rum punch.3 As in the typical modern Jamaican brunch, not all of these items were known or recorded by Nugent, and the event was not designated as a second breakfast. Internationally, by the end of the twentieth century, the best known practitioners of ‘second breakfast’ were J.R.R. Tolkein’s hungry hobbits, who squeezed it in early in the day, between breakfast and elevenses, but for them it was simply an element in day-long snacking. The creoles of Jamaica who enjoyed second breakfast in Nugent’s time would have viewed such offerings as pitifully insufficient to
demonstrate their wealth and status and quite incapable of satisfying their vast and varied tastes.

NOTES

1 Since first publication Nugent’s journal has appeared in edited versions, beginning with those of Frank Cundall in 1907, 1934 and 1939, and Philip Wright in 1966, the last of these being reissued with a foreword by Verene Shepherd in 2002 (University of the West Indies Press). References here are to Wright’s 1966 edition. On Nugent, see Brathwaite 109–110; Mohammed 145–66; Brereton; Klepp and McDonald.

2 See Higman.

3 Information kindly supplied by Pamela Beshoff, who conceived the event, and Stephen Porter.

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Catherine hoped that the tinkling of the water fountain wasn’t going to make her want to pee again. The restaurant was heavily decorated with the regional artefacts which went with its name, La Table de l’Aveyron. Wide-brimmed black velour hats hung on the walls, and there was a lot of black ironmongery in the form of clockwork spits and long handled basting funnels. There was a great deal of copper ware too, bowls, moulds, warming pans, jam basins, and those antique wall fountains made up of a cistern with a tap and a flattened bowl underneath. There used to be one of those in the waiting room of the doctor, a stone room, vaulted and groined, in the street that was once the moat of the castle above. His house was somehow built into the walls of the old town, and, as well as the copper fountain, kept polished to a mirror shine, there were faience plates, and on the door a knocker in the shape of a lady’s beringed hand. As a child she had taken it for granted that all doctors’ waiting rooms were like this; chilly, dim, stony caverns with glowing ancient copper on the walls.

The fountain in the restaurant was converted into an ornamental fountain; this was the diuretic water that trickled out of the tap, tinkled into the basin and then was pumped back into the reservoir. Round and round. Catherine had already been to pee once, down a crooked staircase and into a dim smelly lavatory, only one, with a man in it, standing at the urinal, who turned his head to look at her. When she went into the cubicle she couldn’t find the light switch, and realised it was the old-fashioned system, where the light goes on when you latch the door, so there are seconds of blackness while you are getting it to work. She didn’t think there were any of those in existence any more, not in Paris. Perhaps it was part of the regional décor.

I ordered for you, said André when she got back. I know what she likes, he smiled at his guest. A business colleague. Usually Cathérine was not present when André entertained his business colleagues, but he thought she’d like to meet this one since he came from the Avéyron too, from a little town called Meyrejouls. He was a lean rangy man, with small eyes looking out from a face like one of those natural carvings in the landscape that make up the Chaos of Montpelier, and strings of oiled hair combed over his bald head. One string had become detached and dangled down the side of his face like an earring; it was quite long and flapped languidly when he turned his head. Cathérine wondered how he couldn’t notice it. André said he was very rich, and a nice man when you got to know him. Cathérine had been thinking about people being nice, lately, and had decided that mostly they weren’t. She thought that this man, who was called Louis Prouzot, wasn’t nice at all.
The first dish was a thrush pâté. It came on an oval platter with moss and a twiggy branch on which sat two tiny stuffed birds, their beady eyes regarding the other fates of their fellows. There were two intricate nests perched on the twigs, containing eggs as inedible as the birds. The pâté was a small round pat, and beside was its empty tin. Cathérine didn’t think the provenance was much to boast about. The thrushes were a bit shabby; you wondered how often they had been carried out, once inquisitive heads cocked, to proclaim the authenticity of the delicacy offered. If she’d wanted to get out her glasses she could have picked up the tin and read just how much thrush was in it. Much more pig, she guessed. It could be soya bean protein, for all the sad little birds could proclaim otherwise.

André had ordered aligot. He was right, it was her favourite dish. But it wasn’t a good one; the potatoes were dry, the cheese was not juicy enough — Cathérine took the metro across to the rue Moufflard market to buy the very fresh new Cantal cheese, before it had firmed up into its usual hard yellow self, to make her aligot — and there was hardly any garlic in it. She found it difficult to swallow.

The partridge wasn’t very much better, an ancient bird, dry and stringy, which is of course quite the normal choice for this dish but it must not end up like this, and the cabbage tasting stewed to death. She was thinking how she could have cooked these dishes, and how delicious they would have been, when she heard Louis Prouzot say. Do you not think so, madame? And she had to beg his pardon, because she hadn’t been listening.

I said, a Frenchman has two homes, the place where he is born, and Paris. Do you not agree, madame?

André was nodding, and she said yes, she supposed that was true, and then she thought, does that mean that nobody is born in Paris? But then André wasn’t, and she wasn’t. But Fanny was.

She couldn’t get any more flesh off the partridge. She stopped listening to Louis Prouzot talking about the importance of rootedness in the French provinces to the French character. Instead she remembered a young woman called Henriette who’d lived in the next door flat when Fanny was a little girl. She’d told Cathérine how she’d gone to Isère to have her baby, so the child would be born in the country of her forefathers. And afterwards, she said, I took Claudine to my grandmother’s grave and I talked to her. I said, grandmother, I am here with my new baby daughter Claudine. Do you know we are here? I would like your blessing, grandmother. Give me a sign. It was very quiet, the graveyard was nearly in the country, there were hayfields around and that buzzing still feeling of bees in the flowers. Give me a sign, grandmother, I said, and do you know! — here Henriette opened her eyes wide and looked solemn — do you know! — two blue butterflies came and flew just above the grave, round and round in spirals. For minutes. I’d never seen blue butterflies in that place before. I knew it was my grandmother speaking to me. Claudine opened her eyes and held out her hands. To the blue butterflies the same colour as her eyes. I’m certain she understood. She won’t know her great
grandmother but maybe one day she’ll remember the blue butterflies she sent to bless the new baby in the family.

When André came home she told him the story. You don’t believe all that about blue butterflies, do you, he said, and she said, no, not that, but maybe they should have had Fanny born in the country of her ancestors, and he scoffed: No, why ever would you? Leave the safety of Paris for god knows what sort of care in the south? No, he said, Fanny can belong there, without needing to be born there. And they did go back, most years, for their summer holidays, so Fanny was familiar with the Avéyron. Though it was to André’s particular region they went, not hers, she hadn’t been back for a long time. You go back to see people, she thought, not the place, and I have no people left.

Cathérine sometimes cooked the dishes of her country, not always, she read magazines and liked to keep up with new recipes. Cathérine’s food always transports me to the Avéyron, said one guest, but she thought he was just saying that, it was the kind of flowery speech people thought suitable for such occasions. Though she knew that if she had been cooking this meal she would have got it right.

Louis Prouzot bullied André into another bottle of wine. Well, come, he said, this is an excellent drop, I see you agree with me, can’t beat a good Cahors, I always drink it when I can, provided it’s a good one, of course, and this is good, very good. He drained his glass and looked at it sadly. Such a melancholy sight, an empty glass, don’t you think? To suppose that it’s time to stop, that’s it, finished.

When the waiter brought a new bottle Prouzot took his arm, pincering it above the elbow with his fingers. His hand was big and bony and pulled the young man’s arm at an awkward angle from his body. And you, my lad, what about you? Do you come from the Avéyron too?

The waiter smiled. Well, it was a grimace, standing there with his arm pulled out from his body in that crab-claw grip. He shook his head. I come from Normandy, he said. He was a brown young man, with velvety dark hair and eyes. He tried to pull his arm away, but Prouzot’s grip was strong, and he was hampered with the bottle and three fresh glasses he was carrying.

You must be a Celt, said Prouzot, and pushed his arm away.

Thank you, said André gently, swallowing the taste of wine the waiter poured, nodding, Excellent, excellent, thank you.

The dessert was a cake cooked on a spit, one of the famous old recipes of the region. She’d never made it. It involves a mechanical spit turning in front of an open fire, to which you fix a wooden cone made of wood, and then tie oiled paper around it with string. The fire needs a deflector so the heat is not too direct. The batter, resembling the batter for madeleines, is made of a kilo each of flour, of sugar, of butter; twenty-four eggs, rum, orange flower water. The spit turns, the cook ladles the batter, slowly, so it hangs off the cone in lacy folds, caught just before they fall and set in place by the heat; only a few drops slide into the pan below. The result is rather like a model of a Christmas tree, a conical cake with lacy frills of batter, cooked golden, crisp, creamy. It takes hours. It’s
insanely laborious. Cathérine hasn’t a fire, or a spit, or the faintest inclination. The variables need a lifetime’s experience to get right — the heat of the fire, the speed of the spit, the thickness of the batter, the quantity ladled out. There are several shops in Rodez which sell real gâteau à la broche; if you want to eat it, that’s where you go. Of course it is very expensive.

The cake at La Table de l’Avéyron is industrial. She wonders how you make it in a factory but you clearly can. It doesn’t taste fresh and eggy but of artificial essences of vanilla and orange and rum, heated and chemical.

Louis Prouzot was talking about the cake he always ate, from a certain pastry shop in Rodez, on the square, just along from the cathedral; did they know it? Cathérine thought this probably meant he didn’t think much of the gâteau à la broche either. Cathérine said that yes, she believed she had eaten those cakes, and very good they were. Though she had heard they were a nearly dead art, that quite soon it would not be possible to buy them anymore. Which would be a great pity, lost skills are always a pity.

The country’s going downhill, said Prouzac. Has been ever since Vichy. Pity they didn’t get a better run. Should never have let things fall into the hands of de Gaulle. The ruination of the state.

Cathérine said, Can we blame de Gaulle for the disappearance of cake-making skills in the provinces? Prouzot said that given the ideals of a Vichy inspired government — I understand of course, the Marshall could no longer be with us, but his heirs, his heirs — such skills would have been retained because they were valued. His statements hung in the air like gas from a fart, and the hosts had no response to dispel it. Cathérine could think of several but they were all too rude. André said, What about a digestif? A prune, perhaps? An Armagnac? Cathérine wanted to moan. Just when she thought the evening might be going to be over. But Prouzac said, no, better not, best be going, and she almost forgave him the rest of the meal. André called for the bill, which took hours to come, and hours to process, the fountain piddled interminably, but finally they were out in the cold spring night.

By the time they were going to bed she had indigestion. I don’t know why we go out to eat bad food in bad company, she said.

It was supposed to be good, he said. I thought it would be pleasant to meet a fellow countryman. And you ought not to turn up your nose at the company; after all it is your bread and butter.

Are you sure it’s not mouldy bread and rancid butter? His money’s quite wholesome. He might be a Pétainist but he’s dead keen to buy in that new development. If you’d been listening you’d have known that.

He was probably a collaborator. Probably made his money by robbing deported Jews.

Are you mad, woman? He’d have barely been a baby when all that was happening.
In spirit I bet he was. And probably inherited it from his father. His roots are probably deep in collaborators’ gold.

What’s got into you tonight? Money’s money. It’s not dirty or clean. It’s real, or it’s not. I don’t run checks on how my clients’ grandfathers made their money. Only that their descendants have it.

Catérine was looking in the dressing table drawer for Vichy pastilles, which she always swore by for indigestion. But we don’t have to eat with them.

No. You don’t.

Catérine had not been born in the little town whose doctor’s surgery was in the street that had once been a moat, in a house built into the fortifications of the city’s walls. She had been born in a small place called la Canourgue, at the bottom of the steep road that winds up to the plateau where Veresac perches vigilant on its hill, surrounded by fields. La Canourgue is a town full of water. Once when she was a little girl her grandfather had taken her to see her cradle, as he called it. Little busy streams ran along the streets. Every house had its own bridge from the pavement to the road, and the air was full of the music of the water rushing.

When she was very small and the Occupation happening they moved up to the old city, to a house within the walls, in a small square. Most of the houses had barns underneath, where the sheep were kept at night. On one side of the square was a wooden door in a wall, that opened into an enormous cistern. It was built of stone and arched and stretched a long way, right under the castle as well. When you unlatched the door and stepped on to a little balcony cold fresh watery air flowed across your face. The house was tall, four storeys, with quite a grand stone staircase at the front and a turret at one side which her grandfather said meant it had once been the house of a nobleman. In the medieval era, that was. When she asked what that meant, he said, many hundreds of years ago. But the town is older than that, he said, older even than the Romans, though that is where the name comes from. Veresac: ac, he said, when you hear that syllable at the end of a word you know that it is Roman, it means camp. Such a good place for a fortification, no one can surprise you. Stand on top of the hill, you can see a cat creeping, far over the plain.

The house belonged to her grandparents. There were no sheep under it, her grandfather had been a schoolteacher, as her mother was. This is a proud city, the old man says, no one has been illiterate here for several centuries. Her father wasn’t much there. Her mother sometimes talked to the grandmother about him. Often she seemed cross. Once she said, They are like boys playing games. Like boys, and not thinking how dangerous it is. When he was killed, her mother said, There, I told you, and tears ran down her cheeks, so many tears, they dropped on to the front of her apron and made it soaking wet. Catérine put her arms around her mother and felt the wetness on her own cheeks.

It wasn’t until the Occupation was over that the word Resistance was used, and the stories began to be told.
Going Back

After she left school Cathérine went to Montpelier to live with a cousin who was married to a baker. Her mother would have liked her to be a teacher but she didn’t want that, she did a business course. It was there that she met André who came from near Rodez. She was pregnant when they got married. She could not believe that so shameful a thing had happened to her, certainly could not talk about it. She told people they wanted to get married quickly, with no fuss, and her mother being a widow and never having much money did not mind. But shortly after the marriage she miscarried, and then several more times. Sometimes she imagined a priest saying these miscarriages were a punishment for the sin of conceiving out of wedlock but she did not believe that. She loved André and did not think that getting pregnant was ever a sin to be punished. Eventually Fanny was born, and the doctor said, no more children.

No one but André knew that Cathérine had been pregnant before her marriage. She felt rather clever, having got away with it. So many girls hadn’t. And then she sometimes thought of telling people, her family — but it was too late for that now — or Fanny. But always decided that really it was a silly idea. She stuck with the narrative, which was certainly a truth: a number of miscarriages, misery, despair, then, such luck, Fanny.

Cathérine Picard. Née Delmas. A daughter. A wife. A mother. A grandmother? Who knows. She can define herself thus. It is not all there is but it is of value to her. Whereas André? A man. He makes his place in the world as himself, not in relation to others. Though the possibility is there.

The day after the dinner at la Table de l’Avéyron Fanny called in to visit. She stood at the sitting room window as she always did and looked down into the small square of formal garden. It was a simple maze of box hedges in rectangles, paths of reddish gravel, a towering wall covered in a pelt of ivy and another of stone. It never changes, said Fanny. Year after year, the hedges the same height, the gravel the same red.

The man in the bottom flat manicures it, said Cathérine.

Fanny knows the story of the garden. How, when the original mansion was being knocked down ready for André to build his apartments, he had been going to bulldoze the garden as well, but Cathérine said let’s keep that little bit. Can’t do that, said André. You know what that patch of land is worth? You’ll beggar me with these fancy notions.

It’s such a small scrap, said Cathérine. And think of the value the view of it will add to the apartments. The light. The air. Historical. And people will love looking down on it.

And so it was. People did. Including Fanny and Cathérine. Standing at the window, gazing down, letting their eyes follow the unmysterious maze, and feel comforted.

Cathérine made tea and put out a plate of the little cakes called nun’s farts that Fanny was fond of. They sat at the dining room table. Fanny still looked a bit peaky and pale, even though it was a long time since her illness and the
departure of Charlotte. Every time her daughter came Cathérine wondered if she were pregnant, but she never asked. She believed that if Fanny were she would be incandescent, she would not be able to hide it, she would burst in and the news would overflow.

The teapot was a present from Fanny; it was Chinese, and fitted into a padded basket. André thought it was a funny object, but it was good for keeping hot the pale milkless tea they both liked. There were two little shallow cups to go with it.

I met a man from Meyrelure, said Cathérine.

Oh yes.

Your father invited him to dinner. In a restaurant, not at home. It wasn’t very good.

Fanny asked about the restaurant, and the meal, so Cathérine had to describe all that, then she said: I went to Meyrelure once, when I was a little girl. My mother took me. My grandfather drove us there in his old claptrap of a car. It was just after the liberation. Cathérine paused. Fanny listened. We went to see some old ladies. They seemed old to me. I suppose they were younger than I am now. My mother called them aunts. They were some sort of cousin of my father’s, several times removed, I think. My grandfather dropped us in this huge cobbled square, there was an obelisk in the middle of it, with rows of names. I remember we stood and looked at them, and I was reading them, and I said to my mother, Why are so many of them the same? Because there’d be lists of two or three or six, all of the same name. And she said, They aren’t exactly, the family names are the same, but see, there are mostly different initials, they have different first names. They are all different people. They’re brothers, or cousins, or maybe sons and fathers. The same family, not the same person.

It was a memorial, this obelisk, to the Great War, and here were the names of all the men from the village and the farms round about who’d been killed. There were heavy metal spikes around it, rusty, with a rusty chain making a fence. I remember staring up at it, and the blue sky behind it, these high rows of the names of men killed.

Round three sides of the square were narrow tall houses. They looked like old people, shaky on their invisible legs, leaning against one another for support; if one fell down they all would. In rusty black clothes. Not drunk, decrepit.

We walked up some steps to one of them. There was a knocker in the shape of a lady’s hand, with a ring on it, and pinned above that, one of those lucky thistles you find in the fields, like the rays of a round yellow sun. An old woman came to the door and took us through a hall into a dark room with big looming furniture. I was a child, but not that small, I think it really was very big and gloomy furniture. There were thick lace curtains over the window and not much light came through it, though it was a bright day outside; you could see the light but it was shut outside.

Cathérine paused. Fanny waited.

There were two more old ladies, one was the other aunt and the third was a visitor, a neighbour. They brought a big brown jug of water, from their well, they
said, very sweet, and gave us glasses of that with raspberry vinegar in. They made
the vinegar themselves, they said, they grew the raspberries and made the vinegar.
The garden had been good to them in difficult times. There was a bowl of walnuts
and the visitor cracked them, holding two together in the palms of her hands and
squeezing. It’s easy, she said, if you get the angle right. They grew those, too. The
tree had been planted when the elder aunt was born, to be cut down and made
into a chest of drawers for her wedding, to keep her trousseau in. That had never
happened, the tree was still standing, producing excellent walnuts.

You remember this very well, mama.

Yes I do, don’t I. The first aunt gave me an album of postcards to look at; she
pulled up a chair in front of me and put it on that. Turn the pages carefully from
the top right hand corner, she said. They were pale sepia photographs of places
like Vichy, St Nectaire, where people went to take the waters. There were a lot
of marvellous buildings, I thought they were palaces, with ladies in long frothy
dresses, so I thought this was interesting, that they were princesses, and I stopped
listening to my mother and the aunts. Then I heard my mother say in a very soft
tight voice that I knew meant she was stopping herself crying, My husband was a
hero. He died a hero’s death.

One of the aunts said, We should have trusted the Marshall. He was the one
to save us.

The visitor said, Ah, the Marshall. The hero of Verdun. He was the one
betrayed. She was taking a gulp of the vinegar drink and started to say something
about traitors but it came out in a kind of bray and the drink spurted out. I wanted
to laugh, you know how you do when you’re a child, but I was frightened too.
She spluttered and had to be hit on the back. Then I thought she looked like a
witch, with her mouth open and no teeth, well maybe one at the side, and she was
skinny and hunched in the back. Very thin. Everybody was thin, then. They all
wore pinafores of that soft black cotton with tiny flowers on it, you can still see it
in the market, sometimes.

The visitor stopped choking long enough to get out, The dear Marshall, and
then spluttered again.

I could see my mother not saying anything, sitting with her mouth tight and
her hands wrapped together and her eyes opened wide and hard so no tears could
squeeze out. An aunt looked at her. Well, she said, of course we are sorry that
Fleuret died. The other said, Very sad for you.

Then they offered more raspberry vinegar, so good in the hot weather. My
mother said, No thank you. The aunt closed up the photograph album. My mother
said we had to go. But it wasn’t time for grandfather to come. We said goodbye,
with kisses on musty old cheeks, and went down the steps and across the square.
We walked past the obelisk and along the road through the village and looked
at the sleeping fields yellow with the end of summer. My mother said, They are
the widows of the Great War, widows though they never married. Living out
their lives in the family homes, nursing their ageing parents, till they too died
and left them orphans. That obelisk, and the names on them, that’s all that’s left. Maybe no specific names, maybe no actual lovers, spoken, declared, no fiancés, intendeds, maybe not even that. So there is no person to remember, no name to mourn, just the lists of the men who might have been and the loss of the life they should have had. She sighed when she said that. We walked back down the dusty street, hot and empty. My mother said, The death of the village. That’s written on the obelisk too. All the children never born.

When I looked sideways at her, I saw that tears were running down her face. I looked away, and held her hand tight. I was used to her overflowing in tears like that, after my father died.

Poor old things, she said. We can’t blame them. I’m a widow, too, but at least I had a marriage.

Who’s the Marshall, I asked.

Marshall Pétain. He was a hero in the Great War. But then, in the next one, he just gave in. Surrendered. So quickly, so quickly. He betrayed the French people.

I climbed over the chain and sat on the steps of the obelisk. But only for a minute. I could feel all those dead men silently waiting at my back. All the brothers and cousins and fathers and sons, the husbands and lovers and fiancés, all crowded on to a narrow knobbled pillar, and I couldn’t bear it. I ran away to the edge of the road, watching for grandfather in his old car, hearing it churning along the sleepy lane of the road before I saw it.

Grandfather said, How were the old ladies, and mama said: Old. And poor. I think of that now, said Cathérine; old: they can’t have been sixty. They were lean, and fit, as I remember, but they seemed so ancient.

Still the same, then, said grandfather.


So many traitors, said grandfather. So many traitors.

There was a flock of sheep walking along the road and we had to crawl behind them. After a bit we stopped, and waited for them to turn off into a village. Was my father a traitor, I said. They both turned to me. Their eyes had gone large, they made me think of the dog with saucer eyes. He was a hero, they said, both at once, my mother in that angry voice she always had when my father was mentioned, my grandfather with … I wondered if it was pride.

I’d like to go back, said Cathérine, now. Back to Veresac. I spent all my childhood there, and I’ve never been back since. See the plaque on the cliff beside the road where my father was shot. Go back to Meyrelure and look at the obelisk. The old ladies must be dead now, I suppose, or maybe not, maybe they’re still going, they’d be in their nineties, probably look no older now than they did then.

Still serving raspberry vinegar in well water.

I thought it was rather nice. A treat.

Fanny poured more tea, still hot in its nest. Why don’t I come with you? We could take the train. Hire a car when we get there. You’ve never told me about my grandfather, not really.
Thrush Pâté

This recipes is from a book called, *Cent et Une Recettes de Cuisine Aveyronnaise*, which translates as *A Hundred and One Aveyronnaise Recipes*. I have eaten thrush pâté but I have never cooked it.

You need a number of thrush. You entirely bone each bird, making a stock with the bones that you then add to a farce (the same word as forcemeat) of all the flesh except the suprêmes, the fillets, including the entrails, some lean pork and veal, with pepper, salt, four spices, a little duck or goose liver. The recipe says ‘it also accepts some drops of Armagnac’. And truffles, if you wish. You wrap the suprêmes in the farce, put them in a tin and cook as usual. Thrush pâté seems mainly to be presented as a conserve in this manner.

The most prized thrushes are taken on the Causses, the plateau country of the Aveyron, where they have fed on juniper berries which perfume the flesh and are the reason for eating the innards. The birds are caught in a trap called a tindelle: a flat stone held up by an ingenious scaffolding of sticks, which let the stone fall at the least touch. It’s suspended over a hole in the ground, in which are juniper berries to entice the bird in.

You can also roast the bird, undrawn, for ten minutes, you then take out the entrails, chop them, spread them on toast and put the thrush on top, with some of the cooking juice. This is called Grive rotie sur canapé.

Eating thrush may seem shocking to us, but in the Aveyron it was local, even peasant, and ecologically sound. And immensely labour intensive. Cathérine doubts the pâté she has eaten is delicately made in the manner of this recipe.
HAL PRATT

Wheat Silos of NSW

My association with silos goes back to my early childhood. From my bed as a five-year-old I had a view of the town silos a short block away. My bedroom was the front verandah of a small cottage in Parkes in central western NSW. The verandah was a few metres from the footpath and completely open to all weather. We had moved from Wagga Wagga to Parkes when my father was appointed secretary of the Wheatgrowers Union, Parkes then being the geographical centre of the grain belt. It was not long after World War II. Hot bread arrived by horse and cart, we put a billy with money out at night for the milkman and ice arrived twice a week in large blocks for our ice-chest. Sometimes we accompanied my father to conferences, staying on farms with no electricity and for the most part self-sufficient. The novelty of these stays was like holidays for me and my sisters. I would relieve the farmhand of his tractor-driving duties while the others went into town in a horse and sulky. But the real highlight was the afternoon tea with its selection of cakes made from cream, eggs and butter off the farm.

The central wheat belt is called locally the Golden West, a reference to ripened wheat ready for harvest. During the harvest, from my camp on the verandah I experienced the long queues of trucks as they waited overnight to offload their wheat at the silo. It was before bulk transport so each three-bushel bag was cut open and emptied into an underground chamber at the silo. From the cellar the grain is elevated by machinery in a central workhouse to the superstructure where it is distributed to the cylindrical concrete towers known in the trade as bins. The lifting of the grain is such an important part of the whole operation that the label grain elevator is used synonymously with silo. With the arrival of bulk transport, the truck queues disappeared and a huge steel shed, a bulkhead, was built alongside the rail out of the town. It was one of the many to be erected across the wheat belt to meet the demand of increased yields. If space permitted, they operated alongside the original silos, sharing loading and hoisting facilities.

Silos and the railway are inseparable. Early last century the wheat industry was almost wholly dependent on rail. The NSW wheat belt was patterned by railways in zones approximately 50 kilometres wide to service the farming community. Before the advent of silos, bagged wheat was loaded directly into waiting rail wagons. An increase in grain production outstripped the availability of wagons, necessitating temporary storage by stacking bags, up to up to twenty high, in the railway yards. In 1916 across NSW a huge amount of grain that had accumulated during the war, was lost through wet weather, rodents and insects. The loss prompted the government to propose the construction of bulk storage
facilities, resulting in the Grain Elevator Act 1916, with a program to construct sixty-eight silos at select points along existing railway lines, plus a Sydney terminal. Construction of the country silos began in 1917 and the first to operate was at Peak Hill, near Parkes, in August 1918. These original silos with their cylindrical towers in line are the landmark buildings we see today.

During the 1950s when Prime Minister Robert Menzies was in power, my father’s enthusiasm and dedication to the World Peace Movement lost him his job at the Wheatgrowers Union. His empathy with the farmer settlers who were struggling to live on the small holdings granted to them following war service did not help his case against the wealthy landowner faction. However, we stayed on in Parkes. By the time I reached my final year at high school my two parents were teaching my class half of the Leaving Certificate subjects.

A career in architecture sustained my admiration of silo structures. The simple geometry and sheer bulk of these functional buildings are very much part of the Australian landscape. Often they have pride of place in the town centre; shops on one side of the main street, silos on the other; or they will stand proudly as landmarks in the open landscape, often the only building in sight. Glider pilots use silos especially during competitions when a dipped wing and a photograph is proof they have rounded the predetermined mark (although the introduction of GPS is superseding the camera).

Finally I tired of the business of architecture with its mounting paperwork and regulations restricting the creative process. A switch to photography opened the possibility of revisiting silos. An approach to the NSW State Library was met with a response that went something like — ‘Photograph every wheat silo across NSW? You must be crazy. When can you start?’ The NSW wheat belt stretches from Victoria to Queensland, a distance of 1000 kilometres as the crow flies and is on average 250 kilometres wide. The belt straddles the 500mm (20 inch) per annum rainfall contour. This is the same rainfall as London’s average but there the comparison ends. The timing and intensity of rain in the wheat belt is crucial. It can be the difference between sowing or not sowing if the seasonal rains do not arrive. Too much rain at the wrong time will bring on rust in a crop or a locust plague.

To photograph over three hundred ‘public’ silos across NSW is proving to be at least a four year project. Each expedition inland from my home on the south coast needs careful planning. Each day on the road needs to be manageable in terms of the most efficient route — taking in as many silos as possible without covering too many kilometres and having somewhere, perhaps a farmstay, to spend the night. Finding silo locations such as Nelungaloo, The Troffs, Moonbooldool, Ginginbung, Cryon or Burrumbuttock is not difficult. A report from the Library’s own archives lists all the silos and importantly the railway line where each is located. On the way I pass through the likes of Wait a While, The Drop, No
Mistake and Square Bush. Some of the silos are so close together that I can see the
next one ahead while observing the previous silo in my rear vision mirror.

Most locations have the original silo with its central workhouse and a number
of bins. Usually more bins were added later and with the introduction of bulk
transport any number of bulkheads were built alongside. These latter are huge
sheds with roofs that follow the natural angle of repose of the grain. The latest
storage facility is simply a low perimeter wall of concrete to which is fixed an
enormous tarpaulin covering a mound of grain sitting directly on the ground.
Ironically another system borrows from the original method of loading straight
into the rail wagons. It is loaded directly into containers at the rail yard and
transported to mills anywhere in the world.

Sadly one by one the branch lines are closing, unable to compete with truck
transport. All the hard labour and materials that went into building the rail
infrastructure over a century has gone by the board. Political expediency and
lack of foresight is resulting in the abandonment of a perfectly good transport
system, mainly on the pretext of the costly maintenance. This is hard to believe
when the impact of a truck tyre on the road is almost ten times that of a laden
wagon on a rail. When I came to Sydney from the bush to study architecture it
had a functioning light rail system — the tram. Sydneysiders now regret that ‘the
rattler’ was abandoned.

The fear that silos may be headed for the same fate as the railways was a major
influence in my recording their present status. What is their future when they no
longer function as grain stores? Concrete silos were built to last and they can
endure for centuries. In the cities they are now recycled as residential units. In the
countryside they could simply remain as landmarks, a reminder of times past. If
impractical to recycle, they should at least attract heritage recognition. These are
our treasuries, repositories of the golden grain — our daily bread.
Wallenden
**Bush Damper** (with or without a camp oven)

**INGREDIENTS**
3 cups of SR flour  
or  
ordinary flour with baking powder (1 teaspoon for each cup of flour)

**METHOD**
1. Mix enough water with the flour to make a dough.  
2. When mixed and kneaded put it in a camp oven or wrap in greased foil and cook, in fire for 20 to 30 minutes.

Beer can be used instead of water for variation and to give the damper a lighter texture. In the bush a fire with plenty of red-hot coals is the best for cooking damper.

This simple recipe I use on extended bush walks of a week or more when it is easier to carry the flour than bread which can go stale or mouldy and takes up too much room in a full backpack.

**Farm Scones**

**INGREDIENTS**
250g SR flour  
50g butter  
25g raw sugar  
1 egg  
125 mls milk and yoghurt (mixed)

**METHOD**
1. Rub butter into flour and sugar.  
2. Whisk egg into milk and pour into well in flour. Gently mix to form a dough but don’t over mix.  
3. Roll dough out on a floured board to 2.5 cm. thickness.  
4. Place on oiled baking tray and bake at 200°C for 15 minutes until golden.

I call my recipe ‘farm scones’ because the result approximates my childhood afternoon tea experience although I remember being more impressed by the jam and cream than the actual scones.
Rations for the Back Country: Sensory Landscapes

Discovering a relationship to country in inland and northern Australia through eating and taste, rather than sight and sound, is the subject of this essay. European settlers, with a highly organised literate culture, had to develop a sensory orientation in surviving the vast spaces of the country, and came to emphasise a distinctive pattern of eating. By contrast Indigenous peoples moving through the same country perceived another diversity of foods, often plants and animals invisible to the Europeans. For a primarily oral, non-literate society the taste of food was bound up with understanding the land through the intricacies of family relationship and story. The interplay between the senses is a crucial marker in understanding cultural difference, argues Constance Classen. ‘Sensory models are conceptual models, and sensory values are cultural values’ (Classen 161). European explorers, soldiers and settlers travelled over the country in ‘norms’ of travel that were quite rigidly established in military and settler history. Shod in heavy boots, following a designated map, carrying supplies, aware of the passage of time in numbered hours, their sensory mode contrasted to the Aboriginal experience of stepping barefoot through the bush on meandering tracks, touching and tasting the land with another focus of sensibility. Cultural concepts of time and space are revealed in the choice of food — is it freshly gathered and perishable? Dried? Brought from far away? In archaeology the varieties of containers, whether of ceramic, metal or wood, the steel knives, tin plates or silver utensils unearthed through excavation are like clues in a detective story that reveal sensory needs and predilections.

I thought of those earlier travellers when driving at high speed across the flat plains of western New South Wales one January, which is a journey through heat and light. The road is like a perspective exercise, vanishing into a point both in front of the vehicle and behind it, with the sky an immense bowl of white metal. The road trembles in the heat — a few smudges indicate other vehicles on the far horizon almost like boats on a mirage of oceanic space. The car’s air conditioning is not working: hot air and dust pour through the car into every crevice. Bodies sweat and stick to the car seats. Food is not of great interest, but water and cool drinks seem like the prime goal of the journey.

In the boot of the car are Styrofoam and plastic vessels for carrying water — a five litre container in a cone shape with a wide cap and a screw-on plastic cup. The outer Styrofoam casing is chipped and battered, a dirty white, but the
inner lining is smooth and clean. The shape of this water container has hardly changed since it first appeared in the early 1970s, carried then as it is now on rough vehicles all through the back country. I have observed in archaeology that humble functional forms such as the water vessel, the cooking pot or cup hardly change over centuries. The ancestor of the modern lightweight Styrofoam container is the unbreakable water bag, made from a kangaroo skin that was once carried by Aboriginal people across these plains. Each vessel developed from a separate historical trajectory, but the lightweight modern container echoed the ancient solution to carrying water for survival without the weight of the container contributing to the burden of travel.

When you are very thirsty, the taste of water is unimaginable, ineffable; a craving of a different order to that for food. The water in the dry western plains of New South Wales has its own taste, the almost brackish mineral quality of bore water is a last resort; much preferable is the slightly opaque water of the lower Murray River, where there is only a slight tang of salt. The problem of salt pervades the major rivers and wetlands of the Murray-Darling River Basin of New South Wales and Victoria, making stretches of country into desert pierced with the trunks of dead trees. A shimmering crust of white salt forms over lakes that have entirely evaporated, and because of the minerals in the earth these ovoid dry lakes are sometimes pink and crystalline, bordered by red samphire. Thirst and salt wrinkle the membranes of the mouth. The memory of being in that country is the memory of the sense of a bitter taste in the mouth.

I fill the Styrofoam container with ice and lemon juice, and it remains cool and drinkable throughout the journey. Also in the boot are: a billy for boiling tea; a basket with enamel mugs and a plate; and a few old knives, a salt canister, spoons and forks, much used and kept only for trips. Sometimes on such journeys there is meat to barbeque beside the road — chops and sausages — and a few potatoes to roast in the ashes. Matching this need for cooking meat and boiling water, roadside picnic stops provide fireplaces and often neatly stacked wood. Travelling along these remote routes seems to necessitate a reversion to the bush picnic foods of my childhood, that were always cooked by my father. As the sun sets, low raking rays catch and light up discarded drink bottles that line the road like a ritual trail of thirst, glittering votive offerings to the dangers of this country where so many have died of dryness.

The food carried in cars in the twenty-first century echoes patterns of travel set up in the first years of the British colony before agriculture and exploration had established reliable food resources. The search for water inland was the great task of exploration. Rations were supplied in the early difficult years — salt meat, flour, some oatmeal, a little sugar and tea, sometimes rice. Most of these substances were imported from other countries, kept dry and desiccated in tins and calico bags that were used to make new items in the material culture of settlement and ‘making do’. Utensils for eating were very scarce — George
Thomson, an early colonist observing convicts working in 1792 wrote: ‘They have neither bowl, plate, spoon or knife but what they make of the green wood of the country; only one small iron pot being allowed to dress their poor allowance of meat and rice’ (qtd in Walker & Roberts 7). Food was cooked on open fires, and because of its plainness it was seasoned with salt that seemed to have been always plentiful. Meat, flour, rice and sugar remained the profoundly familiar foodstuffs of country Australia, with a minimal use of fresh fruit and vegetables. The ritual around the drinking of liquid centred on tea, as much as on beer or spirits. Fire, meat, bread, salt and billy tea have an iconic status; they are the source of comfort and conviviality in a hostile environment. Such foods, particularly salt meat, are associated in European society with characteristics of strength, virility and aggression in a long military and colonial history. Classen’s contention that ‘The way a society senses is the way it understands’ (161) might explain the Europeans’ complete misunderstanding and bafflement at the ease of Aboriginal survival in what seemed to early explorers a starving desert. They literally could not see or taste the hidden roots of yam and waterlily bulb as proper sustenance.

The taste of tea for British colonists was as important to survival as the taste of water in the remote bush communities because of its resonance with tradition and gathering together, and its mild stimulus. Tea is the iconic substance, the focus of daily ritual. The cup of tea as a constant of settler life was mirrored in the rations given out to Aboriginal workers by missions and stations until as recently as 1970. Along with a tin billy, the stores included: Sunshine powdered milk in green and white tins; packets of Bushells or Billy tea; and big white packets or calico sacks of white sugar and flour. Christian missionaries followed the settlers throughout rural and remote Australia and set up small communities that attempted to ease the dispossession of the Aborigines through education into the mores of the dominant society. The interaction between the two cultures could become a conflict between widely diverse patterns of sensory behaviour.1 The colonial and military pattern of eating and sleeping was about the division of time into comprehensible units and about the ordering and sequence of provisions, and Christian missionaries’ structures of organisation mirrored this patterning and control of appetite.

In colonial times, people assumed that all food would be carried with the traveller, since it could not be reliably found along the way. The kinds of food carried reflected the colonist’s dependence on introduced European foods, while the roots, leaves and berries of the bush foods that sustained Aboriginal people who had intimate knowledge of the terrain were practically invisible to the stoic settlers who colonised and cut down the bush. The country was often seen as improvident and indifferent, despite the evidence of Aboriginal people living adequately in shimmering arid lands.

When Australia was at war in the Middle East in 1940–41, the same qualities were evoked by the rations given to troops, where it may be argued the fight against
enemy forces in the desert had resonances of the battle to colonise Australia. My father remembers being in the western desert in Libya, when fighting at Bardia and Tobruk, that the battle rations for the five-week campaign were individually supplied to each man. They consisted of bully beef and hard biscuits, with a tot of rum before going into action. He remembers the comfort of black sweet tea, boiled on a billy with any fuel that could be found. Each man carried a metal water bottle, a pannikin, a mug, a white enamel plate, knife, fork and spoon.

The spartan simplicity of this diet was miraculously changed for a few weeks, when Mussolini’s troops surrendered and the inspired commander of the Sixth Division, Sir Ivan McKay, allowed any Italian prisoners who were qualified to become cooks for the thousands of Australian troops. The Italians had what seemed like extraordinary food in their captured reserves — dehydrated vegetables and herbs of all kinds, with bottles of mineral water — and they transformed bully beef into ‘wonderful food’. ‘We lived like lords’. Such amicable relationships were established between the Australian soldiers and the Italian cooks that many of them emigrated to Australia after the war. This story surely foreshadows the great changes to Australian society, through the basic elements of food and the fundamental observances of eating and cooking across languages and cultures. Vegetables and herbs, could add to the savours of meat, prefiguring a more nuanced cuisine that might soften the harsh purities of the traditional military regime that underpinned a ‘masculine’ tradition that had curtailed the sensory experiences of taste.

Even in my own household, faint mimics of the campaign tactics of British soldiers and the rituals of colonial tea-making still survive. In the picnic basket near the esky and the plastic drink bottles sit the fire-blackened billy, the chipped enamel plate. As Nadia Seremetakis writes, historical experience and sensory memory are embedded in such persistent objects of everyday life, in the material artefacts that form the shape of a particular culture and time. ‘The artefact is the bearer of sensory multiplicity … a catchment zone of perceptions, a lens through which the senses can be explored from their other side’ (11).

I experienced an unfamiliar sensory world that stretched my perceptions while working as an arts co-ordinator in an Aboriginal (Tiwi) settlement called Nguiu on Bathurst Island north of Darwin in the Northern Territory. Nguiu had been chosen by Bishop Gsell in 1911 as the site of the Sacred Heart Mission. I went with the flatbed truck that took thirty women and children from the mission settlement out to a wild beach called Kilimiraka, forty kilometres away to stay for a week or so of ‘bush holidays’. After depositing everyone in the sand dunes the truck then departed back to the mission.

Going camping changed all my confident assumptions about the ordering of daily hours, the regular provision of food and norms of sleep. The sense of taste was transformed by another knowledge of food, into a kind of stratigraphy or layering of flavours, textures and colours derived from the living bush.
difficult tracts of coastal bush and dunes on western Bathurst Island became an unfamiliar sensory landscape, endowing a fresh patina, a different vocabulary of taste in the search for food and the performance around eating. No one had much luggage — a few blankets, some tea, flour and sugar. That night I sat with Milly and her daughter Rose looking out over a wide beach full of moonlight, campfires lighting up figures wrapped in blankets on the sand or sitting up talking quietly, while children whirled and sang. Ruth, with all her nine children, told me this was her country, here. Her family in the War (World War II) used to walk from the Mission along the beaches in one night, she said, carrying sacks of flour, tea and sugar. The Air Force people at Cape Fourcroy gave them many provisions, but at first they had been too nervous to approach the white people and had hidden themselves in the mangroves.

The main provisions had to be found in the bush, so hunting took up most of the next day. I set out with Milly, walking quietly and slowly in the crackling palm tree undergrowth, tall trees overhead. She carried very little, a long stick for digging and hitting. Any food collected would be wrapped in her skirt. She intently looked for tracks and traces, staring at the crowns of trees to catch the glint of a bee’s wing as it went to its nest full of honey. (This honey, or ‘sugarbag’, is packed in red wax, and tastes ambrosial, a mixture of honey and lemon.) Her feet had never worn shoes and they embodied a sensitivity and muscular fineness that enabled her to gain knowledge from the tactile qualities of the ground. She could tell from footprints on the track which group had passed by, how they were feeling, and what they were carrying. At every fallen log she would kneel down and shine the lid of a milk tin into the hollow, to search for snake or possum, and then walk on. Margaret Mary and Ruth joined us, cutting palm leaves to eat, mainly the soft top part where young leaves branch out. ‘It’s good medicine too’. It tasted astringent, sharp like the smell of the bush, with the texture of fresh cabbage heart. Milly said there seemed to be nothing much around, so we went into a patch of ‘jungle’, of rainforest where ‘pumpkins’ or yams grow, but the ground was too hard to dig.

Then suddenly there was a big hulloo from the other women — they had found a fallen tree with sugarbag and a snake. I saw the coils of the big coppery snake through a hole in the hollow log, but it was very difficult getting it out. They took turns with a big stick picked up from the ground. ‘Poor thing, look at that great scaly head,’ said Milly, ‘poor snake, look, she’s cryin for her husband, opening her mouth like that’.

That night the snake, a python more than a metre long, was cooked in the hot ashes of the fire and tasted delicious, like fish soaked in honey. Tea was made by boiling together in a large billy of water half a packet of tea, about three cups of sugar, and half a tin of Sunshine milk powder, and was very sustaining. We sat round holding enamel and plastic cups as dark came and a group of little girls all told me stories at once, about mopaditi spirits and ghosts, about stars and the strange crucifixion that the nuns had mentioned.
Pauline, a senior woman, was yawning while everyone was talking about the turtles that often came to this beach to lay eggs. People were already in their blankets when suddenly a small group of women decided to walk along the moonlit beach and see if there were turtles arriving with the incoming tide. Pauline said, ‘the old people say when you yawn at night the turtles are coming in’. It was enchanting walking in that cool glimmer under the dome of night by the sea. Then, we could see there were fresh tracks and a great mound of sand full of eggs. The women realised all in a moment that there was only one track, and no second track returning to the sea. There she was, in the loose sand a bit further up the dune, a huge circular beast, a mysterious creature hidden in a dip of the ground, just discernible in the moonlight digging slowly with deliberate clumsy movements of her flippers, her hooded watery eyes fixed ahead. The women were delighted and amazed at their luck. I walked back to get the others, by myself. When the rest of the camp heard about the turtle there were screams of excitement, everyone surging up the beach with no thought of knife, rope, or torch. The turtle resisted strongly — and the only knife sharp enough to quickly slit her throat happened to be the old kitchen knife I had brought. In the end the animal was dragged on its back by the women, up to the beach camp. A great fire was built the next morning under the shady trees that lined the beach, and the turtle was slowly cooked in its shell, feeding everyone for several days. Her unlaid eggs were soft and leathery, a great delicacy even though their texture had an intestinal slipperiness.

I made notes of what was eaten over four days at Kilimiraka, a mixture of mission stores and bush tucker.

Saturday: mussels and some wallaby brought by people returning from Cape Fourcroy further to the west.

Sunday: porridge from oatmeal, tea, carpet snake and a bit of sugarbag. Pauline and Anna also got carpet snake (illininga) and two possums. Snake got cooked mid-afternoon, everyone ate, also possum. Damper for snack at midday, also before bed, with more snake. Hunted for yams about 3pm, found red nuts with Millie and some more sugarbag. Ruth got another possum. Then turtle in the night.

Monday: Cooked turtle all morning, big feast about midday. Then hunting about 3, because people felt sick with too much turtle fat — sugarbag cured this. They didn’t find any snakes as it was ‘too late’, but got a lot of sugarbag in old bloodwood tree. Margaret Mary and Mel got bandicoot, and Millie cut palms (mipara). At night there was damper and roasted palm, which the children liked a lot. All said they felt better after a big feed of sugarbag when they got back from hunting.

Tuesday: Millie opened a tin of stew and veg, and ate it with damper. Off to hunt about 9.30 am, found carpet snake, sugarbag and possum in the big ironwood tree as well as a beautiful bright snake in a difficult log. Millie got pandanus nuts and chopped them open to eat on the spot. Margaret Mary cut more palm. Pauline tried for yams, but said the wallabies had got there first. Ruth and Miranda walked to Moantu for yams, all day, and got some possums
too. Lunch was about 3, more carpet snake and possum, sugarbag at tea time. Millie made damper at night, although flour was running short. Ruth’s mob finished up the turtle as they were short of all tucker — the women who found the turtle only had a ‘little bit’, they said, rather grumpily. The 50 odd turtle eggs were boiled and eaten as snacks by whoever felt like it.

What struck me about being with the Tiwi women was their calm assurance in the certain existence of food, the lack of concern about how far the few tins of meat and packets of flour would stretch to feed so many. They knew that if they walked a few miles back along the coast they could get to the mangroves, to find crabs, mussels and mangrove worms. Mipara palms and pandanus would always provide vegetable food. The country would look after them if they observed custom. Mealtimes depended on what was available. I was often told ‘You can only hunt properly if you are properly hungry’. Sometimes I would wake at two in the morning to sounds of quiet laughter and see two older women, suddenly peckish, cooking possum steaks on a fire by the sea, causing a smell of roasting meat and ash to drift over the camp. The country was experienced through the soles of the feet and through the tastebuds, through the physically tiring search for animals and plants. The food is the country itself, eaten and consumed with knowledge and affection, sustaining the sense of self as well as the physique.

Thinking about living in the wild with a sensitivity to the interplay of taste and touch brought me to consider the influential journals of Henry David Thoreau in nineteenth-century America. Thoreau stepped aside from the normal patterns of society to live off the land at Walden. ‘Walden, or Life in the Woods’ was first published in America in 1893. According to Victor Carl Friesen who has reassessed this classic text for its sensory acuity, Thoreau became ‘inspired through his palate’, constantly ‘nibbling from plants’, experiencing the ‘wild and primitive fragrance of the Dicksonia fern’ or the ‘froth from pitch pines’ so that he discovered an ‘edible religion’, where eating became an ‘ecstatic experience’ and drinking water was a ‘tonic of wildness’. In a sparsely populated stretch of woods he explored even the ‘commonly gross’ sense of taste. His experience, unlike the grounded pragmatism and kinship of the Tiwi hunters and gatherers, was a lonely, even a stoic one similar to the masculine isolation of Australian explorers and settlers (Thoreau 1906, qtd in Friesen 253, 259–60). But because of an entirely different geography, his sensory evocation of the stretch of woods evokes a distinct vocabulary of taste embedded in a particular place and time.

To conclude, the choice of food in moving across country in Australia shows how the sense of taste relates to a sensory model of home and imbued custom in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Eating the dry, hard rations of military survival or colonial settlement, rations that were manufactured at a distant base, was to consume and imbibe histories of conquest and journeying, strengthening the resolve to uphold particular structures of power. ‘By imbuing sensory values with social values, cultures attempt to ensure that their members will perceive the world aright’ explains Constance Classen. Aboriginal traditions are just as clear
about the centrality of bush food in understanding a web of cultural practices. Despite the fact that most remote communities are now, in 2007, only nomadic for brief seasons, the sensory patterns of generations are as deeply engrained, and as emotional as the customs of European settlers. To stand in the country is to taste and feel it, to absorb it through a multitude of sensations into the self. Classen’s persuasive insight is that the standard western model of the senses is unable to comprehend the sensory diversity of non-Western societies as forming a whole cosmology of perception (Classen 162). My experiences suggest that exploring the geography of taste and feeling is a vital, eminently ‘sensible’ risk for artists and writers in discovering unimagined landscapes in what we thought we understood.

NOTES
1 The history of missionaries in Australia is documented in John Harris, One Blood; 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope.
2 Each Australian company of about 100 men received a cook from the 150,000 Italian prisoners-of-war.

WORKS CITED
Harris, John 1994, One Blood; 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope, Albatross Books, Sutherland, Australia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Thanks to my father Dr DRV Wood, for his reminiscences of being a gunner in the Australian Second Fifth Field Regiment, 1939–1945.
Desert Seed Damper

1. Collect half a jam tin of wild grass seeds. The panicum species, known as wakati is considered by the Pitjantjatjara people to be especially delicious.
2. Winnow the seeds in a wooden dish or coolamon, by tipping or tossing seeds into the air so that the wind blows away the husks.
3. Grind the seed with a small stone on a larger flat grinding stone, gradually adding water to form a slushy paste.
4. Make a fire until the ground is hot. Move aside the large coals and burn fine mulga twigs to make a powdery white ash.
5. Place the paste of seeds on the ash, and place more twigs on top of the loaf and burn to a fine ash. The whole loaf is covered with hot coals and left to cook for half an hour.

Half a jam tin of seeds makes a small loaf about 2 cm high by 11 cm in diameter. It tastes like a dark rye bread, and is extremely nutritious.

This recipe was collected by Winifred Hilliard who lived at Ernabella, Northern Territory in the mid twentieth century. See Jennifer Isaacs, Bush Food: Aboriginal Food and Herbal Medicine, pp. 116–17. (Diana Wood Conroy was research assistant and photographer for the book.)
To keep a place alive in your heart, it must dwell in your mouth. Heart-Mouth. Mouth-Heart. This is how you remember or want to remember. The first plum shared with Nancy of the plum garden next door. It was heady sweet. You were both twelve, but she was taller. You were blissfully worried that she might kiss you, because you had plum skin stuck at the roof of your mouth. But you grew up and plums never tasted the same again. Then there was the last barbecue before your father left for Vietnam. You had the only burnt sausage in the pile. You wanted to blame him. Later, all talk of war always left a burnt taste on your tongue.

Your mother used to bake a cake to make things better. These days, you still dip your finger into the batter, anyone’s batter, and lick it furtively. Like testing hope, or maybe love.

Heart in the mouth, mouth in the heart. Maybe each dwells in the other. Maybe each is a dwelling, as memory is a dwelling but without enclosures. It is vulnerable. You remember Judith, the Filipina who once brought rice-cake for office morning tea. Back in the old home, her mother used to make it just like this: ‘Ay, so sticky like you won’t believe it and with her secret caramel’. She poured the hot syrup over the cake and, in a gesture that was like a blessing, coaxed the aroma with her hand towards her nose, then yours. ‘Caramel scent … mother scent,’ she sighed and could not meet your eyes.

Imagine your child imagining. It draws a chalk circle around it, feels contained. No villains will dare cross to its side. This is faith, if there can be faith in a paradox. This home is enclosed but free. It is drawn on grass, which will grow over it. It does not disturb the air, which still flows through it. The animals can walk through it and nibble the
grass. ‘Because they have to eat too,’ your child says while making mud patties.

It is an unusual circle. This containment is not fearful. It is a wise circle. It
knows fear is the most terrifying enclosure. It leaves us joyless, impoverished.

If only the body could take on this unusual wisdom or faith: this body is open
and enclosed. It belongs to itself. It is always home. The dwelling dwells in us.
Otherwise we will be forever lost.

Watch how your tired child says, ‘I want to go home, mummy’, with thumb
pointing to her chest. Perhaps this is not a gesture of identification, of asserting
the ‘I’. Perhaps this is our innate comprehension of the true homecoming: home
is in me. Did the ancient peoples know this all along? Did they go walkabout and
carry home within? Did they think of the sky as an infinite roof? When did we
start building the earthly firmament, the enclosing armament?

TO CARRY: TO BUILD

A body carrying another becomes a new body. Entwined, bodies become a
new structure. It could be home. It could be home-like. It could be joyful.

It never ceases to astonish you — the sudden arms around you, the sudden
lift within. The grip, the heat, the beat. Skin, breath, heart together as if it were a
last chance. Like departures. Nancy moving to Perth, abandoning the plums, the
plums abandoning their sweetness. Or Dad mucking up the barbecue. You felt his
heart for the last time. Last chances are enduring. The last wedge of light before
we shut the door. It remains in the eye long after we have turned away.

Now you hold your own child tightly sometimes. You refuse to let any light pass
between your bodies. Again it astonishes you. But she wriggles out of your love,
distracted by Barbie on TV. Her mother rolls her eyes. You enclose yourself in the
evening news. Feels more like home. There’s Iraq, Bali, the stocks plummeting,
and you wonder what’s the ratio between construction and destruction. How much
do we build, how much do we break?

The smell of garlic takes over. Stir-fried noodles tonight. You’re not partial to
garlic, but they say it’s good for the heart. You are careful about your body. You
know about building it. You wish to know more about bodies building into each
other. You wish to understand connection, reverence or simply survival: if all
bodies dwell in each other, no body will be allowed to break.

IF A PLACE

‘If there are trampolines among the trees — ’
‘I can see their tops.’

‘If there are lollies on their tops — ’
‘I can jump to sweetness.’

You play the ‘if’ game and find your child is a master of seeing. You are
jealous of her sheep wearing a tutu in the sky. Especially of her trampolines
among the trees, and where the vegetation is thickest, her slides that go ‘all the
way down to the roots, daddy!’ Where are they? When did you put on this blindfold? When did you keep losing your way home?

You cannot return to that first time, when the plum broke between your teeth so close to Nancy’s. You can only eat your mother’s cake ‘for making better’, grateful for the little reliefs. Oh for the constancy of love, its ordinariness when things grow too estranged. You wish for strangeness, though: your own sheep in the sky, if you can’t have the old plum sweetness back. ‘Wish’ is another word for discontent.

Your child holds your hand among the trees. ‘There’s a snake grinning on this tree, look!’ You agree. You dare not betray the trick of light, or the wish for the trick of light.

PASSING LIGHT

Light softens edges. Light makes people kind, if not beautiful. For a moment it dwells in a body: filling the concave of a cheek, smoothing furrows, making lips shimmer with intent.

The green light for ‘go’. It does funny things to the air. Suddenly a rain of green dust or green fireflies. After a drought, you can believe it’s raining chlorophyll. Your child asks what chlorophyll tastes like. ‘Uhmm … fresh, I guess.’ She eats a leaf to prove you right.

But there are other lights. They hurt the eyes. That last wedge before the door closed. That burning plane in Hanoi. That napalm. Things go off focus. When your doctor advises glasses, you almost laugh. You want to ask about the different ways of carrying bodies from the light. Or the ratio between building and breaking. How tightly bound are they? How much light can pass between them, if you so allow?

He shines his pen light into your eyes. You see the sun rising from his nose. It is a shock, this recognition. When the light dwells in you, you see more. You really see. Some think of it as affliction, others call it grace.

*Illustrations by Ana Marginson.
Ana’s Bruschetta*
(serves one)

INGREDIENTS
fresh tomatoes
garlic
feta cheese
flat leaf parsley
any bread (best being white bread)
olive Oil
butter

METHOD
1. Put the slice of bread into the toaster. While waiting, cut the fresh tomatoes and parsley into small pieces. For extra flavour, add small amounts of red onion.
2. Put all of these into a bowl and put approximately ½ teaspoon of oil into the bowl and mix well until contents are shiny.
3. When the bread is ready, take it out carefully and butter it. When the butter has melted, rub garlic into the bread.
4. Spread the tomato and parsley onto the bread until it’s all finished. Now put a small amount of feta cheese on it.

NOW……EAT!!!

*Recipe by Ana Marginson.
DOROTHY JONES

‘A Language We All Speak’: Food in Marion Halligan’s Writing

Food can be grown in gardens, which may also offer a pleasant setting to eat in, and Marion Halligan frequently writes about both together. It is usually the domestic, suburban garden — a relatively confined space given over to flowers and trees — that appears in her fiction, sometimes symbolising life in the household it surrounds. Halligan also draws on a wealth of Western literary and pictorial tradition, loaded with biblical associations, portraying the hortus conclusus, or enclosed garden, as an idyllic place all too easily corrupted. Food is another important theme in Halligan’s writing, ‘a language we all speak’ because everyone consumes it, and she has devoted two personal memoirs to the subject, Eat My Words (1990) and The Taste of Memory (2004). Although she describes the latter as ‘another set of stories of my life in food, and travel, and especially gardens, these nourishing spaces that we like to surround ourselves with’ (2004 10), it is also an elegiac tribute to her husband, Graham, and celebrates their thirty-five year marriage. There are close connections between this memoir and Halligan’s two preceding novels, The Fog Garden (2001) and The Point (2003). Halligan began writing The Point when her husband fell ill, ‘but another book [The Fog Garden] sprang out of the intense emotions prompted by his death’ (Wyndham 13). Bereavement is a central issue in these novels as well as in The Taste of Memory and all three books explore the relationship between food and gardens. While gardens are “nourishing spaces”, they can also be sites of loss, subject to extremes of weather and depredation by birds, insects and animals. In this they can echo human and personal experiences of loss, yet, although growth is subject to decay, they also offer the prospect of renewal through new growth.

The Old Testament locates human origins in a garden, which simultaneously represents paradise and its loss through eating the Forbidden Fruit. In Christian tradition, enclosed gardens are also double-sided images invoking both chastity and sexual wantonness. Because Eve’s seductiveness was held responsible for
humankind’s exile from Eden, paradise gardens could be the abode of secular love where a man and woman take their secret pleasure, or where worshippers of Venus indulge as a group in refined debauchery (Hughes 51). Yet the walled garden can also symbolise the Virgin Mary, that second Eve who helped repair the transgression of the first (Stewart 38). So, in the paradise gardens of medieval and renaissance art and literature, food can signify Holy Communion or, in a secular context, the indulgence of profane appetites. Gardens producing food of their own accord have long symbolised a perfect existence, as in the Golden Age of Classical mythology, or the biblical Garden of Eden, so losing such perfection means that hunger constantly threatens and cultivating food now requires hard work. Halligan’s ideal garden of the mind is primarily food-producing - full of fruit trees and vegetables.

In deep fertile beds edged with box grow the vegetables of the season, salads, tomatoes, aubergines, peppers the brassicas, peas, broad beans to pick while still babies. How they flourish, for my mind is a good gardener. (2004 169)

She assures us, however, that even if her imagined garden resembles Eden,

... it is essentially a post-lapsarian garden, a garden made full in the knowledge of good and evil, that values abundance because it has known famine, whose walls acknowledge the fragility of its microclimate, whose tilth has learned that food depends on work. (2004 169)

While Halligan’s gardens are often, like the medieval hortus conclusus, defined by an encompassing fence or wall, appearing on first sight to be safe places where hardship and evil are banished, she keeps reminding us that safety can never be relied on. Evil can spring up within the garden’s confines and walls that provide shelter from outside peril can just as easily imprison those inside.

Garden images pervade The Point and The Fog Garden, with the theme of paradise lost central to both: the former focuses upon society, with its exercise and abuse of power, whereas the latter concentrates upon personal loss and disruption within the immediate family. The Point is both an imagined promontory projecting into Lake Burley Griffin and an equally imaginary restaurant located there, strategically positioned in relation to some of the nation’s main sites of power, privilege and culture.

If you stand outside the restaurant and look to the right, you will see the National Library. To the left is the High Court and the National Gallery. Grandiose buildings all. Directly above the Point, on a small hill, is the Parliament House. It is lit like a performance on a stage. (2)

In this novel, set in Canberra, the garden city — ‘a place where fences are illegal’ (2003 124) — restaurant and garden are conflated. The Point is elegantly beautiful, highly exclusive and very expensive with ‘amazing floral arrangements’ in various corners of the room. Flora, the chef and restaurateur, is regularly addressed by one patron as ‘ma fleur, ma belle fleurissante ... florissima’ (2003
and in earlier days when she worked in publishing, she helped bring out a book on gardens. She also commissions a willow sculpture — ‘living, leafing wands of willow’ (2003 99) — to be planted and established outside the building. Although outsiders may consider it a paradise, the restaurant is thoroughly secular. Lit up at night, it is a microcosm of Parliament House on the hill behind, with a clientele comprising society’s leaders — politicians, wealthy business and professional people, and the wheeler-dealers so essential to their activities. ‘The restaurant is a mirror. It is a glass darkly. It is an octagon. From outside it looks like a lantern. Which lights itself, but how far beyond its own space does it illuminate?’ (2003 1).

Jerome, a former Franciscan monk who now heads a select but very successful computer consultancy and who narrates part of the novel, sees The Point as an image of the World he left the monastery to embrace: a place that hangs over a narrow promontory of land like a lantern against the dark sky and the dark lake, and promises. How it promises’ (2003 47).

The restaurant also signifies exclusion. ‘Outside are the dispossessed. The dispossessed see themselves, and the others, the insiders. The others see only themselves’ (2003 2). This insider/outsider theme is explored principally through two pairs of characters. Jerome and Flora, who become lovers in the course of the book, are contrasted with two homeless people, the middle-aged ex-lawyer Clovis and a young girl, Gwyneth, who form a precarious alliance, haunting the area round the restaurant because of the still-edible food they find among its garbage and because the warm air vents outside the library and art gallery offer comfort on cold Canberra nights. Both are cut off from their families; Gwyneth because of a violent stepfather and uncaring mother; Clovis through the social scandal he caused by embezzling his trust fund — ‘you understand, don’t you Dad, it’s better if they don’t see you, if we all don’t really’ (2003 62). Living on the small stipend assigned by his family, Clovis chooses homelessness, but Gwyneth, who is dependent on methadone, has no choice.

Eventually the two couples eat together in the restaurant, a circumstance that comes about through Flora’s invitation to thank Clovis for rescuing Jerome from a near drowning in the lake by a group of teenage thugs who earlier tried to batter down the newly planted willow sculpture. The meal is a socially awkward, mildly comic episode. While the novel emphasises the artistry and exquisiteness of Flora’s cuisine, from a reader’s perspective her meals are not very inviting, though incompatibility between food and language is partly responsible for this. As Flora acknowledges, ‘My food is a work of art. But I am failing to put it into words’ (2003 104). Halligan deliberately sets out, however, to make her food seem obsessive and unappealing:

The food she cooks is amazing, rare, erudite, serious. Not much fun. Her picnic is almost bizarrely austere; parmesan cheese, bread, olive oil and pears. All perfect of course. With superb wine, on and in and with handsome plates, glasses, napkins.

(2003 97)
Throughout the novel, food, particularly that served in the restaurant, is associated with desire. Flora promises, ‘I shall make a meal that will be their heart’s desire’ (2003 195). There is, however, a fine line between desire and greed. When he looks at The Point, Clovis sees ‘The promise. The rituals. The exquisiteness of desire’, but then reflects, ‘Or else just something that people with quite a lot of money can afford to do’ (2003 129). Emily Dickinson explores the paradox of the outsider who loses all appetite when going inside to dine:

I had been hungry, all the Years —  
My Noon had Come — to dine —  
I trembling drew the Table near —  
And touched the Curious Wine —

The unaccustomed plenty hurts and nauseates her.

Nor was I hungry — so I found  
That Hunger — was a way  
Of Persons outside Windows —  
The Entering — takes away — (238)

This is similar to Gwyneth’s experience. Despite enjoying the food, she feels intimidated and thoroughly ill at ease, eventually vomiting up her meal. When Clovis asks how it feels to be on the inside looking out, she responds: ‘Well, it’s not my inside, is it. This is just a visit. Pretend. It’s not me’ (2003 197). Next day she tells Clovis that the restaurant leftovers rescued from the garbage taste better than the food eaten inside. He insists she is mistaken, but acknowledges a meal’s enjoyment depends on the context in which it is eaten: ‘Food isn’t just its taste, he says. It’s who you eat it with, and where. It’s in the Bible. Better a dinner of herbs where love is …’ (2003 206).

By the novel’s end, the two outsiders’ fortunes have been restored to some extent, whereas Flora’s and Jerome’s are shattered. In the end Jerome recognises they were both afflicted by hubris, ‘I suppose we overweened. Is there such a verb? Flora and I, and our desires to do and to know. But at what point does ambition become hubris?’ (2003 334). Flora seeks to go beyond nature in a search for the absolute:

That’s where her culinary art, her endeavour, took her. It’s a matter of simplifying to the point of perfection. And simplifying by doing, over and over again, until that point is reached. (2003 183)

Late at night in the restaurant, Flora plans a dinner for the Slow Food Society, deciding one dish will contain roasted Bogong moths which Aboriginal people in the area feasted on for centuries. The flat river stone she chooses as a base for cooking the ground-up moths explodes when heated on the gas burner, and the subsequent fire consumes both Flora and her restaurant, while almost killing Gwyneth as she sleeps huddled against the wall outside. The past can never be revisited, and Flora’s attempt to reach back to an almost impossible origin — a
kind of prelapsarian innocence — ends in destruction. Jerome’s ambition is to achieve, through his computer skills, ‘a complete program for all knowledge’ (2003 183), but in the end his business is ruined by treachery. A programmer in his employ has loaded massive amounts of child pornography into the system, triggering a police investigation.

My innocence was finally established, maybe not entirely believed but at least agreed to. But my business was gone. A service such as mine which depends on trust cannot survive months in court. (2003 330)

Flora’s death, even more than social disgrace and the loss of his business, means Jerome is now painfully conscious of living in a fallen world:

The desire to know: the last great Faustian temptation. Age old, age old. The oldest. Eve in the garden succumbed to it. The fruit the serpent offered her was the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. An apple, we call it. It did not occur to me at the time that the means of my temptation was called an Apple too, the very name, for god’s sake, the device which offers us knowledge. Maybe the temptation is the belief that it can be done. (2003 258)

Now he must acknowledge his own expulsion from the garden (TP, 259).

Humanity’s lost innocence is emphasised through constant reference to abused, corrupt and corrupted children. A regular patron of the restaurant, whose firm organises questionable Asian tours for Australian paedophiles, directs the sabotage of Jerome’s business as payback for his refusal to accept him as a client. A sinister group of youths — all from privileged backgrounds — keeps reappearing throughout the narrative, guilty of both murder and attempted murder, as well as gang rape. ‘They’re very okay. They’re fucking nice kids. All the right gear, you know, the Nikes, the Calvin Kleins, all the stuff with proper names you have to have. They go to college’ (2003 146). Even when the boys are taken into custody, one of their fathers, a lawyer, succeeds in having the charges dismissed. When Clovis asks who is to blame here, Gwyneth replies: ‘Maybe it is the way they are. Maybe they have cruel hearts’ (2003 147). Dead children also abound in The Point. Flora’s driven, obsessive personality and her inability to trust in lasting relationships result from having lost a baby boy to cot death. Jerome’s ex-wife aborted their child and Gwyneth, raped by her stepfather, has also been forced to terminate a pregnancy. Oscar, son to Laurel, the restaurant manager, dies of a heroin overdose on his twenty-first birthday. When Jerome tries to persuade Flora they should have a child, she responds: ‘Children die when they are small and beautiful and you love them. Or they grow up and turn into monsters … Or they get killed in car accidents. Or they take drugs and die of heroin overdoses. Or run away from home and live on the streets’ (2003 243).

According to Judaeo-Christian tradition, Adam and Eve’s sin both banished innocence and introduced death into the world — that brutal reality all human beings must come to terms with. The restaurant in The Point, although a monument to art, because of its cuisine and beautiful architecture, is ultimately a sterile
place, though sterility and destruction are offset to some extent by Gwyneth’s and Clovis’s clumsy attempts to create a willow sculpture of their own and by Clovis’s decision at the end of the novel that he will study to become a professional willow sculptor. As Halligan points out in *The Taste of Memory*, gardens in a fallen world may still be havens of a kind, but they have ceased to be truly safe. In both this book and *The Fog Garden* they are equated not with the social sphere of privilege and power like the restaurant in *The Point*, but with lives of individual families. The model here becomes Halligan’s own suburban Canberra garden:

The lawn is small, most of the garden is planted with shrubs and perennials and odd flowers. I can sit on this seat and imagine nooks and corners and wandering paths. It isn’t a formal garden, no box hedges — I read they were originally meant for spreading washing on to dry. No mazes or labyrinths either, to remind of the circuitous courses of sinful man. This is the garden as paradise, suburban incarnation. (2004 157)

Throughout her memoir, the garden, begun when she and Graham first moved into their house, serves as an image of their marriage. ‘We did some spectacular things, a less optimistic person than me might say, made some spectacular mistakes …’ (2004 161). Evil lurks even here, however.

A paradise-garden, a Garden of Eden … in fact, mostly our gardens are fallen gardens, there is a serpent in them. Mine was illness, the cancer that destroyed the image of perfect safety. I did think that Graham and I would go on for much longer, nurturing our garden, making meals, opening bottles of wine, cosseting the house. We knew that you are never safe, really, finally, but thought it would be all right for a while. (2004 164)

Bereavement, widowhood and shattered family life are central to *The Fog Garden* whose principal character, Clare, is, like her author, a novelist. Halligan comments on the resemblance:

Clare isn’t me. She’s like me. Some of her experiences, adventures, terrors, have been mine. Some haven’t. We have the same profession. Both of us have had to come to terms with being widowed, and sometimes we have made similar choices. Not always. (2001 9)

Although in the novel, she plays with the resemblance between herself and Clare, even attributing to Clare’s authorship fiction she has herself created, Halligan publicly disavows too close a connection, especially since Clare’s immediate response to bereavement is a strong surge of erotic yearning, resulting in an intense, though short-lived adulterous liaison.¹ Much of *The Fog Garden* explores how profound grief interconnects with powerful sexual desire, and throughout their affair both Clare and her lover reflect on their respective marriages. The initial image for grief in the novel — presented ambiguously so it seems to apply both to Clare and to Halligan herself — is of a great cathedral:

My cathedral is a truly Gothic edifice, in that it is going to be a long time in the building. I am still constructing it. Not all the parts match, but they never do, that is part of a cathedral’s richness. (2001 8)
Gradually, however, gardens also come to be associated first with bereavement, then with memory and joy.

After their affair has ended, Clare and her lover lunch together on the deck of a Canberra restaurant set in a garden containing a fog sculpture and watch ‘its white vapour eddy and billow and rise in rags of mist among the reeds and through the casuarinas’. Although beautiful, the mist is also an image of transience and grief as its droplets settle on Clare’s hair, ‘not spangling it because her head isn’t in the sunlight, it seems to be laying a grayish veil over it’ (2001 79). There is a further association between gardens and grief when Clare and her friend Polly puzzle over the line ‘Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar’ to discover later that it comes from an Edwardian ballad by Lawrence Hope. The Shalimar is a Mughal garden in Kashmir with ‘Lots of fountains that fling drops of water in the air, so you walk around in a rainbow mist’ (2001 161) and the lyric expresses intense longing for a lost love. As the two women discuss the poem, pondering its narrative possibilities, one points out that the word paradise comes from the Greek paradeisos meaning ‘garden’:

Really? So that’s what you and I are doing, grubbing about in our back yards; we’re making paradises. I did know that Muslims imagine paradise, as in the afterlife, as a garden. And that’s what these Mughal gardens are about, creating it on earth. A sort of preview of the next life’s attractions. (2001 163)

In a situation that links this novel to The Point, Clare knows she may have to face another bereavement — the possible death of a child whose ‘textbook heart should have failed at birth’ (2001 123). Her now adult daughter undergoes yet one more in a series of long and dangerous operations which, against all expectations, she survives. The doctor comments, ‘Well, you nearly went away and left us, but at the last minute you changed your mind and came back’ (2001 123). This recovery is set against, and to some extent softens, the harsh reality of her husband Geoffrey’s death, though Clare knows the threat of mortality will continue to hover over her family.

As the novel progresses, gardens and communally eaten food, frequently in combination, become positive images to offset the bitter pain of grief and loss. Even during her husband’s illness, Clare plans and tends her garden, deciding to put in a quince tree, ‘so she can make quince paste, Cotignac, carnelian-coloured’ (2001 176), and buys a number of roses to plant, including one called Love Potion.

Love Potion flowered and she picked single blooms and put them in a tiny glass vase beside Geoffrey’s bed. Now she puts them beside a picture of him. Of both of them, eating what looks disturbingly like ice-cream sundaes in a nightclub in Katoomba.

(2001 179)

As an assertion about the future, she consults with Geoffrey during his illness about what they should plant.
She told herself she was getting the garden in order for Geoffrey to enjoy, and so she was, but she was also bending it to her will. Geoffrey’s life and health were also the subject of her fierce willing, but she knew she would lose this battle. With the garden she might win. (2001 215)

Just as the garden is embedded in memories of Clare’s shared life with her husband, so too is food. One immediate consequence of his death is a loss of appetite which leaves her considerably slimmer. Food no longer tempts as it once did because the shared meals of marriage are no longer part of her life: ‘Meals were rituals, sometimes simple, sometimes complicated, but always having a meaning. They were of being married, and now she isn’t any more’ (2001 195).

Nevertheless, food still remains important and the garden becomes the site of Geoffrey’s wake where great quantities of wine are consumed — ‘they had to send a nursing mother out for more, and then later still for pizzas to feed people, late in the evening. The nursing mother being the one sober enough to drive’ (2001 223). Eating together becomes an act of communion where family and friends celebrate Geoffrey’s life in his house and garden and the nursing mother serves as an image of hope and renewal. Although such images console, they can only partially assuage a grief which must be continually endured.

Characters in The Point and The Fog Garden yearn for safety, a longing most readers share. Illusions of safety frequently cluster around food, a source of comfort both in fiction and in real life, and, in The Taste of Memory, Halligan indicates how even some of the books written about it can create magical spaces, not unlike a paradise garden, where error and misfortune are temporarily excluded:

Of course the nice thing about food books is they don’t need fear, or threat, the worst that may happen is a soufflé falling, and if you read my words carefully I will save you from this fate. So maybe we like this kind of reading simply because it is never not safe, never offers even a distant frisson of terror. The risotto is always suitably runny and creamy and soft, all at once, the soup is never too salty, the beef is always tender, the Death by Chocolate will never fatten us or clog our arteries, we only flirt with the notion that it will kill us. (2004 260)

Although Halligan revels in the power of language to create and recreate the material world, of which food and gardens form part, she continually reminds her readers that we live in a fallen world where every garden, no matter how fair and flourishing, contains its serpent. No one is immune to temptation and she understands how most people relish a taste of the forbidden fruit. Safety, whether represented by that refined enclave of power and money, the elegant, expensive restaurant in The Point, or a loving, domestic space, as in The Fog Garden, is constantly undermined through human folly and evil, and ultimately by the inevitable presence of death. Nevertheless, she would argue, it is possible to receive consolation from material pleasures whilst recognising their transience and their limitations. People can still rejoice in the pleasures of food, particularly its power to unite them with those they love. Most of her writing about food, whether in fiction or memoir, endorses the biblical passage Clovis quotes from in
Marion Halligan’s kitchen
The Point: ‘Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith’ (Proverbs 15.17).

NOTES

WORKS CITED
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Apple Shortcake

This was my mother’s recipe and I have called it Apple Shortcake because apples are relatively easy to come by in so many parts of the world. Other kinds of fruit can, however, be used as filling. My preference is for gooseberries. These grew abundantly in our south island New Zealand garden, along with red, black and white currants, all of which need a fairly cold climate. One of my summer childhood memories is cleaning currants and topping and tailing gooseberries for the annual jam making. Gooseberries are lovely for eating when ripe, but for cooking they must be picked while still green. They are a fruit I really miss now that I live in the warmth of coastal New South Wales.

**INGREDIENTS**

- 4 ozs butter
- 4 ozs sugar
- 1 egg
- 6 – 8 ozs self raising flour
- 1 large cooking apple

**METHOD**

1. Cream butter and sugar.
2. Add beaten egg and mix well.
3. Add flour. (I usually start by adding 6 ozs and then add more as needed to form a soft paste.) The pastry is very soft and can be placed in the fridge for an hour to make it easier to handle.
4. Roll out half the pastry on a piece of baking paper placed on an oven tray and add a layer of sliced apple.
5. Roll out remaining pastry into a piece big enough to cover the fruit layer, pinching together the edges of top and bottom layers of pastry to enclose the filling.
6. Bake in a moderate oven (180°C) for 40 mins or until pastry is browned. I don’t usually sugar the fruit filling because I find the pastry itself sweetens the dish sufficiently.
No Feeling For Food

From a work-in-progress. The setting is a Sydney suburb in 1936.

There is a saying that a bony hen makes a good broth and this was the hope Katina and Eleni clung to as they stood in the steaming laundry plucking chickens. But Vassili’s bargain birds looked so much worse without their feathers, it seemed a vain hope that these runty creatures would yield anything edible.

‘We could try an avgholemono,’ said Katina when she saw the despairing look on Eleni’s face.

‘My God, Katina, we would need a bigger miracle than the marriage at Cana.’ She picked up a chicken by its neck. The goosy flesh swung limp and pallid.

‘Let’s simmer them for a couple of hours to see what kind of a broth they’ll make.’

The women were exhausted. They’d been plucking since Vassili had slaughtered the fifteen birds that morning. He had waited till the children were out of the way. Eleni had insisted on that. She had also insisted he dispose of the remaining nine with a friend of his who kept hens.

Katina put four of the birds into one of the big saucepans. ‘They’re so small. I’ll put an extra one in and set them to boil. At least we’ll know what we’re dealing with.’

‘Look how swollen my ankles are,’ Eleni said to her sister. ‘Vassili has no idea the work there is in plucking. Nor does Father. I don’t suppose either of them have ever plucked a chicken in their lives.’

‘At least they do the slaughtering.’

‘That’s over in ten minutes, Katina. Look at us. Hands raw from the water and don’t tell me your back isn’t aching? And you’ll be a lot more tired before we’ve finished this lot. It’s the same with making babies,’ she went on. ‘A few minutes work on their part and we’re left carrying the load.’

Katina smiled. She had never heard Eleni speak like this before. ‘Well let’s hope we’re not going to be stuck here week after week plucking chooks. That would be worse than being pregnant.’

‘You’re fortunate to have escaped so long, Katina. By the time I’d been married ten months I had a baby to care for.’

‘I suppose I am lucky.’

‘There’s nothing wrong between you and Yianni?’

Katina didn’t know what to say. Perhaps when they had finished this work and the betrothal party was out of the way, it would be easier then to tell her sister.

Eleni kept on testing the broth. ‘There’s no strength in it at all. What kind of soup is this going to make?’
‘You know it’s bad luck to keep lifting the lid. Why don’t you go and rest for an hour? It’s going to be a long day, Eleni, and there’ll be no peace once the children are home.’

Katina had set out the ingredients for kourambiedhes on the big table. They were Andreas’ favourites and it wouldn’t hurt to have some extras even though the simbetheri were responsible for the sweets. Much as she had lectured Eleni, she could not refrain from leaving her work at the table to check again on the broth. Was she imagining it? The liquid looked richer. Certainly little seeds of fat were forming. By the time Eleni was up and had looked again, the broth had changed colour.

Panaghia mou, Katina,’ she said when she had tasted it. ‘The old timers have made an excellent broth. There’s so much here, I’ll make some avgholemono for us tonight.’

But when they lifted one of the birds out of the steaming liquid, the flesh had darkened to an unappetising grey-brown. ‘The rest of the chickens will need to be kokkinisto’, said Katina. ‘At least the salsa will hide the colour of the flesh. And if the broth is good, the kokkinisto will be tasty too.’

Katina began chopping up the chickens into portions, frying them in butter and placing them in a big saucepan with tomato paste and seasoning. By the time Eleni set out to bring Philipos from school, they had two big saucepans. One ready with broth, the other with the slowly stewing kokkinisto.

‘And while you’re away,’ said Katina. ‘I’m going to set another five chickens stewing.’ She had just fried the last of the pieces and was collecting the last of the juice in the pan, when Andreas came in.

‘What a surprise’, she said to him, pouring the dark red liquid into the saucepan then turning to give him a kiss. ‘You can bring the nifi and all the guests, Andreas. Your sisters have managed to transform tired old chooks into a gourmet dish.’

‘Katina, I’ve got to talk to you.’

But Katina was too busy to notice his agitation. ‘Just a minute, Andreas,’ and she ran back to the stove. ‘Sometimes the chicken catches at the bottom of the saucepan and burns.’ She lifted the lid and stirred the mixture with a long spoon. Then she sipped a little to check the seasoning. He was standing next to her now in the kitchen. ‘Mmm, it’s good. Just taste this, Andreas.’

He took the spoon and flung it onto the bench. The rich gravy splattered on the terrazzo. ‘Will you listen to me?’ he said, shaking her. ‘There isn’t going to be a party.’

Katina looked at him blankly.
‘I can’t go on with this engagement. I don’t want to go on.’
‘The invitations, the mezedhes, the sweets.’ She said the words as if reminding herself of a shopping list. Then she pointed to the two big pots simmering on the stove and her voice grew shrill. ‘Andreas, what about the chickens?’
‘To hell with the chickens. I can’t go on.’
‘What are you talking about?’
‘It seemed what everybody wanted. Father was pleased. Eleni was pleased. but I can’t go on with it.’
Katina had to sit down. Her words were as limp as her body. ‘They’re going to be so angry Andreas.’
‘I’m not going to wreck my life because of some invitations and a few chickens.’
‘What about Father?’ She looked hard at Andreas, making him meet her eyes.
‘You know how much it will upset him.’
‘He’s an old man, Katina.’
‘You told me how much it meant to Father to see us all settled before he died.’ This was an accusation; a statement of her own resentment but even as she said the words she forced them to change direction. ‘And you were right Andreas. Look how happy he is to have me married.’
‘And are you happy Katina? No, don’t turn away.’
‘If I wasn’t so far from the family, I’d be happy. It won’t be like that for you Andreas. You’ll be here in Sydney.’
‘I don’t love Filia.’
‘And what has love to do with a proxenia?’ She couldn’t resist giving him back his own words.
‘I can’t go on with the betrothal now. I saw her last night and I promised her I wouldn’t go ahead.’
Her brother was talking in riddles. ‘Why should Filia want the betrothal called off?’
‘Not Filia. Another girl. I love another girl.’
‘You love another girl and you agreed to the proxenia with Filia?’
‘If you could meet her, Katina. If you could speak to Joyce, you’d know why I can’t give her up.’
‘This girl’s an Afstraleza?’
‘I tried to do what they expected but I can’t Katina. I told Joyce last night that I’m going to marry her. I know they’re not going to understand.’
‘Have you said anything to Filia?’
‘I’m going to see her now. Will you speak to Eleni and Father for me?’
‘No, Andreas. You’ve got to tell them yourself.’
She could see the fear in his eyes. He got up and walked towards the door. Then on an impulse he came back and sat down facing her. ‘If you could meet her, Katie, you’d see what a wonderful girl she is.’
Katina was growing more and more impatient. ‘How on earth could this girl come here?’
‘She might visit you in Queensland. You could teach her things. She’s eager to learn, Katina. Some of the Greek meals — the simplest ones to start with.’
‘For God’s sake Andreas, are you mad?’ How could her brother be so stupid, so unrealistic? ‘You haven’t begun to see what it’s going to mean for all of us.’

** * **

Manoli Papadopoulos roared his rage throughout the house.
Eleni who was making *avgolemono* when she found out, was so startled she forgot to add the broth slowly to the beaten egg and the mixture curdled.

Vassili was tight-lipped until he saw the soup. ‘Why in the name of God didn’t your brother decide last week that he wanted to break the engagement. Never in my life have I eaten a curdled soup and I don’t intend to start now. He got up and left the house. Eleni ran crying to the bedroom.

Katina told the children to play outside while she went to her father.
‘Ah Katina, Katina,’ he said to her. He was sitting in an armchair in the loungeroom and had refused to eat all day. ‘At least my daughters have not given me such pain. At least I have lived to see you both settled with good providers.’

Katina winced, remembering her resolve.
‘This brother of yours, the only son who should have been my joy. This son will kill me.’

Katina tried to reason with him. ‘Isn’t it better that the break should happen before the prayers and the exchanging of the rings? If he has doubts then it is best he should speak now.’

‘The devil take his doubts! Why didn’t he speak a month ago — before the meetings with the girl’s family, before the marketing and the cooking. Now the shame, the waste.’

Manoli stood up and leaned against Katina. ‘I want my bed. Take me to my bed. And don’t bring me anything to eat, Daughter. I have finished with eating.’ Then with a sudden burst of energy he shouted, ‘Tell your brother to keep out of my sight. I don’t want to see him ever again.’

**ONE YEAR LATER**

Andreas had said that the only thing he wanted was to be reconciled with his father. Nothing else mattered. Joyce’s coarse expressions, her smoking, her extravagance, her inability to do the washing without getting the coloureds running into the whites. All these he would put up with as long as he was brought back to the bosom of the family.

But it was only a week later, exactly a week after the meeting of reconciliation that there was an argument between the young couple, so serious, it threatened to break up the marriage.

Joyce had no feeling for food. He knew that. It was no wonder. Beryl’s meals were impossible to eat — her roasts tough and covered with gravy, the vegetables
boiled lifeless. So the girl had had no training. Or Beryl would buy cooked meats from the shop, not noticing the cardboard dryness of the corned beef or the rubbery taste of the ready-cut sandwich ham. And neither Joyce nor her mother had any idea how to make a good salad. They’d use dry lettuce leaves and tasteless tomatoes, sour wrinkled cucumbers and over-sweet corn and beetroot from a tin. He took Joyce to the greengrocer’s trying to point out the beauty of a fresh lettuce, tomatoes which smelt like tomatoes, cucumbers so freshly cut they didn’t need peeling. He showed her how to cook vegetables with the barest amount of water and only long enough to heighten the colour of the greens, leaving the cauliflowers, the beans, the peas, crispy and full of flavour. He went with her to the butcher’s and pointed out the best cuts of meat. He showed her how to pan-fry at high temperatures to seal in the juices. She didn’t seem able to follow any of this, so now, since she had been suffering with morning sickness, he had taken over the evening meal to save her being upset by the smell of the cooking. It was a grand gesture and it seemed to please her. It pleased him too because in fifteen minutes he could manage to serve up steak and chips and a delicious salad with an oil and lemon dressing. He missed the Greek recipes but he intended to consult with Eleni to find out how he might add them to the menu. For the present, his scheme was working very well.

Andreas was particularly fussy when buying meat. He usually settled on middle-cut rump or sirloin if he could be sure it wouldn’t be tough. Fillet steak he avoided because it was just too expensive and tended to be lacking in flavour. But yesterday the butcher had told him that he had a piece of scotch fillet that combined tenderness and taste. ‘The general customer wouldn’t appreciate it but I knew this was the meat for you, Mr. Papadopoulos. One word of advice, though’, the butcher added. ‘Rare is my advice, medium-rare at the most or the fillet will be wasted.’

All the next day, Andreas had been thinking about dinner. He’d already decided on new potatoes in their skins, a Greek salad and some fried tomatoes, not in the pan with the steak but cooked afterwards in the juices. He would put the potatoes on as soon as he got home, would make the salad and then, in the last three minutes would pan-fry the fillet steak in butter. He had changed his mind about the tomatoes. He would simply pour the juice of the meat and the browned butter straight onto the steak and the little potatoes. Andreas had purposely not eaten lunch so he would have a worthy orexi for this meal.

As soon as he stepped into the foyer of their building, he knew there was something wrong. It was like the smell of boarding houses; the heavy farty smell of overcooked cabbage mixing with an acrid burning. He ran to the door of their flat, fearing what he would find and there was Joyce, in one of her dresses with a waist, wearing high heels and stockings. The table was carefully set with a good tablecloth and a bowl of flowers in the middle. Her face was flushed. ‘I’ve done it all Andy. You only have to sit down for me to serve it up to you.’
She didn’t notice his shocked face, his rush to the kitchen. ‘Joyce,’ he said, still hoping. ‘You’ve at least left the steak for me to cook haven’t you?’

‘Nothing,’ she said breathless. ‘There’s nothing for you to do. You sit down and I’ll serve it up as if you’re in a restaurant. It’s all ready, I’ve even dished it out.’

From the oven she took the two plates. The limp cauliflower, the ugly lump of mashed potato he could have borne but he could not look at what she had done to that prime piece of scotch fillet. It lay, charred and shrunken in the plate and right before his eyes, she poured a thick orange-brown sauce over the meat, explaining, ‘Gravox, so the meat will be juicy, the way you like it.’

Andreas could not speak. He made a tortured sign of the cross as he gasped, ‘Christe mou’, Then he began slowly to beat his head against the wall.

For some minutes Joyce could not take in what was happening. Then, it was as if her whole proud body was convulsed. She stumbled, kicking off a shoe and fell back hard into one of the lounge chairs. Her head jolted, her legs were thrown apart, the belt around her waist burst and her placket, held together with a safety pin, came apart. With this last indignity, she sagged into the chair and began to sob as if she would never be comforted.

No feeling man could have ignored the sound of her weeping. He went to her. He tried to take her in his arms but she would not let him. She was gulping for air, so desperate was her distress. ‘I wanted to surprise you. I only wanted to surprise you.’

He patted her hair, he stroked her back, he brought her water then brandy to drink. Slowly her sobbing began to ease. For a moment it crossed his mind that there was only one way to end her suffering. He must take the plate from where she left it near the stove and he must eat the limp cauliflower, the grey potato, the charred meat in its sea of Gravox. But that feat of love was beyond him. The best he could do was to undress her, sponge her face and hands with a warm flannel and let her cry herself to sleep in his arms in the bed.
Avgholemono (Egg and Lemon Soup)

My mother would make Avgholemono for us when we had colds and sore throats. She believed it was therapeutic: the lemon soothing the throat and the egg and chicken stock giving a boost to our protein intake.

I also associate this soup with the fear of not reaching my mother’s standard in the kitchen. At no time was her rigour tighter than in the making of avgholemono. I was ordered to help but the danger of making the soup curdle was so great that I took that fear with me when I began to cook the soup myself. I trembled as I beat the whites, as I added the yokes, and particularly when the lemon was added. Now I know that none of these early stages contributes to the possibility of the soup curdling. The danger lies when the hot broth meets the egg and lemon mixture. This is the time when there might be a separation of the ingredients and the desired creaminess lost. The soup is still edible but loses the smooth consistency which works so well with the tartness of the lemon. I still approach the preparation of avgholemono with caution but that does not stop me making it, especially for ailing children, grandchildren and friends.

The best story I’ve heard about avgholemono occurred when one of my Greek friends revealed to her mother, who was in the process of making avgholemono, that she intended to marry a man who was not a Greek Australian. The mother was so thrown by the news of a possible mixed marriage she failed to stir steadily and the soup curdled.

The broth for the Easter avgholemono called mayerista, is traditionally made from the intestine of the Easter lamb but in our family we kept to chicken broth. When I was growing up, chickens were bought in pairs and slaughtered in the backyard. I don’t think it’s just nostalgia that makes me believe that those chickens and their accompanying giblets produced a much tastier avgholemono than the broth from frozen chooks or even some of the free-range varieties we buy today.

**Ingredients**

1 chicken (a mature bird makes a better broth but the flesh may be tough)  
approximately 5 to 6 cups of broth  
half cup of short-grain rice  
salt and pepper to taste  
3 eggs, yolks and whites separated  
juice of 1 good-sized lemon. 2 lemons for increased tartness

**Method**

1. Boil chicken well to make a strong broth, removing any brown scum that appears during the cooking. Take chicken from pot.
2. Add rice and salt to the broth. Bring to the boil again and simmer until the rice is well cooked (approx 20 minutes).

3. In a deep mixing bowl, beat egg whites until they are stiff.

4. Add yokes and beat until creamy.

5. Gradually beat in the lemon juice.

6. Now, the tricky bit: preferably with some assistance, take care to keep beating the mixture in the bowl while the helper ladles small quantities of the hot ricey broth into the bowl.

7. When the bowl is almost full, return the warm egg and lemon mixture into the saucepan, making sure to stir steadily.

8. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Serve with crusty bread, olives and fetta cheese.

Left-over soup needs to be heated gradually and stirred. Do not bring to the boil.
ABSTRACTS

MERLINDA BOBIS

‘Food, Precious Food: Migrating the Palate’

This essay charts how the tongue/palate/sensibility is reconfigured in the course of migration. What happens to a domestic food image from the first home once the food is cooked and served in the new country? Using creative writing and personal stories from the Filipino community, the essay examines the literary and the lived correlation between food and migration. I cite my own writerly negotiations with the food metaphor and the domestic realities in the Filipino migrant’s kitchen and table, and argue that in this new country, eating becomes a ‘symbolic homecoming’ and the migrant re-invents his/her representation of food and eating, and inevitably of the self.

CHRISTINE CHECINSKA

‘Consuming Colonisation: excavatin’ escoveitched fish’

‘Consuming Colonisation’ investigates the relationship between food, culture, memory and the negotiation of physical and metaphorical borders, central to the African diaspora experience. Just as Jamaican language is creole in character, Jamaican cuisine is an amalgam of African, Arawak Indian, Spanish and English colonial influences. In this context this essay argues that the consumption of creolised dishes, such as eskoveitched/’skoveitch fish, in the postcolonial moment, reveals not only personal memories of real and imagined homelands, but also the interrelated histories of the coloniser and the colonised. Food is seen as more than sustenance; the preparation and consumption of food is regarded both as a means of communing with the past and as an expression or materialisation of interwoven cultures.

DIANA WOOD CONROY

‘Rations for the Back Country: Sensory Landscapes’

Exploring sensory modes of experiencing landscapes in Australia emphasises that the sense of taste and habits of eating is a pervasive way of distinguishing deeply embedded cultural difference. This essay recounts experiences of settler Australians travelling across vast distances in arid and difficult terrains, and contrasts their provisioning and tastes with those of Aboriginal people, who see the same country through another hierarchy of sensory perceptions. The ideas of Constance Classen, which suggest that sensory models are conceptual models for action, and that the interplay of the senses condition the way a society thinks, are fundamental to the discussion. A military approach to victualling soldiers in the Second World War with strict rations is compared to an ancient glimpse of a hunting and gathering group in the bush in the Tiwi Islands north of Darwin.
HELEN COUSINS

‘Banana Rebellion: Food and Power in Lindsey Collen’s Mutiny’

In her novel, Mutiny, Lindsey Collen employs the humble banana as a potent symbol of resistance to oppression. For the inmates of Portlwi women’s prison food is rationed; minds that are obsessed with hunger cannot think of rebellion. Juna, the novel’s narrator, finds a way of using food against the authorities through a game of exchanging recipes. The rules forbid talking or thinking about food outside of the game that thereby creates space in the prisoners’ minds for those thoughts of rebellion the authorities would like to suppress. Furthermore, Collen uses the theme of food to explore notions of political corruption and class difference.

JANE DOWNING

‘A Cookbook for the Tropics’

The Kochbuch für die Tropen — Cookbook for the Tropics — first published in Berlin in 1907, was compiled by Antonie Brandeis née Ruete. The cookbook went to four editions (all in the original German), whether by virtue of the quality of the recipes or the name of the author it is difficult to say. Antonie Brandeis clearly wanted her maiden name advertised. The German book-buying public, and more especially those interested in the colonies of the tropics, would recognise the name ‘Ruete’ for Antonie’s mother, Emily, had published a popular memoir at the end of the nineteenth century that told the exotic tale of a woman born Princess of Zanzibar and Oman. This essay explores the background of Antonie Brandeis and its relationship to her manual for the colonial hausfrau.

JONATHAN HIGHFIELD

‘Refusing to be Fat Llamas: Resisting Violence through Food in Sozaboy and Purple Hibiscus’

Food and foodways are among the most potent of cultural expressions. The food people eat and the way it is prepared speaks volumes about their relationship to their culture, their place in society, and their interaction with the environment. Food has the ability to remember home, to reconstruct cultural memory from the integration of ingredients, seasonings, and preparations. This article examines the way two Nigerian novels, Sozaboy by Ken Saro-Wiwa and Purple Hibiscus by Chimanda Ngozi Adichie, use food to speak to the protagonists’ distance from their community and culture, and through that distance to look at the health of Nigerian society. The inequity of foodways serves to highlight the continuing divisions in society, the scars left by the colonial era which must be healed in order for true freedom to come to Africa.
B. W. HIGMAN

‘Lady Nugent’s Second Breakfast’

Lady Nugent’s Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805 is among the most commonly cited sources for the last years of the Atlantic slave trade in the British Caribbean. The author, Maria Nugent, wife of the Governor of Jamaica, maintained a detailed record of table guests and table manners, particularly the excesses of the creole ‘second breakfast’ which was a meal much loved by the slave-owning classes. Although superior in attitude and ambivalent in taste, Nugent necessarily attended many such rituals, noting their times and occasions, and recording in rich detail the foods served, from cassava cakes to exotic fruits, pigeon pies, hams, salt fish, oysters, chicken soup, confectionary, ginger sweetmeats, with claret and hock-negus, Madeira and sangaree, mixed liquor, coffee and tea. Her experience of second breakfast reflected the eclectic mix of endemic, indigenous, naturalised and imported plants and animals that characterised Jamaican food culture and its creole status.

DOROTHY JONES

“‘A Language We All Speak”: Food in Marion Halligan’s Writing’

Marion Halligan describes her memoir, A Taste of Memory, as a set of stories of her life in food, travel and especially gardens, those ‘nourishing spaces’; but it also commemorates her husband, Graham, and their thirty-five year marriage. Food and gardens often appear as related themes in Halligan’s fiction, where gardens often symbolise suburban domestic space and food may be used to express both desire and social connection. This essay explores how, in A Taste of Memory and the two novels immediately preceding it, The Fog Garden and The Point, food and gardens are linked to themes of bereavement and loss.

ELLEN MCWILLIAMS

‘Margaret Atwood’s Canadian Hunger Artist: Postcolonial Appetites in The Edible Woman’

This essay examines the importance of food and hunger to the feminist and postcolonial dimensions of Atwood’s novel The Edible Woman. It will argue that while the motif of consumerism is crucial to the novel’s investigation of gender relations, an important component of Atwood’s recipe for self-preservation is an awareness of Canada as a national context for the character’s increasingly troubled relationship with food; this can be read as an early expression of the correlation of gender and postcolonial discourses so characteristic of Atwood’s later writing, and as marking an important transitional moment in the author’s interest in survival as a Canadian theme. The essay also includes a number of illuminating references to unpublished material and early drafts of The Edible Woman in the
Atwood Collection, which shed further light on the points of contact between individual and national crises of identity in Atwood’s early fiction.

MEENAKSHI SHARMA

‘Indian Writing on Food: A Skewed Representation of Contemporary Social Reality’

In a country as diverse as India with every conceivable contrast co-existing even in contemporary times, Indian writing on food is an interesting genre in which the deep sociological and psychological rifts in society leave their mark in unsettling ways. While the economy is on an upswing with the impact of liberalised policies taking concrete shape in many areas, there still remain very large numbers of the population for whom food is not an assured reality. Writing on food assumes a certain class divide not only by the exclusion of economically disadvantaged classes but also, in the case of writing in English about elite cuisine and exotic places to eat in, that of much of the middle classes as well. Taking one of the best known contemporary writers on food as a case in point, the essay analyses these assumptions of class that are completely unacknowledged and that result in a highly skewed representation of contemporary social reality. The glossing over of the reality in terms of affordability of food *per se* and certain foods in particular, and of the experience and knowledge base of readers, produces a hazy picture of ‘Indians’ as a homogenous mass that is completely at odds with the extreme heterogeneity of Indian society.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

MERLINDA BOBIS grew up in the Philippines. The author of poetry, fiction and drama, she has received the Prix Italia, the Steele Rudd Award for the Best Published Collection of Australian Short Stories, the Philippine National Book Award, the Australian Writers’ Guild Award, and most recently the Philippine Balagtas Award. Her novel, *Banana Heart Summer*, was short-listed for the Australian Literary Society Gold Medal, and her poetry book, *Summer Was A Fast Train Without Terminals*, for *The Age* Poetry Book Award. Merlinda’s latest novel, *The Solemn Lantern Maker*, will be published in March 2008.

BEVERLEY BRAUNE brought out poetry collections *Dream Diary* with Savacou (1982) and *Camouflage* with Bloodaxe Books (1998). Her poetry and essays have appeared in many anthologies and literary magazines. She graduated from the University of Wollongong in 1999 with her creative and scholarly thesis: “Skulváði Úlfr: Historical Lacunae and Poetic Space”. Bev’s special areas of interest and expertise are poetics, the poetry of the ancient Americas, and Old Norse/Old Icelandic poetry. She lives in Sydney.

CHRISTINE CHECINSKA [SHAW] is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths College, London. Her research interests include biographies of material culture, cultural exchange, and the relationship between culture, fashion and race.

HELEN COUSINS completed her PhD in African woman’s writing from Birmingham University, England in 2001. Her main focus of research is African feminism and violence against women in African literary contexts. Currently, she works at Newman College of Higher Education, Birmingham, England as a Senior Lecturer in English.

Professor in Visual Arts, Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, DIANA WOOD CONROY has a B.A. (Hons) in Archaeology from the University of Sydney and a Doctor of Creative Arts degree from the University of Wollongong. In the 1970s she became a tapestry weaver, although continuing her research interests in archaeology and anthropology. Her involvement with Aboriginal communities began in 1974 when she was co-ordinator of Tiwi Designs, Bathurst Island, Northern Territory. Her exhibition work explores relationships between classical, Aboriginal and personal worlds in tapestry and drawing, and has been selected for survey shows touring nationally and internationally.

JANE DOWNING is currently writing a novel based on the lives of Antonie Brandeis and her mother Emily Ruete, born Princess of Zanzibar and Oman, as part of a Doctor of Creative Arts at the University of Technology, Sydney. She first came across the work of Antonie when she herself lived in the Marshall Islands.
Jane’s previous two novels are set in the Pacific and were published by Pandanus Books, Australian National University (The Trickster 2003, The Lost Tribe 2005).

MARCELLE FREIMAN is a Sydney poet who migrated from South Africa in 1977, spent four years in England, arriving in Australia in 1981. She lectures in creative writing and post-colonial and diaspora literatures at Macquarie University, Sydney. Her poetry has appeared in a range of literary journals and anthologies. Her book, Monkey’s Wedding (1995), was Highly Commended for the Marjorie Barnard prize.

ZENY GILES (Zenovia Doratis) was born in Sydney in 1937, her father having migrated from Cyprus, her mother from the island of Castellorizo. She now lives in Newcastle. Her first novel, Between Two Worlds, was published in 1981, the year in which she won The Age short story competition and the Anne Danckwerts Poetry Prize. A collection of stories, Miracle of the Waters, was published in 1989 (highly recommended in the literature section of the Human Rights Awards) and in 1995 she was one of the winners of the ABC Radio’s Books and Writing Short Story Competition. Zenny collaborated with the photographer Allan Chawner in 1997 to produce Journey of Visions, and with the composer Michael Atherton, to write the text of Inside the Storm (performed May 1998, by the Hunter Singers). Essays, poems and stories are collected under the title Caught in the Light, a Celebration of Newcastle (Catchfire 2002).

MARION HALLIGAN has published eight novels, including Lovers’ Knots, The Golden Dress, The Fog Garden and The Point; collections of short stories; books of autobiography, travel and food; and a children’s book. Taste of Memory: An Autobiography in Food and Gardens, was published in 2004. Her most recent novel is The Apricot Colonel (2006), a murder mystery set in Canberra, where she now lives and and which she finds a most fertile ground for writing. She has been short-listed for most of the prizes on offer, and has won some.

MICHELLE HAMADACHE is completing a Creative Writing PhD in English at Macquarie University, NSW, Australia. The focus of her work is biographical memoir set in Algiers, drawing on her Algerian husband’s experiences and her own as a visitor to Algiers and the years spent together in Italy. Michelle has had work published in the 1997 UTS Anthology, and in Island 106.

JONATHAN HIGHFIELD is an Associate Professor of English at Rhode Island School of Design, where he teaches a wide range of courses in colonial and postcolonial literatures. He has published in The International Journal of Environmental, Cultural, Economic and Social Sustainability, Atlantic Studies, the Canadian Journal of Irish Studies, and Passages: Interdisciplinary Journal of Global Studies. Jonathan is also the co-editor (with Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang and Dora Edu Buandoh) of a collection of essays entitled The State of the Art(s):
African Studies and American Studies in Comparative Perspective (Afram Publications 2006). He lives in North Scituate, Rhode Island, and likes to cook with the vegetables from his garden.

B. W. HIGMAN is a Professor of History in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University, Canberra, and Professor Emeritus of the University of the West Indies. His book *Jamaican Food: History, Biology, Culture* will be published by the University of the West Indies Press in 2008.

Although DOROTHY JONES would rather eat food than cook it, she also enjoys reading books about it and is currently writing about culinary memoirs. She is also greatly interested in post-colonial women’s writing, an area where she has published extensively. Dorothy is an honorary fellow in the English Literatures Program, at the University of Wollongong.

KATE LLEWELLYN is the author of eighteen books comprising travel, poetry, memoir, essays and nature writing. *The Waterlily, a Blue Mountain Journal* was a best seller (and, along with her essays and her book set at Woonona called *Playing With Water*, has been made into a talking book). Her forthcoming autobiography, *The Dressmaker’s Daughter*, is to be published by HarperCollins in 2008. She is currently the recipient of a Senior Fellowship from the Literature Board of the Australia Council.

ELLEN MCWILLIAMS teaches nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature at the University of Bristol. She has research interests in women’s writing and Canadian and Irish literature and is currently working on a book on Margaret Atwood and the female bildungsroman, which is forthcoming with Ashgate in 2008.

ANA ROSA MARGINSON is the illustrator of ‘Dwell’ by Merlinda Bobis. Ana Rosa is aged eleven and loves to read books. She is also a writer. She lives in Melbourne and is in Grade 5 at Footscray Primary School. Her favourite books include the Harry Potter series, *The Vampire Diaries*, and absolutely anything about dragons or werewolves. Ana Rosa learnt how to read at the age of 5. She is doing ok at school, so she will continue to aspire to become one day, a great writer.

HAL PRATT was born in Sydney in 1940. He went to school in Parkes in the Central West of NSW. From the age of six he pursued a vocation in architecture until he became disillusioned with the business of architecture with its mounting regulations and paperwork that restricted the creative process. In the mid nineties he started anew in photography. Each year Hal worked towards a solo exhibition until 2003 when he was contracted by the State Library of NSW to photograph grain silos.
MEENAKSHI SHARMA obtained her Masters and PhD from the University of Queensland, Australia. Her research and publications have been in the areas of Post-Colonial Theory and Indian Writing in English. Her areas of interest are English in India, the Indian diaspora, cultural studies, and tradition and modernity in Indian writing in English. She is currently based in India, close to Delhi, and is Associate Professor at the Institute of Management Technology, Ghaziabad.

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