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**The foods we read and the words we eat: Four approaches to
the language of food in fiction and nonfiction**

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Four Approaches to the Language of Food
in Fiction and Nonfiction**

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The Foods We Read and the Words We Eat:
Four Approaches to the Language of Food
in Fiction and Nonfiction

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Abstract

The Foods We Read and the Words We Eat:
Four Approaches to the Language of Food
In Fiction and Nonfiction

by

Sara Lewis Dunne

Food is a common element in both fiction and nonfiction, and critical theory is the best way to understand food as a literary element. Food and critical theory have a long history together, and this study applies structuralism, feminism, the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, and classical rhetoric to analyze classical and modern fiction and the nonfiction genre of menu writing.

Chapter Two focuses on the structuralist theories of the French critic Roland Barthes, whose keen interest in both food and language eventually leads him to assert that food is a language itself which can be decoded through the principles of linguistics and those of binary coding.

Chapter Three demonstrates Barthes' theories as applied to the satires of the Roman writer Juvenal. In Juvenal's satires, food signifies power; furthermore, the genre of satire is based in the language of food.

Chapter Four applies Barthes' structuralist theories to Bobbie Ann Mason's recent novel In Country. The language of fast food, traditional Southern "slow" food, and some

miscellaneous other foods is decoded, using Barthes' theories.

Chapter Five discusses the recent feminist theories of Nancy Gray, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray. Their theories, opposed to structuralism, are applied to a recent genre, "recipe fiction," in which fictional narrative and referential discourse are combined.

The theories of Mikhail Bakhtin as they apply to Fannie Flagg's novel Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe, to Petronius' Satyricon, and to F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby are the focus of Chapter Six. Bakhtin's two major themes of dialogism and the carnivalesque decode the food references in these three works.

Finally, classical rhetoric is the tool best suited to analyzing the power transactions in restaurant menu writing. Quintilian and Cicero help us to "read" the words we may eat in this form of persuasive discourse.

We eat and speak with the same physical organ, the mouth, so that food and words are intimately connected as parts of human experience. Structuralism, feminism, dialogism, and classical rhetoric help us understand the words we "eat" and the foods we "read."

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Chapter I

Introduction

Everyone eats food, and almost everyone who writes, writes about it. It is one of the most common elements of fiction and nonfiction alike, and it has been throughout the ages. The biblical version of the fall of man hinges on food, "the fruit of the tree of knowledge," and very little writing since that time has not included some mention of food. In America today, there are at least five major publications devoted only to the topic of food: Gourmet, Bon Appetit, Food and Wine, Cooking Light, and Vegetarian Times. There are also food newsletters one may subscribe to with more specialized content and a smaller audience, such as John Thorne's quarterly Simple Cooking or Edward Behr's The Art of Eating. Most major newspapers publish a food section at least once a week, and M. F. K. Fisher's essays on food are recognized as classic examples of the essay form. Writing and reading about food are and always have been almost as popular as eating it.

Food and food imagery as elements of literature have also gained interest in recent years. The PMLA listing of articles since 1981 shows more than one hundred articles with the word "food" in the title, and the double Winter/Spring 1992 edition of Southern Quarterly was devoted to the subject of food and its role in Southern literature. In June of 1992, several writers noted for their writing

about food performed a reading in New York City. Included in the program were Nora Ephron, author of Heartburn, and Roy Blount, author of a volume titled SoupSongs. There is no escaping the intimate connection between words and food, and there is surely more than a simple surface interest in food; however, to understand its importance as a fictional and nonfictional discursive element, we must rely on critical theory.

Food and critical theory have a long-standing historical relationship. The connection between food and criticism can be found as far back as the Platonic dialogues. In Plato's Ion, Socrates is trying to discern, through dialogue, exactly what rhapsodes actually know. It was the rhapsode's business, in ancient Greece, to know how to recite poems, and Ion, the rhapsode speaking with Socrates, is being questioned about his actual knowledge of the events in the Homeric poems he performs. Here is their dialogue:

Socrates: You know the passage in which Hecamede, the concubine of Nestor, is described as giving to the wounded Machaon a posset [a drink made of milk and wine], as he says, "Made with Pramnian wine; and she grated cheese of goat's milk with a grater of bronze, and at his side placed an onion which gives a relish to drink." (Iliad XI 639-40) Now would you say that the art of the rhapsode or the art of medicine was better able to judge of the

propriety of these lines? (quoted in Wimsatt and Brooks 7)

Ion replies that the art of medicine would be the better judge of these lines. The point of this study is to prove otherwise, that literary theory is best suited to judge the propriety of food in literature.

This study will employ three modern critical theories in discussions of food in both ancient and modern fiction and a new hybrid of fiction and non-fiction, "recipe fiction," called by one writer "culinary fiction." In the end, though, all critical theory comes from a common foundation in classical rhetoric, and the tools of classical rhetoric can be used to decode at least one genre of nonfictional food writing. This study begins with a lengthy discussion of the French structuralist critic Roland Barthes, follower of the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. Barthes asserts that food is language itself, and we will apply Barthes' theory to two different kinds of fiction: the satires of Juvenal, written in the first century B.C., and one of Bobbie Ann Mason's minimalist novels, In Country, published in 1984. The two works of fiction are treated in separate chapters because their food codes are so different from one another. Barthes is the starting point here because, of all the critical theorists, his writing is the most acutely focused on food itself both as a subject and as conveyer of meaning outside itself. Food is both substance and language in Barthes'

structuralist theories, and language is inseparable from the idea of food.

Other French theorists help to understand a hybrid kind of writing that really has no name but for purposes of this study will be called "recipe fiction." These are novels that contain many details about food, and the recipes for the food are included in the novels, thus combining fiction and referential discourse. The French feminist critics Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray and the American feminist Nancy Gray help us see why recipe fiction is almost exclusively the domain of women writers as diverse as the detective writer Virginia Rich, African-American novelist Ntozake Shange, and Mexican novelist Laura Esquivel. Feminist theory calls for women writers to cross boundaries and create new forms of their own, and recipe fiction is one way for both feminists and apolitical writers to do this.

The final modern critical theorist to be considered in this study is the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin. His theories about dialogism and about the idea of the carnivalesque bring us back to recipe fiction, and the Romans--Petronius' Satyricon--and F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel The Great Gatsby, which bears a strikingly close resemblance to The Satyricon. Dialogism, briefly, is the presence of multiple voices in a work of fiction--voices that express sometimes conflicting values and divergent points of view, so that the story is a synthesis of dialogue rather than monologue. The carnivalesque allows for

hierarchies to be upended and for the formerly powerless to become powerful. Carnivalesque literature celebrates the human body and every manifestation of the body's power, and food is inseparable from carnivalesque literature. The carnival allows human beings to assume other identities, and this idea of transformation is intimately related to food and food theory.

The modern theories that I have chosen to explicate and employ are particularly relevant to the study of food in literature and also relevant to one another. Barthes' interests were wide-ranging, and he applied his structuralist theories to every kind of narrative, every kind of discourse, every kind of art: photography, clothing, narrative, and, of course, food itself and writing about food. The French feminists based much of their theory on a strong negative reaction to Freudian theory and to structuralism. Structuralist theory depends on binary coding of opposites: raw/cooked, sun/moon, male/female, clean/unclean. This kind of boundary-setting, in the French feminists' view, sets up hierarchies which ultimately allow the male position to dominate the female. The masculine arrogation of power and language is attacked by the feminists who call for new forms for women artists who must destroy the structuralist partitions set up by previous critics, Barthes included. Feminist critical theory is particularly important in any discussion centered on food and food images simply because food is so often associated

with women and the "feminine principle" itself. Finally, the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin offer a third position which is based on two main ideas, dialogism and carnivalization. Dialogism, or "hetero-glossia," celebrates the multiplicity of conflicting voices created in novels, and the inversion of hierarchies, such as those associated with structuralist theory, is a major part of the carnivalesque. The word carnival itself finds its roots in the Latin word for meat, carne; therefore, Bakhtin's theories are basic to discussions of food, particularly as an element of carnival.

All critical theories have their basis in classical rhetoric and, as we observed in Plato's Ion, food has long been the subject of critical and rhetorical speculation. We can use the tools of classical rhetoric to decipher nonfictional food writing as well as food in fiction. In keeping with an attempt to cover new territory and to continue mixing the ancient with the modern, I will conclude this study with a discussion of classical rhetoric and menus. In keeping with the Bakhtinian and feminist theorists, I am juxtaposing two kinds of writing not ordinarily linked together, fiction and menus. The two kinds of writing, though, are linked through their common dependence on words and on the experience of orality. We eat and speak with the same physical organ, the mouth, and whether we are reading about fictional food or food we might actually eat, words are what link our disparate experiences together in a common web. The food we read about in fiction

can be seen as a longhand version of the menus we read in restaurants; both are attempts to convert the sensory experience of eating into the intellectual experience of reading. We are reading food and eating words.

I have deliberately restricted the genres of fiction treated in this study to two Classical writings and several modern and post-modern novels. One justification is that such a restriction pares down the massive number of examples one might possibly include in such a study as this. Food is one of the most common elements of daily life and literature, and it would clearly be foolish to try to cover all the examples of food found in all the genres of literature. There have been numerous articles about food and food imagery in drama, which include, for instance, the plays of William Shakespeare. Two such articles are Maurice Charney's "The Imagery of Food and Eating in Coriolanus" and Joseph Candido's "Dining Out in Ephesus: Food in The Comedy of Errors." More recently, there is Tina Howe's Broadway play The Art of Dining, and the playbook has an elaborate set of stage directions and "recipes" for the food consumed by the characters on stage. Included among these directions is a recipe for how to make a chicken look like duck or veal: "marinade duck half in burgundy until darkened" (102). A press which specializes in theatrical works has recently issued The Theatre Lover's Cookbook, described in their advertisement as "Recipes from 60 Favorite Plays," and The Musical Theatre Cookbook, "Recipes from Best Loved

Musicals." The recipes include "Dromio's Capon from Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors," "Almond Tartlets Ragaueneau" from Cyrano de Bergerac, and a recipe for "The Devil's Hot Dog" from Damn Yankees.

There are numberless examples of food and food imagery in poetry of every conceivable genre. John Cody published an article on food in Emily Dickinson's poetry, "Emily Dickinson and Nature's Dining Room: An Unusual Poet's Essential Hunger," and Helen B. Ellis authored "Food, Sex, Death, and the Feminine Principle in Keats's Poetry." They are only two among thousands of writers who have written about food in poetry. In a recent college anthology, The Bedford Introduction to Literature (1990), edited by Michael Meyer, we find a dozen food poems. It would be possible to teach nothing but food poems for a week. Indeed, it has been done.

Children's stories abound with food tales: Little Red Riding Hood takes a basket of food to her grandmother; Goldilocks eats the porridge of the three bears; Hansel and Gretel are lured into the witch's confectionery house; Snow White eats a drugged apple. Similarly, medieval literature is rife with food imagery, as is noted by food scholar Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat, who notes Chaucer's mention of "roial spicerye and Gyngebreed" as proof that gingerbread is one of the oldest confections in Western diet.

Norman Kiell's recent "Food in Literature: A Selective Bibliography" (1991) suggests some of the range of food

texts, from the Bible to mystery and detective fiction. Kiell speculates that food plays such a major role in literature because it "elicits strong affect" (212); that is, food calls up some of the most powerful emotional responses from readers and characters alike. No reader of the works of Marcel Proust can ever forget the importance of the madeleines to the narrator. The cookies, dipped in lime tea, unleash a flood of reminiscence which forms the basis of the novel. The fiction of Charles Dickens, too, is dependent on food. One of the most powerful scenes in Dickens' novels is focused on the ruined wedding banquet Miss Havisham has kept in Great Expectations. Who can forget, in that same novel, the niggardly portions of bread and butter Mrs. Joe grudgingly serves to Pip? Kiell's bibliography, drawn from the New York Public Library, the New York Historical Society, the New York Academy of Medicine, the Culinary Institute of America, the Cornell School of Hotel Administration, and the Library of Congress, contains several hundred entries, including many about Dickens and Proust, and covers more than fifty pages.

Two notable books which explore food as a literary element are Jane Grigson's Food With the Famous (1980) and Mary Anne Schofield's Cooking By The Book: Food in Literature and Culture (1989). Grigson includes, among the fiction writers, Jane Austen, Alexandre Dumas, Emile Zola and Marcel Proust. Her interests are focused more on reproducing the food than on the literature, however.

Grigson writes about Austen, "You will find it easy to choose a dinner that should have delighted Jane Austen from her novels" (68). Grigson mentions a cookery book edited by Peggy Hickman, A Jane Austen Household Book, published in 1977. It is "full of recipes from the collection made by Martha Lloyd, Jane's great friend, who lived with the family for many years" (68). Grigson offers several recipes for dishes that readers find in Austen's novels. Alexandre Dumas was as famous as a cook as he was for The Count of Monte Cristo and The Three Musketeers. After his death his Grand Dictionnaire de Cuisine was published in 1873. In 1978, according to Grigson, Jane and Alan Davidson translated selections from the Dictionnaire and published it in English under the title Dumas on Food. Grigson reproduces several of the recipes Dumas was famous for. Emile Zola, Grigson claims, "had the strongest, most sensual attitude toward food" (177), but Proust's last days were spent living on "little more than a litre of milk a day, flavoured with coffee" (230) and remembering meals from earlier years. The chapters on Zola and Proust, like the other chapters in this volume, focus more on recipes for foods associated with the writers than on their fiction, so Grigson's volume is interesting to read or to cook from, but it offers little to the student who wishes to analyze food as a literary element.

Cooking by the Book, edited by Schofield, is more clearly focused on food as a literary element, and it

contains several helpful articles and a good bibliography. It provides a good starting point for the student who seeks background material and some methodology for analyzing food in literature and also includes a good essay on current fast food advertising. Three chapters deal with an issue dealt with in this study, recipes embedded in narrative: Anne LeCroy's "Cookery Literature or Literary Cookery," Lynn Veach Sadler's "The New American Melting Pot[ter]: The Mysteries of Virginia Rich," and a reprint of possibly the first article on the subject, and the most widely quoted, Susan J. Leonardi's "Recipes for Reading: Pasta Salad, Lobster a la Riseholme, Key Lime Pie." Since the publication of Schofield's collection, however, recipe fiction has become much more prevalent, so that this growing literary genre deserves more current critical attention.

Obviously, simply to write about "food in literature" is a task too unwieldy for one academic volume. My choice of ancient and modern texts and canonical and popular literature will suggest the breadth of this subject's scope and at the same time offer us ample ground for exercising three vital and useful critical theories. I have tried to choose texts which have not been thoroughly covered by previous writers and students of this subject. The works of Charles Dickens, mentioned earlier, are often the subject of food writing, as are Ernest Hemingway's novels. A survey of any extensive food/literature bibliography turns up numerous articles on both those writers as well as Chaucer, Joyce,

Shakespeare, Proust, Milton, Voltaire, Woolf, Faulkner, Atwood, Fielding, Flaubert, Rabelais, Steinbeck, Conan-Doyle, Majorie Kinnan Rawlings, Barbara Pym, Ann Tyler, and the Bible. The writers I have chosen for their food texts have not been quite so thoroughly examined, and so some new territory can be covered in this study.

Literary/culinary scholars have begun to employ all these theories in their interpretations of food-centered writing, but often without clear distinctions about theories and theorists. Our purpose here is dual: to clarify recent and ancient critical theories and to employ them as a tool to enhance our understanding of the food that feeds our literature and the words that shape our eating. Words are one way we feed ourselves, and where we encounter those words is, in the long run, irrelevant. We can use structuralism, feminism, dialogism, and classical rhetoric to understand the words we "eat" or the foods we "read," no matter where we find those words, in fiction or in menus.

Chapter II

Food is Language, Food as Language:

Structuralism, Roland Barthes, and the Language of Food

Structuralist literary criticism, rooted in both linguistics and anthropology, has among its forbears the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. According to Charles Kaplan, editor of Criticism: The Major Statements, Saussure first based his theory of signs on the premise that language has no intrinsic meaning and that the relationship between words, which he called "signifiers," and meanings, or "signifieds," resulted in "signs" (555). In Saussure's language theory, signs can mean only what a group of speakers have agreed they mean, and languages operate as structures with relationships among signs. Signs are the components of language and speech, codes and messages.

According to Roland Barthes in Elements of Semiology, these ideas were set forth in Saussure's Course in General Linguistics, first published in 1916, with new editions in 1948 and 1966 (9). Barthes goes on in this volume to explain that Roman Jakobson, another follower of Saussure, coined the term "duplex structures" (22) to refer to all the paired terms (signifier/signified, language/speech, code/message) used in describing language and semiotics. Structuralist criticism simply expands this idea of signs contained within sentences to include signs within larger

narrative and non-narrative texts and, ultimately, all forms of communication and discourse.

While Saussure's semiotic theories were gaining wide enough acceptance to become standard practice among linguists, the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss was collecting and "decoding" South American myths. In 1964 Levi-Strauss published his seminal work The Raw and the Cooked, in which he applied various binary codes similar to Saussure's duplex structures to the massive number of Amazonian myths he had recorded. The volume's title is an example of such coding, and its first sentence informs us about this coding process:

The aim of this book is to show how empirical categories--such as the raw and the cooked, the fresh and the decayed, the moistened and the burned, etc., which can only be accurately defined by ethnographic observation and, in each instance, by adopting the standpoint of a particular culture--can nonetheless be used as conceptual tools with which to elaborate abstract ideas and combine them in the form of propositions. (1)

The propositions are combined, much like Saussure's signs, to form structures. Myths, then, like languages, conform to certain structures, and the binary codes contained in them operate as signifiers. The term "raw" in Levi-Strauss's title signifies savagery or being "imprisoned in nature" and doomed to decay (338); "cooked" signifies civilization,

community, and preservation. In a similar work, one of Levi-Strauss's disciples, Mary Tew Douglas, wrote Purity and Danger (1966), another volume whose title employs (and whose contents contain usages of) binary coding.

The late Roland Barthes, another Frenchman and a student and follower of both Saussure and Levi-Strauss, is presently recognized as one of the leading structuralist critics, and he draws on their work with semiotics and binary coding. To Barthes, structure is:

a simulacrum of the object, but a directed, interested simulacrum, since the imitated object makes something appear which remained invisible, or if one prefers, unintelligible in the natural object. Structural man takes the real, decomposes it, then recomposes it. (qtd. in Rowe, 35)

The "simulacrum"--a picture of an apple, for instance--signifies a meaning or several meanings of a real apple. Any work of art, therefore, is a signifier in a language, just as the word "apple" can signify a round, red fruit. A work of art may be thought of as a "word" because it signifies.

The structuralist activities of "dissection and articulation" (Rowe 35) echo the binary theories of Levi-Strauss and the "duplex structures" of signifiers and signifieds of Saussure (Elements 22). Structuralist literary criticism, too, is a process of "dissection and articulation," dissecting a story or a poem and

articulating--"recomposing"--its structural components into something more intelligible to the critic and, presumably, the reader. Criticism replicates the process of the artist, who has taken reality, dissected it, and articulated it into a story, a poem, a novel, a drama, a dance, a souffle, in other words, into a structure composed of codes (signifiers) which convey messages (signifieds). Structuralist criticism helps the reader decode and make connections between signifiers and signifieds, and Levi-Strauss's coding and decoding of myths serve as models for structuralist critics.

Barthes' initial interests in semiology and linguistics eventually grew to include literary criticism, and, in time, cultural criticism. In fact, Barthes became as interested in culture as he had at one time been in language and literature because he began to conceive of all knowledge and all culture as language. In Elements of Semiology, first published in France in 1964, he puts it this way:

There exists a general category language/speech which embraces all the systems of signs; . . . we shall keep the terms language and speech, even when they are applied to communications whose substance is not verbal. (25)

Food is one of those forms of communication "whose substance is not verbal," and among Barthes' publications are several on food and food writing. Barthes writes that food is a "signifying system," an "alimentary language made of i) rules of exclusion, ii) signifying oppositions of

units [sweet and sour, for example]; iii) rules of association . . . ; iv) rituals of use which function . . . as a kind of alimentary rhetoric" (Elements 27-8). Sections i, ii, and iii of Barthes' description of the signifying system of food are obviously indebted to Levi-Strauss's binary codes.

Food is language, and in Barthes' native France (and in many other countries as well) the "rules" of its rhetoric are determined by individual or large group practice rather than by "the action of a [small] deciding group" (Barthes Elements 28). In America, however, many of the "rules" of our alimentary rhetoric are regulated formally by the United States Food and Drug Administration and the United States Department of Agriculture and informally, according to Laura Shapiro in Perfection Salad, by professional home economists and specialists in nutrition who have long had the support of "the universities, the public-school system, the government, and the food industry" (7).

The language of food, according to Barthes' Elements of Semiotics, can be seen in this way: menus are "systems" of language, and within that system dishes have a certain "meaning." For instance, appetizers, entrees, salads, and desserts all have location and meaning in the menu system. Individual dishes in a meal and the sequence in which they are chosen operate as "syntagms." They are seen in relation to one another rather than as larger units of meaning; in other words, these individual dishes demonstrate meaning in

the same way that words in a sentence do (63). Individual tastes and practices in cooking and eating are "idiolects" (28).

Elements of Semiology codifies some of the ideas from Barthes' Mythologies which had appeared seven years earlier, in 1957. A second edition of Mythologies was published in 1970. Mythologies concludes with his long essay "Myth Today" and contains twenty-eight brief essays, four of which are about food. In "Myth Today" Barthes asserts that myth, too, is "a type of speech" and that "everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse" (109). (Here Barthes has obviously expanded Levi-Strauss' ideas of myth from certain kinds of repeated narratives to all narratives, "anything conveyed by discourse.") The French women's magazine Elle, "a real mythological treasure" (78), and its articles on food accompanied by glossy color photographs are the subjects of "Ornamental Cookery." Barthes describes photographs of the food in Elle:

[There are] golden partridges studded with cherries, a faintly pink chicken chaud-froid, a mould of crayfish surrounded by their red shells, a frothy charlotte prettified with glace fruit designs, multicoloured trifle, etc. (78)

The photographs show food which has been glazed or coated in order to gentrify and disguise the "brutality of meat or the abruptness of seafood" (78). The glaze often provides a canvas for ornamentation in the form of carved lemons,

silver pastilles, meringue mushrooms, or candied fruit. This, Barthes writes, is "a cookery which is based on coatings and alibis" (78), and the mythology embedded in Elle's ornamental cookery is that food is so easily obtained that cooks--even poor ones like the working-class readers of Elle--are faced only with the problem of giving it eye appeal. However, "the real problem is not to have the idea of sticking cherries into a partridge, it is to have the partridge, that is to say, to pay for it" (79). The language of ornamental cookery, or the myth, signifies ease, plenty, wealth, and, therefore, order and gentility. It is "openly dream-like cookery" (79) in which the color pink predominates and the food is always photographed from a high angle, "at once near and inaccessible" (79).

American ornamental cookery also embodies the myth of gentility, but the American version of the myth does not counteract the reality of poverty, as Barthes claims the French myth does. Rather, Laura Shapiro claims, the myth of gentility in American ornamental cookery was intended to counteract the power of food to "draw forth cravings and greedy desires which had to be met with a firm hand. [A] goal was to transubstantiate food" (6), sometimes by covering it up with coatings or decoration, in order to negate its naturally seductive powers.

Another essay in Mythologies is "Wine and Milk," "totem-drinks" and binary opposites. Wine "supports a varied mythology" (58). For example, in France it is "the

most efficient of thirst-quenchers"; it is also a "converting substance, capable of . . . extracting from objects their opposites" (58). Wine gives the tired worker the ability to continue working and the effete intellectual a "natural virility" (59). It warms in winter and cools in summer and mitigates all complaints of "hunger, boredom, compulsion, and disorientation" (60). Milk, on the other hand, is "the true anti-wine" (60):

Wine is mutilating, surgical, it transmutes and delivers; milk is cosmetic, it joins, covers, restores. Moreover, its purity, associated with the innocence of the child, is a token of strength, of a strength which is not revulsive, not congestive, but calm, white, lucid, the equal of reality. (60)

In the language of food, wine signifies France, milk, America, and to the Frenchman, milk, not wine, is the "exotic substance" because as a drink it is foreign to the French (61).

In both France and America steak signifies strength drawn from blood. Barthes treats this idea in "Steak and Chips," which follows "Wine and Milk" in Mythologies. Steak, like wine, signifies virility and health because "it is supposed to benefit all the temperaments, the sanguine because it is identical, the nervous and lymphatic because it is complementary to them" (62). Barthes explains the popularity of steak tartare as "a magic spell against the

romantic association between sensitiveness and sickliness" (62). Currently in America, steak is advertised on television and in magazines as "real food for real people," and beef is "what's for dinner." Perhaps Barthes might see the current advertising campaigns for steak as attempts to negate the currently unpopular "macho" image of steak by including women among the "real" people who are shown eating it. In "Steak and Chips" Barthes gives only one paragraph to the latter. Chips--la frite--are "nostalgic and patriotic like steak" (63) and an "alimentary sign of Frenchness" (64). Obviously French food language, like French itself, requires translation. Most Americans would probably claim that steak is a symbol of America, not France, and that "chips" signify the British more than they do the French. Barthes, however, is our translator here, and in 1957 perhaps a different food, hot dogs or apple pie for instance, might have more accurately signified America.

"Operation Margarine," the final essay from Mythologies to be considered here, approaches the issue of significance rather indirectly. Barthes begins this essay by exposing a technique used by advertisers and other propagandists who "take the established value which [they] want to restore or develop," expose its numerous and obvious flaws, "then at the last moment, save it in spite of, or rather by the heavy curse of its blemishes" (41). Barthes' primary examples are the Army and the Church as portrayed in From Here to Eternity and Graham Greene's The Living Room. Exposing the

flaws serves as a kind of vaccination against the evil under consideration, and French advertisements for Astra margarine have used that technique to their advantage. In the advertisement, a niece makes a souffle for her uncle, using margarine instead of butter. The aunt is horrified, but after they have all tasted the souffle and the margarine has gone undetected, they realize that margarine is "a delicious food, tasty, digestible, economical, useful in all circumstances" (42). In completing his comparison of margarine and its advertising to the Church and the Army, Barthes concludes with obvious sarcasm that "Here we are, in our turn, rid of a prejudice which cost us dearly, too dearly, which cost us too much in scruples, in revolt, in fights and in solitude" (42). Implicit in this brief essay is the equation of margarine and margarine advertising with the evils, cruelty, and injustices Barthes and other Marxists saw in the French Army and the Roman Catholic Church. If, as Barthes says in Elements of Semiology, individual foodways are idiolects, we can only conclude that in Barthes' own idiolect margarine signifies evil.

Some time after the second publication of Mythologies, Barthes' interests in food as language led him to write a preface to an edition of Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's Physiology of Taste, which was being reprinted in 1975, 150 years after its first publication. Barthes' preface for this edition can be found The Rustle of Language, and in it he naturally employs structuralist techniques, but his

subject here, as Brillat-Savarin's had been, is the language of eating as well as the language of food. Eating, as described by Brillat-Savarin, is simply another arc in Barthes' ever-widening circle of semiotic interests.

The pleasures of gastronomic taste develop as narrative does, he says, because both occur over a period of time. In Barthes' own words: "The submission of the gustative sensation to time actually permits it to develop somewhat in the manner of a narrative, or of a language" (251). Barthes draws even more parallels between eating and language: eating and speaking are both done with the mouth; "cut off the tongue, and there will be neither taste nor speech" (258). Furthermore, "Cadmus, who brought writing to Greece, had been the King of Sidon's cook" (257). Brillat-Savarin, like Barthes, was as fascinated by language as he was by food, "and he sustained this learned discourse in a radically . . . neological style" using (or inventing) the gustatory terms "irrorator," "esculent," "gulturation," "comessation," "spication," and "verrition" (258-9). Brillat-Savarin, Barthes asserts, had "an amorous relation" to words (259).

The idea of "amorous relations" is a theme in almost all writing about food. For example, Levi-Strauss writes in The Raw and the Cooked that in several of the cultures he studied the word for copulation is the same as the word for eating (269). Perhaps because of his devotion to the works of Levi-Strauss, or perhaps simply because the connection

between oral and sexual activities comes so naturally to writers as well as to eaters and lovers, Barthes sees this alimentary-sexual connection in Brillat-Savarin, not just in terms of his love for language, his "taste" for words, but in his erotic descriptions of eating: the excited diner is "shiny." In Barthes' paraphrase of Brillat-Savarin's description of this state of "shininess," "the physiognomy brightens, coloring is heightened, the eyes gleam, while the mind is refreshed and a gentle warmth penetrates the entire body" (253). Barthes describes the state of "shininess" in binary terms: "at once ignited and moistened" (253), both terms obviously suggestive of erotic arousal. The process of a man watching a woman eat is, therefore, "a minor erotic rape" (252). This idea leads Barthes back to another of the mythologies he and Levi-Strauss are so adept at decoding, namely, that women are often seen as cooks and servants but less often as ardent consumers of food:

Hers is a glorious body, purified of any need. . . . B.-S. [Barthes' abbreviation] subverts two taboos: that of a woman pure of any digestive activity and that of a gastronomy of pure repletion: he puts food in Woman, and in Woman appetite (the appetites). (253)

Laura Shapiro treats the American version of this same myth in Perfection Salad when she writes that at the turn of the century, "There was a long-standing assumption that well-bred women were creatures with light, disinterested

eating habits" and that "an overt fondness for food would have made a woman appear gross and unfeminine" (72-3). The paradox inherent in binary coding--"ignited and moistened," for example--is exposed in this mythology, that women prepare and serve but do not enjoy food. A woman may provide the means for this erotic indulgence, but she must not enjoy it herself.

Another set of binary opposites is employed by Barthes in his analysis of Brillat-Savarin, when he codes foods as wet/dry, liquid/solid substances, a food code widely employed among anthropologists.¹ Barthes' first use of this code is in his explanation of Brillat-Savarin's preference for hand-ground coffee beans. He advises his readers to grind coffee beans by hand rather than in a mill and also to grill or fry meat instead of boiling it. . The hand-ground coffee beans are nearer to a liquid state because they are more finely ground and more "irrigable" (255). Grilled meat retains more of the meat's liquid essence or "osmazome," to use Brillat-Savrin's term (261), as does meat properly fried. Boiled meat, though, has lost some of its precious liquid essence, its "nutritive ichor" (256). "The true state of food, . . . B.-S. believes, is the liquid" (255). Like the water from which life comes or the semen from which human life springs, food "fosters" life when it is liquified by the digestive process (255).

The idea that food could be reduced to its essence, its "osmazome," its "nutritive ichor," its "juice," provides a sign--a signifier and signified--to tie the related but not identical ideas of food, sex, and language together. To Barthes all culture is myth, all myth is language, all food is language, and, ultimately, Barthes' genius lay in his ability to conceive of all of these various human activities as variations on a single theme: the word.

Roland Barthes' food writing is invaluable to any student of food or cooking because he provides a coherent framework for studying the mythology and language of food, and Laura Shapiro's work provides some highly accessible examples to help American students fill in that framework. Oddly enough, though, most students of food, including Shapiro and the often-quoted Mary Tew Douglas, have not yet discovered Barthes' clever, concise, revealing, and entertaining essays on food and eating. A recent publication, Cooking by the Book: Food in Literature and Culture, edited by Mary Anne Schofield, contains references to Douglas, Shapiro, and Claude Levi-Strauss, but none of the eighteen essays in Schofield's collection contains so much as a single reference to Roland Barthes. Two other, more ambitious publications, Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat's History of Food (1987) (translated from the French by Anthea Bell in 1992), and Reay Tannehill's Food in History (rev. 1988) also make no mention of Barthes or his food writing. Perhaps future food writers will come to know the importance

of Roland Barthes, who not only explores the language of food but also translates food into language.

Chapter III

Hunger and Rage: Juvenal's Farrago/Feast

Two of Juvenal's sixteen Satires are often cited for their lengthy references to food and eating: Satire V for its detailed description of the banquet foods served to the patron and the much more humble fare offered his client, and Satire XI, in which the speaker outlines his own discerning choices for fresh provincial food as opposed to the elaborate dishes served in Rome. In fact, though, fifteen of the sixteen satires contain references to food. Probably the least consequential food references occur in Satire VI, the diatribe against women, when the speaker compares the testicles of the slave dealer's boys to "lost little chickpeas" (373). The only other food references--as opposed to descriptions of eating and other digestive processes--in VI are the "pies . . . steaming-black with the poison Mummy put there" (631-2) and the poisoned mushrooms Agrippina served to Claudius (620-1). With the exception of Satire XVI, however, the other satires all contain references to, descriptions of, comparisons to, or catalogues of food and food practices. Why would a satirist be so interested in food? Part of the answer is that food is power, and satirists have always attacked power structures. Food is also intimately connected to the idea of virtue. For instance, as noted in the preceding chapter, Roland Barthes asserts that milk is synonymous with

innocence. Paul Atkinson, in "Eating Virtue," explores this idea at great length. Indignation at the lack of virtue is the main currency of satirists. Another reason for a satirist to write about food is that food and writing--especially satirical writing--have an intrinsic linguistic connection.

In the introduction to Cooking by the Book: Food in Literature and Culture, the following statement is attributed to Clifton Fadiman: "Books about food belong to the literature of power, those that, linking brain to stomach, etherealize the euphoria of feeding with the finer essence of reflection" (2). While it is true that not all the eating that goes on in Juvenal's Satires is described in euphoric terms, he does often use food as a sign of power. The poisoned pies mentioned above are a good place to start. In this anti-female poem, Juvenal first mentions a "knock-out mixture" (not technically a food item) in line 615 fed by Caesonia to Caligula, and then he remarks that "When an Empress sets fashions/ What woman won't follow suit?" (616-17). The woman who poisons her children's pies is simply playing the same kind of power game that these famous Roman women have played before her. She demonstrates, as does Agrippina, her power of life and death over her victims through food.

Food is a more comprehensible and less frightening power symbol in Satires I and V. The treatment of food in Satire I could almost be seen as a miniature version of its

more elaborate treatment in V. In I, Juvenal berates the social climbers and upstarts he sees in contemporary Roman society and outlines some of their vices, one of which is conspicuous consumption of everything, food included.

Which of our grandfathers
Would have built himself so many country houses or
dined
Off seven courses, alone? Clients were guests in
those days,
But now Roman citizens are reduced to scrambling
For a little basket of scraps on their patron's
doorsteps. (95-99)

Later in that satire, the client, hoping to be invited to dinner, is left to "drift away to purchase . . . cabbage and kindling" (134-5), while the patron, alone, gobbles "the choicest produce/ Of sea and woodland" (137); the speaker can only hope that the greedy patron will die of a heart attack, his "belly still swollen with undigested/ Peacock meat" (144-5). Peacock meat is obviously symbolic of wealth and power although, according to Anne Willan, writing in Great Cooks and Their Recipes, its flavor was inferior to the flesh of less showy birds (qtd. in Mennell 52). To be wealthy enough to eat less flavorful meat simply because the bird it came from is rare and beautiful is to be powerful indeed, and to die of such a feast is, probably, Juvenal's idea of poetic justice.

In this first satire presumably the patron does not know how hungry his client is, so the power of food is not exercised on his social inferior. In Satire V, however, the client is invited to dinner but his host, Virro, shares none of the expansive feast with his "guest." There is an elaborate description of the host's dinner: lobster, fine white bread, ancient wine, snow-chilled water, fresh asparagus, Corsican mullet in olive oil, Sicilian lamprey eel, goose-liver pâté, capon, spit-roast boar, truffles, and indescribably wonderful fruit, "such as grew in Phaecia's eternal autumn" (151). The client, however, feeds on rough wine, tepid water, moldy bread, "half an egg/ Stuffed with one prawn, dished up in a little saucer/ Like a funeral offering" (84-6), cabbage cooked in lamp oil, an eel that more closely resembles a water snake, a sewage-fed river-pike, and, finally, a rotten apple. The host's gluttony is offensive enough, but juxtaposed with the nasty, niggardly fare offered his guest, the power of food dominates the poem, just as the host's power dominates the client's life. The bi-level dinner is simply another power play, and as Juvenal tells his listener, Trebius: "He does it to/ Make you suffer, for kicks. What farce or pantomime/ Could be a bigger joke than your empty, rumbling belly?" (156-60). Mark Morford reminds us that the client, too, is being satirized here. The rotten apple is fit only to be thrown to a performing monkey, and Trebius seems willing to fill that post. In continuing to return to Virro's house for dinner,

Morford asserts, Trebius "denies his standing as a free man [and] deserves to get such treatment from his 'friend'" (243).

Juvenal's cynical attitude toward upper-class eating habits helps to establish a major recurrent theme in the satires: food-as-power. Satire II includes a brief food reference in which food represents physical instead of social power when he describes the athlete's diet as "huge mouthfuls of raw mutton" (56). But in Satire XIV, the food of the poor and powerless perfectly reflects their lack of social power. In the days of the early kings, retired soldiers were given small plots of land and lived off "ample supper[s] of porridge" (172) and advised their children that "The ploughshare should furnish men/ With sufficient bread for their needs" (181-2). The truly poor man "must rest content/ With a rag round his chilly loins, and a crust of bread" (301-2). Another abuse of food-as-power is to be found in XIV, and it more directly upholds the poem's theme that children ought to be taught wisely. The man who teaches his children to be miserly exerts power through food by curtailing the slaves' rations, but he even stint himself, eating "yesterday's mince" (129), and even more disgusting leftovers, "beans, a tail-end of mackerel,/ Half a catfish, already stinking" (131-2). Lust for the power of wealth knows no bounds.

In Satire IV, the giant turbot found by a peasant fisherman becomes another power signifier. The fisherman

realizes that he will have to present this large fish to the emperor since "everything rare and beautiful/ That swims in the ocean, wheresoever, remains/ Crown property" (54-6). He presents the fish to the emperor, who has no dish large enough to hold it and orders one made. The fish dealt with, Domitian dismisses his counselors only to call them back for a war counsel, and William Anderson comments that "The monstrous fish awakens the animal appetites of the Emperor, and his menacing violence pervades the atmosphere from the moment the poor fisherman catches the turbot" (142). The giant fish, by provoking the emperor's violent feelings, becomes an inadvertent symbol of saevis, or the savagery which dominates so much of the Satires.

In addition to the food/power motif found in the satires, Juvenal makes several connections between food and virtue. This, in some ways, is simply another aspect of the food/power relationship. In ancient Rome, according to Reay Tannehill in Food in History, the ostentatious display of exotic foods was "not only an adjunct of power but a necessary expression of it" (79). In other words, a powerful display of food was one way of identifying a rich man, but food also helps to identify a virtuous man, although naturally, the definition of virtue is a shifting one. In his diatribe against the purple-robed (wealthy) Greeks who have "invaded" Rome, Juvenal identifies them with the "plums and figs from Damascus" (Humphries 83), and Dryden's translation identifies them with "Prunes and rotten

Figs" (l. 148). The figs and prunes/plums are synonymous with the ever-changing Greeks who can lie or change to fit any occasion as long as it benefits them. The speaker, though, identifies himself with good Sabine olives, home-grown, native Italian produce. The implication is that the olives are associated with the virtues of home, the figs and plums with the scheming, underhanded Greeks who seem to be taking over Rome.

Food is connected even more strongly with virtue, particularly the virtues of unpretentiousness and restraint, in Satire XI. The poem begins with an account of a "gourmand gone broke" (3), apparently a typical enough occurrence in ancient Rome: "You'll find plenty more like him, men who live for their palate/ And nothing else" (11-12). The fate of such a man is to become a gladiator and eat rations, or to live in a hovel, or to hock his family's heirlooms; and Juvenal's message is clear that "restraint gives an edge to all our pleasures" (208). The opposite of the unrestrained gourmand is the speaker himself, who invites someone to dine and promises this menu:

All homegrown produce, nothing bought in the
market

First, a plump tender kid from my farmstead at
Tivoli

The pick of the flock, that's never cropped grass,
or nibbled

Low-sprouting willow-shoots, whose veins hold more
milk than blood;

Mountain asparagus . . . big straw-packed eggs
Still warm from the nest . . . and grapes . . .

Baskets of Syrian pears and Italian bergamots,
fragrant

Apples . . . (65-74)

This menu appeals to modern readers for some of the same reasons it appeals to Juvenal. Food here is being offered as a fresh, untainted gift of nature from the host to the guest. It does not signify wealth or power, and the food itself has not been subjected to the human power of processing. The milk in the suckling goat's veins signifies purity and virtue. As Paul Atkinson asserts in "Eating Virtue," milk "has connotations of 'purity' (as well as 'plenty'), possibly because it comes in the form of 'naturally' occurring 'processed' foods" (11). The food Juvenal's speaker offers his guest, Persicus, is only food at its best, free of political or social connotations. An irony pointed out by Sigmund Fredericks, however, is that the name *Persicum* "implies luxurious excess" (158), so this innocent feast may go unappreciated.

A parallel to Juvenal's attitude toward food exists in Memoirs of Hadrian, Marguerite Yourcenar's historical novel based on the life of the only Roman emperor Juvenal had any respect for (Satire VII). Hadrian prefers simple food: "resin-steeped wine, . . . bread sprinkled with sesame seed,

fish grilled at the very edge of the sea . . . [which] all satisfied the appetite alone without surrounding by too many complications this simplest of our joys" (9-10). Hadrian contrasts this simple food with the Roman practice of "cram[ming] ourselves with ortolans, drown[ing] in sauce, and poison[ing] ourselves with spice" (9). Ortolans are small birds which are eaten whole, bones and all. They are remarkable because when eaten, their juice tends to spurt over a wide territory--a fitting signifier of decadence. Almost echoing Juvenal, Hadrian says that "overeating is a Roman vice, but moderation has always been my delight. . . . The banquets of Rome filled me with such repugnance and boredom" (8).

Food practices connected with religion, another aspect of food/virtue, also fall under Juvenal's scrutiny. In XIV he describes some of the Jewish dietary laws (98-99), and Satire XV begins with some of the religious food practices found in Egypt, those to whom onions, leeks, and beans are considered holy foods. He claims that "All households abstain from mutton and lamb, it's forbidden/ To slaughter young kids" (11-12). (The menu he outlines in Satire XI obviously would not appeal to these Egyptians.) He then relates a story which brings the themes of food, power, virtue, evil, religion, and the above-mentioned repugnance all together. In Satire XV, two Egyptian villages, one of which worshipped cows, the other pigs, fall into conflict while one town is celebrating a feast day. The conflict

grows increasingly bloody, and eventually, one of the citizens of Tentyra, fleeing, falls "before/ the Ombite charge" (76-7). The Ombites attack the fallen man, tear him into pieces, and "They wolfed him/ Bones and all, not bothering even to spit-roast/ Or make a stew of his carcase" (80-2). Again food is at the heart of this power struggle, but here eating food does not signify power; it is power itself. The ability to withhold or bestow life is not displaced through food; the cannibalized man becomes the direct victim of the more powerful victimizers, unlike Trebius, the poorly fed guest in Satire V, whose destruction is indirect. The eaten man's humiliation is total: "After the body was consumed, the last in line/ Scraped the ground with their fingers to get a lick of the blood" (92-3). This may be the ultimate example of man's destructive appetites, and Juvenal's speaker wonders what punishment could be severe enough for "a people in whose minds/ Hunger and rage are alike, on a moral par" (130-1).

Hunger and rage are not separated here, just as food and power or, sometimes, food and savagery are not separated in any of Juvenal's Satires. This pairing leads to another relationship between these ideas, which is discoverable through linguistics. The structural linguist and critic Roland Barthes forges a connection between writing and eating that is at once obvious and almost too clever. Because eating and speaking/writing are both done with the mouth, they are parallel, if not identical activities; "cut

off the tongue, and there will be neither taste nor speech," he writes in The Rustle of Language (258). He also notes that "Cadmus, who brought writing to Greece, had been the King of Sidon's cook" (257). To Roland Barthes, who devoted many scholarly hours to speculations about food as a language, the connection between food and writing is obvious and genuine. This helps in part to explain Juvenal's insistent use of food in his satires. One final piece of evidence helps to seal this connection between food and satire. D. M. Shepherd and A. G. McKay write that "Basically the word [satire] forms part of the vocabulary of food. . . . Satura is connected with satur . . . 'full, sated,' an adjectival form associated with lanx (=a dish laden with a variety of fresh fruits for the gods)" (1). Juvenal himself called his satires "farrago, i.e., a mish-mash of grain served to cattle" (McKay and Shepherd 1). Juvenal is driven to write about food, then, partly because through eating he can adequately express his indignation at the savagery he observes in Roman life, but in light of the linguistic connections we have found, this mode of expression seems inevitable. Juvenal's farrago is destined to be linguistically transformed into Juvenal's satiric feast.

Chapter IV

The Language of Fast Food, Slow Food, and Other Food in Bobbie Ann Mason's In Country

The fiction of contemporary Southern novelist Bobbie Ann Mason is, of course, quite different from the satires of Juvenal. Mason's fiction is not primarily satiric, although that element is not entirely absent from her work. Her novels are sometimes classified as "minimalist" novels because of her rather spare style and her hyper-realistic portrayal of her characters' seemingly uneventful lives. Food is the common thread that ties Mason's fiction to Juvenal's satires.

Even more than the characters in Bobbie Ann Mason's Shiloh and Other Stories, Love Life, In Country, and Spence Plus Lila watch television, more than they listen to rock on the radio and shop the K-Mart blue-light specials, they shop for, cook, buy, sell, manufacture, grow, and eat food. Mason admits in her interview with Michal Smith published in The Kentucky Review that she is somewhat obsessed by food and recalls "a pattern of dreams, what she calls 'food dreams,' dreams she says have haunted her at various times in her life" (56). Mason says, "I have an enormous appetite for experience, on a literal level. I'm always thinking about the next meal. . . . It's my sense of adventure" (57). Food and eating are primary motifs in all her writing, and food signifies some major concerns in In

Country especially, where we find an abundance of mass-produced fast food and some traditional southern--"slow"--food, both of which are used as metaphors, symbols, and essential elements in rituals. These observations have been made by other scholars who have observed the important place of food in Southern literature. One such scholar is Darlene Reimers Hill, whose recent article "'Use To, the Menfolks Would Eat First': Food Rituals in Bobbie Ann Mason's Fiction" concentrates on food as a signifier of social and cultural change in the current South described in Mason's fiction. Hill writes, "Mason's stories are full of the ironies produced by changes in food and food rituals in her native Kentucky and the outside world" (82). Aside from the changes signified by food in Mason's fiction, the language of food conveys some other, quite specific messages--and non-messages--in this novel, which Hill's excellent article does not address. The fast, slow, and other foods fit well into the binary coding scheme of Roland Barthes' structuralist theories. To borrow the words of another critic, Leslie Fiedler, fast food and slow food form the language of life, love, sex, and death in this American novel.

For some of the characters in In Country fast food provides not only nutrition but income as well. Sam, the novel's seventeen-year-old focal figure, is on hiatus from her job at the Burger Boy in her small western Kentucky town of Hopewell. It is the summer of 1984, and Sam, who has just

graduated from high school, cannot decide if she wants to go to Murray State University, to the University of Kentucky, or to stay at home with her Uncle Emmett, a Vietnam veteran who may or may not have been poisoned by Agent Orange. Should she decide to remain at home with Emmett, Sam can always reclaim her job at the Burger Boy and work with her friend Dawn. Dawn lives with her widowed father, a dough machine operator at the local cookie factory, a different branch of the fast-food industry. Sam's boyfriend, Lonnier, works at Kroger, not a fast food outlet like Burger Boy or McDonald's, but most Kroger stores do sell ready-made delicatessen items for take-out, a kind of upscale fast food. Eventually Emmett goes to work for the Burger Boy too, so he can repay the government for veterans benefits he received for enrolling in Western Kentucky State University but did not use because he dropped out.

In 1982 Joe Gray Taylor wrote in Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the South that "People who are still fortunate enough to live in the country, people who could plant gardens, keep chickens, and perhaps even grow their own beef and pork, drive into the nearest town to partake of these abominable viands [fast food]. . . . Whole families, even three generations, sit in automobiles and eat abominations" (153). To Taylor, home-grown farm food is obviously preferable to the "abominations" Mason's characters manufacture and ingest, and hamburgers can carry some rather negative connotative baggage, but the kind of food Taylor

thinks they should eat is not always seen in the rosy glow of nostalgia in In Country. Nor does Mason herself engage in the kind of food nostalgia we see among many modern food writers. In the interview with Michal Smith, Mason says that "Everything we did [on the farm] had to do with food, but farm food was repetitive, uninteresting. . . . The big treat was Coca-Cola and hamburgers. I remember how utterly wonderful a hamburger could be, so I think I can understand why McDonald's has taken over" (57).

The food which signifies freedom and variety in Mason's youth has been transformed into another semiotic function in her novel. The hamburgers, like sex, seem to promise relief from boredom, but, also like bad sex, hamburgers, particularly those sold by chains like McDonald's, are simply the same food produced and served over and over again billions of times. Sam's sex with Lonnie is as mechanical and unimaginative as a Big Mac: "Lonnie labored over her, mashing her breasts, and in about thirty seconds a billion wiggle-tailed creatures with Lonnie Malone's name on them shot through her" (104).

Emmett also makes the hamburger-sex connection when he calls the stretch of road from Burger Boy to McDonald's "the mating ground" because that is where Hopewell's teenagers cruise back and forth in their quest for love--or at least sex. Sam comes to realize the real meaning of the phrase "mating ground" when she learns that Dawn is pregnant by her boyfriend, Ken. Sam remembers being picked up by

Lonnie after her shift at the Burger Boy, and "It all seemed innocent then, but what it amounted to, Sam thought now, was having babies. . . . It made her feel sick" (103). Thus, there is an additional connection between hamburgers, sex and babies. Sam and Dawn are part of the second generation of (literally) fast food "lovers." Dwayne, Sam's dead father, had written from Vietnam to Sam's mother, Irene, "P.S. If that guy at the Dairy Queen bothers you again, tell him I'll fix him when I get home" (182). In the last paragraph of his last letter from Vietnam, Dwayne wrote, "When I get home, the first thing I'm going to do is take you out for a hamburger at the Dairy Queen and do all the same things we did on our first date. It'll be you and me and the little squirt--Sam" (183).

Sam breaks out of this pattern of hamburgers, sex, and babies when she is eating a double cheeseburger at the Burger Boy. She returns Lonnie's high school class ring as she "swallows a hunk of cheeseburger. It was delicious, and it felt inappropriate to be enjoying her food so much right now" (187). Dawn's pregnancy forces Sam to realize that she could be trapped in Hopewell, as her own mother had been after Dwayne was killed in Vietnam. To Sam, Dawn's pregnancy is "cruddy," and the area bracketed by the Burger Boy and McDonald's, like those places and the Dairy Queen before it, signifies not only sex but the limited range of choices available to young people who stay in the small-town fast food circuit--the mating ground. In the language of

food as it is "spoken" in this novel, hamburgers and fast food convey multiple meanings: variety, sex, entrapment, fulfillment.

Southern Food author John Egerton writes that "classic southern barbecue is the antithesis of fast food; it is slow food requiring hours of patient preparation" (47). Country ham is even slower food than barbecue, requiring, in its purest form, about nine months to reach perfection, and even "new" ham, to use Egerton's phrase, takes about ninety days to cure. Egerton includes numerous passages from other works of southern literature that heap elaborate praise on country ham, and he asserts that "The passion of Southerners for the meat has always had a special quality" (256). Egerton goes on to elaborate on western Kentucky country ham cured in Trigg County and sold in Cadiz, Kentucky. Trigg County ham is comparable to the more famous Smithfield hams of Virginia. In Country is not set in Trigg County, but Hopewell, modelled on Mason's hometown of Mayfield, Kentucky, is not far from there, so it is not surprising that in a novel so redolent of food, country ham and new ham should have prominent places. Sam's Grandma Smith, her maternal grandmother, who usually wears blue jeans and tennis shoes, invites Sam to her house for Sunday dinner and serves "new" ham, a "smoked picnic [she] got at Sureway last week for seventy-nine cents a pound" (147). At this dinner, she remembers cooking country ham, field peas, and chess pie for Emmett when he came home from Vietnam, but "he didn't

seem to enjoy them" (145) and drank a Pepsi instead. Country ham, a "slow" food, is rejected in favor of a form of fast food, Pepsi, and the change has been wrought by Vietnam. Grandma Smith, too, has changed since Vietnam, and her new company dinner is "new" ham, and instead of chess pie, she serves Sam Waldorf salad, a dish whose title reveals its non-Southern origin, and she modifies the traditional recipe by including Kraft miniature marshmallows.

Ham is significant to Sam's other grandmother, Mammaw, who remembers that after the Army officer informed her of Dwayne's death in Vietnam, "It was three days before we got him home. It went on so long the people that brought food had to go home and cook some more for us. Lutie Cunningham brought a ham and a gallon of potato salad and three pies. I never will forget that. In a way, it was a relief when we finally got him in the ground" (197). In In Country, ham accompanies unhappy events, Emmett's rather sad homecoming and Dwayne's death.

Ham is also associated with death in another part of the novel and explains Emmett's refusal of his mother's ham and field peas. Emmett remembers the food he ate in Vietnam, and he tells Sam and Lonnie, "'In the Army we had ham and butter beans. We had so much of that we called them ham and mother-fuckers.' 'I want some ham and mother-fuckers,' Lonnie said with a laugh. 'They'll kill you,' Emmett said" (74). Similarly, an entry in Sam's father's diary reads,

"July 7. C-rats, ham and lima beans coming out of ears and butt. We've all got direah" (202).

Post-Vietnam fictional food obviously contrasts sharply to the southern "slow" food remembered so fondly by Taylor, Egerton, and American Food author Evan Jones, who claimed in 1981 that "Pork was and remains a Dixie favorite" (18). Country ham and "new" ham may have held an honored place in southern culinary history, but in this novel, and one suspects in the newly health-conscious real South as well, ham signifies illness, suffering, and death. Perhaps the fact that ham is a heavily preserved meat adds to its potency as a semiotic "word" for death in this novel. As a colleague remarked, "What's more embalmed than a ham?"

Another southern favorite, fried chicken, also has negative associations. Sam eats dinner with Lonnie's family in their neo-pseudo—"country" home, decorated with horse-collar mirrors, ruffled curtains, and a picket fence around the toilet. Lonnie's mother, Martha, serves "fried chicken, corn pudding, three-bean salad, and creamed cauliflower" (84). They eat this rather lackluster--and predictable--meal off a round oak table Martha has found in an old barn. She has cleaned all the bat guano off the table and refinished it. The conversation at dinner centers on Emmett, what may be his Agent Orange symptoms, and his long-standing inability to conform to Hopewell's social norms and get a job. The meal ends with fruit cocktail in Jello, and Oreos. Sam realizes that Lonnie's family is incapable of

understanding her concern for Emmett or the effect that Vietnam had on him and the other veterans. The food they eat mirrors their unthinking politics, their sentimental patriotism, and their middle-class values; it is neither entirely traditional country food, nor is it exotic in any way. Their food and the decor in their home are both pale imitations of genuinely traditional country food and decor. Sam realizes that "Lonnie was just like all the other kids at school. Lonnie had admired Emmett because he had been to war, not because he had become a hippie and turned against the war" (88). The table they eat from, formerly covered with bat guano, suggests the corruption underlying the seemingly normal event of eating a meal that begins with fried chicken and ends with Jello and Oreos.

In addition to the fast and slow food in In Country, there is other food language, but the characters who hear and "speak" this food language are not always able to decode it. Irene remembers that during the sixties, she once went to a "white" party where "chicken breast, milk gravy and biscuits, angel food cake, and white wine" were served (170). She remembers bringing "white bread with the crust trimmed and spread with cream cheese" (170). She explains to Sam that "The whole thing was disgusting, but it was funny. I think it was supposed to mean something, but I can't remember what" (170). Perhaps Irene cannot remember what the white food "means" because choosing food for its color alone serves to divorce the food from its cultural

significance, to de-signify it, so to speak. The white food "words" lost their meaning after the 1960's.

Candy is another part of this novel's food language, and Sam is able to decode the meanings of candy. When Sam watches Irene nurse the baby she has had by her second husband, Sam idly observes to herself that "nipples looked like the end of a Tootsie Roll. [She] wondered if that was where Tootsie Rolls got their name" (167). When Sam realizes that Lonnlie is a bore, she feels that she has grown tired of him just as she grew tired of chocolate covered cherries one Christmas. Candy, in both instances, like the hamburgers discussed earlier, signifies various forms of youthful sexuality.

In the final part of In Country, Sam discovers the truth about her father, that he was not the innocent "loving" boy her grandmother remembers. In three key scenes near the novel's end, Sam reads her father's letters to her mother from Vietnam, she reads his Vietnam diary, and she spends a night at Cawood's Pond, a swamp so dangerous and snake-infested that not even the Boy Scouts will camp there. Each scene involves the ritualistic use of significant food, and in the most important scene, the decoding of that food--a fitting climax in this novel. When Sam reads her father's letters, she has "arranged everything around her, the Pepsi on the nightstand, the Doritos and bean dip on the bed in a cleared spot" (179). While reading, "Sam dropped a Dorito fragment on the letter and she picked it up with a moistened

finger. Atoms from the letter mixed with atoms of her saliva, across time" (180). This literal, physical connection to the past is achieved through food. Doritos were not a popular food item in the 1960's, but they nevertheless become signifiers of Sam's desire to know her father and to share his experience. As a food "word" the Doritos reappear and are "heard" later in the novel.

In the next important food ritual, Sam takes her father's diary, which Mammaw has just given her, to a shopping mall in nearby Paducah. She sits on a "bench beside some plants at the center of the two wings of the mall. . . . She had a Coke and some chocolate-chip cookies" (201). The diary contains several food references, but the most striking ones are related to death. Dwayne describes the decaying corpse of a Viet Cong soldier hidden under some banana leaves. Sam "could see and smell the corpse under the banana leaves. Bananas had a sickly-sweet smell when they were too ripe and the insects stirred around them. She could smell that. She ate a chocolate-chip cookie, thinking it would settle her stomach" (205). Sam is sickened by her father's delight in killing when he writes, "if we run across some gooks, they're going to be gook pudding when I get through with them!" (204). Sam's eating a chocolate chip cookie to settle her stomach is a natural response to her disgust, according to Paul Atkinson. In "Eating Virtue" Atkinson asserts that food "can stand for the many different ways in which the world of culture--of meanings, values, and

human work--is created and sustained in the face of an alien, non-human universe (the jungle, the desert, 'the wild')" (11). Eating the cookie is Sam's attempt to assert herself as "civilized" in spite of her father's obvious glee in killing "gooks" and making "gook pudding" in the Vietnam jungle. Chocolate and cookies (perhaps mall chocolate chip cookies most especially) are the products of highly sophisticated food processing, far removed from the death associated with bananas--unprocessed food--and the jungle--"the wild" from which the bananas came. The mall cookies "bespeak" civilization. The word "cookie" echoes Levi-Strauss' assertion in The Raw and the Cooked that cooking signifies civilization, community, and preservation.

In Sam's final food ritual, she takes her version of c-rations out to Cawood's Pond so she can reenact her father's and Emmett's experience in the jungle, "in country," as the soldiers called it. The language of food is quite significant in this scene, and, significantly, Sam is able to interpret some of the language as she is preparing to "hump the boonies": "They didn't have any ham and mother-fuckers, so she took pork and beans" (207); Doritos, because they connect her to her father; smoked oysters because they are as foreign to Sam as Vietnamese food; potted meat because it is canned, and "G.I.s lived out of cans" (207); and granola bars, perhaps as a reminder of "hippie" or anti-war food. She stays the night at the pond, eating her pork and beans and imagining that she, too, is "humping the

"boonies" (212). She is trying to relive her father's experience by sharing the language of his food, or her approximation of it. In the climactic scene, Emmett comes after her, and she finally induces him to talk freely about Vietnam. He tells Sam about hiding under a dead buddy's corpse: "The smell of warm blood in the jungle heat, like soup coming to a boil. . . . That smell--the smell of death--was everywhere all the time. Even when you were eating, it was like you were eating death" (223). Emmett, too, decodes the language of food. This olfactory and gustatory memory triggers an extended and violent fit of sobbing in Emmett, but presently he is cleansed of his sorrow, grief, and guilt. Sam takes him home, and he begins to take action, planning their trip with Dwayne's mother, Mammaw, to the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington. This ultimate food ritual, perhaps because it is so radical and so potentially dangerous, leads Sam and those she loves away from death and toward life, wholeness and reconciliation. Only when Emmett remembers the sensation of "eating death" can he come alive again. Sam's and Emmett's shared ability to decode and understand the language of food leads them out of the past, away from violence, death, and grief toward new life.

The numerous examples of fast and slow food imagery in In Country serve not simply as reminders of the changing South, although they do amply demonstrate that idea, nor are they merely elements of Mason's "K-Mart realism, hick chic,

Diet-Pepsi minimalism, and post-Vietnam, post-literary, postmodernist, blue-collar neo-early Hemingwayism" (Barth 6). Mason's use of the language of food points toward something much deeper than mere elements of style or surface texture. Her food language signifies more, too, than cultural changes. Ultimately, her food language must be seen as part of a larger myth of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Erich Neumann writes about this myth:

This woman who generates life and all living things on earth is the same one who takes them back into herself. Disease, hunger, hardship, war above all, are her helpers, and among all peoples the goddesses of the war and the hunt express man's experience of life as a female exacting blood. This Terrible Mother is the hungry earth, which devours its own children and fattens on their corpses. (149).

When Emmett, Sam, and Mammaw reach the Vietnam memorial they see "all those country boys' names" as Irene predicted they would (235), the farm boys like Dwayne who could not wait to get back and put out a crop have been reclaimed by the earth they tilled, eaten by the "Terrible Mother" whose chief helper is war. At the novel's end, Emmett faces the memorial and his face bursts into "a smile like flames" (245). Perhaps predicting this return to health, his mother says, "Well, I'm glad Emmett's come to his senses. Maybe

now we can get a crop out" (230). Instead of being reclaimed by the Earth, Emmett will help to reclaim it. Myth, in Barthes' terms, is "a type of speech" (Mythologies 109), and in Bobbie Ann Mason's In Country, the language of food ultimately is subsumed into the language of myth.

Chapter V

Wrecked Partitions and Secret Language:

Recipes, Fiction, and Feminist Theory

In 1989 Susan J. Leonardi published an article in PMLA, "Recipes for Reading: Pasta Salad, Lobster a la Riseholme, Key Lime Pie," in which she explores the practice--an increasingly widespread one--of combining fiction and recipes. The fictional texts she explores are Nora Ephron's novel Heartburn and E. F. Benson's novel Mapp and Lucia. Ephron's novel is the story of the disintegrating marriage of the novel's narrator, a cookbook writer. The novel contains fifteen recipes, one of them the recipe for the Key Lime Pie which Rachel, the cookbook author, throws at her unfaithful husband at the novel's end. Benson, a British author, wrote about two social rivals, Elizabeth Mapp and a woman named Lucia, who moves into Elizabeth's village. At a luncheon party Lucia hosts, she astounds the local socialites with her fabulous Lobster a la Riseholme. Lucia never offers Elizabeth the recipe, so Elizabeth must steal it. The two novels have little in common aside from the recipes, identified by Leonardi as "embedded discourse."

The presence of recipes in fiction raises some interesting rhetorical and critical questions, and this mixture of genres is gaining acceptance in popular literature and in experimental writing as well. Jadyth Rigler, writing for the New York Times News Service, has

coined the term "culinary fiction" and describes the novel-with-recipes as "the newest publishing blockbuster." "Culinary fiction" seems misleading in that any fiction which highlights food might be called "culinary." "Recipe fiction" more accurately describes the kind of fiction explored in this chapter. Recipe fiction is reminiscent of the experimental fiction of more traditionally "serious" authors such as Kurt Vonnegut (Slaughterhouse Five's hand-drawn figures) and John Irving (the two short stories interpolated into his novel The World According to Garp). Fannie Flagg's novel Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe and the three detective novels by Virginia Rich, The Baked Bean Supper Murders, The Cooking School Murders, and The Nantucket Diet Murders are, as is obvious from their titles, novels in which food is vital to the story; in addition, recipes for each novel's main dishes are hinted at in the text and written out in full as a kind of introduction and appendix to the novels. Since Rich's death, writer Nancy Pickard has taken over the Potter series and has penned The 27-Ingredient Chile Con Carne Murders. Although the recipes are not embedded in the texts, each author obviously has read a number of cookbooks and is at ease combining the two genres, cookbooks and novels. Two books by women who are also members of cultural minorities are Ntozake Shange's novel about a family of African-American women, sassafrass, cypress & indigo (1982) and Mexican novelist Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate

(1989). Shange and Esquivel do include the recipes within the text of each narrative and weave their plots around the foods and their consumption. Bode Noonan's Red Beans and Rice, neither fiction nor cookbook, is a personal, reflective narrative about the author's lesbianism, which also contains recipes for many dishes. This mixture of referential discourse (the recipes) and fictional or reflective narrative might seem odd to readers who are accustomed to reading cookbooks for one purpose and novels for another, but feminist critical theories can help us understand this experimental mixture, which is peculiar to women's writings.

Feminist theory questions all theory that has come before it. French feminist theorist Hélène Cixous attacks the structuralist practice of binary coding in an essay called "Sorties" from The Newly Born Woman, a combination of essay, autobiography, poetry and prophecy. Cixous asserts that binary codes ultimately put women or the idea of "the feminine" in an inferior position, and the "the male" is always described in terms such as: "activity, sun, culture, day, father, head, intelligible, logos, convex, step, advance, semen, progress, history, art, mind, action," while their feminine opposites are "passivity, moon, nature, night, mother, heart, palpable, pathos, matter, concave, ground--where steps are taken, holding-and dumping-ground, nature, passion" (63-64). Roland Barthes sees binary codes as producers of new meanings, or signs. Cixous, however,

reduces binary codes to "hierarchical oppositions. Superior/ Inferior. . . . Everywhere (where) ordering intervenes, where a law organizes what is thinkable by oppositions, . . . all these pairs of oppositions are couples (64) (emphasis hers). She goes on to assert that "Organization by hierarchy makes all conceptual organization subject to man" (64).

Other writers with no discernible political bias echo Cixous' statements that binary coding privileges the masculine at the expense of the feminine. In Much Depends On Dinner, Margaret Visser comes to virtually the same conclusion about binary coding--and Visser's subject is food, not feminism. She describes the "hippocratic complex" of the ancient Greeks, who influenced the Arabs, Romans, and Spaniards, who, in turn, spread this set of beliefs to the Aztecs who "already had extraordinarily similar sets of beliefs of their own" (197). The hippocratic complex, like the yang-yin system of the Asians, divides the world into "a series of diametrically opposing principles: up and down, light and dark, male and female, hot and cold, dry and wet, and so on" (197). In a discussion of the medicinal properties of lettuce, Visser writes, "Within this system, lettuce is invariably cold. . . . Because it is cold, it goes with 'female' in the schema of oppositions, together with 'wet,' 'dark,' and so on: it is diametrically opposed to all that is hot, dry, bright, and masculine" (198). Binary coding does, obviously, work to the disadvantage of

the feminine. Levi-Strauss' and Barthes' binary codes are simply a more modern version of the ancient Asian system of yin-yang and the Classical hippocratic complexes.

Schemes which rely this heavily on categorizing and on enforcing clear distinctions will privilege some kinds of writing over others. Cixous calls the privileging of language logocentrism, which she equates with phallocentrism. Cixous asserts in "The Laugh of the Medusa" that "Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse" (1097). For Cixous, language and discourse form boundaries which must be destroyed by women if they are to express themselves on their own terms. Women writers must wreck the partitions of traditional discourse if they are to deflate the hierarchies imposed by structuralist coding. Susan Rubin Suleiman, in her introduction to Cixous' "Coming to Writing" and Other Essays comments that Cixous' writings "most definitely get past . . . the wall of genres." Suleiman goes on to say that Cixous' formal bibliography "divides 'novels, stories, and fictions' from 'essays, theory, criticism,' this division strikes me as purely arbitrary" (xi). We now begin to see the distinction between recipes and fiction as a similarly arbitrary division, a partition which has been "wrecked" by a growing number of writers.

In "The Laugh of the Medusa" Cixous has written another statement which can apply to the practice of women writing about both food and recipes. Cixous writes that "In woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history" (1095). Cooking and sharing recipes has for countless years been the work and the habit--the personal history--of women. Cooking is part of so many women's lives that an adult middle-class woman who does not cook is considered by many a rarity. In America, the most famous cookbooks have been authored by women: Fanny Farmer, Irma Rombauer, her daughter Marion Rombauer Becker, Julia Child. We have come to accept the connection between women, food and recipes as a given of American society, so part of women's private history is the processing of food, and one of women's private kinds of texts is the cookbook.

Virginia Rich, author of the food mysteries mentioned above, began her professional writing career as a food writer for the Chicago Tribune and was food editor for Sunset magazine before she began to write mystery novels. Steeped in the discourse of food, Rich ventured into a totally different form of writing, detective fiction. Rich's "detective" is an amateur, a sixtyish woman named Eugenia Potter who divides her time between an Arizona cattle ranch and a Nantucket vacation cottage, both places where she enjoys entertaining her friends at dinner parties. The rhetorician Lynn Veach Sadler, who is a fan of Rich's,

comments that "food is the most important means by which the Rich books link cultures and families and destroy generation gaps. It is the ultimate expression, Rich seems to say, of our community and communalit" (57). In addition, food "is also a personal salvation" (Sadler 58) when Mrs. Potter tells a character, "When you don't know what else to do, cook something. . . . Get out your cookbooks and try something new!" (The Cooking School Murders 68). Cookbooks provide guides for action, as well as guides for cooking, and the self is nurtured by activity as well as by food. Similarly, one of Ntozake Shange's characters, Sassafras, appliques a banner to hang over her stove which reads "CREATION IS EVERYTHING YOU DO. MAKE SOMETHING" (83).

Sadler comments further on the presence of the recipes printed on the inside covers of the novels that "The technique pulls the readers unresistingly into the world that has been constructed" (59). The two recipes we read before we begin The Baked Bean Supper Murders are for, naturally, baked beans, certainly plain enough food, but also for "Mrs. Potter's Dinner Party Coffee," a sophisticated mixture of coffee, sugar and rum to be served up in demitasse cups. This mixing of plain and fancy fare may be intended to include and invite gourmets and non-gourmets alike. This is not the kind of food and these are not the kinds of recipes which are intended to exclude the uninitiated, nor are the closing recipes, which are for more distinctly regional food: mussell soup, blueberry cream, and

an Acadian bread called plogues. After having read the book, we have a context for the recipes, even for those dishes we may not know much about--mussels and obscure regional breads.

Rich's desire to include the reader in the text, to share knowledge through recipes, to draw us out of one world into another, reflects the circularity and inclusiveness of women--represented by their circular, inclusive, and plural sexual organs--described here by another French feminist critic, Luce Irigaray, in This Sex Which is Not One:

Her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. . . . Whence the mystery that she represents in a culture that claims to enumerate everything, cipher everything by units, inventory everything by individualities. She is neither one nor two. (24-26)

As women are "neither one nor two," Ephron's, Flagg's, Rich's, Shange's, and Esquivel's novels are neither strictly novels nor strictly cookbooks. The margins between their fictional worlds and the reader's own world are blurred. Their writing as well as their life experiences--Ephron's real-life divorce from Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward, Rich's other writing career as a food editor, Flagg's Southern background, and Shange's and Esquivel's deep connections to their cultures through food--are not distinct one from the other, not "ciphered" or "inventoried by individualities." Virginia Rich draws the reader into

the world of the novel through her mixture of discourses and her disregard of "partitions, classes, and rhetorics." Ephron, Flagg, Rich, Shange, and Esquivel, unlike Benson, who never fully reveals the recipe for Lobster a la Riseholme in Mapp and Lucia, blur distinctions between writer and audience, writer and subject, between subjects, between genres of discourse. To carry Irigaray's sexual metaphor further, these women writers have turned the Aristotelian rhetorical triangle--a phallic shape--of writer-subject-reader into a feminist writing circle where all are part of the text.

This inclusive text is described by Cixous who writes that women who have found their bodies and their voices "take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, . . . emptying structures" (1098). The American detective novel, so long the purview of the male writer, has thus become one of those "emptied structures" in the hands of Virginia Rich. The "dick" enters into another era and assumes another shape.

Both Irigaray and Cixous base their theories of women's discourse on the works of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan: Freud's theory that women suffer from the lack of a penis and Lacan's that language is primarily masculine because men have necessarily separated themselves from the first woman (mother) in their lives and must thereafter represent all desires through the displacing symbolism of language, which

is phallic because it is identified with the law of the father and therefore divisive (Richter 637). Cixous writes that "symbolic activity, hence the production of culture, is men's doing" (95). If Irigaray's and Cixous' theories are valid, then it is male writing which divides the discourse of recipes and food from the discourse of fiction.

The modern written recipe, disconnected from any framing narrative, is anchored in masculine rather than feminine culture and discourse. Early cookbooks in America, up until the turn of the century, had been "chatty" and "of good literary quality," according to Anne LeCroy, but "cookery turned from art to 'science' of nutrition, exact measurement, home ec principles, and . . . the broader study of the relation between food and humanity disappeared from view" (23). The early home economists wanted "access to the modern world, the world of science, technology, and rationality, and they believed the best way for women to gain that access was to re-create man's world in woman's sphere" (9), writes Laura Shapiro in Perfection Salad. Shapiro recounts the stories of Ellen Richards, the first woman to be admitted to Massachusetts Institute of Technology (in 1870) and Fannie Farmer, "the Mother of Level Measurements." Richards used the science laboratories at MIT to create the foundation of the home economics movement in America, and Farmer's cookbook, The Boston Cooking-School Cookbook (1896), was the first ever to specify amounts of

ingredients, another "scientific" breakthrough in the rhetoric of cooking.

Similarly, the language of French cooking has always been masculine and authoritarian. In an article about experimental literature, Gerald Prince writes that the very term "recipe" "connotes systematicity, programming, control, continuity (it is etymologically linked to 'receive'), and reproducibility" (209). Elise-Noel McMahon describes the recipe books of medieval France as "obvious, one might say unequivocal, strateg[ies] of control" (192). The modern French recipe remains authoritarian, even when it is reproduced by women. Auguste Escoffier's masterpiece, which emerged two years after Fannie Farmer's cookbook in 1898, is described as "a bible of haute cuisine" (95) by Raymond Sokolov in his recent volume Why We Eat What We Eat (1991). Sokolov quotes Julia Child, who, following Escoffier's tradition of French culinary historiography, wrote that substituting proper French ingredients with American ones produces "'pseudo-French cooking, with which we are all too familiar' and which 'falls far below good French cooking' in taste and texture" (94). Sokolov, however, points out that these authoritarian views on French cooking are based on relatively recent practices and that French cooking did not become distinctly "French," much less authoritatively "French," until probably the end of the seventeenth century, by which time the French and other Europeans were "coming to terms with the exotic ingredients brought from the Americas"

(98). Therefore, the authoritarian language of French recipes, although not claiming any pretensions to being "scientific," does not have the weight of very long tradition, very ancient history, or even cultural purity behind it. In France, though, not only are the most famous cooks male and the most famous and respected recipe writers male, but the most famous writers about food are as well: Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, Escoffier, Roland Barthes, Claude Levi-Strauss. The rigid structuralist theories of Barthes and Levi-Strauss only reinforce the view that in that culture, the discourse of food is masculine.

The interpreters of the language of food in France, then, are like the American women who translated the female language of food in the "chatty cookbooks" described by LeCroy into the male language of science. Conversely, the authors of British cookbooks, writes Reay Tannehill, "still lapse into measures that may be meaningful to the experienced cook but are less than helpful to the tyro" (325). That is, the British cookbook authors may lapse into private, non-standardized "female" modes of measurement and into women's language.

Irigaray and Cixous, both allegedly lesbians, might smile on Fannie Flagg's novel Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe because a major story line of the novel is a lesbian love story. The novel, in spite of its folksy-sounding title, differs from nostalgic Southern works like those of Olive Ann Burns, author of The Cold Sassy Tree.

Flagg's unconventional love story of the two lesbians is at the heart of the novel as well as the film, but the novel contains an equally interesting account of the black characters' lives, as the film does not. One of the novel's central figures is a contemporary woman named Evelyn Crouch who lives in Birmingham, Alabama. She accompanies her husband to the nursing home when he visits his mother and makes friends with Ninnie Threadgoode, another nursing home resident. Ninnie tells Evelyn the story of her foster family's life, but the two most compelling characters in the story are Idgie and Idgie's lover Ruth Jamison, who together raise the son Ruth bears as the result of a brief and abusive marriage. Their son, nicknamed "Stump" after he loses his arm in a railroad accident, becomes a local sports hero after Idgie coaches him in baseball and football. He calls her his "Aunt Idgie," but she obviously has assumed the role of father. This unconventional story material is treated unsensationally by Flagg. Perhaps because they live in a closed community which accepts blacks and white on more or less equal terms, considering the time and place, North Alabama before World War II, and which effectively ejects the Klan members who threaten Idgie and Ruth for their kindness toward the blacks, Idgie's and Ruth's lesbian "marriage" is never even commented on by the other characters. It is accepted as fact, and even the gossipy newsletter edited by Dot Weems in reporting Stump's football victory off-handedly refers to him as "son of Idgie

"Threadgoode and Ruth Jamison" (268). Evelyn Crouch hears the story of Idgie's bravery in facing the Klan, in feeding both black and white hungry families by assuming the role of "Railroad Bill," in simply declaring herself free from all the confining roles assigned to small-town white southern women in the 1920's, '30's, and '40's; as a result, Evelyn finds the courage to face her own fears of death and begins to define her own role as a modern Southern woman. (Somewhat disappointingly, she does this by becoming a Mary Kay cosmetics salesperson, but perhaps this is Flagg's acquiescence to realism.)

The novel's strongest and most sympathetic characters are all women who learn to cope with a notoriously white male-dominated society, and the bravest of these women ignore the margins assigned to them by that society.. For example, Idgie and Ruth form their unconventional alliance and allow black people to eat at their cafe; Sipsey, the gentle and frail-looking black cook, adopts a baby because she can't have one and later kills Ruth's abusive husband by braining him with a cast-iron skillet; Evelyn learns to deal with her fear of death when she attends a black gospel church service and loses her grief and fear through singing and shouting. The novel's last chapter contains Sipsey's recipes, blurring at once the distinction between "black" and "white" food, between narrative and referential discourse, and, for the reader who tries the recipes, between fictional and actual experience. Flagg and her

characters are "dislocating things and values" in a manner Cixous might approve, if not to the degree she might approve.

Cixous and Irigaray would more than likely applaud the idea of recipes being removed from the hierarchized and authoritative contexts of modern American and French cook books and instead appended to or embedded in narrative contexts. The recipes at the end of Flagg's novel, because they are for working-class dishes, give precise measurements in some cases, but not in all. The recipe for red-eye gravy, for instance, instructs the reader to add "about 1/2 cup of water or a cup of coffee" to the residue in the bottom of the pan the ham has cooked in (398). To be sure, other recipes do depend on more authoritatively precise measurements and times, but they are often followed with phrases such as "awhile" or "about" or "as desired," assuming that the reader's own way of cooking this dish might be equally valuable and thus sharing "authority" with the reader.

Flagg links the recipes in the final chapter to the body of the novel through what she writes two chapters earlier. In that earlier chapter, Evelyn is given a box of papers left to her by Ninnie, who has died while Evelyn was out of town. Among the papers are recipes for various southern dishes served at The Whistle Stop Cafe. When Evelyn looks at the box containing Ninnie's papers and the recipes, she thinks, "My God, a living, breathing person was

on this earth for eighty-six years, and this is all that's left, just a shoe box full of old papers" (381). The papers containing the recipes, though, provide Evelyn a link to the novel's fictional past; and just as the recipes in Virginia Rich's novels provide us entry into the world of her novel, Flagg's readers may enter into the world of this novel through the voices in these recipes. They are as essential to our reception of and response to the novels as the story line and the dialogue are. Knowing the novels means also knowing the food which "feeds" the characters as well as the authors. It feeds us too.

Recipes, in addition to crossing discursive boundaries when they are embedded in fiction, are significant for another reason. Language Unbound is Nancy Gray's excellent study of experimental fiction by women. Ntozake Shange's work is included among her discussions of recent women's fiction, and Gray asserts that Shange and other avant garde writers "call upon those forms of language most associated with the separated lives of women--spells, recipes, letters . . . not to reclaim them as 'women's language' but to disperse the categories that enforce disabling distinctions" (135).

Shange, as if in fulfillment of Irigaray's mandate that women learn to "write through their bodies" and Cixous' observation that women's personal and public histories are indistinct, has the four women in the novel share recipes with one another and with the reader. Indigo, the youngest

sister, seems demented to the outside world, but her ostensible "dementia" is her magic power. She is a "woman who knows her magic, who can share or not share her powers" (3), and Indigo chooses to share her recipes for various "cures" and spells with the readers of this novel. Included among Indigo's recipes are ones for journeys to the moon, recipes for keeping a sweetheart, recipes for regulating menstruation, and recipes "To Rid Oneself of the Scent of Evil" (30).

Indigo's mother and sister share recipes for food, and, following the pattern of increasingly formal and authoritarian language of recipes discussed earlier, the language of their recipes becomes less "chatty" and more direct. Hilda Effania, the mother of the three daughters, cooks turkey hash, catfish, and marmalade, among other dishes, for the Christmas breakfast when the two elder daughters, Sassafrass and Cypress, come back home for Christmas after being away from Charleston, South Carolina in East Coast schools. Hilda Effania's recipe language makes an immediate connection with the reader through the use of the pronoun "your": "In a heavy skillet, put your butter. Saute your onions & red pepper. Add your turkey, once your onions are transparent" (61). Sassafrass' recipe for "Rice Casserole #36" is slightly more formal: "Cook rice as usual. . . . Bake in oven 20-30 minutes or until all the cheese melts and the top layer has a nice brown tinge" (84). She does not connect so directly with the reader as her

mother does, but her description of the "nice brown tinge" reveals a friendly, non-authoritarian tone. Cypress' recipes are written in standard recipe language without direct address to the reader through pronouns and without the nontechnical descriptions such as "nice." The titles of Cypress' recipes, however, abandon any pretense at pseudo-scientific objectivity and play on the idea of recipes as forms of language: "Three C's: Cypress' Curried Crabmeat," "My Mama & Her Mama 'Fore her: Codfish Cakes (Accra)," "De Floats Be-before de Fish," and "Cypress' Sweetbread: The Goodness" (111-112).

By the novel's end, the characters have begun to celebrate Kwanza and to collect recipes for African food, but still they share traditional American food. Hilda Effania sends Sassafrass a recipe for "Mama's Kwanza Recipe (for Sassafrass): Duck with Mixed Oyster Stuffing" and comments that it "seems like a dish packed full of love and history to me" (132-3). The duck recipe, although designated as a "Kwanza" dish, is indistinguishable from a South Carolina Low Country duck recipe, and the food these women eat forms a rich cultural connection for them to their home and to one another. When the novel ends, all of them are back together in Charleston, and Sassafrass, having left her dysfunctional and abusive husband, is giving birth, assisted by Indigo, who is now a midwife. The circle of women who nurture one another, and whose language is recipes, is complete.

Shange experiments with language in all her works. Note, for example, the spellings used in the title of her "choreopoem": for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf. Her use of recipes, spells, the language of classical ballet and African dance, black dialect, and, notes Gray, "all her senses, not just language" (137) in her works reflect Shange's strong feelings about standard written language: "I cant count the number of times i have viscerally wanted to attack deform n maim the language that i was taught to hate myself in/ . . . i haveta fix my tool to my needs" (Gray 137). Recipes are one of Shange's tools, and clearly in Shange's fiction, recipes are a language of love, not a language to hate oneself in.

The final example of recipe fiction in this study is Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate, a best seller in Mexico after its publication in 1989, and in America after its translation into English in 1992. Esquivel's short novel is a comic, magically-realistic tale of love, passion, desire, betrayal, family loyalty as well as family oppression, revolution, and, in the end, transcendence. The novel has twelve chapters for the twelve months of the year, and each chapter begins with a recipe. One such recipe is for homemade matches, and other home remedies are included too. Each chapter gives instructions for carrying out the recipe, and intertwined with the food is the unfolding plot of Tita, youngest daughter of the oppressive Mama Elena,

Tita's sisters, Tita's sweetheart who must marry one of those sisters, Tita's new sweetheart, his son, and the Mexican revolution. Always in the foreground, however, is the close connection between food and the body, the heart, the soul, and the spirit.

The novel begins with a recipe for Christmas rolls, and the instruction to "chop the onion fine" (5). The onions remind the narrator (Tita's great-niece) of the story of Tita's birth, an event so touched with magic that the tears she cried at her own birth yielded ten pounds of salt when the sun dried them up. Tita grows up in the kitchen, learning everything she needs to know about cooking and food from Nacha, the family cook. Tita's magic body and her magic in the kitchen thematically bind the story's various elements together. Because she is the youngest daughter, Tita is never allowed to marry and must devote her life to caring for her bitter and tyrannical mother. Tita's sweetheart, Pedro, marries her sister Rosaura, whose hand is offered him by Mama Elena, as a way of staying close to his real love, Tita. The day Rosaura marries Pedro, Tita's tears fall into the batter for the wedding cake, and a much less happy, but equally fantastic, result occurs. The guests who eat the cake first begin to sob uncontrollably and then are made violently ill by the lachrymose wedding cake.

The magic of Tita's body and the food she makes appears again after Pedro and Rosaura's first child, a son, is born.

Rosaura cannot produce enough milk to nurse the baby, but although she has never given birth, Tita's magic body makes enough milk to feed her starving newborn nephew. Pedro and Rosaura leave Mexico for San Antonio, at the command of Mama Elena, and their child dies. Tita's grief over the child's death causes her to fall into a prolonged silence, but she is brought out of her mute, grieving depression by some homemade Ox-tail soup. While she is eating the soup, the ghost of her old nurse Nacha returns to comfort her. As always, it is the smell of the onions which brings Tita back to tears and to rebirth.

At another point in the novel, Tita prepares quail in rose petal sauce; the recipe for it begins the novel's third chapter. Preparing and eating quail in rose petal sauce causes Tita's sister Gertrudis to glow with a bodily heat so intense that the droplets of water she showers in evaporate before they reach her skin. Her body gives off an intense aroma of roses, so intense that a soldier fighting in the Mexican revolution is drawn away from battle to the field where Gertrudis runs naked. Gertrudis and Juan, the revolutionary soldier, elope and Gertrudis becomes a revolutionary fighter too. At the same time, Tita longingly looks at a plate of chiles in walnut sauce, with only one last chile left there out of politeness, and compares her lonely life to the chile:

One last chile in walnut sauce left on the platter
after a fancy dinner couldn't feel any worse than

she did. How many times had she eaten one of those treats, standing by herself in the kitchen, rather than let it be thrown away. When nobody eats the last chile on the plate, it's usually because none of them wants to look like a glutton, so even though they'd really like to devour it, they don't have the nerve to take it. . . . Within it lies the secret of love, but it will never be penetrated, and all because it wouldn't be proper. (57-8)

At the novel's end, Rosaura has died, and the daughter she and Pedro have had is about to marry the son of Tita's second sweetheart, whom she declines to marry because of her love for Pedro. They excitedly prepare for the wedding, and Tita and Pedro look forward to being able to marry after a twenty-two year wait. The final chapter begins with a recipe for chiles in walnut sauce and, significantly, there is no last chile left on the plate. Tita, too, is finally consumed by passion, and the intense heat generated by her lovemaking with Pedro burns them and the ranch to the ground. The only object to survive the fire is the cookbook containing the novel's recipes. The cookbook is the magic text which can survive all forms of destruction.

Elena Poniatavska, in her jacket blurb, claims that "Laura Esquivel has handed us on a silver platter a kind of book which has not previously existed in Latin American literature." The recipe novel is, indeed, new, but the

recipe as a kind of privileged text among women is not new in North American culture, as we have seen in Anne LeCroy's discussion of early American cookbooks. Other Latin American women writers, however, have authored cookbooks. Nina Scott discusses the Argentine writer Juana Manuela Gorriti who, at age seventy-one, edited a book of recipes submitted by her friends and acquaintances. Gorriti's recipe book was published originally in 1890 under the title Cocina eclectica. Its contributors were her friends, many of whom were "celebrities . . . well-known writers" (310). Scott discovered in her research into the cookbook that many of the women who contributed recipes were passionately "devoted to literature and became well-read by dint of great self-discipline. Education for women was a central concern [as it becomes in Esquivel's novel], and became a connecting thread among a number of them" (313). Gorriti was not an enthusiastic cook herself, but editing the cookbook was a financial success. "She was a very well-known writer whose book was bound to sell, and the recipe exchange was a satisfactory arrangement for both parties" (311). The recipes, too, allowed their contributors to share stories, "embedding the former [recipes] within personal anecdotes which reveal a great deal about themselves. Cocina eclectica is thus a fabulous mirror of the community of women with which Gorriti interacted" (311).

The recipe, for many women, and perhaps for all cooks of both genders, is a kind of language that cuts across

culture, as we have seen in this study. It is a language which its speakers can share, and one that can be used to tell stories and to involve readers in those stories. The recipe embedded in fiction is a creative innovation, thus far peculiar to women writers, and discursive innovations merit serious attention no matter where they occur. Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray would be hard put to deny that recipe fiction does blur the kinds of distinctions they and we have come to think of as male--phallic, if you will--distinctions. This kind of crossover seems quite new, but perhaps Flagg and Rich are simply returning to a very ancient practice, the oral tradition of mixing genres by preserving history in verse, as in Beowulf, or, in our case, recipes in fiction.

Chapter VI

Discursive Polyphony and Carnivalesque "Otherness":

Mikhail Bakhtin, Food, and the Carnivalesque

The French feminists' close attention to the works of Freud and Lacan, and their negation of structuralist critics such as Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes has had the ironic effect of valorizing those works. Had Cixous and Irigaray known or taken seriously the works of Mikhail Bakhtin, their rage at Freudian and Lacanian phallocentric theories might have been replaced by agreement with the much more democratic and inclusive theories of Bakhtin. In fact, in recent years, feminist scholars have begun to combine Bakhtin's theories and feminist theories into "feminist dialogism," and their ideas are set forth in a volume titled Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic, edited by Dale M. Bauer and S. Jaret McKinstry. In that volume, Gail M. Schwab explores "Irigarayan Dialogism: Play and Powerplay." Schwab goes on to describe "Irigaray's acute and painful sensitivity to the dialogic nature of language" and her insistence that language is always a function of culture (58-9).

The French feminists are theoretically in agreement with Bakhtin's comments about "authoritative discourse" when he writes that it "permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants

on it" (343). Both Cixous and Bakhtin negate the structuralist idea of borders and the hierarchies suggested by borders. Like Cixous and Irigaray, Bakhtin would likely applaud the idea of recipes being removed from the hierarchized and authoritative contexts of modern American and French cook books and instead appended to or embedded in narrative contexts. In keeping with those theories, Fannie Flagg's dialogic novel Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe provides us with many story-telling voices and many forms of language, including the language of recipes. The language of her recipes, however, is not the language of authority, but the language of dialogue. The recipes at the end of Flagg's novel, because they are for working-class dishes, give precise measurements in some cases, but not in all. The recipe for red-eye gravy, for instance, instructs the reader to add "about 1/2 cup of water or a cup of coffee" to the residue in the bottom of the pan the ham has cooked in (398). To be sure, other recipes do depend on more authoritatively precise measurements and times, but they are often followed with phrases such as "awhile" or "about" or "as desired," assuming that the reader's own way of cooking this dish might be equally valuable and thus sharing "authority" with the reader. Or, in Bakhtin's phrase, we are permitted some "creatively stylizing"

"variants" on this now non-authoritative discourse, the recipe-in-narrative.

Another of Bakhtin's theories about the discourse of the novel is that it contains a multiplicity of voices, as other forms--the lyric poem, for instance--do not. Bakhtin's work, like all work, was produced by the culture he lived in, in this case post-revolutionary Russia, where individual voices were silenced by the rule of the Communism--ostensibly a system that should allow more voices to be heard. Therefore, Bakhtin's celebration of "heteroglossia," or multiple and sometimes conflicting voices found in the novel and short story, seems a logical result of his and other intellectuals' repression. David Lodge, in After Bakhtin, calls the interaction of multiple voices "discursive polyphony" and explains it thus:

The discourse of the novel . . . is an orchestration of diverse discourses culled from heterogeneous sources, oral and written, conveying different ideological positions which are put in play without ever being subjected to totalizing judgement or interpretation. (90)

Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe serves as a perfect illustration of Lodge's remarks. In addition to the recipes included as one of the "voices" of her novel, Flagg uses a number of narrative strategies to tell her story. The novel's events are revealed by six different voices. There is the novel's third-person narrator, who

also quotes extensively the voice of Ninnie Threadgoode, who tells the story of her foster sister Idgie and Idgie's lover Ruth. Here Ninnie's elderly, rural, Southern voice is embedded in the more mainstream American voice of the narrator. In addition, there is a gossipy newsletter written by a character named "Dot Weems," who writes about the local news. There is a black neighborhood newspaper, called The Slagtown News Flotsam and Jetsam, which assumes the elevated diction and British spellings once popular in both black and white Southern newspapers' society columns. For example, "Glamour marked the occasion, which saw the Little Savoy Cafe, scene of the select occasion, given a festive appearance by brilliantly embellished yuletide effects and a long, heavily laden table of choice foods and viands" (230). There is a Valdosta, Georgia (white) newspaper, a white Birmingham newspaper, and a railroad workers' house organ, Southern Railroad News. The newspapers' "voices" predictably attempt to sound as "voiceless" as possible, that is, removed from familiar conversational speech, and they give us information about the characters that the characters could neither know about one another nor realistically convey to us, the readers. Most relevant to Bakhtin's theory, however, is the fact that the novel contains nearly as much dialogue as narration.

The recipes in the novel's last chapter join in with this discursive polyphony, and they are linked to the novel through a previous chapter. In that earlier chapter, Evelyn

is given a box of papers left to her by Ninnie, who has died while Evelyn was out of town. Among the papers are recipes for various Southern dishes served at The Whistle Stop Cafe. When Evelyn looks at the box containing Ninnie's papers and the recipes, she thinks, "My God, a living, breathing person was on this earth for eighty-six years, and this is all that's left, just a shoe box full of old papers" (381). The papers containing the recipes, however, connect Evelyn to the novel's fictional past. These surviving recipes, like the recipes in Like Water For Chocolate which survive the fire, are a kind of indestructable--almost magic--text linking generations of women together. Just as the recipes in Virginia Rich's novels provide us entry into the world of her novel, Flagg's readers may enter the world of this novel through the voices in these recipes. They are as essential to our reception of and response to the novels as are the story line and the dialogue. Knowing the novels means also knowing the food which "feeds" the characters as well as the authors.

In David Lodge's interpretation of Bakhtin's theories, a novelist must employ all languages and all modes of discourse, even languages and discourses not usually considered pertinent to fiction. Lodge writes that a novelist "cannot afford to cut himself off from low, vulgar, debased language; . . . nothing linguistic is alien to him, from theological treatises to the backs of cornflakes packets, from the language of the barracks to the language

of, say, academic conferences" (93). Let us add here the language of popular fiction, newsletters, newspapers, trade publications, and recipes.

Another aspect of Bakhtin's critical theory is the idea of the carnivalesque, set forth in Rabelais and his World, first published in Russian in 1965 and translated into English in 1968. Bakhtin asserts that Rabelais is the least appreciated, least understood, and most "difficult classical author of world literature" (3). Rabelais' sixteenth-century novel Gargantua and Pantagruel explores what Bakhtin calls "the People's second life" (8) of laughter, feasting and celebration, as opposed to their oppressive, feudal "first" and primary life of work, sacrifice, and religious observance and obligation. Significant carnivals, the most famous of which is Mardi Gras, are linked with medieval Roman Catholic religious feasts, which in turn are reenactments of pagan agrarian festivities. In medieval and Renaissance Europe, the feasts which preceded and followed Lent were times of freedom from "the entire official system with all its prohibitions and hierarchic barriers" (Bakhtin, Rabelais 89).

In addition to food, another important element in carnival feasts is the idea of transformation and "the peculiar logic of the 'inside out' . . . of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear" (Bakhtin, Rabelais 11). Carnival is a time when celebrants disguise themselves and assume new identities; it

is, asserts Michael Holquist in Bakhtin and his World, "a means for displaying otherness; carnival makes familiar relations strange" (89). The mask or carnival disguise is "the most complex theme of folk culture. The mask is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity. . . . It is based on a peculiar interrelation of reality and image, characteristic of the most ancient rituals and spectacles" (Bakhtin, Rabelais 39-40). In a more modern and Romantic version of this idea, the masks do not truly transform, and the feast, although it presents a kind of "second life," brings sadness rather than "merry negation" (39).

Bakhtin's extensive analysis of Rabelais' use and treatment of food gives us a starting point for analyzing two other texts, one older and one newer than Gargantua and Pantagruel. Those two texts are Petronius' Satyricon, written in the first Century AD, and F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel The Great Gatsby, published in 1925. Readers familiar with The Satyricon know that a major part of the satire takes place at a Roman banquet hosted by the ex-slave Trimalchio. Students of Fitzgerald's novel know that the novel's working title was Trimalchio in West Egg, and the two novels share many parallels although hard proof that Fitzgerald read or owned a copy of The Satyricon does not exist.¹ Whether he read the story in Latin or in translation, it is obvious that he knew the story and its

details well enough to have been influenced by Petronius' satire. Paul L. MacKendrick was one of the first classical scholars to point to several of the important parallels of the two works: music, houses, decor, people, women, political and moral decadence, and, of course, the large, elaborate, decadent entertainment both hosts, Trimalchio and Gatsby, offer their ungrateful guests (307-313). Some subsequent scholarship has focused on details of these parallels, but our purpose here is to focus on three of the similarities shared by Petronius' satire and Fitzgerald's novel: disguised food, drink, and egg imagery.

The most obvious of these parallels is Trimalchio's banquet and Gatsby's large parties, described by Fitzgerald in chapters three and six of his novel. Trimalchio's banquet is truly carnivalesque, one of the kinds of "pagan celebration" Bakhtin alludes to, but Gatsby's parties resemble the much more recent Romantic version of the carnivalesque celebrations where the playful mask does not transform but hides the emptiness behind it (Bakhtin, Rabelais 40). Analysis of these two texts reveals that in a truly carnivalesque work, not only are the people masked and transformed, but the food is as well. In fact, in The Satyricon, the food and the food servers are disguised, and the revelers are not. The first example of masked food at Trimalchio's dinner is this one, described by Encolpius, the narrator of the satiric tale: "On a silver grill, piping hot, lay small sausages, while beneath the grill black

damsons and red pomegranates had been sliced up and arranged so as to give the effect of flames playing over charcoal" (42). These disguised foods are the hors d'oeuvres, followed by what seems to be spoiled peahen eggs which are really pastry eggs encasing orioles. They have been served in disguise as well, hidden in straw under a carved wooden chicken (43). More courses are served and include a hare "tricked out with wings to look like a little Pegasus," priapic gravy boats with phallic spouts (45), a roasted sow wearing a "freedom cap" with pastry piglets "suckling" at her teats and stuffed with live thrushes (49). Another pig is cut open and sausages and blood puddings, instead of chitterlings, pour out (58). Pastry thrushes are stuffed with nuts and raisins (75), and what looks like a goose surrounded by fish and small birds is a sculpture molded out of ground roast pork (75). There is a calf in a cap (66) and goose eggs "sporting little pastry caps" (71). Trimalchio remarks about his cook, "Just say the word, and he'll whip you up a fish out of sowbelly, pigeons out of bacon, doves from ham and chicken from pigs' knuckles" (75). As in actual fact, the pig in Petronius' Satyricon is the most transformable--and therefore the most carnivalesque--meat (Toussaint-Samat 412-13).

Not only are the various pork dishes disguised, but the food service itself is a kind of disguise. The diners are entertained by tumblers and clowns (60), and many of the dishes are served as the culmination of a performance by the

servers. For example, one of the last dishes served at Trimalchio's banquet consists of oysters, mussels, and buttered escargots. They are caught and served as they spill out of jugs held by two serving slaves who pretend to fight and to pummel one another with sticks. One course is served by a slave who is singing "some song from the pantomime called Asafoedtida" (45); the pantomime, too, is a manifestation of the carnivalesque and reenforces the "joy of change and reincarnation." Asafoedtida is a bitter herb with a strong, noxious odor, but one which the Romans sometimes experimented with in their cooking (Toussaint-Samat 537). The clowns, acrobats, jugglers, singers, and performing slave/waiters are all integral parts of the carnivalesque. The food and those who serve it, as well as the guests, are engaged in the carnival feast which allows its participants, even down to the food, to assume new identities and to celebrate their parts in the continuing process of birth, life, death, and rebirth.

Bakhtin describes truly carnivalesque literature as displaying "grotesque realism," and the origin of the word "grotesque" harks back to the time of Petronius. Bakhtin writes that at the end of the fifteenth century the ruins of the baths of Titus in Rome were uncovered, and a previously unknown kind of ornamentation was brought to light. The ornamentations were called "grotesca" because they were found on grottos:

[The grotesca] impressed the connoisseurs by the extremely fanciful, free, and playful treatment of plant, animal, and human forms. These forms seemed to be interwoven as if giving birth to each other. . . . There was no longer the movement of finished forms, vegetable or animal, in a finished and stable world; instead the inner movement of being itself was expressed in the passing of one form into the other. . . . Such is the fundamental trait of the Roman ornament to which the term grotesque was first applied. (31-32)

Grotesque realism allows for the fanciful transformation of one form into another, for instance, the transformation of pigs' knuckles into chicken, sowbelly into fish, ham into doves, and bacon into pigeons (Petronius 75).

The Great Gatsby does contain many parallels to The Satyricon, but Gatsby is not carnivalesque, although the element of masking is important to Fitzgerald's novel. Very few specific details about food are offered in Gatsby, but one specific food reference unarguably links the two works together. In Chapter three of Gatsby, the first description of one of Gatsby's elaborate parties contains these details: "glistening hors-d'oeuvres, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs, and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold" (33). Gatsby's "glistening hors d'oeuvres" are his version of the sausages on a silver grill over the pomegranates and plums disguised as flaming

charcoal. Hams, by themselves, are disguised foods, having undergone months of processing, as we saw in our discussion of Bobbie Ann Mason's novel, and, in the words of critic Northrop Frye, hams are "displacements" for the many pigs served by Trimalchio. A "displacement," in Frye's terminology, is "the techniques a writer uses to make his story credible, logically motivated or morally acceptable-- lifelike" (36) when he is writing a modern version of an old story. Gatsby's "salads of harlequin design" suggest a much diluted and displaced version of the clowns and acrobats who serve Trimalchio's guests their disguised food. The pastry pigs, though, seem the most obvious reference to Trimalchio's food. Pastry in the shape of pigs is simply too far outside the boundary of American cuisine, either high or low, to be a detail Fitzgerald might have included even for the sake of verisimilitude. Finally, Fitzgerald's turkeys may be seen as the modern-day displacements of the orioles and thrushes Petronius disguises as peahen eggs and pastry suckling pigs. Because of its carnivalesque origins in Petronius' work and its attempts at disguise, this food in The Great Gatsby invites the critic to think of this novel in Bakhtinian terms, but the transforming power of grotesque realism is absent in Fitzgerald's work.

In addition to the pastry eggs, The Satyricon contains another interesting reference to eggs. Trimalchio uses an oval chunk of grass-covered earth as a centerpiece on a table, and it serves as the vehicle for a metaphor.

Trimalchio, an ex-slave who inherited, lost, and remade his fortune several times over, looks gratefully at the grass-covered chunk of earth and comments, "Dead in the center of everything sits old Mother Earth, as fat as an egg, and loaded with goodies like a honeycomb" (48). The earth, like the carnival, transforms seeds into food, which is consumed and transformed into fertilizer for more seeds. The earth, like the egg it is compared to, is the source of life. The egg, like the earth, brings forth the chicken, which brings forth the egg, ad infinitum. Cyclical repetition and seasonal renewal are inherent in both images.

The egg is also a dominant image in The Great Gatsby: the story takes place primarily in East and West Egg, and at the novel's conclusion, Nick imagines the original immigrants to the New World amazed at the abundance they saw in "the fresh, green breast of the new world" (140). The egg image appears elsewhere in Fitzgerald's fiction, but it is always divorced from the natural world. The chunk of earth/centerpiece in The Satyricon becomes, in The Great Gatsby, a divot chunked up by Jordan Baker, the professional golfer Nick dates that summer. Nick tells us, "Usually her voice came over the wire as something fresh and cool as if a divot from a green golf links had come sailing in at the office window" (121). Jordon Baker's divot is "cool" rather than "loaded with goodies like a honeycomb" because of the sterile earth whose fertile pastures have been converted into golf links.

The elements of masked food and eggs are retained in the part of the novel most reliant on its source, and in addition, there is also the element of drink associated with both novels. Trimalchio, after inheriting half his master's fortune, invests in ships and enters into business by shipping wine to Rome. He suffers some reverses, but eventually succeeds beyond even his own dreams of avarice. As part of a jest, Trimalchio claims to his guests that he has "set the wine-god free. So let it flow. And drink up, gentlemen. It's all on me!" (50). As some of his guests observe, Trimalchio's wine is the finest Falernian wine (44). Gatsby's equally good liquor flows as freely as Trimalchio's wine: "in the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials so long forgotten that most of his female guests were too young to know one from another" (33). Gatsby, a bootlegger, has also "set the wine-god free" in the era of Prohibition.

In spite of these important and telling similarities, the important element of grotesque realism is absent in Gatsby. Fitzgerald's novel is neither comic nor satiric but falls into a category Bakhtin labels the "Romantic grotesque"; Bakhtin interpreter and scholar Michael Holquist labels The Great Gatsby a "quest romance" (176). Bakhtin writes, "In its Romantic form the mask is torn away from the oneness of the folk carnival concept. It is stripped of its original richness. . . . Now the mask hides something,

keeps a secret, deceives. . . . A terrible vacuum, a nothingness lurks behind it" (40). There is no substance behind Gatsby's parties, no sustenance in his food, and like the food he serves, Gatsby, too, is masked but not transformed. Gatsby cannot engage in carnivalesque "otherness" because the self he invents comes from a single source (Holquist 89); Gatsby is a monologic character, to use another Bakhtinian term. Jay Gatz "never really accepted" his own parents, who were "shiftless and unsuccessful farm people" from North Dakota (Fitzgerald 76). Disowning his connection with his father, mother, and mother earth, Gatsby severs a vital connection to grotesque realism and his own connection with the natural world. His disguised food reveals no "gay truth" when it is unmasked, and, like the disguised food described by Roland Barthes, shows only the ugly fact of spiritual hunger; "a terrible vacuum" lurks behind the masks.

Food is a major element in Rabelais' writing because he celebrates the "grotesque body" and all its functions. Bakhtin states that the act of eating signifies man's triumph over the world around him:

The body transgresses here its own limits; it swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world's expense. . . . Man's encounter with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself.

The limits between man and the world are erased,
to man's advantage. (Rabelais 281)

In The Satyricon Trimalchio and his guests do defeat the world, but in the newer Romantic version of this carnivalesque celebration, Gatsby, the new Trimalchio, is ultimately defeated by the abundant earth which devours him.

Flagg's novel and Petronius' satire exhibit a "carnival sense of the world," a phrase Bakhtin employs in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (122). This "carnival sense" allows these authors to invert the normal hierarchies, sometimes through disguise, always through food and its language, recipes. The result is, in the words of Bakhtin scholar Renate Lachmann: "the contact of everything with everything else, the mixing of up and down, of the sacred and the profane, a contact which crisscrosses (and crosses up) all hierarchies and discrete realms" (20). Bakhtin's own political responses to Communism interpret this inversion in a positive light, as an inversion that allows the "gay truth" about humanity and the continuance of human existence to surface (Rabelais 282). Fitzgerald, although he does employ some carnivalesque elements, embraces a different political agenda, one that envies the "hier" part of hierarchies their wealth and power. Michael Holquist contends that Fitzgerald's novel exemplifies the dark side of carnival (181), but in the final analysis, The Great Gatsby is not a carnivalesque work because the hierarchy has not been inverted, and the "gay truth" has eluded all the

characters. This is evident, again, through food. The last food mentioned in The Great Gatsby is the plate of fried chicken and the ale Tom and Daisy are sitting over after Daisy has run over Myrtle Wilson in Gatsby's car. Tom and Daisy ignore the food because food in Bakhtin's carnival scheme is celebration of victory, and Tom and Daisy have won nothing. Bakhtin asserts that "No meal can be sad. Sadness and food are incompatible (while death and food are perfectly compatible)" (Rabelais 283).

The critical theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, have provided a means of understanding the significance of food in three pieces of quite diverse fiction and three quite diverse modes: satire, comedy, and romance. Two of those texts, Petronius' and Flagg's, are obviously dependent on food for thematic coherence. In fact, The Satyricon is "the standard text of Classical gastronomic literature" (Tannehill 81), and Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe is cited as one of several Southern novels in which feeding others is seen as a means of personal salvation (Dvorak 92). These two obviously culinary texts, and the descendent of one of them, Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, are linked together here as examples of Bakhtin's critical theory. They illustrate the usefulness of Bakhtin's theories as interpreters of that most universal literary motif: food.

End Note

¹The Satyricon is not mentioned in John Kuehl's "F. Scott Fitzgerald's Reading," nor in Matthew Bruccoli's notes in the Cambridge Edition of The Great Gatsby. Paul L. MacKenrick writes in The Classical Journal (April 1950) that "There is not even direct evidence that Fitzgerald read Petronius in Latin; at least the Satyricon was not included in the syllabus of the two courses in Latin that Fitzgerald took at Princeton" (307). Even so, Fitzgerald could easily have read The Satyricon in one of the Loeb Classical editions issued by Harvard University Press. The National Union Catalog lists the first Loeb side-by-side English/Latin translation of The Satyricon as having been issued in 1913, the year Fitzgerald left the Newman School (his preparatory school) and enrolled in Princeton. The Loeb Satyricon may well have been one of those "dirty" books that students read and pass around, and that time-honored practice could account for Fitzgerald's obvious familiarity with the work.

Chapter VII

The Words We Eat: The Rhetoric of Menus

Fiction writers have used food as part of the language of story telling, both in ancient and recent times. This is only to be expected, since food and words are similar components of the oral experience, and food is one of the most common elements of human life and human narrative. Eating and reading, cooking and writing spring from the same creative impulse. In fiction, we "read" food. Another creative outlet for food writers is the art/science/craft of writing advertising copy, one example of which is restaurant menus. When we read restaurant menus, we are engaging in an activity similar to "reading food"; we are preparing to "eat words." Structuralist, feminist, and Bakhtinian critical theories are better suited for analyzing fiction. Selected portions of classical rhetoric, the foundation of all literary theory, are the perfect tools for the analysis of nonfiction, advertising copy included, and menus in particular.

Menus, bills of fare, or "cards," are a specialized form of advertising, but they differ in purpose from many other kinds of print advertising in that the relation between the encoder, the writer or restaurant owner, and decoder, the reader or diner, has been established by the decoder. Menus, therefore, do not always have to claim the reader's attention, but still they are, like other forms of

what James L. Kinneavy calls "persuasive discourse," "focused on the decoder" (211). Presumably, the menu reader is already seated in a restaurant and is trying to decide which of many dishes to have. Or, perhaps the prospective diner is standing outside a restaurant or in a hotel lobby, hungry, looking forward to eating. He or she is already attending to the advertiser's claims and is often eager to be convinced. Even so, menu writing and menu design are advertising specialties bent on helping the menu reader make up his mind. As Albin G. Seaberg points out in Menu Design: Merchandising and Marketing, "The best menus describe, romance, and sell what is being served" (43). He strongly advises all restauranteurs to "procure the use of professional talent, usually through [an] advertising agency, or the services of a free lance writer. The writing of a menu is too important to be left to an amateur" (46). Menu copywriters, like all other advertisement writers, have among their professional tools the classical elements of persuasive discourse style. Clarity, figurative language, and humor are three of the many rhetorical tools employed in the rhetoric of menus. These implements serve up the words we eat.

Quintilian regards "clearness as the first essential of a good style" (221), and clarity in food description may be the most important part of writing menu copy. Clarity presents a particular problem because the subject is food, and names of dishes can vary greatly from one part of a

country to another and from one restaurant to another. For example, Seaberg lists sixteen potato dishes, some of them obvious from the names--"mashed potatoes, boiled potatoes, baked Idaho potatoes"--but also listed are "Brabant potatoes," "Lyonnaise Potatoes" and "Potato du Jour" (43). His point, of course, is that many diners do not know what "Brabant potatoes" are, nor do they know that "Lyonnaise potatoes" are prepared with flaked or chopped onions or that "potato du jour" is a generic term rather than a specifically descriptive one. Seaberg asserts that most Americans have not "been educated to all the foreign, uncommon words" (44) that are part of the professional restauranteur's discourse, and the average diner needs help.

Clarity is a special problem for those American restaurants serving dishes with foreign names, a problem that dates back at least 150 years. Evan Jones, author of American Food, traces the practice of listing restaurant dishes in French back to 1838 when the Astor House in New York had on its menu "'Boiled Cod Fish' and 'Oysters and Roast Turkey' listed alongside Paris dishes like Ballon de Mouton au Tomato [mutton in tomato sauce] and Roulleau de Veau de la Jardiniere [rolled veal with vegetables]" (43), but the French names were not translated. At the same time, Delmonico's, another New York restaurant, "established a cuisine that was exclusively continental" (Jones 43) and instituted the then-unheard-of practice of listing the dishes in French with a side-by-side English translation.

This practice was widely imitated, and Delmonico's is credited with helping to insure the increasing French influence on American food. It seems obvious that in the nineteenth century successful menu writers were not so haughty as to assume that the diner would know French, even restaurant French. Like Daisy Miller or Silas Lapham, many prospective diners might be wealthy enough to eat in a continental restaurant but neither sophisticated nor well-travelled. The Delmonico's menu writer could not assume that his audience and the restauranteur were members of the same discourse community.

In our own time, a more common approach assumes that the diner who is reading the menu in French understands French food terms and is therefore a member of the restauranteur's discourse community. Such a diner needs little or no explanation for such French culinary terms as "piquante," "en croute," or "provencale." A sample menu from Arnaud's, a well-known haute cuisine establishment in New Orleans' French Quarter, exemplifies this approach and assumes that the menu reader does know something about sophisticated food or at least sophisticated food terminology. Listed under appetizers are Shrimp Arnaud, Crawfish Bourgeois, Crabmeat Cocktail, Crab Claws Provencale, Artichoke en Surprise, Mushrooms Jane, Mushrooms Veronique, and Snails en Casserole. This list provides an interesting mix of American and French food terms, but it assumes two things: first, that the diner is familiar enough

with the Arnaud's menu to know, for example, what the "Arnaud" in "Shrimp Arnaud" is or what "Veronique" is; and second, that this diner, sophisticated enough to call a snail a snail, is not so squeamish that he can only eat snails if they are euphemized by the French term "escargots." The Arnaud's menu does list some items that need clarifying, no matter how well-travelled and well-read the diner is. One such specialty is Veal Wohl, consisting of veal scallopini covered in port wine sauce and topped by small mounds of fresh crabmeat and sauteed crawfish. The dish is named for its inventor, one of the chefs at Arnaud's, but it is not described on the menu, assuming that the diner already knows what the dish contains. The diner is perhaps somewhat flattered to be included in the language community, and if he is not entirely fluent, the waiter will translate for him. The issue of clarity, however, is dealt with through assumptions about the diner's familiarity with food and the language of food.

Even more assumptions about the diner's comprehension of French are made by the writers of the Lutece menu. Lutece is regarded by many as the ultimate French restaurant in New York City, and its menu begins with these soups: "Consomme de Volaille, Julienne de Legumes," "Creme Saint Germain," and "Soupe de Poissons au Caribe" (Radice 129). No English appears on the menu, and the diner who does not understand is totally dependent on the waiter to translate. The waiter's necessary intervention adds another element to

the rhetorical triangle when he joins forces with the diner and becomes one of the decoders.

Present-day non-French ethnic restaurants' menus provide evidence of the Delmonico's approach to the issue of clarity in menu writing, and the waiter is not necessary as part in the rhetorical triangle. Seaberg reprints the menu of an unnamed German restaurant in which seven of the nine main course offerings are German dishes with German names, printed in Gothic type. Sauerbraten, Wienerschnitzel, Knackwurst, Bratwurst, Kasseler Rippchen, Pilsner Huhn, and Rind Rouladen make up the bulk of the offerings, and of those seven, perhaps only the first four on the list might be familiar to the average diner. This restaurant supplies explanations for all the dishes with German names, and, interestingly and perhaps rhetorically significant, the explanations are printed in a non-Gothic typeface. Kassler Rippchen is "truly different smoked pork chops served with our special German sauerkraut and choice of potatoes"; Pilsner Huhn is "half of a golden-brown caponette dipped in our unique batter served with spicy beets and choice of potatoes" and "Rind Rouladen--Friday and Saturday Only--[is] rolled and stuffed Top Round braised in its own gravy Bavarian style--served with a choice of potatoes and sweet-sour red cabbage" (62). Obviously perfect clarity is not always achieved; the terms "caponette" and "Bavarian style" are not defined, but the menu writers for this German restaurant do not assume that we are members of their

discourse community or that we would even desire to be, as the Arnaud's and Lutece menu writers do seem to assume, and so the names of German dishes are explained, if somewhat imperfectly.

A menu from an upscale Italian Restaurant in Boston's Back Bay area lists all the dishes in Italian but with English descriptions of each. Again, few assumptions about the diner's familiarity with the Italian language or with Italian food are posited, but at the same time, the menu's ethnic authenticity is preserved. The Papa Razzi menu is divided into seven categories: zuppe, insalate, antipasti, pizza, pasta, secondi, and dolci. Naming the courses of the meal in Italian might seem to be presuming a knowledge of the language, but the individual dishes under each category are described in such a way that the reader/diner need not speak it or understand it. Under zuppe, for instance are pasta e fagioli and minestrone. Minestrone is probably as familiar a term to most diners by now as pizza or pasta, but if the menu reader is confused, both minestrone and paste e fagioli are described in parentheses, respectively: fresh vegetables, chicken broth, and beans, pancetta, pasta, chicken broth. The diner/reader/decoder may not know what pancetta is but can recognize the other ingredients and deduce that zuppe is soup. A pasta dish on the same menu, Cavatappi Affumicate, includes this parenthetical explanation: "spiral tubes, roasted eggplant, smoked mozzarella, tomatoes, basil, romano." Like the German menu,

the Italian one attempts to clarify terms that it does not expect its customers to know, and resorts to the clear but unpoetic description of the pasta as "spiral tubes." Similarly, a neighborhood restaurant in New Orleans, Mother's, describes its featured sandwich in clearly non-poetic terms. The "Famous Gerdi Special" is "Mother's best baked ham, roast beef, debris and gravy," and two lines down, "debris" is explained: "All the beef that falls in the gravy while roasting." These homey explanations contrast markedly with the name of the chicken and vegetable soup at Lutece, "Consomme de Volaille, Julienne de Legumes."

The German and Italian menu writers have heeded Quintilian's advice that "clearness is the first essential of a good style" (221). The French menu writers do not, but business does not seem to have suffered much, perhaps because in the twentieth century, there is a broader eating and menu-reading audience who have taken at least some French in high school or college. Many diners in French restaurants subscribe to Bon Appetit or Gourmet magazines, and thousands have learned the basics of French cooking and French cooking terminology from Julia Child's books and shows.

The use of Romance languages on menus conjoins another aspect of menu style as well, the use of figurative language, an element of persuasive discourse that dates back also to Quintilian, who recommends the judicious use of tropes in Institutio Oratoria in order to "force [the

hearer] to understand" an argument (222). The "argument" in the case of menus is the desirability of any given food or drink on the menu, and the insistent use of French names for menu items--even chicken soup--claims all the skill, delicacy, and taste implied by French food terms.

Distantly related to the employment of Romance languages is the terminology used to describe wine, and the growing interest among Americans in both French and American wines has led to its inclusion in some rather unlikely menus. Take, for example, The Crab Shanty, a barn-like, unpainted restaurant on the beach in Panama City Beach, Florida. Its ambience is borrowed from the casual beachside fish and oyster houses found further south in Florida or in the Caribbean. Most of the customers at this establishment are either college students or young families on vacation with small children. The majority of customers drink beer or soft drinks, but the menu does contain a brief wine list. Under "French Wine" we find Marc Bredif Vouvray, followed by the parenthetic explanation: "crisp, dry, and fruity." Not to be outdone by the French, Gallo supplies a card for restaurant owners to place on their tables describing three of their popular selections, chardonnay, white grenache, and sauvignon blanc. The white grenache has a "fragrant, fruity bouquet with a smooth, softly sweet finish." The sauvignon blanc's "fresh, lemon grass fragrance is complemented by magnificent dry fruit flavors." Such terms as "crisp," "soft," and "dry" do have specific referents to professional

oenologists and to some practiced amateurs, but to the menu-reading public, these terms are necessarily metaphorical and probably subject to widely varying interpretations. Wine scholars Maynard Amerine and Edward B. Roessler, without condemning what they call the "romantic" evaluation of wine, do emphasize that most amateur wine tasters (and many wine writers) base their sensory evaluations of wine on "the subjective, emotional, intuitive, and romantic" elements of the wine tasting experience (3). In a more objective vein, Edmund Osterland, writing in Restaurant Business, advises restaurant owners that "The wine list has to tell people what they need to know, in a way they can understand, and in a form that entices them to try something new" (192). The figurative language of wine description on the Crab Shanty menu and the Gallo promotion would indicate that the menu writer is following Osterland's advice, that his wine list readers can understand the terms he is using, and that the would-be wine drinker will be convinced to try the wine even though he is not precisely sure what he will be drinking. The successful wine rhetorician will avoid at all costs the kind of wine description Kingsley Amis satirizes in On Drink: "Deep colour and big shaggy nose. Rather a jumbly, untidy sort of wine, with fruitiness shooting off one way, firmness another and body pushing about underneath" (57). Such a wildly metaphorical description is "the sort of thing that gets the stuff a bad name with a lot of people who would enjoy wine" (Amis 57).

Some vastly different forms of figurative language are used in describing food, and one approach to describing or naming food is to associate certain foods with famous people. This is probably the most oblique approach to menu writing because, as in the case of assuming the reader knows French, the menu writer must assume an audience familiar with literature. Seaberg includes a menu from one restaurant which names its hamburgers after famous writers, but since the connection between the hamburger and the writers, Charles Dickens, William Wordsworth, Oliver Goldsmith, and Robert Burns, is purely metaphorical and in no way actual, explanation is required. The "Oliver Goldsmith" is "a plain and juicy burger, cooked to perfection; served on a homemade bun--your choice of a bleu or Swiss cheese topping if you desire," and the "Robert Burns" is "a delightful caper for those young at heart; green pepper, onion and a special sauce with capers" (52). Even one versed in English literature would be hard put to find the connection here between the author and the food named after him, but this restaurant, obviously trying to appeal to a particular audience, wants to include appreciators of British literature in its discourse community.

An even more remote connection exists in a menu from Hudson's, a gourmet eatery in Columbia, South Carolina, where chef and owner Michael Hudson invented a salad he calls "Salad Walker Percy," named for the Southern

philosopher and novelist. It is a "tepid salad" which includes lettuce, spinach, carrot, leek, zest of lemon, salt, pepper, and pecan halves (McClow 45). Hudson, one of the "new breed of restauranteur . . . is young, educated (a degree in English), and has been around" (McClow 42). He claims that he chose the name for this dish simply because Percy is one of his favorite writers. Perhaps the pecans, native to Louisiana, also suggested Percy, a Louisiana native and resident, so that the connection between the food and the writer--tenor and vehicle--is not so remote as with the literary hamburgers. "Friar Tuck's Cornish Hen" with wild rice and black cherry sauce provides yet another literary allusion, but one in which tenor and vehicle seem to share at least their supposed common origin, Great Britain (Seaberg 63).

The humor may be accidental in the naming of hamburgers and salads after authors (or sandwiches after famous people at New York's Stage Delicatessen), but it is certainly deliberate on other menus. Humor--what Cicero calls "the salt of pleasantry" (236)--has a place in the rhetoric of menus, but once again, the writer must have a good grasp of his proposed audience or his intended humor will fall flat. Humor is often topical, and what one generation might find amusing might seem offensive to another, or simply silly. Take for example, Seaberg's sample menu:

Famous Lobster Platter

People are sometimes called 'lobsters,' and

in most cases, my sympathy would be with us tired, old people. But, 'Ole Man Lobster,' free from worry, just lazies around all day, in the azure, sunlit waters, off the incomparable keys, just getting fat to grace, (who's Grace?) your Succulent Lobster Platter at Creighton's . . . and 'Sir' Lobster to you, Pal . . . You get it three ways . . . Broiled Lobster, Lobster in rich Cheese Sauce and Tropical Lobster Salad, with Piquant Dressing. A frying pan of French Fried Potatoes . . . Deviled Eggs, Pickles, and Lettuce and Tomatoes. But Wait !!! That ain't all . . . Assorted hot breads, Coffee or Tea. (53)

The parenthetical pun on "Grace" and the affected "ain't" are clearly intended for humorous purposes, as is the lobster's supposed rejoinder, and perhaps at the time Seaberg collected this menu in 1973, the intended audience found it amusing. The same menu describes its baked shrimp as being so delicious that "This Gourmet's Gustatory Treat should make Old Mussolini (The Shrimp) rise from the grave" (53). There is no indication of when the menu copy was written, but one envisions an audience familiar with the diminutive World War Two dictator reading and (perhaps) chuckling at the joke on Il Duce.

More modern attempts at humor rely less on inside jokes or broad historical allusions than on other standard devices. The Po' Folks and Cracker Barrel menus affect hick

spellings such as "aigs" and "'lasses" for eggs and molasses. Both Cracker Barrel and Po' Folks do high-volume business throughout the South and are patronized by both southern and northern clientele. The affected diction and spelling presume an audience from both sides of the Mason-Dixon line which will not only not be offended but will be amused by the "country" humor, perhaps the same audience which might watch the television show Hee Haw.

Judy Radice's second volume of menu scholarship contains slicker, more sophisticated menus than the ones from Po' Folks. For instance, the menu from Pittsburgh Millie's Grand Opera House in downtown Pittsburgh "though primarily serving a young office crowd, hearkens back to Pittsburgh's proud past as a mill town. This is particularly evident in the slightly brash menu copy" (46). The menu reads as if Mae West had written it and borrows one of West's famous lines, here attributed to Pittsburgh Millie: "Is that spaghetti on your face or are you just happy to see me?" Other comments interspersed among the food listings are "Don't you call me a tomato while you've got that fork in your hand"; "I never met a ball team I didn't like"; and "Just try and fit that in your lunch pail." Some of the dishes are named after local historical figures, Colonel Bouquet's Kolbassi, for example: "He wasn't Polish, but we figured any man who saved Fort Pitt deserves a sandwich named after him" (47). Pittsburgh Millie's menu copy depends on the audience's appreciation of

camp and its willingness to join in the hip ambience. The food on Millie's menu is no more hip than that of most fern bars, but its "brash menu copy" probably does attract a young audience which does not mind the ordinary food and appreciates the menu writer's attempts at humor, the "salt of pleasantry."

Humor is simply another aspect of the menu writer's focus on the decoder, and sometimes humor can make the difference in a diner's choice of one dish over another in a confusing array of choices. In addition, metaphorical language and clarity are also necessary to the rhetoric of menus because restaurant diners expect to be "romanced"--in some cases seduced--and to have their food "sold" to them (Seaberg 43). Restaurant eaters may be the most willing customers in the entire range of prospective consumers, but in the history of eating, which is as old as the history of man, not many new ways of selling food to buyers have been developed. In spite of all the many gimmicks restauranteurs have come up with to entice customers--including a restaurant in Dan Jenkins' novel Semi-Tough called "Beef Jesus" in which the waiters wear loin cloths, carry crosses, and say they have "come back" to serve the customer--the standard rhetorical tools work (113).

Classical rhetoric has historically been associated with food, as the introductory chapter to this study illustrates, and, because of its endurance as a philosophical and critical method, rhetoric is both the

oldest and the newest tool for analyzing language. The foods we read about in fiction form part of the text itself; that is to say, in the rhetorical triangle, they are in the midpoint, part of the subject. Foods described for other purposes, such as the purpose of purchase by a diner in a restaurant, are part of a discourse focused on the reader more than on the subject. Ultimately it is the restauranteur who wields power over the diner: power to bestow life/food and to extract money. Rhetoric, the art of the rhapsode, is the tool best suited to judge such power transactions.

Chapter VIII

Conclusion

This study of critical theory and its application to food texts is necessarily limited in its scope of texts and in the tools used to examine those texts, but it is meant to suggest larger possibilities for further investigation.

Other scholars have used Marxist theory to investigate the significance of food imagery in Russian literature and in the literature of the American depression. Roland Barthes' comments about theory as a tool for decomposing and recomposing reality also suggest the possibilities inherent in deconstruction as a critical tool for food texts.

Freudian theory is another obvious possibility. There are endless critical theories which can be used separately or in combination to help readers understand the significance of food in a text and food as a text itself. The theories explored in this study are particularly relevant to the study of food, however, because in each case the theory evolved in conjunction with an interest in food on the critic's part or an interest in the traditional providers of food--women.

This collection of chapters has explored the intimate relation between food and language. Critical theory provides the tools to examine that intimate relation. The structuralist theories of Roland Barthes provide a springboard for other theories, for Barthes' keen interest

in food and his revelations about food as a form of language provide a way to look at two diverse texts, the first-century Latin satires of Juvenal and a twentieth-century minimalist/realistic novel authored by Bobbie Ann Mason. Both writers employ food images which can be decoded to reveal their full significance, but both codes signify basic human concerns about power, virtue, death, and love.

Feminist theory, in reaction to Barthes' structuralism, shows us another aspect of the language of food: recipes. Historically, recipes have been seen as part of the language of women, and fiction as part of the language of men. Presently women are equally fluent in the language of fiction, and they have created a new kind of fiction which includes their other language of recipes. The two kinds of discourse, fictional narrative and recipes, come together in recipe fiction, and feminist theory is the best tool for examining this new literary genre.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theories about dialogism and the carnivalesque echo the theme of power suggested in both structuralist and feminist critical theories. Structuralist theory privileges the male, and feminist theory advocates the destruction of binary coding in favor of circularity. Bakhtinian theory celebrates the inclusive nature of circularity through dialogism or "discursive polyphony" and the reversal of power relations through carnivalesque celebrations. Bakhtin's theories represent a compromise between the opposing theories of structuralism and feminism.

Classical rhetoric offers a fourth alternative to analyzing the powerful language of food in a totally different context, restaurant menus. Although menus may seem to be too divergent from fiction to be included in the same study, they, too, are part of the literature of power, and it is power that underlies all food writing. Classical rhetoric, like the theories of Roland Barthes, has long attempted to analyze food as an artistic element, as the Socratic dialogue quoted in Chapter One shows.

In conclusion, the foods we read and the words we eat are part of the common reading experience we share as a civilization. Whatever we do not share with other civilizations, we do share the experience of consuming food, and in literate societies we share the experience of consuming words as well. Our triumph over the world that threatens us happens daily in our consumption of both food and written words.

Analyzing the disparate food texts, only suggested by this study of fiction and menus, is a monumental task, but the growing body of critical and theoretical work suggests that the study of food writing is becoming its own genre. When we employ critical theory to analyze food writing, we are analyzing more than just food; we are analyzing our own desires, and the four schools of critical theory discussed in this study allow us a certain measure of detachment from those desires. Stacey D'Erasco writes of M. F. K. Fisher's sophisticated and "detached" essays on food: "That savage

detachment was cultivated in the service of a higher order of perception, the perception of the absolute, indisputable longings that are as necessary as the air we breathe, the ground we walk on, and the food we eat" (12).

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- Cracker Barrel, Murfreesboro, Tennessee
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- Papa Razzi, Boston, Massachusetts
- Po Folks, Murfreesboro, Tennessee