

**The Erotics of Consumption
in Postmodern Culinary Narratives:**

**A Look at
Like Water for Chocolate
and
Reckless Appetites**

By

Sharon Patricia Caseburg

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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The Erotics of Consumption in Postmodern Culinary Narratives:

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Sharon Patricia Caseburg

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree**

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Master of Arts

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Abstract

This study examines gender relations in postmodern culinary narratives. Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate and Jaqueline Deval's Reckless Appetites serve as the primary texts; however, Gail-Anderson Dargatz's The Cure for Death by Lightning and John Lanchester's The Debt to Pleasure also receive brief attention. Since there is little literary scholarship on these texts, I assume an inter-disciplinary approach to them, seeking to draw out their significance in a larger context. It soon became apparent that in order to understand the importance of the culinary narrative in relation to postmodern literature, issues of genre and feminist theory had to be taken into consideration. As the recipe is central to the culinary narrative, a study of both its history in cookbook form and its literary importance also figures in the analysis. The culinary narrative, which commonly features stories of romance, is an important new genre, currently in development. The following document examines this genre and its implications for feminist writing.

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Introduction

The link between food and sex is ancient. Their associated biological functions are perhaps the two most important activities necessary for the endurance of the human species. The tie between food and sex has therefore been exposed and exploited by various means throughout history, their relationship undergoing numerous changes. Not surprisingly, many scholars have examined the association between eating and sexuality in their studies. Among others, Sigmund Freud's theory of infant sexuality, Joseph Campbell's study of a cannibalistic New Guinea tribe, and several other historical investigations of such eras as the Roman Empire (Diane Ackerman's study, for example) have repeatedly drawn a strong connection between mastication and love-making. In literature, too, examples of this tight association are evident. The highly suggestive scene in Thomas Hardy's Jude the Obscure, when Jude forces a ripe strawberry between Arabella's lips, and the situation in James Joyce's "The Dead," where the main character's wife longs after a lover, are but two examples of the association between food and sex.

One significant change in the evolution of the relationship between food and sex is the development of the culinary narrative, a recent mode of female writing, which concentrates on the domestic art of cooking. In several culinary narratives, including Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate and Jaqueline Deval's Reckless Appetites, food's affects on basic libidinal tendencies are examined. Imbedded within these recipe-laden romances are passionate and often erotic tales which can effectively be explored through their links to food and food preparation. As a result of their peculiar structures, these narratives cannot be easily located within already established genres of female writing, such as romance novels or cooking books, but require their own literary space for definition. It is with this concept in mind that I suggest we consider the current development of the culinary narrative as the infancy of a new genre, one which, although it draws upon already established categories, opens enough difference to be defined as a genre in its own right.

The definition of any genre is based upon recognized conventions that typically prevail over texts in a given category. Most theorists who engage in studies of genre theory agree upon this fact. It is a question of whether or not the genre continually evolves or remains fixed that often comes into question. On one side, traditionalists like Alistair Fowler and Claudio Guillén argue that genres never transcend their boundaries. The preconceived network of mutually exclusive textual elements, or conventions, should remain constant in all works of a genre. Deborah Madsen, arguing a more accommodating sense of genre, notes that Fowler is aware that the “dominant generic form is compromised by modal styles and subkinds,” but she quickly points out that “his theory does not allow for a genuinely multigeneric text” (18). Fowler is hardly alone, for many critics and writers agree with this traditional view of the generic dispute. However, I would like to note that such a limited view of literary potential does not readily allow for the development of a new genre such as the culinary romance. Thus, from a traditionalist point of view, the culinary narrative, showing traits of both the romance novel and the cookbook, can be designated only to one of these two genres. But selecting either the romance category or the cookbook category to house the culinary narrative in question means that a significant portion of its structure and literary definition is compromised. Parts of the work must be either deemed less significant than those characteristics that match the area the book is housed under, or, those characteristics that do not comply with the housed definition must be ignored completely. In either circumstance, a significant portion of the culinary narrative is neglected.

Fortunately another, more flexible, approach to the generic question also exists. Mary Gerhart notes that deconstructionists believe “that genres always exceed their stated rhetorical purposes” (355). As everything for a deconstructionist is in motion and undergoes continual change, genres too have for such a reader the constant ability to evolve. The evolution of a genre such as culinary narrative from two other genres is thus deemed possible. Even though deconstruction theory tends primarily to examine individual texts, it has much to tell us about the importance of genre.

I do not think the issue of convention should be disregarded when considering genre. In fact, conventions provide a convenient way to think of specific works as belonging to a special “family.” And just as in real families each member brings to the group those characteristics specific to the individual. It is important to note what is typical and what is atypical in each instance. Jean-Marie Schaeffer provides a useful way to regard genre. “The different texts that we integrate into a genre,” she writes, “are often linked by simple ‘family resemblances’” (175). She further writes:

[T]hey do not all necessarily share the same recurrent characteristic or characteristics, but a given text shares some characteristics with some of its “cogener,” some other characteristics with other “cogener.” Thus a text p shares the bundle of traits A with texts q and r; q in turn shares traits B (different from A) with s, which, furthermore, shares part of traits A with q and r; r in turn, in addition to the A traits that it shares with p, shares other traits C with it and with S, etc. (Schaeffer 175)

Families, like genres, change— someone moves away, a baby is born, someone else marries into the dynamic—nothing with families ever remains stationary. Yet the essential core of the unit, and what is cohesive about the grouping, remains the same. Thus, a genre (such as the culinary romance) will also undergo several changes as it evolves. Even after the genre is well established it will continue to evolve. Therefore, it is important to note that genre is both static and dynamic—it is something in the text as well as something external to it, encoded into the reader’s expectations.

As M.H. Abrams notes, conventions are what make possible the writing of a particular work of literature, even though the writer may play against those prevailing generic conventions (71). In order to do so, the writer must be aware of the conventions required of the literary mode in which he is writing. The purpose of genre conventions, according to Jonathan Culler, is “essentially to establish a contract between writer and reader so as to make certain relevant expectations operative and thus to permit both compliance with and deviation from accepted

modes of intelligibility” (Culler 147). Thus, a reader knows she is enjoying a culinary narrative instead of a romance novel or cookbook when she encounters certain markers such as various recipes distributed throughout a particular story line, the inter-dependency of those recipes and the narrative, and the strong connection between food and gender in the narrative). Because these particular conventions are specific to the category of fiction I am examining in this thesis, it is necessary to consider culinary narratives as having a generic category of their own.

My final reason for considering the culinary narrative as a separate genre finds confirmation in something I stumbled upon in my research: critic and educator Cecilia Lawless refers to having taught Like Water for Chocolate, a culinary narrative, both as a novel and as a cinematic film. In reference to such attention and the excitement it generates from her students, she writes “[t]his enthusiasm for the genre has led students to make testimonial videos of their families’ histories as well as compile their own cookbooks, create poems, and so on” (222). I found Lawless’s use of the word “genre” in reference to this particular mode of writing useful. Even though the article appeared to me well after I had begun to refer to culinary narratives as a “genre,” I feel it legitimizes my claim, as another critic has evidently named the writings much as I have.

Having considered the importance of viewing the culinary narrative as a separate genre, I would further like to add that these novels are also important because they consider issues of reterritorialization. As Deborah Madsen notes, “[w]ithin a system of literary genres that are determined by masculine modes of experience, women are obliged to use noncanonical genres” (13). That being the case, the culinary narrative, as a literary mode, aids in what one might call an act of female reterritorialization of the domestic realm. The term reterritorialization occurs in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s studies of “minor” literatures. They argue that minor literatures are those writings that are constructed by minorities within a major language. These narratives are often characterized by a tendency to be political and serve to draw attention to the

minority (Deleuze and Guattari 16-17).¹ Cooking, Lawless notes, “viewed as manual and everyday labor, automatically becomes associated with and assigned to those people marginalized by class, gender and race” (219). Thus, food functions in strong association with women, a group who has been in the past (and whom, many would argue, still are) marginalized.

Thus the developing genre of culinary narrative may also be considered a minor literature because the narratives included in the category have not been considered, until very recently at least, mainstream writing. They are often anti-patriarchal in their subject matter and they draw attention to a currently minor literary concern: domestic activity. Reterritorialization occurs when the author or work “reclaims” something that had been removed from her or it. For example, women have written about the domestic realm for centuries, although domestic activity was of little literary concern to the patriarchal majority. As a result, such “housely” writing captured a smaller readership. Furthermore, since the women’s liberation movement, women have moved out of the domestic realm and into the workforce. Thus, female attention to the domestic realm has also somewhat elapsed. The culinary narrative is in a sense therefore a movement back to that realm and thus a means of reterritorialization, claiming both food and sex as being profoundly connected to female activity.

The recent development of the culinary narrative has especially allowed for this exploration of the domestic arena. Laura Esquivel’s groundbreaking novel, Like Water for Chocolate, has drawn considerable attention to this particular mode of writing, both from the average reader and from the academic community. The 1993 film version of the Spanish novel garnered even more critical attention, further helping Esquivel to be recognized in the North American market as well as drawing attention to the genre that she helped to create.

My thesis will explore this new and developing mode of writing. In particular, I will concentrate on the relationship that food and sex have in two culinary narratives: Like Water for Chocolate and Reckless Appetites. I will also mark out how this particular type of writing is

¹ Although the term reterritorialization is not used by Deleuze and Guattari to denote freedom from an enslaved position I have chosen, for my purposes, to use the term as a means of identifying a positive reclamation of territory which once had been occupied in ways that are damaging to women.

defined as well as how it functions to further certain literary goals such as increased female participation in writing. Since Esquivel's work is, in effect, the archetype of the literature I am here examining, I will focus my study primarily on what it contributes to the genre as a predominantly female narrative structure. In a similar manner, I will address Jaqueline Deval's Reckless Appetites, a very different culinary romance, partly because it likely was inspired by Esquivel's narrative. Deval's story will help in reading Esquivel's work and, more generally, in understanding the nature of the culinary narrative genre.

Chapter 1: The Culinary Narrative

The structures of the culinary narratives I will here address are essentially female in origin and purpose. The prominence of female authorship, the feminine discourse that originates from the recipes and the female nature of their readership establish a distinctive narrative pattern. Although there have been attempts by male writers to enter this particular literary mode their participation in the genre so far has been limited. Thus, I will examine the ways in which culinary romances (an alternate term for culinary narratives) function primarily as a female literary venture. But first, drawing upon earlier texts, I will examine the link between food and the feminine and I will conclude by examining how recipes function as a form of female discourse in the two novels which particularly interest me here.

The Prominence of Female Authorship

The development of the culinary narrative can be traced back to what would be among the earliest surviving female writing: the receipt collection. Among others, Josephine Donovan acknowledges that nonliterary, typically unpublished forms of writing, such as the letter, the diary and the family biography (which I would add often locates part of the family history in the receipt collection) are forms of writing which women historically have produced (Donovan 443). Janet Theophano further notes that due to the numerous restrictions on the average women's intellectual activities, reading, writing and sharing of recipes became a significant source for women's imaginative life (Theophano 287). In her opinion it is likely that refined cooking instructions were introduced through the private circulation of recipes and were more than likely written in the context of social interaction. Evidently the writing of recipes and the gathering of a receipt collection were considered "acceptable" intellectual activities for women who until the nineteenth century, rarely wrote openly, and were almost never included in the Canon. Those who did manage to get things published often did so covertly, under a male pseudonym. Mary

Ann Evans (George Eliot), Charlotte Brontë (Cūrōr Bell) and many others found it necessary to publish under the guise of male personae. The use of masculine literary personae increased a woman writer's chance of being published and, according to Patricia Lorimer Lundberg, provided women with a shield that they found necessary to protect themselves from the ridicule of male audiences (270).

Most women, in any case, had very little time to write stories of fancy. However, women of privilege, who were educated and who had servants to take over much of their domestic duties, had greater opportunity to write, as opposed to the average woman, who was preoccupied with the daily operations of the home. Naturally, when the average woman did come to write, a portion of her own daily concerns found its way into her work; her own experiences found existence on the written page. Thus, the meals she prepared and events she experienced were documented in her letters, journals and receipt collections.

Hélène Cixous, who has long been an advocate of women writing from their own experience, provides a useful way of thinking about such resources. In several of her more famous texts ('Sorties', La Jeune Née, La Venue à l'Écriture) she calls upon women, encouraging them to tell about their own feminine experiences. Cixous notes the importance of sharing these experiences, both for the woman who is writing (as for her it is a cathartic process of release) and for the woman who reads about the experience (as for her it is an educational and empathetic experience). The importance of such sharing activities is that it allows for domestic knowledge to surpass common patriarchal perceptions of domestic experience. For example, historically, we know the male gaze² has given little attention to the woman in the kitchen. She is in that perception almost always the wife/mother/maid, going in and coming out with a dish,³ someone

² The "male gaze," a term now common in feminist theory, refers to the objectification of women within patriarchal structures. Subject to such gaze, women are seen more in terms of their bodies than of their individuality or character.

³ Endless examples could be provided of this particular female representation. In James Joyce short story "The Dead," we see a detailed description of the food at a banquet and of the hostesses, but we do not have a glimpse of the detailed work that must have taken place prior to the dinner, in the kitchen. Again, in William Thackeray's Vanity Fair, we read about the wonderful curry Mrs. Sedley prepared for Joseph; however, we never see Mrs. Sedley in the kitchen, fussing around, trying to reproduce the favorite dish for her son.

whose role consists of that passage. Rarely does the male gaze settle in the kitchen where the woman moves about, measuring her ingredients, blending her creation or mixing her concoction. Rarely does the male gaze examine her experience there.

Naturally, the subjects which those women who could read, first chose to write about, were also largely a reflection of what reading was available to them. It is important to note that women from the lower classes typically had little schooling and many, therefore, were unable to read or write. As for the middle-class and the upper-class women who could read, very little controversial material was available to them. Largely, women of the nineteenth century were restricted to reading published cookbooks, household guides and books of etiquette: all domestic subjects (Theophano 288). It is no wonder, then, given such experience and models, that when women came to write, they focussed their creative representations on the household domain.

The remarkable prominence of female authorship in culinary narratives can be attributed in part to the acknowledgement of a tradition: recipe fiction provides a means by which women authors can pay homage to what they have received from their foremothers. That lineage becomes especially important for today's society that has allowed for the mass exodus of women from the kitchen. Today's economy demands that to achieve and maintain a comfortable standard of living, women must enter the workforce, alongside their mates. This migration ultimately leaves little time for the culinary arts, as the experience of food is largely reduced to the acquiring of basic sustenance. As a result, for many people, food has lost its pleasure and intimacy, transposed as it is to fast-food restaurants and microwave miracles. Once convenience foods had become the "order of the day," however, culinary romances could function in a contrary action as a means of preserving the Epicurean arts and affirming a matriarchal realm. For both writers and readers, then, these narratives develop a means of both remembering and honoring the lives of our foremothers as most of us hurry about from one meeting to the next, a Big Mac on a food tray, in our cars.

Historically, the prominence of female authorship in culinary romances was further facilitated by a tradition of the receipt collection. A significant portion of female writing that has

survived over the past few centuries has been located in such gatherings, also known as cookbook journals.⁴ Often these “books” were nothing more than different sheets of varying size and texture that were tied or glued together. These collections were constructed from a mélange of pages that were often salvaged from scrap materials, pieces of paper, the backs of envelopes, cardboard from boxes, and any other materials that were available for recording recipes and the day-to-day occurrences of the home. In effect, these books were prototypes for today’s culinary narratives. In these homemade ledgers, women would record their favorite recipes—those that they themselves had perfected, those passed down from their own mothers, and those received from external sources and appropriated into their repertoire.

But these books were often more inclusive. Notes about family—events that had transpired over the life of the book—were commonly included among the recipes. These books in their extension became, among other things, journals of familial history, documenting the changes and growth of the family unit. For many women in the nineteenth century (and those who continue to create these memory books into the twenty-first century), the keeping of a receipt collection has been, and continues to be, quite literally, a life’s work. Filled with both recipes and memories, these compendia were evocations of sensory experience, nostalgia and imagination. Janet Theophano argues that these books were “an account of friendships, exchanges and relationships to others, a testament of devotion, nurturance, skills and knowledge acquired over a lifetime” (Theophano 296). In short, women used these loose assemblages quite liberally to write about their experiences in the home.

The culinary romances, which are my interest here, constitute in part an extension of receipt collections, cookbooks and journals as a form of writing. They are, in a way, a “folk-craft,” filled with recipes and household tips interwoven throughout the narrative. The concept of

⁴ Janet Theophano, in her essay “A Life’s Work: Women Writing from the Kitchen,” points out that manuscript cookery books are not only a phenomenon of the last two centuries. Written recipe collections were often given as gifts from one European Royal court to another and manuscript cookery books have been found from as early as the fourteenth century (297). However, according to Terrence Scully, the actual need for written guides, such as these, in the kitchen of late medieval Europe was largely nonexistent as it was “likely that peripatetic courts, strong tradition, apprenticeship, efficient oral transmission and remarkably retentive memories normally eliminated the need for written guides in the kitchen” (xxv).

the receipt collection is eloquently defined by Gail Anderson-Dargatz in her novel The Cure for Death by Lightning. The reader is presented with the cookbook journal from the onset of the novel as Anderson-Dargatz goes into detail in describing the scrapbook and its composition. The fact that the collection is made from the “backs of letters, scraps of wallpaper, bags and brown wrapping, and on paper she made herself from the pulp of vegetables and flowers” (1-2) plays a significant part in defining the journal as important and magical to the daughter. The collection is comprised of bits and pieces of the mother’s life, of which the daughter, Beth, so desperately wishes to become a significant part. As the journal is, quite literally, a record of the mother’s experience and consequently, to a large extent, the experience of her daughter (who focuses the narrative gaze throughout the story), we can find in it one response to Cixous’s demand to write one’s own experience. Thus the scrapbook becomes important to both the characters in the novel and to the audience who read the story which evolves around it.

By presenting recipes, inter-spliced with stories and other information, such as newspaper clippings and household remedies, Anderson-Dargatz attempts to mimic the cookbook journals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However since the recipes and household tips she includes in her narrative are indexed at the back of the novel, Anderson-Dargatz’s journal is easy to use as reference material in addition to being a literary novel.

Jacqueline Deval also attempts to create a cookbook journal within her novel, although she is to a lesser extent committed to the act than is Anderson-Dargatz. In Reckless Appetites, the heroine, Pomme, includes a “household book” which she intends to share with the readers. Its inclusion connects Reckless Appetites to the early receipt collections upon which the novel is modeled, as well as linking the narrative in a special way to the audience. By including a household book, filled with recipes and tips, Pomme surpasses the common role of literary author by giving a tangible gift to her readers. She shares with the audience outside the narrative, both what she has learned and what is important to her, indicating an attempt at establishing trust and a special reciprocity between the fictional character and the factual audience. We may well assume a special gifting in her act, as cooks will not often distribute their treasured recipes to those they

do not trust.⁵ (Take for example the character of Rachel in Nora Ephron's novel Heartburn. She does not like or trust Thelma, who subsequently turns out to be her husband's lover. Thus, when Thelma requests Rachel's recipe for carrot cake, Rachel refuses to share the instructions because, among other things, she senses that complying with the request would be conferring something important on someone unworthy).

Laura Esquivel's narrative is structured differently than are Anderson-Dargatz's and Deval's attempts at re-creating cookbook journals. In Like Water for Chocolate, Laura Esquivel begins each chapter with a list of ingredients for one particular recipe. She, however, does not index them, or any of the other recipes that she includes, and thus ensures that her book more closely resembles a true cookbook journal than do those written by Deval or Anderson-Dargatz. Similarly, Winnipeg author, Anna Zurzolo, presents each recipe in Bread, Wine and Angels with a list of ingredients *only* at the onset of each chapter. Zurzolo does not present an abundance of other "minor" recipes throughout the remainder of a chapter, or the rest of the larger text. As there are few recipes included in Zurzolo's novel and as all of them are listed at the beginning of each chapter, where they are all unquestionably easy to locate, she evidently feels no need to index them. As the kitchen has traditionally been of little concern to men, very few of them have written or participated in the creation of receipt collections and subsequently in culinary narratives. Their domain was, and largely still is, that of labour,⁶ though noticeable exceptions to this avoidance are the many world-class chefs who are male. Typically, throughout patriarchal history, men would go to work, while women would stay at home and prepare the food. Until recently, this pattern has been fairly constant, men have functioned outside the home, and women have tended to function inside it. It is my opinion, then, as a consequence, when men wrote, they wrote about things they knew about or desired—often as not, those things outside the kitchen.

⁵ The obvious exception to this rule is the commercial cookbook, which is a collection of recipes gathered specifically for publication and distribution. Even though recipes are meant to be shared and special, favorite or family recipes tend to be carefully guarded by cooks.

⁶ In her article "The unproductive housewife: Her evolution in Nineteenth-Century Economic Thought," Nancy Folbre documents the immense pressure levied on women to avoid the marketplace and to remain in the home, performing necessary domestic duties for men.

When they read, they more often than women read about action and adventure: narratives whose events extended outside the home.

That is not to imply that male authors do not address domestic subjects. John Lanchester's entry into the culinary romance arena, The Debt to Pleasure, for example, is a deft rendition of the culinary romance. Although in Lanchester's case, the underlying story is not so much a romance involving another individual as it is a romance of the self and an ideal: the main character, Tarquin, is more in love with the idea of himself than an external individual. Lanchester is aware of the genre within which he is working. He knows enough to tempt and tease his readers with culinary delights, and by doing so, pulls them into the narrative. He also knows the recipes he provides and gives interesting and detailed directions for their preparation. In Lanchester's narrative, gastronomical instructions are incorporated so subtly into the text that removal of any would likely breach the flow of the narrative, resulting in a disjointed discourse. That said, it is important to note that The Debt to Pleasure does not include an index of recipes. Thus, the book is perhaps less aware of its extra-literary benefit than The Cure for Death by Lightning, in effect, making it a more precise example of a culinary narrative than that written by Anderson-Dargatz.

Despite his success, Lanchester's has not enticed many other male authors to attempt this literary mode. Male entries onto the culinary romance scene have, as yet, been few and far between, the genre being still primarily written by women. As this mode of writing gains in popularity and profitability, it might bear witness to greater male participation. However, due to the feminine nature of this recipe-based literature, it is doubtful whether male participation in recipe fiction will ever match, or outweigh, female authorship.

The Prominence of Female Audience

Just as there is a prominence of female authorship for culinary romances, there is also preponderance of female readers. As I suggested earlier, this is largely an issue of interest. Even though the current trend sees more and more women leaving the domestic environment for the workforce, females still often tend to act as primary food preparers, despite their activities outside the home. Thus they have a greater concern for recipe-based narratives than do men, who are largely removed from domestic environments. In turn, as culinary narratives are largely the result of women telling their own experiences, we might well expect females would form a greater portion of the reading audience.

Admittedly, like any “romance,” culinary romances involve large doses of escapism. Because significant portions of their narratives revolve around romantic sub-plots and sexual activities, these texts can be seen as obscure offshoots from the greater romance genre. There is an important difference between culinary romance and other romance novels, however, as in the culinary variety the action is not far removed from the domestic domain that the reader is vicariously trying to escape. These narratives in fact serve to make the domestic arena more enjoyable.

Having acknowledged the escapist appeal of these texts, I would nevertheless argue that a large attraction of any romance novel is what Susan Elizabeth Phillips terms the “fantasy of female empowerment” (Phillips 55). Romance novels provide a site through which women can experience a feeling of control over various events in their lives. Typically, women in the larger world are pulled in a variety of directions (households, children, husbands, work, and the like). Needless to say, it is difficult to be maid and nurse and sex-goddess all at the same time. The result for many women, according to Phillips, is a deep-rooted sense of uncertainty. There are no guarantees that husbands won’t leave wives for younger women, that children will be safe in school, that there will be enough money to pay the bills. Against those nagging doubts (admittedly men experience their own anxieties), the romance novel provides a venue in which

everything turns out satisfyingly, as it should. As a consequence, romance novels are highly formulaic. Almost all romance novels follow the same pattern of rise and fall among their characters. If you've read one, you may not have read them all, but you've certainly read quite a few. The reader knows at the outset that everything will work out in the end. It is this reassurance, Phillips argues, that makes the romance novel so appealing. The reader knows, comfortably, from the first page that the heroine will prevail.

The comfort in knowing that the heroine will prevail from the beginning is evident in Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate. Throughout the narrative, we repeatedly see evidence of Tita's perseverance in very dire circumstances—against Mama Elena, against Paquita, the town gossip and even against her own sister, Rosaura. They all stand in her way of connecting with Pedro. Despite this, the reader, operating within the confines of the romance genre, knows that Tita will overcome all odds and in the end win the prize of Pedro. This knowledge can be very comforting.

There are other reasons many women readers turn to the romance novel. It is crucial, I think, that they experience vicarious control and power through the heroine. Specifying the structure of that appeal, Stella Cameron argues that there are two distinct climactic points in any romance novel. The first climactic point occurs when the hero acknowledges the heroine's heroic qualities, and begins to fall in love with her. The second climactic point occurs when the heroine uses her power and teaches the hero to love (141-142). For those brief moments in which the reader is absorbed in the novel, she vicariously becomes the heroine and holds the position of redeeming power. At the same time, the reader is offered, within the confines of the text, a few crucial improvements over her own life. In a sense, then, it is the reader with whom the hero falls in love and who teaches the hero how to love.

And how does the heroine in a culinary romance achieve this? Through her cooking, of course! Thus, it is the reader, and not Tita, who prepares the sumptuous dinner of quail in rose petal sauce. And it is the reader who teaches Pedro how to love when he consumes the

delectable meal, thus permitting him to make culinary love with Tita, the character that, according to Cameron's theory, the female reader most strongly identifies with.

Thus, we should note that the same power structures that exist in other romance narratives exist in culinary narratives. The reader, through an act of identification, in a kind of imaginative identification "becomes" the heroine. The connection is made possible because, however "erotic" the narrative, the heroine in a recipe text performs many of the same duties that the female reader herself performs in her own home: cooking, cleaning, child rearing, being a lover and so on. And yet, in the culinary romance, the hero's appreciation for those tasks are potentially greater than are likely those of people in the reader's own experience, in her own environment. Through the more domestic narrative that the reader enters, she achieves the gratitude and appreciation potentially lacking in her own environment. In the stories she takes on, she vicariously enjoys reassurance and gratitude.

Food and the Feminine

One of the very first things that any astute reader will notice within virtually any literary structure is a strong association between food and the feminine. Great literary works ranging from the Bible ("The Song of Solomon")⁷ to Chaucer (in his description of the Prioress in the

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- ⁷ How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter! the joints of thy thighs *are* like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman.
- ii. Thy navel *is like* a round goblet, *which* wanteth not liquor: thy belly *is like* an heap of wheat set about with lilies. . . .
- vi. How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!
- vii. Thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters *of grapes*.
- viii. I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof: now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples;
- ix. And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine for my beloved, that goeth *down* sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak.
- x. I *am* my beloved's, and his desire is toward me.
- xi. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages.
- xii. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, *whether* the tender grape appear, *and* the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves.
- xiii. The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates *are* all manner of pleasant *fruits*, new and old, *which* I have laid up for thee, O my beloved (Song of Solomon.7.1-13).

General Prologue of The Canterbury Tales)⁸ and Shakespeare,⁹ all reaffirm and solidify the link. The tendency to forge a strong association between women and food extends far, working beyond narrative confines. Over the centuries, language itself has taken on a highly sexualized dimension, frequently connecting women and food.

Mark Morton's culinary dictionary Cupboard Love: A Dictionary of Culinary Curiosities provides an excellent resource in which to trace the often bizarre etymology of words from their feminine associations to their current usage. "Bain-marie" or double boiler, for instance, links us to Mary, sister of Moses.¹⁰ "Liebesknochen," a cream-filled pastry, originated as a substance used to cure a barren woman.¹¹ And then, among many other examples, there is the origin of the word "groaning," still used today in some parts of England to describe those foods prepared and presented during the time a woman is recovering from childbirth. The word, of course, is a direct reference to a woman's labour pains (Morton 171).

Language and literature are not the only sites in which food and the feminine are intricately combined. The relationship between women and food has become the subject of many

⁸ Although the following excerpt is an ironical depiction of the Prioress' attention to manners, it also serves to highlight her interest in food, as fine dining is an earthly pleasure in which a nun or prioress should not eagerly partake:

At mete wel ytaught was she with alle;
 She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,
 Ne wette hir fyngres in hir sauce depe;
 Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe
 That no drope ne fille upon hire brest.
 In curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest.
 Hir over-lippe wyped she so clene
 That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene
 Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte. (The Canterbury Tales, 127-135)

⁹ Shakespeare's depiction of women and food tends to be less overt, not necessarily directed towards any particular characters, but rather towards a stereotype. Often, women in Shakespearean plays—among them Anne in The Merry Wives of Windsor (l.i. 262-287)—tend to be maids or pages, summoning the male protagonists to dinner.

¹⁰ It seems that the device in question is fashioned in a manner similar to the way in which medieval alchemists attempted to transmute base metals into gold. Mary, the sister of Moses, was considered to be a patron of what Morton refers to as the "mysterious art" whose central vessel was known in Latin as "balneum Mariae," or what we now know as a "bain-marie" (33).

¹¹ If a barren woman ate this pastry and still did not conceive a child, she would then be encouraged to try vielliebchen, another fertility remedy. This cake, Morton claims, leaves little to the imagination, it being "long and tube-like with two almonds ornamenting one end" (211).

art forms including, painting. Pick up any book that identifies itself, as a collection of the great “Masters,” and you will find several images of women in a variety of ways related to food. The possibilities and depictions seem limitless as women are depicted beside a bowl of fruit, reaching for the fruit, serving men who devour the food, and preparing the food.¹²

The tendency to connect women and food may be in part due to the traditional female role of nurturer and hearth-keeper. Certainly, until relatively recently, women have been almost solely responsible for food preparation within the home, beginning with the birth of a child who relies immediately upon her mother’s milk to nourish her. As the child grows, she sees her mother preparing the family meals and from her she learns the traditions of the kitchen. In time, she marries and continues the cycle with the birth of her own child.

The Bible, one of the earliest literary and socio-cultural works of the Western World, not only establishes connections between food and sexuality at its outset in Genesis, but also a strong association of food with the feminine. It is the apple, food from the Tree of Knowledge, which gives Adam and Eve the awareness they are naked. When they bite into the forbidden fruit, they become highly aware of their sexuality. Food thus becomes sexualized into not only something feminine—it being Eve who first bites into the apple and who, as a wife, brings the forbidden fruit to her husband—but into something erotic and charged. In the Bible the consumption of the apple serves as catalyst for man’s fall from grace, causing such emotions as lust, desire and passion to come into being.

Eve is in that narrative the epitome of all womanhood. Mythically she was the first woman and the foremother for humankind. In the book of Genesis, Eve, as the archetypal woman, becomes the very first scullery-maid—her womanhood linked to domestic servitude, her familial position defined at an early stage. Furthermore, Eve’s early association with food almost certainly bestows the same designation upon those who consider themselves her daughters.

¹² Émile Bernard’s Pont-Aven, Paul Cézanne’s Woman with a Coffee-Pot, Edgar Degas’s The Absinthe Drinkers, Édouard Manet’s The Bar at the Folies-Bergère, Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s La Fin du Dejeuner and Jan Vermeer’s The Cook are all examples of famous paintings depicting women and food.

Although Eve is not described in detail in the Bible, she has acquired many elaborate depictions in the para-texts surrounding it—most notably that of Milton’s epic poem, Paradise Lost. In Milton’s version of the creation myth, Eve assumes what within the patriarchal world is her traditional role as domestic servant to her husband. When the archangel, Raphael, comes down to the garden to warn Adam and Eve of Satan’s impending threat, Eve is commanded by her husband to play hostess and, in an act defining of her role, to bring forth a meal for their celestial guest:

And Eve within, due at her hour prepared
 For dinner savoury fruits, of taste to please
 True appetite, and not disrelish thirst
 Of nectarous draughts between, from milky stream,
 Berry or grape: to whom thus Adam called.

Haste hither Eve, and worth thy sight behold
 Eastward among those trees, what glorious shape
 Comes this way moving; seems another morn
 Risen on mid-noon; some great behest from heaven
 To us perhaps he brings, and will vouchsafe
 This day to be our guest. But go with speed,
 And what thy stores contain, bring forth and pour
 Abundance, fit to honour and receive
 Our heavenly stranger; well we may afford
 Our givers their own gifts, and large bestow
 From large bestowed, where nature multiplies
 Her fertile growth, and by disburdening grows
 More fruitful, which instructs us not to spare.

(*PL* V 303-320)

Adam automatically assumes (whatever his professions of generosity and attendance), that Eve should be the one to prepare the meal. Taking for granted that the task is Eve's, he never voluntarily takes the initiative and prepares any food. In the above passage, I would argue that Adam refers to their pantry as "thy stores," meaning Eve's stores. Even though he elsewhere repeatedly utilizes the plural pronouns "we" and "us" in portraying both of them as shared hosts of the visit, Adam consigns the pantry to Eve's sole jurisdiction—"thy stores"—and so removes himself from having to participate in any real culinary duty. Adam dispossesses himself in a telling way, as he names the food not "theirs," but rather Eve's alone.

Milton elaborates on how Eve goes about preparing the meal, further solidifying the bond between food and female:

She turns, on hospitable thoughts intent
 What choice to choose for delicacy best,
 What order, so contrived as not to mix
 Tastes, not well joined, inelegant, but bring
 Taste after taste upheld with kindest change,
 Bestirs her then, and from each tender stalk
 Whatever Earth all-bearing mother yields
 In India east or west, or middle shore
 In Pontus or the Punic coast, or where
 Alcinous reigned, fruit of all kinds, in coat,
 Rough, or smooth rind, or bearded husk, or shell
 She gathers, tribute large, and on the board
 Heaps with unsparing hand; for drink the grape
 She crushes, inoffensive must, and meads
 From many a berry, and from sweet kernels pressed
 She tempers dulcet creams, nor these to hold

Wants her fit vessels pure, then strews the ground
 With rose and odours from the shrub unfumed.

(*PL V 332-349*)

In examining Milton's revealing language, we see a true artist at work: Eve gathers, she tempers, she crushes, she portions and she sequences. It is important to note that the verbs "tempers" and "crushes" and "heaps" are "masculine" verbs associated more commonly with such activities as forging, say, than anything belonging to the culinary craft. Combined with such expressions as "unsparing hand," these words present an image of a very strong Eve, resolute in her task. However, Eve is still presented in female terms. Expressions such as "delicacy best" and "kindest change" remind us that Eve is still a soft and gentle creature. Her observance of important rituals in handling food reminds us of how fundamental the bond between women and food really is.

It is important to note that while Eve performs domestic duties, only Adam converses with Raphael and hears the warning about Satan. Raphael has Adam's full attention, while Eve, though she may be present, is (one might recognize) distracted by the performance of her domestic duties from what is being said. If that were the case, she would not be fully informed about their enemy and therefore unable to prepare her defenses. Thus, one might go so far as to say that had Eve not been "in the kitchen," humanity's fall from grace might never have transpired.

Whatever the fate of Milton's Eve, her daughters have ever tended to food. Over time, society has geared itself to advertise and entice women, as fundamental domestic workers, to buy new varieties of food and try new recipes. Women's magazines are notorious for their food ads. On almost any given page, there will be some kind of reference to food or food preparation. Even fashion ads which are geared towards women buyers will display food imagery: an ad for an evening gown, say, will often be accompanied by a plate of hors-d'oeuvres or a glass of sparkling champagne.

Not surprisingly, certain foods have become sexualized in female terms. As an example, cultural and food critic Karen Klitgaard Povlsen presents her audience with a vision of red meat, cut with a sharp knife. She further presents the picture with a “spotlight dazzling in the blood and the polished knife, two glasses and a bottle of red wine depicted before a fireplace.” In some accounts, this could be a picture of a delicious, romantic meal. But it is a meal that for Povlsen carries defiantly masculine connotations. The food in question is presented as a sexualized food, “representing the female body as seen by the masculine observer whose oral and visual desire is excited by the picture. Food representing the other, who is to be incorporated” (Povlsen 132), food representing the feminine.

Highly sexualized representations of food recur in literature, particularly in culinary narratives. When a particularly erotic food scene is written from a patriarchal perspective, it might well become yet another way in which women are presented as objects: something consumable. When a woman writes a scene in a similar manner, however, it often becomes a means of undermining that stereotype, and claiming an empowered place for feminine sexuality. Although this type of reterritorialization sometimes results in male characters being presented as objects, as is the case with Jeremy in Reckless Appetites, that result is not as prominent, nor as constant, as female objectification in patriarchal texts. Rather, culinary romances present food and the feminine as strong, affirming partners.

An example of strong female reterritorialization occurs in a reworking of the expression “picking a cherry”—a euphemism some men have used as a reference to stealing a woman’s virginity. A particularly striking reworking of this image occurs in Gail Anderson-Dargatz’s The Cure for Death by Lightning. Here, through her female narrator, Anderson-Dargatz reclaims the “cherry” from a feminine standpoint. She defines and creates an origin for the expression and in doing so transforms the representation from a sign of something to be seized, to something both highly erotic and delicately feminine:

You approach each fruit, like each lover, differently. For cherries, you roll your sleeves up. Otherwise you'll stain them purple. And look into the sun when picking cherries, so you can see their dark silhouettes hanging there. And of course you must reach up, so find yourself a sturdy ladder. When you eat a ripe cherry straight from the tree on a sunny day, its juice is so hot, thick and red that it has the feel of blood running down your chin, staining your lips, and filling your mouth. Once you've sucked all you can from it, you spit out the pit and go for another warm cherry off the tree, and another and another, because the cherry will seduce you every time. The cherry becomes a compulsion, a thing you must have, a passion. You don't see that ripeness, that hot blood juice, in a store-bought cherry. But a cherry sun-hot off the tree, well, that's where it came from, the insinuation of lust in the cherry, the smut-name put to the ripe button-love of a woman. Cherry. It's all juice and warmth, an O in your mouth, a soft marble for your tongue to play with, a sweet soft thing with a core cloaked in flesh.

(158)

Anderson-Dargatz's passage is highly sensual and vibrantly alive with traces of the feminine. Words such as "sucked," "seduced," "compulsion" and "lust" aid the already compelling concrete images to make the passage stark and erotic. The blood imagery, linking the fruit to menstruation, constructs the cherry as defiantly feminine against an overwhelming taboo in many patriarchal societies.¹³ The bleeding cherry, however, is powerful and affirming in Anderson-Dargatz's text. Blood is the life force from which we all hale—male or female, we are all "of" women. In the "cherry" passage, then, Anderson-Dargatz dramatically performs a task common to culinary narratives—presenting female sexuality and female functions as a powerful and positive, even inviting, force.¹⁴ The strong lesbian overtones of this passage serve to refocus the

¹³ In many cultures, over the centuries, women were viewed as being "unclean" during their period of menstruation. Often, women were hidden away during this time, neither permitted to eat with the rest of the family, nor permitted to prepare food, for fear that they would contaminate the meal and make it unsuitable to eat.

¹⁴ Although by no means a culinary narrative, Jeanette Winterson's novel Sexing the Cherry, similarly

reader's gaze from what until now has been a male perception to an unquestionably female orientation. Here the link between food and the feminine is obvious.

Perhaps less in an act of reterritorialization than in an act of character development, Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate introduces us to a protagonist who is so solidly linked to food that her every emotion is reflected in the dishes that she creates. Her connection to food has defined her personality even before her birth. Esquivel writes that "Tita was so sensitive to onions, any time they were being chopped, they say she would just cry and cry; when she was still in my great-grand-mother's belly her sobs were so loud that even Nacha, the cook, who was half-deaf, could hear them easily" (3).

Tita's early response to the chopped onions is indicative of her emotional, if not preternatural, ties to food. Later, when she is grown, she channels her emotions into the meals that she herself prepares. Her grief over her beloved Pedro's marriage to her sister Rosaura, and the immense longing she suffers for him, transmits through her tears into the icing of the wedding cake into which they fall. The ensuing consequences are quite remarkable. As the guests at the wedding consume the icing-laden cake, they also consume Tita's grief:

all around her something very strange was taking place. The moment they took their first bite of the cake, everyone was flooded with a great wave of longing. Even Pedro, usually so proper, was having trouble holding back his tears. Mama Elena, who hadn't shed a single tear over her husband's death, was sobbing silently. But the weeping was just the first symptom of a strange intoxication—an acute attack of pain and frustration—that seized the guests and scattered them across the patio and the grounds and in the bathrooms, all of them wailing over lost love. (37)

presents female sexuality and force as something powerful and positive. The title of the novel is a dual reference to the issue of female sexuality and to the exotic hybrid nature created when grafting fruit—i.e. "sexing" the cherry. In Winterson's novel we are again presented with a reterritorialization of this particularly striking sexual image.

Tita's cooking and, more importantly, her grief is powerful. The effects of the cake "seize" the guests and the result "scatters" them across the patio as if a giant hand had grabbed them and flung them about. The guests are helpless against such greater powers, as Tita's suffering is delivered to her guests. Rosaura's happy occasion thus becomes a sad one for everyone in attendance, as they are poisoned for bearing witness to Rosaura and Pedro's unfortunate partnering.

The incident with Tita's wedding cake is the first of many such occurrences. Emotions ranging from love and lust to anger and hate infuse the mouthfuls of food Tita prepares for her guests and her family. The emotional flavoring she adds is not the consequence of conscious forethought, deliberation, nor of any malice; but it is the result of her bond with food—an inherent part of her being—in notice both of her overwhelming sexuality and her ability to overcome adversity. As a result, through her cooking, Tita's diners consume various parts of her emotional self.

Tita's metaphorical consumption by her diners echoes another stark, literary representation of the consumption of a woman through food. In Margaret Atwood's 1969 novel, The Edible Woman, Marion's gradual aversion to food is only rectified after she serves up a woman-shaped sponge cake, symbolic of herself. In serving "herself" to her two male lovers, Marion is able to express her anger at the men, thus also addressing the root of her anorexia—another mode of communication through food (i.e. the denial of food). Marion, like Tita, is really only able to communicate with those around her through the dishes which she serves. It is never clear whether or not Marion's male friends understand what it is she does in serving the cake, as only one of the two lovers actually eats from the plate set before him. Only after her lover eats "her," is Marion set free, just as Tita is only set free after her dinner guests, each time she cooks, consume her.

Jaqueline Deval's Reckless Appetites gives us a very different story from that of Like Water for Chocolate and The Edible Woman. Yet in Reckless Appetites, too, there is an immediate link between food and the feminine. The heroine's name, Pomme, which in French

means apple, defines and determines a significant portion of her nature. Not only does her name provoke thoughts of food, but also more pervasively, it alludes to the Great-mother, Eve, and the apple which in legend she consumed in the garden. We might well recall that Eve is the quintessential definition of womanhood, the archetypal woman—beautiful, innocent and wise at the same time. Most importantly, she is the mother of all humankind. By linking her to Eve, Deval invites us to align Pomme with her namesake. In her resemblance to Eve, Pomme becomes entirely and utterly feminine.

Both Tita and Pomme are “raised” in the kitchen, a place that predetermines the course of their futures. Tita’s connection to the kitchen is more immediate than Pomme’s, as Tita is born there, on its very table, amid the simmering smells of soup, herbs, steamed milk, garlic and onions (4). There she enters the world wailing and crying enough tears to flood the entire kitchen, site of food and flood. What is especially pertinent to my reading is the fact that when her tears have dried, enough salt remains to “fill a ten pound sack” (4), its seasoning later used to enhance food. We might here especially appreciate that salt¹⁵ is an elemental mineral, necessary to bring out the flavour of prepared foods. Right from the moment of her fabulous birth, then, Tita’s connection with food is immediate; her natal tears give the family seasoning for many meals to come. Inadvertently she becomes responsible for the family food right from birth; her future divined from the kitchen table, irrevocably set in place. Her birth in the kitchen and its production of salt set in motion a series of life defining activities, naming her dependant upon the kitchen.

Tita’s definition as a figure of food continues after her initial arrival. When Mamma Elena’s milk dries up soon after Tita’s birth, the infant is turned over to Nacha, the ranch cook, to be fed and cared for. Since Nacha’s domain is the kitchen, Tita’s domain also becomes the kitchen. As she grows, Tita attunes herself to its routine—knowing only by the smells around her when it is time to be fed. In effect, Tita becomes part of the kitchen, always there, always

¹⁵ In Genesis 19.26, Lot’s wife is transformed into a pillar of salt as she turns to look back at the burning cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Despite her transgressions she is changed into something elementary and necessary for the enjoyment of future life.

involved in what transpires there. The kitchen becomes so important for Tita that it influences every aspect of her life. When she is little she plays in the kitchen as if it were a giant playroom filled with toys—something her sisters do not understand and are largely not able to do (6). (That is not to say that the sisters are inept in food preparation, since both girls take part in the preparation of several items including sausages and Christmas rolls. Later in life, Gertrudis even makes fritters. Rosaura, however, is generally unsuccessful at all she does in the kitchen and therefore cannot even make a meal to please her husband) (46-47). Tita, given her ability to commune with food, is always able to please with her cooking. Under the tutelage of her surrogate mother, then, Tita develops a deep understanding of the intricate ways of the kitchen. Upon Nacha's death, she appropriately assumes the domain as her responsibility.

Pomme, too, enters into a tradition of the kitchen, although hers is, oddly, patrilineal. Since her father is a gourmet chef at a high-class hotel, she grows up surrounded by food preparations and haute cuisine.¹⁶ Highly educated, she is also surrounded by literary sources from which she draws much of her pertinent knowledge. (We know little, if any, about Tita's formal schooling). Given Pomme's familial background, her education in food is substantially more intellectualized than Tita's. Whereas Tita turns to the maternal Nacha for her hands-on education, Pomme looks to history and literature to develop her taste for culinary education.

In both Like Water for Chocolate and Reckless Appetites, the association between food and the feminine extend to define all women in the text. In Like Water for Chocolate, for instance, it is the women who cook on the ranch. Nacha, Chenchá and Tita are each adept and powerful in the kitchen, though Tita is the most powerful of them all and proves so formidable she is pursued by two men. In culinary narratives, a woman who cannot cook is deemed unfeminine to the point of being undesirable. And so Rosaura, not particularly gifted in the Epicurean arts, grows fat and flatulent, failing to attract Pedro, her husband. It takes Pedro months to approach his wife to consummate their marriage. He does so only under her insistent

¹⁶ Here, Jacqueline Deval twists the notion that only women are capable in the kitchen, as it is Henri, and not Pomme's mother Geneviève, who shows talent in food preparation.

reminders and for the purpose of procreation, whereas, when he is finally alone with the talented cook Tita, he immediately makes passionate love to her.

Although slightly more gifted in the kitchen than Rosaura, Gertrudis, Tita's other sister, is also not particularly adept in that space. Appropriately, she becomes a General in the Revolutionary Army—a particularly fitting, masculine role for the time period in which the novel is set. It is important to note that even Gertrudis, whatever her deficiencies as a cook, is not immune to the effects of food. After eating one of Tita's more passionately created meals, Gertrudis becomes so enamored that she strips off her clothes in wild abandon, and is carried away by a rebel soldier. It is Tita's cooking which lights the sexual fire within her, her later life as a prostitute largely being the result of the meals that Tita had prepared.

Finally, there is the issue of Katy, John Brown's cook. She too shows little talent with food and provides only tasteless meals. Thus, she is afforded little textual and little sexual, attention other than a brief note on her agedness. Katy is granted no further literary significance.

Katy can be contrasted to Mamma Elena, who is also older. We are quick to appreciate the fact that Mamma Elena acts as a good cook and matriarch of the family, a standing which her narrative, as much as her name, reinforces. Since her husband's death, Mamma Elena finds that her sexual power has been transformed into that of a tyrant's. Mamma Elena is mean and cruel, but definitely powerful. She rules the ranch with an iron hand, despotically dictating that Tita, as the youngest daughter, will never marry but will stay at the ranch, caring for Mamma Elena until her death. Even after her death, Mamma Elena continues to haunt Tita, destroying almost all chance for Tita's happiness.

In Reckless Appetites, we are presented with a similar taxonomy of women based upon their culinary expertise. Henri's wife, Geneviève, described as not particularly adept in the kitchen, has no real interest in her husband's career as a cook. Thus, the unappreciated Henri engages in an affair with Olivia, someone with a greater relish for food. Olivia's name by extrapolation conjures up images of the olive, a fruit that is used to produce a high quality cooking oil. Olives are sometimes bitter and no doubt, Olivia's presence as her husband's lover,

would be something painful and bitter for Henri's wife. Geneviève, like Katy, that other neglecter of food, is afforded little textual space. In this novel, the link between food and the feminine is primarily focused upon the character of Pomme.

In Reckless Appetites, the link between food and the two male chefs, Henri and Étienne, is unusually strong. They are in charge of providing delicious sustenance for the thousands of hotel patrons who walk through their establishments every year. In their correspondence about food it appears they are well informed about the authors of their favorite recipes. Their association with food perhaps shows the author's attempts to make her work more accessible to a male audience. By gendering two primary characters as male, this particular culinary narrative makes itself less threatening for a masculine audience that might otherwise be averse to this type of narrative.

How Recipes Function as a Form of Female Discourse.

Since food and actions related to food are typically "female," it should therefore come as no surprise that the recipe itself might also relate to the feminine. In Portrait du Soleil, Hélène Cixous argues that the kitchen is the natural domain of women; it is here that their community has always existed, and continues, to exist. Recipes serve to aid in the formation of these communities, centred on sharing, handling and serving of food—an act that privileges the form as both resource and commodity. In fact, the actual notion of the recipe itself can serve to announce a means of special female communication.

It would be well to remind ourselves that the word "recipe" comes from the Latin "recipere," meaning to receive, and thus implies a notion of exchange—the act of giving in order to receive. Thus, Susan J. Leonardi argues that a recipe is an embedded discourse, holding within its frame a variety of relationships (340). Traditionally, the recipe was something that was meant to be shared, not a permission for hoarding but rather a resource for largesse to the deserving. Indeed a large portion of the para-text surrounding recipes dictates that they are a commodity and

resource that should be shared. At the same time, they provide the possibility of unifying action through which a subculture, specifically a female community, can evolve.

In such a world, those recipes that are not shared are viciously guarded and protected. The expression “secret family recipe” takes on new meaning, as it becomes a way to sway and control the culinary community’s unique resource-based economy. If a recipe is good, then it becomes desired. Those that possess the recipe have a resource available to them that others do not. Thus domestic economy evolves out of the sharing and hoarding of special recipes. Today’s cookbooks, I believe, evolved out of the notion of sharing. As Janet Theophano implies in her examination of the receipt collection, cookbooks in their original form were made and constructed by the cooks themselves. Like the meals they produced, their books were products from the kitchen—based on recipes gathered and transcribed into a journal; pasted together in a notebook for the purpose of reference and then subsequently at a much later time for passing on to someone else. As I’ve already suggested, these early cookbooks also included other records of the home. Devoting to others an actual cookbook thus would have meant sharing some of the most important moments of one’s life, information that potentially would otherwise be lost. Sharing one’s personal receipt collection involved an implicit act of trust on the part of the lending or giving cook. In Like Water for Chocolate, for instance, Tita shares her cookbook with her great-niece who in turn shares it with us, the readers. In Reckless Appetites, Pomme too shares her cookbook directly with the audience.

Traditionally, recipes were passed on from one cook to another—from mother to daughter, from sister to friend, from chef to apprentice. This act of sharing transcends many barriers; it establishes what Leonardi refers to as “a loose community of women that crosses the social barriers of class, race and generation.” She goes on to say that “many women can attest to the usefulness and importance of this discourse: mothers and daughters—even those who don’t get along well otherwise—old friends who now have little in common, . . . all can participate in this almost prototypical feminine activity” (Leonardi 342-343). In a separate study, apparently

not influenced by Susan J. Leonardi,¹⁷ Rosa Fernandez-Levin notes the importance of recipe sharing and the sense of community that evolves out of the act. In examining Like Water for Chocolate, Fernandez-Levin argues that “Tita’s recipes were originally handed down orally until she carefully compiled them and wrote them, thus creating a cook-book for her female descendants. The cookbook is more than a legacy to posterity; it is an act whose significance is two-fold: it validates the feminine task and brings about the creation of a feminine logos” (107).

Recipes achieve their iconic status not only through culinary pride, but also through exposure on television and radio shows, or inclusion in print media such as magazines, newspapers, cookbooks, and in oral sharing—an action common in the kitchen itself. The texts serve to extend lives, construct and open connections, even among those who might otherwise be at odds. A special recipe shared between people creates a bridge, a common space in their relationship.

Recipes, unique in their power to bring people together, provide instructions for making food, which, in addition to providing us with sustenance, is largely linked to social events. The table becomes a site of solidarity and eating becomes a way of sharing. When was the last time you attended a party and the hostess offered you nothing in the way of food and drink? Thus in Like Water for Chocolate we are shown not only the recipes which Tita and others prepare, but we also shown the social events which are connected with the prepared food.

As a communication medium, the recipe is in its own way complex. Embedded within its structure is a series of involved codes, the ultimate understanding of which hinges upon undeclared knowledge on the part of the cook: what it means to choose the dark variety when chocolate is required; what measurement a pinch of salt amounts to; what it is to wuzzle, rather than to stir or blend, and so on. Such information is rarely, if ever, explicitly coded within a recipe. Even though some cookbooks set aside space to de-mystify any special terminology, the actual recipes themselves rarely contain this information and certainly do not include any kind of

¹⁷ Leonardi is not cited in Fernandez-Levin’s Bibliography.

explicit interpretation when they are exchanged, or passed on, at a lay-person level. Common recipes tend to contain little more than lists of ingredients and at most only laconic directions. The cook therefore depends on prior knowledge of terms and procedures in order to complete her task. This knowledge is almost always the result of one of two things. The knowledge is either self-taught (the result of one-too-many failed meals) or, in many cases, the cook has been taught the meaning of these words from another cook (who explains the terms and shows the actions they require to the beginner).

The novice cook's instruction, in both kitchen ritual and vocabulary, is an important stage in a woman's life. To a large extent, it becomes a rite of passage for women, once they are left alone in the kitchen, armed with their foremother's knowledge of the craft; (much of it built upon observation). Since the kitchen is the domain of the mother, most children will spend a large portion of their time there during their early, formative years. As boys grow older, they are removed from the domestic setting and placed into a more "masculine" arena, spending much of their time playing sports and the like. Female children tend to be left with their mothers in the domestic arena for a much longer time, thus enabling them to learn about the site by observation and participation. Thus when as cooks they encounter a skeleton recipe,¹⁸ they may be able to draw on acquired knowledge of the kitchen to combine the ingredients in the correct order, the proper syntax (liquids first, then dry ingredients; creaming before beating) and as a result produce a fairly good product.

Tita in Like Water for Chocolate possesses just such intimate knowledge. She grows up with Nacha, listening to the sights and attending to the sounds of her kitchen. The result for Tita is a special understanding of the domestic space, and of the function and purpose of recipes that her siblings, raised outside of the kitchen, do not have. Tita and Nacha in effect form a community unto themselves, with Nacha educating Tita in the rituals of food. Tita learns by example, decoding the necessary mysteries so that when Nacha is no longer there to help her, Tita

¹⁸ A skeleton recipe is a recipe that only contains a list of ingredients, baking time and temperature.

will instinctively know what to do. Tita's education soon proves to be worthwhile. When Nacha dies, she is appointed ranch cook in recognition of her abilities: "Tita was the last link in a chain of cooks who had been passing culinary secrets from generation to generation since ancient times, and she was considered the finest exponent of the marvelous art of cooking. Naming her official ranch cook was a popular decision with everyone" (44).

After Nacha's death, the first real sign of her extraordinary skill occurs when Pedro presents her with a bouquet of roses to celebrate her first year anniversary as ranch cook. In giving Tita the roses, Pedro breaks one of the many tacit rules about how a husband should behave. Tita must therefore dispose of the beautiful flowers. But since these are the first flowers any man has given to her, and moreover, since the flowers have come from Pedro, Tita is reluctant to part with them. To resolve her dilemma, she incorporates them into a delicious meal. As she moves about the kitchen, it is as if the spirit of Nacha guides her:

All at once she seemed to hear Nacha's voice dictating a recipe, a prehispanic recipe involving rose petals. Tita had nearly forgotten it because it called for pheasants, which they didn't raise on the ranch So skillful was she that it seemed Nacha herself was in Tita's body doing all those things: Dry-plucking the birds, removing the viscera, getting them ready for frying. (45-46)

Despite the sensation of being possessed, Tita is able to draw on her own knowledge of cooking and not Nacha's spirit to prepare the exquisite dish.

Outside their immediate textual discourse, the meals produced by using such recipes also act as a unique form of communication. Meals certainly become a way for Tita to define her feelings. For example, Tita's creation of quail in rose petal sauce is meant almost exclusively for the distant Pedro. It is filled with her burning desire and passion for the man she cannot have. Through sharing this dish, however, Tita and Pedro develop a hybrid method of contact between each another:

It was as if a strange alchemical process had dissolved her entire being in the rose petal sauce, in the tender flesh of the quails, in the wine, in every one of

the meal's aromas. That was the way she entered Pedro's body, hot voluptuous, perfumed, totally sensuous.

With that meal it seemed they had discovered a new system of communication, in which Tita was the transmitter, Pedro the receiver, and poor Gertrudis the medium, the conducting body through which the singular sexual message was passed.

Pedro didn't offer any resistance. He let Tita penetrate to the farthest corners of his being, and all the while they couldn't take their eyes off each other.

(48)

In the language of this passage, the compulsive drive propelling Tita to be the sexual aggressor is evident. Tita "was the transmitter," "she entered Pedro's body." Pedro adopts a weaker, more subservient role, not offering "any resistance," letting Tita "penetrate" deep within him. This portion of the text portrays Tita as cook in the same terms, but it also names her as the instigator for this particular sexual encounter. This reterritorialization creates a stark reversal of gender stereotypes. Although a sexual exchange clearly occurs in the "quail" section, it is significantly atypical. Not only is the nature of the interaction very different from the conventional, it positions the male in a rather peripheral role. In this passage, the audience's gaze is directed through female eyes, yet the author presents the encounter in masculine language, the raw masculine energy reterritorializing and focussing in a female experience. Once Tita expresses her lust and desire through her extraordinary meal, Tita and Pedro come to an understanding and consummate their desire.

The principle of permeation works well for Pedro, but it has unfortunate side effects on others who also consume the dish. Pedro's wife, Rosaura, begins to feel ill and becomes nauseous—no doubt an adverse effect from ingesting the passion another woman feels towards her husband: Tita's passion becomes her poison. Gertrudis is the figure most profoundly affected by the meal. When she imbibes Tita's desire, the result is really quite startling. Tita's longing for Pedro mingles undeniably with Gertrudis's own desire for a soldier in the Revolutionary Army.

The feeling within her grows so intense that the scent of the roses she has consumed during dinner floats directly toward the rebel, wrapping itself around him, and sending him in a frenzy towards the ranch. Enamored, he carries Gertrudis away from Mama Elena and the rest of the family.

The “quail” passage also carries strong religious overtones. The doctrine of communion dictates that the bread and wine consumed by the faithful is miraculously transformed from ordinary food to holy nourishment, transubstantiating into the body and blood of Christ: the faithful consume their God. Take, eat; take, drink, Christ says. And so says Tita, “this is my body, it is for you, Pedro.” In Like Water for Chocolate, the faithful, Gertrudis and Pedro in particular, consume their Goddess, Tita. Thus Tita takes on the role of an unusual Christ, positioned as savior to a sexually starved congregation.

Very different from Tita’s inadvertent method is the way Pomme speaks through food in Reckless Appetites. Pomme, relying on literature to determine what kind of meal she should prepare for certain situations, consciously chooses to prepare meals that carry within their preparation and presentation appropriate connotations. For example, when Jeremy is to come and dine, Pomme turns to the life and works of Colette to select her romantic meal (chapter one). When Pomme, angry with Jeremy for his betrayal, seeks to prepare one last meal for him, she consults a variety of vengeful works before settling on what she deems an appropriate dietary punishment (chapter four). Her every action, in love or hate, is meticulously weighed and considered.

Conclusion

By including recipes within texts such as Like Water for Chocolate and Reckless Appetites, authors invite the reader to become a part of a specialized community. By sharing her secrets with the audience, the author establishes a level of communication and trust that rises above mere reader response, permitting the reader potentially to take what the author has written

and prepare the very meal described in the text she has just read. In this recipe sharing, audience participation can move to a whole new level. If the reader were to prepare one of the prescribed dishes and to enjoy the food, one could argue that she would perhaps appreciate the book more because its sensory pleasure would then have transcended the limitations of the written text and moved onto the palate and provoked further association. Conversely, should the reader be disappointed with the meal, it is also possible that the reader's enjoyment of the text could be significantly diminished. Thus in allowing the text to become inter-active, the author redefines the boundaries between text and reader.

As the majority of culinary narratives are written by women and are by and large for women, a distinctive feminine voice emerges from these texts, allowing for the creation of a female literary vehicle. This vehicle provides a means to tell the female experience and combined with its inclusion of recipes and cooking instructions, is gradually becoming a popular and innovative new form of writing.

Chapter 2: The Recipe

The word “recipe” was first used in the English language in the fifteenth century, referring at that point only to the directions used in making medicine, a usage it still retains in German, in which “Rezept” means prescription. It was only in the eighteenth century that the word “recipe” came to indicate directions for preparing a dish of food (Morton 301). In the almost three hundred years since then, the definition of the recipe has undergone several more changes. It no longer refers exclusively to the preparation of food and medicine, but has evolved into a type of cultural icon, occupying several media, including, most recently the Internet. Recipes are now commonly available for sale in stores and through mail-order clubs. They are printed in magazines, newspapers, books, sold on video, and highlighted in feature films (such as the cinematic version of Like Water for Chocolate and the film Babette’s Feast). They are not, however, what one comes to expect when thinking of high literature. Thus, this chapter will examine the recipe within the culinary narrative, both as information in its own right and a means to propel the narrative forward. Issues of gender will be limited in this chapter due to my concern for examining the recipe as it functions structurally within the culinary narrative.

Are Culinary Narratives Good Recipe Resources?

Fundamental to every culinary romance is the appearance that the novel also serves as a resource for actual meal preparation. But in reality how authentic, or legitimate, are the dietary instructions included in these narratives? Are recipes in these narratives provided more for show than practice? Moreover, how practical would it be to prepare and eat a dish based on a recipe found in a culinary narrative?

The first consideration one should make when evaluating the legitimacy of cooking stories is the accessibility of the required ingredients. How easy is it for the reader as chef to find the ingredients she requires? Can they be found in the garden or must she search them out in the

market or in special stores? Furthermore, does the narrative even address this issue or is the accessibility of required ingredients left to the imagination of the reader? Like Water for Chocolate will often inform its readers as to where and how Tita acquires the ingredients she uses for her cooking. Since many items come from the ranch on which she resides, we therefore experience some aspects of ranch life (such as how to preserve eggs for use at a later time, and how to select and kill poultry). In Reckless Appetites, though, Pomme's means of acquiring ingredients is largely left to the reader's imagination.

However, some of the differences between our cooking today in North America and the cooking in Like Water for Chocolate are merely cultural. Many of the more inaccessible ingredients required of the recipes in Like Water for Chocolate would not necessarily be difficult to obtain in a Latin American country. In fact, it would be easy to locate several varieties of chiles in a Spanish country market, whereas in a North-American Safeway one is often lucky to find a single variety nestled away, in the back corner of the produce section. Furthermore, the inaccessibility of ingredients gives an air of mystery to the recipes in the narrative, their distance or rarity hinting at the unknown. Many readers of Esquivel's text would not even be aware of what many of the ingredients actually are. Thus an element of curiosity for them is added to the text.

In addition to the practicality of acquiring ingredients, one must also take into consideration any difficulties encountered during preparation. Although every cook will stock her pantry with similar staples, certain ingredients would be considered common or rare to the North American reader. For example, ingredients such as long grain rice, iodized table salt, and granular sugar are very common, whereas Basmati rice, sea salt and vanilla sugar are more rarely stocked and are often harder to find. Rarity also often means that ingredients are more costly. Thus, for the sake of practicality and economy, one is more likely to choose a recipe that consists of ingredients that, if not already in one's pantry, are inexpensive and convenient to purchase.

Just as in today's Western society we would not have access to many of the ingredients in Like Water for Chocolate, Tita would not have access to all the culinary amenities or aids of

modern society. As a result, many of her recipes are complicated, necessarily filled with a myriad of meticulous detail:

The almonds and sesame seeds are toasted in a griddle. The chiles anchos, with their membranes removed, are also toasted - lightly, so they don't get bitter. This must be done in a separate frying pan, since a little lard is used. Afterward the toasted chiles are ground on a stone along with the almonds and sesame seeds. (64)

The first step is to toast the chocolate beans. It's good to use a metal pan rather than an earthenware griddle since the pores of the griddle soak up the oil the beans give off. It's very important to pay attention to this sort of detail, since the goodness of the chocolate depends on three things, namely: that the chocolate beans used are good and without defect, that you mix several different types of beans to make the chocolate, and finally, the amount of toasting. (161)

Tita cannot be faulted for using such lengthy preparatory steps, however her use of complicated preparatory instructions and the use of often difficult to obtain ingredients make Like Water for Chocolate a somewhat impractical culinary resource for a North American audience.

Attention to cooking style or technique is another way in which Epicurean literature can be approached. Food methodology is varied in the narratives: some cooks prefer to work with certain *styles* of presentation (serving multi-course meals for example), while others prefer to work with certain *types* of food (choosing chicken or vegetables for example). This reveals, potentially at least, a lot about the character who prepares the meal. For example, in Reckless Appetites, Pomme has a tendency to favor dishes associated with fine dining (Grilled Spring Chicken), a propensity which reveals her as somewhat "aristocratic" and quite different from Tita in Like Water for Chocolate, who chooses more "folksy" recipes (Northern-style Chorizo). For the most part instructions for the recipes in Deval's novel are not overly complex, though they sound as if they might be complicated because of their elegant names. In particular, Pomme's choice of elegant-sounding recipes reflects her desire to present an air of sophistication to her

audience.¹⁹ In turn, the simple, yet elegant, recipes from Reckless Appetites contrast with the elegant, yet complex, recipes found in John Lanchaster's The Debt to Pleasure. Tarquin, the main character in Lanchaster's novel, displays a sense of snobbish pride that is reflected in the eloquently complex recipes he shares.

The effect of legitimacy in the recipes in Reckless Appetites is achieved by the primary characters' citing of various sources that are external to the narrative, such as cookbooks (The Food of Italy, Summer Cooking, The Escoffier Cookbook, among others) and literary works (primarily the writing of Colette and Flaubert). The citational mode suggests that the recipes have previously been tried and tested—if not, we may well presume they would not have been published.

The recipes Tita prepares in Like Water for Chocolate, however, appear significantly more bizarre and experimental. The rarity (to the North American) of the indicated ingredients (for example, several different varieties of chiles and whole cocoa beans) and the lengthy and involved preparation (such as feeding walnuts to the turkey prior to its death) (63) achieve this effect. Presumably this would not be an issue for the original readers so much as it would be for its current North American audience because the novel was originally published in Mexico for a Spanish audience.

Tita's recipes are so unusual they actually can be compared to magical potions. Potions often require bizarre ingredients in order to be effective, and those very ingredients themselves require specific preparation steps before they can be included in a potion. Both Tita's ingredients and her preparation have just such a touch of the bizarre. Tita's feeding increasing numbers of walnuts to her turkey 15 days prior to its demise is reminiscent, say, of the toad the three witches in Macbeth add to their boiling cauldron (it must be dead for 31 days prior to its use in the spell).

¹⁹ There is a distinct sensation within the narrative that Pomme is aware of, and speaking to, an audience. She demonstrates her desire to be perceived as sophisticated through a series of intellectualized justifications for her actions, from her selections of menu for Jeremy, to choosing a way to bring about Jeremy's demise. However, when we become aware of Jeremy's side of the story and are made aware of her irrational behavior, it quickly becomes evident that Pomme's air of sophistication is merely egotistical posturing.

In the following quotation from Macbeth, we can see the complex nature of the ingredients required for a magical spell:

1. Witch. Round about the cauldron go;

In the poison'd entrails throw;

Toad, that under cold stone

Days and nights has thirty-one

Swelt' red venom sleeping got,

Boil thou first i' th' charmed pot.

All. Double, double toil and trouble;

Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

2. Witch. Fillet of a fenny snake,

In the cauldron boil and bake;

Eye of newt and toe of frog,

Wool of bat and tongue of dog,

Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,

Lizard's leg and howlet's wing,

For a charm of pow'ful trouble,

Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

All. Double, double, toil and trouble;

Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

Shakespeare's cooks then turn to more gruesome human body parts:

3. Witch. Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf,

Witch's mummy, maw and gulf

Of the ravin'd salt-sea shark,

Root of hemlock digg'd i' th' dark,

Liver of blaspheming Jew,

Gall of goat, and slips of yew

Sliver'd in the moon's eclipse,
 Nose of Turk and Tartar's lips,
 Finger of birth-strangled babe
 Ditch-deliver'd by a drab,
 Make the gruel thick and slab.
 Add thereto a tiger's chawdron,
 For th'ingredience of our cau'dron.

All. Double, double, toil and trouble;
 Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

2. Witch. Cool it with a baboon's blood,
 Then the charm is firm and good. (Macbeth, IV.I.4-38.)

The witches depend on bizarre and “exotic” materials in order to brew their potion. The ingredients that Tita requires for her cooking are often equally as complex as those required by the witches for their strange brew in Macbeth. Specific varieties of chiles, cacao beans toasted *only* on a metal griddle, and carefully preserved eggs, are only a few examples of the difficult-to-obtain, complex ingredients Tita requires in her cooking.

The meals that Tita creates further act as magical spells, in that they cause, in those who consume them, specific physical and emotional reactions ranging from lust and desire to the sensation of pain, regurgitation and fainting. It is important to note that Tita is, at most times, unaware of the power in her cooking. Unlike a witch or magician, she does not intentionally create her dishes to affect other people. Rather, the effects of her cooking are the result of the inadvertent adding of her emotions as extra ingredients, and not the consequence of a premeditated addition of specific ingredients. (Chapters three and four will provide a closer examination of the power of Tita's cooking).

Just as spells and potions are passed down from one magic user to another, instructions for the food that Tita selects are passed down through her family. They too are elaborate creations, which tend to be more involved than those based on recipes found in ordinary

cookbooks, and as a result, would prove impractical for today's busy kitchen (e.g. carefully grinding rose petals in a mortar for use in the delicate quail sauce). Who has the time, much less the desire, or the space, to feed a turkey walnuts for two weeks before cooking it?

It would appear that the recipes in Like Water for Chocolate are included more for their relevance to the story than their potential usefulness to the reader. These recipes have several functions: they perform both to pass on traditional folk menus; and they serve to highlight and parody, by their very differences to today's cooking, the modern cooking experience. In addition, these recipes serve to define Tita's characteristics. Much can be learned about her personality by examining both the food she prepares and how she chooses to complete the preparation. However, the inclusion of recipes in Like Water for Chocolate results in a feast of the imagination, rather than an actual dietary feast for the readers.

Jacqueline Deval's Reckless Appetites, however, does incorporate recipes which can be transferred to the modern kitchen. There are in them no overly complex directions and few exotic ingredients. As a result, Deval's work is far more accessible as a recipe resource than is Esquivel's novel. As mentioned earlier, Deval's narrative incorporates an index in the narrative, which makes her work easy to use.

As well as making it easier for the potential cook to locate a particular recipe, the inclusion of indexes within the text of Reckless Appetites and The Cure for Death by Lightning makes the narrative appear somewhat self-aware. Indexes, as we are all aware, commonly occupy the final position in an academic work. By extending the narrative to include a thorough index, therefore, the author constructs a peculiar literary experience. As the inclusion of an index within a culinary narrative acts as a legitimizing factor, the work no longer is centralized exclusively in the realm of fiction, but takes on an air of scholarly intent and moves perhaps to function as an academic or at least informational document. Although the inclusion of such material functions as an act of parody on the part of the contributing authors (most notably Gail Anderson-Dargatz and Jacqueline Deval), it is subtle in its effects.

Furthermore, the inclusion of an index serves as a postmodern device, aiding, belatedly, to break up and fragment the text. It acts as a means by which the reader can examine and dissect the text, apart from plot and story line. The reader is in effect challenged by the meta-textual quality of the narrative, forced to shift between very different reading experiences in order to create a whole new experience that is part of reading a culinary narrative.

In evaluating the legitimacy of a culinary narrative as a cookbook resource, the reader might also consider the acknowledged sources for those recipes that have been included in the text. The recipes included in Like Water for Chocolate are largely credited as being either the creation of Tita alone or of the De La Garza family. Only John Brown's recipe for matches (a non-edible product) does not come, one way or another, from the De La Garza family. However, that particular recipe is also a "family" recipe, as it was originally passed down from Dr. Brown's grandmother. Like Water for Chocolate's "cookbook" more closely resembles the traditional receipt collection, filled with family favorites, than the other narratives here examined. Remarkably different in lineage than those recipes in Like Water for Chocolate are the prescriptions which Pomme, Henri and Étienne present and prepare in Reckless Appetites. Their recipes, all derived from a variety of literary and culinary sources, acquire a sense of legitimacy when cited from an already published source.

Literary interest aside, determining the legitimacy of a culinary narrative as a recipe resource is not an easy task. There are many factors to consider before determining if a recipe presented to the audience can transfer from the confines of the text to the reality of the reader's kitchen. I have attempted to examine some of these issues with regard to both Like Water for Chocolate and Reckless Appetites and concluded that Reckless Appetites is in that respect the more useful text. This fact, however, by no means detracts from the story line of Like Water for Chocolate as the narrative simply operates on a less "academic," more "entertainment" level.

Masculine Accessibility

As we have seen in the previous chapter, recipes tend to serve as a form of female discourse and recipe swapping is a prototypical female activity. Until recently, masculine participation in these exchanges had been rare. Unless a man was a cook for royalty or a restaurant chef, his participation in such activity was relatively unheard of. Thus, culinary romances, which privilege and utilize the recipe exchange, hold a greater appeal to women—the primary food preparers—than to men.

The authors of the culinary narratives I am here examining, however, make overt attempts to include the male audience by enticing their readers with non-dietary creations. Such inclusions result in the presentation of chemically based recipes, specifically instructions for the creation of non-edible, utilitarian products. These tend to be “scientific” recipes, focussing on function rather than sustenance or charm.

The realm of mathematics and science has traditionally been a masculine domain. Thus, it is not surprising that when a male character presents a recipe, it is chemically based, describing a non-edible product. The focus of female instruction and education conversely has traditionally been centred on the arts.²⁰ Since Tita has little formal education and as Pomme’s scholastic instruction, though vast, is still focused on the arts, the female characters in Like Water for Chocolate and Reckless Appetites cannot be expected to present their recipes in a scientific manner. The men in these novels, however, deliver their recipes in a manner reminiscent of scientific practice.

Even so, it is important to note that recipes themselves are somewhat scientific in that they combine things in a particular order to create a reaction that will then further create something else. Like scientific directions, recipes consist of two parts: 1) enumeration of the

²⁰ In the nineteenth century, girls were encouraged to paint and play music. Their studies focussed on more genteel, “lady-like” activities, such as embroidery, and discouraged mathematical and scientific study. As the decades passed, women’s exposure to the sciences grew, until, today women are encouraged to pursue scientific studies.

required ingredients (whether they are palatable or chemical) and 2) a prescription of the order in which the required ingredients are to be combined. As in following a scientific recipe, it is very important for a cook to combine the required ingredients in the proper proportion and order.

Nevertheless, the “scientific” instructions seem to attach themselves more to the male characters. In Like Water for Chocolate, for instance, the audience is presented with a recipe to produce matches. This account, scientifically structured, is an example of a masculine set of preparatory directions:

1 ounce powdered potassium nitrate

1/2 ounce minium

1/2 ounce powdered gum arabic

1 dram phosphorus

saffron

cardboard (102)

The recipe is precisely laid out for the reader, providing exact, mathematical measurements for the list of ingredients required for the production of the product. John Brown, the first male cook in Esquivel’s novel, combines these ingredients, producing the matches. As he “cooks”, Brown tells Tita about the materials, educating her as he goes along. On the surface this seems to be merely a sharing of information, but at a deeper level it appears to be an exercise of his ego, as he attempts to educate the “weaker sex.” As women in revolutionary Mexico knew little about science,²¹ the doctor attempts to rescue Tita from what he sees as her state of ignorance.

The manner in which he presents his recipe to Tita is also an example of the inherent knowledge John Brown has about his “kitchen”:

Talking didn’t make the doctor careless in his preparation of the matches.

He had no trouble separating mental and physical activities. He could

philosophize about even the most profound aspects of life without his hands

²¹ John Brown’s grandmother, the native medicine woman, knew much about science and medicine. However, her race, compounded by the fact of her gender, made her scientific knowledge appear somewhat suspect to the family into which she married.

pausing or making a mistake. While he was talking to Tita, he kept on making matches. (111)

As he moves about the laboratory, Tita does not distract the doctor, nor is he distracted by the act of teaching. Rather, Brown is invigorated by her presence, in effect inspired as he creates.

John Brown is a man of science. The ingredients in his recipe can easily be located in the laboratory—but cannot easily be found in the kitchen. The only possible exception might be the ingredient saffron, used here as a colourant. The chemical forms of potassium nitrate, or phosphorus, however, belong to a world that is largely outside Tita's domain. Thus, chemical ingredients in Like Water for Chocolate can be usefully categorized as masculine ingredients.

Significantly, too, there is a distinct, perhaps scientific, precision in the measurement of each chemical ingredient required in Brown's recipe. Here is where food recipes differ and demonstrate an important difference between male and female territories. Unlike John Brown's extremely precise recipe, the information for making the turkey mole in Like Water for Chocolate is vague in its measurements (a handful of almonds, a handful of sesame seeds and turkey stock). What is a handful? How much is a handful? Inevitably, the beans with chile Tezcucana-style recipe consists of a list of ingredients without *any* measurements (beans, pork, pork rinds, chiles anchos, onion, grated cheese, lettuce, and so on). Such directions are vague and difficult to comprehend for those who are not familiar with the cuisine. Imprecise recipes, then, require a special knowledge which Tita must possess, for *she* must know how much a handful is. She knows how much grated cheese to add to a dish, and how many beans to prepare. If John Brown were to prepare his chemical recipe for matches with the same imprecision that is indicated by some of the recipes Tita follows, there might well be a calamity somewhere along the way. Tita is thus portrayed as having an intuition regarding measurement that John Brown does not possess.

It is significant too that the product of John's recipe—matches—is ultimately fire. Fire is the one element that is absolutely essential to cooking particularly regarding the recipes I am examining. Meat is very rarely served raw, as it requires "fire" in some form to make it both consumable and digestible (either through direct flame, heating on the stove, or through smoke

and curing). Therefore the masculine recipe, however “foreign” it may be, also relates to the domestic, female area of food production.

Equally significant is the fact that fire is also a very masculine symbol. In ancient mythology, for instance, fire was associated with several male figures such as Ares, the god of war, and Hephestus, the blacksmith to the gods. But fire has larger associations; in many primitive cultures, and in the Christian Bible, fire is seen as a means of purification, something able to burn out evil. Significant to the topic of my thesis is the notion that fire denotes love and passion. Whatever its association, fire is elemental, and an intrinsic part of life. Thus, by showing a male figure as presenting something elementally masculine to a subservient female character, Esquivel sets up an interesting sexual dynamic, somewhat patriarchal on the surface, yet a dynamic which she later reterritorializes for Tita through Esquivel’s weak portrayal of Pedro.

John Brown’s passage is the only place in Esquivel’s text in which a character verbalizes the directions for a recipe (noticeable in the quotation marks differentiating his words from the remainder of the text), as the narrative voice predominantly belongs to Tita. The fact that Brown’s passage is the only place for such an occurrence makes the incident stand out dramatically from the remainder of the text. At that point John Brown takes centre stage and, for a brief period, the narrative shifts from a sustained feminine voice, to a noticeably masculine one.

Other non-edible recipes, which appear to invite male participation in Like Water for Chocolate, include those for making ink, gold tint and sealing wax. Again, these recipes are precise in their measurements and are produced mainly through the use of inedible ingredients which guarantee the product will contain little, if any, sustenance:

The ink is made by mixing eight ounces of gum arabic, five and a half ounces of gall, four ounces of iron sulfate, two and a half ounces of logwood, and half an ounce of copper sulfate. To make the gold tint used on the edges of the envelopes, take an ounce of orpiment and an ounce of rock crystal, finely ground. Stir these powders into five or six well-beaten egg whites until the mixture is like

water. And finally, the sealing wax is made by melting a pound of gum arabic, half a pound of benzoin, half a pound of calafonia, and a pound of vermilion.

(229-230)

There is brevity to the execution of these three recipes. They are precise and direct, structurally, very different from many of the female recipes in the text which would be more amplified verbally. Their importance in the text is not belaboured, their inclusion being only brief before the story moves on. They provide minor instructions, never again mentioned in the text, unlike the major recipes that fragment over the course of the narrative, and splinter over the course of Like Water for Chocolate.

Esquivel's attempts in Like Water for Chocolate to make the novel accessible to male readers sharply contrast with that of Deval in Reckless Appetites. Deval's masculine accessibility derives more from her positioning of the characters, than from the types of recipes her male cooks provide. By putting two male characters in the position of primary food preparers, Deval creates a very different type of male function. Rather than emphasizing male differences from women by alternative "masculine" recipes, Deval undermines such differences by placing her male characters in stereotypical female positions.

There appears to be only one non-edible, "male" recipe included in Reckless Appetites. It is a recipe for the productions of ink but very different from the one in Like Water for Chocolate. It is not even included in the narrative proper, but merely within Pomme's household book: "The ink was made by steeping gauls (an acid made from Oak apples) and green copperas (iron sulfate) in beer and sugar for two weeks" (160). Unlike the precise construction of Esquivel's recipe for ink, Deval's recipe is filled with vague directions, making it fairly difficult to reproduce. Thus it is similar to the feminine recipes and serves to further break down stereotypes of gender differences. In addition, when the recipe's origins credits as deriving from Jane Austen, and not a male author, Deval further confuses gender differences.

Recipe Positioning and Location within Text

The positioning of recipes within a culinary narrative varies from text to text, there being no specific place in which to insert these dietary instructions. Recipes appear at the beginning of each chapter in both Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate and in Anna Zurzolo's Bread, Wine and Angels. Their realization is then dished out in bits and pieces, dispersed among the actions of the major narrative. Unlike Zurzolo's narrative, in which the recipes do not always coincide with the food mentioned in the corresponding chapter, Esquivel's text directly relates each recipe to what is happening at a particular point in the narrative. The interdependency between recipe and ensuing text is paramount to her structure of the novel.

Although Bread, Wine and Angels appears to have been modeled after Like Water for Chocolate, both in structure and style, there is in it no strict inter-dependency between recipe and surrounding text. In fact, the recipe and narrative appear to be strikingly independent of each other. Often, the dish that Zurzolo has chosen to present in one chapter is mentioned more frequently or more prominently in another. For example, in the chapter entitled "Bread" there is an involved discussion about Brodo, yet it is not until a later chapter that the recipe for this broth is actually given.

Whereas Zurzolo does not foreground the recipe within her text, Jaqueline Deval goes in the opposite direction in privileging the recipe as paramount in Reckless Appetites. From beginning to end of each chapter, Deval deluges her audience with dish after dish after dish. The novel is, at times, so saturated with culinary instructions that the reader might easily be tempted to disregard the story and merely browse through the recipes.

Deval's narrative is so dependent on the recipe that it cannot move forward without the inclusion of culinary instructions. At the same time, however, a recipe cannot be presented until the story has progressed, so interdependent are the narrative and the recipes. In Like Water for Chocolate, Esquivel creates a similar effect of interdependency, which results in a sensation of constant motion for Tita. As each recipe is presented it evokes for her important memories of

previous preparations—usually relevant information that serves to define Tita’s situation in the narrative present, while simultaneously propelling the story along. Thus, recipes cause temporal skipping, preventing the novel from moving along a linear time-line.

Recipes in Reckless Appetites create a very different effect. Menus and recipe instructions are in it collectively combined at the end of each chapter, with the result that book displays a more linear time-line. Because in Reckless Appetites there is very little leaping between the various stages of time, Pomme seems to be a much less erratic character than Tita. Pomme’s growth is a gradual, yet constant process, whereas Tita’s evolution is more sudden, because her past and present are juxtaposed in a disjointed manner.

Recipes as Text

Despite the limited critical attention that culinary narratives have received, some studies have examined the recipe and how it operates in literary terms. Neal R. Norrick believes that recipes, and therefore also texts that include recipes, demand a classification as something separate from traditional literary writing. He further argues that because of the special demands put on the reader, recipes are not suitable for all audiences. He believes, however, that they are of intellectual interest because they function as rare instances of common operational definitions—these are like the title suggests, the definitions of operational functions and something that until now has received very little academic attention. Norrick supposes that what is unique to a recipe, as opposed to other literary forms, is that in following it, one produces what it defines (173). However, in order to follow a recipe, one must possess a series of presuppositions—knowledge outside of the text, including knowledge of the technical language utilized in a recipe (terminology such as braise, sauté, and baste which is not explained or further defined within the text). Such prior understanding would also include knowledge of the equipment required in order to perform certain tasks (again, something which is not defined within the text), and the knowledge of how to read the bipartite structure recipes typically display.

Another distinction between recipes and other texts is that recipes ordinarily are divided into two sequences, defined by Norrick as a “schedule of items” (in other words, a listing of required ingredients) and a “schedule of operations” (the steps required to transform those ingredients into a dish) (174). In a sense, the schedule of items and the schedule of operations form the constituent parts, grammar and the rules of a recipe combination. Typically, this bipartite structure is further indicated by visual separation on the written page. The schedule of items (ingredients) is almost always listed first, normally in brief, point form, and its details set off from the remainder of the recipe. The directions, which then follow, provide the schedule of operations, which is normally written up, and developed in complete sentences and paragraphs.

It is important to note that the schedule of items is never a comprehensive list of everything required to produce the dish in question. Primarily, it is a list of ingredients. The reader is expected to bring certain things, among them knowledge of items such as equipment, commonly omitted from this list. Directions also use convenient shorthand; a recipe will direct the cook to “blend” or “mix” ingredients, but rarely will it specify precisely how the cook should go about these activities. The decision as to whether to use a hand blender, mix-master or just a wooden spoon is therefore also left to the reader.

It is not surprising, therefore, that despite the vast number of recipes included in Reckless Appetites, very few, if any, mention culinary equipment other than in passing. Deval tends to keep her recipes short and brief, by listing both items and directions together at the end of a chapter. This enables her to develop a menu-rich narrative, mentioning the food, its history and intent, without getting caught up in the preparation itself.

By contrast there is a notable attempt on Esquivel’s part to inform the reader as to what type of equipment should be used to prepare the recipes found in Like Water for Chocolate. Even so, Esquivel does not position her entries as a schedule of items followed immediately by a consolidated schedule of operations. Instead, she doles out directions throughout the remainder of the chapter. This gives Esquivel a greater opportunity to develop the instructions. For example, when Tita prepares hot chocolate, she indicates the best equipment to use: “It’s good to

use a metal pan rather than an earthenware griddle since the pores of the griddle soak up the oil the beans give off. It's very important to pay attention to this sort of detail" (46). She also highlights the equipment necessary for the preparation of the turkey mole: "The almond and sesame seeds are toasted in a griddle. The chiles anchos . . . are also toasted— . . . This must be done in a separate frying pan Afterward the toasted chiles are ground on a stone along with the almonds and sesame seeds" (64). By informing us of the equipment Tita uses, Esquivel provides insight into Tita's resourcefulness and insight into her character. For example, the hot griddle that is used to toast chocolate beans, almonds and chiles at various stages in the text of Like Water for Chocolate is the same griddle upon which Rosaura burns her hand. It is an event that prevents Tita from further kitchen-play with her sisters, and creates a defining point in their relationship (6). Consequently, Tita and her sisters grow up in very different worlds.

Similar to Esquivel, Anderson-Dargatz typically lists the schedule of items separately from the schedule of operations in her narrative. Deval for the most part separates the schedule of items and the schedule of operations from the narrative body, while John Lanchaster incorporates both the schedule of items and schedule of operations solidly into the general narrative of The Debt to Pleasure. This incorporation appears to be so solid at times, that it is, in fact, difficult immediately to separate a recipe from the remainder of the text. Unlike recipes in Like Water for Chocolate or Reckless Appetites which are easily discernable, recipes in Lanchaster's The Debt to Pleasure are defined by a lack of visual markers. Lanchaster essentially forces his audience to read larger passages in order to locate his "hidden" recipes. As a result, searching out recipes becomes a mystery for the reader to solve. This method of incorporating both items and operations encourages the reader to take an active part in the text, causing potential cooks and readers alike to familiarize themselves with Lanchaster's story in order to find a recipe that they can enjoy and possibly even prepare. In effect, Lanchaster forces his reader to ponder a recipe before preparation. Typically, cooks will quickly preview recipes before preparation. By forcing his readers to carefully read recipes, Lanchaster thus equates cooking with reading.

Recipes are briefly examined before cooking for two reasons: 1) to make sure that the cook has all the ingredients required for the recipe in question and 2) to ensure that the recipe is prepared in the proper fashion. The second point is not perfectly obvious for the steps of a recipe are not always cited in chronological order and do not always conform to the order of operations they describe. Ingredients may be ordered as flour, butter, eggs and sugar in the schedule of items, whereas the first step in the schedule of operations may have nothing to do with flour, but rather, say to creaming the butter and the sugar (perhaps combining items two and four on the list). In fact, the first step may have nothing at all to do with flour. It is therefore of paramount importance to completely read a recipe prior to attempting to produce it. To do otherwise could create some potentially serious complications.

Because in most culinary narratives, the schedule of operations is solidly incorporated into the narrative story, the potential cook is forced to read the narrative as a necessary prerequisite to reading the recipe. Whereas such reading is necessary in Like Water for Chocolate and in The Cure for Death by Lightning, in Reckless Appetites, where complete recipes are collected at the end of the chapter, it is not necessary to wade through the entire narrative in order to find the recipe.

It is important to note that the recipe differs from other literary forms in that usually it contains only scant information in its list of operations, making it brief in its narrative elements. Typically, it only consists of numerous shorthand expressions, which are related to the steps in the procedure. Terms used in the schedule of items are further abbreviated in the schedule of operations. Norrick calls this abbreviated naming elliptical identification (175).

However, when the schedule of operations is integrated into the general narrative, an embellished, creative discourse results. The list of operations is made as exciting and interesting as possible. Elliptical identification, however, still applies to recipes that are included in culinary narratives. For example, in the recipe for Christmas rolls in Like Water for Chocolate, “Chorizo sausage” from the list of items is simply reduced to “sausage” in the schedule of operations and “chiles serranos” is reduced to “chiles.” Elliptical identification provides a means by which

simple repetition can be avoided while, at the same time, creativity and diversity of language can be maintained.

Just as there are two distinct parts to a recipe, there are two distinct audiences who approach and read recipes, in manners much different from each other. Emma Kafalenos, in her article “Reading to Cook/Cooking to Read: Structure in the Kitchen,” defines two very different strategies that audiences apply to reading a recipe. First, there are those readers who immediately focus upon the schedule of operations (what I will call type A). These readers delve into the “how”s and “why”s before even consulting what ingredients make up the schedule of items. They have a special interest in the changes individual parts undergo, as they become part of a finished product.

The other type of readers are those who first approach the schedule of items, looking at the ingredients before examining the directions (what I will call type B). These readers, Kafalenos argues, create a potential list of operations on their own, based upon the ingredients required in the schedule of items. Although they are dependent on their previous culinary experience in order to construct a dish from only the list of items before them, they form the creative segment of readers, those who become more involved with the creative process of cooking than do type A readers. Type B readers will often exert their creativity and prepare the dish without using the schedule of operations.

Culinary narratives which visually separate the schedule of items from the schedule of operations, such as Like Water for Chocolate and Bread, Wine and Angels, privilege this second group of readers, as they list the ingredients for their recipes at the onset of the chapter. This methodology enables readers first to consider the schedule of items and become more involved with the text before they turn to the schedule of operations, where they are developed more fully later in the chapter. Though Anna Zurzolo tends not to develop the schedule of operations to any great extent, Bread, Wine and Angels offers an extreme example, more conducive to type B readership, as her reader is forced to create a fictional schedule of operations, and is never rewarded with any directions. As the schedule of operations in Jaqueline Deval’s Reckless

Appetites immediately follows the schedule of items, no particular readership is privileged in her novel. The reader can immediately choose to examine either items or operations, when consulting a recipe.

A very different look at recipes comes with Mary Douglas, who examines the coding and language of a meal, an issue Roland Barthes has also addressed in his essay “Toward A Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption.” Food, Barthes argues, is charged with “signifying the situation in which it is used” (Barthes 172). Certain foods, he argues, are appropriate for certain circumstances, but exactly which foods are appropriate to which situations largely depends upon the culture in which the food is being served. Barthes’s study, which allows for vast differentiation in culture and environment, is similar to Douglas’s much hailed essay, “Deciphering a Meal” in the idea that the meal and eating experience can be translated into purely textual terms. Douglas’s study, however, appears to be based upon only one family (hers), and as her model is based “on the culture of a certain segment of the middle classes of London” (259), it can by no means be viewed as conclusive. Nor can Douglas’s study have any final bearing on the fictional world of culinary narratives—especially those chosen for this study, as their events occur outside middle-class London (Like Water for Chocolate occurs in Latin America, whereas Reckless Appetites occurs in France and among the upper classes of London).²²

Douglas argues that the kinds of meal preparation the family performs depend on the diner’s relationship to the family. Her theory stipulates that the complexity of the meal is determined by the closeness of the diner to the immediate family. If the diner is a total stranger, no meal will be served, and the guest will only receive drinks. Should the guest be an acquaintance of the family, a cold platter will likely be served. Hot meals appear to be the provenance of immediate family or very close friends (256-257). Douglas does not account for those cultures which honour all guests, no matter how remote from the family, or those

²² Secondary sources do not take place in middle-class London either; The Cure for Death by Lightning is a Canadian story, Bread, Wine and Angels takes place in Italy, even The Debt to Pleasure, which has some British influence, is again based in the upper classes.

individuals, more generous of spirit than Douglas, who would willingly serve a stranger or acquaintance a meal more satisfying than drinks or a cold platter.

Clearly comprehension of a recipe as a textual form demands a considered examination. Often, its understanding is dependent upon what the reader brings with her to it: past kitchen experience or knowledge of other recipes she may have previously read. Just as other versions of language are multi-faced, so too are recipes, as they are dependent on a multiplicity of items and occurrences for their realization in an actual meal.

Recipes and Postmodern Signification

The locating of recipes within a literary text is a fairly recent innovation and has been facilitated by the postmodern movement. Certainly, food has played a significant part in literature but the inclusion of the recipe itself within the text is an action enabled, perhaps, by the postmodern movement. Traditionally, recipes have been intended for the use of food preparation and were therefore texts suitable only for housewives and chefs. They did not exist for literary or linguistic enjoyment. Certainly, they would have been included within the broad scope of writing, and until very recently they were by no means considered high literature and were therefore not canonized.

The English canon is a structure based on hierarchy. Certain texts, such as those by Shakespeare, Chaucer or Milton, say, are deemed to have more intellectual and social value than texts by those writers who cater to writing pulp fiction, say Daniel Steele or Stephen King. The notion of hierarchy and canon are therefore to a large extent historically linked, with more traditional forms of writing taking precedence over new writings which do not meet the specific standards our culture values. Great works of fiction by such authors as Dickens and Joyce hold a much higher position in the canonical hierarchy than recipes which are often anonymous or are created by someone who is not famous. The face of the canon, however, is changing, partly because the postmodern movement questions hierarchy, constantly testing and challenging it.

The inclusion of recipes within literary texts is one way by which the postmodern movement disrupts the notions of hierarchy that the canon has long established.

Jonathan Culler writes that “literature challenges the limits we set to the self as a device or order and allows us, painfully or joyfully, to accede to an expansion of self.” He further argues that for this to be adequately accomplished, one must have knowledge of the interpretive models that inform one’s culture (130). Postmodernism is constantly challenging these models, intent upon forming new models or amended models with new connections to our culture. Often this occurs through movements that attempt to step away from things that appear to have a long canonical standing. It is possible therefore to locate at least some culinary narratives among postmodern texts.

One way that culinary narratives function as postmodern texts is through the forced fragmentation of the texts they occupy. In basic terms, the classical text has a beginning, a middle and an end which roughly move in a chronological order. The postmodern text will often disrupt this flow, drastically at times, by incorporating other “interrupting” media into the work, such as newspaper clippings and photographs, in order to create a more fragmented and disjointed narrative. In the case of the culinary narrative, the fragmentation is caused by the inclusion of recipes. In order to return to the general narrative and thus the overlying story line, one must first read the recipe that interrupts the narrative flow. As culinary narratives typically incorporate several recipes into the text, several breaks occur in their narrative flow. These fractures cause readers to shift their narrative focus. An entirely different narrative pattern ensues in such texts than in more regular narratives and readers must alter and refocus their attention to match these changes. The result is a somewhat disjointed and fragmentary reading experience for the audience. Further additions such as indexes (such as those found at the end of Reckless Appetites and The Cure for Death by Lightning) and illustrations (such as those found in another recent culinary romance The Secrets of Pistoulet by Jana Kolpen) cause the narrative to become even more disjointed and fragmented.

In his article “Criss-Crossing Texts: Reading Images in Like Water for Chocolate,” Victor Zamudio-Taylor examines the abundant fragmentation in both the novel and the cinematic version of the story. In the novel, readers are confronted with a hybrid construction that juxtaposes first-person enunciation, recipes, and low melodrama to create a polyphony of forms, which are thus able to register different modes of experience (46). Thus when the reader engages in the narrative, a singular experience is not to be had. Family history, personal experience, fine dining, as well as colloquial and academic representation mix together to challenge the reader. “An allegorical level emerges from the extended use of metaphors around food and in the writing down of recipes: ingredients, modes of production, cooking utensils, the kitchen as space of social (re)production, eating, dining as social ritual, and lower body movements” (Zamudio-Taylor 46). The critic, further invoking Mikhail Bakhtin, notes that the above literary experience echoes carnivalesque in its disjointed presentation. Zamudio-Taylor is surely correct in making this assertion, as Like Water for Chocolate does appear to draw heavily upon the notion of carnival and the broad, vibrant stories it requires.

The fragmentation one encounters when reading a culinary narrative affects all aspects of the narrative experience and thus blurs distinct lines within the story itself. Characters, for example, tend to be defined by the food they cook and the recipes they prepare. As a result the distinctions between individual and food are not easily drawn. The individual cannot stand alone without being linked to the dish she wishes to prepare. Within these characters there appears to be no strong sense of a singular self, save what is rooted in the act of cooking and what is dished out on the table. The defining characteristic of all our culinary heroines is their definition of themselves as those who exist in the kitchen. Tita, for example, belongs in the kitchen. It is the one area of the ranch that she feels at home in. The defining of Tita in Like Water for Chocolate is so dependent upon and utterly inter-twined with the food she prepares that everything she feels emotionally, while preparing the dish, is incorporated into the food she makes. Thus, those who dine upon her cooking also experience her emotions. When she is sad, they consume her grief.

When she is mad, they take in her anger. In short Tita and food become almost interchangeable elements within the narrative confines of Like Water for Chocolate.

Similarly in Reckless Appetites, Pomme is defined by the food she wishes to prepare. Pomme's anger and malice towards the abandoning Jeremy is evident in her long exposition of what kind of poison or culinary torture she should prepare for her former lover. All the recipes and food she lists at that point in the narrative function to hurt Jeremy. She is therefore defined as a malicious and vengeful woman, whereas, when earlier in the narrative Pomme seeks to make a seductive meal for Jeremy, she is defined through her choices (such as chocolates and strawberries) as sweet and loving.

There is also, often in postmodern texts, a tendency to make things appear grandiose and sometimes preposterous. Like Water for Chocolate is certainly no exception. Esquivel constantly exaggerates the scene set before the audience. Her entire manner of writing falls into the category of the "tall tale." For example, the overweight Rosaura loses 30 kilos in 7 days—a remarkable, if not impossible, accomplishment for anyone, even those on a diet. As well, Tita's knitted bedspread becomes so large, it eventually covers the entire property of the ranch, some 3 hectares. Kathleen M. Glenn examines these exaggerations and others in her article "Postmodern Parody and Culinary-Narrative Art in Laura Esquivel's Como agua para chocolate." In her article, Glenn highlights Esquivel's "flaunting of the inverisimilitude of her narrative" (44) by examining a series of preposterous situations in the novel, including the mass-vomiting scene at Rosaura's wedding and Tita's tremendous birth and entrance into the world, bringing with it an additional 5 kilos of salt. Glenn is quick to note that "Postmodern parody recognizes that a work dating from the closing years of the twentieth century cannot be written in the same way as one from a much earlier period. Nor is it likely that a work will enjoy critical success if it slavishly adheres to the conventions of popular literature" (40). Thus Esquivel makes the situations she addresses in her novel even more preposterous in an attempt to break out of some of the more established conventions, and out of the conservative constraints of popular literature that she can present her audience with something that is new, innovative and fresh. Though Esquivel speaks

in hyperbole, she uses a simple tone that would imply that these situations are documented fact and simply represent, the way things are, when in reality things could not have happened in the ways she represents them.

Conclusion

As recipes have become cultural icons, their inclusion in media has become more prevalent and has thus aided the development of the culinary romance. The value of culinary narratives as actual recipe resources ranges from the accurate to the somewhat suspect. A narrative like Reckless Appetites is framed in such a manner as to make any food preparation based on its menus quite easy to accomplish, whereas other narratives, such as Like Water for Chocolate, present recipes which are not easily reproduced and therefore do not serve as good practical resources.

Furthermore, their relevance to actual meal preparation aside, the inclusion of recipes is necessary to propel the culinary narrative forward. Without recipes, there is no complete story. Regardless of their value as resources, culinary romances provide good examples of postmodern narrative: they are filled with fragmented text, disjointed narrative, odd, interrupting lists, recipes and extra-textual instructions, and fabulist invention.

The culinary narrative is a demanding form of literature that requires of its readers a large body of culinary knowledge in order to approach the text. The presuppositions required of the reader vary depending on the recipe, but each recipe requires some kind of kitchen knowledge in order for the reader to place it properly within the story line. Without some such presuppositions, recipes would be highly obtrusive for the reader, distracting from the narrative flow. However, if the reader has the appropriate presuppositions, everything falls into place and recipe and narrative function virtually as one. Reckless Appetites and Like Water for Chocolate are thus dependent on their recipes to propel the narrative forward and thus to develop their romantic stories.

Chapter Three

The association between food and sex has been recognized for centuries. History, psychiatry, art and literature have all played a significant role in establishing the dependency of two life-sustaining biological functions—eating and mating. The notion of the “romantic dinner” is an archetypal mating ritual exemplified both in fiction and the media as an activity joining food and sexual interest. For those who are not romantically involved, the substitution of food for sex is a common occurrence. Eating to forget their loneliness, or abstaining completely from eating, having lost all appetite,²³ some people try to compensate themselves for being alone. There are also those who link food to sex by abstaining from both—often as a means of religious chastity, or personal penance.²⁴ Furthermore, the media has subsequently fostered the connection between eating and sex. Television, cinema and literature (particularly recipe fiction) reinforce the link by their frequent portrayal of these activities in conjunction with each other.

Culinary romances by their very nature emphasize the association between food and sex. This chapter will examine the structures of such emphasis, focussing on the substitution of food for sex. As well as examining the correlation between eating and sexual activity, I will look at the role females play as sexual aggressors and culinary masters in both Jaqueline Deval’s Reckless Appetites and Laura Esquivel’s Like Water for Chocolate.

²³ Several studies have examined the correlation between various feelings and the amount of food consumed. Among these feelings are emotional stress and loneliness. Robert Plutchik, among others, saw an increase in eating habits among those of his distressed subjects who were obese and a decline in eating habits among those of his subjects who were of a normal weight range. Regardless of their weight, it isn’t uncommon for people to change their eating patterns dramatically due to anxiety and depression, or so Logue tells us (196). Loss of appetite, for instance, has long been attributed to being in love.

²⁴ Fasts are observed among Christians, Jews, Muslims, Confucians and Hindus. (Funk and Wagnalls New Encyclopaedia, Vol. 9, 382)

Food and Sex

The English language itself testifies to an essential link between eating and sex. When we eat, we “consume” food; when we have sex, we say we “consummate” the relationship.²⁵ It is interesting to note that the Latin root word “consumare,” from which the words “consume” and “consummate” derive, means to accomplish and complete (OED 801-802). Thus, in etymological terms, the completion of a meal is aligned with the consummation of a romantic relationship through sexual intercourse.

The natural linkage of food and sex is further demonstrated in their entanglement with ceremony and ritual. The ancient Romans, for example, followed their lavish feasts with equally lavish orgies. As Diane Ackerman writes, “Orgies and dinner parties were the main diversions, and the Romans amused themselves with the lavishness of a people completely untainted by annoying notions of guilt” (Ackerman 144). Other cultures have also incorporated sexual activity and eating into their sacred rituals. In his book The Power of Myth, Joseph Campbell tells of a ritual from a New Guinea tribe in which boys participate in their first experience of sexual intercourse. As the last of the boys engages the only female participant, the male and the female are killed and their flesh is roasted and then eaten by the tribe. The consumption of the deceased couple affirms the ultimate combination of food and sex. Tied together by ritual, these activities are marked as important for the entire tribe.

By contrast, for the many religious sects that frown upon bodily pleasures, food and sex are defined within patterns of abstinence and penance. For many religious groups eating is merely a means to gain sustenance, and sex is nothing more than a means to propagate the species. Thus Puritanism, for example, denounced spices as too sexually arousing (Ackerman 145). As both eating and sex tend to provide gratification for those who indulge in their pleasures, many such sects place a high value on abstinence or, less severely, restraint. Often,

²⁵ This, of course, precludes such incidents as rape.

there is belief that abstaining from these pleasures will incite a cleansing and purification of the individual.²⁶ Similarly, fasting—the refusal to imbibe food for a period of time—is believed to focus the mind and bring one closer to one’s God. Often, such groups view sex as an activity that clouds the mind and hinders spirituality.

Psychiatrists and psychologists have also explored the deep-rooted association between food and sexuality. Sigmund Freud, one of the most influential psychoanalysts, examined that correlation as it figures in the early stages of an infant’s development in his famous work Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality:

We shall give the name of ‘pregenital’ to organization of sexual life in which the genital zones have not yet taken over their predominant part. We have hitherto identified two such organizations, which almost seem as though they were harking back to early animal forms of life.

The first of these is the oral, or as it might be called, cannibalistic pregenital sexual organization. Here sexual activity has not yet been separated from the ingestion of food; nor are opposite currents within the activity differentiated. The object of both activities is the same; the sexual aim consists in the incorporation of the object—the prototype of a process which, in the form of identification, is later to play such an important psychological part. A relic of this constructed phase of organization, which is forced upon our notice by pathology, may be seen in thumb-sucking, in which the sexual activity, detached from the nutritive activity, has substituted for the extraneous object one situated in the subject’s own body. (Freud 198)

Freud’s theories about infant sexuality and the importance of food consumption have had a profound effect on the field of psychiatry and in literature.

²⁶ The Catholic Church maintains that celibacy is a state of greater perfection than marriage for those who enter the priesthood. (Funk and Wagnalls New Encyclopedia, Vol. 5, 265)

Tita in Like Water for Chocolate is one such figure whose sexuality is linked both as a child and as an adult to food and oral gratification. When she is young, she is not given milk, but rather takes greater pleasure in the consumption of more elaborate foods such as the soups and gruels that are made for her. Thus her early childhood is defined by more adult (than oral) activity than are her siblings.

Food and sex have become so integrated in our society they affect elemental aspects of our culture, such as language and ritual, as we have seen. In addition to the word “consummation,” the English language contains several quite obvious culinary terms that frequently serve as sexual terminology. These words have strong metonymic overtones: words such as eat, lick, suck and devour are typically used in a culinary context, yet these same words are equally at home in referring to sexual activity, ripe with innuendo and implied intent. It is appropriate to say that in the novel Like Water for Chocolate Pedro “hungers” for Tita.²⁷

Although the above observations demonstrate some of the many ways food and sex are aligned, they do not explain why they are. We are left with many questions about the link between eating and sex. What is at the root of the connection between these two?

For one thing, eating and sexual activity will often provide a similar physical effect. This is partially due to the fact that the lips, tongue and genitals all have the same neural receptors, known as “Krause’s end bulbs,” which make them ultrasensitive and highly charged (Ackerman 132). Thus, the pleasures one experiences through eating and through sexual activity frequently trigger similar responses in the individual. Furthermore, certain foods will trigger the release of chemicals into the brain that create an effect similar to the experience of being in love. One such food, especially pertaining to my thesis, is chocolate. Chocolate contains a chemical called phenylethylamine (PEA), which, although its concentration in chocolate is small, still appears to

²⁷ Food terms are also used to describe someone sexually. Females will often refer to handsome, muscular men as beefcakes while sexy, promiscuous women are in some circles called tarts. According to Diane Ackerman, however, the word “tart” is a term that is typically used by the British rather than North Americans (Ackerman 130). As well, Gail Trussler, a British colleague, informs me that in Britain, people express their sexual desire for someone by saying “I’d fancy a bit of him (or her) on toast.”

trigger in some individuals feelings of contentment similar to those one enjoys when in love (Ackerman 154-155).

Foods such as chocolate, containing properties that cause the consumer to become sexually aroused, are known as aphrodisiacs. “For a man, the drug or tonic or salve is meant to increase endurance and performance. For a woman, an aphrodisiac serves to excite her arousal” (Moore 236). Phallic-shaped foods such as leeks, cucumbers and pickles tend in some circles to be especially prized as aphrodisiacs. Other foods, such as figs and oysters, are regarded as aphrodisiacs because they tend to remind people of female genitalia. Other foods are designated for other reasons. Caviar is considered an aphrodisiac because it is composed of eggs, at least according to Diane Ackerman (Ackerman 130-131). On quite another level, exotic foods are commonly prized as aphrodisiacs—purely because of their rarity. According to Ackerman, the common opinion is that if a substance is difficult to obtain, it must possess some kind of magical property, the principle of scarcity apparently marking the erogenous. In fact, almost anything can be thought of as an aphrodisiac, if only it is seen in the right way. As Susanna Moore has pointed out, in the late twentieth century, such food as Green M&M’s candies (most likely because of their chocolate content) and the new virility drug Viagra, have become the aphrodisiacs for the new millennium (Moore 236).

These observations on the cultural significance of food bear directly on the novels I am reading for in Reckless Appetites, Pomme, the heroine, is a strong believer in the power of the aphrodisiac. Hoping to seduce Jeremy, she plans a meal that is comprised of a series of foods that she believes to be sexually provocative. Her actions are entirely premeditated. Pomme carefully selects each item based upon what she has read of its romantic effect. Pomme tends to draw her experience of aphrodisiacs primarily from the French author Colette. Other authors do not seem to have as strong a hold over Pomme:

Such odd advice, Pomme reflects, as she reads *Venus in the Kitchen’s* recipes for caviar and oysters—spiced, raw or stewed in ways designed to seduce. The startling array of foods, calculated to drive one into the author’s

lusting embrace, makes Pomme feel ill in the contemplation. Dishes made from eels, kidneys, brains and pies calling for bull's testicles, are described in conspiratorial tones with a knowing nod to anyone who's watching. . . . Pomme imagines peeling his insistent arms from her neck and flying back to Colette's comforting embrace and wise words (4-5).

Thus for Pomme, Colette holds the key to aphrodisiac knowledge.

It is both interesting and important to note that Colette did not enjoy a particularly stable love life. She was married three times, with at least one of her marriages ending in divorce. If the source of Pomme's culinary inspiration did not enjoy a secure romantic-life, does she have much hope for stability with Jeremy? The romantic instability so apparent in Pomme's idol therefore may not bode well for the girl, as she is so reliant upon Colette's romantic "advice."

Because of her reliance upon writers like Colette, Pomme in her approach to food is quite different from Tita in Like Water for Chocolate. Tita does not turn to external sources for inspiring information about aphrodisiacs but rather turns to her own inner intuition to create meals with seductive qualities (for example, the quail in rose petal sauce). Unlike Pomme, Tita cooks food that is not accented with literal aphrodisiacs but food that has its own seductive qualities, due to the emotional qualities she has transmuted into them. In effect, Tita creates her own aphrodisiacs.

The Substitution of Food for Sex

The substitution of food for sex is a common occurrence in culinary romances as it is, of course, in some other narratives. When two characters desire each other and are unable to consummate their passion (for any of a number of reasons), eating becomes a way to satiate the intense sexual urge within them. The substitution becomes so great in Like Water for Chocolate that eating becomes the only medium through which Tita and Pedro can share an intimate relationship, since Mama Elena has repeatedly disapproved of and punished Tita for being alone

with Pedro. And so, when the family gathers for meals, Tita and Pedro share both the same food and the same general, physical area, in the only time they can safely be together.

Tita knows that the way to Pedro's heart is through his stomach. Although this is a cliché, his constant praise and delight over her cooking repeatedly prove its truth to her. When Pedro stops raving about her talent (because, unknown to her, Mama Elena has "asked" Pedro to keep silent), Tita is devastated. She has come to rely on Pedro's enthusiasm as a sign of his feelings for her. Thus she desperately tries to cook better meals each day: "In despair, at night—after she had knit a little section of bedspread, of course—she would invent new recipes, hoping to regain the connection that flowed between them through the food she prepared" (67). However, as nothing she makes creates a response in the tight-lipped Pedro, Tita feels more rejected and thus becomes even more determined. Tita's emotional isolation fuels her culinary creativity. She is driven by unfulfilled desire to excel at her craft. What further results from this impulsion to succeed is a taut combination of anxiousness and sexual tension. The magnitude of this desire is so pervasive it renders Tita helpless to do anything but try and please Pedro, stealing him away from his wife, Rosaura.

Furthermore, as Pedro's feeling for Tita remains unchanged and is merely suppressed in obedience to Mama Elena's edict, the sexual tension that arises whenever the two are in the same room becomes so palpable it saturates the air:

When she [Mama Elena] opened the kitchen door, she didn't see anything that wasn't socially acceptable—nothing to make her worry.

Still, there was something in the air, she could smell it, and she sharpened her senses to try to figure out what was troubling her. (75)

The sexual tension between Tita and Pedro becomes so unbearable that when Tita prepares a sumptuous meal of quail in rose petal sauce, the two lovers unite through their consumption of the meal. It is at this point that the most eloquent substitution of food for sex in Like Water for Chocolate occurs:

Tita wasn't there, even though her body was sitting up quite properly in her chair; there wasn't the slightest sign of life in her eyes. It was as if a strange alchemical process had dissolved her entire being in the rose petal sauce, in the tender flesh of the quails, in the wine, in every one of the meal's aromas. That was the way she entered Pedro's body, hot, voluptuous, perfumed, totally sensuous

Pedro didn't offer any resistance. He let Tita penetrate to the farthest corners of his being, and all the while they couldn't take their eyes off each other. He said:

"Thank you, I have never had anything so exquisite." (48-49)

In this passage, in which the meal shared by Tita and Pedro symbolically consummates their desire and passion, it is important to notice Pedro's use of the word "had." Literally, it refers to the dish he has before him. However on another, more colloquial, level the word is indicative of sexual consummation: Pedro "had" Tita. Through the food he is eating, he "experiences" her. As several other erotic overtones and expressions exist in the passage (such as "entered Pedro's body," "voluptuous," "totally sensuous," and "penetrate"), the meal is no longer simply about food, rather, it becomes almost exclusively about sex. Nourishment and sustenance are set aside to make room for passion and desire as the value of the food set before the diners becomes measured in sexual gratification.

The key ingredients in the sensual dish the lovers share are rose petals (according to directions, those used are preferably red). Roses, according to Diane Wallis in her book The Language of Flowers, are symbolic of love and red roses are especially symbolic of passionate love. There is a difference, however, between the complete rose and the parts or petals. A complete rose is representative of wholeness and unity, and yet, in Tita and Pedro's relationship there is nothing unified or whole. The breaking of the rose into petals reminds us that the relationship between the lovers is incomplete and has been broken apart by various pressures including Mama Elena and Rosaura. By eating the rose petals, the flowers once again become

complete within the diner and completion and consummation of the relationship between Tita and Pedro occurs.

Furthermore, according to the recipe, once the petals have been removed from the stem, they are to be ground with spice in a mortar (49). The mortar and pestle, according to Karen Klitgaard Povlsen, are, given their symbolic shapes, an old symbol of intercourse (141); thus immediately through their preparation the roses take on a sexual aspect indicative of the desire Pedro and Tita feel for each other. Their ultimate consummation is inevitable once the mortar and pestle have been used.

The stimulating qualities of the quail dish affect not only Pedro and Tita, but also another diner at the table, Gertrudis. Gertrudis, herself a product of an illicit, passionate affair, is defenseless against the food that has been set before her on the table:

On her the food seemed to act as an aphrodisiac; she began to feel an intense heat pulsing through her limbs. An itch in the center of her body kept her from sitting properly in her chair. She began to sweat, imagining herself on horseback with her arms clasped around one of Pancho Villa's men: the one she had seen in the village plaza the week before, smelling of sweat and mud, of dawns that brought uncertainty and danger, smelling of life and of death. She was on her way to market in Piedras Negras with Chenchu, the servant, when she saw him coming down the main street, riding in front of the others, obviously the captain of the troop. Their eyes met and what she saw in his made her tremble. She saw all the nights he'd spent staring into the fire and longing to have a woman beside him, a woman he could kiss, a woman like her. She got out her handkerchief and tried to wipe these sinful thoughts from her mind as she wiped away the sweat. (47-48)

Gertrudis is so hopelessly affected by the meal that her daydream is filled with steamy, sexual thoughts, the riding of a horse among them. The reverie is significant, of course, as many psychoanalysts have interpreted the image of riding a horse as symbolic of sexual intercourse.

Further, the references to smell enhance the sensual quality of the passage. Pheromones, those chemical substances that are secreted and released by animals for detection and response by those of the same species (The Concise Oxford Dictionary 893), are also thought to play a part in human sexual mating practices. Even though human pheromones have not yet been certainly identified by researchers, there is some evidence that they do exist and that they do affect human sexual cycles and response (Ackerman 28-29). Therefore, the constant references to smells observed by Gertrudis serve to heighten our sense of the sexual chemistry that exists between Gertrudis and the captain. Tita's and Pedro's passion stirs up lustful emotions within Gertrudis, emotions that are so strong they remain with her well after the meal has been consumed and well after Pedro and Tita have consummated their love for each other through her.²⁸

Although Tita actually feeds Pedro, Pomme in Reckless Appetites merely fantasizes about feeding Jeremy. Thus, for her, substitution of food for sex exists merely in the imagination. Jeremy never eats the elaborate Colette-inspired feast through which Pomme plans to seduce him. The fact that Pedro and Tita consummate their relationship both in food and sex, whereas Pomme's consummation is merely in her mind, highlights the significance of the sources of their aphrodisiac knowledge. While Tita's knowledge comes from her own intuition, Pomme's is derived from Colette's writing and remains unrealized in her.

Despite their obvious ontological differences, Tita's and Pomme's cooking functions in a remarkably similar manner. Both activities fill a need within the women to bring themselves closer to the men they desire. While Tita is cooking for Pedro, she is happy, making something for her beloved. Similarly, Pomme is happy as she fantasizes about how the evening with Jeremy will go, certain that it will end pleasantly in some combination of food and sex:

Pomme and her lover will sit by the fire, carefully melting thick slabs of dark chocolate made heady by a splash of cognac. They will dip black cherries into the dark chocolate, astonished by the burst of the fruit's complicated

²⁸ See Chapter One for more about Gertrudis's role as a sexual medium.

sweetness behind the warm chocolate shell. “Sweet things belong in a man’s mouth,” Jeremy will say. And then he will kiss her finally. (17-18)

Pomme’s fantasy, anchored in elaborate thoughts of food, serves to make her happy, indicating that fulfillment can occur in the mind as well the body. It is only when she is outwardly rejected by Jeremy, thus bringing into collision the worlds of fantasy and reality, that she becomes bitter about being apart from him.

In effect the various cooking activities Tita and Pomme practice serve to calm the women, burning off their sexual energy and channeling it into an alternate occupation. Their way of substituting food and the experience of it in place of sexual activity proves to be helpful and harmful at the same time. Although the compensation serves to aid Tita in her romantic endeavors with Pedro, Pomme’s substitution of such a fantasy in place of sex works against her relationship with Jeremy, causing her to turn to more obsessive behaviour later in the story.

The Correlation between Eating and Sexual Activity

Just as food and eating serve as a substitute for sexual activity in culinary narratives, so they also provide a means to mark romantic intent within the narrative itself. Rarely, if ever, will an overtly sexual scene be presented in a novel such as Like Water for Chocolate without some immediate association to food. This, however is not always strictly the case, for there are exceptions such as the scene towards the end of Like Water for Chocolate, when Pedro and Tita make love in “the dark room.” At that point no meal is on the table, nor is any meal being cooked. It is only Pedro and Tita in the little room outside the kitchen and no actual food is involved in the exchange. Yet even this instance is indirectly related to food since, after Mama Elena’s death, “the dark room,” which is close to the kitchen and therefore informed by its powers, is used as a storage space for the ranch’s many kitchen utensils.

In Like Water for Chocolate, the correlation between eating and sex is almost immediate and relatively constant. Aside from the quail passage, there are many other instances in the text

in which food is immediately linked with sex. For instance, when Tita prepares the turkey mole for Roberto's baptism, Pedro enters the kitchen, seeing Tita in a somewhat erotic position, on her knees, bent over the grinding stone, moving in a slow, regular rhythm. Pedro is so overcome by sexual desire that the only thing preventing him from "caressing the breasts Tita offered him" (65) is the entrance of Chenchu into the room. Again, one hot summer night, Pedro rises to refresh himself by eating a piece of watermelon. Tita, also rising from sleep, is on her way to relieve herself when she is discovered by the lustful Pedro (94). And after Esperanza's and Alex's wedding, the guests are overcome with strong sexual desire, no doubt the result of the "Chiles in Walnut Sauce" Tita created:

. . . they felt quite different; tasting these chiles in walnut sauce, they all experienced a sensation like the one Gertrudis had when she ate the quails in rose sauce.

Before Tita and Pedro knew it, along with John and Chenchu, they were the only ones left on the ranch. Everyone else, including the ranch hands was making mad passionate love, wherever they had happened to end up. (235-236)

Then again, the final time that Tita and Pedro make love takes place in the dark room—the storage room for the kitchen utensils.

Reckless Appetites addresses the correlation between eating and sexual activity in a far less accentuated manner. Even though numerous incidents of eating are followed by sexual activity, such moments occur more in passing and the passages are not as developed and detailed as those in Like Water for Chocolate. For example, when Henri shares Étienne's excellent pâté with his lover Olivia, we read simply, briefly, that they "become carried away" (35).

There is no question that although both eating and sexual activity are important in Like Water for Chocolate, the details given to the sexual description of the eating implies that sex is so pervasive that its significance outweighs the food itself. By contrast, in Reckless Appetites food at times appears to be more important than sex, as the novel seems to be saturated with recipes, while the sexual encounters are only brief. Thus, while leaving readers with the belief that food

and sex are connected, the two novels give very different impressions as to which activity is more important.

Female Reterritorialization

As we have seen in the first chapter, culinary narratives are particularly apt as female literary vehicles. In particular they explore female reterritorialization of what has been traditionally presented through the male gaze. Several techniques and devices are used in recipe fiction to direct the audience's attention away from expectations based in a patriarchal literary universe.

One way in which female reterritorialization occurs in culinary romances comes through altering the role of sexual aggressor. Traditionally, women have been relegated to a sexual position as passive recipients. In Like Water for Chocolate and Reckless Appetites, this attitude is completely reversed. In these narratives active female sexual experience is important for textual development. As a result, women are permitted to become sexual initiators, while men become the passive prey.

We have already seen, in the "quail" passage, how the woman repositions herself as a figure who concentrates and directs a romantic act. There are other signs in Like Water for Chocolate of such reterritorialization. For one thing, Pedro remains a passive character throughout the entire novel, and not only in sexual terms. When Pedro comes for Tita's hand in marriage, and is told he cannot marry her (but that he can have Rosaura as his wife), he makes no attempt to fight for Tita. Instead, he quietly accepts Rosaura. Although his marriage to Rosaura may bring him physically closer to Tita, it does not give Tita to him, and thus the marriage can only be an example of passive resistance. Nowhere in the novel is there a strong refusal on the part of Tita's lover. Pedro does not even entertain thoughts of rescuing Tita from her fate, or protesting his options; he simply surrenders:

“Why did you do that, Pedro? It will look ridiculous, your agreeing to marry Rosaura. What happened to the eternal love you swore to Tita? Aren’t you going to keep that vow?”

“Of course I’ll keep it. When you’re told there’s no way you can marry the woman you love and your only hope of being near her is to marry her sister, wouldn’t you do the same?” (13)

At one point, further in the novel, Pedro is presented with an opportunity to “rescue” Tita. The moment occurs when after consuming Tita’s passionate dish of quails in rose petal sauce, Gertrudis is overcome with passion and “rescued” by a revolutionary soldier. Both Tita and Pedro witness the couple ride off together on horseback. However when Tita turns to Pedro, hoping for him to do the same, Mama Elena effectively (even if unknowingly) prevents Pedro from “rescuing” his love by simply calling out, wondering what the commotion is about. Susan Lucas Dobrian notes that “the reader cannot help but compare Juan’s dashing rescue, galloping off on horseback, with Pedro’s weak *escape*, furiously pedaling off on his rickety bicycle. This is certainly not the vehicle of choice for the romance hero” (60). Nor is escape the path that a romantic hero takes. The retreat is a cowardly act on Pedro’s part. As cowardice appears to be one of Pedro’s stronger traits, he never has the chance to wear the mantle of the true romantic hero. When Mama Elena demands that Pedro stop praising Tita’s cooking, he does so, immediately, without even praising Tita’s cooking in Mama Elena’s absence.

Even when Pedro takes steps to be the sexual instigator, he soon reverts to his normal acquiescence. On one occasion, for instance, when Pedro, drunk, serenades Tita beneath her window, the ghost of Mama Elena, angered by Tita’s outburst, causes a lamp near the singer to explode, burning Pedro in the process. Instead of dealing with his injuries with strength and dignity, Pedro acts like a child—sulky and petulant: “Tita couldn’t understand Pedro’s attitude; he was behaving like a child throwing a tantrum. He talked as if he was going to be sick for the rest of his days, but it wouldn’t be that long—in a little while he’d be completely healed” (205). His childish behaviour prevents the audience from seeing Pedro as a strong man and solidifies his

role in the female reterritorialization of the patriarchy. In the process, the audience's estimation of Tita, who maintains a position of sexual dominance, is also strengthened. As a result, her talent, beauty and charm cause not only Pedro to fall in love with her, but John Brown to desire her as well.

It is important to note that it is only the alcohol that inspires Pedro to approach Tita. When Pedro is sober he makes no public displays of his affection for her. He is for the most part discreet taking care to only approach his lover when out of the watchful eye of others. Pedro only makes public his feelings for Tita under the alcohol-inspired illusion that it is acceptable to do so. Thus Rosaura, his legal wife, is publicly shamed and the audience's perception of Pedro is further tainted.

Like Tita, Pomme in Reckless Appetites adopts the untraditional position of female aggressor. Unlike Tita's stance, however, Pomme's action, we find, takes on a somewhat disturbing aspect. Although Tita desires Pedro, she does not let her desire so possess her that it becomes an obsession. Pomme, on the other hand, displays extreme behavior in her pursuit of Jeremy. She continues to chase Jeremy, even to the point that, when rejected, she continues stalking him until he is fearful (it is important to note that Pedro never fears Tita):

I've not thought about Pomme in ages. After I broke off our affair, telling her the easy lie that I'd fallen for another woman, she kept appearing at unexpected moments. I'd notice her at the end of my street when I left for rehearsals, or in the restaurant where I meet my reading group every two weeks. She'd just sit there—always alone—until she saw that I'd noticed her. Then she'd suddenly leave without saying a word. She spooked me, killing my appetite for the food and the books. (We had been reading Rabelais.) (137)

Here we see a side of the sexual instigator that we did not see with Tita. Whereas Tita is assertive only within her own environment, not entering the direct environment of Pedro or his wife, Pomme ventures into Jeremy's environments, choosing to go to him if he will not come to her.

Pomme does so because she needs Jeremy to define her, having no sense of herself as a woman in her own right.

We also see in Pomme a darker side of the sexual aggressor than we have seen before. She is a defiantly more masculine threat than is Tita. Pomme becomes the stalker, while Jeremy becomes the weak prey, hunted and tricked into an early death. The patriarchal literary universe would position the roles in reverse, with Jeremy the more dominant force, adopting the role of stalker and Pomme adopting the more typical female role of the passive, threatened prey. In Deval's reterritorialization, the roles reversed, Pomme is anything but threatened, is in fact, entirely threatening.

It is interesting to note, though, that when Pomme puts into action her plan for Jeremy's demise, she is reacting totally within the stereotypical notion that "a woman scorned" is a dangerous woman. So even though she is a strong representation of female reterritorialization of a male role (i.e. the stalker),²⁹ she still retains traditional patriarchal qualities (i.e. the woman scorned). Unfortunately for Jeremy, when she leaves the country and takes up other interests, her desire for his demise washed away, he still suffers the latent consequences of her revenge.

Another way in which the culinary romances I am examining in this study reterritorialize traditional sexual roles occurs through a repositioning of authority. Mama Elena, and not any of the male characters, serves as the authority on the ranch. Physically strong and domineering, she embodies many characteristics of a bullying male autocrat. Mama Elena is a despot in her own right: her orders are to be obeyed to the letter and at all times.

At times her assertiveness serves a heroic function. When rebel soldiers come to the ranch, it is Mama Elena, not the male ranch hands, who defends the property:

²⁹ According to Kerry Ramsay, studies conducted by the Canadian Department of Justice show that in the majority of all stalking cases almost all victims are female and almost all stalkers are male. As strangers stalk only 12 percent of victims, it appears that the accused and the victims are typically acquainted with each other (31).

Mama Elena raised the gun, braced herself against the wall so she wouldn't be knocked to the ground by the kick of the gun, and shot the chickens. Bits of chicken flew in every direction along with the smell of burnt feathers.

Shaking, Rosalio and Guadalupe got out their pistols, fully convinced that this was their last day on earth. The soldier next to the captain was going to shoot Mama Elena, but the captain motioned him to stop. They were all waiting for his order to attack.

"I have a very good aim and a very bad temper, Captain. The next shot is for you, and I can assure you that I can shoot you before they can kill me, so it would be best for us to respect each other. If we die, no one will miss me very much, but won't the nation mourn your loss?"

... "You're right. Don't worry, no one is going to kill you, or fail to respect you, that's for sure! Such a valiant woman will always have my admiration." (86-87)

There is no question that Mama Elena is totally and convincingly in charge of the situation. The soldiers, like the members of her family, do not stand a chance against her determination. This comical reterritorialization of the traditional male role as tyrant, mocking the captain's sense of self-importance, places Mama Elena in the unique position of embodying both extremes of the same paradigm: being both matriarch and patriarch at the same time. With Mama Elena, the line between male and female blurs, leaving the readers with the notion that Mama Elena occupies both positions.

In addition to the already-mentioned role reversals entered by Tita, Pedro and Mama Elena in Like Water for Chocolate, other characters succumb to the pattern as well. Gertrudis, for example, becomes a General in the Revolutionary Army, choosing a masculine role, and Trevino, a soldier, becomes a cook, taking on a feminine role in helping his general to make her favorite cream fritter dessert.

Conclusion

The associations between food and sex are so pervasive in Like Water for Chocolate and Reckless Appetites that the erotic nature of these texts often supercedes the remainder of their stories. Romantic plots and subplots garner by far the most attention in these novels, often relegating other interests to the peripheral edges of the narrative. Eating and food preparation become vehicles for sexual inter-action between the heroines and their prospective mates. Without the cover that meal sharing and meal preparation provide the lovers, Tita and Pedro would not be able to come together. Nor, without the ability to fantasize about meal preparation, would Pomme be able to release her pent-up desire over Jeremy. Thus the substitution of food for sex provides these couples with a means of communicating their desires and intents while at the same time maintaining the delicate moral balance that surrounds their lives. Maintaining this balance includes not offending Tita's sister and Pedro's wife in Like Water for Chocolate and allowing Pomme to have a vicarious relationship with a man who does not desire her in Reckless Appetites.

Chapter 4

Just as the link between food and sex is ingrained in our society, so sex and death are similarly connected. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, even the word “die” has sexual connotations, having once meant, “to experience a sexual orgasm”³⁰ (OED 632). In Like Water for Chocolate and the other narratives I am examining in this study, the heroines are passionate, sexual women who are nurturing and thus life-giving. However, in their quest for autonomy and romantic conquest, they also become life-takers. Thus food, sex and death form an unholy trinity in the culinary narratives I am here exploring. Tita in Like Water for Chocolate, Pomme in Reckless Appetites, and Beth in The Cure for Death by Lightning each engage in a personal struggle with a series of individuals and impediments in their environments. How these women cope with, and triumph over, their adversaries demonstrate the strong power of their individual selves and the power that they seemingly infuse into the food they prepare.

Life and Death Cycles

Death’s presentation in Like Water for Chocolate is, like almost everything else in the novel, connected with Tita. Although Tita is a vibrant, passionate individual, her vitality is bound and stifled by her oppressive mother. Thus, early in the novel, Tita and Mama Elena’s relationship is not defined in terms of enduring familial love, but rather in a dark, murderous tone:

[Tita] realized that you can’t be weak when it comes to killing: you have to be strong or it just causes more sorrow. It occurred to her that she could use her mother’s strength right now. Mama Elena was merciless, killing with a single blow. But then again not always. For Tita she had made an exception; she

³⁰ This term was particularly common as a poetical metaphor used in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

had been killing her a little at a time since she was a child and she still hadn't quite finished her off. (45)

Mama Elena doesn't try physically to terminate her daughter's life. She needs her to care for her in her old age. Rather, Mama Elena attempts to break Tita's spirit and kill the vitality that so defines her daughter. Among other smothering actions, she forbids Tita to marry. As the youngest, Tita must care for her mother until the woman dies. The man whom Tita desires is thus encouraged by Mama Elena to wed Tita's sister, Rosaura. Tita is, in effect, Mama Elena's handmaid, constantly at her mother's beck and call. She must cook, clean, wash clothes and iron at Mama Elena's will. If these activities were met with praise or if there was the possibility of emancipation, Tita could perhaps carry on. However, no matter how much she struggles against Mama Elena, Tita's role in the De La Garza home does not change, and she slowly withers inside:

"But in my opinion . . ."

"You don't have an opinion, and that's all I want to hear about it. For generations, not a single person in my family has ever questioned this tradition, and no daughter of mine is going to be the one to start."

Tita lowered her head, and the realization of her fate struck her as forcibly as her tears struck the table. From then on they knew, she and the table, that they could never have even the slightest voice in the unknown forces that fated Tita to bow before her mother's absurd decision. (9)

Tita is here defined by frustration and unfulfilled desire; she is a bird slowly dying in the nest, smothered under the weight of its mother. Interestingly, only the table she sheds her tears upon knows the true extent of Tita's unhappiness. Because Tita's link to food is so strong, only an inanimate cooking object has any sympathy for her unhappy situation. To the family, she outwardly continues to do her duty. Here again we see the extent to which Tita is connected to food, its production and its consumption, the table being a site of food, the place at which it is served and from which it is taken.

Bound by familial duty, bit by bit Tita dies inside, with her metaphorical death and subsequent rebirth only possible after she suffers a brush with insanity and a nervous breakdown. Tita's breakdown is the result of her unique relationship with her nephew, Roberto, Rosaura and Pedro's son. Initially, Roberto's birth fills Tita with hope and joy and provides the girl with something into which she can channel her energy and all her pent-up love and emotion. Roberto becomes her highest priority.

That nurturing takes on a remarkable manifestation. Because Rosaura's milk never comes in and, inexplicably, Tita's virgin breasts are full with wonderful, nourishing milk with which to feed the starving child, Tita is able to become a mother figure in the young boy's life. Because Roberto's hunger is satisfied, Tita moves from being the food preparer, to becoming the source of food for the child. She, and not the child's own mother, Rosaura, is the giver of life to Pedro's son:

The baby clamped desperately onto the nipple and he sucked and he sucked. When she saw the boy's face slowly grow peaceful and when she heard the way he was swallowing, she began to suspect that something extraordinary had happened. Was it possible that she was feeding the baby? She removed the boy from her breast: a thin stream of milk sprayed out. Tita could not understand it. It wasn't possible for an unmarried woman to have milk, short of a supernatural act, unheard of in these times. When the child realized he'd been separated from his meal, he started to wail again. Immediately Tita let him take her breast, until his hunger was completely satisfied and he was sleeping like a saint. (74)

The activity of nursing is virtually sanctified as the audience reads that the baby sleeps "like a saint." The simile redefines the mother, giving her a religious power. It is interesting to note, here, that Esquivel chooses to portray Tita and the nursing child in terms of religious piety. Naming the child as a saint in the above passage places Tita in a Christian role, similar to that of Mary. The food she provides for him comes from her body in a Christ-like image of bestowing

divine sacraments. The food in a sense provides salvation for the little boy. Thus Tita's divinity enables her to forge stronger bonds to Roberto than even his own mother can. It is the pull of these bonds against the painful bindings of Mama Elena, which cause Tita finally to break down.

In her role as food-supplier, Tita replaces Rosaura as the child's mother, both to Roberto, the child, and to Pedro, the father. As only Pedro knows about his son's unusual feeding habits, he helps Tita with the daily task of nourishing the child, ensuring that no one discovers that it is actually Tita who is nursing the child and not Rosaura. As far as the rest of the ranch is concerned, Tita is feeding the child the same thin gruels and teas Nacha fed Tita when she was little. Because of Pedro's help in protecting the secret, no one questions how Tita manages to feed the child. Thus, Tita and Pedro's relationship shifts again, enabling them for the first time to become a family once Rosaura, the real wife, is pushed to the outside of the picture. The child is clearly central to Tita's happiness. With Roberto she is able to fulfill her desire to have a family; she experiences tender moments with Pedro who acts as *her* husband and not her sister's. Through Roberto she is able to have the life she thought she could never have because of her commitment to Mama Elena.

When Roberto, so dependent upon Tita as the source of his food, is removed from this nurturing scene (sent to San Antonio with his parents), he soon dies and with him so does Tita's happiness. When the child dies, she is not permitted to grieve as a mother, for outwardly, Tita is nothing more than aunt and cook. Furthermore, even though a member of the family has died, Tita is not permitted even to cry. Death, it appears, does not warrant tears in Mama Elena's opinion: "Sit down and get back to work" she heartlessly demands of Tita "I don't want any tears. Poor child, I hope the Good Lord has taken him in all his glory, but we can't give in to sorrow; there's work to do. First work, then do as you please, except crying, do you hear?" (95). This order to suppress her grief is what finally triggers Tita's descent into madness. The outcome is not surprising, as evidence of Tita's propensity towards madness, is evident early on in the text. At one point her sister's wedding linens blind Tita until all she can see is white (31). Furthermore, when making Rosaura's wedding cake she hears the cheeping of a baby bird. When

the egg is cracked open, there is no bird to be found and the audience realizes that the sounds she has heard are manifested only in her imagination (26). These instances only served to accentuate Tita's instability. When Tita is finally pushed too far by her oppressive mother she turns crazy, eventually ending up naked and covered in bird droppings in the dovecote.

Tita's breakdown is her death, and her recovery under the care of John Brown is her rebirth, that narrative picking up the Christian imagery that surrounds Tita's relationship to Roberto. It is important to note that her madness does not prevent her from communing with food, as it appears that Tita's culinary influence is even more powerful while she is in an altered state. Whereas when Tita is sane, she merely injects emotions into her cooking—passion, sorrow and longing become spices, making flavorful her meals—when Tita's sanity slips, her ability to alter foods reflects her illness, producing much more grim and startling effects.

These startling results figure when news of Roberto's death comes to the women while they are making sausages. Tita, in her rage tears apart all the sausages she can reach, all the while, screaming wildly (96). After the episode, the other women attempt to finish the sausages. Their efforts, however, are in vain as Tita's madness has already tainted the food: "Mama Elena and Chenchá finished filling the sausages in silence. Mama Elena was always such a perfectionist and so careful to get all the air out of the sausage, no one could explain it when they discovered a week later that all the sausages in the cellar were swarming with worms" (96). The use of the word "swarming" would imply that Tita has cursed or plagued the De La Garza home, again not only reinforcing the religious power Tita holds, but reinforcing her culinary power as well. Instead of infusing her emotions into the food, Tita performs a dark miracle and the same worms which she gathers to feed the injured dove, the same worms which will creep and eat through Roberto's body in the grave, locate themselves into the De La Garza food. Displeased with those who would dine from her creation, Tita punishes them by giving them nothing. In effect, Mama Elena's edict to work first and grieve later has proven to cause even more sorrow because in the end, none of the delicious sausages can be eaten.

When Tita leaves the De La Garza home she is a broken woman. Her return to the home, however, is quite triumphant. Under John Brown's care, Tita recovers, stronger than she ever would have been had she remained in the stifling De La Garza house. When she returns, she finds herself in a position she has never encountered before. Tita is in charge! Her role as ranch cook becomes even more important than ever as she, and not Mama Elena, takes control. Mama Elena's power is hindered still further when, not long after Tita's triumphant return to the ranch, Mama Elena dies. It is as if Tita's inner strength (and not her cooking) kills the once powerful Mama Elena. Tita's cycle of redemption and emotional rebirth, then, begins with Roberto's birth, and ends with her mother's death.

The cycle of life and death in Like Water for Chocolate truly becomes complete at the end of the novel when Pedro and Tita, finally engaged after Esperanza and Alex's wedding, make love. During the act of passion, Pedro, overcome with bliss, dies in Tita's arms. Here literally the word "die" operates under its sixteenth century poetical metaphor, when the lover not only experiences an orgasm, he physically ceases to live. Tita, overcome with grief, makes the decision to end her own life and join her lover in the afterlife. In a scene, echoing the classic tale of star-crossed lovers, Romeo and Juliet, Tita ends her life (239-240). The story ends with the two lovers erupting in flames and the ranch destroyed. Thus even in the end, Tita and Pedro conclude their lives in a manner related to food. The lovers not only engage in relations for the last time in "the dark room" where the kitchen utensils are stored, they are also consumed by fire, an element required in most cooking.

In Reckless Appetites, the struggle between life and death centres on Jeremy and Pomme's planted jars of poisoned preserves, which he stumbles upon. Throughout the novel, the audience becomes acutely aware of Pomme's obsession with him. From her sensuous dinner at the beginning of the novel to the way she stalks him later in the novel, Pomme revolves around Jeremy in her desire to be with him and him alone. It is only when her father, disturbed by Pomme's saddened state, sends her out of the country, that her horizons expand and her obsession with Jeremy is forgotten. Unfortunately for Jeremy, this release comes too late, as his appetite for

the delicious preserves Pomme has left for him, before her departure, wins over his better judgement, and the residue of her presence and her cooking consequently kills him. Poison, it appears, is the means by which most heroines in culinary narratives exact their victories and overcome their antagonists.

Other culinary novels also incorporate the life and death binary. The title of Gail Anderson-Dargatz's narrative, for example, is a direct reference to the cycle of life and death. The Cure for Death by Lightning not only provides the title of her novel, it also designates a recipe included in the story:

The CURE for death by lightning was handwritten in thick, messy blue ink in my mother's scrapbook, under the recipe for my father's favorite oatcakes: *Dunk the dead by lightning in a cold water bath for two hours and if still dead, add vinegar and soak for an hour more* (1).

Ironically, pressed flat on the page beside the written cure is a butterfly. Its dead corpse acts as an immediate reminder of the prevalence of death in life, and of death in this particular culinary narrative (Sarah Kemp's death, Henri Moses's death, Coyote Jack's death, the death of the homesteader's children: the list goes on). Beth's mother catches and presses—in effect kills—the torn-winged butterfly as “a reminder to keep going” (1). In catching and killing the butterfly, she prevents the small creature from doing the very thing she wishes to exemplify: movement and persistence. Thus, we see in the butterfly a symbol of the way that Beth's mother has been caught and preserved by her own mundane existence.

It would be easy to establish a correlation between recipes and death in Anderson-Dargatz's novel because death permeates almost every page, through the dark tone that blankets the story. However, Beth's redemption and triumph over the death and darkness that surrounds her is not born out of her ability to cook, or out of the recipes she chooses to prepare, but in her ability finally to stand up for herself and attack the problem head-on. For Anderson-Dargatz and her characters, recipes and food are not as important for their own empowerment as they are for the characters in Reckless Appetites and Like Water for Chocolate. Therefore death in Anderson-

Dargatz's novel is overcome through the heroine's strength of character, rather than the strength of her particular cooking.

John Lanchester's The Debt to Pleasure is another culinary narrative which pays specific attention to the life and death binary. In The Debt to Pleasure, Tarquin prides himself in his ability to stir up trouble. As he grows older this desire for chaos shifts from practicing harmless pranks to committing murder. "Destruction," says Tarquin, "is as great a passion as creation, and it is as creative, too—as visionary and as assertive of the self" (245). Tarquin is obsessed with destruction and so, in The Debt to Pleasure, we become privy to the mind of a culinary killer, watching as he selects and stalks his prey, eventually, like Pomme in Reckless Appetites, poisoning them with his cooking.

Patterns of Poison and the notion of the altered recipe

Poisoning in culinary narratives fall into two distinct categories—those which are premeditated, such as those which Pomme in Reckless Appetites engages in; and those which are accidental, those which Tita practices through the emotion-saturated dishes she prepares in Like Water for Chocolate. The nature of these poisonings differs in that they are the result of different textual circumstances. Pomme's premeditated poisoning of Jeremy, for example, is the result of jealousy and rage, a by-product of Jeremy's rejection of her aggressive advances. By contrast, Tita's acts of poisoning are mostly accidental, the result of her unconscious addition of emotional ingredients into her cooking. Nevertheless I would stress that, regardless of the textual circumstances from which the poisonings arise, poison is still an altered food, adulterated to a point at which it has become contaminated and at which, when imbibed, contaminates the consumer. Pedro and Jeremy therefore do not stand a chance against their lovers' cooking.

The first instance in Like Water for Chocolate when Tita accidentally poisons her dining audience occurs at Pedro and Rosaura's wedding. Despite her love-lorn grief over her lover's impending wedding to her own sister, Tita must help prepare the food that is to be served at the feast. After everything else they have completed, the only thing remaining for them to make is the wedding cake. Tita, exhausted and mourning, is on the verge of collapsing. She starts to cry, pouring all of her grief, anguish, and lonely suffering into the icing of the cake. The next day, as the wedding guests consume the cake, they consume Tita's broken-hearted sorrow, resulting in catastrophic circumstances:

She could hardly wait until everyone was done with the cake so she could leave the table. Carreno's manual of etiquette said she couldn't leave until then, so she kept her head in the clouds and gobbled down her piece of cake. She was so wrapped up in her thoughts that she didn't notice that all around her something very strange was taking place. The moment they took their first bite of the cake, everyone was flooded with a great wave of longing. Even Pedro,

usually so proper, was having trouble holding back his tears. Mama Elena, who hadn't shed a single tear over her husband's death was sobbing silently. But the weeping was just the first symptom of a strange intoxication—an acute attack of pain and frustration—that seized the guests and scattered them across the patio and the grounds in the bathrooms, all of them wailing over lost love. Everyone there, every last person, fell under this spell, and not very many of them made it to the bathrooms in time—those who didn't joined the collective vomiting that was going on all over the patio. Only one person escaped: the cake had no effect on Tita. The minute she finished eating it, she left the party. (37-38)

Just as people can render themselves immune to certain toxic substances by ingesting increasingly small doses of the toxin, as Pomme intends to do with the brucine she fancies giving Jeremy (*Reckless Appetites*, 64-65)³¹ Tita renders herself immune to the grief with which she taints the cake. Since Tita's suffering becomes increasingly acute as the day for Pedro and Rosaura's wedding approaches, she becomes increasingly immune to the effects of her own sorrow. Now that the wedding day has finally arrived and she once again consumes the poisonous grief when she eats her piece of cake, she remains unaffected because she has already suffered enough. However, everyone else who consumes Tita's grief suffers tremendously for it: they weep and endure pain, frustration and extreme nausea. Here we see the power of fury in her cooking. Tita's inner pain and passions transmutes her emotions to the plates of her guests.

Unfortunately for Tita, the fact that she has already suffered escapes Mama Elena, who blames Tita for poisoning the guests and ruining Rosaura and Pedro's wedding. It is obvious to Mama Elena that Tita, having suffered no ill effects from the food she consumed, must have poisoned everyone else's. Tita, unable to shed the guilt Mama Elena thrusts upon her shoulders, is brutally beaten for her insolent disobedience:

³¹ Pomme accredits this scheme to Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

She spent two weeks in bed recovering from her bruises. What motivated such a monstrous punishment was Mama Elena's conviction that Tita, in league with Nacha, had deliberately ruined Rosaura's wedding by mixing an emetic into the cake. Tita was never able to convince her that she had only added one extra ingredient to the cake, the tears she had shed while preparing it. (39)

Tita's grief figures here as a purgative, cleansing both literally (the guests) and emotionally (Tita). The brutality of her punishment serves only to draw attention to the monstrosity that motivates Mama Elena. Nowhere in the text do we read about Rosaura or Gertrudis being physically punished or consistently reprimanded in the way that Tita is (although Mama Elena disowns Gertrudis after she runs away from the ranch and joins a brothel).

The wedding cake is the first in a series of instances of altered recipes created through Tita's inclusion of emotional ingredients. As we have seen earlier in the highly erotic "quail" passage, Tita's addition of emotional ingredients produce quite stark effects upon those who consume her dishes. In the case of the "quail" passage, Tita transforms a delicate poultry dish into a highly sensual, erotic, dining experience. Everyone who dines upon the dish is affected by Tita's infusion of her longing and the intense desire she feels towards Pedro, the food figuring as site of emotional transmission. Similarly, as argued earlier in this chapter, Tita's mad rage while making sausages results in the physical manifestation of worms in the meat.

Tita's emotional state constantly alters the food she is preparing. When she has a brief encounter with Pedro while making the turkey mole, her euphoria is passed on to the dinner guests (70). Everyone has a wonderful time at the party except for Mama Elena who is so preoccupied watching Pedro and Tita for any sign of indiscretion that she cannot eat. After "witnessing" an argument between Tita and Rosaura, the beans Tita is preparing become angry, like their chef, and will not cook until Tita soothes their ire by singing to them (213).

No one is more acutely aware of how Tita's emotions affect the meals she produces than is Mama Elena who, once she is bedridden and dependent upon Tita for her care and feeding, is thoroughly convinced that her daughter is purposely poisoning her food. Tita, though, feels a

strange sense of compassion for her bed-ridden mother, and perhaps even a hint of concern for the woman who in the past had caused her such pain. As a result, Tita takes great effort to create and prepare good, nourishing meals for the ungrateful Mama Elena: “She prepared her mother’s meal very carefully and especially the ox-tail soup, with the good intention of serving it to her so that she would recover completely” (126). However, despite her good intentions, Tita is unable to hide the bitter taste her own dislike and disgust adds to the soup:

Tita waited anxiously for her mother’s reaction when she had her first sip, but Mama Elena spit the soup on the bedspread and yelled to Tita to get the tray out of her sight immediately.

“But why?”

“Because it is nasty and bitter, and I don’t want it. Take it away! Don’t you hear?”

...She was sure the soup was delicious. She had tasted it herself before bringing it up. It couldn’t help but be good, she’d taken so much care in preparing it. (127)

Tita does not intentionally poison her mother, nor does she attempt to alter the meals she prepares in any way. Like the longing and grief she adds to Rosaura’s wedding cake, Tita’s dislike and hurt make their way (unconsciously and unintentionally) into her mother’s food, resulting in a bitter-tasting meal. Thus, Tita comes to be a source of contamination and spoilage. Whether this contamination is real or only in Mama Elena’s head is never certain.

Even though Tita is by far the most talented cook, her mother’s distrust leads her to attempt to appease Mama Elena by hiring another cook for the ranch, though each candidate for the position does not last long around Mama Elena’s sharp tongue. We see that Tita still cares greatly for her mother, so much so that she tries to find someone else to prepare the food so that her mother may regain her strength and fully recover. However as Mama Elena alienates one cook after the other, Tita is left no choice but to care for her mother alone. And unfortunately, no matter what Tita prepares, nothing she makes or does, is to Mama Elena’s satisfaction:

After that there was nothing Mama Elena could do except eat what Tita cooked, but she took every possible precaution about it. Besides insisting that Tita taste the food in front of her, she always had a glass of warm milk brought to her with her meals, and she would drink that before eating the food, to counteract the effects of the bitter poison that according to her was dissolved in the food. Sometimes these measures alone sufficed, but occasionally she felt sharp pains in her belly, and then she took, in addition, a swig of syrup of ipecac and another of squill onion as a purgative. (131-132)

Whether the mother's death is due to Tita's dislike or simply Mama Elena's fear of her daughter taking revenge upon her for her previous years of maltreatment, Mama Elena soon dies.

However accidental or sad her death is, it equates to Tita's freedom and Tita is once and for all released from her bonds of torment and suffering.

While Tita in her acts of spoiling food is entirely unintentional, Pomme, the heroine of Reckless Appetites, provoked by scorn, is quite deliberate in how she conceives of poison. When Jeremy reject's Pomme, she retaliates by turning to literary sources in order to discover the best means to contaminate food by which she can aid and accelerate the demise of her once beloved man. (Thus literature becomes the means by which Pomme "gets" her man—attracting him and harming him).

Just as Pomme is able to draw upon several literary sources in order to create her aphrodisial menu at the beginning of the story, she is able to draw upon several sources in order to come up with the perfect poison for Jeremy. Pomme briefly considers Mark Twain's recipe for New England Apple Pie (also known as a Recipe for Vengeance). However, as "Pomme knows New England Apple Pie is far from fatal" (64) and as she cannot see herself in a position easily to serve the dish to Jeremy (the recipe suggests serving the pie cold at breakfast) she quickly abandons this idea. However she chooses to poison Jeremy, its presentation must not cause any suspicion. Thus practicality, it appears, is of the greatest importance when she is considering how to successfully poison her victim. In pursuit of a lethal concoction, Pomme also considers liquid

poisons, such as the brucine the Count of Monte Cristo uses in Alexandre Dumas's famous novel, and absinthe, which was famous among the café set in Paris. Laudanum, a blood-red elixir made from opium, honey, alcohol and hot water, and favored by Charles Baudelaire, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Wilkie Collins, is also briefly considered. Though laudanum will not kill Jeremy outright, Pomme still contemplates its use because it will eventually alter his mind and drive Jeremy mad, giving him strange and horrible nightmares as he sleeps (66). Madness, it appears, would be sufficient punishment for Jeremy.

Death is not Pomme's ultimate goal in her consideration of a suitably altered food for Jeremy. She wishes merely to make him suffer, seeing in that result an adequate revenge for her rejection. Thus she briefly contemplates giving Jeremy food that will deliver him into pain: jaundice (carrots, eggs and mangoes), kidney stones (spinach and rhubarb pie), and anemia (onions). Pomme considers several options before settling on poisoned preserves.

The significance of Pomme's planting the preserves in Jeremy's cupboard for Jeremy to discover and consume at a later date is that once Pomme is over lamenting Jeremy and thus also over her desire for his demise, he will still suffer the consequences of her rejection. Jeremy is never given a means of escape. It is his own greed and gluttony which encourages him to try the preserves he knows must have come from Pomme (a fact that should make him wary). It is that same passion that encourages him to consume so much of the deliciously lethal treat. As a result Jeremy cannot escape.

Conclusion:

Along with sex, death and poisoning are among the most developed interests in Like Water for Chocolate and Reckless Appetites. Whether the act of poisoning is accidental or intentional, the same women who are nurturing and life-giving in the narratives are the same women who take away life. The alteration to the recipes they prepare appears to be another means by which the heroines in the stories learn to control the texts and determine the outcome of

their lives. Pomme and Tita, in particular, depend on their ability to cook and consequently “poison” their lovers into submission. The ultimate deaths of both adversary and lover alike demonstrate a power that is almost always underestimated but certainly necessary for their conquests.

Final Conclusion

As we have seen, culinary narratives are a hybrid blend of qualities found in cookbooks and romance novels. In these domesticated narratives, the voice is given opportunity to articulate female interest, female activity and female experience, subjects that are often neglected in the traditional patriarchal novel. Thus, the culinary romance acts as a feminist literary vehicle, aiding in the reterritorialization of patriarchal interests. In addition, the connection between food and the feminine becomes a way to highlight the gendered nature of the complex narratives located in recipe fiction.

As with many genres, culinary narrative continues to grow and evolve at a brisk rate. Academic interest in the connections between food and literature and how food functions in literature have become increasingly frequent over the past decade. In 1991, Mosaic devoted a special issue to food. "Diet and Discourse: Eating, Drinking and Literature" which includes a 51-page bibliography on the subject. In 1996, Joan Smith published Hungry For You. From Cannibalism to Seduction: A Book of Food, a 393-page volume filled with essays, articles and blurbs about food, sex and, of course, a fair amount of literature. Also at the end of 1996, Mark Morton published Cupboard Love: A Dictionary of Culinary Curiosities, which as the name implies, looks at the meanings of food words. These, along with many other academic works, examine the role that food plays in literature. As a result, culinary romances are now viewed with a greater respect and keener interest by academics, who in turn influence the patterns of hierarchy in the English canon.

The genre of culinary narrative is therefore now on the verge of becoming a legitimate area of academic interest and writing. A further result, is the inclusion of recipes in many recent stories; even those that are not exclusively defined as culinary romances. For example, Carol Shields's 1993 Pulitzer Prize winning novel, The Stone Diaries, begins with a recipe for Malvern pudding. As well, culinary narratives have begun to take on new forms. The Secrets of Pistoulet by Jana Kolpen, for example, incorporates the characteristics of the culinary romance while, at

the same time, attempting to imitate the vastly popular Griffin and Sabine books by Nick Bantock. As more authors attempt to write this demanding form, we will likely see more changes and further studies in the area.

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