# Cooking in the Books: Cookbooks and Cookery in Popular Fiction.



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## Cooking in the Books: Cookbooks and Cookery in Popular F

**Rachel Franks** 

#### Introduction

Food has always been an essential component of daily life. Today, thinking about food is a complicated pursuit than planning the next meal, with food studies scholars devoting the researching "anything pertaining to food and eating, from how food is grown to when and how who eats it and with whom, and the nutritional quality" (Duran and MacDonald 234). This is it the work undertaken by an increasingly wide variety of popular culture researchers who explor of food (Risson and Brien 3): including food advertising, food packaging, food on television, popular fiction.

In creating stories, from those works that quickly disappear from bookstore shelves to those t entrenched in the literary canon, writers use food to communicate the everyday and to explore of ideas from cultural background to social standing, and also use food to provide perspectiv cultural and historical uniqueness of a given social group" (Piatti-Farnell 80). For example in (1838) by Charles Dickens, the central character challenges the class system when: "Child as he desperate with hunger and reckless with misery. He rose from the table, and advancing basin a hand, to the master, said, somewhat alarmed at his own temerity–'Please, sir, I want some more'

Scarlett O'Hara in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) makes a similar point, a dramatically, when she declares: "As God is my witness, I'm never going to be hungry again" can also take us into the depths of another culture: places that many of us will only ever read ab also used to provide insight into a character's state of mind. In Nora Ephron's *Heartburn* (1983 simple as boiled bread tells a reader so much more about Rachel Samstat than her preferred b "So we got married and I got pregnant and I gave up my New York apartment and moved to I Talk about mistakes [...] there I was, trying to hold up my end in a city where you can't even b bagel" (34).

There are three ways in which writers can deal with food within their work. Firstly, food ca ignored. This approach is sometimes taken despite food being such a standard feature of storyte absence, be it a lonely meal at home, elegant canapés at an impressively catered cocktail party sandwich collected from a local café, is an obvious omission. Food can also add realism to a many authors putting as much effort into conjuring the smell, taste, and texture of food as t providing a backstory and a purpose for their characters. In recent years, a third way has emerge writers placing such importance upon food in fiction that the line that divides the cookbook at has become distorted. This article looks at cookbooks and cookery in popular fiction with a part on crime novels.

# Recipes: Ingredients and Preparation

Food in fiction has been employed, with great success, to help characters cope with grief; givi reassurance that only comes through the familiarity of the kitchen and the concentration requ routine tasks: to chop and dice, to mix, to sift and roll, to bake, broil, grill, steam, and fry. Su come from the breakdown of a relationship as seen in Nora Ephron's *Heartburn* (1983). An au under the guise of fiction, this novel is the first-person story of a cookbook author, a description the narrator as she feels her works "aren't merely cookbooks" (95). She is, however, grateful described as "a distraught, rejected, pregnant cookbook author whose husband was in love witl (95). As the collapse of the marriage is described, her favourite recipes are shared: Bacon Hash; I Eggs; Toasted Almonds; Lima Beans with Pears; Linguine Alla Cecca; Pot Roast; three types Sorrel Soup; desserts including Bread Pudding, Cheesecake, Key Lime Pie and Peach Pie; and a all in an effort to reassert her personal skills and thus personal value.

Grief can also result from loss of hope and the realisation that a life long dreamed of will never *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989), by Laura Esquivel, is the magical realist tale of Tita De La Garza

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youngest daughter, is forbidden to marry as she must take care of her mother, a we "Unquestionably, when it came to dividing, dismantling, dismembering, desolating, dispossessing, destroying or dominating [...] was a pro" (87). Tita's life lurches from one pai episode to the next; the only emotional stability she has comes from the kitchen, and from her series of dishes: Christmas Rolls; Chabela Wedding Cake; Quail in Rose Petal Sauce; Turkey Mole style Chorizo; Oxtail Soup; Champandongo; Chocolate and Three Kings's Day Bread; Cream Beans with Chilli Tezcucana-style. This is a series of culinary-based activities that attempts to s normalcy on a life that is far from the everyday.

Grief is most commonly associated with death. Undertaking the selection, preparation and premeals in novels dealing with bereavement is both a functional and symbolic act: life must go on behind but it must go on in a very different way. Thus, novels that use food to deal with loss are important because they can "make non-cooks believe they can cook, and for frequent cooks, they already know: that cooking heals" (Baltazar online).

In *Angelina's Bachelors* (2011) by Brian O'Reilly, Angelina D'Angelo believes "cooking was not food. It was about character" (2). By the end of the first chapter the young woman's husband is d is in the kitchen looking for solace, and survival, in cookery. In *The Kitchen Daughter* (20 McHenry, Ginny Selvaggio is struggling to cope with the death of her parents and the friends a who crowd her home after the funeral. Like Angelina, Ginny retreats to the kitchen.

There are, of course, exceptions. In Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (198 celebrates, comforts, and seduces (Calta). This story of three sisters from South Carolina is t diary entries, narrative, letters, poetry, songs, and spells. Recipes are also found throughout the Marmalade; Rice; Spinach; Crabmeat; Fish; Sweetbread; Duck; Lamb; and, Asparagus. Anthon *The Food of Love* (2004), a modern retelling of the classic tale of Cyrano de Bergerac, is about t Laura, a waiter masquerading as a top chef Tommaso, and the talented Bruno who, "thick-set slightly awkward" (21), covers for Tommaso's incompetency in the kitchen as he, too, falls for novel contains recipes and contains considerable information about food:

Take *fusilli* [...] People say this pasta was designed by Leonardo da Vinci himself. The spiral fins carry the biggest amount of sauce relative to the surface area, you see? But it only works with a thick, heavy sauce that can cling to the grooves. *Conchiglie*, on the other hand, is like a shell, so it holds a thin, liquid sauce inside it perfectly (17).

### Recipes: Dishing Up Death

Crime fiction is a genre with a long history of focusing on food; from the theft of food in the r nineteenth century to the utilisation of many different types of food such as chocolate, mari sweet omelettes to administer poison (Berkeley, Christie, Sayers), the latter vehicle for arsen much attention in Harriet Vane's trial in Dorothy L. Sayers's Strong Poison (1930). The Judge, in s the case, states to the members of the jury: "Four eggs were brought to the table in their she Urquhart broke them one by one into a bowl, adding sugar from a sifter [...he then] cooked the c chafing dish, filled it with hot jam" (14). Prior to what Timothy Taylor has described as the "pre the crime fiction genre was "littered with corpses whose last breaths smelled oddly sweet, or almonds" (online). Of course not all murders are committed in such a subtle fashion. In Roald I to the Slaughter (1953), Mary Maloney murders her policeman husband, clubbing him over the frozen leg of lamb. The meat is roasting nicely when her husband's colleagues arrive to investiga the lamb is offered and consumed: the murder weapon now beyond the recovery of investiga years have also seen more and more crime fiction writers present a central protagonist workin food industry, drawing connections between the skills required for food preparation and thos catch a murderer. Working with cooks or crooks, or both, requires planning and people skills ir creative thinking, dedication, reliability, stamina, and a willingness to take risks. Kent Carrol "food and mysteries just go together" (Carroll in Calta), with crime fiction website Stop, You're listing, at the time of writing, over 85 culinary-based crime fiction series, there is certain evidence to support his claim.

Of the numerous works available that focus on food there are many series that go beyond featuri beverages, to present recipes as well as the solving of crimes. These include: the Candy Holli Mysteries by B. B. Haywood; the Coffeehouse Mysteries by Cleo Coyle; the Hannah Swensen I Joanne Fluke; the Hemlock Falls Mysteries by Claudia Bishop; the Memphis BBQ Mysteries by I the Piece of Cake Mysteries by Jacklyn Brady; the Tea Shop Mysteries by Laura Childs; and, the V Chef Mysteries by Julie Hyzy.

The vast majority of offerings within this female dominated sub-genre that has been labelled Dine" (Collins online) are American, both in origin and setting. A significant contributincreasingly popular formula is, however, from an Australian author Kerry Greenwood. For within her famed Phryne Fisher Series with recipes included in *A Question of Death* (2007). I form part of Greenwood's food-themed collection of short crime stories *Recipes for Crime* (15 with Jenny Pausacker. These nine stories, each one imitating the style of one of crime fiction.

contributors (from Agatha Christie to Raymond Chandler), allow readers to simultanec

mysteries and recipes. 2004 saw the first publication of *Earthly Delights* and the introduc character, Corinna Chapman. This series follows the adventures of a woman who gave up a accountant to open her own bakery in Melbourne. Corinna also investigates the occasional mur can be found at the end of each of these books with the *Corinna Chapman Recipe Book* (nd) instructions for baking bread, muffins and tea cakes in addition to recipes for main courses suc goulash, and "Chicken with Pineapple 1971 Style", available from the publisher's website.

### **Recipes: Integration and Segregation**

In *Heartburn* (1983), Rachel acknowledges that presenting a work of fiction and a collection within a single volume can present challenges, observing: "I see that I haven't managed to verecipes for a while. It's hard to work in recipes when you're moving the plot forward" (99). How her story is, however, a reflection of how she undertakes her work, with her own cookbook admits, more narration than instruction: "The cookbooks I write do well. They're very personal they're cookbooks in an almost incidental way. I write chapters about friends or relatives experiences, and work in the recipes peripherally" (17).

Some authors integrate detailed recipes into their narratives through description and dialogue. example of this approach can be found in the Coffeehouse Mystery Series by Cleo Coyle, in the What Grounds (2003). When the central protagonist is being questioned by police, Clare Cosi's interrupted by a flashback scene and instructions on how to make Greek coffee:

Three ounces of water and one very heaped teaspoon of dark roast coffee per serving. (I used half Italian roast, and half Maracaibo—a lovely Venezuelan coffee, named after the country's major port; rich in flavour, with delicate wine overtones.) / Water and finely ground beans both go into the *ibrik* together. The water is then brought to a boil over medium heat (37).

This provides insight into Clare's character; that, when under pressure, she focuses her mind firmly believes to be true – not the information that she is doubtful of or a situation that she is a understand. Yet breaking up the action within a novel in this way–particularly within crime fict that is predominantly dependant upon generating tension and building the pacing of the place climax—is an unusual but ultimately successful style of writing. Inquiry and instruction are bedfellows; as the central protagonists within these works discover whodunit, the readers di committed murder as well as a little bit more about one of the world's most popular bey highlighting how cookbooks and novels both serve to entertain and to educate.

Many authors will save their recipes, serving them up at the end of a story. This can be seen in White House Chef Mystery novels, the cover of each volume in the series boasts that it "includes a Complete Presidential Menu!" These menus, with detailed ingredients lists, instructions for options for serving, are segregated from the stories and appear at the end of each work.

Yet other writers will deploy a hybrid approach such as the one seen in *Like Water for Chock* where the ingredients are listed at the commencement of each chapter and the preparation for form part of the narrative. This method of integration is also deployed in *The Kitchen Dauş* which sees most of the chapters introduced with a recipe card, those chapters then going on action in the kitchen. Using recipes as chapter breaks is a structure that has, very recently, been Australian celebrity chef, food writer, and, now fiction author, Ed Halmagyi, in his new work, w cookbook and novel, *The Food Clock: A Year of Cooking Seasonally* (2012).

As people exchange recipes in reality, so too do fictional characters. *The Recipe Club* (2009) Israel and Nancy Garfinkel, is the story of two friends, Lilly Stone and Valerie Rudman, which i as an epistolary novel. As they exchange feelings, ideas and news in their correspondenc exchange recipes: over eighty of them throughout the novel in e-mails and letters. In *The F* (2004), written messages between two of the main characters are also used to share recipes. readers are able to post their own recipes, inspired by this book and other works by Anthony Caj author's website.

# From Page to Plate

Some readers are contributing to the burgeoning food tourism market by seeking out the me pages of their favourite novels in bars, cafés, and restaurants around the world, expanding the is as menu" (Spang 79). In Shannon McKenna Schmidt's and Joni Rendon's guide to literary tout Destinations (2009), there is an entire section, "Eat Your Words: Literary Places to Sip and Supto beverages and food.

The listings include details for John's Grill, in San Francisco, which still has on the menu Sam Sr Chops, served with baked potato and sliced tomatoes: a meal enjoyed by author Dashiell H subsequently consumed by his well-known protagonist in *The Maltese Falcon* (193), and the Ca in Paris, frequented by Ian Fleming's James Bond because "the food was good enough and it am watch the people" (197). Those wanting to follow in the footsteps of writers can go to Harry's Ba

where the likes of Marcel Proust, Sinclair Lewis, Somerset Maugham, Ernest Hemingway, a Capote have all enjoyed a drink (195) or The Eagle and Child, in Oxford, which hosted the regu of the Inklings—a group which included C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien—in the wood-panelled F (203).

A number of eateries have developed their own literary themes such as the Peacocks Te Cambridgeshire, which blends their own teas. Readers who are also tea drinkers can include in Holmes (Earl Grey with Lapsang Souchong) and the Doctor Watson (Keemun and Darjeeling w Souchong). Alternatively, readers may prefer to side with the criminal mind and include in t (Black Chai with Star Anise, Pepper, Cinnamon, and Fennel) (Peacocks). The Moat Bar a Melbourne, situated in the basement of the State Library of Victoria, caters "to the whimsy and fiction housed above" and even runs a book exchange program (The Moat). For those read unable, or unwilling, to travel the globe in search of such savoury and sweet treats there is a willocally-based literary lunches and other meals, that bring together popular authors and won routinely organised by book sellers, literature societies, and publishing houses.

There are also many cookbooks now easily obtainable that make it possible to re-create fiction. One of the many examples available is *The Book Lover's Cookbook* (2003) by Shaun Wenger and Janet Kay Jensen, a work containing over three hundred pages of: Breakfasts; Poishes; Soups; Salads; Appetizers, Breads & Other Finger Foods; Desserts; and Cookies & C based on the pages of children's books, literary classics, popular fiction, plays, poetry, and crime fiction is your preferred genre then you can turn to Jean Evans's *The Crime Lover's Cook* which features short stories in between the pages of recipes. There is also Estérelle Payany' *Murder* (2010) a beautifully illustrated volume that presents detailed instructions for Pigs in a Bl on the Big Bad Wolf's appearance in *The Three Little Pigs* (44–7), and Roast Beef with Truff Potatoes, which acknowledges Patrick Bateman's fondness for fine dining in Bret Easton Ellis *Psycho* (124–7).

#### Conclusion

Cookbooks and many popular fiction novels are reflections of each other in terms of creativing and structure. In some instances the two forms are so closely entwined that a single variety concurrently share a narrative while providing information about, and instruction, on cook cooking in books is becoming so popular that the line that traditionally separated cookbooks types of books, such as romance or crime novels, is becoming increasingly distorted. The between food and fiction is further blurred by food tourism and how people strive to experient the foods found within fictional works at bars, cafés, and restaurants around the world or, experiences in their own homes using fiction-themed recipe books. Food has always been acknowledged as food for thought and food for the sou in both the real world and in the imagined world serves to nourish and sustain us in these ways.

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#### **Keywords**

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