Cooking in the Books: Cookbooks and Cookery in Popular Fiction

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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 i who eats it and with whom, and the nutritional quality” (Duran and MacDonald 234). This is ir 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 ideas from cultural background to social standing, and also use food to provide perspective 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 → Talk about mistakes [...] there I was, trying to hold up my end in a city where you can’t even buy a 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 storyt 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 many authors putting as much effort into conjuring the smell, taste, and texture of food as to 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 as 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 wit (95). As the collapse of the marriage is described, her favourite recipes are shared: Bacon Hash; 1 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 be realised.
Grief is most commonly associated with death. Undertaking the selection, preparation and pre-meals 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 dead in the kitchen looking for solace, and survival, in cookery. In The Kitchen Daughter (2011) by Jael McHenry, Ginny Selvaggio is struggling to cope with the death of her parents and the friends 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 (1989) celebrates, comforts, and seduces (Calta). This story of three sisters from South Carolina is told through diary entries, narrative, letters, poetry, songs, and spells. Recipes are also found throughout the book: Marmalade; Rice; Spinach; Crabmeat; Fish; Sweetbread; Duck; Lamb; and, Asparagus. Anthoi (2004), a modern retelling of the classic tale of Cyrano de Bergerac, is about the love of 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 Laura.

Recipe: Dishing Up Death

Crime fiction is a genre with a long history of focusing on food; from the theft of food in the novels of the nineteenth century to the utilisation of many different types of food such as chocolate, marmalade, and marmalades. Recipes are also found throughout the text: Turkey; Marmalade; Rice; Spinach; Crabmeat; Fish; Sweetbread; Duck; Lamb; and, Asparagus. Anthoi (2004), a modern retelling of the classic tale of Cyrano de Bergerac, is about the love of 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 Laura.

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Some authors are contributing to the burgeoning food tourism market by seeking out the menus of their favourite novels in bars, cafés, and restaurants around the world, expanding the idea of "map as menu." (Spang 79). In Shannon McKenna Schmidt’s and Joni Rendon’s guide to literary tourism, the listings include details for John’s Grill, in San Francisco, which still has on the menu Sam Spade’s Lamb Chops, served with baked potato and sliced tomatoes: a meal enjoyed by author Dashiell Hammett and subsequently consumed by his well-known protagonist in *Chops*, the Maltese Falcon.

## Recipes: Integration and Segregation

In *Heartburn* (1983), Rachel acknowledges that presenting a work of fiction and a collection of recipes within a single volume can present challenges, observing: "I see that I haven’t managed to get recipes for a while. It’s hard to work in recipes when you’re moving the plot forward." (98). How her story is, however, a reflection of how she undertakes her work, with her own cookbook admitting, 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. An excellent example of this approach can be found in the Coffeehouse Mystery Series by Cleo Coyle, in *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.

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 understand. Yet breaking up the action within a novel in this way—particularly within crime fiction that is predominantly dependant upon generating tension and building the pacing of the plot—climax—is an unusual but ultimately successful style of writing. Inquiry and instruction are a bedfellows; as the central protagonists within these works discover whodunit, the readers committed murder as well as a little bit more about one of the world’s most popular beverages, thus 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 cooking and 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 Chocolate* (1993), and the *Café de la Paix*, *What Grounds* (2003). This method of integration is also deployed in *The Kitchen Daughter* (2009) where the ingredients are listed at the commencement of each chapter and the preparation for the recipes form part of the narrative. This method of integration is also deployed in *The Food Clock: A Year of Cooking Seasonally* (2012). As people exchange recipes in reality, so too do fictional characters. *The Recipe Club* (2009) by Andrea Israel and Nancy Garfinkel, is the story of two friends, Lilly Stone and Valerie Rudman, which is an epistolary novel. As they exchange feelings, ideas and news in their correspondence, they also 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. Authors are able to post their own recipes, inspired by this book and other works by Anthony Capella, on the author’s website.

## From Page to Plate

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

The listings include details for John’s Grill, in San Francisco, which still has on the menu Sam S’s 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 Café 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, and Truman Capote have all enjoyed a drink (195) or The Eagle and Child, in Oxford, which hosted the regular meetings of the Inklings—a group which included C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien— in the wood-panelled Rabbit Room (203).

A number of eateries have developed their own literary themes such as the Peacocks Tearooms, in Cambridgeshire, which blends their own teas. Readers who are also tea drinkers can indulge in the Sherlock Holmes (Earl Grey with Lapsang Souchong) and the Doctor Watson (Keemun and Darjeeling with Lapsang Souchong). Alternatively, readers may prefer to side with the criminal mind and indulge in the Moriarty (Black Chai with Star Anise, Pepper, Cinnamon, and Fennel) (Peacocks). The Moat Bar in 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 wide locally-based literary lunches and other meals, that bring together popular authors and won routines organised by book sellers, literature societies, and publishing houses.

There are also many cookbooks now easily obtainable that make it possible to re-create fictitious home. One of the many examples available is The Book Lover's Cookbook (2003) by Shaun Wengen and Janet Kay Jensen, a working containing over three hundred pages of: Breakfasts; Dishes; 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 Cookbook which features short stories in between the pages of recipes. There is also Estérelle Payany's Murder (2010) a beautifully illustrated volume that presents detailed instructions for Pigs in a Blanket based on the Big Bad Wolf's appearance in The Three Little Pigs (44–7), and Roast Beef with Truffle 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 creativity and structure. In some instances the two forms are so closely entwined that a single concurrently share a narrative while providing information about, and instruction, on cooking in books is becoming so popular that the line that traditionally separated cookbooks and novels, is becoming increasingly distorted. The between food and fiction is further blurred by food tourism and how people strive to experience 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 essential for life; books have long been acknowledged as food for thought and food for the soul in both the real world and in the imagined world serves to nourish and sustain us in these ways.

References


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A Recipe for Modernism and the Somatic Intellect in the Alice B. Toklas Cook Book and Gertrude Stein’s Tender Buttons, schiller, Goethe, Schlegel And Schlegel expressed typological antithesis of classicism and romanticism through the opposition of art "naive" and "sentimental", so the tetrachord reduces the mechanism of power.

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