“To Feed Such Hunger”: Proposing a Women’s Gastronomic Literature

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This is to certify that the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree.

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I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, and that all assistance received in preparing this thesis and all sources have been acknowledged.

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Abstract

My project "To Feed Such Hunger": Proposing a Women's Gastronomic Literature is a close reading of texts that examines the writing of four authors producing narrative non-fiction food writing in twentieth-century America. Feminist scholarship has established the importance of women's life writing as historical, political and productive, but food writing, particularly by women, has often been categorised as a separate generic entity. Similarly, the relationship between women and food is rife with existing presuppositions about gender and class dynamics: wherein women cook in a domestic rather than a professional sphere; wherein the way that they eat is always mediated by body-consciousness; where women cook in service of and to provide nourishment for others. If we understand both foodways and life writing as gendered spaces, it follows that food writing is a gendered domain. Historically, women's food writing has been the domestic cookbook; by comparison, men are gastronomes whose writing showcases their knowledge and taste. My project recognises women's food writing as a complex arena with no easy or monolithic definitions, in an attempt to ensure that such writing is afforded the attention and nuance so easily applied to men's writing. I argue that the work of M.F.K. Fisher, Julia Child, and later Nora Ephron and Laurie Colwin can and should be understood within the context of the gastronomic tradition: each writer brings her own unique contributions to the category. By opening up this space to include women, we can better understand the ways that gender has impacted the aesthetics of pleasure, taste, hospitality and eating.

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***

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Doreen, who loved sun-dried laundry, curried chops, black tea and Arnott's biscuits, and sitting in the sun on the back deck listening to the birds. She never knew a poem as lovely as a tree.

And Claire, our very own Julia Child.

Introduction

This project has always been about pleasure. I knew when I started writing that sustaining my intellectual interest in a project would never be difficult – what I was curious about was whether or not I simultaneously could sustain the enjoyment and comfort that comes from reading for pleasure whilst treating the subject of my work with intellectual and academic rigour. The most pleasurable thing I read about is food. As a young reader, my favourite parts of *The Hobbit* were the sumptuous feasts (Tolkien 1937); I loved the descriptions of picnics packed by Anne and Diana in *Anne of Green Gables* (Montgomery 1908); Shirley Jackson's description of a boiled egg "done soft and buttery" is my withstanding recollection from *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (2006, 20). I have also always loved to read funny, bolshy women, and those worlds collided when I first read Laurie Colwin's *Home Cookin*g (1989) and *More Home Cooking* (1993). *Home Cooking* was reminiscent of Nora Ephron's *Heartburn* (1983), and her funny, tender movies – not least *Julie and Julia* (2009), which introduced me to Julia Child. Learning more about Julia Child led me to her contemporary, friend, and pen pal M.F.K. Fisher. These were women writing about food. Not cookbooks specifically, or criticism, but something that existed in a nebulous space somewhere between the two. Their work was opinionated, casual in tone if not in content, but manifested in a huge variety of media spanning film, television, book, novel, and magazine column. There was a resonance that connected the writing of these women beyond a simple thematic preoccupation with the alimentary.

From this starting point, my thesis coalesced around my personal taste, and around the various pleasures we derive from reading (comfort, imagination, and entertainment). With this approach, I move away from what Rita Felski calls historical embedding, wherein "the

critic is absolved of the need to think through her own relationship to the text she is reading. Why has this work been chosen for interpretation? How does it speak to me now? What is its value in the present?" (2008, 10). At its core, this thesis is about pleasure as a fundamental tenet of life and of the art that we enjoy. In many ways, it is about "ordinary motives for reading – such as the desire for knowledge or the longing for escape" (Felski 2008, 14). But it is also about how the work that women produce is so frequently excluded from longstanding historical categories – and when I hunted a little further, I was both excited and disappointed to learn that the connections between these authors had not been made elsewhere. I am interested in prodding the boundaries that we take to be static: can a cookbook be narrative? Can a novel have workable recipes? Can gastronomic literature – enduring domain of the strictly male gastronome – be produced by women? This thesis, then, is a proposal: it assesses the work of M.F.K Fisher, Julia Child, Laurie Colwin, and Nora Ephron, and suggests that their work is not simply memoir or cookbook, but a logical continuation of gastronomic literature, its elision from the category to date is because gender is inherent to the way that the culture of gastronomy has been defined. I also interrogate the simple designation of these texts as foodoirs, not because such a categorisation is not valid but because it obfuscates this writing's participation in a specific literary lineage. As I demonstrate, these authors reimagine what gastronomic literature might look like when penned by a different type of author: in this case, an American woman in the twentieth century.

When I started writing this thesis in 2020, locating Laurie Colwin's food writing or M.F.K. Fisher's work in my local bookstore was not straightforward. They could be in life writing, cookbooks, sometimes travel writing. Nora Ephron was a little clearer – fiction, as *Heartburn* purports to be – and Child's books were split between the cookery section (*Mastering the Art*

of French Cooking) (2009) and life writing (*My Life in France*) (2006) respectively. Today, the Kinokuniya[1] website features a subsection of their Food & Drink category titled "Biographies", which includes a broad swathe of food-based life writing – books formatted and presented as memoirs but defined by their focus on food. Since 2020 alone, this category has added at least 140 new titles – including more explicitly literary offerings like Kate Lebo's *The Book of Difficult Fruit: Arguments for the Tart, Tender, and Unruly* (2021), Charlotte Ree's *Heartbake: A Bittersweet Memoir* (2023), or Rebecca May Johnson's *Small Fires*: *An Epic in the Kitchen* (2023); or books by celebrity chefs, like Alice Waters' *We Are What We Eat: A Slow Food Manifesto* (2021), David Chang's *Eat a Peach: A Chef's Memoir* (2022), Ina Garten's *Be Ready When the Luck Happens: A Memoir* (2024) and several reissues and anthologies of Anthony Bourdain's work*;* books by noted food critics and journalists like Jay Rayner's *Chewing the Fat: Tasting Notes From a Greedy Life* (2021) or Nigel Slater's *A Thousand Feasts: Small Moments of Joy… A Memoir of Sorts* (2024); books by celebrities like Stanley Tucci's *Taste: My Life Through Food* (2022) or Zosia Mamet's *My First Popsicle: An Anthology of Food and Feelings* (2022); and books dedicated to particular foods or food cultures, like Victoria James's *Wine Girl: A Sommelier's Tale of Making it in the Toxic World of Fine Dining* (2020), Fuchsia Dunlop's *Invitation to a Banquet: The Story of Chinese Food* (2023), and Samantha Ellis' *Chopping Onions on my Heart: On Losing and Preserving Culture* (2025). This sample is not exhaustive, but it does speak to the huge boom in food-based life writing in the last five years and the growing comfortability in defining that writing as its own genre. It is variously termed culinary memoir, culinary autobiography, gastrography, and foodoir – and one could reasonably assume to now locate Colwin or Fisher in this subcategory. If its popularity and the generation of new generic markers has boomed

[1] Kinokuniya is a Japanese bookstore chain with outposts in Dubai, Singapore, Taiwan, the USA and Australia. Per the Kinokuniya website, the Sydney store alone is home to over 300,000 titles in English, Japanese and Chinese ("About Us" 2025).

in the last five years, the genre itself is nothing new, and in part this thesis seeks to reverse engineer the classification of culinary memoir that it is now easy to take for granted.

The focus of this thesis is a type of writing that exists at the cross-roads of multiple genres, forms, or categories – all of which are well-trodden in the academic landscape. These forms include women's writing – be it fiction or the more slippery memoir – life writing more broadly, food writing, the recipe, and food cultures as a sociological and historical study. As a genre study, this thesis benefits from the breadth of existing research on these categories, though there is comparatively little where they intersect: women's nonfiction narrative food writing. This point becomes all the more compelling given that such writing has been defined and studied under the term "gastronomic literature" for some time. But gastronomic literature has historically been gendered as a male domain, characterised in opposition to female food writing: cookbooks. As such, women's food writing of a kind stylistically aligned with gastronomic literature has either been overlooked or judged by the criteria established by male gastronomic literature – that is, women's gastronomy has either been treated as if it does not exist or is otherwise a poor man's approximation. My thesis seeks to make space for thinking about women's food writing as complex, multi-generic, and as existing beyond the bounds of the domestic cookbook. Whether it has historically been categorised as gastronomy or not, I nonetheless hope to demonstrate the ways in which our thinking about women's food writing has been insufficient, and in doing so to rectify some of this insufficiency.

Women, Food, and Writing

Broadly speaking, scholarship on women, food, and writing has fallen into one of two categories: literary analysis of food as it occurs in women's fiction and its value as a signifier or metaphor; or historic contextualisation that traces the emergence of the female-penned

cookbook. Much of this literary work analyses the role of food in fiction with the general goal of understanding food not just as narratively circumstantial but rather as a key component in "the formation of individual and cultural identity" (Piatti-Farnell 2011, 1). For example, Sarah Sceats' 2000 book *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction* analyses food in writing by authors including Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood, and Angela Carter. Sceats uses psychoanalytic theory, literary and cultural criticism, and sociology as frameworks for understanding the role of food in the texts she examines. Sceats draws attention to the

> centrality and versatility of food and eating in women's writing… food and eating themselves convey much of the meanings of the novels… [which] results from… deep associations between food and the psyche, specific socio-cultural pressures, especially on women's bodies, cultural and artistic inscriptions, and from the fact that food and its activities offer multiple possibilities for expression and action (2000, 8).

Since Sceats' book there has been no shortage of scholarly material on food in women's fiction: Diane E. McGee's *Writing the Meal: Dinner in the Fiction of Early Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (2002), Kerry Myler's chapter "Food, Duty and Desire in the Women's Novel in the 1960s" in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Food* (2018), and Nicola Humble's *The Literature of Food: An Introduction from 1830 to Present* (2020). Lorna Piatti-Farnell, however, explains that despite the existence of scholarship concerned with food and literature, "the majority of critical works… are preoccupied with periods before that in which 'food studies' became prominent as an interdisciplinary field of research", and as such there is a comparative scarcity of food studies scholarship written about texts after food studies emerged (2011, 3). Piatti-Farnell's work in *Food and Culture in Contemporary American Fiction* notes the abovementioned gap in the analysis of food literature, and then seeks to redress some of this omission. Piatti-Farnell's book aims to "amalgamate theoretical approaches to food in the readings of literary texts and find a productive balance at the point of intersection between disciplines" (2011, 7). Though not

specifically focused on women's writing, it nonetheless looks at writing by female authors like Toni Morrison and Ntozake Shange.

Piatti-Farnell cites Sceats as an important predecessor to her focus on contemporary fiction, and Sceats' influence is evident insofar as both scholars emphasise the semiotics of food writing. Piatti-Farnell argues that though food itself is not an inherent symbol, it has been so bestowed with cultural meaning that it can be understood, in Deborah Lupton's terms, as "the symbolic meaning par excellence" (2011, 17). Sceats on the other hand claims outright that "if anything could function as a universal signifier, it would surely be food" (2000, 8). Food as signifier takes on a gender-specific meaning in these texts – just as Sceats suggests that women's cultural roles "contribute much mimetic content to women's writing" (2000, 2), she too performs this mimesis when she argues that "food itself is not bound within any single discourse, but becomes *impregnated* with meanings" [emphasis mine] (2000, 126). This semiotic approach occurs in much scholarship about women's food writing. Susan J. Leonardi in her article "Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster à la Riseholme, and Key Lime Pie" states that the recipe's "kinship to the literality of human reproducibility… contributes to the gendered nature of this form of embedded discourse" (1989, 344); Ruth Cruickshank suggests that female appetite is "inextricable from desire, lack and sexuality" (2013, 301); Jolene Hubbs suggests that when we read women's food writing we are "consuming other works – metabolizing their politics and poetics" (2015, 2). Harriet Blodgett, in "Mimesis and Metaphor: Food Imagery in International Twentieth-Century Women's Writing" ostensibly does push back against this tendency, quoting Sceats to state that "women's writing manifests far more diverse areas of engagement" (2004, 263). Nevertheless, Blodgett also assesses Angela Carter's writing through a Freudian lens,

concluding that Carter's writing is a manifestation of the claim that "sexual desire grows out of satisfying hunger for food" (2004, 261).

Much of this scholarship approaches food writing from a hermeneutics of suspicion, one in which food writing necessarily contains metaphoric meaning and, when that food writing is authored by a woman, that metaphor is typically for erotic desire. Certainly, food writing – particularly in fiction – can be a demonstrative vehicle for metaphor. But, as Piatti-Farnell herself says – food itself is not inherently symbolic. By assuming otherwise, what gendered assumptions is this scholarship replicating? Such an approach, I believe, is making the "mistake" that Bruno Latour describes critique as committing when it "believe[d] that there was no efficient way to criticize matters of fact except by moving *away* from them and directing one's attention *toward* the conditions that made them possible" (2004, 231). When we approach food writing from this angle, food can never simply be food – it must always be a mirror for the broader social context in which it is produced. This is not to suggest that word choice, metaphor, and semiotics are not applicable when analysing non-fiction, especially life writing. Rather, the tendency to use gendered language often undermines a project whose goal is to better understand the relationship between women, food, and writing. I understand such scholarship as – intentionally or not – replicating what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls paranoid reading, one in which "an anticipatory mimetic strategy" is applied, "whereby a certain, stylized violence of sexual differentiation must always be *presumed* or *self-assumed* – even, where necessary, imposed – simply on the ground that it can never be finally *ruled out*" (1997, 12). This thesis hopes not to combat the assumption that women's historical relationship with food deserves attention and analysis, but rather to complicate it. What if the food in the texts stands for nothing but food – and what if the reliance on metaphor obfuscates a different relationship? How might our understanding of women and

food change if we remove the layer of metaphor? This approach proceeds from the position of a "reparative impulse" (Sedgwick 1997, 27), one that is "additive and accretive" (Sedgwick 1997, 27-28) rather than "anticipatory and retroactive, averse above all to surprise" (Sedgwick 1997, 24).

As mentioned above, the other area of scholarship where women, writing, and food frequently occurs is in historical work. Critical food studies is interdisciplinary in nature: like women's studies, argue Arlene Voski Avakian and Barbara Haber, "the emerging field of food studies is interdisciplinary and includes attention to the daily lives of ordinary people within its purview" (2005, 2). Though this thesis is a study of literature, it aims to understand women writers and eaters across the twentieth century – a century over which approaches to women's bodies, values, careers, interests, and lives undertook enormous fluctuations. This historical context, while not determinative, provides a backdrop against which we might understand these writers as breaking new ground. Moreover, the male gastronome and his gastronomic literature existed well before the turn of the twentieth century – and since this thesis aims to unpick some of the gendered assumptions that have shaped men, women, food, and writing, it is essential to have a broad understanding of the cultural forces that created a distinctly male gastronomic literature and a distinctly female cookbook. The work of such scholars builds essential context for understanding the emergence of particular writers and culinary figures like Julia Child and M.F.K. Fisher in the early twentieth century, and for understanding how their writing differs from, and therefore should not be subsumed into, the broader category of cookbook. Again – as Piatti-Farnell established, food and food cultures have become imbued with meaning across time, and it is the historical studies of these cultures that help to understand the how and the why.

Steve Jones and Ben Taylor's work agrees with this assessment of the state of food writing more broadly, though their analysis is not gendered. They explain that "while there has been a growth in literature attempting a sociological and cultural analysis of food practices in recent years, very little detailed attention has been paid to food writing and *cookery books*" (emphasis mine) (2001, 173). The emergence of scholarship on cookbooks specifically takes hold over the twenty-first century, in texts like Janet Theophano's *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives Through the Cookbooks they Wrote* (2002), Rachel A. Snell's article "As North American as Pumpkin Pie: Cookbooks and the Development of a National Cuisine in North America, 1796-1854" (2014), Arlene Avakian's article "Cooking Up Lives: Feminist Food Memoirs" (2014), Megan J. Elias' *Food on the Page: Cookbooks and American Culture* (2017), Roxanne Harde and Janet Wesselius's *Consumption and the Literary Cookbook* (2020), Anne Willan's *Women in the Kitchen: Twelve Essential Cookbook Writers Who Defined the Way We Eat from 1661 to Today* (2021) and *Women's Imaginary Cooking and Appetites Across Cultures: Studies in Literature, Media and Film*, edited by Dana Bădulescu Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru and Florina Năstase (2025). These scholars are demonstrative of the research interest in cookbook as historical artefact. That such work has emerged since the start of the twenty-first century speaks to a growing interest in food culture, occurring concurrently with the development of the critical food studies movement. Both the content of the work and the frequency with which it has been produced in the last twenty years are important, heralding a growing community of food studies scholars who seek to better understand the role of food as a cultural force. Though these studies are cultural and historical rather than literary in approach, they nonetheless recognise cookbooks as a component of peoples' lives that was both influential in its historical moment and illuminative of the cultural conditions of that moment. Perhaps cookbooks' more rigid format lends them to cultural or sociological study, where the primary texts in my focus are more

apparently literary. Regardless, in recognising cookbooks as material worthy of scholarly attention, we might also open them up for recognition as literary material.

Laura Shapiro's book *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the turn of the Century* (1986) and paper "And here she is… your Betty Crocker!" (2004) help to flesh out the origins of many of the gendered assumptions that have stuck to women and food. Shapiro's scholarship also draws attention to the domestic – a complex space but one whose history must be reconfigured to include both the cookbook and gastronomy. Through her analysis of the fictional advertising mouthpiece Betty Crocker – a so-called "live trademark" – Shapiro shows how a gendered domestic ideal was shaped as a specific vision of white womanhood, and how its parent company Gold Medal Flour then projected that ideal to influence American women and their purchasing habits (2004, 88). Because the idealised American housewife has been typified by figures like Betty Crocker, the homogeneity of food cultures in America is often assumed. But research like Shapiro's draws attention to the fact that food cultures are just as susceptible to racializing as they are to gendering. This intersectional approach highlights another troubling element of such rigidly defined generic categories: whose recipes and food cultures are we missing if the cookbook is exclusively defined as the product of white middle-class feminine domesticity? Vicki A. Swinbank's article "The Sexual Politics of Cooking: A Feminist Analysis of Culinary Hierarchy in Western Culture" contributes to our understanding of domestic cultures, too, by arguing against an exclusively "top-down" relationship between professional cooking and home cooks, positing that this relationship also works in the reverse, where women's domestic cooking influences "up" to haute cuisine (2002). Analysis like Swinbank's complicates the gender hierarchy of cooking, pointing out that many male purveyors of classical haute cuisine in fact learned to cook from their (domestic facing) mothers and grandmothers (2002, 470).

Sherrie A. Inness is another scholar whose work has emerged in recent years, work that provides widespread context for food cultures in America since the twentieth century. *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (2001), *Secret Ingredients: Race, Gender, and Class at the Dinner Table* (2006) and *Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race* (2015) are historical investigations of food culture from a variety of angles – and, as the titles of these books communicate, these angles make sure to include analyses through lenses of gender and race. Inness is interested in "kitchen culture" – a matrix of discourses that considers gender, race, food, and cooking as they emerge from the domestic (2015, 3). Inness' specific focus on the domestic is a way of bringing women's writing, and role in food cultures, into the conversation. By virtue of this focus, Inness demonstrates that home cooks – particularly female home cooks – are just as much a part of food history as Michelin starred chefs and food critics. And so, for Inness, the relationship between these discourses "must be untangled by anyone wishing to understand American culture" (2015, 3). The aims of Inness' work on kitchen culture can be broadly understood as attempting to:

> show how women's roles have been shaped by kitchen culture… [because] kitchen culture is a critical way that women are instructed about how to behave like "correctly" gendered beings… [to] demonstrate that kitchen culture is influenced by race, ethnicity, social class, and regional location… [and to reveal] the importance of recognizing that food culture is composed of much more than cookbooks, television cooking shows, and women's magazines (2015, 4).

Like Shapiro's study of Betty Crocker, Inness' work interrogates the ways that gendered ideals have been constructed and maintained through the kitchen: chapters of *Kitchen Culture* use source material from radio programs to sex manuals to confectionary advertising to understand how gender norms have pervaded food cultures across America. Just as Shapiro's study provided a framework for understanding the ideal (white) American woman – so

idealised as to not be actually real – Inness' work helps to understand a culture that could allow such a figure not only to exist but to flourish. In doing so, their work helps to better understand why Julia Child and M.F.K. Fisher's more literary works might not have been considered cookbooks (despite their inclusion of recipes), and also how we might retroactively determine them as such, despite their not adhering to white American femininity in other ways. Read together, the scholarship of Shapiro, Inness and Swinbank illuminates a vision of the domestic culinary space as less straightforwardly gendered than its history implies.

Despite this broad body of scholarship – historical, literary, sociological – that addresses women's writing and food cultures, there is a noticeable lack of attention paid to women's nonfiction narrative food writing. Though a comparatively under-researched field, there are nonetheless a few key scholars that have emerged since the late 1990s whose work has sought to make sense of a female gastronomic literature. Broadly speaking, this work asks – how has gastronomic literature excluded women? What would a female gastronome look like?

Gastronomic Literature in Scholarship

Sociologist Stephen Mennell's foundational work on gastronomic literature not only provides a helpful framework for understanding the phenomenon of the gastronome as a historical figure, but of recognising gastronomic literature as its own specific literary form. Mennell's books *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (1985) and *The Sociology of Food: Eating, Diet and Culture* (1992), elucidate the figure of the gastronome as gendered:

> a person who not only cultivates his own 'refined taste for the pleasures of the table' but also, by *writing* about it, helps to cultivate other people's too. The gastronome is more than a gourmet – he is also a theorist and a propagandist about culinary taste (1985, 267).

My own research, as a literary study, approaches the matter of gastronomic literature from a different disciplinary practice than Mennell's sociological and historical studies. But these are works that shed light on the how and the why of gendered food writing. Jones and Taylor look to Mennell's work, specifically considering his assertion that the work of Elizabeth David and Jane Grigson exist at the "ill-defined margin" between "the gastronomic essay" and "the more learned sort of cookery book" (2001, 173). Jones and Taylor suggest that though David and Grigson have been marketed as cookbook authors, "there is doubtless a considerable erudition to them: many of their books can indeed be read not simply as cookery manuals, but as a form of culinary, historical literature" (2001, 174). Notwithstanding that this assessment naturally distinguishes cookery books from learned, erudite writing and fails to recognise them as culinary, historical literature in their own right, Mennell, Jones and Taylor are veering towards a conclusion similar to my own: the line between cookbook and gastronomic literature is not nearly so clear as history might have us believe. Jones and Taylor are here focusing on British food writers, and *All Manners of Food*'s focus is English and French: nonetheless, these observations – which both explain the gendering of gastronomic literature and cookbooks and uphold that gendering – are equally applicable to American food cultures. As Alice McLean states:

> Mennell first drew attention to the gendered history of food writing within England, pointing out that men authored gastronomic literature, which concerns itself with public appetite. Women… authored domestic cookbooks, which focus on the private realm… an examination of American food writing illustrates that the same gendered divisions were carried across the Atlantic to take hold in the nineteenth-century United States (2012, 6).

As evidenced by McLean's quote, Mennell's work on the sociology of food has laid the groundwork for thinking not just about how food cultures are gendered, but how the ways in which we *write* about food cultures are gendered. Mennell is not alone, though – other scholars, like Denise Gigante and her book *Gusto: Essential Writings in Nineteenth Century Gastronomy* (2013), also seek to comprehend and expand our understanding of gastronomy as an aesthetic movement.

Gigante's book is comprised of several critical essays on essential gastronomic treatises written between 1758 and 1873, and whilst her book's specific focus is on gastronomic – and thus male – writers, *Gusto* nonetheless establishes a comprehensive aesthetics of gastronomy that is helpful in understanding how my primary authors might, or might not, be better understood through a gastronomic lens. She includes the following table for defining the various elements of gourmandism:

Gastrology	The Science of Eating
Gastronomy	Precepts for Eating
Gastrophilism	The Love of Eating
Gastrophililist	One Who Loves Eating
Gastropolitechnical	The Various Arts for the Gratification of the Belly
Gastrophilanthropic	The Benevolent Purveyor for the Belly of Others

(Gigante 2013, xxxvi)

As we have established, the historical gastronome or gourmand describes not just an enthusiast of food and eating but a specific historical phenomenon – and one that was explicitly male. Gigante explains: "nineteenth-century gastronomy was a male-gendered aesthetic and the culinary dandy a distinctly male (if not masculine) figure… their writings worked in many ways against the feminized aesthetic of the novel, founded on ideals of bourgeois domesticity" (2013, xxxv). Gastronomy, as it developed in the nineteenth century, was a philosophical practice – with all the moral and epistemological components that entailed (Gigante 2013, xviii). Though it was often expressed in a playful, humorous way, it nonetheless sought to "define a new cultural arena for the practice of aesthetics" (Gigante 2013, xviii). Gastronomy's foremost philosophical framework helps to further understand its coding as explicitly male: this was a variation of established male tropes, like the Flâneur/Dandy and the Man of Taste. If the Flâneur or Dandy aligned with Pierre Bourdieu's consumers "of cultural goods considered as the most worthy of being consumed… the museum, the theatre, the concert, the art cinema, and, more generally, of all the symbolic wealth that constitutes 'legitimate' culture", then the gastronome was an equivalent consumer of haute cuisine (1973, 76). As Gigante explains in her *Taste: A Literary History*, early nineteenth-century gastronomic groups employed "the same juridical language and concern with philosophical principles that defined the eighteenth-century discourse of aesthetics" (2005, 1). By intellectualising the process of eating, gastronomy established itself as distinct from domestic – and thus female – cookery. Reading Gigante's work in conjunction with research like Inness', for example, helps to develop a comprehensive understanding of the rigid historical distinctions that have been applied to women's and men's relationship to food.

Gigante also explains gastronomy as emerging from a specifically French historical moment. She argues that gastronomy resulted from the French Revolution, when elite chefs who had

previously served the nobility were released into the public sphere, and in doing so "helped foster a new and complex world of discretionary dining in the form of the restaurant" (2013 xviii). With many of these chefs also moving to, and in doing so transforming, the dining scene of England, London and Paris became the "taste professional" [sic] hubs of Europe (Gigante 2013, xviii). Gastronomer Eugène Briffault noted that, while France had been known for its literature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, by the nineteenth century it was defined by its cuisine (Gigante 2013, xxviii). This is a reminder that France as emblem of and metaphor for good food is a historically contingent, culturally shaped idea. Indeed, Gigante explains that "while early in the nineteenth century, only a few homes and private clubs in London could afford to serve French haute cuisine, by midcentury it was assumed that to acquire taste was to acquire French eating habits" (2013, xxx-xxxi). But Gigante also explains that adopting French cuisine and gastronomy did not come without reservations, since for the typical English reader to attach philosophy, sensualism, and beauty to food would have been frivolous (2013, xxix). The English food culture of the time prided itself in no-nonsense thriftiness – French gastronomy was its opposite. With the obvious caveats that my focus is on American writers in the twentieth century, this context is relevant to my research. France and French cuisine take on an almost mythological place in the world of gastronomy, but also for the specific food and life experiences of Fisher and Child. As I will discuss, French cuisine is in direct contrast to the mass-produced, bland food of their American upbringings. The France-gastronomy connection persists, and this is yet more compelling context for considering female writers in such a tradition.

Gigante also points out the generic amorphousness of gastronomic literature. She explains that:

> Like its best practitioners, gastronomy was generically omnivorous, swallowing a wide variety of literary forms into itself. One finds, for example, gourmand maxims

> and reflections, gourmand meditations, gourmand geographies and travel narratives, fictional and nonfictional epistolary exchange between epicures, as well as poems, dialogues, satires, and parables on the gastronomical model. Together, though little known today, they comprise a distinct genre that is witty and eclectic, but with the philosophical prowess to treat food as a matter for serious thought and analysis (2013, xix).

What we can glean from this is that gastronomy was strictly defined as a philosophy and an aesthetics, but not a writing style. There are clear examples that would be excluded – namely, the domestic cookbook – but, like the French connection, this is a precedent for arguing that writing like Fisher's is gastronomic in nature. After all, we could define all the core texts of my study as proceeding with "the philosophical prowess to treat food as a matter for serious thought and analysis" (2013, xix).

Along with Gigante, Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson's work on taste and on the emergence of the gastronomic field is crucial in establishing the principles and context of gastronomic literature against which my work is situated. Parkhurst Ferguson explains that:

> because no one can taste the same material good as someone else, tastes cannot be shared. Yet every society devises means to contain the centrifugal forces of multiple tastes. Every culture works to counter the physiological singularity of food. Most do so through three social practices: samplings that extrapolate from the tasting of a dish; language that communicates tastes; and a focus on the common gustatory space of the meal (2011, 371-372).

For Parkhurst Ferguson, all three practices are inherently linked, since "what is food criticism but language in the service of sampling? What are meals but sites for communicating these samplings?" (2011, 372). Fisher, Child, Colwin and Ephron participate in each of these practices in their own ways, but since "taste writes the intertwined histories of women and men and their times", and given the historical association of the feminine with the domestic, often the common gustatory space in question is not the meal but its preparation and the explanation thereof (that is, recipes) (Parkhurst Ferguson 2011, 384). Parkhurst Ferguson, like Gigante, writes about taste's lowly rank in the hierarchy of the senses, but posits that

food begins “in a favoured location” (near the head and source of knowledge), before “its sites then descend, philosophically no less than physiologically, into the nether regions” (Parkhurst Ferguson 2011, 374). Because of food’s physical relationship to the body and its processes, Parkhurst Ferguson explains that in gastronomic circles, food was often “used to great comic effect” (2011, 374). Though food itself is not the source of comedy in the works of Fisher, Child, Ephron and Colwin, their food writing is – in different ways and to various degrees – funny. In the case of Child, this is often slapstick, or dramatism; for Fisher it is in her acerbic judgments; and for Ephron in the literal writing of comedies (book, essay, screenplay, or otherwise). In all instances, food is a vessel for communicating that humour, and as such all authors engage their more “noble” senses in the writing of their “baser” ones.

Parkhurst Ferguson, like Gigante, also writes on the emergence of the gastronomic movement as a specific historical phenomenon, explaining that gastronomy serves as a fruitful example for understanding when a series of social occurrences coalesce to make a cultural field (1998, 599). Parkhurst Ferguson explains that though:

> culinary arts in the West can be traced to the Greeks and especially the Romans, gastronomy as a modern social phenomenon was instituted in early 19th-century France. It was then… that the culinary arts moved into public space and acquired a public consciousness that justifies identification as a “gastronomic field” (1998, 599).

Gastronomy specifically constituted itself “through an expansive culinary discourse and, more specifically, through texts” such that “the “second-order” culinary consumption of textual appreciation was as crucial for the construction of the gastronomic field as it was (and is) for its operation” (Parkhurst Ferguson 1998, 600). In other words, there is no gastronomic field without gastronomic literature: food and the writing of it are essentially bound. Allison Carruth and Amy L. Tigner’s *Literature and Food Studies* supports this assertion, explaining that:

> as works of literature interact with food in its various stages – agricultural, culinary and alimentary – they often traverse the boundaries between the intimate and the social as well as the microscopic and the planetary, a capacity that arguably defines the literary. It is this capacity that makes literature an especially vital and vibrant area of inquiry for food studies. Put differently, we view the relationship between literary practices and food practices as recursive. Literary texts do not just transmit or depict food cultures and food practices: they also help to structure them (2018, 1).

In this line of thinking, then, the writing of Fisher, Child, Colwin, and Ephron does not simply describe and record each author's experience with food and cooking, but actively constitutes and creates a model of women's gastronomy.

The Female Gastronome

As previously mentioned, there are a few examples of scholarship that draw upon the gastronome and its philosophical framework and apply this to women's food writing. McLean's book *Aesthetic Pleasure in Twentieth-Century Women's Food Writing: The Innovative Appetites of M.F.K. Fisher, Alice B. Toklas and Elizabeth David* (2012) (henceforth *Aesthetic Pleasure*), and the scholarship of Traci Marie Kelly focus on women's non-fiction narrative food writing and in doing so break new ground in thinking about gender and gastronomy. Kelly's 1997 dissertation *Burned Sugar Pie: Women's Cultures in the Literature of Food* is "an attempt to begin a discussion of how women writers can use dinners and food production as vehicles for cultural identification, fiction writing, community representation, and autobiographical expression" (5). Like Sceats and Piatti-Farnell, Kelly is interested in understanding how women write about food – and though her dissertation is not singly focused on non-fiction writing, it nevertheless advances new ways of thinking about narrative non-fiction food writing. Kelly's interest in the interplay between language and food results in a definitional framework for considering narrative non-fiction food writing. She looks at the encoded language that emerges from kitchen work; cooking and recipes as means of enacting revenge and resistance; the notion of cooking as art and the associated

language; the inclusion of recipes within writing as destabilising the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction; and the function of pleasure in descriptions of food. Kelly's dissertation is thus one of the few exemplars of literary studies of women's nonfiction food writing.

Kelly's work on the flimsiness of the fact versus fiction dichotomy when thinking about food writing is of particular interest. As Kelly explains, "novels are generally labeled as fiction while cookbooks are supposedly non-fiction. Fiction is make-believe, requiring the willing suspension of disbelief… cookbooks are perceived as straight-forward instructional manuals" (1997, 68-69). And yet how do we understand recipes (thought of as "factual" insofar as they must be scientifically and culinarily viable) that are embedded in a novel? How do we understand the existence of personal anecdote in many cookbooks? By drawing attention to this slipperiness, Kelly encourages different readings of women's food writing, and different ways of thinking about this writing generically. For example, Kelly purposefully refers to some of the texts in her scope as "cookbook/memoirs" – the fusion of which destabilises the traditional codifying of cookbook as "fact" and proposes a new generic category in food writing. In Kelly's own words, "my purpose… is to highlight the possibilities that are available to readers, critics, and theorists when they approach a text that uses food imagery, culinary metaphors, or recipes" (1997, 28). These kinds of generic confusions are not exclusive to food writing but are also present in discussions about the essay as form, and indeed many of the examples I explore in this thesis can be understood as essayistic in nature: Philip Lopate refers to M.F.K. Fisher as one exemplar of "the range and talent of… essayists" in Postwar America (2022, 232), and compiles her "Once a Tramp, Always" in *The Art of the Personal Essay* (1997, 546). The *New Yorker* understands Laurie Colwin's *Home Cooking* as a "collection of essays" (Syme 2021). Certainly, these writers' multi-generic, discursive

styles align with what Claire de Obaldia calls the "essentially ambulatory and fragmentary prose form" of the essay (1995, 2). De Obaldia describes the essay as "sauntering from one topic to the next… a randomness which seems to elude the unifying conception – syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic – of a recognizable generic identity" (1995, 2). Kelly's work homes in on the specifics of women's nonfiction food writing and in doing so provides a template for understanding that, while essayistic, there is more to these writing forms than an "uncircumventable indeterminacy of the genre" (De Obaldia 1995, 2). This is precedent for my own thesis, which draws upon Kelly's foundational research in order to expand the ways that we understand women's nonfiction narrative food writing.

Kelly develops some of her work on the inadequacy of the fact versus fiction dichotomy in her chapter ""If I Were a Voodoo Priestess": Women's Culinary Autobiographies" in Inness' *Kitchen Culture in America* (2015). In this chapter, Kelly attempts to develop a set of criteria that defines "women's culinary autobiography" (2015, 252). With this move, we can understand Kelly to be identifying a category like male gastronomic literature, but reframing it – moving away from the assumption that women's food writing is either fiction or cookbook. "Culinary autobiography", then, is the "literary extension of… kitchen storytelling" and is defined as "a complex pastiche of recipes, personal anecdotes, family history, public history, photographs, even family trees" (Kelly 2015, 252). Culinary autobiographies are thus "rich sources for autobiographical assertion because they present the lives of women through their own voices, rendered from a room that has been, truly, a room of their own" (Kelly 2015, 252). With this established, Kelly presents the following matrix:

> 1. "Culinary memoirs, which present a personal story interlaced with reminiscences about cooking, dining, and feasting. These are autobiographical gestures that have an emphasis on food, but they may or may not provide recipes." (2015, 255)

2. "Autobiographical cookbooks, which intertwine practices of autobiography and cookery books." (2015, 255)
3. "Autoethnographic cookbooks, which are documents written by a community or family members, presenting information intended to educate an outside audience about personal or group activities and values." (2015, 255)

Per this framework, the majority of my focus texts are culinary memoirs. Though my own scholarship pushes against some of the specifics of these definitions, their existence signals a shift away from thinking of women and food writing in such rigid terms – instead adding to the conversation the same kinds of critical thinking afforded men's writing.

As Kelly has demonstrated, part of this critical shift includes the ostensibly basic move of establishing that some food writing lives outside the bounds of the male/literature, female/cookbook framework. Barbara Waxman's pedagogical study "Food Memoirs: What They Are, Why They Are Popular, and Why They Belong in the Literature Classroom" adds to this argument by demonstrating that food writing lends itself to memoir since food writers "understand that they are writing about everyone's strongest basic instincts as they tell their own life stories" (2008, 364). In these texts, says Waxman, food is the central focus, and it is through food that the memoirists communicate "intense emotions, pleasurable recollections of communal and private food experiences, messages of familial wisdom, and insights into culture" (2008, 364). Again, the very existence of this scholarship helps to complicate our assumptions about food writing – and in building a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of this writing, we can better understand the role that gender plays in its categorisation.

McLean's aforementioned *Aesthetic Pleasure* consciously builds on both Mennell's and Kelly's scholarship. McLean's book focuses on the food writing of M.F.K. Fisher, Alice B. Toklas and Elizabeth David, and uses Kelly's matrix to define Fisher's writing as "culinary

memoir" (2012, 8). McLean's book contextualises the historic gender divide in food writing, and, importantly, draws attention to the notion of pleasure in this regard – women's food writing, namely cookbooks, have typically "eschewed pleasure and defined the proper housewife as dutifully bound to the home" (2012, 1-2). By contrast to the domestic cookbook, gastronomic literature was written by and for men, and sought to explore "the aesthetics of taste and the pursuit of pleasure", explaining "gastronomy as an art and the gourmand as an artist in his own right" (2012, 2). Importantly, says McLean, though these two forms were stylistically and ideologically opposed, "both coded eating as a masculine endeavor" (2012, 2). According to McLean, it is from this context that female gourmands emerged: "pleasure-oriented women" who chose "to move beyond the domestic realm in order to nurture their own gustatory pleasures and to express such pleasures in writing" (2012, 2). McLean's focus on pleasure is an interesting and necessary divergence from what I see as an over-reliance on Freudian conflation between pleasure in eating and pleasure in sex. *Aesthetic Pleasure* thinks about pleasure in food not as metaphor but as the literal enjoyment of and joy in eating that had previously been reserved to representations of men and food.

McLean builds an argument for female-penned gastronomic literature by establishing her own set of criteria for the form and then arguing that these are applicable to the writing of Fisher, Toklas and David. The criteria are:

1. "A reverence for the pleasures of the table and for cookery as an art form;
2. An unconventional form that incorporates and crisscrosses between several styles of writing, including personal anecdote, historical reference, witty commentary, and literary allusion;
3. A cosmopolitan flair and a transnational frame of reference;
4. An emphasis on eating, public eateries, and on dining as a social event;
5. A penchant toward self-indulgence, or outright egotism, and
6. A decidedly undomesticated approach toward pleasure." (2012, 4-5)

Using this framework, McLean is able to argue that Fisher was a self-styled gastronome. McLean defines Fisher's gastronomy as one that more or less aligns with traditional (that is, male) gastronomy: a philosophy "developed from the belief that how we gather, prepare, and eat food is inextricably linked to the quality of our lives" (2012, 60). Fisher's writing specifically explores the interplay between the psychological and physical hungers, and in doing so Fisher pens a new kind of literary gastronomy, one that allows us to think about women's food writing in psychologically complex ways (McLean 2012, 60). Fisher "depicts eating as an act of self-construction and as a celebration of the self in communion with others. She does so, in part, by articulating those moments when the boundaries between self and other are dissolved during the act of eating" (McLean 2012, 60). It is this dissolution of the self and the other that sets Fisher apart, particularly as a female food writer in what McLean refers to as an "other-oriented economy" (2012, 66).

By viewing Fisher through the lens of the gastronome and her writing as gastronomic literature, McLean not only enhances our understanding of Fisher's legacy, but demonstrates how examples of female-penned gastronomic literature have been historically overlooked. The relationship between these two facets of McLean's analysis – Fisher's work, and the gastronomic framework – is mutually illuminative. Nonetheless, McLean's definition of gastronomy is strictly anti-domestic, since the domestic is inherently an other-oriented economy. Though I recognise the historical space of the domestic as "other-oriented", this rejection of the domestic in gastronomic literature is limiting. If domestic food and eating and the associated pleasure that it may bring are not included, then we necessarily exclude from gastronomic literature the great number of women who, for reasons including but certainly not limited to geography, ability, caring responsibilities, and disposable income, were not eating out. With the caveat that the male gastronome was historically wealthy, this limitation

poses a problem when looking at writers like Laurie Colwin and Nora Ephron, whose writing might persuasively be understood as gastronomic literature and yet luxuriate in the comforts and pleasures of the home. As such, though McLean's framework is essential to my own work in its recognition of certain women's writing as gastronomic literature, my own scholarship posits a theory of food literature that makes space for the domestic.

Genre, Life Writing, and Recipes

In 1992 Jeanne Schinto wrote, "culinary history, a lively but still relatively new academic field, isn't only the study of old recipes and ways of cooking" (16). Schinto is right – but in the thirty-some years since her paper scholars have returned to recipes time and again: not just as historic material but as cultural signifiers, and, in some instances, as significant literary devices. Some scholars have focused on recipes' potential to illuminate the social and political conditions of women's lives (Theophano 2002), or as the basis for escapist narratives whereby the reader experiences a cookbook as a "romance", with all the imaginative associations that entails (Bower 2004, 35). Such work helps to make sense of why a reader might encounter a recipe outside of a cookbook, an encounter that takes on specific historical significance when the recipe writer is female. This is a question whose answer has a complex history rooted in the gendered division between gastronomic and domestic literature; epicure and home cook. One such article is Sarah Garland's "'A cook book to be read. What about it?': Alice Toklas, Gertrude Stein and the Language of the Kitchen", which pays attention to the role of the domestic whilst applying literary analysis to food writing (2009). This article is an analysis of Toklas, Stein, their relationship, and the different ways that domesticity and food figure in their respective writings. The very title of the article demonstrates its relevance to my research: how do we make generic sense of a cookbook that might never be intended to be cooked from? Though this article is specifically

about the writing of Toklas and Stein, it nonetheless works through several of the problematics of “readable” cookbooks.

Garland, referencing Kelly’s *If I Were a Voodoo Priestess*, spends time considering the “truthfulness” of recipes (2009, 44). She says that as well as the difficulty of following a recipe that is not “literally true”, “there’s also something about the collision between the boldness of the instruction, the reality of the ingredients and the authority of the cook that translates into a particular tone of voice” (Garland 2009, 36-37). This tone is crucial because it delivers the recipe as a “trusted recommendation” – it, rather than the reproducibility of the recipe, becomes the thing that rings true (Garland 2009, 37). By pointing out that the recipes in Toklas’s *Cookbook* are variably “true” (for example, different measurements in different editions; excessive use of expensive or rare ingredients; wrong measurements entirely), Garland posits: “the failure of a batch of croissants hardly constitutes a massive betrayal in the general scheme of things, but in terms of a book meant for cooking it does rather defeat the object, unless that is, cooking isn’t really the point” (2009, 44-45). And so if cooking (in a cookbook) isn’t really the point – what is? The fact that this question can be asked speaks to the slipperiness of much food writing and the multiple genres it inhabits. If we can convincingly remove Toklas’s *Cookbook* from the category of cookbook, can we do the same for other female food writers? This strikes me as a key component of rethinking these texts as more aligned to gastronomic literature than they are to cookbooks. Garland does acknowledge that certain cookbooks lend themselves to reading more than others do – and to me this is precisely the point. Some cookbooks are intended to be cooked from; some are intended to be pillaged for clippings; some are intended to be referenced when the occasion calls for it; some are intended to be shared – and others are simply intended to be read.

Garland makes one other observation regarding food and truthfulness that is apt particularly for my primary texts written in (or, in the case of Child, relating to) the first half of the twentieth century. One of the big barriers to the "truthfulness" of Toklas's recipes is that many of them were written during wartime rationing, and so their writing was an act of imagination and of craving for foods that she could not access. Garland explains that many of the recipes in *Cookbook* were not producible when not even their writer could access their ingredients. She says, "recipes from the past summon up extra time and a kitchen full of other cooks, recipes with lists of expensive and rare ingredients crystallise desire in the signifiers of luxury, abundance and financial ease" (Garland 2009, 46). What I take from this is that there is a temporal element to the "truthfulness" of recipes as well: perhaps Toklas's recipes were culinarily viable but not accessible when she was writing them, but that is not necessarily the case for readers enjoying her *Cookbook* since its publication, and not experiencing rationing. This loops back to the initial conceit of the paper: if the recipes can or cannot be cooked – what of it?

Garland does make some assertions about readers and writers of recipes that I am not convinced of: "all cookbooks, I'd argue, come to us as some kind of attempt at seduction, and equally, we come to a book of recipes with desire" (2009, 48). But this kind of assertion is an example of the tendency to equate food with erotic desire, and when we apply these kinds of arguments to women's food writing we often limit, rather than expand, our understanding of what that writing might mean. Adam Gopnik posits a different theory for the reading of recipes: their consumption, even when a cook's repertoire leaves no room for new additions, is not due to "vicarious pleasure" but rather to "deferred frustration", since "anyone who cooks knows that it is in following recipes that one first learns about the anticlimax of the actual" (2011, 59). Gopnik's theory is that reading recipes:

> is an active practice, too, even if all the action takes place in your mind. We reanimate our passions by imagining the possibilities… when you start to cook, as when you begin to live, you think that the point is to improve the technique until you end up with something perfect… then you grow up, and you learn that that's the game (2011, 80).

In Gopnik's theory, the recipe-reader is male ("a man and a woman lie in bed at night… she is leafing through a fashion magazine, he through a cookbook"), perhaps accounting for an analysis that leans away from desire and seduction and towards self-development and the complexities of life (2011, 58). Whether Gopnik's theory is one that feels immediately applicable to the general reading of recipes, it nevertheless offers a way of reading – particularly women's recipes – that does not rely on the trope of sexual desire as the backbone of gustatory pleasure.

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Though there is no shortage of scholarship on women's life writing, a particularly relevant component of the research has been to expand the study beyond its historic focus on "autobiography" – a term that necessarily limits the practice to "writing being produced at a particular historical juncture, the period prior to the Enlightenment in the West" (Smith and Watson 2024, 4). We might think about the pivot away from autobiography in Carolyn G. Heilbrun's terms: an attempt that "has either moved women, or tried to move them, from the margins closer to the centre of human experience and possibility or has made evident their absence from that centre" (2016, 3). In its aim to recoup women's experiences from the margins, much of this scholarship grapples with and challenges assumptions about which texts "matter". Marlene Kadar, in the introduction to her *Coming to Terms: Life Writing – from Genre to Critical Practice*, suggests that:

> life writing as a critical practice, then, encourages (a) the reader to develop and foster his/her own self-consciousness in order to (b) humanize and make less abstract (which is not to say less mysterious) the self-in-the-writing. Thus, there are many forms, or genres, in which a reader may glean this written self, but we usually think immediately of autobiography, letters, diaries, and anthropological life narratives, genres in which the conventional expectation is that the author does not want to pretend he/she is absent from the text (2014, 204).

And so in opposition to terms like autobiography or memoir, which might represent only a particular historical moment or a particular kind of writer, Kadar's life writing is defined relative to the presence of this written self. According to Julie Rak, Kadar was interested in life writing as a genre that could be expressed not just through books and letters but through ephemera – particularly "ephemera that are unpublished, by people without privilege, including many women, people of color and Indigenous people" (2018, 543). By including different media as examples of life writing, Kadar's definition pulls in new texts from the margins, because "ephemera… does not have to be something that can be paraphrased in order for it to be about a life or constructive of subjectivity" (Rak 2018, 543). In this spirit, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in their *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, specifically use "life writing" and "life narratives" as terms since they are "more inclusive of the heterogeneity of self-referential practices. We understand *life writing* as a general term for writing that takes a life, one's own or another's, as its subject" (2010, 4). A critical theory of life writing that makes space for historically overlooked forms is particularly relevant when addressing the role of the recipe in my research. How might we understand recipes as life writing ephemera? Could the oral traditions of cooking culture be considered life writing?

In recent years we can see an emergence in women's life writing scholarship centring on these "alternative" means of women's self-expression – in other words, looking to atypical "texts" as expressions of life writing: for example, in T Curtis's *New Media in Black*

Women's Autobiography: Intrepid Embodiment and Narrative Innovation (2015), Catherine Delafield's *Women's Letters as Life Writing, 1840-1885* (2020), Ana Belen Martinez Garcia's *New Forms of Self-Narration: Young Women, Life Writing, and Human Rights* (2020), and Valerie Baisnee-Keay's *Text and Image in Women's Life Writing: Picturing the Female Self* (2022). With Kadar's idea of ephemera and a scholarly environment putting these concepts into practice, there is ample space for considering recipes and cookbooks as an especially fertile subject for life writing – and specifically women's food writing.

David McCooey reinforces this idea, stating that "a concern with limits brought the field of life-writing studies into being" (2017, 277). He explains that the rise of auto/biography studies in many ways concerned itself with the boundaries between literature and auto/biography, a project that McCooey implies only served to underscore the limitations of placing limits. The limits McCooey speaks of are not simply those between genres, but also exist between "literary and factual writing… narrative as a literary device and narrative as lived experience… oxymoron and paradox… between self and other, memory and forgetting, past selves and present self" (2017, 277). A more recent turn in life writing studies, which McCooey attributes to postcolonial and feminist praxis, has opened up life writing to voices previously excluded from the field. Here, much of the writing concerns itself with "reconfiguring subjectivity as diverse, provisional and intersubjective": actively deconstructing the secure limits of self and how that self can be expressed (McCooey 2017, 277). As McCooey argues, speaking to the limits in life writing should not just be in favour of a broader argument – "limits – and the crossing of those limits – are central to the practice and understanding of life writing" (2017, 280). With this in mind I consider the limits in my own primary texts. There are limits all throughout food memoir: between personal narrative and recipe; between cookbook and literature; between cook and eater. But where else might

these limits be, and what might they be excluding or including? And more broadly, what are the potential limits to affixing my texts within a specific genre, rather than recognising that, like the field of life writing itself, these texts are, "prismatic… prone to morphing, to play, crisscross, and perhaps even violate the boundaries and definitions that philosophy and literary criticism have… attached to different genres" (di Summa-Knoop 2017, 1).

In their *Reading Autobiography*, Smith and Watson recognise "gastrography" as a form of their so-called "new-model narratives of embodiment", explaining that the growing interest in life writing and materiality has brought into focus topics like food that had formerly been at life writing's margins (2010, 148). Regarding the nexus of memoir, materiality and embodiment, Smith and Watson suggest that food memoirs introduce novel ways of thinking about production and consumption (2024, 247). The combination of recipe or vivid food description with food memories "feed[s] readers' desire to redefine themselves by both imagining pleasures and cooking them up, as a way of enacting the life chronicled" (2010, 149). This particular assertion adds depth to theories by Kelly or McLean about the embedded recipe by speaking to the specific relationship between culinary memoirist and reader of culinary memoir. Since the reader is able to (in many cases) cook and eat the food described or explained in the text, they are positioned differently than in other forms of life writing where duplicating the writer's experience is neither explicitly encouraged nor necessarily desirable.

As Smith and Watson summarise, "gastrographic life narratives suggest that "you are what you eat" and imply that they can "cook up" for readers both menus of composing a self and recipes for reshaping subjectivities" (2024, 249). Though, again, I hope to move away from the oversaturation of food metaphors in food writing scholarship, Smith and Watson have

nonetheless signposted an area of consideration that I had not previously addressed. This poses questions about whether or not the reader/writer relationship changes depending on the form the recipe takes – is it embedded or not? What if we think about this reader/writer relationship as an essential way of delineating the ways we define culinary life writing? Moreover, how is the reader/writer relationship impacted if the book is never intended to be cooked from, but rather read as one reads a novel?

Smith and Watson proceed from an assumption of food as metaphor in memoir and suggest its multifaceted potential as a symbolic engine. They suggest that food as metaphor in memoir may, among other things:

> reference everyday life and project cultural identity. Or it may transubstantiate an object, changing it into something else by interweaving the remembered pleasure of eating a food with the politics of hunger and scarcity as a sign of class or economic positioning. It may discuss particular diets as indicative of colonial regimes. Some gastrographies engage food to focus on self-sufficiency (2010, 149).

Again, I do wish to challenge the a priori assumption of food as metaphor in culinary memoir. But by engaging with food in the broader terms of life writing scholarship, Smith and Watson expand food's metaphoric potential beyond being a symbol of a woman's desire.

Smith and Watson also explain that "the body has always been there in life writing", and because of this, life writers "negotiate cultural norms determining the proper uses of bodies" (2024, 93). Food writing engages with the body in a specific way that is both implicit and explicit: the writer eats, cooks, touches – engages tangibly with recipe, and then evokes the process in writing about it. When Smith and Watson suggest that life writers "contest and revise laws and norms determining the relationship of bodies to specific sites", I believe this has a specific application to female food writers (2024, 93). Female food writers, whose bodies are multiply implicated: by aesthetic and beauty standards, historical mandates of

thinness, pressures of childbearing – but also as writing food outside the bounds of the traditional cookbook. The body is indeed always "there" in food writing: and we need look no further than in scholarship about it which parses women's enthusiasm for food and eating as metaphor for sexual desire. These assessments hinge on an assumption that thinness, and an associated neutrality toward food, is an expectation for most women.

One approach to the body and life writing is in considering the materiality of the form and ideas of embodied practice, notions that crop up when addressing the diary as life writing but that I believe might bear equal relevance to food writing. Babs Boter, in her article "Body Work: Diarising Self-Display and Risk", argues that manuscript diaries – that is, handwritten diaries, which, in the case of Mary Pos, "show the apparent force and determination with which she has written" (2022, 192) – are demonstrations of "body work", and inhabit two spheres of bodily influence (2022, 191). Boter here uses Julia Coffey's definition of body work: "a series of affective relations between the body and its environment; and as an embodied practice" (2022, 192). A manuscript diary contains "both the corporeal and temporal presence of the author" – that is, "the body positioned in time and space, and the body working to write the manuscript" (Boter 2022, 191). As a result, the reader might encounter evidence of the author otherwise sanitised by the printing process: paper degradation, pen marks, annotations, coffee stains – phenomena that seem equally likely when considering well-loved recipe books and cards. Food stains, warp from water, adjustments and corrections based on personal preference are all evidence of the physical presence of the author. As mentioned above, given the unique proximity between food and the body, we can also read food writing as a kind of body work, and as an example of the double bodily presence Boter speaks of.

Smith and Watson also address the fact that "memoirs linking ethnicity and food also register difference and specify the coordinates of a writer's cultural identity" (2010, 149). They explain that, in our present day of globalised food cultures and increasing access to differently "cultured" foods, "food can function as an evocation of the particularity of cultures and regions that life writers may imagine only in negative stereotypes" (Smith and Watson 2010, 149). Anne E. Goldman's chapter " "I Yam What I Yam": Cooking, Culture, and Colonialism in New Mexico" in Smith and Watson's *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* also focuses on the intersection of food, life writing, and experiences of diaspora (1988). Goldman is particularly interested in autobiography as a vehicle for communicating specific political environments and uses M.F.K. Fisher as a launching point for exploring the complexities of cultural exchange, cultural appropriation, and "edible metaphor" (1988, 170). Goldman's article begins with a Fisher quote to establish that "to write about food is to write about the self as well" (1998, 169). Using *The Gastronomical Me* as source material, Goldman argues that when Fisher writes about the foods of other cultures, she is implicitly creating an us/them dichotomy between herself and other cultures – as such, the foods of these other cultures become "commodities to be (literally) assimilated for her own use" (1988, 170). Goldman caveats that a reading of this kind is, in essence, a political reading of food writing, and though cookbooks and food writing are not typically understood as literature, nonetheless the exchange of recipes is increasingly being addressed for the political complexity it may entail (1988, 172). This is because, says Goldman, "art – in this case, the art of cooking – is produced… within a specific social context, it encodes a political problematic" (1988, 171-172). Goldman argues that many of these texts reinforce the labour of the domestic as means of communicating the labour of maintaining a cultural lineage, an equivalence that "provides a means of associating struggle in the political domain with endeavors in the cultural sphere"

(1988, 191). Goldman's explicit assertion about the relationship between food, art, and the political gives credence to thinking about food writing for its political potential.

Rather than a political medium, Leonardi takes a literary studies approach to recipes, interpreting them as a narrative strategy and emphasising the importance of the recipe's authorial voice. Leonardi refers to recipes as "an embedded discourse", arguing that the sharing of recipes is a social exchange, and without a narrative context the simple recounting of ingredients and instructions would make for "an unpopular cookbook indeed" (1989, 340). Leonardi suggests, too, that there is a particular gendering to the sharing of recipes, questioning in parts whether female readers might interpret her project differently than male readers, and asserting in others that a female audience necessarily understands particular context clues lost on male readers. Leonardi's essay is foundational in establishing the value of understanding recipes as narrative strategies, and by analysing recipes across genres she demonstrates the breadth of their potential. Goldman builds on Leonardi's "Recipes for Reading" to counter that the cookbook is not simply an archetypally female phenomenon but instead an example of writing that, when coded as female, "is also a culturally contingent production" (Goldman 1998, 172). Though the remainder of the chapter focuses on other authors, this tertiary engagement with Fisher's writing and the potential problematics of exoticising food is a relatively rare reading of Fisher – and not because it is unwarranted. As mentioned above, the relationship between identity formation, national culture, and food cultures presents itself in the writing of two of my key authors: Fisher and Child. Goldman's is an argument that addresses this relationship through a postcolonial framework – flipping the attention from the wide-eyed wonder of white women traveling to and eating in new countries to the consequences of a food exchange that occurs in a cultural power imbalance. I acknowledge the valid application of readings like Goldman's to the authors in my focus and

note that those four authors present a very small cross-section of the range of women's food writing available. In doing so, this thesis speaks not to a definitive reading of women's gastronomy, but instead hopes to contribute to the "additive and accretive" reading of the form (Sedgwick 1997, 27-28).

Certainly, there is an increasing interest in food as a driving metaphor in the writing of diaspora, evidenced by dissertations like William R. Dalessio's *Are We What We Eat? Food Preparation, Food Consumption, and the Process of Identity Formation in Contemporary Ethnic American Literatures* (2007) and Kellie French's *Remembering, Eating, Cooking, and Sharing: Identity Shaping Activities in Ethnic American First-Person Food Writings* (2014), articles like Rosalià Baena's "Gastro-graphy: Food as Metaphor in Fred Wah's Diamond Grill and Austin Clark's Pig Tails'n Breadfruit" (2006), Jopi Nyman's "Cultural Contact and the Contemporary Culinary Memoir: Home, Memory and Identity in Madhur Jaffrey and Diana Abu-Jaber" (2009), Tram Nguyen's "Asian American Cookbooks as Autobiographies" (2017), and Leila Moayeri's "The Language of Food: Semiotics in Diana Abu-Jaber's Gastrographies" (2021). Baena's 2006 paper is credited with coining the term "gastrography" – which recurs in much of the subsequent literature, including in Smith and Watson, and Moayeri. Goldman suggests that the inclusion of the political in life writing works in a kind of feedback loop, since political environments shape how people understand themselves in a particular moment and also how they communicate that understanding (1996, 7). This is a sentiment echoed by Dagmara Drewniak in her chapter "'Between Recipes and Stories': Food as Metaphor for Identity – Marusya Bociurkiw's *Comfort Food for Breakups* and Laura Elise Taylor's *A Taste for Paprika*" (2018). Drewniak explains that the texts in her focus use food as a mechanism to drive their authors through time and space in connection with their cultural history (2018, 119). In these texts, food functions as a means "of either gaining self-

awareness and identity or purpose in life" (Drewniak 2018, 117). But in the writing of such texts, their authors also consciously contribute to the growing corpus of life writing by postcolonial or diasporic subjects, since they "purport to negotiate the ethnic self of the narrators of the memoirs" (Drewniak 2018, 117). Drewniak draws on Baena to conclude that the term gastrography:

> perfectly illustrates this interplay of the epistemological quandary of a diasporic self, intertwined with the discussion of self-representation in a memoir, which is by definition an autobiographical genre. Among various metaphors of identity, such as language and music, Baena sees food and eating as one of the most important "ethnic signs that symbolize the processes of transition that characterize transcultural selves." (2018, 120)

Despite writing thirty years apart, Goldman and Drewniak both speak to food's particular aptitude as a vehicle for expressing the connection between life writing, political context and self-perception.

As we have seen in Smith and Watson, autobiography is a historically exclusive category, in parallel, Goldman asserts that "the very domestic and commonplace quality of cooking makes it an attractive metonym for culture" for writers who have otherwise been excluded from participating in "high art" (1988, 172). Goldman looks at the cookbooks of two such writers, specifically Mexican women writing in mid-century America, whose writing uses food to demonstrate the tension between the preservation of cultural tradition and the pressure to assimilate. The expression of this tension, rather than through explicitly political statements, often comes from "a kind of composite genre" including "familial reminiscence and personal narrative, descriptions of custom, history, food, folklore" (Goldman 1988, 178). This is a kind of hybridity we see in the work of writers like Fisher, but her participation in food cultures is reframed in this context as Goldman points out that the texts in her focus are

self-aware of the likelihood of their recipes' appropriation (1988, 178). The authors thus emphasise the age of their recipe collections and the geographical specificity of ingredients as a means of cementing their authenticity as cooks of a particular cuisine: this in turn reinforces their cookbooks as contributing to the enduring legacy of a culture (Goldman 1988, 178). Here, Goldman introduces an entirely different element of the idea of recipes being "true", "factual" or "real". As she explains, "to assert that the recipes in one's cookbook are the genuine articles, after all, is to imply that fabrications – nonauthentic recipes – exist" (1988, 179). These cookbooks, says Goldman, were partly a response to other cookbooks of the day by white women experimenting with cuisines that were not their own: this raises the question, "when does recipe sharing… become recipe borrowing, with only a coerced "consent" from the domestic "help"?" (1988, 172).

Many assumptions are being made here, but this is nevertheless a framework for considering writers like Fisher, with her joy in and adoption of "other" cuisines, from the "other" perspective. In part the problem is one of access: as Goldman points out, many of the texts never made it through traditional publishing paths. And though I have no sweeping statements to make about this particular interaction as yet, Goldman nonetheless is forcing us to think about *who* is reproducing recipes, and how that reproduction is steeped in its own political moment in time.

Baena draws on James Olney to explain that autobiography "presents itineraries of subjectivity through an engagement with metaphor" (2006, 105), and that food works particularly well as metaphor in life writing because it "limns the issue of identity significantly" (2006, 106). Through their use of particular culinary language, the writers of such memoirs "make[s] the notion of food a metonym of the elaboration of culture and

identity", and in doing so present otherwise exoticised or racialised foods as complex symbols of "positionality, affiliation, and selfhood" (Baena 2006, 105). Baena, for example, focuses on two specific texts that explore the experience of postcolonial or diasporic subjects in contemporary Canada through their writers' experiences with food. She explains that both writers "transform recipes into a highly significant narrative strategy" (Baena 2006, 107). In one instance, the recipe becomes metaphor for the author to work through the different "percentages" of his ethnicity, and in the other "each dish has a place, and the memory of each dish recalls the memory of a certain place" (Baena 2006, 110). Baena's work is an example of engagement with food as metaphor that complicates the women – desire – food triad that crops up in women's food writing scholarship. With the obvious caveat that the subjects of Baena's work are male, this nonetheless provides a precedent for thinking differently about what the food in food writing is "doing".

While I certainly do not suggest that the writers in my focus are diasporic subjects, because many of my primary texts describe their American authors' lives as expats in France, the relationship between home country, repatriated country, food, and memory nonetheless recurs. And, since these writers find their culinary footing whilst living abroad, America and American food are posed as inferior, uncultured, and lacking when compared to the food cultures of France. We might understand this as the opposite of the postcolonial subject Beana and others explore – since writers like Fisher and Child renounced their birth country and its associated food culture in order to develop their interest in food. Though of course the experience of two wealthy women traveling to France to eat and cook is very different than a racialised subject using food to connect to family, culture, and heritage, both Baena's study and mine explore a connection between identity formation, national culture (whether embraced or renounced), and food cultures.

In Baena's later book *Transculturing Auto/Biography: Forms of Life Writing*, Alison Goeller's chapter "The Hungry Self: The politics of food in Italian American women's autobiography" explores gastrographies specifically penned by Italian American women (2007). Like Baena, Goeller emphasises life writing as a particularly apt form for exploring food as metaphor since, "including a recipe in a text, writing a cookbook, or employing food images in one's writing is a way of maintaining one's culture and also of sharing it with people outside that culture" (2007, 20). Goeller explains that food preparation and culinary domesticity, and the gendered coding it carries, is being "reexamined and acknowledged as a source and site of creativity and another medium by which women can talk about their lives" (2007, 19). Goeller suggests that many writers in her study speak of food as a crucial pillar in the development of identity and creativity, "sometimes even combining storytelling with recipes, thus erasing traditional boundaries of discourse" (2007, 19). Though Goeller does not expand on this point, it works well with theories like Kelly's and McLean's by emphasising that in food writing the line between recipe and memory is not always clear. And when Goeller suggests that food is a "medium by which women can talk about their lives", might we think of that in a literal sense (2007, 19)? The oral tradition of passing down recipes comes to mind, but what if there are other situations where the recipe *is* the story – rather than just a part of it?

Goeller's chapter is particularly interesting to me in its focus on specifically Italian American writers. My own project's focus on American writers has thus far and unintentionally focused on white and Jewish American women, but of course foodways within America are not a monolith – even before taking into consideration the layered and complex experiences of American women who may be first-or-second generation migrants. As Goeller explains, the

women in her study have a particularly complicated relationship to food, not just because of the gendered coding of the domestic kitchen, but also because as Italian Americans, their "culture centers around food, both the preparation and the eating of it" (2007, 20). Though the scope of this thesis is constrained to white and Jewish women, this is of course only a small subsection of the potential range of women writers and eaters.

Conclusion

The current state of scholarship on women, food, and writing is extensive but often siloed – scholars write in disparate fields of Literature (Leonardi, Piatti-Farnell, Sceats), History (Shapiro, Swinbank, Inness), Sociology (Mennell, Gigante, Parkhurst Ferguson), and Life Writing (Baena, Smith and Watson). Where these studies intersect, however, is less well-trod, and to date has been defined by a handful of scholars like Kelly, McLean, and Garland attempting to draw together the disparate strands into a cohesive aesthetics of women's narrative nonfiction food writing. It is within such an aesthetics that I locate this thesis: an analysis that connects existing giants in the food writing field (Fisher, Child) with authors whose food writing is not as broadly studied (Colwin, Ephron). This analysis uses historical and sociological frameworks on gastronomic literature and applies it to women's food writing, and in doing so complicates, and thus redresses, how women's appetites and approaches to food have been understood.

This thesis, then, is a starting point – it builds upon the genre-based arguments of Kelly's and the pleasure-based arguments of McLean's to demonstrate what a woman-authored gastronomy might look like. With this starting point established, future research has the opportunity to zoom out (a survey of existing women's gastronomy, for example), or look granularly: to track the different iterations of women's gastronomy and its development

across time; its aptitude for the expression of the diasporic experience; or its connection to experiences of body image, weight and fat politics. The interdisciplinary arena of critical food studies is vast and rapidly expanding; the basis of a women's gastronomy provides a lens through which we might interpret that arena.

This Project

This thesis first asks: how has gastronomic literature excluded women? And in answering that question, levels its central concern: what does a female gastronome look like? What constitutes women-authored gastronomic literature? In order to answer these questions, my methodological approach is to undertake a close textual analysis of the works of four American authors, all of whom produce writing concerned with the material, psychological, sensual, and mnemonic experiences of preparing and eating food. Because of these authors' historical exclusion from the apt category of gastronomic literature, engaging closely with the texts' formal features emphasises that this exclusion need not be taken for granted. After all, their generic flexibility and playful language align closely with the formal features of gastronomic literature. Through this close reading, further questions arise: how do we understand recipes that are embedded in a novel? How do we understand the existence of personal anecdote in cookbooks? Can a novel have workable recipes? In order to address these questions in a manner that allows for the expansion, rather than reduction, of women's narratives, I opt for a surface reading approach – one that attempts to understand the food in food writing for what it explicitly is, rather than for what it might stand for. This approach ultimately leads to the final sub-questions: what if the food in the texts stands for nothing but food – and what if the reliance on metaphor obfuscates a different relationship? How might our understanding of women and food change if we remove the layer of metaphor?

The four authors I have chosen were American women working across the twentieth and, in Ephron's case, early twenty-first century. I start with Mary Frances Kennedy Fisher, author of twenty-seven books, and an outlier amongst these authors because her contributions to gastronomy were acknowledged in their own time. I will specifically address the five texts later anthologised into Fisher's *The Art of Eating* (1954): *Serve It Forth* (1937), *Consider The Oyster* (1941), *How to Cook a Wolf* (1942), *The Gastronomical Me* (1943), and *An Alphabet for Gourmets* (1949). Though numerous of Fisher's other texts are also food-focused, the five in *The Art of Eating* represent Fisher's scope as a writer: each text is structurally unique, some are thematically unique (*Consider the Oyster*), others play with genre and form (*An Alphabet for Gourmets*). These five texts individually are demonstrative examples of Fisher's contribution to gastronomic literature – taken together they illuminate both how Fisher adheres to and bends away from the traditional tenets of gastronomic literature. The texts in *The Art of Eating*, written across Europe in the first half of the twentieth-century, dovetail with the work of Julia Child, a contemporary and later friend of Fisher's. Child, Cordon Bleu trained chef, cookbook author and television cooking show host, published nineteen books – mostly traditional cookbooks like *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, co-authored with Simone Beck and Louisette Bertholle (1961), and *Mastering the Art of French Cooking Volume Two*, co-authored with Simone Beck (1970). In this thesis, I focus on Child's posthumous publication *My Life in France*, co-authored with her nephew Alex Prud'homme (2006). I specifically look at *My Life in France* because of its retelling of the genesis of Child's career, including the writing of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking (vol I and II)*. Though retrospective, the book provides insight into the culinary and gastronomic culture of France in the early twentieth century, and thus into the context in which both Fisher and Child were working. *My Life in France*, marketed as memoir rather than cookbook, also provides an opportunity to assess Child's contribution to food cultures when not writing in

the more rigid format of a traditional domestic cookbook. Child's contribution to the culinary world is not debated, but the same cannot be said for her contribution to gastronomic literature, and this thesis argues that *My Life in France* can and should be read as an example thereof.

I then pivot to New York in the late twentieth century, when both Laurie Colwin and Nora Ephron were writing. Colwin was mostly known as a fiction writer, though her columns for *Gourmet* magazine were anthologised as *Home Cooking* (1988) and *More Home Cooking* (1993). Colwin's novels are themselves preoccupied with comfort, food, and domesticity, but I believe her nonfiction output is a translation of the features of gastronomic literature in a female-authored, New York City context. In many ways Colwin's two nonfiction texts are the most straightforward examples of contemporary gastronomic literature – they are explicitly and singularly about food in both a practical and intellectual sense – and yet the food in question is never the haute cuisine, public-facing meals of gastronomes but rather the simple food of the home kitchen. From Colwin I then address Nora Ephron, and, like Fisher, I address a cross-section of Ephron's work. Specifically, I look at Ephron's roman-à-clef *Heartburn* (1983), and her nonfiction food writing, published across a variety of platforms like *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times* and in anthologies between 1975 and 2002. I also address Ephron's films, specifically her 2009 *Julie & Julia* because of its direct connection and homage to Julia Child. The Ephron texts, unlike the previous three authors, exist across a variety of media, and were selected because taken as a whole, they represent a body of gastronomic work. *Heartburn* provides recipes and food opinions, the nonfiction pieces are reviews and reporting, and *Julie & Julia* is a direct engagement with the world of gastronomy through its focus on Julia Child.

There is a spatial and temporal gap between Fisher and Child on the one hand, and Colwin and Ephron on the other. This study is not a survey, and these authors are by no means an exhaustive representation of women's gastronomic literature. Rather, Fisher, Child, Colwin and Ephron, taken at an individual level, offer differing but overlapping examples of how gastronomic literature might be "done" when removed from the constraints of time, place, and gender. Read together, we can start to see connections and patterns: each writer has an idiosyncratic sense of humour, a series of stubborn opinions about food and its preparation, and the capacity to communicate the sense experience of eating well. They each experiment with form, genre, narrative voice, and the boundaries between truthfulness and fiction. Each one of them loves food and is capable of using their specific authorial voices to communicate that love. Each text is about pleasure.

There is a wealth of research on various topics orbiting women's nonfiction narrative food writing: historical, sociological, and cultural studies; literary studies of food in women's fiction writing; women's life writing; critical food studies – and these are all fields that significantly inform my thesis. But the closer we get to the specifics, the less there is. With a few key exceptions, like the work of Alice McLean, Sarah Garland, and Traci Marie Kelly, food, women, and writing tend to be assessed as they appear in fiction, or in domestic cookbooks, or in circumstances where food is considered a semiotic marker for a woman's sexuality. It is in this scholarly landscape that my thesis hopes to bridge some of these gaps: recognising women's food writing as a complex arena with no easy or monolithic definitions, and in doing so ensuring that such writing is afforded the attention and nuance so easily applied to men's writing.

Chapter One – Mary Frances Kennedy "M.F.K." Fisher

Introduction

This thesis is interested in the similarities between Fisher, Child, Colwin and Ephron's food writing, and "traditional" (see: male) gastronomic literature. In particular, I am interested in how all four authors meld genres, use humour, and explore the many and varied associations that food has in their lives. But, where the connections between gastronomic literature and Child, Colwin and Ephron's writing have rarely been made, the same case cannot be said for Fisher: scholars and critics seem to generally agree that Fisher produces gastronomic literature. Susan Derwin refers to Fisher's writing as "a lexicon of idiosyncratic gastronomic musings and anecdotes" (2003, 273). Christina Van Houten explains that *How to Cook a Wolf* "differentiated Fisher from other women who wrote about food, gastronomy, or home economics – and the critical reception of her book reflected as much" (2018, 124).[2] For Max Rudin, in writing about food, Fisher "could at the same time write the secret history of her heart, and with this discovery she introduced gastronomy to American literature" (2001, 129). Alice McLean suggests that with the publication of *Serve it Forth*, "Fisher established herself as a well-educated gastronome" (2012, 60). David Lazar believes that what distinguishes Fisher as a food writer (rather than a writer whose subject is sometimes food) is "because she has chosen gastronomy as her central subject, her all-purpose metaphor" (1992, 516), and Patricia Storace describes *The Gastronomical Me* as "unique among the classics of gastronomic writing" (1989). As such, this chapter, rather than demonstrate gastronomic literature's aptitude as a genre that makes sense of writing like Fisher's, I instead address

[2] A *New York Times* review of *HTCAW* claims that few cookbooks "have any claims to literary merit. At least, few did until a knowing lady who signs herself austerely M. F. K. Fisher began conducting her one-woman revolution in the field of literary cookery. Mrs. Fisher writes about food with such relish and enthusiasm that the mere reading of her books creates a clamorous appetite" (Prescott 1942).

what happens when gastronomic literature is both female-authored and recognised as such, despite this being a significant interruption of the historical lineage of the form. In this chapter, I ask what it is about Fisher's writing that can so easily register as gastronomic literature when the same cannot be said for Child, Colwin and Ephron?

Firstly, I establish the formal overlap between gastronomic literature and the texts in Fisher's *The Art of Eating*, specifically focusing on the texts' approach to intertextuality and generic flexibility. I then show how readily Fisher's work is referred to as gastronomic and argue that this ease comes down to three primary factors: one, Fisher's authorial confidence, both in regards to the development of her own taste and the ways that she issues advice to her readers and her earlier self; two, how Fisher positions herself both in relation to gastronomy and in relation to other cooking women; and three, how Fisher's sexuality registers as a "masculine" trait, which in turn makes her positioning as a gastronome more palatable. The second part of this chapter then focuses on the complex and often confused way that Fisher's gender is understood in scholarship: on the one hand, she positions herself as stridently not like other female cooks (see: domestic; other-oriented) and this allows her to gain legitimacy as a gastronome. On the other hand, Fisher's gastronomic literature is nonetheless specifically female, and this allows it to flow between the more domestically coded elements of *How to Cook a Wolf*, the assertively philosophical and academic components of *Serve it Forth*, and the deeply personal and emotional aspects of *The Gastronomical Me*. Fisher also frequently falls prey to analyses that conflate her gustatory pleasure to sexual pleasure, and whether intentionally or not, these analyses reinforce the idea that female appetite – sexual, emotional, alimentary – must be in some way deviant to be comprehensible. Such analyses illuminate the trappings of gender in the way Fisher has been read, particularly with regards to pleasure, food, and sexuality.

Drawing on Lorna Piatti-Farnell, in my literature review I suggest that food is not inherently symbolic, and when we assume otherwise we risk replicating gendered analyses of the writing. I pose the following: what if the food in the texts stands for nothing but food – and what if the reliance on metaphor obfuscates a different relationship? How might our understanding of women and food change if we remove the layer of metaphor? This is particularly compelling because Fisher is very clear about what food means to her and its literal and figural significance in her life. At multiple junctions, Fisher explains that the hunger she speaks of is multi-faceted and connected to all aspects of her human experience – and yet the overarching conclusion drawn is that her hungers are sexual and culinary, only. This analysis voids the explicitly complex model of hunger that Fisher poses. As such, it is not only the metaphor that Fisher herself writes, but also the ways that Fisher's metaphors become conflated into broader metaphors about women and food, and ways that gendered metaphors pervade scholarship about Fisher's writing.

Denise Gigante's *Taste: A Literary History* (2005), as well as her anthology *Gusto: Essential Writings in Nineteenth-Century Gastronomy* (2013), and the work of Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson will inform large components of this chapter by providing crucial context about the history of gastronomy, gastronomic literature, and aesthetic approaches to taste. Though necessarily focused on male authors, it lays out an aesthetics of gastronomic literature that neatly maps onto Fisher's own writing style and will help to support the argument for why Fisher is more readily understood as a gastronome. Alice McLean draws on Gigante's work and builds out her own aesthetics of female-authored gastronomic literature: in her chapter on Fisher, McLean uses the term "culinary memoir" to define Fisher's writing. McLean's scholarship provides essential context for the historical gender/genre divide in food writing

and argues that Fisher bridges the gap as a "pleasure-oriented" woman who chose "to move beyond the domestic realm in order to nurture [her] own gustatory pleasures and to express such pleasures in writing" (2012, 2). McLean is unique in her attempts to thoroughly investigate how gender and genre overlap and interact in Fisher's writing, however I find the connections drawn between Fisher's sexuality and her pleasure in eating undermine McLean's overall project. McLean's work will inform crucial elements of the second part of this chapter.

This chapter will also be informed by life writing scholars like Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, whose work on gendered forms of life writing will help to understand the ways that Fisher's gastronomy is a specifically female model. Smith and Watson state that "the body has always been there in life writing", and this takes on a pertinent meaning when addressing how Fisher's (sexualised) body does indeed seem to always be "there" in analyses of her work (2010, 54). Notes, asides, and arguments about Fisher's looks or sexuality are rampant in scholarship about her, a topic I hope to address and counter in the second half of this chapter.

The Art of Eating, The Art of Layering: Fisher, Food and Formal Flexibility

In this chapter I will focus on the five of Fisher's texts that are ultimately compiled into the anthology *The Art of Eating* (2004): *Serve it Forth* (2002), *Consider the Oyster* (2018), *How to Cook a Wolf* (2020), *The Gastronomical Me* (1989), and *An Alphabet for Gourmets* (2005). As standalones, these books each contribute their own structural and thematic approach to food writing. Taken as a whole, *The Art of Eating* is a snapshot into Fisher's stylistic dynamism and the complexity of her intertextuality. Fisher's works in *The Art of Eating* offer

different approaches to retelling the story of her life through food. But all of the books in this series use food as a means of exploring identity, of organising memory, of tracing Fisher's personal development as an eater, food writer, and gourmand, and of exploring the ways – emotional, intellectual, physiological – we experience hunger.

Gastronomic literature is defined by a few uneasily demarcated features – uneasy for how wide-ranging and expansive such features can be and yet how exclusively they appear in the historical record. First and foremost, gastronomy is an aesthetic movement and gastronomic literature an expression of that movement. In its infancy, gastronomy rerouted concepts of taste from beauty to include food (Gigante 2005, 1-2). This was a movement that imbued food with a serious philosophical underpinning, and it is this thinking that grounds the epistemological component of gastronomic literature. But as Gigante has explained, its expression is "like its best practitioners… generically omnivorous" (Gigante 2013, xix). Tonally, gastronomic literature tended toward a "lively tongue-in-cheek manner" (Gigante 2013, xviii), but as it relates to Fisher I am more interested in its "swallowing" of a range of formal properties (Gigante 2013, xix). *The Art of Eating* is also generically omnivorous: it ranges from bildungsroman to travel narrative, recipe to scholarly practice, borrowing from poems, domestic treatises, the texts of friends and lovers – difficult to categorise generically but thematically concentrated on the ways that hunger, and therefore food, is a powerful tool for the exploration of the human experience. But it is not simply the *Art of Eating* taken as a whole that is generically complex: each of the texts contained therein experiments with form in its own way. As I will do with Ephron, I view Fisher's output here as a holistic, coherent body of gastronomic literature. I argue, then, that the generic play in Fisher's writing both recalls and enacts the generic play of gastronomic literature. The layering of her voice is one example of this play at work: the first layer is the generic exploration contained in each

individual text; the second is the way each text speaks to the others, through replication, repetition, and recall; the third then compiles all these elements into the *Art of Eating* as its own collage, anthologising the disparate offerings as a family of texts.

Serve it Forth is Fisher's first book: a compilation of essays written during the Fishers' time in Dijon. Joan Reardon explains, "the map of the inner city, whose ancient streets Mary Frances memorized… became a palimpsest that she would partly erase and write over many times… but it would be more than five years before these isolated pieces came together in *Serve it Forth*" (2004, 64). *Serve it Forth* alternates between personal history and gastronomic history through the ages, from Ancient Greece through the Dark Ages to Revolutionary France. Max Rudin says the "lesser" pieces in *Serve it Forth* "show too clearly their origins in the library", suggesting a self-conscious emulation of gastronomic style on Fisher's behalf that has not quite found its footing (2001, 127). For Rudin, *Serve it Forth*'s weaker essays are "charming but primarily antiquarian… entertaining, witty, lightly learned, and mostly forgettable" (2001, 127). On the other hand, where Fisher excels as a writer is when her "voice is distinctly, and sometimes remarkably, personal and intimate" (Rudin 2001, 127). Already, as we can see, *Serve it Forth* can neither be exclusively classified as personal essay nor reference book. Though Rudin is correct to identify that some of the essays in the collection err on the personal, the Fisher of *Serve it Forth* is elusive. *Serve it Forth* is most structurally similar to *The Gastronomical Me*, however this is a text where Fisher is married to her first husband in one chapter, her second husband in the next, then back to her first husband in the next – as if removed from time, with no contextualisation of her relationship status.[3] There is none of the cheery family memory of *The Gastronomical*

[3] Not to suggest that she needs to – but it is a jarring representation of Fisher-in-time that echoes *The Gastronomical Me* in a more complex way.

Me, nor the grief or heartbreak. In some essays, Fisher occupies a third-person masculine persona – in the chapter "When a Man is Small", Fisher describes the gastronomic awakening of a boy growing into a man, before seamlessly switching to the first person (2002, 6-7). Sandra M. Gilbert explains that this is Fisher's identification of gastronomy with a masculine subject, and Fisher's fluid transition from masculine third-person to her own (female) first-person creates an implied connection between herself and gastronomy (2014, "A Portrait of the Transcendental Gastronome as a Young Woman", n.p.). Gilbert believes that by positioning herself in this way, Fisher demonstrates that her own grasp of gastronomy makes her "exceptional among women" (2014, "A Portrait of the Transcendental Gastronome as a Young Woman", n.p.). This tendency, Gilbert argues, continues throughout *Serve it Forth*, as Fisher establishes herself as a "soon-to-be-acolyte of Brillat-Savarin" (2014, "A Portrait of the Transcendental Gastronome as a Young Woman", n.p.). Though I do not disagree with Gilbert here, I also argue that in these early days of Fisher's writing, the mosaic of her authorial voice is just one of the ways that she expresses generic flexibility.

Layering in Fisher's work does not just occur between her multiple authorial voices, but in the ways that she plays with form and genre. As Lazar says, "she is the author of fifteen or so books of essays, memoirs, recipe-essays, food-memoirs, autobiography, travel-essays, travel-food-essays… the list is meant to suggest how hard her work can be to classify, to genrify" (1992, 515). In *The Art of Eating*, *How to Cook a Wolf* contains recipes and recipe essays; *Consider the Oyster* food history; *The Gastronomical Me* merges memoir, travel writing, travel-food-essays; *Serve it Forth* moves back and forth between memoir and gastronomic history and *An Alphabet for Gourmets* contains all of the above. Like Colwin's work, these texts fuse a range of literary styles. Each text shares generic similarities with the next without overlapping entirely.

Within *The Art of Eating*, *Consider the Oyster* is a unique example of Fisher's food writing as generic collage. The text is a love letter to oysters, but beyond this thematic through-line its formal properties are mutable. *Consider the Oyster* borrows recipes from cooking pamphlets, cookbooks, Fisher's own family lore; it quotes Shakespeare, Dickens and gastronomic literature; it flits between research text, personal opinion and cookbook. Each chapter begins with a quote about oysters, all playfully titled in line with Fisher's general authorial voice: "Love and Death Among the Molluscs" (Fisher 2018, 3), "A Lusty Bit of Nourishment" (Fisher 2018, 33) "Pearls Are Not Good to Eat" (Fisher 2018, 55). The first chapter is a short narrative explanation of the life cycle of an oyster, accounting for geographical differences and enemies of the mollusc but written as a short story with oyster as protagonist: "she has travelled some, thanks to cupidinous farmers who have subjected her to this tide and that, this bed and that, for their own mean ends" (Fisher 2018, 6). The inevitable end to the oyster's life is the beginning of its interest as a culinary subject: "its chilly, delicate grey body slips into a stewpan or under a broiler or alive down a red throat, and it is done" (Fisher 2018, 8). Some chapters recount Fisher's personal opinions about oysters, and others explain common debates about the preparation of oyster dishes. Others borrow the recipes of other cooks, and when a chapter involves recipes, the format of that recipe is not consistent: some include a list of ingredients with the instructions formatted as a paragraph of text (rather than bullet-pointed); others only include the instructions. As Patricia Storace explains, Fisher's voice in *Consider the Oyster* is so assured that it "can maneuver a reader through a narrative in which recipes enhance instead of interrupt the reader's attention to the tales" (1989). Its formal playfulness and Fisher's voice coalesce to keep the book interesting and readable: after all, *Consider the Oyster* is a book about oysters.

How to Cook a Wolf is ostensibly structurally similar to *Consider the Oyster*, albeit with a broader thematic focus. The text, as the title suggests, is a protracted metaphor for keeping the wolf from the door. A response to wartime rationing, each chapter posits itself as a How-To, but with the same playful Fisher voice: "How to be Cheerful Though Starving" (Fisher 2020, 103), "How to Have a Sleek Pelt" (Fisher 2020, 185), "How Not to Be an Earthworm" (Fisher 2020, 233). Again, as in Colwin, there is a distinctly literary preoccupation in Fisher's intertextuality, and, as in *Consider the Oyster*, each chapter begins with a related quote – there is a haiku (Fisher 2020, 55), Shakespeare (Fisher 2020, 83), and Thackeray (Fisher 2020, 177) among others. *How to Cook a Wolf* is a book of intertextuality, in part attributable to its 1951 reprint, which incorporates Fisher's revisions and commentary in parentheses through the text. Not only does this contribute to the layering of Fisher's authorial voice, but it is also an opportunity for Fisher to re-assert her gastronomic expertise, often demonstrating the ways that her knowledge and taste have developed and (it is implied) refined in the nine years between the book's original printing and the reissue. She says:

> Soup, in other words, is good. [As a matter of fact, soup is even better, in my gastronomy, than it was nine years ago. This is due partly to my increased knowledge of its ever-changing structure, and partly to my own increased age. A good hot broth is more welcome now, and will be more so in yet another decade… or two or three!] (Fisher 2020, 32)

In *How to Cook a Wolf*, Fisher is explicitly in conversation with her younger self, the effect of which interrupts the barrier between author and reader, instead implying that we are reading a draft, or journal; a presumed insight into Fisher's inner monologue that we would not have without this conversation. In this way, the frequent asides help to connect Fisher to her reader: they generate a kind of intimacy in which Fisher humbles herself by demonstrating how unafraid she is of questioning and correcting her younger self in recipes, phrasing, and life more broadly: she, too, is always learning. The corrections mirror the kinds

of revisions one might expect to see in a cookbook – constant tweaking and amending, but given that *How to Cook a Wolf* is not pure recipe, and the amendments not just about cooking, this is another way that Fisher blurs the lines between the domestic and the gastronomic. These corrections are also one of the ways that Fisher reveals her sense of humour, since the asides are a fitting vessel for expressing self-deprecation: "there is another kind of soup, certainly not bland but with a freakish appeal to it [I do not know why I said freakish…]" (Fisher 2020, 42). "Freakish" is in itself an odd and potentially humorous word to use to describe soup: revising her younger self in this manner, Fisher let us know that she understands the weirdness.

In some ways, *How to Cook a Wolf* is *The Art of Eating*'s most thematically complex contribution since it speaks explicitly to the strictures of wartime rationing and the real pressures of keeping mouths fed. Where many of Fisher's other culinary suggestions are philosophical or theoretical in nature (for example, a cost/benefit analysis of store-bought versus self-foraged snails for escargots (2002, 44-45), *How to Cook a Wolf* is the most practical (in other words, domestic) of her offerings. In McLean's words, it is "the closes Fisher comes to authoring a cookbook", and yet even so the recipes within it "ornament, or illustrate, the gastronomic philosophy of the book" (2012, 109). While it remains grounded in Fisher's own perspectives – her opinions and memories still pepper the writing – *How to Cook a Wolf* necessarily negotiates Fisher-the-food-writer within a broader global setting. As Van Houten argues, the text "attempts to mediate the public-private, individual-collective, foreign-domestic tensions" of wartime and postwar America (2018, 116-117). Van Houten understands *How to Cook a Wolf* as Fisher's "intervention in broader cultural debates on "guns versus butter"" (2018, 117) by simultaneously providing "advice for conforming to food rationing programs while also critiquing their ideological platforms and material

effects" (2018, 118). Allison Carruth agrees, describing *How to Cook a Wolf* as "an exposé of rationing as an instrument of state control that exacerbates social inequalities as well as wartime deprivations" (2009, 778). Given that Fisher's food writing is fundamentally about the human experience of hunger, *How to Cook a Wolf* belongs to its own complex framework of associations since, on first publication, its readers were literally hungry as a result of rationing. In this sense, with its guidance on maximising a hot oven for the most meals possible, stretching a cut of meat, and the best way to make fifty cents last, it is Fisher's most practical offering. But where practical might suggest a domestic cookbook, as Van Houten and Carruth have demonstrated, the text plays with some tenets of domestic cookbooks whilst speaking – sometimes directly – to Fisher's own beliefs about war. In this way, we can understand the layering of *How to Cook a Wolf* as multifaceted: the generic expansiveness; Fisher's multiple authorial voices; the dual preoccupations of the domestic and the global.

The Gastronomical Me is the most personal of the texts in *The Art of Eating* – its approach to food is grounded in Fisher's own experiences. It alternates between a series of interconnected chapters titled *The Measure of my Powers*, which trace the development of Fisher's intellectual and gastronomic palate through her life, with more thematically consistent chapters – "The First Oyster" (Fisher 1989, 19) "Noble and Enough" (Fisher 1989, 87), "I Remember Three Restaurants" (Fisher 1989, 171). In *The Gastronomical Me*, oysters are one way that Fisher layers associations. The dialogue here occurs in a broader circle, though, this time between particular anecdotes in *The Gastronomical Me* and *Consider the Oyster* as a whole. In *The Gastronomical Me*, Fisher describes her first experience eating an oyster when she is a teenager at her boarding school Christmas party. Fisher explains that "nothing could have been more exotic in the early twenties in Southern California" than oysters shipped from the East Coast (1989, 23-24). As a "Westerner", however, she is horrified at the

prospect and under strict maternal instruction that to do anything other than swallow an oyster quickly is not only "vulgar" but "extremely unpleasant" (Fisher 1989, 26). When a popular older girl recognises the oysters as Blue Points, Fisher tries to eat one to seem sophisticated, only to be immediately swept off to begin dancing with the very girl she hopes to impress. With the oyster still in her mouth and seeming to grow larger, Fisher explains "that I must down it, and was equally sure that I could not" (1989, 27). The passage reads as a classic of teenage embarrassment: trying something new to impress a peer only for it all to go wrong. Fisher imbues the scene with her usual humour – the band is playing "with sexless abandon" and Fisher is "dumb with pleasure at [her] own importance" (1989, 26-27). And yet it is not the approval of the popular peer that defines the passage, for as she is dancing Fisher notices "a dawning gastronomic hunger. Oysters, my delicate taste buds were telling me, oysters are *simply marvelous* [sic]! More, more!" (1989, 27). The remainder of the memory is a rollercoaster of teenage drama mapped by Fisher's wonder at the oysters. When the plates are cleared, she is "flattened, dismayed" (1989, 27); when confronted by a pushy older girl Fisher, buoyed by the taste of oyster and her "new-born gourmandise", is able to slip away (1989, 28); when, finally, she witnesses a private moment between two faculty members she wishes "suddenly and violently" to never see an oyster again (1989, 30).

In this scenario, food – oysters, specifically – exist within a system of associations, the object onto which Fisher projects her own rapidly changing range (ecstatic, disgusted) of emotions. Food here is referential, but it is also, specifically, a pleasure in its own right. Felski clarifies that metaphor has the "capacity to generate new perspectives, to make possible other ways of seeing, to intensify meaning by dynamically recreating a world already mediated by language. That something is a figure of speech does not disqualify it from also serving as a source of potential truth" (2008, 86). This is true of the above scene:

that the food is a metaphorical frame through which Fisher later understands a series of complex social interactions does not preclude it (here and in Fisher's work more broadly) from also and always being food for food's sake. The evening could have been about any number of social interactions, but in Fisher's recollection these are overshadowed by the experience of the oyster. Fisher, set against the stereotypically coming-of-age backdrop of a school dance, experiences her own evolution when she declares her enjoyment of oysters the birth of her gourmandise.

Fisher begins her dialogue with regards to oysters after she is settled and comfortable in Dijon, providing her analysis of the worthwhile restaurants. One of Fisher's favourites, Crespin's, has a fish stand out the front and an "old oysterman", displaying his oysters in baskets: "Portugaises, Marennes, Vertes of different qualities, so fresh that their delicate flanges drew back at your breath upon them. Inside the little restaurant you could eat them with lemon and brown buttered bread, as in Paris, or with a plain crust of the white bread of Dijon" (Fisher 1989, 88). Though this passage is short, and ostensibly a way of communicating her familiarity with the Dijon restaurant scene, it symbolises an important development in Fisher's food journey. Much is made, in Fisher's recount of her first oyster experience, of the oysters' provenance and type, and of Fisher's own attempts to seem knowledgeable by identifying them. In Dijon, Fisher can now not only identify multiple varieties of oyster but can advise on regional ways of preparing and eating them. Moreover, these are not oysters shipped from one coast of America to another but shucked right in front of her, on the street, by the "best one I have ever seen for opening those devilish twisted shells" (Fisher 1989, 88). If we read Fisher's books chronologically, *Consider the Oyster* establishes her expertise on oysters: encountering details of her first oyster in *The*

Gastronomical Me is backstory to this expertise, a way of tracing Fisher's gastronomical journey.

An Alphabet for Gourmets evinces Fisher's playful approach to form in yet another way: organising each chapter around a letter of the alphabet. Amongst the chapters are such explicitly gastronomic themes as "D is for Dining out" (Fisher 2005, 25), "P is for Peas" (Fisher 2005, 121), and "T is for Turbot" (Fisher 2005, 156). In true gastronomic fashion, though, these are intertwined with other themes such as "L is for Literature" (Fisher 2005, 88), "G is for Gluttony" (Fisher 2005, 51), "O is for Ostentation" (Fisher 2005, 113). The book concludes with an "A to Z" of the perfect meal (Fisher 2005, 226), and as with *Consider the Oyster* and *How to Cook a Wolf*, it includes a recipe index (Fisher 2005, 239). It is a generic collage, described by Paul Levy in its 2005 introduction as one of Fisher's "oddest books" (2005 vii).

In *An Alphabet for Gourmets*, formal layering, and Fisher's re-call of her prior voices is not merely limited to the text but recalls other texts in *The Art of Eating*. For example, in "Q is for Quantity", Fisher takes the story of her poorly-executed "Hindu Eggs" (first present in *The Gastronomical Me*) to discuss the importance of following recipes (2005, 138). In both texts, the Hindu Eggs are a stand-in for the lesson learned of being overly-confident in your own instincts as a chef, but told in entirely different ways. In *The Gastronomical Me*, the Hindu Eggs fit within the broader recurrence of Fisher's *The Measure of my Powers* – chapters that track the development of her gastronomic palate (1989, 15). They are situated amongst context of Fisher's family life as a child, and the family's relationship to cooking and food, included as a tale of hapless childish misjudgement. In *An Alphabet for Gourmets*, the story of the Hindu Eggs is briefer, and contextualised by a series of anecdotes about

proportions in recipe. Fisher's authorial voice takes on a different approach as well: less about family recollection, this time the story of Hindu Eggs is brought back to bear on her present as a gastronomer, since the story has "conditioned at least two potential gastronomers to look up and murmur 'Hindu Eggs!' whenever ignorance or stupidity shows in the seasoning of a dish" (Fisher 2005, 134). Fisher proceeds to provide the recipe for Hindu Eggs, a revised version which she explains is a "more knowing version" than the one she attempted on "that far-off horrible day, that basically *blessèd* day" (Fisher 2005, 138). To provide the amended recipe for something that had previously been contextualised as a site of culinary disaster is evidence of what Branch calls Fisher's gastronomical Kairos, defined by a "feminine style" – one which "involves anecdotes, personal examples, and inductive reasoning. Fisher's style makes her writing accessible to wide audiences" and "helps her to cultivate a welcoming ethos, that of an ordinary nonexpert whose authority derives from personal experience and experimentation" (2017, "Gastronomical Kairos", n.p.). It is also an act of confidence and authority and demonstrates that Fisher is in constant conversation and negotiation with her former voice. Recognising her formal flexibility is crucial to understanding why Fisher has been so readily understood as a gastronome but does not solely explain why she has been defined this way since, as I demonstrate, this is also practised by other female food writers including Child and Colwin.

When, indeed, is water water? When, indeed, is a gastronomer gastronomic?

In 1982, the *New York Times* wrote that Fisher's latest anthology might "take the gastronomic curse off Mrs. Fisher and convince a world quite ready to acclaim her as the doyenne of food writers that she deserves much higher literary status" (Sokolov). That she could be the recipient of the "gastronomic curse" at all, though, is a feat – given how rarely this is a term

afforded female food writers, and especially those writing before the twenty-first century advent of the "foodoir". Fisher perhaps initially skirted this exclusion with her pen name M.F.K., a choice that Paul Levy calls "camouflage, to hide her sex from commissioning editors" (Fisher 2005, x). But even when recognised as the "doyenne" of food writing, there is no shortage of concurrence that Fisher is both a gastronome and an author of gastronomic literature. Specifically, scholarship seemingly finds no friction in applying the term gastronomy to Fisher, even without caveating its historically gendered meaning – as demonstrated in this chapter's introduction, Fisher-as-gastronome is almost taken for granted. What is it, then, that allows Fisher to so readily attract the terms gastronomic and gastronomy? Most obviously, Fisher's most lauded book is titled *The Gastronomical Me*[4] – a confident insertion into a male-dominated field. This confidence, I believe, is essential to how seriously Fisher is taken as a gastronome. Her voice is direct, opinionated, and sardonic, and by re-calling and re-editing prior editions of her works Fisher both reasserts her taste and faith in her own taste. But Fisher also explicitly locates herself in relation to gastronomes and gastronomy, and I argue that these two components are crucial to her eas(ier) designation as a female gastronome.

The texts in *The Art of Eating* are not simply culinary anecdotes, gastronomic history and recipes – these components are explicitly tied to Fisher's tastes, opinions, and experiences. But as examples of life writing, the texts also map the way Fisher's tastes, opinions and experiences change throughout her life. In Cathryn Halverson's words, "with their repeating titles, settings, and themes, the stories blur together to hypnotic effect. The argument they all share is that knowing how to satisfy one's appetites is the seat of fortitude" (2013, 178). Fisher has no trouble correcting the assertions of her former self – but at no point is she shy

[4] Rudin calls *The Gastronomical Me* Fisher's "one great book" (2001, 133).

to offer guidance and perspective, even if this is subject to later revision. The repetition of various memories between texts functions as a kind of dialogue between the authorial Fisher and the Fisher in the anecdotes. In Reardon's words, Fisher's "art was kaleidoscopic – the same words telling different stories, the same story told with different words" (2004, xiii). Fisher, for example, describes living in Strasbourg in a particularly cold winter in both *Serve it Forth* and *The Gastronomical Me* – in *Serve it Forth*, this is the setting for Fisher ruminating on the foods we eat in private, and the particular pleasure such privacy affords (2002, 30-32). For Fisher, this is sitting in her room in Strasbourg, segmenting a tangerine, warming the segments on the radiator, and then freezing them in the snow on the windowsill (2002 31-32). This is about simple gastronomic pleasures. By contrast, in *The Gastronomical Me*, there is no such talk of tangerines: the apartment is so cold that "it was discouraging to have to put on my fur coat and gloves to cook a meal in the little kitchen" (Fisher 1989, 114-115). Fisher spends her days watching the freezing animals in the zoo, where "the storks, symbol of Alsace, would stare bleakly at me and occasionally drop a languid feather into the frozen filth" (1989, 115). Both versions of the Strasbourg apartment are sensorily evocative, but where one focuses on pleasure the other is on visceral discomfort. The same story, then, told with different words.

As with many forms of life writing, Fisher is constantly inhabiting multiple timelines: the Fisher writing, the Fisher revising in a later edition, the Fisher revising in a different text, the young Fisher of the text, the slightly older Fisher of the text. This creates a cacophony of interjections, usually with regards to food, meals, and restaurants which serves to further illustrate the development of Fisher's tastes and opinions. For Lazar, this layering, or revision of experience, is a symptom of Fisher's lack of a "system of ideas, intellectually or gastronomically" (1992, 523). As a result, Lazar says, Fisher's works accept that

"perceptions and positions can be momentary experiences, subject to changing circumstances and mood", they are "the forceful expression of the instability of experience" (1992, 523). Lazar's opinion makes sense of the discrepancies between Fisher's Strasbourg experience: as readers, we are to take both examples as real reflections of her memory, but we must also acknowledge that this memory is susceptible to revision, with different elements presenting themselves more vividly depending on the Fisher writing. In other words, such a layering is baked into Fisher's model as a life writer, exploring, as she does, the flexible nature of sense memory.

Part of the way that Fisher melds genres is through her authorial voice – like authors of gastronomy, and like Child, Colwin and Ephron, she is "witty and eclectic", she speculates on the metaphorical and existential meanings of taste and hunger, and she has no trouble making her opinion of food and all its related social connections known (Gigante 2013, xix). As Cara Parks explains, for Fisher, "food is not just evocative; it is a unique language she wields to explain subtleties glossed over by the written word" (Slate 2013). Her writing is lyrical and emotive: "probably one of the most private things in the world is an egg until it is broken" (Fisher 2020, 65); "heat a heavy skillet very hot, so that a drop of water dances and vanishes on its surface, which seems to look more stretched than you thought iron could look" (Fisher 2020, 119). But she also expresses such certainty and comfort with her subject matter that to read Fisher is to feel you are in the reassuring hands of someone who knows what they are talking about. Just as she can offer evocative descriptions of how to adequately heat a pan to cook meat, she also demonstrates an assured understanding of the tenets of taste. Take her guidance on cooking chowder as an example:

> Who knows? Furthermore, who cares? You should eat according to your own tastes, as much as possible, and, if you want to make a chowder with milk *and* tomato, and

> crackers *and* potatoes, do it, if the result pleases you (which sounds somewhat doubtful, but possible) (Fisher 2020, 39).

Such sardonic asides are peppered through Fisher's writing, encouraging readers to pursue their own likes and dislikes and be confident with them – but registering in the same breath that some of these tastes will be unimaginable to her. As Branch explains, Fisher "encouraged readers to take so-called expert advice with a grain of salt and to recognize that their own experiences were equally, if not more, instructive" (2017, "Gastronomical Kairos", n.p.). The individual experience is crucial here for Branch's gastronomical Kairos, since Fisher's "more poignant moments… appeal to readers' emotions precisely because of their kairotic nature… [because of] a kind of fitness or appropriateness to a particular moment" (2017, "Gastronomical Kairos", n.p.). We infer that Fisher's taste is something that cannot be learned, but rather something inherent to her – though she will generously guide her readers in the right direction, the end point is to develop one's own taste rather than to emulate somebody else's.

Parkhurst Ferguson explains that "the egoism of taste raises yet another barrier to sharing particular tastes", since taste is "arguably… the most singular of all the senses, and tasting makes the most private of connections to the material world" (2011, 371). The difficulty, then, is sharing imaginative or conceptual representations of taste that are capable of communicating something so individual. Parkhurst Ferguson explains that to counter this difficulty, most cultures adopt a three-pronged approach (2011, 371-372). This approach involves "samplings that extrapolate from the tasting of a dish; language that communicates tastes; and a focus on the common gustatory space of the meal" (Parkhurst Ferguson 2011, 372). Here, Fisher explains the various ways one might cook chowder (samplings that extrapolate from the tasting of the dish); her own preferred recipe, with asides such as "my

father likes to stand a spoon in this, but I myself prefer it somewhat wetter" (language that communicates tastes) and finally her general opinion about the likelihood of a milk, tomato, cracker and potato chowder being enjoyable (a focus on the common gustatory space of the meal) (2020, 38-39). In other words, in Fisher's books, she is the designated translator of taste; a role that the confidence of her guidance suggests she comfortably inhabits. Fisher is often in such dialogue with her readers, vacillating between absolute specificity and ambiguity. In one instance, Fisher provides a recipe for a beef and polenta dish – one of her longer recipes, with thirteen ingredients, and interjections in the reprint to adjust both quantities and ingredients (2020, 168). The recipe is immediately succeeded by the following commentary:

> A sauce made with chicken is less strongly seasoned. One with hare is better if a good dry wine is used instead of water, as indeed any can be, according to your tastes and prejudices. [If made with cooked shrimps, they should be added about ten minutes before time to serve the whole. Little clams, oysters, or shrimps, either raw and shucked or raw and frozen (and, of course, shucked!), should be simmered in butter until they curl and then added just before serving. And so on… a combination of common sense and courage is indicated!] (Fisher 2020, 169).

As is consistent across Fisher's texts, the intention seems to be to encourage the pursuit of individual preferences and tweaks to the recipes provided. But by offering quite so many variations, Fisher obfuscates the clear reproducibility of the recipe – such that Fisher's readers might not have a choice other than to develop their own adaptations. As Carruth also suggests, "consumers will… respond to gourmet cookbooks as aesthetic, rather than pragmatic, artifacts in "direct ration" to their social situation" (2009, 780). How, for example, might we interpret and respond to "and so on…" in the above quote? Asides like this are an essential way that Fisher establishes her authorial voice, but practically speaking these amendments expect a level of inventiveness and confidence from the reader that is confused by the detail of the original recipe. Though one might reasonably be able to follow Fisher's

recipes, we can also think of them as ways that Fisher cements her own opinions and taste: *she* prefers a wild hare to chicken, and knows what her prejudices are between water and wine with which to simmer. Likewise, she is confident to use her own common sense and courage to riff on the recipe with game, seafood, “and so on” (Fisher 2020, 169).

But Fisher is also in a constant state of re-calling and re-negotiating her previous culinary opinions. *The Gastronomical Me*, like *My Life in France*, is a culinary coming-of-age, where food is both a vehicle for recollection and a means for articulating instances of personal development. As I will demonstrate, in *My Life in France*, Child’s coming-of-age is specifically grounded in her experiences of France – though Fisher also lives in France, her coming-of-age occurs sooner than Child’s, and we experience the development of her palate from childhood all the way through to adulthood. Take, for example, Fisher’s description of herself after high school: “I had never traveled [sic] more than a twelve-hour trip home from school for vacations; I lived in the country outside a very small California town; I had almost no friends there… I was as sexless as a ninety-year-old nun” (1989 32). It is this insulated and isolated version of Fisher that goes to stay with an uncle in Chicago. He is described as “a quietly worldly man… who knew more about the pleasures of the table than anyone I had yet been with” (1989, 33). Fisher’s experience dining with her uncle is almost a social test: at first, she orders only what seems familiar, to her uncle’s protests. In time, Fisher notices that in her attempts to be “sophisticated and polished” by not clarifying what she would like to eat, she has annoyed her uncle, whose reaction Fisher interprets as “how dare you say such a thoughtless thing, when I bother to bring you to a good place to eat…?” (1989, 34). The memory concludes with Fisher looking at the menu “with all my brain, for the first time” (1989, 34). Then, “without batting an eye”, Fisher orders “iced consommé… and then sweetbreads *sous cloche* and a watercress salad” (1989, 35). In response, her uncle sits back

proudly, and Fisher knows not only that "he was proud of me and very fond of me" but that "I was too" (1989, 35). Ordering a meal is an inherently social, often public act, and in this instance one that requires Fisher to not only identify her own tastes, but to identify them with her brain – referring to the intellectual component of eating, we might understand this as Fisher's first turn to gastronomy. The layers here are of validation: Fisher speaking to the waiter, and then having her tastes validated by her worldly uncle and cousin, and in doing so validating her own instincts as a gastronome. Through this process, Fisher "learned for the first time that a menu is not something to be looked at with hasty and often completely phony nonchalance" (1989, 33). The menu in this instance becomes a motif for Fisher, learning not only to assert her own tastes but to gain validation in public, amongst people who know how to eat. The self-validation takes on another layer when the authorial Fisher, older and more worldly than the Fisher in the memory, not to mention an established food writer, interjects: "(that was an excellent restaurant… I went back years later, and found it had a good wine list and a good chef. It was like coming full circle, to find satisfaction there where I first started to search for it)" (1989, 34). Bracketing this aside helps to distinguish the teenage Fisher, whose visit to the restaurant is wholly contingent on her uncle choosing it, from the adult Fisher, who, it is implied, now has the credentials – or at least, the confidence – to pass her own judgment on the venue. By including this commentary, Fisher is enacting the "full-circle" she speaks of by recalling and re-validating her own instincts as an eater.

It is not only her comfort asserting her opinions and tastes that makes Fisher such a confident gastronomer, but also how she places herself in relation to the gastronomic culture. Where Child literally interacts with gastronomy and gastronomic groups (though relegated to the women's table, unless as a guest of her husband's) Fisher's engagement with gastronomy is intellectual. Fisher begins her writing career by dealing explicitly with the history of

gastronomy. *Serve it Forth* begins, “there are two kinds of books about eating: those that try to imitate Brillat-Savarin’s, and those that try not to” (Fisher 2002, 3). Fisher explains that the book to follow is an attempt to evade and yet be marked by what she calls the “three fires”: the first, writing “consummately on eating with delicate art”, the second, “our plans for dishes” – that is, recipes – and the third, “book[s] about people who eat” (2002, 4). She concludes the introduction, “I serve it forth”, and in doing so immediately signifies that this is a book self-consciously located in the realm of gastronomic literature (Fisher 2002, 5).

Though Fisher proceeds through *Serve it Forth* vowing not to exist purely in relation to Brillat-Savarin, this does not stop her from referencing his theories and, indeed, those of other gastronomes. *Serve it Forth* builds into its anecdotes Brillat-Savarin’s three-pronged theory of taste sensations (Fisher 2002, 69), Lucullus’ “refined” approach to hosting banquets (Fisher 2002, 34-35), and Achestratus’ opinion on guests (Fisher 2002, 49). In this way, Fisher locates her own experiences, memories and opinions on food within a broader gastronomic discourse – sometimes literally so. Take Achestratus as mentioned above – this reference occurs in a chapter called *Meals for Me*, which theorises on the most comfortable times and places to dine, and the ideal number of guests (Fisher 2002, 47). Per Fisher: “perhaps Landor… meant more than he said… when he decided, “I shall dine late, but the dining room will be well lighted, the guests few and selected.” Whatever his imputations, his tastes are mine” (2002, 47). Later in the chapter, Fisher reproduces a fragment of the Achestratus poem “Gastronomy”, contextualising the fragment by explaining “the guests, “few and selected,” are most important to Landor and to me, as they were to Archestratus long ago” (2002, 49). Fisher concludes that she would “add one more person” to Archestratus’ maximum, and in doing so asserts her own preferences alongside some of the gastronomic greats (2002, 49).

References to Fisher's burgeoning gastronomic confidence and skill recur throughout *The Art of Eating*. Take, for example, the following scene from *The Gastronomical Me*. Fisher describes celebrating her one-month anniversary with her then-husband Al by dining out in Dijon. This recollection is a dance between the authorial Fisher's learned asides and the anecdotal Fisher's naivety of the French dining scene. The anecdote begins with the Fishers mistakenly ordering a "Cocktail Montana", at the Café de Paris; "one of the biggest, strongest, loudest drinks I ever drank" (Fisher 1989, 56). They then move on to dinner at Aux Trois Faisans, a venue that looks "far from promising" and where the waiter leads Al by the arm, "as if we were deaf and dumb" (Fisher 1989, 56). They are "ignorant" (Fisher 1989, 55) and "timid" when it comes to ordering, such that the meal is a "shy stupid one" (Fisher 1989, 57). Not knowing how to order and under the sensitive guidance of their waiter Charles, the Fishers order the deluxe prix-fixe menu (Fisher 1989, 58). The authorial Fisher describes the meal as a kind of baptism by fire in French fine dining, concluding that "the only reason we survived it was our youth" (1989, 59). Fisher describes drinking the Cocktail Montana, as well as two litres of wine, coffee, and liqueur; the meal is "rich winy spiced cuisine that is typical of Burgundy, with many dark sauces and gamy meats and ending… with a soufflé of kirsch and glacé fruits" (1989, 58-59). Child, as we will see, also lists long, elaborate French meals: listing their components emphasises both the languor of the dining experience, and also these meals' excess. But for Fisher, the meal at Aux Trois Faisans also registers as an induction into the gastronomic tradition. She explains that "the kind ghosts of Lucullus and Brillat-Savarin as well as Rabelais and a hundred others stepped in to ease our adventurous bellies, and soothe our tongues. We were immune, safe in a charmed gastronomical circle" (Fisher 1989, 59). Though the authorial Fisher interjects to clarify that "the thought of a prix-fixe meal, in France or anywhere, makes me shudder now", this anecdote suggests that the

meal was a hurdle to be overcome to get to the point where she could comfortably, correctly, order a meal in France (1989, 59). As with her experience with her uncle, being able to order confidently is an indication of Fisher's development as an eater, and growth as a person. And to do this, Fisher places herself in direct lineage with the very gastronomes who informed her first book. By referring explicitly to Lucullus and Brillat-Savarin, Fisher locates herself in the gastronomic tradition.

Where in *The Gastronomical Me* Fisher distinguishes herself through her associations *with* gastronomy, in *How to Cook a Wolf* Fisher distinguishes herself by associating herself *against* the housewife. Like Colwin and Ephron, Fisher creates a kind of distancing between herself and other women, specifically those women associated with homemaking and the nuclear family. Van Houten calls *How to Cook a Wolf* "a home economics book for American women suffering under the burden of wartime shortages" and it is certainly Fisher's book with the most in common with home economics manual (2018, 121). But it is here where Fisher explicitly sets herself apart from "housewives". As mentioned, *How to Cook a Wolf* straddles the domestic and private with the global and public: unlike the other books in *The Art of Eating*, it is specifically focused on the home. Its domesticity, though, is a direct consequence of World War II – demonstrated not as a choice of Fisher's, but a necessity. Carruth understands Fisher as a late modernist in this regard, and suggests that *How to Cook a Wolf*, in "treating food aesthetically… neither resist[s] the culture of consumption nor disavow[s] the "social life of things"… but squarely confront[s] the global market in the practices and ideologies that fuel the food economy" (2009, 768). In other words, the book's more domestic markers are never *just* symptoms of domesticity, but negotiations between the material world of rationing and the philosophical tenets of gastronomy.

How to Cook a Wolf is dense with recipes, energy-and-cost-saving tips, workarounds for domestic cleaning tips: in other words, it overlaps considerably with the version of domestic cookbooks that Fisher's writing had been defined against. As McLean explains, the domestic cookbook "concerned itself with the construction and maintenance of the private sphere", by emphasising practical guidance and economic restraint (2012, 1). Fisher offers practical guidance and economic restraint: she guides readers about how to make the most of a gas-rationed hot oven (2020, 21-22), how to make soap (2020, 182), and how to stretch a tin of soup (2020, 51-52) – types of guidance not common in Fisher's other works. Noticeably missing from *How to Cook a Wolf*, though, is what McLean describes as the "rigid format… [which] often downplayed the author's creativity and sense of humor" that went in hand-in-hand with the practicality of domestic cookbooks (2012, 2). Interjecting on a recipe's fat content, for example, Fisher says "[Quote now that the war is over hah hah unquote, I would add about three times that much fat to the pot.]" (2020, 21). Revising a recipe for baked ham, she claims that "any kitchen-idiot would know enough to core the apples" (Fisher 2020, 23). And, explaining her preference for how to best cook vegetables, Fisher recalls the kind she once ate in Venice, "in the days when the Italians could eat correctly" (2020, 27). Such interjections are not only demonstrative of Fisher's sense of humour, but they are also tonally aligned with the kinds of opinionated asides that are peppered throughout *The Art of Eating*. If a standard domestic cookbook eschewed its author's creativity and sense of humour, the insertion of such colloquialisms by Fisher do the opposite. Though *HTCAW* is still grounded in Fisher's gastronomic ethos, it is nonetheless an example of what a domestic cookbook might look like if it was not restricted to the rigid formatting that McLean describes. Evidently, censoring her personality to deliver her recipes is not within Fisher's model of domestic guidance.

Van Houten reads *How to Cook a Wolf* as a "critique of the gendered economy of American food politics and the feminization of hunger" (2018, 116). For Van Houten, *How to Cook a Wolf* is "a specific kind of commentary on the experience of American women in the first half of the twentieth century" (2018, 121). And though *How to Cook a Wolf* may indeed oppose the gendered economy of American food politics, this does not mean that Fisher herself identifies with the "housewife citizens" called to support the home front during World War II (Van Houten 2018, 121). In fact, Fisher continuously separates herself from these figures, such that it is not simply the strength of her authorial voice that distinguishes *How to Cook a Wolf* from domestic cookbooks – but her own ardent identification against the designation "housewife". Fisher describes casseroles as "what the home economists love to call a 'one-dish meal', a 'co-ordinated dinner' or, less genteelly, a casserole" (2020, 23); she explains that roast recipes can be found in most cookbooks, "especially the endearing paper-bound volumes edited… by farflung Ladies' Guilds and other churchly societies" (2020, 127); and sarcastically appeals to "'Housewives… stir in a bit of water and treat your family *tonight* to a tempting custard sauce!'" (2020, 194). In the chapter "How Not to Boil an Egg", Fisher's focus is eggs – specifically, how to not over-boil them, and suggestions for how they should be prepared instead (2020, 68). In this chapter, Fisher describes the different schools of omelette making, and offers the following recipes: Basic French Omelette, Basic Souffle Omelette, Frittata of Zucchini, Basic Foo Yeung, Eggs in Hell, Eggs Obstáculos, and Scrambled Eggs. By comparison, she explains that:

> During the last war housewives used to buy several dozen eggs when they were cheapest, and cover them in a crock with a singularly unpleasant stuff called water glass. I can remember going down to the cellar and fishing around in the stone jar for two eggs for a cake the cook was making: the jellied chemical made a sucking noise as I spooned out the thickly coated hideous stuff… I would rather eat a good fresh egg only occasionally than have a whole cellarful of those dishonest old ones (Fisher 2020, 66).

Note that where Fisher introduces a multicultural selection of egg recipes – implying worldliness, globality, but also asserting her strong grasp on culinary tradition – the "housewives" are associated with "dishonest" eggs, confined to the cellar, that "would not make omelettes, even", which themselves are the basis of Fisher's egg recipes (2020, 66). Fisher is showing us that she is not a housewife, and her foray into domestic guidance is in fact grounded in tenets of gastronomy.

The tenets of gastronomy are not only present in Fisher's voice and style but exemplified by the chapter "How to Be a Wise Man" (2020, 209). The chapter's beginning quotation is "a wise man always eats well" (attributed as a Chinese proverb) and considers Brillat-Savarin's belief that "the destiny of nations depends upon what and how they eat" (Fisher 2020, 209). Already, we see stylistic alignment with gastronomy (intertextuality, philosophical consideration). Given this is a war rationing book, Brillat-Savarin's quote may seem a little close to the bone, but Fisher uses it to consider why we[5] eat from habit, unthinkingly, and feel discomfort discussing our eating habits in public. Fisher attributes this tendency to the fact that her entire generation has been "taught when we were young not to mention food or enjoy it publicly" (2020, 210). For Fisher, this does indeed relate to nation building, for, she says, if a child is able to express their culinary preferences, "it is the beginning of a sensitive and thoughtful system of deliberate choice, which as he grows will grow too, so that increasingly he will be able to choose for himself and to weigh values, not only sensual but spiritual" (2020, 211). Fisher believes it is a "sinful waste" for children to grow into adults and bear the responsibilities of adult life if they are never able to determine and feel comfortable in their own tastes – which, she suggests, are born from culinary taste and

[5] For Fisher here, "we" is "American Anglo-Saxons" (2020, 210)

preference (2020, 213). To include in her book of guidance about wartime rationing a broader treatise about the value and dignity of refining one's palate is deeply gastronomic.

"A Logical, if Less Lusty Procedure": the (over)sexualisation of Mary Frances

Part of Fisher's playful voice as a writer is innuendo – she describes the baking of a loaf of bread: "the white-faced baker's boy… slid it surely, intensely, on a long shovel into the blaze of the open oven"; the oven is "naked, like a firm-hipped woman" (2020, 100); a gift of oysters is enough to make nostalgia "less a perversion than a lusty bit of nourishment" (2018, 54); gastronomic complements are "a subtle pleasure, like the small exaltation of a beautiful dark woman who finds herself unexpectedly in the company of an equally beautiful blonde" (2002, 28). A loaf of bread on a long shovel being slid into a naked oven invites a sexual reading and it would be remiss to suggest otherwise. Fisher, in these examples, uses the image of a beautiful woman as a means of evoking gustatory pleasure – a distinct difference from traditional domestic cookbooks which "eschewed pleasure" in service of a "didactic, matronly persona" (McLean 2011, 1-2). Gilbert argues that such wordplay contributes to Fisher's "implicit identification with the masculine", in doing so suggesting that innuendo is a necessarily masculine trait (2014, "A Portrait of the Transcendental Gastronome as a Young Woman", n.p.). Gilbert uses an example where Fisher disagrees with "the Greeks and Romans that women should be reserved for the end of a meal and served with the final wines and music" because she prefers "simplicity above all" (2014, "A Portrait of the Transcendental Gastronome as a Young Woman", n.p.). From this, Gilbert concludes that "the speaker of this passage might as well be a middle-aged male gastronome" (2014, "A

Portrait of the Transcendental Gastronome as a Young Woman", n.p.).[6] But where Gilbert here reads a cocksure Fisher pontificating on the correct time to "serve" women for consumption, we might instead read Fisher playfully drawing attention to the absurd decadence of a meal that ends with the offering up of sex. Given it is never mentioned again, presumably Fisher is not actually intending to "reserve" women for any point in a meal – instead, she operates from a place of irony, mimicking male gastronomes' own association between women and food, and sex and eating. That Fisher mentions this practice of Greek and Roman gastronomes is not an opportunity for her to talk about sex so much as it is to talk about the dual opulence and misogyny of gastronomic culture. To then emphasise her own preference for "simplicity" renders the preferences of the Greeks and Romans ridiculous: the reader can then glean what they like about the politics of serving women for a meal at all.

I suggest, then, that part of Fisher's innuendo is an expression of her sense of humour rather than of her sexuality. Regina Barreca explains that women-authored comedy is often "characterized by the breaking of cultural and ideological frames", and Fisher busts through those frames as a female food writer in the 1940s comparing an oven to a naked woman (2022, 6). Male-authored gastronomy is tongue-in-cheek and Fisher's is too: but what if we considered certain traits of male-authored gastronomy (such as how they understand women) as the subjects of Fisher's humour? Fisher, after all, is not afraid of poking fun at men: in *Consider the Oyster*, she explains that "men's ideas… continue to run in the old channels about oysters as well as God and war and women… this is wrong, of course, except that all oysters, like all men, are somewhat weaker after they have done their best at reproducing"

[6] This example is from *Serve it Forth*, Fisher's first book – she arguably had a lot to prove. Remember, this is an author who (as with many women of the time) had to initialise her name to hide her gender (Levy in Fisher 2005, x), and who had versions of her books withdrawn from the market because the cover photo of her was "too sexy" (Reichl 2019)

(2018, 20). Sianne Ngai and Lauren Berlant argue that, "if it can sometimes be hard to tell if or how comedy is comedy, this might be because some people think a comedy without pleasure or laughter violates itself more extremely than, say, porn that does not produce a desired arousal or a weepie that doesn't make us cry" (2017, 239). If we approach Fisher's writing assuming that all instances of innuendo are literal expressions of Fisher's sexuality, it is no wonder that the comedy in her writing is overlooked. Heidi M. Hanrahan explains that "while women writers have used humor to open doors, disarm resistant readers, identify with other women, and participate in important cultural conversations, such efforts are often risky and fraught with tension… and take on dominant cultural assumptions about gender, propriety, and power" (2011, 9). Likewise, Barreca locates this overlooking as a specifically female phenomenon, and explains that "women's humor has not so much been ignored as it has been unrecognized, passed over or misread as tragic" (2022, 4). In Fisher's case, humour is misread not as tragic but as expressive of her sexuality – and as such her comparison between men and oysters or her ironic parodying of the Greek and Roman gastronomes above are less sexual provocations than intellectual ones.

Gilbert also argues that Fisher's use of innuendo is Fisher attempting to distinguish herself as exceptional among women – an assertion I do not disagree with. Though, as I will show, all four authors in this thesis use humour as a central feature of their food writing, and all four authors distinguish themselves against other women (and the figure of the housewife specifically), Fisher most clearly uses humour as a vehicle through which to perform that distinguishing. I am interested, though, in Gilbert's next step, where she analyses a passage of Fisher's in which Fisher dines alone. Fisher explains that her solo dining often upsets males because "I know my way around without them" and puzzles women (1989, 190). She concludes the passage "all these reasons, and probably a thousand others, like the way I wear

my hair and what shade my lipstick is, make people look strangely at me, resentfully, with a kind of hurt bafflement, when I dine alone" (Fisher 1989, 191). Victoria Burns agrees with this assessment, explaining that when Fisher "does gesture toward embodiment, it is usually to situate herself outside of society's expectations" (2019, 71). This remains in line with Fisher's distinguishing of herself against other women and is a – perhaps arrogant, but nonetheless – self-aware reading of the gendered dynamics of the dining room in the 1940s. But from this passage, Gilbert reads a "femme fatale" who "revels in her own voluptuous union of culinary intelligence with sexual sophistication" (2014, "Portrait of the Transcendental Gastronome as a Young Woman, n.p.). Gilbert goes on to describe Fisher as "self-possessed, seductive… a modernist heroine" (2014 , "Portrait of the Transcendental Gastronome as a Young Woman, n.p.). Ironically, Gilbert seems to be replicating the very behaviour Fisher calls out in her passage. Fisher claims that she taught herself to enjoy being alone – and, as Fisher herself clarifies in *How to Cook a Wolf*, "*alone* does not necessarily connote *salaciously*, *lasciviously*, or even amorously" (2020, 225). Rather than letting Fisher simply eat her meal on her own, Gilbert, like the men and women "on trains and in ships, or in restaurants" assumes something of her – in this case that she must be a seductress in order for her appetite to make sense at all (2014 , "Portrait of the Transcendental Gastronome as a Young Woman, n.p.). Throughout *The Art of Eating*, Fisher is explicit about what she is "doing", and this is no exception: she is eating a meal alone not with the intention to seduce or entice, because she enjoys it.

It is not just Gilbert who makes these connections. In emphasising the innuendo, scholarship has (perhaps inadvertently) turned its gaze back onto Fisher, as if by daring to write about the complexity of what she considers the three human needs ("food and security and love") she invites objectification (1989, ix). This generates a tension inherent to the way that scholarship

has understood Fisher: she subverts "feminine" ideals about food writing and in doing so seems to invite sexualisation. Part of this involves descriptions of Fisher's looks. Ruth Reichl describes the cover of *The Gastronomical Me* as follows: "a photograph of a young Mary Frances, long hair tossed back, eyes almost closed in ecstatic pleasure, conveys the sensuality of the words inside. She was very beautiful" (2019). In an interview for an anthology about female American authors, Fisher is described as "a slender, strikingly beautiful woman of eighty-one with silvery hair and high cheekbones" (Pearlman and Henderson 1990, 79). Rudin argues that Fisher has all the "elegant, lyric sorrow of a forties movie siren – a character and voice to match the glamorous photos that grace her book jackets" (2001, 137).[7] Molly O'Neill describes Fisher as "a beauty and an enchantress" in her obituary in the New York Times (1992).[8] Burns speaks to Fisher's looks in slightly different terms, arguing that the distinction between the textual Fisher (M.F.K) and the authorial Fisher (Mary Frances) is a kind of disembodiment, whereby M.F.K. can speak of the pleasures of eating without acknowledging the impact on Mary Frances's body – weight gain, specifically, is never a part of the equation (2019, 67). In other words, for Burns, it is remarkable that Fisher does not mention her body – regardless of the fact that the assumption that she should hinges on Burns's own expectations about women, eating, and their bodies.

Richard Magee explains that this fixation on female food figures and their bodies is because "many of the food icons that capture our attention appear at first taste to fall easily into two opposing kitchens: food Puritanism and food pornography" (2007, 1). Magee is using this definition in regard to Nigella Lawson, arguing that Lawson "complicates" the food – sexual

[7] The same kind of visual representation is not true of the other three authors in this thesis. Considering the covers of each of their first editions: though Child's has a photo on the cover, it is of herself and her husband from one of their famed Valentines' Day photoshoots. Both of Colwin's covers are of paintings of tablescapes, and Ephron's is an illustration of a heart being burned in a saucepan. Certainly none of these covers connotes a forties movie siren.
[8] Per Fisher: "I wasn't so pretty that I didn't have to do something else" (O'Neill 1992).

appetite metaphor "by explicitly acknowledging it… and by implicitly arguing that the taste – the gustatory experience – is more important than the sexual connotations" (2007, 2). Fisher certainly appears at first to more easily fall into the food pornography kitchen. Fisher and Lawson both explicitly acknowledge the metaphor, though where Lawson's, as a television chef, is visual, Fisher's is literary first, and then becomes conflated with her looks by critics later. Magee quotes O'Neill's definition of food pornography: "food and recipes so removed from real life that they cannot be used except as vicarious experience" (2007, 4-5). But neither Lawson nor Fisher's output could be categorised as an exclusively vicarious experience – both are offering actual recipes, opinions, and ideas about food – no matter how suggestive the presentation of such content may be. Perhaps, then, the rush to assume one kitchen or another – particularly from female food writers and cooks – says more about the reader than it does the writer.

The innuendo in Fisher's writing is also often in service of a broader argument about gastronomy – concluding *How to Cook a Wolf*, for example, she laments those who are not interested in "the pleasures of the flesh, or pretend that if we do not *admit our* sensual delight in a ripe nectarine we are not guilty… of even that tiny lust!" (2020, 257-258). This is preceded by an explanation, as is consistent throughout *How to Cook a Wolf*, that one of the primary ways to exert our humanity – particularly in the face of war – is to "nourish ourselves with all possible skill, delicacy and ever-increasing enjoyment" (Fisher 2020, 258). It would certainly be simpler to take Fisher's description of the ripe nectarine as disembodied from the remainder of the explanation – after all, it is transparently evoking sexual pleasure and thus linking it to gustatory pleasure. But that would ignore the more complex ideology of hunger that Fisher ultimately proposes, which is that by recognising and honouring our literal hunger, we develop self-awareness, confidence, and a deeper understanding of how to care

for ourselves – a template we can then apply across the more figural hungers that we encounter in our lives. It is not only in descriptions of her appearance that Fisher is sexualised. There is a tendency in scholarship about Fisher to remove the context from her assertions about food and love. In particular, the tendency is to focus on the following phrase from the foreword of *The Gastronomical Me* and rely on this passage as a kind of tell-all for Fisher's motivations as a food writer.[9] The passage is as follows:

> People ask me: Why do you write about food, and eating and drinking? Why don't you write about the struggle for power and security, and about love, the way others do?... The easiest answer is to say that, like most other humans, I am hungry. But there is more than that. It seems to me that our three basic needs, for food and security and love, are so mixed and mingled and entwined that we cannot straightly think of one without the others. So it happens that when I write of hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it, and warmth and the love of it and the hunger for it… and then the warmth and richness and fine reality of hunger satisfied… and it is all one (Fisher 1989, ix).

In particular, scholars have focused on the sentence beginning "so it happens", to theorise about Fisher's self-conscious exploration of the overlap between physiological, psychological, and emotional hungers. Such focus makes sense: in this passage, Fisher is straightforward about what her work is "doing", so much so that she removes the guesswork from speculative metaphorical analysis. However, I believe that Fisher's claim that "when I write of hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it" has not only become a decontextualised stand-in for Fisher's entire ethos as a writer, but has also allowed for simplistic conflations between women, food, and sex, to proliferate in studies of Fisher's work (1989, ix). This is a curious move considering that Fisher's own complicating analysis directly precedes and succeeds the statement, but it is one that falls into a long tradition of semantic gymnastics regarding women, food, the senses, pleasure, desire, sex, and eros. Susan Bordo understands food cultures, specifically food and diet related advertising, as

[9] See Campbell (1997), McLean (2012), Reardon (2004), Derwin (2003)

"gender ideology… specifically (consciously or unconsciously) servicing the cultural reproduction of gender difference and gender inequality" (2003, 110). Though Fisher's work is of course not advertising material, understanding it within a world in which physiological appetite is organised across a gender binary helps to illuminate the tendency to read Fisher's physical appetite as a sexual one. Bordo explains how appetite as gender ideology plays out: on the one hand, "when women are positively depicted as sensuously voracious about food… their hunger for food is employed solely as a metaphor for their sexual appetite" (2003, 110). The precedent here is a recurring belief across "many cultures and eras [which] certainly suggest the symbolic potency of female hunger as a cultural metaphor for unleashed female power and desire" (Bordo 2003, 116). On the other hand, for men, "food is *supposed* to supply sensual delight and succor – not as metaphorically standing for something else" (Bordo 2003, 112). As a result, we have become culturally divorced from the idea that a woman's enjoyment of food can be just that – an assumption that plays out across scholarship about Fisher.

With this context established, we can now look to the ease with which analysis of Fisher's work often obfuscates the semantic difference between forms of desire, forms of pleasure, and what it means for something to be sensuous, and in so doing assuming an eroticism of Fisher that simply may not be there. In her interpretation of Fisher's motivations, McLean suggests that "Fisher articulates a gastronomic philosophy developed from the belief that how we gather, prepare, and eat food is inextricably linked to the quality of our lives" (2012, 60). For McLean, *The Gastronomical Me* "illuminates female desire – for food, for love, and for the pleasures of a life well-fed" (2012, 82). McLean argues that Fisher establishes a specifically female gastronomy grounded in pleasure, an aesthetic distinct from the domestically focused, other-oriented culinary texts of Fisher's female contemporaries (2012,

60). McLean's work on Fisher, for the most part, offers a thorough understanding of the way that gender functions in gastronomic literature, and makes space for Fisher's uniquely female interjection into gastronomy to both align with and diverge from traditionally male gastronomic aesthetics. But take, for example, the following claim: "Fisher often wrote about the pleasures of eating as an implicit metaphor for emotional and physical intimacy; the most evocative gastronomic moments in Fisher's memoirs often occurred when she was intimately involved with a lover" (McLean 2006, 15). McLean uses as an example the prix-fixe meal between the Fishers as mentioned above. For McLean, however, "the meal along with the emotions it stirs (here wonder and fulfillment) speak not only to the satisfaction of a hunger for food but also to the delight of being in love" (McLean 2006, 15). She concludes of Fisher that, "the more in love she felt, the more likely she was to encounter an unforgettably tasty dish" (McLean 2006, 16). Certainly, the newness of the Fishers' marriage, their youth, and their exploration of a new country are not to be discounted as important influences in Fisher's writing. But to take from this passage only a connection between food and love is to disregard a whole host of features that speak to Fisher's burgeoning palate and that foreshadow her career as a gourmand, not least of which is her explicit listing of Lucullus, Brillat-Savarin, and Rabelais (Fisher 1989, 59). McLean goes on to fortify her analysis by referencing that famous Fisher refrain, "when I write of hunger, I am really writing about love…" (2006, 15).

McLean goes on to claim that in *The Gastronomical Me*, Fisher "recounts her alimentary and sexual awakening", referencing a quote of Fisher's in which she says that she and Parrish made love (2006, 17). Importantly, though, the quote is not from *The Gastronomical Me* – it is from *Life in Letters*, a compendium of Fisher's correspondence throughout the years. This is important because the recipient of a letter is a very different audience to the general readers

of a widely published book, and because it is an explicit example of the conflation of the sexual and the culinary in scholarship on Fisher. In fact, Fisher is fairly withholding about her romantic relationships in *The Gastronomical Me*. She occasionally references being in love, but she both divorces and remarries (the two relationships overlap) in the course of the text with minimal fanfare. Let us consider a passage from *The Gastronomical Me* in which Fisher is not yet divorced from Al, but living with Parrish in Switzerland. Fisher travels from Europe back to America to announce her divorce from Al to her family – when Parrish suggests writing the announcement in a letter, Fisher responds that she must "do it myself, a kind of castigation for hurting good people" (1989, 180). Fisher describes the physical turmoil she endures on the ship, "flattened, boneless, with despair at having gone away from Chexbres"[10] (1989, 180). The authorial Fisher believes in hindsight that her agony on the trip is "punishing me for leaving Chexbres, when there was to be so little time for us together" (1989, 181).[11] She endures her time in her cabin only to find that on deck is "an atmosphere so much more tortured than mine that it was almost as sickening as my private woe had been", because the majority of patrons on the ship are Jewish Europeans fleeing the Holocaust (Fisher 1989, 181). In this passage, love for Fisher is entwined with grief, horror, and physical discomfort born of a kind of psychic foreshadowing of her husband's death – it is difficult to read the passage as a sexual awakening. Fisher herself begins the passage by questioning what it has "to do with me, the gastronomical me?" and responds: "I grew older… my hungers altered: I knew better what and how to eat, just as I knew better how I loved other people, and even why" (1989, 180). This is consistent across Fisher's philosophy of food: when we know how to eat, we have a better understanding of our other needs – in

[10] "Chexbres" is Fisher's name for her second husband, Dillwyn Parrish (Reardon 2004, 90).
[11] The passage is from a chapter set between 1937 – 1939 (Fisher 1989, 180); Parrish would die in 1941 (Reardon 2004, 135-136).

this case, the suggestion is that her knowledge of how and why to love has led not to a sexual need but rather to a divorce.

As is the case across *The Art of Eating*, food and love are not simply two sides of the same coin, but rather exist in a complicated matrix of human needs and desires. And it is not just her relationship with Parrish that is given these complex signifiers. In Julie Campbell's words, even the Fishers' honeymoon is "hardly a "sexual frenzy"" (1997, 184). Campbell, here, is drawing on Julia Kristeva to map Fisher's arrival in France against Kristeva's conceptions of alienation in the construction of the self (1997, 182). But where, for Kristeva, the daring required to enter a new country is often accompanied by a "sexual frenzy", Campbell demonstrates that instead Fisher experiences a "gastronomical awakening", whereby her "first exuberant taste of French cuisine – the chocolate and croissants – confirms her lasting engagement with the culture" (1997, 184). Campbell's analysis reconfigures Fisher's honeymoon not as the site of her sexual awakening but as her introduction to France and by extension French cuisine. This awakening is crucial to Fisher's self-construction, related, as it is, to her identification with gastronomy and to the career that would follow: as in *My Life in France*, the texts in *The Art of Eating* describe the creation of a culinary career. For Child, this is in the explanation of the creation of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking (vol I and II)*. For Fisher, *The Art of Eating* constitutes that career: it is through the texts contained within that Fisher establishes her voice and place as a food writer. The intention here is not to disregard McLean's analysis entirely, but rather to suggest that when Fisher discusses her romantic relationships across *The Art of Eating*, they are always connected to series of additional preoccupations: identity, memory, confidence, knowledge.

Susan Derwin works through a semantic analysis of hunger and desire in Fisher, a useful framework for clarifying how we understand Fisher's articulations of pleasure. Derwin says:

> hunger, in addition to its literal meaning – a need for food – has a figural significance. Certain insatiable desires, distinct from physical hunger, may become manifest through the urge to eat. We might thus say of hunger pangs that they operate like the words of a language, with their many levels of significance: they can signify both a need for food, which constitutes their literal level of meaning; and they can signify desires that are not necessarily physiological in nature and which comprise the figural meaning of hunger pangs (2003, 269).

But Derwin's overall project hinges on the assumption that the figural significance of Fisher's hunger is sexual desire. Derwin, for example, uses the chapter "P is for Peas" in *An Alphabet for Gourmets* (2003, 273). In the passage in question, Fisher and her parents are shelling peas in the garden in Fisher and Parrish's house in Switzerland. Derwin focuses on the following quote, where Fisher runs "down to be the liaison between the harvesters and my mother, who sat shelling peas from the basket on her lap into the pot between her feet" (2003, 273). For Derwin, liaison, as used by Fisher, has multiple figural meanings, one of which is the "fantasy of liaison", from which Derwin proposes three possible interpretations:

> A primal scene of parental coitus, or a homoerotic scene in which Fisher offers herself to the mother as her surrogate penis (pea-nis), or an Oedipal scene in which her mother becomes the sexually active barmaid receiving gentlemen on schedule (2003, 274).

Later, Fisher recalls running "like hell" – a word choice that Derwin concludes could be "a kind of self-punishment for her incestuous fantasy" (2003, 276). Again – I do not suggest that all interpretations that link sexual pleasure to alimentary pleasure are invalid. I do, however, understand Derwin as undertaking a symptomatic reading here, one that, per Best and Marcus's definition, "locate[s] outright absences, gaps, and ellipses in texts, and then ask[s] what those absences mean, what forces create them, and how they signify the questions that

motivate the text, but that the text itself cannot articulate" (2009, 3). In this way, it is also a suspicious reading, one in which, per Toril Moi, "the text is never what it seems, or never *only* what it seems" (2017, 189).

I aim, instead, to attend to what the text actually shows us: that Fisher harbours incestuous fantasies can *only* be read through the gaps and ellipses in the text, because it is certainly not evinced in the words themselves. Instead, I propose an alternative reading of this scene, and one in which sexual complexity does not feature. "P is for Peas" is about green peas. It is largely anecdotal, structured around the three key attributes that Fisher determines make good peas good: "they must be very green, they must be freshly gathered, and they must be shelled at the very last second of the very last minute" (2005, 121). The anecdote to follow is one in which the peas "met these three gastronomical requirements to a point of near-ridiculous exactitude" (2005, 121). Fisher plants the seeds for the peas whilst her house in Switzerland is still being built – after months of growing them, and with her parents visiting, Fisher sets the scene: on the terrace "sat most of the people in the world I loved", the sun was setting, and a cow in the neighbouring field "shook her bell in a slow, melodious rhythm, a kind of hymn" (2005, 125). The scene is sensuously evocative (taking sensuously to mean of the senses): it recalls sound, visuals, and later taste and smell. Fisher then describes the meal: "small brown roasted chickens lay on every plate… there was a salad of mountain lettuces. There was honest bread. There was plenty of limpid wine, the kind Brillat-Savarin said was like rock-water… there was cheese" (2005, 126). The segment concludes that what really mattered in the meal were the peas (Fisher 2005, 126). Fisher explains that her idea of heaven "that night, and this night too, is fresh green garden peas, picked and shelled by my friends, to the sound of a cowbell" (2005, 126). What would it mean to interpret this passage, rather than a protracted metaphor for Fisher's latent Oedipal desire, as instead an exemplar of the

way that Fisher understands food and its connection to memory, love, comfort, and pleasure? Peas – literal peas – are the seed and structure of this memory, not just its entry point: they are the thing that "really mattered" (Fisher 2005, 126). In Fisher's writing, food is not simply a vehicle for human connection and dignity, but an intrinsic part of it. The memory of the peas would not be as strong without the setting, and the setting would not be as important without the peas.

How, then, do we read Fisher? As Derwin suggests, Fisher's work explores the figural significance of hunger – but in Derwin's suspicious, symptomatic reading, the figural means only that the hunger for food is actually a hunger for sex. Instead, we might take what Heather Love calls a "close but not deep" approach, one in which we consider "what texts do say, rather than what they don't or can't" (2010, 383). And what Fisher does say paints a more complex, richly illustrated vision of human hunger than one that simply equates food and sex. In Fisher's world (and contrary to much of the scholarship on her), hunger, desire, pleasure, sensuality, and sex are not interchangeable terms. Fisher in fact clarifies this at certain points: she describes someone she knows who has "so simplified his concept of human hunger and its quelling that he considers the act of taking food as necessary and intimate as any other function, like defecation or sexual play" (2002, 50). To Fisher, this is neither reasonable nor healthy (2002, 50). But as with the abovementioned passage from *The Gastronomical Me*, *The Art of Eating* is full of assertions about what food and hunger mean to Fisher – she is constantly telling her readers what it means. As Moi explains, "there simply is no need to think of texts and language as hiding something" (2017, 191). When we conceive of Fisher's writing as hiding an undercurrent of sexuality, we miss what she is actually telling us. As Fisher explains in the introduction to *An Alphabet for Gourmets*:

> It is apparently impossible for me to say anything about gastronomy, the art and

> science of satisfying one of our three basic human needs, without involving myself in what might be called side issues – might be, that is, by anyone who does not believe, as I do, that it is futile to consider hunger as a thing separate from people who are hungry (2005, xix).

We can see this in action, also in *An Alphabet for Gourmets*, in the chapter "R is for Romance" (2005, 143). Fisher clarifies that in this chapter, when she speaks of passion, it is "not the lasting fire I felt for my father once when I was about seven and we ate peach pie together" nor "the equally lasting fire I felt for a mammoth woman who brought milk toast" when Fisher was ill (2005, 143). From this, we can understand Fisher to be speaking not to the incestuous fantasy of passion for her father, but rather clarifying that food and emotion come in many forms, and in this chapter she happens to be talking about "the height of emotional play between the two sexes" (2005, 143). As Erin L. Branch explains:

> desire for Fisher is not simply an uncomplicated, aimless physical need, but rather desire is the multifaceted hunger described above;[12] it is a composite of our hunger for food, for security, for love. The topos of practical self-education grounds Fisher's argument that the appeasement of such hunger requires a thoughtful, systematic approach that satisfies empirically, emotionally, and intellectually, and that is grounded within the self (2012, 67).

This chapter explains Fisher as a child having a crush on a boy called Red, and him gifting her a chocolate called a "Cheriswete" (2005, 145). After a tumultuous eight-year-old courtship involving sneering and mockery, this seals the deal for young Fisher, and she states, "my heart was full. I knew at last that I loved Red. I was his, to steal a phrase. We belonged together, a male and female who understood the gastronomical urge. I never saw him again" (2005, 145). The remainder of the chapter is about milk toast, and the kinds of soul-soothing foods to eat when ill. Perhaps this is a curious way to approach a chapter on romance – but I believe it is perfectly aligned to Fisher's model of gastronomy. Firstly, she is funny – and has

[12] "Described above" refers to the passage introducing *The Gastronomical Me*: "people ask me:…" (Fisher 1989, ix).

no trouble poking fun at her young self and the turmoil of childhood love. That she should use this as an example for romance is to both recognise the moments in our lives where food is important while simultaneously not taking it too seriously. It is also in keeping with Fisher's understanding of the ways that love and food intertwine: sometimes the most romantic food we can eat is the food prepared for us by a loved one when we are ill.

Taking both Fisher and Branch at face value provides an alternative framework for analysing the "topos of practical self-education", in this case, in regard to potatoes in *The Gastronomical Me* as a symbol both for Fisher's burgeoning gastronomic palate and for her pleasure in eating (Branch 2012, 67). Fisher's process of reviewing and confirming her own culinary instincts is backed up by her experiences eating in France, where, it seems, the entire history of French cuisine is there to substantiate her suspicions. Recalling a meal in her early days in France, Fisher says that "one important thing happened" when they are served a souffle of potatoes (1989, 51). The important thing, for Fisher, is that the dish is served as its own course, and this prompts "a secret justification… a pride such as I've seldom known since, because all my life, it seemed, I had been wondering rebelliously about potatoes" (1989, 51). Fisher muses that her general uninterest in potatoes is, in fact, an uninterest in the way "they were always treated. I felt that they *could* be good, if they were cooked respectfully" (1989, 51). She explains:

> At home we had them at least once a day, with meat. You didn't say Meat, you said Meat-and-potatoes. They were mashed, baked, boiled, and when Grandmother was away, fixed in a casserole with cream sauce and called, somewhat optimistically, O'Brien. It was shameful, I always felt, and stupid too, to reduce a potentially important food to such a menial position… and to take time every day to cook it, doggedly, with perfunctory compulsion (1989, 51).

Here, we see the way that food and writing interact in Fisher's work. Potatoes are personified – those of her childhood (and by extension, America) are disrespected, lowly, their treatment induces shame. In the souffle, they are "hot, light, with a brown crust, and probably chives and grated Parmesan cheese" (Fisher 1989, 51). Though not the most extensive description, it is certainly removed from the sarcastic 'optimism' of the potato casserole. Most importantly, these potatoes are severed from the Meat-and-, an imaginative and literal distinction that allows the ingredient to be respected as its own course. The implication, too, is that Fisher had always suspected potatoes of greatness but never had the avenue to validate her suspicions. As soon as she is in France – in the "first really French restaurant I had ever been in" – her suspicions are proven (1989, 51). As Julie Campbell explains, "France gave her permission to give more credit to her own discerning taste" (1997, 184).

Later, Fisher explains a significant culinary experience – eating potatoes – when she and Al travel to Strasbourg. Fisher is served a bowl of potato chips:

> not the uniformly thin uniformly golden ones that come out of waxed bags here at home, but light and dark, thick and paper-thin, fried in real butter and then salted casually with the *gros sal* served in the country with the *pot-au-feu*. They were so good that I ate them with the kind of slow sensuous concentration that pregnant women are supposed to feel for chocolate-cake-at-three-in-the-morning… It seems impossible, but the fact remains that it was one of the keenest gastronomic moments of my life" (1989, 111-112).

Though she is about to dine with Al (and in fact acknowledges that the bowl of chips spoils her appetite for the dinner), Fisher eats the potato chips in a "strange private orgy of enjoyment" (1989, 112). Fisher uses "orgy" here, and not for the only time in her writing. For example, she explains returning to Marseille in 1932 and "the prospect of one final orgy of real *bouillabaisse*" (1989, 119). The use of "orgy" is an understandable starting point for conflating Fisher's culinary enjoyment with sexual enjoyment. But what if the use of "orgy"

is simply a stylistic choice, not standing in for something else but a descriptor of the experience of eating these chips? Best and Marcus explain that surface reading attends to what is "evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts… a surface is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*" (2009, 9). With this in mind and locating "orgy" in the context of the passage as a whole, what is evident and apprehensible is Fisher taking immense gustatory pleasure in a bowl of potato chips. For Best and Marcus, "depth is continuous with surface and is thus an effect of immanence": rather than reading depth into the use of "orgy", we can instead understand that eating, in this scene and in Fisher's work more broadly, is not a metaphor for another sensory experience – it *is* the sensory experience (2009, 11).

Potatoes, now, are not just their own course, but Fisher's pleasure in eating them is its own private experience. In some ways her instincts about potatoes are validated even further, for this is a preparation and dining experience as far removed from the meat-and- of suburban America as could be. Instead of "perfunctory compulsion", there is the compulsion of a pregnant woman craving chocolate – a full-bodied, purely sensory experience. The potatoes in this scene are not just a far cry from American potato chips, but also from the "mashed, baked, boiled" potatoes of Fisher's youth (Fisher 1989, 51). Fisher's description is textural (light and dark, thick and paper-thin), sensorily evocative (fried in real butter and then salted casually), and rhythmic; it mirrors the "slow, sensuous concentration" with which Fisher savours the chips (1989, 111-112).

The experience of eating the potato chips is just one in a string of descriptions of Fisher enjoying food in ways that reconfigure traditional expectations of women's hunger. As Lazar explains, "appetite, the pleasures of the palate, developing and empowering one's ability to

discriminate among the varieties of sensation served forth, are surrounded by the actual complications of mortality, gender, history, and culture" (1992, 524). Bordo's work on hunger provides context as to what some of these complications are. Bordo establishes a tripartite model that she suggests has underpinned ideologies of gender and eating: "woman-food-man, with food expressing the woman's love for the man and at the same time satisfying woman's desire to bestow love" (2003, 125). In this model, when women eat "in the form of private, *self*-feeding", it is considered a stand-in for human love (Bordo 2003, 126). Fisher confounds these expectations in multiple ways: firstly, she is out to dinner with her husband and not cooking for him, the meal is outside of the private, domestic realm. Secondly, despite her husband's presence, Fisher eats the chips in a "strange private orgy" (1989, 112). Though Bordo speaks to women's private self-feeding, Fisher's experience here should not be taken as an example: her enjoyment is private and personal, but her eating is public – by suggestion not even her husband is participating. Thirdly, though a heterosexual couple dining together in a restaurant carries its own gendered implications of chivalry and romance, Fisher's meditative enjoyment of the chips spoils her appetite for the dinner. And then there is the embodied experience of hunger. Bordo argues that "women are permitted to lust for food itself only when they are pregnant or when it is clear they have been near starvation" (2003, 110). That Fisher should use the metaphorical pregnant woman to describe her enjoyment of the chips supports Bordo's claim. But Fisher isn't pregnant in this scene – nor is she near starvation, nor self-pityingly eating in her own private shame as an antidote to heartache. Despite its brevity, this passage is a layered examination of what it might look like for a woman to eat, with pleasure, in public, and only for herself.

Conclusion

As I established in this thesis's introduction, gastronomic literature has necessarily excluded women. But Fisher is an outlier in that she is the only writer in this study who has been understood as authoring gastronomic literature both at the time of her works' publication, and posthumously. It is *because* she has been recognised as creating gastronomic literature that Fisher makes an excellent case study for understanding how gender has influenced the way that we read food writing.

Fisher demonstrates what a female gastronome looks like in two ways. In the first, she presents a body of work that both self-consciously adopts the philosophy of gastronomic literature – as in texts like *Serve it Forth* and, to a lesser extent, *Consider the Oyster* – and which emulates gastronomic literature's stylistic features. Fisher does this through fusing myriad genres, through her distinctive first-person narrative voice that is at once humorous, opinionated, and intimate, and through a multi-layered intertextuality that sees Fisher's oeuvre (but specifically the texts in *The Art of Eating*) in conversation with one another, repeating and adapting the same memories, recipes, and experiences for different means. Branch argues that key to Fisher's gastronomic literature is a specifically rhetorical feminine style, defined by writing which "frequently involves anecdotes, personal examples, and inductive reasoning" (2017, "Gastronomical Kairos", n.p.). In this way, argues Branch, Fisher's work is exemplary of "feminist rhetorical practice… while she employed strategies we now associate with a feminine style, she frequently wrote about topics – such as pleasure and desire – which were usually associated only with men's writing about food" (2017, "Gastronomical Kairos", n.p.). And Fisher herself often plays into her own perceived gender exceptionalism: explicitly placing herself in contrast to other (domesticated) women. This is achieved both through asides about "housewives" and an elusiveness about her own gender,

whether because of the way she uses first person pronoun or the marketing of her books as – initially – male-authored.

This fusion, of the "feminine" and the "masculine", leads us to the second way in which Fisher shows us what a female gastronome looks like, and that is by understanding how the scholarly record has interpreted and analysed her writing in an environment where the only framework through which to parse it is a masculine one. Fisher's looks and sexuality are endlessly invoked in scholarship about her, an invocation that I have argued generates readings that actively ignore the complex model of hunger that Fisher posits. In these readings, Fisher's innuendo and suggestive language are not markers of her sense of humour but instead demonstrative of an uncontained passion, a passion that extends to both her sexual and gustatory appetites. Felski asks, "why is it that critics are so quick off the mark to interrogate, unmask, expose, subvert, unravel, demystify, destabilize, take issue, and take umbrage? What sustains their assurance that a text is withholding something of vital importance, that their task is to ferret out what lies concealed in its recesses and margins?" (2015, 5). As this chapter has demonstrated, scholarship of Fisher's writing has often proceeded from this assumption – that her texts, and particularly the food within her texts, are withholding something. The reading I propose instead understands the food in Fisher's writing for what she tells us it is – one point in a constellation of associations that cannot be distilled into a simple one-for-one placeholder between, say, hunger and sexuality. Through her gastronomic literature, Fisher presents a coherent, though complex, aesthetics of appetite. In her own words, "there is food in the bowl, and more often than not, because of what honesty I have, there is nourishment in the heart, to feed the wilder, more insistent hungers. We must eat. And, if in the face of that dread fact, we can find other nourishment, and tolerance and compassion for it, we'll be no less full of human dignity," (Fisher, 1989, ix).

This model, in Branch's terms, is one in which Fisher's "influence has been considerable in large part because she helped us to see eating not simply, as she said, a "thrice-daily necessity" but instead as a practice imbued with deep emotional, spiritual, and social meanings" (2017, "Gastronomical Kairos", n.p.). The depth of these emotional, spiritual and social meanings is glossed over in scholarship that concerns itself only with subverting, unravelling, and demystifying. Fisher's gender is thus always "there" in her writing – her role as a gastronome made more legible because she is not like other women, and because she has been understood as possessing of a deviant sexuality that makes sense of her hungers. In the chapters that follow, I will turn to three authors who also distinguish themselves against the "typical" female cook, but who themselves have not been classed as producers of gastronomic literature. In the first instance, Julia Child, who – despite working in similar times and places to Fisher – was never sexualised in the same way.

Chapter Two – Julia Child

Introduction

Julia Child was an American chef, cookbook author, culinary instructor, television host and writer whose vast body of work spans the 1960s until the posthumous publication of *My Life in France* in 2006. As the book describes, the Childs moved to Paris in 1948 when Julia's husband Paul was offered a job there as cultural attaché (2006, 6). Though *My Life in France* is primarily a recollection of the impact of her time in France on her life more broadly, much of Child's fame is attached to her television personality on *The French Chef*, and her cookbook *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (henceforth *Mastering*), which she co-authored with Louisette Bertholle and Simone Beck. *The French Chef* ran from 1963 to 1973, and as Dana Polan explains, though *Mastering* is engaging and entertaining, "no specific personality emerges from behind it… but once one has seen Child on *The French Chef*, she is impossible to forget" (2011, 26-27). Child's contribution to gastronomic literature might easily be overshadowed by her more prominent offerings to the culinary world: she was a graduate of the prestigious Cordon Bleu culinary institute (and the only female student in her cohort) (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 120); best-selling cookbook author; pioneering television cooking show host; co-founder of Boston University's gastronomy program (Metropolitan College 2025). Chronologically, though a working contemporary and, later, friend of Fisher's, *My Life in France* is the latest publication of all the texts in this thesis. This trajectory makes sense: as a piece of life writing, *My Life in France* looks back on a storied career and exceptional life. Given the momentum that food-focused life writing has gained in the twenty-first century, it also makes sense that *My Life in France* was published in 2006. The timing of this output is, I believe, an excellent justification for reading *My Life*

in France as gastronomic literature: though not published until later in Child's life, its philosophy is nonetheless legitimised by her extensive career and experience in food. In other words, it is the very success of Child's other culinary pursuits and the authority they bestow upon her that inform and fortify her foray into gastronomic literature.

Though, as I have demonstrated, Fisher has been more readily understood as a gastronome than Child, *My Life in France* nonetheless shares a number of features with Fisher's writing, features that recall and reflect the tenets of gastronomic literature. Fisher and Child were contemporaries – and later, friends – who both moved from California to France with their husbands. For both Child and Fisher, France was the site of their culinary education and the inception of a lifelong dedication to the philosophy and enjoyment of food. Like Fisher's work, and, as I will later show, Colwin and Ephron's, *My Life in France* is generically complex. Like Fisher, Colwin, and Ephron, Child cannot easily be subsumed into the category of domestic housewife – the figure that otherwise dominated women's food writing in the mid-twentieth century. In this chapter, however, instead of making sense of the unusualness of a female being easily categorised as a gastronome, I will argue that Child's *My Life in France* can and should join Fisher's work as an example of gastronomic literature. *My Life in France* is essentially structured as a life writing text, but it is about more than Child's experience writing a cookbook. In addition to its descriptions of cooking and eating, this is a text where food not only comprises the bulk of the content but is used as a narrative device – and these are two components that are often inextricable from one another.

In *My Life in France*, food is a complete mode of communication: a way of expressing love, friendship, curiosity and the self. As a mode of communication, food is not simply a metaphor for other desires, but is also, always, food for food's sake. It is this vocabulary,

combined with Child's persona and the way she is situated in relation to gastronomic cultures that contribute to my argument that *My Life in France* is a work of gastronomic literature. To demonstrate these components of the text, I first look back to *Mastering* to contextualise Child's authority as a culinary figure, and to emphasise the ways that, even at her most "traditional" (writing a domestic cookbook), Child's output defies contemporary gender expectations. I then turn to Child's persona as delivered through *The French Chef* and *My Life in France*, emphasising the ways that they put forth a persona for whom cooking and eating generate an enthusiastic intellectual engagement, technical challenge, and self-expression. I then address the way that food and language intertwine in *My Life in France*, firstly through the incorporation of embedded recipes and then through the use of elaborate descriptions of food. Finally, I look at Child's positioning in the material culture of her time: not a housewife and yet not outside of the domestic sphere; tangential to, but not wholly absorbed within, French gastronomic groups. To read *My Life in France* as "just" life writing is to effectively disregard a central component of the book's content: food. Instead, recognising *My Life in France* as a contribution to gastronomic literature enables a broader conception of how life writing and food writing might interact, and how gender has come to bear on this interaction.

"A Very American Stomach in Paris": Mastering the Art of French Eating

Though this chapter will focus on *My Life in France*, it is worth spending some time here to consider Child's most famous piece of culinary writing: *Mastering (vol I and II)* (published in 1961 and 1970 respectively). On publication, *Mastering* was both a critical and commercial success, selling over 100,000 copies within its first five years in print (Reardon 2005, 62). Craig Claiborne in the *New York Times* called it "the most comprehensive,

laudable and monumental work" on French cooking (1961); Michael Field claimed that the book "surpasses every other American book on French cooking in print today" (1965). *Mastering* brought Child "celebrity and adulation" (Polan 2011, 37), and though Polan contextualises it as "majestic… in its historical moment" the books have maintained enduring success (2011, 26). Indeed, following the release of Nora Ephron's 2009 film *Julie and Julia*, *Mastering* sales surged, and it debuted at number 1 on the New York Times bestseller list some 48 years after its initial publication (Clifford 2009). *My Life in France* tells the story of Child's passion for French cuisine, and in doing so tells the story of how *Mastering* came to be.

When Child first encounters the book that would become *Mastering*, it is already in production with two French co-authors, Louisette Bertholle and Simone Beck. Child's participation begins as a kind of cultural advisor: taking the essential methodologies and ideologies behind classical French cooking and translating them for an American audience. The clarity of her translation is key to *Mastering*'s success: Field writes that "for once, the architectural structure of the French cuisine is firmly and precisely outlined in American terms" (1965); for Claiborne, *Mastering* doesn't "concede to U.S. tastes" but rather "is simply written for persons who enjoy cuisine" (1961). Child's project with *Mastering* was not just to make French cooking accessible to American cooks, but to provide essential context about the science of cooking: to "explain, if possible, why things work one way but not another" (2006, 146). Such explanations involve considerations of varying climates, ingredient availability, and cooking standards. As Branch explains, "Child and Beck present themselves as middlemen between culinary experts and novice home cooks to clarify opaque

French cooking techniques" (2015, 174).[13] Child speaks of the rigorous experience recipe testing, editing, and writing *Mastering,* explaining, "I found the process of getting recipes into scientific workability absolutely fascinating" (2006, 137).

Assessing how Child approached the co-authoring of a cookbook at a time when female-authored cookbooks were philosophically and stylistically domestic in focus shows that she never neatly aligned to contemporary expectations of female food figures. One way that Child does this is her marriage to her husband Paul. Child is married, but not until later in life. The Childs move to France because of Paul's job. When there, Julia is initially unemployed – so, perhaps, a housewife. Soon in need of stimulus, she ventures out into Paris and eventually lands on culinary school – not to improve her status as the provider of home-cooked meals to her husband, but for her own interest. Prior to this, she speaks candidly of her ineptitude in the kitchen, and the Childs have an in-house chef – certainly, then, not a housewife in the sense of keeping home for her husband. Paul, by all accounts, is nothing but encouraging of her pursuit of the culinary world: he writes to his twin brother Charlie that "the sight of Julie in front of her stove full of boiling, frying and simmering foods has the same fascination for me as watching a kettle-drummer at the Symphony" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 78). Famously, Child's initial experience in the women's classroom at the Cordon Bleu moved too slowly for her, and she was soon progressed as the only female in a classroom full of GIs. She wrote a domestic cookbook that operated as a kind of soft-power cultural translation between postwar France and postwar America.

[13] Branch references Child and Beck only, because Bertholle would not join Beck and Child for Vol II of *Mastering* (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 274)

This was a far cry from contemporary cookbooks like Peg Bracken's 1960 *I Hate to Cook Book* (Neuhaus 1999, 544) or the countless booklets published by "freezer, blender, mixer, cutlery, and electric range companies… to help convey the convenience of their products" (Neuhaus 1999, 533). Such publications appealed to women through an acknowledgement of the effort of cooking for their families, instead promising a way of cooking that privileged economy without sacrificing nutrition or taste. As Katherine Parkin explains, mid-century cooking paraphernalia "advocated changes in cooking practices, including increasing its efficiency and moving it out of the home altogether" (2015, 53). Child is perplexed by these convenience foods when she arrives back in America in 1956: "instant cake mixes, TV dinners, frozen vegetables, canned mushrooms, fish sticks, Jell-O salads, marshmallows, spray-can whipped cream, and other horrible glop" (2006, 225). This "horrible glop" is representative of exactly the change in cooking practices Parkin speaks of – all Child can see is "products labeled "gourmet" that were not" (2006, 225). In America, the supermarket is full of brands, by contrast, Child is used to shopping in the market.

Mastering, rather than making the cooking process as convenient as possible, aimed to draw its readers right back to the kitchen: not for the purpose of cooking for one's family, but because, in Child's words, the best way to bridge the cultural divide between France and America was through an emphasis on "the basic rules of cooking… not least of which was the importance of including *fun* and *love* in the preparation of a meal!" (2006, 231). Caroline B. Barta explains that Child, Bertholle and Beck presented cooking not "as either a daily grind or as an elite, exclusive pastime" but as "a fulfilling hobby. Time in the kitchen, they insist, could lift the harried housewife's spirits and offer intellectual satisfaction" (2021, 95). To this point in *My Life in France*, Child has emphasised the importance of fun and love in cooking – it is easy to miss how revolutionary an approach she is taking. But as Parkin

explains, American food culture – and particularly advertising material – at the time "promoted the belief that food preparation was a gender-specific activity and that women should cook for others to express their love. This emphasis on giving was so complete that ads rarely portray women finding gratification in eating" (2015, 52). Child, on the other hand, "believed readers could aspire to be this sort of artistic housewife, much as she had been, who read cookbooks in bed much like one would devour popular works like detective fiction" (Barta 2021, 104). This vision was not one shared by the multiple publishing houses who considered *Mastering*: it is not surprising in this context, then, that it took eight years of back and forth before being accepted for publication (Child and Prud'homme, 2006). Barta explains that the precipitating factor for the book's acceptance was being found by Judith Jones at Knopf, who would go on to become Child's lifelong editor and friend.[14] Per Barta, Jones understood that Child, Bertholle and Beck's proposal in *Mastering* "appreciates and artfully overcomes the limitations of the American kitchen" (2021, 104). Child and Jones agreed that the book's reader was "a cook, not a trained professional hired by the household… for the book's first readers, this focus would have stood in clear contrast to the established portrait of the "servantless" American housewife" of contemporary cookbook (Barta 2021, 105).

Another defiance of expectation: cooking, for Child, was neither simply pedagogy nor passion, but career.[15] Importantly, this was something she attempted to share through her domestic cookbook – not nuclear-family propaganda but aiming to equip American housewives with the skills of proper (as Child believed French cooking to be) cooking. This

[14] Jones was a chronicled editor, first known for having recuperated *The Diary of Anne Frank* from the reject pile (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 244). *Mastering* was one of her most successful publications, but Jones was the editor for a host of culinary giants, James Beard, Marion Cunningham, Madhur Jaffrey, Claudia Roden, Edna Lewis, and Marcella Hazan, among others (McFadden 2017).

[15] Nancy Walker explains that a successful career as a writer (in Child's instance, cookbook writer) in the Postwar period was "by definition atypical" for women (1985, 99).

approach aligns more closely to a number of male-authored cookbooks from the early twentieth-century, in which "some authors differentiated themselves from the female home cook by declaring themselves innate gourmands who, like their nineteenth-century predecessors, wanted to help their readers hone an aesthetically nuanced palate" (McLean 2012, 94). And Paul was not just Julia's husband, but also her creative associate – she calls him her "trusty sous-chef/bottle-washer" (2006, 264). Paul also planned all the layouts of *Mastering*, and was Julia's official photographer. Their innovation is collaborative: Child explains that she and Paul "came up with a new way to illustrate the making of recipes… we thought, why not illustrate, say, the trussing of a chicken *from the cook's standpoint?*" (2006, 202). Child concludes, "I would cook something, Paul would photograph over my shoulder" (2006, 202). Even in her most traditional offering, Child's work sidesteps traditional expectations.

My Life in France reverse engineers many of the recipes in *Mastering*: as I will later argue, the inclusion of recipes in *My Life in France* are a crucial part of the text's generic play and thus a key component of its alignment with gastronomic literature. But providing insight into the recipe development in *Mastering* adds more complexity to these recipes. As with Fisher, this puts Child into conversation with her prior self – where Fisher self-styles as "editing" her past recipes, Child, in demonstrating the trials and tribulations of recipe development, imbues some of the personality that was otherwise missing from *Mastering*.[16] Take, for example, Child's explanation of developing the baguette recipe that would end up in *Mastering*. Child explains that, for example, French recipes use grams as measurements, where American recipes tend to use tablespoons – which throws off the proportions significantly. For Child,

[16] Polan explains of *Mastering* that "one can read it in vain for any biographically specific glimpse of the larger-than-life personality of Julia Child herself" (2011, 26).

this "was a process of discovering an important and overlooked step, and then devising our own rationally thought-out solution. In short, a triumph!" (2006, 146). Part of Child explaining writing the cookbook involves demonstrating all the complications she faces along the way. Developing a baguette recipe, for example, is described as "the Great French Bread Experiment, one of the most difficult, elaborate, frustrating, and satisfying challenges I have ever undertaken" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 279). The difficulty is due to two factors: American flour differs from French flour, and French bakers use traditional bread ovens, the conditions of which would need to be replicated in a domestic kitchen (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 279). The recipe development process took "two years and something like 284 pounds of flour", with the bread oven workaround involving a slab of asbestos cement, a pan of cold water, and a brick (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 280). When research emerges suggesting that asbestos is carcinogenic, Child must find a solution: "any new tile must be affordable and available to the average American" (2006, 312). These processes are embedded chronologically amongst the happenings of Child's life, emphasising the centrality of *Mastering* to her experience of France: instead of there being a "bread" chapter, for example, the full extent of the bread process from conception to conclusion crops up amongst travel back and forth from France to the US, visits from James Beard, meals the Childs ate, Paul's photographs for *Mastering*, and so on.

By revealing the process of her recipe development, Child is not simply personalising *Mastering*, she is also speaking to questions of culinary authenticity. For example: the development of the bouillabaisse recipe that would end up in *Mastering*. Child explains that, having mastered fish soup, she sets her sights on perfecting Marseille's classic dish, bouillabaisse, "a fish chowder; a local fisherman would make it with whatever he had at hand" in order to include it in *Mastering* (2006, 191). Variations on the dish abound: "some

were made with a water base and flavored with nothing but saffron, whereas others were quite elaborate, based on a fish stock… and were chock-full of mussels and scallops and fennel and such" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 191). Child thus asks, "so what was the Real McCoy bouillabaisse recipe?" (2006, 191) Recipe is a form necessarily prone to adaptation and amendment, often morphing considerably over time. Child explains that she would ask around for the "true recipe" – more to experience "French dogmatism" than anything else (2006, 191). This anecdote speaks to the core tension of recipes and their authenticity: even in the birthplace of a recipe, it will vary, but even so each recipe author might consider theirs to be the authentic one. Despite her agreeable fascination with "French dogmatism", and her explanation of all the ways that bouillabaisse recipes differ, Child still asks the question: which is the real one? Child ultimately concludes that "*to me*" [emphasis mine] bouillabaisse is defined by a combination of Provençal soup base (garlic, onions, tomatoes, olive oil, fennel, saffron, thyme, bay, dried orange peel) and fish (2006, 191). The recipe for bouillabaisse in *Mastering* begins with the guidance that "you can make as dramatic a production as you want out of a bouillabaisse, but remember it originated as a simple, Mediterranean fisherman's soup" (Beck, Bertholle, and Child 2009, 45). In *Mastering*, the recipe contains: olive oil, onion, leek, garlic, tomato, fennel, orange peel, saffron, and fish (Beck, Bertholle, and Child 2009, 43-44). The final published version aligns almost exactly to the version Child explains above: regardless of the authenticity debate, she chooses the version of the recipe that most aligns to her own take on bouillabaisse.

As I will demonstrate in a later chapter, this kind of repetition across texts occurs across Ephron's oeuvre. But, whereas for Ephron I argue that repetition links her media as parts of a broader gastronomic project, for Child the repetition of these recipes solidify her expertise in the culinary world. In *My Life in France*, Child guides the reader through her own journey

with authenticity and recipes: when she lists the variations for bouillabaisse we share in her frustration at the impossibility of a "true" version. But in *Mastering*, Child's tone is authoritative and almost flippant: discouraging readers and home cooks from overcomplicating the recipe, but without the context that she, too, once found it daunting. In *My Life in France*, Child is not calling her readers to the kitchen with the same authority she does in *Mastering* – rather, the authority of *My Life in France* is one of a learned culinary expert. By including her experiences writing the cookbook, Child is not just recounting the events of her life, but is engaging with the complexities of the culinary world.

When considering what makes *My Life in France* gastronomic literature, the role of writing *Mastering* is almost self-referential: the memoir ostensibly provides behind-the-scenes insight into the writing of one of the world's most famous cookbooks, but the existence of this cookbook in the memoir helps to cement it as life writing that is fundamentally about food. *My Life in France* traces Child's trajectory from her arrival in France as an enthusiastic but naïve culinary outsider, to her training at Le Cordon Bleu, her connection with the Parisian gastronomic scene, to her ultimately translating her knowledge to an American audience through *Mastering*. This cookbook is the material representation of Child as cultural conduit – Polan explains that "the Frenchness she offered up… was Americanized to the core. Much of the cultural work that an action figure such as Julia Child performed in the period was to mediate an American go-getter, frontier spirit and a European concern with aesthetic refinement" (2011, 36). Though Polan refers here to *The French Chef*, the sentiment is true of *Mastering* as well: Child was enough of an insider in French culture to write a book on its cuisine, enough of an insider in American culture to make that cuisine comprehensible to its home cooks. As we've seen, Smith and Watson explain that food memoirs might "conjoin the story of preparing and eating food with the discovery of a vocation" (2010, 148).

Child's irreverence and humility in *My Life in France* often belie the extraordinariness of her career, but this is a text that undeniably fits Smith and Watson's definition: from the Cordon Bleu, to *Mastering*, to Child's show *The French Chef*, as readers we are guided through an extensive, dynamic, and ultimately iconic career.

"Never Apologise": Reading the French Chef

My Life in France recounts the Childs' experiences as American expatriates in Europe, starting in the late 1940s and concluding with the sale of their Provence house in the 1980s. This is a book that melds stories of travel and expatriate life; of family history and political history; of text with photographs; narrative with letters; all of which constitutes a generic slipperiness not unusual in life writing. Like much life writing, *My Life in France* is generically "prismatic… prone to morphing, to play, to crisscross" (Di Summa-Knoop 2017, 1). Unlike with Fisher's work, and similarly to Colwin and Ephron, critics reach no easy consensus about what kind of text *My Life in France* is. The book has broadly been categorised as a memoir, including on its dustjacket, but also in the *New York Times* (May 28, 2006), NPR (June 8, 2006) and *Kirkus Reviews* (May 19, 2010), and in *The Guardian* it is termed "autobiography" (November 21, 2022). Smith and Watson recognise food-focused life writing, which they call "gastrography", as "new-model narratives of embodiment", explaining that the growing interest in life writing and materiality has brought into focus topics like food that had formerly been at life writing's margins (2010, 148). For Smith and Watson, gastrography can take many forms, and each one "enables new reflections about the interplay of production and consumption" (2010, 148). In the breadth of gastrographies, some texts combine food with finding a career – Smith and Watson place *My Life in France* in this category, explaining that it "mingles travel memoir with the story of collaboratively writing

the cookbook that brought her international fame" (2010, 148). Smith and Watson use the Baena's term "gastrography" (2010, 148). Where Smith and Watson use "gastrography" to classify *My Life in France*, I reiterate the importance of instead understanding Child's work as gastronomic literature, understanding gastrography as a form of gastronomic literature but not all gastronomic literature as an example of gastrography. In this instance, Baena's work helps to expand specifically upon the interaction between food, identity formation and self-expression in life writing, which is a relationship crucial to understanding Child. But reading *My Life in France* beyond gastrography and as an example of gastronomic literature benefits both our classification of the text (since it locates it directly within the social context of gastronomic groups), and our understanding of gastronomic literature (by pointing to the explicit gender exclusions which defined, and thus limited it). Since Julia Child is one of the culinary world's most famous female figures, the book is also an opportunity to understand how gender functions in the food writing/life writing relationship.

Whilst I agree that this book is arguably an example of life writing, food – the cooking, eating, preparation, ritual, culture and enjoyment – is the thematic constant. In *My Life in France*, food is the vehicle through which Child communicates her relationships, her memories, and herself. Child opens the book by explaining that it is about the things she has loved the most in life: her husband, France, "and the many pleasures of cooking and eating" (2006, 3). And so, though a title like *My Life in France* might suggest a text organised around travel, France, in Child's own words, "marked a crucial period of transformation in which I found my true calling, experienced an awakening of the senses" (2006, 3). France becomes largely inextricable from French cuisine and the monumental role it came to occupy in her life. In *My Life in France*, food is central: not just as content but as narrative device. This centrality, combined with a style that blends seamlessly between genres, provides an

opportunity to understand the text beyond memoir or autobiography. As such, this chapter will demonstrate that *My Life in France* – a text forged in the context of gastronomy but with a distinctly female experience – can and should be read alongside Fisher's work as gastronomic literature. To read *My Life in France* as such firmly places the book within the specific culinary and literary context in which it belongs, but also contributes to – and thus helps to flesh out – a more comprehensive understanding of woman-authored gastronomic literature.

Co-authored with Child's nephew Alex Prud'homme, *My Life in France* was written using the Childs' correspondence from their years in France. Despite the existence of a co-author, this very much reads as an insight into the life and mind of Julia Child. In Polan's words it is "a joyful, even wacky, world for which she sets the terms" (2011, 2). Polan is specifically referring to Child's persona as represented in *The French Chef*, but *My Life in France* presents an identity consistent with the one viewers might be familiar with from the show. For Polan, part of this wacky joyfulness derived from Child's fundamental belief "that cooking should be enjoyed, and… that the best means to a person's self-realization in any domain… was through energetic engagement in vital activity" (2011, 25). In *My Life in France*, energetic engagement with cooking is not just the summation of the book's content but is reflected in Child's writing style. The text is peppered with exclamations, ranging from "what fun! What a revelation!" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 68) to "oh, those were such fine, fat, full-flavored birds from Bresse" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 48); "oh, *crise de foie*, that French sole was so delicious!" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 75) and "oh, the glamour of Paris!" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 33). As well as the repetition of these phatic expressions ("oh" and "what"!), *My Life in France* is full of exclamation points and one-word asides – "whew!" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 81) – that flow through the

narrative. Whether in a moment of breathless delight (as with the birds from Bresse) or difficulty ("*merde alors*, and *flûte!')* Child renders herself as a person of energy and enthusiasm, particularly as it relates to the culinary (2006, 111). Like Fisher and her revisions of *How to Cook a Wolf*, these kinds of asides colloquialise Child. As readers we feel as though we are gaining insight into Child's character, how she actually speaks and acts. For viewers of *The French Chef*, this persona would indeed feel consistent with the television host who lined up seven chicken carcasses on her bench and dubbed them "the chicken sisters: Miss Broiler, Miss Fryer, Miss Roaster, Miss Caponette, Miss Stewer, and Old Madam Hen" (Child 1971). Rachel Trousdale, describing "Bergsonian humor", explains that laughter is not "a dyadic relation between laugher and object of laughter, but as a social phenomenon, in which laughter at an object can join us pleasurably to fellow laughers" (2021, 6). We might see the Chicken Sisters in this light: Child is not asking her audience to laugh *at* her, but, in literally playing with her food, to understand the social phenomena of food as something that can be enjoyable, fun. Even for those unacquainted with Child's expressive passionateness it is difficult to read such a sustained demonstration of excitement without sharing in the joy: if not for the food, then for Child herself.

Child also generates a communion of joy with the reader through a lightly self-deprecating sense of humour that carefully never crosses into self-abasement – we understand that though Child is deeply serious about her craft, she is never too serious about herself. Take, for example, what Child calls her "ersatz eggs Florentine" (2006, 77), "the most vile eggs Florentine one could imagine outside of England" (2006, 76). Child explains that the eggs are due to a series of mishaps arising from guesses and substitutions, like Fisher and the Hindu eggs, Child "had gotten a little too self-confident for [her] own good" (2006, 76). And so though her description of the dish is fairly incriminating: "horrid", and a repetition of "truly

vile", Child uses the opportunity to espouse some of her cooking philosophy (2006, 77). She says, "usually one's cooking is better than one thinks it is", but if not "the cook must simply grit her teeth and bear it with a smile – and learn from her mistakes" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 77). This balance between comedy (the drama of terms such as horrid and vile), pragmatic self-critique (overconfidence leading to error), and self-actualisation from persistence (gritting one's teeth and bearing it) recurs throughout the revelation of Child's career, whether as a beginner or as the culinary professional she would become. It is crucial to the way *My Life in France* generates identification with the reader: Child is not so important as to be above humour; not so superhumanly talented as to be without error; and achieves her success through a commitment to her craft. In Trousdale's words, humour "can be uniquely effective at creating communities of like-minded readers and writers, and, more surprisingly, at teaching us to understand other people" (2021, 1). Child creates community in this way: the impression is that if she can do it, we can too – never mind that she is one of the world's foremost culinary experts. Comedy is another trait Fisher and Child share, but where Fisher is provocative, Child's humour errs on silliness.

As Barreca explains, women's "use of comedy is dislocating, anarchic and, paradoxically, unconventional" (2022, 6). Child and "The Chicken Sisters" on *The French Chef* is surely unconventional and a little dislocating (lining up chicken carcasses and presenting them as if in a pageant). Consider this move in the context of Sianne Ngai's "zany": "an aesthetic about performance as not just artful play but also affective labor" (2010, 948). As an aesthetic category, Ngai explains, zaniness is "most sharply brought out in performance: dance, theater, happenings, television, film", which makes it particularly apt for the way that Child interacts with food visually – pointing at it with a knife, lining ingredients up, literally playing with her food – and verbally – personifying her ingredients, naming them, talking to

them (2010, 950). But this slapstick translates to *My Life in France*, too, by virtue of Child's expressive writing style: rather than travelling, Child "whizzed" (2006, 94), she disembarks trains with a "WHOOOOSH!" (2006, 184). In the kitchen, she is a "Mad Scientist" (2006, 89) working in her "Roo de Loo laboratory" (*2*006, 147). In both scenarios, we can consider Child's sense of humour to be zany with regard to its "affective or physical effort" (Ngai 2010, 950). For the Child in *The French Chef*, cooking *is* a physical effort, but a joyous one that impresses upon its audience the importance of self-expression and enjoyment in the kitchen. For the Child in *My Life in France*, the affective effort is there, too – our attention as readers is captured and recaptured by what Child presents as fun: her cooking, her experimentation, even the ways that she moves around the world are presented as experiences to be enjoyed. Ngai emphasises that the zany, as a historical category based upon the Italian *zanni*, bridges "the worlds of cultural performance and service work", which takes on yet more pertinence considering Child's place as a cooking instructor (2010, 953). Perhaps, then, the zaniness is crucial to Child's pedagogy: it takes the cultural labour of domestic cooking and moves it away from drudgery and duty and towards self-expression, creativity, and fun. Where Fisher self-styles as cheeky but aloof, Child is buoyant and playful – but both approaches reframe the position of women food writers. Fisher provokes by ironically parroting – and in so doing, drawing attention to – the misogyny inherent in gastronomic texts. Child, conversely, demonstrates what a domestic kitchen might look like when grounded in gastronomic practice.

That Child can maintain both a sense of humour and a sense of authority allows her to simultaneously occupy the positions of amateur and professional. The Child of *My Life in France* is one of hybrid identities, not just blending amateurish and professional cooking, but

also personas of gastronome and domestic cook, French and American, student and teacher. The flexibility of the book's genre reflects the hybrid identities that Child explores within it. These tensions are then mapped onto Child's writing style, which reflects her journey as a student of French language. In *My Life in France*, language, food, and Child's identity are closely connected. During the Childs' first meal in France, Julia tries her hand at some French: "“mairci, monsoor,” I said, with a flash of courage and an accent that sounded bad even to my own ear", in another example of her humorous but self-aware tone (2006, 19). Like exclamations, French words pepper Child's writing – not just as they pertain to proper nouns but in a way that both speaks to her growing vocabulary and decorates her sentences, infusing them with a sense of her personality as a Francophile. She explains, for example, that "computing *l'addition* all depended on which exchange rate you used" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 29), and introduces her cat as a "*poussiequette* we named Minette" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 38). In Child's recall of this time, her interest in French cuisine and French language are intertwined: she is first loaned the Ali-Bab cookbook by her language teacher (2006, 43). Food and language then converge as the market becomes the yardstick for Child's fluency: like Fisher in Dijon, learning about food is synonymous with learning about place, and there is no better classroom than the local market. Where she once managed through gestures and noises, her French evolves to the point where she "could actually carry on a lengthy conversation with the jolly olive man" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 43); her produce vendor teaches not just "which vegetables were best to eat, and when" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 44) but about "so-and-so's wartime experience, or where to get a watchband fixed" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 44). Child explains that these experience in the market "helped my French immeasurably, and also gave me the sense that I was part of a community" (2006, 44). This statement hints at a crucial component of Child's identity: that of a different kind of American, one who is fully immersed in the French lifestyle. Though

Child is not uncomfortable speaking to her ignorance of France prior to living there – "in Pasadena, California, where I was raised, France did not have a good reputation" (2006, 13) – she also describes her initial reaction to the country almost as a kind of homecoming, explaining that "I had only been in Paris for a few hours but already considered myself a native" (2006, 22).

Though there is something tongue-in-cheek to this statement, Child in many ways frames her commitment to France less as a cultural outsider attempting to assimilate to a new environment than as the realisation of a coming-of-age narrative, as if she had been French all along and only just discovered it. She has a disagreement with a friend that disturbs her because this friend hates Parisians, and for Child, "I had come to the conclusion that I must really *be* French" (2006, 58). As she continues to learn French cuisine and language, she explains that "now I knew that French food was *it* for me" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 59), "how magnificent to find my life's calling, at long last!" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 68), and "I was thirty-seven years old and still discovering who I was" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 72). It is these kinds of proclamations that help to position Child as the ideal translator between French and American culture – and yet for all her naturalisation Child is also unmistakeably American. Amongst her smatterings of French are persistent, and deeply American, exclamations: "yum!" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 19), "phooey!" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 23), "woe!" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 111), and "ha!" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 110) to name a few. And, at the heart of this, a deeply American adherence to the notion that hard work pays off – an ironic consideration when the goal of that hard work is to be more and more French. As Polan suggests, Child's approach acknowledged the "comparative advantages that the go-getter American way of life might bring to classic French cuisine": we might situate her Americanisms as one of these

advantages, since they temper the perceived rigidity of the French culinary world with familiar, even casual, speech (2011, 119).

One final dynamic to consider is the one between the authorial Child and the Child of her memories, since there is such a distinct difference in fame, skill level, and French fluency between the Child of 1948 and the Child writing the text. Fisher does this too, though often in much more explicit ways – such as her revisions in the reprint of *How to Cook a Wolf*. In the concluding paragraphs of *My Life in France*, Child explains "I tried to hold on to my impressions, but it was hopeless, as if I were trying to hold onto a dream" (2006, 332). While such a relationship might occur across life writing – the present day author recalling their younger selves – it is particularly pronounced for Child because, as she continues, "no matter. France was my spiritual homeland: it had become part of me, and I a part of it, and so it has remained ever since" (2006, 332). Polan argues that though *The French Chef* was not the first television cooking program, it was fundamental in bringing the phenomenon of the chef-as-personality to the public (2011, 34). Specifically, *The French Chef*, "rendered personality – or, at least, her personality – indispensable" (Polan 2011, 34). Essential to this personality was an infectious enthusiasm – particularly as a propagandist for French cuisine – and a considered, focused approach to pedagogy. Viewers would be familiar with the enthusiasm that delivers the final line of each episode, "this is Julia Child, bon appetit!" As Polan suggests, "one is tempted to imagine that this voice is unique and inimitable except that hearing it seems to lead so many listeners to feel impelled, precisely, to imitate it", referencing both Dan Aykroyd on *Saturday Night Live* and Nora Ephron's 2009 *Julia and Julia*, in which Meryl Streep plays Child (2011, 2).

Child, for many Americans, was the embodiment of her brand: "The French Chef", and *My Life in France* is the context that describes not just the writing of *Mastering* or the origins of the television series, but how it was she could be branded the French Chef in the first place. Given the groundwork Child lays in establishing France as the place where she truly finds her identity and her life's meaning, the conclusion of the text comes full-circle.[17] For Child, this revision is less specific: where Fisher will revise recipes and culinary opinions, Child is speaking to her younger self from further in the future than the few years between reprints. Not only does Child consider herself and France to be perpetually intertwined, that readers of *My Life in France* would know Child because of her career and her persona as The French Chef is a testament to the immense success of her trajectory. The authorial Child holds onto memories of her life as a dream, but for the Child of 1948 who exclaimed "oh, *la belle France*… I was already falling in love!" (2006, 15) the life that would follow, the sum of her life's work is that dream realised.

<u>Giving and Receiving: Reading Recipes</u>

In *My Life in France*, food is not simply part of the way that Child constructs her persona but is intertwined with the language she uses. Child includes numerous recipes in the book, all of which are embedded in the prose: not just in its layout but also in the narrative, as explicators and propellors of Child's story. Where in a traditional cookbook (like *Mastering*), recipes dictate the structure and purpose of the text, in *My Life in France* these recipes are prosaic, a

[17] Per Child, "after considering dozens of titles, we decided to call our little experiment *The French* Chef until we could come up with something better" (2006, 264). Polan elaborates on this point, explaining that "one motivation for the title *The French Chef* was that, as she [Child] put it, "I always hoped we would have some real French chefs on the show." In other words, she was not necessarily imagining herself as the french chef of the series; instead, she saw herself more modestly, as a facilitator of both the cuisine and the chefs who would demonstrate how to make it" (2011, 126). That Child has become synonymous with that French Chef speaks to the power of her legacy – again, per Polan, "what made *The French Chef* as it aired so powerful in its appeal was its concentration on Child, with the immensity of her personality, face to face with her insistent kitchen mission" (2011, 126).

way for Child to communicate her interest in and love of food. *My Life in France*'s use of recipes is unique amongst the texts in this study: it is the only one in which no "traditional" recipes feature.[18] The use of embedded recipes is consistent throughout all authors in this thesis: Fisher, Colwin and Ephron also use recipes in their writing as narrative devices that contribute to the revelation of the story. Some authors use metaphor, these authors use recipe. For example, Child describes her progress after a few months training at Le Cordon Bleu (2006, 74). In this passage, Child describes one of her favourite lessons under the tutelage of Chef Bugnard, whom she says: "was a wonder with sauces, and one of my favourite lessons was his *sole à la normande*. Put a half-pound of sole fillets in a buttered pan, place the fish's bones on top, sprinkle with salt and pepper and minced shallots" (2006, 74). The recipe continues: including measurements, ingredients, and a method, it has all the requisite elements of a recipe. And yet this is a potentially unfamiliar reading experience: *My Life in France* has been packaged and marketed as life-writing, and, though a flexible form, it is not one where readers necessarily expect to find recipes. Recipes usually follow a fairly standard format, and are typically signposted by other features of the book, including but not limited to its title, size and shape, layout, and so on – not just suitable for use in the kitchen, but explicitly designed for that purpose. In *My Life in France*, on the other hand, we confront recipes that perhaps are never intended to be cooked. Why, then, a recipe? Leonardi offers a suggestion of what such recipes might instead be doing (1989). Leonardi says that there is something specific to the "giving" of a recipe that goes beyond a simple list of ingredients and method (1989, 340). She argues that the root of "*recipe* – the Latin *recipere* – implies an exchange, a giver and a receiver. Like a story, a recipe needs a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be" (Leonardi 1989, 340). Here, Child gives her recommendation (this was

[18] *The Gastronomical Me* contains no "traditional" recipes – but as my Fisher chapter focuses on *The Art of Eating* as a whole, I am not counting *The Gastronomical Me* as a standalone book.

one of her favourite lessons) and a context (learning to cook at Le Cordon Bleu) and in doing so creates a considerably personal exchange: we read a recipe but we also gain insight into Julia Child and her experience at one of the world's most prestigious culinary institutes. The "exchange" gains an extra element when we consider Chef Bugnard: Child is the conduit for the reader to learn his recipe.

In this way, we can understand the recipes in *My Life in France* not necessarily as a call to action but instead as a way of building out a scene, developing "context" to Child's education in the kitchen (Leonardi 1989, 340). Sandra Gilbert interprets the giving and receiving of a recipe as a kind of gift, explaining that recipes "are culinary procedures that we've inherited from history, ancestral gifts meant to guide us through the mysteries of the kitchen" (2014, "The Pulse of the Kitchen", n.p.). If this recipe is one that Child intends her reader to cook, that reader is presumably already fairly proficient in the kitchen and capable of using experience and instinct to forgo the measurements and specificity omitted from these instructions. Instead, to think of this recipe in Gilbert's terms provides the reader the gift of a guide through the mysteries of the kitchen, a guide who in this case is Julia Child. Gilbert and Leonardi demonstrate how a recipe can be a language structure unto itself, a method of communicating. Read in tandem with Felski, who explains that "language is not a hurdle to be vaulted over in the pursuit of pleasure, but the essential means to achieving it", we can understand Child's recipes as one of the ways that she communicates the essential pleasure of the food she cooks (2008, 63). This communication has layers, too: Leonardi explains that in relaying the recipes of friends and family members, a cookbook reader encounters "a lively narrator with a circle of enthusiastic and helpful friends [which] reproduces the social context of recipe sharing" (1989, 342). In *My Life in France*, however, Child is not just sharing the recipes of her friends – with her insights into recipes from Le Cordon Bleu and the French

culinary elite, Child interrogates some of the distinction between the gastronomic establishment and the home cook, potentially with an aim to erode it.

For Leonardi, successful cookbooks maintain relevance because they create a story surrounding the recipe, and this allows the exchange between giver (author) and receiver (home cook) to take place (1989). In *My Life in France*, and indeed in gastrographies more broadly, the line between story and recipe is blurred as the recipe becomes part of the narrated life. As we can see in the above example, the recipe *is* the story, or at least inextricable from it. Kelly explains that while in a culinary autobiography "it may appear that the recipes interrupt the stories or vice versa, the combination of the two elements actually provides a strong framework for organized recollection… The recipes provide verisimilitude for the stories, and the stories explain the food" (2015, 253-254). This is evident throughout *My Life in France*. Child includes recipes of varying precision throughout the book – the more precise, the more viable they appear as recipes – and each recipe is deployed as a kind of narrative device, propelling the anecdote in a particular direction. Unlike in a traditional cookbook, as demonstrated earlier in *Mastering*, where the recipe is the point, and the authorial voice the "context" that Leonardi speaks of, in *My Life in France* recipes are frequently the context.

Child includes recipes to explain the labour-intensiveness of preparing a dinner party (2006, 98); the joy of mastering a particular sauce (2006, 74-75); the repetition involved in learning to cook a dish by memory (2006, 89); the delight in recreating a successful recipe by taste for the first time (2006, 294). The recipes also act as a temporal marker, symbolising Child's progression at Le Cordon Bleu and her growing proficiency as a cook. Adam Gopnik agrees that not all recipes are intended to be cooked: instead "they have literary purposes, and one of

them is to represent the background of thought" (2011, 219). By demonstrating recipes as the background of thought, the authorial Child allows the reader to witness her trajectory from willing amateur to graduate of Le Cordon Bleu. To recite a recipe proves a knowledge of that recipe. Child's casual tone and repetition of "simple" only emphasises that this is now a dish in her wheelhouse: "I simply salt-and-peppered the veal, wrapped it in a thin salt-pork blanket, added julienned carrots and onions to the pan with a tablespoon of butter on top, and basted it as it roasted in the oven. It couldn't have been simpler" (2006, 74). She concludes that it "gave me a great sense of accomplishment to have learned exactly how to cook such a savory dish, and to be able to replicate it exactly the way I liked, every time, without having to consult a book" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 74). Leonardi explains that a recipe is "an embedded discourse, and like other embedded discourses, it can have a variety of relationships with its frame, or its bed" (1989, 340). Evidently, the recipes in *My Life in France* also have a variety of relationships with their "bed" – and a whole different relationship again than the recipes in, say, Child, Bertholle and Beck's *Mastering* to *their* "bed".

Recipes also occupy a very different but equally narratively significant space in *My Life in France*, because of the ways that Child explains her experience co-writing *Mastering* (1961). Child is a specific example in the world of gastronomic literature because she has also written a traditional cookbook – and because *My Life in France* details the process of writing that cookbook, we can plainly see the difference between the recipes in her memoir and the recipes in her cookbook. In *My Life in France* she makes clear the enormous effort of developing a viable recipe – but will explain a dish which involves "a live lobster cut up (it dies immediately), and simmered in wine, tomatoes, garlic, and herbs" as an almost effortless afterthought (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 89). In *Mastering*, this aligns most closely to

Homard à L'Americaine, "a live lobster chopped into serving pieces, sautéed in oil until the shells turn red, then flamed in cognac, and simmered with wine, aromatic vegetables, herbs, and tomatoes"(Beck, Bertholle, and Child 2009, 202-203). This recipe has a minimum of sixteen ingredients (not including the risotto it is served with) and nine steps (Beck, Bertholle, and Child 2009, 202-203). As readers, we know the work involved in getting to this state of effortlessness: Child thus further builds upon the giver and receiver exchange. In *Mastering*, the recipes may seem complicated or baroque to the home cook, but with the implication that the cookbook author has it mastered. And yet the implication of ease has an extra layer of meaning for the reader: Gopnik suggests that part of the appeal of recipe reading is the gulf between the recipe promised and the recipe realised. Gopnik explains that when we ask a pro-chef "what's the recipe?" the answer is that "the recipe is the totality of the activity, the real work. The recipe is to spend your life cooking" (2011, 60). Child's reminiscences about writing *Mastering* demonstrate Gopnik's theory precisely: recipes might be dashed out as expressions of simplicity, but with *My Life in France* the reader understands that this ease is a result of Child's skill and training. In *My Life in France*, the implication is that recipes are worthwhile, but difficult, precise, and labour-intensive – nuance that is glossed over by the formal structure of a cookbook, regardless of how "informal and humane" the tone of the authors (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 150). Gastronomic literature by contrast, makes sense of these tensions: in it, there is the flexibility to relate that complexity, and to use recipes to do so.

The presence of recipes in *My Life in France* also speaks to the text's generic expectations as a life writing text because the presence of a set of scientific instructions in a piece of narrative disrupts expected boundaries between fact and fiction, truthfulness and falsity. Smith and Watson explain that autobiographical narratives are "sites of agentic narration where people

control the interpretation of their lives and stories, telling of individual destinies and expressing "true" selves" (2010, 54). Truth in the food/life writing relationship finds its sticking point with recipes. Kelly argues that the inclusion of recipes, which for her are a key feature of the narrative non-fiction food writing, complicate the boundary between fact and fiction. She says, "novels are generally labeled as fiction while cookbooks are supposedly non-fiction. Fiction is make-believe, requiring the willing suspension of disbelief… cookbooks are perceived as straight-forward instruction manuals" (Kelly 2001, 68-69). Garland builds on this idea, arguing that as well as the difficulty of following a recipe that is not "literally true", "there's also something about the collision between the boldness of the instruction, the reality of the ingredients and the authority of the cook that translates into a particular tone of voice" (2009, 36-37). This tone is crucial because it delivers recipes as "trusted recommendations" – it, rather than the reproducibility of the recipe, becomes the thing that rings true (Garland 2009, 37). But how do we make sense of "literal truth" when it comes to recipes? Garland posits: "the failure of a batch of croissants hardly constitutes a massive betrayal in the general scheme of things, but in terms of a book meant for cooking it does rather defeat the object, unless that is, cooking isn't really the point" (2009, 44-47). Indices function in tandem with recipes in such texts: Kelly argues that the presence of a recipe index in non-fiction narrative food writing guides how we read these books (2015, 256). *My Life in France* is indexed: but the index does not relate just to food. Amongst food and recipes, the index includes "Clift, Montgomery"; "French language, Julia's study of" and "stag-hunting" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 340-351). Child's inclusion of an index is quite evidently a general one and not specifically a recipe index. When the text does include recipes, those recipes are embedded in the prose flow and largely imprecise, and yet the inclusion of recipe or recipes is not incidental – it is instead a calculated literary device that works to express and illuminate Child's very singular experience with food and cooking.

How might we make sense of the relationship between recipes, indices, and life narrative in *My Life in France*? As Frow explains, it is the framing of a text and how it occurs in different contexts that “govern[s] the different salience of their formal features” – and as such it is not necessarily the inclusion of recipes but how a text-with-recipes is framed that determines how we categorise that text: if, like *My Life in France*, the recipes are formatted as prose, marketed as memoir and packaged as a paperback, we might be more likely to assume that a reader should be reading, not cooking (2015, 9). As Smith and Watson explain, paratext like indices “not only frame and contextualize the narrative but target certain reading publics and encourage certain kinds of audience responses” (2010, 248). This question of intent is, I believe, central to how we make sense of such texts’ hybridities. If cooking (in a cookbook) is not really the point – what is? The fact that this question can be asked speaks to the slipperiness of much food writing and the multiple genres it inhabits. This strikes me as a key component of reconsidering such texts as fusing life writing and food writing – rather than being either cookbook or memoir. Though they could theoretically guide a reader to the kitchen, in *My Life in France* recipes are more narrative device than the basis for cooking, and as such we might understand their inclusion as a means of “agentic narration”: a comfortable way for Child to express her “true” self (Smith and Watson 2010, 54). Garland does acknowledge that certain cookbooks lend themselves to reading more than others do – and to me this is precisely the point. A cookbook can serve a variety of (often overlapping) purposes: some cookbooks are intended to be cooked from; some are intended to be pillaged for clippings; some are intended to be referenced when the occasion calls for it; some are intended to be shared – and others are simply intended to be read.

Sole Meunière and the Pleasures of the Table

My Life in France is also full of vivid descriptions of food that, like the recipes, are used not only to communicate Child's passion about their flavours but as a literary device: these descriptions are time markers; signifiers of important life events. Writing about *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book*, Kelly explains that "Toklas wanted to write a cookbook to be read for enjoyment; she wanted to write the memoirs of her years with Stein; and… those two elements… could not be separated" (2015, 258). This also applies to *My Life in France*: Child writes about cooking, and France, and her marriage, and these elements are so intertwined that they cannot be separated. One way that Child communicates the sensuousness of food is through abundance: writing long and detailed lists of all the courses she has eaten. This also reflects Child's interest in learning about food: as if she is taking notes on how a good meal is put together. Such descriptions recur throughout the book: the Childs' Parisian anniversary is earmarked by "a *loup de mer* (sea bass), its stomach cavity stuffed with fennel, grilled over charcoal", followed by venison, wine sauce, chestnut puree, roasted larks, potatoes, cheese and coffee, which, for Child is, "a perfect meal" (2006, 105-6). Describing one of her favourite discoveries at culinary school, the partridge, Child contrasts learning about the bird at a market with Chef Bugnard, and eating one at Restaurant des Artistes, where it is presented with bread, and "topped with the liver – which had been chopped fine with a little fresh bacon – then mixed with drops of port wine and seasonings before a brief run under the broiler" (2006, 124). At the gastronome Curnonsky's eightieth birthday, Child eats "oysters, turbot, tournedos, sherbet, partridge, salad, cheeses, and ice cream" (2006, 154). In the book, special occasions are invoked by the meals that accompanied them: they act as memory markers but also allow the reader to participate in Child's enjoyment of the occasions themselves. In this way, descriptions of food become

associated with people, recollection, celebration. Like recipes, vivid and detailed descriptions of food are included throughout the book as explicators, fortifiers of narrative, and, in the case of the *sole meunière*, structural frameworks.

One example of how this relationship – between the Childs' life in France, and Child's passion for cooking and food – is inseparable is by considering the dish of *sole meunière*. The text is bookended by *sole meunière*, the first dish Child eats in France. Child could have described the countryside, the people, the journey, but instead she describes a meal. The *sole meunière* – as well as many of her other meals – become structural organisers in the text. Child spends two pages describing the experience, from an oyster starter to the "large, flat Dover sole that was perfectly browned in a sputtering butter sauce with a sprinkling of chopped parsley on top" (2006, 18). As Child describes, "the flesh of the sole was delicate, with a light but distinct taste of the ocean that blended marvelously [sic] with the browned butter… it was a morsel of perfection" (2006, 18). Each stage of the meal is contrasted with its (inferior) American counterpart – Child is "used to bland oysters from Washington and Massachusetts" (2006, 18); in California had eaten mackerel, codfish balls, salmon, and trout, "but at La Couronne I experienced fish, and a dining experience, of a higher order than any I'd ever had before" (2006, 18-19). In this way, Child begins her association of France with food, especially (as is implied) "real" food, and the pleasure that comes from enjoying that food. It is not just the food itself but the way Child experienced it: she closed her eyes "and inhaled the rising perfume", "chewed slowly and swallowed" (2006, 18). During the meal the Childs also "happily downed" a bottle of "crisp white wine" (2006, 19). Bread is "a crisp brown crust giving way to a slightly chewy, rather loosely textured pale-yellow interior" (2006, 19). Child explains the meal as a complete sensory experience – a far cry from the ""boiled" (poached) salmon" of America (2006, 18). Where American food is dashed off in a

few lines, each course of the French meal is described in depth and given space in the narrative, as if to reflect the languor of a long, decadent, lunch in the French countryside.

With such an evocation Child is harkening back to the tenets of gastronomic literature, demonstrating her own aesthetics of food and eating when she concludes the passage, "it was the most exciting meal of my life" (2006, 19). *Sole meunière* is then mentioned again on page 135, when Child explains the students at her newly-opened culinary school, then called *L'École des Gourmettes* (2006). Many of the students are American expatriates learning French cuisine, and for one lunch they cook "*sole meunière*, a mixed salad with chopped hard-boiled eggs, and a dessert of *crêpes Suzettes flambées au Grand Marnier*" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 134). Though this lunch is mentioned in passing (it is added detail for an anecdote about the students at the culinary school), Child could have chosen any number of days and any number of dishes – and so *sole meunière* takes on further significance, particularly given the emphasis Child initially puts on the dish as distinctly French.

Both Fisher and Child experience a baptism-by-fire in French cuisine, a metaphorical hazing that leads them to their ultimate appreciation for food at its simplest. For Fisher, this is the elaborate prix-fixe meal she has with her first husband Al in Dijon – a meal so rich that she feels the ghosts of gourmands past guiding her through the courses but also vows to never order a set menu again. For Child, the pleasure of French dining – the magnanimous sole meuniere that would define her culinary life – is transformative and immediate, and the pitfalls take longer to settle in. In the passage "An American Stomach in Paris", Child describes the illness that befalls herself and Paul in 1950, ultimately diagnosed as "good old *crise de foie* – a liver attack… evidently, French cuisine was just too much for most American digestive systems" (2006, 101). Child attributes the illness to the "rich gorge of

food and drink" (2006, 101) the couple had been consuming, bemoaning the treatment of a restricted diet as "no fun!" (2006, 102). In due course, Child is back on track and capable of eating the French diet in the same manner as she originally had been – moving past her "American Stomach" to something more acclimated. These culinary hurdles are a necessary step that Fisher and Child must move through in order to properly legitimise themselves as true French eaters, and in doing so to ground their authority and expertise in gastronomy.

With so much of *My Life in France* configured around Child's embrace of French culture, culinary and otherwise, and her unique positioning as a kind of translator of French cuisine for an American audience, *sole meunière* in this context is not just a lunch but a symbol of that translation. Child is not just introducing the dish to her American students, but is also an American teaching to an American audience this dish that she has signposted as representing the authenticity, simplicity, and flavour of French cuisine. As with the inclusion of recipes, by including *sole meunière* we can track Child's progress: from the revelation of the dish in the book's opening chapters to being able not only to cook but to *teach* the cooking of the dish, we glean not just Child's proficiency as a cook but something more: her elemental comprehension of French culinary culture. As Baena explains, in gastrographies authors "manipulate the food metaphor as an axis of personal, familial, and historical memory" (2006, 107). Though there is no recipe included for *sole meunière*, its recurrence in the book can be read as a synecdoche for French cuisine in Child's life.

Food, in Child's writing as well as in the writing of Fisher, Colwin, and Ephron, is its own language, one that privileges food for food's sake. In writing about the dish, Child also adds another layer to her positioning as cultural conduit: she explains the experience of eating the dish in vivid detail, thus allowing the reader to share (at least imaginatively) the meal, not

unlike the giver – receiver exchange Leonardi speaks of with reference to recipes. Child closes the book with the following passage about *sole meunière*: "in all the years since that succulent meal, I have yet to lose the feelings of wonder and excitement that it inspired in me. I can still almost taste it. And thinking back on it now reminds me that the pleasures of the table, and of life, are infinite" (2006, 333). The dish, she says, is "an epiphany", "a life-changing experience" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 333). For Child, a love of life and a love of food are intricately linked: gastronomic literature is the ideal format to express such love. What better way to write of her life than to write about food; what better way to write about food than to write the story of her life.

The "Ill-Defined Margin": Child's Flexible Domesticity

I now pivot to look at the way that *My Life in France* positions Child in relation to the culinary culture of her time: firstly, in relation to traditional domesticity, and then in regards to gastronomic groups. Child, like Colwin and Ephron, reconfigures a view of the domestic space that complicates the distinction between woman/private and man/public. Alice McLean's framework of gastronomic literature is specifically anti-domestic – but as Child demonstrates, one's relationship to the domestic can fluctuate. Writers like Fisher, Toklas and David were all contemporaries of Child's, but while they were writing their undomestic gastronomic treatises, Child was publishing a domestic cookbook. Jones and Taylor argue that what makes writing like David's inhabit the aforementioned "ill-defined margin" is "an appetite to explore the culture of food beyond the confines of domesticity", and Child's relationship to domesticity is also more complex than what might be suggested as the author of a domestic cookbook (2001, 178). Branch, for example, suggests that Child revolutionised the domestic cookbook by "presenting cooking as an essentially gender-less activity. For her,

cooking was something anyone – men, women, young, and old – could do, given the time, resources, and (importantly) inclination" (2015, 172). Child would go on to publish *My Life in France*, which – with its emphasis on travel, eating out, socialising, and professional cooking – could convincingly be argued as undomestic. For women writers, and certainly for Child, a relationship to the domestic might not always be so straightforward. As Joanne Hollows argues, Child presented "domestic femininity" in a way that "was also opposed to the role of the housewife. In the process, she begins to reimagine the meanings of the domestic in a manner that feminism frequently cannot and has not" (2007, 41). As future chapters of this thesis will demonstrate, Colwin and Ephron's writing reimagines the domestic space not as a site of straightforward female oppression, but as one in which many women find comfort, creativity, and solace. Where Colwin and Ephron's food practice is based in the home, Child's cooking is professionalised. And, writing from a context some forty years prior to Colwin and Ephron, the social circumstances that shaped Child's approach to the home is necessarily different. But reading all three authors together provides a more dynamic configuration of the domestic kitchen for women cooks, eaters, and writers. Acknowledging this complexity helps to clarify why writing that otherwise looks gastronomic might have been subsumed into the category of domestic cookbook: if we proceed with a narrow conception of what domestic spaces represent, it follows that we have a narrow conception of what kind of writing those spaces produce.

The Childs were also childless – Child acknowledges as much matter-of-factly in *My Life in France*: "We had tried," she says, "but for some reason our efforts didn't take. It was sad, but we didn't spend too much time thinking about it and never considered adoption. It was just

one of those things. We were living very full lives" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 101).[19] They were also the subjects of some political drama, both with Child's Californian family, and with the American government. Discussing Eisenhower's presidency win, Child says to her father that she guesses "you Pasadenans are pretty glad about Ike's election results" (2006, 155).[20] Child's father responds of course, and "you people over there, you wouldn't know how the country feels – all your news is slanted" (2006, 155). Following this conversation, Child's stepmother and brother both ask her to stop baiting her father, and to "keep [her] liberal views to [her]self!" (2006, 155). Paul is regarded by Julia's family as an "artist" and a "New Dealer" – insults both (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 155). Child's role as a cultural conduit, then, emerges in an interesting cultural context: she is configured as outside of the American experience, influenced by a particularly European liberalism at odds with her home country.

In my previous chapter I spoke to the specific political view represented by Fisher's *How to Cook a Wolf*. *Mastering* is not explicitly political in this way, but *My Life in France* is very aware that the Childs first arrived in France at a time of enormous cultural difference between the United States and France. Child places herself as on the European side of the divide: "Paul and I were temperamentally more sympathetic to the French than to the American approach" (2006, 103). When they do move back to America, Child refers to it as "the land of "Elvis the Pelvis," Nixon-lovers, and other strange phenomena" (2006, 224). There is a sense throughout *My Life in France* of political friction between the Childs and their home nation. Bemoaning McCarthyism to her father, he responds that she is "falling right into the plan the Reds are developing – that of creating dissension and distrust among their enemies"

[19] In *Julie and Julia*, the Childs' childlessness is given more emotional heft: Meryl Streep's Child cries at the news of her sister's pregnancy, an expression of grief at her and her husband's unsuccessful attempts (2009).
[20] Note: "you" Pasadenans – she is, implicitly, not one of them.

(Child and Prud'homme 2006, 200). When we consider that domestic cookbooks in postwar America were propaganda of a sort, a vessel through which the tenets of a nuclear family and its associated domesticity were espoused, what does it mean for *Mastering* to be authored by a woman whose husband was under investigation by the United States Information Service's Office of Security? Paul had been "implicated… as a treasonous homosexual", an accusation that Julia calls "shockingly weird, amateurish and unfair" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 215). These framings indicate that this was an environment in which gender ideals and the expectations of heterosexual relationships were rigid: the suggestion of Paul's homosexuality a symptom of "his liberal friends, the books he read, and his associations with Communists" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 215). And yet the Childs and their relationship were constantly bending and reimagining the boundaries of those ideals. In other words, the category historically applied to female cookbook writers working contemporaneously to Child do not apply. Happily married, yes. Housewife? No.

A Novel, or Another Century: Child in the World of Gastronomy

My Life in France has a unique, and in many ways self-reflexive relationship to the cultural phenomenon of the gastronome and to gastronomic literature, and its engagement with this tangible aspect of food culture helps to crystallise the text as an example of gastronomic literature. It also provides context for what "true" gastronomes (as perceived by Child) looked like at the time. In *My Life in France*, the figure of the gastronome is most apparently described by "the celebrated gastronome Curnonsky" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 138). In his first introduction in *My Life in France*, he is referenced not as a friend (as it is later revealed he is), but an authority to be quoted. His expertise Child uses to legitimise the preferences she is coming to understand: "just something very good to eat… classic French

cooking, where the ingredients have been carefully selected and beautifully and knowingly prepared. Or, in the words of the famous gastronome Curnonsky, "Food that tastes of what it is."" (2006, 124). We might think of this as a similar literary move to the ones that Fisher makes when she agrees with Lucullus – legitimising her own palate by placing it in the lineage of gastronomic philosophy. Note that Child is explicit here: Curnonsky is a famous gastronome. When he is next introduced under the subheading "Le Prince", Child is being introduced to Curnonsky by Bertholle and Beck – the introduction is accompanied by a photo of the four dining together. Curnonsky is surrounded by the kind of lore that, it is implied, justifies his status as a gastronome. An expert on Russian cuisine[21], author of an encyclopedia of French regional food, founder of the Academie des Gastronomes, editor of a cooking magazine, a laundry list of dinner invitations every night, Child says of Curnonsky, "his ego was enormous, but so were his charm and the breadth of his knowledge" (2006, 138). He is figured as larger-than-life: seventy-nine years old but dining out and attending nightclubs every night, to Child "he struck me as a character out of a novel, or from another century. I couldn't imagine a person like *le prince* coming from anywhere but France" (2006, 139). There is something to be said here for the accuracy of Child's assessment: as a gastronome, Curnonsky belongs to a historically French tradition from another century. A contemporary of Child's, he nonetheless ticked easy boxes for what it meant to be a gastronome.

In *My Life in France* Child is positioned as a contemporary – or, at the very least, a friend – of Curnonsky. Child refers to him with a casual fondness: "the old buzzard" (2006, 164), "the old gastronome" (2006, 217), "dear old Curnonsky" (2006, 223). She dines with him, and attends his eightieth birthday party, and he attends the Childs' farewell dinner when they

[21] The name Curnonsky is a "vaguely Russian sounding nom de plume from the Latin words *Cur non* and the English "sky"" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 138).

depart Paris for Marseille. From her relationship with established gastronomes to her participation in gastronomic groups, we understand that Child orbits, and even participates in, the world of French gastronomy. And yet, taking into consideration the historic context, we can see that the circumstances are more complex. As Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson notes, "the gastronome was invariably male. Beyond the fact that men held the purse strings and haute cuisine was a very expensive pursuit, the public culinary sphere was inhospitable to women: chefs as well as gastronomes were male" (1998, 602-3). Child is often forthright in describing how the gendered world of gastronomy plays out in her own life. It is also through gastronomic groups that she meets Bertholle and Beck, who become co-authors of her *Mastering*. In the process of writing the cookbook, Child explains her trouble with:

> the deeply ingrained chauvinism and dogmatism in France, where cooking was considered a major art: if Montagne said such-and-such, then it was considered gospel, especially by the men's gastronomical societies, which were made up of amateurs – and, my, how they loved to talk! (2006, 145)

Child describes the experience as an excellent way to meet French women and learn about food (2006 113). Paul, conversely, joins *Les Princes Consorts Abandonès* and says of the group "“this appears to be the group of civilized, witty, intelligent gourmets I've been looking for all these years”" (Child and Prud'homme 2006, 114). From the Childs' commentary, these gastronomic groups are a way to socialise and pursue their interest in food: in other words, these groups are important in the Childs' French culturalisation, but not specifically significant. By including Paul's take on the experience, Child suggests that these groups are for both of them, and though obviously gendered, nonetheless Julia can participate as much as Paul. But even in this introductory passage we can glean the complexity of Child's relationship to gourmandism. Child comments that "women knew something about food too" – and though light-hearted, this speaks to a key tension in her experience with

gastronomy: the gastronome, and gastronomic groups, are historically male-gendered (2006 113).

Upon Curnonsky's death, Child feels as though "his passing marked the end of an era" (2006, 223). Child might be being literal here, with Curnonsky's death marking the end of a social dynamic the Childs once participated in. But Child also considers Curnonsky to be asynchronous, a figure from the past. We might understand the end of the era Child speaks of to be that of the gastronome as we know him: Child, Bertholle and Beck are working on *Mastering*, perhaps the baton is being passed.

The gender binary imposed on gastronomic groups is evident when considering Child's description of Curnonsky's eightieth birthday celebration, composed of 387 guests from various gastronomic societies. Child explains that she and Paul sit at the table of his new club, rather than with the Gourmettes: "we couldn't help noticing a few cold stares from the Gourmettes when we sat at the Prosper Montagne table. But we had decided the Montagnes would be a more interesting lot, because they were all food professionals, whereas the ladies were enthusiastic amateurs" (2006, 152). These examples illuminate the ways in which Child is suspended between the historical figure of the gastronome and her reality as an American female. As Parkhurst Ferguson explains, despite "dominant associations of women with food and feeding… those associations concern the domestic order, whereas gastronomy occupied the public domain" (1998, 612). Moreover, gastronomy as a movement signalled the shift of fine dining from the private to the public sphere, and as such the historically urban space of the restaurant, where gastronomic groups would meet, implied an "inherent promiscuity… that effectively excluded upper-and middle-class women" (Parkhurst Ferguson 1998, 603). And so though of course the restaurants of Child's time were not morally suspicious in the

way they were perceived in the nineteenth century, this nonetheless speaks to the tensions at play in the gendered distinctions between public and private. Notably, when Child mentions dining with the Gourmettes, it is in a model kitchen with a professional chef; a hybrid space that implies professionalism – but not by the Gourmettes themselves – and is not public in the way a restaurant is. By contrast, in the public display of gastronomy that is Curnonsky's birthday feast, despite being professionally trained, Child is a guest of her husband – who is not a chef. Though Child herself is both a Gourmette and a professional, she nonetheless takes the opportunity to sit with the Prosper Montagnes, reinforcing the understanding that the gender of the Prospers bestows them with culinary legitimacy. In this way we can also see the tensions of Child's hybrid identity at work: she socialises with and engages with the principles of gastronomic clubs, but at a remove: her own group is female, comprised, in her own words, of "enthusiastic amateurs". Though it is unclear whether Child defines as such, she is Cordon Bleu trained, owns her own culinary school and was, at the time, in the process of writing a cookbook – she can hardly be thought of as an amateur. Nevertheless, the implication is that Child is only seated with the male gastronomic group as a guest of her husband: the existence of the female group of which Child is a member would not be necessary if the groups were not separated across a gender binary. It is perhaps then unsurprising that Child's own writing at the time, regardless of how technically and professionally informed, remained firmly in the category of domestic cookbook. I believe Child offers her version of gastronomic literature with *My Life in France*: this is a text that demonstrates the requisite stylistic dynamism, intellectual engagement with the culinary world, and fundamental passion for food. To disregard Child's contribution to such a form is to risk repeating the same gendered exclusions that played out across her culinary career.

Conclusion

If Fisher was an anomaly in her categorisation as an author of gastronomic literature, Child makes for an interesting counter point, given that the two were both Americans who cut their culinary teeth in France at approximately the same time – and eventually became penpals and friends. Though Child produced writing generically aligned to gastronomic literature, and interacted closely with gastronomic groups[22], her status as a cookbook author has precluded her from easy inclusion in the category.

Child-as-gastronome aligns with the traditional male gastronome in a few crucial ways: she understands food – and specifically French cuisine – as a source of deep philosophical engagement, and this manifests in her evangelism about process, technique, and ingredients as means of representing French cuisine as a thing of cultural and historical purity. Child also participates in elite culinary environments – whether through her education at the Cordon Bleu, or in *The Gourmettes*, or as a friend of Curnonsky, or a guest of her husband's in *his* gastronomic group. For Child, food is part art form, part science experiment, part method for self-actualisation, and part site of sensory pleasure. But, like Fisher, Child's gastronomy is inherently influenced by the fact of her gender. Her socialisation and acculturation into the world of food cannot be disentangled from her relationship to the domestic – her cookbooks and specifically their aim to make French *haute cuisine* legible to the domestic cook, but also her affinity with French markets, and her centering of her domestic spaces like La Pitchoune, the Childs' Parisian and Marseille apartments, and the set of *The French Chef*.[23]

[22] As indicated in this thesis, Child herself was part of the female-only gastronomic group *The Gourmettes*, though she also attended events for the *Prosper Montagnes* – but only as a guest of her husband's.
[23] As Polan explains, the set of *The French Chef* was designed to look like a provincial kitchen: "distinguished by a French country visual style… with chestnut paneling throughout (showing quaint scenes of French cookery) and carefully placed rustic items such as pitchers, decorative plates, [and] earthenware jugs and jars" (2011, 140).

Child's fusion of the literal French gastronomic world and the American domestic ones is a core feature of her *My Life in France* – a text which, unlike with Fisher, has not been classed as gastronomic literature but which I argue should be. The fusing of these culinary approaches is mirrored by the fusing of the different literary modes in *My Life in France*: it is at once travelogue, memoir, bildungsroman, and culinary exploration. This fusion, indicative of gastronomic literature, then becomes the foundation from which Child can present her experiences as a woman in the gastronomic world of mid-century France. From it, we read new modes of domesticity: in Hollows' words, Child was one of the "alternative figures of domestic femininity… that were closer to second-wave feminism than might be imagined yet also imagined domesticity in ways that feminism could not" (2007, 37). This domestic femininity is best understood through Child's depiction of her marriage and working relationship with Paul, and through her inclusion of recipes. The inclusion of heavily embedded recipes in *My Life in France* itself fuses genres. In *My Life in France*, Child retroactively explains the methods of generating the recipes in *Mastering the Art of French Cooking (vol I and II)* in ways that can be mapped to, and compared with, the recipes in the former, in a way that is unique to Child and to this text. This is another instance of domestic flexibility: not only is Child's role in the domestic space flexible and prone to adaptation, so are her domestic recipes.[24]

Where Fisher – and, as I will show in future chapters, Ephron and Colwin to a large extent – format their embedded recipes in a more straightforward recipe format, in *My Life in France*, Child's recipes are never signposted, and always a natural continuation of the prose flow. They are distinct from the recipes in *Mastering*, and from other kinds of embedded recipes –

[24] See, in particular, my discussion of *Bouillabaisse* and *Homard a l'Americaine* on p. 111-112 and on p.127 of this thesis respectively.

often so embedded they might not be read as recipes at all. Where, with Fisher, attending to her texts' surfaces open up a more complex understanding of what food means, with Child, we can understand the push for surface reading to clarify these recipes for what they are. If we recognise a series of ingredients and a method – despite their existence in the midst of a narrative paragraph – as the key features of a recipe, and thus read these features in Child's texts *as* recipes, it opens up a series of alternative questions. What are they doing here? How *do* we understand recipes that are embedded in narrative prose flow? As this thesis argues, the inclusion of recipes is one of the crucial ways that these authors enact gastronomic literature by destabilising the generic barriers between cookbook and memoir or domestic and public. In the forthcoming chapters, we will see further examples of how recipes might be used in women's gastronomic literature as a method of enacting generic play: in Colwin, through her explicitly domestic gastronomic literature, and in Ephron across fiction and non-fiction.

Chapter Three – Laurie Colwin

Introduction

"Cookbooks hit you where you live," says Laurie Colwin, in a chapter of her *More Home Cooking* adapted from a talk she delivered to the Radcliffe Culinary Friends in 1992 (2014, 10). "If you want to know what *real* life used to be like, meaning domestic life, there isn't anywhere you can go that gives you a better idea than a cookbook" (Colwin 2014, 10). Colwin's two food writing collections *Home Cooking* (originally published in 1988) and *More Home Cooking* (originally published in 1993) read as thematic tributes to this concept: that a cookbook is a narrative artefact of peoples' "*real*" lives. These are appropriate volumes for the writer who explained that "the idea of a dinner party is rather like the idea of a novel" (Colwin 2012, 96). Introducing Colwin moves this thesis away from early-to-mid-century France to New York in the latter half of the twentieth century, two entirely different culinary environments. Where Fisher and Child worked primarily in the culinary world and explicitly grounded their writing in the tenets of gastronomy and classical French cuisine, Colwin and Ephron's food-related outputs are supplementary to otherwise successful careers as fiction writer and screenwriter and director respectively. Colwin was an author of nine novels and compilations of short stories, and in the mid-1980s began as a contributing columnist at *Gourmet* magazine, writing vignettes of her life in the kitchen that were later compiled into *Home Cooking* and *More Home Cooking*. Though her foray into food writing was initially conceived of as a "counterpoint to her other work… *Home Cooking* and *More Home Cooking*, outsell her other work by more than three to one" (Quindlen 2001). Colwin's work is contextually very different than Fisher and Child's, and yet all three authors espouse a personal philosophy of food and eating well aligned with the ideas propagated by

gastronomic literature. This chapter uses Colwin's *Home Cooking* and *More Home Cooking* to understand what female-authored gastronomic literature might look like when not written in the specific context of French gastronomy.

In prior chapters, I have focused on the overlap between gastronomic literature and my authors' texts: many of these same overlaps exist in Colwin's works too. Like Fisher and Child, Colwin's authorial voice is assured, opinionated, and funny. It neither shies away from culinary mishaps nor allows such mishaps to undermine its authority. Like Fisher's *The Art of Eating*, *Home Cooking* and *More Home Cooking* are intertextual and generically malleable. And like *My Life in France*, Colwin's texts offer a model of food writing that embraces tenets of gastronomic literature without disavowing domesticity. There is no specific consensus as to what genre *Home Cooking* (henceforth *HC*) and *More Home Cooking* (henceforth *MHC)* are – the 2012 edition of *Home Cooking* classifies it as both a "volume [sic] of essays" (Colwin, ix) and a "manifesto" (Colwin, i). Packaged more as essays or memoirs than as commercial cookbooks, but mingling indexed recipes with personal narratives, like Fisher and Child's work Colwin's collections deny simple categorisation.

I first establish *HC* and *MHC*'s generic slipperiness through an analysis of their intertextuality before addressing their use of recipes: though some may be functional, I argue that these recipes are also narrative strategies, used variously to organise memory, to structure character development, and to argue a point. The combination of this intertextuality with the unorthodox incorporation of recipes demonstrates that Colwin's food writing more comfortably sits in the lineage of gastronomic literature than of the standard domestic cookbook. With that in mind, though, the second half of this chapter argues that Colwin's food writing provides a model of female-authored gastronomic literature that both privileges gustatory pleasure and embraces the domestic sphere. Part of this embrace is in Colwin's

understanding of the materiality of domestic culture – cookbooks, second-hand kitchenware – as crucial to understanding how people live. After all, as Colwin tells us, for her "real" life means domestic life (1993 10). But the sanctity of domesticity is present throughout all aspects of Colwin's works: Amy Richlin (1991) and Tanfer Emin Tunc (2018) refer to her as a "domestic sensualist", a term that first appeared in her novel *Happy All the Time* (1978) but that scholars have aptly applied to Colwin's non-fiction, too (Colwin 2009, 10). By embracing cooking from a domestic perspective Colwin disrupts existing models of female-authored gastronomy. In this gastronomy, the domestic does not symbolise sexual or gender-based subjugation, and hunger is not simply a metaphor for erotic desire. Rather, the domestic sphere becomes the arena through which Colwin explores the various ways that she loves food – whether as a vehicle for human connection, a method of enacting her politics, or because she loves to eat. She cooks for her husband, her child, her family and friends, but also and always for herself – privileging all of these relationships equally under the ethos that being well fed is a crucial aspect of the human experience.

HC and *MHC* make sense as volumes: they are tonally consistent, with a humorous, opinionated narrative voice, and they are short expressions of Colwin's own subjectivity with a specific focus on food. Since they are about food, it is not necessarily the presence of recipes that is unexpected, but rather the way that the recipes are included: the narrative writing contextualises many of the recipes, and the recipes often fortify the narrative. And, given Colwin's emphasis on the domestic – with its complex gendered associations – the fusion of narrative and recipes in this context throws into contention gendered distinctions between food writing forms. In considering the complex way that Colwin incorporates recipes into her food writing I draw on Susan J. Leonardi and Sarah Garland. Leonardi approaches recipes as a narrative strategy, calling them "an embedded discourse", and

arguing that the sharing of recipes is a social exchange, and without a narrative context the simple recounting of ingredients and instructions would make for "an unpopular cookbook indeed" (1989, 340).

Garland builds on this idea by exploring how the inclusion of a recipe impacts whether a text is considered fiction or non-fiction. She agrees with Leonardi – since the most appealing recipes are disseminated as "trusted recommendations", the question of truth is twofold: in the first instance it isn't possible to follow a set of instructions that do not work, but the authoritative tone of the recipe giver is part of its appeal (Garland 2009, 36-37). These scholars speak to the opportunity we have to understand recipes as dynamic narrative features with the potential to complicate gendered assumptions about food writing, destabilise genre, and express subjectivity. I use *HC* and *MHC* to propose that reading recipes beyond simple instruction destabilises the generic boundaries that have associated cookbooks with an expected format, tone, feasibility of method and gender. This destabilisation reverberates, complicating distinctions between fiction and nonfiction, cookbook and life writing, and domestic and public.

Alice McLean's definition of female-authored gastronomy is strictly anti-domestic, since, she argues, the domestic is inherently an other-oriented economy. Though McLean's definition acknowledges the domestic space as historically "other-oriented", I show that Colwin configures a multi-faceted space that is situated in the home but pleasure focused, and thus capable of orienting outward and inward at once (2012, 40). Recognising work like Colwin's helps to expand the bounds of female-authored food writing more broadly: if domestic food and eating and the associated pleasure that may bring are not included, then we necessarily exclude from gastronomic literature the great number of women who, for reasons including

but certainly not limited to geography, ability, caring responsibilities, and disposable income, were not eating out. With the caveat that the male gastronome was historically specifically a public figure, this limitation poses a problem when looking at writers like Colwin and also Ephron, whose writing might persuasively be understood as gastronomic literature and yet whose aesthetics of cooking and eating luxuriates in the domestic space. Joanne Hollows and Stacy Gillis's work on domesticity reconfigures the binary that associates the domestic with oppression and the public with freedom. Hollows and Gillis argue that "there is a need to find alternative ways of reconceptualizing the relationship between public and private life within feminism", I believe that Colwin provides us with one example of what that might look like (2008, 9).

The Most Hearty Appetite/The Most Jovial Humour

"One of the delights of life is eating with friends; second to that is *talking* about eating. And, for an unsurpassed double whammy, there is talking about eating *while* you are eating with friends," says Laurie Colwin in the Author's Foreword to *HC* (2012, xiii). At its core, and perhaps stripped of some of the more serious aesthetic concerns that underpinned its traditional iteration, this statement of Colwin's is reminiscent of the following assertion by Grimod de la Reynière, one of France's foremost gastronomers. For Grimod, the gastronomer should:

> join to the most hearty appetite that jovial humor without which most festivals are nothing but a sad hecatomb; always ready with repartee he should keep up a continual activity of the senses which nature has given him; finally, his memory should be replete with anecdotes, amusing stories and histories, which he should deliver in the interval between courses, and in the interstices of the meal, so that even the most sedate and sober participants will pardon his appetite (Gigante 2013, xx).

There are a number of reasons why *HC* and *MHC* may not at first strike us as gastronomic literature. Though explicitly about food, the food in question is both removed from the public sphere ("Home Cooking") and removed from the classical French and English context of the historical movement (instead reflective of the 1980s New York in which they were written). They are literarily accessible – not full of culinary jargon, not particularly long, and focused on convenience without artifice. Because of this, it might be easy to underestimate how generically complex *HC* and *MHC* are. But on closer inspection, these are books with no formal consistency – there is no apparent chronological or thematic order to the "chapters". Some chapters focus on a culinary scenario ("Friday Night Supper") (Colwin 2012, 51) others on a singular ingredient ("Chocolate") (Colwin 2012, 78), some are grounded in memory ("The Case of the Mysterious Flatbread") (Colwin 2014, 47) and others are entirely hypothetical ("Lemons and Limes") (Colwin 2014, 22). The inconsistency of these formal properties are somewhat explained since *HC* and *MHC* are anthologies of food columns, but beyond this, understanding these properties as belonging to the lineage of gastronomic literature helps to clarify exactly what these texts *are*. I propose understanding *HC* and *MHC* with Grimod in mind: as a literary transposition of a dinner party. If we read *HC* and *MHC* as the conjoining of a hearty appetite with jovial humour, they coalesce more easily as a specific kind of literary text, with each course (or explanation of food) interspersed with anecdotes, amusing stories and histories.

Where Grimod might be referring to humour as in disposition, Colwin (like Fisher and Child before her) is literally humorous. Taking Grimod's descriptors literally in the first instance, readers can find ample instances of Colwin expressing her hearty appetite and her jovial humour, sometimes both at once. Colwin shares an anecdote from a dinner party she once attended where guests were served mashed potatoes with black and white sausages – Colwin

explains that though she "can't think of anything worse for you than black sausage… once every thirty years they are really quite irresistible" (2014, 30). This is a precursor to the "pièce de résistance", "a bowl of big, fat cloves of garlic that had been blanched in milk and then caramelized in butter and brown sugar. To this day it embarrasses me to remember how I disgraced myself with these" (Colwin 2014, 30). The next day she was "hung over from the food. I felt bottom heavy, like Baby Huey" (Colwin 2014, 30).[25] Vignettes like this perfectly distil the ways that Colwin merges her sense of humour with her passion for food: carefully executed self-deprecation goes a long way to endearing a figure to their audience; like Child, Colwin is able to poke light fun at herself but never so frequently that it errs into self-abuse. Transferring the culprit of disgracing oneself and then being hungover from alcohol to garlic is demonstrative of Colwin's tongue-in-cheek approach to food writing. But we can also understand Grimod's description of gastronomic literature as encapsulating the mood of a dinner party: one discourses on food, one eats, one shares food, and crucially this is done with a sense of festivity. This is what *HC* and *MHC* do: the books' formal flexibility provides a fertile setting for intertextuality and generic play, the impression of which is to give Colwin's readers a sense of what it was like to sit at her table. In her foreword to *HC*, Juliet Annan explains of the late Colwin: "she brought out the best in all her guests and everyone shone at her table… but as I (and her friends) cannot make that journey again, I hope you enjoy reading these essays as much as I enjoy publishing them" (2012, xi). As Annan suggests, in lieu of being able to actually sit at Colwin's table, *HC* and *MHC* are the next best thing.

[25] As we will discuss later in this chapter, Colwin often regards foods in terms of their health benefits, in a dieting era where fat was particularly maligned. In this context, confessing to gorging on potatoes, sausages, and confit garlic takes on an extra layer of confession.

In the introduction to *HC*, Colwin says that she reads "English cookbooks as if they were novels", a foreshadowing of one of her key expressions of intertextuality (2012, 4). Colwin references, adapts and reprints other cooks' recipes in *HC* and *MHC* not unfamiliar practice in cookbook writing and a feature that also crops up in some of Fisher's books like *Consider the Oyster*. She includes recipes from her sister (Colwin 2014, 127), mother (Colwin 2012, 55), mother-in-law (Colwin 2012, 167-168), as well as Katharine Hepburn (Colwin 2014, 75-76), Edna Lewis (Colwin 2014, 103-104) and Marcella Hazan (Colwin 2014, 29). Colwin's food writing is also intertextual because of its direct interaction with the literary. Colwin explains that the best way to describe American cuisine to a visitor from Mars, she would refer to Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Farmer Boy* – decidedly not a cookbook (2014, 124). One recipe Colwin provides for chocolate cake is from an illustrated children's book, "given in rhyme and then written out on the facing page" (2014, 156). This is not just a chocolate cake given in theory, though – Colwin describes it as "easy, wholesome, and delicious", a favourite of her daughter's (2014, 156).

Another curious recipe adaptation comes when Colwin eyeballs a recipe for baked pears mentioned in Isaac Bashevis Singer's memoir *In My Father's Court* (2012, 163).[26] From what Colwin shares, Singer "mentions his mother's baked pears – long baked with a scrap of vanilla and cinnamon, and a curl of lemon peel" (*HC* 2012 163). Colwin then proceeds to share her own recipe for these pears – not formatted as a standard recipe but with oven temperatures and measurements nonetheless. As mentioned, the regular referencing of other texts – whether cookbooks or not – demonstrates an intertextuality common to gastronomic literature. But by including a variety of texts, Colwin is directly interacting with the fuzzy boundary between fact and fiction in cookbook writing. That she can replicate a recipe as

[26] Isaac Bashevis Singer also crops up in *Heartburn*, but this time with a recipe for noodle kugel (1996, 19).

easily from a children's book, a memoir, and more traditional forms of cookbooks speaks practically to a broader preoccupation of this thesis: that women's narrative food writing confuses the sanctified boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. This confusion is clarified when we understand these offerings not as aberrations of women's domestic cookbooks, but as contributions in the long lineage of gastronomic literature.

Colwin demonstrates the ways that food writing and fiction cross their boundaries in her life through the recipes she provides, but she is also quite specific about it. A life-changing reading experience for Colwin is *English Bread and Yeast Cookery* by Elizabeth David, which she "read… as if it were a novel: I took it to bed with me and stayed up late to finish it" (2012, 46). Elsewhere in this thesis and drawing on Kelly I have established that a cookbook's format provides some insight into how it is intended to be interacted with: a standard paperback implies a different reading experience than a large-format, hardbacked book. Colwin speaks to this very assumption: David's book is not intended to be read as a novel. Colwin contextualises that she "read it as a house-bound person reads a travel book" since she was a new mother with little time to dedicate to bread-making (2012, 46). And yet the subsequent paragraphs describe that it is guidance from David's book that ultimately teaches Colwin how to make bread at home. For Colwin, David's book is as compelling and as readable as a novel, a piece of escapist media, and capable of imparting practical and replicable recipes. Here, Colwin actively destabilises the boundary between kitchen and living room; cookbook and novel: we can understand *HC* and *MHC* as consciously playing with this boundary.

Colwin explains that "all I ever do is read", and says:

> one of the great things about Barbara Pym is that the food in Barbara Pym is *just wonderful*. I realize the reason I love cookbooks is that cookbooks leave out all the other stuff. You don't have to find out about family relationships. It's just like Barbara Pym, but there's no novel! It's just the food (2014, 8-9).

This is in direct tension with one of Traci Marie Kelly's assertions, that when a writer includes "nonrecipe items, the author leads us further into her life and community… this is an essential step in contributing to the idea of veracity in the stories, biographies, and the recipes themselves" (2001, 260). Colwin reframes this relationship entirely: she does not need a cookbook author to purport its veracity, nor does she need a text to be nonfiction to attempt to recreate its food. The impression for the reader is that Colwin will be our guinea pig for this culinary experimentation, which then raises the question: how does Colwin herself enable trust in her own readers? Where Fisher and Child include quite personal "nonrecipe" items – if not delving into their emotional states then nonetheless sharing specific circumstances of their lives, like losing family members or meeting their husband – such additional details in Colwin's writing almost always appear in service of a broader point about food. Her trustworthiness then comes down to three main factors. Firstly, there is the fact of the texts themselves: columns for a renowned culinary magazine turned inductees to the James Beard Foundation Cookbook Hall of Fame (Colwin 2012, ix). But accolades themselves are not enough to make a cookbook author trustworthy: what if the food is incredibly complex? Inaccessible to the home cook? Beautiful but collects dust on the bookshelf? Colwin bypasses this issue with a constant suggestion of a community around her – not just one that shares its recipes with her, as mentioned above, but that loves to eat at her table. She promises that following her fried chicken recipe will yield a "table… full of ecstatic eaters" (Colwin 2012, 32).[27] Describing cooking in bulk for a school fair, Colwin

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[27] This is verified by Annan, who claims in her foreword that Colwin's "recipes for fried chicken and her potato salad are indeed the best in the world" (Colwin 2012, x).

assures that “the fair was a huge success and every scrap of food was consumed” (2012, 76). Of her recipe for baked spinach with jalapenos: “my friends liked it too, and I was happy to pass the recipe along. My friends fed it to their friends, and so on. By now, probably half the people in the Western Hemisphere have eaten this savory dish” (Colwin 2012, 84). It is not just Colwin who is borrowing recipes: her own are purloined and passed along, adding to her trustworthiness as a recipe provider.

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It is not simply their intertextuality that aligns *HC* and *MHC* with the culture of gastronomy: like Fisher’s and Child’s writing, these are books that express a deep interest in and reverence for food culture, a feature that manifests in descriptions of food. These descriptions of food often double as demonstrations of her generic experimentation: it is not always possible to distinguish between food description, recipe, and possible dinner party menu. Consider the following paragraph, which succinctly captures Colwin’s entire food philosophy:

> it was home food! The most delicious kind: a savory beef stew with olives and buttered noodles, a plain green salad with a wonderful dressing, and some runny cheese and a chocolate mousse for dessert. Heaven! (2012, 4).

The individual descriptions here are not particularly detailed (what does a ‘wonderful’ salad dressing taste like?), but the meal is no less clearly evoked, especially considering it is bookended by “home food!” and “heaven!”. Like Child, Colwin peppers her descriptions with conversational asides. Where these asides often cemented Child’s Americanness, for Colwin they communicate a down-to-earth approach to cooking and eating. Evidently, the language reflects the food, which in turn reflects Colwin’s ideas about food: all the better for their simplicity. Such simplicity helps affirm Colwin’s approachability, but never detracts from her authority, since simplicity here is contextual: Child often explains food as simple

that to a modern audience reads as decadent. By comparison, Colwin regularly evokes a meal by listing a minimal set of ingredients or dishes, with or without culinary descriptors. The simplicity of these descriptions is no less evocative of time and place, and of food heartily enjoyed. Colwin describes summer food: "a sharp knife and a supply of tomatoes is all one needs to make tomato salad. Add some fried bread and you have a first course. Offer some corn on the cob, a plate of steamed vegetables, and some homemade mayonnaise if you have the energy. For dessert, peaches, berries, and melons in their natural state without a thing on them" (2014, 106). She provides these economical suggestions (always with the chef in mind – mayonnaise is an option "if you have the energy") and then demonstrates that she participates in menu-building the same way. This kind of description recurs throughout *HC* and *MHC* – lists of entire home-cooked meals that cumulatively provide a template for how to put together a dinner party menu. Gigante explains that menu-building for gastronomes was a practise in the development and assertion of taste, since "one… needed to know what dishes were best put together, in which order, and which wines and desserts should accompany them" (2013, xxix). Colwin here is certainly asserting her taste, but these menus have a decidedly domestic bent. Grounding this domesticity in her own enjoyment of and pleasure in eating upends the standards of the domestic cookbook.

Consider the following menu from *MHC*, thrown by Colwin for her cousin who is "fanatical about his diet" and "has a sensitive palate" (2014, 28). Colwin suggests in such an instance Cold Yogurt Soup, Spicy Brussels Sprouts, Purée of Cranberry Beans in a Béchamel Sauce, "a platter of naked asparagus, another of sliced cucumbers (dressing on the side), and baked potatoes" with green salad and fruit salad to follow (2014, 28-29). Designing and espousing a diet-specific dinner party menu is not unfamiliar to a domestic cookbook, but Colwin makes sure to demonstrate exactly how she, too, enjoys the meal: "the interesting thing about this

dinner was how *keen* I felt the next morning – light as a feather and ready to fly" (2014, 29). The menus in *HC* and *MHC* are also ones that Colwin has been served, but almost exclusively by friends and family at dinner parties rather than at restaurants. For example, the meal served to her by a friend visiting who came equipped with "four veal scallops, a little bottle of French olive oil, a bunch of arugula, two pears and a Boursault cheese, and a loaf of bread", which Colwin describes as "one of the most delicious meals I have ever had" (2012, 26). The simplicity of this description implies that Colwin has noted the components for future replication – she then passes it along to her reader so that we can, too. This is quite a different approach to the ways that Fisher and Child incorporate descriptions of food in their texts – it gears toward hosting rather than imbibing, without ever excluding Colwin herself as an active consumer, and enjoyer, of the meals.

Like Fisher and Child, Colwin is also openly opinionated about food, and like Fisher and Child, humour often tempers the strength of her assertions. Speaking again of her fried chicken, Colwin begins, "as everyone knows, there is only one way to fry chicken correctly. Unfortunately, most people think their method is best, but most people are wrong. Mine is the only right way" (2012, 29). Explaining that she does not like grilling, Colwin caveats, "this implies that I do not like to eat al fresco. No sane person does, I feel" (2012, 101). One chapter begins, "anyone who walks into a kitchen should know how to make biscuits" (Colwin 2014, 56). That Colwin is able to maintain authority without slipping into arrogance is due, in part, to her humour, but also, as with Fisher and Child, through sharing her own trials and tribulations in the kitchen. Colwin reflects on mishaps with fondue (2012, 23); gluey spaghetti she attempts to serve to an ex-boss (2012, 26-27); attempts and mixed results trying to make Latvian bread (2014, 94). The general ethos of sharing these failed attempts is demonstrable from chapter titles like "Kitchen Horrors" (Colwin 2012, 140) and "Repulsive

Dinners: A Memoir" (Colwin 2012, 150), but is perhaps best represented by the chapter "Stuffed Breast of Veal: A Bad Idea", which begins "there comes a time in every cook's life when he or she feels he or she ought to make a stuffed breast of veal. I know this impulse well, for I have fallen prey to it" (Colwin 2012, 176). Fisher and Child's less successful forays into cooking and eating allow their readers to bear witness to the fact that they – greats in their field – were once novices too. But for Colwin, the more constant back and forth between success and misfire implies not a person reflecting on the learning curve of their younger self but of a cook constantly trying and therefore constantly learning. By making her successes as well as her failures funny, Colwin allows neither to become too serious.

"No one who cooks cooks alone": Readable Recipes

As I have now established, *HC* and *MHC* occupy a complicated generic space, made so by their incorporation of recipes. John Frow explains that "genre is neither a property of (and located 'in') texts, nor a projection of (and located 'in') readers; it exists as a part of the relationship between texts and readers, and it has a systemic existence" (2015, 112). Both within and without the texts, *HC* and *MHC* elude specific categorisation. Tanfer Emin Tunc refers to them as "foodoir[s]" (2018, 128); Mickey Pearlman and Katherine Usher Henderson call them "part memoir and part cookbook" (1990, 146); Rachel Syme a "a collection of essays" (2021). Colwin herself refers to these books as collections of "essays", and yet begins *HC* with an author's foreword explaining that "the sharing of food is the basis of social life", and as such "no one who cooks cooks alone" because each cook is "surrounded by generations of cooks past, the advice and menus of cooks present, the wisdom of cookbook writers" (2014, xiii). Colwin thus immediately engages with cookbooks as a vessel for social exchange, with the implication that the writing to follow is, too, a contribution to the world of

cookbooks. If that is so, then the use of "essay" to describe the same writing is an intriguing one: though the books contain cooking opinions, advice, and ideas about flavour combinations, essays are not the typical basis of a cookbook and recipes not the typical matter of essays. As Leonardi explains, "it seems easier to account for a recipe in a cookbook than for a recipe in a novel or a recipe in an essay" (1989, 340). *HC* and *MHC* are thus generically complex – Frow describes "complex" genres as "multivocal: their formal logic allows or encourages the incorporation of other forms, other 'voices'" (2015, 43). In the case of Colwin, the incorporation of recipes with narrative self-expression is what solidifies their complexity, since without recipes we might more easily categorise the books as narrative food writing or food-focused life writing, and without the density of self-expression we might more easily term them cookbooks.

Looking to the texts' paratext offers no further clarity. *HC* and *MHC*'s physical format sets expectations about what the books contain. Following the author's foreword in *HC* is "A Note for British Readers", with a conversion table and a glossary: standard frontmatter for a cookbook (Colwin 2012, 1). Both books are the size and general shape of a novel and published in paperback, and both contain a table of contents and indices. The contents lay out a series of headings ranging from the straightforwardly culinary: "How to Fry Chicken" (Colwin 2012, 29), "Fish" (Colwin 2012, 64), "Three Chocolate Cakes" (Colwin 2014, 154); to the more opinionated and irreverent: "Bread Baking Without Agony" (Colwin 2012, 44), "In Praise of Pears" (Colwin 2014, 160), "Stuffing: A Confession" (Colwin 2012, 132); to writing that could either be food related or not: "After the Holidays" (Colwin 2014, 11), "Four Easy Pieces" (Colwin 2014, 136), "The Same Old Thing" (Colwin 2012, 83). The 2012 version of *HC*, the earlier text, also includes a number of domestic illustrations attributed to Anna Shapiro: a basket of eggs (Colwin 2012, 14), a table setting with an

embroidered cloth (Colwin 2012, 43), a box of recipe cards (Colwin 2012, 89) and clothes hanging on a clothesline (2012 105). These features, the books' paratext, "seek to orient the reader towards an expectation of the kind of thing this is" (Frow 2015, 115). The expectations in this instance, then, are multiple: we can expect a focus on food, and from the glossary and indices, recipes. But we can also expect to read the books as paperbacks, which, as mentioned above regarding Elizabeth David, draws us away from the kitchen. We can also probably expect writing that is not explicitly food related – and so the question of what kind of "thing" we are reading is indeed multivocal. For Frow, the fusion of different genres – in Colwin's case, life writing, essay, food writing, recipe, amongst others – "defies generic classification, while still drawing strongly on generic logics" (2015, 121). What we are tasked with as readers, then, is not to attempt to classify the texts one way or another, "but rather to notice its provocation of the question about what kind of thing this is, a provocation which, however forcefully it unsettles generic norms, never takes us to some point beyond that question" (Frow 2015, 121).

HC and *MHC* are about food, but like Fisher and Child's writing, they are also vignettes of Colwin's life, formulated as de Obaldia formulates the essay: like the essayist, Colwin's "chosen object serves mostly as a pretext for the discussion of subjects that are close to [their] heart" (1996 10-11). The chosen object here is food, and the discussion of subjects close to Colwin's heart include her family, her friends, her politics, and also – food. Sedgwick explains that, "like Proust, [the reparative] reader "helps himself again and again"" (1997, 34). To help ourselves again and again to Colwin's writing reveals the way that food exists in a complex network of associations and meanings, and cannot simply be reduced to a singular symbol. As in Fisher and Child, food in Colwin's work is both a vocabulary for communicating her life, but it is also just food. A column ostensibly about feeding children is

also a dedication to Colwin's daughter (2014, 85); "Rented-House Cookery" does provide tips about cooking on holiday, but is also, ultimately, about memorable holidays Colwin has taken with friends and family (2014, 105); "In Search of Latvian Bread" is about a specific Latvian bread, and it is also about her Latvian husband (2014, 92). Colwin is not recounting the chronological story of her life, but like Fisher, she does use food as a prompt for the recollection of memory, and as a structuring framework for speaking of the people in her life. In some instances, recipes are included, and when they are, the recipes bolster the narrative that precedes them. But not all segments of the books include recipes in an immediately identifiable way - take, for example, "Fish" (Colwin 2012, 64). "Fish", as I have mentioned above, is one of the more straightforwardly culinary headings in the table of contents, and demonstrates just one of the ways that Colwin uses food as the starting point for exploring the social and familial connections in her life. "Fish" is one of the few portions of *Home Cooking* where recipes are not, at first glance, included: yet another way that Colwin confuses expectations. "Fish" sets forth Colwin's history with seafood, beginning with the caveat that she does "not come from a family of adventurous fish eaters" (2012, 64). This is the launchpad for memories of Colwin's childhood crabbing: "fixed in my memory of childhood is the wonderful time when the catch was so enormous we ran out of peach baskets and had to put the last crabs in a cardboard box" (2012, 64). These memories are cut with present-day Colwin's distinctive tone, "the best way to eat crabs, as everyone knows, is off newspaper at a large table with a large number of people" (2012, 64). "Fish" continues in this way: vacillating between Colwin's memories (of childhood, of fishing with friends, eating fresh seafood from a roadside diner) and her authorial guidance on the preparation of seafood ("fish in my opinion should be grilled, broiled, sautéed in butter or turned into fish cakes") (2012, 67). In some instances, the fish in "Fish" is an ingredient, and in others it is the point of connection for Colwin's memories and relationships.

I have indicated that "Fish" does not include recipes in a straightforward way, and by straightforward I mean formatted separately from the narrative, with a title and a set of numbered instructions – though the format of recipes is itself flexible, this is how they are laid out in *HC* and *MHC*. And though "Fish" does not contain recipes that fit this description, it does include the following:

> I like baked codfish served with green almond sauce. This is easily made by putting scallion greens, chopped blanched almonds, garlic, lemon juice, watercress bottoms and a hot green pepper into the blender with enough olive oil to make a sauce – it is delicious on a bland fish like cod or scrod (Colwin 2012, 67).

This missive is embedded in a paragraph, absorbed into the prose flow – it is immediately followed by another paragraph about fish. It has a set of ingredients and a straightforward instruction as to its preparation, and it is not indexed – though this, too, is difficult to affirm since it has no title. It has no measurements, though this does not necessarily nullify its viability, and since Colwin immediately continues the narrative it reads less as an encouragement to head to the kitchen than as a textual feature like metaphor, anecdote, or dialogue. This is also how Child incorporates the lobster dish in *My Life in France*, and as established with Child, Baena explains that texts like this "transform recipes into a highly significant narrative strategy", and in "Fish" the recipe sits amongst Colwin's recollections as another way in which she shares her life with the reader (2006, 107). This takes on extra pertinence when, toward the end of "Fish", Colwin pivots, and explains that her family became "fish-eating" once their daughter began eating solids and developing a love of salmon (2012, 68). Seeing her daughter eat salmon with an "almost giddy delight" prompts Colwin to "realize how as we acquire experience things stop being so amazing" (2012, 68). She concludes:

> part of the experience of being a parent is the reexperiencing of your own childhood, and as I watch my daughter taste her first this and that… I remember back to that time when my palate was clear and unsophisticated, everything was an adventure and the world was as fresh as a fish (Colwin 2012, 69).

In this way, fish is an extended food metaphor and the organising theme for a series of memories that, though expressed irreverently, moving fluidly between time frames and from anecdote to recollection to opinion, are ultimately a mediation on childhood, parenting, and experience. That the fish in this chapter can be both literal seafood and an extended food metaphor demonstrates the opportunity we have in removing the layer of suspicion when reading women's food writing. In Colwin's writing, food is more expansive than either metaphor or food, and instead is the literary vehicle through which she explores her life.

The recipes in Colwin's work function in different ways. The section "Red Peppers", in *HC*, for example, is dedicated to red peppers: Colwin's favourite ways to prepare them; their seasonality; potential serving suggestions (2012, 90). We might consider this structuring as similar to Fisher's *Alphabet for Gourmets*, or, more extensively, *Consider the Oyster*. Each of these texts takes an ingredient as a starting point for explorations of memory, taste, and personal food philosophy. As with Fisher's texts, too, "Red Peppers" incorporates a number of recipes – three of which are immediately recognisable as such. Though none of them contains an ingredients list, they do follow the format described above, and they are all indexed – warm potato salad with fried red peppers (Colwin 2012, 92), pepper zucchini (Colwin 2012, 93), and braised fennel, celery, onion and red pepper (Colwin 2012, 94). In "Red Peppers", Colwin organises her ideas around a single ingredient, and uses narrative prompts to embed recipes for that ingredient. Each of these recipes has a context: after Colwin expresses her own love of oil-preserved peppers, she suggests that some might want a

more elaborate preparation, and offers the potato salad recipe. The pepper zucchini is an adaptation of a dish Colwin loved from a restaurant she had visited, and the braised vegetable dish a recreation of one she ate at a dinner party. In this particular instance the recipes may indeed be functional, but they are also in service of a broader treatise on a particular food that Colwin loves. Whereas in a cookbook, where one might encounter a narrative that contextualises the recipe to follow, in "Red Peppers", Colwin pivots between recipes, anecdotes, and opinions, which function as narrative features that coalesce to express Colwin's love for the ingredient. If the reader wants to participate in her love by cooking a recipe, they can too.

The recipes in "Red Peppers" become more complicated, though, because embedded in the narrative Colwin provides instructions for making pimientos, since she figures "somewhere there are people who do not like olive oil and for them, pimientos are the answer" (2012, 92). What follows is a set of instructions stylistically identical to the ones provided for the potato salad or the pepper zucchini, but completely absorbed in the prose, like the codfish with almond sauce: the pimientos have no title and no numbered instructions but *are* indexed. Like the previous recipes there is no list of ingredients, and so practically speaking the pimientos are just as easy to make as any other recipe. Why, then, is it formatted so differently, especially in a text that evidently has no problem incorporating a "straightforward" recipe? Leonardi's scholarship aims to explore the "giving of the recipe and not simply of the list of ingredients and the directions for assembling them" and one way to read Colwin's work in this instance is as this exploration in motion (1989, 340). The variance in delivery demonstrates the importance of narrative in the "giving" of the recipe: regardless of format the recipes in "Red Peppers" have "a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be" (Leonardi 1989, 340). To move fluidly from formatted recipe to narrative to narrative that

includes embedded recipes implies a level of off-the-cuff sharing that enhances the reader's sense of "receiving" these recipes: as if Colwin is handing you a recipe card for the pepper zucchini and then, remembering pimientos, recites the ingredients mid-anecdote. Recipes in this instance have a constitutive relationship with the narrative: just as the recipes in "Red Peppers" support a broader expression of love for red peppers, so too does the narrative context enhance the appeal of the recipes. In Colwin's food-writing recipes are not simply a set of instructions for cooking: they are also narrative features used to structure the recollection of memory, express passion, and illustrate a point.

Real Life, Meaning Domestic Life

The recipes in Colwin's writing take on historical significance when considering the emphasis she places on the domestic. *HC*'s introduction begins, "unlike some people, who love to go out, I love to stay home", and, as the titles suggest, these are texts very much centred on the home (Colwin 2012, 3). Colwin begins *MHC* with a kind of treatise on what might be thought of as her brand of culinary domesticity. "Introduction: The Family Dinner in Real Life" is a tongue-in-cheek lament of times past, and the cultural prevalence of the family dinner in those times (2014, 1). Comparing a Norman Rockwell vision of nuclear familial domesticity to her present, when "everyone works" (since she precedes this by explaining that back in the day "mom was home", we can safely assume "everyone" implicitly means women) and therefore "we are a nation… of people who eat pizza or yogurt on the run, and standing up" (Colwin 2014, 1). *MHC*, Colwin suggests, is a mediation between these two extremes: a new domesticity. In this new domesticity, gender-based distinctions are not assumed and the preparation of meals is about nourishment for yourself, your family, your friends, and your community. Colwin's ideas about cooking are still rooted

in the home, with a familial bent (though the definition of family is expanded) but a refreshed version: “family life is never smooth… but whether we are happy or sad, we must be fed… this book was written for the sustainers and those who will be sustained” (2014, 5). In Colwin’s world, the sustainer-sustainee relationship is no longer necessarily mother-child, or wife-husband, but any number of infinitely variable relationships where one expresses their care for another through cooking. Colwin’s food writing focuses on comfort, simplicity, sharing: potato salad at a barbecue, cosy Friday night dinners at home, “a harried cook’s guide to some fast food” (2014, 71)– as Willard Spiegelman explains, “the associations among food, writing, domesticity, and human relations are the most salient part of her legacy” (2001, 64).

The associations of domesticity in a food writing style as generically complex as Colwin’s have broader consequences for the ways that food writing has been gendered. McLean explains the historical gender division in food writing: men authoring gastronomic literature, which “showcases the art of eating as a means of nourishing self-expression”, and women authoring domestic cookbooks, which “codify the boundaries and guidelines of middle class domesticity” (2012, 5). Given this divide, she argues that female food writers have generated their own version of gastronomy, the crux of which was a disavowal of the domestic. For McLean, M.F.K. Fisher, Alice B. Toklas, and Elizabeth David explicitly explored “an undomesticated appetite… their work does not take the form of the domestic cookbook, in large part, because the authors lay claim to an undomesticated task” (2012, 8). Jones and Taylor offer a different perspective on David, instead positing that her writing (along with Jane Grigson’s) did not outright reject the domestic since it was here that “culinary interests could be fully realized”, but rather formulated an alternative model of female domesticity that separated cooking from other kinds of domestic tasks (2001, 176). Similarly, Hollows

explains that "cooking as a form of domestic practice… becomes anchored around a singular mode of gendered identity" which manifests in the housewife (2007, 37). Hollows suggests that Julia Child also adopted her own brand of feminine domesticity by posturing herself not as a housewife but as a chef and home cook (2007, 42). These are just some examples of how the tension posed by the domestic in women's food writing plays out: the domestic becomes a fraught space of adoption (in the case of domestic cookbooks) or rejection (in the case of the "gastronomically grounded works" of writers like Fisher, Toklas and David) (McLean 2012, 87). In Colwin's case, the domestic is unabashedly embraced, with scholars and reviewers returning time and again to Colwin's term "domestic sensualist"[28]. But for Tanfer Emin Tunc, Colwin's domesticity was not simply a "bourgeois female "guilty pleasure"" (2018, 128) but rather the conscious adoption of a gendered narrative voice that, in the "backlash against feminism" of the 1980s, allowed Colwin to "work within the system to change the system" (2018, 130). Tunc argues that Colwin's work espoused her politics and activism through her domesticity (2018, 128), which makes sense for a writer who explains that "it is not just the Great Works of mankind that make a culture. It is the daily things, like what people eat and how they serve it" (Colwin 2012, 3). Like the food writers mentioned above, Colwin's is a version of narrative food writing that proposes its own specific relationship to the domestic. Though she writes in a lyrical and at times gastronomic style, her wholesale embrace of domesticity aims to redirect our assumptions away from gendered expectations about household labour and instead towards a politics and aesthetics of care, comfort, joy, and pleasure.

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[28] See Span (1988), Spiegelman (2001 64)

Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson argues that the emergence of the gastronomic field was contingent on a mutually constitutive relationship between the material (food), and the intellectual (gastronomic literature), since it was through writing that the fundamentally individual pursuit of eating could be translated into something for public intellectual consumption. For Parkhurst Ferguson:

> The gastronomic field is structured by the distinction between the material product – the foodstuff, the dish, or the meal – and the critical, intellectual, or aesthetic by-products that discuss, review, and debate the original product. The relentless intellectuality of the one is as necessary to the gastronomic field as the insistent materiality of the other. In a paradigm of what cooking is all about, culinary discourse transformed the material into the intellectual, the imaginative, the symbolic, and the aesthetic (1998, 610).

A defining feature of this literature was moving culinary symbolism away from the religious into a more secular domain that purported to be accessible to institutions and individuals alike (Parkhurst Ferguson 1998, 607). This reimagining "presupposed the consideration of food for its own sake and the ideological subordination of religious, symbolic, or medical concerns to the gustatory" (Parkhurst Ferguson 1998, 607). In writing about food and eating, gastronomic literature upended the precarity of cuisine as "a general cultural artifact and practice" reliant on oral transmission, since culinary writings then "fixed the culinary product and gave it an existence beyond the sphere of immediate culinary production" (Parkhurst Ferguson 1998, 610).[29]

Key to Parkhurst Ferguson's argument is a focus on the translation of the individual and private to the collective and public, a feature of gastronomy that was reflected in the transformation of dining spaces from the home to the restaurant. The gastronomic movement

[29] This also takes on gendered significance when we consider Kelly's assertion that women's kitchen memoirs are the natural continuation of oral storytelling (2015, 252).

"taken as the systematic, socially valorized pursuit of culinary creativity" (Parkhurst Ferguson 1998, 602) began in 19th century France, a century of considerable political turmoil during which culinary institutions moved from the court and the aristocracy to the nation (Parkhurst Ferguson 1998, 601). In this context, chefs of exiled aristocrats began cooking for a more general public rather than remaining with private patrons, and as a result "restaurants… became a notable feature of the urban landscape" (Parkhurst Ferguson 1998, 604). Parkhurst Ferguson acknowledges that some gastronomic literature of the time provided guidance on private dining, but ultimately concludes that "the public restaurant, not the private gathering, was the primary vehicle institutionalizing gastronomy as a social and cultural practice in early 19th-century France" (1998, 606). Understanding gastronomy as public practice helps to make sense of its gendered exclusions, since:

> the public culinary sphere was inhospitable to women: chefs as well as gastronomes were male. The host whose duties Grimod de la Reynière spelled out with such care could only be male. Moreover, as with other urban spaces (shops, parks, public transport, and above all, the street), its inherent promiscuity gave the restaurant an uncertain moral status that effectively excluded upper-and middle-class women. At the most extreme, the gastronome dined alone (Parkhurst Ferguson 1998, 602-603).

Class and status-based distinctions still occurred, and Parkhurst Ferguson explains that a new form of social division presented itself: that between chefs and diners (1998, 605) – again, in contemporary France chefs and diners alike were "invariably male" (1998, 602).

Though this is relevant context for Fisher, Child and Colwin, it is particularly interesting in Colwin's case because at the heart of Colwin's work is a tension between the public, intellectual engagement with food and the privileging of a private domestic space in which that food is prepared and consumed. If nineteenth century gastronomic literature were a – flawed and exclusionary but nonetheless – democratised approach to the culinary arts in comparison to its aristocratic predecessors, Colwin's twentieth century New York reconsiders

what culinary engagement in an urban space might look like. As Syme explains, Colwin "wasn't a polished homemaker in the Betty Crocker tradition or a highly technical haute-cuisine enthusiast like Julia Child, and though she was a working woman in New York, she didn't fit the type who returned from the office to a sad fridge full of SlimFast" (2021). In many ways, the material elements of Colwin's life instead imply a level of urban intellectualism that is synchronous with the standards of the gastronomic movement: a full-time, published author living in a major city and espousing an aesthetics of food that, like gastronomic literature, presupposes "the consideration of food for its own sake" (Parkhurst Ferguson 1998, 607). The subtitles of *Home Cooking* and *More Home Cooking* – "A Writer in the Kitchen" and "A Writer Returns to the Kitchen" respectively – identify Colwin by her career first and foremost. The question of a professional life as it pertains to the female domestic food writer is relevant insofar as domesticity in food writing has been associated with the housewife and an "other-oriented" economy. We know by the use of "home" in these titles that Colwin is likely to be writing about the domestic kitchen, but clarifying her profession from the jump moves Colwin into an uncertain realm: domestic, but not a housewife; writer, but not just about food. Colwin often caveats that certain culinary feats are more accessible to her because she works from home, though this is neither as a housewife nor exclusively as a food writer. Fisher and Child, on the other hand, more comfortably occupy the role of gastronome, not simply because of their temporal and geographic proximity to the phenomenon but because of the public-facing professionalisation of their interest in food and food writing. Colwin's food writing, by contrast, offers an interjection and an opportunity to think about how we might understand narrative food writing that is fundamentally situated in the private space of the home.

As a title like *Home Cooking* suggests, Colwin's home is the central setting of her food writing and is described as being intentionally so. As we have established, Colwin is clear about preferring to stay in, but there are hints throughout both books of her enjoyment and investment in her home. We are introduced to this idea in Annan's foreword to *Home Cooking*, when Annan first describes that everything in Colwin's "Chelsea apartment was picked with care: she had a passion for flea markets, for brown and white china, for enormous tea cups, for a special kind of straw basket and for antique table linen" (2012, x). This is one of the ways that Colwin reimagines the domestic space: this precision is not so much in service of status or materialism, but rather of creating an enjoyable space for herself, her family, and her guests. Annan evokes visiting Colwin at her home, wishing she could:

> walk through the pretty garden, down the steps to her basement front door… to sit down in her sitting room with a drink provided by her husband Juris and talk to her daughter Rosa… and then to sit down to a perfect meal: her baked chicken or her flank steak with a beautiful rice salad and a green bean salad, and strawberries and homemade shortbread to follow. After dinner she'd put some of her beloved early Motown on the stereo and make really good coffee (2012, xi).

Central to this description is the idea that Colwin's place was one of both comfort and pleasure: absent the frills or pomp of fine dining, to dine at Colwin's is to be fed simple, hearty food; listen to Colwin's favourite records; be interrupted by her young daughter and accommodated by her husband. The result is that guests "shone" at her table – a hard thing to do unless one is comfortable. This sense of comfort and pleasure derived from the home permeates through *HC* and *MHC*, and is part of the way that Colwin reimagines domesticity. In Colwin's writing, the domestic space is the foundation of an ethics of care. In this ethics, comfort and safety are crucial to human dignity, and food is often the way that that comfort and safety is delivered. For Colwin, this begins in the home, but, as we will see, also extends into the world. One of the ways that Colwin communicates the comfort of her spaces is by

stripping the artifice from cooking good food, and another is by focusing on the full sensory experience of dining. Colwin's approach to culinary tools evidences both her interest in the material culture of the kitchen and endears her as a practical chef not interested in selling her readers things they will not need. In her chapter "The Low-Tech Person's *Batterie de Cuisine*", Colwin explains "I do not have a toaster or a juicer. Three toasters have died on me and now I toast under the broiler. I do not have a cutlet bat, a pastry pin or a pastry bag. I wish I had a mandoline, but I do not. Instead I have my knives and the knuckle-scraping grater" (2012, 16). She concludes, "most things are frills – few are essential" (Colwin 2012, 16). And yet, as Annan explained, Colwin has a particular interest in antique and second-hand kitchen goods, a claim Colwin supports when she explains that, when single and living alone, she would eat eggplant "out of an old Meissen dish, with my feet up on my wicker footrest as I watched the national news" (2012, 27). As she reminisces on the time in her life when she ate eggplant for most meals, Colwin confesses that though she now has a husband and child, "I often find myself alone in the kitchen with an eggplant… about to make a weird dish of eggplant to eat out of the Meissen soup plate at my desk" (2012, 28). The Meissen dish, then, is one such example of kitchen materiality that is not so much about having the best things as it is about pleasure and comfort: the ability to revitalise a simple comfort meal with a nice piece of china, or the ability to revisit a particular moment in time by using a dish you have had your entire adult life.

This comfort and pleasure also comes from the scene setting Colwin does, describing dining as an experience that engages all of the senses and which is therefore, to her, best done in her home. Take her chapter "Friday Night Supper", which proactively pushes against a contemporary culture which is "surrounded by overabundance but admire[s] the minimal" (Colwin 2012, 51). One antidote to this, says Colwin, is to slow down, rest, and revive Friday

night supper. This is followed by a recipe for pot roast and potato pancakes, followed by orange ambrosia for dessert. The chapter concludes:

> This meal, which takes some time to prepare, must be eaten slowly. Afterwards it is best to stretch out on the sofa, balancing a cup of coffee on your stomach… on a cold Friday night, with the candles lit and a white cloth on the table, it is good to celebrate your good fortune in living comfortably and to remember those who do not. In short, it is a time to count blessings, to savor life without rush and to end the work week happy, drowsy and content (Colwin 2012, 58).

This passage barely references food, instead focusing on the way in which one should eat it (slowly); digest it (on the sofa, cup of coffee on the stomach); the environment it is best suited to (a cold Friday night, candles lit) and the resulting state it leaves you in (happy, drowsy and content). Colwin, in passages like these, is imparting what the nineteenth century gastronomers were doing when they sought to consider food for its own sake. It is a dish not without consideration or effort, and yet it recognises that sometimes the most important thing a meal can do is to leave its consumers comfortable, safe and happy.

The public spaces in *HC* and *MHC* are rarely restaurants: instead they are markets, delis, parks, homeless shelters, beaches, street vendors – all manner of backdrops that are included as facilitators for either the preparation or consumption of food. Rarely, however, are these settings where Colwin is cooked for: when a restaurant is mentioned it is usually so that Colwin can attribute a recipe to that restaurant, before sharing that recipe with her readers. In such cases, Colwin has always made that recipe herself. She explains in her “Red Peppers” chapter that her recipe for Pepper Zucchini is one that she first discovered “at a restaurant on the upper East Side of Manhattan called Café Divino”, but “since I do not live on the upper East Side and therefore could not go to the Café Divino every day, I was forced to try to replicate this dish in my own insufficient kitchen” (Colwin 2012, 93). The boundary between chef and diner so crucial to the social strata of nineteenth century French gastronomy is

blurred here – Colwin always remains a diner but moves from restaurant guest to home chef. Even in her “insufficient” kitchen she is able to recreate Pepper Zucchini – the recipe follows – undermining a hierarchy that places restaurant chef above home cook (Colwin 2012, 93). But it is not just the distinction between public and private cook that Colwin disrupts. Take, for example, her aptly titled “Salade Gourmande”, a salad “served in the kind of very expensive, old-fashioned restaurant that makes you feel secure and safe while you are there” (Colwin 2012, 148). She proceeds with the recipe: a combination of lettuce, cubed foie gras and lobster meat (hardly standard domestic fare) that she made for friends on New Year’s Eve (Colwin 2012, 149). Bemoaning the cost of such ingredients, Colwin nevertheless concludes “never mind – it is worth the half a month’s rent it costs” (2012, 149). Where the proliferation of and competition between restaurants in nineteenth century France helped to drive the emergence of gastronomy, here Colwin is distilling her own culinary philosophy into one ostensibly simple meal.[30] Firstly, her Salade Gourmande is not one obtained from a specific restaurant – rather, the more nebulous “kind of” restaurant that is presumably ubiquitous enough that it is identifiable more by its traits (in this case, expensive and traditional) than by signature dishes (Colwin 2012, 148-149). Secondly, though its ingredients are stereotypically expensive and luxurious, Colwin makes a pass at lessening the financial blow by suggesting “cooked lobster meat (a whole lobster is a waste)” (2012, 149). Thirdly, by providing a recipe at all – and it is, in fact, more a list of ingredients than a specific methodology – Colwin flattens the difference between haute cuisine restaurant and home dining. The ingredients are expensive but the process is straightforward, and Colwin attests that it is worth it – an endorsement we can trust because she herself has cooked this very dish for friends (2012, 149). Restaurants, in Colwin’s world, are not the site of culinary

[30] Parkhurst Ferguson explains that “competition was vertical as well as horizontal; the range of restaurants – the consequent economic, social, and culinary stratification that they solidified – was as important a factor in setting up the gastronomic field as the production of haute cuisine in a select few of them” (1998, 605).

cultural capital but a source of inspiration for dishes to be cooked at home. Given that this description of Salade Gourmande was originally published in Colwin's *Gourmet* column and later in *Home Cooking*, the particular democratisation of the culinary world is taken one step further – one might be able to afford to dine at the "kind of" restaurant that serves a Salade Gourmande; nor might they be able to afford lobster and foie gras to cook at home; a great number more could instead read about it in a magazine.

Colwin embraces the domestic as a space, and presents a vision of domesticity that is not reliant on the social and financial disenfranchisement of women. The same cannot be said for her relationship to the traditional domestic female figure, a distancing she often implements by self-deprecation. Consider the following passage:

> I entertained a newly married friend. This friend had married a goddess and lived in the country. I of course was a slob and lived in the city. The goddess had built their post-and-beam house with her own two hands, raised chickens, milked cows and was a veterinarian as well. On the side she was a glassblower… of course she baked her own bread, raised her own vegetables and made her own clothes… As the burden of this woman's accomplishments was being piled ever higher on my lowly shoulders, I cooked dinner. Baked chicken, hominy in cream, steamed string beans. By the time I heard about the glassblowing, I was whipping up some butterscotch brownies for dessert (Colwin 2012, 142).

This woman is a goddess and Colwin is a slob. Though never specifically called a domestic goddess, her achievements are expansively domestic, and harken back to a pastoral idyll where convenience is irrelevant even for someone with as complex a job as a veterinarian. This vision sits in direct contrast to the urban domesticity of Colwin's imagining. Colwin describes the goddess with reverence and yet there is something to be said for the way she is presented as almost parodically competent. Like Fisher, Colwin positions herself as different to the stereotypical domestic female, a more relatable version evidenced through her ability to fail, show humility, and poke fun at herself. The goddess, in this instance, aligns with what

Stéphanie Genz describes as “the self-sacrificing housewife who likes nothing better than baking pies and polishing floors”, the image of which we must move away from since “for most, housewifery will never have any utopian or dream-like quality but simply be a routine part of our lives” (2009, 59). Unintentionally or not, Colwin is perpetuating the idea of a self-sacrificing housewife: the goddess presumably has or had a career as a veterinarian and yet her vocation is categorised alongside a series of variably domestic skills not limited to building houses, raising animals, baking bread, growing vegetables, and making her own clothes: a list of attributes we might associate with the idea of the woman who “had it all”. As readers, though, rather than aspiring to be the goddess, we are supposed to side with Colwin here, as she draws on the universal feeling of meeting someone whose extensive accomplishments make us feel inadequate. Even when she is sighing with relief at the knowledge that the goddess has not yet learned to spin her own fabric, Colwin is nonetheless engaging in her own domesticity, preparing a fairly rustic meal emblematic of comfort and home: roast chicken, hominy and string beans. She “whips up” butterscotch brownies for dessert, concluding a multi-course, balanced meal one could hardly call slovenly (Colwin 2012, 142). When the brownies emerge from the oven inedible, Colwin surmises, “I learned that you should never be in the kitchen with anyone married to a perfect person” (2012, 143). As Genz explains, a pervasive narrative in the 1980s American context in which Colwin was writing, was that of the “Superwoman”, a “career-focused workaholic and strident feminist who is thoroughly antidomestic” (2009, 58). The Superwoman was posed as an alternative to the “public/private predicament” where “in case of doubt, female ambition should always be directed towards hearth and heart” (Genz 2009, 58). The result of this predicament, though, are perspectives like Colwin’s: in her reimagining of the domestic, caring for a home and family are democratised concerns, or at least not the result of – it is implied – passé gender

ideals. There is no space in this reimagining for the domestic housewife – Colwin distances herself from this figure.

It is not just in the melding of an intellectual engagement with food with an explicit and strident focus on the domestic sphere that Colwin's food writing innovates: it is also in the ways that she approaches topics like cooking for children, etiquette, and dietary concerns. Cooking for one's children was as key to the duties espoused in the domestic cookbook as cooking for one's husband – as McLean explains, "domestic cookbooks helped to define female propriety and to delineate the domestic bounds within which the proper woman was expected to perform" (2012, 44). This "proper woman" was expected not just to care for her husband, but raise sons who would become "moral men" and daughters who themselves would become ideal wives (McLean 2012, 44). McLean is specifically using examples of domestic cookbooks from the mid-nineteenth century, but these are ideals that have permeated the domestic cookbook through the twentieth century. In them, the housewife's "other-oriented domesticity" is aligned "with the health of the family and, in turn, the nation" (McLean 2012, 44). Some of these cookbooks implied that the woman who left the domestic sphere "risks the ruin of her children" (McLean 2012, 45). Neither Child nor Fisher write about cooking for children: though Fisher had two daughters, they are not present in *The Art of Eating*, and as mentioned, Child's childlessness is briefly addressed in *My Life in France*. We might understand this in part as legitimising both authors' status in the world of gastronomy, since caring for children is a markedly domestic preoccupation. Colwin, though, has a child and writes about preparing food for them, as well as her tastes, in both *HC* and *MHC*. The chapter "How to Disguise Vegetables" is, on its surface, the kind of parenting hack designed to ensure that children do not "live entirely on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches" and then become adults who "ignore their vegetables… actively loathe them"

(Colwin 2012, 59). The chapter suggests pairing vegetables with a sauce; turning them into fritters; making a pasta sauce from broccoli, and making a carrot pudding. But, as with the salmon passage mentioned earlier in this chapter, cooking for her daughter is actually a pathway for Colwin to enjoy food: “it was from my child that I rediscovered how good plain steamed vegetables are, and I will never forget the look of delighted surprise on her face at her first taste of zucchini” (2012, 59). This is part of Colwin’s vocabulary of food, and also part of how she reimagines domestic spaces: providing guidance on how to encourage one’s children to eat more vegetables is less a matter of fortifying them for their future domestic aptitude than it is an opportunity to share in a collective enjoyment of food.

The chapter “How to Give a Party”, also in *HC*, merges guidance about hosting, etiquette, feeding (Colwin 2012, 164). Colwin quickly establishes that the party in question will be a tea party (2012, 165). The advice for throwing the party is economical, practical, and designed to ensure the happiness of adults and children alike. Colwin provides a menu, and a time frame of three to five in the afternoon, with the explanation:

> Birthday parties are often more of a strain on young children than many adults realize, and it seems a good idea to keep them fairly simple. The rule is that if the adults are having a nice, relaxed time, the children will, too, and many small children will stand by the table amusing themselves nicely by picking all the cucumbers off the cucumber sandwiches. Because a tea party does not rely merely on cake and ice cream, children do not fill up on sugar and if the party ends at five, you have an hour to unwind before dinner (2012, 169).

That the party in question is a tea party to which children are invited is inherently domestic, and yet this domesticity is consistent with Colwin’s broader approach – though frequently geared at entertaining and caring for the people around her, Colwin’s domesticity is never exclusively other-oriented. Including children is a part of her decision-making process, but not all of it: “after years of contemplation (and the arrival of a baby who is now a child), I

realize that I do not like parties at night: I am too tired" (Colwin 2012, 165). Her guidance for feeding children is not about moulding them into domestic subjects but rather ensuring that, like her adult guests, they are comfortable and well-fed. In fact, in direct opposition to the gendered expectations of children in the home, Colwin, quoted in an interview, says "we have to get our sons into the kitchen with us and teach them how to cook so that, as adults, our daughters do not end up working to a frazzle while our sons sit around reading the newspaper" (Tunc 2018, 140, quoting La Ferle, 1996). As such, the above description of the birthday party seeks a happy medium: as with the salmon and the steamed vegetables, parents and children's comfort and happiness in this circumstance is mutually constitutive. If the children can be happy then the parents can relax, if the parents are relaxed so too will the children be. Colwin describes the conclusion of one such tea party:

> The older children ate cake and cheese buns and then everyone helped clean up. By the time the last dish had been put in the dishwasher, the three-year-olds had been fed their suppers and given their baths… Every crumb had been eaten, the table had been wiped. The toys had been put away and there was a relative degree of order in the house. It was seven thirty, with plenty of time to finish the paper, read a book and send out for Chinese food. Now, that's what I call a good party (2012, 170).

In Colwin's parties, the children are neither ignored nor uninvited, and yet the conclusion of the party is one which centres Colwin's relaxation and pleasure. Setting the scene in a way not dissimilar to the ending of "Friday Night Supper", Colwin evokes an environment where, with the people around her taken care of, she can now focus only on herself. *HC* and *MHC* espouse a complex matrix of assumptions about care: Colwin evidently cares for her husband, daughter, and friends, and expresses that care in part as a thoughtful and considerate host and cook. But she also upends the assumption that cooking is only about others because Colwin is always a passionate participant in these events and meals.

In line with the inclusion of recipes and tips for feeding children is Colwin's occasional foray into hosting etiquette – across *HC* and *MHC* there are guidelines for "catering on one dollar a head" (2014, 81), accommodating a variety of allergies or food restrictions in the one meal (2012, 38), making an entire dinner party salt-free (2012, 127), and cooking for jet-lagged guests (2012, 129). One complex example of such guidance comes in the chapter "Feeding the Multitudes" in *HC* (Colwin 2012, 70). Colwin explains that throughout her life she has found herself in environments where she is tasked with feeding vast quantities of people – making late-night sandwiches for co-eds whilst in university, and feeding a group of striking students in the 1968 student strikes. Immediately, Colwin pulls this quandary of hosting into the political sphere, as feeding the striking students becomes the entry-point to her own capacity to cook for the masses. "I am proud to have been in that kitchen. The issues were real issues of academic freedom and social justice" (2012, 72). This entry point leads to the focus of the remainder of the chapter, which is Colwin's involvement in the kitchen at a women's shelter. Here, we see how food operates as another layer of social connection: it is not just the literal fuel that the striking students consume, but the entry point for Colwin's own participation in the activism. Colwin's experience volunteering demonstrates to her that food and politics are as enmeshed as food is in any other part of her life. As a kind of sous chef to the full-time cook, Colwin helped to serve lunch to over a hundred women, concluding that "not one of them was like another. They were and are the most surprising group of people I have ever encountered, and not a single assumption can be made about them except that they are all living in a horrible way" (2012, 73). In fact, the one uniting factor is that "all of them had to be fed and I was happy to be the person ladling lunch onto plates" (Colwin 2012, 74). When the permanent chef does not show up one day, it falls to Colwin to feed the women and she explains that she "spent many waking hours wondering what to make for large numbers of people" (2012, 75). She suggests "chilli, baked beans,

macaroni and cheese, baked ziti, borscht, cabbage salad, pasta salad, vegetable stew and toasted cheese" (Colwin 2012, 75). Though she eventually quits, her experience volunteering at the shelter provides Colwin with experience feeding crowds that comes in handy later in life, such as when she cooks for her daughter's annual school fair.

This is a curious chapter because what begins as an etiquette problem quickly grounds itself in the political before pivoting back to questions of feeding large crowds in ways that satisfy a variety of tastes. There are hints of food politics across *HC* and *MHC* – issues such as the eroding quality of American produce (Colwin 2012, 61), the interconnected food histories of different countries (Colwin 2014, 49-50), and the importance of organic, homemade foodstuffs, especially for children (Colwin 2014, 85). For Tunc, *HC* and *MHC*, "reveal the political value of Colwin's domestic circle and simple tastes by linking her sensuous priorities to her social priorities and… by connecting her culinary approach and lifestyle choices to her personal concerns and public activism" (2018, 137). Tunc argues that Colwin's focus on organic, locally produced ingredients and homemade foods was a way of enacting her broader concerns with agribusiness and the denatured quality of American foodways in her private sphere. But Tunc also sees Colwin's approach to simplicity and efficiency as demonstrative of her pushback against the gendered distinctions in the domestic sphere. Tunc explains that Colwin:

> Geared her cooking towards ameliorating the impact of the double-shift, always recognizing the gendered politics of housework, and underscoring the reality that despite the gains made by feminism, women of her generation still carried the bulk of domestic responsibility… Colwin sought to alleviate this concern by making one aspect of the domestic dilemma – cooking – simple and pleasurable (2018, 140).

I agree with Tunc's arguments, but would like to build on them by suggesting that Colwin's food politics are even simpler and subtler than the above: they are an extension of the ethics

of care that emerge from Colwin's domestic vision. From her approach to cooking for children, to how she inhabits the domestic sphere, to the ways that she thinks about hosting (be it for guests in her house, her own wedding, hundreds of student activists, or the women at the shelter), the core of Colwin's politics is that every person is deserving of security and comfort, and that we often find that security and comfort through food. In the introduction to *MHC*, Colwin, in a passage reminiscent of Fisher's "when I write about food…", says:

> You want comfort; you want security; you want food; you want to not be hungry; and not only do you want those basic things fixed, you want it done in a really nice, gentle way that makes you feel loved. That's a big desire, and cookbooks say to the person who's reading them, "If you will read me, you will be able to do this for yourself and for others. You will make everybody feel better" (2014, 10).

For this reason, Colwin expresses that it is important to heed your guests' food preferences and to serve them organic chicken for the same reason it is important for you to enjoy the food you serve them: because you all deserve to eat. There is no philosophical distinction between cooking for children and cooking for adults because both parties derive comfort and enjoyment from food; a political dilemma becomes an etiquette dilemma because at the crux of the issue is ensuring that all participants are fed and fed well.

Conclusion

There are distinct similarities between Colwin on the one hand, and Fisher and Child on the other. Like Fisher, Colwin's food writing is imbued with pleasure, and full of humour and opinions. Like Child, Colwin's writing exemplifies an alternative kind of domestic femininity. Like both authors, Colwin distinguishes herself against the housewife. Where Fisher and Child were writing across Europe and America in the mid-twentieth century, Colwin's writing is grounded in domestic New York in the late 1980s and 1990s, and this context necessarily influences her approach to cooking and eating. Colwin is another example

of a writer whose output stylistically mirrors gastronomic literature, but whose writing has never been classified as such. But when we attend to the surface of Colwin's food writing, what we read is an aesthetics of cooking and eating – of gastronomy – that is centralised in the home.

Though Colwin's food writing was published as articles in a regular column in Gourmet magazine before their compilation in *Home Cooking* and *More Home Cooking*, food was not the basis of her career in the way it was for Fisher and Child. But even removing the question of professionalisation, Colwin's food is specifically home cooked, and her aesthetics of food privileges domestic spaces over public ones. Like Child, Colwin's food writing delights in the process of cooking and eating her own food, but this is not the stuff of the Cordon Bleu – instead, it is family recipes, how to organise a barbecue, what to feed children, what to eat on a beach holiday, what to eat on a cold Friday night. Colwin's vignettes are also a fusion of a multitude of genres – from travelogues to personal anecdotes to political opinions to literary references – but all connected by their focus on food. They are examples of, in Frow's terms, complex genres (2015, 43). As I have argued, Colwin's writing can be read as the literary embodiment of a dinner party – a celebration of food and human connection. *Home Cooking* and *More Home Cooking* are full of recipes and dinner party plans, and though, at first glance, these recipes are often more obviously formatted as recipes (separated from the prose, titled, with a set of instructions) than those in Fisher and Childs' writing, this is not *always* the case. Colwin often includes untitled, unindexed recipes that are embedded in her paragraphs: she follows no specific format in her delivery of recipes. I argue that, as with Fisher and Child, these recipes are thus not simply functional instructions, but narrative strategies that the authors use to structure their memories, express their opinions, write about their families. The complexity of recipes in these texts are crucial in my understanding of

them as gastronomic literature, since they remove these authors' texts from easy categorisation as *either* cookbook *or* narrative nonfiction.

Colwin's brand of gastronomic literature, as mentioned, is specifically located in the home – but she is sure to clarify that she, too, is not a housewife. This is not a mid-century nuclear idyll, but rather the cosmopolitan domesticity of New York City, and Colwin a working intellectual. Colwin-as-gastronome is one in which her home is not about status but about enhancing pleasure and comfort for herself and for the people she loves: it is an expression of her politics and her ethics of care. Though she is careful to distance herself from the figure of the housewife, Colwin's domesticity does not depend on the oppression of women. Instead, questions of cooking and etiquette often become vessels through which Colwin discusses her politics and activism – concerns like the quality of organic food, her experience cooking for a women's shelter and her community engagement. As Tunc explains, for Colwin "cooking in a socially responsible way is always revolutionary, for there are many ways to define revolution. For Colwin, revolution began in the kitchen" (2018, 140). This, again, is demonstrative of Colwin's ethics of care – one which begins in the home kitchen and reverberates outward, to her family, her friends, her neighbours, and her New York City community. This specifically domestic-focused version of gastronomy demonstrates not that female-authored gastronomy must be based in the home, but rather what an intellectual aesthetic approach to cooking and eating might look like if we expand its perimeters beyond 18th century French and English high society. In the final chapter of this thesis, I continue this expansion, this time reading Nora Ephron's work – also based in New York City in the late-twentieth century – as a gastronomic whole.

Chapter Four – Nora Ephron

Introduction

Where this thesis has focused on non-fiction writing by Fisher, Child and Colwin, with Ephron the nebulous boundaries between genres and recipes, fact and fiction, cookbook and life writing becomes more complicated. *Heartburn* (1996), Ephron's only novel, is a roman à clef – a fictionalised account of the public breakdown of Ephron's marriage to Carl Bernstein, following Ephron's discovery of Bernstein's infidelity when she was seven months pregnant with their second child. Per Paul Douglass, a roman-à-clef is:

> fiction with thinly disguised allusions to real people, places, and events. This mode of writing has its origins in satire, adopting a form which enables the writer to deal with controversial topics while avoiding charges of libel. *Romans-à-clef* also reinforce social in-groups, since one must be 'in the know' to recognize allusions to real people and events in supposedly fictional works (2012, 1).

Such is *Heartburn*: ostensibly fiction, though its use of "real" events and characters is not the only way *Heartburn* muddies the waters between fiction and non-fiction: it also contains recipes. The purpose of this chapter is not to prove definitively *Heartburn*'s veracity, but rather to look at Ephron's food writing as a holistic body of work that is able to capitalise on generic flexibility to explore the particular overlap between food writing and life writing. Gastronomic literature, as a genre built on formal flexibility, becomes a lens through which Ephron's food writing coalesces into a coherent whole. In this chapter, I will first look at *Heartburn* as an example of the truth/fiction tension in life writing and argue that it is food that allows Ephron to play with these boundaries – not just through her inclusion of recipes,

but also through an exploration of domesticity and gender in 1980s America.[31] I will then pivot to Ephron's nonfiction narrative food writing, which first appeared in a range of publications like *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times* but has since been compiled in the anthology *The Most of Nora Ephron* under the subheading "The Foodie" (2015). [32] Reading Ephron's nonfiction emphasises her thematic connections to Fisher, Child and Colwin, and to the broader lineage of gastronomic literature. Reading Ephron's nonfiction alongside her fiction helps to emphasise the porousness of these generic boundaries – what can be found in the nonfiction can be found in the fiction and vice versa. Ephron's character in *Heartburn* describes her food writing as "very personal and chatty – they're cookbooks in an almost incidental way": this is true not just in *Heartburn* but in Ephron's essays, and for all the authors in this thesis (1996, 17). All authors incorporate recipes in their writing in an almost incidental way: casually, as a continuation of the way food infiltrates their own lives, but also as if to gloss over the fact that the inclusion of recipes in narrative nonfiction or in a novel is, in fact, unexpected.

Heartburn

This chapter begins with an analysis of Ephron's *Heartburn*, with particular attention paid to three specific components of the text: firstly, the use of food and recipes as the key factor in Ephron's ability to erode the sanctified boundaries between fact and fiction, memoir and novel; secondly, the use of food as a linguistic driver in the book, particularly as it relates to comedy, and thirdly; the upending of the domestic ideal as a way of interrupting the male –

[31] The in-group alluded to by Douglass is present in other ways in *Heartburn*: its exploration of domesticity reinforces a perceived dichotomy between the suburban domestic housewife and the urban culinary intellectual.
[32] "Serial Monogamy: A Memoir" first appeared in *The New Yorker* (2006). "The Food Establishment: Life in the Land of the Rising Soufflé (Or Is It the Rising Meringue?)" first appeared in Ephron's book *Wallflower at the Orgy* (1970). "Baking Off" first appeared in Ephron's book *Crazy Salad: Some Things about Women* (1975).

public – gastronome and female – private – home cook triads. In examining these components of *Heartburn*, I establish its distinct positioning as a "fictional" text with "nonfiction" recipes, and thus demonstrate that food is the way that Ephron is able to destabilise these generic boundaries. As Frow says, "we cannot but attend to those embedded assumptions and understandings which are structured by the frameworks of genre and from which we work inferentially to the full range of textual meaning" (2015, 110). What embedded assumptions do we impute in a text like *Heartburn*, which we infer to be both fictional and also a loose version of "true" events; which we read like a novel and yet which also includes recipes? Harde and Wesselius, for example, refer to Heartburn as "recipes mixed into fiction" (2020, 1), "novel/cookbook" and literary cookbook (2020, 2). *Heartburn* can be read without ever being cooked from, and, though it plausibly could be cooked from without ever being read, that seems a less likely outcome given its packaging as literature. But the generic tension central to *Heartburn* begins to cohere when we understand it as an example of gastronomic literature. Much like in gastronomic literature, in *Heartburn* "the boundary between gastronomic and other kinds of writing is an unstable one that includes satire, parody, and polemic" (Carruth and Tigner 2017, 144). As I will demonstrate, *Heartburn* does not sit on its own as Ephron's singular foray into gastronomic literature, but rather works with her other food writing to form a gastronomic whole.

i. "Aaaaah, kreplach!": Food as Method for Generic Weirdness

Heartburn's protagonist, Rachel Samstat ("in almost every way, Rachel resembles Ephron" says Karen Heller in *The Washington Post*) is a cookbook author, which might on the surface account for the sixteen-odd recipes, and recipe index, in the book (*The Washington Post*, February 23, 2023). But, just like the recipes in Fisher and Colwin's works, the recipes bear

further consideration: what does it mean to confront a recipe in a piece of fiction (no matter how based in reality that fiction might be)? In *Heartburn*, recipes are a direct continuation of the narrative flow: trying to put a positive spin on being in New York and staying with her father after the discovery of Mark's infidelity, Samstat says:

> If I couldn't have Mark, I could finally be back making sorrel soup. Take 4 cups of washed sorrel and cut off the stems carefully. (If you don't, the soup will be hairy, and no one will know it's the sorrel's hair and not the cook's). Sauté the sorrel in 4 tablespoons butter until wilted… (Ephron 1996, 35).

The recipe continues, made all the more prominent because here it is food and the cooking of it that brings solace, however minor, in light of her failing marriage. Recipes weave in and out of the story, both from a narrative and a formatting perspective. Whether their intention is to send you to the kitchen or not, the recipes still work: one *Paris Review* article from 2022 made all 16 recipes from the book and concluded, "Ephron's recipes were fabulous. Almost every dish was… the best version of its kind I'd ever made" (Stivers).[33] In this sense, as in Colwin, Child, and Fisher, the food in Ephron's writing is both literally food – it can be cooked, by both characters in the text and people reading it – and its own literary device. Though they are indexed, none of the recipes has a title, a list of ingredients or tools, or a set of numbered instructions. As with many of the recipes in Colwin's writing, in *Heartburn* the recipes seem less like an encouragement to cook and more as a way of establishing Samstat's character as a cookbook writer, though unlike Colwin's recipes these, for the most part, include measurements and therefore read as functional recipes[34].

[33] This recalls a quote of Samstat's, referring to her family's housekeeper Amelia: "What a cook she was! Everything she made was the lightest, the flakiest, the tenderest, the creamiest, the whateverest" (Ephron 1996, 49).
[34] See also De Leeuw (2022).

The sharing of recipes makes sense as a way of legitimising Samstat as a cookbook author, but they are also essential to the way Samstat conceives of herself: “Step right up, it’s Rachel Samstat, she’s bright, she’s funny, *and she can cook!*” (Ephron 1996, 135). And yet the instances when she does cook in the book are associated with disaster: the book begins with the humiliation of Samstat learning of her husband’s infidelity and realising she has not only just baked a carrot cake for her husband, Mark, his lover Thelma, and Thelma’s husband, but that it contained too much tinned pineapple (Ephron 1996, 6). The humiliation is compounded because Samstat then shared the recipe with Thelma: as Leonardi explains, “to share a recipe… is an act of trust between women, a trust that Thelma has clearly betrayed” (1989, 346). Leonardi also notes that the carrot cake recipe is “one of the two withheld recipes in the narrative, withheld perhaps because, ineffective as a sign of trust between Rachel and Thelma, it could not be expected to carry the weight of recipe sharing between narrator and reader” (1989, 346). In a cooking demonstration, Samstat shares the recipe for a pot roast, and then becomes so overcome by her husband’s betrayal that she sends an onion flying off the bench into the audience (Ephron 1996, 135); the book concludes with Samstat baking a pie (the recipe is also included) that she throws in her husband’s face (Ephron 1996, 175). She says:

> I loved to cook, so I cooked. And then the cooking became a way of saying I love you. And then the cooking became the easy way of saying I love you. And then the cooking became the only way of saying I love you (Ephron 1996, 135).

All four authors develop an expansive vocabulary of food, and it is through this vocabulary that they explore a range of issues – in Colwin, those are often issues of comfort and connection. In Ephron food becomes, among other things, the vehicle through which Samstat processes her divorce. Food, recipes, and the sharing of them, becomes a way that Samstat communicates (or struggles to). Again, Gopnik has postured that part of the appeal of reading

recipes is the inherent gulf between the recipe promised and the recipe recreated – he says that in cooking, as with in living, "you think that the point is to improve the technique until you end up with something perfect, and that the reason you haven't been able to break the cycle of desire and disillusion is that you haven't yet mastered the rules" (2011, 80). The metaphor here is apt: in *Heartburn*, living and cooking are inextricable, so as the communication in Samstat's marriage breaks down so too does cooking as a reliable expression of her love. As readers, we witness Gopnik's theory in action: Samstat is a cookbook author, ostensibly a master of the cooking rules, and yet as in her marriage no matter the effort expended the results may vary.

More than simply providing recipes, Ephron also refers to providing recipes – and so recipes become a kind of dance that Ephron engages in with the reader that points to the generic oddness of the text. Reflecting on her childhood, for example, Samstat recalls her mother's:

> famous lox and onions and eggs, which… took her so long, in fact, that I really don't have time to give you the recipe, because it takes up a lot of time to explain how slowly and painstakingly she did everything, sautéing the onions over a tiny flame so none of them would burn, throwing more and more butter into the pan, cooking the eggs so slowly.., (Ephron 1996, 22-23).

Granted, this is a very basic description of an apparently more elaborate meal – and yet why provide such a description at all if, as Samstat claims, she is low on time? Humour, for one – and also to demonstrate the way that language and food merge in *Heartburn*'s internal logic: the sentence labours on like the process of cooking the lox, its cadence mirroring the rhythm of cooking something low and slow. As *Heartburn* has already demonstrated, recipes meander through the broader narrative in Samstat's writing. Later, Samstat explains that she "made shrimp curry. (The recipe's in *Uncle Seymour's Beef Borscht* if you want it.)", *Uncle Seymour's Beef Borscht* being Samstat's previously published cookbook (Ephron 1996, 128).

This is unusual: there is of course no way for a reader of *Heartburn* to find a recipe from a cookbook that does not exist, and there *is* a precedent to providing recipes in the book. So why mention the shrimp curry, if not to provide its recipe? Recipes are both a way that Ephron enacts generic complexity, and comments on it: in these self-referential gestures, recipes are the textual element that destabilises the boundary between Ephron and Samstat. Though Samstat's being a cookbook author is perhaps the most obvious explanation for the inclusion of recipes, the amorphousness between Ephron and Samstat is a contributing factor. As Kelly has explained, "recipes-with-memories are a natural extension of storytelling", and so though *Heartburn* is fictionalised, the distinction between public and private in *Heartburn* is porous (2015, 252).

Instead, *Heartburn* could be read as Ephron's own kitchen storytelling: as Leonardi suggests, "the text itself refuses to decide not only whether it is cookbook or narrative, cookbook or autobiography, autobiography or novel but also whether it is journalism or autobiography or novel – or mudslinging" (1989, 345). The "real-life" counterparts of the characters in *Heartburn* have long been known – a *Harper's Bazaar* article published not long after *Heartburn* says, "given the publicity surrounding Nora Ephron's marriage to and subsequent divorce from *Washington Post* Watergate reporter Carl (*All the President's Men*) Bernstein, her novel retaliation doesn't come as any great surprise" (Harrington 1983). And so to read Samstat explaining that, "if I tell the story, I control the version… if I tell the story, I can make you laugh, and I would rather have you laugh at me than feel sorry for me", and then providing a recipe, is also to join Ephron in the kitchen as she muddles through a heartbreak (Ephron 1996, 176-177).

In *Heartburn*, recipes are not simply a metaphor for communication but for how Samstat experiences love more broadly. Samstat and her husband's good friends, Arthur and Julie Siegel, unite over their shared passion for food: "the four of us had a friendship that was a shrine to food" (Ephron 1996, 104). To prove the point, this statement is followed by a page of descriptions of food and memories and a recipe for a bread pudding: the food is the memory and vice versa. The bread pudding recipe is included anecdotally, as Samstat describes a meal they had together in New Orleans (Ephron 1996, 104). The meal goes on until "Arthur said, "Let's go to Chez Helene for the bread pudding" and we did, and we each had two. The owner of Chez Helene gave us the bread pudding recipe when we left, and I'm going to throw it in" (Ephron 1996, 104). Food, a uniting factor in not just Samstat's closest friendships but Samstat's and her husband's, is shared with the reader the way it is shared between the four of them: the bread pudding recipe is enmeshed with associations of friendship, travel, and love. This takes on further pertinence because it is contrasted with Thelma, who, Samstat asserts "really didn't care about food" (Ephron 1996, 104). The distinction is manifold – not only is Thelma an outsider because of her indifference to food (and therefore not a suitable match for Mark), her puddings specifically are bad. As a counterpoint, Samstat can provide a recipe for the best bread pudding she's ever had, and the mutual associations it has for herself and Mark. Though Arthur and Julie experience their own infidelity, the relationship endures, and Samstat shares a recipe for peach pie (Ephron 1996, 111). Recipes, then, are symbols for strong bonds and positive memories: by contrast when Samstat is cooking in the present-tense, recipes – like her husband and Thelma – betray her.

These associations come full circle considering Samstat's vinaigrette recipe, withheld until the second-last page. Not long into *Heartburn*'s second chapter, Samstat expresses her

retroactive disbelief: “even now, I cannot believe Mark would want to risk losing that vinaigrette” (Ephron 1996, 14). The vinaigrette becomes a metaphor for Samstat’s value in the relationship: if she can cling on to the recipe, he will need her, and if he needs her, he won’t leave. Two thirds of the way into the book, Samstat admits, “Mark might be willing to give me up, and my vinaigrette” (Ephron 1996, 103). The book concludes with her revealing the recipe to Mark and the reader. Though this is preceded by the climactic pie-throwing scene, there is an opportunity to read the vinaigrette as the more transformative metaphor: the sharing might be an admission of defeat, or of Samstat releasing herself from the notion that her value lies in her ability to cook. Either way, it is a moment of closure that traces the many shades of Samstat’s heartbreak.

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It is not only recipes that destabilise the boundaries between Samstat and Ephron; fiction and non; but food more broadly. Samstat’s first marriage, too, ends in infidelity – but she is quick to clarify that more than the infidelity, it was her ex-husband Charlie’s hamster Arnold that was the cause of their divorce. As readers, we understand Samstat and Charlie’s incompatibility from the jump: Samstat describes Charlie as “so neurotic” he wouldn’t eat fish (because he once choked on a fishbone) or onions (claiming an allergy) (Ephron 1996, 79). Though this is attributed to his neuroses, these food aversions are at odds with Samstat’s general approach to life. She explains, “you can’t really cook without onions” (Ephron 1996, 79). While Samstat cooks for Charlie, Charlie cooks for his hamsters Arnold and Shirley – he was “always whipping up little salads for them with his Slice-o-Matic” (Ephron 1996, 79). When Arnold dies, Charlie has him cryogenically frozen and then stores the corpse in their freezer at home. Samstat says:

> I could just see Cora Bigelow, the maid, taking Arnold out one Thursday thinking he was a newfangled freeze-dried potato treat in a boil bag; boy, would Charlie be in for a shock the next time he went to put an eensy-weensy bouquet of flowers next to Arnold's final resting place, directly to the right of the ice cube tray. I mean, what are you supposed to do with a first husband like that? I'll tell you what: divorce him (Ephron 1996, 80).

As with all of *Heartburn*, there is comedy, exaggeration, and intentional dramatism to the retelling of this story: it is an absurdist metaphor for being out of step with one's spouse; for the comparative domestic ineptitude of men; for the stereotypical neurotic male. But as with the breakdown of her relationship with Mark, Samstat tells her story using the scaffolding of the kitchen, and of food. In this slapstick, neurosis attaches itself to food, a husband is more capable of making salad for his pets than his wife, and a dead hamster might come to be mistaken for a potato.

We might understand *Heartburn* as an extended exposé – a piece of gossip about the breakdown of a high-profile marriage. As a text, it does not need to have food in it at all. It might inherently be about love, but in *Heartburn*, there is no love without food. And by including food, food that can be cooked and enjoyed by its readers no less, the book's generic boundaries begin to erode – if the recipes are true, is the gossip also? As we have seen, the generic malleability is largely attributable to the book's inclusion of recipes. But that is just one way that Ephron plays with genre. Take, for example, when the standard formatting of the text halts and continues with what Samstat calls "the Kreplach Joke", which is just that – a joke about kreplach, but one indented and titled (as a recipe might be) and that pulls us out of the narrative flow (Ephron 1996, 31).[35] Because of its formatting, it becomes a generic

[35] She precedes The Kreplach Joke by saying, "I would throw in a recipe for kreplach as well, but it's a pain in the ass to make kreplach" (Ephron 1996, 31).

interrupter – more like script than novel, and a nod to the scriptwriting component of Ephron's career and a reminder of the multimodal nature of her creative output. There is also "Rachel Samstat's Jewish Prince Routine", (the routine's central joke is about butter), this time formatted as a dialogue and embedded in the middle of a chapter (Ephron 1996, 20-21). Again, and per Gigante, amongst the literary forms adopted by gastronomes were "poems, dialogues, satires, and parables" (2013, xix), and we see Ephron here playing with a variety of literary forms. Consider also midway through the book, when chapter eight begins, "I see that I haven't managed to work in any recipes for a while. It's hard to work in recipes when you're moving the plot forward" (Ephron 1996, 99). Who is speaking here – Samstat, or Ephron, or both? This kind of metafiction is only possible because of the presence of recipes elsewhere in the book: we might exist in this context as the fictional audience of the fictional Samstat's cookbooks, or we might exist as the "real" audience of the real Ephron's roman à clef. It is itself a kind of ironic distancing, allowing Ephron to speak about her heartbreak in less serious terms. But it is the reference to recipes, or their comparative absence at this part of the text, that hints to *Heartburn*'s broader generic play. Though it is Samstat who notes that this book "has more plot than I've ever dealt with before", we can also understand this passage as Ephron nodding to the fact that this book has more recipes than she has ever dealt with before (Ephron 1996, 99). That the text then quickly realigns itself with the plot is exactly the point – as readers, we go along with whichever pathway Ephron provides for us.

One final, distinctive instance of this generic play is a passage embedded in chapter nine, seemingly apropos of nothing (it is directly preceded by a phone call with Samstat's friend Betty about Thelma), called *Potatoes and Love: Some Reflections* (Ephron 1996, 123). This is structured as narrative, with subheadings *the beginning, the middle (I)*s *the middle (II)* and *(the end)* (Ephron 1996, 123-126). Each subheading then details the types of potatoes Samstat

eats at different parts of a relationship, given, as she says, “whenever I fall in love, I begin with potatoes” (Ephron 1996, 123). There are three recipes included in the duration of the narrative: Swiss potatoes (Ephron 1996, 125), potatoes Anna (Ephron 1996, 125), and mashed potatoes (Ephron 1996, 127). Swiss potatoes and potatoes Anna both occur in the beginning – they serve two. Mashed potato comes at the end – and serves one. In this narrative, love and relationships have a beginning, middle, and crucially an end – but potatoes (and thus, for Ephron, food) are the constant. The narrative voice of *Potatoes and Love* is no different than the one in the rest of *Heartburn*, and though thematically organised there is no practical reason why such a passage could not be embedded into the rest of the plot. And yet it is given its own title, its own structure, its own specific allying of love and food – this is part of *Heartburn*’s generic play in action. And in every instance, food is the entry point and vehicle for the ways that these boundaries are pushed and pulled.

ii. “I CAN’T STAND NOT TALKING!”: Mudslinging, Pie-Throwing, and Culinary Catharsis

Ephron’s food vocabulary is not simply used as a way to process divorce but is crucial to Samstat’s self-expression more broadly. Food is not just what Ephron’s writing is about, but inextricable from how she writes it. On its face, this is a book about heartbreak, betrayal, and the breakdown of a relationship, but food is the way that this story is told. It becomes the crucial linguistic driver of the plot and its unravelling. From the book’s title – not heartbreak, but heartburn; a reminder of the particular cruelty of cheating on a heavily pregnant woman but also of a food-related bodily symptom – to its protagonist’s job to the metaphors that pepper the story, food is everywhere in *Heartburn*. Samstat describes the “peanut-butter-and-

jellyness" of her pre-affair life (Ephron 1996, 43); her pregnant body has a "belly button that looked like a pumpkin stem and feet that felt like old cucumbers" (Ephron 1996, 44); of Samstat and her husband's best friends, "two of us liked dark meat and two of us liked light meat and together we made a chicken" (Ephron 1996, 101); her husband's mistress is named Thelma Rice. Where in Fisher, Child and Colwin's writing, stories of food structure the authors' memories and in some instances – like with Fisher and Child – track personal development, in *Heartburn* food is more frequently the chosen metaphor for Ephron's sense of humour. A book about relationships told through food, *Heartburn*'s jokes range from love and relationships ("the man is capable of having sex with a venetian blind") (Ephron 1996, 13) to food ("Arthur makes coffee by putting eggshells and cinnamon sticks and an old nylon stocking into the coffeepot. His coffee tastes like a very spicy old foot") (Ephron 1996, 114), to a combination of the two ("I couldn't believe that anyone would be so sexually driven that he might actually skip lunch – and after an auction!") (Ephron 1983, 63). The centrality of food in Samstat's literal vocabulary reflects its figurative importance in her life: it is a mode of access, allowing Samstat to not only process but speak about her experiences and emotions.

Comedy makes sense for both Ephron and Samstat: Ephron was a known humourist[36], and Samstat's circumstances provide ample opportunity for her to express her incredulousness, to use humour as a coping mechanism, and also to channel Ephron's own feelings through her fictionalised counterpart. In her work on women's comedy, Barreca defines humour as "those specific textual strategies where the refusal to take serious matters seriously is rendered

[36] Not just a known humourist but one whose humour orbited the pillars of food and relationships. As Julia Moskin explains in Ephron's obituary in the *New York Times*, Ephron "used food to define characters in a stroke… in the famous Katz's deli scene in "When Harry Met Sally," the actress Meg Ryan became famous for her epic faked orgasm, but something she does early on – methodically removing most of the meat from her sandwich – tells you much more about Sally" (2012).

explicit" (2022, 4). In a similar vein, Sianne Ngai and Lauren Berlant explain that "comedy's pleasure comes in part from its ability to dispel anxiety", but that it also "just as likely produces anxiety: risking transgression, flirting with displeasure, or just confusing things in a way that both intensifies and impedes the pleasure" (2017, 233). This dynamic is at play in *Heartburn*, where Ephron refuses to take seriously the difficult or traumatic situations that plague her characters, and, through this refusal, she looks her characters' – and by extension, her own – (often messy) emotions dead in the eye. In *Heartburn*, Ephron is constantly flirting with displeasure, as no topic is too serious not to be made a joke. Take, for example, Samstat describing her mother Bebe's death – after a slapstick routine in which Bebe is declared dead before "rising like a slow-motion poltergeist" from beneath her sheet in a complete and anomalous resuscitation, Bebe believes she has witnessed a miracle that proves God's existence (Ephron 1996, 27-28). Bebe then,

> Checked out of the hospital, filed for divorce, and went to New Mexico to find God. And she did. She found God and she married him. His name was Mel, he honestly believed he was God, and as my first husband Charlie said at the time, "If there's one thing we know about God, it's that he's not named Mel" (Ephron 1996, 28-29).

Mel swindles Bebe out of all she owns, before Samstat declares, "then she died again, this time for good" (1996 29). Approaching not just the breakdown of her marriage but tragedy and difficulty more generally with comedy intimates that Samstat's humour is fundamental to the way that she processes her life. This scene, which brings levity to the tragic and unjust, is emotionally anchored by Samstat wondering what advice Bebe would have given in the face of her daughter's heartbreak. This is a brief moment of candour, immediately pivoting back to the comical: "the truth is she probably wouldn't have been much help" (Ephron 1996, 29). Samstat muses that if she were able to ask her mother for advice:

> she would probably have said something fabulously brittle like “Take notes.” Then she would have gone into the kitchen and toasted almonds. You melt some butter in a frying pan, add whole blanched almonds, and sauté until they’re golden brown with a few little burned parts. Drain lightly and salt and eat with a nice stiff drink. “Men are little boys,” she would have said as she lifted her glass. “Don’t stir or you’ll bruise the ice cubes.” (Ephron 1996, 29).

This imagined scene – of a mother comforting her heartbroken daughter before passing down a recipe – is by no means performed as expected. Instead, it relies on humour – a “fabulously brittle” comment, the whiplash of moving into a recipe, and as much advice given about ice cubes as there is about men – and in doing so is demonstrative of *Heartburn*’s central preoccupation with the intertwined nature of love, humour, and food.

For Barreca, a female humourist will “often mask her satire by appearing to describe faithfully a series of events”, when in reality such comedy “is characterized by the breaking of cultural and ideological frames” because in it, “the very ideal of the “universal” is challenged, confronted and, finally, shattered” (2022, 6). Consider how Samstat describes the changes to her pregnant body, which gifts her with “breasts, fantastic tender apricot breasts, then charming plucky firm tangerines, and then, just as you were on the verge of peaches, oranges, grapefruit, cantaloupes, God knows what other blue-ribbon county-fair specimens, your stomach starts to grow, and the other fruits are suddenly irrelevant because they’re outdistanced by an honest-to-God watermelon” (Ephron 1996, 45). Though *Heartburn* does purport to faithfully describe a series of events – pregnancy, marriage, the dissolution of said marriage – it does so with a total breaking of cultural and ideological frames. Here, marriage is neither sacred nor infallible, the family home is in constant need of repair, and pregnant bodies are a miracle not because they generate life but they generate a bigger cup size – that is, until the stomach outgrows them, at which point Samstat says “if pregnancy were a book, they would cut the last two chapters” (Ephron 1996, 44). The metaphor for breasts here is a

little crude, a little silly, and, because it's *Heartburn*, the vehicle of the metaphor is food. Just as the food in *Heartburn* is both literal food and a communicative tool, so too does it straddle the line between absurdist on the one hand, and a crucial part of Samstat's self-conception and relationship-building on the other. This tension is inherent in the way that Ephron expresses humour, allowing her characters to work through traumatic experiences without making them too serious.

It is not only in its capturing of the failure of marriage through which Ephron's humour breaks cultural and ideological frames, but in the way that Samstat's anger at her husband's infidelity manifests. For Barreca, "comedy can effectively channel anger and rebellion by first making them appear to be acceptable and temporary phenomena, no doubt to be purged by laughter; and then by harnessing the released energies, rather than dispersing them" (2022, 6). Initially, and as the book begins, "the first day I did not think it was funny. I didn't think it was funny the third day either, but I managed to make a little joke about it" (Ephron 1996, 3). We track Samstat through various stages of processing – disbelief, bargaining – again in line with Barreca's faithful recall of events, all of which lead up to the book's climax, a pie-throwing scene. In it, Samstat and her husband are invited to a dinner party where the host requests a key lime pie. The dinner party conversation is gossip about friends of theirs and their affairs – Mark's is not known to the hosts. When one host asks, "how is it possible to be married to someone and not know something so fundamental?" (Ephron 1996, 174) Samstat reaches breaking point: she says to her reader, "I can't stand sitting here with all this rage turning to hurt and then to tears. I CAN'T STAND NOT TALKING!" (Ephron 1996, 175). Noticing the pie, she concedes that if she throws it at Mark, that will be the end – but this precipitates the realisation that "nothing mattered except that he didn't love me. *If I throw*

this pie at him, he will never love me. But he doesn't love me anyway. So I can throw the pie if I want to" (Ephron 1996, 175). The pie is thrown.

Because the Key lime pie recipe is included, Leonardi calls this scene, "the key recipe" (1989, 346): key to the narrative's tension and catharsis, but also key to the generic confusion. The climactic success of the pie throwing is, for Leonardi, in the context of its recipe, which is "a wink from author to reader… a pie that can be either eaten, read, or thrown into someone's face" (1989, 346-347). "The Key lime pie embodies the fiction of the narrator herself. Like Mark Feldman, who steals all his friends' experiences as material for his column, Rachel turns event into story and food into recipe" (Leonardi 346). But its importance doesn't end there: it is Ephron making her story literal. "Like the recipes," says Leonardi:

> it is first embedded in fiction, then literalized in the text, then given the possibility of literalization outside the text, not simply as advice but as Nora Ephron's version of real life (1989, 346).

In this instance, we see the shades of Ephron's food vocabulary at play: for Samstat, throwing the pie is literally the method through which she expresses her emotions; for Ephron, writing this scene is a metaphorical expression. Pie-throwing might be a cliché of slapstick, but here, as throughout the book, comedy, love and food are points of the same triangle. Barreca argues that comedy can be a potent way for women to channel their anger – Ephron gives us the catharsis of feeding Mark his just desserts. Though indeed the tension in the pie-throwing scene is purged by laughter, it is Samstat's realisation that she *can* throw the pie since Mark's love has already dwindled that impacts the reader's satisfaction: Samstat is harnessing the released energies that Barreca speaks of, rather than dispersing them. There is no greater proof for that harnessing than the existence of the book in the first place: in Samstat's life, the

most Mark gets is a pie to the face. In Ephron's, her ex-husband gets a public, barely veiled account of his adulterous behaviour.

iii. <u>"We never even had lunch!": Renovated Ideals of Love and Domesticity</u>

Heartburn, like *Home Cooking, More Home Cooking*, and in some respects Julia Child's writing, concerns itself with the domestic sphere. Unlike in the abovementioned texts, in *Heartburn* the domestic ideal fails to live up to its promise. Hollows has pointed out the paradox central to Betty Friedan's assessment of housework: "it is labour… but it is not the *real* labour associated with public sphere of professional occupations… the role of the housewife and consumer become coterminous" (2007, 36). This is indeed a difficult space in which to situate a character like Samstat, whose job it is to produce domestic cookbooks (presumably for the housewife/consumer to purchase), but who is also a wife, mother and friend who cooks as a way of expressing her love. *Heartburn* and Samstat have their own unique relationship to domesticity scaffolded by the fact that cooking and recipe sharing are Samstat's career, and so the associations of the culinary with the home and the housewife are complicated. Nonetheless, preoccupations of domesticity, social mores, hosting, and decorating proliferate. Societal perception and the specific social mores of 1980s Washington DC are a recurring way that Samstat interprets her relationship to Thelma: Thelma is suspected of having an affair because she is planning to buy a condominium, and because of whom she has sat herself next to at her own dinner party (Ephron 1996, 9); Samstat downplays her relationship with Thelma because "we had never even had lunch!" (Ephron 1996, 151). Recipes, and the mention of recipes, often arise in tandem with hosting scenarios – both the pie-throwing and the carrot cake incidents are compounded by their occurrences

with either hosting or being hosted. Though recipe development is Samstat's job, when recipes do appear they are personal rather than professional contributions – although this again is complicated since, as a roman à clef, we might consider the very existence of *Heartburn* as a professional enterprise. Throughout the book, such preoccupations leave Samstat in a kind of freefall, since there is no domestic space – no home – in which to reliably anchor them. Genz locates the unfixed nature of the domestic space in postfeminism, explaining that in this context, "domesticity… [is] a fiercely debated concept in both popular culture and feminist criticism, proving that the meaning of 'home' is far from being domesticated and remains unresolved" (2009, 49).

Indeed in *Heartburn*, home is unresolved: Samstat moves back and forth between Washington D.C. and the house she shares with Mark, to her father's apartment in New York, commuting between the two on the Eastern Shuttle with government workers returning to New York from a day's work in Washington. Even before she has learned of her husband's infidelity, Samstat's housing instability is due to the affair: she spends time at her father's house because "we were broke", because of "the affair with Thelma Rice. Thelma went to France in the middle of it, and you should see the phone bills" (Ephron 1996, 5). As readers, we learn of Samstat and Mark's Washington house (where the renovations go so awry that their new carpet is mistakenly installed in a department store instead of in their house), a holiday home in West Virginia (where the contractor has not installed a front door) and Samstat's father's apartment (Ephron 1996, 15). Home in *Heartburn* is both unfixed and in a state of constant disrepair, and yet Samstat remains attached to the notion of domestic activity as a crucial component of her marriage. She says, "I love figuring out what's for dinner and where to hang the pictures and do we owe the Richardsons" (Ephron 1996 14), and explains that "it was almost as if Mark had a career as a columnist and I had a career as a food person

and our marriage had a career as a fighter with contractors' (Ephron 1996, 15). Part of Samstat's outrage, then, is that all throughout Mark's affair, she has been holding up her end of the domestic bargain (1996 14). Where Mark and Thelma's relationship reflects the courtship of the contemporary bourgeoisie – gifts, meals in restaurants, hotels stays[37], and flowers – Samstat by comparison had been "doing nothing but boiling eggs and teaching my child to differentiate between the cat in the hat and the fox in socks" (Ephron 1996, 37). As Rebecca Swenson explains, "the idea that food preparation is fun and pleasurable has its roots in its assignment to the happy homemaker, a wife and mother whose unpaid labor is done for loved ones because of natural, altruistic, and maternal instincts": in cooking and tending to her child, Samstat is correctly performing her gender (2009, 38).

In one of the book's final acts, Samstat discovers yet another betrayal: Mark has been looking for houses in the Sunday real estate section of the newspaper – houses to move to with Thelma (Ephron 1996, 153). That it's a domestic space that creates this moment of realisation for Samstat is telling: while she has been commuting between houses like a government worker, her husband has been looking for somewhere else to live with his new partner – a woman who makes "gluey puddings", no less (Ephron 1996, 6). Though delivered in her trademark tongue-in-cheek manner, Samstat repeatedly tells us that part of her incredulousness at her husband's infidelity is that she has done everything right – not just as a woman, wife, or mother, but as a homemaker. Accordingly, she wonders, ""maybe we just ran out of things to renovate"" (Eprhon 1996, 161). These activities – what she calls the "everydayness of marriage" – are ones Samstat genuinely enjoys, but not without the knowledge of what they contribute to the overall domestic project (Ephron 1996, 14). The

[37] Including, Samstat says incredulously, "room service! he'd even had room service with her!" (Ephron 1996, 37).

catharsis of the aforementioned key lime pie scene is impactful for this very reason: with it comes the realisation that no matter how good Samstat is at domesticity, it cannot save her marriage. That she destroys a piece of her own homemaking in the process of this revelation is both personal growth and narrative resolution for the protagonist who wondered, “would anyone love me if I couldn’t cook?” (Ephron 1996, 135).

In *Heartburn*, Samstat clings to domestic ideals because of their associations with a strong marriage: her marriage ends regardless. The relationship between women, cookbooks, and the home here are not of a domestic idyll, whether that be the one against which Friedan is revolting or – as in Colwin’s case – an updated vision of comfort and pleasure. Instead, recipe sharing is professional (for both Samstat and Ephron), home is in a state of flux, and domestic preoccupations are not a strong enough foundation to save a marriage. Whether it’s as host or guest, homemaker or career woman, the structures of domestic life in *Heartburn* are flimsy at best, nonexistent at worst. In this way both Colwin and Ephron offer visions of domesticity that challenge and expand our understanding of women’s food writing. Read in tandem, Colwin and Ephron present a domestic space which is key to their self-expression since it is the primary site in which they cook and eat. But, though as individuals they might seem to participate in domesticity of their own accord, the shadow of housewifery, and of the kitchen as a space of constraint and submission, is never far away. For Colwin, this is through her distancing from what she perceives to be the typical housewife. For Ephron, it is because no matter the effort expended and no matter how much she enjoys cooking, the strictures of nuclear family domesticity curtail her. The domesticity presented by Colwin and Ephron acknowledges the complexity of the space – even if their participation in home cooking is driven by their own pleasure and interest, it is indivisible from the context that aligned women with home cooks and domesticity in the first place. The effect is not a wholesale

reinvention but a reimagination of the home, one that situates the women in it as complex actors with a variety of motivations, sometimes pushing up against and sometimes conceding to its historical restraints.

The Rising Soufflé: Ephron as Food Writer

> Food vanishes. I don't mean food as habit, food as memory, food as biography, food as metaphor, food as regret, food as love, or food as in those famous madeleines people like me are constantly referring to as if they've read Proust, which in most cases they haven't. I mean food as food. Food vanishes.

So begins Ephron's 2005 op-ed for the *New York Times*, "The Lost Strudel." In it, Ephron describes a cabbage strudel she first tried in 1968, and which "vanished from Manhattan in about 1982" (2005). The piece is part New York food history, part wild goose chase (for the recipe to the strudel; the potential son of the original strudel's cook; for an alternative purveyor of the cabbage strudel), and part homage to a specific food, one which has "a buttery, flaky, crispy strudel crust made of phyllo… with a moist filling of sauteed cabbage that's simultaneously sweet, savory and completely unexpected, like all good things" (Ephron 2005). As an op-ed, "The Lost Strudel" is short, succinct, and culminates in the opening of a new bakery that serves cabbage strudel. When she is finally reunited with the pastry after her twenty-some year search, Ephron is quick to clarify that this is no madeleine and it does not incite in her Proust's response, since "that would take way more than cabbage strudel" (2005). She does, however, conclude the piece:

> Tasting it again was like being able to turn back the clock, like having the consequences of a mistake erased; it was better than getting a blouse back that the dry cleaners had lost, or a cellphone returned that had been left in a taxi; it was a validation of never giving up and of hope springing eternal; it was many things, it was all things, it was nothing at all; but mostly, it was cabbage strudel (Ephron 2005).

This op-ed, one of many of Ephron's contributions to non-fiction narrative food writing, is exemplary of her food writing style and demonstrative of its similarities to gastronomic literature. As a piece of fiction, *Heartburn* does not necessarily register as gastronomic literature at first glance – but Ephron's op-eds fit the category more neatly. In their work on gastronomy and print cultures, Allison Carruth and Amy L. Tigner explain that "gastronomic authors both employ literary techniques and connect their work with that of literary figures" (2017, 138). In this instance, Ephron does both: the op-ed is structured as narrative, with a beginning, middle, and an end. It engages directly with Proust and his madeleines – though Ephron insists on distancing herself from the canonical work on food and memory, references nonetheless recur. Ephron's years without the strudel are her *temps perdu*, and she vows to master phyllo making in her next life, "when I will also read Proust past the first chapter" (2005). Ephron assures the reader that she will not report "that "the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory"", but she does – no matter how tongue-in-cheek – liken finding the strudel to turning back the clock or erasing the consequences of a mistake (2005). There is a broader literary project occurring, facilitated by Ephron's tone: one that satirises the over-seriousness of food writing while simultaneously indulging in it.

Carruth and Tigner explain that "the corporeal taste of food… compels a complex network of associative memories that emerge out of the narrator's unconscious and conscious minds" (2017, 107). Here, they are specifically referencing the way that food works as a "narrative trigger" in Modernist fiction, but Ephron, too, is able to evoke the catharsis of rediscovering her beloved cabbage strudel with her own complex network of associative memories (Carruth and Tigner 2017, 108). These associative memories – a returned cellphone, a drycleaner locating a lost blouse – are modern constructions, playful and inconsequential in comparison

to Proust's madeleines. And yet their evocation of palpable relief is in many ways as imaginatively generative as the earlier description of the strudel's taste components. Ephron assures the reader on multiple occasions that the food is simply food and the strudel ultimately only a strudel – but the overall impact of the op-ed demonstrates that the strudel is both "just" a strudel, and also pleasure, relief, memory, urban history, among other associations (2005). This is a tension like the one that Carruth and Tigner attribute to classical French gastronomic literature, which they define as one between "contemplative criticism and artful play" (2017, 151). Ephron's contemplative criticism errs toward the poignancy of a food lost, longed for, and rediscovered, but is anchored in the artful play of a writer who refuses to even admit to reading the author she repeatedly references. The key tension in "The Lost Strudel", thus becomes the one between recognising food's capacity as a vehicle for memory, metaphor, love, and so on, whilst acknowledging it as just food. As Parkhurst Ferguson says, gastronomic literature espouses "the intellectual, the imaginative, the symbolic, and the aesthetic" components of food – all considerations Ephron manages to include in one short op-ed on a Hungarian pastry (1998, 610).

Crucial to the gastronomic writing that Carruth and Tigner speak of are "rhetorical and stylistic features" that "reinforce… demographic exclusivity by aligning restaurant criticism and culinary guides with high literature and implicitly distancing these genres from cookbooks, recipes, and household manuals" (2017, 138). Here, as with all other authors in this thesis, Ephron's perspective as a female food writer and, like Colwin, her perspective as a female food writer in late-20th century New York City, allows the bendable limits of gastronomic literature to be expanded. For example, Ephron's 1997 *New Yorker* entry "Something Fishy: Love and Loss at Citarella". This is a short piece about the Upper West Side fish market Citarella, and the panic engendered in Ephron when the store is subject to an

industrial dispute and she, out of allegiance to the workers, stops shopping there while they protest (1997). The story suggests the kind of loss we see with the strudel, though this time it is not a specific item and rather the market as a whole: Ephron is "besotted" with the store, "and it plays a fairly active role in what passes for my imagination" (1997). But "Something Fishy" has a happy ending: the workers are rehired, and Ephron can once again shop at Citarella. Reuniting with the market results in a grocery-shopping idyll: "the meat glistened and the fish was even more twinkly than usual… the fishmongers had suddenly become personable and were saying things like "Enjoy!" as they handed over the fish" (Ephron 1997). In the end, Ephron finishes her shopping and goes "home to cook spaghetti with clams and hot sausage for the love of my life" (1997). "Something Fishy" is neither straightforwardly domestic nor urban: on the one hand, Ephron is grocery shopping to cook for her husband. On the other hand, the very basis of the article is a bourgeois anecdote about the inconvenience of striking workers interfering with one's access to high-quality produce.

Demographic exclusivity is present not just in "Something Fishy" but in "The Lost Strudel" also. In the case of the latter: published originally in-print in the *New York Times*, it now sits behind a paywall. Its very narrative is entwined with reference to one of the most notoriously opaque authors in modern publishing. It is about dining out in a very specific time and place (one so exclusive that it no longer exists). But it is also about dining at an "extremely modest Hungarian bakery", rather than a fine-dining establishment (Ephron 2005). And crucially, it does not attempt to distance itself from the home cook. As in Colwin's writing, the public eateries in Ephron's food writing are often launching points for the genesis and inclusion of her own recipes. In "The Lost Strudel", she assures her readers that she expended significant effort searching for comparable recipes – including chasing down a noted Hungarian chef. She confesses, "I tried making it and it just wasn't the same. (The truth is, most of the

genuinely tragic episodes of lost food are things that are somewhat outside the reach of the home cook, even a home cook like me who has been known to overreach from time to time.)" (Ephron 2005). We assume that, had the recipe succeeded, the article might look very different – its contents perhaps shared. Here again is a tension: one that negotiates the necessary exclusivity of Ephron's time and place and the inclusivity of her food writing, and the democratisation of her self-definition as a home cook and one who would share her recipes (if only they worked out). The safety of this assumption comes from Ephron's broader oeuvre, in which recipe sharing, as we have seen, is a given. Her review, "A Sandwich", which, of Ephron's food writing is the most thematically similar to "The Lost Strudel" but does well to demonstrate that the specificity of the dining establishments that Ephron recommends is often the basis of information sharing rather than of reinforcing the tenets of high taste (2002). Firstly, and again, the food in question is a deli sandwich, rather than fine dining fare. It is a hot pastrami sandwich, and Ephron explains both the cooking process of pastrami, and also where its purveyor (in this case, Langer's Delicatessen in Los Angeles) sources its pastrami, its rye bread, the brand of its mustard, and the deli's method that sets it apart from other pastrami sandwiches. Ephron concludes her treatise, "it costs eight-fifty and is, in short, a work of art" (2002). Though, yes, a pastrami sandwich from Langer's Delicatessen is not immediately procurable for all readers in the way that a shared recipe might be immediately cookable, the point here is that unlike in traditional gastronomic literature where a home cook could not have a serious, public engagement with food, Ephron's writing demonstrates what it looks like when those fundaments are bridged.

The selection of Ephron's food writing included in "The Foodie", while not comprehensive, reflects the abovementioned tension inherent in Ephron's food writing: that she is at once a food journalist who publishes in prestigious publications, a self-deprecating humourist, and a

home cook. The writings include opinion pieces about egg-white omelettes and the toxicity of Teflon, a gossipy society piece about the big names in the New York food scene,[38] a gentle indictment of *Gourmet* magazine, on-the-ground reporting from the 1973 Pillsbury Bake-Off, a review and endorsement of her favourite pastrami sandwich, and an opinion piece about hosting dinner parties. For Ephron the food writer, recipes are not as ubiquitous as they are in *Heartburn*: she does include one more "formal" recipe in an excerpt on Thanksgiving in which she concludes, "it's the same every year, except for one thing. Every year one thing changes" (2015, 382). The recipe in this section is the one changed thing: an indented recipe (though its ingredients and method are integrated) of an adapted version of Suzanne Goin's succotash (2015, 382-383). Elsewhere in "The Foodie", the recipes are simpler, and embedded in the text much like those in *Heartburn*: Ephron explains her method of steak making (2015, 346-347), and of making omelettes and egg salad (2015, 347-348). From each of these fairly simple, domestic food preoccupations, Ephron pivots. Sometimes, this pivot is to history: "just before I'd moved to New York, two historic events had occurred: The birth control pill had been invented, and the first Julia Child cookbook was published. As a result, everyone was having sex, and when the sex was over, you cooked something" (Ephron 2015, 328). Other times, personal observations about specific foods: "I never served fish, and I'll tell you why: It's too easy to eat fish. Bim bam boom you're done with a piece of fish, and you're right out the door" (Ephron 2015, 335) or "it's time to put a halt to the egg-white omelette" (Ephron 2015, 347). These pivots return to Ephron and her relationship to romance and food: "whenever I get married, I start buying *Gourmet* magazine" (2015, 348).

[38] Per Ephron: "the Big Four of the Food Establishment" were James Beard, Julia Child, Michael Field, and Craig Claiborne (2015, 367).

As always, Ephron's narrative voice is pithy and light-hearted, and as a result more easily belies the significance of the food history she espouses – but the alignment of the contraceptive pill and of Julia Child's cookbook is a correlation that could, and should, be taken seriously as food history. Ephron also posits that the rise of the Food Establishment is attributable not to beef Stroganoff ("some think it was beef Stroganoff, but, in fact, beef Stroganoff had nothing to do with it") but to curry (2015, 362). Ephron's assessment makes sense, given, as Swinbank explains, "the development of *haute cuisine* has traditionally consisted of the elaboration of regional peasant cuisine with expensive, exotic ingredients, especially spices" (2002, 466). Ephron elaborates that curry emerged in the 1950s across class boundaries, when "dinner parties in fashionable homes featured curried lobster. Dinner parties in middle-income homes featured curried chicken. Dinner parties in frozen-food compartments featured curried rice" (Ephron 2015, 363). The proliferation of curry meant "the first fashionable international food" such that "food acquired a chic, a gloss of snobbery it had hitherto possessed only in certain upper-income groups" (Ephron 2015, 363). Swinbank's *haute cuisine* here is dispersed to the masses, and for Ephron that meant the "American hostess, content serving frozen spinach for her family, learned to make a spinach soufflé for her guests" (2015, 363). To and from this analysis of curry and the food establishment, each of Ephron's chapters moves seamlessly: an egg salad recipe to food review and opinion, to the history and culture of food. Rather than separating her intellectual and aesthetic engagement in food from her experience as a home cook, Ephron clarifies that these two components of her character are not mutually exclusive.

Though Ephron might have no issue self-identifying as a home cook, her relationship to the traditional housewife, like Colwin and Fisher, is more complicated. There is a distancing from this figure at play in Ephron's non-fiction writing, evident in "Baking Off", a piece of

reporting on the 1973 Pillsbury Bake-Off competition. In it, Ephron-as-reporter provides a brief history of the Bake-Off, introduces a number of its contestants, and walks through the various stages of the competition. There is an us-and-them dichotomy established immediately – Ephron's presence at the competition is observational and, crucially, professional. As Carruth and Tigner explain, "gastronomic writing has long inscribed sociocultural relationships of taste, power, authorship, and authority" (2017, 141). When the food editors laugh at a joke, Ephron explains "I am not sure why" (2015, 339). In this dichotomy, Ephron is not just a careerwoman, but one who takes food seriously – by contrast, the baked goods of the competition are so unserious as to be inedible: reflecting on the fact that going to a Bake-Off was a childhood dream of hers, Ephron affirms, "in reality, going to a Bake-Off *is* like being locked overnight in a bakery – a very bad bakery. I almost became sick right there" (2014, 341). She clarifies that "cooking, it is quite clear, is only a small part of the apparently frenzied creativity that flourishes in these women's homes" (2015, 341). The ingredients are "unbearable" to Ephron:

> none of the recipes seemed to contain one cup of sugar when two would do, or a delicate cheese when Kraft American would do, or an actual minced onion when instant minced onions would do. It was snack time. It was convenience-food time. It was less-work-for-Mother time (2015, 345).

Ephron's retelling of the event is imbued with her trademark sarcasm: sometimes directed at the corporatisation and convenience of contemporary food culture, and sometimes at what she perceives to be the unseriousness of the competition as a whole ("The Pillsbury Company has been holding Bake-Offs since 1948, when Eleanor Roosevelt, for reasons that are not clear, came to give the first one her blessing") (2015, 338).

Mostly, though, Ephron's light disdain takes aim at the female competitors, who she defines exclusively as housewives. Just as Colwin defines herself in opposition to The Goddess, in

"Baking Off", Ephron positions herself in opposition to the competitors. In this way, Ephron is participating in a particular strand of gastronomy: in traditional French gastronomic literature, women are configured "either as foils to the studied gourmand, whose unruly appetites make them bad connoisseurs, or as symbolic objects for consumption and contemplation" (Carruth and Tigner 2017, 155). Though enacted in an entirely different context, Ephron here sees the participants as foils to bolster her own good taste, *and* as objects of the low-calibre consumption rife in American consumer society. Ephron introduces the competitors by name and location, but none is the focal point of the story – we hear of Edna Buckley (New York), Bonnie Brooks (Maryland), Suzie Sisson (Illinois) and Laura Aspis (Ohio), among others. There is no doubt that this is a gendered event: introductions aside, Ephron clarifies that the 1973 cohort is comprised of ninety-seven women, "two twelve-year-old boys, and one male graduate student" (2015, 338).[39] Some of them are housewives who "used whole-wheat flour and Granola and sour cream and similar supposedly hip ingredients" and are "therefore somewhat more sophisticated, or urban, or something-of-the-sort", who "actually" attend a museum whilst in Los Angeles for the competition – nonetheless, they are "housewives, yes" (Ephron 2015, 340). We understand that the us-and-them dynamic is mutually constituted: one of the competitors, looking around at her fellow bakers, claims:

> these are the beautiful people… they're not the little tiny rich people. They're nice and happy and religious types and family-oriented. Everyone talks about women's lib, which is ridiculous. If you're nice to your husband, he'll be nice to you. Your family is your job. They come first (Ephron 2015, 340).

This is a vision of the housewife aligned with what Genz, drawing on Friedan, describes as "the epitome of female non-identity and passivity, a perfect illustration of patriarchal

[39] The male competitors are never introduced.

constructions of Woman as an apathetic, dependent and purposeless being" (2009, 51). Ephron does not complicate this vision: the competitors are all but interchangeable, working towards what is "for the American housewife, what the Miss America contest used to represent" (2015, 341). Ephron momentarily inches towards understanding: "perhaps they are capable of anger after all, or jealousy, or competitiveness, or something I think of as a human trait I can relate to" (2015, 346). The moment is short lived, and the relentless positivity of the competitors becomes the butt of a joke: alienating to Ephron and, by extension, to us as readers. Here, Ephron's alignment with the gender-based stereotypes of traditional gastronomic literature leave her in a bind, since she shares a gender with the very people from whom she tries to distance herself. The us-and-them is a logic that "creates a dichotomy between private and public spheres, between the downtrodden housewife and the feminist revolutionary. Even more importantly, this binary logic also denies domesticity a place in the changing landscape of modernity and progress" (Genz 2009, 51). And yet a decade after "Baking Off" was originally published, Ephron would release *Heartburn* and with it, a vision of domesticity that certainly sits between the binary of downtrodden housewife and feminist revolutionary. Of her persona in the food industry, Samstat knows "enough to make jokes in the food-world language", including the "automatically funny… Pillsbury Bake-Off" (Ephron 1996, 132). She also, though, has a reputation partially informed by her use of "low-rent ingredients like a package of onion soup mix and a can of cream of mushroom soup" – certainly not dissimilar to the Kraft cheese or pre-chopped onions that Ephron balks at in the Bake-Off (Ephron 1996, 133). Through Samstat, Ephron still posits a cynical understanding of the domestic project in *Heartburn* – Samstat is "nice" to her husband, holds up her end of the spousal bargain, and he still cheats on her. Her family is *one of* her jobs. But in *Heartburn* Ephron nonetheless presents a persona who both actively enjoys components of her domestic

life and is failed by its promise of stability. In other words, in *Heartburn* domesticity is elastic, fitting more comfortably with Genz's postfeminist reading, one in which:

> the domestic as a contested space of female subjectivity where women/feminists actively grapple with opposing cultural constructions of the housewife. In particular, a postfeminist lens allows us to transcend a critical impasse (trapped by a dualistic logic) and reinterpret the homemaker as a polysemic character caught in a struggle between tradition and modernity, past and present (2009, 49-50).

Taking "Baking Off" alongside *Heartburn* as components of a holistic body of food writing, Ephron generates a vision of the female home cook, the devoted wife, the food professional, the convenience cynic as different facets of the same person.

Ephron's food writing participates in intertextuality in a layered, multimodal way: firstly, as with much gastronomic literature, through reference to a variety of external texts, and secondly, as I will demonstrate in the next part of this chapter, through blurring the lines between her fictional and non-fictional writing. Like Colwin and Fisher, Ephron borrows and republishes recipes from other cooks: in *Heartburn*, for example, the included cheesecake recipe is Samstat's father's second wife Amelia's – attributed to the back of the Philadelphia cream cheese packet (Ephron 1996, 49). This same recipe is referred to in "Serial Monogamy", this time attributed to Ephron's family cook Evelyn, which Ephron believes "she got from the back of the Philadelphia cream cheese package" (2015, 336). In *Heartburn* as well, the included pot roast recipe is Lillian Hellman's (Ephron 1996, 133). Samstat's television show is itself referential – she attributes its success in part to the fact that "we threw Proust and his madeleines into the opening credits, and I managed to get Isaac Bashevis Singer to make noodle kugel on the pilot" (Ephron 1996, 19).

Other intertextuality crops up across Ephron's non-fiction: in "Sugar Babies", for example, her 1997 *New Yorker* piece on doughnut machines, Ephron explains, "I love doughnut machines. I have had a thing about them ever since I read "Homer Price," Robert McCloskey's children's classic, which involves a doughnut machine that won't stop making doughnuts". A quote from "Homer Price" follows, and so Ephron begins an article about the legacy of the Krispy Kreme doughnut and its first store in New York (1997). This piece is about doughnuts, yes, but also about Krispy Kreme as a specifically Southern institution finding footing in the North of America. It explains the acquisition of the New York franchise and the specifics of the factory line, before concluding that the doughnuts, working their way through the doughnut machine, are "finally, gloriously… hosed down with a gusher of powdered-sugar glaze that coats them and turns gently crispy as they move along, just as regular as a clock can tick" (Ephron 1997). This is a direct reference to the earlier quote from "Homer Price", in which "the doughnuts kept right on rolling down the little chute, just as regular as a clock can tick" (Ephron 1997). The consequence of observing this miracle of industry and food is that Ephron feels "proud to be an American. Sue me. That's how I feel" (1997). As with the strudel, "Sugar Babies" is a literary enterprise, referencing classic literature as a means of parsing how and why food and food culture can be so meaningful. In this instance, it is through harkening back to childhood, storytelling, and classics of American culture.

One of the key players in Ephron's intertextual references is Julia Child herself. In some instances, Child features in Ephron's writing in her capacity as famous culinary guide but not someone in Ephron's social orbit. Ephron attributes learning to cook in part, to Child's *Mastering*, describing her cookbook style as "nicer and more forgiving [than that of her male counterparts] – she was by then on television and famous for dropping food, picking it up,

and throwing it right back into the pan" (2015, 329). In this dynamic, Ephron is just like the rest of Child's audience: Child's capacity for error, identified earlier in this thesis as one of her most humanising traits, applies not only to home cooks but to Nora Ephron too. In *Heartburn*, Child also figures this way: Samstat classifies her own television personality as "a middlebrow Julia Child" (Ephron 1996, 18), and considers herself better suited to public television, "where the producers and cameramen are used to Julia Child and are pathetically grateful that I'm not quite as tall" (Ephron 1996, 17). But elsewhere in Ephron's writing, Child's presence is not metaphorical but literal – if not as contemporary then at least as a public figure who Ephron can access in her capacity as a reporter. In "The Food Establishment: Life in the Land of the Rising Soufflé (Or Is It the Rising Meringue?)", Ephron attends and reports on a dinner in honour of the Time-Life Cookbooks, at which Child is in attendance (2015, 358). The book's publication had attracted an eviscerating review from the *New York Times*'s Craig Claiborne, and the dinner, as a result, was one of high drama: in Ephron's words, "none of them had come to the party because of the food" (2015, 359). In this context, Child is embroiled in food world gossip: Claiborne's review had "attacked Julia Child, the hitherto unknockable" (2015, 360). In this context, Child is not just a participant at the same party Ephron attends, but also a symbol for the complex politics of the Food Establishment. Explaining that nothing in the Food Establishment is as it seems, Ephron says, "people who tell you they love Julia Child will add in the next breath that of course her husband *is* a Republican and her orange Bavarian cream recipe just doesn't work" (2015, 361). Child's legitimacy is used to undermine Michael Field, when the "shocking tidbit" is revealed that he "had not been to Europe until 1967, when he visited Julia Child in Provence" (Ephron 2015, 370). Ostensibly commenting on the "bitchy", "gossipy", "devious" undercurrents of the Food Establishment, the piece nonetheless repeats these whispers – it is explicitly scandalous (Ephron 2015, 362). Child features as inspiration and

guide to Ephron as well as entertainer on the television as well as the subject of gossipy society piece (and thus recalling her very name becomes a literary technique unto itself, for all she represents in the food world).

“Finding a Way That Food Fits Into Your Life”: Ephron’s Gastronomic Oeuvre

At one point in “Baking Off”, Ephron says:

> ‘Cooking is very creative.’ I must have heard that line thirty times as I interviewed the finalists. I don’t happen to think that cooking is very creative – what interests me about it is, on the contrary, its utter mindlessness and mathematical certainty. ‘Cooking is very relaxing’ – that’s my bromide (2015, 341).

Consider this statement in comparison to the following, from *Heartburn*:

> (Another argument I have with serious food people is that they’re always talking about how *creative* cooking is. “Cooking is very creative” is how they put it. Now, there’s no question that there are a handful of people doing genuinely creative things with food… but also misses the whole point of cooking, which is that it is totally mindless. What I love about cooking is that after a hard day, there is something comforting about the fact that if you melt butter and add flour and then hot stock, *it will get thick!* It’s a sure thing! It’s a sure thing in a world where nothing is sure; it has a mathematical certainly in a world where those of us who long for some kind of certainty are forced to settle for crossword puzzles) (Ephron 1996, 132-133).

Or this, from Amy Adams’ character Julie Powell in the Ephron-directed *Julie & Julia*:

> You know what I love about cooking?... I love that after a day when nothing is sure, and when I say nothing I mean nothing, you can come home and absolutely know that if you add egg yolks to chocolate and sugar and milk it will get thick. It’s such a comfort (2009).

This sentiment – that cooking is relaxing, certain, and comforting more than it is creative – crops up in three different media across Ephron’s body of work and across a time span of nearly forty years. I suggest reading this not simply as a reflection of Ephron’s broader

preoccupation with food, but as strands of her food writing cohering as gastronomic literature. In some instances, it is "fictional", representing characters of Ephron's creation; in one it is "factual", representing Ephron as a "real" historical figure writing her opinion in a news article. This is not a unique phenomenon in Ephron's work: there are several overlaps between Samstat's description of becoming a food personality and her "Serial Monogamy: A Memoir", which first appeared *The New Yorker* in 2006. In *Heartburn*, Samstat learns to cook by alternating making recipes "from Michael Field or Julia Child" (Ephron 1996, 131). In "Serial Monogamy", Ephron learns to cook by cooking "every single recipe in Michael Field's book and at least half the recipes in the first Julia" (2015, 329). Samstat is as vocal about the state of the food establishment as Ephron is, also espousing the kinds of opinions present in Ephron's nonfiction writing. One such opinion: serious food people "use too many adjectives", and fall back on the formula ""the noun was (complimentary adjective) but the other noun was (uncomplimentary adjective)." This is a particular danger for food writers who review restaurants, which I have never done and never will" (Ephron 1996, 130). And, based on Ephron's food writing, she stays true to Samstat's credo: though she reviews specific foods from establishments like bakeries, delicatessens, and fishmongers, the reviews are not for restaurants. Likewise, as we saw in "The Lost Strudel", Ephron's food descriptions are impactful not because of their overreliance on adjectives but because, like the best gastronomic literature, of their ability to "recall a taste *sensation*" (emphasis mine), a skill James Beard describes as a "God-given talent akin to perfect pitch" (Carruth and Tigner 2017, 139).

One of the indexed recipes in *Heartburn* is attributed to Samstat's mother, for lima beans and pears (Ephron 1996, 23). She provides the recipe and uses it to flesh out an image of her mother: "that's the sort of food she loved to serve, something that looked like plain old baked

beans and then turned out to have pears up its sleeve" (Ephron 1996, 23). The pears and lima beans also make an appearance in "Serial Monogamy" (Ephron 2015). In it, Ephron traces her relationship to cooking, beginning with *The Gourmet Cookbook*, gifted by her mother in 1962 when Ephron first moved to New York. Ephron follows various cookbook authors, attempts elaborate recipes to varying levels of success, and then meets a man called Lee Bailey whose simple approach to food revolutionises Ephron's own cooking. Lee always served four dishes at a meal, "and the fourth thing was always unexpected… a casserole of lima beans and pears cooked for hours with brown sugar and molasses" (Ephron 2015, 334).[40] Ephron continues, explaining how her relationship with Lee informed her approach to cooking and hosting, tracing the happenings of her life as she does so. "I always secretly wished that Lee would include a recipe of mine in one of his cookbooks… but he never asked for any of my recipes" says Ephron (2015, 335). At this time, she also got married and divorced again, and since, as in *Heartburn*, in Ephron's life love and food are intertwined, this precipitates the following:

> I wrote a thinly disguised novel about the end of my marriage, and it contained recipes. By then, I'd come to realize that no one was ever going to put my recipes into a book, so I'd have to do it myself. I included Lee's recipe for lima beans and pears (unfortunately I left out the brown sugar, and for years people told me they'd tried cooking the recipe and it didn't work) (2015, 335-336).

The lima beans and pears exist in both the "real" world of Ephron and the fictionalised world of Samstat, though with the caveat that the "real" Ephron's edits to the recipe in the fictionalised world of Samstat makes the recipe less successful to the "real" Ephron's readers. There exists here a complex web of associations and overlaps between the various aspects of Ephron's works – they are intertextual, insofar as intertextuality "casts texts as radically porous entities, whose words and forms are derived from, and whose meanings are glimpsed

[40] The lima beans and pears recipe in *Heartburn* does not contain brown sugar.

through, the mediation of other texts" (Baron 2019, 2). In Ephron's case, the meaning of food is mediated through its presence in her other texts: it is crucial in all instances. In Samstat's world, the recipe helps to contextualise and develop the character of her mother, and in Ephron's world, it is her own development as a cook and an adult – as well as the gradations of her love life – that are elucidated by the pears and lima beans.

John Frow's model of genre helps to make sense of what Ephron might be doing by moving, as she does, between forms. In Frow's model, genre moves away from a taxonomic model to a "more reflexive model in which texts are thought to use or to perform the genres by which they are shaped" (2015, 27). Frow explains:

> To the extent that texts are understood to have a strategic or pragmatic relation to their context, genre classifications are a matter of defining the possible *uses* that texts may have… because the range of possible uses is always open-ended, genre classifications are necessarily unstable and unpredictable… texts do not simply have uses which are mapped out in advance by the genre: they are themselves *uses of genre*, performances of or allusions to the norms and conventions which form them and which they may, in turn, transform (2015, 26).

With this in mind, rather than reading *Heartburn* as a standalone text or Ephron's *New Yorker* entries as weekend supplements, we might think of them as working together as use cases of gastronomic literature. In a 1976 piece on *Gourmet* magazine, Ephron writes, "someone recently told me that his marriage broke up during that period on account of veal Orloff, and I knew exactly what he meant" (2015, 348); and then seven years later in *Heartburn* writes, "one of my friends called up to say his marriage had ended on account of veal Orloff, and I knew exactly what he meant" (1996, 131). What if we understood this as not simply repetition and reinforcement of a particular opinion on food, but also a broader performance of and allusion to the norms of gastronomy? Consider this description of the creative practice of the gourmand by Robert Applebaum, one in which "the day in the life of

the gourmand is rule-driven; but it is rule-driven for the sake of constructing a kind of comedy. Every day… is a kind of performance, of which the gourmand is at once author, director and actor" (Carruth and Tigner 2017, 151). By peppering her food stories and opinions throughout her body of work, regardless of its medium, Ephron, like Grimod, indulges in the "blurred distinctions… between [her] fictional alter-ego and [her]self" (Carruth and Tigner 2017, 152). For Ephron, food is comforting because it is reliable, it has "mathematical certainty" (2015, 341). In a body of work where fiction and non-fiction blur into one another, where ideas and words repeat across media and form, the food i n Ephron's work, and life, is constant.

In *Heartburn*, Samstat explains that part of her rejection by "serious" food people is that they think of her as "basically a performer" (Ephron 1996, 130). Here, Samstat is speaking to the fact that, since she does television demonstrations, she is considered to be performing the part of a serious food person rather than actually being one – but this can also be read as part of her food project more broadly; performing the generic slipperiness of gastronomic literature. Ephron as director moves seamlessly to Ephron the journalist moves seamlessly to Ephron the novelist to Ephron the memoirist: the boundaries between each format are porous because Ephron's food-related output can be read and understood as a holistic gastronomic project. Rather than individual entries to individual genres, they participate in a broader body of work that can pivot between nonfiction, fiction, film, opinion, joke, play – just like gastronomic literature does. But Ephron, from her specific perspective as a woman establishing her career in 1970s corporate America, is able to imbue her food media with at once poignancy and simplicity – just like her lost strudel. In "Serial Monogamy", Ephron explains that, when writing *Heartburn*: "the point… was about putting it together. The point was about making people feel at home, about finding your own style, whatever it was, and committing to it. The

point was about giving up neurosis where food was concerned. The point was about finding a way that food fit into your life" (2015, 336).

Conclusion

Turning to Ephron and her output across film, fiction, and the personal essay demonstrates the possibilities that open up to us as readers and scholars when we begin to understand women's food writing through the framework of gastronomic literature. I argue that like Fisher, Ephron's work – in this case, *Heartburn* and a selection of her nonfiction food writing – represent a gastronomic whole: a series of texts that revise, interact with, and speak to one another to present a holistic aesthetics of food and eating.

Ephron's roman-à-clef *Heartburn* is the first focus of my analysis because of its generic weirdness as a piece of (ostensible) fiction that nevertheless includes multiple recipes, which are formatted and indexed as such. *Heartburn* answers the question: can a novel have workable recipes? As Stivers demonstrates, certainly in *this* novel, the recipes are workable: "I wondered, while recreating her recipes for this column, if her kind of eighties cooking might have been, counterintuitively, a pinnacle: classy yet easy" (*The Paris Review*, 2022). But as a genre study, this thesis also questions – why else might we come across recipes in a text that is marketed as a novel? I argue that to attend to the food in Ephron's writing for what it really is, is to recognise it as both a practical set of instructions and a method through which Ephron presents her ethos of food. The recipes are a celebration of eating, a vessel for the espousal of Ephron's culinary opinions, a means of communicating her social allegiances, and an emotional crutch for Ephron and her character Samstat as they trudge through the difficulties of divorce. Like Fisher, Child, and Colwin, Ephron tells us exactly what the food

in *Heartburn* means to her: “cooking became the only way of saying I love you” (1996, 135). The recipes in *Heartburn*, then, have literal and metaphorical meaning, but they also have generic meaning: because of them, *Heartburn* is not straightforwardly fiction or non-fiction, and the (supposed) distinction between Samstat and Ephron herself is even less clear.

Though the use of fiction is unique to Ephron in this study, nonetheless like Fisher, Child and Colwin, her writing also uses recipes in a way that fundamentally disrupts the generic expectations of women’s food writing. This disruption takes on further significance when we expand our attention to Ephron’s non-fiction food writing, which on its surface aligns neatly with the generic expectations of gastronomic literature. This output of Ephron’s spans literary reference (Colwin and Ephron both reference Isaac Bashevis Singer at points), culinary history, coverage of commercial food events, and celebrations of local business. These are written in a similar voice to Samstat’s – which, incidentally, is similar to Fisher, Child, and Colwin. This voice is opinionated, enthusiastic, tongue-in-cheek – it takes food seriously without taking the food establishment seriously, and, like the authors before her, it is certain to distinguish Ephron’s brand of home cooking from that of the housewife’s. These individual contributions of Ephron’s – published variously for *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Gourmet*, and in Ephron’s collections *Wallflower at the Orgy* and *Crazy Salad* – are themselves convincing examples of gastronomic literature, but they are also in conversation with Ephron’s body of food-related work more broadly. The genesis of a recipe published in *Heartburn* is explained in an essay in *Crazy Salad*; Ephron’s character in *Heartburn* is “a middlebrow Julia Child”, and then Ephron herself reports on Child and other culinary giants in a later piece for *Wallflower at the Orgy* (1996, 18). When we expand Ephron’s food media to include her films, the conversation between her texts recurs anew: a quote about the

meditative certainty of cooking crops up, in different forms, in her essay *Baking Off*, in *Heartburn*, and from the mouth of one of her characters in *Julie & Julia*.

Turning to Ephron to answer the question: what does a female gastronome look like? What we see are all the telltale signs embodied by Fisher, Child and Colwin: a passion for the pleasure of food and cooking, an understanding of the capacity of food as a means of communicating with oneself and with others, a vessel for conjuring sensory memory, and a sense of humour. But what Ephron also shows us is a complex intertextuality, and a way of reading a body of work across media to understand her culinary aesthetics as a coherent whole. By recognising Ephron's output as gastronomic literature, it opens up the possibilities of the genre even further: what other ephemera, what other media, have we missed through our misunderstanding of women and food?

Conclusion

Food cultures have long operated on an implicit binary that classes the sophisticated, professional, and public-facing with the masculine and the domestic, private-facing and simple with the feminine. This binary extends to writing about food: where the realm of serious, philosophical food writing – emerging in France and England in the 18th century as gastronomic literature – was written by men, and economic, practical domestic manuals were written by women. As classifications, such distinctions provide historical context for the ways that gender has influenced public and academic conceptions of food cultures and the writing it produces, but they are not wholly representative of the current state of play. As early as 1896, when Elizabeth Robins Pennell wrote *The Feasts of Autolycus: The Diary of a Greedy Woman*, women writers, eaters, and cooks have been contributing their own works of serious, literary food writing to the genre.

Gastronomic literature is philosophically committed to the idea that food, its preparation and consumption, and the dining practices that surround it are, and should be, a source of considered epistemological enquiry. That enquiry manifests in a broad swathe of forms, such that gastronomic literature is termed, per Denise Gigante, as "generically omnivorous" (2013, xix). In its remit are reflections, meditations, travel narratives, epistolary exchanges, poems, satires, and dialogues (Gigante 2013, xix). We see this omnivorousness reflected in contemporary culinary journalism, which often merges "review, meditation, travel narrative and culinary history, as well as in the current boom in food-focused life-writing. As a fixed historical category, academics have moved away from "gastronomy" and "gastronomic literature" to describe this kind of food writing, instead opting for terms like gastrography, foodoir, culinary memoir, culinary autobiography, or autoethnographic cookbooks, among

others. These categories allow authors to produce writing generically similar to gastronomic literature, without affixing them to a historical denomination in part defined by its associations with men. This thesis, though, approaches such questions of genre and categorisation from what John Frow calls a "reflexive model", whereby "texts are thought to use or to perform the genres by which they are shaped" (2015, 27). In this model, "the possible uses" of a genre are open-ended, always capable of bringing new texts into their orbit (Frow 2015, 26). Rather than occluding their contribution to gastronomic literature because of the time and gender of the authors, Frow's model allows us to see texts as "*uses of genre*, performances of or allusions to the norms and conventions which form them and which they may, in turn, transform" (2015, 26). As such, this thesis looks at the writing of four women writers and investigates the ways in which their writing not only performs the gastronomic literature which is its historic lineage, but who, by virtue of their production of gastronomic literature, then transform the very genre. I situate such an approach within Felski's postcritical framework, too, where genre is not "yoked" [sic] to "a particular epistemology" but instead "literary conventions" are "devices for articulating truth rather than… obstacles to its discovery" (2008, 84). This thesis presents a postcritical gastronomic literature in these terms: a malleable form whose boundaries are stretched, complicated, and enhanced by the inclusion of women writers. Not unlike de Obaldia's "essayistic" form, gastronomic literature is built on generic play, and as such is ripe for experimentation and expansion: widening the scope of its contributors aids this process.

The gastronomic literature approach to food writing has also been adopted by women authors since Robins Pennell, and this thesis specifically looks at the work of four such American writers working in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Chapter One begins with Mary Frances Kennedy (M.F.K.) Fisher and the anthology *The Art of Eating* (2004),

comprised of five of Fisher's earlier texts. This thesis begins with Fisher not only because her writing was published first, but because unlike the other authors some of Fisher's work was recognised as gastronomic literature in its time. Fisher's work in particular draws attention to the conflation between women's gustatory appetites and their sexual appetites, just one of the ways that the gendering of genres applies in the scope of gastronomic literature. In Chapter Two, I assess Julia Child's *My Life in France* (2006), published in the twenty-first century but reflecting on Child's time working in culinary France in the mid-twentieth century. Child was interacting directly with gastronomic cultures but writing a domestic cookbook: her work speaks to the specific barriers to entry for women, even those whose experience and expertise might otherwise class them as gastronomes. Chapter Three looks at Laurie Colwin's *Home Cooking* (2012) and *More Home Cooking* (2014), two texts that structurally and thematically mirror gastronomic literature but have been comparatively underrepresented in academic discussion and review. Colwin's work in particular helps to expand the porous boundaries of gastronomic literature by demonstrating that the tenets and structures of the form can be applicable in a domestic setting – a historically feminised domain and thus excluded from serious consideration as gastronomic. Colwin's writing shows us what gastronomic literature might look like if adapted to New York City in the late-twentieth century, in a specifically private-facing context. And, finally, Chapter Four remains in 1980s New York but pivots to Nora Ephron, specifically her 1983 roman-à-clef *Heartburn*, but also several of Ephron's narrative nonfiction contributions to *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times* and her 2009 film *Julie and Julia*. Taken together, I read Ephron's food-related body of work as its own gastronomic literature – moving, as it does, between media, genres, and forms, but all the while affording food and food cultures with serious philosophical consideration.

This thesis brings together these four authors for the first time. Read together, the work of Fisher, Child, Colwin and Ephron elucidate the limitations of classifying "gastronomic literature" as a specifically male term, as well as demonstrating the benefits of expanding that terminology beyond the cultural milieu of 18th-century European men. All four writers produce work that is undeniably gastronomic: both in content and in form, and yet, with the exception of some of Fisher's works, have been excluded from the canon of gastronomic literature. Though we might also be able to classify these texts as gastrographies, or foodoirs, this thesis argues that to do so would be to obscure both their roots in gastronomic literature and their own contributions to the form. Each of these authors skilfully reshape and expand how we understand food writing. Including such texts within gastronomic literature is aligned with the form's own playfulness and porousness: rather than going out of our way to exclude writers like Fisher, Child, Colwin and Ephron, what does gastronomic literature gain by including them? It gains an enhanced comprehension of the way that women's appetites have been sexualised; of the ways that the gastronomic community, practically speaking, has excluded even the most decorated of women chefs; of the ways that the domestic space can produce the same culinary intellectual stimuli as the public sphere can; and of what gastronomic literature might look in a contemporary media landscape where its authors can seamlessly move from movie to novel to essay.

Proposing a Home-Cooked Gastronomy

In the early phases of this thesis, I asked, how has gastronomic literature excluded women? But the answer to this question is in fact reasonably straightforward: gastronomic literature necessarily excluded women, both through literal boundaries like access to culinary institutions and public spaces, and theoretical boundaries like assumptions that domestic food

cultures were family-oriented, economical and nutritive. This context is established in this thesis's introduction, and is grounded in literary, historical and sociological theory by scholars like Mennell, Gigante, Parkhurst Ferguson, and McLean. But this is a distinction that thrived in a specific historical context: one in which women's activities in the home were primarily orally disseminated and women's participation in public dining was seen as crass. The question of gastronomy's exclusion of women thus instead becomes the context to this thesis's more pressing question: what does a female gastronome look like? What constitutes women-authored gastronomic literature?

In order to explore the figure of the female gastronome, more boundaries need to be stretched – specifically the binary between the domestic and the public. McLean argues that a female gastronome must have "a decidedly undomesticated approach toward pleasure", (2012, 5) but as this thesis explores, a domestic approach to pleasure does not preclude writing that proceeds with "the philosophical prowess to treat food as a matter for serious thought and analysis" (Gigante 2013, xix). The social contexts that prevented women from accessing restaurants do not apply to the authors in this thesis: not only were they living and writing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, when restaurants were no longer the exclusive domain of wealthy men, but all four women were white, middle-class, and heterosexual (often dining with their male partners). Their access to culinary cultures, while sometimes mitigated by their gender, was also aided by their various privileges, such that these authors demonstrate what it might look like to experience food cultures in both public, professional settings and private domestic ones. As Chapter One shows, Fisher pens both a self-conscious pastiche of gastronomic literature and a domestically focused wartime rationing guide. Fisher is both a feminised, sexualised subject and an author who positions herself apart from other women. In Chapter Two, we see how the dual forces of public/private define Child's life as a

cook: she is a professional chef interacting with gastronomic groups but writing a domestic cookbook specifically aimed at housewives. Child's relationship to domestic spaces is complicated: her experience as a chef informs her cookbook writing, and her experience as an American woman and proximity to the housewives who are her target audience informs her cooking practice. Swinbank speaks to this retributive model: public food cultures inform domestic food cultures just as domestic food cultures influence public food cultures (2002, 470). Child's participation in the gastronomic public, though, is negotiated by her relationship with her husband: without him, she is relegated to the women's gastronomic tables. Fisher and Child were both American interlopers into a European culinary establishment in an era where the material conditions of the war played a tangible role in their capacity to access and interact with food and food cultures. They are both products of the time in which they were working, and outliers as American women in food in the early-to-mid twentieth century. And their gender is always *there* in their participation in the culinary and in the writing thereof: Fisher hid her gender in her earliest publications, only for her looks to be constantly remarked upon when it was revealed. Child was not sexualised in the same way, and indeed her looks have sometimes been themselves a source of comedy, particularly her height (Dan Aykroyd impersonating Child on Saturday Night Live is one such example) (Polan 2011, 12). The fact that Child's husband was shorter than his wife, as well as his leftist politics and professional training as a photographer were cause enough for speculation about his sexuality. This was hardly a time bereft of gender ideals: and yet even under such circumstances, for these women interacting with the domestic is never at the exclusion of considered intellectual engagement with food.

So entrenched has the assumed distinction between masculine/public and feminine/private been that even when scholars rightly acknowledge Fisher's contributions to gastronomy, it

comes with the caveat that this is because of Fisher's anomalous self-oriented model of pleasure. But the authors in this thesis also demonstrate that pleasure is not *either* self-oriented *or* other-oriented, instead writing an aesthetics of food in which pleasure is multi-dimensional. Though Fisher's gastronomy is legitimised by its approximation of masculine self-oriented pleasure, it nonetheless diverts from this model because Fisher is almost always writing about cooking and eating with the people she loves. Read in tandem with Chapter Three, we start to see how time, space and circumstance might influence these women's experiences with gustatory pleasure. Where Fisher's memories are often coloured by grief, Colwin's food memories are more emotionally straightforward: she explicitly loves to cook for and with her family and friends. She is a wife and a mother, and also a professional author – these parts of her life have equal footing in her writing. Colwin reflects on the development of her child's palate with the same fondness as she does when "alone in the kitchen with an eggplant" (2012, 28). Her opinions on food are no less stubborn or explicit than Fisher's or Child's. Unlike both authors, though, Colwin's aesthetics of food is anchored in the home – in this instance, the house in 1980s New York City she shares with her husband and child. It manifests both in specific ingredients and cooking methodologies, as well as hosting, and cooking for children, and specific kinds of ornamental kitchenware.

McLean's "decidedly undomesticated approach toward pleasure" replicates – if unintentionally – the gendered distinctions between women's food writing and men's, and later chapters in this thesis demonstrate exactly how the principles of gastronomic literature might operate in a domestic context (2012, 5). In Colwin's context, the domestic is not simply the domain of the subjugated housewife, but a site of comfort, culinary curiosity, friendship, and family. Colwin's model is not definitive, though, as Chapter Four demonstrates: in it, as in Ephron's writing, the domestic space is unstable – as a result,

cooking is synonymous with disaster. Ephron, also writing in New York City in the latter half of the twentieth century, writes about food that is grounded in the home. Again, circumstances apply: unlike Colwin, for Ephron the home is not a source of stability and calm but one of heartbreak, chaos, and culinary misadventure. Reading Chapters Three and Four together provides not a definitive template of what domestic gastronomy *must* be, but rather that it is possible to ground your gastronomic practice in private spaces. There is no monolithic experience of the home and the domestic space: as Joanne Hollows demonstrates, one's relationship to the domestic is likely in a state of constant flux (2007). Gastronomic literature as a genre is apt for such explorations, given food's centrality in many homes as well as the form's malleability. Accepting that the public/masculine and private/feminine dichotomy need not be a philosophical underpinning of gastronomic literature not only recuperates a great many women food writers miscategorised as memoirists or cookbook authors, but also creates a space of enormous opportunity.

It is possible to recognise the historical context that shaped gastronomic literature as temporally contingent whilst also acknowledging that this need not always be the case: just as the contemporary novel is not bound to the same determinations as the classical novel, gastronomic literature need not be a thing of the past. We have the ideal framework here already: a generically nebulous, authorially playful aesthetics of food and eating.

Recipes *are* For Reading

Scholars like Susan J. Leonardi (1989), Traci Marie Kelly (2015), Sarah Garland (2009), Ben Jones and Steve Taylor (2001), and Ann Goldman (1988) have returned to the place and function of the recipe in food writing. Their scholarship complicates the assumption that a

recipe is purely practical guidance, instead addressing the ways that a recipe might be a literary technique unto itself: a way of expressing food in food writing without beckoning readers to the kitchen. In this thesis's introduction, I ask: how do we understand recipes that are embedded in a novel? How do we understand the existence of personal anecdote in cookbooks? Can a novel have workable recipes? Leonardi spearheaded a model in which the recipe is an "embedded discourse", and the sharing of recipes part of a trusted relationship between author and reader. Leonardi's scholarship is crucial in understanding recipes for their merit as literary and not purely culinary conventions. Upon this foundation, scholars like Garland and writers like Adam Gopnik query the purpose of readable recipes; Kelly develops a taxonomic model of food writing genres based on their incorporation of recipes. Building on the work of Leonardi, Kelly, Garland, and Gopnik (2011), among others, each of my chapters demonstrates that recipes are a central literary mechanism for destabilising the boundaries between cookbook, novel, and life writing – the texts can thus be made sense of when we consider them as examples of gastronomic literature.

Taken as a whole, there is no consistent model for the incorporation of recipes across the writings of Fisher, Child, Colwin and Ephron. In Chapter One, we see recipes deployed differently depending on where they occur: Fisher includes ingredient-specific recipes in *Consider the Oyster*, an otherwise decidedly gastronomic text that merges literary quotes with history with personal anecdote. In this context, the recipes for oysters might indeed be legitimate recipes, but they also function as another "type" of literary device like the quotes and statistics do. Fisher's other more recipe-dense offering, *How to Cook a Wolf*, ostensibly includes recipes as a continuation of her rationing guidance, including domestically grounded practices like "cooking" beauty and cleaning products in light of wartime shortages. And yet the recipes in *HTCAW* are also part of a broader political project in what Christina Van

Houten calls Fisher's contribution in the debates on "guns versus butter" (2018, 117). In Chapter Two, recipes emerge in a different context: in *My Life in France*, they are used by Child as a means of explaining and validating the process of writing her famous recipe book *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (*vol I and II*). In *My Life in France*, recipes take on a more prosaic form – the background of developing a recipe in *Mastering* might then appear in *My Life in France* but embedded in the narrative rather than formatted with an ingredients list and method. In *My Life in France* recipes are both context for "traditional" recipes and contextualised by the narrative that surrounds them. By breaking down the formatting of recipes in *Mastering* and then reconstructing them as narrative in *My Life in France*, Child upends assumptions about what a recipe must look like. In Chapter Three, recipes are used differently again. Though Colwin incorporates many recipes in a much more expected format (measurements, ingredients, method), including with an index, many recipes are also embedded as narrative devices – means of recalling family holidays, establishing the development of taste, or generating perspectives on food cultures more broadly. In Colwin's food writing, recipes are in service of broader thematic storytelling, their structure and specificity flexible and adaptive based on whichever chapter they help to unfold. And finally, in Chapter Four, recipes – formatted with measurements, ingredients, method and an index – emerge in what is otherwise book of fiction: *Heartburn*. In Ephron's case, the recipes are the most obviously unexpected, since they force readers to confront a genre in which the factual, scientific structures of a recipe sit side by side with a piece of "fiction". The blurred divide between fiction and non-fiction is expanded, since the workability of recipes in the fictional *Heartburn* is referenced in Ephron's non-fiction essays.

What do we do, then, with the recipes in these texts? I propose that we understand them as just one of the ways that these authors are "doing" gastronomic literature. In the case of all

four authors the recipes are never *just* recipes – they are also exemplary of the malleability of the form. They can be read as a radical experimentation with boundaries: an ostensibly straightforward convention being dis-and-reassembled and then used to structure narrative, make political statements, or muddy the distinctions between fact and fiction. Woman-authored gastronomy takes the backbone of the domestic cookbook – the recipe – and adapts it; makes it metaphor, narrative, uncookable, cookable, readable.

Women, Hunger, Sexuality

In the introduction to this thesis, I note that food-as-signifier has taken on a gender-specific bent in scholarship about food writing. This manifests in a few ways: scholars like Sceats, Leonardi, Cruikshank, and Blodgett have written about women's food writing in feminised language, using phrases like "human reproducibility" and "impregnated with meaning" in their analysis. It also occurs in the broader arguments about what women's food writing *means*, most frequently through the assumption that the satisfaction of a woman's hunger is necessarily a metaphor for the satisfaction of her – either repressed or deviant – sexual desire. But such assumptions replicate the kind of thinking that has domesticated women's food cultures and intellectualised men's. They prevent women's food writing from existing (as I argue they do) within a complex matrix of associations, where food can mean precisely whatever the author wants it to mean and a robust sexuality is not a prerequisite for gustatory pleasure. This thesis asks, what gendered assumptions is scholarship replicating when it understands food *only* as metaphor? What if the food in the texts stands for nothing but food – and what if the reliance on metaphor obfuscates a different relationship? How might our understanding of women and food change if we remove the layer of metaphor?

To explore the ways that these authors "use" food as communication tool, I draw on Felski and Sedgwick to push back against suspicious reading practices in which food *must* be a metaphor, and that metaphor (for women authors) is usually about their sexuality. By approaching these authors from a reparative, in some instances ecstatic reading practice, I seek to imbue back into the texts the kind of pleasure that they project. This thesis responds to the above questions in two ways: in the first instance, Chapters One and Four demonstrate that two women writers who both explicitly speak about love, marriage and sex have been understood very differently by the scholarship. In the second, Chapters Two and Three provide a framework for thinking about what food writing looks like when the food in it is, simply, food. In Chapters Two and Three, Child and Colwin both write about their married lives and both associate food with their romantic love in different ways – Child's entire professional project is entwined with her relationship with her husband, who is the reason for her arrival in France and also her creative collaborator. Colwin's writing is about the home she shares with her husband and child, and food is a way that she connects to her husband's culture, as well as creating routine and comfort. But neither writer's texts are taken as metaphors for their sexuality: when they each write about food and romantic love, it is just one arm in the abovementioned matrix of associations.

By contrast, Fisher's food writing in particular has been the subject of sexualised and sexualising analysis. At first glance, this makes sense for an author who speaks so explicitly about her romantic relationships, who repeatedly uses the term "orgy" as a way to describe eating, and whose playful approach to language often involves sex-based puns and metaphors. But as Chapter One demonstrates, scholarship about Fisher has tended to conflate her mentions of sexuality with the idea that *all* of Fisher's work is a metaphor for sex, even when she explicitly tells us otherwise. The much-quoted phrase of Fisher's, in which she

responds to the question "why do you write about food, and eating and drinking?", becomes a stand-in for this analytical approach (GM, ix). As it is frequently reproduced, Fisher's response is, "so it happens that when I write of hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it" (GM, ix). But the quote continues, "and warmth and the love of it and the hunger for it… and then the warmth and richness and fine reality of hunger satisfied… and it is all one" (GM, ix). Fisher herself tells us that her approach to hunger is multi-faceted – not a simple one-to-one between hunger and love, but an exploration of the kinds of hunger we experience and how those hungers intertwine. We can understand this exploration as the impetus for her overall gastronomic project, but the complexity of such exploration is lost when we ignore the latter part of that quotation. Reading Fisher's work in concert with Chapter Four shows us what it might look like to acknowledge the sex where it is without making it the overall thrust of the project. Ephron, like Fisher, also writes about love, sex, and relationships – often in much more explicit terms than Fisher did. And yet Ephron's work has not had nearly the same treatment as Fisher's. Ephron was known primarily as a filmmaker and scriptwriter, and there is very little scholarship on her food writing – as such, the sexualising tendency of food writing scholarship has not yet been applied to her work. As Bordo says, food in men's writing is "*supposed* to supply sensual delight and succor – not as metaphorically standing for something else" (2003, 112). Chapter Four, then, has demonstrated what a gastronomic analysis of women's food writing might look like when reading women's food writing through Bordo's model. In it, food, sex and love coexist without being underpinned by the conflation of their author's hunger with her sexuality. In this context, women's gastronomic literature is an arena in which authors can communicate their hungers: be they complex, simple, metaphorical, or physiological.

The Future of Women's Gastronomic Literature

This thesis has been concerned with the tenets of gastronomic literature as a historical category, but it is dually interested in the potential of gastronomic literature as a life writing category – one with a unique capacity to communicate subjectivities because of its connection to culture, family, nature, and the body. Contemporary life writing theory demonstrates how apt food-based life writing is for the expression of personal experience, with scholars like Smith and Watson (2010), Baena (2006), Goeller (2007) and Goldman emphasising not just food's potential as a driving metaphor but as a crucial component of identity formation. This thrust is reflected in *Life Writing* and *a/b Autobiography Studies*, who since 2021 have published articles on semiotics in gastrographies (Pazargadi 2021), "culinary cosmopolitanisms" in food memoirs (Dhar 2022), pleasure reading baking memoirs (Moore 2023) and food in Australian literary magazines (Deller 2024). Writing food is not simply the domain of critical food studies, nor an exclusively metaphorical driver in fiction, and such journals demonstrate food's value as a tool of communication in life writing specifically.

Whether by using their experiences with food as a means of communicating the development of their taste, of exploring their identity, or of structuring their memories, Fisher, Child, Colwin and Ephron demonstrate just some of the ways that food can become its own language. In some instances, as in Chapter One, there is a chronology to Fisher's eating that explicitly traces the formation of her taste and then establishes that taste as crucial to her identity as M.F.K. Fisher. In Chapter Two Child, like Fisher, legitimises her understanding of food through her alimentary education in France (both institutional, at the Cordon Bleu, and experiential, through eating and market shopping), and food then becomes the pillar around which Child develops her career. In Chapter Three, Colwin does not demonstrate the same

kind of culinary coming-of-age that Fisher and Child do, and our sense of her taste is that it is already established – but Colwin nevertheless shows moments in which she learns her palette anew: situations propelled by learning how to feed her child or discovering a new type of bread on a street corner. And in Chapter Four, we see parts of all of these elements coalesce: the development of Ephron's food career (both in her food essays and the fictional career in *Heartburn*); the use of food to recall specific memories (like the lost strudel); the constancy of comfort in cooking as well as the excitement about trying new foods for the first time. In all four chapters, we see examples of gastronomic literature – where food is treated with serious philosophical inquiry, where language is playful, where genre is collage – and we also see the way that gastronomic literature is life writing. In writing about food, all four authors are writing about their lives.

Work like Laura Shapiro's and Sherrie Inness', on the gendering of food cultures, pose the question – whose recipes and food cultures are we missing if the cookbook is exclusively defined as the product of middle-class domesticity? By extension, this thesis asks, whose recipes and food cultures are we missing if gastronomic literature is exclusively the defined as the product of bourgeois European masculinity? This thesis only begins to scratch the surface of those possibilities: its focus on middle-class, white American women is restricted in scope, but nonetheless capable of demonstrating the beginnings of a new gastronomy.

I conceive of Fisher and Child as an appropriate starting point from which to stretch our conceptions of gastronomic literature because in many ways, their work is most straightforwardly aligned with gastronomic literature due to the time, country, and cultures in which they were writing. Yet the same frameworks applied to Fisher and Child are also suitable for less straightforwardly gastronomic texts – whether, like Colwin, because of its

being written in late-twentieth-century New York and focused in the home, or, like Ephron, because it here applies to a holistic body of work rather than a singular text. Recent contributions to the field, which focus on women's food writing, demonstrate the direction in which this new gastronomy might move. Harde and Wesselius's *Consumption and the Literary Cookbook* (2020) and Bădulescu, Alexandru and Năstase's *Women's Imaginary Cooking and Appetites Across Cultures: Studies and Literature, Media and Film* (2025) offer explorations of children's cookbooks and British Islam (Rauwerda, 2020), of metaphors in intergenerational food memoirs (Thielen, 2020), and of Edna Lewis's cookbooks (Stamant, 2020) among others. We also see the inclusion of less traditional food medias as key insights into women's writing, such as in Oberholtzer Lee's work on food in American devotional media (2025), or in Ilie's work on exile confessionals in Post-Communist Romania (2025). But there are many more opportunities for further application – texts whose inclusion further elucidates the potential of gastronomic literature as a genre. An interdisciplinary form by nature, when we allow gastronomic literature to expand beyond the remit of a few historical characters, we begin to reconfigure an aesthetics of hunger, care, and domesticity as espoused by its writings. We also contribute to our understanding of the malleability of genre as it travels through historical time; of the aptitude of life writing as a recuperative form; and of women's ability to experience and communicate pleasure in all its messy, deviant, wholesome, nourishing forms.

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