

# Foreword

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*Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed,  
and some few to be chewed and digested.*

Francis Bacon

In our search for a quote to open this issue on *Literary Perspectives on Food*, it was hard to find one more fitting than this quote by Francis Bacon, cited also as the epigraph to the Cambridge Critical Concept anthology on *Food and Literature*. The quote makes visible the at first obscure link between literature and food in suggesting that books, like foodstuffs, are to be tasted and chewed on. After all, what is literature if not food for thought? At the same time, meals are often meaningful in literature. Eating is habitual, as much as daily commutes or morning rituals. But when narratives focus on such habitual instances, they gain more profound meaning. Think for example of the Hobbits in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, or *The Hobbit*. In the very first chapter of *The Hobbit*, the dwarves unexpectedly visit Bilbo as he is about to have lunch,

and in true Hobbit-fashion, he invites the unexpected visitors into his house. The fellowship thus meet each other over a meal that simultaneously, as is apparent in the scene, serves to stress important differences between dwarves and Hobbits, such as the way in which they eat. A similar example is found in the scene from Peter Jackson's adaptation of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, where Merry and Pippin express their surprise over their travel companions' unfamiliarity with "second breakfast," as well as many other Hobbit meals. That scene continues to have a life of its own on the internet, showcasing how meaningful the connection between narrative and food can be. Due to these important relations between food and storytelling, this issue focuses on exploring the way in which foodstuffs, cooking and eating are represented in literature.

One finds one such narrative approach to food history in *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021) by Amitav Ghosh. In this work, Ghosh considers the space of nutmeg and the nutmeg tree in history, starting at the Banda archipelago. Dutch colonists brutally committed genocide on the Bandanese people because they supposedly showed too much resistance in the process of converting the isles into a literal nutmeg factory. In his narration of nutmeg's geopolitical history, Ghosh writes: "It is certainly true that the history of the archipelago cannot be narrated without reference to the tree—but it cannot for that reason be said that the tree authored or decided the fate of the Bandanese" (31). Ghosh considers how different this project was on the nearby islands of Ternate and Tidore, home to clove trees: they were colonised, but spared the same fate.

Ghosh draws parallels between the present and the past, starting at nutmeg. He signals that in contemporary Western narratives, actors such as cloves and nutmeg hold no agency, are "inert" objects, subjects of "science and commerce" (35). In what Ghosh signals as the traditional method in historical research, there is no space for the story of nutmeg, and so he took it upon himself to write it in a blend of narrative and historical research. In Ghosh's history of nutmeg, there are clear parallels between colonialism, capitalism and contemporary crises. Nutmeg "illustrates the loss of meaning that is produced by the vision of world-as-resource" (76), which Ghosh argues starts with colonisation. In

drawing up that history, moving from colonialism to the climate crisis, Ghosh allots agency to the spice in a way reminiscent of the symbolical space nutmeg holds in the remainder of Bandanese culture.

In a similar fashion, Anna Tsing ascribes agency to matsutake mushrooms and the landscapes that grow them in her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (2015). According to Tsing, matsutake is the most valued mushroom in the world, but its growth can hardly be commercialized as the matsutake are only grown in symbiotic relationship with human-disturbed forests, often concealed by the forest floor. They are not farmed but foraged. These mushrooms are a precarious resource, and one that Tsing argues shows “precarity as an earth-wide condition” (4), allowing us to read in it our planet’s state of crisis. The mushroom, that despite its unpleasant scent has become a Japanese delicacy, has come to narrate the social, technological and political structures that have shaped ecology in the post-industrial society.

Tsing illustrates how matsutake mushrooms have become synergetic with nature affected by human presence: matsutake, says Tsing, was allegedly the first organism to emerge in the nuclear landscape of Hiroshima (3). The geopolitical history of matsutake that Tsing writes moves beyond exploring the commodity chains of such valuable produce, and instead poses questions about living in an entangled capitalist world. She differentiates between ‘first nature,’ which exists in ecological relations; ‘second nature,’ indicating the way capitalism has reduced nature to nothing more than resources; and finally ‘third nature,’ by which she means “what manages to live despite capitalism” (viii). Tsing centralizes capitalism in the Anthropocene and uses matsutake to imagine ways of living that exist despite capitalism, echoing the critique of viewing the world as resource that Ghosh also illustrates.

To imagine a life despite capitalism, Tsing writes, we must look further than one-dimensional perspectives on the world, and thus engage in “open-ended assemblages of entangled ways of life” (4), as presented in *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, as well as *The Nutmeg’s Curse*. Both works move away from a purely theoretical scholarly tradition by relying on storytelling in their geopolitical histories of nutmeg and

matsutake mushrooms. Ghosh asks himself how one can narrate spices as actors, and in an attempt to do so relies, for example, on indigenous storytelling. Similarly, Tsing includes stories from foragers and locals without naming her sources, to respect their privacy. Both authors place their subject at the centre: these are not histories *about* food, but the histories *told by* food. Tsing writes that her short chapters, distinctly different from most scholarly works, are “like the flushes of mushrooms that come up after a rain: an over-the-top bounty, a temptation to explore; an always too many” (viii). In doing so, Tsing further centralises the mushroom as it becomes not merely a subject, but also a way to tell its own story. Works such as *The Nutmeg’s Curse* and *The Mushroom at the End of the World* are perhaps not straightforward examples of literary perspectives on food, but they draw attention to the way food highlights important symbolic connections and relations in an entangled world. In any case, what is clear in these two examples is that much can still be said about the storytelling potential of foodstuffs, which is why in this issue, we turn to literary perspectives on food studies.

Food studies is an emerging interdisciplinary field that engages with questions about the figuration of food in the shaping of politics, culture, economy, social life, and individual and communal identity. Literary food studies, too, takes as a starting point the interdisciplinary engagements of food studies in a broader sense. This subfield centres around a critical examination of food as matter, its symbolic and cultural import, and food’s role as both object and subject of various (scientific) methodologies that pertain to the study of ‘food’ in the broadest sense of the term. When searching for scholarship on literary food studies, academic databases such as WorldCat list appropriately titled results such as *Food in European Literature* by John Wilkins (1996), which exemplifies that specifically literary research into the cultural representation of food goes as far back as the 1990s. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of works that thematise the cultural study of food and cooking have been published in the last ten years. At the same time, writing and reporting about food and cooking is a longstanding tradition that is very well-represented in contemporary popular culture by such well-known cooks, critics and entertainers as, for example, Anthony Bourdain and

Jacques Pepin. The unimaginable quantity of extant cookbooks aside, googling for food studies literature results in a rich crossover of scholarly and popular works that, in their own distinctive ways, address the same topics about the history, science and cultural representation of food and cooking. Nevertheless, whereas food studies has been around for some time, literary food studies as a discrete subfield is still in its infancy, which makes it all the more interesting as a point of departure for current literary research.

In the previous paragraph, we referred to Wilkins's book, which is but part of an obscure selection of standalone monographs that research the intersection between literature and food studies. It seems that works on this topic published well before 2010 had not yet been taken up in what is now slowly but surely becoming an established and coherent canon. Nevertheless, several state-of-the-art anthologies and edited works have recently been released that specifically address literature and literary production's role in shaping, reproducing and transmitting stories about food, and genres of food writing. In terms of a literary canon about food writing, Sandra M. Gilbert and Roger J. Porter have co-edited *Eating Words: A Norton Anthology of Food Writing* (2016), in which they synthesise and categorise—largely chronologically—authors who write about and works that address food in relation to themes such as history, memory, identity, ethnicity, eating experiences, trade and circulation, gastronomic traditions and conventions, politics and language.

In a similar vein, J. Michelle Coghlan prefaces her edited volume *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Food* (2020) with a section titled “Chronology of Major Works and Events.” Works listed in this section reach as far back as Plato's *Gorgias*, from 380 BCE, “wherein Socrates suggests cooking is mere ‘routine,’ rather than art” (xiii). However, this collection of anthologies and edited volumes proves the exact opposite. In any case, disagreement with claims such as Plato's Socrates's will undeniably have sparked passionate debates about the cultural and artistic status of cooking, and in extension, the multiperspectival positions of food vis-à-vis creativity. These two examples show that whereas the scholarly interest in food in the form of literary food studies is relatively

new, the interaction between food, cooking and literature goes back as far as historical inquiry can take us.

Yet two earlier works about literature and food were published in 2017 and 2018 respectively. Both Amy L. Tigner and Allison Carruth's *Literature and Food Studies*, and Lorna Piatti-Farnell and Donna Lee Brien's (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Food* adopt a transnational approach in their engagement with food writing, literature and history. In doing so, these works aim to unearth the false presuppositions that shape our perception of food culture to this day in an attempt to decolonise the discourse on food production and cooking traditions. Both works depart from the premise that food is closely tied to politics and thus figures in the establishment and maintenance of geopolitical power relations. Focussing particularly on migratory practices, Tigner and Carruth state in their introduction that "literary engagements with the edible world demand complex ways of thinking about food because they interlace its cultural and corporeal meanings and move across the scales at which those meanings take shape" (1). For them, the scale at which we study food is nearly as important as food itself, which is reflected in their broad, multimedial approach to the term 'literature.' Aside from more standard genres such as the epic poem or fictional novel, the authors include reflections on what they call "food's vernacular literary practices" (1), extending our understanding of literature to every type of speech- or text-based production that is in any way related to food and engagement therewith.

Piatti-Farnell and Brien echo Tigner and Carruth's endeavour, also pointing to the many variables that pertain to one person's social and political relation to "food, cooking, and eating" (2). They further argue that

[b]ecause food is such a quotidian and common element in the world and the individuals' experience of that world, it is often included in narratives by authors from different geographical origins and historical backgrounds; yet, food is not tied to one cultural or representational context, but has the ability to morph into a symbolic depiction of the literary structure in which it is placed. (2)

Zooming in on the possible linguistic and structural function of literary food representations, Piatti-Farnell and Brien's edited volume is inconclusive, in the sense that not one definitive thing can be said about the cultural-historical position of foodstuffs and culinary traditions. Following them, the permutations that happen within food cultures and traditions offer endless variations both within writings on food, and the study of those writings. Literature is thus a locus of food study that both traces those permutations and allows new ones to come into existence. The continuous effort of our contributing authors and editing team has resulted in an issue that pursues the same standards.

Our main section revolves around articles by seasoned scholars from the field and is opened by Angela Brintlinger's essay "Food and Patriotism in Russia from *Domostroi* to Vyazemsky: The Case of *Kvas*." In this article, Brintlinger explores the ways in which the native Russian beverage *kvas* "came to function in the Russian literary imagination" (20). Working her way through the works of multiple Russian poets, Brintlinger shows how different attitudes toward *kvas* have broadly divided the country's literary domain into two camps: those who embrace it as a symbol of local Russian identity and those who treat it as a sign of stagnation, a lack of openness to West European 'progress.' Using poet Pyotr Vyazemsky's concept of "*kvas* patriotism," Brintlinger argues that the literary tropes this idea invokes emblematised the complex entanglements that define both backward and forward-looking types of Russian nationalism in the country's rich literary tradition.

Where Brintlinger focuses on the domesticity of *kvas* in the Russian national-literary context, Psyche Williams-Forsen considers the role of food in domestic relationships in the work of little known Southern American writer Ann Allen Shockley. In "Chit'lins and Champagne: Food, Class and Sexuality in Ann Allen Shockley's *Loving Her*," Williams-Forsen close reads Ann Allen Shockley's *Loving Her*, focussing on the importance of food and food rituals in the interracial relationship between two women, Terry and Renay. She further adds to existing scholarship on this novel by focussing on food and the way food becomes a signifier for issues of race, class and gender. By engaging with E. Patrick Johnson's concept of "quare," a way of thinking about identity

amongst queer people that readily accepts the differences between them, especially the differences caused by race and class, Williams-Forsen shows how, for example, the juxtaposition of Renay's chit'lins and champagne on a set dinner table becomes a "performance of self," as Renay contradicts paradigms of race and class through her cooking.

"Trio Marmalade and Hominy Grits: Gullah Traditions and Home Cooking in Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress, and Indigo*" by Rita Mookerjee is this issue's third article. In this essay, Mookerjee celebrates and honours both the legacy of Ntozake Shange as a Black woman storyteller as well as Gullah culture and history through her writing. Building upon Doris Witt's concept of the recipistolary novel, Mookerjee explores through Shange's novel *Sassafrass, Cypress and Indigo* the importance of recipes and rituals as a means of reifying non-white, non-Western aesthetic codes both between Black people and within literature.

Closing the main section, we have Timothy Nixon's "'The Joy it Promised': Apprehending the Dichotomous Deployment of Food in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*." Here, Nixon aims to fill a lacuna in Morrison scholarship regarding her deployment of food imagery and symbolism. Food, Nixon argues, was a very important part of Morrison's personal life and thus, understandably, also plays a crucial role in her fictional work. Nixon specifically focuses on *The Bluest Eye* and applies Freud's theory of the canny and the uncanny to analyse how the novel's representation of foodstuffs can quickly transition from positive affects—familiar and soothing—to negative ones—unfamiliar and repulsive. Through this analysis, Nixon shows how Morrison strategically employs references to and representations of food in order to direct and play with the reader's ideas of familiarity and emotion.

Masterclass articles make up the second section of our issue, in which we invite PhD and graduate students to publish earlier or current work related to the issue's theme. First up in the masterclass section is an article by Margherita Orsi, who, like Williams-Forsen and Nixon, focuses on the role of food symbolism and representation in the domestic sphere. In "Food and the 'Feminine Mystique' in Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*," Orsi analyses the role of food in Jackson's novel against the backdrop of the rapidly changing lives of American

housewives in the 1950s and 60s. Her Gothic fiction often revolves around women's role in the domestic sphere, which is consistent with Jackson's own struggles with her role as housewife while writing humorous accounts of those experiences in women's magazines. Orsi uses Betty Friedan's concept of the 'feminine mystique,' the performance of domesticity women were (and often still are) expected to stage, to interrogate Jackson's employment of food imagery. Apart from food being a crucial element of every part of the story, Orsi argues that Jackson not only uses food to depict the constraining reality of American housewives' mobility, but also to subvert the image of domesticity imposed on them by representing food as a source of creativity and agency. Orsi concludes that in addition to being a denunciation of American housewives' social status in post-World War II North America, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* emphasises the creative and destructive power of food, and how housewives can harness that power to fight the constraining effects of patriarchy.

We find yet another take on domesticity in our second masterclass article. In "A Case for Dairy and Grocery List Poetry," Rianna Turner challenges the category of 'poetry' by engaging with a grocery list that the New Negro Renaissance poet Anne Spencer wrote down in one of her many journals. Through an intricate close reading of this list of cake mix, face cream and hair pins, Turner blurs the boundaries between the domestic and the artistic. Ultimately, they argue for a broadening of scholarly engagement with domestic writing that does not merely consider its socio-historical, but also its aesthetic value. Attending to domestic writing, and in particular the grocery list, in multiple critical spheres allows for a more thorough understanding of the relationship that exists between Black women writers, such as Anne Spencer, domesticity and art. According to Turner, this relationship, which has been largely absent in academic environments, is crucial for matters of identity as well as genre.

Also interested in the ways food relates to identity formation and the domestic is Carla Kay, who in the penultimate masterclass article turns to Middle Eastern food writing. In "Remembering Eating: Culinary Memory and Identity Formation in Three Culinary Memoirs

of the Middle East,” Kay discusses three culinary memoirs and argues that they become spaces for identification with cultures and places for authors and readers of memoirs alike. Kay’s analysis considers the differences between memoirs, such as the inclusion or embedding of recipes within the narrative, and focuses especially on the moments in the text where memories become affective, as the embedded recipes provide sensory access to the author’s memories. In her close readings, the different memoirs allow readers to look inside their authors’ memories and their identity, as they use food and recipes to navigate their own cultural identity. Kay shows how the memoirs all take a different approach, but how ultimately all three authors use narrative to “work through” their memories, and in doing so gain a critical distance to conflicting memories. Then, they share these affective memories with readers, transforming these memoirs into sites of memory transference, all related to food and food rituals. As such, the memoirs and this article alike work to reframe one-dimensional conceptualisations of the Middle East.

Concluding our masterclass section, we have Esther Eumann’s article “‘Kitchens Will Be Abolished’: An Exploration of How Traditional Female and Societal Norms Are Resisted Through Food in Brigitte Reimann’s *Franziska Linkerhand* and Karin Struck’s *Klassenliebe*.” In this article, Eumann analyses the role of food and foodworks in women’s lives in literature from East and West Germany in the 1970s. The article looks at how the perception of women’s role in society differs between East and West Germany, and how imposed gendered and societal norms are treated in literature. Through their main characters, Eumann analyses how the two novels *Franziska Linkerhand* (1974) and *Klassenliebe* (1973) explicitly deal with these societal pressures by way of food and foodworks. In the former, Franziska’s resistance is expressed by rejecting the typical housewife model, whereas in the latter Karin’s resistance takes shape by eating differently than the people in her surroundings. Eumann concludes that these acts of resistance, as well as the setbacks and discomfort that result from them, are dealt with and expressed through food and foodworks.

*FRAME 35.1 Literary Perspectives on Food* attempts to do similar things as the above-mentioned anthologies, edited volumes, and articles in this issue. By contributing to the study of literary food representation, this edition of *FRAME* hopes to incentivise scholarly approaches to food in literature among our readers, while also, like J. Michelle Coghlan says about *The Cambridge Companion*, “offer[ing] unique insight into the complexity of food matters even as it works at once to archive and refashion our tastes in a gastronomic sense” (1). In this way, this issue hopes to challenge preconceived notions about food culture, and to inspire scholars and students alike to reassess their presuppositions concerning food, cooking, eating and their symbolism.

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