"The Joy It Promised": The Dichotomous Deployment of Food in *The Bluest Eye*

Timothy K. Nixon

Abstract

"'The Joy It Promised': The Dichotomous Deployment of Food in *The Bluest Eye*" considers the ways in which Toni Morrison incorporated foodstuffs into her first novel. The persistent references to alimentary items are inescapable in this work, so this essay attempts to understand what it is the author was trying to do with them. Employing Freudian concepts, this essay shows that foodstuffs can have positive, homely associations for the characters and readers, which equates to the idea of the canny, yet food and food imagery can have negative, disturbing associations, which is more in line with Freud's notion of the uncanny. Finally, there is a third category of gustatory items that are neither negative nor positive but nevertheless useful for situating the characters and the narrative itself in a specific historical, cultural, and ethnic context.

Viewers of the 2019 documentary *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am* heard how early in her career, Morrison approached some clerical assistants about typing up a manuscript and offered to compensate them with the best carrot cake they would ever eat. As a single parent and a working woman, Morrison surely appreciated the value of one's time and labor, so her offer to these secretaries demonstrated the seriousness, the worth she perceived in food. Just about every work by Morrison involves food of some sort as simile, symbol, or signifier. For instance, Bride, the protagonist of Morrison's last novel, *God Help the Child* (2015), is welcomed by a motherly figure with a bowl of highly spiced chicken soup that nourishes the famished young woman. The ghostly narrator of *Love* (2005) is described as smelling like cinnamon bread. Two buckets of blackberries ignite the community's resentment of Baby Suggs and her family with deadly repercussions in *Beloved* (1987). The fearless, powerful woman named Pilate in *Song of Solomon* (1977) is brought to tears when served cherry jam for breakfast. And in *Sula* (1973), Ajax comes courting the titular character with several quarts of milk that "looked precious and clean and permanent" (Morrison 124). When we readers pause to consider what the texts are saying, we cannot help but observe that food's deployment in these novels is not something to be taken lightly; it is a matter of significance and importance that we readers ought to attend to and contemplate.

Surprisingly, however, few critical studies of food in the fiction of Toni Morrison have been released. Sarah Manyika, in her article "On Meeting Toni Morrison," declares Morrison "often uses food to hint at what simmers beneath the surface" (138). Regrettably, she does not explore that idea further; instead, she runs through a quick catalog of foodstuffs in the works. By contrast, a most noteworthy contribution to food-related issues in Morrison's fiction appeared in 2009 when *Modern Fiction Studies* published an intriguing essay by Allison Carruth. Her article focuses on Morrison's work *Tar Baby* (1981) and considers how the text exposes the unfairness of industrial candy production. Nevertheless, while Morrison's fiction has generally received a great deal of critical and scholarly attention, not much has been published looking specifically at food in Morrison's oeuvre.

No other work demonstrates Morrison's preoccupation with and masterful deployment of foodstuffs as much as her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970). On page after page of that work we are presented with alimentary artifacts that situate the work in its historical context, that evoke the cooking of Black families who had undergone the Great Migration, and that exemplify the economic status of the novel's characters. In *The Bluest Eye* Morrison incorporates foodstuffs as metaphors and imagery frequently and strategically. Oftentimes, food is deployed to situate the various narrative strands in domestic spaces and to evoke comfort, family, and home. In other cases, by contrast, food is used to highlight pain, suffering, and discomfort. Given the dearth of scholarship on food in Morrison's writing, we need to bring original approaches to the proverbial table to understand what the author was doing in her work. Focusing on *The Bluest Eye*, then, this essay will employ the Freudian concept of the *unheimlich* to aid us in apprehending how the writer goes about presenting foodstuffs in numerous instances as objects related to well-being, contentment, and familiarity while later incorporating them as markers of pain, trauma, and even disgust. Sigmund Freud's ideas assist us in understanding how in *The Bluest Eye* mouth-watering descriptions that evoke pleasure and comfort can be inverted, so effortlessly and effectively, only a few pages later to amplify heart-wrenching pain and trauma.

The Freudian (Un)canny

Common usage of the term "uncanny" connotes creepiness, unease, and fright, and while the term is expansive enough to accommodate those associations, we would be well served to understand what Sigmund Freud actually wrote about the concept. In 1919 Freud published a treatise entitled *Das Unheimliche* (i.e., *The Uncanny*). Pulling from a 1908 essay by E. Jentsch on the subject, various languages' equivalent terms, and numerous denotative definitions from German-language dictionaries, Freud concludes that the word and its antonym (i.e., *heimlich* [homey]) eventually wrap back around and point to one another. That which is deemed *heimlich* is, according to Freud, "familiar […]

intimate, homely" (126) and is known for "arousing a pleasant feeling of quiet contentment" (127); it is closely aligned with comfort and tranquility. Through understanding the canny, which can be understood as the "local, native, domestic" and even the "familiar" (159n2), Freud suggests, one can begin to understand its opposite, the uncanny. However, the notion of the canny can be taken to extremes wherein the domestic and homey become ultimately private, secret even—as in, that which is hidden within the home's inner sanctum and is withheld from public knowledge—so that the revelation of the domestic and familiar can be causes for anxiety and fear. Freud draws his first section to a close by asserting, "*Heimlich* thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*. The uncanny (*das Unheimliche*, 'the unhomely') is in some way a species of the familiar (*das Heimliche*, 'the homely')" (134; emphasis in original). From there, Freud begins to explicate examples of the uncanny in the writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann, which is perhaps why contemporary usage of the term is associated with the horrific and frightening. Nevertheless, the core of Freud's theory is the tension between (and potential conflation of) that which is known and familiar and recognizable (i.e., domestic) and that which should be known and familiar and recognizable but is somehow not quite comforting. The tension between the known and the unknown or the domestic and the strange is the part of Freud's theory with which this essay preoccupies itself.

Interestingly, other scholars, especially in recent years, have applied the same Freudian theory to Morrison's oeuvre. Andrew Ng considers the haunted house that is the setting for *Beloved* through the lens of Anthony Vidler's *Architectural Uncanny* (1992). Garrett Stewart examines the writing of the protagonist at the center of *A Mercy* (2008) as an uncanny creation. The uncanny plays a large part in Molly Travis's examination of reader response to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Jean Wyatt devoted an entire chapter to employing the uncanny as a lens through which the novel *Home* (2012) can be studied. None, however, grapples with the idea of the uncanny and its relation to food in Morrison's writing, so the application of that idea to foodstuffs in particular in Morrison's fiction is what we are about here. In effect, this

essay demonstrates that there is still much to be said about Freudian thought and Morrison's writing. The impetus propelling this essay is the idea that psychoanalytic theory can help us discuss the ways a remarkable author utilizes food to communicate, whether as an analogy with positive associations, an amplification of a trauma being described, or a neutral signifier of social categories.

The Canny and Food

With an understanding of Freud's concepts behind us, it probably makes the most sense to start with food's positive associations, its canny aspects in *The Bluest Eye*. In these examples we connect with the carrot-cake-offering Morrison; we can easily detect someone who savors food and relishes its sensory *and* sensual appeal. The little girl at the center of the narrative in *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove, is dismissed and disregarded by just about everyone in her life. A trio of prostitutes is one of the few exceptions. Poland, China, and Miss Marie *see* Pecola and welcome her into their home; they salute her with terms of affection and express concern over her welfare. Interestingly, the language of affection that is employed by the women and the little girl is the language of food. Through Pecola, then, an inventory of positive food images in this novel is established in quick, incidental episodes. For instance, in one seemingly insignificant, tossed off passage, as Pecola climbs the steps and approaches their front door, she hears Poland singing and is struck by "her voice sweet and hard, like new strawberries" (*BE* 51). Clearly, the association in the girl's mind between the woman's voice and the seasonal fruit is a positive one. Admittedly, the descriptor "hard" can lead readers to draw the wrong conclusion, to assume Poland is somehow stiff and rigid; however, only a few moments of consideration reveal its appropriateness. For us adult readers, if not for the immature Pecola herself, we might assume that Poland, an African American sex worker in the middle of the twentieth century, would have experienced things that had scarred her psyche and calloused her emotions. A hardness, an edge, therefore, might be expected in her voice. The voice, in effect, would then serve as a sort of synecdoche for the character; it reveals

her biography in miniature. Furthermore, Poland is not yet beyond her prime; neither she nor her voice is equated with a soft, rotting, or overripe berry. There is still a firmness to her and her voice. Nevertheless, the first and most important descriptor of Poland's singing in Pecola's imagining is "sweet." Despite what we might imagine this woman has experienced, the little girl perceives a sweetness in her voice. The simile that the narrator reveals in Pecola's mind, then, is "sweet and hard, like new strawberries." This passage is the first of many where the associations with food are positive and pleasurable.

The accumulation of food references, particularly with positive associations, continues unabated. Once inside, the little girl is greeted by the prostitutes, and we readers are introduced to Miss Marie's nicknames for Pecola: "'Hi, dumplin'. Where your socks?' Marie seldom called Pecola the same thing twice, but invariably her epithets were fond ones chosen from menus and dishes that were forever uppermost in her mind" (51). Over the next several pages we will hear the little girl referred to as "Chittlin'" (52), "Puddin'" (53), "sweetnin'" (53), and "Chicken" (55). In perhaps the only refuge from abuse and neglect in Pecola's short life, the fondness she experiences among the prostitutes is described in alimental terms. Thus, food in these instances is closely associated with warmth and welcome and affection. They are positives in the mind of the little girl, the woman who employs them, and the author who created them both. The foodstuffs, in effect, fall into the category of the *heimlich* or homey that Freud outlined in his essay. We begin to see, then, one side of the dichotomy that Morrison is establishing: food is linked with safety, familiarity, and a range of other positive associations.

Another episode with the prostitutes further cements this positive association with food. Morrison lets us readers eavesdrop as Miss Marie recollects for Pecola the experience of a most delectable meal:

> "[E]very Saturday we'd get a case of beer and fry up some fish. We'd fry it in meal and egg batter, you know, and when it was all brown and crisp—not hard, though—we'd break open that cold beer. . . ." Marie's eyes went soft as the memory of just such a meal sometime, somewhere transfixed her.

> All her stories were subject to breaking down at descriptions of food. Pecola saw Marie's teeth settling down into the back of crisp sea bass; saw the fat fingers putting back into her mouth tiny flakes of white, hot meat that had escaped from her lips; she heard the "pop" of the beer-bottle cap; smelled the acridness of the first stream of vapor; felt the cold beeriness hit the tongue. (53-54)

Miss Marie's memories of the beer and fried fish are linked, inextricably, with her memories of a lover, Johnny, but never having met Johnny, Pecola is only able to connect with the foodstuffs being discussed. The notion of these gustatory delights is real for her, just as it is for us readers. Johnny is blank, a cipher. The food, however, is an understandable, familiar reality, and Morrison deploys it in such a way that her character Pecola and we readers crave those tastes described by Miss Marie and vicariously experience something akin to what she must be feeling. We know the yearning for the savory, the desirable, the comfortable. This passage, then, is yet one more example of Morrison's use of foodstuffs to mean more than they might inherently convey. These positive, even homey associations are not, however, limited to Pecola's interactions with the prostitutes.

The narrative threads recounting Pecola's parents' lives are also replete with food imagery, and juicy fruits are again at the forefront. One instance in the life of Pecola's father, Cholly Breedlove, is particularly illustrative. Cholly was abandoned as an infant and raised by a great aunt. The only father figure he had in his life was a man named Blue, who took him under his wing and taught the boy important life lessons, such as the facts of life and how a Black man survives in this racist world. Cholly feels real affection for Blue, and his memory of the older man is encapsulated in a moment when they share the heart of a watermelon:

> The break was a bad one. The melon was jagged, and hunks of rind and red meat scattered on the grass.
> Blue jumped. "Aw—awww," he moaned, "dere go da heart." His voice was both sad and pleased. Everybody looked to see

> the big red chunk from the very center of the melon, free of rind and sparse of seed, which had rolled a little distance from Blue's feet. He stooped to pick it up. Blood red, its planes dull and blunted with sweetness, its edges rigid with juice. Too obvious, almost obscene, in the joy it promised.
> […]
> Together the old man and the boy sat on the grass and shared the heart of the watermelon. The nasty-sweet guts of the earth. (135)

Cholly's life will shortly be marred by trauma and abuse that will lead him into becoming an abuser himself, but in this one especially tender moment, the character's recollections equate an act of generosity and a tender, loving father figure with the enjoyment of the best part of a watermelon.

Other passages presenting food-based imagery in a positive light include episodes involving Pecola's mother, Pauline. In these cases, the sensuality of food is foregrounded, and the border between sensual and sexual becomes blurred. For example, one passage recounts Pauline's experiences of truly pleasurable sex with her husband. Reflecting on their earlier sex life, Pauline remembers orgasm with vivid, colorful associations: the iridescent green of lightning bugs, the purple of berries, and the yellow of lemonade (131). The colors in the account are notable, but for our purposes, the foodstuffs associated with those colors are most worthwhile. The familiar enjoyment, the familiar pleasure of lemonade and berries is what Morrison is banking on. Those images lead us readers to experience vicariously, if even in mediated and moderated ways, what Pauline is describing in her account. This example, then, is just one more instance where food is deployed in a really ingenious way.

Regarding the issue of food being associated with sexual experience, we should point out that what is true for the mother is true for the daughter. Pecola, Pauline's daughter, journeys into a small shop at one point in the narrative, and she purchases several Mary Jane candies. Morrison writes:

> Each pale yellow wrapper has a picture on it. A picture of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous. To Pecola they are simply pretty. She eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane.
> *Three pennies had bought her nine lovely orgasms with Mary Jane.* Lovely Mary Jane, for whom a candy is named. (50; emphasis mine)

The narrative focus of *The Bluest Eye* is on how white racist notions of beauty inflict psychic damage on little Black girls, figures like Pecola and the MacTeer sisters. In the preceding passage, Morrison is laying bare for us the little girl's pitiful attempt to measure up. Putting the bromide of "You are what you eat" into practice, Pecola ingests the Mary Jane candies in an attempt to become Mary Jane—who is a lovely, white child affirmed by the beauty standards of the United States. Beyond the act of ingesting Mary Jane in order to become Mary Jane, Pecola experiences sexual ecstasy through eating the candy. The account may seem shocking, inexplicable, or even nonsensical, but Freud again proves useful here. Freud himself acknowledges a linkage between the act of consuming and the sexual experience. In his work *The Contributions to the Theory of Sex* (1905), Freud asserts that "the very incipient sexual gratifications" are, in developing children, "connected with the taking of nourishment" (614), thereby establishing a link between the two experiences. Pecola's experience with the candies, at once gustatory and erotic, makes perfect sense. A precedent for this experience may be found in Pauline's memory of orgasm, where it is described as being like berries and lemonade.

We should, at this point, turn our attention back to the mother. Pauline's sexual awakening, we read, occurs with Cholly and is marked by fruit stains. She recollects how seeing Cholly was akin to a memory of how berries, which she placed in the pockets of her "Sunday dress,"

ended up being smashed, indelibly staining the garment and her hips (*BE* 115). Pauline and Cholly will come to despise one another, but there was a real passion between them early in their relationship, as this recollection demonstrates. In a surprisingly similar episode, we read about Cholly's first sexual encounter. Cholly and an acquaintance couple up with two young women and head off into the woods. Ultimately, Cholly's partner, Darlene, is depicted in a dress stained by scuppernongs or wild grapes:

> The object of the walk was a wild vineyard where the muscadine grew. Too new, too tight to have much sugar, they were eaten anyway. None of them wanted—not then—the grape's easy relinquishing of all its dark juice. The restraint, the holding off, the promise of sweetness that had yet to unfold, excited them more than full ripeness would have done. At last their teeth were on edge, and the boys diverted themselves by pelting the girls with the grapes. Their slim black boy wrists made G clefs in the air as they executed the tosses. The chase took Cholly and Darlene away from the lip of the gully, and when they paused for breath, Jake and Suky were nowhere in sight. Darlene's white cotton dress was stained with juice. (145)

In such scenes, there is a close linkage between foodstuffs and sexuality. The delight of the first sexual encounter is intertwined with the juiciness and succulence of berries and grapes. For the two young women, moreover, the stains on their clothing are inherently charged visual symbols of their hymenal blood. It is not insignificant that Pauline's stains are on her hips, a region of her body not far removed from the pelvis. For Cholly and Darlene, the experience will quickly turn negative, but at the outset, it has a luscious, positive association, just like Pauline's first sexual experience. The *heimlich* that Freud described arises here as the first sex acts and the fruits are equally thought of as pleasant and pleasurable.

The Uncanny and Food

Nevertheless, according to Freud, a simple inversion is enough to create the *unheimlich* or uncanny, which is what we see when little Pecola is stained with fruit. The young girl, accompanied by the novel's narrator and her sister, intrude upon Pauline's workplace. As the domestic help for a wealthy, white family, Pauline is responsible for cooking and cleaning, and a blueberry cobbler she has left cooling on the kitchen counter is too much for the girls to ignore. The curious girls accidentally upset the dessert and spill it all over the immaculate kitchen that Pauline has worked so hard to clean. More importantly, "Most of the juice splashed on Pecola's legs, and the burn must have been painful, for she cried out and began hopping about just as [her mother] Mrs. Breedlove entered" (*BE* 108–09). Whereas her mother's hips were stained, Pecola's legs are marked with the sticky, dark berry juice, and the searing pain is a precursor to her first sexual experience. Shortly after this event in the white folks' kitchen, Cholly Breedlove will rape his little daughter. Pecola is barely adolescent and is unaware of what her father is about. She is literally thrown off balance by his initially tender advances in their home, but her world is changed and her psyche is broken by his brutal sexual assault. To employ Freudian theory, then, we would say that Pecola being stained by the berry cobbler and the rape it foreshadowed in *The Bluest Eye* is *unheimlich*, uncanny, because it is the inverse of those earlier positive, enjoyable, pleasant events.

While devastatingly pathetic, Pecola's berry stains and subsequent rape are not *sui generis*; there are other inversions of food images in the novel, albeit none quite as agonizing. For instance, although she is the product of a loving, protective family, Claudia MacTeer, the narrator in *The Bluest Eye*, uses food imagery to convey how detestable and unwelcome winter in their north Ohio town is to her and her sister: "Winter tightened our heads with a band of cold and melted our eyes. We put pepper in the feet of our stockings, Vaseline on our faces, and stared through dark icebox mornings at four stewed prunes, slippery lumps of oatmeal, and cocoa with a roof of skin" (61–62). In this case, what should be familiar, what should be agreeable, what should be comfortable is not. It is the opposite of homey; it is *unheimlich*. We readers are

more than acquainted with the aliments in the text, but their inversion heightens for us the impact, the effect of the passage. Fruit, we agree, is delectable, but "stewed prunes," something eaten by elderly adults for the laxative effect, might be an exception. Oatmeal, we think, is hearty and filling, but "slippery lumps of" presumably cold oatmeal are repugnant. And hot chocolate, we assume, is luscious, but "cocoa with a roof of skin" is rather off-putting, because it adds an unwelcome texture to the drink. For Claudia, winter mornings on the shores of the Great Lakes are not unfamiliar or unexpected, but they are unwelcome. We readers vicariously share her sentiment through her descriptions employing food. "The uncanny," Freud tells us, "is in some way a species of the familiar" (134), which is what Claudia and we readers are experiencing in this episode; that which is *unheimlich* is merely the recognizable inverted so that positive associations morph into the unwelcome and the uncomfortable.

Neutral but Noteworthy Deployments of Food

There is an additional category of foodstuffs in *The Bluest Eye* that is neither positive nor negative. These items function as the pivot point in the dichotomy where the *heimlich* and positive associations shift to the *unheimlich* and negative ones. On one level, they resemble Freud's notions of the canny because they are recognizable and familiar; however, they are not necessarily discomforting, nor do they instill or inspire comfort. Rather, they are merely quotidian and commonplace. That is not to suggest, however, that these foodstuffs are silent or unimportant. They communicate much and tell us significant things about the figures in the narrative. Fred Gardaphé and Wenying Xu, the editors of a *MELUS* special edition on multi-ethnic food, have observed, "food often has an ability to last longer as a signifier for ethnicity than other markers, such as language and fashion" (7), and that is certainly the case here. These seemingly neutral deployments of food place the characters and narrative of *The Bluest Eye* in a racial, economic, and geographical context in an efficient, ingenious manner. In one episode, for example, Claudia and her sister Frieda consider the dilemma of being forced to eat turnips they don't want or getting a spanking for letting them burn

(*BE* 79). For the little girls, the turnips are a bad thing. The decision between eating them and being whipped merits careful consideration. The turnips would not, however, fall into the category of the *unheimlich*. They are neither nightmarish nor uncanny; they are merely unpalatable. Nevertheless, that Morrison centers this episode around turnips is significant, because it marks the MacTeer family as part of the Great Migration, when African Americans moved from the agrarian, Jim Crow South to the industrial Northeast and upper Midwest. The MacTeer and Breedlove families may find themselves surrounded by Greek hotel owners, Italian neighbors, and eastern European shopkeepers, but they are African Americans recently arrived from the American South. Their food shows them as such. They eat turnip greens, a metonym for the region if ever there were one.

The primary characters in *The Bluest Eye* are not just Southern, however; they are transplanted African American Southerners, and that distinction is both important and unsurprisingly conveyed through references to food. In the novel, the narrator ruminates on the plight of Black women in the South, and the burden of their lives is described in culinary and alimentary terms. For instance, she notes, "They patted biscuits into flaky ovals of innocence" (138) and, later, "They plowed all day and came home to nestle like plums under the limbs of their men" (138). The Black women's talent and skill in the kitchen is conveyed, quite economically, through the totem of the biscuit, a specifically Southern baked good that requires no small amount of training and practice in the kitchen in order to achieve flakiness. Dough in the hands of the uninitiated can easily result in dense, heavy biscuits. Likewise, the Black women's sexuality is conveyed, rather suggestively, through the simile of the plums. Their firm, *dark* skin, can yield a sweet juiciness when treated just right by their menfolk. Whether it is in the turnips that the MacTeer girls do not want to eat, the biscuits baked by the African American women, or the dark-skinned plums to which the Black women are compared, the food imagery all has racial significance. *The Bluest Eye,* its characters, and its narrative all have their connections with the American South, but more importantly, they are

inextricably tied to an African American racial and cultural context. Foodstuffs in these instances are significant for their connotative meanings and associations, even if they do not occupy a position on either end of the Freudian canny/uncanny continuum.

In other instances, Morrison uses food to situate her characters in an economic context. No passage does this better than the episode when Pecola and the MacTeer sisters are accompanied on their walk home from school by Maureen Peal. The suggestion of buying some ice cream arises and with it the hopes and expectations of Claudia and Frieda. Their excitement is soon dashed when they realize that Maureen is only offering to buy ice cream for Pecola and herself; the MacTeer sisters do not have the financial wherewithal to purchase ice cream and sweets whenever they feel like it. Enraged with envy, young Claudia fixates on how Maureen eats hers: "The girls came out. Pecola with two dips of orange-pineapple, Maureen with black raspberry" (69). And the narrative continues by pointing out Claudia's inner monologue: "She curled her tongue around the edge of the cone, scooping up a dollop of purple that made my eyes water" (70). Food, then, is used in this instance in a highly effective way to demonstrate the unevenness, the unfairness of some children enjoying abundance while others go without. The account of Cholly's great-aunt Jimmy is yet one more example of food being used to designate financial insecurity. When the old woman grows sick, the wise and regal folk healer, M'Dear, diagnoses Jimmy with having "caught cold in [her] womb" (137). Medicines and medical help are beyond the financial means of the Southern Black woman, so M'Dear prescribes broths: "That evening the women brought bowls of pot liquor from black-eyed peas, from mustards, from cabbage, from kale, from collards, from turnips, from beets, from green beans. Even the juice from a boiling hog jowl" (137). The nutrients from the cooking liquids are the only curative available to the dying woman. The text, in effect, uses foodstuffs to illustrate the characters' economic, social, cultural, and racial context. For as Rita Colanzi, the author of "Marginalization, Inclusion, and Social Transformation: The Politics of Food in the Kitchen and at the Dining Table," so rightly acknowledges, "the kitchen marks the divide between the haves and have-nots"

(33). Thus, the author knew about food. She clearly enjoyed food. She injected food as symbols and signifiers throughout her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, and even throughout all her works.

Conclusion

Other novels in her body of work can and should be examined in this manner as well. In addition to the instances enumerated at the beginning of this essay, a range of other episodes involving food appear with noticeable regularity in Toni Morrison's fiction. Nevertheless, it is how she uses food and food-based imagery that is truly interesting. Sigmund Freud observed, "Among the many liberties that the creative writer can allow himself [*sic*] is that of choosing whether to present a world that conforms with the reader's familiar reality or one that in some way deviates from it" (156). Morrison's writing aligns perfectly with Freud's notion, because she banked on the familiarity of foodstuffs to activate her readers' recognition and emotions. In some neutral cases, food announces characters' racial, economic, and geographic contexts. But more often than not, she deployed the alimental in a dichotomous manner: when good, as a marker of comfort and home, but when bad, as an inversion of what is familiar so that it becomes a signifier of suffering and distress.

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Biography

Timothy K. Nixon received his Ph.D. in English from The George Washington University in Washington, DC. He is a professor in the Department of English and Modern Languages at Shepherd University. His book, *Selected Short Works by Klaus Mann*, was released in 2016, and he has published essays on the lives and works of Kate Chopin, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Arturo Islas, Randall Kenan, Klaus Mann, Herman Melville, Walker Percy, Gertrude Stein, and Eudora Welty. In addition, he has presented papers at numerous scholarly conferences in the US and abroad.